

Haiku by Japanese Masters

The *haiku* format is a form of poetic expression based on Zen Buddhism. This was developed from ancient Chinese models in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *Haiku* are normally restricted to three lines with a maximum number of seventeen syllables in a 5-7-9 syllabic pattern. There are no contrived rhymes, no metrical shackles and no title. Japanese artists, under the influence of Zen philosophy, have tended to use as few words as possible to express their feelings, and the resultant precise focus (being closer to the complete silence of cosmic consciousness) intensifies insight into the heart of experience. Dr Suzuki, Zen's distinguished historian, tells us, 'When a feeling reaches its highest pitch, even seventeen syllables may be too many.'

Early authentic examples of *haiku* occur in the writing of Sogi (1421-1502), but Matsuo Basho (1644-94) is regarded by many Japanese as their finest exponent of *haiku*. The following 36 examples of *haiku* illustrate the use of this format until the beginning of the 20th century, when *haiku* were first introduced into the West, through the medium of English translations. *Haiku* have since become internationally fashionable, although the extent to which many *haiku* currently published in English, embody the quality of consciousness in the Japanese tradition, is open to question. Authentic Japanese *haiku* have never been concerned with wit, rhetoric, gimmickry, exhibitionism or pretension.

Unfortunately, contemporary English may not now be a satisfactory register for *haiku*, since English has become detached from its social roots in any particular community, as a result of globalisation. It has been argued by some poets that English has now become spiritually exhausted as a poetic language, as a result of its adaptation for utilitarian purposes. Comparisons between renderings in Scots and English of *haiku* by Japanese masters suggest that versions in literary Scots have an energy and *frisson* that harmonise well with the true spirit of *haiku*. Accordingly, the following 36 *haiku* have been rendered in Scots, a register which has a long record for poetry of a high order.

C'awa lat's see

aw the rael flouers

o this dulefu world!

Basho (1644-94)

Come on let us see

all the real flowers of this

sorrowful world

The fishmongir's staw---

hou cauld the deid lips

o the sautit bream.

Basho

The fishmonger's stall--

so cold the dead lips

of this salted bream

*The laiverok lilts
aw day an the day
is no lang aneuch.*

Basho

*Back at the lair
Ah bend ma sabbin
til the Back End wund!*

Basho

*Bi the crow's
mankit forleitit nest,
a braw ploum tree.*

Basho

*The auld pypar's puil
lowp-plowter-lowp-plowter----
a mukkil puddok.*

Basho

*The Back End muin
an the breingin tyde faems up
til the verra houss yett.*

Basho

*Waesum lassie cat--
that thin an shilpit lyke
on radge an barley.*

Basho

*The lark sings on
all day, and all day
is not long enough*

*At the gravestone,
bend my grief
to the Autumn wind.*

*By the crow's
old deserted nest
a fine plum tree.*

*By the old pool,
leap, splash, leap
a great frog.*

*The Autumn moon
and the tide foams up
to the very gate,*

*Sad lady cat,
so thin and pathetic
on sex and barley.*

*Ir the sun short cuts
in the mukkil lift abuin,
simmer muin?*

Lady Sute-jo (1633-98)

*Are there any
short-cuts in the sky above,
summer moon?*

*The laiverok ---
tovin i the lift abuin---
hir yung wul sterve*

Sora (1649-1710)

*The lark above
soaring in the sky---
her young will starve*

*Haepit for burnin---
the brushwuid for aw
ettils aye ti bud*

Boncho (?-1714)

*Although piled for burning
the brushwood still
intends to bud*

*Ah think verra shame,
thir braw claes on ,me---
no ae steik ma ain*

Lady Sono-jo (1649-1723)

*Disgraceful
such clothes on me---
not one stitch my own*

*Even in ma ain
hame toun nou, Ah sleep
lyker a traivlar.*

Kyorai (1651-1704)

*Even in my home
town now, I sleep
like a stranger*

*Washin claes in simmer--
on ae pole in the breeze,
hings a whyte shroud.*

Kyoroku (1655-1715)

*The clothes in summer
airing on one pole
a white shroud*

*The bern's brunt down
but nou Ah can fairlie see
the cauld muin abuin*

Masahide (1657-1723)

*The brig this forenicht--
a thousan het haunds cuil aff
on the parapet*

Kikaku (1661-1707)

*Parritch haepit
in a perfit bowle,
sunlicht o Ne-erday*

Joso (1662-1704)

*Sair frost o loss--
faither an bairn thegither
anaith the ae quilt*

Shushiki (1669-1725)

*Eftir yon fell dream
hou unco vieve an rael
this braw iris is!*

Shushiki

*Deer i the rain--
thrie cries ir heard
an syne nae mair*

Buson (1715-83)

*The barn's burnt down
but now I can see
the moon above.*

*On the bridge tonight
a thousand hot haunds cool
on the parapet*

*Porage heaped
in a perfect bowl--
in the New Year's light*

*Hard frost of loss--
father and child
below one blanket*

*After that dream
how real
this iris!*

*Deer in the rain--
I hear three cries
and then no more*

*Sic a lyke muin--
the thief hauds on a wee
ti lilt a bit sang.*

Buson (1715-83)

*Inchin aye on
frae derk til mirk---
a sea slug.*

Gyodai (1732-93)

*Gret mukkil whales
bullerin i the dawin
in icy wattirs.*

Gyodai

*Gean blossoms---
in siclyke pairts the verra gress
aye blooms anaw.*

Issa (1763-1837)

*A guid lyke warld--
the kirstal dew-draps faw
in yins an twas.*

Issa

*Juist you tak heed
aw ye creepie-crawlle things---
the bell o transcience*

Issa

*What a moon!
the thief arrests a while
to sing a little song*

*Inching on
from dark to pitch dark
a sea slug*

*Huge whales
bellowing at dawn
in the icy water.*

*Cherry blossoms?
in parts like these the grass
always blooms as well*

*A good world this---
the dew drops fall
in ones and twos.*

*Take heed
all you creeping things
the knell of doom*

*Flies swarmin aw ower---
whitever dae thay want wi
thir auld runkilt haunds?*

Issa

*Whitna lyke warld---
whan lotus flouers ir ploued
doun intil the grund!*

Issa

*Look oot, ye fyreflies!
Ye'l mebbe clour yeir wee heids
on that whunstane!*

Issa

*Closer an closer
nou ti paradise,
but hou cauld Ah im!*

Issa

*In ma houss wi me
the verra myce an fyreflies
git alang brawlie.*

Issa

*Whan Ah gae at lest
you mynd an gaird ma lair weill
Gresshopper!*

Issa

*Flies everywhere--
whatever do they want
with these withered hands?*

*What a world this is
when lotus flowers are
plowed down into the ground!*

*Look out, fireflies!
You'll bump your little heads
on that fireplace!*

*Nearer and nearer
now to Paradise
but how cold I am!*

*In my house with me
all the mice and fireflies
agree together*

*When I go at last
guard my grave well
Grasshopper!*

*We maunna forget:
we dauner aye on hell
goavin at the flouers!*

Issa

*In this warld
even the butterflies
maun aern thair keep*

Issa

*Ti be suin forgotten---
the pot whaur this flouer blooms
this ae spring day*

Shiki (1867-1902)

*In the blouster
the chesnuds race along
the bamboo porch*

Shiki

*Never you forget
we walk always on hell
staring at flowers.*

*Here in this world
even the butterflies
must earn thair keep.*

*Thing to be forgotten
the pot where this flower blooms
this spring day*

*In the gale
the chesnuds race along
the bamboo porch*