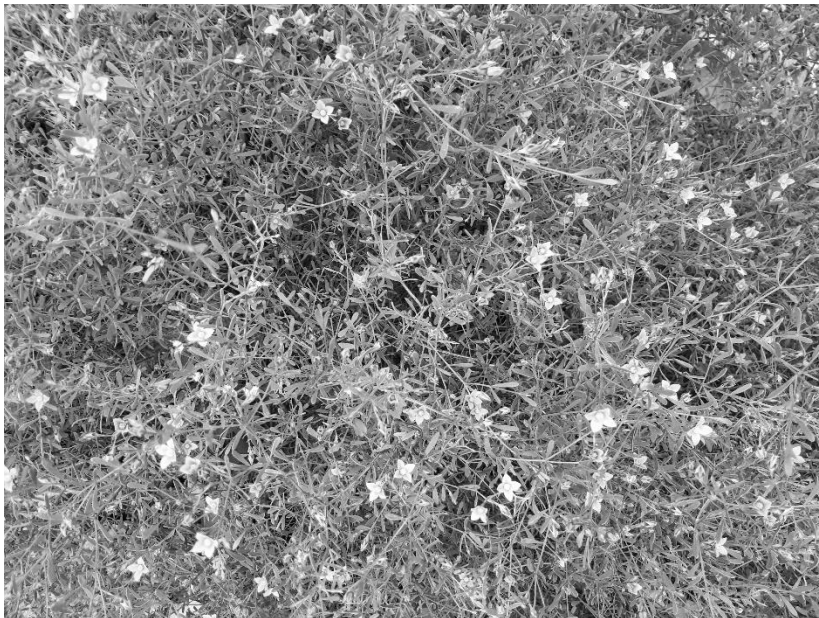


**THE
WOBBLY
POT**

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SPECIAL ISSUE: THE LIFE AND POETRY OF JOHN F. TURNER

CONTENTS

Goodbye to John by Mary Cumpsty	4
John Turner by Emma Williams	5
Celebrating John Turner's Life in Poetry by Ross Bolleter	6
Selected Haiku and Senryu by John F. Turner	8
Spring Renga by John F. Turner, Bob Jones and Ross Bolleter	14
A Net Renga by I Harford, B Lowry, J Turner, S Murphy and R Bolleter	18
John Turner: Wild Man... Poet... Gentle Intelligent Spirit by Lizzie Finn	19
For John Turner by Brigid Lowry	20
Poetry by the Sangha	20-23

EDITOR'S NOTE

It was a great privilege to put together this special edition of *The Wobbly Pot* devoted to the life and poetry of John Turner.

Though I never met John in person, we corresponded by mail and telephone regarding his submissions of haiku to *The Wobbly Pot*. I was always glad to receive an envelope from John. It would be filled with haiku, each one scribbled on a separate slip of paper, or sometimes on the back of postcards of Western Australian wildflowers. The poems were beautiful and inviting.

Through engaging further with John's work in putting together this edition, I have learnt a lot about poetry, for which I am grateful.

I thank everyone who has contributed to this edition.

This is the final *Wobbly Pot* that I will edit. Thank you to all those who have contributed to, read and supported the publication over the past few years.

Gerard Mazza

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www.zgwa.org.au

wobblypot@zgwa.org.au

GOODBYE TO JOHN

By his sister, Mary Cumptsy

John Turner was born on July 5, 1952 in Birmingham. John's mother, Margaret Mary Harrington, was Irish, and had been a nurse — quite a high-flying State Registered Nurse, who won a national essay prize for her profession. She was highly literary, striking and well-dressed, as John came to be. John's father, Laurence Turner, came from Blackburn and taught French at the Catholic grammar school before he was deemed too sick with schizophrenia to stay on. (John would have been about seven years old at that point.) John was the baby of the family, very close to Chris, the younger of his two elder brothers.

I was the eldest and the only girl: Michael and Christopher (now both deceased) were John's older brothers. We lived in Birmingham, where John was educated at the local primary school before moving on with Chris to the Salesian College at Cowley, near Oxford, something I was able to arrange so I didn't have to leave them behind at home when I went to university.

As you may know, John had for many years been preparing for an early death. A letter from him written in March 2012 closes with these words:

My time will come. Every pouch of Drum tobacco carries warnings of heart attack, stroke and cancer. I do not think it can't/won't happen to me.

That grim though accepting note was followed with a jaunty:

Pip, pip

Cheerio

Love/Hug

John

More recently, following his diagnosis a couple of years ago, John was keen to instruct me about funeral directors and options. Touchingly, at the same time he also wanted me to be able to tell you what a sportsman he had been at school.

In table tennis, John was school champion for three years and also played for the county. In cricket, John opened the batting for the school team and played for the College of Law at Guildford. John was a member of the school basketball team and played for the soccer 2nd XI. He was sixth in the school cross-country and also played tennis for the school. He also passed the Duke of Edinburgh Award Bronze Level, which involved camping overnight in the Pennines in winter. On cosier occasions he played chess as a member of the school team.

John also wanted us to remember his later travels, including half a dozen trips in Asia. But perhaps what he most wanted to record was the fact that one way or another he'd clocked up more than 8 years free of alcohol.

I think John came to Australia in 1973. His first psychotic episode took place within a year or two of that: he'd been teaching English in Japan, to earn some cash, and visited the Peace Museum at Hiroshima. Intending, as he said, "to impress its details on his mind," he was only too successful. He experienced his first florid episode on the plane returning to Oz.

John was always generous. I remember the little brooch he chose for me when a young boy. His final gift I discovered on the day of his death. For the first time, among forgotten papers, I came on a delicate necklace he'd picked out for me at a Fremantle market. I've worn it a lot.

But John gave me more than pretty things. His moral insight could be humbling. His

advice, his comments, arose from an integrity that demanded respect. And who could forget his sense of humour, his jokes?

‘I don’t think we’re going to see each other again,’ I told John early last November. ‘I am proud of you. I think you’ve been very brave.’

John lived with schizophrenia for 40 years and I don’t have to tell you, dear friends, who supported him so faithfully, how hard that was.

But there is something more important to speak of. When I was asked to fill in a quaintly

named ‘Death Information Sheet’ for the Public Trustee it required me to name John’s profession. ‘POET’ I wrote, in capitals. And for the tasks that involved, ‘WRITING’.

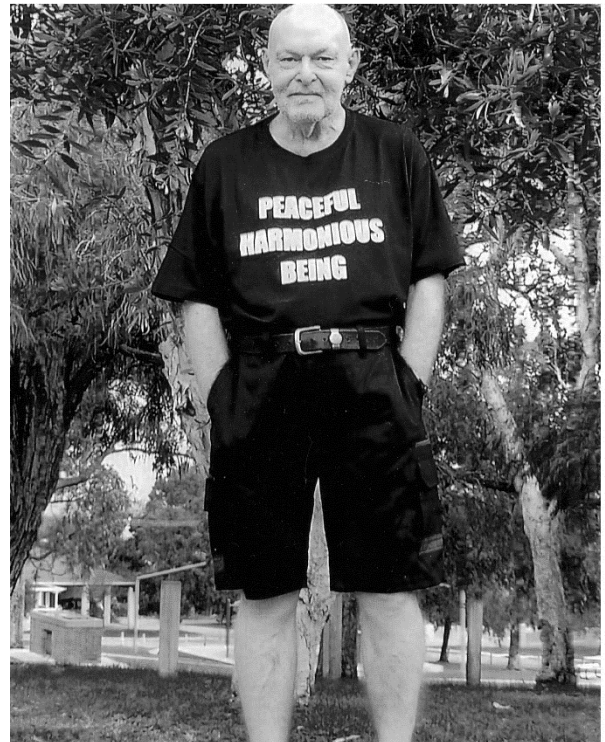
Your friendship and the land of Australia itself made John’s life a rich one. The life in the natural world, the living creatures and the landscape he studied with such care sustained him and fed his poetry.

I want to close by thanking you all. The quality of his friends was a constant reminder of John’s value, even in his darkest days.

JOHN TURNER

By his niece, Emma Williams

John was a gentle and simple man that enjoyed adventure, nature, music and people. Living by the words peace, love and kindness, he had a warm friendliness about him that allowed connection with people across all ages and backgrounds. In the days before *The Lonely Planet*, he had travelled the world on the hippie trail, taking in a range of places and experiences before settling in Australia. He loved to take in the simplicity and beauty of the natural world and would document his memories through his poetry. These words are now even more of a special set of memories for family and friends who remember him fondly whenever they are read.



CELEBRATING JOHN TURNER'S LIFE IN POETRY

By Ross Bolleter Roshi

I first met John in the early 80s, and remember sitting with him on a rock looking out at the karri forest near Pemberton, swapping stories as night slowly encroached on us. John often referred to this evening as a touchstone of our friendship. At that time, John was already embarked on his chosen creative path, haiku poetry, and he was keen to share his discoveries. I remember him introducing me to the haiku of Shiki and Santoka, in particular. Here is a Santoka haiku we both loved:

going deeper
and still deeper –
the green mountains

Living in accord with nature was crucial for John, and the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha Way shaped his life. His poem *Kuan Yin's Secret* interweaves these themes:

Kuan Yin's Secret
“Listen to Nature” - Ogiwara Seisensui

If you want to be happy
then practice deep hearing
listen as silent prayer

this open attention to nature
the tree outside my window
in its glittering susurrus

for what occurs is peace
“Nothing obscures the Mind”
You have returned home

and though it isn't funny
a smile lights the Buddha's face
the heart is gently eased

John wrote many haiku, a number of which are preserved in his three collections: *Cool Water*, *Draw One Breath*, and *Observe the Changes*. Here is a brief selection:

are there many
snails on the path ~
this moonless night?

in hospital ~
knowing which day
by the food

long spring illness ~
sun faded overalls
on the line

dark sky ~
marigolds grow bright
before the storm

John's concern was always for truth, never for adornment. The marigold poem is beautiful because it is true to how we see colours as our surroundings darken. Moreover, his not naming the marigolds' colours allows them to brighten in our imagination.

If the marigolds poem is gorgeous, John could also create in a wonderfully dry “corner of the mouth” style as shown in the following link from the *Spring Renga* printed on page 14 of this issue of *Wobbly Pot*:

not enough rain
to get a crop in

I remember John at the end of an evening of meditation reciting a number of his favourite haiku (without including a single one of his own) while counting out the syllables on his fingers. In its grounded power it was spellbinding.

One of my favourites among John's haiku is:

Orion's belt ~
letting my belly
hang loose

Truly, when you experience the vastness of your essential nature, whether your belly hangs loose or tight, Orion is ablaze there.

John chose to live very simply. He was as averse to crazy spirituality as he was to unhinged poetic expression. He also fought to stay sober, recognizing that alcohol made him vulnerable to manic episodes and psychotic breaks and wrought havoc in his life. To this end John had a sign on his front door: *Sobriety First*. He was rightly proud of remaining dry year after year.

John was not only a fine haiku poet, he also inspired others to write haiku, especially in the form of *renga*: linked verse grounded in nature and the seasons. John initiated and was involved in a great many *renga* over some forty years, most recently with Susan Murphy and Bob Jones in New South Wales and Queensland, respectively. Many years ago, John also worked with members of the ZGWA, together with Susan Murphy, to create a Net Renga, which is published on page 18 of this issue.

Because of his schizophrenia it was difficult for John to do Zen meditation. When he took the Precepts with Robert Aitken in the ceremony of Jukai, Roshi told him, wisely: *Your path is Haiku*. John remained entirely faithful to that path, and his single-minded approach to it remains an inspiration to all of us.

In his book *The River of Heaven: The Haiku of Basho, Buson, Issa, and Shiki*, Robert Aitken wrote regarding John:

Recently a friend sent me a sheaf of haiku by John F. Turner, his colleague in Australia, that included the verses:

*grinding valves ~
bees drift in and out
of the workshop*

and another:

*a night of stars ~
a possum peers down
on my swag*

Swag is Australian for sleeping bag. Turner holds his own as a true haiku poet of his time and place.

*

John faced the prospect of his death with the same equanimity that he faced the lung cancer that took him out – “You just don’t take the next breath – right?” He died peacefully in his sleep at around 1.30 am on January the 10th 2019 at Bethesda Hospice. Ingvar Anda, a student of the Way and a good friend of John’s, wrote to me just after John died:

“I reflect on your chanting for John and ‘wishing him a good journey’. Thoughts of Issan Dorsey come to mind. A friend of Issan says, “I am going to miss you Issan.” Issan, dying of AIDS, replies, “Where are you going?”

I tend to take a too materialist and literal reading of Buddha’s teaching of no self but I will still keep an eye out for John and his possible journey. I suspect a crow or a magpie might be right.

On April 7 2019 John Turner’s friends gathered together with his niece, Emma Williams, at Cottesloe beach to conduct a memorial service for him in accord with his wishes. John’s choice of music: Bob Dylan, Annie Lennox, Aretha Franklin, Lucinda Williams and Fleetwood Mac, was played on a eighties ghetto blaster costing \$30.00 (John would have approved the medium and the price!). There were stories of John – dark, funny, fearful, loving – and there were tears and laughter. Through these intimate exchanges and the many tributes that were read, we all got to know John better. Finally, Emma Williams and Claire-Marie Cluzel carried John’s ashes into the rising surf and amidst flowers brought by Lizzie and Brigid in a cold freshening wind and gathering clouds we consigned John to the ocean.

Afterwards, we went to Moore & Moore Café in Fremantle and had a wake (sans alcohol) for John. As we shared memories and how our paths had crossed all those years without us knowing it, our conviviality and warmth honoured John, and all he had so generously given us.

- January 16, 2020

SELECTED HAIKU AND SENRYU

By John F. Turner

a wave of sleep ~
in the magic theatre
players appear

in coastal scrub
tree martins dipping low ~
dunes in flower

travelling India
writing freestyle poems ~
haiku seeds popping

honeysuckle!
the turn
home

chewing rye grass
against a shady tree ~
day's end

night shower ~
through the open window
flits a moth

an empty mailbox ~
I look for its lizard
living beneath

harbour lights
shimmer on dark water ~
dolphins glide

war breaks out ~
I'm admitted naked
to the madhouse

I kiss
the water tap ~
home from Asia

apricot blossoms ~
mostly beyond the reach
of my nose

a crow rests
on the flat's railing ~
eye to eye

spring comes ~
asparagus races
the bamboo

recurring dream ~
Freshwater Bay
at moonrise

black swan's nest
on the lake's blue sheen ~
mature magnolia flowers

a dead whale ~
a crowd gathers
up wind

shrieking wildly
sixty black cockatoos
as I chant

long weekend ~
wildflower market
gold coin entry

light rain
on the radishes ~
gone to seed

eye catching
High Street graffiti ~
'love is difficult'

on and off rain ~
mushroom pickers roam
lush paddocks

"All change" ~
on the next train
the same faces

a brown goshawk
searches further woodland ~
old horse pasture

billy tea
the fading beauty
of the moon

morning wind
through the house ~
slamming doors

lighting incense ~
the monk reminds us
"... rocks, trees ..."

the umbrella
hangs on the door's back ~
like a bat

bees in the basil ~
she carries vegetables
in a fold of her dress

lighting fires
under blackened pots ~
India at dusk

insomnia ~
in the wet pines
a magpie sings

dharma combat ~
laughter and energy
increases

a winter creek ~
on the cusp of light
black minnows flash

early train ~
every carriage filled
with surf boards

New Year's Eve ~
I idle in the garden
deadheading daisies

in jarrah gloom
we gather firewood ~
catspaws flower

sober ~
I bow with gratitude
to the moon

just on light ~
a kookaburra ruptures
absurd dreams

my new job ~
I look in the mirror
at sweat stains

the elders say
that rock is a cloud ~
spring downpour

revising
one hundred poems ~
one peach

SPRING RENGA

By John F. Turner, Bob Jones and Ross Bolleter

2011

ocean lull
a whale breaches
in migration
jt

left on the sand
a cold fried egg
bj

barbeque –
on sizzling steak
jacaranda petals
rb

chilled metho
at the hardware store
jt

foggy moon ~
something's recalled
in forgetting
bj

smoke smell – once again
burning stubble with dad
rb

unseasonal heat ~
suddenly dragonflies
pear in flower
jt

birds on fallen limbs
after the cyclone
bj

airport arrivals –
not you not you your smile
lost in our hug
rb

in long distance calls
love is exchanged
jt

her photo ~
from far away
a curlew's cry
bj

lightning –
a mopoke doused white
rb

moonless night
a wombat dies
in a hollow log
jt

the bora song fades
buzzing mosquitoes
bj

blind elder's story
more gaps
more death in them
rb

not enough rain
to get a crop in
jt

I remember
showering blossoms ~
this bleak spring
bj

he sweats winter fat –
new girlfriend
rb

shrewd move
having made a move
open air chess
jt

she cleaned me out
but left these white gulls
bj

his child bride's eyes
wherever he turns
in his turning yard
rb

solstice to equinox
two hemispheres
jt

beach bather ~
tattooed on one buttock
a crab
bj

gale – dunes erupt
into black sky
rb

bushfires ~
the town's folk prepare
to evacuate
jt

my rear-view mirror
frames the lit city
bj

through smoking
rafters a sky
tall with stars
rb

the Dreamtime campfires
of our ancestors . . .
jt

as if waiting
for me to awake ~
the full moon
bj

a crow's caark –
mottled sunset
rb

tree leaves
follow their shadows
to the ground
jt

his schemes fall over
the stillness grows rich
bj

the TV off –
a magpie carols
through the small hours
rb

dawn seeps into
lapis lazuli sky
jt

the swamp glade
swirls ~ petals and
blue butterflies
bj

café – old men gossip
spring sun warms their backs
rb

NEVERTHELESS...

A Net Renga by Irina Harford, Brigid Lowry,
John Turner, Susan Murphy and Ross Bolleter

firmly rooted
dances nevertheless
scattering petals
ih

she's wondering
which dress to wear
bl

morning T'ai Chi
under the plum tree
jt

rose madder?
crimson lake?
the rosella won't say
sm

sky ocean same grey
nothing to tell me
if I live or die
rb

understatement
overstatement
pendulum swings
ih

a black ocean devours
the white beach
rb

no point hurrying back
she skims a few stones
jt

vague shadows of flowers
on the fever chart
sm

without a car
I find my feet
bl

looking down
at a Sorry Book
what to say?
jt

a wizened seahorse
swims
in a bottle
bl

let there be light!
three lilies in a glass
comply
ih

Sunday morning -
I take my omelette
back to bed
rb

she pants in their
shade exhausted
by the blossom
sm

suddenly speechless
cobweb-sealed lips
ih

ants, a living wavering fine black
crack in the wall
sm

dark before dawn -
scalding tea unsticks my eyes
rb

an autumn meal
soup, wine, Mozart
bl

ants even in my pants
hot shower
ih

as I dream
light changes
jt

scurrying
endlessly -
my insect mind
bl

crackling Gladwrap
rolled Sunday paper
sheds raincoat
ih

late at night
with the Kyoto school
and a dictionary
jt

Mahler's birthplace -
the topsoil seeded with
his milk teeth
rb

only the bathtub
empty enough and yellow
catches the moon
sm

blurred skateboarders
push back the air
rb

High Street graffito
'love is difficult'
jt

speaking from a dream
to think is to stumble
sm

woken from a dream
I am toe nails, bowl, sky
bl

stars too
on their appointed rounds
somewhere a dog is barking
ih

with cherries and song
we greet
the bright new year
bl

a bell's ring
echoes
around the valley
jt

final layer of morning sky
fishbone when it's almost gone
sm

smiling -
the green tug's hoot
rb

JOHN TURNER: WILD MAN... POET... GENTLE INTELLIGENT SPIRIT

By Lizzie Finn, with *haiku* by John Turner

*apple blossoms ~
I walk the windy grounds
with a lit candle*

It's strange, I don't feel as if you are gone, John. It feels as though you are still walking with a lit candle, warming the Way with your gentle intelligent spirit, the one which imbued your journey so steadily in the last months I spent with you.

Wild, gentle, intelligent spirit... to be all of these is to be like the great Ocean itself, and indeed you were the great Ocean in all of its many colours and moods.

My favourite memory is you wearing your blue boiler suit in true Marxist style when I met up with you for coffee at Gino's. I thought of this garb as 'fashion au John Turner': striking and yet a supremely down to earth statement.

I remember you coming for a night's camping with my partner David and I near Mundaring Weir, and your sheer delight in being out there under the night sky, surrounded by trees. You were right there in the moment:

*a night of stars ~
a possum peers down
on my swag*

I later became aware that you spent many hours sitting solo in nature by day and night, particularly on the hill overlooking the sea near where you lived. It was your true home, the one which gave rise to endless curiosity, and which you captured in so many of your haiku:

*are there many
snails on the path ~
this moonless night?*

You became a teacher for me. During the several years I knew you, I came to understand how courageous you were to endure the suffering of schizophrenia again and again, and yet to emerge from it to live a life of quiet integrity and kindness. It was that kindness which prompted you to phone me after David died and invite me to join you in listening to live local music every

now and again. You were always encouraging me to make my life less busy and complex.

I feel honoured that you asked me to help you when your cancer accelerated and you were finding it hard to manage daily tasks in those final months. You must have trusted me in some way and I really appreciate that. Again, you became my teacher. When Ross rang me to let me know you had asked for my help, my immediate inner response was a fearful one: 'Will I be able to manage this on top of all the other things I have to do?' But I overcame that fear and entered an extraordinarily warm and intimate journey with you in those last weeks.

You never complained or expressed fear. You seemed to enjoy chatting away in the present moment or listening with me to some of your treasured CDs. And then, that day towards the end of your life, when we just sat quietly holding hands... No need to say anything, full and complete in that warm connection. When I visited you on the day you died you were already unconscious, and I had a strong sense that you were already on your Way to a place of peace and light, where there is no suffering.

You would have loved the celebration ceremony we held for you John: down on Cottesloe beach in a Force 10 gale, at least 20 of us, close friends, sitting in a circle on the sand, many of us standing up to say words. The best part was at the end when we started to throw flowers into the sea for you, but with that gale blowing the flowers were scattering everywhere and the waves were high enough to douse several of us, creating mayhem. It was a ceremony which you would have relished!

Now, many months later, I have a sense of your ongoing presence, still sitting on that hill overlooking the sea.....

*within sight
of Indian Ocean surf ~
I breathe freedom*

Fare-well John; may you know you are truly loved as you continue along the Way.

FOR JOHN TURNER

By Brigid Lowry

I don't remember meeting you. You were just always there, a friend of Ross's who became a friend of mine.

You impressed me with your haiku, your dedication to the craft, your love of Japan and of a long-time-ago woman there. You could sum people up in a few dry clear words. Your heart was kind but you didn't do bullshit.

Your poetry spoke about your world so clearly, everything included: therapy, graffiti, snails, hospital visits, dreams, overalls.

I often bumped into you in Fremantle. One day we happened across each other outside Culley's Tearooms and sat down for a natter. We swapped jokes and you rolled cigarettes. Now, when I walk down High Street past the cafe and the buskers, I feel your absence keenly.

I took you fruit when you were dying.

"I am a fruit bat," you said, tucking into a juicy nectarine. It was summer, just before Christmas. I was about to leave for New Zealand. I knew I would never see you again.

On the last day, when I arrived, I watched you sleeping, with the radio on, under a patchwork rug. You were thin, pale, peaceful. When you woke, we talked about death, amongst other things. "Desire continues," you informed me. You did not seem frightened. We met beyond our illnesses, beyond fear, and knew each other fully, in deep communion. When you'd had enough you said so and I headed off, into the afternoon so radiantly alive with jacarandas and the insect music of the afternoon.

*Dying cricket –
How full of life, his song.*

- Basho

THREE HAIKU (to the memory of John Turner)

all at once	moonlight sonata –	ancient freeway –
the jacarandas' mauve	the snail grips tighter	the black cavalcade glides
hazes the slopes	to the piano's back	into the sun

- Ross Bolleter

THANKING YOU JOHN

You rang and rang.
Left messages;
urgent rambles
in kindred states
as brother John.

You laughed and laughed.
Wry tho' it all;
a pun, a joke,
to lighten us
and transform pain.

You walked and walked.
Haiku in heart;
n' blue overalls
till your deep voice
filled the dojo.

You gave and gave.
Passionate words;
weaving courage,
and loyalty
everlasting.

- Kathy Shiels

In exchange for the absence
of something that wasn't there,
the whole world!

- Jane Taylor

ALWAYS BECOMING OTHER

Always becoming other.
Is this inconstant place.
Never arriving at other.
No things completely *are*.

Never ceasing becoming.
Nothing thus *becomes*.
As becoming is unceasing,
All things abide as this.

Wanting or not wanting are fantasies.
Self and Other have no mutual regard.
One eye closes, another eye opens,
Blindness is lively and completely clear.

Seeing things as becoming is not correct.
Seeing things as constant is clearly false.
When seer and seen mutually intersect,
The night has left fresh dew.

Who sees is not a personal matter.
We cannot get to the end of it.
Ask a rock or a stone about seeing.
Eyes and silence have no special category.

Billions of worlds, endless time.
Don't worry about galaxies of dust,
Pots and pans and all thinking,
Release all starry grains.

- Chris Barker

SANGHA HAIKU AND SENRYU

Kwinana Freeway
neck and neck and eye to eye
Echo and Egret

- Koral Ward

Shivering –
I recall
The clear water

In the night
The house dreams –
Hear that bell?

- Tony Balint

smiling
at morning commuters ~
shadows recede

midday sun...
my colleague announces
she's pregnant

jasmine spills
over asbestos ~
tummy rash

- Gerard Mazza