

# The Art of Haiku

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ITS HISTORY THROUGH POEMS AND PAINTINGS  
BY JAPANESE MASTERS



Stephen Addiss

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In this in-depth look at the history of haiku and haiku paintings, one of the foremost experts on the art form offers a fascinating discussion on the development of the poetic form, concentrating on the great haiku poets like Basho, Buson, and Issa, but also moving into the twentieth century with poets like Santoka. While much has been written about haiku as a poetic form, haiku paintings, called *haiga*, are less widely discussed. Historically, all the leading masters created paintings, or at least calligraphy, with their haiku. The interaction of text and image adds another dimension to the already popular form of haiku, and is especially interesting since the two are so closely interwoven. This thorough history of haiku offers a clear view of the art of haiku and haiku paintings, and is presented with a wealth of examples of poems and paintings.

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# The Art of Haiku

*Its History through Poems  
and Paintings by Japanese Masters*

Stephen Addiss



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To Audrey Yoshiko Seo

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## Preface

Unless otherwise noted, the translations of the 997 poems in this book are by the author, who bears responsibility for any mistakes or misinterpretations, while acknowledging that haiku often contain more than one meaning. The appendix offers some comments on the difficulties of translating from Japanese to English, and readers are welcome to make their own versions of the poems using the Japanese romanizations supplied with each tanka and haiku.

Also, in this history of haiku and *haiga*, the ages of poets are given in Japanese style; for example, when Saigyō is described as age thirty, we would consider him twenty-nine.



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Next I must express my gratitude to all those museums and private collectors who have allowed their works to be published here; their fine haiga deserve to be better known and more fully appreciated in the Western world.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book contains Japanese characters and diacritics. If you encounter difficulty displaying these characters, please set your e-reader device to publisher defaults (if available) or to an alternate font.

# Introduction

**T**HIS BOOK WILL TRACE the history of Japanese haiku, including the poetic traditions from which it was born, primarily through the work of leading masters such as Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Shiki, along with a number of other fine poets. Although they are less well-known, haiku calligraphy and haiku-paintings (haiga) of the masters will also be illustrated and discussed as vital elements in the art of haiku. Theory and criticism will be minimized in favor of presenting the works themselves, which were composed to create a spontaneous interconnection with their readers and viewers, who play a vital part in the expressive process.

## What Are Haiku?

Although today haiku may be the best-known form of poetry in the world, there is still confusion as to how to define them. Many people would describe haiku as a three-line poem of 5–7–5 syllables, but this does not penetrate more than the surface of this remarkable form of poetry. Rather than tight definitions, it might be more useful to discuss the guidelines that most haiku follow.

Haiku in Japan are generally written or printed in a single column. Nevertheless, until the twentieth century, most traditional Japanese examples fall into 5–7–5 syllable patterns, although this was stretched and even broken by some of the great masters when it suited their purpose. <sup>1</sup>In the past one hundred years, Japanese haiku poets have been divided between those who basically follow 5–7–5, and those who do not. Furthermore, haiku poets in other languages often ignore this guideline. For example, the great majority of fine haiku in English have fewer than seventeen syllables because English is more compact than Japanese, and the same is true of haiku in other languages as well (see the appendix for more information on syllable counts in Japanese and English).

If haiku do not always depend upon a fixed syllable pattern, what are their most important characteristics? One is closeness to nature, which supplies most of the images that the poems rely upon to convey their meanings. This usually involves concrete observations expressed briefly and clearly through the use of everyday language and a syntax that is natural rather than “poetic.” Since in Japanese language the verb is usually at the end of the sentence, this sometimes involves the translator with changes in word order, but the guidelines remain the same. Here is a view of nature by Bashō that finds the extraordinary in the ordinary:

*fuyu niwa ya*  
*tsuki mo ito naru*  
*mushi no gin*

garden in winter—  
the moon also becomes a thread  
in the insect’s song

The second characteristic of haiku are references to a particular season; these references are called *kigo*. In Japanese, the great majority of traditional haiku indicate spring, summer, autumn, or winter, either directly (as in the haiku above) or through images that suggest which season is being presented. Some of these references may seem arbitrary, but they are firmly fixed into haiku history. To give just a few of many possible examples, frogs, swallows, warblers, the hazy moon, late frost, and plum- or cherry-blossoms are all indicators of spring, while for summer there are short nights, herons, toads, lilies, duckweed, and hail. Fall includes the harvest moon, lightning, dew, deer, grasshoppers, dragonflies, and persimmons, while winter is indicated by snow, frost, ice, owls, ducks, fallen leaves, and bare trees. <sup>2</sup>Therefore a Japanese haiku that mentions a frog is understood as a spring poem, while one including a heron is understood as taking place in summer. Since the season adds to the mood and meaning of the poem, these references are significant.

Third, and most important, haiku suggest rather than define their meanings, leaving much of the process up to the reader or listener.

In effect, the audience joins the writer in completing the poem, and since most haiku have more than one possible meaning, they tend not to have “correct” or solitary interpretations. Here the brevity of the form is helpful; the fewer the words, the more potential for multiple implications. As we shall see, the earlier poetic form called tanka (five-line poems with 5–7–5–7–7 syllable count) tended to be more explicit, while haiku allow readers to become partners to the poet by personally responding to the images. Of course, all art is an experience rather than an object—the poem, music, or painting is merely the instigator of that experience—but in haiku this interactive aspect is especially important. Too much information would be limiting; like the inside of a glass or cup, it is the empty space that is most valuable. In haiku these spaces can take the form of grammatical ellipses, so one may often find incomplete sentences, which allow meanings to emerge rather than being insisted upon.

For the same reason, most haiku are not directly subjective. Instead, an objective description of nature, often with a contrasting element, can allow readers more opportunities to engage with the poem, perhaps supplying their own subjective experiences. The description may contain an element of surprise, mystery, or humor, but it is usually based on fresh, specific imagery with an intense focus. Yet a fine haiku is seldom purely objective, since it has to resonate with human experience. It may give the appearance of being spontaneous, and perhaps it was, but poets like Bashō and Santōka also considered and sometimes altered their verses over a period of time. The purpose of haiku was to use the mundane while exceeding the mundane, to discover a moment of oneness in the diverse or to discern multiplicity in the singular. Haiku can find an inner truth from an outward phenomenon, and ultimately use words to go beyond words.

<i>hatsu aki ya</i>	early autumn—
<i>umi mo aota no</i>	the sea and rice fields
<i>hito midori</i>	a single green

Bashō's haiku seems like pure observation, but it also allows readers to share the experience of an autumn day, as well as the feeling of unity in nature and with nature. However, it does not say so too directly. Haiku present images rather than ideas; they seldom have conclusions, moral lessons, or direct statements of emotions—these may be implied, but the more open haiku are to personal intuition and empathy, the stronger they become as poems.

Another way to view haiku is through the combination of the momentary and the timeless, the blending of human perception and the universal pulse of nature. Like the “just this” of Zen, haiku masters stress the current moment in a state of focused perception, but that individual moment is also part of a greater world that does not begin or end. Each happening can be seen as unique, but also as connected with everything else. The following haiku by Bashō manages to express the former while somehow implying the latter:

<i>kane kiete</i>	the temple bell fading,
<i>hana no ka wa tsuku</i>	the scent of flowers comes forth—
<i>yūbe kana</i>	evening

## Haiku Structures

If haiku are generally written in a single column in Japanese, why are they usually translated into three lines? A good question, to which there are several possible answers. Primarily, it is because the three-part syllable division in Japanese haiku becomes more clear in English when the lines are divided. In addition, traditional haiku often include pause marks called *kireji* (cutting words) that help to mark rhythmic divisions. For example, at the end of the first or second segments there may be the extra syllable *ya*, at most a gentle untranslatable “ah,” indicating a rhythmic pause, or sometimes foreshadowing a change of theme or meaning. In contrast, the ending *kana* gives a sense of completeness, or “Isn’t it so?” One might see these cutting words primarily as sonic punctuations or

intensifiers of mood and meaning, as in these two examples by Bashō:

<i>akebono ya</i>	break of day—
<i>kiri ni uzumaku</i>	swirling though the fog
<i>kane no koe</i>	the voice of the bell
<i>hyakunen no</i>	looking a hundred years old
<i>keshiki wo niwa no</i>	this garden's
<i>ochiba kana</i>	fallen leaves

Neither *ya* in the first poem nor *kana* in the second have a distinct meaning, but in the first haiku *ya* creates a pause, and in the second *kana* fills out the rhythm with a feeling of conclusion. Other cutting words include *yo* and *zo*, both of which emphasize the previous word or words. Since *kireji* seldom have meanings of their own, they are primarily included to contribute their rhythms and sounds; therefore, one may consider many Japanese haiku as having fewer than seventeen active syllables.

In practice, most haiku have two parts, so that either the first two lines or the last two lines are one unit, and the first line or the last line is another unit. In both poems given above, it was one plus two, while in the following five haiku by Bashō, it is the reverse:

<i>aoyagi no</i>	green willow
<i>doro ni shidaruru</i>	drooping into the mud—
<i>shiohi kana</i>	low tide

*saki midasu* in the confusion  
*mono no naka yori* of peach trees blooming—  
*hatsu-zakura* the first cherry-blossoms

*nan no ki no* from which flowering tree  
*hana to wa shirazu* I don't know—  
*nioi kana* but the fragrance!

Some haiku that are two lines plus one might be considered “riddle poems,” in the sense that the first two lines set up an implied question—What is this?—and the final line gives a (sometimes surprising) answer.

*ochizama ni* while falling  
*mizu koboshikeri* it spills its water—  
*hanatsubaki* a camellia

*ōkaze no* still scarlet  
*ashita mo akashi* the day after the storm—  
*tōgarashi* peppers

At other times, the third line is a seemingly unconnected image that can allow us to make our own interpretations, as in this haiku by Ransetsu:

*matsumushi no* the buzz of the  
*rin tomo iwazu* pine cricket is silent—  
*kurochawan* black tea bowl



Does this take place during a tea ceremony? Is the poet simply looking at a bowl that suggests that night is deepening? Or are there other meanings altogether? This is up to us to consider, but it may be that Ransetsu himself wanted multiple interpretations.

To make the situation more complicated, there are some haiku that divide into two relatively equal segments by having the cutting word *ya* in the middle of the second line, such as this poem by Buson, which could be rendered two different ways, 5–7–5 and 8–9:

<i>uguisu no</i>	the warbler
<i>naku ya chiisaki</i>	sings with its small
<i>kuchi aite</i>	mouth wide open

<i>uguisu no naku ya</i>	the warbler sings—
<i>chiisaki kuchi aite</i>	with its small mouth wide open

Other haiku seem to be more continuous over the three sections, although readers may still feel some divisions within them. Here are two examples from Bashō:

<i>yase nagara</i>	although very skinny
<i>wari naki kiku no</i>	somehow the chrysanthemum
<i>tsubomi kana</i>	is in bud

<i>suzume-goto</i>	baby sparrows
<i>koe nakikawasu</i>	are echoed by
<i>nezumi no su</i>	mice in their nest

Finally, there are some haiku that seem to be composed of three separate lines, although of course one can envision connections between them. Here is an example by Buson:

*amadera ya*  
*yoki kaya taruru*  
*yoitsukiyo*

women's temple—  
mosquito nets hanging—  
moonlit evening

## Haiku Sounds and Rhythms

Like other forms of Japanese poetry, haiku do not use rhyme, but they do sometimes feature repetition of words or sounds to create a particular rhythm and music, such as in this poem by Bashō:

*hototogisu*  
*naki naki tobu zo*  
*isogashiki*

the cuckoo  
calling, calling, flying—  
how busy!

Here Bashō's first word, *hototogisu* (cuckoo) is itself somewhat onomatopoeic, since the sound suggests the bird's call, while the repetition of *naki naki* (calling, calling) adds to the rhythm of repeated sounds. Further, the final word has three "i" vowels, somewhat in parallel with the three "o" vowels in the first line. There seems to be no way to retain this music in translation, but it is an important element in the original poem. However, readers can sound this poem out for themselves: vowel sounds in Japanese are similar to those in Italian—*a* as in "spa"; *i* as in "see"; *u* as in "too"; *e* as in "egg"; and *o* as in "so."

Another Bashō haiku begins each segment with an "oo" sound, which also ends the poem. There is also a significant repetition of the "ah" sound in *utagau na*, *hana*, *ura*, and *haru*.

*utagau na*  
*ushio no hana mo*  
*ura no haru*

have no doubt—  
tides have their own flowers  
in spring inlets

The next three Bashō poems also feature the “ah” sound, suggesting flowering, sunlight, or heat, followed by a fourth poem that emphasizes the “o” sound for the cuckoo.

<i>asagao wa</i>	a morning glory
<i>sakamori shiranu</i>	not knowing of our drinking
<i>sakari kana</i>	blooms

<i>ara tōto</i>	how solemn—
<i>aoba wakaba no</i>	green leaves, young leaves
<i>hi no hikari</i>	in sunlight

<i>aka-aka to</i>	red, red
<i>hi wa tsurenaku mo</i>	the pitiless sun, and yet—
<i>aki no kaze</i>	the autumn breeze

<i>no wo yoko ni</i>	crossing the fields,
<i>uma hikimuke yo</i>	“lead my horse to that side”—
<i>hototogisu</i>	the cuckoo

A powerful haiku by a woman poet who became a nun, [Den Sute-jo](#) , also emphasizes the sound “ah” for heat; this sound appears in ten of the seventeen syllables.

<i>hada kakusu</i>	skin concealed
<i>onna no hada no</i>	but a woman’s skin’s
<i>atsusa kana</i>	heat!

## Haiku Uses of the Past

Although one of the most important features of haiku is observation of the present moment, poets have occasionally referred to the past, such as mentioning masters from earlier ages whom they particularly adulated. For example, Bashō especially admired the monk-poet [Saigyō](#), whose wandering lifestyle Bashō praised and adopted. Buson and Issa looked up to Bashō as well as Saigyō—in fact Buson was one of the leaders in a “back to Bashō” movement at a time when he felt that haiku were losing the spirit of the great master. Shiki especially praised Buson, whose reputation as a major poet he helped to restore. Sometimes these poets were included directly in haiku:

<i>imo arau onna</i>	a woman washes potatoes—
<i>Saigyō naraba</i>	if I were Saigyō
<i>uta yoman</i>	I'd write a tanka
—BASHŌ	

<i>Saigyō no</i>	just like Saigyō
<i>yō ni suwatte</i>	he sits and chants—
<i>naku kawazu</i>	the frog
—ISSA	

<i>okinaki ya</i>	Bashō's death day—
<i>naniyara shaberu</i>	what are you discussing,
<i>kado suzume</i>	sparrows by my gate?
—ISSA	

There may also be references to images or phrases from the past, such as *furu ike* (old pond), that bring forth the spirit of an admired predecessor. In one case, a verb we might not expect in haiku, *haku/haite* (belch, vomit), appears in the haiku of a succession of poets.

*tsuki no ku wo* after belching out  
*haite herasan* a verse on the moon  
*gama no hara* the toad's belly shrinks

—BUSON

*kumo wo haku* his mouth ready  
*kuchitsuki shitari* to belch out a cloud—  
*hikigaeru* the toad

—ISSA

*yoiyama ya* early evening—  
*tsuki wo hakidasu* belching out the moon  
*gama no kuchi* the mouth of the toad

—SHIKI

The references to past poets can be subtle, and it is worth keeping in mind that not every element in every haiku is based only on direct observation. Frequently, observation and past literature were combined, as in a haiku by Buson that mentions an [eleventh-century collection of Chinese and Japanese poetry](#) .

*kaji no ha wo* a mulberry leaf  
*Rōei-shū no* serves as a bookmark  
*shiori kana* in the *Rōei-shū*<sup>3</sup>

Beginning with Bashō, however, references to the past were generally curtailed in comparison to the clever haiku that preceded him, and the most important element was the “here and now” on its own terms. In this regard, there has been some dispute about the

role of the imagination in haiku composition. Shiki believed in “painting from life” (*shasei*) in his poetry, but he praised Buson particularly for his use of imagination. This has an interesting connection with memory, since putting a perception or an observation into words is already an act of memory taking place after the event, even if it is just a split second later. Imagination has roots in memory as well, so the situation is certainly complex. Perhaps it is enough to realize that words and images have associations that can add to (or sometimes distract from) the meaning of a haiku.

Some literary connections, whether from tanka, haiku, or other sources, may be lost to us—and certainly no one in Japan could catch every possible reference. However, a fine poem exists perfectly well on its own, and masters were able to use occasional associations without losing the force of their original perceptions. It is therefore the combination of direct perception and the mind of the poet, including memory, personality, and experience, that leads to the finished poem. Many people have heard the sound of a frog jumping into the water, but it was Bashō who transformed this moment into an evocative haiku:

<i>furu ike ya</i>	old pond—
<i>kawazu tobikomu</i>	a frog jumps in
<i>mizu no oto</i>	the sound of water
—1686	

## Haiku-painting (Haiga)

If haiku is a worldwide phenomenon, *haiga* (haiku painting) is almost unknown. Yet the major masters all created haiga, as well as haiku calligraphy, and their words and images frequently add substantial meanings to each other.

One reason that haiga have often been painted by Japanese poets is that the tools are the same as in writing—brush, ink, and paper or

silk, with the occasional addition of colors. Poets with great talent in painting like Buson created haiga, but so did those with modest skills like Issa, and both their haiga are esteemed by viewers. In fact, too much technique can be as much a liability as too little, since sincerity and suggestion are more important than obvious mastery and specificity. Therefore not only is the medium the same, but the aesthetics of haiku and haiga are also similar. Brevity, directness, naturalness, simplicity, and allowing the viewer to participate are the most important qualities. True haiga does not invite comments like “What a great painting!” as much as “How delightfully the painting and poem in-teract!” In fact, the only specific definition of haiga is an image plus a haiku, but over time a special haiga style of painting developed that emphasized the casual, relaxed, and understated.

Japanese haiga, the word-image relationships, developed into three main patterns. The first is the most simple: an informal portrait of a poet with one of his or her haiku (see Buson’s depiction of Chigetsu in [plate 6-2](#) ). This follows an earlier Japanese tradition of portraits of aristocratic tanka masters, but now the colors (if any) are muted, the brushwork is less sharp and precise, and the mood is no longer decorous; indeed, some haiku portraits seem close to caricature.

The second (and most common) interaction in haiga is supportive: one of the images is represented in both words and painting. If the poem mentions the moon, the moon also appears visually. However, in a good haiga the painting does not merely illustrate the haiku, and the poem does not simply explain the painting; they both add to the total effect of the work, reinforcing but also contributing to each other. There are several examples of this kind of multilayered support in the haiga reproduced in this book, and reader-viewers can discover how each art contributes to the expression of the other, even when they seem to be signifying the same thing.

The third form of text-image relationship in haiga is the most intriguing: the words and the painting do not seem to have any direct connection at all. Of course, this can occur in words alone, as in some haiku where the images do not seem to readily connect, but it

is even more apparent in certain haiga. This will be discussed later with specific examples, such as the Issa painting of a hut in [plate 7-1](#) , but in general the result is to add further meanings to both poem and image, setting up a special resonance that expands the total range of expression.

More common than haiga is haiku calligraphy, since many poets were asked for written versions of favorite poems. Because it is believed in East Asia that all calligraphy is a direct representation of the inner character and spirit of the calligrapher, the modest writing of Bashō, the more full-bodied brushwork of Buson, and the gentle script of Issa all well represent their personalities.

Haiga combines not two arts but three: poetry, painting, and calligraphy, and their interactions are always fascinating. It is not merely meanings and styles, but how they are visually combined in space that gives haiga its special flavor (again, see the [description of Buson's Chigetsu portrait](#) ). While the literati in both China and Japan generally placed their calligraphic inscriptions so they were separate from the painting, usually on the top of the scrolls, in haiga these inscriptions are often combined in much more interconnected and intimate ways. The poem swirls around the image, balances it asymmetrically, points to it, or any other combination that varies from work to work. The calligraphy of the poem may even be divided into two different parts of the painting, as in the final haiga of the book by Buntō ([Plate 8-11](#) ).

Summing up the many fascinations of haiga, they often reside especially in the interactions of the different arts of which they are composed. Haiku are marvelous by themselves, but the interpenetration of the different arts is what gives haiga their unique appeal. Since all the master haiku poets must have felt this potential when creating their own haiga, this special form of verbal-visual art deserves to become much better known in the future.



# 1

## Background

### *The Tanka (Waka) Tradition*

**W**ITHIN THE LONG AND illustrious Japanese poetic tradition, the origins of haiku can be seen both as part of a historical progression and as a revolution in aesthetics. To understand these two aspects of haiku, it can be helpful to investigate earlier Japanese cultural history.

This island nation undoubtedly had a strong poetic tradition in its prehistoric days, strongly connected to its ceremony, dance, chant, and song. The first two books compiled in Japan, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712) and the *Nihonshoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720) contain 113 and 131 poems respectively, some of which certainly came from much earlier times. <sup>1</sup>The rhythmic repetition of words and occasional extra vocalizing syllables in many of these verses reinforce the belief that they began as songs. For example, there is an insistent repetition of the word *yaegaki* (eight-sided balustrade) in the very first poem in the *Kojiki*, which is a celebration by a divine bridegroom of his wedding and new railing.

*Yakumo tatsu  
Izumo yaegaki  
tsumagomi ni  
yaegaki tsukuru  
sono yaegaki wo*

Where eight clouds arise  
in Izumo, an eight-sided balustrade  
to receive my wife,  
an eight-sided balustrade I've built,  
oh, this eight-sided balustrade!

The 5–7–5–7–7 syllable count of this five-line poem distinguishes it as a *tanka* (short song), also known as a *waka* (Japanese song) and

an *uta* (song). Its asymmetrical formula is quite different from most traditional Chinese poetry, which features evenly balanced lines arranged in parallel couplets, quatrains, and so on. Chinese *jintishi* (regulated verse) also depends on rhyme and on repeating patterns of tonal inflections, which are both missing from Japanese poetry. Instead, in most tanka there is a structure based on syllables, with a strong emphasis upon the evocation of human feelings, whether expressed directly or indirectly. In addition, many tanka feature “pillow words,” which were standard epithets. An example is the first line of the previous poem, which became a standard phrase for the sacred site of Izumo.

Although the tanka’s thirty-one-syllable form is brief compared with early *chōka* (long songs), tanka became and remained by far the most popular kind of poetry during Japan’s Nara and Heian periods (646–1185), when the court was the fountainhead of refined Japanese culture.

## The *Man’yōshū*

The earliest anthology of Japanese poems, the *Man’yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves or Collection of Ten Thousand Generations), <sup>2</sup> was compiled between 686 and 784. Its last datable poem is from 759, but many of its 4,516 verses are much earlier, and include folk songs, chants, elegies, and dialogue poems. Nevertheless, perhaps nine-tenths of *Man’yōshū* poems are in the tanka tradition.

Although other collections of poetry at times became more popular, the spirit of the *Man’yōshū* has remained an important element in Japanese culture for more than twelve hundred years. In the Edo period (1615–1868), the text was significantly revived and exalted by Kokugaku (National Learning) scholars; the first two complete commentaries on the *Man’yōshū* were completed in 1690. This was just the time when haiku were becoming popular, so it may be useful to examine a number of tanka from this seminal collection.

Many poems from the *Man'yōshū* appear as direct impressions of nature, whether of famous beauty spots or more intimate settings.

<i>Kari ga ne wo</i>	When I first hear
<i>kikitsuru nahe ni</i>	the calls of wild geese
<i>Takamatsu no</i>	at Takamatsu
<i>no no e no kusa so</i>	grasses on the moors
<i>irozuginikeru</i>	begin to redden their color

—ANONYMOUS

<i>Waga sono ni</i>	In my garden
<i>ume no hana chiru</i>	plum blossoms fall—
<i>hisakata no</i>	or is it not rain
<i>ame yori yuki no</i>	but snow, cast down
<i>nagare kuru ka mo</i>	from the sky?

—ŌTOMO NO TABITO (665–731)

The charming confusion as to whether it is snow or plum blossoms that are falling, which originally came from Chinese poetry, became a familiar trope in courtly tanka, and *mitate* (taking one thing for another) proved to have a long history in Japanese culture.

Even in what seem to be pure nature poems, there may be hints of human feelings, usually romantic—more than half of *Man'yōshū* poems are directly or indirectly about love. For example, in the first of the two poems above, the word *iro* in the final line can refer to passion as well as color, and the repetition *no no no e no* gives a rich, dark tonality to the tanka.

The moon has long been a familiar image in Japanese poetry, its meaning ranging from purity to a background for love or longing. The first of the following three *Man'yōshū* poems seems to be a direct

observation of nature, if not of human passion, while the following two indirectly suggest the feelings of a lover waiting for the beloved.

*Ochitagichi*  
*nagaruru mizu no*  
*iwa ni fure*  
*yodomeru yodo ni*  
*tsuki no kage miyu*

—ANONYMOUS

Plunging and foaming  
the flowing waters  
strike the reefs,  
then settle in pools where  
reflections of the moon can be seen

*Nubatama no*  
*yogiri no tachite*  
*oboboshiku*  
*tereru tsukiyo no*  
*mireba kanashisa*

—LADY ŌTOMO OF SAKANOUÉ (C. 695–C. 750)

The sky is dark  
as black beads  
in the fog—  
but what sadness there is  
in viewing the waning moon

*Yama no ha ni*  
*isayou tsuki wo*  
*idemu ka to*  
*machitsutsu oru ni*  
*yo so fukenukeru*

—ANONYMOUS

On the mountain crest  
will the waning moon  
finally appear?  
As I wait and wait  
night deepens

In contrast to many poems that use familiar images, other tanka in the *Man'yōshū* are unique, for example comparing nonsexual nights with bamboo, or a difficult lover with a bracelet.

*Waga seko wo  
izuku yukame to  
saki take no  
sogahi ni neshiku  
ima shi kuyashimo*

—ANONYMOUS

I thought my lover  
would never leave me  
so like split bamboo  
we slept back-to-back—  
how I regret it now!

*Tama naraba  
te ni mo makamu wo  
utsusemi no  
yo no hito nareba  
te ni makigatashi*

—ELDER MAIDEN OF THE ŌTOMO CLAN (N.D.)

If you were beads  
I'd wind you around my wrist—  
but in this mundane world  
since you are a man  
you are difficult to turn

Two other tanka from this collection express the reluctance of a woman to have her love affair become known. The first does so metaphorically through the color crimson, which hints at passion. In the second tanka, since a marriage could be assumed to take place when a lover stayed past dawn, the sentiment is ambiguous—how much does she really want her husband to leave?

*Kurenai no  
fukasome no kinu wo  
shita ni kiba  
hito no miraku ni  
nioiidemu ka mo*

—ANONYMOUS

If I wear  
an under-robe  
of deeply dyed crimson  
when people look at me  
would they see just a trace?

*Waga kado ni  
chitori shibanaku  
oki yo oki yo  
waga hitoyozuma  
hito ni shirayu na*

—ANONYMOUS

At my gate  
a thousand birds call out  
“Get up! Get up!”  
Oh husband of a single night,  
don't let people know!

Not all tanka in the *Man'yōshū* are individual poems. In courtly Japan, noblemen and noblewomen were expected to write elegant verses to each other on a moment's notice, and tanka poetry became the most admired form of elegant communication between the sexes. The following pair of tanka was sent back and forth between a nobleman and his young wife. This style of paired courtship or love poems was to become increasingly popular, and became known as *zōtōka* (exchanged poems).

*Takeba nure*                      Tied up, it loosens,  
*takaneba nagaki*                untied, it's too long  
*imo ga komi*                      my love's hair—  
*kono koro minu ni*                nowadays I can't see it—  
*kakiretsuramu ka*                has she combed it together?

—MIKATA NO SAMI (ACTIVE C. 700)

*Hito wa mina*                      Everyone now says  
*ima wa nagashi to*                my hair is too long  
*take to iedo*                      and I should tie it up—  
*kimi ga mishi kami*                but the hair you gazed upon  
*midaretari to mo*                I'll leave in tangles<sup>3</sup>

—THE DAUGHTER OF OMI IKUHA (N.D.)

Finally, a few of the poems in the *Man'yōshū* have a more philosophical bent; here are three that go beyond the usual theme of romantic love. The first suggests an elderly person who is searching for the Way (*michi*), known as the Tao in China, which can represent both a physical path and a more spiritual journey. The second is also by an elderly nobleman, now regretting that he may no longer be able to return to his home and position at court. The third poem goes beyond death to future life. Although being reborn in an animal state was usually considered unfortunate, this tanka seems to reveal a much more hedonistic approach to life that presages the “floating world” of pleasures that became celebrated a thousand years later.

*Utsusemi wa*                      The husk of my body  
*kazu naki mi nari*               counts for nothing  
*yama kawa no*                    I just view the brightness  
*sayakeki mitsutsu*              of mountains and rivers  
*michi wo tazunena*             as I search for the Way

—ŌTOMO NO YAKAMOCHI (c. 718–85)

*Waga sakari*                      The blossoming of my life  
*mata ochime ya mo*              again fades—  
*hotohoto ni*                      it's almost certain  
*Nara no miyako wo*              that the capital of Nara  
*mizuka nariyamu*              I shall not see again

—ŌTOMO NO YOTSUNA (ACTIVE 1730S–1740S)

*Kono yo ni shi*                    If I enjoy myself  
*tanoshiku araba*                in this world,  
*komu yo ni wa*                    in the next  
*mushi ni tori ni mo*             I'll just become  
*ware wa narinamu*              a bug or a bird

—ŌTOMO NO YAKAMOCHI

## The *Kokinshū*

Poetry collections became increasingly popular in courtly Japan. Around the year 905, Emperor Daigo (reigned 897–930) commissioned several noblemen to compile the *Kokin-wakashū* (Old and New Waka Collection, usually shortened to *Kokinshū*) as a “modern” successor to the *Man'yōshū*. This first imperial anthology was completed between 915 and 920 and contained twenty books, of which seven were devoted to the seasons, always important in



Japanese aesthetics, and five more to love poems. The tone of the anthology is considered refined and subjective, with more emphasis upon the poets' feelings than on nature, which poets often used as metaphors.

One of the poet-compilers, Ki no Tsurayuki (c. 872–945), composed an introduction to the *Kokinshū* that has remained one of the most influential descriptions of Japanese verse ever written, especially its opening lines.

Poetry in Japan begins with the human heart as its seed and myriad words as its leaves. It arises when people are inspired by what they see and hear to give voice to the feelings that come forth from the multitude of events in their lives. The singing of warblers in the blossoms, the voices of frogs in the ponds, these all teach us that every creature on earth sings. It is this song that effortlessly moves heaven and earth, evokes emotions from invisible gods and spirits, harmonizes the relations of men and women, and makes serene the hearts of brave warriors. <sup>4</sup>

Tsurayuki not only wrote this preface, but was also the single largest contributor to the *Kokinshū*, with no less than 202 of his poems included. Some of his tanka are basically variations on familiar romantic themes, but Tsurayuki also contributed a poem on transience, a Buddhist concept that by this time was firmly established in Japan. The occasion was the death of his nephew Ki no Tomonori (c. 850–c. 904), who had collaborated on the anthology but died before it was completed.

<i>Asu shiranu</i>	Although I realize
<i>waga mi to omoedo</i>	we can't know even our own body
<i>kurenu ma no</i>	tomorrow—
<i>kefu wa hito koso</i>	today, even before sunset,
<i>kanashikarikere</i>	is already sad

Some *Kokinshū* poems are direct observations of nature, although one may always suspect a second meaning. In the next poem, for example, since *iro* means both “color” and “passion,” the poem might have been sent by a lover as an avowal of constancy, especially since *aki* can mean not only autumn but also weariness or satiety. Such puns and related words (*engo*) were very important within the seeming simplicity of many *tanka*.

<i>Kusa mo ki mo</i>	Although grasses and trees
<i>iro kawaredomo</i>	both change their colors
<i>watatsuumi no</i>	on the flower-waves
<i>nami no hana ni zo</i>	of the great ocean
<i>aki nakarikeru</i>	there is no autumn

—BUNYA YASUHIDE (NINTH CENTURY)

Noblewomen were important poets in the *Kokinshū*, becoming even more significant than in the *Man'yōshū*. Perhaps the most famous was the talented beauty Ono no Komachi (834–80). By the eleventh century, legends had grown around her name, such as when she required a suitor to stand outside her house for one hundred nights, whatever the weather. On the ninety-ninth evening, he died.

Eventually, Komachi's beauty faded, and she is said to have wandered around in rags before her death, after which her skull ended up lying in a field. While these tales are highly suspect, they did add to her notoriety. One of her most celebrated *tanka* is difficult to translate, since once again the word *iro* has the meanings of both “color” and “passion.”

<i>Iro miede</i>	Its colors fading
<i>utsurou mono wa</i>	with no outward sign
<i>yo no naka no</i>	in this world—
<i>hito no kokoro no</i>	the flower
<i>hana ni zo arikeru</i>	of the human heart

A poet of a generation later, Lady Ise (c. 875–c. 938), also contributed passionate poems to the *Kokinshū*. According to her headnote, this tanka was written while seeing the stubble being burned in the fields, which occurred at the same time she was grieving over a love affair.

<i>Fuyugare no</i>	If I feel
<i>nobe to wagami wo</i>	my body is burned
<i>omoiseba</i>	like the desolate
<i>moete mo haru wo</i>	winter fields—yet
<i>mata mashimono wo</i>	the spring may come again

The *Kokinshū* is often considered more elegant and refined than the *Man'yōshū*, and certainly tanka had been thoroughly developed during the several centuries between the two texts. Nevertheless some of the later collection's love poems are still quite direct, such as these two anonymous verses that suggest that secrecy was an important element in romance. The first poem also has a nice example of personification, another familiar tanka device.

*Waga koi wo  
hito shirurame ya  
shikita no  
makura nomi koso  
shiraba shirurame*

Can anyone  
know of our love?  
If it could be known,  
it would only be  
by our silk pillow

*Shinonome no  
hogara-hogara to  
ake yukeba  
ono ga kinuginu  
naru zo kanashiki*

When the first  
flickering lights of dawn  
appear  
we help each other put on  
our clothes—how sad!

## Poetry in *The Tale of Genji*

Tanka poetry was a major feature of Japan's (and perhaps the world's) first novel, *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki, who was born about 973, and died either in 1014 or between 1025 and 1031. The fact that women were discouraged from learning Chinese gave them something of an advantage when writing prose in Japanese, which many men disdained, and this long narrative remains one of the most celebrated novels by writers of either sex. Although it was written in the early eleventh century, it suggests a period perhaps a century earlier. The principle theme here is romantic love, emphasizing its extraordinary importance in a courtly society where most other elements of life were prescribed and essentially unchanging.

Prince Genji himself is presented as an outstanding poet, as are most of the court noblemen and women that he knows. This gives Murasaki the opportunity to compose many tanka as a means of expressing deep emotions that go beyond prose descriptions. A typical poem sent by a courting courtier includes the word *iro*, which, as noted before, means both "color" and "passion."

*Omou tomo  
kimi wa shiraji na  
wakikakaeri  
iwa moru mizu ni  
iro shi mieneba*

You cannot know  
my deepest feeling—  
like the water  
that seethes over rocks  
its color can't be seen

One feature of the tanka in *The Tale of Genji* is how often they were created as *zōtōka*, therefore becoming a form of two-way communication. The novel contains many such pairs of poems being sent back and forth between lovers or would-be lovers, and sometimes they are described as being composed on the spot. One example was written by Genji for his wife, from whom he must part, with her murmured poetic reply. They both play with the charming conceit that his mirror can retain her image over time.

*Mi wa kakute  
sasuraenu tomo  
kimi ga atari  
saranu kagami no  
kage wa hanareji*

Although we cannot  
travel together  
you will be near  
since your image will never  
leave this mirror

*Wakare tomo  
kage dani tomaru  
mono naraba  
kagami wo mite mo  
nagusame te mashi*

Although we part  
if my image remains  
when you look  
into this mirror  
it will comfort you

Genji thereupon sends a series of letters to his wife from a temple in Uji. One of these includes poem of concern for her, to which she

again responds seemingly reassuringly, but with the undertone that colors (passions) are mutable in this dewdrop world.

<i>Asajiu no</i>	Like dewdrops
<i>tsuyu no yadori ni</i>	clinging to reeds
<i>kimi wo okite</i>	you face the storm
<i>yomo no arashi zo</i>	that comes from all directions
<i>shizugokoro naki</i>	and my heart is unquiet

<i>Kaze fukeba</i>	When the wind blows
<i>mazu zo midaruru</i>	there is confusion at first
<i>iro kawaru</i>	but as colors change
<i>asaji ga tsuyu ni</i>	the dew remains on the reeds
<i>kakaru sasagani</i>	just as it hangs on spiderwebs

Summing up the tanka in *The Tale of Genji*, it is clear that in courtly Japan they expressed more than what could be directly stated, and therefore were of great importance in revealing, or hinting at, inner feelings. These tanka served as a way for people to relate to each other through using natural imagery to express their love, or in some cases, their rejection of love. Of course, to some extent this was an elegant game, but in many cases one may find genuine emotions underneath the cultural patterns. The novel also makes clear that these emotions were transient, as expressed in a pair of tanka that were exchanged between Genji and a court lady. The primary image is, appropriately, a flower that only blooms in the morning.

*Mishi ori no  
tsuyu wasurarenu  
asagao no  
hana no sakari wa  
sugi ya shinuran*

I can't forget  
that time when dew fell  
on morning glories—  
are the flowers  
now past their bloom?

*Aki hatate  
kiri no magaki ni  
musubo-ore  
aru ka naki ka ni  
utsuru asagao*

As autumn ends,  
entangled in the mist  
by the bamboo fence  
are they or are they not  
fading morning glories?

In a supremely elegant society that seemed given almost entirely over to ceremonies and pleasures, it is telling that sadness and regret ultimately become the outstanding emotions in the entire novel, as well as in its tanka. Perhaps this was because the Buddhist notion of transience had penetrated deeply into Japanese sensibilities by this time, or perhaps unabashed hedonism necessarily leads to loss and sorrow in any society.

### *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*

While *The Tale of Genji* is a remarkable novel about courtiers, there is a nonfiction and considerably less romantic book of equal interest that presents the life and times of nobles at about the same period. The noblewoman Sei Shōnagon (c. 966–1017) kept a remarkable “pillow book” as a form of diary during the 990s until 1002. It contains a great deal of information presented in her unique style, combining descriptions of events at court, gossip, personal musings (often acerbic), and lists of all kinds.

Some of Sei Shōnagon's comments on the importance of poetry can help flesh out the record left by the tanka themselves, and give them

more context. First, the expectation that court ladies as well as noblemen should be able to write verses on any suitable occasion caused a certain amount of tension. One story in the *Pillow Book* tells of court ladies returning to the empress after an excursion to hear the call of the *hototogisu* (cuckoo).

“And now,” said her Majesty, “where are they—your poems?” We explained that we had not written any. “Really?” she said. “That is most unfortunate. The gentlemen at court are sure to hear of your expedition. How are you going to explain that you haven’t got a single interesting poem to show for it? You should have dashed something off on the spur of the moment while you were listening to the *hototogisu*. Because you wanted to make too much of it all, you let your inspiration vanish. I’m surprised at you!” [5](#)

Apparently, not only were courtiers expected to be able to write tanka on almost any occasion, they were also expected to know the classics thoroughly. In particular, we learn that the *Kokinshū* was highly esteemed in Sei Shōnagon’s day, and everyone at court was expected to know it well.

The Empress placed a notebook of *Kokinshū* poems before her and started reading out the first three lines of each one, asking us to supply the remainder. Among them were several famous poems that we had in our minds day and night; yet for some strange reason we were often unable to fill in the missing lines. . . . “Those of you,” said the Empress, “who had taken the trouble to copy out the *Kokinshū* several times would have been able to complete every single poem I have read.” [6](#)

In addition, the *Pillow Book* has several sections in which poems are sent with the expectation of receiving a tanka of high quality in response, and the quality of both poems had a great deal to do with one’s prestige at court. Skill at poetry, along with fine calligraphy and refined manners, could lead not only to romance but could also provide access to the emperor and empress.



## Other Tanka Anthologies

Among the anthologies that followed the *Kokinshū*, several gained great popularity, each with its own particular structure. One of these was the *Wakan Rōei-shū* (Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing), a compilation of poems in both languages that was completed about the year 1013, about the same time that *The Tale of Genji* was being written. As well as 216 Japanese tanka, it includes 588 Chinese couplets written by thirty Chinese and fifty Japanese masters. Perhaps it was the Japanese preference for brevity that led to selecting couplets from Chinese verses, rather than including the entire poems. By this time, many noblemen and high-ranking monks were adept at writing in Chinese, but since women were not supposed to learn that language they were added only to the tanka sections. Like most anthologies, the *Wakan Rōei-shū* also presented work from previous publications, and included a dozen poems from the *Man'yōshū* as well as more than fifty that had also been anthologized in the *Kokinshū*.

Because the Japanese poems in the *Wakan Rōei-shū* generally follow trends set earlier, we will offer only two examples here. The first anonymous tanka may seem similar to the well-known question in the West: “If a tree falls in the woods with no one to hear it, does it make a sound?” The second tanka, by the ubiquitous Ki no Tsurayuki (who had more than twenty poems in this compilation), utilizes its title image to hint at emotion rather than stating it directly.

<i>Ashibiki no</i>	In the mountains
<i>yama gakure naru</i>	so wearying to climb,
<i>hototogisu</i>	does the cuckoo,
<i>kiku hito mo naki</i>	with no one to listen,
<i>ne wo ya nakuramu</i>	sing its song?

The Cry of the Crane <sup>7</sup>

<i>Wasurete mo</i>	Its mournful cry
<i>aru beki mono wo</i>	in the reed plains
<i>ashihara ni</i>	calls to mind
<i>omoi izuru no</i>	something much better
<i>naku zo kanashiki</i>	to forget

Another anthology that proved even more successful through the centuries was the *Hyakunin issū* (One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets), which was put together in the 1230s by Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241) from more than five centuries of Japanese poetry. As noted earlier, the *Man'yōshū* was revived by scholars during the Edo period, but during that time the *Hyakunin issū* became more widely popular among many levels of society, in part through a card game in which players had to match the first three lines of a poem with the final two (much like the court ladies noted earlier). In addition, the poems were featured in illustrated books, wood-block prints, and even clothing and home furnishings. <sup>8</sup>Some of these tanka had been anthologized earlier, and for most Japanese they became the canon of classical poetry, certainly well-known to most (if not all) haiku poets half a millennium later.

Since the *Hyakunin issū* is organized in roughly chronological order, a sample of tanka from this anthology can provide a brief review of Japanese poetry up to the early thirteenth century. An even more significant feature of the anthology is how certain main themes vary within the same time period as well as over the centuries. Borrowing from an earlier poem (*honkadori*) was quite acceptable, and to some extent these traditional themes are “performed” by poets much like classical musicians perform Mozart and Beethoven in the West.

To see how the same poet varies a theme, the ninth of the hundred poems is by Ono no Komachi, and relates to her [evocative tanka translated earlier](#) .

<i>Hana no iro wa</i>	Flower colors
<i>utsurinikeri na</i>	have faded in vain
<i>itazura ni</i>	as I pass
<i>wagami yo ni furu</i>	through this world
<i>nagame seshi ma ni</i>	like slowly falling rain

Now the flower has faded, and the poetess seems resigned to her fate. While the previous poem is more purely descriptive, at least on the surface, this tanka is more personal because she refers specifically to herself (and, by inference, her emotions) falling like the rain.

The nineteenth poem chosen for this collection is by Lady Ise.

<i>Naniwa-gata</i>	Are you saying
<i>mijikaki ashi no</i>	we will go through this world
<i>fushi no ma mo</i>	not meeting for even
<i>awade kono yo wo</i>	as small a time as the tiny spaces
<i>sugishiteyo to ya</i>	in the nodes of Naniwa reeds?

Several tanka in the *Hyakunin isshū* utilize the familiar theme of waiting at night for a lover to come, often in vain. We can compare four poems on this theme, the second and fourth of which are by women. Sharp-eyed readers may note that the final two lines of the first poem have eight Japanese syllables instead of seven. This is called *ji-amari* (extra characters) and it appears in tanka occasionally, perhaps to show emotion breaking the bounds of convention. [9](#)

*Ima komu to  
iishi bakari ni  
naga tsuki no  
ariake no tsuki wo  
machi idetsuru kana*

Only because  
you said you would come  
have I waited  
in this long month  
for the moon to appear at dawn

— THE MONK SOSEI HŌSHI (N.D., POEM 21)

<i>Tsuki mireba</i>	As I view the moon
<i>chiji ni mono koso</i>	I feel the sadness
<i>kanashikere</i>	of all things—
<i>wagami hitotsu no</i>	this autumn is not
<i>aki ni wa arenedo</i>	for me alone

—ŌENO CHISATO (FLOURISHED 889–923, POEM 23)

<i>Ariake no</i>	More than seeing
<i>tsurenaku mieshi</i>	the pitiless dawn moon
<i>wakare yori</i>	as we part
<i>akatsuki bakari</i>	is the loneliness
<i>uki mono wa nashi</i>	at break of day

—MIBU NO TADAMINE (BORN C. 850, POEM 30)

<i>Yasurawa de</i>	Instead of
<i>nenamashi mono wo</i>	going off to sleep
<i>sayo fukete</i>	as night deepens
<i>katabuku made no</i>	I watch the moon
<i>tsuki wo mishi kana</i>	until it finally sets

—ATTRIBUTED TO AKAZOME EMON (956–1041, POEM 59)

The first of these tanka is straightforward: the poet waits all night, but the lover does not come as promised. The second is more general, with its discovery that autumn sadness is something that others may share. In the third poem the lovers have been together, but after one leaves, the sense of loneliness is perhaps even greater. The fourth tanka is more like the first, but now the absence of the lover is entirely suggested by implication.

Several other themes find multiple expression in the poems chosen for the *Hyakunin issū*, including the passing of time. This is usually nostalgic and melancholic as the poet recalls his original home, where he felt happy and secure compared with the present-day vicissitudes of living and loving in the capital.

<i>Hitowa isa</i>	One can never
<i>kokoro mo shirazu</i>	know people's hearts—
<i>urusato wa</i>	but in my old village
<i>hana zo mukashi no</i>	the plum blossoms still emit
<i>ka ni hihojikeru</i>	the scent of the past

—KI NO TSURAYUKI (POEM 35)

<i>Ai mite no</i>	Compared to
<i>nochi no kokoro ni</i>	my feelings after
<i>kurabureba</i>	we met—
<i>mukashi wa mono wo</i>	in the old days
<i>omowazarikeri</i>	I had no worries at all

—FUJIWARA NO ATSUTADA (906–43, POEM 43)

Another tanka in the *Hyakunin issū* is a variation on [the pair of poems about tangled hair](#) that we saw before in the *Man'yōshū* :

<i>Nagakaramu</i>	How long it will be
<i>kokoro mo shirazu</i>	my heart cannot know—
<i>kuro kami no</i>	my black hair
<i>midarete kesa wa</i>	is tangled this morning
<i>mono wo koso omoe</i>	just like my inner feelings

—TAIKENMON-IN NO HORIKAWA (N.D., POEM 80)

Are all the tanka in this anthology about human feelings? Certainly the frequent use of the noun *kokoro* (heart, mind), and the verb *omou* (to think, care, feel, love) indicates how often tanka express human passions, whether directly or by implication. There are exceptions, however, such as this nature poem by the Buddhist monk Jakuren (1139–1202, poem 87).

<i>Murasame no</i>	While dew-like drops
<i>tsuyu no mada hinu</i>	from the passing shower still remain
<i>make no ha ni</i>	on the black pine needles—
<i>kiri tachi-noboru</i>	the mist is already rising
<i>aki no yūgure</i>	this autumn evening

## Saigyō Hōshi

The greatest of all tanka monk-poets was Saigyō Hōshi (1118–90), and his influence was to become significant in haiku poetry through the great appreciation of Bashō and Buson. They admired not only his poetry but also his life, which to some extent they copied, Bashō in particular.

Saigyō was born in Kyoto to a military branch of the vast Fujiwara clan. At the age of eighteen, he was given a position as a captain of the imperial guard that served the retired emperor Toba, but five years later he took Buddhist orders in the Shingon (True Word)

esoteric sect. There is considerable speculation as to why Saigyō gave up a position at court for a considerably more difficult life as a monk. Some clues emerge from his own writings, but they have to be considered carefully since it was common for poets to take another voice, such as a male or female lover, when writing tanka. Nevertheless, a few of his poems suggest unhappiness in love.

<i>Nakanaka ni</i>	When she says
<i>omoi shiru chō</i>	“I know how you’re feeling,”
<i>koto no ha wa</i>	how much more hateful
<i>towanu ni sugite</i>	than not saying
<i>urameshiki kana</i>	anything at all

Other writings may be more reliable in giving his thoughts, such as a poem composed when he was, according to his headnote, “coming to a decision about leaving the worldly life.” Since the first word *sora* can mean “sky” as well as “empty,” the poem could be interpreted as a heart-mind (*kokoro*) that becomes like mist vanishing into the sky.

<i>Sora ni naru</i>	The heart-mind
<i>kokoro wa haru no</i>	that becomes empty
<i>kasumi nite</i>	is like the spring mist,
<i>yo ni araji tomo</i>	feeling that it too
<i>omoitatsu kana</i>	may leave this world

This indicates a Buddhist sense of transience, and considering how essentially unstable Japanese society was at that time, Saigyō may well have been aware of the ephemeral nature of the world around him. For example, in 1140 warrior-monks from Enryaku-ji burned the temple Miidera; tensions at court were also very high, and civil warfare was not far in the future. In any event, Saigyō wrote a tanka preceded by “When I petitioned Retired Emperor Toba for permission to leave secular life.”



*Oshimu tote  
oshimarenubeki  
kono yo kawa  
mi wo sutete koso  
mi wo mo tasukeme*

Why hold as precious  
what should not be valued  
in this world?  
The self we throw away  
is also the self we rescue

Although Saigyō's Buddhist vocation was certainly sincere, most decisions in life have more than one cause. For those who prefer a more specifically personal reason for his decision, there is a *tanka* written after he became a monk.

*Nanigoto ni  
tsukete ka yo wo ba  
itowamashi  
ukarishi hito zo  
kyō wa ureshiki*

What was it  
that led me to despise  
this world?  
a hateful person  
whom I now know as kind

Saigyō did not live at a large temple, but preferred a quiet hermitage of his own. At first he stayed near Kyoto, but soon discovered that he wasn't able to find the solitude he sought.

*Sutetaredo  
kakurete sumanu  
hito ni nareba  
nao yo ni aru ni  
nitaru narikeri*

Although I've thrown away  
the world to dwell  
in seclusion,  
it's still like  
living in society

Once he moved away to a small hermitage in the mountains, however, Saigyō was able to accept and enjoy his solitude. He could also look back at his former life with aplomb.

*Tou hito mo  
omoitaetaru  
yamazato no  
sabishisa nakuba  
sumi ukaramashi*

Without the people  
I had hoped would visit  
my mountain hut  
now I wouldn't give up  
my loneliness

In 1147, as he reached the age of thirty by Japanese count, Saigyō began one of his most extensive travels, trekking northeast to Mutsu. This kind of lengthy journeying, which he was to repeat several times throughout his life, enabled him to experience nature more fully as part of his religious practice. Although Saigyō did not always make clear where his tanka were composed, many of his finest were probably written on the road. One of his most intense poems describes the wind dispelling illusion.

*Mi ni tsukite  
moyuru omoi no  
kiemashi ya  
suzushiki kaze no  
augazariseba*

How can we quell  
the burning thoughts  
that inflame the body?  
Only by encountering  
the cooling wind

Meanwhile, life in the Japanese capital was becoming more and more contentious. In 1156, the former emperor Toba died; he had been the true ruler of Japan despite his supposedly retired status. This led to battles of succession, and there was the first overt violence in Kyoto and also the first executions there for several hundred years. Three years later, more fighting took place, and for the next two decades there was increasing martial tension. Saigyō was distressed by the events, and they must have reinforced his decision to become and remain a monk.

Continuing his journeying, Saigyō's visit to the island of Shikoku in 1168 led to this poem about the moon, which he admired from the

mountains of Sanuki near the inland sea.

*Kumori naki  
yama nite umi no  
tsuki mireba  
shima zo kōri no  
taema narikeru*

When viewing  
the moon in the inland sea  
the vanishing  
islands of ice are like  
mountains without clouds

Another powerful poem about the moon takes the reader directly into a chilly pine forest.

*Yama fukaki  
maki no ha wakuru  
tsukikage wa  
hageshiki mono no  
sugoki narikeri*

Deep in the mountains  
the moon shining through  
needles of the black pines  
has a violent  
and frightening power

Perhaps most significant of all Saigyō's many and varied tanka about the moon is one that describes it as a focus of enlightened meditation. In a headnote, Saigyō says that this moment came while "Studying the *Lotus Sutra*, deeply entering meditation, and seeing Buddhahood on all sides."

*Fukaki yama ni  
kokoro no tsuki shi  
suminureba  
kagami ni yomo no  
satori wo zo miru*

In the deep mountains  
when dwelling in the moon  
of the heart-mind  
in this mirror I see  
satori in every direction

Clearly, it was nature that both lightened and enlightened Saigyō's heart, and he compared the Chinese-derived philosophy of the Way (Tao) to Buddhist enlightenment.

*Iwama tojishi  
kōri mo kesa wa  
tokesomete  
koke no shitamizu  
michi motomuran*

Today the ice  
clutched by the rocks  
is melting away  
and the water under the moss  
also seeks the Way

Despite his love of nature, Saigyō was very aware in his poetry of the disasters then befalling Japan. In particular, he wrote a few powerful tanka about the civil war that became extremely violent from 1180 until 1185; it was this warfare that led to the end of a long period of domination by the nobility in favor of a new samurai era. To make matters worse, there was a famine in 1183–83 and an earthquake in 1185 shortly after a climatic battle, all taken as signs that the old order no longer had the protection of the gods. One of the most compelling of Saigyō's poems includes an explanatory headnote.

It has become a time of constant warfare throughout the country. To the west, east, north, and south, there is nowhere without battles. The number of those being killed has climbed until it has reached a huge number, almost beyond belief—but for what reason is the war being fought? This is truly tragic.

*Shiide no yama  
koyuru taema wa  
araji kashi  
nakunaru hito no  
kazu tsuzukitsutsu*

Marching through  
the mountains  
without cease,  
the men who will die  
continue on and on

The final word *tsuzukitsutsu* (continues and continues) is marvelously appropriate in sound, and when one adds the second syllable of the previous word, the effect is like a machine gun spitting out the syllables *zu-tsu-zu-ki-tsu-tsu*.

Within his wide range of subjects, one of the most significant aspects of Saigyō's tanka is how many are specifically Buddhist, to the extent that he has been called "Japan's foremost Buddhist poet." [10](#) This is in part because he takes a variety of approaches. For example, in one tanka he offers an ironic comment on different levels of reincarnation. In another poem about the hell of constantly climbing trees toward sensual women, only to find the branches are sword blades, he also remembers his own youth.

*Ukegataki  
hito no sugata ni  
ukamiide  
korizu ya dare mo  
mata shizumubeki*

Floating up again  
into human form  
is difficult  
but sinking down  
is something anyone can do

*Konomi mishi  
tsurugi no eda ni  
nobore tote  
shimoto no hishi wo  
mi ni tatsuru kana*

The swords  
I used to gaze on fondly  
are now branches  
that must be climbed  
by bodies being whipped

More often, however, Saigyō reflects more deeply on the paradoxes of Buddhism, such as the belief that being a Buddhist depends on the historical Buddha Shakyamuni who preached on Vulture Peak, rather than each person finding their own inner buddha. In addition, Saigyō muses on how the true seeker must release even the seeking, and return to the world. Finally, he contemplates the nature of reality.

*Washinoyama  
tsuki wo irinu to  
miru hito wa  
kuraki ni mayou  
kokoro narikeri*

People who see  
only the moon rising  
over Vulture Peak  
are deluded by  
the darkness in their hearts

*Madoikite  
satori ubeku mo  
nakaritsuru  
kokoro wo shiru wa  
kokoro narikeri*

Confusing—  
satori can never  
be attained  
by the mind that knows  
it is mind

*Yo wo sutsuru  
hito wa makoto ni  
sutsuru ka mo  
sutenu hito koso  
sutsuru narikere*

Does the person  
who abandons the world  
really give it up?  
The person who doesn't renounce it  
is the only one to let it go

*Utsutsu wo mo  
utsutsu to sara ni  
omoeneba  
yume wo mo yume to  
nankia omowan*

If I don't consider  
reality  
to be real,  
why should I think  
of a dream as a dream?

In 1180, Saigyō moved to Ise, the most sacred area for the indigenous Japanese religion of Shinto. This may seem unusual for a Buddhist monk, but it was believed that the multiple gods of Shinto

(*kami* ) corresponded to Buddhist deities; he stated in one of his tanka: *kami mo hotoke nari* (gods also become buddhas). Saigyō may also have been discouraged by the continuing competition, sometimes violent, between Buddhist sects and temples. The poet, now sixty-three years old, certainly must have appreciated the Shinto reverence for nature.

<i>Fukaku irite</i>	Entering deeply,
<i>kamiji no oku wo</i>	if I ask about
<i>tazunureba</i>	the path of the gods,
<i>mata ue mo naki</i>	there is the tallest peak
<i>mine no matsukaze</i>	and the wind in the pines

Despite the strength of his religious poems, perhaps Saigyō's greatest influence in later ages came from his lifestyle of journeying through Japan, and his deep empathy with nature. Both of these became models for Bashō, who wrote that Saigyō had "a mind both obeying and at one with nature through the four seasons." <sup>11</sup> Several tanka by Saigyō express his sense of wonder in natural forces as he travels through Japan, ranging from observations of common people (who since the *Man'yōshū* had been almost entirely absent from tanka), to his most beloved Yoshino Mountain with its spectacular cherry-blossoms.

<i>Yamagatsu no</i>	As I look around
<i>suminu to miyuru</i>	to see where
<i>watari kana</i>	mountain people dwell—
<i>fuyu ni aseiyuku</i>	a quiet village
<i>shizuhara no sato</i>	fading into winter?

*Ko no moto ni  
tabine wo sureba  
Yoshino yama  
hana no fusuma wo  
kisuru harukaze*

As I rest on my journey  
under a tree  
on Yoshino Mountain  
the spring breeze spreads out  
a quilt of blossoms

In 1186 at the age of sixty-nine, Saigyō took one more lengthy trip to the northeast. Part of the reason may have been to raise funds for the temple Tōdai-ji, which had been partly destroyed in 1180 at the height of the civil war. On this journey he had a fine view of Mount Fuji in a semi-dormant state, inspiring a tanka that has echoes of the previous “heart-mind that becomes empty.”

*Kaze ni nabiku  
Fuji no keburu no  
sora ni kiete  
yukue mo shiranu  
waga omoi kana*

Fluttering on the wind  
the smoke from Mount Fuji  
fades into the sky—  
I also don't know where  
my passions have gone

Another poem on the question of human passions has become Saigyō's best-known tanka. It centers upon one of the most difficult words to translate from the Japanese, *aware*, which can mean “feeling,” “sorrow,” “melancholy,” “pathos,” “pity,” “compassion,” and awareness of the fleeting nature of human life.

*Kokoro naki  
mi ni mo aware wa  
shirarekeri  
shigi tatsu sawa no  
aki no yūgure*

Beyond passion,  
I did not know that  
I could feel such pathos—  
a snipe rises from the marsh  
this autumn evening



As he neared the end of his life, Saigyō wrote several tanka that are lighter in spirit than many that had come before. Perhaps he had reached a certain ironic contentment, as when he reflected once more on his childhood with a poem about the *takeuma* (bamboo horse) beloved by children.

<i>Takeuma wo</i>	The bamboo staff
<i>tsue ni mo kyō wa</i>	that today serves
<i>tanomu kana</i>	as my trusty cane,
<i>warawa asobi wo</i>	I remember once using
<i>omoikidetsutsu</i>	to play horsey-horsey

It was this kind of poem, so much more informal and everyday in spirit and diction than most courtly tanka, that was to influence later haiku masters.

Broadly speaking, Saigyō was able in his tanka to expand the range of subjects and vocabulary, add more spiritual elements, and stress the importance of nature as such, not only using it as a metaphor for human passions. He thereby added new life to a form that had become somewhat static in its expression. The result was that Saigyō became revered: twelve years after his death in 1190, he was the most frequently represented poet in the imperial anthology *Shinkokinshū* (Modern Old and New Collection, 1201), with no less than 94 of the total 1,981 verses. Partly as a result of the inclusion of so many of Saigyō's poems, this anthology is considered less subjective than the *Kokinshū*, with broader themes, more fragmentation of syntax, and a more bleak and melancholy tone that suggests a nostalgia for the more glorious past.

During the eight centuries since Saigyō's day, tanka have gradually included larger sections of the Japanese public as both poets and audience, and now it is growing as a verse form in the West. However, a new form of poetry dominated Japanese culture during the samurai era of 1185–1568: this is the *renga* (linked verse) tradition, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## 2

### Renga, Hokku, Haikai, and Haiga

THE PRACTICE OF ONE POET writing half a tanka and another poet completing it started very early in Japanese literature; there are a few examples in the *Man'yōshū*. The division of tanka into 5–7–5 and 7–7 syllables seems to fall naturally; many tanka are divided subtly or not so subtly into these parts, through meaning or imagery. For several centuries the two-poet tanka, called *tan-renga*, was popular, primarily as a kind of poetic game in which a clever second half had to be composed to suit a challenging first half.

Occasionally a half-tanka became known as a successful poem in itself, as in this 5–7–5 verse by Fujiwara no Sadaie (also known as Fujiwara no Teika, 1162–1241).

<i>chiru hana wo</i>	falling blossoms
<i>oikakete yuku</i>	are pursued
<i>arashi kana</i>	by the storm

At first, such individual units were less important than elegant combinations. There is a renga section in the anthology *Kin'yōshū* (Collection of Golden Leaves, 1124–27), and by the mid-twelfth century, renga had often expanded into multiple segments. Renga's popularity doubtless increased due to its socializing opportunities, and poets became accustomed to alternating 5–7–5 and 7–7 links into at least one hundred links, and sometimes many more verses; by 1333 a renga sequence of one thousand links had been created.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, renga expanded exponentially to become the most prominent genre in Japanese literature. Although there are instances of long solo renga, more

often a group of poets gathered together, and either took turns or offered a segment when inspired to do so. Some renga were composed on set topics (*fushimono*), in which every verse had to make some (often slight) reference to the theme, while other renga were more free in their total structure.

Two forms of renga gained the greatest popularity during Japan's samurai era (the Kamakura period [1185–1333] and the Muromachi period [1333–1568]). One was the clever and comic *mushin* (mindless) form, which was full of puns and other wordplay, often bawdy and frequently vulgar. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this form developed into *haikai no renga* (humorous renga), which had a great influence upon the growth of haiku.

The more serious style of renga, called *ushin* (mindful), was closer to an elaboration of the classical tanka tradition. At first, such renga may seem to answer one of the occasional objections to Japanese poetry, namely that it concentrates upon short forms and does not have a longer narrative or epic tradition. Since renga could (and sometimes seemed to) go on indefinitely, wasn't that a longer poetic form?

The answer is both yes and no. Yes, in that the poems themselves were often extremely extended, but no, in that they were not used for narrative or epic purposes; in fact, one of the main rules of most renga is continuous change, rather than following a single theme or even the same weather, time of day, or season. The secret was to make a subtle connection between one link and the next that could be abandoned in the following link or several links further into the poem.

A courtier named Nijō Yoshimoto (1320–88) may have been the most influential of all renga poets. He was not only an expert at the form, but he compiled one of the earliest anthologies of renga, and he also wrote a number of important essays about it. His main aesthetic points were: first, renga should be entertaining and “delight the people present”; second, that “without an elegant spirit there could not be an elegant word or style”; third, renga must have “unity

in variety”; and fourth, “the ideal is to express an old familiar truth in a new, refreshing way.” <sup>1</sup>

Many rules were developed for this serious form of renga, such as that segments should be able both to stand alone and to combine with their other halves in order to form complete poems. Just as in classical tanka, Chinese-derived words were frowned upon, but seasonal references should be included in roughly half the segments, while the other half should be nonseasonal. More specifically, segments about autumn and spring should occur at least three links in a row, but no more than five; summer, winter, travel, Buddhism, Shintoism, lamentation, mountains, dwellings, and waters no more than three links in a row; wild geese two; and so forth. Certain words like “pine” and “dream” should be separated by at least seven links, and “love” by five links; the moon was restricted to eight total appearances, and cherry-blossoms to four.

Furthermore, each month had special attributes that might be mentioned, such as lingering winter, unmelted snow, plum blossoms, and warblers for the first month (corresponding generally to our February), or summer showers, fans, summer grasses, cicadas, glowworms, and the evening cool for the sixth month. <sup>2</sup>—However, according to Yoshimoto, words that should be used only once in a hundred-link sequence include azaleas, peonies, wisteria, roses, irises, monkeys, deer, horses, cuckoos, fireflies, cicadas, and unknown insects. <sup>3</sup>—And as Howard S. Hibbett put it, “A few words were so alarming that they were traditionally supposed to appear only ‘once in a thousand verses,’ *oni* (‘demon’), *tora* (‘tiger’), *tatsu* (‘dragon’), and *onna* (‘woman’).” <sup>4</sup>

Following Japanese ideas about the organization of music, the first eight links were sometimes considered the slow introduction, segments nine to ninety-two were the development, and the final eight were the rapid conclusion. Another system was to give the first twenty-two links a quiet mood, make the next twenty-eight more lighthearted, and construct the final fifty so they were especially exciting. As time went by, many more rules of all kinds were

proposed, but those noted here were among the most often accepted. <sup>5</sup>

More generally, *ushin* renga did not demand individual expression, but were considered at their height when the participating poets worked seamlessly together to create a gradually shifting mosaic of verse. As Yoshitomo wrote, “A stanza by an expert poet is integrated with its preceding stanza through an interesting turn of spirit, though at first sight it may not seem to be linked at all.” <sup>6</sup>As a result, many fine but occasionally obscure renga were later given elaborate commentaries, although experts have not always agreed on all the subtleties of their meanings and connections.

Yoshitomo’s book *Tsukuba-shū* (Tsukuba Collection) of 1356 appeared in twenty volumes (similar to imperial collections), and included almost two thousand pairs of verses, with only the second half of the verses including the author’s name. In addition, one volume contains Japanese verses connected to Chinese poems, and another is devoted to the opening 5–7–5 syllable verses called *hokku*. At this point we may identify *hokku* as protohaiku since they can stand alone, although they may also become the first stanza of a much longer poem. *Hokku* were by now supposed to contain a *kireji* (a “cutting word” such as *ya*, which offers a pause or a mild exclamation in the middle of a verse, or the word *kana* at the end, which gives a sense of completeness) and a seasonal reference (*kigo*), both of which became important in traditional haiku. The main point of *Tsukuba-shū* and other writings by Yoshitomo, however, was to demonstrate for people wishing to join in renga how they could compose appropriate linkages, of which he listed fifteen basic varieties in one of his books.

## Shinkei

The poet Shinkei (1406–75) was head priest at the temple Jūjūshin-in in Kyoto and a tanka and renga expert. He helped to set the tone for *ushin* renga for some decades to come, and also wrote individual verses and links that are admired as poems in themselves. During

the destructive Ōnin Wars of 1467–77 he traveled a great deal; the opening to his renga *Dokugin hyakuin* (Solo 100 Links) represents his first view of Mount Fuji and suggests his solitary state during a time of flux.

<i>hototogisu</i>	cuckoo
<i>kikishi wa mono ka</i>	does anyone hear it?
<i>Fuji no yuki</i>	snow on Fuji

He followed this with:

<i>kumo mo tomaranu</i>	clouds never pause
<i>sora no suzushisa</i>	in the chilly sky

More significant for the gradual development of haiku, a number of Shinkei's 5–7–5 stanzas are fully developed as poems in themselves. Several of these are perceptions of nature far removed from towns and cities.

*yama fukashi*  
*kokoro ni otsuru*  
*aki no mizu*

deep in the mountains—  
falling into my heart  
autumn streams

*yo wa haru to*  
*kasumeba omou*  
*hana mo nashi*

when the world  
is hazy with spring—  
no thought of flowers

*natsu fukami*  
*kaze kiku hodo no*  
*wakaba kana*

summer deepens—  
the faint sound of wind  
in the young leaves

*kiku ni kesa*  
*kumoi no kari no*  
*koe mogana*

chrysanthemums at daybreak—  
and the voice of wild geese  
beyond the clouds

*hi wo itamu*  
*hitoha wa otosu*  
*kaze mo nashi*

bruised by the sun  
a single leaf falls—  
no wind

*usuzumi no*  
*mayu ka shigururu*  
*mika no tsuki*

is it an eyebrow  
drawn in thin ink?  
third-day moon in the rain

In addition to his own verses, Shinkei wrote about renga as substantive poetry in a way that remained significant for several generations. In many regards he could be called the poet who established linked verse as a serious art form.

The best way to illustrate the social and interactive poetic form of renga may be to present the opening portion of one of the most celebrated of all *ushin* renga, which has often been used as a model for aspiring poets. <sup>7</sup>The notes given here after each segment are merely a beginning at establishing some of the linkage pattern.

## Sōgi, Shōhaku, and Sōchō

### *Three Poets at Minase*

In the second month of 1488, the poet Sōgi (1421–1502) and his major disciples Botanka Shōhaku (1443–1527) and Saiokuken Sōchō (1448–1532) composed one of the most famous of all renga to honor the memory of Emperor Go-toba (1180–1239), whose spring tanka written at Minase (the site of his detached palace) served as their initial inspiration:

<i>Miwataseba</i>	As I look out and view
<i>yamamoto kasumu</i>	haze at the foot of the mountains
<i>Minasegawa</i>	beyond Minase River—
<i>yūbe wa aki to</i>	I used to imagine that autumn
<i>nani omoikemu</i>	was the best season for evening

—EMPEROR GO-TOBA

Following this lead, the three poets started a hundred-segment renga, at first quite literally following the emperor's poem but then enlarging the scene, changing the season, and adding multiple meanings. Here are the first twelve segments, and the last:



1

*yuki nagara* despite the snow,  
*yamamoto kasumu* haze at the foot of the mountains—  
*yūbe kana* evening

—SŌGI (EARLY SPRING)

Note: The opening hokku is considered the most important segment, and must be able to stand by itself; here it follows the lead of Gōtoba within its own more terse rhythm. In addition, each of the three elements of this first stanza begin with the soft “y” sound, as does the opening of the second segment (*yuki nagara*, *yamamoto*, *yūbe*, and *yuku*, which includes two words that had been used by Gōtoba).

2

*yuku mizu tōku* distant waters flow past  
*ume niou sato* a plum-scented village

—SHŌHAKU (EARLY SPRING)

Note: the second link both expands and completes the first, while remaining in the same season.

3

*kawakaze ni* the river breeze  
*hitomura yanagi* in a single clump of willows  
*haru miete* shows us springtime

—SŌCHŌ (EARLY SPRING)

Note: the third link retains the season, and adds to the river imagery.

4

*fune sasu oto mo*  
*shiruki akegata*

the sounds of poling a boat  
are clear at dawn

—SŌGI (NO SEASON)

Note: the fourth link has no obvious season, but continues the theme of the river while moving distinctly to daybreak.

5

*tsuki ya nao*  
*kiri wataru yo ni*  
*nokoruran*

is the remaining moon  
still crossing over  
this misty night?

—SHŌHAKU (AUTUMN)

Note: the fifth link takes us back to the evening, or is it just the break of dawn? The image of the moon plus mist suggests autumn.

6

*shimo oku nohara*  
*aki wa kurekeri*

with frost covering the fields  
autumn draws to a close

—SŌCHŌ (LATE AUTUMN)

Note: the sixth link reinforces autumn, and the frost hints that there may be moonlight.

7

<i>naku mushi no</i>	for the cries of insects
<i>kokoro to mo naku</i>	having no compassion
<i>kusa karete</i>	grasses wither

—SŌGI (AUTUMN)

Note: The seventh link again reinforces autumn, now more desolate. To emphasize the crying (*naku*) insects ignored by the grasses, the poet repeated “o” sounds and a play on the word *naku* (*kokoro to mo naku*). The next lines pick up the “k” sound for two successive words (*kusa karete*), and the following segment opens with another “k” (*kakine*).

8

<i>kakine wo toeba</i>	coming to the hedge,
<i>awara naru michi</i>	the path has opened up

—SHŌHAKU (AUTUMN)

Note: the eighth link suggests that the withering of the grasses has made a path visible.

9

<i>yama fukaki</i>	in the deep mountains
<i>sato ya arashi ni</i>	the village is beset
<i>okururan</i>	by storm winds

—SŌCHŌ (NO SEASON)

Note: after four links about autumn, the ninth link moves to a seasonless segment, with just a suggestion that the grasses withering and the path clearing could have been due in part to storm winds.

10

*narenu sumai zo*  
*sabishisa mo uki*

when not used to such a dwelling  
the solitude can be miserable

—SŌGI (NO SEASON)

Note: the tenth link is the first to specifically address human life, as well as presenting a moment in nature.

11

*imasara ni*  
*hitori aru mi wo*  
*omou na yo*

after all this time  
don't feel that you  
are all alone

—SHŌHAKU (NO SEASON)

Note: the eleventh link goes even further in directly speaking to the reader.

12

*utsurowan to wa*  
*kanete shirazu ya*

haven't you already learned  
that all things change?

—SŌCHŌ (NO SEASON)

Note: the twelfth link states what may be the main theme of the entire renga sequence, the inevitability of change and transience.

Here is the hundredth and final segment:

*hito ni oshinabe*

for all people

*michi zo tadashiki*

the Way is straightforward

—SŌCHŌ (NO SEASON)

Note: The path (*michi*) that opened up in segment eight has become the Way (*michi*) for all people in the final link.

Finally, as befits a fine renga, not only can each segment stand alone, but each pair of 5–7–5 and 7–7 links also forms a complete poem. For example, here is the combination of segments seven and eight:

for the cries of insects

having no compassion

grasses wither—

coming to the hedge,

the path has opened up

One of the interesting aspects of many renga poets is that they did not all come from the highest reaches of society. Courtiers did their best to reserve the classical form of *tanka* for themselves, but with warriors now ruling Japan, they could not completely control all literary and artistic matters. Renga in particular became the province of educated people from several different classes.

Sōgi, for example, may have been the son of a *gigaku* (ancient masked dance) performer, although by becoming a Zen monk at Shōkoku-ji in Kyoto he gained access to cultural matters. Shōhaku was the son of a court noble, but Sōchō's father was a blacksmith. This would have disqualified him from high-level poetry during an earlier age, but during the flux of the early sixteenth century, this humble origin seems to have done him no harm.

Of the three men, Sōgi became the most renowned renga poet and scholar of the later fifteenth century. At a time when a poet could evoke a famous scene in Japan simply by the use of a common phrase, he traveled extensively (like Saigyō before him), wishing to see the celebrated places in Japan for himself. Sōgi also learned the “secret teachings” (mostly obscure pronunciations) of the *Kōkinshū*, and became widely known for his lectures and writings, particularly on the art of renga. His individual hokku and 5–7–5 links also become known as fine poems on their own.

<i>kusa mo ki mo</i>	grasses and trees
<i>tsuki matsu tsuyu no</i>	all waiting for the moon—
<i>yūbe kana</i>	dewy evening
<i>suzushisa wa</i>	cooler
<i>mizu yori fukashi</i>	than water
<i>aki no sora</i>	the deep autumn sky
<i>michi-shiba no</i>	sweeping the dew
<i>asatsuyu harau</i>	from the grasses on the path
<i>yanagi kana</i>	the willow

Another of Sōgi’s poems is interesting for its conclusion.

<i>samidare wa</i>	is it the end
<i>harete mo iku ka</i>	of midsummer rains?
<i>mizu no koe</i>	the voice of water

The final words of this verse are almost the same as the ending of Bashō’s most famous haiku: “the sound of water.” This may not be coincidence; Bashō was a great admirer of Sōgi, in part for the travels that helped to give his poems their strength and authenticity.

In 1682, Bashō took the following Sōgi renga section, with its pun on *furu* meaning both “to rain” and “to spend time”:

<i>yo ni furu wa</i>	raining over the earth
<i>sara ni shigure</i>	and showering even more
<i>yadori kana</i>	on my home
—SŌGI	

Bashō then transformed it to:

<i>yo ni furu no</i>	raining over the earth—
<i>sara ni Sōgi no</i>	and even more on
<i>yadori kana</i>	Sōgi’s home
—BASHŌ	

Shōhaku was the highest born of the three collaborators, but he too became a monk and traveled during the Ōnin Wars. His individual verses include several that feature his special combination of natural observation and refinement.

<i>hototogisu</i>	the cuckoo—
<i>kyō ni kagarite</i>	but just for today
<i>dare mo nashi</i>	no one's here
<i>shizukasa wa</i>	silence—
<i>kuri no ha shizumu</i>	the leaf of a chestnut sinks
<i>shimizu kana</i>	in the clear water
<i>hoshizukiyo</i>	night of stars and moon—
<i>sora no hirosa yo</i>	what a spacious sky,
<i>ōkisa ya</i>	what grandness!
<i>nabatake ya</i>	rape-flower field—
<i>futaba no naka no</i>	inside a leaf
<i>mushi no koe</i>	an insect chirps

At the time of the Minase renga series, Saiokuken Sōchō may have been the least celebrated of the three poets at *ushin* renga. Nevertheless, after facing a Japan full of disorder due to the Ōnin Wars through his twenties and thereupon leading an unconventional life, he admitted to having two children by a washerwoman despite being a monk. He became the primary renga master upon his teacher Sōgi's death in 1502. Instead of composing tanka, Sōchō concentrated upon linked verse, and wrote *mushin* comic links that were occasionally quite salacious. His friendship with the eccentric Zen master Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481) in the latter's final years no doubt stimulated both his literary and lifestyle experimentation. Although most of his *ushin* renga links are relatively conservative, he also collaborated with Yamazaki Sōkan (1458–1586), who is usually considered a founder of the humorous *haikai no renga* .



Sōchō's poetry covers a range of styles and purposes. On one hand, he wrote anniversary poems in honor of Sōgi, such as the following:

<i>asagao ya</i>	morning glories—
<i>hana to iu hana</i>	every flower called a flower
<i>hana no yume</i>	has this flower's dream

On the other hand, Sōchō also wrote [ironic and comic verse](#) .

## Yamazaki Sōkan

We have concentrated in this chapter upon *ushin* renga, particularly the opening stanzas called hokku, in part because these are what have generally been preserved. However *mushin* renga was at least equally popular, if much more ephemeral. Chinese-derived words were now freely admitted, and jokes, puns, parodies, slang, crass, lascivious, and even tawdry elements were welcomed. Bolstered by goodly quantities of saké, composing humorous linked verse became a very popular pastime.

Sōkan's background does not suggest that of a comic poet; he served as a calligrapher for the shogun Ashikaga Yoshihisa (1465–89); upon the latter's death, Sōkan became a Buddhist monk. After some time spent in travel, he settled in a quiet hermitage in Yamazaki. Five years later, he moved permanently to another hermitage, this one on the grounds of the temple Kōhō-ji in Sanuki. His poems were compiled into a book, and he is also credited with editing an important anthology of *haikai no renga* called *Inu-tsukuba-shū* (A Dog's Tsukuba Collection, also known as the Mongrel Collection). All the poems in this anthology, which are mostly composed in two parts as *tan-renga*, are anonymous, and the following may give their general flavor:

<i>saru no shiri</i>	the monkey's ass
<i>kogarashi shiranu</i>	not concerned with winter winds—
<i>momiji kana</i>	autumn maple leaves

An example of how poems could be linked in *haikai no renga* is the following *maeku* (first half):

<i>kiritaku mo ari</i>	I both want to cut
<i>kiritaku mo nashi</i>	and don't want to cut

One poetic *tsukeku* (second half) is satisfactory but rather conventional.

<i>sayaka naru</i>	becoming bright
<i>tsuki wo kakuseru</i>	the moon is hidden from view
<i>hana no eda</i>	by a branch of blossoms

Much more in the spirit of comic haikai is this imaginative *tsukeku*.

<i>nusubito wo</i>	when I catch the thief
<i>toraete mireba</i>	I discover that he's
<i>waga ko nari</i>	my own son

Although he was known for an unrefined style of poetry that was to inspire the [Danrin school of Sōin](#), many of Sōkan's individual poems are charming, such as his observation that a frog bowing is much like a courtier about to emote.

<i>te wo tsuite</i>	bending down his hands
<i>uta mōshiagaru</i>	and offering up a song—
<i>kawazu kana</i>	the frog

Sōkan also noticed that the Chinese-style round fan, unlike the Japanese folding fan, needed a separate handle. This verse might be termed a “riddle poem,” since the last line explains the mystery of the first two.

<i>tsuki ni e wo</i>	if you add
<i>sashitaraba yoki</i>	a handle to the moon—
<i>uchiwa kana</i>	a Chinese fan!

Sōkan also painted one of the first haiga (*hai* for “haikai/haiku,” and *ga* for “painting”). The ease in which a poet could move from writing to painting, using the same materials of brush, ink, and paper, make it difficult to determine when this form of art began, but this work is surely one of the earliest to combine a haiku and an image, something that every major poet would later practice.

Sōkan’s haiga ([Plate 2-1](#) ) may need a little explanation. According to Shinto lore, during the eleventh month in Japan all the deities (*kami* ) return to Izumo, leaving the rest of the country without gods. The word *kami* also means the paper from which doors and windows were made, leading to the pun in the inscription.

<i>kaze samushi</i>	cold wind
<i>yabure shōji no</i>	torn paper doors—
<i>kami-nazuki</i>	the month without <i>kami</i>

The poem is given spatial precedence in this work, covering more than 80 percent of the surface, with the first and third lines given one column each, while the longer middle line is arranged in three diagonally placed sections. Looking out at the bold calligraphy, a solitary figure sits within his thatched hut, seeming to endure the cold with patience and fortitude. One unusual feature of this haiga is the several narrow horizontal bands of silver-and-gold paint, perhaps an allusion to the art tradition of golden clouds across screens, or perhaps merely a decorative element on the paper chosen by

Sōkan. In any case, they are reminiscent of designs on smaller decorated papers used for poetry, and provide a horizontal counterpoint to the primarily vertical elements in the haiga.

Before leaving Sōkan, we should include his response to the first *maeku* that opens the *Mongrel Collection*. This opening image is a personification of a spring morning.

<i>kasumi no koromo</i>	the robe of mist
<i>suso wa nurekeri</i>	is damp at its hems

Sōkan's *tsukeku* shows the lewd tone that many *haikai no renga* display.

<i>Saohime no</i>	now that spring has come
<i>haru tachinagara</i>	the goddess Sao
<i>shito wo shite</i>	pisses standing up

A more discreet *tsukeku* was composed by the renga master Sōchō.

<i>nawashiro wo</i>	evicted from
<i>oitaterarete</i>	the rice plantings—
<i>kaeru kari</i>	departing geese

[Three more \*tsukeku\*](#) were written by Teitoku, who was conservative to his core. Here is one of them, which loses any touch of humor:

<i>tennin ya</i>	a deity seems
<i>amakudarurashi</i>	to have descended from heaven—
<i>haru no umi</i>	spring ocean

Arakida Moritake

Contemporary with Sōkan and sometimes considered a cofounder of *haikai no renga*, Arakida Moritake (1473–1549) was a pupil of Sōgi who served as a Shinto priest at the inner shrine at Ise. He is considered the originator of Ise haikai, although he was also a well-known *ushin* renga poet in his earlier years.

The first poem given here shows Moritake’s Shinto beliefs, while the second is one of the most famous verses of all early haikai poets. It also can be seen as another riddle poem, since the final line explains the first two:

<i>ganchō ya</i>	New Year’s morning
<i>kami yo no koto mo</i>	also brings to my mind
<i>omowaruru</i>	the age of the gods

<i>rakka eda ni</i>	watching the falling blossom
<i>kaeru to mireba</i>	return to its branch—
<i>kochō kana</i>	a butterfly

This second poem gains even more resonance if one is aware of the Zen saying: “The fallen blossom cannot return to its branch.”

Moritake also excelled at adding links to the opening hokku of a sequence, or completing a *tan-renga* of five lines after being given the first two or three. Here are two examples of *tsukeku* by Moritake that show his sympathy, his subtlety, and his humor.

<i>zatō e to</i>	to the blind minstrel
<i>goze no moto yori</i>	from the blind female singer—
<i>fumi no kite</i>	a letter
—ANONYMOUS	

Moritake’s response:

*horori to me yori*  
*namida ochikeri*

—MORITAKE

falling tears  
drop from the eyes

*abunaku mo ari*  
*medetaku mo ari*

—ANONYMOUS

it's dangerous  
but also auspicious—

Moritake's response:

*muko iri no*  
*yūbe ni wataru*  
*hitotsubashi*

—MORITAKE

the groom joining  
his wife's family at night  
crosses the log bridge

Two more poems by Moritake show his range as a haikai master.

*aoyagi no*  
*mayu kaku kishi no*  
*hitai kana*

green willows paint  
on the forehead of the riverbank—  
eyebrows

*natsu no yo wa*  
*akuredo akanu*  
*mabuta kana*

the summer night  
never tires of the new dawn  
but my eyelids . . . .

Matsunaga Teitoku

The sixteenth century was a difficult one for Japan, with almost constant warfare either threatened or actually taking place between rival daimyo armies, and the resultant dispersion of people and culture. Despite this (or perhaps partly because of it), *haikai no renga* linked verse gained great popularity, with poets traveling to the provinces to lead gatherings that were usually reputed to be higher in exuberance than wit.

The work of most influential haikai master, Matsunaga Teitoku (1571–1653), appeared at the end of the century and was notable in the history of the form. He might have been surprised at this, because he saw himself primarily as a tanka poet (composing almost three thousand verses) and secondarily as a renga master, but his hokku, *haikai*, *maeku*, and *tsukeku* were more influential. Although he did not see these as discrete units like modern haiku, they helped to lay the groundwork for the poets who came after him. Despite the fact that he had served as a scribe for the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), studied with members of the imperial court, and was a close friend with the Confucian scholar Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), it was in comic verse that Teitoku’s popularity became immense, and members of his school, which was called Teimon (meaning the “Tei[toku] school”), eventually published more than 260 collections of haikai. [8](#)

For some reason, most haikai by Teitoku do not seem to resonate with readers today, and he tends to be ignored in recent anthologies despite his historical importance. One cause may be his use of puns, which today don’t seem to please Japanese readers as much as they once did, and which are almost impossible to translate. For example, the word *anzu* is a *kakekotoba* (pivot word) that can mean both “apricot” and “grief,” giving two meanings to this Teitoku haikai:

*shioruru wa*                    are they drooping  
*nanika anzu no*                some apricot branches?  
*hana no iro*                    the color of blossoms

*shioruru wa*                    are they drooping  
*nanika anzu no*                because of some grief?  
*hana no iro*                    the color of blossoms

Remembering that *iro* (color) can also mean passion, there is some emotion in the poem, but the clever pun does not help sustain it. More satisfying are two Teitoku poems that mention either sleeping or not sleeping.

*minahito no*                    the reason for everyone's  
*hirune no tane ya*                noontime nap—  
*aki no tsuki*                    the autumn moon

*kukurime wo*                    all night long  
*mitsutsu yo nagaki*            staring at the tied strings  
*makura kana*                    on my pillow

Another nature poem by Teitoku takes the “riddle poem” form, dealing with *utsugi*, a shrub (*Deutzia scabra*) with small white flowers, juxtaposed with the three main exemplars of natural beauty in Japan.

*setsugekka*                    in a single look  
*ichidō ni miyuru*                we can see snow, moon, and flowers—  
*utsugi kana*                    *utsugi* blossoms



One of Teitoku's more empathic haikai is one he wrote on a *tanzaku* (tall, thin poem-card) in a single column on decorated paper ([Plate 2-2](#)). Both blue and gold are utilized to add impact to what might otherwise seem a simple calligraphy. However, the varying thickness of the lines, along with the tilts and mixes of complex Chinese characters and simpler kana (Japanese syllabary), gives the poem a sense of motion. Staying in the center of the *tanzaku*, the calligraphy seems to move with a personal sense of rhythm that helps it come alive from the strong “a” syllable (あ) at the beginning of the haikai to the heavily inked cypher-signature at the bottom.

<i>ari tatsu ni</i>	still standing here
<i>hisuru tachitaru</i>	while another year
<i>kotoshi kana</i>	silently passes

Ultimately Teitoku may have been more important historically than as a poet, but his influence was to remain strong for several generations.

## Nonoguchi Ryūho

The editor of the first two Teitoku collections was his disciple Nonoguchi Ryūho (1595–1669), who might well be called the “father of haiga” since he was the first poet to produce a large number of haikai paintings. <sup>9</sup>Born in Kyoto, he made his living as the owner of a doll shop called Hinaya, so he is also known as Hinaya Ryūho.

After helping to compile further volumes by Teitoku, Ryūho eventually founded his own school of haikai. He then published a number of his own books, including one in 1636 that set out a code of rules for haikai. This prompted Teitoku in 1651 to publish his own set of rules in an extensive compendium of word usage in haikai with their various overtones. Compared with the freewheeling style of Moritake a century earlier, these rules were all very conservative, but they did give haikai some standing in the poetry world of Japan

during a significant moment in its history, the beginning of the early modern period under Tokugawa rule in the seventeenth century.

Ryūho's own poetry is often either verses that are basically good-luck wishes, often with uncomplicated drawings, or more serious haikai that occasionally have surprising imagery. An example of the former includes a painting of Hotei, the god of good fortune, asleep.

<i>neburumaya</i>	while sleeping
<i>kokoro no tsuki no</i>	the moon in his heart
<i>sokuikari</i>	is his inner mind

A somewhat similar moon poem by Ryūho is accompanied by a simple picture of a boat.

<i>nishi e yuku</i>	as my heart travels west—
<i>kokoro ya sora ni</i>	the moon in the sky
<i>tsuki no fune</i>	is my boat

One of Ryūho's more successful haiga shows a pine tree ([Plate 2-3](#)) with the following verse:

<i>suzukaze ya</i>	cool breeze
<i>matsu ni tsutaite</i>	bequeathed to the pine's
<i>sagari eda</i>	leaning branch

In this hanging scroll, the first two lines of the poem form a single column, with the final line in a shorter column lower to the left. The inscription is spatially removed from the painting of the tree, with the tree's leaning branch balanced by a band of mist cutting off the center of the upper branch. The freedom of the brushwork depicting the pine perhaps suggests the cool breeze bequeathed to the tree, and now also to us.

Ryūho's imagination is not seen in all his poems, but one of his haikai has a marvelous combination of the unusual with the everyday, exactly the aesthetic of this modest form of poetry at its best.

<i>tsukikage wo</i>	pouring
<i>kumi koboshikeri</i>	moonbeams
<i>chōzubachi</i>	into the washbasin

Ryūho has a place in the history of haikai as a poet, but it is his haiga, ranging from humorous sketches of earlier poets and figures symbolizing good fortune to small landscapes and other scenes, that became his greatest contribution to the field. [10](#)

## Nishiyama Sōin

The founder of the Danrin school of haikai was a *rōnin* (masterless samurai) from Kyushu named Nishiyama Sōin (1605–82), who eventually became an Obaku sect Zen monk. Like most of the other poets at this time, he began with renga and moved toward haikai as his life went on. His school was born in 1675 when eight haikai poets, acknowledging Sōin as their leader, called themselves in jest “Danrin,” meaning “forest of sermons.” Rejecting the rather conservative Teimon school, they claimed to revive the bold spirit of Moritake and Sōkan, and Sōin himself began a *haikai no renga* at that time with the poem:

<i>sareba koko ni</i>	and yet here
<i>danrin no ki ari</i>	there are <i>danrin</i> trees—
<i>ume no hana</i>	blossoms of the plum

Known for its freedom and spontaneity compared with the more formal standards of the Teitoku's followers, the Danrin school encouraged breaks with tradition such as allowing extra syllables (*ji-amaru*), especially in the final line of the poem. It also featured the

language of everyday life and a certain amount of playfulness that sometimes became frivolity. However, this school also produced many teachers who developed technical features such as unusual figures of speech and literary precedents that made much of their work obscure. Yet between 1765 and 1775, the Danrin style held sway over the Teitoku tradition—in his very early days, even Bashō was a Danrin poet, although he moved away from this school early in his career.

Four haikai by Sōin can give a sense of the range in this school, the first being an observation of nature, the second introducing a new subject based upon the importation of books from Holland, and the third and fourth more humorous.

<i>no no hana ya</i>	rape-seed flowers
<i>hito moto sakishi</i>	just one plant has blossomed
<i>matsu no moto</i>	under the pine
<i>Oranda no</i>	Dutch letters?
<i>moji ka yokotau</i>	a line of wild geese
<i>amatsukari</i>	across the sky
<i>matsu no fuji</i>	wisteria on the pine—
<i>tako ki ni noboru</i>	like an octopus
<i>keshiki kana</i>	climbing a tree
<i>nagamu tote</i>	viewing cherry-blossoms
<i>hana ni mo itashi</i>	is also
<i>kube no hone</i>	a pain in the neck

Sōin also wrote a hundred-verse solo renga dealing with love, including these links from a regretful husband.

*komusume ka tote*  
*yobishi kuyashisa*

wasn't she just a young girl  
when I foolishly wooed her?

*mikaeshi no*  
*kasa no uchi wo mo*  
*chira to mite*

I just had a glance  
at her under her umbrella  
only a glimpse

*Namu Amida Butsu*  
*koi wa kusemono*

Hail to Amida Buddha  
love is but a scoundrel!

## Ihara Saikaku

In his fifty years of life, Ihara Saikaku (1642–93) accomplished an amazing amount of writing, including huge numbers of haikai, although he is best known today for his stories of the floating world. Born to an Osaka merchant family, at age thirty-four he suffered the tragedies of his wife's death and one of his daughters going blind and dying, after which he turned over the family business to his chief clerk and lived a life of a bon vivant, especially in literary circles.

Saikaku seems to have started writing haikai in his early teens, first following the Teimon school and then becoming a pupil of Sōin's Danrin school. Although Sōin's tradition is sometimes considered emotionally rather shallow, he did write two memorial hokku honoring his departed wife. Saikaku greatly enlarged this idea by composing one of the most moving renga of this period, the "One Haikai Alone on a Single Day" (*Haikai dokugin ichinichi*) written three days after his wife died in 1675. [11](#)It begins with an introduction:

We mourned for others while you were alive, but I couldn't stop  
you from departing yourself. Waking from a dream, I know the  
world is only a mirage, which helps me forget that you are gone.  
We enjoyed viewing the moon, snow, and blossoms together,  
but one day you felt illness coming, and as spring ended you

grew more and more weak. Like a crane leaving her children weeping, you died on the third evening of the fourth month. Just then I heard the call of a cuckoo, and a hokku arose in my mind. Between dawn and sunset today, I have composed a thousand haikai for you, and a calligrapher has written them down for me —please accept them as my farewell offering.

*myaku no agaru*  
*te wo awashite yo*  
*mujōdori*

fold your hands  
that have no pulse  
bird of transience

*shidai no iki wa*  
*mijikayo jūnen*

when her breaths became short  
ten callings of the Buddha's name

*mokuyoku wo*  
*shigatsu no mikka*  
*bōzu nite*

her body bathed  
the third day of the fourth month  
by monks

*naka ni wa nani mo*  
*mienu kusa no ya*

nothing at all to see  
inside the thatched hut

Later in the renga are more links that specifically pertain to his wife's death.

*kakkokaka ga*  
*satori no katachi*  
*wa ikani*

—LINK 201

cuckoo, mother, wife—  
what is the form  
of your satori?

*hiru hana ya*  
*ima ni shinda to*  
*omowarezu*

—LINK 899

fallen blossoms—  
even now I can't fully  
realize she's dead

In the 201st link above, we may note the repetition of the “ah” and “k” sounds, which add a sense of insistent rhythm. Eventually the renga goes on to cover a broad range of topics that go beyond his wife’s death, with some links even descending to vulgarity, but the spirit of loss remains throughout.

Stemming from this experience, in 1677 Saikaku invented the “poetry marathon,” in which a poet tried to see how many haikai links he could compose within twenty-four hours. Saikaku himself took the honor with 1,600 verses, and in 1680 he raised the record to 4,000 verses, finally reaching his apex in 1684 with 23,500 verses in one day and night, spouting them out faster than a scribe could record them. After his teacher Sōin died in 1682, however, Saikaku generally turned his attention to prose, and it was in this field that he gained his greatest success.

Despite his flamboyant nature, some of Saikaku’s haikai show his powers of observation and modesty of emotional expression, such as this verse about the Yodo River.

*samidare ya*  
*Yodo no kobashi no*  
*mizu-andon*

midsummer rain—  
under the small Yodo bridge  
a lantern to show the way

Saikaku also wrote about *rōnin*, an increasing problem in a peaceful society; some of these former samurai became bureaucrats for the new government, but others were left to wander. In this case, the words *kamiko* and *jūmonji* refer to a sturdy paper clothing treated with persimmon tannin and then dried in the sun; first worn by upper-class Japanese, they later became popular with everyday people.

*rōnin ya—*  
*kamiko mukashi wa*  
*jūmonji*

*rōnin—*  
wearing a paper kimono  
like the old days

Two Saikaku poems with the same final line about the moon show both how people take it for granted, and how it becomes special.

*sasake atama*  
*yo no fūzoku nari*  
*kyō no tsuki*

shining on our heads  
it just becomes a habit—  
tonight's moon

*tai wa hana wa*  
*minu sato mo ari*  
*kyō no tsuki*

sea-bream and blossoms  
and a village out of sight—  
tonight's moon

The first line of the second poem contains five “ah” sounds, but another haikai by Saikaku is even more a tour de force in its use of language.



*kokoro koko ni  
naki ka nakanu ka  
hototogisu*

was I paying no attention,  
or did it not yet sing?  
the cuckoo

There are eight “o” and eight “k” sounds in this poem, including four “ko” syllables in the first line, as well as another “o.” The second line offers a contrast with five “ah” sounds, including two “na” and three “ka” syllables. The final line then adds three more “o” sounds, two of which are “to.” Despite this brilliance of effect, the poem has a nice “riddle style” meaning, and perhaps the repetitions of sounds are meant to suggest the (missing?) song of the cuckoo.

In some ways Saikaku marks the final brilliance of the Danrin school, which gradually become clever to the point of triviality; his contemporary Bashō was to take haikai in a completely different direction. First, however, we should consider the poet Onitsura, who in some ways anticipated the style that most poets would follow in the future.

## Ueshima Onitsura

A slightly later contemporary rather than predecessor of Bashō, Ueshima Onitsura (1660/1–1738) came from samurai-status birth; he started writing haiku at the age of eight, and by his teens was already an expert. First a follower of Teitoku, he then became a pupil of Sōin and his Danrin school, but soon began to break away in his work. A friend of Saikaku, he also came to know several of Bashō’s pupils, but never really joined the Bashō movement despite some similarities in their verses. To make a living, he became a saké distiller, then an acupuncturist, but finally lived for poetry, eventually taking the tonsure as a monk. Most notably in his aesthetic, from the age of twenty-five he stressed that “apart from *makoto* (sincerity, truth, reality), there is no haikai.” [12](#)

Generally speaking, Onitsura avoided the puns and clever references to earlier literature, although there are exceptions to the

former. For example:

<i>ume wo shiru</i>	truly to know plum blossoms
<i>kokoro mo onore</i>	needs your heart
<i>hana mo onore</i>	as well as your nose

Since *hana* can mean “flower” as well as “nose,” the final line could also be understood as “and for you to be the flower.” The repetition of the word *onore* (you) points to a frequent aspect of Onitsura’s poems, often seen in his use of double-word onomatopoeias.

<i>koi koi to</i>	come here, come here
<i>iedo hotaru ga</i>	we say, but the firefly
<i>tonde yuku</i>	flies off

<i>sawasawa to</i>	rustling and rippling
<i>hachisu ugokasu</i>	the lotus stirs—
<i>ike no kame</i>	a tortoise in the pond

<i>haru no mizu</i>	spring waters
<i>tokorodokoro ni</i>	hither and thither
<i>miyuru kana</i>	can be seen

<i>hyū-hyū to</i>	hissing and whistling
<i>kaze wa sora yuku</i>	the wind flies into the sky—
<i>kan-botan</i>	winter peonies

Onitsura was clearly concerned with the sound of his poems, sometimes using identical or very similar words.

*shirauo ya*  
*me made shirauo*  
*me wa kurouo*

the whitefish—  
up to his eyes, whitefish—  
his eyes, blackfish

Sound is also a factor when Onitsura begins the three words comprising lines two and three of a haikai with the syllable *na*, and includes the vowel “a” seven times.

*uguisu no*  
*nakeba naniyara*  
*natsukashiu*

when the warbler sings  
I feel nostalgic  
for something . . .

In Onitsura’s own words, however, his primary aim was to represent even the most simple and unassuming aspects of nature as they really were. Sometimes this led to poems that are very direct in feeling, as when watching cormorant fishing at night. [13](#)

*u no tomo ni*  
*kokoro wa mizu wo*  
*kuguriyuku*

along with the cormorants  
my heart also dives  
into the river

Other poems by Onitsura could be quite personal.

<i>kono aki wa</i>	this autumn
<i>hiza ni ko no nai</i>	with no child in my lap
<i>tsukimi kana</i>	moon-viewing
<i>koi mo nai</i>	without a lover
<i>mi ni mo ureshi ya</i>	I'm still happy to change
<i>koromogae</i>	into summer clothes
<i>shitagau ya</i>	if we submit
<i>oto naki hana mo</i>	the silent blossoms are also
<i>mimi no oku</i>	deep in our ears

Several of these verses deal with sound rather than sight, and this trend is continued in other poems by Onitsura.

<i>tōkitaru</i>	coming from afar
<i>kane no ayumi ya</i>	the sound of the temple bell roams
<i>haru kasumi</i>	through spring haze
<i>suzukaze ya</i>	cool breeze
<i>kokū ni michite</i>	the empty sky filled
<i>matsu no koe</i>	with pine voices
<i>tanimizu ya</i>	valley stream—
<i>ishi mo uta yomu</i>	stones also chant songs
<i>yamazakura</i>	of mountain cherries

Onitsura's greatest gift was to see elements of nature and humanity with fresh eyes, and to express them in a direct and simple way. In

this regard he was similar to Bashō, if perhaps without Bashō's depth of spirit. Nevertheless, the best of Onitsura's verses can give a sense of delight that makes him one of the finest, if undervalued, of all haikai poets. Here are some of his best verses:

<i>haru no hi ya</i>	spring day—
<i>niwa ni suzume no</i>	sparrows in the garden
<i>sunabaite</i>	bathe in the sand
<i>gaikotsu no</i>	skeletons
<i>ue wo yosōte</i>	all dressed up
<i>hanami kana</i>	flower-viewing
<i>yaretsubo ni</i>	in the cracked jar
<i>omodaka hosoku</i>	a water-plantain blooms
<i>saki ni keru</i>	slenderly
<i>nusubito no</i>	also on the thief's grave
<i>tsuka mo musaruru</i>	shabby and untidy
<i>natsu no kusa</i>	summer grasses
<i>tobu ayu no</i>	under the leaping trout
<i>soko ni kumo yuku</i>	clouds float
<i>nagare kana</i>	on the stream
<i>nani yue ni</i>	why are some long
<i>naga mijika aru</i>	and some short?
<i>tsurara zo ya</i>	icicles

While Onitsura did not have a great personal influence on many later poets, his straightforward verses and sincerity of style marked a new direction for haikai, which would be greatly deepened and amplified by Bashō.

# 3

## Bashō

IT IS RARE THAT A SINGLE PERSON can dominate a form of art over its entire span. In the Western world, we have perhaps Shakespeare in theater and Michelangelo in sculpture, but in music there is Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, in painting everyone from Giotto to Leonardo da Vinci to Picasso, and a plethora of masters in novels, Western poetry, and even in more recent arts such as photography, fashion, and film. But in haiku, Matsuo Bashō (1644–94) stands alone. Buson and Issa are considered second and third, but it is a very rare critic who would not place Bashō first, and usually by a large margin. <sup>1</sup>—What was his appeal, and how did he become so important both aesthetically and historically?

It is true that Bashō came along at the right moment, when culture was flourishing and literacy expanding in the newly peaceful Japan that had just shut itself off from the outside world. The Teimon (Teitoku) and Danrin (Sōin) schools of haikai were weakening, and Japanese society was ready for a verse form that could not only be enjoyed but also composed by almost anyone among the general public. Yet this does not explain Bashō's appeal and influence any more than it would if we merely said that he was a genius.

Scholars have taken various approaches to understanding Bashō, one of which is chronological, with comments about his changes of style. This approach can be very helpful, since Bashō indeed went through several phases in his work, but it still does not explain the myriad exceptions to any generalities that one might make about his haiku. The American Zen master Robert Aitken has written a fascinating book called *A Zen Wave*, which relates Bashō's poems to his spiritual attainments. <sup>2</sup>—Others have emphasized the poet's influence from Taoism, or disputed Bashō's ties to Zen and found

other ways to explain his work, including the importance of influences from classical Chinese and Japanese literature. Again, there is much to be learned from all of these approaches, but none of them seems to come close to conveying fully the range as well as the quality of Bashō's poetry.

While generally following chronology, the most useful approach might be to discuss Bashō's importance in terms of the variety of subjects and styles he used, and how he brought them forth through his attitude toward life. This was consistently refreshed and replenished by the choices he made to keep his work ever fresh and resonant through his lifetime, especially through travel; as Robert Aitken wrote, "It is at the edge of transition that we find experience."<sup>3</sup>

Although the world's most famous haiku are by Bashō, such as the classic haiku about the frog and the old pond, his verses often seem simple and undramatic compared to those by poets such as Buson. Yet Bashō's flavor is the kind that lingers, rather than being entirely apparent at first and then quickly fading. It might be difficult to convince someone that Bashō was even a major poet, for example, if that person did not have an "ear" or the "eye" for his work. Nevertheless Bashō has been almost universally regarded as the greatest master of haiku, and in this chapter we will try to discover how and why.

In the process of understanding Bashō, we can switch from the words *hokku* (first poem in a sequence) and *haikai* (comic verse or sequence) to the better-known term *haiku*. Although technically this word did not appear until the end of the nineteenth century, it has gained such currency in the past century that haiku is probably the most known and practiced form of verse in the world. And although Bashō certainly participated in verse sequences, often opening them with a *hokku*, it is his single poems, along with his *haibun* (haiku prose) and haiga paintings, that are his greatest achievements.

## Becoming a Poet



Bashō was born in 1644, probably in Ueno in the province of Iga, thirty miles south of Kyoto. This was at a time when the Tokugawa government had firmly established itself in Edo (Tokyo), and after long periods of civil war, Japan was at peace. It was also a time when the government almost completely cut off connections with the outside world, turning the Japanese populace inward toward its own interests and achievements. In addition, it was an era when, despite the government's efforts to keep the merchant class in check, this sector of society began gradually to gain in influence.

Bashō's father was a landed farmer with the privilege of holding a family name, but he died in 1646. Bashō entered the service of Tōdō Yoshikiyo (n.d.), a relative of the ruling daimyo, becoming especial friends with Yoshikiyo's son Yoshitada, an amateur haiku poet in the Teimon tradition. This style of witty allusions to classical verse influenced the young Bashō, although he discovered the more rough-and-ready Danrin style as well.

Bashō was no Mozart. He did not create lively and prodigious works in his childhood, and his first extant poem, written at age nineteen, is no indication that he would come to excel in his field. Playing on the fact that the Japanese calendar occasionally had an extra day or two at the end of the year from following the moon cycle, he created a slightly wry question of when the New Year (representing spring) actually arrives.

<i>haru ka koshi</i>	has spring come
<i>toshi ya yukiken</i>	and the old year gone?
<i>kotsugomori</i>	the second-to-last day of the year
—1663	

While certainly not a great haiku, the poem does show the use of plain language and direct phrasing that were to be features of Bashō's mature work.

Few other early haiku by Bashō remain, although he must have written many that have since disappeared. Most were probably somewhat trite or unexceptional, although there is a hint of compassion in the following:

<i>ubazakura</i>	the old-lady cherry
<i>saku ya rōgo no</i>	blossoms—a remembrance
<i>omoiide</i>	of declining years
—1664	

Here the double meaning is contained in the word *ubazakura*, which can also mean “faded beauty.”

The next major event in Bashō’s life was Yoshitada’s sudden death in 1666; Bashō seems to have been strongly affected; he gave up his position and possibly moved to a temple in Kyoto, although this is uncertain. In any case he maintained connections with Ueno, and began to have some of his haiku published in anthologies. He continued to write about the most popular of haiku subjects, such as cherry-blossoms and the moon, sometimes with a touch of humor.

<i>Kyō wa kuman kusen</i>	Kyoto—
<i>kunju no</i>	ninety-nine thousand people
<i>hanami kana</i>	flower-viewing
—1666	

<i>hana no kao ni</i>	shy before
<i>hareute shite ya</i>	cherry-blossom faces—
<i>oborozuki</i>	the hazy moon
—1667	

Interestingly, the first of these poems has a 10–4–5 (or 4–10–5) syllable pattern, and the second 6–7–5, showing that the young Bashō was not a slave to convention. The first poem also has five “k” sounds to begin words, stressing the number 99,000.

A more standard poem from about the same time makes a play on the word *kuchi*, meaning both “mouth” and “opening.”

<i>akikaze no</i>	the autumn wind
<i>yarido no kuchi ya</i>	through an opening in the sliding door—
<i>togarigoe</i>	a piercing voice
—1666	

After dedicating a poetry-contest book in Ueno, a competition for which he had served as referee, Bashō moved to the new capital of Edo in 1672, where at first he served as a scribe for another poet while trying to build up his own career. From being a big fish in a small pond Bashō was now the reverse, but one important step that he took personally was to study Zen under the monk Butchō (1642–1716). Butchō was only two years older than Bashō, but he had an abiding influence upon him. Not many poems survive from this period of Bashō’s life, but we can assume he was slowly building both his technique and his reputation while considering deeply the direction that he wanted his life and his haiku to follow.

In 1675, Bashō was introduced to the visiting poet Sōin (see the previous chapter), considered the founder of the Danrin school of haiku, and we can see some of the more mundane aspects of this tradition in the young poet’s work of this time, including references to both the delicious but potentially lethal fugu soup (in 8–7–5 syllables) and to visiting Dutch merchants.

*ara nani tomo no ya*  
*kinō wa sugite*  
*fukutojiru*

—1677

well, nothing's happened—  
even though yesterday I ate  
fugu soup

*Kabitan mo*  
*tsukubawasekeri*  
*kimi ga haru*

—1678

the Dutch captain  
also bows down before  
the shogun in spring

*Oranda mo*  
*hana ni ki ni keru*  
*uma ni kura*

—1679

the Dutchmen are also  
coming to see cherry-blossoms—  
saddle the horses!

Two more poems from 1679 illustrate the young Bashō's life of both observation and enjoyment, still with an atmosphere of wit rather than depth.

*kesa no yuki*  
*nebuka wo sono no*  
*shiori kana*

—1679

morning snow—  
onions send up  
bookmarks

*sōkai no nami*  
*saké kusashi*  
*kyō no tsuki*

—1679

waves on the blue sea  
smell of saké—  
tonight's moon

In 1680, Bashō moved from downtown Edo to Fukugawa, a more rustic part of Edo near the Sumida River. Although he and his followers put out two more books with his commentaries, Bashō seems to have turned against the secure life of a haiku teacher who corrected poems and judged contests for a fee, and instead reached for more depth in his own work. This coincided with a greater interest in Chinese poetry, and he compared his “Bashō hut” dwelling to that of Po Chu-i (772–846) who described living in Changan as “a place rough enough for a traveler empty-handed and penniless.” <sup>4</sup>

Contrasting with the poem about the scent of saké of 1679 is this haiku from 1680 with a 10–7–5 syllable pattern:

<i>ro no koe nami wo utte</i>	the sound of oars beating the waves
<i>harawata kōru</i>	freezes my bowels—
<i>yo ya namida</i>	night tears

—1680

Other haiku from the same year show an increasing seriousness on the part of Bashō, with a general focus on the season of autumn.

*kumo nani to* spider—  
*ne wo nan to naku* what voice and what song?  
*aki no kaze* autumn wind  
—1680

*yoru hisoka ni* in the moonlight  
*mushi wa gekka no* a worm secretly burrows  
*kuri wo ugatsu* into a chestnut  
—1680

*guanzuru ni* it seems to me that  
*meido mo kaku ya* beyond the grave is like this—  
*aki no kure* autumn evening  
—1680

## Maturity as a Poet

Using the same final phrase, this same year Bashō composed one of his most famous haiku, often considered the first poem that fully expressed his individual genius.

*kare-eda ni* crow perched  
*karasu no tomarikeri* on a withered branch—  
*aki no kure* autumn evening  
—1680

There are a number of interesting features about this poem. First, since Japanese nouns can be either singular or plural, it might be “crows perched / on withered branches.” Bashō either painted or

inscribed this verse at least three times, once with multiple crows and branches, and twice with one crow on one branch (see [plate 4-3](#) ). Did he change his mind about his own poem—or did he appreciate the ambiguity where readers might paint the picture in their own minds?

Next, once again Bashō has defied the “rule” of haiku that it be organized in 5–7–5 syllables, in this case preferring 5–9–5. Surely Bashō was expert enough as a poet to have found a way to write this verse in 5–7–5 had he wished to, but he clearly wanted something different, perhaps in part as a way of engaging the reader with a rhythmic surprise.

As for the imagery, later critics generally found it to express loneliness in direct and unadorned words, although Shiki criticized it as being too close to the Chinese phrase “a chilly looking crow on a bare tree.” <sup>5</sup>—A story arose that Bashō composed this haiku after being asked by other poets to help launch a new poetic style, away from Danrin influence, but this is historically questionable. In any event, this verse helped move haiku away from clever allusions and recondite imagery to something more simple and at the same time more evocative, and it can be regarded as the poem that put the Bashō tradition in the foreground from this time onward.

The year 1681 was important for Bashō: he was given a plantain (banana, *bashō* ) tree by a pupil for his new home, and he so identified with the tree that it became his most celebrated haiku name. While banana-trees would not bear fruit in the Edo climate with its cold winters, the poet much enjoyed the large leaves that provided shade in the summer and gave forth a natural music in the wind and rain, even though the leaves were not very sturdy and liable to split in a storm. Was all this part of his sense of identification with the *bashō* ? He even wrote a poem that compares two different sounds of a rain shower.

*bashō nowaki shite*  
*tarai ni ame wo*  
*kiku yo kana*

—1681

*bashō* leaves in the storm—  
at night I can hear the rain  
dripping in the tub

The sense of *wabi* (a word impossible to translate, but generally meaning “rustic simplicity,” “poverty,” and “solitude”) that this poem conveys is part of what Bashō gave to the haiku movement, although later commentators have disagreed whether the tub had been left outside or was indoors gathering leaks from the ceiling. In this regard, Makoto Ueda has written a valuable book about Bashō poems with various comments from Japanese poets and scholars through the years, called *Bashō and His Interpreters* .<sup>6</sup> Regarding the meanings of the various haiku, it is surprising to see so much disagreement—which only suggests that the ambiguities that the poet included were meant for his readers to interpret according to their own experiences.

Two more poems from 1681 have an even darker and colder tone. Here Bashō is certainly opening up new ground for haiku; it was his depth and seriousness rather than his wit that transformed haiku into a much richer poetic form than before.

*hinzan no*  
*kama shimo ni naku*  
*koe samushi*

—1681

the poor temple’s kettle  
calls out in the frost  
with a chilly voice

*ishi karete*  
*mizu shibomeru ya*  
*fuyu mo nashi*

—1681

stones exhausted,  
waters withered—  
winter also empty



It would be too simple, however, to credit Bashō with only expressing darker scenes and emotions; he still maintained a kind of humane humor, the smile of experience rather than allusion, which was another way of saying “Just so!” or “Just like that!”

<i>samidare ni</i>	summer rain—
<i>tsuru no ashi</i>	the legs of the crane
<i>mijikaku nareri</i>	have become shorter
—1681	

<i>gu ni kuraku</i>	foolishly in the dark
<i>ibara wo tsukamu</i>	grabbing a thorn—
<i>hotaru kana</i>	fireflies
—1681	

Hunting for fireflies was an age-old Japanese pastime with many literary precedents, but only Bashō writes of the minor dangers involved. The syllable count of the first of these poems is 5–5–7, a further indication of the freedom that Bashō felt when writing his haiku. Confirmation that this was deliberate comes from a letter he wrote to an aspiring poet in 1682, in which he commented: “Even if you have three or four extra syllables—or as many as five or seven—you need not worry as long as the verse sounds right. If even one syllable stagnates in your mouth, give it a careful scrutiny.” <sup>7</sup>

Two haiku he wrote in 1682 confirm multiple views of Bashō—the poet—as someone especially attuned to nature, and as everyman. <sup>8</sup>

<i>hige kaze wo</i>	who is lamenting
<i>fuite boshū tanzuru wa</i>	as the wind blows his beard,
<i>tare ga ko zo</i>	for late autumn?
—1682	

*asagao ni*  
*ware wa meshi kū*  
*otoko kana*

—1682

along with morning glories  
I eat my breakfast—  
just another fellow

In the first month of 1683, there was a major fire in Edo, and the Bashō hut burned to the ground. According to his pupil Enomoto Kikaku (1661–1707), Bashō survived by submerging himself in water, and this experience certainly strengthened his view of life as transitory.

Bashō spent the spring in Kai Province, but returned to Edo in the summer to edit the first full-scale book of his school's haiku, *Minashiguri* (Shriveled Chestnuts). Bashō wrote a postscript pointing out four flavors in the haiku: the lyricism of the Chinese Tang-dynasty masters Li Po (701–62) and Tu Fu (712–70); the *wabi* of Saigyō; the Zen spirit of the eccentric mountain-wanderer Han-shan (ninth century); and the romanticism of Po Chu-i. <sup>9</sup>Perhaps the words that most characterize Bashō's own haiku, however, are sincerity and integrity.

Another difficult moment came in the seventh month; when Bashō's mother died in Ueno, he was unable to attend her funeral, probably from lack of funds. However, that autumn his pupils gathered money and materials to build a new Bashō hut, actually part of a larger building near his former hermitage. A few poems from 1683 give us an idea of his various observations and emotions at this stage of his life. On one hand he was resonating with nature, but he was also well aware of the sadness and solitude of his life.

*ganjitsu ya*  
*omoeba sabishi*  
*aki no kure*

—1683

New Year's Day—  
thinking lonely thoughts  
of an autumn evening

*hana ni ukiyo*                      among the blossoms  
*waga sake shiroku*                in this floating world—  
*meshi kuroshi*                      my saké clouded and rice unmilled

—1683

*kiyoku kikan*                      hearing purely,  
*mimi ni kō taite*                    my ears cleansed by incense—  
*hototogisu*                          cuckoo

—1683

Sitting in the new Bashō hut, he wrote:

*arare kiku ya*                      listening to hail—  
*kono mi wa motono*                I stay the same  
*furugashiwa*                      old oak

—1683

One more poem from that year is also interesting because it gives a sense of Bashō's attitude toward painting. He commented to an artist at work that the man on a horse looked like a monk—where might he be going? The painter replied that the man was Bashō himself, who then wrote this haiku:

*uma bokuboku*                      the horse clip-clopping along  
*ware wo e ni miru*                    I see myself in a painting—  
*natsuno kana*                      summer fields

—1683

The Years of Poetic Journeys

In his never-ending search for authenticity and integrity of expression, Bashō began to make extended journeys into the countryside, keeping poetic journals that he was to revise and turn into *haibun* (haiku prose), of which he is still considered the greatest master. *Haibun* generally consist of prose passages interspersed with haiku, the prose often serving as introductory material to the poem, or sometimes the poem summing up the experiences described in the prose.

The first of these major trips that led to a poetic journal that Bashō began when he started traveling with his friend Naemura Chiri (1648–1716) in the fall of 1684. Starting in Edo, they made their way to Kyoto, with several detours including passing Mount Fuji and stopping at Nagoya, Nara, Osaka, Mount Yoshino, Mount Kōya, and Akashi. Including a pause in Ueno for two months, this trip ended in the summer of 1685. The resultant *Nozarashi kikō* (Journal of a Weather-Beaten Skeleton) was both Bashō's travel diary and the record of forty-five haiku that he composed during that time (along with two by Chiri); the extended prose passages that Bashō would write later in his *haibun* were yet to appear. [10](#)

There is no particular narrative thread to this journal; things happen when they happen, happy or sorrowful, and that is part of the appeal. The first haiku, however, shows Bashō's somewhat fatalistic attitude toward taking a long and difficult journey in his usual less-than-robust state of health.

<i>nozarashi wo</i>	just a weather-beaten skeleton
<i>kokoro ni kaze no</i>	with my heart exposed—
<i>shimu mi kana</i>	the wind pierces my body

—1684

One element of much Japanese poetry is the use of certain words or phrases to describe famous beauty spots, thus eliminating the need for the poet to actually visit them (Saigyō was a notable exception in

this regard). In his quest for authenticity, however, Bashō was determined to experience the actual locations, whatever the results.

<i>kirishigure</i>	misty rain
<i>Fuji wo minu hi zo</i>	the day Fuji can't be seen
<i>omoshiroki</i>	is also beguiling
—1684	

One of the most heartrending scenes that Bashō encountered was an abandoned toddler left out in the autumn weather by parents too poor to maintain him.

<i>saru wo kiku hito</i>	for those who have heard a monkey's cry,
<i>sutego ni aki no kaze</i>	this abandoned baby in the autumn wind—
<i>ika ni?</i>	why? how?
—1684	

The sound of a monkey's cry was said to be the epitome of sadness, but Bashō had to deal with reality, not poetic convention, and the experience gave him more evidence of the pathos of the floating world, here rendered in an unusual rhythm. He concluded that the child was not despised or neglected by his parents, but rather that this was the will of heaven, and he mourned. Bashō gave the child food, but could not carry him on his journeys.

Taking a detour to the sacred shrine at Ise, Bashō was struck again by the power of nature compared to the relative limitations of humans.

*misoka tsuki nashi*  
*chitose no sugi wo*  
*daku arashi*

moonless last day of the month—  
a thousand-year-old cedar  
embraced by a storm

—1684

Early in the ninth month of 1684, Bashō arrived at his home village in Ueno, noticing how much older the members of his family had grown: everyone now had gray in their hair, and there was even gray in Bashō's eyebrows. Some of his mother's white hair had been preserved in an amulet, and Bashō was moved to write:

*te ni toraba*  
*kien namida zo atsuki*  
*aki no shimo*

if I held it in my hands  
my hot tears would melt it—  
autumn frost

—1684

The surprising word “frost” here has several meanings—to compare white with white while contrasting cold with hot, to suggest how the heat of tears would melt the frost, and to imply that holding his mother's hair was very emotional for the poet.

Wayfaring was by no means an easy life. Visiting an old friend in Ōgaki, Bashō was in a somber mood.

*shini mo senu*  
*tabine no hate yo*  
*aki no kure*

not dead yet  
after so much travel—  
autumn darkens

—1684

Perhaps the visit with his friend was salutary, or perhaps Bashō was ready to return to more observation in his haiku, but many of the verses he composed as he continued his journey are somewhat

lighter in spirit and more wondrous of the everyday. Three of the poems deal with white: the first directly, the second indirectly, and the third in synesthesia through connections to sound.

<i>akebono ya</i>	whitefish
<i>shirauo shiroki</i>	a single inch
<i>koto issun</i>	of white

—1684

<i>uma wo sae</i>	we even gaze
<i>nagamuru yuki no</i>	at the horse
<i>ashita kana</i>	this snowy morning

—1684

<i>umi kurete</i>	darkening ocean—
<i>kame no koe</i>	the voices of ducks
<i>honoka ni shiroshi</i>	faintly white

—1684

With the following poems we have now reached 1685, with Bashō continuing his travels.

*toshi kurenu*                      year's end—  
*kasa kite waraji*                still wearing my bamboo hat  
*hakinagara*                      and straw sandals  
—1685

*haru nare ya*                      it's spring!  
*na mo naki yama no*            a nameless mountain  
*usugasumi*                      in thin haze  
—1685

*na batake ni*                      in the rape-blossom fields  
*hanami-gao naru*                making flower-viewing faces—  
*suzume kana*                      sparrows  
—1685

To conclude the *Nozarashi kikō*, Bashō wrote, “Near the end of the fourth month, I came back to my hermitage and recuperated from the wear and tear of the journey.”

*natsugoromo*                      from my summer robe  
*imada shirami wo*                I've still not finished  
*tori tsukusazu*                      picking all the lice  
—1685

For the rest of that year, Bashō seems to have rested while working on making his travel journal into a finished *haibun*. He did not complete the final draft until 1687, demonstrating that although his writing has the feeling of spontaneity, he also worked it over to some extent, perhaps (paradoxically) to make it more authentic to his experiences.



Some commentators have seen a strong Chinese influence in this travelogue, and indeed Bashō was reading and admiring Chinese poets from the past at this time. Others have noted a Zen influence, and again this was surely part of Bashō's background that he made use of without direct imitation. Most important, Bashō was now able to put his observations and encounters into prose and poetry with a direct acceptance of whatever life brought him.

## The Old Pond

Despite the vicissitudes of such a journey, the search for this freshness of experience led Bashō to future travels, and it was not long before he was on the road again. In the meantime, however, he was to compose the most famous haiku ever written.

<i>furu ike ya</i>	old pond—
<i>kawazu tobikomu</i>	a frog jumps in
<i>mizu no oto</i>	the sound of water
—1686	

As noted before, nouns in Japanese can be singular or plural, so there may have been more than one pond or more than one frog—but one of each seems sufficient. Bashō wrote this haiku out as a calligraphy several times, no doubt upon request, usually in *tanzaku* (thin poem-card) form. He seems to have enjoyed using the more complex Chinese kanji (characters) for most of the nouns and the verb, and simpler Japanese syllabary for the rest ([Plate 3-1](#)). He allows a generous amount of space at the top for the blue wave pattern and includes further empty paper below it, perhaps giving the viewer a short moment to pause before beginning to read. He then does not separate the three parts of the poem in space, but maintains a slightly hooking sense of flow down the *tanzaku*, with thicker and thinner lines adding rhythm to the work.

As might be expected, there has been a great deal of commentary about this poem, of which we can present just a fraction here. For example, there is a story by his pupil Kagami Shikō (1665–1731) that Bashō originally composed the final two phrases, and then considered what words to open with. Supposedly Kikaku suggested “mountain roses,” but Bashō decided on “the old pond.” A century later, a scholar named Shinten-ō Nobutane compared Bashō’s verse with Zen Master Hakuin’s “Sound of One Hand” koan ([meditation subject](#)), writing of the sound in both cases that “it is there and it is not there.” <sup>11</sup>—The monk Moran perhaps summed up Japanese attitudes by calling this haiku “indescribably mysterious, emancipated, profound, and delicate. One can understand it only with years of experience.” <sup>12</sup>

For an American point of view, we can turn to Robert Aitken, who compares this moment with Zen Master Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien (d. 898) becoming enlightened to his Buddha-nature when he heard a small stone strike a bamboo. Aitken wrote that “Bashō changed with that *plop*. The some 650 haiku that he wrote during his remaining eight years point surely and boldly to that essential nature.” <sup>13</sup>

With Bashō’s great admiration for Saigyō, it is possible that he was influenced by one of the monk-poet’s tanka, although Saigyō’s poem reads as though it could follow rather than lead Bashō’s haiku.

<i>Mizu no oto wa</i>	The sound of water
<i>sabishiki io no</i>	becomes my companion
<i>tomo nare ya</i>	in this lonely hut
<i>mine no arashi no</i>	while the mountain storm
<i>taema taema ni</i>	pauses, pauses
—SAIGYŌ	

One other Bashō haiku from the same year mentions a pond again, but this time the poet joins the pond with the circle of the moon.

*meigetsu ya*  
*ike wo megurite*  
*yomosugara*

—1686

harvest moon—  
walking around the pond  
all night long

Bashō was very busy in 1687. He made three trips, beginning in the early autumn with a journey to view the harvest moon with his pupil Kawai Sora (1649–1710) and a Zen monk named Sōha (d. 1512–16), then traveling northeast to Fukugawa and Kashima, where they met Bashō’s former Zen teacher Butchō.

One early evening on the way to Kashima, Bashō noticed a youth looking upward.

*shizuno ko ya*  
*ine surikakete*  
*tsuki wo miru*

—1687

a farmer’s child  
stops husking rice  
to gaze at the moon

Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), the night of harvest moon itself was rainy, so in Butchō’s temple, Bashō composed:

*tsuki hayashi*  
*kozue wa ame wo*  
*mochi nagara*

—1687

a quick glimpse of the moon—  
while leaves in the treetops  
hold the rain

Bashō followed this with another poem that is more personal, and again connected to Zen, where there is a koan that asks: “What was your original face?” [14](#)

*tera ni nete  
makoto gao naru  
tsukimi kana*

—1687

staying at a temple  
with my own true face  
I gazed at the moon

At home in 1687, Bashō composed several of his most delightful haiku, the first having a Buddhist implication.

*haranaka ya  
mono ni mo tsukazu  
naku hibari*

—1687

in the fields  
beyond any attachments  
the skylark sings

*nagaki hi mo  
saezuri taranu  
hibari kana*

—1687

the day is not  
long enough for its song—  
the skylark

*sazare kani  
ashi hainoboru  
shimizu kana*

—1687

a little crab  
crawling up my leg—  
clear waters

*kimi hi wo take  
yoki mono misen  
yuki-maruge*

—1687

If you start a fire  
I'll show you something good—  
a snowball!

Although they are not very often chosen for translation, many haiku by Bashō (and others) had immediate and specific meanings, for instance to celebrate a host or to hail a gathering. In one case, Bashō is inviting a pupil friend named Sodō (n.d.) to come visit.

<i>minomushi no</i>	come and listen
<i>ne wo kiki ni koyo</i>	to the sound of bagworms—
<i>kusa no io</i>	grass hut

—1687

This, however, is not as simple as it seems, since the bagworm, whose sound is supposedly a sign of autumn, actually makes no noise. Did Bashō want Sodō to be able to hear the sound of silence?

Bashō also painted this scene as a haiga, with the poem placed above a depiction of the *bashō* tree and the gate to his hut ([Plate 3-2](#)). But gates demarcate boundaries, and can allow one in or shut one out. Here, is the gate open or closed? Does it depend upon Sodō's (or the viewer's) perceptivity? The long leaves of the tree point both up to the invitation and downward, and the artist's signature and seals are poised just outside the gate like a welcoming host.

The painting is enhanced by very light colors and a subtle range of ink tones that range from soft gray to rich black when visual accents are needed. Interestingly, Bashō divided the haiku into four columns of calligraphy, the shortest merely being the syllables *koyo* (come), which becomes the heart of the invitation. Together, the poem, the calligraphy, and the painting combine three arts into a single, seemingly modest expression that is nevertheless fully realized.

Despite the charm of these haiku and the haiga, Bashō may have felt that his inspiration would grow deeper on the road. In any case, in late 1687 he began a much more extended journey, basically following his earlier route westward, and such was his fame at this time that he received many farewell parties and verses from haiku friends.

Bashō was later to describe this 1687–88 journey in *haibun* form as *Oi no kabumi* (Notes for My Knapsack). Bashō begins with an introduction, telling how he regards the spirit in his body as windblown. It had led him to poetry many years before, initially for pleasure but then as a way of life; he knew that he could not satisfy his spirit either in court or as a scholar. <sup>15</sup>All he could do was to respond to nature, just like the tanka poet Saigyō, the linked-verse master Sōgi, the painter Tōyō Sesshū (1420–1506), and the tea expert Sen no Rikyū (1522–91), who were all moved by the same spirit. Among other meanings, this statement establishes Bashō’s belief in haiku being among the highest of Japanese arts. He went on to state that whatever such a heart and mind sees is a flower and whatever it dreams about is the moon, so the initial task of any artist is to become one with nature. For Bashō, replenishing his spirit meant travel, as the first poem in this *haibun* makes clear.

<i>tabibito to</i>	wanderer
<i>waga na yobaren</i>	can be my name—
<i>hatsushigure</i>	first winter shower
—1687	

Following a path through rice fields during a storm, Bashō composed four versions of an interesting observation—or at least, four versions have survived.

<i>samuki ta ya</i>	chilly fields—
<i>bajō ni sukumu</i>	crouching on my horse
<i>kagebōshi</i>	a shadow
—1687	

*fuyu no hi ya*                      winter sun—  
*bajō ni kōru*                      icy on my horse  
*kagebōshi*                          a shadow  
—1687

*sukumi iku yaō*                      moving at a crouch  
*bajō ni kōru*                      icy on my horse—  
*kagebōshi*                          a shadow  
—1687

*fuyu no ta no*                      winter fields—  
*bajō ni sukumu*                      crouching on my horse  
*kagebōshi*                          a shadow  
—1687

Assuming that these versions are indeed all by Bashō, we can find some small but significant comparisons. The cold is suggested by “winter” “chilly,” or “icy”—which word works best? Only the second version omits *sukumu/sukumi* (which means “crouching, “cowering,” “be cramped”)—how important is this image to the poem? This is up to each of us to decide.

Another significant haiku in this *haibun* uses the word *ukiyo* (floating world), which originally had the Buddhist meaning of “transience,” but was now also gaining the flavor of “worldly pleasures.” Bashō seems to be using the word in both senses, with an added touch of humor.

<i>tabine shite</i>	stopping at an inn
<i>mishi ya ukiyo no</i>	I see the floating world
<i>susu-harai</i>	house-cleaning
—1687	

Bashō included the same word in another haiku the next year.

<i>Kiso no tochi</i>	acorns from Kiso—
<i>ukiyo no hito no</i>	souvenirs for people
<i>miyage kana</i>	of this floating world
—1688	

Returning to Bashō's journey, when noting that the mining of coal near Iga Castle emitted an unpleasant odor, Bashō took a positive approach.

<i>ka ni nioe</i>	covering with scent
<i>uni horu oka no</i>	the coal-mining hill—
<i>ume no hana</i>	plum blossoms
—1688	

Bashō noticed not only the plum blossoms (the first to appear, even in the snow), but also another sign of early spring.

<i>kareshiba ya</i>	Over the dead grasses—
<i>yaya kagerō no</i>	faint heat waves,
<i>ichi ni sun</i>	one or two inches
—1688	



Although Bashō did not very often make extended use of repeated sounds, here we have the syllable *ya* (pronounced “yah”) three times in a row. First it serves as the cutting word, like an exclamation point or long dash, and then *yaya* means “a little.” Furthermore, the vowel “a” repeats five times in a row (*ba ya ya ya ka* ), giving an extra sense of warmth to the poem.

Four “a” vowels followed by five “o” vowels open another poem a little later in the *haibun*, with the “a” vowel returning for five of the final seven syllables.

<i>samazama no</i>	how many memories
<i>koto omoidasu</i>	flood my mind—
<i>sakura kana</i>	cherry-blossoms
—1688	

After several more poems praising cherry-blossoms, Bashō also describes the *horohoro* (melodiously or rhythmically dropping petals) of another flower near the sound of falling waters. Accenting the rhythm, the poem begins with five consecutive “o” vowels and ends with three more.

<i>horohoro to</i>	yellow mountain roses,
<i>yamabuki chiru ka</i>	are you falling in rhythm?
<i>taki no oto</i>	the sound of the waterfall
—1688	

The final haiku in *Oi no kobumi* is one of Bashō’s most celebrated, partly for its unusual subject, but even more for its resonance.

*takotsubo ya*  
*hakanaki yume wo*  
*natsu no tsuki*

octopus pot—  
fleeting dreams  
in summer moonlight

—1688

Are the dreams those of the octopus? Or of Bashō? Or are they our own?

Bashō probably did not complete the editing of *Notes for My Knapsack* until 1691. This is more evidence that he considered each word and each scene carefully, and he may have changed the order of some of the prose and haiku if he felt this would be more true to the significance of the experiences. Yet momentary inspiration was still very important to Bashō; one of his most famous comments to his pupil Hattori Dohō (1657–1730) was: “If you get a flash of insight into an object, record it before it fades away in your mind.” <sup>16</sup>

Several further statements by Bashō to Dohō reveal his attitude toward fresh and direct experience, as well as the ability of haiku to see many sides of life. One of his most trenchant comments was to learn about a pine tree from a pine tree, and about bamboo from bamboo. <sup>17</sup> Bashō also described a significant difference between renga and haiku in terms of their subject matter: “A willow tree in the spring rain is wholly of the linked-verse world. A crow digging up a mud-snail belongs entirely to haiku.” <sup>18</sup> This meant that on his travels, Bashō could explore almost every aspect of life.

Before starting another major expedition, however, in 1688 Bashō made a side journey, of a “Visit to Sarashina” (*Sarashina kikō*) to see the moon over Mount Obasute, where according to legend, villagers once took their old grandmothers to die. Stopping at the temple Zenkō-ji, which was unusual in that it maintained subtemples of various Buddhist sects, Bashō composed a haiku that suggests clearly his ecumenicism.

*tsuki kage ya*  
*shimon shishū mo*  
*tada hitotsu*

in the moonlight  
four gates and four sects  
become one

—1688

## Journey to the North

In 1689 Bashō took his greatest and most arduous journey on the five-hundredth anniversary of Saigyō's death, the *Oku no hosomichi* (translated variously as “The Narrow Road to the North,” “Narrow Road to the Interior,” “Back Roads to Far Towns,” and, most simply, “A Haiku Journey”). One of the most famous travelogues ever written, it also serves as the ultimate *haibun*, with a good deal more prose mixed with poetry than in Bashō's previous work.

Starting in early summer, this time Bashō went north to much less developed parts of Japan. He often stayed with local poets, took side trips, explored, rested, continued on, and finally turned west and south until reaching his hometown of Ueno, where he spent the end of the year. The early part of this adventure was shared with his pupil Sora, who had to leave halfway due to poor health, but other poets joined Bashō for some later parts of the journey.

*Oku no hosomichi* begins with one of the most famous paragraphs in Japanese literature.

Months and days are eternal travelers, as are the years that come and go. <sup>19</sup>For those who drift through their lives on a boat, or reach old age leading a horse over the earth, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is their home. Many people in the past have died on the road, but for many years, like a fragment of a cloud, I have been lured by the wind into the desire for a life of wandering.

This opening not only sets the tone for all that follows, but also conflates space with time in a way that might have pleased Albert Einstein. In any event, carrying as little as possible—a paper garment, a cloth robe, rain gear, and writing utensils—Bashō set out with Sora. A number of his pupils saw him off in a boat and then lined the road, not sure if they would ever see him again, truly a sad moment of parting that inspired Bashō's haiku:

<i>yuku haru ya</i>	spring passing—
<i>tori naki uo no</i>	birds cry out, there are tears
<i>me wa namida</i>	in the eyes of the fish
—1689	

Although it goes beyond the trajectory of this book, the entire *Oku no hosomichi* is such a significant work that it deserves to be enjoyed in full; fortunately there are several fine translations extant. Since we are focusing on haiku here, we will present some of the outstanding verses in this *haibun* with their basic contexts. As usual, Bashō participated in a number of linked verses during this trip, but he also kept the haiku separate in his *haibun*, so they could stand on their own. [20](#)

Bashō traveled in monk's robes and shaved head, but he never became a monk as such. In effect, he was traveling through Japan beyond any of the official categories of society (in descending official order: samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants, plus monastics and Confucian scholars). As they began their journey, Sora also shaved his head and put on Buddhist-style robes, writing this haiku himself:

<i>sori-sutete...</i>	cutting off my hair
<i>Kurokami-yama ni</i>	at Black Hair Mountain
<i>koromo-gae</i>	and changing clothes
—SORA, 1689	

Bashō commented that this changing of clothes was “pregnant with meaning.”

Another Buddhist implication comes in the next haiku. Bashō and Sora climbed into a grotto behind Urami-no-taki (Back-View Falls) where they could see the waterfall from the rear, as though inside it—an appropriate place for a form of meditation.

<i>shibaraku wa</i>	for a time
<i>take ni komoru ya</i>	secluded behind the waterfall—
<i>ge no hajime</i>	summer retreat begins
—1689	

The word *ge* (ninety-day summer retreat) is specifically Buddhist, and gives another indication that at least one of the purposes of this journey was spiritual; waterfalls were used for purification rites in both Buddhism and Shintoism. However, it was earlier in the summer than the normal time for “summer retreats,” so it seems that Bashō was taking events and opportunities as he found them, rather than having planned them all in advance.

One of Bashō’s most significant haiku was composed after passing the Shirakawa barrier, one of the government checkpoints for travelers.

*fūryū no*  
*hajime ya oku no*  
*taue-uta*

the origin  
of poetry—  
rice-planting songs

—1689

The word *fūryū* has several meanings in Japanese, so this haiku's opening words could also be translated as “the origin of the arts” or “the origin of elegance.” In a society where most poets now lived in cities or towns, Bashō's appreciation for the farmers' natural culture is unusual; we can also note once again that *oku* can mean the far north or the interior, including the human interior.

Bashō and Sora came to a huge chestnut tree where a monk had built a modest hermitage. Bashō recalled that Saigyō had written a poem about gathering chestnuts deep in the mountains in this part of Japan, and so he responded with:

*yo no hito no*  
*mitsukenu hana ya*  
*noki no kuri*

people in this world  
don't see these flowers—  
chestnuts under the eaves

—1689

The two travelers continued north, stopping to see the pine islands at Matsushima, which Bashō termed the most beautiful place in Japan, and where he noted that the Zen master Unko Kiyō (1582–1659) had once sat in meditation and also rebuilt the major temple Zuigan-ji.

Journeying further to where a famous battle had taken place hundreds of years earlier, Bashō recalled the Chinese poet Tu Fu's lines:

As spring returns to the ruined castle,

The grass is always green. [21](#)

—T U F U

This led Bashō to write another of his best-known haiku.

<i>natsugusa ya</i>	summer grasses—
<i>tsuwamono-domo ga</i>	all that remains from the dreams
<i>yume no ato</i>	of brave warriors
—1689	

Somewhat later in the journey Bashō wrote on a similar theme.

<i>muzan ya na</i>	how merciless—
<i>kabuto no shita no</i>	under the helmet
<i>kirigirisu</i>	a katydid
—1689	

Moving back and forth from Japanese history to the sometimes ignominious world of travel was not always easy, as Bashō and Sora discovered when they stayed for three heavily raining days in a guard's shack.

<i>nomi shirami</i>	fleas, lice,
<i>uma no shitosura</i>	a horse pissing
<i>makuramoto</i>	by my pillow
—1689	

Perhaps most haiku are inspired by what is seen, but what is heard was often an important element in Bashō's haiku (as in the line "the sound of water"). One of his poems, written when he found the

temple Ryūshaku-ji closed and bolted, is especially interesting in that it expresses both sound and the loss of sound. [22](#)

<i>shizukasa ya</i>	silence—
<i>iwa ni shimiiru</i>	penetrating the rocks,
<i>semi no koe</i>	cicada voices
—1689	

Another haiku that has become celebrated concerns an incident where Bashō and Sora were staying at an inn and were mistaken for monks by two prostitutes. The women asked if they could travel along with Bashō and Sora. The poets replied they had many detours and side trips, but if the women would follow the road, the gods would see them through. Bashō felt sorrowful about this for some time, and wrote:

<i>hitotsuya ni</i>	under one roof
<i>yūjo mo netari</i>	courtesans are also sleeping—
<i>hagi to tsuki</i>	bush-clover and the moon
—1689	

Bashō continued to write haiku at a very high level throughout the journey; as it was coming to a close, he once again turned to *hagi* (bush-clover):

<i>nami no ma ya</i>	between the waves—
<i>kogai ni majiru</i>	mingled with tiny shells
<i>hagi no chiri</i>	are fragments of bush-clover
—1689	



## The Final Years

Spending the last two months of 1689 in his hometown seems to have given Bashō a chance to recover from the arduous journey. In the first month of 1690 he went to Nara, and then the next month he stopped in Kyoto and the nearby town of Zeze, visiting pupils during his stay.

<i>Kyō nite mo</i>	although in Kyoto
<i>Kyō natsukashi ya</i>	nostalgic for Kyoto—
<i>hototogisu</i>	cuckoo
—1690	

At that point Bashō returned to Ueno for three months, and then spent the summer in a cottage near Zeze (at “my unreal hut”). Afterward he spent two more months in a nearby hermitage in the precincts of the temple Gichū-ji, finally returning to Ueno for the rest of the year.

Now a famous poet, Bashō faced a steady influx of pupils or would-be pupils, perhaps one of the reasons he moved frequently to outlying areas.

<i>waga yado wa</i>	at my hut
<i>ka no chiisaki wo</i>	all I can offer is that
<i>chisō kana</i>	the mosquitoes are small
—1690	

He also warned a potential student named Shidō (n.d.):

*ware ni niru na  
futatsu ni wareshi  
makuwauri*

—1690

don't be like me  
even if we resemble  
two halves of a melon

Bothered by ill health for some of this time, Bashō returned to his reading of the Taoist sage Chuang-tzu, especially the story of the sage going to sleep and dreaming he was a butterfly. When he awoke, was he Chuang-tzu who dreamt he was a butterfly, or was he a butterfly now dreaming he was Chuang-tzu? Two haiku that Bashō composed, one perhaps a decade earlier and one about this time, refer to this theme.

*oki yo! oki yo!  
waga tomo ni sen  
neru kochō*

—1681–83

wake up! wake up!  
and let's be friends—  
sleeping butterfly

*kimi ya chō  
ware wa Sōshi ga  
yume-gokoro*

—1690

you the butterfly  
and I Chuang-tzu—  
a dreaming heart

The progression of these haiku spells out something about Bashō's state of mind from before to after his major travels. At first he wants to be friends with the butterfly, who may be Chuang-tzu, but later he becomes one with the Taoist sage who could fully identify with another form of life, while at the same time questioning what it means to be human.

It is dangerous, however, to try to read too much into individual haiku, since Bashō was certainly aware of the very different observations, moods, feelings, and expressions that we all can feel, sometimes in close succession. For example, in 1690 Bashō wrote two haiku that seem to contradict each other, at least by implication.

<i>tsukimi suru</i>	among those
<i>za ni utsukushiki</i>	viewing the moon,
<i>kao mo nashi</i>	not one beautiful face
—1690	

<i>meigetsu ya</i>	harvest moon—
<i>chigotachi narabu</i>	children lined up
<i>dō no en</i>	on the temple veranda
—1690	

Despite the first poem, one may strongly suspect that Bashō found these children's faces to be beautiful. Equally, he honored the music of the cicadas as autumn deepened.

<i>yagate shinu</i>	showing no signs
<i>keshiki wa miezu</i>	that they will soon die—
<i>semi no koe</i>	cicada voices
—1690	

As winter came, Bashō's observations became darker. The first of these haiku describes a scene on Ishiyama (Stone Mountain); the first two lines both begin with the word *ishi*, followed by eight "ah" sounds:

*Ishiyama no  
ishi ni tabashiru  
arare kana*

—1690

flying among  
the stones of Stone Mountain—  
hail

*shigururu ya  
ta no arakabu no  
kuromu hodo*

—1690

early winter shower—  
enough to plaster the field  
black

*inoshishi mo  
tomo ni fukaruru  
nowaki kana*

—1690

even wild boars  
are blown along  
by wintry blasts

*byōgan no  
yosamu ni ochite  
tabine kana*

—1690

the sick wild duck  
in the cold of night  
flies down to rest

The latter poem comes with an interesting anecdote from Bashō's pupil Mukai Kyorai (1651–1704). Throughout his life the master was very interested in linked haiku, now called *renku*, and while compiling the *renku* and haiku anthology *Sarumino* (Monkey's Raincoat, 1691), Bashō asked his pupils Nozawa Bonchō (1640–1714) and Kyorai to select either the wild duck poem above or the following poem:

*ama no ya wa*  
*koebi ni majiru*  
*itodo kana*

—1690

fisherman's hut—  
mixed among the small shrimp  
crickets

Although Bonchō preferred the second poem as fresh in subject and superb in choice of words, Bashō replied that while it had new material, the ailing duck had more profound implications. The students asked if they could include them both, but Bashō laughed and asked whether they would discuss each poem on the same level? [23](#)

Bashō spent most of 1691 in and around Ueno and Kyoto, finally returning to Edo near the end of the year—he had been gone more than two and a half years. A selection of Bashō haiku from 1691 shows his continued combination of variety and empathy, with perhaps an extra touch of melancholy as the seasons flow by.

*shibaraku wa*  
*hana no ue naru*  
*tsukiyo kana*

—1691

lingering a moment  
above cherry-blossoms  
this evening's moon

*matsudake ya*  
*shiranu ki no ha no*  
*hebaritsuku*

—1691

mushroom  
stuck to the leaf  
of an unknown tree

*samidare ya*  
*shikishi hegitaru*  
*kabe no ato*

—1691

midsummer rains  
traces on the wall where  
poem-cards have peeled

*ushibeya ni*  
*ka no koe kuraki*  
*zansho kana*

—1691

in the cowshed  
mosquito voices darken—  
summer heat

*te wo uteba*  
*kodama ni akuru*  
*natsu no tsuki*

—1691

when I clap my hands  
they echo with  
the summer dawn's moon

In contrast with this last poem are two haiku from the same year.

*uki ware wo*  
*sabishi garese yo*  
*kankodori*

—1691

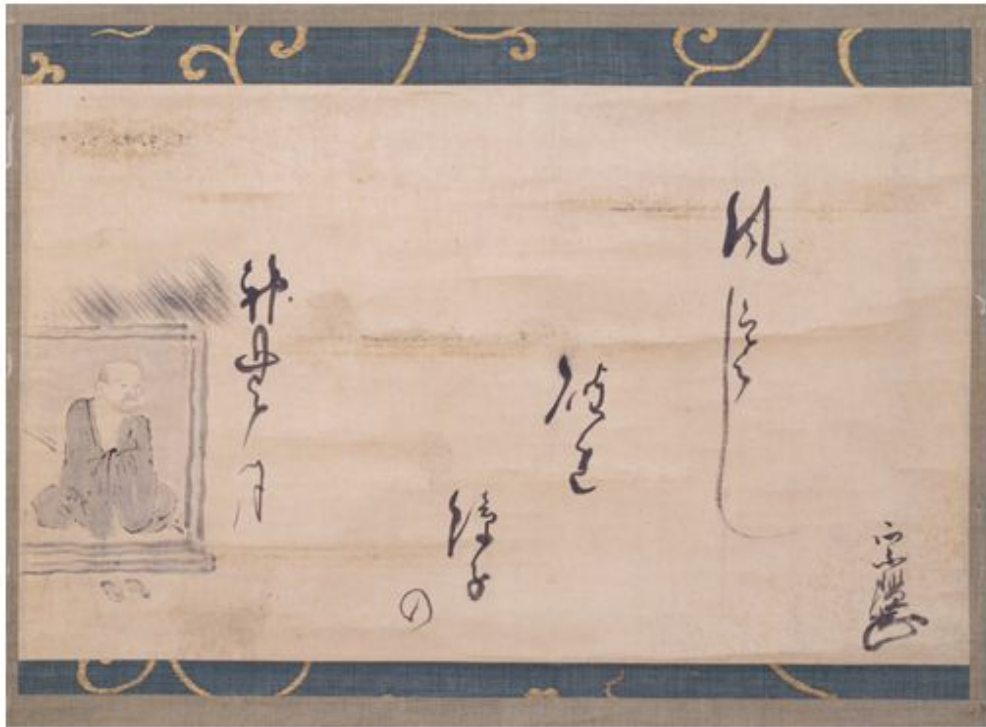
already sorrowful  
he makes me more lonely—  
the mountain cuckoo

*otoroi ya*  
*ha ni kuiateshi*  
*nori no suna*

—1691

becoming feeble—  
my teeth grate on  
sand in the seaweed

Bashō also may have been referring to himself as he evokes the chill of winter.



2-1 Yamazaki Sōkan (1465–1553), *Cool Wind*. Ink and colors on paper, 26.2 x 43.4 cm. Kakimori Bunko.

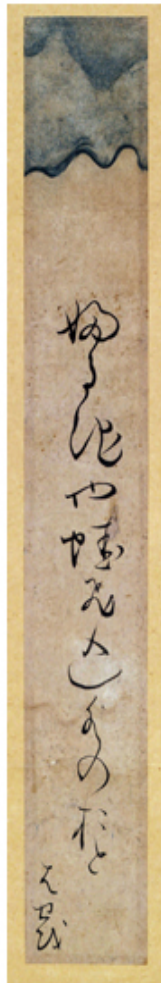




2-2 Matsunaga Teitoku (1571–1653), *Still Standing Here*. Ink on decorated paper *tanzaku*, 35 x 5.6 cm. Private Collection, Japan.



2-3 Nonoguchi Ryūho (1595–1669), *Cool Breeze*, Ink on paper, 80 x 27 cm. Arimura Collection.



3-1 Matsuo Bashō (1644–94), *Old Pond*. Ink on decorated paper *tanzaku*, 35.2 x 5.7 cm. Kakimori Bunko.



3-2 Matsuo Bashō (1644–94), *Gate and Banana Plant*. Ink and colors on paper, 97.3 x 29.7 cm. Idemitsu Museum.



4-1 Enomoto Kikaku (1661–1707), *Melon Skin*. Ink on paper, 31 x 44.4 cm.



4-2 Morikawa Kyoroku (1656–1715), *Sparrows, with Five Haiku by Bashō*. Ink and color on paper, 28.6 x 76.5 cm. Private Collection.



4-3 Morikawa Kyoroku (1656–1715), *Crow on a Withered Branch*. Haiku by Bashō. Ink on paper, 100 x 30.1 cm. Idemitsu Museum.



4-4 Kaga no Chiyo (1703–75), *Introduction and Six Haiku*. Ink on paper, 15.8 x 44.1 cm.

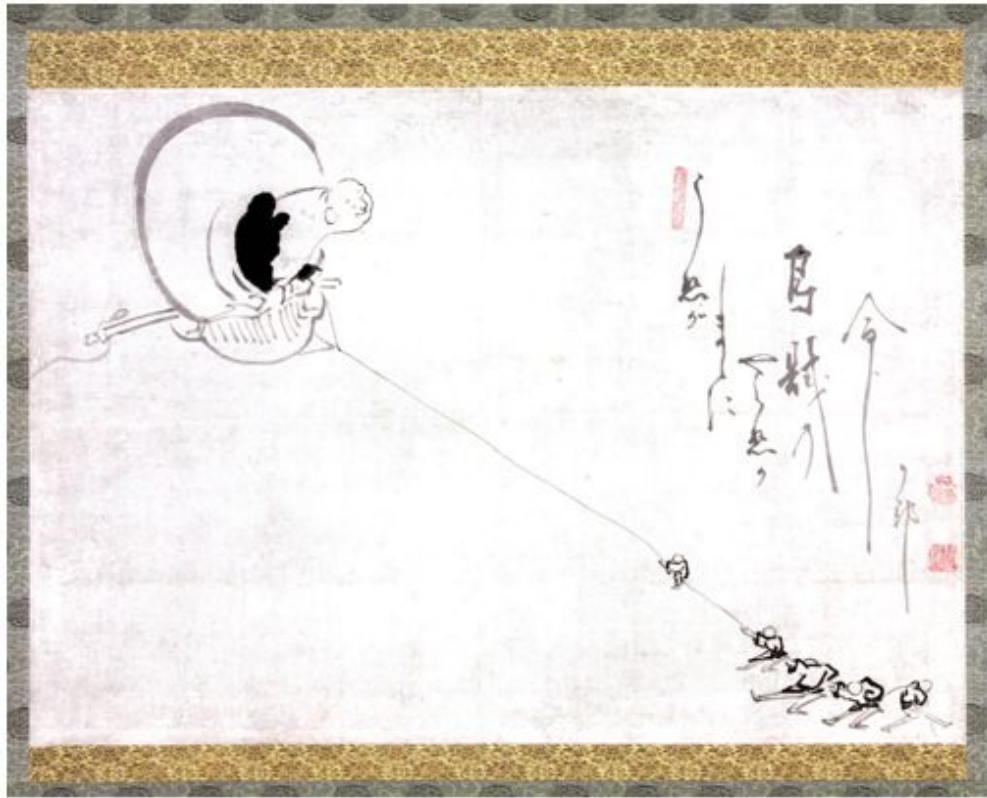




4-5 Yokoi Yuyu (1702–83), *Katsuo*. Ink on paper, 36 x 50.5 cm. Marui Collection.



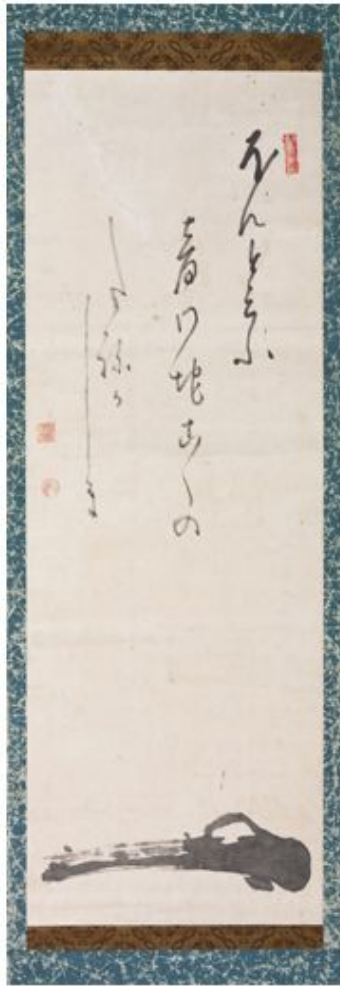
4-6 Nakagawa Otsuyū (1675–1739), *Deer*. Ink on paper, 27.7 x 37.6 cm.



5-1 Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768), *Hotei as a Kite*. Ink on paper, 38.3 x 54.5 cm. Hōsei-an Collection.



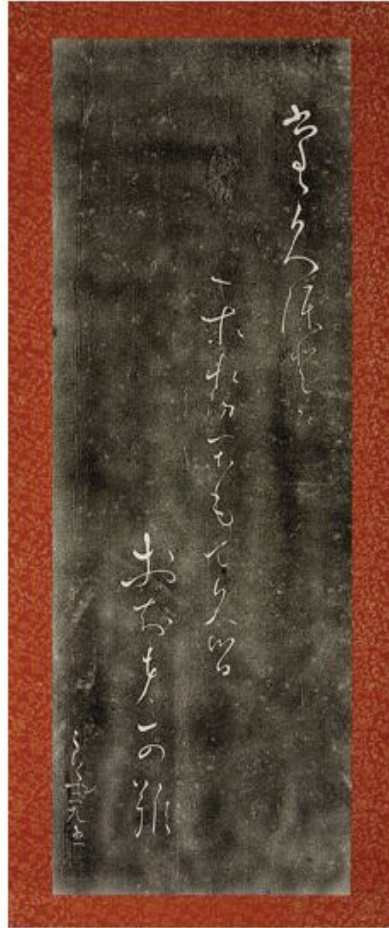
5-2 Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768), *Monkey and Cuckoo*. Ink on paper, 55.4 x 43 cm. Shin'wa-an.



5-3 Reigen Etō (1721–85), *Gun*. Ink on paper, 70.1 x 25.2 cm.



5-4 Suiō Genro (1717–89), Ax. Ink on paper, 119 x 28.8 cm.



5-5 Daigu Ryōkan (1758–1831), *Enough for a Fire*. Rubbing, ink on paper, 117 x 44.8 cm.



6-1 Yosa Buson (1716–84), *Oku no hosomichi* (Detail of hand-scroll). Ink and color on paper, 48.2 x 28.8 cm. Itsuo Art Museum.





6-2 Yosa Buson (1716–84), *The Poet Chigetsu*. Wood-block print from *Haikai sanjūrokkasen* (Thirty-Six Haiku Poets, 1799). Ink on paper, 26.8 x 19.3 cm.

<i>tomokakumo</i>	somehow surviving—
<i>narade ya yuki no</i>	dry pampas-grass
<i>kareobana</i>	in the snow
—1691	

He was also able to suggest the season with both indoor and outdoor images.

<i>negi shiroku</i>	leeks washed
<i>arai tatetaru</i>	completely white—
<i>samusa kana</i>	the cold
—1691	

<i>kogarashi ni</i>	winter wind
<i>iwa fuki togaru</i>	through the cedars
<i>sugima kana</i>	sharpens the rocks
—1691	

Bashō spent most of 1692 in Edo, where he renewed friendships and eventually moved into a third Bashō hut, with the plantain tree transplanted next to it. However, he was sorry to see the general craze for winning haiku prizes. Some of his former pupils were now earning fees as haiku-contest judges, and at one point Bashō even considered giving up haiku himself, but inevitably a poetic sentiment would appear that he could not resist.

Bashō's own output of haiku was relatively modest that year. This may have reflected to some extent his disappointment with the haiku world of Edo, but at a reduced pace he continued expressing his observations of nature and humanity, sometimes with humor.

*neko no koi*  
*yamu toki neya no*  
*oborozuki*

—1692

when the cats' affair  
is ended, hazy moonlight  
in the bedroom

*uguisu ya*  
*mochi ni funsuru*  
*en no saki*

—1692

a warbler  
poops on the rice cake  
on the edge of the veranda

*aokute mo*  
*aru beki mono wo*  
*tōgarashi*

—1692

better  
to have stayed green—  
the pepper

And, in reverse:

*yuku aki no*  
*nao tanomoshi ya*  
*aomikan*

—1692

still hoping  
as autumn ends—  
green tangerines

This may refer to Bashō's own feeling that he had not accomplished everything he had hoped for. In any event, he was also cognizant of his age.



Around this time he wrote a more ambiguous poem on this subject.

<i>asagao ya</i>	morning glories—
<i>kore mo mata waga</i>	you too are no longer
<i>tomo narazu</i>	my friends
—1693	

Japanese commentators have long questioned why this “friendship” had ended, and some of the possible reasons that they have advanced include:

- Bashō’s depression compared to the cheerful flowers
- The flowers’ transience
- Bashō no longer being able to get up early enough in the morning to enjoy the flowers
- The competitive colors of the flowers
- The fact that the flowers could no longer lift his spirits [24](#)

One of the most interesting comments about this haiku is a Zen interpretation by Robert Aitken. He wrote that “the friendlessness of the morning glory and of Bashō are the fundamental aloneness in which each of us is born. . . . Each individual entity is its own reason for being. . . . There is only Bashō in the universe. There is only the morning glory in the whole universe.” [25](#)

In any event, Bashō had not lost his sense of humor, as a poem on the “evening glory” (*yūgao*), also known as “moonflower,” makes clear.

<i>yūgao ya</i>	moonflowers—
<i>yōte kao dasu</i>	I stick my drunken face
<i>mado no ana</i>	out the window
—1693	

Among the many elements that make Bashō unique is his ability to use the same image, in this case the large radish called daikon, for totally different purposes.

<i>kuratsubo ni</i>	on the saddle
<i>kobōzu no sete</i>	a little boy is settled—
<i>daikon-hiki</i>	going to pull radishes
—1693	

<i>mononofu no</i>	the radish-flavored
<i>daikon nigaki</i>	acid conversations
<i>hanashi kana</i>	of samurai
—1693	

This was a time when Bashō was advocating *karumi* (lightness) in haiku, as opposed to the heaviness of logic and reason that can easily lead poetry toward over-elaboration. His own variety of direct observation and expression can be seen in several further poems from 1693.

*tsuki hana no  
gu ni hari taten  
kan no iri*

—1693

acupuncture  
for flower-moon foolishness—  
the cold weather's sting

*hototogisu  
koe yokotau ya  
mizu no ue*

—1693

the cuckoo's call  
stretches  
across the water

*kodomo-ra yo  
hirugao sakinu  
uri mukan*

—1693

hey children!  
the noontime flowers are blooming  
I'll peel a melon

*shira tsuyu mo  
kobosanu hagi no  
uneri kana*

—1693

without scattering  
the white dew, bush-clover  
undulates

But Bashō's imagery was not always so attractive, as in the following poem:

*namagusashi  
konagi ga ue no  
hae no wata*

—1693

on the waterweeds  
the smell  
dace-fish guts

At this time, the poet could bring out different flavors through using different contexts for a single image, in this case the chrysanthemum.

*kiku no hana*  
*saku ya ishiya no*  
*ishi no ai*

—1693

chrysanthemums—  
blooming between the stones  
of a stonemason

*kiku no ka*  
*niwa ni kiretaru*  
*kutsu no soko*

—1693

chrysanthemum fragrance—  
in the garden, the sole  
of a broken sandal

*kangiku ya*  
*konuka no kakaru*  
*usu no hata*

—1693

winter chrysanthemum—  
rice bran fallen  
at the mortar's edge

Although Japanese (and Chinese) poetry had praised the chrysanthemum for blooming late into the year and surviving the cold, Bashō took a different approach. He contrasts the flower with the humanistic elements of a stonemason, a broken sandal, and rice bran, which brings out the flower's beauty without a word of praise being needed.

Bashō's final year was 1694. Suspecting as much, he sent a letter to a friend saying, "I fear the end is drawing close." <sup>26</sup> He still wanted to try one more journey, so in the summer he left Edo, carried on a litter, for stops in Nagoya, Ueno, Lake Biwa, and Kyoto, and finally back to Ueno. In the fall he traveled to Nara and then Osaka, but fell severely ill there, and he died on November 28th.



Despite his health problems, Bashō was actively writing haiku in his final year, perhaps to help spread the idea of *karumi* that was, in his words, like “looking at a shallow river with a sandy bed.” [27](#)—In any case, a number of Bashō’s haiku from his final year have a certain lightness of spirit that belies the poet’s age and precarious health.

<i>hiyahiya to</i>	the coolness
<i>kabe wo fumaete</i>	of my feet against the wall—
<i>hirune kana</i>	midday nap
—1694	

<i>sara hachi mo</i>	plates and bowls
<i>honokani yami no</i>	faintly gleaming
<i>yoisuzumi</i>	in the cool darkness
—1694	

<i>asa tsuyu ni</i>	in the morning dew
<i>yogarete suzushi</i>	a little muddy but cool—
<i>uri no tsuchi</i>	melons on the ground
—1694	

It may be more difficult to see *karumi* in the following poems that inevitably describe his feelings of old age and ill health, but Bashō was determined not to let his haiku become weighty or oppressive.

<i>iki nagara</i>	still alive
<i>hitotsu ni kōru</i>	but frozen into one—
<i>namako kana</i>	sea-slugs
—1694	

*uguisu ya*  
*take no ko yabu ni*  
*oi wo naku*

—1694

*Nehan-e ya*  
*shiwade awasuru*  
*juzu no oto*

—1694

*u-no-hana ya*  
*kuraki yanagino*  
*oyobi goshi*

—1694

the warbler  
in the bamboo-shoot grove  
sings of old age

Buddha's death day—  
the sound of wrinkled hands  
rubbing prayer beads

leaning over  
white hedge-flowers—  
a dark willow

*kono aki wa*  
*nan de toshiyoru*  
*kumo ni tori*

—1694

this autumn  
why am I feeling old?  
a bird in the clouds

*tōgan ya*  
*tagai ni kawaru*  
*kao no nari*

—1694

winter melon—  
how our faces  
have changed!

*samidare ya*  
*kaiko wazurau*  
*kuwa no hata*

—1694

midsummer rain—  
a silkworm ill  
in a mulberry field

*mugi no ho wo*  
*chikara ni tsukamu*  
*wakare kana*

—1694

clutching some ears of wheat  
for strength  
and parting

*kono michi ya*  
*yuku hito nashi ni*  
*aki no kure*

—1694

on this road  
not one traveler—  
autumn deepens

And Bashō's final poem "during my illness":

*tabi ni yande*  
*yume wa kareno wo*  
*kake-meguru*

ill from journeying  
but my dreams circle  
over withered fields

—1694

## Conclusion

What makes Bashō so special in the history of haiku, and what makes his poems so distinct? The first question is easier than the second: he came along at just the right time to turn haiku from a clever and often frivolous form of verse to poetry that could express depth and richness of both observation and spirit. This was recognized in his own day, and later in his life he was besieged by prospective and actual pupils from many different parts of Japan. Indeed, Bashō's followers were to dominate the next generation of poets, and his influence has remained vital in haiku to this day.

Accepting that Bashō accomplished all this, the question remains: How? For anything approaching an answer, we need to examine in what ways his own character and life choices advanced his poetry. In this regard, there are a number of factors that can be cited.

First, Bashō maintained his freedom. By giving up his official position, by frequently moving, and especially by his journeys, he never grew stale or redundant, but could view fresh places, meet new people, and experience multiple aspects of nature. He changed his aesthetic approach to haiku several times, starting with the Teimon and Danrin traditions, but quickly moving on to deeper observation and expression of the world around him, and ending with *karumi* just when one might expect the opposite. He studied Zen, shaved his head, and wore a monk's robe, but never become a monk. In short, Bashō didn't fit into a category or niche in a society that was very niche conscious.

Second, he appreciated the past without being overwhelmed by it. Through his deep admiration of both classical Chinese poets and Japanese masters such as Saigyō and Sōgi, Bashō could use them as exemplars of travel, nonattachment, and profound observation of the world around them. Earlier haikai poets used the past primarily for parody or to demonstrate their erudition and wit, whereas Bashō had a more personal, and often more poignant, response to his predecessors that still retained his own poetic spirit.

Third, Bashō never became self-satisfied. In a world where humility could often be a pose, he felt it deeply; despite his success, he never stopped searching for greater significance and range of expression. It helped that he seems to have been boundlessly curious and nonjudgmental; he did not find dace-fish guts, or a horse pissing near his pillow, to be unworthy of poetry. Bashō's journeying became a way to always seek the new, rather than resting content with what had gone before.

<i>yo wa tabi ni</i>	traveling the world
<i>shiro kaku oda no</i>	instead of tilling a small field
<i>yuki modori</i>	round and round

—1694

Fourth, Bashō added a kind of humor to his haiku that did not depend upon puns or esoteric references to earlier literature, although both might occasionally appear in his verses. Instead, he celebrated the humor of daily life, where a small smile of recognition became more valuable than an “I get it” grin or an “Isn’t that clever” smirk.

*susuhaki wa*  
*ono ga tana tsuru*  
*daiku kana*

year-end cleaning—  
the carpenter builds a shelf  
for his own home

—1694

Fifth, Bashō was an expert in combining into a single haiku two images or two elements that might not seem to match, but which together become very evocative. Sometimes these involved synesthesia, where two different senses are combined, such as sight and sound.

*inazuma ya*  
*yami no kata yuku*  
*goi no koe*

lightning—  
into the darkness  
a heron's cry

—1694

Sixth, although Bashō did not paint many haiga himself, he gave this form of visual art a kind of sanction and significance through his interactions with other poet-artists, especially Kyorai, as well as his own modest paintings. One haiku from his final year shows his belief that visual art could express just what his poems put forth.

*suzushisa wo*  
*e ni utsushikeri*  
*Saga no take*

coolness  
painted on a scroll—  
the bamboo at Saga

—1694

Seventh, Bashō continued to develop his art with ever-greater depth. As noted, to keep from becoming heavy-handed or overly serious, in his final years he advocated lightness in haiku. As Robert Aitken

wrote, “The path of clarity is the path of weightlessness. . . . Assumptions, explanations (including this), extrapolations, personal associations—all add weight, and the experience will not rise.” [28](#)

Finally, Bashō was a poet of great humanity. Although people do not appear in the majority of his haiku, they are always present, if only in the forms of Bashō himself and his readers. For Bashō, nature included human nature, and there need be no separation of the two into different worlds of feeling or expression. This is made clear in two more haiku from his final year.

*yuku aki ya*  
*te wo hirogetaru*  
*kuri no iga*

—1694

autumn passes—  
with their hands spread open  
chestnut burs

*aki chikaki*  
*kokoro no yoru ya*  
*yojōhan*

—1694

autumn is near—  
hearts come together  
in the tearoom

# 4

## Followers of Bashō

**B**ASHŌ HAD MANY PUPILS and even more followers. This was in part due to his poetry and personality, and in part because during his travels he frequently met with local poets and would-be poets in many parts of Japan. Therefore, one aspect of Bashō's pupils is their geographical range, which helped provide the variety that can be seen in their work.

In addition, as Bashō himself developed and changed his views on haiku, he tended to work with different pupils. The result was that separate aspects of his aesthetic became significant to various poets at various times. For example, the pupils he worked with at the end of his life were more likely to have been influenced by Bashō's views on *karumi* (lightness), than those whom he had taught earlier.

What all Bashō's students had in common was taking haiku as a worthy kind of poetry and not a clever game. Although the Teimon and Danrin schools continued in a very weakened way, the influence of Bashō was so vast that in one sense, all haiku poets after his day might be considered his followers. <sup>1</sup>

Another factor among Bashō's direct and indirect pupils was their varied backgrounds—samurai, ex-samurai, monks, nuns, farmers, artisans, doctors, officials, merchants, saké brewers, even a beggar—so they saw and experienced many aspects of Japanese life, and frequently recorded them with both skill and empathy. As Bashō taught, “In composing haiku, my students begin by looking within the topic, but when they start by looking outside the topic, they find a plethora of material.” <sup>2</sup>



It would be impossible to consider all of Bashō's followers here, but some of the most significant will be examined, however briefly, and the growing interest in haiga during this period will also be discussed and illustrated.

## Enomoto Kikaku

Enomoto Kikaku (1661–1707) may have been Bashō's favorite pupil, despite (or perhaps because of) their differences in lifestyle, poetry, and vision of nature. He began learning from the master at age thirteen, and also studied both Chinese and Japanese classical prose and poems, as well as medicine, calligraphy, and painting.

While Bashō was subtle and sympathetic in his haiku, Kikaku definitely had a more radical sense of the world around him, including a robust sense of humor. Unlike the humor in pre-Bashō haiku, however, Kikaku's wit rarely depended upon elaborate puns or references to earlier literature, but rather arose from observation. Here are a group of haiku by Kikaku, moving through the seasons.

<i>uguisu no</i>	the warbler
<i>mi wo sakasama ni</i>	sings its first song
<i>hatsune kana</i>	upside-down
<i>kane hitotsu</i>	not one temple bell
<i>urenu hito nashi</i>	that someone won't sell—
<i>Edo no haru</i>	springtime in Edo
<i>yogi wo kite</i>	wrapping myself in a quilt
<i>aruite mitari</i>	and walking around just to see—
<i>doyō-boshi</i>	summer airing

<i>hito nagaya</i>	locking the door
<i>jo wo oroshite</i>	everyone in the boarding house
<i>odori kana</i>	goes out to dance
<i>kabashira ni</i>	the floating bridge
<i>yume no ukibashi</i>	of my dreams is suspended
<i>kakaru nari</i>	on a column of gnats
<i>hatsu yuki ni</i>	first snow—
<i>kono shōben wa</i>	what creature
<i>nini yatsu zo</i>	has pissed on it?

Kikaku even utilized humor when writing a poem commemorating the death of a Bashō pupil named Kōsai (n.d.).

<i>sono hito no</i>	even his snores
<i>ibiki sae nashi</i>	have disappeared—
<i>semi no koe</i>	cicada voices

Another poem shows Kikaku's effective use of words in a riddle haiku.

<i>kiraretaru</i>	stabbed—
<i>yume wa makoto ka</i>	was my dream a reality?
<i>nomi no ato</i>	a flea-bite!

In a conversation with Bashō, his pupil Kyorai commented that “Kikaku is really a clever writer. Who else would ever have thought of writing a poem merely about being bitten by a flea?” The master

said, “You’re quite right. He deals with trifling matters in a most eloquent way.”<sup>3</sup>

To become the major haiku master that he was, of course Kikaku wrote many more serious haiku, showing a sharp eye for the world around him. Some of these seem extremely simple, as though the outgoing personality of Kikaku were now retreating inward with only nature as his guide—or might the first of these have a reference to his relationship with his teacher?

<i>ama-gaeru</i>	the tree-frog
<i>bashō ni norite</i>	riding a banana leaf
<i>soyogikeri</i>	rustles and sways
<i>aoyagi ni</i>	the bat skims
<i>kōmori tsutau</i>	among green willows—
<i>yūbae ya</i>	sunset glow
<i>tombō ya</i>	dragonflies
<i>kurui shizumaru</i>	quiet their mad darting—
<i>mikka no tsuki</i>	crescent moon
<i>kojiki kana</i>	the beggar
<i>tenchi wo kitaru</i>	wears heaven and earth
<i>natsu-goromo</i>	as his summer clothes
<i>sumu tsuki ya</i>	clear moon—
<i>hige wo tatetaru</i>	lifting up its whiskers
<i>kirigirisu</i>	a katydid

To use moonlight to observe an insect (a katydid is a form of grasshopper) is typical of Kikaku's approach to haiku.

We can compare two of his haiku that begin with almost the same first line to discover the difference between his humor and his empathy.

*yūdachi ya*  
*ie wo megurite*  
*naku abiru*

sudden evening shower—  
running in circles around the house  
quacking ducks

*yūdachi ni*  
*hitori soto miru*  
*onna kana*

sudden evening shower—  
alone and looking outside  
a woman

Kikaku was also a talented painter; his works tend to be minimalistic in a manner appropriate to haiku, although the subject matter is sometimes unusual. One of his haiga, for example, shows the skin of a melon that someone has thrown into a stream ([Plate 4-1](#)). The poem can be read two ways, depending on whether one translates *kumode* as “spider-legs” or “crisscross.”

*uri no kawa*  
*mizu mo kumode ni*  
*nagarekeri*

melon skin—  
spider-legs floating  
on the water

melon skin—  
the water also flowing  
in crisscross directions

Not many poets would take such a plebian image, really just a piece of garbage, and see it resembling a spider as it floats down the stream.

Kikaku has gone even a step further by enclosing the painting with his spidery calligraphy, now moving in its columns (unusually) from left to right, in ways that echo parts of the painting. For example, the darker lines of the calligraphy bring forth the heavier accents of the calligraphy, while the character that begins the second column (from the left) is a cursive-script version of “water” (水), rendered in one bending line that resembles the curving lines of the stream in the painting. In effect, the water flows, the melon skin flows, the poem flows, and the calligraphy flows, showing how haiga can add to the total imagery while unifying its underlying expression.

## Hattori Ransetsu

A second pupil who was very close to Bashō was Hattori Ransetsu (1654–1707). He led a much more modest life than Kikaku, but seems to have been equally admired by the master, who included them both in two 1680 anthologies. From a farming family, Ransetsu first served a daimyo in a samurai capacity, and also studied painting from Hanabusa Itchō (1652–1724) and Zen from Saiun Hōjō (1637–1713). At Bashō’s death, Ransetsu became a Zen monk.

Ransetsu’s haiku have sometimes been noted for what Bashō called their austerity, although there are many lighter poems as well. Above all Ransetsu shows sympathy for all living creatures.

*mino hoshite*  
*asa-asa furuu*  
*hotaru kana*

drying my straw raincoat  
morning after morning I shake out  
fireflies

*kamo arite*  
*mizu made ayumu*  
*kōri kana*

the ducks walk  
all the way to the water—  
on ice

*ganjitsu ya*  
*harete suzume no*  
*monogatari*

New Year's Day  
is clear—sparrows are  
telling stories

*kao ni tsuku*  
*meshitsubu hae ni*  
*ataekeri*

stuck to my face  
I give this grain of rice  
to a fly

Ransetsu was observant and empathetic to many aspects of life, as a number of his haiku attest, ranging from a small hint of spring to the “Heavenly River” of the Milky Way.

*ume ichirin  
ichirin hodo no  
atatakasa*

one blossom of plum—  
and one blossom's worth  
of warmth

*wakatake wa  
kata hada nugi no  
kioi kana*

the young bamboo  
bares one shoulder  
dashingly

*mayonaka ya  
furi kawaritaru  
ama no kawa*

in the depths of night  
it has lost and gained a place—  
the Milky Way

*meigetsu ya  
kemuri haiyuku  
mizu no ue*

harvest moon—  
the smoke slithers  
over the water

Three final Ransetsu poems are given below: the first refers to a small home altar, seen in most Japanese dwellings of the time; the second is his most famous haiku; and the third is his death poem, which includes the Zen shout "Totsu!"

<i>tamadana wa</i>	altar shelf
<i>tsuyu to namida mo</i>	dew and tears both
<i>abura kana</i>	oil for the lamps
<i>umazume no</i>	the childless woman
<i>hina kashizuku zo</i>	touches the dolls
<i>aware naru</i>	so tenderly
<i>hitoha chiri</i>	a leaf falls
<i>Totsu! hitoha chiru</i>	Totsu! a leaf falls—
<i>kaze no ue</i>	riding the wind

## Mukai Kyorai

A third pupil of Bashō who became a major haiku poet was Mukai Kyorai (1651–1704), the son of a high-ranking Confucian scholar and physician in Nagasaki. A member of the samurai class and an expert in archery, at the age of twenty-three he gave up his position in order to become a poet. This was due in large part to a meeting with Kikaku, after which Kyorai also became a disciple and friend of Bashō. Building a hermitage on the outskirts of Kyoto, he dedicated himself to haiku.

<i>hito aze wa</i>	from one ridge
<i>shibashi naki yamu</i>	they call for a time and stop—
<i>kawazu kana</i>	frogs
<i>go roppon</i>	five or six trees
<i>yorite shidaruru</i>	weighing each other down—
<i>yanagi kana</i>	willows



Other poems by Kyorai give his sense of the relation of humans to nature, and to each other.

<i>ugoku tomo</i>	although hoeing
<i>miede hata utsu</i>	the man in the field
<i>otoko kana</i>	seems motionless
<i>“ō-ō” to</i>	although I call “yes yes”
<i>iedo tataku ya</i>	someone still knocks
<i>yuki no mon</i>	at the snowy gate

The companion (and possibly the wife) of Kyorai known as Kana-jo (n.d.) also wrote several haiku that effectively suggest the season.

<i>yukuharu no</i>	the back view
<i>ushiro sugata ya</i>	of passing spring—
<i>fuji no hana</i>	wisteria
<i>mugi no ho ni</i>	ears of barley
<i>owareru chō ni</i>	chase the agitated
<i>midare kana</i>	butterflies

Kyorai’s sister Chine (1660–88) was also an accomplished haiku poet, and wrote of journeying with her brother.

<i>Ise made no</i>	as far as Ise
<i>yoki michi-zure yo</i>	you are welcome companions—
<i>kesa no kari</i>	this morning’s geese

Chine's death poem, and the response by her brother Kyorai, are among the most affecting examples of these forms of haiku.

<i>moe yasuku</i>	easily blazing
<i>mata kie yasuki</i>	and easily extinguished—
<i>hotaru kana</i>	the firefly
—CHINE	

<i>te no ue ni</i>	in the palm of my hand
<i>kanashiku kiyuru</i>	so sadly extinguished—
<i>hotaru kana</i>	the firefly
—KYORAI	

We can compare this with Bashō's poem on Chine's death.

<i>naki hito no</i>	the clothing of the dead
<i>kosode mo ima ya</i>	also now has its
<i>doyōboshi</i>	summer airing
—BASHŌ	

## Chigetsu, Sute-jo, and Sono-jo

Although the list that someone made of the “ten outstanding pupils of Bashō” included only men, Kana-jo and Chine were only two of many fine women poets who either studied directly with Bashō or followed his lead. <sup>4</sup>One of the former was Kawai Chigetsu (1632–1706), also known as Chigetsu-jo or Chigetsu-ni (*jo* meaning “woman,” and *ni* meaning “nun”). In her youth she seems to have served at court before marrying the owner of a carting business in Ōtsu, outside Kyoto. She was not only Bashō's haiku pupil but also

his friend, and he visited her home on his travels. After Chigetsu's husband died (probably in 1686), she asked her younger brother Otokuni (1657–1720, also a student of Bashō) to manage the family business, and she became a nun.

For women in early modern Japan, taking Buddhist orders not only represented a sincere vocation, but also allowed them a role in society where they could travel and have a certain amount of freedom. One of Chigetsu's haiku, however, indicates this lifestyle was not entirely blissful; it was written on the seventh anniversary of her husband's death.

<i>kakashi ni mo</i>	just like scarecrows,
<i>awaresa makeji</i>	how sorrowful—
<i>ama-nakama</i>	a group of nuns

Chigetsu also used the image of a scarecrow for a happier scene.

<i>kirigirisu</i>	a katydid
<i>naku ya kakashi no</i>	chirps from the sleeves
<i>sode no uchi</i>	of a scarecrow

Repeating an image but changing the mood, Chigetsu again uses the word that itself chirps, *ki-ri-gi-ri-su*.

<i>toshi yoreba</i>	when it gets old
<i>koe mo kanashiki</i>	its voice becomes plaintive—
<i>kirigirisu</i>	katydid

Other haiku by Chigetsu express her observations of those admiring the moon, a form of indirect praise well suited to haiku.

<i>yubi sashite</i>	stretching out
<i>nobi suru chigo no</i>	and pointing their fingers—
<i>tsukimi kana</i>	children moon-viewing
<i>meigetsu ni</i>	at the full moon
<i>karasu wa koe wo</i>	crows
<i>nomarekeri</i>	swallow their voices

Perhaps what made Chigetsu unique was her ability to represent attractive moments of nature amid the detritus of the everyday world.

<i>uguisu ni</i>	a warbler—
<i>temoto yasumen</i>	I stop doing what's at hand
<i>nagashimoto</i>	in my sink
<i>matsu haru ya</i>	waiting for spring—
<i>kōri ni majiru</i>	ice mixed together
<i>chiri-akuta</i>	with rubbish

Born into a samurai family near Kyoto, Den Sute-jo (1633–98) became fascinated with renga and haiku as a young woman. Rather than a direct follower of Bashō, she was his slightly elder contemporary, writing most of her haiku in the 1650s and 1660s. Seven years after her husband's death in 1674, she took Buddhist orders in the Pure Land sect. She then converted to Zen in 1686, becoming a follower of the major Zen master Bankei Yōtaku (1622–93), and the leader of a group of nuns in Himeji.

The first known haiku by Sute-jo came at the age of six when she noticed the pattern made by her wooden clogs.

<i>yuki no asa</i>	morning snow
<i>ni no ji ni no ji no</i>	the characters “two, two” (二 二)
<i>geta no ato</i>	made by my <i>geta</i>

Sute-jo’s mature haiku show that she had some range as a poet, moving from comparisons between nature and a woman’s life to more complex verses. The last of these four verses might be considered Zen in spirit.

<i>mizukagami</i>	with water as a mirror
<i>mite ya mayu kaku</i>	you can paint your eyebrows—
<i>kawayanagi</i>	willow by the river

<i>natsu mata de</i>	not waiting for summer
<i>baika no yuki ya</i>	the plum blossoms have
<i>shiragasane</i>	put on a white dress

<i>kumoji ni mo</i>	does the path of clouds
<i>chikamichi aru ya</i>	also have a shortcut?
<i>natsu no tsuki</i>	summer moon

<i>omou koto</i>	my face showing
<i>naki kao shite mo</i>	nothing—
<i>aki no kure</i>	autumn darkens

Sono-jo (1649–1723) also had an interesting life. She studied haiku with Bashō in 1689, and then with Kikaku the following year; she is reputed to have been an eye doctor, and finally became a nun. Two of her haiku refer to her hair.

<i>suzushisaya</i>	the coolness
<i>eri ni todokanu</i>	does not reach my neck—
<i>kami no tsuto</i>	the chignon
<i>outa ko ni</i>	the child on my back
<i>kami naburaruru</i>	plays with my hair—
<i>atsusa kana</i>	the heat!

Bashō seems to have admired Sono-jo greatly, and wrote the following haiku about her only a few months before his death:

<i>shiragiku no</i>	white chrysanthemums—
<i>me ni tatete miru</i>	not one speck of dust
<i>chiri mo nashi</i>	to be seen
—BASHŌ	

After Bashō died, Sono-jo wrote a haiku of mourning.

<i>samusō na</i>	when seeing the cold
<i>kasa sae mireba</i>	bamboo traveling hat—
<i>namida kana</i>	tears

## Kyoroku and Jōso

Among the other direct pupils of Bashō, of whom there were many, a few deserve to be singled out. One is Morikawa Kyoroku (also pronounced “Kyoriku,” 1656–1715), a late pupil of the master who is reputed to have given him advice (or lessons) in painting after having himself studied with Kanō Yasunobu (1613–85). Bashō and Kyoroku did several joint haiga; for example, a scroll of sparrows was painted by Kyoroku with five haiku added by Bashō. The birds interact

joyfully on the left of the scroll, with Bashō's sparrow poems on the right ([Plate 4-2](#) ).

<i>nabatake ni</i>	in the mustard fields
<i>hanamigao naru</i>	making flower-viewing faces—
<i>suzume kana</i>	sparrows
<i>hana ni asobu</i>	please don't eat the horsefly
<i>abu na kurai so</i>	as you play in the blossoms—
<i>tomosuzume</i>	friend sparrows
<i>suzumego ya</i>	baby sparrows—
<i>koe nakikawasu</i>	exchanging their chirps
<i>nezumi no su</i>	with a nest of mice
<i>ine suzume</i>	rice-field sparrows
<i>cha no ki batake ya</i>	find sanctuary
<i>nige dokoro</i>	in the tea groves
<i>sekizoro wo</i>	year-end mummings—
<i>suzume no warau</i>	a sight to make
<i>detachi kana</i>	even sparrows laugh

Bashō wrote his poems in modest size and style, not intruding on the pleasure of the sparrows. Each haiku is given a single column, with the signature on the lower left of the poems.

Another collaboration shows Kyoroku painting one of Bashō's most famous poetic subjects ([Plate 4-3](#) ), with Bashō adding in calligraphy his celebrated haiku, which was discussed in the [previous chapter](#) .

<i>kare-eda ni</i>	crow perched
<i>karasu no tomarikeri</i>	on a withered branch—
<i>aki no kure</i>	autumn evening

—1680

The powerful image of the crow, facing away from us and huddled over, brings forcefulness to this otherwise melancholy scene. Bashō's calligraphy emphasizes the first word in the final (left) column, "autumn" (秋). This haiga demonstrates once again how a painting can add resonance to a poem and vice versa, whether or not they express different pictorial elements.

Kyoroku's own poems demonstrate his strong visual sense. The first of these haiku was composed in 1692 when Kyoroku was visiting the Bashō hut, and drew praise from the master.

<i>kangiku no</i>	even next to
<i>tonari mo ari ya</i>	the winter chrysanthemums—
<i>ikedaikon</i>	a living radish

<i>shirakumo no</i>	above the white clouds
<i>yue ni koe aru</i>	there are voices—
<i>hibari kana</i>	skylarks

<i>u-no-hana ni</i>	among the hedge-flowers
<i>ashige no uma no</i>	a gray horse—
<i>yoake kana</i>	first touch of dawn

Jōso (1662–1704) resigned his samurai position to become a Zen monk at the Obaku sect temple Kōsei-ji. His haiku are often about



living creatures, which he views with a fresh eye.

*hi wo uteba* as I strike a light  
*noki ni naki-au* they start their chorus—  
*amagaeru* tree-frogs in the eaves

*ōkami no* wolves  
*koe sorou nari* howling in harmony—  
*yuki no kure* snowy evening

*kuyami iu* in the pauses between  
*hito no togire ya* his condolences—  
*kirigirisu* a katydid

*hototogisu* a cuckoo cries  
*naku ya kosui no* and the lake waters  
*sasanigori* slightly cloud over

One of Jōso's haiku is particularly Zen in spirit, while another is much darker in tone.

*toritsukanu* by not clinging,  
*chikara de ukabu* he has the power to float—  
*kawazu kana* the frog

*sabishisa no* the bottom falling out  
*soko nukete furu* of loneliness—  
*nizori kana* blowing sleet

Completing the “ten [male] pupils” of Bashō, there were some fine poets including Tachibana Hokushi (1665–1718), a sword sharpener who met the master in Kanazawa; Ochi Etsujin (1656?–1739), with whom Bashō traveled; Sugiyama Sampū (1647–1732), a fish merchant who provided Bashō with a hermitage; Kagami Shikō (1665–1731), a Zen monk at Daichi-ji who also became a doctor; and Shida Yaha (1662–1740), a merchant from Fukui who moved to Edo.

Here, one haiku by Etsujin can represent these poets, offering a scene that allows for various interpretations.

<i>yuku toshi ya</i>	year's end—
<i>oya ni shiraga wo</i>	I hide my gray hair
<i>kakushikeri</i>	from my parents

Does Etsujin merely feel embarrassed by his aging, or is he worried that seeing his gray hair will make his parents feel even older?

## Kaga no Chiyo

Some critics have felt that the spirit of Bashō was gradually lost over time, particularly as clever wordplay and excessive literary references started returning to haiku. However, a number of second-generation masters continued to write excellent verses in the Bashō style. One of these, Kaga no Chiyo (1703–75), is sometimes considered the finest of all female haiku poets.

Also called Chiyo-jo, or Chiyo-ni after she became a nun, Kaga no Chiyo was born near Kanazawa along a major road previously traveled by Bashō. <sup>5</sup>—Her family ran a scroll-mounting business, so she was familiar with artists and calligrapher-poets from a young age. Exhibiting an early interest in haiku, she had a number of mentors, including Bashō's pupils Hokushi and Shikō. The latter is generally considered her principal teacher, although they apparently

met only once in person, with the rest of their lessons conducted by correspondence. <sup>6</sup>

It is not certain whether Chiyo ever married, despite a well-known haiku attributed to her wedding day.

<i>shibukaru ka</i>	I don't know
<i>shiranedo kaki no</i>	if it will be bitter—
<i>hatsu-chigiri</i>	the first persimmon

In any case, if Chiyo did marry, either her husband died young or they separated, because she lived her life almost entirely in her family home in Matto. There she associated with a number of both male and female poets, and gradually became celebrated as an outstanding talent. In her middle years, however, her parents, her brother, and his wife all died, leaving the scroll-mounting business for Chiyo to manage. During this time she wrote few haiku, but around the age of fifty she adopted a young couple, in part to care for the business.

In 1754, Chiyo became the nun Chiyo-ni, and was once more able to devote more of her time to writing poetry. One of her calligraphy scrolls may have been written near the beginning of Chiyo's second period of creativity ([Plate 4-4](#)). It begins with a prose introduction and continues with six haiku, one with a title and a Bashō ending. The name "Okame," mentioned in the fourth poem, refers to a prototype of the good-natured, middle-aged woman.

I was troubled for about three years, but the melody of this morning's spring breeze brought forth a new tune and I felt, indeed, it was the sky of early spring—my heart was encouraged and so I happily took up my brush.

*chikara nara*  
*chō makesasemu*  
*kesa no haru*

in terms of strength  
the butterfly yields  
to this morning's spring

## Spring Pleasure

*uguisu ya*  
*uguisu ni naru*  
*mizu no oto*

the warbler  
becoming a warbler—  
the sound of water

*wakakusa ya*  
*mada dochira e no*  
*kata yorazu*

young grasses—  
not yet bent  
in any direction

*Okame mono*  
*miru asa asa ya*  
*haru no niwa*

Okame  
every morning views  
her spring garden

*kiji nakite*  
*yama wa asane*  
*wakare kana*

a pheasant sings  
and the mountain's morning sleep  
comes to an end

*ame no hi mo*  
*nani omoidete*  
*naku kaeru*

even on rainy days  
perhaps remembering something—  
the frog sings<sup>7</sup>

Chiyo's calligraphy is somewhat compressed and gnarly, with a sense of the poet's intensity brought forth by the interplay of darker

and lighter forms. The heavier forms are created when the brush has been dipped again in ink; however, this redipping does not always occur at the beginning of a column, which creates asymmetrical variations in the total visual expression.

In order to create a sense of structure, each haiku begins a new tall column, and the poems usually conclude with two more partial columns. This pattern is not totally consistent, as the six haiku have 3–2–3–3–3–4 columns respectively. But although these columns generally coincide with the 5–7–5 syllabic poetic structure, even here there is some variation. For example, the second poem, just after the two-word title, is written in a single column until its final word, *oto* (sound). As a result of these patterns being created but not consistently followed, the calligraphy takes on a feeling of life's own repetition and changes. Chiyo, returned to joy and creativity by the melody of the spring breeze, is composing both haiku and calligraphy in her own personal rhythm.

As well as her personal and flavorful calligraphy, Chiyo was known for her haiga. However, she was most celebrated for her verses: a sampling shows her range of subject and emphasis, with a special closeness to nature and a good ear for sounds. For example, the first haiku investigates a warbler's call, while the second has a middle line entirely using the vowel sound "ah," and the third repeats *kirema* (between).

*uguisu ya*  
*mata ii-naoshi*  
*ii naoshi*

the warbler  
practices his song  
and practices again

*more izuru*  
*yama mata yama ya*  
*hatsu-gasumi*

gradually appearing,  
mountain after mountain—  
the first mist

*wakakusa ya*  
*kirema kirema ni*  
*mizu no iro*

young grasses—  
and between each blade  
the color of water

Two Chiyo haiku seem to contrast with each other.

*chōchō ya*  
*onago no michi no*  
*ato ya saki*

as she walks  
butterflies in front  
and behind her

*shimizu ni wa*  
*ura mo omote mo*  
*nakarikeri*

clear waters—  
front and back  
don't exist

Other Chiyo haiku emphasize her variety of poetic effects, from the momentary to the unhurried.

*yuku mizu ni* over the stream  
*onoga kage ou* pursuing its own shadow—  
*tonbo kana* a dragonfly

*hirou mono* everything we pick up  
*mina ugoku nari* moves—  
*shiohigata* low tide

*tsuri-zao no* the line from the fishing rod  
*ito ni sawaru ya* just touches  
*natsu no tsuki* the summer moon

*hyaku nari ya* hundreds of gourds  
*tsuru hitosuji no* all coming from the heart  
*kokoro yori* of a single vine

Like many fine poets, Chiyo was prepared to write when she was away from home.

*michi no ki no* for her travel diary  
*fude ni mo musubu* she also scoops up clear water  
*shimizu kana* for her brush

Of all Chiyo poems, the following is her best known; in fact it has become one of the most famous of all haiku by any poet, male or female.

*asagao ni*  
*tsurube torarete*  
*morai mizu*

the morning glory  
has claimed the well bucket—  
I'll go borrow water

## Haiga Masters Yayu and Otsuyū

In addition to Kyoroku and Chine, within the first and second generation of Bashō followers were several poet-artists who were gifted in producing evocative images that extended the focused world of haiku. One of these was Yokoi Yayu (1702–83). Born to a samurai family serving the daimyo of Owari, Yayu continued this tradition until the age of fifty-three, when he retired to enjoy artistic pursuits including Noh drama, music, painting, and calligraphy, as well as haiku. He was exceptionally well read and well traveled, having had the experience of journeying with his daimyo to Edo at least eight times, and meeting the Tokugawa shogun himself. Ultimately, Yayu's most famous work was a collection of often humorous essays, entitled *Uzuragoromo* (Patchwork Robe), which was published after his death.

Since his grandfather had studied haikai under the Teimon-school poet Kitamura Kigin (1624–1705), it is not surprising that Yayu took up haiku early in his life, learning primarily on his own. His poems are noted for their range of expression.



*ha wa ha wa mo  
fuyu no kozue wo  
naku karasu*

“leaves, leaves”  
cry out the crows  
from winter treetops

*hiya-hiya to  
ta ni hashirikomu  
shimizu kana*

flowing “hiya-hiya”  
into the paddies—  
clear waters<sup>8</sup>

*yuki-akari  
akaruki neya wa  
mata samushi*

lit by snow  
the bedroom is bright—  
but cold!

*degawari ya  
kawaru hōki no  
kakedokoro*

a change of servants—  
and a different place  
to hang the broom

Yayu wrote many humorous haiku, yet he always seems to capture the natural moment.

*ashimoto no* beans are stolen  
*mame nusumaruru* from right under his legs—  
*kakashi kana* the scarecrow

*shōben wa* when pulling rice shoots  
*yoso no ta e shite* he pees  
*sanae-tori* in the next field

*kusame shite* one sneeze  
*miushinōtaru* and he's lost from view—  
*hibari kana* the skylark

*monomou no* hearing “is anybody there?”  
*koe ni mono kiru* I put on my clothes—  
*atsusa kana* the heat!

Yayu wrote several other poems using the same last line.

*ido-hori no* the well-digger  
*ukiyo e detaru* comes out into the floating world—  
*atsusa kana* the heat!

*keisei no* the prostitute sells  
*ase no mi wo uru* her sweaty body—  
*atsusa kana* the heat!

And with the opposite final line:

*kuragari ni*  
*zatō wasurete*  
*suzumi kana*

in the dark  
he forgets his blindness—  
the cool!

One of Yayu's many evocative haiga depends upon the viewer knowing that dried bonito flakes look very much like flower petals and are called *hana-katsuo* (bonito blossoms), while *nama katsuo* means "raw bonito."

*karashite zo*  
*hana no na wa are*  
*nama katsuo*

all dried-up  
this flower's name is  
uncooked *katsuo*

To provide a strong image to accompany the poem, Yayu fills most of the space with a large fish moving down in a diagonal, which is echoed by the lightly written calligraphy of the haiku ([Plate 4-5](#)). Most of the graytoned brushwork is moist and fuzzing, and the only true black is the eye of the fish. For added humor and a sense of movement, Yayu added playful wiggles just before the bonito's tail.

A second master of haiga was Nakagawa Otsuyū (also known as Bakurin, 1675–1739). Born in Ise to a family of lumber merchants, he is said to have become a disciple of Bashō at age fifteen, but studied more fully with Shikō in 1694 when the latter opened a poetry school in Ise. The Shikō-Bakurin tradition was to continue as a "countrified" style for several generations, with naturalistic haiku such as this verse by Otsuyū.

*aki fukete*  
*ko-no-ha goromo no*  
*kakashi kana*

autumn deepens—  
dressed in a robe of leaves  
a scarecrow

Otsuyū also had a sharp eye for the unexpected, or more accurately, for presenting an unexpected view of everyday matters.

<i>tsubakuro ya</i>	the swallow
<i>nani wo wasurete</i>	must have forgotten something
<i>chūgaeri</i>	and turns a somersault
<i>yūdachi ya</i>	sudden evening shower—
<i>chie samazama no</i>	people cover their heads according
<i>kaburimono</i>	to their inventiveness

In a more serious and traditional vein, Otsuyū created one of the most fascinating haiga of his generation. It relates back to a tanka by the courtier Onakatomi no Yoshinobu (921–91), which depends upon the Japanese belief that autumn’s arrival can be known by the lonely cries of the deer.

<i>Momiji senu</i>	The deer who live
<i>tokiwa no yama ni</i>	without maple leaves
<i>sumu shika wo</i>	on old pine mountain
<i>onore nakite ya</i>	can know that autumn has come
<i>aki wo shiruramu</i>	only by their own cries

In this tanka the scene is clearly spelled out: without maple leaves turning red, yellow, and orange, the deer create their own sense of autumn. Otsuyū’s haiku, on the other hand, goes further while suggesting more than it defines.

*shika no ne no*  
*todokanu yama wa*  
*mada aoshi*

the mountain  
no deer's cry has reached  
is still green

Otsuyū's implication, that the cries of deer are not just a response to the experience of autumn colors but actually its cause, is certainly a poetic fancy. Yet this poem serves as an expression of empathy for feelings of loneliness and loss as the season changes, which are reinforced and extended by his haiga ([Plate 4-6](#)).

Otsuyū has painted a deer and a simplified shape that can be read as a mountain, but the manner in which he depicts them is significant. First, the major forms are created with the same kind of broad, wet, and tonally varied brushwork. Second, they seem to merge into each other; the body of the deer could easily be understood as part of the mountain but for the darker brush-strokes that define its antlers and legs. Third, these lines relate both to the somewhat more gossamer calligraphy on their left and to the strongly inked signature in the lower left. Thus the mountains become the deer, the deer becomes the poem, and the deer as well as the poem become Otsuyū. To emphasize the interconnection, the poet-artist has composed the entire work into a diagonally structured totality that can also be seen as leading the eye in a pendulum-shaped movement. By this intense interaction of verbal and visual imagery, Otsuyū brings us a moment in which we may sense a unity of poetry and art, which provides the delight of a fine haiga.

Many more followers of Bashō composed fine verses, and his influence has never been lost in Japanese haiku. As we shall see, however, new directions also developed as the form became ever more popular, particularly in the towns and cities, where literacy was growing exponentially.

# 5

## Senryu and Zen

**D**URING THE DEVELOPMENT of mainstream haiku in Japan's early modern period, there were two related cultural elements of note. The first was a form of humorous verse called senryu that kept the 5–7–5 syllable count but tended to eliminate most references to nature, and the second was the changing world of Zen Buddhism, which influenced haiku and occasionally intersected with it. This chapter will examine each in turn.

### Senryu

When Bashō redefined the haiku poem by adding depth, richness, and a profound connection with nature, he also left a vacuum for poems that were clever and often satiric. Into this vacuum came senryu, which usually stressed the foibles of human nature. Reaching a peak of inventiveness and popularity in the middle of the eighteenth century, senryu were evanescent, often disappearing as soon as they were composed. Fortunately many of them were collected in anthologies, without crediting the poets themselves, and it is from these anthologies that we still have a sense of what the verses expressed about Japanese society in the early modern period. <sup>1</sup>

The first senryu were often selected from longer *haikai no renga*, using both 5–7–5 and 7–7 segments, although eventually the more interesting asymmetrical 5–7–5 form predominated. One of the first anthologies was the *Mutomagawa* (Mutama River) of 1750, which proved so popular that seven more volumes were published in the next three years, and eventually a total of eighteen were printed by 1776. The editor of these volumes until his death was a poet and

judge named Kei Kiitsu (1694–1761), and among the 7–7 poems he included are several that show some of the range of senryu.

The best of these poems exhibit the kind of irony that is typical of this poetic form, with occasionally a bit of wisdom as well—no one is exempt from scrutiny, including mothers, sons, daughters, poets, courtesans and their customers, courtiers, monks, and nuns.

<i>mekura musuko no chichi wo nagaku nomi</i>	the blind boy long drinks his mother's milk
<i>haha mo aware to omou hodo hore</i>	even her mother pities her— so deep in love
<i>shini sokonōte jisei shi-naosu</i>	not dying yet he revises his death poem
<i>futta tokoro ga keisei no zen</i>	turning him down is a courtesan's Zen
<i>ōmiyabito mo nomi wo taru kao</i>	even the courtier makes a face when catching a flea
<i>daisōjō no he ni oboe nashi</i>	the great monk's fart totally forgotten
<i>yudono ni sukoshi ama no onnake</i>	in the bath the nun becomes a little bit female

Of the 5–7–5 verses, the following are from the initial volume, which was published in 1750. They represent the general style and subject

matter of the anthology, including the first poem that is purportedly simply about nature but carries a human message, and the second that refers to the large radish called daikon.

<i>suzume-go no</i>	young sparrows
<i>kawaigararete</i>	being fussed over
<i>nigete yuki</i>	fly away
<i>shiba no to wo</i>	knocking on the brushwood gate
<i>daikon de tataku</i>	with a daikon—
<i>shimo no hana</i>	flowers of frost

Three poems from the second volume (published a year later) are about beauty and love, and as might be expected they each have an ironic viewpoint. Rather than being especially Japanese in spirit, these seem universal.

<i>sararetomo</i>	divorced
<i>sararetomo mada</i>	and again divorced—
<i>utsukushiki</i>	but beautiful
<i>utsukushii</i>	to the beautiful face
<i>kao de hanashi ga</i>	his talking
<i>nagaku nari</i>	goes on and on
<i>deru koi ni</i>	love leaving
<i>uchi e kuru koi</i>	passes
<i>surechigai</i>	love coming in



The second major editor of senryu anthologies was Karai Senryu (1718–90), from whom the form gained its name. His major editions include *Yanagidaru* (Willow Cask), which eventually totaled 167 volumes from 1765 to 1837, and several other series that took poems from the *Yanagidaru* and included additions, such as the *Yanagidaru shui* (Premier Willow Cask, ten volumes beginning in 1796).

Although Senryu is said to have received twenty-five thousand submissions in 1779, <sup>2</sup>his anthologies often included verses from previous compilations such as the *Mutomagawa*, so it is difficult to know when any particular senryu was first written. Furthermore, at this time senryu were almost always anonymous, so perhaps the most useful way to organize them is by subject matter.

## Parody and Professions

In senryu, no one was too lofty for parody, no matter how admired and revered. Bashō himself was occasionally the subject, as in this rather heartless takeoff on his most famous haiku.

<i>hashi no ban</i>	the bridge-keeper calls
<i>tashika ni nageta</i>	“must be another jumper” —
<i>mizu no oto</i>	the sound of water

Even the master’s death poem was made the subject of parody. In other countries, this might be considered too unkind, but in Japan it was accepted as par for the course. Here is Bashō’s poem:

<i>tabi ni yande</i>	ill from journeying
<i>yume wa karenō wo</i>	but my dreams circle
<i>kake-meguru</i>	over withered fields
—BASHŌ	

And here is the anonymous senryu:

<i>zashiki-rō</i>	stuck at home
<i>yume ni kuruwa wo</i>	my dreams circle
<i>kake-meguri</i>	to the gay quarters
—ANONYMOUS	

Although not parody in the same sense, senryu about the various professions had much of the same kind of humor. For example, doctors were fair game for satire, as were their patients.

<i>itai koto</i>	“this won’t hurt”
<i>nai to geka-dono</i>	says the surgeon
<i>hari wo dashi</i>	taking out his needle

<i>iigoke ga</i>	“she’ll become
<i>dekiru to hanasu</i>	a fine widow”—
<i>isha nakama</i>	doctors’ gossip

<i>mō shite mo</i>	I’m feeling fine now—
<i>ii no sa isha ga</i>	what do
<i>nani shitte</i>	doctors know?

Other professions treated in senryu include farmers, timber merchants, and carpenters, with the former treated the most poetically.

<i>hatake kara</i>	home from the fields
<i>senzoku hodo no</i>	enough sunshine remains
<i>hi wo amashi</i>	to wash his feet
<i>zaimokuya</i>	the timber-seller
<i>tsuite aruite</i>	follows him
<i>sora wo mise</i>	pointing upward
<i>te ni ataru</i>	whatever's at hand
<i>mono wo daiku no</i>	becomes the carpenter's
<i>makura shite</i>	pillow

## Money

A favorite topic in senryu is money, of which there is never enough, or occasionally too much. Two such poems begin with the same words, but one is more poetic with a typical haiku final line, while the other is more specific.

<i>shindai no</i>	a hole in finances
<i>ana kara shireru</i>	can be known by
<i>aki no koe</i>	autumn voices
<i>shindai no</i>	a hole in finances
<i>ana wa yane kara</i>	starts appearing
<i>miete kuru</i>	in the roof

Three more senryu are even more ironic.

<i>kari ni kita</i>	coming to borrow money
<i>toki wa shōjiki-sō</i>	he looks
<i>na kao</i>	very honest
<i>kasanu kuse</i>	rather than money
<i>iken gamashii</i>	he just offers
<i>koto wo ii</i>	advice
<i>tsukaubeki</i>	owned by the money
<i>kane ni tsukaware</i>	he should have owned
<i>oiru nari</i>	he got old

## Love and Romance

One might expect that affairs of the heart are well represented in senryu, and indeed they are, with several different points of view represented. Many aspects of love are described, often with humor's propensity to see things as they are, rather than as we might wish. In the following senryu, first there is courting and then success—one could make an entire story from this series of separate poems.

<i>kudokarete</i>	being wooed
<i>eki mo nai mono</i>	she picks up something
<i>motte miru</i>	she doesn't need
<i>ura no yo wa</i>	the second night
<i>shi-go sun chikaku</i>	she sits four or five inches
<i>kite suwari</i>	closer
<i>ashioto de</i>	hearing footsteps
<i>futatsu ni wareru</i>	it divides into two
<i>kagebōshi</i>	the shadow
<i>ii-nikui</i>	hard-to-say things
<i>koto no ii-yoi</i>	become easy to say
<i>kaya no uchi</i>	under the mosquito net

Of course, there were many senryu that stressed other aspects of male-female interactions that were anything but romantic. In the first poem below, we hear a complaint but may wonder if it is honest, while the second and third verses represent the aftermath of a love that has faded.

*tsukamaemo*  
*senu noni nigeru*  
*iyarashisa*

running away when  
I wasn't going to touch her—  
how annoying!

*horegusuri*  
*mukashi kiita wo*  
*kuyashigari*

the love potion  
that once succeeded  
he now regrets

*saiken wa*  
*yoppodo saki e*  
*yatte kai*

only when far from home  
does he buy  
the list of courtesans

## Beauty and Hips

In senryu, as often in life, beauty is not always positive. There can be a sharpness that is not always attractive, while the tears of a (young?) prostitute are just grist for the mill of her panderer. There is both irony and sadness in the following two poems.

*shō futari*  
*hamono no yō ni*  
*utsukushiki*

two concubines  
as beautiful  
as knives

*nakigao ga*  
*ano kurai da to*  
*zegen ii*

even when crying  
she looks noble  
says the pimp

With the somewhat cynical attitude that underlies many senryu, it seems that a woman's hips were often more effective in the world of romance than a beautiful face, sometimes too much so.

<i>shimete yaru</i>	tying her sash
<i>oido wo hitotsu</i>	she pats her hips once
<i>ton to home</i>	in praise

<i>koshi obi wo</i>	when the sash
<i>shimeru to koshi ga</i>	is tied
<i>ikite kuru</i>	her hips come to life

<i>kuchi kikanu</i>	onto his silent lap
<i>hiza e kuchi kiku</i>	she lowers her
<i>hiza wo nose</i>	eloquent hips

<i>machigai de</i>	the hips
<i>tataita shiri ga</i>	he patted by mistake
<i>fūjite ki</i>	send him a letter

Before leaving the world of romance, one senryu can be added that has a more romantic, and possibly plaintive, tone.

<i>sagi de sae</i>	even herons
<i>kure mutsu sugi wa</i>	after six in the evening
<i>futatsu tobi</i>	fly two by two

## Marriage

In early modern Japan, women had few rights; they were expected to stay in the family home until marriage, and tend to their husbands and children after that. Even *kanai*, one of the words for “wife,” literally means “within the house.” Yet what society tried to establish was not always what actually happened, and depending on personality and character, roles could be reversed. Behind the scenes, it was women who often held the interpersonal power, sometimes for the good of the husband, even if he couldn’t (or shouldn’t) admit it.

<i>hitokoto mo</i>	without a single word
<i>iwade naigi no</i>	my wife
<i>kachi ni nari</i>	triumphs
<i>nyōbō wo</i>	after he married
<i>motte ninsō-zura</i>	he began to look
<i>ni nari</i>	human
<i>nyōbō wo</i>	praising his wife
<i>taisetsu ni suru</i>	too much—
<i>migurushisa</i>	unseemly

Naturally, there was another side to the story. One of the most frustrating things for many a wife was her husband’s ability to spend as much time away from home as he pleased, especially when he was enjoying nature (or a drinking party with the excuse of viewing nature) without her.



<i>nyōbō no</i>	painful for a wife
<i>ku wa hana ga saki</i>	blooming cherry-blossoms
<i>tsuki ga sashi</i>	and the shining moon

<i>tsuki ochi</i>	moon setting
<i>karasu naite nyōbō</i>	crows calling
<i>hara wo tate</i>	wife seething

## Entertainment and Umbrellas

Senryu depict various aspects of the entertainment world, including different forms of theater as they became more and more important in early modern Japanese society. There were the stately Noh drama from the past, the exquisite puppet plays of Bunraku, and most notably the newly popular Kabuki theater. Senryu went about deflating the pretentious and gently mocking the earnest, usually without the sense of celebration that contemporary wood-block prints of similar subjects tended to provide. In addition, as literacy grew quickly among the populace, wood-block books became part of everyday life, including novels and poetry compilations of all kinds.

<i>gakuya de wa</i>	backstage
<i>Yoritomo-kō no</i>	Lord Yoritomo
<i>heya wa nashi</i>	has no dressing room

*yaku-busoku*  
*darake shiroto no*  
*shibai jami*

everyone unhappy  
with their roles—  
amateur theater

*kōshaku no*  
*teki wa ashita e*  
*nige-nobite*

in the story  
the enemy escapes  
into tomorrow

While entertainment was a frequent subject of senryu, another subject that turns up more than one might expect is the umbrella. Colorful, waxed-paper Japanese umbrellas were later to be highly admired in the West, but to senryu poets they provided the opportunity to make interesting juxtapositions. The first two of these verses show how umbrellas could strengthen or reveal an emotion, the third implies a romance, while the fourth has a striking visual sense of an artisan gradually enclosing himself in his work.

<i>karakasa de</i>	when I go out
<i>deru hi wa kowai</i>	with my umbrella
<i>mono ga nashi</i>	nothing scares me
<i>hara tatte</i>	going out angry—
<i>deru karakasa wa</i>	the umbrella opens
<i>hirakisugi</i>	too far
<i>ototoi no</i>	the shower from
<i>shigure wo modosu</i>	the day before yesterday—
<i>kasa nihon</i>	returned by two umbrellas
<i>shimai ni wa</i>	his face
<i>kao hari nakusu</i>	finally disappears—
<i>karakasa-ya</i>	the umbrella maker

## Nature, Animals, and Religion

Although one of the characteristics of senryu is the focus upon humanity, there are also examples that center on nature. Some of these senryu are indistinguishable from haiku; they remind us that the difference between these poetic forms is not absolute, but rather a sliding scale where a poem may be either haiku or senryu, or both, to any degree.

*akatsuki no  
koe wo kiki-suru  
mine no matsu*

listening to  
the voices of dawn—  
mountain pines

*kumo wo haki  
kumo wo suikomu  
mine no matsu*

breathing out clouds,  
breathing in clouds—  
pine trees on the peak

*yuki ni neta  
take wo asahi ga  
yuriokoshi*

sleeping in the snow  
the bamboo is shaken awake  
by the morning sun

*shini-yō wo  
sakura ni narae  
kiku no hana*

chrysanthemums—  
learn from cherry-blossoms  
how to die

Similarly, with animals, senryu are at times very close to haiku, but at other times the sense of irony is quite strong. Moving from mainly haiku to fully senryu are the following three verses:

*yoru mireba  
me bakari aruku  
karasu-neko*

when seen at night  
only his eyes are walking—  
black cat

<i>mekura uma</i>	the blind horse
<i>mino no sawareba</i>	touched by the straw coat
<i>kuchi wo ake</i>	opens his mouth
<i>ureshisa ya</i>	so happy
<i>ki ni tsukiataru</i>	the freed bird
<i>hanashidori</i>	collides with a tree

The next three verses similarly move in the same direction toward pure irony. Nature in Japan is very close to religion, so senryu on this topic sometimes combine the two, while at other times they simply note hypocrisy.

<i>ki no tsukanu</i>	singing so well
<i>tera ni yoku naku</i>	in the neglected temple—
<i>kirigirisu</i>	the katydid
<i>furudera ya</i>	old temple—
<i>ayumeba ugoku</i>	when I walk by
<i>hotoke tachi</i>	the buddhas move
<i>Hokekyō no</i>	chanting the <i>Lotus Sutra</i>
<i>kuchibiru bakari</i>	only his lips
<i>isogashiki</i>	are busy

## Human Foolishness and Human Nature

A very high percentage of senryu are about human foolishness. Some are simple observations, and may lead us to realize that we are no different from the people being mocked. We can also note

that the next poem has 3–9–5 syllables; the “rules” are certainly not “laws.”

<i>ki ni wa</i>	saying not to worry
<i>kakerarena to kakeru</i>	he says something
<i>koto wo ii</i>	worrisome

Three more senryu also focus upon the difference between what we think of ourselves and what we really are like.

<i>fuyu no tsuki</i>	the winter moon—
<i>hometarikeri de</i>	he praises it
<i>batari tate</i>	and shuts the window

<i>mono omou</i>	as I think things over
<i>mukō wo tōru</i>	across the way
<i>katatsumuri</i>	passes a snail

<i>ato no kusame</i>	looking foolish
<i>wo matte iru</i>	while awaiting
<i>baka na tsura</i>	another sneeze

On the other hand, senryu can also explore those moments when we are more in tune with ourselves, sometimes in ways that reveal the manner in which we live our lives.

*gyōzui no*  
*to wo seki de*  
*osaeru*

bathing  
he shuts the door  
with a cough

*fukikeseba*  
*waga mi ni modoru*  
*kagebōshi*

blowing out the lamp—  
my shadow  
returns to my body

In two verses about women, one may find unexpected triumph and loss, the tables may be turned, and at the end one may find a wry smile.

*yome no koto*  
*shūtome miburi*  
*shite hanashi*

she talks about  
her daughter-in-law  
with gestures

*nido karita*  
*kosode wo morau*  
*katamiwake*

she inherits  
a robe she had  
twice borrowed

As we can see, senryu tend to find humor in turning things around and taking a different point of view—husbands may be weaker than their wives, animals may not act as we expect, and religiosity may be a sham—but this form of verse is not just negative. For example, children are generally treated in a sympathetic manner. If there are problems, they may not be the child's fault, a parent may gain a wider acquaintanceship, and, poignantly, a toy may become unexpectedly useful.

<i>narōta wo</i>	what he had learned
<i>ato no shishō ni</i>	was only a nuisance
<i>jamagarare</i>	for his next teacher
<i>ko wo motte</i>	having a child
<i>kinjo no inu no</i>	and learning the names
<i>na wo oboe</i>	of neighborhood dogs
<i>mayoigo no</i>	searching for
<i>onoga taiko de</i>	the lost child
<i>tazunerare</i>	with his own drum

In conclusion, senryu formed an important part of Japanese culture. Haiku alone could not express every kind of human experience, every shade of human feeling, or every aspect of human thought. These verses, whether sympathetic or (more often) satiric, include many aspects of human nature, sometimes the simple surprise of noticing something for the first time. Above all, senryu make us more aware of the life that we lead, and finally, how even in violent actions there may be humor.

<i>miken kizu</i>	when the wound
<i>heiyu suru to</i>	on his face was healed
<i>kubi ga ochi</i>	he was beheaded

## Zen and Haiku

It may seem a far leap from senryu to Zen, from the shallower waters of irony and satire to the depths of a profound spiritual tradition. Yet senryu and Zen haiku have several features in common, such as seldom including a seasonal word and often omitting references to



nature. One major difference, however, is that senryu rarely inspired paintings to accompany the poems, while Zen haiku were often used as inscriptions on images. Another even more important difference is that senryu look at life from the outside, whereas Zen haiku focus on the inside.

The relation of Zen to haiku is often debated, especially since R. H. Blyth gave it such prominence in his many books on haiku and senryu. <sup>3</sup>On one hand, Bashō himself studied Zen seriously, as did several of his followers, and one may interpret Bashō's poems in a Zen context, as did Robert Aitken. <sup>4</sup>On the other hand, most haiku poets did not study Zen; many of them followed other Buddhist sects, Taoism, Shintoism, or Confucianism, and some professed no religion at all.

Furthermore, when Zen masters themselves created haiga, it was often to reach a wider audience with their teachings; until the modern period they generally did not write haiku as an avocation. So is the Zen influence in this form of poetry exaggerated? Or is the issue more complex?

It may help to consider that the word "Zen" has come to have two meanings. First it is usually a noun, referring to the specific sect of Buddhism that stresses meditation and finding one's inner Buddha-nature. Its second usage is more amorphous; it is usually an adjective, and tends to mean "natural," "simple," "peaceful," "focused," and "unworldly." Both meanings relate to haiku, the first in some specific cases and the second more broadly.

In pursuing this question, first we can examine some haiku by Bashō in order to investigate the Zen influence or Zen spirit in his poems. Next we can present some haiga by Zen masters, and finally we can discuss more broadly the influence of Zen in Japanese culture, and therefore also in haiku.

## Bashō and Zen

Using his haiku as guideposts, there are some factors that ally Bashō and Zen. On his travels, he shaved his head and wore a monk's robe, but he considered himself somewhere between a monastic and a layperson; he jestingly called himself a bat—between a bird and a mouse. <sup>5</sup>A number of his poems mention Buddhism, but not always specifically Zen. For example, in one haiku he mentions the *nembutsu*, which is the chant to Amida Buddha of the Pure Land sect.

<i>yo ni sakaru</i>	to blossoming cherries
<i>hana ni mo nembutsu</i>	we also recite
<i>mōshi keri</i>	the <i>nembutsu</i>

It is significant that the poet here combines his love of nature with the religious mantra.

Other haiku of Bashō mention Buddhism without being specific as to the sect. <sup>6</sup>In general, he seems to have a broad conception of Buddhism that could be understood by any of his readers.

<i>kanbutsu no</i>	Buddha's birthday—
<i>hi ni umare-au</i>	a dappled fawn
<i>kanoko kana</i>	is born

There are some Bashō haiku, however, that suggest Zen more strongly, for example this reference to the “unblown flute.”

<i>Sumadera ya</i>	Suma Temple—
<i>fukanu fue kiku</i>	hearing the unblown flute
<i>ko shita yami</i>	in the shade of the trees <sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting Zen influence in Bashō's poetry comes when there is no overt religious reference, but the haiku resonates with Zen spirit. Bashō himself commented that haiku "is simply what is happening here and now," <sup>8</sup>—and according to his pupil Dohō, he advised, "Attain a high stage of enlightenment and return to the world of common men." <sup>9</sup>—In Bashō's haiku, the everyday, the "just this" of Zen, is convincingly presented through his ability to take the ordinary world and perceive unexpected images and interactions.

<i>ika-uri no</i>	the squid-seller's voice
<i>koe magirawashi</i>	mixed with that of
<i>hototogisu</i>	the cuckoo
<i>takotsubo ya</i>	octopus pot—
<i>hakanaki yume wo</i>	transient dreams
<i>natsu no tsuki</i>	in summer moonlight
<i>fuyugare ya</i>	withered in winter—
<i>yo wa hito iro ni</i>	in a single-color world
<i>kaze no oto</i>	the sound of wind
<i>niwa hakite</i>	sweeping the garden
<i>yuki wo wasururu</i>	forgetting the snow—
<i>habaki kana</i>	the broom

Finally, we can consider a haiku by Bashō that adds a touch of humor, often a feature of Zen, to keep the poet and his readers from feeling too self-important.

*inazuma ni*  
*satoranu hito no*  
*tōtosa yo*

how honorable the person  
who doesn't feel enlightened  
when seeing lightning

## Haiga by Hakuin and Other Zen Masters

As mentioned above, Zen masters did not tend to write haiku very frequently until the modern era, but some monks added haiku inscriptions to their paintings. The pioneer in this field, as in many others, was Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768), who has been recognized as the most important Zen master of the past five hundred years. It was Hakuin who invented the koan “What is the sound of one hand?” (the Japanese does not include a word for “clapping”). He also taught many monk and lay followers, wrote a number of books, gave frequent public lectures, and created several thousand Zen paintings (*zenga*) and works of calligraphy. In the process Hakuin not only painted traditional Zen subjects, such as the First Patriarch Daruma, but invented so many new themes (including everyday activities, images from folklore, birds, animals, and insects) that he created a new visual language for Zen. [10](#)

Although Hakuin wrote Chinese poems as well as Japanese tanka, he also composed haiku that he inscribed on some of his paintings, often with more Buddhist meanings than they first suggest. One humorous haiga by Hakuin shows Hotei, the happy-go-lucky wandering monk and god of good fortune, flying through the air as a kite, with its string held by five small figures ([Plate 5-1](#)). Hakuin often painted Hotei in various guises, and this scroll shows one of the unique contexts that he invented for the blackrobed laughing Buddha. In spidery calligraphy, Hakuin added a haiku that suggests the English phrase, “It’s a dog’s life.”

*unu ga mama ni  
yaranu ga ika no  
inochi kana*

you can't just do  
anything you want—  
it's a squid's life

The strong diagonals of the painting and poem give the haiga a sense of movement, but is Hotei truly free, as he seems to break forth from the kite, or is he still tied by the string to this world? As an enlightened monk, Hotei should be liberated, but still, “it's a squid's life.”

Some of Hakuin's painting designs were published during his own lifetime in a small wood-block book, another way in which he could reach out to a broader public. <sup>11</sup>One of these designs is a portrait of Bashō with his “old pond” poem and Hakuin's laudatory inscription in Chinese: “A linked-verse master and haikai expert, he heard a frog jump into the water and dropped off mind and body.”

Another haiga by Hakuin, *Monkey and Cuckoo*, represents his most famous teaching. The work is painted in gray ink except for black accents depicting the monkey's face and feet, plus darker gray for the cuckoo. The image might seem to symbolize the “hear no evil” theme, but Hakuin turns this idea upside down ([Plate 5-2](#)). Here the monkey refuses to listen to the song of a cuckoo flying above him, but the inscription says:

*kikazu to mo  
katate wageyo  
hototogisu*

even when not listening,  
lift up one hand—  
the cuckoo!

The sound of the cuckoo has long been celebrated in Japan, in part because it is one of the rare birds that sings as it flies. But what of the monkey? Instead of simply not hearing evil, this little creature is cutting himself off from the world, avoiding any chance for an

enlightening moment. As Hakuin suggests, it's much better to hear the sound of one hand.

## Hakuin's Followers

Hakuin's direct pupils carried his teachings to many of the most important temples in Japan, and over time it was the Hakuin tradition that reestablished Rinzai Zen as a powerful force in Japanese Buddhism. His pupils and followers also continued his ink-painting tradition, including haiga, although they did not often make major new steps beyond what Hakuin had created. His pupil Reigen Etō (1721–85), for example, often utilized haiga themes by Hakuin, including the unusual subject of a gun ([Plate 5-3](#)). Here the poem depends on the understanding that guns were imported through the island of Tanegashima.

<i>pon to iu</i>	the sound of a gun
<i>oto wa jigoku no</i>	is the Tanegashima entrance
<i>Tanegashima</i>	to hell

Reigen painted the gun horizontally in gray ink tones that include a drybrush stroke on the left. Within the divided composition, the gun looks as though it had been consigned to the lowest reaches of the format, far from the vertically arranged haiku calligraphy above it. Since in most *zenga* the interrelationship of the painting and the poem is significant, this use of empty space between words and image is a deliberate element in the visual experience created by Reigen.

Another direct pupil of Hakuin, Suiō Genro (1717–89), portrayed an ax in a haiga where the relationship of text and image is quite different ([Plate 5-4](#)). Although there is a good deal of space between the poem and the ax blade, the handle of the ax completes the diagonal downward flow of the calligraphy, moving the viewer's eye to the serrated blade. Suiō adds a sense of life to the entire work

through the varied ink tones for the handle, the blade, and the calligraphy—nothing more is needed.

There are several possible interpretations for the haiku, showing just how multivarious Zen haiga can become—*yoki* can mean both goodness and hand ax, and *wariki* can be both evil (*warui*) and split firewood. [12](#)

<i>waga yoki ni</i>	this ax of mine
<i>hito no wariki wa</i>	chops away people's
<i>nakimono zo</i>	wickedness

The early nineteenth century Zen master Sengai Gibon (1750–1837) was second only to Hakuin in inventing new painting subjects, and his charm and humor are unique. At one point he created delightful responses to Bashō's celebrated poem, inscribing his scrolls of a frog and a banana plant (*bashō*) with senryu-like haiku:

<i>furu ike ya</i>	old pond—
<i>nani yarapon to</i>	something has PLOP!
<i>tobikonda</i>	jumped in

<i>furu ike ya</i>	old pond—
<i>Bashō tobikomū</i>	Bashō jumps in
<i>mizu no oto</i>	the sound of water

<i>ike naraba</i>	if there were a pond
<i>tobite Bashō ni</i>	I'd jump in
<i>kikasetai</i>	for Bashō to hear!

The well-known Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki commented that these verses “are not to be understood as mere parodies; they are in truth comments from [Sengai’s] Zen viewpoint.” <sup>13</sup> Suzuki also wrote about the original haiku that “Bashō’s mind penetrated into the secrets of creation and captured the whole universe from the beginningless beginning to the endless end.” <sup>14</sup> Is Sengai being disrespectful? Without trying to explain away his humor (never a worthy task), we can note that he himself takes an increasingly active role in the poems.

A contemporary of Sengai was the hermit monk-poet Daigu (or Taigu) Ryōkan (1758–1831). While Sengai lived in the warm southern island of Kyushu, Ryōkan spent most of his life in the chilly northwest of Japan. Instead of a temple, he preferred living in a small hut in the mountains, from which he could go out to wander, beg, or play with children. Most of his poems are either tanka or written in Chinese, but he also wrote haiku, including the following:

<i>taku hodo wa</i>	enough for a fire—
<i>kaze ga mote kuru</i>	the wind has blown me
<i>ochiba kana</i>	maple leaves

Ryōkan became so beloved in his Echigo District that poems such as this were carved into stone stelae, reproduced exactly from his highly admired calligraphy. This meant that ordinary people could not only enjoy the poems, but also make rubbings. Here the haiku was composed in three descending columns using a form of script (*man’yōgana*) in which a Chinese character is used for each Japanese sound, with Ryōkan’s signature in the lower left ([Plate 5-5](#)). The tonal variations in the dark background of the rubbing add an extra sense of life to the gentle but confident cursive-script calligraphy.

Other haiku by Ryōkan include one written when his little hut on the mountain was robbed.



<i>nusubito ni</i>	left behind
<i>torinokosareshi</i>	by the thief—
<i>mado no tsuki</i>	the moon at my window

Ryōkan could also express in haiku both his understanding of the connections between nature and humanity, and his acceptance of life as always the same, and always different.

<i>nabe migaku</i>	blending with the sounds
<i>oto ni magiruru</i>	of scouring the cooking pot—
<i>amagaeru</i>	tree-frogs

<i>taorureba</i>	when they fall
<i>taoruru mama no</i>	and just as they fall—
<i>niwa no kusa</i>	garden grasses

## Conclusion

There is yet one more issue on the relationship of Zen and haiku, and that is the broader question of Zen and Japanese culture. During Japan's medieval period, which ended around 1600, Zen became the dominant cultural force. Zen monks served as advisers to the government, were in charge of much of the education, created ink paintings that were considered appropriate for palaces and fine homes as well as temples, and even led trading missions to China. During this period, Zen strongly influenced many Japanese arts including everything from garden design to the tea ceremony, and ideals such as *wabi* (rustic simplicity), *sabi* (withered elegance), and *yūgen* (mysterious beauty) had an impact on many aspects of Japanese life.

The Tokugawa government moved away from strong sponsorship of Zen during the seventeenth century, but it was still from this medieval context that haiku grew to be a major form of literature. This meant that even poets who had no direct connection to Zen were nevertheless influenced by it. To see how far this influence extended, we can compare Zen aesthetics to those of haiku. Both emphasize seeing the world as it is, right here and right now, rather than the past, the future, or the wished-for. Both find beauty and meaning in the ordinary, rather than the special, the ornate, or the elaborate. Both are experiential rather than theoretical or intellectual. Both go beyond the ego to a state of selflessness. Both feature their own kind of humor, albeit more paradoxical in Zen and more subtle and gentle in haiku. Both shy away from telling in favor of discovering. Finally, both favor simplicity and terse expression, as exemplified in the Zen phrase: “Nothing missing, nothing in excess.”

The fact that these parallels exist does not, of course, prove a direct transmission or even influence. But considering the cultural fabric in which Bashō, the avatar of haiku, grew up, and his own studies of Zen—as well as the significant points they have in common—at least a certain amount of influence from Zen can be inferred in haiku. When we add the haiku and haiga created by Zen masters, the connection can be established even more fully. This is not to say that all haiku are Zen, but rather that haiku came of age in a Zen-influenced context, and the two cannot be completely separated.

# 6

## Buson

IN BOTH EAST ASIA and the Western world, a number of painters have written poetry, and a smaller number of poets have painted, but it is exceedingly rare to have one person become a truly major figure in both arts. Yet such is the case with Yosa Buson (1716–84), who is regarded as one of the greatest literati and haiga painters in Japanese history, and is considered second only to Bashō as a haiku master.

### Early Life and Poetry

Born in a village outside Osaka in the last month of 1716 (which becomes 1717 in the Western calendar), Buson seems to have lost both parents at a young age. <sup>1</sup>He moved to Edo in 1736 or 1737, where he is said to have squandered his inheritance and perhaps trained briefly as an actor. <sup>2</sup>Broadening his education, he attended lectures by the Confucian scholar and Chinese-style poet Hattori Nankaku (1683–1759), as well as studying haiku as a live-in pupil of Hayano Hajin (also known as Sōa, 1677–1742), who had been a pupil of Bashō's followers Kikaku and Ransetsu. Significantly, Hajin, also known as the Master of Yahantei (midnight pavilion), told Buson not to follow any teacher too closely but to change his style by time and occasion, setting it apart from the past and the future. <sup>3</sup>

Buson also seems to have been influenced by Sakaki Hyakusen (1698–1753), a haiku poet who had studied with Otsuyū, and who also painted in the Chinese-derived literati style. This combination of Chinese and Japanese studies was very important to Buson, who saw no barrier between the two despite their differences; he later recommended the study of Chinese poetry to his own followers. <sup>4</sup> Again, the most important point was to develop one's own style;

Buson commented that Hyakusen had studied with Otsuyū but did not try to imitate him, while he himself followed the Kikaku tradition without trying to copy Kikaku. <sup>5</sup>

Like other haiku masters, Buson wrote other forms of poetry such as linked verse and in his case a few longer poems, but his great success came through haiku. Only a few of Buson's earliest efforts in this form remain, including this poem for a New Year's album. <sup>6</sup>

<i>shirami toru</i>	the beggar's wife
<i>kojiki no tsuma ya</i>	plucking off his lice—
<i>ume ga moto</i>	under the plum tree
—1739	

What is the connection between the two parts of this poem? Solely the contrast between the beauty of the plum blossoms and the unattractive lice? Or is there some sense of familial affection and the new possibilities of springtime?

The following year, Buson went to Shimōsa and wrote a haiku with the headnote: “Waiting for the springtime in the foothills of Mount Tsukuba.” This time the cutting word *ya* (indicating a pause) appears after the first line rather than after the second, giving a different rhythm to the poem.

<i>yuku toshi ya</i>	the year is ending—
<i>akuta nagaruru</i>	rubbish floats down
<i>Sakuragawa</i>	Cherry-Blossom River <sup>7</sup>
—1740	

After Hayano Hajin died in 1742, Buson spent the next decade sojourning and wandering north of Edo in the spirit of Bashō, and in fact he re-traced Bashō's famous northern journey of 1689 during

this time. Not too surprisingly, one of Buson's extant haiku of this period borrows the last line of a haiku from the *Oku no hosomichi*.

<i>aki suzushi</i>	autumn cool—
<i>tegoto ni muke ya</i>	hands busy peeling
<i>uri nasubi</i>	melons and eggplants <sup>8</sup>
—BASHŌ, 1689 <sup>9</sup>	

<i>mizuoke ni</i>	in the bucket
<i>unazuki-au ya</i>	bowing to each other—
<i>uri nasubi</i>	melons and eggplants
—BUSON, BEFORE 1748	

Another Buson haiku from this period has an even more complex pedigree. Saigyō had written a tanka about a willow tree at Ashino on his northeastern journey:

<i>Michinobe ni</i>	Along the roadside
<i>shimizu nagaruru</i>	a clear stream flows
<i>yanagi kage</i>	in the shade of a willow—
<i>shibashi to te koso</i>	I paused for a short rest
<i>tachidomaritsure</i>	and I am still here <sup>10</sup>
—SAIGYŌ	

Visiting the same scene in 1689, Bashō wrote an ensuing haiku:

*ta ichimai*                      an entire field planted  
*uete tachisaru*                before I would leave  
*yanagi kana*                    the willow  
—BASHŌ

Buson was also aware that the great Chinese poet Su Shih (1036–1101) had famously visited the Red Cliff twice, the second time seeing the water level low and rocks sticking out. Buson then responded with his own haiku:

*yanagi chiri*                      willow bare,  
*shimizu kare ishi*                stream dried up  
*tokorodokoro*                    rocks here and there  
—BEFORE 1752

Why so pessimistic? Perhaps he simply recorded what he saw, but there is certainly the implication that for Buson, the great poetic ages of Saigyō and Bashō were gone.

While working seriously on haiku at this point in his life, Buson seems to have supported himself at least partly through painting, although he was by no means the master artist he would later become. In any event, he moved to Kyoto in 1751, where he first lived in Zen monasteries, shaving his head and wearing black robes.

In 1754, Buson moved again, this time to the temple Kenshō-ji in Tango Province (Yosa District), near where his mother had been born. He seems to have devoted much of his efforts during this period to painting, especially literati-style landscapes but also figures and bird-and-flower subjects. As late as 1757, he regarded himself as following the official Kanō school of painting, but was already moving toward the literati style. He compared himself with Hyakusen,

writing in a haibun that “we have ventured into virgin territory in art, not being afraid of falling into a stream that might be hidden there.” [11](#)

Buson returned to Kyoto in late 1757, and other than a few subsequent journeys, Kyoto was his home for the rest of his life. A year after his return to the city, he officially changed his family name from “Taniguchi” to “Yosa.” Buson was earning an income both from teaching poetry and from his paintings, but still found ample time for his own haiku, which began to flow in ever-greater abundance over the next few decades. He formed his first haiku group in Kyoto in 1766, but was listed in the *Heian jimbutsumi* (Who’s Who in Kyoto) in 1768 as a painter. Finally becoming settled, around the age of 45 or 46 he married a woman named Tomo (d. 1814) and they had one child, a daughter called Kuno.

Buson’s haiku during this time had an interesting range of themes, sometimes traditional but often with a new and inventive touch.

*sararetaru*  
*mi wo fungonde*  
*taue kana*

—1758

although divorced  
she goes into his field  
to help plant rice

*akikaze no*  
*ugokashite yuku*  
*kakashi kana*

—1760

the autumn wind  
stirs a scarecrow  
and moves on

*sarudono no*  
*yo samutoi yuku*  
*usagi kana*

—BEFORE 1761

visiting Mr. Monkey  
on a cold night—  
a rabbit

*haru no umi*  
*hinemosu notari*  
*notari kana*

—1762

spring ocean—  
all day rising and falling  
rising and falling

*kaminari ni*  
*koya wa yakurete*  
*uri no hana*

—1766

by the small house  
struck by lightning—  
melon flowers



<i>waga sono no</i>	picking my own
<i>makuwa mo nusumu</i>	garden's melon
<i>kokoro kana</i>	I feel like a thief
—1766	

The *notari notari* of the fourth poem is an early indication of Buson's occasional fondness for repetition, here appropriate to the rising and falling of ocean waves.

## Poems from 1768 and 1769

An even more clear use of repetition and onomatopoeia occurs in one of a number of poems Buson composed, or at least published, in 1768. It refers to the sound of women pounding (fulling) cloth, one of the distinctive features of autumn in the countryside.

<i>ochikochi</i>	far and near,
<i>ochikochi to utsu</i>	far and near, the beating
<i>kinuta kana</i>	of fulling blocks
—1768	

Many writers have speculated that since Buson was a painter, his haiku should stress the visual—but to what degree is this actually the case? [12](#) The previous poem features sound, but most of Buson's poems, like the majority of haiku in general, stem from the act of seeing. This selection from 1768 and 1769 begins with spring poems, some of which are perhaps more melancholy than usual for this season of rebirth.

*yamadori no  
o wo fumu haru no  
irihi kana*

—1769

treading on  
the tail of a pheasant—  
the setting spring sun

*Fuji hitotsu  
uzumi nokoshite  
wakaba kana*

—1769

Fuji alone  
remains unburied—  
young leaves

*nashi no hana  
tsuki ni fumi yomu  
onna ari*

—1769

pear-tree blossoms—  
a woman reads a letter  
in the moonlight

*yama-oroshi  
sanae wo nadete  
yuku e kana*

—1768

mountain winds  
come down to stroke  
the young rice seedlings

*kyō nomi no  
haru wo aruite  
shimaikeri*

—1769

the last day of spring  
ended  
by my stroll

In several other haiku, Buson adds a touch of humor to cheer up any sense of melancholy.

*yuku haru ya*  
*me ni awanu megane*  
*ushinainu*

—1769

spring passes—  
the glasses that don't fit my eyes  
are lost

*sumiuri ni*  
*kagami misetaru*  
*onna kana*

—1768

a woman's mirror  
shows the charcoal-seller  
his face

*katatsumuri*  
*nani omou tsuno no*  
*naga mijika*

—1768

the snail  
with one horn long and one short—  
what is he thinking?

*makumajiki*  
*sumai wo*  
*nemonogatari kana*

—1768

pillow talk—  
the sumo bout  
he shouldn't have lost

In these same years, summer and (especially) autumn led Buson to several of his more celebrated visual haiku, some again with a wistful mood. The summer poems include two in which moments in the ordinary life of a stonemason come alive in haiku with the same first and third lines.

*mijika yo ya*  
*kemushi no ue ni*  
*tsuyu no tama*

—1769

the night is short—  
on the caterpillar,  
beads of dew

*ishigiri no*  
*tobihi nagaruru*  
*shimizu kana*

—1768

the stonemason's  
flying sparks flow away—  
clear waters

*ishigiri no*  
*nomi hiyashitaru*  
*shimizu kana*

—1768

the stonemason  
cools his chisel—  
clear waters

Autumn is a time equally for admiring the harvest moon and regretting the loss of summer; one of Buson's haiku captures a sad moment with a surprising matter-of-factness.

*meigetsu ni*  
*inukoro suteru*  
*shimobe kana*

—1768

under the harvest moon  
a manservant goes out  
to discard a puppy

An almost opposite mood comes from another poem of the same year.

*shi go nin ni*  
*tsuki ochikakaru*  
*odori kana*

—1768

the moonlight begins to fall  
on four or five people—  
dancing

Buson's usual view of nature from autumn to winter was by no means always this benign. He wrote several haiku about autumn storms (*nowaki*) and fallen petals or leaves, as well as about withered grasses; the second-to-last poem in this series suggests a Shinto source.

*kō no su no*  
*ajiro ni kakaru*  
*nowaki kana*

—1768

the swan's nest  
caught in a fish trap—  
autumn storm

*sendō no*  
*sao toraretaru*  
*nowaki kana*

—1768

the ferryman's pole  
seized—  
autumn storm

*nishi fukeba*                      when it blows from the west  
*higashi ni tamaru*            they gather in the east—  
*ochiba kana*                    fallen leaves

—1769

*botan chirite*                    from the fallen peony  
*uchikasanarinu*               lying on each other,  
*ni san pen*                        two or three petals

—1769

*kusa karete*                    grasses withered  
*kitsune no hikyaku*           a fox-messenger  
*tōrikeri*                         passes by

—1769

*kanashisa ya*                    sadness—  
*tsuri no ito fuku*               a fishing line blown  
*aki no kaze*                    in the autumn wind

—1774

Interestingly, Buson changed the first line of the final poem to “the river spreads out,” but was advised by his student Takai Kitō (1741–89) at a poetry meeting to go back to “sadness.” [13](#)

Winter brings its own violent weather as well as the irony of both flowers and a sandal lost to nature. The last of these three poems comes close to echoing the first line of Bashō’s most famous haiku.

*kogarashi ya*  
*hita-to tsumazuku*  
*modori kana*

—1769

winter winds—  
suddenly stumbling,  
the returning horse

*fuyukawa ya*  
*hotoke no hana no*  
*nagarekuru*

—1768

winter river—  
flowers once offered to Buddha  
come floating by

*furu ike ni*  
*zōri shizumite*  
*mizore kana*

—1769

in the old pond  
a submerged straw sandal—  
sleet

There is a sound-play between *ni zōri* and *mizore* in the Japanese that adds additional interest to the last of these poems.

The strong visual sense in these verses bolsters the idea that Buson's painting perceptivities carried over into haiku. Further support comes from the way Buson mentions colors, directly or indirectly, in a number of poems from these same two years.

*byakuren wo*  
*kiran to zo omou*  
*sō no sama*

—1768

*kimi yuku ya*  
*yanagi midori ni*  
*michi nagashi*

—1769

*cha no hana ya*  
*shiro ni mo ki ni mo*  
*obotsu kana*

—1768

deciding  
to cut a white lotus—  
a monk

you are leaving—  
in the green of the willows  
the road is long

tea-plant flowers—  
whether white or yellow  
is uncertain



*noji no ume*  
*shiroku mo akaku mo*  
*aranu kana*

—1769

plum blossoms along  
the path through the fields  
not quite red or white

*asagao ya*  
*ichirin fukaki*  
*fuchi no iro*

—1768

morning glory—  
a single blossom the color  
of a deep pool

*tombo ya*  
*mura natsukashiki*  
*kabe no iro*

—1768

dragonflies—  
in my longed-for village  
the color of walls

Even more closely tied in with Buson's paintings are three haiku relating directly to his art and its appurtenances.

*kiku no tsuyu*  
*ukete suzuri no*  
*inochi kana*

—1769

receiving the dew  
from chrysanthemums—  
the inkstone comes to life

*asagiri ya*  
*e ni kaku yume no*  
*hitodōri*

—1769

morning mist—  
painting a dream  
of people passing by

*tesusabi no*  
*uchiwa egakan*  
*kusa no shiru*

—1768

just for fun  
I'll paint on a round fan  
with the juice of grasses

So far there seems to be ample evidence that Buson the painter had a strong influence upon Buson the poet. However, by careful selection of which haiku to include, almost anything can be suggested, if not proven. For example, although Buson was not known to have been a musician, a number of his haiku from the same two years are based upon listening rather than seeing. Several of these recall Bashō's famous frog poem, which Buson alluded to at various stages of his life.

*furu ido ya  
ka ni tobu io no  
oto kurashi*

—1768

old well—  
the dark sound of a fish  
jumping at mosquitoes

*tori naite  
mizuoto kureru  
ajiro kana*

—1768

as a bird calls out  
the sound of water darkens—  
wicker fish trap

*sara wo fumu  
nezumi no oto no  
samusa kana*

—1769

the sound of rats  
walking on dishes—  
the coldness

*tori mare ni  
mizu mata tōshi  
semi no koe*

—1768

birds rarely seen  
waters also distant—  
cicada voices

*asagiri ya  
kuize utsu oto  
chō-chō tari*

—1769

morning mist—  
someone driving in a stake  
“cho-cho”

*samidare no  
utsubobashira ya  
oi no mimi*

—1769

fifth-month rains  
falling down the drainpipe—  
my old ears

These six haiku could be used to establish that Buson as a poet was especially drawn to sounds rather than sights, but this is plainly false.

It does suggest, however, that critics should be very careful in drawing conclusions from only a selection of haiku, and that as a great master, Buson did not limit himself to the visual. The most one may say at this point is that he was often more precise in his imagery than Bashō, who seems to have been more content to suggest rather than define his experiences.

## The 1770s

The 1770s marked the full maturation of Buson as poet and artist. <sup>14</sup> In 1770 he succeeded to a haiku studio called Yahantei, which had been idle since the death of Hayano Hajin in 1742. Although Buson seemed to have been somewhat reluctant to take on the added responsibility of heading the Yahantei School, he used this name as a signature for some of his haiga, and it marked another step in his career as a haiku master.

Buson made several rules for his school. He said that the stylistic models for the poets should be Kikaku, Ransetsu, Kyorai, and Sodō—all true pupils of Bashō, whose tradition was being “altered and debased” by other poets of the time. Haiku should spring from admiring the moon and enjoying blossoms, thus causing the mind to move beyond the world of dust. More specifically, when the poets met as a group, everyone should speak up in discussions, without flattery, intimidation, or ridicule. <sup>15</sup>

This kind of democratic process was quite different from some other haiku schools, where the leader was the primary (or only) judge. It also reaffirmed Buson’s central commitment to Bashō, which was to appear in several manifestations during this decade. For example, Buson and his friends renovated a hermitage named Bashō-an (Bashō’s Hut) in the hills of northeastern Kyoto, of which Buson wrote a short account in 1776. He gave the hut’s history and described it as “a quiet, secluded place, where it is said that the green moss has buried the traces of human beings for some hundred years, but the deep bamboo grove seems like it is enveloped in the smoke of a tea fire. Streams flow, clouds linger, the trees are ancient, birds sleep,

and the sense of the past is powerful . . . in the end I talked about it with like-minded friends and we rebuilt the hut.” [16](#)

Several haiku by Buson were written at Bashō’s Hut, including two that use the image of a cloud first spreading and then gone—do they refer to Bashō’s influence on haiku poetry?

<i>fuyu chikashi</i>	winter is near
<i>shigure no kumo mo</i>	the shower-clouds also
<i>koki yori zo</i>	spread out from here
—1777	

<i>hata utsu ya</i>	tilling the field—
<i>ugokanu kumo mo</i>	the unmoving cloud
<i>naku narinu</i>	has disappeared
—1778	

<i>ware mo shi shite</i>	when I die
<i>hi no hotori sen</i>	put my tombstone next to his—
<i>kare obana</i>	dried pampas-grasses
—1777	

In addition, a few of Buson’s other haiku from the 1770s make direct or indirect references to the master and his poetic legacy, some quite pessimistically.

*furu ike no*                      the old pond's frog  
*kawazu oi yuku*                has grown old—  
*ochiba kana*                    fallen leaves

—N.D.

*hosomichi wo*                    the narrow road  
*uzumimi mo yaranu*            almost completely covered  
*ochiba kana*                    by falling leaves

—1770(?)

*Bashō satte*                      Bashō is gone  
*sono nochi imada*                and since his time, the year  
*toshi kurezu*                    does not end well

—1776

Buson further commented, “Rushing along in the road to fame and riches, drowning in a sea of desire, people torture their ephemeral selves. Especially on New Year’s, even their behavior is unspeakable. . . . Bashō once gone, we have no master to teach us, whether the year begins or ends.” [17](#)

How close was Buson’s style to Bashō’s? It can be instructive to compare haiku by the two poets on a similar theme; the first is by Bashō.

*shiogoshi ya*                      in the shallows  
*tsuru hagi nurete*                the crane’s legs are moistened  
*umi suzushi*                      by the cool sea

—BASHŌ, 1689

Eighty-five years later, Buson responded with a haiku that is by no means a copy.

<i>yūkaze ya</i>	evening breeze—
<i>mizu aosagi no</i>	waters splash up against
<i>hagi wo utsu</i>	the legs of a blue heron
—BUSON, 1774	

What are the differences? Buson gives some context with his “evening breeze,” while Bashō suggests the “cool sea.” Buson presents a more dynamic scene; Bashō is gentle and peaceful in his imagery, and the crane also carries connotations of long life. The more one examines these haiku, the more differences appear, yet they are both evocative observations of quite similar moments. Which haiku is preferable is something for each reader to decide, or perhaps the two haiku can be equally appreciated as poetic expression.

In admiration for Bashō, Buson also wrote a haiku in which he borrowed the master’s persona.

<i>mon wo izureba</i>	as I go out the gate
<i>ware mo yukuhito</i>	I too am a traveler—
<i>aki no kure</i>	autumn darkens
—1774	

Of course Buson was not fundamentally a wanderer like Bashō, but rather a poet with a home and family. For example, he went to some effort to secure a good marriage for his daughter Kuno in the last month of 1776; unfortunately this did not work out, and he brought his daughter home the following year for a divorce. It may be that there was a difference in cultural norms; Kuno was a fine musician who played the koto, and perhaps expected a more cultivated family than the one into which she married. <sup>18</sup>—In any case, being a

daughter-in-law in traditional Japan could be very difficult. Buson wrote in a letter that “her aged father-in-law has turned out to be a man who thinks of nothing but making money and has no taste for the arts. . . . I felt so sorry for her that I took her back home at once.”  
[19](#)

Meanwhile, Buson’s renown as a painter had been growing. For example, in 1771 he was invited to share the painting of an album, *Jūben jūgi-jō* (Ten Pleasures and Ten Conveniences of Living in the Country), with the most famous literati artist of the day, Ike Taiga (1723–76). [20](#) During this decade, Buson further reaffirmed his admiration for and lineage from Bashō by writing and painting a number of versions of Bashō’s travel records, particularly the *Oku no hosomichi*, with haiga-style paintings interspersed with the texts.

Buson created these paintings on various formats, including screens, a set of fans, and several hand-scrolls. It is always interesting to see what moments in a narrative that painters and illustrators choose to show, and in this case it seem to be the most significant moments plus the most picturesque. For example, one section from a Buson hand-scroll depicts the request by the two prostitutes to follow along with Bashō and Sora, and their reluctant reply that they will have many detours and side trips, and so they cannot be of help ([Plate 6-1](#)).

This painting demonstrates both Buson’s confidence in depicting figures in various poses, and his skill and empathy in capturing the spirit of Bashō’s prose and poetry. The seeming simplicity of the lines and light colors mask Buson’s sure touch, and the composition establishes the relationships of the people without needing background details; the woman who is crying is not the only person in tears. Although the tone seems relaxed, there is an underlying sense of respect; the image is balanced with a sense that human feelings are part of the larger world through which we all travel.

Returning to Buson’s haiku, he produced a great number during the 1770s, with a broader range of subjects than before. These can again be divided into groups based first on parallelism, second on



which sense is primary, third by poems featuring colors or otherwise related to painting, and ending with a few that are more deeply personal. Some haiku are not datable, but these generally fit in with or relate to other haiku from this decade.

Parallelism is an extension of the repetitions found in a few Buson haiku from earlier in his career, but here they are mostly what might be called multidirectional.

<i>uguisu no</i>	the warbler sings
<i>naku ya achira-muki</i>	facing this way
<i>kochira-muki</i>	facing that way
—N.D.	

This haiku has the cutting word *ya* in the middle of the second line, making an implied rhythmic counterpoint of 8–10 syllables. It could therefore be rendered in English:

the warbler sings—

facing this way, facing that way

The first poem of the next three has the unusual syllable pattern of 11–7–5, while the second adds repetition to parallelism, and the third substitutes time for direction.

*gekkō nishi ni watareba* as the moonlight moves to the west  
*hanakage higashi ni* the flower-shadows  
*ayumu kana* move to the east

—1777

*ume ochikochi* plum flowers far and near  
*minami subeku* splendid to the south  
*kita subeku* splendid to the north

—1777

*kinō ini* departing yesterday  
*kyō ini kari no* departing today—  
*naki yo kana* no geese tonight

—N.D.

Moving on to haiku that are based on the experience of different senses, one poem follows the sense of touch, followed by one based on scent.

*kangetsu ya* cold moon—  
*koishi no sawaru* feeling small pebbles  
*kutsu no soko* under my shoes

—N.D.

*ono irete* when the ax strikes,  
*ka ni odoroku ya* a surprising fragrance—  
*fuyu kodachi* winter trees

—1773

Many more of Buson's poems from the 1770s are based on hearing. Some of these are at least partially the result of human activity, including one that also mentions an ax. The first two haiku each have two seemingly unconnected images—why the woodpecker in the first poem, and why the peonies in the second?

<i>teono utsu</i>	the sound of an ax
<i>oto mo kobu kashi</i>	in the forest depths—
<i>keratsutsuki</i>	and a woodpecker
—N.D.	
<i>jiguruma no</i>	the heavy cart
<i>todoro to hibiku</i>	resounds with a roar—
<i>botan kana</i>	peonies
—1774	

While the answer to the first question could be that the repeated sounds of the ax relate to the woodpecker either in similarity or in contrast, the second question is more difficult. A peony is not usually compared with a cart, so readers must find a connection for themselves—is it that a peony is larger than most flowers? Another option is to simply enjoy the contrast.

More Buson haiku about sounds include both the vocal and the nonvocal.

<i>kujira-uri</i>	whale-meat market
<i>ichi ni katana wo</i>	sharp blades
<i>narashi-keri</i>	drumming
—N.D.	
<i>akikaze ya</i> <sup>21</sup>	autumn wind—
<i>shushi ni shi utau</i>	in the wineshop, fishermen and woodcutters
<i>gyosha shosha</i>	chant poems
—1774	
<i>machibito no</i>	the sound of footsteps
<i>ashi oto tōki</i>	of the awaited person—
<i>ochiba kana</i>	falling leaves
—1774	

More common among Buson's haiku are poems in which the sounds are made by nature rather than by humans. In [one of these](#), the autumn wind is more fearsome, if less poetic, than Bashō's voice of the cicada penetrating the rocks.

<i>kogarashi ya</i>	winter wind—
<i>iwa ni sakeyuku</i>	coming to split the rocks
<i>mizu no koe</i>	the voice of water
—1775	

Frequently in Buson's haiku the voices come from living creatures, each with its own meaning and context. As for the voice of the deer in the second poem, it is, as noted, understood in Japan to mark the beginning of autumn.

*yūgarasu*  
*aki no aware*  
*tsugenikeri*

—N.D.

an evening crow  
speaks up about  
autumn melancholy

*mitabi naite*  
*kikoezu narinu*  
*shika no koe*

—N.D.

it called three times  
then was not heard again—  
the voice of the deer

*ka no koe su*  
*nindō no hana no*  
*chiru tabi ni*

—1777

mosquito voices  
every time honeysuckle  
petals fall

Buson also wrote two haiku about the sounds from a temple bell.

*suzushisa ya*  
*kane wo hanaruru*  
*kane no koe*

—1777

coolness—  
leaving the bell,  
the voice of the bell

*kogarashi ya*  
*kane ni koishi wo*  
*fukiateru*

—1777

winter wind—  
blowing small stones  
against the temple bell

What of Buson the painter as a poet? As before, there are many visual haiku, and color is mentioned from time to time. However, of the colors Buson specifies in his poems, the most common is white. This color is not very frequently seen in his paintings (except as the white of the paper, which sometimes represents snow), but it is more significant in his haiku.

<i>kagerō ya</i> <i>na mo shiranu mushi no</i> <i>shiroki tobu</i>	heat waves— a nameless insect flies whitely
—N.D.	
<i>yoru no ran</i> <i>ka ni kakurete ya</i> <i>hana shiroshi</i>	the orchid at evening hiding its fragrance— white flowers
—1777	
<i>yama ari no</i> <i>akarasama nari</i> <i>shiro-botan</i>	the mountain ant stands out clearly— white peony
—1777	
<i>shiragiku ni</i> <i>shibashi tayutau</i> <i>hasami kana</i>	white chrysanthemums— the scissors hesitate
—N.D.	
<i>kaze ichijin</i> <i>mizutori shiroku</i> <i>miyuru kana</i>	one gust of wind and the waterbirds look white
—N.D.	

Other colors also appear in Buson's mature haiku, sometimes stated and sometimes implied.

*kaya tsurite*  
*suibi tsukuran*  
*ie no uchi*

—1775

hanging the mosquito net  
I create blue mountains  
inside my house

*utsukushi ya*  
*nowaki no ato no*  
*tōgarashi*

—1776

just beautiful  
after the autumn storm  
a red pepper

*ishikiri no*  
*yubi yaburitaru*  
*tsutsuji kana*

—1778

the stonemason  
has cut his finger—  
azaleas

*yama kurete*  
*momiji no ake wo*  
*ubaikeri*

—N.D.

mountains darken  
robbing the crimson  
from maple leaves

*teshoku shite*  
*iro ushinaeru*  
*kigiku kana*

—1777

when I pick up the hand-lantern  
they lose their color—  
yellow chrysanthemums

*niji wo haite*  
*hirakan to suru*  
*botan kana*

—N.D.

breathing out a rainbow  
as it blooms—  
the peony

*otsuru hi no*  
*kugurite somuru*  
*soba no kuki*

—1778

the setting sun  
passes through and dyes  
buckwheat stalks

Several further Buson haiku mention screens, a format on which he often painted, although usually on silk or paper formats rather than gold or silver leaf ones. At one point, a little earlier in his life, there even seems to have been a club of admirers who gathered funds to pay for his painting materials; members then received preferential treatment in acquiring his works. [22](#)



*mijika yo ya*  
*makura ni chikaku*  
*ginbyōbu*

—1770

short nights—  
next to my pillow  
silver screens

*kinbyō no*  
*usumono wa tare ka*  
*aki no kaze*

—1776

whose gauze dress  
is on the gold screen?  
autumn wind

A few of Buson's haiku from this decade mention works of art, or his own struggles with painting in the deep of winter. The references are to Ōtsu-e, folk paintings created in the town of Ōtsu outside of Kyoto, and to a portrait of Vimalakirti (Japanese: Yuima), a Buddhist layman who proved to be as wise or wiser than bodhisattvas.

*Ōtsu-e ni*  
*fun otoshi yuku*  
*tsubame kana*

—1778

pooping on the  
Ōtsu-e and flying away—  
a swallow

*rofusagi ya*  
*toko wa Yuima ni*  
*kakekaeru*

—N.D.

closing the hearth  
I change the scroll  
to Vimalakirti

*yamadera no*  
*suzuri ni hayashi*  
*hatsugōri*

—N.D.

at the mountain temple  
the first ice on the inkstone  
comes early

*ha arawa ni*  
*fude no kōri wo*  
*kamu yo kana*

—1774

with a remaining tooth  
I bite off the ice from  
my brush at night

As for Buson's primarily visual haiku, of course there are many from this era. Several of the most delightful mention living creatures, the first of which also suggests a farmer.

*kamo tōku*  
*kuwa sosogu mizu no*  
*uneri kana*

—1770

distant wild ducks—  
when washing the hoe,  
the water undulates

Once again we have a two-part haiku for which the reader must make the connection. Is the water stirred by the hoe undulating? Does the flight of the ducks also undulate? Perhaps the farmer washing the hoe is simply looking into the distance, where he sees the ducks? Or maybe his mind is undulating?

Haiku about insects show Buson's range as a poet, from observation and wonder to a sarcastic sense of humor.

*asakaze no*  
*ke wo fukare iru*  
*kemushi kana*

—N.D.

we can see the morning breeze  
blowing its hairs—  
the caterpillar

*utsutsunaki*  
*tsumami-gokoro no*  
*kochō kana*

—1773

unreal—  
holding in my hand  
a butterfly

*gakumon wa*  
*shiri kara nukeru*  
*hotaru kana*

—1772

scholarly brilliance  
comes forth from its bottom—  
the firefly

Other Buson haiku about living creatures reveal his dispassionate eye for nature, including one that may seem a little gruesome.

*oborozuki*  
*kawazu ni nigoru*  
*mizu ya sora*  
—1774

hazy moon—  
a frog muddies up  
both water and sky

*yūdachi ya*  
*kusaba wo tsukamu*  
*mura-suzumi*  
—1775

sudden shower—  
clinging to the grasses  
village sparrows

*musasabi no*  
*kotori hami-iru*  
*kareno kana*  
—1775

flying squirrel  
munching on a small bird—  
withered fields

Beyond insects, birds, and animals, Buson came up with two haiku, four years apart, that share the same final line in presenting an almost living creature.

*ine karete*  
*bake wo arawasu*  
*kakashi kana*  
—1770

in the drying rice fields  
it looks like a ghost—  
the scarecrow

*mizu ochite*  
*hosohagi takaki*  
*kakashi kana*  
—1774

as the rice-field water drains  
its legs grow long—  
the scarecrow

Another case of repeating an image comes with two poems about summer. The first line, ending in the cutting word *ya*, was used several times by Buson, as in these two haiku written one year apart.

<i>mijika yo ya</i>	the night is short—
<i>nami uchigiwa no</i>	on the beach,
<i>sute-bōki</i>	a discarded broom

—1774

<i>mijika yo ya</i>	the night is short—
<i>asase ni nokoru</i>	remaining in the shoals,
<i>tsuki ippen</i>	a slice of moon

—1775

People feature in many of Buson's haiku from the 1770s, either directly or indirectly. Among the more unusual are several that suggest a scene for the reader to imagine, or present an image that implies a short narrative. The first of these uses the device of repetition.

<i>shoku no hi wo</i>	with one candle
<i>shoku ni utsusu ya</i>	lighting another candle—
<i>haru no yū</i>	spring evening

—N.D.

The next two present an anticipatory moment, and a visit not made.

*seki to shite*                      in the silence  
*kyaku no taema no*              before guests arrive—  
*botan kana*                        peonies

—1774

*na no hana ya*                      hedge-flowers blossoming—  
*hōshi ga yado wa*                not stopping at the monk's hut  
*towade sugi*                        I pass on by

—1776

Although Buson was becoming successful with his poetry, he was also proud of his haiga. He used them at times for income, writing to his pupil and agent Kitō, “My paintings in the haiga style are unequalled in Japan; don’t sell them too cheaply.”<sup>23</sup> Yet judging from the relatively small number that survive, Buson did not paint very many of them, and when he did, he usually added an introduction, another inscription, a line or two from a Chinese poem, or even another sketch.

Because Buson’s haiga are almost never dated, it is difficult to know when he painted them, but probably he turned to this art at various points in his life. Some seem to be earlier than others, such as several that were probably created from the early to mid 1770s, while others are more likely from later that decade.

One of Buson’s most influential works was an album of portraits of earlier haiku masters with representative poems; this was published as a wood-block book in 1799 and achieved wide circulation. One example from this album is a portrait of [Chigetsu](#) with her autumn poem ([Plate 6-2](#)).

*toshi yoreba*  
*koe mo kanashiki*  
*kirigirisu*

when it gets old  
its voice becomes plaintive—  
katydid

One notable feature of this seemingly simple work is the integration of poem, calligraphy, and painting. The melancholy tone of the haiku is well expressed in both the slightly melancholy pose of the poet, and yet we are able to read any emotions that we wish into her face, which is made simply of three dots and a hooking stroke. The poem nestles against her, and its basic triangular form is repeated in the figure, but this time with the triangle's base at the bottom. The calligraphy itself, which is made up primarily of curving lines with subtle modulations in thickness, has exactly the same kind of brushwork seen in the figure. Echoing some of the lines in the image, the notable semicircle over Chigetsu's head is actually a repeat mark, indicating that the *kiri* syllables become *kirikiri*, or *kirigiri*, before the final *su*.

Another parallel occurs at the bottom of the calligraphy in the character for “moon” (月, *getsu* in the signature “Chigetsu”): the vertical line on the left ends with the same kind of small hook as the line that moves down to the left of the poet's face. To indicate how important the relation of calligraphy to image is here, we can make a collage that puts the signature to the left and the poem farther to the right ([Plate 6 –2a](#)). <sup>24</sup>It is still an attractive image—but something is now lost.

One of Buson's most famous haiga depicts the figure of Matabei, a happy-go-lucky fellow who has been admiring the cherry-blossoms while drinking a little more than he should ([Plate 6-3](#)). The introduction and poem are somewhat complex, referring to the painter Tosa Mitsunobu (1434–1525), who often used layers of gesso under his bright colors, and to Omuro, a section of Kyoto well-known for its late-blooming cherry trees.

The falling of cherry-blossoms in the capital is like gesso flaking off a Mitsunobu painting.

<i>Matabei ni</i>	have I met Matabei?
<i>au ya Omuro no</i>	Omuro blossoms
<i>hana zakari</i>	at their finest
—CA.1777	

Matabei is depicted with relaxed brushwork appropriate to the subject. His robe is slipping off his shoulders and his discarded wine gourd has fallen beneath him like a little chunk of gesso, while the red-orange of his cap relates to cherry-blossoms.

Although many of Buson's poems relate to what he has seen, heard, or sensed, there are a small number of Buson haiku from the 1770s that seem more personal to the poet, although one must always be careful about assuming autobiographical intent in haiku. Like other poets, haiku masters could and did take on different personae, and yet some of these verses seem to carry more internal emotions than usual.

Buson may have become infatuated with a woman, perhaps from the pleasure quarters. He wrote:

<i>oi ga koi</i>	if the old man
<i>wasuren to sureba</i>	could only forget his love—
<i>shigure kana</i>	winter showers
—N.D.	

Another haiku may or may not also refer to this infatuation.



*gu ni tae yo to*  
*mado wo kuraku su*  
*yuki no take*

—1774

“endure your foolishness”—  
darkening the window,  
snowy bamboo

One well-known Buson haiku subtitled “In My Bedroom,” however, mentions his wife, who was very much alive at the time.

*mi ni shimu ya*  
*naki tsuma no kushi wo*  
*neya ni fumu*

—1777

it penetrates my being—  
stepping on the comb  
of my dead wife

More attuned to Buson’s moods are several haiku concerning the seasons of autumn or winter. Two of the former are sad, but the third contains an emotional turnabout while using the same final line as the previous haiku.

*botan kitte  
ki no otoroeshi  
yūbe kana*

—1776

after cutting the peony  
my spirit wanes—  
evening

*kyonen yori  
mata sabishii zo  
aki no kure*

—1776

more lonely  
than last year—  
autumn darkens

*sabishisa no  
ureshiku mo ari  
aki no kure*

—1776

in loneliness  
there is also some joy—  
autumn darkens

Three winter haiku are more emotionally chilly. The third, in the unusual form of 8–7–5 syllables, was composed on Bashō's death anniversary.



6-2a Buson, *The Poet Chigetsu* (rearranged).



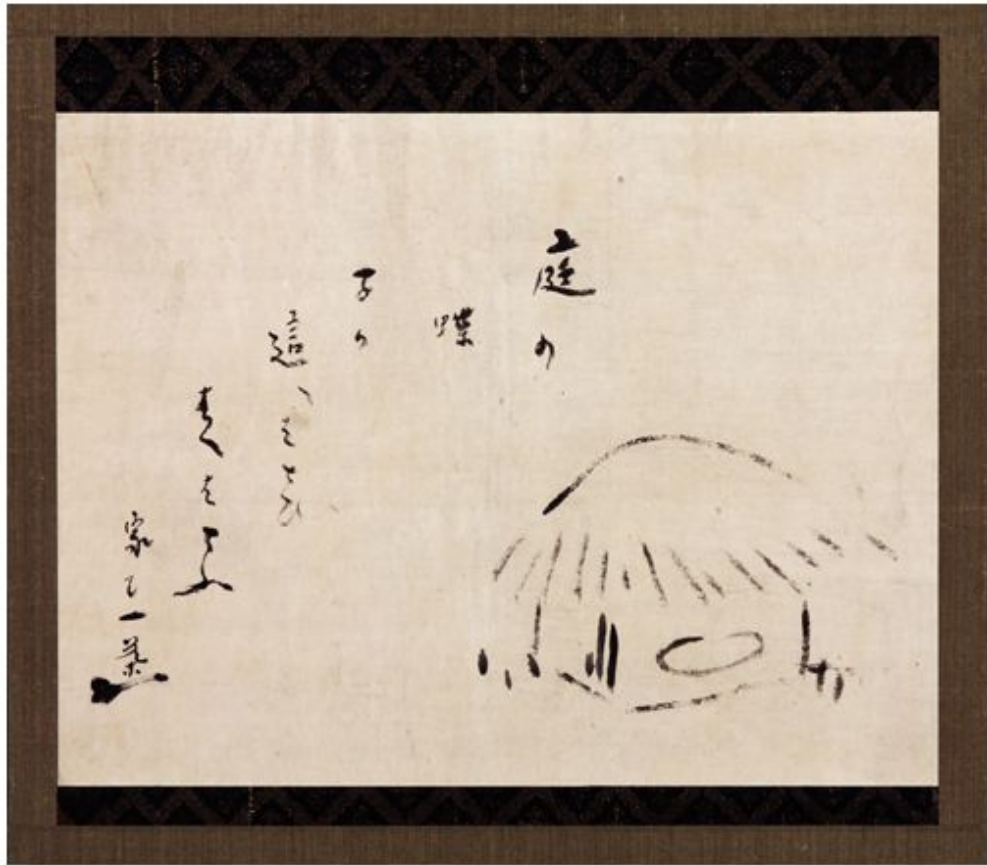
6-3 Yosa Buson (1716–84), *Matabei*. Ink and color on paper, 103.3 x 26.5 cm. Itsuo Art Museum.



6-4 Matsumura Goshun (1752–1811), *Portrait of Buson*. Wood-block print from *Shin hana tsumi* (New Flower Picking, 1777). Ink and color on paper, 27.2 x 18 cm.



6-5 Matsumura Goshun (1752–1811) and Yosa Buson (1716–84), *Dowry Haiga* (*Yomeiride*). Ink and colors on paper, 15.8 x 39.3 cm.

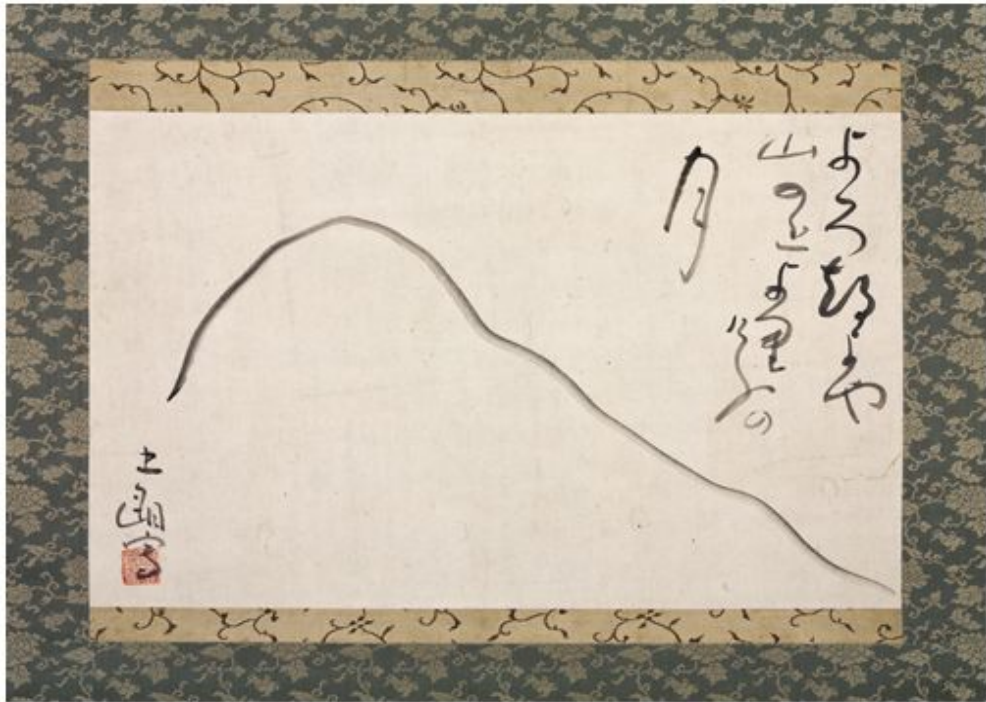


7-1 Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827), *Garden Butterfly*. Ink on paper, 28.6 x 37.6 cm. Chikusei Collection.



7-2 Inoue Shirō (1742–1812), *Cuckoo*. Ink on silk, 27 x 38 cm.





7-3 Inoue Shirō (1742–1812), *Moon and Mountain*. Ink on paper, 31 x 50 cm.



7-4 Takebe Sōchō (1761–1814), *Discussions Under a Mosquito Net*. Ink and colors on paper, 34 x 55.8 cm. Masuda Collection.



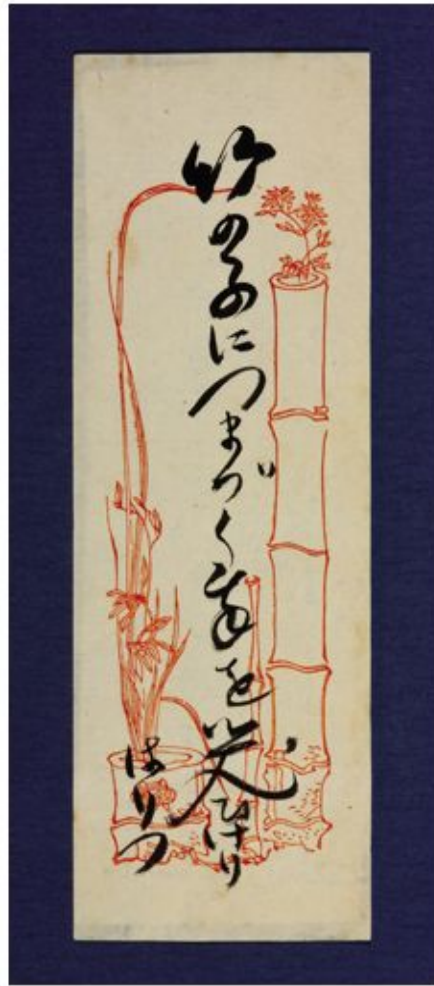
7-5 Takebe Sōchō (1761–1814), *Old Couple* (detail). Ink and colors on paper, 28 x 16.7 cm.



8-1 Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), *Fruit* . Colors on paper, 26 x 33 cm. Shibunkaku Collection.



8-2 Kawahigashi Hekigotō (1873–1937), Ōhara. Ink on decorated paper, 36.3 x 6 cm.



8-3 Fukuda Kodōjin (1865–1944), *Bamboo Shoot*. Ink on printed paper, 22.7 x 7.8 cm.



8-4 Fukuda Kodōjin (1865–1944), *Snow Daruma*. Ink on colored paper, 62 x 23.2 cm.



8-5 Taneda Santōka (1882–1940), *Hail*. Ink on colored paper *tanzaku*, 36 x 6 cm.





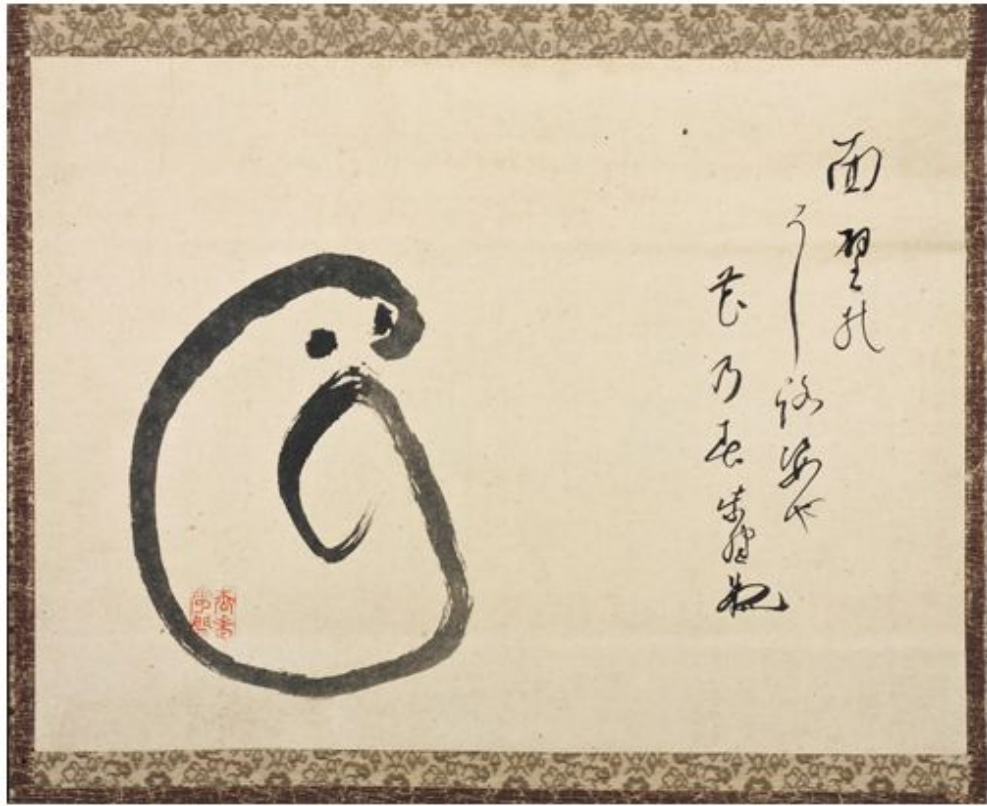
8-6 Taneda Santōka (1882–1940), *Alone, Silently*. Ink on decorated paper *tanzaku*, 36 x 6 cm.



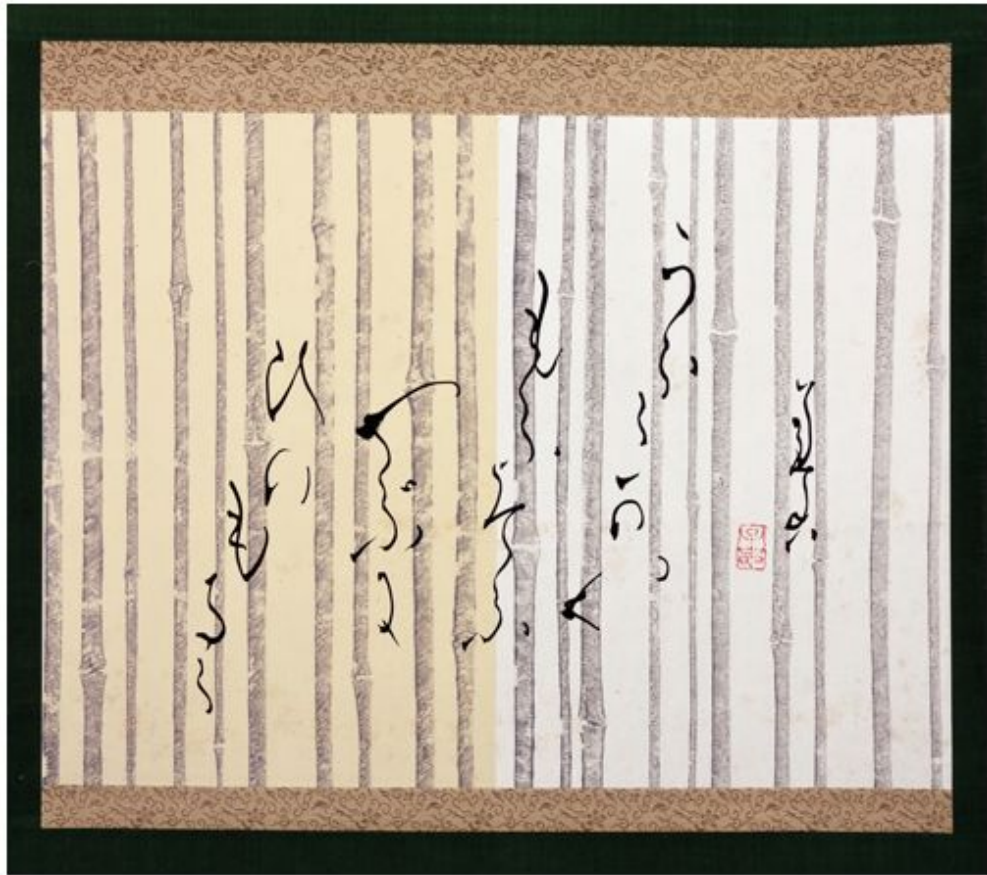
8-7 Taneda Santōka (1882–1940), *No Money*. Ink on paper, 49.4 x 69.3 cm.



8-8 Nakahara Nantembō (1839–1925), *Moon Ensō* (1924). Ink on paper, 130.9 x 31.5 cm.



8-9 Sōhan Gempō (Shōun, 1848–1922), *Daruma Meditating*. Ink on paper, 39 x 52.2 cm.



8-10 Tsuji Kakō (1870–1931), *Spring Haiga*. Ink on decorated paper, 33.8 x 45.3 cm.



8-11 Hayashi Buntō (1882–1966), *Shops by the Beach*. Ink and colors on paper, 33 x 29.2 cm.

*ineburite*                      going to sleep,  
*ware ni kakuren*            I hide in myself—  
*fuyugoromi*                  winter seclusion  
—1775

*waga hone no*                my bones  
*futon ni sawaru*            touching the quilt—  
*shimoyo kana*              frosty night  
—1777

*shigure oto nakute*        winter shower  
*koke ni mukashi wo*        soundless on the moss—  
*shinobu kana*              thinking of the past  
—N.D.

In 1777, Buson took on the self-imposed task of writing ten haiku a day for one hundred days, following an earlier example by Kikaku. He began on Buddha's birthday, the eighth day of the fourth month (which itself becomes the first line of the second haiku). The following haiku may have been written in memory of Buson's mother, and the first two are unusually emotional.

*kanbutsu ya*  
*motoyori hara wa*  
*kari no yado*

—1777

Buddha's birthday—  
the womb is only  
a brief shelter

*uzuki yōka*  
*shinde umaruru*  
*ko wa hotoke*

—1777

fourth month, eighth day—  
the baby born dead  
is a buddha

Buson became ill and did not finish the hundred-day task, but the haiku he did write were collected (along with prose stories of the fanciful and supernatural that he had collected) in *Shin hana tsumi* (New Flower Picking, 1777). One of the wood-block illustrations by his pupil Matsumura Goshun (1752–1811) shows Buson with his traveling pouch, much like pictures of Bashō ([Plate 6-4](#)). This is one more example of his sense of identification with the earlier master.

In a prose introduction written in 1777 for the “Shundeï Poem Collection” (*Shundeï kushū*), a compilation of verses by his friend Kuroyanagi Shōha (1727–71), Buson gave one of his rare comments on the art of composing haiku. <sup>25</sup>He refers to the important Japanese term *zoku* (mundane, common, plebian) and how it may be used in poetry.

Haiku values verses that detach themselves from the mundane while using mundane language, but such an art of detachment is very difficult to put into practice. A certain Zen monk [Hakuin Ekaku] said, “Listen to the sound of one hand.” In his words, the Zen of haiku as well as the art of detachment from the mundane are contained.

## The Final Years



Late in his life, Buson continued to produce exceptional work in both art forms. His literati landscape paintings achieved their height of expressiveness, adding a personal touch to the millennium-old Chinese poet-painter tradition. Perhaps his work in haiku made him even more receptive to the ever-changing aspects of nature that brushwork could evoke visually, and his scrolls from this time have a special warmth not always seen in his earlier works. In terms of haiku, Buson composed fewer than in the 1770s, but with no diminution of his powers of poetic observation.

As for style, in 1780 Buson wrote in a book preface that haiku “is an open-minded fellow. . . . It may seem there is a specific style of the day, but actually there is not. This can be compared to a line of people running round a circular course. The runner heading the line looks as if he were following the last runner, who is lagging one lap behind. How can we tell which is the leading poetic style?” [26](#) This idea was later known in America as “lapping the track in sensibility,” and it is interesting that Buson used the same image.

While one might expect autumn and winter poems to predominate in Buson’s old age, some of his finest verses from these years are about spring.

<i>wakakusa ni</i>	in the young grasses
<i>ne wo wasuretaru</i>	its roots are forgotten—
<i>yanagi kana</i>	the willow
—1782	

This poem is as much about what is not seen as about what is visible; might this show Buson at an advanced age still enjoying the emergence of new life in nature?

<i>ike to kawa</i>	pond and river
<i>hitotsu ni narinu</i>	have become one—
<i>haru no ame</i>	spring rain
—1782	

It is tempting to imagine the pond as Bashō and the river as Buson, but this is probably reading too much into the poem. However, in the same year Buson wrote several more poems about spring rain, now using it as the first segment of the poems, each of which could have personal meanings.

<i>harusame ya</i>	spring rain—
<i>kawazu no hara wo</i>	the frog's belly
<i>mada nurezu</i>	not yet wet
—1782	

<i>harusame ya</i>	spring rain—
<i>kurenan to shite</i>	almost evening
<i>kyō mo ari</i>	but today lingers
—1782	

A third poem with the same first line is quite delightful.

<i>harusame ya</i>	spring rain—
<i>monogatari yuku</i>	telling stories as they go,
<i>mino to kasa</i>	straw coat and umbrella
—1782	

Buson was certainly capable of haiku that tell (or suggest) stories within their brief span.

<i>tobikawasu</i>	fluttering about
<i>yatake-gokoro ya</i>	impatiently—
<i>oyasuzumi</i>	parent sparrows
—1780	

<i>fuyukawa ya</i>	winter river—
<i>ta ga hikisuteshi</i>	pulled up and discarded,
<i>akakabura</i>	a red turnip
—1782	

<i>nokogiri no</i>	the sound of a hand-saw
<i>oto mazushisa ya</i>	is poor and meager—
<i>yowa no fuyu</i>	winter midnight
—1780	

Generally, Buson's late haiku do not suggest the infirmities or sadness of old age, but a few have a slightly melancholy tone.

*yuku haru ya*  
*shunjun to shite*  
*osozakura*

—1782

spring passing by—  
reluctant, hesitating,  
the last cherry-blossoms

*kagari aru*  
*inochi no hima ya*  
*aki no kure*

—1782

in this limited life  
a time of leisure—  
autumn darkens

In Buson's final year, he took part in a special poetry festival in Kyoto honoring Bashō, perhaps the major event in the Bashō revival. That year he wrote haiku that can serve to represent his respect for earlier poets, his fresh observations of nature that incorporate humor, and his irrepressible spirit.

*Saigyō no  
yagu mo dete aru  
momiji kana*

—1783

Saigyō's quilt  
has again appeared—  
maple leaves

*hasu karete  
ike asamashiki  
shigure kana*

—1783

lotus leaves dried up,  
the pond is pitiable—  
early winter rain

*hi wa hi kure yo  
yo wa yo ake yo to  
naku kawazu*

—1783

by day, “darken the day”  
at night, “brighten the night”  
chant the frogs

*ikada-shi no  
mino ya arashi no  
hana-goromo*

—1783

the straw raincoats  
of raftsmen in the storm  
become flower-rob

Buson's health had been generally good until late 1783, when he began to have severe chest and stomach pains. At first he seemed to recover, but in the eleventh month, knowing his passing was near, Buson summoned to his side his two major painting pupils, Ki Baitei (1734–1810) and Matsumura Goshun. He asked that since his daughter's first attempt at marriage had not been successful, could they help raise a dowry so she could marry again?

After the master died the following month, the two young poet-artists searched among Buson's papers to find examples of his poems that he had written at various times in his life. To these poems they created and appended small paintings in haiga style that related to the themes or seasons of Buson's haiku. Thus they produced one of the most unusual forms of Japanese painting, *yomeiride* (dowry haiga), which seem to have been created only this once in history.

Several examples of *yomeiride* by both Baitei and Goshun still exist. <sup>27</sup>One that has only recently come to light includes thirteen Buson haiku (probably from 1770) with a delightful painting by Goshun showing two itinerants ([Plate 6-5](#)). One figure relates to the sixth poem by preaching Namu Amida Butsu (Hail to Amida Buddha) while striking a gong (all we can see is his thin mallet), while the other figure is selling whisks for the tea ceremony. Goshun notes on his painting that the calligraphy to the right is a genuine work of his master Buson, whose haiku celebrate several seasons, primarily late autumn and winter. These haiku are written in single columns from right to left.

*uguisu no*  
*au tamaribi ya*  
*fuyu no eda*

—N.D.

the warbler  
finds a sun-drenched spot—  
a winter branch

*yadokase to*  
*katana nagedasu*  
*fubuki kana*

—1768

“Give me shelter!”  
he throws down his sword—  
the blizzard

*hosomichi ni*  
*nariyuku koe ya*  
*kan nembutsu*

—1768

voices coming  
into the narrow lane—  
winter prayers

*hanken no shayō*  
*kamiko no sode no*  
*nishiki kana*

—1768

the setting sunlight  
on the paper kimono sleeve—  
brocade!

*kamo samuku*  
*suki susugu mizu no*  
*uneri kana*

—N.D.<sup>28</sup>

*yūgao no*  
*sore wa toguchi ka*  
*kane tataki*

—N.D.

*machibito no*  
*jō no kowasa yo*  
*yū shigure*

—N.D.

even ducks are chilly—  
the tool-washing water  
shivers

evening glories—  
is that a doorway?  
he strikes the begging bell

the person I'm waiting for  
has no sympathy at all—  
winter evening rain



*nigemizu no  
nige soko nōte  
shigure kana*

—1770

escaping water  
twists and turns in its channel—  
first winter rain

*hatsuyuki no  
soko wo tatakeba  
take no tsuki*

—1770

when the first snow  
strikes the lowest culms—  
bamboo in moonlight

*hatake ni mo  
narade kanashiki  
kareno kana*

—1770

even it couldn't  
become a farm, it's sad—  
withered field

*mata uso wo*  
*tsukiyo ni kama no*  
*shigure kana*

—1770

still telling lies  
on the pot in the moonlight  
early winter rain

*koi wo yama e*  
*suteshi yo mo aru ni*  
*sakura kana*

—N.D.

even for one who  
renounced love in the mountains—  
cherry-blossoms

*haru usu no*  
*kokoro ochitsuku*  
*ochiba kana*

—N.D.

harmonizing with  
the springtime mortar—  
falling leaves

These poems represent much of what made Buson a major haiku master. They include fresh observations of nature, along with some scenes of human nature, and also have both a sense of drama and a personal touch.

As far as we know, the dowry haiga were successful in raising funds. Baitei thereupon returned to Shiga Prefecture, outside of Kyoto, to become a successful *nanga* (literati) painter. Goshun remained in Kyoto, eventually switching from Buson's painting style to that of the more naturalistic Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–95), while helping to spread haiga as a painting genre for professional artists as well as poets.

Before he died, Buson called Goshun to his bedside to record a death poem. Worried that he might not come close to matching Bashō's death verse about dreams circling over withered fields, Buson actually wrote three. They each represent the early spring,

which Buson did not live to see, and the one he chose is the third and finest:

*shira ume ni*  
*akuru yo bakari to*  
*nari ni keri*

among white plum blossoms  
what remains is the night  
about to break into dawn

—1784

# 7

## Issa and the Early Nineteenth Century.

**A**LTHOUGH BASHŌ and Buson are usually ranked above him, there is no haiku poet as beloved as Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827). This is in part due to his responses through haiku to a very difficult and often tragic life, and in part to the empathy he shows in his poems for all living creatures, from wolves to mosquito larvae.

### A Short Biography

Issa was born as Kobayashi Yatarō to a farming family in Kashiwabara (Nagano Prefecture), a village of heavy snow. <sup>1</sup>Only two years later his mother died, and despite care from his grandmother, he missed her for the rest of his life.

*naki haha ya*  
*umi miru tabi ni*  
*miru tabi ni*

—1812

my lost mother—  
every time I look at the sea,  
every time I look . . .

Issa was sent to study with a local scholar and haiku poet named Nakamura Shimpo (n.d.), but he was a solitary child who spent a great deal of time by himself in nature. When Issa was seven, his father remarried, and his stepmother Satsu seems to have treated him badly, insisting that he work at the farm rather than go to school. When she bore a son three years later, the situation became worse, with Issa being given the responsibility of looking after the baby, and

later Issa wrote that he was frequently beaten. One of his later haiku may relate to this time:

<i>hito no yo ya</i>	this human world—
<i>konoha kaku sae</i>	scolded even for writing
<i>shikaruru</i>	on a leaf
—1816	

After his grandmother died in 1777, Issa was sent to Edo, where he barely made a living at several different jobs. A haiku written many years thereafter may carry some of his emotions from that time, with the understanding that “starling” was slang for “country bumpkin” or “ignorant migrant worker.”

<i>mukudori to</i>	“starling”
<i>hito ni yobaruru</i>	is what people called me—
<i>samusa kana</i>	the cold
—1819	

Through these difficult years Issa continued his interest in poetry, and by 1787 he was able to study haiku with a poet named Chikua (1710–90), who followed the Bashō tradition. One of Issa’s earliest haiku refers to a stone image in the countryside of the Buddhist guardian deity Jizō.

<i>koke no ha</i>	moss flowering
<i>kokizu ni saku ya</i>	on his little scars—
<i>ishi Jizō</i>	stone Jizō
—1788	

After Chikua died in 1790, Issa determined to become a wanderer, much like Bashō. Beginning in 1792, he spent the next decade traveling and visiting a number of poets in Edo and the Kyoto-Osaka area. That same year he took the name “Issa” (a single tea), as a later haiku explains.

<i>haru tatsu ya</i>	spring returns—
<i>Yatarō aratame</i>	Yatarō has become
<i>Issa-bō</i>	the monk-poet Issa
—1818	

During these years, Issa also began to gather his haiku into collections. <sup>2</sup>One of his early poems is an observation of nature, the second could well refer to himself, and the third shows his sense of humor.

*chiru botan*                      the falling peony  
*kinō no ame wo*                 spills  
*kobosu kana*                    yesterday's rain  
—1792

*aki no yo ya*                      autumn evening—  
*tabi no otoko no*               a man on a journey  
*harishigoto*                      mending his clothes  
—1793

*shōben no*                         shivering as I piss—  
*miburui warae*                 and the smile  
*kirigirisu*                         of the katydid  
—1795

In 1801 Issa's father died, and following his father's final wishes, Issa tried to settle in his home village. Unfortunately, arrangements with his stepmother and half brother went badly; they challenged his father's will, and so Issa alternated for some years between Kashiwabara and Edo, an existence he sometimes felt had no real purpose.

*tsuki hana ya—*  
*shijū-ku nen no*  
*muda aruki*

—1811

moon and cherry-blossoms—  
forty-nine years of  
walking uselessly

*ikinokori*  
*ikinokoritaru*  
*samusa kana*

—1811

living on  
living on—  
the cold

In 1813, Issa finally received half of the Kashiwabara home. Although family relationships were still not ideal, this seems to have cheered him up, and several of his haiku reflect his more relaxed state of mind.

*hara no ue ni*  
*ji wo kakinarau*  
*yonaga kana*

—1813

practicing Chinese characters  
on my belly—  
the long night

We can imagine the poet, on a winter evening, using perhaps his index finger to trace out some difficult characters on his stomach.

The following year, Issa married a twenty-seven-year-old woman named Kiku (chrysanthemum), and one of his more humorous haiku details his embarrassment at being a middle-aged groom.



*gojū muko*  
*atama wo kakasu*  
*ōgi kana*

—1814

the son-in-law over fifty  
hides his head with  
a folding fan

Issa seems to have been fond of Kiku, in part for her lack of pretension, which is apparent in a haiku.

*waga Kiku ya*  
*nari ni mo furi ni mo*  
*kamawazu ni*

—1815

my Kiku—  
what she wears and how she walks  
don't concern her

Issa and Kiku had four children, all of whom died in childhood, surely among the most difficult experiences that anyone may suffer. In particular, the loss of their baby daughter Sato at the age of four hundred days seems to have been especially heartrending, and led to this poem composed at the grave thirty-five days after her death.

*akikaze ya*  
*mushiritagarishi*  
*akai hana*

—1819

autumn wind—  
the red flowers  
she loved to pick

Issa began to spend more and more time traveling and teaching; on one journey in 1820 he suffered his first stroke, from which he never fully recovered.

Kiku herself died in 1823, and one of Issa's haiku written the previous year, another soon after her death, and a third perhaps a

little later (although undated) serve to express his changing feelings in everyday terms.

*kotoshi koso*                      this year there's  
*kogoto aite mo*                  someone to complain to—  
*natsu zashiki*                    our summer room  
—1822

*kogoto iu*                          if she were only  
*aite mo araba*                  here to complain to—  
*kyō no tsuki*                    tonight's moon  
—1823

*shikararuru*                      envious even  
*hito urayamashi*                of the one being scolded—  
*toshi no kure*                    the year ends  
—N.D.

At age sixty, when one is supposed to be free of cares, Issa saw himself as nothing but foolish. He may have viewed the world the same way; although the following haiku does not indicate himself directly, the poem feels like a personal comment:

*haru tatsu ya*                      spring returns—  
*gu no ue ni mata*                on top of foolishness  
*gu ni kaeru*                      more foolishness  
—1823

Issa married again in 1824, but this quickly ended in divorce. Two years later he married a third time, despite suffering from various health difficulties including partial paralysis from a second stroke. Unfortunately, the following year the main section of his house burned down. Issa and his pregnant third wife then lived in the storehouse without sufficient heat, and this proved too much; he died that same year.

Issa's life was certainly filled with sorrow, and yet Issa of all haiku poets seems to celebrate the world, not without a touch of irony, but generally with joy.

<i>iso-iso to</i>	cheerful cheerful
<i>oiki mo wakaba</i>	the old tree befriends
<i>nakama kana</i>	the young leaves
—1824	

## Pure Land Buddhism

Issa seems to have been a devout Buddhist, especially later in his life, but rather than Zen he followed Pure Land teachings. <sup>3</sup>These center upon faith; anyone who intones the *nembutsu* chant *Namu Amida Butsu* (Hail to Amida Buddha) with perfect sincerity will be reborn in Amida's Western Paradise after death. Pure Land Buddhism is generally seen as a devotional "outer directed" form of Buddhism in contrast with "inner directed" Zen, but it also could be practiced with an inner focus.

Although haiku do not usually deal with religion as such, some of Issa's poems over the years reflect various aspects of his beliefs. He was frequently able to combine a view of nature with the *nembutsu*, believing that the entire world could resound with the chant.

*nembutsu wo  
sazukete yaran  
kaeru kari*

—1810

teaching us  
the Buddhist chant,  
geese depart

*suzume no ko  
ume ni kuchi aku  
nembutsu kana*

—1804

baby sparrows  
open their mouths to the plum tree—  
a Buddhist chant

Issa also believed that this world is full of craving and grasping, which according to the Buddha are the cause of so much human suffering.

*hana saku ya  
yoku no ukiyo no  
katasumi ni*

—1810

cherry trees blossoming—  
desires fill the corners  
of the floating world

By Issa's day, the term "floating world" had become well-known as meaning a world of pleasure, but it retained a much older Buddhist meaning as a world of transience. Issa wrote that people lived seemingly unaware that they were not far from death and possible punishment.

*yo no naka wa  
jigoku no ue no  
hanami kana*

—1812

in this world  
we are flower-viewing  
over hell

Issa also had a sense of irony, as several haiku make clear, the latter two relating to forms of Buddhist paintings.

<i>hae hitotsu</i>	swatting a fly
<i>utte wa Namu Amida</i>	and chanting
<i>Butsu kana</i>	Hail to Amida Buddha
—1814	

<i>Ōtsu-e no</i>	even the folk-art demon
<i>oni mo mijito ya</i>	can't look—a little bird
<i>nukumedori</i>	warms the hawk's nest
—1814	

<i>jigoku e no</i>	in the painting of hell,
<i>kaki ni kakarite</i>	perched on the fence
<i>naku hibari</i>	a skylark is singing
—1815	

Other Issa haiku with Pure Land themes range from a peaceful household scene to more irony.

*yu mo abite*  
*hotoke ogande*  
*sakura kana*

—1815

after a hot bath,  
worshipping Buddha—  
cherry-blossoms

*nomi kanda*  
*kuchi de Namu Amida*  
*Butsu kana*

—1817

from the mouth  
that crunched the flea,  
Hail to Amida Buddha

As Issa grew older, he became more convinced that Buddha does not only exist in paradise, an insight that is also important in Zen.

*aki kinu to*  
*shiranu koinu ga*  
*hotoke kana*

—1820

the puppy not knowing  
autumn has come—  
a buddha

*hito areba*  
*hae ari hotoke*  
*arinikeri*

—1823

where there are people  
there are flies  
there are buddhas

When Issa died, his family found the following poem under his pillow, so it may be his final verse, or even a death poem:

*arigata ya*  
*fusuma no yuki mo*  
*Jōdo yori*  
—1829(?)

thankful—  
snow on the quilt also comes  
from the Pure Land

## Snow

Living most of his life in a village with a high snowfall, Issa composed many poems about snow, occasionally using onomatopoeia, and sometimes mentioning his interest in making a “snow-buddha” (snowman) with varying success. As often with Issa, he has a range of attitudes toward the subject, frequently depending upon whether or not he is including himself in the imagery.

*beta-beta to*  
*mono ni tsukitaru*  
*haru no yuki*  
—N.D.

sticky-sticky  
it clings to everything—  
spring snow

*tada oreba*  
*oru tote yuki no*  
*furi ni keru*  
—1805

when being here—  
just being here—  
snow falls

*te no hira e*  
*hara-hara yuki no*  
*furi ni keru*  
—1812

onto my open hands  
fluttering-fluttering  
snow falls

*waga sato no  
kane ya kikuran  
yuki no niwa*

—1813

our village's bell  
can't be heard—  
a garden of snow

*yoriatte  
suzume ga hayasu  
yuki-botoke*

—1815

gathering sparrows  
raise a cheer—  
my snow-buddha

*waga kado ya  
itsumo mijime na  
yuki-botoke*

—1817

at my gate  
it's always pitiful—  
my snow-buddha

*monzen ya  
tsue de tsukurishi  
yukige-gawa*

—N.D.

before my gate  
I use a stick to make a river  
from melted snow

*massugu na  
shōben ana ya  
kado no yuki*

—1820

a straight hole  
from pissing in the snow  
by my gate

## Flowers, Grasses and Trees



Issa wrote about flowers, grasses, and trees somewhat less often than other poets, but he nonetheless composed some evocative haiku on these themes. For some poems he turned again to repetition and onomatopoeia.

<i>nanigoto no</i>	to what are you
<i>kaburi-kaburi zo</i>	nodding, nodding,
<i>ominaeshi</i>	maiden-flower?
—1811	

<i>yusa-yusa to</i>	rustling, rustling,
<i>haru ga yukuzo yo</i>	as spring departs—
<i>nobe no kusa</i>	field grasses
—1811	

<i>yuku aki wo</i>	to departing autumn
<i>obana ga saraba</i>	the pampas-grass waves
<i>saraba kana</i>	farewell, farewell
—1813	

<i>yase kusa no</i>	the skinny plant
<i>yoro-yoro hana to</i>	has grown a wobbly-wobbly
<i>nari ni keri</i>	flower
—1813	

Two haiku about kites have an opposite focus.

*kyō mo kyō mo*  
*tako hikkakaru*  
*enoki kana*

—1807

today too, today too—  
the kite caught by  
the nettle-tree<sup>4</sup>

*utsukushiki*  
*tako agarikeri*  
*kojiki goya*

—1820

beautifully  
a kite rises from  
the beggar's hut

Although haiku are seldom fully narrative, one of Issa's verses begins to tell a story, perhaps to chill the bones of listeners.

*karesusuki*  
*mukashi onibaba*  
*atta to sa*

—N.D.

dry pampas-grass—  
once long ago they say  
there was an ogress . . .

The willow tree has always been a favored theme of haiku, but Issa found new ways to discuss it in terms of implicit or explicit human interactions, each time ending with the words *yanagi kana* (the willow).

*iriguchi no*  
*aiso ni nabiku*  
*yanagi kana*

—1819

at the entrance gate  
waving amiably—  
the willow

*hitogoe ni*  
*momarete aomu*  
*yanagi kana*

—1820

buffeted by human voices  
it grows greener—  
the willow

Several of Japan's favorite flowers were also among Issa's themes, but each time with meanings that stretch beyond the flowers themselves. Whether he was writing about the passing of time, nature expanding, or the wonder of a child, Issa was able to find fresh ways to create new haiku from traditional themes.

*yūzakura*  
*kyō mo mukashi ni*  
*nari ni keru*

—1810

evening cherry-blossoms—  
today has also become  
the past

*asagao no*  
*hana de fukitaru*  
*iori kana*

—1812

morning glories  
thatch  
my cottage

*kore hodo no*  
*botan to shikata*  
*suru ko kana*

—1810

“the peony was  
this big”—the child  
stretches her arms wide

More complex are the poems that Issa wrote about chrysanthemums. He may have raised these plants himself for the annual contests every fall, or he may have just observed reactions from other growers, but in any case he was keenly aware of the competitions.

*kachi kiku ni* at the winning  
*horori to jiji ga* chrysanthemum, the old man  
*namida kana* sheds a tear

—1814

*kata sumi ya* stuck in a corner—  
*saru nen kachitaru* last year's winning  
*kiku no hana* chrysanthemum

—1814

*makegiku no* the losing chrysanthemum  
*shikararete iru* scolded—  
*kosumi kana* off in a corner

—1818

*makegiku wo* examining again  
*jitto minaosu* the losing chrysanthemum—  
*hitori kana* alone

—1822

## Views of Nature

Issa did not write standard views of nature, but rather noticed the individual moments that often inspire fine haiku. For example, in two quite different poems he noticed how liquids reflect; one poem is more serene, and the other is a humorous take on the familiar theme of the autumn moon.

*haru no hi ya*  
*mizu sae areba*  
*kure nokori*

—1804

the spring sun remains  
where there is water  
at dusk

*yamazato wa*  
*shiru no naka made*  
*meigetsu zo*

—1813

mountain village—  
all the way into our soup  
the harvest moon

Similarly, Issa noticed how a hole in his paper door (*shōji*) could create music when the wind blows, but could also become a vantage point for gazing at the sky.

*aki no yo ya*  
*shōji no ana no*  
*fue wo fuku*

—1811

autumn evening—  
a hole in the paper door  
plays the flute

*utsukushi ya*  
*shōji no ana ga*  
*ama-no-gawa*

—1813

beautiful—  
through a hole in the paper door  
the Milky Way

Issa also used onomatopoeia to emphasize the poverty of his home province, as well as some unsteady shadows in the breeze.

*ge-ge mo ge-ge*  
*ge-ge no gekoku no*  
*suzushisa yo*

—1813

lowly lowly again lowly lowly  
lowly lowly province—  
coolness

*akikaze ya*  
*hyoro-hyoro yama no*  
*kagebōshi*

—1814

autumn wind—  
trembling, trembling  
mountain shadows

## Issa and People

With this attitude toward nature, how did Issa write about people? It turns out that there is great variety in his human-centered haiku, including his sense of compassion, a slightly skeptical attitude that his experiences had fostered, a touch of humor, and sometimes almost pure observation.

One example of Issa's skeptical attitude is undated; it may have been composed during his difficulties with his family, but it may also reflect his view of the government.

*hito wa iza*  
*sugu na kakashi mo*  
*nakarikeri*

—N.D.

people?  
there's not even  
a straight scarecrow

Another poem, from relatively early in his career, expresses Issa's view of humans in constant motion (with repeated "k" sounds), observing how they try to gain something outside themselves.

*mata hito ni*  
*kakenukarekeri*  
*aki no kure*

again someone  
rushes past me—  
autumn dusk

—1806

Most of Issa's haiku about people, however, take a more gentle, if sometimes ironic tone; we may even sense more empathy as well as humor in his verses as the years go by.



*harusame ni* in the spring rain  
*ōakubi suru* giving a huge yawn—  
*bijin kana* the beautiful woman

—1811

*daikonbiki* pulling up radishes  
*daikon de michi wo* he points the way  
*oshiekeri* with a radish

—1814

*tabibito no* abusing  
*waruguchi su nari* the traveler—  
*hatsu shigure* first winter rain

—1818

*kogarashi ya* late autumn storm—  
*niji-shi mon no* the twenty-four-cent  
*yūjo goya* prostitute shack

—1819

While Issa was clear-eyed about human faults as well as virtues, he had an abiding love of children. They inhabit his haiku with games and fun, occasionally take part in family outings, and are generally treated with fatherly love. As with other groups of Issa poems, there seems to be an increase in compassion as the years go by.

*u no mane wo  
u yori kōsha na  
kodomo kana*

—1819

*hatsu uri wo  
hittoramaete  
neta ko kana*

—1819

*harusame ya  
neko ni odori wo  
oshieru ko*

—1820

*shibui toko  
haha ga kuikeri  
yama no kaki*

—1820

*sue no ko ya  
ohaka mairi no  
hōki-mochi*

—N.D.

imitating cormorants  
the children are more adroit  
than cormorants

clutching the season's  
first melon—  
a sleeping child

spring rain—  
a child teaches a cat  
how to dance

their mother eats  
the bitter parts—  
mountain persimmon

the youngest child  
visiting family graves  
holds the broom

## Animals

The last of the above poems has its counterpart among Issa's haiku about animals.

<i>furu inu ga</i>	the old dog
<i>saki ni tatsunari</i>	leads the way—
<i>haka-mairi</i>	visiting family graves
—1823	

Which is the better haiku? Which is more moving to the reader? This must depend on each individual, but while the former has the charm of youth, the latter has both a gentle smile and a sense of transience that mark it as exceptional.

Other Issa poems about canines were written a little earlier; they begin with charm, and end with a bow of the head.

<i>inu no ko no</i>	as he sleeps
<i>kuaete netaru</i>	the puppy gnaws
<i>yanagi kana</i>	on the willow
—1819 <sup>5</sup>	
<i>kuchi akete</i>	mouth open
<i>hae wo ou nari</i>	chasing a fly—
<i>kado no inu</i>	the dog at the gate
—1821	
<i>inudomo</i>	the dogs
<i>yokete kurekeri</i>	kindly step aside—
<i>yuki no michi</i>	snowy path
—1822	

The last of these poems is a fine example of singular-plural ambiguity in Japanese—is it one dog or several? Or can we choose, as readers, each time we encounter the poem? The same question is true for a poem about a wolf (or wolves); translators are forced to make a choice, losing the nice ambiguity.

<i>ōkami mo</i>	the wolf also
<i>ana kara miru ya</i>	watches from his cave—
<i>aki no kure</i>	autumn darkens
—1814	

Issa saw cats quite differently, noticing particularly their romances.

<i>yamadera ya</i>	mountain temple—
<i>sōshi no yurushi no</i>	by the founder's permission,
<i>neko no koi</i>	affairs of the cat
—1817	

<i>kuraki yori</i>	out from darkness
<i>kuraki ni iru ya</i>	back into darkness—
<i>neko no koi</i>	affairs of the cat
—1818	

A more unusual subject for haiku was the bat, here in two different contexts:



## Frogs and Snails

Two creatures that Issa seems to have much enjoyed are frogs and snails. The former subject immediately calls to mind Bashō's famous haiku, but Issa adds a connection between the amphibian and himself.

<i>ware wo mite</i>	looking at me
<i>nigai-gao suru</i>	with a sour face—
<i>kawazu kana</i>	the frog
—1808	

<i>ore to shite</i>	locked
<i>niramikura suru</i>	in a staring contest with me—
<i>kawazu kana</i>	the frog
—1819	

It's unknown how aware Issa may have been of paintings by Zen Master Hakuin (see chapter 5), but one haiku suggests a familiarity with Hakuin's depictions of blind men crossing a bridge, a visual metaphor for seeking enlightenment. <sup>6</sup>Another Issa haiku also has a Buddhist connection, as the frog naturally sits in what resembles a meditation position.

*hashi wataru*  
*mekura no ato no*  
*kawazu kana*

—1812

crossing the bridge  
after the blind men—  
the frog

*yūzen to shite*  
*yama wo miru*  
*kawazu kana*

—1813

viewing the mountain  
in deep contemplation—  
the frog

As for snails, the first of these four Issa haiku is entitled “Hell,” while the last of them suggests the “just this” of Zen.

*yū-tsuki ya*  
*nabe no naka nite*  
*naku tanishi*

—N.D.

evening moon—  
calling out from the cooking pot  
pond snails

*katatsumuri*  
*mi yo mi yo ono ga*  
*kagebōshi*

—1814

hey snail  
look, look!  
it's your shadow

*shiba no to ya* brushwood gate—  
*jō no kawari no* instead of a lock,  
*katatsumuri* a snail  
—1815

*dedemushi no* the snail  
*sono mi sono mama* goes to sleep and wakes up  
*neoki kana* just as he is  
—1821

## Birds

Issa often wrote about the chirps, songs, murmurs, and squawks of birds, so rather than organizing the following haiku by species, they are presented by the different meanings their calls had for the poet. Moving from 1804 to 1817, these haiku sometimes compare sounds, occasionally imitate the birds' voices, and from time to time directly relate to Issa's life—but each vocalization is appropriate to the occasion.

*misosazai* although the wren  
*chi-chi to iute mo* calls out "chi-chi"  
*hi ga kureru* the day darkens  
—1804

*uguisu ya* the young warbler  
*kiiro na koe de* with a yellow voice  
*oya wo yobu* calls for its parents  
—1810



*toshitoru ya*  
*take ni suzume ga*  
*nuku-nuku to*

—1811

*kuina naku*  
*hyōshi ni kumo ga*  
*isogu zo yo*

—1812

*kari waya-waya*  
*ore ga uwasa wo*  
*itasu kana*

—1812

one year older—  
sparrows in the bamboo  
call “nuk-nuk”

moor-hens call—  
and to their rhythm  
clouds hurry by

geese murmur-murmur—  
are they spreading  
gossip about me?

*naku na kari*  
*dokko mo onaji*  
*ukiyo zo ya*

—1813

wild geese, don't cry out—  
it's the same floating world  
everywhere

*harusame ya*  
*kuwari-nokori no*  
*kamo ga naku*

—1813

spring rain—  
the ducks not yet eaten  
are quacking

*uguisu ya*  
*ame darake naru*  
*asa no koe*

—1815

the warbler—  
its morning voice  
covered with rain

*ko wo kakusu*                      circling the grove  
*yabu no meguri ya*                where she hid her chicks  
*naku hibari*                        the skylark sings  
—1815

*senjū no*                              a mountain cuckoo's song—  
*tsuke-watari nari*                left behind  
*kankodori*                         by the previous tenant  
—1815

*hai-wataru*                         as I creep across  
*hashi no shita yori*              the hanging bridge—  
*hototogisu*                        from below, the cuckoo  
—1817

The warbler is usually associated with spring and plum trees; perhaps because there were already so many tanka and haiku praising this bird, Issa often shows another side.

*uguisu ya*                            the warbler  
*doro-ashi nuguu*                 wipes his muddy feet  
*ume no hana*                        on the plum blossoms  
—1814

Issa also enjoyed the different habits of different species.

*kitsutsuki ya*  
*hitotsu tokoro ni*  
*hi no kureru*

—1805

the woodpecker—  
still in the same place  
as day ends

*misosazai*  
*kyoro-kyoro nan zo*  
*otoshita ka*

—N.D.

the wren  
looking busily busily—  
what have you dropped?

*daibutsu no*  
*hana kara detaru*  
*tsubame kana*

—1822

flying out  
from the Great Buddha's nose—  
a swallow

Three of Issa's haiku about crows give the sense that he respected them for their confidence and self-sufficiency; the first word of the third poem *kerorikan* (relaxed, nonchalant) may well have been coined by Issa himself.

*hata uchi no*  
*mane shite aruku*  
*karasu kana*

—N.D.

as though  
plowing the field  
walks the crow

*nogarasu no*  
*jōzu ni tomaru*  
*bashō kana*

—N.D.

the field crow  
skillfully perches  
on the banana-tree

*kerorikan*  
*to shite karasu to*  
*yanagi kana*

—N.D.

nonchalant—  
crow and  
willow

Perhaps Issa's favorite bird was the humble sparrow, and his haiku on this theme cover a wide gamut from observation to compassion to irony. In the first of these poems, it may be that the children are also sparrows wearying their mother.

*ōzei no ko ni*  
*tsukaretari*  
*suzume kana*

—1811

tired out  
in a crowd of children—  
a sparrow

*oki yo oki yo*  
*suzume wo odoru*  
*chō wa mau*

—1812

wake up, wake up!  
sparrows are dancing  
butterflies frolicking

*cha no hana ni*  
*kakurenbo suru*  
*suzume kana*

—1813

among the tea flowers  
playing hide-and-seek—  
sparrows

*suzumera yo*  
*shōben muyō*  
*furu fusuma*

—1814

sparrows,  
please don't piss  
on my old quilt

*suzume no ko*  
*soko noke soko noke*  
*o-uma ga tōru*

—1819

sparrow chicks,  
look out, look out!  
Mr. Horse is passing by

*jihī sureba*  
*fun wo suru nari*  
*suzume no ko*

—1824

when you are kind to them  
they poop on you—  
baby sparrows

One final Issa haiku about birds is unusually pessimistic.

*kiru ki to wa*  
*shirade ya tori no*  
*su wo tsukuru*

—1824

not knowing the tree  
will be felled—birds  
build a nest

Structurally speaking, this haiku has the cutting word *ya* in the middle of the second line, dividing the poem neatly in half.

## Insects

*naki nagara*  
*mushi no nagaruru*  
*ukigi kana*

—N.D.

singing as they go  
insects float down the stream  
on a broken bough

If there is any haiku theme that Issa is most famous for, it is insects. Traditionally, the Japanese have not only admired butterflies, but have particularly enjoyed the voices of crickets, cicadas, and katydids, which are often sold in small cages. Issa, however, goes much further in also writing about flies, fleas, and mosquitoes. His ability to empathize is most apparent here, and it may well be that the struggles of his own life led him not only to compassion, but also to delight in all living creatures.

Beginning with the sound producers, we can note that not all the haiku are primarily concerned with vociferation—some also mention or imply human characteristics, not only in the insects but also in the world around them. Also to be noted are the five “ah” sounds in the first line of the fifth poem.

*yamabito ya*  
*tamoto no naka no*  
*semi no koe*

—1810

mountain dweller—  
from his sleeve  
a cicada’s voice

*aonoke ni*  
*ochite nakikeri*  
*aki no semi*

—1820

falling face-up  
and still singing—  
autumn cicada

*kōrogi no*  
*naki naki hairu*  
*fusuma kana*

—1812

calling “naki naki”  
the cricket crawls into  
the quilt



*kōrogi no*  
*shimo yo no koe*  
*jiman kana*

—1820

the cricket's voice  
on a frosty night—  
boasting

*tamadana ya*  
*jōza shite naku*  
*kirigirisu*

—1813

on the altar  
in the place of honor  
sings the katydid

*negaeri wo*  
*suru zo soko noke*  
*kirigirisu*

—1816

I'm turning over  
so find another place,  
katydid

*kirigirisu*  
*mi wo urarete mo*  
*naki ni keri*

—1820

the katydid  
even when being sold  
sings

*hanachi yaru*  
*te wo kajirikeri*  
*kirigirisu*

—1825

nipping the hand  
that sets it free—  
the katydid

*ware shinaba*  
*hakamori to nare*  
*kirigirisu*

—N.D.

when I die  
take care of my grave—  
katydid

Throughout his life, Issa wrote poems about butterflies. One of the first can be dated to 1788 and takes an appreciative tone, but as time went on his haiku tended to have other elements that make the expression somewhat more complex.

*mau chō ni*  
*shibashi wa tabi mo*  
*wasurekeri*

—1788

dancing butterflies—  
for a while my journey  
forgotten

*tōri-nuke*  
*yurusu tera nari*  
*haru no chō*

—1804

where the temple  
allows me a short-cut—  
a spring butterfly

*yo no naka ya*  
*chō no kurashi mo*  
*isogashiki*

—1811

in this world  
even butterflies keep busy  
making a living

*bettari to*  
*chō no sakitaru*  
*kareki kana*

—1814

blooming thickly  
with butterflies—  
the withered tree

*kago no tori*  
*chō wo urayamu*  
*metsuki kana*

—1823

the caged bird  
looks with envy  
at the butterfly

The most celebrated of Issa's poems about a butterfly does not have a date, but certainly was composed during his mature years.

*niwa no chō*  
*ko ga haeba tobi*  
*haeba tobu*

garden butterfly—  
as the baby crawls, it flies,  
crawls closer, flies on

—N.D.

The scene of a baby trying in vain to reach the butterfly can be considered pure observation, but it can also have a Buddhist reading where we fail to grasp what we seek outside ourselves.

This poem became one of Issa's favorite haiga themes, as he added a painting several times when writing out the verse. Interestingly, he did not depict either the baby or the butterfly, but rather sketched a picture of a small hut ([Plate 7-1](#)). This is a case of visually adding to the poem, rather than illustrating it, but we may still ask: Why the hut? One answer might be found by examining the entire composition, in which there is a nice use of space between the painting and the calligraphy. Is the image giving a sense of context? If so, might the meandering calligraphy suggest the fluttering path of the butterfly?

Issa's signature at the lower left says "hut also Issa." Perhaps he is merely stating that the painting is also by him, but more adventurously we can imagine that he himself is the hut, viewing the scene in the garden. In any case, the painting, like all those by Issa, is quite simple with very modest brushwork, far from the skillfulness of Buson and his followers. This haiga may seem childish at first glance, but the unassuming sincerity of the image, poem, and calligraphy all add together to offer viewers an experience that tends to deepen over time. Issa's haiga, like his haiku, have a unique touch that has made them especially admired in Japan.

Two other attractive insects that Issa clearly enjoyed are the firefly and the dragonfly. As is so often the case with Issa, the poems gain in depth as the years go by.

*akatombo*  
*kare mo yūbe ga*  
*suki ja yara*

—1810

red dragonfly—  
it seems that you too  
enjoy the evening

*omatsuri no*  
*akai dedachi no*  
*tombo kana*

—1817

going to the festival  
dressed in red—  
the dragonfly

*tōyama ga*  
*medama ni utsuru*  
*tombo kana*

—1820

distant mountains  
reflected in his eyes—  
the dragonfly

*waga yado ya*  
*nezumi to naka no*  
*yoi hotaru*

—1813

at my hermitage  
the mice are friendly  
with the fireflies

*hatsuhotaru*  
*tsui to soretaru*  
*tekaze kana*

—1818

as the first firefly  
escapes—  
the breeze in my hand

*ōbotaru*  
*yurari-yurari to*  
*tōrikeri*

—1819

the large firefly  
staggering, staggering  
passes by

Issa's enjoyment of insects continues with some varieties that he wrote about less often; these insects tend to be missing from the work of earlier poets.

<i>nigeru nari</i> <i>shimi ga naku ni mo</i> <i>oya yo ko yo</i> —1813	the fleeing silverfish include parents and children
<i>oni mo iya</i> <i>bosatsu mo iya to</i> <i>namako kana</i> —1814	not a demon not a bodhisattva— a sea-slug
<i>meigetsu ya</i> <i>funamushi hashiru</i> <i>ishi no ue</i> —N.D.	harvest moon— sea-lice run over the rocks
<i>keshite yoi</i> <i>jibun wa kuru nari</i> <i>hitorimushi</i> —N.D.	coming just when I turn out the light— a tigermoth
<i>kumo no ko wa</i> <i>mina chiri-jiri no</i> <i>misugi kana</i> —1822	the spider's children all skitter-scatter to make a living

## Flies, Fleas, Lice, and Mosquitoes

To many people, the most surprising and yet ultimately the most characteristic of Issa's haiku are those about insects that humans tend to dislike most. They were parts of his life that he did not disdain, for as he noted:

<i>naga iki no</i>	flies, fleas, and mosquitoes
<i>hae yo nomi ka yo</i>	live long in my
<i>bimbo mura</i>	poor village
—1820	

This did not mean that Issa always welcomed these insects, or that he ignored their obnoxious qualities, yet he was able not only to observe them, but also to see life from their point of view with rare empathy.

## Flies



*waga yado wa*  
*hae mo toshitoru*  
*urabe kana*

—1804

at my inn  
the flies too are a year older—  
at the seacoast

*hae uchi ni*  
*hana saku kusa mo*  
*utarekeri*

—1816

when hitting the fly  
I also hit  
flowering grasses

*hito hitori*  
*hae mo hitotsu ya*  
*ōzashiki*

—1819

one person  
and one fly  
in the large room

*yare utsu na*  
*hae ga te wo suri*  
*ashi wo suru*

—1821

“don’t hit me!”  
the fly wrings its hands  
and wrings its feet

*utte-utte to*  
*nogarete warau*  
*hae no koe*

—1822

swat, swat—  
the escaping laughter  
of the fly

## Fleas

*sakazuki ni*  
*nomi oyogu zo yo*  
*oyogu zo yo*

—1811

in my saké cup  
the flea is swimming,  
swimming!

*nomi hae ni*  
*anadorare tsutsu*  
*kyō mo kurenu*

—1813

despised by fleas and flies  
today too  
comes to an end

*tsujidō wo*  
*nomi ka ni karite*  
*netari keri*

—1814

borrowing the roadside shrine  
from fleas and mosquitoes  
I take a nap

*semaku tomo*  
*iza tobinarae*  
*io no nomi*

—1814

although it's small,  
you can practice jumping—  
fleas in my hut

*tobibeta no  
nomi no kawaisa  
masarikeri*

—1816

the flea  
least skilled at jumping  
is the most charming

*nomi no ato  
kazoe nagara ni  
soeji kana*

—1818

while feeding her baby  
she counts  
the flea-bites

## Lice

*shirami-domo  
yonaga karō zo  
sabishikaro*

—1813<sup>7</sup>

also for lice  
is the night cold  
and lonely?

*onorera mo  
hanami-jirami ni  
sōrō yo*

—1815

on us too  
as we go flower-viewing—  
lice

*ōkawa e  
shirami tobasuru  
bijin kana*

—1817

throwing her lice  
into the broad river—  
the beautiful woman

## Mosquitoes

*hiru no ka wo  
ushiro ni kakusu  
hotoke kana*

—N.D.

noontime mosquitoes  
hiding behind  
a Buddha

*hitotsu ka no  
nodo e tobikomu  
sawagi kana*

—1812

a mosquito has  
jumped down my throat—  
what a commotion!

*kabashira ya  
kore mo nakereba  
ko sabishiki*

—1814

a column of mosquitoes—  
but when they're not here  
it's a little lonely

*waga yado wa  
kuchi de fuite mo  
deru ka kana*

—1816

in my hut  
when I just whistle—  
here come mosquitoes

*abare-ka ni  
juzu wo furi-furi  
ekō kana*

—1818

swinging prayer beads  
whish-whish at fierce mosquitoes  
during the memorial service

If these poems were not enough, Issa goes one step further, writing about mosquito larvae, surely the most unusual of all his haiku subjects.

<i>bōfuri no</i>	mosquito larvae
<i>nebutsu-odori ya</i>	dancing a Buddhist chant
<i>haka no mizu</i>	in the graveside puddle

—1821

<i>kyō no hi mo</i>	this day
<i>bōfuri-mushi yo</i>	along with mosquito larvae
<i>kure ni keri</i>	comes to an end

—N.D.

## Dew and the Dewdrop World

One more subject was very important to Issa: the dew, with the evanescent world that dewdrops call to mind. Here his Pure Land Buddhist beliefs were combined with his observations of nature to create some remarkable haiku. Some of these can be seen as clear descriptions of moments in nature, but others make it clear that the image of dew was of special significance to the poet.

<i>tsuyu no tama</i>	pearls of dew
<i>hitotsu-hitotsu ni</i>	one by one—
<i>furusato ari</i>	my old village

—1806

*shiratsuyu to*  
*shirade fue fuku*  
*tonari kana*

—N.D.

not knowing the white dew,  
he plays his flute—  
my neighbor

*tsuyu no yo no*  
*tsuyu no naka nite*  
*kenka kana*

—1810

a world of dew—  
and with the dewdrops,  
quarrels

*tsuyu no yo no*  
*tsuyu wo naku nari*  
*natsu no semi*

—1811

in a world of dew  
singing of the dew—  
summer cicadas

*tsuyu chiru ya*  
*sude ni onore mo*  
*ano tōri*

—1813

dewdrops fall—  
I too will soon  
follow

*asa tsuyu ni*  
*jōdo mairi no*  
*keiko kana*

—1813

in the morning dew  
there is a lesson about  
the Pure Land

*tsuyu chiru ya*  
*jigoku no tane wo*  
*kyō mo maku*

—1814

dewdrops fall—  
the seeds of hell are  
planted again today

*oku tsuyu ya*  
*ware wa kusaki ni*  
*itsu naran*

—1826

dew settling—  
when will I become  
grasses or a tree?

The most quoted of all Issa haiku is also about the dew, and was written after his infant daughter Sato died. It perfectly captures the moment when sincere religious understanding meets the deepest feelings of the heart.

*tsuyu no yo wa*  
*tsuyu no yo nagara*  
*sarinagara*

—1819

this world of dew  
is just a world of dew  
and yet . . . and yet . . .

## Inoue Shirō

Two haiku friends of Issa were noted not only for their verses but for their excellent haiga. The first of these was Inoue Shirō (1742–1812), a doctor from Nagoya who followed his family profession, specializing in obstetrics. Despite achieving fame in this field, he devoted much of his life to literature and the arts. Studying “National Learning” (referring to classic works in the Japanese tradition, such as *The Tale of Genji*) with the celebrated Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), he also became known for painting, narrative chant, and playing the *biwa* lute.

Living almost his entire life in Nagoya, Shirō achieved his greatest renown as a haiku poet and haiga master, and frequently met with other poets and literati. To some extent he followed the Buson tradition in haiku, but his paintings tend to be much simpler and almost always feature varied ink tones rather than colors. Like Issa, he also liked onomatopoeia in his haiku, as the following two verses make clear:



<i>tō-tō to</i>	“tō-tō” gushes
<i>taki no ochikomu</i>	the waterfall—
<i>shigeri kana</i>	lush vegetation
<i>sasatake ni</i>	falling “saya-saya”
<i>saya-saya to furu</i>	on the bamboo—
<i>shigure kana</i>	late autumn rain

Two more haiku depict winter; there is a pun in the first poem, where *kazahana* can mean “stuffy nose” but can also mean “snowflakes” (which of course have no color or scent).

<i>iro mo ka mo</i>	no color or scent
<i>nakute hanamiru</i>	when flower-viewing—
<i>kazahana kana</i>	stuffy nose <sup>8</sup>
<i>akebono ya</i>	break of day—
<i>arashi wa yuki ni</i>	the storm is buried
<i>uzumorete</i>	in snow

Shirō’s view of spring can be represented by another pair of haiku, where he finds new uses for the familiar symbols of plums and warblers.

<i>takusan na</i>	many months and days
<i>tsuki hi ga dekite</i>	have made possible
<i>ume no hana</i>	plum blossoms

<i>dokoyara de</i>	somewhere
<i>uguisu nakinu</i>	a warbler sang—
<i>hiru no tsuki</i>	the moon at midday

Since the cuckoo is a harbinger of summer, some people (not only lovers) might stay out for much or all of the night to hear its first calls. One of Shirō's most evocative haiga, where the image is not specifically stated in the poem, shows a cuckoo, beak open as it sings ([Plate 7-2](#)). The bird flies down to the left, the calligraphy follows the same diagonal, and only the signature and seal at the lower right balance this sense of movement, like a visual anchor. The poem sets the scene rather than fully describing it.

<i>kyo koborete</i>	instead of home
<i>suzushiki tsuki no</i>	the cool moon's
<i>mushiro kana</i>	straw mat

The painting is unusual for a haiga in using silk rather than paper as its medium, but this is perfect for the tones of gray in the cuckoo, as though one could almost see right through the bird in the moonlight. And although the painting and poem do not share the same image, one might interpret the character for “moon” (月, originally a pictograph of the crescent moon) as the moon itself, written near the center of the scroll.

If this interpretation seems questionable, it is reinforced by another haiga by Shirō in which the character for “moon” is larger and slightly

separated from the calligraphy as it shines over a mountain ([Plate 7-3](#)). Here the haiku is very straightforward:

*yorozu yo ya*  
*yama no ue yori*  
*kyō no tsuki*

through the ages  
over the mountains—  
tonight's moon

Amazingly, this haiga is composed of a single line. The brush was dipped in gray ink, then just the tip in darker ink, and as the line rises to the right and then descends to the lower right, tones of gray appear that give this single stroke life and energy. Always pliant, the line continues to slightly curl and bend as it moves confidently across the paper. The primary diagonal that this line describes is countered by the slightly tilting “moon” above it, and here it would be difficult not to agree that Shirō was aware of the moon as a pictographic form as well as a written character.

Three more haiku by Shirō demonstrate some of the range of his poetry, from broadscale views of nature to an indoor observation during the summer.



As well as learning calligraphy from his father, Sōchō studied haiku with Kaya Shirao (1738–91), a follower of the Bashō tradition, and practiced painting under several teachers. Leading an artistic life, he also excelled at flower arrangement and the tea ceremony, and was close friends with a number of artists and poets including his brother-in-law Kameda Bōsai (1752–1826), a scholar-calligrapher-poet-painter in the Chinese style, who noted that Sōchō “loved saké and loved guests.” [11](#)

Like Shirō, Sōchō had a wide range of subjects and moods in his haiku, often abetted by paintings to form haiga. One of his most delightful for both image and poem is *Discussions Under a Mosquito Net* ([Plate 7-4](#) ). Although travel was restricted by the government, going on pilgrimage was often a good excuse to see the country and meet people, and we can imagine such a case at this country inn. The poem itself sounds like a complaint:

<i>susuki kara</i>	from the pampas-grass
<i>ka no deru yado ni</i>	mosquitoes came into the inn
<i>tomarikeri</i>	where I stayed

What kind of painting might one expect with this haiku? The figures are huddled to the left, while semicircles indicate a rump, a lamp, and a sedge hat, with the poem to the right. Indeed, Sōchō has taken a positive view toward the scene: the guests are huddled under a single mosquito net, giving them the opportunity to chat among themselves. In the back, a woman seems to be asleep, but a baby looks on wonderingly as several old geezers smoke, wave a fan, and gossip. The painting has offered a new interpretation of the poem: the usually obnoxious mosquitoes seem to have done the travelers a favor.

Sōchō also painted a pair of screens with haiku and images from the twelve months, in which this haiku appears in the sixth month. [12](#) Other notable poems included on this screen were also written when traveling.

*asa no ma ni* through the morning  
*sakura mite kite* I watched cherry-blossoms  
*oinikeri* become old

—SECOND MONTH

*nemu saku ya* seeming to desire  
*tsuge no kokushi mo* a small boxwood comb—  
*hoshige ni te* the blooming silk-tree

—SIXTH MONTH

*ro ni yoreba* leaning on the hearth  
*kamo ga matarete* waiting for the duck to roast—  
*kamo no koe* voices of wild geese

—EIGHTH MONTH

*keisei wa* the courtesan  
*mino mo tashiname* scolds even the straw coat—  
*hatsu shigure* first winter rain

—ELEVENTH MONTH

Sōchō's haiku for the twelfth month has a headnote: "Coming to Ikuta Forest, where winter cherry trees are planted by the side of the beach, and since this is a shrine with ancient ceremonies":

<i>koyuki seyo</i>	let the light snow fall
<i>kasa kite mawan</i>	I'll dance with my hat
<i>kami no mae</i>	in front of the god

—TWELFTH MONTH

Another twelfth-month poem comes on a hand-scroll by Sōchō dated 1799. [13](#)

<i>toshi kurete</i>	at year's end
<i>hi wo taku ni sae</i>	even making a fire
<i>omoshiromi</i>	is delightful

We might imagine that once a poet-painter has combined a haiku and an image, that is how it will be combined from that time on, but Sōchō proves this is not always true. He painted two distinctly different images for the same verse:

<i>dore kara to</i>	where did it come from?
<i>ogi no tonari ya</i>	next to waterside reeds—
<i>nochi no tsuki</i>	late autumn moon

One image simply shows the reeds in a rather literal rendering of the image, but another shows two elderly people sitting and conversing ([Plate 7-5](#)). [14](#) What relation does this have to the haiku? Because moon-viewing is a favorite activity in Japan, we might assume that the couple has gone out for this purpose, but it seems they are enjoying their conversation, and perhaps the moon is just beginning to appear. In any event, the overlapping figures created with relaxed brushwork may give us something of the same pleasure that they are feeling.

There were of course many other fine poets contemporary with Issa. While none of them achieved his range of subject matter and depth of feeling, they did create some fine haiku, and especially in the cases of Shirō and Sōchō, added a great deal to the haiga tradition.

By the first half of the nineteenth century, haiku painting and haiku poetry were thoroughly established as important elements in Japanese culture, practiced by a great number of people from all walks of society. However, when Japan opened to the West in 1868, all the traditional arts faced new challenges. The following chapter will explore different responses to this challenge, which included the flourishing of both traditional and new forms of haiku and haiga.



# 8

## Shiki and the Modern Age

**T**HE OPENING OF JAPAN to the West in 1868 had consequences for almost every aspect of Japanese life. Caught in the turmoil between Westernization and traditional values, haiku writers continued, but in different directions. Some poets accepted the guidelines from the past, while others found new freedoms, including abandoning the 5–7–5 structure that had been followed more or less rigorously for several hundred years. <sup>1</sup>

### Masaoka Shiki

At the turn of the twentieth century, the leading haiku poet, who was also a theorist and tanka master, was Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902). If Bashō, Buson, and Issa have been accepted as the three greatest haiku poets, Shiki is often considered the fourth; despite his short life and other literary activities, his influence was profound. <sup>2</sup>

Shiki was born in Matsuyama, a city on the island of Shikoku, to a modest samurai-class family. His father was an alcoholic who died when Shiki was five, and his mother taught sewing to support the family. After studying the Chinese classics with his grandfather and spending three years at the Matsuyama Middle School, Shiki moved to Tokyo (no longer called Edo in the new Meiji era) for further studies in 1883. Some of his earliest haiku date from this time, but they do not yet show the special touch that marks his later works.

*ki wo tsumite*  
*yo no akeyasuki*  
*ko-mado kana*

the tree cut down,  
dawn comes early  
through the little window

—1885

In Tokyo, Shiki first attended a preparatory college and then Tokyo Imperial University, focusing on classic Japanese literature and haiku (in 1888 he also became fascinated with baseball). However, his interest in formal education declined just as the health difficulties that were to eventually cost him his life began to appear. He left college after failing his examinations in 1892; he later wrote that when he studied the exam questions, new haiku flew into his mind. <sup>3</sup>Shiki thereupon decided to focus his life on poetry; he began to write a haiku column for the newspaper *Nippon*, and soon became its poetry editor, a position that put him at the forefront of the haiku world.

Over the next decade Shiki published hundreds of poems of his own and by his young friends, as well as articles and essays. He became the voice of the new haiku movement that soon became a strong force in Japanese literature. In fact, it was Shiki's insistence that haiku was indeed a form of literature that helped to give it significant intellectual standing in the unsettled cultural times before and at the turn of the century. He himself wrote about eighteen thousand haiku, an amazing total considering that they were mainly composed over a twelve-year span between 1891 and his death in 1902.

The early 1890s were an especially fertile period for Shiki's poetry, and he poured forth haiku that can be divided into two general categories. The first is a large group of poems that do not directly mention elements of the newly Westernizing Japan. Some of these seem as though they could have been written a hundred years earlier, while others begin to show a different tone and voice.

*iwa-iwa no*  
*wareme-wareme ya*  
*yama tsutsuji*

—1891

*te no uchi ni*  
*hotaru tsumetaki*  
*hikari kana*

—1892

*kogarashi ya*  
*jizai ni kama no*  
*kishiru oto*

—1892

cliff after cliff  
crevice after crevice—  
mountain azaleas

in my hands  
emitting a cold light—  
the firefly

cold winds—  
the squeak of the kettle  
hanging free

*getabako no*  
*oku ni narikeri*  
*kirigirisu*

—1892

from the back  
of the shoe closet  
a katydid sings

*hadakami no*  
*kabe ni hittsuku*  
*atsusa kana*

—1893

pressing my naked body  
against the wall—  
the heat!

*suzushisa ya*  
*kami to hotoke no*  
*tonaridoshi*

—1893

coolness—  
gods and buddhas  
are neighbors

This last haiku suggests the close relationship that had developed over centuries between the native Shinto religion and Buddhism, whose deities were often seen as manifestations of each other. However, this relationship was officially severed at the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the new government promoted Shintoism and denigrated Buddhism. In a popular anti-Buddhist frenzy, many monks returned to lay life, and a number of temples were abandoned or even destroyed, forming the background for two other haiku by Shiki.

*mujūji no*  
*kane nusumarete*  
*hatsuzakura*

—1893

at the closed temple  
with its bell stolen—  
first cherry-blossoms

*yare tsukusu*  
*bimbō-dera no*  
*bashō kana*

—N.D.

at the poverty-stricken  
broken-down temple—  
a plantain

Three more haiku bring new Westernized elements into the poem.

*hasu no hana*  
*saku ya sabishiki*  
*teishajō*

—1893

lotus flowers  
blooming at the lonely  
railroad station

*kisha sugite*  
*kemuri uzumaku*  
*wakaba kana*

—1895

a train passes by  
its smoke swirling  
in the new leaves

*hitori iru*  
*henshūkyoku ya*  
*satsuki ame*

—N.D.

alone in  
the newspaper office—  
fifth-month rains

Shiki was ambiguous about how much of the new industrializing Japan to allow into haiku. On one hand, he recognized that the modern world was now part of people's experience and therefore appropriate to include in poems, but he also felt that many of the new images had little poetic content. In his *Talks on Haiku from the Otter's Den* of 1892, he wrote, "What mental reaction does the word 'steam engine' evoke? . . . or try listening to such words as 'election,' 'competition,' 'disciplinary punishment,' 'court,' and the like, and see what images they call up." <sup>4</sup>

Shiki's own solution to this problem was to be very judicious in the use of new Westernizing words and concepts. Nevertheless, he was definitely influenced by the events of his own day; for example, despite having developed the early stages of tuberculosis, he insisted upon traveling to China as a war correspondent in the spring of 1895. To his disappointment, the war had ended before he arrived, but during his time there he composed a few tanka and haiku, including these verses written in Chin-chou.

<i>nagaki hi ya</i>	days lengthen—
<i>roba wo oiyuku</i>	a donkey chased by
<i>muchi no kage</i>	the shadow of a whip <sup>5</sup>
—1895	

<i>nashi saku ya</i>	pear trees blooming—
<i>ikusa no ato no</i>	after the war,
<i>kuzure-ie</i>	destroyed houses
—1895	

On his way back to Japan that summer, Shiki suffered a lung hemorrhage that was so serious he was not expected to live. He slowly recovered, however, convalescing at the house of his friend Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) in Matsuyama. Sōseki had focused on

haiku before becoming one of Japan's most successful novelists, and we can compare verses with the same final line.

<i>soko no ishi</i>	stones at the bottom
<i>ugoite miyuru</i>	look like they're moving—
<i>shimizu kana</i>	clear waters
—SŌSEKI	

<i>kanemochi mo</i>	rich people and bears
<i>kuma mo kite nomu</i>	both come to drink—
<i>shimizu kana</i>	clear waters
—SHIKI	

Judging from these two examples, Shiki was the more adventurous poet, but they each offered a fresh view of an otherwise familiar scene.

While in Matsuyama, Shiki introduced his haiku style to a group of young poets and wrote *Haikai taiyō* (Elements of Haiku), one of a series of works in which he discussed the past and the future of haiku. Feeling that the form was being stultified by too many rules and regulations, he began to search out new guidelines that were not entirely revolutionary but would allow some freedoms from past tradition.

Parting from Sōseki in fall of 1895 in order to return to Tokyo, Shiki wrote:

*yuku ware ni*                      for me going  
*todomaru nare ni*              and you staying—  
*aki futatsu*                      two autumns  
—1895<sup>6</sup>

Back in the metropolis, Shiki's outlook had changed; despite his growing circle of friends and admirers, a sense of solitary selfhood sometimes prevailed, no doubt increased by his growing illness. Two years after his haiku about gods and buddhas as neighbors, he wrote:

*yuku aki no*                      autumn passing—  
*ware ni kami nashi*              for me no gods  
*hotoke nashi*                      no buddhas  
—1895

More haiku from 1895 also have a somewhat pessimistic tone.



*keshi saite*  
*sono hi no kaze ni*  
*chirinikeri*  
—1895

poppies bloom  
and the same day  
scatter in the wind

*buke machi no*  
*hatake ni narinu*  
*aki nasubi*  
—1895

where samurai once lived  
now there are fields—  
autumn eggplants

*kumo korosu*  
*ato no sabishiki*  
*yosamu kana*  
—1895

after killing the spider  
it gets lonely—  
cold evening

That same year Shiki wrote what was to become his most famous haiku.

*kaki kueba*  
*kane ga narunari*  
*Hōryū-ji*  
—1895

as I eat a persimmon  
a temple bell resounds—  
Hōryū-ji

Interestingly, it was not the bell of Hōryū-ji that Shiki actually heard, but that of Tōdai-ji; he decided that mentioning the earlier temple (which had persimmon orchards nearby) would have more resonance. This is despite Shiki's claim that haiku should follow the conception of *shasei*, or "painting from life." Perhaps the most important element of Shiki's theories, this term originally came from

Chinese painting, and was opposed to the more idealistic conception of *sha-i* (painting the idea), which was so important for literati art. *Shasei* could be equated with naturalism, and was strongly influenced during Shiki's time by Western-style painting; Shiki's idea was that *shasei* could equally apply to haiku poetry.

In some respects, stressing *shasei* was one means to get away from poems written in familiar ways on familiar themes, or poems based on other poems. Shiki loved persimmons, and just as he was biting into one, he heard the temple bell. While there was no actual connection between the two events, they nevertheless seemed to relate to each other beyond logic. Somehow the concurrence of the immediate with the seemingly timeless, of the two different senses of tasting and hearing, and of the personal with the traditional, all worked together to create a poem that is still taught in Japanese schools today.

## Shiki and Bashō

Although Shiki is sometimes considered a harsh critic of Bashō, the truth is much more complex, especially since Shiki wrote about Bashō often and not always consistently. On the negative side, he complained in his 1893 essay "Some Remarks about Bashō" that the admiration of the master had become almost a religion in which he was venerated like a saint. To counter this trend, Shiki wrote that 90 percent of Bashō's haiku were not very good, although he believed that the other 10 percent were marvelous. What he admired in these successful haiku was a sense of grandeur combined with natural observation about the life around him. On the other hand, he felt that Bashō "discarded scenes which arise from imagination." <sup>7</sup>With his admonition to follow *shasei*, one might not expect Shiki to favor haiku stemming from imagination, but that was just what he admired in the poems of Buson, whose reputation Shiki did much to foster.

Shiki realized that he and Bashō were very different in their choice of lifestyles, and wrote a haiku with the title "Viewing a Portrait of Bashō."

*ware wa kotatsu  
kimi wa angya no  
sugata kana*

I by the little stove,  
you portrayed on your  
pilgrimage

—1894

Realizing that the wandering of Bashō was not something he could emulate, Shiki nevertheless traveled when given the chance, but his health problems cut short any possibilities of larger journeys. Instead, he worked on his art theories and criticism, publishing many articles in *Nippon*.

In 1898, Shiki wrote a significant essay entitled *Furu ike ya* (Old Pond) in which he traced the entire history of renga and haiku up to the time of Bashō. Shiki basically felt that earlier haiku suffered from lack of depth and not enough natural observation, too often opting for humor or reworking past themes. In contrast, he wrote that when Bashō came up with his “old pond” poem in 1686, “That’s it! At this time, Bashō got enlightened. . . . He found that an ordinary thing can be immediately a verse . . . and rejected unpoetical, intellectual, made-up verses. . . . It is clear that he reached a hitherto unknown region. . . . Bashō opened his living eyes to the frog; that meant he opened his eyes to nature. . . . The meaning of this verse is just what is said; it has no other . . . he heard the sound of a frog jumping into an old pond—nothing should be added to that.”<sup>8</sup>

Shiki had earlier written that he doubted if this poem marked the Zen experience of *satori*, but in common with Zen, the haiku “truly ‘describes as is’—the ‘as is’ became a poem.”<sup>9</sup> Whether or not the poem was an enlightenment experience for Bashō has been debated, but for Shiki it marked the beginning of true haiku and the quintessence of what he considered *shasei*, painting from life.

As time went on, Shiki elaborated his views on haiku, and sometimes changed them. In his 1897 book on Buson, for example, he wrote that Buson’s haiku were the equal of Bashō’s, with more

“positive beauty” and pictorial qualities. In an extension of (if not opposition to) *shasei*, Shiki insisted that “literature should not be based upon actuality alone. . . . The writing of an author of ordinary experience will ultimately be unable to avoid triteness. . . . [An author’s] imagination ranges from beyond his country’s borders throughout the universe and seeks beauty in absolute freedom. . . . In haiku there is only one poet like this: Buson.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, in his final year of 1902, Shiki wrote, “It is imagination which is shallow and has nowhere near the variety of the sketch from life. I do not say that a work based on the imaginative method is always bad, but it is a fact that many of the works which rely on it are often bad.”<sup>11</sup>

What are we to make of these seeming contradictions? First, poets are certainly allowed to change their minds as the process of creation and evaluation matures, but there are other factors in the case of Shiki. His own state of health limited his experiential world as his final years went by; this gave him a different view of the importance of imagination than one might expect, since he could now focus his attention on the smallest of themes. In addition, he realized that everyday experience can be the basis of fine haiku, but finding the extraordinary in the ordinary is what makes them sing. Perhaps he would have agreed that the imagination in the service of the everyday is what the finest haiku have to offer—the sound of water after the frog’s jump energizes our own imaginations, and Bashō did not need to elaborate any further.

## Shiki’s Final Years

Although he had basically recovered from his major lung hemorrhage of 1895, Shiki became more and more of an invalid over the next months and years. By November, he was experiencing pains in his pelvis that made it difficult to walk. In 1896 he was confined to bed for a time, and he continued his ideas of *shasei* by writing of his life, now limited to house and garden.

*yuki furu yo*  
*shōji no ana wo*  
*mite areba*

—1896

it's snowing—  
I can see it through a hole  
in the paper window

*yuki no ie ni*  
*nete iru to omou*  
*bakari nite*

—1896

in this snow-covered house  
all I can think of is that  
I'm just lying here

*furu niwa ya*  
*tsuki ni tampo no*  
*yu wo kobosu*

—1896

old garden—  
emptying a hot-water bottle  
into the moon

Despite the new elements in these poems, we can see traces of the past as well. The hole in the paper window was an image used by Issa, and the first line of the third poem suggests Bashō's "old pond."

In 1897, Shiki and his close followers began to edit *Hototogisu*, which was to become the most influential journal in the new haiku world, drawing huge numbers of submissions. Of course, this also increased the work Shiki had to do, but he kept up a frenetic pace despite his illness, sometimes allowing himself the reward of his favorite fruit.

*sanzen no  
haiku wo kemishi  
kaki futatsu*

—N.D.

after inspecting  
three thousand haiku—  
two persimmons

## After I Die

*kaki kui no  
haiku konomishi to  
tsutau beshi*

—1897

you can report  
I ate persimmons  
and loved haiku

That year, Kawahigashi Hekigotō (also spelled “Hekigodō,” 1873–1937), whom Shiki made haiku editor of *Hototogisu*, became ill with smallpox. Shiki was sympathetic:

*samukarō  
kayukarō hito ni  
aitakarō*

—1897

probably cold  
probably itching  
probably wanting visitors

For Shiki, as each season passed his world became smaller. Nevertheless, he could focus his attention on both beauty and the less enjoyable aspects of nature.

*Furansu no  
ichirinzashi ya  
fuyu no bara*

—1897

in the French  
single-bud vase—  
a winter rose

*hae nikushi  
utsu ki ni nareba  
yoritsukazu*

—N.D.

hateful fly—  
when I want to swat it  
it won't come near

Shiki became very fond of roses, and as he became more and more confined to his room, he liked to paint them in *shasei* style.

*bara wo kaku  
hana wa yasashiku  
ha wa kataki*

—N.D.

painting roses—  
the flowers are easy,  
the leaves difficult

He also made a number of watercolor sketches of such subjects as fruit ([Plate 8-1](#)). There is a definite influence here from Western art, but Shiki's haiku-style focus is also apparent.

One of Shiki's earlier enthusiasms was now reduced from watching to just listening.

*natsugusa ya  
besu-bōru no  
hito tōshi*

—1898

summer grasses—  
people in the distance  
playing baseball

Unfortunately, Shiki's tuberculosis settled in his spine and became both debilitating and very painful. He tried to work on reforming tanka the way he had with haiku and achieved some success, but his energy was limited. As the seasons passed, he found that he couldn't walk without a cane, then couldn't walk at all, then could just sit up, and finally had to spend his time lying down.

## After Buying My First Cane

<i>tsue ni yorite</i>	due to my cane
<i>tachi agarikeri</i>	I could stand up!
<i>hagi no hana</i>	bush-clover blossoms
—1899	

In December of 1899, Shiki's friend and follower Takahama Kyoshi (1874–1959) arranged to have a glass door installed between Shiki's room and his garden.

<i>garasu goshi ni</i>	winter sun shines
<i>fuyu no hi ataru</i>	through the glass door—
<i>byōma kana</i>	sickroom
—1899	

<i>ringo kūte</i>	eating an apple
<i>botan no mae ni</i>	in front of peonies
<i>shinan kana</i>	is how I'll die
—1899	

In 1900 there was a great fire at Takaoka, and Shiki responded from his sickbed.



*ie no naki*  
*hito ni-man nin*  
*natsu no tsuki*

—1900

twenty thousand people  
homeless—  
the summer moon

This haiku can have various interpretations. One might feel Shiki was somewhat heartless to invoke the moon when people had lost their homes, or one might imagine that he was making an ironic contrast. But for people without dwellings, the moon might also be their companion; as good haiku can do, this one invites the reader's participation to bring forth its meaning or meanings.

Most of Shiki's later haiku, however, center on the experience of his room and the garden just outside.

*akaki ringo*  
*aoki ringo ya*  
*taku no ue*

—1900

a red apple  
and a green apple  
on the table

## Facing the Garden

*keitō no*  
*jūshi-go hon mo*  
*arinu beshi*

—1900

cockscombs—  
there must be about  
fourteen or fifteen

These poems, especially in translation, may seem too simple, but they have become quite famous. The poems highlight the sheer experience of looking at apples of different colors, or at brilliantly red

autumn cockscombs—any further responses and associations are left to us.

In his final two years, Shiki found his life even further reduced.

<i>kaki kuu mo</i>	also for eating persimmons
<i>kotoshi bakari to</i>	I think I have only
<i>omoikeri</i>	this year
—1901	

<i>mainichi wa</i>	every day
<i>budō mo kuwazu</i>	not even eating grapes—
<i>mizu-gusuri</i>	just drinking medicine
—N.D.	

<i>kusuri nomu</i>	cold season—
<i>ato no mikan ya</i>	after swallowing medicine,
<i>kan no uchi</i>	the tangerine!
—1902	

Shiki was now taking morphine several times a day, and after each dose he could read, write, or sketch for a little while. He still found Zen texts difficult, such as the Chinese koan collection the *Blue Cliff Record*, but he could enjoy the flowers, fruits, and vegetables that were in his garden or brought to him.

*kai shikanuru*  
*Hekiganshū ya*  
*zōni-bara*

—1902

still impenetrable  
the *Blue Cliff Record*—  
my stomach full of soup

*kubi agete*  
*ori-ori miru ya*  
*niwa no hagi*

—1902

stretching my neck  
I can sometimes take a look—  
garden bush-clover

*kobocho yori*  
*nasu muzukashiki*  
*shasei kana*

—1902

eggplants are  
more difficult than pumpkins  
to paint from life

*kōbai no*  
*chirinu sabishiki*  
*makura moto*

—1902

red plum blossoms  
scattered in loneliness  
by my pillow

*kuroki made ni*  
*murasaki fukaki*  
*budō kana*

—1902

a purple deep  
to the point of blackness—  
grapes

At the end, Shiki could still dictate haiku to his followers. Here, in a poem spoken only hours before he died, the final word *hotoke*, which

means “Buddha,” is also used for a body at death.

<i>hechima saite</i>	snake-gourd in bloom—
<i>tan no tsumarishi</i>	my lungs clogged with phlegm—
<i>hotoke kana</i>	<i>hotoke</i>
—1902	

## Takahama Kyoshi

The two major followers of Shiki took different paths in moving haiku into the new world of twentieth-century Japan. Takahama Kyoshi (1874–1959), born near Shiki’s original home in Matsuyama, was more conservative than Hekigotō, maintaining tradition without being stultified by it. He met Shiki in 1891, and soon became his follower and friend. After Shiki’s death, Kyoshi became editor of *Hototogisu*, while Hekigotō took over the daily haiku column for *Nippon*. Kyoshi soon opened his journal to other forms of writing, and for a few years starting in 1909 he stopped composing poetry himself, but returned with a haiku column in *Hototogisu* beginning in 1912.

Over the course of his long life Kyoshi insisted upon simplicity, but was ready to accept other rhythms than 5–7–5 while still favoring seasonal associations. A few of his early haiku give a sense of his general style.

*fuyugare no  
michi futasuji ni  
wakarekeri*

—1894

winter decay—  
the road divides  
in two

*akikaze ya  
ganchū no mono  
mina haiku*

—1903

autumn wind—  
in my eyes,  
everything is haiku

*kiri hito-ha  
hiatari nagara  
ochinikeri*

—1906

a single paulownia leaf  
catching the light  
as it falls

Admirers of Kyoshi point to his evocative and unpretentious lucidity; critics sometimes complain that his poems lack the layers of meaning one can sometimes find in the haiku of Shiki. Kyoshi's best poems from his middle years, however, can evoke a sense of mystery.

*hebi nigete*  
*ware wo mishi me no*  
*kusa ni nokoru*

the snake has fled  
but the eyes that looked at me  
remain in the grasses

*fumite sugu*  
*daisy no hana*  
*okiagaru*

as soon as  
I walk on it,  
the daisy rises up

*akikaze ni*  
*kusa no hito-ha no*  
*uchi-furuu*

in the autumn breeze  
one blade of grass  
oscillates

*sankaku no*  
*tokage no kao no*  
*sukoshi nobu ka*

the triangular face  
of the lizard—is it  
getting longer?

Other haiku of Kyoshi contain touches of humor that are very welcome.

*hana no ue ni*  
*ochiba wo nosete*  
*higo uku*

with a fallen leaf  
on his nose—  
a golden carp

<i>nusundaru</i>	on the hat
<i>kakashi no kasa ni</i>	stolen from the scarecrow
<i>ame kyū nari</i>	sudden rain
<i>yorokobi ni</i>	when she's happy
<i>tsuke uki ni tsuke</i>	or when she's miserable
<i>kami arau</i>	she washes her hair

Two of Kyoshi's later haiku, from 1936 and 1938 respectively, show on the one hand his ability to find a nice contrast of images when traveling, and also his *shasei* -style observation.

<i>London no</i>	treading on London's
<i>shunsō wo fumu</i>	spring grasses—
<i>waga zōri</i>	my Japanese sandals
<i>ware omou</i>	just as I thought—
<i>mama ni bōfura</i>	mosquito larvae
<i>uki shizumi</i>	rise and sink

## Kawahigashi Hekigotō

Although equally a follower and friend of Shiki, Hekigotō was very different from Kyoshi in temperament and poetic style. He too was born in Matsuyama and met Shiki in 1890 or 1891, soon becoming a believer in *shasei*. After he became haiku editor of *Nippon* in 1902, however, Hekigotō did his best to revolutionize haiku and cast away what he considered stifling regulations, such as the 5–7–5 syllable count. <sup>12</sup> Although his early verses had been more or less traditional, he became the voice of “new haiku” through his column in *Nippon*, through traveling and proselytizing from 1907–1911, and especially

through his own haiku. A comparison of his verses from 1906 and 1918 makes this clear, not only in the syllable count of 5–7–5 versus 6–7–10, but also in theme and expression.

<i>omowazu mo</i>	unexpectedly
<i>hiyoko umarenu</i>	little chicks are born—
<i>fuyu sōbi</i>	winter roses
<i>ringo wo tsumami</i>	picking up an apple—
<i>iitsukushite mo</i>	even if I've said it all
<i>kurikaesaneba naranu</i>	I must definitely say it again

Another Hekigotō haiku with unusual rhythms has a total of twenty-six syllables compared to the traditional seventeen.

<i>konogoro tsuma naki yaoya</i>	nowadays the widowed grocer
<i>na wo tsumu negi wo tsumu</i>	loads the greens, loads the onions
<i>aruji musume</i>	with his daughter

Hekigotō believed that haiku should simply be short poems rather than rhythmically rigid, so he also thought fewer syllables could be effective.

<i>onna wo soba e</i>	a woman next to me
<i>sode fururu</i>	our sleeves touch
<i>momo</i>	peaches
<i>tō hanabi</i>	the sound of
<i>oto shite</i>	distant fireworks—
<i>nani mo nakarikeri</i>	nothing else



Since in Japan haiku are usually written or printed in a single column, this latter poem might be translated into a single line:

the sound of distant fireworks—nothing else

Nevertheless, why did Hekigotō usually add words and syllables to his poems rather than reducing them? This may have been partially for the extra meanings he could include, but it could also have been intended to make the reader or listener pay attention to the new expanded rhythms. It also allowed more contrast to the nature images that frequently end his poems.

<i>kojō no tachi</i>	sounds of expanding the factory—
<i>hirogaru oto mo</i>	today again is clear
<i>kyō mo seifū no hare</i>	with a west wind

<i>waga kao ni iro shita koto</i>	no one has commented that
<i>tare mo iwananda</i>	my face is the color of the dead—
<i>yoru no mushi no ne</i>	insect voices at night

In addition to his experiments with rhythms, Hekigotō tried to use words the way impressionist painters used colors.

<i>yama made</i>	as far as the mountains
<i>mikan irozukinu</i>	tangerines paint their hue
<i>kabe wo iru nuru</i>	coloring the walls of the house

Hekigotō's calligraphy was also eccentric. To some degree he followed a late-nineteenth-century Japanese interest in early styles of Chinese scripts, but he did so with his own spirit, somehow achieving a balance between bold exuberance and childlike simplicity. He frequently wrote on *tanzaku*, especially when

decorated paper could contrast with his blocky characters to create an effect of dramatic innocence. In one such example, he praises a natural scene just outside of Kyoto ([Plate 8-2](#) ).

<i>Ōhara nara</i>	if it's Ōhara
<i>Yamabe no taki ya</i>	then at the Yamabe Waterfall
<i>den tsukuri</i>	building a shrine

The calligraphy is typical for Hekigotō, with thick wet lines, simple Chinese character forms in loose standard script, a few equally bold Japanese syllables, and a slightly irregular rhythm in the sizing and spacing of the forms. As one examines this work, the seemingly spontaneous calligraphy begins to take on more subtleties. Although Hekigotō used the pause sound *ya* at the end of the second line, the calligraphy itself pauses after the first line. Along with the more strongly brushed forms, this creates a contrapuntal rhythm that might be expressed as:

<i>ŌHARA nara</i>	If it's ŌHARA,
<i>Yamabe no TAKI ya</i>	then at the Yamabe WATERFALL—
<i>DEN TSUKURI</i>	BUILDING a SHRINE

In this manner, calligraphy is able to enhance and add shades of meaning to its texts. The double patterns of clouds on the *tanzaku*, in blue, purple, and gold, also convey a hint of natural splendor to the scene being described in the poem. While the haiku at first may seem to be of no great interest, its formulation in this small work of art shows how calligraphic presentation can add a great deal to any written text.

For some years Hekigotō's innovations swept the day, and he was considered the leading poet of the new haiku movement. Eventually, however, much of the public found him too strange, while other poets found him difficult to emulate, and as a result his influence waned.

When Kyoshi wrote in 1927 that haiku should sing of birds and flowers, this more traditional goal found many followers. As a kind of epitaph, Kyoshi commented about Hekigotō that “the path he took led in the end to failure, but I would like to think of it as a brilliant failure.” [13](#)

## Fukuda Kodōjin

Another friend and follower of Shiki who created interesting haiku was Fukuda Kodōjin (1865–1944). Born in Shingū in Wakayama, he was a precocious child who wrote his first haiku at the age of five by Japanese count (we would consider him four).

<i>tsurube kara</i>	from the bucket
<i>yo ni tobidetarū</i>	jumping into the world—
<i>i no kawazu</i>	frog in the well

This could well describe the young Kodōjin himself: he was eagerly learning all that he could, including both Japanese and Chinese literature, and while still in school began to compose his own Chinese-style poems. [14](#) He moved first to Kyoto, for further study in poetry and also painting, then in the early 1890s to Tokyo, where he focused his attention on Chinese-style poetry. However, after meeting Shiki, Kodōjin became part of his haiku group, and by 1894 he was being praised and published in *Nippon* under his haiku name of “Haritsu.”

Several verses from 1898 show Kodōjin’s ability to give new life to familiar imagery as well as bring in new themes.

*haru no kasa*  
*chasana geta no*  
*nagareyuku*

spring river—  
a tiny wooden clog  
floats by

*ganjitsu no*  
*shimbun ōki*  
*tsukue kana*

New Year's  
newspaper—  
a big deskful!

*fune ni kite*  
*Nankin no hito*  
*uchiwa uru*

arriving at the boat  
a Chinese from Nanking  
sells round fans

In 1899 Kodōjin joined the staff at *Nippon* and soon became its editor for Chinese-style poetry. In 1901, however, he moved back to Kyoto, where he spent the rest of his life.

Rather than a haiku poet per se, Kodōjin was a literatus who followed the Chinese tradition of self-cultivation through the practice of several arts, including poetry, calligraphy, and painting. His temperament seems to have been modest; he did not seek fame or publicity for his work, so he did not become as celebrated during his lifetime as did Shiki, Kyoshi, and Hekigotō. Yet Kodōjin's poems in both Japanese and Chinese, as well as his paintings, have attracted favorable attention for their combination of skill and personal expression.

Kodōjin made a very modest living teaching Chinese and Japanese poetry; his haiku remain important as a way of expressing themes from the past as well as those of his own day.

<i>waga hin wa</i>	poverty
<i>hone ni tesshite</i>	penetrates my bones—
<i>kamiko kana</i>	paper clothes
<i>gunkan no</i>	next to the battleship
<i>soba ni bora tsuru</i>	a small boat
<i>kobune kana</i>	casting for mullet
<i>yakeato no</i>	by the burned-out campfire
<i>furu ike kōru</i>	the old pond is frozen—
<i>ashita kana</i>	dawn

The last of these poems is especially interesting as it offers a new context for Bashō's old pond, perhaps suggesting that the haiku world was not flowing freely.

Kodōjin's haiku do not tend to break new ground technically, but he did experiment with some of the new ideas, composing this poem in an 8–8–2 syllable count while on a 1906 visit to his hometown in Wakayama:

<i>naruko kashimashi</i>	the noise of the clappers
<i>kakashi shizuka nari</i>	the silence of the scarecrow—
<i>yū</i>	evening

Although most of his paintings were in Chinese literati style, Kodōjin also created some unusual haiga. In one case he wrote out a poem on a printed design of bamboo, chrysanthemums, and orchids on Chinese paper ([Plate 8-3](#)). The calligraphy of the haiku parallels the long bamboo tube, while the signature “Haritsu” is over the shorter tube on the lower left.

*take no ko ni*  
*tsumazuku ware wo*  
*waraikeri*

a bamboo shoot  
causes me to trip—  
I laugh at myself

Writing haiku and creating haiga no doubt gave Kodōjin an enjoyable change from his more elaborate Chinese-style poems and landscapes. One of his most delightful visual works is a haiga called *Snow Daruma* ([Plate 8-4](#)). Since Daruma (Bodhidharma) was the First Patriarch of East Asian Zen, one might not expect humor, but Daruma was so well accepted by the Japanese populace that satirical or comic renditions of this famous monk were common. According to folklore, when Daruma meditated in front of a wall without moving for nine years, his legs withered and fell off. What we call a snowman therefore in Japan is called a “snow-daruma” or “snow-buddha” (see chapter 7 on Issa). Here Kodōjin’s brushwork in white on the red paper is extremely simple—a single curving line for the figure, with two dots and a dash for his humorously sad face—while the poem nestles above and to one side of the figure.

*yuki daruma*  
*sude ni jakumetsu*  
*itaru kana*

snow Daruma—  
already entering  
nirvana

Since entering nirvana has been described as moving beyond and extinguishing all traces of this world, the melting of a snowman could be seen as an everyday symbol of this spiritual goal.

Kodōjin died in 1944 at the height of the Second World War, perhaps in part from poverty and a lack of nourishment, but he never gave up his ideal of a literati lifestyle. His haiku, as well as his Chinese-style poems, calligraphy, and paintings, all attest to the personal spirit that motivated him; far from the search for fame and influence, he was able to appreciate nature, including human nature, with a calm heart and mind.

<i>momiji fukashi</i>	so deep the autumn leaves
<i>ishi kumo wo</i>	that rocks
<i>haku tokoro</i>	exhale the clouds
<i>kohara hi sashite</i>	Indian summer sunlight
<i>shokan mabayuki</i>	pierces the books on the
<i>tsukue kana</i>	bedazzled desk
<i>ka no naka</i>	taking a bath
<i>gyōzui yaru ya</i>	with the mosquitoes—
<i>tera otoko</i>	the temple sexton
<i>ame mitsubu</i>	three drops of rain
<i>fureba kochi fuki</i>	east wind
<i>umi aruru</i>	ocean

## Taneda Santōka

If Kodōjin was basically traditional in his approach to haiku, Taneda Santōka (1882–1940) was unique. Originally a follower of a poet in the Shiki circle named Ogiwara Seisensui (1884–1976), Santōka soon found his own style. His haiku are perhaps the most basic and unadorned of any Japanese poet, yet they so clearly and honestly express his often difficult life that they seem to reach directly to the heart. Of all Japanese haiku masters of the twentieth century, he has most intrigued the West, with several books of his verses now available in English. [15](#)

Santōka was born in a small village; his father was a landowner, heavy drinker, and womanizer, and his mother committed suicide by jumping down a well when Santōka was eleven years old. His older

brother died two years later, and these traumatic events foreshadowed Santōka's troubled and often dissolute life. He entered Waseda University in 1901, but partly due to concern about his family, he suffered a nervous breakdown in 1904 and left Waseda. His father opened a saké brewery in 1906, but neither father nor son was a good businessman, and both were too fond of the product they were trying to sell.

By this time, Santōka had renewed his childhood interest in haiku and become a disciple of Seisensui, publishing seven haiku in his teacher's magazine *Sōun* (Layered Clouds) in 1913. Kodōjin was even made an associate editor of *Sōun* in 1915, but the Taneda family business went bankrupt in 1916 after their entire stock of saké was ruined. Santōka then opened a secondhand bookstore, but this business also failed. If these troubles were not enough, in 1918 his younger brother committed suicide, and the following year the grandmother who had raised him died. Santōka then moved to Tokyo and took on several jobs, eventually working in a library, but after his father's death he suffered another nervous breakdown in 1922, and quit his position.

In 1924, Santōka attempted suicide by standing in the tracks before an approaching train, but he was rescued and taken to a Zen temple. There he learned to meditate, to go on begging pilgrimages, and to control, at least for some days and weeks at a time, his alcoholism. He took the tonsure in 1925, and spent the rest of his life as a monk, starting his first pilgrimage the following year.

Many of Santōka's poems were composed during his extensive walking and begging trips, including one of his most famous haiku, written in 1926.

*wakeittemo*  
*wakeittemo*  
*aoi yama*

still walking into  
still walking into  
green mountains



This kind of simplicity and repetition is characteristic of his poems, following the cadences of his life.

As Santōka made his begging rounds, he also made notes into a diaryjournal, commenting at one point that “words express the subject, but what gives life to the words is rhythm. What transmits a particular poet, time, place, aroma, tone color, and reverberation is this rhythm, and a poem’s rhythm—only its rhythm—is what makes it good. . . . I dislike haiku crafted by a knife, yes, by a razor—what I want to make are bold, decisive works.” [16](#)

<i>ichinichi ni</i>	every day
<i>oni to hotoke ni</i>	coming to meet
<i>ai ni keri</i>	buddhas and demons

Santōka further noted in 1932, “As for haiku, if it is a true haiku it must be a poem of the spirit, because when not expressing the heart and mind, the essence of haiku is gone. . . . When you’ve forgotten any sense of purpose or intentionality, that is the fundamental existence of art.” His own poems reflect this everyday sense of naturalness, but not all his verses were simply spontaneous utterances that remained as they first appeared. Santōka also wrote in 1938, “Today I’ve composed ten haiku—of course they’re about as good as broken pieces of tile—but they may shine as much as a piece of tile can, so my job is to polish, polish, polish them until they shine.” Much of his achievement was to create poems that seem totally natural, even if he worked on them over time.

The first main theme found in Santōka’s haiku relates to his begging rounds and pilgrimages.

*ko no ha chiru* leaves fall from the trees—  
*aruki-tsumeru* I keep on walking

*dare ni mo awanai* no one to meet—  
*michi ga dekoboko* the path worsens

*kasa e pottori tsubaki datta*  
on my straw hat—plop—a camellia

*dō shiyō mo nai* can't do anything else—  
*watashi ga aruite iru* I just keep walking

As he wandered from place to place, Santōka was especially aware of the heat, cold, wind, rain, and snow, all of which he seems to have accepted and even embraced.

*samui kumo ga...* chilly clouds  
*isogu* hurrying

*oto wa shigure ka* is that sound a rain shower?

*ishi ni shiku-shiku* soaking into the rocks  
*shimitōru* sobbing, sobbing  
*aki no yo no ame nari* autumn evening rain

*shigurete* persimmon leaves  
*kaki no ha no* in early winter rain—  
*iyoiyo utsukushiku* even more beautiful

*amadare no oto mo toshitotta*  
the sound of raindrops—also grown old

*yama no shizukasa e* to the mountain quiet  
*shizukanaru ame* the quieting rain

*yasuka yasuka* peaceful, peaceful  
*samuka samuka* chilly, chilly  
*yuki yuki* snow, snow

*yuki e yuki furu* snow falls on snow  
*shizukesa ni oru—* silence

On his travels Santōka occasionally encountered other living creatures, and he could certainly empathize with them.

*yama no ichinichi*  
*ari mo aruite uru*

all day in the mountains  
ants are also walking

*ishi ni tombo wa*  
*mahiru no yume miru*

the dragonfly on a rock  
looks at noontime dreams

*ichiwa kite . . .*  
*nakanai tori de aru*

a bird comes once  
and does not sing

*tereba naite*  
*kumoreba*  
*yagi ippiki*

braying when it's clear  
braying when it's cloudy—  
one goat

*kawazu ni nari kitte*  
*tobu*

becoming a frog  
and jumping

The simplicity of these haiku almost takes them beyond the usual definitions of poetry, which was fine with Santōka. He commented in 1936: “Haiku that don’t seem at all like haiku, that’s what I’m after.” He noted that his verses had been like wine, not even the best wine, but from now on they would be like water—clear, bright, and rippling without overflowing—or so he hoped. He also felt that poets must honestly express every aspect of their experience, as he declared in a prose passage that is close to poetry:

When an art becomes intense,

loneliness comes forth,

clarity comes forth,

strangeness comes forth—

if it doesn't go that far,

it's a lie.

This use of repetition can also be seen in one of Santōka's most moving haiku, written on Obon, the Japanese Memorial Day.

<i>tomato wo tanagokoro ni</i>	offering a tomato
<i>mihotoke no mae ni</i>	in front of the Buddha
<i>chichi haha no mae ni</i>	in front of my father and mother

At the request of some of the few friends who came to visit him, Santōka occasionally wrote out his haiku as calligraphy. He often chose the narrow *tanzaku* form on decorated paper, but he usually considered his writing as “ugly characters.” <sup>17</sup> This judgment has not been echoed by others, and his works are now assiduously collected by those who can feel a sense of his presence in the calligraphy.

One of Santōka's most admired poems that he would occasionally write out on a poem-card deals with his begging rounds ([Plate 8-5](#)).

<i>... teppatsu no naka e mo</i>	... even into my begging bowl—
<i>arare</i>	hailstones

Santōka does not offer his reactions to the hail; he simply accepts it. Similarly, his writing has no pretensions, but an inner strength is apparent. Here he stresses the first character, and then reinks his brush for the final four forms, adding his signature in a smaller size below.

In comparison, a haiku by Santōka on another *tanzaku* has its strongest graphs at the beginning of each of the two columns ([Plate](#)

[8-6](#) ).

<i>hitori hissori</i>	alone, silently
<i>take no ko</i>	the bamboo shoot
<i>take ni naru</i>	becomes a bamboo

The cursively written elements that begin the lower column on the left are the somewhat pictographic forms for “bamboo shoot” (*take no ko*, 竹の子). *Take* occurs again halfway below, with the brush almost running out of ink as it descends toward the three smaller forms at the bottom. Comparing the calligraphy of *take no ko* with the same characters written by Kodōjin ([Plate 8-3](#)), we can see greater force and continuity of the brush in Santōka’s version, but more control and elegance by Kodōjin.

Santōka’s attitude toward both poetry and calligraphy was summed up in his diary when discussing his admiration for children’s writing: “For me, more than anything, I love artlessness. I hate skill, but even more I hate primped-up unskillfulness.” This means that one should not get too involved in technique, but also avoid pretending to be “amateurish.” Simply put, integrity is the most important quality.

An unusually large scroll by Santōka has some of his most dramatic calligraphy ([Plate 8-7](#)). The haiku makes full use of repetition, echoed in the columns of writing.

<i>kane ga nai</i>	money, none
<i>mono ga nai</i>	things, none
<i>ha ga nai</i>	teeth, none
<i>hitori</i>	—alone

Santōka starts on the top right with a strongly brushed character for “money” (金), followed by three Japanese syllables for *ga nai* (don’t

have). He then continues the pattern for the next three lines, ending with his signature at the lower left. Although haiku are usually written in a single column, here the poet has four columns, with the final two characters literally meaning “one person” (一人). By his spontaneous brushwork within the irregular placement of the columns, Santōka has given this work a sense of life and motion. It is not only the calligraphy itself, but also the spaces within and around it that create the unique rhythm that becomes an honest expression of his spirit.

As a begging monk, Santōka was equally honest with himself. For example, he seems to have struggled with the Buddhist ideal of nonattachment, writing: “Setting oneself free from desires and attachment is the purpose of Zen training, and through this training one can finally become free of passions—but this tragic kind of feeling is part of human nature. In other words, if you can finally extinguish human passions, it feels like you have extinguished human life and human feelings, so I admit to having a weak spirit that would like to free itself, but would also not like to free itself.”

Similarly, Santōka could control his alcoholism for periods of time, but never completely.

<i>tamasaka ni</i>	occasionally
<i>nomu sake no oto</i>	the sound of drinking saké
<i>sabishikari</i>	is lonely

He was best at staying sober when out on pilgrimage, making his motto not to get angry, not to chatter, not to be greedy, but only to walk slowly and steadily onward. In his diary he wrote, “This life of walking and begging is, for me, the only peace.” In this regard, he must have felt a kinship with the wandering monk Hotei, and wrote a poem upon encountering a weather-beaten image of the deity along the road.

*sukkari hagete*  
*Hotei wa*  
*waraitsuzukeru*

Hotei  
his paint rubbed off  
keeps smiling

A few haiku by Santōka express his attitude toward other people, whom he could sometimes enjoy as friends—but he ultimately understood himself as solitary.

*otoko onna*  
*to sono kage mo*  
*odoru*

men and women  
along with their shadows—  
dancing

*... hitori sumeba*  
*ao-ao wo shite kusa*

when you live alone  
green green are the grasses

In his final year of 1940, Santōka felt that even grasses might be too luxuriant and positive an image to express his life. He wrote that “people who don’t understand the meaning of weeds cannot know the mind of nature itself. Weeds hold its essence and express its truth.”

*shinde shimaeba*  
*zassō*  
*ame furu*

when I finally die—  
weeds  
falling rain

## Haiga by Zen Masters

Although not primarily haiku poets, several leading Zen masters of Santōka’s era occasionally added haiku to their paintings, creating haiga that generally followed the tradition of Hakuin ([see chapter 5](#)). Perhaps the most dynamic of these Zen masters was Nakahara



Nantembō (Tōjū Zenchū, 1839–1925). <sup>18</sup>He received his nickname “Nantembō” from his habit of carrying a thick staff (*bō*) made from the nandina (*nanten*) bush. After serving in other temples, he eventually settled down at Kaisei-ji, near Kobe, where he spent his later years.

Like many prestigious abbots, Nantembō received numerous requests for his brushwork from monks and lay followers, especially during his last two decades, and he turned out over one thousand works of painting and calligraphy, as well as writing several books. One of his favorite painting themes was the Zen *ensō*, the circle that can mean the universe, everything, nothing, or even a rice cake. In some cases Nantembō added a haiku to his circle and created a haiga, with the circle now suggesting the moon (itself a Zen symbol). Yet these are quite different from other haiga on the moon, such as [those by Shirō](#), in large part due to their different purpose. Zen works of art are basically teachings, and tend to be more bold and perhaps less subtle than other haiga.

In one moon haiga created by Nantembō at the age of eighty-six, he deliberately wavered his powerful brush-stroke of the circle at the top, as though to create a moving pulse ([Plate 8-8](#)). Below it he has written a Zen message in haiku form.

*kono tsuki ga*  
*hoshikuba yarō*  
*totte miyo*

if you want this moon  
I'll give it to you—  
try to catch it!

This is a nice Zen paradox: nothing can really be given to followers, since they must find their own inner Buddha-nature, yet the presence of the masters is vital to encourage, test, and ultimately sanction their successors. Furthermore, the moon can represent what people seek outside of themselves, always in vain, and yet it can also symbolize enlightenment. So Nantembō presents us with a conundrum: Here is the moon, but can we catch it?

Sōhan Gempō, often known by the name of Shōun (1848–1922), was another leading Zen master in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born as the eldest son of a Shinto priest, he became a Buddhist monk at the age of twelve, and then spent some years studying and traveling, working under different Zen teachers including Nantembō.

In 1898 Sōhan returned to Empuku-ji, where he had studied in 1880, to run the monk's training center, at which time he took on the name "Shōun." He raised funds to repair the temple, and then in 1901 he visited China for a year and a half, observing local religious practices. Seven years later, he was appointed chief abbot of Kyoto's Daitoku-ji, one of the major temples in Japan, where he served until the year of his death.

Shōun was regarded as a friendly and unpretentious person, treating all people equally, and his personality comes through in his paintings and calligraphy. He often painted the most common and important Zen subject, Daruma, but he was unusual in adding a haiku ([Plate 8-9](#)).

<i>mempeki no</i>	the wall-gazer's form
<i>ushiro sugata ya</i>	seen from behind—
<i>hana no haru</i>	a springtime of flowers

The theme of Daruma meditating in front of a wall for nine years is most often inscribed with a couplet attributed to the First Patriarch himself:

Pointing directly to the human heart-mind

See your own nature and become Buddha.

This is a fundamental Zen message, so why did Shōun turn this subject into a haiga? [19](#)—Perhaps he wanted to take the formality out of this kind of visual Zen teaching and reach people more directly.

The figure, made of a simple curving line and two dots, is certainly charming, with a seal just where he is sitting, and the three-column poem is placed so the patriarch seems to be looking directly at it. Does the meditating Daruma represent the flowering of Zen?

## Nakagawa Soen

Although Zen masters such as Nantembō and Shōun occasionally inscribed haiku on their paintings, thereby creating zenga and haiga simultaneously, it was Nakagawa Soen (1907–84) who was the most assiduous writer of haiku, composing poems throughout his life. [20](#) His father, a medical officer in the army, died in 1917, and Soen's younger brother died shortly thereafter, leaving the family to struggle. His mother educated her children herself until high school, where Soen read both Western philosophers and a book by Hakuin, which developed his interest in Zen. Soen entered Tokyo Imperial University in 1927 and studied literature; he especially admired Bashō, and wrote his thesis on him. It would be these two themes, Zen and haiku, that were to dominate Soen's life.

Upon graduating in 1931, Soen became a monk in the Rinzai Zen sect. He also did solitary meditation retreats at Mount Dai Bosatsu, and continued to write and occasionally publish haiku. Three verses from this time show his interest in combining a poetic sense of nature with his Zen vision.

*arigata ya  
namida ni tokasu  
yama no yuki*

—1931

thankfulness—  
tears dissolve  
into mountain snow



*ama mo kite*  
*tsurara zukiyo to*  
*nari-nikeri*

—1938

a nun is visiting—  
icicles sparkle  
in the moonlight

*haru shigure*  
*itsu yori sō to*  
*yobareken*

—1939

spring drizzle—  
since when have I  
been called a monk?

*ume no mi no ko to*  
*tsuyu no ko to*  
*umare au*

—1946

little plums  
and small beads of dew  
born together

In 1950, Gempō decided to retire as abbot of Ryūtaku-ji and asked Soen to be his successor. After some hesitation, Soen agreed, although he continued to make journeys both within Japan for further training and to the United States to assist Zen monks there. Soen proved to be somewhat unorthodox as an abbot; he wore an ordinary monk's robe, and played classical music records and composed haiku during his free time.

*Zendō no* even in the Zen Hall  
*naka ni mo mainu* evening maple leaves  
*yū-momiji* are dancing

—1952

*yama no oto* mountain sounds  
*umi no oto* ocean sounds  
*mina haru shigure* all in the spring drizzle

—1957

Yamamoto Gempō died at the age of ninety-six in 1961, and Soen's mother passed away the following year. Soen was very close to both of them, and to shake his depression he made several solitary retreats to Mount Dai Bosatsu, followed in 1963 by a trip to India, Israel, Egypt, and Europe, visiting various Zen centers along the way.

While surveying the grounds at Ryūtaku-ji in 1967, Soen fell from a tree, and he was not found for three days. Although he gradually recovered from his head injury, Soen was never fully healthy from then on. After traveling to America in 1968, 1971, and 1972, he retired as abbot in 1973, freeing him for more journeys until his final trip to the United States in 1982. He lived his final years on the Ryūtaku-ji grounds as a recluse.

Three of his late haiku sum up Soen's Zen approach to poetry. The first refers to a famous koan about a dog having or not having Buddha-nature, and the third is Soen's death poem.

*ima zo hito* right now  
*kushi busshō no* the Buddha-nature of  
*hanazakari* dogs and people, flowering

—1970

*na-no-hana ya* mustard flowers!  
*sara ni nageutsu* nothing left  
*mono mo nashi* to throw away

—1984

*haru no yama* walking  
*yukeba michi ari* in the spring mountains  
*doko made mo* the path never ends

—1984

## Two Professional Painters: Tsuji Kakō and Hayashi Buntō

Haiku and haiga were certainly not the sole province of poets and Zen monks, and in the twentieth century, professional painters sometimes turned to haiga as a form of visual expression. Among the number of fine artists who occasionally created haiga, two of them painted works that were unusual in their medium or word-image relationships.

Tsuji Kakō (1870–1931) was one of the masters of *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) in the first third of the twentieth century; in contrast to artists who tried Western media such as oil on canvas, he remained faithful to Japanese traditions. Born in Kyoto, he was trained in the Maruyama-Shijo school of naturalistic painting. He also undertook some Zen study beginning in 1899, and remained friends

with the Zen master Takeda Mokurai (1854–1930) thereafter. Kakō did not follow trendy fashions in painting; he was an individualist, but not an iconoclast.

In 1920, Kakō traveled with painter friends to Korea to see the famous Diamond Mountains, which inspired many of his subsequent landscapes. The following year he organized a personal exhibition of these themes in Osaka and stopped participating in government-organized shows, although three years later he was made a judge for certain official exhibitions. Kakō developed stomach cancer in 1928, while still at the height of his artistic powers, and died in 1931.

Kakō's work shows a large amount of variety in subject, style, and scale. Some of his most appealing scrolls are modest, such as *Spring Haiga*, which utilizes a silver-leaf design on two-toned paper ([Plate 8-10](#)). His poem is celebratory:

<i>uraraka ya</i>	a splendid spring day—
<i>mōsō yabu ni</i>	sunlight seeps
<i>hiimoruru</i>	into the bamboo grove

The calligraphy is divided into shifting columns, beginning on the right with the signature and seal, and then dividing into a diagonal column for the first section of the haiku, two columns for the second section, and another diagonal column for the third section. This creates a subtle counterpoint with the straight verticals of the silver bamboo, which extend on every side of the calligraphy. In addition, the white paper on the right conveys brightness, and as the calligraphy moves to the left, it enters a goldyellow tone of paper that suggests suffused light.

Calligraphy on decorated paper had already been familiar in Japan for a millennium, both for poetry and for the narration of such novels as *The Tale of Genji*. Its use was revived for tanka poetry by decorative-style artists in the seventeenth century, who featured silver and gold paper. Kakō's scroll is unusual because it is



combined with a haiku, usually considered a more plebian form of art than court poetry. Kakō demonstrates here that elegance of style and richness of expression can work splendidly with an appropriate haiku—the light seeps both into and out from this scroll.

Hayashi Buntō (1882–1966) was also an artist trained in the naturalist Maruyama-Shijo tradition, and he traveled to China several times to widen his artistic scope. His works are very Japanese in spirit, however, such as a small haiga ([Plate 8-11](#) ) in which the poem suggests autumn melancholy.

<i>hamagoya wo</i>	shops by the beach
<i>mina tozasarete</i>	all closed and boarded up—
<i>mushi no koe</i>	insect voices

The mood is clearly expressed: summer fun is over, families have headed back to their homes, the beach is empty.

What kind of painting might one expect for this haiku? A lonely seashore? The closed-up shops? Insects? Buntō comes up with a surprise that totally changes the mood of the poem. He paints a *kappa*, a troublemaker from Japanese folklore that does all kinds of mischief, including stealing children and vandalizing travelers. Kappa gain their powers from water and so they always live near streams, rivers, or the ocean, and they frequently hide under bridges. In addition, since the tops of their heads are concave, they keep a supply of water there for strength.

Here the kappa is ready to make trouble. Disguised in a jacket and head scarf in order to fool people, his beak and clawlike toes give him away. But wait—what can he do, whom can he harass? Suddenly the poem takes on a new meaning; now it is the kappa who is alone, and he seems clearly unhappy that there is no one to provoke or afflict. Are we to feel sorry for him, or glad that he can't torment us?

Perhaps both Buntō's composition of both the painting and the calligraphy adds greatly to his bittersweet theme. The kappa stands before a willow that acts as a vertical complement to his form. Behind him are the first two lines of the haiku in two columns, plus the artist's signature and seal. In contrast, there is nothing before the kappa but a light gray wash that may represent a lake or the ocean, and the final line of the haiku, "insect voices" (虫の声). In fact, all the creature can look forward to is the sound of autumn insects, so often admired by Japanese people, but of no use to this trickster. It is a case of "all dressed up but nowhere to go," and our own melancholy as summer ends is diverted to the kappa.

Although Buntō never became a particularly famous painter in Japan, this work shows how even a lesser-known artist could create a multilevel haiga of great charm.

## Conclusion

There are a great many other poets and artists who might have been included in this volume, although the major names in haiku and haiga are well represented. One might also wish to continue to the present day, when haiku and haiku painting are more popular than ever, but that would take another volume at least.

Perhaps the most significant fact about haiku in the past one hundred years is how it has become a worldwide phenomenon, even if it is often misunderstood to the point where almost any doggerel in a 5–7–5 syllable pattern is called a haiku. Yet in Russia, India, France, Brazil, Croatia, Ghana—all over the globe—people are composing haiku seriously, usually adjusting the syllable count to their own languages, and expressing new and fresh views of nature (and human nature) with both skill and empathy. Some of these have been writers known for other work, such as Langston Hughes and Jack Kerouac, while many others have concentrated on haiku, or haiku and tanka.

Books and journals on haiku have also flourished, giving a voice to poets from many countries, and various haiku societies also sponsor meetings for public readings, information, and interaction. Some poets and critics have attempted to define what a haiku has now become, but in general there is a welcome openness within the basic guideline of a short poem that suggests more than it defines, usually allied to nature.

A certain number of haiku poets are also painting haiga, or joining with painters to create combined haiga. These cover a range of styles and media, sometimes utilizing Western watercolor techniques and other times working with the East Asian brush-and-ink method, or even going further into collage and photography. As in traditional Japanese examples, the relationship between the verbal and the visual might be a portrait of the poet, an image that repeats in both text and painting, or different and seemingly unconnected elements that add new meanings or contexts, such as the kappa in Buntō's haiga.

As haiku and haiga continue to spread through the world, and as more and more poets and artists devote themselves to these art forms, the future is indeed bright. If there were to be a new *Art of Haiku* book fifty years from now, who knows what wonders it might include!

# Appendix

## *Translating Haiku*

Someone once said that when translating poetry, what you lose is the poetry. More specifically, you tend to lose the sound and rhythm that give poems their music. This leaves the verbal meanings, and since haiku often have multiple meanings with overtones beyond the words, translating becomes a difficult task indeed.

Japanese and English are very different languages in several important aspects. One is sentence structure; as noted earlier, in Japanese the verb tends to come last.

Second, Japanese nouns are generally not clearly singular or plural, and one must depend on context. As noted earlier, this means that in Bashō's famous poem, there could be one pond or several, one frog or many. In this case, one pond and one frog seem to carry the most meaning, so that is the way this verse has been rendered into English. Other times, it is not so clear whether singular or plural is better, and the translator is forced to make a choice. This becomes one of many occasions where interpretation must creep in, even for the most literal version of a poem. As noted earlier when discussing Bashō's "[crow on a withered branch](#)" verse, the poet may have wished for the kind of ambiguity that is much more possible in Japanese than in English.

Third, since English tends to be more compact than Japanese, translating into 5–7–5 syllables often necessitates "padding" the poem in a way that destroys its appealing brevity. We can again take the most famous of all haiku as an example.

*furu* (old) *ike* (pond/ponds) *ya* (pause signal)

*kawazu* (frog/frogs) *tobikomu* (jumps in)

*mizu* (water) *no* (possessive) *oto* (sound)

Using the singular rather than the plural, in English this literally becomes 2–4–5 rather than 5–7–5.

old pond—

a frog jumps in

the sound of water

One could try to add words to reach the Japanese 5–7–5 rhythm.

there is an old pond—

suddenly a frog jumps in

the sound of water

The problems are the wordy first line and the addition of “suddenly” that is not in the original. Similar difficulties appear when trying to translate most haiku into 5–7–5 structures. As a result, translators have generally had to give up trying to match the Japanese rhythms and word orders, and must create what in some ways become new haiku in English. The main meanings (and sometimes possible additional meanings) of the originals can be given, but only at the cost of losing much of their music.

A final Japanese haiku can allow you, the reader, a chance to translate for yourself. The poem is by Chiyo, with a word-for-word equivalent.

*tsuki no yo ya*

*ishi ni dete naku*

*kirigirisu*

*tsuki* (moon) *no* (possessive) *yo* (evening/evenings/night/nights) *ya*  
(pause signal)

*ishi* (stone/stones/rock/rocks) *ni* (from) *dete* (come out) *naku*  
(sing/cry/chirp)

*kirigirisu* (katydid/katydid)

Now it is up to you: Will you try to make this a 5–7–5 poem in English? Will you change the line order? Will you use any plurals? What words and rhythms in English do you think can convey this scene best?

Some translators write what they think the haiku must mean, rather than what it actually says, but this implies knowing what the poet intended beyond the actual verse. Instead, the translations in this book are as close to the Japanese sources as possible. One can only trust that they retain enough of the perception and expression of the original poems to convey their wonder and delight.

# Notes

## Introduction

1 . Strictly speaking, haiku usually have 5–7–5 *onji* (also called *morae* ). The word “syllables” is not quite an exact match for *onji*, which can be less than a syllable when combining sounds. For example, the word *atta* is counted as three *onji* in Japanese (*a-tsu-ta*, but pronounced *atta* ), which we would consider two syllables.

2 . For more discussion of such seasonal indicators and their Westernization, see William J. Higginson, *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1996).

3 . For a full translation of the *Rōei-shū*, see J. Thomas Rimer and Jonathan Chaves, *Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing: The Wakan Rōei Shū* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

## Chapter 1. Background: The Tanka (Waka) Tradition

1 . For translations of these poems, as well as a great many from the *Man'yōshū*, see Edwin A. Cranston, trans., *A Waka Anthology: Volume One: The Gem-Glistening Cup* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

2 . Scholars are divided on how to translate this title.

3 . “Tangled hair” as a metaphor for passion extended into the early twentieth century, when Yosa no Akiko (1878–1942) wrote dramatically bold love poems in tanka form; her seminal 1901 collection was called *Midaregami* (Tangled Hair).

4 . Translation by the author.

5 . Ivan Morris, trans., *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 122.

[6](#) . Ibid., 36–37.

[7](#) . Tanka, like the later haiku, were only seldom given titles.

[8](#) . For a thorough study of this anthology and its later interpretations, see Joshua S. Mostow, *Pictures of the Heart: The Hyakunin Isshu in Word and Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

[9](#) . See *ibid.*, 12–17, for a discussion of this and other poetic techniques in tanka.

[10](#) . See William R. LaFleur, *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyō* (Boston: Wisdom, 2003), 1.

[11](#) . Quoted in William LaFleur, trans., *Mirror for the Moon: A Selection of Poems by Saigyō (1118–1190)* (New York: New Directions, 1978), xiii.

## Chapter 2. Renga, Hokku, Haikai, and Haiga

[1](#) . Quoted from Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Cleveland, Ohio: Press of Western Reserve University, 1967), 38, 42–43, and 44.

[2](#) . See *ibid.*, 40–41, for further enumerations.

[3](#) . For a more complete list, see Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 929.

[4](#) . Howard S. Hibbett, “The Japanese Comic Linked-Verse Tradition,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23 (1960–61): 82.

[5](#) . For an extended discussion of the rules of renga, see Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku in English* (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), 18–36.

[6](#) . See Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories*, 49.



[7](#) . For a complete translation of this renga, see Steven D. Carter, *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 303–26.

[8](#) . For more information on Teitoku and his place in Japanese literature, see Donald Keene, *Landscapes and Portraits: Appreciations of Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971), 71–93.

[9](#) . On a painting of Lady Murasaki, Ryūho noted that “from about the age of sixteen I started a new kind of painting.” Some people have taken this to mean that he believed that he invented haiga, but the comment is too ambiguous to be sure. See Leon M. Zolbrod, *Haiku Painting* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982), 6.

[10](#) . For more illustrations of Ryūho haiga, see the exhibition catalogue *Ryūho kara Bashō* [From Ryūho to Bashō] (Itami: Kakimori Bunka, 1995).

[11](#) . For a thorough discussion of this renga and a translation of its first hundred links, see Christopher Drake, “The Collision of Traditions in Saikaku’s Haikai,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 (June 1992): 5–75, and “Saikaku’s Haikai Requiem: A Thousand Haikai Alone in a Single Day: The First Hundred Verses,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 2 (December 1992): 481–588.

[12](#) . See Cheryl Crowley, “Putting *Makoto* into Practice: Onitsura’s *Hitorigoto*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 50, no. 1 (1990): 1.

[13](#) . Torches bring fish to the surface, then the cormorants dive in after them; however, the birds have rings around their neck so they cannot swallow the fish whole. The fishermen pull the cormorants back to the boat with light ropes, and then give them small pieces of fish as a reward.

Chapter 3. Bashō

[1](#) . Interestingly enough, Shiki, who was generally ranked fourth among haiku poets, seems to have particularly admired Buson and was sometimes [critical of Bashō](#) , but this is a rare exception.

[2](#) . See Robert Aitken, *A Zen Wave: Bashō's Haiku & Zen* (New York: Weatherhill, 1978).

[3](#) . Ibid., 53.

[4](#) . For this quote and further information, see Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 53.

[5](#) . Ibid., 59.

[6](#) . Ibid., 76–77.

[7](#) . Ibid., 80.

[8](#) . See previous chapter, p. 73.

[9](#) . See Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 85.

[10](#) . For translations of Bashō's four major travel journals plus a generous number of his haiku, see Sam Hamill, trans., *The Essential Bashō* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

[11](#) . Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768, see chapter 5) often gave both his monk and lay pupils the question “What is the sound of one hand” upon which to meditate.

[12](#) . These three comments, plus others, are given in Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 140.

[13](#) . Aitken, *Zen Wave*, 27–28.

[14](#) . From *The Platform Sutra* of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng.

[15](#) . The comments in this paragraph come from Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories* .

[16](#) . Ibid., 159.

[17](#) . Ibid., 156. Dohō took the phrase “learn from the pine” to mean casting off desire and intention.

[18](#) . Ibid., 164.

[19](#) . This first line was inspired by the preface to “Peach Blossom Banquet” by the Chinese master Li Po.

[20](#) . For examples of Bashō’s *renku* (he favored thirty-six verses), see Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō: The Master Haiku Poet* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982), 69–111. For discussion and analysis of Bashō’s verse-linking techniques, see Haruo Shirane, “Matsuo Bashō and the Poetics of Scent,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 (1992): 77–110.

[21](#) . For a discussion of influences from Chinese poetry in Bashō’s aesthetic, see Stuart H. Sargent, “Echoes of Chinese Poetry in Bashō,” *Delos* 10, nos. 1–2 (1997): 47–57.

[22](#) . In earlier versions of this poem, the verbs were *shimitsuku* (sticking to) and *shimikomu* (seep into), but the final verb *shimiiru* (penetrating) is the strongest.

[23](#) . See Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters* , 300.

[24](#) . Ibid., 361.

[25](#) . Aitken, *Zen Wave*, 87.

[26](#) . See Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 370.

[27](#) . Ibid.

[28](#) . Aitken, *Zen Wave*, 67.

## Chapter 4. Followers of Bashō

[1](#) . It is significant that during his lifetime Bashō never published a book of just his own haiku; he always published with his pupils as a group.

[2](#) . Translation based upon that of Makoto Ueda, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 105.

[3](#) . Donald Keene, ed., *Anthology of Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), 379.

[4](#) . For women haiku poets, see Seiga Yokoyama, *Josei haika-shi* [Women haiku poets], (Tokyo: Gai-i Insatsujo, 1947), and Makoto Ueda, *Far Beyond the Field: Haiku by Japanese Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[5](#) . For a more extensive biography, haiga, and poems, see Patricia Donegan and Yoshie Ishibashi, *Chiyo-ni: Woman Haiku Master* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1998).

[6](#) . Ibid., 30.

[7](#) . I am grateful to Fumiko Yamamoto for her assistance in translating this text.

[8](#) . For several Yayu haiga including one with this poem, see Ron Manheim, *Haiku & Haiga: Moments in Word and Image* (Amsterdam: Hotei, 2006).

## Chapter 5. Senryu and Zen

[1](#) . For more information and many poems, see R. H. Blyth, *Japanese Life and Character in Senryu* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1960).

[2](#) . See R. H. Blyth, *Edo Satirical Verse Anthologies* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1961), 237.

[3](#) . The American haiku poet James W. Hackett also believed in the strong influence of Zen on haiku, although his views have been criticized by later haiku experts. See Charles Trumbull, “Shangri-La: James W. Hackett’s Life in Haiku,” pt. 1, *Frogpond* 33, no. 1 (2010): 80–92.

[4](#) . Aitken, *Zen Wave* .

[5](#) . See David Lewis Barnhill, “Of Bashōs and Buddhisms,” *Eastern Buddhist* 32, no. 2 (2000): 177.

[6](#) . For a discussion, see *ibid.*, 170–201.

[7](#) . This is a reference to the flute-playing Taira Atsumori, who was executed at the age of seventeen in Japan’s great civil war between the Taira and Minamoto clans in the twelfth century.

[8](#) . This was supposed to have been Bashō’s response when being criticized by his Zen teacher Butchō for writing poetry. Adapted from R. H. Blyth, *Haiku: Volume 4: Autumn-Winter* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1982), 1,080.

[9](#) . Quoted in Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories*, 148.

[10](#) . For further information, see Audrey Yoshiko Seo and Stephen Addiss, *The Sound of One Hand : Paintings & Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010).

[11](#) . *Hakuin Oshō shigasanshū* [A collection of the monk Hakuin’s painting and calligraphy], (Kyoto: Zenka Shorin, colophon dated 1759).

[12](#) . My thanks to Norman Waddell and Yoshizawa Katsuhiko for their help in understanding this haiku.

[13](#) . D. T. Suzuki, *Sengai: The Zen of Ink and Paper* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 177.

[14](#) . *Ibid.*

## Chapter 6. Buson

[1](#) . His mother may have died in 1728, and his father at the same time or earlier. See Makoto Ueda, *The Path of Flowering Thorn: The Life and Poetry of Yosa Buson* (Stanford, Calif.: The Stanford University Press, 1998), 3.

[2](#) . Ibid.

[3](#) . Ibid., 5.

[4](#) . Cheryl A. Crowley, *Haikai Poet Yosa Buson and the Bashō Revival* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 275.

[5](#) . Calvin French, *Poet-Painters: Buson and His Followers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1974), 6.

[6](#) . Since New Year's Day usually arrived in February or early March, it represented the beginning of spring.

[7](#) . *Sakuragawa* literally means “Cherry-Blossom River” and is a poetic place name associated with the blossoms. There is also a reference here to a Noh play *Sakuragawa* in which the word *akuta* (rubbish) appears; see Crowley, *Haiku Poet Buson*, 64. Instead of praising cherry-blossoms floating down the river in this haiku, Buson turns the romantic scene upside down. This may recall [Kikaku's melon-skin haiga](#) .

[8](#) . Another reading of this final line could be “melon-shaped eggplants.”

[9](#) . Dates for Buson's haiku are taken from Tsutomu Ogata and Kazuhiko Maruyama, eds., *Buson zenshū* [Complete works of Buson], vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1992). There are 2,849 haiku in this “complete collection,” of which 2,376 have been dated.

[10](#) . This scene was later made into a Noh drama.

[11](#) . Ueda, *Path of Flowering Thorn*, 34.

[12](#) . In *ibid.*, v, Ueda comments that Buson “took delight in the natural beauty of colors and forms as well as the artistic beauty of forms.” See also Crowley, *Haiku Poet Buson*, 9–10.

[13](#) . Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 88.

[14](#) . In 1777, he wrote 451 haiku, the most for any year. See Leon Zolbrod, “The Busy Years: Buson’s Life and Work, 1777,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* , 4th ser., 3 (1988): 53–81.

[15](#) . For the full rules, see Crowley, *Haiku Poet Buson*, 96–97.

[16](#) . *Ibid.*, 259–61.

[17](#) . Quoted from Blyth, *Haiku: Volume 4*, 1159–60.

[18](#) . In one of his letters of 1776, Buson had complained that “she practices so much that it gets on my nerves, but it is a pleasure to see her grow up without mishap.” See Zolbrod, “The Busy Year,” 59.

[19](#) . Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 114.

[20](#) . This album has now been registered as a National Treasure by the Japanese government.

[21](#) . Another reading for this first line is *shufū ya*, with the same meaning.

[22](#) . Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 37.

[23](#) . Translation based on *ibid.*, 95.

[24](#) . My thanks to Audrey Yoshiko Seo for this idea and image.

[25](#) . This was originally written for the now-lost *Yahantei meiwa* [Chats by Yahantei].

[26](#) . Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 131–32.

[27](#) . Two are printed in the book-catalogue by Calvin French, *Poet-Painters*, 70–71.

[28](#) . This is a variant of a 1770 haiku found [here](#) .

## Chapter 7. Issa and the Early Nineteenth Century

[1](#) . For a full biography of Issa, see Makoto Ueda, *Dew on the Grass: The Life and Poetry of Kobayashi Issa* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[2](#) . See Ohashi Raboku, ed., *Issa haiku zenshū* [Issa's complete haiku], (Tokyo: Shunshūsha, 1929).

[3](#) . See David G. Lanoue, “The Haiku Mind: Issa and Pure Land Buddhism,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 39, no. 2 (2008): 159–76.

[4](#) . Shades of Charlie Brown in the *Peanuts* cartoons!

[5](#) . In another undated version of this poem, the puppy paws, rather than gnaws, on the willow. See the excellent website Haiku of Kobayashi Issa, <http://haikuguy.com/issa/index.html> .

[6](#) . See Stephen Addiss, *The Art of Zen* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 111.

[7](#) . This poem also exists in a variant for fleas.

[8](#) . For a Shirō haiga with this poem, see Stephen Addiss, *Haiga: Takebe Sōchō and the Haiku-Painting Tradition* (Honolulu: Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond, in association with University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 98–99.

[9](#) . For a Shirō haiga with this poem, see Manheim, *Haiku & Haiga*, 115.

[10](#) . For more information, see Fumiko Y. Yamamoto, “Takebe Sōchō (1761–1814)” in Addiss, *Haiga: Takebe Sōchō* , 20–26. The



translations of these Sōchō haiku were done with her expert help.

[11](#) . Ibid., 21.

[12](#) . These screens are illustrated and discussed in Stephen Addiss, *Haiga: Takebe Sōchō*, 62–67.

[13](#) . For the image, see *ibid.*, 79.

[14](#) . For both images, see *ibid.*, 76–77.

## Chapter 8. Shiki and the Modern Age

[1](#) . There are a number of successful haiku groups in Japan representing different points of view, including the Nihon Dento Haiku Kyōkai (Traditional Japanese Haiku Association), the Haijin Kyōkai (Haiku Poets Association), and the Gendai Haiku Kyōkai (Modern Haiku Association), each with thousands of members.

[2](#) . For a thorough study of Shiki's life and work, see Janine Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986). More of Shiki's haiku, tanka, and a few of his Chinese poems can be found in Burton Watson, trans., *Masaoka Shiki: Selected Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[3](#) . Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki*, 16.

[4](#) . Quoted in *ibid.*, 34.

[5](#) . This haiku recalls Case 32 of the Zen koan collection *Mumonkan*, where the Buddha comments that “a first-class horse moves at even the shadow of the whip.” See Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo, and Judith Roitman, *Zen Sourcebook: Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2008), 105.

[6](#) . This haiku has also been attributed to Buson. See Blyth, *Haiku: Volume Four*, 1,004.

[7](#) . From Shiki's *Bashō no ikkyō* [Some remarks on Bashō], (1893). See Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki*, 37 and 39–40.

[8](#) . Translated by R. H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1964), 66, 75, and 46–47.

[9](#) . From Shiki's *Bashō no ikkyō* . See Beichman, *Masaoka Shiki*, 47.

[10](#) . From Shiki's *Haijin Buson* [The haiku poet Buson], 1897, as translated by Beichman, *ibid.*, 59.

[11](#) . From Shiki's *Byōshō rokushaku* [A six-foot sickbed], 1902, as translated by Beichman, *ibid.*, 59.

[12](#) . As noted, adding extra syllables had been done by the Danrin school of poets, and other masters did not feel absolutely confined to 5–7–5, but Hekigotō went much further in his freedom from syllabic constraints.

[13](#) . Translated by Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West* (New York: Henry Holt, 1984), 113.

[14](#) . For a biography of Kodōjin plus many of his Chinese-style and Japanese poems, see Stephen Addiss and Jonathan Chaves, *Old Taoist: The Life, Art, and Poetry of Kodōjin (1865–1944)*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[15](#) . See the selected bibliography for books of translations by Sato Hiroaki, John Stevens, Burton Watson, and Scott Watson.

[16](#) . Translations from Santōka's journals and diaries are by the author.

[17](#) . For a publication on Santōka's calligraphy, see *Santōka ibokushū* [A collection of Santōka's remaining ink works], (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1993).

[18](#) . For more on Nantembō and Shōun, including illustrations of their works, see Audrey Yoshiko Seo with Stephen Addiss, *The Art of Twentieth-Century Zen: Paintings and Calligraphy by Japanese Masters* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

[19](#) . For a larger version of the same theme by Shōun without the dots for eyes, see *ibid.*, 88.

[20](#) . For more on Soen's life and poetry, see Kazuaki Tanahashi and Roko Sherry Chayat, eds., *Endless Vow: The Zen Path of Soen Nakagawa* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).

## Glossary

**haibun.** Prose mixed with haiku poems.

**haikai.** Originally a comic verse in a linked series, later standing alone in 5–7–5 syllables (now called haiku).

**haikai no renga.** Humorous linked verses.

**haiku.** A term popularized by Shiki around 1900 for a 5–7–5-syllable poem previously called haikai or hokku.

**hokku.** Originally, the first 5–7–5 syllable verse in a series; later it could stand alone as what is now called a haiku.

**kireji** . “Cutting words” such as *ya* or *kana* that help to emphasize an image or create sections in a haiku, often without any particular meaning.

**renga.** A series of linked verses with 5–7–5 syllables alternating with 7–7 syllables.

**renku** . A series of linked haiku-style verses, also called *haikai no renga* .

**tanka.** A court-style 5–7–5–7–7-syllable poem, also called *waka* or *uta* .

**uta.** Another name for tanka, a 5–7–5–7–7-syllable court-style poem.

**waka.** Another name for tanka, a 5–7–5–7–7-syllable court-style poem.

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