

# THE HAIKU PATH OF MONTENEGRO

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Montenegro is a independent country in the Balkans in southeast Europe. Its territory is about 13.812.00km<sup>2</sup>, and has access to the Adriatic Sea, so it is the Mediterranean country as well. The length of its shoreline is 293,5 km. Montenegro is well known for its mountains, especially Durmitor, as well as its many lakes, the pearl of which is Crno jezero—The Black Lake. Another famous one is Skadarsko jezero—Skadar Lake. The river Tara is also justly famous for its canyon.

In Montenegro, epic poetry has been part of the culture for centuries and has always had an important meaning for its inhabitants and writers. Though epics often focus on war, one can find even here portions which speak of man as a part of nature, man presented as a being who can by no means be separated from nature. A number of contemporary Montenegrin lyric poets have found their inspiration in this poetry and have interwoven their work with these threads. These authors, who did not write haiku, often noted their thoughts in a manner full of the haiku spirit. For example:

after heavy rains  
the sun with its warmth  
dries the mountains  
—Veljko Vlahović

These were the last words written in Vlahović's notebook, dated March 7, 1975. He passed away the same day. This excerpt was published by Zvonko Petrović in *Haiku* 1, Varaždin, Spring 1977.

Since then it has arrived, shyly, from the East, this small / grand poem, glistening with sunlight, so it has become “our” poetry as well, teaching us how to watch and listen to the things around us in a different way; how to live NOW in the full meaning of this word, without complicating the simple and everyday things with the unnecessary and redundant; how to

look at the images that move in front of us with joy; and finally, and most importantly—how to search for our own selves.

Or, did we know all that already, and that's why we have accepted it so easily? The beauty of haiku poetry is, at first sight, in its simplicity which has conquered so many Montenegrin authors. Once they perceived its magic, they could not deny it. Haiku has become a part of our lives, as our poets have become a part of haiku's song. As a matter of fact, a poet is only the medium that conveys what he sees to others in his own way, giving thus his readers an opportunity to live their own vision

Or, are they only allusions and suggestions?

The brevity of haiku is a very demanding and challenging aspect of the form, as it teaches us to evoke things that enslave us in a given moment with very few words, and then, in this game of words we discover that we have not in fact been restricted, neither by form nor by theme. The perfection of haiku is hidden in its incompleteness. Besides, all witty thoughts have been told with a few words, haven't they?

Miloš Crnjanski published *Pesme starog Japana (Poems of Old Japan)* in 1928, but haiku in Montenegro only began to be read some forty years ago. Among the many translators whose help was essential in bringing information to the authors as well as translating them, the most meritorious was Vladimir Devidé. Thanks largely to their work, Montenegrin authors were able to begin publishing their haiku in the dedicated haiku magazines.

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a cherry stone  
making a shadow  
a stony crevice  
—Ljubislav Milićević (*Paun* 1989. Požega)

Though there was not much understanding and acceptance of haiku among a wider reading public and even among poets, haiku slowly but successfully found its way through the thorny ignorance. Montenegrin haiku poets write haiku, an assertion that may be proved by its many successes domestically as well as internationally.

By the end of the 1980s several magazines—*Odzivi*, *Univerzitetaska riječ*, *Školjka*, *Mostovi*, *Pobjeda*, *Latica Osmjeh*—began to publish haiku by both native and foreign poets.

*Odzivi*, edited by Ljubislav Milićević, is a magazine of literature, culture and the arts founded in 1991 in Bijelo Polje. It sponsored the first competition for haiku in Yugoslavia and received more than 100 submissions. Milićević was a well-known haikai who contributed much to the creation and affirmation of haiku in the region. During his tenure *Odzivi* published an anthology of Montenegrin haiku, the first of its kind, collected and edited by Zoran Raonić.

This anthology was translated into Slovenian and published in the well-known journal *Apokalipsa*. *Odzivi* have been published annually ever since, with great contributions and persistence from its current editor, Blagoje Vujisić.

The Haiku Association of Yugoslavia (later known as The Haiku Association of Serbia and Montenegro) was founded in 1999, in Belgrade. Since 2000 it has published *Vesnik*, its membership newsletter, and (since 2001) the journal *Osvit*. Most Montenegrin haiku poets belong to this community, which publishes haiku collections as well these publications.

The first Montenegrin magazine for haiku, *Školjka*, was founded by Nelica Ivanović-Radović and Dejan Bogojević in 2000. It is bilingual, and publishes native and foreign authors alike, as well as a number of professional contributions.

In 2009 Milutin Đuričković collected and edited *Guests in their own House*, a monograph of work published 1990–2009 by the Haiku Association of Serbia and Montenegro. In his biography of Blagoje Nišavić, Đuričković says: “It may be told that Blagoje Nišavić is the founder of Montenegrin haiku: he was the first poet to publish a collection of haiku verses, *Jutro na rijeci*, (*Morning by the River*) published by the “Matsuo Bashō” library, in the town of Kula, Serbia, 1993), while *Vidokrug* (*The Horizon*) is the first haiku collection published in Montenegro by Međurepublička zajednica, Pljevlja, 1995.

the aspen here  
does not flicker  
like in my soul

—Blagoje Nišavić (7<sup>th</sup> Yugoslavian Haiku Festival, Odžaci 1994, HM)

Montenegrin haiku poets have achieved international as well as local success. Their work has been published in such anthologies as *Leptir na čaju* (*A Butterfly Having Tea*), the first Yugoslav haiku anthology by Milijan Despotović in 1991; and *KNOTS: The Anthology of Southeast European Haiku Poetry*, collected and prepared by Dimitar Anakiev and Jim Kacian. A number of individual haiku collections have been published by Montenegrin authors.

From my research of the haiku scene in Montenegro, I conclude that Montenegrin haiku poets deserve an anthology to showcase their talent. As a consequence I have edited *Mountain Pearls*, forthcoming in 2016. Along with our known haiku poets, I have included authors who have not published much, and even some beginners. Common to all our authors is their love for haiku, and their belief in the interconnectedness of Nature and Man, especially the idea that they are nothing by themselves, but together, they are all. This unity is offered through the diversity, rendered through the variety of their images. The ranks of our poets are growing constantly, an indication that haiku will continue its important and recognized place in Montenegrin literature.

(Translated by Đurđa Vukelić-Rožić, Croatia, and Jim Kacian, USA.)