

Gabriella Valaczkay: Seventeen nuggets

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Somebody scratched it into a Christmas ornament's surface, others wrote it to a necklace. There were students of Judit Vihar, who thought that their haiku would look good on Christmas candies' tinfoil or on an eggshell of a quail. The Haiku genre's masters meet at a national conference in Pécs, the cultural capital of Europe.



Toni Piccini's Haiga

„Some kind of Japanese poem maybe?”, „Sort of a wisdom?”, „I have no idea!” - this is how we can sum up the guessings about the Japanese poetry genre from the 17th century. The most surprising answer to this quickie survey was the line „5-7-5” what I were told by a young man from the other side of the corridor as it would be the only and most obvious answer.

This is exactly like he said Haiku is not just a simple genre. Not just a non-self centered, nature-focused genre of the Japanese Literature, but also a form of poetry. For instant, we can read funny japanese poems –Senryu (川柳), or death poems –Jisei (辞世の句) in this 5-7-5 form.

You can get to know this poetry form better, if you visit the Hunyor Hotel in Pécs on the weekend. In this national meeting, Haiku writers meet up to read and write haikus, participate in workshops and give lectures. The World Haiku Festival 2010's main organizer was Dr. Judit Vihar, who is the President of the Japan-Hungary Friendship Association and a great translator as well.

„The World Haiku Festival is not certainly an annual event. Let's say, we meet up if one of the associate countries can take the responsibility holding this meeting. I first met with the World Haiku Association's President, Banya Natsuishi in a conference in London, and also, I had the pleasure to translate one of his works. When he found out that Pécs became the cultural capital of Europe, he suggested to keep the World Haiku Festival in Hungary for this time. It is quite a honor you know, because up until now, only Lithuania had the chance in Europe to hold an important conference, like the World Haiku Festival.- Dr. Judit Vihar said.

By the way she organized audience-friendly programs as well. For instance two exhibitions on the spot: one of them includes the haigas (haiku with picture) of the Italian artist Toni Piccini. The other

one introduces the homeworks of the Karoli Gaspar University's students. In the seminar of Judit Vihar students have to write they own haikus and moreover, find out some interesting form for them. Somebody scratched it into a Christmas ornament's surface, others wrote it to a necklace. Some students thought that the best form to a haiku is a candle, or an eggshell of a quail. Visitors are now welcome to have a look at 52 of the creative ideas of the students, as well as the installations of the haikus of the festival's participants, placed to the windows of the shops in Pecs.

Interestingly the acclaimed Hungarian haiku poets, like Akos Fodor, Imre Babits or Laszlo Bertok don't take a part in the Festival. But why starts a Hungarian poet write haikus at the first place? This is a frequently asked even from Tibor Zalan. Some times the reproach-like sentence "There are so many beautiful Hungarian poetic form!" follows the question also.

One of Zalan's reasons is personal: he wanted to surprise his Japanese friend with a haiku as a goodbye present. The other reason was the impersonality. "For many years I wrote I-poems, and I was interested if I can somehow decolonize the poem from myself. Make it impersonal but still personal."

Moreover, Zalan had written a lot of 800-1000 word poems before and he became interested, how it is possible to write in such a short form. And to top it all, even the number of moras is fixed too. He found interesting the way to get close to this exotic poetry form, which was able to control even samurais. (Before seppuku (Japanese ritual suicide) samurais were chant haikus for hours.) Anyhow, it's strange, that this short, hardly controlled form makes European poets so free. "We are like gold washers. We have to seek several gallon of water to find a little gold nugget. We are using a lot of variations, until we find the right one. And then we find the 17 gold nuggets.