

A HISTORY OF HAIKU IN ITALY¹

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I. Poetry in Italy

“Un popolo di poeti di artisti di eroi / di santi di pensatori di scienziati / di navigatori di trasmigratori” (“A people of artists of heroes / of saints of thinkers of scientists / of sailors and migrants”). These are the words you can read on the façade of Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, also known as “the square Colosseum,” a monumental building in the modern neighborhood called EUR, in Rome. Italian literature began in the 13th century when, in the various regions of the Italian peninsula, people started using the Italian language for literary purposes. The first literary document (1224) is considered to be the “Cantico delle Creature” by Francesco d’Assisi, and it is a poem. The oldest examples of Italian literature are, in fact, all poems: the “Tesoretto” by Brunetto Latini, the “Laude” by Jacopone da Todi, the “Canzoniere siciliano”. Guido Guinizelli, who is considered to be the founder of “Dolce Stil Novo” (a poetic movement that developed between 1280 and 1310 in Florence) wrote poetry, and so did Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri, the author of the “Divina Commedia.” Works in Italian “vulgar” prose, the first of which is the “Novellino”, a collection of 100 novels dating back to the end of 1200, are less frequent than poetic works. Because of this—or maybe not because of this—there are a lot of poetry writers in Italy, but unfortunately, not as many poetry readers. In the sixties “contemporary poets” were cited and well known, in the last decades either there haven’t been important poets, or the diffusion of poetry through internet, together with the fact that some publishers ask authors for money to print their work and would therefore publish anything, have lowered quality and furthermore increased the number of writers.

The fact that poetry is secondary today does not have only one cause: first, the marginalization of humanistic culture has taken away some of poetry’s cultural prestige and its symbolic value. Second, the school system did not seem able to create more readers, despite the overall increased level of instruction; and third, there has been bad poetry teaching and education. And if there isn’t reading competence, what kind of “culture” remains possible?

Poetry needs a reactive approach, capable of extracting words from everyday commercialization, and this is exactly what makes reading poetry so complex and demanding

1. By kind permission of Cascina Macondo (www.cascinamacondo.com), on whose site the article appeared first.

an activity. Without poetry, the language and imagination of society as a whole could lose the degree of experimentation and research on language that is so typical of poetry. Language is becoming poorer, not only because of a lessened ability to use a varied and complex lexicon, but also because of a lessened value and consistency of words themselves, the latter caused by oversimplification (occurring in commercials, text messages, chats, etc.).

We live in the era of media, where the uppermost value is communication, and poetry is bound to lose ground and relevance. It happens because poetry is in contrast with the system and relies exactly on what escapes communication, i.e. on the limits of communication itself. Poetry investigates different questions, it works on the beauty of language, on the transmission of experience.

There isn't a lack of communication, but rather a lack of analysis of what's being communicated. Without analysis, what's being communicated becomes dogma and a basis for absolutisms, fundamentalisms, and many other "isms." The Nielsen Bookscan data, collected in more than thirty-five thousand bookstores worldwide (Amazon excluded), and presented by the association of Italian publishers during Salone del Libro in Turin in 2015, indicate a 4% loss in the book market during 2014, and through the first quarter of 2015. Paraphrasing Garcia Marquez, we could say that "Reading in the Time of Crisis" has been frozen in order to be able to wait and see how it evolves. One positive number is the one referring to the growth of independent bookstores—as opposed to big chains. Usually, this kind of bookstores can establish a privileged relationship with the readers, who tend to trust the bookstore owners. Novels constitute 40% of sales, children books 21%, and non-fiction as a whole 39%. Incorporated in this last percentage, we can find poetry books.

We do not want to analyze the reasons behind the fact that people do not like to read, or behind their choices in the matter of how to spend their free time. There is an excess of inputs (too many published books, too many publishing houses, too many internet sites, too many different places where you can buy books, etc.) that lead to a sense of fragmentation in the reader. This sense of fragmentation often translates in a paralysis of choices. If in the past it was the famous publishers who presented readers with poetry, today this kind of work is left to the small ones. There are some very respectable publishing houses that print excellent poetry work, but also a great number of publishers that rely on self-publishing authors to increase their profits, other than to promote a good read.

Poetry is not well distributed in bookstores and it is not promoted. Every year a number of titles between 1500 and 2000 come out, most of which self-published. The classics still sell, both Italian and foreign. There's a general lowering in quality, too, both for poetry and for prose: in the bookstores, quality novels that are harder to read and problematic, as well as high quality poetry books are less likely to find their place on a shelf. It is true, though, that poetry readers represent a niche of readers who possess a very strong identity. This means that the genre gets to be more "clean," also because in fact it doesn't sell much. Video-poetry, poetry slam, poetry sites and blogs have multiplied in the last ten years, often with good ideas and results, but more often they are self-referential in an embarrassing way.

Luckily, there are some positive signs. First, public readings and large poetry festivals (like the ones in Parma, Genova, Cuneo, Pordenone, followed in time by Messina, Napoli, San Benedetto del Tronto and Salerno, with its Casa della Poesia) are spreading. The same is happening to poetry magazines (Poesia, Quaderni di poesia italiana contemporanea, etc.). Finally, there are many poetry contest like the famous Viareggio and Mondello, but also new

types of contests like the online contest Dedalus and the biennial young poetry competition in Cetona.

Among poetry contests that, together with promoting poetry reading, help the territory become a center of cultural activity, there is “Premio Città di Arenzano-Lucia Morpurgo Rodocanachi.” Since 2008, this contest’s goal is to promote the most significant contemporary authors, but also and foremost to “educate” poetry readers.

A technical committee choose the authors that can participate among those who published a poetry collection in the two years preceding the contest, and after that they select three finalists, who will then be examined by a non-technical panel of judges. The latter will select the winner.

As a conclusion, in Italy you can’t live off of poetry, but it may be impossible, perhaps, to live without it.

II. How the passion for haiku and Japanese poetry were born

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, we witness in Italy a growing interest for Japanese culture. Among the first translations, in 1915 we can find “Note di Samisen”—a collection of Japanese haiku and tanka translated by Mario Chini (1876–1959), man of letters, teacher, art historian and art critic. The translation, like it was common at the time, makes use of rhyme and each poem has its own title.

Agonia del mondo (Matsuo Bashō)

sopra un ramo seccato
un corvo s’è posato
e s’è stretto nell’ale
in questo scolorato
vespero autunnale

Agony of the world

upon a withered branch
a crow lands
and shrugs its wings
in this discolored
autumn dusk

Tristezza della vecchiaia (Saiongi no Kintsune) *Sadness of old age*

il cader della neve
più non mi sembra un lieve
cader di fiori bianchi . . .
L’inverno è inverno, e greve
me lo fan gli anni stanchi

falling snow
doesn’t seem anymore a soft
falling of white flowers . . .
Winter is winter, and becomes a burden
because of old age

La vita è breve: amiamoci (Fukuda Chiyo-ni)

il vilucchio ha impigliata
la fune abbandonata
accanto alla cisterna?
Va a bere altrove: data
non gli è una vita eterna

Life is short: let’s love each other

field bindweed has trapped
the abandoned rope
at the well?
go drink elsewhere: its life
is not eternal

Mario Chini translated a lot of work from Latin, Chinese and Japanese, and he wrote poetry that was published posthumously under the title *Attimi* (Haikai/Haiku).

Haikai

In tre versetti
tutto un poema, e, forse,
tutta una vita

Haikai

In three lines
A whole poem and, maybe
A whole life

Largo

Bastan tre grilli
per far grande una notte
di mezza estate

Largo

Three crickets
And a midsummer night
Becomes bigger

Meriggio

Tutto riposa
in una stessa inerzia
la luce e l'ombra

Afternoon

Everything rests
In the same inertia
Light and shadow

It is likely that one of the first times Italy comes in contact with Japanese poetry is through the literary magazine *L'Eco della Cultura* (founded in 1914). The magazine published some Japanese poetry edited by Vincenzo Siniscalchi. Between 1920 and 1921, Università di Napoli published *Sakura*, a magazine about Japanese culture, in collaboration with Harukichi Shimoi, a Japanese scholar who will become friends with Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938). In 1921, *La Ronda* magazine published a substantially negative critique about the “Hai-kai” trend that was spreading in France and Spain, whereas in the following years many Futurists began to appreciate the “fast” haiku style.

D'Annunzio himself, who was highly interested in Japan and had many personal acquaintances, between 1885 and 1890 published the poem “Outa occidentale,” following the Japanese tanka prosody. The first two stanzas read as follows²:

Guarda la Luna
tra li alberi fioriti;
e par che inviti
ad amar sotto i miti
incanti ch'ella aduna.

Look at the moon
among the trees in bloom;
It seems to invite
to love under the slight
enchantments gathered soon

Veggio dai lidi
selvagge gru passare
con lunghi gridi
in vol triangolare
su 'l grande occhio lunare.

I see through the airs
wild cranes passing by
with long bales
in triangle they fly
above the great moon's eye

Even among the youngest, in the 1920–1930 he was well known as a writer and appreciated as a brave man. Important writers such as Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki read his work; Mori Ōgai translated it too. Mishima Yukio himself studied French in order to be able to translate *Martirio di San Sebastiano* (1964–1966), a sacred drama written by D'Annunzio in old French.

2. In order to render the feel of the original, we preferred to privilege rhymed structure over a strict literal translation of the text.

D'Annunzio was and still is well known in Japan, and the 150th anniversary of his birth was celebrated in Tokyo and Kyoto in 2013.

Andrea Zanzotto (1921–2011) is considered one of the most important Italian poets in the second half of the 20th century. In the eighties he wrote a collection of 91 pseudo-haiku *Haiku For a season/Haiku per una stagione*, in English with Italian translation on the side.

Delicato belletto di seta
nel riflesso di grandi distanze—
ogni pensiero semplice è vicino

Delicate makeup of silk
in reflections of far distances—
all simple thought is near

Edoardo Sanguineti (1930–2010) published haiku poems in his poetry collections *Mikrokosmos* and *Poesie*. The latter includes four haiku in the section titled “Corollario”:

Sessanta lune:
i petali di un haiku
nella tua bocca

sixty moons:
the petals of a haiku
in your mouth

è il primo vino
calda schiuma che assaggio
sulla tua lingua

the first wine is
a warm foam that I taste
on your tongue

Among the twentieth century Italian poets who wrote haiku there was also Margherita Guidacci (Florence 1921–Rome 1992), even if it was only for a very brief phase of her poetic work (*This little measure* 1988). She herself, in a moment of search for greater leanness and agility in her poetry, defined this stage as a kind of “mental sauna.” Some of her haiku were published in 1991 in a Japanese anthology.

Le prime nebbie
e uccelli di passo.
Viene l'autunno.

First fogs
and migratory birds.
Autumn comes.

Cadon le foglie.
In cuore si risvegliano
tutti gli addii.

Falling leaves.
In our hearts
all farewells awake.

Sera d'autunno.
Sulla strada fangosa
ci separamo.

Autumn evening.
On the muddy road
we part.

Treno di notte.
Sulla mia insonnia passano
altri destini.

Night train.
other destinies pass by
my insomnia.

III. A people of poets . . . and chaos

Many people erroneously think that, because they live in the beautiful country where the Italian language can be heard “del bel paese là dove ‘l sì suona” (Dante, *Inferno*, C. XXXIII, v. 80), then anyone is a poet because they are Italian. It is a country where unedited self-publishing sites abound, and so do, as a consequence, thousands of literature and poetry books. A country where poetry books are the least read or bought, where creative writing courses proliferate, but a serious MFA in creative writing does not exist, as if unnecessary because we are Italian (and pay attention to how subjunctive clauses can get messy, even when spoken by politicians). In this beautiful country, where 80% of the world’s historical-cultural beauty is located, many years ago haiku arrived. However, haiku poems get confused, in 99% of the cases, with epigrams, or with short poetry that often makes use of rhyming couplets. It is often mystified (we found a site that illustrates haiku like a way to predict the future), snobbed (Festival della Poesia di Genova did not include haiku, and the Libreria delle Donne in Milan won’t consider hosting a presentation of a haiku book because none of the owners knew about haiku or wanted to learn about it). And yet, haiku stuck.

Because of what we study in high school, haiku is often associated with hermetic poetry, maybe because of a few common characteristics. Hermetic poets do not use their lines to narrate, describe or explain. On the contrary, they capture on the page fragments of truth they discovered through poetic revelation, and not through reason. Hermetic poems are extremely brief and they carry multiple meanings in just a handful of words, the latter being pervaded with intense evocative, correlative and symbolic value. Hermetic poets aspire to free themselves from rhetoric, from superfluous language richness, from the abuse of autobiographic reference or description, and from sentimentalism. Hermetic poets want to create “pure poetry” using essential language. Essentiality is also the reason for preferring a simplified syntax, which often gets rid of logical connections and makes use of blanks, as well as of long and frequent pauses that represent moments of concentration, silence and waiting. Giuseppe Ungaretti wrote poems that can be assimilated to haiku:

Mattina (1917)

M’illumino
d’immenso.

Morning (1917)

I shine
with immensity

Soldati (1918)

Si sta come
d’autunno
sugli alberi
le foglie.

Soldiers (1918)

It’s like
in the fall
on tree branches
the leaves

As it happens with haiku, Ungaretti’s poetry starts from the specific to reach a universal truth. He starts from his own individual experience to talk about the condition of humanity as a whole.

Also one of the most famous poems by Salvatore Quasimodo (Nobel prize for literature in 1959) has been assimilated to haiku:

Ed è subito sera (1930)

Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra
trafitto da un raggio di sole:
ed è subito sera

And suddenly it's evening (1930)

Everyone stands alone at the heart of the world,
pierced by a ray of sunshine,
and suddenly it's evening

IV. Haiku in Italy

Many people think it's easy to write haiku: the kigo —the seasonal reference—is a concept that is fairly easy to understand and apply, though not always subtly. Moreover, it is not necessary to read a Japanese *saijiki* (a list of season words) when you can find the Italian translation on Cascina Macondo's site. But what about the other elements that make a haiku a haiku? *Wabi, sabi, aware, yugen, karumi, miyabi, yobaku, furyu, kire* . . . It is necessary to read, study, research, meditate, feel. . . . Like with any other form of art, one has to study (a lot) first and then create. For its apparent simplicity, however, haiku looks “easy.” So why should one read or study? “Easy” and “simple” are not, alas, synonyms. Haiku's simplicity is the harmony we find in every single thing, the balance, the deep perception of beauty, of impermanence, of the inexplicable. Haiku means doing without unnecessary words in order to perceive the very essence of things. Haiku is the maximum possible concentration of here and now.

And yet, haiku in Italy holds its grounds. It does so thanks to the passion and the work of many people who, since the '70s, study, read, participate in national and international haiku conventions. People who teach haiku in schools of every degree, and in prisons. People who organize contests, conventions, public readings. People who publish books and are always looking for creative ways to make haiku known to the public.

EDIZIONI EMPIRÌA

Founded in 1985 as a cultural project to explore contemporary literary experiences in the fields of fiction, poetry, and critique, this publishing house ended up opening—in Rome—a bookstore with an attached room dedicated to shows, meet-the-author/artist events, readings and debates (www.empiria.com). The events keep happening through the years and many important people in the cultural field have participated to said events, attracting a varied audience and regulars.

One of their series is dedicated to Japanese poetry, particularly to haiku, with text in original language and poetic version in Italian. Since 1987, the publishing house organizes, together with Associazione Nazionale Amici dell'Haiku—founded by Ambassador Sono Uchida—the national literary contest “Haiku in Italia.”

Carla Vasio was born in Venice and lives in Rome. She participated in the Italian neo-avant-garde of the '60s as part of Gruppo 63. Art historian, essayist and writer, she published many novels with Einaudi, among which *Laguna* and *Come la Luna dietro le nuvole*. For Edizioni Empiria, she published *Invisibile*, *Spazi Oscuri* and the poetry collection *Blasone corporale*; she

also edited a few haiku collections by contemporary Japanese authors. She is president of Associazione Italiana Amici dell'Haiku.

Pigne sul tavolo
un tempo è stata viva
la primavera

pine cones on the table
spring once
was alive

CASCINA MACONDO

“Cascina Macondo” (www.cascinamacondo.com) is a cultural association founded in 1993 by a group of artists who used to perform, read poetry and play in the streets. In time, they specialized in the art of teaching and education, working on rehabilitating and/or intercultural instructional projects for the school system, but also for the adults and the special needs. Among their instructional projects, we find haiku poetry, reading out loud, creative writing, pottery, dance and theatre, music. In 2003, the association announces the first International Haiku Contest in Italian. Participation to the contest is free and open to schools and individuals. In the same year they found also Haicom (Haiku International Community Cascina Macondo), to which both Italian and foreign haikai belong. Cascina Macondo organizes haiku poetry events in Turin, to which many Italian and foreign haikai participate.

Another event specifically meant for haiku writers is Wasnahaijin Oicimani, a walking trip that lasts a few days whose purpose is to allow participants to write haibun, interspersing haiku to short, essential prose paragraphs. The walking trip includes pit stops for food and overnight sleep, together with stops to observe nature, to write, to read out loud. You can find some accounts of the experience on Cascina Macondo's site.

Members of the association regularly participate to conventions both in Italy and abroad, as well as to workshops, editorial projects, events and shows. They write articles and reviews, they teach in schools; moreover, between 2013 and 2015, some of the members took part in the European project “PAROL! Scrittura e arti nelle carceri, oltre i confini, oltre le mura” (WORDS! Writing and art in prisons, beyond borders, beyond walls), an innovative project in which different countries cooperate internationally to establish creative connections between their jail systems and society, in order to promote the values of inclusion, of citizenship and the inmates' rehabilitation at a European level. Fourteen different prisons in five different countries (Italy, Belgium, Poland, Greece and Serbia) and about two hundred inmates were involved in high quality instructional projects carried out by artists, poets, actors, photographers, writers, dance and theatre teachers, with the purpose of activating, through workshop participation and text production, a process that goes in the direction of transnationality and European citizenship. The national exhibits and the larger collective exhibit in Belgium showed the most meaningful products, together with books and collections with multilingual translations. Haikus were printed on bookmarks, on sugar packets and on paper placemats, which were distributed also among bars, dining halls, restaurants, theatres, libraries and other public places. Reading out loud sessions and theatrical shows open to the public took place in jails, both by inmates and by the integrated (handicap & non-handicap) acting and dancing company “Viaggi Fuori dai Paraggi”, also part of Cascina Macondo.

Cascina Macondo is the only Italian haiku association that promotes writing experimentation but also pottery experimentation (for example, RakuHaiku, raku pottery

production that strives to interpret haiku by translating its meaning into clay objects: words become shapes, shapes become words), together with haiku experimentation (for example, kigo temporis e misuralis): only a deep knowledge of an art and its tradition allows for a new perspective and innovation.

Pietro Tartamella

In the '70s, Pietro Tartamella was the founder of the literary and poetry magazine *La Tenda*. Being passionate about essentiality and spontaneity, he became fascinated by haiku. Co-founder and artistic director of Cascina Macondo, he wrote the “Manifesto della Poesia Haiku in lingua italiana” and the “Manifesto della sillabificazione delle parole italiane per la composizione di haiku” (two tracts about haiku in Italian and the Italian syllabic system with reference to haiku writing, respectively). He promoted many events to spread haiku in Italy. Oral narrator, poet, writer, haikin, storyteller, voice-over for documentaries and shorts, for many years he has been working with elementary and middle school children, with adolescents and adults, and with the special needs. Reading-out-loud teacher, creative writing teacher, and teacher of haiku poetry in the European project “PAROL! Scrittura e arti nelle carceri, oltre i confini, oltre le mura,” he teaches refresher courses for teachers (oral narration, Italian diction, creative writing, haiku poetry). He published numerous short story collections, essays, haiku collections.

Anna Maria Verrastro

Founder and president of Cascina Macondo, Anna Maria Verrastro is manager and supervisor of the cultural association's instructional projects. She is a teacher, potter, and an expert in pedagogy and psychomotor techniques. For many years she taught pottery techniques in elementary schools, working with special need and problematic children, and she acquired a solid experience in their rehabilitation, also by using psychomotor techniques. She participated in research committees for the integration of the special need children in elementary and secondary schools. In the pursuit of the ideal of an “interactive and active” school system, she developed specific pottery instructional projects, which proved to be important instruments of creativity, containment and support to the traditional syllabus. She was a pottery and raku teacher in the European project “PAROL! Scrittura e arti nelle carceri, oltre i confini, oltre le mura.”

Fabia Binci

Fabia Binci taught Italian literature and History for more than thirty years in high schools in Turin and Genoa, where she dedicated herself in particular to the teaching of creative writing, through the school paper, a writing workshop and the use of new computer technologies. She participated in writing seminars and creative writing courses. She taught refresher courses for teachers about creative writing teaching in many high schools in Genoa and in various Italian regions, and in private institutions and didactic innovation associations. Since 1992, she organizes and coordinates the Creative Writing Workshop by Unitre in Arenzano and Cogoleto (GE). Member of the Association of Journalists, she is a current contributor for cultural magazines, with articles about literary criticism and interviews with contemporary authors. She works as an editor and as a preface writer for a few publishing houses. She is editor-in-chief for the magazine *N.O.I. Nuovi Orizzonti Insieme* by Unitre in Arenzano and Cogoleto,

of which she is president. With Edizioni Empiria, she published two haiku books: *Haiku golosi* and *Haiku per un anno*. She is particularly fond of the book *Il fiore pungente-Conversazione con don Andrea Gallo*, published by O Caròggio 2000, which she wrote with Paolo Masi. She took part in the project “PAROL! Scrittura e arti nelle carceri, oltre i confini, oltre le mura” with a lectio magistralis about haiku. She is a judge in the International Haiku Contest in Italian organized yearly by Cascina Macondo.

Fanny Casali Sanna

Born in Genoa, she works in a medical lab. In 2003 she participated in a creative writing workshop by Fabia Binci and she fell in love with haiku poetry. In 2005 and 2010 she placed in the National Haiku Contest organized by the Japanese Institute in Rome. In 2005 one of her haiku poems placed in the first ten at the National Poetry Festival in Genoa and was published in the newspaper *Il Secolo XIX*. In 2009, her haiku placed fourth (*ex aequo*) in the International Haiku Contest in Italian by Cascina Macondo. In 2011 and 2012, two of her haiku poems were published in their annual collection. In 2010 she won first prize at the same contest. In 2011, one of her haiku poems won the contest “Poesie con i Fiori,” organized by *Il Secolo XIX*. In 2012, one of her haiku poems about the Fukushima earthquake was selected and published in Japan by the poet Momoko Kuruda on the newspaper *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*. Two of her short stories were published in the short story collection *La rondine sul filo e altri racconti-Antologia di Scritturalia* published by Cascina Macondo with Marco Del Bucchia Editore in 2012. In 2015, she won first prize (*ex aequo*) in the National Haiku Contest in Italy organized by Associazione Amici dell’Haiku in Rome. Since 2013, she is a judge for the International Haiku Contest by Cascina Macondo.

Giorgio Gazzolo

Giorgio Gazzolo is a doctor who was born in Genoa in 1937. He lived in Rome and Milan. His literary debut was in 1967, when his work was published in “Letteratura” (Vol. 88-90). He was a contributor for specialized magazines like *Resine, Pietre, Atelier, La Clessidra, Nuovo Contrappunto* and *Tribuna Letteraria* and for newspapers like *Paese Sera* and *il Corriere Mercantile*. His work appeared translated in Japanese in the magazine *Ginyu*. He was also published in many Internet sites and haiku collections. The plaque *Sguardi* with Edizioni del Leone was presented to the Oriental Art Museum E. Chiossone. In 2002 he won Mainichi Haiku Contest (Tōkyō) and appeared in the *Premio Lerici Pea* poetry collection. In 2003 he won the contest “Friends of the Berkeley Public Library.” He organized (Genoa 2004) the Festival Poesia Haiku at Museo Chiossone. In 2003 he published the essays “Appunti per un improbabile viaggio in Giappone” (Joker Edizioni, *Novi Ligure*) and in 2004 the book *Quattordici Haiku di mare* (Edizioni Takeda, Lugano). In 2005 he won third prize at the International Haiku Contest organized by Cascina Macondo. He was a judge in the International Haiku Contest in Italian organized yearly by Cascina Macondo from 2006 to 2009. His poems, aphorisms and short stories appeared in collections and he wrote many novels. He also organizes literary conventions.

Oscar Luparia

Bank clerk out of necessity and trade unionist by reaction, he was born in Vercelli, where he lives and works. Totally allergic to millennial frenzies, every day he tries to live by his

favorite motto: “Festina lente.” In his free time, he travelled a lot, but today he would love to be able to move exclusively on foot. Besides his wife and their cats, he loves the mountains in the summer and antique prints in the winter, while he thinks every season of the year is good to write haiku. Since 2002 he became interested in Japanese classic poetry, and he wrote many poetry collections (*Haiku in cammino, I tanka dello zaino, Volta la pagina, Lattimo che resta, Nella tazza del tè*). In 2009 he won second prize at the International Haiku Contest organized yearly by Cascina Macondo; since 2010 he is a judge in the above mentioned Haiku Contest.

Fabrizio Virgili

Born in Rome, he was a P.E. teacher and wrote many books about the subject. He was a good running athlete when he was young, winning many “maglie azzurre” (the blue Italian t-shirt worn by the winner) in the 110 meter hurdles. He has been interested in traditional Chinese medicine for decades. Haiku lover, he visited Japan and teaches haiku seminars in elementary and secondary schools and in various cultural institutions and associations. He writes the bimonthly haiku poetry column “5-7-5” published in the Cascina Macondo newsletter. In 2003 he won first prize at the International Haiku Contest organized by Cascina Macondo and since 2004 he is a judge in the above mentioned Haiku Contest.

He participated in the project “PAROL! Scrittura e arti nelle carceri, oltre i confini, oltre le mura” with a *lectio magistralis* about haiku.

Arianna Sacerdoti

Born in Naples, she began writing as a child. Researcher and professor of Latin Language and Literature at Seconda Università degli Studi in Naples, she also organized and taught creative writing workshops in schools in and around Naples. She published the poetry collection *Sentieri diversi* (Napoli 2009), a fairy tale, short stories and lyric poems in different collections. She also published essays and research monographs about poets in antique Rome. Haiku lover, she is a Judge in the International Haiku Contest organized yearly by Cascina Macondo. She translated haiku collections from English into Italian (*Haiku for the single girl* by Bett Griffenhagen) and from Italian into Latin (*A piedi scalzi* by Pietro Tartamella).

Alessandra Gallo

Born in Turin, she lives in Houston with her husband and her two sons. She graduated in Foreign Languages and Literatures. Former EFL teacher in a middle school in Turin, now that she lives abroad she writes, works as a translator and, in her spare time, she reads. Some of her short stories, articles and poems were published in magazines and poetry collections. She participated in many creative writing courses at Scuola Holden in Turin and Inprint Houston and, since 2005, she collaborates with Cascina Macondo, mainly as a judge in their International Haiku Contest and as a translator.

Fiorenza Alineri

She started writing haiku and short stories in 2004. She is a member of “I Narratori di Macondo” and of Cascina Macondo editorial staff. She loves writing, painting and acting in theatres. She is a member of “Volcaedi,” a group of voluntary out-loud readers that was created by Cascina Macondo and that organizes reading performances in nursing homes and associations for the special needs.

Antonella Filippi

Born in Turin, she has always been in love with writing and travelling, as well as with nature and science. For many years she managed a publishing house. She also founded an association that organized environmental integration courses for adults and young adults, which brought her to create a ten-episode series that was broadcasted by RAI (the Italian national television). She worked as scientific director and as a research and development manager for a company based in Milan and she taught for many years in a complementary medicine school. She became fond of haiku in eighth grade, broadening her knowledge of the subject with the passing of years. She practiced Zen meditation. As an adolescent, she worked in the editorial staff of the magazine *La Tenda* and, afterwards, of Cascina Macondo. She organizes courses on haiku poetry and haiku writing. She published haiku and haiga collections, articles, short stories, essays and haiku poems in Japan, the US, and a few European countries, as well as on Cascina Macondo's site. She is a member of Meguro International Haiku Circle in Tōkyō. Two of her short stories appeared in the collection *La rondine sul filo e altri racconti-Antologia di Scritturalia* published by Cascina Macondo for Marco Del Bucchia Editore in 2012. Haiku poetry teacher for the European project "PAROL! Scrittura e arti nelle carceri, oltre i confini, oltre le mura," she is a judge in the International Haiku Contest organized yearly by Cascina Macondo.

ALBALIBRI

Albalibri was conceived and founded in Milan in 2006 by Çlirim Muça, an Albanian poet and writer. The publishing house objective is to present to the Italian public both debuting and previously published authors who are heralds of a new, high quality "literary voice" that can leave a mark. The publishing house also strives for finding and publishing foreign writers of haiku in Italian language, particularly writers from Albania or, after the launch of the series "Poesia dal Mondo," writers who come from literary cultures that are not well known in Italy.

Çlirim Muça

Born in Albania in 1966 from a poor family of farmers, he spent his childhood and youth in Cerme-Lushnje, where he completed his secondary education. In 1990 the State and the Party of Labor allowed him to continue his studies, so he went to college in Tirana and studied agronomy.

In 1991 he decided to run away from his country. He passed through Greece and ex-Yugoslavia, on foot, by bus and by train, until he made it to Italy, where he lived as an illegal immigrant for five years. When he finally got his papers, he lived and worked in Milan, and then in Tuscany where, together with his wife, he managed a small hotel in Castiglioncello, in the province of Livorno.

Poet, writer, playwright and editor, he considers himself a perfect autodidact. His first book *Tani gjerëve u jap nje kuptim te ri* is a collection of verses in Albanian. *Milano-Tirana senza ritorno* was written together with the Italian poet Alberto Figliolia; his poems appear with side to side Albanian translation. He wrote many other poems, all in Italian. *I racconti della terra dimenticata* and *Cento e una favola* are short story collections. As a playwright, he wrote *Il delirio di Adrasto e altri drammi*. Prolific poet, he became fascinated with haiku and has written four haiku collections, the first of which is *Fango di strada*.

A few years ago the *ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA HAIKU* (www.aih-haiku.it) was created. The association publishes a bimonthly e-zine, *Haijin Italia*, which is distributed online to all of its members, as well as a weekly newsletter. Since 2013 the association organizes Premio Letterario Internazionale Matsuo Bashō, a haiku and senryū contest for haijin and schools of any nationality or language. The association, together with the publisher Edizioni Man'yōshū in Pordenone, also created the national archive of haiku poets—Archivio Nazionale dei Poeti di Haiku (www.anph.it). The purpose of the archive is to spread haiku poetry knowledge in Italy and to promote the most interesting poetic voices. The inclusion of an author on their site happens by invitation only. The archive is directly supervised by the Italian Haiku Association. Luca Cenisi is the Managing Director. He is also president of AIH and founder of Scuola Yomichi. In 2015, he founded the European Haiku Society (www.haikusociety.eu), an association that aims to become an institutional reference for those who wish to learn more about traditional and modern haiku. In 2015 he organized the first European Haiku Prize and the first Kobayashi Issa Award.

Luca Cenisi

Born in Pordenone, he is founder and president of Associazione Italiana Haiku and European Haiku Society. In 2013, he created Scuola Yomichi, to promote and teach haiku in Italy. He organizes courses, seminars and instructional projects dedicated to haiku. He published *Il fiore e lo haijin. Haru ni narimashita* (2009), *Keiryū* (2011), *Guadando il fiume. Per uno studio coerente e unitario della poesia haiku* (2013) and *Introduzione alla poesia haiku* (2016). In 2014, he edited *Donna di neve*, the first Italian collection dedicated to the female poet Fukuda Chiyo-ni (1703–1775).

Daniela Zglibutiu

Born in Timosoara, she currently lives in the province of Reggio Emilia, Italy, where she practices naturopathy. Her passion for short poems starts during her adolescence, but only in the last few years she approached Japanese poetry and haiku in particular. In 2014, she creates Haiku de azi si de ieri, a Romanian group with the purpose of preserving and promoting classical haiku in Romania. In 2015, she wins second prize at the International Haiku Contest organized by Cascina Macondo. She is also among the winners of Premio Letterario Internazionale Matsuo Bashō by Associazione Italiana Haiku, and of Romanian Kukai. She publishes her work in the blog <https://haikumine.wordpress.com>.

Andrea Cecon

Born in Udine, he writes haibun and is a haiku poetry lover, as well as vice-president of Associazione Italiana Haiku. He won numerous contests during the years, and he writes both in English and in Italian. Among the magazines that published his work we find *The Heron's Nest*, *Mainichi Daily News*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Tinywords*, *Ulitka*, *Paper Wasp*, *Contemporary Haibun online*. He collaborated with other haijin in the writing of haiga and renku in *Journal of Renga and Renku*, *Notes from the Gean*, *Lishanu*, and in *A Hundred Gourds*.

Valeria Simonova-Cecon

Haiku writer and lover since 2004, she has Russian-Ukrainian origins. She writes for *Ersbik*, a Russian senryū and kyōka magazine. Her work appeared in many specialized magazines,

among which are *Mainichi Shinbun*, *Town News*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Modern Haiku*, *Ulitka*, *Moonset*, *Diogen*, and *The Renga and Renku Journal*. She won first prize in the fifth Bilingual Calico Cat Haiku Contest and second prize in the sixth. In 2009, she won honorary mention in the first Kikakuza Haibun Contest, in the Ito En Ōi o-cha New Haiku Contest and in *Haiku Calendar Ludbreg* (2009).

Guido Cupani

Born in Pordenone, he works at the astronomic observatory in Trieste. He published the poetry collections *La felicità* and *Qualcosa di semplice sulla neve*; he translated the collection *Nel santuario* by Patrick Williamson; some of his poems appeared in the live performance *Ballate per il nordest* by Vasco Mirandola and Piccola Bottega Baltazar.

Among haiku contests, it is important to mention *Capoliveri Haiku* (www.giorgioweiss.it), promoted by the town of Capoliveri together with *Il Parnaso* by Giorgio Weiss. The contest is open to works written in one of the European languages. As opposed to what happens in other contests, this contest presents its participants with a theme. The winning haiku poems and one hundred selected poems are then published in a collection.

Giorgio Weiss di Valbranca

Born in Livorno, he lived in Rome and was the president of the honorary section of Cortei dei Conti (Italian Institution with the role of safeguarding public finance and guaranteeing the respect of jurisdictional system). He was a writer and a researcher of facetious literary works. He was a freelance journalist, painter, writer of anagrams and poet. He created and organized poetic events for the television, theatres, libraries, festivals and scholastic seminars. In Rome, he directed "Domenica ai Fori," a street art event with live performances, drama, music and dance. Since 2001, he was a member of *OPLEPO* (Opificio di Letteratura Potenziale), analogous to *OULIPO* (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle), a linguistic laboratory founded by Raymond Queneau. Since 2002, he directed the Festival Le Voci della Poesia in Capoliveri (Isola d'Elba) and, since 2006, the Capoliveri Haiku contest. He died in September 2016.

Toni Piccini

For the last ten years he practiced haiku poetry and composed haiga. His first exhibition in Italy of this form of art is at the 13th International Poetry Festival in Genoa in 2007. He also exhibited in Hungary, Croatia and USA. With his lyrics he attended the 11th International Poetry Festival in Genoa in 2005, the 1st Tokyo Poetry Festival in 2008, the 8th International Mindfulness Congress in Pomaia in 2009 and the World Haiku Festival in Pécs in 2010. He has conducted workshops and worked with school children (elementary and middle schools) and with students of the University Károli Gáspár in Budapest. His works have been published in Italy, England, Germany, Japan, India, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia, Canada, Australia, USA. His most recent book, *No Password*, was published (in Italian and English) by Terra d'ulivi in 2014.

V. Conclusion

Haiku in Italy began as a poetry niche for orientalists and “authorized personnel,” but it has spread during the last century. From “literature of meetings and of the solitary soul”³ it became the subject of conventions, of teaching, of gathering.

The haiku scene is varied: some prefer the traditional, others *gendai*; some experiment with it, others strictly adhere to its standards. And furthermore, some write haiku as a pastime, others change even their relationship with nature and the world as a whole because of it—even from a spiritual point of view. There seems to be, however, a common element among those who are actively involved with haiku, and that is they strive to improve haiku quality in the Italian language, so that it finds one day its place on the global literary scene.

3. Junko Saeki “L’haiku nella vita quotidiana dei giapponesi”, Cascina Macondo, Second Italian Haiku Conference, June 28, 2009,