

Journey Through the In-Between: A Haibun Anthology

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For Elissa, Jonathan II, Gabriel, Mom, and Dad
—thank you for your love and support

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Abstract

The critical paper addresses the haiku and haibun of the seventeenth-century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho and argues that his poetry demonstrated a high level of ingenuity and flexibility. Accordingly, it serves as a model that can be reappropriated by modern poets writing in a different language and context at a distance of hundreds of years. The haibun anthology entitled *Journey Through the In-Between* is divided into two main parts. Part One presents the ambiguity that I have discovered on my mental and spiritual journey of faith. It is divided into five chapters. Each chapter's title and content features two juxtaposed states of mind as follows: "Between Light and Darkness;" "Between A Dark Night of the Soul and Acedia," "Between Purpose and Failure," "Between Faith and Doubt," and "Between Hope and Despair." Part Two, also divided up into five chapters, focuses less on juxtaposed ideas and more on several trains of thought that present my faith struggle to the reader. Each chapter's title serves as the introductory phrase for the haibun in that chapter as follows: "Pain is a..." "Depression looks like..." "I Remember..." "The Other Day..." and "Dear Lord..." Ultimately, the reader is taken on a journey from the darkness to the light as the read through the anthology.

Through the Cold and the Empty Desolation: A Writer's Journey

"The fire and the rose are one."

T.S. Eliot

Writing is often a selfish endeavor. And by *self-ish*, I mean that in putting words on the page, a writer may learn as much about the *self* as about the material that has been researched and incorporated into a project. Even the author who begins writing with the high intentions of bringing peace to the world or joy to the human soul could find, after all, that he has been working out his inner self, discovering hidden motivations, yearnings, personal strengths and weaknesses, even inconsistencies in his belief system, as he proceeds down the literary pathway. And on such a pathway, a writer may come to a dead end and find that he must turn back and search for another way forward. Or it may be that he comes to a Frostian fork in the road where he must decide between two or more equally rewarding alternatives. Perhaps the writer, as he makes his way down a well-trodden path, stumbles upon an overgrown and forgotten detour and takes it. Perhaps he resists the temptation. Or maybe he decides to clear a new trail, to make an as-yet-unknown connection between two or more (seemingly) divergent pathways. Upon that fresh detour, the writer may encounter pitfalls and rocky terrain, a briar patch, or a forest enshrouded in fog and closed off from the sun. And at journey's end, he might learn that the rough, dark, and treacherous passages along the way were the most meaningful and beneficial. And learning, he might realize, as I have, that writing with its ups and downs, its ebbs and flows, its clarity and ambiguity, is a journey toward what is hidden beyond the darkness. A journey through the in-between.

For me, there is that aspect of writing very much akin to what St. John of the Cross called a *dark night of the soul* when joy is nowhere to be found despite one's mature practice of Christian

discipline and relationship with God. The silence of God amid suffering or hardship brings on this sorrowful state. Of course, sorrow, depression, and the silence of God are not necessarily part of the writing process, but writing can be quite ambiguous and is, in that way, like a dark night of the soul. For example, I doubt that I am alone in having asked the question of why I write. Do I write to teach? Do I write to spread love and joy? Do I write for prestige or money? All the above? And it may be that I am not alone in discovering that more than writing for an audience or an income, “I am out with lanterns looking for myself,” as Emily Dickinson put it.

In all probability, I will never fully find myself in this life through writing or otherwise. But on the other side, perchance, I will have opportunity to look over my life with the realization that, as in Tohaku Hasegawa’s *Pine Trees*, it was the fog, the ambiguities, the in-between where “the fire and the rose are one,” that made up the best parts of me. And the moments, days, even years, of darkness and silence when I descended “into the world of perpetual solitude” were the periods of greatest spiritual growth. For now, while I am on this journey through the in-between, writing joined with the *other* spiritual disciplines, will be my pathway to discovering myself. And in the discovering, I hope that my writing, indeed, my life, will benefit others somehow.

In planning out this anthology and accumulating ideas, I found myself struggling with indecision. Should I continue writing the fiction novel on which I had spent eight weeks already? Should I continue writing poetry along a similar theme to an anthology I completed for another course? Or should I begin from scratch? Finally, it dawned on me that indecision was a type of ambiguity, in which the mind, stuck between alternatives, is like a forest covered in gray fog through which the white of day or the blackness of night cannot be seen. I had only recently come across the late sixteenth-century *byōbu* (screen painting) of Tohaku Hasegawa called *Pine Trees*. In the work, few trees are visible, and even these seem to disappear into the fog.

Hasegawa had painted the screen after losing his son Kyuzo tragically and later his close friend and mentor Rikyu. The mist—representing silence, sorrow, and ambiguity—rather than the trees, is the actual subject of the painting. Not only did Hasegawa feel that his life had drifted into a dense fog, but he mourned over the darkness that was rising in his homeland of Japan. About fifty years after painting *Pine Trees*, a series of imperial edicts closed Japan off from the rest of the world. This painting said it all for me: life is often ambiguous, but we do ourselves a disservice if we miss the fog for the forest. So, for this poetry anthology, I chose to write about the ambiguities, gray areas, and the in-betweens of my life and faith.

A second inspiration for the project's subject matter was Hans Holbein the Younger's painting *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, in which the recently entombed corpse of Jesus is presented as that of an ordinary man who has undergone unbearable physical and mental torment. Taking in Holbein's painting, I could imagine, as does Ippolit of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, the terror that would have greeted the disciples as they gazed at the dead body of their Master—the One in whom they had placed all their hopes. I could imagine the feelings of utter despair and helplessness at the power of death. I could even imagine myself doubting that He would rise again. In beholding Christ in this way, there is a single glaring question that rises above the noise of many, and it is one that Jesus Himself uttered from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Desolation and emptiness encapsulate that question at a level I may never experience, but it is comforting, nonetheless. If Jesus experienced feelings of abandonment by God, perhaps there is an ordinary, though ambiguous, facet of faith that deserves to be addressed here. I have attempted to take up that task in my anthology.

Of course, manifold inspirations contributed to the content of my anthology, and I have surely overlooked or neglected to mention many. Still, since this is a literary work, it seems

pertinent that I mention the literary inspirations for my content. One is the poetry of T.S. Eliot, especially “Hollow Men,” “The Wasteland,” and “Four Quartets,” and the other is the novel *Silence* by Shusaku Endo. “Hollow Men” and “The Wasteland” present a bleak picture of a society that has lost faith in anything substantial, resulting in mental and moral barrenness without hope of restoration. “Four Quartets” essentially addresses the same matter of spiritual desolation but was written after Eliot’s conversion to Anglicanism and carries more theological implication than the other primarily intellectual poems. Also, where the two earlier poems leave the reader without any apparent hope, “Four Quartets” points to Christ as the basis for hope.

Regarding *Silence*, if there is in any story that has captured the ambiguities in life and the Christian faith (the two cannot truly be divided) for me, it is this one. Shusaku Endo, a Japanese Christian himself, presents a picture of the struggle of seventeenth-century Portuguese missionaries and their converts in Japan to retain their faith in the face of persecution. When Father Rodrigues is faced with watching the torture and slaying of his followers, he recants his faith. The reader is left in shock until a glimmer of hope manifests itself at the end of the story: it seems that Rodrigues may have retained his faith internally, in silence. *Silence* left me asking what I would do in the place of these missionaries. Would I outwardly deny Christ to save the lives of other Christians? Is outward denial the same as inwardly rejecting Christ? What would God’s conclusions about this scenario be? When I considered Ichichiro, the Judas character in the story, more questions came to my mind. Is there a place for weak Christians in our churches? How much is any Christian, myself included, failing to truly confess Christ in everything we do? Am I more like Rodrigues or Ichichiro than I care to admit? Remembering the impact of this story on my thinking, I was inspired to create poetry about crises of faith, dark nights of the soul, and the ambiguity that is found in nearly everything in life.

As for the form and style of my poetry anthology, indecision brought me to a crossroads where I felt I must decide between prose and poetry. Should I go the route of personal essays about my struggles with faith and hope? Should I start a new fiction story akin to *Silence*? Or should I take the poetic path? I knew that trauma, tragedy, and depression had been written about through all these means. But I remembered a book that I read by Makoto Fujimura, a Japanese painter who converted to Christianity, called *Silence and Beauty*, in which he discussed the works of several Japanese artists, including his own, and how they addressed the trauma experienced by the Japanese in the past, especially the persecution of Christians in sixteenth-century Nagasaki (as represented in *Silence*), and the atomic bombing of the island at the close of World War II. Fujimura then relates these past experiences to the mental and spiritual crises that Japan now faces. *Silence and Beauty* led me to Japanese art forms, which in turn led me to a form of haiku poetry called *haibun*, a combination of prose and haiku.

One prominent *haibun* artist that I discovered was the seventeenth-century poet Matsuo Basho. *Haibun* has been adapted by Western poets since his time, but to my knowledge there are few adaptations of the anything like Basho's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. What differentiates this work from more contemporary *haibun* is that it is written in the form of *ryokoki*, or a travel diary. The object of Basho's use of *ryokoki* is not to give an account of true events, per se, but to have a literary influence on the reader. Still, the fact remains that *The Narrow Road* is written as a travel diary with haiku inserted between accounts. The haiku are either loosely or directly associated with the travel accounts. As with all traditional haiku, they are written with the goal of presenting two juxtaposed and disparate, usually natural, images to readers for reflection on their meaning. The haiku serve as poetic, reflective, or meditative stops along the road.

Accordingly, for my anthology I chose to present a journey of faith, a travel diary, dealing with the unanswered questions, trials, fears, doubts, and periods of spiritual fog and darkness—the ambiguous happenings that I have experienced for which little direction is given in the Bible on how to proceed. Interspersed between these happenings on the journey are stops for reflection. These haiku, or poetic interjections, present natural images that are meant to be thought-provoking and relate back to the prose that has preceded them. Where Basho may have embellished on true events or simply imagined or invented them, I have chosen to be as faithful as I can to the essence of my experiences.

Incorporating natural images into my anthology was my greatest joy. I can relate to the traditional Japanese bond with nature. I do not mean to suggest that I am a pantheist or have Buddhist leanings like T.S. Eliot seems to have at one point. What I mean to say is that, for me, nature is a place of solace, a refuge from the noise of the world. At times, it is even an escape from inner turmoil. Observing a duck floating on a pond, a heron gliding over the sea, or a deer lowering its head to a blade of grass is a respite to me on an often dreary and tumultuous journey. I imagine that Basho, like most artists of his time, shared these sentiments. Basho's juxtaposition, or *toriawase* (combination), of two disparate natural elements in his haiku and haibun was a perfect fit for the content and structure of my work. The word-image created through haiku, and the separation of the image into two elements by an emphatic particle, or *kireji*, represented the ambiguity to which I pointed throughout my corpus.

When it comes to haiku, however, there is something that is lost when translating from Japanese to English. Not only do Westerners generally have a different outlook on seasons and nature but we often are unaware of the associations that the Japanese, at least those of the past, make between these natural elements and human emotion. More than the content of traditional

haiku, there is also a syllabic disconnect between Japanese and English. For that reason, it is nearly impossible for English translations of Japanese haiku to consist of seventeen syllables spread over three lines with a 5/7/5 pattern. As a case-in-point, the word haiku, two syllables in English, is three in Japanese (*ha-i-ku*). Dr. Michael Haldane, a translator of *The Narrow Road*, made the point that a seventeen-syllable line in Japanese, considered to be a moment in time, is about eleven or twelve in English. With that in mind, I have not confined my haiku to the pattern of 5/7/5 or even to seventeen total syllables but, instead, gave my attention to brevity and natural content in each line, two vital aspects of haiku.

In my research, I did find that there are numerous Western haiku poets that focus on brevity and nature rather than on the syllabic constraints of the art. In fact, there is a website called “Contemporary Haibun Online” that is designed for English-language haibun. Many of the haiku within these haibun are three lines, but neither the 5/7/5 nor the seventeen-syllable pattern are followed. Some poets use as little as nine syllables, some as many as fifteen. Others have chosen to veer away from the natural in their haiku to discuss diverse topics like cancer. I did not take that step because it was my goal to be as representative of the original form as I could.

In terms of my main goal in this work, it was not to promote the idea that faith or one’s thinking should always flow in the vein of ambiguity, but only to acknowledge that this is where I have been of late. I trust Christ will guide me beyond the fog through which I have been journeying and into the brightness of day again. In life, much is unknown and even the known may be incomprehensible. Good people experience unbelievable pain and heartache at times. Sadness is often the bedfellow of joy, doubt the companion of faith, fear of hope, pain of pleasure, shadow of sunlight, discord of harmony. “The Journey Through the In-Between” was an exercise in self-examination and discovery and, in the process of writing, I was able to draw

out things lying dormant deep within that I otherwise may not have known were there. But beyond my *self-ish* goals for writing, my work was meant to be an honest, excruciatingly-painful-to-write, presentation of my struggles to others out there who will find hope in knowing 1) that they are not alone in their darkness, 2) that battling to maintain faith or grow in it is common to all Christians, and 3) that someone has given a voice to the often “voiceless wailing” that goes on in our souls. Faith is a journey, and sometimes we get lost in the fog, or we stumble into a ditch, or we get cut up by the thorns along the way. But, in the end, I believe we will find that it was the times when we rose from the ruins that our faith was strengthened most.

From Waka to Haibun: A Journey Between Tradition and Nuance

Scholars consider the seventeenth-century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho to be the central figure in Japanese poetry who bridged the gap between traditional waka and renga (traditional linked-verse)—with all their constraints and themes—and the divergent and more flexible arts of haikai (comical linked-verse) and single-verse hokku. While the works of haikai artists before Basho were mostly reactionary and “low brow,” living up to the definition of haikai as “comical verse,” Basho “refined and “elevated” haikai, giving voice to the “intellectual sensibilities of the age, even while maintaining fidelity to tradition” (Thomas 415-16). The poetic ingenuity and flexibility exemplified in Basho’s choice of diction, expansion of traditional themes and content, and innovative poetic structure, indeed, his willingness to journey between tradition and nuance, have allowed space for modern English-language poets to borrow and reappropriate traditional Japanese poetry forms despite differences in language, tradition, and era.

Development of Haikai from Traditional Waka and Renga

Before turning to the contributions of Basho, it is pertinent to first understand the development of hokku, later called haiku, from waka and renga. Gaining an understanding of this development should shed light on just how innovative Basho was and also reveal his influence on modern haiku. The form of haiku that we are familiar with today, at least in the Western world, is a three-line, seventeen-syllable poem with a syllabic sequence of 5/7/5.

Early in the Tokugawa, or Edo, period (1603-1867), however, *haiku* was called *hokku* and referred to the first three lines of a *renga* (“linked-verse”) sequence (Shirane, “Poetry” 275). A *renga* sequence generally consisted of thirty-six (*kasen*) or one hundred links (what we might call stanzas) and was composed by multiple poets alternating with one another. The first poet

would compose a three-line *hokku* with a syllabic pattern of 5/7/5, then another poet would follow it with a two-line poem of a 7/7 pattern. It is from renga that *haikai* (“comic linked verse”) stemmed, and from *haikai* eventually came the single-verse *hokku*, now called *haiku*.

Renga and *haikai* stemmed from *waka*—an umbrella term for traditional thirty-one-syllable Japanese poems that later became synonymous with *tanka*. The main difference between *waka* and renga is that the latter breaks up the 5/7/5/7/7 syllabic pattern in the manner mentioned above, as does *haikai*. Where *waka* and renga were governed by strict rules for “poetic diction, topics, and word associations” and were mainly the possession of the aristocracy (Kawamoto 711), *haikai* was originally considered a “plebeian,” or “low brow” form of poetry (Thomas 415).

One example of the rigidity of *waka* was the requirement to include standardized seasonal words. These seasonal words represented “particular emotions, moods, and images” (Shirane, “Poetry” 275). For instance, “summer rain” (*samidare*) elicited feelings of depression or oppression, while “spring rain” (*harusame*) prompted a pleasant mood. Seasonal words also fell under specific “seasonal topics” (*kidai*). Cherry blossoms or frogs represented spring, snow indicated winter, the moon indicated autumn, and so on (Shirane, “Poetry” 278). The collection of standardized seasonal words “formed a vast pyramid,” the words at the top considered more elegant than those borrowed from popular culture or Chinese at the bottom.

In addition to being the poetry of the plebeian, *haikai* was essentially a reaction against the strictures of *waka* in Bashō’s day. Instead of simply ignoring established rules, *haikai* poets parodied traditional poetry. For both reasons, *haikai* compositions often bordered on “eccentricity” and “incoherence” (Kawamoto 712). As a case in point, Nishiyama Soin, the head of the Danrin School of *haikai*, composed the following poem: “*Thanks to my gazing, / a pain*

from the blossoms in / the bone of my neck,” which was a parody of a poem by Saigyō about sadness and the end of spring.

On the other hand, parody was a staple of haikai in its inclusive employment of “contemporary language and subject matter” that was prohibited in traditional poetry (Shirane, “Poetry” 276), and its focus on the comical—haikai being translated “comic” or “unorthodox.” In fact, Kawamoto argues that it was likely the “anti-traditional stance” of haikai¹ that prevented it from being “swallowed up by the older tradition” (711).

Still, a balance had to be found for the movement to be successful. The Danrin School did not last mainly because it was far too extravagant in its divergence from tradition. It was Matsuo Bashō who finally achieved a balance between the traditional and the contemporary, the serious and the comical, the “meaningful” and the “disruptive” (Kawamoto 712).

Understanding the rigidity of medieval Japanese poetry before and contemporary with Bashō reveals just how flexible he was by comparison. This is important because some modern haiku poets in North America have assumed that haiku can only be defined in certain terms, almost in the spirit of traditional Japanese poetry prior to Bashō. They have assumed that haiku must come from direct observation, avoid metaphor, and discuss nature alone. For that reason, haiku like this one written by Ezra Pound in 1912 are rejected as not being in accord with that definition: “The apparition of these faces in the crowd: Petals on a wet, black bough”. In Shirane’s opinion, Bashō “would have seriously disputed” such a narrow definition (Shirane, “Haiku”).

¹ Kawamoto uses *haiku* instead of *haikai*. I have chosen to use *haikai* because it was the term used in Bashō’s day for the comic linked-verse that characterized his poetry early on. His single-verse poetry was a later development and was referred to as *hokku*. The use of the term *haiku* for single-verse *hokku* was a nineteenth-century development.

Basho's Haikai: Innovation in Diction, Theme, Structure, and Content

Basho seems to have intentionally taken upon himself the task of journeying down the “narrow road” between tradition and “antitradition” (Shirane, “Poetry” 276). He wanted to speak to modern sensibilities while not wholly departing from the rich heritage of poetry of which he was a part. It was not always so with Basho. He was familiar with and had even written in the Danrin style early on, downplaying the customs of classical poetry.

But later, Basho moved away from a facetious approach toward a more mature haikai that “embraced larger human and worldly concerns” and changed the future of haikai in the process (Shirane, “Poetry” 279). No longer would haikai be something to raise one’s nose at, it would become a poetry style to be reckoned with.

Despite Basho’s shift in approach, he did not abandon the comical elements of haikai altogether: parody was replaced by novelty and surprise. As an example, the following hokku, often called the “frog poem,” sticks to the traditional topic of spring, represented by the seasonal word “frog.” But rather than continue in the traditional vein by referring to the sorrowful voice of the frog that calls to its lover, Basho mentions the sound the water makes as the frog jumps into it (Shirane, “Poetry” 277): “*An ancient pond— / a frog leaps in, / the sound of water.*” It appears that Basho’s goal with including classical imagery here and elsewhere was not to return to the traditional form but to add a level of freshness to that form.

More than just using divergent diction in the frog poem, Basho took a step away from classical situations and themes. Typically, there were only a few themes addressed in poetry, such as “seasonal changes, love ... grief for the dead, and the loneliness experienced on journeys,” i.e., generally somber subjects (Kawamoto 711). In the frog poem, Basho combines

the serious aspect of loneliness with the comical picture of a frog plopping into the stagnant water of a pond.

But the splashing water and the frog are not simply comical elements in the poem, they represent the interpenetration of “the momentary and the eternal, of movement and stillness” (Shirane, “Poetry” 278). The seeming permanence of the pond underlines the transiency of the frog’s movement, and the movement of the frog emphasizes the stillness of the pond. The comical element in the poem does not distract from its depth, nor does it disparage classical poetry. This narrow path taken between the traditional and nuance, this flexibility, was characteristic of all Basho’s mature haikai.

The reason Basho’s frog poem is significant for modern English-language haiku poets is that it serves as an analogy for the situation they are in. As Basho combined traditional ideas and forms with modern ones in this poem, so English-language haiku poets must combine poetry in the tradition of Basho with ideas relevant to Western culture and the English language. For example, where Basho and his contemporaries were immersed in nature and traditional ideas surrounding them and pulled from those ideas, modern haiku poets are generally living in more urban areas and may need to draw from diverse cultural ideas. Shirane notes that “topics such as subways, commuter driving, movie theaters, shopping malls, etc. ... while falling outside of the traditional notion of nature ... provide some of the richest sources for modern haiku ... and should be considered part of nature in the broadest sense (“Haiku”).

Connecting Juxtaposed Images through Overtones in Basho’s Haikai

Beyond Basho’s flexibility in terms of diction and theme, he also took an amenable position compared to other haikai poets of his day in the way he chose to connect juxtaposed

images in his haikai, and later in his single-verse hokku. Haikai consisted of an added verse (*tsukeku*) and a previous verse (*maeku*) that were connected by particular words, content, or overtones across a *kireji* or cutting word (Shirane, “Scent” 78).

The *kireji* divided the “semantic, grammatical, or rhythmic flow of the verse” and is usually represented by a dash in English translations (Millett 328). The function of the *kireji* was to “heighten the impact of the juxtaposed images by directing the reader's attention to the question of how these seemingly disparate images ... are related to one another.” The combination of the disparate images was referred to as *toriawase*. Once the relationship between the images was discovered, so was the poem’s meaning.

Where most haikai poets² of Basho’s day used the “content links” (*kokoro-zuke*) of the Danrin school (1673-1681) or the “word links” (*mono-zuke*) of the earlier Teimon school (1625-1674), Basho favored what Shirane calls “scent” links (*nioi-zuke*), or overtones, to connect the added and previous verses of his haikai (“Scent” 78). These scent links were much like the distant links (*soku*) found in traditional waka and renga (Ramirez-Christensen 96), while content links and word links were like close links (*shinku*).

The terms *soku* and *shinku* indicated “the relative distance between” the fourteen-syllable added verse (*tsukeku*) and the seventeen-syllable previous verse (*maeku*) in a haikai or renga sequence. Distant links were commonly used in traditional renga but typically not among the haikai of Basho’s contemporaries. Basho broke with the then-current trend of drifting from distant links toward close ones, while simultaneously deviating from traditional associations, preferring the untried and unpredictable instead (Shirane, “Poetry” 282).

² Or *hakai no renga* poets, as opposed to traditional renga poets.

The following renga composed by Jien in the *Shinkokinshu* illustrates a traditional “distant link”: “*Why does no one / inquire about / my dark thoughts?*” (previous verse). “*When I gaze up: / a clear moon in the sky*” (added verse). To understand the meaning of the renga, the reader must “bridge the gap” between the emotion and subjectivity of the previous verse and the natural aspect of the added verse (Shirane, “Scent” 87). The reader of Basho’s day would have understood that the darkness of human thoughts is juxtaposed to the moon, which here represents enlightenment. The images in the two verses are disparate, but it is their difference that makes the point.

Another example, and one that shows the difference between a close content link and a distant scent link is the following haikai sequence by Basho in *Genroku 3* (1690): “*Beneath the tree; / clear soup, pickled fish, / and cherry blossom too!*” (Basho). “*A spring that brings regret to tomorrow’s visitor*” (Fubaku). This version of the added verse by Fubaku consists of a close content link and is a “direct narrative extension of the ‘contents’ of the previous verse” (Shirane, “Scent” 79): the cherry blossoms have already fallen, and visitors will find this a regrettable situation.

By contrast, the following revised version of the haikai sequence reveals a distant “scent” link: “*Beneath a tree: / clear soup, pickled fish, / and cherry blossoms too!*” (Basho). “*A sun setting gently in the west / Great weather!*” (Chinseki). In this version, the added verse follows the implication and mood of the previous verse rather than its actual contents. Even though the previous verse implies the end of spring when the cherry blossoms fall, the added verse infers that it is spring, nonetheless, and “great weather” still abounds.

After the example of Basho, modern haiku poets attempt a juxtaposition of two ideas across a kireji in order to create “a potentially resolvable tension” that is neither random nor

artificial (Welch, “Haibun”). In fact, Welch notes three aims that modern haibun poets attempt to meet: 1) “effective poems,” 2) “strong prose,” 3) “effective leaps or links between the poems and prose” (“Haibun”). Though modern poets are still learning how to do that successfully, Basho has proven that it is possible.

Connecting “High” and “Low” Culture in Basho’s Haikai

One other way that Basho displayed his versatility and ability to tread the narrow path between the old and the new was in his willingness to combine the elegant with the commonplace through a process of what Basho’s school termed *kogo kizoku*, translated as “awakening to the high and returning to the low” (Hargiss 154). For Hargiss, *kogo kizoku* denotes an ideal pilgrimage or spiritual journey that awakens the pilgrim to the immutability and beauty ... the way of poetry behind all phenomena” seen through Buddhist eyes, while also “returning” the pilgrim to “the world of common people and everyday life” (Hargiss 149).

Hargiss believes that *kogo kizoku* is prevalent in Basho’s haibun anthology *Oku no Hosomichi*, or *Narrow Road to the Deep North*,³ but whether Basho’s primary impetus for taking the journey that he wrote about in *Narrow Road* was finding enlightenment through pilgrimage or not, is beyond the scope of this paper. What is important for our purposes is that Basho was concerned with bringing the “high” and the “low” together in his poetry.

Perhaps more than reconciling the “high” and the “low,” Basho sought to find the “high” in the “low” (Shirane, “Scent” 98). Like traditional waka with its pyramid of high and low-cultured words, linked-verse, in general, was split into high and low, traditional renga being

³ Also translated variously as *Narrow Road to the Interior* or *Narrow Road to the Far North*. I will simply refer to the work as *Narrow Road* from this point forward.

associated with “‘high’ culture, elegant diction, and subtle overtones” and haikai being associated with “‘low’” culture, “‘popular’ language and society” (Shirane, “Scent” 97).

Basho was interested in taking the “poetic overtones and medieval aesthetics” of traditional renga and connecting them to the “everyday commonplace topics and language” of the plebeian. For instance, he would take a “high” traditional overtone such as “loneliness” (*sabishisa*) and write about it in the “low,” ordinary vernacular of society.

The following portion of a linked-verse sequence from “Kite’s Feathers,” which was included in a 1690 anthology of the Basho school called *Sarumino*, is an example of finding the high in the low: “*Even the kite’s feathers / are tucked in tight— / first winter showers*” (Kyorai). “*Blown by a gust of wind, / the tree leaves come to rest*” (Basho). “First winter showers” was a traditional poetic overtone that elicited a feeling of loneliness from the reader (Shirane, “Scent” 94). But the verses are written in an unexpected way without the “high” diction of renga, as is clearly gathered from the next verse in the sequence: “*Trousers soaked / from early morning / crossing a river*” (Boncho).

Modern haiku poets have adopted Basho’s technique of combining what is considered high culture with low culture; refined poetry forms combined with everyday occurrences and modern vernacular. This pairing of the high and the low is especially evident in the “profound” range of English-language haibun from “visually descriptive travelogues to elliptical journal entries, from meditative personal essays to surrealistic imaginings” (Youmans, “Sum”). For Shirane, there is no other poetry form that can have “a special meaning and function for everyone” like haiku (“Haiku”). Yet, he also believes that modern haiku should have a certain level of depth and complexity to it as did Basho’s.

Basho's Single-Verse Hokku (Haiku): Another Level of Innovation

Haikai and renga (i.e., linked-versed poetry) eventually fizzled out and were replaced by single-verse hokku (Shirane, "Scent" 98). Yet, Basho continued to utilize his technique of juxtaposing two disparate images across a kireji in his hokku. He would use the "technique of kireji ... both to split his hokku into maeku-like (previous verse) and tsukeku-like [added verse] sections,⁴ and to reconnect them in toriawase [combination] fashion" (Millett 330).

Doho, a student of Basho, noted that Basho's hokku "compelled his readers to mentally replicate his creative journey, demanding that they go back and forth [across the kireji] over selected sounds, words, and images, searching for poetic relationships among seemingly disparate things." The combination of the two disparate things, indeed, "the common path" between them, was found by first "going" to an image in the hokku, considering its undertones, and then returning to that image "by another route" (Shirane, "Scent" 99). Doho referred to this movement as "the spirit of going and returning."

The "spirit of going and returning" can be characterized in the following hokku from haibun thirty-nine of Basho's *Narrow Road*: "*In the same lodging / Play-girls too are sleeping- / Bush clover and moon*" (Millett 332). The elements of the previous verse, the "lodging" and the "play-girls," seem to have nothing to do with the "bush clover" and "moon." But if the reader leaves the images of the lodging and playgirls and goes to the image of the moon, considers that the moon represents the permanence of enlightenment and the bush clover impermanence, then returns to the images in the previous verse, they will find what these things have in common.

The stay at the lodge and the life of the playgirl are temporary like the bush clover and are unlike enlightenment and the moon. Retaking this route, the reader may discover that the

⁴ They are "maeku- and tsukeku-like" because there is no actual division between these sections of the single-verse hokku as there would be between verses in a linked-verse (renga or haikai) sequence.

lodge is like the moon in that they are both singular. The single person who is awake in the lodge writing the hokku is also like the moon. One might also find that the bush clover is like the playgirls because there are more than one of them. “Pivot[ing] around ... contrasting images” in this way creates “space in which the mind can play and expand, using memory and experience to fill in the scene” (Eaton 332-3).

Basho could apparently look at a single natural event from many different points of view, juxtaposing two or more images in surprising ways. For that reason, some scholars recognize Basho as not only the mastermind behind hokku but also as the “greatest haiku poet” (Eaton 334). In this hokku about a butterfly perching on a flower petal, it is as if we are getting the perspective of the butterfly and the orchid: “*The butterfly is perfuming / its wings in the scent / of the orchid.*” When “going and returning” through this hokku, the reader gathers that both elements are imagined “in a moment of sympathetic accord, as if each were able to appreciate fully the beauty of the other” (Eaton 334).

In addition to carrying his technique of toriawase (combination) over into his hokku, Basho continued to combine traditional and contemporary diction and themes, bringing high and low together. For instance, one can visualize how Basho gives a sense of elegance to the ordinary in this hokku about the simple act of having breakfast in a garden: “*I break my fast / Amidst the morning glory*” (Clements 9).⁵ There is seemingly nothing extraordinary in this poem, yet the fact that the object of the poem is eating in a place surrounded by flowers gives the hokku an elegant, possibly even highbrow, ambiance.

But the surprising nature of the morning glory poem does not end there: the “morning glory” is a beautiful and elegant flower, though it has a short lifespan, blooming only for a matter

⁵ Clements’ translations of Basho’s hokku, like this one here, are not always seventeen syllables over three lines in a 5/7/5 pattern.

of hours. The hokku carries the deeper meaning of “life is very short, so seize the day.” Basho also had a knack for giving a serious tone to the comical or vulgar. According to Carter, all sorts of bugs (e.g., lice or flies) and bodily functions of humans and animals were acceptable in Basho’s poetry, “but only in the context of a scene that is in general melancholy and stark in tone” (198).

Just as Basho innovatively carried his method of bringing the high and low together, combining traditional and contemporary diction, expanding themes, and juxtaposing images over from his haikai to his single-verse hokku, so English-language haiku poets are also innovative in their approach by bringing an old Japanese art form together with a modern context. It may be more exact to say that Basho was inspired by the old but did not attempt to duplicate it. Modern English-language haiku poets share in this method in that they are inspired by Basho’s technique, but do not duplicate it. Even if they wanted to, they would find it impossible. Instead, they echo “the spirit of Basho's own poetry” by keeping the poems short, “seek[ing] out new and revealing perspectives on the human and physical condition,” and “focusing on the immediate physical world around” (Shirane, “Haiku”).

Narrow Road: Ingenuity and Flexibility in Basho’s Haibun

Ingenuity and flexibility in Basho’s poetry may have reached their apex in *Narrow Road*, which was his last major work (Hamill xxxiii). *Narrow Road* is somewhat of a travel diary (*ryokoki*) written in the form of *haibun*— “discrete passage[s] which characteristically end in one or more hokku” (Millett 328). It is important to note that some commentators do not consider Basho’s travel accounts to be “factual” in all aspects (Millett 327). Basho probably did not compose the hokku as he went along on his journey but did so later, crafting them in such a way

as “to convey a particular literary effect.” It is also possible that many of the events he describes in the prose are embellished or even invented.

Nevertheless, there is great artisanship involved in the combination of prose and hokku in the haibun of Basho. One certainly cannot divide the hokku from the prose in *Narrow Road*. In his characteristic manner, Basho linked the hokku and prose through overtones or “scent” links, the hokku serving as responses to a “set of circumstances” addressed in the prose that preceded them (Millett 345).

In fact, all the qualities of Basho’s haikai and single-verse hokku were incorporated into his haibun. The prose and hokku sections of each haibun were connected in the same way as his standalone hokku—with their maeku- and tsukeku-like divisions over a kireji in toriawase fashion; traditional elements, such as allusions to classical waka and renga and seasonal words, are incorporated into contemporary situations; and the diction is a melding of traditional and modern words and phrases. Thus, *Narrow Road* is a fitting title for a poet who walked a thin line between the old and the new in his work and life. The work is testimony to innovation for any modern English-language poet seeking to write in the Japanese haibun style.

Connecting Juxtaposed Images through Overtones in Basho’s Haibun

A good example of how Basho melds disparate images together is the hokku of haibun thirty-nine in *Narrow Road* mentioned above: “*Under one roof, / courtesans and monks asleep— / moon and bush clover*” (Hamill 29). The “bush clover” (*hagi*) is a tall shrub whose magenta-colored flowers bloom at the beginning of autumn. It was once used to “feed livestock ... for fencing, roofing, and rope making” (Millett 333).

The moon (*tsuki*) is “a common Buddhist symbol of enlightenment” or “truth.” Brought together, the bush clover and moon create a clear contrast or contradiction between the concepts of transience and eternity and of “many-and-one” (Millett 334). But the question that arises is how do these concepts relate to the rest of the hokku? And that is where the “spirit of going and returning” comes into play (Shirane, “Scent” 99).

To understand how the contrasting images of bush clover and moon relate to the rest of the hokku, one must first gather information from the prose section of the preceding haibun in the “spirit of coming and going.” For the sake of brevity, the entire prose section will not be included here, though elements of it will be discussed. First, we learn from the prose that Basho, accompanied by another poet named Sora (“I told Sora, and he wrote down”) had journeyed through several places that day with names like “Children-Desert-Parents,” “Lost Children,” and “Turn-Back-the-Horse.” Apparently, these were “dangerous places” (Hamill 28).

In addition, there is the idea of separation in these placenames. We also learn that there is an old man accompanied by two courtesans in a separate room of the lodging (“roused by the voices of two young women in the room next door. Then the old man’s voice joined theirs”). Accordingly, one begins to think that the theme of the haibun is separation, and Basho and Sora do separate from the old man and the courtesans the following day.

On the other hand, Sora and Basho do not separate and, though they are in a separate room from the old man and the courtesans, they can hear them talking through the thin walls. There is a paradox here: “in contrast to the names of the places just passed, things are not splitting up ... circumstances are bringing them together, making separate things one” (Millett 341).

This “many-and-one” contrast is paralleled in the corresponding haiku, though in reverse order. While the prose shifts from separation (place names) to unity (several people in one lodging) and back to separation (the parties going their different ways the following day), the haiku goes from unity (“Under one roof”) to separation (“courtesans and monks” in separate rooms) and back to unity (the single moon).⁶ According to Millett, the theme of many-and-one “keeps the argument of the prose distinct from that of the poetry; yet it also confirms the intended structure of the haiku” (342).⁷

Following Basho’s example in *Narrow Road*, English-language haibun poets of modern times connect their prose with their haiku in the same manner as two disparate images would be connected across a kireji in a single-verse hokku (or haiku). According to Youmans, this connection is made in at least seven different ways by modern haibun poets: 1) the haiku serves as a conclusion to the narrative of the prose passage; 2) the haiku derives one image from the preceding prose passage that “captures ... [its] principle theme;” 3) the haiku adds “insight” or “commentary on the prose” passage; 4) the haiku serves as an introduction to the prose passage, which will in turn expound on the haiku; 5) the haiku functions as a sort of epigraph that lays out a theme for the subsequent prose; 6) the haiku functions to add to the atmosphere or situatedness of the prose that follows; 7) multiple haiku follow one prose passage to “extend and enhance the prose” (“Sum”).

⁶ That is, if we use Millett’s translation, “bush clover and moon,” rather than Hamill’s “moon and bush clover”

⁷ Or *hokku*. I kept Millett’s wording here.

Connecting “High” and “Low” Culture in Basho’s Haibun

As for the connection between traditional elements and contemporary situations in Basho’s haibun, there is in haibun thirty-nine a reference to a poem from the *Shinkokinshu*, a thirteenth-century anthology of Japanese poetry: “Where the white foam-crested waves break / On the shore / [We] live our lives / As daughters of fisherfolk / Our dwelling too is impermanent” (Millett 342).

One of the courtesans quotes the poem from the *Shinkokinshu* in a modified form: “Where the white foam-crested waves break / On the shore / We wander, / Daughters of fisherfolk in this world miserably / fallen [exchanging] fleeting vows.” By modifying the classical wording, Basho alludes to the original while addressing a contemporary situation. The courtesans, or as Millett prefers, “playgirls,”⁸ are not actually living as daughters of fisherfolk “on the shore,” but as wanderers “on the shore” (343).

Also, where the daughters in the original waka are concerned with the “impermanence of their dwelling,” the daughters in Basho’s haibun are concerned with their fallenness “in this world” resulting from the impermanence of their relationships (Millett 343). They have chosen to remain unmarried, thus the reference to “[exchanging] fleeting vows.” The original poem may approach impermanence differently than Basho’s haibun does, but the theme is important to both.

Impermanence was a major theme in classical poetry due to its connection with Buddhism. As Lafleur notes, “Buddhist thinkers in the medieval period often used people’s mistaken belief that their home was permanent to illustrate the illusions the enlightened person

⁸ The difference being that playgirls only performed sexual acts as a “secondary matter” in their trade, while it was a “main occupation” for courtesans (Millett 336).

could see beyond” (77). Because monks were travelers, they were more enlightened than others about the impermanence of a dwelling, or of life in general.

More than simply borrowing from classical poetry, Basho repurposes it. Most of the original poem from the *Shinkokinshu* is kept intact, but the changes that are made transform the poem into “plain verse” (Millett 344). Though Basho cites the courtesans as quoting/rephrasing the poem, and though it is in plain verse, he chose to incorporate it into his haibun.

It could be that Basho wanted to add a comical or even vernacular element to his haibun, which was characteristic of his writing style. The language in the revised version of the poem is plain in that it is one-dimensional. The “fleeting vows” in the *tsukeku* portion (added verse) do not force the reader to cross back over the *kireji* to the *maeku* portion (previous verse) to figure out what else is impermanent in the poem (Millett 345). In other words, there is no “spirit of going and returning” (Shirane, “Scent” 99). It is made plain in the *tsukeku* portion that the “vows” are “fleeting” because the courtesans are “miserably fallen.”

Conversely, the original poem forces the reader to go back across the *kireji*, because there is seemingly no mention of anything impermanent in the *maeku* portion of the poem. If anything, the opposite is true. The daughters of fisherfolk are stuck on the shore in a fishing village, which denotes permanence. But then there is the surprise line in the *tsukeku* that says, “Our dwelling *too* is impermanent,” implying that something in the *maeku* portion is impermanent. Upon returning to “waves” and “lives” in the *maeku* from the impermanence mentioned in the *tsukeku*, one can gather that these are the elements that are impermanent in the *maeku* (Millett 345).

It appears that Basho incorporates this rephrased poem, among other reasons, to contrast it with the *hokku* that follows it. In the *hokku*, Basho “restores images of false permanence (pilgrims sleeping safely under the ... [one roof]), but also adds [the moon] ... an image of true

permanence.” By doing this, Basho reincorporates the “spirit of going and returning” into the haibun, showing his flexibility and ingenuity in the process.

Relative to Basho’s repurposing of traditional poetry (the “high”) like the one from the *Shinkokinshu* in his haibun (the “low”), English-language poets reappropriate Basho’s haiku and haibun style (the “high”) into a contemporary situation using modern vernacular and cultural themes (the “low”). In other words, they are “wrestling with how to incorporate the Eastern traditions of haibun with their own Western heritage” (Youmans, “Sum”) as Basho wrestled to integrate the “high” and the “low” of his day into his poetry. This haibun entitled “Outer Banks” by Anita Virgil is an example of pairing Basho’s style with a modern Western context:

Noon. Everyone is at the beach. Here, on the shaded breezy porch, away from burning sun and salty ocean water, kites and shovels and surfboards. Looking eastward, there’s a stretch of dune with a single staircase to the beach. On the left end of the dune stands a white pavilion against the sky. The hollow between it and the wooden stairs holds a sliver of ocean.

in the empty laundryroom

a pile of seashells...

the dryer rumbles on

The Influence of Basho’s Ingenuity and Flexibility on English-Language Haiku and Haibun

So, what does Basho’s work signify for those who would like to utilize or reappropriate his poetry form and style in the modern world? For one thing, it indicates that one can be faithful to traditional forms and styles of poetry while remaining relevant in modern times. Today, we have access to diverse Japanese works of waka (tanka), hokku (haiku), and haibun, translated

into English. There is always something lost in translation, and perhaps English translations will never fully capture the original artistry of Japanese poetry.

The same may even be true of new English compositions that utilize Japanese poetry forms as their basis. But it is conceivable that many elements of the original form can be adapted for modern, even Western, use. In that way, our situation is a bit like Basho's. He was a trailblazer in his day. His contemporaries were writing in a new way, ignoring, or despising the standards of traditional poetry. Basho chose to create poetry that would bring a balance between the new and the old. He chose the in-between.

In Western classrooms today, the arts of tanka and haiku (and haibun) are being taught. Prevalent in that teaching is the idea that if an English-speaking (or another Western language) poet wants to compose tanka or haiku, that poet should use the same syllabic structure as Japanese poets did. The problem is that our writing style is much different from theirs, and even our translations of their work do not always come out as 17- (haiku) or 31-syllables (tanka).

According to Harr, "English language hokku writers are still groping to find adequate rules which would allow some latitude between adhering to the strict 5-7-5 syllable count and using only the number of words it takes to express what one has to say regardless of syllable count" (115). That seems to have been Basho's sentiments exactly. He wrote that "Even if you have three or four extra syllables, or even five or seven, you needn't worry as long as it sounds right. But even if one syllable is stale in your mouth, give it all of your attention." (Hamill *xxvi-xxvii*). It would seem, then, that the focus of haiku, and by extension, tanka poems should be on their feel, rather than their syllabic structure or standardized rules. And perhaps modern versions of these forms have focused more on structure than on content, to the detriment of the quality of the poem.

Harr observes that haiku “are not structured verses” and that “they do not seek to express opinions or draw conclusions” (114). In fact, a haiku is more “like a Japanese dry brush painting in that it gives only a hint of things, not their entirety.” Put another way, the haiku poet “sets the scene and allows the reader to add his emotional response to it” (Harr 114). For that to be done, it may require breaking some of the rules of haiku and tanka poetry, especially the former given its inherent brevity; but breaking them while trying one’s best to remain faithful to the original form. That is what Basho did with his linked-verse (haikai) and his single-verse (hokku) poetry, over against the rules of waka and renga.

According to Stryk, ‘Basho centered his poems so deeply in his feeling that at times he dared to ignore time-honored elements of the form, including the syllabic limitation’ (33). For the modern haiku and tanka poet, brevity and emotional effect are likely the most important concerns, as opposed to a given syllabic structure, when using these forms. Brevity gives the appearance of the original form without constraining the imagery in the poem and the imagery produces an emotional effect.

Another way that modern poets can follow in Basho’s footsteps is to incorporate tension into their tanka, haiku, and haibun. Basho called the technique *toriiawase* (combination), in which two objects/images are brought into tension across a cutting word or *kireji* (implicit or explicit), as already mentioned. The difficulty may be in finding images that are relatable and understandable in a modern Western culture that is not as in tune with the natural elements of the world. But perhaps this concern—or respect—for nature can be revived somehow. If not, it may still be possible to “distill the spontaneity of a single moment of heightened awareness: impression, not conclusion into one’s poetry,” as that “is the essence of good hokku” (Harr 114).

From juxtaposing disparate images within his haikai, an offshoot of traditional renga and waka, to juxtaposing the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary, the high and low, the aristocratic and the plebeian in his hokku and haibun, Basho exemplifies the ingenuity and flexibility that seems necessary for any modern poet endeavoring to write great Japanese-style poetry in a different language, from a dissimilar background and tradition, and at a distance of hundreds of years. Haiku “rules are usually flexible, constantly evolving, and contain room for the unexpected” (Eaton 335); poets will benefit from these same characteristics on their journey through the in-between of tradition and nuance.

*Journey Through the In Between:
A Haibun Anthology*

by Jonathan Andrew Painter

PART ONE

Chapter One

Between Light and Darkness

The Creator looks down from His celestial balcony onto a world that has existed for only a moment. Seen through the eyes of eternity, darkness and light are the same to Him. The difference between night and day can be of little consequence to one who beholds everything at once. Yet, to humanity, there are no two things more dissimilar.

While much of the planet sleeps in the darkness of night, the captives of disquieted minds and malefactors of the human race remain active. It is in the dead of night when frightful dreams and night terrors disturb the sleeper. It is at the witching hour when screams are amplified, sorrow is compounded, bad fortune is multiplied, and the power of demonic forces is enlarged. Or so it is thought.

How foolish it would be to think that anything is hidden in the wee small hours. There is nothing that the ever-watching eyes of God do not see. Not a single black mass or devil's hour, not a solitary act of villainy is overlooked by His attentive gaze. He does not slumber, nor does He hide away in the night. He is there, always there.

When I find my way into the realm of dreams where flowers of Xanthian hue line hills the color of Xanadu, God is there. When my spirit returns from that golden faery land at sunrise, He is there. If I grieve upon my bed in the night, He watches over me. If I toil in the daylight, He stands at my side. Or so I felt once.

Why do I sense that You are so far from me, Ever-Present Help?

A cloudless fall night

Mars glows in the sky above—

emptiness within

I once walked through the darkness by the light of God, but even that light has become darkness to me. Perpetual nightfall fills my waking dreams and I long for the day when the light will shine again. There are moments when I can almost see a glimmering moon rising in the distance, but they never endure. At the very moment when the moonlight appears, black clouds swell and snuff it out, leaving me alone with the night as before.

Doubt and despair lurk in the dismal recesses of my mind waiting for an opportunity to reveal themselves in all their vile glory. Death calls to me as an inviting, sympathetic friend. And just when I believe that sorrow has passed and I can live anew, the black hand of torment reaches out and pulls me back down into the grave. I die again as life, with all its misery and grief, tears the beating heart from my chest. I am a living death.

If all that existed were an empty, indifferent universe and God was but a dream, perhaps my darkness would not seem so great. But my soul knows that the Light of the World lives and chooses to allow this oblivion to endure. He hides His illuminating face from me, and I am lost, lost in a kingdom of shadows.

Will You shine on me again, oh Dayspring? Or will I awake from this nightmare to find that desolation has come upon my world?

At one time I could sense the presence of God so strongly. It was as if every step I took and every thought that passed through my mind was consecrated and appointed by God. I was the body and He was the spirit animating me. He was the sun and I was the moon reflecting His light. Now it appears that the light has all but faded and the spirit lies dormant on the other side of the darkness.

The song sparrow nests
 early on a summer day—
 a new moon above

My soul groans in the night, not for redemption as it should, but only for this curse to be lifted. Creation's lament has become my own; I am the harmony to her melody. How can I present my dilemma to God when my words are exhausted, and I no longer know what to pray? Every utterance returns to me void and bereft.

Holy Spirit, will you intercede for me, groan for groan? Will You be the voice for a mute soul, Spirit of the Living God?

I can no longer bear this blindness that deflects the light of God. How can I set my eyes on a hopeful future when I cannot see His light in the present? How can I make my way to One who is hidden from me? My torch has gone out and my firestone is worn down beyond use. My coat, tattered from years of pursuit through darkness, wind, and rain, lies damp and cold on the ground. I have grown weary of searching.

Will You continue to elude me, Emmanuel?

The darkness has enlarged itself over me. I receive counsel from shadows, from phantoms uttering dark proverbs in the night. Where is the voice of the Friend I once knew? Where is the Word who spoke light into the darkness long ago?

Speak life to my soul again. Let Your song of joy pour over me as rays of radiant sunshine. Command the night to disperse, oh Great Light.

The ribbit of frogs
at the last light of summer—
petrichor upwind

Chapter Two

Between A Dark Night of the Soul and Acedia

Does God empty my soul so that His voice can better reverberate through its halls? Does He bring the darkness so to one day light a bright fire in my soul's hearth? Will He burn up everything within me to allow something greater and more beautiful to take shape?

Lord, will you turn all that is good in me to ash along with the bad?

Have I stumbled into this void of deathly reticence and mournfulness myself? Truly, I have not done all I can to commune with God. There have been days when not a word directed toward the Almighty passed my lips. Days when not a single thought was set on His words. Long hours of delusion when His presence was not desired above all things.

It could be that I have too often neglected the only One who can deliver me from the night that has overtaken my soul. But have I strayed too far? Has God removed Himself from me? Or has my love for Him dissipated like a late-morning dew insomuch as I have grown tired of His silence?

It is as if stretched between my heart and my spirit, a dense, sullen forest has arisen. My spirit attempts to call out to my heart, assuring me that I have not been forsaken and that such a thing would be impossible. But the woodland is too great, and the echo of those hopeful words cannot reach my heart on the other side.

Perhaps I have rather fallen out of love with those whom God loves, and this is the sinister seed of separation from which the wood has emerged. It is possible that I have grown tired of extending grace to others as is expected of me, a recipient of immeasurable grace. I must confess, it has become a burden to concern myself with people who often take more than they give, who expect all of me but offer little of themselves in return.

Selfish individuals cleave to me and then cleave themselves from me when it suits them.
Giving my best to them never seems to compensate for the worst that they suspect in me.

Have I grown weary in well doing, God of All Goodness?

Is it not telling that I long to return to former days when spirit and heart were joined together as a vast green pasture? Does desire not make the difference between a dark night of the soul and acedia? Surely the soul that God purges through darkness is the one that desires to return to Him, while the soul that lacks such a desire finds its own way into the obscurity of spiritual apathy.

Will You arise and burn down this forest of forsakenness between us, Consuming Fire?

How beautiful the
firefly is in darkness—
sunlight on hilltops

To find joy in going to the house of the Lord has become an endless struggle for me. Preach to me a hundred sermons about the love of God and how He delights to dwell with His people, and I will believe them. But I will not feel His presence near me. Lift a thousand words to God in worship and I will join with you, for He deserves it all. But I will not imagine that my adoration is a sweet aroma in His nostrils. Pray ten thousand prayers and I will raise my hands to God in heaven and cry out with you. But I will not sense that He is bending His ear to me. There is no consolation for me in spiritual things.

I would lift my eyes unto the Mount of God for help if its slopes were not enshrouded in a stygian curtain of clouds. I would approach the Lamb on the Throne with my petition but for

the veil resewn before it. If an immense wasteland did not stand guard, I would seek out the River of Living Water to satisfy my thirst. The way to my deliverance is shut.

Please come near to me again, God of My Salvation. Scatter the storm clouds. Tear the veil once more. Cause a stream to flow into the desert where I am stranded.

A walk through the woods
in summer twilight—oak trees
bent over the path

Chapter Three

Between Purpose and Failure

I have a sense that I am always on the threshold of stepping into my purpose in life but never able to quite lift my feet off the ground. I once maintained that God had great plans for me and that someday I would impact the world. Now, there is emptiness where initiative once resided. My expectations have been carried away as on a swift wind. Away from reality, away from memory. They have become but a faint whisper in my ears of former times. And like the wind that blows unseen, so my dreams have become an enigma.

Divine providence has always been a stronghold for me. Even now, I do not abandon the principle, though I reimagine it. Where once I dreamed that I was on a path to transform the world, now it appears that a road through fog and darkness has been ordained for me. Where once I dreamed my gifts would take me to the ends of the earth, now they feel but a curse to me, memorials to lost and forgotten ambitions.

Though founded on a sturdy bedrock of faith, the dwelling place of my aspirations has collapsed. It is as if I awoke one day to find that the solid walls of purpose constructed around my heart had turned to glass. And when the turmoil of life rose to a cacophony, the walls were shattered leaving me with little hope of ever fitting the broken fragments back together.

Will you rebuild these walls, Great Framers of the Universe?

Gray heron standing
in white shallows at twilight—
a storm is coming

I love my children and I strive to do what is best for them. But when we are together, a faint suspicion that I am failing as a father grows and festers in my mind. Feelings of inadequacy and guilt over not doing enough become a prison to me. I worry that my boys are not getting the attention they need; that because I am uncomfortable in my own skin, I cannot be the outflowing fountainhead of energy and unreservedness they desire in a father.

God, why did you make me this way? Why am I plagued by introversion and melancholy?

I wonder how much my sons really care if I am around. They certainly could not be blamed for preferring more jovial people over me, though they would never tell me so. I keep thinking about that parasitic species of cuckoo that lays its eggs in the nest of a bird of another species, releasing itself from the responsibility of caring for its own young. I would never wish my children away; my life would be empty without them. But I cannot help wondering if out there in this vast world another father exists who would have been better suited to raise my sons.

Every day I fight against selfishness for the sake of my children. Sometimes I lose the battle as my own interests gain the advantage. Victory has been sounded on many occasions, but those triumph songs are drowned out by the beating drum of perceived failure. There is indeed purpose in training up my posterity in the way of the Lord. I have taught my children many things, but have I always shown them?

Am I designed for winning? I fear that I am not. Will I be victorious in the end, Almighty God?

A winter-day sun
 hidden above the clouds—
 two loons on the sea

Indecision is a terror to me. But unlike sages and philosophers of the past, I have found it preferable to risking a bad decision. Over the years, I have made plans for my life, plans often thwarted by overwhelming fear of failure. Or, more exactly, fear of looking back with regret. To pay the penance of mental anguish for a bad choice throughout my life is an unbearable thought.

I find myself in this predicament regularly: Do I remain unmoving and risk missing out on something that could change my life, or the lives of those I love, for the better? Or do I effect change and risk disaster and remorse? These questions bleed into my concerns over the spiritual well-being of my children. My family and I are part of a small congregation in an area that is quite hostile to Christian values. It is the only church that my children have ever known. There are good people here, but not many to whom teenage boys can relate.

I worry that the academic environment my sons are in and the school friends they associate with may influence them negatively. And without young people of the same age at the church to influence them for the better, I fear that their love for the things of God will suffer. So, I look to the east, where larger youth groups and congregations exist. Maybe their salvation lies over there where the grass appears greener.

But suppose staying here is the best decision. Suppose I look back years from now and realize that if I had moved away at this delicate time, things would have been drastically worsened. What if the best thing for my boys is a small church where they know everyone. What if they are not received well or do not take to a youth group somewhere else. What if they hate me for removing them from everything they now love.

Will you prepare the way for me, Counselor? Will you make the path straight?

Indecision is thought to be the burglar of opportunity. What if opportunity itself is a masked marauder. Would it come as a surprise if opportunity turns out to be only possibility or,

worse yet, fortuity? I cannot fathom basing a decision on merely a chance of success. Not when my family is at stake. But is there any escaping chance? In the end, it seems I take a chance in staying or going. I risk failure in decision and indecision alike.

The buzz of bees at
the cemetery—not all
can be so busy

Sometimes I think about running until my legs give out. Far away from the monotony that gives time the wings of an eagle as it swoops down upon its prey. My disdain for a quotidian schedule may lend to indecisiveness, but I find spontaneity and flexibility far more comforting than routine. When I hear myself saying, “I feel like I just did this very thing,” then I start to reflect on my inability to slow the rapid pace of life.

It is not that death never crosses my mind. I know that my time on the earth is short. But if my life were the tide, the workaday would be the moon drawing it toward its dead low water. To give in to the gravitational pull of routine would only quicken the day of my end. At least that is the way I imagine things.

Ironically, a lack of a routine is a routine in the same way that indecision is a decision. Though I do not have a nine-to-five, I tend to sleep and wake at the same times, get ready in the same manner, and do most of the same things each day. Interestingly, the day does seem to expand a bit when on the face of it I am in control of the agenda. All the same, it is an illusion.

What can a man accomplish in seventy years though he follows a strict schedule? Aside from the few individuals given the opportunity to make a mark on history, most people come and

go without being remembered by so much as a handful of people. They may have made a fortune, won esteemed awards, earned the respect of many. But give it a few generations and no one will mourn for these once renowned. No tears will fall at their gravesides, no flowers will stand before their headstones. The wind and rain will be their only visitors, the pinewood and the dirt their only relations.

So, why not run? What purpose is there in plans and schedules? What difference will they have made in the end? Maybe a routine will have prolonged my life, but what for? Maybe it will have shortened my life, but who can say? A life of purpose or failure, no one will care a hundred and fifty years from now.

Winter is early—
a downy blanket of snow
for the long-cold dead

Chapter Four

Between Faith and Doubt

When did my faith begin to waver? When did I learn to fear? I never ceased to believe that God exists or that He is intimately involved in the lives of human beings. Yet belief is not synonymous with faith, is it? Belief is not enough to calm fear. I might believe that bungee jumping is a safe activity because I have seen many take the plunge and turn out alright. But to actually climb up to a high platform and jump off with only a cord to prevent me from falling to my death would require faith. I would have to trust beyond the shadow of a doubt that the cord would not snap or overextend to make that leap of faith, as it were.

I believe God is real and that He died for the sin of the human race. But there is part of me that does not fully trust Him to save my soul in the end. I believe God has the power to heal whomever, whenever He wishes. On occasion, I have seen Him do so. But there is doubt in some dark quarter of my mind that God will heal when *I* ask Him to.

In my mind, every word of Scripture is true from the stories to the prophecies to the promises. Jesus gives His disciples the power and authority to heal sickness in His name. When disciples of Christ lay hands on the sick and call on the name of the Lord, the sick will recover. I know this to be reality, or I did once. It could be that the miracles I witnessed had nothing to do with the prayers of the saints, but with God's will alone.

Has God ordained a day for each of us to die? Or does He simply know the day of our departure? If the former, can God's mind be changed? His nature never changes, but surely there is evidence of God having amended His plan in Scripture. Just ask Abraham about God's plan for Sodom. Ask Moses about convincing God to go before Israel when He planned to send and

angel instead. Ask Jonah about God's forbearance with the city of Nineveh. Ask Hezekiah about his extended life.

It appears that God can and does turnabout when His people intercede. Why is it then, that He has become to me like a ship sailing away on a vast ocean as I swim for dear life, my cries for aid dampened by the ever-widening distance? David called to the Lord after his great sin, and He heard his voice. Job questioned God and He answered from a whirlwind. Before Moses ever called on God, the I AM spoke to him from a burning bush. God even spoke to the corrupt prophet Balaam. Yet the only antiphon to my swan song is deafening silence.

My faith has waned as an old moon. Its bright light no longer shines upon my spirit's well; the dim light of doubt has superseded it. In the darkness, I stumble around in search of that source of replenishing water, but all is in vain. Doubt will be the death of me.

My faith has rotted like an ancient tree. On the outside it appears to stand sturdy and tall, but one severe wind and it will topple; one season of infestation and it will go the way of many others before it. Doubt will surely be my undoing.

Will You restore? Will You revive, Author and Finisher of my faith?

The gray of winter
all around—I long to hear
robins laugh again

If my faith in God has dwindled, it has done more so with people. A few days ago, I parked on a hill next to a gravel road in a county park. I was enjoying the view of the sea and the mountains when another car came driving up the hill toward me. The driver, for no apparent

reason, proceeded to honk his horn at me. And being the courteous citizen I am, I said hello back with my horn.

So, what did that obviously unhinged man do? He crested the hill and turned around. Evidently, he grabbed a handful of gravel before his descent because he threw it at the side of my car as he passed. And if that was not enough, he held his middle finger high in the air as he drove away. I thought to give chase but decided against it. I was disturbed by the incident the rest of day.

I imagine that the lunatic in the car was more miserable than I. What other reason could he have to provoke me? So, I let it go. But the damage was done—another blow struck to my faith in humanity. I guess I should expect that something like this would occur in a selfish, sin-soaked land. I understand the weight of misery and frustration upon a person, though I feel it should not affect how that person treats others.

Far surpassing the carelessness of strangers, and possibly the greater impetus for my lack of faith in people, is the disregardfulness of friends. It would not surprise me if atheists ignored the Golden Rule. What would compel them to follow it? But when Christian friends and acquaintances, even family members abandon consideration, the wounds run deep.

Some I love continually expect me to be a rock to lean on when the ground beneath me has turned to quicksand. They lose patience with me as I struggle to free myself. Some I love leave forever without saying goodbye as though our friendship were a sandcastle to be blown away in the wind or drowned in the sea.

Some I love only speak to me when in need. And no one is more willing to extend a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, than I. Some I love blame me for circumstances beyond my control. And when I truly fail, I am willing as anyone to take responsibility. Nevertheless, I

cannot tolerate one-sided friendship; like a one-way street, it often creates confusion as questions about the sincerity of the relationship are raised.

Of late, it seems that most people expect more from me than they are willing to offer. They come around to collect or to settle disputes, but when the alms dish is held out to them, they have nothing to give. When there is something to be held accountable for, they are nowhere to be found. I have all but lost my faith in humankind.

I do not wish to feel this way. Isolated. Alone.

Would it be easier if I expected less from people, Lord? I am also flawed, after all. But do I not try my best to consider others?

Gray squirrel climbing an
 evergreen, mouth full of nuts—
 somewhere a midden

I am shipwrecked between faith and doubt, and it is too far to swim to either shore. My rescue stands on the banks of faith, but alas I depend on an unruly current to carry me there. A castaway, I drift upon the flotsam of a fleeting hope that God will see me through. To end up on the banks of doubt would mean a fateful end to my voyage. It would mean victory for a soul-ravaging atheism.

How terrible it would be to reach solid ground at last only to find that I had planted my feet on the sands of skepticism. And there—accepting that God and eternity do not exist, forced to invent a purpose for my existence and finding none—have no recourse but to plunge into the

sea, never to walk the earth again. I pray that through all my misgivings about God and humankind, I never reach that shore.

The wind embraces
an unmoving maple tree—
red leaves lie beneath

Chapter Five

Between Hope and Despair

If I live a hundred years, I will bear enough worry for a thousand. Will I be able to handle the death of my parents? Will horrendous things happen to those I love? Will my children grow to hate me and abandon all that I have taught them? Will my body be riddled with cancer twenty years from now? These are questions that constantly gnaw at me.

I fear that I can no longer look expectantly toward a bright future. I fear that I will soon find myself descending into the deep belly of despair; that floundering there in its oppressive juices, my entire being will slowly dissolve into nothingness.

Life seems to suggest its meaninglessness to me, which leaves me questioning why God even put me on the earth if only for a short time. If the earth is simply a purgatory for pilgrims on their way to another land, what is the point of passing through it? Why not cut out the in-between—the pain and suffering, the temptation and sin? They seem unnecessary.

I cannot blame the Creator for the deterioration of humanity's way of living. He did not intend such a thing. Still, He saw us wallowing in the mire when we were only a thought in His mind. He saw us, then proceeded with His plan. And I fear that He has now left me to wrest myself from this bog of desolation in which I am now ensnared.

Hope is dwindling as winter's daylight and despair surrounds me like fog in a midnight forest. Joy is fading as pink dusk and anxiety swells like gray-headed waves on a dark and stormy sea.

Will you come to me as bright dawn and drive off despair with Your luminous glory, Lord? Will you repel fear and anxiety with Your brilliant beams of light?

On a summer night
the song of crickets—mist streams
through the hills and dales

I fear that it is too late for hope to be fully restored. The thorny stems of despair have entwined themselves around me. All the roses of anticipation have withered. I cannot remember their sweet scent, nor the softness of their petals. Lost to my mind are their bright hues and elegant symmetry. And what if they never grow again? Winters henceforward could be long and springs late and dry.

I scarcely recall what it was like to be hopeful. Long has it been since the harvest. The crop has all been gathered in and the stalks that stood tall and ripe are now reserved for burning. The days of growth and fulness are gone, sacrificed to a cold and hostile god in the white fires of winter. They will never rise again. Springs henceforward will be late and dry and summers infernal.

It seems hope is now behind me. There once dwelled a high and lofty headland called Confidence in God here on the Coast of Despair, but years of erosive winds and waves of doubt, failure, and darkness have whittled it down to a memory. Now I cannot recognize even a remnant of the man I used to be. Nothing remains of light or purpose. Nothing of faith or hope.

I am Adam cast out of Eden, Esau bereft of birthright and blessing. I am Ishmael rejected and sent away, Job lying in the wake of destruction. I am the spy returning from Canaan, the Israelite swallowed up by the wilderness. I am David weeping over Absalom, Jeremiah mourning the fall of Jerusalem. I am Peter at the third cock crow, John at the foot of the cross, Judas standing before the tree, rope in hand.

Despair has beleaguered me. All is lost.

A decomposing

doe lying in tall green grass—

flies gather to mourn

Part Two

Chapter Six

Pain Is A...

PAIN IS A dead dream. It is planning for a particular future only to later discover it will never come to pass. Pain is pouring every part of yourself into a well of dreams in the desert only to later find that it was greedily drawn from by others until emptied. And due to enduring barrenness in the land, the well dried up and was abandoned.

I never asked to be involved in ministry. To devote the substance of my life to serving others was the furthest thing from my mind. But there came a time when leadership was thrust upon me as the need arose. Being a dutiful son, I did not refuse. I can blame no one for ending up where I am. If I felt that I had no choice, it was because I gave myself none.

The church needed a minister of music and God had given me the ability to sing and play. Could I say no? For many years, the experience felt edifying. But somewhere along the line, my responsibilities grew, and I found myself preaching from behind a pulpit and ministering to people on a more complex level. I was not sure I was in my element, but I thought God would eventually supply the necessary abilities. Perhaps he did.

Dad had begun to prepare me to take his place as pastor. I thought finally my purpose in life was envisioned. I would pastor a community-impacting church and lead many to the Lord. So, the church became the well of dreams into which I poured myself.

Yet, as time went on, I began to feel drained of desire. It may have been the life-encompassing nature of my role that fatigued me. Or it may have been problems in the church or difficulties with people that did it. Exhaustion aside, I continued to believe that it was all leading somewhere. I continued to believe that somehow everything was going to work out, and I just needed to get through whatever I was feeling. But the odd sense of depletion remained much

longer than I anticipated. As time passed, other setbacks arose, and I began to understand that the well was spent. My dream was dead.

The spring sun rises —
a whip-poor-will abandons
its moonlight singing

PAIN IS A forgotten love; it is wishing that things could be as they once were when she and I strolled along the Oregon shore together. The wind brushed our backs like butterfly wings and the smell of pink lilies filled our nostrils. The golden path before us glistened against the azure sea. Our new love was a mystery and the future before us was as bright as the sun that day.

As time carried on, our love grew, and we learned of each other. But a day came when her love for me was forgotten. Like a winter wind, her disregard became a torment. Like a drought sun, her words rose and scorched our once well-watered garden.

I tried to blame her for everything, but it was a fruitless attempt to evade the reality that I had failed to make her happy. I had descended into a dark void where there was no place for mirth and no way of escape. Nothing could reach me in that pit of despair, no one could pull me out. That was the way I saw it, anyway.

How long did I expect her to stand there peering down into the abyss, waiting for me to claw my way out? How long did I believe her strength would last before she was drawn into the depths with me? I had fallen a long way from the pedestal on which she had once placed me. But how and when I began to fall into this darkness is unknown to me.

I always thought depression was for those who were far from God. Sure, I knew that David and Elijah had experienced low points when they felt God was far off. But lingering depression with no discernible cause? Did David feel forsaken at that level? Perhaps. Who am I to say?

Did my wife feel forsaken by me? Had I created a chasm between us so great that I had become unrecognizable, unreachable to her? Lamentably, that seems the way of things. She grew tired of reaching into that dark and hopeless abode in which I was trapped only to be rejected. She grew weary of waiting for a future that appeared further away than ever before.

Then the question arose within her of whether there was even an ember of love still smoldering in her heart for me. She did not leave me, but she found her own way forward. If I could not stoke the flames of happiness within her, then she would need to build her own fire. And to my lasting regret, that is what she did.

A moonless night—
all is taken by darkness,
even the shadows

PAIN IS A guilty conscience. It is weeping in the night over what has been torn apart. It is groaning over wounds you have inflicted on another that cannot be healed. It is believing that if you had done things differently, all the heartache could have been avoided.

I thought I had planned for everything, but who really can? I could work for 45 years building up a 401k, then learn on the very cusp of retirement that a cancerous tumor is growing

on my brain. And my plans to have all-expenses-paid freedom in my sixties and beyond would come to a grinding halt. I have seen it happen to others.

Though we never stop planning for the future, how much of our planning is in vain? There is no way to prepare for every contingency, certainly not when other people are involved. The human heart can be quite unpredictable. More than that, it can deceitfully convince us of anything.

The heart can make us believe that we are doing everything right. It can make us believe that our selfishness will not result in consequences down the line. The heart can persuade us that we will always be who we are now. It can persuade us that a vow is enough to keep a marriage from breaking when we become different people than we once were.

How I wish I could return to the days before I allowed myself to become lost on a stormy and saturnine sea of melancholy. Rather than believing I could get through the tempest on my own, I would reach for the lifeline thrown out to me. I would do anything necessary to get back to shore before my absence alienated the love of my life. Why was I so foolish?

How I wish guilt would depart from me, but how can it? Any path it could take away from me is obstructed by the overgrowth of the wrong I have done. Regret has become my constant companion.

Heavy rain tonight—
the leaves of the poplar tree
curl into themselves

PAIN IS A joyless existence. It is forgetting what joy felt like and asking where the sweet innocence and verdure of spring have gone. Where are the summer days of playfulness and levity? Where is the house filled with laughter and singing? Where is the brightness and beauty of autumn, the last measure of joy before dreariness sets in? No longer, the warmth of the sun on the face. No more, the gentle wind in the hair. All faded, the fragrance of flowers. Forgotten, the days of mirth and happiness. They have all been gathered into the white bleakness of winter. Did they ever exist?

I once knew what it was like to wake up every morning with a smile on my face. But now I do not recall what made me happy. I must have expected that marriage would always be a stroll down the beach on a bright summer day. I must have imagined that aging and circumstance would not change us. In the spring of life and matrimony, we do not know what to expect. We do not know each other. Nor do we really know ourselves. How could we ever suspect that time might alter us so dramatically?

To start over again is painful. When you come to love someone for who they are and then later realize they are no longer that person, there is no going back. And if you found gladness in the way things were and awoke one day to discover that everything was unfamiliar, then you know pain. You know what it is like to see joy driven away from you like a withered flower in a snowstorm.

A coyote howls

somewhere in the dark forest—

no answer

Chapter Seven

Depression Looks Like...

DEPRESSION LOOKS LIKE a distant mountain. Sometimes I long to be the mountain far away from the noise and the people that bring me heartache. Other times I am the outlying mountain separated from others, not belonging in the crowd. Is this why my heart fills with sadness as I watch a mountain fade into the distance? Is the mountain a reminder of who I am? Is it a monument to unfulfilled longing for another life?

I cannot recall when a desire for reclusion became so prominent in my mind, or if it has always been so. In my childhood, I was often alone, though never lonely. I was equally happy with or without people around. Maybe it began in high school when there were times of great discomfort. I knew very few of my classmates, and to avoid the embarrassment of sitting alone in a cafeteria full of students at lunchtime, I found solace in a music room. I had a few friends, but I was ultimately invisible.

Now, as an adult surrounded by many friends, the feeling of detachment persists. I have never been a good conversationalist. I speak slowly and many people do not have patience for that sort of thing. I interact frequently with others, of course, and even enjoy these encounters on occasion. But I am often present in body alone. My mind, like a far-off mountain, is miles away.

Although I often find little pleasure in conversation, I am not opposed to friendship, nor do I dislike people. I do love them and am deeply concerned for their well-being. To avoid talking to others or to tell them that I do not care to speak with them would be uncaring and rude. Thus, I often find myself in uncomfortable dialogue, while secretly dreaming of being alone somewhere. I feel stretched, dislocated, and trapped all at once. Selfish? Maybe. Depressing? Undoubtedly.

I would prefer that things were less difficult. But people, through no fault of their own, slowly wear me down to the point where I wish I was a mountain a long way off in the distance. I have in many ways become the mountain already.

Distant mountain held
in the embrace of shadows—
sunbeams hovering

DEPRESSION LOOKS LIKE a frozen pond. Some days I wake up with little desire to do anything. No movie or book seems interesting. No hike through the woods or walk by the sea sounds refreshing. No local haunt attracts me. Lifting myself out of bed is an accomplishment, and possibly the only one for the day.

Though I am eventually able to force my body to move, my mind remains icebound. And I find myself looking at creation as if through murky, glacial water. At such times, a blank wall can hold my attention for hours.

It is a mystery where these paralyzing winters blow in from. One day a thaw will transpire releasing my mind from the opaqueness, the next the ice rematerializes. Those who have witnessed these debilitating episodes—a very few indeed—are sympathetic to my plight. Nonetheless, they have trouble understanding how I can be so disinterested in everything.

It is not that all activities suddenly become distasteful during these winters; I only fail to find any value in them. I see them as a duck would a frozen pond: serving their purpose once, but now reduced to a solid slab of uselessness. On melancholic days when it feels like the world is

ending, what use is there in entertainment and exercise? What joy could outings and gatherings possibly bring me?

Snow piles to the sky
ice strains for the depths—hoarfrost
on decayed cattails

DEPRESSION LOOKS LIKE a deserted, fog-cloaked island: everything without at a great distance, everything within enfolded in a cloud of gloom. If purpose and reality exist, they do so only in a faraway land beyond the fog. On the island, there is only the dismal imagination of a lone marooned soul.

To realize that my perception of a situation is often drastically different from that of other people is an estranging feeling. I am spilled ink on blank paper. While others can see the bright side of matters, I tend to stain them with cynicism. Occasionally, my assessment is correct. More often, I find that I have allowed my imagination to run wild.

A bleak outlook toward the voyage ahead ripens in my mind as I repeatedly sail through the doldrums. Progress is halted by pessimism and every ounce of alacrity—the sustenance necessary to navigate on to new horizons—is depleted. Stranded at sea and left with no alternative, I make for the dreary island nearby where little prospect of rescue abides.

There are times when a strong wind of positivism rises allowing me to sail from the island. Though not long afterward, I find that I am again skimming the equator headed for listless waters. I know what awaits me there, yet I cannot seem to resist the siren song of inconsolable forlornness.

A single light on
the horizon—fog slithers
across pitch-black seas

DEPRESSION LOOKS LIKE a burning forest. Flames spreading, laying waste to everything that once brought me joy and happiness. Thick smoke suffocating my ambition and hiding the way of escape from misery and destruction. And when the fire is over, little is left to prevent the landslides and floods of life from burying me.

It is painful to desire to be an encourager, but to at every turn discover another burning disaster within me. If I am constantly fighting the fires within, how can I possibly be the hand of rescue for others I want to be? If every other day I am in hell, tormented and loathing life, how can I be the light of renewal that I ought? There is no hope in desolation, no regeneration in hellfire.

Nothing good can come from despondency and disheartenment. They are the flames frequently returning to a woodland, consuming whatever nutrients endured their previous bout of devastation. The phoenix does not rise from these ashes. No seedling or sapling springs up from this soil. The bird will never return to sing on high boughs, nor squirrels to play on sturdy trunks in this forest. And the whisper of the wind through leaves and pine needles will not be heard again.

Anguish and indifference are the smoke that gathers, slowly choking the life out of me. My heart begins to ache in my chest and my eyes become blinded to the way ahead as the smoke rises. My breath depleted and my lungs poisoned, I have no strength or desire to press forward.

Confusion sets in. Unable to move, unable to think, unable to dream, I am reduced to a huddled mass awaiting asphyxiation on the forest floor.

A yellow-brown haze

beneath an orange sky makes

me long for winter

Chapter Eight I Remember...

I REMEMBER the feeling of nostalgia. It lasts for only a moment. A lightness in the head like floating. Heart slowing, breath deepening. A brightness in the eyes, a warmth in the chest. It can happen when listening to a song or traveling through a familiar place. It can arise along with a certain aroma. It might even originate from nothing.

In my mind, nostalgia is not harmful. Some might call it homesickness or sadness, others, severe depression. For me, it is simply an endearing reminder of pleasant times. When nostalgia occurs, I am elated, and peace alights upon my entire being.

Remembering my life ages hence, I may ascertain that these euphoric moments were small draughts of heavenly sensation; that in yet another way, I was experiencing the life of heaven on earth. My heart does yearn for that eternal habitation where the Lord dwells. And in that way, perchance, homesickness is bound up in nostalgia.

But as with all earthly joys, nostalgia does not last and therein lies the rub. For a moment there is a lifting, then gravity pulls the head back down, the brightness in the eyes fades to dull gray, and the warmth within dissipates like morning mist. Maybe I would be better off without these blissful experiences. Would it not be better to be completely ignorant of bliss, seeing things the way they really are?

A flash of lightning
so wondrous in the night sky—
fire in the fields

I REMEMBER the old house. It may not look like much to a passerby or visitor. But to one familiar with its rooms and hallways, there endures the brilliant luster of gilded memories there. In the minds of the ones native to my home, no greater specimen of beauty exists.

There are days when cares of life carry me back to that old house. Upon the wings of dreams, I fly to childhood serenity. I imagine that I am walking once again through the woods near my home. Scattered rays of sunshine cut through the trees here and there like brazen swords alighting the well-traveled trail.

Somewhere near me I hear a bird sing a descant melody, complemented every so often by the gentle tenor of the wind as it rustles the trees. The spouting creek in the distance amplifies the chorus with ambient sound. All is peaceful bliss as if these woods were a distant land known only to me.

But the fruit of the tree of bygone days is bitter-sweet as a green apple. I often long for what once was, yet I love the fond recollections of times past. That home, those woods, now serve as mementos to me of youthful joy and innocence. They are gateways into the land of pleasant memories. Though, now and then, these memories have a way of rendering present times bleak by comparison.

Seeking out such reverie is not a means of escaping reality. It is only that I find myself longing for simpler days, occasions when difficulties were only trifles compared to the ones I now face. Solomon in all his wisdom rightly counselled not to look upon the past more fondly than the present. But if no one ever struggled with the inclination toward looking back, he would likely have been silent on the issue.

I assume that God gave us the faculty of memory so that we could recall in all life's situations the many blessings He has given us. It is human nature to remember better times when

facing tribulation. To a point, I do not see any harm in it. If I became so focused on the past that I neglected the needs of my wife and children in the present or refrained from planning for the future, that would obviously be sinful. I have not done so.

It has been twenty years since I walked through the doorway of that old house. In more recent years, I have found that I need not go back so far in the annals of my mind to discover amiable occasions.

Wild horses play on
the plateau—sad reminder
of innocent times

I REMEMBER family Christmases. There was a time not long ago when all my siblings and their families lived not two miles down the road. The days were much kinder then. And there was no hint of change on the wind. We worshipped together, broke bread together, celebrated life together.

Every Christmas we gathered in one house around one Christmas tree. We sang carols in one accord, giving thanks to one Lord. A family neatly fitted together, working toward a common goal. That was many years ago. Now the Christmases come and go and whether we all be together no one knows. It just depends on the way the wind blows.

Can we not go back to the way it used to be when often it was that our eyes did meet? Back when Christmas meant gathering near to all the ones that we hold dear. I once thought it could be so. That was many years ago. Now the seasons come and go, and the passing years have shown how far apart our hearts have grown.

No one is to blame for the distance that parts us. Time and chance loosen the strongest of trusses. Not that we are divided in spirit. Only, the time grows long between each visit. And when apart, life's trials are endured and thoughts toward distant loved ones obscured. Now the years fly ever on, quickly as a bird from snow. But I remember family Christmases, though now they seem so long ago.

Fall waves march briskly
through Hood Canal—suddenly
I feel very old

I REMEMBER old friends. Some found their way to the golden shores of another realm. Some yet remain. Of those that remain, some have blazed away leaving me in their dust years ago. I grieve for the ones who have gone on; their absence is felt deeply. But I also rejoice for them, knowing that they are present with the Lord.

For those friends who have deserted me, I only grieve. If life had taken them on another path to some distant place, I could certainly understand. How could I blame anyone for pursuing a dream? But when they could reach my doorstep within an hour yet choose not to, the sting is bitter. I have only ever been kind to them, why such acrimony toward me?

I suppose it is no mystery why these companions left me. I am the friend who sits in the shadows giving his heart but rarely his voice. I am the silent friend who loves them more than they could ever know. In the night I weep for them. I stand waiting at the point in the road where we were separated, longing for their return. My heart calls out to them, but they do not hear. They never did hear.

We once gathered at the house of the Lord, my old friends and me. We used to laugh and sing and weep and pray in fellowship. But somehow a rift formed. Disagreements arose and peace between the friends involved could not be restored. The circumstances of life changed other friends. Suddenly they saw things differently and the church became a symbol of opposition to them. It became the scapegoat for all their troubles. Rather than attempt to work things out for the sake of friendship, these friends chose to forget all that had once been done for them and all we had shared together.

These old friends chose to forget the tears that were shed for them when grief came into their lives. They chose to forget the kindly prayers that were lifted to the Lord for their sick children. They chose to forget the encouragement they received when weak, the teaching that made them strong, and the love that was worth more than all the opinions in the world. Strange that friendship can be cheapened so.

An owl hoots beneath
the moon—I too am alone
on this winter night

Chapter Nine

The Other Day...

THE OTHER DAY I saw mountains in the rearview mirror, wide-open spaces and close-knit towns ahead. For so long, I yearned to make the journey. Things were stressful at home and another year of running the kids around was... well, not like a trip through the mountains. But what was the point of escaping? Everything was the same when I returned, and I was left longing for more time away.

I was not built for busyness. I am a small-town man living in a big-time world. I need the river flowing through farmland, far off from the noise of an interstate or an airplane. I need the sky where stars shine brightly, a long shot from a stadium or a high-rise. I need the front-porch swing where workaholicism is an unwelcome stranger on a warm evening.

Work, work, work until we die. That is the way of modernity, they say. But were we not promised that modernization and technological advancement would mean less work? Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we fill up every minute of our lives and leave no time to enjoy them.

I wish I could slow my life down, but the world pressures me into keeping a quick pace. If I want to travel at my own pace, someone is right there behind me attempting to force me to go faster. If I want to have a day without phone calls, everybody and their brother suddenly *must* talk to me.

Busyness has become so ingrained in my mind that I cannot go for a walk in the park without feeling like there is something more productive I could be doing. And so, a battle ensues within between my desire for calmness and enjoyment and my desire to get "important" things done. Most of the time, it is the latter that wins out. I need an escape from myself.

Will you deign to give me rest, Prince of Peace?

Wind whispering in
the pines on a summer's eve—
a murder of crows

THE OTHER DAY, I experienced a toothache. There is no one in existence but me when I am in such pain. Nothing exists beyond that gnawing feeling. Misery fills every corner of my mind like black ink poured into a transparent inkwell. No one else really seems to understand the pain. If they have experienced this particular pain before, they only remember their emotional state at the time. But the pain itself cannot truly be imagined.

Nor can the absence of pain be imagined by those who endure it. Pain is only in the present, there is nothing before, nothing after. I wonder how people coped with toothaches before there was Tylenol or Advil to dull the pain or any such thing as a root canal procedure. Surely, before men and women of old reached their wits' end, they yanked the problem tooth out themselves.

I remember hearing somewhere along the way that people once died from toothaches. Perhaps they even preferred death to what seemed unending pain. To that, I can relate. Many times, I have pleaded with God, begging him to release me from the agony in which I was encapsulated. When the pain continued, I asked him for death instead.

Ever-Present Help, it is a mystery to me why I feel your presence before the pain begins and after it is gone, but your absence in the midst of it.

Mallard floating on
 an orange sky in the fall—
 a fish jumps nearby

THE OTHER DAY, I made my way across the water to a Seattle hospital. The noonday sun was clearly visible and the wind across the bow of the ferry was warm. I wondered how long it had been since my good friend, Jordan, had stood in the clear light of day or felt the crisp sea air on his face. He found out a few months ago that he has stage-four cancer. He's twenty-five.

He's too young to die. Will you not save him, Merciful Lord?

What does it mean to be too young to die? There was never any guarantee of the length of a lifespan. Many people in the twenty-first century live beyond seventy, but in some countries, to live to see sixty is quite rare. Regardless of expectancy, life is short. Every day, people in their twenties die somewhere on the planet. But only now, when someone close to me faces death before seeing marriage or having children, before achieving any of his goals in life, do I ask why.

Why take him so soon? Do you not have something greater for him to accomplish?

The doctors were once optimistic, but as complications multiplied, the chances of survival divided. Jordan is unable to keep his food down. No nutrition, no surgery—no surgery, no chance of survival. I pray and I weep, and I weep and pray. It seems this kind goes not out even by prayer and fasting.

Why do you withhold his healing, oh Balm of Gilead?

God, who is sovereign over all, has seen fit to allow COVID to take hold of our cities, and now it is only one visitor a day in the hospital, no more. It pains me to know that my friend has been lying in this hospital bed for weeks on end, locked away, isolated from those who love

him, cut off from any joyful expectation. Soon they will require visitors to be vaccinated, further limiting his access to loved ones.

Will You be the voice of reassurance for him, Holy One, faithful and true?

Snow melting on the
mountains, flowing down—river
running to the sea

THE OTHER DAY, I drove through the country not far from the church where we remembered Jordan. I recalled the last time I was with him before he got the news. We drove to a beautiful spot by the Puget Sound. He had once been afraid of the water and could not bear the thought of standing on a dock, but he did that day. He never told me how he had overcome that fear, but it was clear that life had changed him. Maybe God had worked fear out of him to prepare him for the most terrifying trial of his life: the one he did not make it through.

I still don't understand, King of Kings. The things he could have done for your kingdom.

My friend never shined as he would have liked, though he shone brightly in our hearts. He twinkled, then faded like a dying star. My family loved him. My children wept bitterly for him when they learned he was gone.

In the months before he passed, Jordan never once complained to me about pain or loneliness. He never spoke a single word of regret about his life, never a word of fear about dying. The one thing that he expressed to me repeatedly was that he was afraid he would miss his friends. He was more concerned for those he was leaving than he was for himself.

I believed full well that God would heal my friend. I had seen the hand of God reach down and heal several friends of cancer before. If God were to rid anyone of this dreadful disease, I thought surely it would have been a young man whose life had barely begun.

Do you intend to remove every source of joy from me, oh Comforter?

Jordan is with the Lord, and I am overjoyed for him. His time on earth was riddled with difficulty. He was blind in one eye, abandoned by drug-addicted parents, juggled back and forth through the foster care system, and used for his money. On top of all that misery, he struggled with severe depression and finally suffered through the cancer that took him. My joy and my faith in the power of prayer may have diminished at his death, but if that was the cost of seeing him finally free, it was undoubtedly worth it.

Farewell, my friend. It will not be the last we meet. But until our next meeting, my heart will ache to see you again.

Help me to understand, Lord.

Waves against the shore
in the darkness of twilight—
summer sun rising

Chapter Ten

Dear Lord...

DEAR LORD, you know the darkness I have been through. I have not yet found my way into the bright light of day again. But I am reminded that there is no night into which Your magnificent glory will not shine. And darkness and light are the same to You not because there is no difference between them, but because You have dominion over both equally. Great Creator and Redeemer, You have the power to pull me out of the void, and when it is the right time, You undoubtedly will.

I once felt abandoned, but I am reminded that You sent Your light into the world long ago. You became the light to those lost in darkness as You entered the darkness Yourself. And You understand what it is to experience the oblivion of hell and forsakenness, and the weight of the world falling upon You. The punishment that I deserve You received in my place long before I was born. Surely, I was mistaken to believe that You had left me. Even in the blackness of a moonless night there are stars in the sky, glimmers of hope and restoration.

Though joy has not accompanied me along the way, I now see the value in the dark night that my soul is traveling through. I know not what is planned for me. But if You were willing to let me descend into the grave as You did, then I know I will someday rise again as something more than I was. Something more like You. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

Blue sky this morning
on the threshold of winter—
dew on fallen leaves

DEAR LORD, I had forgotten that the purpose of my life is not wrapped up in a ministry, a position of influence, or the fulfillment of a dream, for all their worth. The purpose of my existence is to one day follow You into the resurrection and glorification of the body. And in doing so, to magnify You. In the meantime, there is a cross for me to bear and a grave for me to lie in.

I am reminded that I need not weep as I watch my flesh wasting away, nor mourn over the world that is dissolving. For I am wayfaring on the road that You once trod. I need not be troubled with some elusive or mysterious plan for my life. For You have already modeled the perfect design: life to death and death to life.

As for my children, though I am purposed with teaching them, I know that I must trust You for their salvation and welfare, Lord. I may never come to the place where all worry sloughs off like so much dead skin. I may never be clear of the necrosis of anxiety and fear of tomorrow. In fact, I know I will fail to trust You time and time again. But the scars on Your back and the wounds in Your hands reassure me that You were acquainted with the full measure of my sins when You died for me.

I am reminded that it is not knowing how to win that defines a Christian, it is knowing how to lose. In this world the faithful lose many times over; not only at the hands of the worldly but also at our own hands, knowing what is righteous and failing to do it. Perhaps purpose in life is nothing more than a series of failures followed by new mercies and new beginnings. In this world I will often lose, but in the end, the kingdom will be gained. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

A graveyard of wild

flowers in frozen green grass—
 soon a spring seedbed

DEAR LORD, I have little to say about the depression that plagues my mind time and again. It is a scourge and nothing more. There is no more value or benefit in it than there is in cancer. I continually pray that You will deliver me from this curse. If not, there will be some dark days ahead of me. But if the fires rage within me or the ice gathers to hold me captive, I will not be overcome with anxiety. And if the fog surrounds me once again, and I feel lost and alone, or if I find myself desiring to run for the hills as an outcast, I will not give in to fear. For I am reminded that you are familiar with grief and forsakenness, having endured them Yourself. And I know that You sit upon Your throne eagerly waiting to extend mercy to me. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

Trees falling by the
 roadside in a winter storm—
 stars replacing clouds

DEAR LORD, I allowed doubt and fear to shipwreck my soul. I repressed the memories of all the things You did for me in years past. They were buried at sea along with my faith—the best part of me. I still have doubts about the future, but they are only discernible when the billows rise and begin to flood my vessel. Even then, doubt is present because I remove my gaze from the One who is sovereign over the blustering winds and mounting waves.

I now spend my days diving down into the depths of the sea to salvage the faith I had lost. Some days, I surface with a remnant of what used to be. Other days, I find it impossible to separate the wreckage from the silt and sand that now covers it, impossible to fight off the noxious creatures that attempt to make a home within it. Some days, the corroded debris that could not withstand the salty, lukewarm waters of idleness and resignation is all I am able to find. Other days, I surface with sturdy, ferrous remains capable of enduring the tides of discouragement and doubt.

I am reminded that despite my inability to recover every bit of the faith I once had, You offer me opportunities for new faith every day. I am encouraged by remembering that You put each of us through refining experiences at one time or another for our betterment. My adventures on the high seas have not been pleasant and I would not ask to go through them again. But I know when all is said and done, like the wreckage of a ship, my former faith will become more valuable to me than it was before calamity occurred. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

A storm this fall day
and the ships are moored at port —
my soul too is safe

DEAR LORD, who sees all things, my sinful heart wants to believe that all I have done for You has been in vain. That all my accomplishments and the work I have done for Your kingdom have been forgotten. But I am reminded that everything I do for You is recorded in the annals of eternity. Though my life and works may not be remembered by the men and women of

this age, a day is coming when they will be lauded before the very throne of God. And thankfully all the wrong I have repented of will be as if it never existed.

I dreamed of doing many things for You, and perhaps I will yet see these dreams fulfilled. Or perhaps they will be recast. The well of my dreams has dried up, but I know that You will one day bring me into a good land where many streams flow and the wells never run dry. And there in that land of plenty, dreams will rise and run as rivers to the sea. Until that day comes, I will replenish my soul's well with water from the stream You have already caused to flow into this desert in which I abide.

I dreamed of a great marriage. I once thought that it would be an easy road. I thought that if my wife and I loved each other, everything would naturally fall into place. In reality, we could not plan for everything. Only You have full knowledge of the future, Lord. Down here, we are the blind leading the blind. But though she and I wandered into a dry and barren wilderness, I see rain from heaven on the horizon. I see that stream of grace and renewal finding its way to us. Things are not perfect, and You never said they would be, yet much has been restored already. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

A remarkably
dry summer this year—the sky
is red this morning

DEAR LORD, who knows all things, my sinful heart wants to blame You for the fallenness of the world and for the tribulation that has come into my life. You knew that humanity would fail to do what is right. You looked out across space and time and saw the pain, disease,

and destruction that would come upon the human race as a result. You saw me suffering under the weight of sin and chained in despair. You allowed history to commence anyway. But I have discovered this to be the very picture of hope. Without defeat, hope has no meaning. Without failure, winning becomes obsolete.

Yes, You knew that humans would sin immeasurably, and You knew the plight that would ensue. But Love allows something to exist that does not deserve existence. Love looks for good in something that possesses little goodness. Love creates and refines despite difficulty; it rescues and redeems despite unworthiness. Love hopes when defeat is inevitable. Love comes as a Lamb to the slaughter for the sake of the ones He loves.

The harvest may be over and the old eaten up or burned, but on the horizon is a time of restoration and plenty. Soon the ground will be tilled, and the seeds planted. The warm rains and the bright sun will return. And the golden stalks will stand tall once again. Hope cannot be lost as if it rested in my hands. It can only be forgotten. Hope slept in a manger. Hope hung on a cross. Hope has prepared a place for me in a golden city.

The voice of despair may not always be silent in my heart, but these days I am Noah coming aground, Abraham holding his newborn son, Joshua looking out over the Promised Land, David anointing Solomon. I am Lazarus breathing again, John standing in the empty tomb, Peter eating with the risen Lord. Hope is restored. All is not lost. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

Daylight has broken
and snow has turned to rain—the
warmth will soon return

DEAR LORD, love can be painful. You know that more than anyone. Sometimes loved ones exchange this life for an eternal one. Sometimes friends forget or betray. Still, there are many faithful friends and loved ones that remain. But whether they are coming, or going, or somewhere in between, I am reminded that these relationships are living, breathing examples of Your grace to me.

I have learned that though struggles will inevitably arise, and death will separate, in every association with another human being there is a blessing to be discovered. No, friends and family members do not always get along or even stick together. But when I look back upon my days with loved ones, Lord, I will remember the good times when we laughed and prayed together. And I will forget the times of heartache and sorrow. For someday we will all stand together on the golden shores of Your everlasting kingdom.

Perhaps more than anything else, my journey through the in-betweens of faith has reminded me that this life is temporary, and doubt and despair, pain and heartache, depression and insecurity, loss and separation will not last forever. This earth may feel like purgatory at times, but a new earth will one day descend. And in that bright and perfect world, I will never know darkness again. For that I am joyful. For that I am thankful.

In the meantime, I will live my life for all its worth.

Butterflies perched on
daffodils—forgotten are
their larva days

Annotated Bibliography

Carter, Steven D. "Bashô and the Mastery of Poetic Space in Oku No Hosomichi." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 120, no. 2, 2000, pp. 190–98. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/605022>. Accessed 16 Sep. 2022.

Carter makes the claim that Basho's *Narrow Road* figures into the Japanese canon of "haikai poetics" as a "foundational text." In addition, Carter finds *Narrow Road* serves as a teaching tool for students of haikai. This article is important for understanding how Basho brings the high and the low together in terms of diction and themes in his haiku and haibun.

Clements, Jonathan, translator. *The Moon in the Pines: Zen Haiku*. Penguin Books, 2000.

The Moon in the Pines is a short, translated anthology of classical Japanese haiku. Several of Matsuo Basho's haiku are included in the anthology and serve as examples of his method and work. These examples reveal that when Japanese haiku cannot always follow the syllables-per-line pattern of 5/7/5 or the total-syllable count of seventeen when translated into English.

Eaton, Garry. "A Note on Hokku." *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2009, pp. 328–37. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42966936>. Accessed 15 Sep. 2022.

Eaton discusses a few of his favorite haiku, including some by Japanese haikai poets such as Basho, in order to illustrate how to read English-language haiku. The author claims that Basho was the "mastermind" behind haiku and the "greatest haikai poet." Important to the critical paper above is Eaton's point about how innovative Basho was and how flexible the rules of haiku are.

Hamill, Sam, translator. *The Essential Basho*. By Matsuo Basho, Shambhala Publications, 1998.

The Essential Basho is an anthology of Basho's haibun and haiku translated and introduced by Sam Hamill. Included in the collection is Basho's *Narrow Road*, which is drawn from frequently in the critical paper above. Hamill makes the point in the introduction that Basho was not a stickler for syllable count but was more concerned with the content and sound of the haiku.

Hargiss, Dennis G. "Awakening to the High/Returning to the Low: The Pilgrim's Ideal in Bashō's 'Oku No Hosomichi.'" *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2000, pp. 130–56. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44362246>. Accessed 15 Sep. 2022.

Hargiss connects Basho's *Narrow Road* to the Buddhist idea of pilgrimage. He believes that the Buddhist pilgrim ideal of "awakening to the high" and "returning to the low" is prevalent in *Narrow Road*. This is important to the critical paper above in that it addresses Basho's technique of connecting the high to the low in terms of diction and themes in his haiku and haibun.

Harr, Lorraine Ellis. "Hokku Poetry." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1975, pp. 112–19. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3331909>. Accessed 1 Sep. 2022.

Harr discusses the content and purpose of good haiku. In her opinion, haiku are not meant to bring the reader to a conclusion about their meaning but are meant to impress something on the reader. This is important to the discussion of Basho's content or "scent" links mentioned in the critical paper above. Harr also relates the struggle of English language haiku poets to follow a strict 5/7/5 syllabic pattern in their haiku.

Kawamoto, Koji. “The Use and Disuse of Tradition in Bashō’s Hokku and Imagist Poetry.”

Poetics Today, vol. 20, no. 4, 1999, pp. 709–21. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773197>. Accessed 17 Sep. 2022.

Kawamoto compares and contrasts twentieth-century American imagist poetry, such as that of Ezra Pound with Bashō’s haiku. Where the imagists tended to be preoccupied with “newness” in their poetry to the point of rejecting the traditional (the “old”), Bashō and other haiku poets utilized both the traditional and the novel. This is important for the point about connecting the old to the new and the flexibility of Bashō’s art form in the critical paper above.

LaFleur, William R. *The Karma of Words*. University of California Press, 1986.

LaFleur connects several works of Japanese literature from the eleventh century onward—including Bashō’s *Narrow Road*—to Buddhism. This is important to a study of Bashō’s work in that it reveals the mindset behind his poetry, especially in relation to his religious background as a Buddhist monk.

Millett, Christine Murasaki. “‘Bush Clover and Moon.’ A Relational Reading of *Oku No*

Hosomichi.” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 52, no. 3, 1997, pp. 327–56. *JSTOR*,

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2385632>. Accessed 5 Sep. 2022.

Millett’s article discusses the development of haikai (linked-verse) and hokku (single-verse) from traditional Japanese waka and renga poetry. She also discusses Bashō’s haibun and haiku technique, specifically the elements of *toriwase* (combination) and *kireji* (cutting word—a dash in English) in Bashō’s *Narrow Road*. Millett uses Haibun 39, “Bush Clover and Moon,” as the basis for her point that *Narrow Road* should be read relationally. This article is important to the critical paper in that it

addresses Basho's "spirit of going and returning" across a *kireji* in his haiku and across the division between prose and haiku in his haibun.

Ramirez-Christensen, Esperanza. "The Close Link and the Distant Link." *Murmured*

Conversations: A Treatise on Poetry and Buddhism by the Poet-Monk Shinkei. Redwood City, CA, 2008; Stanford Scholarship Online, 2013, pp. 96-101.

<https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9780804748636.003.0034>, accessed 24 Sept. 2022.

Ramirez-Christensen discusses the difference between "close" and "distant" links in the haikai poetry of Basho's day. Where most haikai poets used "content" or "word" links (i.e., "close links"), to connect previous verses to added verses, Basho used distant "scent" links, or overtones, to accomplish the connection. This is important to the point about Basho's innovativeness in the critical paper above.

Shirane, Haruo. "Beyond the Haiku Moment: Basho, Buson, and Modern Haiku Myths." *Modern*

Haiku, vol. 30, no. 1, 2000. *Contemporary Haibun Online*,

https://contemporaryhaibunonline.com/chohtmlarchive/articles/Shirane_beyond.html.

In this article, Shirane poses the question of what North American haiku looks like to Japanese poets of the past and present. In his opinion, Basho would have looked on North American haiku as too restrictive. Instead of holding to a narrow definition of haiku, English-language poets should focus on brevity, the human condition, and nature. In this way they can be faithful to the spirit of Basho's haiku.

---. "Matsuo Bashō and The Poetics of Scent." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1,

1992, pp. 77–110. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2719329>. Accessed 9 Sep. 2022.

In this article, Shirane discusses the development of haiku from traditional renga but gives special attention to Basho's use of overtones, or "scent" links, in his haiku. The

process of coming and going across the *kireji* and juxtaposing disparate images are important aspects of “scent” links and are discussed at length in the critical paper above.

---. “The Poetry of Matsuo Bashō.” *Finding Wisdom in East Asian Classics*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary, Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 275–86. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/deba15396.27>. Accessed 14 Sep. 2022.

In this article, Shirane compares Bashō’s poetry to that of his contemporaries. Where others followed strict traditional rules about poetry, Bashō was innovative and flexible. Bashō connected the traditional to the “antitraditional” and brought *hokku* to a place of respectability in Japanese poetry.

Stryk, Lucien. “Matsuo Bashō.” *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1984, pp. 33–36. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40742309>. Accessed 16 Sep. 2022.

Stryk’s article is a brief biography of Bashō’s art form. It is important to the critical paper above in that it discusses how Bashō prioritized the feeling behind his haiku to the rules that governed the art form, such as syllable count.

Thomas, Roger K. “Peasants, Peddlers, and Paramours: Waka Selections.” *An Edo Anthology: Literature from Japan’s Mega-City, 1750-1850*, edited by Sumie Jones and Kenji Watanabe, University of Hawai’i Press, 2013, pp. 413–30. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wqdwg.29>. Accessed 14 Sep. 2022.

In this article, Thomas discusses Bashō’s ability to bring the high (traditional) and low (plebeian) together in his poetry. He makes the point that Bashō was able to refine and elevate haikai by accomplishing that connection. This is important to the critical paper above in that it lends to the point about bringing traditional Japanese art forms together with modern, “low brow” contexts.

Welch, Michael Dylan. “Haibun: Aims and Problems.” *Contemporary Haibun Online*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2019.

https://contemporaryhaibunonline.com/chohtmlarchive/pages152/A_Welch_HaibunEssay.html.

In this article, Welch makes the point that modern English-language haibun poets are following in Basho’s footsteps by juxtaposing disparate images in their haibun, and by linking their prose and haiku together. Welch discusses the importance of writing effective poems and prose and developing effective links between them. This article is important to the critical paper above in that it connects contemporary haibun to Basho’s.

Youmans, Rich. “More than the Sum of Its Parts.” *Contemporary Haibun Online*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2021. <https://contemporaryhaibunonline.com/cho-17-1-table-of-contents/more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts-by-rich-youmans/>.

In this article, Youmans discusses how Modern English-language haibun poets are wrestling to bring Eastern traditions and Western heritage together in their haibun. The author argues that these poets are doing this by bringing the high and the low together by combining a traditional art form with everyday occurrences and typical aspects of the human condition. These poets are also bringing East and West together by utilizing the *toriawase* method of combining disparate images juxtaposed across a *kireji*—whether the *kireji* is imaginary (as in the leap from prose to haiku in haibun) or literal (as in a haiku by itself)—characteristic of classic Japanese poets such as Basho.