

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF COLOR IMAGERY IN THE POETRY COLLECTION *DAR* BY MAŠA HAL'AMOVÁ

KATARÍNA GAJDOŠOVÁ¹ – IVICA HAJDUČEKOVÁ² – PETER MALČOVSKÝ³

¹Slovak National Corpus, Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia (ORCID: 0009-0005-2995-1146)

²Department of Slovak Studies, Slavonic Philologies and Communication, Faculty of Arts, Pavel Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia (ORCID: 0000-0001-7718-335X)

³Slovak National Corpus, Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia (ORCID: 0009-0001-2970-789X)

GAJDOŠOVÁ, Katarína – HAJDUČEKOVÁ, Ivica – MALČOVSKÝ, Peter:
A Corpus-based Analysis of Color Imagery in the Poetry Collection *Dar* by Maša Haľamová.
Journal of Linguistics, 2025, Vol. 76, No 1, pp. 335 – 344.

Abstract: The study presents a methodological approach that employs an annotated corpus to track the frequency of colors and their shades, as well as to visualize color clusters and their preferences. Corpus analysis reveals that the highest frequencies in the debut collection *Dar* [The Gift] are found in red, yellow with gold, white, but also gray and green. The results indicate that the color palette in the collection functions as an integral component of lyrical structure and actively contributes to the process of spiritualization. The poetic symbolization of color and its compositional use in expressing spirituality are part of the author's artistic strategy.

Keywords: color imagery, corpus, Maša Haľamová, poetry of the heart, the poetry collection *Dar* [The Gift], spiritualization

1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary literary criticism, particular emphasis was placed on the subtlety and lyricism of Máša Haľamová's poetry, which scholars have sought to align with modernist tendencies, such as impressionism, neo-romanticism, or symbolism. As her poetry, in some respects, eluded these poetological categories, it became more and more evident that she was a solitary voice, positioned outside of modernist experimentations.

Current literary research confirms that the expressive qualities of Haľamová's poetry are subordinated to its spiritual meaning (Hajdučeková and Bónová 2024). Sensually inflected natural motifs play an important role in this poetry, becoming key elements in the processes of symbolization and emblematisation. However, the sensual effect of natural imagery is further accentuated by the deliberately chosen use of color. This color scale reflects not only the emotional fluctuation of the lyrical subject but also deliberate allusions pointing to the processes of spiritualization and the sacralization of poetic expression (Hajdučeková and Bónová 2024, pp. 121–171).

As shown in the research of I. Hajdučeková a I. Bónová, the function of the nature-psychological parallel with spiritual significance is already strongly developed in the emblematic poem The Gift. On white silk, within the flowers of a wild bouquet, a symbolic scale of several colors is represented (red, pale violet, blue, green with the dominance of white). The emblematic poem The Gift, with its suggestive color scale, marked the poetic beginning and anticipated the core of the themes of Haľamová's later work. The study notes that, in terms of color motifs found in selected poems, white, red, gold, and silver appear most frequently. These colors intensify the spiritual dimension of meaning and the sacrality of expression (ibid. p. 152). Within research on the nuanced spectrum of spirituality in M. Haľamová's work, color connotations and their sequencing have so far been observed only secondarily as a thematic thread within subtle lyricism.

However, color can also be examined as an independent component of aesthetic structure, revealing deeper meanings across the poet's entire body of work. The integration of corpus linguistics and literary studies, which is gaining increasing ground within the field of digital humanities (Změlik 2019) can, through poems processed in corpora and appropriately visualized, offer new impulses for broader interpretations of a specific poetry collection or the author's entire oeuvre. In the present study, we test selected methodological approaches and the hypothesis that the color scale in the debut collection *The Gift* functions as a meaningful component of lyrical structure and participates in the process of spiritualization.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine color usage, we adopted a combined approach in which literary texts processed within a corpus are visualized¹ and subsequently interpreted. From the three poetry collections by M. Haľamová *The Gift* (1928); *Red Poppy* (1932), and *I Live Your Death* (1966), we created an internal text corpus (6,777 tokens). The corpus is lemmatized and morphologically annotated by MorphoDiTa, trained and tuned on the Slovak National Corpus tagset. In addition to the attribute lemma, we manually added another attribute lemma1, in which we always recorded the color in the form of an adjective, e.g. *red*. We explicitly assigned this value to all adjectives denoting the given color in the lemma attribute, as well as to all tokens that carry an implicit association with that color in the poem, e.g. *krvavý* 'bloody', *srdce* 'heart', *oheň* 'fire'. The color attribute was also assigned to multiple words within a construction when the adjective conveyed a broader color reference that extended to the modified noun, e.g. *red poppy*. Some colors were grouped under a broader, overarching color category, which we indicated in the annotation using an underscore, e.g. words like *ružička* 'little rose', *ružové slnko* 'pink (neutral) sun',

¹ We would like to express our gratitude to colleague Jakob Horsch for his willingness and help in creating an R script for data visualization, which we further modified according to our needs.

ružový máj ‘pink (masculine) May’ were assigned the color attribute *red_pink*. In the collection *Gift*, 33 tagged² colors and 23 overarching³ color categories were identified. Given the nature of the annotated text and the specificity of literary interpretation, some color designations – such as *light-dark*, *white-black*, *transparent* – are considered non-standard colors.

In this study, we worked with the primary color labels in the visualization – e.g. the color *red_lilac* was processed as *red*. The annotated corpus data was placed into various types of graphical representations. Among them, the most suitable for our purposes proved to be a complex visualization of individual poems in the collection arranged vertically, as well as figures showing the distribution of colors within individual poems. The colors in poems are displayed in the figures in sequence according to the numerical position of the token as it appears in the corpus, with the y-axis representing the title of the poem.

The size of the color dots represents the accumulation of identical colors within the textual space. For example, in the poem *Gift*, Fig. 2 shows a third red color dot with a value of 5, indicating that five instances of red color references occur consecutively in the text without interruption by another color.

3 ANALYSIS OF KEY COLORS

Based on the analysis of overarching color frequency (see Note 2) in the collection *Gift*⁴, several colors compete for prominence at the center of the color spectrum. This configuration of colors suggests that the somber, balladic atmosphere – despite being present in the thematic focus of several poems – is not overtly emphasized.

² red (40), white (37), dark_black (29), yellow (22), green (18), grey (15), dark_grey (15), golden (12), colorful (11), transparent (11), brown (10), dark (10), light (9), blue (6), greenish brown (6), colorless (5), red_pink (4), dull grey (4), pitch dark (3), red_dark red (3), bright (2), silvery (2), light-dark_grey (2), goldish (2), red_violet (2), red_bloody (2), red_purple (2), spectrum (1), light-dark_colorful (1), greenish blue (1), green, light green (1), green_dark green (1), black and white (1)

³ dark (54), red (53), white (37), yellow (22), green (20), grey (15), golden (12), colorful (11), transparent (11), brown (10), light (9), blue (6), greenish brown (6), colorless (5), dull grey (4), light dark (3), pitch dark (3), bright (2), silvery (2), goldish (2), spectrum (1), greenish blue (1), black and white (1)

⁴ The collection is divided into four parts: *Dar* (*Gift*), *Balada o veľkom žiali* (*Ballad of Great Sorrow*), *Pieseň* (*Song*), *List* (*Letter*), *Láska* (*Love*), *Z večera* (*From the Evening*), *Balada o hre slnka a vetra* (*Ballad of the Play Between Sun and Wind*), *Západ marcového slnka* (*March Sunset*), *Sekera v lese* (*Ax in the Forest*), *Horniaky* (*Highlands*), *V marci* (*In March*), *Jiřímu Wolkovi* (*To Jiří Wolker*), *Za Dušanom Kardosom* (*For Dušan Kardoss*), *Z kacionálu* (*From the Hymnal*), *Riadok z kacionálu* (*A Line From the Hymnal*), *Z knihy žalmov* (*From the Book of Psalms*), *Zo sanatoria* (*From the Sanatorium*), *Agonia* (*Agony*), *Balada o klamných ružiach* (*Ballad of Deceptive Roses*), “*Budť wôle Twá*” (*Thy Will Be Done*), *Milému* (*To My Beloved*), *Epilog* (*Epilogue*), *Legenda* (*Legend*).

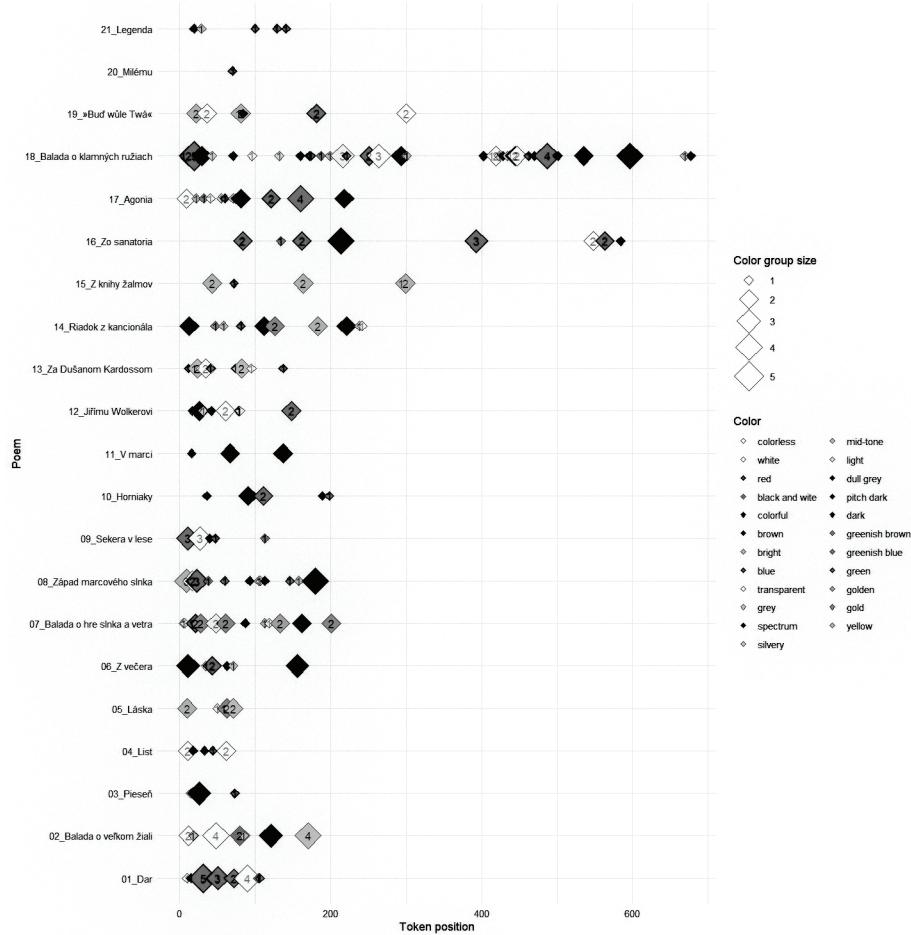


Fig. 1. Visualization of the colors in all the poems in the poetry collection *The Gift*

In the following section, we analyze the preferred colors identified in the debut collection *Gift* – namely red, gold and yellow, white, dark black⁵, green and gray.

The graphical representation of individual poems shows that among the dominant color combinations, those featuring the overarching red color⁶ stand out. This red is connected to either explicit expression or figurative and symbolic representation, as for example:

⁵ Although this color is not an overarching one, we have chosen to pay special attention to it and its surrounding colors, particularly in contrast with white.

⁶ In addition to explicitly stated red, the attribute red also includes the following: violet red, bloody red, crimson red, pink red, red dark red.

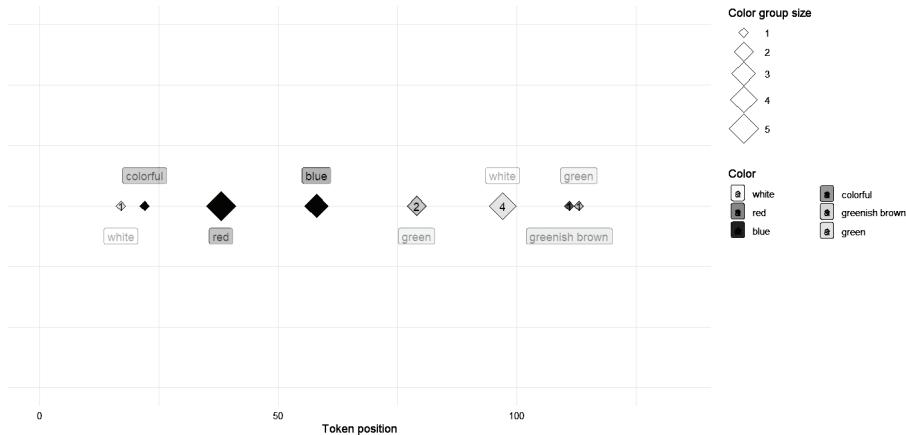


Fig. 2. Visualization of the colors in the poem *The Gift*

- in the motif of the heart (13): Song (1), For Dušan Kardoss (3), From the Book of Psalms (1), From the Sanatorium (1), Agony (2), Thy Will be Done (2), To My Beloved (1), Legend (2);
- in the motif of blood: *výčitka krvavá* ‘bloody reprach’ (Gift), *krvavá ruža* ‘bloody rose’ (Ballad of Deceptive Roses), *krv z rozťatej rany* ‘blood from an open wound’, (March Sunset), *halúzky krvácali* ‘twigs were bleeding’ (Ax in the Forest);
- in the motifs of natural phenomena and flowers: *červený mak* ‘red poppy’, *lilavé sirôtky* ‘lilac pansies’ (Gift), *ružové slnko* ‘pink sun’ (Ballad of the Play Between Sun and Wind), *rudá zora* ‘crimson dawn’, *rudý klinčok* ‘crimson carnation’ (From the Sanatorium), *ruža* ‘rose’, *temnorudý kalich kvetov* ‘dark crimson flower chalice’ (Ballad of Deceptive Roses);
- in representations of physicality and emotionality: *oheň oka* ‘fire of the eye’ (From the Evening), *rumeň líc* ‘blush of the cheeks’, *záblesk plameňa* ‘flash of flame’, *purpur rudý v tvári* ‘crimson flush in the face’ (Ballad of Deceptive Roses), and similar expressions.

The frequency of red forms a meaning-bearing axis throughout the entire collection. It is interesting to compare the presence of the color red in the framing poems Gift (5) and Legend (2), where it appears in the symbolism of the red poppy and the heart. Both poetically developed symbols are semantically linked to the gift of Divine love, which in the opening poem is sacred but in the last one is antithetically profaned.

It was only through the graphical representation of overarching colors that the distinct coloration of certain poems – serving as focal points within individual

sections of the collection – became evident. For example, in the poem Love, yellow and gold colors dominate: yellow in the sky and the gold color of letters in the declaration of love „Milujem!“ ‘I Love!'; yellow underscores the spiritual dimension of transcendence, while gold emphasizes the sacredness of love. A similar character can be observed in the poem Ballad of the Play Between Sun and Wind, which was not identified as a semantic focal point within the analysis of the collection's polyfocal architecture (Hajdučeková and Bónová 2024, pp. 214–217). However, based on the analysis of color-related motifs – sun implying yellow color (3), *zlatá/zlatistá kader* ‘golden/golden-hued lock' (4/2) and *zlaté vlasy* ‘golden hair' (2) – as well as the poem's position in the collection, it becomes evident that it serves as a pendant to the poem Love, forming a polyfocal pair along the axis of individually experienced Božej L/lásy (Divine L/love) in an eternally present parable.

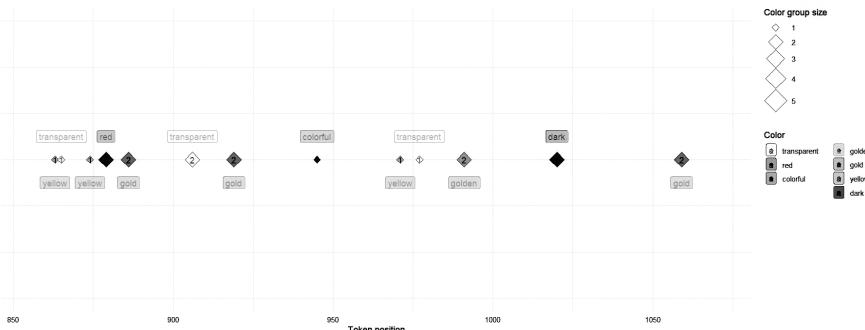


Fig. 3. Visualization of the colors in the poem *The Ballad of the Play Between Sun and Wind*

Yellow and gold also dominate in the poems A Line from the Hymnal and From the Book of Psalms, which form a focal point of the poetic whole. The yellow color here is also an iconic expression of the sacredness of the chalice and the yellow page in the psalter emphasizes the tradition of spiritual song and dialogue with God. Žltá stuha ‘yellow ribbon' (3) also marks the place of a mother's final prayer. Both poems thus create an initiation point where a personal spirituality of the heart is born and unfolds within the poetic unit with the symbolic title Gift. The yellow color also appears in the third part: in the opening image of the golden sun as an accent marking sacralized time and space (Agony), as well as in the central poem Thy Will Be Done, where the yellow color of the hospital becomes a sign of mystery – a struggle for life in contact the Transcendent.

Through these semantic associations and new findings, it becomes evident that the specific colors – yellow and gold highlight the polyfocal structure of the collection's composition and symbolically reinforce the focal points of spiritualization. Yellow

represents the suprasensory dimension of (auto)t/Transcendence, while gold iconically conveys the sacrality of expression.

The strong presence of white is already developed in the emblematic poem *Gift* (5), where its frequency matches that of red. White serves as a pendant to the red color in its evocation of spirituality, which is also seen in the graphical representation of several poems. In *Gift*, it forms the foundation of silk '*hodváb*' for the embroidered image of a bouquet and is also connected to the central symbol of the white dove '*holubice bielej*' – a biblical representation of the Holy Spirit. In contrast to red, which dominates primarily in floral motif, white – when in focal position – implies a penetration into the transcendent. It highlights the initiation point of sensuous perception of spirituality, that is, a diaphanously doubled reality (both revealed and concealed). It connects predominantly with:

- a) natural imagery: *biela priepast* 'white abyss', *biele stromy* 'white trees', *snežný rad* 'white row of snow' (Ballad of Great Sorrow); *obláčik ľahký*, *biely* 'a small, light white cloud' (2) in a combination with colorful blossoms (Letter); *snežné hory ako krv z rozťatej rany* 'snowy mountains like blood from an open wound' (March Sunset);
- b) human fate and death: *biela poduška* 'white pillow' – here contrasted with the absent red carnation which serves as a sign of death (From the Sanatorium), *biela izba a záclony* 'white room and curtains' as delimited space which, when combined with red in the image of the transcending heart evokes the mystery of death (Agony), *krvavá ruža na bielej tvári a rumeň líc* 'bloody rose and blush of cheeks' or *purpur rudý* 'crimson flush', are signs of illness and also death (Ballad of Deceptive Roses), *biela posteľ v priestore sanatória* 'white bed in the sanatorium' – combined here *budovou žltou* 'yellow building' – signifies a spiritual struggle at the threshold of life and death (Thy Will Be Done).

A semantic analysis of the color white reveals that it becomes established as a symbolic marker of the perception of spirituality and meta-empirical dimension of reality. It is associated with intuitive and suprasensory experiences of auto-transcendence, faith, and existential situations. In the context of diaphony, it appears in a dual color pairing most often of white and red⁷, or white and gray. In complementation with red – which in the collection is meaningfully tied to motifs of blossoms, the heart, blood and sacrifice – white contributes to a sensuously perceptible marker of the doubled threshold between life and death, which constitutes a semiotic precondition

⁷ Colors in the poem From the Sanatorium represented by a particular token and its order in corpus: blue (siné 'dusky blue'; 85) – blue (mraky 'clouds'; 86) – greenish blue (more 'sea'; 135) – red (rudej 'crimson'; 163) – red (zore 'dawn'; 164) – dark_black (Čierne 'Black'; 211) – dark_black (nebo 'sky'; 213) – dark_black (černejšia 'blacker'; 218) – dark_black (zem 'soil'; 220) – red (ret 'lip'; 264) – red (retom 'with lip'; 415) – red (srdca 'of the heart'; 504) – white (bielu 'of white'; 549) – white (podušku 'of pillow'; 550) – red (klinčok 'carnation'; 563) – red (rudý 'crimson'; 565) – brown (hrudy 'of soil'; 585).

for the poetic shaping of the lyrical parable (Turner 2005). Thus, the color white intervenes in the composition of the lyrical structure and assumes the function of a compositional component (Sabolová 2000, pp. 500–503).

The color dark_black stands in contrast to white. Its occurrences, categorized under the overarching color dark⁸, suggest that connotations of a balladic atmosphere – usually expressed explicitly through black – are relatively rare in this collection. The presence of the color black can be observed as follows:

- a) in the attribute of initiatory objects: *kancionál čierny* ‘black hymnal’, *čierne dosky* ‘black planks’ (A Line From the Hymnal);
- b) as a temporal mark: *čierne noci* ‘black nights’ (Song), *(pod)večer* ‘(from) evening’ (From Evening), *noc* ‘night’ (Ballad of the Play Between Sun and Wind), *ruže večerné* ‘evening roses’ (Ballad of Deceptive Roses);
- c) as an attribute of topoi: *brázdy zčernelých orníc* ‘furrows of blackened soil’ (March Sunset), *čierne nebo*, *černejšia zem* ‘black sky, even blacker soil’ (From the Sanatorium).
- d) In the color spectrum, the appearance of dark_black (29) is surpassed by the combined presence of grey, dark_grey, light_gray and dull grey. With a total of 36 occurrences, these colors weaken and counterbalance the semantic effect of dark_black. Instead of reinforcing a tragic tension, they establish a gradual scale (white, dull grey, grey, light grey_grey, dull grey, dark_black) that functionally connects several key colors⁹.

As the analysis has shown, the frequency and distribution of the color black in the collection *Gift* confirms the research hypothesis that it is not tragic balladic elements that carry semantic weight, but rather a psalm-like quality with a perspective of hope – one that is further supported by the function of the color green.

Fig. 1 clearly shows that green¹⁰ appears with a relatively high frequency. In the opening poem *Gift*, it symbolizes hope through the motif of green leaves and is linked to a semantic shift from despair to hope and the initiation of a new path in life. In the subsequent poems, it participates only in the motif-based depiction of nature and in imagery: *husté lesy kosodrevia* ‘dense dwarf pine forest’, *tmavý les* ‘dark forest’ (Ballad of the Great Sorrow), *jedľa* ‘fir tree’, *lišajník* ‘lichen’ (March Sunset), *hory* ‘mountains’, *vŕby* ‘willows’, *topole* ‘poplars’ (Highlands), *les* ‘forest’ (3), *hory* ‘mountains’, *jedlice* ‘silver firs’ (To Jiří Wolker), *teplý mach* ‘warm moss’ (Agony).

⁸ In addition to explicitly expressed black color (dark_black), the attribute dark also includes color labels such as dark_grey; the characteristic of darkness is also present in separate colors like light-dark_colored, light-dark_grey.

⁹ Leaf: white (Obláčik ‘Little cloud’; 10) – white (biely ‘white’; 14) – dark_grey (večerom ‘evening’; 19) – colorful (kvety ‘flowers’; 34) – red (rety ‘lips’; 45) – white (Obláčik ‘Little cloud’; 61) – white (biely ‘white’; 65).

¹⁰ In addition to the explicitly expressed color green, the attribute green also includes the following variants: green_lightgreen, green_darkgreen.

From these connections, it becomes clear that the green color of natural elements implies the presence of verticality – in contrast to the axis of down versus up. This subtle green element of nature serves as a kind of hint of a transcendent perspective, carrying the semantics of hope, and it is against this backdrop that lyrical experiences are situated. This may help explain why, despite the spiritual nature of poetry, the color blues appears relatively rarely in the collection. Typically associated with the vertical axis of sky and earth, blue is linked to the motif of sky (*Gift*, *Legend*). A more prominent presence of the blue sky can be observed only in the motif of clouds, which, however, tends to lean toward white/gray tones. Nevertheless, the color blue does appear in both framing poems (*Gift* and *Legend*), as well as in the poem in Part 3 (From the Sanatorium), with all three being united into a semantic triad through a leitmotif: (God's) gift – love and life.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The chosen methodological approach – using an annotated corpus to track the frequency of colors and their shades, along with graphical visualizations of color clusters and their preferences – made it possible to evaluate key semantically charged components of the composition that would not have been identified through literary analysis and interpretation alone, without the intervention of linguistic tools. This is confirmed by the comparison: while in literary research the authors point to a preference for white, red, gold, and silver, the corpus shows that silver is only marginal, and the highest frequencies are found in red, yellow with gold, white, as well as gray and green. The semantic roles of the key colors are as follows: the overarching red forms a meaning-bearing axis throughout the collection and affirms the aptness of the label „poetry of the heart“; yellow and gold emphasize the collection's polyfocal structure and the focal points of spiritualization; white becomes established as a symbolic marker of the meta-empirical dimension of reality and contrasting black (within the overarching dark) does not hold a central position. Green implies a constant presence of a transcendent perspective. From this, it follows that the initial hypothesis – that the range of colors in the debut collection *Gift* functions as a semantically charged component of lyrical structure and contributes to the processes of spiritualization – has been confirmed. The poetic symbolization of color and its compositional use in expressing spirituality are integral to the author's strategy.

Based on the presented research, future work with annotated data from poetry collections will involve annotated data from the poetry collections for overarching color categories – e.g. treating black as an independent category, unifying variants of gray, and merging of yellow and gold.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research in this paper was supported by the Slovak National Corpus project, supported by the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics, Slovak Academy of Sciences and by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the projects APVV-19-0244 Methodological procedures in literary research with an impact on the media environment.

References

Hajdučeková, I., and Bónová, I. (2024). *O lyrickom triptychu Maše Haľamovej (život a tvorba)*. Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 286 p.

Haľamová, M. (1928). *Dar. Básne Máši Haľamovej*. Bratislava: Literárny odbor Umeleckej besedy slovenskej, 54 p.

Haľamová, M. (1932). *Červený mak*. Druhá sbierka básní Maši Haľamovej. Bratislava: Sväz slovenského študentstva, 53 p.

Haľamová, M. (1966). *Smrť tvoju žijem*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 81 p.

Sabolová, O. (2000) Z terminologických otázok výskumu kompozície umeleckej prózy. In: K. Buzássyová (ed.): *Človek a jeho jazyk. 1. Jazyk ako fenomén kultúry*. Bratislava: Veda, pp. 500–503.

Slovenský národný korpus – masa-2.0. (2024). Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav Ľ. Štúra SAV. Internal Corpus.

Turner, M. (2005). *Literárni mysl. O pôvodu myšlení a jazyka*. Brno: Host, 278 p.

Změlík, R. (2019). Koncepcionalizace barev v narrativní fikci na pozadí kvantitativních modelu. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 320 p.