

This Week's Montage

—*Summertime*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

“...And the livin’ is easy/ Fish are jumpin’/ And the cotton is high.”

—*George & Ira Gershwin and DuBose & Dorothy Heyward*

Daylight predominates. It’s the season of grass, stasis, and lemonade. Quiz question: Are those three lines penned by four authors I’ve taken for an epigraph a haiku? Why or why not? Disregard “And the”: livin’ is easy / fish are jumpin’ / and the cotton is high. Well? Haiku *tends* to avoid direct statements like that “first line”—but note the abstract question in the last Shiki haiku below. (Other counterexamples aren’t hard to find: How about John Stevenson’s celebrated “snowy night/ sometimes you can’t be/ quiet enough”?) Certainly the last “two lines” of this “found haiku” are concrete and imagistic. They’re also introduced by a “cut,” exhibit seasonality, and occur in the present tense. Hmmm. Today in the northern hemisphere the Earth’s axis is tilted as far as it goes toward the sun. Turn on the fan, grab that lemonade, don’t fry your gray matter on definitional conundrums, and enjoy these summer-themed haiku by three masters of the genre:

Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)

Peggy Willis Lyles (b. 1939)

Garry Gay (b. 1951)

A hoe standing there
No one to be seen—
The heat!

Towering clouds
Over a dried marsh
Where a python dwells.

The coolness of it
In the middle of a green rice-field,
A single pine-tree!

The firefly,
Its glow
Cold in the hand.

Nobody there;
A child asleep
In the mosquito-net.

The summer river;
In mid-stream,
Looking back.

My life—
How much more of it remains?
The night is brief.

from *Haiku: Vol. III* by R. H. Blyth (The Hokuseido Press, 1952)

heat lightning
the heron’s toes
grip dead wood

summer stillness
the play of light and shadow
on the windchimes

shimmering pines
a taste of the mountain
from your cupped hands

a black bear
noses muscadines
slow summer stream

dragonfly...
the tai chai master
shifts his stance

sun shower
the river otter
somersaults

summer night
we turn out all the lights
to hear the rain

1 from *The Heron’s Nest* 2.1, 2000
2-7 from *To Hear the Rain* (Brooks Books, 2002)

All day long
it rains...
plums

Summer solstice;
garden shadows
grow longer

Late summer moon—
the cricket remains silent
in the glass jar

Reflected
in the sword’s blade
soft summer clouds

Midday heat;
the ice cream melting faster
than I can lick

Skunk skull—
the smell
of a summer shower

Letting go
of the yellow balloon
last day of summer

1-2 from *The Silent Garden* (Smythe-Waithe Press, 1982)
3 from *Haiku Moment*, ed. Bruce Ross (Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1993)
4 from *River Stones* (Saki Press, 1998)
5-7 from *Along the Way* (Snapshot Press, 2000)

Previous Montages

June 7: Water Works
June 14: Juneteenth

Next Week's Montage: Birthdays

Nick Virgilio
Martin Shea
John Wills