

So Happy to See Cherry Blossoms: Haiku from the Year of the Great Earthquake and Tsunami

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Edited by Mayuzumi Madoka

Translated by Hiroaki and Nancy Sato

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The haiku has been a universal poetic form for more than half a century now. The second UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld expressed his private thoughts in it;¹ the founding executive director of the UN Population Fund Rafael Salas recorded his daily observations through it;² so does the current President of the European Council Herman Achille Van Rompuy.³

Last year the Belgrade-born physician-filmmaker Dimitar Ananiev compiled a large anthology of haiku by writers from 48 countries on war and other forms of violence.⁴

In Japan where one out of ten people is said to write haiku, many, naturally, resorted to this form to express their reactions to the events and aftermath of the great earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011. As the haiku poet Mayuzumi Madoka learned in promoting the writing of haiku as a “cheering tool” among the survivors, some survivors proposed a new seasonal word (*kigo*) to mark the crippling of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Generation Plant and its consequences: *genpatsu-ki* (原発忌), the day to abhor nuclear power generation.



Mayuzumi Madoka.

Many of the writers of haiku Mayuzumi selected for her book are septuagenarians or older. This reflects not just the famously aging society that Japan is, but also the fact that the depopulated farming and fishing villages that were struck hard are demographically skewed toward older generations. Still, the boy who wrote the haiku chosen for the title was a fifth grader when he wrote it, and Mayuzumi made sure to include one written by an 8-year old.

The haiku form is so compressed that all the pain or any other emotions lying behind the short expressions may not be apparent. So here let us note that the high school student with an unusually beautiful name had this background: having lost her mother while in junior high school, she lived alone with her fisherman father, helping him in his work. She fell in love with a fisheries high school student. It was then

that the earthquake and tsunami struck. The tsunami swept away not just her boyfriend, but all the relatives who lived in her neighborhood. Since then she has suffered from panic syndromes.

On the afternoon of March 11, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the Pacific coast of the Tōhoku (Northeast) Region of Japan created a giant tsunami. It engulfed a long stretch of the coast and took away many lives: 15,884 identified as dead and 2,636 missing. The disaster also injured 6,150 people and created large numbers of refugees.

At the same time, the tsunami damaged some of the reactors of the Fukushima Daiichi (No. 1) Nuclear Power Generation Plant, in Ōkuma Town, Fukushima Prefecture, that is built right on the Pacific shore. Radioactive materials began to flow out into the air and the sea and have continued to do so, creating a nuclear accident said to be the largest since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. As a result, by mid-June 2011, about 116,000 people had evacuated the affected areas, by government order or on their own.

When the disasters struck, the haiku poet Mayuzumi Madoka 黛まどか was in Paris as Japan's cultural ambassador to Europe. But soon after she returned to Japan, she traveled to the Northeast, met some of the survivors, and held haiku-writing sessions with them. She went back to the region half a year later. The result is a selection of haiku by the survivors of the calamities that she compiled and edited in 2012, [Mankai no sakura ga mirete ureshii na: Hisaichi kara no ikku まんかいのさくらがみれてうれしいな 被災地からの一句 \(I'm So Happy to See Cherry Blossoms in Full Bloom: Haiku from the Areas Affected by the Disasters\)](#).

Her selection consists of one hundred twenty-six haiku, each writer's account of the haiku and the editor's notes on the seasonal word (kigo 季語) in each. It begins with a tsunami victim's letter to Mayuzumi and includes Mayuzumi's accounts of her visits to the region and her dialogue with the novelist and non-

fiction writer Morimura Seiichi 森村誠一. Translated here are excerpts from the book.

Hiroaki and Nancy Sato

A Letter from a Disaster Victim

The following is a letter to Mayuzumi Madoka from Koike Michiko, a high-school teacher in Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture. The port city of 56,000 people was hit by one of the highest waves of the tsunami on March 11, 2011, with the second wave that surged in around 3:26 p.m. estimated to have attained the height of 8.5 meters or 27 feet. The initial count of the victims, made five days after the tsunami struck, put the number of people killed at 157 and that of people missing at 1,658. The tolls continued to rise as days and months passed, until the count in early 2014 put the number of people killed at 420, even as that of people missing fell to 94. The tally of buildings and houses destroyed was 4,005.

In Ms. Koike's letter, "1seg" refers to a mobile terrestrial digital broadcasting service available in Japan and certain other countries.

That day of the disaster I was in the high school where I work. My school is built on a hill facing the sea. My husband and I had just rented a house at the foot of the hill for the two of us to live. Two days earlier the entrance ceremony for the new class had been held, and my students and I were engaged in afterschool extracurricular activities. Following the initial alarm we evacuated to the schoolyard. But all the 1seg showed on our cellphones was something we'd never seen before: "Warning: Great Tsunami."

The school where my husband taught was a kilometer away from the sea, but the ground where he coached the students' track team faced the sea. Our house? Our families? My brain turned white.

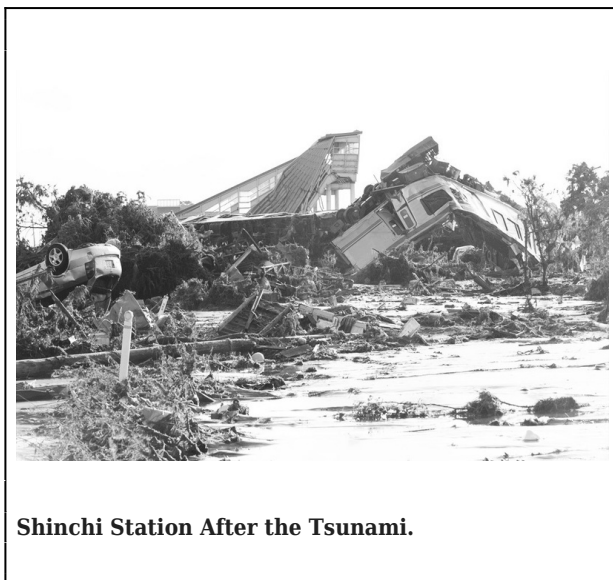
In about thirty minutes one of our colleagues who had gone up to the roof of the school building to watch our town below came down

and said: “Your houses were swept away.”

Our school was not one of the city-designated evacuation zones, but soon a great many town residents soaking wet, fleeing, began coming up to the schoolyard. By now everything on our cellphones was out of service. Our hill had become an isolated island. With the evening dusk descending, the snow started. The school opened its gymnasium as a shelter for the evacuees.

People looking for their family members came to the shelter to check. One bloody injured person after another was carried in. The gymnasium now looked like a field hospital. The radios some evacuees brought said the tsunami had struck not just Miyako, but the broad swath of the Pacific coast of the region, from Hokkaido to the north to Chiba Prefecture to the south. Dead bodies were reported in groups of hundreds. Town after town was being engulfed by fire. The list of areas “totally destroyed” continued to grow.

More than three hundred evacuees that included our students spent the night together, unable to learn what had happened to their families and houses, unable to tell those close to them that they were alive and all right.



Shinchi Station After the Tsunami.

We ended up managing the evacuation shelter for the next eight days. Food wouldn’t arrive on time. We served on night watch while dozing.

We tried to learn whether the students who weren’t part of the extracurricular activities that day and their families were all right. The situation grew desperate. I didn’t have the time to think about myself.

Three days later I was able to meet my husband and learned that our rented house wasn’t seriously damaged; the invading water had merely flooded the floor. In contrast, the high school where my husband worked was completely drowned by the waves. As a result, he, with others, was working to remove the mud day after day.

My husband and I had many problems to think about: our car swamped by the waves, our loan, where to live until our house became livable. Yet we had so much to do that we had to leave such considerations for the future.

The night of the disaster, in a situation where I couldn’t think of anything, I made haiku. Ever since, I’ve kept weaving them as a means of keeping up my spirits.

Tomorrow, again, I’ll start slowing down — in gratitude to my students, my family, the people of Miyako, Madoka Sensei, and to all those related to me through haiku.

被災者と呼ばるるままに秋白し
Hisaisha to yobaruru mama ni aki shiroshi
Being called a disaster victim the autumn
white¹

小池美智子 Koike Michiko

¹The description of autumn as “white” derives from ancient Chinese astrology which set four imaginary animal guardians for the four directions and four seasons: a blue or green dragon for east and spring, a scarlet phoenix for south and summer, a white tiger for west and autumn, and a black turtle for north and winter.



Viewing cherry blossoms.

吉野宏子 Yoshino Hiroko

38 years old: Namie Town, Fukushima

春寒や家も車も流されて

Harusamu ya ie mo kuruma mo nagasarete

Spring cold both house and car washed away

Yoshino: "In a single moment our house, our car, and all valuables, including the piano we'd bought a month earlier were washed away in the tsunami. But all of my family were spared our lives. At this time we live in Yamagata."

The seasonal word harusamu, "spring cold," refers to the cold that persists after the Vernal Equinox. Yamagata is a prefecture northwest of Fukushima and on the Japan Sea side. The name of the town Namie 浪江 means "estuary of waves."

In Namie Town 149 people perished.

西内正浩 Nishiuchi Masahiro

64 years old: Minamisōma, Fukushima

原発忌この牛置いて逃げられず

Genpatsu-ki kono ushi oite nigerarezu

Nuclear Power Day "Can't leave these cattle and run"

Nishiuchi: "A friend of mine is a dairy farmer. For him, to stay in his village is hell, so is to leave it."

When the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant Accident forced many people to evacuate, they had to leave behind their cattle and other animals, including some kept in zoos. Many of

the animals starved to death, but some wandered off to live on their own. Some of them became feral.

Most such animals were ordered slaughtered. Many ranchers and dairy farmers were torn, like the farmer described in Nishiuchi's haiku. And at least one rancher in Namie Town, Fukushima, resisted the government order. He, Yoshizawa Masami, went back to his ranch of wagyū, rounded up stray cattle of other farmers, and added them to his own. In the end he started taking care of 360 of them. His story was widely covered in Japan and elsewhere. The New York Times, for one, carried an article with the heading "Defying Japan, Rancher Saves Fukushima's Radioactive Cows" (January 11, 2014).



300 Policemen in NBC Suits Search Victims Near Namie Town.

“Nuclear Power Day”: A New Kigo

Mayuzumi notes that Genpatsu-ki (原発忌), “Nuclear Power Day,” is a new seasonal word proposed for spring to mark the grave consequence of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident following the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The word Genpatsu-ki consists of genpatsu, an abbreviation of genshiryoku hatsuden, “nuclear power generation,” and ki, “mourning,” hence the anniversary of something unfortunate.

In haikai and haiku, new kigo are constantly created and added, so that today the number of kigo, if related words and phrases are included, may readily exceed several tens of thousands. Among them, the nuclear accident has special meanings for the Japanese for the obvious reasons. Theirs was the only country that was attacked with atomic bombs — Hiroshima, on August 6, and in Nagasaki, on August 9, 1945. And following the war, Japan suffered considerably as a result of the large-scale nuclear tests conducted in the Pacific. In fact, March 1, 2014, was the 60th anniversary of the H-Bomb test on Bikini Atoll that radiated a large number of fishing ships operating in the waters around the Marshall Islands, most notably the Daigo Fukuryū Maru.

Naturally, there is the seasonal word Genbaku no hi, “Atomic Bomb Day,” to mark the atomic bomb blasts, with variants: Genbaku-ki, “Day to Mourn the Atomic Bomb(s),” Bakki, “Day to Mourn the Explosion,” Hiroshima-ki, “Day to Mourn Hiroshima.”

Here is a haiku by Hirahata Seitō 平畑静塔 (1905 – 1997).

原爆の日の洗面に顔つけて

Genbaku no hi no senmen ni kao tsukete

Into Atomic Bomb Day’s sink I dunk my face

As for ki, the anniversary of something to be mourned, there are a number of kigo to commemorate the deaths of prominent people, not just in the field of haikai and haiku, but also in religion and other fields — both Japanese and foreign.

Among the foreign people for whom kigo have been designated and accepted are St. John

(Yonane, Iohanne), St. Paul (Paulo), and the Polish-French physicist-chemist famed for pioneering research on radioactivity and the discoverer of polonium and radium, Marie Curie (1867-1934).

A “festival” to commemorate the death of Madame Curie on July 4 was started in 1951 by Misasa, in Tottori Prefecture, for the simple reason that its hot springs contain radium. Later the date of the festival was changed from late July to early August for better weather. The writer of the following haiku is identified as “Maria Magdalena,” but little is known about the owner of this unusual name.

キュウリー忌薊は棄教の花かとも

Curie Day: the thistle is said to be the flower for abandoning faith

寺島勅 Terashima Tadashi

86 years old: Shinchi Town, Fukushima

春の夢さめよ現世の津波跡

Haru no yume sameyo gense no tsunami ato

Awake from spring dream to real world’s tsunami scars

Terashima: “The unprecedented disaster brought to bear not just nature’s ferocity and man’s powerlessness but the incompetence of the government, bureaucracy, and industry. Who would heal the grief of the regular folk who lost everything?”

Traditionally, “spring dream” is a metaphor for something fragile and fleeting, as in the opening lines of the account of the rise and fall of the Taira clan, Heike monogatari 平家物語 (The Tale of the Heike): “The arrogant do not last for long, / just like a dream on a spring night.” This reflects the Buddhist tenet on the transience of life. As The Heart Sutra says, “The laws of all existence are like a dream, phantom, bubble, a shadow.” And in Buddhism, what is given in the haiku as “real world” is “the present” in the three worlds of existence (Sanskrit: Traiyadhvika): the past, present, and future.

Shinchi Town was directly hit by the tsunami, which devastated most of its coastal area. One

hundred people died as a result.

高野裕子 Takano Hiroko

62 years old: Minamisōma, Fukushima

命ある今確かめて花の下

Inochi aru ima tashikamete hana no shita

Alive I assure myself now under the cherry blossoms

Takano: "Following the earthquake, tsunami, and the accident at the nuclear power plant, people have disappeared from my town. Still, the cherry blossoms have returned in full bloom, beautifully. Finding myself under them, I thought — I was allowed to live."

The haiku echoes two tanka of Saigyō 西行 (1118 - 1190), the great poet who was constantly on the road and greatly influenced Bashō. See next.

Saigyō: Life and Death

Among Saigyō's many famous tanka is one he wrote during his second journey to the north in the second year of Bunji (1186), when he was 68. Sayo no Nakayama is a pass in Sayoshika, Shizuoka, in those days reputed to be one of three most difficult passes along the Tōkaidō Road.

年たけてまたこゆべしと思ひきや 命なりけり小夜の中山

Toshi takete mata koyubeshi to omoiki ya inochi

narikeri Sayo no Nakayama

Age so advanced had I expected to cross this again? Here I'm

alive in the Mid-Mountain of Saya

Another has to do with death. It may read like a "farewell-to-the-world" poem but Saigyō is known to have written it some years before his death. Still, he did die just about the time he specified, the sixteenth of Second Month. The fifteenth of Second Month is the day Sakyamuni is believed to have entered Nirvana.

願わくば花の下にて春死なんその如月の望月のころ

Negawakuba hana no shita nite haru shinan sono

Kisaragi no mochitsuki no koro

If I could so wish I'd die under cherry blossoms in spring, in

Second Month, around the full moon

齋藤溪水 Saitō Keisui

77 years old: Yamamoto Town, Miyagi

瓦礫のみ残るふるさと山笑ふ

Gareki nomi nokoru furusato yama warau

Only wreckage left in my hometown the mountain laughs

Saitō: "My house is five kilometers inland from the seacoast, but the tsunami still came to attack it with a wave one meter high. It left all the rice paddies two kilometers east of National Highway 6 with mountains of wreckage. But as the paddy ridges turned green and cherries bloomed on the mountains, I was soothed by the expression, 'mountain laughs.'"

The seasonal word, yama warau, "mountain laughs," "mountain smiles," is for spring, and it comes from a Chinese poem, for which see next.

In Yamamoto Town 680 people perished, with an additional 18 still missing.

"Mountain Laughs"

Origins of kigo may be traced to the genres set up

for Wenxuan (文選), China's 60-volume anthology of verse and prose Crown Prince Zhaoming (昭明太子 501 - 531) edited. Although the major categories of Wenxuan did not include the four seasons, Japan's oldest extant anthology of verse Man'yōshū (万葉集), put together in the latter part of the eighth century, devoted two of its 20 volumes to poems divided into spring, summer, autumn, and winter. With the first imperial anthology of poetry, Kokin waka shū

(古今和歌集), in the early tenth century, categorizing poems by season and composing poems to reflect seasonal changes became the most important part of Japanese poetic tradition.

The poetic form of renga (連歌), which links 5-7-5- and 7-7-syllable units up to fifty times, directly inherited this practice, but it went further. Because of the requirement of the form that change occur at every turn, observations of seasonal permutations and the terms for

them grew ever more fine-tuned. What is known today as haiku (俳句) started out as the opening verse of renga, hence the predominant role of seasonal words in this short poetic form. The Japanese poets learned a great deal from Chinese poets, but they also adopted astrological seasonal divisions and practices from China. As a result, many seasonal words and concepts in haiku today derive from that country.

The idea that “the mountain laughs” is no exception. It comes from the first line of the quatrain “The Mountain in Four Seasons” (四季山之詞) by the Chinese painter of “mountain and water,” Guoxi (郭熙 1023 – 1085):

春山淡冶而如笑
夏山蒼翠而如滴
秋山明淨而如粧
冬山慘淡而如睡

Spring mountain is plain-sensuous, as if smiling.

Summer mountain is deep-emerald, as if dripping.

Autumn mountain is bright-clear, as if made-up.

Winter mountain is bleak-plain, as if asleep.

The Chinese character for “laugh,” “smile,” 笑, also means “to bloom,” “to blossom.”

Happily, the Chinese painter-poet Guoxi was not the only person who found the mountain smile or laugh with the arrival of spring. The English painter-poet William Blake (1757 – 1827) also did when he celebrated the coming of spring by writing “Laughing Song.” It begins:

When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy,

And the dimpling stream runs laughing by;
When the air does laugh with our merry wit,
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it.

阿部竜成 Abe Ryūsei

11 years old: Yamada Town, Iwate

まんかいのさくらがみれてうれしいな

Mankai no sakura ga mirete ureshiina

I’m so happy to see cherry blossoms in full bloom

Abe: “Orikasa was left with wreckage and rubble. But I saw a cherry tree, small but

blooming. It was in full bloom. So I wrote this haiku.”

Orikasa, part of the town with 16,000 people, was almost totally destroyed by the tsunami and the great fire it touched off. In the township of Yamada as a whole 604 people perished, with an additional 148 people still unaccounted for.

Abe Ryūsei, an elementary-school pupil, wrote this haiku in an impromptu haiku session with Mayuzumi. It reads like a natural, conversational utterance. But it fulfills the traditional haiku requirements of the set form of 5-7-5 syllables and the inclusion of a seasonal word.



A beech forest in Tadami Town.

志賀英記 Shiga Hideki

81 years old: Kawauchi Village, Fukushima

一本の松世紀津波に緑立つ

Ippon no matsu seiki tsunami ni midori tatsu
A lone pine tree in century's tsunami upright
green

Shiga: "I was deeply moved by the lone pine tree that, undefeated by the tsunami, powerfully continued to stand. I wanted to describe the way the tree lives facing tomorrow, dreaming."

The seasonal word here is midori, "green."

In this haiku Shiga most likely refers to the single pine tree left standing after the tsunami swept away the 70,000 pine trees that had lined the beachfront of Rikuzentakata, Iwate. The survival of the tree was called a "miracle" in the port town that saw 1,564 people perish, with an addition 217 people missing. The Wall Street Journal carried a long series of articles on the town's recovery efforts, among them "Japan's Tree of Hope Seeks Donations" (July 6, 2012).

郡良子 Kōri Ryōko

77 years old: Minamisōma, Fukushima

福島はもう人住めず草茂る

Fukushima wa mō hito sumezu kusa shigeru

In Fukushima no longer can humans live grass
thrives

Kōri: "Most of the residents of Minamisōma evacuated. I still can't go back. Be it a garden or a lane by the house, grass runs wild, turning my town into a place unfit for human residence."

The seasonal word is kusa shigeru, "grass thrives."

木幡幸子 Kowata Sachiko

75 years old: Minamisōma, Fukushima

亡母の声聞きたくて佇つ青岬

Haha no koe kikitakute tatsu aomisaki

Wanting to hear mother's voice she stands on
the blue cape

Kowata: "My friend's mother was swept away by the tsunami. She tells me that in the evenings she drives to the tip of a cape and, standing there, calls out her mother's name."

The seasonal word here is aomisaki, "blue cape," a cape covered with summer green. In

China and (therefore) in Japan, "blue" (青、あお) is often interchangeable with "green" (緑、みどり). So, for example, 青山 or あおやま means "green mountain"; 青草 or あおくさ means "green grass"; and 青苔 or あおごけ means "green moss."

荒二三子 Ara Fumiko



"Elf's Forest." Courtesy of Max Fujishima.

91 years old: Iitate Village, Fukushima

被災地も余震つづきや盆迎ふ

Hisaichi mo yoshin tsuzuki ya Bon mukau

Even in evacuation aftershocks continue till
Bon arrives

Ara: "We evacuated to Sendai because it was where my daughter lives, but here too aftershocks continue."

The word bon of Bon or O-Bon means “tray” on which offerings are made to the souls of the deceased who come to visit. The Bon festivities include making a bonfire to welcome them, washing their graves, and making another bonfire with which to send them off back to where they live.

Sendai was one of the cities hit hard by the earthquake and tsunami.



Daikon in winter.

西内正浩 Nishiuchi Masahiro

64 years old: Minamisōma, Fukushima

放射能村見回りの灯の冴ゆる

Hōshanō mura mimawari no hi no sayuru

Radiation village patrolling flashlights lucid

Nishiuchi: “Because of the radiation pollution caused by the Tokyo Electric Power Company, all the residents of Iitate Village of Fukushima Prefecture were forced to evacuate. But the villagers formed crime-prevention, fire-prevention patrol units. Being in an mountainous area, it’s severely cold here, but we are protecting the village.”

The seasonal word here is sayu, “to be lucid,” “to grow lucid.” The idea for its seasonality comes from the sense that in the winter cold everything — the moon, the stars included — appears far more lucid than in other seasons.

星空舞子 Hoshizora Maiko

18 years old: Kesennuma, Miyagi

行く年や今年はいっぱい泣いちゃった

Yuku toshi ya kotoshi wa ippai naichatta

Departing year this year I’ve just wept so much
Hoshizora: “Crying is something you can do when you have an emotion. To get away from just simply shedding tears in a daze, so I may take back the emotions of joy, anger, pity, and delight, I made bold to write ‘I’ve just wept.’ Praying for the recovery.”

The seasonal word is yuku toshi, “departing year,” “year that goes away,” which is for winter.

The name Hoshizora Maiko means “Dancer in a Starry Night.”

Hiroaki Sato has published three dozen books of translations into English including *Japanese women poets: an anthology*, *Miyazawa Kenji: selections*, and *One Hundred frogs: from renga to haiku*. He is the winner of the PEN American Translation prize and is a former president of the Haiku Society of America.

Nancy Rossiter Sato, a passionate lover of art, is the primary reader of Hiro’s writings in English and has helped him judge haiku in English.

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¹ Kai Falkman, *A String Untouched: Dag Hammarskjöld’s Life in Haiku and Photographs* (Red Moon Press, 2006).

² Rafael Salas, *Fifty-Six Stones* (Weatherhill, 1986).

³ “Herman Van Rompuy publishes haiku poems,” *The Telegraph*, April 16, 2010

⁴ Dimitar Anakiev, ed., *World Haiku Anthology on War* (Kamesan Books, 2013).