

Classic Poetry Series

**Matsuo Basho**  
**- poems -**

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## Matsuo Basho(1644 - 1694)

Basho; was born Matsuo Kinsaku around 1644, somewhere near Ueno in Iga Province. His father may have been a low-ranking samurai, which would have promised Basho; a career in the military but not much chance of a notable life. It was traditionally claimed by biographers that he worked in the kitchens. However, as a child Basho; became a servant to Tada; Yoshitada, who shared with Basho; a love for haikai no renga, a form of cooperative poetry composition. The sequences were opened with a verse in the 5-7-5 mora format; this verse was named a hokku, and would later be renamed haiku when presented as stand-alone works. The hokku would be followed by a related 7-7 addition by another poet. Both Basho; and Yoshitada gave themselves haig;, or haikai pen names; Basho;'s was Soba;, which was simply the on'yomi reading of his samurai name of Matsuo Munefusa. In 1662 the first extant poem by Basho; was published; in 1664 two of his hokku were printed in a compilation, and in 1665 Basho; and Yoshitada composed a one-hundred-verse renku with some acquaintances.

Yoshitada's sudden death in 1666 brought Basho;'s peaceful life as a servant to an end. No records of this time remain, but it is believed that Basho; gave up the possibility of samurai status and left home. Biographers have proposed various reasons and destinations, including the possibility of an affair between Basho; and a Shinto miko named Jutei, which is unlikely to be true. Basho;'s own references to this time are vague; he recalled that "at one time I coveted an official post with a tenure of land", and that "there was a time when I was fascinated with the ways of homosexual love", but there is no indication whether he was referring to real obsessions or even fictional ones. He was uncertain whether to become a full-time poet; by his own account, "the alternatives battled in my mind and made my life restless". His indecision may have been influenced by the then still relatively low status of renga and haikai no renga as more social activities than serious artistic endeavors. In any case, his poems continued to be published in anthologies in 1667, 1669, and 1671, and he published his own compilation of work by him and other authors of the Teitoku school, *Seashell Game*, in 1672. In about the spring of that year he moved to Edo, to further his study of poetry.

On his return to Edo in the winter of 1691, Basho; lived in his third basho; hut, again provided by his disciples. This time, he was not alone; he took in a nephew and his female friend, Jutei, who were both recovering from illness. He had a great many visitors.

Bashō's grave in Ōtsu, Shiga Prefecture

Bashō continued to be uneasy. He wrote to a friend that "disturbed by others, I have no peace of mind". He made a living from teaching and appearances at haikai parties until late August of 1693, when he shut the gate to his Bashō hut and refused to see anybody for a month. Finally, he relented after adopting the principle of karumi or "lightness", a semi-Buddhist philosophy of greeting the mundane world rather than separating himself from it. Bashō left Edo for the last time in the summer of 1694, spending time in Ueno and Kyoto before his arrival in Osaka. He became sick with a stomach illness and died peacefully, surrounded by his disciples. Although he did not compose any formal death poem on his deathbed the following, being the last poem recorded during his final illness, is generally accepted as his poem of farewell:

tabi ni yande / yume wa kareno wo / kake meguru

falling sick on a journey / my dream goes wandering / over a field of dried  
grass

# A Ball Of Snow

you make the fire  
and I'll show you something wonderful:  
a big ball of snow!

Matsuo Basho

# A Bee

A bee  
staggers out  
of the peony.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# A Caterpillar

A caterpillar,  
this deep in fall--  
still not a butterfly.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# A Cicada Shell

A cicada shell;  
it sang itself  
utterly away.

Translated by R.H. Blyth

Matsuo Basho

# A Cold Rain Starting

A cold rain starting  
And no hat --  
So?

Matsuo Basho



# A Cool Fall Night

At a hermitage:

A cool fall night--  
getting dinner, we peeled  
eggplants, cucumbers.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# A Cuckoo Cries

a cuckoo cries  
and through a thicket of bamboo  
the late moon shines

Matsuo Basho

# A Field Of Cotton

A field of cotton--  
as if the moon  
had flowered.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# A Man Infirm

A man, infirm  
With age, slowly sucks  
A fish bone.

Matsuo Basho

# A Monk Sips Morning Tea

A monk sips morning tea,  
it's quiet,  
the chrysanthemum's flowering.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# A Snowy Morning

A snowy morning--  
by myself,  
chewing on dried salmon.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# A Strange Flower

a strange flower  
for birds and butterflies  
the autumn sky

Matsuo Basho

# A Weathered Skeleton

A weathered skeleton  
in windy fields of memory,  
piercing like a knife

Matsuo Basho



# A Wild Sea

A wild sea-  
In the distance over Sado  
The Milky Way

Matsuo Basho

# All the day long

All the day long-  
yet not long enough for the skylark,  
singing, singing.

Matsuo Basho

# An Old Pond

old pond.....  
a frog leaps in  
water's sound

Matsuo Basho

# As They Begin To Rise Again

As they begin to rise again  
Chrysanthemums faintly smell,  
After the flooding rain

Matsuo Basho

# Autumn Moonlight

Autumn moonlight--  
a worm digs silently  
into the chestnut.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Awake At Night

Awake at night--  
the sound of the water jar  
cracking in the cold.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Basho's Death Poem

Sick on my journey,  
only my dreams will wander  
these desolate moors

Matsuo Basho

## Bitter-tasting Ice —

Kori nigaku enso ga nodo o uruoseri

Bitter-tasting ice —  
Just enough to wet the throat  
Of a sewer rat.

Matsuo Basho



# Blowing Stones

Blowing stones  
along the road on Mount Asama,  
the autumn wind.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Bush Warbler

Bush warbler:  
shits on the rice cakes  
on the porch rail.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Bush-Clover Flowers

bush-clover flowers —  
they sway but do not drop  
their beads of dew

Matsuo Basho

# But For A Woodpecker

But for a woodpecker  
tapping at a post, no sound  
at all in the house

Matsuo Basho

# By the old temple

By the old temple,  
peach blossoms;  
a man treading rice.

Matsuo Basho

# Cedar umbrellas

Cedar umbrellas, off  
to Mount Yoshimo for  
the cherry blossoms.

Matsuo Basho

# Chilling Autumn Rains

Chilling autumn rains  
curtain Mount Fuji, then make it  
more beautiful to see

Matsuo Basho

# Clouds

Clouds -  
a chance to dodge  
moonviewing.

Matsuo Basho



# Cold As It Was

Cold as it was  
We felt secure sleeping together  
In the same room.

Matsuo Basho

# Cold Night: The Wild Duck

Cold night: the wild duck,  
sick, falls from the sky  
and sleeps awhile.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

## Collection Of Six Haiku

Waking in the night;  
the lamp is low,  
the oil freezing.

It has rained enough  
to turn the stubble on the field  
black.

Winter rain  
falls on the cow-shed;  
a cock crows.

The leeks  
newly washed white,-  
how cold it is!

The sea darkens;  
the voices of the wild ducks  
are faintly white.

Ill on a journey;  
my dreams wander  
over a withered moor.



# Coolness Of The Melons

Coolness of the melons  
flecked with mud  
in the morning dew.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Crossing Long Fields

Crossing long fields,  
frozen in its saddle,  
my shadow creeps by

Matsuo Basho

# Deep Into Autumn

Deep into autumn  
and this caterpillar  
still not a butterfly

Matsuo Basho

# Don'T Imitate Me

Don't imitate me;  
it's as boring  
as the two halves of a melon.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho



# Eaten Alive

Eaten alive by  
lice and fleas -- now the horse  
beside my pillow pees

Matsuo Basho

# Even That Old Horse

Even that old horse  
is something to see this  
snow-covered morning

Matsuo Basho

# First Day Of Spring

First day of spring--  
I keep thinking about  
the end of autumn.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# First Snow

First snow  
falling  
on the half-finished bridge.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# First Winter Rain

First winter rain--  
even the monkey  
seems to want a raincoat.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Fleas, Lice

Fleas, lice,  
a horse peeing  
near my pillow.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Flower

Flower  
under harvest sun - stranger  
To bird, butterfly.

Matsuo Basho

## Four Haiku

Spring:

A hill without a name  
Veiled in morning mist.

The beginning of autumn:

Sea and emerald paddy  
Both the same green.

The winds of autumn

Blow: yet still green  
The chestnut husks.

A flash of lightning:

Into the gloom  
Goes the heron's cry.

Translated by Geoffrey Bownas And Anthony Thwaite

Matsuo Basho



# From Time To Time

From time to time  
The clouds give rest  
To the moon beholders..

Matsuo Basho

# Haiku

scent of plum blossoms  
on the misty mountain path  
a big rising sun

Matsuo Basho

# Heat Waves Shimmering

Heat waves shimmering  
one or two inches  
above the dead grass.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# How Admirable

How admirable!  
to see lightning and not think  
life is fleeting.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# How Wild The Sea Is

How wild the sea is,  
and over Sado Island,  
the River of Heaven

Matsuo Basho

# Husking Rice

husking rice  
a child squints up  
to view the moon

Matsuo Basho

# I Like To Wash

I like to wash,  
the dust of this world  
In the droplets of dew.

Matsuo Basho

# I'M A Wanderer

I'm a wanderer  
so let that be my name –  
the first winter rain

Matsuo Basho



## In This World Of Ours,

Yo no naka wa kutte hako shite nete okite  
Sate sono ato wa shinuru bakari zo

In this world of ours,  
We eat only to cast out,  
Sleep only to wake,  
And what comes after all that  
Is simply to die at last.

Matsuo Basho

# It Is With Awe

It is with awe  
That I beheld  
Fresh leaves, green leaves,  
Bright in the sun.

Matsuo Basho

# Long Conversations

Long conversations  
beside blooming irises –  
joys of life on the road

Matsuo Basho

# Midfield

Midfield,  
attached to nothing,  
the skylark singing.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Moonlight Slanting

Moonlight slanting  
through the bamboo grove;  
a cuckoo crying.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Morning And Evening

Morning and evening  
Someone waits at Matsushima!  
One-sided love

Matsuo Basho

# None Is Travelling

None is travelling  
Here along this way but I,  
This autumn evening.

The first day of the year:  
thoughts come - and there is loneliness;  
the autumn dusk is here.

An old pond  
A frog jumps in -  
Splash!

Lightening -  
Heron's cry  
Stabs the darkness

Clouds come from time to time -  
and bring to men a chance to rest  
from looking at the moon.

In the cicada's cry  
There's no sign that can foretell  
How soon it must die.

Poverty's child -  
he starts to grind the rice,  
and gazes at the moon.

Won't you come and see  
loneliness? Just one leaf  
from the kiri tree.

Temple bells die out.  
The fragrant blossoms remain.  
A perfect evening!

Matsuo Basho

## Now the swinging bridge

Now the swinging bridge  
is quieted with creepers  
like our tendrilled life

Matsuo Basho



# On Buddha's Deathday

On Buddha's deathday,  
wrinkled tough old hands pray –  
the prayer beads' sound

Matsuo Basho

# On New Year's Day

On New Year's Day  
each thought a loneliness  
as winter dusk descends

Matsuo Basho

# On The Cow Shed

On the cow shed  
A hard winter rain;  
Cock crowing.

Matsuo Basho

# On The White Poppy

On the white poppy,  
a butterfly's torn wing  
is a keepsake

Matsuo Basho

# On This Road

On this road  
where nobody else travels  
autumn nightfall

Matsuo Basho

# Passing Through The World

Passing through the world  
Indeed this is just  
Sogi's rain shelter

Matsuo Basho

# Petals Of The Mountain Rose

Petals of the mountain rose  
Fall now and then,  
To the sound of the waterfall?

Matsuo Basho

# Scarecrow In The Hillock

Scarecrow in the hillock  
Paddy field --  
How unaware! How useful.

Matsuo Basho



# Shaking The Grave

shaking the grave  
my weeping voice  
autumn wind

Matsuo Basho

# Sleep On Horseback

Sleep on horseback,  
The far moon in a continuing dream,  
Steam of roasting tea.

Matsuo Basho

# Souls' Festival

souls' festival  
today also there is smoke  
from the crematory

Matsuo Basho

# Spring Rain

Spring rain  
leaking through the roof  
dripping from the wasps' nest.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Staying At An Inn

Staying at an inn  
where prostitutes are also sleeping--  
bush clover and the moon.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Stillness

Stillness--  
the cicada's cry  
drills into the rocks.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Taking A Nap

Taking a nap,  
feet planted  
    against a cool wall.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Teeth Sensitive To The Sand

Teeth sensitive to the sand  
in salad greens--  
I'm getting old.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho



# Temple Bells Die Out

Temple bells die out.  
The fragrant blossoms remain.  
A perfect evening!

Matsuo Basho

# The Banana Tree

The banana tree  
blown by winds pours raindrops  
into the bucket

Matsuo Basho

# The Butterfly

The butterfly is perfuming  
It's wings in the scent  
Of the orchid.

Matsuo Basho

# The Clouds Come And Go

The clouds come and go,  
providing a rest for all  
the moon viewers

Matsuo Basho

# The Dragonfly

The dragonfly  
can't quite land  
on that blade of grass.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# The First Snow

The first snow  
the leaves of the daffodil  
bending together

Matsuo Basho

# The Morning Glories

The morning glories  
bloom, securing the gate  
in the old fence

Matsuo Basho

# The Morning Glory Also

The morning glory also  
turns out  
not to be my friend.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho



# The Narrow Road To The Deep North: Prologue

Behind this door  
Now buried in deep grass  
A different generation will celebrate  
The Festival of Dolls.

Matsuo Basho

# The Oak Tree

The oak tree:  
not interested  
in cherry blossoms.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# The Old Pond

Following are several translations  
of the 'Old Pond' poem, which may be  
the most famous of all haiku:

Furuike ya  
kawazu tobikomu  
mizu no oto

- Basho

## Literal Translation

Fu-ru (old) i-ke (pond) ya,  
ka-wa-zu (frog) to-bi-ko-mu (jumping into)  
mi-zu (water) no o-to (sound)

Translated by Fumiko Saisho

The old pond-  
a frog jumps in,  
sound of water.

Translated by Robert Hass

Old pond...  
a frog jumps in  
water's sound.

Translated by William J. Higginson

An old silent pond...  
A frog jumps into the pond,  
splash! Silence again.

Translated by Harry Behn

There is the old pond!  
Lo, into it jumps a frog:  
hark, water's music!

Translated by John Bryan

The silent old pond  
a mirror of ancient calm,  
a frog-leaps-in splash.

Translated by Dion O'Donnol

old pond  
frog leaping  
splash

Translated by Cid Corman

Antic pond-  
frantic frog jumps in-  
gigantic sound.

Translated by Bernard Lionel Einbond

MAFIA HIT MAN POET: NOTE FOUND PINNED TO LAPEL  
OF DROWNED VICTIM'S DOUBLE-BREASTED SUIT! ! !

'Dere wasa dis frogg  
Gone jumpa offa da logg  
Now he inna bogg.'

- Anonymous

Translated by George M. Young, Jr.

Old pond  
leap - splash  
a frog.

Translated by Lucien Stryk

The old pond,  
A frog jumps in:.  
Plop!

Translated by Allan Watts

The old pond, yes, and  
A frog is jumping into  
The water, and splash.

Translated by G.S. Fraser

Matsuo Basho

# The Passing Spring

The passing spring  
Birds mourn,  
Fishes weep  
With tearful eyes.

Matsuo Basho

# The Petals Tremble

The petals tremble  
on the yellow mountain rose –  
roar of the rapids

Matsuo Basho



# The Shallows

The shallows –  
a crane's thighs splashed  
in cool waves

Matsuo Basho

# The She Cat

The she cat -  
Grown thin  
From love and barley.

Matsuo Basho

# The Squid Seller's Call

The squid seller's call  
mingles with the voice  
of the cuckoo.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# The Warbler Sings

the warbler sings  
among new shoots of bamboo  
of coming old age

Matsuo Basho

# The Whole Family

the whole family  
all with white hair and canes  
visiting graves

Matsuo Basho

# The Winter Leeks

The winter leeks  
Have been washed white --  
How cold it is!

Matsuo Basho

# The Winter Storm

The winter storm  
Hid in the bamboo grove  
And quieted away.

Matsuo Basho

# This First Fallen Snow

This first fallen snow  
is barely enough to bend  
the jonquil leaves

Matsuo Basho



# This Old Village

This old village--  
not a single house  
without persimmon trees.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Tremble Oh My Gravemound

Tremble, oh my gravemound,  
in time my cries will be  
only this autumn wind

Matsuo Basho

# Under My Tree-Roof

under my tree-roof  
slanting lines of april rain  
separate to drops

Matsuo Basho

# Ungraciously

Ungraciously, under  
a great soldier's empty helmet,  
a cricket sings

Matsuo Basho

# Untitled

The summer grasses  
All that remains  
Of brave soldiers dreams

Matsuo Basho

# What Fish Feel

What fish feel,  
birds feel, I don't know--  
the year ending.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# When The Winter Chrysanthemums Go

When the winter chrysanthemums go,  
there's nothing to write about  
but radishes.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Winter Downpour

Winter downpour -  
even the monkey  
needs a raincoat.

Matsuo Basho



# Winter Garden

Winter garden,  
the moon thinned to a thread,  
insects singing.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

# Winter Seclusion

Winter seclusion –  
sitting propped against  
the same worn post

Matsuo Basho

# Winter Solitude

Winter solitude--  
in a world of one color  
the sound of wind.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho

## With A Warbler

With a warbler for  
a soul, it sleeps peacefully,  
this mountain willow

Matsuo Basho

# With Every Gust Of Wind

With every gust of wind,  
the butterfly changes its place  
on the willow.

Matsuo Basho

# Won't You Come And See

Won't you come and see  
loneliness? Just one leaf  
from the kiri tree.

Matsuo Basho

# Wrapping Dumplings

Wrapping dumplings in  
bamboo leaves, with one finger  
she tidies her hair

Matsuo Basho

# Wrapping The Rice Cakes

Wrapping the rice cakes,  
with one hand  
she fingers back her hair.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho



# Year's End,

Year's end, all  
corners of this  
floating world, swept.

Translated by: Lucien Stryk

Matsuo Basho