

PLENTINESS OUT OF LITTLENESS

The Landscape of Haiku in Greece - Haiku: A Spiritual Globalization

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Résumé

Le Haiku est un genre poétique japonais qui a exercé une influence sur la culture occidentale moderne en raison de son “abondance” conceptuelle attrayante produite par sa “frugalité”. Lafkadio Hearn, un chercheur grec-irlandais, traduit le Haiku en anglais et le fit internationalement connaître.

Mots-clés

Japon, influence, Occident, abondance, frugalité

Abstract

Haiku is a Japanese poetic genre having influenced modern Western culture by its appealing conceptual “abundance” produced through “frugality”. Lafkadio Hearn, a Greek-Irish scholar, translated haiku into English and made it internationally-known. Haiku is vaguely interacted with the ancient Greek epigrammatic genre of “comos”, Hesiod’s pastoral poetry and the laconic poetic form of “epigram”.

Keywords

Japan, influence West, abundance, frugality

“Pay no attention to what critics say.
A statue has never been erected in honour of a critic.”
Jean Sibelius

I do not intend to exercise critique upon critique but I would simply wish to try to uncover the power of sensitivity. “Poetry is another face of our pride”, says Greek Nobelist Odysseus Elytis and, as such a standing matter, how am I to leave it unprotected? There are people who place faith in this parasitic profession and take a leading role not only in literature but in all of the arts.

In such a situation, El Greco¹ would be lost in the labyrinth of the Holy Inquisition and its members. He would have a narrow miss and almost be put to death by them because he painted his angels’ wings too large in contrast to his predecessors, who painted them small and different.

Constantine Parthenis² followed suit, not painting what delighted him but what his critics and the past knew as typical iconography.

A “Kouros” stretched his leg and paced after many centuries when the sculptor dared figure out his next move, etc.

I have used a few brilliant examples and will be immediately clear in terms of my intentions.

When It Comes to Haiku

Haiku (俳句) is a genre of Japanese poetry; an awakening in the context of an event expressed in a laconic way, effacing blurredness and leaving clear, thus, the “core” of rationale, picture and epoch. It firstly appeared in the form of variations occurring in other poetic genres priding about the same specifications in Japan in the 16th century, adopted by Europe in the early 20th century and crossing, thenceforward, the Atlantic Ocean to become very popular in the whole of the Western world. This Japanese poetic genre started to become known along with its Japanese accompaniment of paintings and other Japanese exportable spiritual products when Japan opened her shores to the West. Haiku may have been developed belatedly and in a limited range in Greece, but, regardless of its delayed advent in this country, the facts stated below as the outcome of the research performed over time show that the “demand” and literary quests related to haiku and promoting exchanges were progressing and acquired in the form extracted from written textual sources dating back to early 20th century, such as literary magazines, correspondence, literary memories, etc, which leads to the

1 Domenico Theotocopoulos (1541 – April 1614), also known as El Greco that is “The Greek” due to his Greek origin, was an important Cretan sculptor and architect during Spanish Renaissance. He spent the best part of his life away from his home, creating the main body of his work in both Italy and Spain. D. Theotocopoulos was initially trained as an iconographer in Crete, his homeland, then part of the Venetian territory, and later moved to Venice. Once in Italy, he was influenced by great Italian masters of painting, such as Tintoretto and Titian, became their student and adopted some elements of their mannerism. In 1557, he settled in Toledo, Spain, where he lived until the end of his life and made some of his most famous works.

2 Constantine Parthenis (10 May, 1878 – 25 of July, 1967. Athens), born in Alexandria, Egypt, was a renowned Greek painter whose remarkable works made a significant change in Greece’s evolution of pictorial arts in the early 20th century.

ascertainment that this poetic form was finally introduced into Greece between the years 1900 and 1925.

Thought is the way leading to the flourishing of art, even in terms of actions in a different –perhaps secret and revelatory – manner. Some travellers will dwell on great life events, overlooking previous arts and life, the minimum of mind, and, in our case, the diamond of haiku, with a sort of word painting, phrases, seasonal events, comic verses, puns as well as philosophical and, yet, with a secretly phrased testimony, which are all bound with our endless world in eternity as a miracle in the structured poetic three-line and only seventeen-syllable universe. No matter if the philosophical haiku is heard as an almost prohibitive aspect, I have ascertained the opposite, providing you hereby with a poem of Bashō³, the greatest representative of this poetic genre, endowed with, I think, a philosophical notion.

“I am growing old / and, yet, not despised / by cherry blossoms³

His haiku is sublime, consoling and philosophical, structured, however, with a loose wording controlling the limits, the weight and even the words as I view it through my Western mentality. The time, the man-nature connection and its boundaries are clearly phrased.

It is said that haiku was merely a small, charming poem before the appearance of Bashō³, who transformed it into a divine piece of art and into an aesthetically agreeable model, as well as a mastered, unrivalled secret means of condensing voluptuousness and emotion to their minimal manifestations. In addition, Bashō formed a new trend in prose, indulged in Zen Buddhism and founded a haiku school. There is an adage-cum-declaration of Bashō’s I would like to refer to at this point since, in my opinion, it indicates human attitude toward life: “Go to the pine if you want to learn about pine or to the bamboo if you want to learn about bamboo and, in doing so, you must leave your subjective self behind. Otherwise, you will impose your presence upon the object and learn nothing”.

Here is a haiku poem with philosophical dimensions and another written in the Zen style:

Zoe Savina

τι αληθινό;	what is real:
το είδωλο, ο καθρέφτης	the idol, the mirror
ή ο που κοιτάς;	or their looker?

όταν βαδίζεις	when walking
πάντα ανατολικά	always east
πας προς τη δύση...	you go west

I have always believed that the substantial inner “man” has both no limits and homeland since this expansion and unanimity emanating from the poem corroborates the convergence of peoples. My own experience may serve as an explanation of this concept. In

3 Matsuo Bashō (1644- 1694). Poetry and Painting in Japanese Art: “Bashō and the Wind-Beaten Voyage” by Claire Papapavlou, Historian Of Oriental Art.

1979, I wrote some short poems I called “stigmas”, which would not take even one more or less word than those contained therein and, admittedly, I had no idea whatsoever about what to do with them until I discovered the haikai⁴ poems of the previously mentioned great Greek Nobel poet George Seferis⁴. I studied them and realised, to my great surprise, that they functioned impeccably as haiku in terms of their metrics but were written in one line.

We see that G. Seferis as well as all poets who were engaged in haiku in Greece before him would call their poems “haikai” inasmuch as they may have not known or failed to learn that haikai or renga is a genre of live poetry, like a cooperation binding them together. I remember discussing this issue intensely with knowledgeable American friends of mine in 1979, when I visited the USA.

An event bearing witness to the reality of haikai or renga precisely is the one described below.

I was invited to a dinner party organised in honour of Japanese officials who had come to Greece to orchestrate the fraternisation of a Japanese city with a Greek one, and to sign relevant documents on the taking over of a statue of Asclepius, the ancient Greek god of medicine, made by the distinguished Greek sculptor Evanghelos Moustakas, to be placed in Japan. I was sitting by the seaside of Epidaurus, when, all of a sudden, a charming gasp of wind started blowing and scattering the delegates’ papers all round. They took to chasing them, laughing, and I, staring at them, said aloud, “Oh butterflies! The wind knows not / how to read them”. The Japanese interpreter translated my words automatically to the Japanese gentlemen, who surrounded me and recited Japanese haiku in unison and, despite the fact that I did not understand them, a “renga” was initiated. I am referring to the facts “beyond reality” as the latter emanates from my references.

Subsequently, in 1985, I published my first haiku book titled *The Enchantresses*, and it received an “Annual Prize” by the Society of Greek Writers (it contains the following haiku and tanka poems). Since then this genre has always been represented in all my succeeding books. It happened that my book, *Enchantresses*, was read by a Japanese female essay writer who addressed me as one of the ten best Western haiku writers. Here are three of these “stigmas”:

βάλε στο στήθος
ένα τριαντάφυλλο
και, να ο κήπος

just put a rose
upon your chest
and, lo, the garden

δεν ήταν άλλη
στης νύχτας τη σοφία
παρά η γλαύκα

it was no other
in nightly wisdom
but the owl

κλαδάκι σιωπής
σκεπάζει τις πράξεις σου
αίνιγμα λύνεις;

twig of silence
covers your actions:
do you explain riddles?

4 “Sixteen Haikai”, Exercises Notebook by George Seferis, first published in 1932.

It is implied by the aforementioned event that this poetic genre was not transplanted into but “self-planted” in me.

“How can this happen?”, I wondered incessantly, regardless of the fact that this genre was conceived and written in Greece, where every genre is developed according to the particularities of certain people of different idiosyncrasy and spiritual structure. At that time, it was the question of Japanese haiku, which is considered an ambivalent venture by many people who were, nevertheless, belied by reality, especially through the dynamics of my own case.

I was attacked by dissensions I repelled and refuted by employing examples, softness and, truth to tell, even with a slight aggression several years ago to take my “sacred revenge” eventually after receiving the above mentioned award. However, I should refer to a cultural event happening these days as a “conquest” achieved by the Greek educational system.

In Greece, haiku has been a significant educational material that can be utilised either in the context of materialising school environmental education programmes or syllabus. An example of utilising haiku in Grade A of the Greek primary school language workbook is both vivid and a form of intercultural education.

In 2013, I was asked to deliver a speech on haiku, including analysing its technique in view of the 2013 London Olympics, to Grade C primary school pupils at the Athens Campion British College. Here is a haiku sample used in the presentation:

Zoe Savina

Τύμβος του Μαραθώνα
μνήμες στον τύμβο
και τρυφερά χορτάρια
φωνή καμία

The Marathon Tomb
memories in the “tomb”
and tender grass:
no voice at all

A START THAT TURNED OUT TO BECOME A “MOVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD”

Haiku, this tiny poem, is truly loved more than any other poetic genre in the world. However, is it really a “movement”? I wondered and answered, “Yes, it is!” Haiku, as a product of social and philosophical contemplation, offers one the astounding motives to deal with it, is embraced by the whole world and serves as the subject of innumerable magazines, anthologies, conferences, essays, analyses, “New Haiku Societies and museums or attachments to ornamented objects in the manner of my interventions in space, such as a pictorial installation⁵ the tags of which are suspended on an old plane-tree and bear haiku poems taken from my book “International Anthology Haiku”.

⁵ This is called “Installation Art” in pictorial arts jargon, meaning conversion in the concept of space. Generally, this method is applied in interior spaces whereas external interventions are usually called “Land Art”.

Thus, behold the great civilisation contained in the context of an opening to the world. We see today that such a great expansion and promotion of haiku is much in the interest of the Japanese and, indeed, this paradoxical phenomenon of their great cultural and ethnological “production” poses as a target as well as, so to speak, a “diplomatic representative” of theirs. It is, perhaps, their hectic involvement in technology that has been reversing their need for the last years in order to come into a closer cultural contact with the “outer world”: the West, which was one of the topics of my discussions in Japan during my visit to this country.

Let’s devote a few words to the history of our well-known haiku (俳句), a genre of Japanese traditional poetry, comprising an epigrammatic three-verse, seventeen-syllable poem (5, 7, 5). It initially appeared as a result of modifications applied to other Japanese poetic genres, such as tanka⁶ (comprising a thirty one-syllable metric units of 5, 7, 5 and 7, 7 syllables each) of about the same specifications.

A tanka poem as a sample of Matsuo Bashō’s poetry:

Η άνοιξη περνά και ξαναπερνά σε στρώσεις ανθισμένων κιμονό· ίσως οι ρυτίδες να’ ρχονται με τα γηρατειά	spring passes by again and again in layers of blossom-kimono may you see wrinkles come with old age
--	---

and here is a tanka sample by Zoe Savina:

ξέρω να πατώ σε μεταξωτούς δρόμους σαν πεταλούδα πιο κει πάγος ξυπνάει και τρέχει το νερό...	know how to tread along silken roads like a butterfly; ice awakens farther on and water flows
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Hokku was established in the 15th century in parallel with tanka as an autonomous poetic form, continued to develop in the form of haikai, that is, renga, and culminated in the form of haiku. However, it is worth mentioning that this very small poem, giving an outline of a picture or its significant element, and denoting, at the same time, a season, surprises us. It is as if a thought, panic-stricken, reached simplicity and discarded the excess, or was in a “non-lingual” state or experienced liberation.

Haiku flourished after the end of the 16th century and became exceptionally popular with the Japanese people after the appearance of the charismatic Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō (松尾芭蕉), a refined, intelligent, well-educated person gifted with insight and poetic innovation, who, in essence, refined it and made it so popular that it spread out among all social classes. It epitomises a sort of an awakening process in the context of an event or an apotheosis of the minimum concept, expressed in a laconic way, effacing all blurriness to leave clear, thus, the “core” of a rationale, of a picture and of an epoch and, as such, I should refer to this “opening” from Lafkadio Hearn’s viewpoint.

6 Poetic Musings: “Kasane” Tanka by Matsuo Bashō, translated by Jeff Robbins and Sakata Shoko.

1900 – A Significant Milestone of the Greek Opening: Lafcadio Hearn

The first appearance of haiku was made through translations into English -since he did not know to write in Greek- from Japanese by a Greek person called Lafcadio Hearn, alias Koizumi Yakumo (小泉 八雲) (1850–1904), an ecumenical writer, educationalist and translator, who served as a cultural transcriber. Lafcadio Hearn, a modern Ulysses, was born to an Anglo-Irish father, a medical doctor and major of the British Army, and to a Greek mother on the Greek Island of Lefkada. He initially lived in Ireland to move, thereafter, to New Orleans, where he resided for ten years, and, thenceforward, to Japan, where he spent the rest of his life. He married a Japanese woman, a Samurai's daughter, was appointed professor of English Literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo and delved into the Japanese morals, customs and folklore traditions, spreading Japanese culture abroad as a scholar and introducing it to the West more than any other Western scholar had done HHH before him. Today, he is regarded as a native, national Japanese writer, enjoying international reputation. The "Lafcadios Hearn Museum" was built on the Greek island of Lefkada, his birthplace, where events and festivities organised in his honour took place there last year (July 4-6, 2014).

Lafcadio Hearn relocated from Tokyo to Matsue after the 1890s, during the Meiji-Jidai (明治) transition period, representing the first six-month era of Japanese Empire during which the then, heretofore isolated, feudal Japanese society was transformed into its modern status and opened to the West in the way in which we know it today. These fundamental changes affected Japan's social structure, internal policy, economy, military and foreign affairs. Thus, Lafcadio Hearn is considered to be one of the first Westerners who got acquainted with and appreciated haiku along with its great cultural significance for Japan and its people. Cor van den Heuvel states in his essay "Lafcadio Hearn and Haiku"⁷ that Hearn was the first Westerner who offered the Anglophone world, despite his Greek origin as is mentioned above, a personal view of the Far East as well as the silk of its heart.

Lafcadio Hearn's essay "Japanese Lyrics – Haikus" (Lafcadio Hearn, Japanese Lyrics-Haikus, 1915, in English) was published posthumously in 1915 (he died in 1914) in English, positioning him as a significant literary figure that translated this genre from Japanese into English and serving as the ground on which he built his reputation of a great interpreter of Japanese culture to the West. His strong acumen and vivid poetic imagination enabled him to penetrate deeply up to the core of concepts conveyed by the Japanese language. As an "exporter" of Japanese aesthetics, he conceived the subtlety and earthly realism of both ancient and modern Japanese poetry. His verses were collected in this spirit, crossing the fertile ground of love, spirituality, longing, merriment and lullabies through the enchanting sphere of "Goblin" poetry. Some of his short stories were used as scripts for films made in the USA. Lafcadio Hearn would conceive Japanese poetry as a universal, indispensable, and vital - like the oxygen we breathe - treasure as well as a calligraphic decoration to our eyes and music to our ears apart from being a moral duty or internal need characterised by density and lightness in its style. In other words, I daresay, he saw Japanese poetry as a "cosmic wholeness" spread among all people as well as a therapeutic treatment for various human conditions such as birth, love, inutility, injustice, unluckiness and sorrow for a beloved deceased person or a woman's preference to die than to be dishonoured or the brevity of a man who decides to leave behind him a few lines in the form of an elegant verse as a moral

7 Featured essay "Lafcadio Hearn and Haiku" by Cor van den Heuvel / © 2002 Modern Haiku / Summer

exercise before committing “hara-kiri”, etc. I think that a poem, a haiku, for instance, occurs as a “relieving confessor” facing bravely any problem whatsoever that all of us may come up against even today.

Nevertheless, even Hearn would be sceptical at times about the simplicity of Japanese haiku poems, mainly in the sense that they did not manage to live up to their Western readers’ and Western literary society’s expectations (an example of our “outdated, cantankerous minds” is given above). His writings on the subject vacillate from apologies for their not giving us the kinds of philosophical speculation about the natural world found in Western literature to words of praise for the unique way in which haiku creates a direct awareness of nature, which gives the impression that Hearn offers praise with one hand and takes it away with the other. He puts this appreciation in more emotional terms whereas he often uses the word “delight” to describe the Japanese haiku poet’s reaction to nature. We can say that this poetic genre was transferred to the West by a Greek person directly from the country of chrysanthemums. There are sources referring to a work of Hearn related to haiku. In addition, he delivered two university lectures: in the context of the first of which he compared the ancient Greek epigrammatic poetry to haiku poems and in the context of the second, very impressive one, he compared ancient Greek bucolic (idyllic) poetic traditions to the respective Japanese ones. Furthermore, studies were performed from 1890 to 1904 by Japanese researchers on Hearn’s relationship with Japanese haiku! Let us consider the first haiku translated by Lafcadio Hearn. It is crystal clear that the pulses of intangible deeds as well as the conspiracy of the substance pertaining to this genre would not evade him nor did he fail to acknowledge and to pay tribute to Bashō, the reformer of haiku and the ecumenical, sparkling, refined, spiritual, philosophical master. Here are some of his translations:

Matsuo Bashō (松尾芭蕉) 1644 -1694

Furu-dera ya:	Old temple :	Αρχαίος Ναός:
kané mono iwazu;	bell voiceless	άλαλη καμπάνα,
sakura chiru	cherry-flowersfall	πέφτουν φύλλα κερασιάς.

The bells are so utterly reticent that even the cherry flowers can be heard when falling. Hearn emerges here as the observer of the sensitivity characterising an infinite courtesy.

Baijak

Sémi no tatsu,	when the cicadas cease	όταν σιγούν τα τζίτζικια,
ato suzushisa yo!	what coolness!	τι δροσιά!
matsu no koë	the voice of the pines	η φωνή των πεύκων

This excellent poem of Baijak is in the same mood as that of Bashō: as soon as cicadas have stopped singing, the chill of the evening is felt and pines' rustle is heard like a human voice. Everything has its own presence. Haikuists' values and roles employed for the purpose of bringing to surface what most people will not "see" or/and "hear" are manifested through such sublime haiku poems. Frugality in expression accentuates the abundance of blessings existing in the world.

Kitō

Kagéroishi
kumo mata satté
sémi no koë

Taking the shade,
the clouds have gone
cicadas' voices

Παίρνοντας την σκιά,
έφυγαν τα σύννεφα
- φωνές τζιτζικιών

This haiku stares at things with a penetrative glance and thought: when cloudiness is dispersed, cicadas' voices are enlivened by the sun and heat, causing the return of summer.

Banko

Té no hira wo
hau ashi miyuru

hotaru kana!

The firefly;
as it crawls on my
palm,
its legs are visible

Η πυγολαμπίδα,
έρπει στην
παλάμη μου,
τα πόδια της είναι
ορατά!

Onchō

Akénuréba,
kusa no ha nomi zo
hotaru-kago κλουβί

When dawn comes,
only grass
in the fire-fly cage

Όταν ξημερώνει,
μόνο χορτάρι στο
των πυγολαμπίδων

Kaga no Chiyo. H Fukuda Chiyo-ni (Kaga no Chiyo - 福田 千代尼, 1703–1775), a picture framer's daughter, was an important Japanese poetess of the 18th century, specialised in the description of nature. She is regarded broadly as one of the greatest female haikuists. She started writing poetry when she was seven years old, having already become popular throughout her country at the age of seventeen.

Kaga no Chiyo

Kayane te wo
Hitotsu hazushite,
tsuki-mi kana!

Detaching a corner
of the mosquito net,
lo, I behold the moon

αποσπώντας μια γων
κουνουπιέρας,
να, βλέπω το φεγγάρι

“Lo and behold! This is a finely-woven connection showing that similar songs of the ancient Greek literal genre of “comus”⁸ were employed by sprightly groups of merry people

8 Comus was the personification of the Dionysian procession according to Greek mythology, appearing also during the late years of Greek antiquity as the god of celebration. Philostratus depicts him in one of his

roaming in the streets of a town in groups and singing – actually scoffing at– their emotions beneath the windows of their loved ones after departing from sumptuous banquets, which shows that similar forms are noticed also in Greek antiquity”, I thought.

A sample of this poetic genre in the form of a two-line verse of an ancient Greek Alexandrian epigrammatist, Callimachus (circa 305–240 BC), is given below.

Ούτως υπνώσαις, Κωνώπιον ως εμέ ποιείς I wish you also sleep Mosquito as you
make me
κοιμάσθαι ψυχροίς τοίσδε παρα προθύροις sleep i by these cold windows

This is a charming piece of poetry approaching the essence of Issa’s popular style: a haiku-like adage which, like haiku, lends itself to the employment of humour.

Here comes also the ancient Greek bucolic (idyllic) poetry, to which also Lafkadio Hearn refers, of the ancient Syracusan-Greek poet Theocritus (315–260 BC), who was one of the most significant poets of the Alexandrian Hellenistic Period as well as a pioneer in the field of bucolic (idyllic) poetry.

Theocritus (315-260 BC)

Τραγουδώ τον έρωτα για την Αμαρυλλίδα κι I sing my love for Amaryllis and
ο φίλος
μου ο Τίτυρος τις αίγες μου βοσκάει (πα’ Tityrus, my friend, grazes my goats
στο βουνό) (in the mountain).

(This is a sample of a “crispy” Greek sense of humour)

Hesiod⁹ (7th or 8th century), the second most important ancient Greek poet after Homer, states that: “Έργον δ’ ουδέν όνειδος, αεργίη δε τ’ όνειδος” (work is not a shame but idleness is), which sends my mind to popular Japanese poet Issa.

The elegiac two-line verse – that is a line in dactylic (heroic) hexameter and a line in dactylic pentameter – was used in epigrams. The first line – the one of the Homeric epic poetry – can be said to have generally been a triumphant prelude in epigrams inscribed on tombs and dedicated to the virtues and glory of the dead persons buried in them. In the second line (the one of lamentation, as it is implied by the cuts it contained, the voice was interrupted in a way that gave the impression of sobbing in the manner, I daresay, of a social, collective outburst.

The epigram appeared many centuries ago, inscribed on tombs, monuments and artefacts. Its wording changed according to the needs, requests and expressions of intellectuals as well as of arts. In addition, epigrams stopped being exclusively funereal and became erotic, votive, satiric, exhibitiv etc in the wake of time. The cultural past of Greece also resembles evidently – albeit differently – the style of a haiku or tanka but lacks metric rules. Nothing is done on

paintings as a drunkard whose head stoops down to his chest after a sumptuous meal. The Dionysian happening of Babougeri takes place in Greece even today. There are charming representations of this motive on ancient Greek vessels.

9 “Hesiod Advises” - Thessaloniki Arts and Culture.

purpose but the internal need of expression will push inner contents outwards like “oestrus” (inspiration), as it has been called since Greek antiquity.

Here is a maxim of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus¹⁰ of Ephesus (c. 535 – c. 475 BC), called “The Obscure”:

“ἀρμονίη αφανής φανερώς κρείττων”

(the inostensible harmony is better than the ostensible), which is an outstanding diamond in itself.

This adage stands on its own, functioning almost as an oracle, not to mention that the Zen Path is, so to speak, a substructure of haiku.

Therefore, it seems that a certain substructure existed with, at least, ancient Greeks in the form of epigram, which appeared during the Archaic Period (750–479 BC). We ascertain today that what is required for –frequently burdened with platitudes or diffusions– free poetry is the sense of “opening up”, which allows us to express anything we want through this specific poetic genre restricted to 5,7, 5 syllables. Syllabification, epoch and spirit pertain all to haiku. Thus, the substance of things lies in the sound knowledge of this poetic form as well as in its requirements. I, personally, have never said, “I will sit back now and write haiku poems” since the element of the adventure of thought subconsciously underscores a brilliant conclusion, which comes down as an intolerable definitive agent falling in the form of words upon a sheet of paper or a drawing or incision or a Zen secret enterprise or a rain of sunrays at times and is not interested in explanations.

Involvement in Haiku Appears to Be Progressing in Greece Eventually

In the first period haiku was mentioned in a theoretical text of Spyridon De Viazis (1904). Then, it emerged in the context of the first recognised attempts of its composition several years later, in 1925, with the appearance of G. Stavropoulos.

G. Stavropoulos, 1925

μαύρο χελιδόνι
σε παλιό πατάρι
φτεροκοπάει

a black swallow
in an old attic
flutters

Paul Crinaeos-Michailides, 1926

χλόη, πεταλούδες, λουλούδια
κελαδισμοί και θρόοι,
κι ερωτικές καρδιές

grass, butterflies, flowers
chirps and rustles,
and loving hearts

¹⁰ Heraclitus: “His Life and Philosophy” – Part A. The article was based on Costas Axelos’ work: “Heraclitus and Philosophy”, published by “Exantas”.

In 1940, George Seferis (1928-1937) was the most prominent modern Greek poet who wrote haiku poems and published them in his “Sixteen Haikai Poems”, in a poetry collection titled “Exercises Notebook”. He is believed to have been the introducer of haiku into Greece due to his high reputation and his successful attempts to deal with it despite some negative criticism he received at times. These sixteen haikai poems, as he called them, may reflect a strange poetic idiosyncrasy, but they are milestones in the history of this genre and represent a significant contribution to the development of haiku poetry in Greece. Although George Seferis was an important poet, diplomat and Nobelist (a laureate of the 1963 Nobel Prize for Literature), he would not comply with the required metrics in all of his 16 haikai poems, which may manifest a digression from haiku stereotypical pattern, but they will bear witness to their creator’s high quality and poetic mastery. Finally, his work was a decisive contribute on to the further evolution and development of Greece’s modern literary history, testifying that the haiku poetry form reached its maturity.

1940, George Seferis:

σηκώνω τώρα
μια νεκρή πεταλούδα
χωρίς ψιμύθια

I am lifting now
a dead butterfly
without cosmetics

γυμνή γυναίκα
το ρόδι που έσπασε
γεμάτο αστέρια

a naked woman
the broken pomegranate
was full of stars

The Second Period: 1900-1972 – Sample:

1969, Zisimos Lorentzatos

στον ουρανό σου
μια μπαταριά σε βρήκε
πρασινολαίμη

in your sky
a gunshot hit you
mallard

1972, D.J. Antoniou:

φυσά ο αγέρας
μα τα σπαρτά δεν γέρνουν
- ζωγραφισμένα

the wind blows
but crops stems will not bend:
painted...

The Third Period

In 1972, haiku seemed to have been well established in Greece, still lagging behind a bit but progressing remarkably in terms of the poetic being in this country. A dramatically growing haiku poems production has been noticed since 1972 despite the scepticism about it shown by some artists some of whom are of progressed age as well as by certain theoreticians who find it difficult to believe that transplanting such poems-cum-models into other countries

of different mentalities and spiritualities involves a backhanded venture. At this point we call to mind Lafkadio Hearn's anxiety and scruples about the acceptance of haiku poems by the literary circles in the West. During a forty-year period many, extremely interesting things have happened and many poets have successfully dealt with this poetic genre. Here are some examples.

Anestis Evangelou made his appearance in literature with his "haikai" poems in 1878.

τρυφερά χέρια, δε λησμονούν οι πληγές τ' απαλό χάδι	tender hands; wounds never forget a soft caress
---	---

Zoe Savina, 1979

παίζεις συννεφιά τις μέρες του Φλεβάρη στα γόνατά σου	cloudiness, you play with February's days on your knees
---	---

Tassos Corfis – "Pain-killing Sonnets and Haiku Poems", 1987

στα λασπόνερα της στραγγισμένης λίμνης έντομα βουίζουν	insects buzz in the muddy waters of a dried lake
--	--

George Pavlopoulos, 1990

το ένα σου μάτι στο ποίημα· και τ' άλλο να σε δικάζει	your one eye stares at the poem and the other condemn you
---	---

The poetic approach of Greek poets to haiku calls upon Japanese aesthetics in the same way in which the latter call upon Greek poetic speech in the fields of humanities, philosophy, ideals and symbols that have been flowing through Greeks' blood for many centuries and are impossible to ignore. This is a great heritage of the tradition which extends from the Greek Archaic Period (750 - 479 BC) to our modern times and has functioned incessantly until this day, working its way through the trivialities of everyday life. It fights back, struggling as well as beautifying mediocre and painful things. It meets eternity as well as its matter outside the flattering picture every writer wants to gain, and principally, helps him exist, which sets a way in which he may be protected against faltering. "When you walk, stick to your walking", says a Zen teacher and, therefore, when you sit, stick to your sitting and, what is more, do not sway. This is haiku: a buffer of "faltering".

Influences

Influences have always been present in our world and, thus, the phenomenon that a person transpires something new to another is quite natural and so is an expected event that is awakened by or through another person. Were the Japanese not influenced by their literature, music, art and architecture? However, being able to be yourself in the present time is a great issue or secret.

On the occasion of my visit to Japan, I got acquainted with Kenzo Tange, a famous modern Japanese architect, whose work made great impression on my husband, our son, John Moustacas, a brilliant architect, and on me and so did a Japanese ceramist Yusuke Aida, the creator of famous squares and monuments. I also met an internationally renowned sculptor, Noguzi (Isamu *Noguchi* (1904–1988), at a conference held in Delphi. These men's creations are modern and robust, bearing all the elements of their personality, intellectual concepts and skilfulness as well as lacking other influences except for those related to the impact of “change-time”, which are all virtues characterising talented masters.

An “Unexpected” Event

It is quite certain that no one from the scholarly world of both Greece and Japan –as well as from the scholars of the whole world– imagined that this brief Japanese epigrammatic poem would evolve into such a unique poetic form that would exceed peoples’ origins and be spread everywhere like branches of a tree rooted deeply in the land of the Far East and stretched to embrace the entire universe. The foliage of this tree rustles in the ears of our cosmos, piercing, with its ornamental branches, heterogeneous people’s, such as scholars’, scientists’, artists’, politicians’, seamen’, businessmen’s etc., hearts. The situation in terms of this poetic genre today is exactly the same as it was in Japan many centuries ago when everyone –from emperors to servants– was engaged in it. Thus, I imagine how the great Japanese haikuist Matchuo Bashō, the principal representative of this poetic genre, would be elated to see this short poetry genre of his homeland situated at the end of the world, transplanted and re-blossoming all over the universe. Just because all these things are under the influence of beauty, this miracle is what has always surprised and enchanted me.

Cultural Globalization

I have been in touch with haikuists from all over the world through correspondence since 1979 in my desire to be informed of what happens internationally. I started presenting haikuists and their works along with brief analyses of them (as well as, in the context of translations of Pablo Neruda’s poetry from Spanish and French in conjunction with my great, adorable friend Danae Stratigopolou, a legendary artist of a woman, as well as with other willing lovers of poetry) in literary magazines. I have undertaken this task on many levels, a series of translations of Pablo Neruda’s poetry from Spanish and French, which resulted in the fact that the information about this poetic genre given to magazines readers was broadened. It was in 1985, when my bilingual book *The Enchantresses* was published, that I “justified”, so to say, the magnificence of haiku by receiving the “Annual Prize for Poetry” by the Society of Greek Writers.

Thanks to my international contacts, a bold and interesting idea of creating a global anthology dawned on me, signalling, in my opinion, also a significant event in the field of Greek literature. This idea was admittedly more difficult to realise than I had expected since

this venture took five years of correspondence between poets and me around the world. It was a persistent, painstaking, time-consuming and, yet, strangely tender task outweighing both the toil and the time invested in the whole project. The more I made progress towards the implementation of this idea, the more intensely I thought, “Lo and Behold! It is about a sort of ‘cultural globalization’, as stated in the preface to my anthology for the first time, as far as I remember. It is the most constructive and interesting globalization that could have ever achieved, involving a spiritual convergence through the literary means of a brief, external phrasing of speech firmly established by haikuists around the globe. I prepared and published the *International Anthology Haiku: The Leaves Are Back on the Tree Again* in 2002. It represents works of 186 poets from fifty countries and appropriately presents each of them on two pages with ten haiku. The anthology also contains my bibliography and illustrations done by a young painter, Alexander Moustacas. This 500-page anthology functions as a “compass” both in Greece and abroad. I came across its various sections cited in other people’s books or referred to in lectures delivered in our country and even online, at times with no reference whatsoever to their source. A Japanese friend of mine living in England and promoting haiku by organising symposia, forums, conferences, said to me once “I would expect such anthology to have come from the USA but not from Greece!” and I counter-commented by saying, “Why not? Who are Greeks culturally? What have they handed down to humankind through their philosophy, arts, sciences and theatre as well as a multitude of other cultural treasures and values? We Greeks are persistent, versatile, talented and aesthetically agreeable people, which is corroborated by the fact that such a sublime anthology exists today.” One discovers global differences of cultures, habits and even seasons through poets of the world. For example, spring, as an image of a season, is revealed in a different way to each and every one of us: some northern Europeans think of it as the time of year when snow thaws, Greeks think spring has come when they can get a glimpse of fast blossoming almonds, the Japanese see cherry blossoms as the harbinger of spring, the Finns perceive it as the sight of a swan floating on the water of a lake or the surface of a frozen sea, etc.

Establishment and Countless Extensions

Having been working on various poets’ haiku poems and submitting my own to online haiku magazines and competitions, I have ascertained that traditional haiku poems containing season words pertaining to spring, summer, autumn, and winter have become obsolete even for Japanese haikuists, who, however, have not excluded them totally from their repertoire. The strict compliance with its metrics (5, 7, 5) has been overcome to a certain degree by many other poets as well. Modern haiku poems could be envisioned as having a free thematic adopted by the poets of a world without frontiers. Then, does the whole story mean a chain rebellion against traditional haiku? This freedom that has been rejuvenated by degrees in the wake of time does not result, I think, from a degenerative process but from the provisions of times, the impulsion and repulsion of events as well as from a globalised mentality that functions and, at the same time, militates against everything. The pursuit of substance and the continually intensified tendency towards this few-line poem have been manifested clearly by all poets worldwide. This fact is confirmed by the aforementioned *Global Haiku Anthology*, which represents poets from fifty countries. I believe that if one calls one’s poems haiku, one should also comply with certain rules because, otherwise, one may call them as one wishes. Modern haiku may make one resort to delicate solutions and dictate inhuman conveniences recognised belatedly unless it is studied, investigated and elaborated as well as if one is endowed with fine inspiration, one will succeed in acquiring a harmonious sense and drawing out of haiku without taking to a mere poetic fabrication as we may have noticed how trite and badly-fabricated haiku poems seem to be when they lack

immediacy. We live in modern times with variegated stimulations and needs that make us speak about different things.

George Seferis:

άδειες καρέκλες
τ' αγάλματα γύρισαν
στο μουσείο

empty chairs
the statues returned
to the museum
sprinkle on the lake

στάξε στη λίμνη
μόνο μια στάλα κρασί
και σβήνει ο ήλιος

only a drop of wine
and off goes the sun

φόρεσα πάλι
τη φορεσιά του δέντρου
κι εσύ βελάζεις

I wore again
the tree's attire
and you bleat

Argyris Chionis

άγουρο ακόμα
κόπηκε το ποίημα,
τώρα σαπίζει

still unripe
the poem has been cut
now it's rotting

Elias Cephalas:

γράφω και πάλι
πλην της απουσίας
στο μαύρο τζάμι

I write again
the minuses of my absence
on the black glass

Tasos Corfis:

χρόνια φευγάτη
ανάμεσα στα χέρια μας
ένα ποτάμι

gone for years
between our hands
a river flows

John Patilis:

μόνο ο καθρέφτης
να σε βλέπει αντέχει
δίχως να σπάει

only the mirror
can bear to see you
without breaking

Zoe Savina (Award "Diogen" 2010: haiku – Bashō in Town):

γυάλινο κτήριο...
«πού είναι ο ουρανός;»
ρωτά ο Μπασσό

a glass mansion;
"where is the sky?"
Bashō asks

επιθεωρεί
ο Μπασσό από το μπαλκόνι
–σκύβει στο κενό

Basho
inspects from the balcony;
e bends to the void

«κάτω απ' τη γη
ναι, όλα είναι ίδια»
λέει ο Μπασσό...

under the earth;
yes! all is the same,"
ays Basho...

The signifying element and diffusion of invisibility intervene as well as Basho's vigilance painting our modern world.

το σημερινό
εμφιαλωμένο κενό και
η Κόκα-Κόλα

today's
bottled water
and Coca Cola

Great causes are absent and a mirror awaits our voice to reflect it and not to absorb it.

John Tolias:

παλιά κορνίζα
πόσους θανάτους έχεις
φιλοξενήσεις;

an old frame
how many deaths
it hosted?

This is a ceremonial haiku.

Charis Melitas:

Θεραπευτική αγωγή
ο ψυχολόγος
υπήρξε σαφέστατος.
Ν' αφήσω νύχια

Therapeutic Treatment
the psychologist
was very clear:
I'd let my nails grow.

In circulation

Many national anthologies may circulate round the globe, but the international ones are rare, obviously due to the difficulties entailed by the venture of preparation, at least, like those I had when compiling my anthology all by myself. Other, smaller anthologies circulate without problems. Editors of haiku magazines and newspapers, haiku societies and individual haiku poets work on and spread this attractive tiny poem internationally through collaborations and competitions. A global "orgasm" is in full swing. Acceptability poses as a condensed lingual expression justifying human experience and presence through time as well as a creator's poetic apotheosis. It is a structured souvenir for the future as a final result of what is seen and what exists. I would like to lay down this globalization through random examples of several poets' haiku poems, thinking that it is impossible for one to include all the significant names in a single work.

James Kirkup (Πριγκιπάτο της Ανδόρρας)¹¹
η άνοιξη ξαφνικά

spring suddenly comes

¹¹ Zoe Savina: All cited poets are from the International Haiku Anthology: The Leaves Are Back on the Tree.

έρχεται σαν πλανόδιο τσίρκο
σε βομβαρδισμένο χωριό

like a wandering circus
to a bombed village

Koko Kato (Japan)
εκεί που κύλησ' η πέτρα
όταν έπαιζαν σκοινάκι
άνθισαν ροδακινιές

there where the stone rolled
when they played ropes,
peach-trees bloomed

Hussain Rizvi (India)
δέντρο σε σκιά
βγάζει κι αυτό φρούτα ...
δεν έχει απολαβές

a tree in the shadow
also produces fruit:
it has no profit

David Cobb (UK)
ανεβαίνοντας
το λόφο με το ποδήλατο
με φτάν' η πεταλούδα

climbing
the hill on bicycle,
I'm reached by a butterfly

Ban'ya Natsuishi (Japan)
Ο Ρεμπώ σε κύκλο
περιπλανώμενος
–ο σπίνος πετάει

Rimbaud in a circle
wandering about:
a linnnet is flying

Olga Arias (Mexico)
ενάντια στη μοίρα:
οι ψευδαισθήσεις μου
πανίσχυρα πουλιά

against fate:
my illusions are
almighty birds

Djurdja Vukelic Rozic (Croatia)
πρωινή δροσιά-
αγελαδόγλωσσα μαζεύει
κομμάτια ήλιου

morning dew;
a cow's tongue gathers
pieces of the sun

Anna Rosa Nunez (Cuba)
στο καταφύγιο
συνομιλούν μονάχοι
ήλιος και σκιά

in the shelter,
sun and shadow
converse alone

Ines Cook (Peru)
κάτω απ' τα πέλματα
των ολόλευκων αλόγων
...το ηλιοτρόπιο

under the hooves
of all white horses
...the sunflower

Jim Kacian (USA)
πέφτει το χιόνι
το «καλώς όρισε» σβήνει

now falls
he "welcome" is off

απ το χαλάκι

om the mat

Hansha Teki (New Zealand)

ψωμί της ζωής...
από μια σκουλικότρυπα
μπαίνει μέσα το φως

read of life...
light enters through
a wormhole

Humberto Senegal (Colombia)

το χαϊκού
πρώτα βλέπεται ...και
γράφεται μετά

haiku
is firstly seen...and,
then, written

Niji Fuyuni (Japan)

φωλιά μικρού πουλιού
ταλαντεύεται σαν καθρέφτης
σε λαϊκή αγορά

a small bird's nest
swings like a mirror
in a flea market

Martin Berner (Germany)

«καυχησιάρικο»
λέει η χιονοστιβάδα
στ' άσπρο γιασεμί

“braggart”,
says the snowball
to the white jasmine

Willy Vande Walle (Belgium)

μόλις στη ξενιτιά-
στο στούντιο χωρίς αλάτι
το πρώτο του αυγό

fresh in alien land:
without salt at the studio
his first egg

Max Verhart (The Netherlands)

μισοφέγγαρο –
ξαφνικά γουστάρω
καρπούζι

half moon:
I, suddenly, fancy
a watermelon

Lee Gurga (USA)

το φεγγάρι κοιτά...
σκυλιά όλο γυρεύουν
να μας διώξουν

moon gazing...
the dogs keep trying
to lead us away

Robert D. Wilson (USA)

αυτός ο άνεμος...
κι ένα φύλλο που παίζει
...κουτσό

this wind...
a leaf playing
hopscotch

David G. Lanoue (USA)

στην κρήνη
τέσσερα αγοράκια,
τα δύο αληθινά...

in the fountain
four little boys,
two of them real

Jean Luis Borges (Argentina)

η πλατειά νύχτα
δεν είναι τώρα άλλο
πάρεξ ευωδιά

the vast night
is nothing else
but fragrance

Milenko D. Cirovic Ljuticki (Serbia)

το τηλέφωνο κτυπά
κανείς δεν απαντά
- όλοι στο καταφύγιο-

the phone rings
nobody answers it
everybody in the shelter

Sasa Vazic (Serbia)

γρασίδι καλοκαιριού...
τόσα μονοπάτια χαμένα
στ' αγριόχορτα

summer grass...
so many pathways lost
in the weeds

Ingo Cesaro

Οδός Ιακώβου.
Στο καπέλο μου πεταλούδα
-περπατώ, σχεδόν πετώ...

Jacob Street.
A butterfly on my hat:
I walk, almost fly

Alain Kervern (France)

ένα πουλί σκιρτά
επάνω στο τραπέζι
-τριγμοί λέξεων

a bird flutters
on the table:
creaks of words

However, what impressed me most is the fact that haiku societies were founded in a great number of countries in the past, except for Greece, until 2002, when my anthology was published. Five years before, it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to establish a Greek haiku society. Supported by my haiku friends from abroad, I started to contact a number of Greek poets but they all wrote other poetry forms and were already members of other literary societies, which made me think that such initiative was aimless. On second thoughts, however, I reconsidered this issue and suggested to one of my haiku friends that we promote haiku poems together. He initially accepted my proposal to turn his back on me later and to found "The Society of Greek Haiku" by himself without any notice or invitation to me to become a member of its directors' board. I overcame that incident as such things frequently

happen all over the world. I continued to be active in Greece and internationally by contacting foreign haikuists and presenting their works in online magazines. I have been awarded various individual recognitions and honors for my work as is the one I received from the “Hiroshima Memory Museum” of Tokyo. It was in 2014 that my work was represented in five (5) International Anthologies, four of which deal with haiku and one with “love poems”. I daresay that no one becomes famous for merely founding a literary society but what really counts is the quality of our work and our integrity.

Ζωή Σαβίνα
Χιροσίμα
σαν σε αγκαλιά
στη λίμνη της Χιροσίμα
-φεγγάρι ξεψυχά

Hiroshima
like being embraced,
the moon is dying
in Hiroshima’s lake

It is a wonderful thing to have a chance to express sad, strange, beautiful and cheerful images and walks of life in only 17 syllables, that sounds as if haiku invaded our space through a rift, resulting in an explosion of the haiku development and revealing haiku's silky fabric, which hasn't been transformed into a plastic material. The eyelids open and shut to let the light pass:

Frrrasst! An incision has been drawn.

Translation from Greek into English: Constantine Fourakis



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