

**white thoughts, blue mind: tanka**, by George Swede, inkling press, POB 52014, Edmonton, AB T6G 2T5 <www.inklingpress.ca> 2010, 45 pp. perfect bound.

**D'âmes et d'ailes/of souls and wings: Tanka**, by Janick Belleau, (Les Editions du tanka francophone, 2010) 151 pp. perfect bound, English and French.

The two new tanka collections, *white thoughts, blue mind* by George Swede and *D'âmes et d'ailes/of souls and wings* by Janick Belleau, have much in common. They are by well-established Canadian poets who are helping to define the tanka form in their respective languages—English and French. The authors are recently retired from successful careers. They are well-educated, thoughtful people who have interesting things to say about themselves and the world.

They deal with many of the same subjects, such as retirement:

Thirty-eight years here	hazy first light of April
and leaving as the bare trees	mixed feelings—
get their new buds	in retirement
my steps cautious	more or less free time
on the icy campus street (GS)	bicycles going by slowly (JB)

They ponder the inevitability of aging.

A bug, a bullet	blizzard
a breakdown of the heart	sleepless night
one way, or other, we go	in a bed too big for one
the winter sunset has	I think about the Reaper
a purple afterglow (GS)	how to tame it (JB)

They write of the loss of friends and loved ones, especially parents:

The Salvation Army truck	a goldfinch
packed from floor to ceiling	shreds a bagel
with my dead mother's things	her tuberculous father
I remove a wicker basket	how he ruined his health
I don't need (GS)	on the docks (JB)

And then, of course,	there is love:
She, who last night	along the green road
shouted at me, now	on a midsummer day
in the first light	a bay of diamonds
an angel asleep	wild with joy I go to you
I must have deserved it (GS)	wearing red lipstick (JB)

They write joyfully of the pleasures of food:

Lamb shoulder slow-cooked      clouds—  
 with white wine, beans, rosemary under the canopy  
 onions and garlic                      hollyhocks open  
 our glasses of shiraz click          while she prepares mussels  
 as snow whips the window (GS) caressing her ex's buttocks (JB)

They also write about writing:

I write because                              in Kyoto  
 of civilization, yet yearn                  paying a visit to  
 to be free of it                              waka poetesses—  
 (as long as I can return)                will I be remembered  
 xylophone window icicles (GS)      in one thousand springs (JB)

George Swede is becoming a prolific tanka poet—this is his second collection in two years. Although a slim volume containing 81 poems presented two to a page without section breaks, white thoughts, blue mind is nevertheless a satisfying collection. The well-crafted, pared down poems range from very short, almost haiku brevity, to longer ones. Swede is perhaps best known for his humour, which is often gently self-mocking—and there is plenty of that here— but he also shows his serious side in poems of social commentary. As well, he is capable of moments of lyricism. Tanka often seem to me like conversations shared between friends. Swede's poems are a perfect read in a Starbucks—a few memorable moments snatched with a friend over a quick coffee with the sound of people and life going on noisily in the background.

Janick Belleau's book on the other hand is more akin to a conversation in a tea shop, lights dimmed, voices lowered, a more intimate, leisurely conversation shared over cups of green tea. Her poems require time to be savoured and fully appreciated. This is

Belleau's second tanka collection—her previous (trilingual) volume *Humeur/Sensibility/Alma* was published in 2003. *D'âmes et d'ailes/of souls and wings* continues the poet's commitment to making her work available to both French and English audiences. Belleau has also contributed much to tanka research. She is passionate about giving value to the work of women poets and in this collection she has included a well-researched, informative essay on selected women tanka poets, both ancient and contemporary, Japanese and Western. Belleau's poems are infused with a restrained classicism at the same time as she manages to dwell firmly in the contemporary world. As an "out" lesbian poet, she has honestly and fearlessly revealed her heart.

I'll end with my favourite tanka by each poet.

Still backwater                              not fighting the current  
 my white bearded face and that      on the pedalo  
 of a big-mouth bass                        she lets go  
 merge into something                      wherever the wind carries her  
 strangely comforting (GS)                dragonfly on one knee (JB)

*Angela Leuck*