



Another ancient Japanese form of poetry is unrhymed. It is three lines long. Line one has 5 syllables. Line two has 7 syllables. And you guessed it, line three has 5 syllables. I can hear you saying: “But hang on...that’s a haiku.” No, this time the subject is different. Haiku tends to focus on nature -- a world that it does not judge or comment on. Senryu looks

at human beings and pokes fun at the silly things we do. It doesn’t tend to be harsh or cruel -- these poems are not designed to be critical or hurtful. But it does acknowledge how strange human behaviour can be. The poet, remember, is human too and so must accept that the absurdity he laughs at is also within himself.

Here are a few of mine to help get you started. Remember that, like haiku, these poems can be either strict-form or free-form.

Expensive new shoes
pinch my toes and rub my heels --
feel bad to look good.

Gossip magazine--
Read about the stars you love
and want to see fall.





A sun-kissed day –
My life remains unchanged yet
I am happier.

“How are you today?”

Translation:

“Ask me how I am.”

The hamster wakes up,
runs nowhere in his wheel -- I
wash dishes again.



The child longs to grow up.
The mother buys
Oil of Olay.



The mouse runs
from the shrieking giant
cowering on a chair.

Control fate...
with four-leaved clovers
and knocks on wood?

Unlike the photographic snapshot of the haiku, these poems are based, not only on our observations, but on our judgments of what we see. Remember when Basho commented that another haiku equaled more cherry blossoms, but not his own face? Well, with senryu it is quite the opposite. This poem acts as a sort of mirror for all of mankind's vanity and foolishness, including that of the poet.

Considering the fact that human beings have a talent for creating ludicrous amounts of trouble, there is plenty of material out there for your own senryu. But please remember to treat your subjects with compassion -- the harsh judgments you make on them are also on yourself.

Now you try ...

