

Haiku in Romania

by Vasile Moldovan

Romanian poets expressed their interest in Japanese culture as early as at the very beginning of the 20th century. Two classics of Romanian literature, Alexandru Macedonski and Vasile Alecsandri, were fascinated by the beauty of Japanese landscape poems, and wrote several poems inspired by classical Japanese literature. First Romanian essays on haiku and tanka appeared in the Iasi-based *Literary Event* magazine in 1904. In the same year, the poet Al Vlahuta published an essay titled "The Japanese Poetry and Painting" in the *By the Fireside* magazine; this essay contained a number of tanka and haiku poems. Poet Al. T. Stamatiad published the first haiku poems in Romanian language, 12 in total, in the anthology titled *Tender Landscape*, which won the Romanian Academy Prize.

In the 1930s, the poet Ion Pillat experimented with one-line poems, many of which resembled haiku. His best miniatures appeared in his collection that he called- *One-line Poems* (1935). These poems usually had a caesura and comprised of thirteen to fourteen syllables. In the preface he claimed that even if his poems differ from mainstream haiku they should be regarded as a form of haikai poetry. Pillat's book proved to be influential, and nowadays many Romanian poets follow this trend.

At approximately the same time poet Traian Chelariu published *Nippon soul*, an anthology of classical Japanese poetry in his translations (incidentally, he translated it through German). Chelariu adhered to the 5-7-5 pattern, which afterwards influenced many Romanian authors of haiku.

In 1942, Al. T. Stamatiad published *Nippon Courtesan Songs*, a tanka anthology, and, a year later, *Silk scarves*, an anthology of haiku and tanka. He also couldn't translate directly from Japanese, so he translated the texts through French.

In the 1970s, three anthologies of tanka and haiku appeared in Romania; all were edited by Ion Acsan and Dan Constantinescu, and translations were made by the same Traian Chelariu (again, through German). Well-known Romanian poets Nichita Stanescu and Marin Sorescu wrote a few haiku poems each in the 1980s, however they didn't commit to this genre. The Communist authorities were always suspicious of haiku, so the first Romanian haiku books and leaflets had to appear in such countries as Austria, France and Yugoslavia.

The Romanian haiku movement got a real boost in 1989, the year when the totalitarian regime in Romania came to its close. Towards the end of that year Florin Vasiliu, a Romanian diplomat who worked for a number of years in Japan, published a book entitled "Haiku constellation. Lyric interferences". This book bears a special significance for Romanian haiku. Vasiliu was a well-informed

essayist, and he wrote a complex work interweaving literary history with the poetic studies. It still is regarded as a guidebook for the interpreting and writing haiku poems. Some chapters were corrected and expanded later. And this wasn't the only book on the history of haiku and the poetics of the genre published in our country, so Romanian haiku poets now have quite a number of books they can refer to if they need it.

In March 1990, Florin Vasiliu founded the *Haiku Magazine of Romanian-Japanese Relationships*, one of the first publications of this kind in Europe. At first this magazine was a quarterly with the circulation of 8,000 copies, but now it appears semi-annually, and its circulation fell to under 1,000 copies. Among the members of the editorial board of the *Haiku* magazine there were a few renowned writers, such as Marin Sorescu (at that time he was the Minister of Culture). The editing board of the "Haiku" magazine has formed the core of the Romanian Haiku Society (RSH) founded one year later, in March 1991. The RSH was established on the national level, and now includes about 200 members. Shortly after that some of these haiku enthusiasts formed a few literary circles in several cities and towns of our country. Later some of them were reshaped into haiku societies. First of them, the Haiku Society of Constanta, was founded by poet and painter Ion Codrescu in 1992. Also in 1992, the Costanta-based magazine called Albatross started publishing haiku in both Romanian and English.

In 1992, the HAIKU publishing house was established. It existed for a decade and gained a good reputation for publishing small booklets of haiku and monoku, one line poems; many of these books were printed in three languages: Romanian, English and French. When this publishing house went out of business, the poetess Cornelia Atanasiu founded another, ALCOR, which specialised in haiku poetry.

In 1995, Serban Codrin, a poet especially interested in tanka and renga, founded the Tanka, Renga and Haiku School in Slobozia. This school published two magazines, *Orion*, and *Little Orion*, the latter being dedicated exclusively to linked poems (renku). In Targu Mures, the poet Ioan Gabudean founded a haiku club, which he called "Ephemeral Joys"; it had about 80 members, mostly from Transylvania. Gabudean edited two magazines: *Orfeu/Orpheus* and *Beautiful pictures*; the latter published students' work. Gabudean also founded the Ambassador publishing house, which brought out almost one hundred haiku, senryu and tanka booklets, some of them containing one line poems, in Romanian, English and French.

Haiku magazines have also appeared in some other Romanian towns, e.g. in Piatra-Neamt and Targoviste. Of nine haiku periodicals mentioned here, three survive till this day, and publish all the main Romanian haiku.

Apart from that, many Romanian haiku poets saw their work appearing in the best international haiku publication. They also asserted themselves at an international level by winning prizes and high commendations in the most

important haiku contests, both in Japan and English-speaking countries. In the course of 1994, the year of Basho tercentenary, two international conferences took place, in Bucharest and Constantza, and in both cases a celebration of Matsuo Basho was a part of the programme. In Constantza, a twin town of Yokohama, four international haiku gatherings were held in 1992, 1994, 2005 and 2007. Participants represented such countries as Japan, USA, France, Germany, Bulgaria, Great Britain, and Ireland.

Among the elements which give local colour to Romanian haiku, lime tree has to be named first. This flowering tree looks gorgeous in May and June, and is famous for its aroma. We strongly believe that lime tree may exemplify our way of haiku, which is, of course, only one of many possible ways.

(translated from the Romanian by Magdalena, Dale and Anthony Kudryavitsky)
Vasile Moldovan authored four collections of haiku. He has been the President of Romanian Society of Haiku since 2001