



Paco's Story

Larry Heinemann

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Paco Sullivan is the only man in Alpha Company to survive a cataclysmic Viet Cong attack on Fire Base Harriette in Vietnam. Everyone else is annihilated. When a medic finally rescues Paco almost two days later, he is waiting to die, flies and maggots covering his burnt, shattered body. He winds up back in the US with his legs full of pins, daily rations of Librium and Valium, and no sense of what to do next. One evening, on the tail of a rainstorm, he limps off the bus and into the small town of Boone, determined to find a real job and a real bed—but no matter how hard he works, nothing muffles the anguish in his mind and body. Brilliantly and vividly written, **Paco's Story**—winner of a National Book Award—plunges you into the violence and casual cruelty of the Vietnam War, and the ghostly aftermath that often dealt the harshest blows.

Paco's Story Details

Date : Published April 12th 2005 by Vintage (first published 1986)

ISBN : 9781400076833

Author : Larry Heinemann

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Fiction, War

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From Reader Review Paco's Story for online ebook

Mrs. Palmer says

An incredibly disturbing story, but powerful as well. There are some scenes of extreme violence, but the voice is true. An important novel for those interested in the soldier's experience of Vietnam-and after.

Laura says

This is a book written by an old graduate school instructor of mine (an instructor whose last class meeting of the quarter nearly got all of us drunk graduate students kicked out of school and arrested [as it turned out, only one of us got arrested (not me) and we all got kicked off of campus. But that's a story for another day, as Larry would say]). My bias aside, however, it's a terrific war (post-war) story told by a ghost. Literally.

Irene says

The writing mesmerized me while much of the content repulsed me. The language was absolutely musical with its rhythm and assonance. The descriptive passages were pure poetry from a lengthy discussion of menu styles to the contents of a small town hardware store. Paco is a Vietnam vet drifting across America. We watch him for a few months while he is living in a cheap motel washing dishes at a little diner. He is doped up on pills and liquor to mute the brutal pain that cripples his body and psyche. The story is told by a ghost that hovers near Paco, one of his dead platoon mates. He narrates both Paco's story as well as that of the medic who found him, the tattooed soldier, Gallagher, the self-destructive young girl who spies on him and so many more. We are asked to watch the gang rape of a Vietnamese teenaged girl and an old Eastern European jeweler talking to his long dead wife through the same lens of gorgeous and vulgar prose. This is a violent, haunting novel, deserving of its awards, but uncomfortable to read.

Serena says

Paco's Story by Larry Heinemann chronicles the war experiences of Paco, the only surviving soldier of the Fire Base Harriette massacre from Alpha Company. The narrative is unusual in that Paco does not tell his own story of his survival or his recovery and ultimate return to the United States from the Vietnam War. Though readers get to know Paco through the eyes of others and his nightmares, Paco is a vivid and lost character in search of peace.

"Paco is in constant motion, trying to get settled and comfortable with that nagging, warm tingling in his legs and hips." (Page 35)

Heinemann's language is raw, scraping down to the guts and bones in his readers, making them cringe, turn away, and stand agape. A number of readers may find the graphic scenes in this novel to be too much, but what makes them uncomfortable are the realities of war and the breakdown of humanity. Paco struggles not only with why he was the only survivor, but how to assimilate himself back into a society he no longer

recognizes once stateside.

Read the full review: <http://savvyverseandwit.com/2010/07/p... ?>

Rachael says

the author was my creative writing professor at texas a&m & he was amazing. i was a bit desensitized to the book, as he had told our class about a few of the more gruesome scenes, so i wasn't as offended by the audacities of war that the american soldiers committed against the vietnamese, particularly the women. larry is a great writer. he also liked me a lot & gave me a's, so that helps. he really liked my hair.

James says

Paco's Story is the simple tale of a soldier who is grievously wounded during the Vietnam War. Heinemann begins the novel by showing us Paco's horrific physical injuries, but really the book is about the equally debilitating mental injuries he carries with him. The writer uses the blunt simple speech of the soldier and small town denizens of Boone, Texas to great effect. His prose is lean and hard. The plot of the story is incredibly simple and is designed not to get in the way of one of the novel's themes, the blind eye that society turned on Vietnam vets upon their return. It is a somewhat ugly book about an ugly subject, and the author tends to make his point in a fairly heavy handed manner at times. Heinemann makes an interesting choice with his narrator that is revealed a little over halfway into the book. Suffice it to say that it isn't Paco, and the story is being told to someone named "James". In the preface the author indicates that he viewed the story as the sort of thing that would be told on a back porch from one person to the other.

I listened to this book on audio, and I found the reader to be excellent. The story was hard to put down once I really got on a roll with it. The novel won the National Book Award. Did this book deserve to win over Toni Morrison's Beloved? Since I haven't read that book, I can't really speculate about it. I will say that at 224 pages Paco's Story is worth your time.

Sarah Funke says

It's no "The Things They Carried," but then it's not trying to be. Depressing but good.

Dan says

How does one write in such a way that every sentence is poetry...?

Dennis Henn says

National Book Award winner? The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote, "Exceptional for its bleak, shared unexceptional reality." It was bleak. Eliminate the gratuitous profanity and the book shrinks by a third. Exceptional for its unexceptional reality. An odd statement. Maybe I didn't get the book. I have read much better books on Vietnam.

Sheehan says

Started out really liking (4stars) the book, which follows a lone surviving vet in his returning travails to the States, but wanted to just liking it (3stars) as the resolution of the story sort of deflated the first 2/3rds storyline. Most of the characters kind of monologue in a not entirely plausible way, but the topics, time frame and perspective of the returning vet and the people he met, were very interesting, and a bit novel from other things I have read.

I had initially thought this book rivaled, "The things they carried" in tone/scope and wondered how I had never heard of this book before picking it up used; then the end sort of summed up to me why this book wouldn't really be taught in a classroom. I'm not gonna spoil the ending, but it has a less satisfying resolution than other veterans novels; and of course I didn't expect a happy ending, but I also didn't feel like the journey was over when the writing ran out either...

Audrey-Uyen Hoang says

Paco's story is written with graphic, lyrical language that brings his horrific war memories, and his trying to fit in as a veteran of a war that nobody really understood, to life. Heinemann writes in an unusual, dream-like way that just draws the reader in, until they feel like they are feeling what Paco feels. He writes of Paco's seemingly mundane experiences and transforms them into something cathartic.

Paco's story has some clever conceits: there is the narrator, who only reveals himself slowly and carefully, as a ghost from Paco's decimated company in Vietnam, and appears to have some companion who he calls James; but we are never told who James is, and why it is necessary for the narrator to tell him Paco's tale. Paco himself is a type of ghost. For the protagonist of an entire novel, we get extremely little insight about Paco qua Paco. Even his odd name, Paco Sullivan, hints at some wider, more humorous story, which is never exploited in this novel. Paco acts more like a ghoul than the narrator, who in compelling ways, is more fleshed out than Paco. We know Paco is wounded physically and psychologically, but we never get his own voice. It is reflected through others, but it lacks immediacy. Yet even with this vital flaw, Paco's story is a moving elegy to war, its victims, both dead and alive, and the confounded human ability to forget the horrible price of waging war itself.

A must read for anyone interested in Nam.

Wendy says

In Larry Heineman's Paco's Story, Paco was the only surviving soldier after a raid that decimated his unit.

With both physical and mental scars, Paco re-enters society, going through the motions of life. Readers are offered a glimpse at how a soldier from that war was treated upon his return, both with disdain and occasional pride. We get an inside look at the horrors of war, and Heineman pulls no punches in describing the war in brutal and honest terms.

Paco's Story began strong, one of those books I was sure would be a five star book by the time I finished. However, I was a little put off by the shifting voice of the narrator as the novel went on. It was inconsistent at times, and therefore a bit disjointed. It is still a powerful book, one I am glad I read, and deserves a high rating and much of the praise it has received.

Johnny says

Strangely hard to find even as we are again mired in a horrible, endless, an increasingly pointless war, "Paco's Story" represents another piece of the Vietnam literature canon, along with the works of Fussell, O'Brien, and other. The opening vignette could be a story in itself and propels the unique narrative within the story. Someday this novel will receive its due

Lois says

Paco's Story is about young Paco Sullivan. Sole survivor of his unit's ambush, he has returned to the States to look for work. Left with painful injuries that require powerful painkillers every day, Paco encounters both curiosity and discrimination from the locals in the small town he ends up in.

Paco's story is written with graphic, lyrical language that brings his horrific war memories, and his trying to fit in as a veteran of a war that nobody really understood, to life. Heinemann writes in an unusual, dream-like way that just draws the reader in, until they feel like they are feeling what Paco feels. He writes of Paco's seemingly mundane experiences and transforms them into something cathartic. A must-read for anyone interested in Nam.

Rob says

what an awful piece of writing. the voice is the most irritating i have ever encountered. on the same page, the tone careens back and forth between pretentious pseudo-literary over-writing (words like "lilting" and "echoous", endless strings of adjectives, dumb similes, and lists of meaningless descriptive details) and larry-the-cable-guy haw haw blather (bangin pussy, smokin dope, gettin some, know-it-all winking nonchalance). and there is no doubt that it is supposed to be a single voice. the owner of the voice is finally confirmed on page 137, and it is one more dumb, pointless gimmick.

interestingly, the voice is abandoned for the last 10 pages, granting a small measure of solace to the reader.

how this won the national book award is totally mind-boggling. at least it was short.

