

This Week's Montage

—Content

Comparative Haiku

selected by

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What are haiku “about”? Many things, it turns out. James W. Hackett has noted that the purpose of haiku is to enhance one’s “awareness of *this moment of life*”. But is anything within our experience beyond the power of haiku to record? Mountains of haiku suggest the answer is probably no—although different poets tends to be keyed to different types of moments. It’s partly a matter of one’s temperament and of one’s experiences, sought out or simply endured. The haiku by the poets juxtaposed below suggest something about the vast range of possibilities. Alexis Rotella is a master of sardonic haiku and senryu that probe (often with a sharp point!) the ironies of human existence. Charles B. Dickson was one of our strongest nature haiku poets, finding his self-effacing haiku moments beyond the confines of human civilization. And Johnny Baranski, who did prison time for protesting war and nuclear weapons, was confined by civilization in the most literal and terrible sense—and yet found in haiku a way of freeing himself to steal back his stolen moments.

Alexis Rotella (b. 1947)

Charles B. Dickson (1915-91)

Johnny Baranski (b. 1948)

Funeral home—
among the chrysanthemums
his wives.

Undressed—
today’s role dangles
from a metal hanger.

All Hallow’s Eve—
my broom
is missing.

Reaching toward heaven,
the chi gong master
breaks wind.

In the cemetery—
why are we
whispering?

After his last patient
the psychoanalyst stares
at the gibbous moon.

Reading Wordsworth—
so many
words.

1-3 from *Eavesdropping* (Lulu.com, 2007)
4-6 from *Ouch: Senryu That Bite* (Lulu.com, 2007)
7 from *Looking for a Prince* (Lulu.com, 2008)

shrill midnight cries
of low-flying snow geese
a meteor flares

winter beach
tinkling trills
of water pipits

a moon in each eye
under the white-feathered brows...
nestling goshawk

field of Queen Anne’s lace—
a black butterfly settles
on a stone

midnight arch of stars
and a forest of tree frogs...
your head in my lap

November field
a bird dog sculpted
by the scent of quail

dense fog
a mockingbird
fills it

from *A Moon in Each Eye* (AHA Books, 1993)

The road home
beyond the prison wall:
deepening snow

Moonlit spider
web weaving
cell bar to cell bar

After a strip search
old inmates, new inmates
in blue prison garb

Starting a new month
in Snohomish County Jail;
same old teabag

Prevailing wind!
neither prison bars nor spider web
yield to it

in the prison graveyard
just as he was in life—
convict 14302

road to freedom
just a stone’s throw beyond
the prison graveyard

1-5 from “Convict Shoots the Breeze” (Saki Press, 2002)
6-7 from “Just a Stone’s Throw” (Tribe Press, 2006)

Previous Montages

March 8: Foundations

Next Week's Montage: Spring Is Here

Yosa Buson
Richard Wright
Jack Barry