

And the very title of Caroline G. Banks's "Lessons in Bipedalism" suggests that the learned observer in the poem is going to have an uncomfortable (albeit enriching) experience of some kind; Banks's sensitive distinction between walking for mere good health and walking for survival is, indeed, a telling lesson.

Therefore I, professional poet and amateur anthropologist whose contributions to the field consist entirely of unpublished observations regarding the behavior of my fellow human beings in shopping malls, conclude that good anthropological poetry is not only well-written and pleasurable to read but also contains

a significant amount of humility. Further, the humility in such poetry is not there for its own sake but serves to further and deepen the empathetic abilities of the anthropological poet him- or herself.

This conclusion is based entirely on the examples that follow. I wish I had more space in which to introduce other examples of anthropological poetry to you; even if I did, though, I doubt that I would alter my hypothesis. Of course, I'm just a poet. I don't have to be "right" the way anthropologists do. But read on, reader, and see if you don't think that I am.

### *First Prize Winner*

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## Restoration Triptych

The buttress leans against the scaffold, breathless,  
Flying its last mission unsupported through the ages,  
And the gargoyles tense above the masons' blades,  
Their haunches flexed, and undecided still,  
Pondering the leap of faith required  
To bridge the centuries or return to earth.  
The bell tower now is silent save for birdsong  
And for scholding, as the hammers ring  
In service of a reconstructed nave.

Uncobbling the ancient arteries of their neglected town,  
A medieval wheel of radiant spokes staved almost to the hub,  
Repiping life with fiber optic nerves, with water, gas, electric,  
Ancestral city fathers gird the streets and grid the town,  
Retrofitting custom to convention, hardening targets, multi-  
Lingually labelling photo importunities, returning to the future  
All the idols and the alleys of the guilds. The workers tile  
And spackle, sift and dig and haul and hose,  
Laboring to enchrism these weird ways with honest sweat.

Images glimpsed through the sooty windows of a speeding train,  
Or savored on an aimless solitary stroll  
Of embraced places, distant times and strangers,  
Revisit me as often I do them.

I balance lightly on the couch prepared to root and scared to fly  
And lift again that silent spade with once rough hands gone soft,  
Determined to unearth and to inter a calloused soul,  
To undermine, to tunnel out, to backfill and to plant.

## Too Far Afield

I held a child's voice  
Against an ocean,  
And wondering too late  
If it were mine,  
Released it dumbly to a  
Foreign wind.  
Alone he was, and not,  
Yet could not fathom  
Such dark distance as must  
Pass before we meet.





## Local Custom [Field Journal/Amsterdam Station]

At last the rain relents.

Sunlight warms the bridge rails  
And the smell of sweat and sausages,  
Of diesel fumes and cold canals  
Is wafted into town on measured gusts.

A ragged band of unwashed foreign boys,  
A fluid claque of banter and percussion,  
The very occidental tourist becomes

An accidental terrorist  
Safeguarded by a bungling host.

Exchanging currency as they embody it,  
They mount a raucous randy quest  
For guilder bags and golden arches.

As life unfolds, Imbaya Kuna trill  
Andean tunes outside the station,  
Lilt and shill, accompany hawked tapes,  
And dare ethnographers to record

The truth of this Dutch treat.

Market day in Amsterdam  
(photo by John Sherry).

