

Opening the Door to Haiku, the Unknown

--An interview with Mr. Diego Manka, an Italian haiku poet--

In Italy, poetry is a form of culture loved by the people. It is the country where the sonnet originated. Today, the number of Italians who compose haiku and tanka is increasing, albeit slowly. On this occasion, we asked the poet Diego Manka about the appeal of haiku composition.

--What is the role of poets in today's Italy? What kind of activities are they involved in?

In Italy, *poesia* (Italian for "poetry") has always been loved as a form of culture and art. In recent years, people have finally come to learn about Japanese haiku and tanka that are different from Western poetry. Haiku contests are held in different parts of the country. Italy has joined the group of countries where many enthusiasts who are outside the exclusive special realm of poets are beginning to support haiku and tanka.

Some of the poets in Italy are involved in a broad range of activities to spread literary art to the citizens, for example, by teaching poems to children. I have taught haiku to children in third and fourth grades myself. A child with autism found emotional expression through haiku, which was an emotional experience. I still treasure the beautiful pieces that the students composed back then.

Many poets are involved in these activities to develop sensitivity and spread literary art, in addition to their own creation and publishing activities.

--Haiku in Japan tends to take nature as its main subject. What about haiku in Italy?

Many of the haiku pieces in Italy are also about nature. Italian poems have traditionally centered on the subjectivity of *io* (Italian for "I") and many poets wrote

only about themselves. To compose haiku, we must cast off our "ego," become closer to nature, feel it on the skin and express what we feel in haiku. This series of creative activities is new for us. So the current situation is that there primarily are pieces based on nature, followed by the pieces about emotions, subjectivity, personal experience, love, life and death.

--What prompted you to compose haiku? What attracts you about composing haiku?

I began to compose poems 20 years ago. I had a German, who is a poet, read my first poem and I asked him what he thought about it. He did not want to tell me his impression and instead, he asked me if I knew what haiku was. I had never heard of it at that time, but he nonchalantly said, "Haiku, my friend, is a challenge."

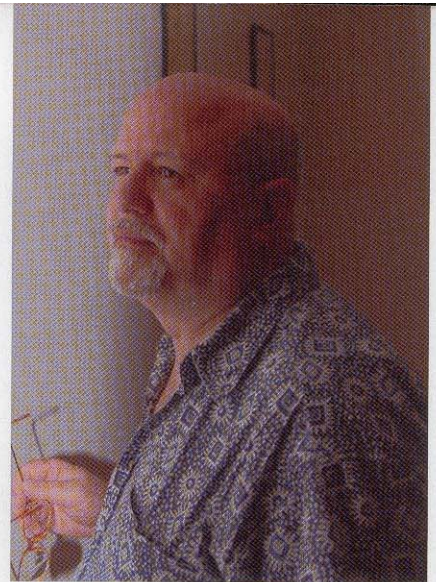
It was then that I started to read many haiku pieces and compose them myself. I had been writing about my ego until then, but I learned to remove it and become closer to the world of nature filled with color and a sense of relaxation. Haiku, at a glance, seems brief, simple and easy to compose. However, it is in fact, very profound. That is what is attractive about it.

--Will you recite one of your pieces (with a brief explanation)?

*Terra aquarella
sulla tela del ragno
perle di pioggia*

*A light rain fell on the ground
A spider web becomes a canvas
For the pearls of rain drops*

Note: After light rain fell on the ground, the raindrops caught on the spider's web are shining beautifully like a pearl necklace.



Diego Manka Profile

Diego Manka, poet and writer, lived for many years abroad, then chose to come back to Italy and lives in Florence. Passionate searcher of the ancient roots of Sardinian shamanism (he is the author of the beautiful novel *La donna delle sette fonti* (The woman of the seven springs), Corbaccio Editore), after a long poetical journey he discovered the Haiku in Italian language (he wrote a book of Haiku, *Images in verses*, translated into Japanese by Shinobu Nakajima and with calligraphy (Shodo) by the painter Yoko Nakajima). He writes poetry in Sardinian language and is author of a new novel, *Heart of Europe, dedicated to the Spirit of our continent, Europe.*

--Do you have any suggestions for Japanese poets and haiku composers? Is there anything you would like to do with them?

I would very much like to actively promote cultural exchange with Japanese poets and haiku poets. We will be able to discover something new if we have the opportunity to talk directly with them, exchange opinions and compare each other's views of nature. I hope that we get to know each other through conversations and be inspired for creative activities in the future.

As long as we share a love of poetry, we are coming from the same place. I believe that we will be able to find something that we have in common and mutually understand beyond the language barrier. I think that we will be able to encounter something new as long as we keep that spirit and soul. By having a nice time together in a relaxed fashion, drinking wine or dining, we will be able to find something new. Through these opportunities for cultural exchange, I would very much like to talk with Japanese poets and haiku poets, learn more about their sensibilities, and touch each other's hearts.