Matsuo Basho
- poems -

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Matsuo Basho (1644 - 1694)

Bashō 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 Bashō 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 Bashō became a servant to Tōdō Yoshitada, who shared with Bashō 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 Bashō and Yoshitada gave themselves haigō, or haikai pen names; Bashō's was Sōbō, which was simply the on'yomi reading of his samurai name of Matsuo Munefusa. In 1662 the first extant poem by Bashō was published; in 1664 two of his hokku were printed in a compilation, and in 1665 Bashō and Yoshitada composed a one-hundred-verse renku with some acquaintances.

Yoshitada's sudden death in 1666 brought Bashō's peaceful life as a servant to an end. No records of this time remain, but it is believed that Bashō gave up the possibility of samurai status and left home. Biographers have proposed various reasons and destinations, including the possibility of an affair between Bashō and a Shinto miko named Jutei, which is unlikely to be true. Bashō'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, Bashō lived in his third bashō 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--
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,
it's quiet,
the chrysanthemum's flowering.

Translated by Robert Hass

Matsuo Basho
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
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.
Matsuo Basho
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
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
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
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.
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

Old pond  
leap - splash  
a frog.

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

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

Translated by Bernard Lionel Einbond

Translated by George M. Young, Jr.

Translated by Lucien Stryk

Translated by Allan Watts

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
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