"Different Songs Sung Together":

The Impact of Translation on the Poetry of José Juan Tablada

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José Juan Tablada was one of Mexico's leading modern poets. During his lifetime (1871-1945) he was not only a literary writer but also an artist, art critic, and journalist. Tablada's interests also included translation. For many years, he edited *Revista Moderna*, a magazine he founded which featured poetry translations as well as original poetry and art.[1] After translating a number of classical Japanese poems, Tablada wrote and published his own Spanish-language *haiku* and *haiga*. His *haiku* and *haiga* did not adhere to the criteria established by Japanese versions of these forms but combined the Japanese tradition with references to religion and Mexican culture. By integrating elements of the Japanese and Mexican poetic traditions, Tablada's translations ultimately led him to create new forms of poetry and art.

Tablada's interest in Japan began in the late nineteenth century and increased with his trip to Japan in 1900.[2] While editing *Revista Moderna*, he published a few original poems about Japan.[3] However, these poems were few and far between in comparison with his other writings. Even the publication of *El Florilegio* (1899), his first full collection of poetry, gave only limited attention to his growing interest in Japan and its poetry, containing a short section of poems about Japan that reflected an exoticised view of the country and the culture through references to opium, the Mikado, and pa-

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godas.[4]

It was not Japan as a poetic subject, however, that most influenced Tablada's own poetry. Instead, it was the short forms of classical Japanese poetry – the *uta* and the *haiku* – that significantly impacted upon his writing. Tablada translated a number of Japanese *uta* that he published in *Revista Moderna*, and these same poems were reprinted in the second edition of *El Florilegio* (1904).[5] *Uta* are 31-syllable poems that break into five sections of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables respectively. When printed, the poems appeared as a single line, using a caesura after each 5-or 7-syllable unit. However, when written in calligraphy, the poems were separated into multiple lines. *Uta* are comprised of unrhymed units and, because the Japanese language uses a spoken punctuation, there are no formal symbols of punctuation in the poems. *Uta* usually contain natural images and a seasonal reference, but they also include the poet's thoughts and emotions. In most *uta*, a parallel is suggested between the natural imagery and the emotions of the poet and, because of the number of homonyms that exist in the Japanese language, puns and/or pivot words are invoked to construct this parallel.[6] Pivot words are words with multiple meanings that offer one meaning when read with the first part of the *uta* and another meaning when read with the second part of the *uta*. They allow the poem to change direction, beginning with one image and then moving on to another image or idea such that the relationship between the first and second parts of the poem is fully revealed by the end of the poem. However, these pivot words are difficult to translate. Punctuation is often used instead, as in this example of a traditional Japanese *uta*:

> As rays of moonlight stream
> through a sudden gap
> in the rain clouds –
> if we could meet even
> for so brief a moment![7]

Rather than using a pivot word, a long dash was used to divide the two parts of the poem. The brevity of the moonlight through the clouds and the brevity of the desired meeting were presented as two different but related parts of the poem by separating them with punctuation rather than using pivot words.

The poems Tablada selected for *El Florilegio* are divided into two sections, poems that he translated and poems that he paraphrased. Both sections reflect an interest in specifically classic versions of the *uta* form. The section of translations is entitled "Japanese Utas" with the subtitle "Poems of Love." These translations were written in Kamakura, Japan in 1900 and

they were published in *Revista Moderna* in October of that same year.[8] His interest in adhering to a direct translation is emphasized by the accompanying note describing the *uta* form. By describing the *uta* as a small, traditional, Japanese form used primarily for popular poetry and noting that many great Japanese poets have also used the form, Tablada ensures that his readers will understand that he is translating a specific form with its own poetic history. The note reinforces the fact that, in this case, Tablada wanted to share a specifically Japanese style of verse rather than to explore that verse’s potential as a new form for Mexican poetry. The seven *uta* that he translates again show his interest in the classical form. While some of the *uta* are credited to anonymous poets, Tablada also includes poems by famous poets such as Ono no Komachi (834?-?). In the preface to the *Kokinshu*, Ki no Tsurayuki describes Ono no Komachi as one of the “six poetic geniuses” in the collection.[9] She was the only woman to receive the honor of this title. Ono no Komachi was best known for her use of the pivot line in *uta*, and her fame as a poet turned into legend after her death when she became the subject of song, folktale, and *noh* drama. The following is Tablada’s translation of one of her poems:

> On the barren rock drops the traveling seed
> and among the aridity rises the steep pine…
> If the love that invites me is, oh beloved, sincere
> let us exist united … ; such is our destiny![10]

The above poem is one of four *uta* that Tablada translates into four lines instead of the five-line format he uses for the paraphrases and the other direct translations. Because the poems were originally written as one line, there is a considerable amount of room for a translator in determining the exact line count and the number of words per line that will appear in the translation. *Uta* are often translated into poems of either four or five lines. However, the fact that Tablada does not attempt to keep the 31-syllable count in any of the paraphrases or translations, and his use of punctuation not only at the end of lines but within lines, suggest that Tablada recognized that even a direct translation could not precisely reproduce the poem in a different language. He granted himself a certain amount of freedom in constructing the Spanish-language *uta*. For instance, it may be that Tablada recognized that the Spanish syllable did not equate to the Japanese *onji* in duration and made a conscious decision to disregard the syllable count. William J. Higginson and Penny Harter discuss the difference between Japanese *onji* and Western-language syllables in their book on English-language haiku: “Japanese poets do not count ‘syllables’ at all. Rather, they count *onji*. The Japanese word onji does not mean ‘syllable,’ it means

'sound symbol,' and refers to one of the phonetic characters used in writing Japanese phonetic script … each of the onji represented a very short sound, much simpler than most syllables in, say, English or German."[11] This structural difference between languages, and the fact that Tablada does not adhere to specific syllable counts, suggests that Tablada realized that some aspects of the *uta* form could not be precisely translated and that any Spanish-language version of *uta* would be different from a Japanese-language version. Structural experimentation, in this case, was not just possible but necessary.

The degree of experimentation increases with the paraphrases, which were written in Yokohama, Japan in 1900. They were first published in December of 1900, just two months after the publication of the translations. Like the translations, the paraphrases were published in *Revista Moderna*. They appeared under the title "Songs of Love and of Autumn," and were specifically defined as paraphrases of Japanese poems rather than being designated as *uta*.[12] The poetic license that Tablada takes in paraphrasing some poems, rather than directly translating them, bridges the acts of translation and of writing original poetry. He works with an existing *uta* as a base and then embellishes it, expands on it, and makes it more like a short Western poem than a Japanese *uta*. The result is a poem that is not quite a Japanese *uta* and not quite an original Tablada poem, but it is someplace in between the two.

Tablada also cites the *Kokinshu* as the source for his paraphrases of Japanese *uta* that appeared in *Revista Moderna* and the second edition of *El Florilegio*. He paraphrases poems written by famous Japanese poets including Saigyo (1118-1190), a priest who was of aristocratic lineage but who left the court to travel and for extended stays at different religious retreats. Saigyo, however, was not published in the *Kokinshu*, which appeared in the tenth century but in the thirteenth century collection, the *Shinkokinshu*. According to the scholar and translator Burton Watson, Saigyo "is the leading figure in the famous anthology entitled *Shinkokinshu*, or 'New Collection of Ancient and Modern Times,' being represented by a total of ninety-four poems … he has come to rank as one of the most influential figures of the Japanese court poetry tradition."[13] The following is Tablada's paraphrase of one of Saigyo's *uta*:

> Among the somber humanity
> of the rocks, separated from,
> and shunned by, the light of day,
> my loves have been told
> to the black and cold night…[14]

Tablada’s versions, as exemplified by the above poem, poeticize the subjects and construct more complicated lines than is typical in traditional *uta*. For instance, the phrase “somber humanity of the rocks” poeticizes the barren landscape, whereas a traditional *uta* would avoid this embellishment of nature to suggest that the isolation of the rocks was a comfort to the speaker in his loneliness. Many of Saigyo’s poems are recognized for their Buddhist acceptance of loneliness as a human condition. Tablada also poeticizes the darkness, suggesting that the speaker has been “shunned by” daylight. Again, a traditional *uta* would not usually use this type of description, nor would it pack so much description, for instance in the pleonasm “separated from, / and shunned by.” Carrying descriptions over from one line to the next is unusual for an *uta*, as well, which favour a straightforward presentation of thoughts and description. This difference can be more clearly seen by comparing the lines of the previous *uta*, titled “As rays of moonlight,” with Tablada’s paraphrase.[15] Only the final two lines of the paraphrase – “my loves have been told/to the black and cold night…” – with their straightforward diction and lack of figurative language, resemble a traditional *uta*. Tablada is accurate in designating “Songs of Love and Autumn” as paraphrases of Japanese poems, suggesting that he was aware of his variations of the *uta* form and was interested in experimenting with *uta*, rather than simply adhering to its established structure. His experimentation suggests that he was already interested in Japanese poetic forms as potential new forms for Spanish poetry.

That Tablada was intentionally working with a classical Japanese form is heightened not only by his translation of poems written by the most famous classical poets, but also by his use of the term “*uta*,” which was not in regular use by the late nineteenth century. “*Uta*” was an archaic term, whereas the term “*waka*” was more commonly applied to this form of poetry in Japan and especially to poems written before the late nineteenth century. In fact, Tablada’s interest in Japanese poetry coincided with the *tanka* reform of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the reform, poets sought to modernize *waka* so that they “would respond to the emotional needs of those living in the modern era. They succeeded, and in time classical waka was reborn as modern tanka.”[16] *Waka* came to signify 31-syllable poems written before the reform, while *tanka* referred to those written after the reform. *Uta* was no longer used. It is unclear whether Tablada simply did not know of the reform, which happened concurrently with his visit, and was only exposed to classic versions of *uta*, or if he simply preferred the classic versions to the modern *tanka*. It is possible that his interest in *uta* was in taking a classical form and altering it to create an innovative, modern version.

The relationship between Tablada's translations of Japanese poetry and his own original works reaches its zenith not with his translations of *uta*, but with his publication of two collections of original, Spanish-language *haiku*. Through these works, Tablada introduced the *haiku* into the Spanish language. It is not surprising that Tablada began experimenting with *haiku*, given its relationship to *uta*. *Haiku* derived from a form of linked verse called *renga* which itself developed out of the *uta*. *Renga* was written by multiple poets and consisted of verses of 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllables. The 5-7-5 verses were linked together by the two lines of 7 syllables each. In other words, one poet wrote the first section of the *uta* (5-7-5) and another poet capped that verse with the second section of the *uta* (7-7). Ultimately, the opening 5-7-5 verse of the *renga*, which was called the *hokku*, was separated from the longer, linked poem and became a separate poetic form.

Haiku shares many common characteristics with *uta*. For instance, both are short forms that are part of the classic Japanese tradition. Interestingly, *haiku* was undergoing a reform at the same time as *tanka*. The syllable count that was part of traditional *haiku* (and *uta*) was no longer considered mandatory. Modern subjects were being introduced. And again, Tablada was in Japan when these events were taking place. However, some of the characteristics of *haiku* hold true for both traditional and modern versions, and a working definition of *haiku* is necessary in order to evaluate Tablada's poems. First and foremost, *haiku* convey a "*haiku* moment." Bruce Ross, in his introduction to *Haiku Moment: An Anthology of Contemporary North American Haiku*, describes the concept of the *haiku* moment as follows:

> [In *haiku*] each of these particular instances of time is intended to present an insight into reality, often evoking moments of transcendence, awe, or simply the joy found in the unexpected. Underlying this emphasis on the given moment of time is the Buddhist idea that the world is made anew in each moment. A kind of divine spontaneity thus inheres in each moment … A *haiku* does not simply portray mere nature. It reveals the universal importance of each particular in nature as it burgeons forth and relates to other particulars in a given moment.[17]

In terms of specific guidelines, the haiku form of poetry focuses on a single moment in which physical nature is linked with human nature. It contains no more than two images and these images are of things that have occurred simultaneously resulting in the *haiku* moment. Most *haiku* are written sparsely, in one to four lines, with few verbs and adjectives, and using little punctuation. Some *haiku* make subtle references to literary works or to his-

torical events, and *haiku*, which can be translated as "playful phrase," often contain humor. Consider the following example of Basho's "old pond," which is the most widely translated and probably the most well-known *haiku*:

> Old pond…
> a frog leaps in
> water's sound.[18]

Note how there are few descriptive words or verbs. There is little punctuation. The entire poem is sparsely written and juxtaposes two primary images: the old pond and the simultaneous moment of the frog jumping in and the sound of water. Basho's poem captures, in Ross's words, "the universal importance of each particular in nature as it burgeons forth and relates to other particulars in a given moment," and in doing so, it presents a *haiku* moment for the reader to experience.[19]

When considering Tablada's work, however, the question becomes how to evaluate a poetic form once it has been taken from its original culture and language and transplanted. To some extent, the same guidelines used for Japanese *haiku* apply to *haiku* written in other languages. For instance, the number of images that a *haiku* can contain does not vary depending on the language. Nor does the concept of the *haiku* moment. In any language, a *haiku* is the poetic conveyance of a *haiku* moment from the poet to the reader. However, other aspects of *haiku* must be adapted. For instance, the images used to convey the *haiku* moment will vary depending on the region, or natural setting, in which the poet is writing. Given the fact that Japanese *haiku* are written in a single vertical line and that the Japanese *onji* does not equate to the syllables, or units of speech, in other languages, a poet also has more freedom in determining syllable count, line length, and the number of lines in the poem.

Tablada's *haiku* show an understanding of the form but they also suggest that he was more interested in adapting *haiku* into a modern form of Spanish-language poetry. He was no longer translating specific Japanese poems into Spanish but was translating the form of *haiku* – a traditionally Japanese poetic verse – into a viable form of Mexican poetry. While other Western poets, such as the Imagists, wrote *haiku*-like verses that focused on Japanese scenes and subjects, Tablada used the form to write about Latin America. Tablada does acknowledge the Japanese origin of *haiku* by dedicating his first collection *Un Día … Poemas Sinteticos* (1919) to Shiyo (Chiyo-ni) and Basho.[20] This dedication also recalls Tablada's introduction into Japanese poetry through *uta*. Shiyo, a Buddhist nun, was a well-known *uta* poet. Basho is the most famous *haijin*, or writer of *haiku*, in the *haiku*

tradition. The dedication also reinforces that Tablada was familiar with much more Japanese poetry than his few published translations would suggest and that his exposure to Japanese *haiku* included a familiarity with some of the best *haiku* ever written.

Some of the poems in *Un Día* recall the Japanese origin of *haiku*. For instance, compare the following Japanese *haiku* by Moritake to a poem by Tablada. Moritake's poem read:

> A fallen flower
> Returning to the branch?
> It was a butterfly.[21]

Tablada's poem, titled "Night Moth," reads:

> Give back to the naked branch
> Night moth,
> Your dry leaf wings.[22]

It is unclear whether Tablada simply wrote an original poem that is similar to Moritake's *haiku* or whether Tablada knew of Moritake's work and wrote a paraphrase of the Japanese poem. Given that Tablada had already published many paraphrases of *uta*, it would not be inconsistent for him to also paraphrase a Japanese *haiku*. Furthermore, many Japanese *haiku* are similar to one another, and indirect referencing of a more famous poem is not uncommon in the Japanese *haiku* tradition. References to other texts, such as Zen writings, also take place in traditional haiku. Zen passages were used by monks while they were studying Buddhism in monasteries, and these monks often wrote *haiku*.[23] In fact, Moritake's poem may have come from the following Zen saying: "The broken mirror will not again reflect;/ Fallen flowers will hardly rise up to the branch." Nevertheless, as the Buddhist and *haiku* scholar R. H. Blyth notes, "it is quite probable that his verse was for him an original one."[24] Perhaps Tablada's verse, like that of Moritake, contains similarities to another poem but is, in fact, original for the poet.

Other poems in *Un Día* incorporate traditional Japanese images, such as bamboo, frogs, the moon, and herons. For the most part, these are not obvious references to Japanese *haiku* because subjects like frogs or the moon are universal and a reader who was unfamiliar with Japanese *haiku* would not draw a connection between Tablada's poems and their Japanese counterparts. In many ways, Tablada's poems adhere to some of the basic tenets of traditional *haiku*. His poems focus on nature. They are imagistic. They are short, although they do not adhere to the 5-7-5 syllable count. As explained in the earlier discussion of *uta*, Tablada may have been aware of

the differences between the Japanese *onji* and the Spanish syllable and may have therefore chosen not to attempt a strict syllable count in his *haiku*.

Even with his adherence to some of the principles of *haiku*, however, Tablada still alters the form to suit his own design. Many of the poems in *Un Día* reflect Tablada’s interest in word-play and he constructs a multi-level reading that involves natural imagery, religious references, and allusions to Mexican culture. These threads run through the text above and beyond the natural images being described. Some of the word-play is in keeping with the ability of the Japanese language to use double entendres and puns, but Tablada’s word-play is engaged specifically to maintain the multi-level reading. Since *haiku* is a form that does not allow for poeticizing or providing social commentary on the subject, but instead focuses on the natural moment being described, this multi-level reading is another way in which Tablada is experimenting with the form. Tablada also titles all of his *haiku*, which is a highly unusual move and sets them up as short Western poems as much as *haiku*. As in his *uta* translations, he often uses punctuation two or more times in a poem, whereas languages that use written punctuation tend to write/translate *haiku* using punctuation no more than once per poem. Above all else, Tablada’s poems rarely convey a *haiku* moment. The focus of his poems is on the multi-level reading that combines natural imagery, cultural references, and religion rather than on revealing “the universal importance of each particular in nature as it burgeons forth and relates to other particulars in a given moment.”[25] This multi-level reading is a significant departure from traditional Japanese *haiku* that are typically recognized for “their directness, simplicity, and unintellectuality.”[26] Furthermore, Japanese *haiku* present images that “appeal directly to the senses without the intervention of abstraction or commentary, and, for the most part, without figurative language; a remarkable alternative to the Western poetic tradition of moral verse, standardized figurative expression, and symbolic images.”[27] The following poems reveal how Tablada’s *haiku* diverge from traditional Japanese *haiku* through their references to religion and culture.

“The Insect,” from *Un Día*, demonstrates how Tablada uses a natural setting to create a short, dense poem that has multiple layers of meaning.

> Tiny insect, you go on your way
> Shouldering folded wings,
> Like the pack of a wandering pilgrim…[28]

The insect – although a popular subject of Japanese *haiku* and used by all the *haiku* masters, most especially Kobayashi Issa – here recalls less of

the Buddhist respect for all living things and more of a Christian struggle. The insect is burdened down in this life, unable to fly. It shoulders its wings like a pack, a burden. The image, Tablada suggests, is similar to that of a pilgrim or traveler. However, "pilgrim" also recalls the Christian usage of the word to describe those on a journey through this world and on to Heaven. Compare Tablada's poem with the following *haiku* by Issa, and notice how Issa's poem is free of the multiple readings characteristic of Tablada's work:

> It is true even
> among the world's insects
> some sing well, some not.[29]

The poem connects physical nature and human nature by suggesting that in both the world of insects and the world of human beings not everyone sings well. The poem offers this one connection, this one insight, and nothing more. There is no reference to religion or culture. There is no suggestion that the insects are symbols for something else. Issa simply notes the comparison between singing humans and singing insects to suggest the connectedness of the universe traditionally found in a *haiku* moment.

In the poem titled "The Aviary," Tablada again includes a religious reference combined with natural imagery:

> Different songs sung together;
> The musical aviary
> Is a tower of Babel.[30]

Here, a biblical meaning is suggested through a reference to the story of the tower of Babel found in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. In the biblical story, people were building a tower to Heaven. To prevent them from working together to finish the task, God caused them to speak in different languages so that they could not understand one another. The story was intended to explain why different people spoke different languages. Tablada's poem suggests on a literal level that the different birds in the aviary are all singing but cannot understand one another's songs. In effect, they are singing in different languages. The religious reference in the poem also draws a connection between the lack of communication between the birds and the lack of communication between people speaking different languages.

The result is a poem that speaks as much to the problems of transplanting a poetic form into a new language and culture as it does to the aviary that it describes. In translating *uta* and in writing the first Spanish-language *haiku*, Tablada was aware of the difficulties of trying to write a

traditionally Japanese form in a different language and culture. *Haiku* had been written for hundreds of years before Tablada discovered the form and it had always been written in Japanese using specific Japanese poetic conventions. Trying to achieve a successful *haiku* in Spanish, with no body of Spanish-language *haiku* on which to build, recalls the tower of Babel and the different songs sung together in the aviary. Tablada is working with poetry in two languages, Japanese and Spanish, just as the people in the biblical story spoke different languages but, more importantly, the poem’s treatment of communication in different languages suggests both positive and negative aspects for translation of poetry. The poem suggests that different voices can be musical – Japanese poetry can be translated into or written in Spanish and still be poetry. However, different voices also carry the potential for misunderstanding if a word or phrase cannot be accurately translated or if the cultural associations with a particular word do not make sense to readers from a different culture. In this case, the result is a “tower of Babel.” Differences between two languages can construct a cage that limits communication. Such a suggestion is not traditionally included in Japanese *haiku* and is an example of Tablada adapting the classical form.

Given Tablada’s interest in translation, the above poem, with its reference to the tower of Babel and its suggestion of potential miscommunication between different languages, also resonates with critical conversations surrounding the act of translation in general. Concerns about the viability of translating a text directly into another language have long been addressed by translators and theorists, including Walter Benjamin in his foundational essay “The Task of the Translator,” George Steiner’s significantly-titled *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, and Willis Barnstone’s *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice*, which includes an introduction entitled “The Other Babel.” Benjamin considers the act of translation in relation to language itself. He argues that all languages share a relationship to an original, pre-Babel language that no longer exists, and that “languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express.”[31] For this reason, “a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.”[32] Through translation, one recognizes the relationship between all languages. Steiner addresses the fact that languages are not static but are always in the process of change.[33] He also acknowledges that language is connected to social institutions and cannot be separated from the institutions it informs, a particularly relevant point when considering Tablada’s

translations and his original *haiku* because the *uta* and the *haiku* are so deeply steeped in Japanese culture and tradition.[34] Barnstone's consideration is even more applicable to Tablada's work because Barnstone emphasizes that translation involves interpreting one text and then, in the process of translation, producing a new text such that "translation then, as all transcription and reading of texts, creates difference."[35] Tablada's description of some of his work as paraphrases suggests that he is aware that he is producing a new text, and his innovations with the *haiku* form also suggest that he has adapted the form for his own purposes and created something new.

Many of these critical discussions of translation, rather than reaching any universal resolution or system of translation, have emphasized the challenges involved in translating texts as well as suggested possible approaches to understanding and engaging in the act of translation. Tablada's different attempts at rendering Japanese poetry into Spanish and his experimentation not simply with translations but with paraphrases, gestures toward the difficulty in translating these poems into another language. His recognition that there will always be a barrier to an exact one-to-one linguistic correlation between the two versions of the poem as well as between the two different languages, and his decision to move away from attempting such a one-to-one correlation, is further emphasized in his original *haiku* and his decision to forego a strict syllable count and to incorporate references to Mexican culture and Christianity.

Another example of Tablada's adaptation of the *haiku* form occurs in the poem "The Ants." Tablada references the Mexican tradition of associating orange blossoms with celebrations, including weddings, when he writes:

> Tiny wedding procession,
> The ants trail
> Petals of orange blossoms…[36]

Orange blossoms may be scattered at a wedding or worn by the groomsmen as boutonnieres. They may also be scattered at certain other festivities, such as a *quinceañera*, which is a large formal birthday celebration for fifteen-year-old girls in Mexico and other Hispanic countries. It traditionally marks the family's and the community's recognition of a girl's transition to womanhood. The above *haiku* can be read in two ways. The line of ants can themselves resemble a miniature wedding procession thereby reminding the poet of the traditional association with orange blossoms. Or, if there has been a real wedding procession, there could be ants passing through actual orange blossoms. In either reading, Tablada has connected a cul-

tural tradition with the ants, suggesting a parallel between the human and the natural world, which recalls the *haiku* tradition. But just as in "The Aviary" and other poems in *Un Día*, Tablada is not only adapting the Japanese *haiku* to fit his subject matter. He is also addressing his subject matter through new forms. The tradition of scattering orange blossoms at a wedding is seen from a different perspective when it is presented in a short verse that connects marriage with a procession of ants. The poem suggests that marriage is as natural as the ants trailing the orange blossoms. At the same time, it takes the subject of ants, something normally seen as too insignificant to be poetic, and acknowledges it as part of nature and therefore as a viable poetic subject. Based on the definition of *haiku* cited earlier, according to which a *haiku* should focus on the natural image just as it is without personifying it or using other poetic tropes, this poem is clearly not a traditional Japanese *haiku*. However, like "The Aviary," it is a dense, three-line poem that is also atypical of Mexican poetry. Tablada has constructed a variation of both *haiku* and Mexican poetry, creating a new form that is the result of combining two poetic traditions.

Tablada pursues his new form of poetry, continuing to vary the tradition of *haiku* form and Western subjects, in *El Jarro de Flores: Disociaciones Liricas*.[37] His interest in *haiku* is suggested in the introduction when he states that *haiku* is the perfect vehicle for modern thought.[38] Instead of citing its more traditional characteristics, Tablada notes its lyrical quality as well as its ability to convey a sense of surprise and irony. Traditional Japanese *haiku* often convey a sense of surprise; however, irony is not something usually associated with *haiku*. Irony, or saying one thing and meaning another, is the opposite of the goal of *haiku* because, as previously noted, *haiku* emphasize "directness, simplicity, and unintellectuality."[39] Although Tablada states that he is interested in the form's potential to convey irony, his *haiku* contain more word-play than irony as it is traditionally understood.

In *El Jarro*, some of Tablada's variations focus on the form. For instance, just as he experimented with the number of lines in his *uta* translations, he also explores the possibility of *haiku* written in two and four lines instead of three. The following are examples of his two-line *haiku*. The first is titled "Day of Sun":

> There is one butterfly
> on each flower…[40]

And the second is titled "Day of Rain":

> Each flower is a vase
> for tears…[41]

These *haiku* are also intended to be read together, and they appear on facing pages. In the *haiku* tradition, *haiku* sequences are written on a single topic or from a particular experience or event and are grouped together vertically on the page. Although "Day of Sun" and "Day of Rain" appear on separate pages, the unifying theme of a flower pot from *haiku* suggested by the title, *El Jarro de Flores,* presents the book itself as an extended, innovative version of the *haiku* sequence because of its length and its presentation as a book, rather than a page, of haiku on a single theme. The same is true for *Un Día*, which presents one day's *haiku* chronologically from morning, afternoon, evening, and night.

Other variations in *El Jarro* involve the content of the poems. For example, Tablada continues to make references to Western culture in this collection of *haiku*. Just as some traditional *haiku* refer to Chinese and Japanese literary classics, Tablada adapts one of his *haiku*, titled "In Lilliput," to refer to an English classic.

> Ants over an
> Inert cricket. I am reminded
> of Gulliver in Lilliput…[42]

Many of Tablada's innovations with *haiku* involve taking a traditional aspect of the form, such as references to literature, and adapting it. However, he also uses *Un Día* and *El Jarro de Flores* to explore other Japanese forms that are related to *haiku*. For instance, the *haiku* sequence that presents a vertical column of *haiku* on a related theme becomes two book-length collections of *haiku* on single themes where the sequence of poems appears horizontally with one poem per page. This is not simply an innovative use of the *haiku* sequence. It is also an adaptation of Japanese book-art. Book-art in Japan combines exquisite papers, sewn binding, and illustrations to create books that are themselves an artistic experience. Tablada uses the same book-making method with both of his collections of *haiku*, and the emphasis on a single theme only enhances the unity of each collection. Both *Un Día* and *El Jarro de Flores* were published in limited editions.[43] *Un Día* was published in Venezuela in a chapbook edition of two hundred copies. Each page of the book contains one poem and one illustration that is hand-stamped in all two hundred copies of the book. *El Jarro de Flores* was published in an edition of two hundred and eighty copies and the first ten were bound in Japanese paper. Full colour prints are featured on a few of the inside pages while the remaining pages contain one *haiku* each.

The illustrations that Tablada includes in *Un Día* also suggest that he is experimenting with *haiga* or paintings combined with *haiku*.[44] Tablada was clearly familiar with Japanese art because he wrote an entire book on

the artist Hiroshige, so it is quite likely that he also knew of the *haiga* tradition.[45] In *The Haiku Handbook*, Higginson and Harter provide the following definition of *haiga*: "*Haiga* involve a spare, sketch-like picture and a *haiku* in calligraphy in the same piece of art."[46] This definition is helpful in examining Tablada's hand-stamped illustrations because he does not use the brush stroke painting that is traditionally used in *haiga* just as he does not write traditional *haiku*. Higginson emphasizes the "spare, sketch-like" nature of the illustrations, and while Tablada's stamped illustrations are not brush stroke, they are spare and sketch-like – they at once recall traditional *haiga* and diverge from it. The poems and illustrations also work together, which is in keeping with the *haiga* tradition. As Stephen Addiss states in his discussion of *haiga*, "the poem does not just explain the painting, nor does the painting merely illustrate the poem. Instead, they add layers of meaning to each other."[47] This is true of Tablada's poems, as well. They have multiple layers of meaning that are enhanced by the illustrations. Consider "The Aviary," which was discussed earlier but now is presented with its accompanying illustration:

LA PAJARERA

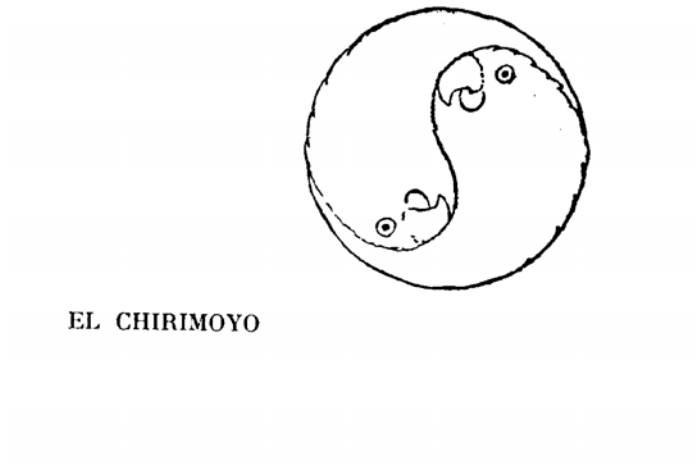
Tablada, "The Aviary", Un Día … Poemas Sinteticos*, p. 15.*

Different songs sung together;
The musical aviary
Is a tower of Babel.[48]

As previously noted, the different songs can represent different languages and/or different voices expressing different interests. In one respect, these

differences can be musical, but when people do not listen to one another and their songs are all "sung together," the songs construct a tower of Babel. The dark, distinct bars in the illustration heighten the confining nature of the aviary. They enhance the impression of the aviary as a prison, an image not specified in the actual *haiku*. The poem, however, recalls the story of the tower of Babel, which is not visible in the illustration. In this way, the poem and illustration work together, and as in traditional *haiga*, the reader must make the connections and complete the relationship between illustration and poem.

In some traditional *haiga*, a direct correlation between the painting and the *haiku* is not obvious. The painting may refer to the theme of the poem or it may depict a small, easily unnoticed detail from the poem. Tablada also has examples of this indirect correlation, for instance the poem titled "The Chirimoya":



Tablada, The Chirimoya, Un Día … Poemas Sinteticos, p. 23.

The chirimoya branch
Back and forth it twists and speaks:
A pair of parrots.[49]

In this example, he combines a *haiku* about parrots with an illustration that at first appears to be a design. On closer examination, the image of parrots can be detected as can the yin-yang symbol. The overall subject of universal connectedness that is suggested through the yin-yang symbol is heightened by the fact that it is a Mexican poet borrowing a Chinese sym-

bol within the context of a Japanese artistic tradition. The masculine within the feminine and the feminine within the masculine that is part of the yin-yang symbol suggest that the parrots may be mating. In keeping with his other illustrations and the tradition of *haiga* in general, the full significance of the *haiku* and illustration is left intentionally incomplete so that the reader may make the connections.

Tablada's *haiga* are consistent with his *haiku*. He has taken a traditional form and, while adhering to some of its characteristics, has altered it to accommodate a different subject. The yin-yang symbol or an aviary would not be part of a traditional *haiga*. The illustrations also contribute to the multi-level readings of the accompanying *haiku*, which are themselves an innovation. Tablada uses the illustrations in combination with the *haiku* to construct a form of art/poetry that is not traditional *haiga* or traditional Mexican art or traditional Spanish-language poetry. It is something new that results from integrating these three things into a single form.

In addition to *haiga*, there is one other tradition that may have influenced Tablada's combination of *haiku* and art in *Un Día*. The *uta* that Tablada translated and then published in *Revista Moderna* and *El Florilegio* were traditionally written by court poets and often focused on love. However, the townspeople wrote their own version of *uta*. These poems, called *kyoka*, also used natural imagery but focused on the humorous side of love.[50] They reached their height in popularity during the eighteenth century. *Kyoka* were comparable to *senryu*, the humorous *haiku*-style poems that focused on human nature. However, unlike *senryu*, *kyoka* were also combined with illustrations. During the late eighteenth century, there were many books produced that combined *kyoka* and wood-block prints. Given Tablada's own knowledge of Japanese art, his translation of classic *uta*, and his awareness of *haiku*, it is possible that he encountered both *haiga* and the prints with *kyoka*. Either of these forms, which were themselves innovations of *haiku* and *kyoka*, would have interested Tablada, who was both poet and artist. They allowed him to combine not only the Japanese and Mexican traditions but the different media of art and poetry as well.

Although *Un Día* and *El Jarro de Flores* were the only full books of *haiku* that Tablada published, he did write other *haiku*. Some of these were included in his diary. Others were published in his books that were not *haiku*-specific. One of the most interesting innovations in these *haiku* is Tablada's attempt at titling them. In the two chapbooks of *haiku*, he refers to the poems as *hokku*. This approach is in keeping with the original Japanse name for the form. However, in other instances, he refers to *haiku* as *haikai*. This approach is also a logical decision. The *renga* form, from which *haiku* descended, was originally called "*haikai no renga*." In its current us-

age, *haikai* encompasses all forms of Japanese poetry relating to *haiku*. For instance, not only *haikai no renga* but forms such as *tanka*, *senryu*, and *haiga* are all considered forms of *haikai*. Tablada also alters the spelling of *haikai* in some instances, substituting a "j" for the "h" – presumably because the "j" sounds like an "h" in Spanish. By changing the spelling, Tablada uses "*jaikái*" to designate a Spanish-language version of the Japanese *haiku*. All of these variations suggest Tablada's interest in constructing *haiku* that are specific to his own language and experience, rather than imitations of the Japanese form.

The exact sources of influence on Tablada's original, Spanish-language *haiku* and *haiga* are difficult to specify. His published translations of classic *uta* and his use of the *haiku* form suggest a familiarity with Japanese poetry and his own writings acknowledge an awareness of Japanese art. Whether he combined his poems with art in an intentional effort to adapt *haiga* or *kyoka*, or whether he simply took one of the poetic forms he knew about and tried to experiment with it, is less important than the fact that the results were Spanish-language, modernist versions of *haiku* and *haiga*. What becomes increasingly clear when considering the impact of translation on Tablada is that his interest in translation and his recognition of the obstacles encountered when translating poetry from one language to another had a significant impact on his own poetry. His translations and his paraphrases of *uta* led him to write original haiku in Spanish, thereby introducing a new poetic form into the Spanish language. His modifications to the form, through intellectualization and references to religion and Mexican culture, created a new version of this centuries-old form of poetry just as his combination of *haiku* and illustrations created a variation on Japanese *haiga*. Ultimately, translation allowed Tablada to experiment with producing new renditions of classic Japanese poems and with developing innovative original poetry in Spanish.

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NOTES

[1] José Juan Tablada edited *Revista Moderna* from 1898-1903. For a discussion of his work with *Revista Moderna* and its relationship to his other publications, see Esperanza Lara Velázquez, "Prólogo", in, *Obras*, 3 volumes, ed. Héctor Valdéz (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988), 1: 9-47.

[2] See Velázquez, "Prólogo", p. 20.

[3] José Juan Tablada, "El Samurai", *Revista Moderna*, 2 (March 1899), p. 74; "El Daimio", *Revista Moderna*, 4 (September 1901), p. 284; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 242-3.

[4] These images of Japan are especially clear in the four-page poem "Japón," printed at the beginning of the section of *El Florilegio* entitled "Poemas Exóticos." Tablada, *El Florilegio* (Mexico: Imprenta de Ignacio Escalante, 1899), pp. 33-6. Cf. *Obras*, 1: 231-3.

[5] See Velázquez, "Prólogo", pp. 17-21. Cf. *Obras*, 1: 239-41.

[6] For a historical overview of the *uta*, including a discussion of its formal characteristics and translations of classical *uta* with notes, see Steven D. Carter, *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[7] Saigyo, *Poems of a Mountain Home*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 115.

[8] Tablada, "Utas Japonesas", *Revista Moderna*, 3 (October 1900), p. 298; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 240-1. For a discussion of *Revista Moderna* and the second edition of *El Florilegio*, see Velázquez, pp. 25-6.

[9] Jane Hirshfield, "Introduction", trans. Jane Hirshfield with Mariko Aratani, in *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu, Women of the Ancient Court of Japan*, (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1990), p. xix. The *Kokinshu* is one of Japan's most famous, classical anthologies. Published in the early tenth century, this collection of *uta* was the first anthology of verse ever produced by decree of an imperial order. Its 1,110 poems reflect the work of a primarily aristocratic group of poets because by the early tenth century, the *uta* had moved from an oral poetic form to a written form favored by court poets.

[10] "En la roca desnuda cae el germen viajero/ y entre sus arideces surge el frondoso pino …/ Si el amor que me brindas es, oh amado!, sincero/ unidos existamos… ; Tal es nuestro destino!", Tablada, "Utas Japonesas", p. 298; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 241, my trans.

[11] William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 100-1.

[12] Tablada, "Cantos de Amor y de Otoño. Paráfrasis de Poetas Japoneses del 'Kokiñshifu': Coleccíon de Odas Antiguas y Modernas", *Revista Moderna*, 3 (December 1900), p. 373; cf. *Obras*, 1: 239-40; cf. Velázquez, pp. 21-2.

[13] Burton Watson, "Introduction", in trans. Burton Watson, *Poems of a Mountain Home* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 1-2.

[14] "Entre la humanidad sombría/ de las rocas, alejado,/ y huyendo la luz del día/ mis amores he contado/ a la noche negra y fría…" Tablada, "Cantos de Amor y de Otoño", p. 373; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 239, my trans.

[15] Saigyo, p. 115; Tablada, "Cantos de Amor y de Otoño", p. 373; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 239.

[16] Makoto Ueda, "Introduction", ed. and trans. Makoto Ueda, in *Modern Japanese Tanka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. xv.

[17] Bruce Ross, "Introduction", in ed. Bruce Ross, *Haiku Moment: An Anthology of North American Haiku* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1993), p. xiv. For additional discussions of *haiku*, see the following: Joan Giroux, *The Haiku Form* (Rutland, VT: Tut-

tle, 1974); Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku* (New York: Doubleday, 1958); William J. Higginson with Penny Harter, *The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985).

[18] Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook*, p. 9. For an extensive collection of English-language translations of Basho's poem, see Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs* (New York: Weatherhill, 1983).

[19] Ross, "Introduction", p. xv.

[20] See Tablada, *Un Día … Poemas Sinteticos* (Caracas: n.p., 1919), p. 5; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 363.

[21] R. H. Blyth, *Haiku*, Vol. 1, Paperback ed. (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1992), p. 24.

[22] "Mariposa Nocturna": Devuelve a la desnuda rama,/ Nocturna mariposa,/ Las hojas secas de tus alas." Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 81; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 383, trans. Ce Rosenow and Amy Zenger.

[23] Blyth, *Haiku*, p. 24.

[24] Blyth, *Haiku*, p. 24.

[25] Ross, "Introduction", p. xiv.

[26] Blyth, *Haiku*, p. 7.

[27] Ross, "Introduction", p. xiv.

[28] "El Insecto": "Breve insecto, vas de camino/ Plegadas las alas a cuestas,/ Como alforja de peregrine…" Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 25; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 370, trans. Ce Rosenow and Amy Zenger.

[29] Issa, Kobayashi, *The Spring of My Life and Selected Haiku*, trans. Sam Hamill (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), p. 151.

[30] "La Pajarera": "Distintos cantos a la vez;/ La pajarera musical/ Es una torre de Babel." Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 15; Cf. *Obras*, 1: 339, trans. Ce Rosenow and Amy Zenger.

[31] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p.72

[32] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," p. 78

[33] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 17.

[34] Steiner, *After Babel*, pp.24-5.

[35] Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 13-9.

[36] "Las Hormigas": "Breve cortejo nupcial,/ Las hormigas arrastran/ Pétalos de azahar…" Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 47; *Obras*, 1: 375, trans. Ce Rosenow and Amy Zenger.

[37] José Juan Tablada, *El Jarro de Flores: Disociaciones Liricas* (New York: Escritores Sindicados, 1922); cf. *Obras*, 1: 419-62.

[38] Tablada, *El Jarro de Flores*, p.1; cf. *Obras*, 1: 421.

[39] Blyth, *Haiku*, p. 7.

[40] “Día de sol”: “Hay una mariposa/ En cada flor…” Tablada, *El Jarro de Flores*, p. 26; *Obras*, 1: 431, my trans.

[41] “Día lluvioso”: “Cada flor es un vaso/ Lacrimatorio…” Tablada, *El Jarro de Flores*, p. 27; *Obras*, 1: 431, my trans.

[42] “En Liliput”: Hormigas sobre un/ Grillo inerte. Recuerdo/ De Guliver en Liliput…” Tablada, *El Jarro de Flores*, p. 29; *Obras*, 1: 432, my trans.

[43] Much of Tablada’s work was published in limited editions. Only 200 copies of *Un Día* were made and each was hand-illustrated by Tablada, while 280 copies of *El Jarro de Flores* were produced. See Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 2 and *El Jarro de Flores*, p. 4 for descriptions of the print quantities, paper choices, and binding used for these two books.

[44] For an useful introduction to *haiga*, see Stephen Addiss, *Haiga: Takebe Socho and the Haiku-Painting Tradition* (Richmond: Marsh Art Gallery and Honolulu and University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

[45] José Juan Tablada, *Hiroshigue: El Pintor de la Nieve y de la Lluvia, de la Noche y de la Luna*, (México: Monografías Japonesas, 1914). Hiroshigue (1797-1858) was a Japanese painter and printmaker. He was especially well-known for his work with landscapes, and his work was admired and collected by Western visitors to Japan.

[46] Higginson and Harter, *The Haiku Handbook,* p. 247.

[47] Addiss, *Haiga*, p. 9.

[48] “La Pajarera”: “Distintos cantos a la vez;/ La pajarera musical/ Es una torre de Babel.” Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 15; *Obras*, 1: 339, trans. Ce Rosenow and Amy Zenger.

[49] “El Chirimoyo”: “La rama del chirimoyo/ Se retuerce y hable:/ Pareja de loros.” Tablada, *Un Día*, p. 23; *Obras*, 1: 370, trans. Ce Rosenow and Amy Zenger.

[50] See Higginson and Harter, *The Haiku Handbook*, pp. 186-7.