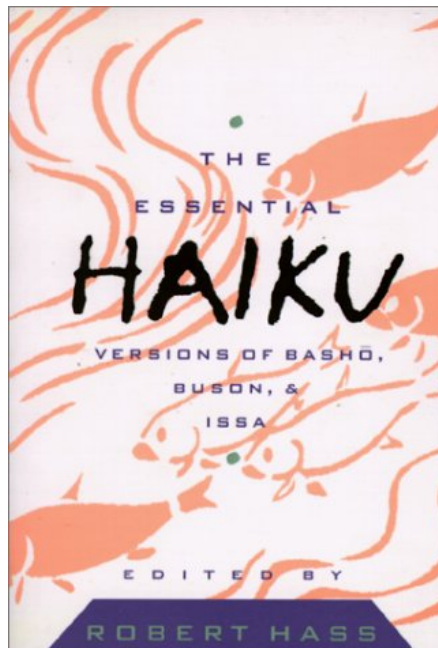




The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa

Robert Hass (Editor, Translator) , Matsuo Basho , Yosa Buson , Kobayashi Issa

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American readers have been fascinated since their exposure to Japanese culture late in the nineteenth century, with the brief Japanese poem called the hokku or haiku. The seventeen-syllable form is rooted in a Japanese tradition of close observation of nature, of making poetry from subtle suggestion. Infused by its great practitioners with the spirit of Zen Buddhism, the haiku has served as an example of the power of direct observation to the first generation of American modernist poets like Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams and also as an example of spontaneity and Zen alertness to the new poets of the 1950s. This definitive collection brings together in fresh translations by an American poet the essential poems of the three greatest haiku masters: Matsuo Basho in the seventeenth century; Yosa Buson in the eighteenth century; and Kobayashi Issa in the early nineteenth century. Robert Hass has written a lively and informed introduction, provided brief examples by each poet of their work in the haibun, or poetic prose form, and included informal notes to the poems. This is a useful and inspiring addition to the Essential Poets series.

The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa Details

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From Reader Review The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa for online ebook

Jenna says

This book makes me wish there were renga parties in my neighborhood that I could attend. One of the most unfortunate things about the Western poetic tradition -- when contrasted with, say, the Eastern poetic tradition or the Western music tradition or the Western mathematics tradition -- is how rarely collaboration occurs among different practitioners.

One interesting thing about Basho, Buson, and Issa, which Hass duly emphasizes in his editorial notes, is how devoutly Buddhist they all were. These three poets were all so damn conscientious, so damn hagridden by their unceasing awareness of how they **should** feel or how they **should** act in a given situation. I can't help but wonder if this omnipresent religiosity dilutes the force of their poetry at all. It certainly makes their prose and their longer poems seem oversentimental at times. Ultimately, however, this fact merely serves to highlight the inherent powerfulness of the haiku form: a form that forces a poet to focus his attention narrowly on small idiosyncratic real-world things so that, even though these three poets had many spiritual sentiments in common, their three oeuvres turned out to be anything but homogenous.

Bee says

I am sad, that i don't know who I lent this too. Because this book is a constant companion. You can open it anywhere, and BAM, kildeer, a little slice of this very moment right here, with a twist of lemon and a cherry blossom

Audrey says

One of the most accessible forms of poetry--and the Japanese do it best, especially these 3 masters. Very well worth reading. I left this book feeling serene, uplifted and educated (the perfect combination).

Sally Hegedus says

I really loved this little book! I enjoyed learning something of the history and form of haiku, also of the stylistic differences between the three haiku masters represented in this book. For someone with little knowledge of the form, who had never, to my recollection, been introduced to these Japanese poets before, this collection was a lovely first dip into their works. I also enjoyed the short sections of longer poems and prose which were also included, particularly those of the poet Issa. This collection has made me want to do more reading of and about haiku. What a nice introduction this was!

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

The Essential Haiku is a distillation of a distillation, the best of the best, a delight of simplicity, beauty, and truth. This book has reminded me of the brilliance of poetry, and the wonder that a tiny haiku holds. I will read more poetry. I will read more haiku.

Harriet says

A gorgeous book of haiku by Basho, Buson, and Issa, translated and edited with great care and intelligence by Robert Hass. I keep this book by my bed, actually, and am continually dipping into it; it's a great cure for too much Facebook, email, text messages, etc. The beauty of a haiku is to distil a whole world, or thought, into three lines that linger and unfold their meaning slowly, or else burst into meaning like a private, joyful fireworks.

Kate says

I find it interesting that so many people who rated this book three stars or less did so because they didn't like haiku. Totally unfair. That's like saying, "I think I'll read this here book about tarantulas, and then I'll give it one star because I HATE tarantulas." Actually, this is a lovely introduction to haiku and other short form Japanese poetry by masters of the form. Of course it's translated, and something is lost in translation. However, the ideas are still faithfully portrayed. I think Mr. Hass did a great job of communicating the humor, and sometimes the pathos and quiet beauty revealed in the work of these masters.

Sarah says

"First day of spring-
I keep thinking about
the end of autumn."
-Matsuo Basho

"He's on the porch
to escape his wife and kids-
how hot it is!"
-Yosa Buson

"Even a fleabite,
when she's young,
is beautiful."
-Kobayashi Issa

This is a lovely collection of poetry that I enjoyed devouring very much. Japanese literature has always hit an emotional spot for me; I can't quite explain why, but something about the style shakes me to the core. There is no time that this has become more clear than during my reading of these three masters, particularly Issa. At times I laughed aloud and at times I might have cried a little bit because of some subject matters and exquisite word choices. That is rare, but it's what any author wants to make the reader do.

The art of the haiku is very interesting indeed- while one might think it is easy to simply follow the rules and

make a poem based on syllable count, there's a lot more than meets the eye. It takes someone who "lives in the common world", as Basho puts it, to transport the reader to a specific place and feeling in less than twenty words at most. That's amazing if you ask me!

I find that I don't have a lot to say about this collection specifically as it is the first true collection of haiku which I've read. The organization appears to make enough sense and at no point did I feel lost. For all of the reasons I have listed, I'd recommend this to anyone who likes poetry. For me, it definitely makes me interested in reading more from each of these three poets.

Juli Anna says

This is an essential text for anyone interested in haiku. It is concise, palatable, and beautiful; collections of poems by three great haiku masters (Basho, Buson, and Issa) are complemented by biographies, essays, and extensive endnotes by American poet Robert Hass. Wonderful for readers as well as poets who may want to try their hand at this complex little form.

Robert says

Hass's anthology offers generous selections of three haiku masters: Basho, Buson, and Issa. In addition to their haiku, he offers prose works by all three, as well as three longer poems by Buson. His introductions and notes provide full, clear contexts for the haiku and other work, contexts missing from many haiku anthologies.

Most of the translations are Hass's own. Whereas English translations of haiku often sound flat, Hass typically creates versions that justify their original authors' reputations.

Kimber says

Basho--favorite poems/lines:

"Winter solitude--
in a world of one color
the sound of wind."

"Don't imitate me--
it's as boring
as the two halves of a melon."

"Who mourns makes grief his master.
Who drinks makes pleasure his master."

"Don't follow in the footsteps of the old poets,
seek what they sought."

"Every form of insentient existence--plants, stones, or utensils--has its own individual feelings similar to

those of men."

"When we observe calmly, we discover that all things have their fulfillment."

"One need not be a haiku poet, but if someone doesn't live inside ordinary life and understand ordinary feelings, he's not likely to be a poet."

Buson--favorite poem is "mourning for Hokuju Rosen" This is one of the most beautiful poems I have ever read! I wish I owned this book for that poem.

Here is a haiku by Buson:

"I go,
you stay:
two autumns."

Issa--haiku poems:

"Don't worry, spiders.
I keep house
casually."

"Even with insects--
some can sing,
some can't."

"For you fleas too
the nights must be long,
they must be lonely."

"All the time I pray to Buddha,
I keep on
killing mosquitoes."

Dana Nordstrom says

I love this book! I've read it over several times and still just open it up randomly and start reading. A definite must for Haiku lovers!

Kerfe says

The current attention span of my life is well-suited to haiku.

These are the Japanese masters: Basho, Buson, and Issa. Hass' translations, lyrical and free, seem faithful to the imagery and emotional impact each poet has condensed into three lines. The afterword explaining the difficulties of translating haiku is also enlightening.

There is history and context for both haiku in general (the essay at the end on its collaborative origins in renga I found especially interesting) and each poet's life, contributions and legacy. Monks, artists, teachers, wanderers, fathers, husbands, sons: all at times sought simple solitude; at times family, friends, and home.

Basho:

Another year gone-
hat in my hand,
sandals on my feet.

Buson:

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

Issa:

Don't worry, spiders,
I keep house
casually.

Adrian Astur Alvarez says

I took a class from Robert Haas during my undergrad. He was a vague teacher but his lectures were careful, rigorous, and were often delivered with a gentleness that made what would otherwise be burdensome topics graceful. So it is with this collection of Haiku by Buson, Basho, and Issa. Among the projects he set forth in the this edition, Haas wanted to show through contrast, how each master's personality and style comes through their work however restricted the form. The effect of reading this collection is that the differences become clear:

Issa's comical voice:

I'm going out,
Flies, so relax,
Make love.

Buson's imagery:

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

Basho's philosophical melancholy:

First day of spring-
I keep thinking about
the end of Autumn.

I highly recommend this collection for anyone interested in the Haiku form. Though there are some cultural and translational fault lines mapping the boundaries of this style of poetry the main ideas come through, often in unexpected ways: a flash of imagery or setting will set off a spontaneous feeling of sorrow or happiness, frustration or guilt.

Abby says

Knowing my love for Japanese literature, my husband gave me this book some years ago. It was edited by one of our favorite poets, Robert Hass, which makes it that much more incredible. I think this is the best primer for haiku in English translation for any reader. I was floored by the depth, beauty, and simplicity--and challenged to make my own writing so succinct and clear.
