cattails

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Cover Photo: Australian Pelicans – Woy Woy, New South Wales
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Introduction

There’s an old Bhutanese saying: “Even a single enemy is one too many and a thousand friends too few.” It is inspired by the Buddhist teachings that harmony is a fundamental need in human relations. What better way to forge conciliation and accord than by expressing and sharing our deepest joys, fears and concerns in poetry? Even when faced with the obliteration of his world, Celan offers a similar hope:

“... there are
still songs to sing beyond
humankind.”

(Threadsuns by Paul Celan, trans. by John Felstiner, 1995)

Lavana, Kathy, Geethanjali, Gautam and Kala have read and now showcase your poems with acuity and dedication. Behind the scenes Mike has worked with his inimitable patience and eye for artistic excellence. As ever, the UHTS team - Alan, Neal, Iliyana and Marianna have been unfailingly supportive. We have amazing images of Australian birds in this issue and for this our appreciation and thanks to Beverley George, Marietta McGregor, Vanessa Proctor, Michelle Brock and Rose van Son.

We carry a beautiful tribute by Marion Clarke to the prolific and inspiring English poet, Rachel Sutcliffe who contributed to cattails right from its inception.

Sonam Chhoki
In Memory of Rachel Sutcliffe (1977 – 2019)

Former member of the British Haiku Society and the United Haiku and Tanka Society (UHTS), poet and linguist Rachel Marie Sutcliffe was born in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. A lover of languages, Rachel spent time working abroad as an English language assistant in Spain and a technical English lecturer in France. On her return to her native England, she became a lecturer and language tutor in her hometown of Huddersfield.

However, during her early twenties, Rachel was diagnosed with an incurable, immune disorder. Writing, which had once been a pastime, suddenly became a form of therapy. Although widely published in international haiku and senryu journals and on dedicated websites and forums, Rachel was a very private person; many of her writing friends with whom she corresponded on a regular basis were unaware of the extent to which her health affected her daily life.

Contributing to the UHTS’s journal *cattails* right from its inception, Rachel’s haiku and senryu were informed by her keen observation skills of both nature and people. Her
work resonated with readers from all over the world and the Yorkshire countryside and its changing seasons often featured inspired her poetry:

autumn stroll
we pick blackberries
out of the mist

*September 2014*

sunrise
through my open window
the sound of Monday

*January 2014*

shorter days
every road ends
in fog

*September 2016*

snow-filled nest
the depth of silence
before spring

*April 2017*

Despite being faced with many challenges, Rachel’s quirky sense of humour was evident in poems such as:

after Christmas
only the tree
looking slimmer

*January 2016*
dental check up
the waiting room fish
Open-mouthed

*October 2018*

... And she was not afraid of writing from a very personal perspective:

make up bag
the many faces
of me

*September 2014*

paving stones
stepping round the cracks
in our relationship

*May 2015*

another lie
the crab digs deeper
into the sand

*September 2016*

bitter lemon
I swallow
my words

*April 2018*
Rachel’s work was often highly emotive, particularly when describing the pain of losing her beloved grandmother:

hospital ward
the hum of machines
she no longer needs

*May 2014*

now taller
than your headstone
our rose bush

*April 2018*

And I think her finest work reflected the loss and of the life she’d hoped to have had, before it was overtaken by her condition:

we talk
about survival rates
winter sky

*January 2014*

the leaf’s descent
leaving my best years
behind me

*September 2015*

However, probably the most poignant poem that describes the sadness of losing her former self was the following:
atlas-
all the life
I once had

October 2017

Rachel’s Facebook page featured several favourite quotes and these lines from Maya Angelou are particularly apt for the haiku poet:

"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away."

reflecting Rachel’s ability to find joy in small things, even when faced with such an uncertain future.

Finally, followers of Rachel’s blog Project Words may have been surprised to discover that she had arranged for it to continue posting her work posthumously; the following haiku on St Valentine’s Day no doubt raised a few smiles. I’d like to think that somewhere in the universe Rachel was also smiling at the reaction of her readers. She will be deeply missed by many.

speed dating
my peachy lip gloss
attracts a wasp

Tribute prepared by Marion Clarke, Northern Ireland.
Haiku

Rainbow Lorikeet – New South Wales
power outage . . .
a magnolia stellata
undresses the moon

pană de curent . . .
o magnolie stelata
dezbrâcând luna

_Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania_

the shimmer
in her smile . . .
full corn moon

_Jessica Latham, USA_

tatting
by starlight
an orb spider

_Marilyn Humbert, Australia_

a night swan
unfurling to the wingtips
moon feathers

_Mira Walker, Australia_

breaking drought
the first drop strikes
my shadow

_Quendryth Young, Australia_
night meadow
under a dome of stars
feeling immortal

*Carol Raisfeld, USA*

no stone unturned moonbeams

*Matthew Caretti, USA*

down the scent
of wattle in bloom—
winter moon

*Gavin Austin, Australia*

last night's dream—
strands of broken web
in the wind

*Martha Magenta, UK*

pale moon
fading into the silence
a green heron

*Angela Terry, USA*
dripping 
from oars 
the quiet 

Lori Becherer, USA

reeling in 
the evening tide 
moonlight’s spool 

Joanna Ashwell, UK

riding the wave 
of an endless moon . . .
cicadas 

Mark E. Brager, USA

lightning . . . 
for a moment 
a river in the sky 

Adjei Agyei-Baah, Ghana/New Zealand

thunder . . . 
she touches my hand 
in her sleep 

Ashish Narain, Philippines
October rain
on a cowbird’s neck
the only rainbow

_Bryan Rickert, USA_

a white blaze
on the colt's forehead
forked lightning

_Debbie Strange, Canada_

last drop of rain
on the echeveria—
words in tune

sull' echeveria
l'ultima goccia di pioggia—
parole d'intesa

_Margherita Petriccione, Italy_

passing storm
the faith I’ve placed
in rainbows

_Gregory Longenecker, USA (EC)_

waterfall near rocks—
accepting more of itself
sound of water

_Gillena Cox, Trinidad_
my same walk
in reverse
autumn equinox

Julie Warther, USA

poplar leaves rustle . . .
choosing between
myself and myself

Nicholas Klacsanzky, Ukraine

waterfall —
it was different
last year

Michael Galko, USA

the sky awash
with apricot and indigo
Cézanne sunset

Gregory Piko, Australia

swirling
to Stravinsky's Firebird . . .
autumn colors

Eric A. Lohman, USA
autumn sun—
the young hawk's
vivid red shoulders

*Ruth Holzer, USA*

empty nail holes
on the wall that needs painting
autumn sunlight

*Craig Kittner, USA*

late autumn
catching up with
my breath

*Michael Henry Lee, USA*

autumn colours . . .
forgetting the fragment
before I get home

*Raamesh Gowri Raghavan, India*

dusk creeps in—
the daylily prepares
its final nod

*Bernard Gieske, USA*
oak woods . . .
a woodpecker arranges
the night silence

*Ivan Gaćina, Croatia*

learning
what melancholy means—
a curlew's cry

*Hazel Hall, Australia*

moon shaving—
the carver's last stroke
before full dark

*Nola Obee, Canada*

moonless night
a raven alights
without its shadow

*Simon Hanson, Australia*

wind chime . . .
a dragonfly’s wing
shorn in the grass

*Cyndi Lloyd, USA*
gusty wind—
dead leaves head north
with the birds

*Bob Carlton, USA*

winter sun
the wind blows shadows
up the wall

*Nancy Rapp, USA*

empty farmhouse—
the field's whistles now
no longer human

*William Keckler, USA*

all day fog
the white-bellied heron’s cry
almost fierce

*Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan*

opening
to the black woodpecker
a dying pine tree

*Ernest Wit, Poland*
Silvereye – New South Wales
first frost
the grey in her hair
barely noticeable

Andy McLellan, UK

cold front
in the damp straw
whisper of starlight

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

waiting for
snow clouds . . .
slow moonrise

Guliz Mutlu, Turkey

impending blizzard . . .
a combine spits out
the last of the chaff

Alan S. Bridges, USA

growing log by log
before the snowstorm
Dad’s woodpile

William Scott Galasso, USA
first snow . . .
the silence of the hawk
among the clouds

la prima neve . . .
il silenzio del falco
tra le nuvole

Stefano d'Andrea, Italy

cold morning—
some snow on the beard
of a schnauzer

студена сутрин
сняг по брадата
на шнауцер

Vessislava Savova, Bulgaria

cold silence
a little girl wearing
snowflakes in hair

хладна тишина
маля девојчица носи
пахулје у коси

Jasna Popović Poje, Croatia
opening a bag
of bird seed . . .
snow flurries

Edward J. Rielly, USA

winter light
shining through his tail feathers—
collared dove

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

goldenrod gall—
snow covers
the hemisphere

Tom Sacramona, USA

winter sunlight
mother's smile
in a yellowed photograph

Robert Witmer, Japan

long winter
a gentle touch
of her hand

dолгая зима
нежное прикосновение
её руки

Nikolay Grankin, Russia
change of prognosis —
from the edge of winter clouds
a beam of sunlight

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

pillow talk
coming between us
a low winter sun

Susan Mallernee, USA

a treed lure
twisting in the breeze
the dead of winter

James Chessing, USA

late winter
the garden’s breath
shifts once more

Mary Kendall, USA

February —
in an unploughed field
the hunger of crows

Adrian Bouter, The Netherlands
last exit taken
the old dog is still looking
for her

_Pitt Büerken, Germany_

funeral cortège . . .
the leafless branch
where the crow should settle

_Eva Limbach, Germany_

burial grounds—
first into the grave
our shadows

_Kwaku Feni Adow, Ghana_

country graveyard
some of the facts
carved in stone

_Rebecca Drouilhet, USA_

gaping
at rush-hour rain
a dead hawk

_Paul Chambers, Wales_
crow at dusk
crossing from one world
into another

    *Keith Polette, USA*

  a star
  fades away into darkness . . .
  plum blossom

    *Norie Umeda, Japan*

flights of geese
the freckled face
of morning

    *David J Kelly, Ireland*

  bluebird
  between branches
  a bit of dawn sky

    *Nancy Shires, USA*

cherry buds—
a language yet
to be spoken

    *Stephen Toft, UK*
the soft sway
of grandma's wisteria
spring mourning

Rachel Sutcliffe, UK (EC)

digging
to bury the dead puppy—
cherry blossoms

Barnabas I. Adeleke, Nigeria

rain on the pond
between ripples
a shimmer of tadpoles

John Hawkhead, UK

car windows down
despite the chill
spring peepers

Kristen Lindquist, USA

river song—
beat of footsteps
on the wooden bridge

Billy Fenton, Ireland
dawn chorus  
my daughter unearths  
mum’s old records  

*John McManus, England*

shallow creek  
all the secrets of  
small pebbles  

*ayaz daryl nielsen, USA*

hillside crocus  
the deep reaches of the sun  
on my back  

*Adelaide B. Shaw, USA*

warbler song  
the spring vibrato  
of opening buds  

*Jay Friedenberg, USA*

a budding tree  
older than me  
fingerprint whorls  

*Agnes Eva Savich, USA*
spring rain . . .
the changing pitch
in an empty bucket

*Indra Neil Mekala, India*

morning stillness
the tremble of
tea leaves

*Ben Moeller-Gaa, USA*

thistledown floating
on a summer breeze —
azure blue skies

*Anne Louise Curran, New Zealand*

calla lily
the scent of mother's
freshly washed hair

*Veronika Zora Novak, Canada*

day moon
I fold myself into
a wind song

*Elisa Theriana, Indonesia*
valley railway
the chuff chuff
consumed in trees

David Gale, UK

glinting salmon
my world briefly
then his

Roger Watson, UK

foaming surf—
one bright mussel shell
cups sunlight

Amanda Bell, Ireland

no sky for snow
a summer song crackles
on the radio

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

wild Africa—
an elephant carries
the burning sun

Justice Joseph Prah, Ghana
a bird flies
between me and the sun
— all these eclipses

Richard Kakol, Australia

late summer
a coil of snakes
scatters

Brad Bennett, USA

motionless
on a moving bus
the buddha

Shobha Rao, India

all the light
in a nutshell —
end of summer

toată lumina
într-o coajă de nucă —
sfârșitul verii

Carmen Duvalma, Romania

mangroves . . .
the unflinching eyes
of a crocodile

Cynthia Rowe, Australia
Editor’s Choice (EC) - Haiku

passing storm
the faith I’ve placed
in rainbows

*Gregory Longenecker, USA*

In this haiku, the poet evokes many emotions and meanings with just a few words. On the surface, the first line brought out (for me) all the rain and fury of a storm but it being qualified as a passing storm, indicated that there might not be too much permanent damage. This image of movement and action leads to the second half of the haiku which is a simple statement – ‘the faith I’ve placed in rainbows’. The second image in my mind was a calm and serene rainbow. But quickly, I realised that it isn’t the rainbow, it is the faith that the poet has placed in the rainbow. The informal tone of the second part (I’ve) drew me into the conversation- an ideal quality in any writing, drawing the reader in. The images evoke so many senses – the sight, the touch, the smell, the sound of rain-storms and then, the beauty of rainbows. Moving on to the deeper level, most of us go on through storms and some of them pass easily. What helps us move on is perhaps, our faith that there will be rainbows after the storm. Sometimes, what keeps us rooted is the belief that we will move on, despite a lack of rainbows. This haiku does not tell you what to feel. Depending on your own philosophy, you can take Gregory Longenecker’s haiku with you through the storms – do you focus on the storm passing, the rainbow or on your own faith and where you place it?
the soft sway
of grandma's wisteria
spring mourning

Rachel Sutcliffe, UK

Rachel Sutcliffe was a regular contributor of beautiful haiku to many journals. *Cattails* has been fortunate to be a journal that she regularly sent her work to. This time too, we were fortunate to receive some beautiful haiku from her. I present one of them to you. Rachel, we will miss your haiku submissions and your gentle ways.

Geethanjali Rajan
in crack sealant
on blacktop
finding Kokopelli

Haiku: Alan S. Bridges
Photo: Neil Kruszkowski
Angelescu Cristina

cricket in a jar -
the universe is moving inside

Angelescu Cristina
heron’s cry
ice slowly knits
the lake
building our home
one twig... one leaf
at a time
sunday supper
tears for the times
we laughed
when we gave our all
to each other

carol raisfeld
painting & words
Senryu

Laughing Kookaburra
the day I don’t
  take a coat
  summer rain

Rachel Sutcliffe, UK

fork in the trail—
  the decision maker
  in my other jacket

Angela Terry, USA

Peter’s Pence—
  the village priest arrives
  in a new luxury sedan

Djurđa Vukelić Rozic, Croatia

in her sleep
  the smile she keeps
  denying me

Adjei Agyei-Baah, Ghana/New Zealand

optician’s bill
  unable to read
  the small print

Roger Watson, UK (EC)
caterpillar
in restaurant salad
almost my protein

Nancy Shires, USA

perhaps the last
sunny day until spring—
his funeral well attended

Angela Terry, USA (EC)

fire spike
struggling to remember what
I just recalled

Michael Henry Lee, USA

winter stars
a navigation light
going somewhere else

John Hawkhead, UK

clean table
the day after
guests leave

Michael Galko, USA
spring thaw
the neighbor’s long beard
emerges

_Bryan Rickert, USA_

widow’s garden
the old shed held together
by ivy

_Lucy Whitehead, UK_

cosmetic surgery—
my selfie’s wrinkles
missing

_Hazel Hall, Australia_

my finger
bruised
by the friendship ring

_Ruth Holzer, USA_

our guests gone
the misshapen soap
back in its place

_Steve Dolphy, UK_
dictionary of epithets
getting ready
for mother-in-law’s cake

Irina Guliaeva, Russia

move day
untangling cords
I no longer know

Bill Cooper, USA

factory
not noticing the sound
till it stops

Quendryth Young, Australia

Great Wall of China
tourists dodging tourists
at every turn

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

sore thumb
I find the way
to get noticed

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia
in the margin
of a crossword
a senryu

Brad Bennett, USA

grandma
trying to text
on her landline

Carol Raisfeld, USA

new expectant grandma
she puts the sonogram
on facebook

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

burst pipes
I’ve always wanted
an indoor pool

Debbie Strange, Canada

last day of summer
Mother slips a pickle jar
into my suitcase

Indra Neil Mekala, India
perplexing
the inaccuracy of every
bathroom scale

Carol Raisfeld, USA

summer auction
the heat rises
with each bid

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

slaying a dragon
a child struggles
with a piece of cake

Ernest Wit, Poland

love me tender
what’s a few scratches
on old vinyl

Simon Hanson, Australia

male nurse---
it’s grandma’s turn
to wink

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan, India
bachelor party . . .
after the fifth glass of brandy
I speak Chinese

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

next door’s yard
a peeing cherub
tops up the pond

Gavin Austin, Australia

psychology teacher screaming in red ink

Martha Magenta, UK

Black Friday —
every single mannequin
without clothes

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

Earth Summit —
everyone tweeting
but the birds

Ashish Narain, Philippines
salary day
the pockets stuffed
with moonshine

Barun Saha, India

high spirits
in the sanatorium
infectious laughter

Roger Watson, UK

Earth Day
recycling last year’s
poster

Michael Henry Lee, USA

chain smoker
extinguishing another
ember of hope

David J Kelly, Ireland

office party —
the half-smiles of people
I half know

Ashish Narain, Philippines (EC)
Butcherbird
happy hours
I order another glass
of maudlin

Barun Saha, India

track meet  my runny nose

Bryan Rickert, USA

smoke
from my neighbor’s BBQ
uninvited

Bernard Gieske, USA

old typewriter—
the creaks as her fingers
press the keys

Hazel Hall, Australia

cooking channel
the chef
with salt-and-pepper hair

Olivier Schopfer, Switzerland
morning exercise
I get a cramp
In my double chin

Terrie Jacks, USA

incognito
the comfort of unloading
to a stranger

Quendryth Young, Australia

intimately mingled
his books
and mine

Julie Warther, USA

office party
my female boss’s coat
on top of mine

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

roadblock
we steer away from
the big issues

Debbie Strange, Canada
before shop opens
the shop owner dresses
a mannequin

*Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India*

the kettle’s whistle
turning Monday
into a Monday

*Indra Neil Mekala, India*

World Peace . . .
the spiritual leader argues
with the cabbie

*Praniti, India*

silent night—
wondering what the child
is up to

*Raamesh Gowri Raghavan, India*

trespassing
through the picket fence
her neighbour’s voice

*Gavin Austin, Australia*
fuel price protest
we burn our placards
for warmth

Martha Magenta, UK

identity crisis—
she writes her name
in abbreviation

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

debate club
we take turns
to disagree

Debbi Antebi, UK

morning coffee
making sense
of it all

Rachel Sutcliffe, UK

baby giraffe on TV
thinking of
my uncle Frank

Djurdja Vukelic Rozic, Croatia
where the two streams meet
the color
of my morning coffee

Adjei Agyei-Baah, Ghana/New Zealand

morning stroll —
the town bore standing
on the corner

Ruth Holzer, USA

watching
the neighbors having fun
New Year’s Eve

Olivier Schopfer, Switzerland

missed call
the rush
to not answer

Terrie Jacks, USA
two weeks into school
my little cousin picks up
the f-word

Barnabas I Adeleke, Nigeria

bronze monument
the snow-capped head
of a revolutionist

Nikolay Grankin, Russia

acquired taste
since when did I start liking
the space between us

Vandana Parashar, India

lower back pain
I shovel on
ointment

Tom Sacramona, USA
vegan entree
the sprig of parsley
is overkill

*Brad Bennett, USA*

family meeting –
I pilfer some ketchup
from the kid’s table

*Eva Limbach, Germany*
Editor’s Choice (EC) - Senryu

perhaps the last
sunny day until spring—
his funeral well attended

Angela Terry, USA

The importance of juxtaposition in senryu cannot be overstressed. Just as in haiku, in senryu too, juxtaposing two parts of a poem, which by themselves may seem unrelated, can result in a combination which is not only hilarious but so true, so true...

The first two lines of Angela Terry’s poem and the last have little in common if viewed independently of each other. But when read together the reader’s mind takes a quantum leap to a conclusion which is not of the writer’s creation but the reader’s own. The hilarious conclusion is only suggested subtly and not stated. This requires mastery over the idiom.

office party —
the half smiles of people
I half know

Ashish Narain, India

This senryu comes across as a universal truth. The smile which comes to your lips on reading it acknowledges it as such. How well we know the half smiles of those of our colleagues we barely recognize but feel obliged to reciprocate to with our own half smiles. A slice of urban life that is so familiar to most of us.
optician’s bill
unable to read
the small print

Roger Watson, UK

What if the first line had been: grocer’s bill? The result would have been a very mundane poem not worth committing to memory. But put ‘optician’s bill’ instead and the irony hits you in the eye. Yet another senryu where juxtaposing two apparently unrelated images results in a whole which is funnier than the sum total of the parts.

Gautam Nadkarni
cold room  --
your woolly scarf forgotten
on the armchair

Corina Farcasanu
no greeting card -- Valentine's day

Daniela Lăcărăcioara Capotă
winter walk
in unexpected places
rainbows

Dian Duchin Reed
frustration -
Poseidon threatens
the balance

Authors: Franjo Oršanić (Haiku), Sandra Samec (Photo)
All Saints' Day...
creaking at the touch
my mother's closet
Tanka

Sulfer-crested Cockatoo
blackening sky
a storm is coming . . .
this time
she battens the hatches
doesn’t let him in

*Barbara Curnow, Australia*

the alpha breath
of a far-north winter
slamming doors
this sting on my cheek, words
thrown back in my face

*David Terelinck, Australia*

a door stands
at the edge of a dream
will it open
to the fabric of my past
or the threads of my future

*Susan Constable, Canada*

under the eaves
an empty spider web
she still clings
to the skeleton
of a perfect dream

*Michelle Brock, Australia*
I watch
the balloon rising up into
the blue sky
another night and the same dream
and not knowing when it will end

Bernard Geiske, USA

in a blink
of an eye you’ve gone
chasing dreams . . .
a kite drifting
on outback thermals

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

glaring at
the evening clouds
a refugee child
who lost his way
in search of Orion

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

on the border wall
children lobbed by tear gas
far from home
a Kiskadee swoops over
catches a fly in mid-air

Linda Jeannette Ward, USA
a startlement
of waterfowl rises
from the marsh . . .
we gather cattail fluff
as tinder for our fire

*Debbie Strange, Canada*

new arrivals
in the thrift shop window
her favourite hand-knits—
another eulogy delivered
in the tiny country church

*Michelle Brock, Australia*

surrounded
by a jumble of shoes
an old cobbler
taps away content
in his low tech world

*Keitha Keyes, Australia*

for a second
the metal roof galumphs
with possum feet
alone once more with silence
and the emptiness of night

*Jan Dobb, Australia*
my time alone
on the porch with the peace
of a country road
    a bumblebee and I
keeping to ourselves

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

stretching
from apartments to slums
a rainbow —
one end, a pot of gold
the other, just the view

Hazel Hall, Australia

balcony view
tempered by the impulse
to throw myself off
that I don’t want
to mention

Owen Bullock, Australia

sleepless —
the things we aren't telling
each other
screaming all night
in my head

Ruth Holzer, USA
I feel the truth
and fiction in you
never committing
when a half-moon lights the sky
is it waxing or waning?

Tony Williams, Australia

contemplating
near the border
a constellation
that connects the stars
at both sides

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

keeping vigil
she wears a hijab
I hold a rosary
our tears come
carrying the same sting

Patricia Pella, USA

reunion—
this night-blooming
waterlily
by the same lake
on our very first date

Cynthia Rowe, Australia
you woke me
this morning with a kiss
a habit
I’ve sadly missed
since your death

Jan Foster, Australia

security
less certain late in life—
enough that he asked
on bended knee
then stood up again

Hazel Hall, Australia

he bakes
metaphors for love
as I sleep
this man of few words
perfumes the dawn with cinnamon

Barbara Curnow, Australia (EC)

a love song
from the mariachi band
at our table
chili peppers
heat our lips

Cyndi Lloyd, USA
a cascade
of silver spills down
the mountain . . .
your fingers tremble
as you unpin my hair

Debbie Strange, Canada

memories boxed
and love letters bound . . .
she smiles
with wonder at a second
blooming of the rose bush

Gavin Austin, Australia

the way a woman
can send out her man
on a bicycle
on Christmas Eve
to get cream

Owen Bullock, Australia

by 8:15
the new parking lot
is full
not a car or sapling
out of line

James Chessing, USA
in the graveyard
the roar of a leaf blower
sweeping the stones—
who can hear the wind
singing through the hazel

*Jenny Ward Angyal, USA*

sun-drenched
mornings bring the rush
of birdsong
dogs pull heavy-eyed owners
on the street to the park

*Carol Raisfeld, USA*

I pack ten years
of my immigrant life
into fifteen boxes . . .
my old dog follows me
from room to room

*Chen-ou Liu, Canada*

small grey moths
flutter from rose to rose
restless
for adventure
she backpacks town to town

*Kate King, Australia*
Bush stone-curlew - Cairns, Queensland
wind chimes
belling autumn freshness
over the porch —
too soon to travel
to cherry trees in bloom

Amelia Fielden, Australia

the sign read:
watch where you step
in the garden
then I noticed as I took a step
those snapdragons close by

Bernard Gieske, USA (EC)

my walking group
now in their senior years
today’s topic
the falling leaves and how long
they can still keep their colours

Thelma Mariano, Canada (EC)

from black and white
our family photo album
turns to colour —
we never caught those moments
when life was not so rosy

Carmel Summers, Australia
the photograph
on your funeral card . . .
who you were
before I knew
who you were

*Kathryn J. Stevens, USA*

posting photos
titled: 'Dad and me'
on Father's day
. . . before I get back
to my screaming son

*Raamesh Gowri Raghavan, India (EC)*

old enough
to be called grandma
and still learning
what it means
to be a mum

*Anne Benjamin, Australia*

my grandson
climbs the weeping cherry
pretending
its fingery limbs are his own—
may he always remember they are

*Kenny Ward Angyal, USA*
my grandchild's tiny hand
tucks into mine
will there come a season
when I need
to lean on his arm

_Patricia Pella, USA_

with care he prunes
the old bonsai
she nurses back to health
the spring
in his footsteps

_Shobha Rao, India_

a narrow pass
through the mountains
five spires
point to the sky
each to a different god

_Alan S. Bridges, USA_

contained
inside the puzzle
of the water sculpture
the eternal question
of sky

_Terry Ann Carter, Canada_
a fisherman
counts the stars
by the lake
a wind soughs
through tall grass

David He, China

river pirates
in suits & senate seats
what lies
beyond the curve
of the Murrumbidgee . . .

David Terelinck, Australia

leaving behind
this tangle of anger
I follow
a river of stars
rowing my own boat

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

almost an hour
to do a crossword
yet only
a second to say one
six across: REGRET

Susan Constable, Canada
struggling

to keep my balance

with river songs

I find currents

I shouldn’t step into

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan, India

picked over

chicken bones

from Sunday lunch . . .

so much untouched

and left unsaid

Gavin Austin, Australia

October frost

a blackbird loiters

on the asphalt . . .

how we strut with pride

pecking at crumbs

Anna Cates, USA

on this wooded ridge

eucalyptus saligna

stands so proud

yet in midday sun

it casts its shortest shadow

Carmel Summers, Australia
how difficult

to be anonymous . . .

even as

the butterfly flies

the golden dust disappears

_Diana Teneva, Bulgaria_

one crow

and a clutch of chickadees

at the birdfeeder—

that simple need

to fit in someplace

_Mary Kendall, USA_

red fox

slinks through long grass

an outsider

in this digital world

I press ink to paper

_Kate King, Australia_

pen poised

to write another poem

for you . . .

instead I watch a raindrop

squiggle down the pane

_Jan Dobb, Australia_
from the sale
of my books
I buy a sweater
my words
keeping me warm

_Terry Ann Carter, Canada_

that feeling
when we walk into our house
after a long vacation
dust motes dancing
in a stream of sunlight

_Mary Davila, USA_
Editor’s Choices (EC) - tanka

A sweltering summer, the hottest on record ‘down under’, and a colder one north of the equator; thank you poets who have submitted tanka regardless of the weather.

I’m not writing as many tanka as I have over the years since 2005 when I began. Are you? And if so, do you feel that there’s only so many times one can write about love, loss and longing? I’m not suggesting that we don’t write about such things. Tanka is the perfect form to express grief, sorrow and ecstasy. The trick is to catch oneself in the act of expressing something too similar to tanka already published. Not always easy. Pain can linger longer than we expect. Writing them out of our system important. Why not explore different angles or techniques?

There are touching and amusing moments on love in this issue, in particular Debbie Strange, Hazel Hall, Owen Bullock’s tanka for example. What takes the eye is the uniqueness and humour with which they are written. It’s with this thought in mind that I’ve picked tanka for the Editor’s Choice.

the sign read
watch where your step
in the garden
then I noticed as I took a step
those snapdragons close by

Bernard Gieske, USA

What is it that sets this one apart? It’s the way it is said. In other words the voice, which in this case is deceptively simple, but assured along with language that leads us into the mood and scene the poet is experiencing (did you for a split-second glance down at your feet -- your mind bringing an image of a step in view? Mine did). Strangely enough this is written in past tense. Present tense, as we know, usually brings us into
the present moment. It’s almost as if the poet is still standing beside the snapdragons marveling at the event that took him there. And what a surprise the last line is. We literally stumble, not physically, but mindfully into a moment of awareness.

---

he bakes
metaphors for love
as I sleep
this man of few words
perfumes the dawn with cinnamon

*Barbara Curnow, Australia*

This is a most unusual tanka. Instead of naming what is baked, the poet states they are metaphors for something else. We are not only left to dream our way into what’s cooking in the kitchen, but also what’s occurring between the chef and the poet. The use of smell aids us all the way. I found myself breathing in as I read this, almost expecting to smell cinnamon in the air as I inhaled. The language is not only beautiful, it’s so in keeping with the spirit of tanka we all endeavor to express -- the unsaid – for isn’t love, real love, often shown not so much in words but action? It must be said also that ‘as I sleep’ is a brilliant pivot line. How evocative this is of a Sunday-sleep-in, memories ticking over of the night before.

---

my walking group
now in their senior years
today’s topic
the falling leaves and how long they can still keep their colours

*Thelma Mariano, Canada*
Could it be that I like this one because I could slip into this walking group with ease and not stand out? While facilitating *Read Around Canberra* workshops in four ACT libraries years ago, I noticed that where participants became emotionally involved in what they are reading is the point where it touches or echoes our own life experiences. It becomes clear as I age, how important it is to keep active. And although the poet has not used those exact words, it is inferred in the last line. This is today’s topic, and likely to be tomorrow’s as well. Science is concentrating on this.

However there’s more than one thought to dream into the last two lines. Such sorrow as our loved ones close down, lose vitality along with many shades that make them who they are. The sensitivity in what is not expressed outright attracts and satisfies most of all in this tanka. Even the pace of the poem is slowed to a walking speed.

posting photos
titled 'Dad and me'
on Father’s day
. . . before I get back
to my screaming son

*Raamesh Gown Raghavan, India*

Oh the reality of being a parent. Not to mention the irony in the poet’s words. Kyoka (tongue-in-cheek tanka) is a pleasurable and what a reflection this one is on the foibles of human nature. Did you recognize yourself in what is written? Were you able to laugh? Did you cringe --- hopefully only for a moment? We all have moments when our actions are not as faultless as we might like them to be. What could be a better way to finish than with the celebration of imperfection in a tanka that sends up the way we can get carried away with the romance of idealism.

Kathy Kituai
shadows move across the high mesas

full of coolness
another day without a plan
I decide
to roll over

John Hawkhead
osteoporosis –
I’m dusting more carefully
the chipped shell

Haiku: Ioana Dinescu
Artwork: Constanța Erca
still trying

to identify the song

this bird from my dream
storm wind ... rose petals
suddenly homeless

Kath Felting
Haibun

Noisy Miners - Sydney
How High

Diana Webb, UK

A snatch of music just a few bars long. First taste of Mozart many moons before I knew his name. An accompaniment to a sequence of steps in my childhood ballet class.

As I hear it now I see the barre I see the mirror.

glissade  jete  pas de chat  pas de chat  the milky way
The Butterflies

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

In the break of day my friends and I used to run out into the yard to hunt butterflies. We would pick huge leaves and put them on butterflies that flew down on flowers. We collected them in cardboard boxes and prided ourselves with our catch.

Today I wonder where did such cruelty come from? How to redeem myself, what worth is my repentance, how to explain my behaviour towards the ancestors of those life-rejoicing creatures? I wish it had never happened.

a butterfly flees
the shadow
of a grasping boy
Playmate (EC)

Barnabas I. Adeleke, Nigeria

The first thing we do when we return from school is race to where Aunty Aisha is lying on a mat, propped up against a wall. She picks up our voices as soon as we step into the gate of the big compound. She jerks her head up and her eyes light up. We gather around her as she struggles to salute us: “Tọ-ọ-ẹ̀ . . . Ní-í-kè-ẹ̀ . . .” We cut her short as we stuff her mouth with bọ̀lì and roasted groundnut bought on our way home. Then we run into the arms of our waiting mothers, eat lunch and soon return one by one to sit by her to play and do our assignments. Apart from Alhaja who comes to sit on the mat with her often, we are the only friends she's got. We regard her as our big friend as well as a bona-fide member of our little group. She even struggles from time to time to recite with us the rhymes we have learnt at school.

Aunty Aisha is the daughter of Alhaji, our landlord who is also a local politician. Alhaja, his first wife, has had the misfortune of having only one surviving child. All five she gave birth to died leaving only Aunty Aisha — a quadriplegic since childhood. Alhaji married three other wives, as he wanted a large household.

A month ago, Alhaja died. Today, the Alhaji's men are burying Aunty Aisha. They say she had a high fever overnight and passed away before daybreak.

spring-cleaning . . .
a hand-me-down
set alight
Battle Lines

Jan Foster, Australia

My first teaching post is to an inner city boys’ High School. My subjects are French, English, and history. I am 19 years old. It is a rough area; many of the students have English only as a second language.

icy winds
rattle the windows
. . . inner chill

The school is housed in an old church building, which has been decommissioned. My classroom entrance on the first day is greeted by a startled silence, followed by a slow clap from the boys.

no sanctuary
— faltering steps
to the stake

This senior class become my champions in the challenges of life at an all-male school. Only two years my junior, they take proprietary interest in my wellbeing.

solitary rose bush
. . . companion plants
of garlic and chives
Our backyard is small, fenced so the dog and my little sister can’t slip away. There is a swing set, brick fireplace, three dwarf fruit trees, and my mother’s garden.

George is one of our neighbors, retired now, spends most days tinkering in his garage. He sharpens mower blades and scissors, changes points and plugs on his car. A quiet man except when Sam is over. They are like fire and gasoline—not a good combination.

My mother wears a halter top and cut-off shorts when she works. Her hair tumbles from her shoulders as she crouches to weed between rows or stoops to pick tomatoes.

George and Sam open the backdoor to the garage in order to see my mom. They giggle and laugh like children, hide in the shadows. Mom ignores them when they whistle like wolves as she carries her basket to the gate.

My mother turns and stares at the two men in the doorway. That alone is enough to silence them as they hide like insects in the dark. “They can’t help themselves,” she will say as the latch closes behind her.

hum of crickets
laughter pours
from an open bottle
To The Mat

*Bryan Rickert USA*

When I was a little boy I would get beat up every Saturday by a girl. She was cute, brunette, with a sweet little smile and we were about the same age. My parents thought it would benefit me to take judo lessons so that one day people might stop picking on me. Every week this little girl would toss me around like a rag doll and grind me into the mat. We were the only students our age at the dojo. After class one day my father took me aside and explained that I need to start trying harder. “We are paying for this, after all.” Without missing a beat I said, “But dad, you always told me never to put my hands on a girl.”

Women’s lib
I hold the door open
for the wind
When I was a child an old man who always coughed lived in the yard in front of mine. He spent his days sitting on the balcony of his house. During the day he wove baskets out of reeds, in the evening, by candlelight, he cut tobacco that he never smoked. These memories come back to me now because for many days I have a persistent cough and I never smoked, just like that good and hard-working man.

cigarette papers
in the candlelight
this dry cough

Quando ero bambino nel cortile di fronte al mio abitava un vecchietto che tossiva sempre. Trascorreva le giornate seduto sul ballatoio di casa, di giorno intrecciava giunchi per preparare ceste da lavoro, di sera, a luce di candela, trinciava tabacco, preparava sigarette che non fumava. Mi tornano questi ricordi perché da parecchi giorni ho una tosse che non mi lascia ed io, proprio come quel vecchietto buono e laborioso, non ho mai fumato.

una candela
le cartine per sigarette
la tosse secca
The Binding String

Matthew Caretti, USA

The orphan’s old sweater becomes one long strand of yarn. Becomes the towline for his makeshift car. Of wire, bottle caps, cardboard and saliva glue. Then abandoned, becoming attached only to the wind.

evening sun
wondering where
the contrail goes
Winter Berries

Carol Pearce-Worthington, USA

This morning in the light of dawn we swim in a cloud the shape of a fish that paddles past the edge of this window but never fades and you swim off, always so far away while I wait and float where I can. Barely morning. You contact me to say whatever you do, don’t buy the porch. People try hard to get me to the buy the porch (you were right) not knowing why I refuse.

For us that day in new haven at the outdoor table under an umbrella a slight breeze a warm day almost Caribbean you wished would never end I think that day has never ended.

So our summer house has no porch. Just green grass and tall windows and love that means forevermore. As in our fairy tale we remain together in this cloud so long as it lasts. It narrows. Slowly we drift south with a plan that has no hope of lasting, your vision of the summer house binds us tightly in the comfort of sunlight you and me.

Swimming.

in need
of a schedule
winter winds
Atlantis

Robert B. McNeill, USA

In 1955, construction began on a hydro-electric dam that would eventually flood the town and valley of Northfork, Montana (USA). It was a hard time for those being forced to leave their homes, their way of life.

The movie NORTHFORK (2003) tells the stories of several of those who refused to leave, their reasons, and their outcomes. In one scene, an "extraction team" finds an old grandpa on his front porch, dead, sitting upright in a rocking chair holding a long gun (which can tear a man apart), with his feet nailed to the floor . . .

sailing the reservoir —
b Briefly, in the depths below
our old church steeple
The World Left Behind

Rebecca Drouilhet, USA

Children don't explore the woods the way I did, riding my bike for miles and then melting into the woods to find and bend over in awe at the sight of a blooming lady's slipper.

Few of them visit their grandparents' farms, feed baby calves or spend an afternoon in the loft of a barn jumping onto bales of hay until they've exhausted themselves and must stop to contemplate the quiet while dust motes glitter in the sun filtering through the cracks.

Ecologists warn us the natural world is disappearing at an alarming rate and tell us that those now in their mid-sixties will have lived to see the extinction of half the species who ever lived

the sweetness gone—
an empty candy wrapper
blows down the road
Australian Magpie
A Moment of Joy

Padmini Krishnan, Singapore

I shuffle my legs colliding with the lady sitting in front of me. She scowls at me, before turning back to her cell phone with a smile. The school kid behind me, engrossed in Extreme Car Driving Simulator angrily chases someone, bending sideways to get sharper focus. At the next stop the train lets out a couple but admits a huge crowd. They all immediately latch on to their cell phones. Just then, I notice a man in the corner seat, smiling He has no device in his hand. He murmurs something. Many turn around and I spot a huge lemon-colored butterfly fluttering near the train door. Some whisper, their cell phones forgotten. Many smile.

daily commute
bespectacled eyes dreaming
of virtual world
Porth Nanven

Lucy Whitehead, United Kingdom

Grey granite and honey coloured rocks glow in the warm summer sunshine, their creases and fissures softened by the salt air and time. They stretch up in tall cliffs, upon which seagulls, birds of prey, and tourists occasionally alight. The cliffs are gouged open in places with cavernous holes — abandoned mines, leading to a network of dark tunnels deep in the granite.

Huge oversized 'egg pebbles' cluster at the base of the towering cliffs. They are bleached bright white like giant sugared almonds and flecked with quartz so that they sparkle in the sun. Most are firmly nestled down having found some sort of order over the millennia, but the occasional one rocks precariously when you tread on it.

Leaping across the beach, rock by rock, was one of my favourite games as a child. Today, I hurl myself across the beach one last time. It has to be done in bare feet and the rocks are baking hot. Clutching my sandals in one hand, I aim for the larger, more solid rocks at the far side. When my feet find an unstable boulder, I have to balance my weight on it just right and leap off before it lurches too much and tips me off with a loud cracking sound. I must keep up the momentum. I can't go backwards.

red anemones
cling to green rock pools
going . . . staying

escaping
from my shadow
a fleet of silver fishes

the tide goes out
leaving my childhood
home
Hawkesbury River

*Marilyn Humbert, Australia*

Early summer, the river is alive, blue and green waves playing with the wind. Our boat ambles by Lion Island, stark and black against the skyline, guarding the entrance to the sea. We pass under the rumble from the iron arch bridge of a major highway heading north south. Steer into a feeder creek where the steep-sided shore is heavy with eucalypts and banksia, tangles of bushy undergrowth hide groves of dancing grass trees and red waratah. Float by primitive rock carving hewn in exposed cliffs. We drop anchor in one of the small sandy bays littering the rocky waterline.

shell middens
bleached white . . .
lingering shadows
Manjushri

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan. India

Walking out of advertising after a career of ten years, I spent the next two trapped between regret and elation. Much of the regret was about money, and the ambitions left behind: a bigger house, a bigger car and bigger savings. The elation was about the long days not spent in meetings, nor the cold commutes home in the small hours. But like an earlier regret, of not finishing that PhD that would have won me a Nobel Prize or two, this too will fade, and the perfection of the wisdom of being the moment, death and breath alike is setting in. Sometimes the lack of ambition is itself an ambition.

Wind Horse—
how far do I go
from myself
Glory, With or Without, The Morning (EC)

Christy Burbidge, USA

I never learned to cook. As I grew, I learned to be less embarrassed by this fact, and came to wear my reality as a cloak of gratitude. Black bean hummus and pickled kale stems will likely never come from these boxing-blistered, keyboard-tapping hands. Yet, there’s an appreciation I have for cooking that knows no rival.

When I smell a Morning Glory muffin in the local coffee shop, every shred of carrot and chunk of misplaced walnut gets due reverence.

beaten down raisin
hiding in salty batter —
tell me your story
Shoveling Thoughts

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

my to-do list . . .
bindweed takes over
the rosebush

The wooden fence I painted seven years ago leans, with broken slats and holes, battered by high winds and the neighbor kid’s baseball. I’ve patched it with Gorilla glue and string, propped it up in one place with a defunct birdbath. It wavers in the breeze.

Last night the wind gusted and gusted. This morning that old fence still stands.

Despite the pain around my shoulder blades, I shovel dirt into the holes my puppy dug in the grass. I’m tired of dealing with a missing camera cord, crumbs on the counter, a car that won’t start, extra charges on the cell phone bill, the confusion of health care coverage, dust on top of the doorframes . . .

What if I let these non-matters topple? Would it matter?

tulip rain . . .
a poem blooms
on the page
Nothing So Novel

Gautam Nadkarni, India

It isn’t everyone who is fortunate enough to come across a living, breathing novelist in one’s lifetime. I used to think they were like museum pieces to be viewed from a distance with stern instructions on placards not to touch them.

The man-of-letters I came across sat in an overstuffed armchair with a furrowed brow and a gel pen dangling from his right hand. Occasionally he would raise the pen to his mouth and chew on it. I was beginning to understand what made for successful novelists: Overstuffed armchairs, furrowed brows and chewy gel pens obviously. I also noticed that he wore shapeless tees and shorts, which once may have been trousers before they shrank. But then, whoever heard of well-dressed intellectuals? Another thing I observed very keenly was that this great man kept closing his eyes and breathing hard. Courting the muse, I was convinced. Until I realised that he was snoring. Well, everyone needs a nap.

When I went home that evening I told sis all about the famous writer I had just met and how he had influenced me forever. I would henceforth stop wasting my life chasing will-o’-the-wisps and do something really concrete and worthwhile like sitting in armchairs, chewing at a gel pen and taking a snooze.

I still cannot understand why sis had an unlady-like horselaugh and slapped her thighs.

museum tour . . .
everyone gapes at
the old watchman
My happy future

Nikolay Grankin, Russia

My grandson says, when he grows up, he'll be a moonshiner to make good cheer for his grandpa. Now I'm optimistic for my future.

children's art
all faces
smiling

Моё счастливое будущее

Внук говорит, что когда вырастет станет самогонщиком, чтобы дед всегда ходил навеселе. Теперь я с оптимизмом смотрю в своё будущее.

dетский рисунок
на всех лицах
ultybki
John

Anna Cates, USA

He dreamed of being devoured by pigs, from seriously fat "squashers" to girls simply greedy for him, porcine noses snorting as they fought to get enough of him, a task at which he hoped they’d never fully succeed.

3:16
scrawled in the sand
the tide takes it all
Bedazzled One

Hazel Hall, Australia

Braxton chooses the stone as if it were skin. 
Eyes it with purpose. His critical fingers 
dawdle over the surface 
assessing its smoothness. 
Zig-zagging and 
zag-zigging. Now, he carefully 
lays on paint, creating an exquisite image, 
enough for her to breathe its mystery, 
drawing her into the moment’s bliss.

outgoing tide 
nothing but willpower 
ebbing away
Uphill climb

Gregory Longenecker, USA

My father was a prickly man; charming on his good days, full of verbal abuse on his bad. No wonder that we often clashed as I grew into manhood. But one thing he always gave me as I grew older was room to be me. He might begin to push me on something, and then back off when he saw I was set on my way.

hat in hand
an old man climbs
the graveyard hill
Visiting Home

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

It's been years since she passed away, yet I think of her often, especially in May, the month of her birth, when warmer days have turned the brown earth into a green baize and the air is sweet with lilacs and peonies. I remember her smile and the welcoming cup of just brewed coffee and the enticing aroma of chicken roasting in the oven for dinner prepared for my visit with cool white wine and strawberries soaked in marsala for desert accompanied by crisp biscotti. I remember I am a guest, company from three thousand miles away, fussed over and pampered.

my old bed
in the sheets the freshness
of sunshine
A sign from heaven

Susan Beth Furst, USA

Her leg hurts
like the devil,
behind barrack 22
she hides
with Dorka,
between the straw mattresses,
with the lice,
until it is dark . . .

Bashert
the lines on mother’s hands
Old Sparky

*Tim Gardiner, United Kingdom*

The darkness is literal. I hear the shuffling of feet, a rasping cough, and the final prayer of the pastor. Sweat merges with the sponge drips trickling down my cheeks. Leather lacerates taut wrists, scars still present from the alleyway struggle. I wait for the officer’s command. One, two, three . . .

morning sun  
another widow spider  
under the chair
Nemesis

Praniti Gulyani, India

You sit at the sleek tables of the five-star restaurant and eat fish. You don't know who catches that fish for you. You just enjoy it.

I sell nets. And, they're not just "any other " nets. They are stitched together with shadows. The ones left lingering in the corners. They spill out of the cracks in the ceiling. I collect them all. And then, I stitch them together. Do you want to see what I've made? I've made one with interlinked shadows — an old woman's shadow knotted into an old man's shadow and a soldier's shadow. It looks as though the old woman has lost her balance. She is clinging onto the soldier. Her finger is tightened around the trigger of his gun.

weighing the vegetables
against a clump of stars
. . . night bazaar
Editor’s Choices (EC) – haibun

Playmate

Barnabas I. Adeleke, Nigeria

The first thing we do when we return from school is race to where Aunty Aisha is lying on a mat, propped up against a wall. She picks up our voices as soon as we step into the gate of the big compound. She jerks her head up and her eyes light up. We gather around her as she struggles to salute us: “Tọ-ọ-pẹ... Ní-í-kẹ-ẹ...”

We cut her short as we stuff her mouth with bọ́li and roasted groundnut bought on our way home. Then we run into the arms of our waiting mothers, eat lunch and soon return one by one to sit by her to play and do our assignments. Apart from Alhaja who comes to sit on the mat with her often, we are the only friends she's got. We regard her as our big friend as well as a bona-fide member of our little group. She even struggles from time to time to recite with us the rhymes we have learnt at school.

Aunty Aisha is the daughter of Alhaji, our landlord who is also a local politician. Alhaja, his first wife, has had the misfortune of having only one surviving child. All five she gave birth to died leaving only Aunty Aisha — a quadriplegic since childhood. Alhaji married three other wives, as he wanted a large household.

A month ago, Alhaja died. Today, the Alhaji’s men are burying Aunty Aisha. They say she had a high fever overnight and passed away before daybreak.

spring-cleaning . . .
a hand-me-down
set alight

Playmate by Barnabas I. Adeleke is an evocation of an African childhood filled with descriptions of the family structure and network. The personality of Aunty Aisha, “a quadriplegic since childhood” emerges through the poet’s use of some vivid details as in this opening account:
“She picks up our voices as soon as we step into the gate of the big compound. She jerks her head up and her eyes light up.”

The children’s acceptance of her as one of their own underlines the poignancy of Aunty Aisha’s death. The closing haiku suggests memory, loss and remembrance. The overall impression of the haibun is of affirming the saving role of memory.

Tipplers

Glenn G. Coats, USA

Our backyard is small, fenced so the dog and my little sister can’t slip away. There is a swing set, brick fireplace, three dwarf fruit trees, and my mother’s garden.

George is one of our neighbors, retired now, spends most days tinkering in his garage. He sharpens mower blades and scissors, changes points and plugs on his car. A quiet man except when Sam is over. They are like fire and gasoline—not a good combination.

My mother wears a halter top and cut-off shorts when she works. Her hair tumbles from her shoulders as she crouches to weed between rows or stoops to pick tomatoes.

George and Sam open the backdoor to the garage in order to see my mom. They giggle and laugh like children, hide in the shadows. Mom ignores them when they whistle like wolves as she carries her basket to the gate.

My mother turns and stare at the two men in the doorway. That alone is enough to silence them as they hide like insects in the dark. “They can’t help themselves,” she will say as the latch closes behind her.

hum of crickets
laughing pours
from an open bottle

Glenn Coats is an adept haibun writer and in Tipplers he portrays well a child’s realization of how his mother is seen in quite a different way by the neighbour, George and his friend, Sam.
George is a “retired” “quiet man”, who “spends most days tinkering in his garage.” This contrasts with the ogling and wolf whistling and sets up an ambiguity in the narrative. The mother’s nonchalant, “They can’t help themselves” seems to echo “they know not what they do.” In the haiku, the juxtaposition of the sound of the crickets to the ‘laughter’ further enhances this ambivalence. One wonders if the laughter is just fun or drunken folly.

Glory, With or Without, The Morning

Christy Burbidge, USA

I never learned to cook. As I grew, I learned to be less embarrassed by this fact, and came to wear my reality as a cloak of gratitude. Black bean hummus and pickled kale stems will likely never come from these boxing-blistered, key board-tapping hands. Yet, there’s an appreciation I have for cooking that knows no rival.

When I smell a Morning Glory muffin in the local coffee shop, every shred of carrot and chunk of misplaced walnut gets due reverence.

beaten down raisin
hiding in salty batter -
tell me your story

Finally, Glory, With or Without, The Morning by Christy Burbidge is a heartfelt and heart-warming appreciation of food despite a lack of culinary skills. The muffin becomes a Proustian Madeline opening up both memory and a warm conceit about the life of a humble raisin that could be a metaphor for the self. The concluding poem is original and amusing.

Sonam Chhoki
the soft click
of a reindeer's hooves...
northern lights
in the places
of sleep and dreams

fleeting childhood
a tangle
in the garden of life ~
time to prune

Pat Geyer
shifting sand...
they attempt to rebuild
old dreams

pris campbell
morning rain...
the village is its own
watercolour

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan
summer solstice
she puts an extra cutlery
on the table
Youth

Frogmouth Parent and fledgling
The focus of this issue’s “Youth” is: Will haiku, haibun and tanka workshops stand up to children’s understanding and expectations?

Haiku and tanka were taught at the year-end Katha Creative Writers’ Workshop. Here is a copy of the invitation that Katha.org sent to us, the mentors!

Celebrating story!
KATHA NATIONAL WRITERS UNWORKSHOP
THE CHALLENGE GROUNDS
26-28 December 2018

WHO’S YOU? You are 400 students from across the country . . . from Changalang to Kuchh; from Leh to Kanyakumari have your say as an awesome wordsmith!

What do we want badly? To invite you to participate in the most exciting three days under the sun

What should YOU bring? Bring in your walk-tall ideas and hot-blood words to make your Classrooms UnClass! Rooms; learning areas poised to take you to the most imaginary places in the 21st century. And yes, please bring your mobile phone if you have one, with a camera, preferably. We have BIG secrets up our sleeves :) 

What will YOU do? Listen, think, debate and ACT! Leave with more exciting, doable action ideas to take with you! To change your world and own it! Come share your ideas to make India a free and fun for all, a fair and fearless world! And show the way for 300 Million children in India’s many schools to say so, using the power of story!

Following this invite I enter with my pen drive loaded with the haiku and tanka of Japanese and contemporary masters, wanting to teach these experiential poems to my batch of school kids.

I had mild trepidations, for haiku doesn’t really fit into this invitation style. I had 43 pairs of eager eyes looking straight at me. After 30 minutes, two wanted to change their class and I allowed them to go – for doing something not to one’s interest is actually detrimental to what I was trying to teach.

I discovered that disclosing each haiku in all its beauty was the trick! And on the second day, I took the same approach with tanka . . . showing the way each bud unfolds, until
the whole blossom is before the child. Without fail, this method worked each time!

Now, let’s read the children’s haiku, senryu and tanka.

Kala Ramesh

The Tejas Award (Tejas in Sanskrit means “fire” and/or “brilliance”) goes to: Nikhil Gupta and Ustat Kaur Sethi for the haiku.

spring night
a hawk cuckoo dips
into its tune

Nikhil Gupta (age 14 yrs)
India

This is an amazing poem. Those of us who practice this art form say that, along with makoto (poetic truth), craft should also be employed . . . and that is what Nikhil has done in his nine-word poem! All I can say is, I wish I had written this.

midnight showers . . .
I greet a jewelled world
at dawn

Ustat Kaur Sethi (age 14 yrs)
India

As haiku poets, we have read and written enough ku on dewdrops and raindrops! Still here is one ku fresh from the eyes and imagination of a 14-year-old school girl. For a school student to understand the concept of brevity, conciseness and simplicity is not easy. Well done, Ustat. The best part of these two-day workshops is that I come to know the students quite well and along with them revel in their joy of discovering haiku!

*********
Considering it was a first exposure to haiku and senryu for them . . . every single poem ‘showcased’ here can be considered an Editor’s Choice!

I like to present several haiku written by each student during the workshop, just to show that it’s not an accident that kids do understand and grasp the art of haikai poetry in a day or two!

foggy evening —
I watch people turn
into silhouettes

* 
leaves change colour . . .
I scour the horizon
for Siberian cranes

* 
white sheet
the cushioning
of a polar bear’s bed

* 
umbrellas . . .
the smell of roasted corncobs
fills the air

V.K. Sai Gayatri (age 14 yrs.)
India

The seasonal reference – *kigo* – and the cut – *kire* – are most beautifully employed. I would say even the (punctuation) cut-marker – *kireji* – or lack of it is effectively done. Children amaze me each time.

~~

127
morning mist
a cuckoo’s call
awakens the forest

* 

blink of an eye
a sleek black movement
and the mouse is dead

* 

rubber boots
with one step
I shatter the sky

Sriradhaa Satishkumar (age 14 yrs.)
India

Read these haiku aloud and see how well they roll off your tongue! So musical and rich with internal rhythm! Can all this be taught or was it lying dormant … until haiku came along into her life!

~~

mirror on the wall . . .
all I see
is me

* 

glass window . . .
I see the world
it carries within

Sukanya Tamuly (age 14 yrs)
India
These paired ideas and the way Sukanya has folded in the difference between a mirror and the glass window is masterful. Children surprise me with their talent and I keep getting clean bowled!

~~
dead forests . . .
metal towers take over
a little plant

*

wet grass . . .
a slithering coil rushes
past my feet

Riddhiman Deb (age 15 yrs.)
India

I vividly remember that when I had a round of rapid questions at the end — a fun exercise, which also served as a quick review of all that they had learned in the workshop — Riddhiman had all his answers at the tip of his fingers!

~~

blossom cool—
a cardinal touches
the last cloud

*

foggy night—
the rooted logs become
distant shadows

Kalaiselvi Ashokkumar (age 14 yrs)
India

~~
cattails – April 2019

... cotton candies—
a fluffy horse gallops
    across the sky

*

... falling snowflakes—
I snuggle into the warmth
    of my mother's hug

Nandini M Prakash (age 13 yrs)
    India

~~

... choking smog —
it takes an hour
    to move an inch

Nandika Rohith (age 14 yrs)
    India

Classic! Look at the words she has used ... *choking smog* in L 1 sets the scene for Ls 2 & 3. Pollution is everywhere and how well Nandika has expressed it. I felt like I was being strangled.

~~

... orange skies
    a pack of birds fly into
    the fading universe

Niranjana Prasad (age 14 yrs)
    India

What a poignant L 3 . . .
    Beautiful!
This ku took me to my childhood days, when we used to make paper kites at home, with newspaper ... there’s arithmetic involved in that! The string that holds the corners must be correctly measured and knotted. Even adding glue to the paper kite needs a sensitive hand. If we add too much, the kite will become heavy and won’t take off and if we use less, then the tail will detach and the kite won’t be able to fly.

What agony!
What ecstasy when things turn out just right!

V. M. Nihilaa (age 13 yrs)
India

after the thunderstorm . . .
a little boy waits
for his dog

Ananya Saraf (age 14 yrs.)
India
Bowerbird fledgling
dense forest
light seeps through
the gaps in trees

Rhea Shah (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

rainforest . . .
the sounds
birds leave behind

Shaarad Jarandikar (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

study table . . .
I play around
with a pencil

Akash.G.C (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

deep in thought . . .
sea waves wash over
my feet

Lakshmi R Menon (age 14 yrs)
India

~~
cattails – April 2019

dirty puddles—
young shipmen navigate
paper boats

Ustat Kaur Sethi (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

summer dusk
birds dive into
the orange pool

Nikhil Gupta (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

thick smoke—
tall trees dissolve
into nothing

Pranav Raj (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

Thanks to Diana Teneva from Bulgaria, who sent her students’ haiku. It’s amazing how at the age of eleven, children are able to bring their thoughts around to write haiku. Not easy at all. It’s tough for both, the mentor and the kids.

сняг вали . . .
вога да чуя
dаже дъха си

it is snowing . . .
I can hear
even my breath

Fatme (age 11 yrs.)
Bulgaria
Christmas sweets—
the biscuits melting
like snowflakes

Krastyu St. (age 11 yrs.)
Bulgaria

---

winter day . .
the sunny smile
of the snow man

Jasmin Sel. (age 11 yrs.)
Bulgaria

---

hot chocolate . .
I'm reading a book
on the couch

Niya D. (age 11 yrs.)
Bulgaria
първи сняг . . .
чувствам студ
dори в новия пуловер

first snow . . .
I feel cold even
in my new jumper

Niya D. (age 11 yrs)
Bulgaria

TANKA

Teaching an art form is never easy. One needs to give structural information and still leave “dreaming space” for each person’s originality and creativity, so that by the end of the session, the student feels she has learnt something that will stay with her for the rest of her life. In developing a way to teach tanka, after having taught haiku, I realized there is a similarity in how the two forms handle the two images – which is the spark plug effect! The gap between the two images (top and bottom) must be neither too wide nor too small — just the right amount of space needed for the “spark” to happen, which ignites the poem. I showed sample poems with the two images – and explained how the poem may be divided into 2/3 or 3/2 image patterns. Later I explained the pivot or door hinge. I kept it very simple.

Considering it was a first exposure to tanka for most of them . . . every single poem ‘showcased’ here can be considered an Editor’s Choice!

I've this memory
of my bestie losing her brother
a few months ago . . .
the little heart he left behind
still beats in her

Niranjana Prasad (age 14 yrs)
India
Showing the extraordinary in the ordinary . . . the above tanka is a strong example of this aesthetic nuance which is often quoted when teaching haikai poetry. I could see the joy in Niranjana’s face when I told her that this tanka was beautiful! One more from her:


taking little steps  
with food all over your face  
speaking baby language  
now you have your own little wings  
my darling sister

Niranjana Prasad (age 14 yrs)  
India

~~

I remember  
making paper boats . . .  
how do you wrap  
a raging thunderstorm  
in such a feeble float

Praniti Gulyani (age 15 yrs)  
India

This tanka is most deftly handled. I love the way the top image pairs off with the lower image – the resonance is startling. This is what makes a tanka click!

~~

a stick lying  
with thorns all over . . .  
my father’s frown  
comes to my mind  
making me smile

*
looking out
through the window I see
the bare tree—
a bunch of hair
covers my bed linen

*

I flip
through an old album . . .
a little girl
peeps
through the pages

Lakshmi R Menon (age 14 yrs)
India

This set of three tanka poems read like a tanka sequence . . . something that I didn’t even talk about in the workshop!

~~

a woodcutter
hacks at the roots
of an ancient tree—
a nestling bird chirps
for its mother

Saumya Mishra (age 14 yrs)
India

~~

I've this memory—
bidding goodbye to
the best of my friends
who will always be
there, though, in my heart

*
I walk along
a curving
path—
old memories race
through my mind

Trishna Shah (age 14 yrs)
India

Hearty congratulations to cattails Youth Corner’s regular contributor - Lakshay Gandotra, for winning the 3rd Grand Prize at the 23rd International "Kusamakura" Haiku Competition 2018.

silent sun
girl child collects her ruined
books after the flood

太陽は黙して語らず
洪水の後 女の子は
台無しになった本を拾い集める

Lakshay Gandotra
India（インド）

Finally, here is a letter of appreciation from a student:

Dear Ma’am,

I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for the time you spent teaching us about haiku and tanka. It was an amazing experience learning about how the simplest of words can convey such deep things about life.
I live in Surat, so if you ever drop by, please do tell me. It would be wonderful to meet you once again.

Also, I’ve sent you another email with my haiku for cattails.

Once again, a great big thank you to you, and to my stars for having given me an opportunity to meet you.

Thanking you,
Saumya Mishra
woodpecker
stuck inside my head
has left
the moon envelops
world of silence

Natalia L Rudychev
sedimentary fossils
forgiveness unable
to forget

Susan K. Hagen
moonlit border crossing
traces of a childhood
left behind

Ursula Funnell
Evelyn Thompson
first contact -
will my smile
hide the flaws

 senryu by Valentina Rinaldi-Adams
photo by A. D. Adams
seagull jeers at me
encouraged by the flock
i’m cleaning the fish
before a delicious meal
a fascinating moment

vladimir šuk
White-faced Heron – Swan River, Burswood, Western Australia
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