THE UNEXPECTED IMPORT: A Disquisition on the Days of Proto-Haiku

In 1854 the archipelago-country of Japan was forced into the economic and cultural commerce of the greater trading world. One export that neither Commodore Perry nor anyone else could have anticipated was a poetic form called the haiku. Traditionally a seventeen-syllable form, in a 5-7-5 pattern, the Japanese haiku emerged only slowly from other forms of Japanese poetry. Its earliest ancestors have been seen in a select group of thirty-one-syllable poems called haikaika in the Kokinshu, a 10th century anthology of Japanese poetry.1 Another predecessor was a thirty-one-syllable variety of linked poetry, often composed by more than one person, in which a verse of 7-7 was joined to one of 5-7-5. Such tanrenga appeared with increasing frequency toward the end of the Heian period (794-1192).2 A longer form of linked verse also developed, reaching its height in the Muromachi period (1324-1549).3 In this complicated form of poetry, the initial verse, called a hokku, took a place of honor and prime importance. The hokku consisted of three lines, in a 5-7-5 pattern, and by 1461 independent hokku, called kanto hokku, were written without the necessity of a longer sequence.4
But since haiku is determined by content as well as syllable count, what we know as haiku is genetically traced to the emergence of a contrasting form of verse, *haikai no renga*. These long, linked poems, too, opened with hokku, but were characterized throughout by elements of humor and the presentation of commonplaces. *Haikai no renga* served as a foil to the more exalted classical poetry with its refined diction and imagery, and so, too, did the independent hokku (or haiku) that developed from its practice. Though haiku widened its scope of expression in the seventeenth century, to reach a true sublimity, it never unmoored itself entirely from its roots in humor and plainness. People who had no great training in classical forms of poetry could write and appreciate haiku, while those who did have such training could also write haiku as a means of reflecting on that tradition.5

At the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans began importing the haiku. It came out of the box a little differently than it had gone in. Some features remained while others remained uncomprehended—left to drift in the packing materials until they could be rediscovered later. And what first came out was made to look more familiar. Haiku were called epigrams, appeared in two or four lines, and sometimes acquired end-rhymes. Some were blatantly abstract, metaphorical, and even sported rarefied language. Yet for all that they could still be called haikai (as they were in France), or hokku (as usually in England and America), and not be too far from the mark. For in intent they resembled what was known of the models—they were brief, focused on some physical presentation, and tried to suggest resonances as opposed to detailing them.

But why haiku? Why not classical Chinese odes? China had been open far longer than Japan, after all. But shortly after the end of the nineteenth century haiku came to be written not only in French and English, but in Polish, German, and Spanish. What was it about haiku, in that particular era, that made people wish to write it (or something like it) in their own languages?

In looking at those days of proto-haiku, and at some of the people who worked with it, I will try to answer this question. In examining these activities around the year 1900 we can draw conclusions about why haiku remains an important import today. Haiku helped shape its eventual audience, and then as now, it fits, like no other form, certain desires for expression.

**FRANCE**

In 1905 Paul-Louis Couchoud, during a French boat-canal trip, wrote with two friends some poems after a Japanese model.6 He published these as a volume, *Au Fil de l'eau*, and called the poems haikai.7 Couchoud was not a professional poet. He was a physician and at one time had been doctor to Anatole France, the author. But Cochoud had traveled widely, and during a visit to Japan had learned about haiku through French transla-
tions. He was so intrigued by the form and its possibilities that he wrote a study called “Les Épigrammes Lyriques du Japon” that appeared in the journal *Les Lettres* in 1906. The same virus that possessed him possessed others; the editor of *Les Lettres*, Fernand Gregh, soon published *Quatrains à la Form des Haïkaï Japonais*; and Albert de Neville said that Couchoud’s essay gave him the impetus to write 163 *Haïkaïs et Tankas, Épigrammes à la japonaise*. In 1910 Michel Revon published an anthology of Japanese literature in a pocket-size edition. And Joseph Seguin, probably one of the friends and co-authors on Couchoud’s canal-trip, published *Cent Vision de Guerre* in 1916, under the pen name Julian V Lacance. This volume received reviews in major literary journals and the proliferation of French haiku proceeded apace.

Couchoud’s *Au Fil de l’eau* is believed to be the first volume of haiku written in a European language. It appeared two years after Japan’s military defeat of Russia. Yet that victory did not suddenly catapult Japan into the ken of France or Frenchmen; this had been achieved long before. Sadakichi Hartmann, in his thick 1903 volume, *Japanese Art*, says of the period after the Paris Exposition of 1867:

> Paris in particular went mad. . . . There was hardly a house in the Monceau Park district, which had not furnished some rooms with Japanese lacquer-work, bronzes and tapestries. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt became its champions, Zola invested thousands of francs on Japanese curios. And among the artists who appeared at the sales, one encountered celebrities like Alfred Stevens, Diaz, Fortuny, James Tissot, Alphonse Legros, Whistler, Carolus Duran, and the engravers Bracquemond and Jules Jacquemart.

Fifty years after the forced end to Japan’s seclusion, its graphic arts were both familiar and respected in France. When Couchoud and his friends lifted their pens to write haiku they engaged a culture that they deemed accomplished as well as exotic. And while haiku may have been taken up lightly on the canal-cruise, Couchoud’s further study of it, printed in installments, suggests the growth of a more serious intent.

Haiku offered potential solutions to developments in earlier French poetic theory; developments oddly contemporary with the period following the opening of Japan. In 1852, Charles Baudelaire wrote to his mother, “I’ve found an American author who has aroused in me the most astonishing sympathy.” That author was Edgar Allen Poe, and the article Baudelaire published that year was the first about Poe in any language other than English. Over the next few years Baudelaire translated several poems and stories by Poe. He also translated the critical essay that contains Poe’s starkest poetic theory—his belief that a poetic moment is extremely brief; and that a long poem is in fact a contradiction in terms. Four years later, Théophile Gautier, declaring that poets should make hard, clear lines, published a volume whose very title, *Enamels and Cameos*, suggests a preference for the...
small, the hard, even the miniature. As haiku is the briefest poetic form, poetic brevity as a principle created a favorable environment for its possibility in France.

Other features of haiku also fit in well with French poetic theory. Among these were its asymmetric line-lengths and lack of regular rhyme. And here the work of yet another American poet comes into play. Walt Whitman (anything but brief, of course) wrote poems that did not adhere to traditional patterns of line-length, stress or rhyme. He was translated into French in 1886 by Jules Laforgue, and in 1888 by Francis Viélé-Griffin. Laforgue and Viélé-Griffin also wrote poetry in lines of irregular length, and viewed Whitman's work as a kind of sanction. Though Laforgue died at twenty-seven, Viélé-Griffin in the 1890s edited a literary magazine in which he argued the merits of Laforgue's poetry and of such "freed verse" in general. Freed verse, even conservatively espoused, by allowing poets to experiment and tamper with forms, opened their minds to haiku in two ways. Minds committed to practiced forms might have thrown haiku out as contrary to tradition, while minds committed to an absolute supremacy of structure might never have attempted haiku, convinced (and rightly) that a form cannot, strictly speaking, be lifted from one language to another. The idea was not to encourage chaos, but rather, the rule of flexibility.

The ostensible thrust of haiku is the presentation of an image, though perhaps not always classifiably "poetic". In 1872 Theodore de Banville claimed that a poet's chief concern should be a sharply defined poetic image. And in 1873 the poet Paul Verlaine asserted that poetry should aim at "the impression of the moment followed to the letter." Haiku is a natural for such poetics as these. And because haiku expends its stingy disposition of syllables in presenting an image, with little room left over for prolix commentary, it is hard to imagine a poetic form that could better accord with Verlaine's cry, "Take eloquence—and wring its neck!"

Such an outlook, emphasizing spareness and the impression of the moment, did not confine itself to literature, but also found itself expressed by those who worked in the plastic arts. The American painter James McNeill Whistler lived in Paris during the germination of these literary and artistic ideas. From time to time he raised his blunt pen after setting down his brush, and made such comments as the following:

Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like.

Or this:

The vast majority . . . cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell. My pic-
ture of a "Harmony in Grey and Gold" is an illustration of my meaning—a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture. 24

Spareness, and the impression of the moment, here applied to painting and not poetry.

Not surprisingly, some of the critical comments written about Whistler’s work during his lifetime sound rather like early criticisms of haiku. For instance, an anonymous writer in a letter to Pall Mall, after commenting on the painting “Old Battersea Bridge,” adds “Nor can I imagine any one acquainted with Mr. Whistler’s works speaking of any of them as ‘completed.’” 25 P. G. Hamerton remarks about the same picture, “Subjects unimportant in themselves.” 26

And on “Lobster Pots” this same critic says, “So little in them.” 27

In France at the turn of the century there was an established respect for Japanese art, a movement to reduce unnecessary words in poetry, a willingness to experiment with form, and a call to dwell on immediate images. Into this scene came the model of spareness and apparent simplicity, the Japanese haiku. The French poets sensed the possibilities and went to work.

BRITAIN AND AMERICA

England and America imported haiku several years later than the French. A lag in catching up with changes in French poetic theory serves as one explanation. But another may be that its early translators and interpreters had wrapped the Japanese originals in indisputably ugly paper. They belittled Japanese literature and haiku, even as they dangled them as curiosities in front of English-speaking eyes.

This did not go entirely without notice even at the time. Ernest Francisco Fenollosa had this to say sometime before his death in 1908:

An unfortunate belief has spread both in England and America that Chinese and Japanese poetry are hardly more than an amusement, trivial, childish, and not to be reckoned with in the world’s serious literary performance. I have heard well-known sinologues state that, save for the purposes of professional linguistic scholarship, these branches of poetry are fields too barren to repay the toil necessary for their cultivation. 28

Examples of the condescending attitude cited by Fenollosa abound in the work of the early translators, in regard both to haiku and Japanese literature more generally.
Basil Hall Chamberlain, who served as British ambassador to Japan, was one of the earliest English translators of Japanese poetry. His *Classical Japanese Poetry* first appeared in 1880. His *Things Japanese*, a popular guide for those with an interest in Japan, contains the following recommendation for a volume called *Japanese Literature*, by W. G. Aston, "Late Japanese Secretary to Her Majesty's Legation in Tokyo." (Considering Asotin's occupation, it's probably safe to assume that the two were acquainted.) Of this 1899 book Chamberlain writes:

All that the outside world can ever hope to understand, or is ever likely to wish to learn, about Japanese poetry and prose is here compressed by the most accurate, and yet least pedantic, of scholars into the limits of a single octavo volume.

*Japanese Literature* contains much information about its subject, including tanka and haiku. But in assessing haiku this least pedantic of scholars states blankly, “It would be absurd to put forward any serious claim on behalf of Haikai to an important position in literature.” And of Japanese poetry in general, there is this: “A feature which strikingly distinguishes the Japanese poetic muse from that of Western ones is a certain lack of imaginative power.”

Chamberlain himself tackled the subject of haiku. "Basho and the Japanese Poetical Epigram" appeared in 1902 in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* and was later included in the 1910 edition of *Japanese Poetry*. In this article Chamberlain likens the investigator of Japanese literature to a "botanist whose specialty should be mosses or lichens." He equates haiku with the Western epigram, "not in the modern sense of a pointed saying .. . but in its earlier acceptation, as denoting any little piece of verse that expresses a delicate or ingenious thought." He laments that Bashô had not been born under the same lucky star as Wordsworth. "He inherited," Chamberlain writes, "a language incomparably inferior as a vehicle for poetry, and was restricted to a single form of verse, and that the poorest."

The most famous popularizer of Japanese life was Chamberlain’s friend, the Greek-born Lafcadio Hearn, who lived in Japan from 1890 until his death in 1904. Many of his writings include translations of haiku, and his statements about what he took haiku to be are quite consistent with the views of other early translators. Of the seventeen-syllable form he writes:

Almost the only rule about hokku, — not at all a rigid one, — is that the poem should be a little word-picture, — that it shall revive the memory of something seen or felt, — that it shall appeal to some experience of sense. The greater number of the poems that I am going to quote certainly fulfill this requirement: the reader will find that they are really pictures, — tiny color-prints in the Ukiyo-ye school. Indeed, almost any of the following could be delightfully imagined, with a few touches of
the brush, by some Japanese master.36

William N. Porter, who published A Year of Japanese Epigrams in 1911, epitomizes this view when he writes:

The writer in a few striking words strives to convey the suggestions of an idea on the outlines of a picture against a background of mist, and the reader is left to fill in the details for himself. Indeed, the hokku writer does in verse what the artist does with his suggestive brushwork, sketching in a few strokes, hinting at his meaning, and leaving the rest to imagination.37

Praise, one supposes, although the suggestion of an idea on the outlines of a picture against a background of mist sounds perhaps like something less. Porter joins Hearn in reducing haiku to a quaint kind of picture painting, whose value the latter establishes with the comment: "Of course these compositions make but slight appeal to aesthetic sentiment; they are merely curios, for the most part."38

Such condescension and disdain may well have acted to retard an earlier development of haiku in English39. Yet the form had more to offer than such detractors could take away, and others, unlike Aston, Chamberlain, and Hearn, spoke up for the serious merits of Japanese literature and haiku.

James Jackson Jarves was perhaps the earliest of these. In his 1876 A Glimpse at the Art of Japan he praises the sharpness of outline and graphic realism of Japanese poetry.40 He also finds its sincerity and simplicity a pleasant contrast to the excessive sentiment and overstrained composition of the poetry of his day.41

Ernest Fenollosa was another figure who actively countered the Anglo-American deprecation of Japanese literature. The son of a Spanish musician living in Salem, Massachusetts, Ernest graduated from Harvard in 1874 at the head of his class. He worked for a time at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and in 1878 accepted an offer to teach philosophy at the Tokyo Imperial University.42 In a strange twist, Fenollosa himself became a kind of unexpected import: the government of the Meiji restoration, inviting experts from the West to share Western expertise,43 soon found their Massachusetts professor assiduously trying to keep the Japanese aware of the beauties and merits of their own artistic traditions. In the 1880s, with Okakuro Kakuzo, Fenollosa helped found the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, a school for Japanese-style painting; for such efforts he received several Imperial decorations,44 and after his death in London in 1908 a steamer was commissioned to bring his ashes back to Japan.45

Fenollosa's first Japanese sojourn, however, ended in 1890.46 On his return to Boston he was appointed curator of the newly-established Department of Oriental Art at the Boston Museum, a post he held for five years.47 In 1892 he gave his first series of public lectures in Boston, titled,
“Chinese and Japanese History, Literature and Arts.” That same year, he wrote a poem for the Phi Beta Kappa society of Harvard, in which he touched on a potential “marriage” of the Eastern and Western hemispheres. In 1911 he spent three months in a New York apartment writing a pencil draft that would be his major two-volume work, Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art. The book would be published posthumously in 1912. In November of 1913 Fenollosa’s widow began sending some of her late husband’s finished manuscripts to the American poet Ezra Pound, then living in London. The manuscripts included translations of poetry, Noh plays, and an article that Pound would edit and print in book form in 1919 as The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry. The bequest of Fenollosa’s translations was an indisputably huge factor in Pound’s continued creative experience with Japanese and Chinese poetry after 1913.

But Pound was not the only poet influenced by Fenollosa. Conrad Aiken mentions both Fenollosa and his Boston work in a letter to Earl Miner, who was gathering information for his 1958 book, The Japanese Tradition in English and American Literature. Aiken writes:

I once quite elaborately collected [block prints] — and I still have some very fine ones. . . . There was also much talk [at Harvard about] of Fenollosa and the Boston Collection. . . . Of course [Japanese poetry] was all in the air — at Harvard [and everyone] around the Harvard advocate was already aware of Hearn’s hokku, and we all had shot them.

If Aiken’s recollection is accurate, and Japanese poetry was “in the air,” it would be surprising to find no one but Fenollosa, either in Boston or elsewhere in America, discussing its merits. One need not look far for at least two who did so: Yone Noguchi and Carl Sadakichi Hartmann. Both were younger than Fenollosa, both wrote poetry, both discussed tanka, haiku, and unlike Fenollosa, who traveled to Japan, both these men were born there.

Yone Noguchi was born in 1875, one year after Fenollosa graduated from Harvard. Realizing in his middle teens that his life’s ambition was to become a hokku poet, he called one night on a “lineal poetic” descendant of the haiku poet Kikaku. Noguchi spent the night of the September moon at the elder poet’s small house, where, he writes, “we two, young and old, sat silent, leaving all talk to the breezes which carried down moon’s actual message . . .”

At the age of eighteen he went to San Francisco. Able to write English but unable to speak it, some at first took him for a mute. He read much Western literature, especially poetry, and among his favorites was Paul Verlaine.

As San Francisco was no repository of haiku masters, the young Noguchi sought out the next closest thing — the aged poet Joaquin Mil...
who lived in semi-seclusion in the hills behind Oakland. Noguchi not only befriended Miller, but moved into the poet’s home. Noguchi dates his first spiritual awakening to this period of his life.57

The second awakening he dates to 1903 and his first visit to London.58 There he discovered that poetry and art were the two great forces of his life. His third awakening came at the Temple of Silence at Kamakura, after his return to Japan. This last awakening left him with the imperative to “hear the voice of his hand.”59

These awakenings did nothing to stanch Noguchi’s flow of publications. He gained fair acclaim for his Western-style poetry written in English, and numerous magazines published articles in which he described his experiences in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, London, and Japan.60

In “My London Experience,” published in 1911, he quotes a diary entry from November fourth of 1903, and offers one of his own hokku.

What a parade of frock coats! . . . How many hundred thousand people in that immortal coat pass by Charing Cross every day? It is here that I wrote one seventeen syllable hokku poem, which appears, when translated, as follows: —

Tell me the street to Heaven.
This? Or that? Oh, which?
What webs of streets!61

Interestingly, he wrote this haiku in Japanese. But during his London stay he also attempted an original haiku in English:

My Love’s lengthened hair
swings o’er me from Heaven’s gate
Lo, Evening’s shadow!62

About this poem’s genesis he relates the following:
It was in . . . Hyde park that I wrote the above Hokku in English, where I walked slowly, my mind being filled with the thought of the long hair of Rosetti’s women as I perhaps had visited Tate’s Gallery that afternoon; pray, believe me when I say the dusk that descended from the sky swung like that lengthened hair. I exclaimed then: “Thank God that I have a moment to feel a Hokku feeling and write about it in English.”63

Whether this may be the first recorded haiku in English—or even good haiku—I leave to others, but Noguchi’s contribution is fortunately not confined to the quality or possible priority of his poetry. It is in his informative
writings about haiku, in which he counters the misconceptions of the early translators, that he best fosters a keener awareness of the form. His essay "What is a Hokku Poem?" appeared in Rhythm in 1913; The Spirit of Japanese Poetry, published in 1914, devotes an entire chapter to the subject; and his own book of English-language haiku, Japanese Hokku, came out in 1920.

Unlike Chamberlain, Hearn, and Aston, Noguchi does not conceive of hokku as a dwelling on the trivial. In 1914 he writes:

When I say that the Hokku poet's chief aim is to impress the reader with the high atmosphere in which he's living, I mean that the readers also should be those living in an equally high atmosphere.64

In describing the technique of association, he hints that others have misapplied alien standards:

It is the aim of this Japanese poetry that each line of the poem should appeal to the reader's consciousness, perhaps with the unconnected words, touching and again kindling on the particular association; there is ample reason to say that our poetry is really searching for a more elusive effect than the general English poetry.65

Yet this assertion does not let him condone the use of suggestiveness as a catch-all word to explain the appeal of Japanese poetry. He is convinced that this particular word is overused, just as he feels that calling hokku by the name of epigram is off the mark. Epigram, he says, is not the right word, in fact there is no right word at all, "just as overcoat is not the right word for our haori."66

Perhaps Noguchi's most important contribution to English-language haiku was the direct influence his haiku-criticism had on Ezra Pound. Evidence indicates this influence came via two routes. The first was Noguchi's article published in Rhythm in January of 1913. Now it may or may not be deemed mere coincidence that the poem often cited as the first published English-language haiku, "In a Station of The Metro", by Ezra Pound, appeared only three months later, in April of 1913. But to my knowledge no one has drawn attention to a rare and identical error of fact, found both in Noguchi's article and in one written shortly afterward by Pound. Though in earlier and later works Noguchi says the hokku consists of seventeen syllables, in "What is a Hokku Poem?" he refers to it as being made of sixteen.67 And so does Ezra Pound in "How I Began", an article that appeared in T. P.'s Weekly in June of 1913. Speaking of some difficulty he had in composing his "Metro" piece, Pound mentions "Japan, where a work of art is not estimated by its acreage and where sixteen syllables are counted enough for a poem . . ."68 It is a strange error for Noguchi, but less so for Pound, whose knowledge of haiku could not be firsthand; in misstatement this fact it seems as though Pound has unwittingly revealed one of his sources.
But there is more. The British poet-laureate Robert Bridges invited Noguchi to speak at Magdelen College in Oxford in the winter of 1913-14. And speak there he did—as also in London—on the subject of Japanese poetry and hokku. Noguchi met Ezra Pound during this English interlude; and in September of 1914 Pound regales the audience of *Fortnightly* with another genesis of his “Metro” poem, this time referring to it as a “hokku-like sentence.” Both the poem and Pound’s description make it clear that he recognizes the principle of association as earlier explained by Noguchi. Pound writes:

The “one-image” poem is a form of superposition, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. . . . I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work of “second intensity.” Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following hokku-like sentence:

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough.

I dare say it is meaningless unless one has drifted into a certain vein of thought. In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."

Is not this “vein of thought” the “high atmosphere” called for by Noguchi in both the hokku poet and hokku reader? And doesn’t this poem exemplify the principle that Noguchi asserted, that each line appeal to the reader’s consciousness, with the unconnected words perhaps touching and kindling associations? Though Pound’s choice of a two-line format clearly suggests a familiarity with Chamberlain’s translations, it seems equally clear that Noguchi provided a much-needed understanding for Pound of the cultural precedents for this type of poetry. And armed with such an understanding, Pound was better able to pursue such experiments.

Another figure who championed Japanese literature and art on the cusp of the twentieth century was Carl Sadakichi Hartmann. Hartmann was born in 1867, only months before the Meiji restoration, on the island of Deshima, for two hundred years the designated precinct for Europeans residing in Japan. His Japanese mother died shortly after his birth, and his father, a copious traveler, arranged for Carl’s rearing in Germany. He was baptized at Hamburg in 1871 and his wealthy uncle saw to it that he received the benefits of German private schools. Yet later, when a naval career was selected for him, the boy fled the Seemannsschule, or Naval Training Academy.

Instead of a future in the German military, in 1882 Hartmann found himself packed off to Philadelphia. In a serendipitous parallel to Noguchi, Hartmann befriended the nearest aging poet, who was considered by many
to be eccentric, or worse. So in Camden, New Jersey, the young Sadakichi fried eggs with Walt Whitman, and even wrote a small book, *Conversations with Walt Whitman*.

In the eighties and nineties Hartmann made four long excursions to Europe. He sent interview pieces back to America describing his visits with various artists — including Zola, Mallarmé, and even the surviving Goncourt brother, who had been one of the first Europeans to collect Japanese art and voice its appreciation. Through his friend Stuart Merrill, an American who wrote poetry in French, Hartmann met Verlaine and other symbolist poets, and Hartmann was one of the first critics to discuss the symbolists in America.

From the later nineties until 1915 Hartmann found a congenial environment in New York's Greenwich Village. Though often traveling to lecture, both as Sadakichi Hartmann and as his invented persona, Sidney Allen, he wrote article upon article for Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Notes*. His first book on art, *History of American Art*, appeared in 1901, and his last art volume, *The Whistler Book*, came out in 1910.

Hartmann became more than a writer—he was a personality. At lectures promoting cremation he showed, via stereoptican, graphic images of decomposing bodies. He staged events called “Perfume Concerts” in which fragrances blown by a high-powered fan accompanied sequences of pictures. (Fortunately, the cremation lectures lacked this particular nuance.) The Allen in Sidney Allen, his extracurricular persona, he took from Edgar Allen Poe—and like Poe, Sadakichi Hartmann was consistently low on funds and often used what funds he had to raise his spirits with more than a drink or two. He had learned a lot about Bohemia during those long trips to Paris in the eighties and nineties. As Ezra Pound writes in *Canto LXXX*:

> and as for the vagaries of our friend  
> Mr. Hartmann  
> Sadakichi a few more of him,  
> were that conceivable, would have enriched  
> the life of Manhattan  
> or any other town or metropolis?

Pound also pays Hartmann this tribute in his *Guide to Kulchur*:

> Sadakichi . . . has so lived that if one hadn't been oneself it wd. have been  
> worthwhile to have been Sadakichi.*  
> *Not that my constitution wd. have weathered the strain.

Though Hartmann left Japan long before he could learn the language, his exotic appearance made it easy for him to convincingly emphasize his Japanese descent. One photograph shows him in “oriental garb used for
and in a letter written to Hartmann in the 1930s the artist Frederick Dana Marsh recalls how Sadakichi had once "filched a ride up Broadway in the guise of a Japanese prince." 82

Yet Hartmann also had a very serious interest in Japanese topics. In 1897 in his own magazine venture Art News, he printed an article on Japanese art. 83 In 1899 he lectured, in Brooklyn, on "Das Japanische Theater" and in 1900 he lectured on the same subject, again in German, at Columbia University. 84

By far the largest product of this interest was his nearly three-hundred-page volume, Japanese Art, published in 1903. In this book he makes suitably grand claims for Japanese art, and allocates several pages to what he views as its huge impact on Western culture. Not content to limit that impact to the graphic arts, he extends it to literature as well. He sees it as an influence in the development of the short story, and also in the general tendency toward the brevity and conciseness of expression that "suggests a good deal more than it actually tells." 85

He also wrote articles on Japanese literature. The first and most lengthy of these, "The Japanese Conception of Poetry" appeared in The Reader Magazine in 1904. One segment of the article delineates the essential as well as the formal differences between haikai and its thirty-one-syllable relative, tanka. Only rarely setting poems out from the text, Hartmann weaves the images of specific tanka and haikai into his prose. What he aims at is not a translation of particular poems, but an exposition of the Japanese poetic intent. He characterizes it as concentrated, pictorial, and though lyric, also governed by the muse of calmness. Amazed at how much confidence the Japanese poet places in the reader, Hartmann writes:

He simply depicts a crow sitting on a withered branch, and leaves it to the reader to complete the poetic thought. If he wants to dwell upon the fugitiveness of all earthly things he simply says, "A joint of bamboo is floating down the river"; if he wants to compare the sorrows of mankind with fading autumn leaves that cover the ground, he exclaims, "There are far more of you than ever I saw growing on the trees!" . . . The symbolism of Japanese poetry is unique. It has nothing in common with our Western emblematic signs and forms. It is rather a spiritual idea, a subtile (sic) speculation, a unison of the external beauties of nature and the subleties of the human soul, which has its origin in tradition and a continual association with flowers, with animals, trees, mountains and the everchanging elements. 86

Hartmann thought highly enough of this poetic endeavor to include several versions of Japanese tanka in his 1904 book of poetry, Drifting Flowers of the Sea. 87 The title poem itself, though formally Western, takes its main image from one of the Japanese tanka included in the book.

Nor was Hartmann finished with Japanese forms in 1904. In June of
1915 Bruno ChapBooks in Greenwich Village published his *Haikai and Tanka*. This volume contained several pages of each form. Many of the images can be found interspersed in the 1904 article, but here they are rendered in five or three lines, with the addition of rhyme. Three of the haikai appeared the next month in the magazine *Greenwich Village*. R. Hartmann reworked and reissued these images for much of his later life (spent mostly in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and lastly on the Morongo Indian Reservation) and a later compilation dates his first work with these forms to 1898.

As with Noguchi, there is a connection between Hartmann and Ezra Pound, although it’s hard to say exactly what the connection may have been. The two corresponded in the twenties and thirties, with Pound even sending money to Hartmann. And the Pound texts cited earlier imply that Pound knew Sadakichi during his New York heyday.

Whether the two men ever met, both shared a temperamental and artistic outlook that, for lack of a better term, might be called Whistlerian. Not only did they both echo Whistler’s elitist tone and confrontational personal conduct, but also his positive attitude toward Eastern aesthetic accomplishment. In *The Whistler Book*, Hartmann styles Japan as the last custodian of ancient Oriental culture, and feels that the “Eastern idea will win out and that a new era, as important as that of Greek influence, will set in” Ezra Pound, in his 1915 article, “The Renaissance” also touts the positive artistic revolution to be gained from the Eastern hemisphere. “The first step in a renaissance, or awakening, is the importation of models for painting, sculpture or writing. . . . It is possible we may find a new Greece in China”

It is commonly said that behind Pound you will often find Ernest Fenollosa. Fenollosa and Hartman were both active in Boston of the nineties, and both lived in New York at times during the next decade. It may be that behind Hartmann there also you will find Fenollosa, and it may be that beside Fenollosa there is some shadow of Hartmann. Without more documentation it is impossible to say. What is truly worth notice is how far these men’s attitudes are from those displayed by the first English-language translators and interpreters of Japanese poetry. Whereas Chamberlain, Hearn, and Aston saw in Japanese art and poetry derivative techniques and sheer lack of imagination, Fenollosa, Hartmann, and Pound saw the approach of a rich culture and complex aesthetics that had much to offer the Western hemisphere.

**EZRA POUND AND THE USUAL SUSPECTS**

In London in 1908 a group of poets, artists, and philosophers gathered in Soho on Wednesday nights to read their works and share their thoughts. The group, calling itself the Poet's Club, had as one of its focal figures the philosopher T. E. Hulme. Hulme wrote only a few poems, but he had strong critical views, several of which sound the same notes as the earlier French ideas. He stressed brevity, and held that precise, definite descrip-
tion should be the great aim of poetry. In one dictum he writes that literature is a method of sudden arrangement of commonplaces, in which the suddenness makes us forget the commonness. In another maxim he casts thought as the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different images, with language as its feeble mirror. He often praises solidity but not more than when he writes "the man did not talk, but saw solid definite things and described them."95

Frank Stuart Flint joined the Poet's Club in 1909, the year it moved to Thursday nights and a new location, the Eiffel Tower Restaurant. Looking back from the distance of 1915 he describes how the group, heavily influenced by French symbolist poets, and dissatisfied with current poetry, hoped to effect its transformation. He mentions as possible replacements pure vers libre, sacred Hebrew poems, or even, he says, the Japanese tanka and the haikai. With such a serious project at hand, his next comment is puzzling. He says all the members of the group wrote dozens of haikai "as an amusement."96

The members of the club who so amused themselves were F. W. Tancred, Edward Storer, Joseph Campbell, Florence Farr, and later in 1909, Ezra Pound. Even before his association with the Poet's Club, Pound was veering in a similar direction, as evidenced by a 1908 letter to William Carlos Williams, in which, as two "ultimate attainments of poesy" he cites "Freedom from didacticism" and "To paint the thing as I see it."97 By 1911 more writers were loosely associated, including D. H. Lawrence and Ford Madox Hueffer, who repeatedly told Hulme and Pound that "poetic ideas are best expressed by the rendering of concrete objects."98 By 1912 pound had his own group that met in a Kensington tea-shop and that same year he slapped the title of "Imagistes" on these poets. By this time the group included John Gould Fletcher, as well as Pound's former fiancée, Hilda Doolittle, and her husband-to-be, Richard Aldington.

If the direction of these authors was toward the presentation of concrete objects, it was also away from traditional measures. Iambic pentameter was one of their chief whipping boys. In 1909 Edward Storer writes,

There is no absolute virtue in iambic pentameters as such . . . however well done they may be. There is no immediate virtue in rhythm even. These things are merely means to an end. Judged by themselves, they are monstrosities of childish virtuosity and needless iteration.99

In 1912 pound writes, "Don't chop your stuff into separate iambcs. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave . . ."100

In 1915, by way of saying what should be done in a poem, Pound also launches an attack on the rhetoric of traditional English poetry. He admon-
There must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped journalese. The only escape from such is by precision, a result of concentrated attention to what one is writing. 101

Perhaps it is a tribute to the ingrained strength of tradition, but for most of the Imagistes there is the strangest of gaps between the program and the performance. Brevity is usually attained, and the iamb avoided, yet overt metaphor, vague adjectives, and direct admission of subjective states often undermine the possible precision and independence of an image. Take, for example, number five from Richard Aldington’s “Images” series:

The red deer are high on the mountain,
They are beyond the last pine trees,
And my desires have run with them. 102

The first two lines accord with the Imagist program by detailing an objective scene, but the third line brings a blatant subjective tangent, the poet’s desires.

Other poems in Adlington’s series conform to a similar pattern, and can be seen as bald metaphorical equations drawn from two terms, one objective, the other subjective. For instance:

Like a gondola of green scented fruits
Drifting along the dark canals of Venice.
You, O exquisite one.
Have entered my desolate city. 103

The first half of the poem renders a physical picture (though not nearly so precise as one might have expected). The picture then receives its consummation in the remaining lines by direct importation into some interior, emotional landscape. The poems fulfill the rhetorical formula “As ‘A’, so ‘B,’” where A is some image drawn from the physical world, and B pertains to a subjective state.

Ezra Pound not only spouted the critical precepts more loudly than the others, but also managed more often to practice what he preached. For the sake of contrast, look first at Storer’s 1909 poem “Image”:

Forsaken lovers,
Burning to a chaste white moon,
Upon strange pyres of loneliness and drought. 104

Compare this translation of Pound’s, reduced from his source, which
consisted of ten lines of iambic pentameter:

O fan of white silk,
Clear as the frost on the grass-blade,
You also are laid aside.  

First of all, Pound has concentrated one hundred syllables into twenty, using syntax and one-syllable words to present a definite image and action. The two adjectives, clear and white, describe visual attributes. Compare, too, the nouns. Fan, silk, frost, and grass-blade are concrete entities. Yet Pound's poem is not devoid of emotion, or even about a fan and frost at all.

To my mind this translation from the Chinese is closer to haiku than Pound's "hokku-like sentence" cited earlier. Its deviation from haiku are as interesting as its similarities. The syllable count (5-8-7) is only approximate, and the love-theme is not traditional haiku fare, yet the poem makes use of the super-pository technique. The white silk fan and frost modify each other by association - the fan feminine and delicate, the cold frost ephemeral and quickly burnt up by the morning sun. After the interaction of these lines, a physical action takes place in the third line: the fan is laid aside. The picture is more than a static description, but a complete action, even a tragedy, as it were, of fading beauty and passing fancies. This poem alone suggests that Ezra Pound, unlike other members of the Poet's Club and the Imagistes after them, did not amuse himself by writing dozens of haiku. Instead, looking past haiku's exotic exterior, he grasped its essential technical lessons well.

The same cannot be said of Amy Lowell, who landed with a bump in the Imagist camp in 1914. This ample woman was said to have two passions in life: Keats and cigars. At the start of World War I she ordered a stockpile of the latter for fear of an interruption in trade, and she demonstrated her love of Keats with a two-volume biography based in large part on manuscript materials. She is said, in 1911, to have invited Sadakichi Hartmann to her Boston home to look at her manuscript collection. When he commented that Keats didn't know a Grecian urn from a Pompeian latrine she gave him the moniker of the "most mysterious man in American letters," a compliment he returned by noting that she was undoubtedly the greatest cigar-smoker since General Grant.

Yet Amy Lowell had no need of Sadakichi Hartmann to become intimately acquainted with Japanese art. Her older brother Percivall Lowell spent considerable time in Japan, and sent back not only prints and other wares but even a book he had written on the subject of Japanese religion. So filled was her childhood with such cultural items that she claimed Japan to be so "vivid to my imagination that I cannot realize that I have never been there."

She came to London from Boston expressly to work with the Imagists, after having seen a poem by "H. D. Imagiste" in a 1913 issue of Poetry.
There was not enough room for two strong-willed impresarios, and when Amy came in, Ezra went out. It was a clash of ideas as well as personalities. Pound, who held stricter notions of what the term Imagism should intend, referred to the later productions of these poets as “Amy-gism.”

But Amy Lowell did write a lot of poetry, much of it brief and nonmetrical, some of it derived directly from Japanese haiku. For instance, “Autumn Haze”:

Is it a dragonfly or a maple leaf  
That settles softly down upon the water?

This can be seen as a variation on the Moritake haiku as translated by Chamberlain:

Fallen flower returning to the branch,—  
Behold! It is a butterfly.

Many of her longer poems contain images from Japanese art, and her 1919 book of poems is even titled Pictures of the Floating World, a translation of a Japanese artistic term. But here, though Japanese icons and images appear, Lowell is not too strict in applying lessons of objective presentation. From her sequence “Twenty-Four Hokku on a Modern Theme” there is this:

This then is morning.  
Have you no comfort for me,  
Cold-coloured flowers?

While this adheres to the 5-7-5 structure, it is not a strong physical presentation. The first line is an emotional statement, referring less to the morning itself than to some unspecified discontent preceding it. The second line is an emotional plea. And the “cold-coloured flowers” of the third line is none too clear. What species of flower? And cold-coloured? Does this refer to a kind of fading caused by cold, or merely to the speaker’s emotional response? The poem fits the Imagistic program in that it is brief and not in meter, but it fails in two ways: the image is imprecise and the sentiment is broached directly.

Not just for Amy Lowell, but for most of the Imagists, there is such a drop-off between the thought and the deed. Yet the potential was always encouraging. This did not go without notice at the time. In a review of the 1916 Imagist anthology the Times Literary Supplement wrote, “Imagist poetry fills us with hope: even when it is not very good in itself, it seems to promise a form in which good poetry can be written.”

The same can be said with some justice of early English-language haiku.
Even though little of it is worth preserving now outside of a historical context, within a historical context it is actually quite intriguing. On the cusp of the twentieth century, in Boston, New York, and London, a variety of authors knew about haiku, and many took their shots at it, some lightly, some seriously. Knowledge of it was not due solely to Lafcadio Hearn, W. G. Aston, and B. H. Chamberlain, and it is interesting to note that Chamberlain, in spite of his low regard for Japanese poetry, even tried his hand at it—though whether haiku or not, or in English or not, he does not say.115 We have Yone Noguchi’s word for it that he attempted haiku in English in 1902, and Sadakichi Hartmann attempted to explain its nature to Americans in 1904. It may be that the changes in French (and so in time English and American) poetic theory merely coincided with the familiarization of Japanese art and poetry; or quite possibly it took some of its aesthetic cues after 1850 directly from these Japanese models. In either case haiku served as a rallying point for those who wished to change the poetic landscape. It was the ultimate ideal of what might be achieved in a few words, without benefit of meter or rhyme—in fact, it helped shape by example an ideal of what poetry could become.

It may be that very few good English-language haiku could even be written until the implications of the newer poetics had been fully apprehended. It’s a huge jump from the culture of Swinburne and Tennyson to Basho and Issa. Even T. S. Eliot, the archetypal modernist, sounds more like Tennyson than he would have cared to admit, and sparseness is a quality that people whose business it is to write have a hard time taking to. The poetry, in a sense, had to catch up to the poetics.

It is amazing that haiku is written in any language other than Japanese. It is clearly a form whose strengths suit the way a large number of poets wish to express themselves. As for English-language haiku, some say that it didn’t germinate until the 1950s116, and did not really bloom until the first English-language haiku journals appeared in the 1960s, and the Haiku Society of America formed in 1968. Yet the influence of haiku as a poetic force and the start of its importation date far earlier. It is as though it had been shipped on some gigantic slow-moving freighter, whose bow wake arrived in the 1870s, whose prow tapped shore about 1900, and whose stern is forever arriving. To me it seems appropriate that a host of poets and artists, and not just the most famous ones, have been standing on shore to greet it all this time.

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1 Haruo Shirane, Traces of Dreams, Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 55.
3 Ibid., 132.
4Ibid., 134.
7Ibid., 160.
8Ibid., 161.
9Ibid., 161-162
10Ibid., 204.
11Ibid., 206-15.
12Ibid., 159, footnote 3: "The question of priority in the composition of haikais has been settled by the critical bibliography of René Maublanc, "Le Haïkai français" in *Le Pample* (Rheims), Oct. 1923."
24Ibid., 126.
25Ibid., 318.
26Ibid., 101.
27Ibid., 98.
32Ibid., 30.
33Basil Hall Chamberlain, "Basho and the Japanese Poetical Epigram," *Trans-

34Ibid., 243.

35Ibid., 291.

36Lafcadio Hearn, Japanese Miscellany (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1901), 94-95


38Hearn, Miscellany, 112.


40James Jackson Jarves, A Glimpse at the Art of Japan (New York: Hurd & Hutton, 1876), 122.

41Ibid., 123.

42Ernest F. Fenollosa, Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art (New York; Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912), xiv.


46Okakura, Book of Tea viii., x.


48Fenollosa, Epochs, xix.

49Miner, The Japanese Tradition, 22.

50Fenollosa, Epochs, xxii, xxiii.

51Brooks, Fenollosa, 65.


54Yone Noguchi, Japanese Hokkus (Boston: Four Seas, 1920), 9-11.


56Ibid., 224

57Ibid., 225

59Ibid., 234


61Yone Noguchi, “My London Experience,” Fortnightly Review, ed. by W. L.
Courtney, Vol LXXXIX New Series (Vol XCV Old Series) April 1911, 615.


63Ibid., 23.


65Ibid., 44.


73Sadakichi Hartmann, *Autobiography*, unpublished, in holdings of Special Collections at the University of California at Riverside. Much of the following information is drawn from this source.


76Weaver, *Modernist*, 9-10.

77N. Y. newspaper clippings, Special Collections, U.C.R.

78Weaver, *Modernist*, 3-4.


81Photograph, 1889, Special Collections, U.C.R.

82Letter from Frederick Dana Marsh to Sadakichi Hartmann, 1931. Special Collections, U.C.R.


84Newspaper announcements/advertisements, Special Collections, U.C.R.


86Sadakichi Hartmann, “The Japanese Conception of Poetry”, *The Reader
Sadakichi Hartmann, *Drifting Flowers of the Sea*, ms. edition, 160 copies, 1904, Special Collections, U.C.R.  
Various mss., in several formats, typed, handwritten, one even ruled with blue and red pencil, at Special Collections, U.C.R.  
Ezra Pound to Miss Hartmann, 8 May 1932, photocopy at Special Collections, U.C.R.; original in the Beinecke Rare Book and Ms. Library at Yale University Library.  
It is known that Fenollosa subscribed in 1893 to Hartmann’s short-lived magazine, *Art Critic*; Weaver, *Modernist*, 2-3.  


Jones, *Imagist*, 90.

Schwartz, *Imaginative Interpretation*, footnote 1: states that this translation is to be found as #51 in Basho and the Japanese Poetical Epigram, as reprinted in Japanese Poetry, 1910.

I would like to thank Lee Gurga and Michael Dylan Welch, whose time, interest and editorial suggestions have served (I hope) to save me from the usual pratfalls of the autodidact.

[Brett B. Bodemer is accorded a Richard R. Imig award in the amount of one hundred dollars for this disquisition]

Cor van den Heuvel

A Thunderous Miss

I found the article “Haiku: Toward an Organic Definition for the West” by J. P. Trammell and his two reviews (of The Red Moon Anthology 1997 and Vincent Tripi’s tribe) that appeared in last fall’s issue (Volume XXIX, Number 3) of Modern Haiku very interesting. His examination of different attitudes towards the concept of emptiness, or nothingness, was particularly fascinating. However, I would have liked to see the author discuss some of the haiku he quotes at the end of the article to show how they reflect the different ways that the Japanese and western traditions differ in their poetic realization of reality. The only haiku he quotes within the article is a kind of straw haiku. A very poor specimen (whatever awards it may have garnered) and already leaning over perilously due to its author’s own explanation of its genesis, it was easily knocked down by Mr. Trammell.

Perhaps if he examined more haiku in detail, rather than spending so much time on theorizing, he might have avoided the mess he gets himself into when in his review of The Red Moon Anthology he attempts to evaluate Dee Evetts’s

thunder
my woodshavings roll
along the veranda

which he states “is not a haiku at all.”

Apparently Mr. Trammell’s thunderous miss in trying to connect with this poem is a result of his belief that cause and effect cannot exist in a haiku. His concern with demonstrating the validity of this view has blinded him to what is going on in the poem. To echo R. H. Blyth he sees a closed door where there is none.