

# Short Poetry of San Luis Potosí

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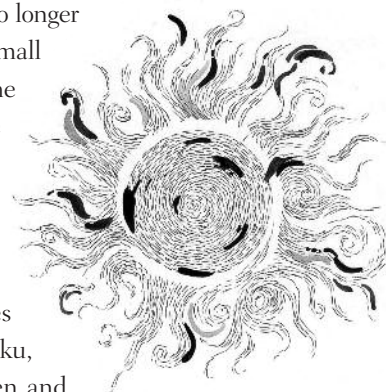


Short poetry is like a spark. It is the product of intuition, irony or, as with haiku, the result of profound meditation resolved through the density of a metaphor.<sup>1</sup> Summarizing a vision of emotional or intellectual reality in a few words is a challenge most poets cannot resist. However, the practice of short poetry does not always have fortunate results; it often fails or ends up displaying ingenuity more than creativity. It is sometimes necessary to write hundreds of short poems to come up with a salvageable dozen.

From the inception of literature, and specifically poetry, many authors have written different forms of short poems. Classifying them poses serious difficulties, above all because the dividing lines among them are often blurred. Short poems are from two to six lines long, although sometimes they may be longer if each line has fewer than nine syllables. However, this limitation to six lines, or 48 syllables, is rather arbitrary, since longer poems can be considered short because they contain a single poetic idea or very effectively summarize an experience or event.

Martín Alonso, in the first volume of his work *Ciencia del lenguaje y arte del estilo* (The Science of Language and the Art of Style), dedicates paragraph 398 to reviewing a short song which includes a series of brief poems that are no longer than seven lines long.<sup>2</sup> So, this kind of poetry is also known as a small song, and brief or condensed poetry. In this genre, we find the warnings of the Greek oracle, usually fashioned in hexameters;<sup>3</sup> the images of the *I Ching*; children's songs; couplets; epigrams; Alfonso Reyes's *jitanjáforas*;<sup>4</sup> the *seguidilla* stanza of four or seven lines; the Japanese *tanka* and *haiku*; the *poemínimos*;<sup>5</sup> and Bécquer's rhymes, among others.

Some of these forms, like the epigrams, follow traditional rules of verse writing, respecting meter and rhyme. Others, like haiku, only use a specific meter, consisting of three lines of five, seven and five syllables each, but without rhyming. The *jitanjáforas* appeal to musicality



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Drawings in this section by Héctor Ponce de León.

without taking into account meaning, and use words and neologisms not for their meaning but for their musical qualities. For example:

Vilichumbito de papagaya  
lastirilinga de miñatay  
trabuquilindo, lindo, lindoli  
la papagaya de muranday<sup>6</sup>

Tankas, poems that add two seven-syllable lines to the haiku, and haiku aim for a meaning that goes beyond common sense, beyond the vision of the ordinary mind. *Poemínimos* are ironic, paradoxical, ingenious visions of reality.

The sample of poems offered here was born from a search for haiku produced by San Luis Potosí poets. After reviewing more than 50 books of poetry, I found only two authors who had published works they considered haiku: Álvaro Álvarez published three in a special issue of *Alfa*, put out by the San Luis Potosí Autonomous University Cultural Office in 1991; and Julio Rangel published two in a collective work called *La densidad del aire* (The Density of Air) in the UNAM Wing of the Tiger Collection in 1999. Other writers who have published poems with the intentionality of haiku, but that are not presented as such and do not adhere strictly to the metrics of a haiku, include Joaquín Antonio Peñalosa, Juana Meléndez, Arturo Medellín, José Ramón Gutiérrez, Fernando Sifuentes and Ana Coloma.

During my search, I found a good many texts that, while they cannot be considered haiku, are short poems. We can understand, then, as brief poetry, all poems that contain a maximum of six lines, preferably with fewer than nine syllables per line. However, epigrams usually have nine syllables or more per line.

Compared to worldwide production, little short poetry is written in San Luis Potosí. Its quality is varied, and it ranges from intense poems to loose ones, including simple attempts at humor or ingenuity. For my anthology, I consulted the greatest possible number of books of poetry. The authors included range from those who had been published in the twentieth century, from Manuel José Othón, to the books printed before 2000. It is possible that I have missed some authors, above all in the first half of the century. This is due to the fact that some books have been published by the authors themselves and others are practically impossible to locate. Some writers, like Mago Medellín and Juan de Alba, are not included because they did not write poems with six lines or less, at least in the books I was able to consult. The reader will find a sample of brief poems; I hope it is a sample of the best and most representational works written by poets born or living in the state of San Luis Potosí. They are not all of the same quality and intensity, the same capacity for summarizing a poetic experience. But I think that they do maintain a minimum of rigor and decorum that make this sample readable and instructive. ■■■

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See T. Hadman, *Breve historia y antología del haikú en la lírica mexicana* (Mexico City: Domés, 1987); Nuria Parés, *El haikú japonés* (Mexico City: El Mundo Moderno, 1966), and Norberto de la Torre, *El universo en un sombrero* (San Luis Potosí: Ediciones Koan, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Martín Alonso, *Ciencia del lenguaje y arte del estilo* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> William Holding, *La lengua oculta* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Alfonso Reyes, "Las jitanjáforas", *Obras completas de Alfonso Reyes*, no. 14 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Efraín Huerta, *Estampida de poemínimos* (Mexico City: Premià Editora, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Alfonso Reyes, *op. cit.*