

Night Jasmine and the Ethics of Attention

Goran Gatalica's Poetics Between Science and Silence

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AI-Assisted Technology Declaration

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author utilized **ChatGPT** and **DeepSeek** for language polishing and brainstorming during the initial drafting phase. The author has thoroughly reviewed and edited all AI-generated content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work presented in this publication.

Abstract

This extended critical feature examines the poetry of Croatian poet Goran Gatalica as a distinctive instance of contemporary minimalist poetics situated at the intersection of scientific discipline, ethical attention, and cross-cultural haiku practice. Drawing on his formal training in physics, chemistry, and engineering, Gatalica develops a poetics characterized by precision, restraint, and an ethics of observation that resists rhetorical excess. Through close theoretical positioning and contextual reading, this essay argues that Gatalica's work exemplifies an international lyric grounded not in abstraction or exoticism, but in attentive engagement with silence, locality, and empirical reality. Structured in three parts, the study moves from intellectual biography and theoretical framing, to a curated bilingual haiku corpus with commentary, and finally to a book-length reading of *Night Jasmine* as a peace-oriented poetics of ethical minimalism. Rather than treating haiku as a formal exercise, the essay situates it as an ethical compression of experience, aligning poetic practice with scientific humility and moral restraint. In doing so, the feature positions Gatalica's work within a living global network of contemporary haiku and minimalist poetry, while articulating its relevance to current debates on attention, silence, and responsibility in lyric writing.

Keywords: Goran Gatalica; haiku poetics; minimalist lyric; contemporary European poetry; ethics of attention

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Editor's Note

Verse Version has consistently sought to publish poetry and criticism that foreground ethical attention, cross-cultural dialogue, and poet-centered inquiry. In recent years, as minimalist and short-form poetries have gained renewed global prominence, questions concerning restraint, silence, and responsibility in lyric expression have become increasingly urgent.

This feature on Goran Gatalica was commissioned not merely to introduce an accomplished international poet, but to examine a mode of poetic thinking that resists the acceleration and amplification characteristic of much contemporary discourse. Gatalica's work—shaped by scientific training and sustained engagement with international haiku communities—offers a compelling example of how poetry may function as a practice of care rather than assertion.

By presenting an integrated critical study alongside bilingual poetic texts, *Verse Version* affirms its commitment to scholarship that does not separate theory from practice, nor aesthetics from ethics. This feature is published in the belief that such work contributes meaningfully to ongoing global conversations about poetry's role in an age of excess.

PART I

1. Editorial Introduction: An International Lyric at the Edge of Stillness

In an era marked by excess—of speech, of image, of instant interpretation—the contemporary lyric faces a paradoxical demand: it must speak less in order to mean more. The global revival of haiku and short-form poetry over recent decades is not merely a stylistic tendency, but a cultural symptom: a renewed desire for precision, restraint, and ethical attention.

Within this context, the work of Goran Gatalica occupies a distinctive and consequential position. His poetry emerges at the intersection of domains too often assumed to be incompatible: physics and metaphysics, chemical exactitude and spiritual resonance, scientific rationality and lyric intuition. Yet his work does not attempt to reconcile these domains through synthesis or metaphor alone. Instead, it subjects language itself to a discipline analogous to scientific method—testing, stripping, observing, and refining until only what is essential remains.

For *Verse Version*, an international journal committed to academic rigor, cross-cultural dialogue, and poet-centered inquiry, Gatalica's oeuvre offers more than exemplary texts. It offers a model of poetic responsibility: a demonstration of how a poet can inhabit global traditions without dilution, and how minimal form can sustain maximal ethical depth.

This feature does not aim to canonize or monumentalize. It seeks, rather, to read attentively—to understand how Gatalica's poetry works, what conditions produce it, and why it matters now. In doing so, we position his work not as an isolated achievement, but as a node within a living international network of contemporary haiku and minimalist poetics.

2. Beyond the Curriculum Vitae: A Mind Formed by Matter and Measure

It would be reductive to recount Goran Gatalica's biography as a sequence of academic degrees and literary honors, though both are substantial. What matters more is the epistemological formation that precedes and underwrites his poetry.

Formally trained in physics, chemistry, and chemical engineering, Gatalica belongs to a lineage of poet-scientists for whom the natural world is not an abstract theme but an empirical reality. Scientific education, at its most rigorous, teaches not accumulation but elimination: the removal of noise, bias, and untested assumption. This intellectual discipline finds a direct analogue in Gatalica's poetic method.

His poems do not describe the world expansively; they interrogate moments. They ask what can be known through minimal data, what can be felt through a single image, and what remains unsayable even when language is precisely calibrated. In this sense, his poetry inherits not the rhetoric of science, but its ethics: accuracy, humility, and respect for the unknown.

Crucially, Gatalica's scientific background does not produce a poetry of explanation. There is no didactic impulse, no conversion of poem into proposition. Instead, science functions as a disciplinary silence behind the poem—a pressure resisting ornament, abstraction, and excess sentiment.

This resistance is especially evident in his engagement with haiku, a form whose demands align naturally with scientific thinking: economy, observation, and precision. Yet for Gatalica, haiku is neither technical exercise nor formal game. It is an ethical stance toward reality.

3. Language, Place, and the Acceptance of the Exotic

For poets working with global forms like haiku, a persistent challenge lies in integrating exotic imagery seamlessly. The seasonal motifs and aesthetic traditions commonly found in Japanese haiku are reimagined in Gatalica's works—cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, chrysanthemum—not as decorative symbols borrowed superficially, but as elements transformed and woven into the fabric of his distinct personal narrative and universal concerns through his intrinsic poetic logic. Such reception is far from mere imitation; it confirms that universality in poetry derives from the depth achieved through a creative and reflective reworking of specific experiences, even cross-cultural ones, rather than from the shallow replication of their surface appearances.

In both his Croatian-language poetry and his English-language haiku, Gatalica demonstrates a careful negotiation between linguistic systems. English is not merely a vehicle for international circulation; it is a medium whose constraints actively reshape perception. His English haiku do not sound translated. They sound considered.

This consideration extends to silence. White space, line breaks, and the unsaid play a decisive role in his work. Meaning frequently emerges not from what is named, but from what is withheld. Such restraint is not an aesthetic affectation but an ethical decision: to refrain from overstatement is to trust the reader and to acknowledge the autonomy of the observed world.

4. Haiku as Ethical Compression

To understand Gatalica's poetics, one must move beyond formal definitions of haiku as syllabic pattern or aesthetic convention. In his practice, haiku becomes a mode of ethical compression—a way of reducing experience without trivializing it.

Compression here does not entail simplification. On the contrary, it intensifies complexity. A single image must carry temporal depth, emotional resonance, and philosophical implication without explanation. This demand disciplines both poet and reader.

Gatalica's haiku frequently inhabit liminal moments: dusk rather than noon, aftermath rather than event, presence marked by absence. These moments resist narrative closure. The poems do not illustrate; they situate. The reader is not instructed what to feel but invited to notice.

Attention, in this work, is not passive observation. It is an ethical act. To attend carefully is to recognize the autonomy of the other—whether that other is a natural phenomenon, a human trace, or silence itself.

5. Toward *Night Jasmine*: A Poetics of Peace Without Rhetoric

The haiku collection *Night Jasmine* represents a culmination of these tendencies. Recognized for its contribution to peace-themed literature, the book does not approach peace as slogan, ideology, or declaration. Instead, it approaches peace obliquely—through nocturnal imagery, quiet persistence, and fragile continuity.

What distinguishes *Night Jasmine* is its refusal of dramatization. There are no grand gestures, no overt moralizing. Peace appears not as abstraction but as a condition of attention: the ability to notice fragrance in darkness, continuity amid rupture, and stillness under historical pressure.

This approach aligns with a tradition of ethical minimalism, in which moral force arises from restraint rather than amplification. By focusing on the smallest perceivable units of experience, Gatalica constructs a poetics that resists violence at the level of language itself.

6. Positioning Within Contemporary Global Haiku

Gatalica's role within contemporary global haiku culture extends beyond authorship. His editorial work—curating, contextualizing, and sustaining international dialogue—reflects a commitment to haiku as a living, evolving practice rather than a static inheritance.

What distinguishes his contribution is attentiveness practiced horizontally rather than authority imposed vertically. His engagement across cultures demonstrates respect for difference without relativism and commitment to quality without dogmatism.

This balance—rigor without rigidity, openness without dilution—mirrors the aesthetic principles of his poetry and explains its resonance across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

If Part I has examined the conditions of Goran Gatalica's poetry—intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic—Part II turns to the poems themselves. There, a curated selection of English haiku is presented alongside faithful, poetic Chinese translations, followed by close commentary grounded in haiku aesthetics and cross-cultural reading.

PART II

1. Entering the Text: Why the Haiku Must Be Read Slowly?

If Part I has argued that Goran Gatalica's poetics is grounded in ethical attention, restraint, and disciplinary silence, then the haiku themselves must now be allowed to speak—not as illustrations of theory, but as primary sites of meaning. Haiku resists paraphrase. Its logic is experiential rather than discursive; it unfolds in perception, not argument.

For this reason, the haiku presented here are offered bilingually, in English and faithful—poetic Chinese translation, each adhering to core haiku aesthetics: seasonal awareness, cutting

logic, understatement, and resonance beyond statement. Each poem is followed by a brief critical commentary intended not to close meaning, but to open it further.

The Chinese translations do not aim to domesticate the poems, nor to embellish them. Instead, they seek equivalence of attention: rhythm answering rhythm, image answering image, silence answering silence.

2. Haiku I: Ethical Power and Minimalism

the plum petals
stuck in a rain gutter -
refugee camp (Gatalica, 2022, p. 29)

梅瓣落如绡
搁浅在雨水沟里
恍若难民潮

This haiku demonstrates astonishing conciseness and restraint, revealing the ethical power of cross-cultural imagery. The poet places “plum petals”—an image deeply rooted in East Asian classical aesthetics, symbolizing nobility and transient life—within the “rain gutter,” a functional, marginal space of modernity. The “stuck” state of the petals represents both physical entrapment and the suspension of life’s natural flow. Following the dash, the abrupt appearance of “refugee camp” is not a straightforward metaphor but rather a juxtaposition that compels the reader to draw connections between two forms of “temporary existence”: the petals awaiting decay or washing away in the gutter, and the refugees awaiting resettlement or repatriation in the camp. Both are equally fragile, equally excluded from the mainstream system.

The minimalist poetics of haiku plays a crucial role here: it refuses explanation, sentimentality, or didacticism, presenting only the visual superimposition of two concrete scenes. Yet, through this, it places the decay of natural phenomena and the political

displacement of human lives within the same ethical field of vision, accomplishing—in silence—a profound meditation on war and marginalized existence.

3. Haiku II: Violence and Freedom

thinking of war -
trapped in barbed wire
a butterfly (Gatalica, 2022, p. 45)

念及战争时
蝴蝶陷于铁丝网

振翅不得脱

With just three lines, this haiku accomplishes a profound ethical gaze. The opening line, “thinking of war,” introduces the vast violence of history into personal consciousness, only to materialize it immediately as barbed wire—an emblem of modern warfare, originally designed to demarcate borders and imprison human bodies. The butterfly trapped within, a classic symbol of natural fragility and beauty, becomes here an epitome of innocent life. The poet does not explicitly denounce the cruelty of war; rather, through the passive state of being “trapped,” the poem reveals how the machinery of violence silently consumes non-combatant lives.

The tactile contrast between butterfly wings and wire spikes, the sudden shift from contemplating war to witnessing a microscopic scene—these together form a structural metaphor: every individual caught in systemic violence, human or non-human alike, becomes a “butterfly” ensnared in the invisible logic of war. Within the poem’s silence echoes a pressing question: when violence permeates the everyday, how can beauty and freedom ever survive?

4. Haiku III: Acoustic Space and Ethical Perception

city cannon -
mother's hyacinths tremble
in the flowerpots (Gatalica, 2022, p. 44)

城头炮声沉

母亲裁的风信子

盆中颤春深

This haiku transforms acoustic space into a battleground, staging a silent ethical confrontation. The cannon's roar is not mere background noise but a physically invasive agent of violence that tears through the calm of the air, penetrates walls and window frames, and reaches the most fragile vessel of life indoors—the hyacinths in their flowerpot. Here, sound ceases to be a neutral natural phenomenon; it becomes a weapon mobilized by the machinery of war, reconstructing the ethical nature of space: the private sphere, brutally penetrated by sound waves, loses its sanctity and turns into a resonance chamber for public violence. The hyacinth's "tremble" thus becomes a convergence of multiple perceptions: first, it is a physical transduction of acoustic energy, documenting sound's penetration as material force; second, it is a biological response of living beings to irresistible violence, rendering invisible war as visible crisis; finally, this trembling becomes an ethical tremor, exposing war's systemic colonization of non-combat zones—when cannon fire enters the daily soundscape, any attempt to preserve beauty and order on a windowsill becomes a silent yet tenacious indictment of violence.

5. Haiku IV: The Dissolution of the Quest

spring cloud...

a pilgrim is disappearing

among the higher cliffs (Gatalica, 2022, p. 38)

春云渡远岑

朝圣者影渐朦胧

隐入危崖深

With minimalistic strokes, this haiku sketches a profound spiritual landscape. “Spring cloud,” serving as a seasonal word, hints at the flow and impermanence of the seasons, while its lightness and diffuse texture create a dual tension—both spatial and textural—with the weighty “higher cliffs” that follow. The pilgrim’s act of “disappearing” is not an erasure but a gradual merging into a higher, more expansive natural order—a visual vanishing that also metaphorizes the seeker’s union with a sublime object—the cliff or faith.

Through omission and negative space, the poet freezes the narrative focus on the instant of “disappearing”: no origin or destination is given for the pilgrim. Instead, the softness of the spring cloud and the hardness of the cliff engage in an existential dialogue. The cliffs symbolize both the arduous realm of practice and the pinnacle of the spirit, while the ethereal cloud lends the entire process a transcendent, serene quality. Ultimately, the natural scene and the human act of pilgrimage achieve a poetic unity in the moment of disappearance: the ultimate meaning of the quest lies precisely in the dissolution of individual traces, merging into the more ancient rhythm of the cosmos.

6. Haiku V: Love and Mark

early autumn-
on mother’s apron
plum stains (Gatalica, 2022, p. 95)

早秋晨光里

母亲围裙染梅渍

浅深皆往昔

This haiku carries a profound narrative of time through a still-life of everyday objects. “Early autumn,” as a kigo (seasonal word), not only marks the season but also implies transition and sedimentation in the cycle of life. The “plum stains” on the mother’s apron are by no means accidental marks—they are material crystallizations of labor, time, and memory, perhaps from

pickling plums, where splashed juice oxidizes into faint brown imprints on the cotton fabric. The apron, as an extension of the body in domestic labor, transforms here into a micro-history of the family: the plum stains bear witness to the mother's quiet guardianship in the kitchen year after year, while also metaphorizing the wisdom of preserving perishable fruit into lasting flavor.

Through minimalistic juxtaposition of images, the poet creates a poetic dialogue between the transience of autumn and the permanence of stains. The plum stains act as a non-verbal inscription, chronicling the mother's silent dedication within the seasonal cycle. Between the crisp chill of early autumn and the late-summer abundance symbolized by the plum, there lingers a gentle sigh over the passage of time. Without uttering a word of emotion, the poem turns a simple stain into a transparent window onto family memory and enduring labor, flowing with a restrained yet tender reverence for life.

7. Patterns Across the Corpus: What the Haiku Share?

These haiku reveal a coherent ethical and aesthetic program:

(1) Aftermath over event –The poems never directly depict the moments of war, flight, or death. Instead, they focus on the residual traces of violence in the physical and sensory world: the trembling of hyacinths in a flowerpot from cannon fire, a butterfly trapped in barbed wire, plum petals stuck in a rain gutter. These are the “echoes” of events rather than the events themselves, revealing that the true permeation of violence lies in its enduring recoil, which alters the texture and meaning of everyday space.

(2) Absence as presence –Figures such as the mother, refugees, and pilgrims often remain outside the text, yet achieve a powerful presence through their traces and associated objects: the mother appears through plum stains on an apron or trembling hyacinths; refugees become haunting specters via metaphors of cherry blossoms and barbed wire. This absence

functions as an ethical structure of summoning, compelling readers to actively contemplate lives excluded by systemic forces.

(3) Nonhuman agency –Natural elements are not passive images but active agents that carry history, perceive violence, and bear silent testimony: the hyacinth’s “tremble” records acoustic violence; plum petals “stuck” in a rain gutter mirror the plight of refugees; a butterfly “trapped” in barbed wire exposes the logic of war. They become sensors and archives of human ethical failure.

(4) Refusal of closure –Each haiku ends in a state of suspension: petals “stuck,” a butterfly “trapped,” a pilgrim “disappearing,” hyacinths “trembling.” The poet refuses to offer resolution or redemption, instead placing readers within the continuity of an ethical dilemma. This incompleteness remains faithful to the nature of historical trauma—true suffering has no poetic full stop, only endless aftershocks.

These features align Gatalica’s work with the most rigorous currents of contemporary haiku, where the poem becomes a site of encounter rather than expression. The self recedes, not in erasure, but in respect.

8. Toward Longer Silence: Preparing for *Night Jasmine*

The haiku above do not function as isolated jewels; they are elements within a larger poetic ecology. In *Night Jasmine*, these moments accumulate into a sustained meditation on peace—not as ideology, but as attentiveness practiced over time.

What distinguishes Gatalica’s approach is that peace is never named directly. Instead, it is enacted formally: through brevity, restraint, and the refusal to instrumentalize suffering or beauty. The poems do not ask to persuade; they ask to be noticed.

If Part II has lingered with the micro-ethics of individual haiku, then Part III will step back to consider *Night Jasmine* as a book-length project and to situate Goran Gatalica within

contemporary global haiku and minimalist poetics—where science, spirituality, and silence converge into a coherent poetic vision.

PART III

1. From Poem to Book: *Night Jasmine* as a Sustained Ethical Gesture

While individual haiku can be read as autonomous moments of perception, *Night Jasmine* reveals its full significance only when approached as a book-length poetic argument without rhetoric. The collection does not progress narratively, nor does it arrange poems into explicit thematic clusters. Instead, it accumulates attentions. Each poem slightly recalibrates the reader's perceptual stance, until a larger ethical atmosphere emerges.

What distinguishes *Night Jasmine* from many contemporary haiku collections is its refusal of thematic branding. The book does not announce itself as a work about peace, trauma, or reconciliation. These dimensions are present, but they arise indirectly, through patterns of restraint: early-autumn settings, aftermaths rather than events, city cannon, and persistent yet fragile continuities. Peace is never stated; it is practiced.

This practice aligns with a long tradition of non-declarative ethics in lyric poetry, where moral force derives from form rather than proclamation. In Gatalica's case, the form of haiku—radically concise, ethically modest, resistant to domination—becomes the very medium through which peace is imagined.

2. Peace Without Ideology: A Poetics of Non-Violence

The recognition of *Night Jasmine* as a peace-themed work is significant precisely because the book avoids all conventional markers of peace literature. There are no slogans, no explicit condemnations, no didactic gestures. Instead, the poems enact what might be called linguistic non-violence.

Non-violence here operates on several levels:

(1) Semantic restraint – meaning is not forced or overdetermined. In the poems, meaning remains in a state of suspension: for instance, “the butterfly on barbed wire” does not explicitly articulate the cruelty of war, nor do “the plum petals in the rain gutter” directly symbolize refugees. The poet refuses to assign a single interpretation to the images, instead relying on juxtaposition to stir associations. In doing so, themes such as violence, memory, and displacement naturally emerge from the resonant silence of the unspoken.

(2) Imagistic humility – images are allowed to remain partial and open. Imagery is often presented in fragments: “the trembling of the hyacinth” does not narrate the mother, nor does “the plum stain on the apron” depict the scene of labor. This incompleteness resists a closed symbolic interpretation, allowing petals, stains, and clouds to remain as “half-open vessels” that can be filled with multiple layers of experience.

(3) Temporal patience – the poems dwell in slowness rather than urgency. The poet selects durational verbs such as tremble, strand, and dissolve, stretching the momentary into a prolonged process. For instance, the reverberation of cannon fire extends through flower petals, and the pilgrim’s “disappearing” into spring clouds is a gradual fade rather than an abrupt halt, compelling the reader to follow the text into a slow-motion ethical gaze.

(4) Ethical decentering – the poet’s voice withdraws in favor of attention. The poet’s judgment consistently remains behind the scenes. For instance, when describing the city cannon, only the physical tremor of the hyacinths is presented, with no explicit commentary on the war. This withdrawal shifts the authority of interpretation and the burden of ethical responsibility to the reader, transforming the poem into a training ground for attentiveness rather than a platform for moral pronouncements.

3. Science and Spirituality: Not a Synthesis, but a Discipline

One of the most distinctive aspects of Gatalica’s work is the way scientific training and spiritual attentiveness coexist without being merged into a facile synthesis. There is no attempt

to aestheticize science or to mystify empirical knowledge. Instead, science provides a discipline of attention, while spirituality provides a discipline of humility.

From science, Gatalica inherits precision of observation, respect for limits of knowledge and suspicion of unnecessary explanation.

From spiritual traditions—particularly those aligned with contemplative minimalism—he inherits valuation of silence, acceptance of uncertainty and ethical patience.

Haiku becomes the meeting ground of these disciplines, not because it reconciles them, but because it refuses the need for reconciliation. The poem does not need to explain the world; it needs only to attend to it faithfully.

This is especially evident in the way *Night Jasmine* treats time. The poems are temporally modest. They do not gesture toward transcendence or revelation. Instead, they remain grounded in moments that are measurable yet irreducible. In this sense, the collection enacts what might be called a spiritual physics—a recognition that meaning emerges not from magnitude, but from relation.

4. Minimalism as Moral Practice

Minimalism in poetry is often misunderstood as an aesthetic preference or stylistic trend. In Gatalica's work, minimalism functions as a moral practice. To say less is not to evade responsibility, but to resist the violence of overstatement.

This resistance is particularly important in a global literary context where poets frequently feel compelled to represent suffering, conflict, or injustice through heightened language. Gatalica chooses a different path. He does not represent suffering directly; he attends to what remains around it. This choice avoids appropriation and preserves the dignity of what cannot be spoken fully.

Minimalism here is not emptiness, but ethical density. Each word carries weight because it is surrounded by silence. Each image matters because it is not crowded by explanation. The reader is not instructed; the reader is entrusted.

Such trust is rare, and it signals a deep confidence in poetry's capacity to work quietly and persistently, beyond immediate recognition.

5. Global Haiku Without Homogenization

Gatalica's position within contemporary global haiku is distinguished by his ability to participate fully in international discourse without flattening cultural difference. His English-language haiku do not imitate Japanese models superficially, nor do they assert a localized identity defensively. Instead, they operate within a shared aesthetic field shaped by attentiveness, restraint, and respect for form.

This balance is increasingly important in global haiku culture, where rapid circulation can lead either to homogenization or to rigid traditionalism. Gatalica avoids both. His poems are formally disciplined yet responsive to lived European landscapes, histories, and atmospheres.

Equally important is his role as a curatorial intelligence—someone who understands haiku not only as a genre, but as a global conversation requiring careful mediation. His editorial work reflects the same values found in his poetry: patience, inclusivity, rigor, and resistance to spectacle.

Through this combination of authorship and curatorship, Gatalica contributes to shaping the ethical norms of contemporary haiku practice, emphasizing quality over novelty and attention over assertion.

Conclusion: The Fragrance That Remains

The image of night jasmine is instructive. The flower does not dominate its environment. Its presence is subtle, often unnoticed, yet persistent. It releases fragrance not through display

but through duration. Goran Gatalica's poetry operates in much the same way. It does not demand attention; it rewards it. In a literary culture oriented toward immediacy and amplification, his work reminds us that poetry's deepest force may lie in what it chooses not to say.

For *Verse Version*, this alignment is not merely aesthetic but ethical. To publish, read, and edit such work is to affirm a belief in poetry as a practice of care—care for language, for perception, and for the fragile continuities that persist even in darkness.

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