

The Three Laws of Poetics

There is no handbook
showing what a poem needs
but still no poet should
set out to harm, or
through inaction,
cause a poem to be harmed

A poet must obey
the rules of poems
that have come before,
except where these would clash
with Law the First or are,
like the poet's own,
impossible, heartfelt
achings

A poet must protect
their own existence
even if doing so might
harm a poem, even if
this conflicts with
the First or Second Laws
or any other Laws
that they hold dear

As for poetry itself,
that limitless abstraction,
no poet (no matter how
sufficiently advanced)
could ever hope to guess
what “harm” might mean
in the long march of years,
the swoop and swirl of stars,
the ever-changing needs
of humanity

—Stewart C. Baker

