

Jane Kenyon Poetry Prize – First Prize

Su Smallen

YAU YELLOW

Why . . . pray to colors

as if their names are impenetrable

vaults of latin snow

John Yau

Are we ready to send

a yellow rose petal falls, with a pat on *send*. Yellow on a cherry table,
the petal within the table a yellower cherry

and receive each other's images?

The table has caught the petal's flight.

There is no there to get to.

Not haiku but quantum physics.

Petal
(thing)
soft
like
dog's
ear

Petal
(event)
balloon
when
breath
leaves

Caught, the petal, soft like a balloon after the breath is gone. (This in another now.)

The yellow roses you gave me are museum perfect. Except they stopped accepting water (the fresh water). They tipped their corolla revealing a post-it: "what is the color underneath?" (Painters ask this.) The color underneath perfect yellow is red, red tipping, drips, a streak.

Now as I read the yellow roses overbloom (this in another now) and brown. Looking in from the outside, the boulevard maple yellows on the far side. The near side is still green.

I am tossing out words as I read that I don't recognize as what I am looking for. They land (pat) in my notebook as yellow leaves, curling as they dry into question marks. Tossing out more and more words, agitated, until there are no more words only question marks. Layers of question marks. (42 question marks (32 and 33 are twins)). I am in a still wind. There is no more green notebook.

My notebook has caught the question marks. Not haiku but quantum physics.

Question mark (thing)	Question mark (event)
to	mulch
rake	for
and	less-hardy
bag	yellow
as	mums
trash	(brown already)

Not quantum physics but a museum installation.

Are we ready to send and receive each other's images?

The memory exam:

can you recall without aid of detail of color
nor the color underneath where you were then
when you thought you would remember now
when it is so important so there will be
another now after this moment? Not a future
for I and the squirrel have no future.

We only exist in now.

Now consists of digging through to

we don't recognize as what we are looking for

There is no there to get to

and burying against the potential ferocity of the next now.

The tree is in a still wind. The squirrel lifts and resettles yellow marks (a streak of red) with a pat, tamping in one answer against the white trial. Not the future.

Some answers are questions we bury in the questions to keep the Other Question at bay.

The roses are yellow, you answer, because you love yellow and you love flowers and these roses are perfect. I have chosen them of all I could have chosen to be my words. Why they *are* yellow is that they are yellow. Irreducible like the sun we drew as a blessing. Not haiku but quantum physics.

Where were you then (this in another now) when you drew a yellow sun (you thought you would remember) in the top right corner of every picture as a blessing (now when it is so important). With so many rays, but instead of rays, triangles, because you never saw rays. You saw the fracturing of yellow light clattering down into eyes full of involuntary resistance to the ferocity. Triangles falling on yellow flowers (or perhaps trees – it's a matter of scale and we did not draw the legend – the legend is missing). Are we ready to receive the blessing? Even though yellow is caution?

To make some food out of yellow. Triangles tipping like overblown roses, falling like question marks. Because these are words I don't recognize as what I am looking for. To be able to accept water (the fresh water) from the next now, so there will be another now when I don't need to tip my perfect corolla to reveal (scarlet) underneath.

The (effect) meaning of yellow, of Yau's yellow, held away from me on the south side. I look through the green (my green side) filtering yellow through a window beyond the yellow roses (breath is leaving: pat) beyond Yau's book (he from the other side of yellow).

My yellow is grandparents' kitchen table and chairs, yellowed floor, and sleeping above them in rooms where the morning sun accompanied the morning dove, mourning, through the yellowed shades suspending a crocheted circle, yellow with fingers pulling over time.

Yau's yellow: *sentence headlights, hats, school bus, children* (3 and 4 are fraternal twins), *hexagons, birds, fields, obstacle, stings, dust, lamp, linen* (not chink), *name, moonlit race of bold potatoes, jelly snacks, leaf, frown, wires/thoughts/batteries, time's factory, brine, champagne glasses, stalls/pages, sky's schemes, stones, sounds, alarm clock, angel, blossom, light, tongue, stalks, tongue* (30 and 32 are identical twins), *novel pages, flowers.*

My yellow: Czech rosary called and answered from kitchen to dining room. October trees when they stop accepting water. The cartoon streaks streaming around circling dogs

circling happiness. Breath the thing (soft as a dog's ear) and breath the event (breath is leaving):

pat)

The effect (meaning) of Yau's yellow is held away from me on the south side. Without aid of detail of color nor the color underneath, the squirrel and I have no future. Yau writes *chink* and in the next line *yellow* and I recall it as "yellow chink" and I wonder what that means for him to use the word *chink* and for myself to have misremembered.

Are we ready to send and receive each other's images?

The memory exam: fingers pulling over time.

The tree and I are in a still wind tossing. My eye has caught a blessing triangle. The triangle within the eye a yellower petal.

Not haiku, not quantum physics, not a museum installation, but a post-it I don't recognize as what I am looking for. A yellow petal slips out of now. Now is the color underneath.

All italicized words are John Yau's from poems in his book *Edificio Sayonara* (Black Sparrow Press, Santa Rosa, 1992).