

This Week's Montage

—Winter I

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

It's a common misunderstanding that the seasons are caused by the Earth's distance from the Sun—summer when we're "close" and winter when we're "far away." That's not merely an error but an example of what one might term "hemispherism." After all, it would hardly account for why the northern hemisphere experiences winter at the same time that the southern experiences summer. In fact, the primary cause of the seasons, in certain latitudes, is the 23.5 degree tilt of the Earth's axis relative to the plane of the ecliptic (i.e., the apparent path the Sun traces through the sky). Seasonality has been, of course, a defining traditional feature of Japanese haiku, and when season words were first established, they were principally based on the climate of the imperial capital, Kyoto, which lies by the 35th parallel north. English-speaking poets are still negotiating how to adapt the allusive richness of that seasonal system to a global haiku culture without an intricate preexisting system of *kidai* (season subjects) and *kigo* (season words) and that also includes regions with relatively little seasonal variation and others with only two seasons: dry and rainy. It may be, as some have argued, going back at least to Anita Virgil in 1972 (*A Haiku Path*, pg. 77) that a more universal concept such as "nature reference" should supplant season words in our haiku. Of course, such matters cannot be decided by theory alone; they must be worked out through actual practice. As of now, it's safe to say our tradition has produced many fine seasonal and non-seasonal (*muki*) haiku. This gallery is the first of a pair featuring work in the former tradition, English-language haiku being especially rich in fine winter-themed haiku. Just keep in mind that now in Lorin Ford's neck of the woods (Brunswick, Victoria, in far southern Australia) it's the height of summer.

Scott Mason (b. 1952)

Ruth Yarrow (b. 1939)

Lorin Ford (b. 1947)

late December evening
a fox tail tapers
to nothing

frozen lake
a crack, cleaving silence
to silence

returning sun—
the glitter of snow where I sowed
my father's ashes

you have
no voice mail messages
winter wind

the swirling blizzard
abates . . .
cat on my lap

car door clunk
a shell of fresh snow
falls utterly away

a whitetail flickers
into birch . . .
what time I have left

1 Betty Drevniok Award 2003, First Place
2 Betty Drevniok Award 2005, First Place
3 James W. Hackett Award 2005, Highly Commended
4 from *The Heron's Nest* 11.4, 2009
5 Suruga Baika Literary Award 2007 (tie)
6 James W. Hackett Award 2007, First Place (tie)
7 Betty Drevniok Award 2006, First Place

no longer dripping
the icicle holds
the sunset

north wind moans
through a crack
in my dream

alone
glacier-edged lake brimming
with sky

cold enters with her—
the snarl of her zipper
before her words

thick snow—
entrance to the vole tunnel
softly closes

black willow—
gliding river ice slices
its reflection

we glance back—
a curtain of snow
sifts through cedars

1-4 from *A Journal for Reflections* (The Crossing Press, 1988)
5 & 6 from *Sun Gilds the Edge* (Saki Press, 1998)
7 from *Whiff of Cedar* (2007)

cold moon
the panel beater's dog
howls at a hubcap

wool skeins
the shades of winters past
sorted anew

clear night—
cows huddled
behind their breath

finally getting
the why of loneliness—
bright sun on ice

a silver hair
woven into the nest
winter light

the bent nail
where garlic hung . . .
winter moon

without
a thing to cling to . . .
winter moon

1-4 from *a wattle seedpod* (Post Pressed, 2008)
5 & 6 from "what light there is," 3LIGHTS Gallery, <http://www.threelightsgallery.com/ford.html>
7 from *Presence* 39, 2009

Previous Montages

December 6: *Now & Zen*
December 13: *Halcyon Days*

Next Week's Montage: Winter (II)

Martin Shea
Jim Kacian
Jack Barry