

This Week's Montage

—Looking with the Universe

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

For twenty-four years (1978–2002) Robert Spiess served as editor of *Modern Haiku* and thus had a huge hand in shaping the history of English-language haiku. He had already served as editor of *American Haiku* (1965–1968) and as associate editor of *Modern Haiku* (1970–1977). In his own poetry no less than in his editing and critical writings (such as the famous series of “speculations” about the nature of haiku), Spiess helped define excellence in—and the general direction of—our haiku. More than perhaps any of his contemporaries, Spiess saw juxtaposition as the essence of haiku: “I frequently use multiple-sense imagery (juxtaposition of two or more sense perceptions) to intimate the interrelations within the natural world and between the world and perceiving man.” Spiess is one of the great nature haiku poets; his work acquired precision and density through its specificity and philosophical weight from its erasure of the boundary between subject and object. As he wrote: “A genuine haiku is a way of looking both at and with the universe.” This gallery commemorates Spiess’s birthday on October 16th and what John Stevenson has called “the first complete life in American haiku.” A selection from Spiess’s haiku appears here along with work by his two distinguished successors to the helm of *Modern Haiku*, Lee Gurga, who edited the journal from 2002 to 2006, and Charles Trumbull, the current editor. Sight is the dominant but not the only sense emphasized here; more importantly, these are all poems of apprehending what is.

Lee Gurga (b. 1949)

exploring the cave . . .
my son’s flashlight beam
disappears ahead

a little boy
alone in the ripening wheat—
hazy moon

evening haze:
in the dead oak a bluebird
broods her eggs

after
chickadee
stillness

pitching change
a butterfly follows a wave
through the upper deck

fishermen’s cars
parked along the roadside—
cold rain at sunset

country stop sign—
the pink glow of sunset
through .22 holes

1 & 6–7 from *Fresh Scent* (Brooks Books, 1998)
2 from *Haiku: “the leaves are back on the tree”*—*International Anthology*, edited by Zoe Savina (2002)
3–4 from *The Measure of Emptiness* (Press Here, 1991)
5 from *Baseball Haiku*, edited with translations by Cor van den Heuvel & Nanae Tamura (W.W. Norton & Company, 2007)

Robert Spiess (1921–2002)

Muttering thunder
the bottom of the river
scattered with clams

A long wedge of geese;
straw-gold needles of the larch
on the flowing stream

Asparagus bed
silent in the morning mist
the wild turkeys

No wind
the chrysalis
trembles

Frost asters—
a monarch with tattered wings
flutters by

The fisherman waits . . .
again a wren’s refrain
comes from the willow

the field’s evening fog—
quietly the hound comes
to fetch me home

1–2 from *The Turtle’s Ears* (Wells Printing Company, Inc., 1971)
3–5 from *The Shape of Water* (Modern Haiku Press, 1982)
6 from *The Bold Silverfish and Tall River Junction* (Modern Haiku Press, 1986)
7 from *The Cottage of Wild Plum* (Modern Haiku Press, 1991)

Charles Trumbull (b. 1943)

after the Renoir
I look differently
at dappled sunlight

October dusk
a plastic coffee lid
fills with rain

back from vacation
looking through all the photos
to see what we saw

between
the chimes of the clock
shooting star

marsh walk
a white butterfly
shows me the way

sharp, chill wind
lingers in the willow
over her grave

. . . but in the window
of the doctor’s waiting room
a cloudless sky

1 from *Haiku in the Light*, February 1998
2 from *Acorn* 17, 2006
3 from *South by Southeast* 9.1, 2002
4 from *The Heron’s Nest* 3.8, 2001
5 from *Snapshots* 6, 1999
6 from *The Thinking Post Anthology of Haiku and Zen Poetry* (Thinking Post Press, 1997)
7 from *Still* 4.1, 2000

Previous Montages

September 27: *New England Sketches*
October 4: *Animals*

Next Week's Montage: *Three Poets of the UK*

John Crook
Caroline Gourlay
John Barlow