

ATLAS
POETICA
A Journal of World Tanka

Number 21

M. Kei, editor
toki, editorial assistant

Keibooks, Perryville, Maryland, USA

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P O Box 516

Perryville, Maryland, USA 21903

<http://AtlasPoetica.org> Editor@AtlasPoetica.org

Atlas Poetica *A Journal of World Tanka*

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Atlas Poetica : A Journal of World Tanka, an organic print and e-journal published at least three times a year. Atlas Poetica is dedicated to publishing and promoting world tanka literature, including tanka, kyoka, gogyoshi, tanka prose, tanka sequences, shaped tanka, sedoka, mondo, cherita, zuihitsu, and other variations and innovations in the field of tanka literature. We do not publish haiku, except as incidental to a tanka collage or other mixed form work.

Atlas Poetica is interested in all verse of high quality, but our preference is for tanka literature that is authentic to the environment and experience of the poet. While we will consider tanka in the classical Japanese style, our preference is for fresh, forward-looking tanka that engages with the world as it is. We are willing to consider experiments and explorations as well as traditional approaches.

In addition to verse, *Atlas Poetica* publishes articles, essays, reviews, interviews, letters to the editor, etc., related to tanka literature. Tanka in translation from around the world are welcome in the journal. Complete guidelines are available online at: AtlasPoetica.org.

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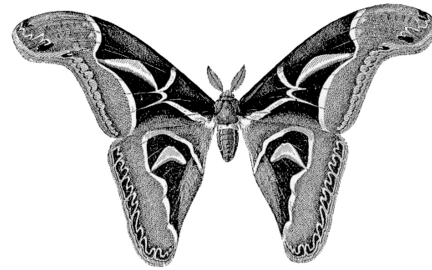
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Editorial Biographies

M. Kei is the editor of *Atlas Poetica* and was the editor-in-chief of *Take Five : Best Contemporary Tanka. Vols. 1–4*. He is a tall ship sailor in real life and has published nautical novels featuring a gay protagonist, *Pirates of the Narrow Seas*. His most recent book is *January, A Tanka Diary*.

toki is a published poet and recent addition to the Keibooks editorial team. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest US, toki often writes poetry informed by the experience of that region: the labyrinthine confines of the evergreen forests, the infinite vastness of the sea and inclement sky, and the liminal spaces in between. toki’s poetry can be found online and in print, with work published in *Atlas Poetica*, *The Bamboo Hut*, and *Poetry Nook*.

Our ‘butterfly’ is actually an Atlas moth (*Attacus atlas*), the largest butterfly/moth in the world. It comes from the tropical regions of Asia. Image from the 1921 *Les insectes agricoles d’époque*.



To Be a Spiritual Poet

Shortly before his death, Brian Zimmer sent me a collection of his syllabic tanka for publication. They appear in this issue of *Atlas Poetica*, with an introduction by his friend, Joy McCall. Brian didn't give the collection a title, so I dubbed it "See What Love Can Do" after one of the tanka in the collection. The quotation is well known within the Religious Society of Friends, better known as Quakers. It is an apt summary of our faith; both Brian and I are Friends.

The subject of religion is not much discussed in tanka, but it has been an integral part of tanka for as long as tanka has existed. In its native Japan, Buddhism and its awareness of the transient beauty of the world infused tanka with a sense of spirituality that was, as is usual in tanka, more implied than directly stated. In other cases, the authorship of tanka was attributed to various Shinto deities. In such cases the human poet was considered the channel of a numinous power and not the author of the works. Tanka literature is one of the few texts in which divine beings are granted bylines as poets and not as authorities laying down religious laws. This human dimension bridges the gap between the mortal and the eternal.

It is not surprising that tanka poets of various spiritual practices have found in tanka a suitable vehicle for religious expression. If religion is the discipline of living spiritually in the material world, then tanka is a voice for poets alive to the myriad dimensions of existence. Some poets are overt in their expression. For example, Joy McCall has rendered verses from *Ecclesiastes* in tanka form. She is not the first; some years ago the Psalms were published as a tanka chapbook. Past issues of *Atlas Poetica* have published Richard St. Clair's Buddhist tanka, Claire Everett and Autumn Noelle Hall's paeans to the Pagan places of Ireland and Great Britain, as well as Gerry Jacobson's histories of the Jewish Holocaust. Other metaphysical practices ranging from yoga to astrology appear in tanka, and so do the traditional hymns of Christian faith.

When the world draws a sharp line between things of the spirit and things of the material world, when overt expressions of religion are suspect, when the empty consumerism of Western society rings hollow, tanka's ability to imply more than it states provides a method to unite the disparate halves of our human existence. A reader new to tanka once told me that she had to enter a meditative state to read tanka; I personally write tanka while in the same state of relaxed alertness with which I worship. It is the same spirit in which I serve as a sailor on historic wooden vessels, and it is the spirit I try to take with me as I move through the natural and human worlds.

We find the traces of metaphysics in many of the tanka in this issue, whether it is Carole Johnston's transmogrified witch or Chen-ou Liu's statue of Shiva amid the SUVs. Matsukaze invokes both the Holy Grail and Venus while Roman Lyakhovetsky worships the guitar gods of the secular world.

Religion does not always bring solace. Samantha Sirimanne Hyde's retreat into the 'Noble Silence' brings sobs and chattering. The Twenty-Third Psalm does not console James Schneider in the face of death. Genie Nakano bargains with God over her husband's shattered body while Don Miller rattles through a medical labyrinth not knowing by which exit he will leave.

Once we start looking, religion is everywhere in tanka. Poems that we previously accepted at face value acquire a new resonance. Tanka, the labyrinthine poem, has more turns and twists than we knew. Each time we shift our mind, more dimensions open to us. These small poems are doorways between worlds.

~K~

M. Kei
Editor

Atlas Poetica : A Journal of World Tanka

Sand Dunes, Junggar Basin, Northwestern China.
Cover Image courtesy of Earth Observatory, NASA.

Alexis Rotella

A roomful of Republicans
not one stops
to consider
I might not
be one of them.

I stoop
to touch the bluebells
a breeze that smells
of childhood
lingers in my hair.

They won't be here long—
the least I can do
is pull up a chair
to keep the peonies
company.

First doves
of morning
as if their song
were blown
through a comb.

Each holding
a cup or more
of moonlight
white long-stem tulips
on our evening walk.

Take me to your place
my mother with dementia pleads—
I'll help you clean
I'll iron your sheets
I won't be any bother.

~United States

Don't Leave

Alexis Rotella

He dreamed he had a cat that could talk, a cat
who was jealous of me. The cat clung to his arm
and when I'd walk into the room, she'd cry,
"Don't leave me. Please don't leave."

Forty years married—
I've learned
not to mention
his birthday or how
he's slowing down.

~United States

*Alexis Rotella is a popular poet. Michael McClintock referred to her
collection LIP PRINTS as an outstanding example of modern tanka.
Rotella practices acupuncture in Arnold, Maryland.*

Allistair Wilson

solitary tree on the skyline
are you bowed by wild winds
or the howling words
of every poet
who passed you by?

who listened to this
haunting wind
one billion years ago—
who will listen
a billion years from now?

winter walk
warm top
cold legs
a walking
yin and yang

small children
running home
from school
full of stories
and stones

a steep alleyway
empty beer cans crushed
by the up-hill struggle—
an occasional drinker
I often arrive puffed-out

your long visit
dropping pieces of yourself
to the floor—you formed an SOS
I rearranged them into
a ‘V’ for victory . . . of sorts

years
playing the guitar
and I still
have trouble
getting an ‘F’

the tax inspector
seemed to have ears
that were older than his head
and that’s
the truth!

stepfather
in his casket
too tidy to be normal—
and they put
too much powder on his face

a neighbour
has started talking to himself
not gen-gan-gooley
but I did
hear a banjo

a strange dream indeed
you inside
a kettle
and me
sitting on the lid

if I had known
being an optimist
was such hard work
I’d have become
a pessimist

another poem
for the anvil
to be battered
or persuaded
into shape

waking from the freedom
of sleep
we soon start to reassemble
the burden
of memory

a vapor trail of discarded
words left behind me
in the street
scavengers may find them
before the wind-sweeper

like the Olympic torch
we hold our
opinions high
casting shadows
on those around us

a great film idol of old
how come it is only now
with age
I see
the sadness in your eyes?

no one could
take their inhaler
like my mum—
grand sweeping gestures
worthy of Shakespeare

I took my pen
into the garden
pointed it at the sun
and waited
for it to be filled with light

we collect
small handfuls
of things
and pat them
into mountains high

damn
the philosophy
just call me
sexy
and gorgeous

write some poems
feed them
to the crows—
they are good
at spreading the word

like a new love
breaking ground
these first crocuses
tender
to the world

pigeons of London
scratching a living
on sooty streets
the only workers who can
still afford to live here

It wasn't lines on my face
in the mirror that told me
I was getting old
but when I stopped looking in
the sky—for aliens!

~England

Allistair Wilson has previously published in Bright Stars 7 and Atlas Poetica 20: A Journal of World Tanka. He lives in Kent, South East England.

Andy McCall

the wind blows
no one hears me cry
only the gulls
circling catch the sound
drifting over crashing waves

safe
in the holy room
unshackled
from the broken body
her spirit soars

in the darkness
of night, the glow
of a soft light
from a window—
a welcome awaits

light
falls on stone
the poem written
in darkness we come
to pay respect

across the room
the cat sits
watching me
this, too
is friendship

windswept beach
silent windmills
on the horizon
hot coffee
and love

the oven is warm
bread laid
on the table
would we ask
for anything more?

the kitchen
silent now
no voice
to say *welcome* . . .
it's not home

the trees
bend in the wind
heavy rain
on the windows . . .
warm under blankets

through
the window I see her
I settle
my heart is glad
all is well

~*Norwich, England*

Andy McCall lives with his wife Joy in Norwich, England. He works for the local council. In his spare time he rides motocross and he loves to spend time in the countryside. He loves all creatures, especially his scruffy cat. He likes to cook, and he bakes bread. He has occasionally written longer poems, but lately he began to write tanka as a way of expressing his tangled feelings. He likes country music and old movies, and home.

Anna Cates

honey sticky summer
the petal's scent
I am outside
myself growing
on the branches

song of spring
the crab apple blossoms
have fallen
mourning birds
have come

Anna Cates's poems have appeared in Acorn, Modern Haiku, Shamrock Haiku Journal, Frogpond, and other publications. She teaches graduate creative writing for Southern New Hampshire University online and maintains several other part time positions. She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and several other advanced degrees related to English studies. She resides in Wilmington, Ohio, with her two cats, Freddie and Christine.

Shedding Skin

Autumn Noelle Hall

on the eve
of Martin Luther King Day
a bomb
blasts the NAACP
inclining me to join

my empathy,
my apologies: insults
I've run out of thread—
the names of the dead, pinpricks
of blood on the quilts' muslin

what of this evil
masquerading in white skin?
the bloodstains
down to my DNA
though I wash and I wash

the plague of shame . . .
how came we by this ghastly
immunity
to conscience? our eyes now turn
to Iran . . . to Syria

to dollar \$ign\$
which coil \$nake-like on them\$elve\$
green and \$lithering
lifele\$\$ through gra\$\$ that grow\$
over downed brown-\$kinned bodie\$. . .

~Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA

“An improvised explosive device was detonated against the exterior wall of a building housing the Colorado Springs chapter of the NAACP [. . .] FBI officials are seeking a ‘potential person of interest,’ described as a balding white male, about 40 years old [. . .] driving a 2000 or older model dirty, white pick-up truck.”—Jesse Paul, *Denver Post*, January 6, 2015.

unconscious
our exhalation of breath
on Cosmic waters
—the ripples are there
before the stone is cast

fixed
on Polaris
our night
a dizzying whorl
of star trails

the light
glowing around
my edges
I am my own
eclipse

~Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, USA

Autumn Noelle Hall lives in Green Mountain Falls, Colorado, with her husband, daughters, and their rascalion Australian Shepherd. When not feeding the birds or photographing the mountains, she writes. A Pikes Peak Arts Council nominee for Page Poet of the Year, Autumn is honored to have had her work included in many fine Asian Short Form publications both at home and abroad. She is especially grateful to you, the readers, who bring her words to life.

Ron Truax writes from Colorado Springs, CO. He also does large format black and white photography and admires his wife's paintings. This is his first collaboration with his friend, Autumn Noelle Hall.

Barbara Curnow (Australia) has two favourite places to read and write; the sunroom in her Canberra home and on the veranda of her Bega Valley property, with views across an endless range of mountains.

Gerry Jacobson writes tanka in the cafes of three cities. Canberra where he lives and grows vegetables. Sydney, hanging out with grandchildren. And Stockholm, home of another grandchild, this one a Viking princess. Tanka prose is his challenge and his delight.

My Boots Still Serve

Autumn Noelle Hall & Ron Truax

shoulders squared
twenty-four years later
still in the lead
the military cadence
of my shadow

*my drill step ended
forty-four years ago
cadence now harkened
to a fading drum beat
on the long march of time*

my combat boots
never saw combat, unlike
Dad's bomber jacket
its leather cracked and creased
while his face remained ageless

*trod so many miles
issued fifty years ago
my boots still serve
paint-splattered and resoled
disguised as civilians*

from her trumpet
the notes of Taps spilling
like liquid silver
will her military blood
call my own daughter to serve?

*bugles and trumpets
history's war heralds
better Miles Davis
plays "Walkin'" at first light
than all those reveilles*

in place of the fife
wee nuthatches piping
to flicker's tattoo
I take my marching orders
from the full birds on high now

~Pikes Peak Region, Colorado, USA

Revisiting

Barbara Curnow & *Gerry Jacobson*

I stand on a chair and stretch up to the top cupboard. It's a big bag I take hold of; more cumbersome than heavy. I take care with my balance.

I place it on the floor and open it. Folded neatly inside are a pair of gardening trousers (unwashed), a pale green shirt, a windcheater with wine stains on the front, a battered hat and a Mickey Mouse tie. Keepsakes. Clothes of Kim's that were put away carefully after he died. Not sent to the Salvos. Clothes with memories in the warp and waft.

Now, with some years gone by, I go through them; decide to keep only Mickey Mouse and the hat.

revisiting
my favourite beach
up north—
five years on
the sands have shifted

I won't go back. I've flown over the island a few times going up to Torres Strait or PNG. Sometimes I read about it in the newspaper. Dingo eats tourist. Shark eats swimmer. Things like that. Actually I never swam in the sea there. But all my life the boom of that surf resounds within me.

I did swim in the freshwater lakes—Lake Wabby, Lake McKenzie. Often first thing in the morning. Words in my head. Was it Byron or Browning? Something about the wild joys of living, the plunge into living waters. Used to read.

*empty shells
litter the sandhills
mussel . . . oyster
nothing else left
for those who inherit*

~Australia

Bob Lucky

my wife's
new cello
is settling in—
I get ideas watching her
rosin her bow

my son calls
from his new home
in Madura –
an archipelago of clouds
stretches to the horizon

sucking
the juice out of
passion fruit—
I would stand here
all day if I could

came downstairs
saw my wife upside down
in a handstand—
I imagine only astronauts
fantasize breasts that way

a student
falls asleep behind his book—
I was the one
who told him it was
a cure for insomnia

my friend
who shaves his head
every month
makes me want to ask
where he gets his strength

Alex
now Alexandra
hugs me hello—
when I knew him
she wasn't so happy

~Jubail, Saudi Arabia

Bob Lucky lives in Saudi Arabia. He is the author of the chapbook Ethiopian Time and is an editor at Contemporary Haibun Online. His work appears in various journals.

See What Love Can Do: Introduction

Joy McCall

Brian sent me, and then M. Kei, the rough file of these syllabic tanka in the September of 2014—a brief two months before he died. During the summer, we had begun to write tanka in the old ways, counting 31 syllables in lines of 5-7-5-7-7, as it seemed to give him some comfort from the fear and loneliness and despair that he was feeling.

Sometimes, writing the more formal tanka seemed to bring him some peace and even fleeting joy, and although it was a passing solace, still it was . . . something.

In the end, it was not enough. It still hurts and brings tears to read these late poems and to re-live the sharing of his struggle to find some reason for living.

At times, it seemed that the help of doctors and medications and the great love of his family and friends, might keep him going.

This last collection shows the enormous strain Brian was under, but also the huge courage with which he faced it all.

He sought answers in many places, not just medications and counselling, but in love and faith.

He searched for God in his Quaker meetings, and in other churches too. He read the Bible. He sang old hymns.

He sought love, and he gave it, from the depths of his soul.

He wrote, of his efforts to make the poems fill all the spaces that were breaking open in him:

As is often true,
only tanka can seal it,
the torn cut, the rift
that siphons my humanity
and leaves me in need of blood.

and:

Words are left to me,
often I think all that's left,
but all that's needed
for a tent to look out from
and to rest in for a night.

and how he longed for rest, as he fell and searched deeper inside himself:

A revelation
to open doll within doll,
to go deeper and deeper
finding a figure smaller
yet the same in every way.

In some way, these are Brian's 'last songs'—a return to the counting, the saying, the solace, before the machine wound down to a stop, and that eternal silence:

The cicada calls
as the morning sun rises.
A last song it seems,
as if what once was wound tight
has arrived at winding-down.

Soon I will grow hoarse,
perhaps I'm there already.
No matter when one
sings for the late moon alone,
the curve of its ear so thin.

He added a few later poems to the collection, as the summer ended, and looking back at this one he wrote to me, I wonder if the 'five' of tanka was enough for him to say: *OK, now I will shut the door—*

Every witch is born
with a sense of great nonsense,
obsessed with counting,
hears: "one-two-buckle-my-shoe,
"three-four-shut-the-door".

At last, he gave up rebelling and chafing at the ropes that bound him, and did give in to the

eventual kindness of death. It grieves me so deeply; but for Brian—maybe it was all he could think to do.

If taken fully
I would not rebel or chafe.
If there were nothing
left me to decide or do
I could surrender wholly to you.

This collection is Brian's own last choice of his poems, and I think he would have been so very glad that M. Kei will publish them. It was what he wanted. They are such beautiful poems, a legacy of a beautiful soul.

Joy McCall
Norwich, England

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Kei books published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

Tribute from Brian's sister

Brian was an amazing man, brother and friend, and is missed by so many people. I wish he knew in life how others felt about him, and I wish he could have felt about himself the way others felt about him. Even just a little. I miss our daily talks, I miss his advice and counsel, but more than anything I miss his laughter. There is less joy and happiness in my world with his passing, and it will never be replaced.

—Love, Beth

See What Love Can Do: Syllabic Tanka

Brian Zimmer

The words "restless legs"
hardly sound the agony
of twin hornets' nests,
their energy gathering
in preparation to swarm.

I cannot decide
if it's dismay or delight
that keeps me singing
of these wondrous little pills
and their powerful witchcraft.

I once knew a child
who rose happy for the day,
the first in his house
to breathe the morning silence
with all its hidden promise.

Such a fleeting thing
this uprush of sudden joy,
yet so powerful
some will follow health or harm
just to feel it one more time (once again).

And later we learned
they had dug-up the garden
—your years of labor—
and laid a square plane of grass,
then moved away the next year.

A taut violence
outstretches the summer heat.
The video shows
a man with a blade taunt them.
Their release leaves us gasping.

The killing of Kajieme Powell by police, St. Louis City, August 19, 2014.

As is often true,
only tanka can seal it,
the torn cut, the rift
that siphons my humanity
and leaves me in need of blood.

O my tormentor
it is true that I miss you;
your loving-kindness
overfed and nearly drowned
this plant with necessity.

If only you knew
the heat of this crazy love,
it would make you flee.
Sometimes one must burn alone
to spare the innocent fire.

Why now and why this?
The muse turns its gaze, smiling.
The hidden seasons
are its secret works and signs;
discussed, you wouldn't listen.

There is joy in it.
Lustily the green finch sings
the divine hours.
But solemn his silences
the days of unbroken fast.

Let me be a drum,
a string strummed, a trembling reed.
Shape me as needed
for some careful utterance,
then, kind-hearted, lay me down.

To see the fatigue
in the late rose of August
requires observance—
summer's eye has moved beyond,
her strength taken for granted.

Grandma's *View Master*—
those cold April days the sky
retained blue brilliance
behind a tardy rabbit,
and a marble Taj Mahal.

A revelation
to open doll within doll,
to go deeper and deeper
finding a figure smaller
yet the same in every way.

We arrive furnished,
there's no mistaking the man
in the nursery.
It's a matter of movement,
and conscientious placement.

All this preciousness—
no, I am not without fault,
but poems should speak
and sing in their own language,
not feign a foreign accent.

Now this final pause
before night takes on color.
Lower your eyelids.
Daylight shifts, her inks fading,
waiting for the blue hour.

The moon is not kind.
Limit your expectations
and learn to protect
yourself from reflected light—
it is neither yours nor theirs.

He was a stranger,
don't let engagement fool you.
The kind and cruel
that wound from so far away
are dragons, windmills, and air.

The summer was vague
its dangers and joys unformed,
like the foggy wraiths
the Mississippi raises
in the park across the way.

Words are left to me,
often I think all that's left,
but all that's needed
For a tent to look out from
And to rest in for a night.

I relish the light
the night-surgeon shaves finely,
replacing silver
with living tissue of blue,
leaving all wounds clean.

How free not to care
who approves or disapproves.
Age does not feel old.
One might as well forget it
and be outpaced at leisure.

Can it be I've learned
at last to merely spill them?
Why so fast and loose
it takes but a coffee cup
and keyboard for them to pour?

If this is it,
all that's left for me to sing,
I'll gladly sing it.
Only let the notes ring true
in my voice and no other.

The cicada calls
as the morning sun rises.
A last song it seems,
as if what once was wound tight
has arrived at winding-down.

Disarmed I feel free,
suddenly incapable
of wounding myself;
thorn-studded yet clear of harm,
blooming just above danger.

At last I arrive
at a place finally real.
A lifetime of sin
can add or subtract nothing
where such (now) words mean more and less.

Now I want to touch
to make all of you feel real.
You, who've become dream
like the flavor of water
to one no longer thirsty.

My tea smells of wood
and tastes like the scent of fruit.
Removed from water
through subtlest alchemy
by a step, but one quite large.

One may meet pathos
without being pathetic.
It's how the tear falls,
it's why, when and where that tests
grief's depths and beauty's.

Soon I will grow hoarse,
perhaps I'm there already.
No matter when one
sings for the late moon alone,
the curve of its ear so thin(ed).

That light on the wall
(I saw it again today)
arrives filled with hope;
harbors in its simple patch
a joy to wake aged men.

I fall fast asleep
and wake early next morning
to find my legs calm,
those twin beehives vacated,
my buzzing ears gone silent.

I was told no one
would call me a man of peace
who saw my true state.
And I wept deeply inside,
that state so far from my truth.

Heavy in my hand
this great drusy amethyst,
coloring eons
within the dense crust of earth.
It's true, I'm holding my/a heart.

How do we arrive at
naming the pure and impure?
Our minds, no measure,
know only the scent of death
in the sterile and the germ.

The end of summer,
when August's darts of light pierce
every opened heart,
I cannot help recalling
Bernini's Saint Teresa.

The medications
have their counsel to impart
and begin each day
on the most somber of notes,
while something else in me trills.

I need them to win,
I also need them to lose.
To win, let them pass,
to let go an easy shot
stolen by chance and slam-dunked.

His mind takes beauty
when and how it comes, right here.
What used to be hard,
a tango of tripping feet,
becomes the light trip/step of dance.

No one to say "Come,
and walk with me by the sea.
Take my hand and hear
the lure of sirens over-sung
by surf. You might even wet your feet."

In Memoriam, Robin Williams

What passed for normal
is now suddenly finished.
St. Louis summer
steaming-up every window.
Remember we've been through this.

I want just one thing:
something to show for it all.
A painting perhaps,
made from the fine-blown silt
of the Mississippi River.

I dreamed her again,
in braided hair and torn shift,
a century gone
but only twenty-eight years
since I called to her: "Grandma!"

Receive my envy
and my admiration too,
blooming coleus,
enduring lawful trespass
to your blooming stalks decreed.

Good God, silly dogs,
if you're going to tell time
learn to get it right.
I won't give the benefit
of the doubt where others might.

For me they're the same,
I know no signifier.
If I breathe a flame,
it dances in the palm of my hand
and will burn us both held long.

Every witch is born
with a sense of great nonsense,
obsessed with counting,
hears: "one-two-buckle-my-shoe,
"three-four-shut-the-door".

This is all I know:
when the trouble comes
start scattering words
like blossoms from a turret.
Some land on their feet, some crush.

Yes, even I see
how the Kingdom of Heaven
is a broken jar
of scattered grain, emptied by
so profligate a cosmos.

Brewing my coffee,
I become fully awake
to the morning light;
the four walls pearlescent
like the chambers of a seashell.

The old man recalls it
as if he were still a boy;
the thrill of first day,
the yellow bus, black letters,
oiled door folding shut.

Did I see it fall,
a leaf between the houses?
Not so fast, my friend,
one leaf is no sign;
remember the young long gone.

Kudos, hibiscus,
though the sun ascends scorching,
you, without a care,
insist on your unfoldment
in the rolling, rippling air.

You are the grand quest
of each yearning librettist,
you, humble cricket
and sudden fountain of rain,
O lonesome summer duet!

Instead of rocking,
smoking, pacing up and down,
I work in wordcraft.
No regard for good or ill,
it's only movement matters.

Give me empty road
and a late summer rainstorm.
I will leave my car,
and strip naked with nothing
to detect tears from downpour.

Yes, I can suffer,
day of unbearable heat;
by late afternoon
your pity unrestrained, comes
in strikes of lightning and rain.

If taken fully
I would not rebel or chafe.
If there were nothing
left me to decide or do
I could surrender wholly to you.

It is the morsel,
the single crumb of control
that renders me mad;
the licked-clean or famished plate
frees me from all begging: "please".

Strange how I appear
all of a piece, still whole cloth.
Yet “soon enough” comes
when your touch will turn to crepe
this diaphanous carcass.

My friend, wheel-chair bound,
cannot sleep and wants to dance.
I fly on my stang
across the sea to cavort,
two marionettes cut loose.

I will sing two songs,
choose whichever you prefer.
Or none. Never push
or the effects will vex you,
as the lines feel forced to clench.

for Margaret

You were the first one,
the one I trusted to tell.
The sidewalk stopped short
of the field. I crouched in pain
to deliver my secret.

See what love can do,
saith George Fox, friend, but this?
Does love not grant thee limits?
Thy passion outruns thy guide
love, O love, O careless love.

Not caring for it,
the dead man stood up again
and headed for home.
It's been a long time now since
he's given thought to leaving.

Post-trauma, I hear
not the voice of injury,
but for the first time,
since we were little children,
the soft rasp of coming age.

The final raucous—
the end of August covers
beneath its surface
a growing sense of silence,
ready to possess the land.

All things hang heavy
on every stalk, vine, and hive.
Ceres, apron full,
bears forth the final harvest
for her dear daughter's lean months.

I dreamed a great wind,
and though I was not alone,
each was on his own.
I clung tight to that mountain,
and yearned for that wind again.

another/a/the (second) blast/gust

Removed from my meds,
a temporary cleansing,
I sit quietly
by blooming water lilies
floating on their black water.

This ikebana
Of sere, crumbling maple leaves
clinging to their stalk
moves me most of all;
its delicate discretion
tender gift to the viewer.

The dragonfly wed
to his blue lily
leaves to clear his head,
unable to quite believe
he has at long last found her.

The absurdity
of a scale that could balance
mediocrity
with the freedom for genius—
Justice you are truly blind.

Words are not mere marks,
never type across a page;
when I read *lily*
a speckled beauty's soft lips
gently brush my fingertips.

~*St. Louis, Missouri, USA*

Brian Zimmer was born December 1, 1957, in Dayton Ohio. While living in Detroit he had a heart aneurysm and open-heart surgery, and was unable to work after that. He took his own life on November 3, 2014, but was on life-support until November 5, 2014.

Life Support

Brian Zimmer

O my faithful one,
surely my conversation
must be a trial
examining the reaches
of your love's limitations?

To one who dared say
friendship is not forever,
the provocation
brought on the head that said it,
the charge he'd never known it.

Yet who are you now
that I must sink down fathoms
to find you a word
whose boat was once surrounded
by their soft luminescence?

All parties agree
the pact needs no solemn oath,
a mere breath required
to set the thing in motion.
Stopped, it simply disappears.

I'd have been happy,
yes, even now I would be,
but for the haunted
who arrive, uninvited,
arthritic forefingers raised.

Urashima

Brian Zimmer

The turtle, rescued
from heartless, cruel children,
in her gratitude
leads Urashima below
to her deepest sea demesne.

Fathom on fathom,
they travel without fatigue,
the waters blacken
till they reach such strange creatures
all illumined from within.

Strange respiration,
his lungs singular, content,
become sea bellows,
transformed like gills, elements
exchanged, redirected.

Hours, days and years,
nothing heard or known above.
Why then this impulse
to leave the happy behind,
to follow nostalgia's tide?

Ah, Urashima,
landed, the queen's gift opened,
your eyes once more close;
her heavy breath fogs again
and forever, sea and shore.

Bruce England

Hospital room
old woman ready to leave
"can you sign the check?"
granddaughter holds her hand
writing her name

Seedlings
in the yard
once stored
as nuts
by squirrels

Bright sun
a small
shadow
flies by
on the ground

There's a hole
in my throat
it's growing
I have no song
to fill it up

How can I get
the best corner
of scalloped
potatoes when
my dish is round?

Blessed be
the elephant
the gorilla
the dog, the cat
the sacred chicken

My parents
and grandmother
paid no mind
to the buzzing flypapers
above our evening meal

How
we met
she put
her tent up
next to mine

If you get
to one hundred years old
you're still in the pack
get to one hundred and ten
then the race really begins

Only evidence
of a vague figure skating
away in the mist—
markings on a sheet of ice
in a photo, and these words

Sedoka

Bruce England

Pumping
her bloody walls
we reach for tissues
to wipe up
red dick, red cunt
red hair, red thighs

Bruce England lives and works in Silicon Valley. His haiku writing began in 1984, and his serious tanka writing in 2010. Other related interests include haiku theory and practice. Long ago, a chapbook, Shorelines, was published with a friend, Tony Mariano.

Carole Johnston

he says
“I think dinosaurs
are not real”
they're like dragons & vampires
george washington and god

awaiting
the birth of my grandson
I visualize
him cradled by silver clouds
floating—safe in azure

lost my
opal bear pendant
it's green
luminous mother eyes
peer out from mine

~Asheville, North Carolina, USA

geranium
oregano marjoram
basil and thyme
scent hot on my hands
thoughts of my father

when I first
desired to be a crone
you squelched
my dreams of moon dancing
under indigo skies

the year descends
into gloom . . . darker . . . darker
we search for light . . .
each house competing
for the tackiest display

silent night
in the upscale suburbs
each house
so bright you could see
the tacky lights from space

the sky
whites itself again
my fingers freeze
yet the cardinal
trills his mating song

oak leaves
cold wind rattle rattle . . .
robins
perch like little brown monks
shivering at vespers

I follow
the secret path
to midnight
laughter rings from
inside a hollow tree

October dusk
blood red maple trees
blend with black
velvet souls of angels
blue lip of the moon

reading "Bright Stars"
my mind ignites like jasper
carved from
the earth deep fire
synapses birthing poems

~Lexington, Kentucky, USA

in my room
a window seat for reading
and moon gazing
watching in furtive silence
the lonely dome of night

the first time I heard
"Eine Kleine Nacht Musik"
Amadeus'
cyclone hallucination
swirled about my brain

my fingers touch
the moon rocking on top
of the ferris wheel
kissing stars and sea
waves crash under us

that salesman
who flimflammed my mother
into buying
all those magical books
he saved my life

once I was
the neighborhood witch
lashed to a tree
transmogrified from
evil to good and back

that night
in the Jersey Diner
black eyes
staring over coffee mugs
knew we were headed to hell

~New Jersey, USA

Carole Johnston is a retired creative writing teacher, poet and novelist. She enjoys driving around the bluegrass region of Kentucky and over the North Eastern United States with a notebook and a camera. She is a seeker, searching for those haiku moments. Her first poetry collection, Journeys: Getting Lost, will be published in January by Finishing Line Press.

Chen-ou Liu

Delhi at twilight—
rickshaws weaving
in and out
as SUVs slowly pass
the statue of Shiva

~*Delhi, India*

my dog and I
engulfed in a cloud
of butterflies—
my first love once told me
each of their names

~*Taipei, Taiwan*

a giant Maple Leaf
in the ceremony
I answer
to my English name
with a twinge of sadness

for naturalized Canadians

their voices
hurled against the darkness
and thrown back
by the wall of silence . . .
migrants in a trailer truck

~*Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*

awake
in the thin blue light
of morning
I say to myself
she's gone forever

Silent Night
from the next-door neighbor
becomes louder . . .
I talk in circles
with my shadow on the wall

writing love poems
in winter twilight
the muse
starts shape-shifting
into my ex

my “now”
written to fill up
a jagged piece
of time . . .
maple leaves turn yellow

morning eggs
sizzling in the pan . . .
a tanka
only half done
in my foggy head

my age
standing tall and wide
in my head
blocks the leafy path
to the life I've dreamed

from afar
the sound of fireworks
on Canada Day
folding, unfolding
my immigrant dream

~*Ajax, Ontario, Canada*

Happy Families Are All Alike

Chen-ou Liu

she and I
sit across the table
in the morning
bearing the silence
of another new year

separated
and yet living quietly
under the same roof
we used to share
a ripe pomegranate

she can't stand me
even in a photo
bits and pieces
of our honeymoon
drifting into the dark

~*Ajax, Ontario, Canada*

Bitter Place and Broken Dream

Chen-ou Liu

*our skin
is the scarlet letter
lingering
on this chilly night
a man with his hands up*

columns of smoke
from a commercial strip
the banner
Black Lives Matter
stained with mud and blood

~*Ferguson, Missouri, USA*

A Walking Shadow

Chen-ou Liu

stage lights on . . .
my copy of *Macbeth*
battered
and its cover spotted
as if by white molds

I start reciting in a hoarse voice, *Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow* . . . In the back of my mind, I wonder if there is another tomorrow for a gentile like me in this promised land.

~*Toronto, Canada*

The Journey Itself Is My Home

Chen-ou Liu

The last time I visited my parents in Taipei, I strolled through Da An, an affluent leafy residential district known for its prominent universities and small publishing houses. I spent half an hour in its winding alleyways and couldn't find the bookstore I had frequented for 20 years. At first, I felt a surge of panic and, moments later, a stabbing pain in my body. The Taipei I had known was gone.

on the wall
an old map of Taipei—
I look outside,
tiers of color lighting up
the Toronto night sky

*Taipei is the city of my birth, the capital of Taiwan
(formerly known as the Republic of China)*

~*Taipei, Taiwan*

Chen-ou Liu lives in Ajax, Ontario, Canada. He is the author of five books, including Following the Moon to the Maple Land (First Prize, 2011 Haiku Pix Chapbook Contest) and A Life in Transition and Translation (Honorable Mention, 2014 Turtle Light Press Biennial Haiku Chapbook Competition). His tanka and haiku have been honored with many awards.

Dave Read

a little deeper
under the covers
I hide
from a day I'd
rather not begin

my childhood
questions of death
remain
unanswered by
my adult self

landing
with a cold
sting
snowflakes fat
as bumblebees

although not
motivated by money
he continued
to follow
its trail

stepping on
each other's toes
there's only
so much room at
the foot of the bed

feeling
the weight of
failure
I begin
another diet

looking out
on downtown snow
the top
of office towers
mostly white

composed of
millions of cells
the little
ways she has
him trapped

meeting
for the first time
in years
we pretend our lives are
just as we planned them

his spiritual
journey was comprised
of the books
he read from
the comfort of his couch

the one light on
the apartment building
my flashlight
pointing out
her room

appearing at
the edge of the city
mountains
hundreds of
miles away

over time
as he came out
of his shell
we looked for ways to
squeeze him back in

blowing in
an empty bottle
the hoot
of an owl echoes
through the night

a rainbow in
the February rain
again he
forgets to take
down the Christmas lights

folded
like a butterfly
this old love letter
no longer causing
storms across the sea

as tall
as office towers
the shadows
wedged
between them

speeding through
a yellow light
that old
desire to be
anywhere but here

a pebble bouncing
off the windshield
she chips
away at
my point of view

insisting upon
his Canadian age
the old immigrant
counts the candles
on his cake

falling through
the gaps in
our fence
snowdrifts and
the neighbour's gaze

feeling less
like a king
the Monarch
butterfly
under my swatter

the jingling coins
I drop in
his cup
carry a better
tune than his guitar

replacing the filter
of the brita water
I remember
the streams from which
we drank with cupped hands

playing football
on the church fields—
with the half
winding down he
calls a Hail Mary

a la-z-boy
left by the curb
with no
words between us
I read my wife's mind

~Canada

Dave Read is a Canadian poet whose work has appeared in many journals, including Atlas Poetica. You can view his tanka and micro-poetry on Twitter, @AsSlimAsImBeing

Från ett tågfenster / From a train window

David Nilsson

David Nilsson, svensk-engelsk översättare /
Swedish-English Translator

du har gett
precis tillräckligt
för att hålla mig flytande
jag är öppen som våren
har ingen aning

*you have given
just enough
to keep me afloat
like spring, wide open
I have no clue*

när människorna
kliver av tåget
ser jag deras ansikten
vet inte hur mycket
jag ska bry mig

*when the people
leave the train
I look at their faces
unable to decide
how much to care*

med precision
i sin distraktion
lägger hon inte märke till någon
i en tågagn
full av människor

*showing precision
in distraction
she notices nobody
in a train car
full of people*

man kommer alltid
till en plats som är bekant
rosenbuskar tittar fram
med taggiga ögon
när man rundar ett hörn

*you always arrive
at some familiar place
rose bushes peeking out
with thorny eyes
from around the corner*

vi ser hur
människor förändras
men märker inte
hur vi själva
byts ut

*watching
people change
we fail to notice
how we replace
ourselves*

det finns ingen anhalt
där jag kan stiga av
och glömma dig
i vårljuset
gör du mig klarvaken

*there is no stop
where I can walk out
and forget about you
in the spring light
you have me wide awake*

ibland är det fönstret
som tittar genom mig
med föränderligt ljus
söker det
min uppmärksamhet

*sometimes the window
looks through me
with its changing light
it seeks
my attention*

~Sverige / Sweden

David Nilsson

even now
I expect the night
to tell me something
as she prowls
the streets

after a busy day
when silence settles
like a lizard
and you wonder if it ever
moved an inch

senior citizens
lonely enough
to pick
the slow queues
intentionally

her hand
searching her purse
I walk away
in order not to
be found

you're about
that far away
those hills
greyed out
in the fog and rain

how I love you
midnight
even when I'm troubled
by the uncertainty
of my emotions

nothing in the sky
but a bright
full moon
nothing on my mind
but you

mirrored in
the train window
sleepy faces
watching lights
in the distance

the thin sheet
of snow
he watches her
turn cold
flake by flake

time rolls on
like a small stream
hid away
on the sunless side
of a mountain

I put my hands
together
as if to close
the distance
between us

no more words
today
blood flowing
quietly
in a vacuum

on the wet asphalt
the index finger
of a stray glove
reaches towards a point
in the sky

there must be
an emptiness
a howl at the heart
of the forest
heard by none

to fall asleep
like a ghost
letting its white gown
silently slip
onto the ground

the blank sheet
of paper
a ghost could live
your life
you wouldn't know

from his lookout
high above
the hawk is waiting
for the suspension of time
between winds

walking
through the snow
her coat
a dark ship
on the misty sea

as we progress
into winter
the leaves harden
barely mumbling
in the wind

the tower you build
in sleep
trembling as it
stretches upward
into the skyless night

walking the woods
as a child
I know the trees
were taller
and sleep, darker

I let the landscape
flow through me
untroubled by
all the things
I'll never write

holding her
green party pamphlet
like she means it
dark coloured girl
with the kind eyes

the little bit of world
we happen to see
a wind turbine
just below
a massive cloud

Sedoka

David Nilsson

does the wind
remember
the roughness of the bark
and the tree hollows
where it stopped to rest
mid storm

~Helsingborg, Skåne, Sweden

David Nilsson has been writing poetry sporadically for most of his adult life. Swedish of nationality and language, at the present his main focus is poetry in English. You can find David's short poems on twitter, at @haikutahren, or at his website, poetry.astroroom.com.

Dean A. Brink

Dean A. Brink, Japanese-English Translator /
デーン・ブリンク (英翻)

亡き母の愛でし踏み石の苔なるを知らず刮
りて再びを見ず

in her eyes I saw
my mother loved the moss
I scraped clean
from the stepping stones
which she would never see again

returning from
our favorite café,
I hold you tight
when you are cold
as if neighbors could see

日の沈み木の上を飛ぶ蝙蝠の出でてツバメ
の去る道辿る

as the sun went down
bats began to appear
flapping as if to fly
like the disappearing
swallows

朝早く海へ泳ぎに行き惑う鬼月の記憶の引
き波恐れ

during Ghost Month
my wife says *stop* swimming
mornings at the sandy beach
surrounded by boulders
before the patrol arrives

I was turning right
while you would go straight,
toward I-5 North
the last time I saw you
in the rearview mirror

the sad look of their father
always sagging in work clothes
the three kids trail
as to a stranger
even limping when he limps

~*Taiwan*

Dean A. Brink's poetry reflects experiences growing up in rural Washington State, attending schools in Seattle, Chicago, and Tokyo, as well as living on a Kibbutz and traveling widely. He now lives in Taiwan with his family and is an associate professor of English literature at Tamkang University. His poetry has appeared in Columbia Poetry Review, Exquisite Corpse, Frogpond, Going Down Swinging (Australia) and many other journals and anthologies, including In Protest (2013). He composes senryū and tanka in Japanese as well as free verse. His research on American, Japanese, and Chinese poetry appears in various academic journals, including "Richard Wright's search for a counter-hegemonic genre: the anamorphic and matrixial potential of haiku" currently in Textual Practice. An older essay is his "John Ashbery's "37 Haiku" and the American Haiku Orthodoxy." He maintains a blog of sound work and poetry: Taiwan Scooter Poet (interpoetics.blogspot.com) and is currently working on a film about tanka poets in Taiwan.

Debbie Strange

rusted train tracks
over abandoned prairie
will-o'-the-wisps
beckon us into the light
until we become blind

~*Rosetown, Saskatchewan, Canada*

they wondered
if she was a changeling
this fey child
with alabaster skin
and raven-feather hair

~*Port Voller, Isle of Lewis, Scotland*

we seek refuge
under a railway trestle
thunderstruck
by flamenco dancers
with hailstone castanets

~*Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba, Canada*

rogue wildfire
a matchstick forest
smouldering
in the burn ward
the screams of a child

~*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

the boy
slipped off his medal
placing it gently
around the neck
of his grandfather

~*Rosetown, Saskatchewan, Canada*

Prairie Quills

Debbie Strange

they made
my sister give me
her new doll
every time I wheezed
between shots of adrenaline

each morning
we vomited our porridge
on the bus ride
over roller coaster hills
to a one-roomed school

the slop pail
always needed emptying
that winter
we found three kittens
frozen on the windowsill

we choked
on the acrid smell
of singed feathers
never forgetting
how lifeblood drips away

~Rosetown, Saskatchewan, Canada

Debbie Strange lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. She is a member of the Writers' Collective of Manitoba and the Manitoba Writers' Guild, and is affiliated with several haiku and tanka organizations. Her writing has received awards, and has appeared in numerous journals. Debbie is an avid photographer whose images have been published and exhibited, and she is currently assembling a collection of haiga/tanka art. You are invited to visit her on Twitter @Debbie_Strange.

Exit Dream

Don Miller

what is it
about a dream
running toward
exit signs
I wake out of breath

an erratic pulse
coursing
through my aorta
another night
of denial

midnight thunder
and gurneyed
through a labyrinth
not knowing
which exit I'll use

aortic aneurysm
how close
to being
etched
in granite

still enough
now
to feel
a rhythmic beat
and to know it isn't a dream

Don Miller lives in southern New Mexico, USA. He has been writing tanka since the early 1980s when he learned about the poetic form while attending Purdue University. Don has had tanka poems, tanka prose, other short-form poems and haibun published in various print and online journals over the past decade or so.

Cousins

Don Miller

I didn't recognize
my cousin
the cancer had taken
her weight
her hair

if only
I had held my gaze
I would have remembered
her eyes
her smile

had I listened
I would have heard
her laughter
in the echoes
in the wind

In memory of: Laura (Opperman) Dunam

Esther Gillies

lying helplessly
a prisoner in his bed
he waits out the night
she comes smiling warmly and
draws the drapes to a new day

~California, USA

Recently retired and currently a member of the writing group at the Pasadena Senior Center conducted by Mira Materic, Ms. Gillies has been published in the 2013 and 2014 Poetry and Cookies anthology of local poets published by the Altadena California Library.

Genie Nakano has an MFA in Dance from UCLA. She performs, choreographs dance and teaches Gentle Yoga, Meditation and Tanoshii Tanka at the Japanese Cultural Center in Gardena, CA. She was a journalist for the Gardena Valley Newspaper before she discovered tanka and haibun and was hooked. She enjoys performing the spoken work with music and movement/dance at open mics and cultural events.

The Scar

Genie Nakano

the scar
underneath his scapula
I remember the night
1:30 AM, a full moon
blood everywhere

never saw such a night
as this, the ER nurse screamed
gunshot gang bangers
roll in one after another
their tattoos falling off on the floor

drugged, unconscious
my husband lies on the hospital bed
his body broken and torn
he can't hear my prayers
nor feel my touch

hallucinations
Bruce Lee episodes
dance in his head—
while us mortals cringe our hands
morphine drips the hours away

light a thousand candles
forgive the speeding drunk
who ran the red light
nothing else matters . . .
only my husband's life

that was ten years ago
they say he's a miracle man
with energy to spare
the promises I made to god . . .
that was ten years ago

~United States

Life on the Shore

Geoff King

razor edged
segmented armour
barnacles
immoveable grip
hunkered low on rocks

warm shallows
a scurrying tribe
hermit crabs
winkle shelled youngsters
gleaning particles

hung under rocks
anemone blobs
come to life
with rising waters
tentacles dancing

oily fur
tufted salty wet
otter cubs
writhing and wrestling
careless in their play

sand hoppers
snuggle beneath weed
disturb them . . .
leaping anarchy!
fleas of the shoreline

Death on the Shore

Geoff King

seaweed slumped
prostrate and forlorn
sand smothered
ripped from its holdfast
storm thrown by the sea

empty halves
a mirror matched pair
hinge askew
once mussel's abode
the vacant shell gapes

flaccid forms
at the tide's mercy
stranded high
jellyfish drying
beyond hope of life

full moon calls
long coiled many legged worms
laying eggs
at high water's reach
work done, they expire

shrunk remains
dirty matted quills
swan's carcass
once was majestic
now an ugly pile

~Northern Scotland, sandy estuary

Geoff King

once trees grew
where furrows are ploughed
breaking soil
does the earth recall
its forested past?

*~The mountains between Inverness and Edinburgh,
Scotland*

Bee Dreaming

Geoff King

do bees dream
of flights of fancy
free from hive
and liberated
seek nectar alone?

wandering
flower to flower
all colours
a honeyed reward
pollen laden bliss

or

does their tie
to a queen enslaved
put visions
beyond the reach of
bees' imagining?

*Geoff King lives on an organic woodland smallholding in the North of
Scotland that he describes as "an oasis in a desert of sheep". Inspired
by nature, he designs and carves wooden jewellery, writes both short and
long fiction and is a recent convert to Tanka. Bits of him can be seen at
<https://www.facebook.com/Geoff.F.King>*

Geoffrey Winch

I painted this scene
and inhabited this street
thirty years later
made my foliage fresher
and my *Sacré-Cœur* larger

*~'View from Rue Norvins to Montmartre', Georges
Feldkirchner: oil on canvas, 1945*

the bush is gone
nothing now
to mark the time
or place
of our blackbird's final song

through the window
the fly boldly flies in
just to buzz me
then sneaks out
through the back door

she says
she'll do the ironing
while I read
even after a hard day in the garden
I still feel guilty

~United Kingdom

Sedoka

Geoffrey Winch

a reworking of Amos Oz

a basement tale
the perfect depths
suddenly black
don't call it darkness
perhaps a box of evil
a panther night

~*United Kingdom*

Geoffrey Winch is a retired highway engineer living in West Sussex, England. His poetry has been published widely in the UK, US and online. His fourth collection, Alchemy of Vision (Indigo Dreams Publishing, 2014) focuses on the arts, and is available through Amazon. In addition to his freeform poetry, also included are many of his tanka and haiku etc. first published in Atlas Poetica; Fire Pearls 2; MET; Ribbons; Blithe Spirit; A Hundred Gourds, and Haibun Today.

Grunge

out of
nutrient goop
my gecko lives
like a prisoner
in a dystopian future

~*United States*

Grunge is a gay Indo-American blog writer, with an interest in bugs, body modifications, and the end of the world.

After

James Schneider

for LWW

here lies
the waxen doll
of herself
painted and brushed
dressed in finery

gathered from afar
we say the twenty-third psalm
but lose our way
in the valley
of the shadow of death

we will check out
the riches life lent her
treasures big and small
with unknown due dates
before the time to scatter

~*United States*

Downstairs Upstairs

James Schneider

in a dark basement
the father leans over
the controls
of a vast train set
he has engineered

the model railway
has curves and rises
boulders and trees
by a neat village
with small plastic people

just back
from his special school
the teenager grabs
the neighbor boy's arm
and tries to steer him away

upstairs
in his bedroom
he whispers
he has a magazine hidden
with oh such wonders

~United States

Cycling

James Schneider

as he biked
by the lake to see her—
in his eyes mouth ears
a frenzy of mayflies
seizing the day

clothes shed
on the sweltering shore
they ran whooping
to plunge into
the shivering moon

where the lake
spills into the river
he listened alone
to a car trailing
the scarf of a sad song

beneath snow
and black ice fish flash
silver and gold
while under thick quilts
lovers dream of spring

~United States

Gunplay

James Schneider

what did dad think
just fifteen years
after D-Day
of my backyard
shootouts

a photo
of him at 6, jaunty
in a Rough Rider get up
and one 30 years later
in a dusty jeep, staring

for birthdays
I'd go to the museum
delighting in the sight
of arrows from
Custer's last stand

the next war
would be different
dad said
so I feared I'd never
get to bear arms

~*United States*

Jim Schneider's tanka and free verse poems have appeared in various publications, including Ribbons, American Tanka, and Take Five 4. He is from Madison, Wisconsin, and also practices contemplative photography.

John Tehan

midway through
my seasonal fast
gluttony is but one
of the seven visitors
come to call

my father's
gray fedora
tiny feathers
in the band
A Little Night Music

diagnosis and prognosis
like dual staircases
climbing, I descend
descending, I arise
Escher's *Relativity*

a houseful of ghosts
is visiting today
everywhere I look
everything I hear
tendrils from all my pasts

a lovely house surrounded
by a white picket fence
down below
out of sight
the cellar, dark, menacing

telling the signs of the times
the morning paper
arrives with a thud
storm clouds gather
and block the sun

anger internalized
hurt subsumed
she climbs the silo mute
only to find her voice
on the way down

—for R.S., gone far too soon

~United States

John Tehan lives on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where he reads some, writes some, and ponders this and that. His tanka and other poetry have appeared in Atlas Poetica, Ribbons, Bright Stars, Reflections, and PrimeTime Cape Cod. In his spare time, John enjoys nurturing and communing with his eternity plant, Zamioculcas zamiifolia, which is happily proving true to its name.

Joy McCall

there is love
that comes whispering
on the wind
that tumbles in
on the rising tide

like the deer
in the quiet woods
I startle
at sudden sounds
my heart skips, leaps, runs

the minnow sleeps
on the cold river bed
and dreams
she has wings for fins
and can lift on the wind

down the ramp
running ahead of me
a mouse
tiny feet scurrying
not looking back

stopping
by the hawthorn
to look at stars . . .
a rustling—a field mouse
in the dead leaves

the cleaner
puts his photo away
in a drawer
it is bad luck she says
to look upon the dead

hearing the news
the shaman is dead
the sky grows dark
a storm of sharp hail
falls through the trees

stretched
with a wild longing
I watch clouds
scudding across
an almost-full moon

(thanks, Larry)

voices
coming down the lane
singing out of tune
two old men merry with ale
making their slow way home

the holly wand
sits, vengeful in my hand
I lift it
and write the cursed name
on the heavy air

~England

the dark hare

Joy McCall

the dark hare
is lying on the floor
panting
he has run a long way
and is far from the form

his brown body
is tipped with frost
his ears burn
water gathers
on the floorboards

his footprints
are all over the house
muddy feet
the cat is nervous
and hides in the cupboard

after a while
the hare's breathing
settles and slows
he stands and shakes
water flies everywhere

he looks at me
with wild dark eyes
he is not afraid
I open the door
the sun shines in

the dark hare
lopes outside, and sits
on the doorstep
steam is rising
from his wet body

he runs off
I lose sight of him
but there's a man
loping along, singing
'*oh careless love*'

~*Norwich, England*

a solemn place

Joy McCall

he lays down
his winter coat
by the graves
and he takes her there
under the oak tree

there are
white-capped mountains
in the distance
and a pale moon rising
into a deep blue sky

the sun
is beginning to set
there's a chill
in the gentle wind
blowing round the stones

somewhere
a dog is barking
disturbed
by the sounds of loving
in that solemn place

the man
and the woman
are happy
they share a true
and an honest love

they hold
each other close
and speak
of wonders and signs . . .
the air smells of cedar

there are bones
shifting beneath them
a frail woman
walks among the graves
singing a sad song

swing low
sweet chariot
the faint voice
curls and settles
on the woman's face

the man
touches her cheek
and smiles
dusk is coming
and the bones lie still again

~Norwich, England

“A writer’s heart, a poet’s heart, an artist’s heart,
a musician’s heart is always breaking. It is
through that broken window that we see the
world . . .” —Alice Walker

broken

Joy McCall

it was no good
taking the bright
broken shards
like stained glass
from the ruins

they sat
shattered, sharp
inside her
blood red and bitter blue
and green with envy

and stained
yellow where she ran
from the fates
and the deep purple
of old bruises

and the black
of night and loss
and dying . . .
and the picture
was lost in soil and weeds

and the man
breathed into her mouth
love, and her name,
and the heat of it
burned the grass

and the shards
melted and flowed
one into the other
and the colours ran
together, solid and fast

and there came
a singing, almost a hymn
where the light
shone through the window
onto the floor

and the man walked
through the ruins, looking
at his work
and the woman's eyes
followed his steps . . . and she wept

~England

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks has published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

later, the wind 2

Joy McCall

slowly, quietly
he walks into
the dark wood
behind him
the wide skies are grey

pine needles and moss
beneath his feet
are damp
light rain is falling
on the treetops

he stops
for a moment
listening
to the distant sound
of wind and waves

he takes off
his heavy clothes
and kneels
naked on the ground
he closes his eyes

the trees drip rain
down his body
he speaks her name
light fingers of wind
move over his skin

~Norwich, England

the chaplain

Joy McCall

for Revd. Colin Reed

he comes to sit
by my hospital bed
silent and still
I expect him to pray
in some holy way to God

he says nothing
I expect him to begin
dear Father
in that comforting way
priests do

I expect
catechisms
signs of the cross
Biblical quotations
rituals and rites

he sits by my bed
saying nothing
doing nothing
giving me no magic words
to take away the pain

I am lost
suffering and confused
and he just sits
and holds my hand
with tears in his eyes

and then
I understand
his prayer
is not about words
and liturgies

it is a silence
a sacredness
the only possible answer
to my brokenness
it is love

~Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, England

the valley of the dry bones

Joy McCall

found tanka, Ezekiel 37, King James Bible

the hand of the Lord
was upon me, and carried me
out in the spirit
and set me down in the the valley
which was full of bones

and caused me
to pass by them, and behold
there were very many
in the open valley
and, lo, they were very dry

and he said unto me
son of man, can these bones live?
and I answered,
O Lord God,
thou knowest

again he said unto me
prophesy upon these bones
and say unto them
O ye dry bones
hear the word of the Lord

thus saith God
unto these bones
behold
I will cause breath to enter into you
and ye shall live

and I will lay
sinews upon you
and will bring up flesh
and cover you with skin
and put breath in you

so I prophesied
and there was a noise
and behold a shaking
and the bones came together
bone to his bone

then said he unto me
prophesy unto the wind
son of man
and say to the wind
thus saith the Lord God:

come
from the four winds
O breath
and breathe upon these slain
that they may live

so I prophesied
and the breath came into them
and they lived
and stood up upon their feet . . .
an exceedingly great army

~Norwich, England

all is vanity

Joy McCall

found tanka, Ecclesiastes 1, King James Bible

vanity of vanities
saith the Preacher
vanity of vanities
all is vanity . . .

what profit
hath a man
of all his labour
which he taketh
under the sun?

one generation
passeth away
another generation cometh
but the earth
abideth for ever

the sun
also ariseth, and the sun
goeth down
and hasteth
to his place where he arose

the wind
goeth toward the south
and turneth about
unto the north
it whirleth about continually

all the rivers
run into the sea
yet the sea is not full
from whence the rivers come
they return again

all things
are full of labour
man cannot utter it
the eye is not satisfied with seeing
nor the ear filled with hearing

the thing that hath been
it is that which shall be
and that which is done
is that which shall be done
there is no new thing under the sun

is there anything
whereof it may be said
see, this is new?
it hath been already of old time
which was before us

I have seen
all the works that are done
under the sun
and, behold, all is vanity
and vexation of spirit

that which is crooked
cannot be made straight
and that
which is wanting
cannot be numbered

I gave my heart
to know wisdom and to know
madness and folly
I perceived that this also
is vexation of spirit

for in much wisdom
is much grief
and he
that increaseth knowledge
increaseth sorrow

~Norwich, England

oaks

Joy McCall

Nature experts have discovered a remarkable submerged forest thousands of years old under the sea close to the Norfolk coast. The trees were part of an area known as 'Doggerland' which formed part of a much bigger area before it was flooded by the North Sea. It was once so vast that hunter-gatherers who lived in the vicinity could have walked to Germany across its land mass.

divers
just off the coast
find themselves
in an ancient forest
great oaks, and wolf bones

herring shoals
are swimming though
leafless thickets
crabs dance sideways
in twisting roots

bones
lie on the seabed
scattered
by the currents
and the tides

I think
I would like my bones
to lay there
down the centuries
slowly sand-covered

I would like
fish to nibble
at my ribs
and barnacles to live
in my eye sockets

imagine
the long eternity
among the trees
with the wolves, the fish
the sand, the stones, the sea

~Norwich, England

rocking

Joy McCall

what now
do I do with this
pale crescent
shining and rocking
at my feet?

he has called
the moon down
from the sky
the stars alone
must light the night

I smile
touching the thin curve
with the dark wand
sending it spinning
from corner to corner

it catches
on the leg of the chair
and turns away
into the middle
of the holy room

and sits there
on the oak floorboards
turning slowly
as if it remembers
the small acorn, splitting

~Norwich, England

dusty

Joy McCall

they walk
a country road
in drizzling rain
and the west wind
is blowing

the field
beside the road
is dun
he says *it's a dull
greyish-brown*

she likes best
that it is the colour
of a mouse
and of the soil
where the mouse runs

her mind
goes roaming then
to the small field
where the flax grew
in summertime

that earth
was damp with rain
and she dug
with the old spoon
a few inches down

and she held
a spoonful of soil
in her hand
and she thought
umber, not dun

the raw umber
of ancient pigments
mingles there
with yellow ochre
and rusty sienna

and she took
the soil to him
and he let it fall
on the dun field
in the rain

and the small
tawny mice came running
down the hill
and scurried among
the pine cones

and they rustled
the brown grass
and grew dusty
with the yellow of mustard
and old chamomile

and he ran
his fingers through her hair
and the dust fell
on the field, on the mice
on the grey gravel road

*<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDscqyD3iuA>> this is where
I go, through the fields.*

~Norwich, England

mazed

Joy McCall

for my witch friend, Kate

she is
mazed as a stoat
hissing, spitting,
fast and furious
across the dark moor

she fears
nothing, no predator,
no man
gold and silver
will not tempt her

she is wild
and cannot be tamed
by any love
she has no time
for romance

she races
with the south wind
alone
in bleak places
where the thorn trees grow

she tosses
her red hair back
and runs away
into the night and sits
snarling, by the fire

~Norwich, England

the light was good

Joy McCall

in the beginning
God created the heaven
and the earth
and the earth was
without form, and void

darkness
was upon the face
of the deep
and the Spirit of God moved
upon the face of the waters

God said,
let there be light
and there was light
and God saw the light
that it was good

and God
divided the light
from the darkness
and God called the light, day
and the darkness, night

and the evening
and the morning
were the first day

Found poem: Genesis 1, the King James Bible, suggested by Jonathan Day.

found

Joy McCall

out of the mist
that hung below
the mountains
a tall man came
with a bag on his back

he knew a woman
and he loved her
and one night
under a waning moon
she told him:

*men have knocked
at my door, bringing
flowers and wine
and fancy words
and I was fooled*

*and when they left
there were precious
things missing
for they were thieves
every one of them*

so the man had gone
wandering far and wide
searching the lands
following trails
and old footprints

and he found the things
on the roadsides
tossed aside
and he knew they were hers
for he knew her heart

and he came to her
over the plains and fields
over the bridges
down the long road
from the mountains to the sea

to where she sat
sad, on the hill among
the bare fields
with her hair tangled
by the winter winds

and he was weary
and he slept in the ruins
while one by one
her fingers touched
all the familiar things

and in her hands
they grew warm and seeped
into her skin
they soaked into her flesh
and inside her bones

they crept
into her cells, and swam
through her blood
and they settled, singing
into their rightful places

and the man
stirred from his sleep
and came to her
and sat and smiled
and he took her hand in his

and pale dust
fell on the stony ground
and the wind
caught the dust and carried it
over the hills and far away

~Norwich, England

the hundredth monkey

Joy McCall

once
on the island
of monkeys
one small brown one
sat alone on the shore

breadfruit
was falling from
the sacred tree
a quiet thump
on the soft sand

the creature
looked at the fruit
and reached out
his thin fingers
to touch it

he turned
the fruit in his hands
hungry
while at his dark feet
the waves came in

and then . . .
conscious thought
or instinct?
he washed the fruit
in the salt sea

it became
a habit : washing
cleaning
other monkeys watched
and did the same

and then
one brown monkey
on a distant island
washed the sand away
in the stream

so it is
that without even the voice
of one other
sometimes, somehow,
we learn, we evolve

The Japanese monkey, *Macaca fuscata*, had been observed in the wild for a period of over 30 years. Between 1952 and 1958 a young monkey on the island of Koshima learned to wash the sandy breadfruit, their staple food, to make it more palatable. Soon other monkeys on the island began to wash the fruit. And when the 99th monkey on Koshima learned the new habit, then, far away on another island, one young monkey began to wash her fruit. As so the habit spread on that island, too.

Thus, when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness may be communicated from mind to mind. The Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon means that when only a limited number of people know of a new way, it may remain the conscious property of these people. But there is a point at which if only one more person tunes-in to a new awareness, a field is strengthened so that this awareness is picked up by others. "The Hundredth Monkey Theory".

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks has published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

echo, friend

Joy McCall & Barry Dempster

Sisyphus
I would climb those hills
once more . . .
are they higher
or are we shrinking?

in pieces, the pain
is less
than when I was whole—
merciful shatter

that's where
I'm going wrong
trying
to stay in one piece
instead of falling apart

what frightens me most
the loss
or the brand new self
scraped and uncovered?

my soul
pared down to the core
a single chime
of a bell, carrying
across night fields

if I listen to
that tone,
can I really be
alone? echo, friend

~Norwich, England / Canada

Barry Dempster, twice nominated for the Governor General's Award, is the author of fourteen poetry collections. His collection The Burning Alphabet won the Canadian Chalmers Award for Poetry in 2005. In 2010, he was a finalist for the Ontario Premiers Award for Excellence in the Arts and in 2014 he was nominated for the Trillium Award for his novel, The Outside World. He's presently acquisitions editor for Brick Books and lives in Holland Landing, Ontario.

Brian Zimmer died on November 5, 2014. He lived in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. A posthumous collection of his tanka is planned.

indigo blues

Joy McCall & Brian Zimmer

*I dreamed
it was the moon that fell
through the roof
tumbling down the stairs
to greet you*

but love,
the stars fell too
one after another
after another
in a pile on the floor

*I will gather them
into the blue
of my river
the blue of forget-me-nots
those indigo blues of yours*

until I take
your hand in mine
let the maiden
sit and muse there
dropping stars

*she will
bring you the fire
you need
bring you galaxies
and gibbous moons*

I need
the company of maidens
let me begin
with one sacred dark one
solitary against my palm

~United States / Norwich, England

rain

Joy McCall & Don Wentworth

*I sit pondering
the existence of god
or many gods
Zeus calls down the rain
Fujin howls in the wind*

feeling
a breath at my ear
the wind
singing, oh, friend
believe in me

*cold rain
stinging my face
I weep
with the wonder
of voices and words*

inside
breath on glass
runneling rain
condensing
in mind

*there's a pool
of thought, settling
clearing
confusion falls
into the silt*

~Pittsburgh, USA / Norwich, England

Don Wentworth is a Pittsburgh-based poet whose work reflects his interest in the revelatory nature of brief, haiku-like moments in everyday life. His poetry has appeared in Modern Haiku, bottle rockets, bear creek haiku and Rolling Stone, as well as a number of anthologies. His first full-length collection, Past All Traps, was published in 2011 by Six Gallery Press and was shortlisted for the Haiku Foundation's 2011 Touchstone Distinguished Books Award. His poem "hiding" was selected as one of "100 Notable Haiku" of 2013 by Modern Haiku Press. A second full-length book, Yield to the Willow, is now available from Six Gallery Press.

thin ice, sunrise

Joy McCall & Gerry Jacobson

thin ice is forming
along the edges
of the river
my heart is patched with cold
since he took his life

*the plum tree
shakes its dappled shade
on my bare legs
a warm wind whistles
its song of hope*

a grey mist
hangs round the trees
drops fall and run
down the old flint wall
no sunshine, again

*seagulls call . . .
there are ripples
on Cygnet water . . .
far off news disturbs
our dancing day*

there are webs
spinning around us
as we move
they stick to my hands
and tangle my hair

*bright moon
fills my window tonight
the tide is high
in Hobart town
the silver ocean links us*

high seas
storms batter the islands
no heat, no light
the harbour is ruined
the houses are in darkness

*daybreak
at Bondi beach
sunrise
over the headland
the power . . . the glory*

~England/Australia

Gerry Jacobson writes tanka in the cafes of three cities. Canberra, where he lives and grows vegetables. Sydney, hanging out with grandchildren. And Stockholm, where another grandchild lives. 'Tanka prose' is his challenge and his delight.

Kat Lehmann

outside this house
the erratic song of wind chimes
like Brownian motion
the randomness
of beautiful moments

when I finally sat down
I still felt in motion
like a momentary insight
into the Earth
and its paradox of stillness

it could fall
either way
yet I will count
on your odd petal
loving me

Kat Lehmann (@SongsOfKat) lives in Connecticut, USA by the river where she writes. Her first book of free verse poetry, Moon Full of Moons (Peaceful Daily, 2015), was published in February 2015 <<http://peacefuldaily.com/page/books>>.

Cherita

Larry Kimmel

your town-raised Sheltie

took in our donkeys and our llama
with equanimity, but the cows—

the cows
were a suspension
of reality

subterranean plaza

in watery dome-light the fountain nude
presides over moss and bracken

the marmoreal eyes
of the
milling many

whiskey

and the Saturday night streets
of walking

touch-
me-
nots

~Massachusetts, USA

Sphinx Moth

Larry Kimmel

Coming out of the supermarket we see it on the pavement, utterly motionless. Remembering a large butterfly once found, whose wings in death were fixed for flight, I put it on top of a bag full of groceries. In the hour it takes to reach our woodland cottage dusk has settled. On the kitchen table we find a bouquet of wildflowers and a note. A neighbor has come and gone. Putting down the groceries, I place the dying sphinx moth on a clover bloom. It clings, it quivers, it revives, it is flying from room to room—all in a matter of seconds. With outspread t-shirt and much commotion, we encourage it toward the open door and the beaming porch light. Finally, the lovely creature finds the way out, finds its way into the waiting night, finds its way back to its natural world.

glint
of a dewdrop,
the fleetness
of beauty
keeps beauty alive

~Massachusetts, USA

Beliefs

Larry Kimmel

Frank Delaney ends his book, *The Celts*, with the statement: “They [the Celts] believed in the suspension of reality. And they feared that the sky might fall.” “Yeah, I can get behind that,” I thought, and threw it into the hopper that feeds my cobbled belief system.

I might add, here, that everything I know about physics I learned from Wile E. Coyote. Yes, I am one who knows that at any moment a piano might drop from the sky and flatten me.

in the undoubtable words
of Henny Penny,
“the sky is falling”—
what more do you need?
(pass it on)

~*Massachusetts, USA*

Larry Kimmel is a US poet. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and Pittsburgh University, and has worked at everything from steel mills to libraries. Recent books are “this hunger, tissue-thin,” and “shards and dust.” He lives with his wife in the hills of Western Massachusetts.

Larry Kimmel

her paintbrush
defines a leaf’s edge,
one fluid motion
widening, thinning, curling, curving—
a musical phrase, seen

winter
and once again
the slow creaking door’s
long haunting
follows me into bed

afflicting
my eye
with its angel shimmer
sunlight
off the morning lake

after love-making
she laughs
and her breasts quiver—
through the cabin window
the Sphinx-like summer sunshine

watching her soap
her breasts
I feel the nub
of a nipple
rub my palm

the twig-fractured moon
and me—
a little night music, please
a lament
for broken dreams

in the old photo,
beside your pretty wife
you look so happy
in black & white—
the colors of ashes

tumbling
out of nowhere
a bronze leaf lands
at my feet—
the puzzle of omens

strapped to my wrist,
how silver the numerals and hands
amid bare branches
backed by a winter sky
at 4:15 pm

ah, night
a warm room
a winter storm
and a good book
to read

~Massachusetts, USA

Paired Tanka

Larry Kimmel & Joy McCall

midnight koi

in the still
of the midnight koi pond,
the shadow wing
of a luna moth brushes
the moon

*the ghost fish
rises to the bait
swallows
a handful of stars
and the edge of a wing*

too late

*gathering
long hawthorn spikes
for the spell
drops of blood
on the white page*

scrying the brownish stain
my blood runs cold—
what have I done?
too late too late
the die is cast

prayers

when I cross my fingers
there are all kinds of prayers
and magic built in—
Buddha, Odin, St. Winifred . . .
you name 'em

*Boudicca still
rules in my land
warrior queen
yet, to Odin
I sacrifice limbs*

glass half full

*in pain
I rant and rave
at all the gods
in vain—they are silent,
balancing on pedestals*

don't have to take this
lying down, could recline—
my glass of Guinness
half full
soon to be empty

sweet

Fund Raising Banquet—
a large man smiles at me,
I feel like a chocolate
saved
for after dinner

*sometimes
a woman feels
like dessert
pretending to be
nothing but sweet*

running on empty

on borrowed time
with the ink gauge running
on empty—
sometimes ready for next things
sometimes not

*I turn a corner
blind to the dangers
that lie ahead . . .
in the gutter silt
a wild violet*

the silence of origins

*above us
a solar-powered plane
almost silent—
one small step closer
to the blue heron*

our barnstorming days
over—under
a blue October sky
we return
to the silence of origins

hunt

when coyotes hunt
it's like the worst dog fight
you ever heard—
eerie & wild
to the 10th power

*the same howling
echoes in my flesh,
needles and knives
tearing nerve from sinew
sucking marrow from bone*

off-stage

*the full moon
calls out the common moth
it leaves white dust
on the windows
where the oil lamps burn*

how the ghost called
my grandmother's name
one Victorian night
almost my own memory—
so much of life, off-stage

old themes

again the sparrows
that haunt the sidewalk café
again the eroticism
of sunlight through a blouse—
make the old themes new!

*at the bar
the red-haired girl fiddles
with her nose ring
she is covered in tattoos
and strangely beautiful*

living out the days

*grubby fishing boats
moored along the river
far from the sea
tired old fishermen
living out their days*

might have known
this would happen—
not a hermit's hut
above the clouds, but a van
down by the river

bells

willowware
and it all comes back—
skipping stones across
a shaded stream,
distant cow bells . . .

*church clock
strikes the noon hour
small feet
paddling in the creek
playing hooky from school*

bitter

*closed sign
on the coffee shop door
a voice, singing . . .
the lights are on
but no one is home*

where to now?
turning
I turn my collar against
a bitter wind casts dust
in my eyes tear

~Colrain, Massachusetts, USA / Norwich, England

Larry Kimmel was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. His most recent books are "this hunger, tissue-thin;" and "shards and dust." He lives with his wife in the hills of western Massachusetts.

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks has published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

singing into darkness

Liam Wilkinson & Joy McCall

pointing my *bansuri*
at the moon
this breathless night
I play the silence
of a standing stone

*the low notes
of the sumac flute
sound in the circle
from the cracked oak
a hoot owl calls*

fire in our eyes
kindling in our grasp
man and beast alike
singing
into darkness

~England

*Liam Wilkinson has been publishing his short poems for fifteen years.
He has served as editor of 3LIGHTS, Prune Juice and Modern
Haiga. He lives in North Yorkshire, England.*

*Lynda Monahan lives in the pines just outside of Prince Albert,
Saskatchewan, Canada. Her third poetry collection titled 'verge' will be
released in April of this year with Guernica Editions. Her tanka has
been previously published in Atlas Poetica and other tanka publications.*

*Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia
following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50
years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the
old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in
Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and
tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks has published her 'circling smoke,
scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks
M. Kei for his constant support.*

shedding

Lynda Monahan & Joy McCall

she weeps
and laughs
and breathes tanka
small songs
falling from her skin

*the snake
her scales caught
on a fallen tree
sings as she sheds
the outgrown skin*

the music
of old stories
undulating
through long grass
her trail of yesterdays

*hissing
at the sad past
she swims
across the surface
sinuous, rippling*

on the far bank
a lick of white fire
snake woman
tonguing the air
tasting her newest song

~Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada /
Norwich, Norfolk, UK

Marilyn Morgan

windblown snow
drifting
rising and falling
sculpting
the field

fire in the hearth
crackling and popping
delicious warmth tonight
read to me and
brush your hand over my leg

Pink Floyd playing . . .
once you
played *Dark Side of the Moon*
and we danced
around the kitchen

the sun disappeared
a moonless sky
embers dying in the hearth . . .
the river waiting
to be crossed

ghost music playing
from the river . . .
my tangled hair
 blows
 in the wind

flashbacks

Marilyn Morgan

my brother and I practicing . . .
Mary and Joseph in the manger
waiting
for mother
ironing in the kitchen

still . . . someday
you'll come
again
returning
like spring

Marilyn Morgan is a retired English teacher. She lives and writes in New Hartford, New York, USA. Her poems have been published in Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars, A Hundred Gourds, American Tanka, and Inner Art.

Marshall Bood

coffee
with a failed actor . . .
smoke pours
out
of his yellow teeth

sickly yellow street lights . . .
he leaves the city
after cigarettes
burned
into his face

the guts of the hovel
carried out in cardboard boxes
myself included . . .
still the dreams
of ancient plumbing

anxiety rising
with the smoke . . .
I stand outside alone
watching
myself burn down

the shoreline
of cinnamon
on the surface
of my coffee—
New Year's Day

~Canada

we tossed the football
back and forth
by the willow trees
in that dusty village
light

~Tantallon, Saskatchewan, Canada

you pulled over
your car
in the valley
and read Shakespeare
to cows

~Qu'Appelle Valley, Saskatchewan, Canada

your last phone
call
from a cabin up north:
"I'm in the depths
of depravity"

~Fond-du-Lac, Saskatchewan, Canada

The Inner Harbour
ignited by magicians . . .
still standing there
in the dark
with you

~Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

a man
with cheap cotton stuffing
falling
out of his winter jacket
enters the overheated bus

everyone lined up
before Valentine's
for drug store
chocolate
and lottery tickets

with narrowed eyes
my uncle asks:
*what is your
diagnosis
anyways?*

playing Star Trek
in his trailer . . .
my older sister
kept putting me in Sickbay
behind the couch

~Manor, Saskatchewan, Canada

Marshall Bood lives in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He began to understand tanka after reading The Tanka Anthology (Red Moon Press) with the guidance of Michael McClintock's introduction.

Man's Cold Dismissal

one-line tanka rensaku

Matsukaze

toeing the line, somewhere around this house the sound of settling wood
an evening at work, watching 'Maude.' smell of scrambled eggs and sausage
at some point, in the morning, i decide to render tanka in one line permanently
perhaps i'll pick up 'Tale of Genji' one more time—i realize i'm rather sleepy
meeting with a friend, we discuss the gay lifestyle—peeling persimmons
reading, Ishii Tatsuhiko's treatise on tanka freed me to write them in one line
this older man, i sorrow over his affections for other men . . . ordering a mimosa
going to sleep to Parsifal the holy grail, my sexuality in his hands . . . what a dream
for a moment, playing-making shapes with a few paper clips long before he arrives
Isolde and her prince. Tannhauser and Venus. the pattern of lovers and i'm lonely
morning: an empty koi pond, teeming with bacteria the water a greenish-brown
during the night, feeling his solid leg next to mine dreams of flowering quinces
too many phone numbers in my phone. none of those men are mine . . . i'm lonely
the althea flowers noisily fall. a cold house silent; i, wrapped in his thick robe
a patch of cosmos, some chocolate some regular: another disappointing text from him
contemplating getting my first tattoo—morning coffee and this long line of thoughts
a man's cold dismissal. shopping in the mall . . . this Sunday i wonder where to buy rolls

reading about Post-war Japan . . . out in the back yard someone knocking over a fence
he's a gay tanka poet, always visiting New York at year's end to see MET opera shows
awaking: what thoughtlessness when you aren't my husband! a morning spent washing
this morning, a piece of cake and conversation about war. love. sex. degeneracy etc
“Dancing the Elemental Body” some random article i read—is that Marvin Gaye?
clinking of someone's keys, this hotel begins showing signs of awakening by and by
random discussion with a judge, this post-dawn darkness seems palpable like it moves
spring hyacinth in bloom. figure of some blue-collar worker his ass looks great!
“call me again” “when are you free” always questions and terse messages from you
employing a special notebook for random tanka—again, can't sleep i'm watching 'Maude'
in this city of silence a great many posters—“do you love me?” he asks me in a whisper
“Et tu Brute” (reading an aside while you speak) there are swans. peeled oranges. silence
another outburst—took a quick stroll downtown, near the waterfront—eating beignets
“have you gone out of your mind!?” those kinds of questions . . . folding towels, he passes
a cute brother in the breakfast area . . . i notice him noticing me—morning prayers congeal
what remains are the shadows. it's as it should be—waiting for my ride to come. work to end.
“my storm windows are fine . . .” deciding around 6am to have lunch with him after 3pm
he's at the table eating a bowl of fruit loops . . . double entendres and other useless talk
polishing stained glass windows: there are no thatched roofs, wide sleeves, or love affairs
“she only cried half of the night.” miserable Thursday evening—the faceless ones greet me

Unfinished

Matsukaze

several hydrangea bulbs
fragile—
in a new day-frock
hoping you
will notice

on the table
a country flower arrangement—
scribbled on a napkin
a senryu in
pale rose ink

reached
for the napkin
before the server—
only 45 minutes
to get to the train station

preoccupied—
gathering baggage,
turning quickly to kiss your cheek—
'i'll call you once i
get to Charing Cross!'

somehow scattered in my thoughts—
thought i saw you
in the corner
of my eye . . .
i must finish this brief

~*United States*

Matsukaze was born in Texas and now resides in Louisiana. He is a full time hotel administrator/auditor; while pursuing his passion as a budding classical vocalist and stage actor. His introduction to Japanese short poetic forms began 10 years ago after discovering haiku and tanka by way of activist, playwright, and poet Sonia Sanchez. He began practicing Haiku primarily. After re-connecting with M. Kei, editor of 'Atlas Poetica : A Journal of World Tanka,' he turned his complete attention on making tanka. Since then he has found the 31 sound-pattern/5 unit form to be his choice of expression. In addition to tanka, he composes sedoka, zuihitsu, and free verse.

Nicholas Klacsanzky

I left your home
when summer heat calmed
the nightingale's call—
you have also soothed my voice
to compassionate whispers

having nothing to do
and everything to do
I imagine traffic noise
as the Pacific Ocean
smell of my childhood

I wait for myself
beyond breath
when rain washes
snow from winter streets
it does not remember the cold

the color of the lily
has faded in vain . . .
whether blazing sun
or torrential rain
I search for you

my dreams
of you are different
than who you were
I cherish your shadow
fixed in the silence before dawn

how sweet the contours
of your lotus-like feet
as spring wind lifts dust
into air, letting it glitter in sunlight
I too am lifted by the sight of your feet

birthday
of my late mother—
listening to the *gugin*
I don't know whether to be
sad happy detached attached

thinking
has little to do
with living
seeing the universe
in my master's feet

how much longer
will I follow desires
no sun for days
I think rain
is bright

what a joy
to be nothing
after the rain
has dried, my barren
garden glitters in sunlight

coming home
what have I become
the shrill voice
of my mother as first grass
appears after a traveling winter

first time
my newborn sister feels
grass in her fingers
what if I left behind
thought altogether?

ashamed
I don't wake up
thinking about you
a wispy voice
in cloudless rain

~Ukraine

*Nicholas Klacsanzky is a content coordinator of an educational website,
and a poet in his free time. He lives in Kyiv, Ukraine.*

Patricia Prime

think of journeys
disconnected pictures
of the mind
nothing to do with reality:
dust, poverty and beggars

a fantail flits past
it small shadow
taking my eye
to the curve of light
on its black and white tail

meaning and memory
draw lines from here to there
and back again
making history of my life
seventy-five years of myths

outdoor wedding
the sunset strikes
down the cliff face
illuminating the faces
of guests and revellers

a gravestone
tucked away in high grass
grows colour
from spreading lichen
and its date's indentation

the plain urban street
where the rain is caught
on an open umbrella
and a passer-by in a burqa
draws it closer round her body

her new kitten
is named after a singer
like all her
previous pets, its blue
eyes like Frank Sinatra's

sun on the table
and my hand shaping
the words dancing
across the lined paper
in my cursive script

I look to the sun
for some sign that death
isn't there yet
in my ancient bones
and the pains in my joints

after all
the excitement of the wedding
to be quiet now
and let the trees speak
their special language

for a short while
there is meaning
to a teapot and cups
as we share Sunday lunch
in a beachfront café

as I read
'The Works of Raphael'
I receive an email
from a friend in England—
his new baby named Raphael

days after planting
seeds, hundreds of zucchini
barge out of the ground
and spread around the garden
menacing other vegetables

beside the motorway
a monochromatic meadow
the hay paddock
of dog daisies, wild carrot
and flowering rye grass

vases in the sun
full of her wedding flowers
red, purple, yellow—
she catches them with her camera
to post on Facebook

I watch the sunset
taking its time in the sky
turning from red
above the ranges, to pale
yellow, then disappearing

red plums
plucked from the old tree
forever a memory
of our first day in the garden
over forty years ago

in the art gallery
we meet the young doctor
who is exhibiting
portraits of his patients:
young, old and some naked

the stunned bird
kicks in my hand
I watch
its eyes dull and glaze
it is mute, warm, dead

a landslip of stones
leads down to the river
in the distance
two bridges, delicate
as if painted on a scroll

water kidnaps
the children's folded
paper boats
and washes them out to sea
where they become flotsam

a photo arrives
in time for Christmas
my school friends
looking a lot older
than I feel this summer

as I read your poems
it's hard to hold the thought
you died so tragically
but if I listen hard enough,
I can just catch your laughter

i.m. Brian Zimmer

~New Zealand

Patricia Prime

As Long as the Sky

I enjoy myself here
reading and writing
in the garden
first raindrops splattering
lightly from the clouds

It grew dark late in the day, in the sky and in me. Light rain fell on my open book. The purple petals of the jacaranda lay like shadows on the lawn. Moving my position to the veranda's overhanging roof, the links of words and thoughts broke, a tattered rose fell to the ground as the breeze strengthened. But this is all unclear. I will forget everything: the movement of shadows, the petals, the trees and the song of a tui balanced on a palm leaf, the squeak of wet grass, and the edge of clouds, the damp pages and the lines merging into one another. What I won't forget is the book I'm reading about Stephen Hawking's life, his illness, despair and failings; his joys and travels and his brilliant mind.

the setting sun sinks
west west over the mountains
floating clouds
gathering into clusters
veiling the trees

~New Zealand

Patricia Prime

Arthur's Pass

on my thick jacket
a single speck of dust
from the city—
one note from a kea
breaks the silence

There was snow on the mountain path whose white crumbled into folds of tree bark, the spread green glow of moss. We went on. The spring water was alive, swirling, foaming over ancient rocks. Snow dusting, whirling white, bringing the sky down. We found the slow boot marks of other trampers ahead of us. Our feet slipping on ice. It was time to turn back from winter, the white-hung trees; descend exhausted to the wet green valley. We entered the warmth of the lodge, festooned with deer antlers, wild boar's heads and stuffed fish. Downed a hot toddy by the heat of a log fire.

rising from our boots
drying before the fire
scent of the day
the sound of a game of pool
as the night dawns on

~New Zealand

Patricia Prime is co-editor of the New Zealand haiku magazine, Kokako, reviews/interviews editor of Haibun Today, and is a reviewer for Takahe and Atlas Poetica, and for several Indian magazines. She has interviewed poets and editors for Takahe and for the online magazines Haiku NewZ, Simply Haiku, Haibun Today, Stylus. She co-edited, with Australian poets, Amelia Fielden and Beverley George, the tanka collection 100 Tanka by 100 Poets, and is currently editing, with Dr. Bruce Ross and others, the world haiku anthology A Vast Sky. Patricia writes haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose and has published her poetry worldwide.

Payal A. Agarwal

walking through the house
from broken wooden steps
to untended backyard
i pack knick & knacks
of my childhood for the last time

in the cool
gust of wind
my white layered gown
flirt with my tattooed ankle
as i walk down the sand aisle

the night wind
hawk like a crying lady
through open windows
overpowering the beautiful memories
i shared with you—
for the last 30 years

mid afternoon
amidst ringlets of black smoke
a metal bird lay crumbled
in lush field of wildflowers
mingled with carpet of bodies
in earth's green bosom . . .

~Delhi, India

Payal A. Agarwal, a resident of Delhi, India, dabbles in free verse poetry especially Japanese forms : tanka and haiku. Her poems have appeared and are forthcoming in various international journals, both online and print.

Peter Fiore

I love being up
at 3 o'clock in the morning
listening to music
from Bali
and taking snaps of the falling snow

do you remember
the night
you escorted a girl in a kimono
to the opera in NYC
in the snow?

she thinks my mind is in the gutter
cause I keep asking about shagging
a word I can never remember . . .
in Singapore
the gutters are immaculate

am no folkie
singing birdsongs and work songs
am a one-note punk
with a chip on my shoulder—
watch out for my love

~United States

Afterimages

Peter Fiore

days before the war
are idyllic
America in 1941
and I can hear the pilots
joking in the empty hangars

snow country
planes grounded for days
a barge trudges the icy river
some hide out in deserted barns
escape at night into angels and ghosts

the lost daughter
haunts the noir streets
amnesia of the yellow star
and god is great . . .
shades of gray as far as the horizon

golden light in the windows
along the river
far off the sirens
starting up slowly
all the doors closed

the city fills every corner
with shouts and slamming doors
somewhere a child is crying frantically
and two men drinking
red wine in an alley

~*United States*

She Asks About My Hat

Peter Fiore

in Starbucks
outsized eyes in an oval face
black-silver hair
curls to her shoulders—
she asks about my hat

so he returns every weekend late in the morning,
drinks his coffee, reads and revises his reports and
poems. and looks up every time the door opens.

then on Valentine's Day, in a snow storm, he's the
only one there, when she walks in, hair drenched
and dripping. sits in the chair opposite him and
they talk for an hour. she lives with aged parents,
he touches her face and she smiles.

they go for soba noodles and a bottle of Chablis.
she tells him she hasn't made love for more than
three years. he takes her to Heidi's Inn. *give me
your tongue* he says and they shag till she has rivers
of comes and he's knackered—then she calls
home.

it's still snowing lightly as they drive back holding
hands. she doesn't offer any contact information
except her name and says, *we'll meet again.*

~*United States*

days and nights

Peter Fiore & Joy McCall

nights
when she stays
in the city
he sleeps with the lights on
in the living room

*days
when he wanders
by the river
she listens for sirens
and drinks sloe gin*

~United States / England

Peter Fiore lives and writes in Mahopac, New York, USA. His poems have been published in American Poetry Review, Rattle, Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars, red lights, A Hundred Gourds, and others. In 2009, Peter published "text messages", the first volume of American poetry totally devoted to Gogyohka. Forthcoming, Keibooks will publish "flowers to the torch", Peter's book of tanka prose.

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

Randy Brooks

hibiscus bloom
will you be the one
to open up
to me
this morning?

a pear tree full
of white blossoms
in the bay window
a yoga master
cat

full moon
the silent one
as we walk
and talk
along the river

Captain Shirley
at the wheel
of our van
the granddaughters
aye-ayeing her

one of the young
in comparison
I spread out a beach towel
between a couple
of elephant seals

we follow
the hobbled over lady
sure enough
here it is
cool spring water

confident eyes
of dead flyboys
looking over
the relief map
of Iwo Jima

farts
from town
to town
in a convertible
nobody cares

on a whim
we turn
onto the dirt road
as if grandpa
was still there

a week later
grandma joins grandpa
we're all back
in the Kansas wind
on cemetery hill

wild strawberries
on this Tennessee hill
how she lived
before her mother
died

an orchid blossom
leans over the sink
three ice cubes
melting slowly
into her heart

old truck
with a loose clutch
good enough
for one more trip
to you

Mother's Day
left under an avocado
on the kitchen table
her daughter's declaration
of independence

brothers suddenly
harmonizing
from years ago
the old mushroom
hunting song

the thump
of fireworks
on her face
she signs
for more

a coyote gives us
a hitch across Missouri
his jail release things
in a manila envelope
on the pickup dash

favorite jokes
and Kansas pranks
my grandpa
just a story
I like to tell

a-ten-hut!
the pinup girl salutes
boys headed to war
in the shop over
grandpa's workbench

needle nose tweezers
for a tick
in an intimate place
grandma banishes
the cousins

Dr. Randy Brooks is the Dean of Arts & Sciences at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. He teaches courses and workshops on haiku and tanka poetry traditions. He and his wife, Shirley Brooks, are publishers of Brooks Books and co-editors of Mayfly haiku magazine.

Rebecca Drouilhet

the gifts
that can't be wrapped in ribbons
and bows . . .
silver moonlight on the lake,
the warmth of my love's touch

a winter hush
falls over the countryside . . .
I realize now
why Grandmother spoke
in parables and euphemisms

Anse Chastanet
a beautiful beach for diving
on Saint Lucia . . .
again I find your name
becoming part of our story

Rebecca Drouilhet is a 59-year-old retired registered nurse. Her haiku and tanka have appeared in numerous print journal and e-zines. She and her husband have written a book of haiku titled Lighting a Path. She lives in Picayune, Mississippi, USA where she enjoys playing word games and spending time with her large family.

On the Job

Richard St. Clair

what kind of safety
in these cement walls
sitting behind
a computer all day
a mockery of salvation

quiet office
the only sound
the water cooler
and the hissing
in my ears

retirement
in the near future
this office
more and more
like a prison

fluorescent light
functional furniture
nary a window
to look out of—
where's the humanity?

science and engineering
all my superiors
ever talk about—
my coworker and I
recall old movies

I yearn
for green grass
and cherry blossoms
anything to restore
my wintered mind

alone in the office
except for me
and my email—
even spam
is welcome

coffee waking me from
psychopharm stupor
just what I need
to get through
the workday

diminishing piles
of paperwork
patiently waiting
for the weekend
and soon retirement

out the restroom window
bare trees battered
by the blistering wind—
I return alone
to my empty office

what good is it
all the work I do
when the world
keeps trending toward
escalating disaster?

not even cocoa
can make the day
go any faster
the strum and drag
of routine

my mind wanders
spaceward to eris
and its moons
any spirits there
must thrive in the cold

graduate seminar
on the higgs boson
any excitement
kept to a dull
monotone

cold March day—
even colder
the technological
chit-chat
of my superiors

why won't they say
what they really
are dreaming—
the scientists hiding
behind their equations

boredom set in
the day I knew
I would retire—
now I go through
the motions

the tao of physics—
dare they
show excitement
when all is still
in the dewdrop world?

as the researchers
plod by baby steps
the world decays
into oblivion
faster and faster

when will I awaken
to see what truly is—
I seem to see
the world through
such parochial eyes

if science
cannot save my friend
from cancer
how can it
save the world?

just another day
like all the others
how dreary
to while these hours
away in vain

let me think
of ways to help
this failing world—
if science is failing
what can I do?

shall I give thanks
for a job
that allows me time
to think
how pointless it is?

all this science
all this research
please do something
say something
for our world's sake!

I return
to my home
a job well done
having accomplished
nothing

~Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Seasonings

Richard St. Clair

a limp basketball
in the courtyard
and passing by
a hearse
with hell's angels

a robin crashes
into the window
lightning and thunder
offer no relief
for the parched soil

black kids
versus white
a basketball game
in the 'hood
still tied at sunset

first thunder
first raindrops
falling
straight
down

heavy spring rain—
hanging
from the porch ceiling
wind chimes
clogged with cobwebs

tiger swallowtail
flapping faintly
a kitten
pawing it
can't make it fly

dung beetle
working
amongst the flowers
the scent
of mouldering earth

summer fever
when was it
the last time
I felt this way—
long forgotten days

early arrival
of cricket songs
the slugs
have found their way
to the tomatoes

family portrait—
it's welcoming
our new visitors
more than
my weak smile

creeping alzheimers—
grandma's creaking
rocking chair
bisecting the eery
solitude

just moved in
African-American
JWs
again knocking
at the door

first day of school
does anyone feel
this loneliness
permeating the trees
of many colors?

November desolation
as the flag
is lowered—
'Taps' no more children
for unknown soldiers

just before sunset
rising over the treetops
the hazy moon's face
of neither sorrow
nor pity

caught
in the mirror
her silhouette
and the last rays
of the reddening sun

a bitter morn
these sun dogs
bracketing the sky—
when at last
will spring arrive?

rescuing the house
from an ice dam
more days
and even more
of cold and snow

back home
after a hard day
the full moon
and evening star
brighten my sky

~Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Richard St. Clair (b. 1946) is a native of North Dakota but has lived most of his life in New England. He has written tanka for 15 years and is also a published haiku and renku poet. A classical composer academically trained at Harvard where he holds a PhD, he has written well over one hundred musical works including a symphony, solo and chamber music, choral music, and an opera. He has set many Japanese and Japan-influenced poems to music. He is a Shin (Jodo Shinshu) Buddhist in the Pure Land tradition.

wild rain

Robert Epstein & Joy McCall

winter rain
slanting the wrong way
her signature
no going back
it is goodbye

impossible
to silence
wild rain
his footsteps are quiet
on the hallway mat

wild rain
the old woman hurries out
to plant turnips
the old man pulls his chair
closer to the fire

hard rain
he has trouble
pulling on his pants
she walks away
not stopping to look back

looking
for the sun in all
the wet places
the breeze disturbing
his reflection

~El Cerrito, California, USA / Norwich, England

a day of texting valentines *words are never enough*

Robert Epstein & Joy McCall

February sun
'back to meditating'
the ladybug says
making its slow way
across the windowpane

pileated woodpecker
stop all this
competing
ah, but if you've got it—
flaunt it

old pine
half-buried in foliage
a magic wand
feeling the saplife
where I rest my hand

crescent moon
I know I know
what I don't know
earthlight shadow
seen, unseen

Valentine's Day
you can't always
get what you want
then, sometimes you do
and you're sorry

~El Cerrito, California, USA / Norwich, England

stones

Robert Epstein & Joy McCall

one pebble
in a billion
that's us
*one tiny black seed
in a field of sunflowers*

that pebble
in my shoe
saved my life
*stepping sideways
at just the right time*

trail's end
an ancient
stone totem
*granite eyes
never close*

~El Cerrito, California, USA / Norwich, England

Robert Epstein, a psychotherapist by training, lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has edited five haiku anthologies and his own books of haiku include: A Walk Around Spring Lake; Checkout Time is Noon; and Haiku Forest Afterlife.

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

Roman Lyakhovetsky

desert crossroads
where angels used to
walk this earth
the lonely moaning
of a blues harp

last bus
on a rainy winter night
in my headphones
a dead albino guitar god
plays his guts out

elevator full
of espresso flavor
orderly tells her
it's OK to dream about
parachutes

sipping cold water
I tell the pretty HR agent
about my career
made out of summer moon
and fallen leaves

by the entrance
of a dim lit blues club
this long-haired boy tells me
he digs the wind
through his harmonica

slow queue
to a gas station . . .
did this guitar god really write
his soaring solo
about an old flame?

stuck guesstimating
who left on her lab bench
bouquet of daisies
in a water-filled ice bucket
this spring night

Introduction

Roman Lyakhovetsky

Much has been written about the Ziggy-era albums of David Bowie. For the sake of explaining why to write a set of tanka about them, I would only mention here that these are the albums that distinguished Bowie apart from all the other rock ‘n’ roll musicians of the period and catapulted him to international stardom. These songs presented the first one of many personae that Bowie took on through the years such as the Thin White Duke and The Man Who Sold the World. But it is Ziggy Stardust who is most remembered of them all. I would also say here, that I relate to *Hunky Dory*, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, *Aladdin Sane*, as Ziggy albums. This is because *Hunky Dory* is the album where the Spiders band first came together and *Aladdin Sane* being called by the man himself as “Ziggy goes to America”. Following the *Aladdin Sane* tour, Ziggy was officially retired.

As I first came about the idea to write a set of Ziggy-related tanka, I tried to find a challenge better than just write some sort of hunky dory (pun intended :) to Ziggy lyrics. I thought that I could find words (nouns) that are most frequent in the lyrics of these albums and then write a set of tanka each featuring a single challenge word. So I analyzed lyrics for Ziggy triptych using the online-utility.org free online tool. I then chose out of the word frequency table the ten nouns that I regard as the most representative for this set of songs. Two types of words were excluded—rock ‘n’ roll clichés, such as “man” and “baby”—and words that were too specific for these lyrics, such as “suffragette” and “Aladdin”. I was finally left with:

Changes	Children
Star	Home
City	Love
Rock	Time
Eyes	Night

While there are obviously very common words for rock lyrics such as “love”, “night” and “city”, I regard “star”, “children”, “changes” and “time” as pretty much intrinsic to Ziggy albums and carrying the verbal quintessence of these songs. This kind of challenge might be used as an inspiration for an indirect homage to any written work including of course poetry and prose.

Roman Lyakhovetsky

** I would like to thank Norman Darlington for minor editing*

Vaudeville Pawnshop—a tanka set

Roman Lyakhovetsky

driving along
an empty street i seek
the sign of changes
to come
even if just as rain

they grow so fast—
same children that clutched
my hand to take a step
now say I don’t know jack
about the modern world

tomcats tiptoeing
through the darkened alley—
in life’s vaudeville pawnshop
how can we tell a paper star
from a real one?

off the train
and into the big city—
sometimes
it’s so hard to stick at
just doing your thing

leaves falling
out of a square piece of sky
between the roofs—
somehow this always felt like
love in an isolation zone

home surrounded
by piles of moonlit snow
in the mirror room
i am mesmerized by the swirl
of bubbles in my cup of wine

drum brushes
making way for a solo
as the singer whispers
about a stream of fire
erupting through the rock

would those words
make it into a poem?
it's as if time itself
is sifting through an hourglass
grain by grain

fur and feathers
hanging in glass spider webs
I've always been puzzled
by how my world might look
through the eyes of strangers

alone at last—
all today's highs and lows
still sparkle
in the back of my head
this autumn night

~*Maale Adumim, Israel*

Roman Lyakhovetsky, originally from Russia, now lives in Israel. His haiku and tanka appeared in various journals including Modern Haiku, Frogpond, Atlas Poetica, A Hundred Gourds, SciFaikuest, Heron's Nest and tinywords.

Metropolis

Ruth Holzer

the night bus
doesn't stop anywhere
unless you shout—
I jump off
at a random corner

from block to block
the neighborhoods
change
now I'm in
a bad one

charity
in the lighted courtyard
a meal, a bed
only for those
of their faith

residence hotel
explaining that
I used to live here
there's still
no vacancy

wandering
in the dark
metropolis
an hour
before the alarm

~*Canada*

Ruth Holzer

the freedom
of being a foreigner
on a barren island
where no one remembers
your lost looks

~Crete, Greece

dread in the morning
at nightfall, panic
in between I drink
those eight glasses of water
and ply my sword, now here, now there

never so downcast
that you can't
be restored
by a wild kitchen party
or the memory of one

~Cheticamp, NS, Canada

Ruth Holzer's tanka have appeared previously in Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars and the Take Five anthologies. She lives in Herndon, VA, USA.

Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

unruly grey hair
dyed 'midnight blue,'
and a drooping mouth
why don't I recognise
this clown in the mirror?

golden sunset
trying to reconcile it
with the tsunami
 a family that died
 my family that lived

ten days'
meditation retreat
of 'noble silence'*
in my neighbour's room
. . . chattering and sobbing

**vow of silence*

over the black crag
the blueness of the waters
staggers me endless
ringing to wish you for your 21st
i'm told you died on your bike

two decades
into our friendship
i finally decide
it was time to put you right
on misspelling my surname

before the flames
passing a cloth bag
from their balcony to ours,
our neighbour whispered
our passports and jewellery

this oxymoron . . .
militant buddhist priests
whipping up
communal hatred
organising bloodshed

~Denistone NSW, Australia

Samantha Sirimanne Hyde was born in Sri Lanka and now lives in Australia. She is grateful to have recently crossed paths with the exquisite world of haiku, tanka, and other Japanese poetry forms.

A Death in Japan

Sanford Goldstein

five times
I had served as an
English prof,
all in Japan at Niigata city,
my wife's death on our third trip

I had been teaching
an afternoon class in English
when the door opened,
a colleague called me over
and told me I was needed at home

on the ride in a taxi
my colleague said nothing
to me,
I sat in fear knowing that
the trouble concerned my wife

arriving home,
I saw my three
children,
my son rushed over
to tell me his mother was all right

the taxi took
my colleague and me
to a hospital,
he led me to the room
occupied by my wife

quietly I went in alone
and it was then I saw the white cloth
over her face,
intuitively I knew she had died,
I left the room and sat on a corridor bench

I sat terrified, sad,
not knowing what to do,
overwhelmingly low,
I was not aware of what
procedures to follow

finally I went home,
the two older children
burst into tears,
my son angry at the youngest,
she was even more confused than I was

of what to do
in terms of Japanese customs
I had no knowledge,
my kids in bed, I stayed
awake when suddenly a neighbour came

we were going
to the hospital, I discovered,
the man drove me
not by taxi or car or bicycle,
but on his motorcycle

in a room
on the basement floor of the hospital,
several colleagues stood,
we were going to have a midnight
mass with flowers given to each

each colleague went up
to put a beautiful chrysanthemum
in my wife's hair.
I was last watching what they did
and for the first time saw my wife's face

how beautiful she looked,
how peaceful was her quiet face,
and I put my chrysanthemum in,
I had never experienced such a moment,
whirling in sadness and doubt I returned home

not fluent in Japanese were we
though my wife and I had studied
the language at Stanford,
my wife focusing on anthropology,
I taking courses in poetry and writing

overwhelmed
by what to do for a funeral
in Japan,
I was helped by my students
and a Zen master we had known

the funeral
was the very next day,
my students helping,
writing down names and contributions,
too dazed was I about what to do

the Zen master had been
our guest two years in Indiana,
so I knew what to expect,
and that was why I said to make
the ceremony as short as possible

I sat Japanese style on my legs
in that empty room in the hospital
basement,
my three kids to my right,
a teacher behind each one

on and on
went the service,
my feet aching,
at one point I wanted to leap up
leap up and knock the master down

all had been arranged
for I was told we were going
to the crematorium,
my kids sitting quietly,
more mature in their silence

the Zen master
said I should go in once the body
had burned to gather bones,
my colleagues told me not to
and I followed their advice

even now
I see my oldest child David
a high-schooler then,
see him carrying the ashes
gathered and placed in a wooden urn

its white cloth cover
in the sunshine glared at
this ridiculous me,
ridiculous yes, but saddened
and confused about each moment

blunders I made,
not realizing i should thank those
who gave offerings,
not realizing I should offer special
packages with food at the funeral

all I could do was
remain at home and shop
for my kids.
I made their food for two weeks,
and then it seemed they ought to return to school

how they liked
the oatmeal with sugar
I made for breakfast,
sandwiches for lunch,
then I knew I had to shop for meat and bread

when visitors came
I showed them the steps
to the second floor,
up above they would find only
ashes in their cloth covered container

no flowers
did I buy to decorate the room,
no picture of my wife,
at night when I went upstairs
I stopped before her ashes

the Zen master
never came and I did not
want him—
he had gone as usual to do
whatever he had planned

~Japan

Tanka pair

Sanford Goldstein/*Joy McCall*

Joy, Joy,
you are at times
the sound
of one hand
clapping

*Sandy
in truth, I am
one foot
always dancing
without music*

~Japan / England

Sanford Goldstein has been writing tanka for more than fifty years. In addition, he has co-translated many Japanese writers—those in poetry, to cite a few, are Akiko Yosano, Mokichi Saitō, Shiki Masaoka, and Takuboku Ishikawa. It is to Takuboku that Goldstein feels most indebted. Takuboku believed that tanka is a poem involving the emotional life of the poet. Goldstein's poems focus on what he has experienced, suddenly seen, suddenly reflected on—they are not imagined.

Joy McCall is a nurse/counsellor, retired because of paraplegia following a motorcycle crash. She has written all kinds of poetry for 50 years, publishing occasionally here and there. She lives on the edge of the old walled city of Norwich, England, having spent much of her life in Canada. She treasures most her loved ones, nature, books, words and tattoos, life, and poetry. Keibooks published her 'circling smoke, scattered bones', 'hedgerows' and 'rising mist, fieldstones'. She thanks M. Kei for his constant support.

Here at the End of All Things

Scott Alexander Jones

someone out there
assembled this shipping crate
abandoned by tides—
alone at first light
I take a seat in the mist

the edge of the world
undressing this shipwreck
since 1906—
coastlines up close
never stop sounding like this

sky burial
for the eyeless sea lion
here at sea level—
birds dive-bomb
the closer I approach

I peel lemons
while ravens can't puncture
the sea lion's skin—
a seagull stalks me
like I've got any answers

in so many days
the sea lion will be gristle
among driftwood—
I'm getting sick of how
foreseeable it all is

not yet noon
& dogs are chasing kindling
& windsurfers—
the sun hurries up
to get away from us all

walking into town
The Tibetan Book of the Dead
in my headphones—
a dotted line of geese
perforate the sky

the checkout girl
is the first to never hesitate
to card me for wine—
given enough time
we turn into monsters

waking from a nap
my cap enshrouds the beach—
momentarily
old shoes in the dune are you
dead & buried in the sand

a swarm of young men
sweep sand from beneath a van
& don't ask for help—
the dog snaps & snarls
as I reach down to say hi

the bride hikes up her dress
as cold waves reach her feet
& dances & screams—
am I the only one
seeing all of us in coffins?

following footprints
in the sand, I realize they're mine
from this morning—
by om I mean um & when
did my thumb start bleeding?

sand from my feet
clogs the bathroom sink
just off the boardwalk—
in the Thai food joint outside
a mop crashes onto tile

crooning off-key
an old man passes out
saltwater taffy—
the sky won't be blue for long—
the world keeps on ending

sunburnt at sundown
in windy grassy sand dunes,
the world is still here—
I'm not looking forward
to saying so long for so long

as I dig for my pen
deep in my army satchel
to write about how
the sun sets,
the sun sets

lemon peels in shoes
slung over my shoulder
at day's end—
everything about the sky now
in the carcass of a crab

a child climbs
what's left of the iron frame
of the shipwreck—
the centuries we spend
unbecoming

a stranger runs up
to the edge of the jetty
to tell me
these logs weren't here this morning
& the tide's coming in fast

one false step
on the precipice
& I'll slide to my death—
use my obituary
to get a fire started

in these seaside woods
whisky once brought the cops
& we hid like mice—
what else is the night
keeping quiet?

“no place for you to rest
in your ceaseless wanderings,”
says the ancient text—
sleep comes easy in this tent
on nights with no shortage of wine

leaving my tent
to let the chipmunk out
I piss & look up—
above my headlamp's ring of light
evergreens vanish into fog

I wrote this collection two summers ago, during a week-long solo backpacking trip along the northern coast of Oregon. Specifically, I hiked from the northwestern tip of Oregon in Fort Stevens State Park, down through Sunset Beach State Recreational Area and ending at Ecola State park.

Scott Alexander Jones—a PhD dropout who has lived in Portland, Austin, Seattle, and Lawrence, Kansas, as well as New Zealand and Prague—is the author of elsewhere (Black Lawrence Press, 2014), Carpe Demons (Unsolicited Press, 2014), and One Day There Will Be Nothing to Show That We Were Ever Here (Bedouin Books, 2009). His poems have appeared in over fifty journals. In 2009, he received his MFA from the University of Montana and was a writer-in-residence at the Montana Artists Refuge. In 2011, he received the Nancy Dew Taylor Poetry Award from Emrys Journal. He lives in Bozeman, Montana

Shernaz Wadia

grains of sand
from some ancient rock
on the shore
which aeon is lodged
between my toes?

the shelves
I stare at
will never know
I feel
as empty as they are

New Year . . .
a list of resolutions
not kept
I begin to rewrite them
in my new diary

in this circle
where the end merges
into the beginning
I wonder at the distinction
between life and death

as the train
begins to pull out
we wave good bye
to stray cattle
on the platform

meditating
under the banyan . . .
where
the aerial roots end
his matted hair begin

every shot
has missed its mark
his quiver
now holds
broken dreams

midnight knock
a civet crashes
through
the false ceiling
into the sitting room

awed
I roam these hills . . .
each step
each breath
becomes a prayer

brawls drift in
from the balcony
opposite mine . . .
how I love
my single status

crispy leaves
scattered on the lawn
underfoot
I hear
their last song

~Pune, India

Shernaz Wadia is a retired primary school teacher, and lives in Pune, India. She was educated in St. Joseph's High School, Valsad and Wadia College, Pune. Her articles, short stories and poems have been widely published in web journals and anthologies. She has also published 'Whispers of the Soul', a collection of some of her poems and "Tapestry Poetry"—a genre of poetry composition in partnership, developed by her and Israeli poet Avril Mealem.

Shirley A. Plummer

calm sea
stratus cloud—
thin veil of fog
masks the horizon over
a borrowed-lavender sea

when all your lovers
lie down with no hope
of you beside them
do they dream only of you?
would you like to know their thoughts?

~*Tenmile Creek, Oregon, USA*

firstborn in her arms
she reads Shakespeare for him
and soothes him to sleep
with lullabies “my mother
she has an old spinning wheel . . .”

~*Missoula, Montana USA*

forget me not
though marks of my being
have rained away
the grass unbent, sand unmarked
pillow smoothed—still think of me

~*St. Simons Island, Georgia USA*

is it smell or taste
that makes me desirable
and for what purpose?
bitten by red ladybird
bitten by daddy-long-legs

~*Salem, Oregon, USA*

*Shirley A. Plummer <plums@peak.org> was born, raised, and educated in Oregon. She left soon after University and moved and traveled, moved some more always farther east, always trying to return to Oregon. Several short poems appeared in 1969; her first haiku were published in *Haiku West* in 1970 (v. 3, no. 2 & v. 4, no. 1). Then life rolled over her like a juggernaut. She now lives on the central Oregon Coast, USA.*

Tanka for Lent

Tim Lenton

It has its origins in my decision not to give anything up for Lent this year, but instead to write a tanka a day! I succeeded in writing one for each day, though there was a certain amount of catching up in the process, to be honest.

Ash Wednesday

scratched on my sword
a thousand shining suns
and empty fields—
no footprints reaching beyond
the warmth of closing doors

Thursday, Feb 19

seeking rainbows
cranes fly through sudden snow
and come to rest:
your shafts of icicle light
prickle my drying skin

Friday, Feb 20

blue skies too bright
to hold dreams passing through
ancient hollows:
you hide in caverns too deep
for my small ambitions

Saturday, Feb 21

crosses of stone
shadow the evening road
as music plays
pilgrims break uneasy ground
going against the flow

Sunday, Feb 22

high tides threaten
to overcome pale coasts
and sweep inland
while your undefended eyes
see nothing untoward

Monday, Feb 23

an icy wind
leaves pictures in the sky
and shakes the ground:
you lift remnants of your hand
to shield your righteous face

Tuesday, Feb 24

now the distance
between images drifts
into the river
and fireflies surround the dusk
of your descending love

Wednesday, Feb 25

across deserts
the innocents head east
waiting for death
as sand falls from aching skies
on to broken faces

Thursday, Feb 26

ancient stories
rise from uncovered graves
and live again
while killers make for the sea
expecting no mercy

Friday, Feb 27

crocuses burst
on to the hill, claiming
it for spring:
by the cold sun I see you
sheltering in the stones

Saturday, Feb 28

frost-coated grass
stands like spears until the sky
burns out its blood:
you ask about autumn love,
I reply too quickly

Sunday, March 1

voices again
hang in the seaside air
outside the night:
the moon is circled by clouds
above your homeward road

Monday, March 2

a wall of ice
faces the explorers
beyond the gate
and there is no place to lay
your consuming burden

Tuesday, March 3

going backwards
familiar faces rise
in the old reeds
telling forgotten stories,
singing those ancient songs

Wednesday, March 4

sand on the path
covers new morning ice
dusting the day
and you slide through recklessly
colliding with my heart

Thursday, March 5

we drink red wine
next to an open fire
as evening falls
I watch your tongue flickering,
words burning in my brain

Friday, March 6

in the white cell
blind windows do not open
and no-one flies:
the air is too heavy to
support brighter ideas

Saturday, March 7

old friends rejoice
at unexpected notes
in the rafters
when souls have stopped listening
and dust dulls the music

Sunday, March 8

at last the rain
leaves me on drier land
near the island
all secrets suddenly bare,
all memory fading

Monday, March 9

words from the past
reshape your endless love
and then catch fire:
barely holding on to you
I leave my mouth open

Tuesday, March 10

promises pass
in the sudden stillness
from hand to hand:
winter blossoms bright and strong
fall to the icy earth

Wednesday, March 11

round the houses
no longer visible
dreams are floating:
stories told and told again
change shape in the darkness

Thursday, March 12

between two deaths
you inconsolable
disdaining birth:
lines in the high heavens
cannot lure you onwards

Friday, March 13

swamps closing in
obliterate the path
quartered by owls
and you go down unbreathing,
knives in your naked nerves

Saturday, March 14

crawling to the
celebration, you pause
for directions
but your words find no way out:
you smile and close your eyes

Sunday, March 15

watching lovers
curl on the river bank
playing with light,
you feel a weight on your chest
and a dream of sadness

Monday, March 16

so little light
flows through that old window
between the dirt:
you hope for a quick journey
into the healing night

Tuesday, March 17

fire in the sky
creating new visions
just before dawn
perhaps a path emerging
from the pale wilderness

Wednesday, March 18

high on the hill
where no dogs disturb me
and sun breaks through
I wait for old leaves to fall,
air still as nameless graves

Thursday, March 19

golden birds come
to our outstretched fingers
nervous and free
light as the morning windows
delicate as sunrise

Friday, March 20

behind the clouds
dark covers light again
as rumours fly:
I look for you in corners,
wanting to get it right

Saturday, March 21

lamentations
follow the long marches
across blue nights,
your optimism eclipsed by
new mist in the desert

Sunday, March 22

birds who fly in
from cool and quiet towns
settle near us:
we understand their hunger
but not their poetry

Monday, March 23

misconstruing
the difference between
noon and twilight,
you are blinded by the sun
while searching for lost owls

Tuesday, March 24

by the old road
you stop for refreshment
under the glass,
still coughing and facing your
usual nemesis

Wednesday, March 25

I dream of eggs
hidden beneath the straw
and fresh water
in the secret bowl you left
under the shadowed rocks

Thursday, March 26

at the crossroads
they bury the bodies
of the possessed,
but you see bigger pictures,
kiss the magical moon

Friday, March 27

a blue guitar
transforms words and music
into raindrops:
those pursuing perfection
fail to find true shelter

Saturday, March 28

waiting for friends
to end a long journey,
the sky grows grey
but arrows thrown from above
pierce your old certainty

Palm Sunday

on the approach
to the occupied city
cry hosanna
not knowing how salvation
might be torn from heaven

Monday, March 30

as shouts recede
and the temple empties
a donkey waits,
uneasy stones balanced on
his soft and naked back

Tuesday, March 31

when one mouth speaks
in different voices
and will not stop,
recovering the truth leaves
an unfamiliar taste

Wednesday, April 1

you open arms
when love knocks at the door
and stands smiling:
nothing will stand in the way
of tomorrow's journey

Thursday, April 2

where the poor walk
words of salvation fall
on empty ears:
no-one could look in your eye
if they allowed you in

Good Friday

in museums
you seek infinity
and play old games,
use knots and pieces of wood
to find a way forward

Saturday, April 4

chasing the past
across empty bridges
and up bare slopes,
you hear words spoken by streams
and tread on broken stones

Easter Sunday

stones roll away
revealing emptiness
inside the hill:
the light leaps and tumbles out
filling receptive hearts

~Norwich, UK

Tim Lenton is a writer employed for 30 years as a journalist on the Eastern Daily Press in Norwich, UK. He has written poetry most of his life, but much more in the last dozen or so years since he took early retirement. He won the Fish International Poetry Prize in 2007 and was introduced to tanka by Atlas Poetica contributor Joy McCall. He was born in Norwich and lives there today, though he has lived in other parts of the UK and has strong connections with Scotland and Canada.

Other than poetry, he enjoys chess, love, mountains and songs, though not necessarily in that order. He is married with a son and grandchildren.

Tracy Davidson

happy now
the dark cloud has passed
I turn my cheek
still bruised from his fists
still streaked with dried tears

harvest moon
diving in and out
of haystacks
we find a needle
an addict left behind

he tells me
we're looking at the Plough
all I see
are twinkling white blobs
in a square window

blood moon
you turn your red face
away from me
unable even now
to admit your guilt

sweet sixteenth
how I lost my innocence
behind grandad's shed
the discarded beer bottles
not all from the party

they tell me
he's in a better place
I bite my tongue
to stop from screaming my rage
at their stupid lies

on the beach
with her bucket and spade
my daughter digs up
several used condoms
and a broken syringe

another storm
we stock up on sandbags
and tinned goods
gran talks about blitz spirit
over cold beans and sweetcorn

wishing well
I toss in a few coins
and make a wish . . .
back in the hospital
there's no change

~Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, England

Tracy Davidson lives near Stratford-on-Avon and enjoys writing poetry and flash fiction. Her work has appeared in various publications and anthologies, including: Atlas Poetica, Bright Stars, Modern Haiku, Simply Haiku, A Hundred Gourds, Ribbons, Notes from the Gean, Lyrical Passion, Haiku Presence and Frogpond.

Review: *Eucalypt: A Tanka Journal*, Issue 17

Eucalypt: A Tanka Journal, Issue 17
Edited by Beverley George.
Umina Beach, Australia
www.eucalypt.info
Pb. 44 pp. (2014)
ISSN: 1833-8186

Reviewed by Patricia Prime

A calmness, even sanity, is to be found in issue 17 of *Eucalypt*, the tanka journal edited by Beverley George. This calmness comes from the poems' engagement in the everyday, absorption with the past, or in the influence on us of nature. They offer us a slower language: reminding us of the pleasure of unhurried words, yet this inclination is often nostalgic, as we see in Barbara Strang's tanka on remembrance:

I remember this
of the last snowfall—
one flake poised
on your sleeve
not melting

The illustrations by Pim Sarti are as impressive as always for this established artist. Sarti has the confidence and skill to address all manner of images such as street lights, a gramophone, a seashell and the delightful frog that illustrates André Surridge's lively tanka:

my daughter
house-sits a dog, two chooks
& Buster . . .
a tree frog living
near the tea caddy.

George avoids the dangers of heavy-handedness through a careful arrangement of subjects. As George says in *Ribbons 10:3*: "By

arranging and rearranging the individual poems, the full sequence emerges.” So, on one page, we have poets writing on the actual writing of their poems; on another the topic is childhood, and another is locality. The tanka are arranged so that we alternate between more demanding poems and those that are more accessible—poems about family, childhood and nature. The following tanka by Gavin Austin might be said to be one of those with a more serious topic:

one night
of tenderness during
a lost winter
years of wondering
if your son could be his

while Lois Holland’s tanka is a tender love poem:

just a stirring
of maple leaves
in the breeze
your whispered words
weaken my will

The following tanka by Terra Martin has a startling power to capture the wonder of late pregnancy:

clusters
of tiny brown acorns
fall’s bounty
after trying for years
she’s expecting at forty

while Hazel Hall’s tanka is a perfectly humorous image for the way in which one faces becoming a certain age:

‘respected member
of the community’
emblazoned on a card
I knew I’d passed
my use-by date

The humour in several tanka does not try to attract attention. It rather reveals the world to us in all its guises. Such simplicity is the hardest

thing to achieve, but these tanka poets are able to do so with finesse. Here are two examples:

a fragment
of flirty conversation
a broad grin
sunlight on his silver hair
as I join the dating game

Kirsty Karkow

your new jerseys
and groomed grey hair
show off your eyes . . .
when I think fondly of you
you are wearing your old clothes

Anne Curran

The collection also contains several ‘urban’ poems on people, objects, scenarios, as in this tanka by Payal A. Agarwal

tequila sunset . . .
I wake up in the backyard
to a million flies
covering me like a blanket
under a flowering mango tree

These little poems traverse moods, and are like emblems of endearment, curiosity and thoughtfulness. At their best, they are unpredictable. For example, in Jesse Wallis’ tanka, the reader is moved from sadness at hearing someone has an urgent appointment to humour when they realise it is only for appearance’s sake:

doctor’s? I worried,
rereading your cryptic text:
‘appointment . . . urgent’
only late owning up—
you were getting your brows done

Specific images convey a kind of moral code, as we see in the following poem by Aya Yuhki, where she tries not to burden friends with her own troubles:

after trying
not to depress others
with my sufferings—
I sit in a boat painted white
with fallen petals

and in this tanka by Marilyn Humbert she writes
of the wars in far off places that we read or hear
about every day:

another city
another market
so mundane
so commonplace . . .
'til the bombs fall

Many ideas are captured by the imagination
and 'saved' for later use in a tanka. Being aware
of the changing seasons, listening to birds,
recalling the past or predicting what the future
holds form a deep appreciation of life. Tanka
then becomes an active part of our lives. This
archive offers not only memories of the past, but
the vitality of the lived lives of poets, as in this
tanka by Rodney Williams:

final weekend
up north with my brother—
in the high jump
a teenaged girl from home
wins gold at the games

or this by Carol Raisfield:

the window washer's
dark glasses reflecting
her every move . . .
he lingers another minute
then rappels down one floor

The tanka in *Eucalypt 17* is poetry of the
senses, using simple yet powerful language to
capture intensely human moments. This issue
features a wide array of renowned tanka poets
who, with the greatest economy of words and
purity of vision, have captured those moments of
true feeling that make up the human experience.

Patricia Prime is co-editor of the New Zealand haiku magazine, Kokako, reviews/interviews editor of Haibun Today, and is a reviewer for Takahe and Atlas Poetica, and for several Indian magazines. She has interviewed poets and editors for Takahe and for the online magazines Haiku NewZ, Simply Haiku, Haibun Today, Stylus. She co-edited, with Australian poets, Amelia Fielden and Beverley George, the tanka collection 100 Tanka by 100 Poets and is currently editing, with Dr. Bruce Ross and others, the world haiku anthology A Vast Sky. Patricia writes haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose and has published her poetry worldwide.

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Review: *Storyteller* by Genie Nakano

Storyteller: tanka by Genie Nakano
Purple Aura Press (2014)
Pb. 124 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-9908953-0-5.
\$15.00 USD

The book is available from
genieyogini@gmail.com or
genieyogini@yahoo.com or Amazon.com.

Reviewed by Patricia Prime

In her introduction to *Storyteller*, Genie Nakano states: "Fast forward to 2009 when I was first introduced to tanka. This brief, barebones form resonated with me and hooked me immediately." Nakano also experiments with movement, music, dance and poetry at spoken word events. The book includes not only Nakano's tanka, but responsive tanka with Amelia Fielden, Susan Rogers, Kathabela Wilson and Deborah P. Kolodji. Although these writers seem on the surface to be of a type—women, published poets—their absorbing differences of form and content burrow deeply into their various psyches.

Genie Nakano is known for her dancing and writing and is also the recipient of awards for photography. She has published in international

tanka and haibun journals and has published a book of haibun and tanka tales, *Enter the Stream*, 2013. With this body of work behind her, her position is secured as one of the remarkable talents in contemporary tanka. The poems collected in this book are not presented chronologically, but rather they are suggested by mood or theme. Several photographs by Nakano illustrate the poems.

Each of the thirty sections is titled and they begin with the section named ‘Storyteller.’ The tanka are tangled—in the best way—with tangential thoughts expressed in plain language that nevertheless picks delicately over the sweetest, lightest, deepest concepts. In the first tanka sequence, ‘Storyteller,’ she adopts a first-person narrator to tell her tale about the woman who lives in the forest:

I remember now . . .
she ignores my stares
so I follow her
who are you I ask,
go back to sleep, she answers

The poet marvels equally over highs and lows, the practical and the esoteric—the sound of water, a sandalwood tree, a handsome man, the L. A. Airport. Nakano’s accessible, conversational mode is never banal but always surprising, taking the reader around corners: “I fit around him / like jigsaw pieces / falling into place,” she says at the end of the sequence.

Residing at the centre of Nakano’s voice is a moral soul-searching which packs a punch in both an intellectual and emotional way. In ‘Quiet Dawn,’ for instance, where she writes of “the Thar’s desert / sand dunes in Rajasthan,” she is equally at ease with camel bells, shimmering moonlight, a campfire and warm chai, until she sees red flowers:

poppies
prompt happiness
red, vibrant
my pulse
beats a Hungarian waltz

‘The Food of Love’ is a tanka sequence together with Amelia Fielden, where the two poets “converse” about opera, ballet, wind-chimes, flutes and the sequence ends with Fielden’s verse:

chamber concert:
a local quartet plays Mozart
this evening
I sit in the salon
eyes closed, imagining . . .

In ‘Shushhh,’ it is as if Nakano has trampled down the sequence-fence and must now find other elements to keep things unified. There is no “I”—but, more than that, the tanka array themselves over a broad spectrum of images, yet build intractably, with all but one of the tanka containing the sibilant “shushhh” in varying forms:

as night
takes over the day
and crickets start to thrum
she softly whispers
shushhhhhhhhhhh

The collaborative sequence with Amelia Fielden, ‘Everything is Enough,’ is a wistful account of love morphing with the ageing process. Here is one of Nakano’s verses:

your hair has greyed
yet the fire of our love
still burns—
come closer and you’ll see
its reflection in my eyes

‘Kokoro’ is a tanka prose piece, with a narrator who guides and is guided by thickets of pain as she writes about her parents. Her mother, having left her father, regrets her choice especially when she learns of his death. The following week, she herself dies after an operation. The poet expresses her own sadness in her tanka:

I feared Mom
had died unresolved—
years after
alchemy transformed
sunrays through my fingers

‘Golden Deer’ is a collaborative tanka sequence with Susan Rogers. It is a poem of acute observation: the structure of the scenes leading a forward movement narrative shorthand. Here are the first tanka by Rogers and the last by Nakano:

hill top deer
yearns for a pine branch
the bough softens
leans and bows
a golden sunset flows

high
above pines
Orion beckons
piercing the dark with stars—
she rises to meet him

In the end this sacred/profane dance enables the tanka and the tanka sequence to function as distractions from something more serious rumbling on underneath. We get quite caught up in the topics that Nakano writes about. For example, in ‘Morning Raga’ (with Kathabela Wilson) the focus is on sound—chakras, breathing, drums, puja bells and the listening place. It is an uplifting poem, like all good writing, and has beauty at its core.

‘First Beladi’ (with Deborah P. Kolodji) is a sequence about dance. These opening two verses by Kolodji and Nakano express their delight in music and movement:

my snake arms
wooden as a marionette
she teaches me
to find my
center

warming
to the Arabic rhythms
so long ago
almost forgotten
stepping into a groove

if I die
before awakening,
look for rose petals
falling
from the sky

the sun hidden
in her pocket
belly full of butterflies
she carries a knapsack
filled with regrets

In the individual tanka, Nakano relaxes into territory that is common for women writers, where the domestic meets nature. Here are two examples:

sunshine morning
until my cat kills a humming bird,
its rainbow wings
crushed in one swift blow—
forgive the cat, she’s colour-blind

the sun hidden
in her pocket
belly full of butterflies
she carries a knapsack
filled with regrets

There is a hint in this simplicity where Nakano goes as far as you can go into hopeful simplicity, teasing out every poignant tracery. Nakano’s individual tanka are interspersed with the tanka sequences and tanka prose. They traverse moods and are like emblems of endearment, curiosity and delight in the world that surrounds her: “unexpected growth: / a solo sunflower first of many seeds.” While these small poems brim with lovely images, I am still more of a fan of the sequences as they form a narrative. The small poems don’t appear to have the same cumulative effect. There is a sense of observation

trying to form their own kind of narrative. In the longer sequences there is an urgency in the telling, a feeling that two narrators impart to us what they see and sense because it is imperative they share it.

While *Storyteller* contains tanka, tanka sequences and tanka prose on the domestic, nature, travel and more, the poems also leap outwards into share and sound, into the readerly, the diaryesque and the romantic.

Patricia Prime is co-editor of the New Zealand haiku magazine, Kokako, reviews/interviews editor of Haibun Today, and is a reviewer for Takahe and Atlas Poetica, and for several Indian magazines. She has interviewed poets and editors for Takahe and for the online magazines Haiku NewZ, Simply Haiku, Haibun Today, Stylus. She co-edited, with Australian poets, Amelia Fielden and Beverley George, the tanka collection 100 Tanka by 100 Poets and is currently editing, with Dr. Bruce Ross and others, the world haiku anthology A Vast Sky. Patricia writes haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose and has published her poetry worldwide.

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Review: *Tanka Left Behind* by Sanford Goldstein

Tanka Left Behind: Tanka from the Notebooks of Sanford Goldstein
Keibooks. Perryville, 2014
RRP: \$US15.
Pb, 207 pp.
ISBN-13: 978-0692258897 / ISBN-10: 0692258892.

Reviewed by Patricia Prime

Tanka Left Behind calls to the lovers of tanka everywhere. It sounds the signal to listen closely and in alert reverie to the voice of master tanka poet, Sanford Goldstein. Goldstein's reach of reference, culled from notebooks dating back to 1976, covers the marriage of high and low, the grasp of popular and classical allusion. His ear for beauty, the commonplace and the philosophy

garnered from his long life, both in America and Japan, is evident.

Divided into the Introduction and the years 1976–1996, with an afterword by M. Kei, this large volume of tanka contains reflections on happiness, youth, marriage, children, nature, illness, and death, interspersed with meditations on the poet's own frailty. There is humour in many of the poems, some more entertaining than one might expect. Each year does the work of an overall view of two decades of writing and narrative with efficiency, indulgence and poetic intelligence. In his Introduction, although Goldstein offers few insights into the writing process, or his strategies and engagement with the composition of his tanka, he does say: “. . . here I am again with what most certainly ought to be my last attempt, *Tanka Left Behind*.”

There are dazzling compressions of personal history, astonishing poems from the dark to the satirical, critiques of contemporary life and a teeming vocabulary to match. And often too a sense of the imperative, grounding reality of the phenomenal world—the *thisness* of things.

Goldstein's delicate syntax and rhythm are all here, and his concern with the urge to write. His cadences are unique in my experience, as we see in the first tanka from 1976:

the urge
to impress
eludes me
this fall day
as I pour my tanka out

This urge to produce tanka is a typical touch, preparing us for “the fall day”. There is considerable skill here, a delightful playfulness which finds the precise rhythm for the subtlety of what is being said. What is being ‘said’ in these tanka? Is it “reading / my poems / and feeling / the taste / of smile”? Or that “I ask / for whom the bell tolls / knowing / it tolls for me”? which drives the poet to admit “I could burn / every book, / every line, / and still still, / this tanka me!” I do actually think this is the poet's wider philosophical concern, the difficulty of composition is not just in writing tanka but in any

form of discourse with one's self; one's own feelings and the way images often carry fleeting glimpses of meaning that can't be expressed any other way. But poetry is not philosophy.

In the section '1977', the poet is in Florida, enjoying the physical world of beaches, pools and sunshine, where he asks himself:

why
in this Florida light
do
my tanka lines
seem shorter?

Here, with his family, the pleasures of love are imagined in imagery and action. There are the elusive joys of being with one's children:

my kid
thinks I'm great
buying her sweets—
how easy to make
her smile

And there are the games played with memory:

can't feel now
as if April's
the cruellest month,
maybe
tomorrow

Or the way we sometimes see ourselves in the future looking back at what we used to be, as in "puberty / and I hid / all the longing / of terrible afternoons, / terrible nights."

By '1978' the poet is "packed / and ready to go" and we learn of his wife's death:

telling my kids
about loads of
farewell gifts
at the Japanese train,
my wife's ashes carried too

In several of these tanka we read about illness, accidents, pain and suffering. Here, he sits

at the bedside of his daughter who has been involved in a car accident:

sitting by my daughter's
hospital bed,
food broken into bits
and pieces,
I watch her drift off

We also learn in this section more about the poet's dual religious beliefs as he mentions Zen, sermons, prayers, the synagogue and then moves to his arrival in Japan:

again
the multiple roofs
of Japan,
beyond fields of green rice,
I trace some on my stone path

In '1979' Goldstein's fascination with humanity in all its facets is evident on almost every page:

my friends expect me
to be engulfed in exotic climes
I hardly know myself,
ah! Japan as it turns out
is snow-country cold

Elsewhere in '1979' it is the life of the solo parent, living far away from his children, which the poet considers:

always find
myself near the surface of
this whirlwind mind,
how distant are my campus kids,
how the father in me has faded

Goldstein's way of writing is generally unflamboyant in style, although he does vary the lines of his verse from the minimalist earlier poems to longer lines in some of these later sections. Inevitably many of the tanka are given over to his personal thoughts and feelings, but perhaps the best tanka are the more lyrical ones, where he reflects on his own writing:

and did I
spill these various moments
in a niche of pain?
I pause and remember—
they were not all sad

By '1980' the poet's memories return to his lost wife and the words that come to him at night, which makes him believe that there may be an afterlife:

she won't
flick me away—
I listen to her words
through the dark room
and for now I believe

'1983' sees the poet back in America visiting his sisters:

the sisters
in tears—
it's departure
for Japan time,
and again we embrace

While he is back home in America in '1989', he writes little tanka, until inspiration again takes hold of him:

away
from rapid spills
for a month,
and now, now
the ink flows

In '1996' he is back in Japan with his students, where he asks:

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

Predominantly, the reader is offered minimalist tanka, five-line poems capturing an impression, a thought, an experience, something

seen, heard or remembered. Often enigmatic and richly suggestive, these short poems are canticles, slivers of a day-to-day life, luminous. They are never boring, but modest in their claims on the reader. They are also highly controlled and worked limina.

Goldstein's work is clearly informed by his physical terrain, a fact that shows itself through not only the subject matter—family and work are recurring themes—but frequently in the way the poems appear on the page, inhabiting space in which the silence of the white page shows through between the tanka like light through leaves. These are poems which reward concentrated reading and the cumulative effect is meditative. Goldstein is attentive, his eye and ear are intensely tuned, so that the words are partners in the poems and he images are vivid.

Tanka Left Behind is never boring, for its engagement with the minutiae of daily living it is entertaining and illuminating. There is much here that is fascinating, much that is perceptive. Though there are some occasionally repetitive poems, the whole makes an enjoyable read and most of the tanka which make up this long text are fine and powerful poems.

Patricia Prime is co-editor of the New Zealand haiku magazine, Kokako, reviews/interviews editor of Haibun Today, and is a reviewer for Takahe and Atlas Poetica, and for several Indian magazines. She has interviewed poets and editors for Takahe and for the online magazines Haiku NewZ, Simply Haiku, Haibun Today, Stylus. She co-edited, with Australian poets, Amelia Fielden and Beverley George, the tanka collection 100 Tanka by 100 Poets, and is currently editing, with Dr. Bruce Ross and others, the world haiku anthology A Vast Sky. Patricia writes haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose and has published her poetry worldwide.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Atlas Poetica will publish short announcements in any language up to 300 words in length on a space available basis. Announcements may be edited for brevity, clarity, grammar, or any other reason. Send announcements in the body of an email to: AtlasPoetica@gmail.com—do not send attachments.

* * *

TSA Contest Renamed to Honor Tanka Pioneer

In celebration of our fifteenth anniversary today, April 14, 2015, the Tanka Society of America is pleased to announce that we have renamed our annual tanka contest after Sanford Goldstein. Sanford is the foremost pioneer of English-language tanka, a scholar and translator of tanka, and a widely respected tanka poet. The contest's new name is the Sanford Goldstein International Tanka Contest.

This year's contest submission window is May 1 through June 30, 2015. We welcome submissions from everyone, not only in support of tanka, but also in honor of Sanford. For more information about the contest, please visit the TSA website at <http://www.tankasocietyofamerica.org/tsa-contest/how-to-enter-the-tsa-international-tanka-contest>.

—Margaret Chula, TSA President

* * *

Tanka Poet Radhey Shiam Passes at Age 93

My dear father Sri Radhey Shiam breathed his last on Saturday, 18th April 2015 late evening after a brief spell of illness. He was 93.

His way of life was influenced by a Danish Saint Mr. Alfred Samerson (nicknamed Sunya Bhai) who lived in India many years. After meeting with founder of Indian Haiku late Dr. Satya Bhushan Verma JNU, he started haiku

writing, and within a few years, his haiku started appearing on international forum. His all literary work was the shadow of Sunya Bhai and Satya Bhushan Verma. He was the torch bearer of these two grand souls.

After a hip replacement operation in 2001 my father was mainly confined to home but was always busy writing, until even before getting admitted to hospital on 17th April.

He left us with a lot of unpublished work to keep his soul alive in Haiku world.

He was of great help to all of us. I pray God to bless him for all the good he did in this world.

With regards

Rama Kant

S/o Late Shri Radhey Shiam

* * *

“Orale Pues” by Genie Nakano on YouTube

Genie Nakano is performing tanka on YouTube. Check out “Orale Pues”, a tanka series first published in *Atlas Poetica*, May 2014. Joey Kamiya on sanshin and Alan Furutani on flute perform with Genie at Japanese Cultural Institute in Gardena, California. Genie and Joey perform regularly at open mics. More YouTube tanka/haibun series soon to be released on YouTube. Stay tuned.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-MY_Zo3JNo&feature=em-share_video_user

* * *

Haibun Today (March 2015) is now online.

The spring quarterly issue of *Haibun Today* is now online for your reading pleasure at <http://haibuntoday.com>.

This new issue features critical essays by Ruth Holzer, Ray Rasmussen and Jeff Streeby as well as an in-depth interview with Harriot West.

Writers are now invited to submit haibun, tanka prose and articles for consideration in the June 2015 issue of *Haibun Today*. Writers of haibun, in particular, should note the new reading periods that now apply to that section of the journal. They will find the pertinent deadlines by consulting our Submission Guidelines at *Haibun Today*.

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Tanka Tree Rings by an'ya

TANKA Tree Rings, by an'ya (translations by Saeko Ogi), published POD by FEA Press, POB 332, Westfir, OR 97492 USA. Hand-sewn, 11 x 8 1/2" single-sided on heavy archival bond with hand-made paper inserts and bamboo spine, n.p. ISBN 0-9727130-5-0, price \$39.95 plus postage (order from FEA Press at whazammo@gmail.com, subject: Order Tanka Tree Rings).

This collection of 50 of an'ya's tanka is a gleaning from dozens of print journals and anthologies where they first appeared over the years. The book is, quite simply, a treasure - a hand-crafted delight to eye, mind and heart, not only because the poems themselves are each a window into this poet's fecund thought and spirit and keenly wrought, but also because each poem is in an attractive script font centered on a single page accompanied by an'ya's arresting and evocative artwork. an'ya writes from a background echoing the poems of the great female waka poets of medieval Japan, yet her voice is distinctly modern. Her style is unforced and natural, deceptively simple, with layers of meaning revealing themselves upon repeating readings.

The interplay between the artwork and the poems is a third dimension that fulfills the dictum, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. One simply cannot experience the tanka in this collection as poems alone, but as true haiga, with poetry enhancing art and art enhancing poetry. The interplay is often stunning.

As an added feature in this collection, each of an'ya's poems is translated into Japanese (kanji/

kana) by Saeko Ogi, herself a distinguished tanka poet of long standing in Japan. Hopefully the translations will encourage the spread of this book into the Asian market.

The cover displays one of an'ya's tanka with her artwork, along with its Japanese rendering, a heart-warming metaphor of tree rings as her place in the human life-cycle:

already
three-quarters around
life's circle
from this point forward
just counting tree rings

Prominent is the multi-faceted theme of love:

a love poem
will I ever compose it
one with words
as sweet as the song
from this nightingale's beak

The book closes on a detached, almost meditative note suggestive of Eastern spirituality:

the symmetry
of a common moth
makes me think
about how I am
unremarkable

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Tanka Canada & GUSTS web pages updated

Kozue Uzawa announces that she has updated the Tanka Canada and *GUSTS* web pages at: <http://tanka.a2hosted.com/>.

Publications by Keibooks

Atlas Poetica : A Journal of World Tanka

Collections Edited by M. Kei

flowers to the torch, by Peter Fiore *forthcoming*

rising mist, fieldstones, by Joy McCall
Hedgerows, Tanka Pentaptychs, by Joy McCall
circling smoke, scattered bones, by Joy McCall

Tanka Left Behind : Tanka from the Notebooks of Sanford Goldstein, by Sanford Goldstein
This Short Life, Minimalist Tanka, by Sanford Goldstein

Anthologies Edited by M. Kei

*All the Shells : Tanka Society of America
Members' Anthology 2014*
Bright Stars, An Organic Tanka Anthology (Vols. 1-7)
Take Five : Best Contemporary Tanka (Vols. 1-4)

M. Kei's Poetry Collections

January, A Tanka Diary

Slow Motion : The Log of a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack
tanka and short forms

Heron Sea : Short Poems of the Chesapeake Bay
tanka and short forms

M. Kei's Novels

Pirates of the Narrow Seas 1 : The Sallee Rovers
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 2 : Men of Honor
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 3 : Iron Men
Pirates of the Narrow Seas 4 : Heart of Oak

Man in the Crescent Moon : A Pirates of the Narrow Seas Adventure
The Sea Leopard : A Pirates of the Narrow Seas Adventure

Fire Dragon