

MAKOTO UEDA

## *Bashō and the Poetics of "Haiku"*

THE JAPANESE *haiku* (sometimes called *hokku*) is quite possibly the shortest of all verse-forms, as it consists of three lines with seventeen syllables altogether. There was a time during the early part of this century when a number of Western poets were keenly interested in it. But the enthusiasm soon faded out; today no major poet in the West writes in the *haiku* style. The reason for this is both obvious and commonplace: the *haiku* has its own poetics difficult to imitate for a foreign poet with a different language, culture, and pattern of thinking. Yet precisely for the same reason the poetics of *haiku* will interest those who are seeking a definition of poetry which would transcend all linguistic and cultural differences. This paper is intended to outline the traditional concept of *haiku* in Japan, centering upon three questions which seem to be crucial in a discussion of poetics. The three questions are: (1) What is the relation between life and art, as the *haiku* poet sees it? (2) What are the implications of the *haiku* form? (3) What is the technique of *haiku*? The best qualified person to answer these questions is no doubt Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), founder of the genre whose theory and practice still represent the highest ideal for most of Japanese *haiku* poets today.<sup>1</sup>

The first thing that attracts one's attention on reading Bashō's comments on *haiku* is, as perhaps is the case with all major

poets and artists, the utmost seriousness with which he took his art. As he himself recalls, there were times when he thought of becoming an official or a priest, but each time his passion for poetry held him back.<sup>2</sup> He fully knew that poetry was useless from a practical point of view; he once said, "Poetry is like a fireplace in summer or a fan in winter."<sup>3</sup> But he also knew that poetry, as well as other arts, was of infinite importance in life because it would nurture the "poetic spirit" in man. He says:

There is one common element which permeates Saigyō's thirty-one-syllable poetry, Sōgi's linked verse, Sesshū's brush painting, and Rikyū's tea ceremony. It is the poetic spirit, through which man follows the creative energy of nature and makes communion with the things of the four seasons. For those who understand the spirit, everything they see becomes a lovely flower, and everything they imagine becomes a beautiful moon. Those who do not see the flower are no different from barbarians; those who do not imagine the flower are no different from beasts. Detach yourself from barbarians and beasts; follow the creative energy and return to nature.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, Bashō believes that there are two types of men: those who possess the poetic spirit and those who do not. What is the poetic spirit? As Bashō explains it in this passage and elsewhere, it is a spirit which seeks beauty in nature, which tries to escape from the collisions of everyday life. Anyone who wishes to become a happy artist should strive to gain this spirit, because it is in this way that he learns to assume an aesthetic attitude toward life. If he takes this attitude, he will become indifferent to material interest; he will look at life in the same manner as he looks at a

MAKOTO UEDA is assistant professor in Japanese language and literature at the University of Toronto and the author of *The Old Pine Tree and Other Noh Plays* (1962).

painting, listens to music, or reads a poem. A person enjoys a story of war since he is not in a war himself; he will enjoy his life more if he transcends his present utilitarian ways of life. A flower is beautiful, the moon is beautiful, all objects in nature are beautiful, because they have no egoism, because they do not fight for gain. Bashō once said: "When we observe calmly, we discover that all things have their fulfillment."<sup>5</sup> A pine tree lives its own life, a bamboo plant fulfills its own destiny; a pine never tries to become a bamboo, nor does a bamboo envy the life of a pine. A poet should therefore "learn from a pine things about a pine, and from a bamboo things about a bamboo."<sup>6</sup> He should simply follow the creative energy of the universe and make communion with nature; only when he does so, everything he sees will become a lovely flower and everything he imagines will turn into a beautiful moon—he will live in the realm farthest from barbarians and beasts. Saigyō, Sōgi, Sesshū, and Rikyū, four of the master artists in medieval Japan, all entered this happy realm though they specialized in different branches of art.

Bashō's idea that poetry is a product of man's close communion with nature inevitably leads to a "transpersonal" theory of poetry, since such a communion presupposes the dissolution of the poet's ego. For a *haiku* poet, to learn from nature should mean:

...to submerge himself within a natural object, to perceive its delicate life and feel its feelings, out of which a poem forms itself. A poem may skillfully delineate an object; but, unless it embodies feelings which have naturally emerged out of the object, the poem will fall short of the true poetic sentiment, since it presents the object and the poet as two separate things.

Such is a work of artifice created by the poet's will.<sup>7</sup> Beauty in nature is a manifestation of the supreme creative force which flows through all things in the universe, animate and inanimate. This force should be distinguished from the passions of an individual physical being. The energy of the universe is "transpersonal" in the sense that it has no personal emotion such as joy or anger, grief or hatred, which springs from egoism. The energy of individual man is

"personal"; it roots in his conscious will, in his passions and desires. But man, being part of the universe, also has transpersonal energy within him, an energy which he shares with the cosmos. It is this energy which every poet must work with in his creative activity. Bashō, therefore, does not share the view that a poet puts his own emotion into a natural object and gives airy nothing a local habitation and a name. On the contrary, he believes that a poet should renounce his personal emotions in favor of the transpersonal energy within him, through which he may return to the creative force that flows in all objects in nature. A poet may attain this ideal state of mind through the contemplation of a natural object, a contemplation so zealous and deep that he may see its "delicate life" and feel its "feelings." A poem is the spontaneous creation of a man in such a state; it is not the result of forced will or logical thinking. Bashō makes a distinction between two ways of poetic creation, "becoming" and "making," and he advocates the first while rejecting the second:

In composing *haiku* there are two ways: "becoming" and "making." When a poet who has always been assiduous in pursuit of his aim applies himself to an external object, the color of his mind naturally becomes a poem. In the case of a poet who has not done so, nothing in him becomes a poem; consequently he has to make out a poem through the act of his personal will.<sup>8</sup>

The true poet has his mind entirely transparent, as it were, at the moment of his composition. An external object enters the mind and dyes it in its own color, whereupon a poem emerges by itself. Such a poem would be the purest type of *haiku*, the "*haiku* without impure thoughts," as Bashō describes it elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

This concept at once explains the extremely short form of *haiku*. The *haiku* form presupposes a complete purgation of the poet's egoism during his creative activity. But the poet will not stay in this state of mind for more than a few moments, because he, being a social and a biological existence also, cannot live without his egoism. The *haiku* crystallizes a glow coming out of this momentary self-denial; it must be short. Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare

try to define human existence by setting it within a huge but coherent vision of the cosmos. The *haiku* poet does not do this; he does not try to do this. He attempts to describe human existence by a negative definition of it. By dissolving human elements in himself the poet approaches the essence of man, the "transpersonal" essence which man shares with the universe.

Bashō's aesthetic ideas are all along this line. Among them there are eight principal ones: *sabi*, *shiori*, *hosomi*, "inspiration," "fragrance," "reverberation," "reflection," and "lightness." The first three and "lightness" define the philosophical and religious implications which lie behind the *haiku* form. The remaining four are concerned with the technique of *haiku*, the technique with which these implications would be best expressed in an actual work.

*Sabi* is a notion which is closely related to the "poetic spirit." The term stems from an adjective, *sabishi*, which means "lonely" or "desolate." Bashō himself never used the term *sabi* in his writing, but he did use *sabishi*. One of the instances appears in a poem which he wrote while sitting alone at a lonely temple:

My sorrowful soul—  
Make it feel more lonesome:  
You, a cuckoo.<sup>29</sup>

Sorrow is a personal emotion, while loneliness, in this context, is a transpersonal mood existent in the cuckoo's cry. The poet, painfully aware of his physical existence, wants the purification of his soul by transforming sorrow into loneliness, the personal into the impersonal. *Sabi* seems to imply such a transpersonal feeling. It is not personal loneliness, not the kind of loneliness a man would feel when he loses his wife, parent, or child. It is universal loneliness, the loneliness latent in nature. A *haiku* poet, therefore, has no intense grief even at the death of someone very dear to him. Here is a poem which Bashō made when one of his most promising disciples died:

In the autumn gust  
Lies, sorrowfully broken,  
A mulberry stick.<sup>31</sup>

In order that the reader will not be misled by the word "sorrowfully," here is another

poem by Bashō which describes dead grass in winter:

All flowers are dead.  
Only a sorrow lies, with  
The grass seeds.<sup>32</sup>

A reader with no background information will say that roughly the same mood prevails over these two poems. The "sorrow" which Bashō felt over his dear disciple's death was in kind little different from the "sorrow" he had as he watched dead grass in winter. It was not that Bashō was inhuman; he was only "unhuman," as he suppressed human elements in himself.

This quality is the essence of one of the most famous poems by Bashō:

Spring is going—  
Birds weep, and the eyes of fish  
Are filled with tears.<sup>33</sup>

A long journey through rural areas of northern Japan was ahead of him; he was old, sickly, and not sure of his safe return. But there is no personal grief in the poem. Bashō's sentiment is transpersonalized. It is spring that goes; it is birds and fish that weep. There is no acute pain; there is only a vague sadness which fills nature. Intense joy, bottomless despair, flaming anger, piercing pain, maddening jealousy—all these are foreign to good *haiku*. They are all transpersonalized and melt into a vague, lonely feeling of *sabi*.

The non-personal quality of *haiku* becomes even more obvious in some of Bashō's best poems:

Quietness—  
The cicada's voice  
Penetrates the rocks.<sup>34</sup>

The rough sea—  
Far over Sado Isle, extends  
The Milky Way.<sup>35</sup>

Gathering the rains  
Of June, how swiftly flows  
The Mogami River!<sup>36</sup>

In these poems there is little trace of the emotion which the poet might have had on each occasion. All that the reader can get is a feeling of the quiet, the vast, or the swift. The poet does not say happy or sad, wonderful or disgusting. He only crystallizes the feeling of nature.

*Sabi* catches the feeling of nature in its transpersonal loneliness; *shiori* does essentially the same in a slightly different manner. The term *shiori* comes from a verb, *shioru*, which means "to bend" or "to be flexible." Originally, therefore, *shiori* seems to have been used in describing a poem which is not stiff or straightforward in expression but is flexible in meaning and allows several levels of interpretation. Yet it so happened that there was another verb *shioru*, written differently and declined differently but pronounced the same, which described a withered flower or a frustrated man. This implication seems to have found its way into the noun *shiori* and added the connotation to the original meaning of the word. Thus *shiori*, in its later usage, refers to a poem which permits several levels of meaning all of which have the common undertone of sadness—if we understand sadness to be a transpersonal mood as distinct from pity which is a personal emotion. Bashō was quite insistent on the difference between pity and *shiori*.<sup>17</sup> A poem of pity would contain an intense, personal emotion as we often find in a dirge or elegy. A poem of *shiori*, on the other hand, would embody an indefinable, ambiguous mood surrounding the feeling of pity; the reader would wonder, for instance, whether the poem is about a particular person's death, or about man's mortality in general, or about the passing of summer. The ambiguity of meaning widens the scope of the poem; it elevates a personal feeling to the universal.

A poem which Bashō thought had the quality of *shiori* has been cited by one of his disciples:

The Ten Dumplings  
Have become smaller, too—  
The autumn wind.<sup>18</sup>

The Ten Dumplings, so called because they are sold in units of ten, are a special product of a small mountain village in central Japan. It is autumn; travelers have become fewer and fewer. The villagers, who make their living by selling their special product to travelers, are now in a straitened state; their dumplings, as a consequence, have become smaller. The mood which pervades the poem is what we may call sadness. But,

we ask, what is the sadness directed toward? Toward the local villagers? Toward the fate of mankind, represented by the villagers? Toward the poet himself, the lonely traveler? Toward the summer that has gone? Or toward both man and nature that must change with time? The word "too" and the no-verb last line leave the whole meaning ambiguous; nevertheless the mood which comes out of it gives us a uniform impression of sadness. The feeling of pity, which the poet originally felt toward the villagers, is universalized by the ambiguity which the poem embodies. While the mood of *sabi* is based on a certain philosophical attitude, that of *shiori* comes out of ambiguity in poetic feeling. Both of these moods have a certain, almost identical undertone, although *shiori* perhaps has a greater implication of sadness than of loneliness. To conclude: *sabi* is a formless atmosphere enveloping the loneliness of nature, *shiori* an ambiguous mood which surrounds the sadness of nature.

*Hosomi*, which literally means "thinness" or "slenderness," seems to point toward the delicacy of sentiment lying in the depth of a poem. The *haiku* which is said to illustrate it is:

I wonder whether  
Seabirds too are asleep  
On Lake Yogo tonight.<sup>19</sup>

The poet is trying to sleep at a fisherman's shack by the lake one cold winter night. Suddenly he hears a seabird's cry. At once he compares himself with the seabirds and wonders if they are too cold to go to sleep on the lake. The poet buries himself in an external object with delicate sensitivity; this is *hosomi*. It is, as it were, an invisible vibration of the poet's heart in response to the smallest stimulus in nature. It is subtle but not feeble; it has a power coming from the poet's mind concentrated on the smallest natural phenomenon. Anyone can catch crude emotions such as anger and jealousy, but it requires utmost sensitivity to grasp the thin mist rising over the life of a natural object.

*Hosomi* is referred to by Bashō on another occasion, when he criticized a poem by one of his students:

The monkey's shriek  
Is hoarse, his teeth white.  
Over the peak, the moon.

Bashō charged the poet for creating an unusual scene for shock effect, and he himself composed a *haiku* for contrast's sake:

A salted sea-bream,  
Showing its teeth, lies chilly  
At the fish shop.<sup>20</sup>

As Bashō explains, the writer of the first poem has not put himself in the monkey's position; he is standing far away from the monkey and listening to his shriek. But Bashō has set himself within an external object—a sea-bream. Just as the writer of the seabird poem could feel what the seabirds felt, Bashō feels chilly as a salted fish would feel chilly at a fish shop in winter. The whiteness of the fish's exposed teeth has caused a delicate vibration in the poet's heart, establishing a slender but firm relationship between the fish and the poet.

Thus *hosomi*, emphasizing the thin string which draws the poet into the heart of an object, again reiterates the basic premise of the *haiku* form. A *haiku* poet does not use nature images to express his emotion; he lets natural objects express their feelings. Bashō's repeated warning that a poet should suppress his personal sentiment and submerge himself within an outside object is in a way a warning against the pathetic fallacy. The seabird's lonely cry or the seabream's white teeth is what causes a vibration in the poet's heart; the cause-effect relation must not be reversed.

"Inspiration," the fourth of Bashō's poetic principles, refers to an instantaneous insight into the hidden essence of things. Bashō repeatedly taught his disciples not to miss the moment of inspiration in composing a poem. "If you get a flash of insight into an object," he told them, "put it into words before it fades away in your mind."<sup>21</sup> "A poet," he said on another occasion, "should compose a poem with the force of his inspiration."<sup>22</sup> Again at another time he explained it with a series of similes:

Composition of a poem must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous foe. It is

also like cutting a ripe watermelon with a sharp knife, or taking a large bite at a pear.<sup>23</sup>

But "inspiration" does not come to anyone at any moment. It is the result of the poet's strenuous effort and constant self-discipline. "A poet," says Bashō, "should discipline himself every day."<sup>24</sup> When "inspiration" arrives, it arrives in an instant. The poet should catch this moment and put that momentary experience into words on the spot. Therefore, once the poem is finished at the inspired moment, the poet would better not try to change words from one to another. "Inspiration" is intuitive—not discursive. It is not something which the poet wrings out of his intellect by effort. His effort should be directed toward the creation of a mental state so open and sensitive that "inspiration" would come with the smallest stimulus from outside.

Bashō rejects artifice on the same ground. Artifice kills "inspiration"; it is merely an intellectual play, without an intuitive insight into nature. Bashō calls it "a craftsman's disease." "Let a little child compose *haiku*," he says. "A beginner's poem always has something interesting."<sup>25</sup> Often the poet's too eager effort to write a good poem does harm to his work, because his personal will shows in the foreground of the poem. A good *haiku* cannot be written merely by a long verse-writing experience or by wide knowledge of the technique of *haiku*. For this reason, "some who have been practicing *haiku* for many years are slower in knowing true *haiku* than others who are new in *haiku* but have been experts in other arts," as Bashō observes.<sup>26</sup> Here again we see Bashō's idea that all arts are the same in spirit and that this spirit is indispensable in *haiku* writing as well as in other arts.

"Fragrance," "reverberation," and "reflection" are the main principles which rule the relation between the parts of a poem. These terms are often used in linked verse, but they are basic ideas in the composition of *haiku*, too. Among them "fragrance" is one of the oldest ideas in Japanese aesthetics, frequently used in essays on classical poetry. "Fragrance" means "fragrance of sentiment," some vague quality rising out of a mood and faintly appealing to human



The monkey's shriek  
Is hoarse, his teeth white.  
Over the peak, the moon.

Bashō charged the poet for creating an unusual scene for shock effect, and he himself composed a *haiku* for contrast's sake:

A salted sea-bream,  
Showing its teeth, lies chilly  
At the fish shop.<sup>20</sup>

As Bashō explains, the writer of the first poem has not put himself in the monkey's position; he is standing far away from the monkey and listening to his shriek. But Bashō has set himself within an external object—a sea-bream. Just as the writer of the seabird poem could feel what the seabirds felt, Bashō feels chilly as a salted fish would feel chilly at a fish shop in winter. The whiteness of the fish's exposed teeth has caused a delicate vibration in the poet's heart, establishing a slender but firm relationship between the fish and the poet.

Thus *hosomi*, emphasizing the thin string which draws the poet into the heart of an object, again reiterates the basic premise of the *haiku* form. A *haiku* poet does not use nature images to express his emotion; he lets natural objects express their feelings. Bashō's repeated warning that a poet should suppress his personal sentiment and submerge himself within an outside object is in a way a warning against the pathetic fallacy. The seabird's lonely cry or the seabream's white teeth is what causes a vibration in the poet's heart; the cause-effect relation must not be reversed.

"Inspiration," the fourth of Bashō's poetic principles, refers to an instantaneous insight into the hidden essence of things. Bashō repeatedly taught his disciples not to miss the moment of inspiration in composing a poem. "If you get a flash of insight into an object," he told them, "put it into words before it fades away in your mind."<sup>21</sup> "A poet," he said on another occasion, "should compose a poem with the force of his inspiration."<sup>22</sup> Again at another time he explained it with a series of similes:

Composition of a poem must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous foe. It is

also like cutting a ripe watermelon with a sharp knife, or taking a large bite at a pear.<sup>23</sup>

But "inspiration" does not come to anyone at any moment. It is the result of the poet's strenuous effort and constant self-discipline. "A poet," says Bashō, "should discipline himself every day."<sup>24</sup> When "inspiration" arrives, it arrives in an instant. The poet should catch this moment and put that momentary experience into words on the spot. Therefore, once the poem is finished at the inspired moment, the poet would better not try to change words from one to another. "Inspiration" is intuitive—not discursive. It is not something which the poet wrings out of his intellect by effort. His effort should be directed toward the creation of a mental state so open and sensitive that "inspiration" would come with the smallest stimulus from outside.

Bashō rejects artifice on the same ground. Artifice kills "inspiration"; it is merely an intellectual play, without an intuitive insight into nature. Bashō calls it "a craftsman's disease." "Let a little child compose *haiku*," he says. "A beginner's poem always has something interesting."<sup>25</sup> Often the poet's too eager effort to write a good poem does harm to his work, because his personal will shows in the foreground of the poem. A good *haiku* cannot be written merely by a long verse-writing experience or by wide knowledge of the technique of *haiku*. For this reason, "some who have been practicing *haiku* for many years are slower in knowing true *haiku* than others who are new in *haiku* but have been experts in other arts," as Bashō observes.<sup>26</sup> Here again we see Bashō's idea that all arts are the same in spirit and that this spirit is indispensable in *haiku* writing as well as in other arts.

"Fragrance," "reverberation," and "reflection" are the main principles which rule the relation between the parts of a poem. These terms are often used in linked verse, but they are basic ideas in the composition of *haiku*, too. Among them "fragrance" is one of the oldest ideas in Japanese aesthetics, frequently used in essays on classical poetry. "Fragrance" means "fragrance of sentiment," some vague quality rising out of a mood and faintly appealing to human

senses. Bashō seems to have believed that different parts of a poem could be related to one another by "fragrance," forming an atmospheric harmony rather than logical coherence as a whole. Here is an example from linked verse:

How burdensome  
Are the innumerable names  
Of spring flowers!  
A butterfly, slapped,  
Awakes out of its sleep.<sup>27</sup>

The first stanza describes the loveliness of spring flowers; all flowers are so beautifully blooming that one would like to enjoy them wholeheartedly, without being bothered by their names. Yet the expression "burdensome" suggests a certain quality of mood, somewhat unsettled, faintly uneasy, as if something is fluttering in the corner of a beautiful landscape. The second stanza takes over this "fragrance" of mood latent in the first stanza and introduces the image of a fluttering butterfly. The relation between the two stanzas, therefore, is what Bashō calls "fragrance."

"Reverberation" implies a relation of two parts in a poem in which the mood of one part reverberates in the other. "Reverberation in poetry," one of Bashō's disciples explains, "may be compared to the case of two objects in which as soon as the one is hit the other reverberates from it."<sup>28</sup> For instance:

In the blue sky  
Dimly hangs the moon  
As the day breaks.  
The first frost has fallen  
At Hira, by the autumn lake.<sup>29</sup>

The first stanza presents a lovely mood with a wan morning moon, but there is one image, the blue sky, which suggests the feeling of magnitude. This causes a "reverberation" in the second stanza and introduces the magnificent scene of a large lake extending into an infinite distance in the chilly autumn air. "Reverberation" is like "fragrance" in its function: it relates one part of a poem to another by a certain quality of mood. Yet, whereas "fragrance" accompanies a delicate, elegant, feminine mood, "reverberation" occurs when the mood is of force, grandeur, magnitude,

masculinity. Such a mood, as it were, is so forceful that it causes an echo in the stanza that follows.

As for "reflection," Bashō's own comment is recorded by his disciple:

Men are cutting the brushwood  
By a grassy path on the peak.  
In the dense pinewood  
On the leftside mountain  
Is the Temple of Kaya.

The Master said: "In view of the reflection from the line 'Men are cutting the brushwood,' it would be better to change the opening line of the second stanza to 'It is hailing—' "<sup>30</sup>

The effect of the first line in the first stanza is strong and coarse. But "In the dense pinewood" implies a silent, calm atmosphere. So Bashō thought that the mood of the second stanza did not "reflect" that of the first, and advised to change the line to "It is hailing—," which would correspond to the roughness of the mood in the first stanza. "Reflection," again like "fragrance" and "reverberation," is the reflection of a mood between different parts of a poem creating a harmony as a whole. Its basic difference from "fragrance" and "reverberation" is that it can be applied to any mood, elegant, magnificent, or coarse.

The concepts of "fragrance," "reverberation," and "reflection" show that in *haiku* the relation of one part to another is basically that of atmospheric progression rather than discursive logic. Thus the *haiku* poet often sets two apparently unrelated things side by side and still creates some strange yet harmonious mood out of the combination. The two things may have nothing in common to ordinary eyes, but the imaginative union of the two may produce an unusually beautiful "fragrance," "reverberation," or "reflection." One of the consequences of this idea is the merging of different human senses in *haiku*. The very fact that Bashō used such terms as "fragrance," "reverberation," and "reflection" in denoting a mood suggests his belief in the interrelatedness of the five senses; from an ordinary point of view a mood would have no smell, sound, or color. Bashō saw an experience in its total impact; odor, sound, and color were one to him. Hence examples of synesthesia are abundant in his work.

Among his poems which imply a correspondence between sound and color are:

As evening has come  
On the sea, wild ducks' cry  
Is faintly white.<sup>31</sup>

Quietness—  
Near a painting on the wall  
Chirps a grasshopper.<sup>32</sup>

The blending of vision and the sense of temperature is seen in such poems as:

Onions lie  
Washed all in white.  
How chilly it is!<sup>33</sup>

The autumn wind  
Whiter than the rocks of  
The Rock Mountain.<sup>34</sup>

Vision and odor are fused in these poems:

Scent of orchids—  
It perfumes the wings  
Of a butterfly.<sup>35</sup>

Their fragrance  
Is whiter than peach blossoms:  
The daffodils.<sup>36</sup>

The correspondence between sound and smell is shown in the following poems:

The wind fragrantly  
Sounds, as if to adore  
The pines and the cedars.<sup>37</sup>

The rippling waves—  
They beat time, with the fragrance  
Of the breeze.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to these, there are many poems in which synesthesia is indirectly implied. These poems juxtapose two different human senses in such a way that a unique fusion of the two will take place. Some of the most beautiful poems by Bashō belong to this category:

Quietly, quietly,  
Yellow flowers fall to the ground—  
The sound of the rapids.<sup>39</sup>

The chrysanthemum smell—  
In the old town of Nara  
Many ancient Buddhas.<sup>40</sup>

A cuckoo's cry—  
The moonbeams are leaking  
Through the thick bamboos.<sup>41</sup>

Yellow flowers and the sound of water, the fragrance of chrysanthemums and old Buddhist images, a cuckoo's cry and the moonbeams—there is no immediate relation be-

tween the two that constitute these pairs; yet the poet brings the two together—by the principle of "fragrance," "reverberation," or "reflection"—and creates a uniquely harmonious mood permeated by the "poetic spirit." This is the point at which the "correspondence" in *haiku* differs from its counterpart in French Symbolist poetry. French Symbolists try to unite two disparate objects and create the beauty of artifice; their beauty is the perfume of "amber, musk, benjamin and incense"—strong, sensual, artificial, sophisticated, often decadent and even abnormal. The beauty springing out of Bashō's "correspondence" is like the fragrance of a chrysanthemum or orchid—faint, natural, simple, primitive, and never extravagant or shocking. This, of course, stems from his attitude toward life, from his "poetic spirit," as we have already seen.<sup>42</sup>

The attitude which tries to accept all things as they are in life came to form another aesthetic concept, "lightness," in Bashō. As he grew old Bashō emphasized this notion so much that it almost appeared as if he thought it the highest ideal of *haiku*. "By all means endeavor to create lightness," he said to one of his students, "and tell this to your friends too."<sup>43</sup> "I was delighted," he said to another, "to find that, among other improvements, lightness has come to prevail in your poetry."<sup>44</sup> As for the nature of "lightness" an interesting conversation has been recorded by one of his disciples:

A certain man asked about the latest development in the art of *haiku*. The Master answered: "Do not take duck soup. Sip fragrant vegetable soup instead." The man inquired further: "How could vegetable soup be compared to duck soup?" The Master smiled and gave no reply. As I was with them I said to the man: "It is no wonder that you should not be tired of duck soup. I have never seen you eating it. You crave for it day and night." The Master said: "Do not stop even for a moment. If you do, your poetry will get heavy."<sup>45</sup>

"Lightness" is a type of beauty found in common, everyday things. It is not gorgeous but plain, not sophisticated but simple, not greasy but faintly fragrant. It is free of sentimentalism, as seen in an instance in which Bashō criticizes a certain poem for being "sweet."<sup>46</sup> It is partly the beauty of



innocence and naiveté: "Simply observe," Bashō says, "what children do."<sup>47</sup> It is partly the beauty of "shallowness." "The style I have in mind," explains Bashō, "resembles a shallow sandbed river. Both the form and content of a poem should be light."<sup>48</sup> A good *haiku* is transparent and swiftly flowing, like the pure water in a shallow sandbed river. It is devoid of any intent to give a doctrinal sermon or to shock with violent emotions. The "shallowness" does not mean superficiality of thought or feeling: only those who have tasted duck soup may properly appreciate the flavor of vegetable soup; only those who can deeply feel may attain the stage of transcendental "lightness." The relation between "lightness" and "heaviness" is not antithetical but dialectical.

Bashō illustrates the quality of "lightness" by an actual example:

Under the trees  
Soup, fish salad, and all  
In cherry blossoms.<sup>49</sup>

Cherry-blossom viewing had been one of the favorite materials in classical Japanese poetry. But this *haiku* radically differs from traditional blossom-viewing poems in that it does not praise the loveliness of blossoms nor mourn over the brevity of life, but introduces a down-to-earth subject, food. Here is no graceful courtier playing music under the blossoms; this is a world of common men, a family picnic scene where the blossoms fall on the most commonplace of Japanese dishes. The same sort of light-hearted mood is seen in this poem:

In the rain of June  
Let us go and see the floating  
Nest of a little grebe.<sup>50</sup>

No ordinary adult would be tempted to go out in the rain just to see a grebe's nest on the pond. But the poet Bashō, with almost childlike gaiety, enjoys doing so. "Let us go and see" successfully conveys the light-heartedness of the poet, which is in the center of the poem.

Indeed this light mood is the main element which distinguishes the *haiku* from other types of poetry in China and Japan. One of Bashō's disciples writes: "Chinese poetry, classical Japanese poetry, linked

verse, and *haiku* are all poetry. Yet *haiku* covers all the areas of life, including the things which have not been treated in the other three." For example: "A willow tree in the spring rain belongs to the world of linked verse. A crow digging up mud-snails is an exclusive property of *haiku* poets."<sup>51</sup> Chinese poetry, classical Japanese poetry and linked verse aim at the creation of heroic or elegant beauty; naturally their materials are limited in kind. Yet the *haiku*, with its "lightness," accepts all things for its material—a muddy crow, a bird's dropping, horse-dung. The beauty of *haiku* is that of the "poetic spirit" which discovers delicate workings of the universal energy in all things of life. If one looks at things with the "poetic spirit," even the pettiest, humblest things will become subjects of poetry as precious as the blossoms and the moon. The *haiku* poet may use colloquialism too, which was a taboo in the pre-*haiku* tradition. "One use of *haiku*," says Bashō, "is to correct colloquialism."<sup>52</sup> A vernacular word, when it is used in *haiku*, is no longer crude; it is "corrected," it is elevated to the poetic level. Thus the realm of *haiku*, both in subject-matter and in language, is as broad as the whole range of human life.

For Bashō, then, the *haiku* was a kind of religion. It was no wonder that he did not enter the priesthood; he did not need to. Buddhism would recommend that man should renounce all his passions in order to attain serenity of mind. But the *haiku* poet assumes such a passive attitude toward life that he has no egoism, no personal emotions, to suppress or destroy. Buddhism would advise man to contemplate death in order to find meaning in life. But the *haiku* poet takes so all-inclusive an attitude toward the things of the world that life and death no longer much matter. Bashō's aesthetic principles are, in the end, the principles of his religion. *Sabi*, *shiori*, and *hosomi* are the principles by which man purges his tormenting passions and gains calm of mind; they enable man to live in this world while transcending it. "Fragrance," "reverberation," and "reflection" are the ideas by which man unites opposites and resolves struggles; they help man to see a corre-

spondence between himself and nature. Synesthesia is a mode by which man comes to recognize the interrelatedness of all things; it is a principle of assimilation and integrity, as against the method of natural science which is analysis and dissociation. "Lightness" is a concept through which man perceives a true value in common ways of life; it teaches man how to endure hardship with a smile, how to accept the fact of human imperfectibility. "Attain a high stage of enlightenment and return to the world of common men" was Bashō's death-bed teaching.<sup>53</sup> The *haiku* still has a firm grip on thousands of Japanese today, and not without reason: it quenches their thirst for beauty on the one hand and helps them to gain mental equilibrium on the other.

<sup>1</sup> Most of Bashō's comments on the art of *haiku*, recorded by himself or by his disciples, still wait to be translated into an European language. Available in English are a short prose piece "The Rustic Gate," and excerpts from Kyorai's *Conversations with Bashō*, both included in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, comp. Ryusaku Tsunoda et al. (New York, 1958), 458-467. Other prose writings by Bashō appear in *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, ed. Donald Keene (New York, 1955). Translations from Bashō's *haiku* are included in every anthology of *haiku* and of Japanese literature, such as Asatō Miyamori, *An Anthology of Haiku, Ancient and Modern* (Tokyo, 1932); R. H. Blyth, *Haiku*, 4 vols. (Tokyo, 1949-1952); and Keene's *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, cited above.

<sup>2</sup> "Genjū-an no ki," *Bashō ichidai-shū* (*Nippon haisho taikei*, *Bashō jidai*, I. [Tokyo, 1926]. Hereafter cited as *BI*), 614-615.

<sup>3</sup> "Saimon no ji," *BI*, 52.

<sup>4</sup> "Oi no kobumi," *BI*, 572.

<sup>5</sup> "Minomushi batsu," *BI*, 641.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Dohō, one of Bashō's disciples, in "Sanzōshi," *Shōmon haikabun-shū* (*Nippon haisho taikei*, *Bashō jidai*, IV. [Tokyo, 1926]. Hereafter cited as *SH*), 162.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>10</sup> "Saga nikki," *BI*, 606.

<sup>11</sup> "Oi nikki," *BI*, 52.

<sup>12</sup> "Tomaribunc-shū," *BI*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> "Oku no hosomichi," *BI*, 587.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 595.

<sup>15</sup> "Kanjinchō," *BI*, 48.

<sup>16</sup> "Oku no hosomichi," *BI*, 595.

<sup>17</sup> E. g. "Shiori in poetry does not mean a poem with the feeling of pity" ("Kyoraishō," *SH*, 277); "Shiori and a poem of pity are different" ("Kyoshi no monnan ni kotaeru no ben," *SH*, 420).

<sup>18</sup> Kyorai, "Kyoraishō," *SH*, 277.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>20</sup> Fūshi, "Haikai jitei-ki," cited in *Bashō kōza* (ed. Taizō Ebara et al. 4th revised edition. [Tokyo, 1956]), III, 8.

<sup>21</sup> "Sanzōshi," *SH*, 164.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>28</sup> "Kyoraishō," *SH*, 273.

<sup>29</sup> "Sanzōshi," *SH*, 175.

<sup>30</sup> "Sanchō sangin hyōgo," *BI*, 553.

<sup>31</sup> "Nozarashi kikō," *BI*, 88.

<sup>32</sup> "Bashō-ō shōsoku-shū," *BI*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> "Infutagi," *BI*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> "Oku no hosomichi," *BI*, 599.

<sup>35</sup> Bashō-ō shinseki-shū," *BI*, 53.

<sup>36</sup> "Oi nikki," *BI*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> "Arenō," *BI*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> "Oi nikki," *BI*, 70.

<sup>41</sup> "Saga nikki," *BI*, 605.

<sup>42</sup> A more detailed discussion of synesthesia in *haiku* appears in Yoshie Okazaki, *Bashō no Geijutsu* (Tokyo, 1959), to which this part of my article owes a great deal.

<sup>43</sup> A letter from Bashō to Sanpū, 1694. *Bashō kōza*, VII, 291.

<sup>44</sup> A letter from Bashō to Dohō, 1694. *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>45</sup> "Fugyoku ate ronshō," *Kyoraishō*, *Sanzōshi*, *Tabineron*, ed. Taizō Ebara (Tokyo, 1939), 226.

<sup>46</sup> "Kyoraishō," *SH*, 252.

<sup>47</sup> "Tabineron," *SH*, 233.

<sup>48</sup> "Betsuzashiki jo," *Shōmon haikai zenshū* (*Nippon haisho taikei*, *Bashō jidai*, II. [Tokyo, 1926]), 529.

<sup>49</sup> "Sanzōshi," *SH*, 169.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.