an introduction to haiku

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Haiku is but one type of Japanese poetry, based on syllabic count. It consists of three lines, arranged in a five, seven, five, syllable form. Each completed poem contains a seventeen syllable total.

The purpose of Haiku, is to provide a picture without completeness. The last two lines comment upon the first, yet they are independent of the first line. This separateness should be as two poles, between which a spark must leap to be effective. The reader must complete the poem by supplying memories, which connect the two poles.

Matsuo Bashô, was the first master of Haiku. During his lifetime (1644-1694) he studied Zen Buddhism, which accounts for his concentration of mystical awareness in Haiku. The next master was Taniguchi Buson (1715-1783), who wrote of nature and used correlating vignettes. The modern follower of Bashô and Buson was Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) who presented pictures of everyday situations.

Japanese poetry provides circumstance, by which people seek consolation. This accompaniment involves nature, loneliness, and poverty. The reader must supply the inclinations, to complete each connotation effectively.

Here are some examples of authentic Japanese Haiku. The translations are from *BAMBOO BROOM* by H. G. Henderson.

Toshikasa wo
Urayamaretaru
Samusa kana

by Shiki

Now that I am old
I am envied by people . . .
Oh, but it is cold!

Suzushisa ya
Ho no mika tsuki no
Haguro-yama.

by Bashô

Cool it is, and still . . .
The tip of a crescent moon
over Black-wing Hill.
The following three poems were written in the Japanese Haiku form by Miss Clark.

Haiku*

An autumn rain fall . . .
Along suburban pathways
Windows have been closed.

Creatures of the night . . .
Through the encumbering trees
Their songs drift gayly.

In homage trees bend . . .
Where water’s streaked, shining streets
Reflect changing time.

* The titles are always implied in the content.