From Issue 4: Ryland Shengzhi Li

From Issue 4: Humbled Vessel

a piercing call deep in the reeds are you also lost in this floating world like a dream

- Ryland Shengzhi Li

There is a variety of poetic tools we could discuss in relation to this one-line tanka. Because this is the first tanka we have featured in the Lizard Lounge, and because single-line tanka is fairly new to English-language practitioners, we are restricting our commentary to only two areas: a few multiple potential reads, and the rhythm and sounds the poem uses to create an elevated iteration in one-line form.

Here are a few of the readings possible in this one-line tanka. We've shown the breakdowns in both one-line and multi-linear formats to help get people accustomed to reading tanka in this way.

1) a piercing /call deep in the reeds /are you /also lost in this /floating world like a dream

a piercing call deep in the reeds are you also lost in this floating world like a dream

Emphasis on the piercing unpleasantness, the general feeling of being lost, and the characteristics of this world.

2) a piercing call / deep in the reeds /are you also lost /in this floating world / like a dream

a piercing call deep in the reeds are you also lost in this floating world like a dream

Emphasis on the location of the call/calling and if you are there in the dream too.

3) a piercing call deep /in the reeds are you /also lost /in this floating /world like a dream

a piercing call deep in the reeds are you also lost in this floating world like a dream

Emphasis on the depth and existing as well as being lost in the floating world.

4) a piercing call deep in the reeds / are you also lost in this floating world like a dream

a piercing call deep in the reeds are you also lost in this floating world like a dream

The emphasis here is largely similar to that of #2 above, however, dividing the two parts of the poem with a single line break allows for more "dreaming room" versus the 5-line version. Yet, it does not allow the reader to drift off seemingly indefinitely the way the single-line format does. Having even one line break still disrupts the multiple overlapping reads that are available in the single-line format otherwise.

What other readings can you find? The one-line format enhances the meaning of this tanka by not forcing the reader into any one reading (ergo meaning) by way of the enjambment(s). Many readings are possible here, and the multiple nuances captured by each reading emphasize the dream-like feeling of being lost and finding someone who is perhaps lost like you.

The uncut structure encourages a longer rhythm as well as the euphony of repeating sounds across the length of the poem. Below the stressed syllables are shown in capital letters and the rhymes and slant-rhymes (i.e., a near-rhyme) are color-coded. Read the poem aloud and listen to the beautiful sounds of the language used!

```
a PIERcing CALL DEEP in the REEDS are you ALso LOST in this FLOATing WORLD like a DREAM
```

There is a distinct cadence at the beginning of this one-line tanka but as it moves toward the end of the line, the beats begin to lose pace and the reader starts to lose their footing, searching for each next step. This close-to-far feeling is impossible to achieve in any other lineation; the two-line form is the closest, but still has its clear drawbacks in comparison.

While any of these poems may have been successful in their way, there are undeniable qualities to the poem on the single line which rise above the others.

Written by Kat Lehmann and Robin Smith

Originally published at whiptail: journal of the single-line poem on August 9, 2022.