Japanese Poetry

The story of Japanese poetry begins with the *tanka*. The *tanka* is a 5 line poem wherein the 1st and 3rd lines have 5 syllables and the other lines 7 syllables each thus creating a poem with 31 total syllables. We will talk about *tankas* as well as analyze examples in class.

The poem that famously grew from the *tanka* was the *haiku*. In effect, the *haiku* shortens the already short Tanka to just three lines of 5, 7, 5 syllables. In class we will learn how to analyze a *haiku* and recognize its two most famous writers. To prepare, read through and study the eight haiku provided (4 for each author). It may even be helpful to memorize the examples which will provide you a modal to recognize unknown *haikus* you will encounter.

**Basho** (1644 – 1694)

On a withered branch
   A crow has settled –
      Autumn nightfall.

Many, many things
   they bring to mind –
      cherry-blossoms.

Old pond:
   Frog jump in –
      Water sound.

The Summer grasses grow
   Mighty warriors' splendid dreams–
      The afterglow.

**Buson** (1715 – 1783)

Spring rain! And as yet
   The little froglets' bellies
      Haven't got wet!

No poem you send
   in answer – O, young lady!
      Spring is at its end!

Blossoms on a pear;
   and a woman in the moonlight
      Reads a letter there…

What piercing cold I feel!
   My dead wife's comb, in our bedroom,
      under my heel…