

The development of haiku in Germany in the 20th century until today

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Based on the awakening interest in Eastern culture after the Paris World's Fair in 1896, in Germany the perception of haiku as a special and separate literary genre begins. Despite the cultural and language barriers and even more the political developments of the two world wars, haiku remains in the focus of a small but very interested literary public. This publicity expands in the sixties and seventies through the spread of Far Eastern ZEN thoughts into the spiritual practice of Western cultures in Germany. As a result, in the '80s and '90s haiku associations are emerging across the continents. The German haiku society was established in 1988. Since the late 1990s, haiku outside of Japan are strongly influenced by the globalization of Internet communication. In consequence the exchange of haiku across language barriers and cultures gives the haiku a new dynamic and meaning.

The three phases of reception and development of haiku in Germany

1. The perception in the beginning

Yvan Goll (1891-1950)

Five continents tremble,

When the grain price rises:

And not when you cry!

(1927)

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

a cemetery

and autumn fireflies

two or three

(1925)

Anna von Rottauscher: Ihr gelben Chrysanthemen (yellow chrysanthemums),

Wien 1939

Anna von Rottauscher (1892-1970) is an Austrian sinologist. Their work takes place in the phase of so-called "internal emigration". That is the time in Germany before and during World War II.

She wrote the first systematic transmission of Japanese haiku into German. As a template serves her Miyamori Asataros Anthology of Haiku, Tokyo 1932.

Especially she included a register with the classical Japanese writers, which was very helpful for the knowledge of German haiku writers about Japanese poets. In particular, the outstanding role of Basho in the opinion of Rottauscher is emphasized.

2. The literary and cultural implementation

Because of the history of the "Inner Emigration" and their topics, the focus of natural poetry in haiku becomes more and more important for the poets after the Second World War. The protagonist of this development is mainly the Austrian women poet Imma von Bodmershof (1895 - 1982). However, their 1962 book "Haiku" is different, because for the first time, she was able to realize the aesthetic potential of the Japanese short poem in German literature. Bodmershof's 1962 haiku book was enthusiastically celebrated as something in German literature "all new" and "unique":

Look in the middle of the egg

small and yellow a sun

How did she get in?

Strange moonlight

On the old sundial

Where does such time apply?

But despite this leap in quality Bodmershof also solidifies the role of haiku as a nature poem. This understanding continues even after its founding of the German Haiku Society. Through Margret Buerschaper's (chairwoman of the society) determination of the haiku as a "nature poem" that depicts a certain "season", this tradition was again emphatically confirmed in the mid and late 1980s. In fact, in the following years, the spiritual and, in the broadest sense, erotic line of German-speaking haiku literature has receded into the background, especially in the surrounding of the German Haiku Society founded in 1988.

3. Emancipation through globalization

Since 1988, the founding year of the German Haiku Society, until today in 2019, the haiku in Germany has emancipated itself in many ways into a genre that continues to process both traditional trends and accesses of (post)modern elements as well.

The starting point in Germany could be dated to the year 1967 in Freiburg. There was a much-acclaimed lecture by the American literary critic Leslie Fiedler. "Cross the Border - Close the

Gap" was his famous statement that generally equates the beginning of postmodernism in literature. Although much discussed in German literary circles, at least it has had little impact as Wikipedia writes today.

One who has been involved in Germany's post-modern haiku scene right from the start is the German poet Uli Becker (born 1953). His erotic haiku became especially well-known in Germany, here are 2 examples:

Why pick the stars
from the sky? Her tip would be
underground parking
Her kiss an echo
of the plums from the fridge,
so sweet and so cold

Becker refers here to W. C. Williams famous poem "This Is Just To Say".

(„This Is Just To Say // I have eaten / the plums / that were in / the icebox // and which / you were probably/ saving / for breakfast // Forgive me / they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold.”)

Despite the serious differences between the Haiku Beckers and the Haiku Bodmershof's they both follow the same principle of assimilation. Both authors have added the Japanese genus to an already existing poetic conception to realize a new form to develop German literature further on.

Nevertheless, in the course of the 1990s, modern developments in the world of haiku becoming more and more part of the journal of the German Haiku Society, which is published four times a year and which is called: SOMMERGRAS (in English: SUMMERGRASS)

This development is accompanied by new receptions of Japanese classical literary prototypes. In particular, the translation work of the German Japanese expert Ekkehard May opens up new and well-founded insights into the classic haiku world and helps to combine the forms and imagery of the classic haiku with the own german cultural identity. The emerging possibilities of digital exchange of haiku's via internet open up new ways of exchange between the cultures inside a country or between the countries and the continents. By this, haiku becomes more and more a respected part of literary culture today in Germany.

Here are three haiku examples from the German speaking world. All three come from the 21st century and all three are prize winners of major haiku competitions:

Winter evening.

With small stitches appears

the smile of the doll.

Ingrid Kunschke

In my mailbox

The nest of a little tit

Better you do not write me

Gerhard Habarta

currants

my hands washing

memories *Simone K. Busch*

Some thoughts about the spiritual dimension of German haiku

In my view and in the context of German haiku poetry this question is very difficult to answer. From the beginning the German Haiku Society has been a real literary society. In my experience members of the society with a Zen Buddhist attitude do not write haiku in a different style. Moreover, anyone who cares deeply about the haiku will sooner or later try to understand or get to know the Japanese traditions, some in spirit by reading or contemplating, the others at the body in various practices from sitting to archery and still some others performing both. Different ways, same spirit.

By this background I would like to conclude with three haiku, haiku of people who have meanwhile died and in whose life the haiku and haiku writing has played a very central role on their different ways. The spiritual depth of these three haiku is obvious and reveals the significance and greatness of the small form.

The first haiku comes from Margret Buerschaper. She has been the central figure in the founding of the German Haiku Society in 1988. She has lived and has worked for 15 years for the dissemination of Haiku as chairwoman of the Haiku Society. This haiku is her legacy for the immediate time after her death:

When I die ...

pick a field bouquet

sing a hiking song

The second haiku comes from Günther Klinge, a Munich entrepreneur who combined his intense love for Japan with haiku writing. He was a big supporter of the German Haiku Society. Also he is well known as someone who wrestles every day with the words to succeed for a haiku:

today I think

at sunsets

after my death

And the third haiku is by Carl Heinz Kurz, who helped many haiku authors in the seventies and eighties to publish their own haiku and who roamed the world across the continents accompanied by himself and writing haiku:

like crows are pawing

I know since childhood

much more I do not know

The very brief aspects of the German haiku history are mainly taken from the famous habilitation work of Andreas Wittbrodt: *Hototogisu ist keine Nachtigall (transl.: Hototogisu is no nightingale)*, Göttingen 2005.