

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.

