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# Haiku in Slovak poetry

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**Abstract:**
*Haiku, the Japanese form of poetry from the 17th century, has not only spread around the globe, but is considered one of the most popular types of poetry ever. This paper briefly deals with haiku's penetration into Slovak literature around 1989, when the publishing space opened up for less traditional poetic genres as well. Furthermore, it examines typical principles of haiku and explains their meaning, since they cannot be considered exclusively formal criteria. In particular, the paper focuses on the well-known (wabi, sabi, kigo), as well as less known aspects of Japanese aesthetics (shiori, karumi etc.) that are connected with the haiku genre. It brings attention to the significant relationship between poetry and religious-philosophical aspects that has been typical to haiku since its beginnings. In the core of the paper lies the question of the transformation of haiku principles in the Slovak environment that is demonstrated on specific, artistically compelling Slovak variants of haiku.*

## Expansion of Haiku

Haiku is a Japanese poetry form originating in the 17th century which has spread throughout the world and has been considered one of the most popular forms of poetry ever. However, the roots of haiku go even further into the past, to the oldest Japanese literary works: Kojiki and Manyoshu (circa year 712 and 760 AD). In both, the tanka genre can be found. It later developed into the renga, which later stood by the birth of haiku. The term genre is of wider relevance here, at least in the case of tanka, which had replaced the term waka as its

synonym. Tanka consisted of 31 syllables in a 5 – 7 – 5 – 7 – 7 structure. Renga was created to enrich tanka at a time when it was starting to stagnate (Blyth, 1963, p. 40). Exhaustion of one model allows for the creation of another. Renga was a long, chain poem with a strict form, often described as a social game. It usually started with one poet writing the first line of the poem with 17 syllables, another poet adding a line with 14 syllables, the third one writing a line with 17 syllables again that ideologically connected with the first two lines and so on (Aitken, 1994, p. 18-19). As Makoto Ueda (1965) points out, in comparison with typical Japanese poems (as he understands waka and tanka), the new renga poem didn't end with a verb but with a noun, which was supposed to invite the reader to add to the predicate and finish the poem. The most important part of a renga was the so-called opening verse (line) – hokku – not only did it set the atmosphere which had defined the rest of the content, but its dominant position also "shaped" the key to the whole work. In the middle of the 15th century, the opening verse separated and transformed into a poem with 17 syllables that is nowadays called haiku (Aitken, 1995, p. 19).

Although haiku is not the shortest form of poem in the world (there are also shorter forms, but less established), "it is the seventeen-syllable haiku that has set the standard for approaching a literary absolute zero, teetering on the brink of silence" (Kern, 2018, p. xxxvii). Japanese haiku underwent various transformations, which can be demonstrated via its essential elements that had changed, been reduced or complemented under the influence of various poetic authorities. Yet, the classical "Bashō haiku"[1] is still considered the model and the fundament of this art. "Basho was the authoritative model, a poet of the highest order whose presence could never be ignored by anyone writing in that genre. Those who wanted to write in a radically different style had to deny Basho's poetry first and justify their denial in one way or another" (Ueda, 1970, not numbered).

However, apart from epigons and followers of the Matsuo Bashō school of haiku, there were authors that tried to revitalize haiku by changing this model. For example, Masaoka Shiki (1867 – 1902), the most significant reformer of haiku in the period of its decline, criticized Bashō and helped revitalize haiku during the Meiji era. He emphasized the shasei principle – a simple, seemingly ordinary detail from common life (Líman, 1996, p. 8). Similarly, other haiku poets contributed new solutions to the old genre – modifying either its form, theme, or ideology. Despite the changes, it is possible to identify several fundamental principles that are connected with haiku even today: go-shichi-go, kigo, kireji, wabi, sabi, shiori, kurai and karumi, as well as principles such as makoto, shasei, the mono no aware aesthetic and several others.

Many of the above-mentioned principles have been a part of Japanese culture since its beginnings, and are connected primarily with religious thinking or philosophy.[2] They apply in

other arts as well (architecture, tea ceremonies, painting etc.) and we could call them aesthetic categories. Continuity is important in the context of Japanese aesthetics. Despite the fact that the range of essential aesthetic ideals kept extending with new concepts and terms, the continuity of the tradition has been kept. The new ideal has never been defined in opposition to the old one, rather it enriched it (Winkelhöferová, 2008, p. 11). Maintaining the difficult structure of the genre and trying to not "spoil" the specific spiritual essence (and Japanese cultural tradition) of haiku had become a challenge for many Western authors who tried to provide their own solutions. R. H. Blyth, the author of multiple volumes covering the origin and evolution of haiku called *A History of Haiku*, significantly contributed to the spread of haiku into Europe and Northern America, its popularization and academic interpretation. The haiku form fascinated many worldwide-known authors (W. H. Auden, I. von Bodmersdorf, P. Claudel, J. R. Jiménez, E. Pound, R. Rolland, G. Ungaretti) and artists (P. Gaugin and V. van Gogh). References to this form of poetry can be found in the works of J. L. Borges, O. Paz and R. M. Rilke. Jack Kerouac's haiku are popular in the Western cultural context as well.

The first notions of haiku in Slovak literature probably emerged with the interest in Beat Generation poetry, which situates this moment in 1960s – the era when Slovak literature opened up to Western artistic influences. However, the first poems labelled as haiku did not occur before 1989;[3] for example, František Lipka published his double-haiku (with six verses) in Literárny týždenník where he also tried to define this form. Some haiku can be found in the works of a poet group "Osamelí bežci" ("The Lonely/Lonesome Runners") – especially Peter Repka's works on creating haiku more intensively. The volume of his collected works called *Básne* (*Poems*[4]) includes a cycle called *Pútnické haiku* (*Pilgrim Haiku*) from the years 1990-2000. Karol Chmel's road to haiku was longer; his first efforts can be found in his 1985 debut called *Máš čo nemáš* (*You have what you don't have*), followed by an anthology *O nástrojoch, náradí a iných veciach vypustených z ruky* (*On Instruments, Tools and Other Things Dropped from Hand, 2004*). Exclusively haiku-focused anthologies emerged only after 2000, inter alia J. Štrasser's anthology *Hahaiku* (2007), Ivan Kadlečík's *Matka všetkých slov* (*Mother of All Words*, 2008), E. Farkašová's *Načúvam ránu* (*I'm Listening to the Morning*, 2014) and others. Three anthologies of Slovak haiku have been published so far,[5] with the most complex one – by number of authors, works and interviews included – being *Haiku, haiečku, haiku zelený* (*Haiku, Oh Haiku, Green Haiku*,[6] 2011). The editor, Oleg Pastier, invited authors gathered around the F. R. & G. publishing house and the *Fragment* journal to participate. The anthology presents 13 poets: Rudolf Jurolek, Valerij Kupka, Ivan Štrpka, Ján Litvák, Ján F. Púček, Oleg Pastier, Karol Chmel, Ján Štrasser, Ivan Kadlečík, Peter Repka, Angela Repka and Daniel

Hevier. Other authors that were not included in this anthology (for example Ján Zambor and his pioneering activities) were presented in another, shorter anthology called *Mávnutie krídel* (*A Wing-stroke*, 2011) from the Skalná ruža publishing house. The poetological affinity between the participating authors is apparent and the names repeat: Karol Chmel, Daniel Hevier, Rudolf Jurolek and Ivan Kadlečík. Apart from Ján Zambor, other new authors include Erik Jakub Groch, Juraj Kuniak, Igor Hochel, Mila Haugová, Anna Ondrejková and Dana Podracká. The third anthology called *Haiku 2014* consists of five volumes and is bilingual. Four of the volumes present Slovak authors of haiku (Ivan Kadlečík, Stanislava Repar, Daniel Hevier and Daniela Bojnanská) in both Slovak and Slovene, the fifth volume is a multilingual anthology of Slovenian haiku published in the original as well as in Slovak, Czech, Romanian, German and English translation (editor: Primož Repar, Slovak translation: S. Repar). Works of three Slovak poets (Peter Kovalik, Marek Kučera, Zuzana Konopásková) can be found in Czecho-Slovak anthologies of contemporary haiku which were published by the DharmaGaia publishing house: *Míjím se s měsícem* (*I'm passing by the Moon*, 2013) and *Šálek dál hřeje dlaně* (*The Mug Keeps Warming the Hands*, 2020).

The Slovak variant of haiku is unique because of its relatively liberal acceptance of principles – usually, it only emphasizes some of them (syllable count, natural motifs, present moment or the popular karumi that is often transformed into a humorous point etc.). Similarly, the spiritual aspect of haiku is often substituted by the local Christian tradition or the general ethical message of the poem. The aim of this paper is to document specifications of this genre in Slovak poetry in interpretation. The term "Slovak variant"[7] will be used to express the natural (linguistic, cultural and other) modifications of the Japanese prototype.

**Slovak variant of haiku**

The development of the specific form of Slovak haiku has been influenced by multiple factors: the Japanese model, the tradition of other short genres (epigrams, aphorisms, sayings, short poems, lyrical still-lives, tanka, sijo, or senryu poems etc.) and the inclination towards the minimalist poetic in certain periods of Slovak literature. Haiku as an invariable model consists of the above-mentioned principles whose importance in each poem varies. The search for the "essence" of haiku corresponds with the distinction between the so-called dominant and auxiliary aspects of the genre, of which one guarantees its identity and the other allows authorial intervention (in Šidák, 2013, p. 98).

In relation to Polish, but also Western haiku in general, Beata Śniecikowska claims: "Moreover, in the case of specific highly conspicuous group of Polish – and, more generally,

Western – miniature poems, certain features now seem invariant: permanent, crucial, and generally unchanging. Naturally, these are the features that define the centre, the prototype of the genre" (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 90). The Slovak variant of haiku also confirms various possibilities of transformation of the Japanese prototype that oscillate on the axis: imitation – functional enrichment – shift towards a different genre. Śniecikowska explains the dialogue between the Japanese prototype and its international variations via Wolfgang Welsch's concept of transculturality and claims that "the concept of transculturality aims for a multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive understanding of culture" (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 22). Thus, the crucial question that remains is the one of artistic value of each poem.

The diversity of foreign – here specifically Slovak – haiku is proved by ideological and formal shifts in the principles of haiku as stated above. In this paper, I am working with haiku of contemporary Slovak poets whose work I consider not only a valuable contribution to the vitality and popularity of the haiku genre, but to Slovak poetry in general.

**Syllable count and the seasonal word**

In general, the classical Japanese rhythm go-shichi-go (literally 5-7-5), whose origin is rooted in Japanese tradition,[8] is considered the dominant genre criterium of haiku. However, even the first masters of haiku understood that the mechanical adherence to the syllable (morra) count does not equal a good haiku. The later, modern Japanese haiku advocated for the liberating tendency as well. "[H]istorically, Japanese haiku took liberties by running over into extra syllabets (jimatari) rather than under (jitarazu)" (Kern, 2018, p. xxxviii). In the Slovak literary context it is possible to identify two (artistically) contradictory approaches to go-shichi-go. The first one is represented by haiku that keep the syllable count and, at the same time, absolutize it as the only fundamental principle. As Cor van den Heuvel claims: "The idea that haiku is anything in three lines of 5-7-5 syllables dies hard. People write little epigrams in this form, or jokes about Spam, or cute descriptions of birds and flowers, and think they are writing haiku" (Heuvel, 1999, p. xiv). The opposite approach is represented by intentional diversity in the syllable count. There are multiple syllabic and graphic variants labelled as haiku – poems that have less or far more syllables; poems written in one, two or more lines; poems that start with the title etc.

The majority of the texts in the first group are artistically unconvincing. As an example, we could mention anthologies or their parts labelled as haiku that, however, significantly disrupt the essence of this art. Most of them come in the form of 17-syllable statements, grains of truth, gnomes. They resemble haiku because of the requirement of veracity (although subjective), but

are far from the prototype because of their didacticism, moral lessons and the effort to criticize current social phenomena. “What is also important is a sort of ‘pictorial disinterestedness’ of poems – the image primarily fixes attention on itself, without referring of higher (!) planes of reflection, cultural references, etc., even if the text carries intertextual allusions.” (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 66). Moreover, the originality of haiku is connected exclusively with the poetic truth[9] and its verification is not tied to the opinion of the subject, but stems from the natural flow of events.

Haiku from the second group, in which tendency to disrupt the syllable count or the standardized graphic entry is more obvious, are more attractive both in terms of reading and interpretation. Even the first haiku of Slovak literature can be sorted into this group. Many of the haiku in the group were written by Karol Chmel (from his anthology *You have what you don’t have,* 1985, and later journal publications). The author himself disrupts the idea of haiku with the title that is inappropriately long and contains an explicit questioning of its genre affiliation.

II. Haiku (with an eye closed)
*Among the cemetery trees*
*the invisible one, sightless*
*leads the unexpected visitors.*
(Chmel, 1985, p. 57).

Chmel’s hesitation over whether or not to call this poem haiku probably relates primarily to the syllable count which is higher (9 – 9 – 10). Adjectives prevail in this text, which is in contrast to the static, substantival fundament of haiku. The atmosphere of this haiku is formed by these attributes. The first one relates to the trees and, thus, frames the space – a cemetery. The word “among” is equally important – it implies a kind of a “zig zag” movement, a mystery that is connected to the given place. Other attributes relate to the non-specific object (he) of the poem. The fantastic atmosphere with a touch of fear and dramatization gradually intensifies and is complemented by words such as “invisible” or “sightless” which describe someone who needs an escort but is not seen by us. The border between life and death, reality and fantasy is disrupted, and the last line complicates the implied line of thought even further. We can ask: how unexpected are cemetery visits? Is it the living or the dead visiting? In Slovak, the rhythm of the poem is reinforced by the cumulation of words with “i”, the repetitive prefix, and the rhyme that is realized not only at the end of the line but also in its middle.

Similarly, Zambor, who began including haiku in his works in the 1990s, used to use the title of the poem. In this case, the title of the poem is considered another line, it adds to the syllable count and even becomes the key that opens the poem to wider interpretation.

Argonaut haiku
*Still yet, sea,*
*I hold the mane of your waves*
*even if the horse throws me off.*
(Zambor, 1995, p. 35).

It is possible to claim that the poem depicts human fight, dedication, endurance etc. It is expressed by the opposition between man's helplessness against the stormy sea and his dedication to endure forever, despite failures and falls. Zambor uses a visually lexicalized depiction which reminds readers of classical Japanese paintings in which waves look like a horse's mane. However, the title shifts this picture into mythological connotations and connects it with mythical heroes, the Argonauts, who were brilliant sailors. Even though the lyrical subject is expressed in the first person, the title shifts it towards the plural, towards the group of Argonauts – the symbol of man's endurance. If we want to find the "golden fleece", we must believe that impossible is just a temporary state that is waiting for someone to change it into possible.

Among newer haiku that are more liberal in syllable count – on the level of a conscious experiment – Viktor Suchý's poems are worth mentioning. Syllable count in his miniatures varies, and he also uses the title that adds another meaning to the poem.

in dreams
*under water*
*we walk*
*more slowly*
(Suchý, 2017, p. 49)

In Slovak, this haiku consists of 10 syllables (4 – 3 – 3) and Suchý uses it to make a parallel between two worlds – a dream world and an underwater world – based on the similar spatial feeling/movement. Both in dreams and under water, we are seemingly unable to coordinate our movements and, simultaneously, time becomes relative, and its nature is different from the "surface" in reality; it seems to flow more slowly despite many thoughts and

pictures appearing in the short moment of the dream or submerging under water. In the limited space, the author was able to capture not only a complex idea, but also to evoke a specific sensual (and supersensual) experience resulting from a sensitive observation. With its exuberance and fresh humour on the observer's side, Suchý's haiku are much closer to the Western variant, for example to Canadian-Latvian poet George Swede's haiku, whom Cor van den Heuvel described as "the funniest haiku writer who ever lived" (1999, p. xxiv).

The so-called seasonal word – kigo – is also significantly connected to haiku. Makoto Ueda states that the 17-syllable form and kigo, a word that places haiku into a specific season of the year, belong among the essential prerequisites that are valid even today (Ueda, 1965, p. 35-64). The seasonal word principle also reflects the author's relationship with nature and natural environment. Blyth (1963, p. 8-14) reflects upon the changes of nature in English poetry and finds certain differences between natural lyric poetry and kigo. He sees the reasons for this primarily in spiritual tradition and in differences between Christian and, say, Zen Buddhist or Shinto points of view on nature. "Japan's native religion was Shinto. In this system, every material object of the world is endowed with a certain force, power, and ability. [...] To a large extent, Shinto is based on the observation of reality accessible to the senses, deities (kami) are associated with objects of the visible world. [...] is above all a formula of living in harmony with the laws of nature, rather than a set of tenets arising from intellectual inquiry." (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 39–40).

Ueda uses Bashō as an example of this unique, sensitive perception of objects, natural and other phenomena and claims:

> 'Learn' means to submerge oneself within an object, to perceive its delicate life and feel its feeling, out of which a poem forms itself. A poem may clearly delineate an object; but, unless it embodies a feeling which has naturally emerged out of the object, the poem will not attain a true poetic feeling, since it presents the object and the poet as two separate things. Beauty in nature is a manifestation of a supreme creative force which flows through all things in the universe, animate and inanimate. This force, it must be stressed, is different from the creative power of an individual physical being. The energy of the universe is impersonal; it produces the sun and the moon, the sky and the clouds, the trees and the grass. The energy of individual man is personal; it roots in his conscious will, in his passions and desires, in his egotism. But man, being part of the universe, also has impersonal energy within him, an energy which he shares with the cosmos. It is this energy which every poet must work with in his creative activity.

> Bashō, therefore, does not share the view that a poet puts his own emotion into a natural object and gives airy nothing a local habitation and a name. On the contrary, he believes that a poet should annihilate his personal emotion or will for the sake of impersonal energy within him, through which he may return to the creative force that flows in all objects in nature. [...] One should try to enter the inner life of the object, whereupon he will see its 'delicate life' and touch its 'feeling'. (Ueda, 1965, p. 35–64)

In Slovak literature, the opposite tendency is present – the poet projects their feelings into the object. Nature becomes the mirror of the lyrical subject's soul; we talk about natural-psychological parallelism in this case. Hence, anthropomorphism is frequently present in the Slovak variant of haiku, and human characteristics are often projected onto both animate and inanimate natural things. It leads to relatively complicated poetic visions that build on personification, metaphors or parallelisms which are different from classical haiku that uses imagery in a rather economic and modest way. "However, the most important role in the poem is played by the image itself – odd, vibrant, yet easily recognizable in the reader's personal experience" (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 392). Tomáš Straka's haiku can be considered an interesting compromise from this point of view. The author models his personal experience in the context of the whole "block of flats" community.

*our block of flats*
*full of dead butterflies*
*and a sad sun*
(Straka, 2024a)

The possessive adjective "our" expresses a certain fellowship and shared responsibility. In Straka's haiku, subtle implications of criticism or calls for attention towards certain phenomena can be found – even if we cannot talk about engaged poetry, the topos of *the block of flats* in connection with *dead butterflies* evokes the sense of destruction of fragile beauty and its opposition to the natural environment. The subjective emotion, personified in the poem through the *sad sun* reminds the reader of Kerouac's variant of haiku. Despite the fact that Straka uses a metaphorical connection, readers are able to identify the meaning easily – it is possible to relate to not only personal dramas, but to the era of one's growing up or specific historical periods as well. In a sense, this haiku is a generational statement of the "block kids". Moreover, it is easy to visualize the place described in the haiku from the outside (the sad sun

filling places between the blocks of flats that light doesn't reach) and from the inside (the word "full" referencing the block's interior, creating the association with hallways full of dead insects).

Similarly, in Peter Kovalik's haiku the "fantastic" image of a fox with its legs becoming shorter and shorter is accessible enough to read it as a literal description of an observation of a fox in tall grass. The author maintains simplicity and subtleness of haiku and we can visualize the described moment. Thus, Śniecikowska's words (2021, p. 72) are proven to be true: "the so-called sensual mimesis[10] allows the recipient to recognize his own experience in the text, to reconstruct or, literally, visualize impressions written in the poem".

*meadow in May*
*the hunting fox's legs*
*are even shorter today*
(Kovalik, 2023)

The question of extent appears to be crucial. Some Slovak haiku present nature as a result of the subject's inner activity in a complicated manner and rely on analytically difficult poetic devices that disrupt the aspect of simplicity and emotional economy. This issue is described in the hosomi principle as well. Ueda defines it as "a sensitive working of the heart which penetrates into the innermost nature of things. [...] Anyone can catch crude emotions such as anger or jealousy, yet it requires utmost sensitivity to grasp a formless mood which surrounds the life of a natural object." (Ueda, 1965, p. 35-64). The English translation of hosomi is "slenderness", but the term emotional slenderness may be more precise. Similarly, Adam L. Kern (2018, p. xxiv) talks about reticence, by which he means especially personal emotions. In the following haiku, emotions are not only spoken plainly, but also rely on such means of expression as prosopopoeia, rhyme and euphony. For example, Peter Repka repeats the word steps which creates the impression of the sound of walk and the flow of time. The emotion stemming from a nostalgic memory modelled this way is emphasized by the capital J in Joy. He uses rhyme in his haiku, which increases the lightness and simplicity of the text and strengthens the pleasant atmosphere. However, in his other works he uses relatively non-traditional phrases that increase the requirements for the reception of the text. He frequently uses words starting with the same consonant or repeating syllable-formative root to create coherence between meanings of nouns and adjectives that are otherwise incompatible or not

traditionally used together. For example: "*fluffy flatbread*" (Repka, 2005, p. 184); "*sweating sunlight*" (Repka, 2005, p. 184), "*festive flight*" (Repka, 2005, p. 186) etc.

*Steps and steps*
*the air was called Joy*
*all those years*
(Repka, 2005, p. 187)

**Aesthetic categories Wabi, Sabi, Shiori, Karumi, Kurai and others**

The above-mentioned principles (qualities) of a poem are closely connected, although they are often used separately or in a modified version in the non-Japanese variants. The best-known principles include wabi and sabi which are linked with aesthetic ideas such as naturalism, mildness, or modest beauty (Winkelhöferová, 2008, p. 11). Usually, terms wabi and sabi are mentioned together because the lines between them blur: "Wabi-sabi is the most obvious and most typical characteristic of what we consider traditional Japanese beauty. In the pantheon of Japanese aesthetics, it is just as significant as the Greek ideal of beauty and perfection in the Western culture" (Koren, 2016, p. 23).

However, these principles do not concern only literature but other Japanese artistic forms as well – visual art, calligraphy, the tea ceremony (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 51). Originally, wabi meant "sadness of poverty" and its meaning gradually shifted towards a life attitude through which one tries to not resign oneself to life's gloomy aspects but find peace and harmony under any circumstances (Ueda, 1965, p. 35-64). Ľubomír Plesník (2012, p. 125-129) defines it as "a specific kind of wistfulness". Antonín Líman (1996, p. 8) connects wabi with the word aerugo which expresses a certain passage of time. For example, in the tea ceremony, wabi was understood this way – as a crack in the teacup that distinguishes it from the other cups and implies its longer history.

In haiku, wabi can be read as an emphasis on the transience of being which the artist realizes while observing natural phenomena. "In nature, wabi-sabi cannot be found in the moments of bloom and freshness, but in the moments of birth or extinction. Wabi-sabi is not beautiful flowers, majestic trees or vast landscapes. Wabi-sabi means small things that are hidden, impermanent or transient." (Koren, 2016, p. 52). In the following haiku, in the phrase *nothing is yours*, Štefan Kuzma explicitly and resolutely declares the "smallness" of a man in comparison with the world. Despite that we cannot claim that this realization brings sadness or regret.

*nothing is yours*
*not even the silence after*
*the song of the yearning frogs*
(Kuzma, 2013, s. 65)

Formlessness and uncertainty of the depicted mood in the haiku can be connected with the motif of emptiness, but in the positive sense of word – a full emptiness that radiates calmness surrounding the most ordinary events and things around us. Motifs of fog, silence, lowering sound, the colour white and other sensations that seemingly do not provide a physical depiction but only an anticipated yet important moment of truth are quite frequent as well. Morning represents such a moment: the awakening of our consciousness from sleep, from dreaming. Variations of this motif can be found in Slovak haiku.[11] In the following haiku, Kovalik catches the moment of this "brightening" of the landscape and our senses in early morning hours.

*a bird flew over there*
*or it did not*
*the dawn has only just begun*
(Kovalik, 2023)

In this simple haiku, the qualities of wabi, but also shiori, sabi or karumi can be found. The latter principle stands out the most in the text because it is hidden in an implicit question – did the bird fly over or did it not? – and because of a certain lightness or indifference of the answer. We understand that in the end, the answer is not important; the pleasant moment of the "dawning" is more important.

The karumi principle can be defined as a broader picture or perspective in the form of "lightness" of delivery, even in the case of serious or sad topics. Lightness is connected with the simplicity that accompanies even the deepest truths and the most difficult moments in life. It does not grieve over the mutability of life; it gazes at man's mortality with smiling eyes. "In Basho, to 'meditate on death' does not necessarily deny the pleasures of life. He sees life and death from a distance, from a place which transcends both. [...] only those who can deeply feel may attain the stage of transcendental 'lightness'. The relation between 'lightness' and 'heaviness' is not antithetical but dialectical." (Ueda, 1965, p. 35-64).

The oscillation between the pleasant and the heavy appears in Straka's haiku, too. In line with his typical expression, thus, in a more "Western" manner, he places the subject of the author into the centre of attention – the poem is written in first person. Similarly to Kovalik, Straka creates a peaceful atmosphere of contemplation and sensibilization of the subject that, symptomatically, happens in the morning.

*I open the window*
*I let a bit of the morning fog*
*into the flat*
(Straka, 2024a)

Most of the time, the realization of the transience of being happens in solitude that grants the subject space for such contemplation. Sabi is usually explained to the Western reader as the "nostalgia of solitude […], melancholy of the philosophical distance, solitude not in the sense of the youthful feeling of loneliness but, on contrary, as the sweet solitude in which one can listen to one's own inner voice and the song of the universe" (Líman, 1996, p. 8). Similarly, Śniecikowska (2021, p. 46-47) adds that the word sabi comes from the adjective sabishi, which literally translates as 'lonely' or 'desolate', yet it cannot be substituted by either of these terms. Sabi is a life attitude that is present in every haiku; in some, it is more explicitly shown through motifs or symbols, in others, it is hidden so deep in the poem we do not even realize its presence. Ueda uses the imaginative phrase "color of haiku" to address it. In haiku, sabi can be found in the emphasis on the present, in a flash or a momentary awakening to the reality the subject suddenly becomes aware of. Using Bashō's words, Zambor specifies that this realization is unique – it is not about projecting one's self into animals and things, but about a total merging into one and thus, in a sense, about detaching from one's self (Zambor, 2019, p. 111). Sadness in haiku is not expressed as an emotion, the poet does not weep over changing life, but simply describes a scene that evokes a mood ambiguously pointing towards sadness or loneliness (Ueda, 1965, p. 35-64). Even though haiku does not work with direct emotional outpourings, reading haiku can bring out deep emotions. Sabi in haiku can be also read as a positive solitude that can help the subject in its self-realization. It can be compared to meditation, contemplation, or prayer.

Another typical haiku mood is regret/grief (shiori), but not in the full meaning of this word; it is rather a mood that "circles" around this feeling, points towards it indirectly. Some Japanese haiku are incomprehensible to the Western reader simply because they do not evoke

such feelings and moods as they do in the local tradition when they use particular motifs (e.g. a chosen seasonal word). The journey of non-Japanese poets involves searching for their own images, motifs and natural phenomena that rely on local cultural tradition. Images of departure, vanishing or ending of some cycle – natural, circadian, routine etc. – are symptomatic. Ueda speaks of an unidentifiable, unspecified mood that creates a sense of regret: "the reader would wonder, for example, whether the poem is about a particular person's death, or about man's mortality in general, or about the passing of summer" (1965, p. 35-64).

The following haiku by Kovalik is a suitable example. The feeling of regret connects with the change of seasons. Through the simple parallelism – the shadow grows, not the crop – the author evokes the atmosphere of saying goodbye, leaving, or the end of something. The word *shadow* and its symbolism (night, darkness, sadness, but also something mysterious, unseen, not revealed) shifts the poem towards the non-specificity of which Ueda speaks above.

*summer ending*
*in the garden, shadow*
*grows most of all*
(Kovalik, 2023)

It is possible to express such aesthetic qualities of Japanese haiku through empathy and tenderness. Their presence is included in the selection of the object of the poem, in the author's interest in the most ordinary inanimate objects, everyday moments, or plants, trees and "forgotten" animals. "Similarly, an empathetic sensitivity is required to fully appreciate how to forlorn existence (sabi) of tiny crickets under helmets of fallen warrior suggest our own radical existential aloneness in the universe" (Kern, 2018, p. XXIV). The Japanese master of haiku Kobayashi Issa was known for his unusual empathy towards such beings. He wrote poems about crickets, spiders, mosquitos, flies or butterflies, in which he hid his personal tragedies (the deaths of his four children and, later, of his first wife). Despite that, his haiku do not express resignation on life, nor do they demonstrate sorrow or pain. A few (unconvincing) haiku of similar modality can be found in Slovak variants as well. However, such haiku demand maximum sensitivity on both the authors' and recipients' side to be able to capture "only the shadow of an emotion, or a vague mood. Instead of joy, there is a formless atmosphere arising from happiness; instead of grief, there is a mood vaguely suggesting quiet resignation." (Ueda, 1965, p. 35–64).

Tenderness and empathy towards the animal world is expressed in the following haiku by Straka. The first haiku is explicit because pity and empathy towards the fish is evoked by the model deadlock situation – the plastic bag represents the fish's prison. This is implied by its tireless effort to break out despite the fact that leaving the restricted space means death.

*fish in the plastic bag*
*tirelessly hitting*
*the wall of death*
(Straka, 2024b, not numbered)

In the second haiku, the emphasis lies on the observer who has noticed something as small and minuscule as a bug's grave – or who used their fantasy to "read" the natural relief that way.

*maybe a bug's grave*
*two stones*
*under a tree*
(Straka, 2024b, not numbered)

And, finally, in the third haiku, a physical handicap – loss of a wing – is presented as an advantage. The modal verb "to want" refers to an obvious personification and the described situation can be read as a picture of endurance and dedication of the subject that finds new strength and new possibilities of living with its handicap.

*a fly without wings*
*you can walk*
*wherever you want*
(Straka, 2024a)

Similarly, Matúš Nižňanský presents tenderness towards nature and animals in his series of haiku about "tiny" death. Several of his poems refer to the Japanese prototype, especially the poetic modus of Kobayashi Issa, his ability to observe nature, his interest in everything living, especially the tiniest creatures (his numerous and famous poems about crickets, spiders, mosquitos, flies, and butterflies). However, Nižňanský does not express his empathy towards

similar creatures directly in his haiku; it stems from the fact that they had become the object of his poems. His haiku are dominated by a "discreet" (implicit) fellowship of man and animal – specifically, insect. The distance and coldness of the depicted scene in the first haiku multiplies the reader's sympathy. The word "illuminate" sounds almost religious and fantastical, it adds a particular weird beauty, but also seriousness and dignity to the "small" death. The second haiku works with the comical aspect – the annoying sound of a mosquito flying around one's ears is "transcribed" as a persistent request for an overnight stay. Once again, the karumi principle can be identified here, which Śniecikowska (2021, p. 70) defines as "subtle humor, which is often gently tinged with sadness (sabi, wabi), and combines humor with seriousness".

*in a wine bottle*
*they illuminate the garden*
*three dead wasps*
(Nižňanský, 2023, p. 48)

*in the middle of the night*
*a mosquito persistently*
*requests an overnight stay*
(Nižňanský, 2023, p. 51)

**"Cutting word" – Kireji**

Kireji – often translated as "a cut" – should be mentioned separately. It is an important[12] principle of Japanese haiku, although it is usually simplified in the Western variant, and it is often used synonymously with terms such as caesura or dieresis. However, kireji represents a word that interrupts the meaning of the previous thought and binds it with the following one at the same time. That way, it emphasizes, finishes or otherwise redirects the meaning of the poem. Yet, we often read haiku poems that, despite being separated into three lines, basically copy the sentence without any evident division – at most, a comma is used, but that only represents the natural lowering of the voice and supports the syntax, not the verse rhythm. In haiku, kireji means something more resolute, intuitive, and hidden that creates two seemingly unrelated parts and it is the reader's job to connect them. Śniecikowska describes this division as a place that "forces us to suspend your voice [...] They separate the subject from the predicate and the complement, which creates an elusive atmosphere of mystery, as this complement can be accorded the role of the subject" (2021, p. 69-70).

It is, obviously, difficult to find similarities between kireji and versed and logical caesurae of European poetry. In translations of Japanese haiku as well as in original Slovak haiku, it is usually substituted by a dash, a full stop, or a colon. Often, more than one punctuation mark appears in Slovak haiku. It is a way to disrupt the flow of the poem, probably with the intention to emphasize its point. As an example, we provide two haiku by Jozef Tatár from his anthology *Slabikovanie duše* (*Syllabizing the Soul*, 2022). In both of them, the first line is stated as an individual sentence. We can read this line as an introduction into the scene or a wider context. An interruption after the first line encourages the reader to visualize the situation and asks questions: why is the subject in his father's shirt? How tall is the tree? It is presumed that the following lines will provide answers and shed light on the consequences of the described scenes. In the first haiku, a colon appears at the end of the second line that has a wider range of interpretation – it implicitly "says" that birds do not care about anything human. Finally, the third line specifies this statement and provides an example from one of the realms the birds have not noticed and are indifferent to – the loss of someone close.

*In my father's shirt:*
*courtyard birds don't care,*
*who gives from the hand*
(Tatár, J., 2022, p. 28).

*The tree has overgrown me.*
*The sky picks*
*the most beautiful Jonathan apple.*
(Tatár, 2022, p. 18)

However, kireji solutions without punctuation are common as well. Kovalik decided for a coordinating conjunction "or" that effectively separated two spheres, two horizons – earth and sky. Space observed by the subject has widened this way, which corresponds with the sense of "big" wonder over life (and nature) around us.

*what to look at first*
*the ants' march in the grass*
*or the clouds*
(Kovalik, 2023)

**Spirituality of haiku**

Apart from the stated principles, the genre image of haiku is also constituted by a specific "approach" to life – by which I mean its spiritual basis that overlaps with multiple religious and philosophical concepts and often turns into a specific worldview with firm values. The spiritual tradition of haiku goes back to its beginnings in the renga poem. Since many renga poets were Zen monks, it is understandable that the research of Japanese haiku focuses on interpretations of its meanings through the spiritual tradition, primarily Zen Buddhism. For example, Blyth compares Bashō's haiku with zen koans and finds the "flavour of Zen" in them (2021, p. 26). Roland Barthes even claims that "the haiku, on the contrary, articulated around a metaphysics without subject and without god, corresponds to the Buddhist *Mu*, to the Zen *satori*, which is not at all the illuminative descent of God, but 'awakening to the fact', apprehension of the thing as event and not as substance" (1983, p. 78). Robert Aitken follows this line of interpretation significantly in his book *Vlna zenu. Bašó, haiku a zen* (*A Wave of Zen. Basho, haiku and Zen*).

However, the background of haiku was influenced by many more religious-philosophical ideologies than only Zen Buddhism. This includes Shintoism; its influence is already apparent in the *Kojiki* chronicle, which is a valuable relic for the local religion. For haiku, it represents an important period of evolution since it contains genres such as tanka and renga.[13] Finally, Blyth (2021) reminds us about Confucianism and Taoism, especially Taoism developed in touch with Zen: "in the teaching of Zen, every object and phenomenon is just a temporary form of the single eternal essence (tao) that reflects in the smallest thing, transient, accidental, transforming, and so the painter […] or the poet can, in several syllables of a three-verse, depict a small section of reality behind which anyone who is able to understand a work of art, a poem, or a painting, can sense the infinity of the universe" (Trinkewitz, 2004, p. 228). Haiku eliminates words to the smallest measure possible because the unnameable – that Zen took from Taoism – is the most important. "Lao Tzu says in the first sentences of Tao Te Ching: Tao that can be described with words is not the eternal and unchanging Tao. […] Hence, an approach completely opposite to our biblical 'In the beginning was the word'" (Trinkewitz, 2004, p. 230). Not only Karel Trinkewitz's observation, but also other significant differences can be found in the core of the question that has been asked by non-Japanese haiku creators: can Eastern religions be substituted by other world views or an emphasized ethical background?

Successful Slovak haiku variants prove that the answer to this question can probably be found somewhere at the intersection of religions – in religiousness itself. The implied aesthetic qualities cannot be found only in Zen, they are present in almost every spiritual tradition. It is

not an empty claim that Zen offers a specific universal point of view. Hence, it is not necessary to interpret such aspects exclusively from this philosophy's point of view (Śniecikowska, 2021, p. 40–44). Haiku cannot be understood exclusively as a demonstration of the above-mentioned Zen, Tao, Shinto or other doctrines. Similarly, Blyth concludes that even though many of Bashō's poems are directly related to Zen, haiku "is in no sense of the word didactic. If it is, like poetry 'a criticism of life', this word 'criticism' must itself be understood in a poetical and not philosophical or psychological or analytic sense." (Blyth, 2021, p. 29). Thus, aesthetic interpretation should always come before an ideological one.

Therefore, poets are not expected to use sacral properties; their spiritual or ethical views should be already reflected in the analysed qualities of their haiku, such as empathy, tenderness, mercy, sensitive attention, nobleness etc. The message we read in them is not only aesthetical but also ethical, it provides a specific philosophy of life as well as "one of the significant forms of poetry as the (deep) regeneration", claims Zambor about Bashō (2019, p. 106).

God as an instance explicitly appears in Daniel Hevier's haiku (the *Haiku 2014* anthology), as well as in the haiku of Karol Chmel (*A Wing-stroke* anthology), Miroslav Bartoš (haiku anthology *Kvety omylov* [*Flowers of Mistakes*], 2023) and others, again in the form of a sigh or some sort of penance. Nižňanský follows the path of the Christian worldview as well; in his haiku, he uses motifs related to contemplation – bells, prayer, praying or blessing, rosary, Sunday, religious holiday and others.

*morning worship –*
*a spider forgot itself*
*over a drop of dew*
(Nižňanský, 2023, p. 3)

Paradoxically, many aspects of Nižňanský's poetics that are seemingly specifically Christian can be interpreted as Zen Buddhist. The author admits: "And, finally, even though many will disagree, Christian spiritual tradition, for example in the person and teaching of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, brings us closer to what the essence of Zen Buddhism is – our existence in the present moment and contemplation of God's presence in everything we do and everything in and around us" (Nižňanský and Urbanová, 2023, p. 23). Something similar is valid for multiple Slovak haiku that emphasize motifs of peregrination, pilgrimage or journey, as well as the characters of monk, pilgrim etc. This way, the religious aspect is inserted into the text in its general meaning, without the need to connect it with a specific religion or philosophy.

In the following haiku, such admiration of this way of life can be identified, with the emphasis on endurance, asceticism, devotion, gracefulness, lack of egocentrism etc.

(endurance)
*in the biting winter*
*the monk's soul has fallen asleep*
*on a big rock*
(Kuzma, 2013, s. 48)

*Wooden legs*
*under the pilgrim went wild*
*in the burning dust*
(Repka, 2005, p. 186)

*on the side of the road*
*a hermit is changing*
*his track running shoes*
(Tatár, M., 2005, not numbered)

**Conclusion**

The process of counting and naming all the transformations of particular haiku characteristics that demonstrate the difference and uniqueness of non-Japanese, in our case Slovak, variants of haiku could go on and on. It appears that some haiku attributes are more preferred than others in the Slovak literary context; some remain in the background, are only latently present, or their meaning has been significantly modified. I do not understand the modification of the principles, their appropriation in the author's style and Slovak literary tradition as a negative occurrence. On the contrary. As a result of the dominance and modification of these selected attributes (I count the religious essence of haiku among them), many original auteur variants have emerged. These have helped to preserve the vitality of the haiku genre which dates back into the 17th century and further back.

**Endnotes:**

More details on the life and work of Matsuo Bashō: Ueda, M. *Matsuo Basho*. Twayne publisher, 1970.

[2] Among the oldest Japanese relics are the *Kojiki* and *Man'yoshu* chronicles (cca. 712 and 760 AD). Both include the tanka genre which later led to the development of renga, the so-called linked poem, the predecessor of haiku.
[3] A political milestone, the year of the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the communist regime that had restricted free artistic expression for 40 years.
[4] All Slovak titles of anthologies, collections and books, as well as all cited Slovak haiku were translated into English by Jozefa Pevčíková.
[5] At the time of publishing this paper, a haiku anthology was published that aimed to thoroughly map the scene of Slovak haiku. The criteria for its creation were the quality of texts and the variety of haiku forms. The book was published under the title *Tiché ihriská po stopách zapĺňané tušom rýchlej hry* (*Quiet Playgrounds, Filled with the Ink of Quick Play Footprint by Footprint*, Literárna bašta publishing house, eds. Eva Urbanová and Dalfar) and it contains 30 authors of Slovak haiku.
[6] The original Slovak title references a popular folk song and creates a word play based on the similarity of words "haiku" and "hájku", an archaic word for a groove.
[7] The chosen terminology only concerns the geographical aspect and carries no nationalist connotation in my research (similarly, we can talk about Western haiku, Anglo-Saxon haiku etc.). In terms of the genological triade, I consider Slovak haiku a subgenre. While types and genres are an ahistoric phenomenon that leans towards anthropological (and metaphysical) constants, they are rather closed systems. On the other hand, subgenre is a historical phenomenon that shows how each genre has developed, changed, and updated. Hence, it is a more open system. A subgenre can also be a point where multiple genres meet. (Šidák, 2013, p. 96-107).
[8] "The alternation of five and seven syllables had its appeal to the ancient Japanese partly perhaps because the repetition of 5 and the repetition of 7 expressed the regularity of nature, and the alternation of 5 and 7 its irregularity" (Blyth, 1963, p. 40).
[9] So called "fuga no makoto": writing of life. Śniecikowska defines this term as the adequacy of life approaches towards chosen aesthetic values, the support of artistic work in authenticity, the sincerity of feelings and experience from which comes the clarity and verisimilitude of expression (2021, p. 51).
[10] The aesthetically most influential haiku of Slovak origin build on sensual perception and are able to reconstruct visual, auditive, olfactory, but also gustatory and haptic stimuli in a limited space. Various forms of sensual haiku can be found in anthologies *Fabrika na porcelán* (*Porcelain Factory*) by Stanislava Repar and *Na niti mesiac* (*Moon on a Thread*) by Daniel Hevier – in a collected edition *Haiku 2014*.
[11] Frequently for example in Etela Farkašová's haiku, in the aforementioned anthology called *I'm Listening to the Morning* (2014).
[12] Adam L. Kern (*The Penguin Book of Haiku*) mentions it together with kigo as the most important principle. See chapter *Season word and cut.*
[13] For the evolution of haiku from tanka and renga see for example: AITKEN, Robert, 1995. *Vlna zenu. Bašó, haiku a zen*. Praha: Pragma, p. 18-19.

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