



Bird Prints with  
Japanese Poems

空に飛ぶ  
鳥の姿は  
かくも  
美しく  
なり  
人を  
あはれ  
しむる  
鳥

## Introduction

Humans worldwide write poems to express their thoughts and feelings. In Japan, writing poetry was a very popular hobby during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> 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<br><i>(Cettia diphone)</i> | Near the eaves<br>I hear the warbler<br>sing a song of envy;<br>he must be watching us,<br>my lover and me. | Varied tit<br><i>(Sittiparus varius)</i> | Not a sign of you<br>do I find<br>in your bed tonight;<br>alone but sad,<br>I am but a tit in love. |
|---|--|---|--|---|



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.

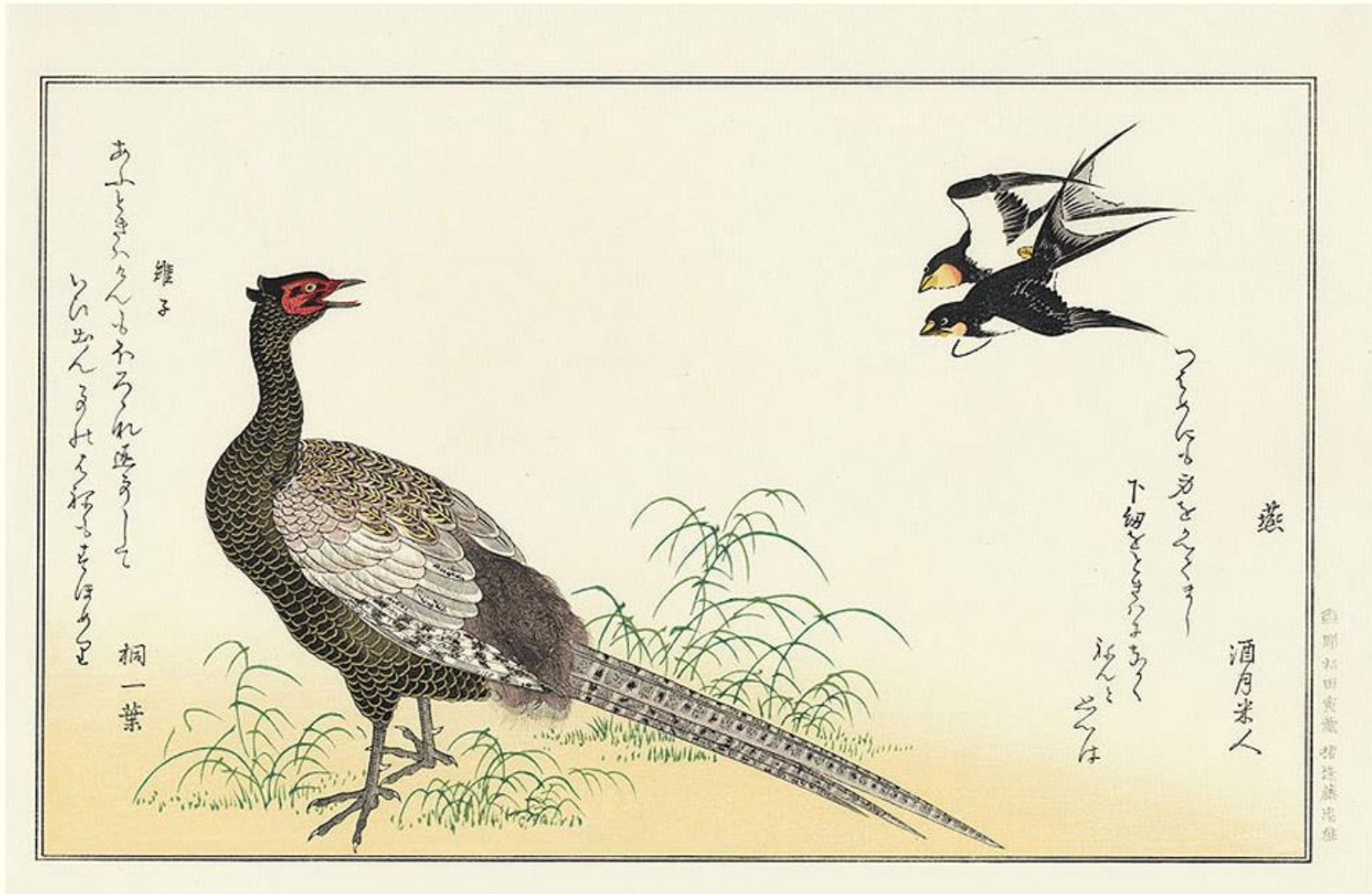
5

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.

7 Common snipe  
(*Gallinago gallinago*) In the night  
unable to sleep  
waiting for a lover,  
loneliness snips away at  
the snipe's empty heart.

Winter wren  
(*Troglodytes troglodytes*) Since your heart  
is as lofty as the great  
mythical bird taihō,  
how can this wretched wren  
ever hope to fly so high.



Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

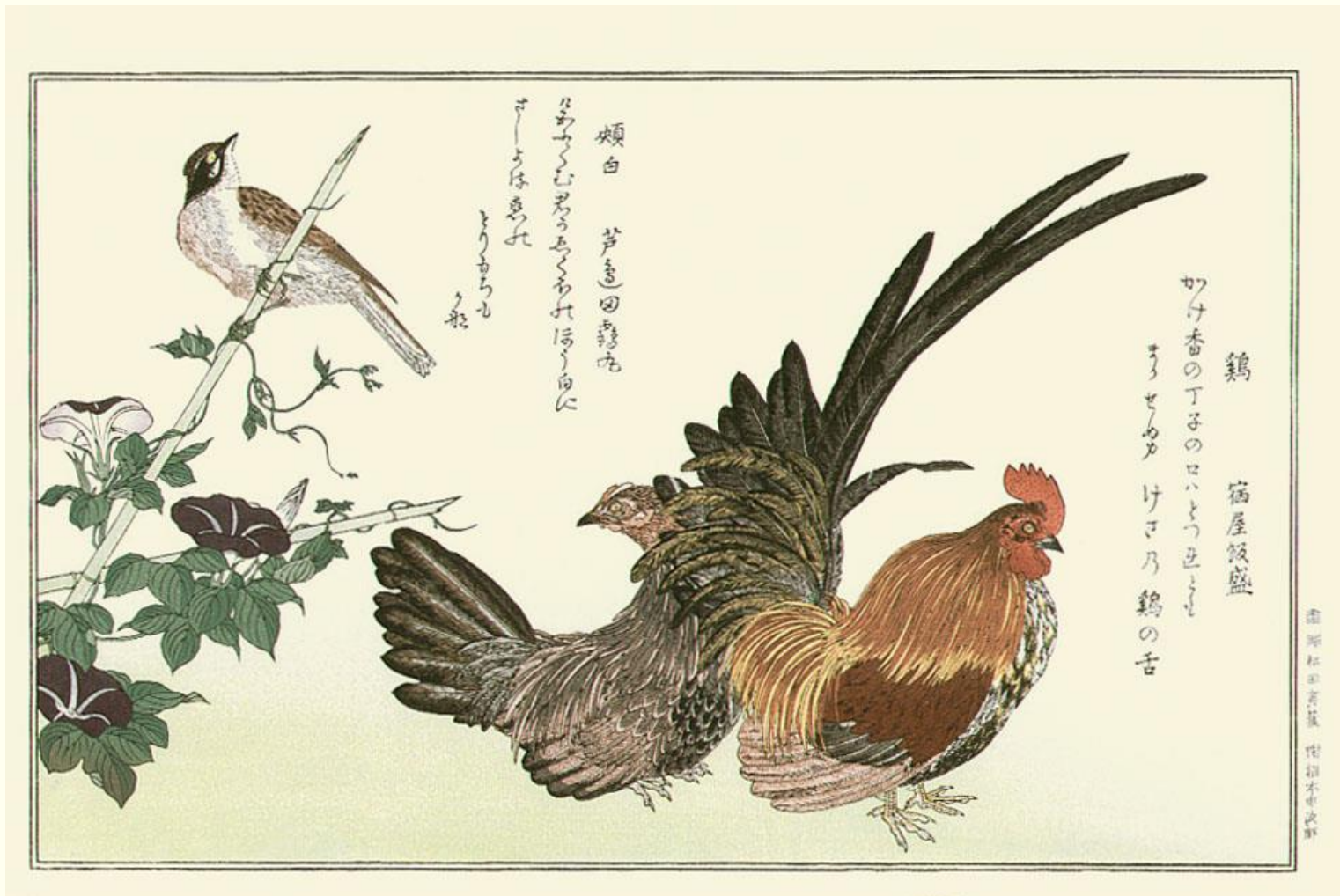
8

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

Scops owl (*Otus scops*) I laugh and cry 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.

11

Japanese  
robin  
(*Erithacus  
akahige*)

My heart  
like the robin  
is joyful in name only;  
I can hardly go on  
burdened so with love.

Great tit  
(*Parus major*)

Seeing my feathers  
you think of me  
only as an old great tit;  
your cruel reply  
is a little hard for me to take.



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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