

Otata

April, 2016

otata 1

April, 2016

copyright © 2016 by the contributors

Contributors

Hansha Teki,
vincent tripi,
Jeanne Martin,
Guliz Vural,
Alan Summers,
Tom Montag,
Shloka Shankar,
Helen Buckingham,
Chad Robinson,
Aditya Bahl,
David J. Kelly,
Kim Dorman,
F.J. Seligson

F.J. Seligson on Ed Baker

tokonoma

KUBLAI: I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden.

POLO: Everything I see and do assumes meaning in a mental space where the same calm reigns as here, the same penumbra, the same silence streaked by the rustling of leaves. At the moment when I concentrate and reflect, I find myself again, always, in this garden, at this hour of the evening...

— Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (trans. William Weaver)

Hansha Teki

a moth enters my waiting

without cause
the sound of water . . .
just the words

loneliness nestles into listening

in silence
a new moon's
echolalia

skylark song
gone now – a bird
unburdened

≡

vincent tripi

never
just one wildflower
meditation spot

how roadrunner
how can you possibly?
no path

the chickadee calls the
chickadee who call to chickadee
to call to

Jeanne Martin

one last ride...
the train whistle
whistles again

all that we know
is all that we know
spring rain

summer solstice
all night moonlight
inside the house

Alan Summers

shadows that don't daffodils belong

sun off stubble a train in its landscape

call of geese the heart I eat inside

≡

Tom Montag

And weeds poking through snow.
We cannot know their code.

Hawk at its watch.
Just enough is patience.

Not to be of use,
the poet;
like the crow,
to be of wind.

Crow
has nothing
to tell me —
it only
looks

that way.

Nothing. Again nothing.
What are the odds of that?

≡

Shloka Shankar

second-guessing itself a nightgown billows in the breeze

as an aside i shape-shift into a key

the sheen on an orange rind negative capability

≡

Helen Buckingham

arterial road
blocked
with snow

jaw
dropping
eclipse

heads crack
together...
the beautiful game

sweatshop city
working the red carpet
she extends a gloved hand

≡

Chad Robinson

prickly pear——
you wake up in
yesterday's clothes

prickly pear every weapon drawn

yellow flowers
of the prickly pear——
we choose a china pattern

late tomatoes
the scarecrow slips deeper
into its waistline

what
rubs off
wild apple

clocks turned back in bed we curl up

blizzard wind——
trying to fold
a fitted sheet

a pine cone
a music box
ballerina

≡

Aditya Bahl

gathered
at the shrine gate
counterfeit crocs

eat
pray
love
xerox

≡

David J. Kelly

Quattro Stagioni

searing until midday's madness ends rain

and under this unblinking moon narcolepsy

winding into nothingness the earth's return

such perfect renaissance in natural greens

≡

Kim Dorman

After Sankara

Ignorance
is darkness.

Knowledge
is like the sun.

Ignorance
is a bad dream.

Wake up–
it's gone

Words are
bubbles.

They vanish
in the Real.

Winnow grain
from chaff.

using Reason.

Knowledge
is freedom

but no cooking
without fire.

The Real doesn't
depend on anything—

light doesn't need
another light!

Imagine searching
for a lost necklace,

one you were wearing
all the time!

Imagine it's dusk & you
see a snake

that's only a rope.

Whoever knows the Real
is like a caterpillar

become a butterfly.

Whoever knows the real
is like a flame

inside a lamp.

Whoever knows the Real
is unattached
like the wind.

At one with Reality,
he or she
is like water in water,
air in air,
light in light.

There is nothing left
to do, nothing
more to know.
No greater happiness
than this.

Everything is filled
with That.

Every action shows only
That. Shining.

it makes the world
shine.

✕

Skipping stones. Midsummer.
A shower before the dance.

Boys snapping towels. Nervous.

The Yardbirds on a transistor radio.
Scent of Jade East.

It's almost time. Sunset

≡

F.J. Seligson

Before
the
leaf,

**one
white**

b

lossom

opens

JOY AND PEACE FOR ED BAKER (1941-2016)

The poet Ed Baker passed away on March 29 at 12:30 am after living 73 robust winters. He has given to the earth new energies and offered to human beings new sounds and colors, meanings. Google his name, with poetry after – and you will discover only one Ed Baker fitting that accurate description. He was as much as an accomplished painter as a

poet, maybe more, although he didn't offer either for fame or profit. He was content to work at his word-man-ship, drawings and colorings day after day for decades, aiming for the perfection of expression and his favorite subject: love for a woman. Not an unusual topic, yet his approach and characterization were unique fine, alive, even glorious. Cid Corman introduced me to Ed in an affectionate 1975 letter from Kyoto and John Martone introduced me to Ed in Washington D.C. near the Washington, Monument around 2000. He was driving an old pickup truck and wore a baseball cap over his bald head, magnifying his fluffy white beard. That was the real start of our friendship. After that, whenever I was in Washington, D.C., on three occasions, I would stay with Ed in his antique house on Flower Avenue in Takoma Park, Maryland. His son lived on the 3rd floor and his daughter in the basement apartment. He occupied ground level rooms, sharing the dining room and kitchen. He was a deeply caring man toward his grown children, a father and a mother, too, for he even cooked for them. I never heard him raise his voice or utter an inconsiderate word toward them, and they I saw could live comfortably and quietly with him,

despite all the eccentricities of a painter and a poet, without which there would be no art, but rather the commonplace.

Ed earned a MFA in creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University in 1973, specializing in poetry. Already his work was exceptional, reminding me of Ezra Pound, as in Ed's poem, Hydra, in his book BUTCHER OF OXEN and other poems (1970):

Hydra

I think about the great river:
forgetting the sun I suffer the sun
with birds that drink at the edge
with men who cast their nets.

They came as I was gazing at that sun
dressed

I tell you dressed in white
as I was gazing at that other continent.

Great stones in the hills mark the dead; it is almost
impossible to remember

other Greeks

fire

That burned along the shore

Or on the point

was also in process of restoring his own life.

Besides watercolor and oil paintings, examples of which lined the walls of his house, he did abstract wood sculptures. It was one day about 10 years ago that I received word that "Ed had a stroke." When visiting him last summer, 2016, he told me, "I was working outside under the hot sun, but I wanted to keep going on the sculpture, then it hit me and I was unconscious in the yard." He survived and recovered almost completely save for high blood pressure for which he took medication. In the winter of 2015 I heard that he has suffered another stroke, and a couple months after his son notified me that he was in the hospital, where not long after his heart gave out.

And a strong and vigorous heart it had been. After his first stroke he worked at recovery by competing in several marathons, even triathlons. But his greatest marathons had been in writing hundreds of outstanding short poems and illustrating them immaculately. Here are some examples: He had an entire shelf full of his illustrations in carefully dated notebooks. All of his book shelves which filled two rooms were neatly arranged and filled with the classics of modern poetry and spiritual studies as well. Whenever I'd visit he'd conduct an on-going poetry workshop for me:

laying before me piles of his own work, like the monumental Stone Girl E-pic, to peruse as well as well as the works of North American poets I didn't know at all or at least not very well but who I should know, like Irving Layton, and Carl Rakosi. Poetry and painting were his life and he happily shared it with me. Had he been more ambitious his work would have been more widely known and appreciated, but it's not too late.

Here is an example of his love poems for Fay Ling, from The City (1974)

Tonight,
the still slow war
has gotten beyond me
I imagine yellow flowers
growing
on the wall
A girl in a dress
I have not seen her wear
before
her loose movement
in a wet dress
as she went up

houston street

These are examples of Ed short poems, and his particular sense of humor, influenced by his correspondence with Cid Corman and others of Cid's school:

.... Sometimes

being myself

Isn't so easy

.....

butterfly

wrapping

me

around

her

finger

(in Postcards from Myou, 2000)

Within and without

same

red tulip.

(from Things Just Come Through, 2004)

Purple

blossom

just

here

just

hear

just

her

The last night I was in Washington I was walking back to dine and sleep as his guest by old two-story houses along Flower Avenue when the short grass lit up with a glow my feet, and then again here and there in other yards. They created briefly a yellow softness, silent and unspoiled. How many millions of years had the fireflies, "lightning bugs" we Washingtonians called them, been lighting up the plants at night? It seemed to me the most beautifully sublime sight I had ever seen – so silent and gentle, oblivious that this was a dangerous place to be for us humans walking at night. For them life went on in its eternal beauty. I wish the same for Ed's soul.

~Fred Jeremy Seligson, April 9th, 2016, Seoul

otata appears

at the end of each month.

Direct correspondence to John Martone

atotatahaiku@gmail.com

By [john martone](#) April 29, 2016