

Haiku: A Disquisition

Any treatise on haiku begins with the simple definition that haiku "is the shortest form of poem we can find in world literature."ⁱ Of Japanese origin, haiku is poetry reduced to its simplest form. "It has been called 'the wordless poem,' and is often so bare as to seem meaningless to the uninitiated."ⁱⁱ But however minute in outward appearance, haiku possess the ability to see into the very essence of their subject matter, bringing to both practitioner and reader alike a feeling that they have passed through the well known "gateless gate" of zen and attained a state of enlightenment for a brief moment.

Haiku deal with aspects of our normal, everyday existence with immediacy, forsaking pages upon pages of verse and commentary in a manner similar to the Japanese contemplative brush artists. Both, "...more or less influenced by the way of zen, tend to use the fewest words or strokes of the brush to express their feelings. When feelings are too fully expressed, no room is left for the unknown..."ⁱⁱⁱ Haiku, as a result of their brief nature, offer no instruction, but rather share a deep insight of the practitioner which may then manifest in the mind of reader as well.

Much has been written about the length of haiku, seventeen syllables with three alternating lines of five, seven, and five syllables being the traditional format. We can trace the five/seven/five form back to both the Kojiki and Manyoshu, important poetry anthologies of the eighth century in Japan. There were originally four primary forms of Japanese verse, and each consisting of

some variation of lines with five and seven syllables. A kautata has a five/seven/seven form; the sedoka combines two kautatas in a single verse, five/seven/seven, five/seven/seven; and the choka is a series of five/sevens of indeterminate length.

The fourth verse form, which comprised much of the Manyoshu, was the tanka, a five line verse consisting of an upper hemistich of seventeen syllables arranged in a five/seven/five pattern, followed by a lower hemistich of fourteen syllables arranged in a seven/seven pattern. Previously, in both the Kojiki and Nihonshoki anthologies, tanka most often appeared in a five/seven-five/seven-seven form. This was an important step in the history of haiku, for renga, or linked poetry, developed from this new tanka form.

Although the term renga was not used until 1127, the form dates to the Heian period which began in 792. With renga, two poets worked together on a single poem, one writing an upper hemistich of five/seven/five syllables, the other a lower hemistich of seven/seven. By the fourteenth century, "renga rounds" as they were referred to became like theatre. As many as four poets fully aware of all the "rules" of renga, which could take some twenty years to learn, produced links of a hundred or more verses over a two to four hour period.

The most important "rule" was that the hokku, or starting verse, contain a seasonal reference that provided a solid foundation for the ensuing work. Subsequently these hokku were allowed to stand alone as individual poems. Eventually the poets produced hokku as a free verse, not part of a renga

presentation, and thus did haiku originate, retaining for the most part the five/seven/five structure.

However, it should be noted that the seventeen "onji" of Japanese may translate to only twelve syllables in English. Upon review of many works in Western literature, one also finds sections of poetry in English with sixteen to eighteen syllables fairly common. After further analysis, one realizes that sixteen to eighteen syllables comprise the longest line that may be read comfortably in one breath.

If one looks at the songs written in the antique tongue used by poets Virgil in the *Aenied* and Homer in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we find they use dactylic hexameters rather extensively. And in Longfellow's *Evangeline*, the meter consists of five dactyls and a trochee, with syllables varying from sixteen to eighteen. So it would appear the number of syllables that can be spoken in one breath is a natural length for haiku. A little known fact derived from Buddhist scripture offers a somewhat similar notion for our seventeen syllable structure:

According to the Abhidhamma, or metaphysical section of the Pali Canon, the longest process of consciousness caused by sense perceptions consists of seventeen thought instants (cittakkhana) each briefer than a lightning-flash. Is it not significant in the light of this that a haiku should be composed of exactly seventeen syllables?^{iv}

Regardless of the content of a poem, it is obvious that the length of a poem has nothing to do with the true quality of a poet, and in haiku one finds some of the highest expression of emotion of which a poet is capable. This stripping away

of unnecessary language provides haiku with an advantage of immediacy in the mind of a reader. Haiku take away as many words possible between its subject and reader. Robert Bly, in his essay "Dropping the Reader," discusses benefits of writing and reading shorter verse:

Most of the emotions we have are brief: they appear suddenly and vanish. They are part of the swift life of the intelligence.... A brief poem does without the scaffolding of secondary ideas. Because of this, it moves more swiftly than the longer poem and with more intellectual exhilaration....In the brief poem... the poet takes the reader to the edge of a cliff, as a mother eagle takes its nestling, and then drops him. Readers with a strong imagination enjoy it, and discover they can fly. The others fall down to the rocks where they are killed instantly.^v

Writers of short verse, especially haiku, seek to involve their reader in a creative process, to allow, or rather force the "reader" to become "poet" in a sense by drawing on the reader's imagination and experiences as well. Images are presented devoid of commentary and emotion. A reader discovers that he is one with the image before him. Or, as R.H. Blyth remarked, "It (haiku) is a way of returning to nature, to our moon nature, our cherry-blossom nature, our falling leaf nature, in short, to our Buddha nature."^{vi}

Each phenomenon encountered in everyday life may give rise to a myriad of emotions, quite often based on previous experiences. Haiku give us moments to look at with the possibility of seeing more clearly than ever before because of their very nature. It is essentially a wordless state, in which words are used, not to express anything, but rather clear away something that seems to stand

between us and the real thing that (in being not in fact separate from ourselves) are then perceived by self-knowledge.^{vii} The goal of haiku is to put meaning into each moment of existence; the haiku must be the experience, whereas any subsequent analysis only about the experience and thus less accessible to the reader. Haiku are not concerned with the content of experience, but rather the quality of experience and practitioner's ability to relate his perception of a given moment. One finds that a successful haiku is one which makes a profound impression on the reader, "...and this is the real function of poetry - to hold the mirror up to nature in such a way that we perceive its workings. Haiku is 'such a way'."^{viii}

A true haiku poet makes no effort to understand anything he sees or hears, resisting the urge to analyze a particular situation and introduce his own feelings to the moment. The art of haiku is not to make poetry, or even in simpler terms to record particular events as they happen. It is, rather, to relate the very essence of any normal, everyday occurrence. Allen Ginsberg has this following diary entry about writing haiku:

Haiku= objective images written down outside mind the result is inevitable mind sensation of relations. Never try to write of relations themselves, just the images which are all that can be written down on the subject...^{ix}

A problem for a Western reader is his tendency to use logical reasoning, to "over-analyze" as it were. Because of this insufficient cooperation on the part of a reader, haiku often seem "lonely" in appearance, obviously lacking any profundity

due to their brevity. A Western reader often needs to be made aware of the subject matter through extensive extraneous commentary, while the haiku poet is blessed with an understanding that "...there is nothing behind phenomena, they are themselves the meaning."^x Enjoyment of haiku must come intuitively and immediately to the reader. The picture presented must speak for itself, must stand alone without extended verbal support. The purpose of the haiku poet is sharply focused, to relate an image without clouding the air with excessive personal observations on his subject matter. As R.H. Blyth has noted:

...haiku seizes a moment of inexplicable depth. It does not look before and after, but confines itself to the timeless, when life suddenly deepens, and all the universe is present at the lighting of a candle.^{xi}

If the mind of the haiku poet is clear, he can then produce clear images that capture whatever experience he seeks to relate to the reader. When creating haiku images, a practitioner must be careful to express his inner feelings absent any sense of ego involvement. In putting forth clear images reflecting his own intuitions, a haiku poet has no need to include his "ideas" on the subject at hand, for images related point to his original intuitions, in deed they appear to be the intuitions themselves. In the best haiku a poet relates experiences in such a way that his reader shares in an experience as well, and is not limited to an understanding of an image portrayed only because a poet has waxed eloquent on it.

So haiku not only give us an image from a moment of the writer's experience, but also give the reader his own separate image based on his own personal experiences.

"...the non-Japanese listener must remember that a good haiku is a pebble thrown into the pool of a listener's mind, evoking associations out of the richness of his own memory. It invites the listener to participate instead of leaving him dumb with admiration while the poet shows off."^{xii}

With a concentrated and precise effort, a haiku poet can manifest an image that a reader can grasp without any thought of the poet or what went through the poet's mind when he created that image.

Thus a reader recalls and draws from the wealth of his own experiences as well as those of the poet. And often the reader, when encountering a particular haiku image that evokes a heightened response and state of awareness, realizes that he has experienced such a sensation before, though completely unaware.

"So a great many haiku tell us something we have seen but not seen. They do not give us a satori, an enlightenment, they show us that we have had an enlightenment, had it often, - and not recognized it."^{xiii} Haiku are best when able to elicit an instantaneous response from the reader, his mind empty of thoughts and feelings that would otherwise blur the image presented.

As an example of a haiku that presents a profound image without explanation or extraneous emotional discourse, we have Michael McClintock's response to seeing a dead cat. He could have simply stated, "I was sad when I saw the dead cat," but that would not have been a haiku. When one puts forth an image that

is sad and says it is sad, one loses a certain degree of the feeling of sadness. It is important not to say something is sad but that it be sad of itself, without further commentary. In McClintock's case, he wrote the following:

*dead cat...
open mouthed
in the pouring rain*

Here we have a crystal clear image of this dead cat, we can see the cat possibly laying by the side of a road while rain pounds the ground nearby. Obviously McClintock was sad when he saw the cat, and the reader is made aware of his sadness as well, but the poet is able to express this sadness with a minimum of words. Sadness becomes a feeling inherent in the image. Further commentary regarding the image could only detract from its intensity. "Sensing the Infinite and Eternal in the here and now, while always remaining free from philosophizing, haiku can become the penultimate expression of the ultimately inexpressible."^{xiv}

Often the haiku poet includes a seasonal reference in his work, the reasons for this dealing with its hokku origins as discussed earlier, and this is particularly evident in haiku of the great Japanese masters such as Basho, Buson, Issa and Shiki. On occasion we may read a haiku and fail to connect with a seasonal reference provided by a poet. It is important to acknowledge seasonal settings because it enables one to more fully comprehend the image the poet is trying to share with us. The goal of a haiku poet is not to divide man from

nature or nature from man, but rather bring about a unity of sorts through expressing some aspect of nature in its simplest form. Again from R.H. Blyth:

Just as one part of a long poem is to be enjoyed while the whole is held in the mind, so a haiku is to be read with the object clearly before the eye, while the season, the world in one of its four aspects, is occupying the whole of the mind. This is because every object, every flower, every creature is in itself all that is, while at the same time it is itself and nothing more.^{xv}

When we are entirely alone with nature, or with an image from nature in a haiku, this aforementioned sense of unity enables us to breathe in and breathe out at the same time. Even though one might sense a profound loneliness when contemplating the vastness of his natural surroundings, one must in turn recognize a completeness of sorts as well.

A certain level of understanding is required for a reader of haiku to fully appreciate the image encountered. It has been said certain haiku images "...may not be at all intelligible to those whose minds have not been fully trained to read the meaning contained therein."^{xvi}

Most readers, particularly of Western literature, are accustomed to having an image discussed thoroughly, presented in a way that leaves little, if anything, to their imagination.

The most effective haiku convey a mood, sometimes by simply employing this seasonal reference. Mountains "covered with wildflowers" or "covered with snow" might be the same mountains, but the mood surrounding any subsequent haiku

image would be quite different. Haiku are most often compared to the sparse brush stroke paintings common in Eastern art, where images of mountains, trees, rocks, rivers and waterfalls seem to emerge from blank canvas with a minimum of effort by the artist. The structuring of haiku in regard to spatial relationships is much like a painter's composition on canvas, and this enables the haiku poet to achieve immediacy with his work. And whereas the painter is limited to placement of images in a spatial context, a haiku poet can bring movement, often times three dimensional, with his proper conveying of an image.

As with most Eastern painting, haiku has as its goal the representation of the subject alone, without excessive commentary, the image being presented as what it is and nothing more. Often in haiku a word is strategically placed to produce a "thought pause" on the part of the reader, causing a more sustained reflection on the image being presented. Out of this pause may rise a plethora of ideas or emotions left unsaid that fills out the verse in the mind of the reader, much as an artist in Japanese sumi painting fills the blank space of the silk without filling it.

As haiku are studied further, it will be seen that they usually gain their effect not only by suggesting a mood, but also by giving a clear-cut picture that serves as a starting point for trains of thought and emotion. But, again owing to their shortness, haiku can seldom give the picture in detail. Only outlines or important parts are drawn, and the rest the reader must fill in for himself. Haiku indeed have a very close resemblance to the 'ink sketches' so dear to the hearts of the Japanese.^{xvii}

There are two forms of function of the imagination, active and passive. With an active imagination, an image would be presented complete with the poet's musings on the subject matter, more often than not derived from his imagination, his "understanding" of the image that he tries to relate to the reader. Often a Western poet puts forth an image, the emotion surrounding his interpretation of that image, and the cause for his emotional state that led to his interpretation of an image in a certain way. In point of fact, the poet just overdoes it.

Haiku poets are different, and thus a more passive form of imagination is prevalent in their work. They attempt to perceive the nature of their subject matter by removing all obstacles that would prevent an otherwise instantaneous understanding of the image, an "enlightened state" of poetic endeavor so to speak. John Gould Fletcher writes, "...the Japanese Haiku poet...is content to suggest an object, and leaves the resulting emotion for the reader to complete in his own mind.^{xviii} Take the following haiku by Shiki:

*One fell, -
Two fell, -
Camellias.*

In the simplest of terms Shiki has described red or white flowers falling from an evergreen shrub. We are left to our own devices to comprehend the circumstances surrounding this fairly elegantly portrayed moment. "The simpler the verse becomes, the stronger and purer and deeper the meaning. The one

flower falling, the two flowers falling are as significant as Lucifer falling from Heaven."^{xix}

This is an example of how a haiku poet strips an encounter with nature bare and presents a powerful image in succinct terms in the simplest of words. It has been said that the writing of haiku is a meditative or contemplative practice, a religious experience as it were. Haiku are often spoken of in the context of Zen Buddhism. This is because both deal with removing the superfluous, non-essential elements of emotion and consciousness that prevent one from realizing their true self-nature. The basic tenet of Zen is that it has nothing to say, nothing to teach, that "The truth of Buddhism is so self-evident, so obvious that it is, if anything, concealed by explaining it."^{xx}

In this same manner, haiku offer the reader a specific image without any readily apparent explanation to cloud his perspective. Haiku force the reader to give up the illusion of being separate from an image, "on the outside looking in" as it were. If a poet has successfully combined the three key elements of where, what, and when in a haiku, these elements become one, parts of a whole, the three elements so unified that no substitute is possible. "A successful haiku contains the spontaneous feeling that comes from the image or moment itself, and it is the poet's duty to relate the essential nature of this image or moment. If the poet is in that Nirvana state in which he is "one" with the universe he attempts to translate into words, he understands that he is not separate from things and that he deals with life "as it is lived, as it is being lived."^{xxi}

For a better understanding of how important it is for a reader of haiku to be in a somewhat meditative frame of mind, we need only heed the words of Roshi, "All things in Heaven and Earth spring from Existence, but Existence springs from Non-existence."^{xxii} Obviously certain haiku images are a manifestation of some aspect of the poet's physical world... these images do exist. But to truly understand and relate to the poet's expression, one must be in touch with that which is left unsaid by the poet, that which in actuality does not exist, at least not in a manner that is readily apparent in the abbreviated framework of a haiku. If a haiku poet is successful and has presented an image properly, the reader will perceive that which is left unsaid without a thought of it.

Poetry, and in particular haiku, does not seem to succeed when there is no mystery or sense of intrigue present. This is where Roshi's "Non-existence" is such a major variable. A haiku written by Shiki upon awakening one evening:

*The long night;
A light passes along
Outside the shoji.*

We know that it is evening, we know that Shiki is inside, we know that someone is passing by outside carrying a lamp or maybe a lantern, but has Shiki told us anything, do we really know anything? Any emotional or psychological response to this image must be created from the imagination and experience of the reader; it is left for the reader to decipher this somewhat mysterious moment. Who it is, why he or she is passing, where they are going, will never be known. The poet

realizes once again the mystery of life, the way in which we are separated from one another not only by ages of time and vast realms of space, but by moments, and by the thinness of a paper screen.^{xxiii}

What seems to be incompleteness and inadequacy on the part of a haiku poet is in actuality what makes the medium so powerful. The haiku poet realizes the depth of meaning to be found in a particular moment, and his eye remains focused on object at hand, not concerning himself with the myriad of thoughts that could interfere with either his or a reader's subsequent appreciation of this moment. It has been said of the ability of haiku poet Joso to capture individual moments:

He does not venture to think of anything beyond. He just sees them there and gives no intimation as to what he has in his mind. It is this very silence of the poet that makes the verse all the more eloquent.^{xxiv}

Often silence is more powerful than speaking, as evidenced in the following haiku, the first by Ryota, the second by Foster Jewell.

The host has said not a word.

The guest was dumb.

And silent, too, the white chrysanthemum.

Ryota has captured here a moment of profound insight, for this is a silence identical to that by which the Buddha transmitted to his disciple the Secret of Zen by lifting up a single lotus-blossom and smiling.

*Cliff dweller ruins
and the silence of swallows
encircling silence.*

As a reader we can feel the silence of this haiku, it is almost overwhelming, even though the image is but of birds circling in the air near a mountain. Jewell has made sound visible with his treatment of this image. Empty space is brought to life by means of a few well chosen words, the empty space in this instance being "the surrounding silence...a silence of the mind in which one does not 'think about' the poem but actually feels the sensation which it evokes - all the more strongly for having said so little."^{xxv} Such a picture is one whose meaning eludes any further analysis because it has no meaning beyond a moment captured with crystal clarity by the poet.

Much has been written of the importance of "immediacy" in haiku, of the need for a haiku poet to capture and present an image in such a way that the reader relates to it without hesitation, without thought. R.H. Blyth states:

Haiku are the recording of experiences of what seem to be particular things and sensations, but which demand from us a universalization that nevertheless does not relinquish an atom of the uniqueness and differential of the thing. In order to achieve the complete fusion of example and law, creation and the appreciation must be instantaneous, in the sense that no rational elements, no logical thinking as such, is to interfere or come between us and the thing that is at one and the same time itself alone, and yet includes all other things.^{xxvi}

If an image is not immediately perceived by a reader, one has an intellectual cleavage which no amount of effort can overcome. An image must be presented in such a way that the reader has no need to engage in any thought process to reach a deep understanding of the moment portrayed. It is as Ryutan Soshin once remarked to a disciple, "Seeing is direct seeing. Hesitate and think about it, and you have gone astray."^{xxvii}

In a haiku both language of the poem and what the poet had in his mind when he produced a particular image should be almost transparent to the reader. The reader must see into the essence of the object portrayed as if he himself was viewing it for the first time, instead of the poet. Images must speak to a reader so that impressions of the poet of a particular moment are invisible. A haiku done properly will trigger a reader's thoughts and memories based on their own experiences. It is almost as if the poet must present an image without words, for as Toenmei suggests to us in a section concerning the nature of existence in one of his poems:

*In these things there is a reality, a meaning,
But when we would express it,
Already the words are forgotten.*

These "haiku moments" as they are called seem almost of eternal duration, for even when they are gone their impact lingers in the mind of the reader.

Turning once again for a moment to mood in haiku we find that the medium is quite proficient at expressing *sabi*, a "loneliness in the sense of Buddhist

detachment, of seeing all things as happening 'by themselves' in miraculous spontaneity."^{xxviii} Nothing appealed more to haiku poets than Chinese poetry that portrayed a life of solitude. In the mind of a haiku poet, all men are born alone, become enlightened alone, and die alone, one's path is for all practical purposes a lonely journey.

Basho's great habuin, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, detailed his long journey alone across Japan through prose sections interspersed with haiku images, a style used by Jack Kerouac in his *Dharma Bums*. Basho finds himself on a journey, but so too are all men, the difference being the degree to which each person is aware of the path they follow. Basho ended his great habuin with the following short section:

*As firmly cemented clam-shells
Fall apart in autumn,
So I must take to the road again,
Farewell, my friends.*

His journey had spanned many miles and several seasons, and it was as if was speaking for nature, not just himself here.

"Autumn is the season of *sabishisa*, which means 'loneliness' in an ordinary context, but 'alone and rooted in the essential self' for the poet and Zen student."^{xxix} So Basho traveling alone has no reason to feel sad and depressed, for he is "alone" in a different sense. This sense of loneliness generated by travel enables one to reflect upon the true meaning of life, for what is life but a journey from one unknown to another, whether in the sense of birth and death or from

one moment to the next. This is instead a kind of loneliness in which the soul is able to ponder the Absolute. Just as persons studying Zen practice the loneliness and silence of 'emptiness' in long hours of meditation, so too does the haiku poet confront this same 'emptiness' with his verse.

For most individuals, the moments of their existence which could readily be related in a haiku format come when least expected, when one is not "open" to receiving them, very often passing before the individual unnoticed and unremembered, possibly until a later time. Most haiku poets are more "aware" of their surroundings because they are often looking for just such moments to transform with their brief verse. Harold Stewart remarks in his essay concerning haiku:

Each true haiku is a swift record in words of one moment of Satori, of the sudden flash of Enlightenment which grants us a transcendent Insight into the Suchness of things. For one second, the Eye of Metaphysical Realization opens, and we are transformed into Buddhas. The next it closes, and we are forced to resume our separate and mortal selves again, imprisoned in the illusion of ordinary life.^{xxxx}

This refers in part to the Buddhist doctrine of cosmic interrelationship of space, and identity of existence. Although time passes on, an individual moment can be captured and relived over and over again in the mind of a poet and his reader. Haiku require that we find ourselves, our "Buddha nature" which is infinite, in a finite, accessible image. We find that nothing indeed is hidden from us because we have transcended our ordinary, self-imposed boundaries of intellect which does not know, can by its nature never know a thing. Our mind,

our "Buddha mind" can realize all aspects of existence simultaneously, in an eternal moment of time, at an infinite point in space.

Because we live in a world of multifariousness and complexity, the brevity of haiku becomes an even more powerful tool to relate our impressions of the world to another. Each moment as it comes possesses value in its own nature, and although haiku appear at first glance to be very minimal by most poetic "standards", in point of fact, their appearance is deceiving to an ordinary reader. They must heed these words of R.H. Blyth: "Things do not begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop; there is simply ceaseless becoming."^{xxxi} And haiku may seem to come to an end, but its meaning often reverberates in the mind of a reader with a resonance for the ages.

And each "haiku moment," though a part of the infinite cosmos, offers a feeling of the whole even when we know we are only dealing with what seems to be but a small portion of our world. All our aesthetic and ethical pleasure should be spontaneous, grasped without searching for meaning or gain, in our "illusion" of reality as it were. And if one is trying to produce a haiku about a particular moment of great intensity, one must be careful to heed the following advice expressed in long ago teachings from the Mugaku:

*I thought
I would like
To give you something,-
But in the Daruma Sect,*

We have not a single thing.

The members of the Daruma sect believe they have nothing to offer, and so also a writer of haiku has nothing of his own to share with a reader, nothing but a moment to be related without commentary. For the person who believes that haiku are difficult to write and believe themselves incapable of producing one, they might pause to recall whether they were ever having a discussion with someone else during which they were asked about the weather. Suppose, having looked through the window, the person determined that it was raining. They could say, "It is raining again this morning." Or they could produce the following haiku image:

*'It is raining,
Again,
This morning.'*

After producing sometimes thousands of haiku dealing with a multitude of experiences, the haiku poet realizes that only on a not too frequent occasion has he passed through the "gateless gate" and produced an example worthy of the name haiku. But as compensation, he is left with words to ponder from one of the greatest of all haiku poets:

Rare indeed is the well-realized haiku, as Basho repeated to his disciples in many ways: He who creates three to five haiku poems during a lifetime is a haiku poet. He who attains to ten is a master.^{xxxii}

Part Two

Haiku

Down a narrow, dark passageway

in search

of an executioner.

Moonrise above distant peaks.

My whole universe

has utterly changed.

Waterfalls thunder

into a gorge,

gulls white amidst tall pines.

Early dusk.

When death comes as it must

the many worlds are only mind.

A setting sun,

darkened mountains

in a still faintly flushed sky...

Space and time,

creations of a mind

unwilling to acknowledge truth.

Rain moistened

winding stone steps,

morning mist rising above the Buddha.

River of heaven...

deep in the night,

forgetting the passage of time.

Lightning flashed brightly.

Wedding rain

paints a river pastoral.

A traveler

passes by me forever...

we part without regrets.

Moon creeps over waters

of a deep lake.

Ahh...the patience of nature.

Broken promises

guide my journey,

full moon, clear night.

Autumn mountains,

gulls sink low

over still waters.

Bright autumn moon,

the willows are still.

A bird sings, mountains grow quiet.

Hear that howling dog?

It walks a familiar trail,

undaunted by Mu.

Search for me in passing clouds.

Rain falls, listen...

I am a memory.

Stuck in the waters

of a river gorge,

a leaf of some unknown tree.

In beginner's mind are many answers,

in expert's mind

there are few.

Buddha's path?

Hesitate to think about it

and you have gone astray.

Barren trees

standing in still falling snow,

searching in jest for their leaves.

Temple bell,

silenced

by wind's quiet complacency.

A deep, dark woods...

Candles flicker

for Kobo Daishi.

Autumn trees,

a clear mountain lake.

One gull... then another...

Koras at Boudha stupa,

in the distance

the Himalayas.

Death stalks my spirit

disguised as a beggar

who needs no money.

A winter woods,

barren branches,

a full moon.

Alone and awake,

my tears falling

like silken thread.

In search of one mind,

winter waves,

a darkened woods.

Snow covered peaks,

the sound of an oar

striking still waters.

Bhaktapur,

a darkened alley.

A stick chases a tire.

Moonrise above distant peaks.

My whole universe

has utterly changed.

I wonder what my cushion

thinks about

while we meditate...

My Buddha nature

requires me to be unlike Buddha,

doesn't it?

Cold skies of dawn,

Buddha will keep his word,

pearls of morning dew.

Sun rises, waterfalls roar.

Not a breath of wind

as a bird takes flight.

Blow out those paper lanterns!

An autumn moon

is floating through midnight.

Sandals by bamboo screens,
monks in contemplation
of the sutras.

A blind man closes his eyes,
winds carry echoes
from his past.

A bend in the road,
beneath an evening moon
dead leaves are gathering.

The whole day long,
across an old wooden bridge,
a leaf falls, now and then.

Spring!

Birds flow across clear skies
like black ink on rice paper.

A leaf slowly turns,
turning,
awaiting that one last turn...

Crickets chirping,
an oar striking still waters
through evening mist.

Poison butterflies...
reality manifested
at one's choosing.

Dead leaves, Spring winds.

Anyone can follow
a much traveled path.

Bright moon,

a distant mountain.

Nothing whatsoever is hidden.

Birds black

against

a crimson setting sun.

leafclingingtolimbclingingtotreeclingingtoearthclingingtogod

Young rotting corpses

scattered among weeds...

when was there a great war?

One step forward, two steps back...

Two steps back, one step forward...

Not the same.

Shadows on bamboo,

monks meandering,

morning mist.

Boudha stupa, morning rain.

Prayer wheels glisten,

wheels turning, prayers rising.

Children laughing,

vendors selling wares,

clay pots bright against a brick wall.

Small creek near a path,

purple and white flowers

moist near water's edge.

Bright flowers,

sun bursts through tall green hedges.

Man passes with walking stick.

Temple bells in the distance.

A small shrine,

candle drippings... red and white.

Newari Buddhist ghat,

flames rise...

smoke rises...

Bisunu rises...

Writers?

Ah,

what do they know...

ⁱ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959, p.226

ⁱⁱ Cor Van DenHeuvel, editor, *The Haiku Anthology*. New York, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986, p. 26.

ⁱⁱⁱ Suzuki, op. cit., p. 257.

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- ^{iv} Harold Stewart, *A Net of Fireflies*. Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1960, p. 123.
- ^v William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985, p. 244.
- ^{vi} R. H. Blyth, *Haiku* (Four Volumes). Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1950, p. 242-243.
- ^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 1118.
- ^{ix} Higginson, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- ^x Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 981.
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- ^{xii} Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen*. New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, 1957, p. 183.
- ^{xiii} Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 886.
- ^{xiv} Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- ^{xv} Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
- ^{xvi} Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
- ^{xvii} Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958, p. 3.
- ^{xviii} Higginson, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
- ^{xix} Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 556.
- ^{xx} Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
- ^{xxi} Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 370.
- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, p. 913.
- ^{xxiv} Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
- ^{xxv} Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- ^{xxvi} Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 287.
- ^{xxvii} *Ibid.*, p. 741.
- ^{xxviii} Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
- ^{xxix} Robert Aitken, *A Zen Wave: Basho's Haiku and Zen*. New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1978, p. 82-83.
- ^{xxx} Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- ^{xxxi} Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 318.
- ^{xxxii} Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku*. Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1957, p. 25.