

*This Week's Montage*  
—*Transience*

*Comparative Haiku*

selected by

*Allan Burns*

“**W**hy do things break? Because they exist.” That bit of hard wisdom comes from *Being Dharma*, a collection of talks by influential Thai Buddhist master Ajahn Chah. We may understand this truth on a purely intellectual level, but internalizing and genuinely accepting it (especially in regard to the things we love, not excluding ourselves) is another matter. Transience is one of haiku’s most pervasive and compelling themes. Paradoxically, haiku freeze moments in amber, as it were, preserving them for posterity even as they often raise our awareness about how each unique moment flows into the next, forever to be lost. Conflicting impulses to preserve and to go with the flow seem both to be present in many haiku—and these deeply human impulses eventuate from the conflicted core of our own beings, wanting to cling to what is precious to us and yet also wanting to be in tune with how things really are. The haiku in this gallery feature images of water, of the sudden motions or stillnesses of tiny animals, of the changing of seasons, of graves and fossils and the aftermath of bombings and our own reflection in the mirror—all figuring the inexorable flowing of one moment and one thing into the next. I offer these tiny meditations on transience in honor of both the seventy-fourth birthday of Tenzin Gyatso (the fourteenth Dala Lama) on July 6<sup>th</sup> and Dharma Day, July 7<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the discourse in the Deer Park delivered by Siddhattha Gotama, which first outlined the core teaching (“dharma”) of Buddhism—centered on the concept of transience.

*Kobayashi Issa* (1763-1828)

*Charles B. Dickson* (1915-1991)

*John Brandi* (b. 1943)

Once snows have melted,  
the village soon overflows  
with friendly children

As simple as that—  
spring has finally arrived  
with a pale blue sky

As old age arrives,  
considering just the day’s length  
can move one to tears

Fast as it can go—  
sailing into the fire—  
a single hailstone!

This world of dew  
is only the world of dew—  
and yet...oh and yet...

From the Great Buddha’s  
great nose, a swallow comes  
gliding out

From birthing’s washbowl  
to the washbowl of the dead—  
blathering nonsense!

from *The Spring of My Life and Selected Haiku*,  
translated by Sam Hamill (Shambhala, 1997)

time-smoothed footlog  
motionless school of minnows  
pointed upstream

broken pump—  
my tongue remembers  
coolness of the flow

twilight storm,  
another stone topples  
from the pasture wall

a flint arrowhead  
on the brook’s white sand bottom  
darting minnows

my parents’ graves;  
above them on bare oak boughs  
clumps of mistletoe

motionless in stone  
for forty thousand years  
a bird wing

a quail hangs limp  
in the retriever’s mouth  
goldfinches dart

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

in the rain  
before dawn  
snails migrating

daybreak  
pollen rising  
from the unswept path

after the storm  
a dragonfly  
pinned to the cactus

fallen leaves  
the abbot sweeps  
around them

autumn dusk  
a bobbing branch  
where the crow has flown

after the rain  
bomb craters filled  
with stars

in the mirror  
the old man I was afraid of  
as a child

from *The Unswept Path: Contemporary American Haiku*,  
edited by John Brandi and Dennis Maloney (White Pine Press, 2005)

*Previous Montages*

*June 21: Summertime*  
*June 28: Birthdays*

*Next Week's Montage: Quotidian Moments*

Dee Evetts  
John Stevenson  
Carolyn Hall