

# ANDREW LANSDOWN

## THE CHILDREN AND THE DOGS

*Mark vii, 24-30*

We were at table when she came  
uninvited into the room.  
He saw her first. I looked up  
and was furious. Always  
the riff-raff. Other kings  
retire to pomp and splendour  
but He received only the praise  
of the poor, was plagued  
by petitions from the deformed  
the diseased, the deranged:  
“Son of David, have mercy!”  
Have mercy! Can't He eat a meal  
without their badgering!?  
I stood to deflect her  
but she brushed past, making  
my hands unclean. She was  
a Gentile, as her garments  
and bracelets betrayed. She said,  
“Master, my daughter  
has a devil. It makes her ill.”  
A Gentile, a woman, a demon:  
three in one, these filthy things  
at my table. He dismissed her,  
speaking as she spoke in Greek,  
speaking as she could never speak  
of the Covenant and the promises  
to Israel. But she persisted,  
which seemed to please Him  
almost as much as it offended us.  
He wiped a crust around the rim

of his bowl, gathering up  
the gravy, and said, "Should I  
throw the children's bread  
to the dogs?" I wanted to say  
as the Romans say, "Die, dog,  
if you are not happy!" But  
His laughter restrained me.  
My skin tingles, remembering it:  
a mingling of mirth and love.  
She replied, "Yes, Lord, yet  
even the whelps chance a crumb  
while under the children's table."  
Such humility! Such faith!  
He was pleased. He was moved.

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### WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

While my students are  
writing tanka, I notice  
a robin alight  
in a patch of sunlight just  
outside the classroom window.