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## The Slaughter

Pamela Lee  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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coming home to find his plane surrounded by spitting demonstrators. Few myths are as wrong. The anti-war movement was anti-military, but not anti-soldier. The troops sent to Vietnam were seen as victims, draftees captured in the prime of their lives and sacrificed to presidential politics. I was in Washington, D.C. during the great Mayday Demonstrations of 1971 and watched hundreds of vets storm the capital, many in wheelchairs or on crutches, and throw their medals back. If the Vietnam soldier was betrayed, it was by the government that sent him in the first place. If the government had had its way, Vietnam would have been the great national secret. It was the *government* that refused to acknowledge its warriors, sending them home as if they had merely been on another tour of duty. It was the *government* that sprayed Agent Orange and other poisons on its own soldiers (and the people of Vietnam) and then refused to accept responsibility, forcing vets to go to court to force proper redress. Often when the vet came home it was in the hippie enclaves that he found refuge. While it was not deliberate at the time, it is now obviously appropriate that the first of the freaks introduced in *Road Freaks of Trans-Amerika* is a limping Vietnam veteran seeking shelter in a mountain commune.

Most film records of the sixties are of crowd scenes, rock festivals, mass demonstrations and riots. Often forgotten is the loneliness of the freaks of Trans-Amerika. The Vietnam vet also knew the loneliness. Even though he had been part of a large army, there were no hollow squares to give shelter and his combat experiences were intensely personal. There would be a special few who understood, but for the most part, his life as a warrior would be carried within. The anti-war hippie was no different in that respect. Though the anti-war movement was large, it offered little in terms of protection, and all freaks knew that once busted or cornered there was no place to turn for help. There are two recurring nightmares from my life. The first is the memory of being escorted along a jail tier and hearing the threatening voices from the other cells calling, "send that pretty long-hair in here, guard!" The other is the memory of a midnight highway and an attack by a pack of vicious mudsharks eager to be patriots by wasting a hippie. Outside of each small community of outlaws was a very hostile world. Much of the story of *Road Freaks of Trans-Amerika* is about traveling from one sanctuary to another across a dangerous land. One of the reasons the huge rock festivals and mass demonstrations were so important to the counter-culture was that they reminded us that we were not alone out there.

Within our shelters we gloried in our outlaw status, giving great loyalty to our own and viewing those on the outside as the enemy. Each act of rebellion, and each retaliation for that rebellion, enhanced our solidarity and our estrangement from the rest of society. I remember hearing then radical Yippie Jerry Rubin proudly declare, "I don't trust anyone who hasn't been in jail!" He was right; jail time or a fugitive's status were all but obligatory proof of one's commitment to the freak revolution.

All social institutions were viewed as part of the establishment's power structure, designed to turn out mindless beer drinking workers and soldiers. If the individual could not be made to conform in school, then the necessity of keeping respectable employment would do the job. If a person still refused to knuckle under as an employee, then there was

either the military and the war or the prison system. I remember lying in a jail cell facing several years of hard time for possession of weed and flag desecration, wondering if I should accept the DA's offer to drop the charges against me if I joined the army. It seemed obvious that the war in Vietnam was not being fought to protect the nation against an outside threat, but was being waged as another tool of internal discipline.

The hardest memory of the war of freak independence was the war between the generations. Parents were society's first line of defense, and if society had lied to us and betrayed us, it was done with the willing cooperation of our parents. The sledge hammer destruction of our parents' values was an important objective, as if each and every one of them was personally responsible for racist institutions and the war. The wounds suffered in those battles have often been the hardest to heal. I think of my mother, whose family had always proudly sent its sons into the military; military service was a right of passage for the young man and for the parents it meant acceptance by the rest of the family for a job well done. I denied my mother that acceptance; in the opinion of her peers, she failed by raising a traitor.

The freak also threatened the families of his or her friends. In the spring of 1971, I spent about a month thumbing across Iowa to different cities and colleges helping organize the Mayday Demonstrations in Washington, D.C. The night I got home I met a young woman, the daughter of one of the town's leading citizens. When she told her father of her involvement with me, he beat her bloody and locked her in a closet. When she escaped, she hit the highway with me and two days later

## THE SLAUGHTER

If I could hear him read again,  
his head on my belly in the grass,  
of Agamemnon, the hero returning,  
of Don Quixote, wiping vomit  
from his friend's mouth . . .

My blood spinning  
from this Merit Ultra-Light,  
chewing on the touch of him  
and his vinegar-rinsed curls . . .

Tell me, lioness, Klytainnestra,  
what was the power  
rising in your body, sword in hand,  
to draw your knight's blood?  
This man laid his soft neck in my lap,  
and fingered, with olive caresses,  
his pages and my legs, legs willing to open  
and enclose him.  
Tell me, Mother of Innocence destroyed,  
the slaughter, did it satisfy?

— Pamela Lee