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48

prune juice

Issue #48

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Founded by Alexis Rotella in 2009, Prune Juice Journal is recognized as the longest-running international literary journal dedicated solely to exploring new directions in English Senryu and related forms, including Kyoka, Haibun, Haiga, Tan-Renga, and Rengay.

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Best of Issue

semaglutide
I am / I am not
my body

Marianne Paul
Canada

Semaglutide is a GLP-1 receptor agonist that regulates one's appetite and improves blood sugar control. Commonly sold as Ozempic or Wegovy, it was originally prescribed to manage Type 2 diabetes, but has recently become a popular weight management tool. Socially, we seem to be swinging from a feminine body ideal that promoted curves and musculature, back to an ideal of thinness. Some people note that eras of conservatism often correlate to the latter physical ideal. It isn't a natural state for most— to maintain such a figure means to forsake energy, muscle, and sometimes health.

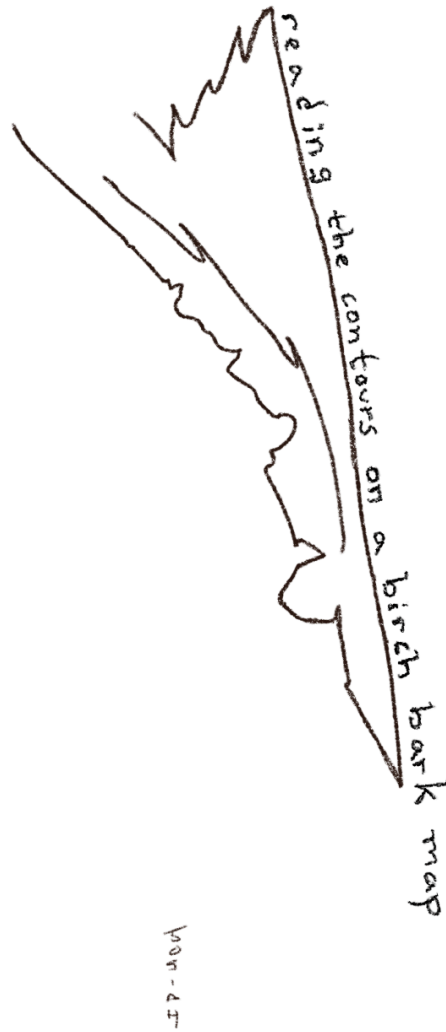
We are all trying to escape our bodies— we use drugs to feel more, or less, to regulate or heal our bodies. We use sex to reach for a bodily unity that eludes us— we always separate in the end. From such unions we sometimes create bodies that extend past our own bodies, that hopefully extend past our timelines. We create music to connect to the world around us— for Nietzsche, dancing was a way to celebrate life in its full form, accepting both its positive and negative aspects.



Marianne Paul's poem centers on that tension between the urge to transgress the confines of our bodies and the fact that we cannot— still, we can change our form, attempt to shape it to our will. Or perhaps we can reject the urge to treat our body like a broken-in horse that must heel and obey and pace itself. I am not convinced we have souls separable from our bodies, although I do believe in soul— that soulfulness, how the spirit manifests. Perhaps, in prioritizing that soulfulness, we can give up the saddle and the reins, give up control, and let the horse run free. Perhaps, in accepting the limitations of the physical, we can find our true selves, our souls— and dance.

Pippa Phillips

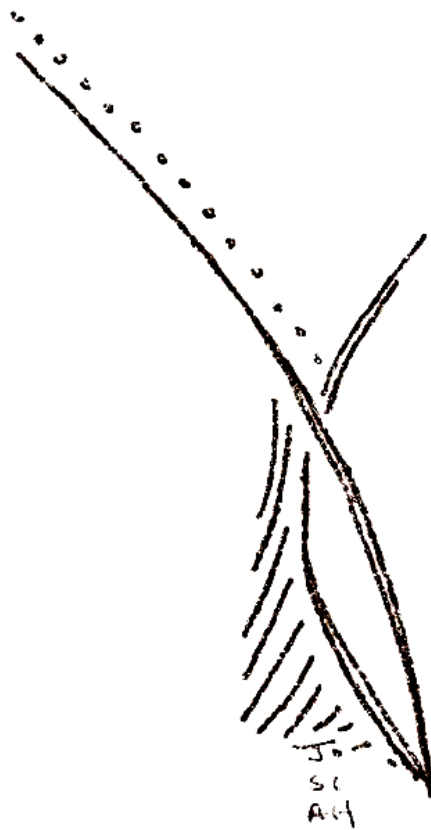
Complete the Haiga

Each issue of Prune Juice features a new image from Josiah to serve as a prompt for your poetry! We will consider e-mail submissions during the submissions period as well as work submitted over our social media prompt. Here is April's winner, Tim Chamberlain!



You can find Josiah on , , and  @lessethereal.

Here is the **Complete the Haiga** prompt for next month!
Send your submissions to prunejuicejournal@gmail.com during the
normal submissions period.



haiga



*Makoto
Germany*

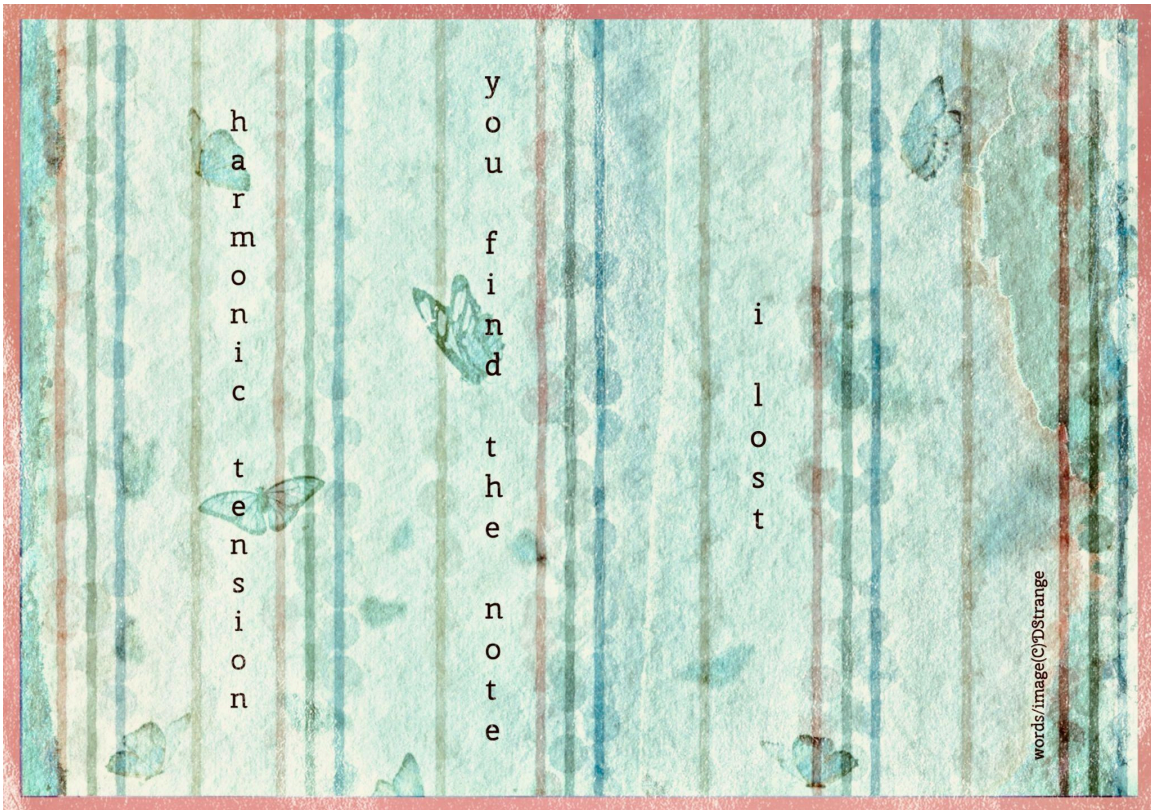


László Aranyi
Hungary

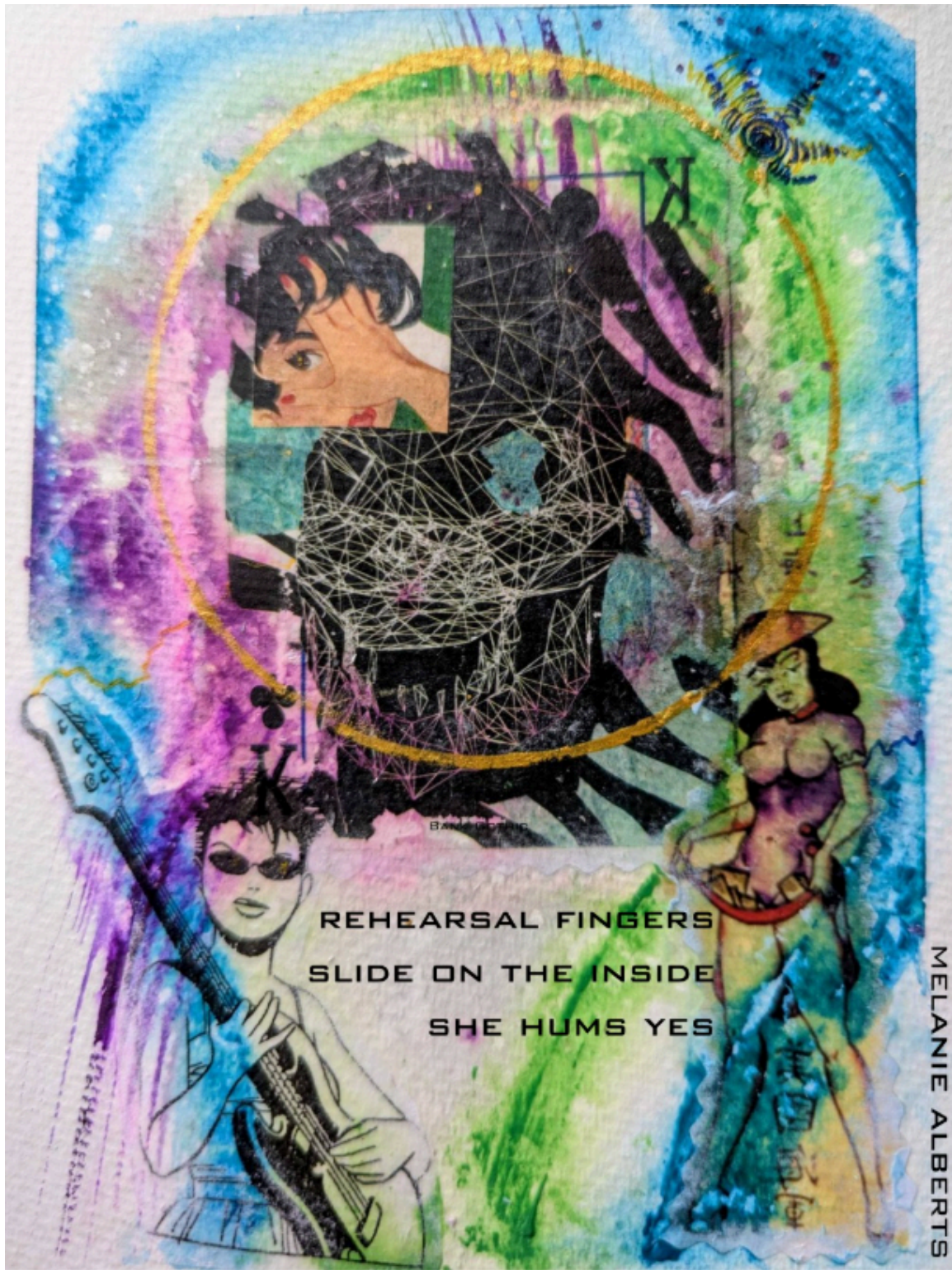


Sankara Jayanth Sudanagunta

*Sankara Jayanth Sudanagunta
India*



Debbie Strange
Canada



Melanie Alberts
United States

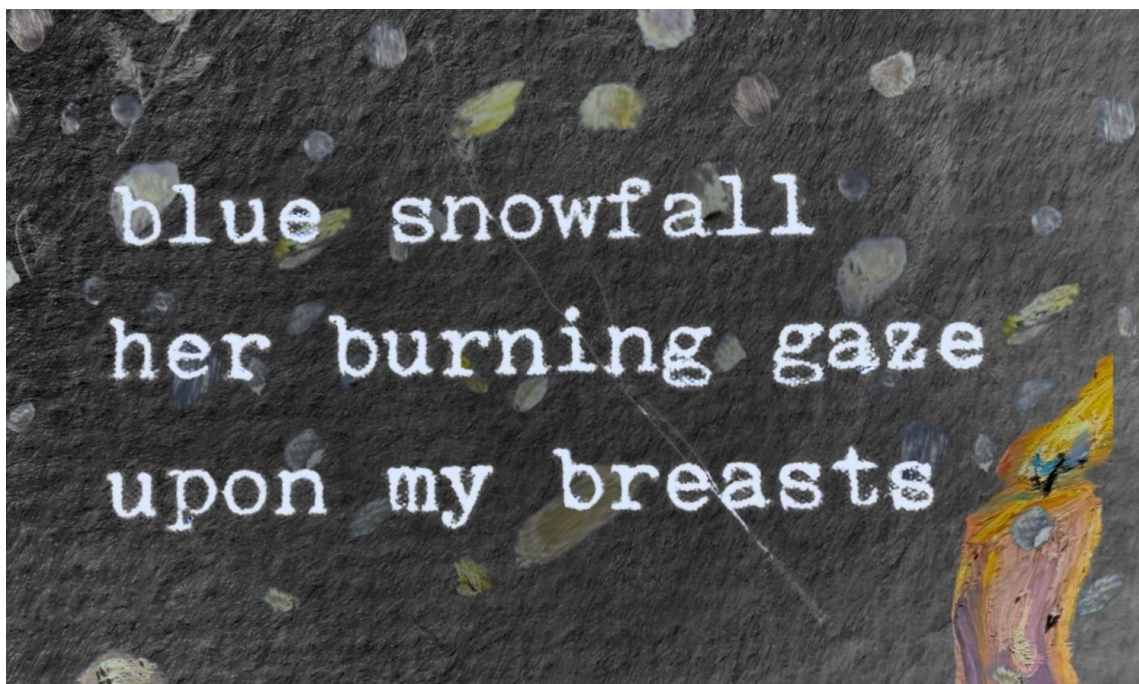


*Vidya Premkumar
Subi Lakshmanan
United States*

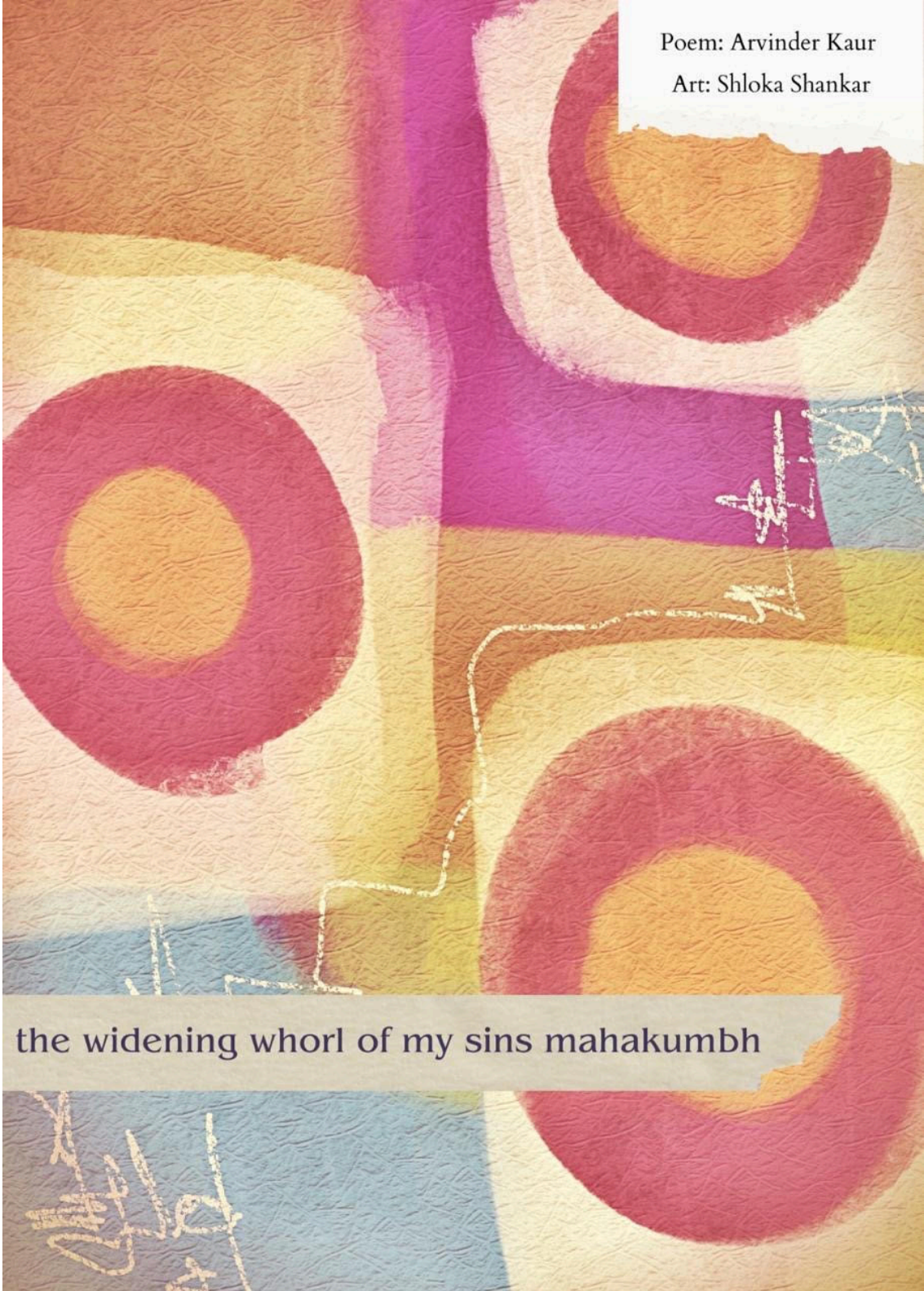


undressing me
with his stare
mall mannequin

Rupa Anand
India



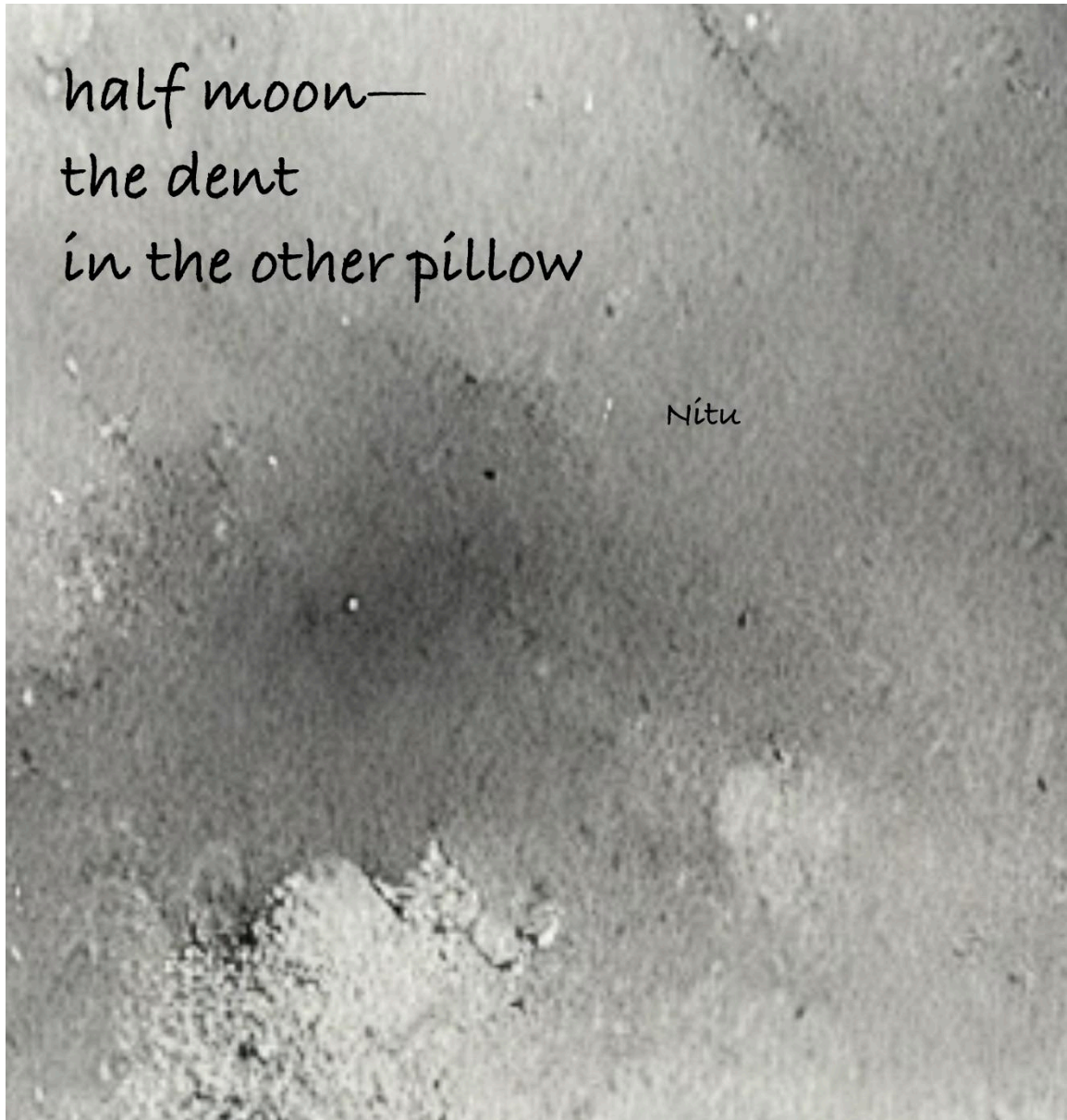
Ash Evan Lippert
United States



Poem: Arvinder Kaur
Art: Shloka Shankar

the widening whorl of my sins mahakumbh

Shloka Shankar
Arvinder Kaur
India



*Nitu Yumnam
United Arab Emirates*



Jenny Fraser
New Zealand

Senryu to the Beat of a Different Drum

Alex Fyffe

Although senryu can sometimes be hard to pin down – comic observations? puns? serious reflections on human emotion? – the one thing most Japanese senryu have in common is the adherence to 17 sounds (the famous 5-7-5 structure). However, there have been poets throughout the years who have occasionally thrown this convention out the window to write something either shorter or longer than tradition dictates. Freeform haiku (*jyuuuritsu haiku*), of course, found several prominent voices in the early 20th century (Seisensui, Hosai, Santoka), but the term “freeform senryu” doesn’t really come up as much. Most of the examples that I have found come from senryu poets who usually kept to the expected 17-sound pattern but, for one reason or another, had poems in them that simply couldn’t conform to the usual rhythm. Today, let’s take a look at a few of these senryu that follow the beat of a different drum.

踊つてる踊つてる懐はからつぽ 近藤飴ン坊

dancing
dancing
my pockets are
empty

–Amenbo Kondo (1877-1933)

It’s probably best to kick things off with a little dancing, to fit the theme. Despite the translation, this senryu follows a 5-5-5-4 pattern in the original language (*odotteru odotteru futokoro wa karappo*). According to senryu writer and certified music therapist Yuhki Ushida, if this poem, which appears surprisingly early in a collection from 1918, had a 4-4 repetition with *odoteru odoteru* or a 3-3 repetition with *odoru odoru*, it might feel more like the speaker is dancing with a partner to some piece of music in common time or in waltz time; but because of the 5-5 repetition, it gives the impression that he is dancing alone to a music all his own (Ushida).

The poem's shift from "dancing dancing" to "my pockets are empty" could also suggest the speaker's defiance, dancing in the face of poverty, even if it means dancing alone. The sudden stop from three lines of 5 to one line of 4 on the word "empty," though, could indicate a recognition of the imbalance in his own life, perhaps an even greater emptiness that, for all his dancing, he can never escape.

夕焼けの中の屠牛場牛牛牛牛牛牛牛牛牛牛

木村半文銭

a slaughterhouse
in the red setting sun
cow cow cow cow cow cow cow cow cow cow

—Hanmonsén Kimura (1889-1953)

This one I find particularly interesting because it starts off like a regular senryu with its 5-7 structure (*yuuyake no / naka no togiuba*), but then it utterly breaks off with ten repetitions of the word cow (*ushi ushi ushi ushi ushi ushi ushi ushi ushi ushi*), making this a very rare 5-7-20 senryu!

Kimura, a proponent of the "New Rising Senryu" (新興川柳, *Shinko Senryu*) movement, was no stranger to these kinds of experiments – there are several examples of him pushing the form in various ways, like in this unusual offering:

—————水

In the original presentation, this would be written from top to bottom instead of left to right so that it looks like a long line going down with the single character for "water" (*mizu*) at the bottom. This reminds me of the minimalist poetry of Aram Saroyan, who often experimented with one-word poems and the use of words as concrete images. About this poem, in particular, Kimura wrote in 1933 that he "was tired of the usual method of fitting appropriate words into this one line" and that he recognized this as an "impasse" of form poetry in its transition from the oral to the written tradition (*Iijima*).

The slaughterhouse poem, though, seems to have become one of his most representative works, and it's easy to see why. It maintains the illusion of traditional form (with its 5-7 opening) while also blatantly breaking the form through unexpected length and repetition. It stands out on the page in a way that's difficult to ignore. The imagery of the "red setting sun" behind the "slaughterhouse" suggests the bloody undertaking within, and the near-endless

repetition of “cow” visually illustrates the long line of individual cows, each and every one waiting its turn to be slaughtered. Only the near-absurd length and number of cows in the poem could achieve this effect of creating a world-weary sigh at the enormousness of death in one of its many houses.

もっと悪い年が来そうだ 井上剣花坊

it looks like
this year's gonna be
worse

–Kenkabo Inoue (1870-1934)

Probably the most well-known senryu poet in this article (certainly the only one with his own Wikipedia page both in Japanese and in English), Inoue, who wrote thousands of senryu, most of which seem to have kept to the 17-sound tradition, also wrote some substantially shorter poems, like this 3-6-4 line (or perhaps 9-4? – *motto / warui toshi ga / kisou da*) – a line that many people might be able to relate to even today. It's a strong example of the more humorous side of his writing. The speaker grumbles about the new year, which, unlike the Counting Crows song “Long December,” doesn't look like it'll be “better than the last.” There are certainly some years that feel more doomed than others.

Another example of his more experimental work:

死、死、死、死、— 世界はない

death, death, death, death,
–there is no world

Apparently, Inoue came to see senryu as a “one-breath” poem that does not always conform to seventeen sounds, allowing room for these shorter efforts in the world of senryu poetry (Ushida). The above poem only has ten sounds, for instance: *shi, shi, shi, shi, –sekai wa nai*. Death marches forward, slowly, syllable by syllable, one kanji character at a time (somewhat like Kimura's cows), seemingly bringing the poet to the rather Buddhist realization that the world doesn't exist; or, at least, that our conception of it isn't real.

There are so many other interesting examples of freeform senryu I've found, but I'd like to share just a couple more, like this one by a seemingly unknown poet:

雨雨雨雨雨離婚する 豊价 ("Jiyuuritsu senryu")
(*ame ame ame ame ame / rikon suru*)

rain rain rain rain rain
we get divorced

–Houka(?)

Unfortunately, there is little to no information to find about the creator of this verse, including the correct pronunciation of their name, but this is yet another effective use of .repetition. The poem highlights the dreary feelings surrounding separation from a spouse. Everything is overcast, overwhelmed by the incessant rainfall. The 10/5 pattern makes the rain seem interminable leading up to the divorce. Whether or not the split is for the better, that heavy feeling will persist a long time.

Here's one more for the road – one to clear away the rain (for now):

こんにちわさよならを美しくいう少女 岸本吟一

a girl
who says hello
and goodbye
so beautifully

–Gin'ichi Kishimoto (1920-2007)

In addition to being a senryu poet, Kishimoto was a film producer, most famous for *Harakiri* (1962) and *Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964). And I'm not the first to feel a cinematic quality in this poem (Higuchi). First off, it's a longer senryu – widescreen, you might say! – at 5-5-7-3 (*konnichiwa / sayonara wo / utsukushiku iu / shoujo*). And the straightforward innocence of the girl's plainspoken manner and youthful loveliness is captured by the speaker through the freeness of the verse, unbound by the limitations of tradition or expectation. The girl's words flow out pure and heartfelt, and each reader will call to mind someone who beautifully says hello and goodbye to them on the silver screen of their mind.

One good thing that modern English-language haiku and senryu poets have learned is that these forms are not about the number of syllables it takes to write them – Japanese haiku and senryu poets have shown this to be true even in their own language. What really matters is the brief poetic expression

that shares with readers the joy, pain, humor, loss, and beauty of the speaker's experience. So write your own rhythms, and dance, dance, dance, even if you're dancing alone.

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(https://note.com/ushidade_0319/n/nfa3189560cc1).

Maekuzuke

In 16th century Japan, poetry had transitioned from a practice exclusive to the nobility and later the samurai class to one the merchant class took on. After work, many merchants would play a game called *maekuzuke* at the local sake bars. A poet hired by the bar would write a two-line poem (*maeku*) on a piece of paper, that would then be posted for anyone to complete with a three-line *tsukeku*. Karai Senryu was one such master—senryu was born from this game. Prune Juice has decided to revive the game for an English-language audience. Below are the winners from the last issue’s posting, as well as our new *maeku* prompts.

hate being responsible
hate being responsible

*clay
oozing out
between my fingers*

Orrin Préjean
United States

*Makoto
Germany*

in the lower chamber
of her heart

*love—
I converse
with a strand of hair*

Pippa Phillips
United States

*Dylan Stover
United States*

maeku

Orrin’s *maeku*:

steaming green tea
and a certain indifference

Pippa’s *maeku*

returning the rabbit
to its foot

Poems

Rather than separating haibun, kyoka, gembun, sequences, tan-renga, and senryu, we allow these poems to exist in conversation with one another. In arranging these poems, we have followed the spirit, if not the letter, of the link-and-shift technique that governs the cooperative tradition of poetry in Japan. Therefore, we encourage you to read the poetry from beginning to end, as if it were a very long sequence.

semaglutide
I am / I am not
my body

Marianne Paul
Canada

for such a time as this
darkness in the belly
of the whale

Julie Schwerin
United States

lift off . . .
wondering if this
is like dying

Jenny Fraser
New Zealand

fidget spinner whirlygigging into ataraxia

Debbie Strange
Canada

morning haze
the other dimension
I spiral into

Bhawana Rathore
India

wintered out
the distance
of to be

Biswajit Mishra
Canada

new year
slipping out
of old skin

Eavonka Ettinger
United States

birthday candles every star dying

Jamie Wimberly
United States

cosmography I volunteer to get lost

Roberta Beach Jacobson
United States

celestial bodies
we almost make out
Jupiter's eye

Lisa Gerlits
United States

lava fire of sunset bodies into Venus and moon rising

Bruce H. Feingold
United States

the potholes
in lava rock
i reconsider

Jenny Fraser
New Zealand

Crystallization

A part of everything I touch clings to me, like dust in sunlight. I cannot wash it away. Thoughts settle and multiply, tinged by unearthed feelings. From this tangled growth, a memory surfaces — heavy, trembling. Memories bruise softly, again and again, leaving an ache that blooms into anxiety, a shadow pressing across my chest. It lingers, persistent, like frost that refuses to melt. I swallow a tiny tablet. Its quiet chemistry threads through my veins, leveling the peaks and valleys of thought. Tremors fold into a steady rhythm, a delicate warmth spreading under the slow light of morning.

bergamot tea —
colouring
the rising cold

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy
India

the weight of the sun
the distance of the moon
& me, pee-shy

Don Wentworth
United States

a fruit fly's sperm
twenty times the length
of its body ...
weeks ago, I began to stand
closer to the urinal

Chen-ou Liu
Canada

cicada season
I wake up
screaming

Lucas Weissenborn
Oslo, Norway

red mouth of dawn—
everything
entering everything

Thomas L. Vaultonburg
United States

driverless the Godot in you & me

Shloka Shankar
India

déjà vu
in all the wrong
places

Sondra J. Byrnes
United States

under the knife
his desire to look younger
than his android twin

G.R. LeBlanc
Canada

sugar soap
polishing dead skin
of old sins

Patricia Hawkhead
England

- a. god
- b. no god
- c.

John Coulton Waugh
United States

_uck

Oliver Schopfer
Switzerland

prayer path . . .
licking a curse
from my lips

Jonathan Roman
United States

last of the communion wine
the priest's hand starts shaking

Steve Black
United Kingdom

day drinking
the list of things
I do alone

Bryan Rickert
United States

blackout drunk
the voicemail
filling in the blanks

Leon Tefft
United States

forgotten home —
the phone remembers
the old password

Amir Kapetanović
Croatia

counting out advil for
the headache after
the headache

Tracie Renee
United States

Lungs and Liver

No one tells you exactly how to dose your child, except for the average.

Amount.

Timing.

Duration.

No one tells you: Are these side effects? Overload? Fluctuations in an avalanche of everyday life?

Get a read on it. Weigh up. Tell the psychiatrist. Tell the doctors.
Translate for your child. Set the right priorities, don't forget anything.

You stand there, having to trust your child's ability to say whether and how it helps.

Can you concentrate? (Yes. (On far too much.))

You seem more balanced. (Don't know. (I don't feel anything.))

You're getting a lot done. (Yes. (Driven. No choice.))

We cry a lot, yell at each other. I don't understand. We're exhausted.
There's this pressure: to get things done, to go to school. Not a single teacher tries to keep in touch.

How are you? ((I'm lonely. I have nothing to hold onto, no goal.))

No one tells you that help can be a big, rough stone. Right in your way.

No one tells you that, or your child.

The cross

in the calendar

erased

the next day—

the glimmer of snow through glass.

Makoto
Germany

chemo fog
reading the side effects
a third time

Bob Stewart
United States

side effects include
getting through my day
with an asterisk

Doug Belleville
United States

familiar faces
at the dispensary
a touch of gray

Mark Forrester
United States

fading candle mother's morphine stories

Wendy Cobourne
United States

October drizzle
checking her old dresser
for unused pills

Eric Arthen
United States

three pills left . . .
counting the hours
before withdrawal

Monty Milne
United States

NA meeting
these constant attempts
to escape reality

Ed Markowski
United States

Snow Again

A dusting adorns the balsam firs lining the river beyond my gate,
and fresh quail tracks lead deep into the thicket. A finch chorus lines
the path. Dawn is crisp—with a whiff of cedar—and I wander along
the river's shadows. Tonight's office party won't be outside.

winter solstice—
my twelve steps backwards

Colleen Farrelly
United States

first hit
the moon babbles
into my ear

Jenn Ryan-Jauregui
United States

the hangnail catches St. Theresa's ecstasy

Dylan Stover
United States

becoming a fish on the holy day i uproot the tables

Rowan Beckett Minor
United States

Grace Cathedral
my illicit thoughts
scatter the pigeons

Lisa Gerlits
United States

when will he kiss me
I yearn to burst open
like the amaryllis

Kelly Westhoff
United States

that consuming need
to be noticed
wild daisies

G.R. LeBlanc
Canada

desert oasis
a drop of sweat gathers
in her navel

Ash Evan Lippert
United States

lazy river
on your sunpink thigh
mating dragonflies

Brendan E. Kennedy
United States

midnight sun
instead of northern lights
just touch me

Joe Woodhouse
Spain

moving in sync
the underrated
breath of god

Tazeen Fatma
India

confusing
my own motion
with the universe's

John Paul Caponigro
United States

her bodice fell away
a flat dark
endless void

Richard Magahiz
United States

sound of moonlight
he whispers
undress me

Chris Meadows
United States

the wait for her fingers his waistband

Peter Jastermsky
United States

a snap of celery the twang of panties

Mark Gilbert
United Kingdom

bare legs
a huge bouquet
where his head should be

Shawn Blair
United States

when did the flowers turn strange a breast dries in twilight

Rowan Beckett Minor
United States

soft moonlight
from her calf to her thigh ...
slowly rising

George Skane
United States

tongue on my teeth
tasting
the breath of another

Jo McInerney
Australia

the warmth
of a soup dumpling
your sloppy kiss

Jon Hare
United States

bare shoulder—
my mouth
changes plans

Thomas L. Vaultonburg
United States

dumb love
we pull each other
over ourselves like furs

Peter Newton
United States

sleeping bag
vowels shudder
in low tones

John Zheng
United States

your thighs
the wet moon running
down my beard

Joshua St. Claire
United States

now leap
from the top
of the swing

Margaret Anderson
United States

Klee
Let's create childhood
right now

David Chandler
United States

heatwave
her orgasm outlasts
the popsicle

Jon Petruschke
United States

cave paintings—
his fingers
after sex

Emil Karla
France

morning kiss
the night before
still on your breath

thomas david
United Kingdom

afterglow math
his fingers
rounding off my wrinkles

C. Oulens
India

vernal knowledge
old enough to be
his wife's mother

Helen Buckingham
United Kingdom

old broad
sex toys shunted to
the junk drawer

Kimberly A. Horning
United States

My Struggles With Endings

are real, or not. What really is an end? If I served lentils for lunch—chopping veggies, tempering spices, pressure cooking daal, will the emptied bowl really be called an ending?

Did the guest that afternoon like it enough to lick out the bowl or was it just an act of generosity? Was everyone able to digest it all? What is the story of the food we just finished? Can I really use the letter I to define the person at work?

what ifs
left unsaid
prequel

Tazeen Fatma
India

Rejected

licking salt
from my lover's legs ...
first swallowtail

What d'you mean, Not for us? Spent a week polishing that baby.
Read it aloud for hours—lost all lingual feeling after all those els?
Oh, and five esses, not counting the ellipsis. Leaves nothing for the
reader? Bollocks—how'd the salt get there, then? Anyway, it's true.
Just don't tell the missus.

distant virga
unable to remember
the last time we touched

Lew Watts
United States

dusk
the empty side
of the bed

Nitu Yumnam
United Arab Emirates

he comes ...
and goes
headlights
circling
the bedroom walls

Rick Jackofsky
United States

bumping
into the husband again
smog-bound

Mohua Maulik
India

a flounder
disappearing into
the seabed sand . . .
barely a memory left
of our honeymoon

Susan Yavaniski
United States

Maria Grazia, II

We are both afraid to feel certain things. So you smoke cigarettes, while I cry thick and white tears to dry up the other kind. It is late here in Buenos Aires, you have long forgotten me, and I am listening to a recording of you reading a poem by Mario Benedetti. My T-shirt is the same colour as the tatty booklet in which you wrote me words in your local dialect in that pub in London. When I was there last, I spent my solitude swiping through the same dating app thinking, I'm failing her, just like I failed you.

plum sky closing in on me another mouth

Timothy Daly
Italy

afterglow
he casually mentions
his wife

Jahnavi Gogoi
Canada

kintsugi
we make love
around her lies

Vishal Prabhu
India

even inside her
I wasn't
inside her

Paul Lobo Portugés
United States

evening thunderhead –
the razor
beneath her pillow

Eve Müller
United States

opening the ripe guava,
you call my name
from the bedroom

Michael Battisto
United States

vanilla pod—
she scrapes seeds
for my chlamydia test

Adele Evershed
United States

pithing a grapefruit
mom insists
G-spot is a myth

Vandana Parashar
India

sex education
teenage son avoids
looking in my eye

Rituparna Maji
India

Sweet Nothings

Waiting in the drive-thru lane for greasy burgers and plastic cups filled with too much soda pop, I glance down at my younger daughter's hands. They are covered in ink. Black smudges and tiny blue hearts the size of tears, with bitten-down cuticles and the remnants of polish that matches her plum-colored hair.

This vision of her hands catches in my throat. I almost say something – about her beautiful child's hands spilling over into the hands of an adult. But I remember how much I hated it when my own mother spoke familiarly about my body. How being seen by her felt like violation.

sky falls apart –
the sugar
on her breath

Eve Müller
United States

young
younger
i have all the answers

Jill Kessler
United States

between the sheets
in love
with a book

Svetla Mirova
United Kingdom

Interlude

In the summer night we break into my old primary school pool. Slip into the shallow, clear water. Watch it fall, like moonlight, from our skins. And for a sweet, teenage moment, forget.

new scar
we both try
not to notice

Sam Renda
South Africa

first kiss making out like a bandit

Roberta Beach Jacobson
United States

dad's Ford flatbed
forgetting
we weren't in love

Sean Felix
United States

moonlit ride
the lone seat
beside her

Julie Ann Lebitania
Philippines

clitoria ternatea—
asked to reproduce
my sexual history

Adele Evershed
United States

unshelled peas his unresolved sexuality

Mona Bedi
India

skeleton closet i fall out of myself

Ed Markowski
United States

late spring thaw—
coming out
at last

Katja Fox
England

ribbons
wrapped around
the maypole
the promiscuity
of a spring day

Susan Burch
United States

Although The World Stood Up And Stopped The Bastard, The Bitch
That Bore Him Is In Heat Again.*

There is a lot to say when it comes to Berlin. About walking down a street, from west to east and back again. Pigeons nod, here and there, pecking at chips from newspaper cones on the ground. A man on heels runs past. A tram jingles. The protest march drums and hisses some blocks of houses away, closer, then more in the distant again.

The white of the sun. A giant cloud creeps along the mirrored windows of a youngish tower.

Amongst other things,
the weather report tells us to
prepare . . .
weeds, running riot,
building walls.

*Bertold Brecht, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui

Makoto
Germany

the greek chorus of our times 403 Forbidden

Shloka Shankar
India

mid-night in Soho —
the voice in my head
so reluctant to listen

Herb Tate
United Kingdom

Funereal

your song
on the radio—
plum blossoms

the sun rising
on an empty garden

guitar arpeggio . . .
sorry seems to be
the hardest word

still waiting
by the church door—
a candle in the wind

slow chorus . . .
I've seen that movie too

funeral for a friend—
a black hearse turns
over cherry petals

Michael Dylan Welch
United States

piccolo snare
words that cut
through bone

Ollie Surber
United States

old guitar
tuning out
my tinnitus

Wendy Cobourne
United States

In the garage
A pawn shop guitar
Drifts out of tune

Shaun Jex
United States

open window—
the music
changes owners

Thomas L. Vaultonburg
United States

dividing my life
into before and after
Coltrane's solo

Bryan Rickert
United States

deepening blues
the evening turns
to vinyl

Millicent Bee
United States

fourth fret he shifts to a minor key

Tracie Renee
United States

thick traffic—
the same oldie
on different stations

Michael Dylan Welch
United States

Discord

our love song
on the radio –
he changes the station

*some sort of disturbance
in the orchestra pit*

again
around midnight
playing the blues

*first church visit
asked to join
the choir*

Gregorian chant –
something lost in translation

*daughter's playlist –
we become
our parents*

Angela Terry
Julie Schwerin
United States

singing to myself
I find the keys
to the lost suitcase

Robert Witmer
Japan

that tannery smell

touring
the deep south, next stop
stone mountain

*I never knew
that cows could use tools*

rolling country
a
blackout poem

*stocking up
on batteries...
just in case*

game
of chance

*a double six
finding my way
out*

*Melissa Dennison &
Jerome Berglund
United States*

ginko five ticks long

Sarah Metzler
United States

a dusk road maybe there goes comes true

Jonathan Humphrey
United States

boombox caravan
the maples
responding in red

Mike Fainzilber
Israel

remembering its scent
the old creek still sings
the same song

Rehn Kovacic
United States

taping over
her mixtape
colony collapse

David Green
United States

hotel room mirror
we rehearse being reckless
before the show

May Garner
United States

basement show
how we drink in
blue neon

John Pappas
United States

rock concert
and the sound of
that one girl talking

Ben Gaa
United States

Cause 'n Effect
a senryu for Big Freedia

turning the beat up
until
the sun turns up

JeFF Stumpo
United States

behind the kit
ghost notes deepen
our conversation

Ollie Surber
United States

gravestones i don't want my life to be summarizable

Pegah Rahmati Nezhad
Iran

dripping rain
from the shrine's roof
a Sufi hymn

Hifsa Ashraf
Pakistan

theremin
hands that know the shape
of sound

Debbie Strange
Canada

shinrin-yoko
i
walk
the
silence
within & without

Kala Ramesh
India

Featured Review

Shuho Ohno's *Modern Senryu in English*, published in 1988, was written to serve as an introduction to senryu for an English-speaking audience. For many, R. H. Blythe's two volumes on senryu serve as the seminal collection of Japanese senryu. Ohno's book should be considered an essential companion for anyone interested in understanding senryu from a more contemporary Japanese perspective.

The book is divided into two sections. The first serves as a historical overview of the form and guide to understanding senryu, followed by a collection of translated poems from various poets. The second section concentrates on the composition of senryu, with a focus on aesthetics and linguistic features.

Ohno's perspective is specific. He dismisses the old senryu, or *ko-senryu* of Blythe's volumes as descending into "collections of dirty jokes with the illicit reputation of Yoshiwara," and characterizes modern senryu as a "leveling-up movement" (11) which some call *gendai*, or free-verse senryu. For Ohno's dismissal of the poetry in Blythe's collection alone, the book is of scholarly importance to English-language poets.

Ohno's advice is often quite literal, but of particular use to both Japanese and English non-native speakers. Ohno describes certain grammatical features in both Japanese and English senryu in helpfully painstaking detail. Ohno advises poets on how to pick a subject, Japanese auxiliary particles and subject markers, rhyme, alliteration, and a general sense of what makes a senryu artful. At times he will compose several versions of a poem to illustrate a point.

Ohno notes five characteristics of an artful senryu. There should be a sense of lingering sweetness in senryu, "a pleasing echo." There should be humor or common interest in the poem— "Unlike haiku, senryu is for everybody" (149). Many of the poems contained within the collection center on or derive from popular witticisms. There should be a sympathy with the truth— exaggeration, caricature, or mean-spiritedness are all things Ohno discourages. And a senryu should be suggestive; it should be "more than what the words say" (149).

Ohno's book first came to my attention when I was researching senryu in anticipation of my editorship of *Prune Juice*. The mandate I envisioned was to make the journal a place for English-language poets to consistently connect

with and learn from the work of senryuists and scholars in Japan. I have often heard the sentiment that Japanese senryu was categorically different from English-language senryu, or that what English-language haikuists were writing was better classified as senryu. In Japan the distinction is so sharp, and in English the distinction so blurry, that Jane Reichhold argues that anglophone poets do not need the term at all (YEAR). There is sometimes a feeling I'd get talking to other poets that it wasn't worth being curious about Japanese senryu, as it wouldn't be instructive for an English language poet. The name 'senryu' was merely a nod to the lineage from which English-language senryu emerged.

Suffice to say, I disagree. Alex Fyffe's monthly column demonstrates that there is much to be learned from contemporary Japanese senryujin. So what can we learn from Ohno's work? Well, first, a familiar distinction: "senryu does not emphasize seasonal expression called Kigo, but rather human psychology in daily living and human relationships" (10). While haiku serves to connect an internal state to the outside world (which can include people), senryu expresses the internal and external aspects of the human world (which can include nature)-- and, just as in English, there are edge cases.

Second, senryu is inherently a populist form of poetry. Many of the poems in Ohno's and Blythe's collection are anonymous. Senryu was written to express oneself, not to establish oneself as an artist. Senryu is a hobby, a communal activity. It isn't necessarily a literary pursuit. Ohno notes: "haiku poets use classical literary language, while Senryu poets use colloquial language" (15). While the distinction between literary and colloquial language differs between English and Japanese, it does seem to me that senryu is a form that can accommodate a poet's voice, rather than constraining her to the objective, sparse language that dominates haiku. "Many people realize certain characteristics of a poet by reading his Senryu for a period of time because Senryu reflects the poet's occupation, background, and family" (149).

Third, senryu should leave the reader with a sense of lingering sweetness, or *yo-in* (余韻). *Yo-in* is an echo, an afterglow, what remains after an experience has passed. If a *shasei*-style is a sketch of a transitory moment, *senryu* is a memento you create, of an experience or idea or sentiment, one that can be revisited again and again.

As long as we identify a form called haiku, it is imperative for us to recognize and engage with senryu, rather than collapsing the two into each other. Once we do that, the connection to the Japanese community of poets has been broken, since the distinction remains in the contemporary poetry of Japan. If we ignore senryu in favor of calling everything haiku because the average English-speaker isn't yet familiar with the form, we turn a blind eye on Japanese senryujin. Once we do that, we are no longer interested in cultural exchange, and might as well call what we are doing micropoetry that is influenced by Japanese haiku (and senryu, but that influence will be lost as we no longer understand what the word means).

Thanks to Jim Kacian, Ohno's book is now available at The Haiku Foundation's digital archives. You can read it [here](#).

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animal, mineral, vegetable



Tim Roberts
New Zealand