Haiku in France: an alternative poetry

1 – Precursors and pioneers

The current fashion for haiku in France, encouraged in particular by the development of the internet, must not let us to forget that this poetic genre has been known and haiku have been written in France for over a century.

It was in July 1903 that a book of French "hai-kaï", as this poetry was called at the time, was first published in French. The precursors of the genre, André Fau, Albert Poncin and Paul Louis Couchoud, were the three authors of a small brochure entitled "Along the Waterways" a collection of the first haiku. Paul Louis Couchoud, on a scholarship from the Kahn foundation, had made a trip to Japan, returning with a real passion for the haiku. In 1906, he published a truly initiatic work entitled: "Haïkaï, lyrical epigrams from Japan", then, in 1916, "Sages and Poets of Asia". In 1910, Michel Revlon published a French translation of a work on Japanese literature. But the genre acquired some independance compared to the Japanese model, with the publication of a collection that caused a shock in the eyes of public opinion. For, with the publication of "A hundred visions of war" in 1915, Julien Vocance showed that the haiku could deal with contemporary subjects, and bore witness to the 14-18 war that was currently raging in Europe. "Dans un trou du sol, la nuit / en face d’une armée immense / deux hommes" (In a hole in the ground / facing an immense army / two men).

2 – Pre-second world war haiku poets

After the first world war, many authors became interested in the art of haiku. For example, Jean-Richard Bloch was at the origin of a "small anthology of French hai-kaï" published in the September 1920 issue of the NRF (Nouvelle Revue française), with 82 short poems by 12 poets, and a preface by Jean Paulhan. In 1923, in issues 10 and 11 of the review "The Vine Branch", René Maublanc presented "The French haikai" illustrated by two hundred and eighty

\[ \text{Traduction de Janet Ormrod} \]

The second world war was to interrupt this French interest in the haiku for several decades.

3 – The situation of the haiku today

After the second world war, the situation of cultural dependency vis-à-vis the United States was a period when Japanese literature was accessed via translations of American publications. This period finished at the end of the 60’s when the Europeans Ivan Morris in English, Fernando Rodriguez Izquierdo y Gavala in Spanish, Gaston Renondeau and René Sieffert in French, began to translate the Japanese works directly into their respective languages. The vulgarisation of Japanese literature and poetry immediately met with public interest, while renowned authors were affected by the concision of the haiku - authors such as Philippe Jacottet, Roland Barthes and Louis Calaferte. In addition, three renowned translators at this period can be mentioned for their contribution to spreading knowledge about Japanese poetry and the haiku.

Translators

René Sieffert, professor of Japanese literature at the National School of Modern Oriental Languages in Paris, brilliantly translated all the works of Bashô, published from 1984 to 1993 by the editors “Presses Orientalistes de France”. For amateurs of Japanese poetry and the haiku poets, the most famous of the translations undertaken by René Sieffert appeared in 1983 entitled “The haiku according to Bashô, Poetic treaty” which revealed the pedagogical talent of Bashô. A few years earlier, in 1978, Maurice Coyaud had published the first anthology of Japanese haikus entitled: “Ants without shadows – The book of the haiku – Promenade anthology” (editors: Phoebus, Paris) which still enjoys great success. We can also mention the painstaking work done by Jacques Bussy who in 1988 published “The hermitage of illusion”, a penetrating work by the poet Bashô (editors: La Délirante).

A new generation of translators appeared in the 90’s: Joan Titus-Carmel, Corinne Atlan, Alain Walter, etc.

Joan Titus-Carmel is an American academic who, after serious studies undertaken in the United States, Japan and France, from 1990 onwards began publishing the great names in the classical haiku tradition: “The 99 haiku by Ryôkan”; “Issa Haiku”; “One hundred and one haiku by Bashô”; “One hundred and seven haiku by Shiki” (ed. Verdier); “Haiku Yosa Buson” (Orphée La Délirante).

Corinne Atlan taught for 15 years in Japan and Nepal after her degree from the Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations. When she returned to France, she started on a brilliant career as a literary translator. In particular, she published two anthologies of haikus “An anthology of the Japanese short poem” (Gallimard 2002) “Haiku in the 20th century: today’s short poem” (Gallimard 2007) as well as translating that great contemporary female haiku poet, Mayuzumi Madoka (Picquier 2012).

Alain Walter is an academic who has written a thesis about the masterpiece by Bashô “The narrow road to the deep north”. It has been published as a beautiful book, with the original text facing a superb translation, enriched with illuminating footnotes and commentaries. (William Blake & Co edit. 2007)

Anthologies of haiku

Then arrived the period of anthologies of haiku poets, and French speakers are not alone among this vast international movement. This movement, that published haiku poets, announced its more or less conscious intention, that is, to extract itself from the Japanese influence, an influence that was now only an external reference to a French poetic approach based on a literary tradition that was already a hundred years old, outside the Japanese archipelago.

“It is with this in mind that the Quebec author André Duhaime undertook the publication of a world anthology of the haiku in 1998. It is a full panorama of haiku poets from all over the world. Its title is: ‘Haiku without Borders, a world anthology’” (Editors : David, Ontario, Canada 1998). The author
rises to the challenge by bringing together poets from 25 countries around the world. The works of each poet are published in their original version with a translation into French. For the French-speaking public, this veritable reference document was to bring notoriety to, and a basis for, the haïku in French which, by displaying greater technical possibilities, enriched it and expanded its audience.

“\nIn 2001, the untiring André Duhaime published "On the moon on horseback, anthology of the contemporary haïku in French". Its aim was to compose "a panorama that, amongst other things, enables us to see how the Japanese poetic form has been appropriated". This anthology is a deep-founded work, in which writing haïkus accompanies an approach involving the whole person.

“\nIn 2003, Jean Antonini set up a project called « an anthology of the haïku in France ». Among the eighty authors present, we can see that there are poets who compose in Occitan, in Gallo, or in Breton, thus showing the richness of France’s cultural and linguistic diversity.

“\nIn 2010, Dominique Chipot published an anthology entitled ‘Only the echo’ which takes up themes from the1930’s, but here treated by contemporary poets. This makes it possible to measure the evolution of the French haïku over 70 years.

University Studies of the haïku

In 1988, André Delteil wrote a doctoral these in comparative literature entitled "Theory and practise of the haïku in contemporary Japanese society". In the pedagogical aspect of this popular art, he points out many interesting grammatical points that can be treated within the framework of writing haïkus:

‘\nWe rapidly notice that we can omit articles and sometimes even verbs, and write using nominal groups. ‘\nHe also mentions the precise lexical work that the haïku requires: ‘Give great importance to your choice of words. There are so few of them, each one is essential: we also work on the precision of the article’. He concludes by highlighting the spoken interest of the haïku: ‘Working on the text is achieved better by pronouncing it out loud. It is on reading out the text that the problems of sonority, echoes and alliterations appear, that were not intended when writing but that must be taken into account.’

In 2002 Nathalie Caradec, in her thesis entitled "The notion of territory in modern Breton poetry written in French", dealt with the phenomenon of haïku writing in Brittany, France:

‘When studying the theme of landscape in Breton literature written in French, we note that many contemporary poets have chosen a very particular formal: the haïku. To what extent does this poetic form suit Breton poets for expressing their relationship to the landscape? To choose the haïku is to accept the provisional nature of what we see, of what we live and of what we are.”

Internet Reviews and Sites

Since 2003, the review "Gong " has appeared four times a year. In each issue, readers can find dossiers on precise themes, selections of poems submitted by readers, foreign authors’ texts, reading notes, etc. This review can be consulted at www.afhaiku.org.

“Ploc! The haïku letter and review” can be consulted at www.100pour-100haiku.fr. It is a real mine of information with news of the haïku, book reviews, articles, etc.

“Five hundred and seventy five haïku reviews” is an online review set up by the Belgian Serge Tomé that can be consulted on the site www.tempslibres.org. The site itself is the first French-speaking haïku site that also explores the world of the English-speaking haïku.

Amateurs of the haïku can also consult the following address: www.big.or.jp/~loupe

which is the site of a Japanese poet, Ryu Yotsuya, where we can find, among other things, a good history of the haïku in Japan, written in French.

Published haïku guides

Three works have recently been published to guide those who wish to try writing this poetic genre:

“Short manual for writing haïku”, by Philippe Costa, (editors Philippe Picquier, Paris 2000). In this guide, the author gives full advice for success at writing a good haïku. It is a kind of poetical D-I-Y (do-it-yourself) guide, full
of humour.

“All you need to know about haiku”), by Dominique Chipot (Aléas editions, Lyon 2006). This is a fairly simple but complete panorama of how to write this type of poem.

“Around haiku”(haiku wo tsukurô) (Fujii Kunihiko La Part Commune, Rennes 2004). Translated from the Japanese by Alain Kervern, this manual was written by a primary school teacher, after ten years’ experiments with his pupils. Pedagogically enthralling, this work enables teachers to get very young children to write haïkus, in the form of letters, diaries and “haïga”.

Attempts at adapting the techniques of the Japanese Poetic Almanach

The seasons and nature are an essential, integral part of the Japanese haïku in the neo-classical tradition. As a result, several translation ventures have been created in French in order to introduce people to the Japanese poetic almanach (saïjiki), an essential document in Japan for anyone attempting to compose haïku. This glossary lists all the keywords characteristic of each season, each keyword or “season word” (kigo) being presented in the saïjiki with a technical description and examples of reference haïkus containing the season word in question. To show interest in this document is to penetrate the heart of the most intimate identity of the Japanese haïku.

Thus, two kinds of approaches have developed in France: translations of the Japanese poetic almanach, and attempts to adapt this document to the realities in France.

Translations

I – In order to understand the essence of the haïku properly, it was judged useful and necessary to introduce Japan’s poetic almanach into France. We can mention three ventures that have translated the Japanese poetic almanach.

1 – The editors of “Folle Avoine” in Bédée (near Rennes, in Brittany) have published a translation-adaptation by Alain Kervern of the “Grand poetic almanach of Japan”, (Nihon Daisaïjiki) that appeared in 5 volumes (editors Kodansha in Tôkyô) in 1982. From 1988 to 1994 five books were published “The otter’s awakening”; “The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd”; “In the west the moon whitens”; “North wind” and “Snowy morning” corresponding to the four seasons, plus the New Year, considered in Japanese poetry as a season in its own right.

2 - Compared to the previous approach, Seegan Mabesone’s “The poetical calendar to be used by poets composing haïkus in French” is an Internet document with clearly stated pedagogical concerns. The aim of this site is to familiarise French-speaking poets with the haïku, to understand its rules and to make it a work of art in its own right.

3 – The French-speaking Japanese poet Ryu Yotsuya has also created an internet site for a “saïjiki” of the four seasons. His introduction illustrates the spirit of the Japanese haïku very well: “Japanese haïkists try to find eternity by describing one moment. The ‘season word’ is a kind of bridge between the instant and eternity, since the seasons make visible the law of natural cycles (...) The haïku is the authentic receptacle of the whole universe”.

Adaptations

II – Two original approaches to adapting the Japanese “saïjiki” began with the aim of reproducing a French haïku that really corresponds to the spirit of the Japanese original.

1 – Christian Faure has seriously attempted to bring together Japanese and French sensibilities by working on composing a “French-speaking saïjiki”, that is, a set of season words that would be specific to the sensibility of the French language. He has undertaken this venture methodically, and his research has been enriched thanks to the contribution of numerous French-speaking poets. His work can be found on the following site: “http://saïjiki-francophone.over-blog.fr”.

2 – A French-speaking saïjiki is also currently being undertaken in the Basque Country. There is a group there who wishes to create a specific almanach, indicating the express desire to move away from Japanese references and to become rooted in Basque nature and culture. Thanks to the contribution of Basque haïku lovers, the Basque Country saïjiki is being enriched with new entries every year.

A few fine examples of haïku, to conclude:

Quand tu ne viens pas/ le froid glisse sous ma porte/ de mauvaises nouvelles
When you do not come / the cold under my door slides / bad news
Cécile A. Holdban

Soulèver un m’intinvezh goañv / ur filip war tavanjér ar puits / ma bubez e klemm ar saib
Silence, winter morning / a sparrow on the ledge of the well / my life in the wail of the bucket
Bernez Tangi

Oiseau migrateur survolant le village / le village aussi est de passage
Migrating bird flying over the village / the village too is passing through
Thierry Cazals

Une poulie grince / dans la voix de l’âne / il rit ou il pleure ?
A pully grates / in the donkey’s voice / does it laugh or weep?
Michel-François Lavaur

Matinée d’avril / premiers soins au potager / in robe de chambre
August morning / early care of the vegetable garden / in a dressing gown
Henri Chevignard

Ils bouchent le passage / les amoureux qui s’embrassent / au milieu du pont
They stand in my way / the lovers kissing / in the middle of the bridge
Pierre Tanguy

Chante petit oiseau , chante / aide-nous à trouver / un nom au bébé
Sing little bird, sing / help us to find a name / for the baby
Gilles Fabre

Canicule aveugle / on abandonne les chiens / un long ciel blanc tire sur ma chaîne
Blind heat / dogs are abandoned / a long white sky pulls my leash
Roland Halbert

1. フランス俳句の先駆者たち：
フランスに俳句が入ってくる100年以上になる。アンドレ・フォー、アルベール・ボンサン、ポール・ルイ・クーショの3人の共同編集による俳句集『水路に沿って』(1903)、その後の編集者の1人クーショによる本格的な俳句書『俳句—日本の叙情詩』(1906)と『アジアの偉大な詩人たち』(1916)。しかし最初注目を集めたのはジェリアン・ヴォカンスの『戦争を描く百篇の詩』(1915)。時まさに第一次世界大戦の真っ最中。俳句が、現代的なテーマを表現できることに国民は熱い視線を送った。

2. 第二次世界大戦前の俳人たち：
ジーン＝リシャール・ブロック編『フランス誹諧小詩選』(1920)、ルネ・モーブラン著の『フランスの誹諧』(1923)、ポール・クローデル著の『詩百選を楽しむ』(1927)など日本の俳句の影響を受けた詩集が発刊された。
1933～35の3年間にわたって、ジョルジュ・ポノー(当時京都日仏学院理事)がシリーズで『日本語のリズム』、『日本民謡の詩的表現』、『俳句』を発刊して日本の俳句を紹介した。
その後、戦中・戦後数十年にわたってフランス人の俳句への関心は遠ざかった。

3. 現代の俳句事情：
60年代以降、ヨーロッパの詩人たちによって日本文学が直接英語、フランス語、スペイン語などに翻訳されたのをきっかけに、フランスでも、フィリップ・ジャコテ、ローラン・バルト、ルイ・カラフェルテなどが俳句をはじめ日本文学への興味を示しはじめた。
さらに以下3人の翻訳家たちの活躍によって、フランスに日本の詩や俳句が急激に広まった。

(1) ルネ・シーフェール：芭蕉の俳句を全訳、『芭蕉の俳句—詩の一つの形態』(1993)
（2）モーリス・コヨー：フランス初の俳句集『影のない蟻』（1978）
（3）ジャック・ブシー：『幻想の遺産ー芭蕉の俳句』（1988）
（4）ジョアン・タイタス＝カーメル：1990年より『良寛の俳句99句』、『一茶の俳句』、『芭蕉の俳句』、『子規の俳句』、『与謝蕪村の俳句』と次々に発表
（5）コリン・アルタン：『日本の短詩集』（2002）、『20世紀の俳句ー現代短詩集』（2007）。黛まどかの句集も翻訳（2012）
（6）アラン・ワルター：芭蕉の『奥の細道』に関する論文（2007）

その前後、日本の古典的な俳句から脱皮して、むしろ現代俳句を好む傾向が現れた。アンドレ・デュエームの『国境を越える俳句ー世界の短詩集』（1998）、『馬に乗って月へーフランス語による現代短詩集』（2001）、ジーン・アントニーニの『フランス俳句選』（2003）、ドミニック・チボーの『(短詩の)残響』（2010）など。

4. 日本の『歳時記』の研究
『歳時記』を次の二つの方法で研究。
（1）フランス語に訳して理解する試み。
（2）フランス既存の俳句を『歳時記』に照らし合わせることによって、日本の季語の心を理解しようとする試み。そして、フランスの時候に合った季語をつけ加える試み。

5. 最後にフランス俳句の傑作を8句
（訳注：紙面の都合で、3句だけ翻訳。フランス語の原詩は訳愛、英訳と日本語訳を併記）
（1）セシール・A・ホルドバン
When you do not come / the cold under my door slides / bad news
君が現れない日 ドアの隙間から寒風 不吉な知らせ

（2）ピエール・タンギー
They stand in my way / the lovers kissing / in the middle of the bridge
邪魔だお前ら キスする二人 橋の真ん中で

（3）ギレス・ファーブル
Sing little bird, sing / help us to find a name / for the baby
小鳥よ鳴け鳴け わが赤子の名前のヒントをおくれ

松本彰二訳
【補足事項】
1. 著者名（日本語よみ）は『外国人名よみ方字典』（日外アソシエーツ）にて逐一調べました。
2. （原稿1頁、「2. 第二次世界大戦前の俳人たち」の6行目の英訳書名“One hundred poems for a fan”は“…… for a fun”の誤り（またはミススペル）と思われる。"fan"でも『愛好家のための詩百選』と訳せないことはないが、やや不自然。
（字数：本文だけで1376字）