

This Week's Montage

—Moonstruck

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

“A beautiful moon—couldn’t help being profoundly moved.”—*Santôka’s diary*, 26 January 1937

The moon: Has any image figured in more haiku? Given the importance of the moon to Japanese culture, including its literature and annual moon-viewing (*tsukimi*) events, it seemed fitting to select two Japanese poets for this gallery: the poet/novelist Sôseki (author of *I Am a Cat* and *Kokoro*) and the wandering poet/monk Santôka. Stylistically, the former was a traditionalist whereas the latter experimented with free-form haiku; despite these differences, though, both are excellent examples of modern Japanese haiku poets for whom the connection between haiku and Zen was essential. Sôseki’s haiku are full of allusions to Zen koans, sayings, and verses, and Santôka devoted his life to wringing poetry out of what he called Zen walking (“one step equals totality”)—well, when he wasn’t sauced on sake. Between the work of these modern Zen haiku masters you’ll find the haiku of Margaret Chula, an outstanding English-language poet who lived in Kyoto for twelve years, teaching creative writing and haiku at the university level. During her lifetime (and most of ours) something happened that the old poets and moon-viewers would no doubt have found astounding: A man landed on the moon. Celebrate Moon Day—July 20th, the anniversary of Neil Armstrong’s “small step”—with these moon haiku.

Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916)

Margaret Chula (b. 1947)

Taneda Santôka (1882-1940)

The moon is up:
Plum blossom shadows
Fall on my pillow.

Well, it’s time
To go to bed, but—
That summer moon.

Persimmon leaves:
On each,
Moonlight.

Walking under the moon,
Sôseki has forgotten
All about his wife.

Moonlit night:
Each silhouette
Moving.

Full moon:
Round is the shadow
Of a priest’s head.

Near and far,
Everything’s under the moon:
Seas and mountains.

from *Zen Haiku: Poems and Letters of Natsume Sôseki*, translated and edited by Sôiku Shigematsu (Weatherhill, Inc., 1994)

under the full moon
plumes of pampas
the cat’s tail twitches

wrapping my hands
round the warm teacup
the waning moon

full moon shines
on the ancient scroll
geese take to the sky

night of the new moon
I crave nothing, no one
frogs croaking, croaking

carrying moonlight
into the house
the white peony

late into the night
we talk of revelations
moon through the pines

lunar eclipse
my father-in-law enters
the Alzheimer’s home

1–2 from *Grinding my ink* (Katsura Press, 1993)
3 from *This Moment* (Katsura Press, 1995)
4–6 from *The Smell of Rust* (Katsura Press, 2003)
7 previously unpublished

The moon bright I go home

To the kitchen moonlight alone

Through the moonlight’s center I come back

Moonlit night, so your gift was rice

Moon invisible moonlit water brimming

Moon’s brightness I wonder where they’re
bombing

There in front of death I put the moon

from *Grass and Tree Cairn*, translations by Hiroaki Sato (Red Moon Press, 2002)

Previous Montages

July 5: *Transience*
July 12: *Quotidian Moments*

Next Week's Montage: Birthdays (II)

Gary Hotham
Lee Gurga
Jim Kacian