

The Golden Carousel of Life: Senryu

An Application to be a) human

Alan Summers



Senryū: An Application to be a) human

by Alan Summers

Japan Times award-winning writer

Senryū (川柳, literally means 'river willow') is a Japanese form of short poetry similar to Japanese haiku.

The form is named after Edo era haiku poet Senryū Karai (柄井川柳, 1765-1838), whose collection *Ifūyanagidaru* (誹風柳多留) launched the genre (and hence his name) into the public consciousness. A typical example from the collection:

泥棒を
捕えてみれば
我が子なり

dorobō wo
toraete mireba
wagako nari

The robber,
if I catch,
my own son

Quoted from:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senryu>

Here's a take on senryū that I developed when asked for some blurb for this senryū anthology. I have simplified the spelling to senryu:

Pieces of Her Mind: Women Find Their Voice in Centuries-Old Forms

Omega Publications, 2012, ISBN-10: 0985035064, ISBN-13: 978-0985035068

https://www.amazon.com/Pieces-Her-Mind-Multiple-Contributors/dp/0985035064/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1474367956&sr=8-1-fkmr0&keywords=Pieces+of+Her+Mind%3A+Women+Find+Their+Voice+in+Centuries-Old+Forms

I've expanded the piece:

Senryu are short aftertastes like amuse-gueule, or small arms visual gunfire, and potent as longer satirical poems. The examples in this book create shredded shooting gallery targets within the bull's-eye area, and will help re-invigorate senryu and give a boost to the confidence of new and established writers alike.

Its bittersweet, ironic, poignant, truthful, painfully revealing verses will delight the taste buds of readers as I tend to think honesty has a higher register in senryu, if done well. Even if we don't want to see the honesty of senryu verse, it's there as checks and balances in our own lives: It feeds a need of a different place than haiku can accomplish.

In Pre-Islamic poetry there were lampoons denigrating other tribes called hijā' (satire of enemies). This genre of Arabic satirical poetry was introduced by the Afro-Arab author al-Jahiz in the 9th century where he introduced biting humour in the developing subjects of what came to be known as the subjects of anthropology, sociology and psychology.

Well-written senryu verse cover these areas in all its sub-genres enveloping politics in particular, and family life and everything relating to social affairs in general and in-between where needs must. That's why senryu (the human experience relating to fallibility)

Note: hijā' (satire of enemies)

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/265599/hija>

R.H. Blyth said one of the properties of senryu should be to expose pretence, and this is where senryu is master or mistress. Politics has been where senryu should stand center, but not in its political views of course:

political election
my application to be
a) human

Alan Summers

Haiku News, Vol. 2, No. 24, 2013

<http://www.wayfarergallery.net/haikunews/?p=4422>

And social issues such as justice/injustice, and debt (false and real):

zombie debt–
the practised slice
of a bread knife

Alan Summers

Haiku News, Vol. 1, No. 41, 2012

<http://www.wayfarergallery.net/haikunews/?tag=zombie-debt>

Senryu can be brutally honest when it comes to our busy, don't make our lives even more difficult existences whether an adult now, and homeless, or starting off early:

sunlit sweat
the young vagrant
sucks a thumb

Alan Summers

Publications credits: Haiku Harvest vol. 4 no. 1 (2003);

Anthology credit: Haiku Harvest: 2000 – 2006 (Modern English Tanka Press 2007)

<http://www.thehaikufoundation.org/omeka/files/original/a7561ad59ac58731fb40afa95ff4a461.pdf>

Collection: Does Fish-God Know (YTBN Press 2012):

https://www.amazon.com/Does-Fish-God-Know-Alan-Summers/dp/1479211044/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1474372424&sr=8-1&keywords=Does+Fish-God+Know

Online feature:

The Haiku Foundation's Per Diem Archive: S. Chhoki December 2012, Children

<http://www.thehaikufoundation.org/per-diem-archive-details/?IDcat=232>

Senryu can also be as soft as a loving parent's caress, at times, when it comes to our children:

Father's Day
a child circles the tree
in his own John Deere

Alan Summers

Scope, Vol. 60, No. 4, May 2014

(magazine of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, Queensland

<http://www.fawq.net>)

Children are certainly an engaging topic for senryu, sometimes highlighting what we as “mature” adults have lost:

snow flurry
a child thrusts his anorak
into it

Alan Summers
Simply Haiku, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2003
<http://www.simplyhaiku.com/SHv1n3/summers.html>

And the open curiosity of children:

wind-spun flakes...
a child's world escapes
the snow globe

Alan Summers
Tinywords Photo Prompt: Joint-Winner
<http://tinywords.com/2015/02/08/19050/>

And then we have to embrace changes of all kinds:

fresh start
all my childhood
in book covers

Alan Summers
Asahi Shimbun (Japan 2011)

And it is vital to return to some childlike innocence now and then:

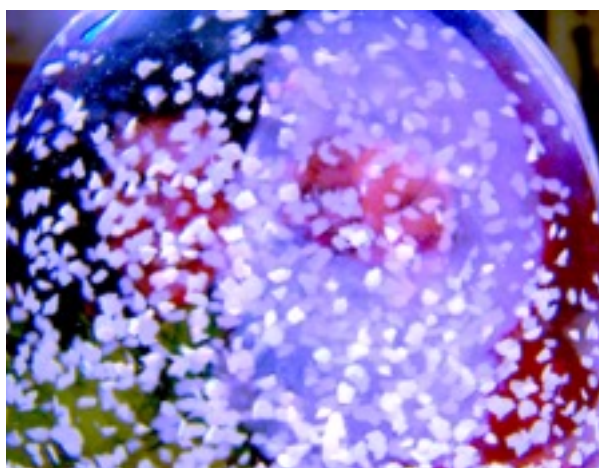
Milky Way Train
I bring my inner child
down to earth

Alan Summers
hedgerow: a journal of small poems, Issue 1, September 2014
<https://hedgerowpoems.wordpress.com/2014/09/26/hedgerow-1/>

If we lose too much, we lose what a childhood should be, and what we should and could inherit from it.

school memories
one tadpole left in
the collection jar

Alan Summers
Simply Haiku, September 2003, Vol. 1, No. 3
<http://www.simplyhaiku.com/SHv1n3/summers.html>



We can poke fun at ourselves and our love life, and Christmas is a great time for senryu. Just think of all the social gatherings, faux pas etc...

the sticky label
over the christmas card
the new boyfriend's name

Alan Summers
Anthology credit: Raku Teapot: Haiku (Raku Teapot Press/White Owl Publishing, California 2003): <http://www.whiteowlweb.com/rakuteapot/project1.htm>
Collection credits: Does Fish-God Know (YTBN Press 2012):
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Does-Fish-God-Know-Alan-Summers/dp/1479211044/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1474376673&sr=8-1&keywords=Does+Fish-God+know

it's christmas soon
then I'll know
if someone loves me

Karen Hoy
Publication credit:
Lakeview International Journal of Literature and Arts, Vol.1, No.2 August 2013
<https://issuu.com/lijla/docs/lijlaaugust2013>

We can certainly be explicit in many ways with senryu:



sunny side up
the autopsy shows
a decent breakfast

Alan Summers

Prune Juice, Issue 9, July 15, 2012

<https://prunejuice.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/pj-issue-9-summer-20121.pdf>



Senryu is coming back, at a good time in our lives, and we should welcome it for the wake-up call that it is, where all too easily a casual thoughtlessness becomes a callous lifestyle choice. Sometimes we just need shock treatment in the shape of a highly focused, ruthless or insightful sense of humour. You could call it a poetic blow to the head, though only for a moment, and then we then resume our life, hopefully a little better informed and conscious of our human actions, and mistakes. After we've been pulled up abruptly for a few seconds of something thought-provoking, so it could steer us in the right direction both for family and social lives, and even within a better workforce environment.