

The Relationship Between Reader and Writer in Contemporary Haiku Poems

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to look at the relationship of communication and readers' participation in contemporary haiku poems. The poems selected for exemplification in this paper will be from *Haiku Canada Members' Anthology 2024. No Two Alike*. The way in which readers work their way through meaning will be underlined, through free associations and use of universal symbols, and also based on common life experiences. A reader response approach will be adopted, since it has in view the way readers react to any text. Textual analysis will be combined with the readers' emotional reactions and interpretations based on personal life experiences and cultural background. We can speak of communities of readers, in this case made up by the Western culture writers of an originally Japanese poem, the haiku. It is adapted and also compatible with other cultural mindsets. The way readers are engaged in the haiku poetry experience further leads to haiku being used in therapy, to encourage patients to express themselves, and become aware of their emotions, without thinking about the rules of this type of poem.

Keywords: reader response, mindfulness, present, free associations, dialogue

Introduction

The haiku poem poses, to readers, a challenge. This challenge is about the way in which reality is presented, from a completely surprising perspective, differing radically from how we perceive it in everyday life, as well as to how the writers communicate their message. The challenge appears since Western culture members have the occasion to enter the mindset of Japanese culture, where the haiku poem originates.

According to the theory of defamiliarization (Shklovsky, 1917), an object can be called art once it offers a completely different and unexpected angle, marking a break with everyday routine. The haiku poem marks a break with the common perception of poetry using figurative language, such as nature's personification. The haiku offers a poetic experience by juxtaposition, or by the combination of the two parts, which use everyday language. Still, the language is indirect, asking for interpretation of its elements according to the context and based on common free associations. Contact with another culture, even if not direct, not involving travelling and establishing relationships with its members, can itself be a source of defamiliarization (Shklovsky, 1917). We discover another way of writing, reading and interpreting literary works. The indirect communication in Japanese culture resonates with a particular feature of the haiku poem: it needs decoding based on clues, allusions, context, and visual language. Contact with another culture, therefore, is an occasion to challenge our previous expectations, as we see reality from a completely different perspective.

This paper focuses on the communication between writer and reader in the haiku poem, as practised in our times by Western culture members. A selection of the poems in the anthology published by Haiku Canada Association in 2024, entitled *Haiku Canada Members' Anthology 2024. No Two Alike* will be analyzed to exemplify this different communication between author and reader, together with the new perspective on everyday life experience haiku poems can prompt.

Literature Review

The haiku challenges Western culture members' stereotypes and usual expectations about poetry. The haiku is very short, made of visual images only (Hiraga, 1996; Hiraga, 1999; Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2022), and, traditionally, does not contain the figurative language we are used to. Its language is not a stereotypical, lyrical one, but everyday, colloquial language (Kern, 2021; Ueda, 1963). The haiku poem does not contain abstract ideas either. The haiku is, originally, from Japan, but we do not need to include elements from the Japanese culture in it. Additionally, while we expect visual poems to be descriptive, the haiku, through the combination of its two parts, manages to go, from literal, concrete meaning towards figurative meaning. The traditional haiku has been adapted to the mindset of Western culture members. What is more, for Western culture members, this type of poem is not only an occasion to view the world and life experiences from a completely different perspective, but also to experiment with literature.

The haiku is not, nowadays, as it has not been in the past, either, grounded in rules. We can never give a precise, applicable to all haiku poems, definition, or give a set of rules that can

guarantee that we write genuine haiku poems at all times. Even the definition based on its fixed form, three lines, 5-7-5 syllables (McCarty, 2008), can and has been challenged ever since the free form haiku movement (Kimura, 2022) led by Ogiwara Seisensui (1884–1976), and practiced by one of his best-known students, Taneda Santoka (1882–1940). This free haiku movement did not only allow freedom with the syllable pattern and even number of lines, but also with using or not a seasonal reference, *kigo*. Nowadays, writers and readers of haiku poems side either with the traditional form or with the free form, yet Western culture members believe that the traditional haiku is the genuine Japanese spirit, while the free form is a Western culture innovation.

Even the idea of the haiku poem being about nature can and has been challenged and proved wrong. We can write haiku poems by focusing on contemporary life, on life in the city, and even challenge the borders between haiku and senryu, the latter being about the human world. Nowadays, however, the American senryu can include a seasonal reference while referring to the human world, resulting, thus, a combination of haiku and senryu (Lynch, 1989).

What remains specifically Japanese to the haiku poem is its indirect communication. We may expect this in poems, where readers are used to decoding the meaning, yet the haiku poem uses everyday language. Japanese culture is an indirect communication culture (Ciubancan, 2015), or a high context communication culture (Noma, 2009). The Japanese rely on mutual knowledge of the context in the case of a dialogue. They rely on body language, facial expressions, and various allusions and clues as to what they actually mean when they have moments of silence or hesitation in their speech. The Japanese wish to maintain the harmony of the relationship, which is why they do not wish to offend their interlocutor by refusing them directly, even if it is not something personal, but a simple object that can be fixed. The Japanese do not say that the object is broken and needs fixing, or that a certain part of a project could be improved. They may say that everything is fine, in the sense that they want to continue the relationship, either as a friendship or as work collaborators. An outsider may not understand the right message and believe that, indeed, they do not need to fix or improve anything. The division between direct and indirect communication cultures is one that roughly draws Western and Eastern worlds apart. Direct communication cultures, with the exception of some indirect polite requests, are known for their members saying exactly what they mean. They do not rely as much on body language so that the meaning of the message depends on decoding them, even if body language may say something else than what is being said directly (e.g., that the interlocutor is not honest, but just polite, since they have an interest in the other person helping them out).

Materials and Methods

The haiku poems can be seen as examples of indirect communication, through visual images and words whose meaning depends on the combination of the two parts or on the readers' free associations (Schachter, 2018), like in psychoanalysis. Freud encouraged his patients to speak freely about whatever came to their mind during their sessions, then highlighted for the patient certain recurring elements or elements which he asked for the patient to develop. We can do the same as readers in our understanding of a word, image, or series of images in haiku. We can tie them to our own emotional response and life experience. This reminds us of the reader-response approach to literary works. In fact, readers have a reaction to any text they read (Mart, 2019). They can have an emotional reaction to the text, or they may be prompted by the text to interpret it based on their personal educational background and life experience. The haiku poem does prompt further abstract reflections on life experience, which can reach philosophical levels. Therefore, apparently small and simple, mere descriptive poems, the haiku poems lead readers to offer an elaborate response to the author by engaging with the text they encounter.

With haiku poems, the dialogue may continue further with other readers, sharing their opinion, as well as with the authors themselves, if they are all part of online social media communities. Such communities belong to organized groups and associations from all over the world. Haiku Canada communicates with its members via email and via website. The selectors for submissions offer advice to their members about certain changes they may do to the selected haiku poems in view of publication.

The first noticeable haiku poem is, in the anthology *No Two Alike*, the one chosen for the fourth cover, and also present inside the anthology, namely:

no two alike
ordinary beach stones
shimmer at my feet (Anne Marie Madziak, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 31).

The author breaks the known traditional rules, since there is no cutting line after the first line of the poem, relying on the reader to separate the two parts. This can create a mutual understanding between author and reader, as if allowing them to look for clues in a conversation with an interlocutor from an indirect communication culture. The use of the personal pronoun "my" may be considered by traditional haiku purists as against the rules, since it challenges the idea of objectivity associated with traditional haiku poems. "My" brings in a touch of subjectivity according to this mindset. However, even so, the emotion is not directly mentioned in words. The readers can deduce that the apparently

“ordinary beach stones” are actually an unexpectedly beautiful sight. Moreover, each stone is unique, which we understand when we read the first line, “no two alike.” Readers can construct a further, figurative meaning by moving beyond the concrete reality, reflecting on how not only every stone, but every person is unique, or even every experience, or perspective on life, once we are careful about the details. Additionally, the poem can be about the fleeting or ephemeral moment, to which we pay attention as we are told by Zen Buddhism to live in the present (Simpkins & Simpkins, 2016). No two similar moments will ever be, in fact, the same. The haiku poem grounds us in the here and now, increasing our awareness of what is currently going on. If we look carefully, we can see how no stone or moment resembles another one.

The following haiku shows us the uniqueness of a moment in time:

father’s shirt
the scent of sunrise
freshly ironed (Jo Balistreru, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 4)

This poem shows readers the same importance of a moment in time, a time when beauty is visible. We are also aware that this is all only a fleeting moment. Together with this moment, a glimpse into inner reality is offered: every moment looks magical, for those that are free, especially. The sunrise is described as having a “scent,” when readers know that this is, first of all, a spectacular, visual moment. This special moment is translated as a special one of emotional connection with the father, suggested indirectly through his shirt that is “freshly ironed,” yet the “freshly ironed” is attributed to the sunrise and to its scent.

The poem below features some “red,” and, not only “red,” but “forgotten apples”:

bare branches –
the red
of forgotten apples (Munira Judith Avinger, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 3)

In the poem above, what matters is not what is described, which is a late autumn scene, as we readers infer, but how it is described. The attribute “forgotten” of the apples and their redness are striking, especially when combined with “bare branches.” Definitely, “forgotten” and “bare” are very close, yet the “red” of the apples is situated in contrast, as it seems to be the opposite of “forgotten” and “bare branches.” Once we forget about the apples, they can get ripe and fall, leaving the branches bare. The ephemerality of the scene is clear. Once we do not seize the moment, the apples are gone or, to extend the concrete meaning to a figurative one, the joy is gone. Red can be suggestive of joy, of liveliness,

once we consider a parallel with red cheeks, suggesting energy, good health, vitality and happiness. Another interpretation could be that, with the apples, the color red, standing for life and vitality, is not there anymore. All life has disappeared. Even the memory of the red apples is no longer there.

Another haiku poem present in this anthology which may strike our attention is the one below:

night walk
a choice of sky
or forest (Joana Ashwell, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 3)

In the above poem readers witness a selection of elements that matter. A haiku poem is characterized by economic style, where no single word is chosen randomly. Any word present in a haiku is carefully selected, as it has its own load of free associations and emotional connotations. The word "choice" shows us the freedom of imagination offered by the sky and by the forest, since we are free to think of unlimited spaces. The walk during night-time is, thus, an element suggesting dreaming, or fantasizing, about various possibilities. The possibilities could be related to our own future and, at the same time, the presence of "night walk" may bring about to readers free associations related to a romantic date. Night-time has a Romantic connotation, especially when associated with the word "walk."

The poem below has a clear emotional charge, although, if we readers come to think about it, the emotion is only suggested indirectly through images and through gestures:

lines down her face –
after kissing her father
through prison bars (Brian Bartless, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 4)

The lines on the daughter's face may be a simple reflection of the prison bars, but, at the same time, they may suggest, through body language, the way the daughter worries about her father. These lines, since they are "down" the daughter's face, can also suggest the tears falling. The sadness is felt when the daughter wants to remain close to her father, while the prison bars are an obstacle.

The following poem shows the slide from concrete meaning to figurative meaning:

in seniors' home
time passes
searching for new batteries (Frances Mary Bishop, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 7)

This poem can suggest the slow pace of life in a seniors' home. With the passage of time, as we age, we feel that time moves on slower. We are no longer waiting eagerly for something exciting to happen to us. Even the most common task takes more time to accomplish as we age and as we move slower and with more difficulty. Even looking for new batteries can become a difficult task. At the same time, this scenario can be raised to figurative level. The batteries may be associated with life, as we frequently hear the expression the "life of a battery." The battery may become a symbol for a person's life or lifetime. How much more we have left can be related, in comparison, to the extent to which a battery is charged or consumed. Definitely, the seniors' home suggests the end of life, and the new batteries they are searching for show their wish to still have more time to live. Once they are well cared for in a home, they may still hope to live some more time, to see their loved ones during a visit one last time. This is another example where, like in the previous one, the readers may imagine an entire scenario, or story, starting from only three lines and a few powerful words that can generate detailed free associations.

We human beings always react to the changes in nature. In addition, the environment, of which weather conditions are part, always makes us react emotionally in one way or another, according to environmental psychology (Kals & Müller, 2012). The following haiku poem shows the poetic persona attempting to create a comfortable environment for him/herself, indoors:

blizzard forecast –
ensuring an adequate supply
of chocolate (Alanna B. Burke, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 9)

We are all familiar with the concept of food for comfort and, in popular psychology articles circulating on the Internet, chocolate is frequently presented as a source of happiness. Readers may reach another meaning of the above poem, namely that our happiness does not necessarily depend on external circumstances. We can change our lives for the best with our own actions. Small gestures such as having chocolate can sweeten our lives during hard times, the latter being suggested by the perspective of the blizzard. We are able to detach ourselves from what is going on externally and focus on our inner world, suggested by the interior of the home where the poetic persona is sheltered from the blizzard. The chocolate helps ensure the creation of a cozy atmosphere, in complete contrast with the blizzard outside.

Nature can offer us moments when we see reality from different perspectives, such as the moment presented in the poem below:

draining my saké –
the full moon
emerges (Pamela Cooper, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 14)

We can call this a moment of enlightenment, when the poetic persona is extremely connected with the here and now. When such a connection occurs, we can take the time to witness apparently fantasy-like moments which are, in fact, as real as they can be. All we need to do is to take the time to notice them. We do not need to imagine another reality, which, according to the Zen Buddhist mindset, applied to haiku poems would distort reality. We need to allow ourselves the time, through Zen Buddhist meditation, to see every element of nature for what it is in itself, and not to project on it human emotions, or, at least, not by expressing them directly, but by using juxtaposition (Blasko & Merski, 1998; Gilli, 2001), so that the reader can make the parallels him/herself. In the above poem, everything is an optical illusion. The poetic persona ignores common knowledge about the large distance between the earth, ourselves and the moon. The poetic persona sips *saké* from his or her glass, and, afterwards, the moon becomes visible, apparently, in the emptied glass. We readers can interpret this as a daydream, or as a result of the state anyone can go through after drinking alcoholic beverages. Fantasies and illusions may be the result of alcohol, together with defying the usual laws of reality. Drinking alcohol can also help get us into a trance, which can have a spiritual side. Then we can see visions and can connect with another perspective on life, which can be similar to a meditative state. In both states we may experience visions and moments of enlightenment that can translate in moments of deep and sudden understanding of meanings until then hidden. We can also connect the state given by alcohol to the inspiration some poets believed they could get when drinking it, e.g. the Romantics.

Defying what is common knowledge, such as distance between us and the planets, can lead, as in the haiku above, to a fresh, surprising perspective which is included in the experience described by Shklovsky's (1917) theory of defamiliarization, referring to art. Zen Buddhist meditation can become, while it is part of writing haiku poems, very close to artistic perception.

While emotions are not expressed directly in haiku, they are suggested in an indirect manner through the combination of two parts like in the poem below:

homeward bound
the scent of sea
in my shoes (Elehna de Sousa, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 16)

The present moment shows the poetic persona on his or her way back home from, we infer, the summer holidays, as our free associations—like in psychoanalytic session or like in self-analysis—for the sea lead us to the summer holidays and the time spent relaxing at the beach. The shoes carry on still “the scent of sea,” which makes readers believe that the memories of the trip are very fresh in the mind of the poetic persona. The poetic persona is not yet home and has just left the seaside. The “scent” is a word with very strong connotations for the senses, which anchors us, together with the author, in the present moment. While, apparently, the first part contains a reference to the present, and the second part a reference to the past time spent at the seaside, the poem refers to a present time which, however, is strongly connected to the past. The author feels nostalgia about the time spent at the seaside, while he or she looks forwards to being home. Therefore, this is an attitude divided emotionally between home and the seaside, connected by the road. Concrete, visual images, and images related to other senses such as the sense of smell are used to suggest, indirectly, an emotional state.

The haiku poem below is based on a play upon words:

white lies
she pins the laundry
in the sun (C. Jean Downer, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 18)

The expression “white lies” refers to innocent lies. In the poem above there is a play between figurative meaning and concrete images. The “white” of the lies can slide towards the color of the laundry, and readers may perceive the laundry as white even though this detail is not mentioned. In the second part, pinning the laundry “in the sun” can be interpreted as an optical illusion, as for a moment we ignore knowledge about the distance between us and the sun. This optical illusion can also be interpreted as a fantasy, as a daydream, or even as a story, which can all be called “white lies.” Any work of the imagination can be considered a white lie, since it is created for the purpose of entertainment, art, education or comfort of the readers. This is the meaning created by readers, moving beyond the literal, visual scene. The poem above generates for readers philosophical reflections on the nature of fiction and reality.

The following poem shows us an example of seeing reality from a fresh perspective, similarly to the defamiliarization theory of Shklovsky (1917):

drought
the vegetable garden
now a mosaic (Huguette Ducharme, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 19)

The drought's consequences on the ground can be likened, by readers, to a mosaic, since it dries the earth and creates a pattern which is deliberately made by human beings when building a mosaic. We can find works of nature that can be similar to those of the artists. Knowledgeable readers can also rely on their background of knowledge about the Japanese culture and the way they believe that gardens should be left as natural as possible, with as little intervention from the gardener as possible. In the poem above we see how we can find, effortlessly, beauty in nature.

The poem below presents readers with an unexpected twist, since we expect the word "fluency" to refer either to speech or to the way rivers flow:

summer
the fluency of
moonlight (David Kawika Eyre, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 20)

Instead, here it is combined with the word "moonlight," bringing about a fresh perception on reality. We usually do not feel that the moonlight is flowing, but, through meditation practice, the poetic persona has managed to perceive reality in a completely different way, leaving behind what he or she has been taught about the world and the usual use of words. The author, through meditation, has taken a distance from preconceived notions and decided to look at reality from a fresh point of view, like a child, seeing the world for the first time. The fluency can also be related to the summer season, when, due to the heat, the moonlight is, apparently, melting, uniting sky with earth. We can also consider that the summer sky is very clear, which leads to the image of moonlight being clear and flawless.

The poem below, through the contrasting images in the two parts, is able to prompt reflections from readers about the way they behave towards their pets:

lovingly placed
by the open window
the caged canary (Marco Franticelli, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 22)

The contrast between the open window and the cage is the same as the contrast between a sense of freedom and imprisonment. We readers can think about how we love our pets, yet our home and the way we can keep them may not be what they are used to in their natural environment. Even if we place the canary "by the open window," it is still in a cage. Likely, the canary longs for freedom, and does not feel comfortable in the cage. Additionally, we can consider another level of meaning: we human beings can feel constrained by

society's rules and conventions, or by the possibilities offered by our lifestyle. We can feel as if we were in a cage. The open window becomes a symbol of various possibilities we can look forward to, as we do when we hope, and start taking actions in view of our future, related to our personal and professional lives. We human beings long for freedom in the same way as the canary does. Therefore, the open window and the caged canary placed by it can be interpreted both literally—and create reflections on the way we treat our pets—and figuratively, as we can consider these images to make allusions to our human condition, in fact. Philosophers have written on the question of freedom in society throughout time, and the theme of personal freedom preoccupies us personally as well. There are ages when we dream and feel optimistic, such as during childhood and adolescence, about our future, and about what we are going to do with our lives as adults. Afterwards, as adults, we look back on those dreams and realize that we do not have that freedom or have never had it. Life includes plenty of constraints, under the form of social rules, as well as under the form of obligations to family and to our workplace.

The haiku poem below is based on a play upon words, which leads us to consider further meanings:

english-french military text
300,000 men lost
in translation (R.A. Garber, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 22)

Firstly, we can consider that there was an error in the translation, and that the figures were not understood correctly. There are different systems of writing even the number 300,000. This is the form it appears in the poem, but Romanians may use the format 300.000 or simply 300 000 with or without a space. We can also refer to the title of the film, *Lost in Translation*, from 2003, directed by Sophia Coppola, where the issue is that of experiencing a lack of connection with others. Its pretext is a lack of adaptation to another culture. Translations also deal with cultural aspects, and we can interpret the loss in translation as the loss of a touch of the original meaning. The loss can also be interpreted as being preserved in the translation, so the expression is not used with the meaning of actual loss. The loss refers only to the lives lost. Moreover, we could also consider the meaning related to the way in which the military text omits from the start these lost lives, since the count was not complete by the time the text had to be written. Going back to the film *Lost in Translation*, we could consider that the men that were lost did not necessarily die, but had lost all connection with the cause, and no longer feel any meaning in their actions and in the war itself.

The following poem shows us how we could interpret it differently, function of how we separate the two parts:

sign
for the city limits
crickets (Gary Hotham, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 26)

We can place the cutting line or break after “sign,” or after “for the city limits.” In the first case, we see a sign meant to stop the crickets, as the city has limits for their actions. In the second case, an actual sign shows us that we are at the periphery of the city, and that is the area where, if it is a big city, nature can be experienced and, therefore, we can hear crickets and not the sound of traffic. There is also a third meaning if we place the *kireji* after “limits”: the artificiality of the city, and the human action to build it, has its limits, since nature is present even in the city. We are still aware of the change of seasons, of weather conditions, and we can even find crickets in some green areas in the city. A fourth meaning includes sign as a verb, which can refer to a petition in order to stop the city expanding and preserving nature or the crickets.

The poem below can be translated into English as: “sunset/ in a far corner of the orange orchard/ one more fruit” (my translation):

coucher du soleil –
au fond de l’oranger
un fruit de plus (Louise Martin, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 32)

Here we notice another example of perceiving reality from a fresh perspective and ignoring what we know about the planets. The sun setting looks like an orange, we infer as readers, and is placed conveniently, at least from our spot, in the tree’s branches. Since the sun setting means the time of going to bed, we can interpret this image as one from a dream. We already start dreaming, even while still awake, thinking of the night to come.

The following poem can be interpreted as referring to a coincidence:

thrift store
in a coat pocket
to-do list (Joanne Morcom, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 35)

The to-do list may be our own, which we take with us while shopping, and, on our way, we stop by a thrift store and try on a coat where there is also a to-do list. The poem can

also suggest that the person who had worn the coat previously, and which is now in the thrift store, has some things to do left unfinished. Maybe they fell ill or had an accident, and the to-do list has remained in the pocket of a coat at home. Maybe the poem suggests how the coat once worn by someone has its history, and the buyer wonders who the person was. We can also consider that the to-do list suggests the past, and the way we forget, ironically, a to-do list in a coat we had once worn and given away. This poem has the potential for readers to create plenty of scenarios.

The same situation, which can be interpreted in various ways, is at work in the poem below:

empty bookshelves
downsizing
my expectations (Wilda Morris, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 36)

The poetic persona may be moving and giving away some of his or her books. The expectations that are downsized may refer to no longer needing some of the books, as he or she is no longer hoping to have enough time to read them. The poetic persona may also be very old and wishing to give away some of the books to others who may have a longer time ahead of them to use them. The empty bookshelves may also refer to a disappointment someone feels when going to the bookshop or to the library and seeing all the books taken by someone else.

A playful spirit is created in the poem below through the play with the words' meaning:

tripping over
exposed roots
family tree (Pamela Jeanne, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 40)

The tree can be both a plant and a family tree. The first part of the poem can be interpreted as showing us the image of someone tripping over the roots of some trees in nature, while the second part, "family tree," baffles the readers' expectations and can make them smile. However, another interpretation could be related to a figurative one of stumbling over some unknown facts about someone's family roots. Secrets of the family's past, either real or imagined, can influence the present-day generation's perception of the respective family.

The poem below can show us an emotion of feeling enthusiastic about the beginning of the summer holidays, when we can relax as much as we want:

summer days
the wild grass in the garden
neverending (Michele Rule, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 46)

The word “wild” in the phrase “wild grass” can suggest enthusiasm and joy for the summer days and also the neverending scenarios imaginable about places we can visit. We can even relax at home, as can be inferred from the wild grass in our garden neverending, as we know the garden is a limited space. We can think about games of childhood when we imagined we were exploring in our grandparents’ gardens.

The poem below is about the practice of meditation and, since we are reading a haiku, we assume that it is about Zen Buddhist meditation:

meditation...
the space
between pines (Zoanne Schnell, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 47)

To knowledgeable readers, in Japanese culture, the empty space does not have a negative connotation, but a positive one, since it allows room for creativity (Rozhin, 2013). From the combination of the two parts of the poem we notice a figurative meaning: the meditation practice is a moment of silence or pause, in this case from walking in nature. Meditation can also be interpreted as a moment when the poetic persona becomes one with nature, detaching him or herself from reality, moving towards another space, an experience which is stopped by the pines, representing concrete, palpable reality.

The following poem shows baffled expectations and the creation of a moment of surprise:

river walk...
the endless flow
of our conversation (Michael Dylan Welch, in kjmunro & St-Laurent, 2024, p. 54)

After reading the first two lines, we expect to continue reading about the waters of the river. Yet, the flow is that of a conversation. We witness the switch from the natural world to the human world, from focus on the surroundings to focus on the interaction among human beings.

The reader response approach is suitable for understanding haiku poems, and the examples of readings given in this research were those of the author of the present paper. She has been part of online and offline haiku communities in Romania and abroad since 2014. She has observed and taken part in the activities proposed by these communities, including writing and commenting, as well as improving haiku poems in online workshops.

The relevance of these haiku poems goes far beyond the field of literature and that of the Japanese culture mindset. Writing, reading and understanding haiku poems can become a part of our everyday life practice, the same way as mindfulness techniques

are part of our personal and professional lives nowadays. Writing haiku is a way of practicing mindfulness, or a strong awareness of and focus on what we are doing at the present moment, whom we are with and our relationship with the respective person(s), as well as of the surroundings and of their effects on our emotions. Mindfulness is a type of meditation derived from Zen Buddhist meditation, which allows us to feel in touch with ourselves, with our own feelings and with those of the others. Focusing on the present moment in our activity and in dealing with various relationships can benefit our understanding of others and our work performance, as well as our own well-being.

Results

The poems chosen for analysis for the *2024 Haiku Canada Members' Anthology* show the relevance and practice of the haiku poem nowadays by Western culture members. We realize that the haiku is universal, and by no means tied to a certain historical age and even culture. We do not even need to practice meditation consciously. All we need is to get into the spirit of such a poem.

The analysis carried out in this paper shows that haiku poems present everyday life reality from special or unexpected angles, as well as from usual feelings we can all relate to and experiences that are familiar to us all. Haiku poems have, as a specific feature, the indirect communication of feelings and ideas. Readers are put to work like in Modernist, Postmodernist and After-Postmodernist fiction where an active participation of the reader (Ravaux, 1979) is called for. From all the examples provided before, it becomes obvious that, although an old form of poetry, the haiku is so relevant to our Western mindset today. We all notice our surroundings, we are all reacting emotionally to our environment, more or less intensely, be it nature, the indoors of our home, or our workplace, as well as our city. All the examples provided in the analysis make it clear that the haiku poems are very concise, and no word or element is randomly chosen. These words have the power to generate free associations and interpretations, as well as carrying forward the story or reflections based on the concrete, visual elements by the readers. We understood how readers can develop and reflect on these small poems a long time after reading them, and generating new stories, various scenarios, and reflections.

Haiku poems encourage us to be aware of the present moment, and to reflect further after expressing ourselves. They are a useful tool in therapy. Their short and concise form allows us to sum up what we need to express, without going through long writing and speaking as in Freud's free associations method. Haikus offer a concise form of Freud's free associations in therapy and self-analysis. However, haiku therapy is by no means a replacement for Freud's curing of neuroses.

Discussion and Conclusion

The involvement of the readers in haiku poems and in the creation of their meaning is very clear and very pronounced. The relationship of communication between haiku author and reader is very productive, to the point where readers are prompted to be creative and create a text of their own in response to the three lines of the poem. This paper started from understanding the relationship between author and reader as a relationship of communication. The written text, like any message that is communicated, needs to be formulated by the sender, in this case, by the writer, and afterwards decoded by the interlocutor, who is the reader. A different way of communication function of cultures can be visible not only in direct contact with people belonging to a different culture, but also in the way readers and writers communicate through the literary text.

The haiku poem is proof that literature can be a very down-to-earth activity, connecting us to the highest possible level with what is going on around us at the present moment. Such a poem does not make us escape reality; on the contrary, we get into touch with it at a very intense level. In order to write haiku, we go through practicing mindfulness and meditating without even realizing it. We simply notice what is going on around us, and we use the images to suggest emotions, various story scenarios, as well as to prompt readers' development of life philosophies and various reflections. The dialogue established between haiku writer and reader is visible in the intensity of the reader's response, shown in the reflections, imagining missing details, recreating the scene, as well as various scenarios and simply resonating with the emotions in the poem.

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