

## BULGARIA HAIKU AFTER 2005

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“Suppose we are all born haiku poets?” reflects Susumu Takiguchi in one of his essays. “In other words, once upon a time, let’s assume, there was haiku in all of us, rather like the Buddha nature. This is in line with the school of thought that we all have within us potential capabilities and possibilities of everything under the Sun. So, the only question is how to realize them.”<sup>2</sup>

For decades, haiku writing in Bulgaria was more or less confined to only certain people who had better access to theoretical articles, materials from international conferences, and haiku poems, published abroad. In 2005, for the Fifth Anniversary of the Bulgarian Haiku Club, Ginka Biliarska reports: “Till that moment (year 2000) in Bulgaria have been published only 10 haiku collections by 6 authors. Now (2005) the books are more than 70, and the poets who write haiku — 40.”<sup>3</sup>

That number, 40 haiku poets, grew exponentially during the next decade. The possibilities that the Internet provided helped spread the “haiku bug” outside of the established poetry communities. More and more people were discovering the beauty not only of reading, but more importantly, of writing haiku. New authors, unknown to anyone before, were spending hours in cybercafés, chatting with people from other counties and continents, translating poems, exchanging emails, discussing fragments and phrases, and joining online haiku courses. Young men and women were buying anthologies and trying to express their own haiku moments in three lines. Some of those new poets published their first haiku collections, alongside the books from the more experienced authors.

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1. With Tzetska Ilieva, Vesseslava Savova and Iliyana Stoyanova’s kind help and support.

2. “Beginner’s Mind”, *World Haiku Review*, August 2009, <https://sites.google.com/site/worldhaikureview2/editorialaugust20092>.

3. Five Years Bulgarian Haiku Club, <http://www.tempslibres.org/aozora/bg/evento2.html>.

Significant publications for this period were the bilingual (English-Bulgarian) books: *Прашинки в слънчевия лъч / Motes in the Sunbeam* (2007, 33 haiku by Liudmila Balabanova, edited by David Lanoue); *Flecks of blue / Парченца синьо* (2010, containing 92 haiku by Maya Lyubenova); *Safety Pins / Безопасни игли* (2010, 55 haiku by Petar Tchouhov); *May Morning / Майска утрин* (2014, by Maya Kisyoova); and the trilingual haiku collection *Matchbox Boats / Кибритени лодки* (2014, English, Bulgarian and Russian, by Dilyana Georgieva, Darina Deneva and Vessislava Savova). These books showed that their authors had thrown away the restrictions of counting syllables, of capital letters and full stops, of direct metaphors and simile and instead wrote their haiku using the phrase and fragment theory and concrete imagery.

The Bulgarian-Hungarian anthology of Bulgarian haiku *Mas-mascsond / Различна тишина*, published in 2012 and compiled by Petar Tchouhov, deserves special attention. One of our new talented poets, Vladislav Hristov, called it “a chronicle of the modern Bulgarian haiku.”<sup>4</sup> The anthology included 159 haiku from 55 authors, born between the years 1932 and 1993. To represent the full diversity in the Bulgarian haiku scene, the editor chose not only haiku of well-known poets, but also of new authors. These new people would prove themselves in the next years, submitting and publishing in the best international journals.

A turning point in the development of Bulgarian haiku was the translation of BARE BONES School of Haiku, by Jane Reichhold. While the members of the Bulgarian haiku organizations<sup>5</sup> specialized in writing academic papers, which were very helpful for the development of a deeper understanding of concepts like “emptiness” or the relationship between Zen and haiku, it was the translation of Jane’s work that gave the Bulgarian haiku lovers a set of rules to help them start, to point them in the right direction, to keep them focused. Or, if we continue Susumu-san’s Buddhist analogy, BARE BONES provided the means to dispel the false beliefs about haiku and to unveil the hidden potentials in everyone with a sincere desire to become a haiku poet. In 2009 Maya Lyubenova published two papers on her personal experience in learning haiku on the AHA forum and in 2011 a group of enthusiastic volunteers translated, with Jane’s blessing, the whole content of BARE BONES School of Haiku, which was posted later online for free use.<sup>6</sup>

Another name that the Bulgarian haiku reader became familiar with was Prof. David Lanoue. At least six of his books were translated and published between 2007 and 2014, adding to the variety of haiku literature.

Bulgarian poets who took part in foreign haiku organizations and workshops realized the need for similar format, which would provide information and assist the development of haiku on a daily basis. The Bulgarian Haiku Union and Haiku Club “Sofia” were concentrating their efforts in organizing conferences, translating, writing, and international cooperation. Their

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4. “Антологията “Различна тишина” – летопис на съвременното българско хайку”, Hristov, Vladislav; Tchuhov, Petar, 2013, PROVO.

5. Both, Bulgarian Haiku Union and Haiku Club “Sofia”, are not open to everyone interested in haiku and have a set of requirements for new members. For example, one has to have a certain number of published haiku already to be considered for membership in the BHU.

6. <http://mayalyubenova.wix.com/jane-haiku-lessons>.

initiatives, popular in the capital, were often hard to attend for authors from other cities or for the many Bulgarians living outside of the country. As a result, in the second half of 2012, the internet group *Шшшшш* / *Shosbin* (初心) was created. (*Shosbin* is a concept in Zen Buddhism, meaning “beginner’s mind.”) Today, the group has more than 180 members and it has become a friendly place where new authors can meet their more experienced colleagues, ask questions, and discuss drafts or published poems. Many of the BHU members are also in *Shosbin*.

As a natural extension of the work done from the group participants, and with the intention to reach a bigger audience, in 2014 Tzetzka Ilieva opened *Дива Люляца — Wild Lilacs*, a blog for contemporary Bulgarian haiku.<sup>7</sup> The blog started by publishing one haiku from a Bulgarian author each week, but now it has sections for *haiga* and *renku*, interviews, deadlines and contests, young authors, translated poems, and haiku collections on a certain theme (or as we got used to call them, *Broenitsi* / *Броеници*). Special pages had to be opened for the First and Second Bulgarian Kukai.

Meanwhile, Bulgarian haiku authors were partaking in international haiku anthologies more and more often: *AHA. The Anthology* (2012); *World Haiku Anthology on War, Violence and Human Rights Violation* (2013); *Fire Pearls 2: Short Masterpieces of Love and Passion* (2013); *Geography and Creative Imagination, Tanka Anthology* (2014); *Bright Stars, an Organic Tanka Anthology* (2014); *Haiku Anthology — Second International Haiku Conference, Kraków* (2015); *Faces and Places: Haiku Anthology* (2015); *The Vast Sky* (2015); the anthologies of WHA, BHS, and HSA.

Haiku, *haiga*, haibun and tanka by Bulgarian authors were honored at international contests: WHA Haiga Contest, *World Haiku Review*, Sharpening the Green Pencil, *Ersbik*, Sonic Boom, Gems, Vladimir Devide Haiku Award, International Kusamakura Haiku Competition (second, third places and honorable mentions), Genjuan Haibun Contest, Yamadera Bashō Memorial Museum Haiku Contest, Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, the Golden Triangle Haiku Contest and others.

More Bulgarian names could be found in printed and online international periodicals such as *Frogpond*, *Haiku Presence*, *The Heron’s Nest*, *Under the Bashō*, *LYNX*, *Modern Haiku*, *Skylark: A Tanka Journal*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Akitsu Quarterly*, Vladimir Devide Award, *Whirligig: Sketchbook — A Journal for Short Eastern and Western Forms*, *Notes from the Gean*, *Simply Haiku*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *Prune Juice*, *Ersbik*, *The Heron’s Nest*, *Cattails*, *Contemporary Haibun Online (CHO)*, *Failed Haiku*, *The Bamboo Hut*, *The Other Bunny*, etc. Here we should mention Diana Teneva, Radka Mindova, Gergana Yaninska, Iliyana Stoyanova (editor in LHA), Detelina Tiholova, Iliana Ilieva, Zornitsa Harizanova, Ljudmila Hristova . . .

The first Bulgarian *renku*, published in English, can be read in the June Issue of *World Haiku Review* (2015). The first publications of Bulgarian horror haiku appeared in *Dracus* and *Scifikuest* magazines.

We are looking forward to what the future will bring. The experienced Bulgarian haijin will keep developing their skills and mentor the new members of our haiku community.

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7. <https://vidahaiku.wordpress.com/>.