

Classic Poetry Series

Yosa Buson
- poems -

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Yosa Buson(1716 - 1784)

Leading haiku poet of the late 18th century and, with Basho and Issa, one of the great names in haiku. Also known as Yosa Buson or Taniguchi Buson. Also a distinguished Bunjinga(literati-style) painter, he perfected haiga ("haiky sketch") as a branch of Japanese pictorial art. His best-known painting disciple, Matsumura Goshun, also known as Gekkei, founded the Shijo school.

Born near Osaka, as a youth Buson went to Edo (now Tokyo). For five years (1737-42) he belonged to a haikai linked-verse circle over which Hayano Hajin (1676-1742) presided. Here he learned the traditions of the Basho school haikai as transmitted by Hattori Ransetsu and Takarai Kikaku. After Hajin's death Buson spent much time around Yuki, north of edo, where he painted, practiced haikai, and wrote Hokuju Rosen wo itamu (Elegy to the old poet Hokuju), the first of his innovative poems that foreshadow modern free verse. Buson also visited places in northeastern Japan famed in Basho's poetic diary, Oku No Hosomichi (1694; tr The Narrow Road to the Deep North, 1966).

Buson settled in Kyoto in the late 1750s. He was active in Mochizuki Sooku's (1688-1766) poetry circle and was also actively painting in the Chinese-inspired bunjinga style. By practicing both poetry and painting, he aspired to the ideals of the bunjin (Ch: wen-ren or wen-jen; literati) of China. One of Buson's commissions involved collaborating with Ike No Tagia on a landscape series based on Chinese poems, Juben jugi (1771, Ten Conveniences and Ten Pleasures), now a National Treasure. In 1770 he took the name of Yahantei the Second (Midnight Hermitage) for his studio. His haikai teacher Hajin was the First Yahantei. In painting, he used the names of Sha Cho-Koh, Shunsei (Spring Star) and others during his earlier years in Kyoto.

Master of Poetry and Painting - Buson found his distinct voice partly from association with two dissimilar poets, Tan Taigi and Kuroyanagi Shoha (d 1772), both of whom helped him develop his spontaneous and sensual style. Following their passing, Buson emerged as the central figure of a haikai revival known as the "Return to Basho" movement. In 1776 his own poetry group built a clubhouse, the Bashoan (Basho Hut), for their haikai and linked-verse gatherings. Buson also prepared several illustrated scrolls and screens, including the text of Oku no hosomich, which helped canonize Basho as a grand saint of poetry. Although Buson sought to emulate Basho, his own poetry is clearly different and versatile. Buson read classics extensively and studied different styles of Chinese and Japanese paintings. Poetry and painting affected each other in his art. His poems were, diversely enough, rich in imagery, clearly depicting

fine movements and sensual appearances of things, dynamic with wider landscapes, lyrical, sensitive to human affairs, romantic with hidden stories, graceful, and longingly time-conscious. Buson completed his own style of painting in his later years when he was using the name of Sha-In. Freed from the influence of China, he created genuine Japanese landscapes.

A Bat Flits

A bat flits
in moonlight
above the plum blossoms.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

?A mosquito buzzes

a mosquito buzzes
every time flowers
of honeysuckle fall

Yosa Buson

Before The White Chrysanthemum

Before the white chrysanthemum
the scissors hesitate
a moment.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Blow Of An Ax

Blow of an ax,
pine scent,
the winter woods.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Blown From The West

Blown from the west,
fallen leaves gather
in the east.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Buying Leeks

Buying leeks
and walking home
under the bare trees.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Calligraphy Of Geese

Calligraphy of geese
against the sky--
the moon seals it.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Coolness

Coolness--
the sound of the bell
as it leaves the bell.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Dawn

Dawn--
fish the cormorants haven't caught
swimming in the shallows.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Early Summer Rain

Early summer rain--
houses facing the river,
two of them.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Elegy To The Old Man Hokuju

You left in the morning, at evening my heart is in a
thousand pieces.

Why is it so far away?

Thinking of you, I go up on the hill and wander.
Around the hill, why is it such a sadness?

Dandelions yellow and shepherds-purse blooming white --
not anyone to look at them.

I hear a pheasant, calling and calling fervently.
Once a friend was there across the river, living.

Ghostly smoke rises and fades away with a west wind
strong in fields of small bamboo grasses and reedy fields.
Nowhere to leave for.

Once a friend was there across the river, living, but today
not even a bird sings a song.

You left in the morning, at evening my heart is in a
thousand pieces.
Why is it so far away?

In my grass hut by the Amida image I light no candle,
offer no flowers, and only sit here alone.
This evening, how invaluable it is.

Priest Buson
with a thousand bowings

Yosa Buson

Evening Wind

Evening wind:
water laps
the heron's legs.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Haiku

The winter river;
down it come floating
flowers offered to Buddha.

Yosa Buson

Harvest Moon

Harvest moon--
called at his house,
he was digging potatoes.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

He's On The Porch

He's on the porch,
to escape the wife and kids--
how hot it is!

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

His Holiness The Abbot

His Holiness the Abbot
is shitting
in the withered fields.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Hokku Poems In Four Seasons

Spring

The year's first poem done,
with smug self confidence
a haikai poet.

Longer has become the daytime;
a pheasant is fluttering
down onto the bridge.

Yearning for the Bygones

Lengthening days,
accumulating, and recalling
the days of distant past.

Slowly passing days,
with an echo heard here in a
corner of Kyoto.

The white elbow
of a priest, dozing,
in the dusk of spring.

Into a nobleman,
a fox has changed himself
early evening of spring.

The light on a candle stand
is transferred to another candle
spring twilight.

A short nap,
then awakening
this spring day has darkened.

Who is it for,
this pillow on the floor,
in the twilight of spring?

The big gateway's heavy doors,
standing in the dusk of spring.

Hazy moonlight --
someone is standing
among the pear trees.

Blossoms on the pear tree,
lighten by the moonlight, and there
a woman is reading a letter.

Springtime rain -- almost dark,
and yet today still lingers.

Springtime rain --
a little shell on a small beach,
enough to moisten it.

Springtime rain is falling,
as a child's rag ball is soaking
wet on the house roof.

@Summer

Within the quietness
of a lull in visitors' absence,
appears the peony flower!

Peony having scattered, two
or three petals lie on one another.

The rain of May --
facing toward the big river, houses,
just two of them.

At a Place Called Kaya in Tanba

A summer river being crossed,
how pleasing,
with sandals in my hands!

The mountain stonecutter's chisel;
being cooled in the clear water.

Grasses wet in the rain,
just after the festival cart passed by.

To my eyes how delightful
the fan of my beloved is,
in complete white.

A flying cuckoo,
over the Heian capital,
goes diagonally across the city.

Evening breeze --
water is slapping against
the legs of a blue heron.

An old well --
jumping at a mosquito,
the fish's sound is dark.

Young bamboo trees --
at Hashimoto, the courtesan,
is she still there or not?

After having been fallen,
its image still stands --
the peony flower.

Stepping on the Eastern Slope

Wild roses in bloom --
so like a pathway in,
or toward, my home village.

With sorrow while coming upon the hill
--flowering wild roses.

Summer night ending so soon,
with on the river shallows still remains
the moon in a sliver.

@Autumn

It penetrates into me;
stepping on the comb of my gone wife,
in the bedroom.

More than last year,
I now feel solitude;
this autumn twilight.

This being alone may even be a kind of happy
-- in the autumn dusk.

Moon in the sky's top,
clearly passes through this
poor town street.

This feeling of sadness --
a fishing string being blown by the autumn wind.

@Winter

Let myself go to bed;
New Year's Day is only a matter
for tomorrow.

Camphor tree roots are quietly getting wet,

in the winter rainy air.

A handsaw is sounding,
as if from a poor one,
at midnight in this winter.

Old man's love affair;
in trying to forget it,
a winter rainfall.

In an old pond,
a straw sandal is sinking
-- it is sleeting.

Yosa Buson

Light Of The Moon

light of the moon
moves west - flowers' shadows
creep eastward

Yosa Buson

Lighting One Candle

Lighting one candle
with another candle--
spring evening.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Listening To The Moon

Listening to the moon,
gazing at the croaking of frogs
in a field of ripe rice.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

My Arm For A Pillow

My arm for a pillow,
I really like myself
under the hazy moon.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Not Quite Dark Yet

Not quite dark yet
and the stars shining
above the withered fields.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Old Well

Old well,
a fish leaps--
dark sound.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Over-Ripe Sushi

Over-ripe sushi,
The Master
Is full of regret.

Yosa Buson

Ploughing The Land

Ploughing the land--
not even a bird singing
in the mountain's shadow.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Sparrow Singing

Sparrow singing--
its tiny mouth
open.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Spring Rain

Spring rain:
telling stories,
a straw coat and umbrella walk past

Yosa Buson

Straw Sandal Half Sunk

Straw sandal half sunk
in an old pond
in the sleety snow.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

The Behavior Of The Pigeon

The behavior of the pigeon
is beyond reproach,
but the mountain cuckoo?

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

The End Of Spring

The end of spring--
the poet is brooding
about editors.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

The Old Man

The old man
cutting barley--
bent like a sickle.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

The Spring Sea Rising

The spring sea rising
and falling, rising
and falling all day.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

The Willow Leaves Fallen

The willow leaves fallen,
the spring gone dry,
rocks here and there.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

They End Their Flight

They end their flight
one by one---
crows at dusk.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

Tilling the field

tilling the field:
the man who asked the way
has disappeared

Yosa Buson

Variations On 'The Short Night--'

Below are eleven Buson haiku
beginning with the phrase
'The short night--'

The short night--
on the hairy caterpillar
beads of dew.

The short night--
patrolmen
washing in the river.

The short night--
bubbles of crab froth
among the river reeds.

The short night--
a broom thrown away
on the beach.

The short night--
the Oi River
has sunk two feet.

The short night--
on the outskirts of the village
a small shop opening.

The short night--
broken, in the shallows,
a crescent moon.

The short night--
the peony
has opened.

The short night--
waves beating in,

an abandoned fire.

The short night--
near the pillow
a screen turning silver.

The short night--
shallow footprints
on the beach at Yui.

Translated by Robert Hass

User Submitted "The short night--" Haiku

Submit your own haiku beginning with the line
"The short night--"
and we'll post the best ones below!

Just dash off an e-mail to:

theshortnight@

The short night-
a watery moon
stands alone over the hill

Maggie

The short night--
just as I'm falling asleep
my wife's waking up

Larry Bole

Yosa Buson

Washing The Hoe

Washing the hoe--
ripples on the water;
far off, wild ducks.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson

White Blossoms Of The Pear

White blossoms of the pear
and a woman in moonlight
reading a letter.

Translated by Robert Hass

Yosa Buson