

INTRODUCTION

THE HAIKU POETRY OF MATSUO BASHŌ

stormy sea—
stretching out over Sado,
Heaven's River
arami ya / sado ni yokotau / amanogawa

Bashō was standing on the western shores of Japan looking out upon the night sea. He was pausing on his long journey to the “deep north” of Japan, and he could hear the crashing of the waves. Miles beyond lay Sado Island. Sado was known as a place of riches, where gold was being mined. But even more it was known as a place where numerous people, including the Emperor Juntoku, the Buddhist leader Nichiren, and the great medieval Nō dramatist Zeami, had endured the enforced solitude of exile. The poem begins with an exclamation of the violence and vastness of the water, the cutting word *ya* functioning somewhat like an exclamation point. Then our consciousness is brought to a focus on the melancholy island, small in the cold sweep of ocean. The island lies in contrast to the ocean that surrounds it, yet it harbors centuries of the emotional storm of exile. Then our consciousness is pulled up and out across the sky, as Heaven's River (the Milky Way) reaches from horizon to horizon. As a metaphorical river, it flows in eternal tranquillity above the storms of the sea and of human life, sparkling with a scattered brightness more pure than gold. Bashō, the island, and everything on earth seem to be alone yet together under the

stream of stars. Over the storm is silence; above the movement is a stillness that somehow suggests the flow of a river and of time; and piercing the darkness is the shimmering but faint light of stars.

The modern novelist Kawabata Yasunari was so moved by this verse that in the climax of his masterpiece, *Snow Country*, Bashō's River of Heaven becomes a principal actor. The protagonist Shimamura looks up into the night sky and feels himself floating into the Milky Way and wonders: "Was this the bright vastness the poet Bashō saw when he wrote of Heaven's River arched over a stormy sea?" A fire rages nearby, with sparks rising to the stars. "And the River of Heaven, like a great aurora, flowed through his body to stand at the edges of the earth. There was a quiet, chilly loneliness in it, and a sort of voluptuous astonishment." The novel concludes with this sentence: "As he caught his footing, his head fell back, and Heaven's River flowed down inside him with a roar" (Kawabata, 134, 137, 142).¹ The River of Heaven continues to flow today not only in the night sky, but also through sensitive readers of Bashō's poetry.

Bashō had come a long way by the time he wrote this poem, not only on his journey to the back country of Japan but in his life. Born in 1644, he grew up in a small town as a member of a low-ranking samurai family. While the still new Tokugawa Period (1600–1868) was characterized by feudal stability compared to the war-ravaged medieval period, the burgeoning affluence of the time opened up aesthetic transformation and social mobility. Literacy spread through many classes, and the merchant class in particular began to take up interest in the arts. The relatively new form of poetry of *haikai no renga*² (comic linked-verse) appealed both to the merchant class and to samurai. As a young man, Bashō began to participate in poetry gatherings with his friend Tōdō Yoshitada, the son of his family's Lord. In 1666, Yoshitada suddenly died, shaking Bashō into considering a departure from traditional feudal society. Because the arts were expanding, it was possible for some gifted writers to opt out of the strict class distinctions of farmer, samurai, artisan, and merchant and establish a livelihood as a master poet. Bashō did just that, heading first to the capital of Kyoto and then to the growing metropolis of Edo (now Tokyo). By 1680,

he had established himself as a successful poetry master, but dissatisfied with the superficial poetics of the time, he developed his own aesthetics that reflected spiritual depth and aesthetic subtlety, exemplified in the Sado Island poem. In the last ten years of his life, he travelled often and wrote five travel journals. In 1694, after starting out on yet another journey, he died in Osaka. Shortly before his death he wrote:

ill on a journey:

my dreams roam round
over withered fields

tabi ni yande / yume wa karen o / kakemeguru

The remarkable power of Bashō's poetry and prose continues today, expanding into cultures he could not have dreamed of. His works, and the life he lived, have been influencing Western literature since Ezra Pound popularized imagistic haiku a hundred years ago. Over the past fifty years, his impact on poetry has increased as distinguished poets such as Kenneth Rexroth, Cid Corman, Sam Hamill, and Robert Hass have translated his verse.³ His influence is also increasing among nature writers, such as John Elder and Gretel Ehrlich.⁴ He continues as a master poet to the growing number of haiku and haibun writers in English.⁵ And recently the scholarly study of Bashō in the West has reached a new level of insight.⁶ My hope is that this translation will help to extend his impact on Western culture.

HAIKAI, HOKKU, AND HAIKU

In studying Bashō's poetry, the modern reader is faced with a seeming confusion of terms, in particular *haikai*, *hokku*, and *haiku*. To clarify these terms, we need to step back in time to classical Japanese poetry. The waka, a short poem with a 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic rhythm, was the principal verse form in classical literature beginning in the Heian Period (794-1186). Waka poetics were characterized by highly refined sensibilities, vocabulary, and themes severely restricted by aristocratic tastes, and highly conventionalized associations in imagery.⁷ *Renga*, a verse form that became predominant in the medieval period (1186-

1600), continued the classical waka aesthetics while expanding the poetic structure. It is a linked-verse form usually composed by a group of poems, and consists of distinct but conjoined stanzas in alternating syllabic rhythms of 5-7-5, 7-7, 5-7-5, 7-7, and so on.⁸

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the rise of a “comic” form of linked verse, *haikai no renga*, which appealed to a broader audience. A number of different schools, with distinctive poetics and techniques, evolved, and Bashō’s poetic school, *Shōmon*, was one form of *haikai no renga*. Bashō spoke more broadly of haikai art and the haikai spirit (*haii*), which included not only linked verse but also *haiga* (haikai painting) and *haibun* (haikai prose) and involved both earthy humor and spiritual depth. So it is most accurate to speak of Bashō as a master of “haikai” poetry.

In linked-verse, whether classical renga or its haikai form, the first stanza (hokku) sets the stage for the entire poem and is considered particularly important. One feature that distinguishes a hokku from other stanzas is that it must contain a season word (*kigo*), which designates in which season the poem was written in: hokku are by definition poems about the current season. A hokku also must be a complete statement, not dependent on the succeeding stanza.⁹ Because of its importance to linked-verses and its completeness, haikai poets began to write them as semi-independent verses, which could be used not only as a starting stanza for a linked-verse, but also could be appreciated by themselves. So the individual poems that Bashō created are, properly speaking, “hokku.”

“Haiku,” on the other hand, is a modern word. It was popularized by the Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), the first great modern haiku poet, as a way to distinguish his type of verse from its antecedents, haikai and hokku. In particular, Shiki emphasized that a haiku is a completely independent poem, not part of a linked-verse. During most of the twentieth century, Western scholars and translators used the term haiku for both modern haiku and premodern hokku. and haiku has thus come to be the generally accepted term in the West for both premodern and modern forms. In addition, Bashō’s hokku now function in modern culture (both in Japan and the West) the same way Shiki’s haiku does, as independent verses.

Such a situation poses a problem for translators. Should we be historically proper and speak of Bashō's hokku poems and haikai poetry, or should we accept the modern if anachronistic idiom and speak of his haiku poetry? Especially for translations intended for both a scholarly and a general audience, I simply don't think there is a fully satisfactory approach. As an indication of the complexity involved, the eminent scholar Haruo Shirane uses a combined approach in his *Early Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). He has sections on "Composing Haiku" (187) and "The Poetics of Haiku" (202) and yet speaks of Bashō's poems as hokku. In a similar way, I use the term hokku when talking about Bashō's verse and haikai when referring to his particular conception of art. However, I use the term haiku and the haiku tradition to refer to the poetic form more generally when I am referring to the long tradition that includes premodern hokku and modern haiku. And since haiku is the more familiar term, I have used it in the title of this book.

THE STRUCTURE OF HAIKU

It is common knowledge that the traditional form of a Japanese haiku is three lines with seven, five, and seven syllables. Unfortunately, this common knowledge is not quite accurate. As Hiroaki Sato has argued, Japanese hokku and haiku are not lined in the way we are used to in the West. As it is written in Japanese script, it may be one line or two lines, and in printed editions it is virtually always presented as one line (horizontally, from top to bottom). As a result, Sato and a few others translate Japanese haiku and write American haiku in one line.

Concerning syllable count, the notion that haiku has a structure of seven, five, and seven syllables has led some Westerners, especially in the past, to translate Japanese haiku into English or write American haiku with that structure. It is particularly common in public schools to teach students to write haiku in this form. But the English syllable is different from the Japanese equivalent (*on*, sound). Japanese "syllables" are quite uniform, most of them consisting of a consonant and a vowel: *ka*, *ri*, *to*, and so forth. As a result, they are also very short.

English syllables have much greater variety in structure and length. Many English syllables would require two Japanese *on* to pronounce, and not a few would require three (for instance, “grape” would be pronounced something like “gu-re-pu” in Japanese). The result is that a Japanese haiku with five, seven, and five *on* is generally more concise than one with the same number of English syllables—and so a translation or an American haiku using 5–7–5 syllables will be longer. Also, in Japanese the five-seven-five has a more regular cadence because of the similarity in the length of the *on*. This is why I prefer to speak of the structure as a five-seven-five *rhythm*. In part for these reasons, few contemporary translators or Western haiku poets attempt to capture the five-seven-five pattern.

But the pattern is certainly there in the Japanese. For this reason, I don't agree with the one-line method of translating Japanese haiku. They are a three-part poem, and even though they are printed in one line, the Japanese reader is aware of that rhythm in a way that readers of one line of English cannot be. On the other hand, I agree that the conventional technique of using three separate lines in translation is also misleading: there is more flow in the original, even when there is a cutting word. As a result, I translate Bashō's hokku with overlapping and indented lines, to suggest both the three-part rhythm and the continuity of the original.

THE NATURE OF BASHŌ'S HOKKU

While haiku is one of the best known of foreign verse forms, the conventional understanding of it remains somewhat limited. In a conventional view, haiku is primarily an objective nature poem. It concerns the pure present—the haiku moment—and so allusions to the past and narrative content are not significant. The poem also presents the object in itself, rather than images with symbolic reference, with the poet writing within the solitude of his encounter with nature. As a result, the cultural context, whether it is the literary traditions or the circumstances of the poem, are unimportant. And so, too, titles or headnotes are not appropriate.

This view is probably the result of a number of different factors. Masaoka Shiki popularized the notion of haiku as *shasei* (a sketch of nature).¹⁰ Zen, with its emphasis on the pure perception of things as they are, has also influenced this perspective. There may be more subtle Western influences as well, including the (now old) school of New Criticism, which maintained that a literary text stands as an independent entity and so cultural and biographical context is not significant. One could also speculate that the notion of objectivity popularized by the Scientific Revolution and the European Enlightenment may be at work here, in particular the notion that it is possible to understand the object as it exists beyond the limitations of subjectivity. And Western individualism, found both in the Protestant emphasis on the individual's encounter with the divine and the Romantic notion of the solitary artist transcending tradition, may be a factor.

As with most conventional views, there is considerable truth in this understanding of haiku. But it is also incomplete and misleading. Narrative content may be central to a haiku, as it was to many written by Bashō and the great poet Yosa Buson (1716–1784). As Haruo Shirane has demonstrated so well in his brilliant *Traces of Dreams*, cultural memory is a crucial part of Bashō's apprehension of the present, and allusions to the past are essential to our understanding of some of his hokku. Particularly important are what we might call "imbedded associations." Although sometimes Bashō employed a symbol, that is, something standing for something else (as a dove for peace), what is crucial to the entire Japanese literary tradition are conventions of reference and association that some images include. A bush warbler, for instance, is a bird of spring, particularly early spring, despite the fact that it is a common year-round resident throughout Japan. Part of the reason it has this seasonal association is that it is one of the first birds to sing in the new year. Its song is not only considered beautiful but is said to sound like the title of the Lotus Sutra (*Hokke-kyō*); it is as much an aural as a visual image. It is also associated with another image of early spring, plum blossoms. All of these meanings are embedded in the one word, *uguisu*.

Another important feature of haikai poetry is its social nature. *Haikai no renga* was usually made by a group of poets,

and many of the hokku that seem to be poems of solitude served as the introduction to a communally created linked-verse.¹¹ In addition, many of Bashō's poems were "greeting" (*aisatsu*) poems, offered to a host (or even a place). That social context is integral to the meaning of the poem and is one of the reasons titles and headnotes are significant.¹² Like the literary associations, the social context of the haiku extends the richness of meaning of these brief poems.

NATURE IN HAIKU POETRY

The significance of nature in haiku poetry is well-known, but it is important to keep in mind the emphasis placed on seasons. As noted before, every hokku or haiku is supposed to be a poem of a season, indicated by one or more season words. The season word may, in fact, refer to a human activity, such as a religious ritual that is only performed in a particular season. But even here the human event implies a period of time in the natural world, with nature understood as a temporal process as much as collection of flora and fauna. Thus, every poem is located in both nature and time. (Most Japanese editions of haiku indicate the season and season word involved, as does this translation.)

There have been two apparently contrasting responses to the significance of nature in the haiku tradition. One holds that the poems are models of "nature poetry," particularly an imagistic portrait of the "thing-in-itself." The other view holds that the haiku tradition doesn't really concern true nature, but rather a culturalized nature that has been defined by tradition and thus is artificial.

First, it should be stated that Bashō was both an inheritor of his tradition's conventions about nature and a transformer of them. He applied "haikai twists" to some poetic conventions, expanding or even inverting some associations. Consider what is probably Bashō's most famous haiku:

old pond—

 a frog jumps in,
 water's sound

furuike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto

This verse was striking in its time because the frog always had been an aural image that implied the resonant croaking in summer. Bashō was the first poet to present the frog not singing but leaping into the water—a very different sound, coming suddenly and yet seeming to linger in the ear the way the ripples spread out and slowly die away. Bashō was not completely tied to the restrictions of the tradition.

More importantly, we need to realize that the literary conventions are based on several assumptions that our own culture would do well to consider seriously. One is that plants, animals, and even scenes have a “true nature,” just as humans do. A bush warbler, a pine, a moment of late autumn dusk when the light fades behind silhouetted trees: they are not mere objects but are characterized by certain qualities that make them distinctive. One can appreciate the true nature of a bush warbler most fully as it sings in early spring with the plum blossoms in bloom. A pine tree that grows in a manicured suburban lawn may grow straight, dense with needles, but the true nature of the pine is manifested by a one holding on at cliff-edge, bent, stunted, and with few needles because of a century of frigid wind. (This idea is the basis of Japanese pruning techniques and bonsai training.) And while we tend to think “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” and that emotions are subjective, the moment of the day’s last light as autumn fades into winter (*aki no yūgure* or *aki no kure*) has a type of beauty and feeling that is in and of the scene itself. The Japanese held to an idea of “poetic essences” (*hon’i*), that captured the true nature of a thing and could be handed down in the literary tradition.¹³

A second assumption is that the natural world and the experience of nature are not wholly distinct. Each implies the other in a way that is similar to the school of phenomenology.¹⁴ There is nature-that-we-are-conscious-of and consciousness-of-nature. The strict split between subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity, is not part of the East Asian tradition. It certainly is not a part of the Buddhist tradition, which emphasizes that the dichotomy between the ego-self and the world-out-there is the principal delusion that causes suffering and desires. In the Chinese poetic tradition, a principal goal was to achieve a unity of feeling and scene. A true poet has cultivated his sensibility to the point that his “subjective” feelings match the

“objective” atmosphere in the scene being experienced. Similarly, Bashō's aesthetic term *sabi* (loneliness) was a quality inherent in scene (such as autumn evening) as well as a feeling experienced by the refined poet. It was the culturally refined poet who could enter into and experience the true quality of scenes in nature.

A third assumption, related to the previous one, is that there are authoritative experiences of nature. Some experiences of nature are “truer”—more deeply insightful of the essential nature of things—than others. We can look to the experiences of great poets of the past as guides for what can and should be experienced when we see a bird, tree, or scene. In this way, great poets are similar to sages in Asian spiritual traditions who embody the experience of a deep insight. These authoritative aesthetic experiences can be codified in literary conventions.

A fourth assumption is that nature and culture are not separate. In the Chinese poetic tradition, writing and literature are human expressions similar in kind to the tracks of birds. Poetry is a natural expression of human feeling, akin to birdsong, an idea presented in the famous preface to the Japanese collection of court poetry, the *Kokinshū* (ca. 920). As the previous assumptions imply, it is the highly cultured person that can truly experience nature and express her feelings about it. “Culturized nature,” if done with deep cultural insight into nature, is “true nature.”¹⁵

So Bashō's “nature” is a combination of what we call the “natural world” and the Japanese tradition associated with it. In order to deepen the reader's understanding of the meaning of nature in his writings, I have tried to supply information both cultural and scientific, including genus and species when I could discover what they are.¹⁶ For images used once or twice, the information is brief and found in the notes to poems. In the case of major nature images used frequently, I have supplied a glossary at the end of the book with more extensive information. My assumption is that the more we know of the nature images both culturally and scientifically, the fuller will be our understanding of the Japanese experience of nature, which will enrich our own experience of the complexity of the natural world and its relation to culture. Indeed, in designing the structure of this

book, I have in mind not only students of Japanese literature and religion, but also naturalists and students of nature writing.

STAGES OF BASHŌ'S POETRY AND POETICS

Bashō's poetic style and aesthetic ideas went through many changes—except perhaps his view that a poet's style and aesthetics *should* undergo change.¹⁷ We cannot here enter into a detailed discussion of those changes, but let me note a few major stages. In his early poetry, Bashō wrote under the influence of the Teimon school, established by Matsunaga Teitoku (1571–1653). This type of poetry drew on the imagery, diction, and elegant beauty of the court tradition while relying on verbal wit to amuse the reader. By 1672, his poetry was beginning to display the characteristics of the Danrin school, founded by Nishiyama Sōin (1605–1682). Under its influence, poets such as Bashō enjoyed greater freedom in subject matter, imagery, tone, and poetic composition. Courtly topics were subject to parody and classical allusions were given “haikai twists.” Verbal wit continued to be used, but more to advance the comically unorthodox perspective than to display classical erudition. In the late 1670s, Bashō began to use more frequently a technique of striking juxtaposition, in which two images were brought together but kept separate enough to suggest (rather than explain) a comparison.

By 1679, he had become a lay Zen monk, and the following year he moved out of the center of the bustling capital of Edo and took up residence in a hut by the Fukagawa River on the outskirts of the city. His hokku, sometimes accompanied by prose introductions, were showing an increasingly dark tone, some bordering on desolation. The following hokku, written in 1680, is sometimes said to be the first example of his mature style.

on a withered branch
 a crow has settled—
 autumn evening
kareeda ni / karasu no tomarikeri / aki no kure

He clearly was being influenced by the seriousness and depth of Chinese verse as well as the spiritual aesthetics of Zen.

In 1684, Bashō set forth on the first of his journeys that resulted in travel journals. By that time, his aesthetic of “loneliness” (*sabi*) was well-developed, and he had established his own school of poetry, *Shōmon*. Although Bashō had become a serious and mature poet, his haikai did retain humor. Part of the genius and appeal of Bashō was his ability to combine deeply spiritual poetics with an earthy humor. The period of 1689–1691, when he traveled to the Deep North of Japan and then spent time in the Kyoto area, Bashō’s life was particularly rich in experiences of nature, stimulation by various disciples, and periods of productive solitude.

In the early 1690s, he began to emphasize lightheartedness and day-to-day subject matter, promoting a new aesthetic of “lightness” (*karumi*). This aesthetic reflected his renewed sense of the significance of the mundane dimension of life and art. It also helped him deal with an increasingly troubled spirit, something that became apparent in his writings after he returned to Edo in 1692. In 1694, frail but determined to continue the hard work of poetry, he set off again on a journey. He made it as far as Osaka, where he died in November. One can only imagine how his poetry might have evolved further if he had lived.

TRANSLATION STYLE AND PHILOSOPHY

As is obvious to those who know any Japanese, my style of translation tends toward the literal. This is not because I am striving for a correct scholarly translation, although accuracy in this sense is certainly a virtue. Rather, I believe the distinctive power of the original poem is usually captured most fully by staying close to what the original poem says and how it says it.

There are several major components of this approach. The first concerns the imagistic quality of many of the hokku. Bashō’s hokku have been called a “poetry of nouns” because of its tendency to rely primarily on images rather than statement. We can look back at the Sado Island, crow on a withered branch, and old pond poems as examples. In each case we have the same pattern of noun, noun-verb, noun. Much of the

dynamism of these poems is the stark imagism that turning them into a statement would only dilute. One could, for instance, translate the old pond as:

sitting by an old pond
 a frog jumps in
 giving off the sound of water.

Obviously this is an intentionally prosaic translation (although one could quote similar ones that have been published), but it illustrates how turning a series of images into a statement of an event robs the original of its power.

Another key component is the order in which the images are presented. Consider the following alternative translations of poems previously discussed:

Heaven's River
 stretches out over
 Sado Island

autumn evening:
 a crow has settled
 on a withered branch.

a frog jumps in
 and the water sounds:
 an old pond

The imagery of these versions is the same as in the original, but with the different image order these versions become quite different poems. The point is that many hokku are psychologically subtle, and the order of experiencing the images is critical to the poem's meaning. As we saw with the Sado Island poem, the movement from sea to island to sky is crucial to its effect. It is also crucial that the crow poem begins with the more general sense of autumn and settles, like a bird, on a withered branch, and that the old pond begins with the pond and ends with the resonating sound of water. If we are to capture in translation the complex experience of the Japanese poem, there must be a high priority on keeping the image order of the original.

Also worth consideration is the type of imagery—for instance, between noun and verb forms. Consider the following: “plovers cry,” “the plovers’ cry,” and “the crying plovers.” At one level all three images denote the same phenomenon, but the first one presents our mind with an image of an activity (crying), the second emphasizes the sound itself (the cry), and the third presents us with an object (the plovers). Subtle differences, to be sure, but poetry thrives on subtlety.

Another aspect of this approach to translating is the attempt to reproduce the laconic, abbreviated style of many hokku. It is tempting to add to the original verse explanations that might clarify it. Indeed, sometimes this is necessary, but I think it should be avoided whenever possible. Part of the meaning of some hokku is found in the very absence of words and lack of explanation. This is most notable in the case of cutting words (*kireji*), such as *-keri* (as in *tomarikeri*) and *ya* (as in *furuike ya*). These words separate the poem into two parts, and some of the power of the verse comes from the gap and tension between the parts.¹⁸

Sometimes, however, the laconic style results from words simply being left out—and left up to the reader to fill in. For instance,

usually hateful,
 yet the crow too
 in this dawn snow
bigoro nikuki / karasu mo yuki no / ashita kana

bamboo shoots—
 and my childhood
 sketches of them
take no ko ya / osanaki toki no / e no susabi

Most translators have added explanatory fillers in order to make explicit what is implicit, or make specific what is ambiguous. The crow too is: beautiful, endearing, welcome . . . there are many words that could be used. But Bashō did not use them. Rather he left a “hermeneutical space,” a gap in the meaning of the poem that invites the reader in to complete the poem in her own experience. To add the term “beautiful,” for instance, only

reduces the richness of the original. Similarly, most translators have explained the bamboo shoots, the old sketches, and the connection between them: the sketches resemble the bamboo shoots; the shoots remind him of his childhood; he used to love doing the sketches; the sketches were an artistic training, and so forth. All of these are possible interpretations of the original, but when one is specified, that lush multiplicity of interpretation is eliminated. Part of the richness of the hokku is in how the copresence of the two distinct but related elements of consciousness creates a complex psychological state: the sight of bamboo shoots growing before him and the memory of his sketches of those shoots when he himself was but a sprout of a man. There is nostalgia, a complex sense of the power of nature's growth, the relationship between that growth and both the maturing process and the growth of artistic ability, as well as a faint echo of his own advanced age. These poetic meanings are upheld by the absence of explanation, a gap between the two images, and an invitation to the reader to enter into the poem. We should not be in a hurry to eliminate ambiguity if it is part of the poetry of the original text.

Similarly, I usually avoid another type of explanation. Here the issue isn't an ambiguity in the original but the associations that are implied. The image of the *hototogisu*, a cuckoo, is often used by itself—in part because it conveniently consists of five syllables. By literary convention (stemming from but not limited to ornithological knowledge), the *hototogisu* is a bird of the summer; it is an aural rather than visual image, because it is more often heard than seen; its call is both beautiful and uncommon, so one anxiously awaits its song as summer comes on. Because it is an image of sound (and also because they may be uncomfortable with a one-word line), most translators will add a verb such as “to sing.” This is accurate, but it is extra. A key part of the Japanese sensitivity to nature is its tendency to *hear* birds and tree breeze. Our experience of nature, which tends to be dominated by the ocular, will be enriched if we cultivate the Japanese sensibility of hearing, learn the birdsongs, and pay attention to the texture of wind through pines. It is a different kind of reading experience (and experience of nature) to say “the cuckoo sings” than to say “cuckoo” and *hear* the image.¹⁹

My general preference is obviously to let the reader come to the poem as it is in the original. This asks more of the reader, for it assumes the reader will bring to the text a knowledge of the traditional associations and won't be asking for footnotes embedded in the translation. Actually, I consider this a matter of respecting both the original text and the reader. I don't think the reader benefits by having the translator hold her hermeneutical hand by filling in the poem. As this approach asks more of the reader, it also asks more of the translator, not only because it is difficult to resist the tendency to explain the poem in the translation, but because the translator has to devise a format that can help the reader become learned enough to enter the poem on her own. (Notes to the poems, word-by-word translations, scientific names when known, and a glossary thus became essential for this translation.) And it asks more of the translator because the goal is not merely to communicate the basic sense of the original, but the structure and style that carries much of its meaning.

I want to be quick to note that none of these principles are absolute. Sometimes it is simply impossible to follow them, and other times a strict adherence to them would result in plain awkwardness. This is particularly true since one principle can work against the other. The translator may be left asking: should I maintain the image order, or change it in order to keep the type of imagery and avoid adding explanatory words? As any translator knows, translation is a craft of very relative success, and I am painfully aware of how often my translations fall short of my ideals.

TEXTS USED, TEXTUAL NOTES, AND ORGANIZATION

Depending on which complete edition you refer to, there are approximately 980 extant hokku by Bashō. I have translated 724, as well as numerous variants that give a sense of Bashō's creative process. I have not attempted a complete translation in order to avoid making the book unacceptably long and to avoid offering translations I thought did not work sufficiently well.

There are numerous excellent editions of Bashō's hokku, and I have referred to many in doing these translations. In general I have taken Kon Eizō's edition, *Bashō kushū*, as my stan-

dard, including the choice of title or headnote (of which there may be several versions). In some cases the combination of the headnote and the hokku constitute a haibun, which are included also in the companion volume of translations from his prose, *Bashō's Journey: The Literary Prose of Matsuo Bashō*. When his hokku are found in journals or haibun included in *Bashō's Journey*, I mention that in the notes.

Because knowledge of associations and circumstances are often crucial to the meaning of Bashō's hokku, I have included notes that give season, season word, year, and in many cases other information that seems important. A thorough commentary on over seven hundred of his hokku is not feasible, and frequently I had to battle my desire to add more information. I have also included in the notes a word-by-word dictionary-like translation that should help readers understand the poems better. They are also meant to encourage readers to create their own translations.

Traditionally Japanese verse is arranged by season rather than chronologically. I considered using a seasonal organization, but the reader would not be able to place the poems in the framework of Bashō's life. So I have used a combined format: the poems are listed chronologically, but I have emphasized the seasonal framework as well by organizing the translations by seasons within a given year. In the few cases where Bashō wrote a hokku out of season (see hokku 289, 375, 404, 415, 490, 714, 718, 723), I have kept the poem in its chronological context but highlighted the different seasonal context in the notes. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact date of composition of all of his verse and in some cases scholars offer different conjectures as to the time period. In general, I have followed Kon's dating, but sometimes when another scholar suggests a more specific year (e.g., 1684 instead of 1684–94), I have gone with the more specific, noting the uncertainty with a question mark after the date. To maintain the combined chronological and seasonal approach, I have grouped those known only by period (e.g., 1681–83) as a separate section, then grouped all those in that period according to the seasonal rhythm of spring, summer, fall, and winter. In the few cases of miscellaneous poems—those that lack a season word—I have ordered them chronologically within the season they were written (see hokku 66, 243, 354,

360, 405). However, in the case of several poems whose date of composition we do not know, I gave them a separate section (see hokku 114–16).

Premodern Japanese culture followed a lunar calendar: the new year began with the coming of spring, which was a different date each year although it was usually around late February. Winter, then, ranged over two of our calendar years, so to avoid confusion I give both years (e.g., winter, 1689–90). When known, I specify the date of composition of the poem (or of its earliest draft) in terms of both the lunar calendar and the Western Gregorian calendar (e.g., 23rd of Third Month: May 12).

There are, of course, many translations of Bashō's hokku, and some of his poems have been translated innumerable times. In a few cases, especially when another translator has remained close to Bashō's original, my translation differs little from a predecessor—something that is true for earlier translators as well. I have avoided replication of earlier translations, but I also have avoided creating awkward translations simply in order to avoid similarity.