

# **For Cecil**

## **Tankas and haikus**

### **Martin Robertson**

#### **Aldeburgh**

They burned drowned Shelley  
on the beach. We on your beach  
raised you a bonfire  
to warm us, be you, burn off  
the chill crematorium.

To one each turns, as  
to a natural centre.  
Now my centre's gone.

I am haunted by  
a thought: might it have been meant?  
I do not think so.  
Too much surely to hold you.  
But if it were, what courage.

I am old, and as  
I failed you, so can only  
fail to take your place.  
Yes, but must still be something  
more than myself, will be, can.

Thorpe white in the sun  
against the black earth; lost in  
the storm now; now here  
too the sleet-wind darkens down.  
Without you your winter shore.

Wind is a sword of  
ice, under wild colours in  
sun-touched or dark cloud.

A rare night. Beach deep  
in snow. A ceaseless gale that  
strips it. Night for you.

## Cambridge

Warm summer cycle  
ride. Home, in the garden found  
you dying. Today,  
bitter beautiful winter  
cycling, past the hospital.

Silver spoon in the  
bathroom. My outrage is as  
yours. Some things slip though.  
Change, knowingly made, all right.  
Not, that's not so good.

Steve Davis knocked out  
of the semi-final. You  
would have liked that, though  
Hurricane Higgins would have  
pleased you better as the winner.

Things you only just  
missed. Sophie of course, and Tom's  
throwaway, that in  
five years perhaps, working at  
home, "We'd start a family".

After grassed acres,  
here you chose stone to raise  
your lovely garden round.

Did you suffer much?  
Would to know the answer help?  
Not you. Us perhaps.

Walking on the white  
slippery track, face smarting  
in the evening frost  
—this monochrome stillness looks  
like death but is something else.

Venus is burning  
big and low, yellow through the  
haze which hides the rest.

A young man in the  
street was humming, whistling not  
very tunefully  
a tune, familiar. . . Then I  
realized: Hyperactive.

I don't believe in  
any afterlife, so must  
accept that in death  
all failures, like all losses  
are irrecoverable.

On the radio  
Schubert's Shepherd on the Rocks.  
For me, you. For you,  
Stephen. I wish I thought you  
were listening together.

Always returns the  
image of your face as mask,  
closed eyes swollen.

## **The North**

Snow under grey cloud.  
Monochrome world from Cambridge  
to the Border. Or  
from here to eternity.  
The train moves. Nothing changes.

What in this city  
do we share? Best, Dominick  
and the children who  
had no fares but an old hat  
he bought, wore to a *première*.

Clear, bright, very cold.  
A hard landscape, beautiful  
but hard. Very cold.

Why should a change of  
date in our artificial  
calendar seem so  
significant? '84  
you were in, not '85.

Children (bright-coloured  
muffings against a white snow  
slope) tobogganing.

Misunderstandings.  
Can they be sloughed in the new  
relation? (live—dead).

In car, bus, train I  
want the journey not to end  
even when the end  
is wanted. I didn't, I  
suppose, want to leave the womb.

Moving across the snow  
towards the sun through bright mist.  
There is nothing else.

Luckily I am  
too often too silly to  
be a wise old man.

Misunderstandings?  
That New Yorker joke: "My wife  
*does* understand me."

I failed you living  
and what I do can't help you  
dead. But it might help them  
a little who loved you, love  
you, love me, love both of us.

You were there, and I  
hugged you. You didn't mind. Death  
had happened, but was  
release from work, and that was  
(you said) relief. We made plans.

You felt I had failed you  
profoundly. I don't forget.  
But must not let that  
blot out what were surely our  
successes, our happiness.

Too much about me.  
But I think about you more  
and better. Light and  
warmth that irradiated  
us. Bonfire on the night beach.