

This Week's Montage

—*Spring Is Here*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

It so happens the Earth tilts on its axis relative to the plane of its rotation. But for that, would there be haiku? Summer results when a hemisphere is tilted toward the sun; winter when it's tilted away. Spring and autumn are the dynamic interludes between extremes. Haiku originated as hokku, or the starting verse of a renku. One traditional function of the hokku was to indicate the season in which the renku was written. As the hokku became liberated from renku and eventually was renamed "haiku" (by Shiki), it retained seasonality as one of its most characteristic properties. A haiku's season word (or *kigo*) involves the "haiku moment" in the larger rhythms of life, resulting from that wobbly sphere on which we reside, and thus expands the verse's meaning. Buson, Richard Wright, and Jack Barry stand among the many haiku poets for whom seasonality has been a central concern. Here, in their various styles representing different eras, are sustaining visions of that favored season we have the privilege of entering—officially on March 20th—once again: spring.

Yosa Buson (1716-1783)

Richard Wright (1908-1960)

Jack Barry (b. 1959)

The light of a candle
is transferred to another candle—
spring twilight.

Plum flowers far and near.
Shall I go to the south?
Shall I go north?

Plum blossom essence
ascending upward higher—
the moon's halo.

Flowers of the pear—
reading a letter by moonlight,
a woman.

Into an old well's
darkness falls
a camellia!

With blossoms fallen
in spaces between the twigs a temple
has appeared.

The foot washing
tub has a leak too—
spring is running out.

from *Haiku Master Buson* by Yuki Sawa and Edith M. Shiffert (White Pine Press, 2007)

Just before dawn,
When the streets are deserted,
A light spring rain.

The spring lingers on
In the scent of a damp log
Rotting in the sun.

With indignation
A little girl spans her doll,—
The sound of spring rain.

Coming from the woods,
A bull has a lilac sprig
Dangling from a horn.

A rooster's sharp crow
Punctures a gray dawn sky,
Letting out spring rain.

A dead mouse floating
Atop a bucket of cream
In the dawn spring light.

Whitecaps on the bay:
A broken signboard banging
In the April wind.

from *Haiku: This Other World* (Anchor Books, 2000)

Spring Equinox
where the wood pile stood
a hole in the snow

sparrows steal threads
from the scarecrow's tattered shirt
the last of the snow

dead branch
finally falling
spring rain

melting frost
a wasp taps against
the sun-warmed window

looking up the name
of the wildflower
I just trampled

neighbors squat
on front porch steps
a chorus of peepers

lilacs in bloom
a swallowtail crosses
the double yellow line

from *Swamp Candles* (Down-to-Earth Books, 2006)

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Fay Aoyagi
Peter Yovu
Scott Metz