

# MONTAGE

## This Week's Montage

### —Confessions

## Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

Emily Dickinson once called publication ‘the auction of the mind.’ Robert Lowell seems to regard it more as soul’s therapy. The use of poetry for the most naked kind of confession grows apace in our day.” So M. L. Rosenthal opened his review of Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* (*The Nation*, 19 September 1959), thereby lending the name “confessional poetry” to an entire movement of twentieth-century verse. In addition to Lowell’s, the term has been applied to the work of John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Delmore Schwartz, Anne Sexton, W. D. Snodgrass, and others. Typically, confessional poetry reveals intimate details of a poet’s personal life pertaining especially to relationships, sexuality, and private feelings or states of mind. Old taboos and traditional notions of modesty, reticence, and discretion were cast aside. What had been repressed, concealed, or falsified surfaced. “Naked” autobiography is implied, but one never knows when fantasy and masks may intervene. It’s not truthfulness but the mode of telling that makes this poetry. Given the extraordinary influence of confessional poetry, it’s not surprising to find it a force in English-language haiku, particularly from the early 1980s onward, with Rod Willmot’s call for “psychological haiku” and the groundbreaking work of Alexis Rotella and other poets, which blurred the lines between haiku and senryu and introduced new subjects. The three poets represented here (N.B. two are lawyers) have developed the mode in their own “twenty-seven ways.” Of course, though, one may perhaps prefer what is left out—the presence of absence.

Nick Avis (b. 1957)

Roberta Beary (b. 1954)

John Stevenson (b. 1948)

this time  
she leaves nothing behind  
the winter moon

longing to be near her  
i remember my shirt  
hanging in her closet

she raises the hem  
of her new dress  
the day now longer

lovedone lightsonshadowsoff

the telephone  
rings only once  
autumn rain

i remember the lie  
i told her  
crocus in midwinter

this longing  
deep inside mountains  
in the distance

1, 2, 5 & 7 from *bending with the wind* (Breakwater, 1993)  
3, 4 & 6 from *You Aim to Love* (Burnt Lake Press, 1988)

snowfall  
his fingers slowly  
unbutton me

rainy season  
again he tells me  
she means nothing

custody hearing  
seeing his arms cross  
i uncross mine

hating him  
between bites  
of unripe plums

breakup  
my daughter’s voice cracks  
across two continents

third date—  
the slow drift of the rowboat  
in deep water

in the seconds  
after death  
warm hands

1–6 from *The Unworn Necklace* (Snapshot Press, 2007)  
7 from “nothing left to say” (King’s Road Press, 2009)

a long look  
at the winter stars . . .  
someone else’s wife

alone again  
making an event  
of a sandwich

Christmas day  
the exchange  
of custody

one last look  
through the old apartment  
a dry sponge

seeing it her way  
it must have been lonely  
living with me

Father’s Day  
she tells me  
I’m not the father

childhood home  
twilight  
as I arrive

1–3 from *Some of the Silence* (Red Moon Press, 1999)  
4–7 from *Quiet Enough* (Red Moon Press, 2004)

## Previous Montages

November 15: THF  
November 22: Three Women

## Next Week's Montage: Now & Zen

Karma Tenzing Wangchuk  
vincent tripi  
Stanford M. Forrester