

# **Skylark**

A Tanka Journal

Edited by Claire Everett

Skylark

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# Skylark

A Tanka Journal

Editor: Claire Everett

[skylark.tanka@gmail.com](mailto:skylark.tanka@gmail.com)

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

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

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**Skylark**  
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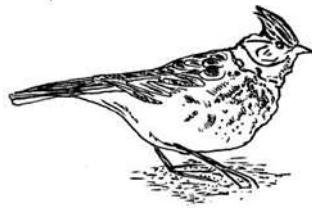
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## Nature's Accord.

How is't each bough a several music yields?  
The lusty throstle, every nightingale,  
Accord in tune, though vary in their tale;  
The chirping swallow call'd forth by the sun,  
And crested lark doth his divisions run?  
The yellow bees the air with murmur fill,  
The finches carol, and the turtles bill,  
Whose power is this? What God?

from *Poems*  
—Ben Jonson 1572-1637



## Editor's Message

I write this early on an April morning after what seems to have been a long winter. As a people we are living in the shadow of terror, not just from extremists, but from the all too chilling reality of the irreparable damage we have done to our Earth, this pale blue dot in space. And yet, as I write, the poet-trees, lit with their green fuses, are putting their pens to the paper of a new season and the poet-birds are building their nests, filling their inkwells for the next hatch of songs. I'm mindful that the time we call our own is only ever borrowed, just as the garden I call mine, belongs no more to me than it does to the snake's head fritillaries preparing to rear their chequered heads, or the pair of song thrush who have chosen a conifer bough in the hope that in a few short weeks it will yield to fledgling acts of faith. In this climate of uncertainty, we tentatively unfold our colours, test our wings — be they of feathers or silk — and sing our songs. For our other-than-human fellow beings these activities are ones of necessity, not mere solace, but then I would question how many birds sing for the joy of singing, not simply to say, *Hey, love, I am here!* or *This is my patch!* and how many humans paint and write out of need, out of passion, out of hunger.

Poetry reconnects me to myself (whatever that may be in this life of many lives) and it binds me to others in these loose-leaf, too easily scattered days. Editing the TSA Anthology *Spent Blossoms*, was not only an honour and a pleasure, it continues to bring rewards, as I receive notes of appreciation and read how others have found joy and inspiration in the words of their tanka kindred. *Skylark* continues to go from strength to strength and has plans for its own Anthology before year's end, so stay tuned for announcements and submission calls via the website ([skylarktanka.weebly.com](http://skylarktanka.weebly.com))

## Skylark

in a few weeks! If you wander over to *Skylark's* sister site, [skylarkpublishing.weebly.com](http://skylarkpublishing.weebly.com), you will see that I have been busy publishing my second tanka collection, *The Small, Wild Places*, and have co-authored *Talking in Tandem* with my lovely, long-suffering husband, Tony. The latest production under the *Skylark* imprint is the fascinating *Seeing Double: Tanka Pairs* by the wonderfully talented Liam Wilkinson; I urge anyone not yet acquainted with Liam's work to welcome this stunning collection into your life. And again, keep in touch, as there other tanka books soon to be released by *Skylark*.

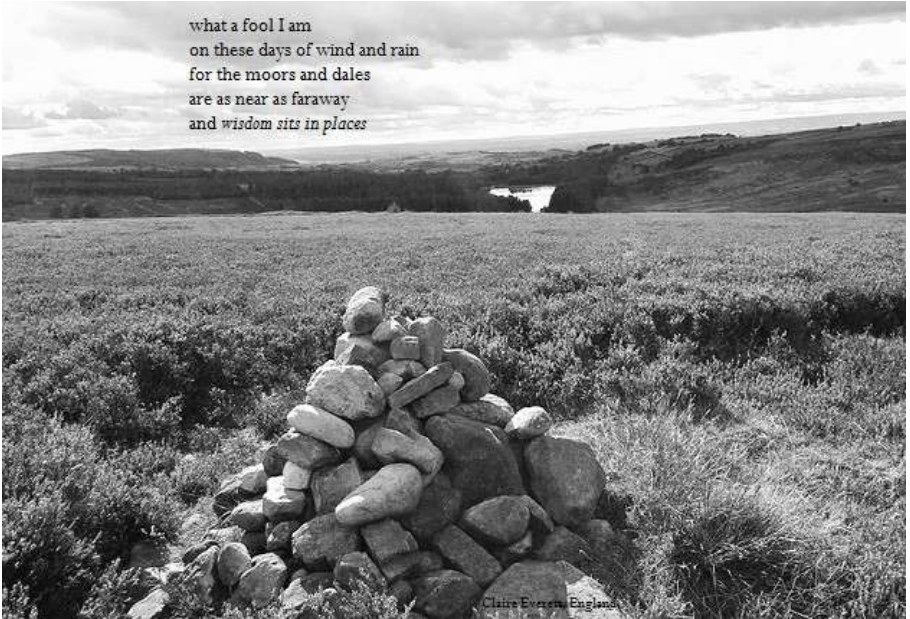
Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the work of two young poets whose tanka are featured in this edition of *Skylark*. Please welcome William Blackwell Partridge (aged 9) and Seth Gladding (aged 10) to the tanka community. It is uplifting to see a new generation of poets are discovering the appeal of this ancient form; may we encourage them to honour the tradition of this 'short song' as they take it into the next chapter and make it their own. And many thanks to the multi-talented Michele L Harvey who has kindly provided the *Skylark's* Nest prompt for the winter issue, with her elegant *Shadowplay*.

I hope you will find solace and inspiration within these pages. Know, that in submitting to *Skylark*, each one of you has granted me both . . . and more.

~ Claire Everett, North Yorkshire, April 2016



# Skylark



\*So say the Apache.

*Claire Everett, England*



## Skylark

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

*The Winners*

Selections by *David Terelinck, Australia*

Sometimes the sweetest song comes from the bird that is rarely seen, or glimpsed only fleetingly. Is it that these almost-seen flashes of coloured feathers that make the music so much more enticing?

In Australia we have the bellbird. This diminutive bird, often not seen, fills the forests and valley floors with honeyed crystalline notes. A sound that ensnares the senses and fills one with the awe of the unexpected; that such a clear sparkling note comes from something not fully recognized.

It is the tanka that does not reveal everything at once that is more likely to draw me in as a reader. It is this premise that guided my choice in seeking the sweetest songbirds in this flock. I was seeking the poem that did not replicate the beautiful image given us by Pamela A. Babusci. I wanted the dreaming room of hearing the Skylark's call, but without seeing the bird.

That mysterious dreaming room, and image of the unstated, was calling me. I wanted the tanka to live for me beyond the season and image of the plum and cherry blossom. These delicate flowers do not last long; they are, like bird song, fleeting and ephemeral. We have only a transitory time to enjoy them before they are lost to wind and other elements.

So this drew me to tanka that spoke to me long after the poem was read and the petals had fallen.

The Skylark's Nest winner for me, on every reading, is:

## Skylark

teach me how  
to hold spring  
in my palm . . .  
the book dog-eared  
to a verse by Neruda

*Paresh Tiwari, India*

This tanka offered so much in the white spaces between each line. It did not speak of blossoms falling, but it leads one to hope that we can find spring when the branches are bare. How to cup and cradle those blossoms any time spring was needed in one's life.

Whether one knows the work of Neruda or not, it is enough to know that his work is loved through feeling these dog-eared pages slip between your fingers. But there is a deeper metaphor for the reader behind this. Just as this book is much thumbed, we know those sakura petals will eventually become dog-eared to wind and rain. But the cherry-viewing season is held in highest regard in Japan. It is a pilgrimage for the Japanese; a journey to hold spring fleetingly in the palm of their hands for the months ahead.

This tanka immediately immerses me in the poem "Your Laughter" by Neruda. It talks about what can be taken away from someone . . . be it life-sustaining bread or air. But it beseeches "do not take me from your laughter". If we teach someone to hold spring in the palm of their hand for all time, as this tanka suggests, then that can never be taken from them either.

This tanka became an extension of Pamela's image and took me on a journey beyond the immediacy of the painting to a deeper need. It opened new windows and moved beyond the blossoms to hope after blossom-fall. For this reason, it was a worthy winner that did not imitate the art work supplied, but amplified the thematic feeling that Pamela so sensitively captured.

## Skylark

Three other Skylark's Nest tanka are equally worthy of high commendation:

a swirl of starlings  
weaving through contrails  
of the topaz sky . . .  
kindled in me again  
this desire to break free

*Yesha Shah, India*

This poet also appreciates the value of development of the image with delicate link and shift. Pamela's image is one of blossoms reaching for the sky. Do they perhaps envy starlings their ability to leave the earth-bound plane and weave through the lofty skies? Is this poet in empathy with the blossoms . . . only when we have the faith to let go, can we truly break free and soar? In this tanka there is great joy in the unsaid. What is it that has been holding this person back from taking off to live these unfulfilled dreams? Is it fear or responsibility? This is a well-constructed tanka that builds line by line to a very satisfying conclusion.

The next commended tanka is:

plum blossoms  
against a gray sky  
a tinge of red  
daubed on the cheeks  
of the aging courtesan

*Margaret Chula, USA*

This is a winning tanka because of the effective contrast between spring and late autumn. We have blossoms that denote new growth and the greening of hope. But how quickly that youth can pass us by unnoticed. This opposition of the

## Skylark

seasons works extremely well in creating a tanka that we can all relate to . . . the inevitable march of time. This courtesan's life is greying out like the sky above her; the splash of rouge upon her cheeks, like the plum blossoms against the wintering sky, are but momentary. This too, like all things, shall pass.

Our final hatchling in this Nest is the following tanka:

as buds to blossoms  
this swelling in my throat  
in my chest  
how close to grief is joy . . .  
different rains, same sky

*Autumn Noelle Hall, USA*

A tanka very worthy of contention because of all it does not say. Again we have a subtle and quite beautiful contrast of spring (joy) and winter (grief). Pamela's image is amplified with the metaphor that although blossoms bring us happiness, we know that there is loss trailing quite closely behind them. Cherry blossoms, and often many people, live and die under the same sky they were born beneath. Tears of joy and tears of defeat and heartbreak.

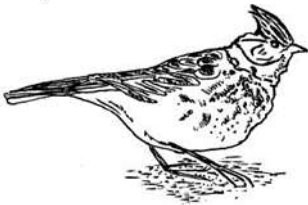
I cannot escape the feeling with this tanka of loss of life at a very young age; perhaps a mother's reaction to the death of a child. And that is one of the great beauties of tanka of this nature — the multiple opportunities it allows readers for their own interpretation.

Congratulations to the winner and the three runners-up. Your tanka are engaging and well-constructed with sound metaphor, imagery and word usage. You have used Pamela A. Babusci's prompt well, and in doing so, drew me in to another world of being and interpretation beyond that of a branch of spring foliage. You have made me stop and think about the

## Skylark

poem, and have created that *Aha!* moment that I continually search for in excellent tanka.

Congratulations to Paresh who will receive a free copy of the journal and an invitation to judge the competition for *Skylark* 4:2, Winter 2016.





if i remove  
my mask will you  
still love me?  
ebony sky crowded  
with washed out stars

Pamela A. Babusci  
2016





Skylark

**The Skylark's Nest Prompt**  
4:2, Winter 2016



*Shadowplay 35 x 50 inches, oil on linen,  
Michele L. Harvey, USA*

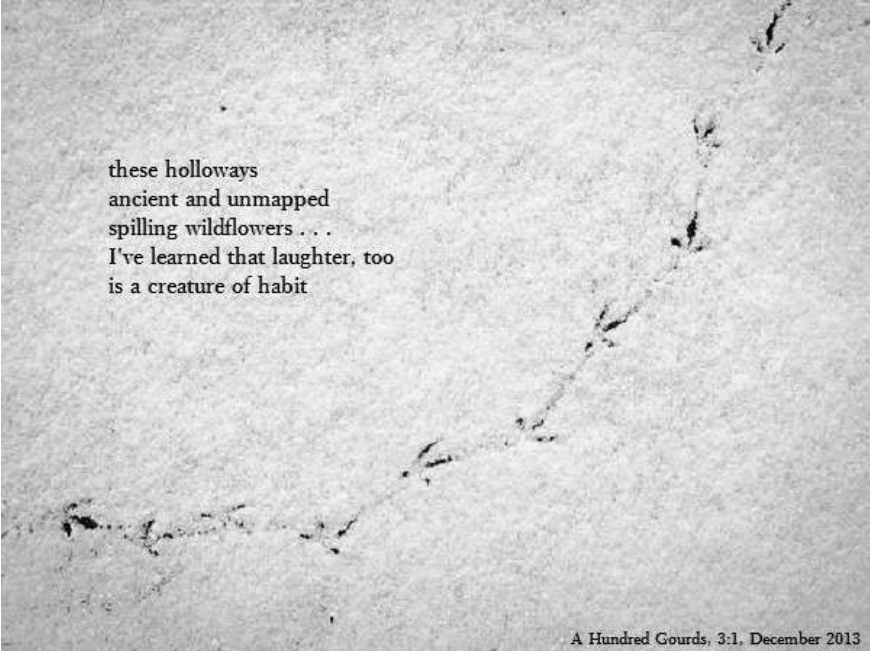
## Skylark

Michele L. Harvey is a professional landscape painter living in New York. Her year is divided between the very rural central NY and New York City, providing a lively contrast. Her poetry has kindly and widely been accepted by most of the current short form poetry publications and she has won numerous national and international Japanese short form poetry contests, both in haiku and tanka. Although introduced to Japanese poetry in grade school, she didn't attempt to write her own until 2005 when she discovered the contemporary poetry scene online. She's drawn to both landscape painting and the Japanese poetry forms for their shared characteristic of nature expressed through art.

You may view both her paintings and examples of her poetry online at [micheleharvey.com](http://micheleharvey.com).

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

# Skylark



these holloways  
ancient and unmapped  
spilling wildflowers . . .  
I've learned that laughter, too  
is a creature of habit

A Hundred Courds, 3:1. December 2013

*Claire Everett, England*



## Individual Tanka



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



Skylark

ambling  
with a guitar strapped  
over my shoulder  
a pale dot  
on a blue highway

another pull  
on the hoodie string  
this whole world  
is not much bigger  
than the hole I'm in

sadness  
came along  
without warning  
a freight train  
barrels into the darkness

*S.M. Abeles, USA*

Skylark

the robin  
sings his song over and over  
rain music  
he was taught, once  
upon a spring morning

*Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA*



Skylark

the sound  
of leafless trees in winter . . .  
spaces  
in the melody  
to draw a breath

soft spot —  
the newborn sleeping  
in my arms  
what silken dreams  
fly in and out

the mist  
of music and mountains —  
this homesickness  
for the fern-green hill  
that lies beneath my feet

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

Skylark

museum display  
with my grade-one reader  
the sign  
DO NOT TOUCH  
but it's way too late

Darjeeling  
with sliced pear  
and chocolate  
my best friend's aging mother  
doesn't remember she's dead

*Maxianne Berger, Canada*

Skylark

the tourist thing  
in faraway holy places  
lighting candles  
for the dead  
we carry with us

after  
the diagnosis  
the prognosis  
i am now  
those other people

*Steve Black, UK*

at my ramble's end  
children's laughter drifts  
on fir scent breezes . . .  
though I cannot see them playing  
through the ancient boughs

*Wendy Bourke, Canada*

Skylark

yesterday's camellia  
droops, dropping petals  
from a crystal vase . . .  
our brief love affair  
perfect while it lasted

surrounded  
by buckets and bouquets  
of flowers  
the florist tells me  
about her colourless life

*Dawn Bruce, Australia*

Skylark

this stillness  
of white morning —  
waking in your arms  
I become  
so many colors of snow

seagull  
on a sandy berm  
drags a broken wing —  
I travel with you  
fellow *pilgrim of sorrow*

*\*from the Negro Spiritual A City Called Heaven*

*Donna Buck, USA*

like spindrift  
floating out to sea  
farther away  
this body  
foreign to me

*Marjorie Buettner, USA*

Skylark

hearing  
fireworks  
each fourth of July  
the vet's unplanned trip  
back to Vietnam

*Susan Burch, USA*

another star  
birthed in the north sky  
such wonders  
clustered above our heads  
while we sighed over Elvis

*Pris Campbell, USA*

over the falls  
and into the roiling mist  
we were better  
at arguing  
than forgiving

*James Chessing, USA*

Skylark

overnight  
a spider spins its threads  
over my keyboard  
to write this poem  
I tear the skeins of silk

a Bhutan Glory  
rises in the dusk light  
I hold my breath  
the stillness of prayer flags  
on the darkening slope

*Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan*

swathe  
after swathe  
of soft, Irish rain . . .  
unable to find  
a ripe avocado

*Marion Clarke, Northern Ireland*

## Skylark

a house key  
tucked in the pocket  
of her coat . . .  
if only she could tell us  
where to find the door

in a small town  
an ocean away from Paris  
a moment's silence  
before the lone trumpeter  
plays *La Marseillaise*

the beauty of light  
through a simple prism —  
in his adopted land  
a Syrian refugee  
feeds the homeless

*Susan Constable, Canada*



Skylark

all these death poems —  
but what about the vessels  
that keep us afloat,  
the oars that move us,  
the moon lighting the water?

*Kyle D. Craig, USA*

on the back  
of a toilet door  
Rumi . . .  
she honours the place  
her journey began

small town servo  
“Mechanic on Duty”—  
the things  
she notices  
since her breakdown

*Barbara Curnow, Australia*

Skylark

a man's time  
is his own  
in the dead of night  
draining his nightcap  
he hears the morepork's call

*Anne Curran, New Zealand*

on the mirror  
the last clear space the mist  
hasn't reached . . .  
that look of recognition  
still in her eyes

*Mary Davila, USA*

Skylark

retrieved  
from a remote alp —  
I strain  
to hear the small voices  
inside my own black box

Flight 9525, March 2015

again the crows  
after the winds blow through  
                  voices  
familiar to us  
on wings of daylight

*Janet Lynn Davis, USA*

Skylark

a white lotus  
dreams it is a woman  
I dream  
I am flesh of a flower . . .  
tango under a sultry moon

*Diane Dehler, USA*

branches breaking  
from the weight of ripe persimmons . . .  
to photographs  
spanning six generations  
I add the baby's picture

*Rebecca Drouilhet, USA*

Skylark

The teacher  
leads her students  
from the classroom  
begins a lesson on  
the edible schoolyard

Next morning  
two strangers of careful grace  
circle heartache  
neither making promises  
about sticking around

*Bruce England, USA*

Skylark

that kiss  
like a butterfly's wing  
brushing a black-eyed Susan  
on my mind for three days  
already

March  
the long afternoons  
as we turn  
and face the sun  
one more time

*Peter Fiore, USA*

Skylark

old carrots  
the last of the root cellar  
at first light  
overwintered, bearded  
I leave my cloistered cell

only the splash  
of oars in the water  
early morning fog  
slowly envelops me —  
I sadly face my shame

papier mâché  
layer after layer  
our bruised psyches —  
some things can never  
be spoken out loud

*Marilyn Fleming, USA*

Skylark

a bonsai gnarled  
by nurturing hands  
as if warped by wind  
even in summer  
the child trembles

old lullabies  
in her heart  
forgiveness  
for her son's  
killer

storm clouds  
the thick shadows  
of my past  
our last words  
split by sirens

*Seánan Forbes, USA/UK*



Skylark

distant thunder  
from a retreating storm  
the tumult  
of losing you  
easing with time

*Jan Foster, Australia*

Skylark

winter thaw  
pigeons wait  
in the park  
for their old men  
to come

my son  
the drug addict  
i hold out my arms  
for a fix  
from an absent God

*Terri L. French, USA*

in my dreams  
you held me close . . .  
I wonder,  
now the sun has risen  
if I slept at all

*Urszula Funnell, UK*

.

Skylark

a dark side  
to the memorial  
fading light  
renders all  
soldiers unknown

leaning gravestone  
by the summerhouse  
*beloved Black Boy*  
*acquisit. April 24 1876*  
*ob. December 3 1896*

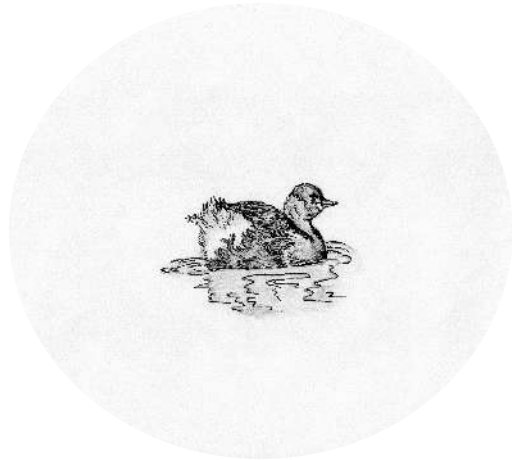
*Tim Gardiner, England*

Skylark

the plop  
of a little grebe

then the splish  
a little distance away

*Mark Gilbert, UK*



Skylark

for days  
I have watched and taken in  
the sordid news.  
the precious candidate I want,  
old yet energetic and behind

spring has come  
at least the temperature  
in Japan is 17  
and now my tanka must change  
as I wrap them in warm words

waiting  
for the kerosene I ordered  
to be delivered,  
how cold my study.  
how cold the tanka I write

*Sanford Goldstein, Japan*

Skylark

impossible  
to ignore their cries  
the babies  
my doctor told me  
I could never bear

*Joyce S. Greene, USA*

nubbly pills  
on careworn flannels  
pillowtop hollows  
how we settle into  
the shape of ourselves

the senior portrait  
my mother chose for me . . .  
what to do with this  
hand-me-down memory  
of the girl I never was

*Autumn Noelle Hall, USA*

Skylark

in the salon  
a dark-eyed girl applies  
my polish  
face still showing  
traces of a shiner

from windows  
a flood of colour  
at first light  
I key in my password  
and open the day

a crane  
at the end of the pier  
rises  
through the starry night  
and crescendos of sirens

*Hazel Hall, Australia*

Skylark

the old horse cart  
once proud to her touch —  
nuts and bolts  
of rusted words  
now bump across my page

a hint  
of old roses  
on a breeze . . .  
does it count  
being happy in a dream

*Carole Harrison, Australia*



## Skylark

imagining myself  
in a fragrance of murre  
flying off sea stacks  
and plunge-diving  
into a blustery sea

*Devin Harrison, Canada*



## Skylark

muffled echoes  
in the great library hall  
the solemn scent  
of the authors gathered  
here, before me

over the years  
I learn quiet has a price  
lightning  
has left its brand on the tree  
solitary, in the field

he sees in me  
the girl I once was  
unnoticed,  
last night's dew shadow lingers  
beneath the hem of pines

that summer storm  
that lifted  
the old tree bodily  
I didn't fear as much  
as the black cloud of your mood

*Michele L. Harvey, USA*

Skylark

quarreling  
long distance with your sister  
you missed  
hearing the swans on their way  
by the clear light of the moon

gathering again  
after day has scattered them  
winter sparrows  
fill the bamboo  
with their thin evening song

putting off  
the inevitable  
one more day  
the sick bird and I  
mindlessly happy

*Ruth Holzer, USA*

## Skylark

the Teign river  
sparkles and ripples  
between  
deep brown pools —  
so too my life

the yurt comes down  
there's no more shelter  
Bride in her parka  
sits on a boulder  
in wind and in rain

this sceptred isle . . .  
ferocious hedges  
barbed wire fences  
everything private  
no admission

*Gerry Jacobson, Australia*

Skylark

reading  
Joy McCall's poems  
as taxol  
drips into my arm I drift  
into her world of yew trees

*Carole Johnston, USA*

decades now  
since his death . . .  
a tattered moon  
slips in and out  
of shape-shifting clouds

*Carol Judkins, USA*

Skylark

moon-whitened  
the birch grove lovelier  
than in sun  
I rest and inhale its magic,  
not coming home 'til dawn

a slim birch  
blown down in its prime  
autumn reds  
why did you think life  
was not worthwhile?

*Kirsty Karkow, USA*

Skylark

the frozen forms  
of autumn leaves fixed  
in pavement concrete . . .  
changing the initials  
around a tattooed heart

saying goodbye  
to the life that  
made mine  
another death  
set in stone

*David J Kelly, Ireland*

Skylark

small bluebirds rest  
on a shiver of branches —  
this unending cold  
a study of light  
and muted color

*Mary Kendall, USA*

jettisoning  
all my modesty  
I unwrap  
my white body  
on a beach of tan

*Keitha Keyes, Australia*



## Skylark

I return  
to where eagles hover  
the moment  
a poem appears by itself . . .  
this rising up, wings outstretched

toy mouse  
— orange fur and feathers —  
you toss  
this faded fabric in the air  
catch the memory

*Kathy Kituai, Australia*

Skylark

beneath the eaves  
icicles drip at twilight . . .  
with eyes that glisten  
the old outfielder  
oils the mitt again

*S.M. Kozubek, USA*

just one puff  
to set the achenes free . . .  
you refuse  
to give your name  
to my bastard feelings

*Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK*

Skylark

at her door  
the stepfather banging banging . . .  
years later  
sounds of the night remain  
in the marrow of her bones

sunlight  
through stained glass windows . . .  
the clank  
of cash registers  
louder and louder

*Chen-ou Liu, Canada*

Skylark

I remember  
her young goth days  
and wonder if  
she's happy here  
among the dead

one poet called him  
sweet Morpheus  
but I often think  
of the dark matter  
of my dreams

*Greg Longenecker, USA*

Skylark

Meiwa the kumquat,  
fragrant golden gem of June,  
tempts without mercy . . .  
we cannot help but oblige,  
slowly peeling her alive

through childhood we kiss  
our mother's soft cheeks good-night . . .  
our lips could not see  
her silky skin a fine sleeve:  
membrane of steel between us

*Clare MacQueen, USA*

## Skylark

sweeping the doormat,  
for a moment I wonder  
about the feet of those  
who have stood there, knocked,  
and were turned away

in morning dark  
I was that kid  
on a bike  
delivering news of a world  
chased by a dog

because the stars  
are unusually bright  
tonight we chat  
and in low voices  
let our thoughts fade

rock moss  
in early spring  
I want that  
to be the color  
of my soul

*Michael McClintock, USA*

Skylark

no storm  
will take me  
I grow  
like the mangrove  
into myself

footprints  
remain on the face  
of the moon  
no second love erases  
the loss of the first

*Jo McInerney, Australia*

Skylark

he is so upset  
with the Buddhists and their gift  
of *juzu*  
prayer beads for his wife  
he decided to live

blues  
this side of indigo  
as if  
we could be different  
than who we are

*Beverly Acuff Momoi, USA*



## Skylark

twilight sky  
with floating clouds  
a long journey  
before I could travel  
the rain-soaked distance

*Pravat Kumar Padhy, India*

## Skylark

I should  
get a mandrake  
just for  
the sake of seeing its roots  
oh, this wondrous little plant

*William Blackwell Partridge, USA*



Skylark

a rosebud  
surprised by winter  
quietly undone  
by the here and gone  
of a moment

golden dusk  
white birds blossom  
a cypress  
i turn my shadow  
to its quiet side

a cedar sings  
of mountain wrens  
and snowflakes  
if only i believed,  
this would be god

*Sandi Pray, USA*

Skylark

at the funeral  
the skirl of bagpipes  
leads my friend  
out of the chapel  
into the sunlight

coming summer  
scraps of sunlight  
on the river  
where men sit on the banks  
fishing for whitebait

*Patricia Prime, New Zealand*

sinking  
into the folds  
of autumn nightfall  
how old can ancient be . . .  
the run of the umbilical cord

*Kala Ramesh, India*

Skylark

interviewed  
about a grandfather  
I never knew  
grief lingers from a war  
one hundred years ago

often  
in spring I choose  
to drive this road  
a sun-dappled tunnel  
of translucent green

*Elaine Riddell, New Zealand*

enunciated silence  
my spittle  
as I read your poem  
each syllable a drop  
of blossom rain

*Grant Savage, USA*

Skylark

slats of light  
from the full moon  
fill the dark room  
the dull ache of losing  
what I never had

one by one  
lights in the high-rise  
go off  
dozing till the kids sleep  
this Saturday night

*Yesha Shah, India*

warm dusk  
replaying this April Sunday  
of chores and rest  
    a yard clear of winter's leavings  
    the first mosquito buzzing

*Adelaide B. Shaw, USA*

Skylark

diagnosed  
on a day in late fall . . .  
behind the house  
he buries himself  
in a thousand leaves

slow walk  
to the mail box  
I renew  
an old friendship  
with time

on the beach  
each piece of glass  
a poem  
I pick up the small ones  
nobody wants

*Ken Slaughter, USA*

Skylark

does it long  
for you too —  
beyond the reeds  
at dusk  
the curlew's plaintive cry

*Paul Smith, England*

ease me down  
into cool waters  
plait my hair  
with green willow roots  
make of me your anchor

this is the song  
of our humpback hearts  
when we listen  
to the ocean breathing  
blood returns to water

*Debbie Strange, Canada*



Skylark

the quiet birdsong  
of childhood memories  
running barefoot  
in the morning  
dew

*Iliyana Stoyanova, UK*

nursing  
a tulip in my palm . . .  
you claim the kernel  
of the universe  
as your own

the shadows  
of neem leaves dapple  
the verandah . . .  
the weight of sunset  
on Dad's empty chair

*Paresh Tiwari, India*

Skylark

a summer's day  
stuck in the office —  
my 9-year-old self  
falling from a rope swing  
into the river's mystery

*Stephen Toft, UK*

on the pool  
rain bubbles collide  
burst and subside  
. . . one by one  
all my illusions gone

*Beatrice Yell, Australia*

Skylark

Indian Summer  
against skies alight  
with ripe persimmons  
my neighbor frees the ladder  
he can no longer climb

decorative wreaths  
on the fence of her pasture  
for the old white horse  
who relieves loneliness  
for the humans who stop by

winter white blooms  
in the crevice of a rock  
. . . this urge to join my cat  
    just so  
    in a bar of sunlight

*Linda Jeannette Ward, USA*

Skylark

the camp counselor  
all of fifteen years old  
tells us the Facts  
I fall off to sleep, thinking:  
Dad, maybe, but not Mommy

*Neal Whitman, USA*

The lacy gloves  
I knitted myself with  
baby rainbow wool  
the toy dolls  
of the childless

*J. Zimmerman , USA*

# Tanka Sequences

Solo & Responsive





Skylark

**gossamer**

the thinning  
of the leaf-green veil  
at Samhain  
the colors of another world  
break through

hummocks  
of golden grass  
let loose  
a volley of birds . . .  
thoughts tumbling skyward

one white stone  
plucked from the gravel —  
again and again  
I toss it into the blue  
to catch its fleeting gleam

the lines  
of a poem I've yet to write  
tangled  
in the silver ribbons  
of a lost balloon

splitting  
the silver milkweed pod,  
Pandora lets loose  
upon the autumn earth  
a raft of spindrift wishes

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

Skylark

**Still**

seven years  
since I last saw autumn  
in the Sento Gosho  
golden fans of ginkgo leaves  
are still fluttering

a young girl  
claps her hands  
to call the koi  
the stone Buddha's palms  
clasped in *gassho*

making her way  
with her umbrella cane  
an old woman  
strolls through the garden  
of renewed moss

at Saiho-ji Temple  
sitting on Muso's  
meditation rock  
that same green moss  
and raucous crows

*Margaret Chula, USA*



## Skylark

### **Equinox**

if tomorrow  
day is longer than night,  
will I  
accomplish more, or less —  
spring weeds grow and grow

if tomorrow  
day is longer than night,  
will we walk  
all the way round the lake —  
magpies are still swooping

if tomorrow  
day is longer than night,  
will we  
make time to talk truths —  
winds from the Antarctic

if tomorrow  
day is longer than night,  
how many dreams  
might colour my sleep —  
more dire news from abroad

if tomorrow  
day is longer than night,  
should we admit  
past pleasures are past —  
blossoms yield now to leaves

*Amelia Fielden, Australia*

**Catalpa tree**

the tree's trunk  
is rough to the touch  
its leaves are like velvet  
it is old and gnarled  
bent over by the wind

when hit by the winds  
her leaves make the sound  
of rain, or a river;  
after all the years  
her smell has changed

instead  
of smelling green and fresh  
she now smells  
dusty and smoky . . .  
mysterious

*Seth Gladding, USA*

## Skylark

### **Grandma's Bureau**

under the lid  
three unmatched earrings  
and a grey shell  
irreplaceable treasures  
once strung around her heart

on an oval tray  
the depression glass bottles . . .  
which one  
holds grandpa's  
favorite perfume?

a brush and comb  
with tarnished silver handles  
those final years  
she almost forgot  
to use them

in a golden case  
Miami Rose lipstick  
first discovered  
as a blushing bride  
became a married woman

the telephone —  
two prongs grasp a receiver  
bakelite black  
a mute testament  
to long-established habits

*Joann Grisetti, USA*

## Skylark

### Sacraments

fire climbs  
over the convent tree  
Virginia Creeper  
red as the chalice-blood  
of the Bridegroom

illuminating  
its manuscript of leaves  
the same light  
that pierces the hands  
of every artist

a V of geese  
above the old steeple bell  
departure's toll  
a thrumming in the chest  
an iron taste on the tongue

roadside crosses  
weathered gray and wreathed  
in black collars  
a pair of ringneck doves  
ascends on wings of prayer

aspen leaves  
scattered now like Judas coins  
rain-laden  
with pearls of great price  
mountain holy water

Skylark

an amber spice  
incense lifting with the mist  
as though censor-swung  
how they rise, these infinite  
blessings of death

*Autumn Noelle Hall, USA*

Skylark

**Shaping A Lotus**

I bathe my eyes  
in jasmine water  
before dawn . . .  
dance the *ragamalika*  
for the lord I worship

red-tipped fingers  
shaping a lotus . . .  
this moment  
if I loved you more  
I would perish

jangling bells  
around my ankles . . .  
I sense  
breath from your lips  
on the bamboo flute

a breeze  
disturbs the curtain . . .  
candles dance  
I open the window  
and all outside is blue

lingering  
perfume of marigolds  
and incense . . .  
I return to the walls  
of my lord's temple

*Hazel Hall, Australia*

\**Ragamalika*: a 'garland' of melodies often used in South Indian dance

## Skylark

### **The Global Flyer**

across oceans  
the record-breaking plane  
with sleek lines  
that our son designed and flies  
beyond his parents' gaze

gathering speed  
the long red wings flex  
then lift the pilot  
from an English dawn  
to chase the westbound sun

against the wind  
through five time zones  
he flies on  
yet my feet stick fast  
to this dew-drop world

*Kirsty Karkow, USA*

Skylark

**funk & fugue**

fen, fern & dusky forest  
thinly layered sunlight . . .  
gold-questing Norsemen  
stomp  
across my vision

what if?  
in a jungle of jewelweed,  
a patch-sized village  
of tiny folk  
brigadoons at my feet . . .

look!  
chalked on the rock face  
a stickman & woman —  
holding hands they spirit-float  
over bracken

cool scary air  
from a crevice in the rock,  
I could squeeze through  
but they'd be waiting —  
funk & fugue

oily sunlight  
through tendrils of jungly woods —  
what if I stumble upon  
an ancient temple,  
a fearful prophecy?

—for Joy

*Larry Kimmel, USA*



**the door**

the little one  
is lost, wandering  
through woods  
up hills, down dales  
over the rocks

she had tried  
to open the heavy door  
to lift the latch  
there is some magic  
she does not know

she sits  
confused and puzzled  
on the shore  
a blue whale is breaching  
far out at sea

there are  
slow strange creatures  
on the land  
great things she knows  
from picture books

the night grows cold  
stars fill the sky  
snow falls  
the child shivers  
and turns back up the path

Skylark

on tiptoes  
she looks in the window  
the room is dark  
she sits on the porch  
crying *mama, mama*

*Joy McCall, England*

## Skylark

### **night rains**

night rain  
hammering down  
on the roof  
and on the garden stones  
splashing, dripping, pooling

little rivers  
running down the lane  
to the marshes  
geese asleep, floating  
above the drowned grass

further north  
the streets, towns  
green fields all flooded  
the raging rivers  
have burst their banks

cars and houses  
swamped with muddy water  
closed the pubs  
the shops the churches  
water everywhere

and low  
over the sound of wind  
and rushing waters  
a voice singing  
*sleep love, all will be well*

*Joy McCall, England*

## Skylark

### questions

does a tree  
sleep at night  
and the sap slow  
and settle, and rise again  
in the morning?

does the mouse  
beneath the tree  
lifting its head  
to look at the moon  
know how beautiful it is?

does the spider  
sense the symmetry  
of its web?  
do the birds know  
the magic of flight?

does the grass  
feel the wind blowing  
or the rain falling?  
do the planets know  
they are circling?

what is knowing?  
we think we are wise  
but we are fools perhaps  
to the wind, the rain  
the tree, the moonlit mouse

*Joy McCall, England*

### **Swimming the Time-Stream**

I swim  
in pleasant sleep  
time's curving, empty way —  
it's always there, and always  
knows my name.

Your soul,  
too, dreamt as mine,  
reposed by that river  
where mind to mind is drawn  
to drink of time.

*Michael McClintock, USA*

### **Pine Hill**

Somewhere I've read  
a million tons of blue steel  
built the Golden Gate  
but, clearly, it weighs nothing  
spanning the west wind.

Hungry, pelicans  
arrow down the channel.  
Wave your kerchief,  
for me, love,  
from your porch on Pine Hill.

*Michael McClintock, USA*

**Goddess of Spring**

Just how long  
will my heart's winter  
stay frozen?  
Each day, lately, it melts a drop  
when you pass down the lane.

Spring is overdue,  
I know that much —  
I will go to the shed,  
clean the gardening tools,  
prepare to work in the mud.

Here you are again,  
passing in the window,  
your long hair  
shining in the sunlight  
like waters in a brook.

Of course I wonder  
what your errands are about —  
and what is your name?  
The air unravels around you,  
time tilts, and days grow warm.

*Michael McClintock, USA*

Skylark

**one blade at a time**

she died  
I sit alone  
feel the wind blow . . .  
watching my life  
in the eddies

I sit  
and watch grass grow  
one blade at a time  
counting the minutes  
since she died

untended garden  
gone to seed  
and weeds . . .  
days pass slowly  
years fly by

I walk  
as on ice  
spring's warmth on my back . . .  
our old dog lingers  
in the sun

*David F. Noble, USA*

**House of Anne Frank**

falling rain  
in Amsterdam  
this same rain  
was falling  
during the war

that famous  
bookcase door is open . . .  
like a ninja  
I quietly slide into  
Anne's secret space

going around  
the empty rooms . . .  
I think of  
loneliness, depression, and  
madness of Anne Frank

I still see  
a long line of people  
standing  
around the House  
even in the cold rain

*Kozue Uzawa, Canada*



**Her Blue Room**

she lived  
in a snow globe  
with a small giraffe  
my little mother  
dressed in blue

I collect driftwood  
on another shore  
she dropped in the deep  
from the yacht of her mind  
little blue lifeboat

curled around  
the foot of the giraffe  
in my mother's room  
was it a cougar  
the quiet imminence I felt

near the end  
my mother swam in circles  
working hard  
to spin the globe herself  
paint it nothing but blue

her heart of gold  
in standing stone  
wise woman  
a blue egg breaks  
on the western sky

Skylark

top shelf in our room  
tightly sealed  
in a silver urn  
my mother's secret  
her bones are blue

*Kath Abela Wilson, USA*



Skylark

**raw silk**

Pamela A. Babusci, USA  
& Paresh Tiwari, India

i wish  
for you to wear me  
like raw silk —  
mulberry leaves  
spinning in the wind

*this dawn  
lost in the taste of  
your skin  
i wrap my soul  
in the night gone by*

you have  
nailed me to  
the cross of love  
resurrection lilies  
blossom at my feet

*many moons  
have wandered by  
our window . . .  
the tiny birth-mark  
on your right breast*

cobalt-blue stars  
orbiting the ebony sky  
my stellar body  
belongs to you  
& only you

Skylark



by Pamela A. Babusci

**Nothing is Real**

Susan Constable, Canada  
& Kathy Kituai, Australia

umpteen times  
I walk up and down  
these hundred stairs . . .  
that shiny stone, ragged leaf  
and shadow of a butterfly

*wood ducks —  
that flash of one  
opal feather  
again you stand out  
from all the rest*

bold lines,  
angles and bright colours  
draw me  
toward Picasso's nudes —  
I sit on this bench, alone

*among boxes  
under the house  
this sweater  
she knitted just for him  
folded for charity*

crayoned patterns  
adorn each piece of paper —  
across the sea  
children wake to discover  
a thousand origami cranes

Skylark

*strung on string  
two cardboard swans  
in the wind  
nothing is real in the way  
you turn towards our son*

after the play  
her warm voice and smile  
can't win my trust . . .  
I greet Hansel and Gretel,  
avoid the wicked witch

*in the end  
were we just a fantasy . . .  
four children  
a cottage and the vow  
'til death do us part*

**Mementos**

Janet Lynn Davis, USA  
& *Jo McInerney, Australia*

what to keep,  
what to throw away . . .  
tiny rhinestones  
missing from the wings  
of her butterfly brooch

*we repair  
her diamante bow  
before pinning it  
to her burial shift . . .  
the hope of resurrection*



**Back and Forth**

Amelia Fielden, Australia  
& *Kath Abela Wilson, USA*

summer garden  
garden of poets listening  
to lyrics  
caress the opened roses  
tune the green-leafed breeze

*cross country and ocean  
poets flock to turn  
virtual to actual  
short songs in the same garden  
for a few moments*

precious moments  
when time seems to stop  
before the clocks  
start panting again  
to keep up with us

*flying by  
memories they say will flash  
before our eyes —  
in dream-time I keep words  
from escaping*

'to sleep, to dream' . . .  
I ride a ferris wheel  
eyes wide-open  
to the clear-cut scenery,  
to my dubious future

Skylark

*back and forth  
the lilting swing  
of a cable car  
up and down the mountain  
as we compose ourselves*

**Passing Spirits**

*Jan Foster, Australia*  
& *Beatrice Yell, Australia*

*cold brush*  
*of fear on my neck —*  
*passing spirits*  
*. . . wind races across the field*  
*leaving footprints in the grass*

gold saucer eyes . . .  
in a sudden rush of air  
the mopoke owl  
swoops past us to pounce  
upon the woodpile

*a heron rises*  
*gracefully from the wetlands*  
*my heart lifts*  
*to hear your message*  
*of a new baby*

many hours  
spent mastering notes  
on a silvery reed —  
far away, by the river  
the carolling of magpies

*camping out*  
*on the western plains*  
*I can hear*  
*in the silence*  
*the music of the stars*

## Skylark

on a cliff  
we call to the mountain caves  
opposite —  
sounds bounce back to us  
an eerie cacophony

**The Distance Between Chairs**

Michele L. Harvey, USA  
& Tom Clausen, USA

this life  
of rust and stardust  
on my tongue tip  
the taste of champagne  
as another year begins

*our spiral circling  
on this mortal coil  
here in the living room  
the distance  
between chairs*

the way  
a discussion diverges . . .  
I follow the path  
up a steep narrow slope  
just wide enough for one

*almost  
too far to see  
those specks of birds  
must be on their way  
to a world beyond this one*

**The Smell of Snow**

Michele L. Harvey, USA  
& Tom Clausen, USA

midsummer  
tarmac bubbles in the heat  
thinking of it  
there is no response  
to not caring

*the novelty to find  
some warmth in cold  
and to feel something  
in the barren stand  
of my chosen lot in life*

where best to use  
my life's fallow passion . . .  
autumn leaves  
lie deep, beneath the maple  
and the sky smells of snow

*was it meant to be  
that whole years  
would come and go  
donning the yoke  
while my heart yearns*

## Skylark

### Prism

Michele L. Harvey, USA  
& *Kath Abela Wilson, USA*

a rainbow shard  
from the bedroom window  
some doubt  
my life would ever settle  
into place, without you

*open window  
or skylight crack  
one feather  
from the wild rainbow bird  
on my study floor*

a song  
she'd sing while she worked  
flown now  
with the little bluebird  
over the rainbow's arch

*just a step  
into the looking glass  
of my mother's eyes  
how they lit up when she danced  
and wore the sky*

~for Kath Abela's mother, Dec 15, 1920 - Dec 5, 2015

Skylark

**A Different Shade of Awe**

A Sequence with Eight Voices

another day  
of howling gales  
and bitter cold  
this roaring month of March  
where are the gentle lambs?

find me  
defiant and immune  
facing memories  
finding ways to heal  
and reasons to live

sharp corners  
curved and wavy edges  
these odd pieces  
just won't coalesce  
to solve the puzzle of me

at high tide  
I try to curl my toes  
around sea-foam  
as if the joy I feel today  
might be gone tomorrow

as the family  
drifts off to sleep  
I part  
my study curtains,  
give free reign to the moon



## Skylark

it isn't only  
that you brew me tea  
when I am tired  
it's which cup you bring it in  
. . . and why

spring dawns  
without enough words  
for green . . .  
each leaf in my garden  
a different shade of awe

the wonder  
of a midweek dawn  
I resolve  
to live each day  
as if it were my first

Poets, in order, by tanka:

Kirsty Karkow, *USA*, Carol Raisfeld, *USA*, Julie Thorndyke, *Australia*, Carole MacRury, *USA*, Maria Steyn, *South Africa*, Beverley George, *Australia*, Susan Constable, *Canada*, Dorothy McLaughlin, *USA*.

The tanka beginning 'it isn't only . . . appears in "*Those Special Days*" — a limited edition perpetual tanka calendar produced by Beverley George & David Terelinck in late 2015. The calendar may be purchased for \$22 AUD, including post. A PayPal option is available. Enquiries to David Terelinck: [tanka\\_oz@yahoo.com.au](mailto:tanka_oz@yahoo.com.au)

**One Memory at a Time**

Kathy Kituai, Australia  
& *Michelle Brock, Australia*

jonquils  
backlit with sunlight  
she never noticed  
beside the bird bath  
before packing —

*concrete path  
to the clothes line —  
the indentation  
where he cracked macadamias  
in winter sunshine*

I finger tunes  
on an upright piano  
she used to play  
moonlight mapping bare floor boards . . .  
that girl who sat listening

*cupping  
grandma's conch shell  
against my ear  
I hear the constant murmur  
of my own ancestral sea*

your head rests  
in my open palm  
shall I stroke  
the softness of fur  
or breathe in time with you?

Skylark

*newborn grandchild  
I had almost forgotten  
the weight of such joy  
I'll borrow your lullaby  
from a magpie's song*

World War II —  
cups of rationed sugar,  
tea and flour  
mother exchanged,  
with neighbours no longer there

*a century  
of prudent measuring  
her 8-ounce jug  
consigned to a bargain bin  
outside the thrift shop*

little by little  
one memory at a time —  
there was that day  
picking berries in autumn  
he told her not to forget

Skylark

## Whisper of Tall Grass

Marcus Liljedahl, Sweden  
& *Anna Maris, Sweden*

summer's end  
our voices in the shape  
of billowing clouds

*carried away by the breeze  
a perfect dandelion clock*

liquid sun  
leaning into you  
beyond myself

*holding that fragile shell  
the rough hands of a nomad*

*train carriage  
a symphony playing  
on laptops*

still on a roll . . .  
the landscapes of Sibelius

table of masks  
I sketch serpent tongues  
in my notebook

*in the whisper of tall grass  
a scent of apple blossoms*

Skylark

tranquil shore  
a part of me is washed up  
with the seashells

*among the sandcastles  
the call of a lost mermaid*

*mirror lake  
she mourns the loss  
of her singing voice*

at the break of dawn  
a nightingale calls down the stars

gridlock  
red lights lead the way  
to a hard rain

*in my silver locket  
a light summer memory*

close to the fire  
her every word trembling  
in his hands

*memories of a war  
in neatly written letters*

Skylark

yet another drink  
the vigilant gaze  
of cathedral saints

*among winding ivy  
the grin of a gargoyle*

first rays of sun  
a butterfly unfolds  
as the night gown opens

*the flutter of brittle wings  
ready to fly*

Skylark

**Unexpected**

Joy McCall, England  
& *David Rice, USA*

her tail  
and her courage, gone  
she finds shelter  
on the same branch  
day after day

*not easy  
to sit still —  
thoughts spinning  
feelings untethered —  
and just listen*

that aching  
to take to the sky  
out of the cage  
to sing my own song  
even out of tune

*yesterday  
I heard you  
— a gull with missing feathers  
gliding just offshore —  
speak of seeing fish fly*

a grey quill  
drifts down to the deck  
the old sailor  
dips it in the ink, and writes  
“how can I catch the wind?”

## Skylark

*just stretch your wings . . .  
wasn't that you soaring?  
checked the field guide  
yes . . . accidental . . . rarely seen here . . .  
I'll send you a picture*



**Come Sit Down**

Don Miller, USA  
& *Joy McCall, England*

the gentle rain  
of a soft guitar tune  
from another land  
the whispers  
of sunflowers

*tomorrow*  
*the Autumn Equinox*  
*today the west wind*  
*blowing the black seeds*  
*over the wet ground*

I sit on her brick ledge  
listening to the flutes  
of wood chimes in the wind  
won't you *come sit down*  
on the garden wall and listen too

\*Inspired after listening to "Come Sit Down" a song by Holly Lerski:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxzhMJvqV8Q>

Skylark

**sparrow**

Don Wentworth, USA  
& *Joy McCall, England*

the spirit  
bruised, battered  
hung up high  
for close inspection  
what say we, friend?

*we look through  
to the other side  
and see  
bright flashes of light  
darting, spinning, flying*

connections  
all over this place  
sparrow threading  
ribbon and stalk  
nest and world

**slow rain**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
& *Joy McCall, England*

foreshore fog  
whitewashing  
my morning eyes  
I shed salt tears  
beneath an onion sun

*I am there  
in the slow rain  
on your face  
seeing the morning  
through your eyes*

come with me  
to the pine shade  
where sea wind  
dries the cheeks  
of weeping statues

**wild thyme**

Liam Wilkinson, England  
& *Joy McCall, England*

swaddled in wisps  
of cigar smoke  
and old English ballads  
my young mind  
blooming

*humming*  
*the Skye boat song*  
*dreaming of mist*  
*on highland hills*  
*the scent of wild thyme*

quietly undoing  
the fiddle case clip  
aching to know  
my way around  
*The Fields of Athenry*

## Rengay





**Coming and Going**

Yvonne Hales, Australia  
& *Matthew Paul (UK)*

at low water  
liveried shelduck  
collect on the mud

*road signs all rebranded  
by the county council*

fellwalkers pore over  
a tea-coloured  
survey map

*I trace the contours  
of my weary face  
in the bathroom mirror*

haunting shakuhachi  
soothes a furrowed brow

*over Fenland fields  
the evening light  
comes and goes*

Skylark

**Threshold**

Mariko Kitakubo, Japan  
& *Kath Abela Wilson, USA*

Finn Air  
we cross  
the dateline

*a leaf through the door  
lost again*

boomerang  
the autumn sky  
between my fingers

*we pull from both sides  
but don't break  
the wish bone*

when the swing  
switches directions

*birdsong  
we meet  
at the clock tower*

\*celebrating our time together at HNA and Tanka Sunday, 2015 in Schenectady and Albany,  
NY



Skylark

**Wild Asters**

Giselle Maya, France  
& Sonam Chokhi, Bhutan

please come and join  
my guest, the wind in the pines,  
in my small tea hut

—*Basho*

*shizuka*  
at the tea ceremony  
harvest moon rising

*where snow leopards roam  
untrodden snow*

on the *tsukubai*  
a lid of ice and snow  
winter retreat

*dusk window  
she sits alone  
sipping memories*

wild asters on the hill  
the way of tea for life

*mountain shrine  
offerings of tea and incense  
rise to the sky*

**Authors' notes:**

*shizuka*: serenity

*tsukubai*: the stone water basin in the garden near the teahouse  
holding fresh water to purify hands and mouth with a bamboo dipper  
before entering the tearoom,  
as one of the four principles of Chado (Tea) is purity

Skylark

**Autumn Anemones**

Giselle Maya, France  
& Tora, France

*tokonoma*  
a white anemone blends  
with its shadow

*straw sandals*  
*set upright by the entrance*

pine song  
or an enormous kettle  
simmering

*haiken*  
*we bend from the waist*  
*to view a teabowl*

without a bow  
cat and east wind enter

*incense fills*  
*this intimate space*  
*heavenly peace*

**Authors' Notes:**

*tokonoma*: present in most Japanese style rooms with tatami mats

*roji*: a path of stones leading to the tearoom

*haiken*: the formal viewing of teabowls by the guests after drinking the green powdered tea (macha) whisked with hot water.

Skylark

**the familiar tune**

Geethanjali Rajan, India  
& *Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan*

typhoon warning  
the sonorous tone  
of a double reed

*a litter of shadows  
in the toppled temple*

cosmos blossoms  
an urchin shares his home  
with a stray

*the only light  
under the old stone bridge  
a cotoneaster bed*

cicadas start to sing  
the familiar tune

*all along the road  
buddleia to buddleia  
a swallowtail searches*

Skylark

**On the Cusp**

David Terelinck, Australia  
& Carol Judkins, USA

earth hour . . .  
the equinox needs  
no prompting

*in the green-dark woods  
fireflies at twilight*

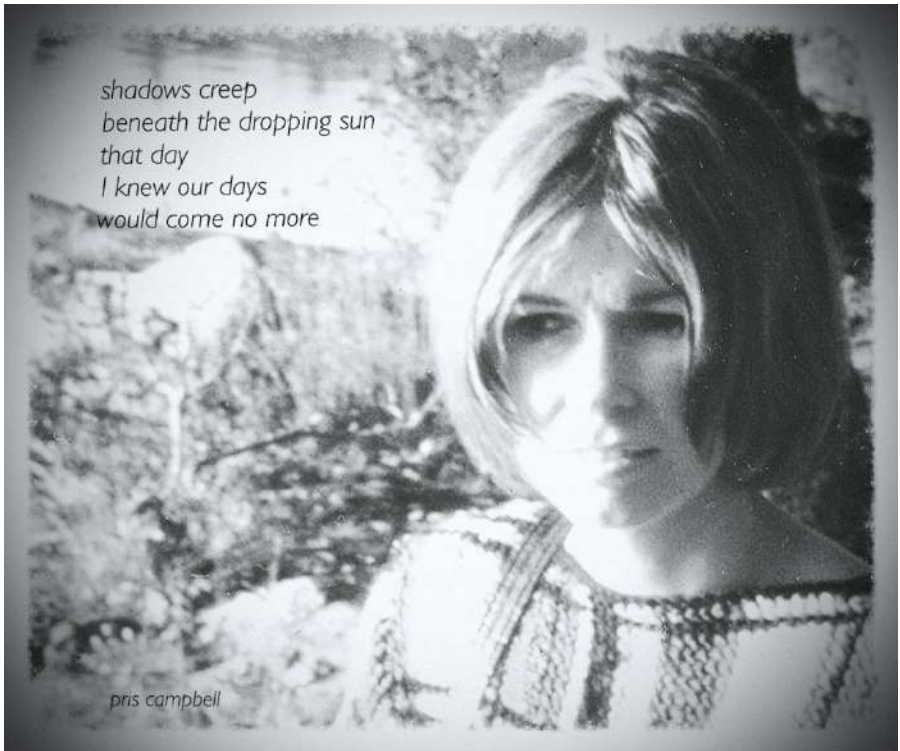
somewhere  
between sea and sky  
a new moon rises

*thick fog  
cloaks the estuary —  
hidden within, the sun*

times we say yes  
when we really mean no

*on the cusp —  
our resolute steps  
in darkness and light*

Skylark



*Pris Campbell, USA*

Skylark



returning to the lake  
after he died  
golden oldies from his radio station  
drift between bangs  
from the squeaky screen door

*Wendy Bourke, Canada*

## Tanka Prose







Skylark

**Threads**

*Mary Frederick Ahearn, USA*

*She watched and taught the girls that sang at their embroidery frames  
while the great silk flowers grew from their needles.*

—Louise Jordan Miln, *The Feast of Lanterns*

Some are self-taught, others learn from their mothers, aunts, or good friends. We share our skills. But mostly we sew alone, in solitude. The hands are busy, the mind quiets, becoming contemplative, still. There's the beauty of the cloth, linen, cotton, natural or dyed. The simplicity of the slender silver needle. And the thread, the twist, the floss — each skein of color brings an association, that connection to a memory, perhaps a season. Tomato red, sunset coral, willow green-yellow, stone gray, and light blue tints of rain. Moss, shell, stone, and snow — all in your hand. Image turns to memory, to words, some for poems, some for prayer, all toward the peace that passes all understanding.

pulling  
floss through beeswax  
to strengthen the thread  
the scent of honey  
in a winter room

saving snips  
of leftover twist  
for the robins  
dreams, hopes, prayers  
woven in spring nests

**On the Cusp of Winter**

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

An unfamiliar car crunches slowly up my quarter-mile gravel driveway. I hope it's not the Jehovah's Witnesses again. An elderly lady climbs out of the driver's seat. *I don't want to intrude*, she says, *but I was born in this house, in 1938. I just lost my husband, and I had a yen to see my homeplace again.* Her eyes swim with tears. She points to the well-house. *I remember my Daddy climbing down into that well*, she says. *My, it was a long way down!*

water  
rising from a deep place . . .  
the last petals  
of the autumn-blooming cherry  
drift earthward

Skylark

## Grease and Grace

*Anne Benjamin, Australia*

As a young man, my husband rode a Royal Enfield 350cc motorbike known as a Bullet: a single cylinder, four stroke, 17 HP, four-speed, air-cooled Indian icon of the roads. With a top speed of 110 kilometres per hour, the Bullet was part of our courtship and became our family vehicle. Bullets have a distinctive pulsing exhaust thump, so I usually heard my husband return home 300 metres before he rode into view.

he takes me  
to meet his family —  
I hang on  
wind in my eyes  
and six metres of sari

Thirty years later, on one of our regular trips back to Chennai, we visit an old college friend of my husband's: a fine leather craftsman and an exceptional photographer who, having turned sixty, has just invested everything into restoring and selling Enfield Bullets. His wife greets us on a gloomy wet evening at a narrow entrance. She guides us under a dripping roof along planks placed above pooled water.

The workroom-cum-showroom is filled with motorbikes — all Bullets — in various stages of repair and re-construction. We pull up chairs, chat and take tea and cake from a table cluttered with tools and paraphernalia.

wrenches, wheels  
disassembled chrome bits  
from a chassis —  
rear-view mirrors reflect  
a jigsaw dream

## Skylark

My husband's friend and his wife have difficulty finding mechanics with sufficient specialisation for their business; they both spend long days at the workshop. The man eats his cake with hands engrained with grease; enthuses about being able to indulge his passion for the Bullet; is cheerful about his lack of business acumen. His wife shrugs at the "showroom" her husband has turned into a work-pit; at the fact they live in a partially constructed home. She is dressed in loose top and long pants, her hair caught up in a soft twist. Her skin is flawless, without make-up. She is charming, elegant and radiant.

incessant rain  
drips through cracks  
into a dark pool  
rainbowed with oil  
a single lotus

Skylark

**Cliffs**

*Kyle D. Craig, USA*

waves no longer waves  
by the time they touch shore . . .  
a swallow soars  
over sea oats, swaying  
in the summer wind

It was the year we traveled to the cliffs of Moher in County Clare and looked out towards O'Brien's tower, the Aran Islands. A combination of height and rock made me want to stay inside the gift shop, but you forged past the sign that read of immense gusts of wind and the number of people who fell each year to their ends. You stood upon the edge, suspended over the blue blanket of the ocean, with outstretched arms and the wind pushing at your back.

a frigate bird  
disappears into the water —  
I find myself  
doubting commitments  
made to others

Skylark

**hovered hallows**  
*Susan Diridoni, USA*

staining stems  
and woody fragrances  
clumps of bee-hovered-over herbs  
some delicacy of sylvan chemistry  
brushes across me every time  
the leaving lets me know it  
will hang in the air  
and immediately will I long for it  
to bring my face low again, blossom-low,  
catalyst-claimed

once wild and  
abandoned the lot next door  
pathway  
to possum, skunk, raccoon  
a sprite in the old pear tree

Skylark

**Fault Lines**

*Autumn Noelle Hall, USA*

At the breakfast table, I say, “Fukushima radiation.” He says, “Organic produce.” I say, “High crime — and cost of living.” He says, “Ocean — and redwoods.” I say, “Sixteen lanes of bumper-to-bumper traffic.” He says, “BART\*.” With each point scored, we gain a little distance, lose a little ground, like each other a little less. *Everything that is, is because other things are.* We would not be fighting were we not leaving the mountains to move to San Francisco. We would not be moving had he not come to hate his job here in Colorado; he would not hate his job had he never moved here in the first place; and, of course, he would never have moved here had it not been for me.

blame . . .  
round and round and round  
she goes  
and where she stops  
nobody knows

\*Bay Area Rapid Transit

But I can stop. Stop seeing him as my enemy. Stop making myself his. For just this moment, at the risk of flying off completely, I can choose to loosen my grip on samsara’s merry-go-round.

infusing the kitchen  
a lavender-lemon scent  
Buddha’s Hand  
opening its citron self  
inviting me to breathe

---

**Note:** Less than a month after this piece was written, my husband’s San Francisco job mysteriously fell through. I was reminded of the old Buddhist wisdom story about the boy who finds a wild horse, breaks his leg riding it, and narrowly escapes an army recruitment as a result. Bad luck, my husband’s cancelled assignment...? Good luck, my own welcoming of one more mountain spring . . .? Perhaps. —*ANH*

**The Gambler**

*Marilyn Humbert, Australia*

In the middle of the 1000-acre paddock he listens to straw stalks rustling in summer heat, watches spiralling dust funnel upwards, and spots an occasional crow circling overhead. Yesterday's busyness of harvesters, augers and trucks is forgotten as he surveys withered, splintered stubble waiting to be fired in autumn.

He turns and sighs, knowing in a few weeks, the cycle of ploughing, sowing, reaping will begin once more.

the farmer  
throws a dice  
every day  
sky watching —  
the vagaries of weather



Skylark

## Marionettes

*Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK*

promises  
of virgins in paradise —  
12 year olds  
playing hopscotch  
from light to shade

As the girls laugh outside on the dusty street, a man discusses the failing monsoon and poor yields with the farmer and his wife. Agreeing that it is so hard to make ends meet, he offers to take their daughter to Mumbai where she can work as a housemaid and send them money.

"We can't marry her for maybe another four years. At least she can do something useful until then"

marching on  
for the One Master  
or another —  
her wide eyes filled  
with unformed dreams

At the Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus, they meet an uncle. He runs his eyes over her as the two men discuss something. After a lot of gesticulation and waving arms, some money exchanges hands. The village man tells her to do what the uncle says and that she will make a lot of money. He says he will tell her mum and dad that everything is fine.

In the cab, uncle's hands go wherever his eyes had been before. She tries to push them away, but he grips her tighter. And then slaps her.

In Kamathipura, lots of girls and women are lounging on doorsteps. An older woman, takes her in and gives her some food.

Skylark

the final call  
for passengers to board —  
everyone  
tells her she's good  
for nothing

She washes away the sweat and grime, eats something,  
catches some sleep. Now she wears make up over her bruises.  
She sits on her bed, waiting, for the next man. At least some  
money is reaching home.

Kalashnikovs  
leave behind ripples  
of silence —  
the rustle of banknotes  
in uncle's pocket

Skylark

**Christmas Eve**  
**Gary LeBel, USA**

*'Lorsque les loupes vivent de vent . . .'*  
—François Villon

'Whipping Post' bursts out of the watering hole and echoes down the empty side street, fading as you round the corner; the dry, brittle hinges of withered palm-leaves creak as they lift and fall with the mild winds blowing in from the ocean. Squatting on telephone wires, stiff-necked crows blurt out stifled cries that sound more like the lamentations of men whose dreams are broken.

Beyond the bar, beyond the vacant parking lot where the night sea breaks and crawls  
    over floodlit sands,  
    silhouettes laugh and stumble along the tide-line as if  
    they were the last two left on earth.

Arm-in-arm  
with a cougar in red pumps,  
the twenty-something in sneakers  
leaves a snow of bells  
as he closes the door behind them

---

*Lorsque les loupes vivent de vent . . .* 'When wolves are fed on wind . . .'  
The song 'Whipping Post' was written and recorded in 1969 by the Allman Brothers Band.

Skylark

**The Sprig**  
*Gary LeBel, USA*

It had snowed during the night. At dawn I went out walking. On the way back to your place, I plucked a small branch-let of white pine dusted with snow to give you.

When I returned you were awake but still in bed. "Here," I said smiling, and you took the sprig awkwardly as if it were someone else's gift you'd been given by mistake or even worse, some strange prickly insect. I blushed with embarrassment.

I said, "Heian princes and consorts once attached poems to sprigs of pine or orange blossoms and sent them to their lovers the morning after."

Still the blank stare. "What is a 'hain' " you said, "and where is my poem?"

It lay folded in my back pocket, and tonight it fell  
like a pressed leaf  
out of the book I was reading.

January first,  
a night of exile and silence,  
the full maelstrom left  
with the dirty dishes  
at the restaurant

**The Deepest Cracks**  
*David Terelinck, Australia*

It's the eyes that bother her the most.

She feels she must get them right. Especially being windows to the soul, as they say. But every time they are far too pointed at the inner canthus. She looks at her notes from the life drawing class.

the truth  
found behind iris  
and pupil . . .  
this constant illusion  
that it's you I can trust

She punches the clay down again, wets her hands, and starts to shape from scratch. As her thumbs gouge out eye sockets, she wonders how God managed to get it right. Did he have any self-doubt when he was shaping his first face? What was the blueprint he followed in his mind?

the heat  
from wood-fired kilns  
is there ever  
a time in our life  
when we're fully centred?

She thumps the clay again. Imagines it is her ex-husband. Then she thinks of the time her cheek gave way under his fist. She lost count of how many weeks she had to take food through a straw. But that's all in the past now . . .

## Skylark

how often  
can we reshape a life?  
the deepest cracks  
are where kintsugi masters  
find the greatest challenge

## Skylark

### **Roots**

*Neal Whitman, USA*

Today, even on firm ground, we stumble into another season of colored maple leaves. I tumble head-first and the leaves watch me fall. Face down, I feel the hum of the earth. Whoosh! Falling from the dead pine, its last needles rain. One blast and the birches are bare. In the last light on the last day of fall, the last apple falls. Under the cypress tree, the violet hour spreads a blanket over me. I remain face down. Still I feel the hum of the earth. Vibrations, notes knee deep. Bullfrog meditations. My fingers poke into the damp ground. Reaching up to touch my fingers, roots. Tree roots send nutrients into my body electric. A not undistinguished poet had sent me a letter, handwritten and barely legible. His apology: "My manual typewriter refuses to type." He advises me to open my first poetry recital "not babbling about yourself, but with a poem." I open my first recital:

There was a time  
when words were treasured,  
an ancient time called  
The Holy Nomen Empire.  
Now we value bits and bytes.

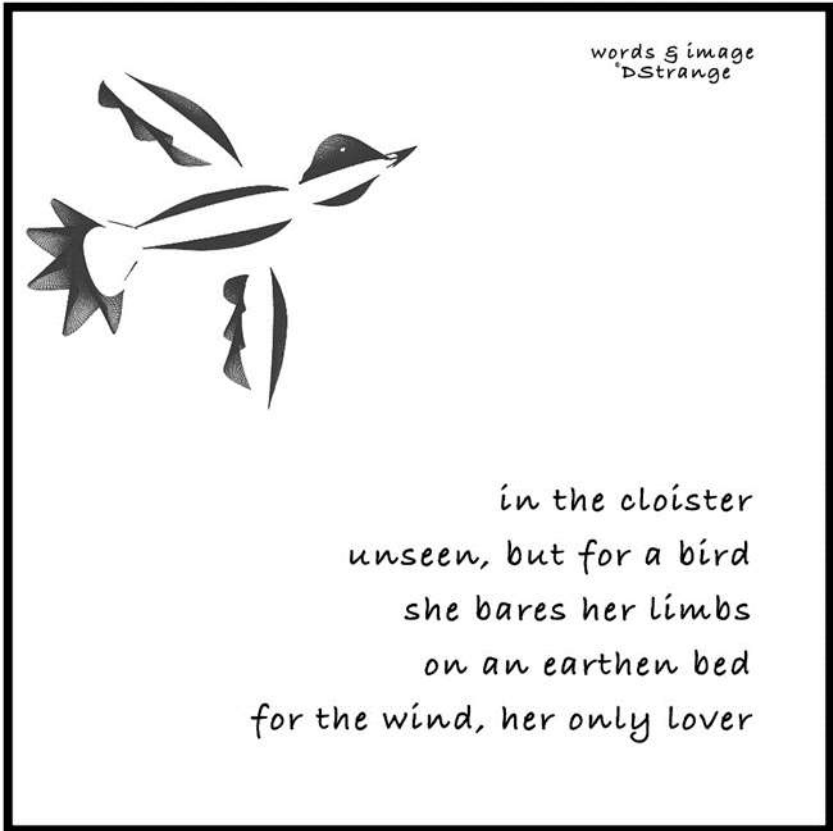
In 1951, Wynn Bullock took two iconic photographs: "Child in the Forest" and "Old Typewriter." In the former, Wynn's five-year old daughter lies face down on a forest floor he viewed as "virginal." He hoped that the cyclic character of natural forces would be evident. In the latter, he found on the same day a typewriter in the muck along the edge of an old road. This common artifact that had once inked letters had now fallen back into nature and become part of the organic whole.

Skylark

God took a selfie  
under the Tree of Life  
He shook it once  
and out fell an apple  
Steve Jobs took the first bite



Skylark



*Debbie Strange, USA*

Skylark



*Sandi Pray, USA*

## **Special Feature**

### **Tanka Prose: Experiments & Reflections**





## **Experimental Responsive Tanka Prose or Tanka Tales Renga**

*Marilyn Humbert, Australia*  
& Samantha Sirimanne Hyde, Australia

The exercise is loosely based on a haibun-renga schema that I was involved with in 2012 set for Bottlebrush Tanka Group by Beverley George: [http://www.haikuo.org/2012/03/about\\_haibunrenga\\_a\\_brief\\_posi.html](http://www.haikuo.org/2012/03/about_haibunrenga_a_brief_posi.html) and I have gained further experience writing haibun renga in a team with Jan Foster, Anne Benjamin and Keitha Keyes: <http://www.ahapoetry.com/ahalynx/282article.html> and another with Amelia Fielden, Carmel Summers and Jane Reichhold added to the team: <http://www.ahapoetry.com/ahalynx/282collabs.html>.

**Aim:** A collaboration, telling a story using link and shift similar to that in renga.

Although when writing tanka prose the prose component can be any length and the number of tanka is not limited, for the purpose of this exercise we decided to keep the prose brief and one tanka each turn as we write alternately as per the schema.

To achieve an overall story written by two people writing alternatively

The tanka to link and shift except for the last tanka which links, shifts and loops back to the beginning.

The tanka stand alone, and when read without the prose, link, shift and tell a story

The prose, when read without the tanka, links, shifts and tells a story.

### **Guidelines:**

*Prose* component is

Written in any tense

## Skylark

Prose is brief, giving a background for poetry lines which follow.

No direct reference back to anything beyond the immediately preceding piece, e.g. if the moon has already been mentioned, refer to it obliquely by some other term.

Each new piece must brush lightly against the one before and move off in a new direction as with responsive sequences.

Prose for this exercise precedes poetry component

*Poetry*

Must link/shift

Must stand alone

Must always move off in a new direction

Mention the required component as per the schema.

Elements Schema for two people

*Marilyn(M) & Samantha(S), Nov 2015*

1

*M* tanka Free Choice

2

*M* prose + Free Choice

3

*S* prose + fire

4

*M* prose + earth

5

*S* prose + Free Choice

6

*M* prose + Free Choice

7

*S* prose + air

8

*M* prose + water

9

*S* prose + Free Choice

10

*M* tanka Free Choice

Skylark

**Echoes Across the Ages**  
Tanka Tales Renga

*Marilyn Humbert & Samantha Sirimanne Hyde*

*winter dusk  
oozes across the horizon  
rainbow colours  
welcome night's cape —  
your hand brushes mine*

*The south wind is sharp; a chill penetrates my heavy clothing. The summit of the hill is covered in fog, and it's difficult to find the trail back to camp in failing light. My feet slip as night dew settles on the rock strewn track.*

*an owl's hoot  
ripples the starlight  
I hear whisperings  
of ancient wanderers  
among tree shadows*

Far away we see silhouettes of smoke fingering a hillock. We check the rural fire service website again. It says in an hour the bush fires will be at our doorstep. We have to leave now. I hurry across the tinder dry grass to open the gate.

daylight glares  
through charred foliage  
on the road home  
my mind stuck on death —  
soaring black kites\*

\* birds of prey

Skylark

*Near the steep cliffs of our cottage, giant honey-comb cracks  
have opened, scarring the seared earth. A carcass, buried  
without ceremony on All-Hallows eve is exposed at the foot of  
the ancient granite towers.*

*interred  
in cold grey soil  
bones  
gnawed and splintered  
our dog's treasure*

My sister and I skip around our gardener who has dug a giant hole to replant the banana tree. Suddenly he jumps into the cavity to claw around the soil with his bare hands. Finally, he emerges brushing the dirt off a large opaque rock.

*chance find  
this palm-sized nugget,  
misty deep blue  
if only I'd valued you  
before you'd gone*

*The hoary first-mate says the Merpeople's city teeters on the  
edge of an abyss where ancient currents converge in a giant  
whirlpool. Telling of glimpses, mermen riding horses, guard-  
ing merfolk harvesting fish and kelp beneath the glow of iri-  
descent lights. Close by, a bullion fleet is moored to submerged  
docks: ghost ships manned by pirate spectres that rise, sailing  
on storm-riven nights hunting the living, crossing churning  
seas.*

*what lies  
beneath foaming waves  
in the chasm  
pieces of eight  
or a mermaid's necklace*



## Skylark

Five days after the tsunami, the bodies still float in the lagoon amongst the debris, the huge gush of water having deepened its channels. Coastal sand dunes lie eroded and seaside vegetation languishes. The sheer force of the waves has even uprooted sturdy coconut palms. The odour of festering, bloated, water-logged flesh clings to the air. Though we cover our noses with handkerchiefs, we have no other option but to breathe in this overpowering atmosphere of death.

an emerald earring  
the only lasting marker  
to identify my cousin  
in recurring nightmares  
we splash on that beach

*Leaving the drudgery of my father's compound. Frost-bound grass snaps beneath my footfalls. Dawn is already warming the earth: mist melting, rime becoming droplets, sliding off stems and leaves, nourishing the undergrowth. As I reach the escarpment, the sun is peeping over the ridge, peering into the valley, bouncing off hundreds of canvas tents. Home to refugees from the quake and aftermath of flooding. It is here I will find food, water, sanctuary and anonymity amongst the displaced. Here I wait to begin a new life of independence and freedom of choice.*

*needing more  
than food and water  
this caged bird  
sings for freedom  
to fly from these shores*

The day I collect my passport from the embassy in Colombo, I'm feverish with anticipation. Even on the return journey home in a jam-packed bus, I can't refrain from opening my satchel just a smidgen to take a peek and to touch the

## Skylark

visa sticker attached to a page inside. The wavy red lines across the label look like vivid rays of sunshine dancing on a river's swells. After three years, the wait is over. Now comes the uncertainty of flying to a country I'm yet to see and starting all over again — making something out of it, stumbling and learning, creating new connections. Let the chips fall where they may.

free falling  
soaring across emerald dells  
over azure oceans  
I toss and turn that night  
dreaming of space travel

*a song*  
*echoes across the ages*  
*moon man*  
*sings of his journey*  
*'til Mithras bridles his horses*

**Reflections on the Bisociation (1) of Verse and Prose  
in Tanka Prose**

*Charles D. Tarlton, USA*

*Prose is when all the lines except the last go on to the margin. Poetry is when some of them fall short of it.*

—Jeremy Bentham (2)

**1**

Amongst the several categories of poetry — like sonnets, ballads, odes, elegies, and villanelles — perhaps none has a single defining trait as salient to its nature as the juxtaposition of verse and prose in the tanka prose. At the core of what makes a tanka prose (beyond the requirement of at least one passage of prose alongside a tanka) is the expectation of how they will conjoin. (3) It is probably useful at this point to distinguish among prose, verse (the tanka) and poem (the tanka prose).

And that is the main question: how the force of the prose will require from the poet a fitting or proportionate verse response and how that verse in the new larger context of prose and verse together will re-read the prose and lift the whole “tanka prose” to the level of poetry.

The idea is crucial to tanka prose; let me provide a couple of examples:

The old wind chimes, that had emerged from the melting snow in spring and ever since held a place nearer to the house by the trellis, I found them enlaced by woodbine.

chimes entwined  
by honeysuckle,  
how I miss  
your mellow tone, now that  
the wind blows west (4)

## Skylark

This is, in form at least, an example typical of much modern tanka prose. The prose passage is descriptive of a direct and simple observation, albeit an inherently literary one. The tanka that follows represents what I would call free-verse-tanka, that is, tanka that follow few or no rules regarding the length of lines. Thus, in this poem, the syllable count is 3-5-3-6-4, which, while seeming pretty random over against the old 5-7-5-7-7 syllable form, probably meets widely adopted S-L-S-L-L rule. (5)

But, more important, the poem undermines itself as poetry, for me, because the crucial separation between prose and tanka (which should arouse and fulfill some new expectation, something that could only be fulfilled poetically and only by the addition of verse to the prose) has been collapsed. The resulting poem represents a single simple thought; there is no dialectic and no tensions resolved.

What if we re-write it this way?

The old wind chimes, that had emerged from the melting snow in spring and ever since held a place nearer to the house by the trellis; I found them enlaced by woodbine. Chimes entwined by honeysuckle, how I miss your mellow tone, now that the wind blows west.

It is clear, (isn't it?) that the tanka here, as a continuation of the prose passage, adds only further similar observations of the poet. The tanka is merely that last sentence chopped up into lines of 3-5-3-6-4 syllables. Does it make us go back and re-read the prose differently? Does it fulfill or resolve any expectation or tension left by the prose? And most importantly, does it transform the prose into an element of a poem? My answer to these questions is: No.

By way of contrast, here is a tanka prose by Jeffrey Woodward that I include to illustrate my argument:

## Graceful Willow

Sixteen perhaps, auburn hair pulled back tightly in a bun, a trace of cranberry lipstick that her mother very likely did not approve. Forsythia aflame and, before the bench by the river where she leans to write, tulips opening. Her elegant and practiced cursive is like that of the current — flowing on. She is too young, certainly, to guard so many secrets. And her diary — would it possess the patience to receive them?

the willow is green  
young and eager to become  
for wind and water  
the pliable plaything of  
each breath and eddy of spring (6)

Now, this is a beautiful example of a contemporary American tanka prose; the prose is a sensitive and perceptive reflection, the verse formed perfectly around the pivotal “for wind and water,” and composed in a traditional 5-7-5-7-7 format. Reading through it and on to the tanka, we notice several parallels of idea and word use.

In the prose passage, a young girl, sixteen, her hair done up, wearing lipstick her mother probably wouldn’t approve, surrounded by flowers that are “aflame” and “opening,” leans to write in her cursive script (that is like the river’s current). Is she ready for the secrets she probably has glimpsed? Will she get them expressed in her diary? I would hazard a guess and sum this prose passage up as follows: a young girl on the cusp of passionate womanhood sublimates her erotic feelings in the act of secret writing in the midst of spring.

Turning to the tanka: there are no girls but, instead, a willow (green, young, and eager) to be “bent” over and made the

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“pliable plaything” of wind and water. Because this “seduction” is taking place in the morally neutral zone of trees and rivers (raising none of the frankly humanly sexual implications that the prose does), the hesitation that constrains the judgment in the prose passage is overcome. When we re-read the prose in light of the tanka, the girl’s sublimated desires there are revealed, and we now see her as eager to become the “pliable plaything” of “each breath and eddy of spring.”

Across that gap between prose and verse, the lines,

the willow is green  
young and eager to become

make a metaphor of willow sapling and young girl to answer in the positive those questions at the end of the prose, albeit in an illusive language that tells us nevertheless that it is sexual desire that is the secret she is recording in her diary.

The central idea here is that the relation between the prose and the verse in tanka prose will be, to borrow a term from optics and popular entertainment — stereoptical. What I mean by this is that the upshot or end-goal of the tanka prose resides in an idea or a feeling at the intersection of the prose and the verse (and not fully in either on its own).

### 2

As the poet arrives at the end of the prose and looks across the gap to the possibility of the verse to come, the possibilities, while not endless, are large. But so is the responsibility; the full meaning of the prose passage hangs in the balance. Say one thing in the verse and, in the combination, the prose takes on one particular hue, say something else in the verse, and the prose means something else entirely. The import that is achieved in the synthesis of prose and verse makes the choices here very important. And, it is crucial, from this point of view anyway, that the prose and the verse NOT say or mean the

same thing, that for there to be a synthesis and a truly distinct level of poetic meaning, the prose and the verse must come from different perspectives.

The difficult question before us is this: can a tanka prose be any prose passage followed or preceded by any five-line verse? In some technical sense, this is an unexceptional question, and seems to describe much of the published tanka prose today. On the one hand, of course, there seems to be little to complain about; there are no accepted rules for the writing of tanka nor any agreement how exactly the prose and the verse need to be related.

There are, of course, no limits whatsoever on the content, style, or voice of the prose passage (much of the delight of experimental tanka prose writing of late has come from wide range of prose styles). Whatever rules once governed the composition of tanka, there seem to be few operative today. From subject matter, to length of lines, to internal structure (the pivot, for instance), tanka today run the full gamut.

The 5-7-5-7-7 syllable structure is not widely practiced any more, nor does even the compromise S-L-S-L-L find very wide acceptance. Tanka today (it may fairly be said) need only be five lines long (the lines can be any length, in any arrangement). The tendency toward free verse in modern poetry has had an effect among writers of tanka prose. Rules requiring specific structure and form in poetry seem crotchety and arbitrary today, and all that really remains of prescriptive form in tanka is the requirement of five lines.

So, in the face of a collapse of rules and, therefore, of expectations in tanka prose, how do we know what we are doing when we write it or when we read it? How do editors make fair and constructive decisions about what to publish?

How, in the face of all this slippage, can we recognize a viable tanka prose? While specifying an acceptable style or content in the prose or reigning in the increasing informality of the tanka are neither possible or desirable, there is an area

of critical judgment by which we can discern the difference between haphazard and disciplined tanka prose.

3

Weak tanka prose can be separated from strong ones by the energy contained at the point of intersection between the prose and the verse. Whether light or serious, rhythmical or uninflected, archly poetic or prosaic, tanka prose redeems itself in the symbiosis that takes place where prose and poetry intersect. Initial reactions to the content of the prose are overcome and altered in the reading of the verse; and, vice versa, as the whole poem now seems different in light of the altered relation of prose and verse.

Tanka prose is a dynamic genre, containing at its core a poetic engine that can transform a prose passage (however staid or dramatic) and a separate but proximate five-line verse into an amalgam that, on whatever scale, can become transcendent.

The side-by-side structure of tanka prose is a given; as Jeffrey Woodward has written, the basic underlying form of tanka prose is — one prose passage and one verse or tanka. The elements of prose depiction, free from the demands of formal rhythm or formal structure, allow the phrase and sentence of verbal expression to employ whatever length and complexity are necessary to say what it means to say. Verse, on the other hand forms its message within the constraints of regular formal structure (even the freest poetry, as Charles Olson reminded us, is tied to the human breath). In verse and prose, the demands or liberties of form put constraints on the way things can be said. Put simply, there are things we can say and do in verse that lie beyond (above, beneath, beside) what can be said in prose.

4

It might be useful here to reflect on some of the many possible relations between prose and verse in combination. Because the power of tanka prose resides in the intersection of



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the prose and the verse, in the space created by their collocation, we ought to explore at least some of the possible relations between prose and verse and their outcomes.

To this end, I would like to suggest several important categories of relation between the prose and the verse in tanka prose. As part of the account of each category, I will try to provide a simple example of a tanka prose displaying those aspects. In the interests of clarity, I will employ the same prose passage in each case.

### 1) Verse as the extension of or conclusion to the prose passage.

What I have in mind here is a reaching in the verse beyond what is being overtly said in the prose, but at the same time drawing an essential thread out of the prose, something whose connection to the prose is not merely to extend it, but to over-determine it. The verse is not just the prose extended, but something that by extending alters the overall meaning:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

in a dream of spring  
a fairy palette of green  
and pink makes roses  
you see only with your eyes  
closed, smell only in the dark

### 2) Verse as commentary or reflection on the prose.

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This is a straightforward strategy in which the verse sets out to reveal subtle or hidden meanings or implications in the prose:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

is this the season  
for reflection, when the eye  
rests in monochrome  
is it easier to know  
our world when it's flattened out?

### 3) Verse as negation of the prose, as discord and contradiction.

This strategy invites us clearly to seek a dialectical overview. From the contradiction of what the prose might plainly state, the verse creates a composite that forces the imagination to seek a way to reconcile thesis and antithesis:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

winter makes me dream  
only of warmth, warm colors  
warmth in old cold bones

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the red squirrel might die for lack  
of acorns cached beneath the snow

4) Verse as free-association with the prose, as something recognizable as intuitively provoked by the prose.

This, I would say, is my own preferred method of writing tanka prose. It requires, of course, a sort of unconscious trust that by thinking of altogether disconnected ideas in the verse a vital relation will, in the end, be found to exist there:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

simpler, the way death is  
(a less enthusiastic  
oracle might say)  
dampening down the pulsing  
green, slowing the heated blood

5) Verse as re-working, re-reading, re-constructing the prose.

In these cases, even a perfectly straightforward prose passage can turn itself in different directions alongside the verse. In the verse, doubt can be thrown on the prose's basic assertions and/or otherwise undermined in its staid simplicity:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow

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muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

looking at snowflakes  
with a magnifying glass  
a kaleidoscope's  
revealed, an architecture  
beyond all comprehension

### 6) Verse as improvisation stimulated by the prose.

Weaving in and around the major elements of the prose, the verse builds imaginatively on discernible features or meanings in the prose. The verse repeats patterns or meanings found in the prose, but repeats them in original ways, in ways that create something entirely new:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

the ice is stillness  
holding the world motionless  
like a slow drumbeat  
prevents the eager dancer's  
flight, fastening feet to floor

### 7) Verse that merely follows upon the prose, the next thing to arise in the poet's mind.

This is perhaps the Ur form of tanka prose; it is the simplicity that all the other modes carry in their DNA. Whether guided or unguided, the prose and the verse follow upon one

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another according to the thought or feeling of the poet. The interaction between the prose and the verse, perhaps not as deliberate here as in the other patterns, nevertheless generates the poetry:

Part of the charm of winter in New England is how the world is made to seem simpler. The leafless trees are simpler the way a skeleton or an outline is. The snow that covers everything is uniformly white, obliterating the differences between lawns and asphalt, river and road. The ice and snow muffle the sounds of civilization all around, and there are far fewer bird songs.

can you dream of white's  
absence of all color, white's  
obliteration  
of the spectrum for a time  
differences by which we see

---

1: See Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*. "Bisociation" is a blending of elements drawn from two previously unrelated matrices of thought into a new matrix of meaning by way of a process involving comparison, abstraction and categorisation, analogies and metaphors.

2. Works, X, 442,444.

3. Jeffrey Woodward uses the term "segue." See his "The Segue in Tanka Prose," *Ribbons* 11:2 (Spring/Summer 2015)

4. Ingrid Kunschke (*Haibun Today*, 2008) tanka prose contained in an "Untitled Diary."

5. See the discussion in *Simply Haiku*: <http://simplyhaiku.com/SHv7n2/features/Ideal.html>

6. Jeffrey Woodward, *Another Garden*, 13.



# Articles, Essays, Reviews

*Jenny Ward Angyal*  
*Editor*



All reviews by Jenny Ward Angyal unless otherwise stated.





**Between Sea and Sky**

**A Review of *From the Middle Country*, tanka by Noriko Tanaka**

Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide, Australia, 2015, 62 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5 x 7.8, translated by Amelia Fielden & Saeko Ogi, foreword by Michael McClintock. ISBN 978-1-74027-908-6. US\$15 (including overseas airmail postage) from [anafielden@gmail.com](mailto:anafielden@gmail.com)

that patch of blue sky  
between floating clouds —  
I do not know  
what lies  
beyond there

In her “Afterword” to the present volume, Noriko Tanaka writes “I have a sense there is some kind of world we must not see.” That sense of worlds unseen or barely glimpsed pervades the poems in *From the Middle Country*, Tanaka’s fourth collection of tanka and the third translated by Amelia Fielden and Saeko Ogi. In these pages the poet herself often seems to be suspended, adrift between worlds and unable to find her place.

as a shadow  
floating  
between life and death  
I circled the night  
in the aquarium

Whether the poem’s narrator is a ghostly shade or a circling shark, the startling last line tells us that she is captive in a small space, in a kind of *bardo* between life and death, searching for home.

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in the snow  
which drifts along  
melting  
between sea and sky  
is my homeland, I wonder

The “homeland” for which the poet yearns lies somewhere between sea and sky, and is not to be found here on the surface of the earth, in this “middle country” we inhabit for the brief span of our lives.

The middle section of Tanaka’s book is entitled “From the Middle Country: Onogoro Island.”

I’m thinking about  
Onogoro Island  
in the ‘age of the gods’,  
meanwhile stirring  
some stew in a pot

In Japanese mythology, Onogoro was a mythical island created by a divine couple who stood on the floating bridge of heaven, stirring the sea with a jeweled spear — a richly ironic contrast with stirring stew in a pot. Such contrasts between the mythic Middle Country and the mundane one we inhabit pervade this section of the book:

that old professor  
who believed utterly  
in dream divination,  
is today concerned  
by the red of a tomato

The poems in the “Middle Country” section are set not in the depths and reaches of the sea, nor in a mythic country,

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but on land, in actual, living cities and forests. Yet even here the boundaries between worlds are thin:

every time  
I think of you, I  
become a leafy forest,  
with trees in that forest  
swaying in the slightest breeze

Is this a love poem? Is it addressed to a person, to the earth, to the “Middle Country” itself? If the “Middle Country” is an island, like Onogoro, that suggests a certain isolation from other, distant worlds. As the poet gazes into the sea surrounding the island that is her life, she muses on existence itself:

looking  
at the water’s surface  
I am doubtful,  
somehow, of whether  
I actually exist

Around each island lies the sea. The first and shortest of the book’s three main sections is called “From the Ocean Country: Blue Times.” Sea images abound:

born through the eye  
of a needle,  
the translucent jellyfish  
swims, wobbling  
around its world

*“Born through the eye of a needle:”* is this an allusion to the difficulty of attaining heaven? Is the narrator herself the “jellyfish,” wobbling uncertainly around her own world?

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swimming behind  
the school of fish,  
a single fish  
is tangled in foam and  
the white shadow of death

This could be read as a literal observation of sea life — or as a metaphor for the human condition. “Blue times,” indeed — the blue not only of sea and sky but of mood as well.

a king penguin  
gazing up at the northern sky,  
said  
‘is this what  
life is like?’

A question surely every thoughtful reader has asked herself: that vast blue emptiness . . . is it all there is, or does something more lie beyond it? Can we know? Can we connect with it? In the third and longest section of her book, entitled “From the Country of the Dead: The Sleeping River,” Tanaka writes

oh, river,  
sleeping as you ice over,  
there is a blue sky  
eternally  
disconnected

And yet Tanaka discovers many connections among the varied realms of sea and sky, between the Middle Country and the Country of the Dead:

beyond the dripping  
of the rain  
are low clouds —

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my deceased father's fingers  
flick the abacus

I laugh, alone,  
and suddenly  
from the floor  
in a corner of the room  
a shadow arises

In the first poem above, the dead seem to live again in the place where sky and water meet. In the second, one can only wonder if the shadow that arises at the sound of laughter is the shadow of sorrow, the shadow of loved ones lost and remembered, or the shadow of the poet's own mortality?

"The Country of the Dead" contains over half of the book's 170 tanka and delves ever deeper into the realm of the mysterious:

on the table  
where an advance notice  
of murder was delivered  
this morning, I placed  
a red apple, then left

Now *that* is the middle of a story — an entire novel, perhaps. Myths and legends of the Middle Country figure in the Country of the Dead, as well:

the myth speaks of  
a thousand-year-old pheasant  
being transformed  
by the sea — into that sea  
I try setting my right foot

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Again the yearning for transformation, and the image of the sea — a symbol of those mysterious, unplumbed depths wherein perhaps our hope of transformation lies.

a day when loneliness  
wells up like water  
in a salt jar —  
the island is my father,  
the ocean is my mother

The ocean, where life arose, is in that sense our mother; and perhaps at death we return to a metaphorical ocean. Between birth and death, we dwell in the Middle Country, an island in the vast sea, where we often feel alien and isolated:

when I come up  
onto the roof to see  
the solar eclipse,  
the wind there whispers  
'I don't need you'

And yet we are afforded glimpses of that other world from which we are shut out:

he travelled  
to the Other World  
wearing ordinary clothes,  
whispers Taro  
as he gazes at the moon

*“Wearing ordinary clothes”* — even in our most ordinary, mundane condition, the mysterious Other may become available to us.

The sense of mystery that pervades Tanaka's individual tanka is present also in her arrangement of the poems. Each of the three major sections of her book includes several titled

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subsections — 12 in the longest, “Country of the Dead” section. The selection and sequencing of poems in the subsections sometimes makes intuitive sense and is sometimes baffling. “Songs at the Bottom of the Sea,” for instance, leaps from images of salamanders, crabs, minnows, moon-jellies and sea otters—to an aviary hedge, poisonous toads, and bespectacled eyes. Perhaps “the depths of spectacles” recalls the depths of the sea; and when the voice from the aviary hedge says “I shall meet you again in the next world,” it echoes the otherworldly themes that run throughout the book.

“I have still not seen Heaven,” Tanaka writes in her Afterword. Readers are invited to abandon strict logic, trust their intuitions, and join the poet’s wandering quest through the Ocean Country, the Middle Country, and the Country of the Dead — a journey full of challenge, mystery, sorrow and delight.

in secret  
I have been walking  
along the edge of life —  
without any trace  
trees bear their blossoms

Skylark

## Ghost Bridges

### **A Review of *flowers to the torch*, American Tanka Prose by Peter Fiore**

Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2015, 86 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, introduction by Stuart Dybek, afterword by Charles Tarlton. ISBN 978-1507577356. US\$12 from Keibooks.

to the music of the spheres  
though our days vanish in smoke  
    we're still dancing  
at the place  
    where the sidewalk ends

*~from "A Confluencia of Rhythm"*

Dancing freely where the sidewalk ends, outside the constraints of traditional form, Peter Fiore celebrates and mourns all the days of our lives that vanish in smoke. In prose and poems and prose-poems, he weaves together the evanescent fragments of his own life, from before his conception to after his death.

The book opens with the title piece, "Flowers to the Torch:"

. . . I am only beginning to rise in my father's blood, my mother's eyes. I watch myself through them . . .

. . . as if the poet, his parents — everyone — are but brief blossoms consumed by the torch of time. The last tanka prose piece in the book, entitled "the end of the line . . ." imagines the poet's own death:

a shudder  
    and then you're gone  
off into eternal peace



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so we think  
or does the light just shut off

Between the bookends of conception and death, the poet explores every facet his life:

memories of childhood and adolescence; relationships with (many) women; families and fatherhood; coming of age and caring for an aged parent; urban life, travel, music, tennis. He writes sometimes in the first person and sometimes in the third, telling the stories of his alter-ego, Rocco.

*Flowers to the torch* includes 26 tanka prose pieces with 29 tanka; 7 or 8 prose pieces without tanka; and 9 or 10 free-standing tanka. (It's not that I can't count: one piece *might* be a tanka with very long lines . . . or it might be a prose piece with five very short paragraphs.) Experimentation with form is Fiore's hallmark. In his "Preface," he wonders "if it's possible to have tanka prose without a tanka poem." Fiore's prose does often share several characteristics of tanka: brevity, immediacy, the use of images to suggest emotion, and a sense of fleeting moments captured before they're lost.

Some prose pieces read like flash fiction:

Rocco hikes his duffle bag up over his shoulder and walks out into the snow falling in thick fast flakes he can hardly see to the corner. Before he gets there, Magnotta the shoemaker, sees him . . .

~ from "*The Return*"

. . .and others like prose-poems:

you can still see horses in the morning in mountain fields grazing across the street from where I live and frost on the tips of golden rod and rock walls and sun breaking through burnished trees . . .



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when  
    can I  
        unwind  
    your kimono  
        again

— a poem that is almost concrete, its indented lines unwinding like a strand of silk.

At their best, the tanka (and the prose, too) are layered with metaphor:

ghost bridge  
in misty frost and morning sun  
    once again  
        I don't know  
            where I am

*~from "Escape from Manzinella Beach"*

*Flowers to the torch* is a book of ghost bridges: bridges between the generations; between the sexes; between gritty urban realism and flights of fantasy; between poetry and prose; between life and death. Readers of every stripe will find in Fiore's work bridges to their own lives, loves, struggles and bewilderments:

I keep writing  
    the same poem  
        . . . full of broken hearts  
    whirling snow  
and flight

*~from "Escape from Manzinella Beach"*

**Grammar of Shadows, Poetry of Light**

***A Review of Warp and Weft: Tanka Threads*  
by Debbie Strange**

Keibooks, Perryville, MD, 2015, 94 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, introduction by Michael Dylan Welch. ISBN 9 781512 361124. US\$12 from Keibooks.

we are  
homeless clouds  
w a n d e r i n g  
a cardboard sky  
begging bowls filled with stars

So many contrasts packed into one little poem: the freedom of wandering, the pain of homelessness; the eternity of sky, the flimsiness of cardboard; the poverty of a begging bowl, the infinitude of stars. This is the closing tanka of a book densely woven with contrasts. In the “Author’s Note” to her first volume of short-form poetry, award-winning Canadian poet Debbie Strange writes “the work is arranged so that readers shuttle back and forth between the light and dark tanka fibres.” Often those fibres are intertwined within single poems as well as between them. Drawing together tanka published at different times in different journals, Strange has woven a fabric of 72 tanka triptychs, titled sets of three poems sharing a common thread. Strange’s thoughtful and effective rearrangement of poems that originally appeared in other contexts highlights the fascinating way in which tanka can change and enhance each another as their variegated threads are laid down side by side to form new patterns.

Like the tanka cited above, many of the poems in this collection explore questions of who we are.

Skylark

I am driftwood  
curves undulating  
worn smooth  
my windswept bones  
the flute of tides

*~ from 'the flute of tides'*

This poem could be read as an imaginative identification with a piece of driftwood — or as a metaphor for the human condition. Are we not all worn smooth, windswept, resonating to the music of forces larger than ourselves?

scattered  
beneath the roses  
these questions:  
are you not more than ash  
am I not more than rain

*~from 'more than rain'*

Raindrops, the ashes of the dead, and questions — questions about who and what we finally *are* — all lie scattered beneath the evanescent beauty of the rose. Strange offers no answers, but many explorations of the questions, couched in powerful, striking images and metaphors.

**ragged**

you shed  
your antlers  
in the glade  
I wear the bleeding velvet  
a cloak of ragged prayer

I am  
the bonedust

Skylark

of winter  
on the bent  
jackpine

he gasps  
at the ragged scars  
upon my back  
remnants of that night  
they tore off my broken wings

Language this magical invites the reader to venture, naked as bonedust, into a world where we must weave our own cloaks of meaning and wonder, grief and beauty

Many of the ragged scars explored in Strange's book originate in the complex relationships of family.

sitting  
on Santa's lap  
year after year  
she asks for one thing:  
a father who stays

*~from 'the child'*

after the divorce  
we sisters in the back  
of a pickup truck  
vagabond wind stealing tears  
from homeward-looking eyes

*~ from 'ancestral bones'*

this baggage  
carried from one life  
to the next

## Skylark

we unpack everything  
but our belongingness

*~from 'baggage'*

Each of these poignant poems illustrates Strange's deft use of language: the childlike simplicity of the wish for 'a father who stays;' the 'vagabond wind' echoing through the sisters' vision of themselves; and 'belongingness,' that perfect final word so unexpected and so resonant with the ache of displacement. The bond among sisters is woven throughout the book in threads both light and dark:

skinny-dipping  
with my sisters  
washing moondust  
from our hair  
then braiding it with stars

*~from 'winter sisters'*

today  
my bleeding fingers  
caress  
the broken strings  
of my late sister's guitar

*~from 'broken strings'*

Strange is a guitarist, singer, and song-writer as well as a poet, so music echoes in many of the poems.

we compose  
the music of our lives  
with grace notes

## Skylark

scattered between  
lullaby and requiem

*~from 'the singing bowl'*

What an exquisite expression of the way in which we strive, from the time we're born until we die, to discover or create grace in our lives — 'grace' in any meaning of the word you choose. Love is a prominent grace note in most lives, and many of Strange's tanka — so like grace notes themselves — celebrate both love and its discontents.

our initials  
tattooed on sand  
b e t w e e n  
heart-shaped tracks  
of white-tailed deer

*~from 'heart-shaped'*

leaves of glass  
splinter beneath our feet  
after the ice storm  
we tread carefully around  
one another's edges

*~from 'edges'*

The impermanence of sand, the brittleness of ice — both these poems illustrate Strange's masterful use of metaphors drawn from the natural world to express human feelings and conditions. Having lived in each of the four western provinces of Canada, she writes poems deeply rooted among the mountains, prairies and forests of her native place.



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a ragged curl  
of birch bark fluttering  
in the sun  
even our smallest wounds  
become limned with light

*~from 'limned'*

Such a vivid image drawn from a phenomenon so small that most of us might overlook it — a bit of bark torn loose and edged with sunlight. But under the spell of Strange's pen, the observation becomes so much more, as — characteristically — she draws our attention to the intimate and inevitable linkage of light and dark, of woundedness and beauty. Indeed, seeking to 'limn our wounds with light' is an exquisite definition of the poet's calling, and it is an art at which Strange excels.

moonbeam quills  
through our windows  
transcribing  
the grammar of shadows  
into the poetry of light

*~from 'a wafer of moon'*

Skylark

## Unpainted Flowers

**A Review of *Spring's First Caress*,  
Tanka by Brian Zimmer  
edited by Kay L. Tracy and Jill Rauh**

Kay L. Tracy, Portland, OR, 2015, 136 pages, perfect bound paperback, 6 x 9, foreword by Beth Zimmer Cunningham. ISBN 978-0996467919. US\$12, available from Amazon.com

*Therese, your dark cry you named prayer — what then my words?  
—Brian Zimmer*

the old friar  
knew no place so dark  
a straw  
could not be lifted  
for love of something

The friar's cell is a dark place, and yet the sound of some small vital thing rustling in the straw brings a smile to his lips — and to ours. Dark places illuminated by beauty and the love of life — this is the texture of Brian Zimmer's posthumous tanka collection.

Zimmer hoped to self-publish a book of poems one day, but felt overwhelmed by the task of making thematic choices. "Maybe I just write poems and not books?" he wrote. In light of that hesitation, and of his tragic and untimely death, readers will be grateful to Zimmer's friends Kay L. Tracy and Jill Rauh for their labor of love in compiling and editing the present volume. *Spring's First Caress* offers about 350 of Zimmer's poems from the years 2008 — 2010, arranged in roughly chronological order. Zimmer, who believed that poets must "keep moving ahead," wrote many forms of poetry, and the present volume includes a number of gogyohka as well as one-line tanka.

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“I’m convinced,” Zimmer wrote, “that being a poet has nothing to do with being read.” Not surprisingly, nearly 90% of the poems in the present volume are previously unpublished. “Write for yourself first,” Zimmer wrote. “That’s my motivation: to make something beautiful; to name what I see and experience; to sing.” And true to that edict, his poems have the spontaneity and authenticity of the best diary-style tanka. Although he claimed he couldn’t “find much of a narrative thread” in his own work, themes do emerge, inevitably and organically, from what the poet saw and experienced, from the straws he chose to lift and the trembling lives he found beneath them.

hummingbird —  
a change of light  
and breeze  
reveals secrets  
to an old man

of course  
the trees laugh  
rocks weep  
and badgers sigh —  
my sly ventriloquists

Everything in the natural world reveals secrets when the inner light changes; and for those with ears to hear, all things laugh and weep. Zimmer heard, and he sang what he heard, sang with the voice of the badger, with the voice of summer itself:

listen —  
Indian Summer  
faintly  
chanting plainsong  
down the country lane

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The image is so perfect that one can almost see the golden light and catch the scent of drifting leaves. The word “plain-song” carries an echo (resounding also in the friar’s cell) of a formal religious faith the poet may have left behind, somewhere along a country lane — not without twinges of regret for those ways of knowing that are closed to the modern mind:

the mystic  
knew the virginity  
of trees  
the sheer grace of  
blossoming cherry

Even under the spell of the cherry tree’s “sheer grace,” Zimmer casts the mystic’s knowledge in the past tense; he does not claim it for himself. And elsewhere he takes a harsher view of faith:

my closest:  
do you understand  
no sacrifice  
was entailed in  
shedding faith’s skin?

the mysteries  
we’ve invented  
are illusions —  
why paint  
the flowers?

cosmos  
by the river  
not a theory  
or opinion  
among them

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Faith is shrugged off with an almost-brutal gesture by one who wishes to regard the flowers simply in-and-of themselves, not gussied up with illusions. And while “cosmos” is, of course, the name of a common flower, it could also refer to the comforting idea of a well-ordered universe — a theory of which the flowers have no need, and which the poet tosses onto the scrap-heap of opinion and illusion.

saved  
from holy falsehoods  
verse sets free  
fate will have its say  
poetry the last word

the courage  
to write it down —  
a superstitious  
fear of careless  
invocation

Poetry may have the last word over against what fate may have in store for us — but only if it is “saved from holy falsehoods.” Believing that “verse sets free,” and overcoming a “superstitious fear” of invoking unknown forces in which he no longer believed, Zimmer nevertheless possessed in abundance “the courage to write it down.” Indeed, he seems to have *needed* to “write it down” as a way of wrestling with private demons.

“stop writing,  
you’re scaring me”  
but he couldn’t —  
spooked horses  
break from the corral

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. . . as words break from the poet, fearsome, wild and uncontained, galloping across the untamed reaches of the mind.

from madness  
he flails and swings  
at empty air  
horror defends itself  
from what stalks

padlocked  
beneath the floor  
a dragon —  
six hours till the  
magic wears-off

Although poetry may ultimately have the last word, in the interim the narrator must defend himself “from what stalks.” The “six hours of magic” is perhaps no more than a temporary chemical stay against the padlocked dragon.

madness  
taught me  
that self  
is a chemical  
cocktail

No reader who has been harrowed by mental illness in self or other will have escaped the bitter speculation expressed in this poem. Mood and mind *can* be drastically altered by medication — are we, then, no more than our biochemistry? Perhaps. And yet . . . whence the uniqueness of Brian Zimmer’s own voice? Perhaps the greatest marvel is that matter itself — “mere” chemistry — is far stranger and more wonderful than we suppose; far from being just insensate, uninteresting “stuff,” it must be shot through with all the potentialities of

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the human spirit. And that potential includes love, that great mystery and power:

how long since  
I spoke a word of love —  
your constancy  
a rain of petals through  
this reign of terror

Here it is not chemistry but the constancy of love that provides the narrator with sustenance throughout the “reign of terror.” In a poem enhanced by gentle wordplay, we can almost see the drifting petals that bless a tormented life with beauty.

Nowhere does love speak more clearly in Zimmer’s work than in his tanka sequence, “April is the Cruellest Month,” about the final days of someone — presumably the narrator’s mother — who long ago taught him to pray.

a wounded deer  
leaps highest . . .  
this day  
the golden hour:  
lucid one last time

Having “crossed the border”— surely a metaphor — to be present at the death of his loved one, the poet rejoices in her last, golden hour of lucidity, drawn forth by the wound of approaching mortality. A wounded deer himself, Zimmer at times underestimated his own capacity for love:

the betrayal  
of this flavourless  
orange —  
my peeled heart  
would also disappoint

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But readers of *Spring's First Caress* will not be disappointed by this poet's "peeled heart," overflowing as it is with all the honest flavours of pain and beauty, borne of the poet's capacity to see and hear the world in all its grace:

from a bench  
above the lilac dell  
hill and breeze,  
song and flight —  
everything undulates

These are surely not the words of a man whose heart is a "flavourless orange." But, as he says, everything undulates — including moods, those humors of the heart that so profoundly color how we see the world and how we see ourselves. From the reader's perspective, Zimmer may have written a more accurate self-assessment in another poem, alive with another metaphor:

white lotus  
emerging  
from my mouth  
my tongue its stalk  
all I ever wanted

A white lotus, symbol of rebirth or awakening, springs from the mud of pain and confusion, emerging from the poet's mouth like song . . . or poetry . . . or prayer.

What then his words? Are they the dark cries of existential anguish, the fervent prayers of an unbeliever, or simply unpainted flowers spilling from the poet's tongue and blossoming into a species of truth at once unvarnished and exquisitely beautiful? However we choose to name them, Brian Zimmer's words will continue to entwine our hearts — like roses, like thorns.



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rose vine  
winding  
through a lantern  
extinguished  
long ago

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**Whorls Upon the Heart**

**A Review of *All You Need is Love*,  
Tanka on the Love of Life**

**by 62 Australian Poets, edited by Amelia Fielden**

Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide, Australia, 2015, 62 pages, perfect bound paperback, 5.1 x 7.9, preface by Amelia Fielden. ISBN 978-1-74027-918-5. US\$15 (including overseas airmail postage) from [anafielden@gmail.com](mailto:anafielden@gmail.com)

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways . . .*

—Shakespeare, Sonnet 43

When Amelia Fielden, well-known tanka poet and translator, called on her fellow Australian poets to submit tanka about love, she asked that they define the word as broadly as possible. The result is a collection of 120 tanka that count not just the *ways* that people love, but also the glorious variety of things and living things and other phenomena that capture our hearts. The poems are arranged not thematically but alphabetically by the poets' last names, yet many recurrent themes are evident. Naturally, romantic love figures prominently:

letting go  
of the past I wish I'd had  
your hand in mine —  
two glider possums  
cross the winter moon

~Michelle Brock

In this richly layered tanka, the first three lines — absent a comma after “past” — can be read in two different ways, an ambiguity that adds openness and interest to the poem. Ei-

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ther way, the last three lines give us a tender image of togetherness in the face of both beauty and adversity — “the winter moon.”

Romantic love may ripen over time into something less passionate, perhaps, but equally deep.

we sit quietly  
how was your day?  
full, and yours?  
the same —  
the mirror catches the light

~*Sue MacKenzie*

It is *almost* possible to miss the understated tenderness beneath the surface of this quiet poem. There is little need for words, but the mirror catches the warm, subtle light reflected to and fro between the partners.

Love of family and children is another common theme.

I bathe you  
in a silvery basin  
filled to the brim —  
tiny fingers grasp my thumb  
trace whorls upon my heart

~*Anne Benjamin*

The silvery basin filled to the brim evokes an image of serving an honored guest — and also becomes a metaphor for the narrator’s overflowing heart.

Whorls traced upon the heart may last a lifetime, yet few human relationships survive unbruised.

what if  
mother had shared my love

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for Beethoven  
cadence after imperfect cadence,  
would I play the blues less?

~*Kathy Kituai*

The love of music resounds in many of the poems, as in this one where playing the blues gives voice to the narrator's sadness over the imperfect cadences of a relationship now ended by death. Love and loss are intertwined throughout the book:

blue felt hat  
high in the cupboard  
a fragment  
of you still remains  
after all these years

~*Kate King*

As in all the best tanka, the simple image of a simple object becomes imbued with great depth of feeling.

The love of nature, expressed in nearly as many poems as those about people, provides both consolation and joy:

new tendrils  
on climbing vines  
reach out —  
my heart lifts  
in the early light

~*Maria Encarnacao*

There is so much to love in this world of imperfect cadences — people and pets, poetry and special places; chocolate, coffee

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and dessert; music, books and the ever-blooming world of nature. Impossible to encompass it all, yet the tiny, highly polished gems that are tanka can give it a good try:

they say  
the universe  
is egg-shaped —  
it lies in my garden  
under a broken nest

*~Lynette Arden*

**A Review of *Eucalypt: A Tanka Journal*: Issue 19**

The first literary journal in Australia dedicated to tanka: Beverley George, Editor, Design & Layout: Matthew George Design Pty Ltd: 2015; Illustrations: Pim Sarti, 44 pages, saddle stapled. issn: 1833-8186. Available from: [www.eucalypt.info](http://www.eucalypt.info).

**by Linda Jeannette Ward, USA**

Considering her own virtuosity in writing tanka, such as her collection *empty garden* and her award-winning poems in international competitions, it comes as no surprise that Beverley George, the Editor of *Eucalypt: A Tanka Journal*, unfailingly presents us with the highest, most sublime examples of the form today. As poetry in print began to fade, and more and more print journals and literary magazines were shifted online, Ms. George persevered by publishing the Australian journal of short form poetry *Yellow Moon*, and then, in 2006 launching *Eucalypt*. A decade later, this peerless work of art-in-print demonstrates that, like the re-launching of *The Paris Review* five years ago, the highest quality work can be found in selective editing by a gifted editor-poet.

In these poems, the childhood memories and fantasies of two poets are juxtaposed in a delightful way that prompts readers to reflect back on their own imaginary play with objects not meant for amusement.

our schoolyard fence	daydreaming
a xylophone	during geometry class
I played	a straight line lifted
my pencil all the way home	and twirled into a spiral
glissando of growing up	like something from the sea

*Kath Abela Wilson*

*Simon Hanson*

Comfort is offered by these poets, and leaves room for our own thoughts about how meaningful the familiar objects and

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sounds around us can provide solace.

where  
in these notebooks  
is that poem . . .  
the one about your blue shirt  
the comfort of your step

a tiny nest  
filled with bits of fluff  
grass and string  
my own comfort of clutter  
in books, photos and shells

*Maria Steyn*

*Carol Raisfeld*

And from the familiar to the unfamiliar — at least for readers like myself who have not been fortunate enough to visit Australia — these poets' nature-watching brings us tantalizing references to *eros* and *thanatos*. A refreshing change from most poetry editors, who often seem skittish about selecting tanka with regional vocabulary or esoteric flora and fauna.

strewn on paspalum  
a torn torso and the head  
of a wallaby . . .  
my rural days, so full  
of life and death

wild medley . . .  
silver dead trees  
black stumps  
tangled regrowth  
and the lyrebird's song

*Barbara A Taylor*

*Gerry Jacobson*

In the best tanka tradition, supernatural themes or references are included in this issue. The reader is shifted pleasantly to alternate realities.

unable  
to find relief now  
in the ordinary,  
I whirl into the uncommon  
place where witches dwell

this snowy eve  
I sense the siren call  
of spirits fey  
yet these leaden feet  
are chained to reality

*Sanford Goldstein*

*Kent Robinson*

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Here we find insights through color: ways to die and ways to stop the endless struggle.

pure indigo  
settles into my heart,  
when I cross borders . . .  
I would like to die  
a wanderer of this earth

*Mariko Kitakubo*

how you struggle  
at making something  
from nothing . . .  
a red flower emerges  
in outback sand

*Hazel Hall*

These poets demonstrate that the stirrings of grief, and the haunting that the loss of a loved one brings, can happen with unexpected departures other than death.

the whistle  
of the northbound express  
punctures the night  
. . . it's not in your leaving  
but the way you chose to go

*David Terelinck*

if I knew where,  
I would send your medications  
and the coat  
you threw in the dumpster . . .  
if only I could send you peace

*Elizabeth Howard*

To close this issue, two poems appropriately bring the day to an end with shadows and the drip of water bringing a sense of oneness with the earth.

stock-still  
the heron  
gathering light  
we pass in shadow  
rainfall on wild garlic

*Joanna Ashwell*

I bid the day  
a quiet good-bye  
watering roses  
in the evening shadows  
until they drip

*Michael McClintock*



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As these poems illustrate, Ms. George masterfully juxtaposes tanka in ways that rise above a planned sequence, yet pull forth memories, observations, dreams and emotions shared by various writers from nine countries around the world. What an inspiring change from the listing of poems by the alphabetical arrangement of the first or last names of poets.

Please don't let my introduction to this review on the strong features of *Eucalypt* in print form give the impression that a complete withdrawal from the Internet has occurred. As a bonus, subscribers to this journal receive from time to time a free electronic newsletter that Ms. George provides for news, discussion and invitations to vote for one's favorite poem: [www.eucalypt.info](http://www.eucalypt.info).

## Submission Guidelines

Submissions for the 4:2, winter issue of *Skylark* will be read through June and July and will close on August 1st 2016.

Kindly submit up to ten original, previously unpublished tanka &/or one sequence\*, tanka prose, tan renga, articles etc. with the subject heading “Skylark tanka submission” to [skylark.tanka@gmail.com](mailto:skylark.tanka@gmail.com).

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

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

In addition to your regular submission, you are also invited to submit one tanka for the “Skylark’s Nest” prompt (see page 13). Unfortunately, we are not able to reproduce colour images in *Skylark*, but poets wishing to submit tanka-art may do so; coinciding with the publication of each issue, a selection of the best will be added to a haiga gallery on the website. Alternatively, black and white tanka-art may be considered for the print journal.

The website [skylarktanka.weebly.com](http://skylarktanka.weebly.com) will be updated regularly. Back issues will be available as PDF files as each new issue is published. The “Skylark’s Nest” winners and runners up will also be archived.

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

[skylarkreviews@gmail.com](mailto:skylarkreviews@gmail.com)

Similarly, submit all articles for consideration to the address above.

Any queries should be addressed to the Editor:

[skylark.tanka@gmail.com](mailto:skylark.tanka@gmail.com)

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\* If you would like to submit more than one sequence (for instance, if you have collaborated with different poets) this is acceptable, although I request that you send no more than 5 individual/collaborative sequences.



## Errata:

In *Skylark* 3:2, Winter 2015, in my review entitled **Marks that Keep on Burning, (*Deep in the Valley of Tea Bowls* by Kathy Kituai & Fergus Stewart)**, there were two places where *chanoya* should have read *chanoyu*. I am grateful to Giselle Maya for pointing out this error.

Giselle also referred to the quote from *The Book of Tea* (1906) and said that the author's name should read:

“OKAKURA KAKUZO (in Japan the last name used to be and still is at times put first) but recently in Western fashion it would be KAKUZO OKAKURA, either way is fine, (instead of Akakura)”.

I pointed out to Giselle that I had quoted the author's name as it appears in Kathy's book.

I welcome all feedback regarding errors. Readers will appreciate *Skylark* is a labour of love and its editor and proofreader work hard to minimise mistakes, but “to err is human” . . .

# Skylark

## Friends of Skylark

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