

# The Development of French Haiku in the First Half of the 20th Century: Historical Perspectives

by  
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In the 19th century, through an artistic and literary movement known as “Japonisme”, French poets appear to have been solely attracted by the evocation and illustration of Japanese works of art such as color-prints or curios, which they usually transcribed in the sonnet form. Therefore the exotic curiosity for Japanese culture was limited to art and did not seem to have yet had penetrated the arcane of Japanese poetry. The poems do not show any interest in the condensed Japanese poetical form or any real knowledge of the Japanese customs and traditions. The fairly recent economic and political opening of Japan to the West, its cultural and geographic remoteness, the difficulty of its language, the lack of translations did not allow for any deep and sustained approach of Japanese letters.(1) Indeed, if one excepts Leon de Rosny’s *Anthologie japonaise* published in 1871, which apparently is the first translation of Japanese tanka into French (2) and Judith Gautier’s (1850-1917) *Poèmes de la Libellule* (1884) (3), French translations of Japanese poetry were rare and remained confined to the limited circle of linguists and other scholars.

In the second half of the 19th C., the French poetical scene was dominated by two main movements the Parnasse and Symbolism. the Parnasse was a reaction against sentimental and confidential Romanticism. Th. Gautier became the undisputed master, the champion of “art for art’s sake”. According to Gautier, by nature art is disinterested, has no useful aim. It is its very own end: “Anything useful is ugly.” (4) Art is the cult of beauty as a means to appease the artist’s worry. In order to conquer beauty, the poet must work on the form. Facility must be banned. The door was then opened to the plastic, impassible poetry of the Parnasse that sees poetical work as an acrobatic and skilled activity. Poetry was reduced to a game of “rime riche” (rich rhyme), which lead Banville to affirm that “the rhyme is the verse” (5). As opposed to the Parnasse, Symbolism is based on the sense of mystery that is in and around us. Therefore poetry cannot be descriptive and will use symbols to reach the soul of things. The unknown and the subconscious are at the crux of this poetry that is also characterized by the use of free verse. Gerard de Nerval and Baudelaire had been the initiators of symbolism, the first one with his experience of the surreal and the second one with his theory of “correspondances” between real life and dream. Later, Lautrémond, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and more particularly Mallarmé contributed to the development of the movement.

At the beginning of the 20th C., the most influential or the most celebrated poets are, on the one hand, the “old” beginners of the years 1880-1890 who exploit and diversify the double heritage of the Symbolists and the Roman School. On the other hand, they are the newcomers who, through these mixed currents, push further the poetic investigation. It is a period of evolution. Reviews, manifestos, schools have never been so numerous. Poetry is still a dominated chant but where traditional meters, cuts and rhymes find a lot of equivalents. Since Gérard de Nerval, the poetic vocation had been one of interpretation and overstepping of appearances towards an approximation of the Being. Poetry tended to be isolated from real life. But Moréas and the Roman School had brought poets back to the concrete spectacle of the world and to a more direct way of treating the themes. The tone adopted testifies to the abandonment of a cerebral and only dreamed universe. In 1909, the Unanimist movement attempted to rejoin, behind the fragmentary spectacle of daily life, not the mysterious essences, but the felt presence of a collective soul. At the same time, Futurism calling for mechanical tumult and material violence confirmed a more general recourse to the vision of the modern world modified by speed, the ubiquity of the new born cinema and the simultaneous interpretation of concrete form toward which painting

tended.

It is in this context that the haiku penetrated the French poetical scene.

It would be an obvious mistake not to include Jules Renard (1864-1910) as a serious precursor of the French haiku. His *Histoires naturelles* (first published in 1896) are definitely not directly influenced by Japanese poetry. However, in his own way, Renard's sense of brevity, objectivity, suggestiveness and terseness is evidently reminiscent of the haiku and will undoubtedly contribute to the popularity of Renard among the new generation of French poets at the beginning of the 20th C.

LE VER LUISANT  
Cette goutte de lune dans  
l'herbe!

THE GLOW WORM  
This moon drop in the grass!  
(6)

Let us quote from Renard's journal where the author's art of poetry not only conforms to some of the rules of haiku writing but denotes an evident environmental preoccupation:

Tout est beau. Il faut parler d'un cochon comme d'une fleur.  
Everything is beautiful. A pig should be spoken of just as a flower.

Je prétends qu'une description qui dépasse dix mots n'est plus visible.  
I believe that a description of more than ten words is not visible anymore.

De presque toute la littérature, on peut dire que c'est trop long.  
Of nearly all literature, one can say that it is too long.

Réduire la vie à sa plus simple expression.  
Reduce life to its simplest expression.

Jules Renard (7)

A) Form experimentation and assimilation.

With the early 20th C., begins the form experimentation period of French language haiku. This period can be divided into two stages running from 1903 to 1925.

I) 1903-1917, Form Experimentation

The French intellectuals and poets were not the first to write about haiku, but they were the first Westerners to attempt to adapt the poetic principles of the Japanese genre to a Western language and culture. According to Gary L. Brower, "an interest in Japanese literature had been evolving in England, based on influences of French exoticism and the translations and studies of a group of scholarly orientalist."(8). In his article on Basho (9) from 1902, Basil Hall Chamberlain, an eminent British specialist of Japan, was the first to coin the term "lyric epigram" for what was then technically called a "haikai". In his turn, in 1903, Claude Maitre, a French scholar, translated some of Basho's haiku while reporting on Basil Hall Chamberlain's substantial article on his "epigrams"(10). Later in 1905, Louis Aubert quoted several "hokku" from Chamberlain's article in his "Sur le paysage japonais" (11). During the same year, Noel Péri translated haiku and uta for a paper delivered at the Alliance française in Yokohama (12).

Undoubtedly, these articles must have had an influence on the French intellectuals and poets who were interested in Japanese literature and were looking for new modes of poetic expression. However it is only with the publication of *Au fil de l'eau* in 1905 that a first serious attempt was made to compose haiku in French. During a canal-boat cruise in 1903, the authors, Paul-Louis Couchoud, Albert Poncin and André Faure composed 72 haikai that were compiled into a collection privately published. Couchoud who taught his friends the Japanese genre, was a professor of philosophy and doctor of medicine. He had traveled to Japan and had been seduced by Japanese poetry and the haiku. Without any doubt not only did he initiate French language haiku but he also became the first true French expounder and initiator of the genre in a series of two articles entitled “Les épigrammes lyriques du Japon” in 1906.

Couchoud kept Chamberlain’s appellation of “lyric epigram” to designate haikai. Indeed, this appellation is not really adapted to the genre. An epigram is a short, witty statement which may be complimentary, satiric or aphoristic. Chamberlain was wise enough to add the adjective “lyrical” to it in order to avoid confusion. The epigram being the shortest literary form in Europe, it was only natural that this designation be used in the first definitions of the Japanese genre. Perhaps this appellation was too misleading for in their attempts to approximate the haiku form, a few poets after Couchoud used the epigram in the form of quatrains, which were still the commonest stanzaic form in European poetry at the end of the 19th century.

Couchoud himself said: “A haiku can be compared neither to a Greek or Latin distich, nor to a French quatrain. It is neither a “thought”, nor a “word”, nor a “proverb”; an epigram in neither the modern sense nor in the antique, which is rather an inscription. It is the simplest picture, in three movements of the brush, a sketch which is a brief touch or impression... In his study of the haikai, Mr Basil Hall Chamberlain calls them “the lyric epigrams of Japan”. This title defines two of their essential qualities – brevity and the power of suggestion.” (13)

In the first two poems of the following selection by Couchoud, the influence of both Bashô and Buson is evident:

Dans le soir brûlant	J'arrive fatigué
Nous cherchons une auberge.	A la recherche d'une auberge
O ces capucines!	Ah! Ces fleurs de glycines.

In the hot evening	I arrive tired
Looking for an inn.	Looking for an inn
O the nasturtium!	Ah! The wisteria

*Couchoud*

*Basho*

Une simple fleur de papier	Simply
Dans un vase	An anemone in a pot
Eglise rustique.	Rustic temple.

A simple paper flower  
In a vase  
Rustic church.

*Buson*

*Couchoud (10)*

Sur le bord du bateau  
Je me hazarde à quatre pattes  
Que me veut cette libellule?

On the boat's deck  
I venture on all fours  
What does this dragonfly  
want?

*Couchoud (14)*

The borrowings only prove how much Couchoud desired to nurture the genre and assimilate it. As a student and a practitioner of haiku, Couchoud must also have been aware that it was not unusual for some poets to borrow a haiku from someone else and only change a few syllables.

Although Couchoud's poems are experimental and far from being masterpieces, they more or less follow the rules of haiku composition. They are brief and terse, not rimed and remote from the lyrical, wordy effusion common to the French poetic tradition. The 5/7/5 structure is used in an approximate manner but each line never includes more than 8 syllables. Most of the poems contain a reference to the season and concretely are associated with nature. Note also that Couchoud carefully uses the themes of flowers, insects and trees such as dragonfly, nasturtia, willow, which are traditional Japanese themes. The result is a series of interesting pictures of French rustic life.

“The interest of such attempts in French”, Couchoud declares, “is that it shows what an effort of limitation the Western artist must impose on his receptivity in order to condense his feeling into a unique sensation. . . . In the work of all French poets it would be possible to trace passages which, if isolated, would exist as haikai. (15)

Both his attempt to practice haiku and his knowledgeable literary and cultural explanations made him the first real originator of French language haiku and lead the way to a growing and continued interest until World War II.

Following Couchoud and his friends, Fernand Gregh published “Quatrains a la facon des haikai japonais” in 1906. Fernand Gregh could not resist the French tradition of the rimed quatrain and tried to find a compromise between the haiku's connection with nature and the French poetic usage of construction. Although he cites Moritake and Busson, and quotes Couchoud's definition of the haikai as being “a sketch, sometimes only one line, a note whose harmonies die out slowly within us” (16), Gregh's poems are far from being haiku.

BOULEAUX

Nuit. Les blancs bouleaux,  
diffus  
Parmi l'ombre verte et brune,  
Semblent garder sur leur fûts  
Un éternel clair de lune . . .

BIRCH TREES

Night. The white birch trees,  
diffuse  
Among the dark green shade  
Seem to hold to their trunks  
An eternal moonlight...

Fernand Gregh (17)

Here we have a heptasyllabic quatrain. Some of his other poems were composed in classic alexandrines. These two poems' central theme is the moon, a traditional Japanese theme, but Gregh relies too much on the effect of versification and lyricism. Furthermore, the formulation is too verbose, therefore avoiding the immediacy and suggestiveness of the images.

Soon after, in 1908, Albert de Neuville, also influenced by Couchoud's article, published 163 "Haikais et tankas, Epigrammes à la japonaise"(18). Contrary to Gregh's poems, they are free rimed quatrains.

O joie!	O joy!
L'hiver est parti;	Winter's gone;
Le pêcher en fleur m'envoie	The blooming peach tree
Des confetti.	Sends me confetti.

LE BOA	THE BOA
Affublée en juin d'un boa	In June rigged out with a boa
La rose a-t-elle la berlue?	Does the rose see things wrong?
Ah!	Ah!
C'est une chenille poilue.	It's a hairy caterpillar.

#### Albert de Neuville (19)

The free stanza form allows the poems to be closer to haiku as far as brevity is concerned. Neuville's poems are still wordy but their lyricism is more moderate than Gregh's. Nature is omnipresent and its vegetable and animal elements are treated in a humorous way reminiscent of Jules Renard's *Histoires Naturelles*.

In 1910, the publication of Michel Revon's *Anthologie de la littérature japonaise, des origines au XXe siècle* greatly influenced the adepts of the haikai. Revon who had been a professor at the Law School of Tokyo, was adjunct professor of the History of Far Eastern Civilizations at the Sorbonne. His anthology was one more step into the understanding of Japanese literature. According to Schwarz, "the influence of this very practical introduction to Japanese aesthetics can be proved by the disappearance of long pseudo-Japanese poems." (20) Interestingly enough, the word "haiku" is mentioned for the first time in this voluminous anthology. (21)

In 1912 and 1914, Gilbert de Voisins, a novelist who had visited Japan, published "Vingt-cinq quatrains sur un même motif" and Cinquante quatrains dans le gout japonais". Schwartz says of him that "he has a gift for the epigram, developed by the teaching of the Japanese poets". (22) The following poem is in pure alexandrines.

La lune éclaire tout le ciel: soufflons la lampe...  
Oh! Voici que le mont Fuli paraît, doublant,  
Par des traits élégants et délicats d'estampes,  
En l'eau verte du lac son profil rose et blanc.

The moon lights the whole sky: let's blow out the lamp...  
O! Here appears Mount Fuji, twinning,  
With elegant and delicate print-like traits

In the green water of the lake its pink and white profile.

Gilbert de Voisins (23)

Moon, Mount Fuji, water are used here in carefully crafted quatrains. As Bernadette Guilmette points out, “it is obviously the themes and vocabulary of Japanese poetry rather than the form that impressed Grehg and de Voisins. Their voice, expressed in four lines, approached, it must be admitted, the concise manner of Oriental art”. (24)

It is obvious that some French writers and poets were not ready yet to thoroughly succumb to the classic 5/7/5 structure of haiku or simply to brevity. The period of exoticism had not yet totally disappeared. Indeed in 1914, poets were still in the process of discovering the various facets of Japanese poetry. French language haiku was simply a curiosity. It was something that had to be tried because it was in the air of time. Both the Japanese themes and brief poetic form had not seduced to the point of radically changing the French artistic mentality and the resolutely intellectual approach that were still characteristic of most of the literary production at the time. Even the Dadaist and Surrealist movements that were then beginning to flourish and bring a new type of perception could not help being intellectual and therefore remote from artistic simplicity. As a matter of fact only a few of the great figures of French literature will venture to tackle the Japanese genre. The haiku remained limited in scope among the poetic establishment. It was only beginning to plant its seeds.

In 1916, Julien Vocance published “Cent visions de guerre” followed in 1917 by ninety haikai in *La Grande revue*. In the middle of World War I, this soldier decided to materialize his emotions and impressions of life in the trenches in the form of haiku.

	My head hardly inside
Ma tête à peine rentrée,	A mosquito whizzes and
Un moustique siffle et soudain	suddenly
La crête de terre s'éboule.	The tuft of earth falls in.

Des croix de bois blanc	White wooden crosses
Surgissent du sol,	Surging from the soil,
Chaque jour, ça et là.	Each day, here and there.

Dans les vertebres	Among the vertebrae
Du cheval mal enfoui	Of the badly buried horse
Mon pied fait: floche...	My foot goes: flosch...

Julien Vocance (25)

His poems are more faithful to the rules of haiku composition. His “hundred Visions of War will be immediately acclaimed by the critics. Emile Vuillermoz in *Le Temps* called it “a spiritual lesson of tact and poetry”. (26) Charles-Henri Hirsch in *La Grande Revue* thought Vocance’s work was “a meticulous work of fine chiselling”. (27) When Couchoud republished his essay on “the Lyrical Japanese Epigrams” in *Sages et poètes d’Asie* in 1917, he included some commentary on Vocance’s work: “In my opinion, these haikai of Julien Vocance are worthy to be placed beside the Japanese models, as one of our prints is sometimes hung beside the Japanese example which has inspired so much of its beauty.” (28)

Vocance's haiku will put an end to the period of exoticism. He had known Couchoud in 1900 and read *Au fil de l'eau*. In the midst of the tragic war, he realized how much the haiku was better adapted to these terrible conditions than any other longer poetic or prose genre. The war haiku will have many followers among the young poets.

It is true that as William J. Higginson said, many of Vocance's "visions" are "rather grandiose and sentimental". (29) Nevertheless the emotion is not as diffuse as in many of his predecessors' poems. Furthermore, his haiku are terse and concrete, less verbose. Vocance had only one aim: to suggest in 3 lines, as he will later expose in his *Art Poétique*, the impassibility of things with all the pain underneath. (30) Leaving war aside, Vocance will explore other themes:

Sur le sable qui crissotte, Ses petits pieds trottent, Trottent menu, menu.	On the creeshing sand, Her little feet scampering, Pitter-patter, pitter-patter.
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Comme le derrière d'un macaque Les fesses du nouveau-né Rougeoient.	Like a macaque's behind The new-born's buttocks Are glowing.
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#### Julien Vocance (31)

Here nature is more present than in the war haiku. From the sound of feet in the sand to the senryu-like poem on the macaque's behind, Vocance gets closer to natural phenomena while expressing the outline of things in a variety of moods: gaiety, charm, and humor in a non-intellectual way. II) The flourishing period (1920-1926)

In 1920, the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise* printed a selection of haikai by several poets including Couchoud and Vocance. This article could be considered as an attempt to begin a school or a movement. In addition to Couchoud and Vocance, one can find the names of well-known poets such as Jean Paulhan, Paul Eluard and Jean-Richard Bloch. As Bernadette Guilmette remarks, "the movement had been gaining momentum from its very beginning and was now important enough to attract some truly great writers." (32).

George Sabiron's poem has a Zen tint to it for its serenity and its philosophical image on reality:

Flaque d'eau sans un pli. Le coq qui boît et son image Se prennent le bec.	Puddle without a ripple. The drinking rooster and its image Catch each other's beaks.
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#### George Sabiron

More accomplished is Jean-Richard Bloch's haiku with its 5/7/5 structure and its concreteness and movement:

Contre le sein nu L'enfant rit, tourne la tête Et le lait déborde.	Against the naked breast The child laughs, turns his head And the milk overflows.
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#### Jean-Richard BlochJean

Breton's poem is delicate but it is rimed, which results in French lyricism. However the movement of the heart associated with that of water is interesting:

Au fil de l'eau, rapprochés, séparés,  
Ce bouquet de roses fanées,  
Et cette lettre déchirée.

With the stream, together, separate,  
This bouquet of wilted roses,  
And this torn letter.

Jean Breton

Paul Eluard's haiku, which are the only ones he ever published, are not necessarily of the best kind. As Rene Maublanc noted in 1923, "all are equally mysterious and hermetic... Due to the absence of a common discipline of thought, symbolism tends in us to a simple individual dream, a la Mallarmé, difficult to grasp for any one but the author." (33) As a matter of fact, the two following poems lack a certain objectivity or direct observation of life:

Le coeur à ce qu'elle chante	The heart to that which she
Elle fait fondre la neige	sings
La nourrice des oiseaux.	She melts the snow
	The birds' nursemaid.

In the next one, the scene is delineated with verbal economy, and the image is more evident:

A moitié petite,	Half-little
La petite	The little girl
Montée sur un banc.	Set on a bench.

Paul Eluard

Jean Paulhan contributed a few haiku. The following one has 17 syllables arranged in 7/7/3 structure.

La fumée s'envole au Nord	Smoke flying to the North
Le papillon blanc vers l'Est	A white butterfly to the East
Vent frivole.	Frivolous wind.

Jean Paulhan (34)

According to Etiemble: "the problem is that one cannot construct haiku in French following the Japanese 5/7/5 structure without it determining an alexandrine purr: 5+7 or 7+5, thus falsifying the feeling which this sequence gives to the Japanese. Paulhan had found a solution: 7+7+3, which provides the 17 syllables, and manages to avoid the epic or lyric verse". (35)

This first minimal anthology attracted the attention of some personalities, among them, Jules Romains who in 1920 discussed the attempt to found the French haiku. He "insists on the question, raised in *La Gerbe*, of an amateur art", and "asserts the necessity of a poetic rule." (36)

Julien Vocance's "Art poétique" was published in *La Connaissance* in 1921. Although it does not absolutely answer the question raised by Jules Romains and is reminiscent of Rimbaud's theory, it enumerates a few basic rules "hostile to rhetorical eloquence in poets" (37), but in favor of

suggestiveness, concreteness and terseness:

Le poète japonais	The Japanese poet
Essuie son couteau:	Wipes his blade:
Cette fois l'éloquence est morte.	This time eloquence is dead.

Chaud comme une caille	
Qu'on tient dans le creux de la main,	Warm as a quail
Naissance du haï-kaï.	In the palm of one's hand,
	Birth of the haikai.

Evoque, suggère. En trois lignes	Evoke, suggest. In three lines
Montre-moi ce masque impassible,	Show me this impassible mask,
Mais toute la douleur par-dessous.	But all the pain underneath.

#### Julien Vocance (38)

In 1923, a new stage in the evolution of French haiku will appear. Rene Maublanc, a friend of Couchoud will be the initiator of it. He had already published haikais in 1919 and a critical study in 1920. His articles entitled "Un mouvement japonisant dans la littérature contemporaine: le haïkaï français" published in *La grande revue* of February and March 1923 discussed the principles, the tendencies and the technique of French haiku.

Rene Maublanc lived in Reims where he started a regional review of literature and art called *Le pampre*. It is in this review that he published an article entitled "Le haïkaï français" in which he shared the belief of Jules Romains that "the French haikai's form is very irregular, so free that it could not follow any rule. However we have not forgotten the warning which Jules Romain gave us in *l'Humanité*". (39) On the other hand *Le pampre* was extremely instrumental in propagating the haiku among French people. Rene Maublanc's democratic belief was that the haiku was a genre that should be practiced by a greater mass of people and not be relegated to the circles of Parisian poets: "If this movement can be transmitted and enlarged, if a greater and greater number of shrewd amateurs take pleasure in composing the lines of a haikai, one can expect, not only a complete renewal of our poetry, but also on the one hand an anthology of delicate works, and on the other hand, an elevation and a refining of the public taste." (40).

Around Maublanc, who published numerous tercets by amateurs, three poets, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and the Druart brothers contributed to create the Ecole Reimoise whose organ will be *Le pampre*.

Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (1907-1943) was only 16 when he wrote the following haiku:

Les yeux du chat:	The eyes of the cat:
Deux lunes jumelles	Two twin moons
Dans la nuit.	In the night.

Dans le ciel de cendre	In the ash-grey sky
Comme un dernier tison	Like a last ember
La petite étoile.	The little star.

Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (41) A sense of observation and economy characterizes the haiku of this young poet.

Rene Maublanc's major haiku work is *Cent Haikais* from which the following selection was taken:

Surgit de l'herbe verte, Des coquelicots à la main, Le major ventru.	Rising from the green grass, Poppies in his hand, The portly major.
--	---

Rangées par ordre de grosseur, Une collection de fesses Cueillent les haricots.	Standing by size, A collection of buttocks Picking beans.
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#### Rene Maublanc (42)

Maublanc's haiku are classic in their composition except for the number of syllables. It is obvious from their construction, themes and even humour that they were written by a man who had studied haiku and its principles. In the introduction, Maublanc humbly remarked that "these little pieces are therefore not at all the spontaneous product of a poetic inspiration. They simply represent the modest but thoughtful effort of a man who, by taste as by profession, is used to analysis, and who scrupulously applied himself to take down, as sincerely and accurately as he could, a few spare details of things and men that he observed around himself and in himself." (43)

The last poet from Reims worthy of praise is René Druart (44). His collection of haiku, *L'épingleur de haikai* was published in 1929 with a preface by Paul Fort himself.

Est-ce un bourdon à la vitre Ou l'eau du thé Qui ronronne?	Is it a bumblebee on the window Or the tea water Humming?
--	---

D'un tilleul jauni, Une feuille tombe à pic, Lourde de tout l'été.	From a yellowed lime tree, A leaf falls sheer, Heavy with the whole Summer.
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#### René Druart (45)

René Druart was very knowledgeable in Japanese art and his delicate inspiration is narrowly connected to the Japanese state of mind with a sure taste for the microcosmic elements of life.

In 1924, Benjamin Crémieux published an article in the *Nouvelles littéraires* on the French haikai in which he invited the readers "to compete with our best haijin". (46). In another article, two weeks later, Crémieux declared: "I received about a thousand haiku from Paris, from the province, from Belgium, from the closest colonies. I also received a certain number of interesting communications on the subject." (47)

Sur l'estrade le lutteur	On the platform the wrestler
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Faillit rêver en écoutant	Almost dreamt listening to
L'allegro de la vieille valse.	The allegro of the old waltz.

René Morand

Sur l'épaule du novice	On the apprentice's shoulder
Tanguant vers la ruelle chaude,	Pitching towards the hot lane,
La guenon grelottante ferme les yeux.	The shivering she-monkey closes her eyes.

P. Enard (48)

Again in the same year, Marc Adolphe Guégan's *Trois petits tours et puis s'en vont...* was published. In the introduction, the author stated that "I therefore did not compose haikai: I only composed tercets, tercets perhaps vivified by the contact with a foreign literature; undoubtedly stylized by the original contribution of the authentic haikai. Yet nothing other than simple tercets." (49)

Giraffe. grand escargot	Giraffe. Tall snail
Qui a perdu sa coquille	That lost its shell
Et la cherche à l'horizon.	And looks for it in the horizon.

Marc-Adolphe Guégan (50)

The publications that followed are characterized by an irregular poetic production in quality and construction. Perhaps this was due to the growing popularity of the genre in France.

Two other major figures of French literature will also leave their mark in the history of French haiku. Francis Jammes produced several collections of quatrains between 1923 and 1925. Although these are not haiku, Jammes's poems are brief and concrete and close to the Japanese print in essence.

Un ciel de soie	A silky sky
Azure l'eau.	Bluing the water.
Un chien aboie	A dog barks
Sur le coteau.	On the hillock.

Francis Jammes (51)

Paul Claudel's interest in Japanese culture and literature is a well-known fact. In 1921 he was named ambassador to Japan. There he familiarized himself with the haiku. His journal is full of simple sentences reminiscent of the haiku spirit:

Une libellule atterit sur une tige de plantain.  
A dragonfly lands on a plantain stem.

There are haiku too:

La grenouille au fond du	The frog at the bottom of
Puits: toute les étoiles	The well: all the stars
Sont brouillées.	Are blurred. (52)

Claudel's *Cent phrases pour éventail* first published in Tokyo in 1927, are his main poetic contribution to the French haiku movement. His poems are sometimes too long to be real haiku but they are written in an unusual scattered and detached fashion and show a rare sense of the Japanese way of perceiving the world.

lanterntrébu	Stumb	
chant	Ling	
sur mes j' essaie	On my	I try
sandaes d' attraper	Wooden	to catch
de bois le	Sandals	the
premier flocon de neige		First snow flake

Paul Claudel (53)

From the 30s to the end of World War II, there was a noticeable decrease in the interest in haiku in France. As mentioned earlier, the beginning of the 20th century gave way to a few influential intellectual movements that penetrated the literary establishment and maintained it in its tradition of elaborateness. Also the new linguistic research (Saussure) and the Freudian studies rather engaged writers and poets in complex and often wordy introspections. Finally when Japan got involved in World War II, France began to lose its interest in the frail and delicate Japanese art. Nonetheless, it clearly appears that between 1859 and 1926, Japanese art and literature gradually settled down in France and influenced the world of letters, opening the way to a flourishing assimilation of haiku between 1905 and 1926. Undoubtedly, the haiku movement in France started as a reaction against poetic eloquence, with a period of experimentation and adaptation of the haiku form to the French poetic rules and traditional short genres. More daring and captivating was the movement which Maublanc, Crémieux and Romain successfully launched, culminating in a democratic and popular development of the haiku in France. The seed was planted. Beyond the historical and literary reasons preventing haiku from being definitely established as a genre among the “belles lettres”, one can invoke the lack of awareness of the spiritual currents that pervade haiku. Very few people in Western Europe at the beginning of the 20th century knew about Zen and Taoism, and the impact of these currents on Japanese arts and letters. Only after World War II in the 50s and 60s will the Eastern spiritual development be strong enough to favor the rise of a new type of philosophical consciousness thanks to Blyth, Henderson, Suzuki, Watts, Kerouac and Snyder among others. These essayists, novelists and poets lead the way to the long-awaited East-West interconnection in which haiku stands as a unique way of reaching a true communion with our environment.

#### Notes

- (1) In his *Le Japon*, Aimé Humbert, a Swiss plenipotentiary in Japan from 1863 to 1864, realistically declared: “We are still exploring Japan... Now in order to integrate Japanese literature into the street stall of the civilized world, the work of more than a generation is needed”. See *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle: Approche du haiku de chez nous*, Editions la voix du crapaud, 1995, p. 26.
- (2) Léon de Rosny (1837-1914) was the first French scholar to have started the study of the Japanese language and eventually taught it. In 1837, he published *Anthologie Japonaise de poésies anciennes et modernes de Nippon*. Although the bibliography mentions a few titles on haikai, the book does not include any translation. See Patrick Blanche, *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit.
- (3) Judith Gautier was the daughter of Théophile Gautier. She adapted with the help of Prince Saionji Kinemochi a selection of tanka published in the 9th C.. She became successful at the end of the 19th C. and was one of the leading figures of “japonisme”.
- (4) Théophile Gauthier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, preface p. 21, Charpentier et Cie, Libraires-Editeurs, 1871, Paris. According to Patrick Blanche, Théophile Gauthier, in a long poem entitled “le grillon” (1845) sometimes practices haiku without knowing it: “Look at the branches,/How white they are!/It is snowing flowers”. See *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit. pp. 16-17.
- (5) Théodore de Banville, *Petit traité de versification française*, 1872.
- (6) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit. pp. 35-37.

- (7) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., pp. 43-44.
- (8) Gary L. Brower, *Haiku in Western Languages*, 1972, pp. 32-33.
- (9) B.H. Chamberlain, “Basho and the Japanese Poetical Epigram”, *Transaction of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 1902, Vol. XXX, part II.
- (10) Claude E. Maitre, *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient*, 1903.
- (11) Louis Aubert, “Sur le paysage japonais”, *Revue de Paris*, 15 sept. 1905. Even though Shiki started using the word “haiku” towards the end of the 19th C., only the words “haikai” or “hokku” were used in France.
- (12) Noël Péri, “Au Japon, Fleurs de cerisiers”, *Revue de Paris*, 1er sept 1905.
- (13) “The salt of French epigrams is almost always in their play of words; they are very justly called mots... They are light lashes of the tongue. The haikai is a coup d’oeil” (a rapid glance). Paul-Louis Couchoud, *Japanese Impressions*, 1921, pp. 35-36; 56-57; 68-69.
- (14) Paul-Louis Couchoud et al., “Haï-kais”, *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Sept. 1, 1920, pp. 331-32.
- (15) Paul-Louis Couchoud, *Japanese Impressions*, op. cit. pp. 71-72.
- (16) *Ibid.*
- (17) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 67.
- (18) Schwartz mentions a first edition in 1908 with 163 poems, a preface and a bibliography (unknown publisher), followed by a second one in 1921 under the title “*Epigrammes à la japonaise*”, “enlarged to 249 items but without the preface and bibliography of the first edition”. W. L. Schwartz, “Japan in French Poetry”, *PMLA*, vol. XL, pp. 443.
- (19) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., pp. 68-69.
- (20) “Japan in French Poetry”, op cit., p. 443.
- (21) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 84.
- (22) “Japan in French Poetry”, op cit., p. 444.
- (23) Gilbert de Voisins, “Cinquante quatrains dans le goût japonais”, *Mercure de France*, I-III-1914, p. 26, 28.
- (24) *Haiku*, *Anthologie Canadienne/Canadian Anthology*, Editions asticou, 1985, p. 38. [Edited by Dorothy Howard and André Duhaime.]
- (25) Julien Vocance, “Cent visions de guerre”, *La Grande Revue*, May 1, 1916, p. 425, 427, 429.
- (26) *Haiku*, *Anthologie Canadienne/Canadian Anthology*, op cit, p. 38. [Edited by Dorothy Howard and André Duhaime.]
- (27) *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- (28) *Japanese Impressions*, op cit. , p. 71.
- (29) William J. Higginson, *The haiku Handbook*, 1985, p. 49.
- (30) William L. Schwartz, “L’influence de la poésie japonaise sur la poésie française contemporaine”, *Revue de littérature comparée*, VI, vi, Oct-Nov. 1926, p. 665.
- (31) Julien Vocance, “Fantômes d’hier et d’aujourd’hui”, *La Grande Revue*, May 1917, pp. 482-83.
- (32) *Haiku*, *anthologie canadienne/Canadian Anthology*, op cit., p. 40.
- (33) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 112.
- (34) “Haï-kais”, op cit., pp. 331-345.
- (35) Etiemble, *Le coeur et la cendre – 60 ans de poésie*, Editions les deux animaux, Paris, 1984, p.
- (36) Rene Maublanc, “Le Haïkaï français”, *Le pampre*, no. 10/11, 1923, p. 13.
- (37) “Japan in French Poetry”, op cit., p. 446.
- (38) William Schwartz, “L’influence de la poésie japonaise sur la poésie française contemporaine”, *Revue de Litterature Comparee*, VI, vi, Oct.-Nov. 1926, pp. 663-66.
- (39) “Le haïkaï français”, op cit, p. 4.
- (40) *Ibid.* p. 6.
- (41) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., pp. 135-36.
- (42) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., pp. 139-41.

(43) Ibid. p. 138.

(44) His brother, Henri Druart, also wrote haiku. See *Pincements de cordes*, Editions du Pampre, 1929. His haiku are of a lesser quality.

(45) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., pp. 143-45.

(46) Benjamin Crémieux, “du haïkaï français”, *Les nouvelles littéraires*, March 1924.

(47) Ibid.

(48) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 158.

(49) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 159.

(50) Ibid.

(51) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 164.

(52) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 174.

(53) *Le chat a des souvenirs de jungle*, op cit., p. 169-71.