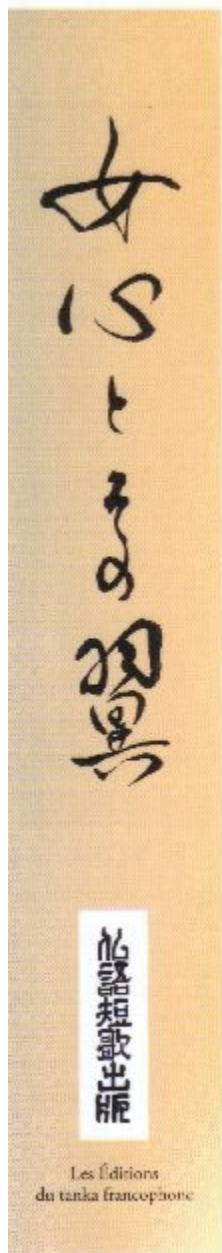


Featured Writer: [Aurora Antonovic](#)



D'ÂMES ET D'AILES  
*of souls and wings*



Janick Belleau

Tanka

**D'âmes et d'ailes/of souls and wings**

*D'âmes et d'ailes/of souls and wings*, by award-winning French Canadian author Janick Belleau,

is a collection of ninety-one tanka poems presented in both French and English. The book begins with a scholarly article by Belleau exploring tanka composed by female poets since the 9th century, and then delves right into the author's own poetry which is divided up into seven thematic sections.

Tanka is a form of Japanese poetry brought to Canada by Japanese-born immigrants in the early 1900's, and has gained mainstream popularity in North America since the late 1990's. Some French Canadian poets were also influenced by a similar poetic movement in France, also brought by Japanese-born immigrants, around the same time. Tanka consists of five lines and is hallmarked by both lyricism and expressions of emotions. Ms. Belleau is adroit at using the tanka form to cover such topics as nature, love, aging, death, the "great beyond" and all the generalities and subtleties that make up everyday life. Her poems are skilful and touched with the kind of honesty that makes for good poetry. They are never too sentimental nor heavy-handed, and always invite the reader in for some thought-provoking musing.

The weightier poems, as far as topics go, seem to be handled with the most sensitivity and use subtle symbols for deepest meanings. For example,

healing  
in an egg-shaped bath  
this fear:  
my death by drowning  
in my mother's bosom

or

she removes  
a limp butterfly  
from the edge of the well—  
an urn will be more tempting  
than a coffin ... when my time comes

Tanka poetry sometimes, but not always, makes use of something called a pivot. A pivot can work in a poem in one of two ways, either by changing topic midway the poem, or by using the third line as a swing line that works whether read in its original place, or by placing it at the end of the poem. Ms. Belleau's tanka often employ this technique, such as in this verse:

August 12  
your cat being put to sleep  
your tears  
my helplessness—  
foliage not as green as it was

In this particular tanka, line 3, (“your tears”) is the pivot, and works in its original spot, or when read at the end of the poem, thusly:

August 12  
your cat being put to sleep  
your tears  
my helplessness—  
foliage not as green as it was  
your tears

Although a book that will obviously appeal to those who are familiar with tanka techniques and the finer elements of the form, this book also reads well to any poetry lover. The illustrations included are photographs of either nature or sculptures taken by Ms. Belleau herself. They add a nice touch and provide an introductory transition to each topic.

This is a book that begs to be read again and again, as my already well-worn copy proves. Highly recommended.

**Aurora Antonovic** is a Canadian writer and editor whose work has been published internationally. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Magnapoets*, a print publication that seeks to promote the love of verse in all forms.