

**HAIKU MASTER  
SHIKI**

**MASAOKA SHIKI**

**TRANSLATED BY  
EARL TROTTER**

# Peach Blossom Press



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# INTRODUCTION

## Life of Shiki

### *The Beginnings (1867–1883)*

Masaoka Shiki (Japanese format with family name first) was born on October 14, 1867, about a year before the commencement of the Meiji period. His official first name was Tsunenori but he was commonly known by the old-fashioned name of Tokoronosuke. This caused some teasing later on and his grandfather changed this name to Noboru. As described below, he later assumed the nom de plume of Shiki and that is how he will be referred to here on in. His left-handedness didn't help the teasing situation later either.

His father was a low-ranking samurai living in the town of Matsuyama on the island of Shikoku. He did teach Shiki calligraphy but was an alcoholic and died when Shiki was five. With his death and the previous commutation of samurai pensions into a one-time payment by the Meiji government, the family had no fixed source of income. Shiki's mother, Yae (1845–1927), had to teach sewing to support the family which included Shiki and his younger sister Ritsu (1870–1941). Shiki's maternal grandfather, Ohara Kanzan who was a distinguished Confucian scholar and Shiki's earliest teacher, became Shiki's mentor and ideal.

Kanzan was a conservative samurai. He was strong, proud, and disdained material goods. Kanzan was at odds with the new world of the Meiji period. He refused to change his traditional hairstyle and made Shiki follow his example. However, Shiki, along with his cousin, Minami Hajime (1868–1940), also known as Ryo, were the only ones at school with long hair, and after much pleading by Shiki, he was finally allowed to cut his hair. Although Shiki

entered public elementary school at age five, he learned as much outside the school system, in his studies of classical Chinese history, philosophy, and literature under a series of private tutors. The first of these was his grandfather Kanzan, from whom he learned the elements of reading Chinese beginning in 1874. There, with his cousin, he studied Mencius and the five classics of Confucian philosophy, proceeding later in the morning to school. However Shiki was not a diligent student, often pursuing matters of more interest to him such as writing poetry.

Kanzan died in 1875, at age fifty-seven. Shiki continued his studies under other teachers. He wrote his first poem in classical Chinese at in 1879 at age eleven, which was evaluated by his new tutor, Tsuchiya Kyumei. His essays written at public school were far different. At age thirteen, he collected several of these essays and the first piece, *Yoken Setsu (On Western Dogs)*, is Shiki's earliest extant piece of writing. In his eleventh and twelfth years, Shiki's found new interests. His tutor for mathematics and reading would devote time to reciting the plots of Chinese and Japanese adventure novels. But it was not until he was fifteen that his mother let him borrow such material from the library. He read the works of Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848), the leading novelist of the late Tokugawa period, as well as the classic Chinese novels, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Water Margin*. He also devoured classic medieval Japanese war tales such as including the *Heike Monogatari*, the *Tale of Hogen* and the *Heiji Monogatari*. In addition, he would go to hear professional storytellers recite their traditional tales of war.

Shiki entered Matsuyama Middle School in 1880. There he and four friends formed the Poetry Lovers' Society to which he devoted a great deal of energy until 1882. They studied works from the Tang and Song dynasties, especially the works of the Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi. Later they composed Chinese poetry, meeting at each other's homes once a week. They created a "magazine" containing essays, travelogues and Chinese poetry, written by all but sometimes solely by Shiki, who was considered the leader although the youngest. It wasn't all study though. Shiki became interested in baseball and in fact later translated some of the baseball terms still used in Japan. He also wrote baseball haiku and tanka later on. Shiki played baseball, as a catcher, but quit after he

coughed up blood in 1889. He was inducted into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame in 2002.

In 1882, Shiki turned to politics. He attended the meetings of the Prefectural Assembly and political rallies. He joined public-speaking clubs as a forum for radical opinions. However the conservative principal suppressed the expression of radical political ideas and Shiki was finally banned from speaking. The way to the future appeared to be Tokyo. Shiki's cousin, Hajime, with whom he was still close, went to Tokyo in 1882. However Shiki's guardian, his uncle Ohara Tsunenori, and his Tokyo uncle, Kato Tsunetada opposed Shiki going. However the establishment of a scholarship fund for Matsuyama students of samurai descent changed his uncles' minds and he left for Tokyo on June 10, 1883, albeit with mixed feelings.

### *A Student in Tokyo (1883–1892)*

In July 1883, he entered Kyoritsu Middle School. There he studied Zhuangzi and was fascinated. That, along with the influence of his uncle Tsunetada, was the beginning of his serious interest in philosophy. Usually one finished the three year course then entered a university preparatory school. Shiki, however, took the examination for the preparatory school affiliated with Teikoku Daigaku (Imperial University, later Tokyo University) in his second year and passed. He hadn't been serious about trying, just accompanying some friends who were taking it, but found he was one of two that had passed, to his great surprise. When he entered the university preparatory school in 1884, he met Natusme Soseki (1867-1916), who was to become the major novelist of the period, and they became fast friends.

A year after entering University Preparatory School, in the spring of 1885, he decided to become a philosopher. However, Shiki learned nothing about philosophy beyond Zhuangzi and he continued to be distracted in his studies. He failed his final examinations at University Preparatory School in 1885 and later, he shifted his sights on aesthetics. He loved literature but he still held onto Confucian ideals. When he discovered aesthetics he found a bridge between the two. A friend loaned him a work on aesthetics by a German writer. As Shiki did not know German he

struggled and finally gave up, not only the book but aesthetics as well. At the preparatory school, as before, his main interests remained outside the curriculum.

Shiki was also writing haiku during the period. He started in 1884 or 1885. When he returned to Matsuyama in 1886, he met the haiku poet, Ohara Kiju. He showed Kiju some haiku he had written and Kiju praised them. Although this was their only meeting, Shiki later said that Kiju had been his only teacher of haiku.

Shiki was well-read in contemporary literature. From Tsubouchi Shoyo (1859-1935) he picked up the idea of “literature” (in Japanese *bungaku*). Up until then, in Japan, the various genres were discreet. Shoyo was thinking mostly of the novel and drama but Shiki embraced the new concept and extended it to poetry. Although at first leaning towards a freer Western-style verse, in 1889 he settled on kanshi poetry (Japanese poetry written in Chinese characters), tanka and haiku. He thought the shorter the form, the deeper the meaning, eventually focussing more on haiku and tanka. He was a trailblazer in using the word “*shika*” to include all varieties of poetry. He wrote *Nanakusa-shu* (*Seven Grasses Collection*) the same year. Besides including kanshi, tanka and haiku, it contains his only Noh play, *Togan Koji*, set in the Meiji period. Some of the poetry deals with his tour during summer vacation in 1888 along the Sumida River.

In 1888 during a trip to Kamakura, Shiki spit up a bit of blood. But it was on May 9, 1889, that he suffered his first major lung hemorrhage and coughed up blood. After happening a second time in the evening, he composed forty or fifty haiku about the *hototogisu* (the lesser cuckoo), a bird whose song is taken to sound as if it is coughing blood. He took the name Shiki (Chinese reading of *hotogogisu*). This was the first sign of the tuberculosis that would eventually take his life. In 1890, he graduated from Koto Chugakko (Higher Middle School, the new name for University Preparatory School), and entered the Department of Philosophy of Imperial University in September 1890. In January, the next year, he transferred to the Department of Japanese Literature. It should be mentioned that throughout these years Shiki seems to have read a number of literary works in English.

In 1891, Shiki began to show the first signs of impatience with being a university student. Shiki's fascination with the haiku and



other forms of literature continued to grow stronger. He toured the Chiba area and visited Matsuyama. On his return, he stopped attending university classes. He left the dormitory in Hongo where he had been living as a scholarship student, and rented a house in Komagome. He failed the examinations of June 1891. He started to study haiku in depth from its origins. This work culminated first in *Talks on Haiku* (see below) and ultimately the *Classified Collection of Haiku* in 1900. At the same time he began work on a novella as he still felt the novel was the way to go. He completed *The Capital by Moonlight* and showed it to the novelist Koda Rohan in early 1892. Rohan was not impressed. By May Shiki decided he no longer wanted to be a novelist, but had decided to become a poet

### *The Literary Life (1892–1897)*

In October 1891, Shiki had written the newspaper publisher Kuga Katsunan (1857–1907), whom he met once eight years earlier, asking if he knew of good lodgings. Kuga invited him over and being impressed with Shiki suggested he rent the place next store. On February 29, 1892, Shiki moved to 88 Kami-negishi. Shiki's last ten years would be spent in this house and, from February 1, 1894, in a larger house at 82 Kami-negishi. Shiki had written a travel diary, *Kakehashi no ki* (The Hanging Bridge Journey), the previous summer and Kuga agreed to publish it in his newspaper, the *Nippon Shimbun*. It was Shiki's first major publication and appeared in six instalments between May 27 and June 4, 1892. That was the beginning, on a part time basis, of Shiki's association with *Nippon*. Shiki remained loyal to Kuga ever after. He then published *Talks on Haiku from the Otter's Den* from June through October in thirty-six instalments. It became Shiki's first book.

Shiki visited Matsuyama again in the summer. Afterwards, he quit university in October 1892, relinquishing his scholarship funds. He then invited his mother and sister to come live with him in Tokyo and they arrived in November. On December 1<sup>st</sup>, he commenced working full-time for *Nippon* as haiku editor. Over the years he published various critical works, two diaries and many haiku and tanka. In 1893, before his full maturity as a haiku poet,

he wrote over four thousand haiku, his most ever, in a single year. This was partly inspired by his trip to the Tohoku region where he followed in Basho's footsteps.

The Sino-Japanese War broke out on July 25, 1894 and Shiki was taken up in nationalistic feelings that swept the country. He wanted to go as a war correspondent to the front lines in China despite his poor health. He was finally accepted in March 1895 but shortly thereafter an armistice was signed and on April 17, the Treaty of Shimonoseki. He departed on April 10, arrived on April 12, and landed at Dairen, China, on April 15<sup>th</sup>. He found that journalists were badly treated by the military. He toured the area and met Mori Ogai (1862-1922), the famous novelist, as well as others. On Shiki's return home, on a ship, third class to Kobe, he fell ill. He was taken to hospital and expected to die, but survived. He recuperated in a sanatorium in nearby Suma. In August he returned to Matsuyama and stayed with Natsume Soseki.

In Matsuyama, a local group of haiku poets, The Wind in the Pines Society, congregated around Shiki and took him as their mentor. He taught them his new haiku style which focussed on one's own observation of nature. One of the group, Yanagihara Kyokudo (1867-1957), became a leading disciple. Later in the year, based on his experiences with the group, he published *The Elements of Haiku*, aimed at beginners, from October through December in *Nippon*. He returned to Tokyo in October, making excursions to Osaka, Nara and other locales on the way. On this trip, he experienced pains in his lower back (due to spinal tuberculosis) which would eventually physically incapacitate him. This realization firmed his resolve to accept literature as his vocation. It was around this time he started to seriously explore tanka as well. However, due to his condition, this proved to be the peak of his critical work (although it did continue) and he concentrated more on his poetry and diaries.

Due to his health, Shiki was concerned about having a successor. He asked one of his group, Takahama Kyoshi (1874-1959), to assume this role but Kyoshi was not inclined to do so. There were some tensions in the relationship but in the end Kyoshi remained a disciple and ultimately did pass on Shiki's ideas on haiku. Although not yet mainstream, members of Shiki's group, dubbed the Nippon School, had their haiku published in various

haiku masters for themselves along with various commentaries on the form to reach an informed opinion.

## The Translation

The translation of the haiku is fairly literal. Usually, the original images are followed sequentially but where it sounds better in English, the order has been switched. A three-line structure has been used but no attempt has been made for a consistent number of syllables or accents per line. The Japanese text is from various sources but each selection has been checked against material on the Shiki Museum website ([shikihaku-digital-archive.jp](http://shikihaku-digital-archive.jp)) and an edition of Shiki's works. Over 1200 haiku have been translated. The haiku are ordered by year and within year by season, seasonal category (season, sky and elements, Earth, human affairs, animals, and plants) and season word (*kigo*). There is some chronological order within the season category itself with obvious early and late references placed accordingly. The "human affairs" category is sometimes split into two with the second relating to the sacred, but we have followed our sources in this case. The season word may just be implied in the piece. Only one haiku is included that is in a miscellaneous category without a seasonal reference. There is often ambiguity in the pieces and alternative renderings are possible in some instances.

Shiki often refers to his home as "thatched hut" in the prefaces and "retreat" or "hermitage" in the haiku themselves. The mention of a bird often implies it is singing and the latter is added to the translation. As well "blossoms" on its own invariably means "cherry blossoms." The harvest moon is the full moon on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month.

For romaji, I have replaced the sound of the older forms, は (*ha*), へ (*he*), ひ (*hi*), and ふ (*fu*), where applicable, as they are now, in many instances, わ (*wa*), え (*e*), い (*i*), and う (*u*). The archaic ゐ (*wi*) is *i* in modern Japanese. Note that ふ (*fu*) was often used as a verb ending where う (*u*) is now employed. There are also the following older stand-alone forms that are retained in modern

Japanese but have a different sound: は (*ha*), へ (*he*) and を (*wo*) as *wa* (topic marker), *e* (to) and *o* (object marker) respectively. As well, the pre-modern rendering of “today” as けふ (*kefu*) has been replaced by *kyou* in the romaji. The odd other item has been modernized. However, in Shiki there was less need of such changes than in my translations of Onitsura and Taigi. The verb ending, るる, is invariably れる (the passive) in modern Japanese but it has been left as is. Usually, modernized kanji have been used. There is, however, a variance in the use of old and new kanji, hiragana and katakana (all with the same meaning) in the various source texts. Months are translated as First Month, Second Month etc. rather than January, February and so on, as the season words especially, relate to the lunar calendar. It should be noted though, that the solar calendar came into effect in 1873.

Footnotes are quite extensive. Items identified as “Preface” may be a preface, header, head note, end note or introductory material by Shiki. Usually they provide some context to the piece. Editorial notes cover people and places, flora and fauna, literary allusions, and context, the latter often based on Shiki’s writings. For a number of haiku the existence of a haiku monument (*kuhi*) is noted. Editorial notes are placed in square brackets. A final note: the haiku continue one after the other, so although the index indicates on which page a year begins, it is not necessarily at the top of the page.

# Haiku

## 1893 AUTUMN

昼中の残暑にかはる夜寒哉

時候 夜寒

hirunaka no zansho ni kawaru yosamu kana

The cold of night transforms  
to the lingering  
summer heat of day!

*season: cold night*

滝の音いろいろになる夜長哉

時候 夜長

taki no oto iroiro ni naru yonaga kana

A multitude of sounds  
from the waterfall –  
the long night.

*season: long night*

命には何事もなし秋のくれ

時候 秋の暮

inochi ni wa nanigoto mo nashi aki no kure

In life  
there's nothing –  
autumn twilight.

*season: autumn dusk*

俳諧の咄身にしむ二人哉  
haikai no hanashi minishimu futari kana

時候 身に入む

Just the two of us  
discussing deeply  
our haiku.<sup>269</sup>

*season: chill & loneliness of autumn*

朝顔の花やぶれけり初嵐  
asagao no hana yabure keru hatsuarashi

天文 初嵐

The morning glory blossoms  
ravaged  
by autumn's first storm!

*sky & elements: 1<sup>st</sup> autumn storm*

恙なきや庵の薜初嵐  
tsutsunaki ya io no asagao hatsuarashi

天文 初嵐

Undamaged  
by autumn's first storm –  
morning glories at the hermitage!

*sky & elements: 1<sup>st</sup> autumn storm*

---

<sup>269</sup> Preface: “Visiting the Venerable Meisetsu.” Naito Meisetsu (1847–1926) was from Matsuyama and of samurai descent. Besides being a haiku poet and disciple of Shiki, he was a government official and head of the dormitory (for Matsuyama students) where Shiki stayed when studying at university in Tokyo. I have translated *haikai* as haiku.

山の温泉や裸の上の天の川  
yama no yu ya hadaka no ue no amanogawa

天文 天の川

Hot springs in the mountains –  
above the naked bodies  
the Milky Way!<sup>270</sup>

*sky & elements: Milky Way*

秋風や人あらはなる山の宿  
akikaze ya hito arawa naru yama no yado

天文 秋風

Autumn breeze –  
people naked  
at the mountain inn!<sup>271</sup>

*sky & elements: autumn breeze*

秋風や妙義の山に雲はしる  
akikaze ya myougi no yama ni kumo hashiru

天文 秋風

Autumn winds –  
clouds scudding  
over Mt. Myogi!<sup>272</sup>

*sky & elements: autumn breeze*

---

<sup>270</sup> Preface: “Yuda Onsen.” A hot springs resort located in Nishiwaga, Iwate Prefecture. Shiki was tracing Basho’s journey in Narrow Road to the Deep North and stayed at this *onsen*. There is a haiku monument at the *onsen*.

<sup>271</sup> Preface: “Yuda Onsen.” There is a haiku monument there.

<sup>272</sup> A famous mountain in Gunma Prefecture.



白河や二度こゆる時秋の風  
shirakawa ya nido koyuru toki aki no kaze

天文 秋風

Shirakawa<sup>273</sup> –  
time of growing twice as stout  
in the autumn breeze!

*sky & elements: autumn breeze*

稲妻をしきりにこぼす夕哉  
inazuma o shikiri ni kobosu yuube kana

天文 稲妻

Grumbling about  
the constant lightning –  
evening.

*sky & elements: lightning*

しづしづと野分のあとの旭かな  
shizushizu to nowaki no ato no asahi kana

天文 野分

All is quiet  
the morning after  
the typhoon.

*sky & elements: autumn gale*

---

<sup>273</sup> Shirakawa barrier leading to the northern Tohoku region. There is a proverbial saying: “Autumn with the sky clear and blue, and horses growing stout.”

暁の霧しづか也中禅寺  
akatsuki no kiri shizuka nari chuuzenji

天文 霧

Mist at dawn  
in the stillness  
of Chuzenji Temple.<sup>274</sup>

*sky & elements: fog*

白露に家四五軒の小村哉  
shiratsuyu ni ie shigo ken no komura kana

天文 露

In the glistening dew  
four or five houses  
of a small village.<sup>275</sup>

*sky & elements: dew*

一寸の草に影ありけ心の月  
issun no kusa ni kage ari kyou no tsuki

天文 今日の月

Even the inch long grass  
casts a shadow –  
Eighth Month full moon!

*sky & elements: 8<sup>th</sup> Month full moon*

---

<sup>274</sup> A temple near Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture on a lake of the same name.

<sup>275</sup> Preface: “Yuda Onsen.”

名月やわれは根岸の四畳半  
meigetsu ya ware wa negishi no yojouhan

天文 名月

Harvest moon –  
me, at Negishi,  
in my tiny<sup>276</sup> room!

*sky & elements: harvest moon*

名月や大路小路の京の人  
meigetsu ya ooji kouji no kyou no hito

天文 名月

Harvest moon –  
people of the capital  
out on the highways and byways!

*sky & elements: harvest moon*

社を出れば十六宵の月上りけり  
sha o dereba izayoi no tsuki agari keru

天文 十六夜

Leaving the shrine,  
the moon of the sixteenth  
ascending.

*sky & elements: 16<sup>th</sup> day 8<sup>th</sup> Month moon*

---

<sup>276</sup> Literally “four-and-half [*tatami*] mats,” a measure of room size. One mat is about six feet by three feet.

葉まばらに柚子あらはるる後の月  
ha mabara ni yuzu arawaruru nochi no tsuki

天文 後の月

The *yuzu*<sup>277</sup> fruits come into sight  
amidst the sparse foliage –  
Ninth Month moon!

*sky & elements: 13<sup>th</sup> day 9<sup>th</sup> Month moon*

夕陽に馬洗ひけり秋の海  
sekiyou ni uma arai hikeri aki no umi

地理 秋の海

Washing the horse  
in the light of the setting sun –  
autumn sea.<sup>278</sup>

*Earth: autumn sea*

うれしさや七夕竹の中を行く  
ureshisa ya tanabata take no naka o yuku

人事 七夕

Happiness –  
walking through the bamboo  
at the Tanabata Festival!<sup>279</sup>

*human affairs: Tanabata Festival*

---

<sup>277</sup> A citrus tree native to East Asia.

<sup>278</sup> Preface: “Dewa Province.” Now part of Yamagata and Akita Prefectures

<sup>279</sup> Preface: “On a trip.” Tanabata Festival is the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month.  
Wishes were written on slips of paper and hung on bamboo.

草市にねぎる心のあはれなり  
kusaichi ni negiru kokoro no aware nari

人事 草市

Pathos –  
haggling  
at the Obon<sup>280</sup> flower market!  
*human affairs: Obon flower market*

母親を負ふて出でけり御遷宮  
hahaoya o oute ide keru gosenguu

人事 御遷宮

Carrying his mother  
on his back  
to the rebuilt Ise Shrine.<sup>281</sup>  
*human affairs: rebuilt Ise Shrine*

どちらから見てもうしろの案山子哉  
dochira kara mite mo ushiro no kakashi kana

人事 案山子

From wherever you look  
you always see its back –  
the scarecrow!

*human affairs: scarecrow*

---

<sup>280</sup> The Festival of Souls, honouring one's deceased ancestors, held on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month.

<sup>281</sup> The holiest Shinto Shrine, in Mie Prefecture, is rebuilt every twenty years and would have been completed in 1893. It is frequently the object of a pilgrimage.

風吹て廻り燈籠の浮世かな  
kaze fukite mawaridourou no ukiyo kana

人事 走馬燈

The wind blows  
on the fleeting world  
of the revolving lantern!

*human affairs: revolving lantern*

月の出や皆首立てて小田の雁  
tsukinode ya mina kubi tatete oda no kari

動物 雁

At the rising of the moon  
all stretching up their necks –  
geese in the rice field!

*animals: goose*

籠あけて雑魚にまじりし鱸哉  
kago akete zako ni majirishi suzuki kana

動物 鱸

Opening the basket,  
sea bass mixed in  
with the small fry.

*animals: sea bass*

秋の蠅叩かれやすく也にけり  
aki no hae tatakare yasuku nari ni keru

動物 秋の蠅

Swatting  
autumn flies  
has gotten easy!

*animals: autumn fly*

秋の蠅二尺のうちを立ち去らず  
aki no hae nishaku no uchi o tachisarazu

動物 秋の蠅

I can't get past  
two feet outside –  
autumn flies!<sup>282</sup>

*animals: autumn fly*

蝸や夕日の里は見えながら  
higurashi ya yuuhi no sato wa mienagara

動物 蝸

The village in sight  
at sunset –  
the call of evening cicadas.<sup>283</sup>

*animals: evening cicada*

---

<sup>282</sup> Written on his walking tour in Tohoku at an inn.

<sup>283</sup> Written at Yuda Onsen. There is a monument with this haiku in Nishiwaga.

暁や厨子を飛び出るきりぎりす  
akatsuki ya zushi o tobideru kirigirisu

動物 蟋蟀

Dawn –  
a katydid  
flying out of the household shrine!

*animals: katydid*

薺や君いかめしき文学士  
asagao ya kimi ikameshiki bungakushi

植物 朝顔

Morning glory –  
it's splendid you are now  
a Bachelor of Arts!<sup>284</sup>

*plants: morning glory*

栗焼てしづかに話す夕哉  
kuriyakite shizuka ni hanasu yuube kana

植物 栗

Chatting in the stillness,  
chestnuts simmering –  
evening.<sup>285</sup>

*plants: chestnuts*

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<sup>284</sup> Preface: “Soseki Visits.” His friend, the famous novelist Natsume Soseki, had just graduated from university.

<sup>285</sup> Preface: “At Shou’s in Oji.” Ito Shou (伊藤松宇) was a haiku poet who became friends with Shiki. They eventually drifted apart as their views on haiku differed. Oji is now part of Kita Ward, Tokyo.



