

## Haiku by Japanese Masters

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

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

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

*C'awa lat's see*

*aw the rael flouers*

*o this dulefu world!*

Basho (1644-94)

*Come on let us see*

*all the real flowers of this*

*sorrowful world*

*The fishmongir's staw---*

*hou cauld the deid lips*

*o the sautit bream.*

Basho

*The fishmonger's stall--*

*so cold the dead lips*

*of this salted bream*

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

Basho

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

Basho

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

Basho

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

Basho

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

Basho

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

Basho

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Lady Sute-jo (1633-98)*

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

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

*Sora (1649-1710)*

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

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

*Boncho (?-1714)*

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

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

*Lady Sono-jo (1649-1723)*

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

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

*Kyorai (1651-1704)*

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

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

*Kyoroku (1655-1715)*

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

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

Masahide (1657-1723)

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

Kikaku (1661-1707)

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

Joso (1662-1704)

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

Shushiki (1669-1725)

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

Shushiki

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

Buson (1715-83)

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

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

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

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

*After that dream  
how real  
this iris!*

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

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

Buson (1715-83)

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

Gyodai (1732-93)

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

Gyodai

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

Issa (1763-1837)

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Issa

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

Issa

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

Shiki (1867-1902)

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

Shiki

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

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

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

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