

Writing with a fountain pen

Being in the Flow of Ink

In the course of our lives, Debbie and I collected a few beautiful fountain pens. It is a small collection and because the box containing the pens is full and we thought this was a pointer to stop adding to it, it will remain this size.

Fountain pens come in many variations. They are all different (apart from the special one among them that says: “I am not”). There are old (vintage) pens and modern pens. There are pens with steel nibs, and those with golden ones. Nibs come in several sizes and with different line-widths, from extra fine to very broad. There are straight nibs and so called cursive nibs or stub nibs, that produce more line variation and need a different kind of writing technique. The body of the pens can be made of wood, resin or metal; some are plain, others have intricate motives – some are decorated with inlays of pearl mother, gold dust, lacquered and polished many times to produce a little piece of art. There are pens that use ink from cartridges, others have converters that can suck up the ink from a bottle, and yet others have an inbuilt fixed converter called a piston.

Of course we have several bottles of ink in different colours. When changing the ink colour in one pen, we have to thoroughly rinse the old ink out, otherwise the colours will get mixed. So, mostly we use one specific ink for a dedicated pen. Debbie also uses the ink to paint with, and occasionally I do as well (mostly using my fingertips). For an example you can look [here](#).

Since I do most of my writing for this and for our own website on the laptop directly, I use our fountain pens for other productions. I use them for writing my poems and for correcting the draft prints of my writings. Debbie writes the appointments with them in our planner. And we love to write together every day, for half an hour, in our journals. These are very suitable notebooks for writing with fountain pens, for they have special paper called Tomoe River. It is very thin, but it has some sort of coating and it is made to work well with fountain pen ink. The characters don't feather and the ink will not bleed through on the other side. Also, it brings out the colours better and it makes for a very smooth writing experience.

So, for a while, we have been writing daily. Writing with a fountain pen is a very meditative and tactile experience. It produces a flow of being in the moment. To not disturb this experience, we like to copy passages from books that are written in the same flow of oneness. Most suitable for this we feel are poems of ancient Zen monks, like Ryokan or Basho. We have been doing this for years, but even despite of this routine, last year we got distracted some how. After a long winter, in spring last year we adopted a different routine apparently, for when we picked up our writing last week, we saw we have not been writing since April 2021. It is so easy to become absent-minded.

After covid seemed to have receded a bit, and having been vaccinated, we started to go out a bit more and visited friends and family more often. And, coming home tired, writing suffered. Fountain pen writing that is, because for the past year I also produced many new Tales and we made a book about some of them, soon to be released. So there was more writing than ever actually.

However, the book almost finished now, we are glad to find ourselves writing with the fountain pens again, copying beautiful poems of Matsuo Basho (1644 – 1694). These are fine Zen poems written by the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan, in which he describes his journeys as a wandering monk in the most direct and immediate way possible. In his first journey, called The Records of a weather-exposed skeleton, he writes about travelling from his broken house on the River Sumida in the August of the first year of *Jyokyo* (1684).

To conclude this Tale I will give you an impression and copy three of the poems:



“In the utter darkness
Of a moonless night,
A powerful wind embraces
The ancient cedar trees.”

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“I like to wash,
By way of experiment,
The dust of this world
In the droplets of dew”

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“It is spring
Even nameless hills
Are decorated
With thin films of morning mist”

J.Paul Jordaans, *Grathem* 4 June 2022
More Tales? Seek [here](#)
Grateful? Find [here](#)

Portrait of **Basho** by **Hokusai** (1760 – 1849)
Poems from: **Matsuo Basho**, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North
and other travel sketches*, Penguin Classics, London 1966 (translated
from the Japanese by **Noboyuki Yuasa**)