

## **Haiku: to enter the fullness of here-and-now**

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*This research is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action, grant No 753561.*

Joint publication of *Nota Bene*, issue 46 and "Haiku world", issue 5

I will begin my presentation with a part of a poem. It is not a haiku, but in my opinion it fully expresses the idea I will talk about – haiku as the entry into the fullness of the moment, from where all transformations, becomings and unfoldings are possible.

The poem is written by Nikolay Milchev and begins like this:

*On the right – the echo of stream,*

*on the left – the flashes of sun.*

*And a little spider weaving*

*a thread of white light.*

Further, the poem talks about the free play of the creator who creates and enjoys creation, for whom the act of creation is as natural as the game for the child.

This poem is an example of poetry written from the position of the centre within the circle of changes, which is also the ever-new centre of the creative happening. Moreover, it even visually expresses the idea that I will present – haiku as entering into the gap between two realities that are not isolated entities but reflections and echoes vibrating in their changeability, from one side, and reaching the thread of the axis that might connect or divide them, from the other.

In Daoism, the centre within the circle of changes is called the pivot of dao, 道枢 (Zhuangzi, 2), the axis of motion. Interestingly, the Chinese character, which we translate as a pivot, means a door hinge – i.e., this is the axis that allows transition and entry into a new state. In this sense, the pivot is also a threshold, and what is the threshold – an emptiness opened to something that is about to unfold, an emptiness that you can get through. This is the area of

endless possibilities at the centre of the world circle, where the events are yet to come and the potential for their realisation is inexhaustible:

*When that and this both fail to get their counterpart, we have what is called the pivot point of the Dao. The pivot gets placed at the centre of the circle in order to respond to the infinite. Affirmations involve an infinity, and denials also involve an infinity. Therefore it is said: "There is nothing like brightness". (Zhuangzi, 2)*

The achievement of this pivot can be interpreted in both the epistemological and ontological sense. On the one hand, it is the insight of the mutuality of opposites "*this is also that, and that is also this*", where any affirmation is also a denial, and vice versa. This, however, is also a pre-potential state from which all possibilities and un-possibilities spring, this is the state of flexibility and openness to all states, events and processes.

I think that haiku, as well as every true poetry, reaches exactly this pivot at the centre of changes, which is a pure potentiality, where the actualisation of possibilities is yet to come. Therefore, from this position any links between future unfoldings are possible. Therefore poetry, and every real creativity as well, is able to connect seemingly impossible thing, and it does it in an effortless and natural way. When the link between things is made from this level, it is perceived as completely natural, however strange, unknown or unexpected it might be.

*Sparrows come – just to drink from the afternoon*

*and just to fly over the cups and over the world.*

*Sparrows are shaggy and they do not fly, they walk*

*and the air is their rounded earth. (Nikolay Milchev)*

This naturalness of links is a sign of the true poetry. When the centre of unfoldings is not reached, the connections are violent and artificial, they might provoke our intellectual admiration, but they do not resonate in us.

For Eastern thought, this centre is not some transcendent extreme to be achieved. Every concrete thing or event can lead us to it. It is at the heart of every process and can be reached from anywhere.

It is not accidental that haiku should be concrete. For the Far-eastern thought, it is exactly through the concrete that universal is attained, and universal is manifested only through and in the concrete one.

With its brevity, haiku represents precisely such compressed breakthrough to the centre, from which the unfoldings are immense.

This is clearly visible in its form, where important is the empty, unspoken space or state between two different perspectives or positions (in time, space, thought, etc.), such as the "echo of the stream" and the "flashes of sun".

We could ask whether haiku is objective or subjective, whether it depicts an external picture or a landscape of the soul, whether it is external or internal, natural or human. The answer to these questions cannot be found in terms of opposing dichotomies, but should be sought in the Far Eastern understanding of non-duality.

Sometimes haiku looks just like a picture or a description of a story. Sometimes it depicts our inner state. Is it a drawing, however, only of the inner or of the outer landscape? I would say that haiku is neither only about the inner nor only for the outer, neither only objective nor only subjective.

Haiku is rather an expression of the relation between the inner and the outer, in which they are not distinguished anymore. The invisible relationship, indicated mostly with a dash or simply by the absence or emptiness, is what haiku expresses and leads to. Haiku is entering through the gap of the relation into the deepest levels of the processual ontology, where there is neither being nor non-being, but only possibilities for becomings and unfoldings.

If the external processes unfold over time, to enter into the depth means entering into the limitlessness of the moment, where time has stopped in a smooth and complete sphericity. This is similar to the moment of leaving the "Matrix" or to the description of "The Book of Mots" by Ivan Metodiev, where the bell transformed the world in such a way that "directions changed their places" and "everything, although moving, was stationary" and every boy could take the hawk "as a plaster figurine off the shelf" from various places of his flight.

The gap of the moment is actually the only thing we really have. To enter the fullness of the moment, to reach the universal source through the most transient and to allow others to achieve this state, this is haiku.

One of the most interesting and unexpected for the Western mind examples of the action from the position of the empty core of the moment is given in the famous Zhuangzi parable for the cook Din.

*His cook was cutting up an ox for the ruler Wen Hui. Whenever he applied his hand, leaned forward with his shoulder, planted his foot, and employed the pressure of his knee, in the audible ripping off of the skin, and slicing operation of the knife, the sounds were all in regular cadence. Movements and sounds proceeded as in the dance of 'the Mulberry Forest' and the blended notes of the King Shou.' The ruler said, 'Ah! Admirable! That your art should have become so perfect!' (Having finished his operation), the cook laid down his knife, and replied to the remark, 'What your servant loves is the method of the Dao, something in advance of any art. When I first began to cut up an ox, I saw nothing but the (entire) carcass. After three years I ceased to see it as a whole. Now I deal with it in a spirit-like manner, and do not look at it with my eyes. The use of my senses is discarded, and my spirit acts as it wills. Observing the natural lines, (my knife) slips through the great crevices and slides through the great cavities, taking advantage of the facilities thus presented. My art avoids the membranous ligatures, and much more the great bones. A good cook changes his knife every year; (it may have been injured) in cutting – an ordinary cook changes his every month – (it may have been) broken. Now my knife has been in use for nineteen years; it has cut up several thousand oxen, and yet its edge is as sharp as if it had newly come from the whetstone. There are the interstices of the joints, and the edge of the knife has no (appreciable) thickness; when that which is so thin enters where the interstice is, how easily it moves along! The blade has more than room enough. Nevertheless, whenever I come to a complicated joint, and see that there will be some difficulty, I proceed anxiously and with caution, not allowing my eyes to wander from the place, and moving my hand slowly. Then by a very slight movement of the knife, the part is quickly separated, and drops like (a clod of) earth to the ground. Then standing up with the knife in my hand, I look all round, and in a leisurely manner, with an air of satisfaction, wipe it clean, and put it in its sheath.' The ruler Wen Hui said, 'Excellent! I have heard the words of my cook, and learned from them the nourishment of life.'*

Here are some of the key points we can draw from this parable:

Action from the position of the finest energy.

Forgetfulness of the self.

Merging with the object and forgetfulness of the object.

Awareness of the empty core of the things; emptiness as a source; this is not a flat emptiness but rather a spherical and full of potentiality void.

This is not observing from the outside but entering inside. As the knife enters the cavity of joints, so is it possible to enter the cavity of the joint *between* the object and the subject.

Stopping of the time. Exiting the matrix and entering the peaceful core of transformations.

Entering the level of emptiness where there is no things – the knife is so slim that it is between being and non-being – like dao that seems to be – and goes into the void.

What happens in this penetration? It is defined as "cutting," but cutting here is not a fragmentation into parts, but rather a removal of distinctions, a return to the original condition, to the suchness of things when the distinctions are yet to come. It is not accidental that the pieces fall like clods of earth, which refers us to the term for the big clod, which denotes the primordial unity, 大塊.

Besides, the action is defined as a dance, it has its own rhythm – it changes and preserves at the same time. It requires both relaxation and alertness, peace and movement. In this state, one has to look at all four directions and keep a circular look, that allows him to notice even the smallest details: "as if you were attaching your nose to the aquarium" (Book of Mots) for all these reasons and maybe for much more, the listener noted that he has understood how to feed life.

Haiku is just such an entry through the relationship of interaction and reaching the suchness of things. Therefore, when haiku is realised, it echoes in everybody.

I would not call the suchness of things archetypes or eidoses, for Daoists do not divide ideal and material worlds. Suchness is not an idea or an abstraction. It exists and unfolds only through the concrete processes. Therefore, in haiku, there should be no abstract generalisation, but a concrete typology. It is a touch to the deepest, which is not eternal and motionless as is the Western being, but is constantly changing, as it is in the Eastern processual vision.

Therefore, in haiku there is a sense of transience, but it penetrates into the vastness that is revealed through the gap of transition. This entering into the moment has the richness of eternity: completeness, integrity and sphericity. You are inside, and you can watch everything that is about to happen, you can stop even the flying bullet. In contrast to the still Western being, however, in the Eastern thought this fixed core is constantly unfolding into new events.

In such a way, things could be seen from all sides. This is neither the perspective of the observer, nor the perspective of the things themselves, but the point of view of their interaction.

Often, the brevity of haiku is misleading. However, it does not describe a picture. It enters inside and experiences, just as Mary Poppins enters the painting and experiences it.

Haiku is not sms poetry – a short message that disappears among others and from which we go quickly to another one. In the hectic world, we do not stop in the minutes. We live externally and let time to pass through us and run out. In such a way we lose our time, though we have so many means that – as if – are saving it (remember Michael Ende's Momo). We lose ourselves as well, while trying to show ourselves up (Daoists say, "He who put himself ahead could not be ahead"). Therefore, what we get is often false and misleading.

Maybe haiku – the open gap to the fullness and circularity of the moment, in spite of, or precisely because of its brevity, can help us live slower and in this way actually have much more life.

Because haiku, and every true creativity, leads us to the roots, brings us to the very beginning. It shows us how to forget ourselves in order to find ourselves – not as an isolated subject or as a manipulated object, but as an integral part of a large, constantly changing and vibrating whole, a part of the all-pervasive and all-embracing life.