

This Week's Montage

—*Foundations*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

Robert Hass notes that Bashô “during his forty-nine years, reinvented the forms of both the haiku and linked verse . . . and gave them a power and seriousness they had rarely had before.” He’s the father of us all. Two hundred and sixty-nine years after his death, the first haiku journal in English was founded: *American Haiku*. Nick Virgilio was there at the journal’s inception; his ground-breaking poems from the early issues are presented here as they first appeared, with their original capitalization and punctuation. Elizabeth Searle Lamb, one of the first major women haiku poets in English, debuted in the second issue of *American Haiku* although she composed most of her best work a number of years later. Following the example of terse Virgilio haiku such as “lily” and “bass,” she helped steer English-language haiku away from the confines of 5-7-5 syllabic form. These three figure among the giants on whose shoulders we stand.

<i>Bashô</i> (1644-1694)	<i>Nick Virgilio</i> (1928-1989)	<i>E. S. Lamb</i> (1917-2005)
Even in Kyoto— hearing the cuckoo’s cry— I long for Kyoto.	Spring wind frees the full moon tangled in leafless trees.	pausing halfway up the stair— white chrysanthemums
The sea darkening— the wild duck’s call is faintly white.	Lily: out of the water . . . out of itself.	a tiny dead bat, spraddled on the sidewalk in this blaze of sun
A bee staggers out of the peony.	Bass picking bugs off the moon!	in the hot sun still swinging this empty swing
Exciting at first, then sad, watching the cormorant-fishing.	Into the blinding sun . . . the funeral procession’s glaring headlights.	deep into this world of Monet water lilies . . . no sound
Coolness: the clean lines of the wild pine.	In the empty church— a quiet child watching flickering candles.	shiverrrring on the winter balcony— first star
Lightning— and in the dark the screech of a night heron.	Rising and falling . . . a blanket of blackbirds feeds on the snowy slope.	hot sand tracks of a roadrunner wind-blurred
Sick on a journey, my dreams wander the withered fields.	A potbellied monk . . . shouldering the last melon: the autumn moon.	the sound of rain on the sound of waves
<small>from <i>The Essential Haiku</i>, edited by Robert Hass (The Ecco Press, 1994)</small>	<small>from <i>American Haiku</i> Vols. I-III, 1963-65</small>	<small>from <i>in this blaze of sun</i> (From Here Press, 1975)</small>

Previous Montages

This is the first of the series.

Next Week's Montage

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