

# **Skylark**

A Tanka Journal

Edited by Claire Everett

## **Skylark**

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# Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Editor: Claire Everett

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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

Winter 2015: Volume 3, number 2

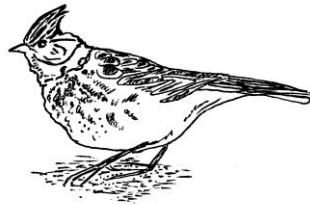
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**In Memory**  
**of *H. Gene Murtha***  
1955-2015

if only you  
could have stayed longer  
little sparrow  
how suddenly you've become  
the autumn wind

*sage stone, USA*



## Editor's Message

As I write this on a beautiful autumnal day in North Yorkshire, the tanka and haiku community is coming to terms with the death of H. Gene Murtha to whom this issue of *Skylark* is dedicated. So many poets seem to have left us in such a short time. Wherever you are Gene, I know there will be laughter — I hope there are birds!

It has been another exciting period for *Skylark* with the launch of the publishing side of this venture; readers may already be familiar with the first two releases from Skylark Publishing: *Hagstones: A Tanka Journey* by myself and Joy McCall (a review by Patricia Prime appears in this issue) and *pine winds, autumn rain: tanka strings*, by Murasame (Joy McCall) and Matsukaze. Look out for upcoming announcements about new publications as well as forthcoming projects which will include contests and themed anthologies.

I have also been very busy making the selections for and editing the Tanka Society of America's Members' Anthology. As a non-American, I consider this a huge honour and have embraced the challenge, hoping that all concerned will be pleased with the results.

Earlier this year I was asked by Joy McCall if I would consider helping her make her late mother's tanka collection available to a wider audience. *A Thankful Heart: Tanka After Ninety* by Cathy Street is available on Amazon and Createspace and its gentle, unaffected charm is winning over readers young and old alike. You can read Liam Wilkinson's review of Cathy's book in this issue, and you will also find some of her tanka on page 57.

You will notice some exciting developments in the Skylark's Nest, as the next prompt image has been provided by Pamela A. Babusci. I look forward to inviting other artists to have their work featured and inspiring us in the process.

## Skylark

I hope you enjoy the issue and thank you for your continued support. In the light of tragic events that have overshadowed summer in the Northern Hemisphere and winter in the South, I wonder if you might consider making a small donation to the Red Cross Syria Crisis appeal, or perhaps to a shelter for the homeless in your local community.

~Claire Everett, North Yorkshire, October 2015

in the same way  
we have stood by and watched  
when seabirds  
have washed ashore  
with oil-leaden wings . . .

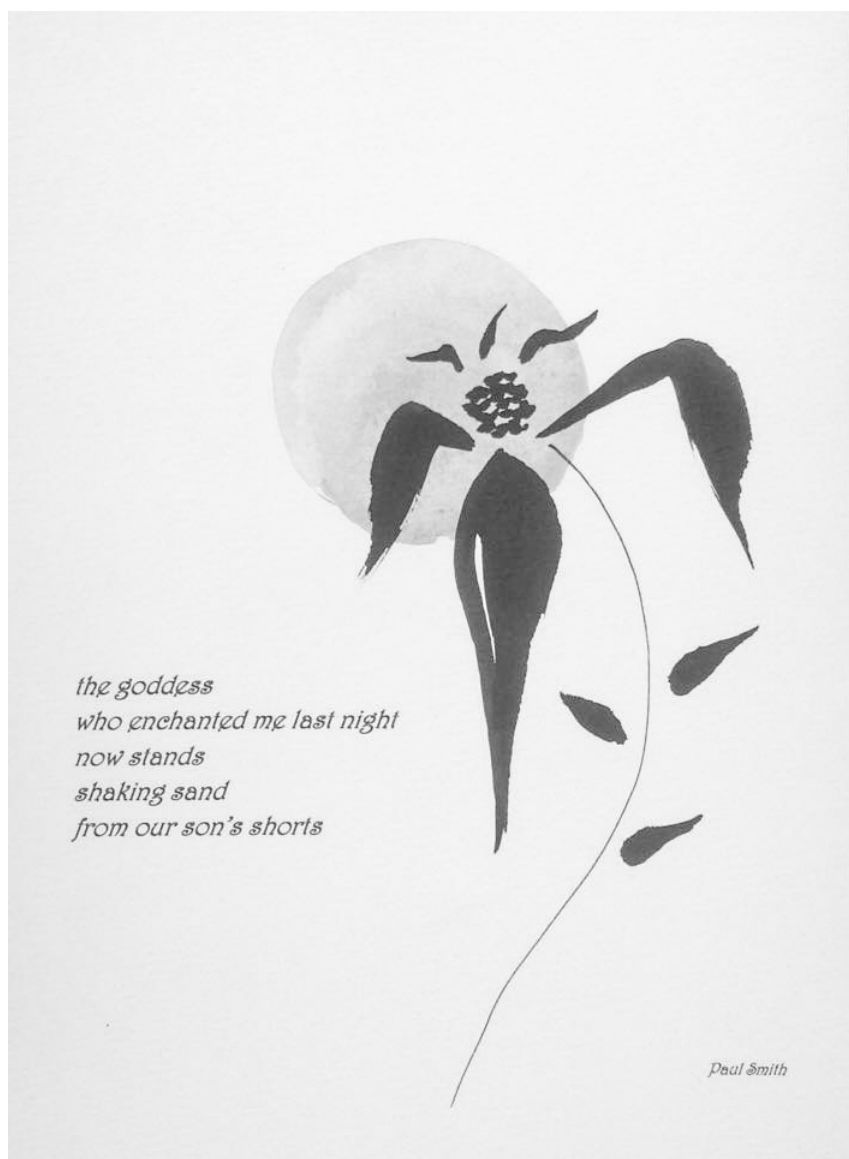
for Aylan Kurdi

. . . and all who have died without a name.

#HumanityWashedAshore #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik

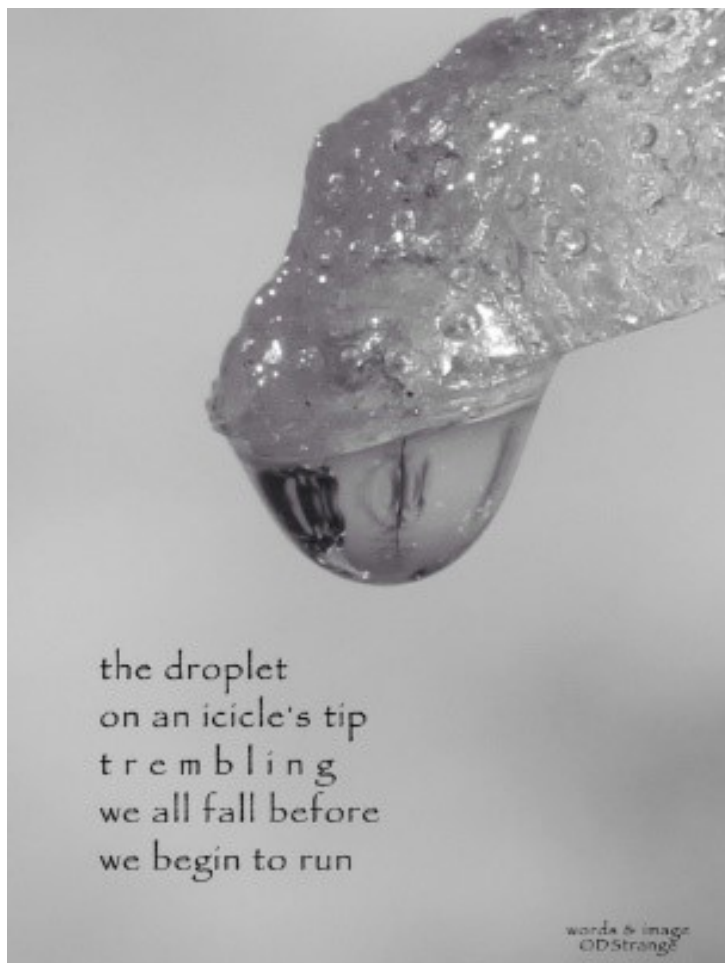


## Skylark



*Paul Smith, England*

## Skylark



*Debbie Strange, USA*

## The Skylark's Nest

*The Winners*

Selections by *Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK*

Claire Everett asks her readers to meditate on the prompt for the Skylark's Nest. Now I certainly did, not only on the prompt, but also on the patron deity of tanka whoever s/he might be, upon my own inner muse (that waxes and wanes), and upon each egg in the clutch of entries. The prompt was a sketch of a deer's bust, in profile. Maybe it is just me, but I saw a look of censure in its eye and a suggestion of despair and sarcasm in the curve of its mouth. And I was convinced that it was aimed at my judging skills. But sshhh!

The image of a deer conjures many things in my mind: life, beauty, gentleness, shyness, fleetness of foot, alertness, anxiety, and at the same time, also brazenness and swagger. To me, the Sanskrit word *cañcala* (pronounced chanchala) conveys the essence of a deer's nature. Valmiki, the poet nonpareil portrays all of this in the golden deer that lures Seeta in the forest. And in those moments, Seeta herself mirrors that nature as a human. Something good came out of the golden deer in the end. I hope that I too manage to say something good and useful at the end of all this talk.

Claire sent me the entries nearly two months ago. After picking out a few, I decided to sit on them, just like a broody hen, waiting for the chicks to tell me when they were ready to emerge. And now I proudly cluck around my brood, with one chick cheeping louder than the rest. Rather than have a set of what I was looking for, I chose to go with gut feeling first, before I identified what appealed to me in the verses that stood out. I will endeavour to outline some of these qualities as we go along. Let me start with some of the tanka that stayed with me in the end. These, listed in no particular order.

Skylark

barely breathing,  
on the cusp of death...  
outside her window  
a white-tailed fawn  
takes its first steps

*Mary Davila, USA*

I liked the contrast of the two images in this verse. Life and death are two facets of a coin. The poet missed a trick in leaving nothing unsaid. I also note some repetition such as "barely breathing" and "cusp of death". Also, it is worded in such a way that the end does not come as a surprise, taking that bit of "aha" away. Even so, a good one.

Northern lights  
the eyes of a deer  
breaking the stillness  
of snow and  
the forest pulse

*Iliyana Stoyanova, UK*

This tanka caught and held my attention for its not so common 1/4 structure rather than the usual 2/3 or 3/2 split. The images also kept bringing me back to this verse. I particularly liked the way the poet feels the pulse of the forest. I felt that changing a word or two (stirring for breaking, for instance), and redistributing them differently in the lines would have strengthened the tanka immensely. Again, a nice one.

early spring  
the soft growth of antlers . . .  
a chill

Skylark

when my eyes meet his  
on the hunter's trophy

*Janet Lynn Davis, USA*

This tanka effectively brings the poem to culmination in the last line. I admire the placement of "a chill" by itself in one line, for that feeling leaves no place for any other. This verse opens with the image of birth, life and growth and ends with the finality of death, dealt by the cruel hand of man. Very nice indeed!

the eyes of a deer  
caught in my headlights —  
that moment  
when I realized  
you had already gone

*Carmel Summers, Australia*

This is a strong tanka with the latter half leaving the reader wondering if this refers to the deer or to a person, perhaps someone that was "caught in the act", with their eyes betraying their guilt. Haven't we all experienced this at some point in our lives? As a child, caught with chocolate smudging our face; as a teenager reading a "naughty" book; as a diabetic nicking a sweet; or something more disturbing?

And now for the sturdiest chick in my brood. The winner of this clutch! This one stands out clearly for me with its contrasting balance of images and words, the empty space in the first two lines that allows the reader to fill it with what they will, and the truly unexpected "aha" finish in the last line.

fleeting glimpses  
between brindled leaves . . .  
still I follow

## Skylark

those sure-footed steps  
of each Manyōshū poet

*David Terelinck, Australia*

The verse opens with fleeting glimpses, which could be of anything. "Brindled leaves" in line two is such a beautiful and fresh image. Even so, it is easy to see a deer in these lines, flitting from light to shade, alert and fearful not to be noticed. Line three introduces an element of tension while line four brings in a contrast of sure-footedness. And line five is the denouement, and how lovely it is.

Manyōshū is the oldest extant compilation of Japanese poems from the latter part of the 8th century CE. The poems range from the fourth to the eighth century, with the bulk of it formed by tanka. Manyōshū in Japanese means "collection of ten thousand leaves" or "collection for ten thousand eras". That we, halfway across the world, and more than a millennium later, are writing tanka in different tongues is testimony to the beauty and influence of this small verse of five lines. The true test of any art form is time. And tanka has most definitely stood that test of time.

To me this tanka so beautifully conveys the elusive nature of poesy and creativity, the inner muse which has to be followed so meticulously and with faith. It is essentially wild and may, with patience and love, let us touch it, even if for a moment. It is not something to be fettered or controlled, but one that needs to be nourished and cherished. Thank you for sharing this tanka with us. A true winner!

Thank you everyone for trusting me with your tanka. I loved them. Congrats, David, on your winning tanka. I sincerely hope Brian Zimmer is happy with my judging, wherever he is. I am grateful to Joyce S. Greene for picking my footprints tanka as the winner of the previous Skylark's Nest contest. Joyce, I have no hard feelings towards you for putting me in this quandary of judging. Honest!

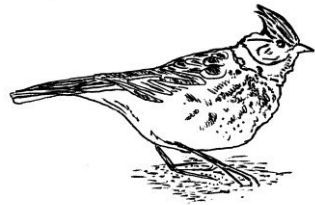
## Skylark

Here's what I came up with in response to the prompt:

the strut  
of a stag in rut —  
your texts  
dripping with love  
for someone else

~*Shrikaanth*

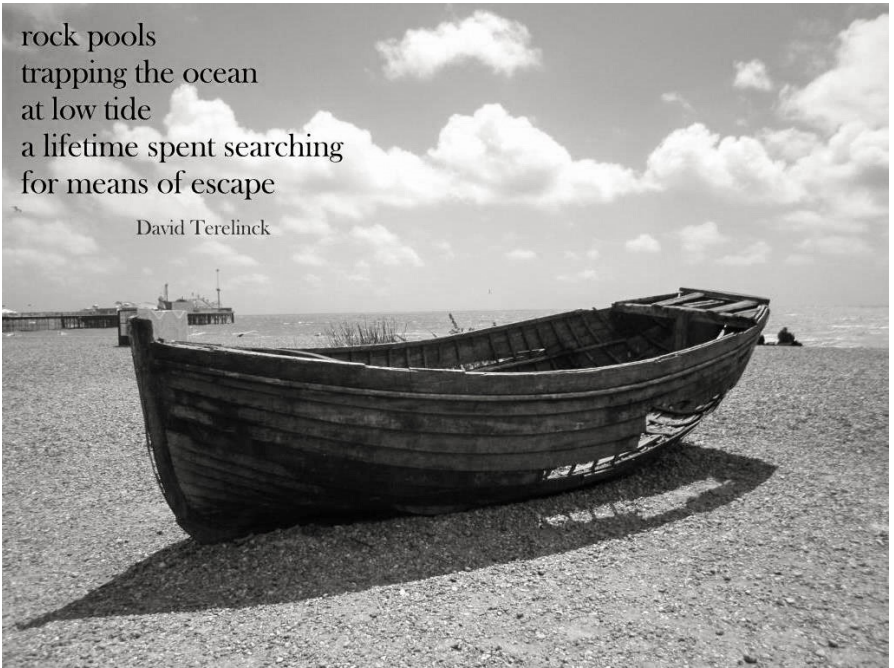
Congratulations to David who will receive a free copy of the journal and an invitation to judge the competition for *Skylark* 4:1, Summer 2016.



## Skylark

rock pools  
trapping the ocean  
at low tide  
a lifetime spent searching  
for means of escape

David Terelinck



*David Terelinck, Australia*



Skylark

## **The Skylark's Nest Prompt**

4:1, Summer 2016



‘resurrection of spring’ by *Pamela A. Babusci, USA*

## Skylark

Pamela A. Babusci, is a self-taught artist. She paints abstractly using oils, acrylics, watercolors & oil pastels; she also writes some Japanese calligraphy symbols, sumi-e paints & is a haiga artist. Pamela with fine artist Larry De Kock, have collaborated together in several tanka/art exhibits at The Black Radish Studio, Steve Carpenter's Art Studio & I-Square Art Center in Rochester, NY, where she will write tanka to enhance/complement Larry's figurative or portrait oil paintings.

She has illustrated several books, including *Full Moon Tide : The Best of Tanka Splendor Awards*, *Taboo Haiku*, *Take Five: Best Contemporary Tanka Vol.1*, *The Delicate Dance of Wings*, *Chasing the Sun: selected haiku from HNA 2007*, *A Thousand Reasons*, 2009, *Moonbathing: a journal of women's tanka*. In addition, she was also the logo artist for Haiku North America in NYC in 2003 and HNA in Winston-Salem, NC in 2007.

Pamela is the founder and editor of: *Moonbathing: a journal of women's tanka*, the first all-women's international tanka journal.

She has published two tanka collections: *A Thousand Reasons 2009* and *A Solitary Woman 2013*.

Poetry and art have been an integral part of her existence since her early teenage years. She has a deep desire to be creative on a daily basis. It feeds her spirit and soul, gives meaning to her life, and will continue to be a driving force until she meets her creator.

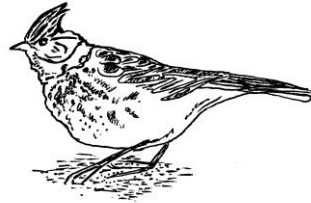
*Poets are invited to respond to the image in any way that moves them. Please label your tanka 'Skylark's Nest entry'.*

## Skylark

“You can muffle the drum, and you can loosen the strings of the lyre, but who shall command the skylark not to sing?”

from *The Prophet*

— Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)



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



## Individual Tanka



Skylark

**Mandy's Pages  
Annual Tanka Contest 2015**

**1st Place**

his stand  
on chemotherapy . . .  
a bluebird's cry  
nestles in the palm  
of sunrise

*Christine L. Villa, USA*

The full judging report by Claire Everett and David Terelinck can be viewed at <http://www.mandys-pages.com/contests/annual-tanka-contest/184-atc-2015-winners>.

## Skylark

whistling love songs  
under back alley awnings  
until the rain breaks  
and I'm on my way  
to the next town

stale booze  
and yesterday  
on our breath  
the hills back home  
when we were young

in the right light  
you can just make out  
a watermark  
the shape of my fingerprint  
on the small of her back

*S. M. Abeles, USA*

## Skylark

beeswax candles  
burn on the altars  
lighting the path  
of wayward prayers  
all smoke and honey

luna moth  
her tailed wings of layered green  
float in the soft air —  
Genji's court lady  
of the trailing sleeves

*Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA*

the distance  
between you and me  
fading  
the child's handprint  
on the wall

*Ramesh Anand, India*



Skylark

chewing  
on black birch twigs  
I savor  
the inner bark  
of my childhood

beside the trail  
a granite monument  
glorifying God  
the song of the thrush  
comes closer and closer

sweeping  
the labyrinth  
with a broken broom  
I gather at the center  
a thousand winged seeds

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

Skylark

at the tire shop  
amidst talk  
of alignment  
and tread, your hand  
slips into mine

*Jose Angel Araguz, USA*

stolen secrets  
even now  
the trees whisper  
branch to sky  
a confidence betrayed

*Joanna Ashwell, UK*

stuck in a bell jar  
or down the rabbit hole  
the mad poet  
who writes  
until dawn

*Pamela A. Babusci, USA*

## Skylark

the afterimage  
of a paper lantern  
before dawn . . .  
in Buson's death poem too  
this illusion of light

*Stewart C Baker, USA*

she's dead  
to the world  
ahead of the pain  
I count pills  
by street light

*S. Black, UK*

## Skylark

up early  
darting from branch to twig  
a blue fairy wren  
steals every word  
from my unhatched poem

a sugar ant  
carrying twice its weight —  
so often  
it's the little things  
that make my day

*Michelle Brock, Australia*

Skylark

dad paints  
around the cobweb  
on the fence . . .  
a book of Issa's poems  
on the garden bench

*Dawn Bruce, Australia*

an old man  
banks jump shots,  
on the bench  
his grandson slays  
iPhone dragons

snow melting  
the IV drips  
into her  
the slowing cadence  
of extinction

*Matthew Caretti, USA*

Skylark

men love the land  
love tools, love machines  
love women  
a few love words  
pity me who loves words

your skin  
the morning after . . .  
the vapor  
from last night's rain  
turns blue

*James Chessing, USA*

## Skylark

even now  
when I light butter lamps  
at dawn  
I hear father's murmur . . .  
prayer flags in the wind

*Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan*



## Skylark

the match fades  
before the wick is lit . . .  
at year's end  
despite our midday snooze  
we miss the stroke of twelve

a sold sign  
outside our waterfront home —  
I start packing  
things I love in bubble wrap,  
memories of a white-capped sea

words spoken  
around the campfire  
all evening  
the hiss of raindrops  
dancing through flames

trying hard  
to untangle the knots  
in this skein of yarn  
I don't know what I mean  
until I see what I say

*Susan Constable, Canada*



## Skylark

her frail hand shaking  
she tells me marriage  
is scrubbing steps . . .  
a spinster, I have  
my own work to do

carrying  
my father's coffin  
the girl  
who always wanted  
to do a man's work

*Anne Curran, New Zealand*

## Skylark

seizures,  
tremors,  
as she withdraws  
from narcotics . . .  
and she's only one day old

the turkey down to bones,  
I pack up leftovers  
on Thanksgiving Day  
a nurse attaches dinner  
to his IV

*Mary Davila, USA*

## Skylark

a stepping stone  
etched with a dragonfly  
and *welcome* . . .  
    the earth, the heavens,  
        me somewhere in between

fresh beet juice  
washes over my hands . . .  
the blunders  
I attempt to sop up  
before the stain of regret

barely past dawn  
the linoleum floor  
shiny, speckless —  
this hope that the surgeon  
will be as meticulous

*Janet Lynn Davis, USA*

## Skylark

the great wide circle  
of our friendship  
like the wide circle  
of the horizon  
is not a boundary  
~for Joy

*Jonathan Day, USA*

a wedding  
on the first day of spring . . .  
the promise  
of an autumn caterpillar  
at last finding its wings

*Rebecca Drouilhet, USA*

## Skylark

glowing purple  
morning glory flowers  
with abandon  
an only child skips  
along the empty lane

"emotional  
independence" counsels  
my psychologist —  
a skylark rises  
flying towards the sun

*Amelia Fielden, Australia*

when you cruised  
into my life  
our mooring lines tangled —  
no leaving port now  
for either of us

*Jan Foster, Australia*

Skylark

some days  
it's the little things  
one long spiral  
of potato peel  
in the kitchen sink

*Terri L French, USA*

gently ascending  
Coniston Old Man  
passing the derelict mine  
feeling young again  
on slate and stone

in fresh snow  
by an empty highway  
bigfoot tracks . . .  
my imagination  
still at large

*Tim Gardiner, UK*

Skylark

I don't mind ironing  
or cleaning tarnished silver . . .  
continuity  
brings comfort  
in this slipping, sliding world

*Beverley George, Australia*

suddenly  
I thought of the old song  
seeing daisies,  
yes give him your answer do,  
or if not, give it to me

again  
at my Friday evening  
tanka cafe,  
what's changed the atmosphere?  
what's brought on this lament?

*Sanford Goldstein, Japan*

## Skylark

three broilgas  
forage on the dry plains  
we watch  
no ritual display  
yet our hearts dance

pink lady apples  
mandarin imperials  
side by side  
not obvious at first  
we would stay together

*Janne Deirdre Graham Australia*



## Skylark

at daybreak  
zircons replace the frost . . .  
I listen  
to morning condensed  
in a wattle bird's song

turning  
the wood fire stove to low  
at night  
their altercations  
smoulder till morning

practising  
modes and arpeggios  
of jazz . . .  
can we reach accord  
when our voicings clash?

*Hazel Hall, Australia*

## Skylark

ivy shadows dance  
over soft-lit windows  
of rippled glass  
sign and lantern swing  
outside the Cobblestone Inn

herons . . .  
on the river's edge  
one of flesh and blood  
another  
of evening light

*Simon Hanson, Australia*

## Skylark

I understand  
the perfection  
of imperfection . . .  
I fold his favorite shirt  
carefully, stains and all

the scrim  
of fog through fog . . .  
so long  
since I've seen you  
I forget the reason why

as always  
my brother takes it neat  
he savors  
the beguiling gold liquor  
that takes its time to kill

*Michele L. Harvey, USA*

## Skylark

clear evening  
from the list of the heard  
to the list  
of the seen  
mourning dove

composing  
the first movement  
adagio  
the second, allegro  
then the silent finale

*Ruth Holzer, USA*

## Skylark

who would have guessed  
that mumbly old woman  
could read Latin,  
conjugate French verbs,  
quote passages from Shakespeare?

watching butterflies  
I wind about the gardens  
losing my way . . .  
no GPS to guide me  
I wander bedazzled

*Elizabeth Howard, USA*

those rocks  
you tossed in the lake,  
I try to count  
ripples rushing to shore —  
all the lies you told

*Marilyn Humbert, Australia*

Skylark

grazing moon  
a koi in hide-and-seek  
with sadness  
dipping into shadows  
for my smile

*Alegria Imperial, Canada*

alder  
is the river tree . . .  
its feet  
in moving water  
its arms around Sophia

*Gerry Jacobson, Australia*

## Skylark

luring me  
to the window screen  
rough wing-beats. . .  
silver moonlight glazes  
a scarab's brimstone back

certificates  
and fading photos  
these gold stars  
to prove to myself  
that I was there — did that

a woman smiles,  
me, in black and white  
I hardly know her  
except to tell her story  
trees grow tall with time

you must have been  
a warlord in old Japan  
so intense  
the noble slope of brow  
a warrior-poet's eyes.

*Kirsty Karkow, USA*

Skylark

so happy to see me  
she can hardly contain herself —  
thanks Sophia,  
my face now  
dog-dish clean

late & soon, the media —  
give me a cabin  
and a scythe  
to keep the brush  
at bay

there it is!  
The Birth of Venus —  
and I,  
out of the whole Uffizi Gallery,  
have the room to myself

*Larry Kimmel, USA*



Skylark

her bruises  
healed by a touch  
of makeup —  
the saree pleats  
so neatly pinned

smiling  
yet again he walks  
down the aisle —  
I climb Fujisan  
just the once

*Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy*

## Skylark

motherese for months  
I no longer remember  
small talk  
the chatter of finches  
brings me to tears

searching for authenticity  
in this world  
honeybees  
hover a plastic feeder  
full of sugar water

*Jessica Malone Latham, USA*

Skylark

her words linger,  
writing does not put food  
on the table . . .  
another winter  
colder than the last

at midnight  
my thoughts and hand moving  
across the page:  
I tanka-barricade  
the door to loneliness

*Chen-ou Liu, Canada*

Skylark

my practice  
of writing  
the irritation  
of sand  
on the oyster

at night  
my parent's problems  
came to me  
with the light  
beneath the door

*Gregory Longenecker, USA*

Skylark

insistent  
as cicada song  
in August  
this yearning to touch you  
fleeting spirit of deer

tethered  
you seem to me  
by unseen threads  
why are you holding back  
the gentleness of touch

*Giselle Maya, France*

## Skylark

the old poet  
sits in Anchorage  
writing  
words falling soft  
from the wide Alaska skies  
*~for Tom Sexton*

children  
blowing the seedheads:  
dandelion,  
what time is it?  
eight-nine-ten o'clock

planting  
chicory seeds  
among the vines . . .  
climbing upwards  
burrowing deep

*Joy McCall, England*

## Skylark

the mind-map  
I've drawn in my notebook  
orbits a space  
at the center  
that is empty

so many roads to choose from —  
with what memories  
does the traveler go  
without luggage  
in the late night?

the names  
of lovers change  
. . . a ballad  
over many summers  
in the hill country

*Michael McClintock, USA*

## Skylark

hands folded  
with his rosary  
can one be  
at peace  
after a short life

rich cousins  
at the funeral  
their designer clothes  
not making much  
of an impression

*Mike Montreuil, Canada*



## Skylark

a bird flies  
but the tree still sings  
if i were young  
on an autumn eve  
i'd be a willow

layer by layer  
i peel back earth  
passing worms  
and years of roots to rest  
the old cat's bones

*Sandi Pray, USA*

Skylark

preening themselves  
on the veranda's handrail  
three sparrows  
claws bent as elegantly  
as fingers round a cup

*Patricia Prime, New Zealand*

still fresh in my mind  
the song sparrow's twirl . . .  
sleepless  
I hum a note or two  
and set its wings to music

*Kala Ramesh, India*

rubbing out her name  
week after week  
in the diary  
butterbur forces its way  
through hard ground

*Sue Richards, UK*

## Skylark

along the fence  
he tests each paling  
looking for an exit  
unaware there is no escape  
from dementia

four year old  
speeds straight down the ski slope  
grandma  
weighted with caution  
follows a convoluted path

*Elaine Riddell, New Zealand*

## Skylark

his photo  
of a mist-shrouded lake  
on Facebook . . .  
so long since I've spoken  
with my brother

lobsters  
crawl over each other  
in the tank . . .  
my sudden fear  
of reincarnation

planting  
in New England soil  
I hit a rock . . .  
beliefs too heavy  
to dig out

*Kenneth Slaughter, USA*

## Skylark

resting  
beneath a bird-less sky  
I've become  
the lake's  
dark silence

collecting shells  
along the beachfront —  
what other passions  
will be passed  
from mother to son  
*~for Karen & Ben*

*Paul Smith, UK*

## Skylark

lost  
between two languages  
fighting  
my own demons  
and yet . . . stardust

изгубена  
между два езика  
в борба  
с моите собствените демони  
и все пак . . . звезден прах

*Iliyana Stoyanova, UK*

## Skylark

Why does the squirrel  
bury nuts, and then forget  
where he has put them?  
During the winter, they will  
take root and become nut trees.

A peacock landed  
on my summerhouse today;  
where did he come from?  
Does he know his way back home  
where his peahen waits for him?

Her words make sense.  
They are wise and loving.  
I read them twice  
as they are worth repeating;  
then I remember them

*Cathy Street, Heaven* (doing the gardening)

Skylark

in lifting fog  
long morning shadows  
on the stone fence —  
the chill in my fingers  
when I reach for yours

*Carmel Summers, Australia*

I am not Jewish  
but today I light  
a candle  
for your Yahrzeit  
is the first year the longest?

in body  
if you could still sit  
across from me  
we couldn't talk  
the way we do now

*Jari Thymian, USA*



Skylark

during the sermon  
I think of the time we first  
made love outside . . .  
the town where they tried  
to fence in the river

*Stephen Toft, UK*

can't find Sartre  
nor Baudelaire, I come out  
with a butterfly  
from Montparnasse  
cemetery this afternoon

*Kozue Uzawa, Canada*

not wanting to see  
how they'll take you away  
I draped you  
with vanilla scent  
and moonlight kisses

*Christine L. Villa, USA*

## Skylark

hoping to excite  
my tired expectations  
I tongue last summer's honey  
a gift from bees  
who fill themselves with wildness

sand paintings  
from nodding tips  
of ripened sea oats —  
a decade past your death  
these reasons to weep

a day in a book  
oblivious  
to the false march of time  
black-headed gulls  
doze around me

*Linda Jeannette Ward, USA*

## Skylark

the cherry blossoms  
rise and ebb,  
the moon flutters to my feet —  
this is how I've been  
since you left me smitten

why did she mail it,  
this French postcard  
from the past,  
from a time when we  
were not yet lovers

*Michael Dylan Welch, USA*

Skylark

it's called Slow TV  
12 hours of Aran knitting  
Norwegians love it —  
now that it has gone world-wide  
I can watch firewood burn

a King and pawn  
return to the same wood box  
when I was young  
I relied on the opening,  
but now it's the end game

*Neal Whitman, USA*

## Skylark

how can I sleep  
on the overnight train  
to Yellow Mountain  
so much of China  
would pass me by

the trees are blooming  
in the dark right through  
my poem  
so close they brush  
against its window

when the fetus  
begins to dream  
lavender  
my mother's scent  
the color of my heart

*Kath Abela Wilson, USA*

## Skylark

I roll my R's  
hoping the kookaburra  
will respond  
a little Hispanic girl  
talks to me in English

Ten centuries  
since she wrote her stories  
interleaved with poems  
she still waits for the one  
who does not love her . . . yet

*J. Zimmerman, USA*

# Tanka Sequences

Solo & Responsive





like a naked tree  
my branches wither  
& grow cold  
adding more wood  
to the fireplace

Pamela A. Babusci 2015



## Skylark

### House

time burnishes  
the rosewood turnbuckle  
my father made . . .  
the keeping room door  
opens inward

at the center,  
twin hearthstones  
settling  
deeper into the earth . . .  
the whispering of ashes

the rough old floors  
my mother speckled  
red yellow blue . . .  
I take the first steps  
of my spatter-dash life

*Stars to Steer By*  
and the *World Book*  
*Encyclopedia*  
handy in the dining room . . .  
food for a deeper hunger

my father  
in the midnight cellar  
shoveling coal  
to feed the furnace . . .  
this comforter around me

## Skylark

warmth rising  
through the metal grate  
I peer down  
into the grown-up world . . .  
the dance of firelight and shadow

on the catwalk  
to the latched loft door  
I straddle  
a dark stairwell —  
fear of falling, dreams of flight

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

Skylark

**how useless**

all this distance  
between us  
i walk  
in lavender fields  
for miles & miles

i paint them  
with sadness  
how useless  
how unnecessary  
these lips without yours

interplay  
of shadow & light  
on the bedroom wall  
i count naked branches  
that never touch me

falling asleep  
with Neruda's love sonnets  
across my breasts  
i have suffered too much  
from loving you

rain-soaked lavender  
on my palms . . .  
your tender  
murderous love  
destroyed me

*Pamela A. Babusci, USA*

Skylark

**Silver Haze**

under silver haze  
only waves  
rake the morning —  
empty beach  
a surfboard stands at rest

there is a garden  
hidden in an ashram  
in far-off mountains  
where I want to linger  
in quietening mist

young men in black  
kneel upon the waves  
intent  
in salted incense  
on this moment's ecstasy

each day  
monks rake the garden stones  
and tend the rows  
of dark green coffee plants —  
blessings flutter on the hours

a gust of children  
scuffles sand  
across my trance  
the cab I've called arrives  
with a blast of horn

*Anne Benjamin, Australia*

Skylark

**had we stayed in touch . . .**

jasmine soap  
the scent I remember  
ever elusive  
is this why old friends  
sometimes disappoint?

undated letter  
my younger self  
never sent  
don't let it fool you  
this smile is a mask

perhaps  
had we stayed in touch . . .  
in the river  
spent magnolia blossoms  
waver in their tree's reflection

pub crawl  
*The Bulldog, The Perch*  
*The Trout*  
horses in the meadow  
watching them run

my potted jasmine  
flowers in February  
if  
we never meet again  
you'll always be young

*Maxianne Berger, Canada*

Skylark

**Homegrown**

*~for Sandy*

for years  
she couldn't venture  
into the garden —  
there, on the paving stones,  
is where she found him

resurrecting  
the raised tomato bed  
plant by plant,  
she sinks her fists deep  
into dark compost

Lily,  
her gardening dog,  
at her side . . .  
a bounty of earthworms  
and a small patch of peace

*Janet Lynn Davis, USA*

### **This Day Like Any Other**

her voice  
cheerful when she says  
“it’s cancer” . . .  
clouds darken the nearest hills  
and leave the fields in shadow

the oncologist  
flatly tells us  
there’s nothing left to be done . . .  
outside, the first blossoms  
busy, with the first bees

the room  
where she's come to die  
her windows  
alive with birds and lilacs  
of cheerful spring in full bloom

lightly, he asks  
if she would like more morphine  
I serve coffee  
just the way she likes it  
this day, like any other

another call  
from a friend with cancer . . .  
the sky so wide  
today's clouds never touch  
but move on toward tomorrow

*Michele L. Harvey, USA*

## Home Again

flying  
above the clouds  
I had hoped  
this landing  
would be different

I want  
to step out of the shower  
in a hotel room  
in Simcoe, or failing that  
any room where you are not

without  
even trying  
I have  
replicated the marriage  
of my parents

*Ruth Holzer, USA*



## Skylark

### Side-by-Side

sour to some  
sweet to others  
yet picked  
in her mother's garden  
lemons linger in her hand

blossom  
opening side-by-side  
riper fruit . . .  
a son masters melodies  
his father plays on the flute

what need to add  
adjectives and verbs  
each tree  
she meant to prune  
full-flower this spring

*Kathy Kituai, Australia*

## Headache

my world  
is a noisy place  
cars and trains  
planes and motorbikes  
the doorbell, the phone

before dawn  
the big birds squawking  
bickering  
dogs barking down the lane  
gulls screaming on the roof

next door  
the demented lady  
sings all day  
out of tune, old songs  
to rally troops for war

a car  
stops outside, radio  
blaring the news  
bulldozers are clearing  
the lovely common land

and in my head  
the poems chase each other  
round and round  
refusing to settle, still  
and quiet on the white page

*Joy McCall, England*

Skylark

**meadowsweet**

field mice  
climbing the stalks  
of barley  
filling their mouths  
with rough grain

meadowsweet  
moving in the wind  
purple flowers  
among the long green  
leaves of sweetgrass

a buzzing of bees  
on the warm air  
some sparrows  
brown like the stalks,  
like the ground

a lark  
singing up high  
out of sight  
swifts hunting, diving  
one of those good days

until, coming  
into my quiet mind  
Amber Peat  
hanging in the oak tree  
not yet fourteen

Skylark

dear god  
there are too many  
young lives gone  
and still, the meadowsweet  
the barley, the field mice

*Joy McCall, England*



## Skylark

### **pine winds**

there are times  
when the wind brings  
the scent of the pines  
from far away  
into my soul

it blows  
from the Algonquins  
from Ohio  
from the Oregon trail  
and the Rocky Mountains

it carries  
across the ocean  
across the lands  
I catch faces and names  
in my mind, in my hands

how dear  
the voices of the living  
and the dead  
that sing on the wind  
I listen, weeping, smiling

before he died  
he said whenever the wind  
blows from the east  
my head grows sleepy  
with the scent of English rape

Skylark

the fields here  
are yellow again  
with mustard and rape  
and still his grey ashes  
blow under green Ohio pines

*Joy McCall, England*

### **My Last Butterfly Poem**

I need to write  
one more poem  
about a butterfly  
then I will make certain  
not another word, ever.

Something about this garden  
the butterfly didn't like  
fluttering one end  
to the other end and  
over the wall, forever . . .

Is the sunlight wrong?  
The shadows too hedged in?  
Can it be  
the flowers here are scary?  
The fragrance sour or unkind?

What are the chances  
this was just a random thing?  
A quantum ripple  
having no special result?  
But it did have — I feel glum.

*Michael McClintock, USA*

**the children**

I see them there  
on the cobbles  
gas-flame ghosts  
of the children  
we'll never have

this old city  
is full of them  
little flickering fires  
of slowly  
smouldering hopes

**inexhaustible world**

listening  
to Ryokan's breath  
inning and outing  
all the oceans  
I'm yet to sail upon

an infuser of sencha  
dipped in and out  
of a broken cup  
today I'm content  
to stay stone still



## Skylark

### **notes to self**

I plant reminders  
in the garden  
and a tree blooms  
with sticky  
yellow notes

the autumn  
of my memory  
sings  
the skittering  
of a million inky leaves

### **yellow moon**

the summer heat  
is a crowd of  
uninvited guests  
come to rifle through  
my cool contentment

under a yellow moon  
I melt  
onto the typer keys  
just a kindling pillar  
of vague ideas

tanka pairs by  
*Liam Wilkinson, England*

Skylark

**moon diaries**

Pamela A. Babusci, USA  
& Paresh Tiwari, India

waxing moon  
burning more violently  
i am trapped  
between purgatory  
& hell

*moored to  
the placid Ganges  
gibbous moon  
with each distant bell  
the ripples in my soul*

full moon  
the ebb & flow  
of turbulent tides  
the gravity of your words  
leaves me drowning

*the dark side  
of this waning moon  
when did i  
begin to yearn  
for a life without love?*

don't leave me  
dangling on the tip of  
the crescent moon  
can i change your orbit  
satellite man?

**shore lights**

*Magdalena Dale, Romania*  
*Luminita Suse, Canada*

*1*  
*the Moon's power*  
*on a restless North Sea*  
*undecided*  
*I leave and come back*  
*to my first love*

the last sunset  
on a gloomy sea  
for better or for worse  
we cross the Arctic Circle  
into 24/7 daylight

*2*  
bird safari in Norway . . .  
the playful puffins  
darting into the arctic air  
bring back steamy  
memories of Alaska

*a seagull's call*  
*across cold waters*  
*into the unknown*  
*you'll never know*  
*how much I miss you*

## Skylark

3

cruising  
a stormy Aegean Sea . . .  
I should've thrown more  
coins into Trevi Fountain  
to appease Oceanus

*across vastness  
a cruise ship full  
of merry tourists . . .  
the sea's restlessness  
left to the deep*

4

*narrow streets  
among white houses . . .  
rivers of blossoms  
fill the Andalusian sky  
chasing away the sadness*

Moorish details  
in the Alcázar of Seville . . .  
the orange blossoms  
invisible to the naked eye  
from Giralda Tower

5

a bright pearl  
atop an emerald mountain —  
Alhambra castle  
calligraphed with the words  
of an earthly aspiration

Skylark

*nothing can melt  
a heart of ice . . .  
Sierra Nevada mountains  
snow-covered  
in the middle of summer*

*6  
lights aglow  
on the shore of Bosphorus  
at dusk  
I remember when I was  
Sultana of a heart*

every bit of me  
adored and cherished  
like a Greek goddess  
I wished to be his  
"la favorita"

## Roots and Wings

Amy Claire Rose Smith, England  
& Claire Everett, England

first time on a plane  
and it's not as scary  
as I imagined  
the cicada I rescued  
dries its tattered wings

*in no rush to send  
my first postcard from abroad . . .  
on Instant Messenger  
my daughter's Spanish market  
and African braid*

the hum of cicadas  
as the sun begins to set  
a nightjar  
brushes past me  
from a different world

*she regales me  
with stilts and bee-eaters . . .  
the blackbird at dawn  
reminds me my roots  
have given her wings*

cattle shake egrets  
from their lathered backs  
please  
can we stay  
just a few more days?

Skylark

**To Autumn**

Claire Everett, England  
& Joy McCall, England

my errant muse  
sleeping off *White Lightning*  
in a shop doorway  
dreams of mists  
and mellow fruitfulness

*across the road*  
*my own dark muse*  
*tries to pull*  
*sensible poems from*  
*her moonshine-addled brain*

a dream of geese  
and a calling once my own  
on hard baked mud  
the web-footed glyphs  
of poems unwritten

*yet another*  
*wakeful night*  
*and at dawn*  
*I'm imagining the stars*  
*the Milky Way, still shining*

the jingle  
of the milkfloat . . .  
the day at my door . . .  
no words, just sparrows  
pecking at the silver-tops

## Whispered Vows

Claire Everett, England  
& David Terelinck, Australia

a gull laughs me  
out of a dream I am  
the smoke spill of dawn  
nag champa on your fingers  
combing poems from my hair

*chanting sutras  
from the mountaintop . . .  
dissolved of flesh  
I am no more, or less,  
than a silvered gust of air*

your breath and mine  
in the blue heights of lark song . . .  
come twilight  
the mist-cowled priestess  
whispers our vows to the stars

*clothed in nothing  
but your sky-clad beauty,  
and my five-fold kiss  
bowing to each sacred name  
of maiden, mother, crone . . .*

your lips  
on the soles of my feet . . .  
I, the dark moon  
rising in the east  
whose ritual is love



## Skylark

*prayers at 3am,  
the temple bell's echo  
lost to the brume . . .  
reading poems by Rumi  
in a pine-bowered garden*

Donne's silken lines  
and silver hooks  
our book falls open  
at the same page . . . come,  
spread the rug and pour the wine

*a drone of bees  
in summer lavender  
trailing our fingers  
through slow-running waters  
and childhood memories*

the breath that buoys me  
the arms that cradle me . . .  
I float  
in a perfumed amnion,  
the bath you drew for us

*then the coolness,  
of Egyptian cotton sheets . . .  
scent of dusk  
and your skin tasting  
of the land of spices*

a sky without swallows  
an Indian summer  
bereft of your touch . . .  
this musk of rain and dust,  
blood of the gods

## Skylark

*on the sirocco  
a hint of cinnamon  
and rose . . .  
at the rim of the world  
every shadow . . . a shroud*

and I will be  
a love letter, burned,  
your name's tattoo  
beyond breath and bloodbeat . . .  
ash on the hills

*I shall find you  
in skylines edged with aspen,  
the year's first crocus  
look for me in dancing cranes  
at the cradle of each dawn . . .*

**Authors' Note:** This sequence was accepted for publication in a major poetry journal, but after some significant delay failed to appear.

*a drone of bees, chanting sutras, on the sirocco, prayers at 3am, then the coolness* appeared subsequently in *Slow Growing Ivy* (David's second tanka collection).

Look out for a future issue of Christine L. Villa's journal *Frameless Sky* where you will be able to watch a video recording of this sequence being read by the poet Beverley George and her husband.

## Winter Games

Amelia Fielden, Australia  
& Jan Foster, Australia

six o'clock  
in the frosty dark  
my dogs  
are ready to start  
another day of play

*ice hockey match  
fiercely contested  
. . . a miracle  
heat between supporters  
doesn't melt the ice*

hot chocolate  
topped with marshmallows  
and sweet kisses —  
all those teen afternoons  
of boyfriends' footie games

*enjoying  
solitaire by the fire  
this silence  
much softer  
since you left*

defeated  
by my thousand piece jigsaw  
the grandkids  
suggest we play golf  
on their new device

## Skylark

*cabin fever —  
an explosion of children  
outdoors  
a snowball fight  
better than fists*

I remember  
icicles hung under  
the Eiffel Tower,  
forget why we argued  
until we departed

*in the car park  
tussling over a corn chip  
two baby sparrows  
their fiery exchange  
undeterred by frigid winds*

cross country run  
slowed to a dogged jog  
by head winds  
straight from Antarctica  
those were the bad old days

*missing skier  
with night approaching  
as we wait  
the radio crackles  
— they've found him*

Skylark

**Magpie Gang**

*Marilyn Humbert, Australia*  
& Andrew Howe, Australia

*lone gunman*  
*in the coffee shop —*  
*stars stare*  
*unblinking*  
*on another bloody scene*

frightened faces  
invade my morning ritual  
memories linger —  
the taste of home  
in a distant land

*bound in chains*  
*I collect bitter herbs —*  
*promised freedom*  
*melts in the rhetoric*  
*of his soft-shoe shuffle*

forged links  
bridge the abyss  
towards unity  
a 'West Side Story' waltz  
between eloping States

*solo note*  
*from branch shadows*  
*drifts and whirls*  
*in the forest*  
*the magpie gang is massing*

## Skylark

rhythmic voices  
break the silence  
painting harmony —  
a red sunrise  
on an unframed canvas

Skylark

## Things that Matter

Giselle Maya, France  
& Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

deep mauve  
long leopard mountain  
things that matter  
bright persimmon moon  
in the evening sky

*I return  
to the ancient grove  
where lichens hold  
the primeval pulse of hope  
in green silence*

she wished  
only to live quietly  
watch the wind  
draw her long life  
on the water's surface

*what more  
can we ask of the wind  
it chases dusk clouds  
one-by-one stars come out  
to the chime of votive bells*

our village bell  
rings each hour twice  
no escape  
from the measure of time  
mid-summer cicada chant

## Skylark

*the rain scatters  
peony petals on the road . . .  
how swiftly  
summer colors become  
a token of memory*

magical river  
deep green chestnut tree  
reflections  
glide over ancient stones  
lifting body and mind

*rise and fall  
of a lammergeier's cry  
on the sunlit pass  
with what majesty  
its wings span the sky*

bird holes  
in the old cherry tree  
no longer alive  
a long heat wave  
leaves deep earth cracks

*summer of aftershocks  
the ancient fields are alive  
with a strange sorrow  
in mute harmony  
prayer wheels fall silent*

a white spot  
on your third eye  
two pigeon fledglings  
have taken flight at last  
is it my turn now



## Skylark

*a bank of rain clouds  
back-lit by the rising moon . . .  
the Third Eye points  
to this parting  
as a caesura in thought*



## Harmonies

David Terelinck, Australia  
& Beverley George, Australia

blending shiraz  
and cabernet in oak . . .  
the alchemy  
of the gifts produced  
by our long friendship

*differences  
forge the spaces in which  
harmonies reside . . .  
the sturdiest of trees are those  
which can sway with wild winds*

a sickness only  
the Fremantle Doctor      1  
can cure  
the blue of the lace flower      2  
the blue of the ocean . . .

*coast to coast  
foam fringes the shoreline . . .  
I shake free  
her lacy shawl from tissue,  
and draw it close around me*

the tremor  
of shale over bedrock —  
always a choice  
of whether or not  
to forgive . . .

Skylark

*no way to pardon  
a childhood stolen  
church bells sound  
as a wispy edged moon  
rides above us all*

then they ask  
to tissue-type  
his siblings —  
is it gift or burden  
to live a borrowed life?

*links and bondages  
those that we shrug off, discard  
others we clasp firm  
those that haunt our waking hours  
and dog us to the grave*

in each  
autumn leaf that falls  
an echo  
of the doctor saying  
'perhaps six months'

*grandma's book is now  
one hundred and five years old  
I deliberate  
which child will love it most  
slip a note to her inside*

every night  
he made orcs and hobbits  
spring to life  
the depth of shadows within  
my father's rushlight voice

## Skylark

*seams of wax  
thicken the shrinking candle  
the comfort  
of sharing long past years  
with those who lived them too*

### **Authors' Notes:**

1: Australian vernacular term for the cooling afternoon sea breeze which occurs during the summer months in the coastal areas of Western Australia.

2: *Trachymene coerulea* (blue lace flower) — a plant native to Australia and also called the Rottnest Island Daisy.

**seeds**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
& Joy McCall, England

with the silence  
of sand  
from a chak-pur  
seeds of a new day  
sprinkled in the yard

*grey ashes*  
*scattered across*  
*the brown earth*  
*I draw a mandorla*  
*with a sunflower stalk*

in the drone  
of this turning world  
I learn to breathe  
dandelion thoughts  
through a dungchen

**the green man**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
& *Joy McCall, England*

at the meeting  
tangled  
in a wickerwork  
of serious tones  
I listen for my heart

*rising up  
from blood and bone  
the thin lines curl  
shaping themselves  
into beat and breath*

you ask me  
for facts and figures  
I open my mouth  
to wreath the room  
with tendrils of tanka

**acorns**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
& *Joy McCall, England*

another symbol  
of our friendship  
ringing with light  
this winding path  
is strewn with acorns

*stepping high  
over oak saplings  
half-drunk  
on acorn coffee  
and red wine*

I ask if you believe  
in ghosts  
you point into the woods  
and tell me  
to listen

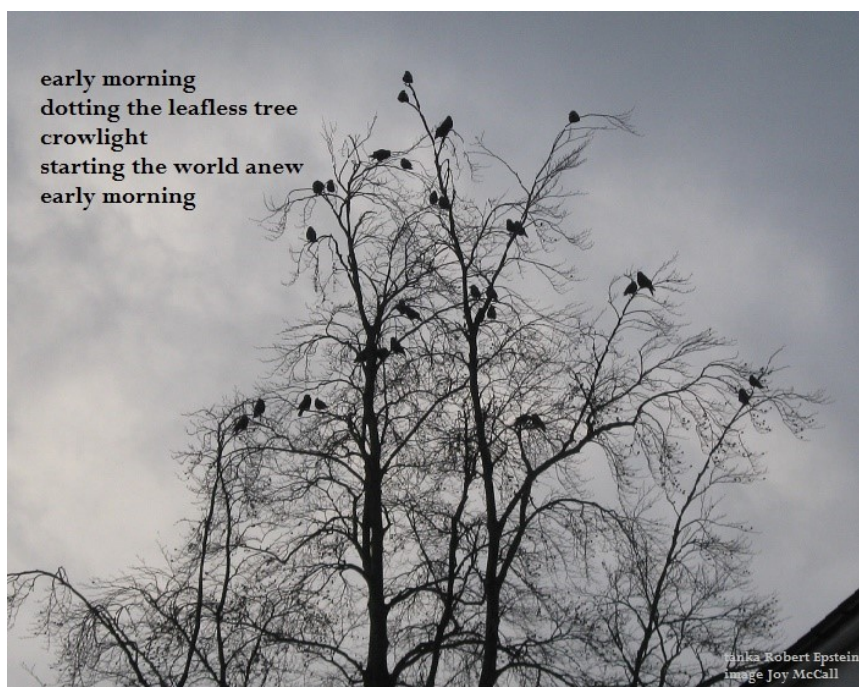




# Rengay



## Skylark



*Joy McCall, England & Robert Epstein, USA*

Skylark

**Sepia Moon**

Matthew Paul, UK  
& Yvonne Hales, Australia

sepia moon  
through the pub window  
the arc of a dart

*autumn tones fall  
about her merino stole*

hilltop rain  
black-faced sheep chew  
liberty caps

*tin roof under fire  
as the storm passes  
a magpie sings solo*

the bird diviner  
waits at the cliff edge

*at twilight  
hang gliders  
ride the thermals*

## Seeing the Light

Sonja Arntzen, Canada  
& Michael Dylan Welch, USA

such a hot day  
even the sun-lover sings  
in praise of shadows                      Sonja

at the seaside park  
an unused chessboard                      Michael

the moon  
filtering through the pines  
one with the wind                      Sonja

headache —  
our station wagon  
winding through the woods              Michael

on the baby's T-shirt  
"Don't get on my dark side"              Sonja

we stop our argument  
in the alpine tunnel . . .  
seeing the light                      Michael

**By Request**

Simon Hanson, Australia  
& Beverley George, Australia

piano bar  
even the chandelier  
on a dimmer

*alone in the corner  
he mouths each word of her song*

outside the club  
girls share a street lamp  
halo

*teetering heels . . .  
loose change pooled  
for cab fare*

quietly returning  
her sister's dress ring

*on the coaster  
secreted in her handbag  
his scrawled name*

## Skylark

### Noel

David Terelinck, Australia  
& *Beverley George, Australia*

traces of moonlight  
the season's first snowflakes  
melting on my tongue

*mulled wine*  
*not one voice in tune*

distant sleigh bells?  
she goes to bed early  
just in case . . .

*a stray dog*  
*laps from the water bowl*  
*left for Santa's reindeer*

the paw-print sweater  
goes straight onto eBay

*Boxing Day*  
*his new helicopter blinks*  
*from a treetop*

## Skylark



*Claire Everett, England*





# Tanka Prose



**Footprints**

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

My parents didn't go to church. Once, when I was a small child, my mother sent me to church and Sunday school with an acquaintance. We colored pictures of Jesus by the well. I thought it was dumb, and that was the end of my formal religious training.

In high school, impelled by curiosity, I independently read the Bible, both testaments, from cover to cover. As Huck Finn said about Pilgrim's Progress, "the statements was interesting, but tough."

In college I wrote an essay for an introductory philosophy course, examining the thesis that "God is love." I reasoned that love implies the existence of a lover. The professor invited me to lunch and practically begged me to become a philosophy major, but I didn't.

still trudging  
after the ox  
I lift  
my flute to my lips . . .  
the silence between notes

**A Lady on Stage**  
*Michelle Brock, Australia*

Almost a year after my mother died, my sisters and I decided to go through her clothes. We sorted everything into two piles, one for throwing out and the other for dropping off at the charity shop. The few items that we thought we might like to keep were put in a wooden chest in the corner of her bedroom.

Her dressing table drawers were jammed with all the things that had gone missing once life got too much for her. Just a few years before she had opened one of those drawers to show me all the pretty night dresses she'd been saving for 'when she had to go to hospital.' She said it as if it were inevitable. Somewhere in her princess fantasies she must have dreamed of drawing her last breath in a lace negligee with a matching bed jacket. Perhaps she'd seen some goddess in a Hollywood production fade gently into the sunset, violins and angel choir in the background.

soft and warm  
against her cheeks  
Zephyr's breath  
chases melodies  
on wind chimes

When I opened that drawer with my sisters there was a musty smell and all her pretty clothes were moth-eaten. There was nothing to save, nothing worth keeping. It was the same with the rest of her things — just a scarf here or a bottle of perfume there, or a string of pearls, or an old wrist watch in need of repair. All those things she accused people of stealing. The real thief was time.

In the end she died in hospital right in the middle of a Hollywood set she created in her mind. She said she was

Skylark

amazed that people had gone to so much trouble just for her.

a spider web  
bejewelled with dew drops —  
the heirlooms  
our mother promised  
to each of us

Skylark

**Lexicon**

*Matthew Caretti, USA*

“Yes. I know you didn’t sleep with him.”  
But the emails. The texts. The intent.

I thee wed  
the dismantling of  
our marriage  
in the flawed vocabulary  
of infidelity



**On Display**

Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, 2012

*Matthew Caretti, USA*

After exhibitions on the chameleon game and a Casspir sitting in obsolete silence, this section notes the role of the white liberal in South Africa's struggle. Would I . . . have ignored or confronted the inhumanity? Would the indoctrination of some make-believe supremacy have seduced? Or would I have risked . . . myself for others?

township tour  
atop each wall  
shards of glass  
the broken dreams  
still slow to mend

**Author's Notes:**

*Chameleon Game*: the process of changing one's racial classification (Native, Coloured, Asian or White), or having it changed by the authorities, during South Africa's apartheid era.

*Casspir*: an armored personnel carrier used by the South African Police to quell anti-apartheid uprisings.

Skylark

**One Mile Square**

*Tish Davis, USA*

this town  
without a traffic light  
with semi's  
rumbling through  
rattling panes of glass

on the lopsided porch  
of our century home  
a beer bottle  
about to fall  
from the balustrade

random order —  
hand-me-downs and diapers  
hung on the line,  
some of the dahlias  
fed lightly

After walking to the center of town, I wait with my younger brothers on the grocer's wooden bench. We're focused on the white brick building across the street. It's both the post office and the hardware store. When the postman's wife can't mate a gasket to the clack valve, she trades places with her husband and sells stamps for a while. He's the barber, too. On Saturday afternoons and on Monday nights he pulls on the store's sun-bleached shade and then plugs in the striped pole.

the magic lamp  
on the shelf  
below  
the barber's bandages  
the books that one can borrow

**the empty steps**  
*Susan Diridoni, USA*

a fan unfolds  
the fabric of memory  
Kyoto's design  
in our hearts over decades  
yet still we roam, finding

green so varied green, Tofuku-ji is adorned by Indian summer upon a day of heat and effulgence. All the flying insects find the water, while walkers linger in the shade amidst momentous history.

over the threshold  
of Nanzen-ji's massive gate  
land of Buddhist eras  
mortality's noble truth sears  
the empty steps of the koan



Skylark

**My Fingers Dance**  
*Gerry Jacobson, Australia*

*Only a hill; but all of life to me,  
up there, between the sunset and the sea.*  
— Geoffrey Winthrop Young

Climbing. How did I get into it at 16 or 17? It must have been through a scouts' rock climbing course. Llanberis. Soaked to the skin in cold Welsh rain. But how did I become so hooked?

It became an obsession when I was 18, 19, 20. An obsession that influenced my choice of career. Well, rocks! And led me to my first friendship group at uni. Led me to my first girlfriend who was also a climbing partner. We held each other on the rope in two mountain 'accidents'. Saved each other's lives. And eventually led me to Rae and that lifelong partnership. How often have we held each other on the rope?

Rock climbing is listed as a sport, and it is nowadays. It wasn't a sport for me. It was a compulsion. Today there are artificial climbing walls and competitions, and it's acceptable for school children. Noticed a climbing wall for 3 year olds in a Stockholm playground. I watched a little one going up it, her dad waiting at the bottom to catch her if necessary.

I still have traces of addiction. If I see a cliff I look for routes up it as well as trying to work out the geology. Remember the film 'Picnic at Hanging Rock'? Gothic mystery of the summit and the disappearing girls. Quite spoilt for me. 'Oh that's the place where Steve fell off!' and 'That's the boulder I only just got up!'

my fingers dance  
remembering  
the rock they gripped —  
granite and sandstone  
rhyolite and dolerite

## Skylark

In the outdoor gear shop I see an ad. A couple of climbers want companions for a trip to Africa. Get a van and drive around. Climb in the Drakensburg and other ranges. Mt Kenya. Sounds like bliss. I daydream. Imagine waking up each morning with nothing to do but climb the cliff above. Warm sunny rock. Then I remember my ageing creaking limbs.

journey of light  
out beyond the stars  
enclosed  
in that deep blue sky  
I don't want to leave

## Two Gardens

*Ingrid Kunschke, Germany*

Sitting at this empty table, not wanting to turn on the light, I watch the garden darken and my thoughts stray to the one at that former home, where, with a treadle sewing machine as a makeshift desk, not knowing what it would come to, I had furnished a place to write by the window. Ah, the thoughts I would jot down there: scribblings that pieced together were a mere patchwork of dream and memory. And that view onto the garden, a meadow with scattered trees where the children grew up amidst bowing grasses and changing boughs, it always reminded me of their tender years.

Of course, the cherry tree will announce spring any day now and it might well be snowing, they say, just as it did when she was born. Her first tour of the trees, bundled-up in my arms — why, she did look frail among those blossoms, making me wonder, is this one to keep? But before long, she spent her days kicking on a blanket, where she listened to the rustle of the canopy and watched its shadow play while

grasping light  
and dark with her little fists,  
what will she  
growing up be given  
to see, this baby girl?

Around her the quinces, their scent, their golden hue, but first her brother, back from beyond the fence, climbed the plum to pick sweeter fruits, and later, when it got cold, we raked up the leaves and tossed them, raked them up and tossed them again: a tapestry for the rime.

In winter the trees belonged to the birds; only rarely did the children climb into the cherry then. But that day, at sol-

## Skylark

stice, they were perched on a branch in their quilted jackets, titmice ruffling their feathers in the afterglow, and another branch holds the doll's pram for their latest game. From my seat I can hardly see them and, well, they don't seem to want me to any more. The gentle rocking of my feet on the treadle lends wings to my thoughts; a weaver's shuttle, they fly now here now there, weaving a gauzy fabric of

dew and rime  
now hiding now dyeing  
the leaves  
now lush now brittle  
in this temporary garden

gossamer strands  
now hidden now glinting  
from tree to tree  
let's move closer together  
for it smells like fall

or so it seems as I suddenly feel chilly and hasten to turn the light on. Standing in the door, I hear the children chattering; just before nightfall I call them in.

Skylark

## Crossings

*Liz Lanigan, Australia*

You have to cross the creek twice to get there. Yes it's probably quicker to walk on the road. But this way's so much more enjoyable. If you go down to the grove where we saw the span-gled drongos the other day — I really love their gloss and that tail, don't you? — that's where the first crossing is. All that rain? Nothing for it but to get wet feet. The cliff on the other side's a bit of a challenge — especially where the path has washed away. Best not to rely on that branch to help you up.

stepping stones  
to cross the creek  
between us  
will we ever find  
a way to be together

At the top, turn left. That's if you don't want any diversions. Otherwise the swimming hole just below is a good place for cooling off. And you'll get to see the catfish father protecting his fry. It's just on the water's edge. Jump straight in or he'll suck your toe — he's only urging you to move on. Goan-nas like it here too. You'll hear one scramble up a tree even if you don't see it. There's not so many around since the cane toads arrived. And if you're quiet you may even see the platypus.

rainforest home  
catfish ceaselessly circling  
his nest . . .  
i cannot venture there  
without a certain fight

Now, the creek flows parallel to the path, going the same way as you. Watch out for the jumping ants nest — best jump

## Skylark

over that. I once forgot it was there. Ouch. But there's some bracken close by — if you get bitten, rub the fronds on the bite — they give some relief.

How are you going to know where to cross the creek again? Well, the path gradually goes downwards. There's a huge log covered in moss right across the track. Climb over and you'll notice a wallaby trail going up again. Don't take that. The right path is the way to go. Nearly there.

The creek is narrower here. Bigger rocks too. The bank on the other side is not so steep and someone's made steps. Walk through the casuarinas — and you'll see the house straight ahead.

Wait! Why don't I just come with you?



Skylark

**Mascot**

Gary LeBel, USA

**I. For so long . . . and so far**

Music, mentor of silences, sister of forests, mother of mountains, high priestess of the mirroring lake,

*when the deeper ear calls out  
to sound your ancient origins,  
it learns to measure distances,  
even the Planck-lengths between  
lovers of old . . .*

How Eleanor of Aquitaine's court must have sounded with all the colors of the southlands sung in that mellifluous tongue, an art of well-born boys . . . but today's a day to change my work-truck's oil, a soberer task than imagining Henry the Second's bride and her amorous, velvet crooners . . .

so of all things to pass the time I think of Walter instead. At fourteen I ran with the so-called 'intellectuals' in my small town: they were older and wiser than me by miles, or at least they made me believe it. I flew by the seat of my pants and tried to act smart around really intelligent people though the jig was always up,

but like a mascot they kept me around. One day I went to Walter's apartment after school. He was the spitting image of the Three Stooges' Larry with his bald pate and frizzy red hair lurching out of the sides of his head like tumbleweeds. There was a mumble of music behind his door; I knocked and went in

— people in those days didn't always use their deadbolts — and Walter, jobless and on the dole, lay sunk in a smoky

haze listening to music: it was stunningly beautiful, the likes of which I'd never heard. I said, "Walter, what's *that* music?" and he handed me the LP's jacket.

"Proco-FIFE?" I asked haltingly, looking down at him from where I stood near the door. His reply was the kind of side-long, snooty glare that intellectuals without girlfriends or boyfriends often hurl at neophytes like me. "Pro-CAW-fee-eff," he corrected rather dismissively. I stood there, a ninny, yet entirely bewitched by the colossal force of a piano that was bolting through its cadenza with a rising, unstoppable power.

A year later my first love played me that same piece, his *3rd Piano Concerto*, and still it contains her entirely, those breathtakingly blue eyes in the first movement, the scent of her perfume in the second, the long goodbye in the third. And somewhere inside it, too, is Walter.

And on a morning some forty-odd years later, I feed that Russian genius into my player again on the way to a dealership in north Georgia

*by way of wind-lashed Dakota fields and a cartel of crows  
barking orders to their minions over vast stretches of land so  
flat the eye could roam forever*

all the while imagining the muse Euterpe as more lovely  
than even Boucher could have painted her,

picturing her as a rather tall girl with broad shoulders,  
athletic, for she'd have to be . . .

to carry us for so long . . . and *so far* . . . .

*I couldn't stop him  
but why should I want to  
slipping out of the door  
and into a night  
full of peepers?*



(Sketched on July 13, 2015 in the waiting room at a Ford garage in Dahlonga, GA)

## II. The Georgetown Hysterical Society

You betrayed me, Geoffrey, along every inch of the word. You goaded a shy, lonely kid into getting up on stage to bang away on a fine Martin 12-string guitar he'd borrowed, whose music even you, a lover of Couperin and Bach, must have known came straight from Richie Havens. A devilish Puck, you invited an older musician-friend of yours to stop by one evening to prick my harsh, Neanderthalean nightsong with the haunting thorn of his oboe, forging an acoustic blend I would hear years later, refined to high art by an ensemble called 'Oregon'.

And we played hard for an hour or more, neither one of us knowing from one bar to the next where we were going, only the voyage mattering, the audience of five or six in the church coffeehouse clapping uproariously at the end. You shook my hand, Geoffrey, then loosed a prideful smile from somewhere in that forest of bushy whiskers: how sweet your betrayal, good, good man Geoffrey.

Then you took a few of us out digging for clay pipes and arrowheads in old colonial cellars and shell middens along inlets and marshes that swarmed with horseflies and rushlight. Sometimes the bitter soil gave them up, but mostly we'd unearth the timelessness you had already planted there for us to find. We called ourselves, in rebellion against the real thing, The Georgetown Hysterical Society, your moniker as I recall.

An intellectual by dint of nature (or was it nurture?) you betrayed me again by never leading me into those far countries, the works of Diderot whom you loved like a surrogate father, and on whom you had written your only book, never

published, mentioned off-the-cuff just once in passing. You with your Whitman beard and Princeton speech, your easy, convivial ways and love of pot, those sometimes furtive eyes where a blush of vulnerability occasionally sneaked through, must have gleaned something from us, too, but I never knew what that was, except that it wasn't enough.

We passed the long summer inventing music, scouring shell heaps and I with growing up, till fall laid down in late-summer's bed and school began.

It was around Christmastime, I remember, that you'd been mentioned in the local papers, having dowsed your bed with gasoline then laid down for a scholar's nap,

and with the flick of a match, set all your learning ablaze, the largest betrayal of all, that of yourself, good man Geoffrey, an act which haunts me still, and even today I cannot forgive,

though I wish I had been older then and had seen the man you were, seen you as more than the shepherd of an adolescence that was grasping at the coattails of adulthood.

*All day long  
with barely a word spoken  
my soul tonight  
walks barefoot  
thru a thousand miles of Petra. . .*

**Making Sense**

*Michael McClintock, USA*

One of those days the English language makes no sense  
inside a classroom of dead air.

Outside, through the window, I see popcorn clouds  
and a wind shaking the birch leaves.

“We’re going outdoors,” I tell them.

And that’s what we did. Smiles, and no questions.  
Everyone understood.

And every poem  
we read that day  
out on the grass, by the birches,  
under a perfect fall sky,  
began to make sense.

Skylark

**Totems**

*Debbie Strange, Canada*

When I live on the prairie, I long for the sea. When I live by the water, I yearn for the land. I am always living either half-empty or half-full, my totem selves pulling me in opposite directions.

my weathered skin  
crusted with salt and dirt  
the aftertaste  
of this life and the last  
where do I go from here

Skylark

## All Things Proportional

*Charles Tarlton, USA*

*...another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of reasoning to its logical conclusion, and attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise.*

— Thomas Hardy

We were fishing for salmon off San Juan Island, trolling from the stern of O'Neill's 30-foot cabin cruiser. The boat was just creeping along, rising and falling gently in the rhythms of the sea. At the end of each of our lines was a plastic lure on which a herring fillet was fastened with a peg through it. Under water, O'Neill assured us, the unseen lure flipped and flopped, twisted and squirmed the way a crippled herring would do. The boat bore steadily straight ahead, though I imagined the fish below us in the sea moved in wildly disparate patterns, every which way. They were bound eventually to run into our hooks; or was it that we were bound to run into them?

how straight and crooked  
meet and marry in a number  
perhaps magical  
one thought mingling with another  
in Mozartian hemiolas

perfection of line  
and perfectly plane surfaces  
the coincidence  
of Platonic Good and Euclid's  
equilateral triangle

*A qualitative change is where something has metamor-*

phosed into another thing entirely, as a monkey might change into an orange. A *quantitative* change occurs when the temperature goes up or the wine drains from the jug. The odd thing is that no quantitative change can ever become a qualitative one, e.g. no increase in temperature can ever lead from happiness to sadness . . . or perhaps, I have got that all wrong.

beauty from hard stone  
a filigree of pink roses  
hammered from hot iron  
in my Grandpa's blacksmith shop  
thick-fingered delicacy

noticing changes  
in each stage of *crepusculum*  
fragmented blues  
under each orange wave across  
the swash up to the sand

A: Let me just say, that a consistency of ethics means always doing good.

B: Yes, but how always? See the possibilities raining down, like sand or powder blown along.

A: The moral person knows the rules, never steals nor lies; lives by a regular code!

B: Like an ivory pillar, then, sturdy as an oak; but what if a hard wind blows? What if everything depends on bending with that wind?

C: Stop, you two! Let me explain! Things change and that's the truth of it, but goodness always remains the same. The good person is a weaver, warp and woof, and one capable of straightening a crooked road.

## Skylark

this Connecticut River  
that was once the only highway  
through Massachusetts  
you only notice now because  
there are bridges in the towns

but now the Turnpike runs  
straight from Boston to the New York  
Thruway; then the 91  
runs from Springfield straight up to Vermont  
both crossing many twisty rivers

**Strange Terrain**

*David Terelinck, Australia*

And what of the first time she will have to take the car for a service. She's heard of the dilemma of others. A two hundred dollar lube job that becomes twenty-five hundred of unexpected repairs. Because she's a woman. And alone.

That's not all that frightens her. Tradesmen and bartering. Her husband always did that. But his bargaining days are over — except with God.

Six months, they say. Then she'll have to start the mower herself, or let the grass and weeds reclaim her life.

such strange terrain  
in her own backyard . . .  
every day  
she tunnels through  
this bedrock of grief

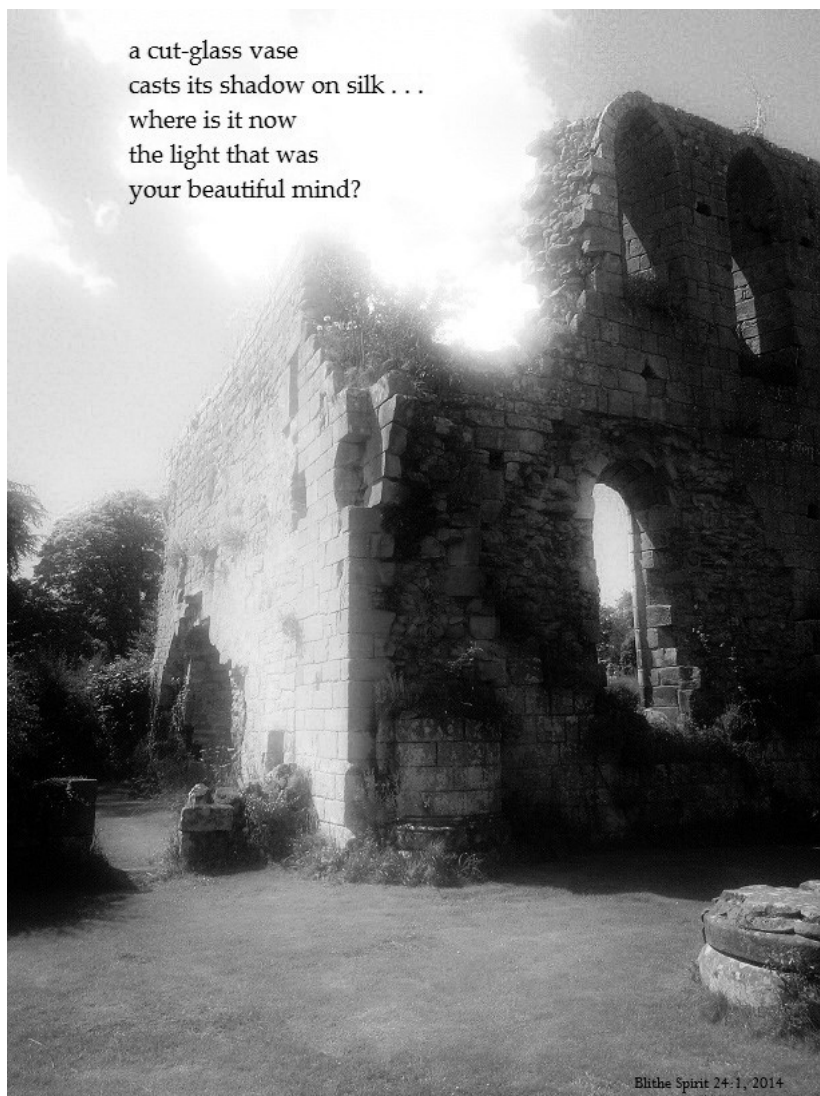


## Special Feature

### Hagstones, Tea Bowls and A Thankful Heart



## Skylark



*Claire Everett, England*

Skylark

**Hagstones: A Tanka Journey  
by Claire Everett & Joy McCall**

Skylark Publishing. Paperback. 49 pp. (2015). Cover illustrations & all interior images by Amy Claire Rose Smith. ISBN: 9781515145393. Price: £9.00 from Amazon UK / \$13.99 Amazon.com / Createspace.

**Reviewed by *Patricia Prime, New Zealand***

*Hagstones* acts as a witness between two fine tanka poets: Claire Everett and Joy McCall, in a book of 92 poems, written over the winter of 2014 in memory of fellow tanka poet and friend, Brian Zimmer. In the collection the poets travel into the past, in one sense, but also into the agelessness of the future. The theme of the death of Zimmer raises the question about how we construct someone's life and come to terms with it. In this endeavour, the poets succeed admirably.

With Everett and McCall, we enter an ornate textual space. In the book, the parts weave memories, descriptions and emotions like a lacquered tapestry, as understanding rises slowly through the intricate phrasing of their combined tanka. The risk here, I think, is that the progression from one tanka to another can feel less urgent, as we sometimes become tangled in the verses, forward and back. Some lines are sombrely memorable, as in McCall's opening verse:

*the hagstones  
hanging at my door  
sway in the wind  
the dead are passing by  
breathing my name*

Yet there are also passages that invite us to discover nuggets of gold: for example, in the following verse by Everett:

today the moor  
is a living ghost whose breath  
and voice are white  
what makes them forget  
the season, forsake the sea?

The verse suggests a simple, even precise clarifying link, yet it's less a stepping-stone than a digression into nature. This serious-minded deployment arises partly because the poets are wrestling with difficult subjects: mortality, and questions of how Zimmer could have sustained intrinsic self-worth when crippled by mental health problems, as we see in McCall's verse:

*when he felt  
the serpent uncoiling  
he called the light  
puzzles, riddles, a black dog  
snapping at his heels*

The book continuously, consciously wrestles with the truth that we really know Zimmer only through his poems. In this tanka by Everett, for example, her love of nature is neatly melded with the need to explore our sadness at the loss of a loved one and to heal ourselves through writing about them:

tail fanned, or forked?  
I learn to tell a buzzard  
from a red kite . . .  
hurts that need ink  
to make themselves known

The quest to fill out his biography so that he becomes more than a wandering ghost often renders up profound sorrow at his loss, as we see in the following tanka by McCall:

Skylark

*the gods stumble  
the candle flame dies  
grey smoke rises  
I weep — oh careless love  
where have you gone?*

Yet there is an imaginative fire in these poets' hearts righting the balance between life and death, in their vision of their friend and his influence on the tanka world:

dusk fills the throat  
of the wild, white rose  
the catch in my voice  
when I read aloud  
your death poem

The tanka shift fluidly from verse to verse. Intensifying adjectival richness and confidence as they take us deep into their love and loss, into Zimmer's sense of isolation and despair — the beautiful language righting the scales:

*ashes blowing  
in the Ohio woods  
the holy pines  
his mother loved,  
welcome him home*

as sure as scent  
from the wind-stirred pines  
a memory  
of the storm-bird's clatter  
and the sadness to come

Everett and McCall revive Zimmer's life and work so that they haunt the reader's conscience: what do we as readers

gather from the book? Are we silent, judgmental or deeply moved? The clear-spoken, direct tanka are all the more scalp-tingling in their belief in the present — and release of the spirit. Written in poetic love and celebration of a life, the poems also implicate the reader. Subtly, the question of an afterlife addresses us from the verses:

*he lives on  
in one of those worlds  
with the hare  
the rabbit, the form  
the burrow, the tree roots*

like the heel-print  
of Eostre herself  
the brown hare's form  
here, among the buttercups  
I would have him lay his head

The book offers its own way up from despair's vortex through poems as regenerative, social acts that embody the opposite to submission and paralysis:

*the frayed edges  
of a high autumn sky  
brushing my face  
they clutch the strings and fly  
the kites of their very selves*

the four winds  
carry them where they will  
and we lose sight of them  
only the threads remain . . .  
drifting, dancing, shining

## Skylark

These two poets write with a crisp, authoritative, confident touch that is, nevertheless, tender in its approach to a difficult topic. Whether intoning images of nature, human nature or eternal truths, it is tanka at its best, expertly tuned to the deeply personal but never sentimental. Every word is the 'note juste' in the melodic, harmonic and contrapuntal whole.

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(Quotations are in *italic* for Joy's tanka and in regular type for Claire's tanka).

Skylark

**Marks that Keep on Burning**  
*Claire Everett, England*

**A Review of *Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls***  
**by Kathy Kituai & Fergus Stewart**

Interactive Press, May 2015, 128 pages, perfect bound, and Kindle.  
Available at Amazon.com & Europe

they linger  
in the corner of the kiln  
tea bowls  
glazed in deeper hues,  
smoke the colour of sorrow

I recall reading this tanka (in *Simply Haiku*, if I'm not mistaken) early in my tanka career. It stayed with me. I found it compelling, Jungian, shrouded in mystery. I knew nothing of Kathy, or the project she had embarked on, yet I found the tanka wholly satisfying; what did these tea bowls represent? Were they memories? Fears? Hopes unrealised? Words on the tip of a poet's tongue? Perhaps they spoke of all that is ineffable in this worldly existence. Imagine my delight to find this tanka lingering within the pages of *Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls*. Now, on reaching into the kiln to once more feel the shape of Kathy's words, I am rewarded with the sight and scent of many tea bowls, of various shades and textures, all waiting to be filled with my own particular brew of poetic interpretation. Isn't that part of the art of tea and its making: that the experience is as much about the flavour as it is about the vessel in which the leaves are steeped and the cup or bowl from which the tea is sipped?

In Japan, we see the spiritual, ceremonial side of tea-making, *Chanoyu*, involving the preparation and presentation of *matcha* (powdered green tea), but in western culture 'the Way of Tea' is no less significant, whether it is made in a bone



china pot and served in matching cups, or brewed in an earthenware mug, 'builders'-style', its strength determined by how long the bag is left to stew, or how many times it is dunked. Tea is brewed in celebration and as consolation, its therapeutic benefits far exceeding a simple elixir of ground leaves and boiling water; asked what place it has in their daily lives, many would flounder like a wrestler trying to get to grips with the Crown Derby. Fittingly, on the dedication page to *Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls*, we read:

Strangely enough humanity has so far met in the tea-cup.  
It is the only Asiatic ceremonial which commands universal esteem.

— Akakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (1906)

And just as the west has embraced the art of tea-making and made it its own, so its poets have welcomed tanka into their creative lives. Tanka was integral to the *Chanoya*; in his poetic afterword to Kathy's collection, the potter Milton Moon observes:

Tanka embodies the gentle perception of words  
Chanoya embodies the shape of the form.  
At their highest expression  
they take us into the silence beyond either.

Little did Kathy know when she first encountered Fergus Stewart plugging clay in a studio at Strathnairn Arts Centre, Canberra in the 1980s, she was about to embark on a friendship that would span more than two decades and lead to a unique collaboration between poet and potter. From the outset, she was not only fascinated by Fergus' Aberdeen accent, but also the sheer physicality of his craft. In her prologue she says of potters, "knowing clay has a memory they learn its way of being and never lose sight of that fact." For many of us tanka, too, is a way of being; moreover, it *is* a living being,

born of breath and experience, something we can knead and mould into a form that expresses our deepest joys and fears, our full immersion in a given moment, our fundamental need to create, to make a mark. And afterwards, we can choose to keep that tanka-ware, or discard it; we can embellish it, or we can cherish it for its earthy simplicity.

can potter  
and poet meet in each  
turn of phrase?  
test cones twist, melt  
and break in the kiln

Throughout the collection, Kathy draws many comparisons between pottery and poetry, but as she says in her prologue, she and Fergus — whose beautiful work is showcased in full-colour photographs accompanying the tanka — concluded that the main difference between pottery and poetry is the extra ‘t’ in the former. (How appropriate that the additional letter should be a ‘t’ . . .) Potter and poet are both well-acquainted with the *is-ness* of a moment; that space, however briefly inhabited, that reminds us we are *beings*, not *doings*.

Was it synchronicity, serendipity, or some otherworldly blessing that the National Gallery of Australia exhibited ‘*Black Robe, White Mist: art of the Japanese Buddhist Nun Rengetsu*’ at the very time Kathy and Fergus were seriously considering the collaboration that was destined to become *Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls*? In another nod to Rengetsu, Kathy went on to win the Tea Towel Tanka Award with the first tanka she wrote for the project — further affirmation:

every night  
she raises to her mouth  
his tea bowl  
whose idea was it  
to glaze it with the moon?

Kathy's engaging prologue in which she outlines the history of and inspiration for *Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls*, is followed by two free-form Western-style poems, the first of which, ('Teapots and Cats') is dedicated to Fergus. Kathy has already explained that she enjoys both Western and Eastern poetry and does not favour one over the other, but tanka with its associations with the Tea Ceremony and its potential for brevity, expansion, malleability, dreaming room, passion, ornamentation — qualities that we might find in clay itself and the process of making tea bowls — seemed most appropriate for her purpose. With the first section entitled 'pricking holes', like salt to the glaze, the magic begins. Immediately, we encounter Fergus through Kathy's eyes:

she finds him  
outside his studio  
on the lawn  
pricking holes in colanders  
and thoughts she had on potters

With this arresting image, we have an inkling that as readers we, too, are about to have our preconceived ideas about potters (and poets) challenged; how will this synthesis be realised? How will this story unfold? On the page next to the opening tanka there are two colanders, one nestled inside the other. We are told these colanders are finished with 'Bracken Green slip' and a 'Wood-fired salt glaze'. Image and description are a poem in themselves. One wonders if, in the process of crafting these pieces, Fergus was reconsidering the thoughts he had on poets. From the outset, there is a sense that this collection is as much about what is taken away as what remains. In the words of the *Tao Te Ching*:

... Shape clay into vessel,  
It is nothing (the emptiness) that is of use as a vessel.

## Skylark

Open the door and frame the window,  
It is nothing (the hollowness) that is of use as a room . . .

Potter and poet are experts at harnessing the use of nothingness, relishing in what others might carelessly discard. In the same way

joyous  
after it rains  
tadpoles  
swimming in tea bowls  
thrown away as seconds

Here is Kathy, pen poised above a clean page of her notebook while the clay spins on the wheel ready to become whatever the hands desire.

bubbles  
before they burst  
raindrops  
before they fall  
pots before they are thrown

The image that closes the opening section is of the ‘Old Stable Studio window’ with its pillar-box red frame stark against the white-washed wall of the cottage. Are not pottery and poetry both ways of looking at the world from outside-in and inside-out?

In ‘pots and poetry’, as witness to Fergus’ art, Kathy sees the rough clay at every stage of its journey to becoming a finished pot, perfect or otherwise, but is Fergus privy to the snip-pets and drafts in her notebook? As poets are we quite so open about the creative process?

no pinch pots  
or coiled platters . . .

## Skylark

will she share  
scribbled scraps of ideas  
or poems trimmed and glazed

As we enter the mind-set of poet and potter alike, there is a certain poise, an awareness of the trance-like connection between artist and art; that epicentre into which none other than the dreamer and the dream can enter:

they limber up . . .  
he with clay centred  
on the wheel  
she with pen on paper  
steadying each word

Here, too, is a reminder to be fully engaged in the present moment:

how to wedge  
the next what if  
clasp hands  
around lumps of clay  
feel its roundness

I imagine (perhaps incorrectly) that most readers coming to this collection will be poets rather than potters; what, then, of these vessels we create? The potter's wares are made for our hands, just so; the cup or jug invites us to feel its weight, to fill it, to tip it, to set our lips to its rim. How might a poet persuade the reader to interact with her creation?

no handle  
or spout for this vessel  
just five lines  
pouring from the nib  
to sip or savour

This can be seen as quite self-deprecating: *just* five lines? Or could it be that the poet must fashion something that will move or transfix the reader out of a *mere* five lines? To those new to reading tanka, it can seem quite simple and apparently easy to create; once one becomes more familiar with this versatile form, its capacity to say so much more than its five lines, is as endlessly spellbinding as that first sliver of light that brings its cursive to a dark moon. Poet and potter might talk well into the night about the things they share as artists, and those they don't, but ultimately

for all their talk  
on poetry and pots  
the wheel spins . . .  
look at what might be said  
simply without words

And as we turn the page, there is a reminder of how we throw words away so thoughtlessly, or those occasions when we put our heads together in idle chat as the moments tick inexorably by: an image of 'A Cluster of Colanders, red clay slip, gas-fired salt glaze'. Never before have I been so aware of the human qualities such vessels possess; how beautifully Fergus' colanders (in association with Kathy's carefully chosen words) convey the sense of an empty mind, whether that is a mind sieved of thought, stilled by meditation, or one that has allowed the finer points of life, or meaning, to slip away. Anthropomorphism is a theme that Kathy plays with throughout this collection. With a childlike eye she conjures all kinds of characters:

gossiping  
hands on hips  
teapots

## Skylark

facing each other  
on a wooden shelf

And reminisces as a mother is wont to do:

pots fired  
ready in the kiln  
shouting  
look at me! look at me!  
were her children any different?

Even the kiln takes on a life of its own, standing before the poet, mirroring her open-mouthed wonder, ‘not always speaking of perfect pots’, but endlessly enchanting when it is ‘cool enough to open brick by brick’. Here, too, we are alerted to the quiet presence of the potter who will ‘listen later, as best he can to pots with little to say’; just as the poet’s words will not always sit comfortably with their creator once reviewed in the cold light of day, the tableware made yesterday might not return the kindness of the hands that shaped it.

Not only do these vessels of clay exhibit human-like qualities, the glazed tea bowls themselves are mirrors of the landscape from which they came: the briefly-clouded loch, the sun-shimmered tarn, the green valley . . .

in a row  
ready to be bisqued  
pots  
set outside at sunset  
glazed pink, red and gold

Throughout the section, ‘a mantra of pots’, there is a real sense of the interconnectedness of all things; of clay beings rising from the spinning wheel just as our most distant forebears emerged from the primal slip.

do spherical  
creatures arise  
from the deep  
with only finger and thumb tips  
guiding them out of mud?

What does this tanka say about Kathy's regard for Fergus' art? This god is in his heaven and he has the power to create life:

kanna\*  
and body-mind centred  
he carves  
the foot of each bowl  
waiting to be discovered

\*metal finishing tool

On entering 'the potter's mind' we cross the threshold to even deeper mystery. A silvery shape at the window of the potter's shed and glimpses of that inner sanctum with its carefully-stacked wood ('preparing for the firing at Torbrec') segue beautifully into Kathy's tanka-portraits of Fergus as alchemist: 'keeping track/he charts temperatures/every hour' and 'diligently/with unwavering focus/he stokes and stokes the kiln'. These pages lie at the heart of the collection and seem to encapsulate the very essence of Kathy's fascination and deep respect for the potter's art. Suddenly, in white on a black page:

flashing  
in the darkness  
potter . . .  
wood . . . firebox . . .  
pen on the page



In bearing witness to Fergus' creativity, Kathy is attuned to the flickering edges of her own. Here are echoes of William Blake's *The Tyger*. There follows a journal entry by Kathy, dated 29th July 2010 in which she says: "Alive, throbbing and crackling, we abandoned all our energy to the flame . . . the last throes of creativity where there is nothing to do but give yourself up to the heat of the moment, the pain or joy . . . No light, or moon, just before midnight. Nothing more than darkness and the kiln, Fergus opened the firebox, flames leapt out at him, drawing us both in . . ."

In Kathy's eyes, this might well be Hephaestus fashioning the shield of Achilles. This is myth in the making, and in reading it we become part of it, as we peer into the furnace of the potter's (and poet's) mind. We also learn that Kathy's time with Fergus is coming to an end and she must return to Australia. The sections that follow are infused with acceptance, reminiscence, a sense of holding on to what is dear even in the knowledge that all is transient.

head bowed . . . hands folded  
she is thankful for mushrooms  
in a bowl of soup  
spiced with onions garlic thyme  
and the outline of her face

careful . . .  
hold it with both hands . . .  
catch every drop  
of Lochinver sunlight  
spilling into the cup

functional  
plain simple teapot  
she brews tea  
whenever she can  
just to say amen

This book does not preach — far from it — but it imparts  
a gentle wisdom:

to which  
would Buddha bow . . .  
this bowl  
fitting the palm of her hand  
or those the potter discarded?

I could say so much more in praise of this long-awaited collection; the images and themes are as many and varied as there are blends of tea. Kathy's tanka invite the reader to pause, hold, weigh, consider, and time and again, I find myself wanting to reach into the photograph to take out one of Fergus' creations and set it on my table. This unique collaboration, like the ritual it celebrates, is inherently comforting yet strangely tantalising:

hand-coiled  
lop-sided tea bowl  
set on a tray . . .  
the taste of tea  
before it is poured

It is not a perfect collection: a discerning reader will spy minor flaws, but therein lies another of its charms. How apt that this tanka

perfect  
imperfection . . .  
pots  
drying too rapidly  
crack without warning

is followed by a double-page spread in which the potter can be seen at work surrounded by his pieces at various stages of their production; the accompanying tanka that overlays the image is quite difficult to read and this detracts from the delightful pairing.

I am grateful for the gift of *Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls* and where Kathy's words offer a deep bow to the potter (her 'mentor') while he, in turn, creates vessels for her outpourings, I bow deeply to them both.

sheer poetry  
leaping from the kiln  
will her poem  
make marks  
that keep on burning

. . . the answer is "yes."

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**A Thankful Heart: Tanka After Ninety**  
**by Cathy Street**

Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, July 2015, 80 pages,  
perfect bound. Available from Createspace, Amazon.com & Europe.

**Reviewed by *Liam Wilkinson, England***

Next week I'm going  
with Joy and Andy to see  
the church on the hill  
at Shotesham, and after  
we shall have lunch at the pub.

- Cathy Street, *A Thankful Heart*

Poet and educator Dan Chiasson once compared Frank O'Hara's "I do this I do that" poems to Shakespeare's sonnets, describing them as "little contraptions designed to stop, and yet unable to stop, the passing of time". When it comes to colloquial, almost diary-like poems there's no one like O'Hara. His poems often appear spontaneous, off-the-cuff and, what's more, they don't require much more than a simple walk through the city or a glass of coke with a friend to provide the impetus for writing. O'Hara, more than any other writer I can think of, knew that poetry could be gleaned from the simplest and most domestic of activities.

Yesterday, I began reading *A Thankful Heart: Tanka After Ninety*, the posthumous collection of tanka by Cathy Street, and was immediately struck by the innocent simplicity of the lines and the uncomplicated subject matter of each crystal-clear poem. They are poems that, like O'Hara's, find their subject matter and ultimate charm in everyday living. As someone who has often found themselves tangled up in over-complicated, thorny tanka that tries to be more than it is, it's with a sigh of relief and utter enchantment that I turn to *A Thankful Heart*.

Here we have a collection of tanka by a nonagenarian who, through careful observation of the traditional 5-7-5-7-7 tanka form, is able to paint a picture of her daily life with a most delicate and untroubled brush. These poems of simple pleasure deliver simple pleasure to the reader, like small watercolours depicting scenes from a comfortable tenth decade. For the first time in a long time I have in my hands a collection of tanka that tells me, unreservedly and without any complexity, that *this* is my life and *these* are the poems it inspired.

Unfortunately, these “little contraptions” as Chiasson puts it, were unable to stop the passing of time. Cathy is no longer with us. Her daughter, Joy McCall, tells us, in an afterword of great pride and warmth, that her mother left her untroubled existence much the way she would have wished — without complication and, it seems, with simple pleasure in her heart.

For anyone with even the slightest wish to untangle themselves or, indeed, their poetry, add this entirely satisfying collection to your shelves: *A Thankful Heart* by Cathy Street.

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**The Place of Rengay  
in Tanka Journals**  
by *Michael Dylan Welch, USA*

The poetic form of rengay was first inspired by renku (and thus its predecessor, renga), or perhaps as a reaction against it. It offers a simplified alternative to the rules of renku that the West often perceived as arbitrary and overly complicated. Garry Gay has said that each of the six verses in the form he created is meant to be a haiku — or at least “haiku-like” in the case of the two-liners. Consequently, the verses are based in haiku, not tanka, and thus do not belong in a tanka journal. Or so it would seem. But does this settle the question that David Terelinck raises in his support for rengay in *Skylark* 3:1, Summer 2015? Not necessarily. As David notes, the relationship between the three-line and two-line verses is indeed similar to tan-renga, and thus to tanka. It’s therefore gratifying to see tanka poets, especially those who do not write haiku, find an attraction to rengay — thus opening, as David says, a new audience for the form. Because haiku grew out of renku, which itself grew out of tanka, perhaps the attraction of tanka poets to rengay brings everything full circle.

For a three-person rengay, it’s easy to see that the structure resembles a set of three tan-renga and therefore, by extension, a set of three collaborative tanka. Rengay writers have always been free (or not, if they so choose) to write content that is more overtly emotional or subjective than haiku, and thus closer to tanka, even if the majority of published rengay have veered more toward the objectivity of haiku. But still the tanka-like relationship of the three-line and two-line verses remains. That structure is muted in the two-person rengay form, where two three-line verses appear in the middle, but two other pairs of verses in each rengay retain the three-line/two-line pattern, and even the third and sixth

verses, both three-liners, could be said to be part of a tan-renga structure, but with the two-line verse coming first. So the tan-renga and tanka dynamic is definitely there.

So is rengay in the haiku camp, or tanka camp? How about both? Ultimately, it's fine for rengay to embrace both haiku and tanka, and it's satisfying to see that rengay can grow in an unanticipated new way by representing a set of collaborative tanka in its verses. As Claire Everett said in *Skylark* 3:1, Summer 2015, "It is not disputed that rengay has its poetic foundations in the haiku tradition, but it seems that it is a linked form that appeals to many tanka poets, who believe, like me, that it can stake a claim in both genres". Indeed, it's pleasing to see that rengay now has its own special section in *Skylark*.

The embrace of rengay by tanka poets would also seem to be an extension of the recent growth in writing collaborative strings or sequences of responsive tanka, as seen in recent books by Naomi Beth Wakan and Amelia Fielden, among others, as well as such collaborative writing in tanka and tanka-friendly journals, including *Lynx*, *Ribbons*, and *red lights*. Perhaps I contributed to that growth myself by writing rengay with Amelia, one of our most prominent and influential tanka writers — a poet who does not also write haiku. I suspect that Amelia feels, like Joy McCall (writing in *Skylark* 3:1, Summer 2015), that "If I was an editor I'd be welcoming to all kinds of things that looked like tanka and calling them tanka or sequences or sets or strings — it's all Japanese-tradition poetry, short songs, whatever name we give it" (140-141).

My own personal stake here is that I'm eager to find new outlets for rengay poetry, so of course I'm inclined to welcome *Skylark's* stance towards rengay purely for that reason. But more than that, on an aesthetic level, I also agree that a tanka dynamic is at work in rengay verses, the same tanka dynamic that's been at work in adjacent renga and renku verses for centuries. The difference, unlike renga, renku, and even tan-renga, is rengay's development of a theme. I would encourage



rengay writers to always remember the central importance of thematic development in all six rengay verses — and most often an objective theme works best, with possible secondary or tertiary themes that might be more subjective.

In any event, what I find most interesting is the idea that rengay is evolving, and now attracts tanka poets as well as haiku poets, and long may it do so. It may indeed be time to start an independent rengay journal — something I myself had already thought to publish, probably in an online format. If I were the editor, I would welcome contributions from both haiku and tanka poets, and welcome rengay that had the flavour of haiku and the feel of tanka. Here's to rengay as an ongoing collaborative celebration that embraces both worlds — haiku and tanka.



# Articles, Essays, Reviews

*Jenny Ward Angyal*  
*Editor*



## Skylark



returning  
barefoot through the meadow  
at the gate  
a kiss for each other . . .  
each step a kiss for the earth

*Claire Everett, England*

Skylark

**alchemy**

**A Review of *rising mist, fieldstones*,  
Tanka by Joy McCall**

Keibooks, Perryville, MD, USA, 2015, 157 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6.0 x 9.0. Introduction by Jonathan Day, afterword by M. Kei. ISBN 978-1502920263. US\$13.00 from Keibooks; also available at Amazon.com

The alchemists of old sought the transformation of base matter into gold — and the transformation of base, mortal human beings into enlightened, eternal ones. In Joy McCall's new book, where mist rises like spirit above the rough surfaces of fieldstones, she never flinches from examining the granite realities of pain, sorrow, and death — yet she uses tanka like a philosopher's stone to transmute and transcend their harshness.

Her sequence entitled “alchemy” opens with this tanka:

can there be  
anything darker  
nigredo?  
all life, all man's joy  
end in cold death

“Nigredo,” which means blackness or decay, was thought by the ancient alchemists to be the first step on the path to creating the philosopher's stone. In Jungian psychology, it is a metaphor for the “dark night of the soul,” when one confronts the shadow within. This richly layered, allusive, and profoundly dark poem opens a sequence of five, which concludes with this one:

the mandorla  
takes shape in our hands  
pavonis rises

## Skylark

the phoenix, healing,  
flies east again

A “mandorla” is an almond-shaped halo that often surrounds a holy person in medieval iconography. “Pavonis” refers to a small southern constellation, Pavo, the peacock, which McCall envisions as a rising phoenix. In five short poems she has led us from the depths of despair to a vision of holiness and healing. This sequence encapsulates the emotional range, philosophical depth, and transformative magic that characterize this book.

*Rising mist, fieldstones* includes over 260 individual tanka and 70 sequences, most comprised of five tanka but ranging in length from three to twelve. This is a remarkable output, coming only about eight months after McCall’s previous book, *hedgerows: tanka pentptychs*. The diary-style individual tanka seem to flow effortlessly from the deep well that is McCall’s life.

I am a well  
people come, making wishes  
they throw in coins  
I rise, shining  
with copper and silver

Paraplegic and wheelchair-bound due to a motorcycle accident, McCall nevertheless lives — to judge from her poetry — a life of astonishing richness, “shining with copper and silver.”

I walk now  
with words, not feet,  
over white pages  
my mind grows feathers  
I begin to fly

## Skylark

She flies over the white pages, gifting the reader with a multitude of sparkling small songs. Many are rooted in the natural world, with which she seems to enjoy a deep and spontaneous resonance:

for three days  
a male chaffinch singing  
on the birch  
I too believe  
enough song will bring love

And indeed the songs she sings in this volume should bring lovers of poetry flocking. But many of McCall's poems also express her sense of *mythos*, her unabashed insight that there is more to the world than meets the eye, and an uncanny ability to re-imagine the familiar in magical new ways that work surprising transformations:

no broomstick  
I ride an ancient sieve  
in the night  
air whistling low songs  
through the little hole

long-legged  
among the butterflies  
he stands  
shoulder blades morphing  
into frail blue wings

McCall's resonance with the natural world and her deep sense of the mystery at the heart of it combine to invest many poems with a unique religious sensibility, as in this charming tanka:

## Skylark

the saint  
sits cross-legged  
high in the pines  
tree frogs are singing  
Hymn to Aquinas

Poems of celebration are tempered by poems of loss and grief, many of them occasioned by the death of McCall's mother.

I was lost  
I called her name  
the loose bark  
on the silver birch  
tore away in the wind

The simple, natural image in the lower verse — something so ordinary — mysteriously creates an aching sense of sorrow. Other poems speak of more physical pain:

riding  
the pain see-saw  
outweighed  
the madman comes  
sits at my end

Here — and in several other poems as well — McCall invokes the mythic persona of the madman — a kind of holy fool, exuding unbridled creativity — to counterbalance the weight of ineradicable pain. And sometimes a quieter vision calls:

every night  
the far high room  
calls to me



## Skylark

every night the snow  
falls in my sleep

Is this perhaps a dream-vision of death, of being drawn toward that “far high room” — another mode of existence in which everything we’ve known is obscured as if by falling snow? Still other dreams transform and liberate in more earth-bound ways:

in dreams  
the old skin sheds  
left to dry  
and I, I dance  
over the hills and far away

And in her waking life the poet *is* truly and fully awake, enabling her to transmute the ordinary into transcendent joy:

sudden  
the soul’s great joy  
I look up  
high in the evening sky  
the swifts are back

There is room here for only a tiny sample of the riches to be found among the several hundred individual tanka in McCall’s book. But — as if this were not enough — she is also masterful at combining tanka into sequences, wherein the individual poems resonate against each other and generate, as if by magic, larger patterns of meaning. It is here that McCall’s alchemical powers of imagination and transformation are at their height. Her vision transforms even so mundane an experience as visiting a grimy, abandoned service station:

## Skylark

all that toil  
and endeavor for nothing  
my soul curls  
into the silence,  
settling in a dark corner

and slowly  
in the great spaces  
where the noise was . . .  
faint windsongs  
northern lights

*~from "closed"*

She feels intensely her connectedness with mice nesting in dusty corners, with every tiny life pulsing and dying alongside her:

I buried  
a dead fishfly  
under petals  
even the smallest death  
deserves mourning

the garden  
lays itself down  
at my feet  
my love shapeshifts:  
man, beetle, leaf veins

*~from "leaf veins"*

In the second tanka above, the pivot in the third line transforms the narrator herself into a kind of shapeshifting shaman, with the natural world laying itself at her feet even as her shimmering love widens to encompass all beings.

## Skylark

The shaman is also a seer, a clairvoyant able to perceive what most of us miss. In her sequence “second sight,” McCall explores another way of seeing, vouchsafed to some who appear blind as moles — a way of seeing so different it elicits fear:

the man  
likes to climb mountains  
in rare air  
he fears these creatures  
that live underground

the old ones say  
when the moles come up,  
close your eyes—  
you will see the unseen  
and know the unknown

It may be that pain, suffering and the felt nearness of death can open the inner eye. McCall writes frankly but without self-pity about her own situation, through which she forges more connections, with human and other beings:

a small hand  
resting shyly  
on my knee  
where the leg comes  
to an abrupt end

little fingers  
tracing the tattoo  
the coiling snake  
like me  
unable to walk

*~from “shared”*

McCall finds ways to transform even her limitations — the walls that hem her in — into freedom:

old walls  
edge all the paths  
I travel  
they curve, they lean  
held by ivy

one finger dips  
into a channel  
where seaworms died  
my soul slips through  
the dark hole and out to sea

*~from “old walls”*

The “old walls” are of course both real and metaphorical, edging all the paths she travels. They seem solid and substantial, yet are held together only by the frail tendrils of a living thing. And the channel through which the narrator’s soul slips away into freedom was left by the death of another living being — one so insignificant most of us wouldn’t even notice it — but what transformative power it confers in this context.

McCall again celebrates inner freedom in outward confinement in the sequence “even the caged bird sings”:

warbling  
through the bars  
the tame song  
her heart is not in it  
it is just what birds do

## Skylark

her wings grow wide  
her voice is low  
and harsh  
the great sky opens  
she makes love to the wind

The ultimate freedom may of course lie in the final transformation, the one we call “death.” The sequence called “kitsune” — the Japanese word for “fox” — celebrates the magical fox of Japanese folklore, whose shapeshifting can transform it into a woman, and whose wisdom and power increase with age — characteristics that may remind the perceptive reader of the poet herself.

make for me  
an origami boat  
red fox  
we will sail then  
across the river styx

when we land  
fold me a white paper crane  
I will leave you then  
far below me  
still folding time

In his “Afterword,” M. Kei suggests that *rising mist, fieldstones* may be Joy McCall’s last book — although she has since published two small volumes of collaborative poems. McCall has completed seven decades of living, and her poems are permeated by the awareness that the final transformation approaches — as, of course, it is continuously approaching all of us, whether or not we choose to let that awareness illuminate and transform our lives as it does Joy McCall’s life and poetry. Whether or not this is her last book, readers of *rising mist, fieldstones* will certainly hope for more magical poems

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from McCall, whose life and vision flow so irresistibly into tanka:

the dreams  
cannot stay inside  
they seep out  
shining  
onto the white page

*~from "spirits"*

. . . and one feels that even after kitsune folds her that white paper crane, Joy McCall's transformed and transformative presence will be with us, radiating from somewhere outside of time.



Skylark

## Ear to the Floor

### A Review of *The One That Flies Back*, Tanka by Barry George

Kattywompus Press, Somerville, MA, USA, 2015, 29 pages, saddle stapled, 5.4 x 8.5, ISBN 1936715759. US \$12 from [www.kattywompus-press.com](http://www.kattywompus-press.com); signed copies available from the author at [bageorge22@juno.com](mailto:bageorge22@juno.com).

Philadelphia poet Barry George brings the age-old art of tanka up to date in this contemporary chapbook whose 29 poems, laid out spaciouly one to a page, are replete with urban themes.

City night  
the screech and groan  
of street repair  
like hinges of a giant crypt  
opening

The magic wand of the poet's imagination transforms familiar urban noises into a surprising image that leads us to see the city in a whole new way. The brief last line throws the poem wide open, inviting the reader to enter the city's hidden spaces.

Those spaces are often hidden in plain sight, invisible to our distraction, our inattention. The poet's job is to *notice*:

In my high-rise  
apartment  
ear to the floor  
I listen for a heartbeat  
anything

This tanka can be read as a comment on urban loneliness — and/or as a description of the poet's customary alertness.

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His ear always to the floor, George offers the reader closely observed poems about lawyers, lifeguards, and metal legs; sports, statues, and skyscrapers. While his urban themes will appeal to many contemporary readers, some of George's poems transcend the particularities of place and offer timeless observations:

Cat sprawled out  
on the windowsill  
his tail alive  
with all that is April  
and airborne

Like the cat, the poet is keenly alive to all that passes on both sides of the windowsill, pouncing on the fleeting moments and capturing them in poems.

George's haiku and tanka have appeared widely in journals and he has previously published a volume of urban haiku, so this slender tanka chapbook is his second poetry collection.

For a second time  
I stoop to pick up  
something silver  
on the floor and find it  
to be moonlight

Readers of *The One That Flies Back* will hope that Barry George continues stooping to pick up moonlight, and that he continues to mold the evanescent shimmers into poems.



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## The Moss Path

A Review of *Shizuka*  
by Patricia Prime & Giselle Maya

Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, U.K., 2015. 99 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5.8 x 8.2, introduction by Beverley George. ISBN 978-1-910185-16-2. EUR 15, GBP 12, NZD 20, USD 15. Available from the publisher at [info@albapublishing.com](mailto:info@albapublishing.com)

Each year the Emperor of Japan chooses a theme to inspire poets all over the world to write tanka. The theme for 2014 was *shizuka*, which means *quiet, calm, peaceful, serene*. Patricia Prime and Giselle Maya, both accomplished tanka poets, have collaborated to give us an entire volume of gentle reflections in the spirit of *shizuka*. Because Prime lives in New Zealand and Maya in France, and because they write not only of their respective homelands but also of places as far flung as China, Japan, Tibet and Sri Lanka, their book also partakes of the international flavor of contemporary tanka.

enlightened  
by early spring sun  
the stone Jizo-sama  
we walk along the moss path  
with silent worldwide pilgrims

~Giselle Maya, from “Chorus of Voices”

The first line of this tanka of course carries a double meaning, illumined by the context. Jizo (*sama* is an honorific) is a bodhisattva, an enlightened being who, out of compassion, postpones entering Nirvana in order to assist others along the path.

Pilgrims on a quiet, moss-lined path, Prime and Maya offer readers the observations and insights garnered along the way. The heart of their collaboration consists of 19 responsive

tanka sequences comprising over 150 tanka. They also offer 3 collaborative tanka prose pieces, one collaborative haibun, and six solo pieces each: a tanka sequence and five tanka/prose pieces by Prime and five haibun and one tanka/prose piece by Maya. The theme of *shizuka* is woven throughout the diversity of forms.

At times the very quietness of style results in tanka that are a simple record of events set down in five lines, but the best tanka in this collection offer — like the poem above — subtle layers of meaning that elevate the form into something more; or the heightened language that causes the reader to see the familiar with new eyes. And, as in all successful collaborations, each responsive tanka echoes off the preceding verse, the reverberations leading the whole composition down unexpected paths.

The title sequence, “Shizuka,” opens with this tanka by Patricia Prime:

autumn afternoon  
in the art gallery  
whispering voices  
in front of the canvases  
of water lilies by Monet

One can feel the hush that falls in the presence of mastery, of beauty. The sequence concludes with this tanka by Giselle Maya:

everything is still  
but for the candle’s flicker  
antlered reindeer  
traced in manganese and ochre  
vanish into the clouds

. . . an utterly different setting pervaded by the same hush of wonder.

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The sequence “Dreams” concludes with these two tanka, the first by Prime and the second by Maya:

my body sighs  
as it slips into dream’s  
undertow  
the anchor rope  
tossed to shore

healed in three days  
a book of tanka arrives  
in translation  
i plant potatoes  
and roll on the earth with the cat

In the first of these, the undertow image is a fresh and effective way of capturing the experience of dreaming: the way the dreamer drifts anchorless in unknown seas. The second tanka refers back to an earlier verse by Maya, in which a bee sting results in “altered dream states.” The tanka above is especially interesting for the way in which line three, “in translation,” forms a pivot — not only the book but the narrator is “translated” into a state of renewed health and — to judge from line five — of joy!

The sequence “Dwellings” explores and celebrates the peaceful places where people and other beings may dwell, from monastery to hobbit hole.

perched high  
among redwood trees  
a hand built dwelling  
have I not always lived there  
this love of birds and wind

~*Giselle Maya*

above the waves  
in the floating world  
a houseboat  
of a person with no cares  
is moored on the riverbank

~*Patricia Prime*

Both these tanka — and the entire sequence — invite the reader to imagine living in places both exotic and familiar, all seeming to float under a peaceful enchantment.

Winter cold, too, can manifest *shizuka*, as in the sequence called “String of Cranberries,” which ends with this pair of tanka, the first by Patricia Prime and the second by Giselle Maya:

as dusk draws in  
its final flecks of gold  
at sunset  
I feel the cold white north  
couched in my bones

bone breathing  
the body lightens  
to rise and touch  
the North Star, silver  
star dust and dreams

In the first of these two we feel the contraction of cold, and in the second, a dream-like expansion. Both emanate peace.

The collaborative haibun and tanka/prose pieces in this volume include accounts of the poets’ worldwide travels and make fascinating reading, enhanced by poems that capture the feeling of mystery in foreign places:

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all that remains  
in an empty niche  
a ghostly silhouette  
of the larger Buddha  
and his gigantic feet

~ *Patricia Prime, from "Riddles & Puzzlements"*

Odin's spring  
where the gods once drank  
from nowhere  
a breeze stirs the ferns  
I bathe my face in clear water

~ *Giselle Maya, from "Power Spots"*

Both of these tanka exemplify the feeling of radiant stillness to be found throughout this book. Many of the poems here may seem deceptively simple on first reading, but look more closely — you may find a mossy path that leads into a deep and fertile stillness.

in front of a painting  
copying a still life still student  
her pencil poised  
as she looks more closely—  
there, a little path to the hills

~ *Patricia Prime, from "Cass: The Little Red Station"*

## Observe the Body's Knowing

### A Review of *Dancing with Another Me* by Gerry Jacobson

iGen4 Press, Canberra, Australia, 2015, 24 pages, perfect bound paperback, 8.3 x 5.9. ISBN 978-0-9943002-0-1. \$10 from the author at [jacobson@netspeed.com.au](mailto:jacobson@netspeed.com.au).

"Dance as a metaphor for life. How lucky we are to have this teaching," writes Gerry Jacobson in *Dancing with Another Me*, his second chapbook about dance. He explains in his introduction that for fifteen years he has been a student of 'somatic dance,' a slow, meditative practice that emphasizes self-regulation and encourages dancers to express their feelings in words and drawings after each movement session. From his dance-class journals, Jacobson has drawn the 22 tanka-prose pieces and one tanka sequence in the present volume, which includes nearly 50 tanka. The first piece, entitled 'bypass,' looks back at a life-changing event:

. . . Eleven years now since bypass surgery. Four thousand beautiful mornings. Still counting.

the dance pulsates  
and my scarred heart  
opens  
closes . . . opens  
tears in my eyes

Typically, Jacobson's prose passages are written in brief phrases, like the stream-of-consciousness journal jottings from which they are drawn, giving them both staccato immediacy and emotional intimacy. The prose passages provide a context for the poems, many of which could, however, stand nicely on their own. Jacobson's best tanka can be read, like the one above, both literally and metaphorically — which of

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us does not have a scarred heart, which of us is not caught up in a pulsating dance? ‘bypass’— and indeed the whole book — serves to remind us just how grateful we ought to be.

Only a few readers may also be dancers, but Jacobson’s prose and poems draw us into the experience and enable us to share it in an intimate way:

partnered  
in the dance of slow  
boundaries dissolve  
and I discover  
I’m dancing with another me

*~from ‘dancing with another me’*

The experience he describes is one of profound connection with other dancers, with the self, and with the universe:

in the depths  
of a temple  
in the centre  
of the universe  
I dance my dance

*~from ‘some sort of god’*

The paradox — to dance one’s own dance and yet to feel rooted in the centre of the universe — is a good metaphor for the tension between individuality and interconnection. Dance provides Jacobson with metaphors for other paradoxes as well — “Joy contained within the sorrow,” as he writes in the piece called ‘inside a sunbeam’:

sitting  
on a cool wooden floor  
crosslegged

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inside a sunbeam  
encircled by shadows

The sunbeams and shadows, of course, lie within as well  
as without

with drawing book  
wide open, black crayon  
in my hand  
I'll travel the darkness  
of my interior

*~from 'cool colours'*

It is fascinating to see how Jacobson uses one art form —  
tanka — to share with readers another art form — dance —  
and how he uses both to explore not only the darkness of his  
own interior but also the shared joy of morning light:

my heart held  
as we danced  
together  
the memory lingers  
into morning light

*~from 'my heart held'*

“Observe the body’s knowing,” Jacobson writes in the  
piece called ‘beyond words.’ Undoubtedly there *are* forms of  
knowing that lie beyond words, but readers will be grateful  
that Jacobson has tried — and in good measure succeeded —  
in pouring into the words of his tanka the nearly inexpressi-  
ble knowing he has gained through dance, his metaphors  
giving voice to experiences and feelings common to all of us,  
dancers or not.



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the dance  
of all my days . . .  
afternoon sunlight . . .  
the path ahead  
in deep shadow

*~from 'ending'*



## Poems like Manna

### A Review of *This Tanka Whirl*, by Sanford Goldstein

Winfred Press, Colrain, MA, USA, 2015; Second Edition; 49 pages, perfect-bound paperback, 6.0 x 9.0. Introduction by M.Kei, graphics by Kazuaki Wakui. US\$8.00 plus shipping from Lulu.com: ISBN 978-0983229896 or Amazon.com: ISBN 978-1508943525

I've no Shiki  
sickbed on the mats,  
and still,  
doesn't my soul  
have a headache?

Most readers will give a rueful nod to Professor Goldstein's question in this tanka — who does not experience occasional headaches of the soul? The poem refers to Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), a leading Japanese haiku poet often credited with revitalizing the practice of tanka, who unfortunately died at an early age of spinal tuberculosis. Sanford Goldstein, in his turn, is widely regarded as a founding father of English-language tanka — and at the age of 89 he is a master of his craft. The present volume, a handsome reissue of a book first published in 2001, is enhanced by publisher Larry Kimmel's cover photo of an outdoor café, where we can easily imagine Goldstein sipping coffee and spilling tanka, as he has done for over forty years.

Goldstein has always been a follower of Ishikawa Taku-boku (1886-1912), who believed that tanka should be a diary of the poet's emotional life. Goldstein's poems record the joys and headaches of the soul as he moves through his tanka world in time to its varied music — “staccato or soaring or bleak or contrapuntal,” as he writes in “some afterthoughts” to the present volume.

Music can be found in the most humdrum places if the poet is alert to its rhythms:

even in this battered  
toasted cheese  
squeezed into my bag,  
I find the music  
of white stoves, burned pans

The simple images of toasted cheese and burned pans convey so much — the snags and stumbles of daily life are redeemed by the poet's ability to hear the music in the mundane. But at other times Goldstein pushes restlessly against the confines of the ordinary, craving madder music:

so tame,  
so tame,  
these tanka tribulations:  
sometimes I want berserk music  
for some world in me gone berserk!

Sometimes we all sense a hidden, repressed wildness lurking under the sedate exteriors we present in daily life — a nameless aspect of the self that yearns to be released, carried away or driven by some overwhelming passion:

balance me,  
Ishmael,  
on harpoon points,  
on sea-spilled undulations,  
and let that white whale drive me too

To escape from the “maw of powers monstrous,” as Goldstein puts it in another poem, requires that we “balance on harpoon points,” keeping the soul's music tuned somewhere between the banal and the berserk, between glory and ruin:

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whirling  
in the glitter of Gatsby,  
I recall  
all the glory, all the ruin,  
of my splintered visions

Not surprisingly for a former English professor, many of Goldstein's most powerful "splintered visions" draw on the world of literature. The sixty tanka in *This Tanka Whirl* are loosely organized into nine sections or "strings," one of which is entirely devoted to *Moby Dick*, while another includes seven "staccato allusions" to figures as diverse as Hamlet and Anne Frank.

Emily, at your desk  
in your quiet room  
did you explode with joy  
hitting with dashes  
just the right catharsis?

We can easily imagine that Goldstein, like Dickinson, experiences both catharsis and joy when his five lines find just the right form, giving voice to the glory and the ruin. The slender pole that helps Goldstein keep his balance as he traverses life's harpoon points *is* tanka:

I listen  
to the simplifications and divisions  
and endless desires  
weaving like brushstroke:  
tonight this tanka world

All of life's complications, divisions, and desires flow from chaos into form at the tip of Goldstein's brush. "It's on paper / I live my other life," he writes. Goldstein has never hesitated

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to write tanka about the challenges and consolations of his own tanka life, and he includes about a dozen such poems in this short volume.

for forty years  
like an Israelite  
in a scorching desert  
waiting for poems  
to fall in manna-relief

And the poems do fall like manna; Goldstein continues to “tanka his way out” of the soul’s headaches and confusions. The book’s last section carries the rueful, relatable title “this stumped self.” Through its pages the reader can accompany the poet as he explores with insight and honesty the uncertainties of his “coin-tossed life.” The section and the book end with this poem:

at the end  
of my white string  
a soulmate came  
so close to the edge  
I could not scissor it away

Goldstein, who lost his wife at an early age, has written often of her death and of his own lifelong grief, loneliness, and celibacy. So could the mysterious “soulmate” at the end of his “white string” be tanka itself, whirling so close to the raw edges of his life that it can never be scissored away?

the way  
the wind took  
that kite  
infinite  
the length of spring

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your words  
born of clay, set with fire  
I will sip them  
like tea from the flowery pot  
of these last-of-summer days

*~for Kate Kituai*

*Claire Everett, England*

## Submission Guidelines

Submissions for the 4:1, summer issue of *Skylark* will be read through December and January and will close on February 1st 2016.

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 13). 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.

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





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