

# THE HISTORY OF HAIKU IN GREECE

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## THE BEGINNING

Haiku (俳句), this tiny poem, has been loved more than any other poetic genre. However, is it really a “movement”? I would say it is, as it involves an astounding motive spawned and spread all over the world as well as dealt with by innumerable magazines, anthologies, conferences, essays, analyses, “New Haiku Societies” and museums related to this poetic genre. Behold the civilization of a start.

Haiku is a poetic form of the traditional Japanese poetry, adopted by Europeans in the early 20th Century. It, then, crossed the Atlantic from Europe and managed to become very popular with the entire Western world. The introduction of haiku into Greece is defined to have occurred between the years 1900 and 1925.

Thus, I intend to track down its roots by penetrating “tanka” (短歌), a five-line, thirty-one syllable (5-7-5-7-7) verse, which is a very old form of Japanese poetry and was widely used by Japanese poets in the past (1439). Tanka is a poetic form that was subsequent to the ancient *waka* poems and preceded haiku. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries, tanka was shortened further by the poetic tendencies prevailing during that era to culminate in the *hokku* or *haikai* poetic form of the *renga* chain poetry as an orally-recited poem.

## ORIGINS

A *hokku* is the originating verse of *renga*, which is performative<sup>1</sup>: that is, a person recites a verse, another person replies to it and another to that, exactly as happens in the Cretan *mantinada*. The *mantinada* is, usually, a rhymed, improvised, four-line, basically-anonymous, spoken or sung poem, with content varying from love and jokes to lamentation and adage: the Cretan people’s idiomatic emotional expression. *Mantinada* is derived from the Italian *mattinata* (hence, “morning song”), a poetic form that flourished in northern Italy during the 15<sup>th</sup> century and exported to Venetian-occupied Crete. The *mantinada* has been declining,

especially among the island's young and urban populations, and is practiced today in the context of weddings, baptisms and other similar social events taking place mainly in rural areas the inhabitants of which continue keeping up with old, traditional morals and customs.

A sample *mantimada*:

Αγνή καρδιά του ποιητή  
στα σύννεφα πετάει  
στην ύλη ασυγκίνητη  
χρήμα δεν προσκυνάει.

A poet's heart is pure:  
it flies in the sky,  
materialism cannot endure  
and money will deny.

Source: Michael Barbounakis (1932)

Similar poetic forms and songs are also encountered in the ancient Greek literary form “comus” (Anc. Gr. *κῶμος*), performed by sprightly groups of merry people roaming in the streets of a town in groups and singing—actually scoffing at—their emotions beneath the windows of their loved ones after departing from sumptuous banquets. An example from Callimachus (c. 305–240 BCE):

Οὕτως υπνώσαις, Κωνώπιον ως ἐμέ ποιεῖς  
κοιμάσθαι ψυχροῖς τοῖσδε προθύροις

I wish you also slept Mosquito as you make me  
sleep in front of these icy cold porches.

The following lovely verse approaches the essence of Issa's popular style: an haiku-like adage that lends itself to humour.

Ζω με ένα όνειρο γλυκό  
κι ίσως να ξεδιαλύνει  
καμιά φορά ξερό κλαδί  
στο βράχο πάνω πιάνει

I live in a dream so sweet  
that may come true  
even a very dry twig  
can on a rock take root

#### 1900—A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN GREEK HAIKU: LAFCADIO HEARN

The first appearances of haiku in Greece were the English translations of Japanese poems by Lafcadio Hearn, alias Koizumi Yakumo (小泉 八雲) (1850–1904), an ecumenical writer, educator and translator, who acted as a cultural transcriber. Hearn, a modern Ulysses, was born to an Anglo-Irish father, a medical doctor and major of the British Army, and a Greek mother, on the Greek Island of Lefkada. He lived in Ireland initially, moving thereafter to New Orleans, where he lived for ten years, and then to Japan, where he married a Japanese woman, a Samurai's daughter, and lived for the rest of his life. Hearn taught at the university of Matsue, where he relocated from Tokyo in 1890 during the Japanese Empire's six-month Meiji-Jidai (明治) transition period, in the course of which the heretofore isolated feudal Japanese society was transformed into a modern one open to the West. These fundamental changes affected Japan's social structure, internal policy, economy, military situation and foreign affairs. While living in Matsue, Hearn delved into Japanese morals, customs and folklore traditions, spread Japanese culture abroad as an individual scholar and introduced it into the West more than any person had previously achieved. He became a national writer of Japan, and internationally famous. The “Lackadios Hearn Museum” is currently being constructed on the Island of Lefkada, his birth place, where events and festivities organised to his honour have already commenced.

Lafcadio Hearn was one of the first Western scholars to become acquainted with and appreciative of haiku. Cor van den Heuvel says in his book *Lafcadio Hearn and Haiku* that he was the first Westerner who offered the Anglophone world a personal view of the Far East as well as the silk of its heart beyond its material one.

Hearn's essay "Japanese Lyrics — Haikus" was published posthumously in 1915 in English and positioned him as a significant interpreter of Japanese culture to the West. His strong acumen and vivid poetic imagination allowed him to penetrate deeply the core of concepts conveyed by the Japanese language. As a "supplier" of Japanese aesthetics abroad, he conceived the fineness and earthly realism of both ancient and modern Japanese poetry. His lines were collected in this spirit, crossing the fertile ground of love, spirituality, longing, and merriment, and of lullabies through the enchanting sphere of "Goblin" poetry. Some of these short stories were used as scripts for films made in the United States. Hearn conceived Japanese poetry as universal, indispensable, vital, like the oxygen we breathe, and a calligraphic decoration to both our eyes and ears, as well as a moral duty or internal need with density and lightness in its style. In other words, he saw haiku as a "cosmic wholeness" spread to all people and a therapeutic treatment for the human condition — birth, love, inutility, injustice, unluckiness, sorrow for a beloved deceased person or a woman's preference to die than to be dishonoured, the brevity of a man who decides to leave aside some lines in the form of an elegant verse as a moral exercise before killing himself by committing *seppuku etc.* I think that a poem, a haiku, occurs as a "relieving confessor" in the face of any problem whatsoever, which addresses all of us even today.

Nevertheless, even Hearn would be sceptical at times about the simplicity of Japanese haiku, mainly in the sense that they did not live up to their Western readers' expectations. His writings on the subject vacillate from apologies for their not giving us the kinds of philosophical speculation about the natural world found in Western literature, to words of praise for the unique ways in which haiku create a direct awareness of nature. This suggests that Hearn gives praise with one hand and takes it away with the other. However, he put this appreciation in more emotional terms by using the word "delight" very often in order to describe the Japanese haiku poet's reaction to nature, arraying, thus, the poet versus nature cleverly. We can say that this poetic genre was transferred to the West by a Greek person directly from the country of chrysanthemums. There are sources referring to a work of Hearn's related to haiku. In addition, he gave two university lectures comparing ancient Greek epigrammatic poetry with haiku, and another in which he compared ancient Greek and Japanese idyllic poetic traditions. There are also studies by Japanese researchers on Hearn's relationship with Japanese haiku.

The thematology of the poems translated by Lafcadio Hearn's is rich and covers many aspects of human life and nature, such as:

*furu-dera ya kane mono iwazu sakura chiru*

Matsuo Bashō (松尾芭蕉) 1644–1694

Παλιός ναός:  
άλαλη καμπάνα•  
πέφτουν φύλλα κερασιάς

Old temple:  
bell voiceless;  
cherry-flowers fall

Matsuo Bashō is indeed a great poet characterised by observation and finesse: in this poem, he manages to illustrate a quiet atmosphere in which the bells are so utterly silent that even the cherry flowers can be heard falling.

*semi no tatsu ato suzushisa yo matsu no koë.*

Baijak

When the cicadas cease,  
what coolness!  
The voice of the pines

Όταν παύουν τα τζιτζικια  
τι δροσιά!  
η φωνή των πεύκων

This excellent poem of Baijak is in the same mood as that of Bashō: as soon as cicadas have stopped singing, the cool of the evening is felt and the pines' rustle is heard like a human voice. Everything has its own presence. Haikuists' value and bring to the surface what most people will not "see" or "hear." Frugality in expression accentuates the abundance of blessings existing in the world.

*kageroishi kumo mata satte semi no koe*

Kitō

Taking the shade  
the clouds have gone  
cicadas' voices

παίρνοντας την σκιά  
έφυγαν τα σύννεφα•  
φωνές τζιτζικιών

This haiku stares at things with a penetrative glance and thought: when cloudiness is dispersed, cicadas' voices are enlivened by the sun and heat, making summer return.

*te no hira wo hau ashi miyuru hotaru kana*

Banko

The fire-fly;  
as it crawls on my palm,  
its legs are visible!

Η πυγολαμπίδα,  
όταν έρπει στην παλάμη μου,  
τα πόδια της είναι ορατά!

*akénuréba kusa no ha nomi zo hotaru-kago*

Onchō

When dawn comes,  
only grass  
in the fire-fly cage.

Όταν ξημερώνει,  
μόνο χορτάρι  
στο κλουβί των πυγολαμπίδων

Fukuda Chiyo-ni (Kaga no Chiyo) (福田 千代尼, 1703–1775), daughter of a picture framer, was an important Japanese poetess of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, specialising in the description of nature. She is widely regarded as one of the greatest *haijin*. She started writing poetry when she was seven years old, having already become popular throughout her country at the age of seventeen.

*kayane te wo hitotsu hazushite tsuki-mi kana*

Chiyo

Detaching a corner  
of the mosquito net,  
lo, I see the moon

Αποσπώντας  
μια γωνιά κουνουπιέρας,  
να, βλέπω το φεγγάρι

Compare these with the idyllic poetry of the ancient Syracusan-Greek poet Theocritus (315–260 BCE), one of the most significant poets of the Alexandrian Hellenistic Period and a pioneer in idyllic poetry (and don't miss the humor!):

I sing my love for Amaryllis  
and Tityrus, my friend, grazes my goats (on the mountain)

#### INDULGENCE PROGRESSES EVENTUALLY

In 1904 a theoretical text on haiku written by Spyridon de Viazis appeared in the literary magazine *Iris Of Athens*. In 1925 G. Stavropoulos published six small poems in the literary magazine *Lycabettus* with the general title “Three-line Verses,” accompanied by a brief note acquainting the general public with the new poetic genre.

μαύρο χελιδόνι	a black swallow
σε παλιό πατάρι	in an old attic
πτεροκοπάει	flutters

The dystocia in haiku continued until Nicholas Hayer-Boufides (1889–1950) published “Five Haikai” (1925). along with an informative note about this new poetic form under the pseudonym “Issandros Aris.”

εκεί, στη δύση,	there, in the west,
ω πορφυρένιες	how many purple memories
θύμησες της Αττικής	of Attica linger

It was in 1926 when Greek-Cypriot poet Paul Crinaeos-Michailides (1902–1986) published ten three-line verses in the periodical *Grand Greek Encyclopaedia* but failed to keep to the 5-7-5-syllable structure, which resulted in a sort of poetic verbalism caused by the violation of the rules governing haiku.

χλόη, πεταλούδες, λουλούδια	lawn, butterflies, flowers
κελαδισμοί και θρόοι,	chirps and rustles,
κι ερωτικές καρδιές	and loving hearts

ολόγιομο φεγγάρι	<i>all full moon</i>
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σαν ασημένιο ένα φλουρί	a silver coin, thin like air,
που στον λαιμό της το φορεί	on her neck she'll wear
και καμαρών' η νύχτα	to night's pride

George Seferis (1928–1937) was the most prominent modern Greek poet to write haiku, including “Sixteen Haikais” in his collection *Exercises Notebook* (1940). He is credited with introducing haiku into Greece due to his great prestige. These sixteen *haikai* may reflect a strange poetic idiosyncrasy, but they are milestones in the history of this genre in Greece, and represent a significant contribution to the development of haiku in this country. Though Seferis was an important poet, diplomat and Nobel laureate (of Literature, in 1963), he did not

comply with the required metrics in all 16 of his *haikais*; still they bear witness to their creator's high quality and poetic mastery. This work has been a decisive contribution in the modern literary history of Greece, showing that the poetic form of haiku had reached maturity.

σηκώνω τώρα  
μια νεκρή πεταλούδα  
χωρίς ψιμύθια

I am lifting now  
a dead butterfly  
without cosmetics

γυμνή γυναίκα  
το ρόδι που έσπασε ήταν  
γεμάτο αστέρια

a naked woman  
the broken pomegranate  
was full of stars

At this point, a *haikai* (*sic*) of the internationally famous Greek novelist, poet, playwright and scholar Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) is worth mentioning. During his wander in the company of his friend, the important Greek poet Anghelos Sicelianos (1884–1951), on the premises of Athos, the “Holy Mountain” and in the context of their quest to work out an answer to great existential questions, Kazantzakis writes in his book *Report To Greco*:

“We had toured the Holy Mountain for forty days. When, completing our circle, we finally returned to Daphne on Christmas Eve in order to depart, the most unexpected, most decisive miracle was awaiting us. Though it was the heart of winter, there was an almond tree in bloom in a small, humble orchard! Seizing my friend's arm, I pointed to the blossoming tree. ‘Anghelos,’ I said, ‘during the whole of this pilgrimage our hearts have been tormented by many intricate questions. Now, behold the answer!’ My friend riveted his blue eyes upon the flowering almond tree and crossed himself, as though doing obeisance before a holy wonder-working icon. He remained speechless for a long moment. Then, speaking slowly, he said, ‘A poem is rising to my lips, a tiny little poem: a *haikai*. He looked again at the almond tree . . .”

Είπα στη μυγδαλιά:  
“αδερφή, μίλησέ μου για το Θεό”  
κι η μυγδαλιά άνθισε

I said to the almond tree  
sister, speak to me of God'  
and the almond tree blossomed

Nikos Kazantzakis, an “atheist” scholar, who sought the divine element throughout his life and work, argues in favour of God's existence and attributes the miracle of a blossomed almond tree in the heart of winter to Him.

Apart for the aforementioned items referring to the history of haiku in Greece, translated haiku were presented in our country by Aris Diktaeos (1919–1983), a Greek poet, translator and essay-writer, as well as by Rita Boumi-Pappas (1906–1984), a Greek poetess, translator and member of the Athens Academy, derived from British and other bibliographies.

#### THE SECOND PERIOD, 1900–1972

Nevertheless, the production of haiku remained “thin” and poets' interest was still confined to this poetic form then for some undefined reasons until the advent of Zisimos Lorentzatos (1915–2004), a writer, philologist and critic, who made his literary appearance in his collection *Alphabetarion* (*Primer*, 1969), which was an autonomous declaration of his preference for this poetic genre in Greece.

στον ουρανό σου  
μια μπαταριά σε βρήκε  
πρασινολαίμη

in your sky  
a gunshot hit you  
mallard

φίδι του χάρου  
βγαίνεις από δερμάτι  
και σ' άλλο μπαίνεις

death's snake,  
you exit from a skin  
and enter another

διαμάντι κόβει  
τη σιγαλιά την άκρα  
το πρώτο αηδόνι

the extreme stillness;  
the first nightingale  
a diamond cuts

1972 also saw the successful appearance of poet D.J. Antoniou (1906–1994), who published his collection *Fourteen Haikais* with Hermes Editions. Poets' interest began to be attracted by the “new” poetic genre. Antoniou seemed to have been well-acquainted with it, as manifested by his metrics, style and epoch, and was awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> Greek State Prize of Poetry for this specific collection.

φυσά ο αγέρας  
μα τα σπαρτά δεν γέρνουν  
— ζωγραφισμένα . . .

the wind blows  
but crops stems will not bend  
— painted . . .

χορεύουν πιάτα  
χρυσά στο κύμα πάνω  
— χίλια φεγγάρια

gold plates  
dance on the wave;  
one thousand stars

### THE THIRD PERIOD

By 1972 haiku was well-established in Greece, despite the scepticism about it on the part of some artists and theoreticians who found difficulty in believing that transplanting such poems-*cum*-models into other countries of different mentalities and spiritual particularities is a backhanded venture. I persisted—as also other knowledgeable persons dealing with haiku had done before me—in arguing for the opposite in various literary circles and by publishing poetry reviews. My “sacred vengeance” arrived through the introduction of haiku into the Greek educational system in the form of a relevant module taught at Grade C of Greek primary schools. I presented haiku to Grade C primary school pupils at the Athens Campion British College in 2013, and was asked to write and analyze several haiku for the London Olympics 2013.

Τύμβος του Μαραθώνα

*the Marathon Tomb*

μνήμες στον τύμβο  
και τρυφερά χορτάρια  
— φωνή καμία

memories in the “tomb”  
and tender grass  
—no voice at all

In 1979, I wrote some short poems I had called “stigmas” but I had been at a loss to know what to do with them afterwards until, discovering the “haikais” of Seferis, I realised, to my

great surprise, that they functioned impeccably as haiku in terms of their metrics but were written in one line. I published my first haiku book, *The Enchantresses*, in 1985, incorporating these haiku and tanka. Subsequently these poetic genres have appeared in all my books in small units. A small percentage of haiku exists in the poetry of many other contemporary Greek poets as well.

Zoe Savina (one of these *Stigmas*):

βάλε στο στήθος  
ένα τριαντάφυλλο  
και, να ο κήπος

just put a rose  
upon your chest  
and, lo, the garden

Anestis Evangelou (1937–1994) made his appearance in literature in 1960 and published his *Haikais* in 1978.

τρυφερά χέρια,  
δε λησμονούν οι πληγές  
τ' απαλό χάδι

tender hands;  
wounds never forget  
a soft caress

Tasos Corfis (1929–1994) published his *Sorrow-killing Sonnets And Haikus* in 1987 as well as a small haiku anthology.

στα λασπόνερα  
της στραγγισμένης λίμνης  
έντομα βουϊζουν

in the murky waters  
of the dried lake  
insects buzz

George Pavlopoulos (1924–2008) published his book *Thirty Three Haiku* in 1990.

το ένα σου μάτι  
στο ποίημα· και τ' άλλο  
να σε δικάζει.

your one eye  
stares at the poem and the other  
condemns you

ουρά παγωνιού  
σε πισινό μαϊμούς  
— τούτος ο κόσμος

a peacock's tail  
on a monkey's arse  
— this very world

Nikos Ladas (1952–1979) published his haikus in 1983.

πέτρινα δέντρα  
κι ένα χάλκινο πουλί  
σε κάθε κλαδί

stone trees  
and a bronze bird  
on every branch

Many interesting developments have happened during these forty years, including magazines, articles, essays, collections and pictorial illustrations focused on haiku, cards containing haiku suspended with small ribbons and tiny bells, haiku projections through painting and music, haiku used as the lyrics of songs *etc.*

## RULES

The above-mentioned poets were advocates of haiku writing in Greece, but were not on a par with Seferis's poetic artistry. Writing haiku can make a poet feel as though he were lying on a Procrustean bed, since he must say everything he wants within seventeen syllables (5-7-5 in three lines) while maintaining a nature-loving or physiocratic mood. In addition, a Greek poet must overcome the serious difficulty imposed by the multi-syllable lexicon of the Greek language. Moreover, haiku accepts no rhyme but is governed by metrics, which, if it is correct, endows it with an inostensible sense of musicality but will leave no room for vulgarities, platitudes, bombast, verbosity, pompous expressions and loquacious "stuffing," which, according to Greek poet Andrew Lascaratos, "may be delicious in a roasted turkey, but it is insipid in a poem." A haikuist should retain the meaning of the words without using surplus small words, conjunctions, articles *etc.*

The delight of haiku emanates from the density of insinuation and the abolishment of protuberances and margins, retaining only the music of meanings and not the sounds necessarily. A haikuist imposes such limitations of this kind upon himself in order to cope with the challenge of haiku. As Bashō wrote, "Learn the rules, and then, forget them. Learn them in the first place, school yourself on them and, then, overcome them. When you have immersed yourself very deeply into them, you will manage to see its secret glamour."

Haiku is a swift, small, crispy, charming, pertinent, effective poem involving surprise, wit, humour, illustration and metrics. You knock on a door and it opens up into a garden. You empty the milk from your mug and savour the residual sugar lying on its bottom. It necessarily challenges the human intellect. It involves accumulation and substantiality in the centre of concepts and not the abolition of meaning. Opening up is exactly what is required for free poetry, which often resorts to platitudes or diffusion, and this specific genre can express everything within the constraint of the 5, 7, 5 syllables.

Greek haiku calls upon Japanese aesthetics in the same way they call upon Greek speech, philosophy, ideals and symbols. Such things have been flowing in poets' blood for ages and are impossible to ignore. This tradition extends from the Greek Archaic Period (750—479) to the present.

Hesiod (7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century), the second most important Greek poet after Homer, states "Ἔργον δ' οὐδὲν ὄνειδος, ἀεργίη δὲ τ' ὄνειδος" ("work is not shame but idleness is shame"), which brings to my mind Issa.

One of the most ancient Greek epigrams is borne on the famous "Nestor's Cup," a clay vessel found during excavations in ancient Greek tombs on the island of Pithecusae—today's Ischia—in 1954 and dating to 750–700 BCE. The inscription on this cup reads:

Νέστορος [εἰμί] εὐποτ[ον] ποτήριον[ν].  
ὃς δ' ἂν τοῦδε πι[ησι] ποτηρί[ου] αὐτίκα κῆνον  
ἕμερ[ος αἶρ]ήσει καλλιστ[εφάν]ου Ἀφροδίτης.

Nestor's cup I am, good to drink from.  
Whoever drinks of this cup empty, straightaway  
will be seized by the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite.

The poets Tyrtaeus (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and Archilochus (680–630 BCE), reflect the laconic phrasing of haiku in their epigrammatic poems, as it can be seen in Archilochus's adage "Πολλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἐχίνος δέ ἐν μέγα" ("the fox knows a lot of things and the hedgehog prizes but one good thing").

The literary form of epigram appeared many centuries ago, evolving according to the needs, quests and expressions of world's intellectuals as well as of arts (inscribed on tombs, monuments and artefacts). In addition, the epigrams ceased being exclusively funereal to become erotic, votive, satiric *etc.* Our cultural past has also affected—though differently—the style of our haiku or tanka in the absence of metric rules. Nothing is done on purpose but the internal need of expression will push inner data outwardly like *oestrus* (inspiration), as it is called from Greek antiquity till this day.

Here is a maxim of Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535–475 BCE, a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, nicknamed "The Obscure": "ἁρμονία ἀφανῆς φανερῆς κρείττων" ("the inostensible harmony is better than the ostensible one"). This adage stands on its own, functioning almost as an oracle, but conjures also the Zen Path is the substructure of haiku.

Aeschylus (c. 525/524–c. 456/455 BCE), one of the three greatest classical ancient Greek tragedians, asserts "Χρήσιμ' εἰδώς οὐχ ὀ πολλὰ εἰδώς σοφός" ("Wise is he who knows useful and not many things").

There was also an inscription on an altar situated in a central street of ancient Athens that read "Τῷ ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ" ("To the unknown god"), which served as a pretext for the apostle Paul to preach the word of God to the Athenians.

I should also mention the *greguería*, a short statement usually rendered as a sentence in which its writer expresses a philosophical, realistic, humorous, or, many a time, sarcastic idea in a witty, extraordinary way. A *greguería* is similar to an aphorism or a humorous part in a comedy, a rhetorical and stylish saying used mainly in the literature of Latin America. *Greguerías* are also written in Greece.

During the ancient Greek Classical Period (479–323 BCE), ancient Greek scholars, such as Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Solo *etc.* wrote *greguerías*. Solo (an Athenian visionary poet and legislator), for instance, asserted "Ὁ ἀν μὴ ἴδης, μὴ λέγε. Εἰδώς σιγά" ("Do not talk about something you do not know and when you have learnt, keep silent").

Greek folklore, poetry and songs ensued during the Hellenistic (330 BC–30 AD), Roman and Byzantine Eras. Greek folklore song derives its material as a literary genre from the oral Greek literary tradition. It is said that Goethe, the great German scholar and writer, greatly appreciated Greek folklore songs and found inspiration in them. Here is an excerpt from one such song:

Don't throw your words like a straw onto a threshing floor  
because the demon takes them and who'll gather them galore?

Finally, arriving directly at modern Greek poetry despite the 400 years of Ottoman occupation over the Hellenic world (1453–1821), we encounter philologist, educationalist and historian Demetrius Vardaris (1757–1823).

In modern Greece, poets have studied, evolved and broadened the practice of haiku, creating sublime, sensitive, emotional, lyrical and high-quality poems. Haiku has acquired friends and fans who are extremely fond of it. Of course not all Greek poets have followed

the classical metrics governing this poetic form. Also, production of haiku by unfledged apprentices who take haiku writing for the magic wand to transform the strings of their amateurish lines into quality poetry in a flash has not been avoided.

#### THE “UNEXPECTED” EVENT

It is quite certain that no one from the scholarly worlds of either Greece or Japan could have ever imagined that this brief poetry would evolve into such a poetic form as would exceed peoples’ origins and spread everywhere like the branches of a tree rooted deeply in the land of the Far East and stretched to embrace our universe. The foliage of this tree rustles in the ears of our cosmos, piercing through heterogeneous people’s, such as scholars’, scientists’, artists’, politicians’, seamen’s, businessmen’s *etc.* hearts with its ornamented branches. The situation in terms of this poetic genre today is exactly the same as it was in Japan many centuries ago when everyone—from emperors to servants—dealt with it. Thus, I imagine the great Japanese haikuist Matsuo Bashō, the most principal representative of this kind of poetry of all the other Japanese haikuists, exalted and glowing by the transplantation and re-blossoming of this short poem of his homeland, which is situated at the end of the world. Just because all these things are under the influence of beauty, this miracle is what has always surprised and enchanted me.

#### CULTURAL GLOBALISATION

I have been in touch with haikuists from all over the world through correspondence since 1979 in my desire to be informed of what happens internationally, and, from that time, have presented haikuists (in conjunction with my friend Danae Stratigopolou, a close friend of Pablo Neruda, as well as with other willing lovers of poetry) in literary magazines along with brief analyses of their haiku. I have undertaken this in many contexts, including the translations of Pablo Neruda’s poetry from Spanish and French. This has resulted in a broadening of the information about this poetic genre given to magazines readers. In 1985 I was “justified” in this approach by receiving the award of the Society of Greek Writers’ “Annual Prize” for my bilingual book *The Enchantresses*.

I had the further idea of creating a global anthology, spawned by my contacts outside Greece, and in response to a very significant event about to take place in Greek literature. This idea required five years of correspondence, a tedious but also strangely tender task, which outweighed both the toil and waste of time it involved. The more progress made towards the implementation of this idea, the more intensely I thought, “Behold! This is about a ‘cultural globalisation,’” which idea was stated, for the first time to the best of my knowledge, in my preface to the anthology. It is the most constructive and interesting globalisation that could have ever been achieved, involving a spiritual convergence through the literary means of a brief, external phrasing of speech that has been firmly established by the world’s haikuists. I prepared and published the *International Haiku Anthology—The Leaves Are Back On The Tree* in 2002, with the participation of 186 poets in fifty countries. Each poet received two pages containing ten haiku as well as a curriculum vitae and an artistic impression created

by the painter Alexander Moustakas. This 500-page anthology functioned as a “compass” both in Greece and abroad. I discover various sections of it contained in other people’s books or referred to in the context of lectures given in our country as well as posted in the Internet—occasionally without reference to the source. A Japanese friend of mine living in England and promoting haiku by organising symposia, fora, conferences *etc.* commented once, “I would expect such an anthology to have come from the USA but not from Greece!” I countered this with “Why not? Who are Greeks culturally? What did they hand down to mankind through their philosophy, arts, sciences and theatre as well as a multitude of other cultural treasures and values? We Greeks are persistent, versatile, talented and aesthetically agreeable people, which accounts for the fact that such a sublime anthology exists today.”

#### AN ASCERTAINMENT AND COUNTLESS EXTENSIONS

Having worked on various poets’ haiku and presented them continuously in electronic magazines and competitions, I have ascertained that the classical season-based haiku has become outdated even for Japanese haikuists, without having become totally excluded from the repertoire. Strict compliance with its metrics (5-7-5) has been overcome to a certain degree by many poets as well. A modern haiku could be envisioned as having a free thematology adopted by the poets of a world without frontiers.

Γιώργος Σεφέρης

George Seferis

άδειες καρέκλες  
τ’ αγάλματα γύρισαν  
στο μουσείο

empty chairs  
the statues returned  
to the museum

Ζωή Σαβίνα

Zoe Savina

το σημερινό  
εμφιαλωμένο κενό  
και η Κόκα-Κόλα

today’s  
bottled emptiness  
and Coca Cola

Αργύρης Χιόνης

Argyris Chionis

άγουρο ακόμα  
κόπηκε το ποίημα,  
τώρα σαπίζει

still unripe  
the poem has been cut  
now it’s rotting

H. F. Noyes (1918–2010) was a highly-decorated American poet who lived in and wrote from Greece for twenty five years. Until I made my first appearance abroad as a haikuist, Greece had been represented in various international anthologies only by this American haikuist.

H. F. Noyes

καταμεσής του ποταμού  
ο καβαλάρης κοιτά ψηλά  
τ’ άστρα που πέφτουν

midstream halt;  
only the rider looks up  
at the falling stars

## MODERN HAIKU

Does this current situation suggest a chain rebellion against classic haiku? I think this freedom, which has been rejuvenated by degrees in the wake of time, does not result from a degenerative process but from the provisions of times, the impulsion and repulsion of events as well as from a globalised mentality that militates against everything. The pursuit of substance and the continually intensified tendency towards this few-line poem have been manifested clearly on the part of poets around the world. This is corroborated by the aforementioned *International Haiku Anthology*. If one calls one's poems haiku, one should also comply with certain rules — otherwise, one may call them as one desires. Modern haiku may make one resort to vulnerable solutions and dictate brutal conveniences recognised belatedly unless it is studied, investigated and elaborated as well as if one is endowed with the gift of good inspiration, one will succeed in acquiring the harmonious sense and extraction of haiku without taking to a mere poetic fabrication since we may have noticed how much platitudinous and badly-fabricated haiku seem to be when they lack immediacy. We live in modern times with other stimulations and needs that make us say different things.

Ηλίας Κεφάλας

γράφω και πάλι  
τα πλην της απουσίας  
στο μαύρο τζάμι

Elias Cephalas

I write again  
the minuses of my absence  
on the black glass

Τάσος Κόρφης

χρόνια φευγάτη  
ανάμεσα στα χέρια μας  
ένα ποτάμι.

Tassos Corfis

gone for years  
between our hands  
a river flows

Γιάννης Πατίλης

μόνο ο καθρέφτης  
να σε βλέπει αντέχει  
δίχως να σπάει

Giannis (John) Patilis

only the mirror  
can bear to see you  
without breaking

Ζωή Σαβίνα

γυάλινο κτήριο . . .  
«πού είναι ο ουρανός;»  
ρωτά ο Μπασσό

Zoe Savina

a glass mansion;  
“where is the sky?”  
Bashō asks

επιθεωρεί  
ο Μπασσό από το μπαλκόνι  
–σκύβει στο κενό

Basho:  
inspects from the balcony;  
he bends to the void

«κάτω απ' τη γη  
ναι, όλα είναι ίδια»  
λέει ο Μπασσό . . .

“under the earth;  
yes! all is the same”  
says Basho . . .

Πιάννης Τόλιας

Giannis (John) Toliaς

παλιά κορνίζα  
πόσους θανάτους έχεις  
φιλοξενήσει;

an old frame  
how many deaths  
has it hosted?

Χάρης Μελιτάς

Charis Melitas

*Θεραπευτική αγωγή*

*Therapeutic treatment*

ο ψυχολόγος  
υπήρξε σαφέστατος.  
Ν' αφήσω νύχια:

the psychologist  
was crystal clear:  
I leave my nails grow

Many national anthologies circulate round the world, but global anthologies are rare due to the difficulties entailed by this venture. Editors of haiku-oriented magazines, newspapers, societies and individual poets work on and spread this attractive tiny poem through collaborations and competitions. However, what impresses me most is the fact that haiku societies had been founded in many countries besides Greece up to 2002, when my anthology was published. I was exhorted by my foreign haiku friends to found a haiku-oriented literary society but all my country's poets dealing with haiku did write poems of other poetic forms and were members of literary societies and so I thought that such an initiative was aimless. However, I reconsidered the issue and suggested to a haikuist friend of mine that we promote haiku together. Initially he accepted, but shortly thereafter forsook me and founded a "Society of Greek Haiku" by himself. I remain active within Greece by contacting foreign haikuists and presenting them in electronic magazines, posting their works on the Internet *etc.* I have been awarded various personal distinctions, by the "Hiroshima Memory Museum" of Tokyo and other institutions. I realize that no one has become famous by founding a literary society, and that it is the quality of our work as well as our integrity that counts.

Ζωή Σαβίνα

Zoe Savina

*Χιροσίμα*

*Hiroshima*

σαν σε αγκαλιά  
στη λίμνη της Χιροσίμα  
— φεγγάρι ξεψυχή

like being embraced,  
the moon in dying  
in Hiroshima's lake

It is a wonderful thing indeed that one can express the beautiful, sad, cheerful and strange pictures and sides of life in only 17 syllables, which sounds as if haiku invades our space through a rift, exploding development, and revealing, however, its silky fabric, which is not transformed into a plastic material. The eyelids open and shut so that light will pass through them: Frrrasst! An incision is drawn.

## Footnotes

1. We notice that many people would take haiku for *haikai* because they ignore or are ill-informed that *haikai* or *renga* is a form of live poetry, like a cooperative scheme in the context of which they were interconnected. I studied this matter thoroughly in 1979, when I started dealing with this poetic genre and discussed this issue with knowledgeable American friends of mine during my visit to the USA.

2. I was sitting by the sea of Epidaurus, invited to dinner along with some Japanese officials who had been there for the fraternisation of Epidaurus with their own birth town and for signing the relevant documents enabling them to take and carry to as well as place in Japan a statue of Asclepius, the ancient Greek god of Medicine, made by the prominent Greek sculptor Evangelos Moustakas. All of a sudden, a gust of wind started blowing, taking the papers away. At this, they started chasing them while I said, looking at them, “Oh butterflies / the wind does not know / how to read them.” An interpreter immediately interpreted my words to the Japanese gentlemen, who surrounded me one after the other and quoted incomprehensible – to me of course – haikus in Japanese, but the *haikai no renga*, as such poetry is called, epoch had commenced.