Temple Bells Die Out Study Guide

Temple Bells Die Out by Matsuo Bashō

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Introduction

"Temple Bells Die Out" is a haiku that was written by the Japanese poet Basho¯, who is credited with developing the haiku form from a light humorous verse based on word play into an evocative, philosophical statement. Basho¯ used descriptions of common scenes from nature to make allegories about life. "Temple Bells Die Out" was written between 1686-1691, a period in which Basho¯ wrote his most renowned haiku. Written in a style which Basho¯ both developed and favored, the haiku has only seventeen syllables and often contrasts two objects with no apparent similarities. In "Temple Bells Die Out," Basho¯ contrasts the sound of bells ringing through the evening with the smell of flower blossoms. His description of the transient sound of the bells and the enduring fragrance of the flowers suggests the disparate aspects of life which combine to give it form.

Author Biography

Little information exists about Basho¯'s early life. The son of a low-ranking samurai, Basho¯ is generally believed to have been born in 1644 in the Iga province of Japan. Basho¯ became a page to, and formed a close friendship with, Todo Yoshitada, a young samurai two years his elder. Yoshitada shared Basho¯'s intense interest in haikai, a form of long poem from which haiku derives. Intending to become a samurai himself, Basho¯ acquired the samurai name Munefusa, but he abandoned his training when Yoshitada died unexpectedly in 1666. Scholars believe both grief over his friend's death and apprehension about a new, less amicable master led Basho¯ to abandon his career as a samurai. Some also include an unhappy love affair as a factor that hastened his departure, although others consider this theory a fabrication of Basho¯'s early biographers. What Basho¯ did during the next several years is unknown, but he is believed to have lived for some time in Kyoto, which was then the capital of Japan, studying philosophy and poetry. Basho¯'s poetry was published in at least four anthologies between 1667 and 1671. He moved to Edo (present-day Tokyo) in 1672 and began to write under the pseudonym Tosei. His reputation as a haiku master steadily increased in Edo, and he began to attract a large following of disciples, who supplied him with a small hut in which he could write and teach. A banana tree, exotic to Japan, was planted in front of the hut and pleased the poet so much that he took for his writing name "Basho¯," the Japanese word for "banana plant."

After about eight years, Basho¯ increasingly felt a sense of purposelessness and spiritual disquiet after achieving artistic and material success. Consequently, he began the study of Zen Buddhist meditation and embraced an ascetic lifestyle. Seeking an exercise in spiritual and artistic discipline, in 1684, Basho¯ undertook a pilgrimage on foot across the Japanese countryside. Although this journey proved to be physically trying for him, for the remainder of his life, Basho¯ continued to make pilgrimages, visiting religious and secular sites, disseminating his ideas on haiku to fellow poets, and often begging alms for subsistence. His accounts and haiku recollections of these travels, especially *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*, are considered his most accomplished and lasting literary works. When he was not on a journey, Basho¯ secluded himself in remote huts in the wilderness, until 1691 when he returned to Edo. Finding himself again besieged by followers, Basho¯ struggled with a spiritual conflict between his religious desire to transcend worldly affairs and his poetic avocation, which focused attention upon himself. Basho¯ left Japan in 1693 to escape this conflict, but he returned the following year to begin a series of travels along the country's Pacific coast. That spring, his health forced Basho¯ to stop in Osaka, where he died of a stomach ailment in the summer of 1694.

Poem Text

Temple bells die out.
The fragrant blossoms remain.
A perfect evening!

Plot Summary

Line 1

In the haiku" Temple Bells Die Out" Matsuo Basho¯ describes dusk as an observer sitting in a Japanese garden might have experienced it. In line 1 the poet describes the sound of the bells ringing from a nearby temple. They chime out and then echo leaving silence to envelop the evening.

Line 2

In line 2, however, the fragrance of the cherry blossoms, in contrast to the sound of the bells, remains in the night air. The contrast between the two apparently dissimilar objects is complex. The first is a sound, the second a smell. The sound of the bells lasts a short time, the blossoms and their perfume linger.

Line 3

In line 3 Matsuo Basho¯ unites the two images, claiming that they are part of one larger whole. Although dissimilar they each function to produce "a perfect evening." At one level Matsuo Basho¯ describes a peaceful seemingly perfect evening, a common scene that many of his readers would have themselves experienced. However, he uses this scene to illustrate the way in which all aspects of life must play their individual roles and yet unite to create a perfect whole.

Themes

Nature

Haiku often contains "season" words, called *kigo*, that signify a time of year. Japan was an agricultural society in the seventeenth century, and its people were attuned to changes in the seasons and the rhythms of nature. Most of the *kigo* in Japanese haiku refer to plants. The "fragrant blossoms" tell readers it is spring or summer, evoking a sense of vitality and well being, and the feeling of being one with nature, both essential features of Basho¯'s haiku.

Knowledge

Haiku often change a person's understanding or recognition of life by describing ordinary events or objects in new ways. Basho¯ accomplishes this in his poem by juxtaposing the fading sound of bells ringing and the sensation of fragrant blossoms. Both of these images were familiar to seventeenthcentury readers. The relationship of the first image to the second suggests concession. So, if the two lines were written as prose, there would be a concessive subordinator, as such: "Although temple bells die out, the fragrant blossoms remain." Reconstructing the haiku this way suggests the poem is commenting on the natural cycles of life and death. One thing dies, but another lives. However, there is no causal relationship between temple bells dying and blossoms remaining fragrant; they both "happen" in the same instant, and in this way are part of the same eternal moment, perfect in themselves, and perfect, like the evening.

Basho¯'s concept of *sabi* is also evident in the poem. *Sabi* refers to the speaker's awareness of the evanescence of all things. Not only is this idea depicted in the image of temple bells dying, a metaphor for their diminishing volume, but also it is present in the image of fragrant blossoms remaining, for the reader knows that even these blossoms will fade in time. The image of "evening" similarly evokes *sabi*, for it highlights the fact that all "perfect" moments are transient, like life itself.

Religion

"Temple Bells Die Out" evokes the sensation of loss, even as it suggests that the very idea of possessing anything is an illusion. By focusing on his perceptions rather than himself, Basho¯ illustrates the importance of selflessness in haiku and in life. Literature was a kind of religion for Basho¯, who studied Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism, and was also a student of Zen Buddhism. In haiku, Basho¯ saw a way to live. He called this the way of elegance, which had its own set of values, the primary one being to elevate life to an art form.

Style

"Temple Bells Die Out" is written in haiku, a Japanese form of poetry. The modern haiku consists of three lines with a total of 17 syllables. The first and third lines consist of five syllables and the second line is comprised of seven syllables. Although haikus are short, they are challenging to write. Their very brevity requires the poet to be efficient and selective with word choice. Japanese haiku, like "Temple Bells Die Out," use images of nature to consider larger messages about life and spirituality.

Historical Context

The Edo Period in Japan lasted from 1600 to 1868, beginning with Tokugawa Ieyasu's founding of the shogunate at Edo, now Tokyo. Tokugawa Ieyasu was named Shogun by the emperor. A shogun is a supreme military leader, and a shogunate is the period during which respective shoguns reigned, and the place where they established their reign. Edo shogunate was Japan's last. It was preceded by Kamakura shogunate and Muromachi shogunate. Tokugawa Ieyasu revolutionized the way Japan was governed by eliminating the feudal system, establishing a military government in Edo, and encouraging trade with the Dutch and English in the early part of the century. However, in 1635 Shogun Iemitsu, Tokugawa Ieyasu's successor, forbade traveling abroad and limited trade to the port of Nagasaki, so Japan traded only with the Chinese and Dutch. Shogun Iemitsu was fearful that foreign influence would destabilize Japanese society. Despite the isolation, however, the Japanese economy thrived, and along with it, Japanese art and literature such as kabuki, ukiyo-e, and haiku, which many historians claim originated with Basho¯. An increase in urban education and the development of the merchant class helped to create a readership and distribution system for much of the new literature. The Edo itself was defined by a rigid class system, with the samurai at top, followed by artisans, farmers, and merchants, and a code of behavior dictated daily life, from such details as what one could wear to whom one could marry.

In the mid 1670s, Basho¯ lived in Edo, where he studied Zen Buddhism under the priest, Butcho, and edited a collection of poetry called *The Seashell Game*. During this period, Basho¯ cultivated students who, like himself, had also dropped out of samurai society, the highest class in Japanese society. Literary historians believe Basho¯ wrote "Temple Bells Die Out" between 1686-1691, when the poet traveled through the northern provinces of Honshu, gathering material for *Narrow Road to the Interior*, a travelogue of poetry and prose.

The ban on Western literature was lifted in 1720, and by the end of the eighteenth century, the Edo shogunate had begun its decline. The financial system was deteriorating because of ongoing natural disasters such as famine and because of the government's harsh taxing of farmers, who rioted in response. The merchant class began to exert more power, while the status of the samurai class continued to erode. The merchants were consolidated in cities, especially Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto. In 1700, Edo had a population of more than one million, while Osaka and Kyoto had about 400,000. A decline of morals and an increase in corruption marked the second half of the Edo period, but the government continued its ban on contact with foreigners. It was not until 1853 that the Tokugawa government finally relented and opened a few of its ports to an American, Commodore Perry. The Tokugawa shogunate fell in 1868 as American warships cruised off the coast of the country, and as an angry nationalist movement rose up against the shogunate. With Emperor Meiji restored to imperial power, America had access to a huge new market for its goods.

Critical Overview

Critics agree that Basho¯ is primarily responsible for developing the modern style of haiku. Some scholars, like Makoto Ueda in his *Matsuo Basho¯*, claim that Matsuo Basho¯ is the greatest haiku writer. In *Japanese Literature*, Roger Bersihand writes that Basho¯ "made the entertaining epigram into delicate poetry, which suggests rather than expresses an idea, using simple, evocative touches under which is often a profound symbolism." However, critics agree that Matsuo Basho¯ developed his style of poetry throughout his adult years and that his later poetry is notably superior to his earlier efforts.

Critics note two distinct characteristics of poems like "Temple Bells Die Out" which were written between 1686-1691, generally considered the period during which Matsuo Basho¯ wrote his best haiku. First, Matsuo Basho¯ developed the idea of *sabi* or loneliness in his poems. Matsuo Basho¯'s poems are not crowded with descriptions of people and urban life. Rather, they center on the relationship of some small aspect of nature to the larger whole. As Makoto Ueda states in his *Matsuo Basho¯*: "[t]o realize that all living things are evanescent is sad, but when one sees a tiny creature enduring that sadness and fulfilling its destiny one is struck with a sublime feeling." This is the mood that Matsuo Basho¯ is attempting to portray. Secondly, critics note Matsuo Basho¯'s propensity and talent for depicting two dissimilar objects in contrast. And yet, as Makoto Ueda points out in the same book, there is "an implied communication" between the objects in "Temple Bells Die Out." Only through the comparison which forces the reader to reconsider the nature and relationship of the objects is the "hidden interrelatedness" discovered.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Semansky is an instructor of literature whose writing appears regularly in literary journals. In this essay, Semansky considers the imagery in Basho¯'s poem.

Basho¯'s haiku does not lend itself to the strategies that literary critics often use to interpret a poem. For one thing, it is short, very short, and for another it is not full of the figurative language and irony of many western poems, which often require the unpacking of allusions and metaphor. However, Basho¯'s technique, of creating haiku by juxtaposing images from ordinary life with seemingly nothing in common, complicates the act of representation while attempting to simplify it. By writing little, he leaves out much.

The Westernized version of kaiku, or *hokku*, as it was called when Basho¯ practiced, is composed of three lines, which contain five, seven, and five syllables, respectively. Sometimes the haiku contains one image and sometimes two or more, which are juxtaposed and presented with no comment or explanation to link them. This is Basho¯'s technique in "Temple Bells Die Out."

The imagery here is concrete yet generalized. The fading sound of bells provides an aural image, and the adjective "temple" provides readers with a visual image that also resonates with ideas of ritual and ceremony, which was important in Buddhist Japan. Buddhism was introduced to Japan around the sixth century, and the next two hundred years came to be known as the golden age of Japanese arts and crafts. During this time, numerous sculptures of Buddha were cast and placed in the large temples around Japan. As a Zennist, Basho¯ visited many of these temples during his wanderings, and often slept in the rooms they provided for travelers. The sound of ringing temple bells would have been very familiar to him. Also during this time, huge bells were constructed by metalworkers, which were often as impressive as the sculptures. For example, the bell of Todaiji Temple in the city of Nara was made from 33.9 tons of copper and 1.6 tons of tin. To sound them, the bells were hit with a large wooden mallet.

But the fading sound might also be that of smaller bells such as those used in Esoteric Buddhism. Practitioners of this form of Buddhism used a set of five Kongo bells, each symbolizing the five main Buddhas of Esoteric Buddhism, also called the Five Buddhas of Wisdom. Devotees would place the bells in front of the Buddha and ring them during their practice.

In his presentation of Basho¯'s writing, *The Essential Basho*, Sam Hamill notes that haiku contain a *kake kotaba*, or "pivot word," which is like a double entendre□a word or phrase that has more than one meaning. The pivot word in Basho¯'s poem might be "bells," which signifies both the object of the ringing and the shape of a flower's blossoms. Hamill also notes that some forms of literary criticism are of little use in reading Basho¯, but suggests, "surface and core may be useful terms for establishing a necessary dialectic" because "they provide frames of reference." Read this way, the surface of Basho¯'s poem is the sensory details themselves□the ringing and the

fragrance, the details of the ephemeral world. The core is the relationship between the details, the recognition that all sensory experience is illusory, transitory, and that all things perceived, however dissimilar, are part of a greater whole. Evening and perfection are both abstract terms and a fitting "summary" and interpretation of the preceding images.

Linking the sound of bells with the smell of fragrant blossoms and evening suggests that the speaker is outside. The second image is also concrete because it appeals to the sense of smell. However, "fragrant" is a vague adjective. Readers do not know if the fragrance is from a specific plant, such as cherry blossom or rose, or if it is a combination of fragrances from various kinds of blossoms. There is also a flower popular in Japan, a purple iris that is called "temple bells;" this fact adds another association for the contemporary reader of Basho¯'s poem. Whether the speaker is outside or inside, however, is beside the point in Basho¯'s haiku, for Basho¯'s aim was to dissolve the distance between himself and what he perceived to become one with the object. Once this is accomplished, the words come naturally. In his introduction to Basho¯'s, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Nobuyuki Yuasa quotes Basho¯'s explanation of his composing process:

> Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord . . . when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there. However well phrased your poetry may be, if your feeling is not natural if the object and yourself are separate then your poetry is not true poetry but merely your subjective counterfeit.

The work of haiku, then, comes before the act of writing, during the writer's meditation on the subject. A successful haiku cannot be written without the proper attitude and stillness of mind. Basho¯'s technique of leaving the self to become one with the object perceived is similar in some ways to the object of the surrealists, who worked more than two hundred years later. Surrealists also wanted to jettison the conscious self in composing poetry, but instead of being motivated by teachings of Zen Buddhism, they were motivated by Freud and his theories of the unconscious. Imagist poets such as Ezra Pound, practicing in the early twentieth century in the west, owe a debt to Basho¯ and to haiku in their own poetic program. Indeed, critics often refer to Pound's wellknown poem, "In a Station of the Metro" as being haiku-like in its juxtaposition of images.

For contemporary readers of Basho¯, haiku are like photographs. "Temple Bells Die Out" tells a story and provokes thought, but much is hidden. When viewers look at a photograph, they rarely think of the photographer; instead, they focus on the subject of

the photograph. Basho¯'s haiku has the same effect. In eliciting subjective responses from its readers, the poem's images lead them to places they have not been to before.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on "Temple Bells Die Out," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Pool is a published poet and teacher of advanced placement and international baccalaureate senior English. In this essay, Pool identifies four approaches to the understanding of Basho¯'s haiku.

Some students will approach a haiku with delight, and others with despair. A haiku is a tiny fragment that distills a moment's observation. The haiku (plural is also haiku, following Japanese linguistic practice, in which plurals of nouns are not distinguished grammatically in most situations) represents the world's briefest and most concise poetic form, and, depending on the reader's personality, it may strike one as, respectively, trivial, portentous, enigmatic, insightful, sensitive, profound, witty, or perversely nonsensical. Several characteristics of the haiku make problems of interpretation even more acute. Haiku are highly compressed and grammatically incomplete, even in the original Japanese. They contain ambiguities, puns, and evocative diction. A bewildering variety of English translations can result from the same poem. They are often responses to natural phenomena, but they also relate to the poet's psychological or social situation at the occasion of their composition. They are often embedded in contexts, both social and literary, often being written on festive occasions, and also are sometimes found embedded in the context of other literary works, such as Basho¯'s famous travel journal *Oku-No- Hosomichi*. Furthermore, they may employ images that have conventional meanings and connotations that are utterly unknown by the reader who has not studied the Japanese culture and language in some depth. Allusions abound in a type of literature that English-speakers have hardly heard of, much less read. Exotic social customs and unknown holidays are mentioned, and readers need explanations and footnotes to understand the connection between images. Finally, haiku illustrate several kinds of thinking that are often unfamiliar, such as the importance of Buddhist thought and the expression of a Japanese aesthetic that is compelling but unusual. Yet, despite all these obstacles, English translations of Japanese haiku, as well as haiku composed in English, have inspired and stimulated many people, among them not only famous writers and formidable scholars, but also many who are sensitive perceivers and perhaps practitioners of this brief but demanding poetic form.

A haiku can demand that its interpreter take one of several critical paths toward understanding it. The term "critical paths" is used in a deliberately ambiguous sense in this essay, because a critical path is both the method used by a critic, and it is also the determining approach to one's comprehension of the poem. There are four paths toward understanding a haiku. These are generally applicable ways to all literature, but they are particularly clear in addressing a haiku.

The first path is to understand the language of the original. The second path is to know the contexts of the poem. The third path is to comprehend the mind of the poet. The fourth path is to respond to the images of the poem. The first path is to understand the language of the original. Basho¯'s haiku in Japanese reads as follows:

Kane kiete
Hana no ka wa tsuku
Yuube kana.

In Japanese, it would be written as one line; these line breaks are intended to show the natural pauses between the first five, the next seven, and the last five *onjin*, which very roughly correspond with syllables in English. Daniel C. Buchanan has translated this haiku as follows:

Temple bells die out.
The fragrant blossoms remain.
A perfect evening!

The last word in the poem is known as a *kireji*, or "cutting word." These words are, in effect, audible punctuation that indicate such things as emphasis or probability or completion. "Kana" usually occurs at the end of a haiku and is used to convey the author's wonder at a scene or event. In other words, it is the rough equivalent to the exclamation point that Buchanan uses. The first phrase, literally, means "bell / is extinguishing." There is no temple overtly present; this is an assumption on the part of the translator. "Kane" means "bell" or "gong," and it is certainly reasonable to associate them with temples in the seventeenth century, but notice that Buchanan chooses to present an image, which, though quite plausible, is not necessary. Problems of translation abound and are irreducible. Makoto Ueda, in his book *Matsuo Basho*, does not refer to temple bells, but simply to "chimes." On the other hand, the word "hana," which literally means "flower," is conventionally associated with the cherry blossom. In Japanese, a "hanami" is an expedition to look at cherry blossoms, not plum blossoms or peach blossoms. Ueda's second line of his translation is, "cherry fragrance continues." Buchanan, who was born in Japan in 1892 and spoke, read, and wrote in Japanese, was certainly not an inadequate translator. Clearly, he understood that "hana" means "blossom" but unless qualified with another noun the word denotes "cherry blossom." For the poetic purpose of his translation, which works out to have five, seven, and five English syllables per line, he has chosen to spend his precious syllables emphasizing the fragrance of the blossom, and in using the articles "the" and "a" to produce a natural effect in English. Finally, the last line literally says, "evening / !" and could be rendered not only as "A perfect evening!" because perfection is implicit, not expressed, but also as Ueda's straightforward "Evening dusk."

The upshot of taking the first path toward interpretation is a reminder, in the first place, just how speculative any translation of a Japanese haiku must necessarily be. Japanese words mean more, and perhaps sometimes less, than an equivalent English term. Taking this first path requires language study beyond the experience of most casual readers of haiku, but it is essential to grasp what the poem actually says in the original. Perhaps the best strategy for a student unable or unwilling to study Japanese is to locate several different translations of Basho¯ and to compare them. Fortunately, there are a number of English translations available.

The second path is to know the contexts of the poem. To do this, a student must know something about the development of haiku and its formal rules, and it is important to understand something about the distinctive aesthetic sensibilities of the Japanese. Donald Keene, in a delightful and accessible book, *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature*, gives a concise history of Japanese poetry. Though recapitulating his chapter is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to remember that there are cultural and gender factors involved in the development of Japanese poetry and haiku. First, it must be remembered that China was the great civilization of Asia; the Japanese borrowed and adapted many things from China, including its writing system, modified for use in Japanese, a language wholly unrelated to Chinese. The Chinese language was a prestigious language, much as Latin was in medieval and renaissance Europe. Scholars and aristocrats wrote in Chinese, including poetry. But women were not educated in Chinese writing. Among the upper classes, a good number of women were literate in Japanese. Much Japanese poetry is love poetry. For a number of reasons, the Japanese adopted extreme brevity in their poetry. The haiku is the ultimate in brevity. The haiku form, once called *hokku*, was the opening section of a collaborative linked verse called *renku*. Basho¯ took this form, which had to some extent degenerated into ribald punning verse, and put it to his own uses. He used the poetic form as an instrument in his own wandering life, in his search for Buddhist enlightenment. Keene identifies the four most important characteristics of Japanese aesthetics as suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability. These qualities are employed in the service of love and also in the service of Zen Buddhist spirituality. Because of their choice to limit their poetry to brief forms, the Japanese eschewed many possibilities, instead focusing on the significance of a brief, spontaneous insight. Keene says, "Most Japanese poetry written before the twentieth century is devoid of intellectual and social concern, though it beautifully captures emotional states and the poets' perception of nature."

To take the third path of interpretation is to try to understand the mind of the writer. Most students trying to interpret a work of literature will intuitively identify a work's meaning with the intention of the author. This is a commonsense approach, but it has its flaws. Anglo-American literary critics of the middle twentieth century, influenced by the logical positivism then current among philosophers, coined the term "intentional fallacy" for the error of judging the quality and meaning of a work in regard to the author's intention, expressed or implied, in writing it. Not all work has a clear and obvious intent. Sometimes it is clear that a poet may, for example, call men to rally around their king and their country or teach a moral lesson or pronounce some other didactic message. But poetry such as Basho¯'s, is often autoletic, which means that it is non-didactic and has no purpose or intention to do anything in the world. That said, it is possible to understand much about Basho¯ through his mind and writings and the stories his contemporaries told about him.

Basho¯ lived in the seventeenth century. A great deal about the man is clarified through his biography and by a recognition of his typical themes. Ueda and others have identified the term sabi with Basho¯. "Sabi" means "loneliness." This loneliness is expressed both in Basho¯'s life and his writing. He spent many years wandering around. It is true he visited people; he was not a hermit, but there was a deep apart-ness about the man. What seems to have been most important to Basho¯ is a desire for

Buddhist enlightenment, or *satori*. This is a state of sudden awareness. D. T. Suzuki, in his book *Zen Buddhism*, gave the following as characteristics of *satori*: irrationality, intuitive insight, authoritativeness, affirmation, sense of the Beyond, impersonal tone, feeling of exaltation, and momentariness. Zen Buddhism values spontaneity and an immediate and clear perception of reality and a cleansing of the mind of too much rational thought. It is apparent that many of Basho¯'s haiku deal with the oneness of man and nature. Higginson quotes Basho¯, saying, "In writing, do not let a hair's breadth separate yourself from the subject. Speak your mind directly; go to it without wandering thoughts." This haiku works through images and indirection, not through categories and logic and explanation. Basho¯ heard the sound of the bell die away, and he smelled the fragrance of cherry blossoms, and it was a glorious spring evening. And that is all, and that is the such-ness of the world.

The fourth path toward interpretation is the easiest path, and as such, the most misleading, the most likely to lead one to be either lazy or overly inventive. To understand Basho¯'s haiku, a perceptive reader needs to take the images and see where they lead. The first three paths are rigorous approaches to understanding. But there is more to haiku than understanding. Like *satori* itself, it can be talked about, but words do not lead to insight. Still, as a poem, this one has words and images. Basho¯ evokes the faint reverberations, the overtones and undertones, of a bell. Perhaps it is a temple bell, perhaps in a very old shrine, expressing a kind of permanence. And the tones die away. What remains is the fragrance of the cherry blossom. The cherry blossom is the emblem of impermanence. The cherry blooms for only three days. All over Japan, people plant cherry trees for those three glorious days in spring. It comes every year, this constantlyrenewed impermanence. One evening in the seventeenth century, a man who had sharpened his mind by not categorizing, who had sharpened his language through concision and indirectness, who had wandered homeless throughout his country, heard a bell's tone evaporating. But the flowers' aroma still surrounded him. He knew the flowers would fall soon, but not quite yet. He exalted in the glory of the evening. He shared the moment that is all moments. It is a poem of transience and permanence. Ueda, in his book, *Basho and His Interpreters*, quotes Abe Yoshishige regarding a different haiku, but that speaks equally to this, "The poem has captured a moment in which eternity manifested itself in tranquility."

Source: Frank Pool, Critical Essay on "Temple Bells Die Out," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Harries traces briefly the course of Basho¯'s literary prowess as the poet worked within and manipulated tradition Japanese literary styles.

Basho¯ is recognized as one of Japan's greatest literary figures. He transformed haiku from a somewhat frivolous pastime into a serious art form and he remains to this day its greatest exponent. He was in addition a seminal critic and teacher. Though he himself produced only a few works of criticism, many of his critical opinions and comments are preserved in the voluminous notes and accounts of his pupils, particularly Mukai Kyorai and Hattori Doho. Such is the importance of his critical percepts and the example of his poetry that no writer of haiku from his time to the present has been able to escape his influence.

In Basho¯'s own day the haiku was regarded not as a form in itself but as the first stanza (the *hokku*) of a longer poem consisting of up to a hundred linked stanzas written by two or more poets taking turns. Much of Basho¯'s effor was given to this type of composition, known as *renku* or *haikai no renga*, and it was in this field tha the showed his greatest superiority, for he was an unrivalled master at the subtleties of linking stanzas and controlling the changes of pace, mood, and theme, which are the essence of this extremely demanding form.

Basho¯ was also a skilled prose writer. He was as meticulous in his prose as in his verse and virtually forged a new style, in which he integrated prose and poetry to an extent never before achieved. In addition to his few critical commentaries, he produced *haibun*, which are short occasional essays written in the haiku spirit, and travel journals. His *Genjuan no ki* [Essay on the Unreal Dwelling] is a moving apologia for his life and is generally considered the finest *haibun* ever written. His travel journal *Oku no hosomichi* (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*) is his most famous work and one of the masterpieces of Japanese literature, in which he displays his mastery of prose style together with a sure command of form and the highest skill at reshaping events into art.

Basho¯'s greatness lies not only in his technique but in the depth of his probing of life. To him art was a way of life, a search for religious truth, which was to be found in nature: and this search led to continuous development, giving his work a variety that can appeal to all types of reader. Following his move to Edo, his style changed from refined and often artificial wit to genuine humour in more mundane subjects; and on settling at his Basho¯ hermitage he continued this trend towards greater simplicity, objectivity, and description, creating a style of his own. The years of his wanderings saw his creative peak in the style of *sabi* ("lonliness"), in which nature, usually in its most insignificant forms, is shown quietly fulfilling its often bleak destiny. In his final years he turned to *karumi* ("lightness"), an obscure term that seems to imply a more contented attitude of acceptance and less tension within a poem. To some, this step was retrograde, but however it is judged, it shows Basho¯ developing and striving to the end to perfect his art in the light of his philosophy of life.

Source: P. T. Harries, "Basho¯," in *Reference Guide to World Literature*, 3d ed., edited by Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast, Vol. 1, St. James Press, 2003, p. 96.

Adaptations

The video *Haiku: Short Poetry of Japan* (1982) introduces the history of haiku and explores the life and poetry of Basho¯. It is available from the Statewide Educational Resources, Office of Statewide Partnerships, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2800 Grove Avenue, Richmond, VA 23221-2466.

In 1983, Big Sur Tapes released *Poetry East and West*, a two-volume set of audiotapes of Robert Bly reading his own poetry and the poetry of Basho¯, Pablo Neruda, Caesar Vallejo, and the ancient Taoists. The tapes can be purchased by writing to Big Sur Tapes, P.O. Box 4, Tiburon CA 94920.

Topics for Further Study

Where is the speaker standing or sitting in relation to the blossoms and the temple bells? Write a short essay situating the speaker, speculating on what he was doing before and after the bells rang.

In groups, compose a poster depicting Basho¯'s poem and hang it in your classroom.

Write a haiku that "updates" Basho¯'s haiku by describing things that are unmistakably contemporary. Read it to your class and discuss its imagery. Compare yours with others in the class.

Research the history of Zen Buddhism and prepare a short presentation on it to deliver to your class.

Write a short description of your idea of a perfect evening and then exchange yours with a classmate's. In pairs, discuss the differences and similarities and what your description suggests about the things that you value.

Research Basho¯'s and Zen Buddhism's influence on Beat writers Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder and present your research to your class for discussion. Consider issues such as Zen's appeal to writers living in the 1940s and 1950s in America.

Compare and Contrast

Seventeeth Century: Japan bans foreign books and isolates itself from the rest of the world.

Today: Japan is an economic world power, and Tokyo is a cosmopolitan city.

Seventeeth Century: Tokugawa Ieyasu is the most powerful man in Japan and in 1603 is appointed Shogun by the emperor. He establishes his military government in Edo (Tokyo), and Tokugawa shoguns rule Japan for more than 250 years.

Today: Japan has a representative democracy, but its government is dominated by one party the Liberal Democratic Party.

Seventeeth Century: The Tokugawa shogunate oppresses Western religions.

Today: Western religions are practiced in Japan, which has developed a society tolerant of many belief systems.

Seventeeth Century: Buddhism is practiced throughout Japan, but is little known in the West.

Today: Buddhism is becoming increasingly popular in western countries such as the United States, as an increasing number of people seek an alternative religion.

What Do I Read Next?

Robert Aiken's *Taking the Path of Zen* (1985) presents complex ideas with simplicity, describing the practice, lifestyle, rationale, and ideology of Zen Buddhism.

In 1996, Stone Bridge Press published *Basho's Narrow Road*, which includes Hiroaki Sato's annotation and translation of Basho¯'s description of his five-month trip through the interior of Japan in 1689.

In 1966, Penguin Classics published Basho¯'s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*, which contains five travel sketches written by Basho¯ towards the end of his life. Most of the sketches consist of linked prose and poetry.

Stephen Batchelor's *Buddhism without Beliefs* (1997) provides an accessible introduction to the principles and values underlying Buddhism, without the accompanying religious dogma.

Mark Epstein's *Thoughts without a Thinker* (1995) considers psychotherapy through the lens of Buddhism.

In his classic novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* (1974), Robert Pirsig's narrator, Phaedrus, uses a cross-country motorcycle trip with his son to question and explore the values of twentiethcentury America and to probe the limits of rational analysis.

Further Study

Keene, Donald, *Travelers of a Hundred Ages*, Henry Holt, 1989.

This collection of essays comments on a number of
Japanese diaries, including Basho¯'s.

Ueda, Makoto, *Basho and his Interpreters*, Stanford University Press, 1991.

Ueda provides selected haiku of Basho and commentaries
on them by various critics.

□, *Matsuo Basho*, Kodansha International, 1970.

Ueda provides an accessible and detailed introduction
to Basho's
life and writing in this lively study.

Yasuda, Kenneth, *The Japanese Haiku*, Rutland, 1957.

Yasuda uses Western literary aesthetics to discuss the
aim and method of haiku.

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Bersihand, Roger, *Japanese Literature*, Walker, 1965, p. 115. Buchanan, Daniel C., *One Hundred Famous Haiku*, Japan Publications, 1973, p. 16.

Hamill, Sam, ed., *The Essential Basho*, Shambhala, 1999, pp. ix-xxxi.

Higginson, William J., with Penny Harte, *The Haiku Handbook*, Kodansha International, 1985, p. 10.

Keene, Donald, *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature*, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 6, 57.

Pound, Ezra, "In a Station at the Metro," in *The Norton Introduction to Literature: Poetry*, edited by J. Paul Hunter, W. W. Norton, 1973, p. 98.

Suzuki, D. T., *Zen Buddhism*, Doubleday, 1956, p. 106.

Ueda, Makoto, *Basho and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary*, compiled, translated, and with an introduction by Makoto Ueda, Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 141.

□, *Matsuo Basho*, Twayne Publishers, 1970, p. 56. Yuasa, Nobuyuki, "Introduction," in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*, by Matsuo Basho¯, translated by Nobuyuki Yuasa, Penguin, 1966, p. 33.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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