

The “Human” and the “Celestial and Earthly” in Masaoka Shiki’s Theory of Haiku

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Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867–1902), an author of poetry and prose, a critic, and a scholar of literature, gave birth to an original theory of haiku and founded a major literary school. A profound authority on traditional poetry and poetics, he initiated a new approach to literature that exercised a powerful influence on the development of haiku poetry in the twentieth century.

Before him, generations of haiku poets succeeded one another in tranquility, without, in effect, any critical evaluation of the formulas and poetic techniques they used in their work. This was due to the institutionalization of haiku—the existence of a tradition of masters and pupils in which teachers would pass on the canon without any alterations. Contributing factors were the anonymity of the genre and the universality of the theme of “nature.” The author’s “I” was practically nonexistent, a feature that had been characteristic of medieval art, and a wide variety of formulas and conventions were used to express observations and feelings about nature. Masaoka Shiki created a retrospective poetics of haiku; his notions about poets and their work and, notably, his selection of samples from many generations of poets is perceived even today as an acknowledged standard.

Shiki did a great deal to breathe life into the traditional genre of *tanka* 短歌, five-line, thirty-one syllable poems. In the present paper, however, we shall be only concerned with his theory of haiku, the three-line, seventeen-syllable form. Appearing as both theorist and practitioner, he won the highest appraisals of his contemporaries and those who came after. Indeed, he was identified as the greatest poet of the twentieth century. He was the founder of the esteemed and still active literary school Nihon-ha 日本派 (Japanese school); it assembled around the haiku journal *Hototogisu* ほととぎす (Cuckoo), which has been in the print since 1898. To this day, some of his haiku selections—*Haiku hashi* 俳句橋 (A Bridge of Haiku, 1896), *Kanzan rakuboku* 寒山落木 (Cold Mountains, Empty Woods, 1885), *Nanakusa shū* 七草集 (A Collection of Seven Grasses, 1888), *Tsuki no toshi* 月の都市 (A Moonlit Town, 1889), epitomize the genre in public estimation, and have appeared in numerous editions. Shiki himself is believed to have authored a total of over 20,000 haikus.

This study will focus, however, on his treatises on the art of poetry, which made a seminal contribution to the emerging theory of haiku as a genre. Even though these works are divided into separate miniature treatises, they do form a single whole in their methods and the style and views expressed by the author; they are like pieces

of a mosaic that can only stay together if joined by a common idea. These treatises are *Dassai sho-oku haiwa* 瀬祭書屋俳話 (Discourses of Old Dassai on Haiku, 1893), *Haiku taiyō* 俳句大要 (Fundamentals of Haiku, 1895), *Haiku mondō* 俳句問答 (Questions and Answers on the Themes of Haiku, 1896), *Haijin Buson* 俳人蕪村 (The Poet Buson, 1897), “Furuike no ku no ben” 古池の句の弁 (A Word on the Haiku “Old Pond,” 1898), and “Byōshō haiwa” 病床俳話 (Discourses on Haiku on the Sick Bed, 1901). We shall also quote some of his other works, such as the diaries of his final years, *Gyōga manroku* 仰臥漫録 (Notes of a Bedridden Man, published in 1901) and *Byōshō rokushaku* 病床六尺 (My Six-Foot Sickbed, 1902). All in all, Shiki wrote eighty works on haiku before succumbing to tuberculosis at the early age of thirty-five. Yet despite the incapacitating illness of his final years it was during that period that he created his most significant oeuvres—poetical, theoretical, and graphic.

Shiki employed three layers of aesthetic and poetic terms: terms of the Chinese poetical tradition and those coined by nineteenth-century Chinese literary scholars; terms of the Japanese tradition that are traceable to the major poet and theorist of versification of the Heian epoch (ninth–eleventh centuries), Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之, and the early treatises on waka 和歌 poetics of the tenth through thirteenth centuries); and his own terminology, fashioned for the specific purpose of recreating haiku poetics in the New Age. He corroborated his theoretical propositions with numerous examples of verse, thus creating his own anthology of the best haiku, an anthology that continues to enjoy high esteem in the expert community.

The famous Russian novelist and scholar Yuri Tynianov wrote that “genre as a system can vacillate. It arises (from dropouts and essentials in other systems) and wanes to become rudiments of other systems. . . . It is impossible to visualize genre as a static system, because the very awareness of a genre arises as a result of a clash with traditional genres (i.e., an awareness of a change, even if only partial, of some traditional genre with a ‘novel’ one that is about to replace it). The thing is that a new phenomenon replaces the old one, taking its place, and while not an ‘evolution’ of the old one, becomes, in effect, its replacement. When no such ‘replacement’ occurs, the genre as such falls apart and vanishes.”¹ This general proposition may be acceptable as regards haiku with a reservation that “vacillations” of haiku have always been insignificant due to its strictly controlled canonical nature. Limited to seventeen syllables, the space of a haiku poem left little if any room for applying and developing new techniques, while the old ones were brought to the ultimate degree of sophistication.

The dominant feature of haiku poetry became the constant appeal to the authority of the past, to the source, to Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 and Yosa Buson 与謝蕪村, with all changes being adopted under the banner of return to ancient times, the classical period of the genre. It was only during the Meiji period that the future of haiku and other canonical genres of art— theater, drawing, literature and calligraphy—arose in real terms for the first time. Indeed, that was the time when the haiku’s existence

was put into question. Such a question did not—nor could it—arise prior to the late nineteenth century, because it had not experienced the devastating influence of the new literary genres from the West, nor had it been subjected to any new world views that called for freer forms of expression.

In that age, medieval art had either to be converted into a piece of “classical heritage” and “samples of the past” or become a starting point for new poetry (as the stanzas of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* did in the case of Russian poetry), or, by changing its relationship with the canon, evolve into an integral part of modern culture. With the latter scenario being the case, the historical destiny of haiku is far from being completed.

The chief theme of haiku is nature, the constant flow of life seasons; haiku does not exist outside this context. The keynote of the theme is the *kigo* 季語, a “seasonal word,” which emblematically designates a season and is a must in a haiku—without a *kigo* there is no haiku. The seasonal word is a brief poetic formula, a unit that the Russian scholar A. N. Veselovskiy called “a nervous knot,” that awakens in us lines of definite images; more in some and fewer in others; depending on our development, experience, and the capacity to multiply and combine associations brought forth by the image.”² Furthermore, the seasonal word establishes connection with “nature” in haiku poetry.

Another remarkable poet and a onetime pupil of Masaoka Shiki, Takahama Kyoshi 高浜虚子, wrote that the theme of haiku poetry is “poet and his landscape,” and its purpose is to “create numerous images, human and granted by heaven, images related to seasonal changes.”³ *Haiku* poets depicted flowers and birds, the wind and the moon (*kachō fūgetsu* 花鳥風月 is the formula of the main topics of haiku), but they admitted that “we talk of flowers and birds, and the eyes record a landscape; we compose poetry, and the heart rejoices”; “although we depict but one blade of grass, its shadow cannot conceal the palpitating feelings of the maker.” “On the surface (of haiku) are flowers, not feelings,” Kyoshi declared. “The feelings are concealed in the depth, and manifest themselves on the surface of poems through moisture, sounds, and melodies.”⁴

Haiku poetry presents a world without prehistory, a “geographical image of the world,” so to speak. History is only present in haiku as a succession of seasons, a history of rotation that is taking place in nature. This seasonal change involves all objects and events mentioned in a poem, and it assumes a cosmic character. Specific things related to the haiku world are incorporated in this universal rotation and endless permutations of natural phenomena, as well as specific single events taking place in each individual poem.

People and objects related to nature appear as objects of artistic observation, not as objects involved in any action. The world of haiku is a fully observable, concrete world restricted by the canon’s rigid framework. Objects mentioned in a haiku reveal an interrelationship between man and nature, something that links together the “near” (concrete) plane of the poem with the “far” (or universal) plane. On the one hand, any

thing in a haiku exists as a thing encapsulated into oneself, an object of intent scrutiny and possessing inherent value; on the other hand, it is itself a link between a number of objects not mentioned in a particular haiku, and in this way it creates an added continuum for the poem. In the new times, the canonized list of objects that may be mentioned in a haiku extended to incorporate completely unpoetic, petty, new and even rude terms to the purely poetic. The use of traditional vocabulary forced the poet to carefully select words to convey images of nature with utmost precision. The poet is eager to be in harmony with nature, and this eagerness finds its expression in his approach toward his material—the words. Such attitude to nature as an all-sufficient phenomenon that requires no changes and only calls for a skilled showing of some of its traits confined within a single picture, calls for exceptional words.

There are always two planes in haiku. Bashō called them *fueki ryūkō* 不易流行 (eternal and current). The universal or cosmic plane relates haiku with the realm of nature in the broadest sense. The main part in this relating is performed by the seasonal word, *kigo*, which must appear in each and every poem. This, in effect, is a hint that haiku, too, belongs to seasonal changes. Poets refer to *kigo* as a semantic center of a poem, which “resurrects the forgotten and gives birth to associations”⁵.

This combination of two planes accounts for perspective in a small poetic space and includes the poem in the context of the genre while at the same time extending the framework of the genre itself. A good illustration of this is provided by the following random example, a poem by Shiki:

雪の絵を春もかけたる誇りかな

Yuki no e o / haru mo kaketaru / hokori kana

A snow landscape / Is still hanging, in the spring . . . / Dust!

The poem alludes to a custom with the Japanese, who habitually pay great attention to seasonal changes, to replace a picture in the parlors of their homes according to the season. A winter landscape that is still on the wall in spring is a clear-cut sign of misfortune. Thus, one detail points to a state of oblivion, sadness, perhaps, an adversity that occurred in the household. The concrete objects mentioned in the poem—a snow landscape, spring, and dust—are interconnected images that, together, create an ambiance of sadness and neglect. At the same time, the words “snow” and “spring” are related to the change of seasons in nature and in time, and, in this particular case, the setting off of spring and winter produces an added effect of involvement in this cycle. Concluding and emphasizing the conflict between the irreconcilable images of spring and winter is the word ‘dust’ which is traditionally linked in Japanese aesthetics with destruction, neglect, loneliness, and melancholy. The opposition of seasons, especially spring and winter, as in depicting snow lying on blooming flowers or bamboo shoots in the snow, is also a traditional motif. Another collision appears when the overall forlorn picture of neglect and abandonment is opposed to the coming of spring, an invariably joyous occurrence in Japanese poetry.

The poem is suffused with traditional imagery, which establishes connection

with the cultural context of the genre, that is, with a system of imagery that had taken centuries to evolve and without which such a poem cannot exist. It will be recalled that the haiku under examination was composed at the very end of the nineteenth century, but it could have been written in the sixteenth or the eighteenth century.

Thus, there emerge two planes of depicted objects: one features objects specifically mentioned in the poem (snow landscape, spring, and dust), and another arising from the context of the genre and understandable only in the framework of the traditional system of imagery (in which dust, e.g., epitomizes neglect, the opposition of spring and winter, etc.), which, through this system is linked with nature.

In haiku, the poet exposes his emotional experience indirectly, by describing a landscape, and, therefore, a haiku should be regarded in a broader context than even the most subtle landscape sketch. Shiki called upon his contemporaries to create a “genuine landscape” (*makoto no keshiki* 真の景色, where *makoto* denotes a profound penetration into the essence of things); this should be interpreted as an appeal to overcome a mechanical painting of a landscape as an instrument to convey one’s feelings.

Another plane in haiku is a specific, physical, tangible world of clearly expressed—or, rather, named—objects. Shiki pointed out that even a simple enumeration of things might produce a profound impression, while Kyoshi echoed him by writing, “In haiku there is no room for excess mentioning of things and phenomena; they draw human hearts with simple sounds.”⁶

Beginning with the reformation of the genre by Masaoka Shiki, contemporary haiku poetry tends toward a transmutation not of the general, cosmic plane of a poem, but of its specific, objective plane. Important as this “near” plane is, however, it does not challenge the continuing existence of the cultural context of the genre, whose beginnings go back to the time of the oldest extant anthology of the Japanese, the *Man’yōshū*, and rely primarily on the genre of *waka*, which was later inherited by haiku. The “near” plane of haiku was transformed thanks to the introduction by Shiki of a system of notions of which the most important was the category of *shasei* 写生, or drawing from nature; but this is a different topic altogether.

Shiki’s treatises on the theory of poetry may be considered not merely as essays in the history and theory of haiku, but as literary works in their own right as well. The tradition of haiku seems to gain a new awareness of its existence in his writings, which create a retrospective poetics of haiku by relying on the age-long classical tradition. Shiki builds a poetic space that is in tune with the new times. He illustrates his opinions with numerous examples of verse from distant past and contemporary times, creating in this way an ideal anthology of selected poems. This method results in a peculiar text that is “saturated” with poems. Similar to early *tanka* poetics (for instance, those of the ninth–eleventh centuries, or the Heian epoch), Shiki includes unquestionably the very best samples of verse created during the preceding centuries. This *oversaturation* of a scholarly essay with works by dozens of the best poets brings into being a peculiar logic of narration, in which the selection of poems

becomes an exercise in high literary taste in itself.

In lyrical asides that Shiki prefaced to some of his treatises he presented, in complex, rhythmic and musically arranged prose, his own life as a poet and those of other poets of the past. Thus, he begins his most significant work on poetics, *The Essence of Haiku*, with the following words: “I am a blind poet singing of flowers and mountains. I compose poetry anew, and this is the same as scooping out water from a stream. . . . I go for help to monks of bygone times and ancient Chinese thinkers, and to “the noise made by wind in pine trees.” How fortunate that they had passed their art on to the children of flowers and mountains.”⁷

Yet another plane in his treatises represents a literary analysis proper; this can be divided into two parts: (1) a concrete textological and semantic analysis of the text, and (2) general aesthetic and philological studies and conclusions, the introduction of new aesthetic categories, the renovation of traditional notions; these portions of the treatises are written in a terse and concise manner, and are full of *kango* 漢語, or Chinese vocabulary. As a theorist setting out to create his own values system and terminology to describe the genre of haiku, Shiki clearly appears as a man of the New Times, post-Meiji times, marked by the invasion to Japan—after nearly three hundred years of isolation—of Western culture, the break-up of the old notions and the emergence of new ones. This is not to say that the poet departs completely from tradition, indeed, in some of their characteristics his treatises resemble medieval writings on poetry, primarily as regards the tradition of commenting on poetic texts, which had been in use since ancient times and which Shiki can be said to be developing. As a matter of fact, commentary seems to be his most important instrument in building his own theory of haiku. Furthermore, his treatises are structured as discourses, i.e., in the dialogue tradition inherent in Japanese culture since the *uta* 歌 (songs) of the questions and answers of the *Man'yōshū*. It will be recalled that the author was in the habit of taking his students, and poets, Takahama Kyoshi and Kawahigashi Hekigotō 河東碧梧桐 to the mountains where he instructed them in haiku theory.

Even the names Shiki gave to his treatises, such as the *Discourses of Old Dasai on Haiku* and *Questions and Answers on the Themes of Haiku*, take us back to a time when, in the seventeenth century, the founder of the genre, Matsuo Bashō, conversed with his disciples on the essence of haiku poetry on the porch of his cabin in the mountains and, acting as a referee, conferred evaluations to poems during poetic tournaments. Shiki was continuing this tradition in his walks in the mountains with Kyoshi and Hekigotō.

This reliance on the dialogue and the penchant for the practice of commenting on old writings with a view to finding new meanings, were Shiki's tribute to tradition, of course; however, his writings are traditional not only in terms of pure form. Thus, quite a few chapters in his *Questions and Answers on the Themes of Haiku* are devoted to Shiki's botanical and entomological studies. Among other things, discussion in these chapters focused on the correspondence of a certain flower, plant or insect to a specific mood, feelings, or sensations. The author describes with scholarly preci-

sion the types of plants, animals, trees, the wind, and the rain. Winds and rains were classified: the sad wind from the hills, the light spring breeze that dispels the mist, for instance, or the autumn drizzle, the freezing rain of winter—the taxonomy includes a total of five winds and ten varieties of rain. Shiki would also examine the noise, finding that the rustle of a willow tree is different from that of a pine, while the babbling noise of a brook in spring is nowhere near its murmur in summer.

In his *Basics of Haiku*, Shiki seeks to formulate and understand a system of inner rules underlying the creation of a poem. The main theme of his poetics is elaboration of the category of *bi* 美 (beauty) and of criteria to evaluate it. Thus, he believes that *bi* is relative, not absolute. In seeking to realize the dialectical nature of *bi* and its evolution in the perception of people over a period of 300 years during which classical haiku was developing, he comes to the conviction that, with certain obvious exceptions, there is “no primordial criteria of beauty” (*sententeki na bi no hyōjun* 先天的な美の標準). He points to the “indisputable beauty of hitting the heart of a target,” i.e., to haikus—“natural” or *tenchiteki na* 天地的な in his terminology, literally “celestial and earthly”—that are comprehensible by all. But such instances are rare, he admits. The individual taste for beauty of a special kind, *bi*, is based on the knowledge of the Chinese and Japanese classical tradition, appropriate upbringing and education, the understanding of allusions and links with the cultural context of the epoch, the knowledge of haiku canons and of the basic and individual rules of prosody. An assembly of individual criteria may help, Shiki says, to develop a summarized general criterion of *bi* that should be used to evaluate haiku. But one should also be aware of the enigmatic nature of this poetry and of many comments that Bashō made at poetic tournaments (which were sometimes extremely laconic: “the victory goes to the left side,” “the right side wins”—tournament participants, it will be recalled, fell into two groups—the left and the right) and which are not fully unriddled to this day.

In order to elaborate the criterion of *bi* Shiki breaks it down to its constituent parts. He sees the difference between haiku and other genres of poetry in different kinds of “harmony.” The harmony of haiku, in his view, is embodied in the tercet with the number of syllables 5–7–5, or 5–8–5, or 6–8–5. In this case, the very term “harmony” is rather indistinct, signifying, apparently, a certain rhythmic and melodic structure applied to different versions of alternating syllables. A specific harmony precedes versification.⁸ Thus, *nagauta* 長唄, a long song or a tale, corresponds to complex things. Simplicity is associated with haiku, and waka fits in with shorter forms.⁹ Simplicity is a merit of Chinese verse; concern with details marks Western poetry; suggestivity is a virtue in waka poems, and ease distinguishes haiku.”¹⁰

By resorting to his favorite technique of parallelism, Shiki builds in this passage a specific rhythmic form of plotless prose. At the same time he solves a twofold task: not only does he separate haiku’s principal quality of “lightness” (*karumi* 軽み), but he also mentioned other definitions of the genres, such as “simple, detailed, suggestive” by introducing these attributes with the help of somewhat vague turns of speech, such as “one cannot say that there is a complete absence of,” which is typical

for his prose.

“Many people appreciate things that lack beauty. . . . Often, there is no beauty in things that are valued by upper layers of society. There is no beauty in a haiku poem that amuses people.”¹¹

Beauty is the only common yardstick for any kind of art. “A haiku poem is built upon a concept (*ishō* 意匠) and words (*genko* 言語), or what the ancients called ‘soul’ (*kokoro* 心) and ‘appearance,’ or ‘form’ (*sugata* 姿). There are poems in which both the concept and execution are bad or good, and where one aspect is artificial and the other is not. If one compares the words and the concepts, one will not find the first and the excellent. There are poems in which the beauty of concept dominates, and others where the beauty of words prevails.”¹² Specific words should fit in with specific concepts: “[I]n their concepts, poems fall into thousands of kinds and tens of thousands of styles. A definite style should correspond to a definite concept: obvious and suggestive, majestic and detailed, elegant and demotic, solemn and easy, illustrious and subdued. Serious and comic. . . . Suggestive vocabulary should go with a suggestive concept.”¹³

A concept may be subjective and objective. He defines as subjective descriptions of one’s soul, heart, and innermost thoughts (*kokoro*), while presentations with the help of mental images of objective things “as they are” (*sono mama* そのまま) are designated as objective. Concepts may be “natural,” “primordial” (*tenchiteki na ishō*), and “of man’s doing” (*jinjiteki na ishō*; *jinjiteki na* 人事的な can also be rendered “human,” as I have glossed it in the title of this essay). The first of these categories is concerned with natural phenomena and images, the sky and earth; the second—all that is human: people’s doings, feelings, and memories. Different as both concepts are they are of equal value as regards the artist.

The category of *bi* in Shiki’s interpretation is a complex, heterogeneous notion without an analogue in Western culture. To analyze the nature of *bi*, the author breaks it down into binary oppositions at various levels. Thus, beauty can be described as “positive” (*sekkyokuteki* 積極的) and “negative” (*shōkyokuteki* 消極的), with the positive appearing in works in which “the concept is majestic (*sōdai* 壮大), powerful (*yūkon* 雄渾), radiantly beautiful (*enrei* 艷麗). Shiki regards *enrei* as “external beauty, in opposition to *yūgen* 幽玄, the shadowed or innermost beauty, alive (*kapatsu* 活発), and original (*kikei* 奇形).” Negative beauty is beauty in works of art “whose concept is elegantly ancient (*koga* 古雅), contains innermost beauty (*yūgen*), sadness of loneliness (*sabi* 寂), quiet (*chinsei* 沈静), lightness (*karumi* 軽み), fragility (*hosomi* 細み)”¹⁴.

Shiki believed that all eastern literature (Chinese and Japanese) had a penchant for negative beauty, whereas Western literature was inherently positive for the most part. For all kinds of concepts there are exact verbal sheaths or shells, i.e., a definite concept relies on a specific vocabulary “assigned” to convey a specific kind of beauty. The “concept” draws—almost automatically—very specific words from a multitude of variants. Poets have always thought that contradiction between “concept” and

vocabulary was “a poem’s illness.” The precise correspondence between *ishō* and *genko* was traditionally conceived as one of the criteria for evaluating a haiku. If the essence, or content (*kokoro*), of a poem is the notion of fragility then the words should also convey the notion of fragility: a dry leaf, the wings of a dragonfly, and joints of an old man. Sorrow had to be sheathed with canonized words of the “sorrowful” streak: white color, the chirring of cicadas, bleached ground, the withering of winter. Even the slightest violation of this correspondence disrupts the poem’s “sad harmony,” or *sabishii shirabe* さびしい調べ. Poems with such violations, e.g., those marked by too bright a tone or loud sounds in a “negative” haiku—and vice versa—were regarded failures.

Shiki came up with the multi-layer, multi-plane notion of *bi* so as to delineate criteria for evaluating haiku. *Bi* comprises two opposite poles, with different categories of the genre grouped around them. Moreover, these categories are in a state of constant mutual influence and mutual penetration, hence this is not an unambiguous sort of opposition. The complex inner structure of *bi* is easily broken down on different levels of perception, which not only helps elucidate the nature of *bi*, but also reflects different trends in the evolution of haiku. Schematically, the notion of *bi* and all its components can be presented in the following manner proposed by Shiki:

bi

positive beauty - negative beauty

objective beauty - subjective beauty

natural beauty (celestial and earthly) - human beauty

ideal beauty - empirical beauty

simple beauty - complex beauty

At times, Shiki was excessively categorical in his drawing up of borders between spheres of influence of different kinds of beauty; this was the case when he assigned to Bashō only the sphere of “negative beauty.” For his part, Shiki preferred the first group of categories, believing that the evolution of haiku would proceed in the direction of greater objectivity, from natural beauty to human, and that “complex beauty” based on unusual images would be in for further development. As a theorist, he showed a proclivity toward a positive, bright and lively beauty, full of movement and strength, an “obvious,” or *enrei naru bi* kind, or, to use his terms and turns, which was as beautiful as the tail of a peacock or as sumptuous as the flower of a peony; he believed the future belonged to this kind of beauty. As a poet, he was a captive of tradition, and valued negative beauty with its faded colors, subdued sounds and “sad” things, autumn and winter.

In examining the notion of *bi* in the diachronic aspect, Shiki expressed the view that in ancient times “negative” beauty prevailed, whereas the present times witnessed an evolution of “negative” beauty toward “positive, with the latter destined to prevail in the future for the simple reason that “positive” art tends toward the logical, not the intuitive comprehension of life. This thesis should not be accepted in too

dogmatic a manner, however.

"In ancient times there existed the majestic and powerful style . . . [and he] who mastered the supreme truth of literature in the Tang epoch resorted to the 'negative concept' in his best poems." Poets who claimed they belonged to the Bashō School follow his example even to this day. They believe that the highest form of beauty is fully negative: it is the sorrow of *sabi* (loneliness), *koga* (the ancient-elegant style), *yūgen* (innermost beauty), *karumi* (lightness). "Positive" and "negative" elements penetrated into alien spheres and existed there, forming an organic whole with foreign material. Thus, the "majestic and powerful" found their way to tercets and, moreover, pictures of raging elements or the entire human lives can be found even in poems by today's authors—pictures metaphorically confined to seventeen-syllable structures. "Many adepts of the haiku school value negative beauty alone as the most adequate to the nature of haikai, and they regard painting, motion and power only as something vulgar. . . . If one compares positive and negative beauty, however, one finds it impossible to ascertain any supremacy of one kind over the other"¹⁵.

Shiki constructs the beauty category of *bi* by setting up his binary oppositions. Moreover, he regards positive beauty as encompassing one aspect of things, with negative beauty covering the other. Some Westerners among haiku poets erroneously believe, he went on, that negative beauty and a negative worldview stem from limited knowledge of the world. In touching upon the peculiar character of innovation in haiku poetry, which he defines with the words "new," and "fresh" (*seishin* 精神), he regards innovation within the confines of the canon that does not result in a radical break-up of the canon. Thus, he refers to the renovation of the genre from inside by means of an instrument related to the tradition, namely, "percolation" (*mi ni shimu* 身に染む) of "positive elements" into the "negative sphere of haiku." Bashō exhibited a negative, shadowy beauty with great skill; in comparison, another great haiku poet Buson (whose work Shiki valued the most) tended toward positive beauty.

On the next level, the notion of *bi* is characterized by two categories of "natural" (given by heaven and earth, *tenchiteki*) and "human" (*jinjiteki*). Shiki breaks down the triad of heaven, earth, and man (*tenchijin* 天地人), or *ame* 天, *tsuchi* 土, *hito* 人, into two parts, opposing heaven and earth to man. He also opposes their corresponding categories: of activity and quiet, complexity and simplicity; he believes that the static (nature) is more easily expressed in haiku than the dynamic (man). The complex (*fukuzatsu* 複雑) and active (*kappatsu*) things and phenomena rarely figured in haiku poems in any case. Shiki wrote: "The small universe of their seventeen syllables can incorporate only one mountain, one stream, one blade of grass and one tree; as for the depiction within these confines of a miniscule part of "the world" of men, with its changes and its activities . . . this is the most difficult of the difficult tasks. . . . Buson alone proudly led the way without even thinking that it was so difficult. People of our times do not think that this is easy, and after Buson only a few learned it."¹⁶ Besides Buson, Shiki mentions two students of Bashō—Kikaku 其角 and Ransetsu 嵐雪—among poets who berhymed the "human."

“Although Bashō composed many a poem about man’s doings, he did not limit himself to depicting his personal destiny.”¹⁷ Shiki quotes the two best “human” haikus by Buson:

青梅に眉集めたる美人かな

aoume ni / mayu atsumetaru / bijin kana

Having bitten a green plum / A beauty frowned / Her eyebrow.

身に染むや亡き妻の櫛を屋に踏む

Mi ni shimu ya / nakitsuma no kushi o / nōya ni fumu

Sorrow pierced me / In the bedroom of my deceased wife / I stepped on a comb.

An impression one gets while reading Shiki’s treatises is that his literary-critical text, which is profoundly lyrical in some chapters and thus comes very close to the medieval essay genre of *zuihitsu* 随筆, lit. “following the brush,” and to haiku poems, contains not merely an analysis of haiku poetics and its main themes and trends, but also concealed recommendations for his contemporaries, poets writing in the same tradition. These recommendations are about comprehension and mastering of the technique of versification and methods of elaborating the canonized theme in all its diversity.

“Raise your heart and return to the common,” Bashō would say (*takaku kokoro o satorite zoku ni kaerubeshi* 高く心をさとりて俗に帰るべし).¹⁸ That is, come back to the common world of people that he called *jitsu* 実, reality. Shiki denotes reality with the notion of *ari no mama* ありのまま (things as they are), and this is the most important thing in a haiku. But depicting a “thing as it is”—truly and accurately—is impossible without appealing to the eternal and unalterable, in other words, without correlating the near and immediate plane with the constant and interminable. In haiku, there is no distance between poet and object. “If an object and I are separate, harmony is not to be attained,” Bashō said. Feeling and action are perceived as one whole. To create a haiku worthy of its name calls for a detachment from personal emotions; poets shun words that would directly point to such feelings as “melancholy” or “merriment” or “happiness.” The poet had to develop an enlightened attitude toward things—nevertheless Shiki called to “appeal to feelings rather than reason.”¹⁹ In this case he might attain a new view of the object he is depicting without resorting mechanically to traditional associations but instilling in them a new spirit, thereby giving the reader a chance to envision his own sequence of associations based on his spontaneous, direct sensations. Shiki and his students believed it most important to recreate not a “landscape of one’s soul,” the goal of “subjective poetry” in his classification, but a “genuine landscape,” or “objective” landscape, which would nevertheless embrace various and diverse emotions of the author; this goal could only be achieved if one resorts to “drawing from nature;” but this is the theme of another study.

Haiku poets of the new times differ from the masters of bygone days in that they express their emotions indirectly, i.e., through things they see—*miru mono* 見る物, or “visible things.” In seeking to convey the inner essence of things, they achieve their goal by means of a complex technique of creating objective (in Shiki’s terminology) pictures of nature. “They portray things they see, and these portrayals stir emotions... In this way, genuine objectivity moves human feelings.”²⁰ Now, “genuine objectivity” for Shiki comprises a meticulous and “thorough,” “detailed” (*seisaiteki* 精細的) presentation of the realm of nature and man; with only a genuine and objective depiction capable of stirring genuine emotions, the path from a “thing seen” toward an emotion is rather complicated. A mere designation of the “thing seen” in a definite context, its “genuine” (*makoto no*) depiction, and its ties are capable of producing perfectly “programmed” feelings in a sophisticated reader. At the same time, the feelings regarding the depiction experienced by the poet, although remaining “off screen” as it were, are nevertheless absolutely coherent. (Shiki uses the verb that denotes “be translucent” or “transparent”). The poet’s feelings stirred by “objective beauty” may be reflected in the text of a haiku, but will occupy only a reserved place there. Exclamatory particles *ya* and *kana* should not, writes Shiki, be perceived literarily as an expression of emotion, as they often served merely to maintain the appropriate number of syllables (5–7–5) and were utterly devoid of any emotional content.

In subjective verse, according to Shiki, the poet does not portray an object but entrusts himself to his “imagination of things seen” (*miru mono no sōzō* 見る物の想像).²¹ He valued Buson’s verse unusually highly because the latter was able to discard his fantasy and skillfully conveyed the objective beauty in “genuine landscapes” and “direct pictures.” Furthermore, he was convinced that the traditional genre was evolving from the negative and toward the positive and from subjectivity to objectivity; at the same time, he presumed that there was taking place a particular synthesis whereby elements of negative beauty were entering the realm of positive beauty, and vice versa.

Apart from the category of *bi*, Shiki also examined in the treatises under review yet another highly important category as regards haiku poetry, namely, the category of *dai* 題 or *daimoku* 題目, i.e., the “theme.” *Dai* in haiku epitomizes the seasons, yet during this period even this perennial theme had undergone sufficient changes, the conservatism of the genre notwithstanding.

In the chapter entitled “New Themes” in the *Discourses of Old Dassai on Haiku*, the author proposes that “people’s consciousness undergoes changes in line with the spirit of the times.”²² While admitting a certain influence upon this canonical genre of the times, Shiki asserts that “the present doings of people are largely similar to the doings of people from bygone times.”²³ New themes are concerned with composing poetry about a new perception of the world that arose during the period from the old themes and the former worldview that Bashō, for one, espoused. The formation of this new perception in haiku poetry was linked to the emergence

of what is known as “the eternal theme of the human.” “Things and phenomena of our world, whether natural or of human doing, are divided into the fine (*ga* 雅) and low (*zoku* 俗).”²⁴ The “crude,” “ignoble,” “plebian”—all that was rejected by courtly poets of the middle ages—began to appear more and more in haiku. The “human” theme bought in its wake many other subjects that were completely taboo in the previous poetic tradition. So strong was, indeed, the inertia of banning the “crude” that even so radical a champion for the introduction of new topics in poetry as Shiki did doubt whether these bans could be eliminated. What kind of mental image can be produced when one hears the phrase “steam engine,” he wondered. Or when one hears the words “elections,” “competition,” or “disciplinary penalty,” and “court investigation”—what images might they produce?²⁵

Poets of the Bashō circle found that the strictly defined canonical theme (it will be recalled that the canon took shape under the influence of Chinese poetry back in the tenth-thirteenth century) and consequent restrictions on the range of themes were made up for by greater freedom of interpretation and possibilities for individual improvisation. These poets explored the theme in depth, showing exceptional sophistication in uncovering the very essence of the thing dealt with. Thus, choosing the theme of “cuckoo,” “moon,” or “autumn cicada,” etc., the poet was well aware of the tremendous experience of his predecessors who delved into the same themes time and again; moreover, he was just as aware of a whole kingdom of words associated with this particular theme, in fact, affixed to it as it were, and, as a result, he sought to turn the theme at a different angle in order to make it shine with a novel light. In other words, he tried to improvise within the framework of the canon that provided such freedom. Shiki knew that for all their rigidity the thematic structures opened possibilities for “turning the theme.” Although he never openly says so, in the chapters of his *Discourses of Old Dassai on Haiku* that deal with the five autumn themes he demonstrates with the help of examples the inherent broad possibilities for developing a traditional theme. As a matter of fact, the theme of haiku is one and the same—the seasons (or as one wise man said, ‘he who witnessed the change of seasons has seen it all’), but it includes an extremely diversified canonical system of sub-themes that make it possible to tie the “landscape of soul” with the “genuine landscape” of nature. The diversity of *bi* manifests itself not merely in the means of depiction (“negatively,” “ideally,” and so on), but also in the wealth of the themes of haiku themes that were reflected in poetics, collections and catalogs of themes. At present, there are numerous data bases accessible on the Internet that contain haiku themes (*dai*) and registers of seasonal words (*kigo*), whose number runs to 35,000.

The five of the main themes that Shiki examines in *Discourses of Old Dassai on Haiku* show how thoroughly they were developed. It is noteworthy that the themes were not an invention of haiku poets at all, having been in use for several centuries in classical waka (*tanka*) poetry since the first Japanese anthology *Man’yōshū* and even earlier, when waka poems were disseminated orally. It was often the case that the emperor himself appointed themes for poetic tournaments. It will be recalled that the sets

of themes were formed under the influence of Chinese poetry, where they had evolved in very ancient times: this made it all the more challenging for subsequent generations of poets to take up work on them. The themes selected by Shiki are “cuckoo,” “*hagi* bush” 萩, “first autumn storm” (*hatsuarashi* 初嵐) and other kinds of autumn winds, “*ominaeshi* grass” おみなえし, and “banana”—all belonging to the “negative” season, the fall. It goes without saying, however, that the five themes in question do not conclude the anthology of haiku autumn themes. In fact, Shiki could have selected other not less usable themes, for instance “autumn cicadas,” “scarlet maple leaves,” “chrysanthemums,” “moon,” and so on; variations on these themes are truly infinite and appear in tens of thousands of poems.

The essence of haiku consists in that a poem is born when a fixed theme undergoes infinitely varied interpretations. The fact that the range of themes is known in advance certainly places restrictions on the poet, but, at the same time, it gives him a chance to deepen the chosen theme as infinitely. It is noteworthy that the rigid control of the themes was never regarded in traditional poetry as a restriction; in fact, the rigorist rules and the canonization of the themes produced—at the other pole—a sense of greater freedom for variation and improvisation within the framework of a theme.

Thus, the formal prerequisites for composing a haiku are an accepted theme and the well-known ways of expressing *bi* (“objective,” “subjective,” etc.). The themes are indirectly related to *bi*, being means of expressing absolute beauty. Together, all objects belonging to one theme—and a theme incorporates not one main object, but tens, even hundreds of other things belonging to the circle of one theme and related to the new object by many ties—form what may be described as a poetic picture—even before a poem is actually composed.

When reading Masaoka Shiki’s treatises one gets the impression that his literary and critical texts, which in some sections are so profoundly lyrical that they resemble the medieval genre of essays known as *zuihitsu*, as well as haiku poems, contain not only analyses of haiku poetics and its main themes and trends, but also some hidden recommendations suggesting to his contemporary poets how to master versification techniques and develop canonical themes in all possible diversity. We may conclude by summarizing his achievement thus: Masaoka Shiki created a new normative poetics in retrospect, a poetics that could be and has been used by his contemporaries and members of the school of his followers to this day.

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1 Tynianov 1979, p. 267

2 Veselovskiy 1940, p. 376

3 *Masaoka Shiki shū*, p. 14.

4 Takahama 1973, p. 14.

5 Ibid., p. 15.

6 Ibid., p. 4.

7 *Masaoka Shiki shū*, p. 340.

8 Ibid., p. 347.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 348.

14 Ibid., p. 485.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 488.

17 Ibid.

“Human” and “Celestial and Earthly” in Masaoka Shiki’s Theory of Haiku

18 *Bashō kōza* 1955–1956, p. 37.

19 *Masaoka Shiki shū*, p. 384.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 456.

21 *Ibid.*, 487.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 394.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*