

The Bamboo Hut

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Edited by Steve Wilkinson

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of The Bamboo Hut tanka journal.

When I decided to undertake this project I was unsure as to what reaction to expect. Would anyone send in their tanka poems for consideration ? If so, how many would I receive? Would there be enough to include in the first edition ?

These were worrying considerations that I only thought about after deciding to launch the journal and advertise such on the various social media outlets.

I am happy to say that the response was much better than I thought and I am pleased to be able to publish this very first edition.

You will find a varied selection of tanka poems here from a number of contributors who are very active in the micropoetry community in the various social media outlets, many who have had their work published in well established Japanese short form poetry editions either on-line or in print.

I would like to thank M. Kei for his very informative article "Everything is Tanka" <http://kujakupoet.blogspot.co.uk/> and also Amanda Dcosta from Mandys pages <http://www.mandys-pages.com/> for advertising this journal on her website.

I have a number of ideas on how to improve future editions of The Bamboo Hut and will attempt to implement these as time passes. News of future additions and features will be posted on the NEWS page on the website. <http://www.thebamboohut.weebly.com/news>

Any suggestions are more than welcome and can be sent in using the CONTACT form on the website <http://thebamboohut.weebly.com/contact-the-bamboo-hut.html>

In the meantime please enjoy the tanka in the first edition of The Bamboo Hut.

Many thanks,

Steve Wilkinson, Editor

Tanka

something
wicked this way comes
on the legs
of an aloof
rainfall

Orrin T PreJean

music repertoire—
the vibrant color of
her ruby red lips,
my midnight desire
matches my old self

Ernesto P Santiago

I dreamed
that I was old
and wept...
burning with death,
I took off my skin

Sergio Ortiz

furred with lichen
still, the old plum puts out
perfect buds
when deep-veined and wrinkled
will my sap of words still flow

Sonam Chhoki

five times
the spider rebuilds
the web I swept
I give up
and let her win

M Kei

watching
leaves silently fall through
light and shadow
an old love song
on my mind

Veronika Zora Novak

standing quietly
outside the window
of my spring dreams
a hooded skeleton
with a long scythe

Chen Ou Liu

puffs of scented air
in moist sounds of weary waves,
a sentinel moon
dotes on two companions
as warm raindrops start to fall

Keith A Simmonds

I never had grandmothers
both buried before my birth
watched my mother's face
for signs of recognition
saw mourning in her eyes

Devin Harrison

staring
at the starless sky...
your memory
takes me deeper
into the night

Josie Hibbing

remembering
fills her eyes
with sorrow-
perhaps tomorrow
her soul will sing

Nancy Wells

lost in time
and bluegrass backroads
I find that place
stone lion gates
rock walls and roses

Carole Johnston

under the pale moon
the tenderness of wife's kiss...
love month
as in every other month
the scent of jasmine lingers

Willie R. Bongcaron

her blindness
guarded so well
this stranger
holds my hand
at the zebra crossing

Kala Ramesh

trees draw silhouettes
stars paint streams...
in moonlit shadows
we walk a celestial canvas
til the sun comes up

Pat Geyer

at the front door
the policemen
wait
for the moment she knows
she's a widow

Susan Burch

the bar's walls
lined with dollar bills
she writes
a note to her future
husband, whoever that is

Jessica Latham

cold winds under the leaves
and clouds rolling over the ridge
the forest shudders
fresh mornings – and in three weeks
days will begin to decay

Jean Pierre Garcia Aznar

songbirds dance
weeping branches
sway gently
from their game
of hide and seek

Grace Beam

leaves fall
the scent of butterfly
remains
in my moldering graveyard
angel wings cast in stone

John Potts

ruins of a Roman villa-
like centuries before
the words of love
are carried away
by desert wind

Roman Lyakhovetsky

a scattering of birds
driven by wind
across an empty sky
the minutes
of the shortest day

Jenny Ward Angyal

leaving
he almost slams
the door—
low gray clouds
seep into the morning

Sondra J. Byrnes

In memoriam
words rooted in memory
I remember you
in that space between heartbeats
the echo of blood rushing

Marianne Paul

so many
keep telling me
it's not that far
in a father's heart
beats a yawning chasm

Clive Oseman

one winter night
he slips an old record
from its sleeve. . .
how easily we settle
into each other's arms

Susan Constable

dangerous loneliness
forgotten cafés
in this time of poetry
my soul
undulating in the wind

Ed Bremson

the vacant plot
once the bamboo hut . . .
in the hamlet
father takes me into
his school days

Ramesh Anand

Rough winds
ruffle bamboo leaves;
in the distance
a bird's piteous cry...
oh, impending dark.

Tracy Beh

at Gorée gates
she holds his hand, returning.
once
slaves to the new world
now its king and queen

Gabri Rigotti

sitting,
under this oak –
between gravestones
wishing to be as still
as my companions

Janette Hoppe

Sequence:

(part 1)

after the Pow Wow,
the Fancy Shawl and Jingle Dance -
the thunder drums and haunting chants
still thrum
inside my dreamings

(part 2)

after the Grand Entry,
the Grass Dance and the Fancy Bustle -
regalia feathers rustle
in the sweetgrass-scented
air

Debbie Strange

twilight thunderheads
way over my head
a hummingbird
and his wingman
rushing home

Roary Williams

detritus strewn
across ripped lawns...
stormy days again
your unopened letter
caught on cross wires

Barbara A Taylor

across the harbour
of night's twinkling stars
I watch
the rise and fall
of your breathing

Gennepher

graffiti
of last night's wine
on the walls of my head
all these marks
my own

Liam Wilkinson

Winning hand
Autumn
loosing her leaves
strip poker
all these naked branches

Traci Siler

autumn-
names and memories
of the deceased
barely whispered, then
dropped in the cold underbrush

Orrin T PreJean

new day—
dreaming
the sweet
moments
I'm not with my soul

Ernesto P Santiago

if rain
knew loneliness and fear
could it still be rain...
am I just another man drifting
to the edge of your life

Sergio Ortiz

first house martins
speckle a cloudless May sky
their cries
and fluttering prayer flags
fill the valley at last light

Sonam Chhoki

blood of my blood
barefoot on the trail
winter weary
forsaken
bound for Indian Territory

M Kei

twilight
for all the day's
wanderings
the song of a mockingbird
and a daisy

Veronika Zora Novak

submerged by talk
about this young woman
veiled in black . . .
but today I swim
in her moonlit eyes

Chen Ou Liu

all my yesterdays
caught in today's agony
and tomorrow's dreams
down the labyrinth of Time
my destiny to fulfil

Keith A Simmonds

my newborn daughter
began her journey at night
travelled earthward
on Helios' chariot
brought fire to our hearth

Devin Harrison

by your truck
we say goodbye--
the red moon peeks
through the corn tassels
as we kiss

Josie Hibbing

though you are gone
the imprint of your touch
remains-
when memory fades
your scent will not

Nancy Wells

crow strutting
in the parking lot
stops traffic
looks me in the eye
what is he thinking?

Carole Johnston

love month
a whisper rides on the crest
of a wave...
funny how swiftly the wind
carries your kiss back to me

Mr. Willie R. Bongcaron

on a sultry morning
it rains in Chennai. . .
I rush out
to see father, at ninety two
walking without an umbrella

Kala Ramesh

mocking bird sings
through the day and night
outside my window
where I hear many bird songs
yet see only a lone gray bird

Pat Geyer

afraid to die
you rallied until the end
squeezing my hand
a small condolence
at your funeral

Susan Burch

searching for
my family roots amongst
the other
Malones – I learn the sad tales
in land hidden by fog

Jessica Latham

in a deep and quiet
night with no moon nor stars
I keep listening
to these calls and rustlings
I would so hard understand

Jean Pierre Garcia Azna

outpouring of tears
brings no relief of distress
mind and body
awash with painful memories
each droplet agony on my soul

Grace Beam

blue screen of death
on this moonless night
I'd write miles of code
to be just a ghost
in her machine....

Roman Lyakhovetsky

the piping
of chorus frogs
in snow . . .
the winter of my life
melts into music

Jenny Ward Angyal

maple seeds
dangle
waiting for wind
—my long delayed
decision to write

Sondra J. Byrnes

your swift dark anger
black storm clouds and then the sun
streaming from heaven
you were Abba, my daddy
and Yahweh, my God

Marianne Paul

falling apart
in spectacular shades
of black and blue
the breaking of moulds
in the shape of his bones

Clive Oseman

among green leaves
daffodils sprout and bloom
time and again
I walk back to remember
what it is I've forgotten

Susan Constable

a girl
with rose-scented hair
singing nostalgic songs
for all the Ophelias
who have drowned

Ed Bremson

hearing the horn
of my father, my dog
runs to the gate . . .
I and my sis run along
into friendship

Ramesh Anand

Painted you red, green, blue...
today your spirit flew,
leaving not a feather;
just an empty canvas,
a song's echo.

Tracy Beh

birdsong
and a slight breeze
my only companion,
palm brushing your side
of these empty sheets

Janette Hoppe

walking quietly
trying not to interrupt
the conversation
of a field
of wildflowers

Roary Williams

stepping out
from the shower
my reflection shocks
I say “Buddha!”
and quietly pray

Barbara A Taylor

blue
origami crane
listing to starboard
a sky
unfolded

Gennepher

approaching
Dunstanburgh Castle
(a giant's broken jaw)
I try to smooth the boulder
of a myth in my head

Liam Wilkinson

Evicted neighbor
how beautiful
their roses grow
with no one
watching

Traci Siler

again
my Hamlet-self will stutter
through day
among loud people
in this noonday bonfire

Orrin T PreJean

horoscope:
forbidden paramour
between us—
the long nights
we never shared

Ernesto P Santiago

a crescent moon
is her reflection,
tilted back
waning wide open,
I step inside her kiss

Sergio Ortiz

she
lies curled in a knot
of blackness
carrying
her father's child

Sonam Chhoki

the needle's gone,
but the ache remains,
a reminder
of the mysteries
medicine cannot solve

M Kei

in spring rain
a long visitor's line
at Anne Frank's house ...
did the church bell ring
on that fateful day?

Chen Ou Liu

behold the wrinkles
in the tired battered face
whispering secrets
of false hopes and broken dreams
buried in the sands of Time

Keith A Simmonds

Icebreaker ships
on the St. Lawrence River
gouge channels
as a boy I watched them
learned a way forward

Devin Harrison

moonshine--
the clouds slowly drift
by my window
a cricket sings to me
while I clean the kitchen

Josie Hibbing

what once
brought pleasure now
burns the tongue-
your words more caustic
than the roughest stone

Nancy Wells

three crows
inspecting a black
high top shoe
on the yellow line
I go speeding by

Carole Johnston

windless day
these Ikebana hands busy
with shapes and forms...
through simple strokes express
the complexity of love

Mr. Willie R. Bongcaron.

carrying
three bags of grocery
I wait
at the traffic signal . . . her smile
from inside the car

Kala Ramesh

falling from a flower
cherry blossom petals
touch my cheek
where the new blush of Spring
kisses away my pale

Pat Geyer

so thankful
I made it through surgery
I cry
your tears
mingling with mine

Susan Burch

my brother's
anxiety – I try to
find a way in...
another call forwarded
a deer runs deep past the brush

Jessica Latham

outpouring of tears
brings no relief of distress
mind and body
awash with painful memories
each droplet agony on my soul

Grace Beam

train whistle
rushing through
the autumn mist
tonight you are as ever
in someone else's arms

Roman Lyakhovetsky

calling
the hermit thrush calling
myself. . .
the answer comes
in a tongue I cannot speak

Jenny Ward Angyal

hot summer day
transplanting dreams—
i strip myself down
to nothing
and a beer

Sondra J. Byrnes

sacred rituals:
birdsong coaxes out morning
from this, the darkness
from behind the large window
the aging cat hunts its prey

Marianne Paul

never
how I wanted it
to be
in a southbound jam
the road north deserted

Clive Oseman

so many ways
to acknowledge spring –
layers of dirt
beneath my fingernails,
the stiffness in my joints

Susan Constable

let the sun shine in
let the late moon rise
let the pine trees rustle
and let me lie
sluggish and peaceful from wine

Ed Bremson

lunching
at the restaurant
I count
the lamps hanging
around the day moon

Ramesh Anand

twelfth moon,
a single kiss,
a fairy tale ending...
the frog I found
did not turn into a prince

Janette Hoppe

how my father
could fix almost anything
my grandmother's blank stare
from the window
of the nursing home

Roary Williams

whilst weeding
she checks the new app
just to ensure
that her posture
is correct

Barbara A Taylor

sitting
perfectly still
in the care home
an old lady
with a secret smile on her face

Gennepher

no name for this
shade of blue
now you are gone
the shore's just
sea and sand

Liam Wilkinson

in the rainy season
how impudent
how foolish
the rich echo
of a walking thunder

Orrin T PreJean

the bamboo hut—
deepening the essence
of the verse
of a rain song
of our heartbeats

Ernesto P Santiago

dear regret,
sweet as a baby's toes—
I watch
my muse slipping
into the sea

Sergio Ortiz

pumice stone
in the morning shower
to scour
the feel of him, the smell of him
into the sewer

Sonam Chhoki

in the end
there was nothing
but
the shimmering radiance
of a thousand stars

M Kei

our love lock
dropped into the river
of lost souls...
a crimson leaf
drifts across the moon

Chen Ou Liu

after nuptials
the pair departs
downy white petals
float from a bridal sky
later the fruit

Devin Harrison

sorting the flip flops
in my closet
suddenly I remember
the barefoot children
back in my village

Josie Hibbing

it matters not
if you come or go-
forgive me
my heart has gone
on one long retreat

Nancy Wells

writers' workshop
at the highway Waffle House
waitress muses
who are these crazy women
with paper and pens?

Carole Johnston

train stop...
handing over the
Gospel of Life
and them, some passengers,
intently evading my hand

Mr. Willie R. Bongcaron

night rain
awakens me
I sit listening
to each raindrop
of my childhood dreams

Kala Ramesh

wood thrush
trills a song
of shy love
hiding in the shadows
of a new spring

Pat Geyer

my dad loved whiskey
more than me
liver now failing
he still reaches for it
instead of me

Susan Burch

still trying
to find a way into my
father-in-law's heart
we watch two puppies play
their bites and growls so tender

Jessica Latham

longing to dwell
between cold gusts
of autumn wind
that once carried me
away from you

Roman Lyakhovetsky

five percent
all we can see
of the cosmos . . .
I release into the unknown
this wraith of prayer

Jenny Ward Angyal

wasp nest
under the eaves
--coming and going
he makes
life miserable

Sondra J. Byrnes

in the rearview mirror:
strobe-lights flash and sirens wail
of mortality
cars pull over, then drive on
as if nothing has happened

Marianne Paul

such love
contained in everything
we shared
the power to hold the world
and crush it in our hands

Clive Oseman

this is Roberta
says the saccharine voice
on the phone
my urge to poke a poppet
with this box full of pins

Susan Constable

father poses
in his first suit
of lifelong desire –
lightness of being him
in my wedding

Ramesh Anand

grey morning,
the constant swish of wipers
if only I had known
you were leaving
I would have prepared for rain

Janette Hoppe

when we drove
to where the gravel
turns to dirt
and two coyotes
watched you get undressed

Roary Williams

how right she was
I am that old woman,
a fool on the hill
still wabi-sabi drowning
my life in haiku

Barbara A Taylor

a wedding ring
on a chain
dangling from my neck
grandma's
willpower

Gennepher

into your death
you took
the melody
of a place
I once would whistle

Liam Wilkinson

on my body,
in between a stained sleep
a sort
of moss or fungus
rises

Orrin T PreJean

another blossom
falls in a sudden breeze
the scent
of gardenias
near my mother's grave

Sergio Ortiz

you can
get used to silence so deep
it hurts
to hear another voice
even when it calls with love

Sonam Chhoki

dawn at sea
a pink mist rising
from still waters,
but still the restless surging
of the breath of God

M Kei

moonless night
the beauty of
a falling star
I wish I had enough time
to make a wish

Josie Hibbing

life paints itself-
color flows with breath
giving meaning
to what would otherwise
be black and white

Nancy Wells

now one thousand
death toll in Bangladesh
those whose fingers
sew our new blue jeans
I lock my closet

Carole Johnston

they look like him
his other kids
with his second wife
my husband's
smile

Susan Burch

crying for
my lost father
the sand
uncovers a worn shell
beside my feet

Jessica Latham

an ensemble
enters the silence
by lantern light
while worlds away
the sound of gunfire

Susan Constable

his hands
unzipped me,
my blue sky
falling...falling –
the promise of sunsets

Janette Hoppe

the girl
with the tide in her eyes
submerged pebbles
torn
from ocean deep

Gennepher

alone now
I stare
at the unopened bottle
of a red that will
white me out

Liam Wilkinson

ten fingers
ten toes
nestling in my arms -
ten years
seem like yesterday

Amanda Dcosta

icy shards
frost on the grass
winter mornings –
my mother's heart
never melted in the sun

Janette Hoppe

summer solstice—
prickles of mist
dissolving
the old ghosts
inside my skin

Jenny Ward Angyal

Everything Is Tanka

by M. Kei

Those who have never written tanka before often think it must be simple to write such a small poem, yet when they try it, they discover it is a good deal harder than it looks. In our modern era, we are taught that 'poetry' consists of 'expressing ourselves,' and that if we have expressed ourselves, we have written poetry. No, we haven't. We have written a journal entry. Even if we format it on five lines, it does not miraculously become a tanka. Keeping a journal in verse is perfectly acceptable (I do it myself), but in order to arise to the level of poetry, it must have artistic expression. There must be something beyond the ordinary about it, no matter how commonplace the subject or vernacular the treatment. In the case of tanka, it must go one step further. Mere brevity and insight are not enough. Tanka is the extra turn of the screw. For the poets accustomed to writing other forms, this compactness, this need to drive the poem even tighter into itself and thereby into the universe, is exceptionally difficult to master. I find it is usually easier to teach neophytes with little or no poetry experience; I do not have to break down pre-conceived notions about what poetry is and how it works.

To learn to write tanka, the poet must first learn to see. This is absolutely essential because tanka is based on the adroit choice of detail that can convey far more than is printed on the page. To do that, the poet has to be able to see the significance of an object or event and be able to follow it as it pins together the obvious with the numinous. Here then,

are lessons in writing tanka utilizing poems of my own with explanations for how they came about.

another lighthouse
by Donahoo; I recognize
the white cylinder,
the black cap,
the vigil of centuries

Slow Motion : The Log of a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack.

Donahoo was a builder of lighthouses on the Chesapeake Bay in the early 19th century. His lighthouses are almost all identical: squat white cylinders with black caps and Fresnel lenses, built from the native Maryland granite. Many people have visited the Bay and seen his lighthouses, but it has not occurred to them to ask who built them, how, when, or why. The lighthouse is an obvious feature of the landscape, and the ordinary person can readily conjure up associations with storms and ships and might think she has written poetry, but tanka must dig deeper. Tanka is too small a poem to permit the obvious. Details matter. More importantly, those details must add up to something.

Lucille Nixon, in her introduction to *Sounds from the Unknown*, says,

I discovered that I was seeing and hearing in a way that I had never before experienced. This had all happened so smoothly, so gently, that I had been unaware that the practicing of writing *tanka* had any effect at all. This discipline, as with any endeavor into which one puts knowledge, practice, and interest-affection, was being rewarded in many small ways. For example, for years each spring I had admired a certain wild

flower, the horse mint, for its lavender coloring, its fringed and delicate outline, so fragile though balanced on a stern and forbidding stem, but I had never noticed its tiny coral center. I couldn't believe that it was there when first I noticed it, and so I looked at the many blossoms to see if all were sent up from this roseate center, and sure enough, they were all the same, and had been for centuries, no doubt! I just had not been able to see.¹

Seeing, then, is the fundamental skill in writing tanka. However, seeing the details is not enough; the poet must see how the details connect to other details, and especially how they invoke the unseen.

another candle lit
at his grave,
chokecherry trees
bloom as white
as ghosts

Gusts 4.

The chokecherry is outside my apartment window. It looks like a maple, but it blooms with spindles of white blossom in the spring. I didn't know what it was. I could have contented myself with the 'white blooming tree outside my window,' but I didn't. I looked it up to discover the name: *Prunus virginiana*. In doing that, I learned that its spindles of blossoms are referred to as 'candles.' That immediately evoked other candles: those set up on the makeshift altar outside my sister's house when her son died. That offered still more resonances. My sister, choked on grief, the chokecherry too astringent to eat. The Japanese

¹ Nixon, Lucille, ed. *Sounds from the Unknown*. Denver, CO: Alan Swallow, publisher, 1963, p ?

cherry is misted over with a rosy haze of sentimentality, but the American cherry is fresh and new and bitter. Japanese cherry trees represent rebirth because they bloom every year; the poet can take comfort in the knowledge of their return. The chokecherry also blooms every year, but since it is not a tanka trope, it is possible to map other meanings onto it. The chokecherry becomes a symbol of death that gives no comfort.

I frequently give myself the exercise of writing tanka out of whatever presents itself, and I oftentimes give myself deliberately difficult assignments. For example, asphalt. The parking lot for my apartment complex is large and obvious; it dominates the landscape. You can't ask for a less poetic subject than asphalt.

in the mud
next to the asphalt,
a broken doll's head,
a crow pecking
at plastic eyes

Atlas Poetica 4.

Walking outside to have a look at the asphalt, I found the broken toy at the edge of the parking lot. The crow is imaginary, but thanks to horror movies, the sight of a decapitated doll's head naturally conjured up macabre images. Salvador Dalí had an influence as well. I daresay horror movies and Dalí are not what spring to most people's mind when thinking of tanka poetry, but everything, absolutely everything, is poetry. It's all a matter of seeing it. Seeing is helped by turning off the television and stepping out to look at things: weeds, art, stranger's faces, graffiti, sparrows, everything.

Asphalt poems are unusual in tanka literature, and unusual for my own work as well, yet if I hadn't been willing to engage the ordinary, I never would have written it.

I have written several 'asphalt' poems since then.

"Riverview Avenue"

no river, no view, no avenue

one lane of

cracked asphalt slipping

into the past tense

Ribbons 6:2.

how full the bay

lapping at the bowl

of earth

pilings and asphalt

unable to contain it

From 'Stone Amid the Water Weeds.' *Lynx XXII:2.*

burning rubber

across your asphalt heart—

skid marks

lead to the wreck

you've made of me

Kujaku Poetry & Ships.

When I'm online on Twitter, I sometimes challenge people to stump me by giving me topics to write on. Here are two I wrote in response to the prompts 'computer games' and 'socks.'

ah, Melville,
what's Moby Dick to me
when I can
conquer the world
from the comfort of my desk?

Kujaku Poetry & Ships.

all these socks
without mates,
yet not one
of them is willing
to pair up with another

Tanka Corner.

The brain must be allowed and encouraged to make random connections. Although startling juxtapositions are not poetry in themselves, they help the mind to make the poetic leap.

two eyes staring
out from the glass coffin
of my skull,
Snow White, I wish I could sleep
as peacefully as you

Eye to the Telescope 1.

I noticed an advertisement for Disney's *Snow White*, and the sight of her lying in her glass coffin reminded me of the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, which gave me the metaphor for the excruciating vascular headache I was experiencing. Not to mention, an acute envy for Snow White's peaceful sleep. Migraine sufferers have told me this poem especially resonated with them. So you see, even old cartoons and dreadfully bad science fiction movies can lead to tanka.

it is hard to imagine
that this little thing,
this single snowflake,
has brought
the world to a stop

Streetlights : Poetry of Modern Urban Life in Modern English Tanka.

The adroitly chosen detail, in this case, a single snowflake, serves as a synecdoche for an entire snowstorm paralyzing the Northeast. Synecdoche is commonly used in English, but not given much analysis as a technique of poetry. A synecdoche is when a part or

piece represents a whole. For example, when the captain calls, “All hands on deck!” she doesn’t want the disembodied hands; she wants the entire sailor.

shaking the bats
out of the mainsail
a cloud of night
made homeless
by my hands

Ribbons, 2:4.

Sometimes a piece or part is all that we can perceive, yet by perceiving it, we know much more. Out of these images we can make poetry.

as night
surrenders to dawn,
a slim mast
emerges from
the mist of Red Cap Creek

Slow Motion : The Log of a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack.

Tanka has often been described as ‘fragmentary’ and ‘suggestive’; Jun Fujita calls it ‘illusivive.’ Yet a tanka is a complete poem. It seems fragmentary because we are used to prose and poetry spelling everything out for us and granting closure. Tanka are open to interpretation and deliberately so. They contain ‘dreaming room,’ which Denis Garrison, who

coined the term, explains as, “some empty space inside the poem which the reader can fill with his personal experience, from his unique social context.”² Michael McClintock calls this quality “multivalence,”³ while I have called it, “the labyrinth of the poem.”⁴

To write tanka, try the following experiment. Look around you and jot down several items that come into view. Don't try to make a poem of them, just pick a few random things. I tried this with Sean Wills, somebody who had never written poetry before. His objects included a messy desk containing some old coins and books. I tutored him to create the following tanka.

thick English coins
a bookshelf in disarray
dusty and old
scattered volumes
read and unread

Sean Wills. *Atlas Poetica* 3.

There is no person in the poem; it is a snapshot or still life of things seen. The reader must connect them himself, yet, without a doubt, there are connections. This type of tanka is what we call ‘shasei’ or ‘sketch from life.’ The Japanese tanka reformer Masaoka Shiki deliberately adopted the Western painting technique of drawing from life and applied it to tanka. Some readers claim that these tanka aren't even poems, but that's like claiming a still life isn't really art. Not every poem or painting evokes a dramatic moment in human life, and that's why landscapes are so very popular, even when (especially when?) they

2 Garrison, Denis M. ‘Dreaming Room.’ *Modern English Tanka* 3. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, Spring, 2007.

3 McClintock, Michael. ‘Tanka in Collage and Montage Sets: Multivalence, *Duende*, and Beyond.’ *Modern English Tanka* 1:4. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, Summer, 2007.

4 Kei, M. ‘The Labyrinth of Tanka.’ *Modern English Tanka* 7. Baltimore, MD: Modern English Tanka Press, Spring, 2008.

evoke scenes in which nothing in particular is happening. They are like sumi-e, the Japanese ink brush art where a few lines represent an image. Consider Hasegawa's pine trees <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pine_Trees.jpg>. if you're looking for the richly luminous colors of Van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night*, you'll probably be disappointed, but that doesn't mean Hasegawa's pine trees aren't art.

While the method of observing the 'thing as it is' easily leads to shasei, it can also lead to more subjective treatments. Another student of mine, Jamila, tried the same experiment. She made note of the loose roof tiles on her house and found a simile.

his words rattle
like loose roof tiles
on a house
I wish
I could abandon

Jamila. *Atlas Poetica 1*.

Some people who have tried this at my suggestion have complained that there is 'nothing out there' capable of inspiring poetry. While I am highly skeptical about that, if true, nothing is still something. Here are a few of mine on the 'uninspiring' sight of 'nothing.'

December . . .
in the stillness of
the ochre dawn,
the neighbor's roofline
and nothing more

Modern English Tanka, 2:1.

the skyline's
not much to look at,
just a green line
drawn along the bottom
of the clouds

red lights, III:1.

rags,
tatters,
and remnants,
full of raveled
winds

Modern English Tanka, 1:1

Or perhaps the complaint is not that there is 'nothing,' but that there is something unattractive. Say, a barge.

low grey hills
of barges loaded with gravel,
softened almost into beauty
by the rising of the mist

on the evening bay

Modern English Tanka, 1:1

Or trash.

shining like a mirror:

the end of a discarded

beer can

before the weeds

cover it

From 'Asking Passage,' *Lynx XXII:3*.

Or a bad ex.

thirty years later:

Prince Charming with nose hair

and love handles;

Cinderella on the telephone

kvetching about child support

Sketchbook : A Journal for Eastern & Western Short Forms, 1:1.

Or annoying people.

they come
selling God, magazines,
and cable tv,
these well-dressed strangers
on my doorstep

Modern English Tanka, 1:3.

Or bad news on the television.

an October day
of pumpkins and corn,
horse droppings steaming,
Amish schoolgirls
dead on the floor

Simply Haiku, 5:1

Or family troubles.

my daughter
searches for an apartment
she can afford
 where nobody
 has been shot

Heron Sea, Short Poems of the Chesapeake Bay.

I have noticed the average person doesn't see much—and may even complain about what she does see! For example, most sailors are annoyed by recreational boaters who don't secure their halyards. Unsecured halyards flap against the aluminum masts and make a racket. A nuisance, plain and simple.

storm bells
the musical tones
of halyards
ringing in
the freshening breeze

Landfall : Poetry of Place in Modern English Tanka.

Likewise, derelict buildings have no poetic value. Heaps of rusted machinery are eyesores.

the iron skeleton
at the water's edge,
what was it once
when machines had meaning
and men their purpose?

Anglo-Japanese Tanka Society.

ospreys nest
on the derelict trestle;
trains rumble over
the 'new' bridge
rusted now by age

Heron Sea, Short Poems of the Chesapeake Bay.

But if you're a poet, then everything is poetry.

Some things are inherently interesting. Writing about this is not difficult. However, it does require that we get off our duffs and go somewhere we don't usually go and have a look at things and do stuff and meet people we wouldn't have otherwise.

Taking a windjammer cruise that visited Caribbean islands outside of the usual tourist meccas.

it was a schooner
that brought me to
this place,
met by old Dutch women
hawking lobsters

Atlas Poetica 1.

Crewing aboard a skipjack traveling the Chesapeake Bay.

the leaning tower
of Sharp's Island Light . . .
all that remains
of a vanished island,
a vanished time

Slow Motion : The Log of a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack.

Visiting an exhibit at the Brandywine Art Museum, Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania.

contemplating
Nureyev's black jacket
and ballet slippers,
how small the man
how great the skill

Simply Haiku, 5:1

Following my mother around San Antonio, Texas, as she retraced her childhood.

as he stropped his razor
to shave a customer
in his shop near the Alamo,
did my grandfather think of
Mexican bayonets?

From 'The Streets of San Antonio.' *Modern English Tanka*, 1:3

Traveling out of town, the only hotel room open was a bed and breakfast.

spending the night

at a small inn,

I discover

all the other guests

are Secret Service agents

Sketchbook : A Journal for Eastern & Western Short Forms, 2:1

As we can see, everything from the ordinary to the extraordinary is poetry. Writing is the easy part. It's seeing that's hard.

Poets Biographies

Orrin T PreJean

I first discovered tanka seven years ago through the work of black poet, Dr Sonia Sanchez. Becoming more enamored on haiku I put aside tanka until I was re-introduced to it by Atlas Poetica publisher and tanka master, M. Kei. My re-introduction was March 13th of this year. Since then the ancient, elusive melody of tanka has gripped me and as a newly born Kajin, I find myself singing tanka about any and everything. I publish my tanka under my penname: Matsukaze.

Ernesto P Santiago

Ernesto P. Santiago is a Filipino living in Athens, Greece, where he enjoys exploring the poetic myth of his senses, and has recently become interested in the study of haiku and its related forms.

Sergio Ortiz

Sergio Ortiz is an educator. Flutter Press released his debut chapbook, *At the Tail End of Dusk* (2009), and his second chapbook, *Bedbugs in My Mattress* (2010). He is a three-time nominee for the 2010, 2011 Sundress Best of the Web Anthology, and a 2010 Pushcart nominee. He received a Commendation in the 2012 International Polish Haiku Competition. His poems appear in, *Shot Glass*, *Notes from the Gean*, *Atlas Poetica*, *Skylark*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Lynx*, and *Kernels Online*; are forthcoming in *Ribbons*.

Sonam Chhoki

Born and raised in the kingdom of Bhutan I find the Japanese short form poetry resonates with my Tibetan Buddhist upbringing. I'm inspired by my father, Sonam Gyamtsho, the architect of Bhutan's non-monastic modern education. My poetry has been published in journals in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, UK and US.

M Kei

M. Kei is a tall ship sailor and award-winning poet. He is the editor-in-chief of *Take Five : Best Contemporary Tanka*, and the author of *Slow Motion : The Log of a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack* (Recommend Reading by the Chesapeake Bay Project). He is the editor of *Atlas Poetica : A Journal*

of Poetry of Place in Contemporary Tanka and compiler of the *Bibliography of English-Language Tanka*.

Veronika Zora Novak

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, I have been studying and writing tanka and haiku for two years. As an amateur, I dabble in photography and enjoy creating haiga as well. Formally, I was educated at George Brown College in the field of Medical Office Administration, having graduated in 1999 with honours.

Chen Ou Liu

Chen-ou Liu is the author of three books, including *Following the Moon to the Maple Land* (First Prize Winner of the 2011 Haiku Pix Chapbook Contest). His tanka and haiku have been honored with many awards.

Keith A Simmonds

I am a lover of all types of poetry and have been writing haiku seriously since 2004. Some of my works appear in Mainichi Daily News, Ambrosia, Simply Haiku, Yamadera Basho Memorial Museum Haiku, Concours de haiku au Sénégal, World Kigo...

Devin Harrison

I have published poetry and short stories in numerous periodicals throughout the US and Canada. These magazines include: Malahat Review, Contemporary Verse Two, Grain, Event, The Amethyst Review, Kansas Quarterly, South Dakota Review, Passages North, and others.

Josie Hibbing

I'm Josie Hibbing from the state of Iowa, USA. I am a homeschooling Mom of 8 children. My husband is a trucker and a farmer

Nancy Wells

Nancy Wells, a member of the Upper Delaware Writers Collective, is a visual artist as well as a poet, and lives near the Delaware River in Pennsylvania. Her poetry appears in the books “Poetree”, “Leaving the Empty Room”, River Rocks Anthology”, and “Moonbathing”, as well as her own chapbooks “Oh to Be a Dandelion”, “Wild Weeds”, and “One Sassy Blossom”. She has created a number of dimensional one of a kind artist books combining visuals with words.

Carole Johnston

Obsessed with Japanese short form poetry, I write haiku and tanka every day and have published in a variety of online and print journals. I live in a hermitage of flowers behind a gate in Lexington, Kentucky.

Mr. Willie R. Bongcaron

A haijin by choice, this poem writer dabbles in short poetry forms, specially haiku and tanka. He believes that short poetry forms may look simple and trite but are actually the hardest to compose. Back in Manila, he works with the mass rail transit where he is enriched by a thousand experiences brought by serving the riding public.

Kala Ramesh

Kala Ramesh write haiku, senryu, tanka, haibun and renku. Her collection of tanka poems, “*the unseen arc*” won The Snapshot Press eChapbook Award 2012. She was on the editorial board — *Take Five: The Best Contemporary Tanka* 2008/2009/2010

Pat Geyer

Nature lover who enjoys the arts of photography and poetry.

Susan Burch

Susan Burch resides in Hagerstown, MD with her husband, stepson, and daughter. She enjoys reading, writing, and puzzles of all kinds. She loves wearing bandannas, hats, and obnoxious bright pink sunglasses.

Jessica Latham

Jessica Latham is a freelance writer, translator, poet and creator of Rowdy Prisoners, which features stories, poems and interviews about daring to live with passion and love. She has been featured in various journals for her poetry, haiku, tanka and essays. Living in California's beautiful Sonoma wine country, Jessica is happily preparing her new life as a soon-to-be mother.

Jean Pierre Garcia Aznar

I am a French poetry writer, born in Spain. I just published, this running June, a book of tanka, TELLURIES. (<http://www.revue-tanka-francophone.com/editions/extraits/extraits-alhama-garcia-2013.html>)

Grace Beam

I am a long time writer but only recently began to write haiku and other Japanese poetry. Enjoy my butterfly garden, nature, Zen. My husband and I are retired and enjoy the company of our pet tortoise and turtle.

John Potts

I live in rainy England in a wabisabi village on the Wiltshire Downs. Rambling with my trusty digital Kodak and a haikai outlook is a natural and constant joy

Roman Lyakhovetsky

Originally from Russia, Roman Lyakhovetsky now lives in Israel. His haiku and tanka appeared in various journals including Modern Haiku, Frogpond, Heron's Nest and A Hundred Gourds. He is

one of the editors of russian-language Senryu and Kyoka online journal, Ershik.

Jenny Ward Angyal

lives with her husband and one Abyssinian cat on a small organic farm in Gibsonville, NC, USA. She has written poetry since the age of five and tanka since 2008. Her tanka and other poems have appeared in various print and online journals and may also be found at her blog, [The Grass Minstrel](#).

Sondra J. Byrnes

Sondra J. Byrnes is a retired law/business professor. She discovered tanka only a few years ago and has since been published in Tuck, Prune Juice, World Haiku Review, Notes from the Gean, among others. Byrnes lives in South Bend, Indiana--until winter comes.

Marianne Paul

Marianne Paul is a Canadian poet and novelist. Her poetry book, *Above and Below the Waterline*, is published by BookLand Press, with a book of haiku forthcoming in 2014.

Clive Oseman

Clive Oseman is a British poet born in Birmingham, now living and working in Swindon. He has been published in several journals around the world.

Susan Constable

Susan Constable's tanka have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Her tanka collection, *The Eternity of Waves*, was one of the winning entries in the eChapbook Awards for 2012, sponsored by Snapshot Press. She is currently the tanka editor for the international on-line journal, *A Hundred Gourds*.

Ed Bremson

Ed Bremson is an award winning haiku poet. He has been publishing poetry for 45 years. He is active in the Facebook poetry community and lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Ramesh Anand

Ramesh Anand authored *Newborn Smiles*, a book of haiku poetry published by Cyberwit.Net Press. His haiku has appeared in many publications, across 14 countries. His haiku has been translated in German, Serbian, Japanese, Croatian, Romanian, Telugu and Tamil.

Tracy Beh

I'm an Australian citizen of Burmese extraction, residing in Malaysia with my husband and family. Due to a number of personal crises, I resumed writing this year. It is so healing to loose and find oneself in poetry, and I find in tanka, a gentle coming home.

Gabri Rigotti

Gabri Rigotti lives in Cape Town, South Africa. He is a sustainability consultant, specialising in impact measurement of green solutions for economic empowerment and upliftment.

Janette Hoppe

Janette Hoppe lives in Newcastle, Australia. Her poetry is a reflection of her Australian and New Zealand Maori heritage. Her tanka and haiku have been published in journals in Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

Debbie Strange

I'm a member of the Writers' Collective of Manitoba. My poetry, fiction and non-fiction have been published in print: *The Collective Consciousness*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Pentimes*, *The Winnipeg Free Press*, and online: *VerseWrights*. A leaflet of my haiku will be printed in a forthcoming publication from *Leaf Press*, and *kernels* online has also accepted a haiku. My abstract photography exhibition was held at the Assiniboine Park Conservatory.

Roary Williams

This is @CoyoteSings on Twitter. My real name is Roary Williams. I live in Albuquerque, NM

Barbara A Taylor

"Each day demands that I write and that my fingers touch and feel the earth." Barbara's Japanese short form poems appear in international journals and anthologies on line and in print, including Haigaonline, Eucalypt, Notes From The Gean, A Hundred Gourds, Atlas Poetica, Modern English Tanka, Kokako, Kernels, Simply Haiku, and others. She lives in the Rainbow Region, Northern NSW, Australia. Diverse poems with audio are at <http://batsword.tripod.com> and <http://batsword.webs.com>

Gennepher

I am gennepher and have been writing haiku for 4 years, only recently started writing tanka. I live in North Wales in the United Kingdom. For me the adventures on the journey of life are important, not the final destination

Liam Wilkinson

Liam Wilkinson lives in York, England. He has been publishing short poetry for over a decade and has, in that time, edited several journals of haiku, senryu and tanka. You'll find him on Twitter @ldwilkinson.

Traci Siler

I am a wife and mother of two wonderful teenagers. I have been writing short form poetry for only a couple of years, but I feel poetry all around me. Despite my busy life, I try and write every day.

Amanda Dcosta

Amanda is an amateur poet and enjoys writing poetic forms such as tanka, sonnets, and villanelles. Apart from poetry, she works for various publishers; the most recent where she co-authored the book, 'Encyclopedia of Cultivated Plants: From Acacia to Zinnia', published by ABC-CLIO, CA. Her current project is a children's book, where she mixes tanka with prose, hoping to introduce tanka to children.



