







REDISCOVERING BASHO



'Matsuo Basho' (*Basho-o Gazo*) painting by  
Ogawa Haritsu (1663-1747)  
(Waseda University Library, Tokyo)

*REDISCOVERING*  
**BASHO**

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A 300TH ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION

EDITED BY  
STEPHEN HENRY GILL  
& C. ANDREW GERSTLE



GLOBAL ORIENTAL

REDISCOVERING BASHO  
A 300TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Edited by Stephen Henry Gill & C. Andrew Gerstle

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## List of Contributors

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# Shepherd's Purse

## A WEED FOR BASHO

STEPHEN HENRY GILL

### 1: HAIKU

*Yoku mireba nazuna hana saku kakine kana*

Taking a close look -  
In tiny white clusters,  
Flowers of shepherd's purse  
At the foot of the hedge.<sup>1</sup>

**T**he essence of haiku is that spontaneous moment of awareness in which our thought is illumined by a sense of wonder, a close identification with some apprehended feature of the natural world. A poem, such as the one above by Matsuo Basho (1644-94), haiku's patron saint, is a celebration of the commonplace, the understated, in a single-line formula that may well take three or four lines of English to get across. The Japanese mind has been conditioned to appreciate *wabi*, humble beauty: rather the hidden weed than the showy rose. It is also finely attuned to the beauty of implication, by which the reader is asked to 'flesh out' the evoked scene and conjured emotion from the bare bones of an experience offered him by the poet. As those of us who already have

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a taste for haiku know, to play an active part in the creative equation, supplying details from our own well of experience and bringing them to bear on the short spell or formula we are confronted with, can be deeply satisfying. The Western tradition of literature sets great store by explanation: one comes to expect to be transported by the writer, who will be charging on all cylinders, pointing out all the details and feelings without us having to make too much imaginative effort. The writer does the work. Not so with Basho and the haiku form he perfected for the world.

Arthur Ransome, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* (Sept. 1910) describes the suggestiveness of haiku in the following way: "The *hokku* (haiku) poet never writes of things about which he is writing. The emotions he wishes to express are too subtle for description in words, and can only be written of in the spaces between the lines, just as between the petals of a flower we may find dreams that the flower has never known, and suggestions of something less ponderable than the earth in which it has its roots." The early twentieth century interpreters of Japanese poetry – Eearn, Chamberlain, Waley, Revon, Porter, Noguchi, and others – prepared the ground for the understanding of haiku in the West. When the 'second wave' – men like Suzuki, Blyth, Henderson, and Miyamori – took over the baton towards the middle of this century, there were many in the West now ready to learn something of the spirit of Zen Buddhism, which informs much of traditional Japanese haiku, not least the works of Basho. His was, above all, a life of the spirit. One day, on horseback, he found his own cold-hunched shadow floating across the winter earth . . . Haiku is the vision word: light transmuted into impression, feeling, memory, ecstasy, time standing still.

*Totoganu namida ya somete chiru momiji*

Out of reverence

Moved to tears,

Now dyed crimson

By the falling maple leaves . . .

We can all remember occasions when, as children, we played, close to the earth, after the rain, in the twilight under an evening star, at the foot of the hedge. The discoveries we made then of sight, of scent, of sound, of touch, of taste may be revived in 'haiku moments' of poignant awareness, phrased, albeit with more sophistication than

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would a child, in the eternal present, and therefore going on forever. When, unwittingly, a tiny frog once jumped into an ancient pond – to be recorded for all posterity by Basho – it never left. It jumps on, always bringing to our minds the contrast between its tiny green ephemeral live-wire splash and the deep wellspring of memory stored in and reflected from the bosom of that selfsame pond.

*Funuke ya kawazu tobi-komu mizu no oto*

A frog jump

Amplifies

The pond's antiquity

With its water sound.<sup>2</sup>

Write this poem in big letters, pin it to the wall, look at it from time to time, live with it for a week, a month: it will grow on you as you bring to bear on it your various moods and your own well of experience! A haiku is not a piece of chewing gum, to be masticated until it has lost its flavour; it is much more like a piece of boiled candy, to be sucked and sucked and sucked. Neither is a haiku just a pretty little poem. It is *useful*: for the use of the reader as an aid to exercising the imagination, soliciting him to play a creative role in the making of a poetry of everyday life.



## 2: LIFE

So who, then, was Basho? He was born into the samurai class in a castle town<sup>3</sup> in present-day Mie Prefecture, thirty miles to the south-east of the old capital, Kyoto. Aged 23, on the death of his lord, Yoshitada, he is supposed to have renounced his status and developed the taste he already had for both poetry and wandering. This took him, six years later, to the new capital, Edo (present-day Tokyo), where, amongst other things, for a number of years he worked for a waterworks office in Kanda.<sup>4</sup> He began to make a name for himself as a *hokku* and *haikai* poet: the former being the first verse of the latter, a long, kaleidoscopic linked verse built out of short stanzas composed by a number of poets working in collaboration. In his twenties, he had published in *haikai* anthologies under his given name of 'Munefusa', but at 32 he took the pen name of 'Tosei', meaning 'peach green'. In 1679, he composed his famous

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verse about the crow (or could it have been crows: there is no plural in Japanese) coming to perch on the leafless tree.<sup>5</sup> From time to time, he caricatured himself, rather as Lafcadio Hearn did two centuries later, as a wandering crow, whose monk-like black robe was dishevelled by the autumn wind, to which both literally and metaphorically he opened his being: his symbol of surrender to the natural energies, whose 'Way' – the Taoist, Zennist one – he chose to follow.

In his late thirties, he changed his *nom de plume* to 'Basho', after the banana palm (plantain) some of his *haikai* students had planted outside his cottage in Edo. The raggedy feel of the commonplace plant – its great leaves are soon torn in the wind – appealed to his self-deprecating nature. Although he often comes across as despairing at his own ability to measure up to the poetic high-water mark set by his revered predecessors – the poets of T'ang, Sung and Yuan China, Saigyô, Sôgi, Soin<sup>6</sup> – it should be said that, behind this veneer, in truth he seldom lacked artistic confidence.

In 1684, aged 40, he set off on the first of the long journeys he made on foot and horse to visit poets and places of scenic, historical or literary significance. He entitled the resultant travel-sketch, *Nozarashi Kiko*, 'The Records of a Weather-exposed Skeleton'.<sup>7</sup> Such travel-sketches, or *kikobun*, comprised a terse prose narrative interspersed with haiku poems, now fully independent of the *haikai* (linked verse<sup>8</sup>) matrix into which heretofore they had mainly been set. The process of liberation of *hokku* from *haikai* had begun before Basho came on the scene, but it was completed and perfected by him.

*Yamaji kite nani yara yukashi sumire-gusa*

Arrested  
On a mountain path  
By the charm  
Of violets.

Haikai was not forgotten, however: while in Nagoya, he presided over a linked verse session, which produced his most famous work to date, *Fuyu no Hi*, 'A Winter's Day'.

Returning to the Banana Palm Cottage (*Basho-an*) in Edo the following year, the popularity of *haikai* and *hokku* propelled him into the status of a leading literary figure. For a time, he enjoyed the ability to provide for himself out of his art, but the unknown called



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him – the prospect of views of autumn moons, the uncertainty of showers. The winds of travel blew him in little more than a year to the East Coast shrine of Kashima, to the South Coast shrines of Atsuta and Ise, to the poets' hills of Yoshino, to the ascetics' mountains of Miwa, Koya, and Katsuragi, to the edge of the Inland Sea, to the old capitals of Kyoto and Nara, to the Kiso Road winding into Japan's central alpine massif. Wherever he went, he thought haiku, talked haiku, taught haiku. His life was now his poetry: his poetry was his life.

Only six months or so after returning to the Banana Palm Cottage, he walked northwards out of Edo towards the glorious mountains of Nikko, . . . and on along the Abukuma River into the vast northern backwater provinces of Mutsu and Dewa. This proved to be the most epic, yet the most lyrical of his journeys, with Basho finding poetry in the simple people he met along the track, in the aroma of snow, in the silence of rocks, in the fleas and lice, in the river-drowned sunset, in the presence of trees.

*Ta ichimai uete tachi-sanu yanagi kana*

Having watched  
One paddy's worth  
Of rice-planting,  
Leaving the willow's shade.

The pine-clad islands of Matsushima rendered him speechless, the grasses swaying on the ruined castle at Hiraizumi brought tears to his eyes, and in the midst of climbing the sacred mountains of Haguro, Gassan, and Yudono, he marvelled at the strength of a tiny wild cherry tree producing blossom after long interment in snow. Crossing from the Northeast Coast to the Japan Sea Coast, Basho went to view the graceful cone of Mt. Chokai from the lagoon of Kisagata,<sup>9</sup> and the distant island of Sado across the sea from Cape Izumozaki.<sup>10</sup> Walking on southwards towards Kyoto, he was spellbound to hear a cricket singing from beneath a five hundred-year-old war helmet at a shrine in Komatsu, near Kanazawa, and then to see tiny petals of bush-clover rolling with the shells in the waves at Ironohama Beach.<sup>11</sup>

Time and time again, we relive the moments of awe and wonder Basho experienced more than three centuries ago. His carefully-framed, beautifully-balanced, yet spontaneous haiku snapshots, as Tsunehiko Hoshino intimates in his contribution to this book, reveal a poet whose practised gaze allows the reader to access that region

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where man and nature are one. The profound feeling of atonement evinced by many of these poems describes the Japanese term '*sabi*'.<sup>12</sup>

*Ishiyama no ishi yori shiroshii aki no kaze*

Whiter than  
The white rocks  
Of Stone Mountain -  
The autumn breeze.

As Basho closes his 'Narrow Road to the Deep North'<sup>13</sup> travelogue, he sets off for Ise. A solid five-month walk had simply turned into a further period of intermittent wandering: this time about the Kansai region, which included his hometown, Lake Biwa, Kyoto, and Nara. Many of his so-called 'disciples' lived in this area - Kyorai, Joso, Boncho, Kyoriku, Doho, Shiko, Kyokusui - and he enjoyed extended 'retreats' at several of their houses. Amongst the creative products of this important period were two *haibun* works, *Saga Nikki* (The Saga Diary<sup>14</sup>), and *Genju-an no Ki* (Prose Poem on the Unreal Dwelling<sup>15</sup>), and one of the best-loved of the Basho School anthologies, *Sarumino* (Monkey's Raincoat<sup>16</sup>), which contained both *haikai* linked verse and individual haiku, arranged by season.

*Hi no michi ya aoi katamuku satsuki-ame*

The rains of June  
Have long obscured the sun -  
Yet its path still tracked  
By the hollyhock leaves.

In the winter of 1691, now aged forty-seven, he travelled back to Edo, where the Banana Palm Cottage was rebuilt for him by his followers. He did not settle in well. The demands of fame and 'family' (a nephew, a nun, her children) did not allow him the creative space he desired. What he gained from this penultimate period of his life was the concept of '*karumi*', of lightness of touch. *Sabi* on its own was not enough: it made haiku perhaps a little too reverent. *Karumi* provided a carefreeness to go with the meditative tone, a human touch to add to the divinely natural.<sup>17</sup>

*Ika-uri no koe magirawashii hototogisu*

The staccato cry  
Of a squid vendor  
Joins to the song . . .  
Of the 'ho-tototo' cuckoo.<sup>18</sup>

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1694 saw Basho embark on his last journey, westwards towards his hometown and the Kansai region. That autumn, he fell ill<sup>19</sup> and died in Osaka, several of his followers in waiting at his side. His body was taken to the Nameless Hut at Gichuji Temple in Zeze near Otsu, and, according to his will, buried there. At his memorial service almost four hundred people crowded in to salute his spirit with incense. His gravestone stands there today in the temple garden, a naturally-shaped pyramidal stone inscribed 'Old Man Basho' mounted on a square stone dais. In 1996, a visiting group of *haijin* (haiku poets) discovered that a little frog was living in a hole in the line of moss behind the stone, where its edge disappears into the dais!



### 3: COMMEMORATION

Gichuji Temple, from whom we obtained our cover picture of Basho travelling on horseback, commemorates his spirit every year on the second Saturday of November.<sup>20</sup> The day is appropriately called 'Shigure Ki', 'The Anniversary of Late Autumn Showers'.

When we put together the idea of holding a commemorative symposium at London University in honour of the three-hundredth anniversary of Basho's death (and the three hundred-and-fiftieth of his birth), it was but one of several commemorative events created at the initiative of members of the British Haiku Society.<sup>21</sup> The Basho Symposium itself was held at the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) on 2 July 1994, and the papers delivered on that day form the main body of the text of this book. Drew Gerstle chaired the morning session; George Marsh, the afternoon. SOAS Library, BHS, and the Museum of Haiku Literature in Tokyo cooperated to produce a Haiku Exhibition open for a number of days on either side of the Symposium.

The following day – another untypically sweltering one – a composition stroll (*ginko*) along the banks of the River Thames was held, followed by the compilation of a commemorative linked verse, or 'renga'. This is also included herein: 'Swiftly Flowing'.

The Japan Research Centre invited the poet and critic, Makoto Ooka,<sup>22</sup> to talk on the subject of Japanese poetry at SOAS on 17 October in 'Basho Year'. In his paper ('Poetry for the Computer Age'), also reproduced here, we were reminded of the appropriate-

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ness of brief verse-forms for the age in which we live. He also sang the praises of Japan's linked verse tradition.

In late October that year, a party of British haiku poets set out from Chepstow in South Wales to walk northwards along the ancient earthwork trail, Offa's Dyke, and create, as they went, a *haibun* (prose passage interspersed with haiku) in the spirit of Basho depicting their journey into the Welsh Borderland hills. This, too, is featured in our book: 'In The Autumn Wind'. It was edited by Stephen Henry Gill and Fred Schofield.

On 3 December, the British Haiku Society held a curiously named<sup>23</sup> 'Basho Balloon-Launching Ceremony and Haiku Tree-Dressing Event' at the top of Primrose Hill in London, in which fifty small helium-filled balloons were released one by one into the skies, each of which bore a haiku by Basho suspended as a poem-card beneath. The haiku were read aloud in both Japanese and English before each was launched (see 'Fifty Basho Haiku For The Sky'). A nearby sycamore tree was later dressed with haiku poems, which fluttered 'on exhibition' in the hilltop breezes throughout the following week.

To return, now, to the day of the Tercentenary Symposium . . . It began with an 'Offering of Tea', by Urasenke teamaster, Michael Birch, in celebration of Basho's life and work, . . . and ended with a 'Haiku Meditation', led by Brian Tasker, in which haiku were read to the accompaniment of a temple prayer-bell. This was no dry academic conference! The order of the six papers presented in between has been preserved. Tsunehiko Hoshino offers a personal view of the significance of Basho to the Japanese *haijin* today, dividing his haiku broadly into three types; Stephen Henry Gill traces the history of pictorial representations of Basho and his haiku, and makes reference to the 'media' of sculpture, tourism, advertising, music, and radio as well; Hirofumi Wada looks at the lasting legacy of Basho as it has affected the spirit and form of modern Japanese literature; Nobuyuki Yuasa presents a chronological overview of humour in Japanese haiku from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, including several pages on Basho; David Cobb gives us a break from the main commemorative theme with a paper on the British scholar, R.H. Blyth,<sup>24</sup> one of the West's chief exponents of haiku; George Swede then analyses the last twenty-five years of North American haiku literature, projecting trends into the distant future.



## SHEPHERD'S PURSE



### 4. A WEED FOR BASHO

While the tiny white flowers certainly need the 'close look' Basho recorded in his famous haiku, the illustration on page 1 of a dried shepherd's purse does clearly show how the beloved weed got its English name: its heart-shaped seed pods resemble the type of purse carried by shepherds in the Middle Ages. It grows, like haiku, in almost every country of the world. This specimen was found by a British haijin in her garden and is identical with the 'nazuna' one of the editors has in Japan on his desk as he writes this sentence. In the Postscript to his 'Essay on the Bagworm' (*Minomushi no Setsu*), Basho quotes the Sung Dynasty poet, Cheng Hao: "Gaze quietly at the things of nature, and you will notice that everything is satisfied just as it is."

*Yoku mireba nazuna hana saku kakine kana*

Taking a close look -  
In tiny white clusters,  
Flowers of shepherd's purse  
At the foot of the hedge.

Reginald Blyth once wrote that this poem was, "of all Basho's haiku, the one that sticks in my mind most".<sup>25</sup> In the spirit of commemoration, let the last words of this introduction be Blyth's on Basho.<sup>26</sup> He considered him a shepherd:

"When all is written that can be written, and all is done that can be done, it may be found that Basho was not only the greatest of all Japanese, but that he is to be numbered among those few human beings who lived, and taught us how to live by living."

We thank all of our contributors – both those featured in this book, and the other members of the British Haiku Society and the Japan Research Centre at S.O.A.S.<sup>27</sup> who have in various ways supported the publishing project, and we hope that through their effort, you, the reader, will now be able get closer to Matsuo Basho than in any book you have so far read.

STEPHEN HENRY GILL

Kyoto

March 1997

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### NOTES

- 1 The haiku in this book are best read several times. By the way, the plural of 'haiku' is 'haiku'!
- 2 During the past hundred years or more, this haiku has been translated and explained in an extraordinary number of quite different ways. For those with further interest, please refer to Hiroaki Sato's *One Hundred Frogs* (Weatherhill), Nobuyuki Yuasa's 'Translating The Sound Of Water' in Penguin's *The Translator's Art* (ed. Radice & Reynolds), or Makoto Ueda's *Basho & His Interpreters* (Stanford Univ.). This translation, and all others in our introduction, 'Shepherd's Purse', are by Stephen Henry Gill.
- 3 Iga Ueno.
- 4 See 'Representation of Basho', plate 20, for an illustration of the vicinity in which he lived.
- 5 See 'Fifty Haiku for the Sky', no.4.
- 6 Saigyō (1118-1190), Sōgi (1421-1502), and Sōin (1605-1682) were all Japanese poets. For something on Sōin, see Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper. Bashō often wrote of himself as a 'no-nashi', or 'good-for-nothing'.
- 7 Translations available of this and other Bashō travel-sketches in: *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Penguin Classics, trans. by N. Yuasa) and *Classical Japanese Prose: an Anthology* (trans. H.C. McCullough, Stanford Univ.). See also 'Fifty Haiku for the Sky', no. 5, for the title verse.
- 8 What modern Japanese poets often term 'reiku', and contemporary Western haiku poets, 'renga'. The form Bashō and his followers used was known as 'kassen', meaning specifically a linked poem of thirty-six verses. The *hokku* (first stanza) would comprise seventeen phonetic symbols (similar to, but not the same as, English syllables) falling into the traditional cadence of 5-7-5; the second, fourteen, falling 7-7; the third, 5-7-5 again; and so on, alternately to the thirty-sixth and final stanza, phrased 7-7. Compiled under the aegis of an experienced poet, like a piece of ancient court music (*gagaku*), the stanzas would build into a gentle 'adagio' introduction, followed by an 'andante' development (picking up speed), and concluding with the poetic equivalent of an 'allegro' (faster still): in Japanese, the 'jo-ka-kyū' structure. Contemporary Western haiku poets have experimented for several decades with all sorts of styles and forms for their 'renga'. For further comments on linked verse-making, please see Hirofumi Wada's and Makoto Ooka's essays in this book.
- 9 This lagoon rose above sea level in an earthquake in 1804: it is now dry land.
- 10 See Stephen Henry Gill's 'Representation of Bashō' paper for a haiku written at Izumozaki and for two recent pictorial renditions (plates 18, 19).
- 11 'Bush-clover' is a cascading *lespedeza* variety. See 'Fifty Haiku for the Sky', no. 19.
- 12 *Sabi* has often been mistranslated as 'loneliness'. Although there is a solitariness about the quiet experience of it, there is a strong identification of the poet with what he or she has observed. This poignancy does not necessarily evoke a 'lonely' feeling. See Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper for more on this theme.
- 13 Bashō's travel-sketch title, *Oku no Hosomichi*, has been variously translated: 'Narrow Road to the Deep North', 'Narrow Road to a Far Province', 'Back Roads to Far Towns', 'Narrow Road to the Interior' and 'Narrow Road

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through the Provinces', to mention but a few. Translators and publishers include N. Yuasa (Penguin), D. Britton (Kodansha), Corman & Kamaike (Mushinsha – Grossman), E. Miner (Univ. of California), H.C. McCullough (Stanford Univ.), Donald Keene (Kodansha), Hiroaki Sato (Stone Bridge Press), Sam Hamill (Shambala). After several years of rumours circulating amongst haiku scholars, in November 1996, it was 'officially announced' that Basho's original 'Narrow Road' manuscript had indeed been found – in an antique bookshop in Osaka, the city where he had died. It had been lost for 250 years! The manuscript clearly shows Basho's careful redrafting and editing for overall compositional balance, always apparently conscious of his poetic travelogue work being in effect a 'linked verse' of prose and haiku, which, like a piece of music, needs to lead forward while echoing developments that have already been played. In many places, one can see words or passages have been replaced with the ones with which we are now familiar. In one place, a haiku, *Ta ichimai* ('One paddy's worth', see page 5 for a translation), had been pasted over another as yet undiscovered Basho verse (alluding to the tree where the wandering poet Saigyô had rested half a millennium before):

*Mizu sekite sanae tawamuri yanagi-kage*

Water flowing

into the fields . . .

Rice seedlings sway –

Green willow shade.

- 14 *Haibun* is the generic term for haiku set in narrative prose. For a translation of 'The Saga Diary', see the periodical, *Literature East & West* (Dec. 1971, Cornell Univ.), trans. Etsuko Terasaki. Basho wrote this in the House of Falling Persimmons (*Rakushisha*) just outside Kyoto.
- 15 For translations of 'The Unreal Dwelling', see either the *Penguin Anthology of Japanese Literature*, ed. Donald Keene, or one by Burton Watson reproduced in *The Essential Haiku* (Ecco Press, N.J., ed. Robert Hass). Neither Keene nor Watson, however, included the haiku that Basho composed on arrival at the hermitage:

*Mazu tanomu shii no ki mo ari natsu-kodachi*

Most important of all,

An evergreen oak

On which I can rely

Here in this summer grove.

The Unreal Dwelling, *Genju-an*, was in the hills just outside Otsu, near Lake Biwa.

- 16 For a translation, see either *Japanese Linked Poetry* or *The Monkey's Straw Raincoat*, both by Earl Miner (Princeton Univ. Press), *Monkey's Raincoat* by Cana Maeda (Mushinsha-Grossman), or *Monkey's Raincoat: Linked Poetry of the Basho School* by Lenore Mayhew (Tuttle). One of the four *haikai* contained in this anthology, *Natsu no Tsuki* ('The Summer Moon'), is also translated and explained in Makoto Ueda's biographical work, *Maisuo Basho* (Twayne-Kodansha).
- 17 For discussion of *kanumi*, see Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper.
- 18 The 'ho-tototo' cuckoo, *cusculus poliocephalus*, does not sound anything like the familiar European one, but, rather, like its Japanese onomatopoeia. It is regarded,

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

however, as a beautiful sound. Not so, the voice of the squid-vendor. In this haiku, we can already feel the spirit of Karai Senryu (1718-1790), the Edo poetry editor who was chiefly responsible for the popularity of a somewhat debased but generally subtle comic form of haiku, *senryu*. Today, both in Japan and in the West, haiku in which a steady gaze is applied not to nature but to the foibles of man, a sort of haiku caricature – the same form, but not the same spirit – has taken firm root at a safe but grey distance from the real thing. *Senryu*, it must be admitted, has its charms, but they are not truly those of a shepherd's purse.

- 19 For a fanciful illustration of 'The Death of Basho', see p. 165. For a succinct account of the last month of Basho's life, see Toshiharu Oseko's *Basho's Haiku*, Vol. 1 (published by the author and produced by Maruzen, Tokyo).
- 20 Basho died on the twelfth day of the tenth month, the 'Godless Month' in the old lunar calendar. This averages out at sometime in our early November. We do not know the date of his birth.
- 21 Although Britain has, for a century or more, been reading haiku in translation and has, for several decades at least, spawned poets who were always quite aware they were *haijin*, until 1990 there was no truly national *haikai* dedicated to this genre and to the spirit it resonates. The British Haiku Society was founded in 1990 by David Cobb, Dee Evetts, and James Kirkup, and has, ever since, been bringing together both habitual *haijin* and new enthusiasts. Amongst the other 'Basho Year' events were the R.H. Blyth *Genius of Haiku* anthology launch in Ilford, two Basho presentations in and around Portsmouth (one, a play by George Marsh, *Renga at Jugo's*), and two Basho radio programmes made by the BBC (one scripted by Chris Nicholson, the other, Stephen Henry Gill). The BHS Membership Secretary may be reached at Longholm, East Bank, Wingland, Lincs. PE12 9YS, U.K.
- 22 Makoto is his given name; Ooka, his surname. We have tried to use the international currency of 'forename before family name' for all names of people active in recent times, but for the Japanese of previous centuries, we have left the names in their traditional order, with which Westerners have become familiar: thus, 'Matsuo Basho'.
- 23 Watch this space in the 21st Century!
- 24 Reginald Blyth died in Tokyo in October 1964, and the Symposium was also commemorating (in parentheses, as it were) the 30th Year since he departed. Some of the best of his writings are collected in *The Genius of Haiku: Readings from R.H. Blyth* (British Haiku Society/Hokuseido). His four-volume work, *Haiku* (Hokuseido/Heian International) and two-volume *History of Haiku* (Hokuseido), together with his oeuvre on *senryu* – *Senryu: Japanese Satirical Verses, Japanese Life & Character in Senryu*, and *Edo Satirical Verse Anthologies* (all Hokuseido), have long been 'bibles' for Western *haijin*.
- 25 In *Edo Satirical Verse Anthologies*, p.11-12. For further discussion of this famous poem, including other Blyth quotations, see Tsunehiko Hoshino's paper, p.19.
- 26 From *Haiku*, Vol. 1
- 27 Publication of this book was supported by subventions from the S.O.A.S. Japan Research Centre and the British Haiku Society and by the hard work of Clare Doran, Helen Macnaughton and Barbara Lazoi. The shepherd's purse image is courtesy of June Mitchell and David Kerrigan.



# An Offering of Tea

IN CELEBRATION OF THE  
LIFE AND WORK OF  
MATSUO BASHO

MICHAEL BIRCH

*Wasuregusa wa sakedo wasurenu mukashi kana*

The forget-me-not is blooming;  
But the things of long ago, -  
How can I forget them?<sup>1</sup>

**F**or each of us, our presence here today is a manifestation of the way the life of Matsuo Basho and the other creators of Haiku have caught the eye of our minds.

I commence all my letters with a seasonal haiku, and the name I acknowledge most frequently is Basho. The *kanji* characters with which I write my own name, Michael Birch, *Ma-ike-nu Ba-chi*, contain the *Ba* of Basho, and *ike* means 'pond'. You need no reminder of that much-discussed 'old pond' haiku of Basho's.<sup>2</sup> I have created an old pond as an integral part of the structure of my home. While in Japan, I took the life and haiku of Basho as the theme of my *shodo koten*,<sup>3</sup> 'A Journey with Basho', held at Daitoku-ji Temple.

There will no doubt be a great number of words used in the

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

discussions here today. With this Offering of Tea – its ritual purification of utensils, and its meditative atmosphere – I also offer you a quiet moment's reflection before the words of this day begin to flow.

*Editors' Note:* The above words had been printed on cards and left on the chairs arranged in a semicircle about the matted area, where the Tea Master would purify his implements and make one bowl of frothy green tea. The ritual itself was conducted in silence: Zeami's words, "The outward scent of inward feelings", printed at the head of each card, latent in the minds of the onlookers. Of the actions the Tea Master effected, Michael explains: "Although both a '*daisu*' (a formal stand) and a '*kaigu*' (a matching set of utensils) were used, the movements made in the purification of utensils were the same as would normally be used in the serving of tea in every environment, with hot water poured over green powdered tea." When the bowl of tea had been made, the Tea Master stood up and bore it slowly towards the '*daisu*', above which hung a vertical scroll bearing a portrait of Basho by Haritsu,<sup>4</sup> the same as that reproduced as frontispiece to this book. This scroll was used throughout the day as backdrop to all of the later presentations.

Lingering  
after the Basho Day –  
the tea master's smile<sup>5</sup>



Michael Birch offering tea at the Basho *daisu*

## AN OFFERING OF TEA

### NOTES

- 1 By Shokyu-mi, a female *haijin* of the eighteenth century. Trans. R.H. Blyth. The *wasuregusa* is in fact a species of day lily and literally means 'forget-me flower'.
- 2 For discussion of this verse, see the 'Shepherd's Purse' introduction, and its footnote (2).
- 3 Calligraphy exhibition.
- 4 For further discussion of this portrait, see Stephen Henry Gill's 'Representation of Basho' paper.
- 5 Annie Bachini's haiku, written a while later, and first published in *Blithe Spirit* 4, 4. This haiku was one of several read at the memorial service held for Michael in London after his death in 1997.

# Basho and I

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BASHO 300 YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH

TSUNEHICO HOSHINO

I would like to begin by emphasising that I am neither a specialist in haiku literature nor a scholar of Basho. Rather, I am what is known in Japan as a *haijin*, that is, a haiku poet. Over the past two years, however, some of my university students and I have read together English versions of Basho's great travel journal, *Oku no Hosomichi* (or 'Narrow Road to a Far Province'). At least eight different English translations of this work exist, and in class we compared the translations both with the original and with each other. Although the students were not literature majors, since my course was an optional one, those who signed up for it were indeed more or less interested in the subject. Each year, about thirty students attended the course. I would guess that not one of these students had read through the whole of the original text of *Oku no Hosomichi*, although in high school all of them had been made to read some excerpts from the work, such as its famous opening passage:

"The passing days and months are eternal travellers in time. The years that come and go are travellers too..."<sup>1</sup>

According to a friend of mine, who teaches Japanese literature at

## BASHO AND I

university and is also a leading contemporary haiku poet, Japanese students in general are only able to recite perhaps two or three of Basho's many haiku. When we consider that there are approximately one thousand haiku by Basho surviving today, we must conclude that, although his poems are truly classic, this oeuvre is in no way a bible to the average Japanese.

When my students had finished reading 'Narrow Road to a Far Province' in English and comparing the translation with the original text, they found themselves deeply impressed and moved by the work. In fact they said they were delighted to have had the opportunity to read it. Most of them also felt that the original, especially in terms of rhythm and style, was much better than any of the English versions. Basho's terse yet grand prose style, with its charming rhythm and tone, had captivated them, and not a few of them declared their intention to make a trip tracing Basho's original route through the northern provinces.

If we consider Japanese haiku poets, however, then I think that we can say without a doubt that an anthology of Basho's haiku will be a kind of bible for them. Members of the Association of Haiku Poets of Japan, an organization to which about 12,000 professional and semi-professional haiku poets belong, are certainly very familiar with Basho's haiku. Perhaps about half of such poets have also read through *Oku no Hosonichi* in the original and visited some of the places mentioned in the text. One friend of mine actually managed to trace the whole route of Basho's original journey,<sup>2</sup> travelling most of the way on foot.

The importance of Basho for haiku poets lies in the variety of his work. He explored the possibilities of haiku, using the form to express a wide range of themes and employing various techniques and styles. In this way, he opened up a new path for later haiku poets, including ourselves, to follow. Indeed, in Basho's case, we may say that the old becomes the new. The topics of his haiku are so varied that we come to feel he has created a poetic world of truly vast scope. By way of illustrating this point, let us now take a look at a few examples of Basho's haiku:

*Araumi ya Sado ni yokotau Ama-no-gawa*

A wild sea,

And the Galaxy stretching out over

The Island of Sado.<sup>3</sup>



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

This well-known haiku was praised by Masaoka Shiki, the nineteenth century haiku poet, for its grand scale and magnificent beauty. Another haiku of this kind is:

*Shimajima ya chiji ni kudakete natsu no umi*  
Island upon island!  
Broken into a thousand pieces –  
the summer sea.<sup>4</sup>

Basho composed this haiku at Matsushima in the north of Japan during that journey recorded in *Oku no Hosomichi*. Matsushima is perhaps Japan's most celebrated beauty-spot, and the bay contains a myriad of small islands upon which pines grow in profusion.<sup>5</sup> The word *kudakete* ('broken') in the second line of the poem contains two meanings. The straightforward one is that the land has been shattered into thousands of fragments scattered as islands over the sea. At the same time, however, the word suggests the waves of the sea which 'break' against the islands. The haiku conveys powerfully the glittering beauty of the summer scene, and also perhaps the difficulty of capturing its myriad brilliance in words.<sup>6</sup>

A further example is:

*Meigetsu ya mon ni sashii-kuru shio-gashira*  
Full moon!  
The crest of the tide flows up  
as far as the gate.<sup>7</sup>

Basho established his *Basho-an* hut near the mouth of the Sumida River, which flows into Tokyo Bay. On the night of the mid-autumn full moon, the tide in the bay rises to its highest point of the year. The tide has pushed up the river until it has almost reached the gate of Basho's hut. The image of the full river, with its waves lapping against the gate, lit up by the bright autumnal moon, has a powerful and grand beauty. Basho both enjoys the beauty of the moon and is impressed by the unusual scene below. It is this combination which gives his haiku such a fresh quality. While I greatly appreciate the above three haiku, regrettably I feel that it is extremely difficult for us to write such haiku today.

Let me now give some examples of a very different type of Basho haiku – almost, as it were, an opposite type:

## BASHO AND I

*Yoku mireba nazuna hana saku kakine kana*

Looking closely, I see  
A shepherd's purse blooming  
Under the hedge.<sup>8</sup>

That famous scholar of Zen Buddhism, D. T. Suzuki, explained this haiku in the following way:

'It is likely that Basho was walking along a country road when he noticed something rather neglected by the hedge. He then approached closer, took a good look at it, and found it was no less than a wild plant, rather insignificant and generally unnoticed by passers-by. This is a plain fact described in the poem with no specially poetic feeling expressed anywhere, except perhaps in the last syllables, which read in Japanese "kana". This particle signifies a certain feeling of admiration or praise, and can sometimes be rendered into English by an exclamation mark.'<sup>9</sup>

The plant *nazuna*, or shepherd's purse, is a very common small weed which we can easily find on the roadside or in fields. It blooms in the early spring and has a small, white, four-petalled flower which forms a minute cross. As R.H. Blyth says, "the point here is the *looking closely*",<sup>10</sup> rather than the beauty of the flower itself. By looking closely, Basho is able to experience the wonder of the small things in nature. The haiku may in fact suggest Basho's own philosophy of life, which sees all things as able to live happily by following their own inner natures. This idea of the peaceful co-existence of the whole of nature, which derives from the Taoist philosophy of Chuang-tzu, lies behind Basho's own view of nature. To a haiku poet, the shepherd's purse in bloom is enough, just as it is. To quote Blyth again: "Its meaning is just as direct, as clear, as unmistakable, as complete, . . . as devoid of reference to other things, as dipping the hand suddenly into boiling water."<sup>11</sup> Most of us, however, are only able to realise the value and charm of this inconspicuous flower after reading this haiku by Basho. This teaches us to try and develop an attitude where we look very closely at every object in nature, whether it be rare or common. Such a haiku is the result of long, hard practice at observing objects closely and carefully.

Another example of such a haiku is:

*Hatsuyuki ya suisen no ha no tawamu made*

First snow –  
just enough to bend  
the leaves of the narcissi.<sup>12</sup>

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

The narcissus is one of the earliest flowers to bloom and so may often be seen amidst the snow, the rich green of its strong leaves standing out against the white. In Japan, the first snow of the year is traditionally looked forward to with pleasure, and this haiku, too, has a distinctly happy air about it. The first snowfall has been a light one, and yet enough snow has fallen for it to settle upon the leaves of the narcissi, causing them to form a graceful arch. One feels a happy balance between the amount of snowfall and the strength of the narcissus. It is as if we are being offered a glimpse in this detail of a larger natural harmony in which all individual events find their place.

A third example of this close-focused kind is:

*Kusa no ha o otsuru yori tobu hotaru kana*

Just as it seems to fall  
from the blade of grass,  
up the firefly flies!

Glowing in the dark, the firefly makes its way slowly to the tip of a blade of grass; just as one thinks it is falling to the ground, it changes course in mid-air and flies off in a graceful curve. Basho observes closely this whole process, which indeed only lasts an instant, and gives it a precise description in this objective haiku.

These haiku remind me of the teaching given by Basho to his disciples: "Once you can catch the light of an object, you should manage to express it before it goes out in your mind."<sup>13</sup> We might explain these words in the following way. While a poet gazes at an object, he should grasp its intrinsic nature. This is just like seeing a flash of light in the dark; the flash, in a sense, one of intuition or inspiration. And then, before the light or flash vanishes, he should compose a haiku. The haiku ought therefore to be composed instantly and spontaneously. Obeying Basho's teaching, we haijin endeavour to gaze at objects in nature. Unless we have practised such gazing eagerly for many years, however, we will not be able to grasp anything true and real. Beginners at writing haiku usually strain themselves to find something, and as a result end up finding nothing at all. Excellent haijin, on the other hand, who, over many years, have practised gazing constantly and have thereby gained a great deal of experience, are able to regard an object selflessly and to submerge themselves into the world of that object, dissolving their egos in the process. I wonder if this is not the true meaning of the 'wise passiveness' mentioned by Wordsworth or the 'negative capability'

described by Keats.

Regarding the poet's creative process, Doho, one of Basho's disciples, wrote the following of his teacher:

"The Master said: "Learn about a pine tree from a pine tree, and about a bamboo plant from a bamboo plant". What he meant was that a person should detach the mind from his own personal self. Nevertheless, some poets interpret the word 'learn' in their own ways and never really 'learn'. For 'learn' means to enter into the object, perceive its delicate life and feel its feelings, whereupon a poem forms itself. A lucid description of the object is not enough; unless the poem contains feelings which have spontaneously emerged from the object, it will show the object and the poet's self as two separate entities, making it impossible to attain a true poetic sentiment. The poem will be artificial, for it is composed by the poet's personal self."<sup>13</sup>

From time to time, we Japanese *haijin* recall these teachings and try to apply them to the process of writing our own haiku. But, as you can guess, it is one thing to understand what Basho said and quite another to carry out his words oneself. To be perfectly frank, I find myself in most cases repeating these words to myself just like someone muttering an incantation.

At this point, I would like to introduce three of my own haiku that perhaps belong to this second, close-focused type, just discussed:

*Nokoru ka no susu no gotoku ni orite-kishi*

A late mosquito  
came down to me  
like a speck of soot.<sup>14</sup>

*Wakiguchi ni yorite wa nagare mizusumashi*

Water striders –  
approaching the well source again  
only to be washed away.

*Sasanaki no utsurite nokoru hizashi kana*

A chirping warbler  
leaving behind  
the sunshine.

This warbler is the bird called *uguisu* in Japanese, which chirps 'tut-tut', and moves about swiftly in the winter bushes.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, then, I should like to mention one further type of haiku composed by Basho. Basho was not only a nature poet, but also a



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

poet of humanity. Some of his haiku show his keen insight into human nature and his deep love for his parents, relatives and disciples. For example:

*Chichi-haha no shikiri ni koishi kiji no koe*

The voice of the pheasant;  
How I longed  
For my dead parents!<sup>16</sup>

One should explain that, in Japan, the pheasant has from ancient times been regarded as a bird possessed of a deep love for its young. Another example is:

*Furusato ya heso no o ni naku toshi no kure*

My native place;  
Weeping over the umbilical cord,  
At the end of the year.<sup>16</sup>

R.H. Blyth explained this haiku as follows:

'It was the custom in Japan, and still is in many places, for the mother to keep the umbilical cord of the child, and when Basho went back to his native place, long after the death of his parents, he found this wrapped up in paper, with his name and the date of his birth written on it. Basho made travel his home, but yet, and perhaps all the more, his feelings towards his father and mother and his old house were painfully deep. It is only those who realize the impermanency of things that can know the meaning of passionate attachment to things and persons and places.'<sup>17</sup>

Allow me to introduce one other of my own haiku, one which belongs in this category of poems:

*Haha no amite kureshi tebukuro kaku chisashi*

How small the gloves  
dead mother knitted for me  
forty-four years ago.

My mother died rather young, more than forty years ago, and I happened to keep one of a pair of gloves she had knitted for me when I was nine or ten years old. In fact, I do not like to make too much use of sentiment in my haiku. In order to avoid sentimentalism, I always rely on the thing itself – in this case, the gloves. While composing this haiku, I was very conscious of the haiku by Basho cited above.

## BASHO AND I

As a haiku poet, I find that Basho's poems both stimulate and encourage me when I am writing haiku. Yet, at the same time, they seem also to hinder and discourage me. Basho is still today the great master of haiku; he is also a formidable rival to me, and to other Japanese *haijin* like me. In this, he is perhaps to us as Shakespeare is to modern playwrights in Britain.

### NOTES

- 1 Trans. Dorothy Britton. All poetry translations in this book are by the author of the paper concerned, unless otherwise stated.
- 2 A total distance of about 1,500 miles (2,400 km.).
- 3 Trans. R.H. Blyth. For another translation, see 'Fifty Haiku for the Sky', no. 20.
- 4 Trans. the author with Adrian Pinnington.
- 5 See Stephen Henry Gill's paper for an illustration (Plate 7b) of Basho and companion Sora at Matsushima.
- 6 This verse is eschewed from Basho's account in 'The Narrow Road', where he professes to have been unable to compose anything at all worthy of the scene in front of his eyes. In the recently-discovered original *Oku no Hosomichi* manuscript, the page on which the Matsushima episode is written can be seen to have been severely damaged before Basho himself repaired it with an overlay: possible witness to the frustration he felt at not being able to write anything worthy. As it is the only page like this, he may well have torn it in a rage!
- 7 Trans. the author with Adrian Pinnington. Another translation in '50 Haiku for the Sky', no. 21.
- 8 Trans. Makoto Ueda. For another translation and further discussion of this poem, see the introduction, 'Shepherd's Purse', p.9.
- 9 D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism & Psychoanalysis*.
- 10 In *Haiku*, Vol. 2, p.374.
- 11 In *Zen in English Literature & Oriental Classics*, p.49.
- 12 Trans. the author with Adrian Pinnington. For another translation, see '50 Basho for the Sky', no. 31.
- 13 Basho quoted in the '*Sanzoshi*' by Hattori Doho. Trans. Makoto Ueda.
- 14 The author has translated his own haiku into English.
- 15 See a Basho haiku exactly describing this swift movement in '50 Haiku for the Sky', no. 12.
- 16 Trans. R.H. Blyth.
- 17 R.H. Blyth in *Haiku*, Vol.4.

# Representation of Basho in the Arts & Media

STEPHEN HENRY GILL

*Kakitsubata kataru mo tabi no hitotsu kana*

To talk casually  
About an iris flower  
Is one of the pleasures  
Of the wandering journey.<sup>1</sup>

**T**his haiku by Basho has long been an inspiration to me, and I give it to you by way of caution for what is to follow, a 'wander', talking casually all the way, through three centuries of representations of Basho and his work, both pictorial and otherwise. The beauty one finds in both iris and in Basho is surely a *spiritual* one, and this spiritual beauty has, down the ages, appealed to more than just poets: as with Shakespeare here in Britain, the whole nation of Japan sees Basho as if eternally set on the bardic pedestal. But I am not to address today the question 'Why was Basho great?'; rather, to illustrate the various and curious ways in which artists and sculptors, composers and playwrights, admen and architects have interpreted the image of Basho himself or created an image based on one of his poems, and, in so doing, have extended the influence of the *Okina* (Old Man Basho<sup>2</sup>) in particular, and haiku in general, and have helped to keep them both in the public eye. As it is addressed elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> I will not be covering the influence of Basho on Japanese literature.

Firstly, then, in chronological order, the portraits:



Plate 1. 'Travel Scenes: Autumn Shower' (*Tabiji no Gakan: Shigure*), by Basho, coloured by Jokushi (Kakimon Library, Itami)

## PORTRAITS: PAINTINGS

Plate 1 shows Basho as he saw himself – on a journey in a November shower.<sup>4</sup> *Tabiji no Gakan: Shigure* is from a scroll of nine paintings done by Basho and coloured by his follower, Nakagawa Jokushi, probably in the year of Basho's death, 1694. He intended to inscribe a haiku on each, but died before the project could be completed. Which haiku, then, might one choose today for this picture? Perhaps, Chora's one, of about seventy years later:

*Tabi-sugata shigure no tsuru yo Basho-o*

In travelling gear,

Stork in a winter shower . . .

Is Old Man Basho.<sup>5</sup>

Another picture by Basho from the *Tabiji* scroll – *Tabine no Futari*, not reproduced here – shows *hinoki-gasa* (cedar- or cypress-strip hats), staffs and bundles set down beside two travellers as they sleep. Basho himself set the precedent, for Buson and all others later on, to portray himself in travel gear. He wears no sword, of course, although born a samurai. Rather, he has the appearance of a mendicant priest,<sup>6</sup> just as he himself had described at the beginning of both *Kashima Kiko* (A Visit to the Kashima Shrine) and *Oi no Kobumi* (The Records of a Travel-worn Satchel).

Basho is generally portrayed in black priest's robes, just as his own 'heroes' – "Saigyō in tanka, Sōgi in renga, Sesshū in painting, Rikyū in tea ceremony"<sup>7</sup> – had worn before him. The portrait of Basho by



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Face half in another world,  
Yet when fully looked at,  
It does not fail to conjure up  
Frail thunder.

The four prints of Basho shown as Plate 5 are taken from a book in the British Museum collection, the *Basho Okina Eketobaden*, and based, at least in part, on the paintings of Kano Shoci.<sup>11</sup> It is dated to 1793, the very year the poet was officially 'deified' by the Shinto authorities. The Imperial Court made him a similar honour in 1806. In the hundred years since his death in 1694, he had been elevated to a rank alongside the gods and patron saints. Yet what a thoroughly 'homely' god he was! At top left (Plate 5a), in familiar garb, he is marching along the trail in *waraji* straw sandals and sporting the beginnings of . . . the beard that never was! Plate 5b is a view through the plantains, of Basho in his hut at Fukagawa, Edo, weatherproofing his *kasa* hat.<sup>12</sup> In Plate 5c, he is seen, at right, dictating verse to a companion in an inn: the ink is being ground. Finally, (5d), at his most godlike, Basho is seen gazing meditatively, probably at the sunrise, through the celebrated Wedded Rocks off the coast at Futami near Ise. This is the Futami alluded to in the closing verse of 'Narrow Road':

*Hamaguri no futami ni wakare yuku aki zo*  
As clam-shells fall apart  
Now autumn's here,  
So too am I  
To take my leave of you.

Plate 6 reproduces a painting in the collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, probably from the early 1800s, by the *nanga* artist<sup>13</sup> and wandering haiku poet, Yokoi Kinkoku (1761-1832). He was thought to have studied with Buson. Basho's satchel is placed just behind his weather hat. The latter is the subject of the verse inscribed above. Basho is talking to his hat:

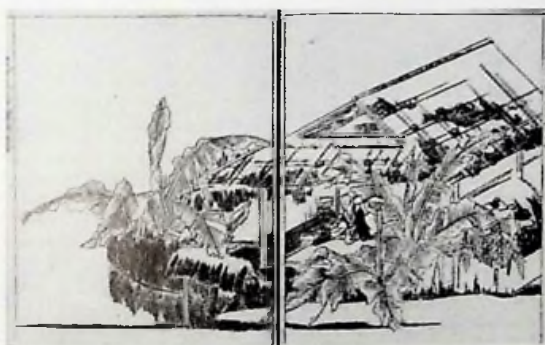
*Yoshino nite sakura misho zo hinoki-gasa*  
At Yoshino  
Let me show you the cherry-blossoms,  
Dear cypress hat.<sup>14</sup>

A second printed book of interest in the British Museum's collection is the *Oku no Hosomichi* of 1822 with illustrations based on

## REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA



a.



b.



c.

Plates 5a, b, c. Three woodblock prints from a 1793 book, 'Narrative Picture-scroll of Old Man Basho' (*Basho Okina Ekotobaden*), based in part on the work of Kano Shoen (British Museum)

# REDISCOVERING BASHO

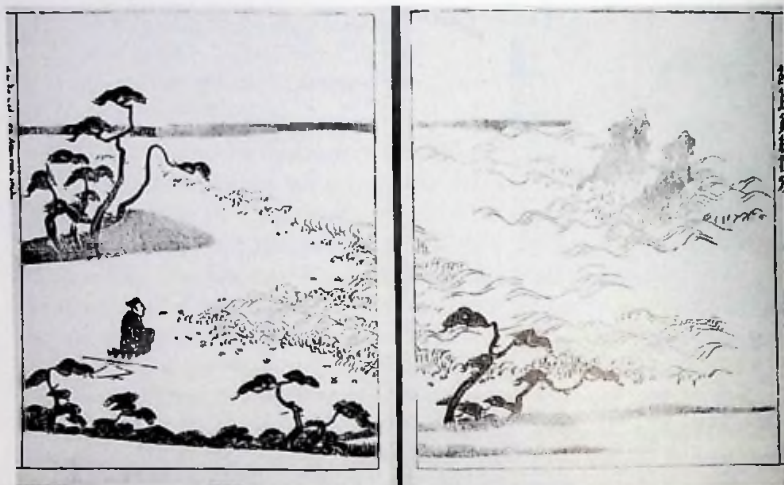


Plate 5d. One further print from the 1793 book, 'Narrative picture-scroll of Old Man Basho': Basho at the Wedded Rocks of Futami (British Museum)

Plate 6. 'Basho', painting and calligraphy by Yokoi Kinkoku (University of Michigan Museum of Art)



# REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA



Plates 7a, b. Two woodblock prints from 'Narrow Road' (*Oku no Hosomichi*), early 19th Century printed book based on the paintings of Kosetsu: above 'The Night at Iizuka', below 'At Matsushima' (British Museum)





the work of Edo painter, Yamada Kosetsu (Plate 7). The scene depicted in 7a, *Iizuka no Yadoya* (The Night at Iizuka), shows many of the accoutrements of travel – *mino* (straw raincoat), weather hats, dried gourd water-bottles, *oi* (satchel), sandals, *tsue* (staves), and so forth. Basho recorded this as a miserable night, whereas (7b) the night at Matsushima certainly was not.<sup>15</sup>

Moving on another fourteen years, to 1836, a well-known illustration of Basho (Plate 8) by Saito Yoshi (1798-1874) reproduced in the printed book, *Edo Meisho Zue* ('Famous Spots in Edo'). Basho is seen at his writing-table in his Banana-plant Hermitage at Fukagawa (in present-day Tokyo). The 'frog pond' haiku, *Fumi-ike ya*, is inscribed at the top.<sup>16</sup> The robes and hat Basho wears have become quite conventionalized.

A few years later, in the 1840s, the *ukiyo-e* artist,<sup>17</sup> Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858), did a brush sketch of Basho (Plate 9), wearing now a Chinese-style scholar's cap, at his desk at the Basho-an, portrayed perhaps in the very act of composing.

*Basho nowaki shite tarai ni ame o kiku yo kana*

Banana palm

In the autumn gale –

All night I listen to the dripping

Of rain into a basin.

The autumn moon is just visible at top, perhaps scudding beneath a racing sky.

From about the same period, there is a print (Plate 10) of Basho by another celebrated *ukiyo-e* artist, Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). Entitled simply *Basho no Zo* (Portrait of Basho), the poet is depicted resting at the foot of an autumn maple, against whose trunk are also propped sheaves of harvested rice. The clean-cut lines with which his wrinkled face is portrayed are those of caricature, yet the resultant calm, kindly-looking features are certainly not designed to make us laugh.

And now, to the last of the great printmakers, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, who was born in 1839 and died in 1892, one year after completing his final series, *Tsuki Hyakushi*, 'One Hundred Aspects of the Moon'. The print shown in Plate 11 is the very last print in the series, and it depicts Basho in the same Chinese-style cap, with script around his neck, leaning on his staff engaged in conversation with farmers at a moon-viewing party at harvest time.

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Plate 8. 'The Basho Cottage at Fukagawa' from *Edo Meisho Zue*, woodblock print by Saito Yoshi (S.O.A.S. Library, London)

Plate 9. Hiroshige Sketchbook II, no.13, 'Basho Reading by Lantern Light', painting by Ando Hiroshige (Library of Congress, Washington D.C.)



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Plate 10. 'Portrait of Basho' (*Basho no Zo*), woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai

Plate 11. 'One Hundred Aspects of the Moon: Basho' (*Tsuki Hyakushi: Basho*), woodblock print by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (S.O.A.S. Library, London)



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Basho had made the viewing of the full moon the poetic objective of at least one of his journeys (*Kashima Kiko*), and the practice figured strongly in several more. In this beautiful print, we feel somehow the loneliness of travel, but also the special significance of chance encounter on the road, especially between people from vastly different backgrounds. What the moon meant to that Basho-mind and to those untutored farmers were poles apart, and yet, at the same time, one and the same.

Moving on into the early twentieth century, with Western literature already flowing into Japan, a general reevaluation of Basho took place.<sup>18</sup> To some, he suddenly seemed too subjective a poet, old-fashioned, outdated. Shiki and Meisetsu criticized his work openly, although still recognizing the universality of his appeal. There were others, however (Akutagawa, Toson, Noguchi and Kusatao amongst them), who did still sing his praises, drawing great inspiration from his life and work, but from this time on, images of Basho were no longer quite so reverential. Caricature becomes the norm, with sheer eccentricity of style reinforcing the 'dear/funny old Basho' approach. Works by Hoan Kosugi (1881-1964), Shiko Munakata (1903-1975), and many others could be cited as examples here.

Today, pictorial representations of Basho have begun to be made in places very far from Japan. Although in terms of both technique and style some have broken new ground, the majority would seem to be iconographically quite firmly based on the pictures of Basho we started with – those made within the first hundred years or so of his death.

### PORTRAITS: SCULPTURE

Sculptures of Basho may be broadly divided into two types: the devotional images and the monumental images. Plate 12 shows both, as reproduced in a variety of books and pamphlets. At bottom left, for instance, a monumental bronze of Basho (with 'Narrow Road' companion, Sora) placed at Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, to commemorate the tercentenary, in 1989, of their 'Narrow Road' visit. An example of the devotional type is the very much older one at bottom right, a wood carving in a private collection in Ueno, Mie Prefecture, Basho's birthplace. This is small enough to sit in the *tokonoma* alcove or on a *kamidana* sacred shelf, both universal fixtures in a traditional Japanese house.





Plate 12. Montage: Basho statues, devotional and monumental

Another sculptural form of relevance, although not portraiture, is the '*kuhi*', or poem-inscribed rock. Most of Basho's thousand or so haiku have at least one commemorative *kuhi* erected in their honour. Generally, they are sited at or near the place of actual composition. The six stones shown in Plate 13 range in date from 1818 to 1979, and all happen to be sited in a part of Yamagata Prefecture 'Old Man' visited on his 'Narrow Road'. Their mixture of styles and forms, more, or less, natural-looking, are typical of *kuhi* throughout Japan.<sup>19</sup> The form of the Basho poem, as brushed calligraphy, is reproduced as cursive carving in the stone. Hardly ever, though, does the sculptural image of the poet himself adorn such poem monuments.

#### HAIKU ILLUSTRATIONS

We have now arrived in the area of representation, not of Basho himself, but of Basho's poetry. Did the poet himself ever embellish his haiku with illustrations, for example? And did those who came after perhaps visually reinterpret some of Basho's famous stanzas by illustrating them in a new way? Yes, on both counts.

# REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA



▲「有雪や雪をかほらす南谷」



▲「出羽三山順礼」句碑



▲「月と日を海に入たりもがみ川」



▲「五月雨をあつめて早し最上川」



▲「トツ美山や吹浦かけてゆう涼み」



▲「めづらしや山をいで羽の初なすび」

Plate 13. Six *kuhi* (poem monuments) commemorating Basho's haiku (Shonai Kanko Kyogikai)



Plate 14. 'Scent of Chrysanthemums' (*Kiku-no-ka Jigasan*), painting and calligraphy by Basho (Idemitsu Museum, Tokyo)

Firstly then, an illustration by Basho himself (Plate 14). The *Kiku-no-ka Jigasan*, in the Idemitsu Museum, Tokyo, is a representation of one of Basho's last poems. It celebrates the Chrysanthemum Festival, which the poet enjoyed in the old capital of Nara before moving on to Osaka, where he died. It is almost certainly his very last extant painting. The haiku is inscribed in four vertical lines, his signature alongside; the single elegant stalk of chrysanthemum harmonizing well with the poet's calligraphy. The discreet atmosphere created by

Plate 15. 'Valerian' (*Ominaeshi Gasan*) fan painting and calligraphy by Yosa Buson (Itsuo Museum, Ikeda)





## REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA

this flower echoes somehow the sense of antiquity described in the haiku itself, where chrysanthemum scent is married to the ancient Buddhas of Nara. No need, of course, for their portrayal: that would be overkill, by Japanese standards.

Next, a fan painting of a Basho haiku from the *Sarashina Kiko* about the delicate valerian bedecked in dewdrops, in which the artist, Buson, has playfully changed the meaning of the poem by showing a young maiden rather than a maiden-flower! (Plate 15) This is a work of c. 1780, and is preserved in the Itsuo Museum.

In the first part of the next century, the Zen monk-turned-painter, Gibon Sengai (1750-1837), executed a triptych (Plate 16) based on Basho's frogpond poem, *Funaike ya*. The frog under the banana-palm on the right looks us straight in the eye. The haiku above, by Sengai himself, goes something like: 'If there were only a pond, I'd like to jump in – for Basho to hear!' The frog in the centre is looking up at another verse:

*Funaike ya Basho tobi-komu mizu no oto*  
The ancient pond:  
Basho jumps in –  
Sound of the water!

Sengai was well ahead of his time in showing a deal of healthy irreverence towards the haiku Master.

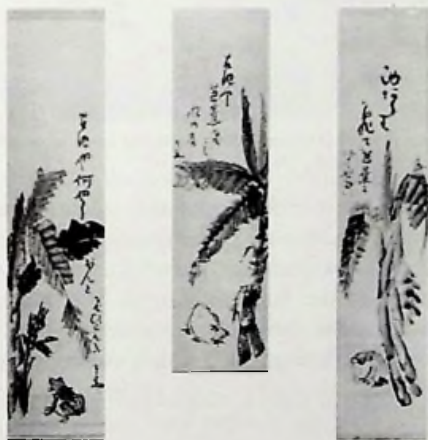


Plate 16. 'Funaike ya' triptych, painting and calligraphy by Gibon Sengai (Idemitsu Museum, Tokyo)



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

We ourselves take a small jump now, from the early nineteenth century straight into the middle of the twentieth, . . . and a quickly-brushed *haiga* painting (Plate 17) by Seisensui Ogiwara (1884-1976), one of the more influential haiku poets of modern times. *Haibun* prose and poetry is neatly combined with the circular illustration, which is of Basho's:

*Samidare o atsumete hayashi Mogami-gawa*  
 Gathering together  
 All the rains of June –  
 How swiftly flows  
 The Mogami River!



Plate 17. 'Mogami River' (*Mogami-gawa*), painting and calligraphy by Seisensui Ogiwara (Yutaka Shobo)

Still somewhere in the middle of the twentieth century, with Western styles and media now quite firmly established throughout Japan, we move to a magnificent pictorial rendition (Plate 18), by painter, Yoshiteru, of the famous 'Rough Sea' haiku by Basho.<sup>20</sup> This painting was used as the design for a 60 yen postage stamp, the poem being written as a single line down the righthand border:

*Araumi ya Sado ni yokotau Ama-no-gawa*  
 The rough sea – ah!  
 And, far beyond, the silhouette of Sado Island:  
 The span between,  
 Bridged by the Milky Way.

## REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA



Plate 18. 'The Rough Sea' (*Araumi ya*) postage stamp, original painting by Yoshiteru



Plate 19. 'The Rough Sea' (*Araumi ya*), poster, designed by Mitsuo Katsui (Museum of Modern Art, Toyama)

In the hands of the modern graphic designer, Mitsuo Katsui, the very same Basho verse moves into the realm of '2001: a Space Odyssey' (Plate 19). This poster was commissioned by the Toyama Museum of Modern Art. Perhaps you will agree that it is, indeed, a work of art itself.

The haiku is inscribed in almost microscopic characters along the bottom edge of the triangle low on the lefthand side. In the three hundred years since Basho's time, when the haiku poem and the *haiga* painting were given equal status in the overall design, we have come to a period of haiku poster art and haiku photography, of which this is but one example, in which the haiku itself has shrunk almost to the role of mere footnote.

## BASHO TOURISM

I will move on now to the subject of Basho buildings and, in the wider sense, to tourism built on Basho.

In the early eighteenth century, some of his followers set up a memorial mound in the precincts of the *Ryuge-an* (Dragonflower Cottage) on Tsubakiyama near present-day Waseda in Tokyo. This was the spot where Basho had lived in the 1670s while working for a nearby waterworks office. You can see both the canal he worked on and the steps leading up to the *Ryuge-an* in Plate 20. At the end of the seventeenth century, a small memorial hall, *Basho-do*, was built nearby, containing statues of Basho and four of his most important 'disciples'. One should here remind oneself of the date (1793) of his 'deification'. By the time Ando Hiroshige<sup>21</sup> came to make his 1857 *nishiki-e* print series *Edo Meisho Hyakkei* (One Hundred Celebrated Views of Edo), the Tsubakiyama *Basho-an* – not to be confused with its less fashionable sister down by the river at Fukagawa – was already a very popular spot, drawing great numbers of visitors.



Plate 20. 'One Hundred Celebrated Views of Edo: Tsubakiyama' (*Edo Meisho Hyakkei: Tsubakiyama*), woodblock print by Ando Hiroshige (British Museum)

## REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA

In time, though, the 'unfashionable sister' of Basho's riverside retreat was drawing as many, or perhaps even more people than Tsubakiyama. Shiko Munakata's 1973 Okkaido (The Road to the North) print series<sup>22</sup> begins with *Fukagawa Basho-an Ato no Saku* (Site of the Fukagawa Basho Hermitage, Plate 21). On it, Basho's frog pond haiku is inscribed, perversely, with the last five syllables at the top!



Plate 21. 'The Road to the North: Site of the *Basho-an* Hermitage' (*Okkaido Munakata Hanga: Fukagawa Basho-an Ato no Saku*), woodblock print by Shiko Munakata (Munakata Hangakan, Kamakura)

Very close to the little shrine marking the site of the long-extinguished Banana-plant Hut in Fukagawa, there now stands a smart new Basho Museum. It opened in 1980: the newspaper announcement is seen top right in Plate 22. Such '*kinenkan*' (memorial museums) have sprung up all over Japan on or near sites with strong Basho associations. Bottom right is the *kinenkan* in Basho's hometown of Ueno in Mie.<sup>23</sup> Top left is a model of the new



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*Yamadera Basho Kinenkan* in Yamagata Prefecture. This is where he wrote the famous haiku:

*Shizukasa ya iwa ni shimi-iru semi no koe*  
The silence -  
Within which rocks absorb ...  
Cicada cries.

How odd to think that, largely as a result of the fame of this poem, silence will now be hard to find at Yamadera!



Plate 22. Pamphlets and cuttings showing various Basho *Kinenkan* (Memorial Museums)

With the Japanese of today enjoying increased leisure time, and possessing a rediscovered interest in many aspects of their own indigenous culture, there has recently been something of a haiku 'boom' (and with it, a 'Basho Boom', of course). The three hundredth anniversary of the *Oku no Hosomichi* (Narrow Road) journey,<sup>24</sup> and now the tercentenary of Basho's death – these two anniversaries have reinforced the desire of the average Japanese to go on Basho tours, to visit Basho sites. The Old Man may no longer be construed a god, but he is once again mighty popular. Plate 23 is a detail from a 1989 pamphlet produced by the Miyagi Prefectural Tourist Board in their drive to attract visitors. The opening lines of 'The Narrow Road' ("Days and months are travellers of eternity ...") are brushed through the night sky.



Plate 23. Detail of a tourist brochure using an image of Basho (Miyagi-ken Kanko Renmei)

The chief city of Miyagi Prefecture is Sendai, and in its 'Narrow Road Fun Map' (detail in Plate 24), a cartoon-style Basho 'shows 'em how to do it' – taking pictures, and even playing baseball!



Plate 24. Sendai City 'Narrow Road Fun Map' (Sendai-shi Kanko Kyokai)

Finally, for the benefit, perhaps, of ready identification from the seat of a car, . . . a Basho symbol (plate 25), obviously dreamed up by some committee. I like to think of it as the 'Basho Roadsign': no nose or mouth, but the cap and scrip and staff we noted in the earliest portraits have been retained.



Plate 25. Basho 'Roadsign' (Shonai Kanko Kyogikai)

## REPRESENTATION OF BASHO IN THE ARTS & MEDIA

### OTHER ARTS & MEDIA

Commercial advertising has not turned a blind eye on the recent growth of interest in haiku. A mayonnaise advertisement series (Kewpie, 1989), for example, used information about the types of vegetable grown in each district passed along Basho's 'Narrow Road' to help sell mayonnaise. One haiku Basho composed in each district was displayed prominently at the centre of each advertisement. *Yuku haru ya* ('The passing spring – birds mourn, fishes weep' poem) was associated here with a savoury cousin of rhubarb.

The Basho Boom is also a publishing boom. Each time I visit Japan, I always set aside half a day or more to visit the haiku sections of the big Tokyo bookshops. Every two years, they seem to double in size: generally, though, a case of quantity triumphing over quality, I am obliged to conclude.

Basho-inspired music has surfaced both in Japan and in the West in recent times. In the 1950s and 60s, both John Cage and Olivier Messiaen had composed pieces of music structured after, or inspired by, the 5-7-5 pattern of traditional haiku. In 1974, however, Basho himself – or rather his poetry – was most evocatively represented in an orchestral suite entitled 'Projections from Verses by Basho' (*Basho no Ku ni yoru Purojekushon*) devised by the contemporary Japanese composer, Joji Yuasa. Yuasa used ten of Basho's haiku as the image-base for this piece. His 'Scenes from Basho' (*Basho no Ku ni yoru Ongaku*, 1980) is a sister 3-haiku work, the second of whose tone-poems represents:

*Aka-aka to hi wa tsurenaku mo aki no kaze*  
Still glaring mercilessly,  
The bright red sun –  
And yet, in the breeze, a hint  
Of approaching autumn.

*Editors' Note: At this point, the audience were played part of the 'Aka-aka to' Scene.*

Other recent Basho pieces include 'Basho' (1981) by Barry Conyngham, 'Tabiyuki' (Taking to the Road, 1984) by Makoto Shinohara, and 'Drei Haiku von Basho' (1985) by Isao Matsushita.

Basho's travels have featured in several recent stage plays: a *kabuki* production in Tokyo, and a children's 'Christmas play' here in London, amongst others. In the latter, put on by the Polka Theatre



of Wimbledon,<sup>25</sup> Basho encountered a badger that could transform itself into a tea-kettle: a true pantomime touch.

Haiku is especially suited, I believe, to the medium of radio, for the very good reason that it is closer to the written word than either television or film. Not being a visual medium, radio uses words and sounds to portray scenes in the mind of the listener, who fills in any descriptive gaps from his own imagination. The first Basho radio play of which I have personal knowledge is 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North' by Edward Bond, produced by the BBC in the mid 1970s. It is a lengthy, and somewhat weary, black comedy set in medieval Japan, but spoken by extremely British voices!

*Editors' Note: At this point, the audience were played an excerpt, 'Hoeing at Fukagawa'.*

From the mid 1980s, I myself have been scripting and helping to produce BBC radio features and plays on subjects Japanese.<sup>26</sup> Each one has been peppered liberally with both natural sounds and haiku, and there have been many Basho verses amongst them:

*Yagate shinu keshiki wa miezu semi no koe*

In the voice of the cicada,  
Absolutely no hint  
That it will finally, certainly  
Expire.

*Editors' Note: At this point, the audience were played a short compilation of excerpts from various European broadcasting corporations' versions of SHG's 'Insect Musicians', the 'Yagate shinu' verse being heard in several different treatments and languages.*

Earlier this year,<sup>27</sup> a Basho programme went out across the airwaves of the world: Chris Nicholson's 'A Wandering Crow: the Story of Master Basho' on BBC World Service. It was not just Basho's cicada that would 'finally, certainly expire'. At the end of the programme, we heard Basho, now on his own deathbed, regretting his 'sinful attachment' to haiku and *haikai*, which was with him to the end.

*Editors' Note: The audience were then played the deathbed excerpt from 'A Wandering Crow: the Story of Master Basho'.*

In Japan, of course, there have been a great number of serious Basho-inspired radio and TV programmes, many of them produced

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by the state broadcasting corporation, NHK, but the one I should like to end with is a comedy, an early 1980s send-up of 'The Narrow Road' by Katsuya Kobayashi, entitled *Chihayafuru Oku no Hosomichi* (The Haywire Narrow Road). The Japanese narrative, in which Basho undergoes rigorous training as a *ninja* spy,<sup>28</sup> is delivered in a Japanese accent even worse than my own by an outrageously over-the-top 'W.C. Flanagan' (a K.K. alias), who occasionally lapses back into his supposedly 'native' haywire English!

Let me sign off then, as Mr Flanagan does, with the affirmation that, especially true in Basho's case, "a little haiku goes a long, lo-o-o-o-o-o-o-ng way!"

*Editors' Note: The Mito Komon entrance scene from 'Chihayafuru Oku no Hosomichi' was played to the audience, concluding with the above quote.*

### NOTES

- 1 Trans. Nobuyuki Yuasa.
- 2 For an allusion to *Okina*, see the end of the second section of 'Shepherd's Purse': 'Life', p.7.
- 3 See Hirofumi Wada's 'Basho Has Been Found'.
- 4 Depending on the region of Japan, '*shigure*' may be translated either 'autumn shower' or 'winter shower'. Generally, such showers come on the cusp between the two seasons. Basho purportedly studied painting with his follower, Kyoriku.
- 5 Translations of all haiku except no.(1) in this paper are by the author. '*Tsuri*' is really a crane rather than a stork, but the image of the latter in English seems to fit better. See '50 Haiku for the Sky', no. 32, for another fitting poem.
- 6 See the first paragraph of the 'Life' section of 'Shepherd's Purse' for more on the crow allusion.
- 7 From *Oi no Kobumi*. Neither 'tanka' nor 'renga' has here been italicised, since both are now commonly used in the English language. Like haiku – also now an English word, but inadequately defined in most dictionaries – both forms of verse are today emulated by Western poets in increasing numbers. The former, one of the most ancient forms of Japanese poetry, was written in thirty-one sound syllables (5-7-5-7-7); the latter, as explained in the introduction, is linked verse based on this tanka pattern.
- 8 There are in fact two other portraits of Basho that can be considered similarly authentic: one by Morikawa Kyoriku, in the collection of Tenri University Library, *Oku no Hosomichi Yuku Basho to Sora* (Basho & Sora on the Narrow Road to the Deep North), and the other by another of his disciples, Sugiyama Sanpu, in the collection of Shigeo Wajima, *Basho Gazo* (Portrait of Basho). Sanpu also left us a rather more fanciful wooden statue of his master (in Zensho-ji Temple, Kaga).

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

- 9 See the last paragraph of section 2 in 'Shepherd's Purse' for more about this temple, p.7.
- 10 There is a second, somewhat inferior *Oku no Hosonichi Gakan* scroll by Buson in the collection of the Kyoto National Museum.
- 11 See Plate 2 and the book-jacket.
- 12 The Iga Bunka Sangyo Association in Basho's home town owns a black weather-proofed *kasa* that was in the poet's possession. They also own a small writing table he used, as does the Idemitsu Museum in Tokyo. The Aizen-in Temple, situated opposite the house where Basho was born in Ueno, owns a stone inkwell (*suzuri*) with wooden lid used by the poet (see Plate 5c for the look of the thing). A stone frog Basho kept is now in the Koto Ward Basho Memorial Museum in Tokyo. A staff, a satchel, and a wooden 'gong' (*hachitadaki mokugyo*) he once used are in private collections (Tanai, Muramatsu, Ato).
- 13 *Nanga* was a style of painting deriving its character from the 'Southern School' of Chinese Sung Dynasty painting. Amongst the leading influences on the work of Kinkoku would have been Ike Taiga and Yosa Buson, both of whom excelled at *nanga*. Haiku-style painting, *haiga*, of which Buson became the paragon, was rooted in this tradition. A further example of *nanga* is the highly fanciful 'The Death of Basho' by Ueda Kocho (1788-1850), reproduced on p. 165. In it, propped against the tree, we can find the three great symbols of Basho – his staff and scrip and cypress weather hat.
- 14 See '50 Haiku for the Sky', no. 42 for another translation, also by S.H.G.
- 15 See Tsunehiko Hoshino's paper for discussion of Basho's visit to Matsushima.
- 16 See '50 Haiku for the Sky', no.18 for a translation.
- 17 *Ukiyo-e* was a genre of painting and printmaking that became popular in the cities of Japan, particularly Edo, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It often dwelt on the 'non-haiku' aspects of the world: love, war, violence, debauchery, celebrities, and so forth. Hiroshige, it must be said, specialized in travel prints, of which he was the finest exponent.
- 18 Both Hirofumi Wada and Nobuyuki Yuasa, in their respective contributions, cast further light on this subject.
- 19 There is at least one well-known *kahi* in London, although not a Basho one: it commemorates a visit by the haiku poet, Kyoshi Takahama, in 1936, and is situated in Kew Gardens.
- 20 Yoshiteru's family name is unavailable. For another translation of the haiku, a shorter one, see Tsunehiko Hoshino's paper.
- 21 For Hiroshige's dates and another illustration by him, see above (plate 9). *Nishiki-e* simply means a 'coloured woodblock print'. This was one of Hiroshige's last series.
- 22 Shiko Munakata (1903-1975) was one of this century's most influential Japanese printmakers.
- 23 Just ten minutes' walk from the Basho Memorial Museum in Ueno is another Basho building of interest – the *Haiseiden*. It is a mausoleum to the spirit of Basho built in 1942 in a two-tier thatched pagoda style. The whole edifice is a portrait of Basho in travelling gear: the upper tier representing his *kasa* hat, the lower tier his cape and robes, and the thin wooden pillars supporting this his staff. The pagoda houses a devotional statue of the poet.

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- 24 Not that of *Oku no Hosomichi*'s publication, though: that will be in 2002.
- 25 In Southwest London.
- 26 In collaboration with Piers Plowright.
- 27 1994.
- 28 His hometown, Iga Ueno, was famous for *ninja*.



# Basho has been Found

## HIS INFLUENCE ON MODERN JAPANESE POETRY

HIROFUMI WADA

### ONE CENTURY OF MODERN JAPANESE POETRY

**I** am very glad to have been invited to celebrate with you the tercentenary of Basho and the thirtieth anniversary of the writer Reginald Blyth. My own speciality is modern Japanese literature, especially poetry. For modern Japanese poets, Basho has been regarded as a *classical* literary figure who lived two or three centuries before their time.

But the classical poets are not creatures that have lost their lives, like butterflies now pinned in a specimen box. For all readers, Basho is still thrillingly alive through his writings. With this in mind, I should like to give some examples of what modern Japanese poets have drawn from him, and how their spirits have been fired by him. This is a story about reading new life into the classics – a rough sketch of the history of modern Japanese poetry; *rough*, because we will travel through a hundred years in only a few pages.

We can divide the history of modern Japanese poetry into two parts. This partition can be set in the latter half of the 1920s. In the

wake of the First World War, various modernist movements came rushing into Japan from the West, and Japanese poetry changed under their influences. The first period may be sub-divided into an 'Age of *Shintaishi*'<sup>1</sup> and a so-called 'Age of Maturity'; and the second period, into the 'Age of L'Esprit Nouveau' and the 'Age of Post Second World War Poetry'. One is not yet in a position to be able to place those poems written after 1975 into the developing picture of the history of Japanese poetry.

## BEGINNING BY DENYING HAIKAI: THE *SHINTAISHISHO* & MASAOA SHIKI

Japanese modern history is said to begin in 1868, but this division is based on a sudden political change. More time was necessary for the modernisation of other fields. For example, the law that forbade people to carry swords, symbol of the samurai throughout the Edo era, was proclaimed eight years later, in 1876. Basil Hall Chamberlain, the famous British Japanologist who helped introduce *haikai*<sup>2</sup> to the Western world, arrived in Yokohama in 1873, at which time he must have seen many samurai with swords.

It was not until the 1880s that Japanese literature really underwent any modernisation. The *Shintaishisho*, published in 1882, was the point of departure for modern Japanese poetry. This book was an anthology, comprising nineteen poems. Fourteen of them were translations, by its three editors, of mainly British works; the other five being poems the editors had composed themselves using the Western works as models. One of the editors, Shoichi Toyama, had been sent by the Edo government to study abroad, leaving Yokohama for London in 1866, but due to the government's subsequent collapse, however, soon having to return to Japan. Later, he studied at Michigan University, and quite probably, poems that he had read in Britain and America were amongst those he translated for the *Shintaishisho*.

'*Shintaishisho*' translates as 'Anthology of Poems in the New Style', for at the time, the word the Japanese still used for 'poetry' implied, fairly unequivocally, 'Chinese-style poetry'. In distinction to this, the editors of *Shintaishisho* were advocating Western-style poetry. But the old-style poetry denied in this book was not only Chinese-style poetry. Toyama wrote in the preface: "Concepts that can be sufficiently expressed in the tanka or senryu forms are short-lived

ideas: each, as it were, a sparkler or a shooting-star."

Tanka is composed of 31 'syllables'; *senryu*, of 17 syllables.<sup>3</sup> Toyama did not use the word '*hokku*', but since it also consists of only 17 'syllables', it follows that he was similarly denying that form, too. For the *Shintaishisho* editors, ideas that were worth expressing were not flowers, birds, wind, and moon – traditionally, the poet's brief – but modern ideology itself; and they sought a Western poetic style in which to express it.

This year, we are marking Basho's tercentenary. One hundred years ago, in Basho's bicentennial year, many commemorative events were held throughout Japan. For example, a mausoleum and a stone monument were built. During the latter part of the Edo era, Basho (plate b) had been idolized. He had even been 'deified' by the Imperial Court. So the commemorative events of 1894 can be seen to have been the outcome of the high regard in which he continued to be held.

Our symposium today is a meaningful commemoration: none of us has the intention of earning money from this event. Yet, at the bicentenary events held one hundred years ago in Japan, businesses had taken an interest. Masaoka Shiki (plate a), pioneer of modern haiku, had taken a dim view of this.

In 1893, Shiki published an essay entitled, 'Some Remarks on Basho'.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, he stated that the activities of the bands of devotees were perhaps out of place in the context of Basho's emphasis on 'solitude'. As if sneering at Basho followers, he asserted that over half of Basho's works were trash. At the same time, however, he praised Basho, pointing out that more than two hundred of Basho's *hokku* were good. In short, he attempted a truly critical evaluation of Basho's work.

The essay is important. Firstly, because it released Basho's oeuvre from its fate of blind idolization. Secondly, and more importantly, it pointed the way for modern haiku by castigating *renku* and admitting only *hokku* as literature. *Renku* ('renga' is used more often in English) is a collaborative poetic work. First, one poet composes a *hokku* of 17 'syllables'. Next, another poet adds a *wakiku*, of 14 'syllables'. Then, another poet adds a third stanza, the *daisan*, another 17 'syllables'. Alternating 14- and 17-'syllable' stanzas link like a chain. A poet reinterprets the previous stanza made by one of the other poets by coupling it with a new stanza of his own making. Since reinterpretations bring new perspectives, the work changes con-

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tinuously. It is important to allow the stream to flow, maintaining harmony with the other stanzas. If one poet tries to stand out, making only personal works, the overall composition will be ruined. Basho composed *hokku* as independent verses expressing his inner life, while still making *renku* with other poets.

Shiki attacked *renku* because one poet alone is not able to control the variations. In his view, individual expression was to be at the heart of the 17-syllable 'haiku' of the future.<sup>5</sup>



a. Masaoka Shiki  
1867-1902



b. Woodblock print of  
Basho, after Haritsu



c. Shimazaki Toson  
1872-1943

### SHIMAZAKI TOSON'S 'WANDERING'

The *Shintaishisho* stands at the portals of the history of modern Japanese poetry by virtue of its ignoring *haikai*. Shiki initiated modern Japanese haiku by denying *renku*. In this first stage of modern literature, Basho's work attracted criticism because it was a monument of *haikai/renku*. Paradoxically, however, as poets tried to break new ground, various aspects of Basho's work were illuminated and appreciated anew. As one example of this, I shall now turn to Shimazaki Toson (plate c).<sup>6</sup>

The 'Age of Shintaishi' lasted about fifteen years. During that time, the Japanese word for 'poetry' came to indicate Western-style verse, rather than Chinese. Poets no longer needed to use the word '*shintaishi*' to mean poetry in the new style. Shimazaki is one of the poets who characterize this age.

In his essay entitled, 'The Period when I Began to Aim at Literature', Shimazaki recalled that in 1887, aged 15 years old, he



had entered a mission school, Meiji Gakuin. At the time, he was particularly interested in two things: Western literature from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, most especially the work of William Wordsworth, and the Japanese classics. Just then, printing type appeared for the first time, which made books easier to read. The classics made a fresh, almost exotic impression on him. The Western literature he read stimulated in him a longing for exotic places, while the Japanese classics induced a longing for another time. It is at the very heart of romanticism to pine for something beyond reach instead of concentrating on the here and now. He appeared, for all the world, to be a romantic poet. Shimazaki was interested in Basho's life, rather than in the style of *haikai*: he saw in Basho the archetypal 'wanderer'.

After Shimazaki had graduated from Meiji Gakuin, he began work as an English teacher at Meiji Women's School. He had difficulties, however, when he fell in love with one of his pupils. At last, in desperation, he resigned, and set off on a wandering journey. 'The Time of Ripening Cherries' is a novel he wrote based on this experience. In it, Shimazaki gives verbatim three episodes from the beginning of Basho's 'Narrow Road to a Far Province'. The hero of the novel, who is wrestling with love, is encouraged by his reading of this work to abandon much that he has, and to set off on his own 'wandering journey'. At this point, the hero utters a sentence from Basho's 'Narrow Road': "Some poets of old there were who died while travelling".

In Basho's *haibun* account, 'Records of the Unreal Dwelling',<sup>7</sup> Basho recalls that, after all the trials and tribulations of his youth, he had in the end found his own narrow path of *haikai*. Shimazaki was fond of this *haibun*, especially of one particular phrase: "Yet in the end we all live, do we not, in a phantom dwelling?" If everywhere is 'a phantom dwelling', one's spirit must ever be wandering, though one's body may well be settled in one particular place.

Shimazaki's fourth poetry collection, *Rakubaishu*, published in 1901, helps to illustrate this. At the time, he was already married and was a teacher in Komoro. Although he gave the appearance of being a settled person, his famous poem, 'By an Old Castle in Komoro', one of the *Rakubaishu* collection, begins with these lines:

By an old castle in Komoro,  
White clouds pass and this wanderer is sad.

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Even when sedentary, he was fundamentally a wanderer at heart. This consciousness of being a spiritual wanderer was in fact at the very core of Shimazaki's poetry.

Whenever Shimazaki faced a crisis, he remembered Basho. In his forties, for example, his wife died, leaving four children. Afterwards, he fell in love with his niece, but left for France alone in order to extricate himself from the immorality and scandal. At that time, he carried with him a book of Basho's writings. Reading Basho at a Paris hotel, once again he felt a wanderer's pain and emptiness.

### MIKI ROFU'S 'SYMBOLISM'

In the 'Age of Maturity' of modern Japanese poetry, various new movements appeared, of which Symbolism was one of the most influential. Miki Rofu (plate e) was one of the movement's best-known poets.

Symbolism does not think of words as signs to be used to pin things down. Symbolist 'words' weave images of the world suggestively; they are not used to describe or explain the world in a concrete fashion. Miki imbibed the theory mainly through the writings of Stephane Mallarmé, soon defining it as the foundation of his own method. Somewhere along the road of practising this theory, he met with Basho, who became his ready guide. He saw that Basho had set great store by 'suggestiveness', and had typified his own soul as being forever in the mode of floating or drifting.

In 1912, Miki sent a letter to a friend: "Since last month, I have been in the Izu area." Izu is a warm, beautiful, maritime region, not far from Tokyo. "Every day I take my copy of Basho out with me, enjoying reading it on beaches or up in the ravines. Sometimes I feel like living in seclusion here." The idea of embarking on a wanderer's life, as Basho had done, was often at the back of Miki's mind. With the development of a modern transportation network, however, the conviction that he could still lead a Basho-like life of travel became increasingly diffuse.

Later that year, he published an essay entitled 'Basho'. In it, we find the following remark: "Everywhere one goes, one seems to find Basho haiku monuments."<sup>8</sup> It would appear that people wish to embellish certain scenic spots by making some connection with the poetry of Basho. Basho is thereby idolized. Throughout Japan, in many places frequented by tourists, one notices heads nodding in satisfaction as

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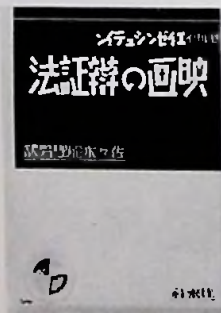
they compare a particular scene with the Basho haiku they have found inscribed on an adjacent poem monument. Some monuments are, in fact, quite unrelated to the scenic spots in which one finds them."

Ultimately though, in Miki's case, it should be said that it was more the poetry of Basho influencing his emerging symbolism, rather than the figure of Basho as wanderer influencing his lifestyle. He felt that Basho had first observed nature and then constructed from his perspective, by abandoning all surplus words, a pristine literary space. A poem entitled 'Nostalgia for Old Man Basho' is included in the collection *Rofushu*, published in 1913. I should like to quote from it, because in it he makes his view of Basho particularly clear.

The setting sun shines brightly; a spider's web is shaking:  
Eternity is hazy beyond his grave.

Miki was a 'poet', not a *haijin*, and his poems were generally long ones. Yet, perhaps it was because of his love of Basho that the above poem was completed in only two lines. Miki is contemplating nature – the sun, a spider's web – but he avoids describing or explaining much about the scene before him. The feeling of uncertainty evoked by a sinking sun and a trembling spider's web is somehow expressed, but not with extra words. The scene impresses itself all the more strongly on the reader's mind by being contrasted with eternity.

d. Cover of Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's book, 'The Dialectic of Cinema' (*Eiga no Bensho*), 1932



e. Miki Rofu 1889-1964



f. Cover of Ichiro Fukuzawa's book, 'Surréalisme', 1937



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### BASHO IN L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU: MONTAGE & SURREALISM

Let us now turn to the 'Age of L'Esprit Nouveau'. With the First World War now over, the youth of the 1920s revolutionized their thought under the influence of modernist movements. How then did the theory of Montage and Surrealism reinterpret Basho?

'Montage', in this instance, was the new cinematic style of the first half of the 1930s. It was then that Japanese translations of 'montage' theory were first published. Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's essay, 'The Cinematic Principle & Japanese Culture' (in his book, *The Dialectic of Cinema, Eiga no Bensho*, plate d), for example, was published in Japanese translation in 1932, and influenced not only Japanese concerned with the cinema, but also poets and *haifu*. In this book, Eisenstein defined 'montage' as producing a new idea by juxtaposing two independent fragments. He also stated that montage was a fundamental element of Japanese culture. By way of illustration, he cited certain Chinese ideographs used in the Japanese writing system. The character meaning 'to bark' comprises two parts: the ideograph meaning 'mouth' and that meaning 'dog'. In a similar way, he went on to say, haiku presents a psychological description by combining a number of different images. In this, it resembles montage, while predating it by several hundred years. Eisenstein referred to Basho's

*Kare-cda ni karasu no tomari keru aki no kure*  
On a bare branch  
A crow is perched -  
Autumn evening.<sup>9</sup>

Basho wanted others, through his combination of 'bare branch' and 'crow', to be able to sense the depth of that autumn evening. To Japanese poets of the time, Eisenstein's book might well have contained some sharp surprises: they, after all, were trying to cultivate a new field of poetry by propagating modernist movements, but who should they meet in the middle of this seminal foreign work, but Basho!

In his 1930 essay, 'Poetry and Montage', the contemporary critic, Saburo Hangaya, gave credence to Eisenstein's ideas. He pointed out that, although there had been no consciousness of a concept of 'montage' on the part of Basho, an allied approach was latent in his works. In the case of *hokku*, whose form consists of only seventeen



syllables, 'montage' could only be performed with single words or short phrases. However, by enlarging the units to lines and stanzas, Hangaya thought, poets could apply, and were applying, montage techniques to their poems. The genre known as 'cine-poem' had already been born.

Some of the poets and artists promoting the new surrealist movement in Japan – from about 1927 onwards – also began to look at the writings of Basho from a new perspective. Plate f is the title page of Ichiro Fukuzawa's book, 'Surréalisme' (1937). At the time, Fukuzawa was one of the most representative of Japanese surrealists. The illustration features Japanese confectionery sold at a department store called 'Matsuzakaya'. Most probably, Fukuzawa himself selected it.

I should think many readers at the time were quite astonished. They probably gravitated towards this book in order to learn about the latest form of French culture, and Japanese dry confectionery appears! Of course, Fukuzawa believed it quite possible to discover surrealism not only in Japanese confectionery but also in *haikai* and in Zen. He quoted Basho's

*Samidare ya shikishi hegitaru kabe no ato*  
Early summer rains –  
Poem-cards, now all peeled off,  
Square traces on the wall.<sup>10</sup>

Fukuzawa compared the combination of 'early summer rains' and 'traces on the wall' to the French poet, Comte de Lautremont's 'Meeting of a Sewing-machine and an Umbrella on a Dissection-table'!

## TOWARDS THE POSSIBILITY OF POSTMODERNISM: EXPERIMENTAL LINKED VERSE & JOINT POEMS

Broadly speaking, there are two types of influence that Basho has had on modern Japanese poets. The first is the strength of Basho's own personality: the wanderer who inspired Shimazaki Toson, the latent symbolism that Miki Rofu found in his works. The second is the form of the *hokku*, which Basho brought to its perfect state. Furthermore, if *haikai* has something in common with montage and surrealism, it must have something to do with its technique of image contrast.

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In this connection, then, I should like to mention some experiments in linked verse writing that have taken place in modern times. One of the pioneers of this has been Makoto Ooka, a Japanese poet who first published in the 1950s, and of contemporary poets, perhaps the one with the deepest knowledge of the Japanese classics.<sup>11</sup> Ooka began to write linked poems in the 1970s. One of them features in *What the Kite Thinks*, published just this year.<sup>12</sup>

In the introduction to this book, Ooka writes of the classical rules of *renku* not being able to be satisfactorily rendered into other languages, because they were "based on the peculiarities of the Japanese language itself and were conceived in intimate connection with Japanese manners and customs, and with natural surroundings". The important thing, he feels, is "to make the fundamental concept of *renga* and *renku*"<sup>13</sup> a creative premise for poetry now and in the future".

What, then, is the fundamental concept of *renku*? It is the dialogue with other poets. Modern poetry is about individual monologue, but now there is a possibility to create a different framework.

One more thing. The classical rules of *renku* cannot be applied to other languages. But that is not all: they cannot be applied to modern Japanese poems, either. If the *renku* form is going to be able to fertilize contemporary Japanese poetry in any way, it will be by means of its unique characteristic of 'dialogue'.

In Japan, in the mid 1980s, many linked verse experiments appeared. There was one, for example, in which one poet would compose a number of lines and then hand it on to another poet. This second poet would then alter these lines, adding further lines to it, and then return it to the first poet. This process is repeated over and over, thereby creating a sort of corporate or anonymous authorship. One can perhaps appreciate their desire to release themselves from the need to express themselves as distinct individuals.

Of course, I am not saying, by any means, that all modern Japanese poetry aims at the creation of joint poems, and certainly modern haiku-writing is not likely to be overtaken by a new enthusiasm for *renku*, either. But the form of *haikai* has undoubtedly been a stimulus to the direction of so-called 'post-modernist poetry' as it has attempted to transcend modernism. Detailed research into the life and works of Basho continues to grow apace, while an increasing number of ordinary readers of Basho are using the *haikai*

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inspiration they find therein as a source for new creations of their own.

### NOTES

- 1 Translated literally, this means 'new-style poem'.
- 2 *Haikai* is here used in its general sense, meaning not only linked verse ('renga' in the haiku style, *haikai no renga*), but also haiku itself.
- 3 Japanese 'syllables' are not the same as those of the English language. They are perhaps best thought of as 'sound symbols'. See Makoto Ooka's paper for more on modern tanka.
- 4 *Basho Zidan*, serialized in the journal, *Nippon*. For further discussion of Shiki's impact on the course of haiku history, see Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper.
- 5 Although, under Basho's influence, *hokku* had long been being published as independent verses unattached to the linked verse form (i.e. what we think of as 'haiku' today), this is the point at which *hokku* actually changes its name.
- 6 The family name, 'Shimazaki', is here given first, in keeping with our practice of using the modern name order (given/adopted name first, family name second) only for those active in recent times. 'Shimazaki Toson' is the traditional Japanese order.
- 7 *Genju-an no Ki*.
- 8 Such inscribed stone monuments, *kudai*, are discussed in Stephen Henry Gill's 'Representation of Basho' paper.
- 9 Trans. Makoto Ueda. See '50 Haiku for the Sky', no.4 for another version.
- 10 Trans. Stephen Henry Gill. This haiku appears as the final words of *Saga Nikki*, 'The Saga Diary', written at the House of Falling Persimmons near Kyoto.
- 11 See Makoto Ooka's essay elsewhere in this book for his own expression of his view of Japanese poetry.
- 12 Pub. University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- 13 Essentially the same thing, but, as applied to contemporary literature, the former term, 'renga', is more often used outside Japan. See note 8, 'Shepherd's Purse'.

# Laughter in Japanese Haiku

NOBUYUKI YUASA

**I**t is generally accepted today that laughter belongs to the domain of *senryu*,<sup>1</sup> and that even a smile is merely accidental in haiku. There is indeed a great deal to be said in defence of this common view. Haiku grew out of *hokku*, the initial poem in a linked verse, which required more dignity and depth than the rest of the poems in the chain, while *senryu* grew out of *hiraku*, the rank and file stanzas comprising the main body of the chain, where more freedom of wit and imagination was expected. Two things, therefore, have generally been regarded as essential in haiku: *kigo*, a 'seasonal word', which gives elegance to the poem, and *kireji*, a 'cutting word', which elevates the status of the poem by giving it syntactical independence and emotional power. Neither of these is required in *senryu*. Moreover, the characteristic traits of *senryu* are said to be in the depiction of *jinji*, human affairs, usually of a comic sort, and in the frank use of *zokugo*, vulgar terms.

Having said this, however, I cannot help questioning this traditional view. When, in the Muromachi Period, *haikai no renga* was started by **Yamazaki Sokan** (1460-1540) and **Arakida Moritake** (1473-1549), it was obviously intended as a rebellion against the elegant tradition of *waka* and *renga*.<sup>2</sup> This is suggested by the very title of the anthology Sokan edited, *Inu Tsukuba Shu*, for 'inu' means 'dog', and 'Tsukuba' is not only a metaphor for *waka*, but also the title of the anthology of *renga* compiled by Nijo Yoshimoto (1320-1388). An example from Sokan's anthology will easily convince us of the 'dogginess' of its poetry:

*Susure nao hana o kaman mo kaminazuki*

Sip your snivel —

Nothing to blow your nose with

In this Godless Month.<sup>3</sup>



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In the original Japanese, since both 'Godless' and 'Paperless' are pronounced identically, a pun is effected, impressing the reader with its wittiness. By today's standard, this is surely '*senryū*', rather than 'haiku'. Yet this was chosen for his anthology by the poet who is usually regarded as the father of the haiku tradition. The same spirit can be seen in the following poem by Sokan himself:

*Tsuki ni e o sashitaraba yoki uchiwa kana*

Into the full moon  
Thrust a handle, and it will  
Form a superb fan.

This poem is iconoclastic in the sense that the full moon, traditionally regarded as the epitome of elegant beauty, is brought down from the sky to the earth. Yet, the poem is not without some beauty because the moon and fan enhance the coolness of the evening.

Now, an example by Moritake:

*Aoyagi no mayu kaku kishi no hitai kana*

The green willow tree  
Paints an eyebrow on the face  
Of an embankment.

This poem, I think, is more traditional than Sokan's in that it depicts a beautiful spring scene, but the bold use of a metaphor distinguishes it from traditional poetry. The poem reads like a double exposure, for behind the willow tree we see the face of a woman with beautiful eyebrows.

This overtly comic tradition started by Sokan and Moritake was somewhat revised in the early years of the Edo Period by **Matsunaga Teitoku (1571-1653)**, who tried to elevate *haikai no renga* from the level of childish rebellion. He says in *Tensui Sho* that since *haikai* is a form of *waka*, it should not be despised as vulgar poetry. But Teitoku did not deny laughter. Instead, he tried to refine it. One of his disciples, Saito Tokugen (1559-1647), compared *renga* to Noh, and *haikai* to *kyogen* (comic interludes performed between Noh plays), saying that anything 'lower', such as *kabuki*, should be excluded. Here is a poem by Teitoku, which shows the difference between him and the earlier poets:

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*Hana yori mo dango ya arite kaeru kari*

Dumplings to flowers

They seem to prefer, all those

Wild geese going home.

Teitoku often provokes laughter by using a proverbial expression in an unexpected place. In this poem, the popular proverb, 'Dumplings rather than flowers', is used to explain why wild geese return home to the North when spring arrives in Japan.

Teitoku certainly succeeded in expelling vulgarity from haikai. On the other hand, it is undeniable that his poetry became somewhat bookish: more learned, but less imaginative than his predecessors'. This tendency was sharply attacked by **Nishiyama Soin (1605-1682)**. He and his followers formed a group called *Danrin*, which means a 'talkative forest'. The name itself suggested that this group was more in touch with the life of common people. As a result, they moved away from the bookishness of Teitoku, infusing a spirit of greater freedom into their poetry. Here is a poem by Soin:

*Nagamu tote hana nimo itashi kubi no hone*

Having seen them long,

I hold the flowers dear, but ah,

The pain in my neck.

Behind this poem, we see the following tanka by Saigyō:<sup>4</sup>

*Nagamu tote hana nimo itaku narenureba  
chiiru wakare koso kanashi karikere*

Having seen them long,

I hold the flowers so dear

That when they scatter

I find it all the more sad

To bid them my last farewell.

We must thus admit that, to some extent, Soin's poem is iconoclastic, but his iconoclasm is of a different quality from that of Sokan. Sokan's aim, as we have seen, was to destroy the elegant world of *waka*, while Soin's was rather to present a humorous picture. I believe we could say that Soin was the first poet to discover the legitimacy of laughter in *haikai no renga*. I think this is what Okanishi Ichu (1639-1711) had in mind when he said in *Haikai Mokyu* that the essence of *haikai* is laughter (*kokkei*). According to him, *haikai* should be written "without rhyme or reason", that is to

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say, with "words that come out of the mouth spontaneously to please the listener".

**Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693)** was another poet who wrote many humorous poems. An example:

*Hiradaru ya te naku umaninu hanami-zake*  
A sake barrel,  
Born without hands, makes merry —  
Cherry blossom time.

This poem is an oblique reference to a Buddhist scripture which says that if you force drinking on others, you will be reborn five hundred times without hands. Saikaku's intention, however, is neither to force this moral on the reader, nor to ridicule the scripture, but simply to present a humorous picture of a drinking party under the cherry blossoms. It is well known that **Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)** was critical of Saikaku. According to Mukai Kyorai (1651-1704),<sup>5</sup> Basho thought Saikaku was "miserably vulgar", and "sought too much in the noisy corners of the present-day world in describing human nature". Yet, in his youth, Basho himself wrote many poems in the style of Saikaku. Here are two examples:

*Tsuki zo shinube konata e irase tabi no yado*  
The moon is your guide;  
Come to my house, says the host  
Of a wayside inn.

*Tenbin ya Kyo Edo kakete chiyo no hana*  
Kyoto and Edo,  
Calmly balanced on a scale,  
Forever in spring.

In both of these poems, a felicitous scene is described with a light rhythm and a touch of humour.

However, Basho soon grew out of this kind of humorous verse and began to write more serious poetry. I think two factors contributed to this change. Firstly, Basho was born a samurai, and although he abandoned this status early in life, he was not completely happy with the mercenary spirit of the ordinary townsfolk, either. Secondly, Basho studied Zen under the priest Butcho. The effect of this sombre religion can be detected in the poems he wrote after he moved to his cottage in Fukagawa in 1680. Yet, it must be remembered that Zen Buddhism, with all its emphasis on *wabi* and

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*sabi* ('sobriety' and 'solitariness'), has its own humour. Blyth in his book, *Japanese Humour*,<sup>7</sup> says, in introducing the famous Zen priest Ikkyu, that he "had what is perhaps necessary for the true comic spirit, a deep feeling of the tragedy of life", and quotes the following Ikkyu tanka as an example of his humour:

*Yo no naka wa kutte hako shite nete okite  
sate sono ato wa shinuru bakari zo*

In this world of ours,  
We eat only to cast out,  
Sleep only to wake,  
And what comes after all that  
Is simply to die at last.

In some of Basho's poems, I think, we can detect the influence of Zen humour. For example:

*Yuki no ato hitori karazake o kamiitari*  
The morning of snow,  
I find myself chewing alone  
Strips of dried salmon.

Another example is:

*Kori nigaku enso ga nodo o umoseri*  
Bitter-tasting ice —  
Just enough to wet the throat  
Of a sewer rat.

Both these poems can be taken as examples of the self-caricature which we often find in the poems of Zen priests. For the understanding of Basho's mature humour, what Kyorai says about *sabi* in *Kyoraisho* is, I think, very important, for it shows that *sabi* does not exclude humour:

'Yamei asked me, what the "*sabi*" of a poem was? I said that *sabi* was in the colour of a poem, not in its subject, however sombre it may be. It is like an old man in armour fighting in a battle, or a man drinking and feasting in his best clothes, and yet looking aged. It can be found in both gay poems and sad poems. I gave a poem of my own as an example:

*Hanamori ya shiroki kashira o tsukiaiwase*  
The flower keepers —  
They put their heads together,  
Frosted with white hair.



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My master praised this poem, saying that the colour of *sabi* is well described in it.'

This passage shows that Basho did not really kill laughter in his attempt to write serious poetry, but only tried to submerge it in the texture of the poem. In the *hokku* just quoted, the contrast between the cherry blossoms and the hoary heads of the gardeners provokes laughter, but it is not the obvious kind of laughter we find in the poems of Soin and his followers.

Here, then, are some *hokku* by Basho himself, in which we find subtle laughter submerged in the texture of the poem:

*Ichibito yo kono kasa uro yuki no kasa*

My dear merchant men,  
I will gladly sell this hat,  
Loaded with white snow.

This poem was written in 1684 when Basho was forty-one. What is noteworthy here is that Basho is no longer stressing a critical view – here, of merchants busy with their trade on a snowy morning – nor is he simply satirizing himself having a leisurely walk in the snow. The poem does have some satirical elements, no doubt, but it also evokes a deep sympathy between the merchants and the poet. The poet's hat loaded with snow might be of no value from the merchants' point of view, but on this particular day when snow is so heavy, who knows, it might just be useful. This hat is also a symbol of poetry. Poetry has no value in the mercenary world under normal circumstances, but on such an unexpected occasion, like the snow itself, it could prove a desirable commodity. All this is beautifully expressed through the subtle laughter contained in the poem.

Another poem containing subtle laughter:

*Tsuki ka hana ka toedo shisui no ibiki kana*

The moon or the flowers,  
I asked, but the four sleepers  
Just kept on snoring.

This poem was written in 1689, when Basho visited Mt. Haguro during his journey to the 'Deep North'. At a temple there, he saw a painting of the Four Chinese Hermits, and wrote this haiku in praise of the painting. In part, the humour of the poem lies in the comic snoring of the hermits, but it goes beyond that. The real humour of the poem lies in the comic question the poet asks. What a foolish

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thing it is to ask the sleepers whether they prefer the moon or the flowers, since both are mere disturbances for them. Basho is making fun of himself. However, this poem is slightly different from the overt self-caricature of Zen poets. It is much more subdued and subtle. Basho only hints at his idea that he has not yet reached the level of enlightenment the sleeping hermits have achieved. In later years, Basho emphasised what he called '*karumi*', which literally means 'lightness'. Exactly what he meant by *karumi* is very difficult to define, partly because Basho himself did not leave any clear-cut definition. According to Hattori Doho (1657-1730), however, Basho is said to have given the following poem as an example of *karumi*:

*Ko no moto wa shiru mo namasu mo sakura kana*  
Underneath the trees,  
Soups and salads are buried  
In cherry blossoms.

This haiku was written by Basho in 1690 when he was forty-seven. Two years later, he wrote the following:

*Uguisu ya mochi ni furu suti en no saki*  
A spring warbler casts  
A dropping on the rice cakes —  
The veranda edge.<sup>8</sup>

The following year, Basho wrote the following two humorous haiku:

*Yugao ya yote kao dasu mado no ana*  
Moonflowers in bloom,  
A sake-flushed face looks out  
From the window hole.  
  
*Kuratsubo ni ko-bozu nomi ya daikohiki*  
On a saddle seat  
A child is mounted, while men  
Pull out radish roots.

Even in his final year, Basho was writing humorous poems:

*Haremono ni sawari yanagi no shinae kana*  
Supple as the hands  
Softly touching the tumors —  
Willow sprays bending.

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All of these haiku indicate that Basho was interested in laughter till the end of his life, but in these poems, his humour becomes so 'light' that it is almost impossible to explain why these poems are funny. Superficially, Basho seems to have returned to his early practice, making daring use of vulgar images, such as bird droppings and tumors, but there is no 'weight' in the humour of his last years. I think the best way to explain the difference between the two kinds of humour is to say that the humour of his youth is like that of Puck in Shakespeare, quite mischievous in intent and action, while the humour of his latter years is like that of Ariel, warm but not sentimental, profound but not weighty.

Among the disciples of Basho, **Takarai Kikaku (1661-1707)** was perhaps the most witty. He sometimes provokes loud laughter. In the following poem, for example, he gives a flea bite as evidence of his nightmare:

*Kiraretani yume wa makoto ka nomi no ato*  
Sword-hewn in my sleep,  
Was that vision true indeed?  
Trace of a flea bite.

According to Kyorai, Basho was rather critical of this kind of laughter. He once said that Kikaku, like Teika,<sup>9</sup> tended to overexaggerate what was not of itself so very interesting. The following poem by Kikaku, however, modelled on a famous poem by Teika, was highly praised by Basho for its ingenuity:

*Kabashira ni yume no ukihashi kakaru nari*  
A column of midges,  
Where the floating bridge of dreams  
Hangs for a moment.

The column of midges is always changing its shape – now breaking into two or three columns, now gathering into one again. Here, this ever-changing shape is used effectively to convey the ephemeral quality of dreams.

Another of Basho's followers who wrote a good number of humorous poems was **Hirose Izen (c.1646-1711)**. His haiku are unique in that we can hear in them the comic tone of a fool:

*Ume no hana akai wa akai wa akai wa na*  
Plum blossoms, they are  
Very red, indeed, very red,  
Very red they are.

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Another example is the poem in which he deplores his temporary separation from his master Basho:

*Wakaruru ya kaki kuinagara saka no ue*

I say my goodbye,  
Eating persimmons, standing  
At the top of a slope.

The act of eating persimmons at the time of farewell is not only funny, but also idiotic. Yet somehow this act tells us how deeply the poet was moved, seeing his master moving further and further away. Basho recognized the special talent of Izen, saying that his style would continue to move towards greater 'lightness'. However, Kyorai was against this kind of humour. He criticized Izen for forgetting Basho's important teachings on the force and shape of a poem. In other words, Kyorai thought that Izen's poems lacked force and were somewhat ugly in form.

It is generally accepted that the greatest haiku master after Basho is **Yosa Buson** (1716-1783). Unlike Basho, Buson was the son of a farmer and by profession a painter.<sup>10</sup> Basho considered himself a wanderer throughout his life. Buson also spent much time travelling, but he chose to live in obscure corners of large towns. They were also different in their attitudes towards poetry. Basho aimed for deep sincerity, but Buson aimed rather for deep aestheticism. If Basho was stoic, Buson was an epicure. It is quite natural, then, to find that Buson's humour is different from Basho's. Here is a poem Buson wrote about a swallow:

*Otsu-e ni fun otoshi-yuku tsubame kana*

A painting for sale —  
A swallow lets fall a dropping,  
As it flies away.

This poem sounds almost like an imitation of the Basho poem I quoted above, but if we look closely, we find a great deal of difference. In Basho's poem, a spring warbler defecates on rice cakes, while in Buson's poem, a swallow does the same on a painting for sale. Basho invites us to laugh for a moment, but somehow, the very next moment, our laughter is frozen. Buson, however, invites us not only to laugh, but also to enjoy laughing. Buson's poem is a picture, complete in itself. If Basho's poem is also a picture, we are nevertheless compelled to look beyond it.



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Another haiku by Buson, in which we are invited to enjoy a spring scene:

*Kumo o nonde hana o haku nani Yoshinoyama*  
Drinking up the clouds,  
It spews out cherry blossoms —  
Yoshino Mountain.

This poem was composed when the poet visited Yoshino Mountain, famous for its cherry blossoms. Unfortunately, however, the day was wet and windy. Instead of deploring his bad luck, Buson enjoyed the turmoil of the storm, and invites us to enjoy it, too. In this poem, even the storm is turned into a humorous picture: I think this poem comes very close to 'mock heroic'.

Here is another humorous poem by Buson:

*Saru-dono no yosamu toi-yuku usagi kana*  
Who goes to visit  
Sir Monkey this frozen night —  
Only Mr Hare?

We come to feel that there are stories behind many of Buson's poems, and this is a typical case. With a little imagination, we could easily write an animal story to go with this haiku. Very often, Buson's humour depends on the unwritten narrative suggested by a poem. In the following *haibun*,<sup>11</sup> Buson tells an interesting story about a badger that disturbed him at night, so enhancing the narrative quality of the haiku following it:

'Jou had a villa in the town of Yuki, and appointed an old man to be its keeper. The house was in the middle of the town, but buried deep under trees and overgrown grass, so that it was an ideal place in which to avoid the dust of the world: I thus decided to stay there for a while. The old man had little to do besides cleaning and sweeping. So, one autumn night, he sat alone by a lonely light, telling his beads and lamenting the length of the night. I was sitting alone in the innermost room, trying to compose *hokku* and reciting the *kanshi* (Chinese poems) I was writing. Soon, I got tired, however, and covering myself, I went to sleep. While I was dozing, I heard a loud noise — the beating of the sliding-door at the other end of the spacious corridor. As this was repeated some twenty or thirty times, I was alarmed, and got up to see what the matter was. I opened the sliding-door, but there was no sign of anything at all. I slipped back into my bed, but then heard the same noise again, a loud beating on the sliding-door. Again I rose and went to the door to see, but not

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even a shadow was there. By now I was possessed by fear, so I went to the old keeper and told him what had happened. He said at once, "It's him again, the Badger. When he comes back, open the sliding-door quickly. I will slip out of the back door and hide myself behind the hedge in ambush." I put a rod close to myself in bed, and pretended, just as badgers often do, to be asleep. When I heard the noise again, I promptly opened the door and let out a loud cry, which was answered by the shrill yell of the old keeper. All our efforts were in vain, however, for we saw nothing in the dark. The old keeper became angry, and searched all the obscure corners, but nothing at all could be detected. This went on for five nights in a row, and I was beginning to feel rather disgusted and quite ready to go away, when the head servant of Jou's household came to me and said, "That thing will not disturb you tonight. Early this morning, a villager shot an old badger in a place called 'Under the Bushes'. In my opinion, it was ~~this~~ badger that has been alarming you with its noise these past few days. You can sleep in peace tonight." What this servant told me turned out to be true: the noise completely ceased. I detested the animal, of course — but, who knows, he might just have been trying to console me in my loneliness at night. If so, our relationship must go deeper than mere chance encounter. Deploring his death, I visited a priest named Zenkubo, and, making a small offering, asked him to pray for the peaceful repose of the Badger in heaven.

*Aki no kure hotoke ni bakeni tanuki kana*

Late in the autumn,  
Transformed into a Buddha —  
A badger at night.'

I think this poem is the quintessence of Buson's humour, in that it is a mixture of fact and fiction, seriousness and playfulness, lyrical impulse and narrative charm.

We find an entirely different kind of humour in the poems of **Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827)**. He was born in a mountain village in the Japan Alps. His mother died when he was only three, and he did not get along well with his stepmother. Throughout his life, he was very poor. His poetry is, therefore, characterized by social satire and sympathizes with the weak. He was especially interested in children and their innocent play. Thus his poetry is a strange combination of the satirical and the pastoral, somewhat akin to the early poetry of William Blake:

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*Naku neko ni akambei o shite temari kana*

At the cat mewling,  
She made faces and kept on  
Bouncing the ball.

In this poem, a girl's reaction to the mewling cat is humorously described. On other days, the girl and the cat are very good friends, but on this particular day, the girl is so absorbed in her play that the cat is merely a nuisance. What is important in the poem is the attitude of the poet towards the girl. I think the best way to characterize it is to say that it is a mixture of approval and disapproval. The girl is behaving rather foolishly in the poem, for she is ignoring her good friend, but she is basically innocent because she is true to her own feeling.

Here is another interesting poem by Issa:

*Kasumi hi ya sazo tennin no gotaikutsu*

What a misty day,  
The angels above must be bored  
Even unto death.

A spring day is long, and if it is misty, by the end of the day we are bored to death. There is nothing uncommon in this experience. Nor is there anything unusual in the association of heavenly beings with spring mist. It is at least as old as the famous Noh play, 'Hagoromo'. Instead of exalting the angels, however, Issa brings them down to the human level. Yet he stops short of iconoclasm. We can see this point more clearly if we compare Issa's poem with the famous stanzas in Sokan's anthology:<sup>12</sup>

*Kasumi no koromo suso wa nure keru*

This garment of the spring mist,  
Its skirt is soaked in water.

*Saohime no haru tachi-nagara shito o shite*

The lady of spring  
Must have passed water, as she  
Got up on her feet.

In this linked verse, the elegant image of a spring day is completely destroyed, but in Issa's poem, the image of a misty spring day itself is retained, although the angels are once again brought down to human level. The result is not iconoclastic, but humorous.

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I should like to give one more example of Issa's humour, as it refers to Basho:

*Basho-sama no sure o kajitte yu-suzumi*

My Master Basho —

At the expense of his shanks,

I enjoy the dusk.

'At the expense of one's shanks' is a Japanese idiom for 'being totally dependent upon someone'. Thus, in this poem, Issa is trying to say that he is completely dependent on his master Basho as a poet, but at the same time, he is trying to say that he does not strive as hard as his master, just sitting down to enjoy the cool evening, while his master wore out his shanks, spending most of his life on the road. The image of the *shanks* is very effective in conveying this double meaning.

I will now quote a short *haibun* piece by Issa<sup>13</sup> by way of comparison with Buson's Badger *haibun*:

'There was once a cruel woman who lived in the village of Tatsuta in the province of Yamato. She refused to feed her stepchild for ten days in a row, and when the child was about to die of hunger, she showed him a bowl of rice and said, "Take this, and offer it to the stone statue that stands beside the road. If he eats it, you can have some, too." There was nothing the poor child could do, except to obey. But, as he sat down to pray before the stone image, a great miracle happened: the stone statue opened its gigantic mouth and devoured the rice as greedily as if it had been a starving child. After that, they say, the horns of cruelty dropped from the woman's brow, and she ceased discriminating between the stepchild and her own children. And, if, perchance, you should ever pay a visit to this village, you can still see the very same stone statue, standing where it always has done: and you will never fail to see fresh offerings laid before it.

*Botamochi ya yabu no hotoke mo haru no kaze*

Huge dumplings offered,

A stone Buddha by the bush

Enjoys the spring wind.'

Obviously, this passage is a reflection of Issa's own unhappy relationship with his stepmother, but in the *haibun* he is not simply criticizing the cruelty of the woman. He is telling the tale of a miracle. What makes this passage so humorous is that he seems not



completely to believe the story he is telling. The stone image might simply be enjoying the spring wind, but so happy is its expression that we are almost persuaded into believing that he has eaten some of the dumplings offered to him. We have already seen how Buson invites us to indulge ourselves in the narrative world he creates. Issa, however, wants us to bridge fact and fiction by using our imagination and our sympathy. This is why, once again, in this passage too, Issa is offering us a mixture of satirical and pastoral elements.

After the Meiji Restoration in 1867, everything in Japan underwent change under influences from the West. The greatest innovator in the world of *haikai* was **Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)**, who invented the word 'haiku'.<sup>14</sup> He thought that traditional *haikai* had fallen to a level below that of other forms of poetry and tried to raise it to the level of Western poetry. For example, he says in his essay, '*Dassai Shoku Haiwa*':

'Poetry without truth tends to flow in cheap rhetoric, and verse without sincerity is bound to fall into vulgarity. Literature and art aim for noble beauty. Nothing is more boring than literature or art made with cheap rhetoric and vulgarity as their aim.'

He wrote this passage under the influence of Western theory of art, especially, under the influence of Ernest Fenollosa and Herbert Spencer.<sup>15</sup> In his attempt to elevate *haikai* to the level of Western poetry, Shiki proposed a number of changes. First, he decided to discard traditional *renga* as unworthy of poetry, and tried to establish the self-sufficiency of *hokku* as independent poetry, coining the word 'haiku' instead. Secondly, he proposed '*shasei*' as the underlying aesthetic principle for all haiku. *Shasei*, in Shiki's words, suggests "the description of things just as they are". In his opinion, haiku was too short to be fitting for description of human affairs, but on the other hand was suitable for description of nature. Shiki himself did not exclude human affairs from haiku, but his followers went so far as to say that the aim of haiku was '*kacho-fuei*', that is to say, poetic description of flowers and birds. It is easy to infer from this, at least in theory, that Shiki and his followers were enemies of laughter in haiku. In fact, Shiki wrote<sup>16</sup> as follows:

'Many people take the word "*haikai*" to imply comic laughter. On the basis of this idea, such terms as "*haikai renga*" and "*haikai hokku*" came into existence, and both of these terms are popularly shortened

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to simply "*haikai*". However, after Basho, "*haikai*" became rather profound and noble, and did not necessarily contain an element of laughter.'

Shiki wrote the above in 1892. In 1899, however, he wrote:

'Dead seriousness is a factor that hinders progress in Japanese painting. The same may be said of Japanese poetry. In recent years, there are tendencies to break with the old traditions. I am curious to know how far these tendencies will go.'

There is an obvious contradiction here, but Shiki's poetic practice itself shows clearly that if he was against laughter, he was equally against dead seriousness. Many of his own haiku seem to contain elements of laughter. For example:

*Kaki kueba kane ga naru nari Horyuji*  
When I took a bite  
Of persimmon, a bell rang —  
Horyuji Temple.

This poem is somewhat reminiscent of Izen's poem on eating persimmons that I quoted earlier, and it is comic for the same reason. It is difficult to see any logical relation between the act of eating a persimmon and the ringing of a temple bell, but somehow, the seeming incongruity harmonizes well.

Now, another poem containing humour, one which Shiki wrote only a few days before his death:

*Hechima saite tan no tsumarishi hotoke kana*  
The snake gourd blossoms.  
My throat blocked with phlegm,  
I am already a Buddha.

Shiki died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-six. He had been using the juice of the snake gourd as a cure for coughing, but in his last days, he became too weak to take it any longer. So the snake gourd flourished and bore some flowers. Shiki's respiratory problems worsened until he realized that he had become virtually a dead man. What is amazing about this poem is that Shiki describes his own impending death with a touch of humour. In the previous year, Shiki had written as follows:

'There are two different ways of thinking about death: subjective and objective. . . The subjective feeling is terrible, painful, sorrowful, so

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hateful that you cannot bear it even for a moment. The objective feeling, however, sees death with perfect indifference, so that in spite of some degree of sorrow and misery, it provokes laughter, and one finds oneself smiling from time to time.'

In the haiku quoted above, Shiki feels his own death 'objectively', and describes it with an element of humour.

The last poet I would like to discuss is **Natsume Soseki (1867-1916)**. He was a good friend of Shiki, but as he said himself, he had a different poetic talent. If Shiki's chief interest was in natural description, Soseki's was in provoking laughter through the description of human affairs. No wonder he became a good novelist.<sup>17</sup> Here is an example of his haiku:

*Tatakarete hini no ka o haku mokugyo kana*  
Struck hard, it belches  
A smoke of day mosquitoes —  
The old temple drum.

The temple drum is a sacred object, but Soseki is making fun of it in this poem. The mosquitoes are most active at dusk, but the beating of the drum has brought them out much earlier than expected. Perhaps they are even going to be a nuisance to the priest himself.

Another humorous poem by Soseki:

*Tsuki ni yuku Soseki tsuma o wasure tari*  
Going to the moon,  
Soseki has clean forgotten  
All about his wife.

This poem was written when Soseki returned to Kumamoto, where he was teaching. He had just been visiting his wife, who was resting in Kamakura after a miscarriage. His rather strained relationship with her is here humorously described. When his wife bore him a daughter, he wrote:

*Yasu-yasu to namako no gotoki ko o umeri*  
Safely, quite safely,  
She managed to bear a child,  
Soft as a sea slug.

The image of the sea slug is so startling that the whole poem sounds a bit like a bad joke. However, it shows the 'metaphysical' quality of Soseki's humour, which would not even spare his own daughter.

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When Soseki fell ill with a gastric ulcer, he wrote the following:

*Akikaze ya karakurenai no nodobotoke*

In the autumn wind,  
It was dyed a deep scarlet,  
My Adam's apple.

I think this poem is somewhat similar to Shiki's poem on his death-bed. They are both humorous because they are both 'objective' descriptions. Soseki does not even mention that he has vomited blood, and does not say anything about his pain. He simply presents an objective picture of himself and invites the reader to laugh at it.



Thus, I have attempted to trace the history of laughter in Japanese haiku. I hope I have been able to show that laughter is an essential element of haiku and that nearly every great haiku poet had a comic spirit. It was Basho, above all, who elevated laughter in haiku from the level of vulgar poetry. He did not kill laughter, however, but deepened it. After Basho, laughter in haiku gained in complexity.

In reading haiku, we may sometimes laugh and weep at the same time. This is where laughter in haiku is different from laughter in *senryu*.<sup>18</sup> Laughter in *senryu* is mostly directed against other people, while laughter in haiku is often directed against the poet himself. Laughter in *senryu* is open and satirical, but laughter in haiku is subtle and sympathetic, so that in some cases it comes close to a smile. However, if the source of the Japanese smile is in the meditative smile of Buddhist statues, as Lafcadio Hearn<sup>19</sup> points out, then what we have in haiku is not so much 'smiles' as 'laughter'.

As we have seen, haiku started as a popular art, so if it should transcend the human level altogether and become too idealistic, and too beautiful, it will no longer be haiku. We should therefore remember that haiku cannot exist without the spirit of laughter.

I started with a poem on the nose, so I should like to end with a poem on the nose:

*Mizubana ya hana no saki dake kure nokori*

Ah, my running nose —  
All is in the closing dark  
Except its wet tip.



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This poem entitled 'Self-Contempt' and written by **Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927)** a few days before his suicide, contains the bitterest laughter in all of Japanese haiku. I should like to use this poem as a warning against the present plight of laughter in Japanese haiku. Like Akutagawa's wet nose, laughter in Japanese haiku is almost dead, surrounded by the closing dark. It is high time for us to remember that if we kill laughter in haiku, we will suffocate haiku itself.

### NOTES

- 1 The satirical form of haiku, focussing chiefly on the human condition. See note 17, 'Shepherd's Purse'.
- 2 *Waka* is another term for 'tanka', the most ancient of the short forms of Japanese poetry, written in 31 sound symbols falling into the pattern 5-7-5-7-7. The author has italicized 'renga', the linked verse form dating back to at least the Twelfth Century, to indicate the classical type. Although the word 'waka' is no longer common currency, 'renga' has for several decades now been a term used in the West because of its association with the *haikai no renga* (light, haiku-style linked verse of the Basho School). In its affinity with the term 'haiku', 'renku' is the term now preferred in Japan. For a discussion of the importance of the linked verse tradition in modern Japan, see Makoto Ooka's essay.
- 3 *Kaminazuki*, although commonly translated as 'the Tenth Month', is roughly equivalent to the 'November' of the present calendar. See 'Shepherd's Purse', note 19. All translations in this paper are by the author himself.
- 4 See 'Shepherd's Purse', notes 6 and 13.
- 5 Kyorai was one of Basho's chief disciples. He owned the House of Falling Persimmons, *Rakushisha*, in Saga, Kyoto, where Basho wrote his 'Saga Diary'.
- 6 For more on the ideas of *wabi* and *sabi*, see the first paragraph and note 12 in 'Shepherd's Purse'. The latter term is often connected with an idea of the 'poignancy' of mortality, as a realization.
- 7 R.H. Blyth *Japanese Humour* (Hokuseido).
- 8 For another translation of this haiku, see '50 Haiku for the Sky', no. 11.
- 9 Fujiwara Sadaie (1162-1241) was also referred to as 'Teika'. He was one of the chief editors of the *Shinkokinshu* Imperial anthology of verse and one of the most famous tanka poets of all.
- 10 Buson was perhaps the greatest painter in the haiku style, *haiga*. See Stephen Henry Gill's paper, including Plates 3, 4, and 15.
- 11 *Haibun* is haiku-style prose, sometimes interspersed with haiku. This piece is taken from Buson's *Shin Hanatsumi*, written in 1777.
- 12 *Inu Tsukuba Shu*. See the first page of this paper.
- 13 This piece comes from Issa's *Oraga Hanu*, which the author has translated into English as 'The Year of My Life' (pub. Univ. of California).
- 14 See Hirofumi Wada's paper for more discussion of this period.
- 15 Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), American art historian and collector, and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), British sociologist and philosopher.

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- 16 In the same essay, '*Dassai Shoku Haiku*'.
- 17 Natsume Soseki wrote many well-known novels, amongst which *Wagahai wa Neko de Aru*, 'I Am a Cat', is possibly the most celebrated. He studied in London during the period 1900-1902.
- 18 See note 1.
- 19 Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) in *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*.

# One Hundred Blyths

DAVID COBB

**T**o some and maybe all of us here today it seems appropriate, when celebrating the tercentenary of Matsuo Basho, to also pay tribute to R.H. Blyth, because this British writer did so much to present Basho and his poetry in a way that people with a Western-style education can understand; or, to put it more grandly, as Donald Richie does in a recent review in *The Japan Times*, "Reginald Blyth remains the single writer to successfully weld the aesthetics of the two island chains – Great Britain and Japan." For this reason, it was felt that today's programme would not be complete without a talk on Blyth, and that I might know as much about Blyth as anyone else within 60 miles of Ilford, where Blyth was born. Which, if true, is cause for lament as well as surprise.

I do not want to abuse your attention by simply regurgitating what you can easily read for yourselves in James Kirkup's excellent biographical introduction to *The Genius of Haiku*,<sup>1</sup> even though, until just a few months ago, almost the entire story of Blyth's life, as it is described there, was unknown in this country, or for that matter almost anywhere else.

Instead, I hope you will find it interesting if I read you a number of reminiscences, written by various people who came close to Blyth, or who have said what he meant to them and how he influenced them. There will also be an extract or two from Blyth's unpublished letters.

We are liable to form very contradictory impressions of Blyth, for he loved contradiction and paradox and does not seem to have cared to eradicate them from his writings, rather to introduce them. Perhaps the biggest paradox of all: this great commentator on haiku tells us, in one of a series of letters to J. W. Hackett, that he never wrote any haiku himself.<sup>2</sup>

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Of the pleasure he extracted from contrariness there is further evidence in the last of this series of letters, written in April 1964, a few months before his death:

'I was greatly pleased to see that you have come to realize, what I could have told you before, but without avail, that writing haiku is not the object of life.' (This from a man for whom writing about haiku seems more than anything to have been the object of life!) What is (the object of) life? The other day I went to see Dr Suzuki,<sup>3</sup> who is now, as you know, 93 years old. I asked him a question, holding a cat in my arms. "Which is more important, to be fond of cats (that is, to write haiku) or to understand Zen?" He answered, "They are one and the same thing"; and I said to him, "You have passed your examination", but I did not really think so. To be fond of cats and to understand Zen are equally important because they are the same thing – yes, this is so, but at the same time, what is more important is to be fond of cats. Now, you see, I have contradicted what I wrote on the previous page, but who cares?'

It need not surprise us, then, when we hear that he was shy yet forbidding and assertive; withdrawn yet given to provocative utterances; self-deprecating yet touched when he received honours; a loving, family man, but possibly attracted to other women; open-minded, yet a prude who is alleged to have bowdlerized *senryu* so that our appreciation of them is warped; apostle of tolerance, yet not above creating or perpetuating stereotypes.

For example, what generalization could ever be more rigid, arrogant even, than this? "I understand the Japanese mind rather well, and almost all Japanese people (who think at all) think in the same way, I mean intuit in the same way." Koreans he characterized as having "a toughness, not exceeded by the Chinese, which does not flinch at any kind of grossness or sadism".

Blyth was open and warm, caring for his students (he repaired violins for them and helped them with their studies by arranging deductions from his pay), yet at the same time reclusive and unapproachable. He once admitted: "I feel lonely sometimes, but remember 'the great cloud of witnesses'." Although he would maintain that "the true poetic life is the ordinary everyday life", he was so reticent about his own life-style that we find his 80-year-old mother replying<sup>4</sup> to a letter from his Japanese secretary, in 1959 when he had been living in Japan for thirty-five years: "Yours is the first letter I've ever had which told me so much of my son's home



and family."

One or two have become so bemused by the many contradictions and dark spots in Blyth's life and work that they have been led on to quite wild speculations.

Could he have been a secret agent, even a double agent? asks one, extrapolating no doubt from his internments, first by the British in World War One, and then by the Japanese in the Second, and the apparent ease with which he mediated between General MacArthur<sup>5</sup> and the Imperial Court, after the end of World War Two. If that were true, there would surely never, in the whole history of espionage, have been a greater master of disguise and disinformation.

Then, I know someone who thinks R.H.B. may have been a descendant from Charles Blythe, crowned King Charles the First of the Gipsies at Yetholm on the Scottish Border in 1847. In the coronation procession, the horse on which the 70-year-old king was riding had its backside tickled by drunken retainers, with the result that it bolted and his majesty fell off and had to be revived with whiskey. I understand President Clinton claims descent from the same gipsy king.

The case for this connection seems to rely on a description of the erstwhile King of the Gipsies, whom we are told was "well-informed", with "a strong natural shrewdness", and "a tall, gaunt sort of man, with shaggy eyebrows and a keen piercing eye". Well, the physical picture fits fairly well, except that Blyth was certainly not tall, and in almost every photo I have seen of him he is wearing either a waistcoat or a cardigan or both, which does not seem altogether to evince a gipsy-like love of fresh air!

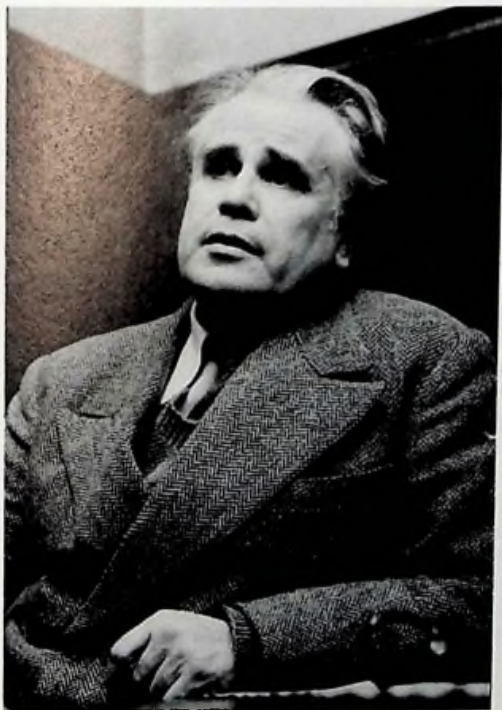
Blyth's own mother, in the letter I quoted from earlier, declared her belief that "our qualities, both good and bad, come from our ancestors", and went on to give a frank description of Blyth's immediate family: his grandmother on the maternal side, "an unusually fine character"; his maternal grandfather, who was adored by his wife, "intelligent and good"; his great-grandmother on that side "very happy and full of loving kindness". On the paternal side, Blyth's father was reported by his wife to be "very gentle, unselfish, very restful to live with". Her own amiability oozes through every phrase of her letter, which – written to someone who up till then had been almost a stranger – begins "Tatsuko dear one", and ends "From your oba-chama Hetty Blyth".<sup>6</sup>

It was only, according to Blyth's mother, from her father that

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Blyth risked inheriting any unwelcome trait: that man was “unloving and selfish, had a very violent temper”, and his interests in politics and religion were such that “he would have given his life for either, if necessary”. The brand of religion seems to have been that of an Independent chapel, for that is where Blyth’s parents married. As to politics, Blyth himself was extremely sceptical.

Reading between the lines, and even some of his *obiter dicta*, one comes to the conclusion that Blyth was definitely worried by the possibility of his own hypocrisy. “We eat hypocritically, we live in shame and stealth, talk of ideals, fritter our half-lives away,” he tells us in *Zen in English Literature*.<sup>7</sup> Characteristically, by using the first person plural pronoun, he doesn’t exempt himself from the



Reginald Blyth (1898–1964), scholar of Zen and haiku (Ikuyo Yoshimura)

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weaknesses of the rest of the human race. It is a line which seems to echo Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and perhaps also Blyth's fanatically religious grandfather.

Then, again, on his study wall at Gakushuin University in Tokyo, one of his students read these injunctions which were addressed to himself: "Not to be sentimental. Not to be cruel. Not to be selfish. Not to be snobbish." The pacifist, the animal lover, aware of a temptation to be cruel? The boy who had run up and down Ilford Station selling chocolate, feeling snobbish?

Maybe it is a pity that we have no word about Blyth from the mouth of his first wife, Annie Bercovitch, his intimate companion for more than a dozen years, who may have seen into him deeper than most of us can ever hope to.

One of the first to record an impression of Blyth was Richard McKinnon, who was a student at the college where Blyth was teaching when World War Two broke out. "We were interned together for a while before I was snatched away on espionage charges. He was a very sensitive soul, but strange in his own way, often at odds with the outside world, a solitary man."

A third internee was Robert Aitken, who recently wrote to me from Hawaii that his contact with Blyth had been the most formative influence in his life. It was Blyth who gave Aitken, later to become an outstanding teacher of *zazen*,<sup>8</sup> his first training in meditation techniques, and they practised daily together. Aitken gives this interesting account of their relationship:<sup>9</sup>

'World War II came along, and I found myself caught as a civilian on the island of Guam, taken to Japan, and interned in Kobe. The guards of our camp discovered my interest in haiku and, when R. H. Blyth's *Zen in English Literature* was published late in 1942, one of them loaned me a copy. I was fascinated by the point of view expressed in this book. I read it over and over, perhaps ten times, and underwent many strange experiences that enabled me to read Shakespeare, Basho, and other profound writers as though for the first time. The world seemed transparent, and I was absurdly happy despite our miserable circumstances. Dr Blyth was interned in Kobe, and when all the camps in the city were combined in May, 1944, we were confined together with one hundred and seventy-five other enemy nationals above the city. For the next fourteen months, until the war was over, I learned much about Zen from this creative teacher, and I determined that I would do *zazen* under the guidance of a *roshi* (priest) when I could find the opportunity.'

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Yet we find Blyth, this 'creative teacher' of Zen, advising Hackett, in a letter dated 1962, to be cautious about *zazen*. "I think its intensive practice is very good for a time, but . . . I feel inclined to warn you against a humourless Zen. The secret of life consists in being always and never serious."

Someone who made Blyth's acquaintance just after his release from captivity was Harold G. Henderson, who admitted that Blyth "certainly knew far more about haiku" than he did. I will quote from a letter Henderson wrote to J. W. Hackett shortly after Blyth's death:

'The loss is enormous, to me, and to all the world of haiku. He and I were once very close – outside the world of haiku. We were the sub rosa liaison channel between the Imperial Household and MacArthur. He was in great degree responsible for the Emperor's giving up his divinity, and for that – as for so many other things – he never received proper recognition. His death is a double loss to me. One reason, purely personal, is that I had hoped, before we both died, to be able to heal an apparent breach between us. When I last saw him – just over five years ago – he was polite to me, but almost icily cool. I must have done something wrong which offended him. But to this day I do not know what. I did disagree with him on the translation of certain particular haiku, but it certainly must have been more than that.'

In an aside, Henderson makes it clear that he was not the only one to have a difference of opinion about literary matters strong enough to damage a personal relationship. Henderson felt able to address these intimate remarks to J. W. Hackett because he believed that Hackett was "closer to Blyth than anyone else" he knew. So let us turn next to what Hackett himself has to tell us.

"It says much about the man," says Hackett, "that he cared to encourage a young, unknown poet,<sup>10</sup> and that he made several efforts to find him a publisher." The correspondence with Hackett epitomized Blyth's lack of concern for time: "His letters were seldom dated." It was to Hackett that Blyth confided a view of his own fortunes: "You yourself are a very lucky man, I mean lucky like Christ was, or Basho was, to be born a poet just at the right time. (I myself am the luckiest person I know; you shall be the next.)"

The next quotation is from Tsunehiko Hoshino,<sup>11</sup> who reminisces about his student days at Waseda University, where Blyth was his teacher of English literature:

'He used to come to our university by bicycle from his residence on



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the campus of Gakushuin University. As the textbook for the class he used his own work, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. In appearance, he was a rather small, old man, and he seemed to us students to be an odd person, half teacher and half Zen priest. We called him "Blyth Sensei"<sup>12</sup> rather than "Professor" or "Dr" Blyth. I remember that his humorous remarks often made us laugh and that he, in turn, would laugh to find us bewildered or mystified by his Zen-priest-like utterances.'

Elizabeth Vining, the Crown Prince's other tutor at this time, remembered Blyth as "a charming and scholarly man of middle age".<sup>13</sup> Women always had a soft spot for him, I think, which is not surprising, for Blyth himself points out (in *History of Haiku*) that "women (really) love only men that (really) love living creatures". "This is true in my experience," he adds, and surely such a famous lover of animals as he was would be bound to know.

But back to Tsunehiko Hoshino:

'One day, after his lecture was over, I went up to Blyth Sensei, who was busy wrapping up his books in a traditional square cloth called a "furoshiki". He always used a *furoshiki* rather than a bag or briefcase. I asked him, "Have you been yet to the National Museum to see the special exhibition of Sung and Yuan art based on the spirit of Zen?" Much to my surprise, he replied, "No, I'm far too busy to go and see it." Now I understand why he was too busy, for at that time he was teaching at many different universities – at least four – at the same time. He also had just published the first volume of *Zen and Zen Classics*. The following year he published *Japanese Life and Character in Senryu*.<sup>14</sup>

I think we may safely add 'workaholic' to the various descriptions of R.H. Blyth. Enough to illustrate that point is the reading schedule which someone once saw pinned to his study wall: "Monday, Cervantes/ Don Quixote. Wednesday, Dante/ Divina Commedia. Friday, Goethe/ Faust."

Another who got to know Blyth in his later years was the since well-known film critic and newspaper columnist, Donald Richie, in whose diaries<sup>15</sup> we are given this vivid account of what it was like to hold a conversation with Blyth:

'He brushed back his salt and pepper hair. "Bath salts, eh? Perhaps you thought that Zen would be a hot bath? More like a cold shower, eh, what? Not that I know much about it." And he tossed his head as he usually did when he said this, disassociating himself from the Zen church. "No, no, Literature. I am all Literature. Never knew

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anything about Zen. Fact is, you know, no one does." Then: "What do you want to study that stuff for anyway?" I told him that I didn't study, not really, just listened to Dr Suzuki. "Well, that's better", he said, as though mollified. Then: "There is nothing the matter with it, you understand. It's just that it's not for study." Then: "Suzuki's a great talker." As I listened to him, a great talker himself, I sat back and appreciated the rationality, the logic. What he said seemed to me attractively vague after the rock-hard incomprehensibilities of Dr Suzuki. Blyth's concept of revelation was not the result of time and hard work. Wordsworthian revelation could occur just any time, any place. "It could occur even in bed. Oh, yes, seriously. Suddenly. In bed." Then he regarded me in an owlsh manner, and I smiled, picturing him in a sudden state of *satori*.<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to read a tribute to Blyth's work from someone who did not know him personally, the American writer, J. D. Salinger:

'Blyth is sometimes perilous, naturally, since he's a high-handed old poem himself, but he's also sublime – and who goes to poetry for safety, anyway?'<sup>17</sup>

Jack Kerouac was another American writer of that generation who much admired Blyth, just as, in 1957, Blyth was attracting the admiration of the Swiss writer, Philippe Jaccottet.<sup>18</sup>

The final paradox, then, is that Blyth's ideas, so eclectic and therefore in some ways eminently British, have until now been resisted in Britain, while they have had impact in North America, Europe, Japan even. The hopeful reviews of Blyth's books in British literary columns of the 1950s and 1960s have not yielded the fruit of a reputation. "Mr. Blyth is not afraid to challenge us with statements in which some truth will be found on reflection even by determined dissentients." So writes a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer in 1950,<sup>19</sup> who hailed him even more enthusiastically as "an original authority" on the unfamiliar subject of *senryū*.

A later *Times* reviewer, writing in 1964 of Blyth's *History of Haiku*, speaks of him as "an accomplished Japanese scholar whose translations are marvellously faithful and unalloyed", but also someone who "is much more, or other, than a capable historian or even anthologist because of his great variety of reading and alertness in apt quotation and allusion". Attributes flow generously from this reviewer's pen: vigorous, practical, workmanlike, enlightening, humorous.

One hundred attributes, one hundred Blyths! At the end of the

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day, you have to pick your own way through the contradictions, just as in the end you have to pick your way through a hundred translations of *Fumike ya*<sup>20</sup> to find a favourite, or even have to amalgamate them all to see the whole truth.

To anyone who shares this feeling of the apparent contradictions between what we take to be the great truths of our existence and of our life in this world, and the need in some way to combine these contradictions or, shall I say, resolve them by letting them be, Blyth must surely have an enduring appeal.

He was a preeminent apostle of contradiction.

### NOTES

- 1 See 'Shepherd's Purse', note 25, for details of this and other books by Blyth relevant to the study of haiku. *The Genius of Haiku* is the first anthology of Blyth's writings to have been published in his native land and contains, amongst other things, an extensive bibliography/chapter list of his writings. Adrian Pinnington's essay, 'R.H. Blyth, 1898-1964' in *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, Vol. 1, ed. Ian Nish (Japan Library) is another source of biographical information.
- 2 Letters by R. H. Blyth, dated variously 1958-1964, and by the American haiku scholar, Harold G. Henderson, dated Christmas Day 1964, addressed to and in the possession of the haiku poet, James W. Hackett of Hawaii, were made available to the author as a contribution to the Society's ongoing Blyth research. In spite of the 'never' of the letter, we know of at least two haiku written by Blyth. While living in Korea, he wrote:  
    Behind a leaf  
    Dreaming a blue dream  
    A snail.  
And then in Japan, in his last few days of life, he wrote the poignant verse:  
    With sasanqua camellias  
    Leaving my heart behind  
    I start on a journey.
- 3 D.T. (Daisetz) Suzuki (1870-1966), the scholar of Zen, whose writings were influential in the dissemination of Buddhist philosophy in the West, especially during the 1960s.
- 4 Letter from Hetty Blyth to Tatsuko Yamada, dated 6 April 1959, in the possession of Mrs Nana Takeda (Blyth's daughter).
- 5 Supreme Commander of the American Occupation Forces.
- 6 Childishly affectionate form of *Oba-san* (Granny).
- 7 *Zen in English Literature & Oriental Classics* (Hokuseido).
- 8 Zen sitting meditation.
- 9 From Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (North Point Press).
- 10 Himself. Letter from James W Hackett to the author, 1993.

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- 11 See 'Profiles of Contributors' and his own paper, 'Basho & I'.
- 12 Meaning 'teacher'.
- 13 Elizabeth Gray Vining in *Windows for the Crown Prince Akihito of Japan* (Tokyo, 1952). The other Imperial tutor was Blyth.
- 14 Both these books were published by Hokuseido Press, Tokyo.
- 15 Donald Richie, *The Japan Journals – Collected Diaries, 1947-1994*, an extract from which appeared in *The Japan Times*, 3 May 1994.
- 16 Buddhist enlightenment.
- 17 J.D. Salinger, *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters* (Penguin).
- 18 See Philippe Jaccottet's essay, 'L'Orient Limpide', first published in *Promenade sous les Arbres*, 1957, and subsequently reprinted in *Une Transaction Secrète* (Gallimard).
- 19 *Times Literary Supplement* reviews of Blyth's books are to be found in the 3 March 1950, 8 Oct. 1964 (together with an unspecified earlier 1964 issue), and 23 Oct. 1970 issues.
- 20 See 'Shepherd's Pulse', p.3.



# Haiku in the Year 2094

GEORGE SWEDE

W

hat is the future of haiku? This question has been popping into my mind over the past three years, and I sometimes wonder if it has anything to do with the fact that my place of work is vigorously promoting an early retirement programme. More seriously, today's North American haiku scene appears vastly different from the year I first encountered it, 1976. It seems more crowded now and less friendly. Everything is moving at a greater pace. More seems to be happening at any one time. In fact, I could be talking about the modern world in general.

Of course the possibility exists that my perceptions are entirely self-manufactured. It is not the haiku world that has changed, but me. Therefore, I decided to do some comparisons between then and now to see if indeed things have become as different as I thought. I also decided to do some crystal ball gazing by projecting the results of these comparisons onto the future.

Such fortune-telling seems fitting in the three hundredth year since the death of Shakespeare's equivalent in the haiku world, Matsuo Basho (1644-94). During those three hundred years, what Basho knew as '*hokku*' underwent many transformations within Japan. The culmination can be seen in Makoto Ueda's *Modern Japanese Haiku: an Anthology*<sup>1</sup> which shows a remarkable range of expression by twentieth-century Japanese practitioners of this seemingly simple form.

During the last one hundred years, the haiku has also become a major Japanese cultural export. Today it would be hard to find a place in the world in which someone is not engaged in the reading and writing of haiku in the local language. What then might be the status of the haiku outside Japan in another one hundred years from now, at Basho's Four Hundredth Commemoration? I shall focus

chiefly on developments in North America because it has the oldest and largest haiku culture outside Japan.<sup>2</sup> The longer the time periods between then and now and the larger the samples under study, the more valid the projections onto the future.

## PROCEDURES

I did a few very straightforward investigations, ones that anyone could do to confirm my findings. To begin with, I compared the number of haiku poets published in the major anthologies fifteen to twenty years ago with the number published in the most recent ones. I also noted the relative size of these books – i.e., the number of pages they had. Next, I looked at the longest-lived North American haiku periodicals across roughly the same time span. What interested me, in addition to numbers of contributors and page counts, were the guiding philosophies of these magazines as indicated by some easily-tabulated data such as the number of books they reviewed, the number of articles on haiku that they published, and whether they printed *haibun* and *renga*<sup>3</sup> in addition to haiku.

Of course, most central to predicting the future was to find out whether the kinds of haiku published in anthologies and periodicals have changed significantly over the years. The method employed was the same as the one I introduced at the first Haiku North America Conference in 1991: to count the number of haiku with only nature images, haiku with combined nature and human images, and *senryu*, which I defined as having only human content.<sup>4</sup> I also added a new category which has more to do with style than content. More on that later.<sup>5</sup>

My means for predicting the future were also fairly straightforward. I merely projected from my data what would happen if certain trends continued.

## ANTHOLOGIES: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

More people are being included in the major haiku anthologies over time. The latest, by Bruce Ross (1993),<sup>6</sup> has almost three times as many as the immediately preceding ones by Cor van den Heuvel (1986)<sup>7</sup> and Dorothy Howard/Andre Duhaime (1985).<sup>8</sup> And the two latter works have from almost two to over three times as many as the earliest two anthologies, by George Swede (1979)<sup>9</sup> and van

den Heuvel (1974).<sup>10</sup> If the trend continues, the next significant collection, very likely to celebrate the year 2,000, should have over 500 contributors. Of course, this is unlikely because such a high number would overwhelm a reader and render useless the whole point of an anthology, which is supposed to be the result of careful selection by an informed editor. I predict that the next major anthology will be very selective. It is time that the poets who have contributed most in terms of quality and innovation be recognized. The year 2,000 seems a good time to review a half century of haiku development in North America. The editor(s) in charge of this project will have to have a deep knowledge not only of all the work published in the haiku periodicals, but also of the true history of developments in haiku writing. For instance, who were the most significant poets in influencing others? Who were the true innovators and who were the imitators? Who produced the most haiku of the highest quality, regardless of whether they were innovators or imitators? In other words, the next anthology, in order to break new ground, will have to be elitist and it will have to justify its selections in a rigorous manner. The time of trying to pay homage to as many haiku poets as possible has, with the new Bruce Ross anthology, come to a natural end.

What about the year 2094? What kind of anthology will be needed, and hopefully produced, then? One very similar to the one I described for the year 2,000. Over the course of almost one hundred years, enough changes occur in terms of content and style, enough poets rise to prominence and then fade away, for there to be a serious attempt at assessment of what happened during that period in relation to the time before.

A parallel development that will undoubtedly affect the content of future anthologies is the rapid growth of an international community of haiku poets writing in many languages. Today's North American haiku magazines often feature the work of English language poets from Australia, Britain and New Zealand, as well as haiku in translation by poets from countries as diverse as Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, China, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Morocco, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, and nations of the former Yugoslavia.

To cope with this diversity, a number of Japanese scholars and poets have established 'Haiku International', which publishes a

magazine called *HI*. In each of its several issues a year, poets from many of the above countries are featured with their work in English and Japanese translation and sometimes in their original language as well. Any individuals who want to edit a discriminating and representative anthology of the best world haiku have before them a daunting task. But it is something that must be done, and almost certainly will be done, by the year 2,000, and by 2094, several such anthologies will likely be available.

What language will they be in? Probably English: the chief language of communication right now is English, and the proliferation of haiku interest in Britain, demonstrated in the early 1990s by the founding of the British Haiku Society with its journal, *Blithe Spirit*, as well as the inception of two other excellent haiku magazines, *The Haiku Quarterly* and *Bare Bones*,<sup>11</sup> should only reinforce this trend.

## HAIKU MAGAZINES: CHANGES IN SIZE AND NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTORS

I examined the changes in size that have occurred in the longest-lived major English-language haiku magazines: *Modern Haiku*, *Frogpond*, *Brussels Sprout*, and *Inkstone*.

The most senior among them, *Modern Haiku*, was founded in San Clemente, California in 1969 by Kay Titus Mormino. It ran under her editorship until 1977, when Robert Spiess, the current editor, took over and moved the editorial offices to his hometown of Madison, Wisconsin. The magazine has grown to more than double the size today, in terms of both page count and number of contributors.

*Frogpond* is another survivor. Founded in Manhattan in 1978, it is not nearly as old as *Modern Haiku*, but its longevity seems assured because it is the official magazine of the Haiku Society of America, a vigorous organization sure to thrive for as long as there is published literature. The magazine has grown to the same curve as *Modern Haiku*. Both periodicals, in their latest issues, are perfect bound: that is, they possess spines.

The third periodical, *Brussels Sprout*, was established in New Jersey by Alexis Rotella in 1980, and in 1988 she passed the torch to West Coast (Washington) poet and artist Francine Porad. During Rotella's reign, the magazine fluctuated in both page length (24-56) and format. In terms of contributors, however, it follows the pattern of



the first two periodicals. In fact, its growth curve is, marginally, the highest.

The fourth magazine, *Luksstone*, out of Toronto, is even more variable than *Brussels Sprout*. As with *Brussels Sprout*, its page length has fluctuated over the eleven years of its existence, in this case from 36 to 48. But unlike the other three, the number of contributors has actually shown a substantial decline. The latter trend reflects the beliefs of its original editors, Keith Southward and Marshall Hryciuk, in keeping the page uncluttered. The fewer the haiku, they feel, the greater each work's impact. Thus, instead of trying to accommodate the increasing numbers of people writing haiku, they have actually gone against the grain and published fewer poets with time.

Of course, they have by no means been alone in espousing such a view. Eric Amann had a similar policy with both the magazines he edited, *Haiku* (1967-71) and *Cicada* (1977-82), as did Randy and Shirley Brooks with *High/Coo* (1976-1982) and their current *Mayfly* (1985-). Many other editors of shorter-lived periodicals followed a similar philosophy.

## HAIKU PERIODICALS: FINANCING FURTHER GROWTH

How much bigger can the periodicals become? The only restraint on haiku periodicals will be funding. Popular magazines catering to other interest groups get their money from advertising. Where will *Modern Haiku* and the others get theirs?

The problem is not as big as it seems. The haiku magazines do not need to have glossy paper or full colour photographs. Nor do they need large staffs and offices with many rooms to house them. Thus a 100-page or even 200-page periodical published three or four times a year seems feasible because it will be relatively cheap to produce. Nevertheless, the current publishers of haiku periodicals struggle to meet costs with the much smaller issues they put out today. So the question remains – where will the dollars come from?

Very likely from two sources: donations and speciality advertising. I predict that many of the current generation of haiku poets and haiku appreciators will make provisions in their wills for their favourite magazine. The 1993 issue of *Modern Haiku* contains the names of ninety-nine financial donors. The 1977 issue acknowledges only eight. To a slightly lesser extent the same pattern is evident in *Frogpond*.

Helping to justify my prediction is the fact that the two longest-running contests, The Haiku Society of America's 'Harold G. Henderson Awards' and 'Brady Memorial Senryu Contest', fund their prizes from trusts established to honour the memories of the two individuals.

Of the remaining two periodicals in my sample, *Brussels Sprout* is definitely following the trend set by the first two. The 1993 version discreetly lists the names of twelve donors. The 1981 issue includes no reference to benefactors. As usual, *Inkstone* continues to function independently of the forces affecting the other three magazines. Its two issues contain no references to any sources of extra money, but I feel it is only a matter of time before this changes.

What of the second source of funding, speciality advertising? In my sample of eight magazines, I found only two ads, both in the 1977 issue of *Modern Haiku*. The editors of all haiku magazines are feeling mounting pressure to increase their page counts. My prediction is that before long they will be soliciting not only donations, but ads as well. The sort of business they are likely to get will be from writers wishing to announce their recently published haiku collections or works of scholarship; from book collectors who have extra copies of hard-to-get publications; from persons who wish to rent their idyllic cottages or lodges as writers' retreats; from organizers of poetry contests. Until now, haiku magazines have provided some of these services for nothing. If editors want to respond to the pressures for expansion, however, they will have to try to raise more money in some manner. Paid advertising is one easy answer.

### HAIKU MAGAZINES: NUMBER OF BOOKS REVIEWED & NUMBER OF ARTICLES

I also examined the four sample magazines for other trends, such as the number of books they reviewed and the number of articles they contained per issue, as well as the number of pages they devoted to each. This research revealed a growth that is, at least for *Modern Haiku* and *Frogpond*, in line with their increase in size and number of contributors. More books are being published today than twelve or more years ago, and there has been an associated increase in the number of book reviews in most haiku magazines. More articles appear about haiku and related matters, but once again only in

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

*Modern Haiku* and *Frogpond*. Such a change implies that we are undergoing a process of greater self-examination than before.

I decided to survey the nature of the articles to see if this is really true. To my surprise, they do not indicate an increasing concern with critical self-analysis, something to be expected as a movement matures. In fact, to a slight degree, the opposite seems to be true: there is an increasing tendency towards uncritical appreciation, that is, to publish more articles with a distinct bias for the poets under discussion, who are frequently the old Japanese greats. Countless articles and books have already been published on the Japanese masters, both inside and outside of Japan. Anyone truly interested in knowing more could consult these sources. In order for the haiku movement to remain vigorous, it needs to rigorously analyse itself. This will not be accomplished by looking through the rose-tinted glasses provided by worshipful articles on Japanese masters. It will also not be achieved with articles that unstintingly praise non-Japanese haiku poets. It can only be done by a direct look at ourselves in the well-lighted mirror provided by informed criticism of the modern haiku movement. Until this happens, we will never be taken seriously by the rest of the literary world.

In a perfect world, creative writing and informed criticism feed off one another in a symbiotic relationship. Right now in the haiku world, informed criticism seems to be active enough in book reviews, but not in the longer and, therefore, potentially more influential articles.

What does the future hold? It is possible that, within a few years, one or two journals that publish only articles on haiku will appear on the scene. The changes between the early and late issues of *Modern Haiku* and *Frogpond* strongly indicate such a development is likely. The haiku content of the two other, less influential, magazines, however, does not support this trend. *Brussels Sprout* actually gave slightly more space to haiku in 1993 than in 1981, but in both issues I surveyed haiku got over 50% of the space. *Inkstone*, too, seem to divide their space about equally between prose and poetry.

### HAIKU CONTENT: HAS IT CHANGED?

To get a good indication of the kind of work being published, I sampled 145 (or 12.5%) of the 1,157 haiku in the eight issues of the four magazines under study. My method was to analyse the first and

seventh haiku (or *senryu*) on every second page to see which of three types each was. Haiku were excluded from the sample if they appeared in tributes or in *haibun*, in articles, in reviews, in *renga*, or in sequences that contained non-haiku fragments. Before a discussion of the findings, examples of the way I distinguished among the three types of haiku might be useful. Here is a haiku with nature content only (N haiku):

rows of corn  
stretch to the horizon  
sun on the thunderhead<sup>12</sup>

The next type of haiku has human content only (H haiku):

baby lip quivers,  
all his clothes off  
in the doctor's office<sup>13</sup>

In other words, a *senryu*.<sup>14</sup>

The third type are poems that include images from both the natural world and the human world (NH haiku):

spring cleaning  
a white kitten  
rolls in the dust<sup>15</sup>

Such haiku I have elsewhere described as 'hybrids'<sup>16</sup> because they fuse the two worlds of human endeavour (spring cleaning) and a natural event (kitten rolling in dust).

Now, what can we conclude from the data? Firstly, most haiku published across the years have been hybrids (NH haiku). 60% fit this mould, a finding very close to the 61.4% NH I found in Cor van den Heuvel's 1986 *Haiku Anthology*. N haiku were the least published (17.2%) of the three types. In my prior study, they ranked second (22.8%), but the low numbers were considered a surprise then because so many persons believed most published haiku deal mainly with nature. The current study confirms that the earlier finding was no accident.

*Senryu*, or H haiku, ranked second in frequency (22%). My 1991 criteria seem to be followed, more or less, by the editors who have special *senryu* sections. Any confusion that still exists seems to involve humour. If an N or NH haiku is funny, editors will tend to classify it as a *senryu*. As I argue in the earlier paper, humour should have nothing to do with any classification scheme. Many *senryu* generate



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feelings of sadness, not humour, while some haiku create a humorous effect in addition to other more profound ones.<sup>17</sup>

Does the data I have collected indicate any trends for the future? NH haiku will continue to dominate, simply because the combination of two different contexts makes for a greater number of possible juxtapositions. What constitutes nature and human content should change, however, paralleling societal developments. The increasing publication of haiku from other cultures will also introduce new content. The revolution in communication everyone is forecasting should also create new content for haiku. Video phones, CD-ROM, interactive television, and virtual reality, to mention only the major changes that have been forecast, should appear as content of many H and NH haiku.

### HAIKU FORM: HAS IT CHANGED?

90.3% of the haiku in the survey occur in three-lines. Of these, 17.9% are 5-7-5 and 72.4% are free-style. The percentage of three-liners is almost identical to what Eric Amann and I got when we conducted our 1980 survey.<sup>18</sup> The only difference is a slight drop in 5-7-5 haiku, from 20% down to 17.9%.

Actually, the percentage of 5-7-5 haiku would have declined even more were it not for *Modern Haiku*. Taken together, its issues have 34.8% of their total contributions in this classic form, while the combined issues of the other 3 periodicals surveyed possess from 4.3% to 15.6%. The difference between *Modern Haiku* and the others is puzzling. As far as I know, the editors of *Frogpond*, *Brussels Sprout*, and *Inkstone* do not actively discourage 5-7-5 work, nor do the editors of *Modern Haiku* encourage it.

Despite the efforts of some to promote one-, two-, and four-line haiku, as well as visual haiku, the combined use of these forms has actually gone down by over a half from early to late issues, 14.8% to 6.6%. The overall average of the 8 issues is 9.5%, which is almost identical to the figure that Eric Amann and I came up with in 1980.

The vast majority of published haiku possess the free-style three-line form. But do most of these haiku still have close to 17 syllables even though they do not have a strict 5-7-5 arrangement? To try and settle this issue, I did a syllable count of the 145 haiku in the sample. If all eight issues are considered together, three groups of syllable counts stand out. The most frequent is the 13 to 15 group (33.8%),

closely followed by the ones for 16 to 18 (30.3%) and 10 to 12 syllables (23.4%).

# RENGA, INDIVIDUAL SEQUENCES, HAIBUN, AND TANKA

Today most haiku magazines regularly publish collaborative or linked verse, 'renga' (or 'renku'). This was not the case over twelve years ago. Then only one of the four periodicals in my sample, *Brussels Sprout*, published a renga. In the ensuing years this way of writing caught fire. At every annual meeting of haiku societies, the writing of a renga involving all those in attendance became the highlight of the weekend.<sup>19</sup> In 1985, Terri Lee Grell founded the periodical *Lynx* in order to feature renga. Last year, Jane Reichhold took over the editorship and will continue to feature renga, but this time alongside tanka (defined, in its classical sense in note 2 of Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper, and, in the modern sense, below). A second linked-poetry magazine *AIR* was started in 1992 by Kris and Tadashi Kondo in Japan, with William J. Higginson as associate editor. Judging from the remarkable surge of interest in renga/renku, collaborative writing will become ever more popular and thoroughly entrenched in the North American haiku community. It should also grow internationally. What better way to get to know haiku poets in other countries? By 2094, a substantial number of renga/renku periodicals should be operating in nations other than Japan.

Individual sequences (haiku written by one person arranged in a narrative manner),<sup>20</sup> as well as *haibun* (prose narratives punctuated by haiku), have always enjoyed a limited but steady popularity. *Frogpond*, however, reveals a sharp decline in the number of sequences published between 1981 and 1992, while *Inkstone* shows zero publication of these forms as well as of renga. Both individual sequences and *haibun* will surely, however, continue to be published on a limited basis in most haiku periodicals.

Tanka (extended haiku with expressed personal viewpoint, usually presented in English as five lines) have never really got a foothold in the haiku journals, apart from Jane Reichhold's *Mirrors*, which also sponsors an annual tanka contest. The tanka remains a puzzle. In Japan, it is an extremely popular form, because it allows more expression of personal thoughts and feelings than the haiku, while still remaining brief. Although my data predicts little increase in interest, I'll go out on a limb and say that by the year 2,000 there

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will be a North American tanka journal,<sup>21</sup> and by the year 2094, several more will have sprung up in Europe and elsewhere.

### OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

North American haiku writing and publishing will be thriving in the year 2094. All the markers point to this: vigorous haiku organizations, well-run, long-lived haiku periodicals, and a steady supply of younger writers turning to the haiku (and related forms) for self-expression.

By 2094, a body of informed criticism should also be firmly in place. Some university departments of literature already have accepted the English-language haiku as worthy of study by graduate students. Increasing acceptance by other centres of higher education is inevitable, as is the birth of related scholarly journals.

Haiku in 2094 will still look very much as they do today. The majority will have three lines, a few will have one, two or four lines, and even fewer will have some sort of pictorial arrangement on the page. Given the fairly strict definition of a haiku, no very significant changes in form are really possible.

In the mid twenty-first century, the haiku world will be even more international than it is today. Currently, North America is the place of greatest ferment outside Japan. But by 2094, the US and Canada will no longer be the clear leaders in non-Japanese haiku publication, haiku innovation and haiku scholarship. Other nations, such as Britain and those in Eastern Europe, will play more important roles. A related development will be a substantial decline in Japan's influence.

watching the earth rise,  
cloned from his ashes,  
basho<sup>22</sup>

### NOTES

1 *Modern Japanese Haiku: an Anthology* (Univ. of Toronto).

2 As an indication of the age of the American haiku movement, its first English language haiku magazine, *American Haiku* (Platteville, Wisconsin) began publishing in 1963. By 1970, there were at least four more in the USA and Canada. By contrast, the British haiku record has been patchy, for although both *The Sunday Times* (London, 8 Mar. 1959) and *The Guardian* (Manchester, 7 Jun. 1967) held nationwide haiku contests each harvesting several thousand

entries, the first haiku magazine did not appear until 1970 (*Haiku Byways*, London) and it was short-lived. It was not until the late 1980s that haiku magazines began in earnest in Britain (see note 11 below).

3 Haiku-style prose and linked verse.

4 See 'Elite Haiku: Hybrids of Nature and Human Content', a paper delivered by the author at this event, held at Las Positas College, Livermore, California, Aug. 23-25, 1991, and later published in *Modern Haiku* (1992, 23-1).

5 The paper reproduced here was first given on 17 Jul. at Haiku North America 1993, held, as it had been two years earlier, at Las Positas College. 'Haiku in the Mid 21st Century' was its title then. The author made some content changes and updates, however, for the Basho Symposium held in London. The following is an abridgment of the conclusions the author reached under his various chosen headings. Because of time constraints, the paper was similarly shortened on the day. Statistical tables are not reproduced. The reader should be reminded that this essay focuses almost exclusively on the North American haiku scene.

6 Ross, B. (ed.) *Haiku Moment: an Anthology of Contemporary North American Haiku* (Tuttle).

7 van den Heuvel, C. (ed.) *The Haiku Anthology* (Simon & Schuster).

8 Howard, D. & Deshaime, A. (eds.) *Haiku: Anthology Canadienne / Canadian Anthology* (Les Éditions Asticou, Hull, Quebec).

9 Swede, G. (ed.) *Canadian Haiku Anthology* (Three Trees Press, Toronto).

10 van den Heuvel, C. (ed.) *The Haiku Anthology* (Anchor Press/Doubleday).

11 Three years is a long time in terms of haiku journal publishing! Since the 1994 Symposium, *Blithe Spirit* (the BHS quarterly journal) has a new editor: Caroline Gourlay, Knighton; *Haiku Quarterly* (ed. Kevin Bailey, Swindon) has changed its name to *HQ* and is no longer quarterly; *Bare Bones* (ed. Brian Tasker, Frome, one of the contributors to this book) is no longer publishing. *Presence* (ed. Martin Lucas, Lancaster), *Snapshots* (ed. John Barlow, Liverpool) and, across the Irish Sea, *Haiku Spirit* (ed. Sean O'Connor, Dublin) have emerged on the scene. The founding editor of *Haiku Spirit* was Jim Norton.

12 Lee Gurga.

13 Randy Brooks.

14 See 'Shepherd's Purse', note 18, for background to the term 'senryu'.

15 Margaret Chula.

16 In *Modern Haiku*, 1992, 23-1.

17 See Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper for a thorough introduction to humour in Japanese haiku.

18 Swede, G. & Amann, E. (1980), 'Toward a Definition of the Modern English Haiku', 'Cicada', 4-4.

19 Our Basho Symposium in London was no exception: see 'Swiftly Flowing'.

20 'Rensaku' or 'ginsaku' in Japanese.

21 True to the writer's prediction, a tanka magazine, *Five Lines Down*, was founded in 1994. It is edited by Kenneth Tanemura of Redwood City, California.

22 Kohjin Sakamoto.



# A Haiku Meditation

BRIAN TASKER

**T**hree hundred years since Basho... and now from 2094  
back to the present moment:

old pond  
a frog jumps in  
the sound of water<sup>1</sup>

It was in 1686 that Basho discovered, almost by accident, that the source of haiku was in his experience and not in his mind; simply in things as they are.

It has been a great privilege to see Basho honoured in so many different ways today. And as the day fades, it seems timely to reflect upon how we might continue to honour Basho and the spirit of haiku. Basho is long gone and the inheritance of haiku is ours. But not quite ours: it will always somehow remain beyond us, in the emptiness – the creative potential of what's left unsaid.

The vacuum of absence that is readily filled by life's longing for itself – only to find the suchness – things as they are – *that* which we cannot grasp.

looking carefully,  
a shepherd's purse is blooming  
under the fence<sup>2</sup>

*Editors' Note: After repeating the haiku, Brian Tasker struck a large metallic singing bowl with a wooden baton, the resonance permeating the room: it was as if the words themselves had turned to sound.<sup>3</sup> Each subsequent haiku, having been read out twice, was similarly translated into sound. On one occasion, wooden clappers were used instead of the singing bowl.*

## A HAIKU MEDITATION

the cuckoo's cry  
goes slanting  
across the water

lightning flash  
through the darkness goes  
the cry of a heron

quietness  
sinking into the rocks  
a cicada's cry<sup>4</sup>

summer grasses  
all that remains  
of warriors' dreams

autumn evening  
a crow has perched  
on a withered bough<sup>5</sup>

broken bowl  
the pieces  
still rocking

at my father's  
distant grave — someone  
has left flowers

boulders  
just beneath the boat  
it's dawn

midsummer's day:  
bee and gardener toiling  
as darkness falls

the blindman  
flower by flower  
smells the posy

late summer breeze  
leaves of the book turning  
before they are read

after the birthday wish  
the smell of wax

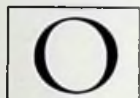
## REDISCOVERING BASHO

### NOTES

- 1 The first seven haiku read during the meditation (down to the famous 'autumn evening' verse), are all Basho's, and were presented in English based on translations by Robert Aitken, Reginald Blyth, and Makoto Ueda. The last seven haiku are by Western poets in their original English – Penny Harter, George Swede, John Wills, David Cobb, Brian Tasker, David Cobb, and Brian Tasker, in that order. Another translation and comment on the Basho 'frogpond' verse can be found in 'Shepherd's Purse' and its note 1.
- 2 For other translations of the shepherd's purse haiku, see the Introduction and Tsunehiko Hoshino's paper. '*Kakine*' can mean either 'fence' or 'hedge'.
- 3 In his Haiku Meditation, Brian Tasker used aural means to have each just-read verse sink into the minds of the participants: the singing bowl's sustained, but ever-fading tone. This had its visual counterpart later in the year, when Stephen Gill led a Basho Balloon-Launching Ceremony, held at the top of Primrose Hill in London. See '50 Haiku for the Sky'. There, each just-read verse lingered in the minds of the participants as the helium, and then the breeze, carried the poem-card away into the distant sky. Once or twice an over-filled balloon burst, producing an effect quite similar to Tasker's clappers!
- 4 For another translation, see 'Representation of Basho', p.44.
- 5 For another translation, see 'Basho Has Been Found', p.59.

# Swiftly Flowing

BRITISH HAIKU SOCIETY RIVER  
THAMES GINKO-NO-RENGA



n 3 July 1994, the day after the Basho Symposium, many of the participants gathered on the Thames Embankment at the ancient obelisk, 'Cleopatra's Needle', for a compositional stroll, or 'ginko', along the river. We were greeted by a high tide and clear blue sky. It soon turned into another scalding day, and we were glad of the pools of shade afforded by the plane trees and the overarching bridges – Hungerford, Westminster, Waterloo – as we proceeded, in ones and twos, jotting down images from the walk, from which the 'sabakite', or editor, would later choose stanzas for our linked verse. George Swede and Tsunehiko Hoshino were requested to jointly perform the editorial role, with Stephen Gill acting as collaborating scribe, 'shuhitsu', introducing the *ginko-no-renga* idea at the outset and then penning the stanzas, once chosen, onto a large paper scroll at the end of the walk. While a few very minor changes were made in correspondence after the event, almost all of the discussion about wording and linking took place on the day itself at a long wooden table under the arches of Waterloo Bridge. Altogether, there were twelve poets, all members of the B.H.S., who succeeded in having at least one of their verses placed in this unusual renga.

No attempt was made to conform to Japanese *renku* conventions, and no figure was set on the number of stanzas the linked verse would comprise. While paying minute attention to questions of pace of development and overall balance, the collaborators, as much as possible, wanted the real experience of the stroll to speak. In this way, perhaps, the composition might be seen as a type of corporate *rensaku*, or 'haiku sequence'.

Swiftly flowing  
Thames and swallows –  
the coolness<sup>1</sup>



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Raised to her thighs  
the resting tourist's dress<sup>2</sup>

Even the helicopter  
shies away  
into a corner of the sky<sup>3</sup>

Intricate spires design  
the near horizon<sup>4</sup>

Above all  
a clock face is framed  
by scaffolding<sup>5</sup>

A difference of opinion . . .  
the half-smile of the sphinx<sup>6</sup>

Pillar to pillar  
skateboarders skim  
the concrete slopes<sup>7</sup>

A stink from the river -  
the homeless man inhales deeply<sup>8</sup>

A water sprinkler  
changing course drives away  
a butterfly<sup>9</sup>

Many bridges  
but no rainbow<sup>10</sup>

Every sight seen  
the open-topped bus  
returns - empty<sup>11</sup>

Into the busker's case  
hajjin throws a poem<sup>12</sup>

Traffic lights out,  
shirtless workmen bent over  
a small hole<sup>13</sup>

Sea-in-the-air  
down here under cirrus<sup>14</sup>

Leaf sway  
the old lady uses her map  
as a fan<sup>15</sup>

Light and shade -  
a cormorant dives<sup>16</sup>

## SWIFTLY FLOWING

Lovers of drink  
have left a row of bottles  
for the rising tide<sup>17</sup>

Children rock on carved wood -  
the breeze in their hair<sup>18</sup>

Into the teacup  
hot water slowly pours itself -  
Basho Festival<sup>19</sup>

Traffic rumble  
drifting into accordion ...<sup>20</sup>

### NOTES

- 1 Tsunehiko Hoshino. There is an allusion here to Basho's *Samidare o haiku*. See '50 Basho for the Sky', no. 27
- 2 George Swede
- 3 Tito. Stephen Gill's haiku name
- 4 David Steele
- 5 Norman Barracrough
- 6 Martin Lucas
- 7 Susan Rowley
- 8 George Swede
- 9 Tsunehiko Hoshino
- 10 George Swede
- 11 Susan Rowley
- 12 Fred Schofield
- 13 Adele David
- 14 Tito
- 15 Martin Lucas
- 16 George Marsh
- 17 Dick Pettit
- 18 Susan Rowley
- 19 Nobuyuki Yuasa
- 20 Tito

# Poetry for the Computer Age

## ANTIDOTE FOR ANOMIE

MAKOTO OOKA

*Editors' Note: This paper was presented at SOAS, London University on 17 October 1994, and not at the Basho Tercentenary Symposium held a few months earlier. It was previously published, in a somewhat different form, in the Japan Foundation Newsletter, August 1992.*

Since January 1979, I have been responsible for a short column entitled *Ori-ori no Uta* (A Poet's Notebook), appearing daily on the front page of the morning edition of the *Asahi Shimbun*.<sup>1</sup> Each day, the column features a single poem (or part of a poem), to which I add my own brief commentary. It has introduced Japanese tanka, haiku, *senryu* (17-sound symbol, humorous or satirical verse), ballads, 'modern verse', 'Chinese poems' (written by both Japanese and Chinese poets), and sometimes Japanese translations of foreign verse.<sup>2</sup> Because the column is carried throughout the year, except for the ten annual newspaper holidays, it is hard work. Even at a conservative estimate, it is likely that several hundred thousand people peruse my column more or less regularly. Come to think of it, the possibility that so large a number of readers sample poetry and poetic criticism on a daily basis may be something

of a novelty in world journalism. Such an opportunity to be 'in touch' with hundreds of thousands of readers every morning is rare good fortune for a modern poet, and, on numerous occasions now, I have actually been able to see for myself that many Japanese take immense pleasure in being exposed to their country's poetic traditions in this manner.

The column has naturally called on me to think a great deal about the characteristics of Japanese poetry, and I have often been invited to lecture on the subject in different parts of Japan. During all these years of study and contemplation, I arrived at one conclusion about the essence of Japanese poetry. Simple and self-evident conclusion that it is – actually, I am even a bit abashed to mention it – I must do so because it is the starting-point for my discussion: Japanese poetry is *short*.

Brevity has characterised Japanese poetry since ancient times. It takes less than ten seconds to recite a tanka verse, and for a haiku poem, five seconds is enough. This all-too-obvious feature, it seems to me, is the key to the distinctive quality of Japanese poetry.

I myself am neither a tanka nor a haiku poet. For half a century, I have composed what we call 'modern poems', in which the verses are free, both in terms of length and rhythm. Such 'modern' poetry, called *gendaishi* in Japanese, began, more than a hundred years ago, with 'new-style poems', *shintaisshi*, whose composition was essentially a revolt against the long-standing tradition of short poems of fixed structure, such as haiku and tanka.<sup>3</sup> Today, however, the ranks of both readers and writers of modern poetry have greatly increased.

The free-style 'modern poem' took root in Japan under the direct influence of Western poetry. In order to grasp the essential qualities of *indigenous* poetic forms, however, we must examine both the tanka, which has a history of more than a thousand years, and the haiku, which is derived from tanka.

*Shiratsuyu mo yume mo kono yo mo maboroshi mo  
tatoete ieba hisashi kari keru*

Our rendezvous, so fleeting . . .  
That dewdrops, dreams,  
Our fleeting lives, and mirages –  
All seem by comparison  
Such abiding events!<sup>4</sup>

Since the early 1970s, Japan has been enjoying a new boom – a



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sort of renaissance – of tanka (poems consisting of 31 sound symbols arranged in five lines of 5-7-5-7-7) and haiku (comprising only 17 sound symbols, arranged as 5-7-5). The study of these poetic genres is important, and not only because of their long traditions. What is almost more remarkable is the popularity they have won in Japan since the early 1970s, two decades in which the nation has developed as an information society based on rapid advances in computerization and other new technologies. It is estimated that, in Japan today, one to two million amateur poets compose and enjoy these traditional types of poem.

There are also professional poets. Their number is far smaller than that of the amateurs, of course, but nonetheless probably totals several thousand. These people, besides composing poems for their own enjoyment, provide guidance to hundreds or even thousands of students in private poetry societies, which publish magazines showcasing the works of their members. Some well-known poets can earn quite a decent livelihood for themselves by offering advice on writing tanka or haiku in the newspapers, in magazines with national circulations, on television or radio programmes, or in classes at adult education centres throughout the country.

Still, it is the massive number of amateur poets throughout Japan which constitutes the most imposing presence in the world of traditional poetry today. Japan is probably the only country in the world so densely populated with amateur writers of verse. Whatever the theme – it might be some trifling event from their daily life, it might be love, work, family, illness, or death – they turn to the short verse forms of tanka and haiku to express their feelings and impressions.

*Gose wa nao konjo danimo negawazaru  
waga futokoro ni sakura kite chini*

In the afterlife  
And even in this world,  
All hope is gone.  
Onto my bosom  
The cherry-blossoms scatter and fall.<sup>5</sup>

How many countries are there, I wonder, where poems are written in such close association with everyday life? Tanka and haiku are sometimes used to treat metaphysical themes, but their key feature is that they easily accommodate images of the minute events of

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everyday life. It is perhaps this characteristic, above all else, that is responsible for the huge number of amateur haiku and tanka poets.

Out of this faceless sea of writers of verse, a rare superstar will sometimes suddenly appear. Seven years ago, in 1987, a young senior high school teacher named Machi Tawara, who had started writing tanka not long before, published a collection of her poems entitled *Sarada Kinenbi* ("Salad Anniversary"). This quickly became a best-seller. In fact, it sold nearly three million copies in one year, and became the chief topic of conversation for the Japanese reading public at that time.

One might have been excused for thinking that tanka was little more than an antiquated style of poetry that has been enjoyed for more than a thousand years, but the enthusiasm with which Machi Tawara was lionized demonstrated unmistakably that, as a medium for expressing the emotions of the young, indeed of the average person living in this 'computer age', tanka has a wider appeal than modern poetry; in fact, a wider appeal than all other types of literature, including the novel, plays or essays. Tawara succeeded not just in expressing herself with tanka, but in restoring its charm by filling its very old 'wineskin' with fresh *sake*.

*Jisoku hachiju kimi no senaka de kaze ni naru  
tsunagatteiru ude dake ga ima*

At 80 kilometres per hour,

I am the wind:

My arms, holding me to your back,

All there is in the world!<sup>6</sup>

Haiku, even shorter in form than tanka, enjoyed growing popularity from much earlier: the 1970s. The number of writers of haiku is probably greater today than in any other period, and innumerable collections of tanka or haiku poems are published all the time. I receive a steady stream of complimentary copies of such collections from authors and publishers, sometimes as many as seven or eight in one day! At least one hundred to one hundred and fifty volumes arrive in the mail every month, and under their increasing weight the floor of my small workroom is gradually sinking. We have a proverb in Japanese that goes, "Dust, left to accumulate, piles up into a mountain"; in my house, it is "Tanka books, left to accumulate, pile up into a mountain – and the floor begins to sag."

To me, the Japan of today has two faces: a country of highly

advanced technology and computers, and a land of traditional poetry where the masses treasure the simple, short-form poems that have been popular for centuries. What I would like to call your attention to here is the fact that these two dimensions of our culture, which might seem totally inconsistent at first glance, actually coexist quite well, blending into each other without a sense of contradiction.

The case of a well-known scientist provides us with a good illustration. Hideki Yukawa, a world pioneer in quantum theory, and the first Japanese to receive the Nobel Prize (1949), was also noted for his fondness for tanka. He published a collection of his own poems, and they are rather good. He liked to read classical works by ancient Chinese thinkers such as Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu,<sup>7</sup> and as he often noted in his writings, there was a hidden link between his knowledge of Asian literature and philosophy and his original discoveries in theoretical physics.

There are many other cases of outstanding scholars in the natural sciences being at the same time first-rate writers of tanka or haiku poetry, and examples of more ordinary people being poets, it goes without saying, are even more common. That short-form poems, unchanged in structure from ancient times, now flourish, as never before, in an age dominated by computers and high-tech is a peculiarity of contemporary Japanese civilization.

One might try to interpret this phenomenon from the perspective of social psychology. The vigorous inroads computers are making into the social framework, an ever-growing impact, is testimony to the fact that the centralizing, controlling forces inherent in giant computer systems, are increasingly influencing the way of life of individual citizens. While affording us increased convenience and comfort in our lives, computers are progressively robbing us of the richness of individual diversity and originality.

Imagine now an evening meal in a future computer-governed age. The same day; and two different people, living hundreds of miles apart, are cooking supper using precisely the same tools, the same techniques, and using the very same vegetables grown in exactly the same way. The two dinners are going to taste identical! This may be an exaggerated picture, but not so very far from the way things already are. On the one hand, we may realize the ideal of equality, but on the other, we may consign ourselves to leading monotonous lives in a society without variety and diversity, all local flavour and distinctiveness having by then been lost.

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The diverse local dialects spoken throughout Japan have, in recent years, been disappearing rapidly, mainly as a result of the spread of television. But the gradual loss of such sources of regional diversity has awakened people to the charm of local patterns of speech and sparked interest in their cultural importance. Such interest can be seen as indicative of peoples' sense of crisis and of their intuitive resistance against the control and standardization mechanisms of our computer age society. My theory is that this same social predicament is responsible for the current boom of short-form poetry. Haiku and tanka poems might be seen as individual acts of resistance against a society that is rapidly being standardized.

Here, one can also discern a deep, internal linkage with the vigorous renaissance of traditional culture today. Take traditional forms of drama, for example. In the 1960s, iconoclastic or avant-garde theatre captivated the hearts of university students. But this radicalism eventually faded, and before we knew it, those theatres specializing in classical performing arts such as Noh, *kyogen* or *kabuki*, with their centuries of tradition and their highly-stylized aesthetic, were suddenly packed solid. Nowadays, more and more people are taking classes in tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and calligraphy, and they include many in their late teens and early twenties.

On the whole, phenomena such as these would seem to indicate a growing conservatism in society, and that aspect is undeniable. Yet there is more to this trend than a simple picture of conservative tendencies and of reaction to avant-garde arts; I would say that it also conveys the more fundamental message of a grave sense of crisis instinctively felt within modern society itself. Together with the rapid progress being made in the fields of computerization and information technology, comes a kind of fear that the coexistence of diverse values may be breaking up society into millions of pieces. People thus turn to short-form poetry, classical performing arts, the tea ceremony, and other stylized arts because they embody solid, traditional values. Such traditional arts adhere to firmly-established stylistic patterns, while following clearly-defined rules of technique that can be progressively mastered with due study and practice. Of equal importance, however, is that such endeavours are not undertaken alone, but in the company of many others striving towards the same goals: here, comradeship and rivalry adds a healthy measure of stimulus and challenge. That individual effort is assessed – and may even be rewarded – on the basis of certain fixed criteria, will be something of a relief for people in our



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information-inundated age, drifting without anchor in a sea of diverse, infinitely fragmented values.

*Yuku haru ya tori naki uo no me wa namida*

The passing spring –  
Birds mourn,  
Fishes weep  
With tearful eyes.<sup>8</sup>

Today's Japan is literally awash in a flood of information. People spend their days wading through this inundation: superabundant sources of information, volume of information, variety of information. Information from newspapers, magazines, and radio – in a sense, the 'classical' media – is already copious, and television-borne information has burgeoned since the 1950s to extend now to more than ten separate channels, not to mention satellite networks. Each TV station broadcasts programmes continuously from early morning until after midnight (and some, through to dawn), programmes tailored to satisfy the interests, tastes, and curiosity of all kinds of people. In the case of the private channels, viewers are bombarded with programme sponsors' advertisements, adding further to this plethora of information. As the logic of capital dictates, all these programmes, ranging from those of high intellectual content produced with sophisticated technology to those of such ultra-lowbrow quality as to constitute a near criminal use of electromagnetic waves, are broadcast indiscriminately to the homes of all Japanese citizens.

The flood of information is, in Japan's case, essentially excess chatter, the vast oversupply of which sharply devalues each individual piece of information. It is hardly surprising, then, that many people have developed a strong yearning for the richness to be found in silence. Could we not interpret the recent surge of interest in the terse, image-rich language of traditional poetry as one embodiment of that yearning? From this perspective of social psychology, it does seem clear that somewhere behind the quiet 'boom' of tanka and haiku there is a sense of wariness, of antipathy towards the 'emptiness of affluence', a pathological phenomenon of alienation, which perhaps an information society is bound in time to generate.

It is in this context that the *shortness* of Japanese poetry becomes especially significant. That distinctive brevity of form, shared by both

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tanka and haiku, inevitably requires of the poet the employment of techniques of omission and suggestion. A case in point: the following poem by Kyoshi Takahama,<sup>5</sup> one of the most famous of modern Japanese haiku poets:

*Kare ichigo ware ichigo aki fukami kamo*

He says a word,

I say a word -

The autumn deepens.

The author of this poem does not say where 'he' and 'I' are. There is no guessing how old they are, whether they are indoors or outdoors, standing or sitting, facing each other or looking in different directions, or what kind of relationship they have. With all background information omitted, all we know is that 'he' utters a word and the poet does likewise. We do not even know what the words were. All we can glean is that when the brief exchange took place the atmosphere seemed to change, giving rise to a feeling or a recognition that the season had advanced somewhat. All that matters in the vast space between heaven and earth, as autumn moves steadily towards winter, is that the two men are together, feeling no necessity for further words. Their rapport nevertheless evokes a sense of the eternal flow of time. To be capable of communicating with such brevity must mean they are very close friends. Their silence reveals more eloquently than anything else the closeness of their relationship.

This poem by Kyoshi illustrates the quality of ultimate abbreviation possible in the Japanese language. The poetic technique of suggestion has been pushed to its limit. Abbreviation and suggestion - the twin sources of vitality for the classical Japanese verse-forms. When readers realize that the tacit mutual understanding between the two men in the poem also exists between the verse and its readers, they find themselves irresistibly attracted by the mysterious charm of haiku, a form of poetry so brief that one can recite a Japanese one in a single breath. The secret of haiku's fascination lies in the way it makes it possible for a person to share a sentiment with others through the subtlest suggestion. The fact that one can establish rapport with anonymous readers through the suggestive power of a limited number of words is not only a source of confidence for those who write haiku, it also brings them the greatest joy.

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As an antidote to the hollow feeling that assaults us in this glib and garrulous age, haiku provides a diminutive capsule of words capable of generating an immense expanse of silence. Small wonder it has captivated so many Japanese of the 1980s and 90s adrift in the Information Deluge.

Of course, it is not easy to achieve a perfect effect, as Kyoshi did with his 'He says a word' poem. In fact, only a very small number are so successful. The reason, obviously, is because of the very shortness of haiku. Extreme brevity requires abbreviation and suggestiveness, which in turn call for the subtlest technique. Even the most talented haiku poets tend not to produce first-rate haiku until they reach about sixty years of age.

Another important facet of the brevity of haiku is that, inasmuch as suggestiveness is a key technique of haiku, descriptions are never complete. Consider the Kyoshi poem again. It contains not one clear image; it is a poem that hinges on an incomplete statement. By any ordinary measure, those three lines would appear as but a small fragment of verse.

*Niji jishin jikan wa ari to omoi keri*

A rainbow itself

Thinks that

Time exists.<sup>10</sup>

Incompleteness may seem at first the fatal flaw of the haiku form, yet it is a quality that Japanese poetry has cultivated wholeheartedly. Incompleteness leaves a poem open to diverse interpretations: hence, at least potentially, it invites others to join in the world of imagery the particular verse evokes. This line of thinking is linked to one of the most important ideas in the whole history of Japanese poetry: namely, that the profoundest joy and value in writing poems lies not in the individual poet working alone, but in the creation of verses in concert with others, through a repeated 'question-and-answer'-like exchange.

And Japanese poems were exchanged from ancient times, as that most thoughtful and affectionate 'gift of words'. Inasmuch as a poem was a gift, the recipient was expected to respond in kind, creating his or her own verse to send in return. This led to the evolution of linked verse of the *uta-awase*, *renga*, and *renku* types, traditions of joint poem-writing which form the very core of the history of Japanese poetry.<sup>11</sup>

*Renga* and *renku* are created by several poets gathered together, who compose verses by turns to produce a linked verse of a certain length. Probably begun under the influence of Chinese poetry, linked verse subsequently developed into a genre unique to Japan. It has a long history, starting with simple, brief dialogue-style verses in the seventh or eighth century, and evolving to the elegant linked verse of Sogi and others in the late fifteenth century, and later to more complex, elaborate and dynamic works as represented by Basho<sup>12</sup> in the late seventeenth century and Buson in the mid-eighteenth. Even today, many poets are involved in the composition of linked verse.

Creation of linked verse as a joint endeavour was possible because of the open-ended, short verse-forms that were basic to Japanese poetry. Herein lies yet further confirmation of the significance of the shortness of Japanese poetry. The unexpectedly dynamic development that unfolds as short poems are linked one to another, assures the poets the exquisite joy of 'discovery of the other'. Through the joint composition of linked verse, for example, you may discover that a long-time friend is an accomplished poet with interests and inclinations you never suspected. The pleasure obtained by expanding the boundaries of your friendship in this way is very different from the joy you might derive simply by reading his or her poems in printed form.

Over the past ten years or so, I have experimented with this traditional Japanese method, pursued with a somewhat different twist, to create linked verse with Western poets in different places in the United States and Europe. The results have turned out to be extremely meaningful to my career as a poet. On one occasion, I joined a number of English-speaking poets writing linked verse in English in a session lasting several days. In most others, however, competent translators had to be invited to join us. I have learned a great deal from such poetic explorations.

Suppose several poets of different nationalities initially unknown to one another sit down at the same table in a building or garden, and take turns adding verses to a linked verse composition. If such a rare opportunity for joint creative endeavour continues through an entire day, or even for a few days, the friendship among the participating poets will quickly deepen. Verses are added consecutively, as each poet, with sensitivity, interprets and responds to a laugh or an expanse of silence. The activity actually offers a certain



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thrill, for the moment a poem is born within each participant is inevitably witnessed by all the others. At first, the participants may feel bewildered, embarrassed, put-out, or even humiliated, but, as they see the linked verse unfold before them, they invariably feel an indescribable stimulation and excitement, and become themselves deeply engrossed in the joint endeavour. The experience offers the poet both a great productive stimulus and a sense of liberation, which in turn strengthens his confidence in the medium of poetry.

I feel deeply grateful for the linked verse tradition at the core of the history of Japanese poetry, and I am proud to be one of its inheritors. I believe that what once existed in the past, if a tradition worthy of the name, is bound to be reborn in new guise in the present. Japanese poetry is just such a worthy tradition: it survives, flourishing, in our modern lives, a rich asset for today and for the future.

### NOTES

- 1 One of Japan's largest circulation daily newspapers.
- 2 Tanka is the most ancient of Japan's short verse-forms. It is structured to fall into the pleasing pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 sound syllables, 31 in all. While, like haiku, a tanka may depict a moment of awareness in nature, unlike haiku, tanka may also often portray matters of love. 'Modern verse' is *gendaishi*; 'Chinese poems' are *kanshi*.
- 3 See Hirofumi Wada's essay for an expansion of the history of this genre.
- 4 Izumi Shikibu, fl. ca. 1000, trans. Stephen Henry Gill. If uncredited in the footnotes, the translation is courtesy of the *Japan Foundation Newsletter*.
- 5 Tomiko Yamakawa, 1879-1909.
- 6 Machi Tawara, b. 1962, trans. Stephen Henry Gill.
- 7 The patriarchs of the Taoist faith, known respectively as 'Roshi' and 'Soshi' in Japanese. A quote from the former is included near the end of 'In The Autumn Wind', p.161.
- 8 Matsuo Basho, 1644-1694, trans. Nobuyuki Yuasa.
- 9 Kyoshi Takahama, 1874-1959. 'Takahama' is his family name.
- 10 Seiai Abe, 1914-1989.
- 11 'Uta-awase' means literally 'the putting together of verses', 'uta' in this case being the (31 sound symbol) tanka. Originally, in the ninth century, a competitive game in which two tanka were compared and one adjudged the winner, it developed through *tan-renga*, or *tsugi-uta*, (in which one poet would compose the first 17 'syllables' and another poet the last 14) into the full-fledged *renga* of the thirteenth century. See 'Shepherd's Purse', note 8, for further discussion of *renga* and *renku*, and Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper for the later development of *haikai no renga*.
- 12 It is important to remember that, in his lifetime, Basho was renowned primarily

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as a master of *haikai no renga*, the haiku-spirited, 'light' school of linked-verse-making. The composition of *hokku*, the first verse of the chain, was his speciality. The publication of pages of detached *hokku*, together with the use of *hokku* interspersed in his travel sketches, created the concept of independent 'haiku' as we know it today. Basho's art was born of linked-verse-making.

# Fifty Basho Haiku for the Sky

**I**n a ceremony to further commemorate Basho's tercentenary held atop Primrose Hill in North London by the British Haiku Society on 3 December 1994, the following fifty haiku poems by Matsuo Basho were read, one by one, firstly in their original Japanese, by actor, Togo Igawa, and then in English version by their translator, Stephen Gill. The poems had been brushed in ink onto poem cards by the artist, Tokuni Ayzen, and each card once read was then tied to a semi-opaque balloon of an appropriate seasonal colour (viridian for spring poems, cobalt for summer, dull gold for autumn, and deep aubergine for winter ones) just filled from a tank with helium, knotted, and immediately released . . . to rise from the Hill into a stiff westerly airstream.

Once the balloon-borne card was a suitable distance away, the next haiku was read. Although the ceremony was temporarily halted after the first ten balloons because of a sudden downpour, with its clearing, it resumed in an atmosphere of silence, with just a few now present, and maintained a dignified pace of one verse (one balloon) per minute until the final (cobalt) balloon disappeared up into the void with a tiny *suzu* (bell) attached to the string bearing the last haiku card: *Hiya-hiya to kabe o fumaete hirune kana*. The assembled listened until the tiny tinkle was no longer audible; watched until the gently rocking balloon was no longer discernible in the luminous midday winter sky.

*Yagate shinu keshiki wa miezu semi no koe*

In the voice of the cicada,  
Absolutely no hint  
That it will finally, certainly  
Expire.

(1. cobalt)

FIFTY BASHO HAIKU FOR THE SKY

*Umi kurete kamo no koe honoka ni shiroshi*  
From off the dark ocean,  
The cry of a wild duck  
Comes flying to my ears ...  
Faintly white.

(2. aubergine)

*Mono ieba kuchibiru samushi aki no kaze*  
The moment you open  
Your mouth to speak  
The autumn breeze stirs,  
And chills your lips.

(3. gold, trans. N. Yuasa)

*Kare-eda ni karasu no tomari keru aki no kure*  
To the leafless branches  
Of a nearby tree ...  
A crow has come to perch -  
This autumn dusk!

(4. gold)

*Nozarashi o kokoro ni kaze no shimu mi kana*  
Before my eyes,  
The image of a weather-exposed skeleton:  
Right through my very body,  
A cold wind blows ...

(5. gold)

*Inoshishi mo tomo ni fukaruru nowaki kana*  
Even wild boars  
Are swept up  
And blown along with it -  
The autumn gale.

(6. gold)

*Takotsubo ya hakanaki yume o natsu no tsuki*  
Octopus traps  
Down there in the ocean:  
Them, and all, one fleeting dream ...  
Under the summer moon.

(7. cobalt)



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*Meigetsu ya chigotachi narabu do-no-en*

The full moon of autumn -  
And, arranged before it  
Along the temple verandah,  
Children in a line.

(8. gold)

*Mikazuki ya chi wa oboro naru soba-batake*

The crescent moon  
Riding above  
The hazy earth  
And its buckwheat fields . . .

(9. gold)

*Kiri-shigure Fuji o minu hi zo omoshiroki*

Cold misty rain  
Hides from me Mt. Fuji -  
Yet, in such a day, finding joy:  
The joy of quiet beauty.

(10. gold)

*Uguisu ya mochi ni fun suru en-no-saki*

The bush-warbler comes  
To the verandah-edge . . .  
And leaves behind  
Droppings on the rice-cakes!

(11. virdian)

*Uguisu ya yanagi no ushiro yabu no mae*

There it goes -  
The bush-warbler:  
Behind the willow, . . .  
In front of the bush . . .

(12. virdian)

*Michi no be no mukuge wa uma ni kuware keru*

Beside the track,  
A rose of Sharon flowering:<sup>1</sup>  
Until, that is,  
Devoured by the horse!

(13. gold)

FIFTY BASHO HAIKU FOR THE SKY

*Basho nowaki shite tarai ni ame o kiku yo kana*

Banana palm  
In the autumn gale -  
Tonight, I listen to the dripping  
Of rain into a basin.

(14. gold)

*Horo-horo to yamabuki chiru ka taki no oto*

Petals of the yellow kerria,  
Do they flutter down  
At the sound  
Of the cascade?

(15. vindian)

*Aka-aka to hi wa tsurenaku mo aki no kaze*

Still glaring mercilessly,  
The bright red sun -  
And yet, in the breeze, a hint  
Of approaching autumn.

(16. gold)

*Hamaguri no futami ni wakare yuku aki zo*

As clamshells fall apart  
Now autumn's here,  
So too am I  
To take my leave of you.

(17. gold)

*Furuike ya kawazu tobi-komu mizu no oto*

A frog jump  
Amplifies  
The pond's antiquity  
With its water sound.

(18. vindian)

*Nami no ma ya kogai no majiri hagi no chiri*

With each breaking wave,  
A wash of little shells . . .  
And tiny pink petals  
Of autumn bush-clover.

(19. gold)

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*Araumi ya Sado ni yokotau Ama-no-gawa*

The rough sea – ah!  
And, far beyond, the silhouette of Sado Island:  
The span between,  
Bridged by the Milky Way ...

(20. gold)

*Meigetsu ya mon ni sashi-kuru shio-gashira*

Bright harvest moon –  
A great tide pushing  
The crests of silver wavelets ...  
Up to my cottage gate.

(21. gold)

*Tabine shite waga ku o shire ya aki no kaze*

Set off on a journey –  
And then, one night,  
Take out my poems and understand ...  
The autumn wind!

(22. gold)

*Kakitsubata kataru mo tabi no hitotsu kana*

To talk casually  
About an iris flower  
Is one of the pleasures  
Of the wandering journey.

(23. cobalt, trans. N. Yuasa)

*Haru no yo wa sakura ni akete shimai keri*

The spring night  
Being dissolved  
At firstlight ...  
Into cherry blossom.

(24. viridian)

*Arigata ya yuki o kaorasu Minami-dani*

Blessed indeed  
Is this South Valley,  
Where the gentle wind breathes  
The faint aroma of snow.

(25. cobalt, trans. N. Yuasa)

FIFTY BASHO HAIKU FOR THE SKY

*Yoku mireba nazuna hana saku kakine kana*  
Taking a close look -  
In tiny white clusters,  
Flowers of shepherd's purse  
At the foot of the hedge.

(26. viridian)

*Samidare o atsumete hayashi Mogami-gawa*  
Gathering together  
All the rains of June -  
How swiftly flows  
The Mogami River!

(27. cobalt)

*Matsutake ya shiranu ko-no-ha no hebari-tsuku*  
Stuck to  
The armillaria mushroom,<sup>2</sup>  
The leaf  
Of an unknown tree.

(28. gold)

*Iza yukan yukimi ni korobu tokoro made*  
Come on then, my friends,  
Let's be off a snow-viewing -  
Till we slip . . .  
And roll right over!

(29. aubergine)

*Uma o sae nagamuru yuki no ashita kana*  
A snowy morning -  
When even a passing horse  
Has become  
Something to gaze on.

(30. aubergine)

*Hatsuyuki ya suisen no ha no tawamu made*  
The first snow -  
Just enough  
To bend  
The narcissus leaves.

(31. aubergine)



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*Tabibito to waga na yobaren hatsu-shigure*

Oh, to be called  
'A wanderer'  
Amongst the first  
Cold autumn showers!

(32. gold)

*Tabibito no kokoro nimo niyo shii no hana*

Go on your way  
With the traveller's mind -  
Discreet as the flowers  
Of the chinquapin oak.<sup>3</sup>

(33. cobalt)

*Hakkuken sora de ame furu yanagi kana*

From a cloud base  
Only fifty feet above,  
Rain streaming down  
On the spring willow ...

(34. viridian)

*Momotose no keshiki o niwa no ochiba kana*

The beautiful sad old feeling  
Of a hundred years ago  
In the brown fallen leaves  
Of a winter garden.

(35. aubergine)

*Kyo made wa mada naka-zora ya yuki no kumo*

Still only halfway  
To the capital,  
And already ...  
Snow clouds.

(36. aubergine)

*Ta ichimai uete tachi-saru yanagi kana*

Having watched  
One paddy's worth  
Of rice-planting,  
Leaving the willow's shade.

(37. cobalt)

FIFTY BASHO HAIKU FOR THE SKY

*Kutabirete yado karu koro ya fuji no hana*

Arriving  
Dog tired  
At tonight's inn -  
Wisteria flowers!

(38. viridian)

*Tabi ni yande yume wa karenno o kake-meguru*

Fallen ill on a journey,  
My dreams wander on . . .  
Round and round  
A withered moor.

(39. aubergine)

*Hakone koso hito mo aru-rashi kesa no yuki*

It seems as if  
There are people who must cross  
The Pass of Hakone  
Even this morning of snow.

(40. aubergine)

*Kusa-makura inu mo shigururu ka yoru no koe*

Journey's rough night -  
From my pillow I hear  
The howling of a dog  
Caught in the winter shower.

(41. aubergine)

*Yoshino nite sakura misho zo hinokigasa*

I shall show you  
The cherry blossoms  
Of Mt. Yoshino,  
Dear cypress hat!

(42. viridian)

*Ara toto aoba wakaba no hi no hikari*

A dazzling magnificence -  
The hillside aflame  
With young leaves, green leaves  
In the light of the sun.

(43. cobalt)

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*Natsuyama ni ashida o ogamu kadode kana*

At the wooden clogs  
Of the ascetic school founder,  
Prayer for a safe journey  
In the mountain forests of summer.

(44. cobalt)

*Toshi kurenu kasa kite waraji haki nagara*

End of another year  
Finds me  
Still wearing my travel hat,  
My walking sandals.

(45. aubergine)

*Kiri no ki ni uzura naku-naru hei no uchi*

At the paulownia tree,<sup>4</sup>  
The chirping of quails  
Coming from behind  
A garden wall.

(46. gold)

*Te o uteba kodama ni akuru natsu no tsuki*

Clapping hands together  
In prayer at dawn -  
As the echo subsides,  
The summer moon fading.

(47. cobalt)

*Kagero no waga kata ni tatsu kamiko kana*

Even as I wear it,  
A shimmer of warm spring air  
Rises off the shoulders  
Of my winter robe.

(48. viridian)

*Futari mishi yuki wa kotoshi mo furikeru ka*

I wonder if  
It has once again fallen -  
The snow that you and I  
Saw on our journey last year?

(49. aubergine)

## FIFTY BASHO HAIKU FOR THE SKY

*Hiya-hiya to kabe o fumaete hirune kana*

Pressing my feet  
Against the cool wall:  
This blissful nap  
In the heat of summer.

(50. cobalt)

### NOTES

- 1 The rose of Sharon is a Eurasian species of St. John's Wort, with large yellow flowers.
- 2 The armillaria variety, *matsutake*, is prized above all others for its delicate flavour.
- 3 The chinquapin oak is an evergreen variety.
- 4 The paulownia tree produces purple flowers around May, but as the flowers are not specifically mentioned and the tree itself is not a special season-word, the quails, which to a Japanese mind evoke autumn, here set the time of year.



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# In the Autumn Wind

BASHO TERCENTENARY  
OFFA'S DYKE WALK:  
A HAIBUN TRAVEL  
JOURNAL

EDITED BY STEPHEN HENRY GILL  
& FRED SCHOFIELD



## FOREWORD

*Tabine shite waga ku o shire ya aki no kaze*  
Set off on a journey -  
and then, one night  
take out my poems and understand ...  
the autumn wind

Basho<sup>1</sup>

**M**atsuo Basho (1644-94) was a poet of the road. His greatest literary works, 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North', 'The Records of a Travel-worn Satchel' and 'The Records of a Weather-exposed Skeleton'<sup>2</sup> were poetic accounts of his journeys, largely made on foot. As one of the tercentenary events organized by the British Haiku Society, its members were offered a five-day hike through the autumn colours of the Welsh Borders, with a rendezvous opportunity each day so that poets could come and go as fitted their needs.

Offa II, the Anglo-Saxon King of Mercia (757-796), had the great frontier earthwork of 'The Dyke' built in order to defend his territory against British (i.e. Welsh) raiders from the West. In places it is still today a formidable structure, a great wave some twenty or more feet in height from crest of bank to trough of ditch, that runs for much of the one hundred and seventy-seven miles between Chepstow and Prestatyn, providing the walker with a trail, generally away from the roads, through areas rich in historical interest.



We were to begin at the southern end of the long distance footpath, in the castle town of Chepstow, beyond which the River Wye flows into the Bristol Channel. To travel northwards through the hills would mean easier walking, with autumn sun and wind largely at our backs. In all, twelve people walked at least one of the five stages, with a thirteenth hosting us for the final workshop at the end of our trail in Knighton. We were to trek an average of over sixteen miles per day, rising early to breakfast together in the inn, farm or guesthouse at which we had bedded down the previous night, before heading off into the landscapes of the new day. Composing haiku as we went, and talking of the great master, Basho, we trod the leaves of the Borders in the autumn of 1994. Each evening, after dinner, there would be a forum in which to air and discuss the poems we had drafted that day and an opportunity to discuss 'running repairs' and all things pertaining to the Act of Walking. Many of us were soon to become proverbial 'weather-exposed skeletons'.

Sometime in late October or early November of 1694, Basho wrote his last haiku about his dreams wandering the withered moor.<sup>3</sup> Exactly three hundred years later, there would be a few of us doing just that. We were now as keen to set off as Basho had

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

appeared at the beginning of his 'Travel-worn Satchel' account:

*Tabibito to waga na yobaren hatsu-shigure*

Oh, to be called  
a wanderer -  
amongst the first  
cold autumn showers

Basho<sup>4</sup>



### DAY 1, FRIDAY 28 OCTOBER: CHEPSTOW TO MONMOUTH

Norman Barraclough, Kazuo & Stephen Gill, Martin Lucas, George Marsh, Fred Schofield, Brian Tasker<sup>5</sup>

A half moon hung over three-hundred-year old Cobweb Cottage as the sun, rising over the distant estuary, began to melt away the night's deep frost. From behind the half-closed wicket gate, Josie, the effervescent Irish landlady who had been our hostess for the night, called her instructions after us with such insistence our quiet 'goodbyes' seemed utterly lost. Down through the town, . . . meeting Norman at the ancient Town Gate, where traders were once forced to pay their feudal dues before entering the market with their goods, . . . along to the bridge by the great Caen stone Castle guarding the first incised meander of the Wye. We crossed into England on a still, autumn morning under a high blue sky.



Having walked the first few miles northwards, gaining elevation on the English bank, our spirits were gladdened when we came across a flagon of ice-cold water and some plastic cups left on a garden wall by a householder. A note invited passing walkers to help themselves.

There, or thereabouts: the first hint of an autumn breeze . . .

Rustle of blown leaves  
scattering -  
crinkle of map  
being unfolded

NB

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

Unpractised as we were in mapreading, and with so little help from signs along the way, we were fortunate that morning to point our steps largely in the right direction: there was just one minor aberration before Wintour's Leap. Wintour, a Royalist leader, had escaped his Cromwellian pursuers by disappearing over this dramatic cliff, or so the story goes. From a rocky outcrop, as if a group of geomancers, we surveyed far below us the silver-blue Wye, the golds and coppers of the late October woods.

Further along, beyond Dannel Hill, we found ourselves for the first time actually treading along the spine of King Offa's Dyke – here, although overgrown with trees, still an impressive fortification. What labour must have been involved; what authority King Offa must have had! Certainly, Charlemagne had treated him as the sole sovereign of England, and the Pope had even sent a representative to the coronation of his son. The penny, in those days struck in silver, dates from the time of Offa's reign: his title, 'Offa Rex', and perhaps his bust – or that of his queen, Cynethryth – would have been stamped on each coin. (Happening upon some drawings of these at the end of the Walk, we decided to place one of them into our text, obtaining the kind permission of the draughtsman, Mark Richards.) Hereafter, the Dyke would appear always to take up the most commanding positions looking into Wales. We followed its line through Morgan's Wood.

Leaf crackle ...  
caught on holly spines  
morning sun

ML

Anyone concerned about how fast or slow others might walk need not have worried, for it soon felt quite natural to keep pace with different people at different times, as well as to walk alone. This casual fluidity of partnership – now in loose conversation with one another, now alone – was one of the joys of the time we spent together. It was a real pleasure to be able to talk to people with whom one felt to be on good terms, though the relationship had usually been limited to phone calls and letters. And the solitary walking could become a kind of kinetic meditation.

The feel of the chestnut  
I failed to pick up

FS

Or, after Basho:



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Stuck to my toecap  
the leaf of some unknown tree

ML



At Devil's Pulpit – an outcropping limestone viewpoint – we gazed out through the vibrant autumn woods. Suddenly, numerous fallen leaves were picked up and swept along at arms' length in front of us.

We were looking down on the ruins of the twelfth century Cistercian Abbey at Tintern. In the summer of 1798, William Wordsworth had walked up here on his progress along the Wye. Just north of Tintern, he had mused that he was:<sup>6</sup>

... well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul,  
Of all my moral being.

'Nature and the language of the sense': a *haijin* might have said the same, albeit in fewer words. In another place at another time, Thoreau had said:<sup>7</sup> 'A writer is the scribe of all Nature – he is the corn and the grass and the atmosphere writing.' And the British poet, Taliesin – in Wales, almost a legend – put it another way:<sup>8</sup> 'I have been a torrent on the slope, a wave on the shore, ... a drop in a shower of rain.'

An intersection of paths in Caswell Wood caused some anxiety amongst the back-markers. Would those at the front, who had no map, have taken the correct route on along the top of the wood?

Sun slanting  
into promontory woods;  
our shadows, at long intervals  
playing the trunks ...

Tito<sup>9</sup>

Pausing  
in the leaves I hear  
your footsteps

FS

As some emerged from the forest at Madgett Hill, others were just disappearing from view at the bottom of a steep field. Contact was reestablished: no one had gone astray in the woods. We descended into Brockweir for a pub lunch.

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

Midday greeting:  
the horse responds  
with a snort

ML



We were served in a small room in which a pool table took up much of the space. George and Stephen sat at a sunlit table in the yard discussing a play about Basho, which the former had recently been working on.<sup>10</sup> Only a handful of customers apart from ourselves: a quiet, pleasant rest.

From Brockweir, we had a choice of path: the 'high' route over St. Briavel's Common, and the 'low' along the Wye. After the morning's long cliff-top path, the idea of walking beside the river appealed; here it was about fifty yards wide, flowing brown and fast.

Somewhere in this area, we crossed the geological boundary between the Carboniferous and the Devonian – day by day, the underlying rocks would be getting older as we progressed northwards towards Mid Wales. We knew too that the deciduous forest would thin out and in time be replaced by high pasture and heathery moorland, but here, rising quite steeply away on either side of the river, the wooded slopes were aflame with autumnal colour. At the water's edge, while Norman was charmed by the bursting mauve-red berries of a warty spindle, Fred's attention was drawn to a Himalayan balsam plant. He was gently tricked, by Kazue, into discovering how its pods explode when pinched.

A mile down the track  
scent of the seedpod  
still on my fingers

FS

After lingering at the sonorous rapids of Coed-Ithel and the luminous reed plumes opposite Llandogo, we eventually reached Bigsweir Bridge, where we left the river. We climbed north-eastwards into hilly terrain, through which the Dyke snakes its way. Woods again – Quicken Tree and Creeping Hill – autumn leaves in flickering sunlight.



In the late afternoon, we emerged into a high pasture near the lonely

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

outpost of Coxbury Farm. A needed rest, and tea from a flask, in the lea of a hedgerow lining the Dyke.

a glistening turd  
of blue beetle husks  
found on a hilltop

GM

Increasingly conscious of the limited amount of daylight – British Summer Time had ended just a few days before – we knew, as we dropped sharply down at the end of the ridge from Highbury Farm into Lower Redbrook, that there we would have to decide whether to continue on the prescribed Offa's Dyke Path with its perverse, roundabout course to Monmouth, up and over the great slopes of the Kymyn, or whether to take a much easier route along the banks of the Wye to its confluence with the rippling Monnow. Whichever route, we would soon reenter Wales.

The party divided: Brian, Martin, and George taking the low road:

As light fails  
sound of a stream  
entering a river

ML

the four others, the high:

As if you can tell  
by the pitch of the crunch  
what leaf you're treading on -  
an autumn dusk

Tito

After the long ascent past Upper Redbrook along Duffield's Lane, the high roaders reached the summit of the Kymyn, there coming across the curious circular Naval Temple, so many miles from the sea, built, we later learnt, by a dining club just two years after Wordsworth had passed this way. In 1802, Admiral Lord Nelson had had breakfast here. The view was stunning. Looking down on the little market town of Monmouth, with its lights now beginning to twinkle – Monmouth, birthplace of the medieval chronicler, Geoffrey, who had gathered together the precious corpus of Arthurian legends – and out beyond, into the gathering gloom of the Welsh hills: this was a prospect amply rewarding the extra effort put in.

After a day  
deep in the hills  
the sound of traffic

GM

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

That evening, at the eighteenth century Riverside Inn, most of us had cause to be grateful to Kazue for bringing along her deep heat and moxa, which helped soothe our sore bits.



### DAY 2, SATURDAY 29TH OCTOBER: MONMOUTH TO OLDCASTLE

Norman Barracough, Kazue & Stephen Gill, Martin Lucas, Matthew Morden, Diane Robertson, Fred Schofield, Paul Seto, (Brian Tasker)<sup>11</sup>

'Since ancient times, those with a feeling for poetry did not mind carrying satchels on their backs, or putting straw sandals on their feet, or wearing humble hats that barely protected them from the elements. They took delight in disciplining their minds through such hardship and thereby attaining a knowledge of the true nature of things.'

These words of Basho's<sup>12</sup> had been read out at the workshop in the inn the previous evening. Some try to carry more on their backs than others, however, and at breakfast, it was obvious that Brian required a day of rest. Deciding not to quit, he would move on to Oldcastle by road and rail in order to be ready for the third day's walk.

The town asleep  
in misty rain;  
rooks  
on the cattle-pen rails

Tito

A warm, fine rain as we left the inn and passed the fortified gatehouse over the Monnow. We walked westwards, away from the waters of the Wye, which we would not see again for two whole days, or another thirty-five miles.

At Rosegarth  
dogs bark, chickens shelter  
under trees

MM

After a mile or so, we turned into the first of many muddy fields.



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Half way across, the path – such as it was – came to a halt, and our boots soon tripled in weight with the red earth that clung to them.

As we climbed up through King's Wood into a mist, leaves of all shapes and sizes in the acid colours of autumn lay in a carpet at our feet, all the brighter for their saturation in the morning's rain.

Nearing the site of Grace-Dieu Abbey:

In the note of the robin  
its gift to us:  
the knowledge of  
the end of the rain

Tito

During the course of the day, spent entirely in Wales and mostly following the vale of the diminutive Trothy, our party of eight walkers divided into just about every possible permutation, including one time when we were strung out singly down the length of a field. Here, suddenly, two horses which had seemed friendly began to weave between us in an agitated canter. We watched them, amazed, as they raced on before us to the stile. There they waited. When Fred arrived and put his hand out to pat the black stallion, it reared aggressively. "Over the fence," came Stephen's voice, unruffled but insistent. We wasted no more time.

It turned out that Stephen had taken a swipe at one horse as it attempted to eat a piece of plastic waterproofing which flapped over his rucksack. Perhaps, as some sort of revenge, as Paul put it, 'the horses had decided we were good sport to chase around the paddock'.



Less dramatic events also constantly reminded us we were passing through varied farmland.

Tractor tracks  
through the fresh kale -  
a startled skylark

MM

This was good cattle country: one magnificent longhorn bull, with his cows gathered close about, gazed attentively from behind a one-strand fence as we moved by.

In the orchard  
the apples have been picked -  
one ladder remains

MM

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

Later, passing farm buildings, the rich odour of a cattle shed asserted itself. Someone inside was listening to a pop radio station. Further on, sheep in neat ranks slowly advanced through a field. They cropped, moved a few paces, cropped again: the uniformity broken only by the occasional lame animal.

To walk with eyes closed  
drifting -  
crows, a distant aircraft

FS

A rest was taken in the porch of a little church rejoicing in the curious Welsh name, Llanfihangel Ystern-Llewern. Matt relates its origin: "Llanfihangel" indicates the church of St Michael; "Ystern-Llewern" means the burning of the will o' the wisp. The reference to this phenomenon is based on a tradition dating back to the sixth century. While journeying in the vicinity, Ynyr, King of Gwent, was overtaken by darkness and followed a light which he imagined would take him to shelter. Instead, the incandescent will o' the wisp led him to a bog, from which he extricated himself only with difficulty. In thanksgiving for his deliverance, he dedicated, for the erection of a church, the land on which he had eventually found safe footing. He named it "St Michael the Archangel and the Burning of the Will o' the Wisp".

There were moments that day when safe footing was hard to come by:

Mud-sliding  
beneath spruce branches  
tipped with rain

ML

A late lunch during a heavy shower at The Hostry in Llantilio Crossenny; the black-bearded landlord, a prickly fellow and owner of a donkey-sized Irish wolfhound. Our boots were not permitted to be dried by the hearth, but his hound drooled, nonetheless, all over the dark slate floor.

It was a relief to enjoy the mood of after-rain again. The path climbed on past Tre-Adam. We dragged our feet to the crest of the next hill, crowned with the ruins of White Castle: a lush green space hemmed in on three sides by massive stone walls and encircled by a deep moat. In the twelfth century, when the castle was built, its walls had been covered with a white plaster, thus giving rise to its name. High above the moat, we crossed a long drawbridge and entered the ruin.

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Through arrow slits  
in castle walls  
colours of autumn

ML

Though some stretches of wall were safe to walk on, there were signs of ongoing repair work; equipment had been left in place.

New platform timber  
high on the castle ruins -  
rain coming on

NB

The downpour emerged from the Welsh hills as a white wall moving rapidly towards us on a strengthening breeze. Those hills, into which we were now gazing, were surprisingly close at hand. Both the force and the icy coldness of the shower that smashed into us a moment later helped to concentrate our minds. As the walk progressed we were becoming increasingly aware of our own frailty in the face of nature's grand scale. Truly we were beginning to feel like travellers on Basho's road of cold autumn showers.



The great pyramid-shaped fell of Skirrid Fawr, towards which we had walked for much of the day, all of a sudden was looming close in a changed form. We were soon to see where the wizard, Jack O' Kent, had landed after his five-mile jump from the Sugar Loaf Mountain beyond Abergavenny. His heel mark was there stamped into the summit on its northern face, a great cleft that others say was formed by an earthquake at the Crucifixion. Until the early nineteenth century, people would take a little soil from this hollow to sprinkle on coffins or to scatter on farmland, for they considered it brought good luck.

Cagle Street, . . . over the Full Brook, . . . Llangattock Lingoed with its Hunter's Moon Inn, . . . and on over yet another small ridge to Llanerch Farm, before dipping down into the Valley of the Honddu with its magnificent backdrop: the towering treeless heights of the Black Mountains.

A lone potato  
outside the kitchen door -  
sounds of a chainsaw

MM

The day's walking ended in Pandy for those who accepted the

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

kind offer Mrs Olive Probert had made in her letter of the previous week: she could drive down from Oldcastle, two further miles to the northwest, and ferry the weary back up the hillside to the huge, ancient farmhouse where we were to spend the night. The two Yorkshiremen, Stephen and Fred, intrepid as ever and 'purists' to the core, struck out on foot towards Treveddw and the Pentwyn Iron Age Fort. Their plan was to follow the Offa's Dyke Path as far as Upper Pentwyn, and then to 'cross-country' past Upper Clydd and Nantymair. The path, however, seemed eventually to lead them up a mountainside going in the wrong direction, precipitating a sharp and undignified descent a mile or so further along the valley. It was another battle against failing light!

It soon became apparent that the 'cross-country' path had either eluded them or was now so overgrown with the past summer's bracken as to have quite lost its identity. Rearing up in all directions to well beyond head height, the jungle of yellowing fern caused the two walkers to lurch and stagger uncertainly about, every now and then a trick of twilight encouraging them to head for a 'clearing', only to find that they never arrived. Soaked with sweat, and with dew absorbed from a too intimate contact with the wet foliage – and, in Stephen's case, with a modicum of blood as well – eventually they emerged onto a recognizable path. When Fred began to curse himself for having left his torch behind, Stephen produced one from his pocket, but it let out about as much light as a pin-hole camera lets in.

A farm loomed out of the night, dogs barking ferociously; a genial farmer stood there in the yard. They could barely make out his face as he confirmed their direction, adding that they were now only ten minutes' tramp away from Oldcastle Farm. "You'll be there before dark," came his disembodied voice as they squelched away across the pitch-black field . . .



Norman spent the night at a different farm close to Pandy, having booked for the walk at the last minute. His hosts now have only one pig and some chickens, but they run the village Post Office as well. 'I was told that walkers complain there are eighty-seven stiles between Monmouth and Pandy,' relates Norman, 'though there was uncertainty as to whether the double ones counted as two.'



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Time for a few more  
rain-drenched blackberries –  
the queue at the stile

Tito

'I learned something of the difficulty of counting sheep on the open hillside for subsidy payments. Also, I was shown a cavernous chimney where a pig's carcass would be secreted in wartime when the inspector called. Each farm was supposed to keep only one for its own purposes.'

After a mountainous dinner of trout and swede at the great dining table of Oldcastle Farm, the rest of the party – now reunited not only with Fred and Stephen, but with Brian, too – held a haiku-cum-foot-patching workshop, before retiring along the draughty, creaking landing to their various beds.

All night icy gales  
tearing at the white windows –  
the Black Hills wait

PS



### DAY 3, SUNDAY 30TH OCTOBER: OLDCASTLE TO HAY-ON-WYE

Kazuo & Stephen Gill, Martin Lucas, Diane Robertson, Paul Seto, Brian Tasker

Having parted company outside the farmhouse, Fred was now approaching Pandey to rendezvous with Norman and then walk with him to the train in Abergavenny. He looked up at the distant hillside and saw a blurred clump of figures nearing the top:

The size of my thumbnail  
friends disappear  
around the hill

FS

The rest of us, including Brian, who, in spite of a damaged back, had declared himself now 'ready for the Ridge', would climb to over 2,300 feet before dropping down into Hay at the end of the Walk's longest day, a day of wilderness straddling the mountain-top border between England and Wales. Not a single settlement would be

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passed until virtually the last mile; no food would be found, and no drinking water.

Settling Mrs Probert's sandwiches into our satchels and bags, we were told to head for a prominent ash tree at the foot of the hill; then, to move up a series of tortuous sheep tracks to 'the third outcrop of rock' – so clear from afar, so invisible once up there – and thence to the top of Hatterall Ridge.

Near the top of the steep initial climb, two ravens were revelling in the turbulence of the air as it streamed over the brow. Once on top, we found an unprotected bleak world of short, springy turf strewn with rocks, and vast acres of autumn-darkened heather. The vistas down into the distant golden larch forests of the upper Honddu Valley to the west were exhilarating. To the east, a tapestry of green fields and bronzed hedgerows spread out as far as the eye could see . . . Longtown, and the Olchon and Upper Monnow Valleys running parallel to the Black Mountain ridge we were now to tread, or rather cling to, for most of the rest of the day.

Toppled by wind  
I clutch the mountain heather  
laughing helplessly

DR

Of this haiku Paul recalls: 'This was written at the beginning of the ridge, when the gales were playful and still an interesting change.' That is to say, the interest waned: and it did not take long!



To have to take one step to the side for every two you take forward quite logically turns an eighteen-mile 'bustle' into a twenty-seven mile 'wrestle'. So, mile after mile, we fought against the wind as it played havoc with hats and straps and packs. Brian's glasses were blown off, and Paul soon lost his wide-brim felt to the Upper Olchon, though not before heroic antics on the edge. There were a couple of narrow saddles we passed where the wind was too strong to stand, and we had consequently to scramble along on all fours.

Basho said: 'Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one – when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there.'<sup>13</sup> Above two thousand feet in the Black Mountains on a day of gales you become one with the wind, certainly, but rather than you

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

delving deep into it, it seems all the time to be delving deep into you.

Purged by the wind  
on an autumn moor:  
losing the appetite  
for words

Tito

We looked down to the twelfth century Augustinian Abbey at Llanthony, where, with more than a jot of poetic licence, Giraldus Cambrensis had described the valley as being 'about an arrowshot broad, encircled on all sides by lofty mountains', the abbey having apparently been built 'on the very spot where the humble chapel of David had formerly stood, decorated only with moss and ivy'.<sup>14</sup> The region of the Black Mountains was evocatively scattered with the shrines of Dark Age Saints – St Clydog, St Benno, St Cadoc, . . . and St Issui, who, had he been a Japanese, would have no doubt written his name with the characters meaning 'One Water' (*Issui*): a hermit's or a *haijin*'s name, indeed.<sup>15</sup> 'A situation truly calculated for religion', Giraldus goes on. 'The rains are frequent, the winds boisterous. A place truly fitted for contemplation.'

Giraldus also tells us something about the wildlife in these parts: 'The mountains are full of herds and horses, the woods well-stored with swine and goats.' The horses are still there, roaming freely across the fell-tops: skewbald, liver, and white. For a couple of minutes, we even watched a foal at close quarters, until the herd got restless and galloped off with it in tow.

Thoughts now few  
and far between –  
the whinny of the wild horse  
extinguished by the gale

Tito

Wolves roamed the valley forests in Giraldus' time, and wild boar were still to be found in Shakespeare's (and in Basho's) day:

*Inoshishi mo tomo ni fukanuru nowaki kana*  
Even wild boars  
are swept up  
and blown along with it –  
the autumn storm

Basho<sup>1</sup>

Although Basho never came to Britain, had he done so, he might well have written this haiku one day in the Black Mountains in the autumn of 1694!

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

Where the thin peaty earth had been exposed to the elements by footpath erosion, landslide, or lightning strike, our way was blocked by a black quagmire, in places 'formalized' into broad pools with rock islands peeking out – these, according to Paul, 'looking for all the world like miniature Zen gardens'. It was at a large cairn not far from one of these, as further word of rain and ice was borne to us on the gale, that Brian made it known he was leaving the Offa's Dyke Path for the distant shelter of Llanthony and Capel-y-ffin:

My companions along the ridge  
beaten back by the wind –  
I turn  
with my words of leaving  
to the valley below

BT



So the rest of us trekked on along the interminable Hatterrall Ridge, as first the cloud – disconcerting, but atmospheric – and then the rain ... came down. In the treeless, bushless moonscape we were now treading, it proved difficult to drink from our water bottles and even harder to eat: the sandwiches tended to be ripped from one's quickly-numbing hands before one could cram each triangle safely into the mouth. Orientation was all-important: miscalculate the angle at which you were slumped in the heather, and say goodbye to your lunch. We all found out sooner or later that having a pee required an even more astute sense of planning and a good grasp of basic physics.

The wind was always on our left side as we walked; Hay-on-Wye was always straight ahead. The difficulty of reading a map in a gale, and the fact that all recognizable landmarks had already been engulfed in the lowered cloudbase, meant that we no longer had much of an idea of how far along the great hogsback ridge we were. Nevertheless, there were some things to be grateful for: the dry and comfortable properties of heather, the intermittent quality of the rain, the undaunted spirits of the remaining five.

It was as if we had sunk our heads too deeply into the cloud as we came over the highest point in the whole of Offa's Path and descended towards the outcropping rock of Llech y Lladron, for we now had heavy rain to contend with.

'To get the value of a storm, we must be a long time and travel far



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in it, so that it may fairly penetrate our skin and we be as it were turned inside out to it, and there be no part of us but is wet and weatherbeaten.' Thoreau's words.<sup>16</sup>



The end of the Ridge, the end of the fog, and the end of the peat hags – all came suddenly at Pen y Beacon. But what should have been a fantastic view was mostly hidden beyond the now quite merciless rain. We descended sharply north-westwards towards a stone circle we never actually found, but which was marked as being near the road at the foot of Hay Bluff. Some ran, others stumbled down. Hay was now a mere four miles away.

Once off the ridgeface  
the wind relents -  
sound of a brook  
through yellow hazel

Tito

Coming down a track towards Dan-y-fforest Farm, we were engaged in conversation by a man who had actually heard of Basho! Leaning against the dripping-wet stone wall in front of his cottage, we talked about his cats and of the joys of long-distance walking in the wind and rain. A view opened out ahead over the Wye Valley, the slate roofs of Hay interspersed between the autumn trees, chimney-smoke transmuting into a silvery, rainy dusk.

My tired feet  
push an acorn  
into soft mud

ML

At the timber-framed Seven Stars Inn, there were friends, dry rooms, and hot-water baths. Brian had managed to cadge a lift with a coach-load of journalists heading over the pass to Hay, but his poor back was now in worse shape than it had been two days ago on arrival in Monmouth.

David Peel, meanwhile, had arrived in Hay on Saturday, before we had even reached Oldcastle. As the rest of us dried off, he told us how he had browsed the bookshops, collecting several volumes – replacing most when he remembered the road ahead. The previous evening he had observed the excited preparations for the Great Hay Fire Festival:

'In the narrow criss-cross streets, ... locals dressed in strange

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costumes were selling long red candles on sticks, and Hallowe'en pumpkins were being set up in windows, or in doorways beside coaled braziers . . . I followed the main current of candle-torches to where a large crowd was huddled against the rain in front of Hay Castle. A large white sheet had been extended before the castle walls, and as we watched, a bewildering Pagan-Christian mix of masque and shadow-play began amid coloured flares, much smoke and fireworks. Finally, a Grand Procession meandered down to the River Wye for a spectacular – if wet – fiery finale. That night, at the Seven Stars, . . . I slept fitfully, dreaming of some mythic child being born into a perilous world.'

Rockets burst skywards  
a child's candle sputters –  
rain on an upturned face

Bamboo Shoot<sup>17</sup>

David concludes his story:

'By Sunday nightfall, the main walking party had limped into Hay from their ordeal on the Black Mountains. After resting, and just as we were about to head into town for food, Edward Lade arrived from Kent. That evening, plates clattered and glasses brimmed as we exchanged our poems and experiences.'



### DAY 4, MONDAY 31 OCTOBER: HAY-ON-WYE TO KINGTON

Kazue & Stephen Gill, Edward Lade, David Peel

Only four were to tread out on the trail on the fourth morning. Brian, who had intended to go all the way to Knighton, had realized he must now retire. David's pack looked suspiciously heavy, especially for another suspect back. He had told us the previous evening that he was not at all sure he would manage to complete the walk: "I'll see how it goes." Someone had lifted his pack to see how that would go. It was incredibly heavy.

Sad to bid so many farewell, we left, once more in inclement weather.

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Last day of October -  
the walking party  
reduced to half . . .  
rain comes and goes

Tito

Alongside the Wye, now brown and swirling, . . . looking back to the Castle built one night by the giantess, Mol Walbee. Near Bettws Dingle, we climbed away from the river past some curious grazed and stunted oaks – an old wood pasture. A little further on, during Kazue's quest for edible mushrooms beneath the birch-leaf-spangled ferns, we found instead what Edward called 'berries to sparkle the buds'.

Glimpses of scarp  
through wheeling shafts:  
the damp sun  
holds our hopes

EL

Little by little, we found some momentum, and developed a good stride. The weather improved. David's pack, although carried at a somewhat rakish angle, was moving easily across the countryside. We did not know why, but there was already that morning a feeling of magic in the air. Is it not true that the most unpromising beginnings often herald the most rewarding journeys; the most threatening prospects, the greatest discoveries? This was just such a hike.

Losing the way  
at the top of a long incline -  
only the sighing of firs

Tito

A rest at the foot of an old white roadsign, pointing back down the lane, with its trickling water, past Bettws Chapel (where the diarist, Francis Kilvert, used to preach) to Rhydspence and its old inn.<sup>18</sup> A chill breeze soon had us on our feet again.

Five abreast  
down a country road -  
four in step  
and our autumn rivulet . . .

Tito

On the descent to the Arrow at the hamlet of Newchurch, the sun was no longer silver but a dazzling gold. Stephen entered the porch of a farmhouse and knocked at the door to ask for water. It was still a long haul to Gladestry, where we had visions of lunch. A dog appeared from around the back of the house, greeting us somewhat ambivalently – a cautious sniff and a lowered tail. It soon

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

became obvious that no one was at home and that the dog was going to bark, but Edward, murmuring something about waterpipes, was already prying into a brick shed nearby. Inside, there was water: we helped ourselves at the juddering tap.



As we climbed steeply up to the blissful moorland turf of Disgwylfa Hill, a purple cloud, looking somehow as if it might be carrying snow, came across from the direction of Colva in the northwest. Up ahead, the distant heights of Radnor Forest were progressively curtained off from view by this fast-approaching storm. Suddenly, there was a sound of drumming in the copses around Hill Farm, then five confluent seconds of rushing wind and shimmering sun, . . . and it was upon us. Every man for himself! Two or three of us began to run down the hill towards the farm, but it was already much too late. A grand 'stair-rod' rain: we all got drenched. Yet what a wonderful drenching! First, a feeling of surrender; then, a sort of gratitude. Perhaps, dear Munefusa, it was indeed this sort of autumn shower we had come for after all.<sup>19</sup>

We were not to travel long with it, however, for it passed just as quickly as it had come. Another burst of sun as the rain continued to fall. At the near edge of the moor, a birch in golden leaf was spotlighted from the west; the backdrop, profoundly black. A high arc of rainbow now stood between us and that blazing wind-tossed tree. We walked on towards it, spellbound.

Always in front of us,  
never quite reaching the rainbow –  
field after field      Bamboo Shoot

A halt for drying-off in a hay barn at Hill Farm. An old man in a battered tweed jacket and slightly shrunk cloth cap came along the track and noticed us propped up against the straw. Some comments were passed about the plight of farmers in an age of European quotas, and of youngsters more interested in the town.

*Kiso no tochi ukiyo no hito no miyage kana*

Horse chestnuts  
picked up on the Kiso Road –  
for my friends in the city  
a good souvenir

Basho<sup>1</sup>



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

Basho's chestnuts were our autumn leaves: a few of the most colourful were collected and dried along the trail.



The Royal Oak in Gladestry,<sup>20</sup> a pocket-sized pub for a pocket-sized village. Apart from one fellow who sat for a while at the bar, we had the place to ourselves: a fireside table, a scrupulously polished black flagstone floor, homemade soup, and a very personal service from the rotund publican, who later came to the door to see us off in the direction of Hergest Ridge. We heard the bolts slide shut as we walked away, the glow of a good lunch-stop on our cheeks and inside our nicely dried boots.

Working off a slope –  
men crafting shelter  
from new oak  
in the old style

A steep lane, a house or two, a few copses of trees, . . . and out onto the broad sweep of Cefn Hergest – three miles of firm grassy moorland pocked with anthills, molehills, rabbit-holes, and topped with a flattened cairn of lichen-covered rocks. Somewhere up here, we crossed out of Wales and back into England. The broad path, lined in places with copper-coloured bracken, bore us on and up towards a wide, three-levelled sky – nimbus-grey rags drifting before high white cirrus against a stratospheric blue above.

The saying goes that if the Whet Stone hears a cock crow, it goes down to the brook to drink. We did not sight this great boulder as we strode on across the sunny moor, so it might just have been that it was slaking its thirst elsewhere. Neither did we pick out, in all the bird's-eye view of landscape, the roof of Hergest Court, which in the late Middle Ages had been the repository for the Red Book of Hergest, that treasure-trove of Welsh chivalric verse, and prime source for the Mabinogion legends.<sup>21</sup> The great house was somewhere down in the Vale of the Arrow below us to our right.

Another important house lay directly ahead on Offa's route: Hergest Croft. Its gardens had been planted with trees and shrubs brought back from China early this century, and its maples and birches had been given the distinction of the title 'National

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

Collections'. Open to the public May to October, it was now nearing 4 pm on October the thirty-first! As we came down off the moor, it was raining *hen wragedd a ffyn*, 'old women and sticks' – an absolute deluge. Half a mile along the descending lane, now streaming with water, we found the gates of Hergest Croft half-closed. Gingerly pushing them open, we traipsed along the drive towards one brightly-lit window in a dark-looking house. The 'window' turned out to be a door to an old conservatory appended to the house. There, the dreaded sign, 'CLOSED'. But old women and sticks are not to be stood under, especially when coming on a stiff wind, . . . and finding the door unlocked, we entered for shelter as much as anything else. Beyond the conservatory in an adjacent room, two ladies could be seen piling books and cards into cardboard boxes. When we explained we had walked all the way from Hay in order to view the autumn maples, the rules were kindly 'bent' for us. In fact, the gardens had closed for the winter the day before. Today, we were riding our rainbow luck.

As the wind and rain diminished, we went out. Some parts of the garden appeared already quite bare of foliage, but one small-leaved crimson maple rewarded our hopes. Back at the house, we found the quiet, resonant mood of *sabi*,<sup>22</sup> sitting in silence, four on a dark green bench, watching the gloaming rain dripping along the ornate summer verandah-edge.



As we walked away from the Victorian peace of Hergest Croft, neat rows of herbs and vegetables caught Kazue's eye, and she led us on a dream-like stroll through a small wrought-iron gate:

Gale into  
autumn sunset -  
a kitchen garden  
we were never meant to see

Tito

Suddenly, and uninterruptedly, blinding oblique sunlight: the oaks around the garden, and those on the neighbouring hills, fired up like golden flares. Another tall rainbow, this time of subdued evening hue, reared ahead of us just beyond the white-framed glasshouses. Then, entering Kington beside the darkening spire of St Mary's Church, evening stillness, evening woodsmoke on the air –

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

presage perhaps of a frosty night. The western sky behind us took on the formation of an orange fan – a glorious, joyous end to the day's hard miles, and the beginning of a memorable night.

We were stopped in the High Street by a mustachioed man: "You must be the Japanese poets walking the Dyke?" – perhaps he had noticed Kazue's features and the muddy boots. "I'll be seeing you later, then, at Mrs Mills', with a reporter from the Journal, Sally Boyce." *The Mid Wales Journal* was the local press, and Wally Lloyd, its contracted photographer for this job, was apparently to come and take our picture once we had had time to spruce up at our guesthouse accommodation on the other side of Kington.

'Amid the blustery autumn winds, the strains of Matsuo Basho, a poet of the road, drifted across the hills. A rare sight – and sound, indeed – for the border country, as haiku hikers neared the end of a long-distance trek along Offa's Dyke. Pelted with rain and buffeted by strong winds, the poets had beavered away at their haiku, later to be linked as a corporate work. "When it's hammering down, you're quite glad they're short", said Edward Lade. The operation worked as a kind of mobile workshop for the poets, thoughts whirling in their heads on the hilltops, pooling their ideas in the evenings.'

This, a part of Sally's published account.<sup>23</sup>

Dinner was eaten at The Swan with our new friend, Wally, once the interview was over. Extraordinary sunsets were commonplace in Kington, we were told: something to do with the sun's rays shooting through the mountains from the west. Wally spoke with pride of the contract his employers, Border Oak, had recently won to build some traditional timber-frame British houses out in Japan.<sup>24</sup> Basho might have come to Kington, but Kington had also gone to Japan! A rightful pride again in the fact that this little town had won the National Village Cricket Championship Final at Lords the previous year; he pointed out the wicket-keeper standing near the bar. And then there was the matter, about which we had read, of Kington having been singled out by Apple-MacIntosh and British Telecom for the site of their first rural 'public telebarn', linking the little market town to the information 'superhighway' years ahead of anywhere else of comparable size. Wally looked out through wire-rimmed glasses and locks of curly hair: "Kington is class", he said definitively.

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Leaves in November  
falling off the autumn trees –  
a blaze of colours

Rachel Lloyd

Wally later sent us a page of his twelve-year-old daughter, Rachel's 'Haiku Yearbook', of which the above is the eleventh verse.

Dinner finished at the Swan, we needed somewhere quieter, more private, to discuss the day's poems. Edward relates:

'Fred Jones' Tavern close to our bed and breakfast had been recommended – "It hasn't changed in a hundred years." Through the front door to the left, the taproom: small, spare, but full of folk. Looking at the faces sitting back against the walls, you felt the depth of history that might be related, given time. We wandered through another door and entered what appeared to be a passage to the back of the inn. However, with the lights now lit, evidently it was the old snug. The "passage" impression had been formed by the back of the settle; until not long ago this was one of the commonest items of public furniture in Britain, but now rarely found.<sup>25</sup> It was a wonderful spot for our workshop. The generous eight-foot-plus length of the high-backed settle and the gentle curve of its narrow seat provided comfort in which to read our haiku. Facing the fire, feeling as if it could be any time in the last century: cider, poetry, peace of mind.'



### DAY 5, TUESDAY 1 NOVEMBER: KINGTON TO KNIGHTON

Kazue & Stephen Gill, Edward Lade, David Peel, (Caroline Gourlay)<sup>26</sup>

Two hundred paces up the High Street: enough to tell the blisters required more carefully packing. To the interest of some children on their way to school, bags were downed and boots and socks taken off at a bench outside the Market Hall. Via Crooked Well ... to cottage gardens, and a footbridge over the cantering Back Brook stream.



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

A scented bush,  
a pretty face -  
the morning sun  
lightens my load

EL

A steep haul to the hamlet of Bradnor Green, where the composer, Mike Oldfield, used to live in a house known as 'The Beacon' with splendid views over the great whaleback of Hergest Ridge to the monstrous half-perceived spectre of the Black Mountains beyond. Stephen had used an Oldfield composition, entitled 'Hergest Ridge', in his radio essay, 'The Half-Said Thing', broadcast by the BBC only six weeks before.<sup>27</sup> No one in Kington had known where he now lived.

Close-hung cloud  
only the distant hills are golden      Bamboo Shoot

By the time we had climbed to Rushock Hill at more than 1,200 feet, the sky looked quite threatening. Somewhere near the top of this great dome of grassland we lost our way completely.

We wander a moor  
looking for the path -  
buzzards wheel  
in circling showers

Tito

A sharp dousing; and the sun came out. Eventually, we stumbled on the earthwork serpent of the Dyke, reestablishing our position on the Path.



The next great dome was Herrock Hill, up there ahead of us, clothed to its shoulders in an orange bracken beautifully paled by distance. Reaching the col between the two fells, we found a maze of paths running through the six-foot-high ferns November had yet to crumple. After tea from a flask, and discussion around the compass, we decided to drop down to the Hindwell, where it emerges from Radnor Vale, once a lake. Here the autumnal larch forests were a sight to behold - equal proportions of lime-green, mustard and yellow.

On the Ditchyeld Bridge, named after the Dyke, we crossed back into Wales, where we would stay for the rest of the Walk. Approaching the bridge, we had surveyed another sort of boundary,

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

a spectacular geological one, between the rocks of the Devonian and those of the older Silurian Age. The former, the jumble of domes and ridges along which we had been walking and were to follow for a good while yet, largely consist of Old Red Sandstone beds, the western ramparts of King Offa's Mercia; the latter, the Welsh skyline, higher and smooother, of the Radnor Forest fells – Bach Hill, Black Mixen and Great Rhos – rising beyond the old lacustrine soil of Radnor Vale. This stirring landscape has also been intruded by ancient volcanism: some of the heights are made of hard igneous rock.

Over the Hindwell, we entered woods.

All shapes, all shades:  
the leaves of every tree  
have given themselves  
into our coloured path

Tito

It just so happened that as we came to the medieval farmhouse of Old Burfa, its owner was overseeing the loading of a bed into a van. We offered a hand. As Vice-Chairman of the Association which established and maintains the long-distance Path, Ernie Kay already knew of the Basho Walk and had kindly written to Stephen a few weeks before about conditions along the Dyke. It was pleasant, therefore, to have the chance to be able to swap some more notes standing there in the autumn sunlight-through-leaves. Behind the house rose Burfa Hill, whose Iron Age Fort was, according to the visionary, Alfred Watkins, a focus for several of the many ley lines criss-crossing the area.<sup>28</sup> Such alignments of camps, graves and holy spots he presumed to indicate the near-lost courses of straight prehistoric tracks.

Old lakes, old mounds, old placenames: the next few hours of Path were to afford us further glimpses into the ancient pagan British past, the region of Taliesin's 'No one knows why the salmon glitters, nor why a harpstring is white. . . . In ages of ages, the day remains concealed'.<sup>29</sup>

Edge of Mercia -  
and all along the Dyke,  
the autumn wind besieging  
its watchtowers of oak

Tito

We had our lunch leaning comfortably against a grassy bank on the side of Evenjobb Hill, just beyond Granner Wood; then, in

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continuing sunshine, found our way round two cwms, high above Dunn's Lane and Beggar's Bush, to a viewpoint above the Lugg Valley. Lugh is the Celtic God of Light, whose festival, Lughnassadh, has long been obscured by the Christian harvest celebration of Lammas. There was, we heard, one venerable soul in the valley who, if he had a memory<sup>30</sup> – which even stones are said to have – might well recall the pre-Christian days of Lugh and Bel, if not the Neolithic ones before: the ancient Yew of Discoed.



With Offa's Dyke running its conspicuous way, as ditch and bank, straight down the great hillside in front of us, we surveyed the valley to the east . . . and half a mile away, across a couple of long sheep-flecked fields, made out a small grey church and, alongside, a dark tree of almost equal size. We made a detour in order to view the celebrated Tree, thought to be one of the three oldest in Britain. A certificate in the church declared it to be five thousand years old. While this figure might stretch the imagination, even if merely half that age, the tree would predate not only the church beside which it stands today, but also Christianity itself. With an old, Celtic-style circular cemetery, and an ancient mound in the cottage garden just beside, the site must have been a Druidic one long before it was Christian, and the Discoed Yew was at its heart, guarding the graves. The great hollow red-barked trunk measures thirty-seven feet around. Another smaller yew beside the church is also hollow, and is dated to the sixth century – a young tree, then, in Aneurin, Taliesin, Arthur, Gildas and St David's time?

These yews live on; our daily lives go on; and the present moment of haiku arrives.

This churchyard yew,  
whether old or ancient:  
winter logs  
cradled in its bole

EL

Traversing meadows towards autumn alders, we soon crossed the sparkling Lugg on a footbridge, just short of Dolley.

Cow pat!

I wipe my feet of you:  
yet how full of life you are

Bamboo Shoot

Back to the Dyke, first high up on Furrow Hill, and then on

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

Gilfach Hill, walking the beige, tussocked line of it along cliff-like heights between earth and sky.

Fieldfares free  
the hawberries hanging  
by the wind-mangled barn

EL

Hawthorn poem talk as we strolled: Wordsworth's 'thorn' – "not higher than a two-year child . . . a mass of knotted joints" – and Seamus Heaney's 'haw lantern' – "a small light for small people . . . bonded pitch and stone".<sup>31</sup> We thought about resting beside one of these crimson-berried thorns, which had taken over from the great Dyke oaks of the Evenjobb and Discoed stretches, but although the sun was warm, the cool wind up here was too insistent. Down a valley to the southeast, a glimpse of Presteigne. We pressed on northwards over Hawthorn Hill.

An obelisk, a dewpond, more Dyke, and then we could sense the space beyond trees where the hillside plunged away on its long descent to the Teme, a great gulf now opening up at right angles to the Path. Here, we turned purposefully off the Dyke and into a long, grassy farm track, which took us in an easterly direction up over Llan-wen Hill.



Great autumn forests and hills crowded in on Knighton, of which there was barely a hint, hidden away by the depth below. 'In valleys of springs of rivers, . . . The quietest under the sun.' Houseman's words to Vaughan Williams' music drifted into the mind, and the step, as the march went on.<sup>32</sup>

Early November -  
lingering beech leaves  
rattle the wind

CG

Although we would sleep in Knighton, our late afternoon-into-evening was spent in the company of poet, Caroline Gourlay of Hill House Farm, which lay somewhere out beyond Long Wood, a good three miles or more to the east.

A peculiar combination of tiredness, elation and relief, tinged with sadness that the venture was now drawing to its close, conspired to make Stephen's steps drag. While walking along at the back of the



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line on this final stretch, he made a mental dedication to Basho, on everyone's behalf, of the effort, both muscular and creative, expended on the Walk. It was, 'as if I were suddenly in conversation with the old poet. Never in my life had I felt closer to him. For half a mile or more, tears blurred my eyes'.

When the yellowhammer turned  
into the evening sun,  
we walked on  
past Knighton . . .

Tito

The aggregated hopes of the other walkers now retired were being carried forward by four walkers hobbling along the final road – a ruthless, but carless stretch of asphalt, that crumbled our knees. After a mile-and-a-half, seemingly lost, we hailed a man in a tractor at the edge of a huge field. He set us to rights again, and we pushed forward, almost counting the paces to Hill House Farm. As if scenting a hare, David shot out to the front. His boots were already off when the rest of us arrived.



Although a letter or two had been exchanged prior to the Walk, Caroline was meeting us all for the first time. A warm welcome; and then, as David apologetically said, "Jam, cakes, tea – and a warm fire. Lady, we bring only our rough poems." The Walk's final poem-sharing-cum-discussion included not only the verses of the day, and some of Basho's, but also several of the haiku from other days by poets long gone home. A rice wine toast at the journey's end, enjoyed.<sup>35</sup>

A final *sake*  
in the company of friends  
there is solitude

Bamboo Shoot

Caroline recounts:

"There was quite a special atmosphere in our sitting-room that Tuesday afternoon, and I have since wondered about it. Perhaps it had something to do with the unusual situation of four strangers arriving on our doorstep, having walked the best part of seventeen miles and feeling genuinely in need of sustenance – people who two hours later seemed like old friends. I was so glad they called; for me the afternoon was a kind of oasis – a sense of touching on what is real

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

that made the two hours memorable. Later that evening, some words from the Tao Te Ching<sup>34</sup> came to mind: "Travellers may stop for music and good food, but a description of the Tao seems without substance and flavour . . . it cannot be seen, it cannot be heard, and yet it cannot be exhausted." That afternoon we had been talking about haiku, some of which at first reading, also seem to lack flavour and substance. "So what?" one thinks, then one reads the lines again – and again. A good haiku, like the Tao, can never be exhausted.'

After dark, we descended into Knighton to stay at The Fleece House on Market Street, a former coaching inn. As our hostess, Dana Simmons, showed us to our rooms, Stephen asked if there had been any messages for the party. Pulling a face, Dana looked him up and down, as if to say: "What? For *you* lot?!" Within a minute, a bell was ringing at her belt, and she unclipped the mobile telephone she was carrying and put it to her ear. "It's for you", she turned to Stephen with only partially-disguised embarrassment. Brian's voice came down the line, asking if we had all made it safely into Knighton.

Autumn light on the haw lanterns

final words –

how inadequate they are

Bamboo Shoot



### AFTERWORD

In his *Records of a Travel-worn Satchel*, Basho wrote a passage that perfectly describes what we have here in our own travel journal. We have simply replaced the first person singular with the first person plural throughout:<sup>35</sup>

'Readers will find in our diary a random collection of what we have seen on the road, views somehow remaining in our hearts – an isolated house in the mountains, or a lonely inn surrounded by the moor. . . . Every turn of the road brought us new thoughts, and every sunrise gave us fresh emotions.'

## REDISCOVERING BASHO

The rigour, risk and wonder he found in travel was clearly the stimulus for which the Master of Haiku lived. On our comparatively brief journey we had begun to discover for ourselves how Basho's travels informed his life's work. We would do well to remember that Basho, Buson and Issa<sup>36</sup> all travelled a great deal, composing as they went.

*Tabi ni yande yume wa kareno o kake-meguru*

Fallen ill on a journey  
my dreams wander on . . .  
round and round  
a withered moor

Basho, Nov. 1694<sup>1</sup>



Ink and brush painting by Kazue Gill

## IN THE AUTUMN WIND

### NOTES

- 1 Trans. Stephen Henry Gill.
- 2 See 'Shepherd's Purse', notes 7 and 13, for details of translations of these works.
- 3 Basho's last poem was composed in Osaka on the ninth day of the tenth month (Kannazuki), which averages out as early November in the solar calendar we use today.  

*Tabi ni yande yume wa kareno o kake-meguru*  
 Fallen ill on a journey,  
 My dreams wander on . . .  
 Round and round  
 A withered moor.
- Trans. SHG. Basho composed this three days before his death.
- 4 See 'Representation of Basho', Plate 1, for what might well have been Basho's own pictorial rendition of this verse.
- 5 The names of those in the walking party that day. Hereafter, initials or pseudonym beside a haiku indicate the poet who composed it. Norman Barnetough passed away on 18 April 1998 while participating in a British Haiku Society *ginko* (compositional stroll) in the Welsh Borders near Ludlow. He will be greatly missed.
- 6 William Wordsworth (1770-1850), from 'Lines Written a Few Miles North of Tintern Abbey'.
- 7 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), from his *Journals*.
- 8 From 'Battle of the Trees' (*Cad Goddeu*) and 'Horses' (in *The Book of Taliesin*). Taliesin lived in the second half of the sixth century.
- 9 'Tito' is Stephen Gill's nickname and *haigo* (poet's name).
- 10 Performance of the play is mentioned in 'Shepherd's Purse', note 21.
- 11 Brian Tasker is in parentheses as he had a rest day, using public transport, but joining the party at their destination for the haiku workshop in the evening.
- 12 See Makoto Ueda's *Matsuo Basho*, p. 116 (Twayne/Kodansha).
- 13 Translation taken from Nobuyuki Yuasa's introduction to 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North', p.33 (Penguin Classic).
- 14 This and the following quotes are from Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Journey Through Wales & The Description of Wales* (Penguin Classic).
- 15 'Haijin' means a haiku poet. The famous eighteenth-century *haijin*, Kobayashi Issa, wrote his *haigo* - 'Issa' - with the characters meaning 'One Tea'. St Clydog had been the wise ruler of the region of Ewyas until murdered. Many miracles are said to have taken place at his tomb. St Benno (or Beuno) was born in the same Black Mountain district, but later moved to the Llyn Peninsula in North Wales, where he founded a collegiate church in the sixth century. St Cadoc, to whom Benno was said to be related, came to the Black Mountains late in life after much travelling (Ireland and Scotland included). He had a hermitage on the island of Flat Holm in the Bristol Channel, where he was said to have turned a pack of wolves into rocks. Of St Issui, precious little is known.
- 16 Henry David Thoreau, from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.
- 17 'Bamboo Shoot' is one of David Peel's several *haigo*.
- 18 Kilvert's *Diaries* paint an intimate portrait of life in this district in days gone by.
- 19 Munefusa was Basho's given name.



## REDISCOVERING BASHO

- 20 Pronounced 'Gladstry'.
- 21 *The Red Book of Hergest* was – along with *The White Book of Rhydderch*, *The Book of Taliesin*, and *The Book of Aneurin* (Aneirin) – one of the so-called 'Four Ancient Books' of Wales. They date to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, although much of the language of the verse contained therein may well date back a further thousand years. Hergest Court was where the Book had come to light.
- 22 For something about Basho's poetic principle of *sabi*, see 'Shepherd's Purse', note 12.
- 23 'Gentle Taste of Japanese Poetry', *The Mid Wales Journal*, 4 Nov. 1994. The article includes two of Basho's verses and Wally Lloyd's photo of the four walkers. The 'corporate work' Ms. Boyce mentions is 'In the Autumn Wind' itself.
- 24 In Fukushima Prefecture, not far from the path Basho trod on his way to the Deep North.
- 25 A 'snug' is a small private room in a pub; a 'settle', an armed wooden bench with high solid back and an enclosed base which can be used as a storage chest.
- 26 Caroline Gurlay is in parentheses as she did not walk that day, but hosted the haiku workshop at the end of it.
- 27 The programme explored the similarities and differences between eighth to tenth century Japanese tanka and early Irish *deibhidhe* written contemporaneously.
- 28 Alfred Watkins, *The Old Straight Track* (Sphere/Abacus).
- 29 From his poem, 'The Hostile Confederacy'.
- 30 The yew-tree is dioecious, and this particular one is a male tree.
- 31 William Wordsworth, 'The Thorn'; Seamus Heaney, 'The Haw Lantern'.
- 32 The twentieth century British composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams, set to music some of A.E. Houseman's poetry from *A Shropshire Lad*. The poem (and music) we had in mind is entitled 'Clun'. It appears as song no. 6 in Vaughan Williams' suite, 'On Wenlock Edge'.
- 33 The dry, colourless 'wine' made from rice in Japan is known as '*sake*'.
- 34 The *Tao Te Ching* is one of the ancient scriptures of the Taoist faith, and was purportedly written by the sage, Lao-tzu ('Laozi' in modern Chinese transliteration).
- 35 Trans. Nobuyuki Yuasa.
- 36 Yosa Buson (1716-1783) and Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827), after Basho the two greatest haiku poets. For something on Buson, see both Stephen Henry Gill's and Nobuyuki Yuasa's papers. For something on Issa, see Nobuyuki Yuasa's paper and note 15 above.

IN THE AUTUMN WIND



'The Death of Basho' (*Basho Nehanzu*), painting by Ueda Kocho (1788-1850, Osaka City Museum)

## INDEX TO BASHO'S HAIKU IN THIS BOOK

Because English translations of Basho's haiku will seldom start with the same words, a 'first line finding list' is of little use. The original Japanese word order, however, is of course always the same, and is given here in its transliteration. In order to further help the reader find a haiku without having to remember the Japanese first line, we have devised twenty general subject headings into which the images in Basho's haiku usually fall. Thus, failing to come up with the Japanese first line, if you remember that the Basho poem you wish to find is about, say, missing his parents when he hears the cry of a bird, you then look at the page numbers for any haiku with the 'Bird' subject number (9) followed by the 'Family, Friends, Children' subject number (14) – in this case, as there is only one candidate, you should locate the haiku straight away. Try it: you will find this sort of index very helpful!

### Image Subjects:

#### A) NATURE

- 1 Sun & Cloud
- 2 Moon & Stars
- 3 Wind, Rain, Storm
- 4 Snow & Ice
- 5 Sea & Shell
- 6 Mountain & Stone
- 7 Falls, River, Pond
- 8 Mammal
- 9 Bird
- 10 Amphibian, Fish, Insect
- 11 Tree, Leaf, Mushroom
- 12 Blossom, Flower, Grass

#### B) MAN

- 13 People & Activities
- 14 Family, Friends, Children
- 15 Body & Illness
- 16 Food & Crops
- 17 Travel & Clothes
- 18 Building & Artifact
- 19 Cities & Towns
- 20 Dream & Sleep

### Beginning of Haiku in Japanese

*Aka-aka to*

*Ara toto*

*Araumi ya*

*Arigata ya*

*Basho nowaki*

*Chichi-haha no*

*Furuike ya*

*Furusato ya*

*Futari mishi*

*Hakkuken*

### Image Subjects

1, 3

1, 11

2, 5

3, 4

3, 11, 18

9, 14

7, 10

14, 15, 19

4, 14, 17

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