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PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Double Take: Response Tanka, by Sonja Arntzen and Naomi Beth Wakan, Published by MET Press

Double Take: Response Tanka, by Sonja Arntzen and Naomi Beth Wakan is an extraordinary collection of responsive tanka. Michael Dylan Welch says, “You will surely come back to these poems for a closer reading, returning to each collaborative pairing to dwell in their candor, their echoes, their surprising turns, their drinking in of all it means to be alive.” Angela Leuck writes, “Like the pleasure of a lingering, afternoon tea party, *Double Take* is a book that you’ll want to read slowly and savour.” Beverley George says, “*Double Take* demonstrates the power of the compressed poem to delight and satisfy an attentive reader.”

Baltimore, Maryland – May 17, 2010 –*Double Take: Response Tanka*, by Sonja Arntzen and Naomi Beth Wakan, has been published as a trade paperback by MET Press of Baltimore, Maryland. It is an extraordinary project, best described in the words of the authors, themselves.

“For many years, as part of teaching courses on classical Japanese literature, I created and participated in exercises where the students and I would write poems in English but in Japanese forms like haiku and tanka as a way to deepen our appreciation of Japanese poetry. It was only after coming to live on Gabriola Island that I shifted toward writing tanka as means of expressing my experience for its own sake. One catalyst was subscribing to a fledgling tanka journal *Gusts* started by a friend, Kozue Uzawa, which provided a venue for tanka submissions. The other catalyst was becoming friends with Naomi Beth Wakan, the well-known haiku poet and inspired provocateur of writing in others. Naomi involved me in workshops, where she taught haiku and I taught tanka. Naomi herself took up the tanka form enthusiastically. Recently, Naomi acquired a book of tanka poetry written by two Australian poets, Amelia Fielden and Kathy Kituai entitled *In Two Minds*, a book of what they called ‘responsive tanka.’ To have two short poems create a conversation with each other brought a whole new dimension into the presentation of tanka in English. Reading the book with delight, I mentioned to Naomi that we could try exchanging tanka for fun. ‘We certainly could and we’ll make a book out of it!’ was her response. Before I knew it, she had the book all planned out. Naomi is the only person I know who considers the writing of poetry seriously as a livelihood. And thus, this book was born. [. . .] The first poem on the page is the poem that launches the conversation, the second poem replies. We have taken turns with supplying the first poem. Sometimes the link between two paired tanka is by a single word, sometimes by shared subject, imagery, or tone. Sometimes the link is close, other times it is distant. Always between the two poems there is a resonance that expands the meaning beyond the sum of the two separate

poems.” —Sonja Arntzen, *Introduction*

“I had written in the disciplined form of haiku for many years. Resting in the senses of the moment, there is no room for past, future, emotions, ideas or metaphors in haiku, although these are often wrapped up implicitly inside. When I turned to tanka, with its total freedom, I felt a strange liberation. Yet tanka, the poetry that has been written for the longest continuous time of any form, has its own deep traditions. Originally songs to the gods in Japan, tanka moved on to being used for communication between friends and lovers. So, staying within these parameters, I trust my tanka have the intimacy of the confessional, along with the awe of things still unknown. For after all, I feel it is best to understand the universe by first studying the things close at hand and everyday. So I hope the simplicity and immediacy of haiku linger on in the familiar images I have chosen for my tanka.”—Naomi Beth Wakan, *Afterword*

Critical Comment about *Double Take*:

“These tanka are worthy of a double take. You will surely come back to these poems for a closer reading, returning to each collaborative pairing to dwell in their candor, their echoes, their surprising turns, their drinking in of all it means to be alive. These call-and-response poems by Sonja Arntzen and Naomi Beth Wakan offer a fluid and fulfilling tanka dance.”

—Michael Dylan Welch, founder of the Tanka Society of America

“In their series of responsive tanka, experienced Gabriola Island writers, Sonja Arntzen and Naomi Beth Wakan, share their daily observations and musings, disappointments and joys. Like the pleasure of a lingering, afternoon tea party, *Double Take* is a book that you’ll want to read slowly and savour.”

—Angela Leuck, author of *Flower Heart: Haiku*

“This collection of paired lyrical responses embraces the linking dynamics that are a hallmark of traditional Japanese poetry. Such linking has the potential to increase the resonance of each poem in the way that an empathetic conversation can extend our understanding of human experience. As in any worthwhile conversation, neither voice dominates. Pauses for reflection are shown physically by the generous white spaces around each poem. *Double Take* demonstrates the power of the compressed poem to delight and satisfy an attentive reader.”

—Beverley George, Editor: *Eucalypt: a tanka journal*

About the Authors:

Sonja Arntzen The translation of poems written in Chinese by the Japanese Zen monk Ikkyū Sōjun (1394-1481) absorbed Sonja Arntzen for twenty years and resulted in the publication of *Ikkyū and the Crazy Cloud Anthology* (Tokyo University Press, 1986). Also drawn to the vast body of work produced by Japanese women writers in the 10th and 11th centuries, she has published a translation of a 10th C. woman’s journal, *The Kagerō Diary* (University of Michigan, 1997). Retired from teaching at the University of Toronto, she is working on various translations and a history of Japanese women’s writing, along with writing poetry and doing a lot of gardening.

Naomi Beth Wakan has written over thirty-five books, including *Haiku - one breath poetry*, (Heian International). Recent titles are *Segues*, *Late Bloomer - on writing later in life*, *Compositions: notes on the written word*, and *Book Ends – a year between the covers*, all from Wolsak and Wynn. Her writing workshops inspire and empower the novice writer. Naomi is a member of Haiku Canada, Tanka Canada, The League of Canadian Poets, and Poetry Gabriola. Her poetry and essays have been printed in numerous magazines including *Geist*, *Room of One's Own*, *Moonset*, *Resurgence* and *Red Lights*. She lives on Gabriola Island with her husband, the sculptor, Elias Wakan.

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About MET Press:

MET Press (Modern English Tanka Press) is an independent publishing house in Baltimore, Maryland, dedicated to producing work of lasting literary value, especially fine verse. A family business, we treat our customers and partners in publishing like family. We use modern print-on-demand production and distribution methods. Our special mission is to promote the tanka form of poetry and to educate newcomers about this most ancient poetic form.

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