

# Haiku In Romania

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## BEGINNINGS

In Romania, the first knowledge of Nippon poetry was in 1878 at the end of the Romanian Independence War. The first poetic book of haiku appeared in the year 1063 in Vienna and the first haiku thin booklets appeared in 1882 in Paris, France, and in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia in 1887. The Romanian ruler Carol I, received two documents from a Japanese prince, one written with Latin letters and the other one with ideograms, both of them contained verses. The quality of the paper and the finesse of the calligraphy have incited the young ruler's curiosity. For the interpretation of these strange messages, he turned to the scholar Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, the director of the State Archives. It is said that Hasdeu told the ruler: "Sire, as far as I can tell these are little poems, which I can't decipher them by myself. I know a Chinese gardener. Please, give my time to find him and construe together the messages." The Romanian scholar ascertained with surprise, that those texts although written with Chinese ideograms, were in fact Nippon poems, tanka and haiku.

Two great poets of the epoch were visibly influenced by the exotic oriental poetry. V. Alecsandri had confessed to his friend I. Ghica (several times prime minister of Romania) that he intends to travel to Japan, being fascinated by its painting and poetry. His precarious health and his premature end hindered him reaching the country of Sun Rise. At the end of his life he had written the masterpiece of his literary career, the tome "*Pastels*". V. Alecsandri has created a new poetical genre in Romanian literature – the pastel (of pictural manner) inspired from the Chinese poetry about nature and Japanese haiku. He had read Chinese poetry in French translation while working in the capital of France as a diplomat.

While in Paris, Al. Macedonski, another classic of the Romanian literature, discovered Japanese literature. We have kept four haiku of his in Romanian language in a manuscript. Al. Macedonski has given fame to a fix form of poetry, the rondel. His masterpiece "*The poem of the rondels*", published posthumously in 1925 contains more poems about the Japanese art and civilization: "*The water rondel from the Japanese yard*", "*The rondel of the Japanese Sea*", "*Chrysanthemum rondel*" and the "*Ioshiwara rondel*".

After diplomatic relations were establishment between Romania and Japan in 1902, numerous conferences about Japanese civilization and poetry took place; numerous travel books were edited in Japan. Many of these works contain distinct chapters about tanka and haiku. The first essays about tanka and haiku have appeared in the "*Literary Event*" magazine from Iasi, in 1904. In the same year,

the poet Al. Vlahuta published in the "*By the fireside*" volume an essay "*The Japanese poetry and painting*" which contained numerous tanka and haiku poems.

If from Macedonski we have the first haiku in manuscript, Al. T. Stamatiad has published the first haiku poems in Romanian language, (twelve in total) in the "*Tender landscape*" anthology. The novelty was so great that this anthology was dignified with the highest cultural distinction of the time, "*The Romanian Academy Prize*".

## **A ROMANIAN RESPONSE**

But there were also other kinds of echoes. The poet Ion Pillat responded in a very original way. A long time ago he had written the poem "From samisen" inspired from Japanese reality.

Mount Fuji, Mount Fuji,  
Over you fly the clouds  
White storks, black storks,  
With stretched wings

My love is sieved softly  
On Kumamoto's paths,  
At Kitzumo, time and time,  
The wind covers up all my past with snow

Samisen with two strings,  
I touch you trembling, and you tremble too:  
Ancient string, young soul,  
Both are breaking.

Near the ancient temple in Nikko  
There is a lake, and its mirror,  
Like a water lily over water lilies,  
The gilded countenance of Buddha...

This time he thought of giving a Romanian response to the Nippon haiku. And he created a new genre as short and concentrated as haiku, which was framed in European aesthetics. He wrote a new book, the most original of all, "*The one line poems*" in the last part of the year 1935 and published it at the beginning of the next year. Unlike the haiku poem, the one line poem had a title. If haiku has 17 syllables, Pillat's poem has 13 or 14, but if we add the syllables from the title, usually very short, we have the same 17 number of syllables. The single verse of the poem has about half implied caesura, marked by a punctuation sign or a blank space, corresponding to kireji from haiku. In the Foreword, Pillat writes that

the one line poem although it resembles haikai is different from it. The Romanian reply of haiku after Ion Pillat, represents:

„A single verse, born and not made, carried around for years, often unconsciously, filtering years of passion, summarizing in it many, unwritten, verses, and so many faces and places, able to render the traveling secret of the poetry, reduced to its single wealth, to be empty and eternal...the poetry which has reached such a despoilment, offers to the reader the highest delectation, but requests in change a constant and intimate collaboration. The less the poet has written, the more the reader has to read... a long poem can be read in a hurry, because each verse helps to understand and enjoy the next one. A single verse is to be read slowly. The letters are read quickly, but the telegram stops us”. The one line poem, genre created by Ion Pillat, constitutes a living page of literary history. It is a challenge, in the good meaning of the word. Many contemporary Romanian poets have distinguished themselves alike in both genres: Dan Florica, Dumitru Radu, Bogdan I. Pascu, Utta Siegried – Konig, Ioan Marinescu (Romania), Stefan Teodoru and Floretin Smarandache (SUA).

## **TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLATORS**

The preoccupations for the propagation of the one line poem appeared in the same time with the translations from Japanese literature. The first haiku anthology appeared seventy years ago at Cernautzi (this city is today Ukraine territory). The publisher of the edition, inspired the poet Traian Chelariu, to name the anthology “*Nippon soul*”. By the quality of the translation and selection, the work presented for the first time the quintessence of the Japanese soul. The book was a real revelation, in our day it has become a rare bibliophile. Traian Chelaru has translated haiku from the German language. He has wanted to respect scrupulously even in the Romanian language, haiku poetics as well as in the Japanese language and in the German language. All haiku have respected the classic pattern 5-7-5 syllables with one exception. The single poem that did not respect entirely this pattern (only one syllable missing) was “exiled” at the bottom of the page with an excuse: “The translation is faithful, but inadequate with 17 syllables of haiku”. This strictness of the first haiku translator in the Romanian language has influenced the poets that have come after. The majority of the haiku Romanian poets try to respect stringently the classic pattern, often in damage of the content.

Seven years later, in 1942, in the midst of war, Al. T. Stamatiad publishes the tanka anthology “*Nippon courtesan songs*”. One year later, he translated from French an ample tanka and haiku anthology from the beginning until in those days, entitled “*Silk scarves*”. Although it had appeared in unfavorable time for literature, “*Silk scarves*” had a good reception from the general readers and from literary critique. As a result of the numerous favorable critiques, the work was distinguished with “*The Romanian Academy Award*”.

Imposition by the political conjuncture followed a hiatus in haiku reception and writing. In the 1970(s) a new opening to the Nippon lyric occurred. During a decade, three anthologies in seven volumes of tanka and haiku appeared. The editors of these anthologies were Ion Acsan and Dan Constantinescu who translated as Traian Chelariu from the German language. Nowadays Ion Acsan is the honorable president of the Roumanian Society of Haiku. The appearance of these anthologies in many editions produces a real emulation among the poets. Some of them have written haiku before year 1989, such as Nichita Stanescu and Marin Sorescu. Both of them are poets with international confirmation and candidates to the Nobel Prize. However, haiku was written sporadically and with uncertainty. The poets already had the patterns but they didn't know very well the poetics of haiku. The authorities from that time didn't like haiku, considering it a subversive literary genre. The allusions, the word-plays brought the politicians anxieties. So, the first works in the Romanian language appeared outside of the country borders.

### **MAGAZINES AND PRINTING HOUSES, SOCIETIES AND LITERARY CIRCLES**

But the real opening to the promotion of haiku occurred in the year 1989 when the totalitarian regime was removed. Towards the end of that year, Florin Vasiliu, a Romanian diplomat who worked for a while in Japan published the book "*Haiku constellation. Lyric interferences*". This book represented a real foundation stone for Romanian haiku. Well informed directly from the haiku source, the Romanian essayist wrote a complex work interweaving literary history with poetics of the genre. It is a guide book for the deciphering and writing of the haiku poem, with essential dates that are available even in our days. Some chapters were taken over and developed. Until the end of his life, the Romanian exegete had published twelve history books and haiku poetics. We may say that Romanian poets have a rich bibliography that helps them write haiku, knowing very well, haiku poetics. In March 1990, Florin Vasiliu founded the "*Haiku Magazine of Romanian-Japanese Relationships*", one of the first profile publications in Europe. At the beginning, the magazine was quarterly and was edited in 8,000 copies. For some time now it appears half-yearly and prints only under 1000 copies. In the editing board of the "*Haiku magazine*" there were renowned writers, like Marin Sorescu in the period when he was the minister of Culture. The editing board of the magazine has formed the nucleus of "*Roumanian Society of Haiku*" (RSH) formed one year later, on 19 March 1991. The Romanian Society of Haiku (RSH) was set up at the national level and included about 200 members. Shortly after several literary circles were formed in the country. In 1992 the HAIKU publishing house was set up. For a decade, this publishing house gained a good name and published several thin booklets with haiku and one line verse poems, most of them being printed in three languages: Romanian, English and French. When its activity ceased, the poetess Cornelia Atanasiu founded a new one, specialized in haiku, ALCOR.

Later, Haiku Societies were set up around the country... the Haiku Society from

Constantza founded by poet and artist Ion Codrescu, was the first, in 1992. Also in 1992, the Haiku Magazine from Constanta, Albatross, began printing in both (Romanian / English).

In 1995, Serban Codrin, a very good poet especially of tanka and renga, founded Tanka, Renga and Haiku School in Slobozia. This school published two magazine: "Orion" and "Little Orion", the latter having been dedicated exclusively to linked poem (renku).

At Targu Mures, the poet Ioan Gabudean founded the Haiku Club "Ephemeral joys" bringing together about 80 poets, especially from Transilvania. He edited two magazines: "Orpheus" and "Beautiful pictures", the second one being dedicated to the pupils. He also started AMBASADOR publishing house, whos has printed almost one hundred haiku, senryu and tanka thin booklets and one line poems, most of them in English or French. Haiku magazines have appeared in towns like Piatra – Neamt and Targoviste. From the nine haiku periodical publications, three have survived, concentrating mostly on haiku poets.

## **OPENINGS**

Simultaneously with approval on a national level our poets have tried also to assert themselves on an international level. Early issues of Haiku magazine published a Romanian from.... Sweden. Soon after beginning, the Romanian Society of Haiku and the Haiku Society from Constantza affiliated with the Haiku International Association (HIA).

In 1993, the president of the HIA, Mr. Sono Uchida met with the poets of the haiku literary circle from Bucharest. He was impressed by the expanse of haiku in Romania. Individually, the poets Florin Vasiliu, Ion Codrescu, Marian Nicolae Tomi later visited Japan to learn haiku from its sources. Once they returned home, the three poets shared from their experience gained in the haiku homeland.

In 2004 Marian Nicolae Tomi visited Japan as a First Prize winner of the International "Kusamakura" Haiku Competition in Kumamoto. The experience of his trip has since been materialized in the haiku, tanka and gunsaku book "Flying to Kumamoto".

Since 1989, the Romanian poets have been published frequently in – "HI", "Ko", "Ginyu", "World Haiku" – Japanese haiku magazines and periodical publications of high reputation like "Asahi Shimbun" and "Mainichi Daily News". For quite some time now, the Romanians are present also in Japanese online publications specialized in haiga "See Haiku Here" edited by Mr. Kuniharu Shimizu and "Photo-Haiku Gallery" edited by Mitsugu Abe.

1994 was an important year for the development of Romanian- Japanese haiku relationship when the Matsuo Basho tricentenary celebration was held in Romania, two international conferences took place, one in Bucharest and one at Constantza.

The materials which were presented at these commemorative symposiums have

appeared in the anthology *"Round the pond"* edited by the president of the Constantza Haiku Society, featured in a special issue of *"Haiku Magazine"*. Also, in 1994, Florin Vasiliu, President of the *"Romanian Society of Haiku"* published the reference work *"Matsuo Basho – The saint of haiku"*.

At the 1994 HIA competition, eight haiku written by seven poets were distinguished with honorable mentions and were published in a special issue of *"HI magazine"*.

During 1992, 1994, 2005 and 2007, there were four international meetings held at Constantza, (a sister city of Yokohama). At these international meetings several poets from Japan, S.U.A., France, Germany, Bulgaria, Great Britain, and Ireland took part.

Increasingly, every year, more Romanian poets win international haiku competitions, prizes and honorable mentions. Sonia Maria Coman, at only eleven years old won a prestigious prize, followed by others which have made her well known in the haiku world. She has the honorary title "haiku ambassador" and thus received a congratulation letter from an American president. Today she is eighteen years old and she has won a scholarship to an American university, where she will study Japanese civilization.

Among the other redoubtable competitors, I shall remember Dan Doman, who at one international competition alone won five haiku awards. The poet Eduard Tara is also a real phenomenon, he has won ten or twelve haiku and tanka competitions every year for some time now.

This year, on the initiative of the poet Valentin Nicolitov, secretary of RSH the first international haiku contest was organized in Romania. The contest was a real success. We were glad that we had received submissions from Japan, thanks to who we owe the existence of haiku. From the six prizes awarded to the foreign poets, two of them were awarded to Japanese poets Shinya Ogata and Ban'ya Natsuishi.

The large participation at this Romanian contest and the quality of the poems received, convinced the organizers to publish an anthology containing best haiku received at the contest, entitled *"Crickets and chrysanthemums"*. (the title taken from the two prize winning haiku, written by a Japanese poetess and a Romanian poet):

The last cricket  
is delaying the departure  
of the dying man  
Eduard Tara – Romania

Wife ill –  
simple supper  
with a chrysanthenun  
Shinya Ogata – Japan

The proceeding is the result of a moment of inspiration of translator Paula Romanescu. . . it talks for itself about the creative power of the communication.

## UNIVERSAL AND NATIVE SYMBOL

Roumanian poets have adopted many Japanese themes for haiku. An eloquent proof is also the title of the aforesaid anthology. But, Romanian haiku about crickets were written since the very beginning of Romanian haiku. Sonia Coman made her debut with the thin booklet *"Listening to the crickets"*, Dan Florica has entitled one of his haiku book *"Crickets up to the sky"* and Serban Codrin has written a haiku which has become famous *"Nights without crickets"*.

Ioan Gabudean has also published an ample study about the presence of chrysanthemum,(the national Japanese symbol) in the haiku of Roumanian poets. And his own *"Chrysanthemum smile"* is a title in the literary circle anthology. The "moon"... is yet another universal theme, which can be founded in many of the creations of the Romanian haikin; Ioan Gabudean entitles a literary circle anthology *"The moon from the lake"*.

One of the best anthology of the RSH is called *"The moon in a thousands bits"*. The title was taken a poem by Eduard Tara which won an award in an international contest in Japan.

The famous frog of Basho was another great inspiration for many of us. This made Florin Vasiliu writes an ample and documented study entitled *"The frog in Romanian poets' haiku"*, a study which has been published in the volume of critique *"Sparks from haiku hearth"*.

After his return from the first European haiku congress, that took place at *"The Museum of Roses"* in Germany, Laura Vaceanu, the president of the Haiku Society from Constantza has set up live discussions with the theme *"Celebrating the roses"*. And the examples could go on...

But at the same time Romanian poets are in search of their "own" symbols. Romanian poems sometimes refer to our national costume. If Japanese poets talk of the kimono, we, as Roumanian poets find the embroidered peasant blouse, (which is a feast blouse with remarkable flourish) and other traditional pieces of peasant dress to write about.

Also, instead of Buddhist temples or Shinto shrine, some poets bring specific Romanian Christian cultural references, especially the orthodox.

If these elements of folklore and religion are difficult to access, or when a translation has obscured a meaning, or lost the wanted echo, these references are still important for the Romanian readers. The insertion of native symbols has the gift of conforming haiku to the local atmosphere.

These have the role of the father plant in gardening, to which an offshoot from another garden clings to. The cutting and the father plant will fuse organically and will form a single being. A new being who will be as viable as the parts that constitute the whole are stronger. Each is adapted at the "ground" of another language.

Among the many elements which give local color to Romanian haiku, the lime tree is at the head. During May and June this flowery tree has particular beauty. Its flowers have one of the most delicate perfumes.

Eminescu, Romanian national poet has sung the lime and especially its flowers in eternal verse. In our days, a lime tree which has adumbrated his youth is seen by thousands of visitors which love poetry. This fact has been determinate by poetesses Laura Vaceanu, Alexandra Flora Munteanu and Ana Ruse to elaborate a haiku and tanka anthology dedicated to the lime flowers, out of which I cite a poem by Constantin Severin. To Eminescu:

Touching your lime tree  
my hand breath through  
thousands of leaves

A pleasant surprise is offered to us by the international haiku magazine "*Ginyu*", number 34, which has published a haiku three part about the lime tree by Magdalena Dale out of which I cite:

Longing song...  
lime blossoms scattered  
on our way

Convinced by the poetic capacity of this venerated tree by a Romanian, the poetess had the initiative to write a renga book to who's "hero" (personage, protagonist) is the lime tree. The title of the book is "*Fragrance of lime*". In our conviction the lime tree may well become our way in haiku of the many ways possible. For now, certainly it is a seasonal term for the late spring and early summer

A powerful Romanian specific able to represent us among the haiku admirers from other places, where this miraculous tree is quite lesser known and where it perhaps does not have the same appreciation as it does in our culture. Using alike the recognized symbols of the literary genre and the national specific ones, the Romanian profile poem may be considerate like a little star belonging to the great interrnational haiku conation.

