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Global Haiku Tradition  
11 November 2021

### Ty Hadman - Vietnam War Haiku

Ty Hadman began studying Japanese culture in 1964, but it was not until 1966 that he became interested in haiku, when a chance meeting with a barber sparked a long conversation about the art form. In 1968, Hadman was sent to Vietnam, where he kept a personal diary that would later inspire some of his most well-known work. Upon returning from Vietnam, Hadman became a monk at a Hindu monastery. Following his stay at the monastery, he became a wanderer until he settled in the San Francisco Bay area. Today, Hadman lives in Peru with his family, where he is the Spanish translator for *The Dozen Tongues* annual haiku publication. Hadman first began submitting his work in 1977, and has published two haiku collections: *The Poor Part of Town*, and *Dong Ha Haiku*. The following haiku are taken from the latter collection, which reflects on his experiences as a soldier in Vietnam. Through examination of Hadman's work about his experiences serving in Vietnam, I have been able to gain a glimpse into the harsh conditions of the conflict, the seemingly common moral dilemmas of soldiers who saw no reason for the US to be involved in the war, and the mixed emotions of guilt and relief upon returning home.

Rust colored water—  
not even enough  
to bathe with

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 3

When I read the first line of this piece, my initial reaction was simply... *gross*; rust-colored from what? Obviously, this water isn't clean, but I wonder what it's going to be used for. The second line supplies us with the knowledge that, whatever is in the water and whatever its intended use is, there is little of it. Finally, the last line informs us that Hadman intends to clean himself with it. The piece, now complete, paints a rather disgusting image of a man so unclean that the "rust colored water" was actually preferable to his current condition. The second line adds in the image of him possibly having to cup his hands to scoop it, presumably, from a muddy puddle in the ground. As he cleans himself, I imagine he is careful to make sure the majority of the water is replaced back into the hole, that way he can reuse it. This haiku effectively shows its readers the unhygienic conditions soldiers endured as they travelled through Vietnam.

Heavy casualties;  
I don't give a damn about  
that beautiful moon

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 4

The Vietnam conflict is known as one of the most unnecessary wars in US history, and the trauma caused has affected several generations. Every American was affected, and every American lost a loved one. The first line of this haiku reminds us of that trauma; no one was more affected by the loss of loved ones than the soldiers themselves, who watched hundreds of their friends die. The second line almost suggests that Hadman doesn't care about the casualties. Does his role as a soldier come before his grief, forcing him to move on without a second look? No; Hadman doesn't "give a damn" about the "beautiful moon." I imagine this was inspired by a journal entry from a particularly difficult day. Heavy fighting, then that night, as the men try to rest, they attempt to console themselves with "at least the moon is beautiful tonight," all knowing that there is simply no silver lining to the day.

Men  
killing  
men

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 5

Brief and to the point, this haiku was the first to strike me as a plea for peace. During the years of the war, there were Americans who fully supported the US's involvement, who fully abhorred it, and many in between. While some that opposed the war burned their draft cards and refused to fight, there were quite a lot who felt that they had no choice. This piece, to me, says that Hadman saw no point in the US's involvement; to him, they were killing men no different from themselves for no reason whatsoever.

It's impossible  
to kill all of them—  
mosquitoes attack!

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 6

While still upsetting, this piece brings a bit of humor to Hadman's experience. Reading the first two lines together, I assume that it's another haiku about the needlessness of the killing of other men. Within the context of a collection of Vietnam War haiku, it only makes sense. With the third line, we see that he is talking about the constant pests of the mosquitoes. Several images come to mind from this piece: I imagine when the soldiers first arrive in the jungle, they're extremely bothered by the mosquitoes. At first, they probably tried to swat at them and kill them to avoid being bitten and possibly contracting any carried diseases. However, they will soon have to learn to grit through it, as any extra movement is a risk for potential detection by the enemy. As they learn to endure it, I imagine their skin becomes raw from itching where they've been bitten, and many men succumb to illness.

Crickets stop chirping;  
I awake  
with a start!

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 6

In this piece, Hadman creates an equally peaceful and unsettling image. With the first line, he sets up the idea of a quiet night, the only sound being the chirp of the crickets. The crickets then stop, either all at once or gradually. While at first this could seem like a good thing, it begs the question *why?* Crickets tend to chirp constantly at night unless they sense a predator approaching, at which point they become quiet in order to avoid detection. In the dark jungle, the crickets may have acted as a sort of natural alarm for the soldiers, alerting them to a possible threat. Therefore, the complete silence that ensues becomes more frightening and the soldiers, asleep, are immediately awake and alert to the threat out of instinct.

Peace symbol  
and the word LOVE  
on his helmet

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 7

Another little bit of humor, this haiku points out some irony. In the first two lines, the audience is given the images of a peace symbol and the word “love.” From here, we can assume this piece will be about protests against the US’s involvement in Vietnam, or possibly Hadman’s personal aversion to the war. With the third line, we see that Hadman has been describing another soldier’s helmet the whole time. This reveals that Hadman is possibly not the only person in his group that opposes the conflict and is there merely out of a sense of duty or compliance with the law. It also brings in a bit of irony, musing at the fact that messages of peace are painted on the gear of a soldier.

Sitting in a hole  
wondering what the hell  
am I doing here?

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 9

Yet another piece on Hadman’s own pacifism, this haiku gives its readers an inside look into the rather common periods of long, *long* waiting. In the first line, we are immediately informed about what Hadman is doing: sitting in a hole. As we know, he is in jungle, so this hole is likely muddy and cohabitated by some uninvited friends (namely, insects of any kind). To be dug in like this, Hadman has likely been here for hours on end, and all there is to do is think. In these conditions, a large topic of thought would surely be “why am I here, subjecting myself to this, fighting a war I don’t agree with?”

Waiting for a flight out;  
I watch several new men arrive  
and a tear appears

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 14

At this point, Hadman has almost finished his term in active duty and is about to be sent home. I imagine that he is quite literally waiting for the flight at the moment he is describing here; he is sitting watching as planes and helicopters arrive and depart, thinking each one that comes in might be for him. As he sits here, he sees a group of soldiers that he doesn’t recognize step off of an arriving flight. I imagine that there’s a distinctly different energy about the soldiers who have spent months or even a few weeks serving versus the ones who have just finished training. These soldiers clearly have not seen any combat, because they still hold an air of eager hopefulness. Hadman probably remembers when he, too, was hopeful, but feels none of that now. He sees them, with the foresight of knowing what is in store for them. He might even consider staying and serving longer in their stead, if only to preserve their innocence; but he’s done his time and is run down. He needs to go home now, and the guilt of not being able to help these living corpses causes him to break down and cry. Of all of Hadman’s haiku, this one was my favorite.

The crying boy  
just can’t understand why  
I broke his toy machine gun

Ty Hadman, *DHH*, 14

This particular haiku was written during a ten-day period of rest and recuperation in Japan. Although the soldiers were temporarily reprieved from the punishment of combat, they were still in a foreign place, alone, with no real idea of who they could trust but themselves. This piece really excellently depicts the level of distrust the soldiers developed while overseas — from my understanding, Hadman broke this boy’s toy because he was concerned that another soldier might mistakenly think it was real and shoot him. Essentially,

Hadman was attempting to prevent this boy from being killed out of another soldier's fear. It's heartbreaking that the conflict instilled this much distrust in those who fought, and this piece gives readers insight into that.

In reading Ty Hadman's collection of haiku written about his time in Vietnam, *Dong Ha Haiku*, I have been able to better understand some of Hadman's experience. He was able to communicate his fears and grievances with the war as a soldier, and describe the awful conditions he endured. He depicted a loss of innocence in the soldiers who served in Vietnam, and the guilt they felt upon returning. I will hopefully never experience what he did myself, but reading his work has given me a better understanding of the conflict that scarred generations of Americans.

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