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Tell About the Truth As If It Were False

PATRICK GALLAGHER

This article interprets a dictum of Yatsuka Ishihara, "I believe that it is crucial for haiku to tell about the truth as if it were false."

Mr. Ishihara was a great haiku sensei in Japan. He was very kind and generous to Claire and me and other American delegates to the Haiku Society of America-Haiku International meeting in Japan in 1997. His friends and admirers were saddened by his death in 1998.

The quotation is from Ishihara's talk at the HSA-HI Conference in Chicago in 1995. I missed that event, but I heard him provide an expanded version of the Chicago statement. The occasion followed a dinner provided by Mr. Ishihara in Ushino, Japan, for delegates to the HSA-HI Conference. Mr. Ishihara's speech was in Japanese, and our appreciation is possible because of translation into English by Tadashi Kondō. The full translated text of Mr. Ishihara's remarks was published in *Frogpond* XX:Supplement 1997. In quoting Mr. Ishihara in this article I have elided words and added connectives to Mr. Kondō's translation.

In responding to the request for explanation put by Lee Gurga, Mr. Ishihara elaborated on his earlier dictum. He spoke in a deliberate style that sounded to me much like chanting. While "Tell about the truth as if it were false" has the appearance, perhaps, of a Zen koan, Ishihara clearly was trying to tell American haiku poets something very meaningful to him, and I hope I have understood it.

He began his explanation, "The common practice in Japan, by more than 60 percent of the poets, is to tell about what is false, as if it were true. I know it is difficult for Americans to understand this, but I believe the basic nature of haiku is humor, that is, expressing the truth as if it were false. Through the expression of truth with humor, a rich space is created to enjoy a wider meaning. I think this is true not only in Japan but in the west."

He continued, "The first line of a poem comes from heaven. Coming from heaven means inspiration, or fiction." He then compared his own theory of "introspective shaping," with the conventional "sketch" theory. In "sketch" theory the haiku is to copy what is in the world; in "introspective shaping" he said, we are with "haiku glasses" to look into our hearts, where "the landscape of truth exists".

4 To help us understand his aesthetic of humor, Ishihara favorably compared the death poetry of Shiki to that of Bashō. One of Shiki's death poems is "While sponge-gourd was in flower, / through too much phlegm / a Buddha kana" (Harold J. Isaacson's translation). The humor here, according to Isaacson, is that the Japanese speak of one newly departed as a Buddha, so "the last line—'a Buddha kana'—is a droll way of saying: 'I died'. The larger joke is in the way the haiku burlesques statements found in Buddhist biographies, that while lotuses were in flower some dying person obtained birth into the Amida paradise, Sukhavata." Another point of humor, approaching irony, is that the sponge gourd which is flowering in the poem will later when ripe, provide a fluid which is useful for clearing phlegm.

Bashō's poem which Ishihara indicated lacks the humor he finds essential in haiku, is "fallen ill on a journey my dream wanders around a withered field" (Tadashi Kondō's translation). Ishihara commented,

“In Bashō’s haiku there is an artificial manipulation of fiction, while Shiki’s haiku comes directly out of his intuition.” After a digression, Ishihara concluded his discussion by saying, “Getting back to telling the truth as if it were false—it is bad to tell about the false as if it were truth—true humor does not have the artificial manipulation of fiction.”

What did Ishihara mean? Is he repeating the conclusion that art, even realism, is necessarily different from reality, and so our poetry will necessarily be untrue to life? Or does he believe, as Oscar Wilde wrote, that “Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art”? Or perhaps he means that in our poems we should use metaphor which, according to a semiologist, is lying?

What I believe Ishihara means is that haiku should be more than inscriptions of natural scenes, that the best haiku will go beyond and in a humorous way exaggerate the literal truth. In his statement the “as if it were false” means to use language in a way that cannot possibly be taken by the reader as literally true. His admonition is not for the use of metaphor, but rather hyperbole, the figure of speech that denotes extravagant exaggeration or depicting the impossible as real.

In indirect support of this interpretation, there is testimony that the use of exaggeration and not being satisfied with the natural scene is a method prominently employed in Japanese esthetics. Frank Lloyd Wright said about Hokusai, “. . . he never drew Fujiyama honestly, the way Hiroshige did. He always lied about it, he liked to make it pointed. . . He looked at Fujiyama in 57 different ways! But never once did he tell the truth about it”. It is interesting to note that Ishihara’s book of haiku translated into English is named *Red Fuji*, after Hokusai’s print, and features the pointed red mountain on the book’s cover.

An inspection of Mr. Ishihara's poems shows the use of hyperbole, supporting the contention that his gnomic phrase is intended to advocate that use. Here in translation are a few his poems that illustrate this use of language.

pulling light
from the other world . . .
the Milky Way

burning withered chrysanthemums
I stirred up
the fires of Hades

faintly white
it sticks to my face
the autumn wind

6 Other examples can be found in Japanese and English-language haiku that illustrate what I think Ishihara-sensei was telling us—the benefit of incorporating humor in our haiku by extreme exaggeration or writing the impossible as true. In his words, “Tell about the truth as if it were false.”

Isaacson, *Peonies Kana: Haiku by the Upasaka Shiki*, George Allen & Unwin, London (1973), p. XIV.

Wilde, “The Decay of Lying” *Intentions*, Boni and Liveright, New York [Modern Library Edition], p. 54.

Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington (1984), p. 109.

That this is not solely a Japanese esthetic principle is shown by Oscar Wilde's claim “What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. . . . When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. . . . Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place.”

Wilde, *op. cit.*, p. 3. And in a quotation kindly provided by Kenneth Leibman, Picasso said, “We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.” “Picasso Speaks,” in *The Arts* (New York, May 1923; repr. in Barr, Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, 1946).

Wright, “The Japanese Print Party” tape transcript, *Taliesin*, 20 September 1950, quoted in Nute; *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York (1993), p. 107.

Ishihara (Higginson and Kondō, trans.), *Red Fuji*, From Here Press, Santa Fe (1997).

Stalking the Wild *Onji*: The Search for Current Linguistic Terms Used in Japanese Poetry Circles

RICHARD GILBERT, PH.D.

ABSTRACT

Many challenges confront poets and educators in the burgeoning international haiku and tanka poetry movements who, researching Japanese forms of poetic composition in English translation, wish to better understand these genres and skillfully emulate them. Differences between the two languages and inadequate presentations of these differences have created confusions, misuse of terms, and in some quarters a reductionistic sensibility regarding formal aspects of Japanese poetry. *Onji*, the Japanese term commonly used in the West to count up and define Japanese "syllables," has had a contentious history in North America, having served as one of several loci of controversy regarding how the haiku, particularly, is best emulated in English. This paper investigates the historic usage of *onji* as a linguistic term in Japan and presents an argument for its removal from usage, as currently construed, by the international haiku community. Linguistic terms that are in widespread use within contemporary Japanese haiku circles are described, defined, and suggested as replacements. It is hoped that such reparations may effectively halt a rapidly escalating situation of cross-cultural miscommunication, occurring in both directions. A brief overview of the evolution of the Japanese writing system and issues relating to the modern Language Reform Movement provides an historical context for terms and concepts discussed.

SYNCHRONIC FORAYS

Finding the Forest

Over the past year, while teaching English Communication to a third-year class of Japanese Literature students at the Prefectural University of Kumamoto, I persuaded the students to try their hand at haiku composition in English. In the course of exploring differences between haiku written in English and Japanese, inevitably the question of which syllables to count has come up, and indeed what to call them; whether in Japanese they are called *jion*, or as I have always called them, *onji*. (viz. "In fact, Japanese poets do not count "syllables" at all. Rather, they count *onji*." Higginson, 1985, p. 100)

8 My anecdotal research into the usage of Japanese poetic terms began when, in several of my classes, I experimentally wrote lines of *hiragana* on the board and asked the students to count the *onji*. In every case, the students had no response at all to my request, there were only blank stares. I was especially surprised that Japanese Literature students had the same reaction as the general education students; I began to wonder if the term itself was problematic. Later, I asked several professors who attended a Kumamoto Gakuen University "Haiku Club" to explain *onji*. None of the professors I queried recognized the term. I was truly surprised. How could contemporary haiku writers, engaging with the haiku tradition, as well as Japanese Literature students, be unfamiliar with this word, considered in North America to be the one and only term used by Japanese poets to count up "syllables"?¹

Quizzing Kojyo-sensei of Kumamoto Gakuen University, a scholar of Old English stylistics and haiku poet, I asked, "What is this word *onji* and how is it used?" Kojyo-sensei didn't recognize the term either. I found the situation rather odd, as Kojyo-sensei had spent many years as a dedicated haiku writer and *aficionado*. What words do

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Japanese people commonly use to describe and count haiku *kana* or “syllables”? What is the meaning of *onji*? Why isn't this word known in Japanese poetic circles? Is the English use of the term *onji* related to another word altogether in Japanese? And, how does the English use of the word “syllable” relate to the Japanese language? These are some of the questions I set out to answer in my search for the apparently elusive *onji*.

Conduct of the Research

Research has been conducted on several fronts. Primary textual research was conducted with the help of Kojyo-sensei; additional internet-based research and Meiji-era translation was conducted at the Prefectural University of Kumamoto, with Matsuno-sensei, Professor of Information Science; a third research group composed of Japanese Linguistics and Phonology post-graduate research students, directed by Kai Tomoko, also at the Prefectural University of Kumamoto, aided in confirming current academic linguistic usage of terms. In addition to anecdotal evidence, the following resources have served as primary sources:

- Dai Nihon Kokugo Jiten*. Mannen & Matsui. (Eds.). [Japanese Language Dictionary].
Fukui University Linguistics WWW Site at <http://www.kuzan.f-edu.fukui-u.ac.jp> [Japanese]
An Introduction to Japanese Linguistics. Tsujimura.
The Japan Encyclopedia. Campbell et al.
Kenkyusha's Japanese-English Dictionary. 4th ed.
Koujien. Shinmura. (Ed.). [Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Japanese Language].
Nihongo Hyakuka Daijiten. [An Encyclopedia of the Japanese Language].
Nihon Kokugo Daijiten. 20 vols. [The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Japanese Language].
Nihongo Kyoiku Jiten. Kindati, Hayasi & Sibata. (Eds.). [Japanese Language Education Dictionary].
Shogakukan Jiten. [The Shogakukan Dictionary].

The results, aided by later confirmations, provide evidence that *onji* is no longer an appropriately communicative term. Additionally, it is my belief that the two 'counters,' *-on* and *-ji*, used for counting Japanese kana or the Japanese "syllables" in haiku and tanka, have been artificially fused or confused with the term *onji* (or sometimes *jion*) as used in English.

Recently, the poet, publisher and translator, Jane Reichhold, (see Kawamura & Reichhold, 1998; 1999), wrote to me about the controversies that had first occurred in the 1970s surrounding the English use of the term *onji*, and methods for counting *-on* in haiku and tanka. Here is an excerpt from our dialogue:

10 Did you know that haiku wars were waged in the 70s over this issue of *onji* and "syllable" counting? Friendships were permanently destroyed. Haiku groups split up. New ones formed. Persons were reviled. There was much sneering, jeering, and rejection. It was terrible. The problem remains and is just now entering the tanka scene. From Japan, one group is pushing that all our tanka be written in 5-7-5-7-7 but 5-7-5-7-7 what? How can we count our syllables and equate them with this unknown factor which the Japanese count and hold in such high esteem? (J. Reichhold, July 11, 1998. Personal communication.)

It is ironic that there were such bitter arguments over a Japanese word—and the "syllable" counting battles it typified—which had existed the Japanese linguistic vocabulary years before the haiku wars.

Counting in Japanese, and Some Differences Between English and Japanese "Syllables"

Japanese counting systems use 'counters,' which are special counting terms for things. There are many different counters, or counting terms, for all sorts of things in Japanese, including phonetic characters, alphabetical symbols, spoken sounds, and sound-units in poetry.²

Onji is an obsolete linguistic term used to define "phonic characters," that is, characters (*ji*) which have sound (*on*), but not meaning. In modern times, this word has been supplanted by the term *hyouon moji* (similarly): characters (*moji*) which are representative (*hyou*) of sound (*on*), or simply "sound representative characters." *Onji* and *hyouon moji* are terms of categorical definition; neither term has ever been used to count up "syllables" in Japanese poetry.

Japanese generally uses two different counting terms for counting "syllables." One counter is *-on*. The other is *-ji*. They are two separate words. *On* means "sound," and *ji* means "character." One can count up the 17 "syllables" in the typical haiku using either term:

1. *go-ji shichi-ji go-ji* literally, "five characters, seven characters, five characters." Similarly we can count:

2. *go-on shichi-on go-on* which has a meaning similar to #1 above: "five sounds, seven sounds, five sounds."

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If we refer to the number of "syllables" in a poem, we can ask, "How many *-on*?" or "How many *-ji*?" These questions ought to be quite clearly understood by modern Japanese people, when referring to poetry. For counting the total number of "syllables" in a poem, two terms are generally used. The first, and more strictly correct is *-on*, as in: "There are 17-*on* in that haiku." Also, people informally use *moji*. *Moji* is not generally used as a counter, but its meaning is virtually identical to *-ji*: a letter or character, that is, any written character. So people also say, "That haiku has 17-*moji*." *Ji* is not commonly used to count totals of "syllables" in poems. So, the most communicative terms used in contemporary Japan to count "syllables" in poetry are *-on* or *-ji* or sometimes *moji*, for totals.

'Syllables' has been enclosed within quotation marks, because with only few exceptions due to dialect, there is virtually no perception of English-style syllabification of words on the part of adult Japanese speakers. Natsuko

Tsujimura mentions that "Specifically, English speakers divide words into syllables while Japanese speakers divide words into *morae*. Due to this difference, a native speaker of English divides 'London' into two syllables, while a native speaker of Japanese considers the word as consisting of four *morae*. [lo/n/do/n] . . . *Mora* is considered as a timing unit, especially within the larger context of words" (Tsujima 1996, pp. 64-6).

Basically, this means that, perceptually-speaking, Japanese speech is composed of small, timed units of sound, rather than syllables. *Mora* (plural, *morae*) is the term that both Japanese and English linguists often use to identify the 'time-unit sounds' of speech, which when put together, compose words in spoken Japanese.³ With regard to Japanese poetry, the terms *-on* and *-ji* identify these same time-unit sounds. It is this time-sense division of sounds, rather than syllabification, which accounts for how words are parsed by Japanese speakers.

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One term that can be used for the English-style syllabification of Japanese is *on-setsu*. It is both a name and a counter. *On-setsu* has several conflicting definitions, and there is some controversy right now in Japan about its appropriate use. Here, following one of the two main definitions advanced by Hattori (1961; cf. Campbell et al, 1993, p. 670), *on-setsu* will be used to indicate English-style syllabification of Japanese, and additionally, the perception of *on-setsu* in non-moraic languages.

If one gives Japanese students the task of separating English words into syllables, and then asks them to describe what they are doing, they will say: "These are English *on-setsu*." *On-setsu*, then, is indicative of the closest available Japanese concept to the English-speaker's perception of "syllable." However, there are some compelling differences between syllables and *on-setsu*, as applied to Japanese. For a start, there are no *on-setsu* in Japanese which are longer than two combined *-on*. Japanese *on-setsu* are always either one or two *mora* in length. Therefore, we can

say that spoken Japanese is a language composed of either long or short *on-setsu*, the long *on-setsu* being more or less exactly twice as long as the short *on-setsu*. When English-speakers hear the word *nihon*, they will perceive the word syllabically as "ni/hon." Are these two English syllables reasonably similar to what is meant by the two *on-setsu*: "ni/hon" in Japanese? Clearly not, because *on-setsu* remain rooted in Japanese language perception. They carry a precise time-sense that is fundamental to the language. English syllables are not only vastly more variable in length, but further, are paradigmatically disjunctive to moraic timing in Japanese.⁴ Thus, the term "syllable" is conceptually counter-intuitive to the way in which native-speakers of Japanese perceive and cognize their language.

Though the use of the term "syllable" may seem expedient and practical in its application to Japanese poetry from an English-language standpoint, our main concern here is to promote clear bilingual, cross-cultural communication. When using the word "syllable" in referring to the individual sound-units which we may naively perceive and count up in haiku or tanka, we are not being correct, certainly, in terms of Japanese usage or sensibility. Further, we run the risk of distancing ourselves from cogent factors that are innately a part of those original poetic works which are serving as models, or as a basis for emulation, translation, or study in English. It seems more elegant, as well as accurate, to use the terms *-on* or *-ji*, and avoid the use of the term "syllable," if possible, when counting up the separate sounds (*hyouon*) in Japanese poetry.

From this point, terms typically used in Japan will be used to distinguish between English-style syllabification and individual sounds, as follows: *on-setsu* to indicate English-style syllabification, and *-on* to indicate the separable sounds (*hyouon*), or time-units of speech (*mora*), which are what we want to count up in Japanese poetry.

There are two Japanese phonetic alphabets in

contemporary use, i.e. the *kana* alphabets. *Kana* can refer to an individual alphabetical character, or group of characters. The *kana* alphabets have often been described as syllabic alphabets, but we can consider each *kana* character as one *-on*. Each *kana* character is, then, representative of a separable, timed, sound-element of language.⁵

Here is an example of the difference between *on-setsu* and *-on* counting: *nihon* (ni/hon) has two *on-setsu*. Notice that a single sound (*-on*) can sometimes function as an *on-setsu*, as in the case of *ni* in ni/hon. With *nihon*, we count the three *-on* as: ni/ho/n. Some further examples which illustrate problems that can arise when counting *-on* in *romaji*, the Roman letter alphabet, are detailed below:

14 *Enpitsu* (pencil) is made up of four *kana*: e/n/pi/tsu, so there is a total of 4-*on*. If we are reading *romaji*, we might mistakenly count *enpitsu* as en/pi/tsu. Parsing *enpitsu* this way separates the word into three *on-setsu*. To get an accurate count of *hyouon moji* in Japanese poetry when we are using *romaji*, we need to count the sounds just as they would be represented by the *kana* alphabets. Here are a few other examples: *eigo* (English) has three *-on*: e/i/go. But two *on-setsu*: ei/go. *Nihongo* (Japanese language) has four *-on*: ni/ho/n/go. And three *on-setsu*: ni/hon/go. *Koukousei* (High School student) has 6-*on*: ko/u/ko/u/se/i. And three *on-setsu*: kou/kou/sei. A word like this may be written in *romaji* as *kokosei* in some variants, with the *-u kana* left out, making it more difficult to accurately count the total *-on*. Usually, an omicron over the *o* will indicate the presence of the additional *-u kana*. *Kekkon* (marriage) has a doubled consonant, which indicates the presence of the small "tsu (t)" *kana*, a "stop" or pause in speech of one *mora*. *Kekkon* has 3-*on*: ke/(t)/kon. And two *on-setsu*: ke(t)/kon." Remember, each *-on* or *-ji* can always be represented by one (or one digraphic) *kana* character in Japanese.

Mora and Prosody

We shall return briefly to the term *mora*, and its plural, *morae*. These are English linguistic terms which we have also found used as Japanese loan-words. In typical Japanese spoken style, each *-on* takes approximately the same amount of time to speak. In fact, each *kana*, including digraphs like *kyo*, *jyo*, *gyo*, etc., takes about the same amount of time to speak. This time-sense or time-count is defined by the term *mora*, or we could say by *kana* or *hyouon* time-units.

Mora is a technical term, not generally used outside the field of linguistics. The more commonly known term is *haku*. Currently, *mora* are undergoing intensive linguistic studies, which show connections between spoken and written Japanese that reveal underlying relationships not altogether unlike English prosody. Recent research shows that the perception of moraic length and timing on the part of native speakers is highly complex, being influenced by the accent, pitch shift, duration, and volume-level of words.⁶ Consequently, it has become somewhat reductive, linguistically, to consider *mora* purely as measures of abstract time-units, a view which was widely held some 20 years ago. This is an exciting area of research and may yield new methods for emulating haiku and tanka in English. *Mora* research is mentioned, then, to call attention to layers of prosodic complexity in Japanese language and poetry that go far beyond *-on* counting alone, which if taken as a singular, defining formal feature of haiku, leads to painfully reductive structural interpretations. In terms of written Japanese, the number of *mora* will always agree with the number of *kana* (with digraphs considered as single *kana*), and therefore the number of *-on*.

A Glossary of all the terms covered in this article will be found in the Appendix.

DIACHRONIC EXPEDITIONS

A Brief History of *Kanji* and *Kana*

Here is a brief history and overview of the Japanese language from an orthographic viewpoint. "It is generally believed that *kanji* came to Japan from China through Korea, [between 300—400 CE]. No record of a written language exists in Japan before this time" (Mitamura & Mitamura, 1997, p. xi). *Kanji* themselves are much more ancient, "attributable to the scribes of the Yin Dynasty [1700—1050 BCE]" (p. xi). The oldest *kanji* descend from hieroglyphs or pictographs (*shoukei moji*, op cit, p. xiv). Japanese *kanji*, as presently used (with some exceptions) are ideogrammatic, not phonetic. Each character represents a singular concept or idea rather than a singular sound. The group of characters from which *kanji* spring are called: *hyoui moji*, meaning, "characters (*moji*) which are representative (*hyou*) of meaning (*i*), not sound." An older term for *hyoui moji* is *iji*: meaning (*i*) + characters (*ji*).

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In China, the meaning and sound of the *kanji* were originally directly related, but when *kanji* were imported into Japan, some interesting changes occurred. First, the original Chinese sounds which came along with the *kanji* were changed to accord with Japanese, which does not use pitch to ascribe meaning, as does Chinese. (This is called the *ON* reading of the *kanji*.) Then, pre-existing Japanese words which had the same meaning as the Chinese *kanji* were added to each *kanji*. (This is called the *KUN* reading of the *kanji*.) Over the centuries, the same *kanji* was reintroduced to Japan, sometimes repeatedly, from various regions of China, and from succeeding Dynasties. With each reintroduction to Japan, the same *kanji* took on yet another form of pronunciation.⁷ *Kanji* were also created and further adapted in Japan, and rarely, a *kanji* from Japan went back to China.⁸

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The typical *kanji* now has two or three *ON* readings and two or three *KUN* readings, while some of the commoner *kanji*, such as “life” and “below” can have as many as ten fundamentally different readings. . . . As a result of fundamental differences between the monosyllabic Chinese language and the polysyllabic, highly inflected Japanese language the Chinese writing system proved decidedly unsuitable in the case of inflected items such as verbs. . . . the potential for confusion was obviously considerable . . . (Henshall, 1988, p xiv).

“The number of *kanji* in actual use probably did not exceed 5,000 or 6,000 [before 1946]” (Campbell *et. al.*, p. 669). Eventually, novel ‘problem solving’ phonic characters (absent of intrinsic meaning) were evolved in stages to distinguish between alternate readings of the same *kanji* and determine verb inflections, among other uses.

Today, there are two phonic alphabets, *hiragana* and *katakana*, in general use. Japanese is written with a mixture of *kanji* and *kana*, mostly *hiragana*. There may be a sprinkling of *katakana* and the merest dash of roman letters, usually for foreign names or places, and technical words. Current linguists now consider contemporary Japanese to have three separate alphabets, plus the 1,945 *joyo kanji* approved for general use—unless you are a haiku writer, in which case you probably know many more *kanji* than the average person on the street. (*Joyo kanji* instruction is not completed until the end of the 9th grade.) When we read a Japanese poem in *romaji*, we are looking at a special form of *hyouon moji*, called *tan-on moji*: a “single-phoneme character” alphabet. However, outside of a few historic social and literary experiments, *romaji* is not ordinarily used by the Japanese themselves in written discourse. *Romaji* is mostly used for the benefit of those who cannot read the *kana* alphabets.

The term *hyouon moji* is very useful in Japanese linguistics, because historically, various phonic characters were employed before the later development of the *kana* alphabets currently in use. The *Man'yoshu*, 759 CE, the earliest collection of poetry, is written in *Man'yogana*,

a script in which certain *kanji* were designated as 'sound-only' *kanji* (see Campbell *et. al.*, pp. 730-31). *Hyouon moji* can be used to describe all of these phonic characters, and *hyouon* can be used more generally to describe phonic representations, without the need to discuss characters, specifically.

Hiragana in its modern form is composed of 48 *kana* characters. "Hira means 'commonly used,' 'easy,' 'rounded' (Campbell *et. al.*, p. 731). *Hiragana* was developed from simplified *kanji*, and takes its name

because the [*kana*] are considered rounded and easy to write [when compared with the original *kanji*]. In its early [9th century Heian era] forms, *hiragana* was used by women [who were not permitted to learn the Chinese script], while the unsimplified *kanji* were used by men; for this reason, the earliest *hiragana* was also called *onnade*, "women's hand." By the end of the 9th century, *onnade* ceased to be a system limited to women and . . . [only] gained full acceptance when the imperial poetic anthology [*Kokinshu*, published in 905] was written in *onnade* (op cit).

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"The *kata-* in *katakana* means 'partial, 'not whole, 'fragmentary' (op cit). This name stems from the fact that many *katakana* were taken from only a part of the original *kanji*. In its earliest use, "*katakana* was a mnemonic device for pronouncing Buddhist texts written in Chinese" (op. cit.). By the mid-10th century, poetic anthologies had been composed in *katakana*.

The Rise and Fall of *Onji*

The year of the Meiji Restoration, 1868, marked the beginning of the modern Japanese language reform movement. "Although much of the development of modern Japanese proceeded spontaneously, the role of planned development was considerable. . . . It was necessary to select a single variety of Japanese . . . to increase literacy, [and] create an extensive modern vocabulary" (Campbell *et. al.*, p. 669). As well, grammatical and

stylistic usages began to be codified, “[and Japanese began] to be liberated from its dependence on classical Chinese. [It was felt by a number of eminent scholars that] the only way to modernize the language—and the minds of the people that spoke it—was in affiliation with the languages by means of which the knowledge of the developed West [could be] introduced” (*op. cit.*).

It seems likely that the entrance of *onji* into the Western lexicon was a result of the publication of Nishi Amane’s (1829-1897) landmark text, the *Hyakugaku Renkan*, in 1870 (see Campbell et al, p. 1098), soon after his four-year sojourn in Europe. Amane equated the pre-existing Japanese term *onji* orthographically with “letters.” In this first Western-style encyclopedia, “patterned after the works of Auguste Comte . . . Amane introduced the full spectrum of Western arts and sciences to Japan” (*op cit.*). The encyclopedia contains hundreds of Western terms, which are correlated with Japanese terms or concepts (and vice versa). Amane’s translation is preserved in the *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, which annotates the *Hyakugaku Renkan* as the root-translation of *onji* to the English “letters” (see *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, 1988, Vol. 4, p. 159). The *Hyakugaku Renkan* was an important source of English-Japanese and later, Japanese-English translations (based upon Amane’s correlations) throughout the Meiji era (1868-1912), during which time the Japanese vocabulary developed with phenomenal rapidity. Meiji-era grammarians typically used *onji* to describe phonic characters, while its sister-term *iji* was used to describe ideogrammatic *kanji* characters. Prior to 1900, language reform groups were urging the government to take steps to modernize the Japanese language, but no major language reforms occurred. The changes that did result were serendipitous. Two varieties of Japanese emerged: the classical standard, based on pre-Meiji styles, used only in writing, and the colloquial standard, rooted in the spoken language and more or less identical to modern

Japanese. Literacy was also rapidly improving through the implementation of mandatory education.

By the early 1900s Ueda Kazutoshi, also known as Ueda Mannen (1867-1937), a professor at Tokyo University (influenced by his studies with Basil Hall Chamberlain and "the first Japanese trained in Western linguistics..." Campbell et al, p. 670), had become a member of the National Language Research Committee. Ueda introduced Western linguistic research methods into Japan, trained researchers, and contributed greatly to national language reform policies. In a relatively early monograph "*Kari-ji Meishyou-kou*" [The Origination of Kana], (1904 or prior), he used the term *onji* exclusively. One of Ueda Mannen's crowning achievements was the *Dai Nihon Kokugo Jiten* [Japanese Language Dictionary], (1972, reprint), originally published in four volumes, 1914-1919. "Containing over 200,000 entries, it became the standard work for editors of later dictionaries . . . it is distinguished by its cautious treatment of etymologies and its policy of including only information of unquestioned accuracy" (Campbell et al, p. 266). Within, *onji* is cited, and a brief definition is included (p. 254). There is no reference to *hyouon* or *hyouon moji*. In fact, examining citations for *hyou*, we find no entry (see p. 1666). Evidently, neither *hyouon* nor *hyouon moji* had entered linguistic parlance prior to publication.

Hashimoto Shinkichi (1882-1945), a noted Japanese linguist and grammarian, graduated from Tokyo University in 1906 and served as assistant to Ueda Mannen from 1909 to 1927, when he succeeded Ueda as professor of Japanese at Tokyo University. We find in his *Kokugakugairon* [An Outline of Japanese Linguistics], (1967, reprint), originally published in 1932-33, a chapter titled "*moji no shurui*" [Types of Characters]. On page 104 is the statement: "Concerning *onji*, it is synonymous with *hyouon moji* and *onhyou moji*" (my translation). In the remainder

of the chapter, *onji* is the term Hashimoto prefers, and uses it on two occasions. This situation is reversed some ten years later in a paper written in 1943, titled "*nihon no moji ni tsuite*" [About Japanese Characters], (see "*moji oyoubi kana ken no kenkyu*" [Research into *Kana* and the Usage of Characters], 1976, reprint, pp. 226-36). The paper's subtitle "*moji no hyoui-se to hyouon-se,*" means roughly, "The Ideogrammatic and Phonic Nature of Characters." On page 226 we find: "Concerning *hyouon moji*, it is synonymous with *onji*." Hashimoto uses *hyouon moji* throughout the paper (some eight times), and does not use *onji*. So, though it is unclear when exactly the term *hyouon moji* entered the linguistic lexicon, it seems apparent that it was becoming more popularly used by grammarians by the 1930s, and likely was becoming or had become the preferred term just prior to the post-war period.

At this time, the field of linguistics was developing quite rapidly, and a great number of language reforms were being implemented. Significantly, Hashimoto, in concert with a group of linguistic scholars, was responsible for the "Supplement to the New Grammar" (*shin buntan bekki*), the official school reference grammar established by the Ministry of Education, as late as 1939. Hashimoto's grammatical ideas were widely distributed and remain influential to the present.

Further references to *onji* in Hashimoto's papers on Japanese phonology written in the 1930s and 1940s have not been located. It is likely that *onji* was removed from educational grammars during or following the 1930s reforms, being supplanted with *hyouon moji*. As to the exact date of the disappearance of *onji*, and a significant referential notation regarding its disappearance, none has been found to this date. Okajima Teruhiro, Professor of Japanese Language and Linguistics at Fukui University, who has done extensive research on the Language Reform Movement and the works of Hashimoto Shinkichi, searched for particular references and reported that there

were indeed very few references to *onji* whatsoever. Okajima suggests: "As the field of Japanese linguistics developed, there arose confusions in the usage of *onji* with another term, *on-se kigou*, a term used to denote the special characters used for phonetic representation. It is likely that the more accurate term, *hyouon moji*, was chosen to replace *onji* in order to avoid confusions caused by variant usages of *onji*" (Personal communication, July 30, 1998, my translation).

Onji is no longer included as a reference in many current Japanese dictionaries. We do not find a reference in the *Nihongo Hyakuka Daijiten* (Kindati, Hayashi and Sibata, 1988), an encyclopedic linguistics dictionary, wherein *hyouon moji* receives a lengthy treatment (p. 307). A top-line electronic translation dictionary, the 1998 Canon IDX-9500, containing nearly 400,000 Japanese word-entries and over 250,000 English word-entries, finds *hyouon moji*, only, when a search is performed using "hyoun" as a keyword. Keying in "phonogram" in English, the dictionary translates the term as *hyouon moji*, only. Searching with the keyword "onji" results in zero hits. *Onji* is not contained in the database. The above facts must give one pause. We do find references in some academic dictionaries, for instance, the 20 volume *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, (1988), as previously mentioned. In the *Koujien*, (Shimura, Ed., 1998), perhaps the best and largest of the single-volume unabridged dictionaries in Japan, we find a citation for *onji* (p. 419), which refers us to *hyouon moji*. It is only under the citation for *hyouon moji* (p. 2275), that we find a definition given. We also find a single reference in the largest of Kenkyusha's Japanese-English translation dictionaries, (1978), where *onji* is translated by the word "phonogram," with a reference to "see: *hyouon*." Further investigations into the disappearance of *onji* will no doubt yield more definitive results. Questions concerning regional variations of usage and specialized technical usages remain.

Clearly, *onji* is not recognized in contemporary Japanese poetic circles. In contrast to *onji*, the term *hyouon moji* is fairly well-recognized as a defining term, in both linguistic, and, as we have found, literary environments. *Onji* was first brought to the United States haiku audience via a letter published in the Haiku Society of America's *frogpond* (1978), written by Tadashi Kondo, in response to the Haiku Society of America, under the direction of Harold G. Henderson, having previously adopted the term *jion*. Kondo wrote that "*Jion* is a specialized term from linguistics relating to the pronunciation of a Sino-Japanese character. *Onji* means 'phonetic symbol' (or 'sound symbol,' and seems to be the term desired. . . . [however] while the concept of *onji* has often been translated into English as 'syllable,' it would be more accurate to say that the *onji* is a 'mora.' . . ." (op cit). Following the *frogpond* publication, *onji* became an important part of the English language haiku-study vocabulary. Hopefully, current research will suffice to change this usage, which still remains active throughout the West. Kondo recently commented that

I knew Professor Henderson through letters exchanged three or four times before his death in 1974. I did not meet him in person, since his death came the day after I arrived in this country. I know he was a fine linguist, and would never make such a trifling mistake. My personal speculation is that the mistake, of having *jion* instead of *onji*, could have simply been a typo. It could have been done either by Professor Henderson himself or by the printer. This type of mistake could have happened easily; as most people do not pay much attention to these words, the mistake might have passed by many peoples' eyes. [Nevertheless] in the early 70s . . . Haiku poets who would come to the HSA monthly meetings at the Japan Society were using *jion*, as in: "haiku is written in 5-7-5 *jion*," which is absolutely wrong. . . . When I found this mistake, my simple reaction to it was to flip the word order, from *jion* to *onji*, because that seemed the most reasonable correction . . . ([When you] look up *onji* in older dictionaries, you may find explanations given, instead of a simple direction to see *hyouon moji* or *onpyou moji*.) . . . I found the problem and decided to write a letter to correct the misunderstanding. So the issue is basically technical and I was not concerned about its popular usage. It is another issue. (T. Kondo, April 3, 1999. Personal communication.)

The well-known poet James Kirkup, a frequent resident of Japan, quoted in a recent article by Hiroaki Sato, has commented that "few [Japanese] have ever heard the word *onji*" (*frogpond*, 1995); we assume he is referring in particular to the Japanese poetic community. Sato himself further mentions that "[Within] descriptions of the terms *tanka*, *renga*, and *hokku* (*haiku*) in Japanese dictionaries and books . . . you will find that the words used for counting the sound units [are] *on*, *ji*, or *moji*. In this light, Higginson's statement, "Japanese poets do not count 'syllables' at all. Rather, they count *onji*" is, to say the least, bizarre." (*op. cit.*) Due to the obscurity of *onji*, some rather ironic cross-cultural miscommunications have been occurring with greater frequency at one of the most active areas of international exchange—internet haiku and *tanka* websites. In a typical scenario, an aspiring non-Japanese haiku poet wishes to discuss how to count *-on* in haiku (a popular research topic), and uses the term *onji* in an e-mail to a newsgroup. Japanese respondents, who are rarely fluent in English, do not recognize the term, and assume it is yet another mysterious English word. A potentially edifying cross-cultural dialogue is thus aborted; the topic under discussion, *-on* counting, is never effectively broached. Terms such as *-on*, *-ji*, or *-moji*, while they might not always be applied with technical precision, would remain communicative. One can also imagine that the use of communicative terms, combined with a more refined understanding of Japanese language issues on the part of haiku poets who are otherwise unfamiliar with Japanese, would create an atmosphere more conducive to a multi-cultural exchange of poetic ideas. Communication problems, as in the example above, only serve to maintain historical patterns of isolation and insularity between the Japanese, North American, and increasingly, international haiku and *tanka* cultures which use English as a medium of exchange.⁹

Eight Reasons Why *Onji* May Have Persisted in the English Poetic Lexicon

It is now possible to summarize some probable reasons for the persistence of *onji*:

1. A number of influential translators and Japanese authors used the term, following the Meiji restoration (1868), through the 1930s. Later translators, seeking translation sources, may have continued to follow English translations by previous translators.

2. *Onji* continues to be indexed in the best available Japanese-English translation dictionary as well as in some of the academic and collegiate Japanese dictionaries. This is a primary source of information for those living outside Japan. Although in all the cases we found, *hyouon* is referred to as an operative term, *onji* is implied by description as archaic only in the *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*. Kenkyusha's translation dictionaries, good as they may be, are no substitute for an unabridged Japanese-language dictionary, which does provide enough information to discern an archaic attribution, if one researches the indicated references.

3. Under the influence of Western linguistic methods and the pressing need for language reform, the Japanese language has undergone rapid change in the 20th century, especially in the use of grammatical terms. The Japanese pay a great deal of attention to their language: Japanese language history, grammar, and phonology are taught in public schools, and knowledge of such terminology is often required for college entrance exams. Any changes made by Ministry of Education linguistic research groups tend to be rapidly implemented in future textbook changes. Given this atmosphere of change, it is possible for a term to quickly exit the Japanese lexicon, say in a period of 20 or so years from the date of textbook removal. Obviously, World War II also had an enormous impact in creating a 'break' from some aspects of pre-war linguistic usage: outmoded aspects of pre-war language dropped from usage with extreme rapidity. This scenario implies that a Japanese word could enter the English language while shortly thereafter disappearing from the Japanese lexicon.

4. A 'culture-gap' can occur through purely written communication with Japanese correspondents. In correspondence with Japanese writers in which I was soliciting information about *onji*, informants never mentioned their personal experience. If they were questioned about an unfamiliar word, a dictionary was consulted. Not finding the word in abridged dictionaries, informants tended to seek out a dictionary such as the *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, whose *onji* information was then quoted. However, the archaic nature of the term, which takes additional research to verify, was not mentioned. Generally, informants tended not to offer personal opinions or their lack of acquaintance with *onji* in personal

communications, unless they were teachers of Japanese linguistics and phonology, had access to numerous sources, and perhaps therefore considered themselves informed enough to comment. Due to differing cultural styles of communication, English informants, on receiving communications from correspondents, may have been lead to believe that *onji* was a viable term of discourse.

5. There is little readily available research into contemporary Japanese terms utilized in Japanese linguistic phonology in English translation. Japanese Linguistics texts often apply English linguistic terms and categories to the Japanese language. Much of the linguistic commentary on Japanese poetry (in English) has taken a Western-oriented approach to the language, as is the case with the term "syllable." This has been true even within Japan, though the situation is changing. In addition, the disappearance of *onji* is not of particular significance within Japanese phonological studies.

6. The Japanese use of 'counting' terms has caused misunderstandings in English. The specific counting terms and concepts utilized in Japanese poetic circles have not been broadly introduced.

7. Few Western poets or translators with an interest in Japanese poetry have lived and worked in Japan, gained Japanese language ability, joined haiku circles, and inquired about linguistic terms. Short visits and overseas inquiries may not have elicited the necessary cultural information.

8. Research into *onji* twenty to thirty years ago might have yielded different results. If Japanese grammarians had been consulted, researchers may have found that some scholars had knowledge of the term, having been educated during a time when *onji* was still in usage.

BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE AND THE SPOKEN WORD

One day, after Kojyo-sensei and I had satisfactorily laid *onji* to rest, sensei dug up a gorgeous book of collected haiku, and read—mostly Basho and Buson, but some modern haiku also. And we talked about each haiku a bit; he made instant translations after reading the commentaries, and we counted *kana* and clapped out the *mora*. This experience was most satisfying. Having had so many haiku spoken out loud by a sensitive reader, I now have a better sense of the spoken haiku rhythm, and why classical writers may have sometimes added or subtracted an *on* or two, here or there. As poets know, the feeling of the language and its living texture often takes precedence.

SUPPLEMENT

Language is not, after all, some pure mathematical equation with exact answers; words play, stretch, bend into each other, eddy and separate. The supposedly “tight” form of haiku and tanka has served to mask the fact that whether a line has 4, 5, or 8-*on*, in Japanese, these lines can sound shorter or longer, staccato or legato, be phonemically complex or have extreme brevity, regardless of the “count.” No doubt this information does not translate easily into English, especially because this has to do with sound and speech, not just reading—the standard medium for approaching Japanese poetry in English translation. It was wonderful to hear a sensitive native-speaker reciting haiku, to “get into it” in this way. I think this was why Kojyo-sensei, at a certain point, just put down the texts and began to read aloud.

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NOTES

1 I first became interested in this subject nearly twenty years ago, while attending the Naropa Institute, in Boulder, Colorado. I encountered the traditional haiku masters through the auspices of Patricia Donegan (Donegan & Ishibashi, 1998), and became involved with various American haiku circles over succeeding years. This paper focuses on linguistic issues related with the most popular traditional Japanese poetic forms, both within and outside of Japan: haiku and tanka. Nonetheless, one can likewise apply this discussion to other forms of Japanese poetry, where counting *hyouon moji* comes into play.

2 Some examples of 'counters,' also known as 'numerators' or 'numeral classifiers': round slender objects take *-hon*; flat objects take *-mai*; (postal) letters take *-su*; footgear take *-soku*; vehicles take *-dai*; animals take *-hiki*, etc. (cf. Inamoto, 1993, pp. 69-73.)

3 Apparently, *mora*, defined by the American Heritage Dictionary, 1992, as "(Latin) The minimal unit of metrical time in quantitative verse, equal to the short syllable," has entered Japanese linguistic circles as a loan-word. I have found this term used frequently within Japanese as well as English linguistics contexts and have also noted its use as a 'counter' in Japanese.

4 Hence the controversy, from the Japanese side, regarding the use of the term *on-setsu*, when applied to non-moraic languages like English.

5 Incidentally, this includes the digraphs, or 'double-characters,' such as *kyo*, *jyo*, *gyo*, etc. These combined characters too are each counted as one *-on* (or one *-ji*), and they take about the same amount of time to speak as *ko*, *ji*, *go*, etc. For simplicity's sake, and the benefit of a reader-ship possibly unfamiliar with the *kana* alphabets, the digraphic

kana are being included here under the appellation “single *kana* characters,” though they are actually composed of two *kana* characters, which produce a single “combined” character.

6 "Previous researchers insisted that only the duration of vowels affects the perception of the number of morae. . . . however it is clear that not only the duration of the vowel sequence but also the accentual change has an important influence on the perception of Japanese subjects" (Omuro, Baba, Miyazono, Usagawa and Egawa, 1996, p. 6). ". . . Various kinds of information (pitch, rhythm, duration, lexical information) contribute in segmentation of three or more consecutive vowels" (Kakehi and Hirose, 1997, p 1, abstract).

7 For example, the *kanji* *i*, as in *iku* (to go), takes the sound *gyou* in *gyouretsu* (procession—introduced to Japan, 5th-6th century CE), takes *kou* in *koushin* (march, parade—introduced, 7th-9th century CE), and *an* in *anka* (foot warmer—introduced, 10th-13th century CE). (cf. Mitamura & Mitamura, p xiii)

8 “In a handful of cases new characters were created in Japan using Chinese elements, such as ‘dry field’ and ‘frame,’ and some of these have since been borrowed for use in Chinese (such as ‘work.’ These ‘made in Japan’ characters usually— but not necessarily— have *KUN* readings only” (Henshall, p xiv).

9 It is only in the last few years that contemporary tanka and haiku poets have begun to be published with some frequency in English translation. Very little is known about contemporary Japanese haiku and tanka culture in North America, and vice versa. Translations from English haiku and tanka into Japanese are still relatively rare.

APPENDIX

Lexical Glossary

Moji— Any written character. *Moji* describes all of the characters that are used in Japanese, which can include both *kanji* and *kana*. *Moji* is also sometimes used informally to count totals of *-on* or *-ji* in poems. We can also say that, “this haiku has 17 *moji*.”

Hyoui— “Representative of ideas.” Ideogrammatic representation.

Hyoui moji— “Characters (*moji*) which are representative (*hyou*) of meaning (*i*).” *Kanji* are *hyoui moji*. *Hyoui moji* are ideogrammatic. A number of *hyoui moji* are directly traceable to hieroglyphs or pictographs (*shoukei moji*).

SUPPLEMENT

Iji— An archaic term for *hyouji moji*. “Meaning (*i*) characters (*ji*).” No longer in use.

Hyouon— “Representative of sound.” Phonic representation.

Hyouon moji— “Characters (*moji*) which are representative (*hyou*) of sound (*on*).” “Sound-representation characters.” *Hyouon moji* include the *hiragana* and *katakana* alphabets. (*Romaji* is also a form of *hyouon moji*.) In modern Japanese, *hyouon moji* are individual phonic units, each of which is a separate alphabetical character (including digraphs) in the *hiragana* and *katakana* alphabets.

Onji— An archaic term for *hyouon moji*. “Sound (*on*) characters (*ji*).” No longer in use.

On-setsu—A term which has a variety of sometimes contradictory definitions in contemporary Japan; one of the definitions, given by Hattori, defines *on-setsu* as a term indicative of English-style syllabification as applied to Japanese, as well as English, among other languages (e.g. “English *on-setsu*”). The word *koukousei* has three *on-setsu*: kou/kou/sei, but six *-on*: ko/u/ko/u/se/i. *On-setsu* is the closest available term to the English “syllable.” But this would be an improper method for parsing words in Japanese poetry (see “*ji*” and “*on*,” below). Word-parsing by *on-setsu* is counter-intuitive to the perception of Japanese native-speakers.

On—(lit. “sound”)—A term used to count *kana*, or individual phonic units (*hyouon*) in poetry. It is this counter (or see “*-ji*,” below), which we want to use when we are counting the *hyouon* in Japanese poetry, as in: “The first line of this haiku has 5-*on*.” *On* is also used to express the total number of *kana* (or phonic units) in a poem, as in: “This tanka has 31-*on*.” *koukousei* has 6-*on*: ko/u/ko/u/se/i. Properly, we can say that most haiku contain 17-*on*.

Ji— (lit. “character”)— Along with *-on*, another often-used counting term to count *kana*, or individual phonic units (*hyouon*) in poetry. We can use *-ji* when we count up the *kana* in Japanese poetry, as in: “The first line of this haiku has 5-*ji*.” *Ji* is not generally used to express the total number of *kana* in a poem. The word: *koukousei* has 6-*ji*: ko/u/ko/u/se/i. As with *-on*, above, this is another appropriate method for counting *kana* in Japanese poetry.

Kana—This term has several referents. It can refer to the *hiragana* or *katakana* alphabets, as in: “Write it only in *kana*; no *kanji*, please.” It can refer to an individual alphabetical character, as in: “Which *kana* is that?” “It’s *ko*.” Most *kana* are single characters; however the group that

uses -y glides, like *kyo*, *jyo*, etc., are made up of two combined characters. These are digraphic *kana*. In this article, for simplicity, digraphs are here included as “individual alphabetical characters.” English-speakers will use the term informally, when speaking in English, as in: “I tried to write a poem in Japanese. I used 24 *kana*.” *Kana* are *hyouon moji*.

Kanji—*Kanji* are generally classed as ideograms, originally imported from China, with many later additions and alterations in Japan. *Kanji* are *hyoui moji*, with some exceptions.

Romaji—*Romaji* is a transcription alphabet which uses roman letters. *Romaji* is not a *kana* alphabet, nor is it a properly Japanese alphabet. It was primarily designed to aid those unable to read Japanese *kana*. The Roman alphabet is one variety of *hyouon moji*, known as *tan-on moji*, or single-phoneme characters, in Japanese linguistics. Many contemporary Japanese transliterations now use the modified Hepburn romanization (see Campbell et al, pp. 665-68).

Mora—A linguistic term used to identify the sense of “phonic (*hyouon*) time-units” or “time-lengths” in Japanese speech. *Mora*, and *morae*, its plural, are English linguistics terms and also Japanese loan-words. In written Japanese, the number of *mora* will always agree with the number of *-on* in a poem. The actual number of perceived *mora* may differ in spoken Japanese.

Haku—A synonym of *mora*. *Mora* is the technical linguistic term, while *haku* is the more commonly known term, familiar to most Japanese people. Both are used to count phonic (*hyouon*) time-lengths in Japanese. *Haku* is also a ‘counter.’

Haiku and Music in the Western Tradition

JIM KACIAN

Overview

Since haiku is a relative newcomer as a literary form in the west, it comes as no surprise that there has been comparatively little use of it in musical composition. Nevertheless, a few composers in the western tradition have discovered and used haiku in a variety of ways. This article seeks to discover what haiku has meant to western composers to this point in terms of perception and utilization, what music has emerged from this understanding, and what role we might expect to see haiku play in serious western music in the future.

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How Haiku Might Function in Music

Western art music in the twentieth century has shifted toward increasingly brief forms. Haiku, as the briefest of poetic forms, naturally has caught the attention of composers, and has served them in two primary ways: as the representative factotum of a *gestalt*, or as available lyric. In the former, a composer seeks to utilize the sensibility which informs haiku, at least as he or she perceives it, and to evoke it in musical terms. This approach lends itself to more abstract conceptions, often without words. In the latter, composers are more directly concerned with haiku as poetry, usually in settings for voice, in part because of its insistence upon a pure imagery. With a few exceptions, however, most often composers have found both reasons compelling in their decision to use haiku in their musical works.

Haiku was, for the most part, poorly understood when it was first available to western readers at the end of the 19th century. The first translations, usually uninformed and often rather wooden, failed to inspire any of the internationally prominent composers of the time. This is not to say the form was unknown: in fact, artists of the stature of Ezra Pound and Sergei Eisenstein knew of and utilized haiku and its attendant aesthetic to advance their own interests. As might be expected, however, no music could use the poetry of haiku, until it was apparent there was poetry to be found in haiku. This was not possible until the broader contexts of haiku were made available to non-Japanese, largely through the efforts of such seminal exponents as D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, and especially R. H. Blyth, who provided a language and context in which it was possible to appreciate what haiku was and might mean.

34 **Some Early Practitioners**

Materials from Blyth, Suzuki and Watts became available in the 1950s, a period when great interest in the Asiatic arts had been brought about by the United States' involvement in World War II and the Korean War. As a result of this interest westerners became aware of eastern religious and artistic practices in a practical fashion perhaps for the first time in such depth. There was great interest in alternative world views, and these imports offered thousands of years of history to go with their attractive surfaces, minimalist pictures and brief poetics. Especially pervasive was interest in Buddhism, and of the many forms, Zen in particular caught the interest of many artists of the time.

One musician who was in the forefront of adopting these new ideas was John Cage. Cage felt his aleatoric techniques were consonant with and expressive of a Buddhist understanding of reality. Typically, Cage's use of "haiku" is completely idiosyncratic: he uses the term suggestively to refer to a short series of minimalist

and wordless compositions for prepared piano, scored in his personal technique. This opus, entitled *Seven Haiku for Solo Piano* (1960), dedicates each of the short pieces to a friend, and it is perhaps too much to say that they are minimalist portraits of the dedicatees: however, there is expected to be understood a correspondence between the piece and its eponym. These seven are, in order, Elsa; Merle Armitage; Aghavril Domini; Richard Leppold; Maro; Willem de Kooning; and Sonja Sekula. No words are utilized, no haiku suggested: it is clear that Cage's use of the term *haiku* is philosophical rather than poetic or lyrical. The pieces, interesting in their own right, are certainly not to be considered major works in his *oeuvre*.

Olivier Messiaen found a more direct route to his understanding of *haikai* (his preferred term, and one which was certainly more current in the early 1960s than now in the haiku community): a lengthy stay in Japan. His *Seven Haikai* for large orchestra (1962) are unusual in their construction and orchestration. In addition to their atmospheric palette, variety of pentatonic and other harmonic devices, and unusual variations of rhythm which marks much of the composer's mature work, there was also much melodic material derived from feudal Japanese court music. Most of Messiaen's overriding interests in composition also appear to effect here as well: birdsong (here, the birds of Japan), Indian rhythmic devices, and so forth. The pieces are intended as evocations of specific areas of Japan, which he indicates in his notes on the pieces, as well as in the names he gave them. Though it is possible that certain poems served to inspire Messiaen, no actual poems were intended or evoked.

The first composer of note to utilize haiku as the source material of lyric was Vincent Persichetti. He called upon texts from the recent *A Net of Fireflies* (1965), translations of classical Japanese haiku into English by Harold Stewart (which remains one of the best-selling books of English-language haiku of all time), for material which resulted in two groups of songs, the

first of six settings for mixed chorus, and the second of five settings for soprano and piano accompaniment. It is apparent in listening to this music that the composer had little idea of what haiku was, as opposed to any other sort of western lyric. Rather, he was interested in finding a source of short lyric pieces to give shape to his own musical ideas, which includes such techniques as repetition of musical and poetic material, refrain, and "word painting". These are wonderful settings, sensitive to the voice and pleasing to the ear, but they sound decidedly "Western" and of their period, whereas it would be difficult to place the Cage other than late 20th century, while the Messiaen piece seems mostly outside of the tradition, albeit definitely from the experimental 1950-60s period. It is of interest to note that Stewart chose two-lined, rhymed iambic pentameter for his translations, which would be more recognizable as poetry to a literary conservative such as Persichetti.

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Synthesis and Success

Perhaps the first successful synthesis of western compositional technique and eastern sensibility was Ursula Mamlok's *Haiku Settings* (1978). Though hampered by poorish translations, the composer manages to keep her music keenly in touch with the feeling of the texts. Rather than simply setting the lyric, there is a feeling here that the text and music are equally complimentary to the sensibility which informs them both. Her musical language throughout the five pieces which make up the opus is innovative and idiosyncratic, but never without reference to the source lyric. The pieces are set for solo voice and flute, and the composer treats the instruments interchangeably: the flute is given passages of wonderful *cantabile* and *rubato*, while the voice often employs a sustained *melisma* and staccato.

Mamlok bridges the gap, and creditably, between composers whose use of haiku informing their music was fueled by a philosophical awareness of the form

through studies of "oriental" sourcebooks, or else through westernized translations of poems; and later composers who had available to them a greater general understanding of the form, as well as translations far more accurate in poetics and sensibility. (This is not to suggest, of course, that all composers avail themselves of these advantages when choosing haiku for their source material.) Contemporary composers also have another resource not available to their predecessors: a large body of English-language haiku from which to choose. In a real sense, composition which stems purely from a western sensibility is only possible once the source material is western as well.

Composers began using English-language haiku in part because it was now available, and in part because it was more expressive of their experiences. Helga Jensen, for example, chose several haiku by American poets for her *A Portrait of Spring* (1993). This set of seven songs, scored for soprano, piano, saxophone and clarinet, uses work by Virginia Brady Young, Marlene Mountain, Alan Pizzarelli and Anita Virgil, among others. There is a definite awareness of how haiku function in these pieces, and an attempt to capture this functioning in musical terms as well. Jensen has gone on to complete the cycle with subsequent works entitled *Summer*, *Winter*, and *Autumn*.

Similarly, Grace Asquith chose to set the haiku of contemporary poet Ebba Story in her 1993 work *Jasmine Tea*. This set of five poems is perhaps more western in feel than the preceding, due in part to the somewhat extended development and reiteration some of the themes receive. Nevertheless, there is a sensitivity to the settings which suggests that Asquith is an acute reader of, not just poetry, but haiku in particular. Her set was originally set for a small group of voices, but a version for large chorus also exists.

If Jensen and Asquith take a "classical" approach to setting haiku, Colin Blundell tends towards the folk and popular traditions in his treatments, which include

several long cycles in which the poems are intoned from a musical backdrop of strummed chords from a guitar, often with a recorder used as a "solo" instrument for color and variation. Such a piece is *Song for Mount Fuji* (1993), which sets a sequence of poems entitled *Mount Fuji* by the well-known Andorran poet James Kirkup. The musical fabric is reiterative, the recorder is "free," and at various cadences, and in a variety of deliveries, the poems are spoken freely. The result is cumulative and very listener-friendly, redolent of folk performances from an earlier day. Blundell works in other styles as well, including impressionistic settings of his own haiku with piano accompaniment which are quite affecting, each being perfectly attuned to the nuances of the poem in question. I don't know that these settings are grouped in any fashion, but a collection of them would be most welcome.

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A similar collection, so designated, is *Seventeen Haiku* (1998) for solo voice and piano by Jim Kacian. These short pieces (none is more than 20 measures) offer a musical analog to each poem, the voice treated in a variety of ways, and often with an ostinato in the piano which sets mood. They are designed to be heard as a unit. This is completely different in conception from his *Shenandoah* (1997), a setting of seven original haiku for soprano, baritone, flute, oboe and string quartet. Here, the music is the constant, a chamber tone poem which follows the course of the river of that name from point of origin to its confluence with the Potomac, ultimately with the sea. Embedded in this fabric are the poems, at moments of change in the river (and consequently in the music). The treatment here is decidedly western, in terms of both music and poetry. The scale of the piece (over twelve minutes of music) is unprecedented for a piece intended for voice, although the actual time voice actually sounds is perhaps just more than a minute.

All these composers—Jensen, Asquith, Blundell and Kacian—must be considered traditional in terms of their use of musical forces and treatment of lyric; they all are

interested, in the works noted, in the artful treatment of lyric as the inspiration of their musical ideas, and less in the philosophy or æsthetic surrounding haiku. That is not to say, however, that such composers cannot be found. Consider, for example, the composition *HaikuFM* (1993) by the electronic composer Ryuichi Sakamoto. This piece of prepared tape uses electronic and natural sounds, overdubbed, inverted and in combination, to create a mood which must be termed mesmeric, but which contains nothing resembling haiku, although there is some voice manipulation in the mix. What we might say is that Sakamoto creates a powerful mood that suggests, at least to him, something akin to haiku in mood. Haiku, used in the title, here refers not to the body of poetry of that name, but to the word current in popular parlance which suggests a certain hipness, an esoteric form smacking of Zen Buddhism, of seeming simplicity which in reality is uncommonly difficult. This is not unique to Sakamoto in these latter days, as we shall see, and reflects other aspects of popular culture where books of "haiku" by celebrities from other spheres (popular music and film, to name two) are published by major houses and marketed internationally, but which content bears little in common with what is understood to be haiku in more knowledgable circles.

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As a further example, there is *Haiku Lingo* (1993) by Shelley Hirsch and David Weinstein. Essentially a street theatre performance piece, this high-energy stream of consciousness ramble with prepared and live music accompaniment can claim some haiku connection: Hirsch, in her declaiming, does quote a haiku by Ryokan: "in the saucepan/where potatoes are boiling/this moonlit night;" as well as what I take to be an original poem: "the distant voices/of the immigrants mingle/with the cicadas". This is fun, but the use of *haiku* again is clearly for its cultural suggestiveness.

Still, these are models of sensitivity compared with Edwin London's *Sonnet Haiku* (1995), which seeks to deconstruct a sonnet by Shakespeare with a technique

reminiscent of Tristan Tzara's snipping the poems into their constituent words and rearranging them randomly as they appeared after being mixed in his stovepipe hat. London would suffer no such randomness, however: he arranges the words into lists of categories, nouns, verbs, articles, etc. and makes up six such lists. He then alternates musical sections, usually solo harpsichord, with sung sections, where the words are iterated in order of the list, without meaning to be attached: a sample list (the second section): *When to the up of the of a and with then an to for in and*. It doesn't sing any better. The music is repetitive and irritating. But one cannot mistake the composer's intent: this is musical deconstruction, in a superficial manner, and it is up to the auditor to supply the context for any significance which he or she would like to attach. Why *Sonnet Haiku*? I don't know. If I was to hazard a guess, it would be that the composer intends to be inclusive in his condemnation of meaning, and so has chosen for equal billing a stalwart form of traditional eastern literature to stand beside a warhorse from the western tradition. This at least has the benefit of referring to the form, but there is obviously little sympathy for, and seemingly little understanding of it.

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So where might we go from here? Whether or not haiku lends itself to musical treatment will remain open to debate until compelling musical treatment ends it. There are many difficulties in treating haiku—not only its brevity, but at the same time its compression, its resistance to reiteration or development, and others—and few outlets just now for performance (which of course is true for all new music, not just that which contains haiku). Perhaps the most encouraging new development is the setting contest—a text, or a few texts, are chosen, and composers are invited to try their hand at setting it. Prizes are awarded, and all settings are performed in an evening of music at the conclusion.

Such a contest was held recently at the University of Richmond (Virginia) in conjunction with a Southeast Regional Meeting of the Haiku Society of America.

SUPPLEMENT

Other arts were also featured, making the entire event a multimedia showcase for haiku and the related arts. Composers were asked to set one of three texts, in this case all translations from Japanese originals, ranging from the 15th century Sōkan to the near-contemporary Santōka. Several excellent pieces resulted, and the resulting concert was a pleasure and an inspiration, proof that composition which incorporates haiku is justified, and in fact is only just beginning to find its way.



Discography

Asquith, Grace *Jasmine Tea* from a recording of a live performance by the Boulder (CO) Songmakers, from the author's private collection

Blundell, Colin *Song for Mt. Fuji* Colin Blundell, Voice & Guitar, David Steele, Recorder; from a recording of a live performance, from the author's private collection

Cage, John *Seven Haiku for Solo Piano* from a realization by the author, from the author's private collection

Hirsch, Shelley and David Weinstein *Haiku Lingo* Shelley Hirsch, Voice, David Weinstein, various instruments & prerecorded tape; FM Records 1993

Jensen, Helga *A Portrait of Spring* Marcia Wolfe, Soprano, Beth Ann de Sousa, Piano, Wendy Tooke, Saxophone, Kerry Roebuck, Clarinet; from a recording of a live performance, from the author's private collection

Kacian, Jim *Seventeen Haiku* from a recording of a live performance by the composer, from the author's private collection

Kacian, Jim *Shenandoah* from a recording of a live performance, from the author's private collection

London, Edwin *Sonnet Haiku* Trio Bariano; New World Records 1995

Mamlok, Ursula *Haiku Settings* Jubal Trio; Grenadilla Records 1978

Messiaen, Olivier *Sept Haïkai* for Orchestra; Yvonne Loriod, Piano, Pierre Boulez, Conductor, L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Everest Records 1967

Persichetti, Vincent *A Net of Fireflies* Christina Lynn-Craig, Soprano, Alex Craig, Piano; from a recording of a live performance, from the author's private collection

Persichetti, Vincent *Winter Cantata* Opus 97, No. 2 for Women's Chorus, Flute and Marimba, New World Records 1983.

Sakamoto, Ryuichi *Haiku FM* realized by the composer, from a recorded tribute to John Cage, EFI Records 1993

A Pattern in the Air Another Perspective

BRENT PARTRIDGE

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There is that which transcends literary devices, and which they are excuses for—or which they may be said to justify. Even so, there may be a difference between perception and observation; and that difference may be what is most interesting in the final analysis. One method for studying this difference is to explore creativity through understatement, light humor, and slight loneliness. Just because some art is beyond literary devices doesn't mean that they are essentially bad, or that they're unnatural, but simply that they may be best appreciated when very subtle—keeping in mind that the actual form of a literary device may be self-defeating, or that it may help liberate.

Lest you consider that I actually dislike literary devices, I'll state that mundane and supernatural matters are like the superconscious mind, and that literary devices are like the conscious mind.

At any rate there appears to be the inescapable idea that in what is set down in poetry, or in any art for that matter, we either point toward the ultimate or speak from its vantage. The problem always remains that one must resolve the unity of the common and the perfect, or the outer and the inner. Beauty, even with a background of gloom, is so very positive that abstract words tend to be inefficient in capturing, or rather in releasing it. Understatement reveals itself as a most practical method of opening awareness, and indeed some people say that, in haiku, that which is unsaid is the most important part.

The problem of the poet's self resolves itself into that of a greater appreciation of space and nature. In haiku, method is studied in studying the nature of the language itself. In fact, a haiku that really *works* may be said to show the way to a new understanding, different from all others. It does this by giving another perspective.

In renga we find an æsthetic which transcends linear thought, and yet does not abandon it. Haiku are concerned most immediately with the underpinnings of transcendence and the shortcomings of language. Renga may be said to have narrative, but no plot; they do, however, retain inner structure. Haiku, on the other hand, using juxtaposition in a smaller form, replaces narrative with understatement. Thus we are left carrying the principle of "the mind is faster than the tongue" into or through or out of art.

The traditional 5-7-5 of Japanese haiku isn't just musicality—it's definitely concerned with number mysticism. The double meanings of the words *five* and *seven* in at least Japanese are those of exaltation. The double meaning of the number *four* in Japanese and Chinese is "death." In Japan, they're very superstitious about the number *four*—much more so than we are about the number thirteen. For example, in hotels in Japan, there are no rooms numbered *four*.

Many times I didn't understand the hidden meaning or subtle working of haiku or waka that I was revising from a translation in broken English—until I managed to get it into a 5-7-5 or 5-7-5-7-7 form. Because kanji contain so very much more information than is contained in syllables, when translating a haiku originally written in 5-7-5, I prefer this meter in English. Because written Japanese is perhaps a hundred times as difficult as the Roman alphabet, Japanese people have a better perspective as to what's appropriate in translation, and most like rhythm and number mysticism.

Patrick Frank's *Walking Alone*:

Alienation, Poverty & Consolation

BRUCE ROSS

Walking Alone

44
1 birds suddenly take flight spirit of a man lifted
2 calm spirit in the shelter ripples of peace expand
3 feeling you fade away fade away
4 hard to face the truth I really am sick
5 head down standing in line a homeless man
6 heart empty no quarter to call my girl
7 homeless alone but the snow falls gently
8 homeless man scared by his mirror image
9 homeless shelter my head is in my hands
10 some part of me has the desire to disappear
11 soup kitchen homeless woman feeds pigeons
12 the planets shining bright closer closer
13 this time really locked in really homeless
14 walking on the shoulder of the road lost
15 walking walking walking alone alone

*Patrick Frank*¹

Frank's stark haiku sequence *Walking Alone* has a precursor in his *Return to Springfield: Urban Haibun*. The haibun describes the recognizable but preferably avoided squalor found in many of our urban centers:

Saturday I returned to Springfield with my wife. She dropped me off at the ghetto court across from Burger King where I used to play. Despite the city's long-standing and well-publicized "urban renewal" program, the physical condition of the court and surrounding area are badly deteriorated:

back to the city—
glass litters
the ground

The court itself, where neighborhood kids are supposed to go to stay out of trouble and play, is a disgrace. The flotsam and jetsam of urban life have been discarded at the court's perimeter.

cigarette butts
everywhere beside
the ghetto court

the shattered pieces
of a transistor
radio²

The profound alienation depicted in Frank's sequence and the urban collapse described in his haibun are emblematic of the unstated poverty and malaise of late twentieth-century America. This "postmodern condition" was envisioned at the beginning of this century in Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Book of Poverty and Death*:

You are the poor one, you are the destitute.
You are the stone that has no resting place.
You are the diseased one
Whom we fear to touch.
Only the wind is yours.

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.....
Like flowers along the tracks, shuddering
as the train roars by, and like the hand
that covers our face when we cry—the poor.

Yours is the suffering of birds on freezing nights,
of dogs who go hungry for days.
Yours the long sad waiting of animals
who are locked up and forgotten.
You are the beggar who averts his face,
the homeless person who has given up asking;
you howl in the storm.³

The narrator of *Walking Alone* can be compared to the emotional flavor in many of the haiku of the modern wandering Zen haiku poet Santōka (1882-1940). Compare Frank's "walking on the shoulder of the road lost" (l. 14) to this haiku by Santōka:

Wearing rags,
 In the coolness
 I walk alone.⁴

Both authors are wandering in a state of poverty and homelessness. But Frank is overcome by his situation—he is literally and psychologically lost—while Santōka is indifferent to his poverty and isolation—he in fact takes pleasure in the “coolness” (*suzushi*). This word stands in the middle of the haiku (it has the most syllables) and, as it were, mediates between Santōka’s poverty and isolation.

In its tone and “free form” haiku style *Walking Alone* also resembles the haiku of the modern reclusive Zen haiku poet Hōsai Ozaki (1885-1926). The painful self-revelations of Frank’s sequence touch on a common subject of Hōsai’s haiku. Frank was in fact reluctant to publish the sequence because of its subject. As he notes in his haiku sequence article: “I felt that too much revelation would expose me to ridicule.”⁵ Compare the existential honesty of Frank’s “homeless shelter my head is in my hands” (l. 9) to Hōsai’s “On a December night there’s one cold bed, nothing but.”⁶ Or Frank’s “free form” expression of loneliness: “walking walking walking alone alone” (l. 15) to Hōsai’s expression of a similar emotion: “I cough and am still alone.”⁷ Both haiku poets are looking objectively at their loneliness, their emotion concretized in a self-cradled head, a cold bed, endless walking, and a solitary cough. All of these reflect a somewhat distanced connection to the common emotional subject except Frank’s “Walking/alone.” Here the spareness of the haiku: 10 syllables, 5 words, and no syntax and the dominating repetition: the same 2 words repeated 2 or 3 times reflect an enormous overflow of strong emotion that makes this haiku one of the most moving evocations of modern alienation and aptly concludes one of the great haiku sequences of the late twentieth century.

This haiku and the sequence resonate with the utter psychological estrangement of Robert Frost’s “dark”

poem "Acquainted with the Night." Its first stanza introduces the theme of alienation with words that echo the last two haiku of Frank's sequence:

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in the rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.⁸

Frost's "dark night of the soul" offers the narrator the "saddest city lane" (l. 4), an "interrupted cry" (l. 8), and an "unearthly" clock that asserted that "time was neither wrong nor right" (ll. 11-13). Though not grounded in a specific social context like Frank's sequence, Frost's poem maintains the same struggle with psychological disassociation so endemic of the late twentieth century as Frank's sequence.

The sense of social collapse and squalor evoked in Frank's haibun and Rilke's *Book of Poverty and Death* and which *Walking Alone* becomes a testament of was, however, enumerated a century ago by Walt Whitman in "I Sit and Look Out." The first line introduces Whitman's concern: "I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all / oppression and shame."⁹ The poem then explores examples of social and natural breakdown and concludes with implicit despair in the face of this condition of sheer global failure: "All these—all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon, / See, hear, and am silent."¹⁰ But yet even within these common conditions there can be transformative gestures.

In Frank's "Return to Springfield: Urban Haibun" Frank by chance meets another fellow who has also come to visit this area where they used to live. Both unemployed and somewhat desperate, they play a game of basketball and discuss their respective conditions. Frank concludes his haibun in a transformative gesture:

I felt I had made a friend.
As I reflect on this whole experience, the double image that pops into my mind is as follows:

greenery entwined
in a chain-link fence

wildflowers growing
out of the cracks
in the cement¹¹

Something about his encounter has allowed Frank to see the natural beauty that exists even in this depressed setting. That something is the compassion humanity is able to grant itself.

Accordingly Gary Snyder has noted: "Buddhist teachings . . . say that the true source of compassion and ethical behavior is paradoxically none other than one's own realization of the insubstantial and ephemeral nature of everything."¹² This turn to an awareness of universal mutability is broached in Rilke's prayer for the poor in his *Book of Poverty and Death*:

make it so the poor are no longer
despised and thrown away.

Look at them standing about—
like wildflowers, which have nowhere else to grow.¹³

Can someone in a state of alienation and poverty be able, particularly in the postmodern First World, to come to the Buddhist realization and take consolation in it?

Frank's sequence is written from the extreme edge of such a situation. Yet, as he notes in his commentary upon it, the sequence has the "potential to induce . . . 'creative transformation and renewal,' i.e. lines 1, 2, 11, and 12, but they are outnumbered by haiku that convey a sense of alienation." Each of these lines, except 2 (which follows the emotional current of line 1 through the word "spirit") is connected with the consolation of non-human nature: birds, pigeons, and the planets, which, as well as line 2, "uplift" the narrator's spirit. Interestingly, the only other haiku in the sequence that contains a direct reference to non-human nature (line 7) is left out of the list. This haiku is most Zen-like in its tone: "homeless alone but the snow falls gently." The

“but” clearly reflects an attitude of consolation, particularly in conjunction with the adverb “gently.” Compare it to this haiku by Santōka:

Pressing on and on,
Until finally falling down;
The grass along the roadside.¹⁴

The metaphysical importance of the two haiku is uncovered in the well-known Zen story of a man chased by a tiger. Hanging from just below the edge of a cliff by a root that is pulling out while the tiger looks down at him, the man notices some wild strawberries and comments on how beautiful they are. One consolation for alienation and poverty is non-human nature, Frank’s birds, pigeons, planets, and snow, Santōka’s grass, and the Zen story’s strawberries. Such consolation when human nature is in collapse, the enormously touching subject of Frank’s sequence, brings the realization of universal subjectivity—these non-human, often outrightly beautiful realities are, like Rilke’s figurative wildflowers, readily existing in their own right. Yet they are often most obviously also ephemeral in their nature, like Santōka’s grass or Frank’s snow. The realization of universal subjectivity and mutability, including one’s own human nature, however subconscious that realization might be, brings with it the consolation for our so often pressing mortality.

1. The sequence, without line numbers, appears in Patrick Frank, “Loosening the Constraints of Haiku Sequencing,” *Point Judith Light* (Fall-Winter 1998), 18.

2. Patrick Frank, “Return to Springfield: Urban Haibun,” *Point Judith Light* 2:3 (1993), 12-13.

3. *Rilke’s Book of Hours, Love Poems to God*, trans. Anita Barrows and Joana Macy (New York: Riverhead, 1996), pp. 141-142.

4. *Mountain Tasting, Zen Haiku by Santōka Taneda*, trans. John Stevens (New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1980), p. 46.

5. “Loosening the Constraints of Haiku Sequencing,” 18.

6. *Right under the big sky, I don’t wear a hat: The Haiku and Prose of Hōsai Ozaki*, trans. Hiroaki Sato (Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 1993), p. 71.

7. *Right under the big sky, I don’t wear a hat*, p. 108.

8. *Selected Poems of Robert Frost*, intro. Robert Graves (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 161.

9. Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. 197.

10. Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, p. 197.

11. Patrick Frank, “Return to Springfield: Urban Haibun,” 13.

12. Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space—Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds, New and Selected Prose* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1995), p. 246.

13. *Rilke’s Book of Hours, Love Poems to God*, p. 143.

14. *Mountain Tasting, Zen Haiku of Santōka Taneda*, p. 50.

Haiku and the Agonies of Translation

HIROAKI SATO

Let us begin by citing five different English translations of a single haiku: *Furuike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto*, which is by the best-known haiku poet, Matsuo Bashô (1644-1694):

Old pond—frogs jumped in—sound of water

A lonely pond in age-old stillness sleeps . . .
Apart, unstirred by sound or motion . . . till
Suddenly into it a lithe frog leaps

Into the calm old pond
A frog plunged—then the splash.

Breaking the silence
Of an ancient pond,
A frog jumped into water—
A deep resonance.

An old pond
A frog jumping
Sound of water

Does this variety surprise you? Probably not. I'm sure some of you have a favorite foreign writer whom you've read in translation and, if the writer is famous enough to be translated by many hands, even read a single piece in more than one translation. These five versions of Bashô's haiku are taken from the compendium of about 140 different translations I once made,¹ but even with these five, some questions leap to mind.

For one thing, suppose the first translation, given in one line, says essentially what the original does, and it does that more or less, how should we account for the explanatory translations that are the second and the fourth?

Next, as it happens, this selection is arranged chronologically, and it spans a period of more than 80 years—with the first one, by Lafcadio Hearn, published in 1898, and the last one, by my late teacher of poetry Lindley Williams Hubbell, published in 1983. In the event, can we say the so-called art of translation makes progress?

Third, as you must have noticed, more than one frog are described in the first translation but not in the others. Why?

Finally, why is it that these translations of a single poem come in four different line formations? Is the haiku so amorphous as a verse form that the translator is at liberty to cast it in any number of lines?

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To deal with these questions as they come, the act of translation, to state the obvious, is greatly influenced by the translator's knowledge and sensibility. With a poem, the translation is likely to be further shaped by what the translator—or, to expand the scope, his age—deems *poetic*. This may explain why Curtis Hidden Page came up, in 1923, with the version that begins, "A lonely pond in age-old stillness sleeps. . . ."

As far as I was able to ascertain, Page was a Dartmouth Professor of English in the early part of this century who compiled a fat anthology of English poetry. If he did not have any Japanese, as I think he didn't, you might say that he was simply taking advantage of his lack of that knowledge to indulge in his fantasies—to imagine how Bashô, a vaguely understood poet in an exotically perceived country, would have written had he had *his*—Prof. Page's—command of English and *his* poetic tradition. Yes, by then, Ezra Pound's Imagist movement, which was inspired by haiku, had come and gone, T. S. Eliot had published *The Waste Land*, but

such things were probably too avant-garde for the Dartmouth professor.

Conversely, you might say that Nobuyuki Yuasa's version, which begins by "Breaking the silence" and ends in "A deep resonance," was based on Yuasa's anxiety that the haiku, if translated straightforwardly, would be unintelligible to English readers of poetry. Yuasa, who published this in 1966, was a Japanese scholar of English whose notion of what makes an English poem tick was probably outdated by then. The likelihood of that may be discerned from his application of the quatrain to a verseform which, in its standard configuration, certainly consists of three syllabic units.

Does translation make progress? I don't think it does in the sense that technologies do. The versions by Messrs. Page and Yuasa, prepared more than forty years apart, may be quixotic, even bizarre. But a good command of the languages involved and a good knowledge of poetic traditions that come into the picture do not necessarily make *progressive* or *better* translations. In this sphere, it is largely a matter of preference and taste.

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What about the question on the number of frogs? Does the original haiku describe one frog, as four of the five translators say it does, or more than one frog, as Lafcadio Hearn says it does?

Last year, a Japanese play about Hearn was staged at the Japan Society in New York. One memorable subplot—memorable if you are interested in such things, of course—has one of Hearn's Japanese students insisting to him: "Professor Hearn, may I dare point out, sir, that in your translation you say 'frogs,' but in this instance there could be only one frog?" Is the student correct? Or, more appropriately, is the playwright who seized on that notion right on target?

The question arises because the Japanese language doesn't have the equivalent of the plural-making *s* which we have in English. Another haiku that provokes perennial singular-versus-plural debate occurs also in the Bashô canon.

SUPPLEMENT

Kareeda ni karasu no tomaritaru ya aki no kure

which I once translated:

On dead branches crows remain perched at autumn's end²

In the most recent translation I've seen of this haiku, and it is by the Columbia professor Haruo Shirane, the same thing comes out as:

on a leafless branch
a crow comes to rest—
autumn nightfall³

With this haiku, the debate is complicated by the existence of several pictures prepared for it. One painting, which is by Bashô himself, has, in addition to the twenty crows flapping about in the air, at least seven crows in various lively postures on a tree that has shed its leaves—whether the tree is dead or simply in its wintry phase one can't really tell. Some other paintings, among them at least one by Bashô, however, depict but one crow perched on a branch of a tree. Considering the gregarious nature of crows, I prefer what appears to be Bashô's initial conception. Yet that doesn't negate the validity of later interpretations—by Bashô, by his contemporaries, and by later readers.

Besides the numbers game, you have noticed that Prof. Shirane gives "autumn nightfall" where I give "at autumn's end." Both are right because the original phrase *aki no kure* means both things. Japanese being Japanese, at one time there appears to have been some heavy debate on which interpretation ought to be orthodox, but it is accepted today that neither is a misinterpretation. I chose late autumn because Bashô's somewhat bright picture depicting two dozen crows suggests that season, rather than the onset of night. Of course, you aren't that lucky in most cases; most other haiku don't come with pictorial aid.

To go back to the pond-frog haiku, was Lafcadio Hearn wrong, as one of his students insists in the play about him? Or, as one Japanese critic knowingly said on a different occasion, in reference to my collection of 140 translations of this haiku, did Hearn commit a mistake in what that critic, Matsumoto Michihiro, called "cultural pattern recognition"? By "cultural pattern recognition," Matsumoto meant that if you are native to a particular culture, you are supposed to recognize automatically that a certain thing signifies a certain other thing. In this instance, someone brought up in Japan, according to Matsumoto, should instinctively, and correctly, see that Bashô was describing a single frog.

Well, then, did Hearn make a cultural mistake? The answer is, Not really—especially if you believe a contemporary's account of how the haiku came into being.

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One spring day, says the account, Bashô and a couple of his friends were sitting around in his hut, when, because "the sound of frogs dropping into the water was not frequent," Bashô was moved to make this haiku. Here again, *kawazu*, the original word for what I have given as "frogs," doesn't indicate whether there was one or more than one batrachian. But if you imagine yourself to be Henry David Thoreau sitting on the shore of Walden Pond, on a placid spring day, you can certainly hear one frog after another flipping into the water, though most likely at some intervals.

This very natural picture changed greatly and soon enough as a Zen interpretation took over. As you know, in Zen, or in a certain branch of Zen at any rate, you are supposed to attain enlightenment at the caw of a crow, the gwock of a night heron, a flash of lightning, or the plop of a frog as it pops into the water. In any such instance, the impetus must be *singular*; therefore and accordingly, there could be only one frog.

In sum, not only linguistic ambiguities—and the singular-or-plural question is only one such example—

but interpretative differences sway what you do in translation.

How about the number of lines? How is it that five different translators have come up with four different numbers of lines?

On this question, I must begin by announcing that lineation of poems in translation is my hobby horse, that I regard the haiku as basically a one-line poem and translate it accordingly, and that my view and practice are exceedingly unpopular among professors.

To start with the last point, Makoto Ueda, formerly a professor of Japanese at Stanford and a supreme gentleman who sends me a copy of his book every time he publishes one despite our disagreement and my lack of learning has said the following:

Some translators have argued, against the objections of others, that one could not translate a [haiku] into a poem of multiple lines because premodern Japanese poets had no notion of lineation as a poetic device. I do not agree. I am not necessarily opposed to one-liners, but I feel it is wrong to maintain that a [haiku] must always be translated into a monlinear (or non-linear) poem. . . . [To] insist that a [haiku] should be a one-line poem in English because the original Japanese poet had no sense of lineation is tantamount to insisting that no English grammatical article, such as "a" or "the," should be used in translating Japanese sentences because the Japanese language includes no concept of articles. Translation means a transference of thought and feeling from one linguistic convention to another; since each convention is different, there is necessarily a limit on the number of conventional devices that can be carried over.⁴

I'm sure that most of you instinctively agree with Prof. Ueda on translation as an act of transference. But, with due respect to the professor and to those of you who agree with him, I must note that he, though here he is focusing on premodern haiku, confuses at least two persons with different views and practices. I have never said the Japanese haiku poet, premodern or modern,

has or had “no sense of lineation.” The one person who has said that is William Higginson, an important figure in what Cor van den Heuvel, the great anthologist of haiku in English,⁵ calls “the haiku movement” in America. And Mr. Higginson, having said so, translates haiku in three lines.

In contrast, I have pointed out that even though the majority of Japanese haiku writers regard the haiku as a one-line poem, some break up their pieces into lines, and that this situation compels the translator to make a choice: ignore the original line formation or try to reproduce it. I have opted for the latter. I have also said that modern prosodic analysis *can* be applied retroactively to classical or premodern poetry.

All this may be a negligible stir in a saucepan, with no kitchen-shaking consequences. Still, the haiku is one of the few cases, I venture, where the doings of translators—or the majority of them anyway—have helped shape the view of the verseform in foreign countries. For this reason, I wish to devote much of the rest of this article to this topic.

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I assume that most of you have composed haiku, either in high school, junior high school, or earlier, or on the Internet. If you have, the definition that your teacher gave you in class or the rules you’ve followed on the Internet must go somewhat like this: Haiku is a “lyrical Japanese verse form . . . tending to emphasize nature . . . and the times of year, and consisting . . . of seventeen syllables arranged in three lines containing five, seven, and five syllables, respectively.”

Of course, the haiku that circulate on the Internet tend to be of satirical varieties, such as SPAM haiku, but most people interested in haiku would agree with the definition that I’ve just cited, though in a somewhat abbreviated form. It happens to be the most recent definition I’ve seen, and it appears in Douglas Hofstadter’s highly opinionated book, *Le Ton beau de Marot: In Praise of the Music of Language* (Basic Books, 1997).

I must say that whether Hofstadter is describing Japanese or English haiku isn't entirely clear. If he thinks he's describing Japanese haiku, he evidently hasn't seen, let alone read, any of the haiku the majority of Japanese writers compose.

The Haiku Society of America, which empanelled a committee to work out definitions, was more careful and made a distinction between the trunk and its branches. After two years of deliberation, the committee came up with the following definitions:

- 1) An unrhymed Japanese poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived, in which Nature is linked to human nature. It usually consists of seventeen *onji*.
- 2) A foreign adaptation of 1, usually written in three lines totalling fewer than seventeen syllables.

Even the Haiku Society's cautious description of Japanese haiku, as far as I'm concerned, leaves much to be desired. Why "a moment keenly perceived"? Why in a moment so perceived must "Nature" be "linked to human nature"? Above all, why introduce the pedantic and utterly wrongheaded term *onji* where the word "syllable" will do just fine?

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My quibbles aside, though, the Haiku Society does not say, as Hofstadter does, that the Japanese haiku consists of "seventeen syllables arranged in three *lines* [emphasis mine] containing five, seven, and five syllables, respectively," and that's important. For, in Japan, not only are most haiku written in one line. The best definition of the traditional haiku I've seen says that it is a one-line poem with two main descriptive elements that can't be divided into lines. The traditional haiku means the one which, at a minimum, is composed of 5, 7, 5, or a total of seventeen syllables.

More recently, the avant-garde haiku poet Natsushiki Ban'ya has offered the following definition:

The haiku . . . is composed of two, three, or four short phrases (*shōsetsu*). However, the length of each such short phrase cannot be regulated or restricted.

Here, you will note, first, that Natsuishi no longer talks about 5, 7, 5 syllable units, but, instead, about much vaguer “two, three or four short phrases,” adding that “the length of each such phrase cannot be regulated or restricted.” This is important because it draws attention to a branch of modern haiku which is often ignored—not only by foreign students of haiku but by the majority of Japanese themselves. This branch, which started in the early part of this century, is made up of pieces that ignore 5- and 7-syllable patterns and are often much shorter than the standard total of seventeen syllables—or much longer.

I have translated a substantial selection of one prominent poet in that branch, Ozaki Hôsei (1885-1926), in *Right under the big sky, I don't wear a hat* (Stone Bridge Press, 1993). The title of the book itself is a haiku made up of fifteen syllables. One of Hôsei's shortest pieces consists of nine syllables, and it reads:

Seki o shitemo hitori
I cough and am still alone

Ogiwara Seisensui (1884-1976), Hôsei's friend and publisher, tended to write haiku much longer than the standard seventeen syllables, so much so that one editor, in apparent exasperation, decided to ignore the ones he regarded as excessively long. Here's one of Seisensui's haiku, which consists of twenty-six syllables:

Kuore o yomi, nami no oto, naomo yome to iuno o yomiowari
I read *Cuore*, the sound of waves, said keep reading but I finished
reading it

Cuore (Heart) is a boys' story by the Italian writer Edmondo de Amicis (1846-1908), which was once popular throughout the world—in various translations, of course. Here, Seisensui's use of punctuation reminds us: At the very start of his career as a haiku poet, he broke up some of his pieces into two lines, which he said he did under the influence of Goethe and other

German writers. But he soon stopped that, recasting them in one line, and he never again resorted to multilinear forms, though he used punctuation, very rarely, as here.

You may be interested to learn that one haiku poet who greatly influenced Japanese immigrants on the West Coast before and during the Second World War was Seisensui's contemporary, Nakatsuka Ippekirô (1886-1946), who was equally radical in syllabic formation and count.⁶ One of his pieces reads:

Onna no kentai ga chirachira yuki o furasu sono yô ni omou
 The woman's boredom makes a flurry of snow fall I think it does

Back to Natsuishi.

In his definition, please note, also, that, like the Haiku Society's first definition, Natsuishi doesn't mention lines or lineation. Natsuishi's silence on lines is especially notable because he is a student of the most famous lineator Takayanagi Shigenobu (1923-1983), who wrote pieces like:

<i>Embô no</i>	In a distant view
<i>omoki</i>	a heavy
<i>akebono</i>	daybreak
<i>ononoki hajimu</i>	begins to tremble

The syllabic formation of this one is 5-7-7.

The haiku lineator I've most recently translated, and that at Natsuishi's request, is Kamiyama Himeyo (born 1963). She has composed pieces such as:

shi
kyû
kara
hajimaru
enke
no ketsuraku

beginning
with
the
womb
a circu-
lar deficiency

gozen
goji
shi
go
kô
choku
to
fuyu-bôshi

five
AM
post-
humous
stiff-
ening
and
winter hat

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The first one is almost traditionalist in its syllabic formation as it consists of 5-8-5 syllables; the second is 100% traditionalist in the same regard, as it is made up of 5-7-5 syllables. The difference is that they are lineated. Kamiyama also writes haiku in one line. The question is: If you break up one-line haiku into lines, what do you do with multi-line haiku? Put them in one line perhaps.

Here's another haiku lineator, Nakatsu Tokuaki:

aiyoku no
uo
uzukumaru
tô-hanabi

love-lusting
fish
crouch
distant fireworks

kantsû no
sora
atatakaki
taka no mai

adultery's
 sky
 is warm
 a hawk's dance

Fascinatingly enough, Natsuishi himself seldom, if ever, breaks up his haiku into lines. However, even the members of the majority who cast their pieces in one line break them into lines when they present them *aesthetically*, as on decorative paper boards or sheets called *shikishi*.

How then has translation helped create a new form? The answer is almost tautological: With the majority of translators casting their translations in three lines, the view has taken hold that the haiku is a three-line form. It has also created the sense, among Japanese haiku writers and observers, that haiku need to be broken up into lines in translation.

The matter hasn't been always like that.

As far as I'm concerned, Lafcadio Hearn's initial response to the haiku form, an example of which we've seen at the beginning, was the most *natural*: With no fuss, he took it to be a one-line affair.

Old pond—frogs jumped in—sound of water

Hearn's contemporary, the scholar Basil Hall Chamberlain, was unlike the world-wandering journalist and paid more attention to the English prosody prevailing at the time. Where he could, he turned haiku into a couplet, each line consisting of iambic tetrameter. Some who followed him applied the heroic couplet to the haiku form. However, Max Bickerton, of whom I know nothing except that he published an account of Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827) in the magazine

of the Asiatic Society of Japan, in 1932, reverted to Hearn's approach, so to speak, and consistently translated haiku—Issa's haiku at any rate—in one line. Here are two examples:

Ware to kite asobe ya oya no nai suzume

Oh, won't some orphan sparrow come and play with me

Mata mudani kuchi aku tori no mamako kana

Once more in vain the stepchild bird opens its beak

Did Bickerton's approach raise eyebrows among his fellow scholars? I don't know. Regardless, in time and somewhere along the way, the notion that the haiku can't be translated in one line became a matter beyond dispute. By the time Burton Watson and I published *From the Country of Eight Islands: An Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Doubleday Ancho, 1981), it had become so ingrained that William LaFleur, writing what is called a review-article on it, felt compelled to observe, in reference to my one-line translations:

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a one-line poem—at least in Western languages—is willy-nilly at the same time a no-line poem. This is a fact around which there is, I think, no route of escape. Lines of poetry are in this respect like sexes in the world of biology: you need to have at least two to make the whole question of sex a meaningful one. Two would seem to be the lowest common denominator if we are going to speak of lines of verse at all; there are couplets and there are parallel lines, but to speak of a 'one-line poem' is to speak of something that cannot exist.⁷

LaFleur conveniently ignored the existence of the monostich or monostick in Western poetic tradition. I say "conveniently," because when I told him of the existence of poems "consisting of just one metrical line," as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, he responded by saying he made the quoted observation "not to confuse the students." (The *OED* quotes a "celebrated mono-stick" from 1708: "The Bashful Water saw her God, and Blusht.")

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LaFleur's "lowest common denominator," in any case, holds sway. Ozaki Hôsei wrote, for example, a piece with just eleven syllables: *Tsukiyo no ashi ga oretoru*. In translating it for his pioneering *Modern Japanese Haiku*, Prof. Ueda cast it as follows:

Moonlit night:
a reed
is broken.⁸

Why not just "A moonlit night reed's broken"?

As a result of all this, today, the awareness that the haiku is regarded as a three-line poem in the West seems to generate a sense of unease among the Japanese when haiku are translated in one line. It would be remiss of me, of course, not to point out that as early as 1892, the haiku reformer Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), in his college paper, translated haiku in three lines in English—based, most likely, on the instinctive sense that the 5- and 7-syllable units each constituted a prosodic line. So he produced:

The old mere!
A frog jumping in
The sound of water

But at the time translation into English and other European languages was at an incipient stage, and the acceptability of such bare-bone "lines" was far from certain.

The matter is now on firm ground. For example, Ôoka Makoto, whose associations with American and European poets are probably the most extensive among Japanese poets writing now, has said that it would be "ludicrous" to break up Bashô's haiku into lines in printing them—in the Japanese original—but it might be necessary to do so in translating them in foreign languages.

Similarly, Natsuishi Ban'ya requests that I break up his one-line haiku into lines in translating them into English. I recently asked why he wants me to lineate his haiku in English translation. In one of the three reasons

he gave, he said: "In English and French poetry, lineation is a far more important rhetorical device than in Japanese."

This, in my view, is utterly unsatisfactory. Still, I'm afraid that I must accommodate the likelihood that Natsuishi, a professor French who sees a good deal of haiku translated into French and other languages, as well as haiku written in French and other languages, almost always in the lineated format, doesn't feel that the line formation of the Japanese original reproduced as is will appeal to foreign readers.

So, I'll pose a question: Are one-line haiku possible in English? The answer has to be yes: I know a number of English-language haiku poets who write one-liners and non-haiku poets who have written haiku in one line. Here's the Australian haiku poet Janice M. Bostok:

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envelope my thumb slips open the seal of his tongue
 quiet church caw of a crow rings out from a vacant lot
 only wishing to rescue it moth's down sticks to my fingers
 muzzle of the drinking cow glides across still water⁹

And here's the Californian haiku poet Chris Gordon, who publishes the magazine *ant ant ant ant ant*:

a purple evening in the window she folds her underwear
 ducks break the surface in the dark blurry crescent moons
 clapping my hands i kill a mosquito find it was a moth
 the smell of garbage cans she asks me to keep her ring anyway¹⁰

Among the American poets who mostly write non-haiku poems, John Ashbery, my friend Michael

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O'Brien, and the late Allen Ginsberg have written one-line haiku. For Ashbery, his one-line haiku are included in his book called *A Wave* (The Viking Press, 1984). I'll cite three of Michael's:

sunset flashing in ranks from an office building's monument
windows

a cat's footprints, first drops on the windshield, wiper opening its fan

out of the tunnel grey spider-sun over wintry Jersey marshes

More of Michael's one-line haiku are included in his book *The Floor and the Breath* (Cairn Editions, 1994).

It was Michael who wrote me to tell me, while I was working on the draft of this article, that Ginsberg's posthumous collection, *Death & Fame: Last Poems 1993-1997* (HarperFlamingo, 1998), has one-line poems. So I bought the book. In its Afterword, Bob Rosenthal, Ginsberg's longtime secretary, says that these "sentences" are written in "Allen's form of American Haiku (seventeen syllables with the common haiku associational enjambment of senses but carried through on a single strophe each)." They are all about pastel paintings by Francesco Clemente. Here are some examples:

Adam contemplates his navel covered with a bush of jealous
hearts

Body spread open, black legs held down, she eats his ice
cream—white sex tongue

He dog licks the live red heart of th' African lady curled up in
bed.

Naked in solitary prison cell he looks down at a hard-on.

Hands hold her ass tight with joy to lick & eat the blue star
'twixt her thighs.

When I showed these to Cor van den Heuvel, he flatly said, "These are not haiku." But that's another story.

Notes

1. Originally published in Sato's *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English* (Weatherhill, 1983); later the chapter was published as an independent book, *One Hundred Frogs* (Weatherhill, 1995).

2. Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson, translators, *From the Country of Eight Islands: An Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Doubleday Anchor, 1981), p. 279.

3. Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dream: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashô* (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 91.

4. Makoto Ueda, *Bashô and His Interpreters* (Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 12.

5. W. W. Norton published the third edition of his *Haiku Anthology* earlier this year.

6. Haiku of those immigrants influenced by Ippekirô are collected, with English translations, in Violet Kazue de Cristoforo's *May Sky: There Is Always Tomorrow: An Anthology of Japanese American Concentration Camp Kaiko Haiku* (Sun and Moon Press, 1997).

7. William LaFleur, "Marginalia: The Expanse and the Limits of a New Anthology," *Monumenta Nipponica* 38:2 (summer 1983), pp. 199-200.

8. Makoto Ueda, translator, *Modern Japanese Haiku: An Anthology* (University of Tokyo Press, 1976, p. 129.

9. These are taken from Bostok's 1998 selection, *A Splash of Sunlight*, self-published.

10. These are from a selection Gordon made for the Japanese anthology *A Guide to Haiku for the 21st Century*, published by the Modern Haiku Association, in 1997.

(From a speech given at Brown University, 18 March 1999.)

Basho Manuscript Revisited

Yaba-hon Oku-no-Hosomichi

SUSUMU TAKIGUCHI

Prologue

In the autumn of 1743 (*Kanpo* 3) a haiku poet of Osaka, called Baijuu (died in 1754 or 1755), took part in a memorial service held in the city to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694). On this solemn occasion he placed a small, thin book which he treasured as part of the *tokokazari*, or tribute displays¹. This was nothing other than the original manuscript of one of the world's most famous classic literary works, namely Bashō's *Oku-no-Hosomichi* (*Narrow Road to the Interior*). It was believed that the manuscript had been hand-written by Bashō himself. The book has come to be commonly known as *Yaba-hon*, or Yaba copy of *Oku no Hosomichi*.

Baijuu was a senior disciple of Yaba (1662-1740) who in turn was a trusted student of Bashō's, especially during the master's last years. Yaba is known to have visited Bashō often at the Banana Hut. He helped Bashō to develop the famous poetic concept of *karumi* (or lightness). After Bashō's death Yaba disseminated *karumi* among poets, especially in Kansai and Kyushu. Quite how this particular manuscript came into the possession of Yaba is not known.

However, Yaba worked for Echigoya in Edo as a *tedai*, or *bantoh* for a living. One theory asserts that he and his two other colleagues there (Rigyū and Ko-oku, both Bashō's disciples) helped Bashō in one way or another with his work on *Oku-no-Hosomichi*. Most notably, Bashō's hand-written manuscript is said to have been lent to them at Echigoya for Rigyū to make

a fair copy of it. It is probable that after the fair copy was completed the manuscript itself just sat there until in the end it became the proud possession of Yaba².

At any rate Yaba left it in his will to Baijuu. So it was a fitting object for Baijuu to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the great master's death not least because it was completed during Bashō's final year. Only, the manuscript vanished after the memorial. It has long been presumed lost for good.

Fifty years previous to this memorial service, Bashō, now a frail figure, embarked on his last and fatal journey to the western provinces. On 11 May (or possibly 8 May) 1694 he left Edo, to which he would never return, and reached his hometown of Iga-Ueno on 28 May³. In his travelling satchel was a fair copy of *Oku-no-Hosomichi*, which his disciple Soryu had just made for him in the previous month. This copy became the definitive version of this famous travel diary and came to be known as *Nishimura-hon*, or simply *Soryu-hon*. Soryu was a renowned calligrapher and is said to have taught calligraphy to Bashō and Yaba, which is significant in the context of the present subject.

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Because Baijuu was an Osaka person, a wholesaler of medicine by profession, it is natural that people should have assumed that the manuscript would be kept, if extant, by someone in the region. There was a rumour immediately after the last war that the manuscript was sighted in Osaka. This raised enormous excitement but came to nothing. The ensuing pessimism led to an assumption, for example, that the manuscript was most likely to have been destroyed in the air-raid during the last war. The hope of those few academics who still wanted some miracle to happen was fast fading. It was now generally believed that the manuscript had after all been lost forever—and became a *maboroshi-no-sho* (a phantom book).

The Discovery

Such was the pessimistic mood among Japanese Bashō scholars over the missing manuscript that the whole matter had been all but forgotten. Little wonder then that an incredible shock wave shot across Japan and beyond when it was announced that the missing Bashō manuscript was discovered and diagnosed as genuine. This was on 25th November 1996 and it was the top story of the NHK evening news. All the major newspapers treated it in the same way the following morning.

Fourteen months on, most people seem to have accepted the authenticity of the manuscript but there still remain some lingering doubts about its authenticity. Surprisingly, in spite of the enormous importance of the manuscript and of the vast publicity it has inspired, no major definitive academic papers seem to have been written about this matter in a comprehensive way⁴. What have appeared so far are fragmentary remarks, articles in the popular press, a few chapters in books for laymen, or repetition of these in various conferences. Strictly speaking, many of these do not follow academic disciplines or structure and cannot really withstand rigorous scrutiny. Some arguments are no more than conjectures, fantasy even, and amazingly the authors openly admit it. By the very nature of their work, this may perhaps be unavoidable to some extent at least. It is detective work, not science.

The investigation, for instance, should have been accompanied by scientific tests. One of the most crucial procedures, the examination of the paper used, has been done mainly by only one expert. And it was done along the traditional Japanese lines, i.e. by the look and feel of it. No scientific test on the paper, ink, paste or thread, or any other materials seems to have been executed. Computer analysis, which was reportedly done, does not yet seem to have been published. All these probably would be too expensive to do.

It appears therefore that research into the manuscript's authenticity itself needs to go on for some while yet before we can feel totally happy about it.

Not completely a new discovery

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The manuscript, in fact, had been "discovered" some forty years previously. An Osaka antiquarian book dealer, Nakao Kenichiro, was approached by his fellow dealer, who tried to sell it to him. Mr. Nakao declined the offer on the advice of a professor in Japanese literature who showed some doubts. However, the same dealer friend brought the matter up again in 1981. This time Mr. Nakao swapped one of his scroll paintings for the manuscript. He was, however, still not really convinced about the authenticity of the newly-acquired manuscript as being *shinseki*, or a genuine hand of Bashō⁵. It was quite common that similar kinds of items by various authors with questionable provenance were brought in. Antiquities from the Edo period are fraught with forgeries⁶. Faked *hakogaki* (description of contents on the wooden box lid), *rakkan* (seals) and *kantei-sho* (authentication certificates) are notoriously numerous. Mr. Nakao sought the opinion of two experts and the reply was negative in both cases. In the end he simply put the manuscript away in a drawer of a chest in his wooden house in Ashiya, deciding not to pursue the matter any further for the time being.

Then the manuscript went through a dramatic fate before coming to the world's attention. Mr. Nakao's two-story house was wrecked by the Great Hanshin Earthquake that struck Kobe in January 1995. He had a narrow escape and evacuated to stay with his children in Amagasaki. When he went back to his half-ruined house to fetch some belongings he also searched for the manuscript in question which he found, miraculously undamaged, in the rubble.

Authentication

The First Positive Sign

Prior to the Earthquake Mr. Nakao had tried to have the manuscript authenticated one more time. This was in August 1990 and the specialist he consulted was Sakurai Takejiro, Professor of Japanese Literature at Kobe Shinwa Women's University. Prof. Sakurai's gut reaction then was positive but his expressed opinion turned out to be rather cautious. He told Mr. Nakao that the book could be the so-called *Yaba-hon* but that he needed further research and test before saying anything definite. In October of the same year, the professor thought of making this discovery public at a national conference of Japanese haiku studies which was held in Itami, Hyogo-ken. In the event he decided it was still premature for him to do so.

However, subsequent research was making Prof. Sakurai more and more convinced about the authenticity of the manuscript. Before too long his research was leaked and various rumours started to circulate about Bashō's manuscript having been "found in Hong Kong", or in America, or even the same having been proved to be a fake. Thus Prof. Sakurai came under increasing pressure to make his research public one way or another.

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Rumours Pointing to Right Questions

Some rumours sounded as if they were coming from someone quite well-informed and with access to insider information. They listed the reasons why the manuscript could not possibly be genuine—(a) the paper used is too new and in too immaculate condition, (b) the hand-writing is too thin, too weak to be Bashō's and lacks the smoothness found in genuine Bashō hand-writing, (c) the writing on the patched papers look different from those on the original pages on which

they are pasted, (d) there has been no instance where Bashō wrote in alterations on scrap papers patched onto existing pages. Prof. Sakurai had many a sleepless nights.

Questions to be answered can be summarised as follows : -

- Did Bashō write down himself a draft version of *Oku-no-Hosomichi*, instead of dictating it to someone else?

- Did he make a fair copy himself as some scholars maintain? (Note in Bashō's case the distinction between a "draft" and a "fair copy" can be somewhat blurred)

- Is either of the above two the so-called *Yaba-hon*?

- Did Sora or someone else make a fair copy of *Oku-no-Hosomichi*, which is now called *Sora-hon*, from either the draft version, or the fair copy mentioned above?

- From what version did Soryu make his fair copies (particularly the *Nishimura-hon* copy) ? Was it *Yaba-hon*, or *Sora-hon*? (It has long been assumed that he based his *Nishimura-hon* copy on *Sora-hon*, which now needs to be checked.)

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- If the discovered manuscript were the *Yaba-hon* is it really in Bashō's own hand-writing, or that of somebody else? If the latter be the case, was it intended to be a malicious fake, or was it simply done under Bashō's instructions, or as a *bona fide* copy?

Examining the Paper

To test the paper used for the manuscript, Prof. Sakurai asked for the help of Dr. Machida Seishi, Professor Emeritus at Kyoto Craft and Textile College. Dr. Machida is an established authority in the field. It was arranged for Dr. Machida to examine the manuscript on 28th January 1995. This plan was wrecked by the Earthquake.

Intensive Research

After the Earthquake Mr. Nakao was now determined to have the manuscript judged one way or the other. Prof. Sakurai and some other scholars involved felt the same need and no less intensely. So, they made concerted efforts to establish overwhelming evidence that the item was genuine as well as refuting any lingering doubts presented mainly by their critics but in small measure also by themselves. Dr. Machida's verdict on the authenticity of the paper was positive. The main individuals directly involved in proving the authenticity of the manuscript include:

- Prof. Sakurai Takejiro
- Prof. Ueno Yozo,
- Dr. Machida Seishi
- Prof. Kira Sueo

To this list should be added non-academic establishments which have strongly supported, and thereby profited from, advocates of the authenticity. One is NHK, a Japanese equivalent of BBC, who not only earned the trophy of scooping this discovery of the century on that October evening but was also given ample time and assistance to prepare a documentary of the whole event. This documentary was broadcast the following day in its flagship programme called *Close-up Gendai*. With all other newspapers and television stations panic-stricken in a mad rush to catch up with the news, NHK alone were rubbing their hands with glee, having achieved the maximum impact of their so-called "scoop". Another establishment that benefited no less from the advocates was a publisher called Iwanami-shoten with all its solid influence and authority. One cannot help thinking that these people are bound by gains to be made should the manuscript prove to be authentic and that they have formed an uncomfortably cosy charmed circle.

The case for authenticity

The case for authenticity can be summarised as follows:

1. Bashō's own hand-writing is known to have some letters whose form is either idiosyncratic and peculiar to him, or simply mistaken (yes, even Bashō can make mistakes!). Crucially, there is a high degree of consistency in them which makes it possible for them to be used like a "fingerprint", or "DNA". The manuscript in question contains more than 20 such letters all examples of which (they are used more than once in the whole text) are found consistent with each other and with examples taken from other authenticated Bashō's hand-writings, including *Nozarashi-kiko* and Bashō's letters, totalling 455 items. Clearest examples of these include *kanji* for death (*shi*), water-side (*gai, migiwa*), barrier (*shoh, sawari*), shore (*kishi*), mound (*tsuka*), and to demand (*motomu*).

74 2. Comparison of the manuscript with other known manuscripts by Bashō's hand has proved that it is genuine.

3. The manuscript has 74 patches of paper pasted on the original pages and on these patches are corrections and additions by Bashō's own handwriting. These were totally unexpected but can be construed as further evidence that the manuscript is indeed by Bashō's hand.

4. The paper used is high-quality, Genroku period *Torinoko-gami*, presumably the *konsho* (mixture) of *kohzo* and *ganbi*. There is no problem about the age of the paper even if it looks rather new. The paper looks new partly because it is of good quality and has little deteriorated or weathered and partly because the manuscript has been kept well, making the condition excellent. *Torinoko-gami*, which has been used since the Nara period, is strong against paper worms. The *ganbi* material makes the paper smoother (i.e. less absorbent) and brush strokes tend to be thinner and finer than in the case of more absorbent paper. Comparison with other *Torinoko-gami* of the Genroku period indicated strongly

that the paper in question was made during the Genroku period.

5. Bashō's handwritings are finer than average, which is consistent with the thinness of the letters of the manuscript. Also, the thinness of brush strokes depends partly on the brush itself as well as the habit of the calligrapher.

6. Bashō was given good quality paper supplies by his disciples and admirers, which explains the usage of rather good quality paper for the manuscript. Besides, around the Genroku period such paper as was used for the manuscript was not so expensive to buy.

7. The wrapping paper in which the manuscript is folded has some writing, saying that the book is genuinely by Bashō's hand and mentioning the name of the owner as Arikuni. This has been identified as Urai Arikuni (1780-1858), a Kyoto *haijin* of the Bashō school and a renowned collector of antique documents and books. The known anthology of Arikuni's *tanzaku*, *Chobo-shu*, has his signature whose style is the same as that on this wrapping paper. This and other items kept together with the manuscript indicate the reliability of Arikuni's records.

As was mentioned in the outset of this paper it has long been held that the manuscript was last seen in 1743. However, there was in fact a mention of *Yaba-hon* more than fifty years after this. In *Bashō Hokku-shuhsetsu* edited by Kan-in in 1797, there is a reference to a famous haiku which Bashō included in the Nikko section of *Oku-no-Hosomichi: Ara tohto aoba wakaba no hi no hikari* (O holy, hallowed shrine! / How green all the fresh young leaves / In thy bright sun shine! tr. DB). *Bashō Hokku-shuhsetsu* points out that according to *Yaba-hon* the same haiku starts with *ana tohto*. And lo and behold, in the newly discovered manuscript sure enough the haiku in question starts with *ana tohto* and not with *ara tohto*, as all the Japanese people have been taught and remembered for centuries!

Some of the Findings

- Some hitherto-unknown haiku poems came to light. These include *Mizu sekite wase tabanuru yanagikage* (In the shade of willow trees works go on making a dam to stop water from flowing in and making early rice crops into sheaves), which Bashō eventually abandoned in favour of *Ta ichimai uete tachisaru yanagi kana*.

- *Kyōka* (or satirical *tanka*) was discovered in the new manuscript. All known versions of *Oku-no-Hosomichi* contain no *kyōka*. The newly discovered *kyōka* reads, *Furu-ato no ikani furikemu samidare no na nimo arukana minowa kasashima*. This was found underneath the patched paper and therefore can be regarded to be Bashō's initial thoughts.

- Many additions and corrections by Bashō reveal the process in which he developed ideas on *Oku-no-Hosomichi*.

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- The identity of the person who copied what is known as *Sora-hon* is newly found and now established, according to Prof. Ueno. It is Rigyu, a disciple of Bashō's and a friend of Yaba and Ko-oku. As we have already seen these three people worked for Echigo-ya of Edo Nihonbashi as *tedai* or *bantoh* and in their spare time frequented Bashō's residence together. Collectively, they also selected entries for the *Sumidawara*, the sixth of the *Haikai Shichibu-shū*.

- On 24 out of 32 leaves of text there are 74 patches of paper pasted, with corrections and additions. Of the 74 patches, 7 are double-patched. All indicate Bashō's enormous effort to revise the work.

- Comparison of the manuscript with *Sora-hon* revealed that the latter contained 8 copying mistakes, which had not been known before.

- Similarly, discrepancies have been found between the manuscript and *Nishimura-hon*. Historically, the latter has been treated as *the* definitive version of *Oku-no-Hosomichi*, on which most of the subsequent copies and research have been based. These discrepancies

could be copying mistakes by Soryu. If so, quite a few corrections may have to be made to the existing literature on Oku-no-Hosomichi.

The Sceptics

After the excitement of the news of the discovery, some doubts about the manuscript's authenticity began to creep in. Two voices carried more authority than others: those of Yamamoto Yuiitsu, Professor Emeritus at Ohtani University, and of Masuda Takashi, a renowned expert in Japan of graphoanalysis of old manuscripts.

Summary of Prof. Yamamoto's Doubts

- From the viewpoint of *hisseki kantei* (graphoanalysis) the manuscript does not look right (*hisseki kantei* can be impressionistic and subjective, lacking in scientific or otherwise objectivity but is still influential as well as essential in authentication processes.)

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- The sample letters given as evidence of the uniqueness, or peculiarity of Bashō's hand-writing style are in fact also found in manuscripts by other hands of the same period as Bashō's and can be said to have been not unique but quite common then. (If this is true, or deemed to be a serious counter-argument, it would weaken perhaps the most important card of the advocates claiming authenticity of the manuscript.)

- The manuscript contains mistakes too rudimentary and too crude to have possibly been made by Bashō. 59 mistakes are listed.

- These mistakes include those which are much more likely to have been made by someone simply making a copy in a parrot fashion from whatever original used. Though this is a conjecture, the copyist may have been

Bashō's nephew called Toin who was staying with Bashō around the time when Bashō was believed to be writing *Oku-no-Hosomichi*.

- From all these points, the manuscript cannot be said to be by Bashō's hand.

Summary of Mr. Masuda's Doubts

- General impression is that the manuscript lacks consistency and natural rendering, which is characteristic of a genuine hand. It gives the impression that someone was copying from other text.

- One of the crucial arguments in favour of the manuscript is letters which are peculiar to Bashō. However, these are the first thing fakers try to imitate more than anything else.

78 • The hiragana letter *ha* has clumsy *kuzushi* (cursive style), indicating that it was written by someone who was not used to this letter.

- Letters are going all over the place and do not flow smoothly, or conversely "squashed" in some lines including 7th *cho* recto (*yuki ni mo koyuru kokochi zo suru*), 16th *cho* verso (*natsu-kusa ya tsuwamono domo ga yume no ato*) and 26th *cho* (*aruji to suru mono ha kumenosuke tote*).

- The cursive style of *seki* in *doseki* on 30th *cho* recto is wrong.

- In the section of *Ryushaku-ji* of Yamagata with a haiku of cicada sound, *ganjoh no in-in* (the sanctuaries on massive boulders) is read wrongly. It should be *gan-ho in-in* as in *Sora-hon* before Bashō corrected it.

- The manuscript does not follow the convention of having the same number of lines in all (or most of the) pages. This is because whoever did this handwriting changed the number of lines on different pages precisely because he wanted it to be taken as a draft rather than a finished fair copy. His conclusion is that the manuscript in question is not genuine, nor is it a normal,

bona fide copy done with good intentions but is a fake maliciously created to look like a draft manuscript.

**How important is this discovery,
and what makes it so significant?**

- It is easily the greatest literary discovery in Japan of this century, also a significant discovery in the history of world literature (unless its authenticity will be categorically discredited). It can be compared in its importance, with reasonable justification, to the discovery of the first folio of Shakespeare. It is “unconditionally a wonderful thing that the original manuscript by Bashō, revered as one of the greatest poets the world has ever produced, has been discovered” according to the leading Bashō scholar, Prof. Ogata Tsutomu. On the other hand, one is reminded of the incidents such as the discovery of Hitler’s diary, or the recent “discovery” in Oxford of the manuscript of Shakespeare’s poems in his own hand.

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- It should merit the national treasure status for its significance as national heritage.

- It will take the study of Bashō to a new stage, especially in terms of Bashō’s thought process and his method of composing *kiko-bun* (travel diary, see next bullet point).

- It will show the process in which Bashō developed his thoughts in creating *Oku no Hosomichi*, especially the process known as *suiko* (changes and improvements) which is obvious from the 74 patches of paper, pasted on the original pages. Bashō’s *suiko* is evident in other works, notably *Genjuan-no-ki*.

- It will help solve those questions in Bashō study which still remain unresolved.

- It will function as a benchmark against which future studies of Bashō’s handwriting can more effectively be pursued.

NOTES

(1) Baijuu published a collection of memorial writings called *Yadori-zuka* in 1743. In it he refers to the manuscript of *Oku-no-Hosomichi* in Bashō's hand.

(2) The postscript of *Genroku-hon* by Izutsuya goes, "The manuscript in (Bashō's) genuine hand resides with disciple Yaba. (However) because it is a draft version its writing is different (from our printed version) in some places."

(3) It is possible that Bashō wanted to use the fair copy of *Oku-no-Hosomichi* not only to spread *Shofu* but also to show the accomplished example of haibun.

(4) Prof. Sakurai mentions that he would present a proper academic paper in a major academic conference.

(5) The major collections of Bashō's genuine handwritings are found at Kakimori Bunko in Itami, Tenri Library Wataya Bunko in Nara, Bashō-oh Kinenkan (Bashō Museum) in Ueno, Mie Prefecture and Idemitsu Museum in Tokyo.

(6) Just to show the extent to which forged or doubtful items have been attributed to Bashō, it is claimed that out of over 600 hand-written letters which have been alleged to be by Bashō, roughly two thirds are "proved" or believed to be faked. The remainder, around 180, are deemed genuine. *Kohon Bashō Zenshu* (1989), for example, presents 171 letters as genuine, 13 needing further enquiries, 17 for reference purposes. *Bashō Shokan-shu* (1976) lists 182 as genuine, 14 as *songi* (with doubts remaining) and 8 for reference purposes.

As for haiku poems themselves, about 980 *ku* (a unit of one haiku) are judged to be genuine Bashō's works, about 200 *ku* are wrong, about 530 *ku* have various degrees of doubts (*songi*). *Bashō Haiku-shu* (Nakamura Shunzo ed, Iwanami Bunko, first published 1970), for example, lists 982 as genuine, 556 as doubtful (of which 26 as having been found in those letters which are deemed wrong), and 208 as wrongly attributed. Compare these with about 2850 Buson's haiku, and over 20,000 Issa's haiku both of which have been confirmed genuine.

A Romantic-Postmodern Perspective of Tanka

KENNETH TANEMURA

We may study the *Manyoshu*, as Shiki did, and believe that we are absorbing the history of tanka. But it is important to realize that, when circling back to the past, it is understood in an altered way. The realization that the study of past works is always distorted by the lens of time is more important than what particular school or era of poetry we choose to emulate. Whether it is the *Manyoshu*, or the *Kokinshu*, or the *Shin Kokinshi*, one must keep in mind that these are not empirical texts that serve as pillars of tanka history; in the sense that each reader creates his own text, the distinction between time, style, and relevance to modernity becomes subordinate. Each of us knows, or thinks he knows, the meaning of tanka. But what is the meaning of that meaning?

All contemporary literature are masterpieces of the past recycled. The idea that some cling to that romanticism is archaic holds no validity. Borges says, "I don't think you should try to be loyal to your century or your opinions, because you are being loyal to them all the time. You have a certain voice, a certain kind of face, a certain way of writing, and you can't run away from them even if you want to. So why bother to be modern or contemporary, since you can't be anything else?" (*Borges on Writing*, 51) Whatever one writes, whether it is a Spenserian sonnet or experimental free verse, is imbued with the present cultural currents of today.

Today it is difficult to place literary forms in a historical context, because we acknowledge that each reader subjectively formulates his own text. To use an example, in a creative writing course I read a Raymond Carver story, which left no impression on me. I assuredly maintained that the story possessed no psychological subtext or emotional complexity. But the woman sitting next to me quickly contradicted me: she brought her own personal associations to the story and wept from beginning to end. We all do this, without the reader the text doesn't exist; the reader completes the work through the act of reading. The question of which reading is the most accurate is totally irrelevant.

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I believe that tanka, though an ancient form, can be made new. Literature is a perpetually changing lexicon of ideas. Yeats said that love comes in at the eye. Bergman made films concerned with God's silence. But how they experienced their days and nights is unknown. It is the aim of tanka to reveal how you spend your days and nights. Tanka goes beyond autobiography, which relies on facts, dates, letters, anecdotes, interviews; this revelation can only come from the poet, and in that sense it is intrinsically romantic.

It is often suggested that romanticism is something particular to Western culture, and although there were early proponents of European romanticism such as Goethe, who wrote *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1774, and Rousseau, who published his first work, *Dissertation sur la musique moderne* in 1743, the Japanese poet Tsurayuki (868-946?) articulated a romantic philosophy of poetry seven centuries before Goethe, in his preface to the *Kokin Waka Shu*: "Japanese poetry has the hearts of men for its seeds, which grow into numerous leaves of words. People, as they experience various events in life, speak out their hearts in terms of what they see and hear." The first formulation of a theory of poetry by a Japanese centered around the tanka, or lyric poetry. Since the Japanese have a deeply romantic sensibility, it was necessary that it should begin with an expressive form.

Hence the beginning of romantic tanka in Japan is literally at the beginning, and what the romantic poets of the Meiji-era, such as Akiko and Takuboku, did was to shift the context of past works, and their works in turn were recontextualized through a form of Menardism by American tankaists. One is reminded of Borges' story, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", in which a character named Menard writes the Quixote and claims that it is better than Cervantes' book because it is new.

Tsurayuki's theory of expression states that the instinctive need for expression is impelled by nature. Almost a millennium later, Takuboku and others grappled with the instinctive compulsion to compose tanka while extricating themselves from nature to a larger degree, faced with a rapidly growing, modern industrial society in which the role of nature began to lose its significance.

In the America of 1999, which is more homogeneous and relatively more static, the necessity for tanka becomes less evident and, to a greater degree, commonplace in terms of subject matter. This is where the concept of Menardism comes into play. While "expression", all-important to Tsurayuki, and a subjective, idiosyncratic form of expression identified with the Meiji-era romantics contrasts sharply with the muted, non-expressive aspects of Japanese culture; for us the opposite is true. Tanka is still expressive, still romantic, but commonplace in relation to our fast, high-intensity, ultra-stimulating culture. From the ninth century to the twentieth, the same concept of expression exists in a drastically altered form through a change of context.

Some critics have expressed an unsubstantial understanding of romanticism. In Higginson's review of Goto Miyoko's book, *I Am Alive* (*Modern Haiku*, Vol. XXIV:3), he says, "And this is the first book in English that I know of to point beyond the narrow style of Takuboku/Akiko 'romantics' to a kind of tanka that might even make sense in English." The word "romantic" is used in a derogatory

sense, as if it was a one-dimensional term, whereas it is clear that there are advantages and disadvantages to romanticism. The disadvantages are a tendency towards self-involvement and narcissism, but the fact that it has the potential to speak more directly to the reader than any other form of tanka and can also be dynamic does not seem to be examined. Higginson claims that "Our community is nominally aware of modern Japanese tanka, particularly those of Ishikawa Takuboku and Yosano Akiko through the translations of Carl Sesar and Sanford Goldstein and others." But it can be argued that our community is more familiar with court poetry, which is more widely translated and available in various editions, whereas Carl Sesar's translation has been out of print for over thirty years.

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Tanka, if one wants to put it this way, is inherently narrow. I am not using the word "narrow" with a negative connotation—that is, it is able to sustain a higher pitch of intensity because of its fragmented nature and usefulness in recording instants. Goto Miyoko's tanka falls flat as narrative autobiographical sketches which tanka is not suited to expressing. Miyoko is applying Shiki's postulation of *Shasei* (sketches of life) to moments of her experience. Shiki failed to instigate a tanka reform through lack of faith in the highly individualized nature of each person and a submersion of identity into feudalistic thought-patterns. He erroneously believed that a reactionary emulation of the *Manyōshū* would save tanka from what he perceived as its eminent extinction, not comprehending that a text can be recycled but not recreated. Just as a novel written in the form of a poem appears convoluted, and a poem with lines too bare seems oversimplified or unsophisticated, a tanka is innately incapacious in the sense that it is disjointed. This is both its limitation and its strength. Miyoko, as Higginson admits, is a "bridge"; because she is connective of two different forms of tanka—court poetry and the more recent effusions of Machi Tawara—her personal stance is not strong enough. She lacks what Akiko

calls *Jikkan*, which for Akiko means “a special type of excited feelings that belong to the realm of poetic emotion. These must enable the poet to transcend common sense, to experience an entirely new joy, sorrow, or other emotion, and to feel the soul stirred with extraordinary excitement.” Akiko’s concept of *Jikkan* is relevant to the growth of English language tanka in relation to its an emerging set of aesthetic criteria.

Higginson goes on to say, “*I Am Alive* is a much more powerful collection than the excellent *Tangled Hair* of Yosano Akiko, because Goldstein and his collaborator Seishi Shinoda worked on a single book that is less complex, less varied than a lifetime body of work.” But a book of tanka is not meant to be autobiography. The subject chooses the poet, not the other way around; hence tanka are of necessity fragmented, broken off into disconnected pieces like shards of glass from a shattered vase. Autobiographical writing requires the intent to organize chronologically, whereas tanka does not operate this way. In a sense tanka is antithetical to autobiography, since tanka moments are not so routine; they occur when a sudden flash of intense emotion or perception becomes so powerful that the poet feels compelled to purge himself of it. The tankaist writes not to record an event, as in home video, but rather out of *sine qua non* to vent his psychological or emotional excess without which the tankaist might not have written anything at all.

On the last page Higginson says, “Some Americans, most notably Michael McClintock and Sanford Goldstein, have found in the modern romanticism of Takuboku and Akiko a spark that kindled a response . . . But their tanka has been as limited as their Japanese models, narrow in both subject matter and feeling, for all their sharp beauty.” At the time this article was written, McClintock had long vanished from the tanka world, and his association with Goldstein seems to imply that this is what American tanka has boiled down to, two poets copying Akiko and Takuboku.

At the time the article was published, Fall 1993, two tankaists, equally gifted as Goldstein, and more experienced and ambitious than McClintock, had been seriously engaged with the form: David Rice and Pat Shelley. Goldstein wrote his first tanka in 1966, but Shelley had written her first tanka in the 1930s. Shelley's collection of tanka, *The Rice Papers*, arguably the best book of tanka by an American, published in 1992, is not even mentioned. Yet Higginson claims it is amazing that most of us in the shortpoem world were not aware of Goto Miyoko's book.

The concluding thought is, "Until now I had not believed that Japanese tanka had much to offer in the way of possibilities for English composition. We have our own lyric tradition. . . . It has always seemed to me that there was little in tanka that we needed, given the possibilities already available to us." But the Japanese lyric, unlike any Western counterpart, was puissant enough to dominate all the literary modes in Japan for several succeeding centuries.

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Although I am aware that lyric poetry, which is to be found throughout world literature, forms the bulk of all poetry and has its beginnings in The Pyramid Texts of Egypt (c. 2600 BC)—tanka, disparate from most forms of Western lyric poetry, does not need to be decoded, analyzed, interpreted, discussed and lectured upon. Tanka's accessibility is one of the reasons why poetry is so popular in Japan.

For example, Machi Tawara wrote a book of tanka, *Salad Anniversary*, which was the best-selling book of Japanese poetry in the history of Japanese literature. The book was comprised primarily of love poems, and sold several millions of copies. Tawara became a phenomenon in Japanese letters. Why is it difficult to believe that a young, relatively unknown school-teacher in America could write a book of lyric poetry, or love poetry, that would hastily shoot to the top of the bestseller list?

Again, tanka is intrinsically romantic, and a cursory glance at the history of tanka will bring this to light.

From the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), compiled in 712, the oldest Japanese book, we find a lost tryst by Yuryaku: "In Hiketa/Young chestnut trees grow;/If only we had slept together/When you were still young—/But now you have become so old." The following poet from the second period of the *Manyoshu* (673-701) trusts in serendipity: "Will not the thunder/Roll for a little while,/The sky cloud over,/And the rain come pouring down?/Then I can keep you with me." Oshikochi no Mitsune (898-922), perhaps the finest *Kokinshu* poet, is consumed by love: "My love/Knows no destination/And has no goal;/I think only/Of meeting as its limit." The *Goshuishu* poet Izumi Shikibu emits passionate concerns: "For love I am ready/To change even my human shape;/All that distinguishes/Me from the summer insects/Is that my flame is hidden." Murasaki Shikibu (973-1013) in *The Tale of Genji* strikes a acquiescent note: "Helpless as I am,/I cannot lead my life as/My heart desires;/I have learned how to submit/My desires to my fate." Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241), in the *Shin Kokinshu*, broods over rejection: "Like a white cloud that/Has been cut loose from the peak/By the blowing wind,/Has your heart, cut off from me,/Turned completely unfeeling?" In 1303, Eifukumon'in, a consort of the Muromachi period, asserts a love that never dies. "If even now/in the midst of rejection/I still love him so,/then what would be my feelings/if he were to love me back?" Yusai, in 1597, ponders ephemerality: "Who in the future/Seeing the moon tonight/In Mishima bay/Will give himself to longing/In the shadow of the reeds?" Tachibana Akemi (1812-68), the last important poet of the Tokugawa period, evokes a sense of serenity: "My sweetheart and I,/Sleepy face side by side,/Look out at the pond/Covered with snow and watch/The mandarin ducks floating." Yosano Tekkan, who has often been credited for creating the modern tanka, is more philosophical in this verse, which appeared in his book, *Tekkanshi*, published in 1901: "Love or reputation--/Which is

more important?/ I have begun to waver./My age at this point in time/Is twenty eight autumns." Tekkan began writing this style of poem, as opposed to his previous virile manner, upon meeting and falling in love with Akiko, which brings us full circle to the modern romantics.

I have culled these tanka from over a millennium of poetry, and it is clear that the romantic poetry written before the Meiji-era was primarily associated with love. Takuboku's first significant book, *A Handful of Sand*, appeared in 1910, and what he did with the tanka form, although innovative, does not stray from the romantic, expressive nature of tanka theoretically established by Tsurayuki and already evident in the Kojiki. He merely turned the romantic aesthetic away from the subject of love, made the vicissitudes of his personality the theme of his poetry, and closed the gap between his life and his work. Akiko recalls this in her book, *Talks on Tanka*, "Tanka served as the best expression of my love. It became an inseparable part of my life. . . I can honestly say that my love gained its fullest expression by means of tanka, and that my tanka suddenly made progress by means of love." Takuboku, by attempting to destroy the conventions of tanka, which would have been impossible to do since he carried a divergent and wavering but consistent link to the past, unwittingly revitalized the form. I say "unwittingly" because his concerns were, ultimately, personal, in spite of his late interest in socialism and ideological concerns. Takuboku reformed tanka not so much by his poetry, but through his theory that there is no subject matter that is not befitting to the composition of tanka.

Akiko made a similar contribution to the rejuvenation of tanka. She believed that "every tanka ends up becoming a lyric." Because tanka is an emotive form, whether the poem is about a flower or a stone it cannot escape a lyrical quality. Akiko acknowledged that romanticism in Japanese poetry had existed since ancient times, but she believed that too many contemporary

tankaists had swerved from that tradition. Hence, rather than creating something new, she merely gathered inspiration from looking back to works of the past for inspiration, and recycled them in a novel way. This is a process of recontextualization.

I believe that this process was partially impelled by the sudden influx of Western influence. Wordsworth, whose "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" helped develop the romantic aesthetic in English poetry, was translated into Japanese in the 1880s. The works of other English romantics such as Keats, Shelley and Byron were also becoming accessible. Their passionate, idealistic individualism and defiance of convention assisted in broadening the scope of Japanese tanka. The term "romanticism" in England, which at first carried political implications in reference to the French Revolution, did not become identified with a literary movement until the late nineteenth century when Pre-Raphaelite writers such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Michael Rossetti, reasserted Keats and Shelley as poets of beauty who valued art for art's sake. The delayed conception of romanticism in England as primarily aesthetic approximately correlates with the Meiji Restoration which occurred in 1868. The Meiji period (1868-1912) began with the overthrow of the 265-year-old rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and the abolition of feudalism. Assimilation of Western knowledge in science, industry, government, art and literature occurred.

In 1880 Wordsworth proclaimed that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Coleridge, in the 14th chapter of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), entitled, "Lyrical Ballads and POETIC CONTROVERSY", wrote "My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in the preceding disquisition. . . . What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies

the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind." William Hazlitt, in *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), from "LECTURE 1: ON POETRY IN GENERAL", declared that "...the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, as with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being." Shelley, in *A Defense of Poetry* (1821), affirmed that "Those in whom it exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word, and the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others..." Coleridge borrowed Immanuel Kant's epistemological theory that subjective feelings dictate form.

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But Akiko and Takuboku were more aligned with Keats and Byron, who were romantic ironists—that is, in contradiction to a progressive, Judeo-Christian philosophy, they perceived the world as constantly changing and chaotic. If the world is unknowable and always in a state of transmutation, the work of art, like the world itself, is in a perpetual movement that must be fragmentary, a partial representation of a constantly metamorphosing, never fully fathomable world.

Akiko's theory of tanka bears an uncanny resemblance to some of the concepts discussed above. She wrote, "These words mislead the reader into thinking that the artist is the principal in all cases. A work of art emerges only when the feelings in the artist's heart, stimulated by things in nature, focus in an image." Akiko was rebelling against the widespread condemnation of individualism in her society, which also seems to correspond with the English romantic revolt against classicism, which propounded that the purpose of art was to imitate nature, and that the universe was ordered by objective laws. According to classicism, art must conform to certain conventions and obey rules inherited from antiquity. The feudalism which the Meiji romantics were trying to extricate themselves from was equally stifling. As John Whitney Hall says, "Perhaps

the most useful way to conceive of feudalism is the simplest, namely that it is a condition of society in which there is at all levels a fusion of the civil, military, and judicial elements of government into a single authority" (*Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times*, 77). In a culture where there are central authority figures, a subordination of the individual is inevitable. Although the Meiji restoration had returned the emperor to the center of government, it is important to keep in mind that he stood above the paradigm of politics and was more of a figurehead than an emperor in the traditional sense.

In conclusion, what Akiko and Takuboku did was reestablish tanka rather than revolutionize it. When one skims through the history of tanka, particularly from the *Manyōshū* up to the Azuchi-Momoyama period of the late sixteenth century, the general uniformity of subject matter within the context of expressiveness is remarkable. The two most common themes are love and nature, and they are so predominant as to neglect other aspects of human experience.

Akiko and Takuboku, as traditional Japanese--after all, they chose as their paramount form of expression an ancient Japanese literary form--were particularly strong, unique, passionate individuals, who broadened the scope of tanka to the point where anyone, anywhere could write a tanka poem without a profuse knowledge of its history. If Takuboku attempted to destroy the tanka form, leaving it unscathed, certainly we, as more moderate, less sadistic individuals could safely work within the limits of tanka with some degree of success. But it is still difficult to understand why it took over a thousand years for such individuals to derail tanka from its repetitive course. Perhaps it took the combination of strong, Japanese poetic individualists and the stimulus Japanese culture received from the West, particularly its unabashedly individual facet, to provoke such a change.

There is a possibility that tanka, as Shiki predicted, would have sunk into oblivion had this auspicious

combination not occurred. But it is this combination that is most relevant to those of us trying to write tanka in English today. Because if we understand that tanka, as it exists today, is, in a sense, as much Western as it is Japanese, the possibilities for what we can do with the form become as open as it is in Japan. In Japan, tanka continues to flourish. I believe it is time now for us to hold up our end and claim, through the writing of tanka, the substantial influence our culture affected upon this very distinctive form without which there is a slim chance that it would not be written today in any language.

Haiku as Social Conscience:

The Poetry of Bud Osborne

EDWARD ZUK

When I was a student at the University of Toronto, I would pass four or five beggars each morning on the way to class. They would line themselves along Bloor Street, calling at me from the same spot for several days; then they would disappear for weeks or even months, only to be replaced by others. They were part of my urban landscape, and each morning I faced the dilemma of whether to load my pockets with change to pass out, or to brush past them and save my finances.

When I look back at the poetry I wrote at this time, I am shocked that none of this is to be found. My haiku were about the glimpses of nature I could wrench from downtown Toronto or from my rambling, solitary walks in the evenings. A very real and important part of my life never made its way into my poetry. While striving for a mystical communion with nature, my haiku were blind to the real sufferings around me.

These thoughts came to mind when I read the haiku contained in *Lonesome Monsters*, a recent book by the Vancouver poet Bud Osborne. These poems seemed to scream about urban poverty and deprivation. The haiku evoke a life lived on the streets or in cheap boarding houses, a life which few of us have ever experienced:

I pull the cord
night disappears
roaches run everywhere

my poems in a library
tonight
I sleep in the wind¹

Ten poems are labeled as haiku in the volume, but other haiku appear at the end of longer, free-verse poems. At their best, these haiku do exactly what they should: they evoke a situation pregnant with meaning. And, perhaps just as importantly, they challenge our notions about the nature of our art.

All the haiku in *Lonesome Monsters* describe the city, and all of them relate to the oppressed or dispossessed. In many of them the poet figures prominently (note the "I" of the above two poems). Their insights are predominantly social and psychological. And, more often than not, they are narrative rather than descriptive:

black man in cold rain
opening a garbage can
christmas morning

police
come with sledgehammers
the door is open²

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Most haiku published today are written along different lines. Conventional wisdom tells us that haiku are about nature; they are objective, descriptive, and impersonal; they often strive to be mystical. People are banished to light, ironic poems called senryu. Osborne's work questions this practice. Are we restricting ourselves too much in our haiku? Are vital parts of modern life not being expressed?

While Osborne breaks with much of contemporary haiku, in some ways he is staunchly traditional. In the history of haiku, depictions of poverty and suffering abound. Here, for example, is Bashō's famous poem on prostitutes:

Under one roof
Prostitutes, too, are sleeping—
Bush clover and the moon³

Is this very different in spirit from the *Lonesome Monsters* haiku quoted above? Or we might look to Bashō's

poem on being forced to sleep in a stable, a verse which finds an echo in Osborne's roaches:

Fleas, lice,
A horse pisses
Near my pillow⁴

I could just as easily draw other parallels from the work of Bashō or Issa. My point is that dispossession and the poor loom large in the haiku tradition, a fact which Osborne's verses bring to our attention.

Of course, socially-conscious haiku have found their way into English. Nicholas Virgilio, for example, has given us portraits of the prostitutes and the homeless of Camden, New Jersey, which are a landmark of our poetry:

on the cardboard box
holding the frozen wino:
Fragile: Do Not Crush

shadowing hookers
after dark:
the cross in the park⁵

However, I can't help but feel that these works provide a model only sporadically followed. Most serious haiku writers have memorized Virgilio's *lily* haiku, but how many of us can recite his social ones by heart?

Here we approach the question of what a haiku is for. Is it primarily an aesthetic object? A social document? An expression of one's spiritual beliefs? This question is, of course, unanswerable, although every haiku writer must face it eventually. I am slowly coming to the belief that a haiku can be all three. After all, one can appreciate Bashō's bush clover haiku as a brilliant poem as well as an elevation of prostitutes to an image of sublime beauty. And what kind of spirituality would ignore the sufferings of the poor?

In fairness, I should add that not all of Osborne's haiku are successful. Several of them lack depth and compression:

“he broke my teevee set!”
“how?”
“when I banged his head on it!”⁶

This is more like anecdote than a poem; the mention of violence replaces the need to shape the scene imaginatively. But when the poems work, they are immediate, moving, and provocative. What else can we ask of a haiku poet?

I broke in here to sleep
but can't sleep
. . . listening . . .⁷

96 As I began this article on a personal note, I feel that I should end on one. I have, recently, been trying to write more along the lines of Nick Virgilio or Bud Osborne. It is not easy. The danger is that one ends up mounting a soapbox, working oneself into a manufactured rage because it is the correct thing to do. The poems I have written thus far on the city are like this: well-intentioned but false. Perhaps we can be most honest by letting the city and its problems become a part—an important part—of our poetic landscape, by letting this aspect of our experience “hurt us into poetry,” as W. H. Auden might have said:

rainy morning—
today an old man
working this corner

1. *Lonesome Monsters* (Vancouver: Anvil Press 1995), pp. 34 & 60.

2. *Lonesome Monsters*, pp. 90 & 60.

3. This translation is adapted from that of D. T. Suzuki in *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1959) p. 230.

4. Adapted from *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p. 237.

5. Nick Virgilio, *Selected Haiku* (Sherbrooke: Burnt Lake Press; Windsor: Black Moss Press, 1988), pp. 59 & 47.

6. *Lonesome Monsters*, p. 90.

7. *Lonesome Monsters*, p. 34.

Patrick GALLAGHER's work has appeared in *Woodnotes*, *Raw Nerve*, and *Geppo*. He writes: "I was introduced to haiku by my wife, Claire Gallagher, and other San Francisco Bay Area poets. For me haiku has opened a window to friends and an appreciation of nature and its reflection in art that has enormously enriched my life. I look forward to more poetry and more acquaintances in the haiku life."

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