

Radu Șerban

Haiku in



Romania

俳

Ecou Transilvan

Radu Şerban

HAIKU
IN ROMANIA

DTP: Andreia E. Precub
Author's Collection

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

ȘERBAN, RADU

Haiku in Romania / Radu Șerban. - Cluj-Napoca

Ecou Transilvan, 2015

ISBN 978-973-8099-96-8

821.135.1-1

© ECOU TRANSILVAN Publishing House,
Cluj-Napoca, 2015
E-mail: office@edituraecou.ro
Phone number: 0745828755; 0364730441
www.edituraecou.ro

Radu Șerban

HAIKU
IN ROMANIA

Ecou Transilvan
2015

Haiku on the Sky of Romanian Literature

Lecture at HIA's annual haiku contest prize

Tokyo, December 5, 2015
Radu Şerban

1. From “doina” to haiku, on UNESCO intangible heritage list of Humanity

Japan has tentatively listed haiku as a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage of Humanity, in 2014. The Romanian “doina”, already on the same list since 2009, is a “lyrical, solemn chant, improvised and spontaneous” (quote from UNESCO site). “Doina” also involves a style of short poetry, close to haiku, slightly melancholic.

By their nature and tradition, the verses of “doina” are a collective (collaborative) product,

not having a named author. Haiku also, as we know from Bashō, are many times composed, refined and recited in groups, not by only one poet. Beyond this characteristic of „group creation“, I see many other similarities between the aesthetics of “doina” and haiku, both taking great inspiration from nature, the seasons, weather, state of spirit etc.

In the UNESCO Decision 4.COM 13.69 is mentioned (R2) about “doina”: “inscription of the element on the Representative List would bear witness to human creativity and would contribute to enhancing the visibility of intangible cultural heritage”. That is 100% valid also for haiku. This is why I sincerely congratulate HIA, for tentatively listing haiku at UNESCO! Two years ago, in 2013, Mount Fuji was also inscribed in the same list. After climbing to the top of Fuji-san, on July 22-23, 2014, I noted this: *“The simple awareness of the present moment, devoid of sophistication, focused my attention on the essence of the spirit, just like in a haiku: no complicated judgements, no detailed analysis, no metaphorical parallels; only a distilled image of the present place and present moment”*.

By joining the UNESCO heritage list, the 17 syllables poetic form, proves to be not just a popular composition, but a profound creation. Of course, by its nature, it is easier for Romanians to write a haiku than a novel, for instance. This is one of the reasons for its attractiveness, even for the people without a talent for literature. Its universality comes also from the facility of making it.

Including doina and haiku on the same UNESCO heritage list would not be an accidental association of facts. There are some basic, important parallels between them. It confirms a resonance in the spirits and minds of the two peoples, Romanian and Japanese, of the beauty of their nature and landscape, with four distinctive seasons and plenty of colorful plants and flowers, all over the plains, hills and mountains, with the changing aspects of the seas and skies and a transcendental harmony between human being and the environment. Like in haiku, in doina too, the poetic ornaments are avoided, or, in any case, they are not very relevant like in the “pastels” of the Romanian classical poet, Vasile Alecsandri (1821 – 1890), for instance.

2. Precursors of haiku in Romania: from Ovid to Eminescu

The tradition of poetry in Romania dates back at least 2050 years, when the biggest poet of the Roman Empire at the time, Ovid (43 BC – 17/18 AD), spent the last years of his life in Tomis, today the city of Constanta. Let's take three of his verses (translated from Latin):

*The morning star shine
brightly, to vanquish the night
and usher the day¹.*

Doesn't it resonate in some haiku format? Like in an old Roman mosaic of his entire work, such verses complete together the harmonious picture of Ovid's literary creation.

But let's recognise, that was in the Latin language, even though Romanian derives from it.

The very first Japan-related Romanian documents date back to the times of Nicolae Milescu Spatarul (1636 – 1708), a famous Romanian ambassador, writer and traveler, who penned his memoirs about the Land of the

¹ Metamorphoses: Book The Eighth - Poem by Ovid

Rising Sun after a visit to China in 1676, during the Edo period in Japan. Nicknamed “Romanian Marco Polo”², in Chapter 58 of his work “On China”, he describes “the famous and big Japanese island and what is there”.

The industrial revolution introduced, in a certain manner, the competitive industrialization of the word too, making it more interchangeable all over the world. The Japanese words travelled up to Romania. In 1878, the writer and scientist Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu (1838 - 1907), director of State Archives at the time, has translated for the Prince Carol I (future King) two tanka poems. They were received from the Prince Nigata no Ito, written on a special silk scroll.

In 1904, two works were published in Romanian: an essay about tanka poetry, and a study by the poet Alexandru Vlahuță, entitled „Japanese poetry and painting”, including many tanka poems translated from French.

In Romanian literature, short poetry has its own history. Ion Pillat (1891 – 1945) is famous for his one-line poems. About him, in September 1988, at a colloquium, the

² Vasiliu, Florin and Lucia – „Romanian writers travelling in Japan”, Ed. Haiku, 1999

Romanian haiku specialist Florin Vasiliu (1928 – 2001) introduced the lecture: *“One-line Pillatian poem and Nippon haiku”*. That showed a deep interrelation of the two kinds of poetry. In his foreword, the poet commented that the one line poem although resembles haikai, it differs from it. *“The less the poet has written, the more the reader has to read. A long poem can be read in a hurry, each verse helping to understand and enjoy the next one. But a single verse is to be read slowly. The letters are read quickly, but the telegram stops us”*. Pillat wrote about nature, plants, animals, mountains, sea, weather, forests, fire etc. Considered a world-range poet, he was defined as *“A single Panlfute, but how many echoes in the woods”*. His poem *“From shamisen”* is recalling Mount Fuji, Kumamoto, Nikko, in beautiful quatrains like this:

*Mount Fuji, Mount Fuji
Over you fly the clouds
White storks, black storks,
With stretched wings.*

Referring to the adored tree of the Romanian national poet, Mihai Eminescu, lime (linden) tree, some inspired authors like

Magdalena Dale introduce in haiku the flavor of this plant widely spread in my country. In fact, Eminescu (1850 – 1889) can easily be affiliated to haiku, if we cut fragments of his genial nature descriptions, like this one:

*All those sleepy birds
Now tired from flight
Hide among the leaves
Good night.*

The natural themes of haiku in Romania, although universal, are in majority adopted from Japanese culture and tradition: crickets, fireflies, chrysanthemums, moon, frogs, ponds, cuckoos, skylarks, roses etc. Through poetry, human nature humanizes wild nature. But one specific theme, symbol of our national poet, Eminescu, is the linden tree (or lime tree). It will, probably, continue to inspire the Romanian haiku writers, like this fragment from his poem “Longing”:

*...And upon our bodies softly
Do the lime-tree petals fall”.*
(Translated by Corneliu M. Popescu)

The hay is also a typical Romanian “ingredient” for poetry, since it is a part of the people’s life for millennia (On the Trajan’s column, in Rome, the first images of Dacia comprise nice hayracks). And apropos Rome, the name of my country is Romania, not Rumania, as you spell it in Japanese, because the name comes from the capital city of Rome.

3. Beginnings

The first haiku anthology in Romanian was published in 1935, a translation from German by the writer Traian Chelariu (1906 – 1966), under the title “Nippon Soul”.

In 1937, he published a collection of fifty tanka and haiku translated from Norinaga Motoori, Matsuo Bashō and other classics. He suggested that the Romanian intellectuals learned about Japanese poetry, especially from French.

The poet and essayist Aurel Rău (born 1930), brought to the Romanian reader the Japanese lyrics in his two books: „In the Heart of Yamato” and „The Japanese quince tree”. He also translated one of the travelling logs of

Matsuo Basho and other Japanese classics of the genre. In 1970 he published „From Japanese lyrics”, including some haiku.

Later on, in 1942, the anthology of tanka, „From Japanese courtesans’ songs” was translated from French and published, by Al. T. Stamatiad. The same author published “Silk Scarves”, a volume of Japanese poetry comprising haiku by Basho, Shiki, Bussan and Issa.

Translations of classical haiku in Romanian had a positive impact on the Romanian original creations - in the opinion of Florin Vasiliu.

In his novel “La Medeleni”, the romantic novelist Ionel Teodoreanu (1897 – 1954) refers to the Japanese haikai, acknowledging the apparition on the firmament of the short Japanese poem.

During the 1970s, two poets, Ion Acsan and Dan Constantinescu translated poems from German and published 2 anthologies of tanka and haiku.

In 1974 a box in Japanese style with 4 Lilliputian volumes, by Basho, Buson, Issa and Shiki with translations by the same poet Dan Constantinescu (1921 – 1997) was published.

A tanka book in Romanian was published in 1987, in Munich, by Dumitru Ichim, who had emigrated to Canada. In fact, Ichim is the expression of an “exiled” poet (remember Ovid!), who escaped the limitations of the communist regime, by publishing abroad during the censored period of 1945-1990, two volumes of haiku, in 1977: “Valley of golden sand” and “Footmarks”. Then, in 1993, he came with a new one, “Draw well of the light”.

In 1983, the poet Alexandru Chiriac published a volume of poems in three verses in Japanese style. In the same decade, another poet, Vasile Smăărăndescu, released the volume of poetry „The cemetery of the rains”, including 30 micropoems in haiku style.

4. Steps towards genuine haiku in Romania

In 1919, the poet George Voevdica translated tanka from German, publishing the volume „Oriental Flowers”. He even adapted the poems to the European tradition, adding rhyme, rhythm and titles.

In the first part of the 20th century, Lucian Blaga, a famous diplomat, philosopher and poet

(1895 - 1961), by his love of nature and profound sense of time, had affinities with haiku. Maybe a good, inspired, poetic translation can put in Japanese, in a haiku form, his verses:

*Such a deep silence surrounds me,
That I think I hear moonbeams
Striking on the windows.*

He even uses the word „haiku” in one of his poems: *„Haiku spirit/ snowflakes that frozen the light/ and reviewing the cold winter of words”*.

Another poet and critic, Tudor Vianu (1898 – 1964), has considered haiku akin to “small objects of fine arts”. In the same spirit, Ion Pillat wrote in his “Poetic Art”: “Not the words, the silence gives voice to the song”.

Romanian literature registers its first haiku in manuscript, by Alexandru Macedonski (1854-1920), who wrote a number of poems inspired by Japan, although he never collected them into a volume; among the 10 so called “rondels” about Japan, published posthumously, we can find: *Rondelul apei din ograda japonezului, Rondelul mării japoneze, Rondelul crizantemei* (“The water rondel from the

Japanese yard”, “The rondel of the Japanese Sea”, “Chrysanthemum rondel” . His own model of poetry, “rondel” was also a kind of short poem.

The first 12 haiku poems published in Romania belong to Al. T. Stamatiad (1885 – 1955), in his volume “Sentimental landscapes” - 1935. It is worth mentioning that the volume was awarded the most prestigious distinction of the “Romanian Academy”.

Ioan Timuș (1890 – 1969), writer and first Romanian specialist in Japanology, published two books about Japan, which he visited between 1917 – 1922. In 1943 he received the Grand Prix of the Romanian Academy for the book „Japan of yesterday and today”.

Gheorghe Băgulescu (1886–1963), former ambassador of Romania to Japan, made many references to haiku in his writings, being considered one of the initiators of haiku in Romania³.

The propensity to exoticism of the 19th century in Romanian literature has favored the interest in haiku, with its lyricism, fitting the idyllic view of Romanian village life held at the time.

³ Florin Vasiliu, „Haiku Poem in Romania”, 2001

The lyric poems in Romania within the “bucolic” period, like elegies, are tending towards pure forms, pure beauty, emptied of solid substance, as it is the case in many classic haiku. But the contemporary poems, be it in the perfect haiku format or not, tend to put some content, some solid substance in its pure beauty. Even the subject of war can be reflected in modern haiku.

The old Romanian pastoral ballads were the source of inspiration for the cultivated creators of poetry in Romania. The best known ballad, Miorița, starts with a snapshot of nature, almost in a haiku manner:

*Near a low foothill
At Heaven's doorsill,
Where the trail's descending
To the plain and ending...*

5. Romanian haiku over the last quarter of a century

Undoubtedly, the last quarter of a century has been the most prolific period in the Romanian haiku, in all aspects: number of composed poems, quality, interest of the readers, international acknowledgement,

contests, online publications, magazines, booklets etc.

Starting with the year 1990, haiku poetry has been promoted largely in Romania, due to some enthusiasts like Florin Vasiliu and Vasile Smăărăndescu, and other poets like Manuela Miga, Magdalena Dale, Eduard Țară or Ion Codrescu (the list is much larger). A generic title “Haiku Poem in Romania” has been given by Florin Vasiliu to a book in 2001.

Klaus Dieter-Wirth, writing about haiku in Europe, in the prestigious book published in 2014 by HIA on the occasion of its 25th anniversary, emphasized the importance of the international haiku festivals in Constanta, Romania, in 1992 and 1994. He also underlines among earlier European attempts towards internationalization of haiku, the bilingual magazine edited in Romania by Ion Codrescu.

It is worth mentioning the book *Something Out of Nothing*, 2015, collecting interpretations of original haiku of 74 North American poets by contemporary *haiga* master Ion Codrescu.

A history of Romanian literature, published by the literary critic Ion Rotaru (1924 – 2006), includes haiku among the literary genres in my country.

Closer to our days, Eduard Țară is one of the most internationally recognized authors of haiku, receiving many awards. In 2010, he won a European contest with the following haiku:

*Unfolding a map
the cherry petals connect
Europe and Japan.*

The starting point of this quarter of a century has been marked by a former Romanian diplomat in Tokyo, Florin Vasiliu, who published in 1989, together with Brândușa Steiciuc, the book *“Haiku constellation; Lyric interferences”*, a kind of cornerstone in guiding Romanians to understand and write haiku poems. It was followed by other essays on the history and technique of haiku. One year later, the same author launched the first haiku magazine in Romania and one of the first in Europe: *“Haiku Magazine of Romanian – Japanese Relationship”*. What is very important, is not only the number of copies printed (8.000), but the composition of the editorial team, including the Minister of Culture at the time, the famous writer and poet Marin Sorescu (1936-1996).

In fact, Marin Sorescu wrote a short stanza of 3 verses, without calling them haiku, in a book titled "The Clouds". For example:

*Random with me happens
something
a human life.*

Sorescu was even a member of the editorial staff of Haiku magazine.

Next year, 1991, marked another premiere, the first association of haiku-lovers, Romanian Haiku Society (RSH), which gained national coverage. Since Romania is a large country (as large as Honshu) and, at the time the internet didn't exist, haiku enthusiasts started to organize themselves at a regional level, setting up local societies, among them the first one in Constanta, with the essential contribution of Ion Codrescu, who founded also his own magazine, "Albatros".

Quite prolific in Romanian haiku, the year 1992 was relevant not only by attractiveness of the genre - reflected in number of societies and magazines, but also by setting up a specific publishing house, named Haiku, which edited booklets in Romanian, English and French. It

was followed by another printing house, Alcor, founded by Cornelia Atanasiu.

In 1993, the president of HIA at the time, Mr. Sono Uchida, received some haiku-poets from Bucharest, establishing one of the first people-to-people Romanian – Japanese rencontre related to haiku.

An important figure in today's haiku scene in Romania is Valentin Nicolîţov, the very prolific president of the Romanian Haiku Society and chief editor of Haiku magazine. His interview with the American poet Charles Trumbull, founder of Chi-ku group in Chicago was published in Haiku Magazine in 2013, mentioning the editing of „Senryu Therapy”, a Romanian - American anthology including 15 Romanian and 15 American poets.

Some regional haiku movements found their way of expression, in Slobozia, Târgu Mureş, Piatra Neamţ, Cluj-Napoca, Arad, Satu Mare, Iaşi, Slobozia or Târgovişte. In Târgu Mureş, for instance, the poet Ioan Găbudean (who prefaced my first haiku booklet in 2012) founded the “Ephemeral Joys”, a haiku club attracting about 80 members, among them some of his pupils too. His fruitful activity culminated with 2 magazines: Orpheus and

Beautiful Pictures. And to complete the range of haiku activities, he set up the “Ambassador”, a printing house, editing booklets in Romanian, English and French. As you may see, the word ambassador as such has been instrumental in Romanian haiku, with many diplomats actively engaged in writing this form of short poetry.

Today, there are more than 2000 students in my country, learning the Japanese language in schools and universities.

Sakura tea house in Cluj-Napoca is well known for promoting haiku in Romania. There, the poet Cristina Oprea met for the first time with haiku. In the city of Slobozia, in 1995, Șerban Codrin, poet, founded a haiku school and two magazines, *Orion* and *Little Orion*. In this very prolific decade for haiku in Romania, he published books like „Zen Garden” and „Beyond the silence”, alongside with other poets: Mioara Gheorghe (Petals of Light), Florentin Smarandache (Bell of Silence), Florin Vasiliu (The Bag with Glow Worms), Ștefan Teodoru (Meeting in the Twilight), Duțu Nițu (Letters of the Steps).

Emblematic for the period, “The Bag with Glow Worms” is structured on 4 parts, one for each season. While the spring is announced by

the butterflies with a “white triumph”, in the summer time the branch of acacia enters the window “with green prying eyes”; autumn is catching within a double window a spider which dies in its own web. In winter time, the snowman becomes a “menhir for a moment”, an ephemeral Stonehenge. Finally, in the fifth cycle called “Meditations”, Vasiliu states philosophically: *“Old clock, when you’ll be plough, I will be furrow”*.

During the ‘90s, some haiku anthologies were published: *Shadow of Dragonfly*, *One Hundred Masts*, *Calligraphies of the Instant* etc.

Owing its beginnings to the international literature, being translated from French, German and English, Romanian haiku started repaying its debt, by being present in many prestigious haiku publications, and winning different prizes at contests, even 20 years ago.

Three hundred years after the death of Matsuo Basho, in 1994, Bucharest and Constanța hosted conferences on this topic with international participation. It was a good occasion for Florin Vasiliu (1928 – 2001), at the time president of the Romanian Society of Haiku, to publish the essay “Matsuo Basho – The Saint of Haiku”. A competition was

organized to commemorate the occasion, with the winning poems being published in “HI Magazine”.

Florin Vasiliu made an inventory, in 2001, of the Romanian haiku poetry with international recognition, concluding that 22 poets received prizes from Japanese juries, and 45 were included in prestigious international anthologies, more than 100 being published in foreign magazines.

At its 7th international haiku festival, in 2013, Constanța succeeded to attract poets from different countries, and even different continents, including from the birth country of haiku. It is worth quoting from the message of the Ambassador of Japan, HE Keiji Yamamoto, to this Festival: *“I’m pleasantly surprised at the fact that in Romania there are many Haiku societies not only in Bucharest, but also in other cities like Iasi, Târgu Mureș, Slobozia, Bacău and Constanța etc, where more than 300 people enjoy the short poetry originated in Japan”*. In 2014, a national colloquium of classical poetry, including haiku, took place in Constanta.

In 2004, the first prize winner of the “Kusamakura” haiku competition in Kumamoto was a Romanian, Marian Nicolae Tomi, who,

after visiting Japan published the book “Flying to Kumamoto”. Translations of Romanian poets are being published in different Japanese haiku magazines: Ko, Hi, HIA, World Haiku etc. More and more Romanian haiku are published in on-line magazines, including Japanese ones, American or even Irish. For instance, in “Shamrock Haiku Journal”, suggestively called “Haiku from Ireland and the rest of the world”, Romanian haiku are present.

In Romania, on the other hand, international haiku are more and more frequently published. In Bucharest in 2012, Marius Chelaru founded the biannual magazine *Kado – review of Euro/Asian Poetry and Poetic Culture*, a member of the Association of Magazines and Publications from Europe.

In 2008, the first international haiku contest was organized in our country, being finalized with an anthology, “Cricket and Chrysanthemums”.

A weekly contest of haiku online is organized, since 2007, by the Romanian Haiku Society.

6. Sharpening the Green Pencil

Last year, the *Romanian Kukai Group* organized the Third Haiku Contest, entitled “Sharpening the Green Pencil” – 2014”. An impressive participation of 47 countries from 6 continents, with 517 poems by 264 poets gives you an idea of the scale of the contest. The Romanian Kukai Group printed its book of the contest, well structured, with some interesting comments for the first three prizes. The internationalization of haiku is given, among others, by the number of participants and winners from outside Japan. Only 8 poems came from Japan, written by 3 authors. The first three winners come from other countries: Poland, the USA and Vietnam.

A look at the first prize, by Dorota Pyra, gives us an idea of the high quality of the poems:

*snowy orchard
the smell of summer
in a baked apple.*

Corneliu Traian Atanasiu, a highly skillful haiku poet and founder of Romanian Kukai, comments on it as follows:

“The snowy orchard evokes the irreparable and permanent invasion of a space destined for harvest and summer reverie. For it was not only the apples, legendarily the most tempting, round-shaped fruits, that perished in this prolific space, but also the quiet rest in the grass swayed by the insects’ busy humming. They all disappeared under the glacial, unforgiving whiteness”.

7. Nichita Stănescu

– a Nobel Prize candidate – haiku writer

Before the fall of the communist regime in Romania, a famous poet, Nichita Stănescu (1933 – 1983), was a writer of haiku. He was a poet with large international recognition, a candidate for the Nobel Prize for literature, and had a profound sense of lyricism. But haiku for him was just a temporary digression and his haiku poems were not published in Romania, since haiku as such was rejected by the regime,

as being subversive, by its sometimes allusive sense, unable to be controlled by the critics.

But the haiku poems inherited by Romanian literature from Stanescu are really characteristic to his style and very valuable in a historical perspective. One of the most suggestive is this one:

*If time had had leaves,
what an autumn
would have been!*

What one can add to such a poem? Maybe this: if Nichita had been Japanese, one can only imagine what splendid haiku he would have written!

The Japanese atmosphere is present in his haiku, associating the immaterial breeze with the irregular but smooth form of stones, specific to Zen philosophy:

*Breeze of the fan
on the oval form
of a stone.*

By their universality, his poems touch the essences of life:

*The fog
wraps in itself the new born
of the light.*

How gentle, the fog is caressing the so much needed light, in its embryonic form!

At the same time, we can find more philosophical nuances, marrying his haiku with the maxim, at the confluence of images and thoughts:

*Death is a child
sucking instead of milk
the sand of clepsydra.*

Master of love poetry, Stanesco reflected his vibrant, melancholic sentiments in haiku, too, mixing drops of human sensitivity in the nature's mortar, with his pestle of talent:

*On turtle's shell
fall tear drops
you weep, or it rains?*

Nevertheless, with all due consideration, we have to recognize, that N. Stanesco

produced just “accidental haiku”, not immersing thoroughly into its miraculous world.

8. “*Simple forms*”: Brâncuși and haiku

In the spring of 2015, when abundant polychrome azalea were graciously tempting me in the miraculous Tokyo gardens, Dr. Keimi Harada, former mayor of Minato Ward, invited me to visit the “Simple Forms”, an art exhibition. The main “star” of that exhibition was the “Bird in Space”, by the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. It was reproduced on all posters and advertisements. I made the parallel with haiku, immediately as I saw again the magnificent piece of art, in its entire splendor, calmly caressed by day light, magically filtered through the demi-draped window, on the 52nd floor of Mori Tower. The emotion of meeting, over the time and space, my famous compatriot, father of modern sculpture, was multiplied with the warm welcome by the chairperson of the Museum, Mrs. Yoshiko Mori, who offered me a refined sample of Japanese hospitality (omotenashii).

It is worth quoting here some haiku inspired by Brâncuși's works, since we have an annual haiku contest on this topic.

*The final act:
carrying in skies the genius,
a flying turtle.*

The flying turtle was the last piece of art by Brâncuși. Shortly after that magnificent creation he passed away, his soul ascending to the sky, according to our beliefs. This simple turtle, surprisingly flying, is symbolizing a miracle. It is the genius, departing from us, but leaving a rich heritage, which inspires and will inspire, centuries ahead, the artists, like the famous Japanese master Isamu Noguchi, but also including poets of haiku, like Cristina Oprea for example:

*the Endless Column –
somewhere, another cricket
is counting the stars.*

The true inspiration for this delicate haiku is, of course, "The Endless Column". What makes it so special, besides brevity, is the juxtaposition

of the image of Column with the cricket endlessly chirping, counting the infinity of the stars.

The same author gives us a splendid example of paronym, in Romanian language, where the sound of the cricket is named with the same word as winch (*cric*):

*old jackscrew in the grass –
the chirping of crickets
lifts the moon*

The beauty comes with the old sound of the cricket in the grass lifting the moon (like a winch). This is the revelation, so much needed in a haiku, beyond the juxtaposed elements.

A sculpture of Brâncuși may have slightly different interpretations, depending on the person looking at it, and the same applies to the haiku inspired by them:

*Flight of the torrents
a flowing form of bird –
feathered thought.*

Trained both in folk and modern arts, Brâncuși had simplified the bird up to its

essences. In fact it is the essence of flight (something intangible), not of bird. One of his masterpieces in many variants, named "Măiastra", represents in Romanian folklore a magic bird, which leads a prince to his princess. Flying like a bird, the thought can lead us to our essences of human kind. A symbolic, stylized bird brings in our mind a common proverb: *Birds of a feather flock together*. Emphasizing the beauty in simplicity and brevity, it is the case of haiku and Brâncuși's modern sculptures, "two birds of a feather".

Transcending time and space, the Japanese "cosmic haiku" fits with Brâncuși's "simple forms", floating together on the smooth surface of the matter. The attentive and subtle choice of words, to fit with the simple forms, when it comes on haiku about Brancusi, laconic and even, is complemented sometimes by the open ended content, like Endless Column.

On synesthesia, or the combination of haiku with other arts, it is worth mentioning the exposition we organized in our Embassy in June this year, called "Chromatic Entropies", of the Romanian painter Laura Nicolae, who composed her own haiku (translated in Italian,

Spanish and some in Japanese) for every painting, in a syncretic attempt of fusion between the two arts. It is a kind of graphic transcription of words, or vice versa.

9. Haiku in the Romanian vocabulary

Certainly, in the last 25 years, the Romanian common vocabulary has been enriched with a new word: haiku. It may be a simple coincidence with the Romanian Revolution of 1989, but it seems the haiku revolution in Romania has, more or less, the same age. Even if only a limited number of people have a serious idea of what haiku is, millions have heard about it. It is obvious, the influence and reputation of haiku in Romania is rapidly increasing.

It is a happy accidental sequence of events that the Haiku International Association has the same age as the Romanian Revolution. The year 1989 turned an important page in Romanian history, with my country entering the same family as Japan, a family of democracy, human rights and the free market.

In the Explanatory Dictionary by the Romanian Academy (2009), the first definition of haiku is quite laconic: “Japanese poem made of three verses, first and last by 5 syllables, the second by 7”. Obviously, it is too simplistic. But I am not in a position to criticize it. Being a live entity, haiku will find, steadily, its proper definition, already provided by different dictionaries. We cannot accept the definition of “sonnet” for instance, by just: “a 14 verses poem grouped in 2 stanzas”. Such definitions, concentrating only on form and not on the content and poetic principles, are damaging the reputation of haiku in Romanian.

As a word, haiku already joined the Romanian narrative with a larger sense than a simple poem. It may suggest sometimes a mood of calm and serenity. Let me take an example, from a contemporary Romanian. In 2013, describing a film at a festival, Doina Giurgiu, journalist, entitled her article: “A haiku of sound and color”. The film “Horizont” by a Norwegian director , starts with an old haiku by Yosa Buson: “*The spring sea rising/ and falling, rising / and falling all day*”. How simply, haiku is teleporting us from Japan to Norway and then to Romania.

“Hai cu noi!” (pronounced “*haiku noi*”) – in Romanian means “Come with us!” During my high school studies, the students were celebrating the Unification Day and, every year, on the evening of January 24, gathered in groups calling for others in the hostels: “Hai cu noi!” Come with us, to dance around the central cathedral the famous round dance of Unification. That was for me the first involuntary use of the sound “haiku”, amplified later on, in the resonance box of poetry.

Today in Romania, quite frequently the authors of haiku are called haijin. I avoid using it, knowing that may have other connotations, even a slightly pejorative nuance, like gaijin. In Romanian, could be called *three-liners* (tristihuitori). In French I found the word *haikist* and sometimes in Romanian *haikuist*.

With today’s explosion of online poetry, we need to distinguish between reasonable literature and fake, between the poetically qualitative haiku and kitsch. In Romanian language, we have a saying: “All that flies is not food” (like in Shakespeare’s “All that glitters is not gold”). That means, not every 5-7-5 row of syllables is haiku.

10. Haiku and Diplomacy

As we can see, diplomacy and poetry go hand in hand, not only for Paul Claudell or Abigail Friedman, but for some Romanians like Alecsandri and Blaga, too. Through poetry, a diplomat gets an added value of subtleness and harmony, diminishing the propensity to arrogance, hegemony, extravagance, vanity or dominance. Haiku offers to a diplomat the tool of simplification up to the quintessence, putting maximum content in a minimum of words. Sometimes haiku in Romanian tend to become maxims, or more precisely a kind of mini-maxims, as in the Latin saying: *non multa sed multum*. This aphorism, well known in other languages, is quite popular in my country. In fact, Romanian is one of the languages closest to Latin.

Of course, haiku by itself teaches us to be balanced, not to exaggerate in any sense. Otherwise, we will fall in the trap of over-simplification, like in the joke below, which could also apply to diplomatic negotiations:

The owner of a fish store put up a notice "Fresh Fish Sold Here". A friend of his said: "You don't need to say 'Here'; would you be selling

them somewhere else? And you don't need to say 'Sold'; would you be giving them away? And you don't need to say 'Fresh'; would you be selling rotten fish? And you don't need to say 'Fish'; you can smell them a block away." No, Romanian haiku-ists know where to stop with the simplification, with the compression of words, especially a diplomat who writes haiku; otherwise their poem will be a white paper.

If we look to the definition of the diplomacy, given by Sir Henry Wotton (1568 – 1639), we discover a paradox: according to that definition, one cannot be at the same time diplomat and a haiku-lover. The definition says: "*An ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country*". On the contrary, haiku teaches us to be extremely honest, with ourselves, with others and with nature. Or isn't it a juxtaposition of lie and honesty?

At a symposium in Brussels in January 2014, the Swedish ambassador in Japan, Lars Vargö remembered a benchmark in the history of haiku in his country: publication, in 1959, of the book "*Haiku – Japanese miniature lyrics*", by Jan Vintilescu. Nothing special, until we look to the name: Vintilescu is a typical Romanian name. Is

it a simple coincidence, that a Romanian name has introduced haiku in Sweden, or we have to remember Alecsandri : „Every Romanian is born as a poet” ? Anyway, the poetic sentiment is inherited by his daughter, Manuela Vintilescu, who accompanies sometimes her paintings with Japanese haiku.

A distinctive note in the landscape of Romanian literature following the haiku phenomenon is Mihai Epure, writer and former diplomat (again a diplomat!), who declares: “Don’t search anymore for the perfection! It was already discovered; you will find it in a lyric moment of haiku, moment equivalent to the sublime fusion between the human being and the nature, a nature which created the perpetual life⁴”. In his definition of haiku, Epure brings a personal flavor, probably inspired by his years of life in Japan. According to him, the components of haiku (space, object, time) form a unitary body. Among haiku’s elements, he identifies an interdependence relation and, in addition to that, he sees haiku as “an intimate and rigorous order governing the construction and the unwinding of a poem, where the

⁴ Mihai Epure, Japonia, Ikebana de gânduri – Japan, Ikebana of Thoughts, 1991, Editura Pentru Turism

objects find their spatial and temporal delimitation". More philosophically, Epure sees sometimes in haiku moments of balance between life and death. Epure is not only reading haiku, he is feeling it, as an entity in which "poetry, truth and existence are forming together an articulated assembly". Through haiku, the human being doesn't need to escalate the obstacles in order to reach the objects.

In his perception, the aesthetic is an atavistic feature of Japanese people. We owe also, as Romanians, to Mr. Epure, former diplomat, some precious details about the life of Matsuo Bashō, whom he calls the uncrowned king of haiku, having today a large "artistic diaspora" all over the meridians. Like a Sphynx crafted into the rock, the words of Basho are immortal: "Who writes 3-5 haiku is a poet. Who writes 10 is a master".

11. Are there any Romanian features of haiku?

A Japanese friend, impressed by our enthusiasm about haiku, told me on 24 April 2015: "If you advance so fast with Romanian

haiku, in a hundred year time the Japanese people will visit Romania to learn about haiku". Maybe the future Romanian haiku will go a step aside, reconciling more viably the native Japanese haiku with the new trend of reformed one, making for instance aphorisms in the haiku format. No one can stop the Romanians' imagination and innovation bias to fly over the borders of standard patterns, even with the risk of breaking their wings. A simple transplant from Japanese to Romanian is not desirable.

As one can see, Romanian poets are not simply copying or imitating Japanese haiku, but they find their own way of writing it. Maybe the right word would be they are "borrowing" haiku for their own use.

Even if the basic rules of haiku recommend not using metaphors, comparisons, epithets, even ellipsis or other kind of tropes, the Romanian haiku today sometime employ such stylistic ornaments. The more subtle and less explicit the more appreciated they are. This seems paradoxical, even contrary to the simplicity of haiku, by definition.

One can realiste, volens-nolens, the reminiscence of popular incantation in the Romanian poetry. More prevalent than the

three-line verses, in Romanian is the quatrain, present both in the popular (folk) poetry, as well as in the cultivated one. From wedding witty couplets to the epitaphs (notably in Sapanta cemetery – Northern Romania), from children’s riddles to epigrams and aphorisms, the harmonic quatrain is omnipresent, not only in our miniscule poetry, but even in day-to-day life. Profoundly philosophical as in some of Eminescu’s poems (like in Zen-shaped haiku), or ironical and joyful like in popular witty couplets, enigmatic like in riddles or explicit like in ballade, or sometimes employing the parodist style, the quatrain is embodied in our life. But remaining on the field of metaphors, allow me to ascertain that a four legged table is less stable than a three legged one. Thus, one can find more stability in haiku’s conciseness and terseness than in a versatile quatrain. In fact, from three to four verses is only one step. If we deduce arithmetically the one-line poem of Ion Pillat from the quatrain, it results in a three-line haiku. Maybe the title of one of his volumes, “Eternities of an Instant” is suited as one of the multiple definitions of haiku.

We, Romanians, have some dilemmas about haiku. For instance, is metaphor allowed,

even as an exception, while haiku is based on directness and concision? Even if not, we find metaphors in classical haiku tacitly understood sometimes. In one of the first poems in the Romanian language, we rediscover the famous “dilemma of the flower”: If I cut it, I damage it; if not, someone else will do it. The author, Ienachiță Văcărescu (1740 – 1797), left to the reader the pleasure of discovering indirectly the comparison of the flower with a girl (minuscule poem “In a Garden”). In some Japanese haiku, it is also up to the reader to make a parallel between a flower and a girl, as for instance in this poem by Bashō:

*Let us arrange these
flowers...
since there is no rice.*

A haiku is a living organism. It evolves according to its own mood, in each language. Look at Mr. Herman van Rompuy! His poems in Flemish are bringing a fresh air, a European one, into the haiku landscape, seeing even Matsuyama, from an original perspective. At the same time, haiku becomes more and more subtle; no one can stop people calling their

three verses a “haiku”, even if it doesn’t respect all the rules. This year I heard, at a conference in Tokyo, a commentary proving the wide space of interpretation of this kind of poem. With reference to a future declaration of the Japanese Prime Minister, someone supposed it will be like a haiku: everyone can find in it what he/she wants.

In any case, by its nature, haiku doesn’t impose too much regulation in Romanian and, in the future, I think it will relax even more its rules, having in mind the need of open-mindedness imposed by its globalization.

What has made haiku so inexorable in Romania in the last decade? Why are they so alluring to us and why do we enjoy reading and writing them? To me, it is above all, its simplicity, not altering the beauty of the poem. No sophisticated knowledge needed, no rocket science, no rhyme, no specific iambic or other kind of meters, no patterns on accented / unaccented syllables, no profound philosophy, all opened to one’s free choice, except the structure of three lines in 5-7-5 sounds, and even this is flexible in many languages. Besides simplicity is the conciseness, saving time for all of us.

In classical Romanian poetry, no one is counting on fingers 5-7-5. The rhythm comes almost instinctively, with the musicality of the verses. But I think the poetry itself is rather more important than strict metric uniformity.

If we obey accurately all the „orthodox” rules of haiku, we are limiting our space of expression, missing the innovative creation. The ones who allow some deviations have the chance to be not only original, but to keep haiku as a living thing. Of course, there are certain limits of departure from the basic rules. On the other hand, any exaggeration has to be avoided. Who can tell us where the limit between epigram and haiku is? In Romanian, there are many epigram makers (?), the genre being very popular. Some of them are exercising haiku too. Even in French, at the beginning, the first haiku poems translated from Japanese were called *Les epigrams liriques du Japon*.

But here is a trap, at least in my case. Once you fall in love with haiku, it's for good, you remain its hostage. A hostage of hospitality (omotenashii), where you feel free to escape anytime, but you don't want it, and you are always welcome to stay as long as you like,

benefitting from the intellectual – spiritual exercise. From this perspective, I would say haiku is like life itself. The majority of us claim it is hard, but no one responsible wants to escape from it.

Every new language adopting haiku is enriched and goes on to then enrich haiku. The first portfolio of Romania in the European Commission was “multilingualism”. Judging upon the number of haiku written in other languages by Romanians, it was the right choice! An island of Latinity in the Slavic environment, Romania shows hospitality to Hungarians, Germans, Turks, Ukrainians and even some of us speak their languages. We are multilingual, like haiku itself today. Someone expressed the wish to learn more English, to be able to translate more haiku (many Romanians are translating their own poems). Our literature was enriched through learning foreign languages. For instance, Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), a Prince of Moldova, writer and philosopher, was a real polyglot, speaking 11 languages.

On a different note, where are the season references and the 7-5-7 cadence in the Romanian haiku?

The specific linguistic features of Romanian culture have already allowed my country to distinguish itself in the haiku world. It is true that, by translating or transposing a haiku from Japanese to Romanian we always lose something, and at the same time, a translation from Romanian to Japanese cannot be perfect. Although both languages have a high degree of musicality, by abundance of vocals, each one has its inimitable characteristics.

The trend in Romanian haiku today is to dilute the regulations (otherwise tested in time), to move away from strictly keeping a “kigo” (season word) and from the bound format of 5-7-5 syllables. Even the juxtaposition of entities is sometimes eluded or diluted, for the sake of flexibility. This is not necessarily a bad thing, having in mind that Romanians brought innovative contributions to arts sometimes, like Brancusi in sculpture, Eugen Ionesco in theatre and Tristan Tzara in poetry. Who knows what kind of innovation will bring the next generation to haiku? In any case, the Romanian authors are not mechanically transposing haiku from other languages, neither reproducing them, but simply producing their own creations. Are they good or bad? It’s up to the readers to judge.

One of the aspects, sometimes neglected in Romania, is the need to recite loudly the poems. Their sonority can make the difference, revealing some irregularities, especially unintended alliterations which can alter the quality of the verses. Notably in Romanian, the musicality of poems matters.

Please accept my apologies for not having an exhaustive approach, and sorry if I missed some of the prominent contemporary haiku writers in Romania, but take it as a token of my dilettantism, even my ignorance. I consider myself, in the best case, an amateur in haiku, if not an apprentice. I cannot be called even a versifier, in Romanian, since that implies rhyme and rhythm, which demands a lot of additional technical effort and time. I am not sure my haiku are real haiku. Who knows? If we enter into the debate of “is this a haiku or not?”, then we will be lost, like contemplating the masterpiece of René Magritte (1898 – 1967) “This is not a Pipe”. The title is right: the painting is not a pipe is just a painting, but it represents a pipe. An entire chain of denials and affirmations like in parallel mirrors can continue with specific reasoning “ad infinitum”. The debate on haiku/non haiku can go up to the

absurd. Thus we come closer to another famous Romanian writer, Eugen Ionesco, the founder of theater of absurd. In the same good tradition, I can say, humbly, “my haiku is not a haiku”, but I will do my best to improve it. Further, one can debate about non-haiku, which can also include the dada-haiku (see the chapter...)

In fact, reading Basho’s most famous haiku, one can say: this is not an old pond! It is only a haiku about an old pond. Right!

It is a product by the people, for the people. One of its definitions should start, like the American Constitution: “We, the People...”. In Romanian, as in other languages too, haiku is about life, about the joy of living, about people’s perception of nature and time. The word “death” and others related to it are seldom found in haiku. That makes of this literary genre a good “balm for the soul”, as I titled my first volume of haiku. These poems are condensed pills of joy, offering a catharsis for fighting the daily stress. They provide us optimism, the power of life, of integrating ourselves in the nature, notwithstanding sometimes the melancholy. Romanian language gives, I hope, an extra flavor to the three line poems.

Certainly, haiku embedded itself into the Romanian literature, overpassing the border of a “do-it-yourself” homemade poem, and, besides the artistic value, showing the ability of our souls to contemplate and respect Mother Nature, and our human nature. Haiku can be for us a receptacle of nature in the human soul.

In the last few years the emulative movement of haiku in Romania, has led to the teaching of this kind of short poetry becoming more widespread.

We observe a process of maturation of the Romanian haiku. Mastering the words within a certain technical, natural and spiritual space, it is obviously the result of a persistent, passionate practice modelled by inspiration.

The unrivalled Japanese sakura (cherry blossom) such an inspiration for haiku, has some parallels in Romanian language and culture, for instance the Romanian affinity for apple blossom. The expression “apple blossom” means “with no finality” or without any scope. In fact, the beauty itself has no finality, no scope. Thus “watching the apple blossom” is like *ohanami* (admiring the cherry blossom – in Japanese), without any pragmatic purpose, but just for the sake of beauty.

But given deeper analysis, maybe another leitmotif of Romanian folk poetry, green leaf (foaie verde), could be compared with sakura, by its frequency in the poems.

Generally, there is a tendency to adapt haiku to the realities in Romania, since many of the common items of the Japanese haiku are exotic in my country: bamboo, banana, turtles, or on another scale, the tea ceremony. On the contrary, there are also things in common, like cherry blossom, pines, creeks, scarecrows, fish, frogs etc.

12. Romanian haiku movement on international stage

Romanians are actively recognized in the international haiku movement. A neutral and objective example is the 6th Yamadera Basho Memorial Museum English contest in 2014. In the selected collection (July 2014), the first European country by number of submission is not Great Britain, not France, not Germany but... surprise, Romania! With 10 selected poems, Romania ranks number 3 after USA and Australia. Even more suggestive, the winner of

Grand Prize at the Division 2 (Junior High School Students) is not a Japanese, but a ... Romanian, Andreea Cîrligeanu (from Botoșani):

*after the rain –
in each puddle
my mother's face.*

Some well-known, felicitous Romanian authors are included: Vasile Moldovan, Cezar-Florin Ciobîcă etc. One can add to the 10 Romanian selected participants, other two Romanian names, registered from Italy (Miclaus Silvestru) and Switzerland (Ana Prundaru). This is a sample by Ms Prundaru:

*Golden stars entwined
Taiko tremors in the air
Cradling the calm sky.*

This year, 2015, again the Grand Prize at Division 2, Junior High School Students, belongs to a Romanian, selected among 15 participants from my country.

We don't need to dig deeply, to discover the recognition of Romanian haiku in Japan. In the 116th issue of HI Magazine/2015, Dan Iulian

received an “Honorable Mention” with this poem:

*The last leaf
meets its shadow –
silent forest.*

Three Romanians are included, with their poems, in the “An anthology of Contemporary World Haiku” published by Bruce Ross in 2015: Marius Chelaru, Cezar – Florin Ciobîcă and Eduard Țară.

The Romanian haiku is inspired, for obvious reasons, from third languages, not from Japanese, thus diluting some of its original content, beauty and flavor. Translations and even original haiku are inspired from English, French, Italian or Spanish. The formal presentation in three lines is also transposed from third languages, since in Japanese they are presented in only one line, but following 5-7-5 “onji” (character sounds).

The books published by the “Romanian Haiku Group” are definitely a great asset to haiku in Romania, by their initiating demarches, gaining already a quite considerable international reputation. What is sure, haiku

made an irreversible entry into Romanian literature, with comprehensive implications on our poetry.

13. Internet-haiku or cyber-haiku

Today, with the internet, it's easy to find a multitude of comments and opinions about haiku. For instance, Ms. Cezarina Adamescu, a Romanian reader, names haiku a „poetical blitz”. One thing is sure: through the internet, the reverberation with the reader or auditor (*yoin*), as a constituent of haiku, is much easier to realize.

We used to say: if something is not on the WWW, it doesn't exist at all. And haiku exists generously in the Web. It is valid for Romanian haiku too. Every day, in the virtual space, new Romanian haiku are published, without being printed. To have a comprehensive look at in Romanian, one should take into consideration the virtual space, too.

Don't under evaluate the blogosphere! It allows individual writers to put their haiku out into the world, without barriers, according to their own taste. They can communicate with

the amateurs of haiku all around the world and it works. One of the blogs even tried to make an inventory of the Romanian haiku blogs, on <http://blogurihaiku.blogspot.jp/>. They identified, in mid May 2015, a total of 30 blogs, which has probably increased in the meantime. On his blog, Ion Codrescu lists many international awards, including an Honourable Mention of Mainichi Daily News (Japan), in 1990.

14. Haiku by Romanian children

The 13th haiku contest of „Haiku by World Children”, organized by JAL Foundation (2013 to 2014) focused on the theme of "Dreams", children from Romania being present among 34 countries and regions, with their poems accompanied by drawings. Let's take this example, by Diana Gontila, age 11:

*I am home again
The forest is my shelter
In my dreams at night*

Encouraged by teachers and enthusiast instructors, children in Romania learn to

understand, enjoy and even compose haiku. The connections between the young generations of our two countries are offering Romanian children the chance to come closer to the meaning of haiku. I had the privilege to meet children from Kawamata elementary school and Shimizu elementary school, from Fukushima prefecture, who sent their drawings to the friends in Bucharest, as a token of thanks in return for pictures and encouraging letters sent from children in Romania following the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Showing the splendors of Japanese landscape and people, the images sent to Bucharest, will inspire Romanian children to write haiku.

Professor Ion Găbudean, in Târgu Mureș, with his pedagogical talents, is one of the enthusiasts teaching his pupils to compose the haiku type poetry, and even published some booklets in which his pupils accompany their haiku with drawings.

On the other hand, this very enthusiasm, if too didactical, can alter the profound spirit of haiku, by making out of it rather a social game, based on strict rules and omitting the original creation.

Teaching haiku by some Romanian experienced haiku writers, I think is good, for stimulating the interest, for more knowledge. At the same time, it can limit the space of expression; can inhibit originality, the innovation the appetite for being oneself.

Haiku has proven to be a good ambassador of Romania. The President of the United States congratulated Sonia Maria Coman, the Romanian girl who at only 11 years old won an international prize of haiku⁵.

15. Extraterrestrial haiku

Introducing extraterrestrial haiku is not a joke or fantasy. There are really extraterrestrial haiku. The Romanian haiku poetess and haiku lover, Clelia Ifrim, had her poems selected by JAXA (Japan Airspace Exploration Agency) to be stored aboard the special KIBO module on International Space Station (ISS). One of her poems was sent directly from the Earth to the astronaut Koichi Wakata, who said: "*Reading the 24th link written by Ms. Clelia Ifrim, I felt we've been given a gift from our parents and also the*

⁵ Vasile Moldovan, Speech for WHAC4, 2008

mother earth. When I looked out of the window of Kibo, the beauty of the blue planet struck me and I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the gift I received from it." Here is the poem, almost a cosmogenesis:

*The way of the earth-born ones is a love dream.
I have it from my parents and I will take it with me
in the blue eternal night, as a part of my life.*

Clelia Ifrim received, among other distinctions, the Grand Prix at Matsuo Basho Festival in Japan, 2011, for this poem:

*A white swan flying
the sacred arrow sliding
in my white body.*

One of her 18 published books, " My Loved Japan" an edition in Romanian, English, French and German, was chosen as one of the Best Books of 2011 by David Burleigh in the Japan Times. Akita International Haiku has already translated her haiku-book about the earthquake of 2011.

Haiku inspired by photographs constitutes the content of a joint composition by Clelia

Ifrim and Nicole Pottier, bearing the title “Des mots du monde”, in French and English. Her works have appeared also in the anthology “Haiku Poetry Ancient and Modern” (MQ Publishing, London).

16. Religious Haiku in Romania

A more philosophical look at haiku brings us to the historian and philosopher Mircea Eliade (1907 – 1986), who developed the idea that God is the unity of all opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*)⁶. Thus, springing from the union of opposites by its juxtaposition, haiku is well suited for expressing Christian thoughts and feelings.

Full of philosophical contrast is also the aphorism of the poet – diplomat Lucian Blaga: „*Darkness does not need light on it to be seen*”.

Surprisingly wide spread in the Romanian religious communities, Christian haiku was not invented in my country. A recent example from the USA is the haiku of Roger W. Hancock. He has his own way of writing, concentrating more

⁶ Anastasia Dumitru, Haiku Magazine, November 18, 2013, Bucharest

on the spirit than on nature more “telling” than “showing”.

But what is going on in the Romanian Christian haiku? The specificity consists in its Orthodox orientation. Not in the sense of respecting strictly the basic (orthodox) canons of haiku, but by following the Christian Orthodoxy. As an example, Ion Untaru is reflecting on Easter, by describing Biblical scenes:

*Son crucified
leaned on the cross
God cry.*

Although this seems to be a simple description of the Calvary, the originality consists in the fact that Father cries, giving to the entire picture a more profound tragic note.

Also on Easter, by the same author:

*The night of Easter
so many lights glittering
in the cemetery.*

Usually, the cemetery is positioned near the church, where the night of Easter attracts

people to the liturgy with lightened candles. The traditional fireflies of haiku are identified here, in spring time. Although in the cemetery, their glitter is joyous, since is the biggest holiday of Christianity, the Resurrection.

In Romania the exercise of Orthodox haiku is quite widely practiced, especially by hermits (călugăr). This is why I consider haiku also, a hermitage of words, and a small calm place, where the words can retreat serenely far away from the stress of the streets.

The fact that Romanians declare themselves 85 % Orthodox is not a proof of dogmatism or bigotry, but rather a reflection of their rich, translucent spirituality, profound sense of extra-material, intangible values of life, and an expression of the generous, sophisticated soul. This can end up altering haiku, but certainly adds a bit of flair at the same time.

Pious sentiments relieve also these verses, by Cristina-Monica Moldoveanu:

*vespers
I bow in front of
the bent candle.*

The magic of prayer is amplified by the night, when the candle is more visible. Humbleness in front of a bent candle proves the sincere penance.

Or this snapshot:

*Forty Martyrs Day –
a child on a bike circles
the street crucifix.*

Street crossing becomes a cross and the ingenuity of a child contrasts with the martyrdom of saints.

But religion doesn't just mean Christianity. The president of the Romanian Writers' Association, Nicolae Manolescu, in his preface to the History of Japanese Literature (by Shuichi Kato), discovered a similarity between the wooden churches in Romania and the wooden temples in Japan, as a source of inspiration for poets. He mentions: "The wood civilization links over time and space, Romania and Japan. One discovers the transience air: wood does not last".

Above all, when R.H. Blyth, in his preface to the 4 volumes "Haiku – Eastern Culture" made a subtle connection when he elevated

haiku to the rank of religion, stating that “haiku... in the singular signifies the poetical attitude of mind of the haiku poets, their way of life, their *religion*”. Thus, I would encourage my Romanian “brothers-in-haiku” to elevate “haiku” to the rank of a mood, of a state of spirit.

Having in mind the three verses, I hope it’s not blasphemy to say that the most notorious entity of three parts is the Trinity, and this can be a blessing for haiku.

It is worth mentioning a simple Christian poem by Ion Untaru, putting a magic light on the simplicity of trust:

*In the Easter night
simmering in the churchyard
so many candles.*

Dumitru Ichim, a magnificent contributor to Romanian Christian haiku, orthodox priest with a doctoral degree at Princeton University, New Jersey, asked whether he is a poet or rather a theologian, answered: “don’t forget, the theologian and the poet are colleagues, sitting at the same table, both preparing to serve the Word through the word”. Born in

1944, he has published poetry since 1973. He was considered, by the writer Valeriu Anania as “the first Romanian poet to write haiku and tanka stanzas at a time when in the country only a few heard about them”⁷.

While in classical haiku we meet sometimes the materiality of emptiness, in the Christian haiku the reverse is catching sometimes our attention: the emptiness of materiality. The items on the earth are senseless for a human being, without the spiritual peace.

17. Haiku and Dadaism

The Romanian born poet Tristan Tzara is one of the founders of Dada poems and the Dada movement, which lead eventually to the so called “dada Haiku” today. Avant-garde essayist, journalist, playwright, literary and art critic, composer and film director, Tzara was part of “an early 20th century movement in art, literature, music and film which made fun of social and artistic conventions” (Oxford

⁷ Preface to the book “Water of the dead”, 2013, Cluj Napoca

Dictionary). That movement developed later towards Surrealism.

Based on the Dadaist technique, today, some people make “dada haiku”, especially on the internet. The method of Tristan Tzara for producing Dadaist poems was described by himself: cut individual words from a newspaper article, mix them in a bag and put them one after another in the order they come out of the bag.

Deeply trusting their subconscious, the Dadaists thought that the random selection of the words is meaningful for the mind, which creates logic association between those words. Besides this vulgar way of producing a poem (which today is helped with the computer programs), some good haiku were produced and inspired by Dadaism, like the one by Paul Éluard (1920):

*the wind
hesitating
rolls a cigarette of air.*

18. Haiku and myself

If you are asking me why I am composing haiku, the answer comes maybe with the exclamation of a great Romanian diplomat and poet, Vasile Alecsandri, in 1866: „Every Romanian is born as a poet”. And I was born Romanian too.

Ambassador of Romania in France, between 1885 -1890, Vasile Alecsandri the time, attracted by Japanese poetry, he expressed his intention to travel to Japan, but unfortunately, it remained just a dream. Nevertheless, influenced by the oriental poetry, he created a new kind of poem in Romanian, called „pastels”. To see how much they resemble haiku, let me give you a small example, a three lines stanza, from the poem „Doina”:

*If I would have about me seven brothers
Brave like me
And riding dragons.*

Doesn't it sound like “shichifukujin”, the seven gods of luck, in Japanese?

Am I flirting with haiku? Maybe, but it is a relaxing and at the same time enlightening flirt.

In my repeated attempts to understand the profound nature of haiku, I discovered tenacity and dedication as very Japanese features, which combined with some “poetical soul” lead to the quintessence of simple poetry – haiku. Trying to familiarize more with Japanese culture, soul and notably with the people surrounding me in the last three years, I ended inexorably by discovering more inside myself.

From generations and generations, Japanese people know something I just learned: if you want to survive in an increasingly sophisticated world, you have to simplify things down to their essence.

Putting what I see into short words is a way of checking me in time. Thus I train my ability of differentiating personal views from others. Fortuitously, I was sent to Japan (in 2012), and this offered me the unique chance to discover the breviloquence of haiku at its origins. By this, I rediscover myself with humbleness, empathy and dedication. At the same time, not being a specialist in poetry, from the very beginning I declare myself an adept of “free-style haiku”, with a quite nonchalant approach towards regulations and especially the subjects tackled.

In a way, the revelation of haiku brought back, in an infallible way, my childhood: simple, magical, innocent, careless, radiant, close to the nature and protected by the parents' umbrella, disseminating around the pure beauty. I rediscovered not only the joy of basic values of life, but also the value of emptiness, of wordlessness, of dumbness. I had to reassess the value of arithmetical zero, as the value of silence expressing one's personality. Every fallen petal is a zero, but not a futile zero, but one added after another figure, giving the strength to the fecundated flowers, remained in the tree. The terrestrial life of every one of us tends towards zero, since it ends somewhere in the future. Haiky tends asymptotically towards maximum simplicity, thus helping us to see our future point "zero" (the death) as an added value to what we were before writing haiku (zero added after 1 gives 10).

On another note, a bit philosophical, I see the quintessence of haiku like a bridge between instant and eternity, between here and there (in infinity).

My father used to quote aphorisms from Confucius, thus bringing to his two sons the flavor of Zen, so embodied in some haiku. There

was the time of spontaneity, of naturalness, of ingenuity and playfulness, of youthful joy and innocent optimism, a kind of lightness of life relieved now by haiku.

To give you a glimpse of my humble three-line poems, I will quote Mr. David Burleigh, again with thanks:

Adeptly translating into English poems that had been originally composed in Romanian, Șerban brings to his haiku a sense of another world, newly perceived in an unfamiliar setting:

*Adorned Christmas tree
the moon in Tokyo Tower –
scent of incense*

Onto the unfamiliar he also translates a sense of fundamental unity, to form a bridge between disparate languages and cultures:

*Under Nippon Bridge
Brancovenian archway –
bilingual ripple*

Sometimes his haiku have a Romantic tinge, which is not unusual among haiku composed in Eastern Europe, as people in different places

take up the haiku form and employ it in their own way. But he can also convey simply and resonantly the experience of being a visitor in Japan:

*Over my white head
first sunrise of the year –
Land of Rising Sun.*

Thus we see the Ambassador exploring the country, from its northern to its southern reaches, and encountering its people, history and culture in this collection of his haiku.

Romania, like Japan, has its own special history and culture, just as it also has a number of active poets, in haiku as well as more traditional poetic forms, some of whom write in English to communicate with those in the wider world. After more than a century of international circulation, and with a still-growing body of enthusiasts, the haiku still retains its freshness of appeal, as the Ambassador notes on a visit to Matsuyama:

*Never an old man
at Matsuyama, Shiki
welcomes the poets*

The short-lived Masaoka Shiki, commemorated in a large museum in his hometown on Shikoku, not only reformed the poem for modern times, but gave it its modern name of 'haiku', which still welcomes and invites.

I'm not considering myself a poet, or a haijin. Haiku-making is a way of disciplining myself, by disciplining my words. If our words are a reflection of our personality, of our thoughts, than one can see in haiku-making a kind of mental gymnastics. Many Japanese are skeptical about the real possibility of writing haiku in Romanian. For instance, when I told a Japanese friend about my own haiku, his question stroked me: what is a haiku? I immediately realized it was not ignorance, but irony: how a foreigner can understand the real haiku? At the same time, regretfully I have to recognize he was right: I'll never be able to entirely absorb haiku, not only as poetry, but as a mood or a nowadays phenomenon. Vagueness, allusiveness and abstract nouns are more used in Romanian haiku, which makes me even more curious to catch the real internal clue of Japanese original haiku.

I need to share with you one of my personal experiences, even risking to become a bit egocentric, but behind the official appearance in public, we need to be ourselves, vis-à-vis haiku. In the last 4 years, haiku became an efficient, almost daily relaxing exercise. The fact that no one is imposing me anything, no rules, no terms, no deadlines, gives me the sense of myself, detached from the entire world, but at the same time connecting with the recent reality.

I have no vanity, I don't care if I write a memorable haiku or not. Much more important is the spiritual effect, the therapy effect of haiku, the revelation by writing it, I feel a cathartic effect on my spirit.

Maybe some are right saying only Japanese can write proper haiku. But they cannot deny the existence of an entire movement called "haiku", proper or improper, in Romania today. I am confident that, by being fashionable in Romania, the quality of haiku will improve in the future. Even remaking a haiku is, in my opinion, recommendable. Personally, I think about remaking many of my haiku, when I'll be retired. It is not a promise, but have you ever heard about haiku-addiction? It seems I am

haiku-addicted. Almost every day, since I am in Japan, I am tempted to put my words into a haiku like pattern, with pleasure and perseverance.

To close the circle, let me come back to the question, why I write haiku. I answered my friend with a joke: to practice a Japanese culture in Tokyo, I threw the coin, choosing between haiku or sumo. Thank God, it was haiku. Much earlier, I started to enjoy Sudoku, an arithmetic game. That demands a more systematic thinking, but at the same time is much more limited to the rules. Haiku is more than a matrix of 7-5-7 syllables, as it is the 9x9 square in the case of Sudoku. Besides being a three line stanza, it has something magic like the clearness of the emerald teardrop of tea at the specific ceremony.

After more than 3 years of life in Japan, I can confess that finally, I realized in a certain manner the logic of cadence 5-7-5. It echoes in my ear the musicality of the common Japanese speech, usually with such a cadence. In Romanian this is not the case, since we make efforts to number the syllables, while in Japanese this seems to come instinctively. And one more important detail: in the Japanese

language there is no distinction between stressed and un-stressed syllables. This is hard to understand in our language, where the accent plays an important role.

I hope that the time and the exercises will bring an added value to my humble compositions.

The Romanian national poet, Mihai Eminescu, made the remark (“To my critics”)

*Lots of flowers in fresh-blown
But only few shall be bearing fruit.*

In my mind, such verses may have another resonance: one should write many haiku and only few of them shall be valuable. With all my modesty, I hope that among my more than 2000 published haiku you will find at least one worth reading.

In a globalized world, Romania comes to the table of cultural delicacies, as every civilized nation, with its specific dishes, offering and consuming at the same time, at the international feast of haiku. Otherwise, “if you are not at the table, you are on the menu”. By this saying, I mean, if we are not present, as a country - Romania, than our poets will be

representing other countries, as it happened with Eugen Ionescu or Tristan Tzara.

Further, I will reproduce almost entirely, in English, my prefaces to the three volumes of haiku, published in 2012, 2013 and 2014 for Romanian readers.

a. Haiku – Spiritual Balm (2012 – Preface)

Surprised by the rhythm of internet and by the acceleration of the daily life, under the doping of endless offers of better and more, we often forget about the beauty in simplicity. Haiku brings our feet back on the ground, on the too often ignored earth, revealing us its miracles in ephemeral sequences, with no equal in time and space, reverberating in unique moments of emotion, sometimes austere and mysterious, or on the contrary, intense, but all the time elegant and natural. Haiku puts face to face the ephemeral with the eternity, timeless with the present moment, or nothingness with the universality. Haiku brings together intelligence and beauty, man and nature, in a never-ending pathos: humans and items.

Between me and no one, haiku engraves a world.

Clink of a while, perceptible rather by senses, haiku is surprising me like a moment of beneficial loneliness, of denial of the time which mills everything.

Pill of natural harmony, haiku is preserved in small recipients called *inro* in the Land of Rising Sun, where this genre of poetry was born. *Inro* represents a small case where the old Japanese preserved their seals, small jewelry, cosmetics and medicines, usually ornamented with a small, personalized blazon. By an elementary anagram, *inro* becomes NI-RO, meaning Nippon – Romania, a small case where we preserve, between Romania and Japan, the small pills of natural beatitude called “haiku”.

In moments of reverie, sudden impressions condense: a vague mist made up of colors, scents, onomatopoeia, sensations and seasons, morphs into drops of dew that gather in the baptismal font of the haiku, Matsuo Basho's spiritual child.

When I arrived for the first time at Narita airport, in the cherry blossom season of 2012, bearing in the “*inro*” of my soul a corner of Romania, the fresh air provoked me an

unknown shiver, resetting the seasons of my spirit in a new octave, where fresh notes of sakura burst into buds. The native country of the sun welcomed me with white and pink inflorescences, and now, I feel like haiku has existed in myself since my birth.

b. Haiku mood (2013 – Preface)

Emerging into the spiritual comfort of composing haiku, or what I consider to be haiku, I discern this relaxing exercise more than a simple versification without rhyme in three lines, be it even based on an elementary inspiration. Haiku becomes an attraction, almost a Fata Morgana, more than a stanza, more than a short poem. Haiku becomes a mood, a state of being in a moment, a state of spirit, anyhow an overwhelming state of wellbeing.

In the structural sense which surrounds me during this mood, I dare to assert that every one of us contains a latent dose of haiku built in our DNA.

To transpose in words the haiku mood represents only the post scriptum of an exercise,

the technical part after the mirage, into which we must make a halt naturally. The text goes without saying, we only insist to give to the words the necessary rhythm, possibly a season reference and a keyword. But precursory and strictly necessary, the interior mood in which we germinate the thought towards the stem of the words is confounding with the genuine haiku mood.

We need the “haiku moment” as a fertile soil indispensable for the shoot of stanza. Writing haiku represents a technically more refined stage, ulterior to the feelings, pure and simple. The words come later, settling gentle and orderly into syllables like the butterflies, according to a pre-established pattern.

It is hard to be sophisticated, but even harder to be simple. The school in enhancing us to add all the time something to the culture we possess. On the contrary, haiku stimulates us towards simplification, up to the essences.

The haiku reflection is simple. We pick up accidentally a snapshot from nature, a tag, or a sequence, let’s say a dragonfly. Behind it, we perceive the free of charge lesson about humanity. We see the dragonfly rushing towards the mirror of the pond in a fight with

itself and it seems we are reminded of a past moment when we were defeated by our own powerlessness. Instantly, we relax, the comparison is funny. We understand to avoid the futile frenzy against ourselves, against the image of ourselves captured into the claustrophobe mirror of our solitary existence.

Obviously, the more profound the *haiku moment*, the more it simplifies the link between photo and lesson, between image and rationing, between heart and mind, between nature and ourselves.

Emotional and mental state at the contact with nature, haiku launches the moment of introspection looking for the positive, bright cells of our human nature, leaving us to develop them, to cultivate them carefully. At the end of the day, through haiku we educate our benevolence towards the surrounding environment, towards our fellow creatures and, most of all, towards ourselves.

Counting the syllables, I count in my mind imaginary prayer beads regulating the rhythm of respiration and calming the pulse until the comfortable state of peace with myself, of intimate equilibrium. The haiku mood becomes

a familiar, calming lime blossom tea or St. John's Wort tea.

On a bench in a park, meditating on a pressing professional subject, by chance I see for an instant a butterfly on my backhand. What's my reaction? A moment of haiku opens, like the diaphragm of a camera. The situation simplifies itself. For a while I'm not anymore in a hurry and I leave myself to be translated towards the zenith of a reverie mood, contemplating the harmony of the wings and wishing to decode the secret of the subliminal message of the instant. Like a coffee break during an extenuating work, it relaxes me! The infusion of naturalness is tempering my temptation to work. The interior balance enters in equilibrium for the benefit of heart, unleashing the brain, almost therapeutically. Thus I dare to recommend haiku as a remedy to tachycardia.

Behind the practice of versification without rhyme, of numbering the syllables, of assembling the pieces of a haiku, we find a sensation of balance in front of the beauty surrounding us.

Accustomed to capture selectively the relevant images, our retina is translating to the

mind the first signal of haiku, in full respect to the observed object. Then, the mind is quickly processing and transforming it instantly into a sensation of the soul. Eventually, from time to time the soul is returning the signal to the brain to explain it, to process it into three verses resonant with the nature. Thus I discover the beauty around me and express it.

Like at home in haiku, the moderation (*chu-yo*) can offer us not only moment of reverie, but also solutions to difficult moments in life. It helps us to be more indulgent, more affable, more condescending, more generous, more soft-hearted, more affectionate, more flexible, more sympathetic and more conciliator with the world around us, whatever happens. We can find all this in a single word in Japanese: *yasashii*. In spite of a warrior reputation of samurais and ninja, Japan is the country of haiku, the country of moderation, and a country where even the objects can be *yasashii*. Maybe the strong seismicity of the zone has induced in the Nippon archipelago the haiku mood, to protect against chaos and panic, when needed, the people which proved to be so “*yasashii*” after the devastating earthquake on March 11, 2011.

For us, Romanians, I think the haiku mood can be beneficial through its virtues of relaxation, of removing the resentments, of creating peace; haiku mood embodies the wisdom to accept the ephemeral character not only of beauty, but also of the pain and trouble.

We can learn from the cherry blossom not to oppose uselessly the wind and leave us to be carried, like delicate petals, wherever the Sky wishes.

In November 2012, in Tokyo, I asked myself, what is determining namely the Japanese people to inaugurate yearly with ostentation the fresh, “young” French wine, *Beaujolais Nouveau*. Maybe their propensity for what is temporary, and their consciousness of ephemeral features of the environment is the answer, with which they celebrate the first cherry blossoms and first bamboo shoots, and then pining after them one year.

c. Window of harmonies – 1001 short poems (2014 – from Preface)

Another kind of haiku in each language

The recurrence of evading into the imaginary space of the haiku type poem, by

lecture of verses in Romanian, English, French or Polish, revealed me the charm of these delicate poems, in each language. It is correct to distinguish a haiku in Japanese language apart from one in English or French, as a formula of photographing in words the images, feelings or thoughts, with specific formal nuances and content for each and every linguistic areal. From the very beginning, we need to give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar: the genuine haiku is majestically modelled only and only in the indigenous melting pot, the Japanese language.

Its Nippon rules cannot migrate accurately in English, for example. First of all, the dimension, respectively the number of syllables (in Japanese, more correct "sounds") differs significantly. An ordinary example: Tokyo! In English, like in Romanian too, the name of the Japanese capital is formed of two syllables: To-kyo. In Japanese, the word contains not less than 5 syllables (sounds): To-o-ky-o-o. How can one translate a haiku in Japanese, from English or Romanian, respecting the same number of syllables, at the same time being consistent with the content, with the spirit and the sense of the poem? It would be like trying to pour 5 quarts of water in a vessel of 2 quarts.

This is why, the majority of English “haijins” are reducing the number of syllables in their own language, in order to adapt to the Japanese content, which means they prefer to pour only 2 quarts of water in their own vessel of 5 quarts. The minimal dimension of the Japanese text results also from its way of writing, usually haiku being written in a single line, vertically (in the old style) or horizontally (more recently).

It is up to each author, thus, to adopt the preferred metrics, to sacrifice possibly some rules of the classical haiku, for the benefit of a comfortable expression in their native language.

Attending the annual HIA (Haiku International Association) meeting in November 30, 2013, I understood, notably from the comments of the famous poet Mr. Michael Dylan Welch, that there are no fixed rules, but just optional “targets”. As in the case of target shooting, the closer the shot to the center, the better the result.

In my case, although I don’t have rigid principles or fixed “targets”, I respect the dimensional limits, usually fitting with the architecture of 5-7-5 syllables (go-shichi-go).

What is the result? It is a higher density of ideas or images, difficult to translate totally in the Japanese language, in the matrix of the classical Japanese poem. In the opposite sense, returning to the example of the word Tokyo, for a translation from Japanese into Romanian, it would be necessary another three syllables like “ballast”, in order to fill our vessel of 5 syllables (To-o-ky-o-o). We could say “city of Tokyo”.

In order to reproduce an image or idea, the Romanian language is somewhere in between Japanese and English, with regards to the number of syllables in a word. Usually, when I tried to translate some of the three line poems in English, I realized that the result is a diminished number of syllables, compared to Romanian, and the vessel is not “full”. I can give many examples: “spring” (1) in Romanian is “pri-mă-va-ra” (4); “heat” (1) is „căl-du-ră” (3) and youth (1) is „ti-ne-re-țe” (4).

Under such conditions, the Romanians composing three line poems 5-7-5 in their mother tongue reach “another kind of haiku”, richer in content than in Japanese, but poorer than in English. Of course, I schematized the things, since the subtleness of a word of an

expression remains sometimes untranslatable in another language.

I have a good example of some haiku poems translated from Romanian to Japanese, through an intermediary English version. I benefitted of the literary craftsmanship of the talented Mrs. Emiko Miyashita (HIA), which had the kindness and inspiration not only to translate, but also to adapt the text, with poetical inspiration, after many questions addressed to me, in order to catch more of the original sense in Romanian of my humble three verse poems, which she read in English. I know how much I lost by translating from Romanian to English, but I have no idea how much the text was diluted from English to Japanese. The translation of 5 such haiku can be found in the issue no. 110 of HIA magazine, of January 2014.

Resting to the formal aspects, let's remember that in the English language usually the authors hesitate to start the verse with majuscule, not to lose the unity of the poem, not to fragment it in three dissonant scores. In my turn, I prefer in Romanian majuscules at the beginning of a verse, maybe due to the classical stanzas learned during the childhood. Thus I put on it the Romanian embroidered peasant shirt

(called “ie” – like home in Japanese). By the way, when reading haiku my subconscious guided me to Alecsandri, before knowing that, as a diplomat in Paris he translated Japanese poems. The same Paris, a contact point with the Japanese literature, attracted another poet, Al. Macedonski, to compose haiku in Romanian.

Rules and content

The content, in its turn, cannot remain a simple multiplication of the poems of Basho or Shiki, not even of the modern Japanese authors. Without pretending that I “produce” haiku, I only try to explain myself the laboratory of these three verses, which offer me relaxation, in the calm moments of the day. I avoid the obsession of the season word (kigo), even if adding the fifth one, the New Year, as in Japanese. Amateur by definition, writing more for myself, I don’t consult the lists of the words specific to the seasons (saijiki), which would limit the freedom of dreaming, of calmly remembering, in harmony, some images or impressions. Even I don’t concentrate too much on the juxtaposition of the two main components of the classical poem, or on the cutting word (kireji) to separate the two. I avoid

the rhyme, not as a strict rule, but for being free of any template.

The differences of content become also more relevant, as haiku becomes more popular in other languages. In fact, even in the same language, time is leaving its fingerprint on the content and form of haiku. If the classical one eludes the metaphor, in the more modern it appears like an expression of juxtaposition of two images or ideas, separated by the key word (cutting word). In fact, the juxtaposition itself is a comparison between two elements.

The rule of “kireji” is not respected strictly. It can be sometimes a punctuation sign, hyphen or comma, and in Romanian, like in English, sometimes becomes diffuse. It can stay in the shadow of a metaphor. The same, the two basic components juxtaposed in a haiku.

No one is making pharmacy or accountancy. In front of a haiku, the reader is not asking for formal accuracy of a micro-poem, like in a laboratory, but the artistic effect, the instant harmony. The author is not necessarily starting from two worlds in order to juxtapose them, mechanically separating by a cutting word (*kireji*), but rather floats with the imagination and sensations towards the fitted words, as

much as possible, in an “orthodox” form of haiku, but not making a religion out of this form.

Otherwise, paradoxically, precisely the shortest poem in the world would be subject to the longest rules.

An excessive attention paid to the style, would blur the dominant image or sentiment. It would be like, in Louvre Museum, admiring the curtains. Alliterations and onomatopoeia, by their simplicity, as well as the iambs and caesura, can amplify the charm and melodicism of the verse, if they are spontaneous.

But at the same time, haiku offers us the opportunity, by its Lilliputian dimension, to express ourselves allusively, to say only half-things, leaving to the reader the pleasure to imagine the other half. By this, the haiku poem is, at the first lecture, simple and obvious like the Columbus egg. We have the impression of always knowing it, but finally it leaves on our meditation the trace of the interior harmony.

Eluding the literary devices cannot reduce it to a simple sentence with subject and predicate. Without its two components, at least suggested, haiku is losing its charm and the element of revelation, of surprise.

Sometimes I involuntarily deviate towards aphorism, which can be, again, a deviation from the simplicity of haiku. I could opt for a bit of mystery, less characteristic for the classical haiku. One thing remains defining: the reduction to the essence, as in Latin "*non multa sed multum*", by limiting the space to 5-7-5. Nothing in surplus! Mathematically, we can define it as a poem tending asymptotically to zero.

The metrics of 5-7-5 syllables must not be a taboo. Who wants to obey it strictly, can do it, aware of the limitation of the own diapason of expression. Some "padding words" can appear or, on the contrary, some words can mutilate the roundness of the poem by their absence.

Haiku as a reverence

Focusing our attention on little matter, haiku teaches us how to value each moment of life, each of its details. Thus we find ourselves as divine creations, simple, but at the same time veritable temples bearing a spirit, just like we are, beyond the 1001 daily trifles.

Spinning the nature and the soul into a bi-color string like in a Romanian „mărțișor” (March amulet), haiku becomes a spiritual

exercise of raising the awareness that we are alive exactly in this moment, in this surrounding. It is like a plot of life against mineral, red and white, hot blood melting the snow...

I see in haiku a form of communication and specific understanding of life, which enhances us to make reverences in front of the nature and of our fellow creature.

By its concision, haiku becomes like a form of greeting between humans, a moment of communication when you pass by someone, an affable and suave smile. The small things caught into haiku are forming steadily an entire day, a season, a life, a century, an eternal composition.

Haiku is short like life itself. But as life, it can redouble its value by density and perpetuation. The freedom of expression in haiku style allows to some people to go deeply into the Zen meditation, to others to understand more profoundly the Japanese culture, and to others to find in the nature the real meanings of life, to discover in themselves the Holy Ghost. But for all of them, the intuition and emotion are essential. Haiku is not a fable, not epigram, aphorism or prayer; it has no moralizing or didactic character. But at the same time,

everyone is free to reach such dimensions, without committing, by this, a serious error.

I think originality and spontaneity play their role, because especially in other languages than Japanese, haiku is evolving in time. The border between haiku and *senryu* (irony towards human imperfections) becomes more fluid. In fact as an amateur I am not preoccupied with such borders.

For me, haiku bears a big charge of modesty, humbleness, even humility, serenity and compassion, eluding the abstract words and sophisticated allegories.

It can be interpreted as an essay to escalate the life calmly and with temerity, like climbing in Haiku City (State of Hawaii), where the word haiku means, in the old Hawaiian language, to stop suddenly. It's like suddenly stopping the stress of the day, in order to stay on a summit to enjoy the rarefied air of relaxation, of harmony.

Why I write haiku? I like the expression of Anne Sylvestre "écrire pour ne pas mourir" (writing in order to stay alive). Without any dream of posthumous glory, I write in order to avoid the lack of interest in life. Not to fall from the bicycle of internal balance, like in the

English saying: “I drop when I stop or I stop when I drop”. I reached a daily therapeutic, tonic exercise: “a haiku a day keeps the doctor away”. From 1001 daily trifles we choose one, in the evening before going to bed, we scan it with the feelings and mind, lay it on the paper in the puzzle of memories and it looks like swallowing a healing balm.

Simpler than we can imagine, haiku is carrying us directly to the essence of the present moment. Elementary like the respiration itself, before transposing in words, it comes from reflex, with no effort, just relaxing, but keeping us into reality. While practicing it, haiku becomes more a hobby, a part of the daily discipline, a spiritual menu. It can even heal the pains and tensions, remove the vacuum induced by shortcomings, loses or failures. It is something opposite to the evanescence, a sustainable treasure; when the soul is emptied, it comes with magic syllables to full it. Sometimes it absorbs the excessive energy, bringing silence and calm, other times on the contrary, compensates the lack of force, stimulating the benefic meditation and reviving the trust. It detaches us from the daily tensions, from dissensions, or failures and vice-versa: it

tempers the euphoria after a success. When we access involuntarily the balance and harmony with ourselves and with fellow humans and we synchronize with universal values, we are “good” to ourselves. And haiku offers us this “good” naturally.

*

By all my remarks here, allow me to consider myself a humble member of Bashō’s diaspora in Romania.

And a final explanation: These are absolutely my personal views and my approach and have nothing to do with my position of diplomat and employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania. These are opinions not reflecting at all my official work in Japan and not pretending to be any kind of literary criticism.

Including doina and haiku on the same UNESCO heritage list would not be an accidental association of facts.

There are some basic, important parallels between them. It confirms a resonance in the spirits and minds of the two peoples, Romanian and Japanese, of the beauty of their nature and landscape...

