

A Comparative Study of Love, Culture and Religion in Haiku and Ghazal

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Abstract

Though Haiku and Ghazal are from different geographical locations, common features could be traced between these two types of poetry. This essay considers how Ghazal shares several basic grounds with the Japanese Haiku. The love in each of these poems is metaphysical one and the same images of seasons and nature as well as dealing with political issues could be frequently traced in both. Moreover, each is influenced by a religious worldview—Haiku by Buddhism and Ghazal by Islam—which shapes even its descriptions of ordinary life. Each makes use of a highly traditional body of imagery. The Ghazal includes wine, the road, the mirror, and the nightingale, while the Haiku includes standard images of the seasons, such as spring plum blossoms, summer spiders, the autumn moon, and the winter bush warbler. Moreover, each is shaped by a set of rules about form that place limits on the scope of the poem and therefore the poet's way of shaping his or her response to the forces around him.

[**Keywords:** sonnet, Haiku, Ghazal, Zen, Buddhism, and Sufism]

Introduction

Haiku is the picture painted with words. This is a particular form of poetry that developed in Japan. Haiku is usually contemplative, mystical and profound. Haiku has to express the momentary impression, emotion and contemplation of nature. Haiku is often used by Zen masters, as a conducive form to illustrate the uniqueness of each moment. Its style expresses a deep fascination with the beauty of meditation and the world. It is rather an expression of egolessness in which the poet turns outward to fully experience and capture the essence of being in a particular moment at a particular place. Such qualities make it comparable with the Ghazal, a form of sonnet developed in Persia, which shares a close affinity with it. For example, each is influenced by a religious worldview—Haiku by Zen and Ghazal by Islam—which shapes even its descriptions of ordinary life.

While the form of Haiku is different from that of Ghazal, the same turn of thought could be traced. The shortness of these poems is a reflection of Zen philosophy, which, like yoga, emphasizes being in the moment. In other words, *Satori*, or the moment of enlightenment, which is the same as the existing inspiration in Ghazal. Objectively reasoning, it must be admitted that the Haiku makes no reference to a past or a future or to a real or imagined self, though in

some cases the Ghazal does, similarly Haiku deals with the present moment or in other words both deal with *Carpediem* in many cases. Yet in the process of capturing it, the present moment is transformed into something extraordinary, that constitutes their basic similarity in the spiritual healing effect of seize the day as a mystic source taking us out of ourselves. For example, consider another Basho Haiku:

On a leafless branch,
A crow comes to rest—
Autumn nightfall.

On the other hand, if we are alone and wandering in nature, our mind becomes free to contemplate and to be more deeply present in the moment, living every moment to the fullest, according to Zen, sacredness is not something to be confined to the temple; the divine can be seen in all. The same idea is kept by the Sufi masters of the mystic Persian Ghazal.

As earlier pointed out, both are influenced by a religious worldview—Haiku by Buddhism and Ghazal by Islam—which shapes even its descriptions of ordinary life. Each makes use of a highly traditional body of imagery. The Ghazal includes wine and the nightingale, while the Haiku includes standard images of the seasons, and each is shaped by a set of rules about form that place limits on the scope of the poem and therefore the poet's way of shaping his or her response to the forces around him.

Discussion

As with Ghazal rooted in Sufism, the formal structure of the Haiku, as well as the body of imagery and cultural values in the Haiku tradition, reflect an underlying philosophy. Given the differences of word order or sound quality between Japanese and Persian, a Haiku presents an image, traditionally, a scene from nature, often related to the seasons. Rooted in the Buddhist teachings, it often captures fleeting, momentary sensations on the edge of perception, with an acceptance that the world is passing and changing that is to an extent the same as the elegiac mourning for loss of time in of much of Persian Ghazals, but the form is much different from the Persian Ghazal. Attention must be paid to the fact that though some formal issues of Ghazal are briefly considered later, this essay is more concerned with the contents and intercultural similarities between Ghazal and Haiku, meanwhile it mustn't be forgotten that as the following paragraph reveals, Haiku has not been short in form, rather the gradual changes has made it so short that is comparable with Ghazal that has been a part of a longer poem called *Qasida* and has according to Christopher Shackle become an independent form, developed by Persian poets, however the short pattern of Haiku has gained a reputation for being so objective that it seems not to represent a particular person's way of sensing the world, though in many valued Haikus traces of the

poet's voice and sensibility remain in the tone and manner of observation, while in the case of Ghazal one faces a longer, usually 14 quatrains, and the first person, subjective point of view to emphasize the poets lament for the loss of time and the widening gap between the persona and the beloved for which time is to be blamed.

As earlier discussed, Haiku has evolved gradually from a more elaborate form known as haikai, or renga na haikai. Rengas were long poems composed by groups, often at parties or other social gatherings. A poet would propose a three-phrase opening known as a hokku, to which another poet would add a two-phrase continuation. Yet another poet would pick up on an image or theme in the preceding lines and add three more of his own. The process continued for as many as 100 verses on casual occasions, and for as many as 10,000 on ceremonial ones. The form involved a complex set of rules requiring the inclusion of certain standard images—such as the autumn moon or the changing of seasons—and other elements designed to give the poem a sense of motion and change.

Haikai itself began as a lighter, more popular form of renga. The poet responsible for refashioning this lightness to a serious form, reflecting more delicate and unusual perceptions, was Basho. “The bones of haikai are plainness and oddness,” he wrote. In his mid-30s, he spent years traveling the Japanese countryside visiting Buddhist places. His later hokku were deeply influenced by the writings of Chinese poets such as Li Bo and Tu Fu, and contain a deep sense of solitude, as in this quiet scene:

“A field of cotton
as if the moon
had flowered”

(Washburn, 1998, p. 1023, Trans. Robert Hass)

While Basho often used conventional imagery, he felt that hokku should also draw from everyday life. His poems have the rare ability to evoke the immediate experience of a moment while opening out into reflection on universal themes:

“On this road
where nobody else travels
autumn nightfall”

(Washburn, 1998, p. 387, Trans. Makoto Ueda).

Another of the great Haiku writers, Issa, was born over 100 years after Basho. By that time, Basho's innovations in hokku had themselves become a tradition that profoundly influenced young poets. Issa built on this tradition and took it further, adding to the conventional images a new range of subjects and a clever empathy with the sufferings of the humblest creatures:

“Fleas in my hut,
it's my fault
you look so skinny”

(Washburn, 1998, p. 1024, Trans. Robert Hass).

As the same event happened to Ghazal too, Haiku and Ghazal seem to share a common feature regarding their historical development in form. As earlier briefly pointed out, the Ghazal form has its origins in 12th-century Persia. Like the Haiku, it evolved from a longer, more complicated verse form, the Qasida. The Qasida, which came to Persia from Arabia, was a poem of praise written to be performed at public festivals and functions. Attention must be paid to the fact that according to Shackle, (1996, p. 36), Qasida was from Arabic, but the beginning of it from which Ghazal developed was developed by Persian poets. Similar to the movement from hokku to Haiku in Japanese literature, the opening portion of the Qasida, a kind of introductory love note, eventually achieved an independent form as the Ghazal. Unlike the public-oriented Qasida, the Ghazal is for intimate communications. The word translates from the Arabic as “talking to women,” and not surprisingly the common subject matters are love, longing, and passion. The Ghazal is an expression of “words of love,” so the themes are usually about earthly and Divine love and beauty, the longing of the lover for the beloved, and the ecstatic “drunken” states of being in love. Occasionally, verses may be about spiritual and philosophical themes concerning life and existence.

One of the most important common feature of Ghazal and Haiku lies in their emphasis on Seize the day. The shortness of these poems is a reflection of Zen philosophy which emphasizes being in the moment. The following Haiku serves the purpose well:

Old pond
A frog jumps in-
The sound of water.

The above Haiku represents the spiritual realm of human existence; the “old pond” represents a state of oneness with nature and a mind that has become still, egoless. Then the “frog jumps in and the sound of water” breaking the silence represents that something is happening, that is another way of emphasizing Satori: the moment of enlightenment. The Haiku makes no reference to a past or a future or to a real or imagined self, though in some cases the Ghazal does, like Ghazal in some other cases it deals with the present moment or in technical terms both deal with Carpediem in many cases. Yet in the process of capturing it, the present moment is transformed into something extraordinary, that constitutes their basic similarity in the the spiritual healing effect of seize the day as a mystic source taking us out of ourselves. For example, consider another Basho Haiku:

On a leafless branch,
A crow comes to rest-
Autumn nightfall.

As earlier discussed the roots of Haiku is in Zen mysticism, exactly as Ghazal is rooted in Sufism that is the strain of Islam which places direct and ecstatic

communion with Allah over the rules prescribed by the Shari'ah, for which Rumi's Mathnawi is an outstanding example based on which Rumi is recognized as one of the greatest of poets and spiritual thinkers. Mathnawi contains Sufi philosophy and ethics, meditations, anecdotes and stories of all kinds. Furthermore, the work traces man's spiritual journey through the world with all its pitfalls, from first awakening to final union with the One. And in incorporating sacred history, simple tales, earlier Sufi writings, learned discourses of predecessors, and the lives of saints, Rumi discusses nearly every aspect of Islamic metaphysics, cosmology and traditional psychology. Like many such poems of medieval Islam, the Mathnawi blends instruction with delight and its pithy comments and apparently simple but astute remarks are still quoted today.

Rumi's Ghazals are ecstatic poems of spiritual love portrayed in reflections on its earthly expression. His poetry created an elaborate vocabulary of wine and physical beauty, which took further the Sufi poetry of Sana'i and Attar, and inspired its greatest proponent, Hafez of Shiraz. The Ghazal tradition draws on features of medieval Islamic life, and can be difficult for westerners to appreciate, appearing somewhat unworldly, melancholy and artificial. The lover is male, and is addressed through degrees of emotional rapport, which are not necessarily or generally physical. The verse form, like Haiku exploits the rhyming facility of Persian, but allows great freedom and ambiguity within its set requirements. Words are often used as symbols, which play with great richness and ingenuity on the understandings of a world steeped in Islamic thought and poetry.

The following example, a literal translation of a Ghazal by Rumi is an expression of the mystic love in Persian Ghazal that is to an extent reminder of Haiku, but in different ways due to the differences in their religious roots:

"If wheat comes up from my grave
 And you bake bread from it, drunkenness will increase.
 The dough and the baker will become mad
 And his oven will sing verses like a drunkard.
 If you come to visit my tomb,
 Its shape will appear to you dancing."
 (Webb, 1982, p. 46)

Indeed, Persia itself is the homeland of mysticism in Islam and this mystical fire found tinder in the hearts of many who were not Persians. Through the investigations of Prof. Sakae Ikeda, Japanese writers have also traced deep influences of Persian mysticism in the emergence of the Mahayana type of Buddhism in China.

The following description of Sufism as a fundamentally practical science, teaching the way of life, that those who enter on the search for perfection must undergo a rigorous course of training under a wise spiritual father, shares a close affinity with Zen. In a great mystical poets like Jalal-ed Din Rumi, for instance,

the most sublime mystical descriptions are never entirely divorced from moral exhortations. It is true that for Rumi the moral virtues are never ends in themselves. They are seen as ways and means, creating the necessary conditions for the attainment of closer union with the divine Beloved. But that does not make his exhortations more pressing.

Ghazals of Rumi are known as his "ecstatic poetry". They are best understood as expressing the stage in the Sufi path known as "annihilation in the spiritual master" [fanâ fi 'l-shaykh], a process through which the spiritual seekers lose their ordinary consciousness and see the face of their beloved everywhere, in everything, and at all times, that are doubtlessly inspired by Rumi's Islamic vision and emphasis on the insight rather than logic, which is as earlier pointed to, exactly similar to Haiku, influenced by Zen. Both sects of Zen (the *Rinzai* Zen introduced by the Buddhist monk Eisai in 1191, and the *Soto* Zen introduced by the Buddhist monk Dōgen in 1227), continued to flourish in Japan. Zen and Chan are, respectively, the Japanese and Chinese ways of pronouncing the Sanskrit term *dhyana*, which designates a state of mind roughly equivalent to contemplation or meditation and as earlier discussed it is equivalent with "annihilation in the spiritual master", without the static and passive sense that these words sometimes convey. *Dhyana* denotes specifically the state of consciousness of a Buddha, who is not meant as the Buddha, rather as one whose mind is free from the assumptions, presumptions, presuppositions and any other kind of subjective hindrances that the limit individuality of oneself. All schools of Buddhism hold that separate things exist only in relation to one another; this relativity of individuals is called their state of being void (Sanskrit *sunyata*), which means not that the world is truly nothing but that nature cannot be grasped by any system of fixed definitions or classifications. Reality is the objective existence (Pali *tathatā*) of nature, or the world "just as it is" apart from any specific thoughts or any subjective blocks to it.

Zen has had a strong influence upon Far Eastern arts, especially Haiku because its point of view is connected with action rather than theory and with direct vision of nature rather than interpretation. The ability of Zen to communicate new life awareness, in other words an awareness based on a mystic power in the same way as Ghazal does which is unearthly according to the Western culture as the Western Culture is oriented primarily toward Being; Eastern culture, toward non-Being. Being can be studied by objective logic. Non-Being must be existentially understood; it is the principle of absolute negation that enables one to loosen bonds and turn toward limitlessness.

The non-conceptual nature of Zen is apparent in the catch phrases that became popular in Sung China. Zen trainees took their cues from such expressions as:

1. No dependence on Being.
2. A special transmission outside the boundaries of classified teachings.

Zen passes from mind to mind outside the classified and systematized doctrines. Systematizing the Buddhist scriptures was a characteristic of Chinese Buddhism. But Zen basically eluded systematization and it does not lean on the classified teachings. Of course, Zen does not dispense with such classical ties. It is merely not be enslaved by them, rather it is based on a mystic power of insight as a common feature with Ghazal, both driven by religious contemplation. The following poem from *Mathnawi*, Rumi's book of poems, is indicative of how Ghazal has been influenced by mysticism and is a further proof of the common bonds both Haiku and Ghazal share.

Listen to the song of the reed,
 How it wails with the pain of separation:
 "Ever since I was taken from my reed bed
 My woeful song has caused men and women to weep.
 I seek out those whose hearts are torn by separation
 For only they understand the pain of this longing.
 Whoever is taken away from his homeland
 Yearns for the day he will return.
 In every gathering, among those who are happy or sad,
 I cry with the same lament.
 Everyone hears according to his own understanding,
 None has searched for the secrets within me.
 My secret is found in my lament
 But an eye or ear without light cannot know it.."
 The sound of the reed comes from fire, not wind
 What use is one's life without this fire?
 It is the fire of love that brings music to the reed.
 It is the ferment of love that gives taste to the wine.
 The song of the reed soothes the pain of lost love.
 Its melody sweeps the veils from the heart.
 Can there be a poison so bitter or a sugar so sweet
 As the song of the reed?
 To hear the song of the reed
 Everything you have ever known must be left behind.
 (Tarcher, Jeremy, P. Trans by Jonathan Star, 1997)

To elaborate on the above Ghazal it must be kept in mind that the "reed" is the lamenting man who has lost his way through the classified teaching. In fact this lament is the common pain in our world. Moreover the "reed" symbolizes man who must be emptied from desires and classified metaphysical formulae to achieve perfection. The reed flute symbolizes the soul which is emptied of ego-centered desires and preoccupations and is filled with a spiritual passion to return to its original nearness to God. According to Gamard, Rumi said, "The world (is) like a reed pipe and He (the God) blows into every hole of it; every wail it has (is) certainly from those two lips like sugar. See how He blows into every (piece of)

clay (and) into every heart; He gives a need and He gives a love which rises up a lament about misfortune." (Ghazal 532, lines 5664-5665). Moreover the "Listen": states of spiritual ecstasy were induced in Sufi gatherings by listening to mystical poetry and music. During a "mystical one" in *Samâ`* -- literally, "audition" or "hearing" session, some dervishes would enter a spiritual state of consciousness (hearing the voice of God) and spontaneously begin to move.

As the interpretation of some of Rumi's poems is further proof of the affinity both Ghazal and Haiku share. According to Zen the mind serves properly as a window glass rather than as a reflector, that is, the mind should give an immediate view instead of an interpretation of the world. All theories of nature and reality are considered to interfere with this direct vision. Zen thereby shows its continuity with the original idea of the Indian philosopher and founder of Buddhism, Gautama Buddha, that suffering is the result of grasping desire, for it holds that the mind and feelings frustrate their own proper functioning when they cling deliberately to the world of experience, and expresses a way of expressing ideas objectively as they are perceived. Zen is the peculiarly Chinese way of accomplishing the Buddhist goal of seeing the world just as it is, that is, with a mind that has no grasping thoughts or feelings. This attitude is called "no-mind", a state of consciousness wherein thoughts move without leaving any trace. Unlike other forms of Buddhism, Zen holds that such freedom of mind cannot be attained by gradual practice, but must come through direct and immediate insight. Thus, Zen abandons both theorizing a system of spiritual exercise and communicates its vision of truth by any method. Its exponents answer all philosophic or religious questions by non-symbolic words or actions; the answer is the action just as it is, and not what it represents. Thus the direct insight or mystic experience can be considered as another common point between the Ghazal and Haiku.

Another important aspect of Ghazal and Haiku could be traced in their political atmosphere. Though these two types of poetry seem to be far away from political issues, analyzing the hidden layers of meaning reveals some indirect political themes as the cultures in which these two emerged and developed in does not tolerate any kind of criticism. It must be declared that as long as both deal with the religious and cultural issues, they indirectly consider politics too, simply because politics is part of human beings social, cultural and religious aspect of life, so though politics looks to be ignored in the essay it indirectly being dealt with. For example in case of Rumi's followers it is still a controversial issue as Sometimes they would stand up and dance or whirl. They would listen to the poetry or music as if they were hearing the voice of God, the Beloved. Such gatherings were controversial, were criticized by orthodox Muslim leaders, and were practiced by very few Sufi orders-- usually with restrictions and high standards for participants. In fact poets have always been under political limitations, so even Rumi's Ghazals are of hidden layers of political themes. for example, Simin Behbahani's has the ability to evoke a time and place not only through description but also by weaving

together phrases and images from different sources and the associations that go with them, well illustrated by the heartbreaking Ghazal, "You leave, I'll stay":

I swear, I cannot endure being separated from my homeland.
Till my last day you will hear in my bonesill
The same "Tale of the reed."
Though sparkles and light may fill the nights of exile,
They are of little use to me, since I am not happy in exile...

As she divulges her disquiet, she refers to Rumi's "Song of the Reed", the opening poem of his Mathnawi, to underscore the trauma of separation, which began in the poem's first line as she separated Iranians into groups of those who left and those who stayed.

While haiku is usually seen in the context of Buddhism, R. H. Blyth discusses the influence of Shinto in a way that suggests some parallels with Anishinabe culture. Blyth declares that the essence of "non-political Shinto" is "animism, the belief in indwelling spirits, together with animatism, or simple nature worship" (158). Though A. Irving Hallowell suggests that the Anishinabe are not entirely animistic, the possibility for animism exists. Indeed in Ojibwa grammar, he concludes "stones are grammatically animate" (24). One needn't propose any great similarity between Shinto and Anishinabe belief to see a basic compatibility on this issue. Vizenor quotes the neglected genius Lafcadio Heam, to indicate the connective possibilities.

Japan's modern haiku originated in Matsuyama mainly through the efforts of Masaoka Shiki. Shiki was unable to fulfill his political aspirations due to the unfortunate circumstances that resulted from the Meiji Restoration (1868) when the Tosa fief gained control of Matsuyama.

Shiki's adoption of this name, which refers to a legendary bird that coughs blood as it sings, coincided with a bout of ill health in which he himself coughed blood and the time period in which he abandoned his political aspirations to devote himself to literature. Shiki's contribution to the haiku came in his refocusing of the craft toward a principle of describing life just as it is. Haiku in this form aims to observe nature at a particular moment in time and reflect on the motion, appearance or impact it has on the observer. In the late 1930s Japan prepared for war beyond the on-going Sino-Japanese conflict. The government demanded that haiku poets actively support the war effort, and in 1940, 12 members of the politically liberal Kyoto University haiku association were arrested for their refusal to cooperate. Yet this is not the whole story related to the modern Haiku. Japan has had a feudal system from 400 A.D. in which the poets were supposed to obey and support the system. The following Haiku by Basho is a good example of how the "autumn" atmosphere, symbolizing hopelessness as well as the first line "No one Travels" as indicative of limitations posed on any kind of

movement are the prevalent issues along the “way” that can stand for the feudal way, to show the opposition between people’s choice and the existing dictatorship:

No one travels
 Along this way but I,
 This autumn evening.

Shiki had learned the basics of kangaku (Sinology) and kanshi (Chinese poetry translated into Japanese) from his grandfather Ohara Kanzan, and Kawahigashi Seikei, the father of Kawahigashi Hekigodo. After various attempts in politics, philosophy, art, and fiction writing, he found his mission in haiku. Like kanshi, or Chinese poetry, haiku was a fixed-verse form, and a familiar genre to most people. Plunging himself into an environment where none of the elite scholars of his day paid any attention to haiku, he attempted to gain the blessing of the Gods of literature by synthesizing the past achievements of haikai and modernizing it by scientific approach.

The other example is also of importance regarding the reaction to the political system, indicating social issues as the result of the feudal system yielding “poverty” in all of the socio-economic conditions, as well as hopelessness and the long lost dream to improve the circumstances, (“no blossoms and no moon”) of togetherness (“alone”) and the spread of individualism (“alone”) in the highly traditional society of Japan.

No blossoms and no moon,
 and he is drinking sake
 all alone!

Conclusion

As earlier discussed, Ghazal shares several common aspects with the Japanese Haiku. The metaphysical love, the images and the political themes to name a few are so similar that one might consider them copies. As discussed each is influenced by a religious worldview, Haiku by Buddhism and Ghazal by Islam, which shapes even its descriptions of ordinary life. Each makes use of a highly traditional body of imagery. The Ghazal's includes wine, the road, the mirror, and the nightingale, while the Haiku’s include standard images of the seasons, such as spring plum blossoms, summer spiders, the autumn moon, and the winter bush warbler. And each is shaped by a set of rules about form that place limits on the scope of the poem and therefore the poet's way of shaping his (or “her”)—though in these traditions, generally “his”) response to the forces around him.

The Japanese *Haiku* and the Persian *Ghazal*, say more when placed in their literary and cultural contexts. As discussed each is influenced by a religious worldview, Haiku by Buddhism and Ghazal by Islam, which shapes even its descriptions of ordinary life. Each makes use of a highly traditional body of

imagery. The love in each of these poems is metaphysical one and the same images of seasons and nature as well as dealing with political issues could be frequently traced in both. Moreover, each is shaped by a set of rules about form that place limits on the scope of the poem and therefore the poet's way of shaping his or her response results in different forms as Haiku and Ghazal, but both reflect similar cultural and religious aspects as the poets response to the existential forces around him.

It must be declared that as long as both deal with the religious and cultural issues, they indirectly consider politics too, simply because politics is part of human beings social, cultural and religious aspect of life, for example in case of Rumi's followers it is still a controversial issue as sometimes they would stand up and dance or whirl. They would listen to the poetry or music as if they were hearing the voice of God, the Beloved. Such gatherings were controversial, were criticized by orthodox leaders, for example it was prohibited in Turkey, where the descendents and most of the followers of Rumi are, during the Ottoman empire and after that, until in the 21st century it is still practiced and practiced by very few Sufi orders-- usually with restrictions and high standards for participants. In fact poets have always been under political limitations, so even Rumi's Ghazals are of hidden layers of political themes. Like Haiku which would be discussed later, the political aspect of both these two types of poetry were prioritized in the modern times, especially in the second half of the 20th century, for example, Simin Behbahani's has the ability to evoke a time and place not only through description but also by weaving together phrases and images from different sources and the associations that go with them, well illustrated by the heartbreaking "You Leave, I'll Stay", written in and representing the atmosphere of 1980 when many Iranians fled home. As earlier discussed, she divulges her disquiet, she refers to Rumi's "Song of the Reed", the opening poem of his Mathnawi, to underscore the trauma of separation, which began in the poem's first line as she separated Iranians into groups of those who left and those who stayed.

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