2015 San Francisco International Competition, Haiku, Senryu and Tanka

**Haiku: Ce Rosenow, judge**

**First Place**

winter gathering –

bits of bone too

heavy for the wind

 *paul m, Bristol RI*

This excellent haiku presents a poignant moment at the scattering of someone’s ashes. The kigo,

“winter,” symbolically represents death, and when combined with the additional reference to the

wind, suggests a cold setting. The use of “gathering” creates a tension with the actual scattering

of the ashes and adds to the poignancy because the speaker will not be gathered together again

with whomever has died. Finally, the word “too” at the end of the pivot line simultaneously

modifies “heavy” and suggests that both the speaker and the “bits of bone” are heavy. The

speaker may be heavy emotionally and the bone bits are too physically heavy to blow away.

**Second Place**

pine needle path

ordinary words

layered just so

 *Julie Warther, Dover OH*

In this fine haiku, one envisions a conversation about a delicate topic where each word is

carefully chosen, not hyperbolic or highly charged. Yet the intentionality of choosing ordinary

words that need to be layered in a particular way suggests the possibly loaded nature of the

subject matter. “Layered” suggests not just the arrangement of the words but the multiple

meanings of individual words. While internal comparisons often involve similarities, this haiku

is structured around tension and contradiction. The pine needles on the path are “ordinary” and

may appear to be “layered just so,” and in this way suggest the ordinariness of the spoken words.

The pine needles, however, are not layered “just so.” They are positioned randomly where they

land after falling, which heightens the constructed nature of the conversation on the same path.

**Third Place**

a fire station’s halyard

banging in the wind –

another night of protests

 *paul m, Bristol RI*

This strong haiku uses natural and human imagery to create a sense of unrest. Formally, the aural

image of the banging, wind-blown halyard parallels the loud sounds common at protests. The

repetition of the banging sound connects to the repetition of the protests, which are taking place

for “another night.” The fire station is a symbol of assistance and rescue, and its inhabitants

might be called upon to provide aid at the protests. The act of protesting can also be considered a

form of assistance or aid because protests draw attention to situations that need to be remedied.

However, because of the jarring sound of the halyard’s banging and the internal comparison with

the nightly protests, there is less a sense of rescue and more emphasis on unrest.

**Honorable Mention (not ranked)**

autumn equinox –

a fern curls back

into the earth

 *Julie Warther, Dover OH*

his widow’s

silhouette

early sunset

 *Joseph Robello,Novato CA*

sea fog

somewhere else

the right words spoken

 *Sharon Pretti, San Francisco CA*

**Senryu: Carlos Colón, judge**

There were a number of very good poems submitted to this contest. I short-listed about 20,

which I read several times trying to get down to a manageable number of finalists. Being

purveyor of puns myself, I had to be careful not to give too much weight to a poem that offered

little more than fine play on words. It’s a shame I couldn’t give at least five more honorable

mentions.

**First Place**

baby shower

the curve of her belly

invites us in

 *Carolyn Hall, San Francisco CA*

This poem was the clear winner. Just as there is a glow on the face of a pregnant woman, there

is a radiance emanating from this excellent poem. No patina of sorrow or loneliness, only joy

leaping from the page. The door is open, and the readers are all invited in to join the party.

**Second Place**

first love the ring his ring leaves

 *Julie Warther, Dover OH*

Definitely a hint of sorrow here compounded by loneliness. My initial response to the poem

focused on the image of the phantom ring, but then I considered how “first love” brought another

dimension to the poem. This is not just any marriage This was a marriage between people who

found each other early in life and likely lived a long time together. Who were these people?

How long were they married? Did the wife die, or did the couple split up? So many scenarios to

consider.

**Third Place**

searching

the pages of the Bible—

two still joined by gilt

 *Julie Warther, Dover OH*

The person has not read the Bible all the way through yet; otherwise, the two pages would

already be separated . . . or perhaps s/he decided to skip a few pages in the Book of Numbers. In

any event, the person now is trying to locate a specific verse, perhaps to prove a point or to

justify a particular action. The pun on “gilt and guilty” adds a nice twist.

**Honorable Mentions (in order of preference)**

after the nightmare

mother leaves a light on

for the ambulance

 *Tracy Davidson, Warwickshire UK*

An O. Henry haiku. Nothing like thinking you have awoken from a nightmare to find out you

haven’t.

your enlistment photograph

 as you were

 *Scott Mason, Chappaqua NY*

So much more than the play on words. How many stories can these six words conjure?

talking to myself

the color of her

last breath

 *Renée Owen, Sebastopol CA*

Surviving spouse? Jilted lover? Color me curious.

an old Dodge Dart on the front lawn

my neighbor, I wonder

how he lives

 *Rich Krivcher, Citrus Heights CA*

A funny parody of a Bashō classic. Can’t be me. My Dodge was a Colt.

**Tanka: Margaret Chula, judge**

**First Place**

the pieces

of his jigsaw puzzle

litter the floor . . .

winter moonlight slipping

through the hospice window

 *Chen-ou Liu, Ajax, Ontario, Canada*

A poignant scene, beautifully rendered without overstatement or sentimentality. Beginning with

the first line (“the pieces”), this tanka is about separation. A jigsaw puzzle serves as the perfect

metaphor for how we organize things in our minds to have them make sense. But, for this man,

deterioration has set in, both physical and mental. Things don’t fit together anymore. The verb

“litter” is an excellent choice to illustrate how pieces are scattered like trash with no

organization or purpose. Both the puzzle and the man have come apart. The brilliance of this

tanka is that the reader does not know that it takes place in a hospice until the final line. In the

first three lines, we can easily imagine a child scattering puzzle pieces on the floor—eliciting an

entirely different emotional response. Strong verbs with multiple meanings add an emotional

resonance. “Slipping” can be interpreted as “slipping away,” which is what happens in hospice.

And yet there is hope here, too, with the moonlight suggesting a moment of lucidity.

**Second Place**

the bouquet

i surprised mom with

on her birthday . . .

the pain in her smile

for the 20 bucks i spent

 *Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, Birmingham, UK*

Anyone with parents who came of age during the Great Depression will relate to this tanka. Or

those who grew up in a frugal household. The pivot from the poet’s “surprise” to the mother’s

“pain” is what makes this tanka so delightful. Perhaps the son or daughter accidentally left the

price tag on or maybe the mother asked outright: “How much?” Surprising her with a bouquet

implies that the poet has not done this before. The small case ‘i’s’ show how unassuming the

son/daughter is and the choice of the slang “bucks,” how casually the money was spent.

**Third Place**

worn thin

after all these years

my worry stone

cracks in half—

all my worries set free

 *Lesley Anne Swanson, Coopersburg PA*

This tanka expresses empathy toward an inanimate object that has absorbed the poet’s

anxieties. Like the apprehensive poet, the worry stone too has become “worn thin” from the

negative energy rubbed into it. For many years, the stone has enabled the poet not to “crack,”

and now it literally has cracked open. Cleanly and with perfect symmetry. Finally, the stone is set

free and we sense that the poet is too.

Honorable Mentions (in order of preference)

plucking

a nose hair—

this divorce

more painful

than I thought

 *Susan Burch, Hagerstown MD*

this jade plant

all that remains

so like you

to bequeath me

so much sturdy green

 *Donna Buck, Carlsbad CA*

your vein-streaked hand

lifts the hem of my dress

. . . barely visible

 beneath frost-burned blooms

 fresh buds on the quince

 *Linda Jeanette Ward, Coinjock N.C.*