

Skylark

A Tanka Journal

summer 2013: volume 1, number 1

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

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

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Thanks to Tony for his patience and support.

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Evolution

*Out of the dusk a shadow,
Then, a spark;
Out of the cloud a silence,
Then, a lark;
Out of the heart a rapture,
Then, a pain;
Out of the dead cold ashes,
Life again.*

John Bannister Tabb
(1845-1909)

Editor's Message

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, it has been a very long winter, but for me it has been a particularly memorable one. Having considered launching a journal for tanka in all its forms for some time, any trepidation I felt was quickly allayed following the initial announcement on New Year's Day, when poets from the international tanka community welcomed *Skylark* with the enthusiasm and generosity I have come to expect. Submissions came in thick and fast, along with wonderful good luck messages and compliments about my daughter Amy's artwork. Thank you all for your kindness.

The past few days, thanks to a long-awaited, albeit slight, rise in temperature, we have been blessed with skylarks and their deluge of song as we walk the path that flanks the field on the way to the woods. If we are very lucky, we are able to spot the songster, a mere fluttering speck in the blue, always so much higher than we anticipate. I am reminded of the tanka I have had the great pleasure to read in making my selections for this inaugural issue; poets from far and wide have invited me to hear their songs and in so doing, I have been afforded a glimpse of their own window of sky. Between these pages, we have an exaltation of skylarks.

I am also delighted that fifteen year old Amy made the selections for the first "Skylark's Nest" award. It was heartening to read David Rice's editorial in the winter 2012 issue of *Ribbons* (the Tanka Society of America journal); Mr Rice spoke of his desire to create a section in the journal for poets aged five to eighteen. As you might expect, my children are well acquainted with tanka

and haiku— and they don't count syllables!—but it was particularly rewarding for me when Amy submitted her first tanka prose. I knew that she read tanka prose with interest, but I had no idea she had been studying the form with a view to begin writing it herself. I share Mr Rice's vision and hope that, as a community, we can introduce many more young people to the joys of tanka, in all its forms. I hope, also, that our readers will enjoy Amy's comments on the "Skylark's Nest" entries and the winning tanka.

Now, let us step out into the sun . . . and listen!

—Claire Everett, April 2013



The Skylark's Nest

The Winners

Selections by Amy Claire Rose

I had a genuinely tough decision choosing the winning Skylark and her clutch of runners up, but it was a delight to read all the entries and see how differently people had responded to the theme. The file of entries I read had all the poets' names deleted, so the contest was judged anonymously. Here I will highlight just a few reasons why the winners were chosen.

I will begin with our clutch of runners up.

With each line, Kath Abela Wilson's tanka beautifully intertwines the human and bird spirit and hints towards the connectivity between ourselves and nature:

what woven words
are poured into your nest
I lean into the grass
my long brown hairs are swept
into your song

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

I chose Joyce S. Greene's tanka as it was one of the few entries to bring to light the devastation of the skylark's habitat due to our intensive farming methods:

oblivious
to men on mowers
she builds her nest
in a farmer's field . . .
the skylark's song fades

Joyce S. Greene, USA

Paul Smith's tanka is simple, yet beautiful, and is a perfect example of the emotions the skylark—indeed any bird with a wonderful song—can evoke in us:

blessings . . .
if you would sing
one more time
little skylark
I'll count them with you

Paul Smith, UK

In Janet Lynn Davis' tanka, I see a beautifully constructed similarity between the poet and the skylark. The first line stresses the 'dullness' of the bird's outward appearance, further highlighting the spectacular song:

brown-feathered bird—
if I could live nameless
on this earth
yet find my voice in flight
across a poem's lines

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

Pamela A. Babusci's tanka is a perfect example of how, although we may not live in a place where skylarks are resident, we can still find a bird that draws out similar feelings in us. The simplicity of the poem is exquisite; the image of the chickadee, brave enough to be hand-fed, echoing the poet's own trust:

a chickadee lands
on my palm filled
with seed . . .
to think I once trusted
you with my heart

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

In Ferris Gilli's tanka, we see that the prompt has evoked in the poet an emotion classically associated with skylarks: love. The last two lines of the poem are delightful, replete with the feeling of long, hazy summer afternoons, when skylarks and many other birds display:

by the tall grasses
where we learned to love
you return to me
on the sweet lazy whistle
of a meadowlark

Ferris Gilli, USA

And finally we come to our winner, our Skylark! Christina Nguyen's tanka is as simple and beautiful as the skylark's song. To me, the poem effectively illustrates our connection with birds; we both reach that time in our lives when we are ready to set up home and start a family—and we are both equally vulnerable in our own ways:

mid-career
we slow down
to build our nest
light and song
fill summer days

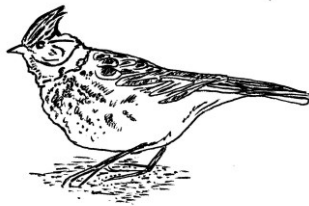
Christina Nguyen, USA

Congratulations to Christina, who will receive a free copy of the inaugural issue and an invitation to judge the “Skylark’s Nest” competition for issue 1:2, winter 2013.

The Skylark's Nest Prompt
1:2, winter 2013



Individual Tanka



the self
I've clung to
all these years
moonlight
on water

he shows me
a Chinese dragon
hidden
in the wintry sunset
this gift from my autistic son

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

all my life
a barren womb . . .
pregnant spring
giving birth to nameless
& numberless flowers

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

after
father's death
my sisters & i clean out
all the shattered pieces
of our dysfunctional family

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

from here
to the clouds
clouds
daily I wear a face
no one sees

Johannes S. H. Bjerg, Denmark

do they
see themselves in
each other—
the old man
and the stringybark

outside my window
a passionfruit vine struggles
against the frost—
the possums have beaten me
to the last of its summer fruit

Michelle Brock, Australia

tallowwood leaves fall
in a rainbow splendour . . .
now in her seventies
leaving the dust to collect
she paints into winter

the hush
after a storm . . .
an echidna
patters across the ridge
of a caved-in road

Dawn Bruce, Australia

with a nod
to their name
whilst I was away
the spider plants were joined
by a cobweb

Helen Buckingham, UK

the summer snails
she stole away
in her bedroom
babies
are missing

Anne Burgevin, USA

nails and screws
in baby food jars
the decade
since grandfather died
airtight and dusty

David Caruso, USA

last day of the year
poems I could have written . . .
a bulbul follows
drifting leaves
to the stone cairn

a toothless grin
with each lick of the lolly
at ninety-six
the monk is delighted
ice is sweet and coloured

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

it's impossible
to make things right
between us
 worn-out knees in jeans
 holes in the toes of socks

a bit of yolk
slips into the egg whites—
harder to see
how one misplaced word
can spoil everything

among the Navajo
male and female unite
as twin spirits . . .
both pistil and stamens
in the same flower

Susan Constable, Canada

clouds passing
through a giant's
flooded footsteps . . .
the scent of pine
and snowmelt

Aubrie Cox, USA

pine-needle nest
with an unhatched egg . . .
I carry it
to the edge of the woods
where birdsong is thickest

tiny skaters
twirling round a pond . . .
undiscovered
until now, this world
inside a music box

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

in the fireplace
the snapshot of my niece
as a toddler
Dad's need to let go
after the diagnosis

a velvet-ant
isn't an ant at all
its stinger
essential for something
so invitingly red

Cherie Hunter Day, USA

tonight in the
cool arms of another
I conjured you
your breath and touch closer
than the ones that held me

Diane Dehler, USA

the dancers spin
a visceral liquid flame
past the night
our limbs can't forget
their igniting thrusts!

—in homage, *Batsheva*, the Israeli Dance Group

Susan Diridoni, USA

long night moon
he traces figure eights
on my shoulders
the sorrows of yesterday
. . . light as a swan's feather

falling asleep
in my dead father's chair
with my glasses on . . .
I almost see what it's like
to pass away peacefully

Margaret Dornaus, USA

his subscription renewal
that arrives
after his death
a heart on the envelope
says "we miss you"

Seren Fargo, USA

dawn would be sad
if it weren't for the birds
singing me awake
another lonely day
if it weren't for the birds

unprecedented
this profusion of flowers—
callistemon,
are you blooming
to persuade me to stay

Amelia Fielden, Australia

trying to remember
what her voice sounded like . . .
a soft breeze
sneaks through the wind chime
without a sound

Chase Fire, USA

in the mirror,
captured in my features
ghosts
of generations past
. . . those yet to come

Jan Foster, Australia

Janice B
it was who told me
forget pens
keep a pencil by the bed
it works held upside down

masquerading
as an avocado blob
wasabi—
how could I foretell the nip
beneath your quiet ways?

pelicans lumber
on take-off and return
then find ease
I struggle into
. . . eagle pose

Beverley George, Australia

I wake to your embrace
and a thousand parrots lifting
into the Chaco sky
the beginning blush of sunrise
plays across my skin

Ferris Gilli, USA

after checking
all the locks twice
I leave for work—
in the road ahead
a leaping deer . . .

the quiet child
became a woman
speaking softly
or not at all
until she wrote a poem

Joyce S. Greene, USA

skip through
the music school doors
heart singing—
my mother's gift—tuition
she wished to take herself

Hazel S.S. Hall, Australia



one by one
faded peony petals
fall to the ground
my father calls me
by my mother's name

a knot of stones
just where the pasture
meets the sky
far enough for any woman
to carry sorrow

deep in the woods
a Pileated drums
the right time
to burn old letters
and let go of past love

Michele L. Harvey, USA

rhythm of red—
the sonographer's voice
muffles all sound
how many heart beats
before an empty womb?

Janette Hoppe, Australia

arms stretched
holding a dented cup
eyes pleading . . .
this child of war
stick legs, bloated belly

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

hunger moon
above midtown skyscrapers . . .
leaving Mother
in a nursing home
was not on my list

Tzetzka Ilieva, USA

clay potter's dawn . . .
a hum in the wind bursts
into song
in my hands a throbbing
winged heart

out of sight . . .
still the thrum of skylark
wings
the way your scent
lingers in darkness

Alegria Imperial, Canada

night kiss
of a damp fur coat
and mom's gin breath
inconstant angel
with bruised and tattered wings

the brazier
in the shaded grove
warms me
the sheltered bower
of my last earthly home

Terry Ingram, USA

a stick in wet sand . . .
last words posted
to an old friend
I smile as the outgoing tide
delivers them

John Irvine, New Zealand

your red roses
glow in the autumn gloom—
so much hope
so many disappointments
in this love affair of ours

Violette Rose-Jones, Australia

memories
of that cajun band . . .
white heat
when you asked me to dance
when you asked for more

Carol Judkins, USA

please, no blindfold
the sun is setting fast
step closer, boys
fill the air with gun shots
and I'll be on my way

—In memory of Erskine Childers
author of *Riddle of the Sands*

it is my hope
to travel very lightly
a quiet exit
with curiosity sated
as to that farthest shore

Kirsty Karkow, USA

a table for two
with romance in the air
each lover
on a mobile phone
to someone somewhere else

Keitha Keyes, Australia

I stand alone
atop a glass skyscraper
where we lay flat
on the summer grass
with our feet tangled

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

my neighbor
awkward and unkempt
like the hermit thrush
will he ever
find a mate

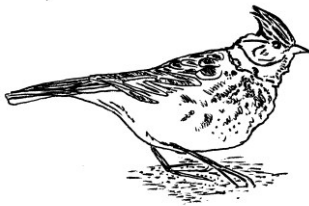
Gregory Longenecker, USA

the hollow light
of a pale moon lingers
as day emerges
I try to recall the words
of your final poem

Carole MacRury, USA

a paper lantern
set adrift on the river . . .
the light dims
inside you as you float
farther from my reach

Lauren Mayhew, USA



year to year
I remember little
although
what I forget
sets the tone

see how
happiness moves
here to there
vaults a fence
and saunters off

trying to read
the world
like a book—
a half-pound
of paper

on my way
to a place
nobody else goes—
squeezed
into the seat

Michael McClintock, USA

snowdrops
beside her grave
I sing the song
she never sang
for anyone but me

the snowman
nearly complete
both of us
take a step back
to admire our children

John McManus, UK

only a breath of wind
and the tree buds open up
one after another . . .
it seems like somebody
sounded the reveille

Vasile Moldovan, Romania

that winter
she took up the clarinet
practicing for hours
to soothe her grief
and feed her hunger for joy

clusterwink snails
scatter green luminescence
to seem
bigger in the dark
so many ways to be strong

Beverly Acuff Momoi, USA

how slowly
the seconds
passing your eyes
catch
mine

Peter Newton, USA

purple crocus
in a snowy robe
listening
I almost hear
grandma's voice

silence
fills the sails
at first light
when the wind is ready
where will we go?

on Lake Superior
rocky shores offer up
uncut amethyst
everything you can be
shining in your eyes

Christina Nguyen, USA

last night
weary eyes blossomed
in the closet
his cold cotton shirts
warmed by my hands

Sergio Ortiz, Puerto Rico

how pointless
to count the miles
between us
we reach into the air
and hope to touch tomorrow

in the Google age
everything known
is mine to find
and yet,
your heart . . .

Clive Oseman, UK

at dawn
on a branch loaded by buds
singing birds . . .
all are in pairs
I'm always alone

Oprica Padeanu, Romania

they are late, as usual,
can't you ever be early
I wonder, or
is it a day like any other
torn from a summer calendar

the hot air balloon
ascends above trees & houses
into a blue sky
the children gone for hours
into a new dimension

Patricia Prime, New Zealand

always one
to make a statement
how you would have loved
these purple daisies
splashed across the dunes

Elaine Riddell, New Zealand

the Big Dipper—
inside the cover
of *Peter Pan*
my son's name
replaces mine

Chad Lee Robinson, USA

thinner and thinner
up in the spring sky
like a top I become
spinning 'round myself
little lark still singing

Ernesto P. Santiago, Philippines

being alone—
a future truth
we do not discuss;
I would go last to spare him
as he would do for me

I buy fresh basil
at the farm market
wishing I knew
how hers grew such lush leaves—
one more question I didn't ask

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

clouds bleed
the dream soaked silence
of first light—
would I really be me
without you

a dark river
running through the night—
would I really
want to be young
again?

Paul Smith, UK

the spiral dive
of a red-tailed hawk
how much
is lost
in translation?

full moon
at the end of April
can my heart
really belong
to one woman?

Laurence Stacey, USA

two double deckers
pass on the narrow high street . . .
on his motorbike
my step-father's ghost
threading the needle

from a park bench
I watch lovers that have learnt
to walk as one
& a little girl waiting to join
a skipping rope game

Andre Surridge, New Zealand

on this night
of jeweller's velvet . . .
promise
by promise, you restring
each constellation

and spring arrives
tied to a silkworm's
silver thread—
these thin days of yearning
for my middle-aged past

pomegranates,
and peaches in malbec—
there are moments
when I can almost taste
everything we lost

David J. Terelinck, Australia

the many Christmas eves
my father left for
another home
I'm not surprised to see
flowers on his grave

Christine L. Villa, USA

shaking off
the fly
a third time
I am getting too old
for death

the cry of
a sparrow's child
still feeling
winter
in her eyes

Dick Whyte, New Zealand

the click
of secateurs
cutting
back to old wood . . .
my aching knee

Rodney A. Williams, Australia

in cold autumn
wattle shines with springtime
promises
a hare strays at dusk
searching for a mate

Paul Williamson, Australia

ghost-white appearance
walking on water
with clown shoes
my love the yellow-footed
snowy egret

cradle moon's
dark blanket
tucked in
I'm already asleep here
a thousand years away

Kath Abela Wilson, USA

in the only photo
that I dare to keep
there you are yet where
we have come at last to meet
in the sweet summertime

Let the bamboo chimes
talk to the night again.
You I've left alone
to welcome the dove's
low, peach-colored voice.

the loveliness of
your hand now faint
and from that bright but
crepe-like stationery
a hint of lilac

Jeffrey Woodward, USA

the Buddha ball
in my glass teapot
drifts upwards
unfurling
into liquid tanka

Tessa Wooldridge, Australia

Bare-root persimmon
its transplant temper tantrums
a lovers' quarrel
endured for leaves of flame
and plump luscious fruit

The widow Kasi
takes the anthropologist's
book about her
into her Borneo grave—
the way stories disappear

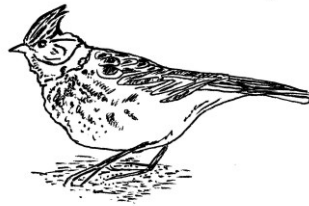
J. Zimmerman, USA

Song from 'Cymbeline'

*Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phoebus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes;
With every thing that pretty bin:
My lady sweet, arise;
Arise, arise.*

**William Shakespeare
(1564-1616)**

Tanka Sequences



My Dear Degas

Aubrie Cox, USA

"My dear Degas, one does not make poetry with ideas, but with words." —Mallarme

bedroom window
overlooks the lake
the last of afternoon rain
slides between
layers of longing

cloud reflections
on the water
the weight of my body
between asleep
and awake

able to make out
everything
but your face
in the overexposed
Polaroid

half-empty album
too many memories
we didn't make
that summer
in the mountains

the last souvenir—
music box ballerina
in her blue tutu
dances to a song
only you used to sing

~ ~ ~

Something Borrowed . . .

Tish Davis, USA

Amish women
with home-cooked lunches
in baskets
handmade by their husbands—
wildflowers in the wheat field

a simple pattern
in solid colors
how right
this wedding quilt looks
on my old bed

on my dresser
in a tiny wooden box
a threaded needle
to remind me
about work, about marriage

~ ~ ~

Before the Dawn

Gerry Jacobson, Australia

in the deep
doona'd night
a curved hip
caresses my hand
through a dream smoothly

bird song
before the dawn
I reach out
she takes me in
gently . . . softly

~ ~ ~

Cyclone

Brian Zimmer, USA

waking to chatter
a magpie and squirrel
cross wires
feet swing to the floor
centered in a beam

a sunflower
dazzles the world
smell the ardor
of wind-tangled hedgerows
the approach of thunder

in the eye
of a twisting serpent
safety is a lie
no outer roar reaches
the spinning uprooted

silos toppled
first yields scattered
every wire down
not a word spoken
during restoration

leap from bed
summer heat rising
raucous birds
the floorboards burn
the sun feels early

~ ~ ~

Suiseki

started January 23,
completed February 4, 2013

Giselle Maya, France
an'ya, USA

landart
in the garden a stone
shaped like a frog
an ice sculpture melting
drop by drop in midday sun *gm*

riverbank
an old basking spot
occupied
a hickory wood oval
displays the suiseki *an'ya*

a long chanting
of Utaikai hajime tanka
at the palace
peony snowflakes settle
on the magic mountain *gm*

distant ridgeline
evergreens tangled in mist
weaving in and out
guided by the phantom
of a windblown ribbon *an'ya*

poets and cats
are they endangered
beings
tenaciously surviving
on the wings of space *gm*

early seedtime
the garden rows marked out
with string
we plant our crops between
only to sit back and wait *an'ya*

a lump of clay
shaped to dam
the spring's flow
where are the squirrels and foxes
in this bone-chilling cold *gm*

with the warmth
of a summer sky upon it
the horned toad
spends most of an afternoon
sunbathing in desert sand *an'ya*

basho leaves
the wind moves them
like a fan
consciously a pearl is shaped
in the center of the heart *gm*

O earth dragon
may you catch the wisdom
that mankind seeks
to keep the eternal flame
of enlightenment alive *an'ya*

~ ~ ~

Lost in the Light

Beverly Acuff Momoj, USA

J. Zimmerman, USA

indulge me
this one small moment
of joy
seeing you squirm
finally a worm hooked

- *BAM*

he expected
to stay married forever
despite his affairs
at last his wife smiles
reeling in her second husband

- *JZ*

forget the lips
it was the Mona Lisa
eyes half-shut
that should have tipped him off
she could see right through him

- *BAM*

those old novels
when people really could
die of shame
modern hip-swiveling hussies
can't find Facebook's delete key
- JZ

his voice
in the wind the only sound
clicking leaves
with their burnt out sameness
things are never what they seem
- BAM

Friday night pizza
with the beer pitchers refilled
her laugh raucous
telling how her ex's
new girlfriend has dropped him
- JZ

this thin sweet
schadenfreude
is this all
we are, what we have become—
day moons lost in the light
- BAM

~ ~ ~

The Truth Falls In

Kathy Kituai and *Barbara Curnow*

outstretched
whirling and twirling
on a whim
cockatoo and I
commence our day

*left right left
spinning his baton
perfectly
crisp creases, fixed face
disguising his delight*

I can't
mask my joy . . .
you phone
quick march, quick march
the truth falls in

*she hides
behind a made-up face
perhaps
even this man will
see reason to leave*

her twin lies
against white satin . . .
forced to face
the final farewell alone
I chant the Lord's Prayer

*I planted
red roses and sage
when you left
but there'll always be
gaps in my garden*

the wind
rippling through weeds
scatters
intricate patterns
where lilies once bloomed

*today
I'm making daisy chains
tomorrow
I may not notice
flowers, earth and sky*

why wait
for rosellas to arrive
two galahs
side by side,
feed beak to beak

*he's loving
the woman he's with
not wanting
peaches in winter
or his hand in mine*

all those
out-of-season berries
I scoffed . . .
oh! the temptation,
the food miles traversed

*they pack
passports and cameras
beach towels and togs
her work worries and
his persistent grudge*

souvenirs
we bring home with us . . .
sand in our shoes
from a beach at sunset,
pebbles and shells washed clean

*now and then
a butterfly lands
on the page—
when the wind dies down
without and within*

~ ~ ~

Never

Lynne Leach, USA and David Rice, USA

*here comes the fog
pouring through our valley
to make of my garden
an airbrushed wonder
in dappled whites and grays*

an apple thuds
and startles me
as I pick the last tomato
I've only read of the roar
of enemy planes

*a crippled bomber
hit our village churchyard
among tilting graves
it lay for years to teach us
a lesson we've never learned*

in a cardboard box
colorful superheroes
and toy soldiers
my never-ending wish
we'd all grow up

*brother strikes brother
on the family room rug
this is where it starts
a mother's deepest fear
that fighting will never end*

~ ~ ~

Tanka Prose



The Taste on My Tongue.

Kirsten Cliff, New Zealand

I'd travelled by train to the well-known *Harajuku* purely for the piercing experience. Tongue piercing, that is. Or a nipple, if you were game and your tongue was already adorned. Sitting upstairs in the studio, I could hear the sounds rising from the busy streets below. Markets overflowed with people and wares. The city had a good vibe. It was a place for the young and trendy. And pierced.

doorstep slices
of white bread, with the Marmite
I brought from home—
morning sun strains
through curtains never opened

I was the next in line and watched with interest: a Japanese boy sitting in a raised chair, his tongue protruding with an X marking the spot. A large cork was positioned under his tongue and held firmly in place ready for the thick needle to puncture it. I held my breath as the piercing needle came down and the boy's tongue curled around it, surprised at the assault. A blur of hands, then a shiny gold bar was poking out from the boy's mouth as he paid and tried to say *arigato*.

stirring
my cappuccino
with a cinnamon stick—
imitation is something
they do well here

Five minutes later I was awkwardly announcing, “It didn’t hurt as much as having my nose done.” The friend I’d come with was lying on a high bed having X’s drawn on her left nipple. Her lengthy black hair looked scruffy against the white pillow. I seemed to be leaning over her in protection, and couldn’t help but watch as her areola changed from a smooth yielding circle into its tight brown peak. This was a welcome distraction from my own discomfort. That is, until I had to avert my eyes from the sharp needle penetrating it.

before work
a quick bite to eat
at the noodle bar—
from pictures, we both order
the same meal every time

My tongue didn’t hurt much, but it sure was a strange sensation. Imagine someone’s forearm stuffed in your mouth: the fist pushed hard against your palate and the elbow jutting down forcefully into the soft base of your mouth. Not much room left for your swollen tongue, so enlarged that your teeth have now firmly sunken into the sides. How was I going to eat?

first sip of grappa
sometimes love burns
last sip of grappa—
but he's still on my lips,
the Italian I met in Japan

~ ~ ~

Progeny

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

My mother was witness. I see myself, as if looking from above.

four years old
how the china doll
I held
shattered on the floor
. . . still my empty arms

Though well cared for, most of them met with tragedy at some point: for example, the pretty one whose neck gave out; the "kissing" doll who broke when I gave her a bath in my grandparents' sink; the baby doll riddled with dart holes courtesy of a neighbor boy (brother to my best friend).

Polly, the doll
with long golden braids
and a gash
that allowed me to see
her sawdust insides

I chose the names of my future daughters when I was just a child. From where does the nurturing instinct come?

a girl whose dolls
were all neatly clothed
and coiffed . . .
not knowing then
that I'd have no children

—"a girl whose dolls" was initially published in *Simply Haiku*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 2008), and subsequently in *Take Five*, Vol. 1 (2009).

~ ~ ~

Planting a Clematis

Gary LeBel, USA

You're a fighter
and have no time for nonsense
on your unpaved road—
will I have helped you smooth it
enough to leave your mark?

Dig: you know the rule of thumb for sizing holes. Inhale the rainy fragrance of a clod of fresh-turned earth; enjoy a quiet nearly crystalline.

Mixing soils with gloveless hands, prepare a sumptuous feast where famished roots can chase their wormy happiness. Pack the sides with loosened, crumbly earth to let it breathe and drink.

Then start the delicate creepers up the post by binding them loosely with lengths of twine. Take care that each bluish bud is unencumbered, free to open its dazzling, living window. Give it a long cool drink to christen it, and then say something, anything at all, but softly to encourage it:

if only I'd been this very gardener with my second born.

~ ~ ~

Sails

Gary LeBel, USA

'You can see through the sail already . . .'

—Alcaeus of Lesbos (late seventh to middle sixth Century BCE)

He'd pulled over and parked though he was expected elsewhere. He said it was late in the day when he noticed a fresh path someone had cut through a field of high grasses, its woods-line dusted with half-light. Who walked there, he wondered. Struck by an overwhelming urge to know, he got out and followed it, climbing the mild slope. Maybe a new friend has left these tracks, he was thinking, or a future ladylove.

And what would he have said had he surprised someone returning? He'd have thought of something, and it would not have seemed awkward or forward or threatening in the least as he charmed them with his bright blue eyes in mid-path. They would have smiled at his good-hearted audacity, moved by the warmth of such rare ingenuousness. He would have wanted to know what they had been looking for, and would have boldly asked. And they'd have told him despite themselves after the surprise of being questioned had settled into an aura of delight that a passerby would ask such a thing.

He said he turned round at the woods-line since it was dark and returned to his car, though not unhappily since there was no loss but only gain. He didn't know why he'd

bothered to tell me such a trivial story, though at the time, he said, it felt like a sort of adventure. In all the years I've known him those were the kinds of sails he always hoisted, full of the holes of seeking. Where some of us trudge like pack animals through our lives, he grows ever lighter: I would know that secret whose inklings must lie somewhere among the trimmings on the sail-loft floor.

December rain
drums on the attic shingles—
as it falls and falls
the heart reaching inside its patter
takes down its lute

Note: The fragment of Alcaeus was translated by Richmond Lattimore from the *Norton Book of Classical Literature*, ed. Bernard Knox, NY 1993

*~For Skylark and its founding editor: may they take us to
places we've never been. ~*

~ ~ ~

Heaven's Gate

Amy Claire Rose Smith, UK

The field is butter-yellow, yet along the path stubborn snow still settles in the dips. As I crouch down in the dry debris beyond the hedgerow, skylark song envelopes me. It sounds as though a beautiful melody has been sped up, as if the skylark—like an excited child—is so eager to tell us what he wants to say, that all the words spill out in the wrong order. The birds fly up, into a cloudless blue sky, until angel-winged, they drift dazily and become flutter-parachutes of sheer joy.

late February
no longer can I listen
to the calendar . . .
the skylarks have brought summer
to this winter field

~ ~ ~



Articles

The Tanka Sequence & Tanka-Prose as Introduction to Tanka

Brian Zimmer, USA

The question put forth by the following article is simply: are the Tanka Sequence and Tanka-Prose among the more viable forms for tanka poets to best introduce tanka to a wider readership? The reader is encouraged to seek-out the English translations of the ancient texts mentioned, as well as the many examples of both forms in the current literature.

Like most poetry, English poetry originated in story and song. It has served both entertainment and mnemonic functions. The narrative poem remains the most widely read poem in English today, but the 20th (and now 21st) centuries evidenced a growing appreciation for the short poem and other forms. Openness to the disjunctive, deconstructed, and experimental also increased during this period.

Despite efforts by English writers like Amy Lowell and the first Japanese-American tanka poet, Jun Fujita, it was the Beat Poets who provided the most successful introduction of Eastern poetic forms to the west. Their impetus stemmed largely from an interest in Eastern religion, particularly the Zen Buddhism of Japan. However, the Beat's eye was trained mostly on haiku.

The slowly growing popularity of tanka may be regarded as a more or less indirect result of the Beat-inspired impulse. There was also a general interest in all things Japanese resulting from the post-war Occupation.

I believe there is no getting around the fact that the tanka's brevity has worked against it where English readership is concerned. English tanka rarely enters into discussions of contemporary poetics except among its practitioners. Yet many who have come to appreciate the richness of the translated ancient texts and many beautiful examples of English tanka, remain bewildered by the lack of interest generated beyond its community.

Tanka requires learning a special set of reading skills. One must be willing to slow down and pay attention to every line, caesura, and image. This type of reading is essential to all poetry but more so for the concentrated English tanka. Read too quickly tanka can appear easy, sometimes banal, and often not very poetic. We in the tanka community hear the lyrical in the best examples while those new to the genre often do not without consistent exposure. There is more than one reason for this but brevity takes a major place among them.

I am convinced the Tanka Sequence and Tanka-Prose are meaningful forms for introducing tanka in general to English readers. This has to do with the preeminence of the narrative poem in English. These two tanka forms possess the essential narrative "hook" that keeps the western reader interested.

The Tanka Sequence and Tanka-Prose both allow tanka to rise naturally from their narratives, but they do so differently and offer unique reading opportunities for the uninitiated.

The best examples of both genres always prompt reader return. Upon further reading, the tanka become more recognizably contextualized and intrinsic to the work, increasing the reader's aesthetic pleasure. In this way, readers are trained how to read and enjoy tanka in a natural and familiar manner; the reader learns to slow

down without stopping and is impelled to return and ruminates.

We cannot apply the same criteria regarding the individual tanka of the Tanka Sequence to the Tanka-Prose. Success in both forms is achieved by different means, both bearing a singularity peculiar to each.

I believe, along with most tanka poets and theorists, that the Tanka Sequence should be comprised of tanka that can each stand alone as a single poem in their own right. The cumulative effect of these tanka through subtle linkage (very different from the links of renga) give the poem narrative unity.

A Tanka Sequence is not merely a collection of fully formed tanka gathered in support of a theme (a conceit almost always evident when employed). One cannot reach into one's files and pull out related tanka, combine them in some reasonable relation to each other, and call the piece a Tanka Sequence. The tanka of the Tanka Sequence must be seen to organically rise to thematic coherence from a shared composition like the floors of a building. They occupy their own space but within a larger, enclosed structure. It is this building narrative that gives the individual poems the unity we look for in a Tanka Sequence.

I do not necessarily believe the same holds true for the tanka within Tanka-Prose. It is not necessary for them to be inherently discreet entities to render the Tanka-Prose effective.

Similar to the Tanka Sequence, the poet's files in Tanka-Prose must remain closed. Both prose and tanka interact in dialectical conversation, sometimes the effect can even be akin to a "liturgical" call and response. Both

prose and tanka give rise to each other, illustrate and delineate, sometimes explode, but usually complement each other. The sense that the prose cannot exist without the tanka and vice-versa is the decisive factor between the Tanka-Prose form and what might otherwise be merely tanka *with* prose or tanka *and* prose. It is why, in a departure from normative use, I prefer to use a hyphen when referring to Tanka-Prose.

One sees this technique very clearly in the earliest Japanese literature of the genre such as Tsurayuki's "Tosa Diary." Here the tanka are more directly related to the prose than would be acceptable to even the most open-minded English editors today. The various poetic diaries (*uta-nikki*), and the more loosely composed *zuihitsu*, also exhibit to some extent this same close relationship between prose and tanka. The poems rise as a kind of release or remembrance, out of a visceral response to the prose.

The Tanka Sequence and Tanka-Prose are unique literary forms and must bear obvious signs of having been composed as such.

The reader new to tanka should find familiar touchstones in both the Tanka Sequence and Tanka-Prose forms. There will be an identifiable flow, progression, and in the case of authentic literature, sympathy, realization or insight. When the reader returns to the poems, they will begin to sense the complexity and extraordinary compression the best tanka integrate. They may be astonished to find how much can be contained and conveyed in a form of such brevity. More to the point, they begin to discover the artistry and craft of

juxtaposition that make for the most memorable tanka, singly or in composite form.

Below is an example of a Tanka Sequence I especially like by Miriam Chaikin, titled “night mutters.” I would ask the reader to note the poet’s skill evident in the narrative connection between the last line of the first tanka and the first line of the second. The two lines appear to flow into each other and complete a single thought, but look again—maybe not! The two poems can and do stand alone. The poet through her artistry has simply crafted them in such a way as to surprise and perhaps initially baffle the reader.

The general principles laid out in this article are merely that, and tentative at best. A poet must be free to do as he or she pleases in adapting (sometimes even breaking) form, when the poem calls for it. The integrity of the poem, not the form, must always take precedence. If not, the poem does injustice to its inspiration and will likely exhibit inferiority for such forcing.

Chaikin’s tanka are strangely elliptical, even for a form known for leaving much unsaid and suggested. How strangely the three poems wend in and out of each other as if in dream, evoking beginnings then short-circuiting to resume again as if falling in and out of a void. But we can follow their trajectory easily enough. The tanka each tell us something significant yet keep us on track like the walls of a maze. The effect of the sequence is to leave the reader with an oddly satisfying sense of unease. I especially appreciate the enigmatic spacing of the first tanka along with its unusual fragmentation, again evidenced in the third.

Chaikin’s Tanka Sequence leaves us with more questions than answers. It presents the reader with an

honest uncertainty and inconclusiveness. That being the case, I think it is a fitting conclusion to this article.

night mutters

 swiftness
that little dark cloud
rushes by me
again today
 —yet again

it whispers
the same secret
in a rush of words
too faint
for me to hear

i feel
as if i stand
on uncertain ground
and at any moment
i can—

miriam chaikin
red lights, Vol. 9, No.1, January 2013

~ ~ ~

Submission Guidelines

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

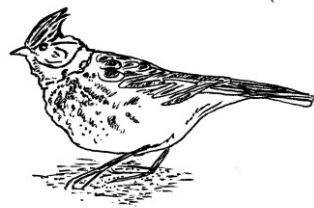
Kindly submit up to ten original, previously unpublished tanka &/or one sequence, tanka prose, tan renga, articles etc. with the subject heading “Skylark tanka submission” to **skylark.tanka@gmail.com**. At the end of your submission, please include your full name and country of residence.

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

In addition to your regular submission, you are also invited to submit **one** tanka for the “Skylark’s Nest” prompt (see page 11). Unfortunately, we are not able to reproduce colour images in *Skylark*, but poets wishing to submit tanka haiga may do so; coinciding with the publication of each issue, a selection of the best will be added to a haiga gallery on the website.

The website **skylarktanka.weebly.com** will be updated regularly. It is hoped that back issues will be available as PDF files as each new issue is published. The “Skylark’s Nest” winners and runners up will also be archived.

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



The Harvest Festival

. . . On the shady boughs the dusky cicadas were busy with their chatter, and the tree-frog far off cried in the dense thorn-brake. Larks and finches sang, the dove made moan, and bees flitted humming above the springs. All things were fragrant of rich harvest and fruit time . . .

—Theocritus (c.310-250 B.C.)

