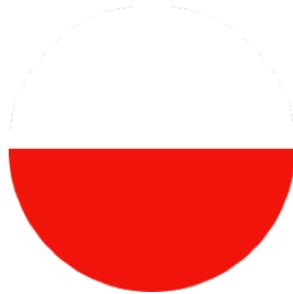


# A Brief History of Haiku in Poland

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Shortly after Poland regained its independence after the First World War Polish literature became more receptive to new literary trends, including those coming from oriental countries. However, the first Polish study of Japanese literature was published in the book entitled *Historja literatury chińskiej i japońskiej* (*A History of Chinese and Japanese Literature*, Warsaw, 1901) by Julian Adolf Świącicki. As far as translations of Japanese poems are concerned, the first compilation titled *Sintaisi-sbo, poeci nowo-japońscy* (*Sintaisi-sbo, Modern Japanese Poets*) by Antoni Lange was published in Warsaw in 1908. In this book we also find a concise history of Japanese literature in the 19th century.

In 1927, first Polish translations of haiku appeared in the essay by Stefan Łubieński entitled “Sztuka słowa i pieśniarstwa” (“The Art of Word and Song”); it was included in the book called *Między Wschodem a Zachodem. Japonia na straży Azji* (*Between the East and the West. Japan Guarding Asia*).

After the Second World War the Communists came to power in Poland. This fact accounts for considerably limited interactions between Polish authors and the outside literary world. Socialist realism dominated the Polish literary scene pushing all the other literary trends to the sidelines. That was the reason why no haiku translations could be published in our country in those times. This accounts for the fact that the first Polish anthology of classical haiku *Godzina dzikiej kaczki* (*The Hour of a Wild Duck*) appeared in 1966 in Great Britain; it was compiled and edited by Aleksander Janta-Połączyński.

Haiku resurfaced in Polish periodicals only in 1975, notably in the *Poezja* (*Poetry*) monthly, one of the co-editors of which was Stanisław Grochowiak. For the first time the whole issue of a Polish magazine was completely dedicated to haiku, comprising several translations of

Bashō's haiku and a detailed essay by Prof. Wiesław Kotański, which he called "Japoński siedemnastozgłoskowiec haiku" ("Japanese Seventeen-Syllable Haiku"). The first Polish poet to include haiku in his collection was Leszek Engelking. His book published in 1979 was called *Autobus do hotelu Cytera* (*A Bus to the Cytera Hotel*).

The decade commencing in 1980 saw a considerable proliferation of Polish literary works inspired by oriental philosophy; haiku in particular. However, a turning point in the changing attitude towards haiku was in 1983, the year when an anthology of classical Japanese haiku appeared in Poland. The editor Agnieszka Żuławska-Umeda simply called it *Haiku*. The book was fitted with an introductory essay, the translator's commentary, several reproductions of Japanese paintings, samples of calligraphy, as well as a closing essay on the history of haiku in Japan written by Mikołaj Melanowicz.

The 1990s witnessed a plentiful crop of haiku and related poems in Poland. Czesław Miłosz, one of the Polish Nobel Prize winners for Literature, translated a collection of classical Japanese and contemporary American and Canadian haiku from English, and in 1992 published his translations in the book entitled *Haiku*. This book provoked an enormous interest in haiku among Polish readers.

The next quality publication followed shortly. In 1993, *Antologia kanadyjskiego haiku* (*An Anthology of Canadian Haiku*) edited by Ewa Tomaszewska hit the shelves of Polish bookshops. From November 1994 to November 1995, five issues of the magazine *Haiku* edited by the poet Robert Szybiak appeared in Warsaw.

At the very beginning of the twenty-first century the first national anthology of Polish haiku finally appeared in our country; it was called *Antologia polskiego haiku* (*Anthology of Polish Haiku*) and edited by Ewa Tomaszewska. This study, that also included an introduction about Japanese influences on the European culture and art, was an invaluable source of information on the history of haiku in Poland, as well as on the status quo in contemporary Polish haiku. It showcased more than six hundred haiku and haiku-like poems by nearly eighty Polish authors, and spanned ninety-six years (1905 to 2001).

In recent years the number of haiku poets in Poland has been growing constantly. There are now several groups of haiku poets, all rather informal.

The one that came to being earlier than the other has poets born in Silesia, a region in south-west Poland. The leader of the group, Felix Szuta, is an important writer and promoter of haiku in our country. He is the editor of *Pileus*, a literary supplement to *Gazeta Chojnowska* (a local magazine from Chojnow) that published quite a number of haiku by local authors. In 2001, members of the group founded the Association of Polish Haiku Authors in Legnica. This is probably the only formal haiku association in our country. There is another, a smaller group of Silesian haiku poets who gathered around their leader, Krzysztof Karwowski. They mostly publish their works in the periodical booklet called *Pagina*.

There is a prolific group of haikai located in Gdańsk, the city regarded as an important cultural centre in Northern Poland. The members of the group won a few awards and commendations in prestigious national and international haiku contests. In 2001, Piotr Szczepański won the Third Prize in the 6th International Kusamakura Haiku Competition. In 2009, Dorota Pyra won the Grand Prize in the 2009 Shiki Special Kukai in memory of William J. Higginson. There is also a large number of creatively active authors who are not associated with any particular haiku group. The Polish haiku scene also includes a few authors living and writing abroad, e.g. Krzysztof Jeżewski (Paris) and Lidia Rozmus (USA).

One of the most original Polish haiku writers is Dariusz Brzóska Brzósiewicz. He is also a performer, and is known to promote the younger generation poets. Brzósiewicz wrote haiku for TV programs and collaborated with a few well-known Polish musicians on the artistic project called *Haiku Fristajl (Freestyle Haiku)*. It resulted in a CD released in 2006, which has haiku in Polish and Japanese as lyrics. Brzósiewicz also published a volume of his haiku entitled *Haiku Brzóska (Haiku of Brzóska, 2007)*.

Poland has many good haiku poets whose works are available mostly on the Internet. They take part in various haiku forums, where they can workshop and showcase their poems. Talking of Polish literary online forums, arguably the biggest of them is “Serwis poetycki - Interkl@sa” (Poetic Website - Interkl@sa), the address of which is <http://www.poezja.org>. It has a big number of portals dedicated to various literary genres. One of them is fully dedicated to haiku, and attracts a number of prolific poets, some of which have texts on these pages, e.g. Maria Kowal, Jacek Margolak and Aneta Michelucci. A few of them won awards and commendations in prestigious national and international haiku contests, e.g. Marek Kozubek (the Annual Suruga Baika Literary Prize, *Lyrical Passion Poetry E-Zine* contests) and Katarzyna Bielińska (the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Invitational).

In 2005, Grzegorz Sionkowski launched a new Internet forum, which he called “forum.haiku.pl” (<http://forum.haiku.pl>). It seems to be the biggest Polish haiku site on the Internet. Some of the participants also have their texts here, e.g. Magdalena Banasziewicz, Artur Lewandowski, Robert Naczas, Mariusz Ogryzko, Katarzyna Prędotka, Dorota Pyra, Bronisława Sibiga, Grzegorz Sionkowski, Juliusz Wnorowski, Rafał Zabratyński. Most of them have their own personal websites or run haiku blogs.

Another valuable haiku resource appeared on the Internet in 2007 when Grzegorz Sionkowski started “mała antologia haiku po polsku” (a small anthology of haiku in Polish) (<http://antologia.haiku.pl>). It currently presents almost three hundred quality haiku written by more than fifty authors.

Summing up, I would like to mention that in 2003 we had an important haiku gathering in our country. It was International Haiku Conference held in the Cracow Center of Art and Japanese Technology, “Manggha”. The motto of that conference was “With haiku into the 21st Century”.

As it happens, we still don't have a nationwide haiku association, which hinders Polish haiku groups from steady contacts between them. Another obstacle is a lack of translations of classical Japanese haiku, as well as of contemporary haiku written in the main European languages. Also, we don't have Polish translations of some important works on the theory of haiku (e.g. the oeuvre of R. H. Blyth), nor have we Polish-language versions of the main haiku handbooks (e.g. of those by William J. Higginson and Jane Reichhold). As a result, we are facing the spreading of short-form haiku-like poems that don't have the essence of haiku, whereas real haiku are rare. Nevertheless, it is heartening that more and more Polish haikaijin not only publish their works in international anthologies, magazines and e-zines but also win awards and commendations in prestigious national and international haiku contests. This means that Poland appears to be clearly noticeable on the modern haiku map.