

Sophie Kibiger
Dr. Randy Brooks
HN 203
8 November, 2018

The Exhaustion of Humanity Within the Haiku of Dee Evetts

While many may think of haiku as short and sweet poetry about nature or other beautiful things, it is easy to find that there are a lot of haiku about the darker sides of life. In the book *Endgrain: Haiku & Senryu, 1988-1997*, author Dee Evetts writes many haiku that portray the exhaustion of human existence. He does this by painting vivid pictures of exhausted situations. The haiku have common themes of inconvenience, tiredness, sadness, selfishness, and disappointment. These shared themes come together to create an image of a population of exhausted, overworked people. Though many people credit Evetts for his humor within haiku, I have seen another side to them. While he writes many humorous haiku about the funny side of life, a lot of his haiku are also about the not-so-funny side, the side that everyone knows unfortunately well. By simply reading through the book, one could find a haiku that portrays images of exhaustion on nearly every page. The first could be found on page six of the book, where Evetts paints a picture of a tired mother, trying to make her way home.

overnight bus
the young mother
sucks her thumb

Dee Evetts, *Endgrain*, 6

While reading this haiku, I could picture the dimly lit, probably crowded bus that the mother is riding on. She's exhausted, overworked, and she's alone with her child. Perhaps her child has just fallen asleep, and she finally has a moment to relax. But she finds that she cannot relax, she's too wired and paranoid that the child will wake again. She doesn't even mean to suck her thumb, it's just a comfort instinct. It's embarrassing, and people probably stare at her, but she's overwhelmed and needs some sort, any sort, of comfort. Maybe she doesn't even realize she's doing it at all. She just knows that she's feeling the comfort that she's desperate for, and this childish action is the only way she feels she can get it. This picture brings feelings of sadness, anxiety, and exhaustion to readers, and they would most likely feel sympathetic for the young mother and her struggles. We know that it is extremely hard being a young mother, especially if she is a single mother (which, as a reader, I assumed was true of this character). We feel for her, and yet, some may judge her for this small action, and that's the exhausting part for the audience. This character is not the only character that readers feel bad for in Evetts' haiku. This next haiku also paints a picture of a person readers pity:

Immigration
trying again to fingerprint
the old carpenter

Dee Evetts, *Endgrain*, 9

This haiku paints the picture of someone who is completely exhausted by the system. He's probably tired from everything he's had to go through, since immigration is not at all any easy process. He's tired from his journey, from all the waiting, and from all of the paperwork and interviews. All he's trying to do is give himself, and possibly his family, a better life, and the system is making it extremely hard for him. This is probably the second, third, or maybe even fourth time the immigration officers have tried to fingerprint this poor man, and at this point, he's nearly given up on the process. I think this haiku is very relevant in today's times as well. Every day, we hear news about immigration and how hard it is now for people to immigrate to America. We hear things that bash immigrants, and we hear about the terrible things that are being done to

him. That layer of reality makes this haiku even more unsettling. It shouldn't be a crime for people to want to immigrate, and the process should not be as difficult as it currently is. This haiku invokes feelings of hopelessness and sadness on top of the exhaustion that I am analyzing, and like the last haiku, we see a character that we pity that has been overworked by their existence.

unexpected news
she stands staring into
the cutlery drawer

Dee Evetts, Endgrain, 13

The darkest of them all, this haiku paints a picture of a character who is desperate and alone. She's looking for an escape of some sort, for the pain she's feelings from this news is too much to bear. She's exhausted by her inferably sad existence, since someone who is saddened by just one thing wouldn't be tempted by the blade of a knife. This character has probably been through hell, and her mind (along with the rest of the world) is against her. She sees no other way out, and she feels like existing at this point may not be worth it. It's interesting that by having this character stare into the cutlery drawer instead of actually picking up a knife, Evetts has created an ominous, frightened feeling within the audience, since we do not know whether or not she's going to act on anything she may be thinking of. She might shut the drawer and go to bed, she might shut the drawer but come back later. She might pick up a knife, then put it back in the drawer, or she might pick up a knife and harm herself. We have no idea. This portrayal of depression and the thought of self-harm is the epitome of the exhaustion of human existence, and it is terrifying to an unknowing audience. Another haiku on page forty-seven paints a very similar picture:

hateful birdsong
I fight against waking
to another day

Dee Evetts, Endgrain, 47

This haiku has a lot of the same emotion that the previous one I analyzed does. Again, we see a character who is desperate and simply tired of living. They have gotten so sick of living that even the songs of morning birds are painful to them. This person has been through so much, or is so mentally ill, that perhaps nothing makes them happy anymore. They are truly exhausted by their existence, along with the existence of life itself. Unfortunately, this haiku is also relatable to anyone who has ever been in a deep depression, and those who have truly been exhausted by their own existence and the world around them. I feel that almost everyone has been in this place at one point or another, where every day feels like a constant battle. It's no way to live, but it's the way they feel they have to live. There's not an easy fix. For a lot of people, medication or therapy doesn't help, and they're forced to continue living in a melancholy, negative state. And, just like we saw in the last haiku, some people feel that they just need to escape.

Evetts' haiku seem to continue their dark, sad tone throughout the book, now showcasing the exhaustion within relationships.

however close
we push the beds together
the gap between us

Dee Evetts, Endgrain, 18

In this haiku, Evetts is painting a picture of a couple that has grown apart. There could have been an event that triggered this separation, or their love could have simply grown old with time. The unknown answer could be the saddest part of the haiku. In this haiku, I picture a couple on a vacation or staying at a parent's

house where there are only two twin beds. Perhaps they're on a honeymoon, or something along those lines. They push their twin beds together, so they can sleep close to one another, as couples typically do, but they still do not feel like they're close at all. One of the worst things about falling in love is the fear of that love being over, and at a certain point in some relationships, loving each other is the part that becomes exhausting. Evetts knows this, and he portrays the exhaustion well in the haiku by showing the struggle of pushing the beds close and not getting a satisfying result. He shows the audience that this couple is trying, and they're going above and beyond to make things work, but at the end of the day, they're still not happy together, and that's the most heartbreaking part. This story could continue in another haiku on page 29:

silent ride home
she restrains her hair
from brushing my face

Dee Evetts, Endgrain, 29

It is easy for one to see this same couple within this haiku. Once again, we see a couple that is trying to make things work, but the separation between them is just too big. They're both too tired to put in the work anymore. I see this couple in the car on their way home from an event, possibly a work-related event or a family dinner of some sort. They can put on fake smiles and play pretend for these events, but as soon as they're alone, there's no hiding their distance. She's keeping herself as far away from her partner, not even wanting something as small as a piece of her hair to touch them. She's so exhausted from trying to make things work that she's completely given up and is now putting her energy into avoidance. It takes a lot of energy to avoid someone as much as she is trying to avoid him, and that knowledge alone shows us, as an audience, that this relationship is completely at its wits end. While in this haiku, we see the female partner having trouble with the relationship, this next haiku gives the male's perspective:

first weekend
his wedding ring
chaffing a little

Dee Evetts, Endgrain, 30

This haiku has the same energy as the previous two, and once again, we see the exhaustion of human existence within a relationship gone awry. Now, we see that the male partner is having relationship troubles of his own. Perhaps this haiku is a reflection on the past, or maybe the couple decided to go through with marriage even though they knew they both weren't happy. The image of the chaffing ring is the first sign that this may not work out, and it gives us a glimpse into the future. It's a horrible feeling when your ring is uncomfortable or doesn't fit right, and it's almost like a bad omen. I myself know exactly how this feels, and just as predicted, things didn't end well. Maybe this is the first thing that makes him question the relationship, or maybe he's been questioning it for a while, and now he has an unfortunate answer to his sad question.

The next two haiku I have chosen to analyze show the exhaustion of typical, everyday experiences that most everyone can relate to.

loud applause
for the last speech
before lunch

Dee Evetts, Endgrain, 17

This haiku is relatable to people in all different situations. Students and workers alike know the feeling of having to get through boring speeches from other classmates, bosses, coworkers, and executives. They're

never really interesting, and they're always too long. You find yourself staring at the clock, counting down the minutes until it's over. And this is an everyday occurrence for a lot of people. We're all just going through our days, minute by minute, waiting for the next boring thing to happen. We look forward to days off, so we can have the chance to choose what we do for just a day, but some people don't even get to do that. Some still have to work or focus on other responsibilities they have outside of work. There's no escape from the cycle. It's completely exhausting. When did a lunch break become the fun part of our days? It's a sad reality for many people, and it's something that unfortunately will most likely never change.

In this last haiku, the audience sees a true example of human exhaustion. It's something we're all guilty of, and we all know the tired feeling that comes with this thought:

how come
whatshisname
never speaks to me

Dee Evetts, *Endgrain*, 30

As I stated previously, it's a thought we've all had. We don't even remember the name of the person we're referencing, and yet we're upset that they don't speak to us. It's a classic scene: You see someone you hardly remember from high school at the store and they don't say 'hello' to you. How could they not say 'hello'? Even though you don't say it to them, they definitely should have said it to you! It's a very selfish, silly thing to be upset about, but it's something everyone has done in their lifetime (or, if they haven't done it yet, they definitely will eventually). We're all exhausted. Too tired to remember their name, sometimes too tired to remember how we even know them, but never too tired to complain about something silly.

Dee Evetts' haiku paint many different pictures, and they are not all unhappy. Many do know him because of the humor they see within his haiku. I believe some of his best haiku are those that depict the exhaustion of human existence. By using vivid imagery to describe everyday occurrences, Evetts shows his audience just how exhausting our human existence can be. We are all tired. We are all, in our own ways, unhappy. Yes, we can laugh at ourselves about this, but it's also okay to just be upset. Sometimes it's almost humbling to see other people or characters that are just as sad, lonely, anxious, and exhausted as we are, because sometimes we don't even realize or accept exactly how hard things are going for us. I believe that is the appeal for these types of haikus. They're completely relatable, and even though they often have sad tones, they're enjoyable to read. Evetts has a way of portraying these emotions gracefully in only three lines, and that's a part of the magic of his haiku. As an author, he is able to write haiku that are both silly and sad, and that's one of the best parts of his work. No matter what you are feeling, he has haiku that will work for your mood. His imagery and use of language to paint vivid pictures is superb, and it sets his haiku apart from others.

Works Cited

Evetts, Dee. *Endgrain: Haiku & Senryu, 1988-1997*. Red Moon Press, 1997.