



## BAN'YA NATSUSHI: AN INTERVIEW



DVR: Here in Croatia, we usually ask haikins how they met haiku, who was their first master. it would be interesting to know how you started to write haiku.

BN: I began to write haiku during my junior high school days. My classmates submitted to monthly magazine for youth, after watching their haiku selected, I began to wrote.

DVR: Is haiku indeed, present in everyday life of Japanese people today?

BN: For some people yes, but no for other people.

DVR. In a certain way, we know how much you work for haiku, but, what has haiku done for you. Did haiku change your life? Can you imagine yourself without haiku in your life, or without such a large engagement being the president of the World Haiku Association?

BN: Haiku had been my passion, but now my mission. After inauguration of WHA, I have been attacked by numerous misunderstandings and jealousies, beyond them haiku is encouraging me to live in this world very confused.

DVR. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870 - 1966) traveled around the world, teaching and writing, bringing Japanese culture to the Western world. Carl G. Jung said of him: "Suzuki's works on Zen Buddhism are among the best contributions to the knowledge of living Buddhism. We cannot be sufficiently grateful to the author, first for the fact of his having brought Zen closer to Western understanding, and secondly for the manner in which he has achieved this task". Do you think western haikins have a true understanding of Zen?

BN: I think C. G. Jung is quite wrong about Japan and Zen. Zen is not so deeply connected with true haiku as poetry. So, your question repeats C. G. Jung's fault. Moreover Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki's remark about Zen is not so clever as you think.

DVR. Culture, religion, politics . they play such a large role in THE development of human beings. Yet, not many of us can walk away into Walden, as Henry David Thoreau (1817 -1862) did, under pressure of civilization's growth and swift changes it brought, then, by the end of 19th century. Is haiku indeed helping modern man under the pressure of constant and swift changes losing his touch with Nature? If so, can you try to explain how, what satori does to a human being?

BN: Satori is not an aim of haiku writing. Nevertheless haiku writing can brings us a wonderful improvement of author's spirit and soul. I'am often encouraged and purified by nature to write good haiku. I don't accept cliché about "nature" that human being can return into pure nature. Human being is always destroying nature. Such human being belongs to nature, too.

DVR: Was there a moment, in your opinion, in the development of haiku when Western philosophies might have had some influence on haiku? For example, some analysts say, perhaps for the first time, it happened when Shiki worked on the revival of hokku, criticizing Basho's work. What do you think?

BN: It is true that Western culture influenced modern haiku. Shiki Masaoka didn't know well Western culture, after Shiki, some Japanese haiku poets were influenced by German, French and American poetry. Basho was not a Buddhist, he was influenced by Chinese literature (poetry) and philosophy.

DVR: Haiku today, especially after a century of its immigration to the United States, has undergone some changes. Has it changed in Japan as well, after Shiki's reform? Some authors talk about several trends in haiku, we talk about traditional, contemporary, innovative, haiku carrying elements of Zen.. What is haiku? What is your interpretation?

BN: As I said before, Zen is not directly connecte with haiku writing. Haiku writing is quite popular in USA, but not accepted by intelligent people, because haiku writing in USA didn't create clearly haiku poem of high quality. In Japan, almost so-called haiku poets imitate previous haiku, but a few poets are trying writing really new haiku to get more complicated, comprehensive and liberated vision.

DVR: Reginald Horace Blyth, (1898 - 1964) man who left the West and lived and wrote in Japan wrote: "These are some of the characteristics of the state of mind which the creation and appreciation of haiku demand: Selflessness, Loneliness, Grateful Acceptance, Wordlessness, Non-intellectuality, Contradictoriness, Humor, Freedom, Non-morality, Simplicity, Materiality, Love, and Courage". - *Haiku, Volume One*, p. 154 I suppose, every haijin would agree with at least a part of this statement. Would you give us your own thoughts on it? And please explain how to read this message, how to live it?

BN: R. H. Blyth's remark about haiku is only a moralist's and excessively simplified remark. He learned a little bit Zen and haiku. Blyth brought a misunderstanding about haiku to overseas countries. Blyth could not understand well Japanese language and haiku poetics. Can you understand European poetry, merely based on Christianity without knowing European language? Blyth's fault is such understanding European poetry from only Christian view point without any linguistic and cultural knowledge. Why do you repeat this childish fault of Blyth? I respect Christianity and Zen, but I'm searching for another spiritual horizon.

DVR: About your haiku collection FLYING POPE Bin Akio writes:

"Last year I enjoyed "Flying Pope", a haiku series written by Banya Natsuishi. At first the motif of these works was the irony of existence having absolute status. The next example shows this clearly.

howaito-hausu-e sora tobu houou kage utsusu

To the White House  
the shadow cast  
by the Flying Pope

However, these are not mere irony. An excellent point of this haiku series is expressing the humanity of the man of power. This is kokkei humor. So in some works, the Pope seems to be Mr.Natsuishi himself.

Kokkei, deep and hidden humor common to Easterners, sometimes is not simple to understand by people from the West. Can you try to help "the rest of the world", in a simple way, to understand the difference between Eastern and Western humor?

BN: Very difficult to explain it in English. Because Western language is a one-lane-road, while Japanese language is a spiral. Humor for me includes deep hate and love, or deep sympathy and criticism at the same time.

DVR: You are a professor at Meiji University , the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the haiku quarterly "Ginyu", the Director of World Haiku Association, Editor in chief of the World Haiku Association Anthologies... You travel throughout the world, organize festivals, building haiku bridges among people. All this experience and continual movement among people of different cultures. what would be your message to the world, told in simple sentences, nowadays with the crisis in political, economical and moral fields of life that has become planetary?.

BN: We are always in crisis as well as happiness. People in advanced countries are forgetting spiritual depth, so forgetting the importance of poetry, while poeple in developing countries are living poetry on ordinary days. From another view point, we are in a remarkably crucial peroid for a big and long changing around the world. I cannot say this chaging in a word. We need more

mutual understanding beyond crisis often repeated in this century. World-wide Haiku writing is essentially linked with this mutual understanding which the 21st century really needs.

DVR: Some astronauts commented on our Planet as "the boundless Earth" Arts can exist and develop thinking the same way. Haiku has become planetary as well. In how many countries is haiku being written nowadays, and in how many languages?

BN: Unfortunately I don't know the exact number, but I guess they are writing haiku in more than 100 countries. Haiku not connected with Zen neither with Christianity can be creative.

DVR. Besides being a bridge between people, can the popularization and mass writing of haiku harm haiku as a serious poetry with such long tradition?

BN: I understand very well your question. I'm always depressed with some superficial haiku writing in any language, while very delighted with haiku poem of high quality which gives me energy to live well.

DVR: Finally, would you be so kind and quote haiku written by an old Japanese master, you seem to like very much and why!

BN: Rough sea--  
over Sado Isle  
extends the Milky Way  
Basho Matsuo

In this haiku, I can find almost everything that human being is involved in.

Hvala!

Biography:

Ban'ya Natsuishi which is the penname of Masayuki Inui, was born in Aioi City, Hyôgo Prefecture, Japan in 1955. He studied at Tokyo University where he received a Masters of Arts in Comparative Literature and Culture in 1981. In 1992



he was appointed Professor at Meiji University where he continues to teach. In 1993 he gave lectures at Jilin University in China, he was invited to haiku meeting in 1994 in Germany, in 1995 in Italy. From 1996 to 1998 a guest research fellow at Paris 7<sup>th</sup> University. In 1997 he held “Contemporary Haiku” event in Provence. In 1998 with Sayumi Kamakura, he founded international haiku quarterly "Ginyu", became its Publisher and Editor-in-Chief. In 2000, after attendance to Global Haiku Festival in USA, he co-founded the World Haiku Association, in Slovenia. Currently works as the association’s Director. In 2001 attended to Vilenica Poetry Festival in Slovenia, in 2003 to Struga Poetry Evenings in Macedonia, in the same year worked as the Chairman of The Steering Committee for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Haiku Association Conference which was held in Japan. In 2004 he was invited to Poetry at Porto Santo in Portugal. In 2005 he attended to the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Haiku Association Conference in Bulgaria, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wellington International Poetry Festival and presided international haiku session of Euro-Japan Poetry Festival in Tokyo. In 2006 he was invited to Poetry Spring in Vilnius of Lithuania and Ohrid P.E.N. Conference in Macedonia. In 2007 he visited Inner Mongolia and promoted haiku writing there and held the 4<sup>th</sup> World Haiku Association Conference in Tokyo as its Chair. In 2008, after attendance to poetry festivals in Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania & Italy, he held Tokyo Poetry Festival 2008 as its Director. In 2009 after attendance to Lahti International Writers’ Reunion 2009 in Finland, he co-organized Druskininkai Poetic Fall & the 5<sup>th</sup> World Haiku Association 2009 in Lithuania., with Kornelius Platelis. His attendance to World Haiku Festival Pecs 2010 in Hungary, Haiku-in-Ghent-in-Haiku in Belgium and Sha’ar International Poetry Festival 2010 in Israel scheduled.

Among his awards are: in 1980 he was recommended as Poet of the Year by *Haiku-hyôron*, in 1981 he won First Prize in a competition sponsored by haiku monthly *Haiku-kenkyû*, in 1984 the Shii-no-ki Prize, in 1991 the Modern Haiku Association Prize, in 2002 the Hekigodô Kawahigashi Prize of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ehime Haiku Prize, in 2008 AZsacra International Poetry Award for *Taj Mahal Review*.

**Main Japanese publication:**

*Ryôjô-ki*, Seichi-sha, 1983; *Poetics of Haiku*, Seichi-sha, 1983; *Métropolitique*, Bokuyô-sha, 1985; *Shinkû-ritsu*, Shichô-sha, 1986; *Dictionary of Keywords for Contemporary Haiku*, Rippu-shobô, 1990; *The Fugue of Gods*, Kôeidô-shoten,

1990; *Opera in the Human Body*, Shoshi-yamada, 1990; *Waves of Joy*, Shoshi-yamada, 1992; *Poetic Spirit of Genius*, Yûshorin, 1993; *The Science of Megaliths and Big Trees*, Shoshi-yamada, 1995.

*Haiku: A Century's Quest*, Kôdansha, 1995 (edited). *Contemporary Haiku Manuel*, Rippu-shobô, 1996; *Haiku Is Our Friend*, Kyôiku-shuppan, 1997; *Earth Pilgrimage*, Rippu-shobô, 1998; *Haiku Troubadours 2000*, Ginyu Press, 2000 (edited); *Collected Haiku Poems by Ban'ya Natsuishi: Crossing Borders*, Chûseki-sha, 2001; *Chibimaruko-chan's Haiku Class Room*, Shûei-sha, 2002 (edited); *A Guide to World Haiku*, Chûseki-sha, 2003; *World Haiku 2005: No. 1*, Nishida-shoten, 2004 (edited); *World Haiku 2006: No. 2*, Shichigatsudo, 2005 (edited); *Right Eye in Twilight*, Chûseki-sha, 2006; *World Haiku 2007: No. 3*, Shichigatsudo, 2007 (edited); *Renku: A través do ar / Through the Air/A travers l'air*, Shichigatsudo, 2007 (co-authored with Casimiro de Brito); *Tenbô Gendai no Shiika Vol. 10*, Meiji-shoin, 2007 (co-authored); *World Haiku 2008: No. 4*, Shichigatsudo, 2008 (edited); *Flying Pope: 161 Haiku*, Koorosha, 2008; *World Haiku 2009: No. 5*, Shichigatsudo, 2009 (edited); *Nichiyôbi no Zuisô 2008*, Nihon-keizai-shinbun-shuppansha, 2009 (co-authored); *Labyrinth of Vilnius*, Shichigatsudo, 2009; *World Haiku 2010: No. 6*, Shichigatsudo, 2010 (edited); *Haiku Juomujin*, Chûseki-sha, 2010 (co-authored with Sayumi Kamakura).

**Overseas publication:**

*Haiku: antichi e moderni*, Garzanti Editore, Italy, 1996 (co-authored).

*A Future Waterfall: 100 Haiku from the Japanese*, Red Moon Press, USA, 1999 & 2004.

*Romanje po Zemlji*, Društvo Apokalipsa, Slovenia, 2000.

*Цветята на Вятъра*, Matom, Bulgaria, 2001.

*Poesia Sempre NÚMERO 17*, Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, Brazil, 2002 (co-authored).

*Haiku: Poetry Ancient & Modern*, MQP, UK, 2002 (co-authored).

*Haiku: the leaves are back on the tree*, Greece, 2002 (co-authored).

*Ombres et Lumières*, LCR, Bulgaria, 2003 (co-authored).

*Haiku: Poésies anciennes et Modernes*, Édition Vega, France, 2003 (co-authored).

*Странный Ветер*, Иностранка, Russia, 2003 (co-authored).

*The Road: world haiku*, Ango Boy, Bulgaria, 2004 (co-authored).

*Ribnik tišine: slovenska haiku antologija*, Društvo Apokalipsa, Slovenia, 2005 (co-authored).

*L'Anthologie du Poème Bref*, Les Dossiers d'Aquitaine, France, 2005 (co-authored).

*Right Eye in Twilight*, Wasteland Press, USA, 2006.

ÎMBRĂȚIȘAREA PLANETELOR (THE EMBRACE OF PLANETS), Edidura Făt-Frumos, Romania, 2006.

*Endless Helix: Haiku and Short Poems*, Cyberwit.net, India, 2007 & 2009.

*Le bleu du martin pêcheur: Haikus*, L'iroli, Beauvais, France, 2007 (co-authored).

*Madarak /Birds/鳥: 50 Haiku*, Balassi Kiadó, Hungary, 2007.

*Pellegrinaggio terrestre /Earth Pilgrimage /地球巡礼*, Albalibri Editore, Italy, 2007.

*Flying Pope: 127 Haiku /空飛ぶ法王 127俳句*, Cyberwit.net, India, 2008.

*Balsis no mākoņiem /Voices from the Clouds /雲から声*, Minerva, Latvia, 2008.

*MUNDUS poesie per un'etica del rifiuto*, Valtrend Editore Napoli, Italy, 2008 (co-authored).

KONCENTRIČNI KRUGOVI, PUNTA, Niš, Serbia, 2009 (tr. by Dragan J. Ristić).

*Music of the Twentieth Century*, A.P.F.Publisher, USA, 2010 (co-authored).

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