

MONTAGE

This Week's Montage

—Forms

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

Just as the subject matter of haiku varies quite a bit, so can the form. The work of this week's three featured poets—O Mabson Southard, Marlene Mountain, and John Martone—illustrates the range of forms English-language haiku poets have developed in trying to domesticate this elusive Japanese genre. Southard, who published no fewer than twenty haiku, including an award winner, in the very first issue of *American Haiku* in 1963, strictly followed the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern that became the norm for haiku of that time. As awareness of the fact that English syllables are not equivalent to Japanese *onji* spread, most "serious" practitioners of haiku in English abandoned this form for a terser organic form—although 5-7-5 remains fixed in the popular imagination as "the" requirement for a haiku, and talented poets such as Richard Wright, James W. Hackett, Nick Virgilio, and Southard have created enduring classics in this form. English-language haiku tend to be written in three lines, corresponding to the metrical division of Japanese haiku, but Japanese haiku are actually usually printed in a single vertical column. By way of analogy with this form, poets such as Matsuo Allard and Marlene Mountain began writing English haiku in a single horizontal line—and thanks to their efforts that form has become established in English as the major alternative to the typical three-liner. John Martone, another important innovator in English-language haiku, often favors a vertical form, which one could say is yet another way of approximating the Japanese originals.

O Mabson Southard (1911-2000)

Marlene Mountain (b. 1939)

John Martone (b. 1952)

In the garden pool,
dark and still, a stepping stone
releases the moon

Now the leaves are still—
and only the mockingbird
lets the moonlight through!

One breaker crashes...
As the next draws up, a lull—
and sandpiper cries

Across the still lake
through upcurls of morning mist—
the cry of a loon!

On the top fence rail
he lights, knocking off some snow—
a common sparrow

Here behind a dune
the wind begins to lay bare
a human jawbone

Down to dark leaf-mold
the falling dogwood-petal
carries its moonlight

from *Deep Shade Flickering Sunlight* (Brooks Books, 2004)

pig and i spring rain

he leans on the gate going staying

one fly everywhere the heat

old pond a frog rises belly up

a butterfly december rises to meet it

dawn mist pebbles hold their ground

invited in the fog of morning all it holds within

1-4 from *The Haiku Anthology*, 3rd edition, edited by Cor van den Heuvel (W.W. Norton & Company, 1999)
5-7 from *Roadrunner* Vol. VIII (2008)

snow

on

moss

under-
shirt

cu

mu

thrown on
sun

lus

flower

wind

some

thru

scare crow

pin

thru

thistles

sleep

've

the chair
w

a loose
rung's

my
chair

this
stepping

burst
between

before
yellow

stone
has a

graveyard
& pond

jacket's
sting

perfect
wobble

its fur's
touch

from *john martone poetry projects*
<http://ux1.eiu.edu/~jpmartone/dhpdf/dhpdf.html>

Previous Montages

May 17: *Bashô's Journey*
May 24: *Life & Death*

Next Week's Montage: *Water Works*

Buson
Christopher Herold
Kirsty Karkow