



Bird Prints with Japanese Poems

空に飛ぶ
鳥の影
を
見れば
心は
安らぐ
なり
人
を
思ふ
は
鳥
の
如
し

Introduction

Humans worldwide write poems to express their thoughts and feelings. In Japan, writing poetry was a very popular hobby during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Some of the poems written then were more playful than others. The most playful type, called *kyōka*, often included words with a double meaning or a pun which was intended to amuse readers. A *kyōka* poem had five lines with 31 syllables arranged as follows: 5-7-5-7-7. A second, usually more serious type of poem was called *haikai*. It had only three lines with 17 syllables arranged as follows: 5-7-5. Some of these *haikai* and *kyōka* poems were added to printed artwork which created a powerful combination of verbal and visual expression. Twenty-five examples of these pictures-with-poems are presented in this virtual exhibition. Examples were selected from the Reader Collection of Japanese Art which includes a number of pictures-with-poems of bird subjects. Perhaps the most famous of these bird pictures-with-poems are those drawn by two prominent Japanese printmakers of the time, Utamaro Kitagawa and Hiroshige Utagawa. Utamaro's book entitled *Momochidori Kyōka Awase* (Birds Compared in Humorous Verses), published in 1790-1, included fifteen pictures. Each picture showed two different bird species with a *kyōka* poem about each. All fifteen pictures are shown below along with English translations of the *kyōka* poems. Hiroshige drew hundreds of bird pictures, each accompanied by either a *kyōka* or *haikai* poem. These pictures-with-poems were sold individually during the 1830-40s. Ten of Hiroshige's bird pictures are included here, four with *kyōka* poems and six with *haikai* poems. An English translation of each poem is provided.

Additional Reading

Bogel, Cynthia J., Goldman, Israel and Marks, Alfred H. 1988. *Hiroshige Birds and Flowers*. George Braziller, Inc., New York.

Meech-Pekarik, Julia and Kenney, James T. 1981. *Utamaro: a chorus of birds*. The Viking Press, New York.

Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| 1 | Japanese bush-warbler
(<i>Cettia diphone</i>) | Near the eaves
I hear the warbler
sing a song of envy;
he must be watching us,
my lover and me. | Varied tit
(<i>Sittiparus varius</i>) | Not a sign of you
do I find
in your bed tonight;
alone but sad,
I am but a tit in love. |
|---|--|---|--|---|



山雀 沈定丸
 君ハ床をみめぐりのくみまはれまう
 ち~~~~~お~~~~~れき乃山から
 山雀 沈定丸
 別み遊
 家遊中を
 一都ハ
 山雀

Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

2

Skylark
(*Alauda arvensis*)

Conceited skylark
flying high in the sky;
even you
must come down to earth
when night falls.

Japanese quail
(*Coturnix japonica*)

Although the quail
coos and coos
to be with you,
like the ears of ripe millet
you do not so easily fall



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| 3 | White-backed woodpecker (<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>) | True to his name the woodpecker pecks and pecks away, never stopping to listen to what people are saying. | Japanese grosbeak (<i>Eophona personata</i>) | Going to meet his secret love, the grosbeak lets out a warble and gives his name away. |
|---|---|---|--|--|



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

4

White wagtail
(*Motacilla*
alba)

My heart
was soothed
when we met at night;
but now, I must suffer
what people may say.

Copper pheasant
(*Syrmaticus*
soemmerringii)

The copper pheasant
cries and cries
and sheds tears to no end;
for too many nights
you have stayed away.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

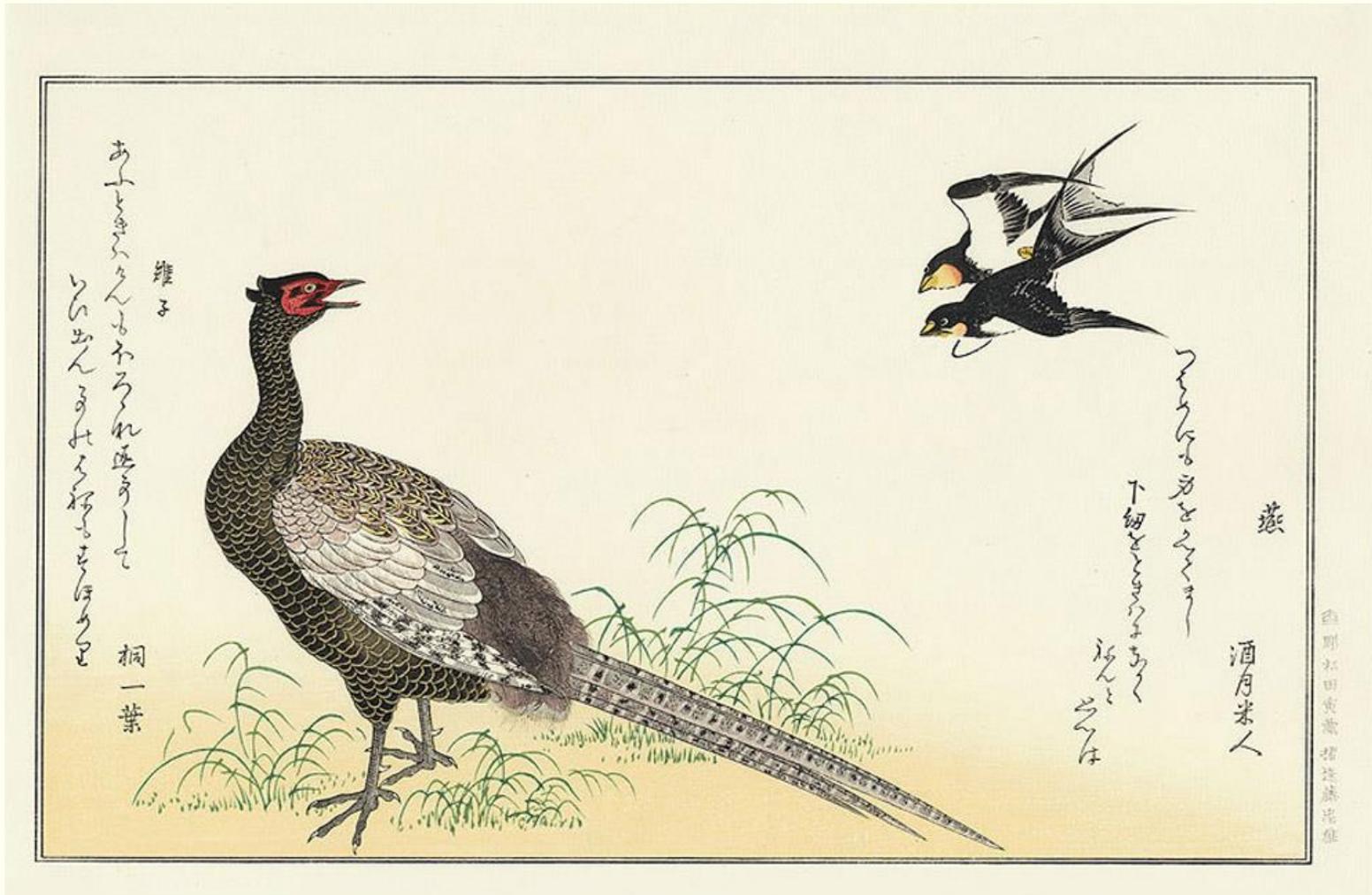
5

Green
pheasant
(*Phasianus
versicolor*)

Your words
are like swords
when we meet;
even my open wings
soon shrivel to nothing.

Barn swallow
(*Hirundo rustica*)

I came dressed
like a swallow;
but now, I untie my sash
looking forward to
the long night ahead.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

6

Japanese
white-eye
(*Zosterops
japonicus*)

Pushed out
of his honey-filled nest
following a fight,
the white-eyed bird
seems not to mind at all.

Long-tailed tit
(*Aegithalos
caudatus*)

Come
and let yourself
be mine;
for us the nights
will be as long as the tit's tail.

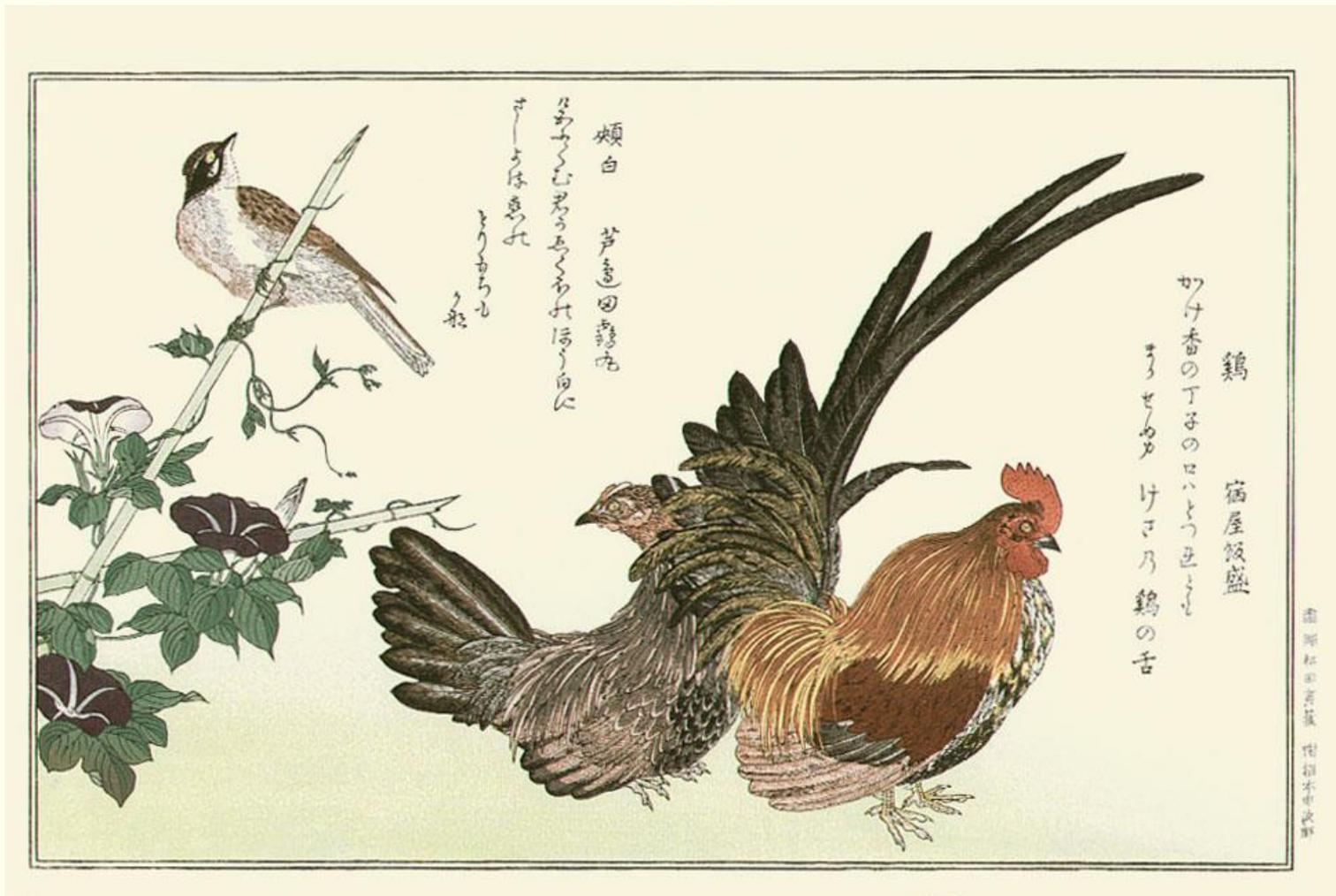


Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

8

Meadow
bunting
(*Emberiza
cioides*)
Your dimples
like the bunting
so full of charm;
beware the stealthy
birdlime of love.

Domestic fowl
(*Gallus gallus*)
The mouth of a
perfume bottle
can be capped,
but the cock of the morn
crows without ceasing.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

9 Eurasian bullfinch Even use the bullfinch
(*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) sleeps in the night
but your lies give me no perch to rest.

Scops owl I laugh and cry
(*Otus scops*) at the same time
since you ignore me like an eared owl in the tree.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

10

Little egret
(*Egretta garzetta*)

More than the chatty
black crow that kisses
and tells,
I dislike the little egret
who is mostly beak.

Cormorant
(*Phalacrocorax*
sp.)

In the river
the cormorant swims
washed by waves;
soon he too
will be drowned in rumors.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

12

Rock dove
(*Columba
livia*)

Colors of the dove
do not fade with age;
we too will not change
no matter the number
of New year's beans we eat.

Eurasian tree sparrow
(*Passer montanus*)

Your wandering heart
is like the restless
village sparrow;
before long
rumors begin to fly.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

13

Ural owl
(*Strix uralensis*)
You must have
the eyes of an owl;
how is it that
you come at night
but never during the day.

Eurasian jay
(*Garrulus glandarius*)
My pledges
sung in a voice
like that of the jay;
even when I cry
you do not lend an ear.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

14

Common
kingfisher
(*Alcedo
atthis*)

When you and I
go into the next life;
let us perch
on lotus leaves
like kingfishers wing to wing.

Mallard duck
(*Anas
platyrhynchos*)

To a man
sending a love note,
even the swift messenger
seems slow as a duck
stuck on birdlime.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

15

Bull-headed
shrike (*Lanius*
bucephalus)

I feel as if
my heart were shrinking,
hung to dry
on a withered branch
by the many-tongued shrike.

Northern goshawk
(*Accipiter gentilis*)

If I were
a hawk,
I would make a meal
of the little birds
spreading rumors.



16 Scops owl (*Otus scops*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

The eared-owl
asail for a three-day cruise
on the three-night moon,
longs to hear pine music
float slowly through his ears.



17 Domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

The cock starts to crow;
the time to part has come.
Take me to a town
where the rooster is not heard;
that's the only place for dawn.



18 Domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

The hour of parting,
with all its deep feelings,
in drifts about them,
they hear the melting tones
of the rooster in the snow.



19 Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) and Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Passing the cold night
watching over little ones
asleep in the nest -
ingratitude is something
only human beings know.



20 Common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Preening his feathers
in a watery mirror -
kingfisher in flight.



21 Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Perhaps for a dream of autumn
the quails
cry.



22 Goose (*Anser* sp.) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Will it come again -
another night like this one?
Wild geese and the moon.



23 Mallard duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

A duck calls softly;
a breeze sets ripples moving
over the water.



24 Golden pheasant (*Chrysolophus pictus*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Blundering into
a path where tasty grasses
manage to grow tall.



25 Mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

For mandarin ducks
thin ice is a wedding cup
now and forever.



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