



Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction

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Pico Iyer, Victor Pelevin, Doris Dorrie and other renowned contributors join young award-winners in what National Book Award-winner Charles Johnson calls "an embarrassment of literary riches," sure to please fiction lovers of every stripe. From the O. Henry Award-winning title story, to visionary short-shorts and barely fictionalized personal memoirs, *Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree* is inventive, exciting, and unlike any collection before it.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"Buddhist fiction" is a contradictory notion, admits Wheeler, a Buddhist practitioner and recipient of two O. Henry awards. "Everything that seems to be happening to 'you' and 'me' is already like a fiction, from a Buddhist's standpoint, and the thing to do is to unravel your involvement in the story, not become entranced and follow it to the end," she explains. Yet she also admits that the Buddhist tradition is rich in stories, especially in the teaching of the sutras. Best to sidestep the spiritual quagmire of this discussion, and just relish the beauty of these well-told tales. Wheeler has assembled a stellar collection, including the titular "Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree," an O. Henry award-winning story by Gerald Reilly. Many stories, with their Zen sparseness, clean imagery and lingering depths, could proudly stand beside the finest of the genre, such as the fiction of Gail Tsukiyama. Marie Henry's half-page story, "At the Change of Seasons," is so spare and profound it reads like a haiku that's been gently stretched into prose. Some speak so intimately to the teachings of Buddhism that they read like inside jokes—which isn't necessarily a bad thing, considering how satisfying these jokes are to insiders. For instance, Dinty W. Moore's exquisitely joyful two-page story about reality and illusion ("No Kingdom of the Eyes") could be lost on nonpractitioners, but will easily elicit a chuckle from many struggling students of Buddhism. Another standout is Ira Sukrungruang's classic tale, "The Golden Mix," a commanding, crass and earthy story about what might happen if Buddha showed up at the local dog pound. This collection is all that fans of fiction and Buddhism hope for—full of play, insight, revelation and diversity, and never compromising in delight.

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Review

"You'll relish the beauty of these well-told tales. Wheeler has assembled a stellar collection, one that fans of fiction and Buddhism hope for—full of play, insight, revelation, and diversity, and never compromising in delight." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"This marvelous collection of nearly 30 specimens of Buddhist fiction shows not only the promise of a genre that is scarcely known as such, but what has already been accomplished by the small but growing band of writers melding the truth of dharma with the invention of fiction. From German filmmaker-novelist Doris Dorrie's unflinching depiction of the 'sheer torture' of meditation to an excerpt from Keith Kachtick's remarkable 2003 novel 'Hungry Ghost', and from works shorter than a page to stories that run several thousand words, the pieces here explore the mundane and the metaphysical with cold eyes and warm hearts. Together, they comprise a captivating view of the landscape of mindfulness." (*Yoga Journal*)

"A milestone in Buddhist fiction. . . . Vigilant readers may have noticed a growing number of novels with Buddhist themes, but you won't see a Buddhist fiction shelf in bookstores. It's out there, but it hasn't been easy to find. Until now. In *Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree*, Kate Wheeler has assembled a marvelous collection of stories, inspired, in one way or another, by Buddhism. They range in length from a few lines to several thousand words, and cover topics as diverse as driving, acting, politics, food, birth, rebirth, love, death, murder, suicide, animal adoption, and lawn mowing. Certain themes emerge—we meet monks and nuns and earnest and not-so-earnest meditators—but there are plenty of surprises. As novelist and scholar Charles Johnson writes in his elegant foreword, these stories succeed because they 'dramatize the dharma by taking us intimately into the loves of their characters,' and show us 'how the Buddhist experience is simply the human experience.' This volume is surely a milestone in Western Buddhist literature—and a book that fiction lovers, Buddhist or otherwise will very much enjoy." (*Tricycle*)

"Poetry & painting yes, but Buddhist fiction? Well, the Chinese and Japanese have been at it for centuries. Now Kate Wheeler has provided a collection of Western-style short stories, homegrown and full of vernacular salt. You'll want to keep this on the shelf with Kerouac." (Andrew Schelling, Naropa University, author of *Wild Form, Savage Grammar*)

"This fine collection of stories introduces a strikingly diverse range of voices who tell their tales with warmth and wit. I enjoyed it very much." (Stephen Batchelor, author of *Buddhism without Beliefs*)

"The twenty-nine short stories stimulate the reader to consider the multifarious paths to the awakened mind. All of them address classic Buddhist concepts, yet do so in the most contemporary of ways, [raising] awareness of how Buddhist practice and interpretation are experienced in the West. [Wheeler's] personal and professional experience infuses the collection with both breadth and depth." (*ForeWord*)

"An extraordinary collection. These beautifully crafted stories are poignant, ironic, compassionate and inspiring. They are a testimony to the ability of the literary imagination to provide glimpses of the mystical dimension of everyday life and the thusness of existence. They illuminate the beauty, frailty and yearning of the human soul." (Jeremy D. Safran, Editor of *Psychoanalysis and Buddhism*)

"The first anthology of a budding genre: Buddhist fiction. Some of the short stories here are autobiographical; others play off the travelogue idiom and portray-- with some interesting twists-- spiritual seekers in distant lands. More often they take place in everyday America: an urban stoop, the beach, a job interview. The stories here are diverse, and intriguing." (*Buddhadharma*)

"This strange and startling anthology is a welcome effort. There are many moments of beauty in these stories. Whether you are a Buddhist practitioner or just a fiction lover, you'll want to read them with pen in hand, underlining an effective phrase or flash of literary insight. A significant debut collection." (*Shambhala Sun*)

"Kate Wheeler is one of my favorite writers, and now I see what a good editor she is too. I love the concept of *Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree*, and found so many of the pieces surprising, intriguing, and even mind-opening." (Sandy Boucher, author of *Dancing in the Dharma* and *Discovering Kwan Yin*)

About the Author

Kate Wheeler is the author of *Not Where I Started From* and *When Mountains Walked*. She has received a Guggenheim award, an NEA, a Whiting Award, and two O. Henry Awards. She lives near Boston and teaches meditation retreats around the country and in Mexico.

Charles Johnson is the National Book Award-winning author of *Middle Passage* as well as *Turning the Wheel: Essays on Buddhism and Writing*. He is also the subject of the new book, *Charles Johnson's Fiction*.

Users Review

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