



CRITICISM

VOLUME

125

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 125

Michelle Lee
Project Editor



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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), PC offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by PC supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." In *Interpreting Blake*, edited by Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Edited by Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Matsuo Bashō

1644?-1694

(Samurai name Munefusa; also wrote under pseudonyms Tōsei and Fūрабо) Japanese poet, travel writer, essayist, and critic.

For more information on Bashō's life and writings, see *PC*, Volume 3.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important figures in Japanese literature, Bashō is credited with transforming the seventeen-syllable poetic genre known as the haiku from an informal exercise into a serious art form. He blended elements of Chinese poetry and Zen Buddhism to express complex emotional and spiritual themes within the simple descriptive language of the traditional haiku. Bashō produced a number of travel diaries that combined both poetry and prose, recounting his experiences as he traveled on foot throughout his native country.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Little is known of Bashō's early life, although it is believed that he was born in Ueno, Iga Province, in 1644. One of six children, Bashō was the son of a low-ranking samurai and he too aspired to become a samurai. He took the samurai name Munefusa and served as a page to a samurai two years older, Todo Yoshitada, who died suddenly in 1666. After that, Bashō abandoned his original plan and began studying classical Japanese literature, possibly in Kyoto. While there, he was exposed to the haiku of the Teitoku school, and began producing his own verses, many of which were published in various anthologies. In 1672, he compiled *Kai Ōi*, an anthology containing haiku written by thirty different poets. In that same year, he traveled to Edo (now Tokyo) and began working on the city's waterworks; however, after three years, his reputation as a haiku master enabled him to abandon that job and devote himself entirely to his poetry. Although his work was successful, he was unsatisfied with his achievements and began to study Zen; after two years, still seeking spiritual and artistic improvement, he embarked on a pilgrimage through the Japanese countryside. For the next ten years, Bashō traveled on foot throughout the country, recording his

experiences in both poetry and prose. He settled briefly near Lake Biwa, north of Kyoto, and continued to write of his experiences. In 1691, he returned to Edo to a hermitage built for him and went back to his former life as a haiku master, discussing poetry with his many disciples. In 1694, he embarked on another pilgrimage—this time to his birthplace in Ueno—but his journey was cut short by failing health. Bashō died of a stomach disorder in Osaka in the summer of 1694.

MAJOR WORKS

Much of Bashō's early work, between 1667 and 1671, was published in anthologies of haiku, sometimes in collaboration with other poets. In 1672, Bashō himself compiled an anthology of the individual efforts of thirty different poets, originally written for a haiku contest. It included his commentary on the poems. He began developing his own style that set his work apart from the rigid conventions generally associated with the haiku genre, and in 1683 produced *Minashiguri* (*Shriveled Chestnuts*). As his style continued to mature, Bashō began producing work that was far more complicated and sophisticated than that of his predecessors, so much so that poetry written in the Bashō style became known as shofu, to distinguish it from the more conventional style usually associated with the genre.

In the 1680s, when Bashō began his series of pilgrimages throughout Japan, he began producing works that combined poetry with the elements of the travel diary, written in prose. These include *Nozarishi kikō* (1685), *Oi no kobumi* (1688), and *Oku no hosomichi* (1689). These three volumes were published together in an English translation, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* in 1966. Other English translations of Bashō's work include *A Haiku Journey: "The Narrow Road to the Far North" and Selected Haiku* (1975), *The Monkey's Straw Raincoat and Other Poetry of the Bashō School* (1981); and *On Love and Barley: Haiku of Bashō* (1985). Bashō also produced two volumes of criticism, and his complete works—poetry, travel diaries, and criticism—were published in the ten-volume *Kohon Bashō zenshu* (1959-1969).

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Although Bashō produced approximately one thousand haiku, his body of work is not large, considering that

the form is so short—each verse consisting of only seventeen syllables. Makoto Ueda acknowledges that Bashō was not a prolific writer, but points out that in part this was because he spent a great deal of time and effort carefully choosing each word. According to Ueda, despite the limited number of poems Bashō wrote, “his haiku, when viewed collectively, display a surprisingly wide range of themes and styles.” Ueda has traced Bashō’s development as a poet over the course of his career, reporting that he was constantly growing and perfecting his art. Similarly, Haruo Shirane discusses Bashō’s devotion to learning and improvement of his poetic form. “Whenever his poetry began to stagnate,” claims Shirane, “Bashō departed on a journey, engaging in poetic dialogue with other poets, often unknown or still young, in different parts of the country.” Through exposure to new places, social groups, and poets, “Bashō developed strikingly different types of poetry in a relatively short span of time,” according to the critic. Hiroaki Sato describes Bashō’s five-month-long journey on foot from Edo (Tokyo) to Ōgaki, a trip of more than 1,200 miles, and the poet’s account of the journey in *Oku no hosomichi*, sometimes translated as “The Narrow Road to the Interior.” Sato reports that Bashō’s journey was motivated by two goals: the first was an attempt to discover “poetic truth,” and the second was to visit the places described in the ancient Japanese poems, some dating as far back as the eighth century. Steven D. Carter has studied Bashō’s 1680 decision to abandon his prosperous life as a haiku master in order to live a solitary, austere life in Fukagawa. Although most scholars interpret this decision as Bashō’s desire to give up material prosperity to focus on spiritual matters, Carter believes that his motive was professional and that “his action was as an instance of what those in the highest ranks of a profession are always wont to do: to test their competence in a wider arena, and by so doing to claim a transcendent status for themselves and their occupation.”

Bashō is known for transforming haiku from a genre that typically involved vulgar or erotic elements, to a serious art form. Haruo Shirane explains that sixteenth and seventeenth century Japanese poets used the form to parody classical literature and to represent aristocrats, and even Buddhas, in a low, vulgar manner. Bashō, according to Shirane, “tended to work in the opposite direction: to find the subtle, the refined, the spiritual, in everyday, commoner life.” In keeping with this poetic practice, Bashō in his later years developed the poetic ideal known as *kōgo kizoku*, “awakening to the high, returning to the low.” Sam Hamill has also studied this aspect of Bashō’s poetry, reporting that Bashō “had elevated haiku from wordplay into powerful lyric poetry, from a game played by educated poetasters into a genuinely spiritual dimension.”

Many of Bashō’s haiku have been translated and appreciated by readers and scholars in the English-speaking world. As is well known, the translation of poetry always presents a number of difficulties for the translator, and Nobuyuki Yuasa explains that such difficulties exist even when working with a poetic genre of so few lines. Yuasa illustrates the problems facing the translators of Bashō’s work by comparing some of his own translations with those of a number of other scholars, some native speakers of Japanese, others native speakers of English. He offers eleven versions of one of Bashō’s best known haiku, and the differences between the various translations are remarkable.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Minashiguri 1683

Nozarishi kikō (also includes travel diary) 1685

Oi no kobumi (also includes travel diary) 1688

Oku no hosomichi (also includes travel diary) 1689

Sarumino [with Mukai Kyorai, Nozawa Bonchō, Enomoto Kikaku, et.al.] 1691; *The Monkey’s Straw Raincoat and Other Poetry of the Bashō School* 1981

Kohon Bashō zenshu. 10 vols. (also includes travel diaries and criticism) 1959-69

A Haiku Journey: “The Narrow Road to the Far North” and Selected Haiku (also includes travel writing) 1975

On Love and Barley: Haiku of Bashō 1985

Back Roads to Far Towns (also includes travel diary) 1986

Other Major Works

Hatsukaishi hyōchū (criticism) 1686

Kashima kikō (travel diary) 1687; *A Visit to the Kashima Shrine*

Sarashina kikō (travel diary) 1688; *A Visit to Sarashina Village*

Aki no yo hyōgo (criticism) 1693

CRITICISM

Makoto Ueda (essay date 1970)

SOURCE: Ueda, Makoto. “The Haiku.” In *Matsuo Bashō*, pp. 36-68. New York: Twayne, 1970.

[In the following essay, Ueda traces Bashō’s development as a poet, dividing his literary career into five distinct stages.]

Extant haiku that are known to be Bashō's number about one thousand. The number must be said to be rather small, in view of the extreme brevity of the form.¹ Obviously, Bashō was not a prolific poet; for one thing, he took such meticulous care in selecting words and expressions. Yet his haiku, when viewed collectively, display a surprisingly wide range of themes and styles. This is because he constantly cultivated new poetic possibilities; like every major poet, he never stopped growing.

For convenience's sake, Bashō's growth as poet can be divided into five stages. The first is his early apprenticeship period, extending up to his departure for Edo in 1672. Bashō was in his twenties, and the haiku was for him little more than an entertaining pastime. The second stage covers his life in Edo up to his settlement in the initial Bashō Hut in 1680. Now in his thirties, he was busily learning from the new trends that were in vogue in that fast-expanding city. The third stage, spanning the years from 1681 to 1685, finds Bashō gradually separating himself from other poets and searching for his identity as poet. The fourth stage represents the peak of his literary activities, from 1686 to 1691. It was in this period that he established a unique style and thereby attracted a number of followers. The fifth stage, comprising the last three years of his life, illuminates the final phase of Bashō's poetic evolution. Though a famed poet already, he was still not satisfied with himself and his work, and he persisted in efforts to improve his poetry to the very end.

In the following pages we shall try to trace these five stages, using representative examples of his haiku. In doing so we cannot overemphasize that these stages have been set up for the sake of convenience, and that the characteristics suggested for each are only generalizations. The scope and versatility of Bashō's haiku are far too great to fit into any neat pattern.

I HAIKU AS PASTIME: 1662-72

Of all the haiku by Bashō that can be dated today, the earliest is the one he wrote in the winter of 1662 at the age of eighteen.² The date was the twenty-ninth of the twelfth month, popularly known as the Second Last Day, as it was two days before the New Year. That year it happened that the first day of spring, which usually came with the New Year, arrived early and fell on the Second Last Day. Therefore young Bashō's haiku:

*Haru ya koshi
Toshi ya yukiken
Kotsugomori
Was it spring that came,*

*Or was it the year that went?
The Second Last Day.*

The poem is rather trite and contrived, for it centers on a pretended confusion at a slightly unusual coincidence. The motif had often been dealt with by earlier poets, of whom the most notable was Ariwara Motokata (888-953) in this *tanka* or traditional thirty-one-syllable poem:

*Toshi no uchi ni
Haru wa kinikeri
Hitotose o
Kozo to ya iwamu
Kotoshi to ya iwamu*

*Before the year is over
Springtime has come.
The remainder of the year,
Shall we call it last year
Or shall we call it this year?*

To enliven this hackneyed theme, Bashō playfully borrowed a phrase from a famous love poem that appears in *The Tales of Ise* (*Ise Monogatari*), one of the classics of Japanese court literature. The *tanka*, sent by a woman to a man after their first love-meeting, sang of her sweet lingering memory of the night:

*Kimi ya koshi
Ware ya yukikemu
Omoezu
Yume ka utsutsu ka
Nete ka samete ka*

*Was it you who came
Or was it I who went—
I do not remember.
Was that dream or reality?
Was I asleep or awake?*

Bashō's haiku was intended to amuse the reader by the clever borrowing of a phrase from an entirely different context.

Another of Bashō's earliest haiku that play with words written some time before 1664, focuses on a species of cherry tree called "old-lady cherry":

*Ubazakura
Saku ya rōgo no
Omoiide*

*The old-lady cherry
Is blossoming, a remembrance
Of years ago.*

There is a certain ambiguity in this verse which seems deliberate. On the surface it is about a cherry tree blossoming beautifully despite its old age. But the words "old-lady cherry" make it possible to interpret

the poem as being about an old woman who still retains some of the loveliness of her youth. Furthermore, the phrase “a remembrance of years ago” has been taken from medieval Japanese drama, a *nō* play called *Sanemori* that tells of an old warrior gamely fighting his last battle among youthful soldiers. All this expands the meaning of the haiku, and the reader’s main interest seems to lie in observing that expansion.

Relying equally on puns but less pedantic is a haiku Bashō probably composed a little later:

*Akikaze no
Yarido no kuchi ya*

Togarigoe

The autumn wind
Through the opening of a sliding door—
A piercing voice.

This contains two sets of word play. First, the Japanese word for “sliding” (*yari*, from *yaru*) also happens to mean “spear,” which immediately invokes the association “to pierce.” Secondly, the Japanese word for “opening” (*kuchi*) also denotes “mouth,” thus bringing out a related word, “voice.” The poem is a clever display of wit, if not much more.

Many of Bashō’s earliest haiku are primarily intended to amuse, and the amusement is created by his skillful handling of the language. They express little of the poet’s own sentiments, even when the occasion must have called for a display of genuine emotion. The following haiku, for instance, was written at the house of a person whose child had just died:

*Shiorefusu ya
Yo wa sakasama no
Yuki no take*

Drooping low
In this topsy-turvy world,
A bamboo plant under the snow.

Again the poem hinges on a pun: the Japanese word for “world” (*yo*) also has the meaning of “stalk.” The “topsy-turvy world,” then, assumes a double meaning: “the world that lets a child die before its parents” and “a bamboo stalk drooping its top to the ground.” Furthermore, the last line is an inversion of the title of a *nō* play, *The Snow on the Bamboo* (*Take no Yuki*), in which a mother mourns for her son who froze to death trying to remove snow from bamboos. These two sets of word play have certain merit: they unite two levels of meaning and create poetic ambiguity. Unfortunately they also have a demerit: the complexity and pedantry detract from the poem’s lyricism. We cannot help thinking that an artless, straightforward lyric would have served its elegiac purpose more effectively.

Of course, young Bashō was simply following the conventions prevalent in his day. The so-called Teimon school of haikai, under whose influence Bashō began writing, advocated this sort of poetic technique. Inevitably, Bashō became more and more dissatisfied with the Teimon style as he grew older; thus in *The Seashell Game* of 1672 we find him moving away from it. One of the two haiku that bear his name in that book is:

*Kite mo miyo
Jinbe ga haori
Hanagoromo*

Come and look!
Wear a Jimbei robe
For your blossom viewing.

Word play is still used: in Japanese, “come” and “wear” are one word with two meanings. But the main interest of the poem lies in its first line, which seems to have been a phrase in vogue among young people at that time. “Come and look!” often appeared in the popular songs of the day. This note of contemporary town life is also echoed in “a Jimbei robe,” which was a short, sleeveless robe worn by townsmen. The first two lines of the haiku, then, bring the poem’s elegant subject, blossom-viewing, right down to earth. This indicates a new direction in Bashō’s poetry, for his earlier haiku had always remained within the realm of elegant beauty and witty word play, frequently alluding to graceful court poetry and aristocratic *nō* dramas. Here in *The Seashell Game* he seems to be descending toward more earthy material, freely adopting popular phrases and colloquialisms.

II TECHNIQUE OF SURPRISING COMPARISON: 1673:80

The transition from refined wit to more earthy humor grew more apparent after Bashō came to Edo, and it was accelerated when the Danrin school of haikai, which arose in reaction to the Teimon school, began dominating the local poetic scene around 1675. The new school markedly expanded the scope of haikai in both theme and diction, extending it deeply into the life of the common people. Elegant subjects cherished by classical court poets were often parodied and ridiculed; word play and allusion were used not to show urbane wit but to provide a humorous contrast to some mundane subject.

One of Bashō’s first poems after his arrival in Edo, cited below, clearly shows this transition. The haiku takes as its material one of the cherished subjects of classical Japanese poetry, a country woman pounding cloth on an autumn evening. In ancient times a court noble, traveling through the countryside, would often

see a woman pounding cloth on a flat stone and would thereupon write a verse on the loneliness of travel. Parodying this poetic tradition, Bashō wrote a haiku:

*Haritate ya
Kata ni tsuchi utsu
Karakoromo*

An acupuncturist
Hammering a needle into a shoulder—
A robe cast off.

The Japanese word for “a robe cast off,” *karakoromo*, also means “a Chinese-style robe,” a garment often worn by ancient court nobles. The elegant picture of a high-ranking nobleman watching a country girl pound a Chinese-style robe to give it a fine finish, recedes into the background. Superimposed on it is the mundane view of an acupuncturist treating an over-worked laborer at a disorderly tenement house.

A slightly later haiku alludes to a story that appears in *The Tales of Ise*. The story tells of a certain courtier who had a mistress. As the love affair was secret he could not enter her house openly; he had to sneak in over a crumbling section of the wall that guarded the house. An illustrious nobleman secretly in love with a charming lady whose family fortunes have declined—this is a fitting subject for a romantic story. But Bashō mocked it in a haiku:

*Neko no tsuma
Hetsui no kuzure yori
Kayoi keru*

The cat's mistress
Walks over a crumbled cooking stove
To a rendezvous.

The humor is enhanced by the fact that in the world of cats it is the female that goes to the male.

While ridiculing conventional poetic subjects, Bashō also wrote humorous haiku that do not rely on classical allusions. A good example is the following poem he produced on his westward journey in the summer of 1676, during which he passed by the snow-capped Mount Fuji. After arriving in his native province he was invited to an acquaintance's house on a hot day. During his visit Bashō, sending a breeze toward his host with a fan, recited:

*Fuji no kaze ya
Ōgi ni nose te
Edo miyage*

A wind from Mount Fuji
Resting on the fan,
My souvenir from Edo!

This is a witty poem, and nothing more. But it should be noted that the wit is not classical or contrived; it is simple, spontaneous, and lighthearted.

Another lighthearted and probably spontaneous haiku is one of his poems on moon-viewing. The reader should imagine Bashō and his friends aboard a small boat waiting for the harvest moon to rise. As befitted the occasion they were having some rice wine, and a round red wine cup was being washed in a large bowl made for that purpose. Suddenly a round red moon began to climb above the sea. Thereupon Bashō's poem:

*Sōkai no
Nami sake-kusashi
Kyō no tsuki*

Waves on the blue ocean
Smell of rice wine—
The moon of tonight.

The humor of the poem lies in its surprising comparison: the lovely moon shining over the sea is compared to a wine cup just taken out of a washing bowl. In earlier haiku Bashō brought together two unrelated objects by means of puns, as we have seen. Now he began to achieve this without depending on homonyms.

Using the technique of surprising comparison Bashō wrote another haiku, this time not so much to create humor as to generate a specifically poetic atmosphere. The poem is again about the harvest moon:

*Ki o kirite
Motokuchi miru ya
Kyō no tsuki*

I fell a tree
And gaze at the cut end—
The moon of tonight.

Here is a novel comparison of the round cut-end of a tree to the full moon, a comparison that produces surprise and humor. But the juxtaposition also yields a unique poetic atmosphere, for there seems to be something in common between the large full moon rising above the mountains and the freshly sawed section of a tree emitting a faint fragrance. They are both round, fresh-looking, and somehow suggestive of nature's hidden mystery.

As the years went by, Bashō came to write more and more serious poetry, freeing himself from the prevailing trend of humorous Danrin-style haiku. Some of his poems written in or shortly before 1680 exemplify his changing style admirably, for example this haiku about a spider:

*Kumo nan to
Ne o nani to naku
Aki no kaze*

Spider, I say!
In what voice do you chirp?
An autumn wind . . .

The humor lies in the colloquial tone of the first two lines, and in the unlikely reference to a spider's chirp. But the autumn wind reminds the reader of the solitude of a spider, which does not chirp for its mate but silently crouches in a web all by itself. There is definitely the image of a poet standing silent and alone in the autumn wind waiting for someone who may or may not come. Another haiku written about the same time has a similar comic overtone overlying deep solitude:

*Gu anzuru ni
Meido mo kaku ya
Aki no kure*

In my humble opinion
Hades must be like this, too—
Autumn evening.

"In my humble opinion," a cliché used by scholarly annotators of classics, is here employed for a comic purpose: Hades is too fantastic a subject to be explained away by a textual scholar. But this comic tone is immediately subdued in the third line, where the reader begins to wonder whether there is not something in common between Hades and an autumn evening.

In some of the haiku Bashō wrote around this time, the comic element is so much reduced that it seems almost nonexistent, as for instance, in the haiku entitled "**The Moon on the Thirteenth of the Ninth Month**":

*Yoru hisokani
Mushi wa gekka no
Kuri o ugatsu*

At night, quietly
A worm in the moonlight
Digs into a chestnut.

The whimsical connection of a chestnut and the moon of the thirteenth of the ninth month, traditionally called the Chestnut Moon, weighs little in the total meaning of the poem. Without the title to establish the connection, it is a fine poem catching the deadly quietness of an autumn night in the woods under a bright moon. Undoubtedly Bashō liked this sort of style and explored the possibilities further, until he came to write several haiku with no comic element whatsoever. For instance:

*Izuku shigure
Kasa o te ni sagete
Kaeru sō*

Where was the wintry shower?
With an umbrella in his hand
A monk returns.

The poem is almost purely descriptive. In the sky are thick gray clouds, and on the earth are bare trees and withered grass. It is a gloomy winter day, anticipating a shower at any moment. Here comes a Buddhist monk in a gray robe, returning to a small temple at the foot of the yonder hill. In his hand is an umbrella that looks wet; it must have been sprinkling where he had been visiting.

In addition to their somber overtone, the last two haiku clearly distinguish themselves from the earlier works in style as well. They are freer in form: in the original Japanese the chestnut poem consists of 6-7-6 syllable lines, and the umbrella poem of 6-8-5, straying considerably from the conventional 5-7-5 pattern. Furthermore, the orthography is rather unconventional; it approaches that of classical Chinese. For that matter, the umbrella poem in particular has a flavor of T'ang and Sung poetry in its subject matter. Apparently Bashō, weary of relying on wit and puns in the Japanese court tradition, had begun experimenting with the more somber and less artificial style of classical Chinese verse.

The best product of these experiments is a famous poem about a crow, with which it is said Bashō came into his own:

*Kareeda ni
Karasu no tomarikeri
Aki no kure*

On a bare branch
A crow is perched—
Autumn evening.

Again, the subject is very much like those of Chinese poetry and painting. The form is rather free, too, consisting of 5-10-5 syllable lines in the first version, and 5-9-5 in the final version. This haiku is superior to the last two poems we have seen, in that it contains neither calculated unexpectedness nor posed picturesquequeness. It presents a scene that can be observed almost anywhere—or so the reader feels—so that the desolate atmosphere is not forced upon the reader. We might say the poem is objective and impersonal. When the umbrella poem asked "Where was the wintry shower?" the poet was present, but here he has almost vanished. This poem has probably been overpraised by

later scholars who emphasize the importance of objectivity in haiku. But there is little doubt that it occupies a significant place as a milestone in Bashō's development.

III. IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY: 1681-85

The first Bashō Hut was built in 1680, and the poet settled down there that winter. From around this time until 1685, when he wrote *The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton* after his first significant journey, he went through a transitional period during which he sought to shake off the prevailing poetic mode and to establish a style of his own. As may be imagined, he experimented with various styles, most of which had their roots in his earlier poetry. Perhaps we can classify these transitional styles in three categories. First, he continued to absorb and assimilate the language of classical Chinese poetry, the culmination of which was *Shriveled Chestnuts*. Secondly, he cultivated his earlier technique of surprising comparison, which resulted in several excellent haiku. And thirdly, he went on writing descriptive, objective haiku; some of the poems in *The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton* are fine examples of this style. We shall examine several examples from each of these categories.

The haiku written under the influence of Chinese verse show the same characteristics as those of the earlier period: they are liberal in syllable pattern, use a pseudo-Chinese orthography, and create a somber, lonely mood. One change, however, is that Bashō wrote these haiku out of his own personal experience. A good example is one of the earliest haiku he wrote after moving into the Bashō Hut:

*Ro no koe nami o utte
Harawata kōru
Yo ya namida*

The sound of an oar beating the waves
Chills my bowels through
And I weep in the night.

The syllable pattern is 10-7-5. "The sound of an oar" and "chills my bowels through" are clichés in classical Chinese poetry. The hyperbolic style poeticizing loneliness is also from T'ang verse; in fact, Bashō's headnote to the haiku refers to a poem by Tu Fu. Yet the headnote also makes clear that the haiku is intended to embody a cold winter night as felt by the poet in his modest hut near the river. The elements of Chinese verse are made to serve his prime purpose: to present his own feelings.

Chinese elements are more closely integrated with his personal experience in the following haiku, which appears in *Shriveled Chestnuts*. It has a short headnote,

"At this modest hut I buy water," meaning that Bashō had to buy water and keep it in a container—his district produced no good water. The haiku was written in winter.

*Kōri nigaku
Enso ga nodo o
Uruoseri*

Ice tastes bitter
In the mouth of a sewer rat
Quenching his thirst.

The reference is to a passage in a Taoist classic *Chuang-tzu*, which says that a sewer rat's thirst is easily quenched with a tiny drink from a large river. The passage, intended to strike home the moral that one can attain happiness only by living within one's means, does not come to the foreground of Bashō's poem. In fact, the haiku is not at all didactic; all it has borrowed from *Chuang-tzu* is the image of a rat taking a drink of water. On a cold night Bashō felt thirsty and wanted a drink of water. He went to the kitchen of his modest hut and, finding the water frozen, broke off a piece of ice and put it into his mouth. It was so cold that it tasted bitter, and Bashō momentarily thought of *Chuang-tzu's* dirty rat living in a sewer.

Bashō's finest poems in this period belong to the second category, where two things not ordinarily associated with each other are brought together by the poet's imagination. We have already seen the genesis of this feature: the full moon and a round wine cup, for instance, were associated in a haiku to produce surprise. Bashō now began to juxtapose two disparate objects not so much for the shock effect as to create a specific mood or sensation which could not otherwise be evoked. Fine examples of this appear in *The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton*. For example:

*Akebono ya
Shirauo shiroki
Koto issun*

In the twilight of dawn
A whitefish, with an inch
Of whiteness.

This whitefish is a kind of icefish that lives in Japanese lakes. A slender fish about two inches long, it looks almost transparent in the water but turns silvery white when taken out. The traveling poet woke at dawn one day and went to the lakeshore, where local fishermen were pulling in their net. Among various kinds of fish caught in the net, a young whitefish was flopping about. In the twilight of dawn, which seemed to extend into an infinite distance over the lake, its whiteness was beautifully clear and definite. Much of the beauty of the poem lies in this unique combination of the twilight and the whitefish.

If this poem embodies delicate picturesque beauty, the following haiku, which uses a similar method of combining, presents a more violent atmosphere. Bashō was at Ise, and visited one of the Grand Shinto Shrines deep in the cedar woods:

*Misoka tsuki nashi
Chitose no sugi o
Daku arashi*

The last night of the month, no moon:
Thousand-year-old cedars
Besieged by a storm.

The black of night on the thirtieth of a lunar month, ancient cedar trees with their dark green needles, and the stormy gusts that blow through them with a roar, are all combined to produce a feeling of being in the primitive, rugged universe before the birth of man, the kind of universe inhabited only by ancient Shinto gods.

Totally different in tone but using a similar method is the following poem, also composed during his journey of 1684. This time Bashō stopped for lunch at a teashop on the roadside:

*Tsutsuji ikete
Sono kage ni hidara
Saku onna*

Azaleas in a bucket
And in their shade, a woman
Tearing up a dried codfish.

Azaleas are wild in western Japan, and a traveler sees them blooming everywhere along mountain roads in late spring. In this haiku long branches of azalea blossoms are casually put in a bucket in a corner of the teashop, and under them the proprietress is preparing a codfish for the customer. Azalea blossoms and a codfish, thus brought together, produce an atmosphere of modest and peaceful rusticity. In fact the reader can almost picture the proprietress: she must be somewhat over thirty, married and with children, her hands hardened with housework yet still retaining some of the charm of her youth.

In these three poems, Bashō juxtaposed two or more visual images. In the following two haiku he combined two sensory perceptions, thereby creating a novel atmosphere:

*Ran no ka ya
Chō no tsubasa ni
Takimono su*

The fragrant orchid:
Into a butterfly's wings
It breathes the incense.

This poem, unusually colorful for Bashō, derives its effect from the merging of a scent with a visual image.

The effect is heightened by the use of Sino-Japanese readings of some of the words in the poem, such as *ran* (orchid), *ka* (fragrance), and *chō* (butterfly). More typical is:

*Kogarashi ya
Take ni kakurete
Shizumarinu*

A wintry gust
Disappears amid the bamboos
And subsides to a calm.

Here a sense of motion is combined with visual scenery. In both instances there is a delicate harmony between two different senses. The strong aroma of an orchid goes well with the colorful wings of a butterfly, and a chilling gust of wind is fitting for a bamboo plant with its lean stalk and pointed leaves.

The merging of different senses, when carried further, will produce synesthesia. That is exactly the case in the next haiku written by Bashō in the same period:

*Umi kurete
Kamo no koe
Honokani shiroshi*

The sea darkens
And a wild duck's call
Is faintly white.

The wild duck's call, faintly heard in the offing as dusk fell, could not be described in any way other than by the color white. It evokes in the reader a vision of the vast, dim darkness falling over the ocean, and a lonely feeling of the poet on the shore gazing into the darkness. This verse can be said to have reached the peak level of Bashō's poetry.

The third type of haiku written in this period is an extension of the earlier line that culminated in the crow poem. The poems show neither Chinese elements nor striking juxtapositions of two objects or senses; they are plain in setting, straightforward in structure, regular in syllable pattern, and lucid in diction. In fact, they sometimes look so ordinary that one starts wondering where their real meaning lies. The truth is that these poems are intentionally plain and ambiguous. They present an experience without the poet's commentary on it, because the poet wants the reader to go through it himself. How to interpret this experience is up to the individual reader.

A good example of this is a famous poem with the headnote "On Horseback":

*Michinobe no
Mukuge wa uma ni
Kuwarekeri*