

This Week's Montage

—*Water Works*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

It covers 71 percent of the Earth's surface. It's the universal solvent. In short order, without it you will die. In many religious traditions it signifies purification. "The highest excellence," the *Tao Te Ching* tells us, "is like that of water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things and in its occupying . . . the low place all men dislike. Hence its way is near to that of the Tao. . . . There is nothing in the world more soft and weak than water, and yet for attacking things firm and strong nothing can take precedence over it." Ezra Pound indicated something about water's importance to poetry when he stated his preference for Gavin Douglas's translation of Virgil (*Eneados*, 1513) to the original: Douglas, Pound claimed, had "heard the sea." The same could be said of this week's featured haiku poets. Evidence lurks in the untranslatable sound of Buson's "*Haru no umi binemosu notari-notari kana*" ("The springtime sea/ all the day long tossing/ and tossing!"). And when Christopher Herold, cofounder of *The Heron's Nest*, notes: "There's a point on this path where the sound of footfalls can no longer be heard above the thunder of the Pacific." And in Kirsty Karkow's tanka: "I swam/ in turquoise water/ last night/ the sound of lapping waves/ colored all my dreams." I offer this selection of water-themed haiku by these excellent poets in observance of World Ocean Day: June 9th.

Yosa Buson (1716-1783)

Christopher Herold (b. 1948)

Kirsty Karkow (b. 1937)

The pond and the river
have joined together as one
in the spring rain.

Rape-seed flowers!
A whale passed without stopping
and the sea has darkened.

In the short night
a passing shower
across the wooden eaves.

Evading the fishnet,
and evading the fishing ropes,
the moon on the water.

Rainfall on the grasses
just after the festival cart
passed by.

In evening wind—
water is slapping against
legs of a blue heron.

An old well!
Jumping at a mosquito, a fish's
sound of darkness.

from *Haiku Master Buson* by Yuki Sawa and Edith M. Shiffert (White Pine Press, 2007)

first light—
through mist-marbled mountains
this road to the sea

deserted beach—
the hollow sound of waves
collapsing

foghorns—
we lower a kayak
into the sound

driftwood
borne out again, again
and again

tide pool
a crab disappears
under the moon

a touch—
the sea anemone
swallows itself

wind-shift
a youngster's tantrum
blows out to sea

from *In the Margins of the Sea* (Snapshot Press, 2000)
(The quotation in the headnote above comes from
this book's preface.)

solstice dawn
a flotilla of sea ducks
turns eastward

new coolness
a bend of current
around the sea buoy

salt marsh
a moose lifts antlers
dripping with weeds

calm morning
a kayak adrift
in clouds

winter stars
a wild goose tucks its head
under a wing

gale force winds—
the shrieks of gulls
flying in place

spring landscape
a watercolorist's brush
tints the stream

from *water poems: haiku, tanka, and sijo* (Black Cat Press, 2005)

Previous Montages

May 24: Life & Death
May 31: Forms

Next Week's Montage: Juneteenth

Richard Wright
Geoffrey Wilson
Raquel D. Bailey