

A Cultivated Vision :
The Currency of Bashō and Pound
(Japanese Tradition and the Making of Modern
Poetry, Part Two)

Scott T. WELLMAN

There are, I'm quite sure, very few people who think that they could not write a haiku if one was required of them. After all, there is not that much involved, three lines of a 5—7—5 syllabic count that render an event, or scene observed in the natural world, without comment or moral. Simplicity itself. In the 1960's it became popular in American classrooms to introduce poetry through the study of haiku ; school children, primarily those on the Junior High School levels, looked at a few examples and then had at it. The results of their efforts were gathered by their teachers and put together not infrequently in some sort of publication ; and the children were praised for their "creativity," and for their ability to be "one with nature" as it was often put. You see, there really isn't anything to it ; children can produce poetry that competes with anything in those anthologies put together by Harold Stewart or Ken Yasuda, though perhaps they 're not as adept at rhyming as the accomplished Stewart (who decided that haiku fit best into English as rhymed couplets). But the children could see, they could teach us to see ! So the testimony went with plenty of exclamation points. The verses produced were, for the most part, precious at best, and when not lost among the readily available transcendentals of the starry-eyed, moral at worst. As examples we can cite from the haiku of the "foremost" haiku poet in English, James Hackett, who won accolades from the likes of Alan Watts and Jack Kerouac, among others:

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reliance on words. The nineteenth chapter, or case, of this text contains the following colloquy :

Jōshū asked Nansen, "What is the way?" Nansen answered, "Your ordinary mind,—that is the way." Jōshū said, "Does it go in any particular direction?" Nansen replied, "The more you seek after it, the more it runs away." Jōshū : "Then how can you know it is the Way?" Nansen : "The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is illusion. Not knowing is lack of discrimination. When you get to this unperplexed Way, it is like the vastness of space, an unfathomable void, so how can it be this or that, yes or no?" Upon this Jōshū came to a sudden realisation⁵¹.

平常心是道

Your ordinary mind,—that is the Way.

Bashō wrote :

Coming along the mountain path
I find something endearing
About violets.⁶¹

There is no probing here, no dichotomizing. Bashō at one moment finds the morning—glories sufficient, at another, the violets. His way, in as far as he had a conscious one, was contained in a phrase older than Ch'an Buddhism, a phrase that appears in *Chuang Tzu*, namely, "constant sufficiency."⁶² There was no beyond, only this, and that was sufficient to present and to put in relation to other things, other words, all working in the one field of the mind, in the domain of the "Imagination" that William Carlos Williams understood to be poetry's only legitimating ground. The mind—making plunge into what Taoists called the "Boundless," into what Rilke called the

“Open,” into what Heidegger called the “Clearing,” into what Charles Olson called the “Field.” Into, in still other words (of Randall Jarrell’s in the poem “Well Water”) “The daliness of life.”⁸⁾

Bashō drank from this well. The water sprang up from the depths of the Eastern tradition, filtered at its clearest perhaps when it came time for him to dip his cup. He knew what he was tasting and he paid homage to the sources, to his predecessors, both priests and laymen, and those like himself, “neither bird nor rat, but something in between, a bat.”⁹⁾ He had learned a way of seeing, so that when he travelled he did not merely “follow in the footsteps of the men of old,” rather he sought “what they sought.”¹⁰⁾ Which was, as Ezra Pound was among the first in the West to articulate, the “luminous detail,” the “radiant node,” the “image,” the “vortex” which invited the plunge; the vortex “from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.”¹¹⁾ Ideas, which are no more than things, Williams perceived, things in the mind as words, making a way to see. An amateur geologist and critic of the painted form, John Ruskin, was one of the first to understand the importance of perception as the Western mind in the nineteenth century began to adapt itself to things as they are, rather than as they should be, to an aesthetic of authenticity rather than one of sincerity, to an ontology of being, rather than a metaphysic of Truth. He wrote :

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion all in one. ¹²⁾

* * *

If the first great wave of Japanese influence crested in the second decade of this century with the association of haiku and its aesthetic with the Imagistic poem and its doctrine, the second great wave swept to our shores in the fifties and crested as the seventies opened,

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with haiku again, but not only. This time it was, as Earl Miner has put it somewhat acidly in the 1966 preface to the second edition of *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, "haiku cum Zen." This wave was generated primarily by an Englishman, R. H. Blyth, who arrived in Japan in 1940, having studied Zen in Korea, and who proceeded, under the dominant influence of D. T. Suzuki (the greatest proselytizer of Buddhism to the West), to study and write about everything there was to know concerning haiku. His first two works, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*, and a four volume translation and commentary on the best of Japanese *Haiku*, were the sources of the wave. Blyth's approach is in total concurrence with the words of Ruskin cited above; only he contends that this "one" is epitomized by haiku, haiku "to be understood from the Zen point of view.¹³⁾" The scale of his claims for haiku can be measured by these words from the preface of his first volume of *Haiku* :

Haiku have a simplicity that is deceptive both with regard to their depth of content and to their origins, and it is the aim of this and succeeding volumes to show that haiku require our purest and most profound spiritual appreciation, for they represent a whole world, the Eastern World, of religious and poetic experience. Haiku is the final flower of all Eastern culture; it is also a way of living.¹⁴⁾

Scholars, more likely than not, choked on this kind of ardent avowal, but students, both the impressionable and the more sober-minded searchers, ate it up. It was not that Blyth himself became that much of a best-seller on campuses, it was more the people who read him who disseminated his enthusiasm for "haiku cum Zen." People like J. D. Salinger, whose books, especially *Franny and Zooey*, are alive with the wisdom of the East and the West in references and allusions that are among Blyth's favorite. Blyth's eclecticism is Salinger's.

One that is bound by the single vortex of Zen :

It is a world power, for in so far as men live at all, they live by Zen. Wherever there is a poetical action, a religious aspiration, a heroic thought, a union of the nature within a man and the Nature without, there is Zen.¹⁴⁾

Franny and Zooey was published as two separate stories in *The New Yorker* in '55 and '57 to the greatest response that magazine ever received to any of its pieces. When the stories appeared in one volume in 1961, the reception was overwhelming. The book went through twelve printings in one year alone, and the Bantam paperback edition, which did not appear until 1964, has gone through 33 printings as of February, 1979. What were people in search of? Not only in Salinger, but in that other bane of scholars, Alan Watts, and in the poet whom he designated as his “dharma heir,” Gary Snyder, Zen revolutionary ecologist, trumpeter of Paleolithic culture? What beside all the fashionable elements? A recipe for wisdom, transcendental flight, revolutionary zeal, inspired company, unconventional truth—telling, middle—class antipodes, energy. But also a way to live, that began with a way to see; how to make contact, how to connect. Citing Wordsworth, Blyth called it “seeing into the life of things.”

Haiku record what Wordsworth calls those “spots of time,” those moments which for some quite mysterious reason have a peculiar significance. There is a unique quality about the poet’s state of feeling on these occasions; it may be very deep, it may be rather shallow, but there is a ‘something’ about the external things, a ‘something’ about the inner mind which is unmistakable.¹⁶⁾

There can be little doubt that Blyth was the first Westerner to

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explore the full dimensions of the haiku art and aesthetic, and that his scholarship and translation skills set the standard for all further exploration into the field, as by Earl Miner for one, in his *Japanese Poetic Diaries* and *Japanese Linked Poetry*. But though all scholars of Japanese literature are fully aware of the Zen influence on Japanese culture since the 13th century, none claim so much for haiku as Blyth. Though Blyth is occasionally given to disclaimers such as this :

I understand Zen and poetry to be practically synonyms, but as I said before, if there is ever imagined to be any conflict between Zen and the poetry of haiku, the Zen goes overboard ; poetry is the ultimate standard.¹⁷⁾

And like many Western Zen apologists he also is given to guilty confessions of disservice to Zen by his unremitting reference to it. The sins of a proselytizer, which are the music of the spheres to the rapt disciple. But the time comes to integrate the gospel, and go on with the task of living. Then we'll do as Blyth suggests, drop the Zen (at least the Zen of the conjurors, and the salesmen, the Zen of those who cannot distinguish between "gesture" and "style" as Oppen reminds us¹⁸⁾) and proceed with the poetry, the way of seeing, that Blyth, one feels, genuinely understands and communicates, albeit with a brush too heavily loaded. Williams once said that when it comes to poetry, the metaphysical takes care of itself. Blyth would have been better advised to have trusted his readers to understand that simplicity.

* * *

We catch up with Ezra Pound where he learned to soar again, at Pisa, below Mt. Taishan (as he called the dominating peak in the region), the holy mountain of China, symbol of the united kingdom of heaven and earth. Here Pound reaffirmed a faith that had but-

tressed the parimeters of the vorticist conception, a faith that upheld "our kinship to the vital universe, to the tree and the living rock¹⁹⁾" A faith in measure, both of the line of poetry that he re-established as his signature ("To break the pentameter, that was the first heave"), and in man's place ("Learn of the green world what can be thy place/In scaled invention or true artistry"). In the cage at Pisa Pound regained his sympathies for his "kin." It was time for him to recall to mind what he loved, to sift though his past, and to find what "remains" and what will continue.

"For forty years," he had written some months before, "I have schooled myself . . . to write an epic poem which begins 'in the Dark Forest,' crosses the Purgatory of human error, and ends in the light" And the time had came to write his "Paradise": here: "Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell" (81/521: 556).²⁰⁾

In these Cantos Pound recites his own history as our collective history; he makes of his own life a vortex though which we peer into the flux of time. He is Odysseus trying to come home, home to what Heidegger once called the "House of Being." And thus water spills, falls, flows though these songs, and we listen not so much to the voice that will never leave off disputation even in Paradise, but to its measure:

Serenely in the crystal jet
as the bright ball that the fountain tosses
(Verlaine) as diamond clearness
How soft the wind under Taishan
where the sea is remembered
out of hell, the pit
out of the dust and glare evil
Zephyrus/Apeliota

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This liquid is certainly a
property of the mind
nec accidens est but an element
in the mind's make up (74)

"The sage" indeed "delighteth in water" (88) as the leveler of all things—it is the bond that links the animate with the inanimate, it is the common source and the common end. And it springs up from the well, the well around which people build their settlement and begin to cultivate the fields, to sing songs, get drunk, forget themselves, have children, move on :

as he was standing below the altars
of the spirits of rain
"when every hollow is full
it moves forward"
to the phantom mountain above the cloud (83)

In all this movement the stillness at the center which was from Confucius, the "unwobbling pivot." This was also the stillness of the very old, of what Rilke calls "our initiator" in his *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Pound traces culture back through nature and celebrates the continuum; energy is never dissipated, simply recombined in fresher patterns, made new :

The roots go down to the river's edge
and the hidden city moves upward
white ivory under the bark. (83)

Fluency : Pound saw the current moving through water, Bashō saw it moving through air—both recognized where poetry begins. Bashō offered this to his hosts :

The beginning of culture !
Rice—planting songs
In the innermost part of the country.²¹⁾

So Robert Aitken, a close student of Blyth's, renders what Cid Corman, a close follower of Ezra Pound's, has put more compactly (the spondee, says Kenner, is Pound),

fūryū's
beginning Oku's
rice—planting song²²⁾

We need notes for the second version, notes that Bashō's audience would not have needed to understand *fūryū* to mean cultivated, refined, elegant ; thus, *fūryū na hito*, a person of resources, a person in touch, someone who sees : *fūryū*: fū 風 the wind, ryū 流 its flowing, or current—the fluency of the wind, the song the women sing as they rhythmically plant the rice seedlings in the flooded fields to the accompaniment of men blowing wind through flutes, and pounding drums. That's where our song comes from says Bashō, those are my people too, farmers who have done what they have always done, who trace back the roots to the river, where undifferentiated time flows.

There was no pose in Bashō. As much as Pound or Williams he was making it new, culminating a process which had brought poetry to the so—called unrefined, to the farmer and the merchant, who participated in poetry as if it were a game, and not the deadly serious affair of unattending scholars or the posturing cadences of sodden dilettanti. Bashō was known as the greatest of *hokku* composers. The haiku that we have of his are what are technically known as *hokku*, the first stanza which begins a sequence of stanzas, usually 36 in a formal setting, composed by three or four poets who

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alternate contributions of three and two lines to make a *haiku no renga*, which came to be known as *renku*, or linked verse. We read in the fourteenth section of the *Oku no Hosomichi* that Bashō's poem about *fūryū* led to further stanzas contributed by the local poet Tōkyū and others, to the end that three sequences were composed. In the nineteenth century *hokku* became the more or less detached art of haiku, a poetic form deprived of context. But for Bashō poetry interrelated to the environment, it was part of the ecology that the nineteenth century West would discover as a science, and as an aesthetic, beginning with the Symbolists. Bashō brought one of Japan's most enduring genres, (since the tenth century) the poetic travel diary, to its highest form of accomplishment by mining the history of his "tribe," and by purifying the "tongue" in the process. He did for Japan what Pound advanced for America and the West, he focused the eye, and found and made luminous details for the eye to attend on.

Within the welter of much of Pound's splayed ends in the Cantos, within all that mass of allusion and personal reference, within the most idiosyncratic of histories, are the lines that hold the rigging to the masts and hold us breezily (almost) on course :

And now the ants seem to stagger
as the dawn sun has trapped their shadows,
this breath wholly covers the mountains
it shines and divides
it nourishes by its rectitude
does no injury
overstanding the earth it fills the nine fields
to heaven (83)

The detail of those ants renders the whole, the relativity of the scene, as well as Pound's own individual position. Within this overfilling

light the “trapped shadow” is himself, pinned down—his shadow, his soul outstanding in the light, helpless, at mercy. Thus his humility, that runs through his Pisan compositions, that closes the Cantos:

I have tried to write Paradise

Do not move

Let the wind speak

That is paradise

Paradise which is, for the Buddhist, in the West where the sun goes down, where Tennyson's Ulysses sought to go without end. In the fifteenth section of the *Oku no Hosomichi*, Bashō reads paradise into a tree, the chestnut 栗, made up of one part west 西 and one part tree 木. Under this tree sits a monk, “completely out of things” doing what Gautama had done so long ago. But from this tree travelers had carved their walking sticks, the post that Bashō used to hold up his house. For Bashō too could never put an end to travel, to the “things of the heart”—

Moon & sun are passing figures of countless generations, and years coming or going wanderers too. Drifting life away on a boat or meeting age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey and journey itself home. Amongst those of old were many that perished upon the journey. So—when was it—I, drawn like brown cloud, couldnt stop dreaming of roaming . . .²⁴⁾

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NOTES

- 1) James Hackett, *Haiku Poetry*, v. IV, p. 12.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 3) George Oppen, "The Occurrences," *Collected Poems*, p. 126.
- 4) R. H. Blyth, *Haiku*, v. I, p. 97.
- 5) Blyth, *Mumonkan, Zen and Zen Classics*, v. IV, p. 147.
- 6) Robert Aitken, *A Zen Wave*, p. 109.
- 7) Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 11.
- 8) Randall Jarrel, "Well Water," *The Complete Poems*, p. 300.
- 9) Ryusaku Tsunoda, et. al., eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 447.
- 10) *Ibid.*, pp. 446—7.
- 11) Quoted in Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 185.
- 12) Quoted in Kenner, *A Homemade World*, p. 96.
- 13) Blyth, *Haiku*, v. I, p. iii.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. iii.
- 15) Blyth, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*, p. vii.
- 16) Blyth, *Haiku*, v. I, p. vii.
- 17) *Ibid.*, p. v.
- 18) See Oppen, "The Gesture." *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- 19) Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 146.
- 20) *Ibid.*, p. 475.
- 21) Aitken, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
- 22) Cid Corman, Kamaike Susumu, *Back Roads to Far Towns, Bashō's Oku no Hosomichi*, p. 41.
- 23) *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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北 星 論 集 20 号 正 誤 表

頁	誤	正
109	(本文16行目) so <u>caugh</u> up	so <u>caught</u> up
111	(本文 3行目) much <u>involed</u> ,	much <u>involved</u> ,
226	([リ]の部 2行目) : An <u>Error</u>	: An <u>Error</u>