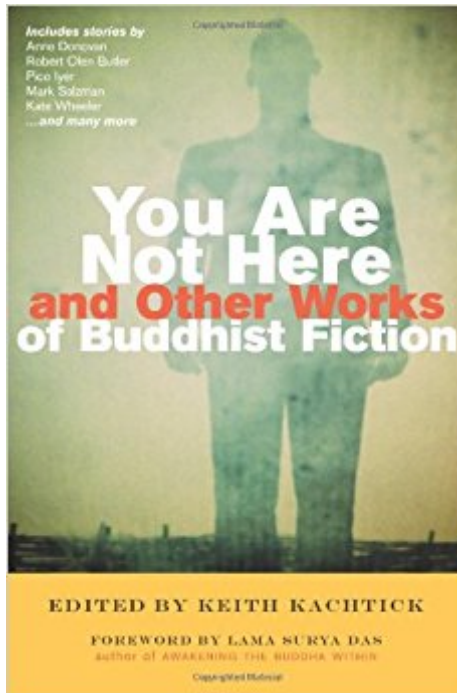




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# You Are Not Here And Other Works Of Buddhist Fiction



## Synopsis

The stories in *You Are Not Here and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction* dramatize the spirit of Buddhism, often with wit, always with verve, and each in some distinctly vivid way. Only a few of these stories touch on the Dharma explicitly and this book takes you on an inward tour across the whole world--to the jungles of Indonesia, a fog-shrouded park in San Francisco, the sun-blistered African veldt, a Burmese monastery surrounded by gun-fire, and the church-like sanctuary of a Nebraska barn, just to name a few. Collectively these stories paint a living portrait of the face of Buddhism, and readers may discover that that face is a strangely familiar one--and that every journey only ever leads home. Edited by Keith Kachtick--the author of *Hungry Ghost: A Novel* (A New York Times Notable Book), *You Are Not Here and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction*--offers more surprising and transcendent work from some of fiction's famous names, alongside that of names you've never heard before--but surely will again: Lama Surya Das, Keith Kachtick, Robert Olen Butler, Kate Wheeler, Anne Donovan, Samantha Schoech, Mary Yukari Waters, Andrew Foster Altschul, Jess Row, Anh Chi Pham, Sean Murphy, Pico Iyer, Dan Zigmond, Michele Martin, Sean Hoade, Jeff Davis, Jake Lorring, Geshe Michael Roach, Anne Carolyn Klein, Dean Sluyter, Mark Salzman, and Hal Hallstein.

## Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Wisdom Publications (April 24, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0861712919

ISBN-13: 978-0861712915

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,605,081 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies](#) #54 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Short Stories & Anthologies > Short Stories](#) #7232 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism](#)

## Customer Reviews

"An elegant, entertaining collection. These stories not only reflect a Buddhist sensibility, but reading

them is a meditation in itself." (Christopher Moore, author of *Lamb* and *A Dirty Job*) "The greater part of the collection is simply a rich literary read where art and dharma seamlessly meet. [. . .] For a collection of stories with a unifying theme, there's a great diversity between these covers. The quality of the writing alone makes this second volume of 'Buddhist fiction' worth reading." (Shambhala Sun) "Drawing on the ancient appeal of 'Tell me a story,' Keith Kachtick has brought together a volume of exquisite tales that breathe with the living spirit of the dharma. These are the sutras of our times, played out in the lives of people we might meet next door." (Lin Jensen, author of *Bad Dog!*) "A collection of sparkling gems that translate the experiences of everyday life into a poetry that will keep resonating within long after you put the book down. As far too few books do today, it vividly demonstrates that the essence of great literature is, and always will be, the process of self-discovery." (Eliot Pattison, author of *The Skull Mantra*, and *Beautiful Ghosts*) "Buddhist fiction? Why not? With *You Are Not Here and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction*, Wisdom Publications continues the groundbreaking work of defining a genre. The stories in this collection are surprising, sophisticated, various, and uplifting without naivete. A terrific and thought provoking read." (Zoketsu Norman Fischer, author of *Taking Our Places: the Buddhist Path to Truly Growing Up*) "Fiction schmiction, this book is for real. With its superb collection of entertaining, thoughtful and intelligent stories, this book is sure to impress whether you're a Buddhist, interested in Buddhism or don't know a zafu from a zendo." (Matthew Bortolin, author of *The Dharma of Star Wars*)

Keith Kachtick is the author of *Hungry Ghost* (Harper Perennial, 2004). He lives in Austin, Texas. He holds an MFA from the Iowa Writer's Workshop. Lama Surya Das is the bestselling author of several books including *Awakening the Buddha Within*. The founder and main teacher of the Dzogchen Foundation, he lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

...If I may be allowed to iterate what has already been said before: "...readers may discover that that face is a strangely familiar one-and that every journey only ever leads home." Writers selected for this book clearly and admirably "dramatize the spirit of Buddhism, often with wit, always with verve, and each in some distinctly vivid way."...Furthermore, it doesn't pay to be too fussy over what fate hands you, since "Zen tells us its best to let go of "picking and choosing.""...My comment goes out to readers, buyers, gift-givers, and vendors of the prose and poetry of Zen-minded writers. After being asked by to leave a "feedback comment" to the seller, I was flabberghasted to find that the seller had objected to my critical comment (Feedback). I felt that my comment imitated a zen-like sense of acceptance and good humor, exemplified by many passages in the book itself. No irony or

negativity intended, but since an customer is not chosen by the seller (no particular seller is implied herein), such a seller need not fear any criticism emanating from the spirit of the book itself... else they should not be selling such a book. In summary, I much appreciate the book and the chain of civilized humanity that brought it to my doorstep... what else can I say?

Being a collection of short stories by different authors, this book reminded me of a sketch show - like SNL - in that some stories (skits in our analogy) were interesting and entertaining, while others were not. Unlike a typical SNL episode, I enjoyed most of the stories! On a side note: This book introduced me to new authors who I intend to read more from.

Caught and kept my attention! A good read! The transitions were excellent. I think this is a great way to take practices and bring them to life. I would recommend this book to my friends in Buddhism.

Compared to its predecessor, "Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree," this 2006 anthology blends little-known with established names in the Buddhist realm in the West. Its editor, Keith Kachtick, provided his strong opening chapter from his novel, "Hungry Ghost" to the collection of "Nixon" edited by Kate Wheeler, and Kachtick returns the favor with room for her long story, "Ringworm." It's not the only one among the twenty entries to feel semi-autobiographical (at least), but it works as one of the best, as it evokes Burma through a Western nun's eyes---feeding a sick kitten--before one of many military crackdowns. Other promising tales skirt Buddhist themes rather than, as the weaker ones do, take them literally or ploddingly. The stories which touch on the ideas and concepts instead of placing characters into obviously Buddhist settings appear to better capture the spirit of exploration and an open-ended approach suiting the uncertainty of many seekers. For instance, Dan Sigmond's "Humans" in the first Zen Mission to the Apes, Jake Lorring's spare natural parable "Distant Mountains," and arguably (I remain uncertain) Pico Iyer's "Abandon" which does not mention any dharma explicitly somehow may belong. Some names in this collection obviously were shoo-ins for their marquee draw, but they tended to disappoint. I liked Anne Donovan's "Buddha Da" for its outsider's view, and her subsequent novel (as with Kachtick's) developed the initial premise effectively. Andrew Foster Altschul's "You Are Not Here" in San Francisco, Jess Row's "For You" in Hong Kong, and Anh Chi Pham's "Mandala" in wartime Saigon capture their edgy, jittery places effectively, to give moods and perspectives that suit their restless themes. A sense of unease, fittingly for a Buddhist collection, succeeds more than the stories that come from the insiders already established from within the Buddhist community, I hazard. Sean Hoade's "Samsara Suite"

more literally applies this condition, but its sadness and scope encompasses its theme poignantly. The best line out of the whole book comes from another unsettled narrator, Samantha Shoech's "The Good People of Lake George." The narrator, at the end of an affair, challenges wearily the previous generation of complacent, purportedly practicing boomers who all think they live the way of the Eightfold Path. Celeste asks her hosts at their vacation rental: "How are you supposed to be good if nothing is bad?" "'Your problem is vocabulary,' her father says. 'Good and bad are not particularly helpful words.'" (67) Words here may help to solve such predicaments, at least for careful readers. This is a fitting counterpart to "Hungry Ghost" and "Buddha Da," and while the MFA-small magazine tone of the anthology dominates for better or not depending on your predilection for such character studies and set pieces, it's a sensible follow-up to "Nixon." If a third volume appears, all the same, I hope it shakes up sensibilities more than soothes them, as many of these inclusions do too well. (P.S. I reviewed all three of these titles on the past year or so.)

I think Keith Kachtick has really done an excellent job of selecting a solid selection of writing for this second anthology of Buddhist fiction from Wisdom Publications. While Zen tells us its best to let go of "picking and choosing," if I had to, I'd say that this second anthology offers a more consistent and satisfying selection than the first anthology.

An unusual collection and much needed assembly of great authors and their perspectives touching in one way or another on the topic of Buddhism. I thoroughly enjoyed the book and finished it in one day. A refreshing break from the "heavier" volumes out there on the topic today.

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