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### A Reader Response Reflection on Haiku by David Lanoue

David Lanoue describes himself as being “a translator of Japanese haiku, a teacher of English and world literature, and a writer of haiku and ‘haiku novels’” (*About Me, Haikuguy.com*). Lanoue has published seventeen haiku-based works, be it his own or translations of someone else’s. After reading through *My Journal with Haiku Sprinkled in* by David Lanoue, I found his careful examination of the mundane to be fascinating. He does a really good job at taking fleeting moments and preserving them in art. Lanoue picks up on individual aspects of everyday life and finds deeper meaning there. He wrote this book to be published on the 200-year anniversary of a similar journal published by Issa, one of the foremost Japanese haiku artists, who also happens to be one of his favorites. Lanoue has spent years translating Issa’s haikus and has learned from his work. This journal takes us through four years and four different seasons of his life and gives us a glimpse into his world. One thing that really attracted me to this author is how he controls his tone to create both very serious and very playful haiku.

translucent nails  
the light  
of her phone

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p10

This haiku is a perfect example of finding deeper meaning within the mundane of every-day life. He is able to capture this very moment of what I imagine is a woman sitting there tapping away on her phone with acrylic nails. The sound that comes from that action is so specific yet so quickly recognizable. This haiku also gives a very detailed image in my head in the way that he describes the translucence of her nails being illuminated by her cell phone. I imagine long white French-tip nails with a blue light shining through the bottom of them. This is only the second haiku that Lanoue writes in his book, and you already get the sense of how good he is at capturing single moments in time. I also think it's really interesting how he manages to focus on just the single subject and excludes the surrounding. We don't know where this is, what time of the day, or any other surrounding details; all we know is this woman and her phone.

a death in the family?  
no  
a B in English

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p24

This haiku resonates with me a little too personally. Growing up, I had always been put into enrichment or gifted classes. Though this was fine at the time, it would eventually bite me in the butt. I remember in 7th grade when I came home with a report card that had my first B minus on it. I remember being terrified that I was going to disappoint my family and that I wouldn't go on to engineering school like I was planning. I walked through the front door and just immediately started crying. Looking back now, I realize how silly and foolish this all was and how little a grade that wasn't even that bad in 7th grade has no real impact going forward. I also find it mildly ironic because I am now going to school for theater and not engineering. This haiku is a really good example of how Lanoue witnesses moments in time that, for all intents and purposes, wouldn't matter in a week, and then immortalizes those moments in time via haiku.

my neighbor  
howls at his dog  
"Stop barking!"

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p34

This haiku is one of Lanoue's more comedic pieces that still falls into the category of a mundane moment. Here, he juxtaposes the neighbor yelling with the dog who's barking. One thing that I find really interesting is that in this haiku he doesn't talk about the noise that the dog is making, but he only comments on how loud his neighbor is yelling. He also uses the word howl specifically to describe his neighbor when that is typically an adjective attributed to a dog's bark. Another thing that I really like about this haiku is how the last line flows out of the top two. I feel like the rhythm and tone of this poem works together really well.

the pigeon's  
three-point landing  
feet and ass

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p49

This is another more comedic haiku from Lanoue. When I read this haiku, I imagine an old man sitting on a bench in a park in the middle of a big city on a nice spring day with a loaf of stale bread that he's feeding to the birds. And then I imagine that one bird bigger than the rest flies off from his perch on the nearby statue and lands right next to the old man in hopes of a meal. I can't help but think but as the man grabs the next handful of bread, he lets out a brief chuckle from watching the bird land on its butt. I really like this haiku because it truly is just one part of the story. Haiku are meant to be up for interpretation and sometimes relies on the reader to fill in the blanks. Another reason I like this haiku is because although haiku and poetry in general can sometimes seem a little pretentious, this haiku plays to some lowbrow humor in the last line. Again, we see Lanoue take a brief observation that is now saved and given birth to by the sharing of this haiku.

a motor scooter  
texter  
puddled streets

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p59

Before this haiku appeared in the book, Lanoue discussed several different vacations that he took following his sabbatical. This scene that he has created feels very European to me. In these three lines, I feel like there is a painted picture in front of me. In my head I see a Thomas Kinkade style scene in the middle of a bustling city where all of these individual pieces of the puzzle coexist. The rhythm of this poem is very interesting to me because the triplet feels like a list. For example, in my head I read this as if it were to say, "a motor scooter, a texter, and puddled streets walk into a bar." This poem feels like it's in a very raw form, almost as if he had only caught a glimpse of what was on a street and then was asked what all he saw.

breaking the mosquito's  
tiny bones  
a pretty girl

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p82

This poem is clearly about a girl smacking a mosquito that landed on her but it takes such an interesting perspective on that moment and that's what I really like about this haiku. Firstly, I think it's a really cool

perspective to think about a mosquito having tiny bones. Mosquitoes are insects which means they possess an exoskeleton made out of proteins, not quite an endoskeleton with bones like humans have. The first two lines of this poem Make me think of a crunching sound as if the bones were actually broken. Secondly, I really like the juxtaposition with the third line because of how it describes the person. Both the words pretty and girl hold delicate and dainty connotations with them. When you think of something being pretty, it typically doesn't correlate with violence. Likewise, when you think of the word girl, generally you think of young, feminine, or weak, based on what society has conditioned you to think. He juxtaposes this murder of an insect that he has anthropomorphized to the killer being a sweet and innocent girl.

final exam  
the steady scritch-scratch  
of pens

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p167

This haiku is very interesting to me for multiple reasons. At first glance, I read this poem from the perspective of a student and all of the stress that comes with final exams. In an otherwise silent room, the sound of students furiously writing is deafening. This haiku already had a meaning to me the first time I read it, but then I remembered something. I remembered that Lanoue is an English professor at the Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. the interpretation of this poem changes completely when you look at it from a professor's perspective. In my past experiences, professors during final exams are generally grading other work or are doing something else in the class, so the idea that a professor focused into the sound of pens and pencils gliding across paper is interesting to me.

someone else  
couldn't sleep  
the warm toilet seat

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p176

This haiku is actually the one that made me want to write this paper about Lanoue in the first place. This poem is the first one where I noticed his mundane moment style. I thought (and still do think) that this is one of the funniest haiku based on its structure. In the first two lines he gives us a statement that someone else must have recently been awake. I love that the third line switches it up and tells us how he knows that statement to be true, because the toilet seat is still warm. I also find this one really interesting because of how universal the notion of sitting on a cold versus warm toilet seat is. This haiku also implies some things about our subject.

five snowplows  
attack the runway  
white billows

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p182

The imagery in this haiku is really impressive. There have been a few spring breaks now that I have either been leaving or returning to the Bloomington, Illinois airport in a blizzard. It's a really pretty sight to see all of the flashing lights of the airport as snow falls down to the tarmac. Inclement weather can often be pretty scary when you are about to be 30,000 feet in the air, not to mention the delays for de-icing planes. Whether you thought that it was pretty outside, or you were terrified to fly, writing a poem about that moments is not something I would have thought to do. I also like the imagery of snow drifting and billowing in the wind. The words he chose make this haiku feel very fantastical.

year's first morning  
first  
hangover

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p189

This particular poem stretches a little longer than just one mundane moment, but still very much fits into Lanoue's style. However, I still think it plays into the same idea of pulling meaning out of the unexpected. If I were to be asked to write a haiku about New Years, I can almost guarantee that it would be about New Year's Eve and not New Year's Day. Nobody wants to remember the morning after, especially if it means as far as this haiku's structure goes, I find it really neat that the first line is longer than the others so it overhangs, or hangs over rather.

hospital waiting room  
the next person's  
scary cough

David Lanoue, MJWHSI, p201

I chose this haiku to discuss last because of how timely it is. A person coughing near you in a normal year is scary, but this year it could be deadlier than ever. Again, this is an excellent example of capturing a mundane moment. How often do we even notice somebody else coughing, especially when already in a hospital waiting room, presumably waiting to be seen himself? I also find it interesting how necessary the adjective 'scary' is in this haiku. Without that word, this haiku wouldn't flow or have nearly the impact that it has. Scary also plays well with the hospital waiting room imagery; it makes me think of a short horror film that I watched that was set in a hospital.

In conclusion, David Lanoue's haiku transform the ordinary and mundane into something with interest and meaning. He manages to capture brief fleeting moments that typically pass us by. His tones shift very subtly towards either serious or more playful topics. It is clear that Lanoue must have learned from one of the greats like Issa. I am very impressed with Lanoue's work and hope to read more of his haiku in the future.

### **Works Cited**

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