

# PRUNE JUICE

Journal of Senryu, Kyoka, Haibun & Haiga

Issue 18, March, 2016

Editor: Steve Hodge

Cover Art: "Bird Man" by Alexis Rotella

Prune Juice : Journal of Senryu, Kyoka, Haibun & Haiga

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Prune Juice Journal of Senryu, Kyoka, Haibun & Haiga is a digital journal occurring tri-annually, dedicated to publishing and promoting modern English senryu, kyoka, haibun & haiga. It is edited by Steve Hodge. Please send all submissions and correspondence to:

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ISSN1945-8894

[www.prunejuice.wordpress.com](http://www.prunejuice.wordpress.com)

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to Issue 18 of *Prune Juice*; my first as the journal's editor. I must admit that it was with a great deal of excitement and not a little trepidation that I agreed to take on the editorship of such a well established and respected publication. Lying in bed at night, I kept thinking of the excellent work Alexis Rotella, Liam Wilkinson, Bruce Boynton and Terri L. French have done over the years to make *Prune Juice* the world's preeminent journal of senryu and related forms. I didn't want to let them down and I wanted to continue to bring our readers the quality and variety they've come to expect.

My trepidation subsided in December when I started receiving submissions for the 18th edition. The warm outpouring of congratulations and well wishes for my editorship were heartening and the quality of the submissions we received was remarkable - not only from poets and friends I've known mostly through social media but from poets whose work I've admired for years but never met.

As time passes, we'll slowly roll out a few new ideas, the first of which is our new 'Featured Artist' profile, which begins on page 26 of this issue. Our first 'Featured Artist' is Chase Gagnon, a remarkably talented young poet and photographer from Detroit. We've included an interview with Chase along with a selection of his haiga and photographs, which can be found immediately after his interview. We've also posted a video which *Prune Juice* produced of Chase reading a selection of his senryu on our Facebook page.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this 18th edition of *Prune Juice* a success. Your contributions are what makes the journal what it is. Also, I'd like to hear from you. If you have a question, comment or suggestion, email me at [prunejuicejournal@gmail.com](mailto:prunejuicejournal@gmail.com) or feel free to 'friend' me on Facebook if you'd like. It's always good to connect with a kindred spirit.

Speaking of hearing from you, several people expressed frustration over the fact that it took me longer than they expected to contact them regarding my editorial decisions. As a result, I hereby commit to responding to everyone's submissions within two weeks of receiving them.

Enjoy!

*Steve Hodge*

*White Lake, Michigan*

## **Debbi Antebi, Turkey**

more bitter  
than I imagined -  
sweet revenge

## **Sanjukta Asopa, India**

ginko walk-  
thehaijinchatterson  
about silence

## Johnny Baranski, USA

Antiques Roadshow  
her grandpa's box  
of burglary tools

black ice  
our argument spins  
out of control

Viagra ads  
on television  
days get longer

the new convict's  
piss and vinegar -  
yawn

## **Freddy Ben-Arroyo, Israel**

after Ikebana Show –  
I demonstrate on one leg  
Living Flower

## **Brad Bennett, USA**

museum docent  
her tattoo unveiled  
when she points

## **Johannaes S.H. Bjerg, Denmark**

### **Tooth Abscess**

The-man-who-talks-so-very-loud stands waiting for a bus as I pass him and without any warning he starts talking to me with his very big words and his very big voice and what comes out of him are jokes from the 1970's, his glory years, he tells me and laughs and laughs and laughs. I manage to get one of my polite-pretend-HA's squeezed in between his as I try to break free of the enormity of his talk and then the bus arrives. It's a small bus and I can barely imagine how it can contain him and his voice ...

something larger than life tooth abscess

## **Willie R. Bongcaron, Philippines**

chemotherapy  
she never wishes the night  
would soon end

## **Maria Bonsanti, USA**

graduation day -  
his parents  
park their divorce

confessional -  
she spins her transgressions  
into quirks

## Mark E. Brager, USA

on daddy's shoulders  
straining for the last  
red leaf

snowy night –  
in the florist's window  
a neon rose

still  
the pond after  
the ashes

autumn leaves  
still learning to color  
outside the lines

## **Alan S. Bridges, USA**

listening to my rant  
my niece asks  
'what's a pizza ship?'

hoarder's house  
all the places  
she'll never see

interpersonal skills course what moron thought this up

## Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

trash day  
the neighbors recycle  
rumors

sucking air  
out of the room--  
her red dress

vegan  
that tone  
of voice

in the dentist chair  
trying to cultivate  
detachment

at the salon  
where everyone looks better  
than they do

## **Anna Cates, USA**

teen lake party  
a gray stork probes  
pink water lotuses

## Stephen Colgan, USA

first leaves falling  
he tells me again of his  
failing memory

the song of crickets  
she calls me darlin' when  
she forgets my name

midnight  
a kiss from one year  
into the next

## **Lysa Collins, Canada**

morning news break -  
eager commentator  
excitingly inaccurate

daisy petals -  
I didn't believe it  
anyway

Louisiana bayou -  
again this year  
politicians  
and leopard frogs  
leading with their tongues

## **Charlotte Digregorio, USA**

my first midwest winter . . .  
working the snowblower  
for a snowfall's inch

## John J. Dunphy, USA

VFW Post  
its new commander  
resplendent in her dress

foreclosed farm auction  
the successful bidder  
wears a suit

the seeds purchased  
by my late mother  
sprouting in the packet

foreclosed home  
its garden's annuals  
reseeding themselves

## **Garry Eaton, Canada**

peeing by the road  
my back  
to the scarecrow

## Haiku Elvis, USA

Zootopia  
a slither of light  
in the snake house

temple bell  
the rope  
lifts me

frogpondering

sleepover  
the murmur  
of secrets

past the bouncer  
and into the night  
saxophone solo

*(For Ralph Gipson and John Howe)*

## Robert Epstein, USA

going on & on  
about her client  
going on & on

car talk  
I find myself  
idling

mom's transfusion  
I end  
a sibling relationship

## Terri L. French, USA

meditation . . .  
all the places  
a body can itch

just when I thought  
things couldn't get worse -  
hotel coffee

burying the cat  
my atheist son  
crosses himself



## **Jay Friedenbergr, USA**

bad date  
trying not to stare too long  
at my beer bottle

*Featured Artist:  
Chase Gagnon*



*Chase Gagnon is an award-winning poet and photographer living in Detroit, Michigan. Though he just recently celebrated his twenty-first birthday, his poetry demonstrates a depth and mastery of craft one might expect from a poet twice his age or more and has been widely published in major journals throughout the world. Prune Juice recently sat down with Chase for the following interview.*

**PJ:** *When did you start writing poetry?*

**CG:** Well, when I was a little kid my mom had a book of Edgar Allan Poe's complete body of poetry. And being a little kid, I liked it because the cover was pretty awesome. I remember it being orange and black with gothic lettering. So I asked my mom to read me some of it. And before I knew it, the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe was my bedtime story. I think I was always a poet. I've always had an interest and appreciation for words and would come up with little poems in my head but never actually wrote any of them down until the age of fifteen, when it all just came pouring out of me for really no reason at all.

**PJ:** *How did you discover haiku and senryu?*

**CG:** I discovered haiku and senryu shortly after I started writing poetry. I would post my poems on online forums and I got some really encouraging feedback

right off the bat. I remember someone saying that she admired my ability to say so much with so few words and haiku instantly came to mind. But at the time, I thought all "haikus" were just three line poems written in the 5/7/5 pattern. So I sat down at my desk and typed out probably ten or twelve of them and sent them off to *Modern Haiku*. Needless to say, it wasn't very long before I discovered what this form actually was and how beautiful it can be.

**PJ:** *You write poetry in other forms as well. What percentage of your work is haiku/senryu and what percentage other forms?*

**CG:** Oh yeah. I write lots of other forms; mainly raps and free verse. Those styles are great for detoxing my soul from all the negativity I've had to deal with in my past - and still am to a point - today. Writing haiku and senryu is a far more spiritual act than venting through long strophes, and I can't write them very well when I feel so low usually. So I go back and forth between the two a lot, and I'd say it's about 50/50.

**PJ:** *What draws you to haiku & senryu?*

**CG:** Simply put, they're beautiful. I remember when I first started reading haiku how shocked I was at the emotions stirred up from these little poems. I didn't even know what most of them meant - and still don't - but that's what's so beautiful about these forms. The real poetry is happening between the lines, and it takes an enormous gift to be able to do that with words... especially in the confinements of haiku. I think more people would appreciate it, and poetry in general, if they thought about how poems makes them feel instead of what it means.

**PJ:** *What poets have influenced your work?*

**CG:** I honestly don't know if any poets have influenced my work at all. I mean, a few probably have subconsciously because I read so much, but I honestly couldn't pinpoint an influence on my poetry other than my own life and emotions. But I do notice that after locking myself away in my room for a

few days, reading nothing but Bukowski with Eminem blaring in through headphones, my style of writing does tend to get more... bold, lets say. *(laughs)*

**PJ:** *The current trend seems to be to combine haiku and senryu together as a more or less common form without much distinction between the two. You write in both forms. When you're writing, do you concern yourself with whether or not you're writing a haiku or senryu?*

**CG:** I almost never think of form while writing, and when I do it usually ruins whatever creative juices I have flowing at the moment. The distinction between haiku and senryu, in my opinion, is getting grayer and grayer the more intertwined humans and nature become. And you also have to ask yourself 'what is nature?,' especially if somebody's natural environment is an urban area surrounded by thousands of other people. To me, sirens in the night are more natural than birds singing or owls hooting. I'm not very educated on this topic, and I'm not pretending to be, but this is just how I look at it because I really don't care at all about what form I write. But from a more technical standpoint, I don't think I've written very many haiku. I think that easily 95 percent of my short poems would fall into the senryu category.

**PJ:** *Explain your writing process.*

**CG:** I'd say my writing process is very fluid. I don't have a strict "regimen" for writing, and I think I'd be far less prolific if I did. I've written haiku on a notepad in the morning rain while sipping herbal tea, and I've written crazy free verse poems while drunk off my ass at three a.m. after a bad breakup. I don't try to write - I need to. I just let it happen wherever, whenever, and however it wants.

And as far as editing goes, I can't say I spend too much time on it. The words of Alan Ginsberg come to mind; "first thought, best thought" and that's usually the case.

**PJ:** *Do you workshop your work, seeking input from friends and fellow poets either in person or online, or do you normally go with your own instincts?*

**CG:** I'm involved with a lot of online poetry groups, and I love workshopping my poems with them. I've learned so much from people online, and I honestly think if it wasn't for the internet I'd just have all my poems hidden away in a notebook under my bed. I love getting feedback online and always consider suggestions and changes, but at the end of the day I go with my own instincts.

**PJ:** *A vast majority of published haiku & senryu appear in written form, either on paper or online. As a young poet, do you see haiku & senryu expanding more into video, audio and other mediums in the future?*

**CG:** Definitely. Especially audio. I think the written form will always be the main way of sharing poetry, but I've seen a lot of interest in sharing work through audio and video recently. The journals *Frozen Butterfly* and *Frameless Sky* are two perfect examples.

**PJ:** *Some of your work is very dark. What inspires your darker work?*

**CG:** Good question. I think “dark” is a misunderstood word when it comes to poetry. The way I see it, there is beauty in everything. In every aspect of life. Existence itself is incredible, each breath is a gift that the universe could've easily left us without, with no repercussions whatsoever. So why should we exclude the elements of existence that aren't rainbows and flowers? These moments of life should be cherished and celebrated just as much as any other, because pain is just as valid an emotion as happiness... and to be blessed with a soul/consciousness that perceives any emotion whatsoever is nothing short of amazing.

But to answer this question more directly, I'll just say that my childhood was not easy. I'll spare you the “sob story” details (because there's enough of that in my poetry) and just say it's left my early adult life in shambles. I didn't grow up around things that are traditionally seen as beautiful, but I had to learn to see the beauty in the things that were around me to keep me from jumping off the ledge, figuratively and literally.

This poem of mine from the last issue of *Prune Juice* comes to mind when I think about how I see the beauty in darkness, and could probably be used as a good example to explain what I'm trying to say.

busted knuckles  
my father's blood mixing  
with mine

My relationship with my father was rough to say the least. I was always afraid I'd grow up to be like him. In fact, that used to be one of my worst fears. Anyway, I wrote this poem shortly before I submitted it for the last issue. And I cried for a good half hour after writing it. It was a poem that has been burning in my soul for so long, and I really think it helped me heal. The correlation between my fears of becoming like him and his blood mixing with my own during one of our many fights is poignant to me, because I've never felt like he was my father. But despite how different we are, he'll always be a part of me whether I like it or not. It also brings to mind the possibility that maybe we're not as different as I thought.

So I don't know... maybe I've just conditioned myself to see the beauty in places and things that most people avoid, and I don't think that's a bad thing. I think it's a blessing.

**PJ:** *You've recently become interested in photography and created some remarkable photographs, developing a distinct and unique style in just a matter of months. How do you see your photography influencing your poetry?*

**CG:** Well photography - at least to me - *is* poetry. It's visual poetry. The way I see it, there is poetry that can only be expressed in words, and there is poetry that can only be expressed in images. A good photo has the same "magic" about it as a good haiku/senryu, meaning it effects your emotions in ways you may not understand. There is a quote from Archibald MacLeish that comes to mind, which says "a poem should not mean, but be." I think that phrase describes both poetry *and* photography. I'm sure we've all walked into an art museum at one point or another and just stared at a visual image in awe of the

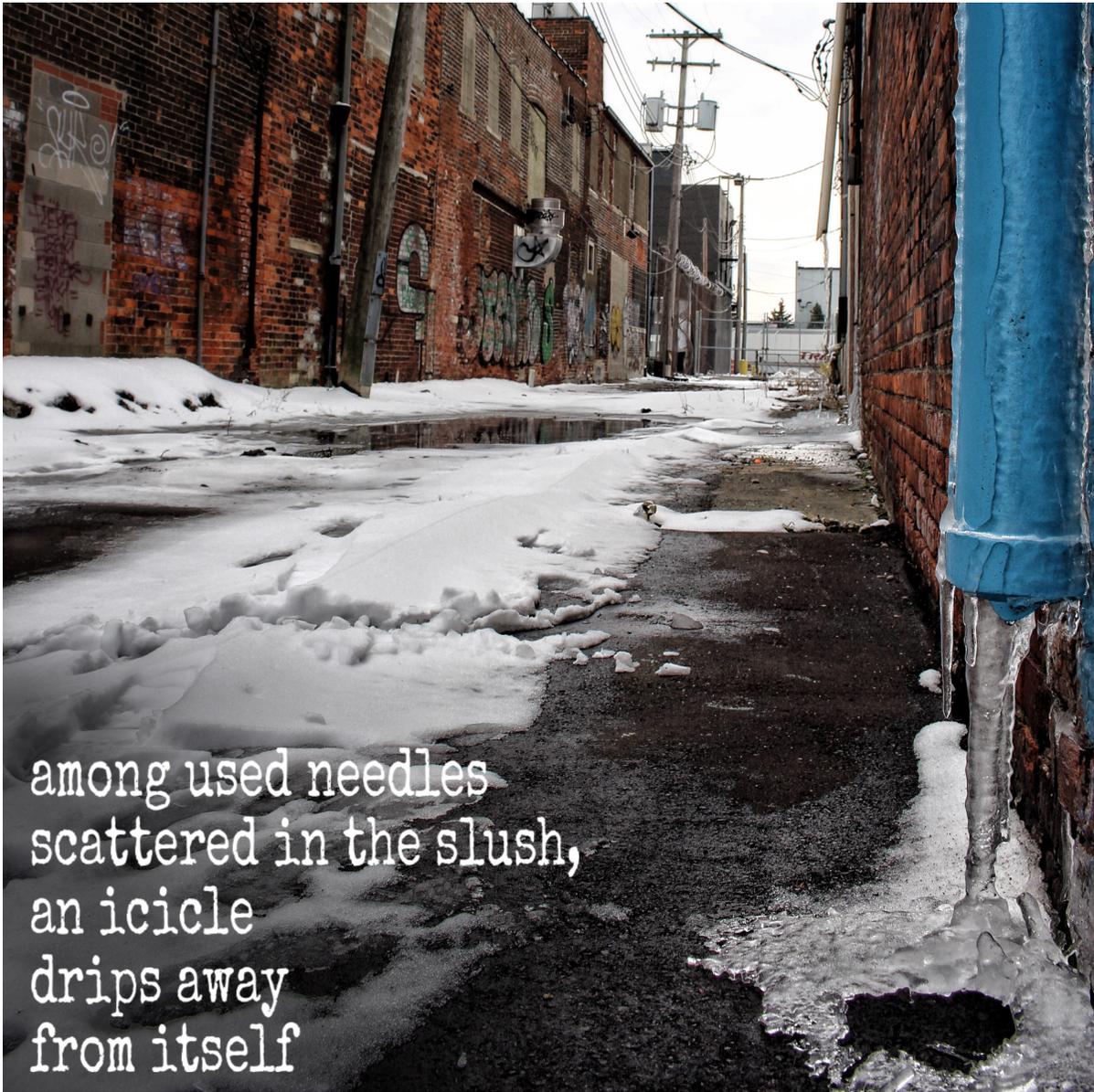
emotion it evokes for reasons we may not consciously know. Poetry effects me in the same way.

But as far as photography effecting my poetry goes, I'd have to say it's something I really commit myself to during periods when I just can't seem to get any words down on the page. It's a very similar creative process. You're out looking for images that go together in strange, unique ways... walking around looking for beauty in places most people wouldn't dare set foot. Most of my favorite and most poignant photos were taken in some of the worst neighborhoods of Detroit, in places where people are terrified to drive through, let alone walk around with an \$800 camera around their neck taking pictures of burned out crack houses. But I've always seen beauty in the strangest places. A lot of my poetry is very urban. That's attributed to my childhood and teenage years in Detroit, I suppose.

But overall, it's really hard to say how creating visual poetry effects the ways I create textual poetry. It's two sides of the same coin, really. And I think they compliment each other perfectly.

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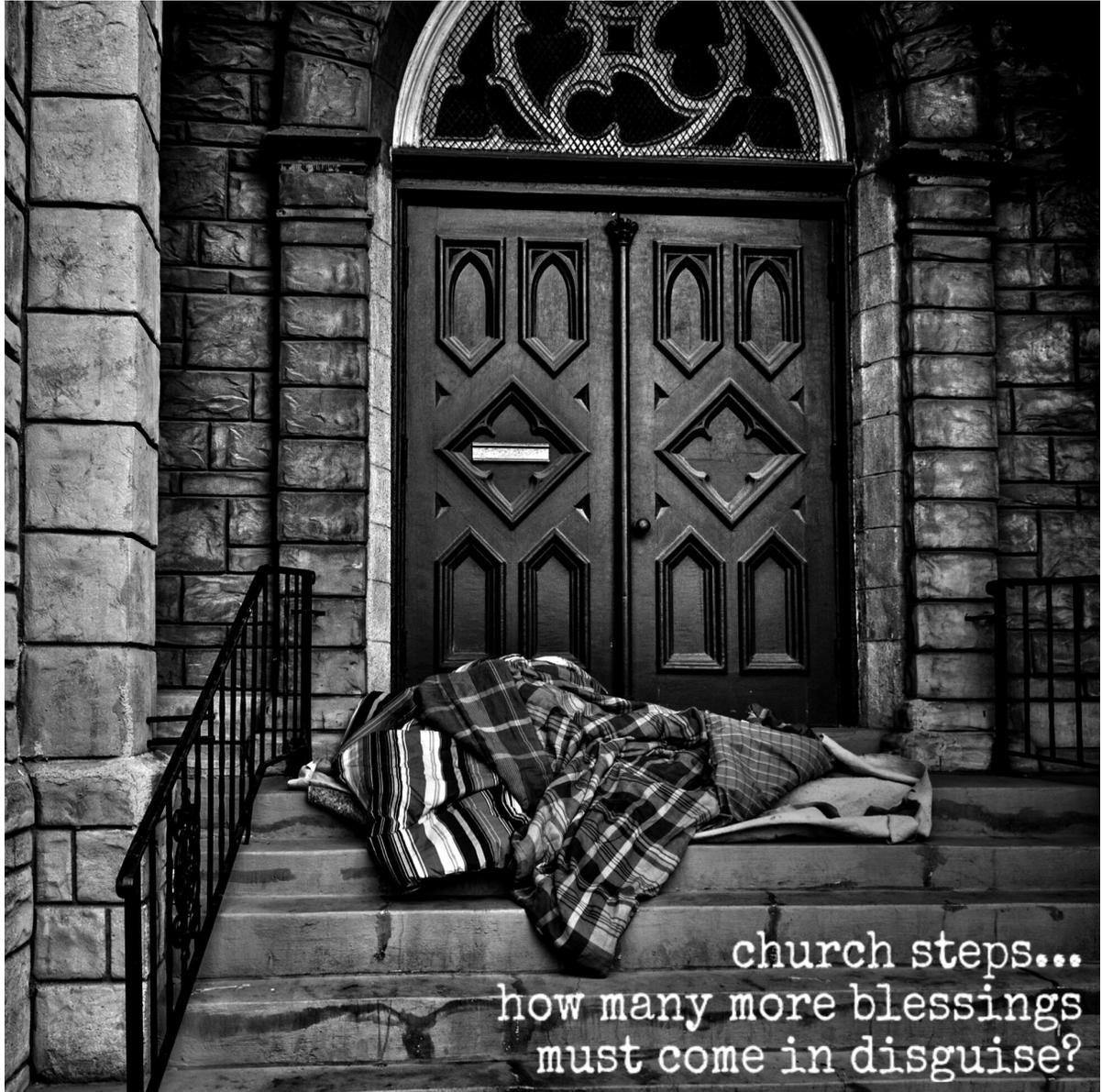
*The following pages contain a selection of Chase Gagnon's recent haiga and photographs.*



among used needles  
scattered in the slush,  
an icicle  
drips away  
from itself

maybe they can  
and there's a reason they don't...  
these speechless walls







abandoned train station  
the peace of waiting  
for nothing





inner beauty...  
I shed my skin  
against the past



*“Angels Among Us”*



*“Snow Globe”*



*“Old Man at the Bus Stop”*

*To find a link to a video Prune Juice has produced of Chase Gagnon reading a selection of his poems, find links to his latest free chapbook, “No Regrets” and to his ‘Detroit Street Photography’ Facebook page, please go to the last page of this issue of Prune Juice.*

## **Tim Gardiner, England**

for once  
jazz seems appropriate  
the bar half full

## Mark Gilfillan, UK

applauding the river  
the swan  
takes flight

## Nick Hoffman, Ireland

queen costume  
my daughter says  
I should bow

e-reader  
    flicking pages  
        I lick my finger

crosswalk  
the pulse  
of my daughter's hand

stripper  
dances my way  
I straighten a dollar

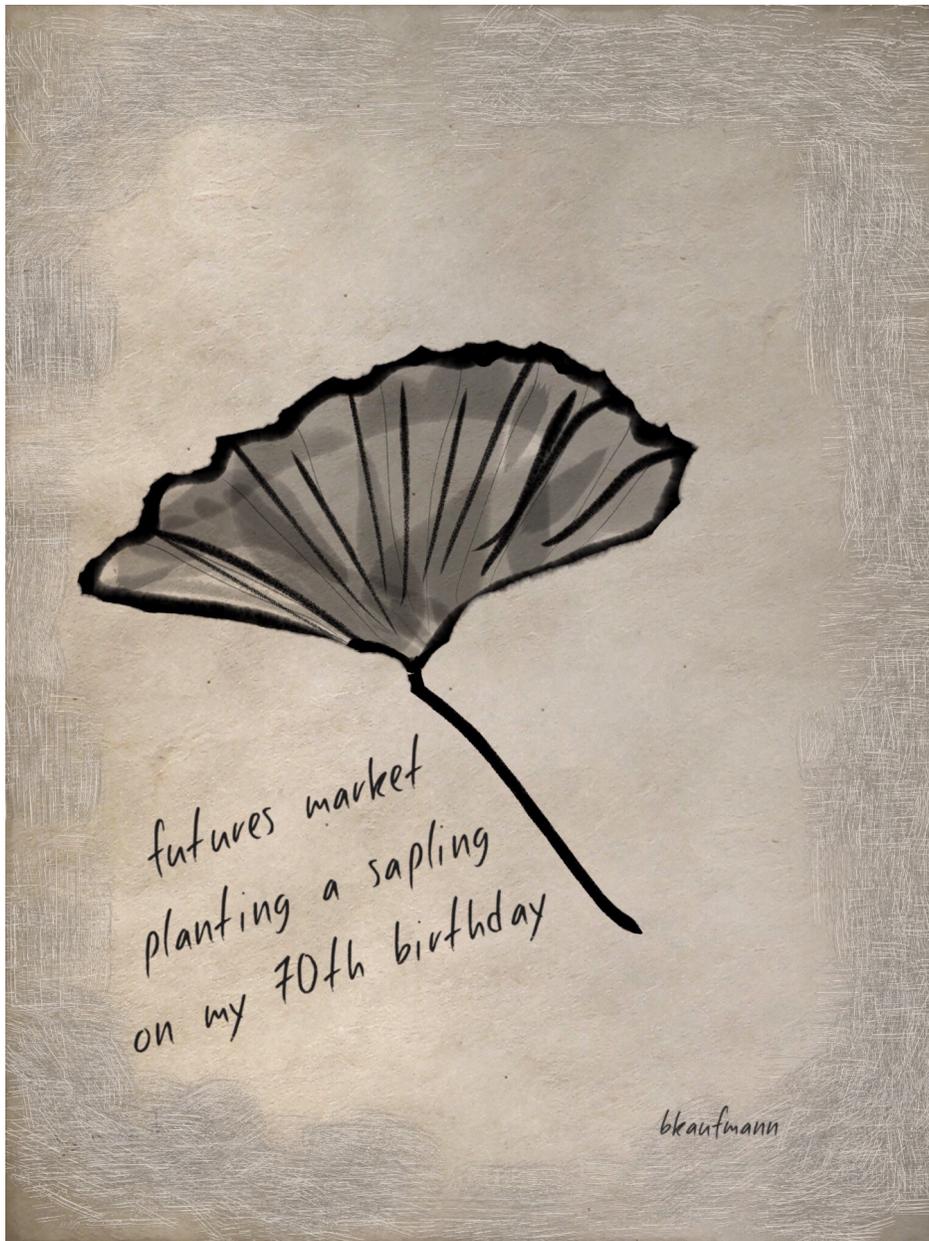
## **Elmedin Kadric, Sweden**

writing workshop  
all of the convicts  
choose free verse

## **Barbara Kaufmann USA**

dental work  
a squirrel cracks  
another acorn

politicians -  
dogs at the starting gate  
pissing and snarling



## Mary Kendall, USA

scalp stapled shut—  
your laughter as you  
try on bright new hats

your tumor growing we worry about the snow

## **Mohammad Azim Khan, Pakistan**

secret admirer...  
the cat watching  
a sparrow

## Deborah P Kolodji, USA

### Pterosaur

An article in *The Illustrated London News* (February 9, 1856, page 166) claimed workmen laboring in a tunnel for a railway line in France uncovered a live pterosaur, which shortly thereafter died, turning immediately and completely to dust.

morning roll call  
the construction worker's son  
says it ate his homework

## Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, UK

a warm smile  
from some random girl  
on the metro....  
my shock on finding  
that i am attractive

all the things  
i do to find out  
what's wrong...  
at last my son tells me  
*yeah you're the problem*

## Flotsam

Now and then, clicks of the pause button punctuate my sobs. A few heaves, sighs, snuffles, and I restart the dictating machine. Three hours later, I am driving home, crying aloud - again and again, calling out to mom, remembering her pain more than mine now.

stop-starting rain-  
plaster over the cracks  
peeled away

Back home, I withdraw into a haze that is occasionally penetrated by the kids laughing. Half an hour of nothingness and I go into the kitchen as my wife fills it with an aroma that should have smelt enticing. I only get the stench of nothingness. I burst into tears, unstoppable now, wracking my body, wringing my gut.

flash floods  
an ant runs the length of  
its twig  
once  
again

## Chen-ou Liu, Canada

the look  
on my girlfriend's son's face  
simmering heat

Goodwill donation:  
brand new copies of my first  
and only chapbook

## Gregory Longenecker, USA

his eyes half-closed  
I speak in whispers-  
stone Buddha

ginger cat-  
with his low-slung swagger  
and his double-notched ear

so forgetful-  
each day I check  
the obituaries

## **Bob Lucky, Saudi Arabia**

supper cruise tossing the salad one more time

## **Myron Lysenko, Australia**

freeway entrance  
a white bicycle covered  
in wreaths

## **Kim Mannix, Canada**

pike fishing  
reeling in  
our guilt

New Year's Eve  
waiting for the kiss  
to end

## Paul David Mena, USA

morning meditation --  
the ringing  
in my ears

in the waiting room  
heads bowed  
in solemn texting

dive bar --  
pretending not  
to recognize each other

## **Vandana Parashar , India**

cookery class

... and the flavour of half-baked  
gossip

## **Minh-Triêt Pham, France**

double rainbow  
after the rain  
and a few drinks

## Alan Pizzarelli, USA

### The Little Old Man

I used to be  
six foot four  
says the little old man

steak for dinner!  
I get my teeth

“When I was your age”  
I tell the young man. . .  
then forget

days are short  
so short  
I’m still in my pajamas

too old  
to rake the leaves  
the wind takes them away

## **LM Popovich, USA**

a hula hoop  
tossed in the air  
catches the moon

## Michael Rehling, USA

peace rally  
they throw rocks  
at the police

bitter cold  
the high quick steps  
of the dog

simplicity  
i need so many words  
to explain it

discussing punctuation i tune out and drink wine

it...  
the gravity of pronouns  
always brings me down

## **Bryan Rickert, USA**

a moth  
steals the spotlight-  
opening night

## **Michael Ritter, USA**

Under the quilt  
The cold creeps in,  
Bringing the cat with it

## **Alexis Rotella, USA**

The snowplow  
pushes our Buddha  
into the Evangelist's yard

Tea for an old bag  
she tells  
the young waiter



Remember me  
as a poet  
who smiled  
when she saw  
persimmons

## **Steve Schultz, USA**

she wants to know why  
my life will be different  
that's why exactly

## Yesha Shah, India

### Encoded

Hours after the artist has finished making her charcoal sketch, she saunters up to the easel. The panache in her stance, the intensity in her eyes, the defiance in her raised chin, the confidence in her firm set shoulders, brashness in the way her jet black, cropped hair has been styled... he has captured it all on the canvas.

Underneath those striking eyes she adds a few fine lines, crow's feet, some laugh lines – that's her mother in her waning youth.

Furrowed forehead, deep cheek hollows, lack luster eye balls, plunging dark circles – now that looks like granny.

Taking a few steps back she imagines the portrait of herself slouched over, slumped like her gran; who lost half of her stature and all of her grace.

Which perfume would she then wear to mask the stench of an incontinent bladder?

*heirloom brooch...  
sutured by the bonds  
of a double helix*

## Betty Shropshire, USA

mistletoe  
her stockings  
far flung

## **Jackson D. Smith, USA**

twenty-one  
sipping gin and tonic,  
he tries to look world-weary

## **Skaidrite Stelzer, USA**

first grandchild  
I learn to hope for the short end  
of the wishbone

**Debbie Strange, Canada**

our last time fishing with grandpa the catch in my throat



## **Rachel Sutcliffe, UK**

another black eye  
the thorns  
on his roses

## **Rick Tarquinio, USA**

the Ivy Leaguer  
shoveling his driveway  
into the wind

## Paresh Tiwari, India

### On the fritz

Sometimes I wonder, how many stars dotting the sky tonight, are already long dead.

You may have once looked at these very stars and painted the canvas with yellow and prussian-blue whorls, binding their pulsating hearts in a helical symphony. As you piled colour after heavy colour, did you ask the stars to hold their heads in repose and chided them when they disobeyed? Did this delirium, this conversing with stars and haystacks and sunflowers and wheat fields bring you peace? Did, you eventually hitchhike a ride on one of death's many bogeys to your beloved?

Under the thick layers of paint, in one of your last known works, the restoration artist has found a perfectly preserved coat of madness.

*a poet talking  
to the dead painter  
talking to stars*

## **Song of Death**

I had once held a raindrop on the tip of my finger, saw the sun rise within it and kissed it like a lover. It must have been happy - this raindrop, for it burst open on my lips with the abandon of an ocean in swell and the freedom of a fish in flight. In that one moment I was the earth and the clouds, i was a wildflower and the soft squish of the morning grass underfoot . . .

*ceasefire  
the shuffle of boots  
and not much else*

## **Lullaby**

When mom gifts me a large box of crayons for my eighth birthday, I hug her for what seems like a really long time before sinking back into the study chair. I am happy of course; I can now choose the right shade for her bloodshot eyes and bruised skin; when they ask me to paint a family portrait.

*after her . . .  
a moon shaped hole  
in the sky*

## **Stuart Walker, Japan**

Nosing around  
seduced by  
the neighbor's  
hourglass-shape  
wood stove

## Julie Warther, USA

a candle's flame --  
the way he leans forward  
when I talk

broken spine --  
gently cradling  
her Bible

silent night --  
the third verse no more  
than a whisper

change in focus --  
threading a needle  
by faith

vintage mirror . . .  
the past reflected in  
the lines around her eyes

# Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Haiku and Senryu But Were Too Busy Writing to Ask

by Michael Dylan Welch

In the spring 2001, I published a short essay in *Haijinx* 1:1 titled “The Difference Between Haiku and Senryu.” It shared the following grid from Tom Lynch’s Ph.D. dissertation on haiku and Emersonian poetics (University of Oregon, 1989):

	Natural	Human
Serious	1. Haiku	2. ??????
Humourous	3. ??????	4. Senryu

I wrote in favour of this grid, saying that poems of either the haiku or senryu persuasion fall into one of the grid’s four numbered categories:

1. Serious nature poems (typically with a season word, but to my mind needn’t always have one).
2. Serious human-centered poems.
3. Humourous nature poems (rare).
4. Humourous human-centered poems.

I suggested that when a poem falls into the grey areas of categories 2 or 3, and if one insists on categorizing such poems (one may choose not to), then one has to exercise discretion based on the tone or mood of the poem, but added that I thought most poems in those two grey areas could most often be considered haiku. That’s because the masters of *haiku* frequently wrote about human subjects (category 2), and that it’s also possible to write haiku about nature in a humourous way (category 3).

Where I now disagree with my earlier point of view is largely regarding Tom Lynch’s grid. It feels helpful on an introductory level, but less so on a specialist level—and may even promote an oversimplified and perhaps even misleading

sense of the difference between haiku and senryu. Moreover, when one tries to assess poems with it, it soon feels like it encounters limitations. As I said in my brief essay, poems in categories 2 and 3 are often haiku anyway, so the grid seems to be of limited value other than proposing that humorous poems about humans are nearly always senryu. The grid also takes no account of the use of *kigo* and *kireji*, or of tones other than humour. In her haiku book *Flower Moon Snow* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), Kazue Mizumura refers to *kireji* as “soul punctuation,” and defines it as “virtually untranslatable emotional shading.” It’s that shading, which contributes to the flavouring of haiku, that’s less prevalent, perhaps even entirely absent, in senryu. Senryu aims more at the head than the heart, more at the intellect than the soul (and in this sense, many so-called avant-garde gendai haiku may be more akin to senryu than haiku). Where haiku are subtle, senryu are blunt. Where haiku are shaded, senryu are lurid. Indeed, I now think it’s an error to position humour versus seriousness as one of only two dichotomies dividing senryu from haiku (although these traits are an obvious influence). Likewise, I now think it’s an error to position human content versus nature content as the only other dichotomy dividing senryu from haiku (although again another influence). There’s so much more to it.

In Japan, for starters, the distinction is fundamentally social—one is a member of a haiku group or a senryu group, but seldom both, if ever. Thus whatever one writes is viewed through the rose-coloured glasses of whether the *poet* usually writes haiku or senryu. And I understand that this is usually done without regard to the traits of the poem itself. But let us leave aside that social distinction as one isolated to the Japanese culture, especially if we are to consider haiku and senryu written in English.

In English, my feeling is that the distinction between haiku and senryu is mainly tonal—and not just humour versus seriousness, because there can be *funny* haiku and *serious* senryu. As I’ve written on the “Haiku and Senryu” page of my Graceguts.com website, haiku is a brief genre of poetry that typically captures a moment of sensory perception, often with a seasonal reference (*kigo*, or season word) and a two-part juxtapositional structure (equivalent to a *kireji*, or cutting word) that conveys or implies an emotion. Senryu (more accurately presented in English as senryū, with a macron) is similar to haiku except that it tends to be more satirical or ironic in tone, and does not need to include a season word or two-part structure (although some senryu *may* still include these elements yet still be considered as senryu). Some people think of haiku as

focusing on nature, with *senryu* focusing on people, but this is misleading. Many *haiku* by the Japanese masters also focus on people (think of Buson's poem about stepping on his dead wife's comb), so having human content is not a distinguishing factor. Furthermore, *haiku* is actually a *seasonal* poem, not strictly a nature poem (many of the *kigo* that *haiku* aim at are in fact not nature-related), although nature often comes along for the ride. Instead, it is usually tone that differentiates *haiku* and *senryu*.

So here's the gist of the matter: *Haiku* tend to celebrate their subjects (even if dark), whereas *senryu* tend to have a "victim," and may or may not be humorous. I don't mean that they are *about* a victim as a subject, but that the poem itself *victimizes* the subject, even if lightly, yet does so without preaching or holier-than-thou moralizing. *Haiku* typically treat their subjects reverently, whereas *senryu* do so irreverently. *Haiku* try to make a feeling, and *senryu* try to make a point. And if *haiku* is a finger pointing to the moon, *senryu* is a finger poking you—or someone else—in the ribs.

As a consequence of these thoughts, I would retain the serious versus humorous dichotomy from Lynch's grid (because it encompasses tone), but I would entirely remove the natural versus human dichotomy. I would add cutting word versus no cutting word, season word versus no season word, and make room for other tonal characteristics, such as reverence versus irreverence, and whether the poem is more like a finger pointing to the moon or a finger poking you in the ribs. Perhaps even the degree of objectivity versus subjectivity is a factor as well. These more realistic dichotomies would make for a much more complicated grid, but that, I'm afraid, is the point. The difference between *haiku* and *senryu* isn't as simple as nature/human and serious/funny distinctions. This is also why some folks continue to have trouble with this issue, and why the debate of differentiating between *haiku* and *senryu* will continue.

The matter set aside earlier, however, further complicates things. In Japan you will find serious poems with seasonal references and even two-part structures (even if formal *kireji* are not used). These *haiku* traits are incidental, though, and the poems are considered *senryu* because they are written by a so-called "senryu" poet. But more than that, they typically offer, by implication at least, a critique of the human condition. In other words, they are saying "This is what it's like to be human," or "This is what it's like to be a particular kind of human." So on that point (that they have a victim of sorts), they match my sense of how we in the West might apprehend the difference between *haiku* and

senryu. But on many other counts, the poems in Japanese may seem very similar to haiku. And that's where the Japanese social construct comes into play —as mentioned, the distinction often boils down to whether the poet usually is a haiku poet or a senryu poet, and then the poem is considered almost exclusively in that framework, which often correlates to whether the poem is presented in a haiku or a senryu context.

Indeed, in Japan, prevailing Japanese social structures settle the question, where one's work represents the group one is in. We don't have this social influence for our poetry in the West. We are nearly always left to look at the poem itself, or perhaps consider the poet's intent, if known—never mind that the poet's intent might be misguided. Should we therefore conclude, at least in the West, that it's all much ado about nothing? Is there a sharp divide between the two genres, or is there a continuum between the two, a continuum that extends beyond both of them to embrace other short poetry?

In the West, for both haiku and senryu, the context in which a poem is presented may still make a difference. If a poem happens to have a cut, seasonal reference, and serious subject matter but is presented on a senryu discussion page on Facebook, for example, we may be inclined to consider the poem in terms of senryu. This would be despite the poem's haiku characteristics. Likewise, if a one-part poem with no seasonal reference with a lighter tone is presented in a haiku context (where senryu are typically avoided or unexpected), we might well consider the poem in terms of haiku rather than senryu. But a third option is also possible, for both types of poems. That would be to suspend the context, to consider the poem on its own terms, regardless of where or how it was shared. Thus we would weigh its characteristics, such as whether it has a cut and season word, and the thrust of its tone—whether reverent or irreverent. This would at least be an interesting exercise to try with each poem, even while the author's name (the poem's "fourth line") provides geographical, biographical, and other contexts. Poems in a senryu journal such as *Prune Juice* are already branded as senryu by the authors because of being submitted, and by the editor by being accepted, so I mean to apply this approach to poems in contexts other than this. Yet still we might assess poems in this fashion even from *Prune Juice*, as long as we do not let this meta-consideration (what *kind* of poem is it?) interfere with the primary poetic outcome of the poem itself, regardless of genre (what *effect* does the poem have on me?). This exercise might well cast some poems from one category (the

context where it was presented) into the other. If nothing else, it shows such poems to fall into that grey area, and not as clearly one or the other as the context alone might imply. I would suggest, in fact, that that grey area between haiku and senryu is not a dichotomy at all, but a continuum, and do away with oversimplified grids entirely.

Of course, it's not nothing, or poets wouldn't keep raising the issue or having this debate. Some Western observers have attempted to suggest that senryu should be abandoned entirely. I consider that a naïve stance simply for the reason that senryu exists in Japan—and thrives widely. Senryu exists in English, too, obviously, even if we don't have the same social structures that impinge upon it as they do in Japan. My feeling is that one can't go far wrong—if wrong is even possible—as long as one views Western senryu and haiku as being on a continuum rather than being distinctly divided. Seeing that a continuum exists empowers poets to write poems that might lean more in one direction or the other—and take advantage of the traits common to one type of poetry rather than the other, as the situation of the poem itself suggests. And they are free to write without concern as to whether a poem might be one or the other. Instead, they can be content that the poem is somewhere on that continuum. Recognizing the continuum leaves some poems in a grey area, but we can take it to be perfectly fine if someone wishes to see a poem one way or the other. Just as there's a point when a poem is no longer a haiku, but just a short poem, or not a poem at all, there's also a point where a poem is a senryu rather than a haiku, or vice versa. We may draw that distinguishing line in very personal or even idiosyncratic places, but as long as we see haiku and senryu as being on a continuum, we can empower ourselves to write the best poems we can, wherever they might fall on that continuum.

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## Michael Dylan Welch, USA

late frost--  
the Catholic priest  
having his puppy neutered

your raised eyebrow--  
I change the channel  
back

love at first sight--  
the tilt of her head  
as she bites a taco

Groundhog Day--  
I read your breakup letter  
again and again

## Ian Willey, Japan

the pink slip  
I spot a few  
redundancies

back from my vacation  
a new temp  
with a perm

Monday meeting  
a yawn  
goes viral

a pen that says  
"Yes we can!"  
out of ink

## **Alison Williams, UK**

sound muted  
the politician betrayed  
by body language

war debate  
the opposition becomes  
the enemy

## **John Zheng, USA**

Chinatown tour—  
the Chinese shakes his head to  
my question in Chinese

blues in the air  
finally that puppy  
stops whining

“I hope my tongue in prune juice smothers, if I belittle dogs and mothers.”

- Ogden Nash

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To see a video of Chase Gagnon reading a selection of his poems, please visit the *Prune Juice* Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/PruneJuiceJournal/>

To read Chase’s free chapbook, “No Regrets,” please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/alotuspoetry/posts/1142418419114051>

To see an extensive collection of Chase’s photography, please visit his ‘Detroit Street Photography’ Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/Detroit-Street-Photography-176615169383782/?fref=ts>

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*Prune Juice* hopes to present a *Featured Artist* profile - such as the profile of Chase Gagnon found in this issue - once or twice per year. If you are, or know of, a senryu poet who possesses additional artistic talents such as painting, sculpture, music composition or performance, etc. please let us know at:

[prunejuicejournal@gmail.com](mailto:prunejuicejournal@gmail.com)