**June HT 52, Section III—Tanka Prose**

Belinda Broughton, Flight and Earth

Amelia Fielden, The Longest Week

Ingrid Kunschke, Beneath the Waves

Bob Lucky, How the Spell is Broken

Dru Philippou, Evening Out

Patricia Prime, Imperfect Travellers

Patricia Prime, Making Waves

Charles D. Tarlton, Flight Patterns

Charles D. Tarlton, Ironies of Excess

Jeffrey Woodward, Green Apples, 1873

**Belinda Broughton**

Lobethal, South Australia, Australia

**Flight and Earth**

*swallows dart*

*around the wingtip*

*of the 747*

*the air hostess lectures*

*the tops of heads*

Beside me is a true Italian Madonna: Rubens’ or Caravaggio’s. The boy-child blinks in the warm, mounded substance of her embrace, giggles, squirms under many smacking kisses, yields to her softness, rests in her softness.

She says, ‘I love you, I love you,’ over and over in his ear. His long black eyelashes blink. He is taking it for granted, as he should, the sacred wholeness of his mother’s embrace.

*a cross*

*in the cleavage*

*of hills*

*our plane’s shadow*

*shadowing us*

**Amelia Fielden**

Canberra, Capital Territory, Australia

**The Longest Week**

*“see you soon,*

*the end of March,” we said*

*hugging and*

*kissing her goodbye*

*for the very last time*

The call comes, as such calls are wont to do, in the darkness just before dawn.

I ring around the family interstate and overseas, regardless of the early hour or time differences.

Then we dismantle the holiday house, pack the car, in bewildered haste. How ? Why?

*all the trees*

*are still in summer-green leaf,*

*our daughter only*

*thirty-eight years old*

*the morning she doesn't wake*

We drive inland for six hours, to the capital.

Homecoming is the same as always . . . and not at all the same.

*she is gone . . .*

*butterflies are dancing*

*the sun shines,*

*but nothing will shift*

*this boulder on my chest*

After a long week of making the arrangements no parent ever wants to make, we hold her funeral.

Outside the chapel the young ones release brightly-coloured balloons into the air.

*the red balloon*

*seems to ride on the wind,*

*becoming a dot*

*high on the blue sky, then*

*disappears into a cloud*

**Ingrid Kunschke**

Porta Westfalica, Germany

**Beneath the Waves**

stay awhile,  
stay*, it seems to say,  
this forest  
of tangled kelp  
that sways with the surf*

*hidden  
off the coast,  
awash with  
greenish light:  
a haven*

*in swarms  
they drift by,  
jellyfish,  
their frailty and grace  
unsurpassed*

*why  
without fail  
does it end  
well before dawn,  
this sense of floating?*

Reluctant to surface after this refreshing dive, the mermaid slowly opens her eyes. Of late these dreams press her more urgently and she isn’t going to resist. It’s her fate to sit on this boulder forever, yet she’s a child of the sea and eager to give in to the tidal force.

*the weight  
of life ashore,  
its lack  
of buoyancy,  
cannot be eased*

And so she sits looking out over the harbor at daybreak, the sun’s first rays caressing her tresses, and she still sits there at dusk with the afterglow putting a blush on her bare chest and maidenly face. She sits in the scorching heat, dreaming of the spray that would wet her tail. And she sits in the cold, when snow adorns her flowing hair, her stiffening limbs.

People come, people go. They flash blinding lights at her. She hears them speak languages she vaguely remembers from foreign shores. Some are reminiscent of waves lapping against a pier; others mimic the murmur of a creek. Why then can’t they see she belongs to the sea?

*her hair  
known to spark  
when stroked  
is truly a mermaid’s  
with its tinge of green*

Tired of being stared at, she turns away, turns to the water for comfort, finding nothing but regret. And so she feigns gazing at the waves until darkness falls and fewer people come by, couples who've only eyes for each other. That’s when she enters the realm of dreams.

*reflections of  
the city's dazzling lights—  
they barely hint  
at the untold treasures  
this gaudy mirror conceals*

*looming  
beneath the waves  
there’s a face  
young and yearning  
for that world beyond*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

First published in *Modern English Tanka* V3, N2, Winter 2008.

**Bob Lucky**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**How the Spell is Broken**

Turning out of the gate, I come to a stop. The lane is blocked by two donkeys in a boxing match. They rear up on their hind legs and paw at the air, then land with a thud and make a quick hop to grab the other by the neck. Neither seems very keen to better the other, and they repeat the moves again and again. For a moment, I think it's donkey foreplay, but as they dance around one another, I can see it's a contest between two males. It's diverting and I'm in no hurry, so decide not to honk my horn.

*brisk morning*

*boys from the local school*

*play a game—*

*the field of dreams*

*no wider than the road*

The beggar woman who trolls the neighborhood bends down and picks up a large stone. She eyes me for a moment and, smiling, takes a wild shot at the donkeys. It's a perfect miss, but the donkeys are startled and trot off. The beggar comes to my window and demands payment for her services.

**Dru Philippou**

Taos, New Mexico, USA

**Evening Out**

*what separates*

*one life from another*

*an imaginary*

*line widening*

*moment by moment*

Wisps of white hair stray from beneath her opaque headscarf as she mechanically lifts the soup-spoon to her mouth. She hardly responds to what the waiter is saying and seems upset. Her son, with his back to the snow-frosted window, asks in a raised voice: “Do you want something else?” She hunches over in silence. He refills his wineglass and leans back in the chair. In the background, the pianist repeats the theme. Caught off guard by her sudden eye contact, he sits up straight.

*heirloom quilts*

*on the walls*

*home spun threads*

*and complex*

*geometric patterns*

**Patricia Prime**

Auckland, New Zealand

**Imperfect Travellers**

*she is studying*

*the map of China*

*while I read aloud*

*the menu for the day*

*in the train to Bejing*

*days and several stops*

*before our destination*

*she can’t stand the food*

*rice and noodles*

*bits of unknown meat*

*the dirt sickens her*

*the other passengers*

*are uncouth and loud—*

*close quarters in the sleeping car*

*with two Chinese men*

*outside snow falls*

*on a desert landscape*

*as the antiquated train*

*makes its slow procession*

*past humble villages*

My companion doesn’t like China: people coughing and spitting, skinny gun-toting soldiers in baggy green uniforms, meat stalls covered with flies, live chickens hung upside down from handle bars. She adds: song birds in cages, the way people lean in around her; she feels she can hardly breathe the dense air. We talk about New Zealand where you can drive all day past the same farmland and there’s the scenery of forest and ocean on either side, chanting past the windows. She loves the immensity, she says, and the way she can lose herself inside it. But I feel lost already, I want to say, in the small crack that has opened between us.

**Patricia Prime**

Auckland, New Zealand

**Making Waves**

*we stand on the cliff*

*the breeze fresh*

*the sky soft*

*a grey mist below us*

*and muffled waves*

*the bay’s near-crescent*

*forms a threshold*

*for our standing figures*

*for what is moving*

*and for what is still*

*now the seascape*

*from rocks to islands shifts*

*and there’s a sea-change*

*disturbing the gannets*

*on their stacked pillars*

*a skirt of sea*

*fills with the moans*

*of desolate birds*

*lifting low over*

*half-lit water*

*last night’s storm*

*that tore across the Tasman*

*is now exhausted,*

*the wan smile of the sun*

*lighting the sand*

Cumulus clouds mass in the sky, then move on, leaving the ocean to the bright summer light. See how the waves rub against the rocks. Look! A blow-hole formed over centuries. There’s a scarlet pohutukawa gripping the cliff face. A leaf drifts into my hand, its ribs lonely and separate. I want you to see too the bluff where we walked years ago mimicking the gannets’ cries. See how unstable the cliff is now—all that is lively slipping away.

The sea rolling in reminds me there are distant lands. And everywhere there is motion, loneliness, the ocean’s cold grind. It is there in the cliff hollows, the rock formation, and the windswept beach. And it is here on the steep track winding its way up from the sand.

**Charles D. Tarlton**

Oakland, California, USA

**Flight Patterns**

*Supposing that someone has often flown in his dreams, and that at last, as soon as he dreams, he is conscious of the power and art of flying as his privilege and his peculiarly enviable happiness; such a person, who believes that on the slightest impulse, he can actualize all sorts of curves and angles, who knows the sensation of a certain divine levity, an “upwards” without effort or constraint, a “downwards” without descending or lowering—without trouble. . . .*

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil, §193*

*a Brown Pelican*

*rising from the bay*

*slow to start*

*his great rowing of the air*

*sails away*

In love enough with himself to fit in anywhere; after a long day sweating in the cornfield, he settles comfortably on the pickup tailgate and talks bushel price with the workers over a couple of beers. Later on, he signs the final papers on his new Porsche, grinning like a kid. He is flying as he turns onto the freeway.

*the sun’s last*

*brightness, light’s angle*

*flattening the sea, blue*

*on the cusp of red*

*and the wind settles*

The great Leader’s drama—forced to abdicate and flee, finish his days in a foreigner’shouse, in someone else’s shoes. He cannot imagine it. He who has lived at such heights, how the mundane weighs down his wings, the air too thick to breathe.

*Hokusai’s famous woodcut*

*of a wave*

*beside the window*

*where I watch*

*and listen to the surf*

In youth we cannot wait and that’s a good thing when you consider just how long we are going to have to wait. If the young could truly imagine how distant their future, how late it will likely be, how wrinkled and frail their dreams will appear. . . .

*on their sides*

*for more than a mile*

*along Interstate 5*

*uprooted almond trees*

*still in neat rows*

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Note:** The epigraph is from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil,* The Project Gutenberg EBook, Helen Zimmern translator.

**Charles D. Tarlton**

Oakland, California, USA

**Ironies of Excess**

*He who is the real tyrant, whatever men may think, is the real slave, and is obliged to practice the greatest adulation and servility, and to be the flatterer of the vilest of mankind. . . all his life long he is beset with fear and is full of convulsions, and distractions. . . .*

Plato, *The Republic*

*And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

tanka *wide enough*

*for railroads, sonnets*

*accommodate*

*bamboo,* [*plum*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prunus_mume) *blossoms*

[*orchid*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orchid) *and* [*chrysanthemum*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrysanthemum)

*five lines ricochet*

*this rising moment*

*off smells of the sea*

*diminishing. The sun*

*over a volcano*

*red-capped Cranes*

tancho*, sail above*

*bowed willows in the snow*

*I look back down*

*to the oilcloth table*

Inwardly, we all know the war of impulses is never over. Each of us is a cacophony of competing desires, lusts, appetites, fears, needs. . . childishness. The way sufficient order is established in the person, sufficient in the sense that we can go about a roughly peaceful daily life, is domination. One impulse rises to the top.

*among bees*

*an order*

*built of inward stimuli*

*and nerve conjunctions*

*fuses each animal*

*fingers in harsh, discordant*

*struggling*

*to pluck the* sanshin

*searching*

*lost, lost* chouwa

*forms not form*

*everywhere, a rambling*

*disharmony*

*stabs the player’s heart*

*hearing—ping, pning*

Things as they are, as they have been, often turn out to be boring; the same old food, people, and games disappoint our fancies. We are perhaps cursed with insatiable desires, desires we learn temporarily to deflect or confuse, but in the end, dams can break and floods come roaring out and carry everything away.

*every cycle*

*repeats taxonomies*

*cold impatient eyes*

*wait out seasons*

*kicking through the leaves*

*calm even in peril*

*imagining*

*warm green rivers*

*on the mountain’s far*

*unseen side*

*a burst of sun when*

*clouds part*

*at dawn exactly*

*I’m truly awake now*

*breath in over the teeth*

Long hours of careful sanding and shaping, following the natural curve of the wood, gone in an instant—along a nearly invisible line of grain, the graceful wooden arm split in two. It started right at the base of the slender thumb and shattered just above the elbow. My father’s face tightened, his lips stretched over his clenched teeth, and, in a rage of curses, he threw the pieces hard against the stones. Turning toward me, he shouted—“God damn you! What were you doing?”

*art triggers*

*(or is triggered by)*

*heightening emotions*

*pressures toward perfection*

*erupt in failure*

*the sand’s insatiable*

*thirst*

*swallows each wave up*

*pounds its fist*

*demanding more.*

*just below the surface*

*patterns*

*in their derangement*

*always threatening*

*to get loose*

*Plato, it seems to me, throws all stylistic forms together and is thus a first-rate decadent in style: his responsibility is thus comparable to that of the Cynics, who invented the satura Menippea.*

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

satura *are classical*

*lyrical parodies,* poetria

*ornamentally*

*and* prōsa *factually so*

*—a Dionysian song*

*wheat and lavender*

*tied up*

*in bundles wrapped*

*with knotted stalks*

*dropped in rows*

*two robust dancers*

*in a single* grand jeté

*poised in the air*

en masse *impatient*

*to descend*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** The Satura Menippea, “a medley of prose and verse [*lit.* ‘a mixed dish’] treating of all kinds of subjects just as they came to hand in the plebeian style. . . . Menippus of Gadara, the originator of this style of composition, lived about 280 B.C.; he interspersed jocular and commonplace topics with moral maxims and philosophical doctrines. . . .”

Charles Thomas Cruttwell, *A History of Roman Literature* (1877), Book II, Part I, “The Republican Period,” Chapter 1, “Varro.”

See, also, for example, Boethius’s *Consolatio,* in which poetry and prose alternate.

**Jeffrey Woodward**

Detroit, Michigan, USA

**Green Apples, 1873**

*to tame the tempest*

*of youthful grandeur and*

*Romantic excess*

*let the new motif be bland—*

*a handful of green apples*

*what other*

*than green will do*

*to signify*

*the true temper and hue*

*of everlasting spring*

*let the apple be*

*what it was or is*

*once smuggled from*

*the precincts of*

*a hidden garden*

*it has the color, too,*

*of a hard but glorious*

*and dry midsummer*

*not for the time being sweet*

*but frankly firm and sour*

With Camille Pissarro, at Pointoise, and with Hortense Fiquet, also, Cézanne spent that turbulent spring and burning summer after the *annus horribilis* of the Paris Commune—with the older painter and decided anarchist Pissarro as master on those *plein air* expeditions, with Hortense and his now-toddling Paul safely concealed from the prying eyes of the domineering father Louis-Auguste, moneyed milliner and banker.

Would not Papa, who did not approve of his painting, discontinue his promised monthly grace of 200 francs, just as he’d once threatened—would not Papa do so, should Hortense and little Paul be discovered?

In good weather, into the meadows then for that daylong adventure with old Pissarro and oils and brushes, and in the evenings, home to the bliss of a young mistress and son, and on the odd days when it might rain, arranged carefully on a table for the still-life study, green apples.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

First published in *Modern English Tanka* V3, N1 (Autumn 2008).