

# 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 28<sup>th</sup>, 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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