

February,
2011

LYNX

A Journal for Linking Poets

BOOK REVIEWS

***D'ÂMES ET D'AILES of souls and wings* by Janick Belleau. Perfect-bound, trade-cover, 5.5. x 8.5 inches, 154 pages, illustrated with black and white photos, French and English. \$20. Les Éditions du tanka francophone, ISBN: 9782981 077059.**

D'ÂMES ET D'AILES of souls and wings is the book that in October, 2010 The Canada Council for the Arts announced as one of the winners of the 2010 Canada-Japan Literary Awards and granted the prize of \$10,000. Not only are applause and kudos due to Janick Belleau for her work but also the Canada Council of Arts for so honoring a book of tanka.

Janick Belleau, poet, cultural writer, and lecturer, has been interested in haiku and tanka since 1998. To date she has edited three anthologies of haiku in French and English and has two personal collections: *Humeur. . ./Sensibility. . ./Alma. . . haiku and tanka* and *L'En-dehors du désir – short poems, du Blé*.

Her feature articles and presentations deal with how women poets have contributed to the advancement of tanka and haiku in Japan since the 9th century and in Canada and France since the 20th century. Twice she has given talks at the Haiku Canada yearly meetings on the work and influence of women writing haiku and tanka in French. Translations of these talks, by Dorothy Howard are now available online at [Women and Haiku in French, Thematic Evolution, talk for Haiku Canada, 2008](#) and [Canadian Haiku Women and Inner Thoughts; talk for Haiku Canada, 2009](#) Before getting to the 91 tanka of *D'ÂMES ET D'AILES of souls and wings*, 42 pages are given to a well-annotated and scholarly essay, in both languages, TANKA BY WOMEN SINCE THE 9TH CENTURY in which Janick Belleau traces the her-story of tanka with brief biographies of the better-known poetesses. Her study and examples are taken from books on the subject that have appeared in French and it is very interesting to note how the tanka story has come down through the French river of books.

So, the poems. The tanka are sectioned into seven divisions titled Between Culture & Nature, Burning Fire (with a photo of 'burning' water), Walking toward Winter, Roots (showing tree branches), Solitary, The Last Sleep and The Beyond (which interestingly enough is prefaced with a

drawing of Ono no Komachi). The section, “Roots” which is dedicated to Ms. Belleau’s father, curiously contains most of the heartfelt poems about mothers. As with many of the tanka, I felt the author was dancing around very upsetting material without the courage to say it outright. There was too much of the ‘good little daughter’ unable to speak her truth. Maybe love poems, as tanka are often labeled, were not the genre for this section. Or does Ms. Belleau get kudos for trying?

The actual love poems for her mate are much more open and precise. The honesty of feeling comes through and the tanka carry it on open arms.

along the green road
on a midsummer day
a bay of diamonds
wild with joy I go to you
wearing red lipstick

Baie de diamants
longeant la route verte
au milieu de l’été
le coeur fou je vais toi
du rouge sut mes lèvres

From the French version one can see how the lines 1 & 3 have been inverted. Ah, a search of the information page, I see Claudia Coudu Radmore has “révision des tanka en anglais.” I wish I had someone here at my elbow to discuss which version is stronger; or even if there is a difference. As I, in this solitude, read the poem again, I delight in the connection between the “bay of diamonds” and the author’s joy and for me that is the crux of the poem. And I admire the contrast between the green road and the red lipstick. Very fine! Why is the poem left so different in the French?

Ah, one more question before I leave this. I am wondering why the English versions are all in lower case (hooray!) and why each of the French poems begins with a capital letter. Is Ms. Belleau adhering to some French tenet that refuses to be moved?

Comfort for the author. Remember any time a critic jabs you with a worded spear, he or she has recently pulled the bleeding side the same and equally painful weapon guided home by someone else aimed at his or her work. How can we use love poems to describe a period of our lives still so outlined in pain due to a lack of love? What is going on with us, the women of imperfect childhoods when we write poetry?