Bashó (Matsuo Munefusa 1644-1694)
The name Bashó (banana tree) is a sobriquet the poet adopted around 1681 after moving into a hut with a banana tree alongside. He was called Kinsaku in childhood and Matsuo Munefusa in his later days.

Bashó’s father was a low-ranking samurai from the Iga Province. To be a samurai, Bashó served the local lord Todo Yoshitada (Sengin). Since Yoshitada was fond of writing haikai, Bashó began writing poetry under the name Sobo, later changing to Bashó.

During the years, Bashó traveled through Japan, especially the northern regions. There, he wrote Oku No Hosomichi (1694). He is considered the "Shakespeare" of Japanese poetry.

Furu ike ya An old pond
Kawaza tobikomu A frog jumps in
Mizu no oto The sound of water

Samidare wo Collecting all
Atsumete hayashi The rains of May
Mogami-gawa The swift Mogami River.

Yagate shinu Cricket, from your cheery cry
Keshiki wa miezu No one would ever guess
Semi no koe How quickly you must die.

The sea darkens;
The voices of the wild ducks
Are faintly white.

Ill on a journey--
My dreams wander
Over a withered moor.

Near the brushwood gate
Furious tea leaves scribble
Nothings on the storm

Yoshi Mikami Issa (Kobayashi Nobuyuki 1762-1826):

Katatsumuri O snail
Sorosoro nobore Climb Mount Fuji
Fuji no yama But slowly, slowly!

In my old home
That I forsook, the cherries are in bloom.

A giant firefly:
That way, this way, that way, this --
And it passes by.

Right at my feet --
And when did you get here, Snail?

My grumbling wife--
If only she were here!
This moon tonight...

A lovely thing to see:
Through the paper window’s hole,
The galaxy.

A man, just one--
Also a fly, just one--
In the huge drawing room.

Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927):
He didn’t start writing haiku before 1919, when he used the pseudonym Gaki.

Green frog,
Is your body also freshly painted?

Sick and feverish
Glimpse of cherry blossoms
Still shivering.

Harvest moon:
Around the pond I wander
And the night is gone.

Takahama Kyoshi (1894-1959):
Notice Kyoshi’s deviation from the normal syllable count:

Aki kaze ya Autumn wind:
Ganchu no mono Everything I see--
Mina haiku Is haiku.
Western Poets Using *Haiku*

While many Japanese *haiku* have been translated into English, with varying degrees of success, there are Western poets now attempting the genre. Far too many of the resulting poems are quite bad, or miss the point of the genre, or actually clever *senryu* rather than *haiku*. However, we have had some successes. Here are some Western poets who have either captured the essence of the original *haiku*, or who have adapted the tradition in unusual but effective ways.

**James Kirkup** (contemporary)

This one is particularly Zen and traditional.

In the amber dusk
Each island dreams its own night--
The sea swarms with gold.

**Michael R. Collings** (contemporary)

What's happened to nature in this *haiku*?

Freeway overpass--
Blossoms in graffiti on
Fog-wrapped June mornings.

**Scott Alexander** (early twentieth century)

By an ancient pond
A bullfrog sits on a rock:
Waiting for Bashó.

**Joy Shieman** (contemporary)

Two leaning tombstones
Took seventy years to touch--
Mist and peace dwell there.

**James W. Hackett** (contemporary)

In my opinion, Hackett is probably the best non-Japanese *haiku* poet the west has produced. Here are four of his most frequently anthologized *haiku*.

Half of the minnows
Within this sunlit shallow
Are not really there.

Deep within the stream
The huge fish lie motionless
Facing the current.

Two flies, so small
It's a wonder they ever met,
Are mating on this rose.

This garter snake
Goes in and out of the grass
All at the same time!