

THE STYLE OF HAIKU POEMS PRACTICED BY EDUARD ȚARĂ

Irina-Ana DROBOT

Lecturer PhD., Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest

*Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyse the haiku poems by Eduard Țară which have been published in the haiku book *Luna în țândări* (2021), after years of intense activity and winning the highest number of prizes in haiku contests at international level. He is one of the main personalities of the Romanian haiku communities. The poem from which the title of the book is the third line ("After the frog's leap -/ only a splash in the night/ and the moon to shards") can be regarded as an example of optical illusion, according to the author of this paper, and as an example of mirror reflection, according to Atanasiu (2022). Other examples of techniques in his poems will be analysed as well.*

Keywords: haijin, moment of revelation, fresh perspective, optical illusion, mirror reflection.

Eduard Țară is considered by the Romanian online haiku community led by sensei Corneliu Traian Atanasiu (2007) as one of the most important haiku poets in our country. He has received numerous awards in haiku contests and has also been among the first notable haiku poets in Romania, before the days when the Internet allowed for resources about learning and practicing haiku, and also before the days when online Romanian haiku communities had settled down and offered materials about haiku and how to write haiku.

The poem that opens the haiku volume *Luna în țândări* from 2021, published by Editura Carte Inspirată, is inspired to some extent by Matsuo Basho's (1644-1694) famous frog poem, considered one of the representative masters of the Japanese haiku:

After the frog's leap -
only a splash in the night
and the moon to shards (Țară 2022: 32)

The old pond
A frog leaps in.
Sound of the water. (Basho 2002)

The above English version is just one of the many variants of translations into English by the famous poem by Basho, which is one of the well-known haiku poems in Japanese literature. We could say that Eduard Țară gets into a relationship of intertextuality with this poem with Basho's poem. According to Orr (2010), intertextuality refers to "a text's relations to other texts in the larger 'mosaic' of cultural practices and their expression." Moreover, "a text's 'intertextual' potential and status are derived from its relations with other texts past, present, and future." The two haiku poems are in a clear relationship, across two cultures, Romanian and Japanese, and

across different historical ages. The Romanian haikin knowingly, as he has confessed in an interview (Ursulean 2010), relates to the other text, that of the Japanese haiku: “I was thinking in my infatuated mind, ‘I have to write something about this frog, what can it do that makes it so famous? He may jump one night on the image of the moon in the water. To make that moon, which is an illusion, break into pieces’” (my translation). The result of this challenge Țară set to himself was the poem about “the moon to shards”. Țară leaves deliberate clues for the knowledgeable reader of haiku by mentioning the frog, the leap, and the result of the leap. Thus, the intertextuality can be identified both at the level of the declared intent of its author, and at the level of the readers’ background knowledge of another famous haiku. This poem won Țară the Honorable Mention at the 13th Itoen New Haiku Contest organized by Japan in 2002 (Țară 2022: 32). We cannot say the poem is an exercise of imitation, since it is built in a different way from Basho’s poem. Whereas Basho sticks to reality, apparently, and the frog’s jumping into the pond results into a splash of water, the frog in Țară’s poem apparently crosses borders between reality and fantasy, turning “the moon to shards”. However, this is just an optical illusion, an illusion which is not present in Basho’s poem. Țară does a trick of playing with the borders between reality and fantasy, which is something surprising especially in haiku, where poets are told to stick to reality, and do not start creating fabulous worlds. However, if readers think a bit, there is nothing fabulous there, in Țară’s poem. The feeling of fantasy comes from a clever not mentioning of the fact that the moon is reflecting at night in the pond, and the frog jumps into this very reflection of the moon, causing it to be troubled and even break with the water drops splashing from the frog’s leap. The illusion comes from not giving an explanation, which is left to the reader to guess. The reader is prompted to reconstruct the scene and fill in with the missing details. In the surface of the lake, we see a reflection of the moon, which transposes, in the manner of an optical illusion, the frog not on earth but in the sky. The lake becomes, thus, the space of illusions, and we can even touch the sky, we can see the sky lying down at our feet, we can step among the stars, and other such fantasy elements. However, there is an element of reality, that the lake acts like a mirror, and there we can do all sorts of apparent tricks. Anyone familiar with social media can, after all, recall photos posted by users during their holidays holding the Tower of Pisa not to fall, holding in their hand buildings such as cathedrals or others, threatening to step over a building which is actually situated farther into the background, etc. These are all optical illusions, based on the changing dimensions when going farther-nearer an objective, and playing with the distances while taking selfies and photographs. This type of optical illusion is, however, different from the reflections in the lake because they were made in a different way. However, the effect is similar, as the moon is brought so close that the frog breaks it apart. The earth and the sky are united in the reflection allowed by the lake. This experience is, in fact, a universal one, and has been taken over by other haiku poets in other versions, with other props and characters. Țară does not mention how the frog manages to break the moon into shards. The first reaction of an unknowledgeable haiku reader would be that Țară uses fantasy elements in his haiku.

The result of reading this poem by Țară is, from the part of the readers, shock, surprise, then making out how this happened and then their moment of revelation when they understand what is going on. This can be regarded as a very imaginative poem and skillful technique, yet there is a purpose to using the mirror reflection in the lake in this poem. According to Atanasiu (2022: 13), when he discusses mirror reflections generally speaking, the reflection in this case is not one that is faithful to reality completely. Instead, it has the ability to create a certain atmosphere, as it leaves those involved, such as the frog and the moon, make the happening sound playful. Atanasiu (2022: 14) continues speaking about the technique of mirror reflection that the mirroring can be troubled by the characters in the poem; in the case of Țară's poem, the mirroring is troubled by the frog, as readers later on reconstitute the scene and what happened.

The message of Basho's poem about the frog was catching in the poem the present moment, the here and now. The moment is one of movement, just as the frog leaps and we hear the sound made by the splashing water. The message is one of the present instant going on right before our eyes. The same message is given by Țară's poem about the frog, which makes, however, the reader work more into understanding what is actually going on in the here and now scene of the action. The transient moment is captured in both haiku poems, and readers are made witnesses to the meditative stance of both haiku poets.

The poem by Țară about the frog, which is an instance of poem showing the technique of optical illusions or mirror reflection, can be an attractive introduction to haiku for beginners. The author of the paper refers to the technique of optical illusion since it suggests the creation of a parallel world in the mirroring reflection, which brings close to reach the world of the sky. It brings the sky on earth in an intermediary world of parallel reality. While the moon cannot actually be touched, since it is the surface of the lake that is touched, it can be, all the same, troubled to the point it is broken into shards. However, another version of the moon is still up in the sky. While nobody bothers to check since it is common knowledge that the moon is still there, the intermediary world remains the focus of the poem. The optical illusion can have a role different from the mirror at this point, since it no longer reflects reality when the moon is shattered into pieces. The illusion is destroyed, while the moon is safe and sound in the sky. The mirroring is broken for an instant, at least. This is the point that marks the sudden change.

This is not the only time that Țară has used the optical illusion or mirror reflecting technique. The poem below is another example of using this technique:

The old fisherman
and a thread from the moon –
tattered sky (Țară 2021: 40)

In this poem, the illusion of a fantasy world is present all the time in the first part, before the kireji or line that separates the two parts of a haiku. Readers expect a world of fairy-tales from the first part. However, the second part, although in itself also possibly part of

a fantasy realm, brings the readers with the feet on the ground. This is because they make the connection between the fishing, which is of course occurring in the water, in a lake or pond, and the “tattered sky”, which has, most likely, been troubled by the movement of the fishing rod. It is interesting how all these suggestions work together and how the readers’ expectations upon reading the first part are upturned by the second part, a fantasy happening in itself. Thus, this time the optical illusion or mirroring technique is used a bit differently than in the first poem by Țară with the frog. Everything that is going on in the optical illusion, or in the fantasy world, seems continuous, yet there is one element that disrupts its continuity. The unmentioned space where the fishing takes place, and the fishing rod itself, which is also unmentioned, suddenly begin to take shape in the mind of the reader and they do not only trouble the illusion, but break it off in the end altogether. The illusion was there for, it seems, just one instant, like the one suggested by the splash of the frog, which ended it all in the previous poem. Change occurs so suddenly, that the moment of the viewer experiencing the illusion is an extremely transitory one. Buddhism, which lies at the core of the traditional, Japanese haiku, warns its practitioners to accept the transience of everything in this world, as well as to live in the present moment. These poems showed a point in time where something had occurred for just one second, and then everything was gone. The moon that is shattered to pieces and the “tattered sky” suggest destruction and disappearance.

Still other poems by Țară are built according to the technique of optical illusions or mirror reflections. The poem below offers a contrast between the beauty of nature and the natural hazards such as floods:

Road under water –
the Milky Way still crossing
the cemetery (Țară 2021: 46)

At the same time, we see in this poem a suggestion of hope in the afterlife, and a compensation felt in the belief in the afterlife for losing dear ones in the cemetery, since the Milky Way crosses the cemetery, meaning as a result of the flooding of the road, since the sky is reflected in the water.

In the poem below, the icicle is seen as a precious object, which is also fragile, like a precious vase which is broken in shards by accident:

Broken icicle –
shard by shard I’m gathering
the moon from the stairs (Țară 2021: 47)

Thus, a comparison in a Western sense of figures of speech is suggested here, through making an allusion to an experience readers know: that of breaking a precious vase and gathering the shards, in the hope of fixing it somehow. The precious object is suggested through the careful action of gathering “shard by shard” and also by the pattern of “the moon from the stairs”. Usually precious vases or plates have nice patterns and breaking

them causes sorrow for the owner. The sorrow is simply suggested as the readers apply their everyday life experience and fill in the gaps, imagining a story out of the three lines of the haiku poem.

Natural disasters are once again suggested in the poem below in contrast with the beauty of the optical illusions following it, in a poem built based on the same technique of mirror reflection:

After the earthquake –
the bottom of the river
full of summer stars (Țară 2021: 49)

The bottom of the river becomes an equivalent of the sky, as the sky is reflected in it. The sky can also be associated with the heavens of the other world in the afterlife, which suggests the losses of human lives and of belongings in a natural disaster such as the earthquake. The earthquake also suggests change, which is felt throughout our lives. According to Buddhist teaching, our lives are marked by change, loss and suffering, and we should come to accept this.

Another example of poem built on the optical illusion or mirror reflection technique is the one below:

End of summer rain –
the old boat of my father
heavy with stars (Țară 2021: 52)

This poem suggests, at first sight, a fantasy world, where magic is possible. Yet, at a second look, it suggests, while answering the question “Why has the boat been filled with stars and why is it heavy?” that there had been a flood following heavy raining. As a result, water filled the boat. The compensation for the problems caused by this is the beauty of the stars that are reflecting in the water filling the boat. The heaviness in the poem is not attributed to the water from the rain, but to the stars.

Other poems by Țară present in this haiku volume include haiku poems where he pays a lot of attention to details. From these details, various emotions are transmitted to the reader, together with raising their awareness to notice what is small but significant at the same time around them. A poem such as the one below illustrates the point:

Postman at the door –
on a letter from abroad
the first snowflake (Țară 2021: 35)

This poem focuses on the way the letter from far away brings to the received the first snowflake, which is generally considered a moment of joy, announcing the coming winter season. The first snowflake is seen as something precious, announcing the beginning of a long time expected event. The winter season is associated with presents and with celebrations, as well as with being together with the loved ones. The first

snowflake can be regarded like a gift received together with the letter. Both the letter and the snowflake can announce news. The letter can announce the arrival of someone close to the receiver, and the snowflake can announce the coming of winter. Both letter and snowflake can be regarded as bringers of news, which are assumed to be joyful news. The snowflake is an element that marks change. The change of seasons is marked by the first snowflake, while a change in the receiver's emotional state is announced by the letter, even before it is read.

Another type of haiku poem in Țară's haiku volume is the haiku where there are coincidences in various moments in nature, and elements of nature act as human beings would. This can be seen as a personification, but one which is not realized in the usual, Western-style manner done by figures of speech:

Shooting star from dark –
a moment of deep silence
between the crickets (Țară 2021: 36)

In Romanian culture, there is a traditional belief that once a human being dies, a star falls from the sky. The “moment of deep silence” is also associated with one of the living persons' rituals when it comes to the dead: in their memory, and out of respect for the dead person, a moment of silence is usually held at any type of event where people who knew the recently deceased person meet. For instance, in an academic conference, out of respect for the memory of a recently deceased researcher, it is customary to hold “a moment of deep silence” while all the participants in the hall stand. The setting of Țară's poem is, guessing from what is going on, a spot in nature, where humans do not interfere. Most likely the only human present is the haiku poet noticing this moment and describing it for his readers. The crickets react in this poem in a human manner. However, all this is an effect of placing together two scenes, in fact: the scene in the sky, with the star that falls, and a moment when all the crickets stop their song. The moment can be coincidental, yet it suggests a human's reaction and emotion.

The poem below is, to some extent, similar in technique with the previously analysed one. This is because the butterflies could be a sign of decorations associated with weddings, or jewels shaped as butterflies:

Only butterflies –
the scarecrow
in the wedding dress (Țară 2021: 37)

The scarecrow is an unexpected character to wear a wedding dress, but this could happen, as the readers are prompted to imagine explanations, as a result of a trash the dress photoshooting session after a wedding happens and after artistic photographs are taken with the bride and the groom. At the same time, another technique could be suggested in this poem, if we interpret it as the butterflies actually dressing the scarecrow in a wedding dress, if there are lots of them, enough to suggest a wedding dress. The butterflies could also be regarded as accessories that change for the viewer

the garments of the scarecrow into a wedding dress. Thus, another technique suggested by this poem could be that a certain element in nature, in this case the butterflies, change the entire scene, at least allowing the viewer to imagine more than the actual reality.

The poem below uses a combination of elements in nature to suggest the viewer's state of mind:

Apricot blossoms –
in the rusty mail box
still snow (Țară 2021: 38)

The apricot blossoms and the snow in the rusty mail box have been carefully selected. None of the elements has been chosen at random. Together they suggest the viewer's feelings at the passage of time in-between two seasons, winter and spring. Winter is regarded as a thing of the past. Now, as spring has arrived, winter should be considered far-away. However, the viewer has not forgotten winter. Winter has probably been heavy, and long, since its presence in the poem is suggested through "still". Snow has not entirely disappeared, just as winter is felt as not yet entirely gone. Perhaps the viewer is afraid that winter may return, not as strong, but under the form of a few colder days. The declining strength of winter is suggested through the "rusty mail box" which actually even keeps the snow inside. The two parts of the poem can be regarded as creating the opposition present and past. The present is the spring, as suggested by the apricot blossoms. The past is the winter, as suggested by the snow still present "in the rusty mail box". However, there is a link between past and present, as suggested by "still". While in haiku poems poets are urged not to use nostalgia about the past, it can be used, after all. It all depends how the link with the past is suggested. In this case, it is not nostalgia for the past, but it is a past that is, somehow, to some extent, still present in the moment here and now. The past is suggested through an image, that of the snow. The entire scene is realistic and plausible, suggesting the in-between two seasons, or the moment of change between two seasons, which is a reality and which requires a careful observer.

The haiku poem below shows, through the combination of its two parts, another example of past vs present, or even past vs future. The poetic persona is looking forward, once winter has ended, to going to the seaside, and to the summer season. The mood is that of enthusiasm that winter has ended:

End of winter –
in the mail box
the roar of the sea (Țară 2021: 111)

The mood of nostalgia for the past and what has been lost is suggested in the poem below, also built based on the structure of the contrast between past and present, and the emotional implications of putting together objects from the present and from the past:

Still in the middle
of the family photo –
the missing plum tree (Țară 2021: 123)

It is suggested that the plum tree is considered by the poetic persona as part of the family, yet now it is no longer among us. Perhaps it was an old tree and it was cut off, or who knows what other circumstances led to its disappearance.

Other poems, like the one below, create another Western-type figure of speech in an entirely different way, through association between two elements. For instance, in the poem below a comparison between a new tooth of a baby and a snowdrop is suggested:

Admiring snowdrops –
in the smile of her baby
a new tiny tooth (Țară 2021: 41)

The element that both snowdrops and teeth have in common is the colour white. Moreover, both the baby and the spring suggest a beginning, the baby suggests the beginning in a human's life and spring suggests the beginning of a new year or of a new cycle of seasons. The Western reader is prompted to compose the figure of speech of the comparison through the combination of the two elements of the two parts of the poem, the snowdrop and the baby's tooth.

Other poems, such as the one below, suggest a connection between man and nature, through a feeling of empathy that is imagined by the reader as a result of the combination of two elements in the two parts of the haiku poem:

Waiting for my pills –
the old cherry tree's blossoms
about to open (Țară 2021: 45)

The cherry tree could be regarded as a medicine in a figurative sense for the person that is ill and is waiting for his/ her pills. The cherry blossoms are regarded as a symbol of human connection as well, since during the Cherry Blossoms Festival the Japanese gather together with their loved ones and celebrate with a picnic while admiring the flowers, cherishing the present moment and accepting its transience. The cherry blossoms opening can suggest the need of the sick person for connection with other humans. The person giving him/ her the pills is expected to care for the sick and offer the poetic persona hope. At the same time, the beautiful cherry blossoms can be regarded as a compensation for the sick poetic persona's suffering. The reader can imagine various scenarios of thoughts of the sick poetic persona. Perhaps the poetic persona finds hope in the arrival of spring and is encouraged by the cherry blossoms in the beauty of this life, finding strength to fight the illness. The cherry blossoms can make the sick poetic persona more optimistic. It is well known that there are connections

between thinking positively and successful recovery in physical illnesses, so there is hope that the sick poetic persona will recover.

Through his haiku poems, Eduard Țară offers readers moments of revelation, achieved through understanding them. He presents in his haiku poems, like any haikai is expected to, a fresh, unexpected, perspective on reality. This new understanding of reality will give readers the occasion for food for thought.

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