

The Haiku

"My" Haiku¹

My problem: how to pass from the Notation (of the Present) to the Novel, from a short, fragmented form ("notes") to a long, continuous form → the decision to concern myself with haiku for a short while *so as* to then be concerned with the novel is therefore less paradoxical than it might seem. Haiku = exemplary form of the Notation of the Present = minimal act of enunciation, ultrashort form, an atom of a sentence that *notes* (marks, delimits, glorifies: endows with a *fama*)² a tiny element of "real," present, concomitant life.

Nothing historical → "My" haiku—"My" doesn't refer, or doesn't *ultimately* refer, to an egotism, a narcissism (objections that, so I'm told, have been made of this course) but to a Method: method of exposition, method of speech: not *speaking* the subject but not censoring the subject either (which is completely different), changing the *rhetorical* conditions of the Intellectual—means: crystallizing theme, theme with variations, geometrical site of reflections, problems and preferences = "simulacrum," "alibi"; act of naming: "to everything that I'm about to say, I give the name haiku, *with a certain degree of plausibility*," cf. "I baptize you Carp."³ = I baptize you haiku → something of the same vague, insistent, and probably distortive relationship as that between the classical authors and Antiquity: do we consider Racine's relationship to the Greeks to be the same as Jean-Pierre Vernant's or Marcel Detienne's? The real difference (clearly I'm not speaking of differences in values here) is that they had a good grasp of Greek and Latin, whereas I don't read Japanese at all—Even if I did! As a general rule, the translations of the classics need to be revised: a translation needs to be redone every twenty-five years. Which says a lot about the *certitudes* of philology. Here, then, it's a matter of a Discourse, not of Explanation, nor indeed of Interpretation, but of *Resonance*.

Valéry, biog. 45

5-7-5

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The Haiku in Its Materiality

I'm not saying: in its history, nor even its structure (technique), but such as it presents itself to a Frenchman. It's a *tercet* → French has no, or only very few, (autonomous and/or continuous) tercets; it begins with the quatrain ≠ Dante.⁴ Paul Valéry: "Dante gave nothing to the French (other than *Paradiso*: a kind of abstract versification)"; cf. *Le Cimetière marin*.⁵

Japanese: a strongly syllabic language; clear, well-placed syllables (the act of syllabification has been linked to manducation: movement of the lower jawbone; we chew our words: bites); a syllabic alphabet (*Kana*) repeats the *Kanji* (especially proper names and linking words)⁶ → the words are relatively easy to pronounce, which means it's relatively easy to make oneself understood: easier to take a taxi in Tokyo than it is in New York.

This tercet: 5 + 7 + 5 syllables Etienne (5-7-5)

<i>Furu ike ya</i>	<i>Une vieille mare</i>
<i>Kawazu tobikomu</i>	<i>Une raine en vol plongeant</i>
<i>Mizu no oto</i>	<i>Et le bruit de l'eau</i> ⁷

Very poor translation! Cf. *infra*.⁸

That 5-7-5 formula: exceptions, adaptations, liberties taken, a certain tendency toward free verse. This matters to us: if that tendency is followed, then what we're left with is pure, unversified, unmetred notation (the only constraint: the presence of the seasonal word; cf. *infra*:⁹ although that too is contested) with, as always, a swing back the other way: there are those who call for a return to a strict 575 (let's agree to call haiku by what's almost the name of a cannon!);¹⁰ now, what *we* consume is a line of free verse, and *we find it pleasing*, despite the absence of meter. Here, a problem of translation arises, which takes two forms:

Translation

1. To emphasize the enigma: what comes to me from a very foreign (very strange) language whose basic principles elude me—and furthermore from a "poetic" discourse—still manages to touch me, interest me, enchant me (yet I'm in no position to check the translation, even from a distance). I'm entirely in the hands of the translator, but he *doesn't present an obstacle* → a situation of *familiarity* that's altogether paradoxical → Think of the *exclusion* that an utterly opaque foreign language represents: Valéry in Prague. "Lost abroad

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in an unknown language. Everyone understands one another, and together are human. But not you, or you . . ." ¹¹ To me, the haiku is human, absolutely human. How is that possible (for me, who never experiences that sensation of familiarity with other kinds of translated poetry)?

This is how I explain it to myself: the haiku is the conjunction of a "truth" (not a conceptual truth, but of the *Instant*) and a form. I'm thinking of another remark of Valéry's: "to show that pure thought and the discovery of truth as such can only ever aspire to the discovery or the construction of some form or other": ¹² yes, I believe that: that form (some form or other) proves, manifests truth (and not only "reasoning"). But for us, the French, the haiku isn't a form.—Or rather it *is* a form, and this can only be explained by the fact that the brevity of the enunciation—how it is *framed*—is already a form in itself; the short Form is an inductor of truth: and it is this that we sense when we read a haiku, despite all the remoteness of the language and the poetic structure. *Poetry and Truth*: ¹³ the appropriate syntagm. Poetry: its sole justification: truth. In Poetry, form and only form is what enables us to *touch* the truth; the tactile power of form: to touch the word, the line, the tercet.

2. Second problem: "poetic" translations of haiku. Some translators have sought to translate the 5-7-5 syllables into (unrhymed) French verse (cf. Etiemble). But to do so makes no sense. Our ability to detect a meter, a beat, a syllabic rhythm is dependent on having already had the metrical formula whispered to us by our poetic culture, on the code functioning like a route, a path, imprinted onto, incised into our brains that's then retraced, *recognized* in the performance of the poem; there is no rhythm as such: all rhythm is *cultural*; otherwise, the formula falls *flat* (it isn't a formula): it doesn't work, it exerts no fascination, it fails to *send us to sleep*. What I mean is: the function of all rhythm is either to excite or to *calm* the body, which, on a certain level, at some, distant, profound, primitive point in the body, amounts to the same thing: to excite or to calm the body by means of the formula is to assimilate the body to a nature, to reconcile it, to put an end to its separation, to *unsever* it. It's been claimed (Morier) ¹⁴ that meter (with its monotony) promotes euphoria and romance, that it's calming (≠ anarchic, stirring rhythm, exclamations, surprises, emotions, etc.).—Now French, I think (I haven't checked this): has few heptasyllables and no pentasyllables (as ever: to be checked because *everything exists*, ¹⁵ though not all of it is *memorable*).

Typography. Aeration

And yet, the haikist Tercet exerts a fascination over us—not because of its meter, which is impossible in French, but because of its size, its tenuity, that is to say, metonymically, the aeration it grants the space of discourse → Haiku: the short form *par excellence*; this is a fact of reading: short forms draw the eye to the page (cf. a phenomenology of verse, even and especially of free verse: we don't read the lines as we would if they were set out end to end; the blank space attracts, reposes, distracts the eye). We're drawn to the short form as toward something that will hold our interest. Example: *Epigrams* (Martial): we go directly to the shortest ones; as soon as we spot one only two lines long, that's the one we'll pick first → aeration of the page, essential for the *picking* of haiku (in the Munier edition, for instance, there are only three per page, that's all).¹⁶ So, to appreciate a haiku—even and especially in French, where its constitutive meter disappears—it has to be seen written down, with the line breaks: a little aerated tome, a little block of writing, like an ideogrammatical square; ultimately, on another, deeper mental level, unfettered by the superficial divisions of everyday discourse, it could be said that haiku—that *a* haiku, it alone, in its entirety, its finitude, its solitude on the page, forms a single ideogram, that is to say a “word” (and not a discourse broken down into sentences). (1) Valéry quotes these lines from Mallarmé: “I have managed to get rid of punctuation [Sollers!]; the line is an entity, a new word—never heard before, someone who punctuates needs crutches, *his sentence doesn't walk / work on its own* {*sa phrase ne va pas tout seule*}.”¹⁷ → The haiku walks / works on its own: it is a word. Indeed, in the corpus, it will be necessary get rid of the punctuation, to make corrections. (2) Despite, or by way of its sophistication, the haiku has a certain affinity with, is in fundamental “sympathy” with the “holo-phrase” (Kristeva, Lacan): a verbal gesture that can't be broken down, a nonthetic expression of desire.¹⁸

So: typography determines reading; it *constitutes* the haiku, even once its metrical constitution has been destroyed. Proof (so to speak): the problem Coyaud presents:¹⁹ Are there some French poems that come close to the haiku?—No, probably not, for reasons that will resurface every now and then; but, what is certain: if here, in France, there were some form or other that might sometimes recall the haiku, it wouldn't be a poem, however short; sometimes a single line can do it—a line that resonates like a haiku: though, again, and despite its seeming childish, that line would have to be divided into three parts—it

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would have to *mimic* the haiku visually, even if those divisions have no metrical reality: once again, the *aeration* of the written form is part of the haiku's mode of being. Cf. (1) Mallarmé and free verse: "it's difficult to write free verse without breaks."²⁰ Here, breaks: plugs of air, of white space. (2) The relationship between the written form and painting in the Orient, insofar as that relationship partici-
 pates in the creation of so-called empty spaces.

For example, this line by Miłosz (Schehadé)²¹ is almost a haiku—
 later on, we'll see what makes it not quite a haiku: the *excess* that is
 its deficiency (the familiar *You*, the lover's interjection):

You, sad, sad sound of rain on the rain

It would gain more in haiku (in "haikuity") if we were to write it
 thus:

*You, sad
 Sad sound of rain
 On the rain*

I repeat: don't underestimate what the *layout* of speech on the page
 can do. All oriental (Chinese) art: a respect for *space*, which is to
 say (let's be more precise) for *spacing*. As we know: the Japanese
 are far from familiar with the Kantian categories of Space and
 Time, but with the category—which runs through them both—of
 Spacing, of the Interval: *Ma*.

1. When we speak of the (oriental) "Void," it shouldn't be in a
 Buddhist sense but more sensually: as a respiration, an aeration
 and, so to speak, as a "*matter*"; a physicist's saying: "If there were
 no space between matter then the entire human race would fit into
 a thimble" → Haiku: the "antithimble," condensation that's antito-
 talizing, and it's this that the haikist tercet says. (I leave it to you to
 interpret this "*protestation of the Void*" (as we say: protestation of
 virility) thematically: respiratory drive, to be free from suffocation-
 anxiety, the fantasy of Oxygen, of Euphoric, Jubilatory Respiration).

2. The Japanese *Ma*: space and time (spacing and interval): haiku
 also involves a practice of spaced Time (cf. *infra* on the Instant).²²

The Fascicule

There are those who'll say: you're expounding a philosophy of the
written haiku (when of course, originally, they were *spoken*), but
 I'm not interested in the origins, in the historical "truth" of haiku;

my concern is the haiku *for me*; me, a French subject who reads collections of translations (it's the practice of this lecture course to always start out from the *subject*: enunciating, reading). I'm not sure that I'd know how to read a haiku (I mean: to read in a way that would *produce* an effect of truth); for that matter, in what context, in what *layer* of other discourses, according to what *Ma?* (*where* to read haiku?)—The *voice* seems impossible to me. → So, in order to articulate what I want to say about the haiku, I've prepared a small collection of haiku; I shall refer to the haiku that figure on the fascicule as and when our topic requires it; this isn't an *anthology*, then, but a *corpus*.²³

The translations are taken from:

Blyth, Reginald Horace. *A History of Haiku*. 4 vols. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1963.²⁴

Coyaud, Maurice. *Fourmis sans ombre. Le livre du haiku. Anthologie promenade*. Paris: Phébus, 1978.

———. *Fêtes au Japon. Haiku*. PAF (Pour l'analyse du folklore) 38, rue de Wagram, Paris, 75013.

Munier, Roger. *Haiku*. Preface by Yves Bonnefoy. Paris: Fayard, 1978.

Yamata, Kikou. "Sur des lèvres japonaises," with a letter-preface by Paul Valéry, in *Le Divan*. 1924.

For the lines from French poems in relation to haiku:

Schehadé, Georges. *Anthologie du vers unique*. Paris: Ramsay, 1977.