

*Invisible Tea: Kyle D. Craig's Haiku  
With A Childlike Sense of Wonder*

by  
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*Invisible Tea* by Kyle D. Craig is an incredible haiku collection that invites us to look beyond the surface level of everyday life and illustrates a very refreshing and whimsical perspective of the world around us. This is acknowledged in Craig's heartfelt dedication at the start of the collection which reads, "To my wife, Cassie Nelson Craig, for encouraging my dreams, and my daughter, Iris, for teaching me to see the world in new ways," (*Invisible Tea*, 3). Craig's family, especially his daughter, is clearly one of his greatest inspirations for his writing, so it should be no surprise that some of these haiku are references to his family, one of which is the titular poem.

high noon  
a toddler pours  
invisible tea

Kyle D. Craig, *Invisible Tea*, 10

Upon reading this haiku for the first time, I was reminded of a mantra that one of my acting professors used say upon completing our scene showings. "I enter into a childlike sense of wonder; giving and receiving with kindness and compassion." Though this is only the first line of the mantra, I feel like this encapsulates not only this particular haiku but also Craig's overall writing style. It reminds us of that childlike sense of wonder.

In this haiku, I envision a toddler (which I assume is Craig's daughter, Iris) playing in the yard. The sun is shining brightly overhead. It's the perfect day for a tea party. She runs to the shed and starts dragging out plastic lawn chairs from the backyard shed and is setting them up in a circle around a garden table. She runs back inside and grabs the tea set that she got last Christmas and starts setting it up around the table. Finally, she goes inside to personally invite each one of her stuffed animal friends to the garden tea party. She laughs. They laugh? We don't know about what. It's a private tea party after all. Hours pass, and as the conversation continues, she continues to fill everyone's teacups from the bottomless teapot.

This childlike sense of wonder seems to be a central viewpoint throughout Craig's book. As stated in his acknowledgement, he has his daughter to thank for that, which is why there are several haiku outside of the title haiku that reference a toddler. But there is one haiku about his daughter in particular that doesn't use the word toddler — the one immediately following the title haiku.

my daughter's eyes...  
the way raindrops  
cling to irises

Craig, *IT*, 10

This is perhaps my favorite haiku from the author's entire collection because there are so many meanings that can be interpreted from it. In the first line of the haiku, Craig mentions his daughter's eyes, which to me is a tremendously powerful image. When you look deep into someone's eyes, you are able to see your own reflection in them. But the author is not looking into just anyone's eyes. He is looking into his daughter's eyes — the eyes of a child. And as he stares into his daughter's eyes, there is a moment of contemplation, shown by the ellipses at the end of the first line.

The following two lines are what really make this haiku so beautiful. Before I talk about the image of raindrops, I would like to explain why the use of the word “irises” in the final line is perfect for three reasons. First, Iris is Craig’s daughter’s name. Second, the word iris references back to the image of eyes. And finally, the author is likely comparing his daughter’s eye color to the flower, which come in a variety of colors. I also think of the way that raindrops refract light and almost “blur” the color of the object that they’re resting on.

Circling back to the raindrops image and taking into account the image of eyes, the first thing that comes to mind would obviously be tears. But tears of what though? Joy? Sadness? Perhaps it doesn't matter. Maybe the point of this haiku is to illustrate just how different a child’s point of view is from an adult. Children understand things differently than we do. What makes a child laugh with delight, may not be funny at all to an adult. What makes a child cry in heartbreak, may be the most trivial thing in the world to an adult. Just as well, what stresses adults out in everyday life, children have no comprehension of. As Craig stares into his daughter’s eyes, what does he see in her tears? How does his daughter see him? This haiku has a very meditative quality to it, as if Craig is trying to stare into his daughter’s eyes so he can once again experience what it’s like to see through the eyes of a child.

What I absolutely love about this collection of haiku is that Craig will often throw in a short story or prose section (haibun) before certain haiku which I think help the reader in gaining a better understanding of the artistic vision for each one. One of my favorite haiku is part of a haibun titled “Screened-In Deck.” In this poem, Craig compares his spirit to “a garden hose in winter — coiled and closed in a box,” (15). He expresses his desire to be a part of the outside world by using a lot of images of animals in nature. At the end of the poem, says that for now he will stay locked in his screened cage and talks about man-made items such as pens, a cup, and even also a sleeping pet to contrast the idea of freedom and images of animals in nature. This poem leads up to this haiku:

star filled sky  
through a crack in the shed  
raccoon eyes

Craig, *IT*, 15

Reading this haiku and taking into account the poem leading up to it, I immediately think of winter. Though it’s pretty in terms of scenery, winter is not always a pleasant time to be outside. The sun goes down extremely early, temperatures drop, and we want to get back to our homes as quick as possible. We don’t want to be outside necessarily but being cooped up inside for too long proves to be mentally taxing as well. In the first line of this haiku, there is the image of the star filled sky. This line reminds me of the beauty that can still be found, even when it is dark and freezing outside. It also strikes me as a reminder of what’s to come because when I think of starry skies, I typically think of summer.

The next two lines of the haiku complements Craig’s pre-poem but not in the way that one might expect. As I mentioned earlier, “Screened-In Deck” uses a lot of imagery of animals in nature. For example, “I want to scurry behind the squirrel who walks the tightrope along a telephone wire or roll my skin in the soil and grass like a lab without a leash,” (15). But just as we become more active in warmer weather and stay inside during winter, so do many animals. I imagine the author staring outside the window at the clear night sky, longing for warmer weather. As he’s doing so, he notices a pair of eyes peeking out of a crack in the shed. This draws a parallel between the author and the raccoon. Both are trying to stay warm and are just waiting until they can go outside again and go about their business without worry of freezing. Craig desperately wants to be a part of nature, but a moment like this almost makes one question how much they already have in common.

It's clear that family and nature are both of great importance to Craig. But it's not just the ideas of these themes that makes them so interesting. It's the fact that he draws so many parallels between them and that there is almost a sense of questioning towards how he fits into his relationship with both of them. To examine both of those relationships a bit closer, I would like to analyze a haiku in which both nature and family are mentioned.

creek stones  
my toddler believes  
I walk on water

Craig, *IT*, 22

As children, sometimes our family members would show us magic tricks to try to entertain us. Being children, we completely believed in it. We didn't see the quarter tucked behind their hand when they pulled it out of our ear. We didn't thin string attached to the levitating card. As children, we genuinely believed in the magic, and as we grow up the illusion begins to break. What I love about this haiku is that it illustrates both the adult and child perspectives.

I envision the author on a walk with his wife and daughter along a shallow creek near their house. The water is flowing swiftly but also gently. As they are walking, the author notices some rocks peeking just over the surface of the water that he can use as stepping stones. As he balances himself on the rocks, his daughter takes notice and wonders with amazement how her father is walking on water. Although the words "walk on water" in the final line are a reference to Jesus Christ walking on water, I do not believe this haiku wants us to focus on the religious aspect of it. Rather, I think it is asking us to examine "the rocks in our lives." In the first line, the author mentions literal rocks. We have already established that nature brings him great joy, so just as he is balancing on the rocks now, nature has acted as a huge rock in his life.

Then we have the daughter looking on. She wonders how her dad is able to walk on water. Her dad has to be the coolest dad in the world. Although the author knows the truth, seeing the delight in his daughter's eyes fills him with a sense of completion, and he is once again reminded of that childlike wonder. She is his rock, just as he is hers. Though the magic of childhood will fade overtime, this shared experience adds to the strength of the bond that they share with each other.

Some philosophical questions that kept coming to mind as I read this collection (especially with the "toddler" haiku) is, when do we lose our sense of childlike wonder? When we first see the coin being palmed in our relative's hands? When we discover Santa or the tooth fairy isn't real? Do any of us actually remember that moment? Better yet, why do we lose our sense of wonder? Is it something that just happens naturally and inevitably as we mature? Or is it because we are conditioned as we grow up and are a result of our surrounding environment? These questions stirred around in my mind the most while reading the next haiku that I am analyzing.

Before I get into the haiku itself, it's worth noting that there is a haibun titled, "Morning Stroll." In the first half of this haibun, Craig once again expresses his desire to be a part of nature after seeing a sparrow fly away. The second half of the poem says, "watch small coins tucked in my pockets spiral down and scatter across the earth, see them discovered by small children who swoop in with beak shaped hands, make several tiny hops, then take flight."

I find this to be incredibly powerful because the author once again combines nature (sparrow, beak shaped hands), with the artificial (money) to create an image of growing up. The children grabbing for the money now have an understanding of the world and can go off and experience it for themselves, but in growing up and having this understanding perhaps they have lost some of their wonder. This haibun leads up to this haiku:

cherry blossoms  
 not knowing their name  
 the toddler points

Craig, *IT*, 25

The first thought that comes to mind when reading this haiku is spring. Cherry blossoms usually come into full bloom in the spring around April, but they typically only last for two weeks before they start to fall. Because of this, cherry blossoms can be viewed as a symbol for how life is temporary and how change is inevitable. But in the author's moment, he and his daughter are appreciating the beauty of the present moment.

In the second and third line of the haiku we once again get a sense of childlike wonder. With the context of the pre-poem, I'm assuming that what the toddler is pointing at is sparrows. Perhaps she doesn't know that the birds are called sparrows. Or perhaps the child wants to form a more personal connection and actually give them names. Speaking from personal experience, when I was young, one spring there was a bird's nest under the roof of my grandparent's back porch. Since I was there basically every day, I watched the eggs hatched and ended up naming each of the hatchlings. Either way, there is a level of innocence that is portrayed in this haiku.

But to delve a bit further into this one, the final line is what really made me think about all of those questions I had earlier. Pointing is something our parents and mentors tell us is rude to do. We shouldn't point at others. But what the toddler is pointing to in this haiku is the sparrows. There's nothing necessarily rude about this, and perhaps I'm looking too far into this, but the image of pointing along with being a toddler reinforces this idea of childlike innocence. She does not have the same grasp on social "norms" as adults do, but still has a greater sense of curiosity than most adults. Taking this and tying it into the image of cherry blossoms and changing seasons makes me think of how soon that sense of wonder will begin to fade.

Perhaps it's not losing the sense of wonder that we have as children, but just disconnecting from it. It's still there, but often times the pressures of the world prevent us from taking the time to see things in a new light. We have deadlines. We have bills. As adults, we take on a lot of responsibility. At times it can be incredibly overwhelming. It seems that Craig wants us to remind us of these moments where we can still connect with our wonder, even if it doesn't seem to be anything particularly special.

In another haibun titled "Sometimes a Pleasantness Comes," Craig notes how sometimes we just don't have the energy to meet the day. We don't want to go to work, or do chores, or anything at all. I cannot speak for everyone, but when I feel slumped like this, I sometimes start to feel a bit depressed. I feel like I could be using the time to get homework done, or memorize monologues, or fold laundry, or any number of things. And on these days, rather than experiencing joy from the downtime, I experience guilt. Work still clouds up my life to the point that it affects my downtime. But in these moments, we must still try to find some joy.

office window  
 the fake green plant  
 starting to grow on me

Craig, *IT*, 27

Craig starts this haiku with an image of an office window. Though this was mentioned in an earlier pre-poem, Craig noted compared his house in winter to a screened cage. In this haiku, the office is also a screened cage in its own way. Outside you can see freedom. You're just waiting for it to be 5:00 so that

you can clock out. That's still six hours away and you have no more energy after working almost a 40-hour work week. As you're trudging through the day, I imagine trying to find any possible way to distract yourself. You're staring out beyond the window, and then your focus comes in a bit closer. Sitting inside the office with you is a plastic green plant. Sure, you know it's fake, but the way it catches the sunlight coming through the window almost makes it look real. You never really noticed it before. It's just always sort of been there. But now that you've overworked yourself, anything that's not work related seems super interesting.

What I really appreciate about this haiku is that it combines the natural and the artificial into one thing. To me, this haiku is about finding the balance between work and play. Work is important, of course, but if we lean too far into it, we overexert ourselves and lose the joy.

But as we all know, life is not always sunshine and rainbows. We can't always approach everything that we encounter with this childlike wonder and naive optimism. Sometimes, we just have to accept the harsh realities of the world, even if it hurts to do so. In another haibun titled "Desconstruction," Craig states that what makes him mad is when there is something beautiful, but someone chooses to focus on the negative aspects of it. One line reads, "What enrages my soul are persons who witness a beautiful skyline and cannot resist pointing out the pollution is the culprit for the haunting array of colors," (55). Craig goes on to give numerous other examples and claims that he tries to avoid nihilism as much as possible. This makes sense given Craig's admiration for natural beauty. However, the poem ends with Craig being forced to acknowledge some darker parts about life when his daughter asks, "Daddy, is it true we all die?" (55). It is this question the author, or rather his daughter, leaves us to ponder before introducing us to the next haiku.

autumn wind...  
the neighbor's daughter  
using again

Craig, *IT*, 55

After reading several of Craig's other haiku, many of which have this bright, whimsical quality to it, this one might come as a bit of a shock to the reader, especially if they didn't have the context of the pre-poem leading up to it. The haiku starts with autumn wind, which carries a double meaning. First, there is the obvious beauty and joy that comes with autumn. The leaves are changing color, children are jumping into piles of leaves, and Halloween decorations are starting to come out. I believe the ellipses at the end of the first line represents Craig trying to appreciate the beauty of autumn. However, autumn can also be associated with dying since winter is right around the corner. Leaves are falling and plants are beginning to fade. So as the author looks around trying to appreciate autumn, perhaps he sees something like a drug deal or a syringe lying on the ground. The fact that the second line uses the image of the neighbor's daughter also makes me think that the author connects this with his own daughter, thinking about how heartbroken he would be if he were to lose her to a drug overdose. Sometimes there are things that we just cannot choose to look beyond with naive optimism. The world is a scary place sometimes and part of growing up is learning to accept that.

From this point in the book forward, many of Craig's haiku have a slightly darker tone to them. However, they still manage to capture a moment of beauty in spite of the dark element.

dried corn stalks...  
missing the neighbor  
I never spoke to

Craig, *IT*, 56

bath time  
my toddler drowns  
a plastic duck

Craig, *IT*, 62

Once again, I believe this is Craig highlighting the two different points of view on things, the beauty and the reality. Sometimes the two match up. Sometimes they don't. That is what I think makes *Invisible Tea* such an exceptional collection of haiku. It invites us to analyze and question how we view the world around us. Do we see things with the optimism and wonder of a child? Or do we view things as nihilistically as possible? Where is the balance between the two? Perhaps by taking the time to look at things through the eyes of a child and reconnecting with that sense of wonder, we will find the answer.

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### **Works Cited**

Craig, Kyle D. *Invisible Tea*. Red Moon Press, 2016.