

## Reviewed

**Carlos Colón. *Haiku Elvis: A Life in 17 Syllables (or Less)*.** Abilene, TX: Laughing Cactus Press, 2013, 89 pp., perfect soft-bound, 5.5 x 8.5. ISBN 978-1-937905-23-1. US \$16 postpaid, autographed from the author, 185 Lynn Ave., Shreveport, LA 71105, ccolon423@comcast.net.

by Charlotte Digregorio, Winnetka, IL

Haiku Elvis epitomizes senryu. Since the time we were young, we all dreamed of achieving fame and recognition, if only for a few minutes, when watching someone famous. Carlos Colón, a longtime haiku and senryu poet, lets us dream about fame through his persona of Elvis, often making us laugh at ourselves and our illusions. He compiled his book largely as a clever channeling of poems from Elvis:

hoping I can  
fit back through it  
kitchen door

screaming fan—  
in her hand  
a clump of my hair

The book is divided into parts, among them: “Birth of a Rock Star,” “Matinee Idol,” “Family Man,” and “On the Road.” It is filled with light-hearted humor and wordplay, illustrating the celebrity performer’s life:

not myself tonight  
my belt missing  
a rhinestone

late for the sky  
another  
curtain call

lost luggage  
I ask for the bag  
with the blue suede shoes

Paris—  
in my mouth  
a foreign tongue

Some of the poems in this collection were written prior to Colón's "Haiku Elvis" days, although he deftly weaves them into the life of Elvis:

family time  
a conversation  
between bathrooms

Ever the senryu poet, he includes poems that won awards in significant competitions:

in the middle  
of making love  
counting syllables

Though *Haiku Elvis* contains mostly senryu, there are also haiku of a serious tone. Colón is a spiritual person, and often his poems include Christian symbols. One of my favorite haiku in the book takes off on Elvis's famous song, "Blue Christmas":

a little more  
periwinkle this year  
my Blue Christmas

In the poem above, periwinkle is a symbol of eternity, a reminder of the departed that we were close to.

Another haiku that embodies spiritual sensibilities is:

pointing  
my way home  
the starfish

The starfish symbolizes the Virgin Mary. She promises safe travel over troubled waters, and is an emblem of salvation during trying times.

Further, consider this lovely haiku:

summer's end  
the trace of your shadow  
through my sunglasses

In reading this book throughout, we have the idea that the often laconic Elvis Presley might have relished haiku for its brevity, had he known about it, and found in it a subtle vehicle for his innermost feelings. Reportedly, Elvis often experienced painfully lonely thoughts. It has been widely publicized that he was an introspective man who pondered his existence and read books on religion and mysticism.

Could Elvis ever come back as a haiku poet? One thing is for sure: if Elvis did come back, he would find Colón's haiku thoughtful and delightful, capturing his sensibilities.

The book's attractive front and back covers, featuring Colón dressed in a white jumpsuit as The King, invite even non-poets to discover haiku. The book undoubtedly will work to bring haiku into the mainstream.

At the end of the book, Jim Kacian, haiku poet and founder of The Haiku Foundation, interviews both "Haiku Elvis" and Colón. The author discusses the free form of haiku that he practices, educating those who grew up thinking they must write in the 5-7-5 syllable format. He makes such points as the need to cut back on our use of adjectives and adverbs when writing haiku. This interview is a great introduction for those who read the book not knowing about haiku and its modern form.

*Haiku Elvis* is a worthy, intuitive book, and it is an excellent addition to our haiku and senryu collections.



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