

This Week's Montage

—*Lifefulness*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

In the coming week we confront grim anniversaries, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima on August 6th and Nagasaki on August 9th. By the end of 1945, more than two hundred thousand people had died as a result of these attacks, from the initial explosions and then radiation poisoning. Many others died in the following years of cancer—and, overwhelmingly, the victims were civilians. To date, these remain the only nuclear attacks ever launched against human beings. It so happens that a major pioneering figure of English-language haiku, James W. Hackett, was born on August 6th; he turned sixteen the day the first bomb was dropped. Noting this coincidence, Hackett observed, “I have always hoped that my poetry would act as a healing between our two cultures. And I believe this has been the case.” This week it seems appropriate to emphasize a defining haiku characteristic, “Lifefulness”—always to be found among Hackett’s lists of suggestions for writing haiku in English. This gallery celebrates his eightieth birthday and his seminal contribution to English-language haiku. His work here is flanked by that of the influential translator R. H. Blyth, whom Hackett has identified as his “mentor” (*A Traveller’s Haiku*, pg. 33), and by that of poet/editor/drummer/gardener Christopher Herold, who in the dedication to *A Path in the Garden* thanks “Jim and Pat Hackett, for taking me in when I was in need, and trusting me with their fabulous garden.” Here is one of the lifeful continuities of our haiku tradition: from Blyth to Hackett to Herold—in memory of the past, in celebration of the present, and in hope for the future.

R. H. Blyth (1898-1964)

James W. Hackett (b. 1929)

Christopher Herold (b. 1948)

In one single cry,
The pheasant has swallowed
The broad field.

The sun
In the eye of the falcon
That returned to my hand.

In the dawn,
Whales roaring;
A frosty sea.

Ebb-tide;
The crab is suspicious
Of the foot-print.

A trout leaps;
Clouds are moving
In the bed of the stream.

A fallen flower
Flew back to its branch!
No, it was a butterfly.

I walk over it alone
In the cold moonlight—
The sound of the bridge.

from *Haiku* (Everyman’s Library, 2003)
the translated poets are: 1 Yamei; 2 Tairo; 3
Gyodai; 4 Rofu; 5 Onitsura; 6 Moritake; 7 Taigi

Bitter morning:
sparrows sitting
without necks.

The fleeing sandpipers
turn about suddenly
and chase back the sea!

The last of winter
melting in a mountain lake:
this morning’s moon.

Half of the minnows
within this sunlit shallow
are not really there.

Deep within the stream
the huge fish lie motionless,
facing the current.

A cloud of bugs
busily going nowhere
in a ray of sun.

The peak looms above,
but roots and rocks in the trail
hold the eye

1 from *American Haiku* 1.1, 1963
2–6 from *Haiku Poetry* (Japan Publications, 1968)
7 from *A Traveler’s Haiku* (The Hokuseido Press,
2004)

bird shadow
from tree shadow
to fence shadow

nearing the roses
swallowtail
from glide to flutter

no ripples—
from under the lily pad
a bubble

first light—
the deep print of a sole
among crocuses

spring dusk—
pouring soil from my shoes
back into the garden

cloud shadow
long enough to close
the poppies

dragonfly . . .
a stream of thought pauses
on the stone buddha

from “Within the Walls” from *A Path in the Garden* (Katsura Press, 2000)

Previous Montages

July 19: Moonstruck
July 26: Birthdays (II)

Next Week's Montage:

The Haiku Capital of the Midwest

Bill Pauly
Raymond Roseliep
Francine Banwarth