

“Yellowstone” by Cliff Haac with a Haiku & Comments by Richard S. Straw

I’ll share a few thoughts about my haiku response to Cliff Haac’s photograph, “Yellowstone.” First, here’s the poem:

darkening sky
a revenant’s strands
on bedrock

In the haiku’s second line (“a revenant’s strands”), I use what may be an unfamiliar term. By definition, a “revenant” is “one that returns after death or a long absence.”

In the instance of Cliff’s photograph, a *revenant* returns periodically in channels of geyser runoff at Yellowstone National Park. This runoff is made up of whitish strands of limestone—calcium carbonate to be exact. The runoff is draping itself over the mammoth-sized rock from the top left to the center of Cliff’s photograph. Each cascading strand is alive with (or was *once* alive with) bacteria and algae. And according to an online field guide to Yellowstone’s geysers, these life forms may be “remnants of some of the earliest life on earth.”

When I look at Cliff’s photograph, I feel as if I’m seeing a place where some of our planet’s earliest forms of life came to be and are still being formed. It’s a comforting image to look at and reflect on, in a beautifully desolate sort of way.

darkening sky
a revenant’s strands
on bedrock

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A video about the Mammoth Terraces is at <https://www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/geysers-hot-springs/mammoth-hot-springs-inside-cave/>. For details on the geysers, see <https://www.yellowstonenationalpark.com/geysers.htm>. Here’s an excerpt:

“Travertine is the mineral formation responsible for the famous Mammoth Terraces. The mineral—calcium carbonate [we consume it in antacid tablets]—is carried to the surface like sinter [a hard deposit], but dissolves in heated water and precipitates or deposits into rinds or terraces as the water cools and evaporates...Calcium carbonate is white when fresh and ages to a dull gray, but in the run-off channels various colors of algae and bacteria add their brilliance, highlighting the delicate travertine draperies.” The field guide goes on to state that Yellowstone’s “thermophilic hot-water-loving species [of bacteria] may be remnants of some of the earliest life on earth.”

“Corner of Studio” by Emily Eve Weinstein with a Senryu & Comments by Richard S. Straw

I'll share a few thoughts about Emily Eve Weinstein's painting, "Corner of Studio," and my response to it in a senryu, which is a haiku-like poem. First, here's the poem:

window view
the play within the play
of an artist

Viewing Emily's painting initially made me long to sketch and draw again. (Maybe I will, someday.) Looking at her painting more closely caused me to write my senryu. My poem's second line ("the play within the play") merely repeats the name of a well-known dramatic technique. William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* contain plays within themselves (also known as "dumb shows"). Artists, too, sometimes include paintings *within* their paintings.

In Emily's painting, we notice more on a second look than we might initially have perceived on a first look. First, of course, she offers a detailed interior view of the bright and cluttered orderliness of her studio. Second, she also provides a glimpse of an exterior landscape through her studio's window. This latter view presents to me what Henry Marvell, a 17th-century metaphysical poet, calls "a green thought in a green shade."

I've tried to replicate this "nesting" technique by enclosing my senryu's whimsical second line *inside* a matter-of-fact first and third lines. I'm also offering a couple of connotations of the word "play" (that is, "playfulness" and "pliability").

window view
the play within the play
of an artist

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A *senryu* is defined by the Haiku Society of America as "a poem, structurally similar to haiku, that highlights the foibles of human nature, usually in a humorous or satiric way." In contrast, "a haiku is a short poem that uses imagistic language to convey the essence of an experience of nature or the season intuitively linked to the human condition." See the following:

<https://www.hsa-haiku.org/hsa-definitions.html#:~:text=Senryu%20definition.word%20or%20a%20grammatical%20break>.

Learn about Marvell's "The Garden" at [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Garden_\(poem\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Garden_(poem)).

“Forgiveness” by Lani Chaves with a Haiku & Comments by Richard S. Straw

I’ll share a few thoughts about my haiku response to the watercolor painting, “Forgiveness,” by Lani Chaves. First, here’s the poem:

first confession
a child skips into
morning light

My haiku response was guided by the title that Lani has given to her painting, “Forgiveness.” I thought, *What does it feel like to be forgiven?*

In the haiku, I imagine being a child again, someone who has been caught in the act of doing something wrong—telling a lie, for example. Rather than face a timing out or worse after confessing to the misdeed, the penitent child is given a hug, as well as kind words of unconditional forgiveness.

The child reacts to this perhaps unexpected gentleness by looking up, not into an angry face, but into billowy clouds in a blue sky. And the child feels relief, even joy, and has a sense of floating like a cloud and wants to celebrate.

This feeling of release reminds me of Henry David Thoreau, who concludes his most famous book, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, with the following words:

“The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.”

first confession
a child skips into
morning light

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Ceremonies and words to be used during a confession vary across the world’s religions. For an overview and sampling, see the following: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession_\(religion\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession_(religion)).

Learn about Thoreau and his writings at https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_David_Thoreau.