

The following is an extract from :

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/moon-glows-same>

“The Moon Glows the Same,” written by the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō, was published in 1687.

A haiku, “The Moon Glows the Same” comprises only seventeen syllables. Bashō is credited with transforming haiku from a predominantly humorous form based on wit and word play into a means for evocative philosophical observations. Bashō skillfully described common settings in Japanese life, often scenes from nature, and through his descriptions composed allegories on the nature of life. Bashō’s poetic skills increased throughout his life, and his poems written after 1686 are considered among his most accomplished. In “The Moon Glows the Same,” Bashō describes the relationship between the moon and the clouds, particularly the way in which the drifting clouds alter the appearance of the moon. However, he is also commenting on the relationship between the infinite and unchanging, represented by the moon, and the finite and temperate, represented by the clouds. The comparison between contrasting aspects of nature is a familiar theme in Bashō’s poetry.

### Poem Text

The moon glows the same:  
it is the drifting cloud forms  
make it seem to change.

### Poem Summary

#### Line 1

In his poetry, Bashō was fond of comparing dissimilar aspects of nature. Initially, “The Moon Glows the Same” does not seem to fit this pattern, but on a closer reading we can see that Bashō is not only comparing the moon to the clouds, but he is also contrasting the unchanging to the temporal. In the first line, Bashō makes a bold but seemingly obvious statement: the moon glows the same throughout the night. Lines 2-3

In lines two and three, Bashō clarifies the meaning of the statement from line one. The clouds drifting across the night sky pass between the watcher and the moon, causing the moon to appear to change in shape and color. While the observer is gazing at the night sky, the moon’s appearance is actually constant and only the clouds change. Bashō seems to be implying that there are aspects of life that are also unchanging and constant, like the light of the moon. However, they may appear to be transformed through their relationship with transient events and objects.

### Themes

#### Appearances and Reality

The most obvious theme of “The Moon Glows the Same”—communicated directly and plainly to the reader via the text—is that there is a contrast between what appears to occur and what really is happening. At first, this seems to be a case of stating a very simple, basic truth that is almost too obvious to mention. Optical illusions are all around us in our everyday lives: objects far away are not really any smaller than they are when they are near, for instance, nor is a person wearing vertical stripes necessarily any taller or thinner than one wearing plaid. If a reader were to quickly skim this poem, it might seem trite, but

it is the very familiarity of its message that makes “The Moon Glows the Same” significant. The stillness of the moon, which Bashō makes a point of drawing readers’ attention to, can be seen as a parallel to the message of the poem itself, which is just as solid, basic, and un-moving: in the same way that our eyes attribute the motion to the moon instead of to the drifting clouds, so too the reader’s desire for “meaning” might draw him or her to see a message beyond what is actually present. Western readers in particular will often be eager to find a hidden layer to this poem that is, according to the standard metaphor of literary interpretation, “buried” beneath the surface. To a great extent, the idea of frustrating the reader’s search for meaning is the point of haiku in general, because this poetic form tends to emphasize life’s simplicity over its apparent complexity.

### Nature

The majority of haiku concern themselves with small events in nature, showing situations in the natural world that can be compared to those that result from human behavior. In “The Moon Glows the Same,” there is a vaguely implied sense of rivalry between the moon and clouds, based on what observers perceive to be the function of each. In general, the moon attracts more attention from humans than do clouds. Clouds, which are readily visible in the daytime, seem mundane due to their ubiquitousness; conversely, the moon tends to inspire awe because it is a solitary entity whose reflective property allows it to glow and single-handedly light up the night sky. Bashō’s point is that people should not think that, just because it is conspicuous, the moon has the ability to alter the shifting patterns of moonbeams that fall across the earth. The drifting cloud formations that are introduced in the poem’s second line are responsible for the appearance of change. Readers who notice parallels between the underrated clouds and the overrated moon can perceive their relative positions as reflections of human interactions, where false assumptions are often made about abilities and responsibilities. The illusion of shifting moonlight—this interplay of darkness, shade, and light—could make it seem that there is something more mysterious going on than there actually is: Bashō uses the flat, tonal style of the haiku to demystify nature—to explain a simple, mechanical process so that imaginary relationships are not necessary.

### Permanence

“The Moon Glows the Same” debunks the notion that the moon has the ability to change its light, thus giving a somewhat tempered account of the moon’s capabilities. At the same time, however, the poem also bestows an even greater degree of admiration upon the moon for its steadfast prominence. The opening line of “The Moon Glows the Same” is phrased in such a way as to emphasize the moon’s strength, not its weakness. The idea that the moon does not change could be stated in any number of ways, but a poem—especially a poem like a haiku that uses so few words—must narrow all possible wordings down to the single correct one. Bashō is not trying to leave readers with diminished respect for the moon’s mystical presence; he is only drawing attention to the simple beauty of reality. It is the strength of permanence that renders this work an homage to the moon, making an otherwise routine observation seem bold and thought provoking. In this haiku, plain speaking affirms the power of durability.

## Style

“The Moon Glows the Same” is written in haiku, a Japanese form of poetry. The modern haiku consists of three lines with a total of seventeen syllables. The first and third lines consist of five syllables and the second line is comprised of seven syllables. Although haikus are short, they are challenging to write. Their brevity requires the poet to be very efficient and selective with word choice. Japanese haikus, such as “The Moon Glows the Same,” use images of nature to consider larger messages about life and spirituality.