Haiku is a short Japanese poem which developed about the middle of the seventeenth century. It consists of seventeen syllables arranged in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. The first line contains five syllables, the second, seven, and the third, five. Though it is written in an extreme brevity, haiku makes a clear statement and presents a sharp picture. Haiku is also highly suggestive and rich in allusiveness and double meanings. Haiku must have a relation, preferably by implication, to a season of the year. A season-word must be used in haiku.

Harold G. Henderson points out that as a general rule a classical Japanese haiku:

1. consists of 17 Japanese syllables (5-7-5)
2. contains at least some reference to nature (other than human nature)
3. refers to a particular event (i.e. it is not a generalization)
4. presents that event as happening now—not in the past.¹

First, we consider Basho’s “Furuike ya kawazu tobi-komu mizu no oto” and some of its English versions.

1. The old pond:
   A frog jumps in
The sound of the water. translated by R. H. Blyth (Haiku, The Hokuseido Press, 1952)

2. An old pond
   A frog jumps in

31 THE ANCIENT POND

Ancient pond unstirred
Into which a frog has plugged,
A splash was heard.

4. The ancient pond
A frog jumps in,
The sound of water.

"Old pond" of (1) and (2) has a meaning of pond with bad water. "Ancient pond" of (3) and (4) is very effective in suggestiveness because "ancient" implies a meaning of "quiet". I try to make an English version as follows:

THE QUIET POND

Ancient pond—silent—
Into which a frog has jumped:
Sound at the moment.

"Ancient", "silent", and "moment" are rhymed because these three words are important in the world of Basho: "Ancient" represents "eternal" or "everlasting". The "ancient pond" is "a frog", motion. When a frog, as a mediator between eternity and moment, jumps into the silent pond, the sound happens at that moment. Eternity is combined with moment by a frog as a motion. And the ancient pond becomes silent again. In the world of Basho, the ancient pond is a quiet pond.

"The Pond" by Amy Lowell (1874–1925) seems to be written under the influence of Basho's haiku above.

Cold, wet leaves
Floating on moss-coloured water,
And the croaking of frogs—
Cracked bell-notes in the twilight.

In "The Pond", there is a description of the same subject matters of ancient pond at lines 1 and 2, of frog at line 3, and of sound at line 4 as in Basho's haiku above.