

Raindrops in a Wineglass **by Dietmar Tauchner**

The Shomon School - an ideal beginning of modernity

We may date the beginnings of modern haiku loosely to the late 17th century. Through the writings of Matsuo Basho, which he knew as haikai, and in his Shomon School, a form of poetry developed with modern features that can be clearly identified as such. I use the term 'modern' in the sense that a new epoch has begun, there is innovation, a noticeable change in the status quo – something going well beyond the previous fashion. Basho was responsible for such innovation, developing a kind of poetry that is multi-layered, and even up to the present day his legacy has lost little of its freshness.

Basho actually drew attention to renewal as an important poetic principle in haikai, the principle of atarashimi – finding new subject matter, content (imagery) that poets have not ventured to use before, or approaching established themes in new ways (honkadori.) Basho expressed this in a straightforward maxim: 'don't follow in the footsteps of the ancients, but seek their goals.'

Let us look at some examples. In his celebrated frog haiku, Basho introduced a new kind of topic to haikai. References to amphibians were completely new. Nor did he shrink from mentioning fleas and pissing horses. For renga poets, composing their verses in a traditional, courtly manner, such novelties were not in good taste, frankly improper. Basho widened the scope of poetry beyond established associations and was, to say the least, a rebel, an avant-gardist. Sometimes he would even free himself from the strict form of haiku too, on one occasion using 10-7-5 on ('Japanese syllables' or mora.) One of his tenets for writing poetry, zoka zuijun, (following the creative) has been explained as 'developing spatial dynamism with cosmological depth.' (1)

In short, the Shōmon School opened up new fields for haikai poets to explore, a bridge between tradition and modernity.

2 Nippon-ha (the Japanese School): its historical beginning

The Japanese apply the term gendai (= modern) to the wave of reforms introduced by Masaoka Shiki, and his Nippon-ha movement, historically speaking early in the 20th century. It was Shiki who conclusively hived off the hokku (opening verse) from the renga and for it, in its new splendid isolation, employed the term haiku. Haiku was now established as a genre in its own right.

Shiki launched a set of principles for the writing of haiku. The best-known of these, and the one most often applied, is the principle of shasei: 'sketching from life.' After the poet has perceived something of interest, using one or more of his/her senses, he/she should try to record it with the greatest possible realism and objectivity. Long before him, Basho had recommended something similar: 'Learn about the pine, from the pine.'

Shiki was a cosmopolitan - even a baseball fan - and drew his inspiration for shasei from the methods used by Western realist painters. In this way he aimed to broaden the outlook of hitherto insular Japanese poets and their readers. It is important to remember that Shiki was addressing novices in the art of haiku. He wanted to stop them indulging their own imaginative thoughts and fantasies.

It is necessary to stress the point, that nowhere did the 'old masters' set up a rigid system of rules for writing 'good' or 'proper' haiku. There are tips, but no rules. The practitioner may feel more attracted to Issa and his more subjective tradition, or he/she may be more impressed by Basho and the Shomon School.

With experience, Shiki expected haiku poets to advance beyond the 'sketching' stage to 'extended realism', and later still to 'veracity'. The haiku apprentice would develop in confidence and learn to use a personal style.

Shiki had a number of disciples, the most important of whom were Takahama Kyoshi and Kawahigashi Hekigoto.

Kyoshi was a conservative who established various orthodoxies (strict syllable count, 'season word' (kigo) and 'cutting word' (kireji) both essential. Kyoshi considered the main field of concern to haiku poets to be 'flowers and birds' (kachofuyei.) Themes such as human psychology and social relationships were to him taboo. Not only, in his view, should the haiku poet reproduce Nature in an objective manner, but also with an attitude of admiration and reverence.

Hekigoto, on the other hand, wished to open up a much wider field of reality to poetic exploration. He thought to awaken the suggestive power of haiku, and strove towards 'a close liaison with the universe'.(2)

3 Perception + Knowledge = effective, affective reality

After World War II, haiku in Japan followed various paths, numerous schools were founded, each with its own master. Of particular interest are those schools that broadened haiku perception into areas of human affairs and situations, acknowledging the urban/industrial environments in which most humans lived their lives.

In effect, haiku has followed two diverging paths: the Kyoshi line persists, in which the beauty of Nature are described and lauded, and in which the perceiver

is still (to use Basho's term) 'the five foot child', and withdraws from all other forms of human experience. The Hekigoto line has also persisted, viewing the whole of mankind's creations, and the way most of us now live our lives, not stopping short of political and social institutions, as suitable material for haiku. Poets of the Hekigoto persuasion do not limit themselves to simple observation, and may as a result have made their poetry less like material for contemplation. To perception they have added knowledge. (A simple example of the difference between the two is this: 'the sun rises' is a perception, but it contradicts the known fact that it is actually the Earth that moves, not the sun.)

Examples of haiku going beyond mere perception are those that transcend sensory perception, and deal with experiences that are not necessarily true. 'Knowledge poetry' disconnects itself from any sequence of moments, it relies on a 'sixth sense' or intuition. It can be understood as a collection of experiences of human knowledge, and implies historical time, such as physical space-time.

So, haiku in the Hekigoto line is no longer without guilt. It has leapt into the 'golden pond' of human affairs. It represents both the ugly and the beautiful, perhaps without distinction. It knows Nature and what she has created. It knows history and that this is more than a bedtime story. In Hegelian terms, it is implicated in both the real and the abstract; but it holds on to 'simplicity' as being essential.

Thomas Mann (3) uses the term Wirklichkeit, by which he means reality + imagination, defining it further as 'that which is effective.' Wirklichkeit is a step beyond 'sketches of life'. It integrates the reality of objects with the surreal, with dreams, visions, and fantasies. A fundamental concept in modern haiku poetry is this: perception + knowledge = effective, affective reality.

4 Traditional (dento) versus modern (gendai)

As you will have gathered, the term 'modern' (Japanese gendai) is used, by the Japanese, in an ambiguous way. They may be referring to a period of time, e.g. since Shiki. Or they may be using it to characterise the work of poets who think of themselves as avant-garde, who use the term dentō to distinguish their work from that of conservatives.

Formal features of dento haiku are:

- adherence to season words and a commitment to presentations of Nature
- use of 'cutting words' (kireji)
- a fixed canon of themes
- established associations

Formal features of gendai haiku are:

- use of evocative 'key words' (muki) but no commitment to 'season words' (kigo) as established in the traditional almanac (saijiki)

- involvement with the human world and knowledge of mankind's achievements, including failures
- no fixed canon of themes, but a challenge to go further than has been gone before
- dissociation and disjunction (both formal and in content)

5 Yugen – the 'aroma', or 'flavour' of haiku

Whilst these lists of formal features may seem to separate dento and gendai, they are close relatives in the tone and style they adopt. Aesthetic qualities mark them out as belonging in the same family or genre.

The first, obvious link is economy in the use of images (katakoto). Fragmentary language is used. The vital point is not uttered, but only implied, leaving space for the receiver to distinguish it, or maybe even appreciate ambiguity. Haiku, of whatever period or movement, 'point to the moon but leave the reader to discover it.' A successful haiku begins when it is over, when the reader is free to make his/her own associations. Allied to katakoto is shibumi, that is compression, reduction to what is absolutely necessary.

To these features, each and every haiku, whether dento or gendai, uses juxtaposition of imagery or disjunction of form and content, describing or implying some relationship, but stopping short of straightforward comparison, as in a simile. The haiku is in fact a 'relationship-oriented poem', it implies possible new connections and relationships between humans and phenomena.

The haiku of both schools are intentionally poetic when they use techniques such as assonance, alliteration, repetition, rhythm.

But what all haiku have in common, beyond formal similarities, is a special kind of mood or tone. We may summarise these under the heading yugen: a quality of mysterious beauty, something intangible.

Basho was on the track of this when he said, 'the taste of haikai is sabi', which has been translated as 'beautiful, but with a sense of loneliness', 'compassion', or 'the pity of things'. (4)

Every haiku that has ever claimed our attention will surely have had this intangible quality of mysterious beauty.

6 Conclusion

The kinship between 'traditional' and 'modern' haiku is evident in these features:

- brevity and reduction (katakoto, shibumi)
- implication (yakusoku-goto)
- juxtapositioning (kire, haigo)

•aroma (yugen)

To fulfil itself as a relationship-oriented poem, haiku needs to combine perception and knowledge. It is now, and always will be, in a state of evolution, yet at the same time timeless. To quote Basho once more, 'that which is unchangeable is in itself continually changing.' (5)

Notes

1 Ban'ya Natsuishi, Modernity and Anti-Urbanism in Matsuo Basho, Kad 3/1, June 2014.

2 Udo Wenzel, Haiku am Scheideweg, Tübingen, 2006

3 Thomas Mann, Doktor Faustus, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1960.

4 e.g. William J Higginson, The Haiku handbook, Kodansha, 1985. Also Joan Giroux, The Haiku Form, Tuttle, 1974.

5 Haruo Shirane, Traces of Dreams, Stanford UP, 1998.