

EARTH & GOLD

LITERARY.CREATIVE. AESTHETIC

OCTOBER 2023

THE WISE OWL

ONLINE MAGAZINE



A CHERITA SPECIAL

Editor Speak

October 2023

The Wise Owl stepped into its second year in November 2022 with the Gold Series and we baptised the first edition of the Gold series as Sienna & Gold. In October 2023, we come full circle with the 12th Edition of the Gold series. which we have named Earth & Gold. The cover picture is a photograph of the 'The Faces of Ruth Asawa', an ongoing installation at The Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.

Like our previous offerings, we again bring for our readers & viewers literary and artistic nuggets mixed with the scent of earth and the richness of gold. This edition is a cherita Special, so we have an insightful and enlightening interview with ai li, the creator of cherita and Larry Kimmel, a stellar cherita poet. We also showcase cherita by 12 poets from across the globe. and talk to Joanna Ashwell, a wonderful cherita poet about her recently released book '*river lanterns*' that has garnered a lot of praise. Poetry, stories, musings, reviews, visual arts and podcasts brighten up our creatively put-together ezine.

Happy reading!!! Happy Viewing!!!



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INTERVIEWS



The Interview: ai li

The creator of cherita, Gembun & dua

The Wise Owl talks to **ai li**, creator of Cherita, Gembun and Dua, three unique storytelling short form genres. She is also the editor of the cherita, founding editor and publisher of still, moving into breath and dew-on-line. She is also a Fellow of The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain [FRPS], and an evidential spiritualist medium who trained at The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain and The College of Psychic Studies, London. ai li's poems have been widely published in the UK, USA, and Japan.

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The Interview: Larry Kimmel

A prolific Poet & writer

The Wise Owl talks to **Larry Kimmel**, a prolific poet and a writer. Larry grew up in the rural area near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and Pittsburgh University and has worked at everything from steel mills to libraries. He now lives quietly with his wife in the hills of Western Massachusetts. He has authored eleven collections of poetry and a novella.

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The Interview: ai li

(Neena Singh, Guest Editor, The Wise Owl in conversation with ai li)

The Wise Owl talks to **ai li**, creator of Cherita, Gembun and Dua, three unique storytelling short form genres. She is also the editor of the cherita, founding editor and publisher of still, moving into breath and dew-on-line. She is also a Fellow of The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain [FRPS], and an evidential spiritualist medium who trained at The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain and The College of Psychic Studies, London. Ai li's poems have been widely published in the UK, USA, and Japan.

She lives quietly and mindfully in London and writes in a Rousseau inspired dream yard watched over by three old stone buddhas, a resident pair of hedge sparrows, and a chorus of blackbirds, robins, green finches, dunnocks, gold finches, chaffinches, blue tits, coal tits, long tail tits and a goldcrest.

Thank you ai li for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl. We are delighted to interact with you.

AL: *Namaste Neena.*

Meera Naam ai li.

Lovely to meet you at long last albeit virtually.

NS: You are a prolific poet and creator of several genres of poetry. Our readers would be keen to know what attracted you to poetry. What were the creative influences in your life that inspired you to become a poet?

AL: Before I answer this question Neena, do I know this person you have just been describing?

Now it's my turn to thank you Neena and The Wise Owl for very kindly inviting me for this tete-a-tete. I've scribbled some notes in anticipation of what you may be asking me and I hope it's okay to refer to them as my dyslexia can rear its mischievous head, if I don't.

Now to answer your question :

Poetry fell into my life like an autumn leaf.

I didn't go looking for it.

I naturally have a very retentive visual memory of people, places, and of objects anyway, and this probably paved my way into the realms of poetry making me the Wordsmith, Storyteller and Word Healer I am today.

Certainly,

One - Early Hollywood motion pictures played a large part. They were magnificent tableaux vivant with their stories, sets, costumes, lighting, lyrics and songs that were melodious, coherent and memorable.

And secondly the Monsoon :

We were cooped up indoors from the daily relentless rain and ensuing floods often from October to March in my grandmother's old house, and my maternal aunts and uncles encouraged us wee ones to combat boredom and ennui by making collages and crafts. They also made us listen to music on my grandmother's old radiogram and captivated us all with stories galore.

Third one - small town blues.

Growing up in a small town encouraged me to daydream, to create a magic flying carpet of my own.

And Four - a household of mixed faiths - Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims.

The coming together to share food, the ups and downs of life and stories - there was always laughter, joy and tears.

And lastly, leaving home at a young age, not quite 16.

Learning to fend for myself and having to grow up quickly.

Being on my own in a place where I wasn't fluent in its lingo encouraged me to be unafraid to try out new ideas and food.

It also taught me about existential loneliness which resides in all my writing.

So, all five factors played major nurturing roles in my early life and so it's probably safe and correct to say that they were all complicit in being tiger mums to me turning out as a poet.

NS: You have created 22 original linked forms akin to Renga, three of which are the cherita, gembun and dua. As this edition is a Cherita special, a genre created by you, our readers would be curious to know how and why you created this genre.

AL: Thank you.

The Cherita was my humble way of paying homage to my ancestors and loved ones who are sadly no longer with us, and of giving my belated thanks. Their storytelling and the way they lived their lives imbued mine with the richness of their memories.

I am of Straits Chinese or Peranakan extraction. The women were called Nyonyas and the men Babas. The Straits Chinese were the descendants of Han Chinese men who settled in the Malay archipelago and married Javanese, Sumatran and Malay wives.

My family were immigrants from China to Malaya and they braved the oceans in sailing junks, braving new worlds that were full of danger and of life's uncertainties.

They brought along with them their stories of the old kingdom. This tradition of oral storytelling was embraced by many immigrants in their newly adopted homelands, sewn into the very fabric of their longings and their dreams of a new life, free from revolutions, famine and pestilence. It was their way of honouring their past and of remembering their ancestors and loved ones.

As to how, well . . .

The late 1990s was an electrifying time for me when I was energised to create these unique linked forms, one after the other, and which included Cherita and Gembun. Dua came much later. This was also the period when I first started to edit and publish still which showcased Haiku, Tanka and short poems. My 22 unique forms can be found with their guidelines and examples on my personal website www.aili.co.uk for anyone who may be interested in writing them.

It was also the period when I received firstly my Associateship, and then within 6 months of that, my Fellowship from the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain. I hit the ground running so to speak. Time and Tide wait for no one.

created the Lunenga on 27 May 1997.

It has 21 verses of 1-2-3 line stanzas with a gap between each stanza of 6 lines.
One link had to include the moon.

So technically speaking, Cherita was born within the Lunenga itself and under la luna.

Larry Kimmel, my dear friend and kindred spirit who's also a fine Cherita and Tanka poet told me in his own words:

'And that's when I told you how this verse within your longer Lunenga sequence helped me to write a small poem that had kept eluding me in free verse;

And that I thought that six-line verse could be a form unto itself. Or maybe you thought that. I'm not sure. But I do know you thought it was an interesting idea and I do remember with certainty, that you said you'd think about it and give it a "smashing name."

I remember, too, how I'd asked you before we began that first collaboration what were the rules of the Lunenga, and you said: *"It's like sex, Larry, there are no rules."*

The rest is now Cherita history.

More detailed info can be found on the cherita website under the ORIGINS heading.

Thank you Neena.

NS: I was reading about your concept of 'one breath poetry' and your belief that drafting tends to loss of potency of the verse. Could you please elaborate on this concept.

AL: I'll try.

For me, writing in one breath is akin to prayer.

I write and have always written all my poems in a semi-altered state of consciousness. Without a doubt, this must have come from my meditation.

Producing a Cherita or any other short form poem, for me, has always felt like manna from heaven.

I'm old school and wedded to pen and paper, and when these gifts of words appear, there's a rush to get them down on paper pronto before they vanish. And vanish they do on occasions when I am too slow to record them accordingly. I only come back to these poems in my writing journals when I need them again for publication or otherwise. They remain how they have been written in one breath, untouched and unaltered.

I've often been told that there are poets out there who spend hours, even weeks trying to get a poem 'right' and this concept of writing just floors me. With respect to them, we are not writing the Ramayana here, for heaven's sake. The more minimal the poem, the stronger its true essence if written in one breath, in my opinion. Once the poem has been messed around the circuit so to speak, its true essence and AHA moment will be irretrievably lost.

As for its authenticity, that has also gone AWOL in the poetry swamp.

I am not advocating that everyone should write in one breath but if you are bold enough to attempt this way of writing minimal poetry, the rewards will surprise you. That I can assure you.

You will be opening yourself up for spirit or muse to come in freely with gifts of words that will descend as scented blossoms.

I have prepared 8 one breath Cherita from my book dream sequence [published May 2023] which I would love to read and share with your readers now if I may. These pieces will hopefully give them an idea of what I have intimated above.

I will read them twice as they are so minimal. [**\[Click link to read ai li's cheita\]**](#)

NS: You have been teaching Cherita and other related forms. Your Hampstead U3A class produced 7 fine poets. What would be your advice to upcoming poets of Cherita and related genres?

AL: For starters, discard the straight jacket of rules that police thought and most importantly read, read, read as many good Cherita or other short form poems, as you possibly can.

Keep your eyes and ears open for stories wherever you may be if you find it difficult to rely on your imagination or memories to tell a story.

If your wish is to be a bona fide Cherita storyteller, then write about what you know and not about what you don't. When I have my editor hat on, it is often very obvious to me when a poem is not kosher in sentiment.

Try not to repeat an opening line or subject matter. Unless each version of a Cherita is totally different in content to the next, it can be boring for an editor to read the same opening line or subject matter again and again.

When I was editing and publishing still in the 90s, I once received a submission of 30 Haiku, each of which started with the word butterfly. I don't think I need to finish this sorry tale for you Neena.

There is also a tendency for poets to only wish to read their own published pieces. This will only narrow their writing skills. One has to read widely, not just one's own poems, and one can learn hugely from the varied ways of writing Cherita, Gembun and Dua. My own personal books of poetry reflect the versatility and flexibility that is inherent in the DNA of the Cherita, Gembun and Dua genres.

Think of writing Cherita, Gembun and Dua as different disciplines of writing. I think of them as a workout or a spa day for my brain cells and I enjoy switching genres in any one sitting.

I would also advise reading your poems out loud when you have written them. If the words don't flow or a word jars, then start again.

I began by reading every submitted poem to me out loud but these days I can hear them in my mind as I read them. It came with practice.

The rest is hard graft. Pure and Simple.

My advice is purely for the purposes of publication. If you are writing Cherita for a private daily journal, then obviously you don't need to be quite as stringent.

I have prepared another 8 one breath Cherita from my book nothingness [published November 2022] which I would love to read and share with your readers now if I may. I hope these Cherita will also give them an idea of what I have intimated above.

I will read them twice as they are so minimal.

[\[Click link to read ai li's cheita\]](#)

NS: Contemporary poetry for the most part is about articulating internal thoughts and musings. Narrative poetry like Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient mariner' is no longer a genre of interest. Also narrative poetry is traditionally long. Stepping away from tradition and contemporary trends, you have made cherita a mouthpiece for flash fiction & tiny stories. What made you look for and find this gap in current poetry genres?

AL: I have M. Kei Editor and Publisher of Atlas Poetica to thank for calling Cherita flash fiction. Here is what Kei originally wrote :

'This form created by ai li has proven to have a staying power that will see it entrenched alongside the cinquain as an enduring poetic form. True to its storytelling origin, many cherita read like the world's shortest flash fiction. They combine the evocative power of tanka with the narrative of a personal story, like the vignettes we glimpse as we sit in a café and watch the world go by.'

I couldn't have written it so beautifully. Thank you again Kei.

I didn't go looking for a gap in the current poetry genres. That would be so calculating of me to do so. Frankly, I was too busy travelling, ticking off my bucket list, after emerging from a long union as it so happens.

Being the free spirit that I was then and still am now, it was only a matter of time before the memory of the proverbial campfire storytelling get togethers would draw me into a bout of nostalgia to initiate a 21st century revival.

And I did with Cherita and my own books.

I can't make anyone write Cherita, Gembun or Dua. I'm no magician. If Cherita has become a mouthpiece for flash fiction and tiny stories, then there must have been a collective hunger out there for timeless minimal storytelling with Cherita and its two siblings Gembun and Dua.

NS: What is the cherita award?

AL: The Cherita Award is an exciting new project from my 1-2-3 press.

Why not become a Cherita storyteller to enthrall a new generation of storytellers?

All you will need is pen, paper, imagination and an open invitation for spirit and muse to grace your page.

I selected, edited, collated and published our first Cherita book river lanterns this august by a solo poet Joanna Ashwell who's a regular Cherita contributor. I loved the challenge and decided then and there, to offer to publish more Cherita books from solo poets.

In a nutshell, poets should submit 30 previously unpublished Cherita as a presentational portfolio.

If the 30 virgin Cherita pass muster, they will go on to the next stage which is to submit another 170 virgin Cherita for me to finally select the entire 90 poems required for their Cherita book which will be published by me.

However, if only 20 are found to pass muster, they will also go on to the next stage but they have to submit another 180 virgin Cherita, 10 more, for me to finally select the entire 90 required for their Cherita book.

The best news is that the selected poets for the cherita award will not have to pay a penny to enter or win the cherita award and it will be ongoing.

the cherita award is gratis to enter or win and open to all.

Having said this, their Cherita will have to be timeless and top notch to make the grade.

Full information can be found on the cherita website www.thecherita.com

I have prepared the last 8 one breath cherita from my book the promise of rain [published May 2022] which I would love to read and share with your readers if I may. These pieces will hopefully give them an even better idea of what I am looking for in terms of Cherita.

I will read them twice as they are so minimal. **[\[Click link to read ai li's cheita\]](#)**

NS: You are an evidential spiritualist medium who trained at The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain and The College of Psychic Studies. Please tell us a little about this.

AL: My mother lost two of my older sisters when they were children. I never knew them as I was the youngest in the family. The fact that they were buried separately, with no grave markers in the wilderness haunts me to this day. This was the norm then with children who died suddenly before they reached adulthood.

When I was going through a tough emotional patch in my life, a dear friend recommended a medium in South London who she felt could help me through this difficult period.

I found myself in a bright but small, rather nondescript room, sitting on an office chair and facing this total stranger of a medium. He looked straight at me and said, and I quote '2 young women have come through and they tell me they are your sisters. They are not of this world and they are both hugging you and letting you know that you will be okay.'

That broke the dam and I was sitting there sobbing my heart out.

Two sisters who I did not know, and who died young, had returned grown up as young compassionate women to comfort their youngest sibling.

How could this medium, a total stranger, know anything about my family history yet his words touched and comforted me deeply, and it changed my life and helped make a difference for me at my time of crisis. I wasn't alone.

This was how my mediumistic journey unfolded and I went on to 'train' with two august spiritualist organisations to enable me to share love and messages from beyond, with the bereaved, who most needed to hear from their absent loved ones.

I won't bore you with more tales as this is a poetry chinwag, suffice to say that it is so emotionally rewarding and uplifting when a message can be received by the intended, with the realisation that love does not simply disappear when the ferryman comes for all of us.

Thank you.

NS: You are a Fellow of The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain. Please tell us what triggered your interest in photography?

AL: Two names – Henri Cartier Bresson and Minor White.

As you may know – Cartier Bresson was French and a consummate humanist storyteller. He was often called the father of photojournalism, and he was also one of the founding members of Magnum photos in 1947.

Here are some of his quotes that inspired me apart from his timeless black and white photographs :

First quote – “Photographers deal in things which are continually vanishing and when they have vanished there is no contrivance on earth which can make them come back again.”

Two – “Reality offers us such wealth that we must cut some of it out on the spot, simplify. The question is, do we always cut out what we should?”

And Three – “As time passes by and you look at portraits, the people come back to you like a silent echo. A photograph is a vestige of a face, a face in transit. Photography has something to do with death. It’s a trace.”

So, Photography for me is about capturing the impermanence of what’s around me and Cartier Bresson’s quotes can be applied to Cherita and the short form poetry that I write.

I have a personal footnote about the great man which I will elaborate after my comment on Minor White.

Now we come to Minor White –

Minor White was an American photographer known for his black-and-white prints of landscapes, architecture, and men. His interest in Zen philosophy and mysticism was evident in his meticulous photographs.

I’ve chosen 3 quotes of his which have inspired me and become personal mantras :

One – ‘No matter how slow the film, Spirit always stands still long enough for the photographer it has chosen.’

Two – ‘...innocence of eye has a quality of its own. It means to see as a child sees, with freshness and acknowledgment of the wonder; it also means to see as an adult sees who has gone full circle and once again sees as a child – with freshness and an even deeper sense of wonder.’

And lastly – ‘Often while traveling with a camera we arrive just as the sun slips over the horizon of a moment, too late to expose film, only time enough to expose our hearts.’

I apply the same one breath method to my photography. When genius loci steps in, I click on the shutter and receive my gift. There is no dilly dallying, no prevarication.

And now, for my personal note on Cartier Bresson :

When I was a student in Paris umpteen moons ago, I met an elderly Indonesian lady who took me under her wing. Her fellow country woman friend invited her to visit one afternoon, and my friend very kindly asked me to come along.

Madame Cartier was a formidable Javanese lady who was warm, full of life, and who corrected me for calling Dutch toast French toast.

Whilst these two ladies were sipping tea and chatting in Dutch, I looked around the room we were sitting in and noticed these black & white photographs of the people of Paris hanging on the wall. The ingenuite that I was, was mesmerised by how striking and special these images were when Madame Cartier came up to me and whispered that they were by Cartier Bresson. I was too young then to have fully comprehended what that name implied.

Years after my father's death, I found a large stash of all my handwritten letters from Paris which my father had carefully tied up with ribbon now faded.

In amongst them was my letter describing that dream afternoon spent in Madame Cartier's apartment. I had often wondered if I had imagined that afternoon visit over the years, but here was the proof in my own young handwriting.

I often ask myself if my deep interest in Photography was first kindled in that dim late afternoon light of a Parisian room when Cartier Bresson 'spoke' to me as a doyen of a storyteller with his humanist photographs.

Thank you

NS: Our readers would be keen to know if you are working on a book as we speak. Please share details with our readers.

AL: A number of books are in the pipeline. I am immensely possessive of my own virgin work. If it hadn't been for my other half, these poems of mine would not have seen the light of day.

He patiently persuaded me to let them be seen and read and I am now so glad and grateful to him that I did let go.

Whenever I have a small window of opportunity, I start working on a new book to enlarge the stable of my own unpublished volumes of Cherita, Gembun, Dua, Tanka, Haiku and other new forms of mine.

I have to admit that the fear of not being able to produce any more poems one day is a constant and unwelcome companion. This fear rides tandem with my omnipresent rage against the dying of the light.

However, the combined fear and rage keep me on my toes writing deep into the mortal's night.

So, to answer your question Neena, yes, there is always a book of mine sitting in abeyance for publication. I am not someone who rests on my laurels. I am not proud of it but I am driven.

NS: If I were to ask you to describe yourself as a poet in 3 adjectives, what would they be?

AL: This is a tricky one and I should proceed with caution here.

I have always adhered to my dear much missed late father's advice which was that one's voice out there has to be thrown by others and not by oneself.

With that in mind, I've come up with these 3 adjectives which I hope my father would have approved of :

Truthful - Fearless - Independent

NS: Thanks ai li for taking time out to speak to The Wise Owl. We are honoured and delighted to speak with you. We wish you the best in all your creative pursuits and hope that you make the world richer with new genres of

poetry and storytelling.

AL: Thank you for having me.

Dhanyavaad Neena or should it be

Bahut Shukirya if we have been informal with our tete-a-tete.

I thought I would be nervous but you made me feel so at home. Bless you.

Thank you Neena.

The Interview : Larry Kimmel

(Neena Singh, Guest Editor, The Wise Owl talks to Larry Kimmel)

The Wise Owl talks to **Larry Kimmel**, a prolific poet and a writer. Larry grew up in the rural area near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and Pittsburgh University and has worked at everything from steel mills to libraries. He now lives quietly with his wife in the hills of Western Massachusetts. He has authored eleven collections of poetry and a novella.

Thanks Larry for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl.

And thank you for the opportunity to explain a little 'my craft or sullen art.'

NS: You have authored 11 collections of verse, mostly Japanese genres like tanka, Cherita, haiku, haibun etc. Please tell us what attracted you to these Japanese genres of poetry.

LK: In the 1960s I began writing short stories, expecting to eventually write novels, but it seemed one had to write to suit the magazines too much. Poetry allowed me a bit more leeway to write in my own style and subject matter.

By the '70s I was experimenting with various forms of poetry, and that is when I first became aware of haiku. I published a few in *Dragonfly*, but mostly went on writing western-styled poems until the mid-'90s. At that time, I had moved from Amherst to Colrain, Massachusetts, where I met Carol Purington, a neighbor, two miles down the road. She was writing haiku and tanka and I helped her and a friend of hers set up a book for publication, as I had a greater computer capability at that time. Of course, I got interested, again, in haiku. Carol introduced me to the haiku world, and I was soon doing little else but writing haiku.

At first, it was a delight to meet new people and to be published on a regular basis, and in time I came to love the aesthetic of the haikai forms, and they became, and remain, my main poetic outlets.

Haiku suited my imagistic and descriptive approach towards writing. Tanka soon followed, and in a few years became my primary poetic form of expression. I was drawn to tanka because it allowed the use of metaphor in a way that the haiku did not. Nowadays, I primarily write cherita. It gives me all that tanka gave, plus a greater freedom, and there are more places to publish cherita now than at its outset.

I might also add that when I found the haikai world, I also found a niche for myself that allowed me to write exactly as I wished, be published, and find an audience.

NS: Our October Edition is a Cherita Special. For the benefit of the readers, please tell us what are the characteristics of Cherita that you find most enchanting.

LK: Its unbounded brevity, its imagistic nature, and its Japanese aesthetic. For me it has been a place to write, or perhaps I should say, suggest, stories, as well as a place where I can indulge the techniques of western lyricism. That is what it is for me, though I should like to make it clear that it can be quite otherwise for other poets. I like, too, that it is without the restrictive syllabic count of haiku and tanka. I like to work in set forms, as it makes me work harder and write better. For me, the concision of the cherita is just the right amount of form.

NS: Of all the Japanese genres of poetry that you have dabbled in, which genre gives you the most creative satisfaction and why?

LK: Cherita and tanka.

For a time, I wrote haibun and tanka-prose, and perhaps I will again. It appeases an anecdotal need, though as time goes on, I found that I can do that with cherita.

When you think about it, the anecdote, as an oral form of storytelling, is so common as to almost go unnoticed. Everyone has stories to tell, whether they write or not. Have you noticed, for example, how often talk-show guests have an anecdotal tale to tell, besides promoting a movie, or a book?

NS: I have been browsing through your poetry (other than the Japanese genres). I especially loved your philosophical poem Seeking The Hermit-Sage, Of Destiny & Moonlight & There is a River Years from here. There is a quality of serenity and acceptance in these poems which really touched me. Please tell us what is the inspiration behind these poems?

LK: An almost impossible task. Two of the poems you mention above were given to me by my muse; the other, there is a river years from here, came from the heart, as childhood memories do. Its voice, however, was given when it came in a flow.

I find it hard to explain how a poem develops. Many of my poems have been crafted, that is they don't come in a rush, but how they begin is hard to say. It might grow from an image, or a thought that has been much on my mind. But I would sooner the poem meant what it means to the reader and not damage a good reading of the poem with some wordy explanation of how I think I arrived at the work. The more anecdotal poems are there to be written, though it may take a long time for them to find their voices. The more lyrical poems more often grow out of images and other observations of the world around me, especially when it meets with some thought or idea from my inner world. The best poems are about feelings or should create a feeling in the reader the way a song creates a mood or feeling.

As for Seeking The Hermit-sage I'm afraid that if I commented, the reader might find the poem better than the poet, who is no sage. Received knowledge is readily available for all of us, but Knowing ... I don't know Knowing. Maybe, after all these years, a pinch of wisdom, but even that might be the mere shift of perspective that each new decade gives us. Let's just say that Seeking the Hermit-sage is about a man the poet desires to be.

I do thank you, Neena, for finding my other than Japanese genre work and reading so much of what I put in my selected poems 1968 - 2008, which is free to read on my website. There is a selected poems 1968 - 2020 now in print, which includes much of my last two books, the colors of ash and the horizon waits, as well as all of my cherita collection, in an upstairs room, selected and edited by ai li.

NS: While going through these poems I also noted that there is strong imagery in them, which makes the poems so visually captivating. I am eager to know how you developed and honed this art of imagery .

LK: I think it came quite naturally to me, as I have always, to paraphrase myself: loved the world with my eye no matter what. By eye, I mean all my senses, but I think I am a visually oriented sort. I have a strong visual memory for landscapes and places I've lived. This trait inspires stories. I wonder that I am not a graphic artist, at times. Probably because I can't translate the simplest vision of my mind to a sketch pad. Well, maybe a stickman.

NS: You have authored so many books of poetry. What would be the advice you would give budding poets on how to hone their craft and imagery?

LK: Read, read, read. Write, write, write. Observe your surroundings. Listen to what people say.

NS: Are you working on any book as we speak? Do share details about the book and when it is likely to be in the

bookstores.

LK: I am always working on books in the sense that I am always writing poems that will in time be collected into books. At the moment I am in no hurry to put out a new book. I've been more interested in collecting the work I have already published into selected and collected works. I have some I've recently published that I have not yet unleashed on the public. I just like knowing they are there. It's a grand feeling to hold a thick book in one's hand and know that it is one's own work. It gives me a sense of fulfillment.

NS: If I were to ask you to describe yourself as a poet in 3 adjectives what would they be and why.

LK: Imagistic. Solitary. Sensual.

Imagistic. I've already written above that I have a strong visual take on the world around me. That is where feelings and ideas come from.

Solitary. I've been told often enough to believe that my poems have a kind of aloneness, though not necessarily lonely, quality about them. I do find that I need a certain amount of alone time in a day if I am going to function well. I like to socialize but need to re-charge my batteries. I suppose I lean more to the side of the introvert than to the side of the extravert. This trait served me well as a child, as I was an only child living in a rural setting in which there were few other children my age who lived close enough to visit in the summer months. I feel it was good for my creativity to invent my own games and other play early in life. And it serves me well at my current age, when most of my friends are on the other side, and I have less opportunity to hang out in town. I do miss just sitting in wi-fi cafés. I find it creatively stimulating to be around people even if I am not actively socializing. I take this stimulation into my solitary hours where I do my writing. Most of my socializing is through email or video calls these days. Good, but not quite the same.

Sensual. By sensual, I mean it as both eroticism and the use of all five senses in writing. At least, I've been told that I use all five senses. I don't actively think about it. I describe what needs to be described in the poem I am working on.

Thank you so much Larry for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl. We wish you all the best in life and hope you continue to enrich the world with your beautiful verse and captivating imagery.

Thank you for asking. It's been a pleasure.

Three of my favorite cherita from in an upstairs room.

you leaned

*against me
and neither of us*

*moved
for the longest
time*

so that was that

now, breaking a dry stem
into bits

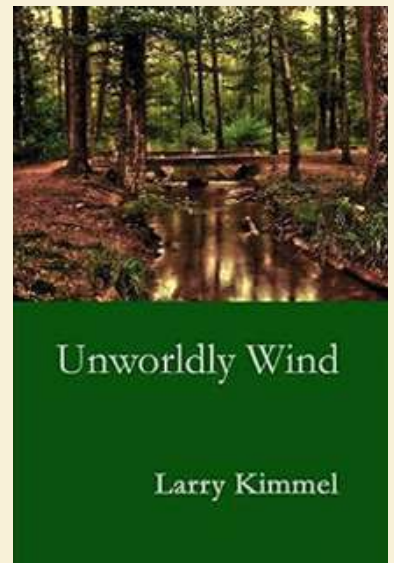
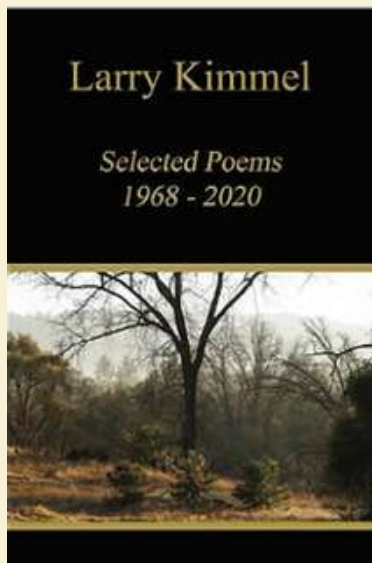
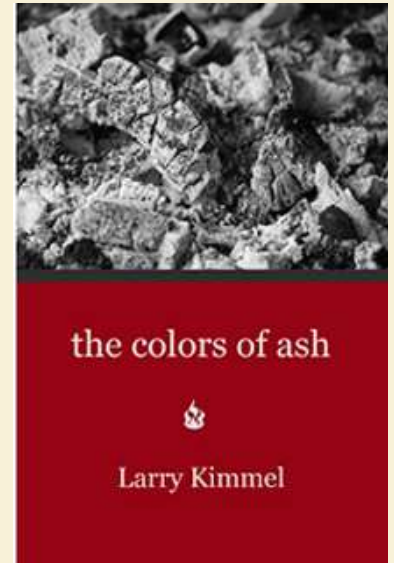
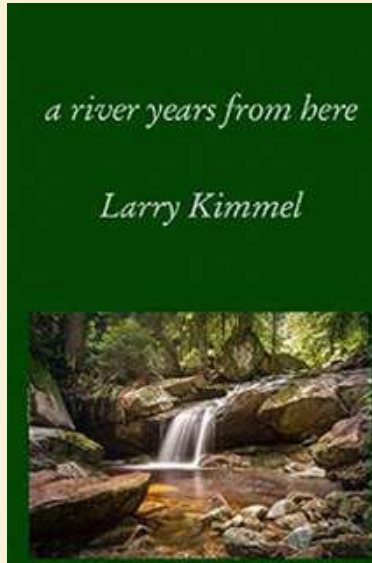
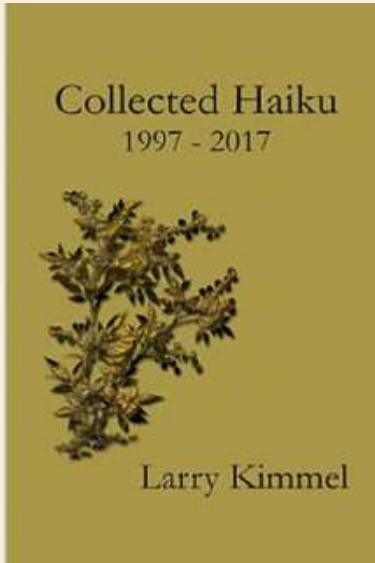
*watching
the river
flow*

sunset after sunset

*these solitary walks
this ache to tell*

*the fiery furnace
closes and leaves me
to my dusk*

Some Works of Larry Kimmel



POETRY



Cherita
ai li

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Cherita
Larry Kimmel

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Cherita
Joanna Ashwell

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Cherita
Rupa Anand

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Neena Singh

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POETRY



Arvinder Kaur

Cherita
Arvinder Kaur

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Mona Bedi

Cherita
Mona Bedi

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Cynthia Anderson

Cherita
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Ram Chandran

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Amita Sarjit Ahluwalia

Cherita
Amita Sarjit Ahluwalia

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Lakshmi Iyer

Cherita
Lakshmi Iyer

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cherita by ai li

unfortunately

it does not
have
the taste

of cruelty
sharksfin soup



bones

mine have
been homesick
for years

overstaying
because you're lonely

mama

has been gone
11 years

but
i haven't stopped
talking to her





cherita by Larry Kimmel

snowbound

staring into the fire all night
my eyes burn at sunrise

the last of the wood
sizzles
in the fireplace



sketch pad in hand

it wasn't the vase
and bowl of fruit
that took my interest

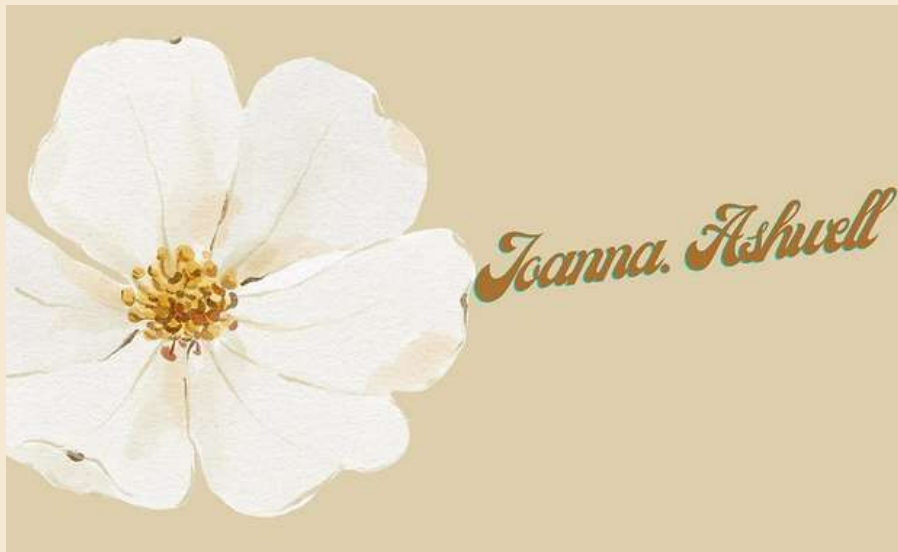
it was the urban roof lines
beyond the window

across the ceiling

both belly down
and upside down

the spider tacks
her
unfathomable course





cherita by Joanna Ashwell

pine needles

say it again
just the lull

of forest sway
a melody
of green



rainbow edge

an arc
across the valley

the diver
never enough breath
to reach the depth

don't ask

where to find
the key

I type by touch
unlocking doors
sightless





cherita by Rupa Anand

dahlias blooming

each winter
purple and white

as flamenco dancers
snapping castanets
they twirl



cancer

just another item
that is not me

i'm
something
other than it

friends
slowly they disappear

one by one like clouds
that the wind blows
leaving crystal skies

rich with hope

(inverted cherita 2-3-1)





cherita by Jan Stretch

in therapy
she shared the horrors
of her past

the rape
as fresh as yesterday

she was only five



sometimes
her problems feel
insurmountable

she rages and cries
fires and floods

... mother earth

most potent
are the tears
in the morning

waking
to the silence

another day





cherita by Neena Singh

full moon
in the indigo sky

so alone
in your eyes
the moonlight

so bright



squirrels scamper
up and down the pine

on the garden swing

granny's hands
weave a garland
of pink honeysuckle

my heart
yearns for my old home

the window

through which
the sun entered
every morning





cherita by Arvinder Kaur

a frail hand
warm
in mine

she talks of love
for her daughter

moonlight fills mother's eyes



wayward poppies

dance
in the breeze

in the spring
of sixties
my wild streak

six a.m.

a phone call
tells me of dad's passing

the glow of marigold
on his wrinkles
before going





cherita by Mona Bedi

autumn eve
the tintinnabulations
of wind bells

now and then

i sense that
you have walked in



braiding my long hair

the way
grandma's hands

smell of pickle
memories of my childhood
come rushing back

balcony garden

the butterfly and I
make our daily rounds

a lone marigold
nods in the breeze





cherita by Cynthia Anderson

eyes level
with the low
snow line

I walk toward

the far
mountain



old cottonwood

among the bent
and broken limbs

dancing
shimmers
of green

my dream twin
can only read lips

she does not speak—

overcome
by the emotion
in people's faces





cherita by Ram Chandran

temple pond

the morning breeze
rebounds ...

everywhere
the fragrance
of lotuses



over the horizon

where a thin line
separates the sky and sea

the boat
carrying her vanishes
leaving me alone on the shore

winter night-

a heron
stands guard

to
the stillness
of a lily pond





cherita by Amita Sarjit Ahluwalia

everything

has to be a story
from day one

or the bird is dead
princess september
scheherazade



pale and beautiful

his sincerity
glows out from his eyes

he hides
deep wounds
and some scars

love-that-lies-bleeding

wildflowers glowing
like burning embers

on piercing tips
of barbed wire
at border fences





cherita by Lakshmi Iyer

stranded
in the season of loneliness

i rephrase

'if sky's the limit
will not i see
the shooting stars'



mundane things

day in and out
of all the seasonal
ups and downs

i finally learn
to contemplate

tired to read
and re-read the mistakes
needlessly done

this autumn

i fold the passage
from the pages of time



FICTION



As seen on T.V.
Leroy B. Vaughn

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The Dust Moth
Travis Flatt

[Read More](#)



Windsor Manor
Snigdha Agrawal

[Read More](#)



Flash Fiction: A Trilogy
Yuan Changming

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As seen on T.V.

By Leroy B. Vaughn

Gunfights in films & Television have a romance that beckons Dwight Johnson. So he packs his bags & decides to follow his passion.

Dwight Johnson poured his third shot of butterscotch schnapps as he watched the pretty East Indian woman and her American boyfriend shoot their way through Columbia. They were not bad ass gangsters, but they were involved in illegal gunfighting, according to the movie Blunt Force Trauma. This would be the seventh time he had watched the movie and he couldn't figure out if this was real, or just a movie. This was his all-time favorite movie and he had been thinking a lot about giving up his job and heading to South America to see for himself. He didn't have a lot to lose, except his job at the Circle K gas station in El Centro, California.

Dwight didn't have any family, friends or girlfriend and had always been a loner. The movie was about an American in Columbia who travels from place to place and enters gunfight contests. The contestants enter a small arena and stand in a designated spot. They wear bullet proof vests and can only shoot at the area covered by the vest. Shooters use either revolvers or semi-automatic pistols and the contestant who is shot until he drops or gives up, loses.

Along the way the American meets a pretty East Indian woman who is also an American gunfighter and for a short time they travel in her car, looking for gunfights that are posted on the internet. The American is looking for a mysterious gunfighter named Zorringer who only fights on his property by invitation of a beautiful mysterious woman, who comes to the contests looking for gunfighters to fight Zorringer. Dwight tells himself that he could pack everything he owns in twenty minutes and drive his Toyota sedan to South America to find the truth about gunfighting and Zorringer.

He did just that. The next morning, he loaded a suitcase, his shaving bag and a few items that he did not want to part with and crossed the border at Mexicali and headed south. His little car was perfect for Mexico. He had purchased the car because it was the most popular model for Mexican taxi drivers. He had plenty of time to think about getting into professional gunfighting during the long drive south. He was ready mentally to try this gunfighting idea, but he had never fired a gun before except once when he went with a co-worker to the dump and shot a small .22 revolver at rats. He was fairly sure he could do it, all he would need was a good handgun and lots of practice. He had the time and thirty

thousand dollars, his life's savings, hidden in various parts of his car.

He knew not to drive at night in Mexico. He caught the Pan American Highway south of Mexico City and drove as far as he could every day for three days, until he reached a town in the central highlands named San Cristobal de las Casas. He took a room in a hotel for the night, before venturing out to look at the town plaza. He was surprised to see that many of the residents were Indigenous peoples from local tribes.

After a quick tour of the plaza, he walked into the hotel bar and ordered a beer. Dwight liked the atmosphere in the bar. He sat on a bar stool and listened to a man strumming a tune on a harp. It was very relaxing and he hardly noticed the young Indian woman who approached him to ask a question. She smiled and asked if she could sit next to him. Dwight wasn't sure at first what to say. He didn't usually have nice looking woman wanting to sit or talk with him. He said it was fine for her to sit down as he looked at her face. She was a real Indian, the type that come from India. She was as pretty as the young Indian woman in his favorite movie, and she had a small gold ring in her right nostril just like the actress.

She had a drink in her hand as she sat down next to Dwight. She didn't waste anytime with small talk and her English was very good when she asked Dwight where he was headed. He said South America and she told him, "I can offer to share gas money with you if I can catch a ride. I don't want to wait until tomorrow for the bus that makes the trip through these mountains and stops at every village along the way, and I don't have enough money for plane fare."

"How did you know I have a car," Dwight asked.

"No gringo in his right mind would be hitchhiking or traveling by bus through the black jungle," she replied.

"Okay, how about we leave at eight in the morning?" Dwight told her.

She was wearing a backpack and standing next to his car in the underground garage, when he walked out and greeted her with a good morning. She smiled and said good morning to him as he opened the passenger door. They made small talk as they headed towards the border with Guatemala. It didn't take very long once they got off the mountain to reach the border and Dwight knew then that the woman would be very helpful at border crossings because she was fluent in Spanish as well as English.

They had been in the car for over three hours when Dwight realized that he didn't know his passengers name. "Layla," she said as she held out her hand for him to shake.

"Dwight," he responded as he took her hand. "So, what do you do for a living Layla?"

"I'm a drug mule," she answered.

"Seriously," Dwight said as he looked her in the eyes.

"I am serious Dwight, and I would never do anything to hurt you. I just need to get to Panama City as soon as possible."

"Do you have something stashed in your body now?"

"Don't be silly Dwight. If I had balloons stuffed up my butt, I wouldn't be hitchhiking across Central America with a man I met last night in a bar, would I?"

Dwight calmed down after Layla explained that everything was perfectly safe and that they would be in Panama City in a little less than twenty-four hours. They took turns driving and Dwight began to enjoy her company. It wasn't any of his concern if she was a drug mule or not and he didn't bring the subject up again.

"So, what are you doing down here in Latin America Dwight?"

He told her about the movie and how he was going to Columbia to find out if the gunfighting really happened, and if so, he wanted to get in on it. She tried not to giggle. Layla had already made up her mind that Dwight may have a screw loose, but he was a nice guy, and she liked his company also.

Two days later Dwight dropped her off at the airport in Panama City after she told him to go to the Tired Texan bar on Calle Ocho and ask for an old American army veteran called Loco. "Tell him you know Layla and he will most likely be able to help you get a good gun."

The bar wasn't hard to find and Loco was behind the bar reading a newspaper when Dwight walked in. Dwight introduced himself to the older man and was grilled for several minutes about how he knew Layla, what Dwight did for a living, and why he was in Panama.

"Sounds like bullshit to me," Loco told him after Dwight described his favorite movie and the man named Zorringer. Loco was a good judge of character and he had no doubt that Dwight was not a federal agent trying to bust him on a gun charge. "I just may know a man who sells quality firearms, but they ain't cheap. Come back in about two hours and I'll see if I can hook you up." Dwight told him that he was looking for a good new or used revolver in .38 or .357 magnum. "Double action or single action," Loco wanted to know. Dwight admitted that he didn't know much or anything about firearms. "Well, from what you've told me so far, sounds like you want a double action piece. Throw in an extra twenty bucks once we find you a shooter and I'll show you a few pointers on shooting and handling a firearm," the older man told him. "And don't worry about getting a gun into Columbia once we find one for you. The captain of the ferry that you have to take to get from here to Colombia is a pal of mine and he can slip the gun through customs for you."

Loco had the gun ready when Dwight returned to the bar. It was a Smith and Wesson .357 magnum with a four-inch bull barrel. The price was high but as Loco said handguns were hard to get in Panama. The gun dealer sent three different types of holsters over to Loco and Dwight selected the cross-draw model. That was what the American gunfighter wore in the movie and Dwight wanted to be like him when he entered the arena. Loco told him that the Smith and Wesson was the best piece for what Dwight was looking for. Dwight didn't complain about the price of the gun, holster and fifty round box of ammo as he counted out eleven hundred dollars for the outfit and Loco's training.

A short squatty Panamanian woman came to the bar and took over the bartending duties while Loco trained Dwight in the backroom. Loco told him that the most important thing to remember about double action revolvers was that they could be fired single action also by cocking the hammer and pulling the trigger. This made the trigger pull lighter and Loco warned him that in the type of firefight that Dwight had told him about you wanted to shoot double action only. Just pull the trigger Loco told him as they went through dry firing without ammo. When Loco felt comfortable that he had shown Dwight enough about the weapon he sent him on his way telling him to be at the ferry dock before seven the next morning.

The ferry ride was a little over sixty miles, but it seemed to take forever because Dwight was anxious to get to Columbia, get into a few gunfights and find Zorringer. He spent most of his time on the ferry sitting in a deck chair scanning his laptop computer looking for gunfights. He didn't find any gunfights, but he was now convinced that his favorite movie was actually a docudrama, and he would need to find a way into this secret society of gunfighters.

The captain told him how to get from the docks to the Pan American highway and he was on his way searching for possible venues for the gunfights. He drove for three hours before he spotted a roadhouse that looked very much like the roadhouse in the movie. He went inside and found the innkeeper, an old woman. He asked for a room and a bottle of beer, but he didn't see any shady looking killers with thousand-yard stares holding onto duffle bags filled with money and shooters, but the day was still young.

The innkeeper spoke enough English to get by, but she did not understand Dwight when he asked if Zorringer's woman came here. She had no idea who Zorringer or his woman was and shook her head when Dwight made a gun out of his finger and pretended to cock the hammer. He realised that she may have thought they he was going to rob her and Dwight apologised quickly, saying he was going to his room now.

Upstairs in the room Dwight strapped on the holster and placed the gun in it. He forgot to check to see if it was loaded like Loco had told him to always do before any type of practice. He looked into the mirror and slowly drew and aimed the gun at the mirror several times. He had placed the gun back in the holster and was getting ready to draw again when a loud truck pulled into the roadhouse parking lot and backfired at the same time that Dwight was pulling the gun from the holster.

He had made a serious mistake and cocked the hammer before the gun left the holster. He had never cocked the gun before when drawing it and may have been confused when he accidentally pulled the trigger causing the shooter to go off sending a red-hot round into his inner thigh splitting the femoral artery of the left leg. The housekeeper heard the shot and Dwight as he screamed in pain. She ran upstairs and found the strange man lying on the floor in a pool of blood that was forming fast.

"Dios Mio," she screamed as she tugged at the gun belt and pulled his jeans down to his ankles. She didn't have any first aid training but had done enough first aid on her ten children to know that he needed a tourniquet, and he needed one fast. She tightened the belt above the wound and ran back downstairs to call the fire department on the house phone. Dwight was dead before she got back to his room.



The Dust Moth

By Travis Flatt

The struggle of the protagonist to win despite the odds

"Looking good in that hat," I tell myself in the mirror, "really makes those pimples pop." The hat's green, so my face looks like Christmas.

My work desk rests against a mirrored wall, so I sit shoulder to shoulder with myself. I toss the vermillion beret in the trash. I bought it at the vintage clothes store across the street. My face was smooth at the time. It looked cute then, suited this Puck monologue I've been bombing at Speech Team tournaments.

Tonight, is going to be a mess. I can defeat the zits, a calmer me decides, with makeup, but I've goofed around so long with my hat, and face, I forgot to take my noontime pills. The bookstore's been open since nine, and not a single customer. Along with my handful of seizure meds, I swig watery coffee from the cafe next door and bite a banana nut muffin. When I was little, my dad told me I should always eat solid food with pills, otherwise, a tablet might lodge in my oesophagus and melt a hole. Now, I can't take pills without eating, a psychosomatic thing. It's sleeting outside - bet no one comes in all day. I put the 'Be Right Back!' sign on the door, draw the blinds, and dim the lights. I'm here alone and have free reign to do whatever. Our owner spends most of his time in New York, Chicago, or L.A.

Anyone who ever comes in compliments the smell. They say it's relaxing, etc. Well, it smells like dust from decaying books. So do I when I go home.

In the dusty dark, I practice my monologue. As the trickster fairy, Puck, I dart around and use my hands too much, which is a note I keep getting on scorecards. Tonight, is my first audition for Dr. Carter at Georgia Tech. I start next fall. The show's *Much Ado About Nothing*. So, I figure, stick with a classical piece? Puck? I'm unsure if he (Dr. Carter) knows about the seizures. He probably does. Everyone at the high school went on about what happened at the speech team tournament on social media: "#prayforkay"

I barely remember it. That was the first seizure. I collapsed in a Dekalb Arts classroom presenting "The Myth of Starter

Pets," a trash speech I'd written, and woke up at Piedmont Hospital. Six months later, I made it through the spring musical, Cinderella, without getting sick, and I was on stage the whole time. Almost the whole time. The chorus teacher lost his mind and cast me as Cinderella. I was so doped up that I barely remember it.

I practice Puck twice more and glue my hands to my hips, stiff and robotic. The words just plunk out of my mouth. I'm too nervous to finish my muffin. Forget eating lunch. I flip the sign back around. Three customers, a clutch of elderly women, come in at two, walk through the store for twenty minutes, and leave without buying anything. My shift ends at five. I'm replaced by Bryan, the owner's electrician, and accountant (my age), and now I'm picked up by my dad, who asks if I want to go home for an hour or straight to campus to wait. I figure it's a good chance to check out the Fine Arts building's bathroom during a serious session of nervous diarrhea. My real motive, actually, is to hunt down a Coke machine. I'm not supposed to drink caffeine; it's a seizure trigger. But a side effect of all my meds is drowsiness. I drink it anyway. I hate being tired all the time. I want to be alert, energetic, and primed for this audition. But not manic. It's a balance. Dad drops me off, wishes me luck. I make him take that back and tell me to "break a leg."

Looking for the Coke machine, I wander the first floor. No luck, but I come across a custodian. He's an older guy-older than my dad, but I have no idea how old-and one of his arms is bent across his stomach, limp. Maybe he had a stroke? His voice is slightly slurred, and he has a thick Bronx or Brooklyn accent. He tells me there's a machine in the basement. I thank him. He says his name's Tom and to "break a leg." He winks, and we exchange a smile. It's not a creepy wink; he's nice.

The Coke machine is dusty and spooky. It's actually a Pepsi machine, but whatever. I buy a diet Mellow Yellow, which has 1000% more caffeine. When I get back to the theatre, it's filling up. The stage manager is a guy I've seen in community theatre plays, a professor or assistant professor named Lee. I find the green room, which is big and full of bookshelves stuffed with scripts. So many people-mostly college students-are here that most of us are standing. I don't talk. When Lee comes back to call in the first round of auditionees, I'm first. To audition, I'm supposed to walk up through the aisle and onto the stage. My knees are shaky. It's a black box theater, and I've been here once last year. We came to see Little Shop of Horrors, Dad and I. Walking up the stairs onto the stage, I stumble bigger than hell. Dr. Carter sees, and we laugh. He's a big, red-haired guy with a booming voice. "Kaylee! How are you?" I think he's from up north, like Tom. "Fine," I say. "Good. How are you?" My voice sounds so tiny on this stage. Our high school's stage is five times bigger, but I can fill it up. "Great," he says, looking at my form. He mutters that he loved Cinderella. "So, what have you got for us today?" "Us" is him, obviously, and I think he's being ironic, speaking in that histrionic royal we like that. He has to see how I'm shaking. "A Midsummer Night's Dream," I say. "Great-I love that show. I was thinking of doing it next year-"

Then the floor drops out from under me, about one hundred feet below my feet, and I'm looking down at it from glass. That's the seizure me. The real me is standing on black wood. I'm simultaneously aware of both. I'm dizzy. Not swoon dizzy, but just "the room is spinning" dizzy. This is my aura. This is how it starts.

I can fight through this or ask for a moment, but if I do that, he'll know. Fight through it. When I perform, I can't hear myself speak; I just focus on Dr. Carter's enormous face as he smiles and nods. Meanwhile, my pimply face tingles. If it wasn't for thousands of milligrams of medication, I'd be writhing on the floor. When it's over-and I could have just given the "Pledge of Allegiance" for all I know-Dr. Carter smiles a big, phony smile. I thank him and leave the stage, desperate to leave the room. He's saying something I'll process later-that he's seen all he needed-and I use a hand along the top of the auditorium chair tops as I march down the aisle. In the green room, Tom sits on a couch with a form. He waves, but I push straight to the "exit" door and into the cold night air.

n bed, I can't sleep. Do I want a role in the play? If I'm cast now, sooner or later, in this show or another, my luck will run out. What happened tonight will happen in front of a paying audience, and the theater might have to cancel the show and refund the tickets. Should I call Dr. Carter and revoke my audition? I spend a terrible week failing tests, arguing with my dad. On Friday, I learn through Facebook that I'm cast as Moth, an ensemble fairy, one of the smallest parts in the play-probably the smallest. Despite everything, I tear up-like, involuntarily-because, after all, it's my first college show.

I discover Tom, the custodian, is in the cast. My first college theatre friend. My high school friends are all going to Emory or UGA. Tom's in the ensemble, a fellow fairy named Peablossom. You know what? He seems like someone who'd know what to do about this. He's probably been through way worse. I don't want to insult or hurt his feelings, but I think I'll ask him next Sunday at read through. I send him a Facebook friend request; he's friends with Lee, Dr. Carter, and most of the cast, so I guess that's okay. I think I'm happy. I think I'm crying because I'm happy. Up in my room, I run through my Puck monologue to take my mind off things. Then I look up Moth's lines—there are only two—and I memorize them.

Now I'm already off-book, like a pro.



Windsor Manor

By Snigdha Agrawal

When a homeless old man runs into the resident of Windsor Manor

It was the last house on the block. Green shuttered windows with few broken slats, made it stand out from the rest of the houses of more contemporary architecture. Realtors had failed to secure a buyer. Most went back with one or the other complaint...

"Kitchen too small!"

"Sanitary ware too old!"

"Furniture old fashioned!"

"Attic infested with bats!"

A homeless old man had taken the liberty of creeping in unseen from a broken window. At last, he would be safe from the blizzards and the winter cold, so, he thought. Pulling down the dust sheets from the sofa, he makes a bed on the floor and settles down to sleep after a meagre meal of pizza pieces picked up from a trash bin. Curled on the floor, the old man falls asleep, his face bathed in the moonlight, streaming in from the gap in the window.

Soon he wakes up flinging his hands around fighting off the roaches crawling all over his face and exposed parts of his body. Irritated he sits upright. His senses alert, to his dismay, he finds he has company. At the far-right corner of the living room, he sees a lady in a jumpsuit, hoodie pulled over her head, seated on a pouffe stool, engrossed in knitting, what looks like a half-complete sweater. Balls of wool lie unspooled on the floor. Humming under her breath, eyes downcast, she pays no attention to him.

Gosh! Alarm bells ring in his mind. Will he be turned out by the lady and reported to the police on charges of trespassing into the private property?

"Please...please...don't file a report' the old man pleads. Failing to elicit a response, he crawls on all four towards her. She doesn't raise her head, nor speak a word. Tough one indeed!

Anyway, how was she going to call up the authorities without a mobile or landline? A comforting thought. Maybe, she was also a trespasser like himself. Retracing his steps back to his floor bed, he once again attempts to sleep. This time sleep does not elude him, never mind the roaches. He would deal with the lady in the morning. Perhaps he could coerce her to agree to a secret pact, of marking out their territorial rights in Winsor Manor, the last house on the street.

Gripped with hunger pangs, the old man wakes up, planning to offer his co-conspirator, a portion of the breakfast he gets free from the Deli nearby. As usual, the Manager greets him and hands over a brown paper packet and coffee in a Styrofoam cup with a lid. "May I request a second cup, Sir? Another homeless lady is staying with me." Mr Stephen gives a quizzical look, handing over two cups.

Taking cover of the grey morning, with dawn deciding to sleep in, the old man hobbles back to Winsor Manor to share the charitable offer. Always good to extend charity to another like him. With his leg, he pushes the door which groans in protest. "Ma'am I bought us breakfast.". Where was the hooded knitting lady? He goes from room to room, searching for her. Comes up with zilch. Just like that, she had disappeared into thin air. Or, had she packed up and left for the day?

Finishing his breakfast, he saunters outside, walking along the back alleys, rummaging through trash cans for food leftovers, for his lunch and dinner. Luck is in his favour. He finds a loaf of bread still in its wrapping. Digging deeper, he discovers dented cans of baked beans and sardine tins. Wow! Enough to last him and the knitting lady for a week.

As day melts into night, the old man sneaks back into Winsor Manor, happy as a lark, with a song on his lips. The prospect of having company for dinner excites him. He waits well past midnight, but she doesn't turn up. Feeling let down, he drifts off to sleep. Around 2 am, the musical sound of the knitting needles awakens him. There she is, calm and composed speed knitting. "Hey...where were you? If you don't like me, I'll not bother you". This time, the hoodie slips off and what he witnesses makes him scream and dart into the cold night. A face with deep pockets where the eyes should have been, two holes for nostrils, and a skeletal grin.

How was he to know that Winsor Manor was a haunted house? Asking around he learns of Lady Windsor committing suicide after being informed of her husband's demise in World War II. She was often seen, sitting in her living room, knitting him a victory sweater, left incomplete. Many residents on the block, mostly those returning home after the grave hour shift, had seen this apparition, recounted by the homeless old man.



Flash Fiction: A Trilogy

By Yuan Changming

Three tiny tales



Initial Contact

The only reason Ming had travelled across the whole Pacific Ocean from Vancouver to Lotus Village was, hopefully, to see Chiung for the first and last time after he left his native place more than half a century ago.

However, upon arrival, he found himself a total stranger. No villager could recognize him or tell him anything about those he used to hang around with after school. The familiar river marking the village boundary had dried up completely. From a distant relative, he learned that Chiung had married someone from a neighboring town and brought up a couple of children before she died of some disease in her forties. Other than these few vague facts, nobody could really remember

who she was or what she had done, but Ming believed that there must have been many heart-wrenching cries over her loss, though none of them had anything to do with him. Definitely not. For he had died even before her, on a sleepless autumn night, when he quietly buried his young heart under the village's tallest banyan tree before his relocation. Now the whole village had taken on a new look and the tree was long gone, their muted laughs traceable only between the rings of the stump, which were still visible like old scars on a newly lifted face.

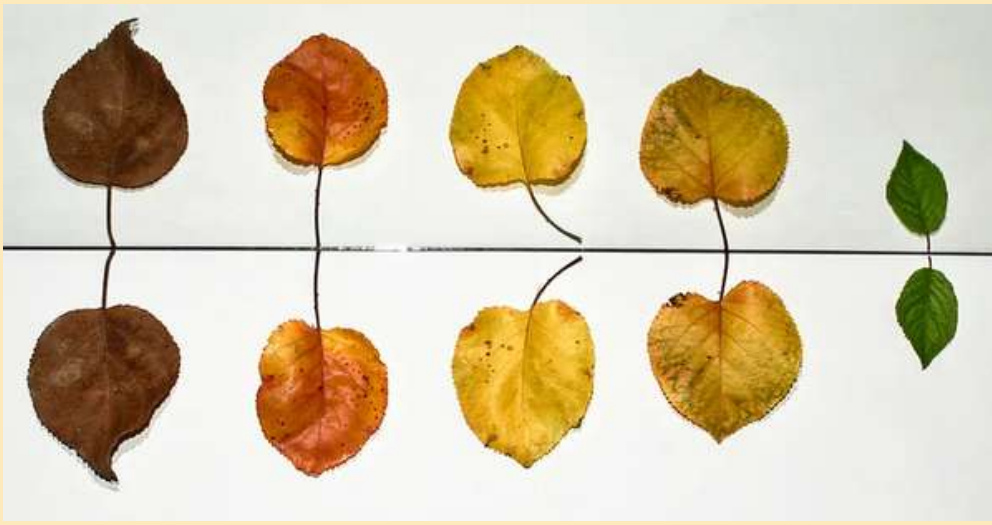
Strictly speaking, Chiung was not his first love, nor could he recall exactly how it all began and ended, but she was the first girl who had come into physical contact with him in his lifetime. It was probably in the early summer of 1971. Just a couple of months earlier, he'd had his initial experience of spermatorrhea. Thinking that he'd unknowingly wetted his bed like a toddler, he became so deeply ashamed of himself that he decided to keep this incident a dark secret. Since no one had taught him anything about puberty, his sexual ignorance was certainly forgivable, though he did begin to enjoy looking at pretty girls like Chiung, a classmate whose family lived in the same part of the village. Slim, fair-skinned, with a conspicuous tear birthmark on her left cheek, about two years older and half a head taller than himself, she was the best-looking girl in his school.

Despite their close contact, he never asked her why she liked him. Probably because, living with his relatives as a foster child, he was different from all other village boys. Probably because he was silly in a good-natured way; for instance, when their Chinese teacher ridiculed him for being the lousiest composition writer in the class, he laughed together with all others as if the teacher had been talking about someone else. Probably because he had somehow received more attention from teachers than he should otherwise have deserved: for instance, within a month after they began to attend junior high school, he was hand-picked by the music teacher to play an important role in the school theatre. On several occasions, he did want to ask her how they two had "come together," but to honor her quiet character, he refrained from raising this question.

No matter what the reason, each time he felt like meeting her in person, he would loudly sing a particular line from the drama in the classroom to signal his request "Be there or be square." As previously agreed, she would go and wait on the riverbank until he joined her for the twilight tryst. Then he would snuggle in her arms like a small puppy for as long as they both wanted. In the meantime, they would say nothing, let alone do anything more than hold each other tightly. The most unforgettable act they performed together was to watch stars appearing in the sky as it was getting darker minute by minute. When there were thick clouds hanging above their heads, they would just listen to the reeds swinging in the wind, as if to keep any trespasser away from them. Chiung may have had some sexual whims, but she never yielded to them, while it never crossed his mind to touch her face or any other part of her body with his hands. He could have done whatever he wanted to, including kissing her on the lips or even fucking her in wildness, but just as his young body was not ready for sex yet, his heart still remained as un-polluted as the water in the Lotus River. What he yearned for most back then was some tangible tenderness from a female he really liked, something which he found not only physically attractive, but spiritually soothing.

One late mid-summer evening, he and Chiung spent more time than usual sitting on a sandy ridge in front of a long stretch of flowering reeds. For the first twenty minutes or so, they just kept listening to the songs of frogs and cicadas. With her long arms embracing him tightly from behind, he could smell her unique girlishness as he imagined himself taking a bath in her water-like femininity. For a moment, he heard her breathing heavily and even felt her heart beating against his naked back, which made him wonder if she was going to swoop on him like a big oestrus female cat. This situation reminded him how, when he visited one of his aunts in the previous summer, her female cat clutched at his left thigh, and would tighten its claw whenever he attempted the slightest movement. To prevent it from hurting him more, he had to play dead for the whole night until it loosened its grasp at daybreak.

A few days later, Ming had to leave the village to join his parents in New Rivermouth, the biggest town in the county. Since that sudden move, he's never seen Chiung again, but always remembered her, long after the entire world had forgotten her.



Onset

"What's your earliest memory?" asked Ming.

"Why are you asking me this?" Hua said.

"Because it marks the beginning of your life as a human."

"You're saying my pre-memory life is not a human one at all?"

"Not in the sense that you're a self-conscious individual."

"Well, you may have a point there.... As far as I can recall, it was in a quite busy street, where I was somehow lost, but I managed to cross it on my own, just by following other people, before my dad found me."

"When and where was that exactly?"

"In Wuchang's Horseviewing Square, when I was almost three. My father later told me that's the first time he took me for a visit to my grandpa."

"No wonder you're lost and re-found by me, at least in love."

"You mean my earliest memory set a pattern for my life?"

"Yeah, as I see it, whatever mental image is embedded in our earliest memory functions like a mythic seed, which would grow, bloom and bear fruit in a cyclic fashion."

"What's your first memory then?"

For Ming, this was a million-dollar question. While he felt amazed at the fact that his soulmate had such an early and clear memory about her toddling experiences, he could recall little about his life before he was five. He had discussed the matter with his parents quite a few times, but neither was sure about the dates concerning the several situations stored in the closet of his mind.

One earliest memory was about him plodding along behind his mother, with a silver wooden sword hung on his waist, on a street in New Rivermouth on a rainy afternoon. In another mental image he was playing a game with a group of children all living in the same residential area of the County's Finance Department. It was a warm and moony evening. Every participant pretended to be a parent. To imitate older children, he and the youngest girl of Uncle Fu, the department head, reached into each other's crotches and made a stir there with their hands. A third episode took place when he was chased around by a boy a couple of years older with a disabled hand. Just as he tried to cross the threshold, Ming stumbled and hit his head against a brick.

Most vivid was his memory about a marble he owned. To him, the transparent ball with something green in its heart looked particularly fascinating because it was like a tender spout encapsulated within a magic glass kaleidoscope. On a cloudy morning, he went to the backyard, dug a little hole with his fingers and put the marble into it, wishing it would grow into something really big. However, each time he checked the place eagerly, he was disappointed to note that the marble had showed no growth of any kind.

"Which one was exactly your earliest memory?" asked Hua.

"I can never tell. The only thing I knew was, these were my earliest memories before my parents sent me to Lotus Village as a foster child.

"You should try to figure it out with your mother's help while she's still alive, or before she loses her memories."

"That's one of the reasons I've come to visit her now in such a hurry."

Once his earliest memory was confirmed, he would gain a better and deeper understanding of his life. To him, a different mental image represented a different paradigm that had somehow manifested itself repeatedly, each time in a different way, in the course of his life. For instance, the chase-picture might well be taken as a symbolic precursor to his grown-up life full of hard pursuits and serious injuries. Similarly, his memory about the pretending game could perhaps help him to understand his relationships with women.

"What if your first memory was about the marble?"

"That would account for why imagination and dream about growth have played such an important part in my existence. Just as my physical life has been a long process of chasing and getting hurt, my spiritual life is full of wishful thinking and disappointment."

"Famous last words," said Hua.

"Maybe," Ming replied, "but that's my way to interpret my life experience, to know myself."

"If your theory is valid, then I'm fated to constantly cross a street, a helpless situation, all by myself."

"Isn't that the case? You are a brave and fortunate girl, in love, as in life."

(Author's note: This story is inspired by Helena Qi Hong (祁红)."



Cat Karma

"Definitely I must have a mystic connection with cats," Ming concluded. Otherwise, he could never understand why he'd nurtured such a strong ambivalence about the creature. On the one hand, he liked a cat's handsome face, its quiet character, its soft and light movements as well as its grooming habit, but on the other hand, he seemed to have an innate fear of cats, though he was not born in the year, or with the psychology, of the rat, which dare not play unless the cat's away.

It was during the summer holidays of 1969 when he'd just finished elementary school. He was visiting his step-aunt living in a faraway village. For a whole week, the weather was sizzling hot even in the evening. To get some sleep, he lay down on a door board laid flat in the front yard of her house, almost totally naked, hoping to get a bit of coolness of the night.

He was dreaming about playing in the bamboo grove when he felt a sudden sharp pain. Between wake and sleep, he perceived a cat clutching at his left thigh. He tried to get rid of it, but each time he attempted the slightest movement, he felt the cat tightening its grasp. After many trials and failures, he decided to give up, waiting passively for the cat to loosen its grip of its own accord. During this endless process, he was nervous and stressful, overwhelmed with a sense of agony, but he had to endure the torture inflicted on him by the cat. He didn't know why the creature had picked him and what it wanted from him, nor could he tell later for sure if this incident was just a nightmare or a true experience, but that was the time when he began to avoid the creature like an evil spirit.

Later on, he heard people say that one of the most expensive dishes in traditional Cantonese cuisine was called 'Dragon and Tiger Fight,' a course prepared with the meat of a cat and that of a snake as the two major ingredients. In folk culture, the cat represented the tiger, while the snake stood for the dragon. "So, a cat can be cooked as a meat dish," he felt amazed at the idea.

As if karma would have it, he had another close contact with the creature when he started to attend senior high school. It was during a field trip to a hilly village, where Ming and his classmates were dispatched to "learn farming" according to Chairman Mao's teachings. On a dark evening, his teacher caught a wild cat somewhere and challenged all the boys to act like Wu Song, the nationally popular hero portrayed in the famous classic novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*, who killed a tiger with his bare hands. Partly to strengthen his guts and partly to seek revenge for the hurt he received; Ming offered to do the bloody job. With a big knife in his hand, his eyes tightly closed, he held his breath and chopped the cat's head off. After giving him a whole pile of compliments, the teacher taught him to skin it and then cooked its meat with a lot of turnip slices. "This way, the soup and meat wouldn't taste sour," he told the boys. "But don't eat the turnips, for they would have an awful taste after absorbing all the bad flavor."

However, Ming did not like the dish at all. The meat was very special, as it contained no fat but countless thin layers of muscle tissues. Imagining how the headless cat might have looked, he couldn't help feeling like throwing up. Worse still, he just couldn't erase the memory of this experience though he longed to, especially after he learned that it's bad luck to kill such "spirited" creatures as cats, snakes and turtles.

As he grew older, he learned to do good deeds like Liaofan, one of his most famous ancient ancestors who kept improving his fortune by performing a kind act on a daily basis. In following his example, Ming hoped he could also attain an equilibrium between yin and yang or maintain a balance within his life. He knew that he must do something about his murder of an innocent creature, or else he was fated to be punished in one way another, sooner or later.

However, he was never sure if he could do enough to atone for his evil, but as he realized now, the three women he had loved with his heart and soul in his life, namely, Hua, his first crush and lifelong soulmate, Yiming, his first date who caused him almost to commit suicide, and Helen, his beloved wife, each looked like a cat in a different way.

NON FICTION



Personal Essay

Morning Walk

John Cantwell

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Essay

Then You'll know what I know

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Musings

Making 'up'

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Morning Walk

By John Cantwell

Out on a morning walk, the author ponders the past and muses about what the future will bring.

He turned and looked at the small Jack Russell terrier making its slow way along the overgrown towpath, its panting face pointing towards him. Come on lad, he smiled.

The dog stopped now and again to sniff the grassy embankment while myriads of insects danced above its head, sidling up to him as they plodded on with their morning walk. Nobody was about the dock or the uneven pathway except for the long cylindrical tail of a small rodent that caught his eye scurrying for cover among the gnarled roots and hidden flowers of an old fallen tree stump. Oblivious to the children's story of Hansel and Gretel who left a trail of breadcrumbs on the grass so that they could find their way back home, he tried to remove the excrement from the sole of his shoe on the elevated root of a tree. To his rear, meanwhile, the small terrier paused for a quick sniff of the mint scented bags worth watching for.

Ought to pick up their bits and pieces instead of leaving them behind for someone to step on, he grumbled. How many times had he walked this path? It was only now that he really began to think. He stopped and squinted up at the branches of an old tree, where a small round bird with a bright orange-red breast cocked its short tail and made a ticking sound, repeating it like an old clock resting on a mantelpiece.

A visiting redbreast, he said musing on the small bird. Without warning, he stood with arms akimbo and frowned at it. Spideoige. brù-dhearg. He toned. Ha, ha, ní bhfaighidh tú aon úll thuas ansin a chara [1]. No indeed.

He stretched out his arm and patted the rough bark of the willow tree. Come to think of it, I knew a lady who used to stop hereabouts to hug a particular tree. He took another look at the large trunk and the small bird warbling in its bare branches. This might be the very one, he said. I used to meet her coming the other way, walking with a large black dog, naturally friendly, who'd suddenly disappear up and down the embankment retrieving empty bottles, half of them full of canal water, and depositing a pile on the grassy towpath.

A warm friendly breeze swept across his weather-beaten old face which he greeted with a smile. I remember she wore a Sombrero hat and dressed flamboyantly in a gossamer fabric that clung to her thin body. A strange combination given she once considered becoming a nun, he chuckled.

The soft pitter-patter of the rain on the leaves made him look up and reflect on the grey clouds scudding across the open sky. A dripping June sets all in tune, he murmured without hurrying. At the same time the small terrier surrounding itself with brightly coloured butterflies, continued to sniff the wild flowers still growing in profusion along the canal bank. He slowed to a halt and contemplated a broken wave give rise to a trail of air bubbles. Waiting he watched like a hawk for the dark seabird to make an appearance its sloping forehead and wedge shaped profile coming to the surface like a periscope, while a long body and neck swam below in the blue green water. A sleek fish mirroring the sun's light wriggled in its hooked bill and like a performer who performs the act of sword swallowing, passed through the beak and down through the oesophagus to the stomach in a flash. His sharp eyes searched the opposite side of the woody bank while a light wind ruffled the water's edge. All the same, he had to look again to see the grey Heron in hiding among the tall saplings and clusters of white flowers, waiting patiently for a fish to swim within easy reach of its dagger-like bill.

Tricks of the trade, he mumbled his eyes transfixed by the Heron's motionless stance and black wispy crest. All at once, there was a slight movement beneath the surface of the muddy water. Breaking from its graceful pose it picked its way forward, slowly but surely, and speared the unsuspecting fish at lightning speed. A clap of wings sounded as the grey bird, its neck and underparts a creamy white, flew less than a metre high into the air before landing gracefully on the opposite side of the rough slope. The old man joined his hands in delight, the white stubble lining the creases of his smiling face.

What is life but a blink of an eye, now you see it now you don't, he said and looking down at the small terrier standing quietly by his side, fished for a half crumbled biscuit in his coat pocket.

Walking a few paces, he turned and stared at a variety of sedges and grasses growing along the steep embankment, sloping down to the changing water. This is where on that snowy January morning you very nearly were done for, he said. If I hadn't turned back, slow though that may have been, it would have been curtains for you my lad. Sliding down without a second thought, short of falling into the water and pulling you up by your harness. He lifted his cap and scratched the back of his head the thought awakening strong feelings in him of what if?

Sixteen years later, the memory lingers. You would have done well to learn how to bark, he said. Moving on, he heard a cat meowing piteously across from him on the other side of the canal bank. Coming to a stop, he continued to listen, while his eyes lingered in the hedgerow and the reed fringe at the water's edge. All of a sudden, the row of shrubs and small trees began to violently shake for a few seconds and become quite still. The cat gave one more piteous cry and was silent.

It's common for foxes and badgers to hunt along the canal bank, he mumbled dismissing the disturbing experience without a second thought. Ambling along the canal bank, he plucked a shiny gold-coloured flower growing beside the tarred track. It's a funny old world, he said examining every facet of the flower. You usually find this type in soggy ground. He held the stout hollow stem between forefinger and thumb while admiring the clusters of yellow flowers and deep green kidney shaped, fleshy leaves which he knew increased in size after the plant has flowered. You can drive out Nature with a pitchfork, but she keeps on coming back, he smiled proudly pinning the yellow flower to his lapel.

Leaving behind the brightly coloured towpath and the loud hum of bumblebees they climbed the concrete stairs leading to the footpath. But the small terrier unable to stretch its stiff legs tumbled back down the steps. The dog rolled like a ball across the towpath and into the grassy verge where it remained among the pink red and white spikes feeling sorry for itself. Offering a few words of comfort, he cradled the small terrier in his arms and continued slowly to the top of the stairs. Crossing over the humpback bridge, he glanced at the white Water-Lily opened fully in the bright sunshine its leaves and flower floating on the surface of the black green water.

[1] Ha, ha, you'll find no apples up there my friend.



Then You'll know what I know

By Dan Hardison

For an artist or musician, the 'feel' of the art or his music is of paramount importance, muses the author.

We all know that an artist sees the world around us in a slightly different way, something Leonardo da Vinci described as "knowing how" to see. But how do you teach or even explain this way of seeing to others? This is something all art instructors must try to convey to their students.

One can possess great technical skills to create art, but still fail to capture a scene or a thought. The artist must learn to go beyond the technical aspect of creating art and develop a "feel" for creating art. The same can be said for music. There is more to being a musician or singer than just playing the notes or singing the words – one must also know how to bring "feeling" to the music.

There are many things in life that we must learn to do, but being able to perform the technical aspect of the task does not guarantee that we will be good at it or even enjoy doing it. Many people enjoy fishing because they find it relaxing. However, if you have ever tried casting, you know that it is not a simple task. It is one that requires practice to develop a "feel" for it. And if you learned to drive a manual shift car, you know that it is more than just a matter of knowing how, but also developing a "feel" for shifting the gears.

So, what is this "feel" for doing something? It is the mental state at which a person no longer consciously thinks about a task, but merely does it. Moreover, is this not true about everything we do as we go about our daily lives? What often seems a difficult task can be accomplished with a bit of practice and patience – and developing a "feel" for it. Our lives today have become so hectic, that we seem to be losing our ability for concentration, for contemplation, for developing a "feel" for how things are done.

When Scottish singer/songwriter Dougie MacLean wrote of his experience trying to learn to use a scythe – the age-old tool with a long handle and a curved blade for cutting grass and grain by hand – he captured his father's instructions with these words:

*O this is not a thing to learn inside a day
Stand closely by me and I'll try to show the way
You've got to hold it right
feel the distance to the ground
Move with a touch so light
until it's rhythm you have found
Then you'll know what I know*



Making 'Up'

By Dr. Suchita Krishnaprasad

Why do women use make-up, wonders the author. Is it for self-importance or self-acceptance?

Of late I have been thinking about this....

Why do women use different colours on their face and why do we call it 'make up'? Making up for what and why....

This question seems to be making the rounds of my mind these days.

Why do we want to show our lips, for example, in a different colour? We did learn to display critical parts of a diagram in different colours as kids, of course! So there must be some interest in applying different coloured powders to the cheeks and various other parts of a face which is less than 10% of our body! And what could that be.. I wonder these days..

Is it for self-importance or self-acceptance?

Either way, we have worked out and established detailed norms for the decoration of the physical form of a woman from toes to the eyelids, to the strands of her hair, to the tips of her fingernails. A woman must therefore store and maintain a treasure trove of a suitable range of accessories and colours to present herself in a different more embellished avatar, at different occasions.

Be it those dangling from the ear, fashioned after chandeliers or chokers that literally stand at a choking distance from the neck, or anklets that seem to shackle her with their weight or face paint that may cause allergies, a woman must carry them and carry them with ease and grace!

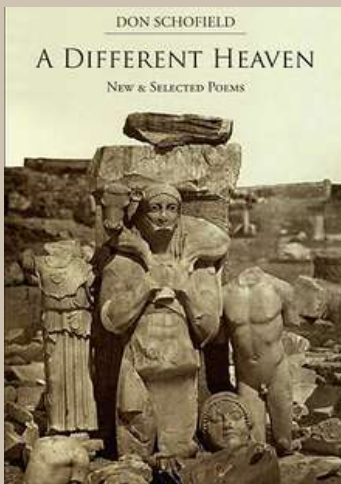
All this unnecessary effort when we know that it's the eyes that speak not the lips.

And that it's the smile that travels from an open heart through the cheeks to the eyes that one really longs for.

No one can possibly 'make up' these!

REVIEWS

Book Review



A Different heaven By Don Schofield

A review by Dr Santosh Bakaya

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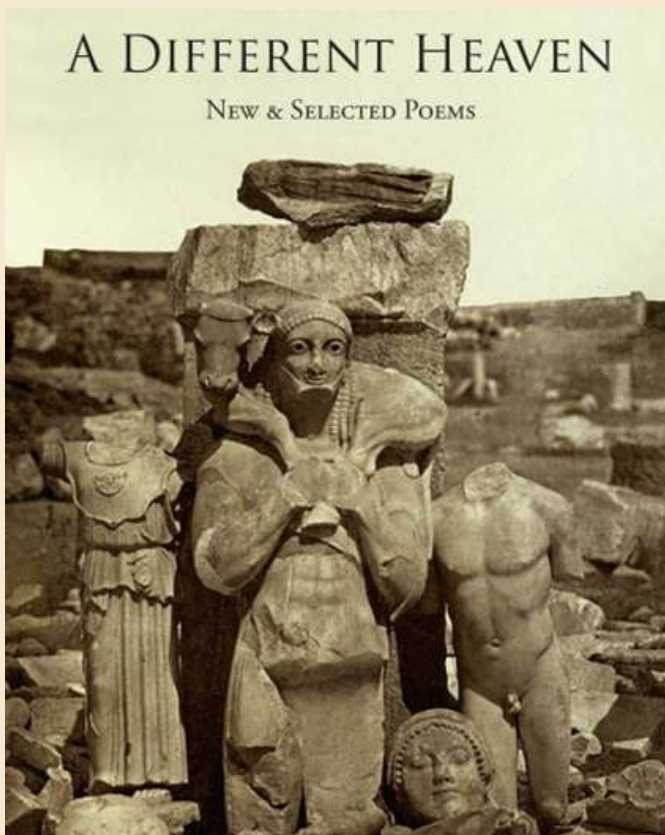
Film Review



Mimi: An amalgamation of emotions

A Review by Ramandeep Mahal

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A Different Heaven: New and Selected Poems

Don Schofield

Publisher: Dos Madies, 2023

A review by Santosh Bakaya

A Different Heaven is a compilation of the poet's handpicked poems, from his five previous collections [three full length books and two chapbooks]; *Of Dust* (1991), *Approximately Paradise* (2002), *Before Kodachrome* (2012), *In Lands Imagination favors* (2014) and *The Flow of Words*. There are also some recent poems and translations from Modern Greek that have influenced him.

The poetic grandeur of *Athens Snow*, the first poem, in the first section *New Poems*, transported me to the sound of falling snow in my homeland, Kashmir, India.

*only the whisper of snow swirling in a March wind, ...
...It's easy to lie here and remember in another country,
another time, nuns telling us in school how each flake is unique [pp 1- 3]*

In *Lost in Place*, I felt his existential doubts-waves caressing his feet, cicadas brilliantly trilling, chest rising and falling, neighbour tossing 'lamb onto the back of his battered pickup as they cry, I aam, I aam.' He concludes: 'surely we all exist. The lambs cry out, I aam, I aam.'

In *Nepal*, we find him on a dirt path with his guide, in a clearing, gazing at 'a tiger eating what remained of a baby water buffalo tied to a stake'.

*we only caught the end as she tossed a thigh-
bone high in the air, rolled in blood and purred as she
licked the remaining flesh from her fur." Blinds [pp 10-11]*

Holiday [p 17], made me think how a 'problem' can mean different things for different folks. How can gin- tonic spilled on

expensive attire, imply a 'problem' for a beggar with outstretched hands?

Reaching

*for her purse, she spilled her gin-tonic
on her blouse, her skirt,
her brand new Il Gancio
leather jacket...
while that beggar
leaned in, palm outstretched—
Can't you see we have a problem! I snapped.
No, he replied, in perfect English,
That's not a problem.*

The poem about *Hart Island*, [p 18] [the domain of the dispossessed, where the poorest and most marginalized citizens are laid to rest..."—New York Times, April 29, 2020] left me tearful and I recalled videos, showing a 90 percent increase in mass burials during Covid.

*great earth-movers
cover the mass graves,
their only mourners
oily wavelets
lapping the shore
and one voiceless angel
who keeps circling this small,
treeless island
sinking under the weight
of a million unwanted souls,
her mercy, now and forever,
unspoken.*

The heart- wrenching poem, *Should We Go To Mars?* [p 19] *Protest sign, Idomeni refugee camp, Northern Greece*] sent shivers up my spine.

*We hang our wet clothes
along the chain-link fences you built,
stand in line to shower, to eat,
in line again to charge our phones and calm
each other down, no news from home.
...Soon, water gone,
motor dead, boat sinking, life-jackets worthless,
you'll see how men, women and children hold on.
Or not.*

After the Firestorms [pp 32-43]-this long, multi- nuanced poem, tugged at my heart- strings. Amidst the despair in the aftermath of the firestorms, we glimpse the poet's love for his elder brother shining - a brother, once good looking and sturdy. *Now-hobbling through the kitchen with his walker, ...arguing with his wife:*

*my good-looking,
fast-living big brother, slicked-back hair and bell-bottoms,
swaggering down Virginia Street any hour,*

day or night, playing the penny-slots near the sidewalk,

*I've been thinking about his laughter a lot these days
as I watch him maneuver his walker,
grunting and moaning,
.....to feel again my brother's despair, his wife's and son's.
I want to carry them all in my heart,
since I know there's no way back to a life once lived.*

In the section *Of Dust*, we come across, *Hagar in the Wilderness, From The Genesis [p 53], Joseph, [P 56- 57] Lazarus in Love [p 58- 59] , Howling Man and His Young: From an Eskimo sculpture [p 60- 61]*
*Howling Man no longer roams frozen fields,
at night no longer measures mouth
against black expanse, for Howling Man
no longer has mouth, teeth, snout.*

In *Approximately Paradise*, the poet is 'Teaching High School in Greece'; and we see

*walking through the National Museum,
Emily and Walt holding hands,
leaning close to Persephone,
her smile simple and clear [p 66]*
We meet Aristotle and Socrates in *The Physics of Parting [pp 72- 73]*
*Aristotle taught wet and dry are absolute opposites,
Socrates, who kept standing and sitting those last nights in his cell,
curious about his presence there.*

Angel, [P 80- 81] is after a photograph by Sir Don McCullin, one of the greatest photographers of the world, known for his visceral war photography. The compassionate clarity defining his photographs, is also reflected in this poem.

*Six boys just turning the corner,
one playing the oud, one firing
his Kalashnikov, one twirling his scarf,*
I keeled under the poetic assault of the tender poem- a boy mourning his father's death- *Driving Thessaly [p112 - 113]*
He botched that death
.....
*let his hands dangle from the bed
like rotting pears.*
*I wrote of his dying, again and again,
how I could touch the full length of his absence,*
.....

At the dormitory, the boys were taught about Good posture- hands folded, mouths closed, backs straight;

*one day, the poet
'stole everyone's pencils
during recess,
how was I to know
stealing was worse than poor posture?*
.....

.....

then retreated to the fields to soothe my aching palms

.....struggling over the fluting of rotting leaves

toward a different heaven [Good posture, p 135]

And a dying mother's wish "Just ashes scattered in the place you were born". [Maybe CA PP 137- 139]

In *Lands Imagination Favors*, the poet, ardently wishes to :

build a house just like the man

across the bay who whistles as he pulls

bricks from the back of his donkey, a house

of words or shards of words from Homer's time.

In the modern language I struggle with,

his words are lost, or broken, a few still whole. [With Homer's Words, P 143]

In the visually rich, *Traveling Greece*, we travel to Santorini, Ithaca, the chapels of Kastoria, see frescoes with eyes gouged out, find him wondering whether he had ever gone to Patras, boarded a ship just like Odysseus, that master warrior ? At Delphi, olive groves glow in sunlight, and a friend points to a German sign, "Please don't wake the statues." [pp 160-61]

Reading *Conference*, and its layered textures was a learning experience.

"I'm tired of words. Of making subject

and verb agree. Of searching for the right

metaphor for pain.

Want pain? I give you

Georgette, my student who wrote how Phalangists

broke into her family's home, shot them all,"

...: [p 166]

Relief [p 186] is a visceral punch, leaving one gasping. At Kos Harbor, 2015, the refugees are given 'Water, dry clothes, a candy bar, a blanket—,

the flotsam of bodies torn and torn again.

Terror this intense—it must be veiled.

One sees tankers in *Tankers* [P 187] in *Salonica Bay*, hearing 'the silent axis of a broken world'. Through the Translation section, I got to know some exquisite Greek poets. Born in Nevada, raised in California, living in Greece since 1980; a citizen of both his homeland and adopted country, hence the desire to translate famous Greek poets into English.

I happened to read Schofield's translator's note elsewhere, on Liana Sakelliou's *With a View of the Sea*. He says, "my primary challenge into rendering Liana Sakelliou's poems into English has been to bring their densely detailed world to life for the Anglophone reader."

Liana Sakelliou.....

Bird of Death, April 21, 1967

On this day, just before the elections, some right-wing army officers seized power in a coup. The poem refers to that.

Everyone remembers exactly where they were when they heard the news.

I learned to speak official Greek,

to conjure up spells and riddles (always a student),

smile oblivious

to everything happening around me. [p 214]

The lyricism of *The Mad Pomegranate Tree*, [p 212- 213], and the refrain 'tell me', mesmerize. I have read many translations of this poem, of the Nobel Prize winner, [1979], Odysseus Elytis [1911- 1996]. This one also flows effortlessly.

*Is it the mad pomegranate tree that leaps
scattering her fruit-filled laughter
tell me,*

*Is it the mad pomegranate tree that grabs, on the run,
A horse's mane by its hundred lashing whips;
....tell me,*

Reading these visually enriching poems, I was girded with 'a thousand dazzling prisms.' In *Athens Snow*, [p112 - 113], the nuns say, 'each flake is unique'. Same with these poems; each dazzles. His elegant poetic prowess flows seamlessly, eclectic strands weaving a multi-hued tapestry of life; the immersive experience, leaving one with a lingering sadness, by its ruminative tenor.

Meant to be sipped slowly, like the *kehwa* back home, in Kashmir, garnished with cinnamon, cardamom and crushed almonds. After finishing the *kehwa*, the tea- drinker continues chewing on the slivers of crushed almond, the pleasing taste lingering. Capturing the essence of the universe in 225 pages of excellently crafted poems, it leaves an everlasting impact, with its somber lyricism, every poetry enthusiast will cherish.

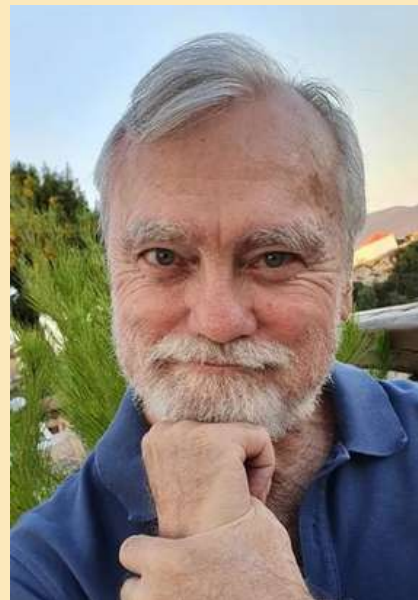
Tell me poet, the secret behind this exuberant exploration of life.

Yes, tell me.

About the Author

Don Schofield

Born in Nevada and raised in California, Don Schofield is a graduate of the University of Montana (MFA, 1980). He has lived in Greece for four decades, during which time he has taught literature and creative writing at American, British and Greek universities, and traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Middle East and farther afield. Fluent in Greek, a citizen of both his homeland and his adopted country, he is the editor of the anthology *Kindled Terraces: American Poets in Greece* (Truman State University Press), and has published five books of poetry in the U.S., the first of which, *Approximately Paradise* (University Press of Florida), was a finalist for the 1985 Walt Whitman Award, and a more recent collection, *In Lands Imagination Favors* (Dos Madres Press), reached the final round for the 2015 Rubery Book Award (UK). His translations of contemporary Greek poets have been honoured by the London Hellenic Society, shortlisted for the Greek National Translation Award and nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He currently lives in both Athens and Thessaloniki.





Mimi: An amalgamation of emotions

By Dr. Ramandeep Mahal

After ages I have come across such a movie. Watching *Mimi* made me smile, cry and laugh, all at the same time. Deep inside *Mimi* is a poignant story of parenting and what it's takes to love and raise a child. Here *Mimi* (Kriti Sanon) who plays the titular character is a 25-year-old woman in Rajasthan who agrees to become a surrogate mother in order to fulfill her dream of becoming a movie star. We are introduced to Mimi through a catchy dance number with lyrics '*bikaneri ki chokri, santre ki tokri*'. Someone named Jolly Bhaiya is scamming her and asking for money in return for some music videos, a sea facing apartment in Mumbai. Clearly Mimi is not very worldly wise. An American couple, John and Summer Roger, played by Aidan Whytock and Evelyn Edwards, watch her video and decide to approach her to carry their biological child. Enter Bhanu's character, a taxi driver played by our fun-loving Pankaj Tripathi who brokers the deal.

Eventually Mimi lies to her parents and moves in with her close aide Shama (played by Sai Tamhankar) to carry her baby to term and deliver her away from her parental town and its puritanical social mores. Her real plan is to just deliver the baby, get the money and move to Bombay, but at some point, John and Summer get cold feet, abandon Mimi and their child. Laxman Utekar has skillfully adapted *Mimi* from the acclaimed Marathi film *Mala Aai Vhhaychy!* by Samruoddhi Porey. Together with screenwriter Rohan Shankar, he ensures that the Hindi film retains the essence of the original while retaining its own character and identity. Laxman had earlier made *Lukka Chuppi* which had Kriti Sanon in the lead. Though I haven't seen the original version of this movie, but Laxman and Rohan construct a screenplay with the ambitious objective of cushioning the complexities of surrogacy with breezy comedy. Even in emotional scenes when Mimi's parents discover her lie, there is an attempt at comic relief through the character of Bhanu who plays along with Mimi, claiming to be the father of Mimi's child.

However, when the baby is born, all Mimi's dreams of becoming a Bollywood celebrity dissipate into nothingness. She abandons her dreams to care for her baby. In one scene, Mimi's mother played by Supriya Pathak tells her, '*Devaki bhi tu, Yashoda bhi tu*'. Here comes the problematic part, Mimi's boy is born with fair skin and blue eyes, making Bhanu the talk of the town with the townsfolk commenting and speculating about how Bhanu managed to father such a fair child. The

good part being is that Mimi's grandparents instantly fall in love with the child, not abandoning it. But the question that arises in the mind of a somewhat skeptical viewer is: would the grandparents have loved him if he was differently abled as claimed by the doctors earlier? Is it the colour of the child (the same old colonial mindset) that made the grandparents fawn over it?

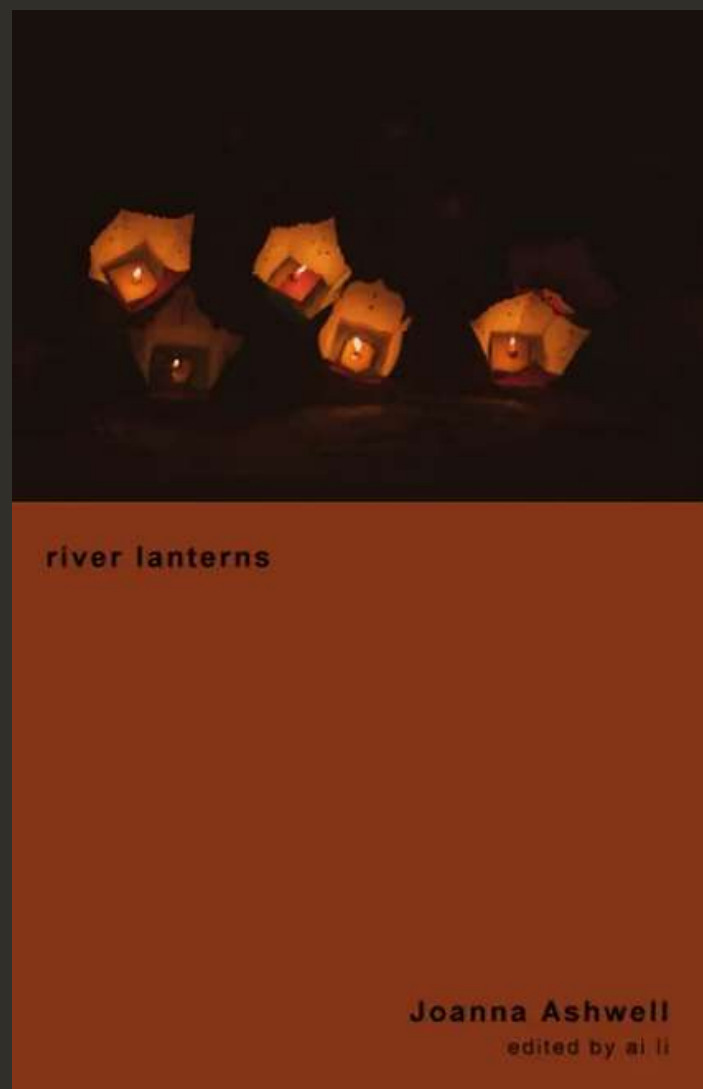
Laxman Utekar has managed to put together a great cast: Pankaj Tripathi, Supriya Pathak, Manoj Pahwa and Sai Tamhankar but he doesn't give them enough to do. As usual the best thing is Pankaj Tripathi, who works hard to infuse life and layers into the character of Bhanu. But Mimi rests entirely on Kriti Sanon's slender but tough shoulders. She has clearly worked hard-put on weight and worked on a Rajasthani accent. There are some glaring negatives. The script clearly lacks depth and empathy. The film makes a herculean attempt to tackle a serious issue with a humorous twist, but it does not always ring true. Kriti is unable to let go the bollywood glamour- even when she is in pain during child-bearing, her lipstick is intact.

Coming to the music, A.R Rehman has done a tremendous job with songs like Rihayee Re and Chotti si Chidiya. Amitabh Bhattacharya was really wonderful with lyrics, each word has a deeper meaning. A keen observer may note that that Kriti Sanon, Evelyn Edwards, Sai Tamhankar, Supriya Pathak represent women at all levels; be it the daughter, mother, friend and finally sister. Overall Sai Tamhankar does a great job as Shama, Mimi's best friend. She doesn't care about herself and is always there for her friend. Mimi's parents are played by Manoj Pahwa and Supriya Pathak, and they have done a good job. This is by far Kriti's best performance and she just took her acting skills to the next level. She is maturing as an actor. Pankaj Tripathi doesn't need any showcasing. He is such a natural actor, and his dead-pan humor is endearing. I will rate the movie 7 out of 10 on the basis of Kriti Sanon and Pankaj Tripathi's superlative performances. Kriti Sanon's was awarded her first National Award as Best Actor (Female) for her performance in the film. You can catch the film on Netflix!



TALKING BOOKS

Talking Books



Rachna Singh, Editor, The Wise Owl talks to Joanna Ashwell about her recently released cherita collection 'river lanterns'

Talking Books



Rachna Singh, Editor, The Wise Owl talks to Joanna Ashwell about her recently released cherita collection 'river lanterns'

Hi Joanna. Thanks for talking to The Wise Owl

RS: Your collection of Cherita 'river lanterns' has been released recently. Our readers would be eager to know (as I am) what inspired you to write this beautiful collection of 90 virgin Cherita.

JA: I have been published in Ai Li's Cherita journals for a while and love writing in this form. I mentioned in my email correspondence to Ai Li that I aspired to have my own Cherita collection published. She offered to edit my selection of poems from a large selection that I sent her. I would say my inspiration came from reading Ai Li's own collections of her Cherita verse, they are so beautiful.

When I began writing these, I was mindful to really show me as not only a writer but as the person beneath and how the Cherita form bends to the art of storytelling. It took me some time to write these and I am delighted with the narrative that Ai Li made with her choices for my book. When another person chooses, they can distance themselves from your work and look critically at what you have sent. It was a real honour for me to entrust the creator of the Cherita with my work.

RS: Your book is a collection of Cherita verse. Cherita is a genre of recent origin (1997). Tell us what attracted you to this genre of poetry. Were there any creative influences in your life that encouraged you to adopt this genre as your own.

JA: I am attracted to this genre of poetry as I hold a deep reverence for Ai Li's poetry and the short form poetry forms as a collective. I was excited to see that Ai Li had developed this new genre. She published my short form verse in the 1990s in her journal Still and I was sad when this was no longer in print. I enjoyed the challenge of learning how to write this new form and find it really resonates with me as a writer.

I discovered her new form of Cherita and was hooked by these story gems. I really admire the way that the Cherita journals are produced and enjoy reading the work within these. As a writer it is important to keep on working at your craft and I love it when I get to enjoy the work of a fellow poet in the same genre.

RS: River Lanterns has been edited and published by ai li, the creator of Cherita as a genre. How was the experience of connecting with the doyenne of Cherita and having her select your Cherita?

JA: As I mentioned earlier Ai Li had published my work in the 90s, then through offering Cherita to her for publication, the connection was reborn. I have always enjoyed reading Ai Li's poetry and I have found her to be a gracious supporter of my Cherita. Sending my work to the creator of the genre I think really made me conscious that I had to elevate my writing to meet the standards to have enough quality Cherita for my own individual collection. The experience is something that I will treasure as I now have a collection published other people can enjoy and will hopefully encourage them to do the same.

RS: Cherita is said to be a unique form of storytelling...storytelling in 6 lines. M Kei says that Cherita verse 'combine the evocative power of tanka with the narrative of a personal story, like the vignettes we glimpse as we sit in a café and watch the world go by.' Do you agree ? For the benefit of the readers would you please elaborate on this.

JA: Yes, I think M Kei's insight is correct. Cherita to me contain the voice/song/whispers around the campfire as the stories unfold. They can be written about such a wide range of experiences, focused through the lens of the individual. I love the power of tanka, and I see Cherita as a close cousin, both forms use beautiful language to sing a fragment of the world that we live in.

RS: I feel what differentiates Cherita from narrative storytelling, is that it tells a story about life & our spiritual journey. This is very true of your Cherita:

*have you
found it yet*

the fun arcade

*where wishes
are the alchemy
of breath*

What are your thoughts on this?

JA: Yes, I feel a real connection with Cherita and my spiritual side. This is an element that attracts me to using this form. It allows me to explore and highlight aspects that may not be accepted in other types of verse. The Cherita can be used as a blank canvas for me to embed my perspective of my inner and outer world through stories.

RS: What are the themes or stories you have touched upon in your various Cherita verse?

JA: Where to begin... The Cherita in this collection provides a map of my highs and lows. They reveal how I see the world and feel about it. I enjoy adding elements of fairytales, myths, rich imagery, and aspects of the natural world. The importance of love, loss, friendship, connections, truth etc. all are within. The Cherita captures a moment of beauty, in time, often of universal things that happen to all of us but told from the narrator's perspective. Often there is a vein of spirituality running through the verse.

RS: There are some cherita terbalik also in your collection. For the benefit of our readers please tell us how this form is different from Cherita and why we need a different syllable arrangement for this form of poetic storytelling

JA: The Cherita terbalik also tells a story but 'terbalik' is the Malay word for upside down or reversal (<https://www.thecherita.com/>) It is a different arrangement of the original Cherita stanza format. By using another variation of the Cherita format it enables the writer to alter the flow of the story that they are telling, such as the example from my collection below:

*the ruby shoes
the glass slipper
the fairy dust*

*as a child
I imagined all*

in my cupboard

To me this verse is stronger with the terbalik arrangement. Writing Cherita I make a judgement as to which stanza suits the flow of the story.

RS: Do you also write in other genres like haiku, senryu, tanka, haibun on a regular basis? Which is your favorite genre among all these genres (we know your fondness for Cherita of course)

JA: Yes, I also write in other genres such as haiku, senryu, tanka, Haibun and other short form verse. I began writing contemporary poetry first and then I discovered haiku when I was looking for poetry journals to read and subscribe to. I fell in love with haiku and feel that they are the guardians of nature and our world. I find short form poetry very special; these dewdrops of tiny forms really capture a sense of the world around us.

I see the bonds between these genres as strings from the same bow -

the heart harp

*wind and rainfall
skeins from sky*

*this humming
of a melody
our soul bonds*

Selecting a favourite is like asking a parent to choose a child. They all hold a place in my heart. I began with haiku and then progressed to tanka - aspects of the heart. These are the two that led me into this world of short form poetry and were my entry point for exploring and discovering other genres. I wouldn't like to be without any one of them as they each offer a different way to express aspects of the world and my own life journey.

RS: What advice would you give budding poets of Cherita verse?

JA: The advice I would give to writers of any verse is to READ, READ, READ. Study the form, work on your craft, support the journals that publish them - if you want to write them, then surely you will enjoy reading them. Write, keep on writing and honing, learning the form, find your own style/voice, make connections in the writing world - even if online and listen and appreciate editorial advice - they have a vast range of experience, and this is how you grow as a writer. The short form poetry world is a beautiful, supportive place. When you buy a journal that publishes Cherita verse or another genre, be open to learning and see how well other writers use the form. Try and buy the collections of writers that you admire, this keeps our writers' world vibrant and alive.

Thank you, Joanna, for taking time out to talk to The Wise owl about your beautiful book. We wish you the best and hope you make this unique storytelling genre rich with your verse.

Thank you so much for asking me to talk to you.

About Joanna Ashwell



Joanna Ashwell is a short form poet (from the UK) who writes Haiku, Tanka, Haibun, Cherita and other related forms. She has published four collections of poetry. Between Moonlight a collection of haiku was published by Hub Editions in 2006. Her tanka collection 'Every Star' was published by KDP on Amazon in 2023. Her Cherita collection 'River Lanterns' was published by 1-2-3 Press on Amazon in 2023. She currently serves on the selection team for the Canadian Tanka Journal GUSTS.

About Rachna Singh



A doctorate in English literature and a former bureaucrat, **Rachna Singh** has authored *Penny Panache* (2016) *Myriad Musings* (2016) *Financial Felicity* (2017) & *The Bitcoin Saga: A Mixed Montage* (2019). She writes regularly for National Dailies and has also been reviewing books for the The Tribune for more than a decade. She runs a YouTube Channel, *Kuch Tum Kaho Kuch Hum Kahein*, which brings to the viewers poetry of established poets of Hindi & Urdu. She loves music and is learning to play the piano.

VISUAL ARTS



Painting

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Meet Birds of Mullanpur with Harmeet Singh

Photography

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Limited Edition Replay
Advait Nadavdekar



Life of Bal Gangadhar Tilak
Acrylic on canvas 3' X 4'



Loving Granny
Oil on canvas 18' X 24''



Artist Speak

I would like to say that, one should be honest to his art. It is said that 'Art is a mirror, it reflects you.' Believing in oneself is very important. One should present or project oneself through one's artworks. I would like to share a quote which I get to hear from my parents, which goes like, 'There is always room on the top.' Always compete with yourself, and aim to become better than what you are today.

(An extract from Ochre Edition (July 2022 of The Wise Owl))

Meet Birds of Mullanpur with Harmeet Singh

The Shivalik Foothills are flanked by reserved forest areas and dotted with small ponds and man-made lakes that abound in birds. Every morning, on a pleasant summer day, Harmeet Singh, a doctor by qualification, a civil servant by profession but a bird lover at heart, steps out with his camera and backpack, in search of birds. Here are some of the treasures he has found. You can find more of the birds clicked by him on his website <https://www.birds-of-mullanpur.com/home>



A Green Bee Eater



Red billed Leiothrix



Pied Bush Chat (Male)



Eurasian Hoopoe



Grey Bushchat (Male)

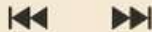


Grey Francolin

PODCASTS



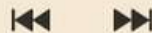
Larry Kimmel
Larry Kimmel reading cherita
Cherita



00:00 / 01:29



Joanna Ashwell
Joanna ashwell reading cherita
Cherita



00:00 / 01:21



Jan Stretch
Jan Stretch reading cherita
Cherita



00:00 / 00:44



Cynthia Anderson
Cynthia Anderson reads cherita
Cherita



00:00 / 01:00



NEW SEGMENT

To make The Wise Owl more dynamic, we have introduced The Daily Verse & The Weekly Yarns, segments where we will upload poetry all days of the week & stories/flash fiction/anecdotes & musings on a weekly basis. Just send in your submissions to editor@thewiseowl.art



THE DAILY VERSE

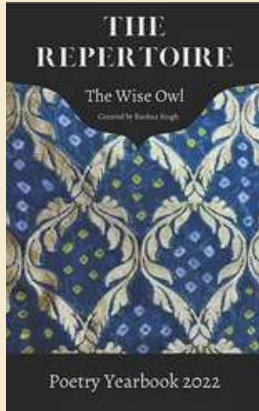
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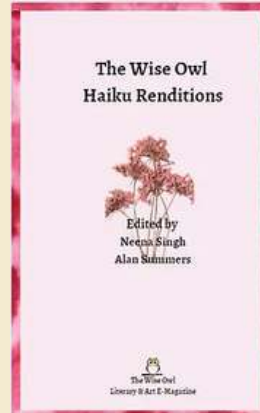
THE WEEKLY YARNS

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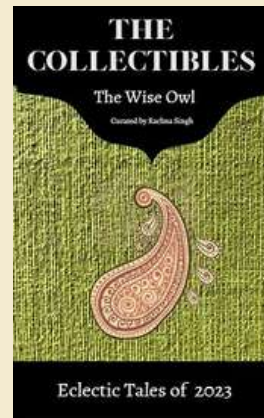


E-book (January 2023)



E-book (March 2023)

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[E-Mags](#)



cherita by ai li (As quoted in the interview)

ai li
wordsmith * storyteller * word healer

cherita is now 27 years old
22 June 1997 - 22 June 2023

www.thecherita.com

storytelling is oxygen for the soul
and
storytelling on its own is incomplete,
you have to feel what you have written

ai li

*

dream sequence by ai li

available on amazon in paperback and kindle

*

1]

alone

in empty space
i lean on

memories
to start
the carousel

*

2]

i'm a friend
of rain

i listen

once i too
fell from
the sky

*

3]

time machine

who will build it now
to stop the princess

from getting
into
the black Mercedes

For Diana, Princess of Wales 1961-1997

*

4]

finishing what you were

placed here
to do

you walk
into the mountains
to become sunrise

*

5]

an old name

in Chinese
for fireworks

smoke flowers

a banquet of echoes
for the night sky

*

6]

scented page

what was
left
in here

from
the Alhambra

*

7]

father's voice
on a still night
he hasn't left

in dreamtime

even when
leaves fall

*

8]

nothing left
for me
to do

but write myself

out of
this empty room

all cherita copyright © ai li 2023

nothingness by ai li

available on amazon in paperback and kindle

*

1]

the silverfish and i

get acquainted
over an old ghost story

when winter arrives
on the page
of the dead
*

2]

honeysuckle cottage

i left you behind
30 years ago in my dreams

but on this cold night
you perfume
all my longings

*

3]

the hologram of you

will always be
in my consciousness

i still talk to you
about moonlight
and old dreams

*

4]

they have all gone

before me
the quiet

of chinese new year
with opera
in the other world

*

5]

my inner scars

let
there be
dragons

to burn
them off

*

6]

in a room

rented
without language

skintalk
then the moon
came

*

7]

crooner

her night
begins

with rhinestones
and sequins
sewn into dreams

*

8]

a life

apart from poetry

i cook, clean,
laundry, iron
and bake

sublime cherry madeira

all cherita copyright © ai li 2023

the promise of rain by ai li

available on amazon in paperback and kindle

*

1]

she is always writing

in her dream
by a window

the baby dragon
snoring
at her feet

*

2]

a fortune teller

in
the empty house

night must fall
before i ask her
where love is

*

3]

this aging place

you used
to call
home

the colour of stove
in north wind

*

4]

a cup of tea

forecast
of snow

i wrap

my shadow up
in cashmere

*

5]

i've become a peacemaker

for my soul
it's happy
to sit home now

make fudge
and not attempt Everest

*

6]

the word homeless

becomes
another old
winter story

that takes
breath away

*

7]

the call

from someone
who died young

to come out
and play
a ghost moon

*

8]

the illusionist

telling me
it's all smoke

and mirrors
my shadow nods
in the empty room

all cherita copyright © ai li 2023

BIOGRAPHIES

ai li has created 22 original linked forms akin to Renku aka Renga, three of which are the cherita, gembun and dua. These three storytelling short form genres have been widely embraced and have grown in popularity since ai li created two in 1997 and one in 2022. ai li is the founding editor and publisher of still, moving into breath and dew-on-line. She is also a Fellow of The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain [FRPS], and an evidential spiritualist medium who trained at The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain and The College of Psychic Studies, London . ai li's poems have been widely published in the UK, USA, and Japan.

Larry Kimmel, a prolific poet and a writer. grew up in the rural area near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and Pittsburgh University and has worked at everything from steel mills to libraries. He now lives quietly with his wife in the hills of Western Massachusetts. He has authored eleven collections of poetry and a novella.

Joanna Ashwell is a short form poet (from the UK) who writes Haiku, Tanka, Haibun, Cherita and other related forms. She has published four collections of poetry. Between Moonlight a collection of haiku was published by Hub Editions in 2006. Her tanka collection 'Every Star' was published by KDP on Amazon in 2023. Her Cherita collection 'River Lanterns' was published by 1-2-3 Press on Amazon in 2023. She currently serves on the selection team for the Canadian Tanka Journal GUSTS.

Rupa Anand is a spiritual seeker and a published writer of experiences. Writing since 2008, her poems are an expression of images, thoughts, ideas, emotions and events that somehow get etched upon her mind and psyche. She says "There is magic in Nature. I hope my poems will connect readers with the beauty and calm of the natural world." Rupa has a BA (Hons) in English Literature from Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi. A cancer survivor, she lives in New Delhi with her husband, daughter and beloved cats.

Jan Stretch is a retired psychiatric nurse-therapist from Victoria BC Canada. She enjoys her large extended family, especially her two grandchildren and returned to thoughts of poetry on her daily walks during Covid. Jan was first published in the Dear Vaccine Anthology in 2022 and has since been published in numerous international journals, podcasts and anthologies including Haiku Foundation, Poetry Pea, Failed Haiku, tsumi-doro and prune juice among others. She has recently discovered Cherita and has been published in the last 4 anthologies edited by ai li. She is currently an administrator on Haiku Moments Facebook group. Insights gained from her years as a therapist and her nature walks continue to inform her poetry.

A Touchstone nominee in the Shortlist for Individual Poems in 2021, **Neena Singh** is a banker turned poet. Her haikai poetry is regularly published in international journals and magazines. She has published two books of poetry—'Whispers of the Soul: the journey within' and 'One Breath Poetry'. She runs a non-profit for quality interventions in the education and health of underprivileged children in Chandigarh. Neena loves to play 'fetch ball' with her pet Rumi, and sit in the garden conversing with squirrels and pigeons.

Arvinder Kaur specialises in English literature and Media Studies which she taught in Post Graduate Colleges of Punjab and Chandigarh. Later she retired as Principal from Govt College Dera Bassi. Punjab. She has a passion for Japanese short form poetry. " I can never get tired of exploring the depths and the mysteries of this genre, " she says. She is fascinated by the sunsets and by the jacaranda blossoms. She lives in Chandigarh with her family.

Mona Bedi is a medical doctor in Delhi, India. She has been writing poetry since childhood but a few years back she started writing the Japanese form.. haiku. She has authored two poetry books published by the name of 'they you and me' and 'dancing moonlight.' She received the Grand Prize in the 3rd Morioka Haiku Festival, 2021 and four haiku of merit in the World Haiku Review 2021/2022 alongwith an honourable mention at the Japan Fair 2021. Her haiku, tanka haibun

and Haiga has been published in various journals of repute like Presence, Modern haiku, Haiku dialogue, Haiku in Action, Triveni haikuKatha, Drifting sands, Failed haiku, Stardust, Creative Inspirations, among others.

Cynthia Anderson's cherita have been published in journals such as the cherita, frameless sky, Femku, etc. as well as in her book, "The Missing Peace." She has an all-cherita book in the planning stages.

Ram Chandran is a Corporate Lawyer by profession. He has been writing English poetry since his college days. Writing Japanese short form poetry since 2020, his English language haiku and other Japanese short form poetries have been widely published internationally in print and digital Journals. A collection of his Tanka poems titled "The flight of a dragonfly" was published in April 2023 by Southern Arizona Press (SAP).

Amita Sarjit Ahluwalia is one of the various pen names used by Punjab-born, Patna-based, retired Indian bureaucrat Amita Paul, who has, of late begun to be recognised on various digital platforms for her original writings in different genres, in English, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. Her writings are imaginative, humane, socially relevant, ecologically sensitive and public-spirited, with occasional flashes of humour ranging from sharp satire to gentle ribbing of her indulgent readers.

Lakshmi Iyer, a homemaker lives in Kerala in India. She came across haiku five years ago and liked its minimalistic form, the way it could see the unread and read the unseen. She likes to live in the breath of words that speak of her observations, the experiences, inner silences and the elements of nature that resonate within her. She feels blessed to have known many senior poets in the world of haikai who have generously mentored and guided her. Her haikai poems have been published in journals and anthologies worldwide.

Leroy B. Vaughn's short stories, fiction and non fiction have been published in print, ezines, anthologies and podcasts. He is retired and lives in Arizona, USA.

Travis Flatt (he/him) is an epileptic teacher and actor living in Cookeville, Tennessee. His stories appear or are forthcoming in Cosmic Daffodil, Glass Mountain, Hive Avenue, Sein Und Werden, Fear of Monkeys, and other places.

Snigdha Agrawal (nee Banerjee) has an MBA in Marketing and Corporate work experience of over two decades. She enjoys writing all genres of poetry, prose, short stories, and travel diaries. Brought up in a cosmopolitan environment, and educated in Convent School/College run by Irish Nuns, she has imbibed the best from Eastern and Western cultures. She has published four books of poems and short stories. The latest titled TRAIL MIX is a book of short stories, published in 2023 by Authorspress Publishing House and is available on Amazon. in. This apart, she is widely published in domestic and international anthologies and poetry journals. A septuagenarian, her passion for writing and travelling continues unabated.

Yuan Changming grew up in an isolated village, started to learn the English alphabet in Shanghai at age nineteen and authored monographs on translation before leaving China. Poetry credits include 15 collections, 12 Pushcart nominations and appearances in 2,019 literary outlets across 49 countries. A poetry judge for Canada's 2021 National Magazine Awards, Yuan began writing and publishing fiction in 2022.

John Cantwell is from Dublin Ireland and holds a degree in journalism and media communications. His short stories & writings have been published in various print and online journals. He hopes to find a publisher for his other work in due course.

Dan Hardison is a native of Tennessee, and now lives in Wilmington, North Carolina where he is a writer and artist. His

artwork is inspired by Japanese woodblocks and ink painting (sumi-e). As an artist and writer, he is drawn to the Japanese haiga - a combination of image and poem. This has led to recent work creating handmade artist books. Dan's writing is primarily in the Japanese short form of haiku and haibun, and has appeared at Frogpond, Cattails, Contemporary Haibun Online, Drifting Sands, and other print and online journals. His work can be found on his website "Windscape Studio" and his blog "Some Tomorrow's Morning".

Dr. Suchita Krishnaprasad retired from Elphinstone College as the Head, Department of Economics after serving for 35 years. She is a free-lance researcher. Labour Economics & Economics of development are her thrust areas. She writes for pleasure & is currently training in Hindustani classical vocal music.

Santosh Bakaya is a poet of repute. Winner of International Reuel Award for literature for Oh Hark, 2014, The Universal Inspirational Poet Award [Pentasi B Friendship Poetry and Ghana Government, 2016,] Bharat Nirman Award for literary Excellence, 2017, Setu Award, 2018, [Pittsburgh, USA] for 'stellar contribution to world literature.' Keshav Malik Award, 2019, for 'staggeringly prolific and quality conscious oeuvre'. Chankaya Award [Best Poet of the Year, 2022, Public Relations Council of India,], Eunice Dsouza Award 2023, for 'rich and diverse contribution to poetry, literature and learning', [Instituted by WE Literary Community]. Poet, biographer, novelist, essayist, TEDx speaker, creative writing mentor, Santosh Bakaya, Ph.D, has been acclaimed for her poetic biography of Mahatma Gandhi, Ballad of Bapu [Vitasta, 2015]. She has participated in many literary festivals, and was one of the delegates to the SAARC Sufi festival in Jaipur, in 2017, her poems have been translated into many languages, and poems and short stories have won many awards, both national and international.

Dr. Ramandeep Mahal is currently working as an Assistant Professor of English at Guru Nanak Khalsa College Yamunanagar. She received her Doctorate degree from Maharishi Markandeshwar Mullana Ambala in 2018. Her research interests include Anglo-American Literature, Indian Writing in English, African Literature. She is the author of more than twenty research papers.

Harmeet Singh is a medical doctor by qualification, a civil-servant by profession and an avid birder. He is also a butterfly watcher and has identified 231 new species of butterflies. He is an artist who dabbles in watercolours and acrylics. His website is Birds of Mullanpur <https://www.birds-of-mullanpur.com> & Butterflies of Mullanpur <https://www.butterflies-of-mullanpur.com>.

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