

MONTAGE

This Week's Montage —Birthdays

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

This week marks the birth of three major American haiku poets who developed quite distinctive voices. Nick Virgilio, born on June 28th, figures in a Montage gallery now for the third time—but whereas before I highlighted his very early work in *American Haiku* and then his elegiac poems, here I've chosen to focus mostly on his lighter work, some of which would qualify as senryu. A poet of many facets, Virgilio remains paradoxically as inspiring as he is inimitable. Martin Shea, born July 1st, was one of the most intriguing haiku voices to emerge in the 1970s, with poems cut at unpredictable points, creating fissures and pressures that cause ordinary words to yield surprising revelations. Shea's best haiku seem utterly fresh discoveries, created according to no predetermined formula. Red Moon Press has recently revived his innovative work with the collection *waking on the bridge* (2008). This triumvirate is rounded out by John Wills, who, like Nathaniel Hawthorne before him, was born on the Fourth of July. One of the very greatest nature poets and technical innovators in the history of English-language haiku, Wills found inspiration in Virgilio's early haiku "bass/picking bugs/ off the moon" and developed a pared-down, punctuation-less style that broke with the typically bulkier *American Haiku* manner and adumbrated the shape of things to come.

Nick Virgilio (1928-1989)

Martin Shea (b. 1941)

John Wills (b. 1921-1993)

having come this far
alive at fifty-five:
the morning star

taking a hard look
at myself from all angles—
the men's store mirrors

Easter morning...
the sermon is taking the shape
of her neighbor's hat

boarding the wrong bus: the heat

Thanksgiving alone:
ordering eggs and toast
in an undertone

my spring love affair:
the old upright Remington
wears a new ribbon

after the bell,
within the silence
within myself

from *Selected Haiku* (Burnt Lake Press/Black Moss Press, 1988)

moving out tomorrow
their
sounds now

on the wind somewhere a
child, crying
here

old paintdrops
on the rusted fire escape—
summer rain

they stand in it,
a doorway
on the other side of the rain

moths have come
around the one light left
forgotten, on

out of the darkness
train tracks
back in

the planetarium doors
open:
we go in

from *waking on the bridge* (Red Moon Press, 2008)

going
where the river goes
first day of spring

the moon at dawn
lily pads blow white
in a sudden breeze

keep out sign
but the violets keep on
going

dusk from rock to rock a waterthrush

this rock
in moonlight warmer
than the others

boulders
just beneath the boat
it's dawn

the ridge
beyond this ridge
and those beyond

from *Reed Shadows* (Burnt Lake Press/Black Moss Press, 1987)

Previous Montages

June 14: Juneteenth
June 21: Summertime

Next Week's Montage: Transience

Kobayashi Issa
Charles B. Dickson
John Brandi