

Buson spring haiku / Buson “Bashō appreciation” haiku

Key to translators mentioned —

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Kumano = hokuto77 [Shoji Kumano] (熊野祥司) Web site: “Living in the World of Buson” (<http://www.hokuoto77.com/frame2-buson.html>) Retired Japanese teacher of English living in Yamaguchi / Miyazaki prefectures. (Profile at: <http://www.hokuoto77.com/preface.html>)

McAuley = Thomas McAuley at: <http://www.temcauley.staff.shef.ac.uk/waka1801.shtml> Professor at School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield (profile: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/seas/staff/japanese/mcauley>)

Merwin & Lento = *Collected haiku of Yosa Buson*, trans. by W.S. Merwin and Takako Lento. Copper Canyon Press, 2013. Merwin was born in 1927, has won numerous awards, and is our current poet laureate for the United States.

Nelson & Saito = William R. Nelson & Takafumi Saito, *1020 Haiku in Translation: The Heart of Basho, Buson and Issa*, 2006. (This is not the William Rockhill Nelson of the Nelson Museum of Art in Kansas.)

Robin D Gill — From a wiki entry: “Robin Dallas Gill, born in 1951 at Miami Beach, Florida, USA, and brought up on the island of Key Biscayne in the Florida Keys, is a bilingual author in Japanese and English, as well as a nature writer, maverick authority on the history of stereotypes of Japanese identity and prolific translator of, and commentator on Japanese poetry, especially haiku and senryū. He writes haiku in Japanese under the haigō (haikai pen-name) Keigu (敬愚).” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_D._Gill)

Sawa & Shiffert = *Haiku Master Buson*, translated by Yuki Sawa & Edith Marcombe Shiffert. Published 2007 by White Pine Press in Buffalo, N.Y. Yūki Sawa was a professor of Japanese literature in Japan.

Ueda = *The Path of Flowering Thorn: The Life and Poetry of Yosa Buson* by Makoto Ueda. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. (There are no entries on this handout for him, but his book is excellent, as are the translations. Makoto Ueda was a professor of Japanese literature at Stanford University.

Further reading suggestions:

Aitken, Robert. *The River of Heaven: The Haiku of Basho, Buson, Issa, and Shiki*. Counter Point Press, 2011.

Crowley, Cheryl A. *Haikai Poet Yosa Buson and the Bashō Revival*. Brill, 2011.

Hamill, Sam. *The Sound of Water: Haiku by Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Other Poets*. Shambala, 1995.

Sawa, Yuki and Edith Marcombe Shiffert. *Haiku Master Buson*. White Pine Press, 2007 (first published in 1978).

Ueda, Makoto. *The Path of Flowering Thorn: The Life and Poetry of Yosa Buson*. Stanford University Press, 1998.

Spring poems

The New Year

New Year

the morning light flashes
off the head of a sardine

Merwin & Lento

Sunlight of this morning
Does originate
In the head of a sardine.

Kumano

on this morning
the sun first shines
from a fish-head

Robin D. Gill

I take a twig from the plum tree
and cage its fragrance
in my withered hands

Merwin & Lento

Picking plum blossoms
And fretting at my wrinkled hand —
Fragrance.

Sawa & Shiffert

In a woman's company
I would go pay my respects at the Royal Palace
by the light of the hazy moon

Merwin & Lento

Hazy spring moon;
I will entice a woman out
To see the Court with respect.

Kumano

the first gleam
of a new day
on pilchard's head

The light of day this morning!
from the head of the fish it came

Plucking plum
I do regret my wrinkled hands,
Filled with fragrance

McAuley

Along with a lady
I gaze at the Palace
In the misty moonlight.

McAuley

1

日の光今朝や鰯のかしらより

hi no hikari / kesa ya iwashi no / kashira yori

Kigo: 今朝 *kesa* (初日 *shonichi*) “morning” (“first day of the year”)

Note: On the night of the last day of winter people in the Edo period (1603~1867) stuck a branch of a holly into the head of a dried sardine and put the stick into the earth at the gate. This was the curse by which people believed they could expel evil spirits from the new year and from themselves. (Terebess Asia Online) ... because the sharp thorns on the holly leaves and the bad smell of the sardine were thought to keep demons away from the house (Wallace)

2

うめ折て皺手にかこつ薫かな

ume orite / shiwa-de ni kakotsu / kaori kana

Kigo: 梅 *ume* “plum”

Note: The plum is known for its strength. (Wallace)

3

女俱して内裏拝ん朧月

onna gu shite / dairi ogan / oborozuki

Kigo: 朧月 *oborozuki* “misty spring moon”

Note: A good example of Buson's “narrative type” haiku, as well as drawing on classical traditions, in the case, perhaps Genji and Oborozukiyo of *The Tale of Genji*, but maybe modified: their relationship was secret so they could “gaze at” but not “pay respects to” the Royal Palace. (Wallace)

Looking across the field

Mist in the grass
the water silent
just before sunset

Merwin & Lento

(View of a Field)

Grasses in a mist
And water flowing silently,
Daylight fading!

Sawa & Shiffert

Warm air shimmers
A man fondles tenderly
The soil in a straw basket

Merwin & Lento

Heat waves in the air —
And a basket full of the earth
which the man loves

Sawa & Shiffert

Met Matahei!
Omuro in its grandeur.

Wallace

Met Matahei!
Omuro in full bloom.

Wallace

4

(野望) 草霞み水に声なき日ぐれ哉
kusa kasumi / mizu ni koe naki / higure kana
Kigo: 霞 *kasumi* “spring haze”

Notes: Because the poem just before this (in the original collection) refers to a Chinese poem that depicts a view of a field which a lone poet gazes upon, the best interpretation of this poem, too, becomes not *just* that the water is silent but that the poet is alone (and so “*koe* / voice” indeed means a human’s voice). (Wallace)

5

かげろふやあじかに土をめづる人
kagerō ya / ajika ni tsuchi o / mezuru hito
Kigo: 陽炎 *kagerō* “mirage” “shimmering effect (from heat)”
“short lived illusion” “wisps of spider web floating in the sky”
Notes: This poem is about a farmer. The key verb, 愛づ *mezu*, means “to appreciate” “to love” and can be in one’s mind only but can include physical action. (Wallace)

6

又平に逢ふや御室の花ざかり
Matahei ni / au ya Omuro no / hanazakari
season

Notes: Matahei is a likable figure from a Chikamatsu Monzaemon puppet play that was later adapted to the kabuki stage. In the play, Matahei is studying painting under Tosa Shōgen Mitsunobu and wants to be able to use the Tosa name in his work. But his is ignored and the honor is given to another, younger disciple. He experiences other humiliations. He and his wife, in despair, decide to commit double suicide. She asks him to paint a self-portrait one last time. Mitsunobu has been secretly watching and, seeing this portrait, finally realizes the passion and talent of Matahei and allows him to use the Tosa name. (Wallace, based on the play summary (in English) at: <http://www.kabuki21.com/domomata.php>) Omuro is another way to refer to Ninna Temple (Ninna-ji) in the northern part of Kyoto. It is the founding temple of the Omuro sect of Shingon Buddhism and was an imperial residence (*omuro* means “imperial room”). It is known for its cherry blossoms. It is apparently now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The fragrance of cherry blossoms—
In Sagano
As the lamp lights go out

Nelson & Saito

The smell of cherry blossoms!
When the lamps at Saga
Went out.

Kumano

Blossoms smell so sweet,
Now that the lamps in Saga
Are starting to fade.

Anon.

As Saga's lamps grow dim,
how sweet the cherry blossom.

Wallace

Spring night!
At my pillow,
The sound of waves.

Wallace

7

花の香や嵯峨のともし火きゆる時

hana no ka ya / Saga no tomoshibi / kiyuru toki

Kigo: 花の香 *hana no ka* "fragrance of cherry blossoms"

Notes: Saga is a traditional part of Kyoto, and is known for its temples and cherry blossoms, among other things. It is good to think of the time as "after the flowering-viewing crowds have left".

8

春の夜や音なき浪を枕もと

haru no yo ya / oto naki nami o / makura moto

Kigo: 春の夜 *haru no yo* "spring night"

Notes: "Oto naki" can also mean "soundless" but this seems to be too philosophical an interpretation for a poem by Buson, on a haiga.

Some other spring poems by Buson (trans. by Merwin):

White plum flowers by the Kitano Shrine teahouse where sumo wrestlers are sitting at ease

shiraume ya kitano no chaya ni sumai-tori

By an old temple a broken clay kitchen pot in a field of water parsley

furudera ya houroku suteru seri no naka

The surge of water in spring— that must be how the trout feels chasing a snake

hebi o ou masu no omoi ya haru no mizu

Spring rain the day ending I linger with it

harusame ya kurenan to shite kyou mo ari

In the spring rain a straw cape and an umbrella walk on, talking to each other

harusame ya monogatari yuku mino to kasa

A craftsman polishing a jewel keeps an open camellia beside him

tamasuri no zayuu ni hiraku tsubaki kana

Through the flowering quinces the crimson face of a pheasant like another flower

boke no kage ni kao tagui sumu kigisu kana

Eating and sleeping I wouldn't mind turning into a cow the peach trees are in bloom

kuute nete ushi ni narabaya momo no hana

On a Weeping Cherry

Darkness overtakes us on our way in my lodging the roof leaks weeping cherries in flower

yukikurete ame moru yado ya itozakura

Courtesans come out to see the cherry blossoms as though they were betting on their next life

keisei wa nochi no yo kakete hanami kana

With Each Petal That Flies Away, Less Remains of Spring

Beautiful woman out looking for cherry blossoms Spring is going and she is hungry

sakura-gari bijin no hara ya genkyakusu

A silk robe left unfolded sends fragrance through the spring twilight

nioi aru kinu mo tatamazu haru no kure

Pear trees in flower a woman reads a letter by moonlight

nashi no hana tsuki ni fumi yomu onna ari

"Bashō appreciation" poems

The old pond's frog
is becoming aged
in the fallen leaves.

Sawa & Shiffert

In an old pond
A frog ages
While leaves fall.

Thomas Rimer

In an old well
a fish leaps at mosquitoes—
a sound of darkness

Merwin & Lento

An old well!
Jumping at a mosquito,
a fish's sound of darkness

Sawa & Shiffert

Old well,
a fish leaps—
dark sound.

Robert Hass

One straw sandal
at the bottom of the old pond
with hail falling

Merwin & Lento

In an old pond
a straw sandal half sunken—
wet snow!

Sawa & Shiffert

the old pond's frog
is growing elderly
fallen leaves

Cheryl A. Crowley

among fallen leaves
a frog
growing old

Wallace

At the ancient well,
leaping high for mosquitoes,
that fish-dark sound

Anon.

Old well—
the sound of a fish jumping at
mosquitoes, is dark

Wallace (as a literal trans.)

Straw sandal
half sunk in an old pond
in the sleety snow

Robert Hass

In the old pond,
a sunken straw sandal.
And sleet.

Wallace (literal)

9

古池の蛙老ゆく 落葉哉
furuike no / kawazu oiyuku / ochiba kana
Kigo: late spring — 蛙 *kawazu* "frog"

10

古井戸や蚊に飛ぶ魚の音くらし
furuido ya / ka ni tobu uo no / oto kurashi
Kigo: summer — 蚊 *ka* "mosquito"

Bashō:

牛部屋に蚊の声くらき残暑かな
ushibeya ni / ka no koe kuraki / zansho kana
Kigo: summer — 蚊 *ka* "mosquito" and 残暑 *zansho*
"lingering heat"

In the cowbarn,
the sound of mosquitoes is dark.
Lingering heat.

11

古池に草履沈ミてみぞれ哉
furuike ni / zōri shizumite / mizore kana
Kigo: winter — 霰 *mizore* "sleet"