

35 haiku by Bashō, selected by me

Below are just 35 of Bashō's haiku. In my opinion, haiku need to be read slowly, with notes and one's imagination, so, for our purposes, 35 is more than enough. These were selected either because they are on paintings or because they are among my favorite of his poems *and* seem particularly accessible via the type of discussion that we will be doing. The translation in the first column is by David Barnhill from the book listed below under "Translations". The translation in the second column is by Makoto Ueda from the book listed below, also under "Translations". The poems are arranged chronologically, more or less, and the numbering is solely for the purposes of this class, it does not refer to any official numbering system of Bashō's poems.

Further reading suggestions (if 35 isn't enough):

Translations —

There are many translations of Bashō's haiku scattered through numerous volumes and on the web. The following are the best of volumes devoted solely to Bashō's haiku and which offer translations to a very large number of them.

There is a volume that translates "all" Bashō haiku (1011 poems). The translations are very good (maybe not excellent), the notes are good to very good. It provides the romanized poems and the Japanese script version, which is nice. It does not have an index to the poems in Japanese, which can be a real problem for those who have a Japanese poem and want to find the translation. It has an interesting, if brief, section, on haiku techniques: ***Bashō: The Complete Haiku*, Jane Reichhold, trans.** (Kodansha, 2008).

There is a volume I much prefer, with many of Bashō's poems translated (724 poems). The scholarship is strong, the translations, generally speaking are a bit better, the notes are excellent. The romanized version of each poem is included but not the original script version. ***Bashō's Haiku*, David Landis Barnhill, trans.** (SUNY, 2004).

There is a volume of about 250 poems translated, but it is carefully selected 250. The special feature of this very interesting work is the translation of commentators and critics who have offered their interpretations over the centuries, on each of the 250 poems. The translations are very good. The notes are very interesting. Strong indices. The romanized version of each poem is provided: ***Bashō and His Interpreters*, Makoto Ueda, trans.** (Stanford, 1992).

Studies —

There are numerous articles and books on Bashō. Here is a very short list.

For basic information, in a scholarly but very readable form: ***Matsuo Bashō*, Makoto Ueda** (Kodansha, 1982).

For "high level" literary critical treatment of his work: ***Traces of Dreams*, Haruo Shirane** (Stanford, 1998) or, in a similar style but as a collection of essays ***Matsuo Bashō's Poetic Spaces*, Eleanor Kerkham**, ed. (Palgrave, 2006).

Bashō's original haiku — Online, legally, at: <http://www2.yamanashi-ken.ac.jp/~itoyo/Bashō/haikusyu/Default.htm#no3>

1680

at night, stealthily,
a worm in the moonlight
boring into a chestnut

night . . . silently
in the moonlight, a worm
digs into a chestnut

1681

in summer rains
the crane's legs
become short

in the seasonal rain
a crane's legs
have become short

on a withered branch
a crow has settled—
autumn evening

on a bare branch
a crow has alighted . . .
autumn nightfall

1

夜ル竊二虫は月下の栗を穿ツ
yoru hisokani mushi wa gekka no kuri wo ugatsu 56
Autumn / 1680

Kigo: chestnut (*kuri*)

Notes: "One text has the headnote 'The later harvest moon,' which denotes the moon of the thirteenth night of the lunar ninth month. It was also known as "the chestnut moon" because it was the custom to offer chestnuts to the moon on this night. The hokku alludes to a line of Fu Wen's poem, 'the night rain silently digs into the moss on the rocks.'" [Ueda]

2

五月雨に鶴の足短くなれり
samidare ni tsuru no ashi mijikaku nareri 73
Summer / 1681

Kigo: summer rains (*samidare*)

Notes: "This hokku plays off a passage from the *Zhuangzi*: "A wild duck's legs are short, but it would grieve if they were lengthened. A crane's legs are long, but it would bemoan having them shortened." [Barnhill]

3

枯枝に烏のとまりたるや秋の暮
kareeda ni karasu no tomarikeri [also, *tomaritaru*] *aki no kure*
Autumn / 1681

Kigo: autumn evening (*aki no kure*)

Note: "There survive three paintings on which Bashō wrote this hokku. The one assumed to be the earliest depicts seven crows settled on a leafless tree, with twenty others

1682

one who breakfasts
with morning glories:
that's what I am

crescent moon
a morning glory bud at night
swelling

ice is bitter
in the mouth of the rat
quenching its thirst

In response to Kikaku's firefly poem
with morning glories
a man eats breakfast
—that is what I am

the crescent moon—
a bud on the morning glory
swelling at night

I buy water at this grass-thatched hut.
ice, tasting bitter
in the mouth of a sewer rat,
quenches his thirst

flying in the sky. The other two painting show only one
crow perching on a branch of a bare tree.” [Ueda]

4

朝顔に我は飯食う男哉
asagao ni ware wa meshi kû otoko kana
Autumn / 1682

Kigo: morning glory (*asago*)

Notes: “The poem Bashô referred to in the headnote was based on the proverb ‘Some worms eat nettles’: ‘within the grassy gate / a firefly eats nettles / —that is what I am *kusa no to ni ware wa tade kû hotaru kana.*” [Ueda] Takarai Kikaku (1661–1707) was one of Bashô’s disciples.

5

三ヶ月や朝顔の夕べ蕾むらん
mikazuki ya asagao no yûbe tsubomu ran
Autumn / 1682

Kigo: crescent moon (*mikazuki*)

6

氷苦く偃鼠が喉をうるほせり
kôri nigaku enso ga nodo o uruoseri

Winter / 1682 late 12th month; February?

Notes: “The hokku is based on a passage from the *Zhuangzi*: “A sewer rat drinks from a river, just enough to quench his thirst.” [Barnhill] “Because the Fukagawa district produced no good water, residents had to buy it from sellers who came by boat.” [Ueda]

1684

an orchid's scent—
 its incense perfuming
 a butterfly's wings

Poem on horseback
 roadside rose of
 sharon: devoured
 by my horse

I stopped at a teashop. A woman named Chō, or Butterfly, asked me to compose a verse alluding to her name and brought out a piece of white silk. I wrote the following hokku on it.
 fragrant orchid—
 into a butterfly's wings
 it breathes the incense

1685

daybreak—
 a whitefish, whiteness
 one-inch

I went out to the beach at daybreak, when it was still dark.
 twilight of dawn
 a whitefish, with an inch
 of whiteness

7

蘭の香や蝶の翅に薫物す
ran no ka ya chō no tsubasa ni takimono su
 Autumn / 1684
 Kigo: orchid (*ran*)

Notes: "According to Master Bashō, this woman said to him, 'I used to work as a courtesan at this house, but now I am married to the proprietor. I hear the previous owner also had married a courtesan names Tsuru, and when Mater Sōin of Naniwa visited here she begged for a verse, too.'" [Ueda]

8

道のべの木槿は馬にくはれけり
michinobe no mukuge wa uma ni kuwarekeri
 Autumn / 1684
 Kigo: rose of sharon (*mukuge*)

Note: "The blossoms of the rose of sharon wither after only one day. ... [According to legend] Bashō told the Zen Master Butchō, who had disapproved of poetry, that haikai was simply what happens here and now. Butchō pointed to the rose of sharon and asked for a hokku, and Bashō composed this verse." [Barnhill]

9

明ぼのやしら魚しろきこと一寸
akebono ya shirauo shiroki koto issun
 Winter / 1684–85
 Kigo: whitefish (*shirauo*)

Notes: "This verse alludes to a poem by Du Fu, which has the couplet 'Each whitefish has its life / by nature one inch.'" [Barnhill]

1686

old pond
a frog jumps in,
water's sound

the old pond—
a frog jumps in,
water's sound

1687

Listening in tranquility
bagworms:
come hear their cry;
a thatched hut

first snow—
just enough to bend
narcissus leaves

A frigid night
the water jar cracks:
in the frozen night
I lie awake

the first snow
just enough to bend
the daffodil leaves

the sound of a water jar
cracking on this icy night
as I lie awake

10

古池や蛙飛びこむ水の音
furuike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto
Spring / 1686
Kigo: frog (*kawazu*)

11

蓑虫の音を聞きに来よ草の庵
minomushi no ne o kiki ni koyo kusa no io
Autumn / 1687
Kigo: bagworm (*minomushi*)
Note: “The bagworm actually does not make any sound,
but in Sei Shōnagon’s *Pillow Book* it was said to make a
faint plaintive cry of *chichiyo chichiyo* (“father!” “father!”).
[Barnhill]

12

初雪や水仙の葉のたわむまで
hatsuyuki ya suisen no ha no tawamu made
Winter / 1686–87 18th day of 12th month; Jan 31
Kigo: first snow (*hatsuyuki*)

13

瓶割るる夜の氷の寝覚め哉
kame waruru yoru no kōri no nezame kana
Winter / 1686–87?
Kigo: frozen

1688

petal after petal
 mountain roses flutter down:
 the sound of the rapids

Petal by petal
 Yellow mountain roses fall—
 Sound of the rapids

travel weary,
 just as I finally find lodging—
 wisteria blossoms

worn out
 I seek a lodging for the night—
 wisteria flowers

Spending the night at Akashi
 octopus traps—
 fleeting dreams under
 summer's moon

an octopus pot—
 inside, a short-lived dream
 under the summer moon

14

ほろほろと山吹 ちるか瀧の音
horohoro to yamabuki chiru ka taki no oto
 Spring / 1688 late 3d Month; late April
 Kigo: mountain rose (**yamabuki*)
 Notes: "Nijikō [the place of the poem], located on the upper reaches of the Yoshino River, is famous for the torrential current that surges through the rocks at that point. The word *horohoro* is descriptive of thin and delicate things fluttering down one after another, but it can also be used as onomatopoeia for a pheasant's cry." [Ueda]

15

草臥れて宿かるころや頃や藤の花
kutaburete yado karu koro ya fuji no hana
 Spring / 1688 11th day of 4th month; May 10
 Notes: "This hokku was actually written in the summer. The original version had the summer image "cuckoo" (*hototogisu*) for the first line. When Bashō changed the line to 'travel weary,' the remaining season word in the poem was wisteria, and so it became a spring poem." [Barnhill]

16

蛸壺やはかなき夢を夏の月
takotsubo ya hakanaki yume o natsu no tsuki
 Summer / 1688 20th day of 4th month; May 19
 Kigo: summer moon (*natsu no tsuki*)
 Notes: An octopus pot is a ceramic trap fisherman use to catch octopi. "Akashi was famous as the place where the Heike warriors were slain. The Japanese poetic tradition emphasized the brevity of summer nights." [Barnhill]

1689

beneath a tree,
both soup and fish salad:
cherry blossoms!

across the plain,
turn my horse over there!
cuckoo

so red, red,
the sun relentless and yet
autumn's wind

1690

The fleeting transience of life
soon to die,
yet no sign of it:
a cicada's cry

Blossom viewing
under the tree
soup, fish salad, and all—
cherry blossoms

*The chief councilor in charge of the
mansion lent me a horse as I left there.
The groom asked if he could have a
poetry card from me. Moved by his
elegant request, I wrote*
road across a plain—
turn my horse sideways
toward that hototogisu!

soon they will die—
yet, showing no sign of it,
cicadas screech

17

木のもとに汁も膾も桜かな
ki no moto ni shiru mo namasu mo sakura kana
Spring / 1689
Kigo: cherry blossom (*sakura*)
Notes: "Written to start a kasen at a blossom-viewing party
in Ueno on April 10." [Ueda]

18

野を横に馬牽きむけよほととぎす
no o yoko ni uma hikimuke yo hototogisu
Summer / 1689 16th day of 4th month; June 3
Kigo: cuckoo (*hototogisu*)
A poetry card is a stiff sheet of paper to give to someone
after writing a poem on it.

19

あかあかと日はつれなくも秋の風
akaaka to hi wa tsurenaku mo aki no kaze
Autumn / 1689 17th of 7th Month; August 31
Kigo: autumn wind (*akikaze*)
Note: "The hokku brings together two seasonal topics: the
lingering heat (*zanshō*) of autumn and autumn's wind."
[Barnhill]

20

やがて死ぬけしきは見えず蟬の声
yagate shinu keshiki wa miezu semi no koe
Summer / 1690

At Shōzui Temple in Katada

sipping morning tea,
the monk is peaceful:
chrysanthemum blossoms

a monk skips
his morning tea, and it is quiet—
chrysanthemum flowers

*First day of the 11th month, 2nd year of
Genroku, for a linked verse at Ryōbon's house*
hey kids!

let's run around
in the hail!

come, children
let's go out and run
in the hail!

first winter shower
even the monkey seems to want
a little straw coat

first winter shower—
the monkey also seems to want
a small raincoat

1691

mountain roses—
when tea ovens at Uji
are so fragrant

Kigo: cicada's trill (*semi no koe*)

21

朝茶飲む僧静かなり菊の花
asa cha nomu so shizukanari kiku no hana
Autumn / 1690
Kigo: chrysanthemum (*kiku*)

22

いざ子供走りありかん玉霰
iza kodomo hashiri arikan tamarare
Winter / 1689–90
Kigo: hail (*tamarare*)
Notes: Barnhill suggests that the “kids” in the poem might refer to the men at the linked-verse party. Ueda notes that Ryōbon was a samurai serving at Iga Castle.

23

初時雨猿も小蓑を欲しげなり
hatsushigure saru mo komino o hoshigenari
Winter / 1689–90
Kigo: winter showers (*shigure*)
Notes: “Written in early November, when Bashō was on his way from Ise Province to his hometown of Ueno. The hokku was later placed at the beginning of *Sarumino*.”
[Ueda]

24

山吹や宇治の焙炉の匂ふ時
yamabuki ya Uji no hoiro no niou toki
Spring / 1691
Kigo: mountain rose (**yamabuki*)
Uji is near Kyoto and famous for its tea.

1692

cats in love:
when it's over, from the bedroom
a hazy moon

1694

plates and bowls too
faint in twilight:
evening cool

in the morning dew,
dirty and cool,
a mud-smeared melon

that's something to see—
chrysanthemums after
autumn's storm

*At Honma Shume's house, hanging on the back
wall of a No stage, is a portrait of skeletons
playing flute and drum. Is human life any
different than the sporting of skeletons?
Zhuangzi used a skull for his pillow and didn't
distinguish dream from reality—truly, this
evokes the character of our lives.*

cats' love—
when it is over, hazy
moonlight in the bedroom

plates and bowls
dim in the twilight—
the evening cool

in the morning dew
spotted with mud, and how cool—
melons on the soil

a flash of lightning—
where there were faces
plumes of pampas grass

25

猫の恋やむとき闇の朧月
neko no koi yamu toki neya no oborozuki
Spring / 1692
Kigo: cat in love (*neko no koi*); hazy moon (*oborozuki*)

26

皿鉢もほのかに闇の宵涼み
sarabachi mo honokani yami no yoisuzumi
Summer / 1694
Kigo: cool (*suzumi*)

27

朝露によごれて涼し瓜の土
asatsuyu ni yogorete suzushi uri no tsuchi [also *doro*]
Summer / 1694
Kigo: melon (*uri*); cool (*suzumi*)
見所のあれや野分の後の菊
midokoro no [also, *mo*] *are ya nowaki no nochi no kiku*
Autumn / 1684–94
Kigo: windstorm (*nowaki*)

28

稲妻や顔のところが薄の穂
inazuma ya kao no tokoro ga susuki no ho
Autumn / 1694
Kigo: lightning (*inazuma*); miscanthus (*susuki*)
Notes: "The preface refers to a story in the *Zhuangzi*:
Zhuangzi used a skull for a pillow, and in a dream the skull

lightning—
through the face,
miscanthus plumes

Upon hearing that the nun Jutei had died
do not think
you did not count:
Festival of the Spirits

a village grown old:
no house without
a persimmon tree

so cool:
feet against a wall
in a midday nap

never think of yourself
as someone who did not count—
festival of the souls

village has grown old—
not a single house without
persimmon trees

it feels cool
to put the feet against the wall . . .
a midday nap

reproached him for thinking that life is better than death. The hokku also refers to the legend about the beautiful poet Ono no Komachi: after death, miscanthus plumes grew up through the eyes of her skull. Lightning is a traditional image of impermanence.” [Barnhill]

29

数ならぬ身とな思ひそ玉祭
kazu naranu mi to na omoi so tamamatsuri
Autumn / 1694

Kigo: Festival of Souls (*tamamatsuri*)
Notes: “*Tamamatsuri*, more commonly know as *urabon* (the *bon* festival), is an annual Buddhist rite at which each family offers prayers to the souls of its ancestors.” [Ueda] “It is not known for certain what was Bashō’s relationship to Jutei; she may have been his mistress in years past or the wife of his nephew Tōin (1661–93). While Bashō traveled to his hometown of Ueno in Iga, she stayed in Bashō’s hut.” [Barnhill]

30

里古りて柿の木持たぬ家もなし
sato furite kaki no ki motanu ie mo nashi
Autumn / 1694

Kigo: persimmon tree (*kaki no ki*)
Notes: “Written on September 25, when there was a haikai gathering at the house of Katano Bōsui (?–1705), a merchant in Ueno.” [Ueda] “The persimmon trees suggest that the village is prosperous.” [Barnhill]

31

ひやひやと壁をふまえて昼寝哉
hiyahiya to kabe o fumaete hirune kana
Autumn / 1694 early 7th month; August
Kigo: cool (*suzumi*)

chrysanthemums'
fragrance — in Nara, many
ancient Buddhas

chrysanthemums' scent
in Nara, many ancient
Buddhas

deepening autumn:
the man next door,
what does he do?

autumn deepens—
the man next door, what does he do
for a living?

still alive
all frozen into one:
sea slugs

still alive
they are frozen in one lump
sea slugs

Written during illness
ill on a journey:
my dreams roam round
over withered fields

During illness
on a journey, ailing—
my dreams roam about
on a withered moor

32

菊の香や奈良には古き仏たち
kiku no ka ya Nara ni wa furuki hotoketachi
Autumn / 1694 9th day of 9th month (Chrysanthemum
Festival); Oct 27
Kigo: chrysanthemum (*kiku*)

33

秋深き隣は何をする人ぞ
aki fukaki tonari wa nani o suru hito zo
Autumn / 1694 28th day of 9th month; November 15
Kigo: autumn (*aki*)
Notes: "Bashō had been invited to a verse-writing party on
November 16, but because he had not been feeling well he
declined the invitation and had this hokku sent to the host,
Negoro Shihaku (?–1713). He seems to have written the
hokku on November 15." [Ueda]

34

生きながら一つに氷る海鼠かな
iki nagara hitotsu ni koru namako kana
Winter / 1693–94
Kigo: sea slugs (*namako*)

35

旅に病で夢は枯野をかけ廻る
tabi ni yande yume wa kareno wo kakemeguru
Winter / 1694
Kigo: withered moor (*kareno*)
Notes: "Bashō, who was near death, dictated this hokku to
his student Donshū in the small hours of November 25."
[Ueda] "Bashō dies three days later." [Barnhill]