



Haiku

History, Formalities and Writing

What is Haiku?

- Haiku is arguably the most important form of **traditional Japanese** poetry
- Haiku is usually defined as a **17-syllable verse** consisting of three metrical units of **5, 7, and 5 syllables**
- However, in both translation and reformation, these simple rules are often **bent or broken** in the writing of haiku poetry

History of Haiku

- In Japan, these short poems have a long history!
- The earliest Japanese poetry, such as that of the *Manyoshu* written in 759 CE, includes stirring narrative, dramatic and short lyrical poems which scholars believe were originally written as part of the pre-Buddhist or early Shinto ceremonial rituals.
- This anthology includes anonymous songs and prayers designed to celebrate and pacify the gods, prayers for safe voyages, formal eulogies on the death of an Emperor or Empress and courting, marriage, planting and harvesting rituals.

History of Haiku

- The 5 syllable, 7 syllable, 5 syllable haiku has evolved and been reinvented many times over the centuries.
- One such form is the 31 syllable *waka* composed of five 5-7-5-7-7 syllable phrases.
- Developed as the early imperial court of the late eighth century consolidated cultural, social and political forms, the *waka* took its place as one of the important regularized poetic forms of the period. Within imperial circles, minor officials and scribes gained recognition as poem-providers and word specialists due to their ability to compose *waka*.

History of Haiku

- Early Japanese poetry went beyond just official usage.
- In the 14th century, an intellectual game developed where one person would write the first half of a *waka*-like poem, and another would complete it, adding the two 7-syllable stanzas.
- As many as four people took part in composing such poetry in what developed as a serious poetic form, with many complicated rules to ensure that the elegant court-poetry diction and aesthetic ideals were maintained.

History of Haiku

- However, in large social gatherings where Japanese rice wine, or *sake*, was often served, participants became inebriated and started writing *haikai*.
- *Haikai* was comic linked verse, which ignored many of the rules and allowed any subject matter at all, from the truly crude and erotic to pure slapstick, daffy comedy.

History of Haiku

- It was this lower-level poetic form which Matsunaga Teitoku, *haikai* master, tried to clean up and popularize and teach to his student Matsuo Basho (1644-1694).
- Basho's haiku, written while traveling around Japan, made him one of Japan's most celebrated poets.
- By the time of his death, Basho had more than 2,000 students.
- Other poets such as Buson, Issa, Ryokan, and Masaoka Shiki (the father of modern haiku), also gained fame as major haiku poets helping to make it a poetic form popular in all corners of the world.

Haiku – How To

- In Japanese, the rules for how to write Haiku are clear, and will not be discussed here.
- In foreign languages, there exists NO consensus in how to write Haiku poetry.

Haiku - Topics

- Haiku poetry can describe almost anything, but you seldom find themes which are too complicated for normal people's recognition and understanding.
- Some of the most thrilling Haiku poems describe daily situations in a way that gives the reader a brand new experience of a well-known situation.

Haiku – Metrical Pattern

- Haiku-poems usually consist of respectively 5, 7 and 5 syllables in three units.
- In Japanese, this convention is a must, but in English, which has variation in the length of syllables, this can sometimes be difficult.
- Holding as closely to the short-long-short format is the most important aspect of the metrical requirement of Haiku in English.

Haiku - Cutting

- The cutting divides the Haiku into two parts, with a certain imaginative distance between the two sections, but the two sections must remain, to a degree, independent of each other.
- Both sections must enrich the understanding of the other.
- To make this cutting in English, either the first or the second line often ends with a colon, long dash or ellipsis.

Haiku – Seasonal Themes

- Each Haiku may contain a *kigo*, a season word, which indicates in which season the Haiku is set.
- For example, cherry blossoms indicate spring, snow indicates winter, and mosquitoes indicate summer, but the season word isn't always that obvious.
- In some cases, Haiku poetry comes in sets of four poems, one for each season, even though the ideas may be linked. Or all Haiku in a series are tied by a single season, or the transition between seasons (summer to autumn, autumn to winter, etc.)

Haiku - Examples

- **Basho (translated from Japanese)**

An old pond!
A frog jumps in -
The sound of water.

Haiku – More Examples

- **Dave McCroskey**

the morning paper
harbinger of good and ill
- - I step over it

Haiku – More Examples

- **Jane Reichhold**

A shower of diamonds
my birthday gift
from a snowy branch

Haiku - Assignment

- **For each haiku:**
 - Find the *kigo* (seasonal word/phrase)
 - Find the cut and identify it
 - Summarize the haiku's meaning (as you understand it) in one or two sentences