

HAIKU IN SPAIN

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At the beginning of the 20th century, when haiku were first introduced to Spanish readers, another strict form of short poetry already existed in our language and was immensely popular among our people; it is called *seguidilla*. Apart from being the name of a traditional literary form, this word also describes a certain kind of Andalusian gypsy or flamenco songs. *Seguidilla* is a 5-7-5-7 verse; here is an example of it, a *seguidilla* written by the famous Federico García Lorca:

Hacia Roma caminan
dos peregrinos,
a que los case el Papa,
porque son primos.

Two pilgrims are walking
to Rome
to be married by the Pope,
because they are cousins.

—(Federico García Lorca. *Los peregrinos*)

There were several factors that contributed to the development of the haiku genre in Spain. First of all, our poets have always been in a close contact with their French colleagues. France was the first country where an attempt was made to adopt this Japanese genre, making it suitable for Western readers. This was the age of modernism and symbolism, the two artistic movements that opposed realism and had as their utmost goal the quest for pure beauty, also assimilating elements of some exotic cultures, not only in architecture and decorative arts, but in literature, as well.

Another interesting phenomenon was the development of haiku in South America. In 1919, the first book of haiku in Spanish was published; it was titled *One day*, and its author, the Mexican poet José Juan Tablada, used the words *haikai* and “synthetic poems” to describe this particular type of poetry. Tablada was inspired by classical Japanese haiku, although in his own poems he didn’t follow the 5-7-5 pattern.

Tierno saúz,
casi oro, casi ámbar,
casi luz . . .

Tender willow
almost gold, almost amber
almost light . . .

When the poet Antonio Machado arrived in Paris, he discovered Chinese and Japanese poetry. According to Octavio Paz, Machado tried to mix haiku and popular songs, and consequently started creating poems based on a contemplation of nature and its transmutations. He followed the oriental tradition, but used the images he had chosen in the spirit of the Spanish cultural tradition.

Junto al agua negra
olor de mar y jazmines.
Noche malagueña.

By the black water
the smell of sea and jasmine.
Night in Malaga.

Another Andalusian poet of the so-called “generation 27”, Juan Ramon Jiménez, was also interested in haiku, which he probably read in English translation. Jiménez was an impressionist; he always used picturesque images and admired brevity in poetry writing, which can account for the fact that he was a big admirer of haiku.

Está el árbol en flor
y la noche le quita, cada día
la mitad de las flores.

The tree blooming—
each day the night removes
half of its blossoms.

The years of the Spanish Civil War can be described as a period when haiku writing came to a standstill. Even after the war silence reigned for about thirty years. In the post-war period, many poets thought more important to develop poetry written according to their own cultural traditions.

The beginning of the 1970s witnessed the resurgence of haiku due to the publication of *The Narrow Road to the Northern Provinces*, Bashō’s major work translated into Spanish by Eikichi Hayashiya and Octavio Paz. Other factors that contributed to the newly found interest in haiku were the growing popularity of Buddhism, publications of English-language haiku poets and the influence of the beatnik writers, e.g. Jack Kerouac. Finally, there have always been contacts with the South American poets, and in those parts the interest in haiku never faded.

In 1972, Prof. Fernando Rodríguez–Izquierdo published his detailed haiku manual titled *The Japanese haiku* (Hiperión Publishing). The same Hiperión helped to promote haiku in Spain by translating classical Japanese poets, as did some other Spanish publishers, e.g. Pre-textos and Miraguano. Two other haiku scholars, Vicente Haya Segovia and Pedro Aullón de Haro, also published monographs on haiku, as well as their translations from Japanese masters of the genre. Notably, Pedro Aullón de Haro authored the book titled *Haiku in Spain*.

Among the Spanish poets who tried their hand are Félix Arce, Elías Rovira, Toñi Sánchez, María Victoria Porras, Verónica Aranda, Frutos Soriano, José Luis Parra, Isabel Pose et al. Over the last decade several anthologies of Spanish haiku have been published; among them were such books as *Aldea poética*, *Alfileres*, *Poetas de corazón japonés*, *Tertulia de haiku* and *Un viejo estanque*. We should give a special mention to the University of Castilla–La Mancha that

held international Spanish-language haiku contests for a number of years and subsequently published anthologies of the award-winning haiku. The same university organises many international events about haiku.

In recent years several associations of haiku poets have been founded in our country, like the “Asociación de la Gente del Haiku en Albacete” (AGHA) as well as the magazine *HELA* that includes articles and hosts a *kukai*. Spanish haiku now have a significant presence on the Internet. There are several websites offering information about haiku. They also host forums where people can learn about the haiku form and post their own poems. There are very interesting sites like *El rincón del haiku*, *Paseos.net* and others.

In conclusion, we should mention that the interest in haiku in our country is on the increase. We won't be exaggerating too much to say that haiku has become firmly established as a genre of Spanish poetry.

Translated by the author and Anatoly Kudryavitsky