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Killer Ku Haiku

When describing something as dark as murder or something as momentary as crime in haiku, authors seem to focus on using imagery to describe something far deeper and more important, much like other haiku. In *Body of Evidence*, edited by kjunro and Jessica Simon, there are several haiku that exemplify this. They take symbolism hidden within sharp images to portray their points in very few words, as well as using efficient imagery to evoke emotion from the reader.

distant gunshots
a cloud of ravens
darkens the day

Chen-ou Liu, BoE, 2

The imagery in this haiku is incredibly cinematic. It is a common trope in film to cut away from a death, especially via a gun with a loud shot, to a flock of birds flying away from the scene. This being ravens in this case is even more fitting. They often represent death, decay, and all things macabre. A flock of crows, of which ravens are a part of, is even called a murder, with ravens also more specifically having the collective nouns of “treachery”, “unkindness”, and “conspiracy”. So, even without saying “murder,” the author has implanted it into the minds of those who know that fact. And, finally there is the imagery of them darkening the day. A large flock of ravens may act like a black cloud, blocking out the sun as they fly away. That image paired with the gunshots of the presumed death in question give a sense of hopelessness and tragedy. It is a scene we as the reader are removed from, but one that hits us hard nonetheless.

playing dead...
in a pool of blood
the one he missed

Pamela Cooper, BoE, 4

In contrast to a lot of the other haiku featured in Killer Ku, this one features a small ray of hope. While “the one he missed” implies there were several other victims that were not missed, having one survive who can tell the story gives the hope that the killer can be stopped before any more lives can be taken. Not to mention, this would be incredibly lucky for that one that was missed. It truly is a testament to just how much momentary circumstance can change a lifetime worth of purposeful decisions. Why was this victim missed? We don’t know. It could have been strategy and skill, but more likely, it was mostly if not all good luck.

murder ballad
he sings as if
he held the knife

Nancy Richards, BoE, 8

This haiku reminds me a lot of the people who idolize killers. The way they speak sometimes of the killer sounds like something only the killer themselves would say. This speech is described as a “ballad,” implying it’s emotional

and would evoke some pity, but “as if he held the knife” implies that pity goes not towards the victims, but towards the killer. It’s also possible this refers to a witness in court, testifying against the suspect but who is actually the killer, which is a terrifying thought in itself. No matter what the context, the juxtaposition of a ballad to a scarily realistic description of a murder is unsettling, since it puts an amount of beauty and struggle behind it, specifically appearing to root for the killer.

moonless night
only my car
in the lot

Joanne Morcom, BoE, 15

Were this not included in *Body of Evidence*, this would be an entirely different haiku. There isn’t any crime in this haiku until you match it up with the fact that it’s in a book about crime haiku. Much like in real life. Most people sitting in a dark parking lot in their cars don’t expect to be murdered, but when watching a horror movie or a murder documentary, the audience will scream at their screen that this is a poor choice. But that just goes along with the context. If you read it as “only my *car*” instead of “only *my car*,” it is a bit more ominous. The person who drove the car to this parking lot on such a dark night is nowhere to be seen, and the car lays abandoned.

a thief
scoops up dreams
wishing well

Carole MacRury, BoE, 19

Compared to the former ones, this one is rather tame, but it uses its wording to make the crime seem much more egregious. The thief is not just scooping up abandoned coins out of a fountain, they are stealing dreams. While it seems more opportunistic than anything to take all those coins that are sitting down there doing absolutely nothing, this haiku makes its criminal a thief in such a way that one could never truly be. Instead of stealing any material belongings, people’s hopes and dreams are being stolen. It’s a bit cute-sounding when phrased like this, but if a thief truly were able to do that, it would be a horrifying concept.

captured
the lone wolf killer
bares teeth for photos

Joanne Morcom, BoE, 26

The strong image of a convict that this haiku portrays can be interpreted a few different ways, but none of them are comforting. I initially imagined a killer who was not good at controlling their anger and would actually clench bare their teeth for mugshots and such out of their rage at being caught and, as they interpret it, mocked. But murderers who smile for these sorts of things can be equally as creepy. There are a few mugshots I’ve seen with killers who have a blank smile or a proud smile, and it is rather unsettling. They don’t just show no remorse for their actions; they show no remorse for being caught either. Those killers that work alone also tend to be a bit scarier. Here the haiku uses that to liken their toothy facial expression to a wolf’s growl to further portray that fear it evokes. But, even without that comparison, “lone wolves” tend to be less easy to understand when it comes to murder. People in groups can be pushed to do things they’d never do alone, and they’re often caught more quickly since there are more weak links in the chain that can be suspected and possibly manipulated to snitch on their friends. With a lone killer, there is much less likelihood for clouded thinking on the killer’s part and for being able to work out a deal to confess.

among the ruins
forget-me-not blue
morning glory red

Anna Yin, BoE, 29

With the form of haiku being so short, this one uses flowers to portray a lot of meaning into just a few words. Forget-me-nots are known for meaning remembrance, as the name would suggest. Additionally, morning glories often represent the fleeting nature of life, since they only bloom in the morning and shrivel up later in the day, only for the next flower to bloom the next morning. Life is short, but new life will take its place, and life will be remembered for as long as there are people to remember it. And this being juxtaposed to ruins gets the tragedy across. Much like the “moonless night” haiku, this one doesn’t immediately pop out as being about crime, but since it is *Body of Evidence*, it is now intrinsically linked to that. So the life being represented in this haiku was likely tragically cut short, making it all the more important to remember just how fragile life is.

evening sun
police question unanswered
enters the sea
David McMurray

This is an incredibly poetic way to describe the disposal of evidence. The culprit throwing anything left over into the sea where it won’t be found, at least not easily. The way this is phrased makes it sound like this was done somewhat far into the investigation as well, since the police already have questions by the time it’s disposed of. In that case, the killer is actively still working against the police, and they are clearly doing well, considering they had the freedom to either carry that out or get a trusted accomplice to do it. The evening sun adds to this as well. They did this in daylight, not under the cover of night. Whoever they are, they feel very safe doing something like this before the sun has set. Whether this is because they are protected from punishment for some reason or perhaps just because they’re in a secluded area, it is not a comfortable thought to have about the area one is living in. If people who kill can dispose of their evidence in broad daylight, everyone there is in a lot more danger. In all of this poetry, the macabre and tragic is portrayed concisely, yet still containing all the imagery it needs to get its point across properly. Some use symbols to portray this, while others merely state what needs to be said cryptically, allowing the audience to fill in the blanks. Barely any even mentioned the images one would expect to see like pools of blood or the glint of a knife. A lot of them stuck with symbolizing the emotion and the response to a situation rather than the visual of simply being there. And, for the art of haiku, that is incredibly fitting.

Works Cited

Munro, Katherine (kjmunro) and Jessica Simon, Editors. *Body of Evidence: A Collection of Killer Ku*. Carleton Place, Ontario: Catkin Press, 2017.