Sukasah Syahdan
A Modern Poet

AP Literature
Smithson
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Poet’s History
Syahdan was born in Indonesia, making English his second language. He took an English course while he was a senior in high school (1983) and quickly mastered the foreign language. In 1986 he was admitted to the English Department at the University of Indonesia. He acquired his English Linguistics major in 1991. After university, he traveled to Budapest, Hungary, working for the Indonesian Embassy until 1994. (Interview)

Poet’s Style and General Overview of Work
Even though Sukasah Syahdan’s first language is Indonesian, he prefers to write his poetry in English. He likes to call himself an “individualist” and writes about what “captures his mind and personality”. Syahdan always considers the form of his poems and how it will convey the elegance and beauty of his message. (Interview)

In his interview he defines his audiences as the educated middle class, but believes his work goes “beyond this boundaries”. (Interview)

Syahdan tends to keep the tone of his poems calm because the speaker is often looking back on a memory or thinking about, and sometimes questioning an idea.

Discussion of Common Themes
In an interview with a PhD student, he says he has always “been interested in social issues such as poverty, injustice, etc.”, which he tends to convey through his poems (Interview). Syahdan doesn’t often take a side on these social issues but if he does he always does in a respectful and calm manner, only to stimulate the reader’s mind.

He prefers to express himself and his views about things that he believes matter most, for example, individual vs. social aspects of life, man-woman relationship, political-economic views on the world, etc. (Interview).

Literary Merit
Because his poems offer an experience for the reader as well as the chance to reevaluate opinions and beliefs, Syahdan fully deserves literary merit. His poems question society and analyze relationships to help provide a relatable speaker for the audience to connect to. In addition, his poems are also enjoyable and offer a gratifying experience for the reader.
Sukasah Syahdan

With hundreds of thousands of poets around the world today, and even more that have passed, how can a modern poet make himself stand out? What will make his poems special? Sukasah Syahdan has demonstrated that if a poet concerns himself with these questions, they will not be successful. In four of Syahdan’s poems, “On Stopping Here”, “Sonnet I: Love Song”, “Thoughts” and “Kitanomaru Park”, it’s clear that the reason his poems are unique and special is because he writes about personal memories, curious ideas, and issues that concern him.

What makes a poem about a special memory so unique is that no one can argue it. The beauty comes from the speaker describing the surroundings, the people involved, and the emotions evoked in that moment. In Syahdan’s poem “Kitanomaru Park”, the speaker successfully describes an exclusive memory in a way that makes the audience feel as if they could have been there. The poem is about the speaker looking at a picture of him and another person, most likely a lover, “taking an impromptu walk / side by side” through Kitanomaru Park, which is in Tokyo. Since it’s unlikely that the speaker would have a framed picture of an unpleasant experience, the reader can assume that the speaker is reminiscing a happy memory but perhaps with a melancholy feeling, since he says the “face used to be mine”. In Syahdan’s interview with a PhD student in America, he said that he often writes about the relationships between men and women and this poem is no exception to that statement. The couple in the poem enjoyed walks “underneath the darkened / canopy of drizzle-wet foliage” and that they called it “our park”. The couple obviously had a special connection and the speaker indirectly describes her beauty by saying that “frogs / suspended their croaks / and returned the quiet / to the nearby loch” as if to say that the couple was left to appreciate their love alone and the speaker had her radiance all to himself. Syahdan also often uses personification in his poems, for example in this poem, “this is the very photo / that framed your radiance / that warmed the shuddering / March”. The photo highlights the memories they had as a couple and using the word “framed” relates to the idea of a picture revealing a memory and shows that the speaker realizes that their relationship is restricted to only a picture frame now. Whether or not this poem connects to Syahdan’s personal life, the reader presents a relatable story by providing a unique memory.

Syahdan demonstrates another man-woman relationship in his poem, “Sonnet I: Love Song”. This poem exemplifies that just because Syahdan is a modern poet, it doesn’t mean that
he can’t adopt classic forms of poetry, such as the sonnet. This poem follows the Shakespearean or English sonnet pattern but often uses a near rhyme rather than a perfect rhyme. For example, “dominate” and “comrade”; “adjective” and “naïve”. Syahdan also utilizes older language to commit to the form of the sonnet, using words such as “thou”, “doth”, and “thee”. Unlike “Kitanomaru Park”, this love story has a more pleasant tone and could possibly be more relatable for Syahdan’s younger audience as it is about confessing love for someone else. The speaker “once tremblingly sent / A three word parcel of premature sentence”, meaning he said, “I love you”, perhaps earlier than he should have. Afterwards he clarifies that he is “presenting thee it again: / Robbed in th’ simple present”. He wants to prove that even though he said it too early, he truly meant it and that it’s still true. The speaker says it again “unclothed of all pretense”, to show that he is being honest and not because something prompted him to say it. This sonnet also contains a simile; the speaker compares his need to be with his love “like a noun needs an adjective” and that “Life without thee will be dull and naïve”. The speaker demonstrates an honest and passionate attitude as he admits to “claiming home”, or finding comfort in the known but realizes he will never accomplish his desires if he isn’t brave. Syahdan’s use of the English sonnet proves to his audience that something old can still effectively illustrate a love story people experience in modern times.

As mentioned before, Syahdan often utilizes personification in his poems. In the poem “Thoughts”, Syahdan uniquely personifies the thoughts of humans to show that they possess their own qualities and abilities. While the whole poem is a personification, it contains many metaphors and comparisons within it. The first stanza compares thoughts to “butterflies wild” that “aren’t your pets ever / taught to come by at willpower”. People can’t train their thoughts to think certain things or to possess a certain degree of knowledge. He goes on to support this statement by saying that “hunters…enslave them through high education”. People believe that the more useless knowledge they gain, the more obedient their thoughts will be, and the more successful they will be at life. People continue to believe that they can trap their thoughts and that they are “meek and docile”, but thoughts cannot “be owned by any known mortal”, as the speaker writes in the third stanza. The speaker does say that the people who must appreciate thoughts are gardeners, “who…send out their love with floral invitation”. Gardeners, or people who tend to their thoughts and cultivate them, are people who understand the way thoughts work. The quote mentioned prior references back to the butterflies in the first stanza. Gardeners
know how to give thoughts what they need (“nectar”, line 4) to be free and wild. The speaker explains that in order for humans to receive what they want from thoughts, they must give them something in return. Syahdan often writes about issues in society and the issue of people living superficial and selfish lives is no exception.

Sukasah Syahdan’s poem “On Stopping Here” provides an example of the speaker promoting self-reflection. The speaker isn’t questioning his own life; rather he asks questions to his audience in the hopes of them realizing a mistake in their lives. He starts off by saying that in life, people eventually “get tired or just need to look down / to see how far [they] have stepped”. Taking time to reflect on mistakes and accomplishments is important and the speaker asks the reader, after you’ve done this, “what would you say?” The reader will immediately have a response, and if they don’t, the speaker provides a few possible answers: “Would you say oh how fast time does past / leaving us memories and realities”. Some people will have a more optimistic and accepting point of view? It’s impossible to go back and fix any mistakes so people might as well accept them. Memories can also be good memories that people wouldn’t like to forget, maybe they’d like to relive them, but not ones that they’d choose to erase or redo. Or, would the reader think, “how slowly time does crawl / awaiting hopes and fate on us to fall”? The personification of time crawling in line 9 makes it seem as if someone wants to get through a hard time or wants it to pass. The word “hope” has a more positive connotation, as if something miraculous or happy is bound to happen, but using the word “fate” brings a more negative tone to the poem, as if something miserable or something forced is bound to happen, leaving someone unable to change the state they’re in. Ultimately, the idea behind this poem is all about perspective. How people look back at their past can very easily alter the way they look at their future. The speaker tries to explain that if people could accept the way their past is, they’ll be more welcoming to the future and what it brings. If all people can focus on is the mistakes they’ve made, they’re bound to make more and dread the future.

While Syahdan writes about issues and subjects that interest him, he always focuses on giving the readers an experience and a chance to question their original beliefs. His poems on love and relationships provide connections and a relatable speaker. Syahdan allows literary devices, such as personification, to push his poems into deeper, more meaningful ideas. His creativity and individuality derive from personal interests, which has lead to his success as a modern poet.
Bibliography

Sukasah Syahdan’s Blog/Contact Information:

Link to all poems: http://www.inspirationalstories.com/poems/t/sukasah-syahdan-poems/