

CHAPTER 5



EZRA POUND, IMAGISM, AND JAPANESE POETICS

1

It is commonplace to say that imagism played a crucial role in poetic modernism and that Ezra Pound, more than anyone else, put this poetics to practice in the 1910s. Yet imagism still remains a somewhat cloudy topic. Many discussions content themselves with restatements of Pound's celebrated essay on vorticism, published in September 1914 ("Vorticism" 461–71). Even Hugh Kenner, the most eminent critic of Pound, says, "The history of the Imagist Movement is a red herring." He admonishes one "to keep one's eyes on Pound's texts, and avoid generalities about Imagism" (Kenner 58).

In his "Vorticism" essay, Pound acknowledged for the first time in his career his indebtedness to the spirit of Japanese poetry in general and the technique of *hokku*, an older term of haiku, in particular. Among the Poundians, and there have been many in the East and in the West who have tried to reconstruct the historical set of circumstances in which Pound moved, Earl Miner gives the best account of the profound influences that Japanese poetry had on Pound's early writing. It is Miner who offers the best annotated evidence that the sources for Pound's interest in Japanese poetics were partly provided by Pound's fellow Imagists, such as T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, and Richard Aldington.¹

It is Miner as well who most frequently comments on the role Yone Noguchi played in the introduction and interpretation of Japanese poetry to the English audience during the early decades of the

twentieth century.² As noted earlier, Noguchi was indeed a well-known bilingual Japanese and American poet, who by 1915 had published not only books of criticism widely read in England and America (*The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* and *The Spirit of Japanese Art*), but also several collections of his own English poems. By this date, moreover, his poems had been praised by Willa Cather, Joaquin Miller, and Gelett Burgess in America, by Bliss Carman in Canada, and by George Meredith, William Rossetti, Thomas Hardy, and others in England. What is surprising, therefore, is Miner's dismissive treatment of Noguchi's English writings as having had little to do with the Imagist movement and with Pound in particular.

2

As Pound explained in his essay, the image is not a static, rational idea: "It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name 'vorticism'" ("Vorticism" 469–70). A year later, Pound defined the form of an image by stating that the image "may be a sketch, a vignette, a criticism, an epigram or anything else you like. It may be impressionism, it may even be very good prose" ("As for Imagisme" 349). An image, he argued, does not constitute simply a picture of something. As a vortex, the image must be "endowed with energy" ("As for Imagisme" 349). Imagism, in turn, is likened to the painter's use of pigment. "The painter," Pound wrote, "should use his colour because he sees it or feels it. I don't much care whether he is representative or non-representative. . . . It is the same in writing poems, the author must use his *image* . . . *not* because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics" ("Vorticism" 464).

To demonstrate his poetic theory, Pound thought of an image not as a decorative emblem or symbol, but as a seed capable of germinating and developing into another organism. As an illustration he presented what he called "a *hokku*-like sentence" he had written:

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

"In a poem of this sort," he explained, "one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" ("Vorticism" 467). The

image of the faces in the crowd is based in immediate experience at a metro station in Paris; it was “a thing outward and objective.” Not only did Pound actually see the “thing,” but it generated such a sensation that he could not shake it out of his mind. This image, he emphasizes, “transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective,” that is, the image of the “Petals, on a wet, black bough.” Imagism is further contrasted to symbolism: “The symbolist’s *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste’s images have a variable significance, like the signs *a*, *b*, and *x* in algebra” (“Vorticism” 463).

Although Pound’s definition is clear enough, the sources for his ideas are hard to determine. Most discussions about the genesis of the Imagist movement are speculative at best. Pound’s insistence that an image in poetry must be active rather than passive suggests that a poem is not a description of something, but, as Aristotle had said of tragedy, an action. Pound approaches Aristotelianism in his insistence that the image of the faces in the crowd in his metro poem was not simply a description of his sensation at the station, but an active entity capable of dynamic development. According to his experience, this particular image instantly transformed itself into another image, that of the petals on a wet, black bough. To Pound, the success of this poem resulted from his instantaneous perception of the relatedness between the two entirely different objects.

But Pound’s note on the genesis of “In a Station of the Metro” in the “Vorticism” essay makes it clear that there was nothing instantaneous about the composition of this poem. It was in 1911 that Pound, having seen those “beautiful faces” at La Concorde, wrote a thirty-line poem, “and destroyed it because it was what we call work ‘of second intensity’” (“Vorticism” 467). Six months later he reduced the longer text to a poem half the length, and still a year later he wrote the final two-line poem. Pound’s insistence on the instantaneous perception of the metro images drove him to repeated attempts at recreating the instantaneous images he had perceived a year-and-a-half earlier. Traditionally, the principle of instantaneity and spontaneity is as fundamental for the composition of *hokku* as the same principle is when applied to Zen-inspired painting and calligraphy. In any event his discovery of *hokku* in 1913 to 1914 was, as he says, “useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion” (“Vorticism” 467). To Pound, the most important thing he learned about *hokku* was “this particular sort of consciousness,” which he was unable to identify with any version of impressionist art.³

Another equally important tenet of imagism calls for directness in expression. The immediate model for this principle was nineteenth-century French prose. Pound did not mention specific English poets but seemed adamantly opposed to Victorian poetry, which he characterized as wordy and rhetorical. Instead he urged his fellow poets “to bring poetry up to the level of prose.” “Flaubert and De Maupassant,” he believed, “lifted prose to the rank of a finer art, and one has no patience with contemporary poets who escape from all the difficulties of the infinitely difficult art of good prose by pouring themselves into loose verses” (“Vorticism” 462).

The disagreement between Pound and Yeats over whether poetic images should be suggestive or active, discussed in the previous chapter, involves what Noguchi, a poet and critic well acquainted with both poets, felt compelled to write in “What Is a Hokku Poem?” published in London in 1913.⁴ In that essay, Noguchi first defined *hokku* as an expression of Japanese poets’ “understanding of Nature,” or, better put, as a song or chant of “their longing or wonder or adoration toward Mother Nature” that is “never mystified by any cloud or mist like Truth or Beauty of Keats’ understanding.” Noguchi differentiated between the “suggestive” and subjective coloration of English poetry and the Japanese *hokku*, “distinctly clear-cut like a diamond or star.” He argued, “I say that the star itself has almost no share in the creation of a condition even when your dream or vision is gained through its beauty. . . . I value the ‘hokku’ poem, at least some of them, because of its own truth and humanity simple and plain.” Noguchi then analyzed the aim of *hokku*: the *hokku* poet expresses the spirit of nature, rather than the will of man or woman. Noguchi would agree that *hokku* is “suggestive” only if the word *suggestive* means that “truth and humanity are suggestive.” He added, “But I can say myself as a poet . . . that your poem would certainly end in artificiality if you start out to be suggestive from the beginning” (“What Is a Hokku Poem?” 355).

Finally, Noguchi based his definition and analysis of aim in Zen philosophy, understood as discipline of the mind: one should not allow one’s individuality to control action. Indeed, Zen does not recognize human reality, the existence of good and evil, because this reality is the creation of human will rather than the spirit of nature. Noguchi thus observed that “there is no word in so common use by Western critics as suggestive, which makes more mischief than enlightenment.” Although Western critics “mean it quite simply . . . to be a new force or salvation, . . . I say that no critic is necessary for this world of poetry” (“What Is a Hokku Poem?” 355).

By 1918, Pound's vorticism theory had extended to his discussion of Chinese characters. As the correspondence between Pound and Mary Fenollosa, widow of Ernest Fenollosa, indicates, Pound began to receive Fenollosa's manuscripts as early as 1913.⁵ Fenollosa's essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," posthumously published by Pound in *The Little Review* in 1918, attempted to show that Chinese characters, which Pound called ideograms, derive from visual rather than aural experiences. A Chinese character, Fenollosa noted, signifies an observable action instead of an abstract notion. Unlike a Western word, a phonetic sign, the Chinese character denotes a concrete, natural phenomenon. It, Fenollosa wrote, "is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature. In the algebraic figure and in the spoken word there is no natural connection between thing and sign: all depends upon sheer convention. But the Chinese method follows natural suggestion" (*Chinese Character* 8).

Pound's attempt to verify Fenollosa's theory involved not only his contemporaries, poets and critics living in London in the 1910s, but his own effort to search for ideas in other sources. One of these sources was the Japanese *noh* play, in which Pound became interested through Fenollosa's notes. It is generally understood that Pound's interest in Japanese poetry, especially *hokku*, grew partly through his acquaintance with Fenollosa's writings. None of Fenollosa's writings, however, directly concerns Japanese poetry, let alone *hokku*. Having lived many years in Japan as an art critic, Fenollosa became well versed in Japanese art and literature, but his actual knowledge of the Japanese language was not profound.⁶ It is, therefore, inconceivable that Pound became well acquainted with *hokku* through Fenollosa. It is also unlikely that English contemporaries such as T. E. Hulme and F. S. Flint, who are said to have introduced *hokku* to Pound, served his purpose. Pound would not have been able to learn from them the subtle elements of Japanese poetry because they had no firsthand knowledge of the Japanese language.⁷

3

Pound's most likely source of information was Noguchi, as noted earlier. He first corresponded with Pound and then met Pound, along with Yeats, when he gave a series of lectures on Japanese poetry in England in early 1914. The relationship between Pound and Noguchi began in 1911, when Noguchi sent his fifth collection of English poems, *The Pilgrimage* (1908 and 1909) in two volumes, to Pound with a note: "As I am not yet acquainted with your work, I wish you

[would] send your books or books which you like to have me read. This little note may sound quite businesslike, but I can promise you that I can do better in my next letter to you.” Noguchi also wrote as a postscript, “I am anxious to read not only your poetical work but also your criticism” (Kodama 4). Pound acknowledged receipt of the books and note and thanked him in a letter postmarked September 2, 1911. Pound further wrote, in part, “You are giving us the spirit of Japan, is it not? very much as I am trying to deliver from obscurity certain forgotten odours of Provence & Tuscany. . . . Of your country I know almost nothing—surely if the east & the west are ever to understand each other that understanding must come slowly & come first through the arts. . . . But I might be more to the point if we who are artists should discuss the matters of technique & motive between ourselves. Also if you should write about these matters I would discuss your letters with Mr. Yeats and likewise my answers” (*Collected English Letters* 210–11).

Although Noguchi did not write again to Pound, Noguchi published his essay “What Is a Hokku Poem?” in London in January 1913, as noted earlier. In the meantime three books of criticism by Noguchi appeared during this period: *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* (1914), *Through the Torii* (1914), and *The Spirit of Japanese Art* (1915). Noguchi was also invited to contribute “The Everlasting Sorrow: A Japanese Noh Play” in 1917 and an article, “The Japanese Noh Play,” in 1918 to *The Egoist*.⁸ Pound’s encouragement was perhaps responsible for the publication of some of Noguchi’s own haiku in *The Egoist* and in *Poetry*.

Because his essays and lectures during this period also dealt with Japanese art, Yeats, who was interested in Japanese painting and the *noh* play, became interested in Noguchi’s work as well.⁹ As Pound’s and Yeats’s letters to Noguchi indicate, Pound and Yeats not only were close associates themselves, but also were both well acquainted with Noguchi. Despite the active dialogues that occurred between Pound and Noguchi, critics have not seriously considered their relationship. The only critic who has mentioned Noguchi in discussing the Imagist movement regarded Noguchi not as a poet and critic from whose ideas Pound might have benefited, but as one of the poets whom Pound himself influenced (Goodwin 32). Such a preposterous connection is undermined by the simple fact that most of Noguchi’s English poems, as Pound noted in his letter to Noguchi, had been published in America and England long before the early 1910s, when Pound and his fellow poets began to discuss imagism among themselves. It is more accurate

historically to say that Noguchi influenced Pound rather than the other way around.

Pound had apparently known little about Japanese poetry before he attended the April 1909 meeting of the Poets' Club. This group, headed by T. E. Hulme, was succeeded by another group called *Les Imagistes* or *Des Imagistes*, which Pound led from 1912 to 1914.¹⁰ Although Pound in fact joined the Poets' Club, its sessions did not prove of much inspiration to him. Richard Aldington, who joined in 1911, was more interested in the color prints by Utamaro, Hokusai, and others found in the British Museum than in Japanese poetry.¹¹ The fact that Pound was more seriously interested in Japanese poetry than was Aldington is indicated by a parody of Pound's metro poem that Aldington published in the January 1915 issue of *The Egoist*.¹² Allen Upward, another member of *Les Imagistes* whom Pound had met in 1911, had some importance for Pound because Upward used the term *whirl-swirl* in his book *The New Word* (1908). Upward, a self-styled intellectual and a poet, had "a powerful and original mind clearly and trenchantly concerned with matters that bear directly on what Pound meant by 'vortex.'"¹³ But Upward, who was well read in Confucius and perhaps familiar with Chinese poetry, did not have sufficient knowledge of Japanese poetry, let alone of *hokku*, to influence Pound (Harmer 38).

The degree of Pound's initial interest in *hokku*, therefore, was not entirely clear, for he was much occupied with Provençal poetry and criticism, as his letter to Noguchi indicates. It is quite possible that Pound learned about *hokku* from T. E. Hulme and F. S. Flint, who were experimenting with *hokku* and *tanka*, the thirty-one-syllable Japanese poetic form (Miner, "Pound" 572). The difficulty with this assumption, however, is that Hulme and Flint studied *hokku* through French translators and critics who used the terms *haiku* and *haikai*, more modern words, rather than *hokku*. Most strikingly, neither Pound nor Noguchi referred to the Japanese poem as *haiku* or *haikai*; both consistently called it *hokku* in their writings.

However coincidental this might have been, there are two more pieces of evidence suggesting that Pound might have learned about *hokku* in Noguchi's work. First, as already observed, the essay "What Is a Hokku Poem?"—in which Noguchi declared that poetic images must be active instead of suggestive, direct instead of symbolic, and that the aim of a *hokku* is to understand the spirit of nature rather than to express the will of an individual—was published in *Rhythm* (London) in January 1913, almost two years before Pound's essay "Vorticism." Even Pound's essay "A Few Don'ts," the earliest manifesto on

imagism, appeared in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry* (Chicago) two months after Noguchi's essay. Second, Noguchi's book of criticism, *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*, was published in London by John Murray in March 1914, half a year before Pound's "Vorticism" essay.¹⁴

Moreover, the key chapter of Noguchi's book, titled "The Japanese Hokku Poetry," was a lecture delivered in the Hall of Magdalen College, Oxford, on January 28, 1914, at the invitation of Robert Bridges, the poet laureate, and T. H. Warren, president of the college and professor of poetry at the university. The first chapter, "Japanese Poetry," was also based on a lecture Noguchi gave at the Japan Society of London on January 14, 1914. The rest of the book had been presented as other lectures to such audiences as the Royal Asiatic Society and the Quest Society in England before April 1914, when Noguchi left London for Tokyo by way of Paris, Berlin, and Moscow. It is altogether possible that Pound heard Noguchi lecture at the Quest Society since Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and T. E. Hulme all lectured there in 1914.¹⁵ During this stay in England, *Through the Torii*, another collection of essays that included a variety of commentary on William Rossetti, James Whistler, W. B. Yeats, and Oscar Wilde, and his autobiography, *The Story of Yone Noguchi Told by Himself*, also appeared in print.

It is most intriguing that Pound's "Vorticism" essay quoted a famous *hokku* by Moritake just before discussing the often-quoted metro poem:

The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:
A butterfly.

("Vorticism" 467)

This *hokku* in Japanese has three lines:

Rak-ka eda ni
Kaeru to mireba
Kocho-o kana

Noguchi translated this poem in three lines:

I thought I saw the fallen leaves
Returning to their branches:
Alas, butterflies were they.

(*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 50)

Pound must have reconstructed the *hokku* in two lines simply because he had in mind “a form of super-position” in which his metro poem was to be composed. The similarities between Pound’s and Noguchi’s versions of the poem in question do not seem coincidental, because the superpository division is indicated by a colon in both constructions. Both translations have identical key words: “fallen,” “branch,” and “butterfly.” The only difference in diction is between Pound’s “blossom” (*ka* in Japanese) and Noguchi’s “leaves.” In syntax, however, these translations are different: Noguchi’s version is subjective from the start and ends objectively; the reverse is true in Pound’s rendering. Syntactically, Noguchi’s version is closer to the Japanese original than Pound’s. A literal translation of Moritake’s first two lines, “Rak-ka eda ni / Kaeru to mireba,” would read, “The fallen blossom appears to come back to its branch.”

What appealed to Pound was the terseness and intensity of imagery in a *hokku*. Irked by the decorative and superfluous style of much Victorian poetry, he urged his fellow poets to eliminate words that do not contribute to the central meaning of the poem. “All poetic language,” Pound insisted, “is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments” (“Vorticism” 466). By saying, “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree,” he meant to elaborate the Imagist principle that using fewer words maximizes and intensifies meaning.¹⁶ In “What Is a Hokku Poem?” Noguchi wrote, “I always thought that the most beautiful flowers grow close to the ground, and they need no hundred petals for expressing their own beauty; how can you call it real poetry if you cannot tell it by a few words?” (355).

Pound, furthermore, applied the principle of terseness and intensity to the construction of a single image in his poetry. “The ‘one image poem,’” Pound noted, “is a form of super-position, that is to say it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion” (“Vorticism” 467). Noguchi pointed out the same technique: “*Hokku* means literally a single utterance or the utterance of a single verse; that utterance should be like a ‘moth light playing on reality’s dusk,’ or ‘an art hung, as a web, in the air of perfume,’ swinging soft in music of a moment” (*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 39). To illustrate his point, Noguchi quoted a *hokku* by Buson:

The night of the Spring,—
Oh, between the eve
And the dawn.

This *hokku* was placed against the opening passage of *Makura no Soshi* (*Pillow Sketches*) by Sei Shonagon (966?–1025?), a celebrated prose writer in medieval Japan: “I love to watch the dawn grow gradually white and whiter, till a faint rosy tinge crowns the mountain’s crest, while slender streaks of purple cloud extend themselves above.” Noguchi considered Buson’s image far more vivid and intensive than Sei Shonagon’s, remarking, “Buson is pleased to introduce the night of the Spring which should be beautiful without questioning, since it lies between those two beautiful things, the eve and the dawn” (*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 48–49).

4

Not only was Noguchi an interpreter of *hokku* poems for the English reader, but he tried his hand at writing *hokku* poems in English. He later collected them in the volume *Japanese Hokkus* (1920), which he dedicated to Yeats.¹⁷ One of Noguchi’s earliest *hokku* is reminiscent of Buson’s, quoted above:

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

(“What Is a Hokku Poem?” 358)

He wrote this *hokku* in England, he says, “when I most abruptly awoke in 1902 to the noise of Charing Cross. . . . And it was by Westminster Bridge where I heard the evening chime that I wrote again in ‘hokku’ which appears, when translated, as follows” (“What Is a Hokku Poem?” 358):

Is it, Oh, list:
The great voice of Judgment Day?
So runs Thames and my Life.¹⁸

Noguchi wrote many *hokku*-like poems like these in imitation of the Japanese *hokku*, as did Pound. The superpository technique, which Pound said he had discovered in Japanese *hokku*, resembles that of Noguchi. For instance, Pound’s “Alba,” typical of his many *hokku*-like poems, reads,

As cool as the pale wet leaves
 of lily-of-the-valley
 She lay beside me in the dawn.

(*Personae* 109)

Most of Noguchi's *hokku*, as the two poems quoted above show, do have a form of superposition. Like Pound's, Noguchi's *hokku* constitutes one image poem which has two separate ideas set on top of one another. In the first poem by Noguchi, an idea of "the street to Heaven" is set on top of an idea of "webs," despite a close similarity between the two images. In the second, an idea of the flow of the Thames is set on top of an idea of the course of "my Life."

But there are some differences between Noguchi's and Pound's *hokku*. Noguchi does not as closely adhere to the well-established Japanese syllabic measure of five or seven as does Pound. Noguchi's two *hokku* above have 7-5-4 and 4-7-6 measures; Pound's "Alba," "Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord," and "Ts'ai Chi'h" have those of 7-7-8, 7-5-7, and 8-7-7, respectively. If the first line of Pound's metro poem had been reconstructed as two lines, the poem would have had a measure of 5-7-7 ("The apparition / Of these faces in the crowd / Petals on a wet, black bough"), much like a Japanese *hokku*. Noguchi, moreover, tends to ignore the long-established poetic tradition in which a Japanese *hokku* has an explicit reference to a season. Pound, on the other hand, consciously adheres to this tradition as seen in many of his *hokku*-like poems and somewhat longer pieces such as "Heather" and "Society" (*Personae* 109-11).

What a Japanese *hokku* and Pound's image share besides their brevity and intensity is the poet's ability to escape the confinement of the poem. The sense of liberation in *hokku* is usually accomplished through references to time and space. A Japanese *hokku* contains not only a reference to a season, an indication of time, but an image of nature, that of space. Pound's *hokku*-like poems, such as "In a Station of the Metro" and "Alba," indeed have references to time and space. Pound called the metro emotion, which came from the image of the faces in the crowd, "a thing outward and objective," and the image of the petals, on a wet, black bough "a thing inward and subjective." The image of the petals, nevertheless, is a natural object in contrast to that of the faces in the crowded station, a human object.

In Pound's mind—in the realm of subjective perception—the image of the faces, an objective image, transforms into the image of

the petals, a subjective image. This perception also means that the image of the faces, an image of people, transforms into that of the petals, an image of nature. The shifting of objective and subjective images in Pound's poem is depicted in terms of a vortex, in which an image is not only active in itself but also capable of merging into another image that appears in its wake. Because Pound's image has this tendency, it is often as difficult to separate the mental vision from the external as it is to separate mind from matter, the perceiver from the perceived, in Japanese *hokku*.

In *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*, Noguchi is as critical as Pound of the Western poet's tendency to wordiness. Noguchi's emphasis on the Japanese *hokku* as "the real poetry of action" entails that a *hokku* aim to narrow the distance between humanity and nature, the perceiver and the perceived. The narrower the distance, the better the *hokku* becomes. Based on "Lao Tze's canon of spiritual anarchism" and Zen's principle of controlling the mind, Noguchi declares,

To attach too closely to the subject matter in literary expression is never a way to complete the real saturation; the real infinite significance will only be accomplished at such a consummate moment when the end and means are least noticeable, and the subject and expression never fluctuate from each other, being in perfect collocation; it is the partial loss of the birthright of each that gains an artistic triumph. . . . I do never mean that the *Hokku* poems are lyrical poetry in the general Western understanding; but the Japanese mind gets the effect before perceiving the fact of their brevity, its sensibility resounding to their single note, as if the calm bosom of river water to the song of a bird. (*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 34)

To illustrate what he calls "the sense of mystical affinity between the life of Nature and the life of man, between the beauty of flowers and the beauty of love," he quotes his own poem, as discussed in Chapter 3 on Noguchi:

It's accident to exist as a flower or a poet:
 A mere twist of evolution but from the same force;
 I see no form in them but only beauty in evidence;
 It's the single touch of their imagination to get the embodiment
 of a poet or
 a flower:
 To be a poet is to be a flower,
 To be the dancer is to make the singer sing. (37)

Pound, on the other hand, views the affinity between humanity and nature differently. What Pound calls “a thing inward and subjective” does not necessarily correspond to a vision of a person; nor is “a thing outward and objective” the same thing as a vision of nature.

This fusion of humanity and nature is called spontaneity in Zen. The best *hokku* poems, because of their linguistic limitations, are inwardly extensive and outwardly infinite. A severe constraint imposed on one aspect of *hokku* must be balanced by a spontaneous, boundless freedom on the other. From a Zen point of view, such a vision is devoid of thought and emotion. Since Zen is the most important philosophical tradition influencing Japanese *hokku*, the *hokku* poet aims at understanding the spirit of nature. Basho, a Zen-inspired poet, recognizes little division between humanity and nature, the subjective and the objective; he is never concerned with the problems of good and evil. Placed against this tradition, Pound's poetics in its philosophical aspect considerably differs from Basho's. Pound cannot be called a Zen poet because he declared, “An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (*Literary Essays* 4). A Zen poet seeks satori, an enlightenment that transcends time and place and even the consciousness of self. This enlightenment is defined as a state absolutely free of any thought or emotion, a state that corresponds to that of nature. For a Zen-inspired poet, nature is a mirror of the enlightened self; one must see and hear things as they really are by making one's consciousness pure and clear. Pound seems to be able to appreciate this state of mind, but obviously he does not necessarily try to seek it in his own work.

In fact, Japanese traditional haiku do not take sexual love, illness, and natural disaster for their subjects. And while Pound's poetry does express good and evil, love and hatred, individual feeling and collective myth, Basho's shuns such sentiments and emotions altogether. Pound and a Zen poet, however, do agree that their poetic vision is spontaneous and capable of attaining enlightenment. Pound maintained, “It is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art” (*Literary Essays* 4). Pound's observation, however, is very much a Western formulation of an experience familiar to Zen-inspired artists.

This sense of liberation suggests an impersonal conception of poetry, for it focuses attention not on the poet but on the image. T. S. Eliot, whom most observers agree Pound influenced, held the same view (*Selected Essays* 8–10). Japanese poets such as Basho, Buson, and

Issa held the same principle. Their poetry seldom dealt with dreams, fantasies, or concepts of heaven and hell; it was strictly concerned with the portrayal of nature—mountains, trees, flowers, birds, animals, insects, waterfalls, nights, days, seasons. For the Japanese *hokku* poet, nature is a mirror of the enlightened self; the poet must see and hear things as they really are by making his or her consciousness pure, natural, and unemotional. “Japanese poets,” Noguchi wrote, “go to Nature to make life more meaningful, sing of flowers and birds to make humanity more intensive” (*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 37).

As opposed to his later poetry, Pound’s early poetry, and his *hokku*-like poems in particular, have little to do with his personal emotion or thought. In such poetry, Pound is not really concerned with thought and emotion. If Pound’s *hokku* sounded intellectual or emotional, it did so only to an English reader who was still Arnoldian in his or her taste and unfamiliar with the Imagist movement of the 1910s, not to mention with “the spirit of Japanese poetry” Noguchi tried to introduce to the English audience. Japanese poetry shuns symbols and metaphors because figurative language might lessen the intensity and spontaneity of a newly experienced sensation. Such expressions would not only undermine originality in the poet’s sensibility, but resort to intellectualization—as well as what Noguchi, perhaps echoing Matthew Arnold, called “a criticism of life,” which traditionally Japanese poetry was not (*Through the Torii* 159).

The *hokku* poet may not only aim at expressing sensation but also at generalizing and hence depersonalizing it. This characteristic can be shown even by one of Basho’s lesser-known *hokku*, as noted earlier:

How cool it is!
Putting the feet on the wall:
An afternoon nap.¹⁹

In “Alba,” what Pound expressed was not the personal feeling he had about the woman lying beside him at dawn, but his spontaneous sensation of the coolness of “the pale wet leaves / of lily-of-the-valley.” Likewise, the sensation of slowly cooling hot water was Pound’s subject in “The Bath Tub,” as the title suggests, rather than his feelings about the woman (*Personae* 100). The image of a “fan of white silk, / clear as frost on the grass-blade” is central in “Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord,” where a minimal image of the lord’s concubine is evoked by a one-word reference to her: “You also are laid aside” (*Personae* 108). Such subtleties could not have been learned from Pound’s fellow Imagists like Flint and Aldington. These Imagists remained labored,

superficial imitators of Japanese *hokku*. Pound and Noguchi, by contrast, showed themselves far more capable of understanding the spirit of Japanese poetry.

5

As partly suggested in the previous remarks on superposition, the *hokku* also provided a structural model for Pound's version of imagism. Acknowledging that the Japanese had evolved this short form of poetry, Pound seized on the unique form of "super-position" which, he observed, constitutes a *hokku*. To him, the *hokku* often consists of two disparate images in juxtaposition, and yet it appears as a single image. Lacking the copula *is* or the preposition *like*, the image cannot be metaphoric or analogical. As Pound's account of the composition of the metro poem shows, he had no intention of likening the image of the beautiful faces in the crowd to the image of petals on a wet, black bough or of making one image suggestive or representative of the other.²⁰ If one image is used to suggest another or to represent another, both images would be weakened. But if one image is used to generate or intensify another, and the other image, in turn, intensifies the first one, then the whole poem as one image would be intensified.

The key to the superpository structure of Pound's image is a coalescence of two unlike images. Such an image must be generated "in an instant of time," as Pound cautions in his essay "A Few Don'ts" (*Literary Essays* 4). Creating such an image needs no preparations, no explanations, no qualifications; Pound calls "the 'natural course of events' the exalted moment, the vision unsought or at least the vision gained without machination" (*Spirit of Romance* 97). In *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* and *The Spirit of Romance*, Noguchi and Pound, respectively, emphasized this revelatory moment when high poetry must be written. But such a parallel in their poetics does not necessitate that one's ideas came from the other's. Pound's observations might have been made independently.

It is quite possible that Pound became acquainted through other sources with many of the superpository *hokku* that Noguchi cited as examples in *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*. In addition to Moritake's "I Thought I Saw the Fallen Leaves" and Basho's "The Old Pond," Noguchi translated the following: Buson's "Oh, How Cool—" (47) and "Prince Young, Gallant" (36), Basho's "Lying Ill on Journey" (38), and Hokushi's "It Has Burned Down" (27). It may be significant, however, that in another collection of critical essays, Noguchi

cited several of his own numerous *hokku* in English along with those by old masters. Many of Noguchi's English *hokku*, moreover, had been published in *The Pilgrimage* (1908, 1909). Pound might have acquainted himself with Noguchi's published *hokku* before he experimented with his version.

As Pound accounted for the circumstances of his metro poem in Paris in 1912, Noguchi also narrated the experience he had had in London in 1903:

I myself was a *hokku* student since I was fifteen or sixteen years old; during many years of my Western life, now amid the California forest, then by the skyscrapers of New York, again in the London 'bus, I often tried to translate the *hokku* of our old masters but I gave up my hope when I had written the following in English:

My Love's lengthened hair
Swings o'er me from Heaven's gate:
Lo, Evening's shadow!

It was in London, to say more particularly, 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 Rossetti's woman as I perhaps had visited Tate's Gallery that afternoon. . . . I exclaimed then: "What use to try the impossibility in translation, when I have a moment to feel a *hokku* feeling and write about it in English?"²¹

Structurally, Pound's metro poem resembles Noguchi's Hyde Park *hokku*. As in Pound's poem, where the outward image of the faces in the crowd is set on top of the inward image of petals on a wet, black bough, so the actual vision of an evening shadow in Noguchi's poem is juxtaposed to an envisioning of a woman's long hair. In each poem a pair of images, similar in form but different in content, coalesces into another autonomous image, which generates different meaning. The superposition of the paired images transforms into a different image in form and content, what Pound calls "the 'one image' poem" ("Vorticism" 467). This transformation of images retains the sensation of each separate object perceived, but it also conveys a greater sensation by uniting the two experiences.²² For both poets, such a transformation is optimal, for they believe that images in poetry cannot and should not be divided as external and internal, physical and mental, objective and subjective.²³

To illustrate the energy latent in this transformation of images, Pound provided an anecdote: “I once saw a small child go to an electric light switch and say, ‘Mamma, can I *open* the light?’ She was using the age-old language of exploration, the language of art” (“Vorticism” 466). Although he later became interested in Fenollosa’s explanation that written Chinese characters denote action, he was first attracted to the poetics of the *hokku*, what he called “the sense of exploration . . . the beauty of this sort of knowing” (“Vorticism” 466–67). Noguchi expounded this poetics in terms of an intensive art by referring to Kikaku’s celebrated *hokku*, as discussed earlier:

Autumn’s full moon:
Lo, the shadows of a pine tree
Upon the mats!

The beauty of the harvest moon is not only humanized but intensified by the shadow of a tree Kikaku saw on the *tatami* mats. “Really,” Noguchi wrote, “it was my first opportunity to observe the full beauty of the light and shadow, more the beauty of the shadow in fact, far more luminous than the light itself, with such a decorativeness, particularly when it stamped the dustless mats as a dragon-shaped ageless pine tree” (“What Is a Hokku Poem?” 357). The situation here, shared by Pound and Noguchi, is one of finding, discovering, and hence inventing the new.

As if to bear out Pound’s vorticist thinking in poetry, Noguchi made a modest proposal for English poets. “I think,” he wrote, “it is time for them to live more of the passive side of Life and Nature, so as to make the meaning of the whole of them perfect and clear.” To the Japanese mind, an intensive art can be created not from action, but from inaction. Noguchi thus argued that the larger part of life “is builded upon the unreality by the strength of which the reality becomes intensified” (*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 24–25). Noguchi’s paradox was echoed in Pound’s statement about vorticism. To Pound, an intensive art is not an emphatic art. By an intensive art, Pound meant that “one is concerned with the relative intensity, or relative significance, of different sorts of expression. . . . They are more dynamic. I do not mean they are more emphatic, or that they are yelled louder” (“Vorticism” 468).

Pound illustrated this intensive art with a *hokku*-like sentence in his essay “Affirmations,” first published in the *New Age* in 1915:

The pine-tree in mist upon the far hill looks
like a fragment of Japanese armour.

The images appear in simile form, but Pound has no intention of intensifying the beauty of either image by comparing it to that of the other. “In either case,” he points out, “the beauty, in so far as it is beauty of form, is the result of ‘planes in relation.’ . . . The tree and the armour are beautiful because their diverse planes overlie in a certain manner.” Unlike the sculptor or the painter, the poet, who must use words to intensify his art, Pound says, “may cast on the reader’s mind a more vivid image of either the armour or the pine by mentioning them close together . . . for he works not with planes or with colours but with the names of objects and of properties. It is his business so to use, so to arrange, these names as to cast a more definite image than the layman can cast” (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 120–21).

Critics have shown over the years that Pound’s idea of vorticism underlies not only his short imagistic poems, but also his longer pieces such as the *Cantos*, *Cathay*, and his translation of *noh* plays. Noguchi, on the other hand, attempted to intensify an image in a poem longer than the *hokku* by endowing it with action and autonomy. “The Passing of Summer” (1909), for instance, reads,

An empty cup whence the light of passion is drunk!—
 To-day a sad rumour passes through the trees,
 A chill wind is borne by the stream,
 The waves shiver in pain;
 Where now the cicada’s song long and hot?

(*Pilgrimage* 1: 68)

Such visual images as an empty cup, the chilly wind blowing over the stream, and the shivering waves do not simply denote the passing of summer; they constitute its action. Similarly, experiences or memories of experiences like drinking “the light of passion” and hearing “the cicada’s song long and hot” do not merely express the poet’s nostalgia or sentiment about the summer; these images, rather than being metonymies, recreate the actions of the summer itself.²⁴ In Noguchi’s poetry, as in the *hokku*, poetry and sensation are spontaneously conjoined and intensified, to leave no room for rationalism or moralism.

6

Numerous parallels between Pound’s poetics and Noguchi’s do not entail the conclusion that both poets held the same principles throughout their respective careers. Much of Noguchi’s art and literary criticism

shows great enthusiasm at times for Yeats's mysticism and Whitman's transcendentalism.²⁵ Noguchi had a taste for certain styles of poetry that Pound obviously did not. But what their writings as a whole suggest is that both writers, as poets and critics, agreed on the ideas of imagism during the period between 1908, when *The Pilgrimage*, Noguchi's fifth collection of English poems, appeared in Tokyo and London, and 1914, when Noguchi's *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* was published in London. For Noguchi, this period came in the middle of his career, as it coincided with Pound's early career and interest in imagism. This agreement on imagism constituted an interpenetrating relationship of Japanese poetics and Western intentions in early modernism. Pound's launching of imagism in London in 1912 and 1913 with the support of T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, H. D., Richard Aldington, and others has become a legend of sorts. And much of the Imagist work by various hands began to appear in Chicago in *Poetry* and in London in *Des Imagistes* and *The Freewoman* (later *The Egoist*). But the sources that Noguchi brought to Western attention as early as 1903, when *From the Eastern Sea*, the third collection of his English poems, was published in London, have become not only obscure but neglected.

In March 1913, Pound and his associates collectively drew up and published the three principles of their "faith." The first was "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective." Noguchi would wholeheartedly have endorsed the formulation. The second principle called for "using absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation," and Noguchi had documented the practice of this tenet in the *hokku* by Japanese masters as well as in his own work. The third principle was "to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome" ("Vorticism" 462). Because the Japanese language radically differs from a Western language in rhythm, rhyme, stress, or tone, Noguchi would readily have assented to the proposal.

Much of Pound's early work and Noguchi's clearly reflects this accord between the Imagists and Noguchi. It is true that while Pound was fascinated by Japanese poetics, he was also interested in vorticism as applied to visual arts, as his commentary on such artists as Gaudier-Brzeska, Brancusi, and Picasso indicates. Through the Poets' Club, Pound was also closely associated with Hulme, Flint, Aldington, Upward, and others, some of whom were initially attracted to Japanese color prints by such painters as Utamaro and Hokusai exhibited in the British Museum. There is clear evidence that Pound's associates also tried their hand at *hokku* with various degrees of seriousness and success. By the mid-1910s, imagism had indeed become the literary

zeitgeist, and any poet living in London would have received some influence from the Japanese sources.

To sum up, then, Noguchi's English poems had been widely circulated in London well before September 1914, when Pound's vorticism essay appeared, and Noguchi's essay on *hokku* in *Rhythm* and his book *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* were published in January 1913 and March 1914, respectively. The material in the essay and the book was delivered as a series of lectures during his stay in England from December 1913 to April 1914. In these circumstances, it is hardly conceivable that the Imagists did not acquaint themselves with Noguchi's ideas. Even though Pound's modernist theory might partly have derived from other sources, one can scarcely overlook the direct link between Japanese poetics and Pound's imagism through Noguchi.

CHAPTER 6



JACK KEROUAC'S HAIKU AND BEAT POETICS

Jack Kerouac (1922–69), whose first novel, *On the Road* (1957), captured a huge audience, played a central role in the literary movement he named the Beat Generation. His second novel, *The Dharma Bums* (1958), gave an intimate biographical account of himself in search of the truth in life. In San Francisco he met Gary Snyder (1930–) and the two Dharma bums explored the thoughts and practices of Buddhism. As Snyder left for Japan to study at a Zen monastery, Kerouac reached an apogee on a desolate mountaintop in the Sierras.

The uninhibited story of Kerouac and Snyder on the West Coast also coincided with the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance. Kerouac called the event “the whole gang of howling poets” gathered at Gallery Six. In the beginning of *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac described the poetry reading:

Everyone was there. It was a mad night. And I was the one who got things jumping by going around collecting dimes and quarters from the rather stiff audience standing around in the gallery and coming back with three huge gallon jugs of California Burgundy and getting them all piffed so that by eleven o'clock when Alvah Goldbook [Allen Ginsberg] was reading his, wailing his poem “Wail” [Howl] drunk with arms outspread everybody was yelling “Go! Go! Go!” (like a jam session) and old Rheinhold Cacoethes the father of the Frisco poetry scene was wiping his tears in gladness. Japhy [Gary Snyder] himself read his fine poems about Coyote the God of the North American Plateau Indians (I think), at least the God of the Northwest Indians, Kwakiutl and what-all. “Fuck you! sang Coyote, and ran away!” read Japhy to the

distinguished audience, making them all howl with joy, it was so pure, fuck being a dirty word that comes out clean. And he had his tender lyrical lines, like the ones about bears eating berries, showing his love of animals, and great mystery lines about oxen on the Mongolian road showing his knowledge of Oriental literature even on to Hsuan Tsung the great Chinese monk who walked from China to Tibet, Lanchow to Kashgar and Mongolia carrying a stick of incense in his hand. (13–14)

Not only did this inaugural meeting of the Beat Generation feature the three well-known writers Kerouac, Snyder, and Ginsberg (1926–97), the subsequent interactions among them revealed their backgrounds and worldviews. Snyder, born in San Francisco, followed Ginsberg's first reading of "Howl" at this gathering with his own lyrical poems, as mentioned above. Later in *The Dharma Bums*, Snyder observed, "East'll meet West anyway. Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, and it'll be guys like us that can start the thing. Think of millions of guys all over the world with rucksacks on their backs tramping around the back country and hitchhiking and bringing the word down to everybody." Kerouac responded by referring to a Christian tradition he remembered as he grew up a Catholic in a French American family in Massachusetts: "That's a lot like the early days of the Crusades, Walter the Penniless and Peter the Hermit leading ragged bands of believers to the Holy Land." Snyder, admonishing Kerouac against believing in his Western legacy, said, "Yeah but that was all such European gloom and crap, I want my Dharma Bums to have springtime in their hearts when the blooms are girling and the birds are dropping little fresh turds surprising cats who wanted to eat them a moment ago" (160).

Discussing Buddhism and Zen philosophy, in particular, with Snyder, as well as reading books on Buddhism in the local libraries, Kerouac realized that Buddhism, rather than denying suffering and death, confronted both. For him, Buddhism taught one to transcend the origin of suffering and death: desire and ignorance. Most impressively, Buddhism taught Kerouac that the phenomenal world was like a dream and an illusion and that happiness consisted in achieving that strange vision in the mind—enlightenment. *The Dharma Bums* also informs that while Snyder was continuously fascinated with Zen, Kerouac was inspired by Mahayana Buddhism. To Kerouac, Zen, which teaches spontaneous, realistic action for human beings, compromises with active, worldly existence. Consequently, Zen admonished against existing in a world of temptation and evil. On the contrary, Kerouac was impressed with Mahayana Buddhism, for one's goal of life is to

achieve Buddhahood, a celestial state of enlightenment and acceptance of all forms of life.

The genesis of the Beat movement goes back to the meeting of Kerouac and Ginsberg at Columbia University in the early 1940s. Kerouac and Ginsberg, who grew up in New Jersey of Russian Jewish immigrant parents, also shared their literary interests with William Burroughs (1914–97), who hailed from Missouri. During this period, Kerouac, immersed with American transcendentalism, read Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. Kerouac was influenced by Emerson's concept of self-reliance as he learned of Whitman's singular, stubborn independence and refusal to subscribe to society's materialistic, commercial demands. At the same time it was Thoreau's writings, such as *Walden*, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, and *Variorum Civil Disobedience* that introduced Kerouac to Confucianism and Buddhism.¹

Learning about Buddhism from Thoreau, Kerouac became seriously interested in studying its philosophy. His study of Buddhism, then, led to writing *The Dharma Bums*. For Kerouac, Mahayana Buddhism served to change the state of defeat in the world that the Beat movement represented to the beatific acceptance of life the Buddhist texts described. For Gary Snyder, Zen Buddhism transformed the Beats to the Zen Lunatics, who refused "to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars. . . . I see a vision of . . . Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures" (*Dharma Bums* 77–78).

Kerouac responded, as did Snyder, to the Zen principle to establish authority in one's spontaneous and intuitive insights and actions. Kerouac took pains to see things as they existed without commentary, interpretation, and judgment. For Kerouac, and for the Beat Generation, the Zen perspective made art conform to life itself. A Zen-inspired poet must see whatever happens in life—order and disorder, permanence and change. This Zen principle partly accounts for Kerouac's rejection of the idea of revision.² With respect to spontaneous prose, Kerouac stated, "And, Not 'selectivity' of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought . . . write as deeply, fish down as far as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning—excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind" ("Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" 73).

Upon publication of *On the Road*, Kerouac was writing haiku. Thanks to Regina Weinreich's edition of *Book of Haikus* by Jack Kerouac (2003), we have a well-detailed account of Kerouac's writing of those several hundred haiku. As mentioned in *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac, while reading a number of books on Buddhism, also consulted the four-volume book on Japanese haiku by R. H. Blyth, especially the first volume, subtitled "Eastern Culture." "Kerouac's pocket notebooks," as Weinreich notes, contained "haiku entries written in New York City, Tangier, Aix-en-Provence, London, New York City again, Berkeley, Mexico, and Orlando. As the notebooks and letters of this period show, Kerouac exhorted himself to write haiku, mindful of the traditional methods" (*Book of Haikus* 106).

While abiding by the principles and techniques of haiku shown by Blyth, Kerouac realized that an English haiku cannot be composed in seventeen syllables as in Japanese. "Western languages," Kerouac noted, "cannot adapt themselves to the fluid syllabic Japanese. I propose that the 'Western Haiku' simply say a lot in three short lines in any Western language. Above all," he emphasized, "a Haiku must be very simple and free of all poetic trickery and make a little picture and yet be as airy and graceful as a Vivaldi Pastorella." He presented, as examples, three haiku by Basho, Buson, and Issa, saying they are "simpler and prettier than any Haiku I could ever write in any language" (Tonkinson 74):

A day of quiet gladness,—
Mount Fuji is veiled
In misty rain.

(Basho) (1644–1694)

The nightingale is singing,
Its small mouth
Open.

(Buson) (1715–1783)

She has put the child to sleep,
And now washes the clothes:
The summer moon.

(Issa) (1763–1827)

In each of the haiku, two images are juxtaposed: the veiled Mount Fuji and the misty rain in Basho's haiku, the singing nightingale and its open mouth in Buson's, and the mother having put her child to sleep and washing the clothes and the summer moon in Issa's. Kerouac said in his *Paris Review* interview, "A sentence that's short and sweet with a sudden jump of thought is a kind of haiku, and there's a lot of freedom and fun in surprising yourself with that, let the mind willy-nilly jump from the branch to the bird" (Weinreich, *Book of Haikus* xxiv–xxv).

As Kerouac's *Book of Haikus* indicates, Kerouac continuously wrote haiku to render the Beats' worldview. "For a new generation of poets," Weinreich has observed, "Kerouac ended up breaking ground at a pioneering stage of an American haiku movement" (*Book of Haikus* xv). Allen Ginsberg celebrated Kerouac's haiku:

Kerouac has the one sign of being a great poet, which is he's the only one in the United States who knows how to write haikus. The only one who's written any good haikus. And everybody's been writing haikus. There are all these dreary haikus written by people who think for weeks trying to write a haiku, and finally come up with some dull little thing or something. Whereas Kerouac thinks in haikus, every time he writes anything—talks that way and thinks that way. So it's just natural for him. It's something Snyder noticed. Snyder has to labor for years in a Zen monastery to produce one haiku about shitting off a log! And actually does get one or two good ones. Snyder was always astounded by Kerouac's facility. (Lynch 123–24)

There were, however, some poets who were not enthusiastic about Kerouac's haiku. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who was associated with the Beat writers and the San Francisco Renaissance poets and who, founding his own press, published his friend Allen Ginsberg's work, said that Kerouac "was a better novel writer than a poem writer" (Gifford and Lee 271).

As many of the classic haiku poets in Japan like Basho were influenced by Confucian thought, so was Kerouac. In the first volume, *Haiku: Eastern Culture*, which Kerouac studied in earnest, Blyth explains that, according to Confucius, the universe consists of heaven, earth, and humans. *The Analects*, a collection of Confucian maxims and parables, contains Confucius's thoughts and observations on the relationships among heaven, humans, and God. For Confucius, God is not a living being like a human being: God is a concept that originated from a

human being. The individual living in society must formulate this concept by understanding the ways of nature in heaven and on earth. One is conscious of the supremacy of heaven over earth and humans.

Some of Kerouac's haiku express this worldview, for example,

Reflected upsidedown,
 in the sunset lake, pines
 Pointing to infinity

(*Book of Haikus* 101)

This haiku focuses on an image of the universe that makes human existence infinitesimal, in contrast to an infinite space that represents the universe. The image of pines reflected in the lake bears a resemblance to that of "the sacred pine-tree" in Emerson's poem "The Problem":

Or how the sacred pine-tree adds
 To her old leaves new myriads?

(*Selections* 418)

Kerouac is impressed, as is Emerson, with the infinity of the universe. Emerson's argument is that divinity that represents the universe is proven by nature, not by the church or human achievements like huge pyramids in Egypt and ancient temples in Greece. Similarly, Kerouac envisions the scope of the universe by looking at the pines reflected upside down in the sunset lake.³

Kerouac's haiku "The Backyard I Tried to Draw" has an affinity with Basho's "The Mountains and Garden Also Move" in its expression of the Confucian worldview:

The backyard I tried to draw
 —It still looks
 The same

(*Book of Haikus* 117)

The mountains and garden also move;
 The summer drawing-room
 Includes them.

(Blyth, *Haiku* 38)

The garden in Basho's haiku represents a space shared by human beings and the earth. So does the backyard in Kerouac's haiku. Both images suggest that despite the human creation of the space, they still belong to the earth, a permanent space under heaven. Similarly, Kerouac's haiku "Dusk—The Blizzard" and Emerson's poem "The Snow-Storm" both express the Confucian worldview:

Dusk—The blizzard
 hides everything,
 Even the night

(*Book of Haikus* 38)

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
 Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
 Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
 Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
 And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.

(*Selections* 414)

Both poems depict the supremacy of heaven over the earth and human beings.

The following haiku by Kerouac also describe the control the universe has over the earth and humanity:

Following each other,
 my cats stop
 When it thunders

(*Book of Haikus* 27)

The summer chair
 rocking by itself
 In the blizzard

(36)

In these haiku, the phenomena above the earth and human beings have control over them. The first haiku, "Following Each Other," captures the moment when the thunderstorm halts the cats' movement. In the second haiku, "The Summer Chair," the blizzard rather than a human being is rocking the chair. Another haiku on the same subject, "In the

sun / the butterfly wings / Like a church window” (62), suggests that human law must follow the law of the universe. So does the haiku “THE LIGHT BULB / SUDDENLY WENT OUT— / STOPPED READING” (64): at night, without light from the sun, humans cannot see.

Confucianism, as Blyth shows, teaches “the sense of something that feeds the life of man, which can be absorbed into our own life and yet have a life of its own, which is organic and glowing” (*Haiku* 71). Some of Kerouac’s haiku convey the Confucian thought that life in whatever form it exists is organic and changeable. For example,

May grass—
 Nothing much
 To do

(118)

illustrates a phenomenon in nature: May grass, with rain and sun, grows naturally and vigorously. In the following haiku,

Sex—shaking to breed
 as
 Providence permits

(91)

sexuality is viewed as something that is organic and divine, as Whitman in “Song of Myself” wrote,

Urge and urge and urge,
 Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance,
 always substance and increase, always sex,
 Always a knit of identity, always distinction,
 always a breed of life.

(Complete Poetry 26)

Another haiku by Kerouac,

Waiting for the leaves
 to fall;—
 There goes one!

(Book of Haikus 32)

not only illustrates an organic phenomenon, but captures a moment of change in nature. In the following haiku,

No telegram today
 —Only more
 Leaves fell

(5)

juxtaposing humanity to nature, Kerouac observes that nature is far more organic and far less isolated than humanity.

Several of Kerouac's haiku reflect a Confucian perspective that all things in the universe are related and united:

The tree looks
 like a dog
 Barking at Heaven

(3)

Not only does this piece show the relatedness of a tree, a dog, and Heaven, it intimates the sense that the dog and the tree, the animate and the inanimate, are united. This haiku recalls an illusion expressed in Moritake's haiku, which Ezra Pound quoted in his "Vorticism" essay:⁴

The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:
 A butterfly

("Vorticism" 467)

Another haiku by Kerouac on the same subject,

Shooting star!—no,
 lightning bug!—
 ah well, June night

(*Book of Haikus* 151)

also depicts an illusion, as does Kerouac's "The Tree Looks" above, both haiku illustrating the Confucian thought that all things in the universe are related.

Some other haiku convey the conflated vision of Confucianism and Buddhism that all the living on earth are related and united:

Frozen
 in the birdbath,
 A leaf

(5)

This piece conveys the Buddhist doctrine that all things, even the inanimate, have the Buddha nature. The reason for Kerouac's stronger attraction to Buddhism than to Christianity was his realization that Buddhists believed in the existence and transmigration of the soul in animals as well as in human beings as Christians did not.⁵ Not only are the bird and a leaf in this haiku, "Frozen," related, water and ice unite them as if their souls transmigrate between them.

Still other haiku, while illustrating the Confucian and Buddhist perspective of the world that the animate and the inanimate are united, express irony and humor:

After the shower,
 among the drenched roses,
 The bird thrashing in the bath

(14)

In "After the Shower," while the roses are benefiting from rainwater, the bird, thrashing in the water, appears uncomfortable. But from a human point of view, the bird also is benefiting from the rainwater, which cleans it as if the bird were taking a bath. In the following piece,

Bee, why are you
 staring at me?
 I'm not a flower!

(15)

Kerouac is expressing the bee's perspective: a flower and a human being are the same, the difference being that a flower might provide a bee with honey, whereas a human being might be the bee's enemy. Another piece on the same topic,

Ignoring my bread,
 The bird pecking
 In the grass

(24)

expresses irony, for seeds in the grass for the bird are far more delicious than bread, a representation of human products. Another similar haiku,

Looking for my cat
 in the weeds,
 I found a butterfly

(40)

is ironic and humorous, because humans unexpectedly discover beautiful things in the ugly. The perspectives of nature and humanity differ, those of beauty in particular.

Like Thoreau, Kerouac lived in close contact with nature throughout his career. He seldom stayed home for a long period of time, except for writing. He took every opportunity to practice Buddhist meditation in open fields and on high mountains. Mahayana Buddhism taught him that all things, even the inanimate, possess the Buddha nature. In *Haiku: Eastern Culture*, Blyth observed, "The scale of beings in the Buddhist universe puts man midway. The primitive animistic ideas of Japanese fall in with Buddhist system, and all are united by the theory of transmigration" (19). The hours of study and meditation Kerouac spent became a reaffirmation of his belief in and compassion for all beings. In *The Dharma Bums* he wrote, "I know I'm empty, awake, and that there's no difference between me and anything else. In other words it means that I've become the same as everything else. It means I've become a Buddha." Then he said, "I felt great compassion for the trees because we were the same thing; I petted the dogs who didn't argue with me ever. All dogs love God. They're wiser than their masters. I told that to the dogs, too, they listened to me perking up their ears and licking my face. They didn't care one way or the other as long as I was there" (115).

Kerouac accomplished his search for Buddhahood on Mount Hozomeen as he heard thunder. All of a sudden he saw "a green and rose rainbow shafted right down into Starvation Ridge not three hundred yards away from my door, like a bolt, like a pillar: it came among steaming clouds and orange sun turmoiling.

What is a rainbow, Lord?
 A hoop
 For the lowly.

The rain, as he described, "hooped right into Lightning Creek, rain and snow fell simultaneous, the lake was milkwhite a mile below, it

was just too crazy.” At dusk he “meditated in the yellow half moon of August. Whenever I heard thunder in the mountains it was like the iron of my mother’s love” (*Dharma Bums* 189–90).⁶ As he descended Mount Hozomeen, he saw “on the lake rosy reflections of celestial vapor,” and said, “God, I love you. . . . I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other” (91).

Evoking the name of God, Kerouac was conflating the concept of God, with which he grew up a Christian, and the Buddhahood he now acquired through his study and meditation. He learned that Mahayana Buddhism puts more emphasis on compassion and love than does Confucianism. For Kerouac, the doctrine that all things in the universe have the Buddha nature distinguished Buddhism from Confucianism as well as from Christianity. The concept of Buddhahood thus inspired him to love and have compassion for all things, the animate and the inanimate, the human and the subhuman.⁷ In several of his haiku, he directly expressed his achievement of Buddhahood:

I close my eyes—
I hear & see
Mandala

(85)

“I Close My Eyes” envisions the self in an image of Mandala, a Buddhist divinity. Another piece on Buddha, “The Mountains” (86), depicts an image of Buddha in terms of nature rather than a figure. In another haiku, “While Meditating” (97), Buddha is defined as a concept; a meditation yields such a concept. Kerouac is illustrating the Buddhist enlightenment by which to reach a state of mind in which one has effaced subjectivity and attained satori.

From time to time Kerouac indirectly portrays in his haiku the attainment of satori, for example,

Quietly pouring coffee
in the afternoon,
How pleasant!

(47)

Such a haiku expresses comfort and peace of mind that derive from the tranquility of one’s environment. The haiku “Hot Coffee” conveys a similar sentiment:

Hot coffee
 and a cigarette—
 Why zazen?

(88)

In contrast to the previous haiku, this one can be read as an argument against drinking coffee and smoking. Kerouac wondered if drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette might prevent the mind from attaining satori. He thus questioned why *zazen*, a practice of Zen, would result in the attainment of satori. The argument against drinking and smoking is reminiscent of Thoreau's admonition against such activities.⁸

Kerouac's love and compassion was extended to the nonhuman livings, as shown in some of his best haiku:

In my medicine cabinet
 the winter fly
 Has died of old age

(12)

A bird on
 the branch out there
 —I waved

(33)

In the first piece, "In My Medicine Cabinet," humanity is pitted against nature. It is ironic that as medicine helps humans, it does not help flies. Not only does this haiku express sympathy for the death of a fly that people would not like to see in their home, but it also suggests that the fly would have died peacefully outdoors. "A Bird on," on the other hand, not only expresses the feeling of love and friendship a person has for a bird, but it also captures a moment of affinity between the two livings, the unity of humanity and nature.

In the following haiku, Kerouac demonstrates the Buddhist doctrine of mercy and compassion in contrast to Christianity:

Shall I say no?
 —fly rubbing
 its back legs

(78)

This piece suggests that Kerouac composed it in praise of Issa's famous haiku on a fly:

You dare not strike him!
The fly is praying with hands
And with legs.

In this haiku by Kerouac,

Shall I break God's commandment?
Little fly
Rubbing its back legs

(109)

by invoking God's Commandment in the second haiku, he is conflating the Christian doctrine with the Buddhist doctrine of mercy, which the first haiku "Shall I Say No?" expresses. In the following piece on the same subject,

Woke up groaning
with a dream of a priest
Eating chicken necks

(31)

the poet betrays a nightmare a Christian-converted Buddhist would have. This haiku suggests Kerouac's view of Christians' cruelty to animals in contrast to Buddhists' belief in the existence of soul in animals.

Not only was Kerouac influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, especially its doctrine of Buddhahood and mercy, but he also became interested in Zen Buddhism as he discussed its philosophy and practice with Gary Snyder, who studied Zen in Japanese monasteries. In *Nozarashi Kiko* (*A Travel Account of My Exposure in the Fields*), Basho, a Zen Buddhist, wrote, "When I set out on my journey of a thousand leagues I packed no provisions for the road. I clung to the staff of that pilgrim of old who, it is said, 'entered the realm of nothingness under the moon after midnight'" (Keene 81). Several of Kerouac's haiku depict "the realm of nothingness":

Everywhere beyond
the Truth,
Empty space blue

(86)

“Everywhere Beyond” is reminiscent of the empty space the whiteness of the whale symbolizes in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*.⁹ Another piece on the Zen state of mind

Spring day—
 in my mind
 Nothing

(124)

bears a resemblance to Richard Wright’s haiku:

It is September,
 The month in which I was born;
 And I have no thoughts.

(Wright, *Haiku* 127)

To enter the state of nothingness, one must annihilate oneself. The undisciplined self is often misguided by egotism. In *Zen*, one’s self-reliance precludes the attainment of *satori*, because one’s consciousness of self means that one is not completely free of one’s thoughts and feelings and has not identified self with the absolute. Whereas in Mahayana Buddhism, as practiced in the Jodo sect in Japan, one can achieve one’s salvation by praying to the Buddha, *Zen Buddhism*, as practiced in the Rinzai sect, urges its followers even to “kill the Buddha” for them to attain their enlightenment. Some of Kerouac’s haiku convey Rinzai’s admonition:

There’s no Buddha
 because
 There’s no me

(*Book of Haikus* 75)

I called Hanshan
 in the mountains
 —there was no answer

(93)

All these haiku express the *Zen* discipline of mind that the ultimate truth lies not in self or another person, or even a divine figure such as Buddha and Christ. The ultimate truth emerges in the state of

nothingness—nature itself. Shiki, a nineteenth-century Japanese haiku poet, expressed a similar point of view in this haiku:

The wind in autumn
As for me, there are no gods,
There are no Buddhas.

As the following haiku by Kerouac show, effacing the subject, the suppression of egotism, is expressed indirectly:

The trees are putting on
Noh plays—
Booming, roaring

(125)

“The Trees Are Putting On” is a portrayal of nature that has nothing to do with the subject who is watching the trees. At the same time, the trees are likened to *nob* plays, which enact the Zen doctrine that one must suppress egotism and subjectivity. Another piece on the Zen discipline of mind

The train speeding
thru emptiness
—I was a trainman

(125)

describes the subject, a train speeding emptiness, a space that constitutes the realm of nothingness. The subject, which is infinitesimal and is pitted against a vast space, cannot claim its place in it. Another haiku on the absence of human subjectivity

Lay the pencil
away—no more
thoughts, no lead

(139)

concerns the state of nothingness, where human thoughts cannot enter.

Still some other haiku intimate that human subjectivity is irrelevant and suspect:

I said a joke
 under the stars
 —No laughter

(39)

“You’d Be Surprised” (65), like “I Said a Joke,” is a haiku that undermines knowledge and that knowledge originates in nature. Both haiku illustrate the human mind, subjectivity, is negligible as opposed to nature, objectivity. In another haiku, “Take up a Cup of Water” (66), Kerouac tries to prove how small and irrelevant an individual is in the midst of an ocean. Another haiku on the same subject, “Or, Walking the Same or Different” (66), not only demonstrates the primacy of nature over humanity but also describes how human action is dictated by universal law: human existence is as ephemeral as nature is ubiquitous.

As a Beat writer, Kerouac was inspired by the Zen doctrine that to attain enlightenment is to reach the state of nothingness. Not only is this state of mind free of human subjectivity and egotism, but it is even free of religious conception. The Rinzai Zen, as noted earlier, teaches its followers that if they see Buddha in their meditations, they must “kill” him. At the same time, Kerouac was deeply influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, which teaches that one can achieve Buddhahood in life or death and that the human soul, buttressed by the virtues of mercy and compassion, transmigrates from one living to another.

In *The Dharma Bums*, Gary Snyder, a Zen Buddhist, had a dialogue with Kerouac, a Mahayana Buddhist, that revealed the two different religiosities the two branches of Buddhism represented. Snyder said to Kerouac, “I appreciate your sadness about the world. ‘Tis indeed. Look at that party the other night. Everybody wanted to have a good time and tried real hard but we all woke up the next day feeling sorta sad and separate. What do you think about death . . . ?” Kerouac responded, “I think death is our reward. When we die we go straight to nirvana Heaven and that’s that” (159). In “On the Beat Generation,” an unpublished scroll manuscript, Kerouac wrote, “Beat Generation means a generation passed over into eternity. . . . The last trembling of a leaf, at being one with all time, a sudden brilliance of redness in the fall. . . . The beat generation knows all about haikus” (*Book of Haikus* 127). Kerouac’s observations of the Beat Generation suggest that the Beat poetics is not to describe the life of the beaten but to celebrate the life of the beatific. For Kerouac, and

for the Beat generation, the state of beatitude can be attained in life or death. This haiku

The bottoms of my shoes
are clean
From walking in the rain

(8)

suggests that, ironically, nature, which is organic, is cleaner than humanity, which is less organic. Likewise, another haiku on the same topic, “In Back of the Supermarket” (18), ironically suggesting the supremacy of nature over humanity, contains an image of natural beauty in an unnatural environment. In “Glow Worms” (137), Kerouac is envious of the glow worms sleeping on his flowers, which are oblivious of the chaotic society of which he is a member. This haiku has an affinity with Frost’s “After Apple-Picking,” in which Frost is as envious of the woodchuck’s peaceful hibernation as he is afraid of a nightmare caused by the chaotic world.¹⁰ In this haiku by Kerouac,

Am I a flower
bee, that you
Stare at me?

(155)

Kerouac is flattered: to the bee he looks as attractive as a flower, an image of beatitude.

Wandering in the fields and the woods, as Kerouac describes in *The Dharma Bums*, he thought that “the substance of my bones and their bones and the bones of dead men in the earth of rain at night is the common individual substance that is everlastingly tranquil and blissful?” A thought occurred to him: “Raindrops are ecstasy, raindrops are not different from ecstasy, neither is ecstasy different from raindrops, yea, ecstasy is raindrops, rain on, O cloud!” (110). Many of the haiku collected in his notebooks, “V. 1958–1959: Beat Generation Haikus / Autumn,” and “VI. 1960–1966: Northport Haikus / Winter,” describe what he called “ecstasy”:

The droopy constellation
on the grassy hill—
Emily Dickinson’s Tomb

(154)

In enormous blizzard
 burying everything
 My cat's out mating

(164)

Because the aim of a Beat poet is to reach eternity, the first haiku, "The Droopy Constellation," is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's poetry. In such poems as "I Died for Beauty" and "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," Dickinson describes her journey to eternity.¹¹ In the second haiku, "In Enormous Blizzard," an image of a powerful blizzard burying everything on earth suggests death and eternity, but it is juxtaposed to an image of love-making that suggest life and ecstasy. This piece bears a resemblance to Basho's "The Love of the Cats":

The love of the cats;
 When it was over, the hazy moon
 Over the bed-chamber.

(Blyth, *Haiku* 264)

Both of Kerouac's haiku suggest there is ecstasy in life and death, love and eternity.

Kerouac's Beat poetics, based on Zen doctrine, led to his concept of individual freedom. Lying on his bag smoking, as Kerouac describes his experience in *The Dharma Bums*, he thought, "Everything is possible. I am God, I am Buddha, I am imperfect Ray Smith, all at the same time, I am empty space, I am all things. I have all the time in the world from life to life to do what is to do, to do what is done, to do the timeless doing, infinitely perfect within, why cry, why worry, perfect like mind essence and the minds of banana peels" (97). Later, envisioning "the bliss of the Buddha-fields," he wrote, "I saw that my life was a vast glowing empty page and I could do anything I wanted" (117). Earlier in the novel, he also recounts the life of a truck driver who gave him a ride when he was hitchhiking to visit his mother in North Carolina. He found that the driver "had a nice home in Ohio with wife, daughter, Christmas tree, two cars, garage, lawn, lawnmower, but he couldn't enjoy any of it because he really wasn't free" (102).

In his notebook collection, "Beat Generation Haikus, 1958-1959," Kerouac included the following piece, which deals with individual freedom:

Jack reads his book
 aloud at nite
 —the stars come out.

(*Book of Haikus* 133)

This haiku challenges the Zen concept of *mu* and asserts human subjectivity. Declaring his own ideas, Kerouac is able to find his audience. His call and the stars' response suggest that his vision of the world is as objective as the world's vision of him is subjective. Such a haiku is reminiscent of Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken."¹² Like Frost, Kerouac takes pride in being free and being a nonconformist. Kerouac's haiku, such as "On Desolation / I was the lonest man / in the world" (136) and "High noon / in Northport / —Alien shore" (137) also reflect individual freedom and autonomy. "On Desolation" and "High Noon" both cherish Kerouac's state of mind dictated by no one but himself. To him, alienation from a corrupt society will lead him to nirvana. Both haiku recall Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues," in which a blues musician takes pride in his alienation and autonomy.¹³ The following piece, "Reading the Sutra," recounts that the Buddhist scripture inspired Kerouac to attain enlightenment by decisive action on his part:

Reading the sutra
 I decided
 To go straight

(143)

This haiku has an affinity with Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool," in which the African American pool players are portrayed as daring individuals who enjoyed living freely on their instincts as did the beatniks.¹⁴

Not only are Kerouac's Beat Generation haiku poignant expressions of freedom and individualism, many of them can be read as direct indictments against materialistic society. Such haiku as "Perfect moonlit night / marred / By family squabble" (17) and "A quiet Autumn night / and these fools / Are starting to argue" (177) thrive on the images of celestial beauty. The image of the universe in harmony, however, is juxtaposed to the image of society in conflict. Such a haiku above is in contrast to another Beat Generation haiku by Kerouac:

Ah, the crickets
 are screaming
at the moon

(140)

In this piece the crickets, as they scream at the moon, the preeminent object in the sky, do not quarrel among themselves. This haiku suggests that human beings, by contrast, at times scream to one another rather than talk about beautiful things on earth and in the sky. In the following haiku

Desk cluttered
 with mail—
My mind is quiet

(145)

Kerouac is able to attain his peace of mind, despite the image of a cluttered desk representing a chaotic society in which the Beat poet lives.

In sum, Kerouac early in his career was well versed in the writings of American transcendentalists, such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, as well as in Emily Dickinson's poetry. He also found American transcendentalists well acquainted with Confucianism and Buddhism. Through his friendship with such Beat poets as Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, as well as through his studies of Buddhism, Zen, and R. H. Blyth's volume, *Haiku: Eastern Culture* in particular, Kerouac firmly established his poetics. The numerous haiku he wrote reflect his fascination with Mahayana Buddhism, as well as with Zen philosophy. What is remarkable about his haiku is that not only was he influenced by the books he read, but he was also inspired by his own experience in wandering and meditating in the fields and on the mountains.

CHAPTER 7



RICHARD WRIGHT'S HAIKU, ZEN, AND THE AFRICAN "PRIMAL OUTLOOK UPON LIFE"

Richard Wright is acclaimed for his powerful prose in *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), books that he wrote early in his career. But later in his life he became interested in poetry, especially the haiku. In the 1950s he liked to work in the garden on his Normandy farm, an activity that supplied many themes for his haiku (Fabre, *Unfinished Quest* 447). Of Wright's other experiences in this period, his travels to the newly independent Ghana in West Africa are also reflected in his haiku. The African philosophy of life Wright witnessed among the Ashanti, the "primal outlook upon life," as he called it, served as an inspiration for his poetic sensibility (*Black Power* 266).

By the spring of 1960, Wright informed his friend and Dutch translator Margrit de Sablonière that he had returned to poetry and added, "During my illness I experimented with the Japanese form of poetry called haiku; I wrote some 4,000 of them and am now sifting them out to see if they are any good." In his discussion of this development, Michel Fabre notes that Wright's interest in haiku involved research into the great Japanese masters, Basho, Buson, and Issa; he ignored the European and American forms that were then becoming popular. Fabre states further that "Wright made an effort to respect the exact form of the poem" but adds that it was curious for Wright to become interested in haiku at a time when he was fighting illness. As Fabre reasons, "Logically he should have been tempted to turn away from 'pure' literature and to use his pen instead as a weapon" (*Unfinished Quest* 505-6).

Constance Webb says that Wright had lost his physical energy and that “while lying against the pillows one afternoon he picked up the small book of Japanese poetry and began to read it again” (Webb 393). Apparently, Wright had borrowed it from a friend, a South African poet.¹ Wright read and reread the classic haiku collected in the book. Webb comments that Wright “had to study it and study to find out why it struck his ear with such a modern note” (Webb 387). The haiku “seemed to answer the rawness he felt, which had, in turn, created a sensitivity that ached. Never had he been so sensitive, as if his nervous system had been exposed to rough air” (Webb 393). In a letter to Paul Reynolds, his friend and literary agent, Wright explained that he had sent to William Targ of the World Publishing Company an eighty-two-page manuscript of haiku titled *This Other World: Projections in the Haiku Manner*. After a few comments about Targ, Wright went on to say, “These poems are the results of my being in bed a great deal and it is likely that they are bad. I don’t know” (Webb 394).

That manuscript had not been published in its entirety until 1998.² We will never fully know the reasons why Wright turned to haiku during the last years of his life, but a reading of the haiku in *This Other World*, as well as the rest of his haiku, indicates that Wright turned away from the moral, intellectual, social, and political problems dealt with in his prose work and found in nature his latent poetic sensibility. Gwendolyn Brooks called Wright’s haiku collected in *This Other World* “a clutch of strong flowers.”³ Wright’s daughter remarks in her introduction to the volume, “These haiku not only helped him place the volcanic experience of mourning under the self-control of closely counted syllables, but also enabled him to come to terms with the difficult beauty of the earth in which his mother would be laid to rest.”⁴ Wright’s discovery of haiku, as Fabre says, “brings to light an often neglected aspect of the writer’s personality: his intimate sense of the universal harmony, his wonder before life, his thirst for a natural existence, all these tendencies which nourished, as much as did any ideology or faith, his courageous and incessant battle against all that prevents an individual from fully belonging to the world” (“Poetry of Wright” 271).

The genesis of Wright’s poetic sensibility can be glimpsed in his “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” even though its theory is Marxist. An African American writer’s perspective, Wright states, “is that part of a poem, novel, or play which a writer never puts directly upon paper. It is that fixed point in intellectual space where a writer stands to view the struggles, hopes, and sufferings of his people” (“Blueprint” 45). Wright establishes this vantage point in the autobiographical prose of *Black Boy*, yet he also consciously creates there a poetic vision

of nature through and against which racial conflict is depicted. The poetic passages in *Black Boy* demonstrate Wright's incipient interest in the exaltation of nature and show the congeniality of images from nature to his sensibility.

On the basis of J. B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God*, Wright was persuaded of the African belief that spirits reside in inanimate objects like trees, stones, and rivers. Wright also adopted an African belief in ghosts and in the spirits of the dead, which meant that life and death are not diametrically opposed. "Life in the ghost world," he remarks, "is an exact duplicate of life in this world. A farmer in this world is a farmer there; a chief here is a chief there. It is, therefore, of decisive importance when one enters that world of ghostly shades to enter it in the right manner. For you can be snubbed there just as effectively and humiliatingly as you were snubbed here" (*Black Power* 214). This African religion furthermore does not recognize the existence of hell and sin, nor does it distinguish in the abstract between good and evil. "When the family is the chief idea," Wright quotes Danquah as saying, "things that are dishonorable and undignified, actions that in disgracing you disgrace the family, are held to be vices, and the highest virtue is found in honor and dignity. Tradition is the determinant of what is right and just, what is good and done." Whereas the Akan religion and Christianity share the concept of life after death, the Akan religion also resembles other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism in its belief in reincarnation. Unlike Christianity, the Akan religion, as do Buddhism and Hinduism, believes in the existence of soul in nonhuman beings. "Death," Wright observes, "does not round off life; it is not the end; it complements life." To him the African religion looks "terrifying" but not "primitive" (*Black Power* 215-17).

One of the theoretical principles in "Blueprint" calls for African American writers to explore universal humanism, what is common among all cultures. "Every iota of gain in human thought and sensibility," Wright argues, "should be ready grist for his mill, no matter how far-fetched they may seem in their immediate implications" ("Blueprint" 45). After a journey into the Ashanti kingdom in West Africa in 1953, when he was forty-five, Wright asserted in *Black Power*, "The truth is that the question of how much of Africa has survived in the New World is misnamed when termed 'African survivals.' The African attitude toward life springs from a natural and poetic grasp of existence and all the emotional implications that such an attitude carries; it is clear, then, that what the anthropologists have been trying to explain are not 'African survivals' at all—they are but the retention

of basic and primal attitudes toward life" (*Black Power* 266). Wright's exploration of the Ashanti convinced him that the defense of African culture meant renewal of Africans' faith in themselves. He came to see African culture buttressed by traditional human values—awe of nature, family kinship and love, the sense of honor—that had made the African survivals possible.

When an African was transplanted to Europe or America, as Wright observed, that person identified himself or herself with the rational, urban, and economic way of life in the West but retained his or her traditional values. In particular, the transplanted African kept intact the awe of nature. That person, Wright argued, "remains black and becomes American, English, or French" but "to the degree that he fails to adjust, to absorb the new environment (and this will be mainly for racial and economic reasons!), he, to that degree, and of necessity, will retain much of his primal outlook upon life, his basically poetic apprehension of existence." The way in which the African sees nature, as Wright realized, is humanistic and is not materialistic. "The tribal African's culture," Wright argued, "is primally human; that which *all* men once had as their warm, indigenous way of living, is his. . . . There is nothing mystical or biological about it. When one realizes that one is dealing with two distinct and separate worlds of psychological being, two conceptions of time even, the problem becomes clear; it is a clash between two systems of culture" (*Black Power* 266).

If the African American, such as Wright himself, retained, in time or for a time, this "primal" outlook on life, it was because that person was unable to "see or feel or trust (at that moment in history) any other system of value or belief": "What the social scientist should seek for are not 'African survivals' at all, but the persistence and vitality of primal attitudes and the social causes thereof. And he would discover that the same primal attitudes exist among other people; after all, what are the basic promptings of artists, poets, and actors but primal attitudes consciously held?" (*Black Power* 267). When Wright studied R. H. Blyth's four volumes on the art and history of haiku,⁵ he was struck with a strong affinity between the worldview that underlies haiku and the African "primal outlook upon life" that buttresses Ashanti culture, one of the oldest in Africa. Unlike Western romantic poetry and even the earlier Japanese poetry called *waka*, Blyth observes that haiku "is as near to life and nature as possible, as far from literature and fine writing as may be, so that the asceticism is art and the art is asceticism" (*History* 1: 1). Blyth's definition of haiku as an ascetic art means that the classic haiku by such masters as Basho, Buson, and Issa that Wright emulated, strictly concern objects and phenomena in nature.

In composing a haiku, the poet must, at first, observe an object or phenomenon in nature from a perspective devoid of thoughts and feelings. Only after the poet attains that stance and vision will the poet be able to achieve a harmonious union with nature.

The haiku poet's perspective without egotism bears a strong resemblance to the African's view of nature and self. In African life, Wright saw a closer relationship between human beings and nature than that between human beings and their social and political environment: "Africa, with its high rain forest, with its stifling heat and lush vegetation, might well be mankind's queerest laboratory. Here instinct ruled and flowered without being concerned with the nature of the physical structure of the world; man lived without too much effort; there was nothing to distract him from concentrating upon the currents and countercurrents of his heart. He was thus free to project out of himself what he thought he was. Man has lived here in a waking dream, and, to some extent, he still lives here in that dream." Africa evokes in one "a total attitude toward life, calling into question the basic assumptions of existence" (*Black Power* 159). Wright was moreover fascinated by the African reverence for the nonhuman living, a primal attitude that corresponds to the haiku poet's awe of nature. He thus observed, "The pre-Christian African was impressed with the littleness of himself and he walked the earth warily, lest he disturb the presence of invisible gods. When he wanted to disrupt the terrible majesty of the ocean in order to fish, he first made sacrifices to its crashing and rolling waves; he dared not cut down a tree without first propitiating its spirit so that it would not haunt him; he loved his fragile life and he was convinced that the tree loved its life also" (*Black Power* 261–62). For Wright, not only do the African and the haiku poet share an intuitive, selfless worldview, but they also have the common belief that humankind does not occupy the central place in the world.

In studying Blyth's analysis and reading of classic haiku, Wright learned that haiku masters were able to present in direct statement the paradox of union with nature, expressing the desire to be a part of nature while simultaneously maintaining their separate identity. Born and trained in Western culture and tradition, Wright as an artist must have struggled to develop such a characteristic in his haiku. Classic haiku call for simplicity of language, thought, and image, a lack of complication often revealed in the spontaneous joy of union with nature. The joy, Blyth points out, comes from "the (apparent) re-union of ourselves with things," our being among others (*Haiku* 9). Austerity on the part of the poet is not only a lack of intellectualization; it is almost a wordlessness, a condition in which words are

used not to externalize the poet's state of feeling, but to "clear away something that seems to stand between" the poet and things in the world. Because things in the world are not actually separate from the poet, they "are then perceived by self-knowledge" (*Haiku* 176). Classic haiku, as Wright learned, remove as many words as possible, stressing nonintellectuality, for thought must depend on and not substitute for intuition.

Another major characteristic of haiku that Wright learned is a love of nature that is inseparable from the ordinary. For Blyth this characteristic is explained in terms of selflessness, meaning that the poet has identified with nature. The loss of the poet's individuality involves a generalized melancholy or loneliness as an underlying rhythm. It represents the state of Zen, of "absolute spiritual poverty in which, having nothing, we possess all" (*Haiku* 162). In Zen-inspired haiku, the material or the concrete is emphasized without the expression of any general principles of abstract reasoning. Animate and inanimate lose their differences, so that one might say haiku are not about human beings but about things. Zen teaches, as Blyth observes, that the ordinary thing and the love of nature are reduced to a detached love of life as it is, without idealistic, moralistic, or ethical attachments. Things are equal to human beings; both exist through and because of each other.

Directly concerned with objects and phenomena in nature, a classic haiku poet like Basho completely suppressed subjectivity. So did Jack Kerouac, as noted earlier, in many of the haiku he was inspired to write by the state of Zen. Wright also attempted to do so as much as possible in many of his haiku. His interest in this doctrine in Zen, the effacement of subjectivity, is reflected in his haiku numbered 508:

508. It is September
 The month in which I was born;
 And I have no thoughts.

In the first haiku in *Haiku: This Other World*, Wright, as the subject as well as the narrator, describes himself deprived of his name and of his subjectivity:

1. I am nobody:
 A red sinking autumn sun
 Took my name away.

The wood in the following haiku is not an ordinary scene; it now exists with different meaning:

809. Why did this spring wood
Grow so silent when I came?
 What was happening?

In the next haiku, Wright tries to suppress egotism and attain a state of nothingness:

721. As my anger ebbs,
The spring stars grow bright again
 And the wind returns.

As he relieves himself of anger, he begins to see the stars “grow bright again” and “the wind” return. Only when he reaches a state of nothingness is he able to perceive nature with his enlightened senses.

In some of his haiku, as the following examples show, Wright offers simple scenes in which human beings and nature exist in harmony, in contrast to complex, intriguing scenes in society where people are at strife.

42. Seen from a hilltop,
Shadowy in winter rain,
 A man and his mule.
377. In the winter dusk,
A thin girl leads a black cow
 By a dragging rope.
541. After the sermon,
The preacher's voice is still heard
 In the caws of crows.

“Seen from a Hilltop” (42) finds unity in humankind and nature: a man, a mule, a rain, a meadow, and a hill. “In the Winter Dusk” (377), like “Seen from a Hilltop” (42), is a direct description of the scene where a girl lives in harmony with an animal. It is not clear whether a girl leads a cow or the cow her. Since the rope is dragging, neither the girl nor the cow is forcing the other to move. Creating such an ambiguous image intensifies the unity and harmony between the living. In “After the Sermon” (541), the seasonal reference is ambiguous, but Wright finds a continuity between humanity and nature, “the preacher’s voice” and “the caws of crows.”⁶

Whether perceiving nature for its own sake or in its relation to humankind, Wright's haiku thrive on the subtle interactions among the senses captured in seventeen syllables. For instance, in number 47, the poet seems to detach himself from a natural scene:

47. The spring lingers on
 In the scent of a damp log
 Rotting in the sun.

The feeling of the warm sun, the scent of a damp log, the sight and silence of an outdoor scene, all coalesce into an image of spring. In the process the overall image has evolved from the separate images of the sun, the log, and the atmosphere. The images of sight, moreover, are intertwined with the images of warmth from the sun and the rotting log as well as with the image of smell from the log, all these images interacting with one another. In trying his hand at haiku, Wright initially modeled his on those of the classic Japanese poets such as Moritake, Basho, Kikaku, Buson, and Issa. Two of the haiku in *This Other World* have a thematic resemblance to a famous haiku by Moritake, "The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: / A butterfly" (Pound, "Vorticism" 467):

626. Off the cherry tree,
 One twig and its red blossom
 Flies into the sun.

669. A leaf chases wind
 Across an autumn river
 And shakes a pine tree.

Both of Wright's haiku "Off the Cherry Tree" (626) and "A Leaf Chases Wind" (669) create an illusion similar to that in Moritake's haiku. In "Off the Cherry Tree," a twig with its red blossom flies into the sun as if a bird flew off the cherry tree. Likewise, "A Leaf Chases Wind" captures a scene as though a leaf were chasing wind and shaking a pine tree rather than the other way around.

According to Margaret Walker, Wright was fascinated by American modernist poets, including Pound. "In the last years of his life," she notes, "Wright discovered the Japanese form of poetry known as Haiku and became more than a little interested in what was not just a strange and foreign stanza but an exercise in conciseness—getting

so much meaning or philosophy in so few words" (*Richard Wright* 313–14). Pound's theory that the poet's use of an image is not to support "some system of ethics or economics" coincides with a theory that haiku express the poet's intuitive worldview. Wright, then, found the haiku poet's intuitive worldview akin to that of the African. Because both views have little to do with politics or economics directly, Wright's haiku remain a radical departure from his earlier work in prose.

Whether Wright was influenced by Pound's imagism is difficult to determine, but many of Wright's haiku bear a close resemblance to classic Japanese haiku. In both style and content, a pair of his haiku in *This Other World* are reminiscent of two of Basho's most celebrated haiku. Wright's "In the Silent Forest" echoes Basho's "How Quiet It Is!":

316. In the silent forest
 A woodpecker hammers at
 The sound of silence.

 How quiet it is!
 Piercing into the rocks
 The cicada's voice.⁷

As Basho expresses awe at quiet, Wright juxtaposes silence in the forest to the sound of a woodpecker. Similarly, Wright's "A Thin Waterfall" is akin to Basho's "A Crow":

569. A thin waterfall
 Dribbles the whole autumn night,—
 How lonely it is.

 A crow
 Perched on a withered tree
 In the autumn evening.⁸

Basho focuses on a single crow perching on a branch of an old tree, as does Wright on a thin waterfall. In both haiku, the scene is drawn with little detail and the mood is provided by a simple, reserved description of fact, a phenomenon in nature. In both haiku, parts of the scene are painted in dark colors, as is the background. Both haiku create the kind of beauty associated with the aesthetic sensibility of *sabi* that suggests loneliness and quietude, the salient characteristics of nature, as opposed to overexcitement and loudness, those of society.⁹ As Basho

expresses *sabi* with the image of autumn evening, so does Wright with the line “How lonely it is,” a subjective perception. The two haiku, however, are different: while Basho describes nature for its own sake, Wright interjects his own feelings in his description. Whether Wright and Basho actually felt lonely when writing the haiku is moot.

Legend has it that Basho inspired more disciples than did any other haiku poet. Kikaku is regarded as Basho’s most innovative disciple. Two of Wright’s haiku bear some resemblance to Kikaku’s “The Bright Harvest Moon,” since both poets emphasize an interaction between humanity and nature in the creation of beauty:

106. Beads of quicksilver
On a black umbrella:
Moonlit April rain.

671. A pale winter moon,
Pitying a lonely doll,
Lent it a shadow.

The bright harvest moon
Upon the tatami mats
Shadows of the pines.

(Kikaku)¹⁰

In Kikaku’s haiku, the beauty of the moonlight is not only humanized by the light shining on the man-made objects, but it is also intensified by the shadows of pine trees that fall on the mats. The intricate pattern of the shadow of the trees intensifies the beauty of the moonlight. Not only does such a scene unify an image of humanity and an image of nature, but it also shows that humanity and nature can interact positively. In Wright’s first poem an element of nature, “beads of quicksilver,” is reinforced by a manufactured object, “a black umbrella.” In “A Pale Winter Moon,” while the second line projects loneliness onto a doll, the beauty of the winter moon is intensified by the presence of a human-made object. In contrast to the four haiku quoted previously (Wright’s “In the Silent Forest” and “A Thin Waterfall,” Basho’s “How Quiet It Is!” and “A Crow”), these three haiku by Wright and Kikaku do lightly include human subjectivity in appreciating natural beauty, although the focus of their visions is nature.

Wright's "I Would Like a Bell" is comparable to Buson's well-known "On the Hanging Bell" in depicting a spring scene, but Wright's poem focuses on a human subjectivity, a desiring self:

13. I would like a bell
 Tolling in this soft twilight
 Over willow trees.
- On the hanging bell
 Has perched and is fast asleep,
 It's a butterfly.¹¹

Buson was well known in his time as an accomplished painter, and many of his haiku reflect his singular attention to color and its intensification. Wright's "A Butterfly Makes," for example, is reminiscent of Buson's "Also Stepping On"; both imply a subjective perception:

82. A butterfly makes
 The sunshine even brighter
 With fluttering wings.
- Also stepping on
 The mountain pheasant's tail is
 The spring setting sun.¹²

In another fine haiku, Wright portrays humanity's relationship with nature in terms of art:

571. From across the lake,
 Past the black winter trees,
 Faint sounds of a flute.

Unlike "The Spring Lingers On" (47), discussed earlier, "From across the Lake" (571) admits a human involvement in the scene: someone is playing the flute as the poet is listening from the other side of the lake. Through transference of the senses between the faint sounds of a flute and the black winter trees, a positive interaction of humanity and nature takes place. "From across the Lake" has an affinity with Kikaku's "The Harvest Moon," noted earlier, for both haiku are expressions of beauty perceived by subjects in an interaction of natural and human objects.

Wright's haiku in their portrayal of humankind's association with nature often convey a kind of enlightenment, a new way of looking at human beings and nature, as in the following examples:

720. A wilting jonquil
 Journeys to its destiny
 In a shut bedroom.

722. Lines of winter rain
 Gleam only as they flash past
 My lighted window.

"A Wilting Jonquil" (720) teaches the poet a lesson that natural things out of context cannot exhibit their beauty. In "Lines of Winter Rain" (722), the poet learns that sometimes only when an interaction between human beings and nature occurs can natural beauty be savored.

While haiku poets often tried to suppress subjectivity in depicting nature, some of Wright's haiku bring the poet to the fore. While haiku 720, "A Wilting Jonquil," focuses on an object, haiku 722, "Lines of Winter Rain," insists on the importance of "my lighted window." None of the classic haiku Wright emulates express the poet's thoughts or feelings. The first haiku in Wright's *Haiku: This Other World* ("I am nobody: / A red sinking autumn sun / Took my name away"), as noted earlier, suppresses subjectivity by depicting the red sun that erases his name. And yet the poet is strongly present, even by negation. The same is true of some of his other haiku discussed earlier, such as haiku 809, "Why did this spring wood / Grow so silent when I came? / What was happening?" and haiku 721, "As my anger ebbs, / The spring stars grow bright again / And the wind returns."

Writing a haiku to depict a spring scene, quoted earlier, Wright and Buson take different approaches in terms of subjectivity: "I would like a bell / Tolling in this soft twilight / Over willow trees" (Wright); "On the hanging bell / Has perched and is fast asleep, / It's a butterfly" (Buson). Wright's focus is on imagining a bell ringing softly over willow trees, while Buson's is on a butterfly actually fast asleep on a hanging bell. The two haiku are quite different: subjectivity is present in Wright's haiku, whereas it is absent in Buson's. Another pair of haiku by Wright and Basho portray autumn scenes: "A thin waterfall / Dribbles the whole autumn night,— / How lonely it is" (Wright); "A crow / Perched on a withered tree / In the autumn evening" (Basho). Subjectivity is absent in Basho's haiku, whereas it is

directly expressed by Wright's third line, "How lonely it is." In depicting the moon, for example, Wright and Kikaku write remarkably different haiku: "A pale winter moon, / Pitying a lonely doll, / Lent it a shadow" (Wright); "The bright harvest moon / Upon the tatami mats / Shadows of the pines" (Kikaku). Subjectivity is entirely absent in Kikaku's haiku, whereas it is strongly expressed in Wright's with the middle line, "Pitying a lonely doll."

Absent subjectivity in composing haiku is akin to Jacques Lacan's concept of the subject. Lacan, a postmodern psychoanalyst, challenged the traditional concept of subjectivity. On the basis of his analytic experience, he saw subjectivity as a concept that concerns neither the autonomy of the self nor the subject's ability to influence the other. Subjectivity is deficient because of the deficiencies inherent in language: "The effects of language are always mixed with the fact, which is the basis of the analytic experience, that the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other, the subject proceeds from his synchronic subjection in the field of the Other. That is why he must get out, get himself out, and in the *getting-himself-out*, in the end, he will know that the real Other has, just as much as himself, to get himself out, to pull himself free" (*Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 188). Because the subject, an infinitesimal fraction in time and space, is isolated from the world, the subject is only capable of imagining the other: society, nature, and life. Only when the subject is conscious of the deficiencies of language, as Lacan theorized, does the subject of the unconscious emerge. Only then is the subject able to approach and encounter the truth of life—what Lacan called "the real" and "the unsymbolizable."

To Lacan, the motive for subjectivity aimed at the symbolic—what constitutes tradition, religion, law, and so on—whereas the motive for absence of subjectivity aimed at the unconscious, a state largely derived from the other and partly derived from the imaginary on the part of the subject. The unconscious, then, is closer to the real than it is to the symbolic; the imaginary is closer to the real than it is to the symbolic. Lacan posited, however, that "there exists a world of truth entirely deprived of subjectivity," universal truth, "and that . . . there has been a historical development of subjectivity manifestly directed towards the rediscovery of truth," historically subjective truth, "which lies in the order of symbols" (*Seminar 2*: 285). Lacan saw the door as language; the door is open either to the real or to the imaginary. He said that "we don't know quite which, but it is either one or the other. There is an asymmetry between the opening and the closing—if the opening of the door controls access, when closed, it closes the

circuit" (*Seminar 2*: 302). He considers language either objective or subjective; the real is objective whereas the imaginary is subjective. Applied to traditional haiku composition, language aims at the real through the imaginary rather than at the symbolic through the historically subjective.

The Lacanian distinction of the imaginary and the symbolic has an affinity with one of the disagreements between Pound and Yeats in reading Japanese poetry and drama. Pound regarded symbolism as "a sort of allusion, almost of allegory." The symbolists, Pound thought, "degraded the symbol to the status of a word. . . . Moreover, one does not want to be called a symbolist, because symbolism has usually been associated with mushy technique" ("Vorticism" 463). For Pound, symbolism is inferior to imagism, the imaginary in Lacan's theory, because in symbolism one image is used to suggest another or to represent another, whereby both images would be weakened. Pound's theory of imagism was derived from haiku, as noted earlier, which shuns metaphor and symbolism, rather than from the *nob* play, which Yeats considered indirect and symbolic.

In any event, Lacan moreover envisioned a domain of the real beyond "the navel of the dream, this abyssal relation to that which is most unknown, which is the hallmark of an exceptional, privileged experience, in which the real is apprehended beyond all mediation, be it imaginary or symbolic." Lacan equated this domain with "an absolute other . . . an other beyond all intersubjectivity" (*Seminar 2*: 176–77). In Lacanian terms, the haiku poet is motivated to depict the real directly without using symbols. In this process the poet relies on the imaginary, a domain that is closer to nature, where subjectivity is suppressed as much as possible or minimized. The poets avoid symbols in writing haiku in an attempt to be objective and yet creative. "If the symbolic function functions," Lacan lamented, "we are inside it. And I would even say—we are so far into it that we can't get out of it" (*Seminar 2*: 31).

That symbolism is an obstacle in writing haiku can be explained in terms of Lacan's definition of the symbolic order. Lacan observed that language symbolizes things that do not exist, non-being: "The fundamental relation of man to this symbolic order is very precisely what founds the symbolic order itself—the relation of non-being to being. . . . What insists on being satisfied can only be satisfied in recognition. The end of the symbolic process is that non-being come to be, because it has spoken" (*Seminar 2*: 308). To Lacan, then, language makes non-being become being. Because haiku aims to represent

Wright saw the images of nature he created in his haiku as expressing the “primal outlook upon life” he acquired in Africa. As he traveled to Ghana in 1953 to write *Black Power*, a postmodern and postcolonial nonfiction, he was deeply impressed with the African worldview that human beings are not at the center of the universe, a worldview that corresponds with that of Zen. Ashanti culture and belief, in particular, convinced Wright that the world of nature is preeminent over the subjective vision of that world. In writing traditionalist haiku, Wright adopted a poetic form in which subjectivity, egotism, and desire stand in the way of seeking truth. Not only do most of his haiku thrive on poignant images of nature, but also they admonish the reader that only by paying nature the utmost attention can human beings truly see themselves.

At the climax of the play, Yang Kuei-fei performs for the priest a dance of the Rainbow Skirt and Feather Jacket to convey Ming Huang “the dancer’s heart.” Noguchi adds a note: “Each bird must fly with a mate, since it has only one wing” (142).

10. One of the players who made an indispensable contribution to Yeats’s understanding of *nob* performance was a Japanese dancer, Michio Itoh. He came from a distinguished family of theater artists. Two of his brothers, Kensaku Itoh and Koreya Senda, who also distinguished themselves in the theater in Japan as late as after World War II, are both famous for their work as stage designers and as dancers. The papier-mâché mask Itoh wore for the performance of *At the Hawk’s Well* in 1926 was made by Isamu Noguchi, the son of Yone Noguchi and his American wife, Leonie Gilmour (Isamu Noguchi, *Sculptor’s World* 123). The performance of the play demanded in its music, movement, and visual effect, firsthand knowledge of the *nob* theater. It was Pound who introduced Itoh to Yeats, who thought Itoh’s “minute intensity of movement in the dance of the hawk so well suited our small room and private art” (*Plays of Yeats* 417).
11. In the play a fisherman finds on a pine tree a feather robe that belongs to a fair angel. She begs him to return the robe and offers to dance for him in return. He insists on keeping the robe with him until she completes her dance. She assures him that angels never break promises, saying that falsehood exists only among mortals. The fisherman, deeply ashamed, hands back the robe to her. The angel, completing her performance, vanishes into the air.
12. For Pound’s and Fenollosa’s version, see Pound and Fenollosa, *Classic Nob Theatre* 98–104.
13. In the play, the Mountain Elf during the night circles round the mountain, a symbol of life. At the climax a famous dancer, another elf who has lost her way in the Hill of Shadow on her way to the Holy Buddhist Temple appears and inquires the right road of the Mountain Elf “with large star-like eyes and fearful snow-white hair.” The Mountain Elf then shows the dancer how to encircle the mountain (*Spirit of Japanese Poetry* 66–67).

CHAPTER 5

1. See Miner, “Pound, *Haiku* and the Image” 570–84; and *Japanese Tradition*. There is some ambiguity in Miner’s chronology since, in his article, the date of Pound’s joining the Poets’ Club is said to be “just before the first World War,” which means perhaps between 1913 and 1914 (“Pound” 572). There is also another ambiguity with respect to the time and circumstance of Pound’s learning about “the usefulness of Japanese poetry from Flint.” Flint’s interest in Japanese poetry is indicated in his own account of the matter, published in *The Egoist* for May 1, 1915: “I had been advocating in the course of a series of articles on recent books

- of verse a poetry in *vers libre*, akin in spirit to the Japanese” (*Japanese Tradition* 100).
2. For Noguchi’s life and work, see Hakutani, ed. *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi: An East-West Literary Assimilation*, vol. 1: *Poetry* (1990) and vol. 2: *Prose* (1992). For a study of Noguchi’s life, including an interview with his son, American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, see Hakutani, “Father and Son: A Conversation with Isamu Noguchi.” For a discussion of Noguchi’s English poetry and literary criticism, see Hakutani, “Yone Noguchi’s Poetry: From Whitman to Zen.”
 3. The impact of *hokku* on Pound was apparently greater and more beneficial than that on his fellow Imagists. Regarding the form of superposition as ideal for expressing instantaneous perception, Pound wrote in a footnote, “Mr. Flint and Mr. Rodker have made longer poems depending on a similar presentation of matter. So also have Richard Aldington, in his *In Via Sestina*, and ‘H. D.’ in her *Oread*, which latter poems express much stronger emotions than that in my lines here given” (“Vorticism” 467). Pound’s argument here suggests that *hokku* and Pound’s *hokku*-like poems can express instantaneous and spontaneous perception better than can the longer poems and the poems with stronger emotions.
 4. See Noguchi, “What Is a Hokku Poem?” *Rhythm* 11 (January 1913): 354–59. The essay was reprinted in Noguchi’s *Through the Torii* 126–39. The page numbers cited hereafter refer to the *Rhythm* version.
 5. In a letter of November 24, 1913, to Pound, Mary Fenollosa wrote, “I am beginning with [*sic*] right now, to send you material.” On the following day she wrote again, “Please don’t get discouraged at the ragged way this manuscript is coming to you. As I said yesterday, it will all get there in time,—which is the most important thing.” See Kodama, ed. *Ezra Pound and Japan: Letters and Essays* 6.
 6. One of Pound’s critics who acknowledge this fact, Roy E. Teele, demonstrates Fenollosa’s failure to understand the Japanese language, particularly the essential rhythm of the *noh* text Fenollosa translated. See Teele, “The Japanese Translations” 61–66.
 7. Earl Miner, who states that Pound knew nothing about Japanese poetry before 1913 or 1914, believes that Pound later learned about *hokku* in the writings of the French translators (“Pound” 572–73).
 8. See Noguchi, “The Everlasting Sorrow: A Japanese Noh Play” 141–43 and “The Japanese Noh Play” 99.
 9. Noguchi first met Yeats in 1903 as indicated in a letter Noguchi wrote to Leonie Gilmour, his first wife: “I made many a nice young, lovely, kind friend among literary *genius* (attention!) W. B. Yeats or Laurence Binyon, Moore and Bridges. They are so good; they invite me almost every day” (Noguchi, *Collected English Letters* 106). In 1921 Yeats, who was in Oxford, England, sent a long letter to Noguchi, who was in Japan, and wrote, in part, in reference to art and poetry, “The old French poets were simple as the modern are not, & I find in Francois Villon the same

thoughts, with more intellectual power, that I find in the Gaelic poet [Raftery]. I would be simple myself but I do not know how. I am always turning over pages like those you have sent me, hoping that in my old age I may discover how. . . . A form of beauty scarcely lasts a generation with us, but it lasts with you for centuries. You no more want to change it than a pious man wants to change the Lord's Prayer, or the Crucifix on the wall [blurred] at least not unless we have infected you with our egotism" (*Collected English Letters* 220–21).

10. See William Pratt, *The Imagist Poem* 14–15; J. B. Harmer, *Victory in Limbo: Imagism 1908–1917* 17; Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* 115.
11. It is speculative, of course, but quite possible that Aldington, fascinated by Japanese visual arts, might have read the three articles about the subject Noguchi published in this period: "Utamaro," *Rhythm* 11, no. 10 (November 1912): 257–60; "Koyetsu," *Rhythm* 11, no. 11 (December 1912): 302–5; "The Last Master [Yoshitoshi] of the Ukiyoe School," *The Transactions of the Japan Society of London* 12 (April 1914): 144–56. Moreover, *The Spirit of Japanese Art* (1915) includes chapters on major Japanese painters such as Koyetsu, Kenzan, Kyosai, and Busho Hara, besides Utamaro and Hiroshige. If Aldington had read these essays, he would very well have been acquainted with Noguchi's writings about Japanese poetics.
12. Aldington's poem reads,

The apparition of these poems in a crowd:
White faces in a black dead faint.

See Aldington, "Penultimate Poetry," *Egoist* (15 January 1915). This poem sounds more like *senryu*, a humorous haiku, than the *hokku* Pound was advocating. *Senryu* originated from Karai Senryu, an eighteenth-century Japanese haiku poet.

13. See Davie, *Ezra Pound* 42 and Carpenter 247.
14. See Toyama, ed., *Essays on Yone Noguchi* (mostly in Japanese) 1: 327.
15. See Jones, *Life and Opinions of Hulme* 122. Neither Noel Stock in *Poet in Exile: Ezra Pound* nor Humphrey Carpenter in *Serious Character* mentions Pound's activities at the Quest Society, let alone Pound's possible interactions with Noguchi.
16. See T. S. Eliot's introduction to *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* 23.
17. About this time Noguchi also wrote an essay titled "A Japanese Note on Yeats," included in his book of essays, *Through the Torii* 110–17.
18. Noguchi's "Tell Me the Street to Heaven" was first published in his essay "What Is a Hokku Poem?" *Rhythm* 11 (January 1913): 358, as indicated earlier, and reprinted in *Through the Torii* (1914 and 1922). The other *hokku*, "Is It, Oh, List" was also included in the same issue and reprinted in *Through the Torii* with a change in the third line: "So runs Thames, so runs my Life" (136).

19. The original in Japanese reads “Hiya-hiya to / Kabe wo fumaete / Hiru-ne kana.” See Henderson 49. The English translation of this haiku is by Hakutani.
20. Alan Durant tries to show that Pound’s metro poem linguistically contains a number of metaphors and associations, and that it is not as imagistic as critics say. While Durant’s interpretation is valid as far as the various elements in the poem appear to the reader as metaphors and associations, Pound’s intention does differ from the reader’s interpretation. The same thing may occur in the interpretation of a Japanese *hokku*, but traditionally the language of the *hokku*, as Noguchi demonstrates throughout *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*, shuns metaphor and symbolism. See Alan Durant, “Pound, Modernism and Literary Criticism: A Reply to Donald Davie.”
21. This passage is quoted from “Again on *Hokku*,” included in *Through the Torii* 140–46. A *verbatim* account is given in the introduction to his *Japanese Hokkus* 22–23. For Noguchi’s London experiences, see “My First London Experience (1903)” and “Again in London (1913–14)” in *Story of Yone Noguchi* 119–65.
22. The union of different experiences is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s statement about an amalgamation. In reference to John Donne’s poetry, Eliot writes, “When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes” (*Selected Essays* 247).
23. In *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*, Noguchi wrote, “As the so-called literary expression is a secondary matter in the realm of poetry, there is no strict boundary between the domains generally called subjective and objective; while some *Hokku* poems appear to be objective, those poems are again by turns quite subjective through the great virtue of the writers having the fullest identification with the matter written on. You might call such collation poetical trespassing; but it is the very point whence the Japanese poetry gains unusual freedom; that freedom makes us join at once with the soul of Nature” (43–44).
24. To the Japanese, such expressions as “the light of passion” and “the cicada’s song” immediately evoke images of hot summer. These phrases in Japanese are attributed to or closely associated with summer; cicada is a *kigo* for summer.
25. For Whitman’s influence on Noguchi, see Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 6

1. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), Thoreau wrote, “We can tolerate all philosophies, Atomists, Pneumatologists, Atheists, Theoists,— Plato, Aristotle, Leucippus, Democritus, Pythagoras,

- Zoroaster and Confucius. It is the attitude of these men, more than any communication which they make, that attracts us" (152). In the conclusion of *Variorum Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau evoked Confucius: "The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the basis of the empire" (*Variorum Civil Disobedience* 55).
2. John Tytell observes, "Kerouac . . . attacked the concept of revision sacred to most writers as a kind of secondary moral censorship imposed by the unconscious" (*Naked Angels* 17).
 3. In *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac saw human existence as a strange beetle when he climbed Mount Hozomeen: "Standing on my head before bedtime on that rock roof of the moonlight I could indeed see that the earth was truly upsidedown and man a weird vain beetle full of strange ideas walking around upsidedown and boasting, and I could realize that man remembered why this dream of planets and plants and Plantagenets was built out of the primordial essence" (187).
 4. As noted earlier, Pound quoted Moritake's haiku just before discussing the often-quoted poem "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in the crowd: / Petals, on a wet, black bough" ("Vorticism" 48).
 5. Like Thoreau, Kerouac grew up a Christian and was well versed in the Bible but became fascinated with Buddhism. "It is necessary not to be Christian," he argued, "to appreciate the beauty and significance of the life of Christ. I know that some will have hard thoughts of me, when they hear their Christ named beside my Buddha, yet I am sure that I am willing they should love their Christ more than my Buddha" (*A Week* 67).
 6. Evoking his mother in his meditation has an affinity with Whitman's allusion to the old mother in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking":

The aria sinking,
 All else continuing, the stars shining,
 The winds blowing, the notes of the bird continuous echoing,
 With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly moaning,

(*Complete Poetry* 183)

7. In *The Dharma Bums*, as Kerouac hitchhiked home to see his mother in North Carolina, he thought of her and Gary Snyder. Kerouac wrote about Snyder, "Why is he so mad about white tiled sinks and 'kitchen machinery' he calls it?" Referring to his mother's doing the dishes in the white sink, Kerouac remarked, "People have good hearts whether or not they live like Dharma Bums. Compassion is the heart of Buddhism" (105). At the end of his journey to Mount Hozomeen, Kerouac witnessed "the world was upsidedown hanging in an ocean of endless

- space and here were all these people sitting in theaters watching movies. . . . Pacing in the yard at dusk, singing ‘Wee Small Hours,’ when I came to the lines ‘when the whole wide world is fast asleep’ my eyes filled with tears, ‘Okay world,’ I said, ‘I’ll love ya.’ In bed at night, warm and happy in my bag on the good hemp bunk, I’d see my table and my clothes in the moonlight . . . and on this I’d go to sleep like a lamb” (187–88).
8. *Walden* teaches the virtue of drinking pure water, for drinking tea, coffee, wine, or smoking tobacco or opium would harm not only one’s physical health but one’s mental health: “I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not so noble a liquor; and think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea! Ah, how low I fall when I am tempted by them!” (217).
 9. Melville writes, “Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?” (169).
 10. “After Apple-Picking” ends with the lines that intimate having a nightmare, or what Frost calls “just some human sleep” (*Frost’s Poems* 229).
 11. See the last stanza in Poem 449 “I Died for Beauty” and 712 “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” (*Complete Poems* 216, 350).
 12. See the last stanza of “The Road Not Taken” (*Frost’s Poems* 223).
 13. See the lines in “The Weary Blues”: “Ain’t got nobody in all this world, / Ain’t got nobody but ma self” (Hughes, *Selected Poems* 33).
 14. See the first two and last two lines in “We Real Cool”: “We real cool. We / Left school. We” and “Jazz June. We / Die soon” (Brooks, *Selected Poems* 73).

CHAPTER 7

1. According to Toru Kiuchi, this South African poet, identified as Sinclair Beiles in Michel Fabre’s *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* 14, was “one of the Beat poets and . . . his and their interest in Zen led Wright to the knowledge of haiku.” Kiuchi further notes that “because the Beat Hotel was in the Latin Quarter and Wright lived very close to the hotel, he must have haunted the hotel bar. I assume that Wright took an interest in Zen, which some of the Beat poets brought up as one of the important topics, and that Wright then must have known haiku through his conversations with Beiles” (Kiuchi’s letter to Hakutani).
2. This manuscript consists of a title page and eighty-two pages, page 1 containing the first seven haiku and each of the other pages containing ten, altogether 817 haiku. The manuscript, dated 1960, is in the Wright

- collection in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. The manuscript was published as *Haiku: This Other World*, eds., Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert L. Tener (New York: Arcade, 1998; New York: Random House, 2000). References to Wright's haiku, including numbers, are to this edition.
3. See the cover of the Random House edition of *Haiku: This Other World*.
 4. See Julia Wright, introduction to *Haiku: This Other World* xi.
 5. See R. H. Blyth, *Haiku: Eastern Culture* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1981). This is a paperback edition of vol. 1 of R. H. Blyth, *Haiku*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1949). Page references to this book are to the 1981 paperback edition.
 6. "After the Sermon" can be read as a *senryu*, a subgenre of haiku that expresses humor. Wright might have likened "the preacher's voice" to "the caws of crows," which sound least mellifluous.
 7. The original of the haiku is in Henderson 40.
 8. The original of the haiku is in Henderson 18. The translation is from Blyth, *History* 2: xxix.
 9. The word *sabi*, a noun, derives from the verb *sabiru*, to rust, implying that what is described is aged. *Sabi* is traditionally associated with loneliness. Aesthetically, however, this mode of sensibility intimates of grace rather than splendor; it suggests quiet beauty as opposed to robust beauty. Many of Wright's haiku thrive on the use of the word *lonely*. For further discussion of *sabi* and of other aesthetic principles, see Chapter 1 of this book and Hakutani, *Richard Wright and Racial Discourse* 275–82.
 10. The original of Kikaku's haiku is in Henderson 58.
 11. The original of Buson's haiku is in Henderson 104.
 12. The original of Buson's haiku is in Henderson 102.

CHAPTER 8

1. The original in Japanese reads "Yama-dori-no | o | wo | fumu | haru no | iri-hi | kana" (Henderson 102).
2. The original of this haiku by Basho is in Henderson 40.
3. See *Haiku: This Other World*. The 817 haiku are numbered consecutively, as noted earlier: "In the Silent Forest" is 316 and "A Thin Waterfall" 569.
4. The word *sabi* in Japanese, a noun, derives from the verb *sabiru*, to rust, implying that what is described is aged, as discussed in Chapter 1. Buddha's portrait hung in Zen temples, the old man with a thin body, is nearer to his soul as the old tree with its skin and leaves fallen is nearer to the very origin and essence of nature. For a further discussion of Buddha's portrait, see Loehr 216.
5. As discussed earlier, while Freud defines death as the opposite of life, meaning that death reduces all animate things to the inanimate. Lacan