

Haiku Palindromes

TIM HEATH

Wantage, Oxfordshire, England
timheath@btinternet.com

Love's Return

Red Rose does reve
Volatile babe lit a love,
Reverse ode's order.

Pleasurable palindromes

The moment of elation when draft wordplay finally crystallises into a finished palindrome is, most likely, an experience common to all palindromists. With disorder tamed and symmetry restored, it's time for a rest and a beer.

Red Ale

Red now for a beer,
Fasting is a sign it's a
Free bar of wonder.

Or is it? The temptation often arises to extend the work by insertion in the middle, or addition to the ends. So when is it time to stop? This is just another way of asking what makes a good palindrome. With palindromes, there is of course only one unbreakable rule: it has to be reversible; no almost or nearly, and no grey areas. Beyond this rule, the criteria are subjective, but some commonly reported guidance includes:

- good grammar and spelling;
- avoiding excessive use of:
 - acronyms and abbreviations
 - apostrophes for unusually omitted letters
 - given names; and
- maintaining a constant theme or themes and, conversely, avoiding random or meaningless hopping from one topic to another.

Inspection of the list shows that what should be pursued is simply high-quality natural writing that happens to have an added symmetry feature. However, anyone who attempts such a pursuit soon becomes aware that maintaining a constant theme in a palindrome is in itself an arduous task, and it takes on an

added level of difficulty when the first two criteria are imposed. The competing constraints of symmetry, theme and grammar come into ever greater conflict the longer the palindrome. Consequently, and despite their skilful construction, lengthy palindromes can require so many sacrifices that they often become almost impenetrable.

Those who, by experience, find the essence of this analysis familiar may well agree that shorter palindromes are more satisfying in both their construction and their reading. The conflicting requirements are not fully removed, but sharp edges are blunted by brevity. So, short palindromes may be a sensible aim, but why attempt haiku? Doesn't this just add to the constraints?

Haiku

Changing Seasons

Liven mutual
Like summer, a harem muse
Kill autumn evil.

Formal haiku comprise three lines containing a total of seventeen syllables in a 5-7-5 pattern. They commonly have a turning point in tone or meaning, usually at the end of the first or second line, and traditionally have a reference to nature or the seasons. In modern haiku the constraints are often relaxed. (The Wikipedia entries for "haiku" and "haiku in English" provide a good introduction to the form.)

Haiku palindromes

The formal haiku structure does indeed add further constraints, which add to the challenge. But it also enforces the selected preference for brevity. In addition, there is a fortuitous synergy arising from the imposed line breaks of poetic forms. This helps to separate the juxtaposed, staccato-sounding phrases and clauses that often arise in palindromes. The haiku form also relaxes the constraint of having full sentences.

I have found few previous examples of whole-haiku, letter-unit palindromes with a 5-7-5 structure. One by Dmitri Borgmann and reported by Howard Bergerson was previously published in *Word Ways* [18(3), 171-178, 1985]:

Smart Nora, alert
Saws goldenrod-adorned logs.
Wastrel Aaron trams.

Some further examples published by Anthony Etherin [*101: A Collection of Palindrome Haiku*, songsofinversion.com, 2015] are well worth seeking out.

The haiku palindromes presented in this article generally conform to the 5-7-5 syllable structure. A title is given to each palindrome, following the approach described by Saltveit [Word Ways 46(2), 131-133, 2013] for palindromes arising in first annual SymmyS awards. This may be unusual for haiku, but is useful in the case of palindromes, because it establishes the theme or helps to unite disparate themes. Except for Borgmann's example above, all palindromes here are original, so far as could be determined by checking common sources and performing web searches. Some further examples are given below.

Decomposition

Saga's reviled tips,
Secret Exeter cesspit
Delivers a gas.

Poetic Licence

Toil estimate met,
A loss, so late-met, am I
T.S. Eliot.

Ivory Towers

Aimed a casual cat
Nastily lit Santa Claus,
Academia.

Denigration

Reviled if I live,
Mistress asserts I'm evil
If I deliver.

Brexit Dilemma

"No" in unison?
No, it's EU question
No sin – union.

Munich Olympics

Red now for a tsar,
Eve aglow, Olga ever
A star of wonder.

Silent Noir

Demi-monde trap miss
I kill, agog, all I kiss
Imparted? No mimed.

Valleys Romance

Wonder erases
Or I adore hero Dai,
Roses are red now.

Some of the listed criteria for good palindromes are not fully adhered to in the above examples, and the sharp-eyed may have noticed that *Brexit Dilemma* has only six syllables in the second line. But that's OK, palindromists don't mind having their words thrown back at them.