

REPELLING THE MONKEY
THE "VIETNAM SYNDROME" AND VIETNAM WAR NARRATIVES

BY

JIANJIONG ZHU

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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for the Degree of

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To my wife, Shu Huang

ABSTRACT

Ever since the end of the Vietnam War, the United States has been confronted with a profound sense of political humiliation and military frustration. Labelled the "Vietnam Syndrome," this complex psychological depression initially functioned as the driving force behind America's political will to refrain from any Vietnam-type interventions; subsequently, it has served to fuel the passion for military adventures in areas of Central America and the Persian Gulf. More generally, the Vietnam Syndrome has generated a cultural enterprise which aims to rationalize the American experience of confusion in Vietnam with a view to eliminating the syndrome.

This study hopes to contribute to this larger cultural project by treating the Vietnam Syndrome as simultaneously an extension and an expression of the American sense of loss in Vietnam. Informed by a Zen perspective, the study is primarily concerned with the role which the American "mindset" played in creating its own disorientation during the war and is currently playing in reacting to it. Through an examination of selected novels about the war and diverse cross-cultural documents surrounding the war, the study attempts to explore America's venture in Vietnam as an east-west cultural conflict in a broad sense, and define its consequent experience of dis-orientation in Vietnam and of dis-ease at home. It also attempts to delineate the way that the "Vietnam experience" derived from America's own cultural and historical conditions, which range from the Puritan mentality and the frontier tradition to the culture of professionalism. Finally, it attempts to illuminate the literary vision of an alternative for America to be renewed from the syndrome and argues that the greatest challenge lies in the current dualistic tendency of "curing" it.

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More than any other kind of scholarly undertakings, the completion of a dissertation demands not only the candidate's own diligence but also the appropriate guidance and encouragement of those who have successfully gone ahead. In my own case, I have had the fortune to meet and learn from a number of scholars who are distinguished both in their respective fields and in their shaping of my view of the following study. Thus, I wish to register my indebtedness.

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and at the end helped me to deliver it across cultural boundaries.

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Introduction

The Mind Is a Monkey

If you want...to be the free master of yourself by doing away with your seeing, hearing, and thinking, [you need to] stop your hankering monkey-like mind from doing mischief; keep it quietly under control; keep your mind firmly collected regardless of what you are doing--sitting or lying, standing or walking, remaining silent or talking; keep your mind like a line stretched taut; do not let it slip out of your hand. (Suzuki, *Essays* [2nd series] 95)

--Tai-hui, a 12th-century Chinese Zen master

Ever since the end of the Vietnam War, the United States has struggled to live with what has been called the "Vietnam Syndrome." The term first appeared and was defined in an article published in *The Nation* four years after the war. It was used to describe a pervasive political mood--i.e., "the American public's disinclination to engage in future Vietnam-type interventions" (Klare, "Curing" 321). Over the years, the term has come to include such cultural activities as the obsessive writing and rewriting of American history since Vietnam (Robinson 60). Whether meant in the original or extended sense, the Vietnam Syndrome does not simply identify the war in Vietnam as a problematic event in the history of the nation; more importantly, the condition calls attention to a dualistic way of thinking which first sent America to Vietnam and has since split the country into opposite responses to its military conduct there. In other words, the Vietnam Syndrome has involved a scapegoating process which results in unresolved tensions between, for example, Vietnam veterans and civilians, the government and the Vietnam veterans, and the government and the public. Rather than being conducive to an understanding that may lead to the nation's

rejection of further Vietnam-type ventures, this scapegoating may actually provide a pretext for future interventionism. What seems needed for America to come to terms with its Vietnam Syndrome, then, is not so much an energized attempt to atone for history as a firm grasp of its own present mindset.

As an immediate result of America's political and military defeat in Vietnam, the American administration and especially the American public had vowed a "never again" to military interventions in the Third World. This "will to refrain" produced significant institutional changes, which included "(1) passage of the War Powers Act and other legislative restraints on Presidential war-making abroad; (2) abolition of conscription and establishment of an all-volunteer service; (3) curtailment of covert operations by the Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence agencies, and (4) adoption of the 'Nixon Doctrine' and the creation of surrogate 'policeman' powers" (Klare, "Curing" 321).

Although such institutional changes reflected a dominant noninvolvement sentiment in post-Vietnam America, for other policy makers this attitude was itself the problem that needed curing. Writing in *Fortune* after his dismissal as Secretary of Defense in 1976, for example, James Schlesinger attributed the lack of "worldwide stability" to the erosion of American power: "This growing instability reflects visible factors such as the deterioration in the military balance, but also, perhaps more immediately, such invisible factors as the altered psychological stance of the United States, a nation apparently withdrawing from the burdens of leadership and power" (qtd. in Klare, "Curing" 338).

Evidently, Schlesinger's concern with the debilitating effect of the Vietnam Syndrome was not his alone. In the 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan persistently denounced Jimmy Carter's noninterventionist stance in foreign affairs. Not only did he accuse the latter of bringing dishonor and humiliation to the United States, but he also "promised to make the restoration of American power his 'No. 1 priority'" (qtd. in Klare, *Beyond* 10-11). The fact that he eventually defeated Carter and won the ticket to the White House serves to indicate the extent to which his superpower rhetoric had captured the American voters' imagination. Furthermore, despite the deep sense of wounds from the Vietnam experience, the U.S.'s recent global interventions under the Bush and Clinton administrations suggest that America's appetite as a world superpower remains unabated.

What is also clear is that perspectives on the nature of the American war in Vietnam are intricately related to views and decisions with regard to America's current foreign policies and domestic issues. This correlation is exemplified by the way that Reagan's definition of the American war in Vietnam as a "noble cause" went hand in hand with his implementation of intervention policies during his presidency. More significantly, this political attitude was accompanied by a similar glorification of power in the arts, of which the Hollywood presentation of Rambo stands as an example par excellence. (Of course, Rambo is only one of the films which have attempted to cure the Vietnam Syndrome by glorifying violence. As critics point out in *From Hanoi to Hollywood*, accomplice to the creation of collective amnesia are such films as *Missing in Action*, *Platoon*, and *The Deer Hunter*.) After seeing *Rambo: First*

Blood Part II (1985), for example, Reagan made a widely publicized statement: "Boy, I saw *Rambo* last night; now I know what to do next time." As the more recent American aid to the Nicaragua Contras has indicated, what sounded like a humorous line from the president was in fact a cue to the staging of American intervention in the small neighboring countries. As a remasculinized force of vengeance, however, the victory of Rambo has only partially succeeded in boosting American morale; although a box-office success, the film has also prompted criticism of Hollywood's historical distortion of the war and cultural self-deception.

Since history informs the understanding of the present and shapes the course of the future, the process of writing and rewriting of Vietnam is crucial to the destiny of America. Nowhere, perhaps, has this relationship between national politics and the arts been more closely monitored than by literary critics concerned with the Vietnam War. In *Vietnam in Prose and Film* (1982)--one of the first book-length studies on Vietnam-related works--James C. Wilson perceives a political agenda in most of the artifacts about the American experience in Vietnam. As he sees it, "Almost all Vietnam writers and directors share an apocalyptic vision of the war's end" (2). This sense of apocalypse, for him, serves as a metaphor for the current American cultural crisis (i.e., the unreality, the discontinuity, and the loss of values). In answer to this crisis, he calls on Americans to listen to the words of Vietnam veterans rather than to politicians, and to confront the reality of the war and assume responsibility for the crimes of the nation. Thus, according to Wilson, the writing/directing and reading/viewing of Vietnam works is able to exert a direct influence on the course of

history: "If we try, we can save the next generation from being crucified a decade from now in distant lands whose names we barely recognize now. We can prevent another misbegotten war" (31).

Writing in the same year as Wilson, Philip D. Beidler, a Vietnam veteran himself, shares the view that literature has the power to influence its readers. For Beidler, however, the impact of literature upon readers is more cultural than political. In particular, this impact is created only through "a common effort of signification" made by writers and readers: "when we have learned at what cost [the Vietnam War] was waged for everyone it touched then and now and beyond" (*American* 202). Thus, what distinguishes the body of Vietnam War literature from the literature generated by America's previous wars is what he calls "an architecture of consciousness" (27). In Beidler's words, this "architecture" involves "a commitment on one hand to an unstinting concreteness--a feel for the way an experience actually seizes upon us, seizes all at once as a thing of the senses, of the emotions, of the intellect, of the spirit--and on the other a distinct awareness of engagement in a primary process of sense-making, of discovering the peculiar ways in which the experience of the war can now be made to signify within the larger evolution of culture as a whole" (xiii). In short, the experience of Vietnam can be transformed into political and historical reconstruction only after cultural digestion and absorption. This point is sharpened and reinforced in his recent study, *Re-Writing America*, in which he focuses on the "impassioned effort at literary sense-making" on the part of the Vietnam generation writers and its role in the attempt to "re-write ourselves, and apace, to re-write

America" (xii, 1).

Although equally concerned with the cultural and political significance of Vietnam writings, Thomas Myers argues for a less immediate impact and a different kind of function. As he sees it, the most significant aspect of Vietnam works "is the coexistence of the rigorous representation of specific horrors and surrounding causes and the conclusion, often implicit, that the lessons learned will not affect finally the institutions, policies, and mythologies they expose so graphically and tragically" (*Walking* 31). Thus, instead of changing the course of present history, the Vietnam narratives may serve to conserve "the war's secret history," thereby serving as "accessible conduits for a radically new American sensibility" (30). In other words, his focus is on the way the narratives of the experience may result in a future retrospection, from which a new America will emerge. Consequently, readers are required to pay close attention to the Vietnam writer--what he calls the cultural "point man"--whose narratives serve as historical witness to the war's deformation of the "American self-image" (30).

According to Susan Jeffords, however, the emphasis upon the masculinity of this "self-image" in Vietnam War narratives is itself a major problem. She argues that what is called the "collective consciousness of America" is in effect a male consciousness:

Because it is...unrelated to class and race, gender provides for Vietnam representation a familiar and simple mechanism for the enactment of collectivity at the same time that it contains a clear system of differentiation. The metaphors, rhetoric, and narrative of Vietnam as it is represented within contemporary American culture depend upon the socially-constructed difference of gender for their actualization and effect. It is thus through gender that

Vietnam is being retold and reappropriated into American culture. ("Things" 80-81)

This point is elaborated and reinforced in her later book-length study, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. By foregrounding the gendered structures in Vietnam War narratives, Jeffords hopes that, in the words of Kristen Thompson, "An awareness [of gender difference]...may help change the status of narrative in general for the viewer" (qtd. in *Remasculinization* xv).

Also bringing gender difference to the fore, Lorrie Smith proposes to "disarm the war story." In the same way that the poet and the philosopher, Thomas Merton, saw America's involvement in Indochina as a "narcissistic tautology of war" (116), she thinks that American young men went to Vietnam because of the dominant political and cultural rhetorics which valorized manhood and masculinity. The same language, in her view, still prevails even in "the most polished and well-meaning literary treatments of the war [which] are often implicated in unexamined assumptions, fantasies, and myths rooted deep in the American psyche" (89). Thus, in order to prevent future wars, it is essential to deconstruct the war story by resorting to narrative techniques other than realism.

Equally concerned with the role of technique in depiction of the Vietnam War, Michael Bellamy feels that it is precisely the confusion between violence in reality and violence in play--what he calls "carnage and carnival"--that led America to Vietnam. Just as the real violence in Vietnam had resulted from a false sense of play, so the violence in literary representation of the war has been mistaken for the prototype of violence in reality. Thus, Bellamy observes, imaginary violence is "homeopathic, in

that only an added dose of carnival can demonstrate that, [without knowing it,] we have all the while been carnivalizing" (19). As he further explains, "temporarily suspending the ordinary constraints of behavior and the customary modes of perception can be a learning experience. To step out of our ordinary roles is to see what is usually disguised or even invisible. So too war, especially a lost war, uncovers much that might otherwise remain hidden" (21).

By drawing attention to a tradition of violence in American history, Bellamy brings into focus a developing direction in criticism concerned with the Vietnam War. For example, In *Backfire* (1985), historian Loren Baritz holds American culture responsible for the American participation and conduct in Vietnam. He analyzes America's cultural myths, political conduct, and bureaucratic behavior to explain the way the nation entered, fought, and lost the war. In contrast to scholars and historians who focus on Vietnam in order to understand the war, he focuses on America instead, for "We cannot understand war without understanding culture" (8).

Working in the same direction as Baritz, John Hellmann examines a variety of tales (including best sellers, serious novels, popular articles, memoirs, and films) and argues that the American frontier myth is the driving force behind the American intervention in Vietnam. Myth, as Hellmann defines it, refers to a nation's deep psychological self-identity. It consists in "stories containing a people's image of themselves in history.... A people cannot coherently function without myth. The narrative structures of myths articulate salient patterns that we see in our past and hold as our present value and purpose. A myth is our explanation of history that can also

serve as a compelling idea for our future" (ix). By demonstrating the continuation of the American frontier tradition into Kennedy's New Frontier and later into the literary representation of a new frontier (such as the *Star Wars* trilogy), he argues that Americans see themselves "as having a world destiny intertwined with the fate of Asia" (4). The failure of their mission, consequently, suggests a disruption of the American story and a discontinuation of the American identity. In order for America to restore its special identity, Hellmann suggests, the nation's political and cultural leaders (as opposed to ordinary Americans) will have to recognize the mythic patterns. In this way, America will be re-energized and "can find a new determination to *brave the opening expanse*" (224, emphasis mine).

In *Vietnam in American Literature*, Philip H. Melling explores another aspect of America's cultural heritage and comes to an opposite conclusion about America's destiny. Examining narratives of the Vietnam War through the lens of Puritan ideology--as Patricia Caldwell has done in *The Puritan Conversion Narratives*--Melling sees parallels between the first-generation American Puritans and the Vietnam veterans: "The common core of both experiences was the displacement of the individual from a familiar land." Thus, he regards the American literary response to Vietnam as an expression of "the nature and purpose of a devout mission and the extent to which individual experience supports the philosophy of the state in making that mission" (xiv). As he sees it, "For a reader of literature the 'problems' of Vietnam may [eventually] be seen as 'opportunities' in the discovery of Puritanism" (xvi), and his conclusion is that "Neither in Vietnam nor in its aftermath has the country shown

the slightest willingness to alter its belief in [its] imperial mission" (170). In contrast to Hellmann's study, which seems underscored by a recuperative ideology, Melling's study appears to be more critical of America's way of life.

Equally concerned with the need for self-examination are critics who see the actions in Vietnam as symptomatic of the state of culture at home. Jacqueline R. Smetak, for example, links the soldiers in Vietnam with the anti-war activists at home. In her view, the works by the soldiers-writers have demonstrated one sobering fact: "we who opposed the war were not fundamentally different from those who fought it. It was not a clean war, not on any level, with participants to be neatly divided between them and us, between the good and the bad.... The moral, if any can be drawn, is that those who were sent to Vietnam could not be what those of us back home, opposed to the war or not, wanted them to be. But we could become as they were. And we did" (163-64). Similarly, by locating the source of the Vietnam soldiers' misogynous and racist acts in American culture and "the values inherent in a patriarchal, mass-culture society" (18), Jacqueline E. Lawson is able to identify perpetrators of misogyny and racism with Americans at large.

Consequently, other critics have emphasized that the problematic nature of the American self needs to be resolved through a link with the Other. Focusing on the racial aspect of the issue, Maria S. Bonn, for example, finds it significant that the Vietnam veteran should return to "the mythic space behind the frontier--the home that is left behind and that the soldier is fighting to bring forward" (3). For her, "the home" (as presented in such works as Caputo's *Indian Country*) contains multi-racial

elements with which the veteran must come to terms in order to achieve "cultural and personal harmony" upon his/her repatriation (13). Dealing with the gender aspect of otherness, Milton J. Bates similarly finds it refreshing that certain works (such as Pferrer's *Neverlight*) succeed in demythologizing gender difference.

The ultimate way to understand the war in Vietnam, however, requires seeing Vietnam as the American other. In order to do so, America needs to reshape its basic way of thinking. As Michael Herr expresses it, "a lot of things had to be unlearned before you can learn anything at all" (*Dispatches* 224). Or, as Donald Ringnalda rephrases it, "getting Vietnam right is not a matter of amassing facts; it is a matter of *interpreting* facts, of using both short and long-range lenses, of seeing the facts in the context of America's history, and, finally, it is a matter of looking at one's own accustomed way of remembering, with suspicion" ("Unlearning" 66). Whether through a process of unlearning or of looking at its memory with suspicion, America needs yet to seek an answer to the question of how it may re-orient its way of life as a result of Vietnam.

Although criticism of Vietnam War literature has become increasingly aware that certain elements in American culture are ultimately responsible for America's intervention, frustration, and humiliation in Vietnam, such awareness will be conducive to a cultural re-orientation and psychic reintegration only if it becomes the self-awareness of America as a collective whole. Behind this emphasis on the nation's self-awareness lies my basic assumption: since the American military was present in Vietnam in the name of the nation as a whole (instead of any one segment), America

as a whole needs to assume responsibility for healing the wounds inflicted on the Vietnamese and Americans alike. The position I would like to advance in the following study, therefore, is that the message encoded in Vietnam narratives posits the view that it is only by understanding itself correctly--i.e., *getting itself right*--that America may eventually have a chance of understanding the Vietnam War and its consequences correctly: "getting Vietnam right."

In contrast to the current critical tendency of seeing Vietnam War narratives as being concerned with exposing and disowning the violent and irrational side of America, this study is based on the premise that their primary thrust is the need to accept and embrace America as a whole. Such a stance involves exposing the falsity of America's self-image in Vietnam as crusader for freedom and seeing itself instead as a militarist or imperialist nation foredoomed by its own hubris; more importantly, it involves the nation's courage to look within itself for answers to questions which have arisen from its intervention in Vietnam. This full acceptance of self as a flawed political and cultural entity is made possible by the actual suffering and confusion experienced by the American soldiers in the war zone and is made necessary by the traumatic memories--both personal and collective--which interrupted the return to normal in America's post-Vietnam life. The self-criticism embodied in such self-acceptance is thus essentially different from what Sacvan Bercovitch has identified as central to the American jeremiad, which, by virtue of self-condemnation, has actually served as a driving force in America's political, military, and economic expansions. The type of self-criticism found in Vietnam War narratives is a form of self-

recognition and a form of assuming self-responsibility, which together help to achieve and maintain the co-existence of the self and the other.

The simultaneous act of self-criticism and self-acceptance which these narratives demand of post-Vietnam America needs to be performed at the human (as opposed to the political) level. Such a reorientation, however, is largely inconceivable in the context of American ideology in particular and of Western culture in general. Just as the extreme polarization of "good" and "evil" is characteristic of the American Puritan heritage, so antagonism is the foundation of the Western intellectual tradition. Hence, in order to resolve America's dilemma, what is needed is the adoption of a larger perspective and is specially one which can accommodate the paradoxical concurrence of self-negation and self-affirmation.

This view can be found in Zen Buddhism. In contrast to Western philosophy, Zen posits that duality does not exist in physical reality, but is ultimately created by the human mind. The process whereby the human being can transcend his/her own (mental) duality, therefore, involves the non-intervention of the logical mind, which has been conditioned to see things in terms of binaries and hierarchies. It is a process of the mind emptying itself until it becomes a state of mindlessness—one that is not conditioned by ego and which is free of ego contents. The attainment of this mindlessness marks the moment of the Zen person's enlightenment. Due to the process of self-negation (in the form of emptying the egocentric mind), such attainment is paradoxically called the attainment of the Unattainable. The Zen mindless mind is not attainable by the logical mind but can be attained by abandoning it. In the context of

Zen, this mindless state is not a mental void. It is simultaneously zero and infinite-- infinite because it is zero, and zero because it is infinite. Such a state of mind diffuses the difference between the self and the other.

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As someone raised in the Orient, my general purpose in the following study is to use Zen as a lens for viewing the American experience in Vietnam and the narratives it produced from a different cultural perspective. Because Zen philosophy is alien to Western ways of thinking, such an approach may afford insights that are not available to those who address the matter from within the American mind-set. Such an approach is called for, moreover, by reason of the fact that Zen Buddhism is the major informing spirit in the Vietnam way of life (Thien-An). Thus while I am not at all suggesting that Vietnam War narratives are consciously Zen-oriented, I would like to posit that contact with a people who ascribed to a different (i.e., Zen) philosophy of life may have been an underlying cause of American disorientation in Vietnam and may have stimulated the revisionist thinking about American culture that informs narratives about the Vietnam experience.

Instead of advancing this point directly, however, my strategy will be to use Zen thinking in my interrogation of Vietnam War narratives and criticism to date and in the way my study is structured. My choice of primary texts, for example, could be said to reflect the paradoxical reasoning that underlies Zen. Thus, on the one hand, I

have tried to be *non-selective* and have chosen eleven narratives (limited to the printed media for the sake of practicality) which have been written by both men and women, both veterans and non-veterans, in the period of a near quarter-century. On the other hand, these narratives have been *selected* for their representative quality, both in the sense of the composite make-up of the authors and in the sense of their proven capacity (often in the form of awards and praises) to appeal to a large audience.

In turn, my reading of these narratives is conducted in the spirit of Zen which sees the relationship between the individual and the whole as an organic and dynamic one in that the whole contains the individual and the individual contains the whole. Thus, I attempt both to uncover the constitutive structure of each individual narrative and to illuminate the inherent connection between the narratives. Equally I locate this connection in the authors' common personal experience of the Vietnam War and in their collective American heritage. In this light, I also try to identify the dominant social image or mood (as reflected in historical facts and cultural documents) which corresponds to the thematic thrust and the technical ingenuity of the narratives.

The positionless position with respect to freedom of ideology which characterizes Zen is also reflected in my use of diverse critical methodologies. Thus I employ Jungian psychology at the same time that I engage in deconstructive readings of the narratives. Similarly, while I attempt to theorize about the Vietnam experience, I also conduct close examinations of the specific narratives.

Finally, the organizational principles of my study reflect the Zen concept of integration between self and other/part and whole. Thus thematically, this study

consists of three major sections, each composed of two chapters. The first section explores the nature of the Vietnam soldiers/veterans' trauma. Chapter One focuses on the pervasive phenomenon of dis-orientation--geographical and cultural--that American soldiers experienced in the fields of Vietnam; Chapter Two concentrates on the disease--physical and psychological--that they experienced as a result of the war when they returned to America. The dominant sense of dislocation on the part of the Vietnam soldiers/veterans links the two chapters and serves as a departing point for my subsequent investigation of the causes and the possible consequences of the dislocation.

The second section, therefore, analyzes the major historical and cultural factors that contributed to the production of trauma in Vietnam and in America. In Chapter Three, I discuss the influence of the Puritan and the frontier traditions on the American conduct, while in Chapter Four, I deal with the implications of popular and intellectual traditions in the American way of thought and perception.

The third section is concerned with how Vietnam War narratives suggest ways that America may atone for its destruction and the trauma which have resulted from its intervention in Vietnam. Thus, Chapter Five emphasizes the importance of adopting an internal approach to the understanding of the Vietnam experience, and Chapter Six focuses on the positive results of such internalization.

I must, of course, leave it up to readers of this study to decide whether my approach succeeds better than others in helping Americans to come to terms with the "Vietnam Syndrome." Where I do know that I have been successful is in the way that

writing about this phenomenon has enabled me to see the archetypal dimensions of America's intervention in Vietnam and in the process has enabled me to confront the ghosts of my own cultural heritage: those which haunt my existence by reminding me of the way that I may have succumbed to the attractions of dualistic thinking and those which make me feel that my attempts to convey the Oriental world view are terribly inadequate.

Chapter One

Dis-orientation in Vietnam

"You ought to keep track of that, Captain," the boy said, "that's nothing to make mistakes with. They might leave you in this place a second time. You can't trust 'em. Got to do your own counting. They won't help you, not on something like that. Guess it's a good thing I happened to drive you this morning, otherwise you'd still be thinking you had four months. Sixty days," he said, "that's one thousand, four hundred and forty" (20).

David Halberstam, *One Very Hot Day*

Just as every American private in Vietnam was a short-timer--one who saw military service not as a life-time vocation but as a temporary position--so all short-timers were their own book-keepers, marking X's on their 365-day military tour calendar after each long day of humping, sweating, and counting bodies of both friendlies and unfriendlies. Some bore their calendars on their backs and talked about the days left in Vietnam; others kept a secret account and would feel ominously offended by any FNG (so called "fucking new guys") who should ask them bluntly how long they had been in country (as if they had already been there for too long and should be dead instead). Their near religious act of counting the days (being alive) and their excessive anxiety to survive the tour of duty constituted what was widely known as "the Short-Timer Syndrome." Whereas all short-timers would celebrate their Deros (Date Estimate Return from Overseas), those who experienced the syndrome at its severest would furthermore go through a paranoia--the so called "acute environmental reaction"--

which could prevent them from actually moving out of or away from the place where they had kept themselves safe thus far. Even the final act of transition from Vietnam (the place of danger) to the home world (the place of safety) could in their minds ruin the goal of survival they had hitherto achieved. The Short-Timer's Syndrome reflects the paradoxical identity of an American soldier serving in Vietnam: he was simultaneously a militant and a tourist. The military mission to destroy the enemy along with the accompanying risk of being destroyed was ironically coupled with the curious expectations of a tourist travelling temporarily in an exotic land (for whom mortality was not an issue).

The double senses of obligation and recreation embodied in the American soldiers' Vietnam "tour" invites comparisons to the knightly war game--"tournament"--in the middle ages. Although historians diverge on which is the more important feature of the medieval tournament, they tend to agree on the simultaneous existence of two aspects of the contest: its potential for mortality and its political pageantry. Thus, while a tournament put physical prowess to the test and sometimes involved fatal consequences, "[h]onour, skill in arms, physical address--these were the glorious fruits of the tournament" (Anglo 21). The "glorious fruits" of the knights, in turn, served the King as propaganda. What is particularly pertinent to the present discussion, however, is the extent to which the medieval tournament was a *privileged* contest in which the contestants came from the noble class. "When the knight was killed in this type of encounter, it was a matter of regret to both parties, for the appreciation of chivalric excellence transcended purely national hostilities" (Barker 31).

Similar to the duality of the medieval tournament, the American "tour" in Vietnam featured both the military search-and-destroy operations and the touristic R & R (Rest and Recreation) vacations. Two major factors, however, made the Vietnam "tour" different from the medieval tournament: a) the "tour" was made not by the privileged class of modern "knights" but by the underprivileged/undereducated groups of Americans, and b) the "tour" was made not against a well-equipped formation of "knights" for the purpose of winning honor, but against an unrecognizable enemy in the interests of survival. Thus, unlike the medieval tournament, the Vietnam "tour" was characterized by the short-timers' inability to reconcile the duality of obligation and recreation. In the words of Doc Peret in Tim O'Brien's *Going after Cacciato*, the American soldiers in Vietnam were "touring soldiers" suffering from "nostalgia"--homesickness (164, 172-73). This paradoxical situation provides a key to the contradictory nature of the American experience in Vietnam as a whole: Vietnam was deadly calm, and fighting was terrifyingly exhilarating.

As O'Brien observes in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, the Vietnam generation had been "fed by the spoils of 1945 victory" (20). To them, the paradox of Vietnam was not immediately perceivable. War effort in general was *pro patria*, and killing was for the glory of the corps, if not necessarily for the defense of the country. Under the cogent persuasions and evangelical rhetoric of commanding officers in stateside training camps, Vietnam easily came to be seen as a part of the human body infected by the virus of communism, and the American soldiers were transformed into dutiful surgeons bound for an urgent operation. In *Meditations in Green*, Stephen Wright

dramatizes the travesty which characterizes the pre-Vietnam briefing by having a captain compare Vietnam to China's male phallus and the VC (a derogatory term for the National Liberation Front) to VD: "The bacteria spread, feeding on healthy tissue, until finally the individual dies. Physicians are bound by a moral oath which forbids them to ignore the presence of disease. They cannot callously turn their backs on illness and suffering and neither can we. A sore on the skin of even a single democracy threatens the health of all" (7).

The captain's conversion of the American intervention in Vietnam into a surgical operation on an infected sexual organ is very effective propaganda in that it appeals to a personal threat/reward system: if the recruits do not complete the mission, their own sexual potency will be threatened; if they succeed, they will experience sexual gratification. The captain's rhetoric is underscored by a rationale comparable to that of a WWI poster which portrayed a beast with German features carrying off a frightened beautiful woman. Seen in this light, the rhetoric reflects the knightly concept of chivalry in medieval times. Highlighting the importance of health, the captain's speech is also vaguely reminiscent of the Nazi rhetoric about the Jews which eventually motivated a grisly racial cleansing. As the development of the Vietnam War likewise demonstrated, however, the acronym, VD, in the captain's rhetoric could stand not only for "venereal disease" (since it succeeded in mobilizing millions of American "surgeons"), but also could aptly connote "victor's disease" (since their unsuccessful "surgical" operation originated from the overweening pride of a hitherto victorious superpower).

Whereas the American fear of VD constituted a real issue with respect to R & R in Saigon, uncertainty about sex was not as great as the ambiguities caused by the terrain of the war. In the "Prologue" to *The 13th Valley*, John M. Delvecchio provides an enigmatic description of the Khe Ta Laou river valley--a synecdoche for Vietnam--in which the life forms "had established a stable symbiotic balance" (xvii). With its highly organized and interdependent life system, however, the valley's equilibrium itself becomes a trap for outsiders: "At the most central point of the valley, in a dark and dank cavern created by the gnarled roots of an immense teak tree, a spider reconstructs its damaged labyrinth of silken corridors and chambers. Upon the outermost threads, dew glistens from a single ray of sunlight seeping through the valley mist, creeping through the shadowing jungle" (xvii). Under the dark canopy of the teak tree, the body of the spider appears "blood-red translucent large" and, in its surrounding, there are "vestiges of tunnels and prey traps encapsulat[ing] dried crusted exoskeletons" (xvii). This image of the valley has both sexual and military aspects. While it serves as an unfailing reminder of the symptoms of venereal disease, it is liminally evocative of ambushes and punji traps in the daytime, and of sniping and infiltration at night. Yet the description equally suggests a vision of Vietnam as a place which circumscribed a site of eternal peace and war.

From different angles, other writers share Delvecchio's disoriented vision of Vietnam, and their description of the place is often charged with sexual connotations. For the black sergeant, Pike, in William Eastlake's *The Bamboo Bed*, the jungle possesses a personality that is unfathomable: "You have to know the jungle, Pike

thought. Understand it. You cannot hate it. You have got to learn how to take advantage of the opportunities it presents. The jungle is cruel, hot, wet, stupid, smart, cunning, quiet" (68). In the eyes of Michael Herr's Marines isolated at Khe Sanh, the "full and voluptuous" hills at once invite adoration for their beauty and hatred for their terror (162-63). In *A Rumor of War*, Philip Caputo recalls "the utter strangeness of this rank and rotted wilderness": "Nothing moved in the paralyzed air, and the only sounds were the gurgling of the river and the rustling of those invisible things in the underbrush. It was not at all a tranquil silence. I thought of that old line from the westerns: 'It's too quiet.' Well, it *was* too quiet. There was a tension in the calm, a feeling of something about to happen" (79).

Similar, but more animistic, is the sensation of Stephen Wright's protagonist, Griffin, when he moves deeper and deeper into the jungle: "he had the eerie sense of vegetation thrusting itself at him for *inspection* and comment. Green tongues lapped at his calves, elastic branches tugged at his arms. And there was no end to it. You pressed through one layer to arrive at another just like it and then one beyond that and another and another like passing through *doors* in an *estate* of measureless dimensions." Instead of seeing himself as a surgeon exposing a hidden disease, Griffin feels that the jungle is flaunting itself before him, and it seems that it is his body that is being inspected and his movement is checked. Overwhelmed by the chaotic density of the vegetation as he moves further, he resorts to domestic metaphors in order to secure a sense of order and safety: "The bush was a stifling enclosure--the air as thick and stale as an overinflated *tire*--of gigantic proportions in no need of *tenants* or *staff*.

Collapse and regeneration occurred at the same moment. Buckling *walls* and decaying *furniture* were repaired automatically here in this *home* of the future where matter itself was perpetually pregnant" (260-61, emphasis mine). As his diction also suggests, while observing the self-regenerative force of the jungle, Griffin is already anticipating, with anxiety, his own sense of dislocation when he returns to his "father's house" after the war.

Like the geographical aspect of Vietnam, its cultural dimension--less visible but eminently more present--had an unfathomable quality. For Americans, as Herr puts it, reading the faces of the Vietnamese was "like trying to read the wind" (1). If Americans found Vietnamese men and women in Saigon easy to understand (especially in monetary terms), they were baffled by the silence that seemed to characterize the faces and gestures of the villagers. In *A Rumor of War*, Philip Caputo recalls his experience with a young woman's pure indifference to the GIs' violence inflicted around her: "The girl just sat and stared and nursed the baby. The absolute indifference in her eyes began to irritate me. Was she going to sit there like a statue while we turned her house upside down? I expected her to show anger or terror. I wanted her to, because her passivity seemed to be a denial of our existence, as if we were nothing more to her than a passing wind that had temporarily knocked a few things out of place" (83-84). Taken from the Book of Matthew, Caputo's epigraph for his memoir is thus doubly significant: "AND YE SHALL HEAR OF WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS. SEE THAT YE BE NOT TROUBLED, FOR ALL THESE THINGS MUST COME TO PASS, BUT THE END IS NOT YET.... FOR NATION

SHALL RISE AGAINST NATION AND KINDOM AGAINST KINDOM... THEN SHALL THEY DELIVER YOU UP TO BE AFFLICTED AND SHALL PUT YOU TO DEATH... BUT HE THAT SHALL ENDURE UNTO THE END, HE SHALL BE SAVED." While this is a fitting prophecy for the American survivors, it is also an appropriate description of the enduring Vietnamese.

Equally disconcerting and humiliating--to Tim O'Brien at least--is the episode of "The Man at the Well" in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, in which a "blustery and stupid soldier...picked up a carton of milk and from fifteen feet away hurled it, for no reason, aiming at the old man and striking him flush in the face." The blind old man, hair white and back stooped, "was motionless and finally smiled. He picked up the bucket and with the ruins of goodness spread over him, perfect gore, he dunked into the well and came up with water, and he began showering the next soldier" (103). No less frightening, in *Meditations in Green*, is Griffin's recollection of the dynamic calmness with which a girl of no more than ten years of age held her grenade as she walked innocently toward American soldiers: "Bodies flopped to the ground all around Kraft as men took cover. He could see the grenade now big as a melon in such a tiny fist. He couldn't tell if the pin was in or out. The girl kept coming steadily toward him. 'Stop!' Kraft shouted. 'Dung lai!' He raised his rifle. The girl kept on" (209). Keeping on, as numerous other accounts of the war testify, was what the Vietnamese did: despite heavy losses, they came for more. In turn, the Vietnamese capacity for more losses contributed to the disorientation of the American military in Vietnam.

In the light of the continual westward movement since the Puritan settlements

in the New World, the American military disorientation in Vietnam can be understood in both literal and metaphorical senses. That the American soldiers in Vietnam had moved westward but ended in the east constituted a literal (or geographical) sense of disorientation. In order to re-gain a proper orientation, they not only needed their own ways of keeping time (as indicated by the way the short-timers calculate their days left in Vietnam); they also needed their own ways of measuring space (as indicated by the ways the Americans constructed highways through the jungle and flew helicopters from one base to another). The fact that the Americans were in Vietnam for a speedy victory through a limited war (i.e., limited time and space), however, introduced the metaphorical (or cultural) aspect of disorientation: the uniformed and all-male American military (except for hospital staff) was inadequately prepared to fight against a protracted "people's war" in Vietnam.

The "people's war" was originally conceived by the late Mao Zhedong as the only effective way for China to repel the Japanese aggression during the War of Resistance (1937-45). A people's war in Mao's definition was one waged on the basis of the total mobilization of the people under the leadership of the communist party. In confrontation with a strong enemy, a people's war became imperative for the Chinese communist army because "[t]he richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people" (Mao "Protracted" 260); it was possible because "[t]he sole purpose of this army is to stand firmly with the Chinese people and to serve them wholeheartedly." To the extent that the Chinese communist army was instrumental in resisting the Japanese invasion and was later solely responsible for the defeat of the

Nationalist army, the principle of the unity of the army and the people was effective; the army was to the people as fish was to water (Mao "Coalition" 299-305).

Similarly, as General Vo Nguyen Giap writes, it was also a people's war that the North Vietnamese and the NLF waged against the American military and its South Vietnamese ally ("People's" 41-64). In keeping with the confusing geographical and cultural features of the country, the people's war in Vietnam made it impossible for the Americans to distinguish a soldier from a civilian (since every soldier came from the civilian people and every civilian was a potential soldier). This lack of a black and white division between the military and the civilians unnerved the American army. As early as the "expeditionary" period, for example, Philip Caputo found it incomprehensible that "a battalion full of VC in ARVN uniforms could be defending an American airbase against the VC" (*Rumor* 52). In *Meditations in Green*, what drove First Lieutenant Zachary Mueller to write a history of his intelligence unit was a shocking vision:

The moment occurred near the end of a routine photo mission when, glimpsing movement at the edge of an empty village, Mueller dropped the Mohawk for a quick peek and a scrawny old woman, all arms and legs, darted out spiderlike from beneath a bush, stopped, planted a pair of splayed feet into the ground and lifted to her bony cheek the long wide heavy barrel of an immense rifle, fixing forever an instant in which horizon rim, banana tree and palm, thatch roof and angular shadow, flowing grass and squinting face, spun about a huge dark oily metal hole. (46)

In Wright's story, Lieutenant Mueller never completed his amateur history. Nor did he solve the puzzle of this vortex on the day when he was blown to pieces by a Chi-com grenade, for continually "[f]acts, events, objects, and people, himself included scribbling away" disappeared into the void, "whirling about the *hole*, debris down the

drain of history" (47, emphasis mine).

In conjunction with the question of who was the enemy was the question of where was the enemy. Equipped with advanced technology that provided superior speed and long-range fire-power, the US troops were able to take advantage of open ground and air spaces. By the same token, in reverse, the North Vietnamese and the NFL took advantage of the impenetrable bush and the underground tunnels. While the American tactic was to search and clear (or destroy), the North Vietnamese used the land to trap and to ambush. The mutual focus on different locations to destroy the enemy thus created blind spots for both. In *The 13th Valley*, Sergeant Egan explains the situation in an effort to relieve the raw soldier Cherry Chelini's anxiety about a possible confrontation with the enemy: "Understand? ... Dinks are like wolves circlin a herd a deer. They pick off the weak and the wounded. Or the lazy. You get some of these jokers too lazy to walk around a valley ta get to the other side. Charlie stays in the valleys. We stay up on the ridges. That's our agreement. If you don't have ta go down there, don't. We don't see them. They don't see us. We're happy. They're happy'" (228). Ironically, in the words of the Brigade Commander, Egan's Alpha Company's "historic mission" was to "take the world" and "make it like we want it" (75), which did not make either side "happy." As the direct consequence of its mission, Alpha succeeded not only in "taking" the headquarters of the 7th NVA Front--if only to lose it later again--but also in taking a heavy loss of its men and officers, including its beloved CO, L - T Brooks.

The American encounter with the enemy everywhere and nowhere in Vietnam

created the myth of a phantom enemy. Speaking of skirmishes with the NVA forces, Philip Caputo observes: "Without a front, flanks, or rear, we fought a formless war against a formless enemy who evaporated like the morning jungle mists, only to materialize in some unexpected place. It was a haphazard, episodic sort of combat" (*Rumor* 89). Even in times when there was apparently a front and a rear, as in Michael Herr's account of the Battle of Dak To, the outcome remained formless: "clearly it was another American victory. But when the top of the hill was reached, the number of NVA was four" instead of the claimed four thousand (101).

The most notorious episode in the Vietnam War, of course, derived from the blind commitment of General Westmoreland and the Pentagon to the defense of Khe Sanh, where they wished that they, for once, could have their form of warfare. The complete formlessness of the war, as Herr notes, "was enough to make an American commander sink to his knees and plead, 'O God! Just *once*, let it be our way. We have the strength, give us the terms!'" (102). As Wright observes, in the light of this desire for a last stand, "A wish became a guess, a guess an estimate, an estimate the reality" (*Meditations* 206). But during the six months of strategic maneuver, nothing happened except for the total destruction of Longvei "manned by twenty-four Americans and over 400 Vietnamese troops" who served as a bait (Herr *Dispatches* 119). The irony does not simply lie with Americans' misunderstanding of their enemy's "way" of conducting the war; rather, the irony lies with the fact that they had "the strength" and perhaps too much of it--a point which is evident in the way that American troops spent their energy. As a witness to the actual American suffering and

waste in the fields of Vietnam, Michael Herr is led to marvel in ironic fashion: "There was such a dense concentration of American energy there, American and essentially adolescent, if that energy could have been channeled into anything more than noise, waste and pain it would have lighted up Indochina for a thousand years" (*Dispatches* 45).

Yet what was more agonizing than the waste, perhaps, is the way that Americans attempted but failed to find a way out of the Vietnam which was as much a state of the American mind as it was a foreign territory. Unable to come to terms with the paradoxical character of Vietnam, the war became an American obsession--an us-against-them game that the Americans had to win. Consequently, handicapped by the difficulty of finding the enemy, Americans poured their ammunition on mountains, sprayed Agent Orange over the forests, fired indiscriminately on villagers--VC or no VC--and eventually on themselves in a desperate effort to achieve something--anything! When the "them"--against whom the "us" were pitched--vanished as phantoms, the game turned into one of the "us" playing against the "us." The us/us "game" was not only evident in the soldiers' "search and destruction" of their own commanders for giving them unnecessary dangerous assignments, but also in the way Americans fought each other over the war in Vietnam at home. The American war in Vietnam, then, was a phantom war played out in reality. Or, to borrow William Eastlake's words, it was a "shadow shadowing shadows" (139).

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The way that self-entrapment characterized the American experience in Vietnam is well illustrated in the narrative technique of David Halberstam's *One Very Hot Day*, which, in Thomas Myers's words, is "a variant of prophetic history as the novel, the same finely realized synchrony of particular story and larger association for which [Graham] Greene provided the prototype [in *The Quiet American*] in 1955" (44). Myers's way of demonstrating the "synchrony" of the particular and the general in the novel is through meticulous analysis of Halberstam's characters. This dual perspective, however, is also rendered through Halberstam's skillful use of parentheses--whereby he simultaneously brackets and highlights the needed explanations, the revealed secrets, and the untold stories beside and behind the main storyline. Extending to the political nature of the tour itself, the use of parentheses enables him to provide the different perspectives of the Americans and the Vietnamese and to suggest the way that the latter functions as a corrective lens to the former.

Halberstam uses parentheses pervasively in the novel--an average of one parenthesis every other page. The majority of the parentheses are ironic quips or byplays subversive of the characters and actions in the main text. Some are characters' inner reflections which offer a complexity of perspectives. Others provide details intended to create the effect of satiric comedy and black humor. Not only does the use of parentheses suggest the need to revise and supplement the existing text--whether it be the form or the content--but the graphic aspect of the device also virtually evokes the novel's two major actions: the American walking in circles and the enemy ambush.

In keeping with this controlling territorial motif, Halberstam begins the novel by describing a volleyball match--the strategic movement of a spheric text within the confinement of an oblong context. He further circumscribes the action by presenting the game through the memory of his protagonist, Captain Beaupre:

He had come to hate volleyball and he had gained a kind of private vengeance against them all when they had played the Vietnamese officers. The Vietnamese liked volleyball too, and the Colonel heard of this, and always anxious to improve relations had suggested a game of Us-against-Them. The Vietnamese officers accepted the invitation, perhaps a bit too readily, and the Colonel was very pleased. The Americans, prepared to be good winners, had fixed a giant barbecue for later. The Viets had come and played, thin, often scrawny men, odd in their much too long shorts, ludicrous in their old-fashioned undershirts (*they were more modest than the Americans and did not strip to the waist*). Seeing the Vietnamese and the tall powerful Americans, Beaupre had felt rare sympathy for the Viets. (3, emphasis mine)

Characterizing Beaupre's view of the volleyball players--both American and Vietnamese--is his contempt for desirable talents or qualities which he does not possess. He harbours "vengeance" against all the players because he is not athletic enough to endure the match; he feels no "sympathy" for the "scrawny" Viets because his constitution is too bulky to endure the heat.

However, the passage also conveys much about the two teams' different attitudes toward the contest and their different potential capacities in the volleyball court. By organizing the invitation match, the Colonel (whose namelessness symbolically suggests the will and power of the American brass) not only expresses his wish to improve relations with the Vietnamese but, more importantly, his desire to win an American victory over the Vietnamese in the "Us-against-Them" game. The contrast between "the tall powerful Americans" and the Vietnamese "ludicrous in their

old-fashioned undershirts" suggests unevenly matched opponents and hence the likelihood of American victory. Seemingly designed as an additional gloss on the Vietnamese players' physical appearance, however, the parenthetical observation also gives them an elusive deceptiveness (i.e., modesty) which balances their apparent disadvantage. When the game surprisingly ends in favor of "Them," the parenthetical modesty of the disadvantaged Vietnamese turns into an ironic mockery of the arrogance of the "Us." Doubly ironic is that the Vietnamese victory in the volleyball match should also have served as an outlet of revenge for Beaupre's antagonism toward the all-American military "game" from which he feels helplessly inextricable.

In the same subversive spirit as the volleyball game, the novel as a whole is structured as a plot that is sidetracked by a number of subplots and which consists of a plan of action ambushed by counteractions. If the objective of the Colonel's three-pronged operation was "'The Ho Chi Minh motel'"--"a reported Vietcong rest house on a route traversing the area" (8)--the novelistic operation is also three-pronged and concerns the lives of three major characters--Captain Beaupre, Lieutenant Anderson, and Lieutenant Thuong. Furthermore, even though the aggressive Americans later compromised with the evasive Arvins and decided to pay a military visit to a place with only moderate enemy presence, the "visit" was totally frustrated by Vietcong traps and ambushes. Not only was the spearhead of the prongs--the helimobile South Vietnamese rangers led by Captain Big Williams--crushed flat, but also the walking prongs were severely blunted by the Vietcong's heavy doses of lead and shrapnel. Moreover, this larger pattern of structural subversion and military frustration is also

mirrored at the level of characterization.

Of all the characters in the novel, Lieutenant Anderson is probably the most representative of American lifers in Vietnam. A young professional West Pointer, Anderson had ambitions: "He had completed the Ranger and airborne training, had been with the best line units in West Germany, married a German wife, volunteered for Vietnam and had learned Vietnamese" (53). Excited to discover the "giant garden" with "little girls in their dresses...so oriental" and to mix "his joy with their joy (he assumed it was joy)" (58), he is a romantic with pastoral dreams and, yet at the same time, an expansionist yearning for personal glory, if not for gold, in exotic lands. His own "greenness" is quickly evidenced in his whooping game with his cyclo driver in "the zoo of Saigon traffic." Overjoyed by his false sense of successful communication with the Vietnamese driver but actually mistaken for "just one more drunk American...Anderson let go with a whoop, the driver whooped too, and soon they were playing a game: Anderson whooping, then the driver whooping; the driver whooping, and then Anderson returning the whoop; Anderson finally giving him the largest tip in his history" (58-59).

Not knowing that the parenthetical "joy" he assumed on the part of the Vietnamese was his own projection, Anderson did not know, either, that he had wasted his generosity on one who thought him a fool. Parallel to his costly whooping game in the city, his walking game in a network of canals costs him his life. Ironically, a little before his death, he is still confused and perhaps enraged why "no one ever tells you anything in this country" (184). Ironic from a more distant view, Anderson's original

enthusiasm becomes the source of his own doom. Although with envy, Beaupre had rightly mused over Anderson and his likes: "And so believing everything they were taught, they came a little too quickly, and died a little too quickly and were replaced a little too quickly by someone just like them, eager to take their place" (89).

In contrast to the eagerness of Anderson, Captain Beaupre is impassive at the idea of glory. Unlike Anderson, who tended to press on, angry and frustrated in the actual operation, Beaupre is reluctant to take chances for very little. With respect to the American effort in Vietnam, as a matter of fact, Beaupre plays the role of an ironist. Resurrected by IBM computers from Korean war files for his long lost guerrilla warfare expertise, Beaupre is an unwilling as well as an incompetent officer and has been relegated to the position of a walking companion and advisor to Captain Dang, "the worst of Vietnamese officers" (13). Like many "American wanderers" in Vietnam, Beaupre was a thirsty soldier--not so much for the enemy blood as for the "watered whiskey and fake French cognac" in Saigon restaurants. Regarded as the only man in My Tho "who will risk five ambushes for one hairless Indo-Chinese piece of ass,"--as the Colonel observes in parenthesis--Beaupre is also a residence "swordsman" (97). But he is better known--by the reader at least--for his verbal sword, which, if not too keen on pleasing his one-afternoon Vietnamese consort, draws blood from the American body politic responsible for having sent him to Vietnam.

Beaupre registers his most fierce thrust when he makes the analogy between the American military and the blood-sucking leeches in Vietnam. Having once "watched his own blood squirt out" (17) of the mosquito he had squashed, Beaupre is

able to anatomize the leeches' point of view on their blood-sucking nature. As he tells Anderson sarcastically, "Now they think they're medics. They've read all their own publicity and their history books, got themselves sure as hell brainwashed, and they see themselves not as blood suckers, but as life savers. They're here to save lives. They're improving relations with you. Giving you first aid, and they put on their best for you, biggest ones they got" (138). Substantiating in the flesh Beaupre's verbal assault, however, is Big Williams, the biggest American officer who was praised as "number one with the Vietnamese" (11); having once complained about the Vietnamese leeches' racist tendency (for not biting him), he is eventually fed by the Colonel like a volleyball to the cross-fire from a "friendly" village.

Opposed as he is to the military system which volunteered him in the war, Beaupre is not opposed to--is indeed depending on--the system itself for a military pension for his twenty-year service for which he is eligible in two more years. Out of shape for a war where he at least twice found himself an alien--once bracketed in a totally Black bar (103) and the other time walled in by "the uncertainty of being in someone's apartment" (110)--Beaupre has learned to bend "with the wind" (88) and gotten used to walking in circles which grow "bigger and emptier" (114). He strives to survive his one-year tour through the same survival technique that he used to survive the one very hot day of country walk, "kissing" the villagers and smiling at Captain Dang. Instead of winning against "his real enemy, the heat" (18), Beaupre thus begins "to cheat, drinking from the canteen a little earlier, and then earlier than that, hoping that some fruit would appear early enough in the day, or that there would be some

other benefactor, a chance and generous helicopter pilot arriving with a full and cold canteen" (31). Having no more water to counter the heat after the untimely exhaustion of his own ration, Beaupre finally faints with heat stroke. If it were not for Lieutenant Anderson's rescue, coupled with a full, though unknowingly ironic, acceptance of him as "our old...American fool," Beaupre would have immediately failed to survive his projected twenty-year service.

Clairvoyant as he demonstrated himself to be about his own position in the war, then, Beaupre is as trapped by what he has to do as Anderson was trapped by what he wanted to do. Having perhaps recognized this common fate between himself and his dead lieutenant, Beaupre for once ceases to be ironic when he lifts and carries Anderson's lifeless body on his own shoulder (even if it is only Beaupre's one more subversive gesture within the Us-against-Them military ball game).

In contrast to the enthusiasm of the Americans (including both the Andersons and the Beaupres), Lieutenant Thuong is characterized by his detachment from the war in his own country. His self-conscious distance from the military entanglement is evidenced not only in his refusal to interfere with his troops' village looting--which becomes a matter of controversy between Anderson and Thuong--but also in his awareness of himself "as a spectator, not as a participant" in the "stupid" operation (200-01). But Thuong's detachment is due not so much to the fact that there is nothing to gain in the war as to the fact that the war, like the pain he suffers as a result from his fall into a punji trap, is a given that he has to endure as part of his life. "A northerner in the south, a Buddhist among the Catholics," Thuong is suspected by the

southerners and distrusted by the Catholics (131). Caught between a conversion for the benefit of promotions and a contempt for surrender, he remains a Buddhist and, consequently, a permanent lieutenant for the purpose of maintaining what he himself sees as "a false sense of integrity" (133). The dilemma in Thuong's personal life, in fact, reflects a larger problem in the Vietnamese life during the war: "You told the truth and you were killed for it, you lied and hid the truth and perhaps you survived; the truth was a terrible luxury" (77). In turn, the larger problem accounts for Thuong's paradoxical view of the American-South Vietnamese joint operation as "a happy circle" of anger (44), and one that is "designed to hide from the enemy while allegedly still seeking him" (73).

The truth of Thuong's view, it seems, is known to all but the Americans. The American ignorance and the Vietnamese knowledge of the war situation is indicated by "one of the unit's rare major battles" which featured "Americans shouting to get those sons of bitches moving, the Vietnamese saying again and again it was not the right time" (160). As suggested by the laughter of the Vietnamese troops over Beaupre's impatience at their sluggish movement (24), the Vietnamese are conscious of the fruitlessness of the American involvement in Vietnam. This consciousness develops into an acute form in Thuong's fellow officer Chinh's cynical and farcical imitation of the Americans' effort to win the Vietnamese hearts and minds: "old American buddy, let's us change some old U.S. dollars for some Vietnamese piastres or disasters, huh old buddy" (182). Yet, it is Chinh who seems to understand the nature of the American passion in Vietnam when he intimates to Thuong sarcastically:

"You think it is pointless for people to fight so well for so little, but you are too hard, that is their business. They are nice people. They are brave although their food is bad, and their cigarettes are for women. So what" (182). Sad from the American point of view, Chinh's defense of Americans' bravery only increases the irony of their unproductive walks in Vietnam.

From a retrospective view of the American involvement in Vietnam, one can see the interplay of two major elements in *One Very Hot Day*: an intended historical portrait of "the frustrations, and the emptiness of the war" and an unintended prophetic view of the USA's "larger commitment still to come" (Myers 42). Ultimately, however, the two elements come together in Halberstam's depiction of the American search for Ap Than Thoi, a village that is tactically locatable (i.e., on the map) but geographically non-existent. Such a search is not only futile but also points to the anxiety-ridden mentality of the Americans which manifests itself in the recurrent pattern of phantom hunting. In the light of the futility of hunting for such a phantom enemy as represented by Ap Than Thoi, it is fitting that the enigmatic acronym "W E T S U"--which the narrator interprets as "We Eat This Shit Up"--should underscore the caricature of "the American officer with a huge grin" at the opening of the novel (1). In this graphic way, Halberstam reveals his sympathy toward the American servicemen in Vietnam, and his sympathy comes precisely from his profound understanding that the American effort would consume not only the American lives in Vietnam but also the energy at home.

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The American disorientation in Vietnam finds expression in more than one way. In *One Very Hot Day*, Halberstam employs the realistic mode to represent his fellow Americans' experience in a strange land; in *Going After Cacciato*, Tim O'Brien resorts to surrealist techniques to present a soldier's view of the confusing war. Both novels, however, have been praised for the ways--one prophetically and the other retrospectively--that they depict the process in which Vietnam disarmed the technologically superior but psychologically handicapped Americans.

Criticism of *Going After Cacciato* seems to be unanimous in seeing O'Brien's protagonist, Paul Berlin, as a role model who either possessed enduring courage or achieved psychic maturation through a baptism of fire. Yet it could also be argued that Berlin is portrayed as a pathetic character who futilely attempted to dream his way out of Vietnam. His decision to remain in Vietnam at the end of the novel does not signify a genuine sense of courage, since the decision was one of expediency only (i.e., for the immediate purpose of avoiding prosecution for going AWOL even in a dreamscape). Nor does it seem accurate to describe Berlin's fantasy journey as what Dale Jones calls "a process of psychological and spiritual integration" (318), since the fantasy world is shattered by a gruesome reality and humiliating experience. What has thus far prevented recognition of Berlin as a psychological casualty seems to be the tendency to overlook the significance of the episode in which, while pursuing Cacciato, Berlin twice loses control of his bowels. This episode strategically spans and

encloses the whole narrative in the same way that Halberstam's use of parentheses provides a gloss on the main story line of *One Very Hot Day*.

Going After Cacciato, as Dennis Vannatta points out in his study of the novel's theme and structure, could be chronologically divided into three narrative time zones: the Observation Post at the present, the memories of the past, and the imaginary journey to Paris as a possibly realized future. Neat as this scheme may seem, it also presents problems. For example, the real (as opposed to the imaginary) pursuit of Cacciato in the first chapter and the conclusion of the last chapter, both entitled "Going After Cacciato," does not comfortably fit in any of the three time zones. In story time, the end of the pursuit is close to the night hours at the Observation Post. In point of view, the pursuit is as much a part of Paul Berlin's memory as those earlier traumatic experiences in the wilderness of both Vietnam and North America. And thematically as well as structurally, the pursuit is integrated into the fantastic journey of Berlin and his squad following Cacciato from Vietnam to Paris. Independent from and yet organically related to the rest of the narrative, the all-encompassing story of the real hunt for Cacciato leads the reader first into and then out of the American experience in Vietnam. Both the entry and exit of the experience, however, are punctuated by the protagonist's loss of physical control, which aptly symbolizes America's loss of political and military control in Vietnam.

What characterizes the opening and concluding episodes of pursuing Cacciato is Paul Berlin's "moment of truth" (19) which occurs on two occasions. The first begins with the false alarm of Cacciato's fake booby-trap, at which Berlin is paralyzed

into "a release of fluids in the bowels, a shitting feeling, a draining of all pretensions and silly little hopes for himself" (18). The second comes as an accompaniment to Berlin's firing of a flare which "went high and fast, rocketing upward and then smoothing out in a long arc that followed the course of the trail, leaving behind a *dirty white wake*" (23, emphasis mine). Particularly worth noting is O'Brien's handling of this subtle moment: he does not let Berlin release himself in the same way that the flare released its visible dirty wake; in fact, he makes no mention of Berlin's actual "dirty white wake" and does not allow him to recover from and reflect upon his "simple folly" (298) until the end of the novel. In other words, O'Brien's esthetic maneuver makes it possible for the reader to image the whole narrative between the opening and the ending as Berlin's uncontrolled and prolonged bowel movement.

Also noteworthy is the fact that each time after he physically loses control of himself, Berlin tries to recall when, where, and how "it" really started. Both times, he succeeds in his recollection. But he fails in one crucial inquiry: although he learns from Doc Peret that "it" was due to an excess of his fear biles, "he did not remember why" the fear came (298). Hence, the major bulk of the narrative also serves as a source where the reader is required to do his/her sorting and find out "why" the protagonist was literally and metaphorically drained of guts.

If the source of Berlin's present physical embarrassment can be traced to such immediate causes as the explosion of the booby-trapped mine or the shaking of his own firing rifle, his greater psychic trauma as a soldier in Vietnam derives from other more long-range causes. Having a history of being a day-dreamer who liked to

pretend, at age twenty Berlin had joined the army which sent him to Vietnam. At the combat training centre, even long before he saw his "first day at the war" (41), Berlin had learned that the war was "real tough shit, real bad" (36). Innocently, he acknowledges to himself that "the war scared him silly, but this was something he hoped to bring under control" (36). His innocence is compounded with irony, however, when he joins the forum "of the shitter's walls":

So short, it was written, I just fell through the fucking hole. Below that, Better off where you at. Others, he read--On Gator, the wind doesn't blow, it sucks, and in a different hand, So does PFC Prawn, when he gets the urge. Another, Where am I? And beneath it, If you don't know, better climb out before I drown your ass. Names, dates, residue. Hapstein's queer...No, man, Hapstein's just good fun...I'm so short, I'm gone--this is my answering service...Cacciato...Brilliant, ain't he?

Paul Berlin took out a pencil.

Very carefully, he wrote: *I'm so short, I can't see the forest for the trees.* (39)

While Berlin's confession about feeling lost is an honest expression, he does not foresee how the other "witty" remarks foreshadow his own future experiences. For not only did he later witness the various "holes" both above and under ground, but he also fell into one on his imaginary journey to Paris. He also got so lost as to "drown" his military pants with his own excremental filth. Finally, his half-conscious plan to follow Cacciato to freedom transformed his tour in Vietnam into self-imprisonment. In short, Berlin does not know that his fear largely came from his sense of loss in Vietnam, that without recovering from his sense of loss he could not control his fear, and that, as long as he remained in Vietnam--a land symbolized by the maze-like tunnel that imprisoned Major Li Van Hgoc--he could not recover from his traumatic

experience.

Berlin's innocent hope but ironic failure to control his fear is reflected in the equally ironic fate of Lieutenant Sidney Martin. Although he is aware of the absence of a moral purpose in the war, Lieutenant Martin romantically believes in "the inner mission"--"that the mission to the mountains, important in itself, was even more important as a reflection of a man's personal duty to exercise his full capacities of courage and endurance and will power" (148). Yet in the same way that Berlin loses control of his bowels in the fields of fire power, Lieutenant Martin loses his life in a situation that tests will power. Dependent on his faith in inner strength, he demonstrates his determination by personally searching an underground tunnel when his soldiers fail his order. What Lieutenant Martin regards as a fulfilment of a man's personal duty, however, the soldiers consider a senseless courting of death. Whereas Lieutenant Martin values the war for its unconditional provision of "the chance to confront death" (148), the soldiers hate him for jeopardizing their number-one principle (i.e., survival) in the war. Consequently, their will to remain alive conflicts with the Lieutenant's objective for both internal and external missions; and, since he happens to apply also to himself his view of the war as a "means to the ending itself" (148), the "fragging" that results from the mutiny deprives the Lieutenant of the chance to confront his own death.

The personal goals of Berlin and Lieutenant Martin to achieve emotional and volitional control are correlated to the communal goal to score in the basketball game, as well as the search-and-destroy game with the unseen enemy. In "Pickup Games,"

the us-against-them game, which is reminiscent of the volleyball game in *One Very Hot Day*, has turned into an all-American game marked with crafty designs, skillful maneuvers, and victory as the single objective. Such games can be clearly tabulated; they are played, won, or lost. Berlin "liked reciting the final scores: 50 to 46; 68 to 40; once, in My Khe 1, a lopsided 110 to 38. He liked the clarity of it. He liked knowing who won, and by how much, and he liked being a winner" (92). In the game with the enemy, in contrast, the scores, the clarity, and the winning in the basketball game dim into silence, obscurity, and aimlessness. The military operation becomes an uncertain movement in a vacuum, a total loss of gravity. In the words of Doc Peret, "Aimless, that's what it is: a bunch of kids trying to pin the tail on the Asian donkey. But no fucking tail, No fucking donkey" (95).

Inevitably, the games of the Americans turned inward on themselves, and the aims shifted consciously or unconsciously to inflicting pain on no other than themselves: "The men bickered and fought. Caution became skittishness. Irritability became outright meanness, then worse" (94). The men not only developed psychosomatic diseases, but also entertained masochistic thoughts of wounding themselves. The "internal game" takes its most dramatic form in the equally causeless and aimless fight between Stink and Bernie Lynn--a miniature of the larger-scale war in Vietnam--after a goalful afternoon of basketball games. Featuring badly choreographed face-clawing, biting, and fisting, "It was not a fight of strategy or quickness." Nor was it a fight with a triumphant result for either the protagonist or the antagonist. The fist-fight "ended that way," though "the lull did not end" (96). Nor did

the internal game, at least for Paul Berlin.

The fantastic journey to Paris is the upshot of Berlin's fear coupled with his desire to control it. Although critics have generally attributed positive value to Berlin's view of the journey as "an idea," one should not neglect the more elemental dimension of "pretension" in Berlin's fantasy. The difference between the journey as "an idea" and the journey as "pretension" is perceivable in the different stages of the Vietnam tour upon which Berlin reflects.

The first time Berlin muses over the possibility of Cacciato's march to Paris occurs the same day that he has just soiled himself and felt shame for not having washed off the faeces and the scent. Imagining the dangers of the march but, more importantly, its happy ending, Berlin thinks, "With courage...he might even have joined in, and that was the one sorry thing about it, the sad thing: He might have" (21). In this context, he reveals a moment of honesty about himself: "He wasn't dreaming, or imagining; just pretending. Figuring how it would be, if it were" (23). Approximately a month later, when he is on a mid-night watch, feeling safe at the "high and strong and fortified" observation tower (25), Berlin, "whose only goal was to live long enough to establish goals worth living for still longer," begins to like his "splendid idea" of Cacciato's leading them west toward Paris. Privately denying Doc Peret's attribution of his Cacciato fantasy to "the work of the biles," Berlin argues for the sensibility of his "idea": "Biles or no biles, it wasn't dreaming--it wasn't even pretending, not in the strict sense. It was an idea. It was a working out of the possibilities" (26-27). By transforming his fantasy from a pretension into an idea,

Berlin tries to change the life-threatening war reality into a life-preserving artistic realm, dreaming and imagining so as to feel disengaged from the harsh reality of the war.

Disengaged from the war as Berlin seems to be on the fantasy journey, his imagination provides no niche where he can escape from fear and shame of fear. His imaginary journey consists of an internal oscillation between his civilian desire for peace and happiness and a commitment to military duty because of his fear of being prosecuted if he succumbs to that desire and becomes a deserter. Thus, no sooner does the squad reach the proximity of the Laos border, than the subconsciously buried issue of desertion becomes open for debate. Since at this moment his strong desire is to see the journey as an unfolding of endless possibilities, Berlin launches a counter-strike against Lieutenant Corson's announcement of the squad's action as desertion. Through Oscar, Berlin evokes the squad's mission--the responsibility of capturing Cacciato the deserter--so that he could "see what happens" (33). As it happens, however, what Berlin remembers making a special effort to see, equipped with the technological help of a periscope, is the scene of his war buddy's death: "Peering into the viewing lens, squinting to see better, Paul Berlin couldn't be sure. Several men appeared to be grouped around the mouth of a tunnel. The forms were fuzzy. Some of them were talking, others silent. One man was on his hands and knees, leaning part way down into the hole" (78). Such a retrospective vision of reality deflates Berlin's imaginary power to control fear. As he himself ironically muses at the observation tower, "What you remember is determined by what you see, and what you see depends on what you

remember" (184).

Irony on a larger scale is the way that Berlin has developed his pretension to be in control into an idea which eventually snares him in the process of the journey to Paris. This is evidenced in the pattern of negation underscoring the apparent dream-like sequence of events on the fantastic journey. In other words, the three major components of the fantasy--the acceptance of Sarkin Aung Wan as the squad's guide, the execution of a young man in Tehran, and the final position statements from Sarkin Aung Wan and Paul Berlin--are sequentially negated one by the other. The process ends in O'Brien's refusal to endorse his protagonist's use of imagination as a way to control reality.

The imagining of Sarkin Aung Wan is characteristic of the way that Berlin attempts to look for the good things in bad times--a way to contain the bad times. Sarkin Aung Wan is clearly a product of Berlin's imagination, since their meeting is "a thing that *might* have happened on the road to Paris" (51, emphasis mine). The young Chinese-Vietnamese woman has as much reality as Berlin, however, not only because she has a personal history as insubstantial as Berlin's, but also because, like Berlin, she is a refugee who wants to go home (50). Sarkin Aung Wan's most significant feature, however, is not her similarities to Berlin, but rather her differences, and these make her a convincingly realized character. Her female endurance in a muscled body and the wisdom she has acquired from her own culture make it possible for her to point to the way out of the imprisoning tunnel while the whole squad of fully armed American soldiers are outrageously but also helplessly trapped by the land

together with the North Vietnamese Major Li Van Hgoc, who had been sentenced to ten years of tunnel imprisonment for desertion. "'The way in,' she repeated, 'is the way out. To flee *Xa* one must join it. To go home one must become a refugee'" (88).

Unlike Cacciato, who provided Berlin with secret guidance through the dark passage of his hidden fear, Sarkin Aung Wan's guidance is through "the black tunnels"--"a maze" (89) reminiscent of a Dantean hell. In this way, she personifies Berlin's open, unambiguous wish for his freedom from the consequences of an unjustified war. In retrospect, the guidance she gives to the American squad might also have served as guidance to the American commitment to Vietnam had the American nation had Berlin's share of imagination. The irony for Berlin is that, as the embodiment of his desire for peace, Sarkin Aung Wan is subversive of his later pretentious attempt to be reintegrated into the imaginary mission.

While bad times can be turned into good times with someone of Berlin's imagination, good times also mean potential danger which needs to be taken under control. During Sarkin Aung Wan's guidance of the march deep into civilization, Berlin "pretended they made love" (152). At the same time, however, he found the serenity of peace disconcerting and felt the need to justify his quiet time: "He could feel himself sweating as he tried to explain that it wasn't cowardice or simple desertion. Not exactly. Partly it was Cacciato's doing. Partly it was mission, partly inertia, partly adventure, partly a way of tracing the possibilities." What he found most difficult to name was the reason for his shame--something "he couldn't put his finger on" (154). As if to discern the nature of his good times on the way to Paris, Spec Four

Paul Berlin focuses on the details of the beheading spectacle: "There was a fly on the boy's nose.... The boy kept shaking his head and blowing to get rid of it, but the fly stuck fast" (168). For Berlin as for the boy, the agony was not due to the fear of death, but due to the loss of dignity marked by the besmearing fly--or flight, in Berlin's case--attendant upon the death. Consequently, when questioned by the Iranian security officer, Captain Rhallon, Doc Peret feels compelled to emphasize the mission aspect of the journey. Thus, in the same way that the squad are arrested by the police while searching for clams for supper (notice the pun on calm and the metaphor for security), so Berlin's desire for mission is entrapped by his desire for peace.

At the end of his journey, Berlin has neither accomplished his mission nor gained his peace. In Paris, the agon between the desire for peace and the desire for mission surfaces in Berlin's consciousness and develops, with its own logic, beyond the control of his imagination. The conflict is fully externalized in the imaginary conference between Sarkin Aung Wan and Paul Berlin at the Majestic Hotel. Through "the voice of translation, a man's voice, precise and unaccented and impersonal" (283), Sarkin Aung Wan adopts an idealistic approach and speaks of the necessity to fight for one's dream goal. As she exhorts, targeting Berlin's weakness, "We must be brave. It is one thing to speculate about what might be. It is quite another to act in behalf of our dreams, to treat them as objectives that are achievable and worth achieving. It is one thing to run from unhappiness; it is another to take action to realize those qualities and well-being that are the true standards of the human spirit" (283-84). Sharing Captain Rhallon's view of the compatibility between action and moral commitment,

Sarkin Aung Wan demands not only personal courage but also ideals which transcend social relations.

Such fighting spirit may befit genuine refugees, like Sarkin Aung Wan herself, who do not turn into victims of irony in their pursuit of peaceful goals. With Berlin, however, the unequivocal romantic spirit is conceivable only in a dream. Standing at the opposite end of the table and putting on a diplomat's "firm and resonant" (285) voice, Paul Berlin adopts a realistic pose and addresses the binding value of one's moral obligations to the community. While acknowledging his fear of "being thought of as a coward," Berlin cuts through what he considers the crux of his dilemma: "The real issue is how to find felicity within limits. Within the context of our obligations to other people. We all want peace. We all want dignity and domestic tranquillity. But we want a peace that endures. We want a peace that we can be proud of" (286). If Berlin's speech had been the extension of Doc Peret's argument on the reasons why soldiers did not desert in Vietnam, it might be understood to be black humor. Coming from Berlin, the speech, prefaced by the whining of the amplification system, is ironically exaggerating. Considering the way that he had day-dreamed, the way he had drifted into the army, and the way his fear bites had got the better of him, Berlin's high talk about "obligations," "dignity," and "peace" starts to create the same effect as the sight of a military uniform on a cute puppy. Finally, Berlin's imaginary fact that "[t]here is only the statement of positions" (286) at the conference suggests not only the schizophrenic condition of the dreamer's mind but also the impossible position of the short-timers in Vietnam.

In the novel, O'Brien does not commend Sarkin Aung Wan's romantic pursuit of happiness, nor does he recommend Paul Berlin's pseudo-realistic endurance. Rather, by presenting Berlin's dilemma, O'Brien raises a basic question about the ultimate purpose of the American effort in Vietnam. If the purpose was to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, O'Brien remains skeptical of the outcome of the direct intervention. In fact, his attitude toward America's attempt to contain communism may be registered in his depiction of Berlin's limited success in containing his fear at the observation post. While Berlin generally resorts to imagination, he also tries to experience real courage through physical actuality. At one o'clock, as his one-hour official guard duty approaches its end, Berlin does not wake Doc Peret for the next guard hour. Instead, he climbs down the observation tower and calmly wades into the sea: "It was his bravest moment." Ironically, this "bravest moment" does not appear any more significant than his least brave moment when he soiled himself, for he "waded in to his knees, spread his feet, unbuttoned, and relaxed" (57). Controlled as Berlin's release may seem in the quiet of the night, it serves as an unfailing reminder of his sense of exhaustion and shame over his scatological leaks during the squad's pursuit--both real and imaginary--of Cacciato.

Nor does Berlin's dream to go literally after Cacciato come true. Although his dream simply to follow Cacciato started before his scatological embarrassment, it becomes an "idea"--namely, a scheme to slip out of the war in the name of pursuing Cacciato--only after his excessive fear bites force him to realize his own physical as well as psychological weaknesses. If the actual transition from "pretension" to "idea"

takes place at the Observation Post, the end of the real pursuit of Cacciato (which is also the end of the novel) serves as a prelude to the fantasy journey. In other words, as much as Berlin wants to imagine that he has reached Paris, O'Brien declares the ultimate futility of his imagination. Thus, whereas the bright moon "passed over the mountains" and Berlin slept with "no dreams" at the end of his real pursuit, the bright moon later becomes "Cacciato's round face"--the symbolic embodiment of Cacciato--in his imaginary pursuit. Furthermore, the final dialogue between Lieutenant Corson and Berlin indicates the latter's strong hope for a successful journey on the part of Cacciato--a hope on which his whole "idea" of going after Cacciato will eventually be based:

"I guess it's better this way," the old man finally said. "There's worse things can happen. There's plenty of worse things."

"True enough, sir."

"And who knows? He might make it. He might do all right." The lieutenant's voice was flat like the land. "Miserable odds, but--"

"But *maybe*."

"Yes," the lieutenant said. "Maybe so." (301, emphasis mine)

Whereas Lieutenant Corson is at best uncertain in his assessment of the possibility of Cacciato's survival in the jungle, Berlin is remarkably more certain (or rather, more wishful) of Cacciato's safe completion of his journey. In spite of his apparent approval of Berlin's wishful certainty, however, the lieutenant's last two words "Maybe so" call the private's idea of hope into question.

Finally, it is worth emphasis that Berlin's pursuit of Cacciato--both the real and the imaginary--is defeated through his failure to control his inner muscles. As the end of the imaginary pursuit conflates with the end of the real hunt:

He let the rifle fall. He put a hand to his lips and held it there, not quite touching. He felt the breath on his hand, felt himself swallow. Somewhere a fire was burning. It was a hot blazing fire, a bonfire. He heard people talking. *Then there was a floating feeling, then a swelling in his stomach, then a wet releasing feeling. He tried to stop it. He squeezed his thighs together and tightened his belly, but it came anyway.* He sat back. He shivered and wondered what had gone wrong. (296, emphasis mine)

What has "gone wrong" comes to Berlin's realization when he fails to imagine a happy ending for his imaginary act of going after Cacciato. While he reflects on his past and sorts out facts from imaginary possibilities, Berlin shows promise of coming to terms with the limits of his real pursuit as well as his imagination. Recalling the moment when he shouted "Go!" in the direction of Cacciato, Berlin becomes aware that "[w]hat remained were possibilities. With courage it might have been done" (289). Berlin's consciousness of his lack of courage thus becomes O'Brien's comment on the imaginary way the former defends his military obligation in the Majestic Hotel in Paris. It ultimately becomes O'Brien's comment on the American short-timers' dilemma in Vietnam. Just as their fear of uncertainty compels them to dream of escape from the war, so their fear of consequent prosecution forces them to attempt, however passively, to survive during their tour of duty.

Chapter Two

Dis-ease at Home

"Everything comes around back to you" (18).

--Philip Caputo, *Indian Country*

People, buildings, cars, dogs, everything looked like clever imitations of the real world. The World that they had talked about and dreamed of every day in Nam was gone, replaced with a flat, lifeless forgery of reality. They didn't belong; couldn't fit in, find out. Nothing worked. No one wanted them. "I went from a free-fire zone to the twilight zone" (240).

--Mark Baker, *Nam*

In the same way that the short-timers' Vietnam experience was characterized by various forms of dis-orientation, the Vietnam veterans' homecoming was characterized by multiple types of dis-ease. As sociologists, psychologists, and physicians have shown, the Vietnam veterans' home dis-ease has thus far emerged in two major forms. The first is medical problems as a result of exposure to the chemical defoliant, Agent Orange. This physical disease has not only left scars on the veterans' own bodies, as with skin rashes and liver disorders, but has also resulted in physiological deformities in their descendants. The second form consists of the veterans' psychological difficulties in adapting to mainstream American life. Back in "the World," as they called it, instead of feeling safe and secure, most veterans have tended either to relive their experience or defensively deny their own traumatic part in the war. Characteristically, they have suffered from nightmares and insomnia, tend to burst into sudden rages, are prone to feelings about the general senselessness of life, and try to

repress their painful memories (Frey-Wouters & Laufer 53-57).

The two-fold--physical and psychological--problems of the veterans can be related in turn to America's double dealings with the war: it had first sent its young men bodily into the war and upon their return had socially denounced them for having been a part of it. To put it in military (which is often euphemistic) terms, the veterans' dis-ease results from "friendly fire," which is ultimately more lethal than the "hostile" kind.

A recent theory concerning Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) provides an additional perspective on the two-fold nature of the veteran's dis-ease. In socio-psychological terms, Robert A. Laufer defines the Vietnam veteran's post-war identity as a "serial self," which consists of the life-long tension between a "war self" and an "adaptive self" within the veteran's psyche. For Laufer, as for Erik Erikson, self is a cultural product of the social environment wherein an individual grows into adulthood, for "identity...depends on the support which the young individual receives from the collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups significant to him: his class, his nation, his culture" (Erikson 89). Moreover, embracing Robert J. Lifton's concept of doubling, Laufer observes that "it is feasible that self-systems are so entirely embedded in social structure that the structural constraints, the self's need to be integrated into and supported by class, nation and culture, permit the construction of two totally encapsulated self-systems that can function without reference to each other in antagonistic social matrices" (38).

On these theoretical bases, Laufer argues that the prevailing social values in the

twentieth-century west which view wars as a human aberration contradict the historical and psychological experiences of war reality as a normal social intercourse, and that this contradiction consequently creates two incompatible environments which nurture two dualistic--the soldier and the civilian--identities. Experienced sequentially, these dualistic identities become the war self and the adaptive self within each individual Vietnam veteran in the post-war era. Developed under the death principle to kill and survive in the war zone, the war self "is located in a distinct historical milieu, constrained in a narrow chronological period in the individual's biography, and is arrested developmentally" (50). Since it is "a truncated self that survives in a timeless dimension of biographical time, able neither to evolve, integrate, nor disintegrate," the war self poses a threat to the adaptive self, which seeks to integrate it into the civilian environment.

According to Laufer, in the light of the permanent existence of the war self, "whereas clinical or social intervention may certainly ameliorate symptom expression and contribute to greater self-understanding, the social transformation of the role of warfare in society means that postwar development is systematically vulnerable to the antagonistic relationship between the encapsulated war self and the adaptive self of civil society--the serial self" (50-51). Laufer's major thesis, therefore, is that civilized society's (cultural and arbitrary) exclusion of war reality is immediately responsible for the psychic problems of the Vietnam veterans.

The socio-psychological insights provided by Laufer accord with what veterans themselves have written about their split condition. From a soldier's point of view in

A Rumor of War, Philip Caputo recounts his first-hand experience of the dichotomy in the American mindset. During his 1965-66 tour as a young infantry officer with the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Caputo witnessed and participated in the American intervention in the ongoing war in Vietnam. Although he had entered the war with a not-too-uncommon romantic dream of proving his manhood, Caputo came out with total disillusionment, though not so much with his manhood itself as with the context in which he had attempted to prove it. As he explained and re-explained in his memoir, the war in Vietnam was an unconventional war with "no Normandies or Gettysburgs"; it "was mostly a matter of enduring weeks of expectant waiting and, at random intervals, of conducting vicious manhunts through jungles and swamps where snipers harassed us constantly and booby traps cut us down one by one" (xiv-xv). For American soldiers (himself included), it was a war to survive and to produce body counts, both at the expense of the Vietcong, who were officially defined by the American military to be any Vietnamese who was dead.

Caputo the narrator may be credited with telling the truth about the war; however, Caputo the combatant was punished for acting out the truth in it. In "the incident of Giao-Tri," for example, when two Vietnamese men were killed by mistake, Caputo and the marines under his command were charged under the criminal code with murder (306). For Caputo, the marines under his command were morally wrong to take innocent lives; but such wrong-doing had been precipitated by the larger context of the American war whose sole goal was to kill Vietcong. Even though he and his men were acquitted (on the grounds, though, of the implicit innocence of all

the Americans in Vietnam instead of specifically in this case), to Caputo, the murder trial reflected the disturbing division between "the facts" and "the truth" (312)--a division between the ambivalent war realities and the clear-cut interpretations favored by legal authorities. By extension, the division implied a confrontation between the soldiers who fought to survive and the country which demanded law and order in a lawless and orderless war. This confrontational relationship between the individual and the state illustrates the nature of the "friendly fire" that the veterans experienced upon their return to their unwelcoming home-world.

Despite the fact that nearly all the short-timers in Vietnam would do anything to return "in one piece" to what they dreamily called "the World," the World did not provide the sort of comfort and peace they had desired. Instead, it received them with snipings and booby-traps which Vietnam survivors found even more difficult to evade than those in the war itself. Consequently, many veterans became living dead. In the dying words of a twenty-seven-year-old veteran concerning the effect of Agent Orange and, metaphorically, of America's rejection of the Vietnam veterans: "I got killed in Vietnam--and didn't know it" (Macpherson 710).

The "friendly fire" at home was composed of hostile attitudes toward what was felt to be an immoral war and, as a corollary, toward the soldier-participants. In *Indian Country*, for instance, Philip Caputo dramatizes an array of attacks his protagonist, Christian Starkmann, is forced to endure. The first of these occurs when Chris is waiting for a hitch-hike upon his discharge from the army. As a maroon Plymouth pulls up,

Starkmann, lugging his AWOL bag, ran up to the car and started to climb in, tricked into a sense of safety by the man's friendly smile. "Just back from Nam?" he asked. Starkmann answered that he was. The man's expression changed in an instant to a snarl. Without a word of warning he jerked a portable fire extinguisher from under the dash and sprayed a cloud of carbon dioxide into Starkmann's face, then punched the gas pedal so that the door swung back and knocked Starkmann into a culvert, where he lay for several minutes, choking, his eyes on fire. (84-85)

More representative of the "friendly fire," however, is the view held by people like Chris's boss, King, that all the veterans were dopers: "Those guys we sent over there weren't like we were back in WW Two, no sir. They were smoking dope on the front lines, even shooting heroin." Although less overtly violent than the driver's insult, such a view becomes more hurtful when the outright attack turns into a way of responding to the veterans' homecoming. Thus watching a televised report about a Vietnam veteran killing his estranged wife, King concludes, "Me, I blame the government. They shouldn't have let any of those guys back into society until they were off the dope and back in their right minds. And the ones they couldn't get straightened out, they should have kept locked up, hey" (84).

In complicity with such violent eruptions of animosity toward Vietnam veterans is the "cold war" attitude which characterizes responses to the sufferings they had experienced in Vietnam. Elizabeth Ann Scarborough's *The Healer's War* portrays the stateside's lack of interest in the Vietnam affair. As Cathy, the first-person narrator, discovers when she arrives at her home city: "Kansas City looked as if nothing else were going on in the whole world. Trees grew unmolested, people dressed in suits and hats with veils and high-heeled shoes that would have made running impossible. It didn't look real to me" (294). More unreal, to Cathy's surprise, is her former

boyfriend Duncan's total indifference to her experience in Vietnam. Even though he "welcomed" her back with "a bear hug," Duncan does not pay the slightest attention to what Cathy had wanted to tell him (297). What hurts Cathy most is the fact that Duncan had not even opened her letters for the past year while she was stationed in Vietnam. "I picked up the pile, all written on stationary with helicopters and Big Chief tablet-style lines. When I removed the rubber band, I understood why his letters never made reference to mine" (298).

In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that books about the Vietnam veterans' home dis-ease are much fewer in number than those about the war itself. Equally one begins to see a different way of explaining why the home narratives have not received as much critical attention as others. The usual explanation is that the home narratives lack esthetic innovation or tend to be ideologically volatile, but the real reason may be that these home narratives force readers into recognizing their complicity in the war and the problems of the veterans. This desire to see the war as something which happened far away may also explain the tendency of critics to focus on the more remote causes of the war (for example, the Puritan and frontier tradition). In turn, the very fact that the long-range effects of PTSD and Agent Orange-related diseases are unsettled accounts encourages one to give special attention to the current cultural climate.

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Whereas Scarborough highlights Americans' passive indifference which apparently did not *intend* (though internally *effected*) harm, Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* depicts an active indifference which borders on a collective conspiracy against Vietnam veterans. Heinemann's protagonist, Paco Sullivan, experiences the impact of unfriendly home fire in a non-descript small town, Boone, whose name is evocative of the frontier tradition. Although Paco learned the rules of the frontier in the Vietnam jungle, he has to relearn the lessons in order to survive in the civilized backwoods. Whereas in Vietnam he had played the cowboy role, at home he is assigned the role of the Indian. Since in both frontiers he plays the us versus them game on the other's terms (one in the "Indian country" and the other in a cowboy town), Paco is situated to lose his stakes. As he limps with the help of his cane, searching door-to-door for work, he is sent from the bulletin board, through the drugstore, an auto-parts place, an insurance agency, and back to the barbershop where he had started. The ways of saying "no" to Paco range from a disapproving "nice shit laugh" (85) to a polite and help-less "sorry" (92). Even though Paco ends up working for Ernest, a WW II marine, at the Texas Lunch, this does not result in his acceptance by the community. Rather, it results in his discovering a small town's old-fashioned frontier hostility. As Paco reads of himself in the diary of "Cathy, the prick tease" (186):

Aunt Myrna says he has a way of stiffening up and staring right through you. As if he's a ghost. Or you're the ghost.

How could I have ever thought it might be fun to sleep with him? Unc says that creeps like him are best got rid of, and is going to start working on him.... (206)

Whereas the American frontier in the nineteenth century was the "meeting point

between savagery and civilization" (Turner 28), in the twentieth century it takes the form of a twilight zone, wherein any alien "ghost" needs to be exorcised. At the same time, however, the sharp distinction between the "savage" and the "civilized" in the past reflects the tendency toward mutual exclusiveness between the civilized and wartime mentality. Consequently, Aunt Myrna's confusion as to who is the ghost serves to suggest the haunting that begins when the two are separated and in turn the way that the frontier mentality lays the ground for the PTSD. Similarly, although the geographical frontier of the past is long gone, Paco's own final westbound bus-ride indicates that its spirit continues to haunt the present. Paco leaves Boone because he feels that "Whatever it is that I want, it ain't in this town" (209). Heinemann, however, suggests that moving west is not the solution.

Paco's Story employs an other-worldly first-person narrator as a major narrative strategy to suggest America's confusion during and after the war in Vietnam. Heinemann's narrator is a corporate speaker who assumes the voice of the ghosts of the whole Alpha Company who, with the exception of Paco the sole/soul survivor, were destroyed by friendly fire at Fire Base Harriette. Departing in this way from earlier twentieth-century war novels which feature a first-person narrative, *Paco's Story* also differs by presenting the narrative voice as "reliable." In turn, whereas, in *A Farewell to Arms*, for example, Hemingway holds Lt. Henry (not the war) primarily responsible for the dead (Catherine) and for his alienation from his own family and home country, in *Paco's Story*, Heinemann endorses the ghost narrators' effort to make Paco and, by extension, America remember the dead soldiers--both despite and

with all their petty jealousy and red-neck boisterousness. Thus, whereas *A Farewell To Arms* is a confessional narrative wherein Frederic Henry attempts to come to terms with his own guilt, *Paco's Story* is a revelatory narrative wherein the ghosts bring the unknown and the suppressed facts into the consciousness of the living.

The significance of the ghost element in *Paco's Story* has received little critical attention, and some readers have also complained that the novel's message is too simplistic. According to one reviewer:

Paco's Story lacks the impact of *Close Quarters* because, back in the world, Heinemann is no longer content to *tell it as it is* but casts around for explanations. The fat necks and small minds of his small-town mid-American grotesques, who will not make room for a man maimed on their behalf, are sitting targets which he could hit blindfolded. He writes best when telling the worst; and *Hicksville* is significantly less demanding in every sense than the *Mekong Delta*. (Melmoth 214, emphasis mine)

Although *Close Quarters* (Heinemann's first novel) focuses on the American soldiers' combat experience in Vietnam and, in so doing, does depict the GI's "real life," actually its major narrative technique and thematic concerns are similar to those of *Paco's Story*. In both novels, Heinemann creates a narrator who expresses antagonistic sentiments toward the world beyond the combat zone. In *Close Quarters*, Heinemann provides what Philip K. Jason calls a "naturalistic perspective" on the soldiers' equation between "fucking and killing" ("Sexism" 129) through the narrator/protagonist, Dossier; in *Paco's Story*, he employs a fantasy perspective in order to illustrate the ways that soldiers die and veterans nurse their physical and psychological wounds. Both perspectives are designed to shock the reader into realizing the nature of war experience. Thus, to depict the veterans' home experience

is no "less challenging" than to depict their combat experience. Heinemann's decision to write a sequel, indeed, stems from his feeling that to under-estimate this challenge is also to overlook the danger of "friendly fire."

The narrative technique of *Paco's Story*, moreover, seems designed to counteract the binary opposition of civilian and war mindsets that causes PTSD in the veterans and allows civilians to feel secure. Thus, the novel focuses on the practical experiences of a Vietnam veteran in a generic Mid-American town, and then infuses this "realism" with "fantastic" elements--the narrative voice and presence of the ghosts. These ghosts, moreover, are not confined to otherworldly dimensions but are able to enter sidereal time and space. They can summon up concrete events from the historical past (destruction of Fire Base Harriette) and they can foretell the historical future (of the Bravo Company medic's obsession with Paco's survival); they can also "stand at the crest of the town's one good hill, James, and pause and get quiet and comfortable and still, and listen to the night sounds" (165). Moreover, they themselves demonstrate such human emotions as jealousy and envy in their recurrent habit of giving Paco "something to think about--a dream or a reverie" (138). The fact that the ghosts do not stay in their ghost-lodge up above, but descend and intervene in human affairs, suggests that the past is not dead and that America's understanding of the Vietnam experience has not yet been assimilated into consciousness.

Yet what validates the reliability of the ghosts' narrative in *Paco's Story*? According to Brian Attebery, there are two elements of a fantasy that distinguish it from a realist work. First, a fantasy deals with a reality that deviates from the author-

reader "consensus reality"; the emphasis of a fantasy is not "on its faithfulness to experience but on its effectiveness in conveying a sense of a radically altered or augmented world" (15). Second, a fantasy is ultimately rooted in the oral tradition, which includes "myths, legends, ballads, and superstitions" (17). Since an oral narrative is primarily judged on its performance rather than its content (which belongs to the community of both the narrator and the listener), "Unreliability does not enter in except with respect to what the audience deems a poor performance, and it is corrected in subsequent performances" (18). Viewed in this light, Heinemann's novel not only satisfies the basic requirement of good "fantasy" but also demonstrates the appropriateness of such a mode for bringing home the "realities" of the Vietnam War.

The opening chapter of *Paco's Story*, entitled "The First Clean Fact," functions as an act of communal bonding between the narrator and the listener. The bonding starts with the narrator's direct address to the listener: "Let's begin with the clean fact, James: This ain't no war story" (3). While inviting the reader's collaboration, "let's" also adds an implicit imperative. The expression involves a command but the colloquial contraction sounds a personal note that shortly disarms any tendency to resist. The collective pronoun "us" has for its referents not only the ghosts of Alpha Company, but also James, the common name the ghost narrators use for any stranger to whom they might wish to communicate. The inclusive quality of the pronoun points to the implicit code by which both the narrator and the listener abide: the narrator and the listener both know what one is going to say and the other is going to hear. Although the content of the narrative is important, the emphasis is on the actual

process and effect of the narration. The communal act of telling, which is characteristic of oral narration, serves to ensure that what is fuzzy common knowledge becomes focused collective consciousness. It is, therefore, the communal nature of the project and the bonding of the speakers and the reader that explains why this "aint no war story."

The second "clean fact" pertains to the reason why: "war stories *put* other folks to sleep" and produce snoring which "is nothing if it isn't the Apocalypse itself choking on its own spit" (4). Instead of serving to awaken, such stories tend to deaden. Accordingly, an initial cleansing ritual is needed: "War stories are out--one, two, three, and a heave-ho, into the lake you go with all the other alewife scuz and foamy harbor scum" (3). Immediately after this disclaimer, however, the narrator begins to tell stories: about Alpha Company "humping and *hauling ass*" (5), about getting "greased" by and then greasing the enemy (7), about giving "the old pecker a few tugs for the practice" while on perimeter guard (10), and about being "pulverized to ash" at Fire Base Harriette (14). What necessitates such telling is that the somnolent response to war stories is also a defense mechanism and stems from the fact that "folks do not want to hear about" what happened in the Vietnam War (5). Thus Heinemann's narrative strategy involves a dual dynamic: the more adamantly the American "folks" refuse to listen to Vietnam War stories, the more persistently the veterans tell them.

Whereas Coleridge's ancient mariner feels the urgency to reveal his ghostly vision as a means to exorcise his guilt over shooting the albatross, Heinemann's ghosts

want to relate their experience to James the American Everyman in order to make the home folks aware of their unconscious complicity. The ghosts' narrative can thus be seen as a way of infiltrating the garrisoned consciousness of American culture; as such it constitutes a reversal and subversion of the American cultural containment of the Vietnam dis-ease. Instead of creating a "Rambo" sort of hero out to revenge the deaths of Alpha Company (killed, after all, by friendly fire), Heinemann gives us Paco, "the guy not dead, but should have been" (33), who has survived, half-dead, the "whole place [that] stank to high heaven" (23). Paco himself does not have the energy to stir up a chicken coop; he is filled with "muscle relaxers and anti-depressants--to the point of a near-helpless stupor" (35). Where the power lies is not in Paco but in the impact of the story about him. In the case of the Bravo Company medic, not only is he obliged to "tell the story of it (years later) in Weiss's Saloon, over and over again" (20), but the effect is to make him "drink himself sick, and die of it" (33).

The Bravo Company medic, however, is not the only one who is obsessed with Paco's story; in fact, no one is more disturbed by Paco's survival than the ghosts of Alpha Company. If "Paco, for all his trouble, has never asked, Why me? --the dumbest, dipstick question only the most ignorant fucking new guy would ever bother to ask" (136), the narrators enviously ask that question for him: "It is we--the ghosts, the dead--who ask, Why him?" (137). Even though Paco has been "terrifically wounded" (136), for the ghost-narrators, living on earth still seems more inviting than being dead in "God's Everlasting Cosmos" (17). Consequently, the ghosts feel the necessity that Paco should be "made to dream and remember" their nightmarish war

and destruction (137). As the narrators tell the listener, when Paco is exhausted from dish-washing at the Texas Lunch and feels "the sore pain of his wounds itching like the burning sting of a good hard slap,"

We reach out as one man and begin to massage the top of his head; his scalp cringes and tingles. We work our way down the warm curve of his neck--so soothing and slack--and apply ourselves most deeply to the solid meat back of his shoulders. And Paco always obliges us; he uncoils and stretches out even more, and eases into our massage bit by bit, leaning into our invigorating touch wholeheartedly. And when Paco is most beguiled, most rested and trusting, at that moment of luxurious rest, when Paco is all but asleep, *that* is the moment we whisper in his ear, and give him something to think about--a dream or a reverie. (138)

The way the ghosts make Paco "dream and remember" is in keeping with the way they engage James to tell their war stories in the first chapter: while they disarm James by including him in "us," the ghosts win Paco's trust by soothing his weary muscles. Thus, unwary of his former buddies' ghostly intervention, Paco has "escape" dreams in which he is persistently chased by men "as mad and murderous as a lynch mob" but never escapes (139). He dreams of being a beggar in the passenger lounge of a ferry boat, "hanging on to the pillars...to steady himself while he passes the hat" (140). He dreams of an execution scene in which "the executions [never] cease, but never does the crowd thin--Paco standing, cramped, with cold pouring into the back of his skull like dry-ice vapor spilling over a table-top" (143). He also dreams of his homecoming but, in his dream, "never can he make out any of the names [being announced], and never does he hear his own" (145). In particular, Paco remembers his complicit role in the mass rape of a Vietcong girl. Just as Paco is both a victim and a man of guilt in his dreams, so he is the same odd combination in reality. Like the

ghosts themselves, as they often remind him through his dreams, Paco is forever a metaphorical wandering soul.

The lesson contained in the novel is not limited to the need for Paco to remember the past; the story also includes a lesson for Cathy "the prick-tease" (186). A student at the Wynandotte Teachers College, Cathy views Paco as a rare object for seduction. As the knowing narrators intimate to the listener, "It is quite a game she plays, James, spying on him at work, speculating about the bulge in his pants and his cute little ass, watching him shake out when he's finished a piss "(148). Eventually, however, her scatological vision leads to an eschatological recognition in the form of a dream:

I think I hear *screams*, as if each scar is a scream, and I look up at him again and he's peeling the scars down his arm, like long peels of sunburned skin, brown and oniony.... And he lays them across my breasts and belly--tingling and burning--lays them in my hair, wrapping them around my head, like a skull cap. And when each scar touches me, I feel the suffocating burn, hear the scream. (208-09)

Like Paco's dreams, Cathy's dream serves as a reminder: it reminds her of the need to redeem Paco, the man and the messenger from the kingdom of the dead, whose function, in turn, is to redeem the ghosts. Unfortunately, instead of redemption, Cathy offers Paco her rejection.

Parallel to Cathy's "teasing" of Paco is America's teasing of Vietnam veterans in general. Simultaneously centering on and marginalizing the story of Paco's ordeal in Vietnam and rejection in America, the stories of the other characters (Russel, Ernest, Gallagher, Jesse) provide a context in which one can measure the relationship between the folks at home and the Vietnam veterans.

Of the four major story-tellers in the novel, Russel is the only one who has no military experience. But what he lacks in experience Russel makes up for in his story. Russel's story is about a black robber being shot dead at the Elks Club Bingo Fair. Not only does his story strongly smack of gun-powder, as the police "nail him with six or seven solid hits," but it is also authenticated with such obscenities as "shit" and "asshole" (81) which apparently would not be of use elsewhere in the society of manners. For the purpose of enhancing the effect of his story, furthermore, Russel has his "little woman" for confirmation of the details. Russel's story is an instant success, but the success is due not simply to his skilful performance; rather, it relies on the basic human desire for a vicarious experience of death. This desire both prompts the telling and accounts for the attentive response on the part of the barbershop crowd; for the one advantage of vicarious experience is that one is not required to pay any price for the thrill. As Hennig the barber says, watching the back of the departing Paco, "Them Vietnam boys sure do think you owe them something, don't they?" (85). Hennig's reference to Vietnam veterans as "them" serves as an unfailing reminder of the "us/them" mentality that the Americans exhibited in Vietnam. Whether or not Hennig and his likes realize it, this dichotomy has been imported back to America and will remain within the home boundary until it is resolved.

Ernest's WW II story consists of two parts: his witnessing the suicide of a Japanese soldier in Guadalcanal and his own experience of wounds in Iwo Jima. While watching the Japanese suicide is similar to the desire for vicarious experience in Russel's story, getting wounded enables the story-teller to see the futile waste of the

sacrificial aspect of the war. Thus, after his visit to the ruined lives in Hiroshima,

Ernest draws the following moral:

Looking down at them from back of that truck--folks huddled around make-do camps and lean-to aid stations--you didn't know whether to laugh your ass off ('Fuck you! Fuck this whole godforsaken island!') or cry your eyes out: thinking about your own family and the town where *you* came from. I mean, they'd been feeding their kids to the green machine...and eating shit themselves for years. You wound up thinking to yourself, *How much humiliation can ordinary people endure.* (131, emphasis mine)

Through Ernest, Heinemann inverts T. S. Eliot's vision of the ruins left by WW I and poses his own rhetorical as well as interrogative question: How much reality can one take?

Unlike Russel and Ernest, Jesse tells a Vietnam story, one which is emptied of gory details and in which the only action consists of parachute-jumping. Even the life-threatening situation is little more than hypothetical. As Jesse recounts, with a bit of black humor:

"And pity your young ass if your chute don't open and you can't get your reserve to work. You'll be dropping past guys, flying like a rock flies, zoom! and your chute'll be streaming along behind you, going snappety-snap, poppety-pop, flappety-flap, like a fucking flag.... [W]hen you hit you'll be going so fast you just plain explode--ka-plush--and make a little hole in the ground all by yourself. Won't be enough left of you to butter a slice of bread, we used to say, and laughed while we said it. Sorry about that, bub" (153).

Jesse, however, is not so much concerned with his own past and with Vietnam as he is with his present and with America. Jesse "got to see what this fucking country's made of" and his purpose is to find "a place to cool out" (155). Compared to Ernest's account of his part in WW II, Jesse's story reveals precious little of what happened in the war to make him need to find a "cool" place. What the reader feels instead is the

heat emitted by his verbal missiles which are launched not against the enemy in Vietnam but against the "friends" in the homeland. Turning Paul Berlin's scatological experience in Vietnam into a scatological vision of the veterans' homecoming, Jesse describes what he feels would be an appropriate memorial. Like a "whited sepulchre," the exterior would be "Carrara marble":

"in the middle of all that marble put a big granite bowl, a big mortar-looking thing about the size of a three-yard dump truck. Collect thousands of hundred-dollar bills, funded by an amply endowed trust fund, say, to keep the money a-coming. Then gather every sort of 'egregious' excretion that can be transported across state lines from far and wide--chickenshit, bullshit, bloody fecal goop, radioactive dioxin sludge, kepone paste, tubercular spit, abortions murdered at every stage of fetal development--I don't know what and all. Shovel all that shit into that granite bowl and mix in the money by the tens of thousands of dollars. Stir it all together--build a goddamn scaffolding and use galley oars if that suits you. Then back way up and hose down the sod. Get it good and soggy; nice and mucky. Then advertise, 'Come one! Come all! Any and all comers may fish around in that bowl of shit and keep any and all hundred-dollar bills they come across,' barehanded, but first they must take off their shoes, roll up their trousers, slug through that knee-deep muck, and wind up slopping it all over that marble" (158-59).

Jesse's story, then, is a story of how to respond to the American response to the war in Vietnam, how to respond to an imaginary college girl's accusation that he was a baby killer (156), and how to respond to America's love for war (157).

The absence of combat details in Jesse's story does not suggest that they are absent in the reality of the Vietnam War. Neither does their absence suggest that Jesse the story-teller prefers to omit them. Rather, the combat details are left out because those "with the purse strings and apron strings gripped in their hot and soft little hands denounce war stories" (3). In Paco's case, this explains why--even though he has "unloaded the whole nine yards" (73) of his survival story--he has more often "dwelt

on it with trivial thoroughness, condensed it, told it as an ugly fucking joke" (72). This also explains why Paco never actually gets to tell his own story within the narrative. Thus, Christopher Benfey's suggestion that, due to his silence, Paco remains "a mystery to the townspeople" and "a mystery to the reader as well" (19) is only partially valid. By creating the ghost narrators to tell Paco's story, Heinemann suggests that the unspeakable experience of Vietnam cannot be heard by the unlistening audience at home and that the "national coming-to-terms" with Vietnam (which Myers finds lacking in the novel) cannot happen until the nation is willing to share Paco's "mixture of guilt and anger" (Myers, "Dispatches" 419).

If Jesse the survivor tells a story illustrating ways of getting killed in Vietnam, the dead Gallagher tells a story (through Paco's memory) which reveals the hardship of living in America. Although the Vietnam story may be suppressed in the public consciousness, it can in no way be supplanted with stories other than itself. Just as the ghost narrators employ the Bravo Company medic--before his long-to-come death--to tell about the effects of friendly fire, so they use Gallagher's life story to reveal the causes of it. The narrators place Gallagher's story in the context of PX Zippo lighter inscriptions. Many of the company favored the lengthy parody of the Fourth verse of Twenty-third Psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley / of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for I am the meanest mother / fucker in the valley." Gallagher engraved his with a terse "all-purpose response": "Gonna fuck / you up, / boy" (120). To explain why he was "the company killer, the company clown, a man both simple and blunt," Gallagher is given the opportunity to tell his own story--a story about his

abusive father, who was a Chicago Motor Coach driver:

"I remember many a night curled up as tight as a fist under my covers, listening to one or another of my brothers getting a whipping [for having 'snitched as much as a dime' from the bus changer]--them hopping around downstairs on all fours like a damn crab--my old man stompin' after them, shoving furniture aside and thrashing at them with that fuckin' belt--bellowing, *screaming* angry. Shit, bub! You could stuff a blanket and an afghan and a pillow apiece into your ears and you could *still* hear that goddamned belt rip and whistle through the air" (123).

Yet what strikes Gallagher most is not the memory of his father's violence, but "the discovered irony" in the similarity between his father's "look of pale and exhausted astonishment" (124) and the look of "the poor fuckin' fool from Bravo

Company...when he drew himself out of that bunker and took a good long look at what was left of his arm" (125). For Gallagher, the moral of his story about his father is that one should show no "pity on those geeks," which is reflected in his leadership role in the mass rape and later murder of a female Vietcong soldier.

Although Heinemann clearly sympathizes with Gallagher as a psychological casualty, he does not condone his act. Thus, as Paco recollects the episode of the rape, after Gallagher shot the girl: "We looked at her and at *ourselves*, drawing breath again and again, and knew that this was a moment of evil, that we would never live the same" (184, emphasis mine). Instead of attributing the murder to Gallagher alone, Heinemann suggests that it is Gallagher's pre-war experience that ultimately caused his war atrocities in Vietnam. In the same way, as Russel's story suggests, the stories about the war in Vietnam have roots in the daily experience of America.

Paco's Story ends with Paco's disillusionment with the possibility of getting accepted by the folks in the town of Boone. Although his final departure for the west

may suggest his belief that somewhere he will find a place conducive to personal renewal, Heinemann seems more doubtful about the possibility of a reconciliation between the Vietnam veterans and the home world. As the overall narrative technique of the novel suggests, Heinemann sees no hope for such a reconciliation as long as the suppressed memory of Vietnam is not assimilated into America's collective consciousness.

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If Heinemann is correct that America in general does not provide the home that the Vietnam veterans want, works like Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* at least hold out hopes for its existence. Mason's optimism seems indicated by her use of Hopewell as the name for the Kentucky town where her novel is set. Similarly, there is little emphasis on the unfriendly home environment. For example, Emmett, a representative of Mason's Vietnam veterans, receives neither "hot" (as with Christian Starkmann) nor "cold" (as with Paco) treatments. Even though he had been rumored to have been a leading dope dealer, a seducer of high school girls, and a baby killer in Vietnam, Emmett "was popular, and...didn't care what some people said" (43). What enables him to cope is his own conviction that he has committed no such crimes during and after the war. What he did in Vietnam remains a mystery to the reader; all we know is that he was a frightened seventeen-year-old who had gone to Vietnam to revenge his brother-in-law's death; what he did in violation of the law after homecoming was to

hang a Vietcong flag from the clock tower of the courthouse. Although the flag incident resulted in his brief imprisonment, it was little more than a sensational topic for people in the uneventful town.

Mason's optimism is also reflected in the narrative structure of the novel: it opens and ends with a journey to the Vietnam War Memorial undertaken by the three generations of the Vietnam era; although a middle section deals with the Vietnam experience and America's coping with it, the fact that they are treated and enclosed as events from the past seems to suggest a unification of America (as represented by the three generations) in the aftermath of the war.

Moreover, her optimism seems indicated by her choice of protagonist: Sam (Samantha) Hughes, a sensitive female adolescent from the "home" territory whose father had been killed in Vietnam, and who lovingly attends to her uncle, Emmett, upon his return as a victim of Agent Orange. Named Sam, the protagonist seems to represent a combination of the masculine and the feminine and the possible conjunction of the individual and the country at large ("Uncle Sam"). By employing a protagonist who is innocent and yet defiant in face of the Vietnam problems, Mason offers a fresh point of view which suggests a shift of America's consciousness of the Vietnam dis-ease to a new level, and involves an innovative way of dealing with it. This new way takes the form of Sam's determination to atone for the veterans' experience by making a scapegoat of herself. Such a solution at once continues and departs from the traditional way of handling guilt.

According to Sir James Frazer, in primitive cultures, the scapegoat functions as

a vehicle "to transfer our guilt and suffering to some other being who will bear them for us," and the notion arises from a sense of continuity "between the physical and the mental, between the material and the immaterial" (Vickery 3). While maintaining this conception of the scapegoat as a vehicle of transference, Jacob Bronowski associates scapegoating with a sense of discontinuity and sees the sacrifice of the scapegoat as a way of propitiating nature for "man's first and gravest communal imposition on her, which is the practice of culture." Thus, he identifies civilization as the cause: "The dying man dies for all farming men, and carries all their sins; and the chief of these is farming itself. The sin is civilization; the scapegoat is less a sinner than a tribute paid to nature" (14-15).

In turn, by employing a psychoanalytic approach, Erich Neumann advances a scapegoat psychology that particularly applies to the modern period of human civilization. At its core, his scapegoat psychology involves the notion of shadow and the transference becomes a form of projection. For Neumann, as for Carl G. Jung, a human personality consists of two major psychic components--consciousness and the unconscious. While consciousness is associated with the ego, the unconscious is associated with the shadow. The role of the ego is to enable the psyche to adapt to the requirements of the collective ideals (or what Neumann calls the "old ethic"). When the ego comes to represent the whole personality, the shadow component is repressed and, in response, the conscious operates to deflate the ego. The repression of the shadow thus produces an unconscious feeling of guilt and a sense of inferiority on the part of ego in face of collective ideals. In order to be released of the guilt feeling, the

ego exteriorizes the shadow, projects it onto an alien other, and tries to exterminate it. Since the chain reaction that finally leads to the sacrifice of a scapegoat starts with the collective ideals, Neumann argues these are ultimately responsible for the eruptions of the shadow.

Thus, in the case of America's experience in Vietnam, scapegoating can be perceived to have taken place in two ways. On the one hand, for the very reason that the American Congressional decision was almost unanimous in sending combatants to Vietnam (i.e., to contain the spread of the communist evil), the military mission is an institutional form of projection. As Neumann explains,

No war can be waged unless the enemy can be converted into the carrier of a shadow projection; and the lust and joy of warlike conflict, without which no human being can be induced actually to fight in a war, is derived from the satisfaction of the unconscious shadow side. Wars are the correlative of the old ethic, and warfare is the visible expression of the breakthrough of the unconscious shadow side of the collective. (57-58)

On the other hand, when the fact that American soldiers committed atrocities in Vietnam was publicized, America began to denounce not only the war but also its service men and women. Although the anti-war response can be seen partly as a reaction against the pro-war response to psychic guilt, the two responses also co-existed throughout and beyond the war, and can be seen as two different projections of the American shadow. Whereas the pro-war force projects the shadow onto the Vietcong, the anti-war force (with the possible exception of those who were able to see through the nature of the war and thus distinguish the war from the combatants) projects the shadow onto the American soldiers and veterans. Both projections stemmed from the discrepancy between America's ideal of human equality and its

actual practice.

In Mason's novel, the scapegoating aspects of the Vietnam War are focused through the character of Sam the protagonist. On the one hand, through the public condemnation of her dead father, Dwayne, and her wounded uncle, Emmett, she herself suffers as a scapegoat. On the other hand, as a young woman who has been raised on the collective home ideals, she is in a position to play the opposite role of those who project their guilt. However, since the novel is not intended to dramatize the tension between veterans and civilians, Sam is not given the chance to play out the two opposite roles one at a time. Rather, in order to exorcise the Vietnam dis-ease, she is allowed to conjoin and neutralize the roles of victim and victimizer within herself. Characterizing Sam as one who scapegoats herself, Mason thus makes one step beyond Neumann in the scapegoat psychology.

By endowing Sam with an "all-purpose name" (118), Mason suggests that America needs to involve itself as the object of sacrifice and that the nation is obliged to restore the harmony between its feminine and masculine aspects. Thus the biblical connotations of Sam's name become significant. As her father's letter to her suggests, "I was thinking about what you wanted to name the baby and I really don't want to name it Darrel. That was the name of a guy in my outfit who isn't with us anymore.... But here's my favorite name: Samuel. It's from the Bible. If it's a girl, name it Samantha. That sounds like something in a prayer, doesn't it?" (261). Although, as Sam discovers later, neither Samuel nor Samantha could be found in the Book of Chronicles as her father had indicated, Samuel the judge and the prophet in the Books

of Samuel was appropriately the figure after whom Sam was named. Meaning "the name of God," the word "Samuel" "was sometimes associated with one of the smaller towns or 'daughters' as they were called in Hebrew" (1 Sa. xix. 18, 19). Moreover, he was the only judge who could perform the ritual of sacrifice, and he led the whole nation to penance after its total loss to the Philistines. In the case of America, without a national "judge" to minister its spiritual affairs, the country must rely on its citizens to attend its own soul.

Subsequently, at the center of what Sam views as the "impossible dramas" of the Vietnam context, the healing is "all up to her"--Sam, the generic name for all Americans (254). In other words, the scapegoat in the sacrificial ritual has to be the nation itself. When Sam touches her own name, Sam A. Hughes, on the Vietnam War Memorial at the end of the novel, she thinks, "It is the first on a line. It is down low enough to touch.... How odd it feels, as though all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall" (351).

Just as the scapegoat is the carrier of all communal evils (or sins in the Judeo-Christian tradition), so Sam becomes the bearer of the Vietnam stigma in Mason's novel. As she finally puts the Vietnam War Memorial in perspective with the opposite Washington Monument and the flag, Sam notices that "[b]oth the monument and the flag seem like arrogant gestures, like the country giving the finger to the dead boys, flung in this hole in the ground. Sam doesn't understand what she is feeling, but it is something so strong, it is like a tornado moving in her, something massive and overpowering. It feels like giving birth to this wall" (345).

The feeling of giving birth to the memorial wall, however, is not entirely the result of a moment's visual juxtaposition. Rather, the life-giving feeling is the accumulative effect of her seventeen years of life-time experience. The posthumous child of a Vietnam soldier and niece of a Vietnam veteran, Sam has been raised in the age of Vietnam--a period of unprecedented political and cultural upheaval in the American history. Even though Sam's hometown, Hopewell, is a place which "the sixties never hit" (335) and where "[p]eople are good" (89), Sam finds herself uneasy at being surrounded by its "goodness." "At her graduation" from high school, for example, "the commencement speaker, a Methodist minister, had preached about keeping the country strong, stressing sacrifice. He made Sam nervous" (31). Less nerve-racking but more accountable for Sam's nervousness is perhaps the conservative mentality of the townspeople in general. While the parents of Sam's boyfriend refuse to "get cable because of all the R-rated movies" (40), they not only allow their son to flaunt his sexuality at a stag party but also feel guilty for missing the two World Wars--or what the father calls "something important" (123-24). The stifling cultural atmosphere, then, prompts Sam and her best female friend, Dawn, to be "the baddest girls in Hopewell" (56).

For either Sam or Dawn to be the "baddest" girl in Hopewell, however, involves a sacrifice of her reputation. Although, in Hopewell, pre-marital sex is socially acceptable, pre-marital pregnancy calls for social disapproval. As a consequence of sexual intercourse, women are confronted with the following dilemma: they either take pills or get pregnant. The similarity of their situation to that of the

Vietnam soldiers becomes clear in the puns which characterize their discussion about pregnancy:

"Not with the pill. You know, when Mom got pregnant last year, she ran me off to the doctor and got birth-control pills for me. She didn't even ask me."

"Aren't you afraid to take those things?" asked Dawn. "I'd be afraid of *side effects*."

"I don't care. Having a baby would be a pretty big side effect." She giggled and touched her stomach. "A *front effect*!" (59-60, emphasis mine)

When, later, Dawn suspects that she has become pregnant, her fear of a "front effect" is demonstrated by the fact that she has to plead with Sam to buy a pregnancy-test kit for her at a local drug mart. Sam perceives that her friend's panic is unwarranted, however, since she comes to realize that "it used to be that getting pregnant when you weren't married ruined your life because of the disgrace; now it ruined your life, and nobody cared enough for it to be a disgrace" (148).

Sam's perception of the "front effect" on women thus becomes an apt analogue for the effect on Vietnam veterans of their experience on the "front." Just as Dawn's pregnancy may ruin her future life rather than her reputation, so the veterans' experience in Vietnam becomes the factor that changes the course of their life. In Emmett's case, for example, his front effect is perceivable in both physical and psychological ways. For reasons arguably related to his war-time exposure to Agent Orange, Emmett had chloracne on his face and suffers an ache in his head and a burning pain in his heart. As adamantly as the medical doctors may desire to persuade Emmett that his pimples are no more than adolescent acne (103), they cannot as conveniently dismiss the deeper psychological scars. Not only does Emmett show a

tendency to freak out, as is the case when he, along with Sam and her boyfriend Lonnie, visits the Cawood's Pond (52), but he also digs a trench-like ditch around his house in order "to expose the foundation under the kitchen" and to block a water leak (61). One suspects that it is the foundation of his own life in Hopewell that Emmett is examining and trying to protect. Thus, when Sam asks if he is afraid the house will fall down, his response is: "Yep.... You take a structural weakness. One thing leads to another, and then it all falls apart" (84). In the back of his mind, as Sam realizes, Emmett is still fighting his war in Vietnam, which was a direct product of America's fear for the strength of *its* foundation.

Nor is it only the veterans themselves who suffer from the effects of their experiences in Vietnam. The effects extend to others through the difficulty the veterans have in either initiating and maintaining a sexual relationship or in fulfilling their procreative function if they are fortunate enough to have a relationship. Thus, Emmett is unable to find courage to respond to Anita, who admires him for his quiet stamina, while Pete experiences conflicts with his wife when he is unable to control his inner urge to shoot at the streets and would "rather be back in Nam" (70). Moreover, in his sexual relations with women, Tom is unable to have an erection ever since his return from Vietnam. As he confesses to Sam, "Well, my mind gets in the way. It takes me where I don't want to go. I thought it would be different with you, but it's not" (183). And, as a direct victim of Agent Orange, Buddy Mangren developed "every symptom in the book.... Nausea, the runs, jaundice, chloracne. His muscles twitch and he can't sleep and he's lost weight. He can't even drink one beer. It makes him drunker'n a

hoot owl'" (159). Indirectly, Buddy's daughter had to have her intestines rerouted "'to keep 'em from twisting so bad'" (159). What is at stake as a result of the war, then, is the life-line not only of the veterans but also of America.

This wasteland motif is also suggested in the association of a defoliated forest Tom had witnessed in Vietnam with the mindscape of the veterans, which "looks like winter, [though] winter doesn't come to the jungle" (135). Similarly, Emmett suggests the connection when he confesses to Sam: "There's something wrong with me. I'm damaged. It's like something in the center of my heart is gone and I can't get it back. You know when you cut down a tree sometimes and it's diseased in the middle?" (323-24). For Mason, the damage in the middle is not only that of Emmett's but also that of America's.

What makes the veterans' trauma particularly poignant is the fact that their pains are perceived through the consciousness of Sam; ready to embrace what life has to offer, she is obsessed with the veterans' home dis-ease. Whereas Dawn and the Vietnam veterans have literally experienced the "front effect" (60)--the former with her pregnancy and the latter with their combat experience--Sam experiences it in terms of her "post-Vietnam stress syndrome" (330). The way she has been affected is partly manifested in her obsession with Emmett's health. Instead of becoming "a girl who wouldn't embarrass him [her boyfriend Lonnie] by doing something strange" (197), Sam took up the "trouble" and "carried Emmett around on a pillow" (239) as her mother Irene once did. What for Irene is trouble, for Sam is a personal and, by extension, a collective responsibility; in her view, the Vietnam War "had *everything* to

do with me" (101).

Thus, Sam lost no chance to turn her private concern with Emmett's health into a public one. Besides inquiring into the effects of Agent Orange, Sam also has no qualms about bringing up the topic of Agent Orange at Lonnie's parents' dinner table (121). Furthermore, in what her mother termed her "horrible imagination" (80), Sam associates orange with Agent Orange (129), microwaves with Agent Orange (154), party with Agent Orange (156), beer cups with Agent Orange (159); she also links cosmetics with Agent Orange-related deformation in Buddy Mangrum's daughter (174), earrings with Vietcong's ears Americans cut off for souvenirs (176), civilian quilt with military poncho (180), bed with muddy ditches in the war zone, and napalm with no palms (177-78).

Sam's sense of empathy with the veterans, however, is counterbalanced by her sense of disgust with them for the other half of their Vietnam experience. From her father's diary, she reads,

Aug. 4. Darrel got it. It was over with before we knew what was happening. Goddam, it was awful. I'll never forget it. Darrel went off in the bushes to take a shit and they got him. Pop-pop. We opened fire all around but didn't get anything. We just stood there firing and firing and Darrel had blood shooting out of his back and his mouth. The chopper lifted him out but it was too late. He lost too much blood. The medic was covered in his blood. If we run across some gooks, they're going to be gook pudding when I get through with them! (292-93)

If Sam's horror of war is re-confirmed through Darrel's death, she has also discovered her own father's killer instinct. Just as she has demonstrated her empathy for the victims of the Vietnam War, so she cannot hide her disgust with what the Vietnam soldiers, with her father as an example, were capable of doing in the war: "Now

everything seemed suddenly so real it enveloped her, like something rotten she had fallen into, like a skunk smell, but she felt she had to live with it for a long time before she could take a bath. In the jungle, they were nasty and couldn't take a bath" (296).

What Sam finds to be "nasty" in her father's diary makes it difficult for her to connect Vietnam with her traumatized uncle Emmett. But it is one connection she feels obliged to make for him so that he may come to terms with his Vietnam: "She remembered when he used to shout in his sleep. He was after Charlie. There weren't any Vietcong to hunt down now, no hills to capture, no bases to defend, but he was still doing it. He was out to kill, in spite of himself, like a habit he couldn't break" (301). Thus, she ventures into what the local veterans have called the "Kentucky boonies"--the Cawood's Pond. By going into the swamp, she had hoped she would be able "to find out what they went through" (299) and thus restore Emmett to the civilian way of life. Despite her effort to imagine her uncle "standing silhouetted against the Vietnam sky" and to simulate a soldier's night in the Vietnam jungle, however, she can only be as close to Vietnam as her memory of monsoons from her geography class (305-06). She cannot help realizing that "this nature preserve in a protected corner of Kentucky wasn't like Vietnam at all" (308).

Consequently, although in the swamps Sam does not learn anything more than what she had already learned from stories, letters, and diaries about Vietnam, she discovers herself. She realizes that she is experiencing a "post-Vietnam stress syndrome," a term she coins to describe her addiction to the past. She also realizes

that she cannot recover simply by recounting historical facts. As Emmett says to Sam after rescuing her from her imaginary Vietcong rapist in the "Kentucky boonies": "I came out to save you, but maybe I can't. Maybe you have to find out for yourself. Fuck. You can't learn from the past. The main thing you learn from history is that you can't learn from history. That's what history is" (325). What Sam needs instead is the same kind of inner strength that makes the egret--Emmett's favorite bird--a free bird. In order to cope with the past, in other words, she needs first to deal with the present. That Sam learns her Vietnam lesson from Emmett suggests that all the nieces and nephews of "Uncle Sam" could similarly learn theirs for a national recovery from the Vietnam experience.

The female recognition of the nature of the Vietnam dis-ease and its self-oriented cure is reflected in a change in women's attitudes towards their own lives. After Dwayne's death, Sam's mother, Irene, had chosen to sacrifice her newly-found love and "to take care of [Emmett] at home" (336). Now, she decides to live her own life dedicated to a new family. Emmett's former girl friend, Anita, is also different. She refuses "to be a picture" and "just be beautiful" for her good-looking husband who was a baseball player (89). Instead, she returns home to take care of her father who has a heart condition. Sam's best female friend, Dawn, had wanted "to do something real wild," and was "mad at the world" (149). Finding herself pregnant and feeling "sick of playing mommy," she had desired "to play Las Vegas" (151). But eventually she makes up her mind to bear her baby since, for her, "having a baby would be as wild as anything I can think of" (253). Finally, Sam herself stops carrying Emmett as

an extra burden and decides to go to college. Regardless of the conventional prescription and newer expectations of the female identity, Mason's female characters become regenerated through their decision to be what they want to be.

In turn, the redemptive prospect for Vietnam veterans is suggested through the conviviality of the three related generations in their drive to the Vietnam War Memorial and through their atonement for the dead. For the present, Mason, however, also foresees difficulties on the journey toward recovery. In the opening part of the narrative, for example, she depicts what looks like an ordinary cross-country family drive, with commercial billboards marking the length of the highway and filling in as topics for the group to pass time. The highway seems to be an open road on which, driving her newly-bought 1973 VW bug, Sam "could glide like this all the way across America" (3). Instead of a glide, the drive turns into a series of fragments and frustrations. Not only does Sam's grandmother frequently request a stop in order to relieve herself in a washroom (3), but the transmission of Sam's VW bug--an appropriate symbol of the Vietnam War veterans--stubbornly goes out of gear and demands Sam's personal attention (8). Most significantly, at the conclusion of the drive, Sam sees the Vietnam War Memorial as a "black boomerang" striking back at the "proud and tall" Washington Monument, which Tom has called a "big white prick" (342-43). While suggesting the way that the Vietnam War serves as a critique of American history, such a vision also foretells resistance on the part of American pride and masculinity to the basic rethinking about a new way out of Vietnam.

Although the novel does not therefore posit any easy solution, Mason's

characterization of Sam as a scapegoat signals the fact that, in locating the cause and cure of the Vietnam dis-ease, the author has indeed "face[d] the Vietnam issue squarely" (Lyons 465). More optimistic than those works which focus on America's imposition of the scapegoat role on the Vietnam veterans (i.e., Heinemann's *Paco's Story*), Mason's *In Country* provides a perspective for America to recognize its own shadow and to assume the scapegoat role itself. Instead of combating, punishing, and exterminating the Vietnam veterans as what Neumann calls "the alien out there," Mason's Sam deals with them as her "own inner problem" (50).

Mason's vision of an internal solution to the duality between America and Vietnam veterans has much to do with the way that her novel originated. As she recalls, the Vietnam War "forced itself upon me. I didn't start out saying to myself, 'I'm going to write a novel about the effects of the Vietnam War on a family.' I started out with the family and then I probed around and discovered what their problems were. It was as though the war came out of someplace where it had been hiding" (qtd. in O'Conner 7). Underlying this artistic inspiration, perhaps, is her deep awareness of the value of history and community--two major elements in Southern writings about Vietnam which, according to Owen W. Gilman, Jr., have continued the Southern literary tradition (*Vietnam* 20-21). Indeed, if the South as a community has long experienced the problems of scapegoating--first as victimizer of the Afro-Americans and then as victim of the North--in America, Mason as an artist is keen on envisioning a way out of the old pattern.

Chapter Three

Yet Another Errand

We have our own national mission to perform--a mission commensurate to the extent of our country,--its resources and possessions,--and the numerous nations, foreign and inferior, all about us, over whom we are required to extend our sway and guardianship. We are now equal to this sway and guardianship. (9)

--William G. Simms, *Views and Reviews* [1st series]

Therein lies a cardinal lesson for the democracies. No nation should put the burden of war on its military forces alone. It matters not whether a war is total or limited; a nation must be wholly dedicated in its purpose, firm in its resolve, and committed to sacrifice by more than one segment of its society. As the war in Vietnam clearly demonstrated, without that dedication, that resolve, that commitment, no matter what the performance on the field of battle, victory will be elusive: (8)

--William C. Westmoreland, "Foreword"

If disorientation was characteristic of the American experience in Vietnam, the cause of such confusion would seem to lie in the way that America employed its military power to serve an ideological purpose. Founded on the "self-evident truths" of freedom and independence for all peoples in the world, America is also evidently a nation that has taken pride in extending to the weaker neighbouring countries what William G. Simms called "our sway and guardianship" (9). The inherent conflict between American idealism and its actual political and military practice is nowhere better exemplified than in the intervention in Vietnam.

Although America's ostensible goal in Vietnam, in John F. Kennedy's words, was "to assure the survival and the success of liberty" (Lott 269), its immediate

purpose was to exercise the Cold War doctrine of containment in Southeast Asia. American intervention in the war was a political and military effort to contain the spread of international communism and to prevent the so-called domino theory from becoming reality. Thus, as foreign policy analyst Ronald Steel sees it, the American intervention in Vietnam was at the same time altruistic and ego-centric--the acting out of "an instinct to help those less fortunate and permit them to emulate and perhaps one day achieve the virtues of our own society" (16). In short, the intervention was symptomatic of what he sympathetically calls "welfare imperialism," which is rooted "in our most basic and generous national instincts" (19). To separate America's "benevolent" intent from its egotistic methods, however, is not only to discount the extent of destruction caused to the Vietnamese people; it is also to underestimate the degree of the trauma experienced by the American psyche. More significantly, the separation of intent and methods can also lead to an inability to recognize the nature of its action.

In the 1960s, America was unlikely to have forgotten John Quincy Adams's warning in his 4 July address in 1823 that, if the nation should "involve herself beyond the power of extrication," she "would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit." Yet, as Steel suggests, it is possible that America's military muscle in the post-World War II years made it feel powerful enough to be the global "champion and vindicator" of freedom and independence. Thinking along this line, however, would mean remembering that the growth of American power began with the coming of the Puritans and at the expense of the native peoples. It would also suggest that, despite

the concept of equality for all espoused in its Declaration of Independence, America has defined itself in terms of a fundamentally imperial "way of life." As historian William Appleman Williams argues, although the term "empire" has undergone semantic changes throughout the history of political thinking, the fact that America exists as an empire has not changed: from the colonial days when the Puritans envisioned "a City on the Hill giving Truth to Mankind" to the present when political leaders talk "ever more about 'extending the area of freedom'" (*Empire* viii, ix). In Williams's terms, America continues to be an empire in that, as a superior economic power, it *consistently* and *systematically* "subjects an inferior economy to its own preferences" (7). Hence, the American intervention in Vietnam was by no means an innocent defense of spiritual ideals. It was an event in which "economics and theology and secular ideology converged" (Williams "City" 13).

Although the economic factor may be questionable in the case of Vietnam--with the Americans acting more as what James Thomson calls "sentimental imperialists"--the way in which America moved toward the goal of a democratic South Vietnam is very reminiscent of the combination of soft and hard tactics that characterized its initial approach to its native peoples and land. While, on the one hand, it supplied economic aids to win the "hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese, on the other hand, it waged a war of attrition on those peoples who genuinely fought for an independent Vietnamese nation. Just as the English settlers and later Americans had made an effort to shape the native American land and people as they desired, so America wished to build a miniature America in Vietnam.

What particularly seems to reflect the spirit of westward movement evidenced throughout American history, however, is the military strategy that General William Westmoreland--Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV)--devised for the Vietnam involvement. It consisted of three tactical operations: "clearing," "securing," and "search and destroy." As Westmoreland explained, "clearing" was either to destroy or to expel the enemy forces from an area so that the so called "pacification" could begin. "Securing" was to guard the cleared area with military forces and at the same time to uproot the secret Vietcong political infrastructure. "Search and destroy" was "to locate the enemy, try to bring him to battle, and either destroy him or force his surrender" (Westmoreland, *Soldier* 83). Placed in the larger context of American history, however, what to Westmoreland was an effective military strategy--the clearing of the enemy in the Vietnam jungle--becomes an elaborate replay of the American "civilization" of the wilderness. That is, putting aside the advanced technological props, the American action in Vietnam's jungle theater can be viewed as a continuation of the same ritual as the Puritan's errand into the American wilderness.

The Vietnam venture can in turn be seen as a modern analogue to the historical settlement of the American west. According to Frederick Jackson Turner, from the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century, the Euro-Americans had settled in the West in the form of three waves by three classes of people. The first wave was constituted by the pioneers, who cleared the backwoods for the later foundation of a county or a state. The second wave was formed by farmers, who "purchase the land,

throw rough bridges over the streams, put hewn log houses with glass windows and brick or stone chimneys...exhibit the picture and forms of plain, frugal, civilized life.'" The third wave was staged by the men of capital and enterprise, who developed the small village into "'a spacious town or city'" arrayed with "'all the refinements, luxuries, elegancies, frivolities, and fashions'" (19, 20, 21). This settlement of the west, according to Turner, was what ultimately gave shape to American democracy. Although the Vietnam errand differed from the western settlement in immediate goals, the fact that General Westmoreland borrowed--consciously or unconsciously--the triplex strategy from the American frontiersman suggests a possible anticipation of a similar political outcome.

Instead of producing a democracy in the American sense, however, the war in Vietnam resulted in a communist government, and this situation raises questions about the way that America practices its ideology. And since the cornerstone of American ideology is the theology developed by the Puritans, in answering these questions it is instructive to consider the scholarly debate over the function of American jeremiads, a body of sermons in which the second-generation Puritan fathers on the American soil delivered to their congregations.

According to Perry Miller, what prompted the jeremiads was the physical and material indulgences that accompanied the process of westward expansion, and the sermons took the form of a self-condemnation for failing to erect what Winthrop had called "a place of Cohabitation and Consorteshipp under a due form of Government both civill and ecclesiasticall" (qtd. in Miller 5)--or, a political institution whose

function was to preserve the Puritan way of life.

According to Sacvan Bercovitch, however, the American jeremiad was characterized not by pessimism but by optimism. It functioned as a rhetoric which not only expiated the spiritual lapses but in effect also encouraged physical and material pursuit. Such rhetoric took the form of what Bercovitch calls "middle-class hegemony"--an ideological consensus that is different from state-imposed ideology--which "became entrenched in New England and subsequently spread across the Western territories and the South" (xii). Bercovitch's view of the American jeremiad thus enables one to see the American errand into the wilderness as a mission which proceeded by combining economic necessity with theological principles, and which succeeded by conjoining reason and faith. In different terms, then, Bercovitch delineates the "empire" concept that William Appleman Williams sees as central to the American identity.

Until Vietnam, America had not realized its own limit as an empire. What forced this realization was the discrepancy between the value system of "middle-class hegemony" and the lack of a real economic need in the case of Vietnam. Whereas containing communism seemed ideologically correct to the American public, killing and being killed by the Vietnamese peasants did not appear to be worth the strips of rice paddies or pieces of mountain terrain which could in no certain way be secured. Consequently, "clear" and "secure" as the American war strategists might have expected their Vietnam mission to be, to the American public their tactics seemed to result in both more and less than what was called for, and to originate in a non-

practical outlook.

This lack of common sense has become a recurrent theme in Vietnam War novels. For example, in David Halberstam's *One Very Hot Day*, the objects of the "clearing" action did not include the Vietcong agents in the Headquarters of the American advisors. Since the elimination of one agent meant the introduction of another, for "the same ones would come back in the fresh bunch," the best way to "clear" the hostile elements was to leave them where they were (16). Neither were the "cleared" villages clear or in any sense secure. In Halberstam's novel, it is precisely in one of those pacified "friendly" villages that Big William, the self-styled "ambassador" to Vietnam, is destroyed along with his elite helimobile company (151). Nor was it possible to distinguish the "hostile" from the "friendly" or to tell if a piece of intelligence was true or false. As Captain Beaupre observes somberly with respect to the words of a Vietcong suspect, "he's telling the truth. That's the worst thing about it. Makes you long for the usual ones, who've never seen a VC, never heard of the war" (125). What makes Beaupre "long for the usual ones" is that, although they may lie about the presence of the enemy, he and the South Vietnamese troops he advises can at least walk in circles for another peaceful, though unbearably hot, day.

Other narratives simply reveal the way that aspects of "search and destroy" were contrary to the intention of the strategy. In *Going After Cacciato*, Tim O'Brien identifies a major conflict--the enlisted men's instinct for survival and the officer's insistent emphasis on discipline--inherent in the search and destroy mission:

"Blow 'em," Oscar Johnson repeated. "Forget going down--just blow the fuckers an' let's move on."

Lieutenant Sidney Martin shook his head. "You've got it wrong," he said. "It's SOP to search the tunnels, then blow them. That's the procedure and that's how it will be done." (207)

Lieutenant Martin may have demonstrated the "Standard Operating Procedure" to his men. In so doing, however, he also convinced them that he is a threat to their lives in Vietnam, which later calls for his fragging. In *The Bamboo Bed*, William Eastlake depicts the aimlessness of a jungle battle: "Beneath the villa the battle flowed up close and then ebbed back into the rubber green. It was not one battle but, like most engagements in Viet, it was many, sometimes separate and distinct, sometimes covert, but always with a seeming divorce and anonymity, without concern or even relationship to what happened in another part of the jungle" (13). The "divorce" aspect of the Vietnam "engagement" also applies to America's own divisiveness over the war, and the sense of uncertainty can be extended to the anxiety of those back home. In the past of American history, as Bercovitch argues, such anxiety always guaranteed a return of more security; in the case of Vietnam, the expenditure has not resulted in such returns.

In *The 13th Valley*, John M. Del Vecchio dramatizes the ironic consequence of search and destroy operations. As he presents it, while seeking to locate and destroy a North Vietnamese Army headquarters, the American troops found themselves trapped by the enemy:

There is pandemonium on the knoll but there is no firing. There is firing in the valley. NVA soldiers seem to be everywhere, firing from unseen everywhere. The four squeezed companies are again all being hit. It is as if Alpha has ripped the top off an anthill. 1st Plt is in a line at the knoll's south crest. 2d and 3d and the CP are coming in, collapsing. (616)

More ironic, in *Paco's Story*, Larry Heinemann depicts the way that Alpha Company's destruction is caused by its own friendly supporting fire. Resorting to homely diction, the ghost narrators recall the scene for James, the everyman listener:

we screamed loud and nasty, and everything was transformed into Crispy Critters for half a dozen clicks in any direction you would have cared to point; everything smelling of ash and marrow and spontaneous combustion; everything--dog tags, slivers of meat, letters from home, scraps of sandbags and rucksacks and MPC scrip, jungle shit and human shit--*everything* hanging out of the woodline looking like so much rust-colored puke. (15-16)

On 29 April 1975, the Saigon government of South Vietnam collapsed under North Vietnamese military pressure. In retrospect, two opposing views exist with regard to the status of the American part in the war. On the one hand, citing military statistics and evoking America's reputation as a winner, General Westmoreland declared that "the record of the American military services of never having lost a war is still intact" (*Soldier* 423). On the other, for many Americans like Philip Caputo, who had experienced personal losses which entailed neither spiritual elevation nor material compensation, "America had lost its first war" (*Rumor* 328). Both views are perhaps valid. In any case, what is perhaps most important is the way that the absolute and opposite perceptions enable one to place American participation in Vietnam in its larger historical context.

With respect to Bercovitch's emphasis on the continuing tradition of the jeremiad in American history, one is able to recognize that the pessimistic (as in Caputo's expression of loss) and the optimistic (as in Westmoreland's assessment of the war) interpretations of America's crisis and future seem to be no longer delivered from the same pulpit. The disconnectedness of the two jeremiad strains seems to

suggest the end of the ideology which informed America's culture since its Puritan beginnings. Similarly, although Bill Clinton charged his 1993 presidential election campaign by harking back to the Puritan theme of a "new covenant" between the government and the citizens, the imperative need for such renewal seems to suggest the exhaustion of the ideology which inspired the original covenant. In turn, this situation may explain why, hand-in-hand with a critique of American imperialism, Vietnam War novels are characterized by their questioning of America's religious ideology.

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Caputo's *Indian Country* is a novel about healing in the post-Vietnam era. While the healing is primarily intended for veterans with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Caputo's concern is also to trace this problem to the dominant Christian culture of America. To Caputo, differentiation of good from evil was the starting point of Christianity, whereas the war in Vietnam was at odds with such clear-cut distinctions. Caputo's major strategy for dramatizing this situation is his focus on the conflict between Lucius Starkmann (a clergyman) and his son, Christian, a mentally disturbed Vietnam veteran. In particular, Caputo's strategy is to present fundamentalist Christianity as a religion which causes the ills that other religions can help to heal. Whereas the father--Lucius Starkmann--has an irreversible cerebral hemorrhage, Chris Starkmann, the son, is restored to psychological wholeness through the efforts of three

non-Christian contacts: his wife June's Finnish distaff of *sisu* (i.e., endurance of the feminine), Dr. Eckhardt's Zen-oriented psychiatric technique, and especially Wawiekumig's traditional Ojibwa religion/medicine. This difference between the diseases and the respective cures suggests not only the Christian tendency toward mind/body division, but also the fatal consequences of an emphasis upon the mind.

In Chris's memory, his father was accustomed to viewing human emotions in a biblical light: "Once man had lived at peace in the natural world; then came the catastrophic bite of the apple, and man was cast into a darkness bristling with dangers" (8). The consequence of "the bite of the apple" was man's ability to distinguish good from evil and the need for endless labor to redeem himself from the fallen world. For Lucius Starkmann--an uncompromising Christian fundamentalist--then, his vocation literally became one of setting an example in observing Christian morality. Extended to daily practice, this meant not merely advocating the good but violently crusading against evil.

Consequently, as if forcing the body to become a vehicle for repairing the spiritual effects of the fall, Starkmann adopts a chastising attitude toward his congregation and his offspring. For example, when on their first encounter his son came into a fist fight with young Bonny George, the grandson of the Ojibwa medicine man, Wawiekumig, Starkmann reproached his son by reminding "Chris" of the meaning of his name: "*Whoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (19). His concern with discipline, moreover, was so severe that Chris "needed his father's approval to do almost everything, even go to the bathroom" (15).

In contrast, Wawiekumig guided his aggressive grandson with gentle and practical words. To Bonny, he said matter-of-factly, "Everything comes around back to you. You give plenty of kids bloody noses--now you got one" (18).

Commenting on the self-reflexive philosophy and quiet (but not passive) pacifism of the Ojibwas, the senior Starkmann attempts to explain the militancy of his own pacifism and its ultimate pragmatism: "it didn't do them [the Ojibwa] much good not to fight the whites, because they lost their land, the same as the Sioux and Cheyenne" (11). His brand of pacifism is exemplified in his fierceness in crusading against the American war in Vietnam. In public, Reverend Starkmann makes frequent appearances on TV and becomes an anti-war advocate in the pulpit. Within his own family, his antagonism toward the war shifts to Chris, when he decides to enlist. For the elder Starkmann, his son's personal safety is less a concern than the possibility that he might turn into something less than human: "A good soldier belonged to a different species, *homo furens*, half man and half beast" (101). The father's view that it would be better for his son to die than to become a "good" half beast, however, ironically reflects his own militancy in conduct. As a result, Starkmann's alienation from his son does not cease with Chris's early discharge. Not only does he refuse to reconcile with Chris and resolve differences, but he also disowns his son by refusing to join the home-coming party. For the father, his son "never came back" (105). The Christian minister's militancy, however, is not limited to the issue of the war in Vietnam. Instead of reflecting paternal protectiveness, his adamant objection to his daughter Anne's marriage to a man from a different social class provides further

evidence of his ingrained either/or mentality and tendency to polarize differences.

While Starkmann's oxymoronic pacific militancy is directly responsible for the failure of the father/son reconciliation even at the father's death-bed, it has also partly caused the son's psychological disintegration. Chris's mental illness does not result simply from his failure to reconcile with his dead father and with his dead friend Bonny George; it is also related to his religious background. As Dr Eckhardt summarizes Chris's case upon the latter's release from the hospital, "Religious son of militant pacifist minister joins up in rebellion against father's values. Blames self for death of best friend. Returns home burdened with guilt, which eventually drives him to self-destructive behavior. Case closed" (412). Although Eckhardt suspects that there is "something [else] wrong," he correctly pinpoints the collision between Chris's experience of the war and the fundamentalist Christian element in Chris's upbringing as a major contributor to his mental breakdown. Caputo dramatizes this point in the two major stages--ante-war and post-war--of Chris's development.

Before his tour of duty in Vietnam, Chris Starkmann is portrayed as a cultivated Christian young man in contrast to his pagan Ojibwa brother Bonny George. His physique is that of a city man. On a street, he may appear impressive and graceful with "strong, wiry legs," but in the woods, he feels bony and awkward with a torso "poorly designed for carrying heavy burdens" (3). In contrast, Bonny is fit for wilderness living. With "compact physique and agile movements," the stocky Ojibwa reminds one of "a bobcat or wolverine" (4). Chris has been raised to sing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (44); Bonny is interested in "becoming a backwoods autodidact,

a font of obscure legends and fables" (21). Chris has an instant "dread" of wilderness at the fall of darkness (3); Bonny has the instinct for "harmony" (22) with the woods and wolves.

The physical and cultural differences between Chris and Bonny inevitably lead to their different views of the American war in Vietnam, as suggested by their dialogue after Bonny declines Chris's offer to help him dodge the draft:

"I guess because the war is wrong."
The Indian scrutinized him for several moments.
"Do you really think it's wrong?"
"What do you mean? Sure I do."
"Do you think it's wrong just because your old man does? What's wrong with it?"
"Are you trying to tell me it's right?"
"I don't think it's right or wrong. I think it just is, like a blizzard or one of those storms that come up on the lake in the fall." (42)

Whereas Chris tends toward polarization of wars into those that are right and those that are wrong, Bonny refrains from such categorizations. Chris's polarization is symptomatic of the rationalist tendency to differentiate between subject (i.e., I) and object (i.e., the war); Bonny's view of the war as "it just is" suggests the absence of such subject/object differentiation. As a result, whereas Chris experiences anxiety in the woods, unity with the woods and its other inhabitants makes Bonny feel at peace in the wilderness. Chris's tendency to differentiate can in turn be related to the Euro-Americans' initial encounters with the wilderness in America and serves to explain both their response and the course of American history. As Bonny explains, "The wolf was killed because white people were afraid of him. The Indian was killed for the same reason" (32). In Vietnam, a similar mindset was involved, and the difference in

Chris's and Bonny's modes of perception also ironically accounts for their different fates in Vietnam.

Just as the American wilderness had once been the object of white conquest, so in the 1960s Vietnam appeared to be another. In Vietnam, however, both the jungle and the people's war made it difficult to tell the subject/friendlies from the object/unfriendlies. In the same way that, in Chris's vertigo, "the distinction between remembered experience and immediate event grew blurred" (205), the line between friends and enemy was never clear in Vietnam. Specifically, Bonny's death is the result of such confusion. Instead of being killed by the enemy, he is killed by the artillery fire that Chris calls for during a military operation. For Chris, the war is one in which brothers slayed brothers: "he saved me from the water, but I killed him with fire" (353).

Although Chris returns home with the survivor's guilt, his guilt is thus compounded: not only has he survived the war, but he was also the cause of Bonny's death. Accidentally, when he is thrown out of a car for being "[j]ust back from Nam" on a San Francisco highway, his initial rejection by the hostile homeworld not only increases but also confirms his own sense of guilt. Later, in addition to being alienated from his own father, he senses that he is an alien anywhere he goes. Going to a discotheque, for example, he feels "as if he were taking part in a weird rite of a tribe not his own" (102). Attempting to find solace in solitude and anonymity, Chris takes a job as a timber cruiser for the Great Superior logging company: "He could move from one town to the next, eating in fast-food restaurants, sleeping in chain motels, an

interstate nomad, a citizen of the fringes, unnoticed, unremembered, unknown" (87). Working among the trees, Chris comes to embrace the woods as his home--"the great woods that had seemed full of menace when he was younger but were now his sanctuary"; for he now perceives that the "real menace lay outside, in what people were pleased to call civilization" (97).

At the same time, Chris's excessive guilt results in "an overdeveloped conscience" (354), and everywhere he sees senseless destruction that reminds him of Vietnam. Not only does the Great Superior's numerical fantasy that there was enough timber to lay a bowling alley around the world remind Chris of the arithmetic acrobatics employed during the war--"five enemy dead magically became ten; ten, twenty; a hundred, a thousand" (106)--but the dead doe with its hindquarters taken off gives him "a strange feeling that he had seen this before" (312). As much as he adopts the perspective of the victim, however, so much does he adopt the perspective of the aggressor: "He held a mental picture of himself, bent at the knees, the flat of the carbine's stock against his hip as he fired into the woods on rock-and-roll--full automatic--sweeping the muzzle back and forth, the carbine a thing of magic power in his hands" (315).

Thus, in the same way that the American war in Vietnam--what Reverend Starkmann calls "barbarisms" (28)--precipitates his anti-war crusade, the encroachment of "civilization" on the wilderness leads to Chris's savage resistance. Both Chris and his father are caught up in an opposition between peace and violence that dates back to the settling of America. America's intervention in Vietnam can in turn be seen as a

continuation of the refusal to accept otherness at home and as a sign of its need for new frontiers for conquest. And just as this leads to a conflict between pro and anti-war factions, so Chris's inability to reconcile himself with the other (whether the city or the woods or those representative of either) results in an internal state of war and self-hatred.

As the geographical location of his residence--between the town and the Indian reservation (137)--indicates, Chris belongs neither to the "civilized" camp nor to its opposite side. Similarly, his war is fought neither for nor against any of the outsiders; it is fought within his own perimeters and against himself. Instead of placing himself in the "Mighty Fortress" of God, Chris builds a forty-acre fort garrisoned with chicken-wire and fox-holes and strolls the perimeter in the early dawn, carbine in his hand. Having isolated himself from the others, as his wife June notices, "[h]is personality seemed to be imploding, collapsing in on itself. He acted as if she, the girls, and the whole outside world had ceased to exist" (343). Having "neither the wish to live nor the will to die" (391), all that is left for Chris is to make a last stand--"an elaborate form of suicide, a ceremony of death, a ritual of self-destruction, the Yankee samurai committing hara-kiri" (392).

The way that violence and peace, wilderness and civilization are underscored by the Christian good and evil mindset is also reflected in Chris's encounter with June, the representative of the female sex. June is depicted as an earthy, independent woman "with the jauntiness of a wounded but defiant soldier" (109). For June, "[a] good meal and a good night of love were all she needed to feel whole and harmonious" (164).

Long before she entered adulthood, she had enjoyed her mother's Finnish tales about bear-god and maiden bride. Although her mother's Christian morals overcame her primeval impulses and occasioned her to omit the sexual part of the tales, June herself was capable of compensating with dreams of having sexual intercourse with the bear-god. Sex for her is simultaneously transcendent and down-to-earth. In her experience with Chris, she feels "as if her body, like his, had only been an instrument in this ritual, through which their souls were released to dance in the true marriage of the spirit" (223). In Chris's absence, she finds herself in sexual communion with the earth: "God...now the living earth was caressing her buttocks, the sun her breasts--it all felt so good, weeks of tensions and heartache releasing themselves. Her climax was like a flood, and...she allowed the stream from within her to trickle upon the earth, God, yes, the earth" (290). In short, June represents the image of wholeness of undifferentiated being.

Tainted by his own family background, however, Chris had detected in himself a mixed attitude toward June, measuring her against his own "discreet, quiet" mother (108). In his first impression, Chris had found June's behavior brassy and her language obscene; yet he was also attracted by "a magnetism that wasn't feminine but *female*...with a capacity to occupy his mind to the point that he could think of nothing but her" (109). Chris's impression of June, in fact, reflects his own needs: his life had been one of such "imbalance" (420) that he needed the vital element which his father had relentlessly extricated from his family environment, as exemplified by his flat refusal to dance with his daughter at the wedding ceremony.

Chris's imbalance is evidenced in his subconscious, self-contradicting attitudes toward sex. In the early stage of his PTSD, Chris thinks of June as the final resource to keep him from collapse: "He had not dreamed, the vertigo spells ceased, and on those nights when his serenity began to crack, June was always there to love and restore him; in the hot, wet detonations of orgasm, he would feel whole again" (229). As his mental condition deteriorates, Chris becomes increasingly alienated from June and disgusted with her flesh. One July night before dawn, for example, after Chris has had one of his dreams in which he re-experiences the burning battle ground in Vietnam--"the smells of mud and blood, of scorched flesh and flaming gasoline"--he finds himself unable to engage in sexual intimacy: "The smell of her body, of her nearness, repelled him." When he completes his perimeter patrol after the dream, he wonders: "How could she ask him to make love?" (341).

In the novel, Chris's schizophrenic condition is characteristic of one that now faces not only Vietnam veterans, who are often condemned for having taken part in the Vietnam War, but also those civilians who stayed in the home world and protested against the war. For either group to reconcile with the other, it would take nothing less than a balanced view of both the self and the other. Although such a view may prove difficult to attain, Caputo sees it in terms of June's experience of a *sisu*-powered life, which, in his fear, Chris perceives in contradictory terms: "like a spring marsh, commingled odors of bog and laurel, a perfume sweet yet loathsome, the stench of life, of life" (390). In order to recover from the Vietnam experience, what Chris and his fellow Americans need is to embrace both the "sweet" and "loathsome" smells

which are integral to life.

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Just as Caputo exposes religious ideology as a major factor which caused the polarization of views of the Vietnam War and the Vietnam veterans, so William Eastlake attributes the disorientation experienced by American soldiers in Vietnam to a culture which glorifies heroism. Placing heroism in the context of American history, Eastlake is able to see it in the form of masculine assertion in the midst of wilderness. Such heroism has the same polarizing effect as the religious ideology in that it differentiates human beings into two dichotomous groups: the hero and the coward. While the hero ventures into the wilderness to prove his manhood, the coward stays at home to be ridiculed as an effeminate. Modelled on General Custer's last stand at the Little Big Horn, Eastlake's *The Bamboo Bed* treats such heroism as symptomatic of an internal disorder in the American character.

In his novel, Eastlake deals with the issue of heroism by focusing on the nature of the total destruction of Alpha Company on the ridge of Red Boy. The narrative consists of a number of surrealistic subplots. Mike McAdam, a CIA investigator, searches for Clancy--the missing company commander and his childhood friend--to account for his losses; meanwhile, Clancy lies, fatally wounded, in the middle of a bamboo thicket and calmly waits for death to release him from the destructive bond of heroism. At the same time, Captain Knightbridge and Nurse Jane coordinate a Search

and Rescue operation and make love while flying a Red Cross helicopter, the Bamboo Bed. In keeping with the surrealistic narrative structure, Eastlake employs the technique of reversal to illustrate the importance of revising the conventional view of heroism.

Eastlake announces the nature of his revisionist project at the opening of the novel, which features a dispute between a newspaper account of the suicide of Clancy's lover, Madame Dieudonné, and the narrator's own "true" story of her walking naked under the moon after she learns of her lover's death. While the newspaper is satisfied with an objective account of her suicide upon her discovery of Clancy's death, the narrator refutes its crude simplicity:

That's the way the papers had it, but they did not get it right. They never do. The newspapers seldom get anything right because *they are not creative. Life is an art.*

It was true--c'était vrai--that Madame Dieudonné went to the jewel box, removed the gun, but nothing more. Another death did not follow fast upon. The newspapers made a good story. But there is a better one. The truth. (1, emphasis mine)

The essential difference between the newspaper story and the narrator's vision lies in their different views of what is important. While the former focuses on the facts, the latter attempts to uncover "the truth" of the events. Thus, what the narrator calls "the truth" is not what actually happens to Madame Dieudonné (i.e., her suicide) at a particular moment, but what may be recreated of that moment. Just as "[l]ife is an art," so creativity is necessary to describe it. Whereas the newspaper provides a factual account and concludes with Madame Dieudonné's death, the narrator is concerned with recreating her life, which enables him to start--instead of ending--the larger story

about Captain Clancy.

The Clancy story may best be seen in the way that Eastlake reverses time sequence in the novel. While the total destruction of Clancy and his Alpha Company constitutes the end of Clancy "the eternal warrior," Eastlake makes it the starting point of the novel and concludes with Clancy's recollection of his triumph at Hill 904.

The reversal of time sequence is accompanied by reversal in points of view throughout the novel, which takes the form of characters viewing themselves in a mirror. Madame Dieudonné, for example,

stared at the naked picture of herself in the great mirror, at the mirror image of a body that had not betrayed. It was still good. The body of herself that was still firm in all the right places and sloping and undulating and good in all the right places. But a body is for someone else. A body is never for yourself, so that the mirror of herself became a vanity, an indulgence, that was nothing at all because it was mirrored back to no one. Nothing. No man at all. (2)

The reversal lies in the striking contrast of two views: while Madame Dieudonné finds her body in the mirror "good," her mirrored self intimates that her "good" body is "a vanity," "an indulgence," and a "nothing." The purpose of the episode is to highlight the difference between a living body and a static (abstract) reflection and to associate living with interaction with others.

Madame Dieudonné's mirror does not stop at reflecting her naked body; it also reflects the secret of the military debacle at the ridge of Red Boy--"the biggest thing since Custer" (100). When Mike McAdam, Clancy's friend and the CIA investigator, ventures to see Madame Dieudonné for information about Clancy's death, he has the opportunity to look into the mirrors in Madame Dieudonné's underground villa: "Mike looked around at all the mirrors, all the crazy mirrors, there seemed to be no certain

one, all the crazy mirrors such as in a funhouse, and the one Buddha. There was only one Buddha and it was at once silly and grave, and now it was listening too. The Buddha silly and grave and listening" (135). In this instance, Mike is offered a multiplied view of himself in "all the crazy mirrors." Characteristic of a man who looks outward, he does not examine his multiple projections; instead, he focuses on the "silly and grave" Buddha "listening." The shift from the visual to the aural faculty, however, stresses the importance of listening (i.e., reception as in internal perception) as opposed to looking (i.e., projection as in external perception).

The presence of the Buddha "listening" surrounded by walls of mirrors evokes a Buddhist tradition: seeing with one's ears and hearing with one's eyes. The failure of Mike the investigator to comprehend the wisdom of the Buddha listening among mirrors is due to the fact that he is following a different tradition of perception--tracking (by looking outward for) the footprints of his predecessor. His perceptual inability is strongly suggested in his dialogue with Madame Dieudonné's son Etienne, who, similar to the Buddha, had "a simple-minded face" (133). Their dialogue begins with Etienne's interrogation of Mike:

"But you would like to see what I saw."

"Yes."

"And hear what I heard."

"Yes. No, I don't give a damn."

"Because you want to believe in the captain. In the evil, you want to believe. I will make you look in the mirror of yourself. The American mirror."

"Let's stick to Clancy."

"Because you do not want to inward look. Inward see."

"You son of a bitch."

"There is this enormous pretending. The Clancy search. You are for yourself searching." (135)

Mike's refusal to "inward look" so as to "[i]nward see" is also characteristic of the general way that American soldiers tended to view the Vietnamese quietness as mere passivity. It is Clancy, however, who is able to understand the relationship between the viewer and the viewee. For Clancy, his men serve as a mirror through which he can see himself: "I wanted to study them. I was curious. I guess every human being is curious about aberrant behavior. Aberrant? Aberrant means truth. By seeing them I wanted each morning to look into the mirror of myself" (321). Perhaps the need to "look into the mirror of myself" is Eastlake's way of seeking what he and his protagonist call the "truth."

In keeping with the reversal of point of view, the novel also features role reversal on the part of the characters. Due to the white suppression of the blacks in the United States, for example, Sergeant Pike is always prepared to get even with the whites while in Vietnam. Trapped together with his white enlisted men while collecting the bodies of Alpha Company, black Pike entertains the thought of surrendering the white men to the enemy. For Pike, "[t]here is no greater honor on this earth to a black man than to hand white men to yellow men for killing" (61). Eventually, however, instead of handing over the white men to the yellow men, Pike sacrifices his own life in order to save the white men. The change of his attitude toward the white men does not result from his desire to play "the black god" (64), but from his inward look--a successful attempt to annihilate the racial differences in front of the death-machine. Insisting on rescuing Arnold, a white soldier who had killed himself in the combat zone, Pike transcends the limitation of skin colors. As Pike

thinks to himself, "What they don't understand...what they will never know is that war is kind. What they don't know is that fucking Arnold is my soul brother. They don't understand that a man can't help being born the color he is born. That a man has no control over being born white. That I got Arnold into this and I will get Arnold out. White or green. Black or red" (70). Consequently, Pike finds his greatest satisfaction in his self-sacrifice "to see someone else" "make it" (72).

Colonel Yvor is another example of a character who undergoes a role reversal. The living embodiment of war itself, the armless Colonel Yvor is believed to have used Clancy and his Alpha Company as a bait to induce and destroy a full battalion of NVA forces. From sergeant Billy Joe's awe-stricken point of view,

Colonel Yvor is the war. Without Colonel Yvor the Communists would be in Saigon now, maybe even Kansas City or New York City, New York.... To know the strength, the power, the glory of Colonel Yvor you had to be with him in the monsoon dark over the jungles of Vietnam on a Search and Rescue, then you would know that Colonel Yvor was kind of God searching us out down there in the jungle of doubt, uncertainty and despair, rescuing us all from the jungle of darkness and doom. (189)

Yet at a moment when personal sacrifice becomes the price for saving the lives of others, it is the same Colonel Yvor who decides to use himself as an irretrievable bait (259). Reminiscent of black Pike's self-sacrifice is Colonel Yvor's desire to scapegoat himself for the sake of others. "I got everybody in this mess and I'll get one man out" (260). Similar to the reversal in Pike, the reversal in Colonel Yvor from a baiter to bait is occasioned by a sense of something other than the difference between winning and losing a war. It points to the absolute no-win situation of the Vietnam War and perhaps any war: the only way to end the war is not to win it, but to die in it.

By means of such reversals, Eastlake emphasizes the importance and possibility of return to the origin as a way of discovering causes. In the case of the major narrative event--the total annihilation of Clancy and his Alpha Company--the mystery to be solved is: what was the nature of Clancy's destruction and what had caused it?

By linking Captain Clancy at Ridge Red Boy with General Custer at the Little Big Horn, Eastlake is able to put Clancy's destruction in a historical perspective. In the eyes of Mike McAdams, his friend Clancy had committed a typical American mistake. Just as a century before Custer was fighting the Sioux in Indian territory to protect Americans from the natives, so Clancy was fighting the Vietnamese in their territory to protect the Americans in the States (21-22). From the positions of the dead Alpha, Mike can see that the destruction was the direct result of a tactical error:

"Clancy had blundered by not holding the ridge. Clancy had blundered by being forced into a valley, a declivity in the hills. It was the classic American blunder in Vietnam of giving the Indians the cover. The enemy was fighting from the protection of the jungle. You couldn't see them" (22).

Clancy's tactical miscalculation is rooted in America's historical tendency and cultural tradition. As Mike thought to himself, "Americans love the open. Americans do not trust the jungle. The first thing the Americans did in America was clear a forest and plant the cities" (22). In Vietnam, the Americans intensified their love of clearing and improved their technique. Revealing the secret of Hill 904, Clancy explains that when the Americans failed to destroy the enemy forces, "[t]hey knocked down the whole mountain. Cloud after dark cloud of B52s came in. You could hear the

explosions all the way to Kansas City. When they were all finished we looked up and there was no more mountain. The top was gone" (334-35). When knocking down a single mountain was insufficient, the Americans resorted to defoliation. With massive doses of chemicals, they could not only clear parts of the forest, but also, in Captain Knightbridge's ironic view, "eliminate the monkeys, the deer, the water buffalo, the rubber trees, the birds, all the birds of bright plumage, and the plants of this planet, and the people who eat the plants" (278). The Americans were obsessed with clearing "so everyone could see better" (278).

The irony lies in the fact that, after clearing, the Americans could still not see better, and the enemy could see even better than the Americans. Thus, during his single-handed Search and Rescue operation, the armless Colonel Yvor not only fails to recognize Appelfinger, the sole unwounded survivor of Alpha, but also yanks with his teeth the string that can trigger the helicopter machine gun in Appelfinger's direction. Confused by the self-butchering of this war, Appelfinger "looked around at the clearing in the jungle. It looked like a place where death would come." The clearing does not simply remain a personal and immediate threat. In a subconscious way, it is linked with inevitable misfortune which had occurred in the recent past but which also threatened to recur anytime in the future:

It looked like the place where his company...got it. The same silent, awesome clearing in the jungle where death always comes. The bad part about all clearing in the jungle in Vietnam is that you got no observation outside the perimeter.... So that the enemy got a perfect cover out of which to kill you, a clearing in the jungle anyplace in Asia is a place where you wait for death to come. (247)

Appelfinger the radio-man failed to transmit the death of his company, but he had

certainly perceived the secret of survival in the midst of the Vietnam jungle.

Furthermore, the American effort to clear the Vietnam jungle was foredoomed by the process of nature. When Colonel Yvor "looked around at the jungle canopy," what he discovers explains Appelfinger's sensitivity to death in the clearing. What Colonel Yvor finds is the unstoppable growth of the forest: "They were in a second-growth section of the forest. A place that had been cleared for an LZ maybe a year ago. The jungle was coming back to its climax phase. It grew while you watched." Accompanying his view of the overwhelming growth of the jungle is his imagination--as supersonic as his frequent whining--that the enemy is growing back like the forest after it was cleared away. As the colonel visualizes it, "The jungle was growing back like the VC. Like Victor Charlie replacing itself after it had been wiped out." Thus, even for the normally unsuperstitious Colonel Yvor, "[t]he thing to do would be to find a different code name for the VC than Victor Charlie" (256). Such an external change, though, proves only to be as self-deceiving and self-defeating as the practice of clearing itself.

Eastlake also explains the destruction of Alpha in terms of gender difference. For Lieutenant Janine Bliss (also called Nurse Jane), the deaths of Alpha Company were the inevitable consequence of male aggressiveness. Anxious for the safety of her ex-lover Mike McAdams when the latter is departing to search for Clancy, she muses, "I can do nothing to stop him because a man will not listen to a woman who is done with him. I could not do any good. A woman should be allowed to have two men. They could keep two men happy nicely. But men are competitive, acquisitive,

possessive. Wonderful. And necessary to a woman. But they will not share. They want all or nothing" (120-21). Even though Nurse Jane's musing might sound self-serving in this case, her observation is concurrent with that of Eastlake's on the men's necessity "to get their manly asses up there and crash in the monsoon to prove they are manly asses" (120). After all, in the case of Clancy and his Alpha, they took Hill 904, or Ridge Red Boy, "because it was there" (310).

The compulsion of men to charge toward death, as Eastlake suggests, lies in the paradoxical fact that they are afraid. In Nurse Jane's view, men are "[a]fraid of anything that moves" (223). Instead of avoiding anything that moves, however, they attempt to overcome their fear by outmoving the thing that moves. In the Vietnam jungle, outmoving meant to shoot and kill the thing that moved. Thus, during his search for Clancy in the deep jungle, Mike does not hesitate to shoot at Peter, who is trying to find a way out of the forest. Neither does he apologize for shooting at the wrong man; instead he provides a matter-of-fact explanation: "I am here to say you shoot at anything that moves" (150). Of course, what moved most efficiently "here" in Vietnam was the American helicopter. Thus the irony was that, having outmoved the thing that moved, the Americans in their "flight" machinery, "[l]ike the rest of the army...did not know where they were going but they were going there fast" (182).

As Eastlake presents it, moving fast is in turn an expression of fear of moving, which causes cowardice. As he is dying in his "bamboo bed" (379)--a symbol of transcendence in the novel--Clancy confesses the secret of his "heroism" to a python, a serpentine figure which, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, encourages disobedience to

God. In Clancy's case, he has complied with the cultural code of heroism by moving out to Vietnam to protect his people inside America but, in so doing, has disobeyed his inner self. Thus, he is a coward wearing the mantle of a hero. "I am a coward," he admits; "Clancy is a coward. Clancy never had it. Why do you think I volunteered to take paradise? Why did I ask, beg, to take 904?" The reason that Clancy acknowledges himself to be a coward is not so much that he fears death, but that he is in bondage to the past and fears the future. As he elaborates on the paradox of cowardice in his continuing confession:

I went up to Hill 904 simply because by this time, by this long endless time, it had become a habit. Ask any man in Vietnam. It had become a habit like the women who go each Sunday to church but only because they have gone all the preceding Sundays. Or the man who works in a coal mine but only because his father did and died there and that's what he's going down there for, for that same cave-in that killed his father. Don't you understand that anything else would be cowardice? (313)

In other words, Clancy is a coward because he does not have the courage to break with tradition. Compared to Tim O'Brien's nerveless Paul Berlin, Eastlake's Iron-man Clancy is not much different. Just as Berlin tried to dream his way out of Vietnam (leave his body behind, as it were), so Clancy attempted to find a way out through death. Both were strong in their immediate pursuit and yet both were weak in their ultimate goals. Similar to the nature of Mike's failure to see for all his effort to look, this mind/body disharmony constitutes the ultimate cause of the American disorientation in Vietnam.

Like Paul Berlin's dream, Clancy's death wish is presented as more than a personal problem; it is also symptomatic of the nature of the American involvement in

general. Just as O'Brien questions the war by characterizing Berlin as a dreamer, Eastlake creates the suicidal Clancy. Whereas O'Brien focuses on the disorienting effects of the war, however, Eastlake concentrates on its causes. In this respect, death serves as the locus where, paradoxically, Eastlake finds the beginning of and solution to the kind of war Americans fought in Vietnam.

The nature of Clancy's death-wish suggests that the American war in Vietnam was a self-defeating enterprise that had its roots in the American past. Reminiscing on the childhood he spent with Clancy, Mike connects the past of his missing friend with the present: "You get to Ridge Red Boy through the battlefields of Prettyfields" (102). Clancy waged his earliest battles at Prettyfields, New Jersey, against the visiting Boy Scouts, who were guided by two adults assuming the look of "blown-up enlargements of the miniature boys, even to the kerchief, campaign hat and merit badge" (102). Playing Indians, Little Clancy led his small band of orphans, ambushed and routed the whole regular army of the Boy Scouts. Clancy's battle against the Boy Scouts signifies a challenge to the institutionalized appearance of heroism, which is suggested particularly by the two adults' "blown-up" uniforms. If the routing of the Boy Scouts deflates conventional notions of heroism, however, to the extent that Clancy adopts the stance of Indians his actions are genuinely heroic in the root meaning of the word. Etymologically, to be heroic means to protect and defend against outsiders.

At the same time, Little Clancy's challenge was not itself motivated by heroism in this sense; rather, his objective was to obtain recognition from the Boy Scouts for his bravery. His final winning of a gold medal from the All-Council of the Boy Scouts

indicates his co-option by the system of "heroism." Indicating his awareness of the problem, Mr. Eaton, the schoolmaster, throws the medal into the schoolmaster's wastebasket, and his rhetorical question serves as a critique of the nature of "heroism" and of Clancy's desire for it: "It says for outstanding bravery. Do you believe that, Little Clancy?" (112).

Imaged in the fate of Clancy and his Alpha, the Americans' self-destructive concept of heroism is made clear in the view that Nurse Jane's father Captain Bliss has of his marines. They "were always charging up hills to prove they were not impotent. But when they got to the top of the hill they were still impotent. Or dead" (264). For Nurse Jane, the word "impotent" has a two-fold meaning: it suggests not only the lack of martial prowess but also of sexual procreateness. The marines were "impotent" simply because they attempted to prove their potency in a place where it was not necessary, ignoring the place where it was needed. This place is precisely back at home, in both a political and sexual sense.

Through Mike, the investigator of Clancy's death, Eastlake extends his view on the reasons for American involvement in Vietnam to a philosophical concern with the general tendency it evidenced. "How did Clancy get into this?" Mike asks himself, reflecting on the hero fantasy; his answer is: "The same way Custer did. The same way all of us do. The fantasy life becomes real. We never grow up, none of us do. No men do" (84). Although Mike's recourse to first-person plural pronouns allies himself with the others he criticizes, this does not lead him to discontinue his outward search; instead of looking within for answers, he is intent on obtaining the secret of war from

Clancy. In contrast, it is Clancy, the man with the biggest fantasy to be a hero, who comes to realize his own fatal weakness and the way that women provide an alternative way of coping with it. "Women are able to sublimate their aggressions with business," Clancy observes; "A man needs the real thing. A man has got to go out and kill someone to prove that he is alive. When there are no more Unfriendlies, inventions in the world, man will sicken and die. That's what had happened to Clancy. The invention, the fantasy, the fairy tale had ended. The Unfriendlies had become Friendlies. The war was over. But the fighting went on" (362-63). Clancy's contrast between men and women underscores the falsity of the notion that the need for "the real thing" must take the form of a "real" contest of one against another. Apart from death, there is still the living self into which one can withdraw--as Eastlake's female characters do.

In view of the code of heroism inherent in American culture, Eastlake thus does not see any way in which the American war hero can withdraw, alive, from the Vietnam quagmire; hence, he presents suicide as the only solution to the killer impulse. In *The Bamboo Bed*, the death of Clancy is the apex of all the deaths since that of the French colonialist Colonel Dieudonné. The deaths of the anonymous Alpha, of black Pike, and of Colonel Yvor are only variants of the death of Clancy in that they are pre-determined as a given and for a given purpose. Although Pike and Colonel Yvor seem to make a conscious choice between life and death, they choose death as a necessity because they see no other way out. In comparison, Clancy's choice of death is made less consciously than the others. Since heroism has been

programmed as part of his life, however, death--what heroism demands of him--is also as much as a given to him. Thus, the meaning--"god-given"--of the name of his lover, Madame Dieudonné, illuminates the fact that Clancy is as attracted to a sense of fate as to his lover.

Consequently, while *The Bamboo Bed* opens with the image of Clancy as the eternal warrior accompanied by "swords and plumes and drummer boys" and Madame Dieudonné as the eternal whore (9), it ends with a vision of marriage of the two in their deaths. Through Mike's eyes, the final deaths appear romantic: he "looked down past all the bodies, down to the peaceful and jewel-green and abiding jungle below. The assignation place. There was Hill 904. There was the villa. There was Ridge Red Boy. There was death--she was our captain's bride" (394). Mike remains a lone man on an on-going quest, however. He represents all those who are yet to follow Clancy until their own deaths. In this light, if Mike's journalistic doggedness results in a romantic view of soldiering, Eastlake's creativeness results in an emphasis on death as the grim truth of the American story in Vietnam.

Eastlake's recourse to a rhetoric of reversal is designed to deal with the paradoxical relationship between the assertion of the ego and its final withdrawal (that is characteristic of wisdom). While recounting the destiny of Clancy, Eastlake illustrates the paradox of American heroism with numerous aphorisms. In view of the American losses in Vietnam, for example, his characters consider it a mistake for Americans to have left home and arrived in Vietnam. In case of a self-destructive war, the Search and Rescue operation should start before the start of the war. To escape

death, one needs to "worm his way into the earth" (131). To avoid war, one must assume "the mentality of apes that they no longer believed in killing as men do" (40). When every effort fails, "war is kind" (127), for death--the result of war--brings all Friendlies and Unfriendlies into the resting place of the Bamboo Bed. Those who have no part in the war need to search for themselves, for "you are the truth" (129). Finally, as the Clancy story demonstrates, just as the Americans "make our world from nothing" (344), so in the end they return it to nothing.

Chapter Four

A Professional War

In this war without heroes, this man had been the one compelling figure. The intensity and distinctiveness of his character and the courage and drama of his life had seemed to sum up so many of the qualities Americans admired in themselves as a people. By an obsession, by an unyielding dedication to the war, he had come to personify the American endeavor in Vietnam. He had exemplified it in his illusions, in his good intentions gone awry, in his pride, in his will to win. Where others had been defeated or discouraged over the years, or had become disenchanted and had turned against the war, he had been undeterred in his crusade to find a way to redeem the unredeemable, to lay hold of victory in this doomed enterprise. (3)

--Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*

The fate of the American intervention in Vietnam illuminated a political paradox: although democracy in America was born of a military power informed by an ideology of liberty and independence, the same ideology advanced by American goodwill exemplified by helicopters and warships was unable to reproduce an American democracy in Vietnam. This paradox in turn became the basis of a scapegoating ritual in which a few participants were singled out to bear the brunt for the failure of the whole. Underlying the ritual is the old assumption which had initially sent America to Vietnam, the assumption that the seed of democracy could be successfully transplanted if Vietnam was reconditioned into a political greenhouse--an artificially acclimatized garden--to accommodate its germination and growth. The results of the war, however, seemed to suggest that, in the political laboratory of Vietnam, the cultural and geographical complexity of the materials exceeded the comprehension of the

scientifically informed mastermind. Indeed, America's failure in Vietnam may be regarded as what Patrick Lloyd Hatcher called "the suicide of an elite"--the foredoomed work of the American internationalists (e.g., Dean Acheson, George Ball, Clark Clifford) who, primarily intellectuals, extended the Lockean expansionist philosophy to the extreme and "wanted an ordered world to reflect their ordered minds" (25).

The dominance and self-defeating effect of the scientific mind, however, was not unique to the intellectual gurus in the Vietnam era. Rather, it reflected a "culture of professionalism" whose impact had been pervasive in American society since the mid-nineteenth century. According to Burton J. Bledstein, the emergence of American professionalism was "a cultural process by which the middle class in America matured and defined itself" (ix). Being middle class in America, as Burton sees it, has referred to a state of mind instead of a fixed social position. Indeed, "The popular imagination has so closely identified being middle class with pursuing the so-called American dream that 'middle class' has come to be equated with a good chance for advancement, an expanding income, education, good citizenship, indeed, with democracy" (7). Consequently, being middle class means self-fulfillment and the improvement of natural talent, which, in turn, implies internal control of the external environment.

The duality of expansion and control, which is unique to the middle-class way of life, stems from a split between ruthless passion and dispassionate logic. On the one hand, as Bledstein describes it,

the middle-class person was competitive, active, bold, brave, and even reckless. He mercilessly combated those who hated innovation. He agitated against complacency, he destroyed prescription, he invented means, he subverted monopoly, he opened up doors of opportunity, and he multiplied the avenues for wholesome rivalry.

On the other hand, the middle-class person

attempted to eliminate wasteful competition and to establish universal standards for moral and civil behavior. He was the world's organizer: punctual, industrious, mathematical, and impersonal. He sharpened his mind into an analytic knife. He sought accurate information, acted with the "coldest prudence," and built a more perfect institutional order than had ever been known.... (27)

While such an environment was salubrious to those who aspired to liberate individual resources, such thinking also created the basis for a pattern of social dependence and individual helplessness.

In the culture of professionalism, the professional expert is the master of "a total coherent system of necessary knowledge within a precise territory" (Bledstein 88). Unlike the amateur, the professional is one who

grasped the concept behind a functional activity, allowing him both to perceive and to predict those inconspicuous or unseen variables which determined an entire system of developments. [He also] penetrated beyond the rich confusion of ordinary experience...hidden to the untrained eyes, which made an elaborate system workable or impracticable, successful or unattainable. (88-89)

Once transformed into a system, a society cannot function without professionals. This is because "Professionals not only lived in an irrational world, they cultivated that irrationality by uncovering abnormality and perversity everywhere: in diseased bodies, criminal minds, political conspiracies, threats to the national security" (102).

Thus, to a culture of professionalism, the environment is seen as a constant source of crises and professionals are indispensable. Yet to Vietnam's dominantly Zen

culture, professionals were not simply dispensable, but also burdensome. This is because a Zen culture emphasizes the unity of the internal and external worlds and regards external crises as internal ones. Thus, instead of building an artificial system to combat external problems, a Zen-influenced community resorts to the inner self, which dwells deep within every individual.

This contrast of cultures is well illustrated in Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie*, which depicts John Paul Vann's ultimate futility "in his crusade to find a way to redeem the unredeemable, to lay hold of victory in this doomed enterprise" (Sheehan 3). "A soldier of the war," Vann was primarily a product of American middle-class culture, although he was born of a poor working-class family in the American South. Equipped with an athletic body, a passionate heart, and an analytic mind, he was a model professional in the American military, who "manifested the faith and the optimism of post-World War II America that any challenge could be overcome by will and by the disciplined application of intellect, technology, money, and, when necessary, armed forces" (5). Ironically, the same faith and optimism eventually killed Vann on a summer night in 1972--the year in which the U.S. withdrew its ground forces from Vietnam--when his helicopter crashed into a grove of trees as a result of his desire to enjoy "taunting his enemies in the pass as his helicopter raced by them in the dark" (788).

Just as military equipment and economic aid did not enable American professionals to transform Vietnam into a system of their own design, so they had difficulty in informing those at home of the war in Vietnam despite their highly

technologized audio-visual systems. As Michael J. Arlen pointed out, although television allowed Americans to focus on some details of the war, the television media's own attitude toward the war was inconsistent and thus confusing. While such programs as CBS's *The Final War of Olly Winter* spouted "a lot of empty-headed propagandish nonsense about the war, and War Itself" (40-41), personal reportings like "Morley Safer's Vietnam" (also by CBS) were "as moving and as tough and as sensitive and as deeply felt a commentary on the war as I've run into" (Arlen 62). Such inconsistency did not derive from the journalist's professional incompetence; instead, it was inherent in the code of objectivity, to which professional journalism subscribed and which was limited by American politics.

This problematic objectivity of journalism has been explored in detail by Daniel C. Hallin in *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Through his study of a massive amount of television's Vietnam coverage, Hallin discovers that the media tended to be supportive of the war in the early years up to 1968--the year of the Tet Offensive--and tended to be subversive after Tet up till the end of the war. This shift of attitude was not arbitrary. Rather it was controlled by the structural mechanisms of the media which maintained "consensus" in such a way that "the media simply do not come into conflict with other established political institutions" (24).

Two major mechanisms, according to Hallin, controlled the media operation during the Vietnam decade: one was the Cold War ideology, which precluded any issue of national security from "the agenda of political debate"; the other was "professional journalism" itself, whose obsession with objectivity ironically turned

reporting into a vehicle of national politics (25). In this context, as Hallin explains, the American media could be divided into three regions: a) the "sphere of consensus," which holds the basic "motherhood and apple pie" values of American society; b) the "sphere of legitimate controversy," which allows debates on volatile political issues within the ideological boundary; and c) the "sphere of deviance," which is "the realm of those political actors and views [e. g., the communist] which journalists and the political mainstream of the society reject as unworthy of being heard" (116-17). The media could then be seen to exercise its objectivity differently with respect to these spheres. Whereas it maintained objectivity and impartiality in the sphere of controversy, it showed non-objectivity in its adherence to the sphere of consensus and in its animosity toward the sphere of deviance.

Thus, the reason why the media shifted its attitude toward the war is clear. Whereas in the early years the media's support of the war derived from the implicit public endorsement in the wake of the Cold War, in the later years its critical attitude toward the war was similarly a result of various levels of dispute on the home front. Just as the objectivity of the media is ideologically bound, moreover, so does its representation contain an element of subjectivity, for "the television camera 'sees' with human eyes" (Hallin 109).

Although the media were able to pose as reliable sources of truth, by representing the war in terms of "us" against "them" or "the good" versus "the evil," they ultimately undermined its purported objectivity and became an inadequate vehicle for presenting the war in Vietnam. As fought by the Vietnamese, the war was

primarily for an independent Vietnam--a war in which the apparent struggle for ideological superiority served only as a means of achieving national independence. Thus, insofar as television media objectively functioned to polarize the Americans and the Vietnamese into the ideologically empowered "us" and "them," they became a powerful, though misleading, optical instrument. Little wonder, then, that Michael J. Arlen, who had described the war in Vietnam as America's "living-room war," should argue that television should be seen "not merely as a box, a piece of furniture dispensing such commodities as 'information' or 'entertainment,' but as...something we are doing to ourselves" (ix). In other words, television viewing desensitized the viewer by diminishing the object of viewing into an insignificant figure and framing it within a screen which the viewer could control with a switch. While encouraging the separation of the viewer and the viewed, this process also functioned to extend the viewer's power of reach and intensify egocentric expansion. Thus television was in league with politics; it not only turned truth into what Philip Knightley calls "the first casualty" of the war but also led to further physical and psychological casualties as a consequence.

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Military professionalism and its relationships to legal systems is a central concern in Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*. Whether in war or in play, Caputo the soldier was trained to be a hero. In the officers candidate school, being indoctrinated

into the Corps's "spirit of aggressiveness" (15) has much in common with "a debutante cotillion" (23). Not only did the field exercises in Quantico function as an outlet for "our Hollywood fantasies" (15), but the field excursions in Vietnam also had a similar "staged" aspect. When the troops rode past the rear base area, for example, "we are filled with a 'happy warrior' spirit and tend to dramatize ourselves. With our helmets cocked to one side and cigarettes hanging out of our mouths, we pose as hard-bitten veterans for the headquarters marines. We are starring in our very own war movie, and the howitzer battery nearby provides some noisy background music" (100).

Caputo's personal experience, however, also taught him about the ironic nature of America's military conduct in Vietnam. He was deeply convinced that the war

was no orderly campaign, as in Europe, but a war for survival waged in a wilderness without rules or laws; a war in which each soldier fought for his own life and the lives of the men beside him, not caring who he killed in that personal cause or how many or in what manner and feeling only contempt for those who sought to impose on his savage struggle the mincing distinctions of civilized warfare--that code of battlefield ethics that attempted to humanize an essentially inhuman war. (218)

And yet, the American troops had to operate by the official "rules of engagement." In an extremely bizarre fashion,

it was morally right to shoot an unarmed Vietnamese who was running, but wrong to shoot one who was standing or walking; it was wrong to shoot an enemy prisoner at close range, but right for a sniper at long range to kill an enemy soldier who was no more able than a prisoner to defend himself; it was wrong for infantrymen to destroy a village with white phosphorous grenades, but right for a fighter pilot to drop napalm on it. (218)

The irony of the war was that it took the form of what Caputo called "organized butchery"--an irrational slaughter of humanity which was legitimized by its rational design and execution (218).

Caputo's legal entrapment indicates that he had been caught by the dichotomy between the rationalized war (in which the GIs could unleash the power of "freedom" against the "evil" of communism) and the actual frontless war in Vietnam. As he recalls: "In the patriotic fervor of the Kennedy years, we had asked, 'What can we do for our country?' and our country answered, 'Kill VC'" (218). Killing VC is what Caputo did. But he had also tacitly allowed--even encouraged--his men to kill two civilians whom he had mistaken for VC. Even though in practice a guerrilla war might blur the line between legitimate and illegitimate killing, the line was clear, according to "rules of engagement," between killing VC and killing civilians (310). While a soldier might be rewarded with an extra leave from duty for killing VC, he was to be charged with murder for killing civilians (if it was proved). On the theoretical level, then, the American war in Vietnam demanded of the troops the automaton-like clear-mindedness capable of distinguishing the "hostile" from the "friendly" in a crowd of Vietnamese uniformly clothed in black pyjamas. It was a demand which Caputo could not meet despite--and perhaps especially because of--his professional training before his expedition to Vietnam.

Just as Caputo was disoriented by the way he was supposed to fight the enemy, so was he confounded by the charges made against him by the prosecution which ostensibly represented the interests of his own country. For Caputo, the case was absurd, not because he felt justified for having the Vietnamese villagers killed, but because the military establishment "had taught us to kill and had told us to kill, and now they were going to court-martial us for killing" (305). In other words, if it was

wrong to kill two villagers by mistake, it was equally wrong to wage "a war whose sole aim was to kill Viet Cong, a war in which civilians in 'free-fire zones' were killed every day by weapons far more horrible than pistols or shotguns" (306). If he and his men were to be punished for murder, the American military, which had sent them to Vietnam, was at least guilty of being an accomplice. In the same way that the American military demanded differentiation between civilians and the elusive enemy, it obliged itself to differentiate murder from "organized butchery" in an arbitrary "free-fire zone."

In the court-martial, consequently, the prosecutor and the defense attorneys each presented a case against and for the defendants: First Lieutenant Philip Caputo and the five marine infantry. On the one hand, Caputo's attorney tried to convince the judges that "on the night of the killings, First Lieutenant Philip Caputo, in a lucid state of mind, issued a clear, legitimate order that was flagrantly disobeyed by the men under his command" (312); the attorneys of the enlisted men argued that "they were all good, God-fearing soldiers who had been obeying orders, as all good soldiers must, orders issued by a vicious killer-officer" (213). On the other hand, the prosecutor was intent on proving that "five criminal marines, following the unlawful orders of their criminal platoon leader, had cold-bloodedly murdered two civilians whom they then tried to claim as confirmed Viet Cong to collect the reward their captain had offered for enemy dead, a reprehensible policy not at all in keeping with the traditions of the U.S. Marine Corps" (313).

As fruitless as the attempt to identify NLF soldiers among Vietnamese

civilians, the attempt to convict American soldiers as common criminals produced nothing but absurdity. Instead of reaching the truth through the facts, in Caputo's view, the trial "divides the facts from the truth," (312) which is that "the war in general and U.S. military policies in particular were ultimately to blame for the deaths of Le Du and Le Dung" (313). Thus, even though the killing of the two villagers was as murderous as the rest of the war, only one verdict was logical to the judges. As Caputo notes with irony, "A verdict of innocent would solve the dilemma. It would prove no crime had been committed. It would prove what the others wanted to believe: that we were virtuous American youths, incapable of the act of which we had been accused. And if we were incapable of it, then they were too, which is what they wanted to believe themselves" (314). The final acquittal of the defendants may have freed Caputo and the five enlisted men from legal authority, but it could not release the United States from the quagmire of Vietnam. As a matter of fact, the American war in Vietnam may be seen as a prolonged "incident at Giao-Tri," and America as the captive of its own legal web, attempting with futility to attain its release.

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Focusing on the role of intellect in the Vietnam War, John Del Vecchio's *The 13th Valley* illuminates the culture of professionalism as the foundation of military professionalism. By balancing the details of military action with highly serious and intellectual inquiries about the nature of war, this lengthy novel (over 600 pages)

provides readers with space and time to think, along with the characters, about their internal and external strains as a result of the American involvement in Vietnam.

Early reviewers of *The 13th Valley* revealed a marked distaste for Del Vecchio's juxtaposition of hot action with cold talk. For some, the narrative design is esthetically damaging. According to Joe Klein, for example, the "bull sessions" not only "dilute the narrative" but indicate Del Vecchio's inability "to make moral or intellectual sense of the very real sacrifices that were made--a torturous problem that haunts many Vietnam veterans" (17). As Klein sees it, the novel is worth reading only if the reader wants to "feel what it was like over there." For others, the novel's mixture of concrete details with abstract words suggests Del Vecchio's lack of writerly "discipline." Thus, Anatole Broyard suggests his disapproval by saying, "If you don't keep your rifle clean, it may backfire" (21).

Actually, *The 13th Valley* does more than recreate the experience of the Vietnam war; it is also deliberately designed to backfire on the reader. By leading the reader through what Klein calls "the whys and wherefores" that Americans have pondered over the years, Del Vecchio demonstrates that, in the words of Vietnam grunts, those questions "don't mean nothin'." More than purely mimetic, his way of representing war events demands the reader's total involvement and insists that we take an objective look into the human personality as the source of outer conflicts--be they domestic, racial, or international.

To a certain extent, therefore, Del Vecchio's novel needs to be approached in the same way that Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been interpreted by Stanley Fish. In

Surprised by Sin, Fish argues three major points:

(1) the poem's centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject; (2) Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his; (3) Milton's method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem's scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam's troubled clarity, that is to say, "not deceived." (1)

These points serve to illuminate the rationale of Milton's epic: the need to educate the reader--the fallen man in the Christian context--on the reasons of Adam's and, hence, his own fall. Thus, despite certain major differences in genre, subject, and the degree of artistic achievement, *The 13th Valley* and *Paradise Lost* share one major theme: that freedom of choice led to the fall, whether it be from God's grace in the Christian context or, in a psychological sense, from a personal sense of wholeness. More importantly, just as Milton's reader needs to place him/herself in Adam's position in order to understand the situation of the fallen man, so Del Vecchio's reader is forced to assume the position of the American soldiers in Vietnam in order to understand the Vietnam experience and, as well, the effort America made at such an understanding.

Reading *The 13th Valley* as a form of *Paradise Lost* is encouraged by Del Vecchio's recurrent use of imagery that is reminiscent of Milton's epic. Treating the American war in Vietnam as a contemporary version of the war between God and the fallen angels, the novel builds an elaborate link between the camp of American soldiers and the camp of the fallen angels. The base camp of Alpha Company, for example, is named "Campobasso" (525)--thereby suggesting the lowest position of the Miltonic Hell--and the Alpha troops evidence the behavior of a serpent. In the jungle,

when they communicate, they start with a hiss. When they move, they slide and slither: "Alpha slithered away from Campobasso, slithered into the still night like one long segmented snake seeking prey.... They glided east moving with no signs of movement, concealed beneath the renewed ground mist" (599). Frequently conjoined are both blasphemy and an excremental vision: "'Oh, God,' Snell snickered. 'Get your entrenching tools, the shit is starting to flow'" (196). Finally, not only does Del Vecchio depict a battle between Satan and God in Cherry's nightmare (425), but he also gives the narrator who relates the history of the war the name of the Archangel who informs Adam of divine history in Milton's epic: Raphael (alias El Paso), the company Radio Transmission Operator.

Yet the allusions to *Paradise Lost* by no means allegorize the situation or call for easy identification. The American soldiers are not presented as Satanic characters; nor are we encouraged to regard the pristine, self-contained valley as a paradise or the North Vietnamese troops as a righteous force. Rather, Del Vecchio's use of Miltonic allusions is designed to evoke the general issue that Milton was addressing: the conflict between a superpower (God) and a creature, a situation which inversely translates into a nature/intellect conflict. In doing so, Del Vecchio suggests that, in the case of the American intervention in Vietnam, America's intellectual arrogance is responsible for its walking wounded.

To distinguish the forces of nature and of intellect, Del Vecchio's strategy is to employ two distinct tenses. Specifically, he uses the present tense when depicting the state of the Khe Ta Laou river valley (i. e., the 13th valley) both at the beginning of

the novel before the American infiltration and at the end when after the infiltration an irruption of fire-fight forces the American retreat; he uses the past tense for the actions--both preceding and following the action in the valley--which take place elsewhere. Because the narrative both starts and ends in the past, the use of the two different tenses does not seem designed simply to distinguish between past and present events in a chronological sense. Even though the present tense can be seen as a form of the "historical" present and can be allied with Del Vecchio's use of statistics and maps to create the sense of historical accuracy in his account of the operation at Khe Ta Laou, his consistent use of the present tense when dealing with the state of the valley suggests that something more is involved.

What Del Vecchio seems to have in mind becomes clear when one considers the way that he describes the nature of the valley. Reminiscent of the Miltonic paradise, the Khe Ta Laou river valley features a balanced symbiotic system, which at the same time is presided over by an ancient teak tree:

At the most central point of the valley, in a dark and dank cavern created by the gnarled roots of an immense teak tree, a spider reconstructs its damaged labyrinth of silken corridors and chambers. Upon the outermost threads, dew glistens from a single ray of sunlight seeping through the valley mist, creeping through the shadowing jungle.

.....
The teak tree shades the spider and all the life below. From the hillock upon which it is perched, the tree reaches up for over two hundred feet, straight, massive and durable. The teak is wide at its base and gradually becomes slender as its huge branchless torso protrudes skyward, finally bursting in an imposing umbrella of boughs and leaves. For countless monsoon seasons, when the sky has broken angrily and lashed the earth, the tree has shielded plants and animals, and, for a time, the spider from the beating rain. The teak's root system has preserved the knoll into which it sinks, of which it has become a part, from the ravenous river crashing endlessly against the knoll's east side. (Prologue)

With the tree, the spider, and other forms of life, the valley has evolved into a self-sufficient, self-isolated and self-defensive biological environment. Yet the equilibrium of this sphere invites disruption from elements of the external world.

The disruptive force has indeed arrived, not simply from beyond the valley river, but from beyond the Pacific Ocean. The disruption, however, is not one-directional; those who disrupt are also destroyed by the encounter. Underscoring the American intervention in Vietnam as a nature/intellect conflict, Del Vecchio depicts the North Vietnamese forces as an inherent part of the impersonal valley. As the American troops enter the valley floor toward the end of the novel, for example, they experience a strong sense of being intruders. Not only does the hollow permanence of the valley proper give them the impression of a presence, but the NVA bunkers integrated in the valley structure give them a sense of nervous awe. As the men of Alpha survey the valley, they realize that, "Never have any of them seen such perfect camouflage. There seem to be no openings. A spooky feeling sweeps across the invaders. Where are they?" (612).

The American success in searching for the commanding center of the NVA 7th Front does not result in its final destruction, as they had hoped. The GIs may have located the cache of the enemy tactical and communications equipment (such as Chi-com claymore mines, anti-aircraft rounds, satchel charges, and radios), but they are forced to battle with an invisible foe. Consequently, besides the unceasing discharge of the M16 rounds aimed at merely approximate hostile directions, what particularly creates dramatic tension, in the midst of the wounded and the dead, is the American

encounter with the permanent residents of the valley: Cherry's duel with a spider tenaciously "defending his territory and snagging the intrusion" (624), and Brooks's violent removal of the monumental teak tree (626). Equally difficult to erase from the memory is the final onslaught by the faceless NVA soldiers swarming as if from nowhere. In the final moment of retreat, "'Where in the fuck did the gooks come from?' Thomaston cries. 'They were right on the knoll with us'" (636).

The problem for, and with, the American troops is their unawareness that battling "right on the knoll" with them are not just the "gooks" but the spooks within their own minds. Long before their penetration into the territory of the hostile valley, the three major characters--Ruffus Brooks, Daniel Egan, James (Cherry) Chelini--in their own ways have encountered but somehow failed to handle the internal enemy.

As a black company commanding officer, Lt. Brooks best represents the image of the American military professional in Vietnam. Influenced by a color-conscious father who taught his sons to "do what is right" and "grow to be gentlemen in the finest sense" (204), Brooks developed athletic abilities which made him popular in high school. In college, he added an intellectual edge to his athletic talent. As "the perfect token" (207) of the human species, in his younger days Brooks was already able to transcend class differences and override sexual and racial distances. During his tour in Vietnam, Brooks comes to conjoin his intellectual skills with his natural leadership. On the one hand, he believes in and defends the nobility of the American cause in Vietnam (406). On the other hand, he knows the stakes of the common field soldiers and, by learning the language of democracy to communicate with them, he

earns the respected nickname of "L-T Bro" from his "boonierat" brothers (37).

Portrayed as an entity composed exclusively of "eyes and brain and thoughts" (33), Brooks has a reputation for mastering conflict situations with logic and words. His intellect, however, is at best double-edged. Although his rhetoric has been instrumental in resolving the racial tensions within the company, for instance, Brooks does not seem equally successful in dealing with the conflict with his wife, Lila. In his pre-marital and marital relationship with Lila, Brooks had always been "able to overcome her arguments with an intellectual logic she could not refute" (265). It is the same intellectual logic, however, that prevents him from seeing the Vietnam experience from perspectives other than a soldier's (which sees war as the totality of life experience) and that, as a result, precludes any compromise between himself and Lila over the issue of the war, even for the purpose of saving their treasured marriage. Most reflective of his intellectual power, perhaps, is his conclusion on the white culture's impact on the black culture:

There is a wholeness in black culture which has been disembodied in much of white, especially Anglo-white, culture. The disembodiment of the culture is both the cause and the effect of perceptions which divide everything into components and then attempts to explain everything as complex constructions of those components. When I say everything, I mean everything. I mean seeing a man as a composite of molecules and a poem as a composite of words or a culture as a composite of people and not seeing the energies which run through the forms, the molecules, the words, the people, the energy which ties the elements together into what the thing is. It's that energy which our blackness is losing by becoming white. (417)

Ironically, the intellectual prowess in Brooks's self-reflexiveness proves to be only an obstacle in his attempt to communicate with the artistic Lila during his Rest and Recreation in Hawaii. It has even made Brooks "a total stranger" so that Lila begins to

plead with him: "'Be here with me. There's a world here that is not just your words'" (417).

Nevertheless, Brooks's world is his net of words. Besides theorizing tactical moves and countermoves against the enemy, Brooks also theorizes conflicts in general. As good an academic as he is a politician with his men, the former graduate student in philosophy researches on the root cause of and ultimate solution to conflict. After numerous field sessions conducted in the manner of college seminars, Brooks produces a proposal based on the assumption that language is the ultimate cause of all conflicts and that a modification of language would re-orient people toward peace (556-65). The proposal is limited, but not so much by his racial background (as Myers has argued) as by the intellectual logic which produces the thesis proposal. Thus his assumption that human beings can eliminate warfare is invalidated during the course of the novel by the major military conflict which is concurrent with the development of his thesis.

Brooks is versed in verbal logic, but he is better at fulfilling his military duties in the anti-logic jungle environment. Particularly worth noting is that any sense of logic takes second place to the importance of completing his mission of hunting the "little people." In this light, one is not surprised to see Brooks's subconscious transformation from a democratic officer to an authoritarian commander. When his men dispute with him over how to respond to an ambush situation, he snaps: "Listen. As long as I'm in command here, recon elements are to return fire but to disengage as rapidly as possible. They are to wait for reinforcements or for arty or ARA. That's it. Any questions?" (489). Furthermore, despite Doc Johnson's warning of "a suicide

mission" (589-90), Brooks is driven to destroy the enemy not only at the expense of the lives of his men but also of his own. Nothing, perhaps, better suggests that his notion of logic does not apply to war, or even to himself than his final irrational death--with his not-so-dead body abandoned as missing in action.

The futility of logic in resolving military conflicts is thus ironically reflected in Brooks's belated realization of its equal futility in resolving his marital conflict:

"Where logic breaks down...is not within its own system but without. It breaks down at the origin of its argumentation. It breaks apart when we attempt to verbalize a unity and divide that unity into cause and effect to fit our logical framework. Yet the cause and effect exist only in our words. They are, in fact, one and the same" (309). The Vietnam experience, as Del Vecchio sees it, teaches that wars simply happen, with or without a logical understanding by humanity.

Del Vecchio's view of war as a fact of life does not mean that he advocates any sort of jingoistic heroism. On the contrary, through his portrait of Sergeant Egan, he reveals the pain of the soldier's silent suffering and his desire to return to a peaceful life. Like Lt. Brooks, Egan has his own conflicts to resolve. Where Brooks depends on words, however, Egan resorts to quiet action, which he considers to be the making of one's identity (448). For Egan, war is not a problem to which he feels compelled to provide a solution. Instead, war simply is. Thus, he sadistically teases his new radio man, Cherry: "They send you to the far corners of the earth. You hear the blasts of artillery and bombs. You get weapons, helicopters. you can call all heaven down, all hell up, with your radio. War. It's wonderful. It don't make a gnat's

difference who the enemy is. Every man, once in his life, should go to WAR" (160-61). Egan's attitude is not reflective of his true feelings; rather it stems from his "healthy animal paranoia" (21)--a mental state the veteran soldier has developed to survive the disorienting Vietnam environment.

The real Egan is a man searching for a destiny in the civilian world. Egan did not enlist in order to satisfy his thirst for blood; he did so out of a consistent pattern of restless living. As revealed in his own recollection, no sooner had he experienced sex with Stephanie, whom he has cherished ever since, than he started to think about leaving her. He was aware that "[a]lways he had to leave, to experience something new, to see more of the world" (308). Even in college when he became a football star and turned into a campus stud, Egan did not cease looking: "He fell in love a dozen times and forgot a dozen names. And he found he hated it. Something was missing" (366). As he writes to Stephanie from Vietnam, "I have experienced it now, all and more than I wanted and I think now I could have stayed there with you and you would have been all the experience I'd ever have needed" (146). That is, not until he experienced Vietnam--where he was forced to look within--does Egan realize that, for all his looking, he has thus far failed to obtain an answer. Reflecting upon his earlier tendency to leave for nowhere, he now sits in the cold jungle night and thinks, albeit with much uncertainty: "Perhaps he had been too close to it [the answer to his restlessness] then. Perhaps he could understand it better now, from this distance in time and space" (369).

In the same way that the war awakens Brooks to the futility of intellectual

logic to resolve his marital conflict, so the war enables Sergeant Egan to see the source of his restlessness, although his enlightenment (like Brooks's awakening) comes too late to change the course of his life. Trapped with Doc and Brooks near the flaming helicopter wreck, Egan enters a state of tranquillity:

He does not see fire, he sees energy. Energy, he thinks. Energy is reduced by the square of the distance from its source. As his eyebrows and hair curl and blacken in the heat like melting red plastic threads, he sees an equation: $L_2=L_1(d^2)$. It isn't energy, he thinks, it is light. No Sight. The power of sight decreases in direct relationship to the square of the distance from the source. Or is it, $S=D^2$? Oh, he smiles inwardly, it isn't distance, it is Daniel. It isn't sight, it is Stephanie. (634-35)

Egan's two equations serve as a direct comment both on Brooks's intellectual logic and on his own external search for a self. While, due to the distance of words from reality, Brooks's logic tends to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of problem solution, Egan's external search can succeed only by ending up in the internal realm. After all, Egan has finally located himself in Stephanie not because Stephanie has helped from without but because Egan has searched from within. To the extent that the two characters are eventually able to recognize the cause of their respective failure, Del Vecchio seems to suggest that the post-Vietnam America may be reconciled with itself after appropriate self-reflections.

In this novel, however, Del Vecchio is more pessimistic than optimistic with regard to the destiny of the American soldier. This pessimism is indicated in the way that he has Cherry survive the suicidal search-and-destroy operation in the Khe Ta Laou river valley, not to become a stronger man but to become a paranoid lunatic. Unlike Brooks and Egan, who joined the war effort for economic and psychological

reasons respectively, Cherry "had allowed himself to be drafted and...allowed himself to be sent to Vietnam" (2). After his older brother Victor had fled to Canada as a draft-dodger, Cherry felt the burden to re-establish the honor of his family--a large Italian kinship which had a proud tradition of military service. As a result, Cherry's enlistment was not an act of free will, if he had any. It borders on an opportunist stroke and a mindless drift, a schizophrenic state of mind which foreshadows the deterioration of his mental state toward the end of the novel.

Raised as a descendent of a military family in America, Cherry plays the role of a forced apprentice of war in Vietnam. In spite of pre-Vietnam infantry training, the replacement training in Vietnam, and the two kills he has made in the Khe Ta Laou operation, Cherry remains a "cherry." As Egan tells his new RTO, "Cherry, yer a cherry ta life. People want you ta be an asshole so they tell ya when yer being an ass how good ya are and when yer bein okay what an ass ya are. It makes em feel superior. Fuck em. Fuck it an drive on, Breeze. It don't mean nothin" (544). In Egan's view, Cherry remains uninitiated, not because he has been unable to get over his first killing, but because he can not relate to this type of violence. Just as the sexual connotation of his nickname suggests that he is vulnerable to his fellow soldiers' macho attitude, so Cherry is an easy prey to the horror of the jungle war. The fact that Cherry is indeed "fucked" (as Egan describes it) not only by the men but also by the war is evidenced in his later sexually suggestive aggressiveness: not only does he put his fingers into Minh's blasted brains (586), but in his red-eyed beastliness he tears an NVA soldier to death with both his teeth and hands (610), and pierces the threatening

spider with the blade of a bayonet (625). Unaware that he has become the victim of his own violence, Cherry feels good about his conquests. Little wonder that Egan should ask himself, "What the fuck have I produced? What the fuck makes him crazy like that?" (600).

What drives Cherry crazy is his own mechanistic patterns of thought, which imitate those of the stronger men. Although his undergraduate environment once impressed upon him some anti-war slogans, his experience with the power of fire arms in Vietnam makes him enthralled by war fantasies. Sitting behind the practice M-60 machine gun, he is more than comfortable "imagining himself holding a hill alone, a hero" (14). As well, if he was once disgusted with the sight of his fellow men taking the ears of dead enemy soldiers, he has no qualm about trying it himself in the name of revenge for his dead buddies. Finally, although he trembles at the thought that, after Lt. Brooks's DEROS, no one will be able to protect the company, he does not hesitate to imagine himself assuming the role of God:

Jesus Christ! If Jesus Christ was a man and all men are brothers, does not that mean Christ was my brother. He is the Son of God. Then it follows that I too am the Son of God and thus a God myself. I am immortal. I am immune to destruction. I am a man-God. If I get blown away I will resurrect myself. My friends, Leon, Minh, Whiteboy, I hold the power to destroy you, yet I love you too much. This is a love the others do not yet understand. My friends, we have become one being. Your cells are my cells, my cells are yours. I have this love in me for you, in me, through me, with me, in the power and the spirit of this man-god you are resurrected and you shall live. I am the Mangod and ye shall not raise false gods before Me. (604)

Cherry's elevation of himself to the position of Milton's son of God clearly does not so much suggest a parody of Milton as invite a comparison between him and

Milton's Satan. Just as Satan schemes to usurp the rightful position of the son of God, so Cherry imagines himself to be the leader and guardian of his company. In the last analysis, Cherry is a joint product of Sergeant Egan and Lt. Brooks, each in his own way reminiscent of the prototypical militarist that Milton portrayed in his Satan. Cherry's unhealthy megalomania is a mirror image of Egan's "healthy paranoia," just as his invocation of theology makes him a descendent of Brooks's intellectual logic. It is fitting that Cherry should rot all over while prowling in the jungle:

He had never been so dirty. Cherry felt his forehead, his nose. They were covered with pimples. On his cheeks his beard was a splotchy stubble which itched. His arm sores had become worse. He pressed about them. The wet scabs broke easily and oozed pus. His crotch rot was worse. The skin of his scrotum and inner thighs was red sore and white sore. (427)

The cluster of rotting imagery serves as a graphic evocation of Satan's descendants: the foul Sin, who had sprung out of his forehead, and the shapeless Death, whom he had sired with his own daughter. As if signalling a warning that more wars are looming, however, Del Vecchio does not leave Cherry "missing in action" along with Egan and Brooks at the end; instead, he allows him to survive among the species of the boonierats.

In keeping with the ironic nature of Cherry's survival, Del Vecchio also employs the enigmatic past tense to describe what is commemorated as an American victory in the concluding chapter. The victory is a qualified success, however, due to the fact that the Khe Ta Laou operation has resulted in heavy losses not only for the enemy but also for the Americans themselves. The victory is thus reminiscent of the success of Satan in his seduction of Eve, which not only precipitates the fall but also

the means whereby his degenerative form will finally be crushed.

At the victory ceremony, the dead are also honored. Ironically, however, honored are only those who are officially registered as "killed in action"; those who are not officially dead--including Lt. Brooks and Sergeant Egan--are simply treated as "missing in action" and their names are to be withdrawn from the roster unless they turn up, alive. Thus, emotional tension emerges among the survivors when the battalion commander, the GreenMan, orders his Sergeant Major to honor the dead by removing their names from the battalion roster:

The theater was silent.

"Hey, Jax, El Paso." Cherry nudged El Paso. "How come they didn't call out Egan? or Doc? or the L-T?"

No one answered. Cherry turned to Thomaston. The new company commander looked at him coldly and said, "Haven't you heard? They listed them as MIAs."

"Well fuck," Cherry smiled. He was happy they were not listed among the known dead. In me, he thought. He laughed. "Fuck it. Don't mean..."

Thomaston cut him off. "Don't say it. Soldier." (646)

The Cherry who is asking his buddies why the names of his former mentors have been skipped in the roll call is no longer the ignorant raw recruit. Rather, he has become a desensitized brute. Having been immersed in the GreenMan's rhetoric of patriotism before the roll call, Cherry now feels the swell of his own power. Even though his buddies are grieving over the death of their friends and leaders, he is happy enough to "Fuck it," for death "Don't mean nothin'" any more. Yet, from Lieutenant Thomaston's perspective, the military megalomania exemplified by Cherry needs to be concealed in order to allow for a later collective release. Thus, the former second lieutenant, who had long coveted the position of the company commander, finds it

morally necessary to maintain the appearance of human decency and military order. He does not seem to mind whether Cherry really means violence; what concerns him is the image of the military, which may determine the security of his professional career.

In this light, Vietnam is indeed not over. By dramatizing the discrepancy between words/reason and meaning/action, Del Vecchio seems to urge his reader to become aware that, although what is said and reasoned may appear to work towards resolving conflicts, it actually perpetuates conflicts by *covering* (as in both representing and disguising) them. Just as, according to Fish's interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's reader may continue to be bewildered by his own fallen status without participating (through reading) in the Fall, so Del Vecchio's reader may be deceived by the officers' rhetoric at the novel's "victorious" ending without experiencing (through reading) the insanity of the war.

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Image-making is another major aspect of the culture of professionalism. Like logical reasoning, it functions as a means of control. Whereas logical reasoning controls by dissecting and analyzing the object of study, image-making controls by imprisoning the object in a psychological frame. Whereas logical reasoning tends to lose a firm grasp of the whole, however, image-making is inclined to lose sight of the substance. The way that American image-making shared responsibility for the

disorienting experience in Vietnam becomes a major point in Stephen Wright's prize-winning novel, *Meditations in Green*. Wright's strategy is very subtle: he employs motion-picture techniques to expose the deleterious effect that making pictures and trying to act according to them had on Americans during their tours in Vietnam.

Meditations in Green may best be read as a work which requests the reader simultaneously to perceive and express. The novel is not simply a window through which the reader views a representation of the American experience in Vietnam; nor is it a screen which obstructs the reader's view of that experience. Rather, the novel provides a space which allows the viewer immediately to experience the Vietnam War--as experienced by those who were there. Reading the novel as a *déjà vu* in which the object of view is the viewer brings the consciousness of both America and Vietnam into a sharp focus within the viewing eye/I.

In one of the first and most comprehensive critical studies of Wright's novel, Ronald Ringnalda draws attention to a "harvesting-destroying motif" (136) depicted through recourse to a variety of screens--such as the apartment walls inscribed with "soulographs," or the blank movie screen in the chapel (318), or the back wall of a hootch covered with "a monstrous collage" (112). Such screens "are the loci of Wright's and [his protagonist] Griffin's search for *something*"--namely "the creation of a real something from a real nothing" (130). To Ringnalda, Wright's point is that creation emerges out of destruction.

Ringnalda's perception of the novel's destruction/regeneration motif is valid with respect to the chronological sequence of the first-person narrator Griffin's life-

story, since out of his mind-boggling Vietnam experience he is eventually regenerated into a whole new being. However, the narrative is not structured chronologically. Instead, the novel interweaves three different time zones: a distinct meditation series set in the present, a first-person narrative in the immediate past, and a third-person narrative in the distant past. Such a structure gives the novel a spatial quality, which places emphasis on the reader's role in simultaneously perceiving and interpreting events. In other words, the story of Griffin serves mainly as a medium for the reader's response.

Wright's way of emphasizing the space motif is through a character named Vegetable. A soldier with the 1069th Military Intelligence Group, Vegetable is a perennially stoned character, who lies "on the floor of the guard tower, head exposed to the nose over the edge of the platform, peering from this choice-balcony seat into the spectacle [of NVA sappers overrunning the unit base] below" (311). His nondescript job seems to include huddling over a copy of *Stars and Stripes* for more than an hour without turning over the pages (22). Like Madame Dieudonné's idiot son, Etienne, in *The Bamboo Bed*, however, Vegetable is portrayed as the inarticulate source of truth with regard to the on-going war, because his way of perceiving involves interaction between the seer and the seen: "Spokes of golden fire stood erect in the backs of both eyes, as if the corneal grates which normally screened the delicate Self from the raw full rush of the Real were now chemically wrenched open, allowing a peek into that holy furnace where outer meets inner and bursts into wild combustion upon the charged wall of the retina" (22).

Thus Wright depicts Vegetable's retina not as a screen which separates the inner and outer but as a dynamic space where they meet and intersect. In the same way, the narrative itself is the place in which not only the inner and the outer converge but also the present and the past. The three distinct temporal discourses--a meditation series, a first-person narrative, and a third-person narrative--all point to Griffin as either the explicit (first-person) narrator or as an implicit (third-person) character. What Ringnalda aptly describes as the "Janus-faced" (138) meditations thus function much like film space--as the meeting place of two opposite faces (hence views)--and they dramatize the convergence of the two aspects of "the genial storyteller" Griffin, who from the present looks into the eye/I of himself in the past--a subject seeing itself in the role of an object.

According to Thomas Myers, the fifteen interludes called "Meditations in Green" function as "a high-relief map of Griffin's internalized post-war battlefield" and "serve as objective correlatives for the buried emotional history of the war." To Myers, Griffin's way of ordering history may be compared to "Wallace Stevens's project of describing the blackbird" (207). It should be added, however, that Griffin is looking at a blackbird that looks squarely back at him. Griffin's historical understanding is made possible only in the mutual gazes between his present and past selves that conjoin into one consciousness. By extension, the reader gains his/her understanding of Griffin's stories through the mediation of Griffin the narrator.

Wright's narrative strategy seems to suggest that a historical understanding of the American experience in Vietnam involves a retrospective look not only into the

temporal past of the American veteran and but also into the geographical past of the conglomerate land, culture, and people of Vietnam. As the title of the "Meditations" series indicates, a green plant is the locus of that retrospective look, which is also an introspective one that brings the past into the present and turns self into an other and vice versa. The meditations, which take place within the consciousness of a series of personas, each of whom assumes the green plant's point of view, may roughly be divided into three groups: a) those of both the veteran and Vietnam, b) those of the veteran, and c) those of Vietnam.

The first group of Meditations correlates the consciousness of the veteran and the war-torn environment. In "Meditations in Green: 1," the persona is a potted plant "dependent upon human hands, clumsy irresponsible hands, hands that pinch and prune, hands that go on vacation, abandon their ferns to northern exposure, cracked beds, stale air, enervations, apathy, loneliness" (1). In the narrative context, the plant is the veteran who suffers from PTSD and receives artificial and inherently insufficient care--"the glow of animate heat, of blood in motion, regular doses of herdlike solidity, curses, tears, life" (2); the plant also symbolizes the war-torn Vietnam whose economy "grows itself to death" in the same way that the plant suffers as the result of the Agent-Orange-induced "botanical inflation" (123). The convergence of the two otherwise separated perspectives through the green articulation provides a ground base for further meditations, which identify the understanding of sufferings caused by the war as the major concern of the novel.

The second group of Meditations focuses on the voices and consciousness of

the Vietnam veteran registered through the plant. Thus "Meditations in Green: 2" consists of a catalogue of things that threaten the house plants and which function as a reminder of the threats experienced by the American soldier engaged in "backwoods survival" (13); "Meditations" 6, 7, and 8 register the process of young Americans being converted into the Green Machine of the military. While "Meditation 10" depicts the sterile perfection of the plastic veteran/plant, "Meditation 11" presents the voice of the veteran/plant who "want[s] to grow big as a house, strong as the wind" (225). In the final three meditations, the way to grow a plant and share its seeds becomes self-instructive for the veteran.

The third group of Meditations allows Vietnam to be expressed through various personas. In "Meditations in Green: 3," for example, which is self-reflexively addressed to "you," the Vietnam/plant muses on the way that it has lived through centuries of "[s]imple nourishment, harmonious rhythms" only to "find yourself all at once chewed and torn, thrust head downward in smoking dirt while above in the hot air dangle your shocked roots already begun to blacken and curl at the touch of a light photosynthesis is hopelessly unable to transform" (33). In "Meditation 9," Vietnam is the language of silence that a pregnant Montagnard woman speaks to herself, who "misses home...as it was then, in the time of the Stone Buffalo" and "wishes her husband Bbaang had not gone away with the Green Hats" (166-67); in "Meditation 12" the focus is the shape-shifting dune, where "[t]he sand is moving, grain by grain, slipping patiently on, a landscape in motion" (246).

The first-person and third-person narratives in Wright's novel substantiate and

extend the thematic concerns outlined in the groups of "Meditations in Green." The various personas of the meditations become Griffin in the first-person narrative which has an urban American setting; in the third-person narrative set in Vietnam, the speaker is transformed into multiple points of view. Even though the third-person narrative does not have an apparent teller, however, one assumes that it is Griffin, since we are given the content of the "strange tales from the war back in the long ago time" which Griffin "your genial storyteller" claims to tell (6).

Wright's narrative strategy allows Griffin at the present to look at himself in the past; the first-person and third-person correlation concurs with the pattern of subject/object interfusion in the groups of meditations. As the narrator-protagonist in both of the narratives, Griffin functions as an inter-narrative consciousness in much the same way that he assumes an "[i]nterstate consciousness" when "the tires, working the road outside, pick up a rhythm from the radio, drum a rhythm onto the pavement, roll a rhythm through the body, lock a rhythm into the wheels of the head, and bam! blood explodes in the piston chambers, axles rotate along the spine, gears mesh, transmission achieved." Such "interstate consciousness" implies that "there must be a way home" (173) with respect to the experience of the Vietnam War.

Griffin's present "interstate consciousness" is a reaction against what may be called the "image syndrome" which characterized American involvement in Vietnam. The image syndrome is the obsession of the American military with a set view not only of itself but of its enemy. To a great extent, the American war in Vietnam would not have been possible without the conscious and unconscious making of images

before or behind the battle scenes. In *Meditations in Green*, Wright presents three major aspects of the image syndrome: the making of the war's image by film producers, the image of itself made by the military, and the making of the enemy's image by the military.

The making of war images can be seen in the recurrent references to the use of photography for political purposes. Near the outset of the novel, for example, the ritualistic initiation of new recruits is concluded with a documentary film about Vietnam:

Lights dim, film begins, images burn through the screen: bursting bombs, dying French, gleaming conference tables, scowling Dulles, golf-shirted Ike, stolid Diem shaking head, Green Berets from the sky, four stars at Kennedy's ear, charred Buddhists, scurrying troops, Dallas, destroyers shuddering, Marines in surf, napalm eggs, dour Johnson: let us reason, come let us reason, plunging jets, columns of smoke, beaming Mao, B-52s, UH-1As, 105s, M-16s, Nuremberg cheers, jack-booted Fuehrer, grinning peasants, rubber-sandaled Ho, Adolf Hitler, Ho Chi Minh, Adolf Hitler, Ho Chi Minh, Adolf Hitler, Ho Chi Minh.... (8)

From Hayden White's meta-historical perspective, the collage of historical images in the film may be seen as serving two purposes: a) the military manipulation of the neophytes' attitude toward their enemy (as indicated by the juxtaposition between Hitler and Ho Chi Minh), and b) the soldiers' grasp of the historical and cultural identity of Vietnam. On the one hand, the media representation of Vietnam and the war becomes an extension of the American desire for political control. On the other hand, such representation sets an example for the veterans in recording their own private history, which itself is a form of control never exempt from cultural implications.

Just as the war in Vietnam is filmed by professionals and viewed by American civilians as a television production, so it has a theatrical quality for the American GIs in Vietnam. Whereas the civilians use photography as a means to see what was happening in Vietnam, the soldier's use of imaging is designed to control the situation. Thus, upon the arrival of a new guy, Griffin "experienced a dreary film buff's satisfaction." In his mental movie, Griffin sees himself as "the brusque hero," who, "brimming with manly tenderness, takes pity and shelters [The Kid] from an apparently good-natured but actually quite cruel reality," and who, after the latter's death, "goes berserk, slaughtering a division of godless gooks and half the allied general staff before being subdued by a foxhole presentation of the Congressional Medal of Honor" (23-24). As immaterial as Paul Berlin's imaginary journey to Paris in Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*, Griffin's private movie is a form of self-glorification which, like Paul's, becomes an unexpected blessing in the war zone. This is so because the private movie has the effect of keeping him out of touch with the kind of heroism and glory for which Captain Clancy sacrifices his life in William Eastlake's *The Bamboo Bed*.

In Wright's novel, however, image-making is not merely an internal activity; more often, it has a concrete aspect and takes the form of an external projection of a private fantasy. Wendell Payne, an electronic technician whose only passion is making war movies, does not simply produce the intelligence unit's commander Colonel Dauer's hero fantasy in what he calls "The War in Vietnam: Leadership in Action," but also plays out his own fantasy of being artist by turning the unit base into the

setting of his movies. Indeed, Wendell is so obsessed with his movie that "he could rarely be found on the set of the real war. In fact, the war and Wendell's duties pertaining to it seemed to be at best props, at worst temporary hindrances to his continuous unfolding delight in the toylike mechanisms." While staging a VC attack with painted GIs, for example, "He envisioned the clash of bodies as a ripple, a repulse, a sweep, and a release, a collision of line, a resolution of tension. He wanted grace and beauty of movement, he wanted to see a spring flower open and quietly close. He wanted choreography, a dance of death" (150).

By making a movie out of the war, as Wendell is well aware, the movie-maker himself "was and always would be a hopeless outsider" (152)--at least, until the "dance of death" becomes the movie-maker's own. Thus, when Wendell is finally hit by enemy bullets while filming "The War in Vietnam: The Final Hours" (314), when he therefore becomes the subject of his own movie, his eyes--along with the camera's--are turned inward and his artistic fantasy burned to ashes like Colonel Dauer's war plane. As Griffin the "honorary cinematographer" (314) looks into the dead Wendell's "huge open eyes, eyes now blank and motionless as camera lenses," he wonders, wanting "to miss nothing": "What had Wendell seen at that instant? What was he seeing now?" (315).

Griffin's rhetorical questions, however, also apply to his own part in the military image-making. In order to locate and destroy the elusive enemy, the American military installs a camera in the belly of a helicopter and uses aerial photography. As an image interpreter, Griffin's function is to analyze the film and find the enemy in

the negatives: with a black grease pencil he would carefully circle "two blurry shadows beside the white thread of the road. Next to the circles he placed question marks." Eventually, the circles on the negative turn into "holes in the ground" (40). Just as Wendell remains outsider to the images in his war movie until his dying moment, however, the military often mis-interprets the enemy image until, with live ammunition, the enemy shoots its "interpretation" of the American military image. Thus, Lt. Zachary Mueller obtains a close-up of the enemy only when, on "a routine photo mission," he drops his altitude to receive fire from "a scrawny old woman" with "the long wide heavy barrel of an immense rifle." Little wonder that, after the exchange of mutual "interpretations" with the enemy, Lt. Mueller should start writing the intelligence unit history (46), or that Griffin will later feel the necessity of telling his stories from "the long ago time" (6).

The American military image-making is by no means limited to aerial photographic missions; it is also the principal method of disciplining the men in the ranks. Major Holly, successor to Colonel Dauer, is versed in the value of building and maintaining the proper image. Clearly aware that his own austere appearance--"a firm jaw, cleft chin," and "a sea captain's wrinkles" (87)--is a career-advancement strategy, he equally knows that an ordered "setting" of his unit--[t]he deployment of objects about a central consciousness"--is crucial to groom the military morale. Thus, Holly "spoke of the importance of pride, in self, in mission, in unit. Pride anchored the spirit. Look good, feel good, do good" (88). No more successful than Wendell's movie and the reconnaissance film, however, Holly's attention to setting results only in the

general's shining boots being soiled by dogs' excrement and the need for him to forsake the "burnished surfaces" and to go underground for fear of revengeful assaults from the men in his unit.

In addition to the visual dimension of image-making, American soldiers also developed the verbal equivalent for self-glorification. Despite his college creative writing courses which landed him the awards and decorations job, Private Grumbacher admits "without false modesty" that few of his own compositions "could equal the naive narrative flow, the melodramatic suspense, the unconscious wit of those fabulous mission reports the officers themselves had written as testimony to their deeds of heroism meriting special recognition" (212). No less melodramatic, of course, are the provocative names for the military operations and weapons. Thus responding with outrage to the use of "Clawhammer" as a name for the Secretary of the Army's visit to the unit base, Griffin exclaims:

"Holy God. What we need around here is an Operation Creamcheese, a Project Lords A-leaping, a Mission Negotiable. All these Greek and Roman and Nordic appellations for everything from a moon rocket to a general's fart. How about Operation Sow's Ear or Mickey Mouse fragmentation devices or the Saint Francis of Assisi surface-to-air missile?" (255).

Behind the image syndrome is an image psychology, wherein the American soldier is often pre-programmed with a set view of himself and a set view of the enemy as a means to keep his mind under control. This psychological strategy is employed by Kraft, the spook, in his mental responses to dead bodies. When envisioning the American dead, Kraft tends concretely to picture "a heap of boots at impossible angles still attached to limp doll-like legs" with worn edges, muddy tread,

and creased leather; with the Vietnamese dead, he sees only the abstract "jagged lines and shaded bars on plastic graphs and colored slides" (205). Besides helping to protect friends and to kill the enemy, evoking images also serves to dispel fear. When he nearly faints at the vibration of the Rolls-Royce engines of his plane, for example, Captain Alvin P. Frye begins to pray for all his DEATH-BEFORE-DISHONOR reputation tattooed on his right forearm. Even though he does not believe in praying, a series of images nevertheless transmogrify: from "a haloed face...on the creamy wall of his Sunday school classroom" to the features of his grandfather, of President John Kennedy, and of Allen Dulles (51).

For Wright, as for other Vietnam War writers, however, Vietnam is not a landscape that easily accommodates the limiting lines and colors of images. As if consciously subverting the American effort to order the land, sand permeates every corner of the intelligence unit. Through the eyes of the heat-stricken Griffin,

It was everywhere. There was sand in the orderly room, sand in the food, sand in the telephones, briefcases, classified files; it collected in crankcases, engine housings, rifle chambers, and handcuffs; there was sand under the beds, in the sheets, between the pages of unopened books, piling up in the dark corners of closed lockers, hiding inside the CO's safe. It jammed tape recorders and typewriters, clogged shower drains, and scratched reconnaissance film. It got under clothes where it chafed against sticky skin; it got inside boots, rubbing sore into sweaty feet; it got in the ears, under eyelids, between the teeth. The sun made the sand sprout from the ground and there was no escape from either this mineral crop or that ball of molten lead dripping out of the sky. (196)

More typical of Vietnam's active defiance of the American intrusion is its bush life. This defiance is a lesson which Griffin learns on a search-and-rescue mission and which occasions his introspective view of himself as an unwanted American in the Vietnam jungle. What fascinates Griffin is his closeness to "a limb or a leaf" which he

has hitherto not seen "without the interdiction of a lens. He felt like a spy in the camp of the enemy, a judge locked into a prison of those he had condemned." Deeper in the bush, he has the eerie sense of vegetation--alive with branches and roots--"thrusting itself at him for inspection and comment" (260). Most significantly, Griffin's intimate contact with the bush prompts his reversed view of the relationship between the intruder and the intruded: "were he to die in here among these botanical springs and gears, a Green Machine larger and more efficient than any human bureaucracy or mechanical invention would promptly initiate the indifferent processes of converting flesh and dreams into plant food" (261). The green power gives rise to a double response within Griffin: his paranoia turns him against the bush, but he is also disintegrated by the bush in the form of a "vegetable overdose." As he concludes, ridiculing himself for antagonizing the bush, "Yes, you too, you fucking American" (262).

Griffin's self-deprecation for being American anticipates the attitude of Wright's post-Vietnam psychiatrist Arden. Perceived cynically by Griffin as "the messiah of the advent of vegetable consciousness," Arden provides psychiatric treatment to those "who suffered from rebellious nerves, insurgent thoughts" (81). Concerned to "make peace," his medium is "a flow-image"--or a flower for the patient to concentrate upon for personality enhancement. Arden, however, is disappointed with the American impatience with his "peacemaking" effort: "Americans have no staying power for this sort of enterprise," he complains; "They bitch, they moan. They want palaces in every dewdrop or what's the point." Like an afterimage of the image-

making impulse in Vietnam, the post-Vietnam America "want[s] happiness, little fixes of delight," instead of "awareness," which, to Wright, is to "suffer" the experience of self-knowledge through the other (82).

In *Meditations in Green*, Griffin is Wright's redeeming figure for America. Narrator of the present and protagonist of the past, Griffin not only meditates on but also mediates between America and Vietnam. In American fashion, Griffin lets himself get stoned--his mind "gone organic"--on his passage to Vietnam (134). Aided by the pure DOUBLEUGLOBE from Hong Kong, he envisions his former unit base in Vietnam returning to nature: "There is growth everywhere. Plants have taken the compound. Elephant grass in the motor pool. Plantain in the mess hall. Lotus in the latrine. Shapes are losing outline, character. Wooden frames turning spongy. The attrition of squares and rectangles. The loss of geometry. *Form is emptiness, emptiness is form*" (135-36, emphasis mine).

Just as Griffin's mind is "organic" in that it is freed from physical boundaries, so the vision he has is an "organic" one. The growth and disintegration he sees are an organic part of the natural process. His final paradoxical statement is in fact a Zen formulation--taken from the Heart of Great Wisdom Sutra--of this perception. Since form and emptiness are interchangeable in the process of nature, the fixed image made by the mind of an object--like that of Arden's Americans--has no "staying power." In this respect, Griffin's recollection of another Zen statement, "Mind is a magpie" (136), as a comment on the earlier scene of the prevailing sand not only aptly describes the uncontrolled (or untrained in the Zen sense) mind of the Americans but also points to

the Zen view of the essential human need to grasp (or empty) the mind.

Not surprisingly, when Griffin makes his return to the United States with the traumatic memory of the war, he also retains a sense of the Vietnamese way of living. Although he lives in an apartment which is set in a sterile urban ghetto and associates with homeless people on the street, Griffin welcomes a social worker, Huetie Mirandella, into his personal life. Significantly, Huetie shares a shortened name, Huey, not only with many an American helicopter which served in Vietnam but also many a Vietnamese woman. She is a living reminder of the veteran's impression of Vietnam. Moreover, she plays electric guitar, studies Chinese, practices martial arts, and paints vast oil abstracts which she calls "soulographs" (3). Thus, for Griffin, Huey is the combined embodiment of modern Western and traditional Eastern cultures--a stronghold in which America of the present may be renewed through its traumatic past.

What follows is Griffin's psychological reintegration, which takes the ritualistic form of refurnishing his apartment. As a first step, Griffin allows Huey to paint soulographs on the walls of his apartment. Whereas the soulographs are for Huey an art form, since she dreams to be a Leonardo "if there was another Renaissance lurking about the bloody horizon of our future" (3), they also seem to have the effect of bringing to light the dark side of humanity. They, for example, arouse suspicion and discomfort in Griffin's former buddy, Trips, who is a regular visitor to the mental hospital: "They look like snakes, nests of snakes.... Skulls in the shithouse, gooks on the wall, ghosts in the night, it's worse than the [psychiatric] ward" (35). After having

Huey paint her soulographs, Griffin transforms his apartment into a garden and begins to cultivate flowers right in its middle. Furthermore, Griffin makes love to Huey among the furrows of the garden, performing what he meaningfully calls an "[a]ncient farm ritual...[t]o ensure the success of the harvest" (271).

Griffin's way of achieving psychological reintegration is through a transfusion of subject and object, or what Arden calls "the objectification of interiority" (277). It is an approach that emphasizes the common base shared by the Americans and the Vietnamese. For Americans to find that common base, Wright suggests, Griffin has set an example. Concluding his multiple roles in the narrative, Griffin envisions the course of his own transformation and the prospect of the transformation of his fellow Americans:

Everywhere the green fuses are burning and look now, snipping rapidly ahead of your leaping eye, the forged blades cutting through the page, the transformation of this printed sheet twisted about a metal stem for your lapel your hat your antenna, a paper emblem of the widow's hope, the doctor's apothecary, the veteran's friend: a modest flower. (322)

This vision presents the paradox of the strength of the resilient green life: it grows to replace the assertive power of civilization, yet it remains in the end "a modest flower."

Chapter Five

Emptying the Mind

The driver, eyes rolling, was demonstrating *t'ai chi* strokes, weaving and dancing on the pavement. He was a great success with the crowd. People laughed and applauded. The exercise he was performing in pantomime was the one called Repelling the Monkey. (20)

The mind is a monkey. (169)

--Robert Stone, *Dog Soldiers*

Ever since the North Vietnamese took over Saigon in April 1975, the United States has been haunted by the ghost of its war in Vietnam. Despite the American administration's admonition to "put Vietnam behind us," the American public seems neither willing nor ready to do so. They draw lessons, revisit them, and over again. Volumes of words point to the nation's obsession with the war's legacy, which gives rise to some recurrent questions and inquiries: What had led the US to Vietnam? What could have prevented the intervention? What steps could have been taken to win the war? What are the consequences of the war? What should America do to recover from its fall in Southeast Asia? What lessons should the Americans learn from Vietnam? And, most importantly, how?

Significantly, although different groups present different (even opposite) views on what should be learned from Vietnam, there would seem to be a shift from initial concerns with international security and foreign policy to a later emphasis on domestic politics and social values, and to a focus on the impact of the war on individuals.

Back in 1977, for example (when the loss of the war was stinging the national pride harder than the loss of lives), Donald D. Frizzel and W. Scott Thompson assembled *The Lessons of Vietnam*--a volume of politico-military essays based on a conference sponsored by the Fletcher School's International Security Studies Program. Arguing that "the United States must...involve itself internationally where its national interests are clearly involved" (iv), Frizzel and Thompson see Vietnam as providing a lesson in how to deal with unconventional warfare:

If there will be "no more Vietnams," there certainly will be many more guerrilla wars, counterinsurgency efforts, urban battles, problems of "costing" weapon systems, problems of unity of command in some theater of action; indeed each of the questions that we separately considered in our deliberations could be part of a different conflict environment in which the United States could well find itself involved in the future. (vi)

Feeling that the United States will continue to play leadership roles in world affairs, they suggest that it might as well prepare now, in terms of political commitment and military strategy, in order to prevent another Vietnam fiasco.

In 1984 (after the almost decade of national deliberation that followed the end of the war), Harrison E. Salisbury edited a volume entitled *Vietnam Reconsidered*, which includes presentations from a conference sponsored by the School of Journalism, Center for Humanities and School of International Relations in cooperation with the Immaculate Heart College Center at the University of Southern California. Taking into account the "human, political, moral, social, philosophical" (1) debts of the American war in Vietnam, Salisbury fears that what might ultimately cause the United States to crumble is not so much international political and military pressure as the burden of lies from political and military leadership at home. Consequently,

instead of drawing attention to concerns with national security, he warns of the necessity to guard against domestic political manipulation which is designed to serve personal interest: "we must never forget that men of prejudice and power will halt at nothing when that power is threatened or when political tempers rise. The preservation of political power by any means is a human characteristic that knows no bounds of country or century" (7). Only by being vigilant against its leaders' political lies, Harrison suggests, can America begin to prevent its abuse of political power.

In 1987, Timothy J. Lomperis's *"Reading the Wind"* records, analyzes, and comments on a 1985 conference convened by the Asia Society in New York. Unlike the two earlier conferences, this gathering attempted to understand the American experience in Vietnam through a literary perspective. Although the participants differed in their views of Vietnam (which are as radically diverse as James Webb's official defense of the war as a "noble crusade," Ron Kovic's personal condemnation of it as evil, and Al Santoli's political justification of the American involvement), they concurred about the fragmentary nature of their understanding of the war.

Yet according to Lomperis, the real problem is not so much the absence of an encompassing perspective on the war as that of how it would be received: "even if such a definitive work has been written or is being written, America is not ready to read it." As Lomperis explains,

James Webb, Ron Kovic, and Al Santoli tried to assert truths that most of their fellow participants weren't ready for: either to hear or to accept. The participants preferred, often quite vehemently, to hold on to the war as an ambiguity. In ambiguity, truth is provisional. In such a state, all egos can be intact, and in provisional harmony, because everyone might still be right even though they presently are in complete contradiction. (9)

Just as ego had first caused the American dilemma in Vietnam, so it now poses the problem in understanding it.

According to a number of novels which precede or accompany America's post-Vietnam concerns with international security and domestic harmony, the two issues are inseparable. Such novels as Eastlake's *The Bamboo Bed*, Del Vecchio's *The 13th Valley*, and Wright's *Meditations in Green* explore the connection between international affairs and domestic issues by examining the relationship between the external and internal dimensions of their major characters. In *The Bamboo Bed*, when Captain Clancy is finally dying of wounds after his company suffered a nearly complete destruction, he is able to come to terms with his defeat: just as his nation had attempted with futility to impose its own brand of order on Vietnam, so he had become a coward by fighting like a hero. In *The 13th Valley*, despite his habitual view of the American presence in Vietnam as a security measure for world peace, Sergeant Daniel Egan finally realizes that, parallel to America's collective sense of insecurity, his personal sense of insecurity is rooted in his restlessness--a tendency of looking outward for a solution to his inner problems. In *Meditations in Green*, as a result of his total immersion in the overwhelming Vietnam jungle, James Griffin reconciles with his inner self not only by turning his living quarters into a garden, but also by starting to live the life of a modest flower. Yet, it is Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers* and Michael Herr's *Dispatches* that show on a larger scale how America's unjustified intervention in Vietnam may lead its citizens to start looking within for answers.

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If David Halberstam's 1967 novel, *One Very Hot Day*, is both a realistic depiction and a prophetic account of the American experience of disorientation in Vietnam, Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers*--published at the time of American withdrawal (1973)--is a compelling illustration of what the Americans may (or perhaps should) have learned as a result of the East-West cultural collision during the Vietnam era. Since the American experience of Vietnam exerts an impact not only on the immediate individual participant but also on the extended cultural and psychological entity, it is important that American civilians share the psychological experience of the immediate participants in Vietnam. Stone's means of doing this is through the use of the conventions of the popular "thriller."

According to Maureen Karagueuzian, the thriller format may be seen in the novel's basic plot:

John Converse, with whom Stone's novel begins, is a newspaperman who has collapsed in terror during a fragmentation bombing in Cambodia. Upon returning to Vietnam, he acquires three kilos of heroin which he sends to the United States with his old buddy, Raymond Hicks. While Hicks and Converse's wife Marge are fleeing brutal, corrupt narcotics agents, she also becomes dependent on the drug. Marge and Hicks save Converse's life, but Hicks is killed and Converse surrenders the heroin. (65)

Yet, she too quickly dismisses the significance of this popular fictional form in order to expound Stone's irony and does not recognize the way it contributes to Stone's analysis of the war.

John Hellmann thinks more of Stone's use of the thriller form. For Hellmann,

Stone uses both the realistic and fantastic aspects of the thriller to suggest the simultaneous continuity and the dead-end of America's frontier mentality: "Vietnam is the murderous field that has finally forced frontier-marching America to gaze upon its self-projected image, stripped of its dreams and myths, and find nothing but brute behavior" (140). To make his point, Hellmann relates Stone's protagonist to the heroes of thriller novels, but he does so mainly to illustrate his larger concern with the tradition of America's westward movement. In the context of drawing Vietnam lessons, I suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the morality component of the thriller format.

In *The World of the Thriller*, Ralph Harper summarizes the classic pattern of the genre as follows: "Out of boredom, through some chance encounter with a world where things are really happening, where the stakes are big and life is lived at high tension, a man hunts and in turn is hunted, is trapped, caught, escapes, and finally defeats his enemy" (21). Implicit in this pattern, according to Harper, is the struggle between the hero as representative of good and the villain as representative of evil. While the villain is invariably a sadistic force that threatens the world of civilization, the hero is a man of privacy, of self-reliance, of self-reflexiveness, of pride, and of honor. The integrity of the hero lies in his loyalty to the job of removing the threat to civilization.

By such a definition, Stone's *Dog Soldiers* is at the same time a thriller and not a thriller. While the novel's action--undertaken by the double characters, John Converse and Raymond Hicks--follows the classic pattern, its purpose does not appear

to be the liberation of a civilized world from the grip of evil. Since heroin is "a figure of corruption" (Karagueuzian 65), the heroes involved in such trafficking are corrupt as well. Thus to Hellmann, the novel "configures into a failed fictive landscape in which a [thriller] reader follows the lurid dreams of the popular culture into a final frustration" (141).

Dog Soldiers constitutes a "failed" thriller, however, only if the reader fails to recognize who is the true hero and the nature of his task. As difficult to understand as he may be in his compounded identities, Ray Hicks, an American samurai, is clearly the only redeeming force in Stone's narrative. If one looks closely at the novel's setting and its movement, one begins to see that instead of being presented as "a stunted human being whose actions are finally aimless and fruitless" (Shelton 81), Hicks the heroin-trafficker is portrayed as a Christ figure.

Stone's novel consists of a movement from the unpredictably violent Vietnam to the historically-determined violent America. While it may appear to resemble the plotline of such rehabilitation stories as Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* or Philip Caputo's *Indian Country*, Stone's *Dog Soldiers* is a rehabilitation story in a different sense. Instead of attempting to help traumatized veterans return to the normal stream of life, it makes a painstaking effort to awaken American society in general to the violent nature of the American psyche. Thus, rather than passively waiting for action to take place (or being acted upon by society), Stone's protagonists take the initiative.

Stone's America seems to survive solely on the supply and demand of violence. Besides the random and organized street violence, there is also the media

orientation to violence evidenced by *Nightbeat*--a weekly tabloid which features sadistic sexuality and which conjoins imaginary violence and real death. Using photographs of real corpses for illustration, the tabloid is filled with fantasies about killer hermits, spanking judges, and teenaged nymphomaniacs; it also captivates its readership with stunning headlines such as "MAD DENTIST YANKS GIRL'S TONGUE" (123). The tabloid does not have the monopoly on the manufacturing of imaginary violence, however; there is no lack of fake veterans making up gory stories of killing and burning in Vietnam. As Danskin, the murderer-turned cop, observes with respect to the fake Vietnam stories generated by his partner Smitty, "he tells stories like you could never forget. Ears cut off. Balls cut off. Little kiddies on bayonets. The most awful shit you ever heard." The satisfaction for telling the atrocity stories is that "they love it. The more ghastly, the more horrible, the more they love it" (238).

The vicarious experience of unreal violence, Stone seems to suggest, serves as a stimulant for the desire to experience it in fact. In the case of John Converse, the personal attraction lies not so much in the experience of committing violence as being in its proximity. A failed playwright and principal writer for *Nightbeat*, Converse had experienced "difficulties with reality" before deciding to embark on a correspondent's journey to Saigon. Although Vietnam does indeed obviate his difficulties with reality, it also ironically pushes him much too close to it. In his very first encounter with violence--a fragmentation-bombing by the South Vietnamese Air Force--Converse discovers that he is "a soft shell-less quivering thing encased in a hundred and sixty pounds of pink sweating meat" (24-25). The self-discovery generates two insights:

first, "Existence was a trap; the testy patience of things as they are might be exhausted at any moment"; second, the "casual arrogance with which he had presumed to scurry about creation" calls for "the moral necessity of his annihilation." The result is Converse's overwhelming desire to live, for, as he concludes, "He was the celebrated living dog, preferred over dead lions" (185). After his experience of real violence (as opposed to the kind that he used to conjure up for *Nightbeat*), Converse is convinced that he would rather live as a worthless dog than to be dead as a valiant lion.

Converse's subsequent involvement with Charmian, however, indicates that he has not learned his lesson. The daughter of a North Florida judge and a former member of the CIA, Charmian possesses more than sexual charm for Converse. While Converse is shaken by his personal experience of the gory details of violence during his stay in Vietnam, Charmian "was utterly without affect, cool and full of plans. She had taken leave of society in a way which he found irresistible" (25). Charmian's "way" is the recourse to high-grade heroin, for which she holds a religious respect. As she tells Converse, although she uses opium as her regular opiate, she has also cultivated the habit of taking "a little *Sunday sniff* now and then the same as anybody" (12, emphasis mine). When Converse subjects himself to the influence of a "Sunday sniff" as a substitute for spiritual needs, Charmian admonishes him: "That'll learn you, *messing with the pure*. Don't get sick on my cushion" (13, emphasis mine).

Although Charmian's warning is as much about the power of heroin as about the violence of the war, Converse does not understand her lesson. As a former playwright with a small reputation, he had come to Vietnam to seek raw materials for

a new play. Since the war reality proved unbearably violent for him, he was compelled to give up his original hope. Being a practical man, which is indicated by his marriage to his boss's daughter, however, Converse finds it logical to make his trip worthwhile by other means--trafficking heroin to the United States. Thus to the extent that his Vietnam venture is more materialistic than spiritual, Converse is indeed messing with the "pure."

By having him turn the package of pure heroin over to Hicks for its actual transportation across the Pacific, Stone suggests Converse's inability to handle the reality which he has come all the way to embrace. Hicks, in contrast, is clearly a competent candidate for the dangerous task. Even though they once seemed to be "doubles" as companions in drinking, moviegoing, and reading Nietzsche (Karagueuzian 66), the two men are as different as night and day.

The major difference between the two is the way in which each approaches the world of objects. Converse is a man of reason. Before he actually delivers the heroin to Hicks, Converse feels compelled to find moral justification for his action. He realizes that heroin trafficking is morally objectionable, but so are many other actions taking place right in front of his eyes. As he enumerates them to himself, "There were moral objections to children being blown out of sleep to death on a filthy street. And to their being burned to death by jellied petroleum. There were moral objection to house lizards being senselessly butchered by madmen. And moral objections to people spending their lives shooting scag" (40). Yet, Converse also reasons that moral objections are sometimes "overridden by larger and more profound concerns" such as

the destruction of termites to protect human interest (41).

Since selling heroin cannot be regarded as being in the interest of humanity, Converse is unable to resolve the moral dilemma with logical reasoning. What eventually helps him is an analogy which sounds like reasoning: "if the world is going to contain elephants pursued by flying men, people are just naturally going to want to get high" (42). The pursuit of the elephants by flying men refers to the Great Elephant Zap, a military operation against elephants as a result of the decision by Military Advisory Command, Vietnam, that "elephants were enemy agents because the NVA used them to carry things" (41-42). It is an operation which Converse once found morally objectionable in the same way that he now finds heroin trafficking morally objectionable. By the same token, however, the analogy also provides Converse's way of backing out of his moral dilemma: he literally overrides his own moral objection by taking the position of the "flying men"--soldiers on helicopters--who need to get high in order to kill elephants. In other words, by literally--also evasively--interpreting his heroin operation, Converse avoids confrontation with his personal sense of wrongdoing.

Stone's characterization of Hicks suggests that a subversive layer of meaning lies beneath Converse's analogy: heroin trafficking can be understood as an amoral reaction to America's immoral action in Vietnam. Unlike the intellectual Converse, Hicks is a man of disciplined action. A professional marine at a "funny" time (57), Hicks is also appropriately both a reader of Nietzsche and a student of Zen. While Nietzsche has knocked nihilistic sense into him with regard to the "empty space" of

the universe (74), Zen training has aroused in him the necessity "to maintain a spiritual life" (75). If he is philosophically equipped for such a criminal act as drug dealing, this "American samurai" seems also technically prepared for it. To Hicks, "[i]t was a source of pride...that he was at home in the world of objects. He believed that his close and respectful study of Japanese culture had enabled him to manipulate matter in a simple disciplined manner, to move things correctly. He believed it was all in your head" (76). In this light, if Hicks is a "psychopath" (58) who views drug dealing as "a little adrenaline to clean the blood" (55), he is not someone who simply ignores moral obligations in the interests of immediate physical gratification. His carrying of the "weight" (54) should duly be seen as a parallel to what Americans see as the "fantastic traffic in the transmigration of souls" by the elephants in the Buddhist country (57).

That Hicks is more than a common criminal is also suggested by his attitude toward heroin. Hicks shares Charmian's religious respect for the "white on white" pureness of the chemical (169). After getting high on it with Marge, Converse's wife and drug-dealing contact in the United States, Hicks marvels not only at the external glow on her skin (170) but also at the internal flow of her life:

"Springs fails [sic] not," she said. "It's a Polish toast. It means 'to life.'" Hicks laughed weakly. "Jesus." He turned over on his stomach and folded his hands between her breasts. "It's a poem, you cooze. I read it. It's a poem." (173)

What Hicks calls "poem" is obviously Marge's Polish toast "to life" and, yet, what gave rise to her toast is precisely her experience of the "pure" heroin. Hicks, however, does not share Charmian's cynical attitude toward life in general, which is evident in

the disinterested way in which he deals in the heroin. When Marge asks him why he had decided to carry it for Converse, for example, Hicks retorts: "Why do you have to have it all figured out? I don't always have a reason for the shit I do" (113).

Stone, however, also allows Hicks to act out the reason for his trafficking. In the Battle of Bob Hope (a battle with the NVA which was designed as a punishment for Hicks and his men who had attended a Bob Hope show against their superior's order), Hicks has learned the price of not being a responsible soldier; in the same way he is now passing on his lesson of responsibility to American civilians. Thus, when Gerald, the Hollywood writer, wants to take heroin in order to earn the right to make a film about the "Chain of Victims" of such drugs (189), Hicks "held his wrist and pushed the shot home," overdosing him into "a quick convulsive shuffle" (199).

Although the lesson for Gerald is personal, it also has a collective implication. To a bewildered Marge, Hicks offers a not so "obvious" reason for his unreasonable action: "Huey City.... We had guys who were dead the day they hit that place. In the morning they were in Hawaii, in the afternoon they were dead. I had six buddies shot to shit in Hue City in one morning" (202). By pushing the heroin shot home on Gerald, Hicks also symbolically pushes home on America the shots experienced by the soldiers in Vietnam.

Stone's characterization of Dieter further accentuates the larger symbolic implications of Hicks's heroin shot. The spiritual leader of a countercultural commune, "Those Who Are," Dieter is simultaneously "a writing roshi" of Zen (215) and a believer in the American dream (270). Worshipped as God, Dieter once attempted to

salvage the collapsing secular world of America. Like Gerald's silver-screen project, however, Dieter's dissolved along with his commune. The reason for Dieter's failure is suggested in a hippie song he nostalgically recites to Marge:

Of offering more, than what I can deliver,
I have a bad habit it is true
But I have to offer more than what I can deliver,
to be able to deliver what I do. (271)

Ironically, while he is able to recognize the fatal flaw in the commune's habit of relying on phantasmagoria to save the world, Dieter commits the same error when he disputes with Hicks over the settlement of the heroin. Still clinging to his dream of a comeback, Dieter keeps preaching such idealistic concepts as "Strength," "Discipline," and "Love" in a landscape which to Hicks is beyond recovery. Consequently, when Dieter attempts to throw the bag of heroin over the cliff in an attempt to restore what he views as Hicks's spiritual sense, Hicks shoots him with his M-16 rifle, mistaking his move as one motivated by a disguised interest in the drug.

While the mistake is tragic, the truth is that words can save neither Dieter's commune nor America. It cannot even save his own life. As Dieter realizes, "I talk too much.... That was perhaps the problem all along" (310). Hicks's symbolic shot is pushed deeper when, in the final stage of his heroin operation, he himself is inflicted with a gun wound in the simulated Vietnam battle he wages at the foot of Dieter's secluded mountain residence. To the fear-stricken Converse, "[t]he din of battle swelled over them--bazookas, mortars, rockets, tank guns--it was Dienbienphu, Stalingrad," although he soon discovers that "[i]t was someone doing it, someone playing games with a microphone" (297). Dramatic as Hicks's "game" may seem to

Converse, by associating it with America's "game" in Vietnam, Stone emphasizes the seriousness of its implications. As Hicks muses, when he finds himself in the role of a Vietcong while calculating his attack on the corrupt narcotic agents:

I'm the little man in the boonies now, he thought.

This thing would be to have one of their Sg mortars. He was conceiving a passionate hatred for the truck--its bulk and mass--and for the man who sat inside it.

The right side for a change. (294)

To clarify the point, Stone has Hicks pronounce through the loudspeakers that "Form Is Not Different From Nothingness," and "Nothingness Is Not Different From Form" (298). The paradoxical statement refers to a Zen state of mind, which has attained the unity between subject and object through a mind-emptying process. When used by Hicks the American samurai, the statement is designed to suggest the connection between the violent state in Vietnam and that in America in general. It also suggests that the mind-emptying process, which is characteristic of Zen, may be crucial in America's understanding of its Vietnam experience.

In the light of the above, Hicks's personal wound may be seen as representative of all wounds suffered in Vietnam; his effort to contain his physical pain can likewise be seen as an effort to incorporate the collective psychological pain of Vietnam. Thus, after being wounded, Hicks acts more in an internal than an external dimension. In a series of hallucinations, while walking in the dryness of the American southwest desert, Hicks re-experiences the wetness of the Vietnam jungle (306), where he had got wounded fighting the Battle of Bob Hope. Realizing that he will not survive the present wound, he thinks to himself while straining to contain his

pain: "You'll never do it twice. Walking away from the Battle of Bob Hope was one thing and this was something else. This was twice" (317).

Such "negative thinking" (317) does not lead Hicks to fatalism, however, but rather to a redemptive sublimation. Using the technique of martial arts to ease his pain, Hicks "came to understand that now he might carry within his mind and soul immense amounts of it. A master of the discipline, such as he was now becoming, might carry infinite amounts of pain"--especially the pain of "all that cringing, all those crying women, whining kids" (325). Thus, in the last few moments of his life, Hicks is allowed to carry not only the pain, but also the bag of heroin, both of which he sees ultimately as illusions. Since, in Zen terms, "the mind is a monkey" (327) which creates only illusions, it must be emptied so as to be the ultimate reality in which the difference between subject and object is dissolved.

Although Hicks's heroin trafficking is doomed to failure from the very beginning (since, as it turns out, he has no one in particular to deliver the drug to), he has nevertheless succeeded in fulfilling the purpose which prompted his action. At the moment when he has "got" the pain of "all you people," Hicks finally recognizes why he has decided to traffick the heroin in the first place: "So there is a reason.... There had always been a reason. You never know until the moment comes and there it is" (326). All along, the reason has been what Buddhists call a transmigration of souls for the dead. Thus, approaching his own death, he chants to himself, "Give Jesus the ass, I'll take the soul" (319). The "ass" and "soul" separation indicates a failure on Hicks's part to unify mind and body in the Zen sense; yet the fact that he received the pure

heroin in Vietnam and is now putting it in the possession of "them" (327) at home suggests a way for America to draw lessons which is reminiscent of Zen instruction. Just as a Zen student learns to grasp his mind by abandoning it, so America may learn to face the reality of Vietnam by embracing its illusions. Such a paradoxical way of learning is characterized by what the post-modern sociologist Jean Baudrillard would term "the reversibility of subject and object" (26). In other words, one attains his/her objective through a reverse process.

Stone's novel ends with multiple twists of irony, which derive from the fact that the corrupt agent, Antheil, is the recipient of the heroin. Acting as a regulatory agent for the federal government, Antheil is also an agent for Charmian. With the heroin in his hand, he envisions gracefully withdrawing from the agency for "the place to which he planned to repair with Charmian." Given the way he effortlessly picks up the bag of heroin from Hicks's dead body, it is also ironic that he should draw the following lesson: "If you stuck with something...faced down every kind of pressure, refused to fold when the going got tough, outplayed all adversaries, and relied on your own determination and fortitude, then the bag of beans at the end of the rainbow might be yours after all" (337). The irony rests in Antheil's simultaneous security and anxiety at his exclusive possession of the heroin, which is revealed in the moral he draws in his final conversation with Angel, a quiet-looking Mexican cop who has collaborated with him in the case and is thus deemed a potential rival over the ownership of the drug:

"Someone told me once," he said, "something that I've always remembered. This fellow said to me--if you think someone's doing you wrong,

it's not for you to judge. Kill them first and then God can do the judging."
He began to translate for Angel, but then thought better of it. (338-39)

The reason that Antheil does not translate the moral is obvious: he fears that his claim to total ownership of the heroin may reveal to Angel his own bad faith, which in turn may incur a fatal return and make Antheil the object of potential revenge.

Thus, if Stone has left his novel open-ended, he is not vague about the consequence of America's Vietnam experience: the burden of Vietnam comes home to America in the form of the drug culture. In short, just as a thriller is always "written for the sake of and written about the interior life of man" and asks "not what kind of world we live in, or what reality is like, but what it has done to us" (Harper 79, 80-81), so *Dog Soldiers* raises the question of what the involvement in Vietnam has done to America. In Stone's view, Vietnam teaches the lesson that America needs redemption and that--as the nauseating effect of the pure heroin suggests--such redemption may occur only through an internal purgation. Yet, the ironic ending suggests that purgation is not possible within the foreseeable future since it is not Hicks the pain carrier, but Antheil the drug dealer, who seems to prevail in America. Whatever hope Stone holds out for America's future is suggested in the implications of the fact that Marge's emotionally charged condemnation of her pursuer, Antheil, is outside his range of hearing: "Fuck you.... Fuck you--fuck you" (335). For America to be redeemed, it seems, Marge's voice would have to be first heard by those for whom it is intended.

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In his acclaimed piece of new journalism, *Dispatches*, Michael Herr shares with Vietnam veterans the urgency to convey the real experience of Vietnam to the folks at home. Like Stone in *Dog Soldiers*, however, Herr is interested not so much in what it seems like "out there" as in what it feels like "in here." While Stone accomplishes his mission by dispatching an American samurai to deliver the enigmatic heroin to the heartland of America, Herr fulfils his duty by examining his own role as a media-man dispatching Vietnam stories to the American public. If Stone's fictive heroin-trafficking has somehow transmogrified America's Vietnam tour into an inward journey, Herr's journalistic exposure of his own occupation presents Vietnam as a place where the adventurer paradoxically perceives the self while encountering the other. As Herr confesses on the consequence of his assignment in Vietnam, "I went to cover the war and the war covered me; an old story, unless of course you've never heard it" (20).

Whether or not his fellow Americans have heard the "old story," Herr, of course, wants them to hear his version of it. In 1967, as a correspondent for *Esquire* magazine, the twenty-seven-year old Herr went on a journalistic tour in Vietnam. Like O'Brien's characters who, in the words of Doc Peret, are "a bunch of kids trying to pin the tail on the [imperceivable] Asian donkey" (*Cacciato* 95), Herr the correspondent came to see that the war could not be pinned down through traditional modes of reporting. For Herr, "Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it, all it could do was take the most profound event of the American decade and turn it into a communications pudding, taking its

most obvious, undeniable history and making it into a secret history" (234-35).

Conventional journalism did not work simply because, just as changes in the land resisted precise mapping, so objective reporting was impossible due to the way the war affected the psychological geography. Thus, *Dispatches* begins with Herr's use of an elaborate cartographical metaphor:

It was late 67 now, even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore: reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind. We knew that the uses of most information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different stories to different people. We also knew that for years now there had been no country here but the war. (1)

Consequently, Herr maps the war by unmapping himself through the process of decoding the always already loaded linguistic signs that constitute his medium.

As such, *Dispatches* seems to ally itself with the post-Vietnam form of thinking known as deconstruction. Indeed, according to Evelyn Cobley, *Dispatches* distinguishes itself from First World War novels precisely because "it deconstructs the fact/fiction opposition in such a way that the documentary mode becomes virtually indistinguishable from modes of new or experimental fiction" (111). What makes Herr problematic to Cobley, however, is that he is "not entirely committed to notions of indeterminacy" (112), and thus although she credits *Dispatches* for its "creative and critical accomplishments," her conclusion is that these are rather accidental since they grow out of "a writer's blindness to his or her own theoretical 'errors'" (112).

Apparently, Herr's most theoretical "error" is in his conviction that "you were as responsible for what you saw as you were responsible for what you did" (Herr 20). To Cobley, "Herr is complicit with the war against which *Dispatches* is also an

explicit protest," for "When 'shooting' pictures, whether with a camera or the pen, the observer is not likely to interfere with the actual killing" (108). The creative accomplishments aside, then, *Dispatches* is seen as barely falling short of serving to perpetuate the war--a conclusion which, indeed, seems to be the point of David E. James's discussion of Herr's use of rock and roll. In James's view, Herr is an accomplice to the Right in its justification of the war because he allows rock and roll "to figure the unrepresentability of combat" in Vietnam, thus concealing "the historical events by which the soldiers came to be in Vietnam." From James's Marxist perspective, Herr's use of rock and roll is a way of capitalizing on consumerism:

The paradigmatic imaginary social relations of rock, by which the rock star embodies everything the audience lacks, recurs in and informs Herr's relation to the soldiers. The correspondents possess everything--the only thing--the GIs desire: the freedom to leave.... The war becomes a spectacle enacted for their consumption, and as they become conscious of their power over the war they capitalize upon their difference from those who are its victims. (86)

Reading *Dispatches* with a focus on the economic relationship between the war correspondents and the actual "workers" is very much in keeping with my own emphasis upon the need to consider the *reality* of the war, but the Marxist approach also tends to lose sight of the psychic costs. Moreover, it tends to ignore the way that Herr's autobiographical persona is self-consciously guilty about the parasitic nature of a war correspondent. To Copley, this confessional aspect is a disarming strategy to win the reader's trust, but one can also see it as a sacrificing "deal": self-exposure as a means to cultural exposure. If the war correspondent profits from his "trade," his internal guilt, external fatigue, and possible encounters with death may be a cost that balances the scale. Or, if one wishes to follow the deconstructive logic, all Americans-

-whether critics or supporters of the war in Vietnam--are accomplices, which would at best make the scapegoating of one member of the whole guilty chain meaningless. Conversely, it could be argued that by becoming aware of his complicity, Herr's persona becomes the surrogate for those who remain unaware.

In *Dispatches*, Herr thus turns self-reflexiveness into a transparent medium for reporting on the war. By reasons of his extreme self-consciousness, Herr has come to realize that war is not simply an isolated, external event which happens and which can be recorded as seen, but that it is a regular expression of humanity. By the same token, the American war in Vietnam is an expression of American culture. Herr's narrative, then, mediates a cultural identification not only between the American GIs and war correspondents but also between the correspondents and the American civilians. Herr's narrative transparency is thus registered in the way he observes the war through personal *and* cultural self-observation.

Because of this double self-reflexiveness, *Dispatches* has prompted a variety of attempts to identify Herr's purpose. Gordon Taylor, for example, calls Herr's narrative "a 'witness act' for the voiceless dead" (i.e., "the Marines who die before his eyes"). Thus, to Taylor, Herr's "dirge for himself as one wounded in a way by seeing what he has seen...is only the means to that end" (304). Thomas Myers scrutinizes what Taylor calls the "witness act" and recognizes a political dimension: it is "political in the sense of disputing the dominance of the master narrative by supplying counterstatements to it and its mainstream repertorial versions" (*Walking* 167). Furthermore, Philip Beidler generalizes the "witness act" into primarily one of an "imaginative artificer": "It is a

question, finally, of writing itself in the largest degree, not a matter of 'being there' in any particular sense at all, so much as a matter of being one's self, a writer, an American in the last half of the twentieth century trying to make sense of a collocation of experience and myth called Vietnam" (*Re-Writing* 265-66).

What needs special attention about Herr's self-conscious narrative, however, is what I would call a religious quality--its reverence for truth, which both resembles and differs from the American transcendentalist tradition. Focusing on Herr's free-writing style, for example, Myers has found traces of American romanticism in *Dispatches*, stating that, like Emerson, Herr "strips his moment of constricting categories to free the organic power of the image and of the word" (*Walking* 149). Since free-writing can come only from a free mind, one might also argue that, like Emerson, Herr is attempting to strip away his ego in order to become a transparent eye-ball. In Herr's case, however, what prompts transparency is not so much a transcendentalist self-reliance as an encounter with the facts of life in the midst of the Vietnam jungle.

What also makes Herr's kind of narrative transparency necessary and yet difficult to comprehend is the ego-deflation that experience of the war involves. Whereas ego deflation may be difficult in a civilized milieu, in a war zone survival requires ego deflation, and fear of dying is what makes one aware of one's dependency upon others. In other words, what occasions the self-reflexiveness is Herr's experience of death, which forces him to abandon his survivalist ego and become honest about the dangers of being a soldier. Only in this way can he make his war narrative bridge the consciousness of combatants and civilians.

In the opening section of *Dispatches*--entitled "Breathing In"--Herr makes a confession about the experience which gave him his first intimation of mortality in the alien terrain. On a sweep operation, the soldier in front of him booted him in the face in an instinctive reaction to a mortar round falling about thirty yards away, leading Herr to think that he had received a fatal head wound:

I tasted brains there sizzling on the end of my tongue.... I don't think I said anything, but I made a sound that I can remember now, a shrill blubbing pitched to carry more terror than I'd ever known existed, like the sounds they've recorded off of plants being burned, like an old woman going under for the last time. My hands went flying everywhere all over my head, I had to find it and touch it.... (32)

All Herr physically experienced, however, was a bloody nose, whereas nearby there was a dead soldier, "propped up against a tree facing away from the direction of the round, making himself look at the incredible thing that had just happened to his leg, screwed around about once at some point below his knee like a goofy scarecrow leg" (33). That Herr is able publicly to confess such a mortifying secret about himself serves to absolve him of the culturally-induced fear of appearing to be a coward in a context which is supposed to prove manhood.

Like Tim O'Brien's autobiographical narrator in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, Herr comes to face the issue of courage squarely. Although he does not declare, as Stephen Wright's Griffin does, that he wants "to be a champion cringer" (*Meditations* 20), Herr's recognition that the insanity of the war is connected to a culturally inscribed notion of courage leads him to acknowledge the sanity of those journalists who "went out once or twice and then never again" (70). In a sense, the honesty that empowers Herr's narrative transparency is figured in a black paratrooper's description of the way

that the war had made him realize his vulnerability: "I been *scaled* man, I'm *smooth* now." Just as Herr wonders *where* this soldier had been "to get his language" (28), so the reader needs to inquire where Herr has been to get the language that enables him to reveal the truth of Vietnam.

The answer, as Herr discloses, is the recourse to personal experience which enables one to present the reality that is glossed over by both official and unofficial stories. In Herr's view, the real experience of Vietnam cannot be obtained from the information officer "denying the enemy resources and cover" (2), nor from the American ambassador briefing on the Pacification program (236), nor from the seasoned war correspondent callously comparing the numbers of the dead between Khe Sanh and Guadalcanal (240). The answer also lies in the realization that Vietnam is not one Lurp's story about the destruction of a total patrol (5), nor one soldier's allegation of Americans' treatment of the Vietnamese (236), nor the reporters playing as "glorified war profiteers" (247). Instead, Vietnam is the sum total of all those--combatants or not--who are engrossed in the unfolding not only of the war but also of themselves in their dynamic responses to the war's ultimate product--death. As Herr sees it,

Pure essence of Vietnam, not even stepped on once, you could spin it out into visions of laughing lucent skulls or call it just another body in a bag, say that it cut you in half for the harvest or came and took you under like a lover, nothing ever made the taste less strong; the moment of initiation where you get down and bite off the tongue of a corpse. (273-74)

Herr's view comes from one whose life and experience of death "got mixed up with their [soldiers'] lives and deaths, doing the Survivor Shuffle between the two,

testing the pull of each and not wanting either very much" (279). Only in this light, perhaps, does one fully realize the importance to Herr's protagonist/narrator of the paradoxical relationship between covering and getting covered and the way it is reflected in the simultaneously impressionistic and realistic modes of *Dispatches*.

As in other Vietnam War narratives, Herr focuses on the paradoxical nature of the land, and presents the jungle as simultaneously serene and menacing. In *Dispatches*, however, this contradiction lies mainly in the human viewer. When the jungle sounds suddenly stop at dusk, for instance, Herr has the sensation that "some signal had been transmitted out to the life: bats, birds, snakes, monkeys, insects, picking up on a frequency that a thousand years in the jungle might condition you to receive, but leaving you as it was to wonder what you weren't hearing now, straining for any sound, one piece of information" (54). Thus the anxiety results not so much from what one hears as from not being attuned to the sound of silence.

This situation is the result of the way that the perceiving mind has differentiated itself from the primitive life of the jungle. In the utter quietness, instead of being tuned to the "frequency" of the jungle, Herr can only *imagine* sounds: "you thought you heard impossible things: damp roots breathing, fruit sweating, fervid bug action, the heartbeat of tiny animals" (55). Yet, when he does hear a sound--"the rotor thud of a helicopter, the one sound I know that is both sharp and dull at the same time," he recalls the "Puritan belief that Satan dwells in nature" and smells an uneasy "tension between rot and genesis" (100).

Closely connected to the disconcerting silence of the jungle is the quiet way

that the NVA engage and disengage from battles. Following the Battle of Dak To at the top of Hill 875, for example, Herr senses the kind of disquietude experienced only by intruders: "You were there in a place where you didn't belong, where things were glimpsed for which you would have to pay and where things went unglimped for which you would also have to pay, a place where they didn't play with the mystery but killed you straight off for trespassing" (101). Small wonder that this sense of seemingly predetermined uncertainty in Vietnam should lead Herr to conclude that "Night was when you really had the least to fear and feared the most" (142), and that "[e]ven the incoming was beautiful at night, beautiful and deeply dreadful" (140).

In contrast to the quiet presence of the jungle, American technology (especially the helicopter) provides the soldiers with noisy mobility. Against the backdrop of the Vietnamese landscape, however, Herr also recognizes a paradoxical aspect of such machinery. Just as civilization introduced the machine into the garden, so technology only speeds up the death trip. Thus, while Herr finds airmobility "exciting," he also admits that the impact of hostile fire on the helicopter--"that wrenching, resonant metal-echo...above the noise of the rotor blades" is extremely sickening (179). As a result, in grunt fashion, he philosophizes: "Airmobility, dig it, you weren't going anywhere. It made you feel safe, it made you feel Omni, but it was only a stunt, technology. Mobility is just mobility, it saved lives and took them all the time" (12). The ambiguity of technology prompts Herr to "dig" the fundamental relationship between motion and standstill in the war: "Fear and motion, fear and standstill, no preferred cut there.... Combat spared far more men than it wasted, but everyone

suffered the time between contact, especially when they were going out every day looking for it; bad going on foot, terrible in trucks and APC's, awful in helicopters, the worst, travelling so fast toward something so frightening" (14). Herr's observation on the ambiguity of technological warfare is thus also a comment on the absurd reliance on technology to resolve such fundamental human problems as psychological tensions and military conflicts.

The introduction of technology into warfare, as writings about World War I indicate, changed traditional attitudes toward death. As John Peale Bishop remarked, "The most tragic thing about the war was not that it made so many dead men, but that it destroyed the tragedy of death" (qtd. in Cooperman 9). In Vietnam, however, there was a personal fascination with death that poses a contrast to the early twentieth-century helpless indifference. Moreover, this fascination has a paradoxical edge to it. As Herr remarks on his own fascination with the dead: "You know how it is, you want to look and you don't want to look." In front of the dead, what Herr experiences is a tension between a magnetic attraction to death and an instinctive distancing from it. To Herr, the experience of death is similar to the adolescent's fascination with the "first porn, all the porn in the world." What characterizes the adolescent fascination with pornography is actually the desire to control the sexual situation when controlling it is out of the question; this is because "[e]ven when the picture was sharp and clearly defined, something wasn't clear at all, something repressed that monitored the images and withheld their essential information." By the same token, Herr's fascination with the dead occurs "because of how often and how badly you needed protection from

what you were seeing, had actually come 30,000 miles to see" (18).

Equally fascinated with death are the American GIs, which accounts for their concern with amateur war photography. Among the hundreds of albums of photographs of the enemy dead, Herr sees "the obligatory Zippo-lighter shot," "the severed-head shot," "the very young dead with AK-47's still in their hands," "a Marine holding an ear or maybe two ears," and "the Viet Cong girl with her pajamas stripped off and her legs raised stiffly in the air" (214). While the photographs are intended to show the takers' conquest of and contempt for the dead, the objectification and hence distancing implicit in the photographs also indicates fear. In fact, the act of distancing also occurs in the soldiers' lost--that is, repressed--memory of the names of the dead in their own unit. Even though, as Herr comments on one case, "it was a matter of pride and politeness for them to come up with the name of a dead buddy," the survivors "really couldn't remember it" (177).

The soldiers' fascination with death helps to develop a paradoxical attitude toward the war and towards themselves. Since they know the end result of the war, "the madness, the bitterness the horror and doom of it," they are "hip to it, and more: they savored it.... They got savaged a lot and softened a lot, their secret brutalized them and darkened them and very often it made them beautiful. It took no age, seasoning or education to make them know exactly where true violence resided" (109). Consequently, the grunts both "dreaded and welcome" being alive (144); everyone wants a wound (84) and anxiety is a luxury (140-41). They become "so innocent and violent, so sweet and so brutal, beautiful killers" (253). Despite his association of

innocence and beauty with killing, Herr is not romanticizing combats and combatants. Rather, his own experience of terror and hope in a war for survival has taught him that the total range of human reactions to death is existentially free of social and moral values.

The American military, however, had entered the war under the ideological pretext in the Kennedy era of assuring "the survival and the success of liberty" (Lott 269), a project that was at odds with a war in which human survival was the primary issue. The consequences involved an ironic discrepancy between the goal and the result of the American intervention. The American mission in Vietnam was ostensibly to uphold democracy, but the way of fighting had the effect of destroying those who would benefit from such a political order. In order to bring South Vietnam under total control, the American military command makes an effort to erase certain areas off the map. As Herr notes of one American major's observation of Ben Tre: "We had to destroy [it] in order to save it" (74). The problem, Herr points out, is that this is the way "most of the country came back under what we called control, and how it remained essentially occupied by the Viet Cong and the North until the day years later when there were none of us left there" (74). Hence the basic irony:

all that the Mission talked about was control, arms control, information control, resources control, psycho-political control, population control, control of the almost supernatural inflation, control of the terrain through the Strategy of the Periphery. But when the talk had passed, the only thing left standing up that looked true was your sense of how out of control things really were. (50)

The failure of "control" is ultimately due to the expedient use of technology in the interests of an imperialist and individualist ideology which is misplaced in a

country where individual survival is related to national independence. Using the words of a helicopter pilot, Herr sees in the American mission another unresolvable paradox: "Vietnam, man. Bomb 'em and feed 'em, bomb 'em and feed 'em" (9). Such a way of waging the war also unintentionally subverts the military infrastructure: it loses both enlisted men and commissioned officers. While many enlisted men lose their lives by going on "vengeance patrols" (Herr 109), many officers resign their commissions due to their "inability to reconcile their love of service with their contempt for the war" (198). Instead of resulting in mission accomplished, then, the war was destined to result in a disintegration of the mission.

The American tendency toward control and its consequent lack of control in Vietnam is reflected in the way the American soldiers view war heroes in their private mental movies. Just as the military's desire for control is determined by the nation's historical and cultural tendency toward containment, so the soldiers' fantasies about being a hero are prescribed by Hollywood's silver screen images. For example, in *Dispatches*, a lieutenant, who had been hit in both legs, both arms, the chest and head, with his ears and eyes full of caked blood, asks a photographer "to get a picture of him like this to send to his wife" (87). A soldier requests the reporter to write a story about him "because I'm fucking good" (192). When a commander hears of the presence of reporters in his unit, he wants "to throw a spontaneous operation for us, crank up his whole brigade and get some people killed" (6). Inflicted with minor shrapnel wounds in his legs and waiting to get on a helicopter, a Marine says with frustration: "I hate this movie" (203). The soldiers and officers, as Herr notes, are

"actually making war movies in their heads, doing little guts-and-glory Leatherneck tap dances under fire, getting their pimples shot off for the networks" (225). The real war in Vietnam is clearly "not a movie, no jive cartoon either where the characters get smacked around and electrocuted and dropped from heights, flattened out and frizzed black and broken like a dish, then up again and whole and back in the game." In the hands of the military lifers, however, Vietnam becomes a replay of the characteristic folly of American military professionalism that is depicted in *Fort Apache*--a 1948 Western modelled on the defeat of General Custer by Indians--where Henry Fonda finds consolation in "the only war we've got" (48).

The folly of professionalism is also played out by the war correspondents. Herr, for example, confesses that he enjoys pretending to be a participant, "hanging out with the grunts and getting close to the war, touching it, losing yourself in it and trying yourself against it." At the same time, like the soldiers, Herr enjoys the pretence that it is all staged, that he is acting a part, "the way this movie is a thing of mine" (222). This actor/spectator reflexiveness is particularly clear when, during the battle for Hue, he is moving from one sheltered position to another and asks a black Marine next to him: "Listen, we're going to cut out now. Will you cover us?" (227). In attempt to cover the combat, he is both literally and metaphorically covered by the combat. As he reflects on the nature of his own repertorial role--which actually reveals more about the reporter than the war--he realizes that a war correspondent goes out after "one kind of information" but gets "another, totally other" (69). Significantly, what he refers to as a *totally other* kind of information is precisely about himself.

More dramatic than Herr in the way he gets covered by the war is Sean Flynn, combat photographer and son of Captain Blood--Errol Flynn (209). Refusing to be swallowed up like his father by the movies, Flynn "did it on the ground, and the ground swallowed him up" (273). Neither are the correspondents alone in being fed by and fed to fantasies. The warning sent by home offices--to the Saigon bureaus--that "the story was losing the old bite" (207) speaks volubly for America's insatiable appetite for fantasies.

Covering the war for Herr, then, is to get covered; getting covered is to know himself; and knowing himself is also to know the soldiers he covers, and the America for which he covers. The link between Herr's covering and knowing starts with the moment he becomes "intimate" with the soldiers, sharing the highs of their fantasy and lows of their reality. His sense of bonding with the soldiers pervades not only his temporary transformation into "a shooter" (71) or "a medic" (72), but also his permanent emotional participation in an ungraspable war "that was part game, part show" (180). The bonding even goes beyond the war until, after years of introspection, he is able to admit that, like the soldiers, he is "just a dancer too" (72). Herr's recognition of himself as a dancer enables him to identify the reportorial eye/I with the soldiering other and, furthermore, to identify himself with the dead in the form of "morbid sensitivity" and "perpetual mourning" (272). Yet, the effect of watching himself dancing and coming out of Vietnam is that he is "changed, enlarged and...incomplete" (263), for he is finally able to read "the wind" of Vietnam by reading himself, or vice versa. In other words, for Herr, the war in Vietnam is a

projection outward of something within the American psyche and this is why Vietnam is ultimately so difficult to read: "Nothing happening there that hadn't already existed here, coiled up and waiting, back in the World" (269-70). It is precisely in this sense that, as Herr concludes, "Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there" (280).

Finally, to Herr this is the reason why in spite of all the volumes of existing "[s]traight history, auto-revised history, history without handles, for all the books and articles and white papers, all the talk and the miles of film, something wasn't answered, it wasn't even asked" (51). What Herr seeks to ask and answer is the question about the "secret history" of the war, which includes both the content and its transmission. When a Marine warns Herr to "tell it" (223), therefore, the emphasis is on both the telling and the content of the story, which the soldier may seem to feel is necessary to ensure that the truth will be told. In this sense, Herr's "double vision"--whereby he sees himself simultaneously from the American military base and from the hills beyond the base (114)--functions as a metaphor for the way he tells his story about the war. Only through this double vision is Herr able to present "an after image that simply wanted to tell you at last what somehow had not been told"--that "a dripping, laughing death-face" that haunts America in the form of Vietnam (235).

Chapter Six

Toward a Unity of the Self and the Other

I wanted to work with the land and not dominate it. I had an impulse to cut open the earth...an initial violence that in time would heal. The grass would grow back, but the cut would remain, a pure, flat surface, like a geode when you cut into it and polish the edge. (Swerdlow 557)

--Maya Ying Lin, *National Geographic*

"What you want to know is how to live with yourself" (425).

--Philip Caputo, *Indian Country*

Until November 13, 1982, when the Vietnam War Memorial was officially dedicated, both the people and the government of the United States had in principle turned their faces away from the trauma of the war. The building of the Memorial wall, however, signaled the crucial moment when the American public began to come to terms with the situation and its implications. Although the idea of the Memorial wall was both conceived and developed by Vietnam veterans, the complete fulfillment of the project was a nation-wide collective effort. Whereas a number of national celebrities formed the National Sponsoring Committee, numerous ordinary Americans contributed to the funds (which totalled millions). What made the Memorial possible, as the organizers emphasized, was a driving force that transcended conventional political partisanship and which aimed to bridge the chasm between those who supported and those who opposed the war in Vietnam. The focus of such a driving force was the desire for a commemorative monument which might help to begin "a healing process" (Swerdlow 562). What becomes retrospectively significant, then, is that the Memorial consists of

the wall and a statue, which were respectively designed by "a woman too young to have experienced the war and a man who never served in the military and said he had been gassed in an antiwar demonstration" (Swerdlow 571).

If the collective effort behind the building of the Memorial suggests the unity of the living, the reflective surface of the black granite wall serves to suggest an interface between the living and the dead. As conceived by its designer, Maya Ying Lin, the Memorial wall served to evoke thoughts of "an initial violence that in time would heal" (Swerdlow 557). In turn, the healing process involves not merely the veterans but also the American public. More significantly, in the way that it is positioned in relation to the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, the Vietnam War Memorial not only points to the immediate historical past but also draws attention to the continuity and evolution of American history from the nation's inception to its present. Since each of the three monuments marks a critical point in the history of the United States of America, the Vietnam War Memorial acquires an additional significance in the light of the historical events reflected in the other two monuments that are commemorative.

That the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam War Memorial are located in the political center of the United States is no coincidence: all three monuments have been erected to commemorate an individual or individuals for their role in coordinating the nation. In each case, the process involved a violent action that was initially divisive but ultimately resulted in a national unity. Just as George Washington was the leader of the American Revolution, which gave

birth to the independence of a new nation, so Abraham Lincoln preserved the Union in its violent division of interests in the Civil War. In a similar way, I believe, history is likely to teach in the future that the deaths, the sufferings, and the alienation experienced by Americans as a result of the war are now in the gradual process of bringing the divided nation together.

Although the similarities of the monuments indicate the capacity of the United States to endure as a political and psychological entity, the differences of these monuments also highlight America's historical tendency to depart--in increasingly larger circles--from and then return to its founding principle. As stated in "The Declaration of Independence," the United States of America was founded on the "self-evident" truths "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Thus, in putting an end to the status of America as a colonial subject of the British Crown, the American Revolutionary War functioned as a "necessary" correction of "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations" and as a re-assertion of the God-given rights of "all men" (Adler 17, 18).

In contrast to the American Revolutionary War, which was waged against an imperial power external to the emerging nation, the American Civil War was an internal war between the industrial North and the agrarian South. The difference in the form of opposition, however, does not preclude the similarity in the wars' causes. Like the American Revolutionary War, the Civil War was ostensibly designed to correct "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations" involving the enslaved Afro-Americans.

The Civil War, as declared in Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," was a test whether a nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" "can long endure" (Adler 119). In contrast to the Revolutionary War, the Civil War embodies the notion that the corrective action is an act of self-correction. While any self-correction of the nation implies its liability to deviation, the Civil War also suggests that a nation endures by means of self-corrections.

In an historical perspective, the American war in Vietnam can be perceived as a deviation on a larger scale. Whereas the Civil War took the form of internal antagonism over the social status of those within America's native boundaries, the American war in Vietnam was the externalization of another kind of internal antagonism, which, within the American political psyche, assumed the traditional form of democracy versus despotism. The bitter irony in this struggle, however, lies in the fact that democracy was represented by the nominally democratic but actually self-serving South Vietnamese government, and the way that despotism was represented by the Vietcong (and the North Vietnamese communists), who spoke the voice of a people long tired of colonialism and yearning for national independence. The irony becomes twofold when American military critics started to elaborate on the way in which the American military could have defeated the Vietnamese insurgents.

Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr.'s study of the relationship between the American military establishment and the war in Vietnam serves as a good illustration of the case in point. In Krepinevich's view, the American army had been indoctrinated with the "Army Concept" by the time of the war in Vietnam. The Army Concept is

characterized by "a focus on mid-intensity, or conventional, war and a reliance on high volumes of firepower to minimize casualties--in effect, the substitution of material costs at every available opportunity to avoid payment in blood" (5). The war in Vietnam, however, was "insurgency" (7) or what the late Mao called a "people's war," one in which the people constituted the vital foundation of the conflict. According to Krepinevich, the American Army was ill-prepared for such a war precisely because the emphasis here was on "light infantry formations, not heavy divisions; on firepower restraint, not its widespread applications; on the resolution of political and social problems within the nation targeted by the insurgents, not closing with and destroying the insurgent's field forces" (5).

Although Krepinevich's assessment of the relationship between the American army and the war in Vietnam is correct, his recipe for the way the American army could have won the war is questionable, even (and perhaps especially) at the theoretical level. "In an insurgency," Krepinevich suggests, "the way to destroy the insurgent is to attack him at the source of his strength: the population" (10). His proposed approach consists of two steps: a) to separate the insurgent from the people; b) to win the hearts and minds of the people by providing them with political and economic security. The rationale behind this theoretical approach is that the government is able to turn itself into a substitute for the insurgent in satisfying popular demands. Since the nature of a people's war implies a popular war against the government, however, the antagonism is not between the government and the insurgent but between the government and the people.

Consequently, it is impossible to separate the insurgent from the people since the former are an integral part of the latter; nor is it possible to win the hearts and minds of the people until the government by itself eliminates the ground on which its antagonism with the people has grown. In other words, only when the government becomes one "of the people, by the people, and for the people" will the insurgency vanish on its own terms. South Vietnam as a testing case, of course, proved the failure on the government's part to achieve unity with the people. The fact that the United States assisted the South Vietnamese government in its failed attempt thus casts an ironic light on the principle of popular government as promulgated in "The Declaration of Independence." As Del Vecchio's Vietnamese character, Minh, observes of the American presence in Vietnam: "It is to me...a paradox that you fight for a land so soon after your own people have won liberation. You are just now removed from slavery and you become imperialist warriors" (13th 224). Minh's American paradox is reminiscent of the so-called Barber Paradox: "In a certain remote Sicilian village, approached by a long ascent up a precipitous mountain road, the barber shaves all and only those villagers who do not shave themselves. Who shaves the barber?" (Sainsbury 2). While both paradoxes may sound acceptable, their conclusions are logically invalid. Just as the Barber Paradox fails to resolve the question of the barber's identity, so the American paradox fails to resolve the question of imperialism: despite being founded on the discontinuity of British colonialism, the U.S. continued the colonial line in Southeast Asia in the form of imperialism.

Meanwhile, however, the war in Vietnam also occasioned America's correction

of its deviation from the nation's own democratic goal. Just as it had once attempted a self-correction through a violent conflict during the Civil War, so America struggled to do so through a cultural re-alignment as represented by the body of Vietnam War narratives. In the same way that the Vietnam War Memorial was built in the nation's capital for those who served in Vietnam, the Vietnam narratives provide a form of self-correction: not to glorify the war but to accept the wounds of the war into the symbolic self of America. This is evidenced particularly in such novels as Heinemann's *Paco's Story*, Mason's *In Country*, and Wright's *Meditations in Green*. Most significant in articulating the need, however, are Philip Caputo's *Indian Country* and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough's *The Healer's War*, which attempt to seek remedies to heal America's Vietnam wounds in areas outside of conventional racial and cultural boundaries. Such an external search is significant, for although the source of remedy lies within the self, and not in a remote land (as conventional adventure stories would suggest), the attainment of the remedy is always manifested externally.

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Caputo's *Indian Country* is a keen anatomy of a Vietnam veteran's psychological wound and of its cultural causes. Although the anatomy constitutes half of the narrative, the other half is concerned with the healing of the individual veteran's wounds and, more importantly, those of America's collective psyche. To Caputo, the Vietnam conflict did not result merely in new physical and psychological wounds; it

also triggered an unmasking of unhealed wounds inherited from the nation's past. In this complex sense, Vietnam wounds go back to those inflicted on the native Americans from the colonial period and onward. Since Vietnam was widely viewed throughout the war as a new frontier of America, the American wounds--the old as well as the new--may appropriately be described as the wounds experienced in "Indian country."

Hence, Caputo's *Indian Country* connects the spiritual wound of the old Ojibwa medicine man, Wawiekumig, with the psychological wound of the young Vietnam veteran Christian Starkmann and juxtaposes their common concerns with the regeneration of their respective lives. Whereas Wawiekumig is anxious to find a future custodian for his traditional medicine bundle, Chris is obsessed with the restoration of his psychological self. In order to heal the American wounds, Caputo suggests, the two wounded races need to join in their common cause.

The complicated nature of America's wounds is reflected in the novel's deceptively simple narrative technique. At the structural level, the divided settings of *Indian Country* indicates the separation of two entirely different modes of life in America. Whereas the native Americans, as represented by the Ojibwa medicine man, Wawiekumig, and his grandson Bonny, lodge in the backwoods, the white Americans, as represented by the Christian fundamentalist minister, Lucius Starkmann, and his son, Chris, inhabit the city. While posing a contrast, the co-existence of the two geographically and culturally different worlds within one narrative also points to the mutual complementarity of differences. Consistent with the dialectic relationship

between the structural separation and co-existence, the plot follows a circular pattern with Chris being saved by Bonny from drowning at the beginning and saved for a second time by Wawiekumig with spiritual water at the end of the novel. Although Chris fails to repay Bonny with a life for his life (since he kills the latter by mistake in Vietnam), he later compensates for his failure and mistake with his determination to renew the spiritual life of the Ojibwa race. By adopting and being adopted by Wawiekumig, Chris not only continues Wawiekumig's line of the tribal medicine bundle but also, in so doing, symbolically strengthens his own cultural, if not religious, identity as an American.

Chris does not embark on the regenerative journey until he has overcome his psychological imbalance caused by his PTSD. His wife, June, is instrumental in initiating his healing process by rescuing him from the brink of his suicidal bravado, and subsequently the Vietnam veteran-turned psychiatrist, Dr Eckhardt, tries to show him the way toward his mental reintegration. Whereas, through therapeutic rapping, Eckhardt aims to make Vietnam veterans like Chris "feel good about their service" (331), however, he recognizes the limitation of his procedures in Chris's case. During his final interview with Chris before the latter's release from the mental hospital, for example, Eckhardt tries to induce Chris to confess the true reason for his enlistment so that Chris may become conscious of the complex causes of his illness. Thus Eckhardt describes and then questions the easy explanations of Chris's motives: "Religious son of militant pacifist minister joins up in rebellion against father's values. Blames self for death of best friend. Returns home burdened with guilt, which eventually drives

him to self-destructive behavior. Case closed. It's a nice neat story, but there's something wrong with it" (412). Actually, however, Chris's inherited good and evil mindset is a major contributor to his breakdown. But what lies behind such a mindset, which, in turn, is ultimately shaped by the I/thou differentiation, is ego.

Chris's decision to go to Vietnam can be traced to the vulnerability of a strong ego. He went to Vietnam not only because he had rejected his father's religious values, or simply because he had wanted to repay Bonny for rescuing him from the devouring waters of Windigo (in the Ojibwa sense, the cannibal river). Chris had decided to enlist also because he feared to share his father's guilt for having avoided the war in his time and because he was driven to prove his own courage and manhood in a real battleground where life was at a greater risk than the relatively undangerous Chicago streets. Chris's fear of being considered a coward can be seen in his reckless way of waging a private fishing contest with Bonny, risking his life while making a fruitless effort to land a giant female trout. In Walter J. Ong's terms, the agon between Chris and the female trout suggests that the male is "the expendable sex" (*Fighting* 52-56).

Equally significant is the way Chris seems to enjoy imagining the macho deeds conventionally associated with war. To Bonny, Chris's decision to go to Vietnam instead of to divinity school was a type of "insanity," but for Chris it was a means of demonstrating courage. Thus prior to enlisting Chris had played at war, aiming an imaginary shotgun at a gliding raven and mimicking the shots of his make-believe gun: "'Bang,' he said with a grin. 'Bang-bang'" (54). Unfortunately, Chris's actual

Vietnam "hunting" trip is costly. If he succeeded in ridding himself of his sense of shame for cowardice, he also unintentionally succeeded in becoming one of the psychologically walking wounded, whereby part of himself, as he later confesses at his father's death-bed, "is still missing in action" (261). In one sense, Chris's metaphor is true. The irony lies in the fact that his eagerness to repay Bonny for saving his life was entangled with his desire to prove his manhood and, that in attempting to prove himself in Vietnam, he accidentally destroyed Bonny or his means of repayment.

The same ego that launched Chris into his Vietnam blunder also directs the way in which he intends to pay his debt to the dead after his early discharge. Through his traumatic accident in Vietnam, Chris experiences a personality change and undergoes a role reversal. No longer the naive and self-confident divinity-school candidate, Chris the veteran has become reticent and withdrawn from society. From one who used to fear his own cowardice, he has come to sympathize with the helplessness of the weak, as evidenced in his identification with the world of wilderness, particularly the forest, when he takes a job as a cruiser for the Great Superior logging company. His sympathy for the maples runs so deep, for example, that he not only risks his job by defying his superior's order to file an exaggerated report on the quantity of mature trees, but also risks his life by waging a fist fight with the old-hand logger and bear-killer, Sam LaChance, for logging on the wrong side of the forest.

Chris's attempt to save the maples is in fact an attempt to atone for the death of Bonny, who was burned to ashes by friendly artillery fire in Vietnam as the result

of Chris's mis-reading of the co-ordinates. When Chris had realized the consequence of his mistake, he subconsciously expressed a death-wish. In a delirium, he had walked out of his perimeter "to a shallow ravine and obeying the voice only he could hear, knelt, scooped up the ashes of the earth, and poured them over his dead. He rubbed them into his face and into his arms and hands." Lying down in the position of the dead and engaging in funeral rites, he had thought of the lines of Psalm 115: *"They have mouths, but they speak not.... They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat"* (206). Thus, in his present defiance of his superior and in his fight with LaChance, Chris's former subconscious death-wish has been transformed into conscious action. Although Chris wishes to redeem his past by defending the speechless maples, however, such redemption can not possibly take place at the expense of his own life. In other words, as Caputo's characterization of Wawiekumig suggests, it is only through himself--the living and the present--that Chris can redeem Bonny--the dead and the past.

The character of Wawiekumig, the old Ojibwa medicine man, is mainly presented in three short "Bawajigaywin (Vision Quest)" chapters. These chapters thread through the four long chapters named after the four geographical directions: Wagunnoong' (East), Ninggabeuhnoong (West), Giwaydinnoong' (North), and Zhawanoong (South). In the Ojibwa tradition, the four directions of the universe represent different states of the individual mind: North is the direction of wisdom, South of trust, West of the gateway to the future and the Afterworld, and East of enlightenment. They also correspond to the cycle of the four seasons. For the Ojibwas,

South is associated with summer and childhood, West with autumn and maturity, North with winter and old age, East with spring and rebirth (158). In contrast to the persistent westward movement of the Euro-Americans, such a structural arrangement (complete with the four directions and all the regenerative elements of the universe) serves to re-orient the American way of life, thus indicating the role that Wawiekumig and his Ojibwa spiritual medicine are to play in the healing of Chris's personal illness and, by extension, of America's collective malaise.

Caputo points to the way in which the Vietnam wounds can be healed by dramatizing the way in which Wawiekumig relies on the Ojibwa tradition to overcome his own spiritual weakness. Once "a Man-Who-Knows-Everything, priest, prophet, and healer" (58), Wawiekumig has lost both his son and grandson at the age of eighty-two and sorrows over the prospect that there will be no candidate to whom he can pass on his medicine bundle. His son was "squashed" by an old tree which he had been felling to satisfy his alcoholic addiction (17) and his grandson was killed in a war against people who were not his "natural enemies" (271). Wawiekumig knows that the death of both was the result of killing "without necessity," which is "a violation," and that both are deaths "out of season," which signals "trouble in the world" (272). Whereas his son's death is self-inflicted, Wawiekumig reasons in the Ojibwa way that he himself is responsible for his grandson's. He realizes that his sorrow over his son's loss had caused disharmony in him and, in turn, a false interpretation of his own vision which later sent his grandson to the war. Just as Wawiekumig had once told his grandson, "Everything comes around back to you" (18), so now his own offense has

redounded upon himself. More importantly, however, the Ojibwa medicine man realizes that he must undertake the traditional vision quests in order to achieve self-regeneration.

Underscoring Wawiekumig's self-restoration is a set of Ojibwa views about human life in relation to the universe. During the ritual of Wawiekumig's initiation into the vocation of the medicine man, the Mide mentor, Red Sky, lays out the Ojibwa world-view for the purpose of expounding the significance of the tribe's sacred bear-story:

As there is night and day, winter and spring, so are there two sides to creation, the visible and the invisible, each as real as the other. As there can be no night without day, nor spring without winter, so can there be no visible world without its invisible opposite. Everything has its opposite twin. You have eyes in your head, but your spirit has eyes also, and it is with those a man can see into the invisible world. He can know things his reason and senses cannot tell him. (148-49)

Similar to the biblical view about man's natural and fallen worlds that Reverend Starkmann preaches (8), the Ojibwa Mide also teaches his pupils that their universe is hierarchically constituted and contains both a physical world and a spiritual world. The common ground of the two religions suggests the imperfection and incompleteness of the physical world and its eternal need for spiritual assistance.

Distinguishing the two world views, however, are their different views of the state of man in the present world and the relationship between the two worlds. Whereas the biblical man has fallen from the eternal world into a world of death as a result of "original sin" (8), the Ojibwa is born into the physical world and has the potential to "see into" the spiritual world with the assistance of his "spirit eyes" (149).

Whereas the biblical man cannot reverse his movement from the pre-lapsarian to the lapsarian state, the Ojibwa can break through the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds. In other words, whereas life for the biblical man is in the spiritual world of heaven, for the Ojibwa it is in the physical world on earth. Instead of suffering the consequence of original sin, then, the Ojibwa is paradoxically burdened with the gift of life: in order to enjoy the gift, one needs to find fulfillment in living.

The story of the bear's breakthroughs illustrates the way in which the Ojibwa is burdened with this gift. As recorded in Wawiekumig's scroll of pictures, the council of manitos gives the bear the Pack of Life because of his strength. The bear is to carry the heavy burden to the people across the sea. On the way, he breaks through the barriers with his head (instead of his paw). After overcoming the last obstacle, the bear enters a lodge on the shore of the sea and plants a tree in its middle. An eagle lands in the top of the tree; then the Creator sends down a perfectly round rock and places it at the foot of the tree. He declares the rock to be the first Midewegun (the Sacred Lodge) and founds the Midewewin (the Grand Medicine Society):

This is where I will listen to the Anishinbe [i.e., the Ojibwa, or the Original Men] whenever they call upon me. This is where they will come to heal sickness or get rid of bad luck. This is where they will come to learn the secrets of how to live, and of those secrets, the bear will be guardian. (147-48)

Hence, the Ojibwa is taught to take the bear as his model and make breakthroughs in order to get close to the truth of life.

Since this vision points to the way the Ojibwa may build and/or maintain harmony between his soul, mind, and body, and between himself and the worlds, it is absolutely necessary for him to make vision quests in the Sacred Lodge, the fountain

of life, especially in times of need. Thus, it is in the Sacred Lodge that Wawiekumig seeks information about the cause of his son's and grandson's deaths and of his own sorrow. It is there that he hears the "voice of insight" speaking of offenses: his alcoholic son was killed by the tree when he was cutting it because he was killing a life for unnatural reasons; his grandson died in the war because the war was not his natural conflict; his sorrow over the deaths of his offspring also resulted because he had wished his daughter-in-law an unnatural death for refusing him the opportunity to give his son an Ojibwa burial (270). It is also in the Sacred Lodge that Wawiekumig, inviting his grandson for Ghost Supper, achieves a breakthrough, whereby, through the flight of his soul with his personal guardian, Migizi (eagle) and through the eyes of his soul, he rises and sees his grief-stricken body dead on the ground and then descends back into the flesh. Wawiekumig's spiritual return thus takes the form of his soul's *ascent and descent* and distinguishes the Ojibwa tradition of self-regeneration from the biblical tradition which follows the pattern of spiritual *fall and rise*. Realizing his rebirth from grief, Wawiekumig murmurs his thanks to Migizi: "my guardian and guide, I am not as I was before. My mourning is at an end. It is I, Wawiekumig, who says this, says this, I who flew around the world with you" (277). By seeing into the spiritual world and going back to the beginning of life, Wawiekumig goes a long way to recover his inner harmony.

Just as Wawiekumig is reinvigorated through the release of his grief, so Chris can be reborn by valuing his present life. Toward the end of the narrative, Chris seeks forgiveness from Wawiekumig for the death of Bonny that his mistake had caused. To

the extent that it takes courage for Chris to do so in the context of his own culture, his request constitutes the prelude to his redemption. At the same time, however, it is impossible for Wawiekumig to grant forgiveness, since there is neither the word nor the concept of forgiveness in the Ojibwa language. As Wawiekumig's own example indicates, what one needs to restore harmony is not to seek forgiveness from an external source, but to come to terms with oneself. The absence of forgiveness does not simply suggest the needlessness of the Christian notion of penance, however; more importantly, it suggests the need to refrain from committing actions that cause offense. As a way of healing, consequently, although Wawiekumig refuses to forgive Chris, he gives bountifully. Despite his awareness of the cultural barrier between the two races, Wawiekumig teaches Chris that "[l]ife was a gift, a song, a prayer." To Chris, Wawiekumig's gift is life itself, "one that Eckhardt, with all his learning, could not have bestowed" (427).

The significance of Chris and Wawiekumig's final mutual adoption, then, goes beyond an individual's psychological restoration. It is mutual healing in the form of mutually receiving and giving. Thus the narrative concludes with Chris's sense of being at home with Wawiekumig and the woods:

This place was separate from the woods, yet as much a part of it as the trees. It was imbued with Louis's tranquillity--or was he with its? Either way, Starkmann felt at home, which was not so strange; he and Louis, for all their differences, had a bond, one beyond their shared loss. Louis, like all his people, had been made a stranger in his own country, and something similar had happened to Starkmann. He saw himself as a kind of halfbreed: his hair and skin were pale, but the war had made him an outsider in the land of his birth. The war had reddened his heart. (427)

Chris's identification with the native race serves as a reminder that harmony is "what

life is all about" (22). If Chris did not understand what harmony meant when he first heard the word from his Indian brother Bonny, he has now learned "how to live" from the latter's grandfather. It is the Ojibwa way, the way of the Original Men: to heal instead of killing and to give instead of forgiving.

In the current context of America's Vietnam wounds, the native way suggests that it does not matter whether the dead are forgotten or the war is forgiven; what matters is the way the living learn how to live with themselves in the present and in the future.

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Also concerned with the re-integration of the American psyche in the post-Vietnam era is *The Healer's War*, wherein Elizabeth Ann Scarborough similarly emphasizes that America needs to look beyond its main-stream culture in order to heal its historical wounds. Just as Caputo's protagonist, Christian Starkmann, makes peace with himself through his adoption simultaneously of and by the Ojibwa medicine man, Wawiekumig, Scarborough's protagonist, Kitty MacCullen, learns to live with herself after she starts to receive Vietnamese refugees into her own arms. At the same time, like Caputo, Scarborough emphasizes that America must ultimately be healed through its own internal resources. In the same way that Chris eventually learns to treasure his own life as a gift instead of as a mistake which is to be forgiven, Kitty recognizes that the healing of the Vietnam wounds starts with the reconditioning of her own shattered

psyche.

A relatively recent book about the Vietnam experience, *The Healer's War* (1988) is a first-person narrative about the education process of a young female American nurse stationed in Vietnam. The novel, however, is more than a conventional female bildungsroman of the kind which Elizabeth Abel describes in her study of women's writing: "the female protagonist or *Bildungsheld* must chart a treacherous course between the penalties of expressing sexuality and suppressing it, between the costs of inner concentration and of direct confrontation with society, between the price of succumbing to madness and of grasping a repressive 'normality'" (12-13). Although tensions between the female protagonist and a sexually suppressive social environment are present in the novel, they are integrated into the novel's larger concerns. What constitutes the major thematic tension is the conflict between two opposing attitudes toward a different racial group--one that underlies the confrontation between those who kill and those who heal. In other words, the tension arising from the suppression of female sexuality serves to introduce the tension between hostilities that characterize the annihilation of human lives, and the resolution of the sexual tension serves to introduce compassion that is necessary for the sustenance of life.

This integration of the specific and the general is also reflected in the novel's formal complexity: while the narrative is coded as a Vietnam veteran's memoir--a retrospective account of real-life experience--its three-part structure is reminiscent of the archetypal pattern of a mythic hero's eternal return as delineated by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. What conjoins the two narrative modes

and coordinates their relationship in the novel is Scarborough's employment of the fantastic in a real historical setting: the focus upon a Vietnamese herbal medicine man's magic healing amulet both during the war in Vietnam and after the war in America. Although the healing power of the amulet is fantastic in the sense that it is otherworldly, the novel as a whole is realistic (in the sense that it is grounded in this world). Scarborough's grounding of the fantastic in a world of reality thus accords with Eric Rabkin's view that fantasy provides a vehicle for exposing "the truth of the human heart" (27-28). In the context of the war in Vietnam, such a perspective not only advances but, more importantly, also makes possible the achievement of cross-racial/cultural and trans-sexual understanding, which in turn may contribute to the restoration of the post-Vietnam America.

"The truly fantastic," Rabkin writes, "occurs when *the ground rules of a narrative* are forced to make a 180° reversal, when *prevailing perspectives* are *directly contradicted*" (3, emphasis mine). That is, for Rabkin, every narrative has "its own interior set of ground rules [that] is fundamental to the esthetic experience." These ground rules legitimize a touch-stone perspective whereby the reader may distinguish normal narrative events from the para-normal, or the abnormal. The fantastic occurs when a narrative event directly contradicts the touch-stone perspective. In *Through the Looking Glass*, as Rabkin points out, the fact that Alice wishes that the plants could talk implies a set of ground rules that precondition the muteness of the plants. When the plants do talk, in direct contradiction to the rules, and astonish Alice by fulfilling her impossible wish, the fantastic makes its appearance, which is not simply

"unexpected," or "dis-expected," but "anti-expected" (3-13).

The anti-expected narrative event in *The Healer's War* occurs in the opening incident, when the first-person narrator/protagonist, Lieutenant Kitty MacCullen, makes a desperate attempt to rescue Tran, a dying eleven-year-old Vietnamese girl. Tran suffers a depressed skull fracture as the result of her fall from a water buffalo, and needs neurosurgery. Charged with the duty of providing her with the routine pre-op medications, Kitty accidentally gives Tran ten times more than the proper dose of medication, which puts the latter into a life-threatening coma. Consequently, burdened with guilt, praying for the best, and fearing the worst, Kitty is driven to check Tran's pulse and test her pain reaction every fifteen minutes: "Right arm, right leg, left leg, left arm, I pulled up a spare lump of flesh from each of the little girl's limbs and pinched hard, silently daring her to kick me or slug me" (3) since a vital sign would mean a "reprieve for both of us" (8).

Despite her wishes and prayers, however, nothing results until Xe, a bed-ridden half-comatose old patient, reaches out to help. Holding an amulet in one hand, Xe grasps Kitty's wrist with the other while the latter is checking Tran's pulse. Miraculously, Tran starts to respond to her stimulation, which, in her weariness, Kitty attributes to the energy emitted by the other patients in the same ward who were whining due to their physical pains. The miraculous fulfillment of Kitty's wish and her subsequent disbelief thus constitute the basic components of the fantastic.

That Xe's amulet is an instrument of the fantastic is further evidenced by a series of events following the Tran incident. In her emergency treatment of Tran, Kitty

had only indirectly contacted the amulet (through Xe); when she subsequently prepared Xe for surgery, however, she had the opportunity, under Xe's insistence, not only to touch it but also personally to keep it for him during the operation. As a result of her intimate contact--wearing it around her neck--Kitty experienced a strong physical impact, for she felt "like a boiling lobster," "faint and headachy" (63). What she did not realize at the moment was that she was actually being energized by the amulet and acquiring the power to envision animate objects in color codes.

Not only did she see her own skin "sending off red light," she sensed that Ahn, a Vietnamese boy with an amputated leg, "was glowing red--red and kind of a murky eggplant color that intensified and darkened when he glared up at me and started shrieking" (64). When she saw that Xhn, a young female patient in her ward, "was that funny color around the edges," she thought, "Maybe we were both sick" (65). But after she took off the amulet (calling it "necklace") and returned it to Xe, "the grey [which she had seen] around him vanished" and "[t]he glow disappeared from around my hands too." Although the color-coded vision was the work of the amulet, she credited Xe for her recovery and, in so doing, "got it backward": "You must be a holy man, papasan.... You seemed to have cured whatever was wrong with me" (67).

As a matter of fact, Kitty had misunderstood the situation not only when she had mistakenly attributed her recovery to Xe. She had also misunderstood Xe when she ranked him as "a holy man." A "combination of doctor and priest" (88) as he was called, Xe is actually no more holy than Kitty herself. Although he was revered as a magical medicine man, and although his healing power, with the aid of his amulet,

excelled that of the American medcap mission, he is a man incapable of saving his legs from mortar shells and, eventually, his life from a fatal stroke. More importantly, Kitty had mistaken her perfect health for illness and Xe as the one who healed "whatever was [physically] wrong" with her. Actually, as other details of the narrative indicate, what needed curing was anything but her bodily illness. What needs curing and what Xe later succeeds in reorienting (albeit unintentionally), is the cultural side of her health so that she, like him, might be a healer not only of physical diseases but also of spiritual malaise.

The Tran incident serves as a powerful narrative opener because, as Kitty observes, it "was the first unknowing link between Xe, the amulet, and me, and what led to...everything else" (14). In addition, the incident dramatizes the way in which healing can take place. If the power comes from the amulet, it also requires to be transmitted by a physical touch between the healer and the patient, and in a communal setting. The incident thus underscores the importance of the basic human factor--such as is demonstrated by the collaborative effort of three generations, two races, and both sexes--in the healing process; it also emphasizes the importance of a holistic way of healing that requires both the spiritual and physical kinds of "medicine."

The rest of the narrative illustrates the ways in which Kitty succeeds and fails in her employment of the healing amulet. To understand Scarborough's message in this respect one might consider first why Xe decides to give her the amulet, choosing her over Charlie Heron, who would seem to be a likely candidate. An American medic, Heron has studied medicine with Xe; he also rescued the wounded Xe and

brought him to the American hospital. Although no ostensible reason is given for Xe's decision not to pass his amulet to Heron, the latter is clearly incapable of being empowered by the magic amulet. As he confesses to Kitty, responding to the fact that she saw aura while wearing the amulet, "Shit. I wore it once, too, and I didn't see a damned thing" (139). Xe's choice of Kitty over Heron as the successor to his amulet, then, seems to suggest that the successful candidate needs to possess the potential to convey the power of the amulet. In other words, in order to play the role of a bridge, one needs to possess the physical and spiritual strength to receive and conduct the energy originated from the amulet to the patient. As is made evident by the Tran incident, Kitty seems to possess both the physical and spiritual strength required of a healer.

Although Kitty has a rugged physical constitution (her sore toes constantly remind her of the limit of her size-nine shoes), she is not a super-woman with extraordinary talents. On the contrary, she is a practical American woman capable of dreaming to be both a princess and a heroine. Her motivation for going to Vietnam stems from a desire to be a center of sexual attention on the one hand, and a patriotic sense of justice, albeit in the interests of personal achievement, on the other. As Kitty recalls, she had followed her mother's steps and become a nurse not simply "to take care of people," but more importantly to be "valuable." Thus, while she was still in nursing school, the war in Vietnam--in her mind "a comparatively piddly conventional war with men and guns and tanks and stuff, like most of World War II, instead of nuclear warheads"--appealed to her sense of practicality and aroused "a rush of

patriotism" in her. As she naively reasoned, "[s]urely, if I joined up and took care of casualties, I wouldn't be helping the war, I'd be repairing the damage as it occurred and doing my bit to keep the war contained until we could win it, without recourse to monster bombs" (18). Little did she then know that the latent conflict between her professional ideal and patriotic impulse, fuelled by her heroine fantasy, would later develop into a fierce struggle between humanitarian compassion and racial discrimination.

If anything seems to distinguish Kitty's character, it is her self-reflexive capacity. The Tran incident, for example, initiates an excruciating soul-searching process in Kitty's internal world. During her introspection, she recognizes that her desire to be "valuable" is flawed since, subconsciously, she has cared more for her professional image than for her patient. Over the incident, she has felt guilty not exactly because she almost killed a helpless child by mistake, but because of her hidden attitudes toward her patient. As she explains, "I had to seriously question whether I hadn't at least inwardly begun to buy into all of that 'anti-gook' stuff" and whether "I secretly didn't give as much of a damn about [Tran] as I did about my 'professional image'" (24-25). By unearthing her racial prejudices, she also exposes the selfish side of her character, since her effort to restore Tran from her coma has at least partly been her own refusal to "live with" the girl's death for the rest of her life (5).

Kitty's soul-search results in her determination to atone for her professional blunder. Since her subconscious racism had ultimately been responsible for her

mistake, her atonement also starts with the change of her attitude toward the Vietnamese patients. After her transfer to orthopedics, Kitty immediately notices that the Vietnamese side of the ward is "more vigorously noisy" than that of the neuro ward. Instead of finding the noise irritating as she did before, when she enters the ward she now regards the "bedlam of *troi ois*, *dau quadis*, and less articulate moans and whimpers" as a greeting (45). Her conscious effort to take the Vietnamese side is demonstrated on numerous occasions. When a Vietnamese man comes for his wife (who has not recovered from her fractured clavicles) and gives her a blaming look for "becoming involved with 'our' side," for instance, Kitty rhetorically defends her newly-adopted position: "'Our' side was supposed to be the side of most of the South Vietnamese, wasn't it?" (52). Later, at the ceremony of her promotion because of her good racial rapport, she is "almost more pleased at being promoted by Lieutenant Long [who offered her his own brass rank symbols] than...by Uncle Sam" (132). Furthermore, when Major Krupman--the combat physician whose brother had been killed in a VC ambush--vents his anger by discharging all the uncured Vietnamese patients from the American hospital, Kitty not only identifies herself with Xe as being "in the same [sinking] boat" (151) but also risks her own career and life by executing a sneak plan to transfer the nine-year-old Ahn to another hospital across the jungle.

Although Kitty's rescue plan is later aborted, her original attempt to identify with the Vietnamese becomes a larger effort to restore life to whoever fights for it. Stranded in the jungle as a consequence of a helicopter crash, she struggles to survive with the aid of the amulet that she has inherited from Xe. When night falls, she

discovers to her wonderment that she can read the mood of life objects (including humans, animals, and plants) according to the colored glows they emit. The first glows she sees, for example, consist of "a brown glow, a taupe one, wine-colored, teal, brown with red spots, olive, rust, and even...a black glowing deeper and hotter than the blackness around it" (173). Even when she recognizes that those glows are from a troop of Vietcong soldiers, the fact that she is able to identify their moods alleviates her fear of the enemy. Actually, as a female enemy soldier moves closer, Kitty feels as if she knew her: "Poor kid, she's so heart-broken she doesn't even know how scared she is" (174). Furthermore, when she meets William, a black GI who is the sole survivor of a unit in a Vietcong overrun, she notices that his aura is "peat-brown and ash-grey"--a sign of being "deathly afraid, even of me" (177). The power of the amulet thus enables Kitty to see through the surface differences (e.g., cultures, races, and genders) and envision the regenerative force inherent in humanity.

Scarborough dramatizes regeneration during a Vietnamese funeral wherein Kitty is honored by the villagers by being asked to sing a hymn for the dead at the end of the rites. She chooses to sing the chorus from "When the Saints Go Marching In," a song the black slaves in America used to sing for the dead "because they believed that it was a sad thing to be born into the world, a happy one to escape it." What justifies her choice of the song, she feels, is the similarity between the slaves and the Vietnamese: "I doubted Ba Dinh had been a saint, but her next life, next world, whatever, could hardly be any tougher than the one she'd just left. And the snake had probably spared the baby a sad life as an unwanted Amerasian child of

rape" (232).

Although she is not aware of it, her perception is also in keeping with the Buddhist tradition pervasive in the Vietnamese culture, which also views the mundane world as one that is filled with illusions and misery. At the same time, however, the Buddhist tradition holds that the cycle of lives--human, animal, and botanical--is unending, and thus it is doubly appropriate that, in recalling the scene, Kitty should juxtapose the images of death and renewal at the grave site--the numerous graves, on the one hand, and, on the other, a young pregnant woman who "tossed flowers, one at a time, on the cloth-covered corpse" (230, 231).

Although, while she is in Vietnam, Kitty is empowered by the amulet to redeem her professional and ethical fall and repair her relationship with the Vietnamese, she has difficulty adjusting to her home environment because of her wartime experience. Where she is awarded a silver star--ironically since she had "killed a man, had been the cause of death for two others, and had abandoned the little boy...in a Vietcong village" (296)--she has also ironically lost her state-side boy-friend despite (or rather especially because of) her effort in contributing to what she has seen as national defense. Most of all, she no longer finds meaning in the trivialities of the materialistic life in general, or reasons to validate her own existence. As she explains, trying to justify her suicidal thought, "Why not? Duncan didn't love me, my parents would be better off without me, I was no good at my job anymore. Nobody wanted or needed me anymore. From being someone with special power, I had become someone who was another body, in the way, who had spent a year of her life doing something

that was not to be mentioned in polite conversation" (301). Knowing full well that as a nurse she was engaged in saving lives, Kitty cannot reasonably feel burdened with the guilt for killing that is heaped upon the veterans collectively by their fellow Americans. What seems, instead, to occasion her ill-adjustment is the striking contrast between the ways she is treated in the two countries. Instead of having to do with feeling that she is a burden to her family and society, in other words, her discontent derives from the way that she now feels unneeded and undesired.

Actually, moreover, egocentricity has long been the major factor in Kitty's life. Reflected in her compulsion to do "the rough stuff" to improve her professional image after the Tran incident (25), her egocentricity is even more clearly evidenced in her obsessive desire to improve her sexual image. As the narrative indicates, Kitty's unsatisfying sexual life before Vietnam (since her love for Duncan is unrequited and few men would invite her to a dance) had given her an inferiority complex, which makes her simultaneously cynical about and yearning for male attention. Her complex feelings about men make her sexually self-protective and yet aggressive. Thus, in Vietnam, while the scarcity of female Americans makes Kitty a center of male attention, she looks down on the way men direct their "impersonal" attention to her (32).

Meanwhile, she does not lose time executing a nurse captain's advice on the way to handle her love life on overseas duty. According to the captain, who speaks from her own experience,

What happens is you have these real killer romances and then the love of your life leaves country, promising to write, and all that shit, then he goes back to

his ever-lovin' wife or his real girlfriend, and forgets all about you. What you do is you find a nice guy who has about three months left in country, just long enough to have a little fun.... It's the only way to keep from being burned. (35)

When Kitty meets Jake--the captain of a helicopter company--and his subordinate officer, Tommy Dean, she immediately finds "these two good old boys really...good" because both mention their wives "within the first fifteen minutes" (37-38). In the case of Jake, she discourages his implicit sexual advances on the grounds that she enjoys being treated respectfully as a woman--as opposed to "a servant (the doctors), a policewoman (most of the enlisted men), or a piece of ass" (39)--but the point is that she feels in no danger of being "burned" in any way.

Whereas Kitty's meeting with Jake reveals her caution, her encounter with Warrant Officer Tony Devlin demonstrates her magnetic attraction to the kind of excitement to be found only in Hollywood. Although Jake and Tommy Dean are harmless "good old boys," Kitty prefers Tony--"the Errol Flynn type"--who is able to generate "the kind of internal fireworks" that she is "a little too fragile to withstand" (37). Their ensuing relationship thus provides Kitty with an opportunity to conclude with satisfaction: "The dialogue wasn't exactly from *Gone With the Wind*, but the action was certainly impressive" (69). Thus, when writing Duncan about a rocket attack, Kitty indulges in a fantasy missive: "In my imaginary letter I told him about Tony, too--well, not everything, but enough to make him jealous.... Then, if I was ever found with shrapnel through my throat like that nurse who was killed while sitting on a patient's bed, Duncan and Tony would both be sorry" (71).

Ironically, however, it is actually Kitty who is the jealous party in her

relationship with Tony, who feels that he has been unfaithful to her, and she is the one who consequently breaks up with Tony. Doubly ironic is the fact that, while flying Kitty and Ahn across the jungle in order to regain her affection, Tony is burned to death in his helicopter (rather than she in her bed) as the ultimate result of their "killer romance." His death, moreover, does not have the effect of ensuring Kitty's affection. Rather, it opens up the possibility for her to experience a fully-blown Hollywood fantasy by acting out the role of her name-sake and television star, Irish MacCulla, as a sexy female serpent-slayer in the series developed from William Thomas's comic book *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. For, no sooner does she reach the outskirts of the jungle than she is wrestling with a giant snake which has killed a female villager and is threatening to kill the woman's pregnant daughter.

While Kitty's eventual slaying of the serpent can be perceived as an extension of her professional duty, it also proves the astuteness of the comment by William, a black marine, on her personal fantasy. As she herself confesses:

William was right. I did think I was Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, serpent slayer extraordinaire. But *the truth was, I didn't exactly see a lot of options*. I was a big, strapping girl then and accustomed to wrestling with three-hundred-pound ladies in body casts onto bedpans, having knockdown dragouts with grown men with the DTs, and subduing hysterical three-year-olds while giving them injections. The snake was bigger and more dangerous and more powerful than any of the situations I was used to, but not by all that much. (218, emphasis mine)

As Kitty sees it, she has no choice but to play out her Sheena fantasy in the real jungle because of her impressive physical constitution. In other words, whereas Sheena on the silver screen is intended as a sexually attractive figure, Kitty--Sheena in reality--is not sexually attractive despite (or rather because of) her inherent serpent-slaying

power. All that is left for her to do is thus to kill a real snake and save human lives. Thus, although Kitty's action may actually be seen as deriving from her compassion which has enabled her to be dedicated to her life-saving profession and to be responsive to the magic healing power of the amulet, the fact that she interprets it as part of her heroine fantasy forebodes difficulty in her return to the civilian way of life.

Not surprisingly, upon her repatriation, Kitty finds herself wanting to visit Disneyland as a prelude to her suicide. Whereas her plan to visit America's fantasyland is intended as a fulfillment of a promise she had made to herself long before she went to Vietnam, it is also a protest against her state-side boyfriend, Duncan, for not keeping up their relationship. It is, more importantly, a protest against the way her fellow Americans conduct their lives. As she watches the North Vietnamese take-over of Saigon, she wonders what has become of her fellow Vietnamese nurse, Mei, and her Vietnamese patient, Ahn, and saddens at the thought of Tony's death on her account. In contrast to the survivalist way of life in Vietnam, as she painfully realizes, life is "trivial, superficial" in America: it "was not sweet. It wasn't even bearable." It is a realization that leads her to view the details of life in America as "inconsequentialities" (300). As a result, although she still wants to be useful and works in a VA hospital, Kitty confesses her apathy to and helplessness with her patients: "Once I worked on ortho, and was caring for a very nice man with a terrible pain in his back. I tried to help him, tried to focus, using the amulet. Nothing happened. I gave him a pain shot, which did nothing either" (299).

The fact that Kitty keeps resorting to the amulet for empowerment even in her

despair, however, signals a thread of hope on her part to assume the role in America she was once empowered to play in Vietnam. She is still able to read auras--her patients' "uniformly depressingly grey-green, deep with self-deception and shit-brown with self-loathing" as well as her own "thin and brown" (299)--and what she mainly needs is to recollect the way the magic amulet works. As she learned in her initial contact with the amulet, the relationship between the healer and the amulet is interdependent. On the one hand, as Heron once explained, the magic amulet empowers the healer to perceive "physical and spiritual information about people that helps him heal them" and it amplifies "his aura so he can use his energy to help someone else's" (139). On the other hand, as indicated first by Xe's healing of Tran and later by Kitty's healing of the villagers and Vietcong soldiers, the amulet generates power *only if* the healer is both physically and spiritually potent, which actually emphasizes the value not of the healer alone but also of the collective healing touch. Although the healing power does not rest with the healer exclusively, touching is important, as Ahn urges and, as Kitty tells Ahn later, it is also important to "think about them as they might have been when well and wish hard that they be that way" (242).

Underlying the principle of the collective healing touch is the amulet's power to form "a link between those who touched it, one that conferred understanding" (249). When Kitty is captured by the Vietcong troops, the amulet's linking power actually saves her from Colonel Dinh's strangling hand. Having loosened his hold on the amulet around her neck, as Kitty realizes, Colonel Dinh

looked as relieved as I felt, and there was something else in his face too.... Without knowing anything of my background, family, language, or customs, he now knew me as well as he knew Hue [her daughter]. Better, maybe.... Holding on to that amulet, strangling me, he'd inadvertently become closer than my mother, closer than a lover, and he couldn't weasel out of it without damaging himself even more than he had already been damaged. (252)

Given the same linking power of the amulet, one would assume that Kitty should be able to help improve America's understanding of the Vietnam dis-ease. Kitty is rendered powerless in America, however, due to her lack of awareness about her own culture. As she once admitted with respect to her "real problem" in relating to William in the jungle, "even though William and I spoke the same language and were from the same country, I knew less about the problems and attitudes of the culture he came from than I did about the Vietnamese" (210). Just as Kitty needs to know her own country better, then, so does America.

The conclusion of the novel suggests that Scarborough is optimistic about this possibility and also points to the way it might be accomplished. By intercepting Kitty's first and last trip to Disneyland with her meeting with crowds of Vietnamese refugees, Scarborough suggests that personal fantasy must yield to the needs of reality; by allowing Kitty to overcome her own egocentricity (as indicated by her attending to the needs of a lost Vietnamese girl at the airport), Scarborough also suggests that post-Vietnam America may come to terms with itself by abandoning its ego-ridden sense of difference from other nations. The amulet power and her regained confidence begin to be evidenced again when she returns the Vietnamese girl to her mother: "A warm rush went through me as we formed a triangle, and the energy formed a circuit; a tentative mauve-pink light, a little grayed down, but definitely growing brighter, sprang up

among us" (305). In the same way, Kitty's memoir is intended to have a unifying effect. Calling upon the survivors of the war, she explains in her prologue: "One hope I have in writing this is that maybe they will read it or hear of it and find me, and we can heal together" (xiv).

Indeed, *The Healer's War* reveals that collective healing is the way to deal with America's Vietnam problem. By extension, it also points out, in Scarborough's own words from her epilogue, that "technology may be less of a factor for change than how people choose to solve certain economic, military, environmental, and social problems that exist right now" (312). What is needed is a common effort to help solve human problems in America and beyond, and the place to find the magic amulet is in the inner reaches of the American psyche. Only from within does healing the wounds of an extreme war begin. Or, as Caputo's native medicine man, Wawiekumig, advises Chris Starkmann how he may be able to deal with his traumatic experience in Vietnam, "What you want to know is how to live with yourself" (*Indian* 425). In the case of the Vietnam experience, what America wants to know is how understanding the other serves as a preparatory step toward self-understanding, which in turn presupposes self-restoration.

Conclusion

The Vietnam Syndrome Revisited

One and a half decades after the collapse of Saigon, President George Bush announced that America had finally "kicked the Vietnam Syndrome" (qtd. in Robinson 60). What seems to have occasioned Bush's declaration was the American victory over the aggressor Saddam Hussein. For Bush, the American success in the recent Persian Gulf War signified the rebirth of the American commitment to democracy; the war thus seemed to liberate not only the Kuwaitis from the Iraqis, but also the Americans from the ghosts of Vietnam.

This political interest in erasing the American memory of the Vietnam experience, however, also suggests a recognition of the powerful impact that the Vietnam legacy had on the American psyche. In America today, the memory of Vietnam has not faded, nor has the Vietnam Syndrome disappeared. Actually, Americans--veterans and non-veterans alike--have made an unusual effort to sustain the memory of the Vietnam experience. Not only is there an increase in Vietnam-related books published each year, but also there is an increase in the number of courses on America's Vietnam experience that are taught on university and school campuses, and more and more libraries feature special collections of works on Vietnam. What sustains such an effort is undoubtedly the desire of the American public to learn a lesson from Vietnam. The crucial question that arises, in turn, is: what is the nature of the lesson to be learned?

Just as Vietnam was a disorienting experience, so the answers to this question are not universal. Although the Bush administration saw the lesson in terms of the need for Americans to win a clean victory against Hussein's Iraq in what both the military and the press have called the "nintendo-style war" (Hamizrachi 17), for many American citizens the lesson is to be found by asking "why?". Thus in a review of books on a possible Vietnam lesson, Peter Riddick has observed: "Clearly history can teach us lessons, but it is often less clear what those lessons are. Perhaps the greatest lesson of Vietnam is that the US should not have been there in the first place" (55). For the veterans and writers whose views I have explored in this study, the lesson of Vietnam cannot be learned by fighting another war, not only because winning of other wars does not compensate for the lost one but, more importantly, because such a reaction impedes the learning process. For them, the lesson to be learned is the need to refrain from fighting any war and the moral is that the restraint from war needs to be a self-regulated one.

What makes these veterans and writers recognize the value of abstaining from war, however, is not the conventional love-thy-neighbour wisdom of peace. Rather, as evidenced in the novels of David Halberstam and Tim O'Brien, it is the agonizing experience of the ultimate futility of war and of the way that the American imperialistic way has led the nation into both political division and a psychological quagmire. To this same effect, by dramatizing the uneasy relationship between the Vietnam War veterans and the American civilians, writers such as Larry Heinemann and Bobbie Ann Mason have pointed to American culture as the major factor which is

responsible for the Vietnam conundrum. Other writers like Philip Caputo and William Eastlake provide an indepth analysis of the role played by traditional elements of American culture, just as John M. Del Vecchio and Stephen Wright examine the intellectual and popular aspects of American life that contributed to the soldiers' confusion in a different geographical and cultural setting. Together these writers suggest that the war in Vietnam was not merely an isolated incident (or what some call an "aberration" of American experience), but rather that it constitutes a link in the chain of American history. In other words, while the intervention was an inevitable extension of American history and culture, its unexpected outcome can also serve as a directive for the future.

Learning from the past, however, is an arduous and painful process. Focusing on the similarity between the revisionist thinking in the post-Civil War period and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Michael Klein emphasizes the opposition played by the collective memory:

After a war or significant social crisis that has been divisive, and especially during a period of conservatism following an era of radical social or cultural action, the history of the recent past is often reinterpreted. Those with access to the means of cultural production, in accordance with the new dominant political attitudes, are likeliest to be behind such major shifts in interpretation. Radical or oppositional moments in the history of a nation are effectively excised from the cultural memory. A process of organized forgetting takes people's complex past away, substituting comfortable myths that reinforce rather than challenge the status quo. (19)

In view of these difficulties, some writers go far beyond the stage of transcribing and interpreting the Vietnam experience; they employ their creative ingenuity in an attempt to shock their fellow Americans into the recognition that the "enemy" is not without

but within. Thus, writers like Robert Stone and Michael Herr use unconventional narrative forms to make the Vietnam War an unforgettable experience.

Yet Vietnam writers have also gone one step further in bringing the message "home." Their immediate concern with the trauma of the veterans extends to a larger concern with both the suffering of the Vietnamese refugees and the experience of those underprivileged social groups such as the native Americans and Afro-Americans. As Philip Caputo and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough demonstrate, recognizing the nation's aggressive tendencies abroad is mainly a preliminary phase in the cultural and psychic evolution of a post-Vietnam America; ultimately introspection needs to result in the establishment of a certain form of harmony between the estranged cultural and racial groups within America itself. By so doing, such writers have broadened the concept of the Vietnam Syndrome and have presented America's post-Vietnam experience as a more general American syndrome. The direction of America's post-Vietnam reintegration thus seems Zen-oriented--one in which, by means of self-attainment, America may eventually achieve harmony not only within the nation but also with nations beyond its own boundaries.

Such a perception of the Vietnam lesson may finally prove worth the cost it entailed on the part of the Vietnam generation in particular and America in general. Yet, it would also seem that in order to put the lesson to use one ultimate challenge remains to be met--one that directly involves all Americans who together determine the nation's destiny. Specifically, the Vietnam lesson might result in actual change only if the nation can make a collective effort not merely to obtain more knowledge of

the facts of the Vietnam War and/or the Vietnam way of life, but also to use such knowledge to rethink the philosophical premise that informs its lifestyle. Consequently, the final challenge also takes the form of a fundamental question: whether America truly wants a way out of Vietnam.

Appendix: The Basics of Zen Philosophy

As defined by the late D. T. Suzuki, "Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one's own being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom" (*Essays*, [1st series] 13). In the discourse of Zen, what Suzuki calls "the nature of one's own being" is also frequently termed as "no-mind," "Emptiness," "Nothingness," "the Ultimate Reality," or "the Unattainable Self." The interchangeability of these apparently contradictory terms suggests a unique metaphysical view.

The key to the Zen view is something called the Self, which is characterized by its absolute subjectivism. This Zen Self, however, is emphatically not the egocentric self; rather, it is one of ego-lessness in a sense more than mere passivity. The Self is inherent in all human beings but is essentially empty. It is a Self that is emptied of "all its psychological contents" and of "all those trappings, moral, philosophical, and spiritual, with which it has continued to adorn itself ever since the first awakening of consciousness" (Suzuki, "Self" 15). Yet, such an emptied Self is not to be taken in the purely negativistic or nihilistic sense. Instead, the emptied Self is a positive, creative, and absolute being. Thus, while it is non-existent and unattainable (since it is empty), the Zen Self exists in its own right.

The primary concern of Zen masters, then, is to attain the non-existent, unattainable, empty Self. Since the Self is not an intellectual concept, the attainment must go without the aid of intellect. Moreover, since it is not a psychological state, the attainment must be free of emotions. Thus, Zen masters emphasize the importance of

sudden awakening to the Self (i.e., *dunwu* in Chinese, and *satori* in Japanese). This emphasis on sudden awakening constitutes the Zen approach to Sakyamuni Buddha's doctrine, which teaches "non-reliance on language, teaching without teaching, direct pointing to the mind, and sudden enlightenment." In the view of Zen, what prevents one from attaining the Self (or, enlightenment) is the mind which is loaded with dualities (such as life and death, I and thou) which are characteristic of human life. Hence, Zen masters come to achieve sudden awakening by transcending those dualities.

In order to transcend dualities, one must first master one's own mind. As Tai-hui, a Chinese Zen master in the twelfth century, teaches,

If you want...to be the free master of yourself by doing away with your seeing, hearing, and thinking, [you must] stop your hankering monkey-like mind from doing mischief; keep it quietly under control; keep your mind firmly collected regardless of what you are doing--sitting or lying, standing or walking, remaining silent or talking; keep your mind like a line stretched taut; do not let it slip out of your hand. (qtd. in Suzuki, *Essays* [2nd series] 95)

In Zen training, a Zen master may use the Verbal Method or Direct Method to induce the pupils to awaken to the Self deeply buried within the consciousness. The Verbal Method may be further divided into a number of categories, such as "Paradox; Going Beyond Opposites; Contradiction; Affirmation; Repetition; and Exclamation." The Direct Method, so-called due to its physical (as opposed verbal) feature, may be subdivided into several groups such as gesture, striking, performance of a definite set of acts, directing others to move about, etc" (Suzuki, *Essays* [1st series] 271-72).

One well-known example of Zen instruction, using the Verbal Method, illustrates the dualistic situation which a Zen person is able to transcend. Hsiang-yen, a

Chinese Zen master in the ninth century, once delivered the following sermon:

"It is like a man over a precipice one thousand feet high, he is hanging himself there with a branch of a tree between his teeth; the feet are far off the ground, and his hands are not taking hold of anything. Suppose another man coming to him to propose a question, 'What is the meaning of the first patriarch coming over here from the West?' If this man should open the mouth to answer, he is sure to fall and lose his life; but if he would make no answer, he must be said to ignore the inquirer. At this critical moment what should he do?"

The duality in the hypothetical situation above is extreme. The man must choose between answering and not answering the question posed to him. According to Suzuki's interpretation, the choice between life and death offers no opportunity for the Zen person to make any logical choice: "Zen, being practical, wants us to make the same noble determination to give up our dualistic life for the sake of enlightenment and eternal peace. For it says that its gate will open when this determination is reached" (*Essays*, [1st series] 277-78).

The Zen person's determination to transcend duality, however, does not suggest any devaluation of life on his part. Rather, it demonstrates the absence of his attachment to any form of substance, which is total freedom. For Suzuki, as for his pupil Masao Abe, such a person is "supra-individual" in the sense that he is identical with "Emptiness," "Seeing," or "Cosmic Unconsciousness." Yet, simultaneously, he is "an individual, a concrete living existence" that is every human being. Thus, the Zen person has two aspects: "one exists as a finite individual, and at the same time, one is a 'bottomless abyss.'" The two aspects go hand in hand. For it is neither possible "to take hold of the 'Person' on the plane of the individual alone," nor is it possible for the "Person" to "manifest itself directly unless it materializes in an individual

existence" (Abe, *Zen* 75). Hence, the Zen person as "supra-individual" and "individual" is one.

Just as the emptied individual is not differentiated from the concrete individual in the Zen person, so his enlightenment is not separable from compassion. In the words of Suzuki, "What makes Zen as such is that various upaya (good devices for salvation) naturally come out of the great compassion with the quickness of the echo following a sound" (qtd. in Abe, *Zen* 79). Suzuki illustrates this aspect of Zen by quoting the following mondo (Zen dialogue):

Joshu (Chao-chou) was approached by an old lady who said, "Women are considered to be heavily laden with the five obstructions. How can I be freed from them?"

The master said, "Let all the other people be born in Heaven, but may I this old woman be forever drowned in the ocean of suffering."

The key words in this mondo are "I this old woman." According to Abe, the literal translation of the original words should be "*the* old woman." In changing "the" to "I this," Suzuki highlighted the Chao-chou's identification with the old woman. This egoless identification is dependent exclusively on the emptiness of the master's Self. As Abe explains, "Chao-chou's seemingly harsh reply springs from great compassion in which no distinction between Chao-chou and the old woman exists and in which Chao-chou himself is willing to suffer much more than or in place of anyone else" (*Zen* 78).

A number of Zen scholars have dealt with the differences between the Eastern and Western ways of thinking. For details, one may read Masao Abe's *Zen and Western Thought* and Nishitani Keiji's "Science and Zen."

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