THE TREE AS IT IS

New and Selected Haiku Poetry

By Bernard Lionel Einbond
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Some of the poems in this collection first appeared in the following publications:

Modern Haiku; Frogpond; Mainichi Daily News; Timepieces: Haiku Week-at-a-Glance 1994; Haiku Moment (1993); Iga-Ueno Basho Festival Anthology (1993); An Anthology of Haiku by People of the United States and Canada (1988).

We thank our father's and husband's friends Eileen Allman, George Braman, and Agnes Davidson, his aunt Edna Parsont, and our editor Jim Kacian, for helping to bring this book to fruition.
We thank our father and husband for the gift of his poetry.

—Aaron, Julia, and Linda Einbond

Soffietto Editions

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Bernard Lionel Einbond: An Appreciation

“Sadly, I part from you;
Like a clam torn from its shell,
I go, and autumn too.”

Bashō

He would have liked it to be brief, this appreciation. Bernard was a “maker,” in the true sense that poets are makers. As Robert Frost said, poets get their knowledge “cavalierly,” they “let what will stick to them like burrs where they walk in the fields.” The haiku was a form natural to Bernard, with his keen perception and delicate insight. It was also natural to him because of its brevity, its ability to say much succinctly, just as he did in conversation.

In the trim structural space of the haiku, he was innovative, playing on Bashō’s famous poem of the frog and the old pond, turning it into something fresh and unique, as well as paying a tribute. And he was original, using his knowledge of musical composition and refrain to do new and exciting things with the English haiku. One clear example is the recurring refrain in haiku on pages 9, 53, and 69 of
his daughter’s “plain brown hair in morning sunshine,” all three poems similar yet slightly different. This ability to blend an imagist sensibility with variation in a minimalist pattern sets him apart. And there is always the call to tradition, not only to his direct forebears, as in the translations and in the haiku on page 25, “the tree as it is,” but to other artists as well.

But I have already said too much. I can almost see Bernard smiling at my “scholarly” attempt to capture the essence of his genius. No paraphrase or explication does it justice. The best thing is to enjoy the poems for what they are, “the tree as it is.”

—George Braman

January 1999

New York City
in memory of

Anna Einbund Feldman (1891-1976)  
and Joseph Feldman (1891-1990)

aunt and uncle of the author  
and of American composer

Morton Feldman (1926-1987)
THE TREE AS IT IS
Silences
frog pond—
a leaf falls in
without a sound
silence
of the leaves' shadows
even in wind

still life—
apples and pears
as they appear
high straight sky
between twin towers—
day receding

the same tonight
eyes open or closed—
so dark

first drops
on parched earth—
rain
rain forest—
only the shadows
move silently

wings
in fog
lifting
the thousand colors
in her plain brown hair—
morning sunshine
from a budding branch,
a lark arises—
spring dawn

Pittsburgh—
the green of the rivers,
the green of the hills
for miles and miles
and miles the sameness of
fields of dry grass

how noisy
it must be up close—
the sun

twin high towers
against straight sky—
night advancing
still roving
over parched fields—
wanderers' dreams

by the casket
no words—
two silences
the silence between
the lightning and the thunder—
everything waits
Centuries Ago
in the early mist
visiting Asakusa
centuries ago
we choose a small doll
at a centuries-old stall—
Asakusa

Haruno tells me
as she serves me a sliced pear
her name means spring field
at Asakusa
the view from the temple steps—
snow falling in June

over a barren branch,
a clock drooping—
memory persists

Broadway in the Forties—
knowing I was seeing things
a child should not see
in the New York rain,
the pavement darkens its grey—
yellow taxicabs

after the rainfall,
following an ice-cream stick
in the gutter stream
Coney Island—
the boardwalk and the ocean
as they were
bootprints in fresh snow—
a young boy looking backward
at where he has been

long corridors
of the school I attended
still haunting my dreams
far away summer—
at my bedtime still daylight—
wanting to go home

hands to his ears—
covering, uncovering—
noise of the subway
Old Master portrait—
whichever way I go
its eyes follow me

in the museum,
this three-thousand-year-old comb,
so clearly a comb

waiting for the end—
in the stationmaster’s hut
at Astapovo
leaves frayed on its boughs—
not for fruit or for blossom—
the tree as it is
Translations
Twelve Haiku

adapted from the Japanese of

Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694)
first winter showers—
monkey, too, for a small straw coat
must be yearning

hatsushigure saru mo komino wo hoshigenari
first snow:
daffodil leaves
just tipping

hatsuyuki ya  suisen no ha no  tawamu made
cooling, so cooling,
with a wall against my feet,
midday sleep—behold

hiyabiya to  kabe wo fumaete  hirune kana
no one viewing
this spring: the back of the mirror's
plum blossoms

hito mo minu  haru ya kagami no  ura no ume
no bells ringing
how does this village greet
spring dusk?

kane tsukanu sato wa nani wo ka haru no kure
the moon clear—
a fox startles a boy
I accompany

tsuki sumu ya  kitsune kowagaru  chigo no tomo
the summer grasses:
of mighty war-lord's visions
all that they have left

natsugusa ya  tsuwamono domo ga  yume no ato
clouds now and again
give a soul some respite from
moon-gazing—behold

kumo ori-ori  hito ni yasumuru  tsukimi kana
refinement's origin:
the remote north country's
rice-planting song

furyu no  hajime ya oku no  taue uta
shortly to die—
revealing no sign of it,
the cicada’s cry

*yagate shinu  keshiki wa miezu  semi no koe*
on my travels, stricken—
my dreams over the barren earth
go on roving

tabi ni yande  yume wa kareno wo  kake meguru
an old pond—
a frog tumbles in—
the water's sound

furuike ya  kawazu tobikomu  mizu no oto
Changing Direction
another season—
pausing at a halfway house—
changing direction
dream interrupted—
trying to recapture it—
unsuccessfully

in mid-November,
a day that has strayed here from
another season
the village children
ask if they may feel again
the soles of my feet

empty soda cans—
of the storm in the desert
all that they have left

the locomotive
of the train I am riding
as it makes a turn
home from a business trip,
everything as it was
except the children

walks down to the sea
and with a sudden movement
bends to wet her wrists
morning sunshine—
in her plain brown hair
a thousand colors
subway car—
choosing the seat too small for
someone to have slept on

still recognizing
a classmate from high school who
certainly has changed
he hears her complaint
with politeness—but I catch
his mischievous glance

improper to ask
how he acquired the scar
half across his neck
as I step outdoors
the brightness of the daytime
causes me to sneeze

a campus squirrel
nibbling a Peppermint Patty
with practiced ease

the curtains drawn closed
a sliver of light admits
a bit of Monday
on the wet sidewalk
a fallen brown leaf regains
a green shape
Seeking the Moment
seeking the moment—
knowing it must come to me—
much time spent waiting
my favorite name—
my mother’s, now my daughter’s—
Julia

in the gutter where
a truck leaked oil, the children
find rainbows
its edges curled up
a leaf falls to the water
circling as it floats

as the train pulls out
a child flattening her nose
against the window
tossing from the deck
crumbs to be caught
by gulls in mid-air

there in the distance
the Statue of Liberty—
on deck my eyes moist

my dreams run about—
getting up to capture them
with pad and pencil
blue water—
each drop of it
colorless
the old violin
even when not being played
a thing of beauty

this doll from Kyoto
my daughter—my son, too—loves
its delicacy
giggles in the dark—
three sisters in one bedroom—
close all their lives

identical layout—
the apartment downstairs
where my best friend lived

a movie seen last
when I was five—never since—
remembering it
first meeting of class—
matching the names with faces—
each face different

people here as one—
the news of John Lennon's death—
above us only sky
the thousand colors
of my daughter's plain brown hair
in morning sunshine
Notes

13. “In the early mist”. Asakusa has been a shopping district of Tokyo for over three hundred years.

15a. “At Asakusa”. In the famous print by Hiroshige of the view from the temple steps, it is snowing.

15b. “Over a barren branch”. After Dali’s painting The Persistence of Memory.

20c. “Waiting for the end”. Tolstoy died in the station-master’s hut at Astapova.

21. “Leaves frayed on its boughs”. The tree from which Basho took his name bears no fruit.

25. To sound less old-fashioned, I offer an alternate version with the word kana translated more loosely. I think the words “just so” provide the right emphasis and feeling.

cooling, so cooling,
with a wall against my feet
midday sleep—just so

41b. “A day that has strayed here [from] another season.” Marcel Proust, A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.

55b. 57a–59a. Bernard Lionel Einbond’s wife and children have added seven haiku to “Seeking the Moment” from misplaced drafts for this book.
BERNARD LIONEL EINBOND (1937-1998), charter member of the Haiku Society of America and its President in 1975, died August 14, 1998, after a long struggle with cancer. In a professional life various as disc jockey and textual editor, Professor Einbond taught in the Departments of English at Lehman College since 1964 and Columbia University, chairing the department at the former from 1976-9. Poetry scholar and authority on popular music, he was contributing editor for Song Lyrics of Columbia University Press's *World of Quotations* on CD-ROM. It is, however, as a poet that we know him best. He was Grand Prize Winner in the Japan Air Lines International Haiku Contest in 1987-8, also a Keats Poetry Prize and Haiku Society of America Merit Book Award winner. He published *The Coming Indoors and Other Poems* (Charles E. Tuttle Co.) in 1979, and a chapbook, *The Tree As It Is*, in 1994, which was the predecessor to the present volume.
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This volume is a collection of haiku from Bernard Lionel Einbond, charter member and past president of the Haiku Society of America and award-winning poet. It includes 12 new translations of poems from the Japanese as well as the poems which made Einbond one of the best known practitioners and teachers of haiku in the English language.