

# **EcoGrief: Poetry Workshop with Tess Taylor**

## **Grounding and Noticing**

**September 6, 2024**

**Xavier University, NEXUS Community Garden**

## **Grounding & Noticing**

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by Matsuo Basho

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Day 2: Concrete Details

*There was a time when I envied those who had government offices or impressive domains, and on another occasion I considered entering the precincts of the Buddha and the teaching room of the patriarchs. Instead, I've worn out my body in journeys that are as aimless as the winds and clouds and expended my feelings on flowers and birds. But somehow I've been able to make a living this way, and so in the end, unskilled and talentless as I am, I give myself wholly to this one concern, poetry.*

**Basho 1644 - 1694**

### **Haiku by Matsuo Basho**

Autumn moonlight--  
a worm digs silently  
into the chestnut.

A snowy morning—  
by myself,  
chewing on dried salmon.

This road—  
no one goes down it,  
autumn evening.

Many nights on the road  
and not dead yet—  
the end of autumn.

A cool fall night—  
Getting dinner we peeled  
eggplants, cucumbers.

A caterpillar,  
this deep in fall—  
still not a butterfly.

Waking in the night;  
the lamp is low,  
the oil freezing.

Winter rain  
falls on the cow-shed;  
a cock crows.

The leeks  
newly washed white,-  
how cold it is!

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

Ill on a journey;  
my dreams wander  
over a withered moor.

Sad nodes—  
We're all the bamboo's children

In the end.

This old village—  
not a single house  
without persimmon trees.

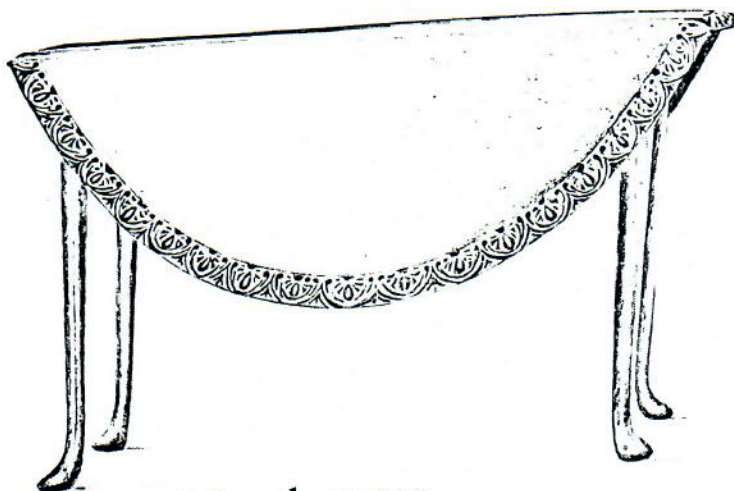
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Sometimes, when I'm in an energetic mood, I draw clear water from the valley and cook myself a meal. I have only the drip, drip of the spring to relieve my loneliness, but with my one little stove, things are anything but cluttered. The man who lived here before was truly lofty in mind and did not bother with any elaborate construction. Besides the one room where the Buddha image is kept, there is only a little place designed to store bedding.

An eminent monk of Mount Kōra in Tsukushi, the son of a certain Kai of the Kamo Shrine, recently journeyed to Kyoto, and I got someone to ask him if he would write a plaque for me. He readily agreed, dipped his brush, and wrote the three characters Gen-jū-an. He sent me the plaque, and I keep it as a memorial of my grass hut. Mountain home, traveler's rest—call it what you will, it's hardly the

kind of place where you need any great store of belongings. A cypress-bark hat from Kiso, a sedge rain cape from Koshi—that's all that hangs on the post above my pillow. In the daytime, I'm once in a while diverted by people who stop to visit. The old man who takes care of the shrine or the men from the village come and tell me about the wild boar who's been eating the rice plants, the rabbits that are getting at the bean patches, tales of farm matters that are all quite new to me. And when the sun has begun to sink behind the rim of the hills, I sit quietly in the evening waiting for the moon so I may have a shadow for company, or light a lamp and discuss right and wrong with my silhouette.

But when all has been said, I am not really the kind who is so completely enamored of solitude that he must hide every trace of himself away in the mountains and wilds. It's just that, troubled by frequent illness and weary with dealing with people, I've come to dislike society. Again and again I think of the mistakes I've made in my clumsiness over the course of the years. There was a time when I envied those who had government offices or impressive domains, and on another occasion I considered entering the precincts of the Buddha and the teaching room of the patriarchs. Instead, I've worn out my body in journeys that are as aimless as the winds and clouds and expended my feelings on flowers and birds. But somehow I've been able to make a living this way, and so in the end, unskilled and talentless as I am, I give myself wholly to this one concern, poetry. Po Chü-i worked so hard at it that he almost ruined his five vital organs, and Tu Fu grew lean and emaciated because of it. As far as intelligence or the quality of our writings go, I can never compare to such men. And yet we all in the end live, do we not, in a phantom dwelling? But enough of that—I'm off to bed.



## Oda a la mesa

*Sobre las cuatro patas de la mesa  
desarrollo mis odas,  
despliego el pan, el vino  
y el asado  
(la nave negra  
de los sueños),  
o dispongo tijeras, tazas, clavos,  
claveles y martillos.*

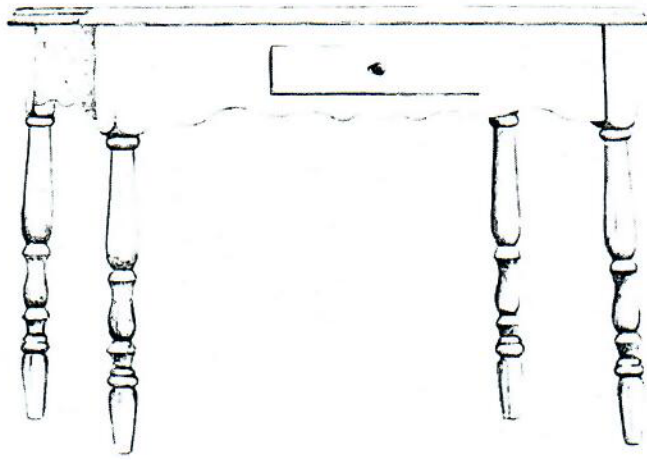
*La mesa fiel  
sostiene  
sueño y vida,  
titánico cuadrúpedo.*

*Es  
la encaracolada  
y refulgente  
mesa del rico un fabuloso buque  
cargado con racimos.  
Es hermosa la mesa de la gula,  
rebotante de góticas langostas,  
y hay una mesa  
sola, en el comedor de nuestra tía  
en verano. Corrieron  
las cortinas*



y un solo rayo agudo del estío  
penetra como espada  
a saludar sobre la mesa oscura  
la transparente paz de las ciruelas.  
Y hay una mesa lejos, mesa pobre,  
donde están preparando  
una corona  
para  
el minero muerto,  
y sube de la mesa el frío aroma  
del último dolor desbaratado.  
Y cerca está la mesa  
de aquella alcoba umbria  
que hace arder el amor con sus incendios.  
Un guante de mujer quedó temblando  
allí, como la cáscara del fuego.

El mundo  
es una mesa  
rodeada por la miel y por el humo,  
cubierta de manzanas o de sangre.  
La mesa preparada  
y ya sabemos cuando  
nos llamaron:  
si nos llaman a guerra o a comida  
y hay que elegir campana,  
hay que saber ahora  
cómo nos vestiremos  
para sentarnos  
en la larga mesa,  
si nos pondremos pantalones de odio  
o camisa de amor recién lavada:  
pero hay que hacerlo pronto,  
están llamando:  
muchachas y muchachos,  
a la mesa!



### *Ode to the table*

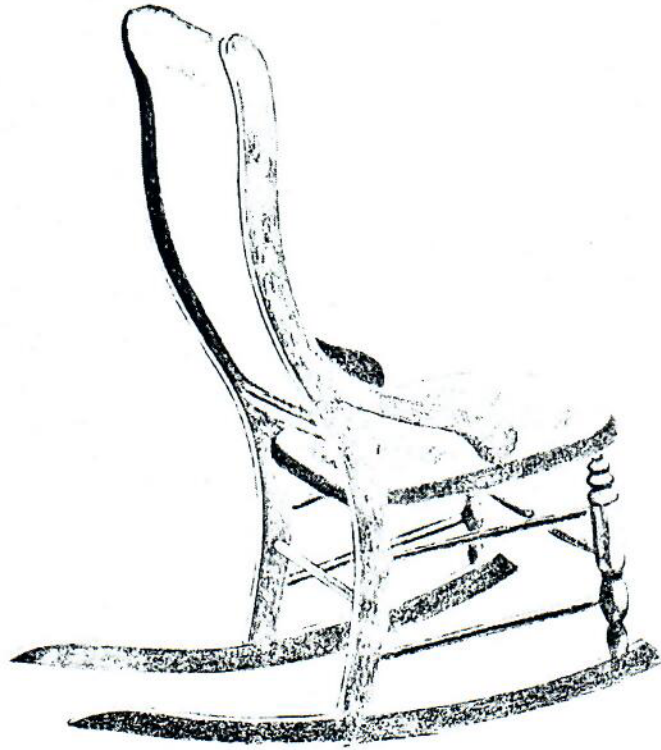
I work out my odes  
on a four-legged table,  
laying before me bread and wine  
and roast meat  
(that black boat  
of our dreams).  
Sometimes I set out scissors, cups and nails,  
hammers and carnations.

Tables are trustworthy:  
titanic quadrupeds,  
they sustain  
our hopes and our daily life.

The rich man's table,  
scrolled and shining,  
is  
a fabulous ship  
bearing bunches of fruit.  
Gluttony's table is a wonder,  
piled high with Gothic lobsters,  
and there is also a lonesome  
table in our aunt's dining room,  
in summer. They've closed  
the curtains,

and a single ray of summer light  
strikes like a sword  
upon this table sitting in the dark  
and greets the plums' transparent peace.  
And there is a faraway table, a humble table,  
where they're weaving  
a wreath  
for  
a dead miner.  
That table gives off the chilling odor  
of a man's wasted pain.  
There's a table  
in a shadowy room nearby  
that love sets ablaze with its flames.  
A woman's glove was left behind there,  
trembling like a husk of fire.

The world  
is a table  
engulfed in honey and smoke,  
smothered by apples and blood.  
The table is already set,  
and we know the truth  
as soon as we are called:  
whether we're called to war or to dinner  
we will have to choose sides,  
have to know  
how we'll dress  
to sit  
at the long table,  
whether we'll wear the pants of hate  
or the shirt of love, freshly laundered.  
It's time to decide,  
they're calling:  
boys and girls,  
let's eat!



## Oda a la silla

*Una silla en la selva:  
bajo las lianas duras  
cruje un tronco sagrado,  
sube una enredadera,  
aúllan en la sombra  
bestias ensangrentadas,  
del cielo verde caen grandes hojas,  
suenan los cascabeles  
secos de la serpiente,  
como un flechazo contra una bandera  
atravesó un pájaro el follaje,  
las ramas levantaron sus violines,  
rezan inmóviles  
los insectos  
sentados en sus flores,*

se hunden los pies  
en  
el sargazo negro  
de la selva marina,  
en las nubes caídas de la selva,  
y sólo pido  
para el extranjero,  
para el explorador desesperado  
una silla  
en el árbol de las sillas,  
un trono  
de felpa desgredada,  
el terciopelo de un sillón profundo  
carcomido por las enredaderas.  
Sí,  
la silla  
que ama el universo  
para el hombre que anda,  
la fundación  
segura,  
la dignidad  
suprema  
del reposo!

Atrás tigres sedientos,  
muchedumbre de moscas sanguinarias,  
atrás negra espesura  
de fantasmales hojas,  
atrás aguas espesas,  
hojas ferruginosas,  
sempiternas serpientes,  
en medio  
de los truenos,  
una silla,  
una silla  
para mí, para todos,  
una silla no sólo  
para alivio

*del cuerpo fatigado,  
sino  
que para todo  
y para todos,  
para la fuerza perdida  
y para el pensamiento.*

*La guerra es ancha como selva oscura.  
La paz  
comienza  
en  
una sola  
silla.*



### *Ode to the chair*

One chair, alone in the jungle.  
In the vines' tight grip  
a sacred tree groans.  
Other vines spiral skyward,  
bloodspattered creatures  
howl deep within the shadows,  
giant leaves drop from the green sky.  
A snake shakes  
the dry rattles on its tail,  
a bird flashes through the foliage  
like an arrow aimed at a flag  
while the branches shoulder their violins.  
Squatting on their flowers,  
insects  
pray without stirring.

Our feet sink  
in  
the black weeds  
of the jungle sea,  
in clouds fallen from the forest canopy,  
and all I ask  
for the foreigner,  
for the despairing scout,  
is a seat  
in the sitting-tree,  
a throne  
of unkempt velvet,  
the plush of an overstuffed chair  
torn up by the snaking vines—  
yes:  
for the man who goes on foot,  
a chair  
that embraces everything,  
the sound  
ground and  
supreme  
dignity  
of repose!

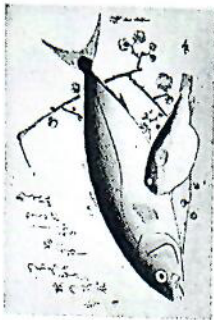
Get behind me, thirsty tigers  
and swarms of bloodsucking flies—  
behind me, black morass  
of ghostly fronds,  
greasy waters,  
leaves the color of rust,  
deathless snakes.  
Bring me a chair  
in the midst of  
thunder,  
a chair for me  
and for everyone  
not only  
to relieve



an exhausted body  
but  
for every purpose  
and for every person,  
for squandered strength  
and for meditation.

War is as vast as the shadowy jungle.  
A single chair  
is  
the first sign  
of  
peace.

## The Fishes, the Seasons, and the Poems



**Inada**, also called buri and warasa. Yellowtail or amberjack. Probably *Seriola quinqueradiata*. Family Carangidae; jacks and pompanos. Highly esteemed in Japan, this fish is marketed fresh, salted, dried, and canned.

**Fugu**. Probably *Fugu pardalis*. Family Tetraodontidae; puffers, blowfish, globefish, etc.

**SEASON**: February. Both the fish and the plum blossoms are appropriate to very early spring.

The warm spray that blows off the fast-moving water will force the bloom of an early-picked plum branch.  
(The word for fast-moving water also means yellow-tail, and the word for blow also means blowfish.)



**Hirame**. Olive halibut. *Paralichthys olivaceus*. Family Bothidae; lefteye flounders.

**Mebaru**, also called chima soi. Black rockfish. *Sebastes schlegelii*. Family Scorpaenidae; rockfishes, scorpionfishes.

**SEASON**: March. The flowers are cherry blossoms.

The taste of fish and the sweet smell of blossoms; both reach their peak in the spring.



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**Koi.** Carp. *Cyprinus carpio*. Family Cyprinidae; carp, minnows, etc. The largest family of freshwater fishes. *Cyprinus carpio*, native to Asia, is one of the first fish species to be "farmed." It was raised in the fish ponds of emperors and harvested on festive occasions.

SEASON: April and May.

With such power the carp climbs upstream. Some day he will turn into a dragon and reach the clouds.

**Tobiuo or tobiuwo.** One of the flying fishes. Probably *Prognichthys*. Family Exocoetidae; flying fishes.

It is almost summer. Women divers are at work in the bay; the flying fish leap; the cuckoo sings. As they splash to the surface the women call out in voices like bird song.

**Ishimochi, also called guchi and shiroguchi.** White croaker. Probably *Argyrosomus argenteus*. Family Sciaenidae; drums and croakers.

SEASON: May. The flower is a lily.



**Katsuo.** Skipjack tuna. *Katsuwonus pelamis*. Family Scombridae; mackerels and tunas. Also called bonito, ocean bonito, stripe-bellied bonito, striped tuna.

SEASON: May. The flower's name in Japanese is "under the snow," it is sometimes called creeping saxifrage, strawberry geranium, or stonebreak.

The spring's first bonito, at market by dawn, are blue and fresh as morning glories starting to open.



**Aji, also called muroaji and maaji.** Horse mackerel. *Trachurus trachurus*. Family Carangidae; jacks, pompanos, horse mackerels, etc.

**Ebi.** Shrimp or prawn.

SEASON: May through July.

(The poem for this print is so dependent on puns and double meanings that it cannot be translated properly.)

**Sayori.** Japanese halfbeak. *Hemiramphus sajori*. Family Hemiramphidae; halfbeaks. This fish grows to about sixteen inches and is commonly harvested for food in Japan.

**Awabi or tokobushi.** Abalone. *Haliotis tuberculata*.

SEASON: May.

On rocks and sand and rinsing waves the jewel, abalone, polishes itself.

The kimono lining comes out now that spring is here and the Sayori fish is cleaned for a springtime feast.

(The word for removing the cotton padding from a kimono is the same as the word for cleaning fish.)

I would love to be transformed into a creature thin enough to follow the abalone into the cracks of rocks.



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**Ainame.** Greenling. Probably *Hexagrammus otakii*. Family Hexagrammidae.

**Shima-hata.** A grouper. Family Serranidae; groupers, seabasses, perch, rock cods, etc.

SEASON: Summer. The plant is a nandin or bush clover.

Shima-hata from the deep bay water is sliced and formed into waves to remind the guests of the sea.





Iseebi. Crawfish or spiny lobster.  
One of the *Pandalirus*.

Ebi. Shrimp.  
SEASON: July.

Failing to catch an Ise lobster is like watching a boat depart that you wanted to board.

When even the ocean appears to steam in the noonday heat a shrimp jumps up from below as if from an icy spring.



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Kani, also called Kegani. Crab. *Charybdis*.

Saba, also called hirasaba and marusaba. Mackerel. *Scomber japonicus*. Family Scombridae; mackerels and tunas.

SEASON: Summer. The flower is a morning glory.

The fish market comes to life at dawn like a great morning glory opening up.



Kochi. Bartail flathead. *Platycephalus indicus*. Family Platycephalidae; flatheads.

SEASON: Summer. Flowering egg-plant appears in summer. Tailfins of swallowed fish can be seen in the flatheads' mouths.

The eastwind fish is as sweet as the east wind itself; on a hot summer day, a breeze coming back from spring. (Kochi also means east wind.)



The sea bass sparkles like the dew on yellow flowers or the glint in a woman's black hair.

Suzuki. Japanese seaperch. *Lateolabrax japonicus*. Family Serranidae; groupers and sea basses.

Kimmedai. Alfonsino. Probably *Beryx splendens*. Family Berycidae.

SEASON: August. The plant is "shiso" or "beefsteak plant."



Kasago. Marbled rockfish. *Sebastes marmoratus*. Family Scorpaenidae; scorpionfishes, rockfishes, etc.

Himedai. Snapper. *Pristipomoides sieboldii*. Family Lutjanidae; snappers.

SEASON: July through September. The ginger shoot in the woodcut is a July plant.

The fishermen sail in their boat from Misaki Bay. Friends shout goodbye, and wish they could hear the replies.



Bora. Common gray mullet. *Mugil cephalus*. Family Mugilidae; mullets. Also called striped mullet. This member of the mullet family may reach three feet in length and weigh as much as fifteen pounds.

SEASON: August. The flower is a camellia.

Look at Fuji's reflection in the water, and see the mullet climbing up its sides.

Thunder shakes the water. The mullet takes fright from the flash of lightning, or was it a fish hook?

**Kurodai.** Black seabream or porgy. *Acanthopagrus schlegelii*. Family Sparidae; porgies, seabreams, etc.  
**Akadai.** Red bream or golden tai. Probably *Dentex tumifrons*.

SEASON: September. The plants are bamboo leaf and Japanese pepper.



Like the limb of a tree the black bream is large and dark. The red bream are small and bright as cherries.

Under a full moon a fisherman looks in the water and sees a large black bream: It is only the shadow of a small bream swimming slowly.

**Ai.** Trout. Family Salmonidae; trout and salmon.

SEASON: August to October; the trout are swimming downstream.



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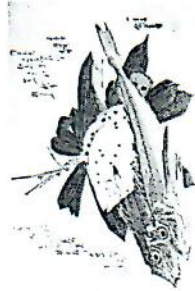
While the noisy autumn rain falls on the river the trout swim in the shadows soundlessly.

**Madai, also called red tai.** Red seabream. *Pagrus major*. Family Sparidae; porgies, breams. One of the most important food fishes in Japanese waters. Marketed alive, fresh, frozen, and spice cured.

SEASON: Fall to winter.



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**Hobo or kangashira.** Gurnard. Probably *Lepidotrigla*. Family Triglidæ; sea robbers, gurnards.

**Karei.** Righteye flounder. Family Pleuronectidae; flounders.

SEASON: October–November. The plant is a low, striped bamboo.

The flounder are like autumn leaves hanging in the sun near the fisherman's hut.

**Oomon-hata.** Arecolated reefcod or yellow spotted rock cod. *Epinephelus areolatus*. Family Serranidae; sea basses, rock cods, groupers, etc.

**Shiro-amadai.** White horsehead. *Branchiostegus argenteus*. Family Branchiostegidae; tilefishes.

SEASON: November–April. The plant is a Japanese horseradish root.



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The brush of a true artist is alive. His fish paintings will make you hungry.

**Akodai.** Red rockfish. *Sebastes matsubarai*. Family Scorpaenidae; scorpionfishes, rockfishes, etc.

SEASON: November–December. Bamboograss as well as rockfish suggest late fall or early winter.



One of life's pleasures is to be given the good luck gift, the fish among fish, aka, which no one dislikes.