



AN INTERVIEW WITH SAŠA VAŽIĆ

DjVR: When I started to write haiku and spend more time on the Internet, it was so wonderful to receive e-messages from you, informing of happenings in the haiku world. I thank you for that with all my heart. I know you were sending the information to many poets. Why are you doing that?

SV: The answer is simple. I want my fellow poets and friends to be informed about happenings in the world haiku community. Therefore, whenever I come upon some information I think could be of interest to them, I simply copy/paste a link or text and bcc it to them. I am also most happy when I have a chance to congratulate someone who has received some award for his or her poetry.

DjVR: As an poet/editor/translator, I believe you enrolled many poets into the world of haiku. How come it is so difficult to encourage poets to start studying and writing haiku? Is our Western culture so much different from the Eastern?

SV: I don't think it's difficult to encourage poets to start studying and writing haiku. They themselves are either interested in haiku or not. I don't seek them. I may notice some good novice poets, but then again I don't address them to offer

them any advice or instruction. I may ask them to do an interview with them if I find them interesting enough, but most often they ask me for some information, and I am happy to assist them if I can.

Haiku poetry seems difficult to be grasped in a short time. The more I study it, the more I discover how complicated and difficult it is to be comprehended and written just like that. On the other hand, there are many haiku schools of thought, and for one to choose among them, one needs a good knowledge of the genre, its history and development. One needs to constantly read and practice.

One of my friends told me that he had spent 20 years of his life to do a book that finally got international recognition. Haiku is not a game, and if it is, it's a serious game.

As for Western and Eastern cultures, they are of course very different, as different as are the material and spiritual worlds. It could seem that this has changed, but no matter how hard you try to change any outward appearance of things and bodies, what is inside is much more important, and cannot be easily uprooted and changed. Western world is more materially oriented whereas Eastern world is more spiritually oriented. Despite attempts of Western world, and I mean America in the first place, with its greed and intention to rule over the whole world by waging wars aimed not as humanitarian actions, as they so often proclaim, the aim is obvious and it is to take away the reaches of other countries, to establish military bases, to spread their influence as did Roman Empire. And they do that also by means of language and rock and roll, by forcing other countries to open toward Western influence, as was the case with Japan.

The modernization of Eastern countries according to Western standards is more than nonsense; it is stupid and seriously funny. No one is capable of uprooting what is deeply ingrained in a culture with a long tradition; no one can take away and destroy spirituality.

DjVR: It appears, haiku has been going through transformation these years, we have several styles and forms of writing, and accordingly, developing theories. Of course, everything changes all the time, and so does haiku, especially, as it enters other cultures and languages. The way we live has changed much, as well. Instead

of birds, fields and butterflies, more and more people live in the urban areas and write about the buildings, asphalt, cars...

SV: As you may know, I don't pay much attention and don't respect any other but traditional haiku with its origin in Japan and the great masters who mastered the haiku form and taught us so much about it. Why some have a need to destroy it, I am not sure, but I believe their reason is selfish and they perhaps want to invent something new to establish themselves in this decaying world. Some may argue that art must develop and change or else it dies, but I don't think it is the case with haiku. We have examples of great masters who would write in the same way today as they wrote in their time. The topic is of no importance, in my opinion. Even in urban areas, we can sense seasonal changes, feel nature, see, smell, touch, taste. Nature is all around us and we are part of it. What resides inside our fragile bodies cannot be taken from us. We just have to be honest to ourselves in the first place.

DjVR: You edit *Haiku Stvarnost/Reality* and *Simply Haiku!* How do you manage all that? Is your day 48 hours long? Is haiku your mission?

SV: I don't measure my day by clock. Time is continuous as is The Simple Continuous Tense. Just now. I am also a member of Haiku Novine editorship, moderator of the facebook WAAJ group, a writer, journalist, translator, astrologer, mother, house and garden keeper and cleaner, a regular doctor's visitor, host and bus traveling visitor, bike rider, jogger.... and sometimes I also wonder if I am made of more than one person. But I don't find it strange. I am used to myself and I have much more energy to share and spend. I believe it has to do with my ancestors.

DjVR: Recently I received haiku collections by Slavko Sedlar, you have translated and edited. I'm stunned by the high quality of his haiku. He belongs to a generation of true haikins just like the late Vladimir Devidé, his friend from Croatia. I'm afraid we have to work very hard to catch up with them...

SV: Every culture has its primer examples, outstanding people in various fields. Devide and Sedlar were ex Yu haiku pioneers. Their contribution to the spreading of the knowledge of haiku and its development in our regions is indelible. And yes, they both are good haiku writers.

But there are many more today, in ex Yu countries and worldwide.

You say they were true haijin. I know for Sedlar as, according to his words, he never wrote desk haiku. I don't know for Davide, but as for Sedlar, I wonder if it is enough for one to be a true haijin? I myself often write from memory, and that memory is also pure and rooted in real life experiences. I guess this is the case with many other haiku poets.

DjVR: My first encounter with haiku was a gifted book, *Samobor haiku meeting joint collection*. And when I started to write down my haiku moments, they were not good. It took me much time to “enter“ the world of haiku poetry. How did you meet haiku poetry? Who was the maser that helped you the most?

SV: I have already answered this question posted to me by Robert D. Wilson in an interview he did with me for *Simply Haiku* (Summer 2005, vol 3 no 2).

So, if you don't mind, I will copy/paste it here:

RW: What one poet has had the greatest influence on you as a haiku poet, and why?

SV: One poet? I may search for information and beauty, and I do enjoy reading and writing, hoping to learn and practice more. If I am expected to say Basho, as most would, I won't admit his influence on my conscious mind, but maybe . . . I'll try to explain . . . I first became acquainted with haiku (“never heard” then) in 1997 as a program organizer for a Belgrade club. I happened to know a man called Ilija Bratić, a retired professor of philosophy, prose and poetry writer, including haiku, whom I interviewed on some other topics for a local magazine. In that interview he mentioned haiku he had written and afterwards I talked to the club people to invite Belgrade poets from their haiku club, Shiki, for a gathering and presentation of their work.

I can't admit that I even listened carefully to their haiku, let alone understood what they were all about. When it was over, Ilija told me that I myself should start writing haiku. I refused. I didn't have that feeling for such a short, tender, “meaningless” form. Out of spite (yes, these are the right words), I just tried to find out what it was all about, and having spent hours and hours over typed pieces of a girl (14) who named them haiku (I saved a manuscript she gave me when I

interviewed her regarding her first novel), trying to make out what that famous 5-7-5 was and . . . finally found out!

Then I started writing like mad. In a day I produced some 20 pages of what I thought were haiku. What I had written were but very good pieces of something else, Ilija told me, and started showing me haiku by various authors. I was still against it and ready to leave. Then he took down a book from a shelf, a small, bright-covered *The Old Pond*, and I stopped to take the last glance at what he “intended” to make from me. I stopped, looked, listened (thank you David Lanoue) . . . and felt ashamed:

Oh, Matcushima
Oh, Matcushima
Matcushima...

(This poem was not among Basho's hokku and haiku in that book).

As I said, I don't feel myself to be a poet and rarely read poetry books. Only particular poems, which I then read and reread until I get to know them by heart. Edgar Allan Poe's "Raven," Lord Byron's "Incantation" . . . and of course and first of all those written by Serbian marvelous lyric masters: Vladislav Petković Dis, Vojislav Ilić, Jovan Dučić, Djura Jakšić, Aleksa Šantić . . . It's a pity their words cannot be translated into any language and save the feeling they are able to evoke. There is always a danger I would leave out some of many world-class authors, but I must mention our Nobel Prize winner, Ivo Andrić, who wrote “as if he does not touch a paper” as another Serbian writer, Jara Ribnikar, said to me in an interview I had with her. Then my favorite and beloved "The Little Prince." In fact we all learn from everybody, from every single being, no matter whether he/she is a writer or not; from every single plant or animal . . . everything and everybody.

DjVR: Last year you visited our Kloštar Ivanić haiku meeting . . .

SV: Oh, yes, you know that better than anyone else. Especially because of all the troubles I gave you☺ And when I finally decided to “hit the road,” here is what happened:

<http://haikureality.webs.com/esejeng103.htm>

DjVR: Here in Croatia, we lost several wonderful haiku poets, our average known haiku poets are in their sixties... What is it like in Serbia? Any youth entering the haiku world? Why is it so difficult?

SV: Here in Serbia we have also recently lost several great haiku poets: Slavko Sedlar, Rajna Begović, and also Srba Mitrović and Moma Dimić.

From time to time new voices appear, as is Damir Janjalija, whose development I have been following from the beginning. He does not write much, but when he does, he produces gems:

<http://simplyhaiku.theartofhaiku.com/past-issues/spring-2011/features/interview-damir-janjalija.html>

And here is where anyone interested in poetry of this talented young man may download his recent haiku e-book, *Imprints of Dreams*:

<http://www.mediafire.com/?zren3s8vs5c1166>

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