

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

---

## Therapeutic poems for advancing coping, empathy, and cultural well-being

Ihanus, Juhani

2022

---

Ihanus, J 2022, 'Therapeutic poems for advancing coping, empathy, and cultural well-being', *Creative arts in education and therapy*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 18-31. <https://doi.org/10.15212/CAET/2022/8/8>

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/350423>

<https://doi.org/10.15212/CAET/2022/8/8>

---

cc\_by\_nc\_nd

publishedVersion

---

*Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.*

*This is an electronic reprint of the original article.*

*This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.*

*Please cite the original version.*

# Therapeutic Poems for Advancing Coping, Empathy, and Cultural Well-Being

## 促进应对、同理心和文化福祉的治疗诗

Juhani Ihanus

University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

### Abstract

From the perspective of poetry therapy, the author relates Western views of poetic time, rhythm, literary creation, and metaphoric language to ancient Chinese conceptions of literature and to the haiku tradition. The author analyzes and develops practical approaches to using haiku for therapeutic, rehabilitative, and preventive purposes. In haikus, he detects potential to explorative and meditative self- and communal transformation, flexible coping with current anxieties, and the advancement of social and cultural well-being. The eco-poetic applications of haiku pave way to more empathic connections of human beings to nature and the whole cosmos.

**Keywords:** haiku, poetry therapy, coping, metaphors, nature writing, empathy

### 摘要

从诗歌疗法的角度，作者将西方关于诗歌时间、节奏、文学创作和隐喻语言的观点与中国古代文学观念和俳句传统联系起来。作者分析并发展了将俳句用于治疗、康复和预防目的的实践方法。在俳句中，他发现了探索性和冥想式的自我转变和社区转变、灵活应对当前焦虑以及促进社会和文化福祉的潜力。俳句的生态诗学应用为人类与自然和整个宇宙建立更多的共情连接铺平了道路。

**关键词：**俳句，诗歌疗法，应对，隐喻，自然写作，共情

### Poetic Time and Flow

When reading and writing a poem, we can get attuned to various developmental levels and various existential states and times. In the realm of poetic voices, vibrations, and reverberations, it is impossible to exactly define what time it is. The always current time of a poem is immeasurable, not fixed, but it can be sensed, perceived, and experienced by those who get immersed in the poetic universe where temporality and mortality, birth and collapse, presence and absence, voices and silence embrace them. On the poetic way toward hitherto unknown sources, hidden perspectives, and unheard sounds, the moving words can both address our anxieties and ground our being in joy.

Poetic metaphors can bridge emotion and thought, let the depths and surfaces unite in the flow and pulse of our existence, reaching from the past through the present toward many possible futures. We imagine, and we dream now—thus we will become. The power of the poem to bind and loosen emerges: a flood of emotion, thought, image, and memory is both channeled and let loose.

Poetic flows express, create, and signify an experiential being that is not neutral but “tuned.” Breathing poems tune languages, readying them for a journey to the wild mindscapes and creative environments, adding pleasure and joy and shades of chagrin and pain. In the haphazardness and transience of every poem, there is also something inalienable and indestructible, carrying over the seeds of renewal, of making new subjects through the transformative spaces of writing and reading. Not to express one’s tunes to others can be an indication of indifference. On the other hand, the poem’s excess of words can repress the intolerable and drown conflicts.

In Western psychology, the talk of a “stream of consciousness” is metaphorical, like the talk of the capital inflows or of the currents of thought. The stream or flow has also been connected to physiological and sexual phenomena (milk stream, blood stream, the flow of semen) and to technological information systems (data stream). The flow experience has been described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as the “optimal experience,” a complete absorption into the experience at hand, one where action and consciousness merge into each other and where the pleasure produced by the feeling of existential communality is sufficient without any external rewards. “Flow” is not the same as chaotic “flooding,” because Csikszentmihalyi considers the flow as requiring acceptance of a set of “formal rules” before one can trustingly throw oneself into the flows of arts, sports, or social rituals.

However, Victor Turner (1977, pp. 51–52) has remarked that the flow experience does not necessarily require formal rules or preconditions. Certain “key symbols” or symbolic acts, closely related to beginnings and transitions, creation, and exile, may awake flow experiences. They break, often in practical situations, social and cultural frames or shake up hierarchies. In many ways, poets have tuned flow experiences, “liminoid phenomena” (Turner, 1977, p. 43) as “plural, fragmentary, and experimental,” arising on the margins, as the harbingers of the unconventional, revolutionary, or alternative ideas of reality and the social order. Liminal poetry is on the threshold, in a state of transition, expressing discomfort, and waiting for a crossing over the border, thus also giving voice to marginalized groups and oppressed communities and their desires.

Through words, flow experiences can be produced, for example, by the whims and jumps, puns, and paradoxes, by a quick wit that ties connections between the most heterogeneous matters: “in every three words, he saw an insight, and in every three dots, the face,” the 18<sup>th</sup>-century German aphorist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1968, F 98) writes, noting a wide perception of unforeseen connections, akin to the haiku practice.

Different phenomena, and “key symbols” can widen the poetic consciousness, even at the peril of losing—or, rather, changing—the horizons of understanding. The expansion of poetic consciousness is present anywhere and whenever. Signification after signification occurs in the poetic universe, polyphonic fields spreading in the spirals of hearing. The voice of poetry can be stronger than that of a prayer or a bluster for war.

A resourceful poem is an organic whole of saying and leaving-the-said: all that is said is ready to change into something else. The poet’s “own” voice is likewise always manifold and grafted. The color of the voice has different nuances. Language cannot be possessed, mastered, or inhabited by any author. A poem each moment utters its everything, all the while heeding new calls to enter the rhythms of unknown and unsaid realities.

## Rhythm and Consciousness

As the French sociologist-philosopher Henri Lefebvre noticed, rhythm makes it possible to join space and time: “Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is *rhythm*” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 15; see also Lyon, 2019). Rhythm is repetitious, but not absolutely repeating the same, because “there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 6). The simultaneous multiplicity and uniqueness of rhythms make the “polyrhythmic” universe that human beings are part of. “Eurhythmia” means joyful rhythmic union in a healthy state, while discordant rhythms bring about disorder and suffering, “arrhythmia” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 16). The accelerated pace of 24/7 societies produces arrhythmic disorders, while alternative slow movements tend to favor eurhythmic relations in the middle of stressing temporalities.

Human thought includes transitions, fluctuations, and vacillations between marginal states that cannot be interrupted except by force. In every consciousness, states undergo change. This kind of consciousness is not a chain or succession of elements but a flow of differences, of irreversibility. Although we believe we know what rhythm is by placing it in nature (in the sea, the sky, and the human life), rhythm defies exact definition, because it does not belong merely to the orders of nature, language, or even art.

The poetic and dialogical exploration of the difference between what is known and what is unknown, is an act of love. Ancient Greek philosophers already observed that the symbols of two human beings never match together. The words we use do not express exactly what we mean. There is no absolute definition of “explanation” or “meaning”—or even of “definition” itself! Our symbols and texts are porous and open to the difference, enigma, and paradox. In between there is Eros, the playful and the “bittersweet” (cf. Carson, 1986/2014, pp. 109, 172). The rhythm appears to be regular and hegemonic, nevertheless not following rules. The rhythm produces deviations, disturbing the regularly rhythmic being.

Dialogical meaning making opens the realm of the possible to intersubjective exchange, transport, and transfer. Discourse in poetry therapy moves from one participant to another, cultivating narrative spaces, re-enacting and trans-affecting. *Transito* means “circulation that includes passages, traversals, transitions, transitory states, spatial erotics, (e)motion” (Bruno, 2002, p. 71). Transformative transferences (Ihanus, 1998, pp. 89–90; Ihanus, 2019, p. 104) foster surprise, creative leaps, and the excitement of the unknown to be expressed. Such transferences no longer repeat the echoes of the past but evoke the rhythm and its continuity “with a *vaster form of discourse*, that which we never stop holding with ourselves and which is held with us” (Laplanche, 1976, p. 138). The poetic hooters on all shores have “an unfading language of earth, life, joy,” as the Finnish poet Viljo Kajava (1937, p. 54) reminded his readers.

Of course, poetry or any literary genre has no monopoly over rhythm that has cosmic as well as everyday human dimensions. However, the motion and rhythm of the appearing and vanishing worlds are framed in all kinds of literary figurations, balancing between order and disorder, taking their chances on a play of language and signification and in the innocence of becoming a possible world, also enabling

eurhythmic co-tuning. For example, Chinese integrated poetry therapy, as depicted by Peng (2019), combines poetic rhythms with breathing, moving, and voice training for maintaining physical and mental health.

### Haiku: Deep Sensibility and Responsibility

The author and the reader are not origins of, but passages to the worlds to appear. The author, the reader, and the world are rhythmically, sensually, kinesthetically, and dynamically implicated in each other. “The texture of a world is not only interpretant but also affect, movement in itself rather than movement as object of understanding or schematization” (Bratt, 2016, p. 190). In ancient Chinese literary theory, Liu Xie’s *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (see Bratt, 2016, p. 191) grasped this relational and kinetic-affective creation of the literary worlds as patterning or “weaving.” Literary works and literature, *wen* (文), were conceived of as flowing with the worlds and thus wit(h)nessing the manifestations of heaven and earth. In Liu’s words, 文之为德也大矣。与天地并生者。 (“The virtue of the text is great, coexisting with heaven and earth,” 1.1). Further, in Liu’s text (46.2), the poets’ connection to writing takes place through feeling, associating, wandering, sensing, and contemplating the things of the world as the flowing appearances of the vital energy *qi*:

是以诗人感物。联类不穷。流连万象之际。沉吟视听之区。  
写气图貌。既随物以宛转。属采附声。亦与心而徘徊。

As the poets feel, endless associations appear. While wandering around, they contemplate what they see and hear. They write the appearances of *qi* when they revolve around the things. They join nature and pick sounds, also wandering with their heart.

Bratt (2016) has even proposed that early Chinese ideas about literary theory, as expressed by Liu Xie, Lu Ji, and later Ye Xie, articulate relational views that can inform the contemporary post-phenomenological literary approach. From this point of view, literary creativity is not limited to cognitive-interpretive acts or socio-cultural practices, but it embodies and enacts the human mind embedded in the larger nature and embraces the pulsating cosmos.

The Japanese master of haiku (hokku) Bashō (1644–1694) maintained that we should follow, and return to, *zooka* (造化), which is not the same as “nature” but refers, together with *ziran* (or *shizen*, 自然), to the naturalness and spontaneity of Dao, the non-anthropomorphic cosmic creative power. In Bashō’s teaching, the object and the self are one (*butsuga ichinyo*, 仏我一如). Time is neither split into separate elements, but all time is one. Numerous directions implicate the Way. Bashō’s concept of *Fueki ryuko* (不易流行), literally the “eternal current,” points out the dialectical balance between the unchanging and the ever-changing. Presence, heightened or extended consciousness, simplicity, the suchness of things, irregularity, and perishability are all suggested in this flow.

This all-pervading creative stance approaches the nature-based expressive arts therapies (Atkins & Snyder, 2017), and, in this literary context, ecopoetry and

*ecopoiesis* (Levine, 2020) that all develop resilience and deep ecological, ethical, empathic, and aesthetic responsibility. In ecopoetic healthcare, “the wounded healer” and “the wounded storyteller” (Frank, 1995, pp. xii–xiii) join to defend and assume “an ethic of voice,” creating unique and shared means of combating anxieties, burnout, and empathy fatigue among individuals, groups, and communities. Through their ecopoetic and creative capacity human beings are more able to cope with global threats, “attuning our vision and our actions to planetary life and the ecosphere” (Alexeyev, Kopytin, & Levine, 2020, p. 4). In the changing world of the senses and sensible appearances, there is no berth for eternal truths, but the flow of *poiesis* (Levine, 1997) makes, for a while, sensible that which had not been sensed before.

In the process of sensing the earth and the cosmos, we human beings can experience the rhythmic merger, differentiation, and transformation, “blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers, mingling our ears with the thunder and the thrumming of frogs, and our eyes with the molten gray sky. Feeling the polyrhythmic pulse of this place—this huge windswept body of water and stone. This vexed being in whose flesh we’re entangled. Becoming earth. Becoming animal. Becoming in this matter, fully human” (Abram, 2010, p. 3).

Japanese Edo or Tokugawa period poems express awe and sympathy for small animals, particularly insects that have their own life sphere. In this famous haiku, Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827) supports a tiny frog—perhaps wrestling in spring before Issa’s eyes:

瘦蛙 yasegaeru	You thin frog,
まけるな一茶 makeru na – Issa	don’t give up – Issa
是に有り kore ni ari	is here.

Issa, like many other haiku poets, took care of the fly too by identifying with it, “Don’t hit me! / The fly rubs its hands / rubs its feet” (やれ打つな はえが手をする 足をする; Yare utsuna / Hae ga te o suru / Ashi wo suru)

In Japanese poetry, the poetic subject, if it is “thin” (*hosoi*) enough (in Bashō’s meaning of deep sensibility, without honing the reason), can also empathize and mentalize itself to the position of the other, here to the waterfowls’ possible sleep on the lake, in the mendicant poet Rotsū’s (1651–1739) haiku:

鳥どもも tori-domo mo	Waterfowls
寝入っているか neitte iru ka	are you asleep
余呉の湖 Yogo no-umi	on Lake Yogo?

Poetic pulses stem from the field of everyday practices and actions. In Haiku poetry, awareness of the present moment is a way to insight, surprise, or delight, without clinging to artificially figurative or “poetic” expressions. In haiku, language takes on freedoms that are based on the mind’s possibilities to move in the safe container, in the restrictions and frames, to be reframed by various new spontaneous plays with inner censorship and cultural codes, consciousness and unconsciousness reflecting one another. Restrictions enable structures that contain emotions, thoughts, memories, and fantasies and resist chaos.



## Haiku Therapy

Of course, the landscapes and mindscapes of haiku have not been without the expressions of irrationality and *kyō* (madness, eccentricity). The classical linked verse (*ushin no renga*, 有心の連歌) in Japanese poetry was more serious in comparison with the often-humorous *haikai* (俳諧, “comic”). The fusion of *haikai* and *kyō* was reflected in what Haruo Shirane (1998, p. 12) has called “the literature of reversal.” According to Shirane’s interpretation (see also Qiu, 2008, pp. 84–85), Bashō celebrated the eccentric in *haikai* by his poetic ideal *fūkyō* (poetic eccentricity) that exaggerated the aberrant and funny and turned it to something more refined and spiritual, while a later *haikai* poet Nampo went the other way round.

The idea of the psychotherapeutic and self-help uses of haiku has been present in psychiatry and psychology, both East and West. Psychotherapy is a Western paradigm that is often too sharply separated from Eastern healing traditions, making the cross-cultural broadening of healing paradigms difficult. However, in Japan, the term *shinri-ryōhō*, first introduced by the Buddhist philosopher Enryō Inoue in 1904, means “psychotherapy” and has generally been used after psychiatrist Tsunerō Imura adopted it in the 1950s and recommended it. Nowadays, Japanese psychologists use this term, whereas physicians and psychiatrists often refer to *seishin-ryōhō*. (Chervenkova, 2017, p. 4.)

The well-known Japanese psychiatrist Morita Shoma was already before the Second World War influenced by the haiku poet Masaoka Shikin, while Morita developed his therapy method (Moriyama, 1991). A centenarian doctor, Hinohara Shigeaki, was also in favor of medical humanities that has adopted, for example, sports, music, dance, narration, recitation, and haiku as therapeutic methods in primary care and healthy life planning. Hinohara himself started to learn to compose haiku at about the age of 100 and published a collection of haiku at the age of 103. The Life Planning Center (LPC) Foundation of Tokyo, established in 1973 by Hinohara has promoted holistic approaches to facilitate individual and cultural healthy lifestyles. The maxim of Socrates in Plato’s *Crito* (48a): “It is not living, but living well which we ought to consider most important” has been the basic principle of the activities of LPC (on Hinohara, see Bando et al., 2017).

One of the earliest proponents of haiku therapy is the Japanese psychiatrist Iimori Makio who, in the 1970s, found that haiku used in individual schizophrenia psychotherapy had positive effects on organizing the language disorders and the chaotic inner reality (Iimori, 1997). Another Japanese psychiatrist, Tamura Hiroshi, has documented a linguistic model of *renku* (linked poetry) therapy for schizophrenia. He maintains that *renku* advances clear expression and metaphorical, even humoristic relational understanding, diminishing the impact of thought disorders and delusions (Tamura, 1998; 2001).

The author of this article has similar findings as Iimori and Tamura. For example, one of the patients in the author’s semi-open poetry therapy writing group for schizophrenia rehabilitation had not previously read poetry at all. During the 3-year period of the group, at the beginning of the 1980s, he became increasingly interested in Chinese and Japanese literature, borrowed books, sharpened his perceptual observations, structured his associations, and refined his writing style so that he was even given an award when

the writings of the patients were assessed with literary criteria. Of course, such outer awards are not the aim in poetry therapy that encourages personal development toward inner balance and flexible relations with the others and the environment.

The patient was especially attracted to the clear structures that haiku and tanka poetry provided him. In the weekly group, participants first had a tea ceremony combined with reading and free discussion on the writings from the earlier meeting. After tea, the members continued together to find a writing theme that suited each member of the group. The members could also choose an individual writing form. The above-mentioned patient, who usually chose haiku or tanka, wrote down his first daily impressions connected with a season (*kigo* word) and nature or, unconventionally, the urban life, followed by a cut word (*kireji*), a turn, a paradox, a caesura, or a humoristic point, concluding with a philosophical or a spiritual dimension, the text immersed in subtle elegance.

According to the author's experience (see also Maanmieli & Ihanus, 2021), the use of haiku and tanka for therapeutic, rehabilitative, and preventive purposes has positive effects on advancing the well-being of the patients. At the same time, haiku and tanka therapy promotes and empowers fair culture, the realization of peoples' cultural rights and equal participation in the cultural activities of creating personal and communal meanings regardless of age, gender, language, disability, ethnicity, and religion. In poetry therapy, it is not a question of high culture for the few but of the common availability and attainability, in daily life, of rich cultural heritage and resources for renewal, thus maintaining physical and mental health, and caring for social justice and well-being. Freely expressed and shared words can give a passage to dialogical means of alleviating both intra- and intersubjective and intra- and intercultural conflicts.

Western psychotherapies, since psychoanalysis, have preferred free associations in the process of the unconscious becoming conscious. Haiku meditative and self-healing therapy advances being conscious of the present associations in the naturalness of human restrictions, while letting go of the fixed thoughts, by writing dialogically, intuitively, even humorously, and in contemplation with the present moment and perceptions.

To give an example of the steps for writing haiku meditatively, Hiltunen (2003, pp. 66–67; Hiltunen, 2005; see also Rossiter, 2004) has proposed seven stages:

1. Stop and relax in a nature setting if possible (silence and stillness).
2. Become present and let go (emptiness & detachment).
3. Be present and aware (focusing on your breath to get back to the present moment).
4. Open your senses, relax your body and become aware of your sense perceptions (see, hear, taste, touch and smell).
5. Concentrate and focus your mind, let go of your thoughts, then zoom on something in nature and amplify.
6. Write spontaneously with intuition, imagination, inspiration and/or contemplation.
7. Rewrite, write, rewrite, and finalize your haiku.

Tamura (1998; 2001) mentions five therapeutic aspects of classical Japanese poetry: orientation to reality, the unconventional syntax, brevity, ambiguity, and word and image



associations. Ambiguity can lead to the insight that reality consists of the overlapped phenomena rather than of binary opposites. Inner conflicts can thus more flexibly communicate with outer realities without the feelings of becoming overwhelmed by chaos and disorder. Everything is connected, big and small, the sublime and the trivial, in the haiku mindscape.

Although Western and Eastern cultures have developed through mainly separate routes, new vistas can be opened for cooperation, co-creative endeavors, and transfertilization. Haiku is a special meeting place for advancing cultural reciprocal relations and enhancing mutual empathy. For example, haiku poets and psychotherapists share pursuit “to connect, unburden, and enlighten” (Deluty, 2002, p. 211). Haiku’s international and transcultural fields extend beyond local, ethnic, religious, and institutional boundaries to probe the perennial, existential, and global questions of the human predicament and the biosphere.

### **Metaphors and the Poetics of Mind**

Psychological, psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and cognitive approaches to literature interpret and try to understand poetic expression by conceptualizing poetic figurative language, translating it into the language of scientific *logos* and abstract reasoning. Even when conceptual scientific *logos* favors exactness and the honing of analytic reason, scientific argumentation is partly dependent on figurative tropes (e.g., metaphor, metonymy, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, understatement, oxymoron, zeugma). Even in science, the tropical and logical ways of reasoning intertwine.

In their conceptual metaphor theory, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed that conventional metaphors are consciously and mostly unconsciously used for structuring our ordinary everyday conceptual system, our language, and our way of thinking, speaking, and acting. Conventional metaphors provide the basis of the poetic metaphors. In his “poetics of mind,” Raymond W. Gibbs (1994) claims that the human mind is not inherently literal, and that language reflects our mind’s perceptual and conceptual understanding of experience. Furthermore, figuration is not tied only to language but provides much of the foundation for human thought, reasoning, and imagination. Figurative and poetic modes of thought, which develop from childhood onward, can be found in everyday contexts and interactions; they contribute to and motivate our comprehension, from the meanings of concrete expressions to those of abstract concepts. Gibbs (1994, p. 16) adds that metaphorical understanding is grounded in the preconceptual “nonmetaphorical aspects of recurring bodily experiences or experiential gestalts.”

While figurative and poetic language is indeed present in everyday interactions, the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological aspects of poetry—and especially metaphorical understanding—are more complex than psychological, linguistic, and social science approaches have so far delineated. Metaphors can carry out different meaning-making, communicative, socio-cultural, and metareflective functions depending on the discourse (for example, scientific, educational, political, economic, religious, moral, literary) where they are used. The level of understanding

(i.e., comprehension, recognition, interpretation, and appreciation) of the language user is also a relevant issue. Scientific metaphors are seen as valuable when they are heuristic, clarifying, or supportive of efforts to explain, whereas literary metaphors carry expressive, evocative, or therapeutic functions, as well as often unconventional, even obscure, and hermetic linguistic dimensions that can approach novel perspectives and possible worlds.

For example, in poetry therapy, novel expressive metaphors can be used deliberately to induce change by discussing, relating to, and connecting with their co-constructed meanings, while conventional metaphors tend to be automatic and unintentional, not calling for shared explorations of meaning. The metaphoric potential and process (see Corradi Fiumara, 1995) in human beings invites us to poetically move letters and meanings, to relate ourselves to the new horizons of understanding. There are naturally also worn-out, oft-repeated metaphors that have been reduced to the empty vessels of language. Through continuous and exploratory metaphorizing, however, the human mind can shape iterative patterns into more flexible and innovative views of the world, a world that might contain our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, impressions, tones, fantasies, goals, desires, memories, and anticipations in ever-changing figurations.

As Gerard Steen (2008) has suggested, there may be a “paradox of metaphor”: what is categorized as metaphor in the structures and functions of language and thought may not count as metaphor in people’s minds and behavior. The framing of figurative language does play a role in social and cultural practices, but metaphors as used in texts do not necessarily correspond to metaphors as understood in people’s cognition and through interactions. Verbal metaphors can also be transferred to multimodal expressions.

Metaphorical perceptions are different from meditative perceptions (Gilcrest, 2002, pp. 121–130). The former tend to turn, through imagination and literary figurations, the perceptual objects to something else, while the latter, through stillness and silence, help the perceiver to meet and become aware of another world that can never be fully comprehended. In the “biopoetics of haiku,” the routines of perception are loosened and the surprising extensions of perceiving pave way to something rare, making the usual something “special” (Marshall, 2013, p. 91). The other is encountered and accepted being as such, without any “shoulds,” forced therapeutic interventions, nostalgies, or calculated future scenarios.

A Latvian Canadian haiku poet and psychologist, George Swede (1980), characterized the specialty of haiku in the act of juxtaposing, “Haiku is a poetic form that avoids the use of metaphor, simile and other poetic devices, obtaining its effects primarily through the juxtaposition of sensory impressions. If done successfully, this juxtaposition creates a moment of acute awareness about the external world. The person wrapped up in himself is forced outward to a consideration of the unity of nature.” Such juxtaposition does not mean sharpening the contrasts, but heightening awareness of the unity of the inner and the outer.

Poetic consciousness is absorbed into the revelations, images, rhythms, and figures of language reality, which bridges the individual and the collective, the past, the present, and the future. The creative whirl of poetry allows images to turn around and change

places in the comedy and tragedy of illusions, without the need for an absolute truth. The movement of the signs of language from the same to other, from self to others, crumbles the world of constants. Without the swaying of meanings, the world would be sealed in official documents, directives, and articles of association. Poems would become subject to licenses.

Nobody can close the fate of the poem in accordance with his/her own mind—that is, by reading, writing, interpreting, or evaluating. A poem creeps into many dimensions, exploring the tensions of consciousness that exist between words and the states of affairs. The breath (psyche, “a butterfly”) of a poem flies further than the poet’s desire, conflicts, and passions.

### **Coping with Anxieties through Poetic Empathy**

Poetry therapy as one of the expressive arts therapies, when facilitated and interactive, makes it possible for the participants to become engaged and to explore personal experiences through embodied, rhythmical, and moving words. They evoke and enact emotionally laden meanings embedded in the mind, to be reflected, co-created, and shared with other minds and reveries, extending and transforming perspectives. For example, poetic rhythms, metaphors, and images can evoke empathic simulations of the possible worlds, console (even when the poetic landscape would be “dark”), give shelter, provide relational and meaningful worldviews. When the human mind and the biosphere resonate within each other, the reclaimed space and time attains surplus meanings, allowing otherwise thinking and feeling, expressing in other words, and resounding polyphonically. Poetic empathy, meditative skills, and flexible coping resources can be further developed in several environments, whether individual, group, family, communal, or cultural, and in several professional contexts, whether they are in the fields of education, health and social care, business, arts, science, technology, industry, or service.

The tasks or functions of poetry can be expressed in many ways, but they have no definite aim. Others can say otherwise what has usually been said, multiplying meanings. Simplicity does not preclude the expansion of worldviews, the surprising frameworks of belief, attitude and value, or unexpected perspectives and resonances. The poetic expression, always dying yet never dead, contradicts its own tenets, affirming and negating, catching for a while and letting go.

The being of a poem consists in the constant perception of openness, in considering the world as it is manifested. Writing proceeds in the open and leaves open the modes of living and dying. Through the perception of openness, poetic consciousness allows things to be and become. This does not amount to passive indifference but to participation in the enabling of people, relations, things, and events to develop into meaningful beings. The world as a poem does not then manifest itself in the system of facts but in the fabric of meanings.

The continuous freshness of perception and appreciation is not self-evident. For poetic consciousness, there is always more than is expected, at the unexpected moments of meeting. The poem’s wisdom—not knowing—is not ignorance but a sensing-otherwise, trans-sensing, and inhabiting everyday rareness and freshness. By

mixing memory and intuition, the poem loads language with the rhythms of otherwise-knowing. The poem draws the mind away from its zone of comfort, seducing us out of the need for certified letters, off the thrones of sovereign control.

When we start writing, we approach a “danger zone,” as Gillie Bolton (n.d.) warns us in her poem: “Writing can seriously damage your sadness / Writing can seriously damage your nightmares / You are in danger of achieving your dreams.”

In a poem that is both alive and awakens restlessness, the unnamable is an instance to keep silent when naming: “to keep still, *preserving silence*: that is what, all unknowing, we all want to do, writing” (Blanchot, 1980/1986, p. 122). The poem gives voice to emptiness, only to fall immediately back into muteness; the poem creates meanings, only to return them to emptiness and oblivion where silence still resounds the enigma (cf. *ibid.*, p. 53).

Teetering between creation and destruction, affirmation and negation, writing may slide away from origins, authors, and conventional modes of expression. The poetic mind is fragmentary and experimental, its positioning plastic; it discards such socially desirable conventions of the linguistic presentation as closure, “personal” narrative voice, pre-established figurative frames, and fixed identities.

The word can deceive poetry and ally itself with the official order. The processing systems of cultural information willingly take over the word and art products and assimilate them into the regulative operations of indoctrination, marketing, advertising, and consumption. Already the Victorian art and social critic John Ruskin noted that words can immobilize and deaden whatever their “information” touches. He warned about the “masked words droning and skulking about us in Europe just now”, spreading “shallow, blotching, blundering, infectious ‘information,’ or rather deformation.” For him, such words were “creatures of prey,” “mischievous,” and wearing “chameleon cloaks” (Ruskin, 1871/1906, pp. 59–60).

Language can enliven or deaden, heal, or hurt. “Masked words” have lost their connection to the experiential flows and to the reciprocal pulsations that crush permanent attributes. The resources of masked words have been sacrificed to maintain stagnation, repetition, and repression. The enormous mass of meaninglessness, the masquerade of information fatigue, is in progress in the world of masked words. So many words swirl around loaded with information, without any contact with sensuous and imaginative language.

The scales and dimensions of anxiety are ever more global, ranging from the past to the future, demanding various anticipations and coping strategies if the human species is to survive. Current forms of anguish include, among others: climate, Coronavirus pandemic, Trump, Putin, media, technology, Zoom, and screen. The author has introduced and defined “virtual anxiety” (Ihanus, 2021) as a continuous background “noise” that people are usually unaware of, but which repeatedly emerges on the global techno-cultural scenes as a conscious distressing feeling, demanding assessment and mobilization of suitable coping strategies for avoiding its long-term harmful effects.

Empathetic dialogues among individuals, societies, and cultures help develop meditative mentalization, interaction, and coping skills. In such poetic co-tuning, sharing the words therapeutically, in interaction, the participants can keep one’s own

and the other's mind in mind, mending and minding the gaps, and alleviating to reframe and resolve conflicts.

*Poiesis* means doing (Ancient Greek *poiein*) something, giving existence to something that did not exist before. Poiesis evokes an internally relevant and meaningful world. Poiesis includes different creative activities (handicraft, verbal, musical, and artistic works, etc.). Poiesis enhances one's personal experience of available resources, even in virtual anxiety. It enriches life values and serves mutual social relations. Positive poiesis meanings can infuse ordinary life events. New priorities and goals can be set, and even in harsh situations positive perspectives and benefits can be found if one reflects on and reminds oneself of them, through "imagination and word."

So far, research on coping has mainly concentrated on past and present stressful issues. Researchers have noticed the limits and failures of the problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies, especially in the long-term stressful situations. Sarah Folkman (2008) has maintained that when those copings fail, people may use *meaning-focused copings* in liaison with positive as well as negative emotions. Personal meanings and positive emotions also support problem-solving and emotional balance. Recently, *future-oriented copings* have received more attention. Furthermore, the means of anticipating the challenges and adversities faced by humankind are not only individual-centered but require the large-group negotiations of life-preserving efforts, the mutual reconciliation of conflicts, and constructive planning for future generations.

Growth may follow even from extremely stressful situations and the sense of coherence may induce a sense of relational compassion and poetic-empathetic relations. Playful poetic-empathetic approaches support upsetting given categories, constructing different selves in changing interactive situations and relations. Poetic playful freedom involves letting go and letting be, feeling the sense and even nonsense of being alive, creatively writing, resonating, and transforming the selves and the worlds.

The therapeutic, rehabilitative, and preventive effects of haiku poetry are in unison with human development toward empathy, mindfulness, resilience, reciprocal caring and responsibility, the sense of meaningfulness, belongingness, and rootedness in nature and the whole cosmos.

## Acknowledgements

The article is partly based on modified and updated passages from the author's work *Transformative Words: Writing Otherness and Identities* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2019). Best thanks to the Finnish poets Kai Nieminen and Niklas Salmi for their expert knowledge concerning the haiku tradition.

## About the Author

Juhani Ihanus, PhD, is an associate professor of cultural psychology at the University of Helsinki and of art education and art psychology at Aalto University, Finland. He is a pioneer of European biblio/poetry therapy, a founder of the Finnish Association for Biblio/Poetry Therapy, and a writer who has published extensively in the fields of psychology, history, culture, literature, and the visual arts. He is an editorial board

member of *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, and *Scriptum: Creative Writing Research Journal*. Besides scientific publications, Ihanus has written works of poetry, aphorisms, and essays. He is also a member of the transartistic and transdisciplinary Sjählö 9 group.

Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; Tel: +358-40-952-6760, E-mail: juhani.ihanus@helsinki.fi.

## References

- Abram, D. (2010). *Becoming animal: An earthly cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Alexeyev, S., Kopytin, A., & Levine, S. K. (2020). Editor's introduction: Ecopoiesis in a time of challenges. *Ecopoiesis: Eco-Human Theory and Practice*, 1(2), 3–4. <http://en.ecopoiesis.ru> [https://en.ecopoiesis.ru/f/ecopoiesis-2-eng\\_v5.pdf](https://en.ecopoiesis.ru/f/ecopoiesis-2-eng_v5.pdf).
- Atkins, S. & Snyder, M. (2017). *Nature-based expressive arts therapy: Integrating the expressive arts and ecotherapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Bando, H., Yoshioka, A., Iwashimizu, Y., Iwashita, M., & Doba, N. (2017). Development of primary care, lifestyle disease and New Elderly Association (NEA) in Japan – Common Philosophy With Hinoharaism. *Primary Health Care: An Open Access Journal*, 7(3). <https://www.iomcworld.org/open-access/development-of-primary-care-lifestyle-disease-and-new-elderlyassociation-nea-in-japan--common-philosophy-with-hinoharaism-2167-1079-1000281.pdf>.
- Blanchot, M. (1980/1986). *The writing of the disaster*. Trans. by Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Bolton, G. (no date). Take care once you start writing. [A Poem.] [http://www.gilliebolton.com/?page\\_id=612](http://www.gilliebolton.com/?page_id=612).
- Bratt, J. (2016). The spirit wanders with things: A literary post-phenomenology. *Literary Geographies*, 2(2), 182–199.
- Bruno, G. (2002). *Atlas of emotion: Journeys in art, architecture, and film*. New York: Verso.
- Carson, A. (1986/2014). *Eros the bittersweet*. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press.
- Chervenkova, V. (2017). *Japanese psychotherapies: Silence and body-mind interconnectedness in morita, naikan and dohsa-hou*. Singapore: Springer.
- Corradi Fiumara, G. (1995). *The metaphoric process: Connections between language and life*. London: Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Deluty, R. H. (2002). West meets East: Processes and outcomes of psychotherapy and Haiku/Senryu poetry. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 15(4), 207–212.
- Folkman, S. (2008). The case for positive emotions in the stress process. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 21(1), 3–14.
- Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gibbs, Jr., R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilcrest, D. W. (2002). *Greening the lyre: Environmental poetics and ethics*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Hiltunen, S. M. S. (2003). Haiku meditation therapy. *Japanese Bulletin of Arts Therapy*, 34(1), 52–69.
- Hiltunen, S. M. S. (2005). Country haiku from Finland: Haiku meditation therapy for self-healing. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 18(2), 85–95.
- Ihanus, J. (1998). Dancing with words: Transference and counter-transference in biblio/poetry therapy. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 12(2), 85–93.
- Ihanus, J. (2019). *Transformative words: Writing otherness and identities*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Ihanus, J. (2021). Virtual anxiety. *Clio's Psyche*, 28(1), 51–56.
- Iimori, M. (1997). Poetry therapy in Japan: Haiku-therapy for schizophrenics. In R. R. Pratt & Y. Tokuda (Eds.), *Arts medicine* (pp. 124–131). St. Louis: MMB Music.



- Kajava, V. (1937). *Murrosvuodet [The years of rupture]*. Jyväskylä: K. J. Gummerus.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laplanche, J. (1976). *Life and death in psychoanalysis*. Trans. by Jeffrey Mehلمان. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis, space, time and everyday life*. Trans. by Stuart Elden & Gerald Moore. London: Continuum.
- Levine, S. K. (1997). *Poiesis: The language of psychology and the speech of the soul*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Levine, S. K. (2020). Eco-poiesis: Towards a poietic ecology. *Ecopoiesis: Eco-Human Theory and Practice*, 1(1), 17–24. [Open access internet journal.] <http://en.ecopoiesis.ru> [https://en.ecopoiesis.ru/f/ecopoiesis\\_2020-1\\_eng\\_v4.pdf](https://en.ecopoiesis.ru/f/ecopoiesis_2020-1_eng_v4.pdf).
- Lichtenberg, G. C. (1968). *Schriften und Briefe. Band I: Sudelbücher I: Hefte A–L [Writings and Letters. Vol. I: Scrapbooks I: Books A–L]*. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag.
- Lyon, D. (2019). *What is rhythmanalysis?* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Maanmieli, K., & Ihanus, J. (2021). Therapeutic metaphors and personal meanings in group poetry therapy for people with schizophrenia. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 34(4), 213–222. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08893675.2021.1951900>.
- Marshall, I. (2013). Stalking the gaps: The biopoetics of haiku. *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 46(4), 91–107.
- Moriyama, N. (1991). Shoma Morita, founder of Morita therapy, and haiku poet Shiki: Origin of Morita therapy. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 45(4), 787–796.
- Peng, Y. (2019). Integrated Chinese poetry therapy with rhythm as the core. *Creative Arts in Education and Therapy*, 5(1), 33–39.
- Qiu, P. (2008). Celebrating *Kyō*: The eccentricity of Bashō and Nampo. *Early Modern Japan: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16, 84–91.
- Rossiter, C. (2004). Haiku: There's more than meets the eye. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 17(1), 45–48.
- Ruskin, J. (1871/1906). *Sesame and lilies: Three lectures*. Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz.
- Shirane, H. (1998). *Traces of dreams: Landscape, cultural memory, and the poetry of Bashō*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Steen, G. (2008). The paradox of metaphor: Why we need a three-dimensional model for metaphor. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 23(4), 213–241.
- Swede, G. (1980). The role of haiku in poetry therapy. *Cross-Canada Writers' Quarterly*, 2(4).
- Tamura, H. (1998). Therapeutic functions of poetic language in schizophrenia. In G. Roux & M. Laharie (Eds.), *L'humour: Histoire, culture et psychologie* (pp. 386–390). Paris: SIPE.
- Tamura, H. (2001). Poetry therapy for schizophrenia: A linguistic psychotherapeutic model of renku (Linked Poetry). *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 28(5), 319–328.
- Turner, V. (1977). Variations on a theme of liminality. In S. F. Moore & B. G. Myerhoff (Eds.), *Secular ritual* (pp. 36–52). Assen: Van Gorcum.