

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9855

# ZEN POEMS

## Read by Lucien Stryk

ENLIGHTENMENT POEMS OF THE CHINESE ZEN MASTERS  
DEATH POEMS OF THE CHINESE ZEN MASTERS  
POEMS OF THE JAPANESE ZEN MASTERS  
SHINKICHÍ TAKAHASHI - CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE MASTER  
ZEN POEMS OF LUCIEN STRYK



SHAKA NYORAI (cakyamuni) 11th - 12th Century

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

PL  
2658  
E3  
Z46  
1980  
c.1

MUSIC LP

CONTENTS:

- 1 LP
- 1 Introduction + texts (8 p.)

University of Alberta Library



0 1620 0506 6830



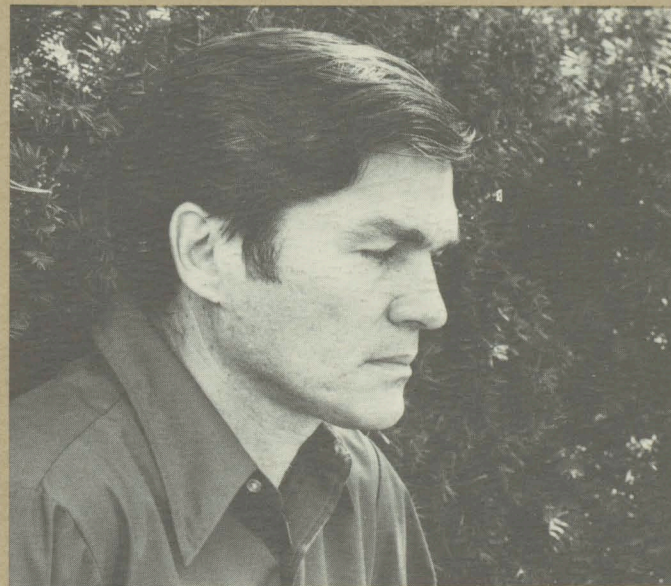


Photo by Barry Stark.

**SIDE 1**

- Band 1 Enlightenment Poems of the Chinese Zen Masters - 6:38  
 Band 2 Death Poems of the Chinese Zen Masters - 8:02  
 Band 3 Poems of the Japanese Zen Masters - 11:54

**SIDE 2**

- BAnd 1 Poems of the Japanese Zen Masters (continued) - 8:00  
 Band 2 Shinkichi Takahashi-Contemporary Japanese Master - 6:40  
 Band 3 Zen Poems of Lucien Stryk - 13:44

Lucien Stryk's most recent of eight books of poems are *Selected Poems* (1976), *The Duckpond* (1978) and *Zen Poems* (1979). His poems and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals, he has received awards, including the Governor's Award for the Arts (Illinois), and has held a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and, to translate Zen poetry, a National Translation Center Grant. He is editor of *World of the Buddha*, the anthologies *Heartland: Poets of the Midwest* (I and II), and translator, with Professor Takashi Ikemoto of Japan, of among other volumes, *Afterimages: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi*, *Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill* and *The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry*. He has given poetry readings and lectured throughout the United States and England, has held a Fulbright Lectureship in Iran and a Fulbright Travel/Research Grant and two visiting lectureships in Japan. He teaches Oriental literature and poetry at Northern Illinois University.

© 1980 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP.  
 43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., 10023 N.Y., U.S.A.

# ZEN POEMS

## Read by Lucien Stryk

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9855



PL  
2658  
E3  
Z46  
1980  
MUSIC LP

AYS RECORDS Album No. FL 9855  
Folkways Records & Service Corp., 43 W. 61st St., NYC, USA 10023

# ZEN POEMS

Read by Lucien Stryk

LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Photo by Barry Stark

## Lucien Stryk

Lucien Stryk's most recent of eight books of poems are *Selected Poems* (1976), *The Duckpond* (1978) and *Zen Poems* (1979). His poems and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals, he has received awards, including the Governor's Award for the Arts (Illinois), and has held a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and, to translate Zen poetry, a National Translation Center Grant. He is editor of *World of the Buddha*, the anthologies *Heartland: Poets of the Midwest* (I and II), and translator, with Professor Takashi Ikemoto of Japan, of among other volumes *Afterimages: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi*, *Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill* and *The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry*. He has given poetry readings and lectured throughout the United States and England, has held a Fulbright Lectureship in Iran and a Fulbright Travel/Research Grant and two visiting lectureships in Japan. He teaches Oriental literature and poetry at Northern Illinois University.

Acknowledgments: "Zen: the Rocks of Sesshu," "The Duckpond" and "Awakening" are from *Selected Poems*, copyright © Lucien Stryk, 1976, used with permission of Swallow Press; "Burning Oneself to Death," "What is Moving," "Tinae" and "Fish" are from *Afterimages: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi*, translations copyright © Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, 1970, used with permission of Swallow Press; all other poems, and the Introduction, are from *The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry*, translations copyright © Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, 1977, used with permission of Penguin Books Ltd., London, England.

## INTRODUCTION

### I

The Golden Age of China, T'ang through Sung dynasties (AD 618-1279), began not long after the Western Roman Empire came to an end and lasted well beyond the First Crusade. One of the most cultivated eras in the history of man, its religious, philosophical and social ground had been prepared centuries before Christianity, and men perfected their lives and arts certain that they gave meaning to something higher than themselves. To artists of the time, numerous and skilled, poetry and painting were Ways - two among many, to be sure, but glorious Ways - to realization of Truth, whose unfolding made possible not only fulfilled life but calm acceptance of its limitations. They saw in the world a process of becoming, yet each of its particulars, at any moment of existence, partook of the absolute. This meant that no distinction was drawn between the details of a landscape - cliffs, slopes, estuaries, waterfalls - shaped by the artist's emotions. Foreground, background, each was part of the process, in poetry as in painting, the spirit discovering itself among the things of this world.

*On the rocky slope, blossoming  
Plums - from where?  
Once he saw them, Reiu  
Danced all the way to Sandai.*

HOIN

The artist's visions were held to be revelatory; painting, poem meant to put men in touch with the absolute. Judgment of art works was made principally with that in mind. Some might delight the senses, a few exalt the spirit, whose role was taken for granted to be paramount, the greatest artists respecting its capacity to discover itself anew in their works. Over centuries the West has deduced the guiding aesthetic principle of such art to be 'Less is More', and a number of stories bear this out.

One concerns a painting competition in the late T'ang dynasty, a time of many such events and gifted competitors, all of whom, brought up in an intellectual and artistic meritocracy, were aware of what success might mean. Judged

by master painters, most carefully arranged, each had its theme, that of our story being 'Famous Monastery in the Mountains'. Ample time was provided for the participants to meditate before taking up brushes. More than a thousand entries of monasteries in sunlight, in shadow, under trees, at mountain-foot, on slopes, at the very peak, by water, among rocks - all seasons. Mountains of many sizes, shapes, richly various as the topography itself. Since the monastery was noted 'famous', monks abounded, working, praying, all ages and conditions. The competition produced works destined to be admired for centuries to come. The winning painting had no monastery at all: a monk paused, reflecting, on a misty mountain bridge. Nothing - everything - more. Evoking atmosphere, the monk knew his monastery hovered in the mist, more beautiful than hand could realize. To define, the artist must have learnt from the Taoism of Lao Tzu or the Zen of Hui-neng, is to limit.

### II

Zen began its rapid growth in early T'ang China, a product of the merging of the recently introduced Buddhism of the Indian monk Bodhidharma, who reached China in 520, and Taoism, the reigning philosophy of poets and painters for some thousand years. Providing a rigorously inspiring discipline, insisting on the primacy of meditation, its temples and monasteries were havens for seekers after truth throughout the T'ang, Sung and Mongol-shadowed Yuan dynasties. Zen masters, religious guides, often themselves poets and painters, made judgements concerning the spiritual attainments of artist-disciples on the basis of works produced. Neither before nor since has art had so important a role in community life, and there are countless instances of poems or paintings affecting the development of the philosophy itself. One such concerns the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng, who was named as Hung-jen's successor chiefly on the strength of his famous enlightenment poem:

*The tree of Perfect Wisdom  
Was originally no tree,  
Nor has the bright mirror  
Any frame. Buddha-nature  
Forever clear and pure,  
Where is there any dust?*

Writers of such poems did not think themselves poets. Rather they were gifted men - masters, monks, some laymen - who after momentous experiences found themselves with something to say which only a poem could express. Enlightenment, point of their meditation, brought about transformation of the spirit; a poem was expected to convey the essential experience and its effect. Such an awakening might take years of unremitting effort, to most it would never come at all:

One day Baso, disciple of Ejo, the Chinese master, was asked by the master why he spent so much time meditating. Baso: 'To become a Buddha.'

The master lifted a brick and began rubbing it very hard. It was now Baso's turn to ask a question: 'Why,' he asked, 'do you rub that brick?'

'To make a mirror.'

'But surely,' protested Baso, 'no amount of polishing will change a brick into a mirror.'

'Just so,' the master said: 'no amount of cross-legged sitting will make you into a Buddha.'

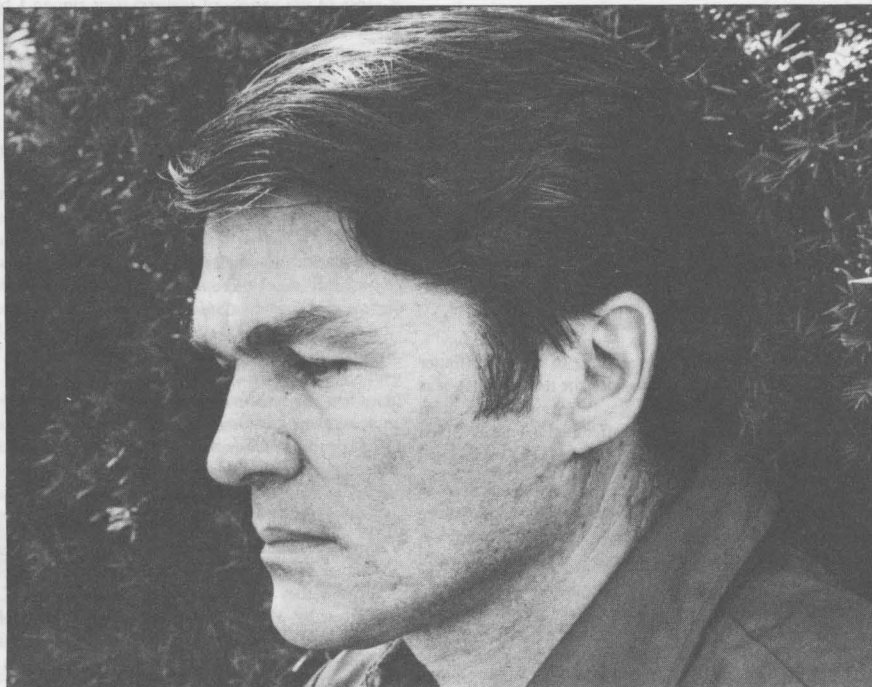
Yet masters did their best to guide disciples: one device was the *koan* (problem for meditation), which they were asked to solve. As no logical solution was possible, the meditator was always at wits' end - the intention. One of the *koans*, usually first given, was Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard', based on the master's answer to the standard Zen question 'What's the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming to China?' These awakening poems, responses to this question of the masters, suggest the range of possibilities:

*Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard' -  
Nobody's grasped its roots.  
Turned from sweet plum trees,  
They pick sour pears on the hill.*

EIAN

*Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard'  
Handed down, yet lost in leafy branch  
They miss the root. Disciple Kaku shouts -  
'Joshu never said a thing!'*

MONJU-SHINDO





Given their importance, it is not surprising to find in early Chinese enlightenment poems frequent references to *koans*. Most poems, though, deal with major aims of the philosophy, escape from space-time bondage, for example, a hard-won precondition of awakening:

*Twenty years a pilgrim,  
Footing east, west.  
Back in Seiken,  
I've not moved an inch.*  
SEIKEN-CHIJU

*Earth, river, mountain:  
Snowflakes melt in air.  
How could I have doubted?  
Where's north? south? east? west?*  
DANGAI

Many express swift release from conventional attachments:

*Searching Him took  
My strength.  
One night I bent  
My pointing finger –  
Never such a moon!*  
KEPPO

Need for such release, transcending of doctrine (finger pointing at the moon, never taken for the moon itself), was the theme of Bodhidharma's historical interview with Emperor Wu of Liang, shortly after his arrival in China (by then some schools of Buddhism had been established there a few hundred years):

Emperor Wu: From the beginning of my reign, I have built many temples, had numerous sacred books copied, and supported all the monks and nuns. What merit have I?

Bodhidharma: None.

Emperor Wu: Why?

Bodhidharma: All these are inferior deeds, showing traces of worldliness, but shadows. A truly meritorious deed is full of wisdom, but mysterious, its real nature beyond grasp of human intelligence – something not found in worldly achievement.

Emperor Wu: What is the first principle of your doctrine?

Bodhidharma: Vast emptiness, nothing holy.

Emperor Wu: Who, then, stands before me?

Bodhidharma: I don't know.

Not long after this Bodhidharma wrote his famous poem:

*Transmission outside doctrine,  
No dependencies on words.  
Pointing directly at the mind,  
Thus seeing oneself truly,  
Attaining Buddhahood.*

As might be expected, awakening poems were held precious in Zen communities, serving for generations as *koans* themselves or as subjects for *teisho* (sermons). Interpretation was often made in the light of the master's life, what led to his experience. Nan-o-Myo, awakened when asked by his master to interpret 'Not falling into the law of causation, yet not ignoring it', wrote:

*Not falling, not ignoring –  
A pair of mandarin ducks  
Alighting, bobbing, anywhere.*

Every utterance of a worthy master was thought significant. The late Sung master Tendo-Nyojo, an example, guided Japan's great Dogen (1200–1253) to enlightenment, which alone made his death poem, simple as it is, glorious to the Japanese:

*Sixty-six years  
Piling sins,  
I leap into hell –  
Above life and death.*

Zen death poems, remarkable in world literature, have a very ancient tradition. On their origin one can only speculate, but probably in early communities masters felt responsibility to disciples beyond the grave, and made such poems in the hope that they would help point the way to attainment, not only for disciples but for posterity. To some the final poem was not felt to be itself of much importance:

*Life's as we  
Find it – death too.  
A parting poem?  
Why insist?*

DAIE-SOKO

Many, however, considered it to be a symbolic summation, quite possibly preparing well before the inevitable moment. It would stand, every syllable pondered, and lives might well be affected by truth, absolute, whatever its message and worth as 'poetry'. Differences between death poems give a sense of the variety of temperament among Chinese masters. Fuyo-Dokai's vital self-assurance:

*Seventy-six: done  
With this life –  
I've not sought heaven,  
Don't fear hell.  
I'll lay these bones  
Beyond the Triple World,  
Unenthralled, unperturbed.*

Koko's sense of release from a harsh existence:

*The word at last,  
No more dependencies:  
Cold moon in pond,  
Smoke over the ferry.*

Shozan's astringent mockery:

*'No mind, no Buddha,'  
Disciples prattle.  
'Got skin, got marrow.'  
Well, goodbye to that.  
Beyond, peak glows on peak!*

There is no way of telling, records being scant and unreliable (there are wild variants of birth and death dates), whether all wrote death poems, but given their solemn purpose they probably did. By 1279, when China was overrun by Mongols, Zen had flourished for almost one hundred years in Japan. There from the start death poems of masters were thought to have great religious meaning. Dogen left, exulting:

*Four and fifty years  
I've hung the sky with stars.  
Now I leap through –  
What shattering!*

### III

Centuries before the introduction of Zen in the Kamakura Period (1192–1333), Japan had been virtually transformed by Chinese Buddhism. Every aspect of life, from the Nara Period (710–84) on, reflected in one way or another the Chinese world vision. Painters and poets looked to China constantly, as did the greatest painter in the Chinese style, Sesshu, who crossed there for instruction and inspiration. Not all became Zennists like Sesshu, who was to join the priesthood, but most were guided by the philosophy, their works revealing the extent. In the earliest Zen communities enlightenment and death poems were written strictly in *kanji* (Chinese characters), in classical verse forms preferred by the Chinese masters – there is little to distinguish poems of the first Japanese Zennists from those written in China centuries before.

Here is the master Daito's enlightenment poem, written when he had succeeded in solving the eighth *koan* of the Chinese classic Zen text *Hekiganroku*, which contains a reference to 'Unmon's barrier':

*At last I've broken Unmon's barrier!  
There's exit everywhere – east, west; north, south.  
In at morning, out at evening; neither host nor guest.  
My every step stirs up a little breeze.*

And here is Fumon's death poem:

*Magnificent! Magnificent!  
No one knows the final word.  
The ocean bed's aflame,  
Out of the void leap wooden lambs.*

The Japanese masters composed not only enlightenment and death poems in Chinese verse forms, they often wrote of important events in the history of Zen, like Bodhidharma's interview with the Emperor Wu. Here is Shunoku's poem on the subject. ('Shorin' is the temple where Bodhidharma, on discovering that the emperor lacked

insight, sat in Zen for nine years. To reach the temple he had to cross the Yangtze River.)

*After the spring song, 'Vast emptiness, no holiness',  
Comes the song of snow-wind along the Yangtze River.  
Late at night I too play the noteless flute of Shorin,  
Piercing the mountains with its sound, the river.*

Even in writing on general themes associated with Zen life the masters employed the purest literary Chinese. Since only few Japanese knew the language, this practice made the Zen poems *elitist*, leading to the feeling on the part of masters like Dogen that an indigenous verse form, *tanka* (or *waka*), should be utilized. Such works would be understood in and out of the Zen communities, and surely it was possible to be as inspiring in Japanese, which, though using *kanji*, had a syllabary and was very different from Chinese. The most important collection of early Japanese poetry, the *Manyoshu* (eighth century), contains three kinds of verse forms: *choka*, *tanka* and *sedoka*, all based on arrangements of 5-7-5 syllable lines, the most popular, *tanka*, structured as 5-7-5-7-7 syllables – strictly, without any possible variation.

In the Heian Period (794–1185), which immediately preceded the first age of Zen, *tanka* was the favourite verse form at the courts. Towards the end of Heian, *renga* (linked verse), became popular: a chain of alternating 14 and 21 syllables independently composed but associated with the verses coming before and after. By the fifteenth century, *renga* expiring of artificiality, something more vital was found, the *haikai renga*, linked verses of 17 syllables. Later came individual poems of 17 syllables, *haiku*, the earliest authentic examples by writers like Sogi (1421–1502), Sokan (1458–1546) and Moritake (1472–1549).

Basho, thought by many Japanese to be their finest *haiku* writer and greatest poet, lived from 1644 to 1694. Like almost all noted *haiku* writers he was a Zennist, practising discipline under the master Butcho, with whom, according to Dr D. T. Suzuki, he had the following exchange:

Butcho: How are you getting along these days?

Basho: Since the recent rain moss is greener than ever.

Butcho: What Buddhism was there before the moss became green?

Resulting in enlightenment and the first of his best-known *haiku*:

Basho: Leap-splash – a frog.

Whether or not they undertook discipline, *haiku* writers thought themselves living in the spirit of Zen, their truest poems expressing its ideals. To art lovers the appeal of *haiku* is not unlike that of a *sumie* (ink-wash) scroll by Sesshu, and many *haiku* poets, like Buson, were also outstanding painters.

Zennists have always associated the two arts: 'When a feeling reaches its highest pitch,' says Dr Suzuki, Zen's most distinguished historian, 'we remain silent, even 17 syllables may be too many. Japanese artists... influenced by the way of Zen tend to use the fewest words or strokes of brush to express their feelings. When they are too fully expressed no room for suggestion is possible, and suggestibility is the secret of the Japanese arts.' Like a painting or rock garden, *haiku* is an object of meditation, drawing back the curtain on essential truth. It shares with other arts qualities belonging to the Zen aesthetic – simplicity, naturalness, directness, profundity – and each poem has its dominant mood: *sabi* (isolation), *wabi* (poverty), *aware* (impermanence) or *yugen* (mystery).

If it is true that the art of poetry consists in saying important things with the fewest possible words, then *haiku* has a just place in world literature. The limitation of syllables assures terseness and concision, and the range of association in the finest examples is at times astonishing. It has the added advantage of being accessible: a seasonal reference, direct or indirect, simplest words, chiefly names of things in dynamic relationships, familiar themes, make it understandable to most, on one level at least. The *haiku* lives most fully in nature, of great meaning to a people who never feel it to be outside themselves. Man is fulfilled only when unseparated from his surroundings, however hostile they may appear:

*To the willow –  
all hatred, and desire  
of your heart.*

BASHO



White lotus –  
the monk  
draws back his blade.

BUSON

Under cherry trees  
there are  
no strangers.

ISSA

In the West, perhaps as a result of fascination with the *haiku* (its association with the development of modern poetry at one extreme, its universal appeal in schools at the other), it arouses as much suspicion as admiration. It looks so easy, something anyone can do. A most unfortunate view, for *haiku* is a quintessential form, much like the sonnet in Elizabethan England, being precisely suited to (as it is the product of) Japanese sensibility, conditioned by Zen. For Basho, Buson, Issa, *haiku* permitted the widest possible field of discovery and experimentation.

The Zen experience is centripetal, the artist's contemplation of subject sometimes referred to as 'mind-pointing'. The disciple in an early stage of discipline is asked to point the mind at (meditate upon) an object, say a bowl of water. At first he is quite naturally inclined to metaphorize, expand, rise imaginatively from water to lake, sea, clouds, rain. Natural perhaps, but just the kind of 'mentalizing' Zen masters caution against. The disciple is instructed to continue until it is possible to remain strictly with the object, penetrating more deeply, no longer looking at it but, as the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng maintained essential, as it. Only then will he attain the state of *muga*, so close an identification with object that the unstable mentalizing self disappears. The profoundest *haiku* give a very strong sense of the process:

Dew of the bramble,  
thorns  
sharp white.

BUSON

Arid fields,  
the only life –  
necks of cranes.

SHIKO

To give an idea of the way *haiku* work, without making an odious cultural comparison, here is Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro', perhaps the most admired (and for good reason) *haiku*-like poem in English:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

A simile, the poem startles as *haiku* often do, but much of what is said would, to a *haiku* poet, be implied. Incorporating the title (*haiku* are never titled), he might make the poem read:

Faces in the metro –  
petals  
on a wet black bough.

If asked why, he might answer: the first few words, 'The apparition of these', though sonorous enough, add nothing. Nor does the reference to 'crowd', metro 'stations' usually being crowded – besides, the 'petals' of the simile would make that clear. His revision, he might claim, transforms the piece into an acceptable *haiku*, one rather like, perhaps less effective than, Onitsura's:

Autumn wind –  
across the fields,  
faces.

Without using simile, Onitsura stuns with an immediacy of vision – those faces whipped by a cold wind.

For centuries *haiku* has been extremely popular, and there are established schools with widely differing views. Typical is the Tenro, truly traditional, working with the 5-7-5 syllabic pattern, clear seasonal reference, and possessing a creed – *Shasei*, on-the-spot composition with the subject 'traced to its origin'. There are around two thousand members all over Japan, and it is usual for groups to meet at a designated spot, often a Zen temple, and write as many as one hundred *haiku* in a night, perhaps only one of which, after months of selection and revision, will be adequate. It will then be sent to one of the school's masters

and considered for the annual anthology, representing poems of some thirty members.

Untypical by comparison is the Soun (free-verse) school, which feels no obligation to stick to the 17-syllable pattern. Short and compact, however, its poems are written in the 'spirit of Basho'. Their creed is more general – Significance – and is very close to Zen, many of the members involved in discipline. They follow an ancient dictum, *Zenshi ichimi* (Poetry and Zen are one), and *Kado*, the Way of Poetry. As they strive for the revelatory, fewer poems are written than in the Tenro. Both schools, while opposed in principle, relate *haiku* to Zen, as do all other schools. Yet very few contemporary *haiku* could have pleased Basho, for however lofty the ideals they are generally derivative.

*Kado*, the Way of poetry to self-discovery, is similar in aim to other *do* (Ways) of Zen: *Gado* (painting), *Shodo* (calligraphy), *Jindo* (philosophy), *Judo* (force). *Haiku* teachers and Zen masters expect no miracles of disciples, yet maintain that with serious practice of an art, given aspirations, men perfect themselves: farmers, professors make their *haiku*, most egalitarian of arts. To those who find art a mystery engaged in by the chosen, the sight of a *haiku*-school group circling an autumn bush, lined notebooks, pens in hand, can be sharply touching. Only a cynic would think otherwise.

The few of course achieve true distinction in the skill, and are known to all who care for poetry. Usually they echo early masters, but some find that language cramping and consciously introduce the modern – factories, tractors, automobiles. They will admit, without derogating, to taking little pleasure from old *haiku*. They are however generous readers of each other's work and that of certain contemporary poets. One in whom many are interested, despite his not being a writer of *haiku*, is Shinkichi Takahashi, regarded throughout Japan as the greatest living Zen poet.

#### IV

Overlooking the sea in a fishing village on Shikoku Island, a poem is carved on a stone:

ABSENCE

Just says, 'He's out' –  
back in  
five billion years!

It is Shinkichi Takahashi's voice we hear. He was born in 1901, and the commemorative stone, placed by his townsmen, is one of many honours accorded him in recent years: another is the Ministry of Education's prestigious Prize for Art, awarded for *Collected Poems* (1973). In Japan poets are often honoured in this way, but rarely one as anarchical as Takahashi. He began as a Dadaist, publishing the novel *Dada* in 1924, and defied convention thereafter. Locked up in his early life a few times for 'impulsive actions', when his newly printed *Dadaist Shinkichi's Poetry* was handed to him through the bars of a police cell, he tore it into shreds.

In 1928 Takahashi began serious Zen study under the master Shizan Ashikaga at the Shogenji Rinzaï Temple, known for severity of discipline. He trained for seventeen long years, doing *zazen* (formal sitting in meditation) and studying *koans* – on which he wrote numerous poems. He attained enlightenment (*satori*) the first time on reaching the age of forty. In 1953, when fifty-two, he was given *inka* (his awakening testified to) by Shizan, one of six or seven disciples so honoured. In addition to some fiction and much poetry, he has written books on Zen highly regarded by Zennists, among them *Stray Notes on Zen Study* (1958), *Mumonkan* (1958), *Rinzairoku* (1959) and *A Life of Master Dogen* (1963).

Takahashi has interested fellow-poets and critics, East and West. A Japanese poet writes:

Takahashi's poetry is piquancy itself, just as Zen, the quintessence of Buddhism, bawls out by means of its concise vocabulary a sort of piquant ontology... Where does this enlivened feature come from? It comes from his strange disposition which enables him to sense the homogeneity of all things, including human beings. It is further due to his own method of versification: he clashes his idea of timelessness against the temporality of all phenomena to cause a fissure, through which he lets us see personally and convincingly the reality of limitless space.

The American poet Jim Harrison comments in the *American Poetry Review* on his 'omniscience about the realities that seems to typify genius of the first order', and goes on:

Nothing is denied entrance into these poems... All things are in their minutely suggestive proportions, and given an energy we aren't familiar with... Part of the power must come from the fact that the poet has ten thousand centers as a Zennist, thus is virtually centerless.

Philosophical insight is uncommon enough, but its authentic expression in poetry is extremely rare, whether found in T. S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets' or in Shinkichi Takahashi's 'Shell':

Nothing, nothing at all  
is born,  
dies, the shell says again  
and again  
from the depth of hollowness.  
Its body  
swept off by tide – so what?  
It sleeps  
in sand, drying in sunlight,  
bathing  
in moonlight. Nothing to do  
with sea  
or anything else. Over  
and over  
it vanishes with the wave.

On one level a 'survivor' poem, inspiring in its moral grandeur, on another, surely important to the poet, expressing dramatically Zen's unfathomable emptiness. Here is the Chinese master Tao-hsin, Zen's Fourth Patriarch, in a sermon on 'Abandoning the Body':

The method of abandoning the body consists first in meditating on Emptiness... Let the mind together with its world be quietened down to a perfect state of tranquillity; let thought be cast in the mystery of quietude, so that the mind is kept from wandering from one thing to another. When the mind is tranquillized in its deepest abode, its entanglements are cut asunder... the mind in its absolute purity is the void itself. How almost unconcerned it appears... Emptiness, non-striving, desirelessness, formlessness – this is true emancipation.

According to the great Taoist philosopher Chuang-tzu, his admirer, Tao-hsin said, 'Heaven and earth are one finger.' In the poem 'Hand' Takahashi writes, 'Snap my fingers – / time's no more.' He concludes, 'My hand's the universe, / it can do anything.' While such a poem may show indebtedness to masters like Tao-hsin, in a piece like the following, deceptively light, the poet's grasp is equally apparent:

AFTERNOON

My hair's falling fast –  
this afternoon  
I'm off to Asia Minor.

Always in Takahashi there is evidence of profound Zen, in itself distinguishing. His appeal, though, is by no means limited to Zennists, for his imagination has dizzying power: cosmic, surging through space and time ('Atom of thought, ten billion years – / one breath, past, present, future'), it pulls one beyond reality. At times, among his sparrows, he resembles the Tang master Niao-k'e (Bird's Nest), so called because he meditated high in a tree, wise among the creatures.

Yet Takahashi is never out of this world, which for Zennists is a network of particulars, each reflecting the universal and taking reality from its relationship to all others: it has otherwise no existence. This doctrine of Interpenetration, as known in Zen and all other schools of Mahayana Buddhism, cannot be understood without being felt: to those incapable of feeling, such ideals have been thought mere 'mysticism'. Poets and philosophers have attempted for centuries to explain interdependence. Here is the late second-century Indian philosopher Pingalaka:

If the cloth had its own fixed, unchangeable self-essence, it could not be made from the thread... the cloth comes from the thread and the thread from the flax... It is just like the... burning and the burned. They are brought together under certain conditions, and thus there takes place a phenomenon called burning... each has no reality

of its own. For when one is absent the other is put out of existence. It is so with all things in this world, they are all empty, without self, without absolute existence. They are like the will-o'-the-wisp.

For one who believes in the interpenetration of all living things, the world is a body, and if he is a poet like Takahashi, troubled by what the unenlightened inflict upon one another, he will write:

*Why this confusion,  
how restore the ravaged  
body of the world?*

And against this confusion he will invoke the saving force of Buddhism, the layman Vimalakirti who 'at a word draws galaxies to the foot of his bed', and Buddha himself, in a poem like 'Spinning Dharma Wheel', which ends:

*Three thousand years since Buddha  
found the morning star - now  
sun itself is blinded by his light.*

The poet once wrote, 'We must model ourselves on Bodhidharma, who kept sitting till his buttocks grew rotten. We must have done with all words and letters, and attain truth itself.' This echo of Lao Tzu in the Taoist classic *Tao Teh Ching* ('He who knows does not speak') is, as truth, relative: to communicate his wisdom, Lao Tzu had to speak, and Takahashi's voice is inexhaustible. No one would question his seriousness, the near doctrinal tone of some of his work, yet his best poems pulse with *zenki* (Zen dynamism), flowing spontaneously from the formless self and partaking of the world's fullness:

CAMEL

*The camel's humps  
shifted with clouds.*

*Such solitude beheads!  
My arms stretch*

*beyond mountain peaks,  
flame in the desert.*

V

Such are the three major phases of Zen poetry, spanning nearly 1,500 years from the earliest examples to the present, and displaying distinctive characteristics: the Chinese master Reito would very likely have appreciated Shinkichi Takahashi, much as Takahashi values Reito. This consistency, while very special, is by no means inexplicable. The philosophy underlying the poetry is today, in every respect, precisely what it was in Tang China: it worked then, it works now, in the face of all that would seem bent on undermining it. In Japan, where industry is king, the need for Zen intensifies, and particular care is taken to preserve its temples and art treasures, numbered among the nation's glories.

Perhaps today Zen's spirit shines most purely in its poetry, some of which is familiar to all, wherever they happen to live and however limited their knowledge of the philosophy. Yet consciously or not, those who care for Fuyo-Dokai, Issa, Shinkichi Takahashi, know Zen - as much as those who revere Mu-ch'i and Sesshu. For to respond strongly to poetry and painting is to understand the source of their inspiration, just as to relate fully to others is to understand Zen's interpenetration - more completely than do those who, though familiar with its terminology, are incapable of attaining its spiritual riches. Walt Whitman, a poet much admired by Zenists, wrote in 'Song for Occupations':

*We consider bibles and religions divine - I do not say  
they are not divine,*

*I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out  
of you still,*

*It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,  
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from  
the earth, than they are shed out of you.*

Zen always travelled well in time and space, through denying them. Its poetry will continue to move some to heroic efforts towards light, constantly delight others - which is as it should be. 'Zen is offering something,' the master Taigan Takayama said, 'and offering it directly. People just can't seem to grasp it.' Zen not only offers itself directly, but everywhere, and nowhere more authentically

than in poems written in its name and honour, as the Chinese layman Sotoba realized 1,000 years ago when he wrote in his enlightenment:

*The mountain - Buddha's body.  
The torrent - his preaching.  
Last night, eighty-four thousand poems.  
How, how make them understand?*

LUCIEN STRYK

SIDE 1  
Band 1

*Ox bridle tossed, vows taken,  
I'm robed and shaven clean.  
You ask why Bodhidharma came east -  
Staff thrust out, I hum like mad.*

REITO

*Twenty years a pilgrim,  
Footing east, west.  
Back in Seiken,  
I've not moved an inch.*

SEIKEN-CHIJU

*The old master held up fluff  
And blew from his palm,  
Revealing the Source itself.  
Look where clouds hide the peak.*

KAIGEN

*The mountain - Buddha's body.  
The torrent - his preaching.  
Last night, eighty-four thousand poems.  
How, how make them understand?*

LAYMAN SOTOBA (1036-1101)

*How long the tree's been barren.  
At its tip long ropes of cloud.  
Since I smashed the mud-bull's horns,  
The stream's flowed backwards.*

HOGE

*On the rocky slope, blossoming  
Plums - from where?  
Once he saw them, Reiu  
Danced all the way to Sandai.*

HOIN

*Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard'  
Handed down, yet lost in leafy branch  
They miss the root. Disciple Kaku shouts -  
'Joshu never said a thing!'*

MONJU-SHINDO

*No dust speck anywhere.  
What's old? new?  
At home on my blue mountain,  
I want for nothing.*

SHOFU

*Loving old priceless things,  
I've scorned those seeking  
Truth outside themselves:  
Here, on the tip of the nose.*

LAYMAN MAKUSHO

*Traceless, no more need to hide.  
Now the old mirror  
Reflects everything - autumn light  
Moistened by saint mist.*

SUIAN

*No mind, no Buddhas, no live beings,  
Blue peaks ring Five Phoenix Tower.  
In late spring light I throw this body  
Off - fox leaps into the lion's den.*

CHIFU

*Clear, clear - clearest!  
I ran barefoot east and west.  
Now more lucid than the moon,  
The eighty-four thousand  
Dharma gates!*

MOAN

*How vast karma,  
Yet what's there  
To cling to? Last night,  
Turning, I was blinded  
By a ray of light.*

SEIGEN-YUIN

*A deafening peal,  
A thief escaped  
My body. What  
Have I learnt?  
The Lord of Nothingness  
Has a dark face.*

LAYMAN YAKUSAI

*A thunderbolt - eyes wide,  
All living things bend low.  
Mount Sumeru dances  
All the way to Sandai.*

MUMON-EKAI (1183-1260)

*Earth, river, mountain:  
Snowflakes melt in air.  
How could I have doubted?  
Where's north? south? east? west?*

DANGAI

*Searching Him took  
My strength.  
One night I bent  
My pointing finger -  
Never such a moon!*

KEPPO



SIDE 1  
Band 2

Seventy-six: done  
With this life –  
I've not sought heaven,  
Don't fear hell.  
I'll lay these bones  
Beyond the Triple World,  
Unenthralled, unperturbed.  
FUYO-DOKAI (1042-1117)

Sixty-five years,  
Fifty-seven a monk.  
Disciples, why ask  
Where I'm going,  
Nostrils to earth?  
UNPO BUN-ETSU

The word at last,  
No more dependencies:  
Cold moon in pond,  
Smoke over the ferry.  
KOKO

Way's not for the blind:  
Groping, they might as well  
Seek in the Dipper.  
Old for Zen combat, only  
The plough will comprehend:  
I'll climb Mount Kongo, a pine.  
TOZAN-GYOSO

'No mind, no Buddha,'  
Disciples prattle.  
'Got skin, got marrow.'  
Well, goodbye to that.  
Beyond, peak glows on peak!  
SHOZAN

Nothing longed for,  
Nothing cast off.  
In the great Void –  
A, B, C, D.  
One blunder, another,  
Everyone seeking  
Western Paradise!  
LAYMAN YOKETSU

Talking: seven steps, eight falls.  
Silent: tripping once, twice.  
Zennists everywhere,  
Sit, let the mind be.  
SHISHIN-GOSHIN (?-1339)

High wind, cold moon,  
Long stream through the sky.  
Beyond the gate, no shadow –  
Four sides, eight directions.  
SHOKAKU

Today Rakan, riding an iron horse  
Backwards, climbs Mount Sumeru.  
Gallop through Void,  
I'll leave no trace.  
RAKAN-KEINAN

This fellow, perfect in men's eyes,  
Utters the same thing over  
And over, fifty-six years. Now  
Something new – spear trees, sword hills!  
IKUO-JOUN

No more head shaving,  
Washing flesh.  
Pile high the wood,  
Set it aflame!  
CHITSU

Forty-nine years –  
What a din!  
Eighty-seven springs –  
What pleasures!  
What's having? not having?  
Dreaming, dreaming.  
Plum trees snow-laden,  
I'm ready!  
UNCHO

Life's as we  
Find it – death too.  
A parting poem?  
Why insist?  
DAIE-SOKO (1089-1163)

Seventy-two years I've hung  
The karma mirror.  
Smashing through,  
I'm on the Path!  
IKUO-MYOTAN

All things come apart.  
No saintly sign  
In these poor bones –  
Sirew their ashes  
Onto Yangtze waves.  
The First Principle, everywhere.  
DAISEN

Finally out of reach –  
No bondage, no dependency.  
How calm the ocean,  
Towering the Void.  
TESSHO

Fifty-three years  
This clumsy ox has managed,  
Now barefoot stalks  
The Void – what nonsense!  
SEKISHITSU-SOEI

Coming, I clench my hands,  
Going, spread them wide.  
Once through the barrier,  
A lotus stem will  
Drag an elephant!  
DANKYO-MYORIN (13th century)

Seventy-eight awkward years –  
A clownish lot. The mud-bull  
Trots the ocean floor.  
In June, snowflakes.  
ICHIGEN

How Zennists carry on  
About the birthless!  
What madness makes me toll,  
At noon, the midnight bell?  
GERKO-SOJO

SIDE 1  
Band 3  
The Western Patriarch's doctrine is transplanted!  
I fish by moonlight, till on cloudy days.  
Clean, clean! Not a worldly mote falls with the snow  
As, cross-legged in this mountain hut, I sit the evening through.  
DOGEN (1200-1253)

Coming, going, the waterfowl  
Leaves not a trace,  
Nor does it need a guide.  
DOGEN

Many times the mountains have turned from green to yellow –  
So much for the capricious earth!  
Dust in your eyes, the triple world is narrow;  
Nothing on the mind, your chair is wide enough.  
MUSO (1275-1351)

Vainly I dug for a perfect sky,  
Piling a barrier all around.  
Then one black night, lifting a heavy  
Tile, I crushed the skeletal void!  
MUSO

At last I've broken Unmon's barrier!  
There's exit everywhere – east, west; north, south.  
In at morning, out at evening; neither host nor guest.  
My every step stirs up a little breeze.  
DAITO (1282-1337)

Thoughts arise endlessly,  
There's a span to every life.  
One hundred years, thirty-six thousand days:  
The spring through, the butterfly dreams.  
DAICHI (1290-1366)

Refreshing, the wind against the waterfall  
As the moon hangs, a lantern, on the peak  
And the bamboo window glows. In old age mountains  
Are more beautiful than ever. My resolve:  
That these bones be purified by rocks.  
JAKUSHITSU (1290-1367)

Beyond the snatch of time, my daily life.  
I scorn the State, unhitch the universe.  
Denying cause and effect, like the noon sky,  
My up-down career: Buddhas nor Patriarchs can convey it.  
JUO (1296-1380)

Magnificent! Magnificent!  
No one knows the final word.  
The ocean bed's aflame,  
Out of the void leap wooden lambs.  
FUMON (1302-69)

For all these years, my certain Zen:  
Neither I nor the world exist.  
The sutras neat within the box,  
My cane hooked upon the wall,  
I lie at peace in moonlight  
Or, hearing water plashing on the rock,  
Sit up: none can purchase pleasure such as this:  
Spangled across the step-moss, a million coins!  
SHUTAKU (1308-88)

Mind set free in the Dharma-realm,  
I sit at the moon-filled window  
Watching the mountains with my ears,  
Hearing the stream with open eyes.  
Each molecule preaches perfect law,  
Each moment chants true sutra:  
The most fleeting thought is timeless,  
A single hair's enough to stir the sea.  
SHUTAKU

Why bother with the world?  
Let others go grey, bustling east, west.  
In this mountain temple, lying half-in,  
Half-out, I'm removed from joy and sorrow.  
RYUSHU (1308-88)

After the spring song, 'Vast emptiness, no holiness',  
Comes the song of snow-wind along the Yangtze River.  
Late at night I too play the noteless flute of Shorin,  
Piercing the mountains with its sound, the river.  
SHUNOKU (1311-88)

Not a mote in the light above,  
Soul itself cannot offer such a view.  
Though dawn's not come, the cock is calling:  
The phoenix, flower in beak, welcomes spring.

TSUGEN (1322-91)

Men without rank, excrement spatulas,  
Come together, perfuming earth and heaven.  
How well they get along in temple calm  
As, minds empty, they reach for light.

GUCHU (1323-1409)

Life: a cloud crossing the peak.  
Death: the moon sailing.  
Oh just once admit the truth  
Of noumenon, phenomenon,  
And you're a donkey-tying pole!

MUMON (1323-90)

INSCRIPTION OVER HIS DOOR

He who holds that nothingness  
Is formless, flowers are visions,  
Let him enter boldly!

GIDO (1325-88)

Riding backwards this wooden horse,  
I'm about to gallop through the void.  
Would you seek to trace me?

Ha! Try catching the tempest in a net.

KUKOKU (1328-1407)

The void has collapsed upon the earth,  
Stars, burning, shoot across Iron Mountain.  
Turning a somersault, I brush past.

ZEKKAI (1336-1405)

The myriad differences resolved by sitting, all doors opened.  
In this still place I follow my nature, be what it may.  
From the one hundred flowers I wander freely,  
The soaring cliff - my hall of meditation  
(With the moon emerged, my mind is motionless).  
Sitting on this frosty seat, no further dream of fame.  
The forest, the mountain follow their ancient ways,  
And through the long spring day, not even the shadow of a bird.

REIZAN (?-1411)

Serving the Shogun in the capital,  
Stained by worldly dust, I found no peace.  
Now, straw hat pulled down, I follow the river:  
How fresh the sight of gulls across the sand!

KODO (1370-1433)

For seventy-two years  
I've kept the ox well under.  
Today, the plum in bloom again,  
I let him wander in the snow.

BOKUO (1384-1455)

After ten years in the red-light district,  
How solitary a spell in the mountains.  
I can see clouds a thousand miles away,  
Hear ancient music in the pines.

IKKYU (1394-1481)

VOID IN FORM

When, just as they are,  
White dewdrops gather  
On scarlet maple leaves,  
Regard the scarlet beads!

IKKYU

FORM IN VOID

The tree is stripped,  
All colour, fragrance gone,  
Yet already on the bough,  
Uncaring spring!

IKKYU

Taking hold, one's astray in nothingness;  
Letting go, the Origin's regained.  
Since the music stopped, no shadow's touched  
My door: again the village moon's above the river.

KOKAI (1403-69)

SIDE 2  
Band 1

Unaware of illusion or enlightenment,  
From this stone I watch the mountains, hear the stream.  
A three-day rain has cleansed the earth,  
A roar of thunder split the sky.  
Ever serene are linked phenomena,  
And though the mind's alert, it's but an ash heap.  
Chilly, bleak as the dusk I move through,  
I return, a basket brimmed with peaches on my arm.

GENKO (?-1505)

ON JOSHU'S NOTHINGNESS

Earth, mountains, rivers - hidden in this nothingness.  
In this nothingness - earth, mountains, rivers revealed.  
Spring flowers, winter snows:  
There's no being nor non-being, nor denial itself.

SAISHO (?-1506)

Why, it's but the motion of eyes and brows!  
And here I've been seeking it far and wide.  
Awakened at last, I find the moon  
Above the pines, the river surging high.

YUISHUN (?-1544)

Though night after night  
The moon is stream-reflected,  
Try to find where it has touched,  
Point even to a shadow.

TAKUAN (1573-1645)

Whirled by the three passions, one's eyes go blind;  
Closed to the world of things, they see again.  
In this way I live; straw-hatted, staff in hand,  
I move illimitably, through earth, through heaven.

UNGO (1580-1659)

Here none think of wealth or fame,  
All talk of right and wrong is quelled:  
In autumn I rake the leaf-banked stream,  
In spring attend the nightingale.

DAIGU (1584-1669)

Who dares approach the lion's  
Mountain cave? Cold, robust,  
A Zen-man through and through,  
I let the spring breeze enter at the gate.

DAIGU

Unfettered at last, a travelling monk,  
I pass the old Zen barrier.  
Mine is a traceless stream-and-cloud life.  
Of those mountains, which shall be my home?

MANAN (1591-1654)

Only the Zen-man knows tranquillity:  
The world-consuming flame can't reach this valley.  
Under a breeze limb, the windows of  
The flesh shut firm, I dream, wake, dream.

FUGAI (17th century)

The moon's the same old moon,  
The flowers exactly as they were,  
Yet I've become the thingness  
Of all the things I see!

BUNAN (1602-76)

When you're both alive and dead,  
Thoroughly dead to yourself,  
How superb  
The smallest pleasure!

BUNAN

Beware of gnawing the ideogram of nothingness:  
Your teeth will crack. Swallow it whole, and you've a treasure  
Beyond the hope of Buddha and the Mind. The east breeze  
Fondles the horse's ears: how sweet the smell of plum.

KARASUMARU-MITSUHIRO (1579-1638)

The seven seas sucked up together,  
The dragon god's exposed.  
Backwards flows the stream of Soto Zen:  
Enlightened at last, I breathe!

GESSHU (1618-96)

One minute of sitting, one inch of Buddha.  
Like lightning all thoughts come and pass.  
Just once look into your mind-depths:  
Nothing else has ever been.

MANZAN (1635-1714)

The town's aflame with summer heat,  
But Mount Koma is steeped in snow.  
Such is a Zen-man's daily life -  
The lotus survives all earthly fire.

TOKUO (1649-1709)

You no sooner attain the great void  
Than body and mind are lost together.  
Heaven and Hell - a straw.  
The Buddha-realm, Pandemonium - shambles.  
Listen: a nightingale strains her voice, serenading the snow.  
Look: a tortoise wearing a sword climbs the lampstand.  
Should you desire the great tranquillity,  
Prepare to sweat white beads.

HAKUIN

ON BASHO'S 'FROG'

Under the cloudy cliff, near the temple door,  
Between dusky spring plants on the pond,  
A frog jumps in the water, plop!  
Startled, the poet drops his brush.

SENGAI (1750-1837)

Without a jot of ambition left  
I let my nature flow where it will.  
There are ten days of rice in my bag  
And, by the hearth, a bundle of firewood.  
Who prattles of illusion or nirvana?  
Forgetting the equal dusts of name and fortune,  
Listening to the night rain or the roof of my hut,  
I sit at ease, both legs stretched out.

RYOKAN (1757-1831)



SHELL

*Nothing, nothing at all  
is born,  
dies, the shell says again  
and again  
from the depth of hollowness.  
Its body  
swept off by tide - so what?  
It sleeps  
in sand, drying in sunlight,  
bathing  
in moonlight. Nothing to do  
with sea  
or anything else. Over  
and over  
it vanishes with the wave.*

FLIGHT OF THE SPARROW

*Sparrow dives from roof to ground,  
a long journey - a rocket soars  
to the moon, umpteen globes collapse.*

*Slow motion: twenty feet down, ten billion  
years. Light-headed, sparrow does not think,  
philosophic, yet all's beneath his wings.*

*What's Zen? 'Thought,' say masters,  
'makes a fool.' How free the brainless  
sparrow. Chirrup - before the first 'chi',*

*a billion years. He winks, another. Head left,  
mankind's done. Right, man's born again.  
So easy, there's no end to time.*

*One gulp, swallow the universe. Flutter  
on limb or roof - war, peace, care banished.  
Nothing remains - not a speck.*

*'Time's laid out in the eavestrough,'  
sparrow sings,  
pecks now and then.*

CAMEL

*The camel's humps  
shifted with clouds.*

*Such solitude beheads!  
My arms stretch*

*beyond mountain peaks,  
flame in the desert.*

BURNING ONESELF TO DEATH

*That was the best moment of the monk's life.  
Firm on a pile of firewood  
With nothing more to say, hear, see,  
Smoke wrapped him, his folded hands blazed.*

*There was nothing more to do, the end  
Of everything. He remembered, as a cool breeze  
Streamed through him, that one is always  
In the same place, and that there is no time.*

*Suddenly a whirling mushroom cloud rose  
Before his singed eyes, and he was a mass  
Of flame. Globes, one after another, rolled out,  
The delighted sparrows flew round like fire balls.*

WHAT IS MOVING

*When I turned to look back  
Over the waters  
The sky was birdless.*

*Men were, are born.  
Do I still live? I ask myself,  
Munching a sweet potato.*

*Don't smell of death,  
Don't cast its shadow.  
Any woman when I glance her way,  
Looks down,  
Unable to stand it.  
Men, as if dead,  
Turn up the whites of their eyes.*

*Get rid of those trashy ideas-  
The same thing  
Runs through both of us.  
My thought moves the world:  
I move, it moves.  
I crook my arm, the world's crooked.*

TIME

*Time like a lake breeze  
Touched his face,  
All thought left his mind.*

*One morning the sun, menacing,  
Rose from behind a mountain,  
Singing-like hope-the trees.*

*Fully awakened, he lit his pipe  
And assumed the sun-inhaling pose:  
Time poured down-like rain, like fruit.*

*He glanced back and saw a ship  
Moving towards the past. In one hand  
He gripped the sail of eternity,*

*And stuffed the universe into his eyes.*

FISH

*I hold a newspaper, reading.  
Suddenly my hands become cow ears,  
Then turn into Pusan, the South Korean port.*

*Lying on a mat  
Spread on the bankside stones,  
I fell asleep.  
But a willow leaf, breeze-stirred,  
Brushed my ear.  
I remained just as I was,  
Near the murmurous water.*

*When young there was a girl  
Who became a fish for me.  
Whenever I wanted fish  
Broiled in salt, I'd summon her.  
She'd get down on her stomach  
To be sun-cooked on the stones.  
And she was always ready!*

*Alas, she no longer comes to me.  
An old benighted drake,  
I hobble homeward.  
But look, my drake feet become horse hoofs!  
Now they drop off  
And, stretching marvellously,  
Become the tracks of the Tokaido Railway Line.*

Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu

(Joi Temple Garden, Yamaguchi)

I

*What do they think of  
Where they lean  
Like ponderous heads, the rocks?-*

*In prankish spring, ducks  
Joggling here  
And there, brushing tails,*

*Like silly thoughts shared,  
Passed from head-  
To head? When, gong quavering*

*About a ripened sky, we  
Up and go,  
Do they waken from a dream of flesh?*

II

*In the Three Whites of  
Hokusai-  
Fuji, the snow, the crane-*

*What startles is the black: in  
The outline  
Of the mountain, the branch-tips*

*Piercing the snow, the quills of  
The crane's wing:  
Meaning impermanence.*

*Here, in stainless air, the  
Artist's name  
Blazes like a crow.*

III

*Distance between the rocks,  
Half the day  
In shadow, is the distance*

*Between man who thinks  
And the man  
Who thinks he thinks: wait.*

*Like a brain, the garden,  
Thinking when  
It is thought. Otherwise*

*A stony jumble, merely that,  
Laid down there  
To stud our emptiness.*

IV

*Who calls her butterfly  
Would elsewhere  
Pardon the snake its fangs:*

*In the stony garden  
Where she flits  
Are sides so sharp, merely*

*To look gives pain. Only  
The tourist,  
Kodak aimed and ready for*

*The blast, ship pointing for the  
Getaway,  
Dare raise that parasol.*

V

*To rid the grass of weed, to get  
The whole root,  
Thick, tangled, takes a strong mind*



And desire—to make clean, make pure.

The weed, tough  
As the rock it leaps against,

Unless plucked to the last  
Live fiber  
Will plunge up through dark again.

The weed also has the desire  
To make clean,  
Make pure, there against the rock.

VI

It is joy that lifts those pigeons to  
Stitch the clouds  
With circling, light flashing from underwings.

Scorning our crumbs, tossed carefully  
To corners  
Of the garden, beyond the rocks,

They rose as if summoned from  
The futile  
Groveling our love subjects them to.

Clear the mind! Empty it of all that  
Fixes you,  
Makes every act a pecking at the crumb.

VII

Firmness is all: that mountain beyond the  
Garden path,  
Watch how against its tawny slope

The candled boughs expire. Follow  
The slope where  
Spearheads shake against the clouds

And dizzy the pigeons circling on the wind.  
Then observe  
Where no bigger than a cragstone

The climber pulls himself aloft,  
As by the  
Very guts: firmness is all.

VIII

Pierced through by birdsong, stone by stone  
The garden  
Gathered light. Darkness, hauled by ropes

Of sun, entered roof and bough. Raised from  
The temple  
Floor where, stiff since cockcrow,

Blown round like Buddha on the lotus,  
He began  
To write. How against that shimmering,

On paper frail as dawn, make poems?  
Firm again,  
He waited for the rocks to split.

*The Duckpond*

I

Crocus, daffodil:  
already the pond's  
clear of ice

where, winter long,  
ducks and gulls  
slid for crusts.

People circle—  
pale, bronchitic,  
jostling behind dogs,

grope toward lawnchairs  
spread like islands  
on the grass.

Sunk there, they lift faces to the sun.

II

Good Friday.  
Ducks carry on,  
a day like any other.

Same old story:  
no one seems to care.  
A loudmouth

leader of a mangy host  
spiked to a cross,  
as blackbirds in certain

lands neighboring on  
that history are splayed  
on fences, warning  
to their kind. A duck soars from the reeds.

III

Man and woman  
argue past the duckpond,  
his arms flaying,

she, head down—even  
by the fully budded  
cherry, clustered

lilac boughs. Not once  
do they forget  
their bitterness,

face the gift of morning  
ducks wake to  
in the reeds.

They have things to settle, and they will.

IV

On my favorite  
bench beside the roses  
I watch ducks

smoothing feathers,  
breathing it all in.  
Catching the headline

where the bird flits  
I'm reminded  
three men were shot up

at the moon. I turn  
back to the roses:  
what

if they don't make it? If they do?

V

Lying near the pond  
in fear of the stray  
dog that daily

roams the park,  
ducks know  
their limitations,

and the world's—  
how long it takes,  
precisely,

to escape the paw thrusts  
of the dog,  
who once again

swings round to chase his tail.

VI

Radio tower  
beyond the blossoms,  
ducks

here in the pond,  
a connection  
between them—

how did I discover  
this, and why?  
Was it

the blue air? The bench  
moves beneath  
us like a seesaw,

the pond sends news of the world.

VII

What becomes of things  
we make or do?  
The Japanese lantern

or from across the pond  
beneath the trees  
a drift

of voices cultured  
and remote: water  
will carry anything

that floats. The lantern  
maker, the couple  
chatting there

would be amazed to find themselves  
a poem.

VIII

When tail wagging  
in the breeze  
the duck pokes

bill into the pondbed,  
keeps it there,  
my daughter thinks

him fun—he is, yet how to say  
those acrobatics  
aren't meant

to jollify the day. He's  
hungry, poking  
away at nothing

for crumbs we failed to bring: how to  
tell her?

IX

Ducks lie close together  
in morning dew, wary-eyed,  
bills pointing at the pond:

roused by squirrels,  
those early risers,  
air's a-whir with wings.

Sad to think of leaving  
this place. A helicopter  
with mysterious purpose

appears above the trees,  
moving low. Its circles  
tightening,

the ducks cling to the pondedge,  
right to fear.

*Awakening*

*Homage To Hakuin,  
Zen Master, 1685-1768*

I

Shoichi brushed the black  
on thick.  
His circle held a poem  
like buds  
above a flowering bowl.

Since the moment of my  
pointing,  
this bowl, an "earth device,"  
holds  
nothing but the dawn.

II

A freeze last night, the window's  
laced ice flowers, a meadow drifting  
from the glacier's side. I think of  
Hakuin:

"Freezing in an icefield, stretched  
thousands of miles in all directions,  
I was alone, transparent, and could  
not move."

Legs cramped, mind pointing  
like a torch, I cannot see beyond  
the frost, out nor in. And do not  
move.

III

I balance the round stone  
in my palm,  
turn it full circle,

slowly, in the late sun,  
spring to now.  
Severe compression,

like a troubled head,  
stings my hand.  
It falls. A small dust rises.

IV

Beyond the sycamore  
dark air moves  
westward—

smoke, cloud, something  
wanting a name.  
Across the window,

my gathered breath,  
I trace  
a simple word.

V

My daughter gathers shells  
where thirty years before  
I'd turned them over, marveling.

I take them from her,  
make, at her command,  
the universe. Hands clasped,

marking the limits of  
a world, we watch till sundown  
planets whirling in the sand.

VI

Softness everywhere,  
snow a smear,  
air a gray sack.

Time. Place. Thing.  
Felt between  
skin and bone, flesh.

VII

I write in the dark again,  
rather by dusk-light,  
and what I love about

this hour is the way the trees  
are taken, one by one,  
into the great wash of darkness.

At this hour I am always happy,  
ready to be taken myself,  
fully aware.