

ALL HAIL HAIKU!

FROM *A FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN HAIKU*¹

Charles Trumbull

You might think that “hail” would be a pretty straightforward word describing frozen hard things dropping from the sky. You’d be wrong. It turns out that there is a variety of frozen hard things dropping from the sky, for example, hailstones, soft hail, sleet, graupel, and snow pellets. Some of these happen in winter, some in summer. Moreover, various cultures regard these phenomena differently. There are even differences between British and American usage. Before looking at the way these basic terms are used in haiku, let’s dwell a moment on definitions.

Hail is the most generic word. *Encyclopædia Britannica* says “[any] solid precipitation in the form of hard pellets of ice that fall from cumulonimbus clouds is called hail.” Britannica then distinguishes three basic types:

True hailstones—“hard pellets of ice, larger than 5 mm (0.2 inch) in diameter, that may be spherical, spheroidal, conical, discoidal, or irregular in shape and often have a structure of concentric layers of alternately clear and opaque ice.”

Snow pellets or soft hail—“which are white opaque rounded or conical pellets as large as 6 mm (0.2 inch) in diameter. They are composed of small cloud droplets frozen together, have a low density, and are readily crushed.” Soft hail is also called **graupel** (from the German word *Graupel*) a term used by meteorologists and increasingly by the English-speaking public.

Sleet—“globular, generally transparent ice pellets that have diameters of 5 mm (0.2 inch) or less and that form as a result of the freezing of raindrops or the freezing of mostly melted snowflakes. In Great Britain and in some parts of the United States, a mixture of rain and snow is called sleet, and the term has sometimes been used to identify the clear ice on objects that is more correctly known as **glaze**.”² In the main “Hail” article, the encyclopedia calls this phenomenon **Small hail (ice grains or pellets)**.

Clear so far? Yeah, not to me either. But let’s turn to the Japanese equivalents. Gabi Greve, in her wonderful online *World Kigo Database*, identifies the following basic terms:

雹 *hyō*—**hail**, especially hailstones, a *kigo* for all summer. Greve writes: “Hail usually comes with the summer storms and is known to destroy the rice harvest in just one go. The grains range from rather small to big as an apple or a man’s fist.” Other related summer *kigo* are 氷雨 **hisame**—**ice rain** or **freezing rain** and 雹の大降り **hyō no ōburi**—**hailstorm**.

霰 *arare*—**snow pellets, winter hail, soft hail, or graupel**. *Arare* is a *kigo* for all winter. Greve also lists these related all-winter *kigo*: 玉霰 *tamaarare*—**jewel-like pellets** or **hail balls**), 雪あられ *yukiarare* (**mixed snow and hail**).

霙 *mizore*—**sleet**, as well as 雪交ぜ *yukimaze*—**sleet mixed with snow**.

It is also permissible to use the winter *kigo* in spring haiku by specifically mentioning the season: 春の霙 *haru no mizore* or 春みぞれ *harumizore* (sleet in spring), 春の雹 *haru no hyō* (hail in spring), and 春の霰 *haru no arare* (snow pellets in spring).

Hyō—**hail**—is a rarely used word in Japanese haiku; I find only five Japanese haiku translated into English that use this summer *kigo*. Perhaps the most interesting are these two:

雹はれて豁然とある山河かな
hyō harete katsuzen to aru sanga kana

The hailstorm cleared up,
 And hills and rivers
 Lie stretched out.

Murakami Kijō, trans. R.H. Blyth, A History of Haiku 2 (1964)

君はいま大粒の雹君を抱く
kimi wa ima ōtsubu no hyō, kimi o daku

You are now
 an enormous hailstone,
 so I hug you

*Tsubouchi Toshinori, Gendai Haiku Kyōkai, eds.,
 Haiku Universe for the 21st Century (2008)*

Although it is technically not “hail” but rather “graupel” or “snow pellets,” *arare* is the word most often used by Japanese haikuists for wintertime hail. The best-known and oft-translated haiku is surely this one of Santōka’s:

鉄鉢の中へも霰
tetsu hachi no naka e mo arare

Into the begging bowl, too, hailstones

Santōka, trans. Hiroaki Sato, Cicada 2:2 (1978)

Here translator Sato renders *arare* as “hail”; of the twenty-two versions of this haiku that I have found, all have “hail,” and both my English-Japanese dictionaries prefer “hail” as the primary translation of *arare*. Bill Higginson noticed this peculiarity as early as 2001 and reported his research to Gabi Greve at the *World Kigo Database*: “Collating the descriptions in the *saijiki* with North American weather guides has led me to believe that ‘hail’ is a bad translation of *arare*, which makes much better sense as ‘graupel’ (technical meteorological name) or ‘snow

pellets' (common name). *Hyō*, on the other hand, does seem to pair well with 'hail.'" [My dictionaries prefer "hailstones" as a translation for *hyō*. ~CT]

In *Haiku World*, Higginson calls *arare* "snow pellets" or "graupel" and explains the translation problem, writing "the [*arare*] phenomenon is common in Japan, where graupel frequently mixes with snow or rain, and is therefore the first image of hard precipitation that comes to mind, accounting for the fact that *arare* occupies the figurative niche in Japanese that is occupied by 'hail' in English." In accord with Britannica's scheme in which hail(stones), sleet, and graupel are all types of hail, and if one thinks "(soft) hail," I think *arare* can be translated as "hail."

Arare is, in fact, a popular *kigo* in Japanese haiku. Bashō and Buson each wrote six haiku on the topic, Chiyo-ni at least one, Santōka at least two, and Shiki more than a hundred. A first reading of the Santōka begging-bowl haiku above suggests that the hail emphasizes the emptiness of the bowl, the absence of anything but the hailstones. I submit, however, that the key sense involved is not sight, but sound. It is the rattling of the *arare* that triggers the pathos of the image. Here is a short selection of other Japanese haiku about the sounds of *arare* to make my point:

いかめしき音や霰の檜木笠
ikameshiki oto ya arare no hinoki-gasa

Harsh sound—
 hail splattering
 my traveller's hat.

*Bashō, trans. Lucien Stryk,
 On Love and Barley (1985)*

呉竹の奥に音あるあられ哉
kuretake no oko ni oto aru arare kana

there is a sound inside
 The black bamboo—

The hail! *Shiki, trans. Michael F. Marra, Seasons and
 Landscapes in Japanese Poetry (2008)*

雑水に琵琶聴く軒の霰哉
zōsui ni biwa kiku noki no arare kana

with rice gruel
 listening to a lute under the eaves
 hailstones

*Bashō; trans. Jane Reichhold,
 Bashō: Complete Haiku (2008)*

Reichhold explains: “The sound of the Japanese lute (*biwa*) has often been compared to the sound of hailstones falling on a thatched roof.” Interestingly, Reichhold uses the words “jewel” and “hailstone” together for *tamaarare* in her translation of another Bashō haiku:

いざ子供走りありかん玉霰
iza kodomo hashiri arikan tamaarare

now children
 come run among jewels
 hailstones

*Bashō, trans. Reichhold,
 Bashō: Complete Haiku (2008)*

Mizore—sleet—is presented as an unpleasant aspect of winter weather in Japanese haiku. It is often visualized as mixing with *arare*—graupel—or, more often, with snow or freezing rain. In fact the translators of the following haiku use the kanji for *arare* but the *rōmaji mizore*:

琳しさの底ぬけて降る震かな
sabishisa no soko nukete furu mizore kana

Unfathomed loneliness
 Breaks through—
 Falling sleet!

*Naitō Jōsō, trans. Ichikawa Sanki et al.,
 Haikai and Haiku (1958)*

While puzzling over cold lumpy things falling from Japanese skies, I came across this haiku that sums it all up:

松山にひよおかあられか論じおり
Matsuyama ni hyō-ka arare-ka ronji ori

in Matsuyama
 heatedly discussing if it's
 hail or frozen dew

Dhugal J. Lindsay, Fuyoh 2 (1995)

Mizore is a fairly common *kigo*, used in classic haiku by Buson, Issa, Shiki, and many others, though not by Bashō or Chiyo-ni. Buson's "old pond" haiku is the most-translated sleet haiku:

古池に草履沈みてみそれかな
furu ike ni zōri shizumite mizore kana

In an old pond
 a straw sandal half sunken—
 wet snowfall!

*Buson, trans. Yuki Sawa and Edith Marcombe
 Shiffert, Haiku Master Buson, 1st ed. (1978)*

None of the translators I have seen make it clear exactly where the sandal is positioned in the pond: Eric Amann says it "sticks to the bottom," W. S. Merwin and Takako Lento say it's "at the bottom," Blyth has it "sunk to the bottom," Robert Hass has "half sunk," both Saga Hiroo and Allan Persinger have it "sinking," and Stephen Addiss says simply "submerged." I interpret the point of this haiku to be someone having lost a sandal in the pond, and his or her misery compounded by cold, unpleasant sleet. Such a dark mood is characteristic of other *mizore* haiku as well:

ゆで汁のけふる垣根也みぞれふる
yudejiru no keburu kakine nari mizore furu

steam from boiling soup
 a fence ...
 falling sleet

*Issa, trans. David G. Lanoue,
 Haiku of Kobayashi Issa Website*

Lanoué asks, “Is Issa implying that the steam from his soup will protect him from the cold world outside—the falling sleet?” I would think that Issa sees the steam from the boiling soup on the far side of the fence, while on his side is only the cold sleet—sort of “the grass is greener” idea.

しみじみと子は肌につくみぞれかな
shimijimi to ko wa hada ni tsuku mizore kana

Pressing the child
 Closely to my body,
 Sleet falling.

*Ogawa Shūshiki-jo, trans. R.H. Blyth,
 A History of Haiku 1 (1963)*

おもい見るや我屍にふるみぞれ
omoimiru ya waga shi-kabane ni furu mizore

Imagining sleet
 pelting
 on my corpse.

*Hara Sekitei, trans. Lucien Stryk,
 Cage of Fireflies (1993)*

Both Higginson and Greve mention *hisame*, “ice rain” (or presumably “freezing rain”) as a variation of hail and a summer *kigo*, but neither provides a sample haiku. My Haiku Database includes only one haiku using *hisame*, so I conclude that it is not in common use in haiku.

Haiku about hail—the large, hard, summer kind—number 275 (about one in a thousand haiku in English) in The Haiku Database, moderately frequently, I’d conclude. This category seems to invite many mediocre haiku as poets struggle to find meaning for their haiku beyond mere observation. Here are two exceptional

hail haiku that may at first appear to be simple observations but lead the reader to deeper thoughts:

Hailstones
through
the spider's web

Peggy Willis Lyles, Tightrope (1979)

deserted park hail on the chessboard

Michael Dylan Welch, South by Southeast 13:2 (2006)

Just as we saw with *arare*, the sound of hail is something that inspires poets. Falling hail is often described using violent verbs such as splatter, clatter, rattle, beat, drum, pelt, pound, or thump. Popping popcorn, war drums, music of various kinds, tennis balls, and other clamor are evoked:

hail in the woods
my maul and hammer
ring

Brent Partridge, Modern Haiku 20:3 (1989)

into
the
rain-
filled
bucket
so
softly
hailstones

Carolyn Hall, Acorn 5 (2000)

Mostly the sound of hail evokes human misery or isolation:

the sound of hail
knocking on the glass roof—
my loneliness

Olivier Schopfer, Modern Haiku 45:2 (2014)

summer hail storm—
 sharing the bus shelter
 with Mormons

Joanna Preston, Valley Micropress, Jan/Feb (2001)

A few haiku deal with the destructiveness of a hailstorm—nothing as terrible, perhaps, as the Seventh Plague that Moses faced (Exodus 9:13–35), but still enough to threaten life and livelihood:

hailstorm
 the farmer and his wife
 holding hands

Tim Jamieson, Haiku Canada Newsletter 17:2 (2004)

So close to harvest—
 hailstones melting in
 my father's hand

Shawn Klemmer, Modern Haiku 31:1 (2000)

Many more haiku are concerned about the effects of hail on flowers, especially, of course, cherry blossoms:

cherry blossom rain
 sunlit tulips crimson
 on hailstone bed

*Vicki McCullough, Angela Leuck, ed.,
 Tulip Haiku (2004)*

Not surprisingly, hail is often used as a metaphor:

the falling hail
 across the old battlefield
 cairn after cairn

David Cobb, Jumping from Kiyomizu (1996)

carving hearts in birch bark hailstones bruising

Bill Pauly, Cicada 2:3 (1978)

On the lighter side, people enjoy watching the antics of falling hailstones:

Yesterday locusts
 lunched happily here . . . Today
 hail jumps in the grass. *Evelyn Tooley Hunt,*
American Haiku 2:2 (1964)

left outside
 in a hailstorm
 a pogo stick *Alan Pizzarelli, The Windswept Corner (2005)*

Some people find unusual uses for hailstones:

summer thunder storm
 saving the hail stones
 for her iced tea *Patricia Benedict, DailyHaiku [Web] (2009)*

Family reunion . . .
 Grandma takes the hailstone
 from the freezer *Alexis K. Rotella, Modern Haiku 15:1 (1984)*

I have found no haiku in English using “graupel.” “Soft hail” is used only once, “ice pellets” three times, and “snow pellets” twice, including:

Snow pellets pinging
 glass—a cardinal
 flits to our feeder *Marshall Hryciuk, Asahi Haikuist Network (2014)*

I have collected about 250 English-language haiku mentioning sleet. For anglophone haiku poets, sleet can occur at any time of year, though the haiku tend to cluster in early spring. Again, sound is an important aspect:

sleet rattles
 brown leaves
 a hunter's distant shots *Jack Barry, Swamp Candles (2006)*

At the windowpane,
 sleet; and here in the dark house—
 a ticking of clocks.

O Mabson Southard, American Haiku 1:1 (1963)

sleet against the window
 at last mother threads
 the needle *George Swede, Almost Unseen (2000)*

breaking the silence
 of Mama's knitting needles
 the click-click of sleet

Raymond Roseliep, Sailing Bones (1978)

A more important aspect, however, is the sheer misery of being outside in a sleet storm and the way it engenders loneliness and despair:

death of an old friend
 a train's horn
 through miles of sleet *Dave Russo, Acorn 14 (spring 2005)*

sleet:
 the color of their eyes,
 these homeless *Geraldine Clinton Little, Frogpond 12:4 (1989)*

Easter sleet storm
 the parking lot full
 at the nursing home *Marsh Muirhead, Modern Haiku 38:3 (2007)*

invalid brother's molars in a jar soft sleet

Michael Dudley, Curvd H&Z #119 (1981)

Slush and sleet of March
and a small mutt at someone's door
wailing to get in.

Marjory Bates Pratt, American Haiku 2:2 (1964)

evening sleet
the koi wait it out
under the bridge

William Hart, Modern Haiku 44:2 (2013)

early spring sleet
driving through Switzerland
to where I might die

J. Zimmerman, Frogpond 37:3 (2014)

sleet
hones
farewell

Raymond Roseliep, Cicada 5:3 (1981)

Sleet seems to have a profound effect on interpersonal communications, both positive and negative:

St Valentine's Day—
sleetflakes drifting
into last year's nest

David Cobb, Snapshots 6 (1999)

the sound of sleet when there's nothing left to say

Gary Steinberg, Frogpond 23:2 (2000)

looking away from each other
tick of sleet
on the car roof

Rod Willmot, The Ribs of Dragonfly (1984)

rain becomes sleet
 the secrets
 we take to the grave *Billie Wilson, Mariposa 31 (2014)*

In haiku, semi-solid sleet is often changing to another state:

asking him to stay—
 snow turns to sleet
 then to rain *Kathe L. Palka, Bottle Rockets 14:2, #28 (2013)*

sleety rain
 the flowered umbrellas
 sold out *Adelaide B. Shaw, The Heron's Nest 12:2 (2010)*

Many poets use sleet to express irony, and enjoy the contrast between the wintry sleet and the signs of spring:

Winter sleet—
 upon the poplar branch...
 a chrysalis. *John Wills, Back Country (1969)*

dried tadpole
 stuck with a pin—
 ticking sleet
Michael Dylan Welch, Betty Drevniok Award, HM (2001)

as well as other incongruities:

cutting posts—
 the sizzle of sleet
 on the chainsaw housing *Lee Gurga, Modern Haiku 22:2 (1991)*

winter wedding:
 sleet and rice together
 pelt the newlyweds *Emily Romano, Wind Chimes 3 (1981)*

sweatlodge
 out of the earth's steaming womb
 into sleet and lightning

Don Eulert, Field (1998)

And to wrap up (so to say), we'll cite Bill Higginson again, this time with his grand summary of spring weather:

rain, sleet,
 ice pellets, snow, this
 hour of spring

William J. Higginson, Gossamer (2003)

•••

NOTES:

1. *A Field Guide to North American Haiku* is a long-term project along the lines of a haiku encyclopedia-cum-*saijiki*, a selection of the best English-language haiku arranged by topic and illustrating what it is about a given topic that attracts poets to write. When complete, the *Field Guide* project will comprise multiple thick volumes keyed to the several topics in traditional Japanese *saijiki* (haiku almanac) and Western counterparts, notably William J. Higginson's *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (1996). These topics are: Season, Sky & Elements, Landscape, Plants, Animals, Human Affairs, and Observances. The current compilation presents "Sky & Elements: hail; sleet; and graupel." The haiku are selected from my Haiku Database, currently containing more than 365,000 haiku, and are offered as prime examples of haiku in English that illuminate our points. Publishing these miniature topical haiku anthologies is an experiment to test the feasibility of the larger *Field Guide* project. Critique and suggestions, supportive or critical, are warmly invited; please comment by e-mail to trumbullc\ at\comcast.net.

2. "Climate," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/climate-meteorology/Types-of-precipitation>; acc. Oct. 27, 2017.

3. "Sleet," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/sleet>; acc. Dec. 8, 2017.

4. "Hail," *World Kigo Database*, Feb. 8, 2005.

5. "Snow Pellets," William J. Higginson, *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (Tokyo, New York, and London: Kodansha International, 1996), 245.