

## This Week's Montage

## —Buddha-nature

## Comparative Haiku

selected by

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Within the Theravada tradition, the oldest Buddhist “school,” practiced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, Siddhattha Gotama’s birthday is celebrated on May 8<sup>th</sup>—providing an excellent occasion to recognize some Buddhist-themed haiku. “Buddha-nature” is a key concept of the Mahayana tradition (which includes Zen), indicating the potential for enlightenment all sentient beings possess. Thus, the occasion and title of this gallery bring together two major Buddhist traditions: the Theravada and the Mahayana. At present, it’s somewhat fashionable in haiku circles to downplay the connection between haiku and Buddhism. Perhaps that comes as a reaction against the formidable early influences of Blyth, Hackett, and Amann; perhaps it’s also because the West is so steeped in Platonic/Christian thought. But there’s no underestimating the potential haiku possesses for giving aesthetic expression to such key Buddhist concepts as “this present moment” and “the suchness of things.” Nor should one forget that Bashō and Buson were Zen lay priests and Issa a devout Pure Land Buddhist. These masters were far from the only Japanese haikai with significant connections to Buddhist philosophy. “The disciple of Bashō who had the deepest understanding of Zen was Jōshō,” Blyth tells us. This gallery presents some of Jōshō’s simple yet profound haiku, which are not as well known in the West as they should be, alongside those of two outstanding contemporary English-language practitioners: Burnell Lippy, whose work is implicitly “infused with the Buddhist precepts he practices” and Stanford M. Forrester, whose haiku are well-known for their explicit—and often extremely playful—engagement with Buddhist themes. In some sense all these poems provide insight into Buddha-nature.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.redmoonpress.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=49](http://www.redmoonpress.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=49)

Jōshō (1661-1704)

Burnell Lippy (b. 1944)

Stanford M. Forrester (b. 1963)

Leaves,  
Fallen on a rock  
Beneath the water.

Fields and mountains—  
All taken by the snow;  
Nothing remains.

A *hototogisu* cries;  
The waters of the lake  
Are slightly muddy.

The frog rises to the surface  
By the strength  
Of its non-attachment.

An evening shower:  
The ants are running down  
The bamboos.

Rain begins to fall:  
The thatcher turns  
And looks at the sea.

Bent over by the rain,  
The ears of barley  
Make it a narrow path.

from *Haiku: In Four Volumes* by R. H. Blyth  
(Hokuseido, 1949–52)

twenty below  
the Milky Way  
lined up with the river

the woods’ long vines  
reaching the ground  
evening calm

late-rising moon  
each rock in the stream  
has its own sound

the long segments  
of the Big Dipper’s handle  
summer fields

hoot of an owl  
a thousand fir trees  
touching each other

autumn deepens  
one leaf carries another  
across the pond

geese  
that stay—  
winter rain

1–4 from *late geese up a dry fork* (Red Moon Press, 2003)  
5 from *Modern Haiku* 36.2, 2005  
6 from *Frogpond* 29.3, 2006  
7 from *The Heron’s Nest* 10.2, 2008

drafty temple—  
only the buddha  
not shivering

summer drought...  
the Zen garden  
in bloom

dog shit  
or me  
the fly doesn’t care

morning downpour...  
only the sound  
of the temple bell stays dry

January sun—  
the snow melts first  
on Buddha’s belly

Zen meditation—  
emptying my mind  
when no one is looking

makes a good  
anchor—  
the stone buddha

1 from *Snapshots* 9, 2001  
2 from *Frogpond* 25.1, 2002  
3 from *Modern Haiku* 33.3, 2002  
4 from *Ko*, Spring/Summer 2005  
5–7 from *January Sun* (Bottle Rockets Press, 2007)

## Previous Montages

April 19: *The Good Earth*  
April 26: *Antipodes*

Next Week's Montage: *Women's Experience*

Chiyo-ni  
Anita Virgil  
Ruth Yarrow