

Global Haiku
Reader Response Essay
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Sonia Sanchez's *Morning Haiku*

by
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Sonia Sanchez is a poet, writer, and professor, who grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. She is a black woman who was heavily involved in the Black Arts Movement. The reason I chose, Sonia and more particularly *Morning Haiku*, is because of its significance to black culture as it relates to art. *Morning Haiku* is a collection of poems dedicated to powerful figures within the black community. These figures range from Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, and Toni Morrison. These are prominent figures within a community that I am a part of, which is what drew me into this body of work. This collection of poems covers loss and the mourning of some of those individuals, but also about overcoming and getting through the period of mourning.

as you drummed
your hands kept
reaching for God

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p. 1

This poem is a reflection of church and a relationship with God. Christianity is a large part of black culture, and this poem seems to be a reflection of that. I imagine a church house in the deep south, there is no air conditioning in the building. All the church-goers fan themselves, underneath their large hats and long skirts. The drummer is a young boy with a gift from God as he plays the drums the older lady on the front row is filled with the holy spirit. She reaches to the sky, tapping her feet against the wooden floors. She believes in all her heart that praising God will deliver her from all of her troubles, so she praises him harder. The drummer plays harder, and taps begin to turn into stomps, she begins to shout, and run around the small and quaint church building.

we taste the
blood ritual of
southern hands

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p.11

This poem was dedicated to Emmett Till, who was murdered by white men in the south because he was wrongly accused of whistling at a white woman. The south was extremely segregated at this time and racism was very much alive. This poem is a reflection of what happened to this young man. He was killed based on southern ideals, all because of the color of his skin. This poem holds so much power because of the pain it caused his mother, his family members, and the black community as a whole. I enjoyed the imagery because it paints the story of his death clearly. It summarizes this tragic story in such a simple way.

Telephone wires sang
her voice over
soft sister laughter

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p.19

Two sisters enjoy a conversation on the phone, missing the days that they once shared a bedroom in their mother's two-bedroom home. You can hear laughter and jokes being shared through the telephone line. One sister is more outspoken than the other, but both swap stories of their children and grandchildren. The imagery that comes to mind, is bright yellows from the sun seeping through the window as they talk on the landline phones in their kitchen. The wires on the telephone swing back and forth as they move the phone from one hand to the next.

you have
rescued women from a
timid ground of loss

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p.66

This poem is written about Oprah Winfrey, a talk show host, and self-made millionaire who came from very humble beginnings. Her show was dedicated to women, about helping them with their growth and work through life problems. I believe this poem was written with that in mind. This poem is to show women's empowerment and how many women's lives were changed by Oprah's show and the guest she brought onto her show. It is a thank you to her, to show gratitude for the platform she created. Especially for black women, who often are not represented in the media and whose voices are not heard.

baptizer of
morning light walking us away
from reserved spaces

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p. 74

Another haiku that depicts the stories of a historical moment in black culture. This poem was of Rosa Parks, who was a large part of the Civil Rights Movement. She was noted for not giving up her seat on a segregated bus. This haiku expresses this story beautifully. The seats of the bus are illustrated as reserved spaces, but reserved spaces could also be water fountains or restaurant countertops at this time. I also liked the comparison of Rosa Parks as a morning light, because she did provide guidance during the Civil Rights Movement. She fought injustice and provide light to many black people at a time when life seemed to be extremely dark.

Your smell
slides under my
fingernails

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p. 77

This haiku is very different from the others in this collection. All of the other haiku have to do with despair, loss, or social injustice. This haiku, on the other hand, deals with love, romance, and intimacy. I imagine a couple who love each other dearly and want to bask in each other's presence as often as possible. The woman sprays perfume on her neck and wrist, as her husband comes over and grasps her hand. As he does so the newly sprayed perfume transfers to his fingertips. I imagine colors of black and gold, gold for the jewelry the woman is wearing around her neck, and black for the suit the man wears. The smell is a big sense evoked in this haiku as well, I imagine smelling perfume and cologne in this room.

what is it about
childbirth that women
ask for seconds?

Sanchez, *Morning Haiku*, p.89

Childbirth is one of the hardest things a woman can go through. I imagine the pain and screaming, a woman's body opening up and pushed to its limits to bring in the life of another individual. Though her body goes through so much, she continues to have the desire for more children even after giving birth. To many it may not make sense, why would someone want to go through something so traumatizing. However, the reward of bringing a child into this world and loving and raising them is worth all the pain and bodily changes they may experience.

Sonia Sanchez's contribution to haiku is remarkable and worth noting. She did not just write about emotions and lighthearted topics. She wrote about serious and traumatizing situations and created art out of them. In *Moring Haiku*, she highlighted people who have contributed much of their own life work to black people. Whether, that is giving women a voice like Oprah or Maya Angelou, or whether that is being a light during the Civil Rights Movement like Rosa Parks. As if creating black art was not honorable enough, she took the time to dedicate her art to uplifting other artists. Her writing style is very comprehensive, she tells a full story with her haikus. She tells summarizes the stories of some of the world's worst social injustices through three simple lines of writing.

Work Cited

Sanchez, S. (2011). *Morning haiku*. Beacon Press. Print.