

Classic Poetry Series

**Masaoki Shiki**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Masaoki Shiki(1867 - 1902)

Shiki was born in Matsuyama on September 17, 1867 to Tsunenao, a low ranking samurai and Yae the daughter of Oharo Kanzan, a teacher at the feudal clan school. His real name was Tsunenori, but he was called Noboru as a child. Shiki, lost his father at the age of five and Kanzan took over his education and educated him in the Chinese Classics. He was very strict and conservative. Shiki was also influenced by his uncle , Kato Takusen, who later served as a diplomat and the mayor of Matsuyama.

Shiki was inspired by the Freedom and People's Right Movement, and in 1883 he went to Tokyo to become a politician, but while studying at the Imperial University, his interest in politics and philosophy gave way to a growing fascination with literature. He began writing fiction, but he gradually concentrated on the study and composition of haiku.

When he was twenty-two, he began coughing up blood and adopted the pen name Shiki, the name of a bird that, according to legend, coughs blood as it sings. He decided to devote himself to literature, withdrew from the university, and began working for the newspaper Nippon.

Shiki called for the reform of haiku and tanka, very brief forms of traditional poetry of seventeen and thirty-one syllables, respectively. Haiku, in particular, focus on nature and or simple occurrences of daily life, but the condensation required by the form can result in great expansiveness and depth. The traditional forms, however, had grown trite and formulaic over the years. Shiki recommended composition based on Shasei, or sketch from life, and interjected this principle of describing life just as it is into his prose writing, as well as his haiku and tanka. Until two days before his death, Shiki continued writing articles, including a series under the title Byo-sho Rokusyaku (A Six feet Sickbed), in spite of intense suffering from the spinal caries that had afflicted him since 1895. He died on September 19,1902.

During his brief life, Shiki attracted a number of followers, who were influenced by and carried on his sketch-from-life theory of literature. Through them, as well as in his own right, he left his mark on the history of modern Japanese literature.

# Haiku 01

In the coolness  
of the empty sixth-month sky...  
the cuckoo's cry.

Masaaki Shiki

## Haiku 02

the tree cut,  
dawn breaks early  
at my little window

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 03

scatter layer  
by layer, eight-layered  
cherry blossoms!

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 04

at the full moon's  
rising, the silver-plumed  
reeds tremble

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 05

entangled with  
the scattering cherry blossoms—  
the wings of birds!

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 06

wheat sowing—  
the mulberry trees  
lift bunched branches

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 07

in the coolness  
gods and Buddhas  
dwell as neighbors

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 08

I turn my back  
on Buddha and face  
the cool moon

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 10

fanning out its tail  
in the spring breeze,  
see—a peacock!

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 11

rice reaping—  
no smoke rising from  
the cremation ground today

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 12

old garden—she empties  
a hot-water bottle  
under the moon

Masaoki Shiki

## Haiku 13

spring rain:  
browsing under an umbrella  
at the picture-book store

Masaoki Shiki

# Tanka 01

curtains drawn,  
the emperor's love  
still lies abed—  
on crimson peonies,  
the morning sun shines

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 02

the plaintain at the veranda's edge  
unfolds its coiled leaves,  
its jewels,  
and veils the water basin  
in five feet of green

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 03

The man  
I used to meet in the mirror  
is no more.  
Now I see a wasted face.  
It dribbles tears.

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 04

In the spring chill,  
as I slept with sword by pillow,  
deep at night  
my little sister came to me  
in dreams from home.

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 05

saw the country  
and returned—now deep at night  
I lie in bed and  
fields of mustard flowers  
bloom before my eyes

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 06

the bucket's water  
poured out and gone,  
drop by drop  
dew drips like pearls  
from the autumn flowers

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 07

on the pine needles,  
each of the slender needles,  
a dewdrop rests—  
a thousand pearls lie  
quivering, yet never fall

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 08

to every needle  
of the needled pine it clings—  
the pearl white dew,  
forming but to scatter,  
scattering but to form

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 09

two feet tall,  
the crimson-budded roses,  
their young thorns  
tender in  
the soft spring rain

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 10

I do not know the day  
my pain will end yet  
in the little garden  
I had them plant  
seeds of autumn flowers

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 11

I remember plucking  
buds of bush clover  
long ago with  
Satsuma geta on my feet and  
a walking stick in my hand

Masaoki Shiki

## Tanka 12

in memory of  
the spring now passing  
I drew  
the long clusters of wisteria  
that move like waves

Masaoki Shiki