

Haiku Noir

The following is the Editorial Policy posted by the webzine, Haiku Noir, which published two issues in 2001. It remains the main definition of haiku noir.

Haiku Noir is a new variety of the ancient poetic form, haiku. Haiku noirs exist at the farthest end of the spectrum of subject matter, dealing with that which is not generally considered to be proper subject matter for the classical haiku; for example: tragedy, loss, sorrow, depression, madness, terror, horror, anger, macabre humor, anti-heroism, crime, passion, the underworld/subcultures, squalor, eros, science fiction and fantasy.

FORM: We are developing a new kind of haiku, not in the classical form, so the rules are substantially simpler. For our editorial purposes, a “haiku noir” is a tercet (3 line poem) in which the first and third lines are from 1 to 5 syllables while the second line is from 1 to 7 syllables. Thus, the classic 17 syllable form (5-7-5) and the even more popular English forms which use from about 10 to 14 syllables (e.g., 3-4-3, 4-5-2, 4-5-3, 4-5-4, 4-6-3, 4-6-4) are all acceptable. There are no rules with respect to capitalization, punctuation, use of complete sentences, fragments, phrases, or clauses. However, excessive use of marks (e.g., !!!!! and &*#@*&) is definitely frowned upon. There are no prohibitions with respect to metaphor, simile, rhyme, direct address, questioning, etc.. There are no “season words,” “cutting,” or “juxtaposition” requirements. In summary, the only form imperatives are that the haiku noir must be a tercet with no more than 17 syllables, distributed 5-7-5 or less.

SUBJECT MATTER: The poetic value of haiku noir is in communicating complex and difficult material in the most brief and crystallized poetic form, the haiku of seventeen or fewer syllables. This necessarily entails using the most concrete language in some instances and the most ambiguous and suggestive language in other instances. This is a tremendous poetic challenge and one of the great attractions of writing haiku.

Showing the beauty to be found on the dark side, showing how our joy is rooted in sorrow, how our ecstasy is found beyond pain, is another great challenge. The defining purpose of the haiku noir is to create in the reader an emotional response which falls at the darker end of the spectrum of human experience. It is in this that haiku noirs are most different from classical haiku. Keywords which help to define the scope of the subject matter of haiku noirs include: tragedy, loss, sorrow, depression, madness, terror, horror, anger, macabre humor, anti-heroism, crime, passion, the underworld/ subcultures, squalor, eros, science fiction and fantasy. On the other hand, there is at this end of the spectrum a great deal of human experience about which we do not want submissions at *Haiku Noir*, and keywords for those subjects that we don't want include: smut, pornography, scatology, banality, obscenity, hate speech, and anything that is simply disgusting. You may find that haiku noirs make you uneasy, even creep you out or turn you on, but they must not be disgusting or filthy. We repeat: Do NOT submit pornographic haiku. Because this can mean making some contentious value judgements, we emphasize that *Haiku Noir* reserves absolute editorial discretion in selecting poems for publication in *Haiku Noir*.

Examples of my own haiku noir:

back home after work—
 on my fresh-painted front door
 a bloody handprint

their promises are lies—
 there's no one in the mirror
 again today

Sequence: September 11th

blue sky sunny day—
how is it the darkness lurks
on the horizon?

sights before unseen
and sounds never heard before—
new world born in flames

after the attacks
we deal with water damage—
oh, so many tears!

my missing legs, they
put the lie to “phantom pain”—
heart-piercing towers!

the sleeping giant
wakes from his bed of comfort
and takes up his sword.

riding the west wind
through smoky plumes, countless flags—
dark Mars approaches

More Haiku Noir

now at my arm's end
a gnarled and scaly claw—
when did that happen?

peering from the street
the mailman must know too much
he'll have to go too

this caveman rhythm
our common pulse more needful
than water or salt

driving home again
after hours of one way talk
suddenly, hot tears

roundness in my palm,
silky smoothness drives my blood
and, ah!, the rough spots

this ancient face
lit by the eyes of a child—
it's time to shed

explosive autumn
now, as below, so above
meteor shower

caught in wind-carved ice
on this distant nameless peak:
an empty Coke can

dug-in in Da Nang—
studying history's
most ghastly lessons

T'aichung morning show—
Chinese fighters dogfight
over CCK

North Korean seas
bow-spray rakes the flight deck crew—
bone-cold and ice-strafed

flight of the Habu—
reports of UFOs
flood the base switchboard

Hiroshima hellfire:
could this crucible yet forge
new katana?

etched in memories—
in stone walls by the death light,
red chrysanthemum

decades later,
night terrors still fester on
moonless nights: round eyes!

dead-end alley
darker than vacant sky—
yowl of a cat

stone still
on the church steps—
no one's son

homeless no more—
the soles of his shoes
white with frost

yellow police tape
crackles in cold wind—
patch of red ice

mown roses
in this madman's garden—
a hard rain

ice-fisherman
frost-brittle line still
in pale fingers

shelter trash can
filled with ripped-out labels
and assorted IDs

tank ruts
crisscross the field—
haiku from hell

fire in the sky
thunderous cataract of
tears

one in grief
nations weep for their
champions

your heat on my thigh
up from the depths
boiling springs

zoo mothers
clutch their babies
both sides of bars

rock strewn dusty moon
rising on the horizon
the water planet

web generation
surprise—the election flamed
in the chad room

in the boiling smoke
ten million shrimp feed in waves—
scarlet seaworm sways

sun bright orange-red
pillow lava in the surf
swells and darkens

crossing the sea floor
lobsters march in line to their
dark destination

deep crystal cavern
resplendent in lantern lights—
still there in the dark

hanging from a cord
totally dependent
trembling neophyte

