Modern English Tanka
ISSN: 1932-9083 (Print Edition)
Print and Digital Editions
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Published in Baltimore, Maryland, USA.
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Modern English Tanka, a quarterly journal, is dedicated to publishing and promoting fine English tanka (including tanka written in cinquain and cinqku set forms). We are interested in both traditional and innovative verse of high quality and in all serious attempts to assimilate the best of the Japanese waka/tanka genres into a continuously developing English short verse tradition. In addition to verse, we publish articles, essays, reviews, interviews, etc., related to tanka.

Published through
Lulu Enterprises, Inc.
3131 RDU Center, Suite 210
Morrisville, NC 27560
www.lulu.com
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Volume 1, Number 1.

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TAIGA

an'ya
cold cemetery.
if only there were.
midsummer night.
Michael McClintock

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on a visit, Art by Karen J. Harlow.

CarrieAnn Thunell

The road.
Oh great egret.
Two eyes.
How delicately.
Such longing.
This small cat.
The sweeping bend.

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EDITORIALS
I’ll Tell You About Onions

From this journal’s name, *Modern English Tanka,* one might reasonably infer that the poetry published herein would all be somewhat avant-garde, little like the traditional Japanese tanka and its precursors, uta and waka. In fact, the poetry in this premier issue covers a fairly broad range on the traditional–modern spectrum. However, the use of a natural, modern English idiom (whether American, Canadian, Australian, Kiwi, Indian, British, etc.) is common throughout. We have tried to select out false notes, whether Japonistic, anachronistic, or self-consciously “poetical.” It is time to write, read, critique, and study English tanka, *per se,* which presupposes the skillful use of our living language rather than some faux-Japanese-English or “Tontoism.”

So, what about onions? We all know this edible bulb with its distinctive fragrance and flavor and the ability to make us cry. The relevant point is that the onion bulb is comprised of its youngest leaves, its oldest leaves, and all those in between. They make the familiar layers that characterize the onion. So, too, do all the ancient and modern variations of the tanka, together, comprise the tanka form. Some poets may be antiquarians and only write in a slavish imitation of ancient uta and waka; others may ignore those venerable exemplars entirely and write modern free verse poems that have only the most tangential
connection to the tanka tradition. Neither need submit their work to *Modern English Tanka*. Tanka poets, in any language, must integrate the ancient tradition with the language actually spoken by current speakers to produce authentic modern tanka.

Just as your nose will tell you when onions are included in any savory dish, so a real tanka, even in the most modern and colloquial language, has that distinctive tanka essence. We may struggle to define tanka, but we need not strain to recognize it. When it is tanka, we know it.

*Modern English Tanka* is dedicated to publishing and promoting fine English tanka—both traditional and innovative verse of high quality—in order to assimilate the best of the Japanese uta/waka/tanka genres into a continuously developing English short verse tradition.

For reasons too far-ranging to rehearse here, English long form poetry has fallen on hard times and many venues do not want to publish poems more than thirty lines in length. Perhaps as society accelerates, attention spans shorten concomitantly. In any case, “English poetry” is becoming synonymous with “English short verse.” The continuing trend towards popularity of Japanese short verse forms in English reflects this sea-change in English poetry. The haiku (and senryu) are so tightly condensed, however, that
they do not serve very well the needs of English lyrical poetry.

On the other hand, the cinquain form invented by Adelaide Crapsey, an Imagist poet, in the early twentieth century, has been developing into a respectable vehicle for the brief lyric. Insofar as some American cinquain (and some even briefer cinqku) have managed to embody that special tanka essence within their set forms, we are open to publishing tanka written in those forms. As any reader of this issue will see, we publish 5-7-5-7-7 tanka and briefer versions, even tanka verging upon free verse.

It is not the goal of *Modern English Tanka* to either authoritatively define English tanka or sponsor any particular formula or template. Rather, it is our goal to give tanka poets a venue in which they can showcase their tanka—not just their show-stopper, standing ovation, fortissimo *tours de force*, but also their quieter, more subtle tanka, their strange tanka, their haunting tanka, their terrifying tanka; even their snarky kyoka belongs. We want to give space to the widest range of tanka because it is such a new form in English. Only by publishing the full panoply of English tanka, will we ever discover its particular place in the English lyric tradition. While there are many centuries to rest upon for Japanese tanka poets (and they, nevertheless, are continually innovating), English tanka is less than a century old and needs
plenty of room to grow and find its feet in the English language.

We want to thank all the fine poets who have contributed their work to this first issue of Modern English Tanka. We are glad to furnish the boat for this ride into the possibilities and potentials of tanka in English, but we are mindful that MET’s contributing poets are the wind in our sails.

— Denis M. Garrison, editor
August 29, 2006.
Tanka and Its Influence on the Short Poem in English

"He can compress the most words into the smallest idea of any man I know."
– Abraham Lincoln

What Lincoln says here about his political colleague caught me by the leg just as I was putting the final touches on this essay. It made me wonder: Is the idea I am trying to frame too tiny to find? Too insignificant for caring about? It's too tough a call for me to make, but I feel certain that I'm on the right track. What Lincoln observes about his verbally-endowed friend is very close to what I have observed in the poetry churned out by America's 50,000-plus “award-winning and acclaimed” poets over the last 50 years. And so I have put his remark at the head of my essay in order to establish a theme, a core idea, in as few words as possible (his). From here on out I will just hope for the best and try to keep the discussion free of split-hairs.

In these pages of Modern English Tanka, the premiere issue, I see the beginnings of a great thing in poetry. The short poem has always been with us, dominated chiefly by the epigram and proverb, particularly those translated from the Bible and from the Greek and Roman poets, and found embedded in various forms of native and folk literature, including
songs, lullabies, and various forms of prayer, homily, and exhortation. Limericks, clerihews, nursery rhymes, and various other forms of doggerel and light, witty, scatological, occasional, or political verse, filled out and completed the range of the short poem.*

In contrast to that history, here collected for our scrutiny is something that does feel like the end of one voyage and the beginning of a new, a journey in modern prosody that involves, perhaps, the notion that major poetry can be written within the five-line, unitary wholeness of English-language tanka and that, as a consequence and by virtue of influence, the short poem in English may be equally well-embarked toward that achievement. The influence of tanka (a.k.a. waka) arrived early, in the work of the Imagists (1913-22), but tanka has emerged and continues to mature as a short form of English lyric only recently. Supple, powerful, and elegant, the achievements of contemporary tanka, and the scope and range of its subject matter, are well exemplified in these pages.

There is at work here, in this relatively small gallery of contemporary poetry, an accelerating, more widespread application of a commonly-held discipline and set of aesthetic principles and objectives that—together, and yet in a diversity of individual voices—appears to concentrate in the short poem, and to bring more fully into play than ever before seen, the bone, sinew, and tissue of the language that poetry
uses to impart human experience, discover meaning in it, and hold it before the world for both pleasure and understanding. That is not a small thing.

In a post-modern world where poets write primarily for other poets, in a language often remote from common speech, taking for their subject matter material that is all but opaque to the common reader, the tanka poets appear to have come together to create a literature that is both lyric and personal and also widely readable, conveyed in a language stripped of all but the most essential conceits, and drawn from the subject matter of daily, ordinary life—imaginatively, but without ornament. Moreover, they are writing a kind of poetry that the reader may fully apprehend only by engaging its words and phrases within the fullness of his or her own experience of like ideas, emotions, and things.

The few words and lines of a tanka are like fingers plucking a stringed instrument: Only a few strings are plucked. The poem's sound passes into silence almost as soon as it emerges, and in that interval the tanka conveys its ideas, emotions, and objects as a unitary whole, a singular impression having meaning. The meaning is, in fact, in the answering echo within the reader's mind, the totality of the reader's own experience, and is an artifact of the words rather than the substance of the words themselves. It is for that reason that the tanka poets kiss the finer objectives of
minimalism without embracing the minimalist’s faith in words alone. The minimalist poets are materialists at heart. However concrete the images used to convey ideas and emotions, the tanka poet is a comparative mystic for whom the word is not a thing or destination in its own right but an immaterial, essentially cultural construction that yields value and significance only in relationship to other words as they are taken up from the page together, in a poem, and sent echoing into the human psyche where meaning finds a conscious embodiment and relationship to life and individual experience.

I think that is what tanka does, and what it achieves as poetry, and why I think the best tanka are, in fact, major poetry. In this much-awaited first issue of *Modern English Tanka* we have, I think, more than two or three such masterpieces. That is enough to justify our pleasure and the time we spend here, in these pages which “lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new . . .”

— Michael McClintock, *contributing editor*  
September 10, 2006
* See also by Michael McClintock “The Tanka Niche” at tankasocietyofamerica.com, or “Compass,” Ribbons, June 2005.

** From “Dover Beach” by Matthew Arnold (1822-88).
TANKA
Melanie Alberts

on the floor,
my heart is hiking
mountains—
a houseful of clocks
begins to chime

I’m fine at night, alone.
But mornings, cool
sheets on your side
still tucked in,
I miss your weight

always hungry
always the same
two unleashed dogs
running up the driveway—
low banana moon
black-capped birds
chase through the branches.
I wait for your return
with a glass of rosy,
this apology

on my thatched roof shack
mist settles—
early morning dream
of summer grasses,
footprints

when you were born
your mouth found me
under a cloud of blankets
we were one body again
in a narrow bed
Aurora Antonovic

once she said to me,
her eyes meeting mine,
“I don’t want to die you know”....
in nightly dreams she comes to me
proving she hasn’t

should I accept
the job offer
in Rome this spring?
the Japanese maple can’t decide
which way to sway in the June wind

how did this start,
and how will it end?
this romance that grew out of nowhere—
the incessant pounding
of spring rains on the windows
Aurora Antonovic

tenderly he cares for me
while I am sick
this stormy Wednesday evening...
this man who loves me
better than he loves himself
Pamela A. Babusci

rainy season . . .
bitterness
in her voice
after all those years
in therapy

detaching
from my dysfunctional family
i find myself . . .
now
what?

does a woman ever find
a man to love her
with total abandon?
spring rains overflowing
the begging bowl
Pamela A. Babusci

thick green tea . . .
pouring
nothingness
into
mindlessness

transforming
her former self
into her new self . . .
looking into the mirror
she sees her mother

sleeping
with the stars
instead of you . . .
i dig a grave
for loneliness
Pamela A. Babusci

having hot flashes
on a hot date . . .
where in my handbag
can i yank out my
youthfulness?

memorizing your face
every detail
every curve . . .
tracing your birthmark
with my tongue

— first published in raw nervz haiku 1995

too shy to reveal
my hidden passions & yet
i dream about you
taking refuge within
my supple breasts
parasols
at the bus stop
one white, one black . . .
shadows overlapping
strangers in the rain
— first published in Heron Quarterly 1997

wind i will not hurry
to this wedding while
i am still unwed . . .
autumn leaves keep
falling endlessly
— first published in American Tanka 2000

going
with my friend
for her chemotherapy
i arrive home & re-examine
my breasts
— first published in tangled hair 3 2001
Pamela A. Babusci

making grandmother's
   cassata cake
i ponder the beauty
of her sicilian eyes &
the hills of her village

— first published in tangled hair 4 2004

even at 84
how caustic
my father's words
my therapist's number
disconnected

— first published in tangled hair 4 2004

silence of water
through the bamboo pipe . . .
my mantra rising
like incense
like prayers
how many years
have they been growing
behind the lilacs
these blood red peonies
I’ve just discovered

ganged up on
in the school yard
after hours
I learn the value
of animal rage

downstairs
my mother sits crying
upstairs
my father sits sweating
I roam the streets
David Bacharach

she muses
on our future
I resist the urge
to tell her
what the psychic said
Along the roofline
between gaps in new shingles
down the builder’s chute
and out into the chaos
of the rough yard—an orange.

Through the thin cloth seat
of the auditorium
sudden vibrations
and snapping rivets, the mind
breaking free on bright steel wings.

Legerdemain—seized
with the possibilities
I fold down that page
and walk through the library doors,
draw a rabbit from a hat.
not much else to do
in line at the Hess station
but note her shy beauty
behind me and disclose it
in a little poem

in the blue cloth
printed with cranes
we place our parakeets
side by side in the hole
where the mystery goes

all of a sudden
the summer has turned
to the goldenrods . . .
this inner welling
that comes and goes
Tom Clausen

the walk back from Rite Aid
a twelve pack and
prescription in hand,
the gas station flag
flapping in the wind

like four grapefruits
that fit in a bowl
my wife explains a family
does not work with a watermelon
and three little plums

another day done
and neither good or bad
it was what it was,
I shoot a basket
in and out
this rainy day
here I am
the father of two children
trapped in the house
trying to catch a fly

my wife had told me
the dog likes to get up
at 5:30 am but while she
is away I discover he also
likes to sleep in

while the chickens
scratch and peck
some common sense
settles an old score
and I do not wish for something more
for another tomorrow
my wife deadheads the daylilies
while I carry just a few
stories of my parents
and their parents inside me

it’s not disappointment
in those who say
they know
but in myself for this lifelong
never knowing

good outdoors work
has filled this day
and brought me a lovely softness
to the late day sun
on the stone steps
twenty five years later
I pass the exit
that I once took
for a long weekend
in the promised land

maybe she too
has studied herself
and how her breasts lift
when she works
to put her hair up

never thought I'd see
the days of breakdowns,
uncontrollable laughter
and the haunts of deepest love
all escape me
Tom Clausen

just a little drive
to pick my son up
and bring him home
yet along the way I see
so much I've left behind

the appointment
in the woods
at the falls
was with no one
but the thought of you

my wife has instructed me
to throw out even more
and as I sit here
the sun filters through leaves
while I rummage my losses
Tom Clausen

the ants at my feet
so close, yet
so far—
how countless the women
I've come to fancy

inevitability
yes of course there is
inevitability,
will it keep us together
or drive us apart?

her look forlorn
as she sits in the car
her head against the window,
he stands there filling the tank
to go some more . . .
I know too well
the sadness
that would be the same
with each woman
I've longed for

we drove for miles
looking for a place to enter,
my girlfriend long ago
who wanted so earnestly
to get into nature

my children laugh
and say look at my face
with its unhappy aspect—
how could it be
I wonder to myself
such a hot night
that without a word
I go out behind the house
and sit there naked
looking at all the stars

this beautiful summer day
I wave to the new neighbor
and she happily waves back
the freedom of not knowing
much at all . . .

in the middle
of our big clean up
I set several maps aside,
places with promise
so far from here
out of all the lives possible
my choices led me far and wide
only to return to where I started

in her pristine office
the large desk calendar has one neat aquamarine line
through each day done

my father let me discover most everything for myself—
in silence I drive my son to visit another college
somewhere
among mountain wildflowers
like these
the grandfather I never met
both lived and died

you, convicted of fraud
and I, accessory
to murder—
these dark masks we sport
in my nighttime dreams

tall, unkempt
this black-eyed susan
rooted deep
into our neighbor’s bed. . .
we should keep the curtains closed
Janet Lynn Davis

around the edges
of my new hand mirror,
faux jewels glitter
    as if such distraction
could brighten the view

my stolen
Valentine pendant,
at its center
a golden, mythical bird
wings no longer mine

a new heart charm,
another year of union;
I’ve wondered, though,
what happens when
all the links have been filled
Janet Lynn Davis

reading tanka,
and yet more tanka,
about cherry blossoms. . .
how I crave
the top of a sundae

— first published in red lights, June 2006

months later
he still clutches
the bowling ball—
all he could salvage
after Katrina

— first published in Wisteria, July 2006

the crackle and pop
of my breakfast cereal—
more news
about car bomb blasts
somewhere else in the world

— first published in Wisteria, July 2006
keening Manitoba winds,
snow piling towards the roof—
wordlessly
my English mother
sets the kitchen table

— first pub. in *Slow Spring Water*, book (Dixon) 2006

long distance
my sister and I recall
our green years—
age two and three, hand-in-hand
up and down our front steps

— first pub. in *TSA Newsletter The Tanka Cafe*, 2003

shadows
of the spider plant
lengthen on my wall
if only sleep would come
as surely as the night

— first pub. in *Ribbons*, 2005
words of love
I know I’ll never speak
stored in my notebook—
these silent pages
allowing them a little life

guitar solo
I recall that first night
you played for me—
head sideways, long fingers
softly stroking songs of love
— first pub. in *Simply Haiku*, 2005
pub., *Slow Spring Water*, 2006

cautiously
letting you into my life
a thin strand of fear
that has always bound me
loosens and falls away . . .
Melissa Dixon

mid-river
stowing oars in the boat, I turn
my face to the sun
letting this urgent current
carry me wherever it flows

slow down, I whisper—
will there not always be
tea in my cup
and a half-written poem
when I leave this body?
— first pub. in Tanka Splendor award,
2002; Simply Haiku, 2004

Mount Baker
rising high beyond the sea—
as the tide glides back
I watch my white rose float away
with a poem for a sail . . .
— first pub. in Simply Haiku, 2005
Sunday afternoon
driving in the park, windows wide
teaching Mozart
to the trees . . . and look!
a deer is crossing the road . . .

something
has been set free . . .
a gull
lazes past my window
bright white in the sun

— first pub. in *Gusts*, 2005
Jim Doss

patchwork of scrap cloth
oranges and browns
for the 40th year
leaves fall in the autumn
of my grandmother's quilt

the words tonight
born grey and cold
no light left in their eyes
time to give them
to the undertaker

her life's become a labor
of mirrors and surgeons
where each reflection
must grow more beautiful
than the last
Jim Doss

nowhere
to escape—
even in the john
the sound
of cell phones and pagers

easing a sweater
over my head
before sunrise
I see the sparks
of our rekindled love

the embrace
of the stairwells'
empty echo
my feet come
in search of you
Jim Doss

listening to cd's
on the ride to work
I study to relearn
the language
my ancestors forgot
Jeanne Emrich

she sits in silence
as the children play—
outside her window
a red oak that will hold
its leaves all winter

the door left open
to your childhood room
I play on the piano
a minuet Mozart composed
when he was six

with nothing
left to say
we hold hands
and go pick
wild asparagus
cursing
under the work light
our fingers fumble
with the carburetor—
closest we’ve been in years

during this sunlit creek
rippling through the pines
no need today
to promise myself
anything

after the soap bubbles
we go inside—
the March wind
having stolen what’s left
of your childhood
Margarita Engle

white wall
in stark sunlight
cactus grows
pressed against the blue
of a mosaic horse

lava
a landscape
of wind
and petrified
thunder

house of balconies
an architectural
ode
to the sea
waves of wrought iron
Margarita Engle

thousands
of miles away
from the war
in wild oak forest
one yellow ribbon

an alpine
species of giant
dandelion
each puffy seed head
is big enough for three wishes

spring thaw
we cross the creek
on a bridge
of old Christmas trees--
still fragrant
Margarita Engle

saris
on a clothesline
wings
of color and light
spun by silkworms

wooden toys
made by a child
the guitar
is too small
for adult fingers

more war news
I feed a stray cat
and flip
the overturned beetle
back onto its feet
bridge
over crocodiles--
hungry children
watch tourists
throw food in the river

antique fair
a young man
kneels
beside the old violin—
reverent silence

silhouette
in tropical sun
old men
play dominos beside a wall
of crumbling stone
book heaven
an eccentric
collector
has moved all the works
of dead authors upstairs

valley of change
the pronghorn antelope
and grizzly bears
are gone—now I watch
as the last farms disappear

bear dogs
between hunting seasons
pacing
in their kennels
like captive bears
Margarita Engle

conga line
in my dream
a river
of people
rippling
Amelia Fielden

like spilt milk
on a blue tablecloth
clouds falter
across the autumn sky—
how far can I go

— first published in Ribbons

in the rear
of American Airlines
two-oh-eight
a flight attendant
knitting pink bootees

bright blue sky
university spires
stretching reaching
beyond this classroom
how much remains to learn
Amelia Fielden

a bit blurred,
his edgy good looks—
could three years
have aged me as much
as today’s lecturer

soft white wings
of seagulls flapping
past concrete
in city canyons
people go stop go stop

that small man
walking across a bridge
balloons aloft—
happiness bought or
happiness for sale
Amelia Fielden

she lingers there
a blonde in a black coat
embracing
an armful of tulips,
then slowly walks away

— first published in Presence

young leaves lift
in summer breezes
blowing green
over the old parapet
over the older river

during dessert
touching on the same old
sad topic
only experience
keeps the tears behind my eyes
a rare reunion
updating current lives
kissed goodbye
in my cousin’s strong arms
the arc of memory

— first published in *Yellow Moon*

a dream of
cutting rain-wet roses
in your garden
that sense of belonging
I’ll always feel, always

sand drifting
in hollows and cracks—
the beach path
no-one I know
walks up any more
Amelia Fielden

green bottles
rolling gushing into foam
a seagull
flies off so easily
and we are beached here

casually
you talked I listened
that was all
except for a sea-eagle
scooping prey from the dunes

— first published in *Gusts*

breakers spraying
far-off rocky islands
rise and fall
rise and fall in rhythm
while we wait for resolution
Amelia Fielden

stretch of shore
quilted by seagull’s feet
clear water
scalloping the edges—
shall I swim to the horizon

I look up
to see a pelican
arcing through
cerulean blue
and my hopes take off

in my childhood
always the singing sea,
these last years
still pleasure in the swirl
below the lighthouse
Amelia Fielden

a dead gull
drifts on the rising tide,
grace and purpose
become feathered garbage
under bland summer skies

darkest night
on ambiguous seas
of memory
casting anxious nets,
hauling in the past

vibrating
under a lorikeet
the grevillea
yields its honeyed flower—
am I still a good mother
clutching at
a stalwart eucalypt
the jasmine vine
is climbing skywards—
please don’t depend on me

kookaburra
perched as motionless
as a pine cone
on the shaggy old tree
let’s fly, let’s fly away

old habits
shouldn’t tie the heart—
it matters that
our hands can stretch and
stretch and never reach
Amelia Fielden

here and there
jacaranda blue
clouds the air—
a pall-bearer stumbles,
the lilies slip a little

— first published in *Yellow Moon*

gardenias
with the strongest of perfumes,
how swiftly
they were dying as we danced
where is the orchestra now?

— first published in *Kokako*

I’ve grown old
just listening to music—
where’s the need
to record the life of one
who plays no instrument
Amelia Fielden

snoring softly
twitching in your sleep
recent nights
more reassuring than
the jangle of our days

midnight call
an urgent awakening
to the voice
of no-one we know,
and it’s still raining

all those good years
of family life, work
and travel—
what if I lose the key
to my memories now
Amelia Fielden

light and shade
my life my poetry—
I drive past
a gaggle of bright cyclists
swooping from the dark forest

six o’clock
morning star a diamond
in sea mist
I’m searching for the start
of a brilliant tanka

today the sea’s
painted ultramarine
clouds are peaked
on the horizon
what is there for us
Amelia Fielden

small splashes
of green tea ice cream
on the last page
of your new manuscript—
our meeting, too, sweet and short

senior’s outing—
becoming aware that
I’ve entered
the time-zone where death parts
more often than divorce

up ahead
a silver curve of train
draws me smoothly
to the conclusion
of one happy day

— first published in *Presence*
always we crossed hot
sand to glittering bays
skins seldom dry
never sat watching
rain puddle the lawn

in the bay you’re small
you swim panting back
I row closer afraid
of green depths you
labour across

far below our room
James Cook approached his murder
sheets gleam with sea light
from a crow’s nest we
might seem dismembered
I and mine
struggle on this peak
together
we are tiring—won’t someone
please throw five lines down

— for Sanford Goldstein

in the clouds
your face for a moment
dissipated by wind
and drunk on sunlight
I call out for you again

after the storm
only our house stands
the wave of relief
is quickly poisoned
by a bitter worm of guilt
Denis M. Garrison

forbidden love
my hopeless hunger
for your touch
more secret than
a geisha’s blush

lean back on my arm
let your honey hair cascade
over the edge . . .
for that one naked moment
when neither of us can smile

come close, young woman,
I’ll tell you about onions:
they are the last sum
of all their layers, oldest
and youngest . . . yes, come closer
hours before dawn
drinking vodka on the porch
while others sleep
I turn off the light
and give the moth a break

pink-bellied pup
asleep in my lap
she’s so trusting
I sit still for awhile
and kid myself she’s right

late night T’aichung
lanterns sparkle in the lake
on a crimson bridge
my eyes full of beauty
my shoes full of blood

Denis M. Garrison
Denis M. Garrison

we smile through tears
and make hopeless plans
as if we had time
one of us is dying
and both of us know

gone so long
days pass without
remembering
waking to your voice
calling my name

an empty lot
except these five stone steps
granite solitude
there is so much to pass on
but no one there to listen
your childhood home—
let my foot fall softly here
and pause
in all those unmarked spaces
that gave shape to your life

demolition—
crashing walls and trees resound
from the house next door
on the shore in wind and wave
I glimpse my own scattering
Sanford Goldstein

alone at home
in the heat of summer,
I iron this and that:
once the dead one
held a sleeve shirt against her

finding
the wimp in me
persists,
I hang back letting others talk, do,
I wait for five lines down

waiting
even into my eighties
for some change,
find the patterns fold
into neat tucks on a table
the teak table
I spread these fingers over
gives strength,
and the teak chair I sit on
makes even the regal not that far

so silent
these three weeks,
my sedated brother,
wrists bound
to his intensive-care bed

another life
in Japan's going on,
another world—
my mate's stooped figure
gathering wood in the rural cold
Sanford Goldstein

oatmeal
too much this morning
after the Oscars,
I settle my knife and fork
for one thin pancake

you're pessimistic,
my friend tells me
over lunch—
I invent some optimism
on my cheese cake fork

each life
progresses from youth
to age,
and still my blinders
remain steady
brief
they are and more brief,
these five lines down,
and still, still, the long
aftermath when they are done

missing
even a frog's repeated night cry
on my American sojourn—
returning, I will stand by a rice field
near my rural home

restless
from the crawl into bed
to the alarm at six,
the only stars are on the ceiling
of my granddaughter's borrowed room
Sanford Goldstein

ages ago
I saw a homeless man
cutting newspapers,
now the sudden dark corner
where poems are spilled

how confident
that elderly psychic
about the color of a dress,
the disease a husband died of,
a better economy in July

supper
at a millionaire's house
with sixty-six guests,
head of a table they put me
and I manage a talk six persons down
Sanford Goldstein

I listen to others
tell their sad stories,
my ear a soft carpet
for blues day or night,
for blues quiet or loud

meeting her once
and saying farewell,
these tears,
and I wonder if frailty
thy name is man

crying
before my granddaughter's
junior high chums—
it was a recall
of the Hiroshima maidens
Sanford Goldstein

the soft
cotton-like ball
of a dandelion,
a finger flick and at least
I can scatter seed in the world

his piercing eye
that thrust itself out and in,
my Zen master's legacy;
dead now, and his long sleeves
still hide contrapuntal mysteries

once,
I samurai'd my coffee cup
at an empty world;
now the tea whisk in the master's hand
continues to spin in my mind
Sanford Goldstein

no circle
woven round
me thrice,
and I have not drunk
the milk of paradise

in the rain
I watch waves lap
the shore,
in the rain
I walk back to my car

in a wheelchair
that frail body rigid
like a chipped stone,
traces of revenge gathering
in her string-like fingers
arriving in time
for a front row seat
clear stream reflecting
black water bugs’
dance

evening fire
dreaming of spring
the old dog sighs
puppies gnawing
his ear

where does the dark
come from she asked
while I pondered
she answered herself
— outside
Sari Grandstaff

I sit and breathe
the children outside
sing and clap:
“Who me? Yes you!
Couldn’t be! Then who?”

young surfer dudes
on the terrace next door
overlooking
the outside shower
at our rented beach house

holding my hand
as we go in
to the restaurant
we skip
right to dessert
we stride
across miles of green fields
flecked with gold
to claim our baggage—
commercial carpet
on a post
at the edge of the field
a cat
sitting so very still
in the stillness of the noon

drinking this tea
called Green Serenity
as snow falls
how sweet and warm the taste
of your eager mouth

tightly holding
your hand in mine I ask
which way
you softly reply
take the long way
hot cocoa
and the cool mornings
of autumn
this breakfast in bed
and the all day smile

while smoking
a cigarette you said
"I love you"
and when done you
turned to another

tonight's sky
bereft of the moon
and stars
if she were here
her face would be enough
walking to work
in the dark and the rain
with a co-worker
we talk about the weather
our umbrellas touching

I am drowning
in the cold cold lake
and you are there
waving and smiling at me
completely oblivious

especially now
as the nights grow longer
tears do not stop
and so this is my autumn
lost in a sea of thoughts
it's sad to learn
love's so very much like dew
as each day passes
I can only wonder
how long will the tears fall

drifting
in and out of sleep
I hear voices
but perhaps it's only
this burning fever

you have passed
from flesh to memory
at long last
I've moved on and yet
my fingers long to touch
the drizzle
slowly soaks my coat
as I walk
looking for the house
where I first met love

clouds piled up
along the horizon
white mountains
stir within my heart
the desire to wander

from the dream
he awakes with a start
heart pounding
in the distance the song
of the siren again
Judy Kamilhor

the former site
of the women's house
of detention
one red rose poking
through the iron bars
years when sadness
greeted every dawn
I would not change—
there lurked the bitter seeds
from which this sweetness grew

the poet's garden
blossoms swell to bursting
then drop petals
madcap color, compost piles
and jars of potpourri

obsessively
he carves eagles. . .
not for sale
never having known
the freedom of flight
first light! listen,
as songbirds celebrate
this quiet time
I keep longing for a jet
to throw around the sky
— for Don Emigholz

where the man
fixes trucks and cars
a loaner dog
pricks up his ears
joins me on my walk

it seemed to me
no leaf was moving
that the world was still
but here's a smallish breeze
ruffling chipmunk fur
Doris Kasson

summer storm
young and in love
we embrace
the wild winds caressing us
each cloud a celebration

hurricane warning
the last window sealed shut
water jugs filled
in the silence of the safe room
the noise of our breathing

the self-help books
lie
in a heap on the floor
no answer comes
to the knock at her door
Doris Kasson

tells me
she cried reading my poem
not for me
some long lost memory
her very own

snow mounts
on the window ledge
i mix my oils
paint it black
the old dogwood tree

etched into memory
her sagging smile
our family bible
me flipping pages
eyes on the clock
once again he tries
to explain it to me
electricity
how it works and oh yes
why he left his wife

yet another
family reunion
ending the debate
grandpa takes a seat
at the children's table

irreplaceable
the cup that was dropped
still
i'll box up the pieces
stave off the mourning
the dowager houses
stand primly in their ragged porches
looking embarrassed
as ladies do
in such circumstances

the slattern houses sag
on a mean street in a small town,
floral sheets for curtains
cinder blocks for steps
and the fetid smell of despair

In my dreams,
a lean, low-hulled corsair
glides up the bay—
and wrecks on rocks
of memory.
Accustomed as I am to angry words, it is kind words that make me tremble like water in a glass.

that man, he teaches my daughter that the golden veneer of love is very thin

tracing the face of the man in the moon my own face looks back at me
M. Kei

His Majesty the Cat
must not be disturbed;
he lolls
upon his throne
of sunshine.

Piñatas
hanging in the air
waiting for a sharp whack
to break them open
and spill their meaning.

My heart:
black linen
hung at night
in the shadow
of a crow.
An abandoned farmhouse
stone eyes gaping
slack-mouthed door
where only flies buzz
in and out.

Late winter,
the bleak trees leafless
until a cardinal lands,
then dead trees everywhere
burst into red bloom.

Rags,
tatters,
and remnants,
full of raveled
winds.
M. Kei

Low grey hills
of barges loaded with gravel,
softened almost into beauty
by the rising of the mist
on the evening bay.

No answer
is an answer,
and so,
after a decent interval,
I abandon hope.

Another man decides
he likes my lonely perch.
Two
is too crowded,
so I leave.
M. Kei

Give me the heart
of an old chief
and I’ll make it
young again,
dancing on the Red Road.

Trust has nothing
to do with it, either
you have the courage
to step off the cliff of love
    . . . . or you don’t.

Ankle-aching acres
of wooded cliffs
between here and there,
but oh! the view
from Turkey Point!
noon.
an envelope with my name
in her handwriting—
how the weather of my body
changes

I’ve heard tell,
that a plenty of juniper shows evidence
of holy ground—
let us spread a blanket here
and marry

“okay! okay!
he’s everything a woman wants.
now what’s for supper?” —
the petals of yesterday’s rose
lie around the vase
in rural Vermont
we stroll
into an October calendar
time
the enemy of lovers

in the shade
of the wisteria, sketching from a snapshot,
he caresses her new—
erases the years
with the rub of desire

season’s end.
in the field above the house tonight
a lone chirring—
o brother cricket
I know I know
“be joyous for me
when I go” — well
my friend,
nobody tells me
how to grieve
Deborah P Kolodji

a broken stem
of agapanthus
bobs in the wind—
my sigh as I think of you
when no one is listening

blue damselfly
over the water lilies
this summer day
currents swirl below
with my day dreams

first thumps
of suitcases arriving
from your plane—
I turn my back on baggage
and welcome you back
walking close
on a dusty path
as the sun falls—
the bugs complain loudly
as if the heat is my fault

lightning
blinds me as I drive
through the storm
reminding me of you
and our night on the hill

she said
she would never
marry—
thinking of her while
watching my children
J. Andrew Lockhart

my daughter,  
in her swimsuit,  
looks out the window  
watching robins splash  
in the birdbath

how many days  
will it be until  
I see you?  
the last lily  
falls to the ground

aimlessly walking  
through downtown as a stranger,  
watching strangers,  
as my soul rests  
at home far away
light rain
caresses the roof
at midnight—
she sighs
in a dream

reflection,
the repetition of
summer sunlight—
looking at photos
from last winter

slowly moving
into my private world, while
staring at the stars—
fireflies try their best
to lighten my mood
sharing wine
as we watch the
slow moving stars—
our love blends
and ages

I'm covered with
the blood of my brothers
and my enemies—
turn off the news,
at least tonight . . .

passion burns
higher as the breeze
blows through the field—
watching you walk
through wild flowers
J. Andrew Lockhart

wading in
humid air
past midnight
imagining stars
through the clouds

you gently
touch my arm
at dawn—
the birds take my feelings
and put them in music

looking through
a foggy window
as rain drops
land on cracked ground
and dead grass
heat tries hard
to divert my attention,
but it fails—
the sun falls earlier
today than yesterday

rain drops bounce
off the shimmering
lake as I
walk alone,
missing my youth

children play
in the city park
under the sun
as the elderly man
walks with his oxygen tank
my vision, 
altered by fog 
in the cool morning 
sending my thoughts 
from summer to fall 

abandoned home 
surrounded by 
a wooden fence—
my spirit tangled in 
unkempt wisteria
Key West afternoon—
a homeless man
on the beach
a blind woman
in the library

skimming rocks—
stillness and the stars
return
each
time

flowers
breach the gray ash
breaking through from the past
showing us the way to begin
once more
Francis Masat

flowing water
under icy banks
  the rain barrel
  already full
  of tadpoles

the stack of books
I want to read
gets higher
  sleeping more
  as I get older

harvest moon
on thin ice
a leaf spins
in early darkness
smoke twirls
Francis Masat

winter beach—
  enjoying shade
  under the palms
  watching tourists
  sunbathe

rest home garden—
  gray and white motes
  drift in sun rays
    evening shadows
    creep along the path

music
  helps sooth my soul
  helps get me through the night
  my sadness then is forced to wait
  it’s cue
sudden shower
dogs, tourists, locals
running together
    the first drops
    raise dust

Do you
remember all
the things we planned to do,
the places we would go some day?
Did you?

wine by candlelight—
we trade clothes for satin sheets
in a jasmined breeze
the soft gentle sounds
of sleep
many days after
cultivating attitudes
rich in depression,
I go outside for the mail
as if on a great journey

stuck on a bus
crossing endless Nebraska,
too much on my mind—
ah, on the noon-bright wheat
the wind and its shadows

at the center
of Manhattan
a manhole cover
catches the rain
and makes it swirl
traveling a country
far too barren to love,
we changed for good
in that bleak motel,
having only each other

choices, choices
at the little shop
on the avenue—
for a friend who’s far away,
the card with the paper circus

I settle within
some uttermost dwelling
before sleep,
taking up the dream-life
in sure and certain hope
nothing like Bach
  to help us choose the flowers
  we take to the graves—
  late spring colors always
  the brighter for Memorial Day

I’ve asked the sparrows
  to be quiet today,
  in respect for the dead—
  to fidget less and sit
  where I tell them to sit

  for sacred things,
  the cobwebs
  never stir . . .
I wish there were a way
  I might console them
screwing a dimmer bulb
into the garden lantern . . .
soon the moths
are up to their old game again
this muggy night in August

one whole week
I wait in a jury room
reading fantasy novels;
our group is never summoned,
crime in the city has ceased

where do the gods get
this idea they can play
pinball with our lives? —
that is as far as I go
in my lament for the world
when life ends
the number of things
I leave undone
will be fewer, if today
I tell no lies
after lunch
with a deaf friend—
the percussion
of a lone raindrop
on my earlobe

cruise ship—
laughter and music
beneath the stars
never have I felt
so lonely

christmas season—
in human art class
his paintbrush gives
the nude model
a breast enlargement
Michael Meyerhofer

Renaissance Faire—
behind the tents
a column of knights
stacking their lances
in a U-Haul

listening to Bach
while making love—
her tiny gasp
between the fourth
and fifth movements
— first published in American Tanka 14

forming a bonsai
out of binder clips—
walking by
my supervisor
trims a branch
— first published in American Tanka 15
Michael Meyerhofer

accidentally loading
an old roll of film—
one lover
superimposing
the next
— first published in American Tanka #13

barefoot, she smiles
stepping out
of a little silken
puddle—
her nightgown
— first published in bottle rockets #7

cloudless night—
billions of stars
in the bullfrog’s eyes
still he winces
from my flashlight
— first published in Simply Haiku
heat waves
of the high desert
fill the air you breathe
escape into the shady place
your mind

the forest chatters
all around
from tree to tree
the language of the mist
echoes in the outhouse

tiptoeing
through the badlands
my son
wanting to be bad
while walking the line
Wild yellow fire
back among the bare trees:
an early bush
announces spring's approach
with a clear, bright voice.

A grey, rusted van
reflected in the water
in a pothole.
An old man climbs slowly out,
stretches, smiles, and walks away.

Warm morning breeze,
whispering of the river—
but still no peace.
The water trying to say a name,
the air filled as my heart is filled.
so far, the light bends
just beyond sanctuary,
beyond the blue hope
of a wandering eye without
the window’s patient guidance.

a kiss: your tongue finds
my tongue following the way
into blue quiet
and perfect magic. such lips
know this place of strange comfort.

just for good measure
two pens find their way behind
the clip of my ear
one pen for deceitfulness
one for the bare bones of truth.
neolithic curves
around the soft banister
of a staircase. Up
toward the loft, the blue shoes
of her dainty feet step up.

spring’s voice comes in, not
bursts of green as expected,
but subtle, dainty
and superimposed atop
the bumblebee’s bumble

at last the cricket
found its way toward the edge
of the wide, deep house.
along the way its song cried
openly to crisp night air.
Am I your good queen?
Does my heart anticipate
a flutter upon
your entrance? How wide must my
kingdom be to house your love?
Dustin Neal

visitation . . .
my brother’s watch
beeps
to let me know
he’ll be gone soon

family gathering;
the silence
between my mother
and stepfather
colder than the rain

new law!
nine o'clock curfew . . .
alone
my father drinks
with the lights off
Dustin Neal

mother and i
share grandma's quilt
to stay warm . . .
the old scars between
us still not stitched
The whole of me
is like a composition book:
on faded lines
I censor my life
in peacock ink.

Mother & I
don't speak of it
this Mother's Day
the white irises
tightly furled.

Cold rain
this first day of spring;
I discard
can after can of old paint,
the plaid shirt you never wore.
Lakeside walk:
strips of birch bark peel
like layers
of live heart these days
of her dying.

this time
I am there
in the dream where
Mother dies
again

the rose garden
in full summer glory
today
I feel
like a rose
Stuck
in a downpour
the wipers
whip our small talk
back and forth.

In queue
for take-off, thoughts
ricochet
from Takuboku to the dog
dying back home.

Time
since her death . . .
the pattern
of scratch marks on bedrock
as the glacier recedes.

— first published in Lilliput Review #141, 2005
Shivers of rainbow
like silk scarves
last night
I dreamt we floated
over Niagara Falls.

— first published in American Tanka #4, 1998

Meet me
amid lilies on the trail
to the sea;
to this wet green world
whisper words.

— first published in Woodpecker, V:2, 2000

Folding the first
of a thousand paper cranes
this new year
her cancer
has returned.

— first published in Tanka Journal #18, 2001
Pamela Miller Ness

A cool wind
after the heat wave—
walking
the old road
without you.

— first published in *Woodpecker VIII:1*, 2002

Father's
tangled mind
I rub
the strength
in his shoulders.

— first publ. in *Raw NerVZ Haiku VIII:3*, 2002

Time
of metastasis.
How tightly
she packs the beds
with impatiens.

— first published in *Tanka Journal #21*, 2002
Pamela Miller Ness

To Guanyin
seated on my study shelf:
grant me
grace when the words flow
and grit in the silences.

— first published in *TSA Newsletter IV:3*, 2003
ankle-length ball dress
flowers scattered in your hair
an inside light
from the hired limousine
as you walk towards the future

my daughter
eating a sandwich
leaves small kisses
at the edge of the bread,
draws them into her open mouth

against the blue sheets
you curl close as two speech marks
honeymoon couple
sleeping in my spare room
before an early morning flight
ninety-two-year-old
bare armed in the hospice
discusses his service
in the Pacific war . . .
his leather dog-tags

inside the dark house
your messages free fall
from the answer machine
sensitive to my touch
as the mimosa leaves

ship’s memorial
placed on the cliff top’s
blurred edge
the list of drowned sailors
gradually dims on grief’s plaque
Patricia Prime

in the new house
everything they need
except a stove . . .
each points a finger at space
by the wall that should be hot

city street
a Chinese busker
playing his flute
reminds me of that first morning
waking in a Beijing hotel

depth of a poet
I mark my address book
with an asterisk
late at night, no-one to see,
I read his poems in bed
Patricia Prime

sixteen
I brushed grandma’s hair
it fell easily
bleached ivory
by the hard sun

in rotorua
I bathe in a hot pool
called purapurawheta
touched by sunlight
a tree fern unfolds

at the maori centre
I cradle in my hand
a bone pendant
its koru shape
circle within a circle
evacuation—
an empty biscuit tin
with its array of buttons
shifting in my hands
entertained me for hours

all the old ladies
who lived in my street
have gone:
one with a mobile scooter,
one with a stick, passed like spring

beneath a rimu tree
in the new garden
a mosaic birdbath
with the tip of my finger
I break the crust of ice
pushed to the limit
I stand on this bridge
and look around
at the unfolding willows,
the curl of ponga fronds

sea fog
the sound of a ship’s klaxon
across the harbour
echoed by the squawk of chickens
from a neighbour’s backyard
a shopkeeper stops
sweeping his footpath
smiles as I pass...
this rite of passage
makes my august day

slack tide
row boats at anchor
in disarray—
your dalliance leaves
my life directionless

late summer
the river meanders
toward the sea . . .
why should we hurry
to the end of everything
a flame tree
theatrical among
grey gums—
in a crowded room
my eyes find you

torn cobwebs
flutter at the window—
I untangle
the satin bed sheets
you wouldn’t share

when you
and your suave husband
have gone
my dog will sit by my side
—honest, I didn’t tell him
Jack Prewitt

rainforest trail
a sinuous lawyer vine
embraces me
it too, has barbs
that never let go

a fly
is laying its eggs
on my dinner

  I do not know the fly
  or take it personally

a photo
of a wedding reception
everyone smiling
the cake still perfect
the steel knife shining
blood drips
from my index finger...

it clots

half way down a page

of the pruning manual
Kala Ramesh

truth lies
embedded in maya
and, beneath the veil
once lifted
truth lies

flipping stones
I see it skip three
times on the lake
which has achieved
perfect stillness

they say
waxing and waning
the moon never-reaching
in truth, truth lies
between the shores
Kala Ramesh

talking
of a ‘live-in’ relationship
a concept hard to accept
I see the flickering butterfly
has no such qualm

two knotted trees
knotting still further
grow skyward . . . poor souls,
even heaven
can’t part them now!
Andrew Riutta

sunday evening
drinking cold beer
in a hot shower
I pray
there is no god

— for Tom Clausen

for my birthday
I want to be a boy
again
just me and my dog
playing dead to the world

untouched
by the sharpest corners
of this world
a lone breast feather
in the shade of a maple
Andrew Riutta

and to think
I once believed
the clothesline
was the only thing
that kept neighbors apart

day night
more than others
I’m tempted
to scratch my back
on that rusty nail

a banana peel
an empty wine glass
in ways
I thought not possible
the world is renewed
a stone
perfect for sitting
a chill
as I try once more
to comfort myself

how unfortunate
this burn that pulses
on my hand
was not caused
by my own warmth

unseen crows
call out from the fog
if only
I were the man
I intended to be
Andrew Riutta

harsh words
have ground his teeth down
to tiny daggers
this man who picks lilacs
for his dying mother

— for Pat

not so different
from the AUM she sleeps to
the hum
of a Junebug’s wings
as it dies

— for my wife
tear roses
slipping through my fingers,
the smooth petals,
each one a memory
of you

your birthday today—
so many years we came
with gifts of love;
a spring celebration
no longer observed

lilacs
stretching into the blue
too high to reach
their fragrance fills my
heart with longing
our good-byes said
the cold of morning lingers
throughout the day;
not for months yet
will there be spring

idling away
a winter afternoon
the sunlight shifts;
inch by inch shadows
bring on the cold

piles of leaves
compacted by the rain
slowly fermenting;
the cycle of change
continues unchanged
brush fire in the hills—
at sunset an orange sky
reflected in the ocean;
all this beauty from the ashes
of the grieving

a quiet moment
when party guests have gone—
sitting here with you
there never has been a need
for the company of others
Guy Simser

In shoreline waves
at Dieppe, 1942,
poppies blossom
bloody row upon
bloody row

War widow—
since then, every day
she takes her
medicine, from her
pill box

In grade ten science
my timid left hand fondled
a warm candled egg
and within days, my
first love’s pale, right breast
Your milkweed pod
fit my cupped palm perfectly
and when gently squeezed
opened with a sigh, proffering
my first touch of moist silk

Searching the copse
for that cicada in heat
and finding
only silence
and a lost youth

Growing in this
delicate nest of entwined grass
a tiny blue egg
and in there, a robin
that cannot dream
Guy Simser

Who else amongst us
sees that fading silver trace
of a snail’s passing
end to end across
this chiselled epitaph?

Church doves, forever
in their white habits, still flock
to vesper tolls, still
genuflect to their ark, so
evidently land-locked

Serenely floating
up into this blue curved sky
in this clear lake, I
extend my hand
to Michelangelo’s
Cheryl Stiles

in $M$ theory
one universe after another
eleven dimensions
a sacred geometry
your body knotted with mine
Marie Summers

the sunrise
in a drop of rain . . .
the doctor informs us
your surgery went
as planned

rosy sunset
over the lake . . .
wanting to set sail
and follow
the colors
As the sun sinks, I
float in a serene, purple
red and yellow sea—
my sense of self shrunk
to a crumb of salt

The August meadow
awash with the colors
of wild flowers
yet an autumn chill
has entered my bones

During winter the evergreens
stood out in the forest, but
now one must search—
the same as for truth
among all that is said
The paper reports
a young woman’s remains found
in three garbage bags—
from the deck, I finally
sweep the early fallen leaves

Somewhere in this city
the man who dismembered
a young woman—
what do they mean to him
these bright red sunset streaks?

The morning after
our fight, I try to think
of what to say—
the sky gray, the air hot, wet
and all the leaves drooped
George Swede

When I live more
I write less
and when I write more
I live less—
in the robin’s nest, a cuckoo

At the window display
of the anti-aging store
a stooped, wrinkled lady—
lovely in her display
of life’s last stage

Interlocked
her back to my front
just as when we fell asleep—
diagonal sunlight
across the blinds
George Swede

A mutinous self
is trying to be captain of
what others see as me—
old yacht left high on shore with
marsh grass swaying on its deck
Allen M. Terdiman

At the monthly
tanka workshop
a poem about a child’s death—
an echo of gravel
against a coffin

In the garden
on my birthday—
green leaves
among the forsythia
tell that spring too is older.

Seventieth birthday reunion
with childhood friends—
eight revelers
fill empty spaces
at a table set for ten.
Magnolia blossoms
blanket the park meadow—
an old woman
warming in the sun
removes her sweater

A frantic search
for a subway without a name—
I wake
longing for an embrace
at the end of the line
The aftertaste
of honeybush tea—
my tongue
is mindful
as a hummingbird.

Dark clouds
obscure her naked beauty.
The shy moon
is full of longing.
Such is my longing for you.

When the last leaf
has fallen, and all is buried
in snow, wait
for the kiss of spring blossoms
and summer’s passion.
CarrieAnn Thunell

Another long
rumpled weekend.
We bask
in slothfulness
just past middle age.

Li Po wrote
of the moon riding the waters.
Centuries later
this same waxing moon
follows me like a hound.

Two men lean
over a game of Go.
The field
is a maze of black and white.
Their coffee and wives cool.
CarrieAnn Thunell

One thin line
divides ocean fog
from waves.
One man gathers up
my life-worn heart in his.

Neon lights
crowd Basho’s mountains.
Stars no longer shine.
No refuge remains
from urban scents and sounds.

That one star.
Shall I call it my own?
If I did
I’d lose the river of heaven
for a dust mote!
CarrieAnn Thunell

Rich
with star-jewels,
rainbows,
and sunrises;
owning nothing, I own everything.

How much
of myself must I sell
to buy safe
passage to a forest grove
to build my hermitage?

The world
seen through the straw hat
of greed:
all is strife and hoarding.
Better to have stayed in the trees!
Wearing his victim’s sweater, the soldier was warmed by the dog who mistook one for the other.

I practice tai chi.
A great medicine wheel spirals with life.
Earth is dancing about her sun.
my lunch
one big pizza triangle—
a feeling of
something missing
grows as I eat

slowly
I open my wings
and let this loneliness
fly away
in the summer forest
Ella Wagemakers

night clouds
swallow the wafer-thin
moon
darker than shadows
my graying hair

wild grass
blowing in the wind
how carefree
were my summer skirts
before the men came

how slowly
the old house crumbles
a heap of stones
long before the fire
burned all my love
to her
who almost was my mother
a gentle kiss
for all the lives we had
that never were

deep pink
tulips adorn my garden
the colour
of the crayons I used up
to make them real
your urgent request
to see me again
after a decade
i begin searching
for the me you thought i was

I set the white table
expecting your arrival
but only wind
the color of grief
blows open my secret door

she wraps burlap
around jonquil bulbs
as if
harboring spring
were possible
the begging bowl
found floating in the fountain
will hold the moon
if i tilt it
a certain way

over shared shrimp cocktail
I confess
to my only friend
who also knows love
with more than one man

three aisles over
from suicide bombers
on wide screen TV
I shop for lettuces
to the tune of "Imagine"
curled
inside a snail shell
i feel the confines
molding me
into a posture of bliss

Linda Jeannette Ward
Robert D. Wilson

laboring in a field
of mirrors,
she harvests her
reflection
again and again

what would i do,
lake, if you were to
dry up and the
fish inside of you,
were made of paper?

she’s more than
a bargirl peddling
summer in a
humid room with
calloused hands
like a coyote,
the wind, its mournful
wail, fueling a
night of wide-eyed
children

where you were a
moment ago; a carved
out moon dripping
could-have-beens
into dark coffee

we huddled
under our table in
the mess hall
until the dragon passed;
the sky raining metal
is this the darkness
i stared into as a
young man, when
owls became ghosts
. . . and sanity scurried?

what will this woman
do when she is too old
to lay on her back,
the ceiling over her,
bleeding shrapnel?

sing to me, river,
the lullaby you sing
each year, when
water spills over the stones
of a young boy’s dream
Robert D. Wilson

i’m not ready
to fly with you, crow,
into an unknown
blackened by a night
of unsure moons

return to me
the dream i used to
dream when reeds
whispered your name
between clouds

when i am your age,
old man, will i too stare
into nowhere, singing
children’s songs I
can’t remember?
T A I G A
cold cemetery —
the long sleeves of your old coat
warm my fingertips
even from beyond this grave
you manage to comfort me

an’ya
if there were only
a way to capture the fog
in a pretty jar—
I'd leave this on your doorstep
and watch while you open it

an iya
midsummer night;
underneath a Rose moon
I'll wait for you --
until my hands are bloodied
from holding back the dawn

an iya
mannequins in a window headless
but how lovely the long silk sheaths

--Michael McClintock

Art by Karen J. Harlow, 2006
on a visit
before I awake
a friend
has left me three apples
on the garden fence

-Michael McClintock

The road less traveled by.
Far from signposts
and tourist attractions,
I follow the river.

Taiga by CarrieAnn Thunell.
Oh great egret,
your Taichi grace
mesmerizes.
Would you consider
Taking on a new disciple?

Taiga by CarrieAnn Thunell.
Two eyes stare into mine. Another feral has found the food bowl. I never could say no.
How delicately
that young girl sips her tea.
Like a hummingbird,
she flits about on wings
made of summer colors.

Taiga by CarrieAnn Thunell.
Such longing
fills me when I see
a seabird wing
its way above the clouds,
master of air, land and sea!

Taiga by CarrieAnn Thunell.
This small cat
I love to hold in my lap
is a predator.
She assaults my urban senses
with unvarnished scenes of life.

Taiga by CarrieAnn Thunell.
Taiga by CarrieAnn Thunell.

The sweeping bend
of an alder to the river,
the way water
foams white on stones.
What more need I know of life?
ARTICLES

&

ESSAYS
In Japan, kyoka was comic verse considered unsuitable for the more courtly tanka anthologies; kyoka is what poets did when they were playing around or had had a little too much sake. These verses were rarely written down, but some did get recorded. Eventually, at about the same time as senryu was becoming popular, kyoka also had its heyday. Kyoka lampooned the tanka of its day and of previous centuries, as well as admitting subjects to the poetic lexicon that were considered vulgar or political or simply taboo for the refined taste of tanka poets and readers.

Needless to say, ordinary folks had a blast writing and reading kyoka. They formed circles to study and share their own comic verses and often commissioned woodblock prints to display their kyoka. Yet kyoka today is nearly dead in Japan and has not yet caught on North America; although arguably many of the verses published in English as ‘tanka’ are in fact kyoka. Be that as it may, the English language already has a five line humorous verse, the limerick, so what does kyoka have to offer?
The first attribute that comes to mind is humor. Not everyone cares to write a limerick and the limerick as a genre seems to be rather stuck on scatological and sexual subjects. Which is not to say that serious or refined limericks are never written . . . but who picks up a book of limericks because they want serious clean poetry? Kyoka, by contrast, is not so narrowly pigeonholed in subject matter or treatment. Indeed, just as there are serious senryu, so it is possible to write serious kyoka.

If kyoka can be serious and have significant poetic merit then how does it differ from tanka? This is a question I will dodge by saying that it is too soon to be drawing any conclusions about kyoka written in English. There are no English-language kyoka books or magazines and precious few kyoka have been translated into English. As far as I know, there is only one email list dedicated to kyoka (Kyoka Mad Poems, <http://groups.google.com/group/kyoka>) and no web sites. A few sites dedicated to other topics also provide some information about kyoka, but there is no ‘Kyoka Society of America’, no kyoka.org, or other resources. The only significant discussion of kyoka written in English is contained in The Tanka Anthology (Red Moon Press, 2003), where it is subsumed as a ‘style’ of tanka. At this point, it can be rather ruefully said, “kyoka is whatever the poet says it is.”
This is admittedly not a very helpful or satisfying definition, yet it’s the best we can do at this time. Even so, as the Moderator for Kyoka Mad Poems, I have seen a number of poems and have participated in some intense discussions via email with editors and poets on the subject. As a result, I have drawn some conclusions regarding what I like and hope for in a kyoka. Still, it is important to remember that there is no such thing as a ‘kyoka expert’ in English and I am certainly not one. But to get people to talk about kyoka at all somebody has to start the conversation, so I will stick my neck out and hope for hatchets.

[Letters to the Editor in response to this article will be considered for publication in Modern English Tanka.—The Editor]

The first thing I look for in kyoka is some form of humor. Humor as a topic is under-represented in tanka today. Which is not to say that there is no humor in tanka, just that it is a minor part of the genre. Since I happen to like humor, and, if the plethora of comedy clubs and humor channels on cable tv is any indication, most North Americans also have a large appetite for humor, then a genre of poetry that deliberately evokes it is a good thing. It also leads me to hope that if the average American ever encounters kyoka, he or she might like it.
I define humor broadly from whimsy and fantasy to mordant satire and biting wit, containing all the elements of parody, self-parody, political and social satire, irony, slapstick, wit, pathos, puns, absurdity, comedy of manners, and all other evidence of intelligence at play that we can conjure. Japanese kyoka also include the odd and unusual; this directly parallels the English word ‘funny’ which means ‘strange’ as well as ‘humorous.’

The other element that distinguishes kyoka is that it is human-centered. In this respect it can be said that kyoka is to tanka what senryu is to haiku: the human half. While human beings have always been a very present part of the tanka tradition, up until the 19th century certain topics, such as love and nature, were considered very suitable for tanka, while certain topics, such as war and bodily functions, were not.

The tanka reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries opened up tanka to a much broader array of subjects, but the same breadth is not seen in English-language tanka. Also dampening the genre is a widespread belief that poetry should not be political. English-language magazines have rarely published the likes of Motoko Michiura’s:

Dead of night
returning home exhausted
after the interrogation—
my period begins to flow
like rage.


A hundred years earlier, Michiura’s verse would probably have been considered kyoka because it touched on taboo subjects, subjects which are also effectively taboo in modern English-language tanka. How many North American tanka can the reader call to mind that mention menstruation? Or being in trouble with the law? Not many. This is why kyoka is not merely a fun adjunct to tanka but a needed expansion of the genre. Kyoka is the needle popping the balloon of our tanka pretensions.

Unfortunately, kyoka is a very new genre in English and its current state of humor is very gentle, even genteel, compared to the Japanese original. While poets have experimented with subject matter ranging from Jack the Ripper to farts, the subject matter and tone usually focuses on poking good-natured fun at human foibles. There is perhaps some insecurity about whether verses about movies and fast-food qualify as ‘real poetry’, and likewise whether verses that treat of violence and child abuse would be acceptable to mainstream publications. Perhaps this is self-censorship on the part of the poets, but whether internal or external, it is real. If talking about kyoka
does nothing more than inspire a poet to drop their own internal shackles and write something new and fresh it will have been a worthy exercise.

But what is the state of English-language kyoka today? I am aware of only three verses that have been labeled as kyoka or ‘kyoka-like’ by an editor who published them. (If anyone knows more, please advise me!)

nightly stroll—
joined by a black cat
insomnia
will be his name
as long as i see him

~Jörgen Johansson
(from *Moonset*, Spring, 2006)

energy waning
as the afternoon wears on
a grim coworker
leans into my cubicle
whispering conspiracy

~Laura Maffei
I
who am not really
a cook
poke gently into
a green pepper

~Leatrice Lifshitz, USA
(from The Tanka Anthology, McClintock, et al, eds.,
2003)

This is not to say that no other kyoka have been
published; they have been, but they have been
published under the label of ‘tanka.’ To my knowledge,
the Kyoka Mad Poems Forum is the largest gathering
of poems in English consciously identified as kyoka by
the poets who wrote them.

While some argue that to introduce yet another exotic
Japanese term is unhelpful and that to separate kyoka
from tanka is unnecessary, I find myself in the position
of the biologist who knows only frogs trying to explain
what a toad is, “It’s an ugly frog, and it’s like a frog in
all ways, except it’s not a frog . . .” If a toad is really a
frog then the terms are interchangeable:
Old pond
toad jumps in
wait . . .
that’s not how
it’s supposed to go . . .

~M. Kei, USA

The output of poets participating in Kyoka Mad Poems has been large and of good quality; choosing a short list of favorite poems was difficult. My own taste definitely leans a certain way, but I also wanted to show poems that illustrated a variety of approaches. In addition, I asked participants to nominate their own favorites and the responses were extremely varied. The only poem that can be said to have had any sort of consensus was the ‘truck full of turkeys’ poem. Nonetheless, I hope this small sample will make you curious enough to seek out other good kyoka and maybe try your hand at writing a few yourself.
Moderator’s Picks
from the Kyoka Mad Poems Forum
<http://groups.google.com/group/kyoka>

1

it was hard for me
not to smile,
whale watching
with a boatload
of fat people

~Robert Wilson, USA

My number one favorite. The humor is pointed yet gentle. The author, being one of the people watching whales, is also presumably one of the fat people, which gives this poem a wry element.

2

distant flocks
passing, passing—
what fine wallpaper
I could make of the scene
given the right training!

~Michael McClintock, USA
Birds are an extremely popular motif in tanka, so much so that the initial two lines had me bracing for yet-another-bird-as-symbol-for-the-passing-of-the-seasons tanka. Then the twist! From flocks of birds to flocked wallpaper and the unexpected substitution of a wallpaper artist for poet. McClintock is not only a great tanka poet but a great satirist on the genre.

3

my knight, 
your perfection's gleam 
enticed me; 
now I thank you often. . . 
for charming someone else

~Janet Lynn Davis, USA

Where Wilson satirizes himself and McClintock satirizes a genre, Janet satirizes human nature and the quest for romance. She captures the allure of Mr. Wrong--how with his charm and illusionary qualities he entices only to disappoint. Having seen Mr. Wrong and his brothers go through endless streams of women of my acquaintance, I can only wish more women were as wise as the poet.
hair dyed
wrinkles under cover
she sits daintily in the park
a child flashes by
yelling 'hi grandma'

~ Kala Ramesh, India

Another verse poking fun at human foibles, in this case, a carefully coifed grandmother trying to pass as younger than her years only to have her cover blown by the grandchild who knows her too well to be fooled by any of that. There is an element of chagrin here, is it the poet herself who is the grandma? The poem doesn’t tell us and we can only speculate. That’s part of the fun of kyoka—kyoka poets are willing to tell a joke on themselves as readily as they lampoon the rest of the world.
The brook rests awhile
in a still pool
before it joins the river.
For one sweet blackberry
I almost join it too

~Norman Darlington, Ireland

In Norman Darlington’s kyoka we have a verse that could almost pass as a tanka with its lyric description of nature. It maintains its illusion of tanka-ness right up until the last line precipitates us along with the poet in a sudden stumble. Laughing, we draw back, and yet, we aren’t disappointed. Verses like this show that even when it uses all the tricks of tanka, kyoka isn’t tanka.

Stopped at the light
a truck full of turkeys,
just like the rest of us:
they have no idea
where they are going.

~M. Kei, USA
In this verse the poet is more blatant in his social satire. In American English ‘turkey’ is a mild epithet for an idiot. In this case, the sight of a shipment of turkeys, probably being taken to market to be slaughtered, causes the poet to reflect upon the unexamined lives lead by most people. Like the turkeys, they have no idea where they are going, and also like the turkeys, they too will eventually discover their own mortality.

7

The neighbors’ kid
would sit on our wooden fence
and cry like a rooster
in a dozen foreign tongues.
His name was Polly Glotka.

~Zhanna Rader, USA/Russia

Having been a substitute teacher I am acquainted with boys like Polly Glotka . . . they seem programmed to produce disruptive noises for no discernible reason. Something about it entertains them (and often the children around them). Yet there is a peculiar sort of innocence in their ability to be endlessly annoying to those with more conventional expectations of social behavior. There’s also a bilingual pun here, but I’ll
Cold, cold . . .
snowflakes slap my face,
my hands are numb.
I can't even turn the key.
Wait, is this my house?

~Carl Bettis, USA

I can’t say as I have ever tried to let myself into the wrong house, but I have walked into the women’s restroom by accident. I recognize the moment of bemused befuddlement as I realize that not only am I not where I am supposed to be, I have no idea where I actually am. The coldness intensifies both the poet’s confusion and the humor of the scene.
at a restaurant
tables fill up—
soon
yakyakyaktheygo
when do they eat?

~Kala Ramesh, India

Ever notice how dieters always win the dinner conversation? They don’t eat so they have plenty of time to talk. What is even more amazing: when people manage to polish off platefuls of food AND keep talking! Apparently their mothers never taught them not to talk with their mouths full. Yet another example of the endless supply of human foibles that are fodder for kyoka.

each year, for you
a box of birthday chocolates. . .
what's yours is mine?
how neatly I slice in two
the pieces for you to share

~Janet Lynn Davis, USA
Being a parent, I have learned that the children get the first pick of the candy they bought me. Once again we have an accurate and humorous view of real human nature as opposed to the idealized and romanticized view that so often crops up in poetry.

we hunger tonight
when the sun next rises, then
we will hunt again
under the golden rainbows
elusive eggs-in-muffins

~Denis M. Garrison, USA

This parody of the American hunter-gatherer society of fast food begs a question the Japanese don’t have to ask: If it talks about pop culture, is it poetry? Yet this verse demonstrates the classic tanka form of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. If it is the form that makes the poem, then this is a perfectly good tanka. If the content bars it from being considered tanka, why? Is not modern tanka supposed to be open to all subjects? Isn’t fast food a universal experience? (In the West at least.) The use of language is clever and effective, the poet is in full control of his material. Would you be pleased or annoyed if you found it in a mythical book entitled, “Best Modern Tanka?” Why?
These are the kinds of questions that kyoka stirs up but I have no answers to offer. Instead, as a poetic agent provocateur, I leave it as an exercise to the reader.

— M. Kei

29 May 2006
The Tanka as Story

Dave Bacharach and Lynne Rees

The following article emerged from an exchange on the AHA Tanka Forum on 30th June 2006.

before snow fell
she ran off to the desert
later I found
a red-tailed hawk
deep inside my freezer

DB

LR: Dave, it’s immediately striking and intriguing—as Jeanne [Emrich] said, it has the makings of a novel. But because of that strong feeling of ‘story’ I’m left wondering what the tanka form is achieving that a traditionally punctuated prose lay-out (for a short-short story) doesn’t? If I set out your tanka like this—

“Before snow fell, she ran off to the desert. Later, I found a red-tailed hawk deep inside my freezer.”

— then, for me, none of the images seem to suffer, or be diluted, for being run on, and I actually enjoy the
prose rhythm of it more because of that strong story drive.

I love the language and syntax and suggestiveness of it, but I'd be really interested to have your response about the form.

DB: A sharp question, Lynne, and one that at first seems obvious; however, I think it is not isolated to tanka, but in fact goes to the very heart of poetics. I don’t know if I can adequately respond, but I'll give it a try.

First, let’s go in the opposite direction and rewrite in verse form the opening of a famous novel, dropping just one phrase in order to achieve a tanka format:

he was an old man
who fished alone in a skiff
in the Gulf Stream
eighty-four days now
without taking a fish

(Dropping “and he had gone” after the 3rd line.)

This is, of course, the first sentence of Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea. I think it makes a superb tanka, or a superb six line poem with the deleted phrase. This kind of thing is true of many of the book’s
sentences.

Let’s switch back. I’ll take the liberty of assuming permission to quote one of my favorite tanka by one of the pre-eminent tankaists of our time, who also posts on this forum; but I’ll put the tanka in quotes and I’ll add punctuation. Imagine reading it as dialogue from a play or short story:

“Here’s a guy sits on his mat like Buddha. But here’s one that just sits.”

Here it is in Michael’s original verse form:

here’s a guy
sits on his mat
like Buddha
but here’s one
that just sits


Throughout the anthology, I found many tanka that work perfectly well as prose with appropriate punctuation. So we often can go back and forth. What does that mean?

Well, I don’t think there’s a bold, black line between the two forms of writing. Rather, I believe they lie on a
continuum, with a very broad area of overlap. Some prose writers have a very lyrical, poetic style (Emily Bronte, Hemingway, especially when writing in third person, Faulkner, Crane); some do not (Charlotte Bronte, Fitzgerald, Conrad, James). Some poets are difficult or impossible to transpose into prose (I randomly tried W.B. Yeats and couldn’t do it), others are easy (Frost’s conversational poems, many of Shakespeare’s gorgeous sonnets, even Hopkins’ sonnets).

But there is a difference in the reader’s experience.

When we take, for example, *before snow fell* as prose and break it into a five line tanka, I think we create certain tensions that the prose version does not have. The line breaks emphasize certain words or phrases not necessarily emphasized in the prose; certain words and phrases are given jobs they do not have to carry out in the prose. For example, the symmetry of the stand alone tanka would be lost in the continual flow of prose that has many sentences before and/or after. The symbolic impact of the hawk, so strong in the poem, becomes just a mysterious piece of information the reader expects to be explained in the prose. Poetic structure is lost or at least muted in the prose, with the alliteration on F sounds far less apparent and less part of the architecture of the thing. Because we read sentences as a continuous flow that make up paragraphs, the strong pause at the end of line two in
the tanka is lost in the prose, altering impact and meaning. Finally, the cadences and rhythms in the verse form are muted in the prose.

I don’t know if I’ve answered your question, Lynne, but I’ve learned quite a bit myself by just trying.

**LR:** You’ve answered it beautifully, Dave. I love to read about a writer’s considered choices behind a piece of their work, and this gives me an insight into your own tanka, your writing process, and also a wider insight into the form. I appreciate the time you’ve given this. Thank you.

The relationship between content, or subject matter, and form is something that fascinates me. Why write a short story instead of a poem? Why a prose poem and not a short story? Why a sonnet and not free verse? As writers we make our own negotiations with what different forms can and can’t achieve, consciously weighing up the particular aspects of craft that inform and construct them.

It was also the use of the past tense in your tanka that slipped it further towards narrative for me, as well as the presence of conflict, or narrative tension (*ran off* is very emotive and significant), which tends to be a principal ingredient of short fiction. There’s also the referencing of time—you explore two different ‘pasts’
within the tanka—another element of craft we’re more likely to associate with prose than poetry through back-story or flashback. Michael’s tanka is observed in the moment (here’s...) with the immediacy of the present tense and the line breaks reinforce that by holding back the moment with their hesitancies.

But, all my subjective responses aside, I find your tanka a powerful piece of writing, and one that has stayed in my head since I first read it. I find myself returning to the images of the snow, the desert, the hawk, and the freezer over and over, noting the connections between them, the emotional disconnections they suggest. And it’s possible that I may not have been encouraged to consider all these things had I first read it as prose.

Incidentally, I think yours is a better tanka that the one you created from Hemingway. You achieve a sense of poetic closure with that striking image in the last two lines (a red-tailed hawk/ deep inside my freezer) reinforcing the emotional theme and also creating a satisfying frame to the work. As a reader I’m left pondering, but not necessarily needing more. The opening lines of The Old Man and the Sea don’t satisfy me as a poem: too many horizons are opened up. I’m left asking too many questions—who, what, why?

Thanks again. I’ve learned a lot too. I’ll consider tanka
as having many more possibilities than the lyrical expression I’d only previously considered:

the days
and nights soured
by his absence
for want of sweetness
I devour my own heart

But looking at it again, it’s ‘story’ that informs this too, particular events and experience that gave rise to the expression.

There probably isn’t enough room in such a condensed form for character development, another principal ingredient of fiction (though I wait to be proved wrong on that!) but you’ve shown that the form can effectively contain a narrative driven by concrete and significant imagery.

**DB**: Yes, Lynne, your excellent tanka certainly does tell a story. Interestingly, it too, could easily be transposed into one punctuated sentence: *The days and nights soured by his absence, for want of sweetness I devour my own heart*. But look at what would be lost: The opposition of ‘soured’ and ‘sweetness’ above and below ‘his absence;’ the emphasis on the last line by it being the only one without an S sound; the weighted pause after line three, much slighter with the comma in the
sentence; and the sheer pain conveyed by having four lines pressing down upon the tortured fifth.

We all love stories, whether spoken around a fire, sung by a blind Greek poet, thrown on the stage by a guy from Stratford-upon-Avon, or even chattered in the break room by gossips. It’s natural that they would show up in our tanka, where we can cut and craft them with poetry’s tools. Don’t you think?

★
BOOK NOTES


"I find that reading Jörgen Johansson's haiku, senryu, and tanka is a lot like getting used to a naked woman running through my backyard with a smile on her face . . . I never know from which direction she will come, or at what time of day or night, but I find myself wide-awake and patiently waiting . . ."

— Michael McClintock

A few tanka, excerpted from Mud on the Wall.

another breakfast
alone—
not complaining
only spilling the cold
hard facts
lost
on purpose
again—
moss is my bed
in the virgin forest

midnight dip—
on her way up
i kiss her
goose bumped
birthmark

one of those days . . .
sliced sunbeams behind
the metal gate
and the long shadows
of me and a guardian lion

spots on the back
of her duffle coat
at dusk outside
the newly painted gazebo
we fell in love

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“No one writes tanka like Robert Wilson. These are poems that nudge but do not push, that have the delicacy of sumi-e brushwork. The insights and percipience of reverie, daydream, and vision have, in English-language tanka, no more persistent or skillful servant. Wilson's vocabulary is that of shadow, moonlight, water-image, and restless loneliness —punctuated by some small detail that surprises, intrigues, or arrests.”

— Michael McClintock
“His original images of the world and its inhabitants will not fail to stir deep-seated emotions and leave the reader breathless.”
— Kirsty Karkow

DROPS FROM HER UMBRELLA: American Tanka editor Laura Maffei's first published collection, consisting of 131 tanka culled from over four thousand the author wrote during a 12-year period, and arranged to read like an autobiography. With an Afterword by Michael McClintock. Published by Inkling Press and available from Magpie Productions. ISBN: 0-9737674-2-1

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  Canada

"In the best way of contemporary poets who work in form, Laura Maffei has taken the tanka and made it her own. This collection functions as a poignant yet clear-eyed memoir in tanka,
juxtaposing the sensual with the workaday, mordant social commentary with the hope—and sometimes the reality—of ferocious intimacy. The poet writes: "my neighbor/ plays his guitar/ through the wall/and I am three chords/less lonely"; having recognized our own complicated experiences in these poems, we too come away from this collection feeling both imagistically satisfied and much less lonely."


"Maffei’s poems are tightly crafted and understated, as are the best tanka of Japan. [...] While feminine in perspective and experience, as literature Maffei’s tanka are genderless. Her poems leap over the gap between the sexes with a graceful and un-pretended emotional continuity that is whole because it is human."

— Michael McClintock, President, Tanka Society of America

Some tanka from *Drops from Her Umbrella*:

Halloween—
infant Batman
in my arms
barely aware of this world
that needs saving
shaking the drops
from her bright red umbrella
this friend
with troubles in her past
meets me at the train

my husband
who does the laundry
congratulates me
on the strong, sound elastic
in my new underwear

tucked away
inside the gray metal drawer
of the desk
of a middle-manager:
a book about angels

pumping
my own gas
here I am world
girl
with a strong squeeze
A WAKA ANTHOLOGY: Grasses of Remembrance — Translated, with Commentary and Notes, by Edwin A. Cranston. Stanford University Press, 2006. 1264 pages, two volumes, hardback. $175 from Amazon.com, or purchase direct from Stanford University Press (WWW.SUP.ORG).

This monumental, landmark work draws its 2,600 poems from the imperial collections "Kokinshu," "Gosenshu," "Shuishu," and "Goshuishu," and includes selections from the late-ninth-century "Shinsen Man'yoshu" and 795 poems from Lady Murasaki Shikibu's "The Tale of Genji." Cranston's notes and commentary are invaluable, and his approach to the translator's task is clear, open, and consistent. These volumes are a triumph of two languages: Japanese and English. A must for all serious students of waka and tanka literature in the West.

Excerpts from A Waka Anthology: Grasses of Remembrance:

Evening comes on:
Bend to dust the bedding
   Where no one now lies,
Heave a sigh for my sorrows —
Tell me, was I born for this?
Flowering plumegrass:
Carefully I keep my longing
Secret from the world —
But openly the tassel flaunts,
Now she is bound to another.

—Nakahira (875-945) [volume one]

The flower withered
Before the dew had dried away . . .
But frailer yet
Are these drops that have remained
In a world where nothing stays.

[from Genji poems, volume two]
THE PIE IN PIECES — thirty-three songs from the Midwest by Andrew Riutta is a chapbook of thirty-three previously unpublished poems. Front and back cover artwork, inside illustration. Foreword by Michael McClintock. Available September 2006 through River Man Publishing Company. $10.00 includes shipping. Contact Jorgen Johansson, tracksonwax@swipnet.se, for purchase.

"Andrew Riutta's The Pie in Pieces is a delight. These are real poems which draw their power from close observation through a keen and patient eye and mind." – Dan Gerber, winner of the 1992 Michigan Authors Award, recipient of the Mark Twain Award.

"The telling of these stories is an unforgettable poetic triumph." – Tom Clausen, author of Growing Late.

A tanka from The Pie in Pieces.

Some days it's even bigger than us, the imaginary fish my daughter and I reel in from the dust. ⭐
Book Review

SLOW SPRING WATER : The life poetry of Melissa Dixon is Melissa Dixon's first published collection of haiku, tanka and haibun. With a Foreword by Michael McClintock. ISBN: 0-9780815-0-1. 62 pages; 5" x 7¼", perfect-bound paperback, color cover, black and white text. Price: US $10 / Canada $12, including postage, send personal check or money order made payable to Melissa Dixon to:
M elissa Dixon
213-2075 Milton Street
Victoria
British Columbia V8R 1N8
Canada

"Dixon's poetry conveys a search for that kind of beauty that is incarnate in real life, and which returns our touch in mystical response. Beauty is not an out-of-reach abstraction to a poet like Dixon, but a reachable, touchable substance . . ."
— Michael McClintock, President, Tanka Society of America

Slow Spring Water includes forty-six tanka, of which eight comprise the title sequence, Slow Spring Water, and five each comprise the sequences, The Labyrinth, For Scorpio, and The Hollowed Lilac. Two haibun, The Caves of Kanheri and The Conspiracy, include five and four haiku, respectively. An additional eleven haiku complete the collection. This reviewer's interest is in the tanka in this book, but one cannot fail
to mention the emotional power and sad beauty of the haibun, *The Conspiracy*, or to note that the selected haiku in this book are first rate, for example:

my heart leaps—
burning into the wet meadow
a rainbow . . .

The heart of this collection is in the four tanka sequences, each of which is strong evidence of the value of the sequence technique in competent hands. Every verse in them stands alone as a fine tanka—complete and satisfying—yet each also participates in the synergy of its companion pieces, making for powerful and memorable sequences. What an edifice one can raise with building blocks like:

late-afternoon sun
dropping gold in algae pools
odors old as earth
merge with gathering dusk
mist creeps toward my feet

— from the sequence, *Slow Spring Water*

and:

shade of a low tree
veils me as I still
my mind and body . . .
crowds of wild hyacinths
reach for the skies
Dixon’s individual tanka allow the reader to hear her voice more fully, over a broader range, e.g., from:

in my palm a rosy stone
wet-scented by the sea
how right I was
to catch a train and leave
the plains behind
to:
radio waves
in shimmering colors cross
my computer screen
SETI scans for life on a star—
stranger, speak to me! O speak!

Melissa Dixon’s *Slow Spring Water* is brief enough to read through in a single sitting, yet full of moving poems that afford the reader her unique perspective on the beauty that surrounds us. It will bear frequent re-reading—a book to cherish and keep at hand.

*Review by Denis M. Garrison.*


Denis M. Garrison is the editor and publisher of Modern English Tanka. He lives near Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay with his wife, Deborah. A 1974 Towson graduate in English literature, he edited Towson’s literary magazine and taught creative writing for Johns Hopkins University’s Free University. His poetry is published in Poetry Scotland, Nightingale, Verse Libre Quarterly, Simply Haiku, Ribbons, Nisqually Delta Review, Moonset, Wisteria, Roadrunner, Stirring, World Haiku Review, Haiga Online, and many others, in his chapbook, Port of Call and Other Poems, and in his books, Eight Shades of Blue (haiku) and The Brink at Logan Pond. He has edited the webzines, Haiku Harvest, Ku Nouveau, Haiku Noir, Templar Phoenix, Haiku Cycles, and Gunpowder River Poetry. In 2002, he was a founding editor of Amaze: The Cinquain Journal. In 2005, Garrison was a founding editor of Loch Raven Review. In 2006, he was the haiku editor of Simply Haiku. His work may be seen at www.flyingfishes.net. Email: editor@modernenglishtanka.com.
CONTRIBUTORS

Melanie Alberts studied writing at Emerson College where she won the Ellen LaForge Prize for Poetry. She serves on the board of the Story Circle Network, a not-for-profit organization for women life writers. Her poems, articles and book reviews have appeared in small magazines over the past twenty years. She lives in Austin, Texas, USA and online at widepathpoetry.blogspot.com.

an’ya  Her haigo (haiku pen name) name (an'ya), loosely translated, means "some peaceful surprise light that arrives under cover on a moonless night." Of Serbian heritage, an'ya has been a published epic poetess for years, and now writing haiku and tanka is her favorite art form. Published worldwide, both online and in printed material, an'ya has won many competitions. She has also been published in numerous anthologies, and published her own haiku and tanka books through the natal * light press.

Aurora Antonovic is a Canadian writer, editor, and visual artist whose work has appeared over two thousand times in publications spanning twelve countries and five continents. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and editor of A Little Archive of Poetry, a publication that seeks to promote appreciation of verse in every form.
Pamela A. Babusci is an internationally published tanka poet, winning numerous awards. Pamela writes at least one tanka every day before the morning star rises. She can't imagine her life without tanka in it. It is an integral part of her life, like her artwork & her spiritually. She finds peace & serenity in writing tanka & many times her words bring emotional healing into her essence. She hopes, that in reading her poems, you will understand the different moods, emotions, the complexity of her personality, and the ebb & flow of the tides of her life.

David Bacharach was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. By day, he manages a large bus garage in Ithaca, NY. At night, in an old farm house, he writes poetry and practices the saxophone. His work has appeared in *Ribbons, Simply Haiku, The Heron's Nest, White Lotus*, and *Paper Wasp*.

James Roderick Burns was born in Stockton-on-Tees in the north of England in 1972. He is the editor of *Miracle & Clockwork* (Other Poetry Editions, 2005) and in the past year has published tanka, or has work forthcoming, in *Anon, Chanticleer Magazine, Haiku Scotland, Hummingbird, Lynx, Poetry Scotland* and *Raw Nervz*. He is working on a full-length tanka collection.

Tom Clausen lives with his wife, Berta, and children, Casey and Emma, in the house he grew up in, just
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**Janet Lynn Davis** lives in Houston, Texas, where she used to be a writer/editor and specialist in the fields of technical publications, communications, and media. She has focused on poetry in recent years. Her free verse and tanka can be found in a number of online and print journals.

**Melissa Dixon**, born on the Canadian prairies, now resides on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. She began with haiku, but embraced tanka when it arrived, appreciating its wider scope for expression. The Japan Tanka Poets’ Society awarded her Third Place in their contest, 2000; the following year she placed Second for the Japan Society on Water Environment. A three-times *Tanka Splendor Award* winner, her work is included in *The Tanka Anthology* (Red Moon Press, 2003). This spring, Melissa published *Slow Spring Water*, her first book of poetry, reviewed in this issue.
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Margarita Engle is a botanist and the Cuban-American author of three books about the island, most recently *The Poet Slave of Cuba, a Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano* (Henry Holt &
Short works appear in many anthologies, journals, and chapbooks. Recent honors include semi-finalist selection for the 2006 Nimrod Hardman/Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize. Margarita lives in Clovis, California, where she enjoys hiking and helping her husband with his volunteer work for a wilderness search-and-rescue dog training program.

Amelia Fielden is an Australian living by the sea near Sydney. She is a professional Japanese translator and a dedicated poet. Retired from service as a government translator, Amelia now specializes in translating the work of contemporary Japanese women tankaists such as Kawano Yuko, Kawamura Hatsue, Kuriki Kyoko, Kitakubo Mariko, Tawara Machi, and Kojima Yukari. To date, Amelia has published seven books of such translations. Together with Uzawa Kozue, she also produced Ferris Wheel: 101 Modern and Contemporary Tanka by 60 Poets (Cheng & Tsui, Boston, July 2006). Her own tanka in English have been awarded and published internationally. Four of Amelia’s collections are in print, the most recent being Still Swimming (Ginninderra Press, Canberra, September 2005). Further books of translation, and of Amelia’s original tanka, are scheduled for publication in 2007.

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Doris Kasson (b. 1925 Petersburg, Nebraska, USA, res. Belleair Bluffs, Florida, USA) started writing haiku and tanka in the early 1990s. She has won numerous awards. With the arrival of digital photography, she hopes to include photo-tanka to her repertoire.

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JB Mulligan has had poems and stories in dozens of magazines, including recently, Autumn Sky, Contemporary Rhyme, Animus, opossum holler tarot, Red River Review, and Cafe Oleh. He has had two chapbooks: The Stations of the Cross and This Way to the Egress, and appeared in the anthology Inside Out: A Gathering of Poets.

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Pamela Miller Ness, with degrees in Art History and Library Science, has worked as a museum registrar, designer and teacher of needlepoint, school librarian, and now is a teacher of English at The Dalton School in New York City. She has published haiku and tanka in a variety of international journals; been featured in the annual *Red Moon Anthology* since 1998, *The Haiku Calendar*, and *A New Resonance II*; and published five chapbooks. Her most recent chapbook is a tanka sequence about her father's journey into Alzheimer's entitled *Limbs of the Gingko* (Swamp Press, 2005). She was a co-editor of *The Tanka Anthology* (Red Moon Press, 2004). Involved in The Haiku Society of America since 1996, in 2006 she was elected president. A charter member of the Tanka Society of America, she served as its newsletter editor from 2000-2003. She chaired the organizing committee for Haiku North America 2003. In 2005, Pamela began editing and publishing *red lights*, a biannual journal devoted to English-language tanka. She has served as a judge of the annual student haiku contest at the Japan Society in New York City, the Haiku Society of America's Merit
Book awards, *Modern Haiku*’s Robert Spiess award, and the Tanka Society of America’s International Tanka Contest. Her awards include first prize in the San Francisco/HPNC International Tanka Contest, the TSA Tanka Contest, and winner and finalist in the Snapshot Haiku Calendar contest and the TWA Penumbra Haiku Contest.

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**Jack Prewitt** is an itinerant Australian who rests up in Sydney, NSW, between forays into bush and beach. He has written many hundreds of tanka, mostly for the wrong reasons. A few have been published in *Ribbons, Tanka Splendor, Tanka Calendar, Stylus* and elsewhere. Email: jack_prewitt9@hotmail.com

**Kala Ramesh** is an exponent of North Indian Classical music and a just-turned-haiku poet. She feels both amazed and humbled by the fact that this great
art form has found such an abiding niche in her heart. Pune, Maharastra, India. Email: nonesuch@vsnl.net


Adelaide B. Shaw's interest in Japanese poetry began over 30 years ago with haiku and has expanded to tanka and haibun. Her work has appeared in many journals both in print and online. Currently living in a suburb of New York City, she expects to be moving to the country very soon.

Guy Simser lives in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. During a varied career on three continents (infantry officer, ETV, international marketing, diplomatic corps and freelance journalism), Guy’s free verse, haiku, tanka and haibun have been published in over thirty journals, books and anthologies in the USA, Japan, England, and Canada.
Cheryl Stiles’ work has appeared in print and online journals such as *Atlanta Review, Poet Lore, Wisteria, POEM, Plainsongs, Storysouth*, and *Pedestal Magazine*. She currently works as a university librarian in the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area.

Marie Summers, editor of *White Lotus* and the *SP Quill* magazines, has been published in numerous publications such as *bottle rockets, Frogpond, Haiku Harvest, Heron's Nest, Kokako, Mayfly, Modern Haiku, moonset, Paper Wasp, Presence, Simply Haiku*, and the *World Haiku Review*, among others. Summers also owns and operates the popular poetry website, ShadowPoetry.com.

George Swede has been publishing tanka since 1978. His manuscript *First Light, First Shadows* won first prize in The Snapshot Press Tanka Collection Competition 2005 and will be published in October 2006. He lives in Toronto with his wife, Anita Krumins.

Allen M. Terdiman has been writing tanka, haiku and haibun since 1996. His poems have been published in the USA, Europe and Japan. Allen has published three books of poetry and is working on a fourth. He has won several prizes and citations for his work and is a member of the Haiku and Tanka Societies of America.
CarrieAnn (CAT) Thunell has been published in over sixty-five print magazines in seven countries. She is editor of the print magazine, *Nisqually Delta Review*, http://NisquallyDeltaReview.bravehost.com, has served as a guest editor for the *Santa Fe Broadsides*. CarrieAnn also is a backpacker, nature photographer, and artist.

Kozue Uzawa was born in Tokyo and immigrated to Canada in 1971. She is an assistant professor of Japanese at the University of Lethbridge. She published her first collection of tanka, *In Canada*, in 1998 (Tokyo: Shinpusha). Kozue has participated in the founding of Tanka Canada, and is editor of its English tanka journal, *GUSTS*. Recently, she published her translation of Yuko Kawano’s one hundred best tanka under the title *As Things Are* (Australia: Ginninderra Press, 2005) and her translation of contemporary tanka, *Ferris Wheel: 101 Modern and Contemporary Tanka* (Boston: Cheng & Tsui, 2006) with Amelia Fielden. Kozue belongs to several tanka associations in Japan and North America and has been published in journals both in Japanese and English.

Ella Wagemakers was born in The Philippines. She emigrated to The Netherlands in 1988 and became a Dutch citizen in 1993. Ella has a Master's Degree in Education at Tilburg and she now teaches English at the Dutch Police Academy. Her essay, "Dutch Journey", was published in 2004 in the book Not
Home, But Here - Writing in the Filipino Diaspora, ed. Luisa A. Igloria. Presently, Ella is trying to put together enough poems and other writings for her first book. She lives in Oudenbosch in West Noord-Brabant with her husband Adrian, who also works for the Police Academy.

Linda Jeannette Ward has been writing Japanese related forms for a decade, and her work has been published internationally. She has placed in several Tanka Splendor competitions, and her tanka have been awarded prizes in Yellow Moon and Tanka Society of America contests. Her collected works include a frayed red thread: tanka love poems, and a delicate dance of wings, which won the Haiku Society of America’s Best Book of Haibun award in 2002.

Robert D. Wilson is the owner/managing editor of Simply Haiku. He lives both in California and in the Philippines.
The Tanka Society of America, formed in Decatur, Illinois in April of 2000, aims to further the writing, reading, study, and appreciation of tanka poetry in English. TSA is a nonprofit volunteer organization that relies on the creativity and energy of its members to carry out its activities, which include the following:

~ Publication of the quarterly journal, Ribbons, Tanka Society of America Journal featuring over two hundred original tanka in each issue, articles, essays, translations, book reviews, and contest results.

~ Publication of a quarterly newsletter containing news and announcements pertaining to Tanka Society of America business, its members, and events in the tanka community in general.

~ Sponsorship of the annual Tanka Society of America International Tanka Contest every April, judge anonymously by respected tanka poets. Results appear in Ribbons.

~ Publication of an annual anthology of tanka by members (copies are available for a nominal fee in addition to membership dues.) For more information on this and other activities, please see the newsletter or contact an officer.

Tanka Society of America website: www.tankasocietyofamerica.com

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ISSN: 1932-9083

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