
WLA



War, Literature & the Arts:
An International Journal
of the Humanities

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Due to outside projects and world events, we are behind in our publishing schedule, but digging in to catch up. The 2001 issue is being prepared and will be shipped as soon as possible. We apologize for the delays and appreciate your support of *WLA*.

The Editors

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Reg Saner

Soldier Poets, a Gadfly, and the Long-Haired Persian

Keynote Address, delivered at The United States Air Force Academy, April 28, 2000, for the "Outstanding Academy Educator Awards" ceremony.

Although many of America's finest teachers are alive and well and right here in this room, doubtless each is too bashful to claim being the greatest who ever lived. But who was? Well, if we set aside religious figures, maybe it was a certain homely, snub-nosed gadfly who spent much of his life bugging his fellow citizens in ancient Athens.

And what bugged them? Not conceit or snobbery. He gave himself no fine airs. Though more poor than rich, he took no fees for his teaching. Instead it was his pesky, habitual questioning that maneuvered many of his self-important fellow citizens into admitting they often didn't know—truly know—what they were doing. Naturally enough, his quizzing angered persons who felt foolish at being made to think in public. By contrast, certain junior faculty here are today being *honored* for stimulating cadets to use their brains.

That oddball educator wasn't so lucky. Disgruntled Athenians looking for scapegoats near the end of a long, losing war finally treated him to a free drink of hemlock. Ever since then, his interrogative ways have influenced teaching methods all over this planet, which is especially ironic in view of his playful claim that if he were wise in anything, it was in knowing that he knew nothing. That amusing ploy lightened up his serious aim of reminding fellow-citizens and pupils how much of our presumed knowledge simply falls apart if we look at it closely.

I'll return to him in a moment. First let me explain that I've mentioned an ancient Greek because the main source of our Euro-American culture is Greece. All faculty at the Air Force Academy know that the very word "academy" is Greek, as is the concept. Not all may be aware that both derive from Plato's school in Athens, nor, perhaps, are

many aware that Athenians of more than two millennia ago were, like us, vitally concerned to keep the difficult balance between military clout and cultural values that make life worth living.

Back in the fifth century B.C., the words most revered by Greeks were, not so surprisingly, those of a war poem. Its characters you know about: Achilles, Odysseus, Ajax, Agamemnon—and Hector, King Priam, Helen of Troy. Along with the proverbial "cast of thousands" it offered—as special effects—armored muscle by the acre, hurtling spear points of bronze, spattered brains, and a rambunctiously heroic chaos of bloody skirmishes. To us, the *Iliad* may be seem mere literature, though it would be odd to call the greatest poem ever written "mere," but for ancient Greeks its epic range gave it a near-scriptural authority. City governments paid professionals to recite it aloud for the benefit of citizens. Had it been written by an American, its warrior heroes would—inevitably—have been American. How could they be anything else?

Well, of course they *could*, if to our American minds that possibility could occur. The *Iliad*, however, is typical of Greece's clear-eyed objectivity, in that Homer (himself a Greek) does not make Trojans the bad guys. Easily the most likable figure in the poem is the Trojan warrior, Hector, who drives his ash spear through scores of Greeks. Quite rightly. Homer would have thought our black hat / white hat polarities illusory if not childish.

In fact, that's the single most obvious mark of ancient Greek poetry: no bull. Take for example Archilochus, a tough-guy poet if ever there was one. He lived somewhere around mid-seventh century B.C., and, though a poet, was proud to earn his bread soldiering, as he tells us in this fragment: "By spear is kneaded the bread I eat, by spear my lsmaric / wine is won, which I drink, leaning upon my spear."[1] I picture him then leaning forward and saying, "Any questions?" Even the scraps of Archilochus that survive make nonsense of American male insecurities about poets and poetry.

On the other hand, being a foot soldier, he knew that sometimes you have to take to your heels—and was securely macho enough to admit it:

> Some barbarian is waving my shield, since I was obliged to
> leave that perfectly good piece of equipment behind
> under a bush. But I got away, so what does it matter?
> Let the shield go; I can buy another one equally good.

He could be ga-ga over a woman, and admit that too: "Here I lie, sick with desire, stuck through the bones with love." Shrugging, he could also admit an amusing truth men know intimately well: ". . . but even iron bends too, / and most of the time / this old poker / is limp as a rag."

Aeschylus, who lived after Archilochus, wrote some of the greatest dramatic verse ever penned. He too saw combat but as a citizen soldier, not a professional. Serving as an officer at the battle of Marathon he faced an invading Persian army that outnumbered his fellow Athenians more than two to one. Maybe that's why, at dawn, the Greek commander, Miltiades, gave the order: "Attack!" In the ensuing carnage and despite those odds, Athenians won a victory that set Persian ambitions back ten years. As a dramatic poet whose work was highly esteemed in its own time, Aeschylus seems to have been less proud of his literary fame than of his service against the Persians at Marathon and elsewhere. By chance, his epitaph survives, which he very possibly either wrote himself or told others what it should say, with a clarity typically Greek:

> Under this monument lies Aeschylus the Athenian,
> Euphorion's son, who died in the wheatlands of Gela. The grove
> of Marathon with its glories can speak of his valor in battle.
> The longhaired Persian remembers and can speak of it too.[2]

Considering his pride in having given the "long-haired Persian" something to remember him by, it is absolutely astonishing to find that when he came to write his play *The Persians*—about a second Persian defeat at Salamis ten years after Marathon—he refused to demonize his enemies. That refusal remains, so far as I know, unparalleled in human history.

Think of it. Persian troops had ravaged the Athenian countryside, seized the Acropolis, killed every one of its defenders, sacked then destroyed its temples, and set fire to the very city in which Aeschylus' *The Persians* was later performed. Moreover, everyone in his Athenian audience had either seen action against that enemy, or had lost family members to them, or both. At Marathon, Aeschylus' own brother was killed, but not—so goes one report—before getting his arm lopped off by a Persian ax. What's more, the stakes were freedom or slavery, and in the ancient world that slavery was unmetaphoric. Losers not slain outright were put very often into actual bondage by the city-full, lifelong, because slave trading in prisoners of war was universal.

Yet Aeschylus' pride in his combat record didn't blind him to the

reality that "the enemy" is human too. And that governments lie. "In war," he wrote, "the first casualty is truth." Less obvious and far more important, he had also seen that by degrees men can become what they set out to oppose. His dramatized versions of that tragic insight influenced all subsequent expression of tragic vision. Far from a being a "merely" literary fact, it's a truth ranking among the deepest that humans have achieved. Persons or nations claiming any kind of moral superiority need to be aware of it.

The most memorable order given me when, as a 2nd lieutenant, I joined my infantry unit during the Korean War was worded a bit deviously by the battalion commander, a light colonel. Apparently some Chinese had managed to crawl, undetected, quite close to battalion positions before rising into view, hands up. Obviously, that raised doubts about a unit's battle-readiness. Blowing those chinks away would prevent the colonel's having to face embarrassing questions at regimental HQ. Deviously put or not, the colonel's meaning was clear: I was to tell my platoon to shoot enemy soldiers coming in to surrender. I was twenty-three. Silently I told myself, "No way." Before my attitude became an issue, that C.O. was rotated back to the States, with my moral courage, if any, never put to the test. To my surprise, our new battalion commander eventually suggested I make the army my career, so I naturally felt maybe I wasn't a complete misfit.

We were allegedly in Korea to oppose the inhumane machinery of Communism. But blasting an unarmed man who offers to surrender is itself de-humanizing. My doing what we were there to oppose would have made me more like the enemy than I meant to become. True, I'd been trained to follow orders, and except for that one did my best. But I'd been educated to at least try to know what I was doing.

This blurring of a hero's actions into behavior like that of his antagonist is a main feature of Greek tragedy because all-too-often a dramatic feature of Greek life. Its cleverest expression occurs in a play called *Oedipus the King*. There Oedipus sets out to solve a murder and punish the killer but gradually learns that he himself is that very man. Again, we need to remember that literary situations echo reality. Throughout U.S. history, from Indian wars to Desert Storm and beyond, we have sat astride our dubiously moral high horse while perpetrating things uncomfortably like the enemies we sought to oppose. At Sand Creek, Colorado, by wholesale murdering of women and children whom we called "savages" we became worse than savages. When General Curtis

LeMay said of Ho Chi Minh and his North Vietnamese, "We'll bomb them back to the Stone Age," he became in that moment crude-minded as any caveman's stone club.

The Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka has rightly insisted that nothing is more destructive than that kind of cocksureness. The moment you believe, as Soyinka puts it, "that *you* have the totality of truth, that you have measured, you have reasoned things out with the worldviews, phenomena, and so on—you reach a point of absolute certitude in which no alternatives can be permitted. Communism suffered from that level of precision, that dangerous and destructive level of precision."[3]

My oddball gadfly, Socrates, whose death made hemlock notorious, argued therefore that ideas held with what Soyinka calls "absolute certitude" and "precision" need examining. As a logical consequence he also held that true knowledge and right behavior go hand in hand. In his view, the man who does bad things doesn't really know what he's doing. If he truly knew the long-term consequences to others and himself, he wouldn't do it. At first hearing, that sounds hopelessly soft-headed. Is it? Psychopaths and sociopaths set aside, the Socratic explanation grows strangely persuasive. There's a line in an American blues lyric, "You got to reap jes' what you sow." Think, for example, Agent Orange. Not knowing what we were doing, we sowed it all right. We're still reaping. And Agent Orange is only an instance.

By the way, lest you suppose Socrates was some bearded, limp-wristed, sandal-wearing, herbal-tea sipping wimp, think again. Yes, he was bearded. He did wear sandals, though he sometimes went barefoot. If Plato's account of him at the drinking party described in *The Symposium* is reliable, Socrates—though no boozer—could drink us all under the table yet never himself be drunk. In his day, "symposium" meant "party," which meant food and plenty of wine. The party Plato wrote of lasted till dawn, by which time all but a couple of guests had either passed out, fallen asleep, or gone home. Not Socrates. Although he had downed as much wine as everyone else, there he was: still apparently sober and discussing plays with the playwright Agathon.

He was also an Athenian of the fifth century B.C. That meant military service anytime Athens had a fight on its hands, which was often, because Greek city-states warred with each other at the drop of an insult or hint of advantage. Neither Plato nor Aristotle thought that odd or even undesirable, and—though each had plenty of other political suggestions—neither philosopher offered any schemes for avoiding it.

Unlike us, however, if the Athenian assembly voted in favor of war against, say, Thebes, members under sixty years of age knew their next move was to go home, fetch spear, shield and field rations, and stand ready to march. Imagine our U.S. Congress under the same obligation! "You voted to fight? OK, now get your rifle and pack." As an Athenian citizen soldier, Socrates himself saw action during the Peloponnesian War, at the battles of Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium. Back then, combat was up close and personal, which surely is why males stayed in shape as if their lives depended on it. They did. Yet Socrates the philosopher impressed his fit, fellow infantrymen with a physical stamina they found unusual, plus an equally remarkable endurance of hardship, and his cool when under attack. He knew there was a time to philosophize and a time to fight.

Athens' neighbor state was Sparta, and their cultures were polar opposites. Athens believed in education, Sparta believed in training. The Athenians thought drama a civic affair, more vital than mere entertainment. They not only built a big theatre; they voted ticket money for citizens otherwise too poor to attend the plays. This too is unparalleled in the annals of government. More surprising still, despite the theater and plays being state-sponsored, playwrights handled subjects with a freedom—social and political—that hasn't happened since, not in the U.S. or anywhere else, dramatizing actions sometimes highly critical of Athenian policies and politicians! With straight-ahead candor, this verse by Euripides, another Athenian playwright, helps us understand: "A slave is he who cannot speak his mind."

In contrast, Sparta tolerated neither drama nor much criticism. Athens welcomed painters, philosophers, sculptors, poets, architects, singers, and dancers, whereas Sparta mistrusted such touchy-feely stuff, lest it make men soft. Today our word "Spartan" denotes that severe and rigorous self-discipline, but doesn't convey details. So, because the cultural chasm between Athens and Sparta furnishes a useful parallel to the difference between education and training, a few features may be worth dwelling on.

In Sparta, from cradle to grave the state exercised iron control in producing soldiers to serve the state. Art there was the art of war.[4] A baby born physically weak was done away with. Family life, strictly limited. Male children stayed with their mothers till age seven, then were placed in barracks, not for education but for training with shield and spear. By age twenty a man was permitted to marry but required,

nonetheless, to continue living in barracks, visiting his wife as he could. His values were military discipline, endurance under hardship, and physical courage. That was a Spartan male's entire concern. To keep him focused, he was forbidden to farm, go into business, or take up any profession except that of soldier. Other pursuits were left to slaves called Helots. Paradoxically, it needed the constant readiness of that Spartan army to keep the lid on these same eruptive Helot slaves. In effect, Sparta was an armed camp where strangers weren't all that welcome.

Meanwhile, 200 air miles northeast, Athens was wide open to foreigners and had no standing army. Male citizens under sixty were called to active duty as need arose. If it came to a fight between the Athenian pansies and those well-honed Spartan hunks, the smart money would be on Sparta and give odds, right? Wrong. Amazingly so. The Athenians—for all their love of philosophy, poetry, money-making, parties, and the arts—proved themselves equal to Spartan opponents. In the Peloponnesian war, Sparta and its allies did *finally* defeat Athens, but only with the help of Persian money, and after twenty-seven years of hostilities. And—even then—only because the Athenians were high rollers whose habit of going for broke led them to outfit a pair of disastrous expeditions related to Sparta very indirectly.

In fairness, however, it's important to note that Greeks everywhere admired Spartan virtues, and felt the obvious appeal of highly disciplined subordination to the common good. Despite enmities, Athenians shared that admiration—all the more because individual egos among themselves often created dangerous crises. Their praise for Sparta's virtues did not, however, imply that Athens had the slightest desire to adopt such a narrow view of life.

From all this you're right to suppose that I think my country best served by officers who, in the Socratic sense—which is the largest sense—know what they're doing. That calls for more than practical skills and subjects, *vital* as they are, and *central* as they must be. A practical result, however, will be fewer officers quick to apply cures that turn out worse than the disease.

But neither good teachers (nor poets who are any good) kid themselves. Humane studies guarantee nothing. Even when offered to someone capable of an open mind, they modify personality so invisibly, so subtly that their effect can never be quantified. All the same, because behavior is learned by imitation, and because from our range of experience we imitate what we admire, the value of humanities in widening

that range is crucial. Any reader of the *Iliad* admires Hector's bravery and human decency, just as anyone reading Plato's account of Socrates' final days finds his moral and physical courage unforgettable.

Perhaps the most fascinatingly mysterious power of literature in the educated imagination is that a personality met only on paper can, and often does, exert greater influence on our lives than any number of actual acquaintances. That influence is everything. Humane values unexercised amount to self-flattery. If they don't show up in our behavior, we don't have them.

Benjamin Jowett was a famous scholar / translator of Socrates' best student, Plato. As an Oxford teacher during WWI, he learned that his own best student was about to leave for the trenches in France. Jowett decided to give the young man a going-away present. What should it have been, do you think? Perhaps some pocket-size, handsomely bound book of philosophy? Nothing of the sort. Conceivably with Socrates in mind, or Aeschylus, he presented to his pupil a first-rate revolver.

Nearer our own time, Robert Lowell's poem "For the Union Dead" paid tribute to the moral and physical courage shown by those Civil War soldiers of New England who thought slavery worse than the risk in fighting to abolish it. In that poem's most hauntingly insightful phrase, Lowell expresses his awed admiration for "man's lovely, / peculiar power to choose life, and die." No Greek would say, "I'm happy to die for my country," though Greeks in their many tens of thousands did perish for theirs. A Greek would shake his head: "*Happy* to die"? Nobody wants to die! But if it comes to that, I will—rather than be another man's slave."

To the extent that military training finds time for humane values, a *few* more of our officers may know a little more truly what it is they're doing. Insofar as they do, our nation and the world will be very much the better for it, *out of all proportion to that fewness.*

Such knowledge kept Greeks like Aeschylus from demonizing their foes, but certainly didn't make pushovers of him and the greatly outnumbered Athenians at Marathon, who attacked, then finally chased Persian troops literally into the sea. So it's unlikely to turn our cadets to marshmallows. Nor in the age of cyberspace should all that be chucked onto a junk pile dismissively called "ancient history." Greece's example is young, alive, and red-blooded among us. After all, "democracy," is a Greek word. Greece is where democracy began. And the Athens of a soldier poet showed us how.

Notes

[1]Trans., Richmond Lattimore, Greek Lyrics, 2nd. rev. ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955) 1. Of Archilochus's poems only fragments remain. Those cited are drawn from this translation.

[2]The Complete Greek Tragedies, eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, vol I (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1959) 1.

[3]Cited from "The Nobel Laureates of Literature," *The Georgia Review* (Winter 1995) 842-43.

[4]Sparta's meager interest in what we call "culture" accounts for our correspondingly scanty information on her social history and daily life. Compared to Athens, Sparta left us almost no direct record of itself.

Reg Saner is author of *Climbing into the Roots, So This is the Map, Essay on Air,* and *Red Letters*, collections of poetry. His prose has been collected in *The Four-Cornered Falcon: Essays on the Interior West and the Natural Scene,* and *Reaching Keet Seel: Essays on the Anasazi Experience*.

Reg Saner

Wake Me

Consider just one sacral tableau: five nails
to drain a god. Then how, ever after,
misbelievers have piled up thick
as centuries. Even while we speak
fresh corpses accrue and conspire, refusing
to see it that way—till everything's re-runs,
late-breaking history all over the place.

Nudged by the just thud of humanitarian
bombs it may seem that a national heart
like an angry red planet kept hurling
itself against the bars of its cage
but for all our wise sayings preserved
in alcohol, it was only the Balkans' bitter end
returning to its beginnings. Victims fled
riding any old thing, wagons, farm carts.
The very roads were refugees. Under the remote
control of scriptural myth, fear, misery,
and rage took turns swallowing each other
as the worshipfully Orthodox knelt to Our Lady
of Carnage, and Albanians drilled Serbs
in the Mosques of Persuasion: scenarios
even gods couldn't worsen. Small wonder
they've sailed off the edge of the world.

How lucky for us these opposable thumbs
evolved in time to help carry our grudges,
though none of the other planets fidget or fuss,

they just roll round and around and around
like ball bearings. Whereas here? The good
soldier's earth-colored: those he wears and lies in,
with man crawling toward man on his belly
across rival axioms. As each aims and fires
at a difference in cloth, each wins the day,
dragging by rope naked elders to the quarry.

Wake me when eternity starts, will you?
I don't want to miss it.

Eleven Poets,

selected by *Will Hochman*

Elizabeth Weber
Jonathan Alexander
Russell Thorburn
Virgil Suarez
H. Palmer Hall
Elizabeth D. Samet
Mario Petrucci
Lee Passarella
Marija Stosic
Gary Mills
Jeffrey C. Alfier

Elizabeth Weber

Dreaming of Bill: September 5, 1994

It's your birthday and the field across the street
swarms with monarchs
drawn by flowering golden rod.
As children, we stunned them with baseball bats
and carried them back home
to fill our living room
with the fury of their wings
as they fluttered back to life.
There were always a few
that didn't make it.
We never thought of their pain.

In my dreams, you're always twenty,
skin smooth, your face
blank as that lake with no wind.
Even your shirts are twenty years old,
button down collars and pin stripes,
the same old white jeans and penny loafers.

Today, rain fell, a slow drizzle.
My breath catching
on the drops that fell before me
I ran out into it and on the path
stumbled across a box turtle.
A pattern of yellow and black diamonds,
it drew itself back
into its shell and hissed at me.
It was the most beautiful thing

I'd seen that day, and I wanted it
off that path and under ferns
where no sniffing dogs could find it.

That last time you came home
unexpected and on leave from the Army,
you stood by the big picture window
not a ghost but a near ghost,
playing the bass guitar and trying
to look brave and not as if you were
on your way to war in a week.
That was another fall,
another falling of leaves
turning the world red, burning the world.
I always thought of you as the flunk-out king
with the "Live for today
for tomorrow you die" motto.
The boy I caught missing his biology final
to attend a rock concert.
Not the hero you later became,
the one, who shot twice and dying,
kept radioing for help.

Each morning this fall I read about men and women
ripped apart, their bodies shredded
like the water balloons
we tossed at each other in fun.
I read about children killed
for reasons not understood,
men who fight for a mark where the land ends,
for the right to tell who to do what.
Serbs impregnating Croat women
so they will be cast out by their families in shame.

What was it like in that country
you went to
where people looked at you
with eyes like those of that dog we once found,
its bloody neck caught in a wire snare?

It snapped at anything that got close.
Perhaps that's what you became.

These days a Vietnamese family lives
down the alley. They grow cabbages
and zucchini in a large field out on Mullen Road.
I see the oldest daughter walking
the irrigation ditches and carrying buckets of water.
Yesterday in the grocery store, her mother squatted
on the floor in front of me in the check-out line
and dug in her purse for money.
The cashier looked at her as if she were a cockroach
just crawled out from beneath the spinach.
I had to close my eyes.
All I could see were the villages you wrote about,
how you went through pulling out old men,
women and children from the places they hid
and burned their huts.
All I could see were their dead bodies
sprawled in a ditch and in a road beside a rice paddy.
That moment I was glad you were dead.
I wanted to lift the woman from the floor.
I wanted to throw her down.
I wanted to rip her money from her still living hand
and scatter it like so many lost seeds.

Elizabeth Weber teaches Creative Writing at the University of Indianapolis. Her poetry has appeared in many journals.

Jonathan Alexander

Anthem for Wilfred Owen

At seventeen, I knew nothing
of war, but I could read between

the lines of your poems: foreheads of
youth and innocent tongues, strange

meetings and smothering dreams,
limbs full nerved but too hard to

stir, and the hanging face, sick of
sin—but whose sin was it that kept you

dreaming? What stuttering vision
choked on the old lie?

In all my dreams
he plunges at me . . .

This is not their war. They would not
know it as you exploded with the brush

of a boy, barely seventeen, drowning
in floating fire. Some truths lie too deep for

taint. Death leaked around you like
poison gas, but you stopped to notice

the clumsy youth fumbling his
helmet and coughing up a prayer,

or the dark-haired boys dying as
cattle while the holy glimmers of

blondes fought at your side for king
and country and a smile from their

captain. You nursed the tenderness of
patient minds and recorded

futility, a simple request:
"Move him into the sun . . ."

But all the while the old lie kept
you marching in your sleep

while others would see you
drowning.

Jonathan Alexander's most recent work appears in *Blithe House Quarterly, Valparaiso Poetry Review, Heart Quarterly, Salt River Review*, and *Chiron Review*. He teaches writing at the University of Cincinnati.

Russell Thorburn

Reese at the Asylum in the West of Ireland

The interns hogtie a shrieking private
who disassembles dreams until there's a fragment
of sky in his blue left eye. "No talking today,"
he cries as they shove his head between
his legs, kick him for good measure.

His naked body is returned for delousing,
his analyst from the war board
waiting to copy notes, if he'd only
say what happened in that pillbox
where the squad located him, the grenade pin
holding back an explosion in his hand
and the lieutenant staring up at concrete;
but Reese imitates a sea gull
in flight, rolls his eyes, makes
a popping sound, and there's no way he's
going to talk about the pillbox in France,
or whisper coherently about mortar
fire that kept him from leaving that damn box,
or how the young blonde in a dirty chemise
didn't wait for the German, but slid
from the dust and chipped concrete,
holes where you could put a fist, and died
in cold fire without another breath.

There's no way he can tell what happened
next, when he unloaded his weapon
into Germans, who raised their hands.

He might have looked at blue sky,
heard a cricket sing before the smoke cleared,
read poetry in cornfields
before the tractor bumped by to pick him up,
his father leaning to the side, asking.
"What the hell is that?"
And Reese would have told him it's a book.

The young blonde in a heap seen
outside the pillbox. The priest
who absolved him drinking wine
beside three German corpses
who would never break bread again.
And Reese measures blue sky through
the window, glancing first at the analyst,
then the dimensions of a wired cross,
as the interns curse him, point to the chair
where they want to tie him to the rungs,
so his veins will grow large and purple,
and the horn-rimmed analyst can ask, "When
did you first think you could fly like a sea gull?"

After the Second Mortar Shell Punched Its Fist through the Chapel Wall

twenty coats of gesso were licked off the icons
by fire. And two American soldiers
crouched by the altar. Heaven descended
from above in the plaster. Reese and I
coughed; we ducked our heads and saw the priest
smother the canvas of Jesus walking on the water.
His arms spread out, as if he were swimming
with the frail arithmetic of a saint's body.
A cigarette and a look at the icons was all we had
wanted before the mortars measured us:
to study how Jesus' hand
frozen in a gaze of rabbit-skin glue
could make a sinner search for his soul.

* * *

A blonde girl undressed to a dirty chemise
and a smirk eating cheese while the priest's words
floated us up a ladder, miles away
from garroting Germans in a wheat field,
or the talk about Jimmy Dorsey.
Reese asked if the eyes of the priest's saints
were daubed with coffee; he had drunk
that sinister grace before; and that was
when God or the Germans spoke,
what was the difference, who could tell
one voice from the other, while mortar shells crumbled
in thunder and fire? Reese pulled out the blonde
and I dragged the priest by his heels toward
the wine cellar.

Apollinaire Explains to Mephistopheles

How he never read Aristotle
but pretended to know the heaviness
in each word; what life meant
after the doctor shakes his head.

We axe a part of others' lives,
that lie blown out like labored breath:
the unthinkable: why we are placed on earth.
Mephistopheles' words this wrinkle of air,

his nakedness showing from the armor
he wears in tribute to the dead.
And the poet on the divan, windows
to the flutter of sound below,

feels he cannot breathe
through another hour, and says
we are always dying, it's strange
to find we are living a minute more.

His forehead swept clean of moist hair,
dark as the Devil's glistening eyes
who blows out another lie: to die
is to know you are nothing.

Russell Thorburn is an NEA fellow who has published two volumes of poetry, *Exposed Splendor* and *Approximate Desire*.

Virgil Suarez

Yes, Cubans Fought on Both Sides of the Vietnam War

from the post-revolution island (as military
advisors), and young Cubans whose parents
lived in exile in the United States, drafted

and sent, and each waited in their own side,
aware of the rain, monsoon season, heat,
humidity, how birds they could never see

cackled in mocking from the distant trees,
mosquitos and other insects, familiar
and strange at the same time, one didn't

know the other was hiding in the bush,
their breathing almost audible, like thunder
rolling over a blanket of clouds over the rice

paddies, just like what they remembered of home,
sugar cane fields, tobacco, rice, then the sound
of music, recognizable beat, rhythm,

"*Tu que me decias que el yayabo no salia mas,*"
music, metallic and resonant, so unmistakenly
Cuban, carried over from the enemy lines

and its sounds like home, an invitation,
this music of conga drums and claves,
and the Cuban American soldier recognized

the tune, and what else was there to do than
to lay down the rifle, remove the backpack,
and get up and dance, right there behind

the sandbags and barbed wire, and the other
soldiers looked up in disbelief, their own music
lost to them now, as if all had been taken

from them, but his rhythm rose and the Cuban
soldiers danced on both sides, not knowing
that each had come from the same hard place.

The Cuban in Vietnam

he sits in the dark of trees, hunched,
his legs numb like his eyes, the rain
pelting his poncho, and he thinks

of crickets, a praying mantis, caterpillars
that will only turn to dust, his father
back home telling him not to enlist,

that this business of duty and patriotism
was the language of the lost, not good
Cuban boys like him, boys who loved

their mothers, anything so he wouldn't
go, but he is here now in the stillness
of his life, somewhere nearby a frog

calls out, like the ones in Miami used to,
toads that leapt at him when he mowed
the grass, these creatures well-acquainted

with the night, and the rain doesn't let
up, and he remembers the downpours
of his childhood, how his grandmother walks

through the emptiness of rooms,
calls out she's made a *colada,* for everyone
to come have a sip. "It is good

for you," she tells him, her yellow frayed
bedroom slippers soft-scratching tiles,
and he closes his eyes now, listens to rain,

how the sounds of things falling settles
his heart, his mind, he opens his eyes
long enough to see an opening in the sky,

clouds mouthing a huge O, and the stars
wink finally, tomorrow he moves on,
his thoughts like dead insects on the dirt

where he sat and pondered what the hell
he was doing here in Vietnam,
so close to the end.

Vertical or How Halved Gourds Glazed with Rain Water Reflect Atomic Clouds

It's one of those blistering desert days,
not a cloud in the sky other than the one
mushrooming behind you. You stand

in uniform, arms akimbo, a smile
on your face like you wish it were always
this safe to stand in the middle of a desert

somewhere and pretend what rises behind
you isn't deadly. On the horizon a train
or what looks like a caravan or trucks,

wagons on their way to the slaughter house,
two power line poles, their cables like hair
almost invisible, your own shadow cowers

beside your dusty, black boots, a wind
sweeps down from snow-capped mountains,
all along the explosion behind you blooms,

emptying like rain-filled gourds behind you,
it's a blistering hot day and everything wants
to melt, suffocates under the taunted forces

of nature, physics, what we've come to know
thus far, all that can destroy us, make us vanish.
If you listen closely, you can hear the heat zing.

Virgil Suarez has published several books of poems. His most recent, *In the Republic of Longing*, was published by Arizona State University's Bilingual Review Press. The poems printed here are part of an upcoming collection, *Caliban Ponders Chaos*.

H. Palmer Hall

Father Buddha

I walked two klicks down Le Loi Street
to a school yard, a buddha broken in the dust
shattered by a rocket meant for us,
and saw you sitting in his hand
tossing carved pieces of the statue's feet,
not even caring where they'd land.

What mattered was that I did not want to be
where and what I was and saw
that you had also had no choice. Some law,
legal in my case, chance in yours,
with no way out that you or I could see,
gave me a twelve-month, you a lifetime, tour.

We shared a cigarette and watched the smoke
rise into the red dust Pleiku air.
You grinned, blew smoke rings with the flair
that comes only when you're very young.
You told me I was on the Buddha's throat
and should beware the Buddha's tongue.

I remember that once, when the war was calm,
we laughed and played with shattered stone,
and know there can be no way to atone
for all the death, the wounds, the pain.
If you still live, rest quietly in Father Buddha's palm;
if not, sleep peacefully with all the dead.

Russian Roulette

—imitations of fantasy (for the names on the Wall)

They thought a little game might be nice—
An American version of Russian Roulette,
but no bullets in a pistol, only a wire-
mesh barrel, revolving slowly, filled
with ping-pong balls, tumbling, rolling,
every 30 seconds another ball falls out,
birthdates professionally printed, falling
into numbered slots.
Like the Texas
lottery, only you win, you lose, and the only
thing you bet's your life. That's how
the game works. Only, they forgot
the props. The big-bosomed woman
in the red, white and blue bikini. She
was supposed to smile for the cameras,
read out the numbers could she count
that high. That high: 1,2,3, . . .120
should have been okay. 120, you don't
have to go, can have a party , celebrate,
drink beer, smoke grass, tell the government
to blow it out its ass, moon them all.

And they forgot to have a winner there,
like NBA draft day, lined up to grin
and walk up on the stage. A real
killing for #1: all-expense-paid vacation
to the mysterious East, exotic women,
big game hunting. They could have plastered
that on the walls, found a way to make
the day appeal to everyone, perhaps even
the players.

But it was a government
party: no props, no bimbos, just
a turning barrel, wire mesh, a voice
(perhaps Georgie Jessel's?) calling
numbers, one by one, winners and
losers.

The Sentinel Trees

Morning, bright sun and warmth, the beginning of a new century
But "dying" seems the one right word. We sit in the back yard,
Tall loblolly pines looking on, whispering to each other
As the wind picks up and the so long dead come back to visit.

Earlier at the first hint of approaching sunlight, I
Ventured out beneath the trees, pushed
Back the thick undergrowth that separates the lawn from
All that wonderment of persimmon, palmetto, mustang grapes

And ventured down to a perfect lake of green algae,
Cypress knees, water tupelos, a small overhang just
A few feet above the swirls of green, below tall
Cypress trees standing alone, guarding snakes

And armadillos, lamenting, perhaps, their own dead,
At the base of the forest slope, and wetting their roots
In the shallow water leading to the slow moving river.
And there, I mourned my dead from an old war

Left over from a time when I was young. I see
Their names on the black gash on a tourist mall,
See their faces in the stagnant, teeming with life,
Water that sits quietly beside tall trees. Jesus God,

Watch over them, I pray, before turning back
To Adirondack chairs to talk of other days, people I do
Not know but who make up the generations of my life.
My aunt, whose husband died just three weeks ago

Today, joins us, fresh tears added to the old. "When
A man and a woman have been married 54 years,"
She says, "God should let them go out together
Instead of leaving one behind to weep."

A long century, adding up to you and me,
To tall trees that speak of us and all who went
Before, to still waters with green molds washing
the base of everything we can see.

H. Palmer Hall's most recent book is *Deep Thicket & Still Waters*. His recent poems have appeared in *Best Texas Writing 2, Ascent, Concho River Review*, and *Rattle*. "Father Buddha" was originally published in *The Practice of Peace* (Sherman Asher Publishing, 1998).

Elizabeth D. Samet

Grant in Mexico

for Tony Hartle

To educated Henry Adams
he was proof
of devolution,
to Melville a cigar,
smoking always and alone,
on a ridge
in Tennessee.
But how visible
four years ago
to the eyes of that coyote—
coyote poised,
so Buber tells us,
between the spirit's venture
and vegetable security—
coyote pushing further south,
too far from the Catskills,
unhappy in the Bronx, arriving
on the Heights between
the Doric columns
of a shabby mausoleum cicatrized
by garbage trucks
and spray paint fusillades?

Unquiet,
in that tomb
as he had been
in Mexico,
the war of politics

he so mistrusted.
By then, of course,
Point Pleasant
had receded,
West Point too,
where,
unapologetic
and unbidden,
he read novels—
all of Marryat and Cooper,
excelled in nothing
save for math
and horsemanship,
indulged the playful
premonition he would,
one day,
be a general.

In Mexico
he studied generals:
Scott with saber, aiguillettes,
Taylor nonchalant,
seated sideways
on his horse.

At Palo Alto
he watched a cannon ball
tear off Page's jaw.
At Monterrey he crouched—
his horse on loan
to a dead man—
in a field of cane beneath
the Black Fort's batteries;
and two days later,
September 23rd,
(almost to the plaza,
but low on ammunition)
he volunteered
to ride unfriendly streets

(the horse his shield)
one boot hooked
around the cantle,
as he said,
one arm
about the neck,
exposed.

Later,
with a troop of voltigeurs,
he would tote the pieces
of a mountain howitzer
along San Cosme road;
still dripping from the ditch
that lay between
them and the church,
he would knock
hard upon the door,
persuade the priest
of what he ought to do
in Spanish
(broken Spanish),
till shells dropped from the belfry.

Veracruz,
Churubusco,
Cerro Gordo and Chapultepec.
Allied with those who
would oppose him:
with Pemberton and Lee,
with Buckner,
most uneasy
most steadfast,
his banker and his
friend who, in the end,
would come again
to Mount McGregor.
On furlough in the spring
of '48-that surreal

climbing party
of incipient
Confederates,
up volcanic Popocatépetl,
through the caves
of Cuernavaca.
Grant adding
even then (as he wrote)
to his book and to his coffin.

Elizabeth D. Samet is an Assistant Professor of English at West Point. She has recent work appearing in the *Connecticut Review* and *English Literary History*.

Mario Petrucci

Negatives
(Photographic Archive, Imperial War Museum)

You'd think an unnamed General, on glass,
safe? But some Private washed him improperly
in the Somme, so he just keeps on developing.
His forehead, bluffed with craters.

Gelatin's no better. Too warm, too moist,
and there's a precise species of mould ready
to bombard its plane. Vegetation's lowest order
reclaims these trenches.

Even envelopes rebel. Acid leaches
from each pore, syringes out its silver
to spatter the illusion or roll time's gas.
The stumbling, enveloped again.

Sudden heat is fatal. Wipes each
slate clean, each little foursquare pane.
Images peel. Their quantum flakes detach—
a miniature snowstorm in black.

So it's all kept cool. Under control.
In the darkroom's Martian light another face
gets half-way saved. The General's two
pressed dimensions, dying to explode.

Winner of the Bridport Prize

Soldier, Soldier

We, no common ground?

Once, we strolled brine in brine
over silt and sediment. Entwined

our tails of incandescent blue
between cackling clouds. Pressed

as one we were, in time's book:
poppies of phosphorus, iron, zinc.

I, the boxfish kissing your coral.
You, the olive branch bearing

my ancestor. Friend, everything came
together to make us upright, warm.
Hold firm—soil looking on soil.
We will never happen again. Brother

of the same sun, how on earth withhold
an embrace? Or guide the bayonet home?

This headlong dustwardness is flesh
blind to itself, our dissolving

the forced hand of love.

Trench

Sniper, Sniper, in your tree—
has your eye closed in on me?
Did your sights hot-cross my head
before you chose young Phil instead?
If looks could kill, would I be dead?

Sniper, Sniper, the one you get
doesn't hear your rifle crack.
They're saying here that you've the knack.
They're telling me I've lost a bet—
they say I'm dead. I just don't know it yet.

Written for the proposed IWM Residency. *Poetry Hunt.*

D-Day Ferry

They served, sailed, smoked. Stood. Sank. Waited, half-bent
under the ceiling shrapnel made, head-height.
Now, so short of breath, is it waste of breath
to remind? Few, they advance, denying time
to cross slicker channels, recall lost friends.
Stuck with the sweet stench of taken chances
they join, hand on shoulder, that queue of men
time trails far behind. Fumbling with glasses
they home to a corner of a beached field
echeloned with foreign stone. One by one
they disembark—their war as far removed
as ours—and will not tax our memory long,
for our century will be tongueless, stone—
deaf, disarmed, once the last of them is gone.

Broadcast on BBC2 TV

Mario Petrucci has nearly 400 poems in print internationally, collected in *Shrapnel and Sheets*, *Lepidoptera*, and *Bosco*. He is poet-in-residence at London's Imperial War Museum.

Lee Passarella

—from *Swallowed up in Victory*

Petersburg
August 1, 1864

All quiet, the air a black miasma, the stench
a thing you lug around with you, like the corpse
they'd strap to the villain's chest in Bible days. . . .

This morning, both sides called a truce so the dead
could be removed. Drew burial duty, worked
among a bunch of Yanks as thunderstruck
as I. Dear God, to think that man could come
to so reduced a state as those dead beasts
we carried off, black with putrefaction,
blown with noxious gas, like the gullet of a frog
or bladder of a fish! There's no humanity
about those noisome things. I wept to see
such degradation—many did.
I've been
in battles now one crueler than another,
but the one on Saturday was desperate
beyond all measure. Bayonets, clubbed muskets,
fire at range so close you saw the blood
and brains fly, saw the man you shot go down.

I'd been on picket duty half the night
and was asleep, down in my rabbit hutch.
I started bolt upright; the ground was shaking
like a railway train or herd of cattle

thundering overhead. I thought these jaws
of mine (that generally have so little to grind on)
'd break! I ran "upstairs" in time to have
a hail of mud and lumber fall on me.
"G_____n it!" someone yelled across the way.
I found out later it was Reds Mabry,
who's my old pard—somebody's severed leg
had brushed right past his shoulder, raining daubs
of blood on him as it went by! Awful
that was, but we saw worse thereafter—God!
much worse. . . .
The Yankees followed up the blast
with pounding salvos—every howitzer,
Napoleon, and ordnance piece they owned
was trained on us. Most fled toward the rear.
Old Bushrod was so far behind the lines,
at breakfast like a man of leisure, that he didn't
know till after sunup what had happened
hereabouts.
It slowly dawned on us
the Yanks would soon be spilling through that hole
their bomb had blown. We tried to form up ranks
with fumbling, cussing inefficiency.
But Colonel Fitz was thinking on his feet, he got
what boys were left assembled fairly quick.
We ran to what had been the salient, now
a scene of devastation beyond belief.
The slabs of still-warm flesh that lay about,
together with the shards of every sort of gear,
from coats and hats and haversacks to cannons!
God, if ever I inclined toward
belief in the Good Book's Lake of Fire, why, here
was what it must, in small, look like!
We joined
with little Bill Mahone's boys, fought our way
back up to the crater's edge. When we got there,
we ran smack into colored troops! Some whites
went wild, they clubbed and bayoneted niggers
left and right, and even ones who hoped

to surrender. "Kill the niggers! Spare the whites,
and kill the niggers!" God in heaven, I hear
them shouting, still! I couldn't help but think
of Daddy's blacks at home, like Ed and Boss,
that I grew up with. They're men certainly
as any backwoods Alabamian,
no matter what their color! Jesus, how
could anyone treat men like that. . . ?
We fought
around that crater till the Yankees called
it quits, till maybe 12 or 1 o'clock.
We found out later on that half our men
were hurt or killed before the battle had
begun. Sergeant Blankenship was killed,
and so were Metts and Whiting. Reds was wounded—
arm ripped up a bit—though he'll be fine.
But General Elliott is hurt so bad,
he'll soon see home again—his Heavenly,
if not the other. God be with him, then! . . .
The 18th Regiment's done for, about—
most blown to pieces when the fort went up.

For once, the Reverend Burket's nearly speechless.
Saw him on the killing ground, as white and haggard
as a hungry prophet in retreat. Wednesday last,
he preached at weekly meeting and took his text
from Matthew 24. I couldn't help
but think there was significance in such
a choice. For when I saw that crater filled
with its ghostly waste, its warring specters lost
in smoke and wrack, I thought about those times—
in Jesus' words—when two will be in the field,
one taken, the other left behind.
Old friend,
you know I may make light of parsons and their truck,
but God's Word speaks aloud to me at times
like these. Perhaps this *is* a vision of the end,
these works and trenches stretching far as the eye
can see, the endless browns and grays of mire

and hewn-down trees. The world we knew before
might just as well be sunk beneath this present
hell, and in the wings, new earth and heaven awaiting
birth, as in the Word. Yet God appears so far
away. . . .
A private in our mess inherited
a jug from some poor soul who won't require
its services again this side of Glory—
shared it with us all. It went down well today,
you can believe. The pity is, we couldn't
requisition half a dozen more!

Virgil J. Cabell
Corporal, 17th South Carolina

At Petersburg
October 4, 1864

Lieber Martin:

Grusse aus Virginien! I am well
and hope that you are too. I know you're safe,
at least, 400 miles behind the lines,
there in your Papa's offices. But were
the war to ever come as far as Broadway,
we can count on you, I'm sure!
There's not
much time for correspondence, you can guess.
This is the first chance that I've had to write,
so I will use it to advantage—make you squirm
with envy.
On the 30th last, I finally "saw
the elephant," which is to say I fought
in my first battle. I can tell you it is
nothing like the books I've read, where heroes
have the luxury of time and thinking space
to plan great acts of valor. I could only
concentrate on these two things: my sergeant,

and my own beloved arse! (which I'll explain
if you read on a space). Of course in war,
you wait around for things to happen, meaning
you've more time to fret. So when the order came
to move, my knees were limp as potted jelly.
There is blessed little question of heroics
with your limbs all trapped in aspic!
Anyhow,
that day, l e i s u r e l y, locked arm to arm,
we moved across a space of half a mile
toward these Rebel breastworks near a farm.
And all we ever heard was "Steady, steady!"
(had to get in range before we fired)
while every moment shells were crashing here
and there. One landed in a tree above
our heads. Big shreds of bark and limbs fell down.
I looked with tender longing at the little hillocks
that we passed, but it was "Steady!" still.
And then a shell hit on my right, and two
men fell. I couldn't help but look at them:
One's arm was ripped off near the shoulder. There
he lay, just like a tailor's dummy someone's
tossed in a heap. His face all gashed and bloody,
a flap of skin pulled back like he' d been scalped.
You know, the boys who'd been through this before
had told me, *keep eyes forward, don't take in
the sights,* but who remembers good advice
with grapeshot overhead? *Vor Gott*, I thought
I'd shit myself! (The veterans told me later
that if I had, I needn't be ashamed.
They'd had their britches full a time or two
themselves!)
I did a quick about face. Well,
the next thing I knew, Sgt. Cornwell had
my shoulder in a grip as mighty as a stevedore's.
He shouted, "Damn you, boy, you'll not turn tail
while *I'm* in charge of you!" and after that,
I toed the mark. *Verflucht!* that rotten bastard
scares me more than Rebel howitzers!

* * *

Their muskets fired a volley, then once more.
A ball whizzed by my ear; I felt one graze
my coat sleeve. Sidelong glances told me men
were being hit and falling down the line,
but I was going nowhere if not forward!

The order came to fire. That volley would
have deafened you! I'd never heard its like
before. It was enlivening, I warrant!
We begun to shout and went at double-quick
(a kind of run) across those last few rods,
and then we started in to storm the works.
Ach, what a sight! the flags a-flapping, while
that big blue line of ours descended on
the Johnnies like a floodtide threatening
to swallow up a beach!
We climbed the works;
I ran so fast, I knocked a Rebel down
with just the muzzle and flat of my bayonet,
not even trying to—but he stayed down!
When he came to, he learned he'd soon enjoy
the good sea air Fort Delaware affords!
The others broke and ran. What do you know?
My very first encounter, and a victory!
So now that *I'm* at the front, we'll make short work
of this ragtag Confederacy!
We seized
a gun (we just recaptured it was all,
for it was really ours but had been won
in earlier fighting) and some battle flags.
You're wrong if you think flags are only bits
of colored cloth, since color sergeants die
in droves to have the honor of toting them.
That's not my cup of tea, especially
the dying part, of course!

Well, here I'll say
aufwiedersehen. Please remember me
to all the boys (and girls!) back home. Don't drink
too much, stay well, and make a pot of money!
Dein freund,

August Kalkbrenner
Private, 146th New York

Petersburg
November 12, 1864

It's been a while since I have penned my thoughts,
a hazard almost unavoidable
in this particular vale of tears. The 5th,
that schoolmarm Bushrod (maybe Anderson)*
cooked up a plan to take the trench across
from us, at moonset—2 o'clock or so.
It was a good idea, if the Yanks had only
cooperated, which they did to some extent.
We took their pickets down without a fight,
though there was just enough commotion
that other Yanks were roused. But unprepared
for us, they fell in droves.
We cleared the front-line
trench and started to advance, but then the Bluecoats
came from everywhere. We scrapped with them
like banty roosters—even overmanned
as much as two to one. Usually,
I'd be the first to call it quits, but now
so many men were hurt, I saw that someone
had to cover the retreat. I held the Yankees
off with bayonet and musket butt
until our boys had cleared the trench. That's when
I caught a minie ball above the breast,
the fleshy part (so nothing vital was involved).
I didn't even know how bad it was
until I'd clambered back into our lines

and saw my blouse was sopping wet with blood.
I might have died right there, but Longwood clapped
his palm across the wound and held it till
he'd hauled me back to hospital.
That shot
had gone clean through, the hole was oozing like a spring.
So once he'd started in to work on me,
the sawbones knew he had as hard a row
to hoe as he had seen in quite a while.
His nerves were frazzled—as with all the docs
you see these days—from overwork. He cursed
and sweated like a teamster, seemed surprised.
"G_____n!" he swore. "I'm going to lose this man."
"The hell you will! I'll stick to you like plaster."
Then he smiled and said, "I'm sorry, soldier.
Guess you doubt my skill right now." I thought,
You're all I have, man. You will have *to do.*

That's all that I remember, but he must
have kept at me like Jacob with the angel, holding on
till he'd been blessed. I know that's how he felt,
for later, when he came to see me at the hospital,
he had this strange, proprietary air,
as if he had a lien up on my life.
In fact, I think you'd have to say he does! . . .

Virgil J. Cabell, Corporal
17th South Carolina

[*Major General Bushrod R. Johnson, Division Commander
Lieutenant General Richard P. Anderson, Corps Commander
IV Corps Army of Northern Virginia]

Petersburg
January 31, 1865

Dear Aunt Julie:

The last that I received from you was yours
of 28 December. Sad to hear
of Albert's passing. He was always kind
to me when we were small and shall be missed.
Of course my deep regrets to Hannah and the girls. . . .

I write with what we hope is great good news.
Today, a peace commission that includes
Vice President Stephens was permitted through
the lines. They passed near where that Yankee mine
went off, then sped for City Point. The town
turned out in all the finery it could muster
after four long years of want to wish
them godspeed, wizened Mr. Stephens waving
his old-fashioned beaver hat to us
from the carriage window, the while our ladies waved
their gloves and hankies with frantic gaiety.
The few small children that remain in town
ran following after, in their dust. A band struck up
from over in the camps, the musicians playing thinly,
as starved musicians might, the Bonnie Blue Flag,
My Maryland, and other jaunty airs
that, till quite lately sounded all too hollow.
It recalled the happier, early days—
Balls Bluff, Manassas, Fredericksburg—when we'd
good cause to cheer.
We've heard of overtures,
initiatives, before that came to naught,
but I will cling to this slim hope since hope's
as rare as hens, let 'lone those mythic hen's
teeth of the proverb!
Jim came home on leave
last week and looks to have aged a year, poor soul!

He's grieved to see the army starved, in rags,
as it is now. At hospital, I see
young men, grown old and helpless, die in droves
of children's ails—of colds and mumps and measles.
If once they get a cut upon their hands,
their arms become infected, gangrenous,
then phagadenic (or necrotic or whatever doctors
call it). Death ensues within a week,
perhaps, of the time that they fall sick, and no
recourse to medicine can save them. Though
of course, there *is* no medicine.
I think
that God inures us to our griefs, or we'd all die
of broken hearts. But as it is, I'm deadened
so to hurt. I feel a callous brute
at times. Well, better that than hope beyond
all compass. May God grant us peace. If not,
at least a saving cynicism—which
you well might think I have enough of now!

I'll write as I learn more. Be well and safe.

Your favorite niece,

Amelia Willis Dettmold

Petersburg
April 3, 1865

Dear Aunt Julie:

Though I can't say how I shall *ever* post
this letter, I will write it just the same.
So much to tell—my Lord, so many sorrows!
Yesterday, the army all withdrew
from Petersburg and Richmond. As they left,
they fired the warehouses in town—munitions
and tobacco. All last night it seemed the town

would surely be consumed. But since, they've put
the fire out, and it is deadly quiet,
something we've not known in months. I've heard
that Grant and that—*orangutan* in tailcoat,
Father Abr'ham, haunted our poor city
with their devilish presences, though they're now gone.
I meant to walk defiantly downtown,
to see our base tormentors, but could not
find strength to do so. Jane and I've not left
the house in days.
Dear Aunt, I *had* believed
and hoped my Jim was with the army, fleeing west.
But just before the troops withdrew, a boy
came to the house to say he's heard that Jim
was captured at Stedman! "God, it couldn't be,"
I said. "Jim is an engineer. How could
they ever capture him in such an action?
We attacked the Yanks, not otherwise!"
The boy assured me what he said was true,
that Jim had asked to be assigned to the squad
of sappers who went first to clear the way
before the assault was made. And when I asked,
incredulously, why he'd do a thing
so rash, the boy replied he guessed because
Jim felt that's where he'd do the greatest good!
My God, the man has always thought the South
would fall if not for his noble sacrifice!
And now, if what the boy has said is true,
he's given all—or nearly so—for what?
The Confederacy's in shards, those wraiths who follow
Lee have every bit as little hope
of freedom as Actaeon running from his hounds. My poor,
dear gallant fool! Aunt Julie, pray for me!
You know I love that d____d fool man of mine
and crave his safe return—and nothing more!

Your loving niece,

Amelia Willis Dettmold

Lee Passarella is the Literary Editor of *Atlanta Review*. His poetry has appeared in *The Formalist, The Journal of the American Medical Association, Chelsea, The Sun, Cream City Review, Blueline, Antietam Review*, and *Black Dirt*. The poems printed here are from a collection about the siege of Petersburg, entitled, *Swallowed up in Victory*.

Marija Stosic

I Won't Say The Lord's Prayer
(to God's ass painted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel)

Oh, you All Mighty You,
I was sixteen when I saw your ass for the first time.
I went to Rome and visited your holy state
And in the Sistine Chapel me and a few friends
Were staring endlessly at the wonders of the ceiling.
Wow, everyone exclaimed.
Fat, said I. Goes along with the theory that
You created our Universe and the stars impossible to reach
And then went for a beer, a biiig lager,
And became too fat to move even your little finger,
I mean if you wanted to, and you don't since there are still
So many fun things to do, like watching
The celestial game of football between the wonderful team
Of Alfa Centauri and the pathetic one of Jupiter's Moons.

Oh, you All Mighty You,
Since then I keep seeing your chubby ass everywhere.
Like that game of earth football, remember, World Cup '98,
When Batty missed the penalty and the wrong team won.
Or, the war in Bosnia, for example, when this friend of my
Mother's (Miriana is the name) wrote to us how she was 38 kg and
Her son was hiding for months in the attic of the friend Muslim's
House, and the snipers with their icy eyes everywhere.

Oh, you All Mighty You,
I blame you for not ordering a smaller beer,
So you could come and intervene in your powerful maleness.
You could fuck a few girls, make a few Jesuses,

Write a few Bibles just for spite. Blame a few Eves for
A few expulsions from fewer paradises on Earth.
Or you could create more meek, ribless Adams, to love
And obey your prick forever. And happily ever after,
Amen.

Oh, you impotent, huge ass of a god,
That lager better be good, man. For
When I see you I will make you a trial,
A little show for the earthly asses to laugh.
I will have an endless roll of toilet paper in my hands,
And the words on it will be:
I blame you.
Now I don't blame you for Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo,
I don't blame you for the creation of the atom bomb,
Or for cancer that came along.
I blame you for not moving your little finger,
Not moving your little heart to stop it all and cry
I AM THE COSMIC JUSTICE!
I blame you for not coming down, not once,
I blame you for the eighteen year olds
On the battlefields, their mouths
Wide open. I blame you
For my mom's friend in Sarajevo who lives
But does not sleep at night,
I blame you for Sarajevo. For Vukovar.
I blame you for Pristina. For my friend who survived the war
And whose mom died after everything was over,
I blame you for Murphy's law.
I blame you for my mom who cannot eat and whose heart is getting
Weaker, day by day by night.
For my uncle who left his family and went
To live in a monastery, blinded by your lies.
I blame you for my father who watched his brother die
Slowly, an invalid, for years. I blame you
For Slobodan Milosevic, who still lives,
I blame you for his peaceful dreams.
I blame you for Divna's cancer, I blame you
For John Lennon. For Milan Mladenovic

Who died aged 36 and the resistance died with him.
I blame you for March, April, May,
For the year 1999, I blame you for the airplanes
That swallowed the sky,
That you didn't stop. I blame you for the hands
Of my people, the hands that slaughtered,
That you didn't stop. I blame you for the tears of my friends
Who didn't know whether their friends, and moms and dads
Will live through the day, day by day by night.
And what about my tears?
I blame you for watching. I blame you for
Laughing your sick ass off, I blame you for the possibility,
The vague possibility that you exist. And if you do,
I will be your Lucifer. And I will not wait for you
To make me fall. I will deny you happily, freely,
Hoping that someday I will be able to kill
The eternity that you are. And then it will make sense.
Everything will make sense. For the first time.

In a Cafe Called Garden

In a cafe called Garden all made of wood
Central Belgrade we skipped classes,
Hot chocolate in blind winters
(But this belongs to a different story).
Having coffee there with my best friend
I haven't seen her since the times when
The sky was no longer a cage for the birds but
The huge airport. She looks a bit Chinese,
but for her cheeks red, the contrast in pale evenings.
I was telling her how my life sucked and how I lost
The people I loved, walking the forbidden
Alleys, dark, how I shivered on the sight of certain
Faces. Her eyes were tiny, still are, smiling
To cute waiters, flirting everywhere
We would go to have coffee, or hot chocolate, anyway.
And this evening, this particular moment in time

Her eyes were smiling again, and she was listening to me,
An almost lost friend, on the other side of the Borderlands.
She told me she loved her boyfriend very much, and her studies were
Going well, she said, and that she had cancer.
Nothing important, she said, nothing, just waiting
For it to eat her up and saying good-byes to the faces
That made her shiver once, and lying in her bed at night
Watching the sky babies of another
Life (cancer of the ovary, lesson one),
This woman with the feet of a child, this child that I will
Forget once, when I find my place away from the Borderlands.
She writes e-mails from time to time, short and shiny,
She says how much she loves her boyfriend, her studies
Are going well. She still smells of Angel, still washes her hair with
Pantene Pro-V, wears jeans size 26 (tiny, tiny), and has conversations
With the mother fucker from above. No good-byes, she mentions
No good-byes, just says I should remember how much she cared.
Once I will write a story, just for her. She will live forever,
The twenty-year old Chinese-like beauty, in a tropic paradise,
Fifteen children and the best man of that world beside her.
When she is bored, she will construct avant-garde buildings,
Lying on the blue beach, the man
Kissing her belly button. And no good-byes, she will
Have to say no good-byes
Anymore.

Marija Stosic was born in Majdanpek in eastern Serbia in 1979 and raised in Belgrade. She was awarded the Borislav Pekic Prize for her poetry in 1995; she remains the youngest recipient in the history of this award. She is especially interested in poetry's cathartic potential to heal, to foment political change, and to plumb "an individual guilt which lies in the act of being silent for years." She is currently a fourth-year student at the American University in Bulgaria.

Gary Mills

Drink with the Ball Turret Gunner

Wracked, short and thin, outcast of no corporate wealth,
I drink with the ball turret gunner. What else but to his health?
He leans confidently on the counter: Coffin for beer-splintered glass.
I drink to you, ball turret gunner. What else but to the last?

Consuming dram air and elixirs he swiftly swivels to-and-fro.
I wait with the ball turret gunner, scanning silently we achingly know,
engaged in spent-link conversation, a skill triggered by fright.
I weep with the ball turret gunner, covenant anointing our flight.

Time for the call, turret gunner, reluctance chemically in check.
Listen by the numbers, turret gunner: Static, muffles, regret.
To sup this evil communion, a map of life fit for none,
I've seen my gunner possum, his name and fate well wrung.

Ascension! Angelic departure, hellishly divine last scene.
Pray all turret gunners: comfort for you from this planet's poison dreams.
I drink to the ball turret gunner: DRINK Drink drink till i forget.

Gary Mills is Assistant Professor of English at the United States Air Force Academy. He was design director for *Andre Dubus: Tributes* (Xavier Review Press, 2001).

Jeffrey C. Alfier

The Kursk: A Valediction

Amusing some dark mistress of silence,
one poet sang the mirth of shipwrecks. But
witnessing the irreducible lives
sink beneath the wake of the ship of State,
your orison ends, 'I am writing blind' . . .

Jeffrey C. Alfier is a U.S. Air Force officer serving in Arizona. He holds an MA in Humanities from California State University. His work has been published in several journals including *Military Review, CrossConnect, Pif Magazine*, and *Southern Cross Review*.

Bill Wallisch

In the Belly of the Whale

Like Joseph Campbell, I'm hooked on the tales of those who are called to duty, bravely face danger, and win. Campbell devoted a lifetime linking the path of the classic heroic journey to the legends and folklore of the many cultures he studied. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he said, "The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale." To be sure, our heroes are our role models and mentors.

Even though Campbell deals with war, he didn't have a lot to say about the campaigns of the last hundred years or so. World War I, for example, attracted his attention only briefly before he returned his focus to the battles of Greek mythology, the Old Testament, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and the Koran.

For me the stories of modern battles and heroes began with my father's firsthand tales of slugging his way through five fronts in World War I. From my uncles, cousins, and neighborhood guys in Pittsburgh, I got stories about their adventures in Europe and the Pacific in World War II. And when I got my Air Force commission, I walked into a place of living legends where everywhere there was a story just waiting to be heard—all around me, in living color.

These tales also followed the key steps of the archetypal heroic journey: The Departure, where the hero is called to adventure and ultimately finds himself in the belly of the whale; The Initiation, where one endures the road of trials to achieve the goal of the quest; and, finally, The Return to the freedom to live, transported home on the wings of magic flight. Along the way guides, helpers, and personal atone-

ment save the day—just in the nick of time.

Sometimes the stories were spontaneous, maybe at midnight chow or on a long flight somewhere over the Pacific. Show a little interest and you were treated to something special. Often they were a part of a training curriculum or a speech at a service school. No matter for me, I can listen any time, anywhere.

At my first squadron, Colonel Joe Routzong told us brown bars about earning his forty-mission crush on gut-wrenching bombing missions over Berlin. Likewise, Major Tom Brown would relive flying through flak and swarms of Fokkers while we rolled the dice for beers at happy hour. Senior Master Sergeant Serdono recounted the missions he flew with LeMay. I'd seen it at the old Temple Theatre, with Jimmy Stewart, Van Johnson, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracey, and the Duke. But now we were talking with the real thing. Stories, stories, stories.

As the years went by, the personalities and the legends got even bigger. I actually got to sit with General Curtis LeMay as he told me about tracking Arthur Godfrey down where he was hunting in the Texas hill country. Like the guides and protective figures in mythology, Godfrey agreed over a fifth of Jack Daniels to plug LeMay's quest on the radio waves to give the general the magical help he needed to move Congress for better pay for the troops and support for SAC. From Jimmy Doolittle I got a vivid personal glimpse of what it was like to be in the belly of the whale during those legendary 30 seconds over Tokyo. With hands describing the path of his F-4 Phantom, Vietnam Ace Steve Ritchie told me how he was almost shot down himself had it not been for a quick-witted radar officer who pointed him to his fourth and fifth kills by warning, "Steve, they're two miles north of you!" Such it is for the hero to travel the road of trials, fight in the whale's belly, be rescued by guides, and reach victory on magic wings.

My father told me what it was like to look up from the trenches to see Americans and Germans dueling each other high above No Man's Land on graceful wings. Imagine how exciting it was to sit in the Air Force Academy Superintendent's office late one afternoon and listen to a group of American Overseas Fliers recount their skirmishes. They were my father's war, his generation, and may have even flown above the Keystone Division he loved and spoke of all his life.

Some of these old fighter pilots leaned on canes. But with eyes as bright as they were in 1917, they told of being called to duty and crossing the first threshold of the quest as student pilots in France.

They spoke of their initiation into air combat. These were green aviators, fresh from the smoky cities of the East or from the farms of places like Nebraska and Kansas, thrown up against experienced German pilots with many kills painted on their cloth-covered airframes. And like the heroes of Campbell's favorite legends, one old pilot told us of his own atonement. How it happened in a desperate moment that his American prairie roots inspired him to rely on his farm-boy instincts—to climb high, turn, put the sun at his back, dive at his pursuer, and get his first kill. "I used sun and hunch," he said. "That was the secret."

The great thing about this story telling deal is that admission is free and there's not a bad seat in the house. I finished up my twenty-one year military career by teaching at the Air Force Academy. What a place for stories. If you spent any time there, for example, you were sure to spot a notice in the Fairchild Hall academic building elevators that Robin Olds or Chuck Yeager or somebody like that would be holding forth in one of the lectinars after classes. If anything, the danger for some was "ho-hum, not another ace." Not for me!

Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* brought the stories home for many who hadn't heard them or may not have been listening. Thanks to his book, those who haven't served in uniform got a taste of what us "lifers" experienced almost every day. It also helped to encourage many who had been silent to finally pass on their wondrous adventures and tales of sacrifice to family and friends. You just never know when somebody's going to open up and share a good yarn.

As a matter of fact, it happened to me rather unexpectedly last fall, the day after a wedding in Minneapolis. We were invited to breakfast by the bride's parents and that's how I came to be sitting in a sunny Wayzata kitchen with the two grandfathers: Jim and Gil.

Now when you first see these two guys, you know they have a story to tell. And once the coffee was poured, it didn't take long. Gil says, "You can call me Red. That's what they called me in the Pathfinders." And Jim quickly adds, "I was the only case of frostbite in the Pacific!"

The Pathfinder Force that Flight Officer Gilbert "Red" Darcy flew with in World War II was an elite corps of RCAF crews that marked targets by night in Lancasters that went in solo, without fighter escort. These Pathfinder guys were legendary. To look at Gil, you knew why. His hair wasn't as red or thick as it was when he enlisted in '42, but he and his wife Louann looked as sharp as ever in their matching fire engine red shirts with white blazers.



Flight Officer Gilbert "Red" Darcy, First Row, 4th from Left



Sgt Jim Krantz, First Row, First Left, Kneeling

While Red was flying through "bumblebees and searchlights" in the European Theatre, Army Air Force Sergeant Jim Krantz was on the other side of the world fighting off Japanese Zeros as a gunner from the left side blister of a B-29 Superfortress. "I was in Twentieth Air Force, Twenty-First Bomber Command, Seventy-Third Bomb Wing, Four-Ninety-Seventh Bomb Group, Eight-Sixty-Ninth Squadron," he says. Some details you just never forget.

"I grew up with holes in my pants and then they made me a gentleman," says Red. "I grew up with a rifle in my hands in Tennessee and that's what made me a good gunner," Jim says.

Words like grit, determination, savvy, and hunch came to mind as they talked. "It was shoot and survive," was how Jim described it. "I never questioned a thing," says Red.

Red's 405 Squadron was located at Gransden Lodge on Old North Road, County Bedfordshire, ten miles from Cambridge. The squadron motto was *DUCIMUS*, "We Lead." And his commander was the legendary John E. "Johnny" Fauquier, known as "The King of the Pathfinders." Red still savors the moment when Fauquier, the "old man" finished a squadron mission briefing in his usual brusque way by pointing to Red and saying: "That man there! His hair's on fire!"

When he wasn't piloting his Lancaster into the belly of the whale, Red liked to ride that Old North Road to where the girls were on his trusty Harley. "I couldn't use the light—blackouts, you see—so some of those rides in the pitch black were interesting! You should have seen the time I was bringing back fresh eggs and had a crack up!"

Jim's Eight-Sixty-Ninth Squadron was based on Saipan, part of the legendary Twentieth Air Force. Like Red, he was good at his job. On mission after mission, Jim's B-29 would be part of a 12-plane diamond formation of Superfortresses, slugging their way through heavy fighter resistance to hit Japanese homeland targets like Musashi and Akashi. "We had it made if we just stayed stacked in, our 50 calibers punching away at them." That was Jim's job, sticking out there in that left blister, his deadly Tennessee trigger finger at work.

"We sacrificed armament for bombs, went in alone, and joined up over the target," said Red as Louann beams with pride.

Armament or not, that old B-29 was one big target, especially if it got separated from its formation. Like Red's solo Pathfinder, the Superfortress formations had no fighter escort to protect them. Jim talked about the special dangers gunners faced, how so many had been hit and severely

wounded. "You could be blown right out of your bubble," he said. In fact, on December 24, 1944, a Zero scored a hit on the top blister of Jim's plane and one of his gunner buddies was nearly pulled right out of the airplane had it not been for his seat belt and the quick hands of crewmates.

That happened on Jim's sixth mission and it got him to thinking. "If that hada been me, I'da been gone," he said. "I had a seat belt all right, but if I buckled in I couldn't see forward enough. I needed a good 180 degrees to see better, to get a good shot, and that belt held me back. So, when things got hot, I unbuckled and wasn't ever really fastened in."

So he drew on his Tennessee hunch and decided "to rig up a harness for myself, just in case." On Christmas day of 1944 Jim and a buddy went looking around the squadron for buckles, parachute rings, webbing, and straps that might do the job. He later told *Yank Magazine* the contraption he put together "Was a rig made out of an old chute harness. One part of it went around my waist and then there were two straps that went over my shoulders, crossed in the back, and fastened to the belt again." His buddies were for the most part unimpressed.

Red Darcy had some pretty big odds stacked up against him as well: "We lost 96 Lancasters over Nuremberg alone!" In all, the RCAF Pathfinders flew 50,490 individual sorties against 3,440 targets and lost 3,727 men in the process. Both Red and Jim knew what it was like to face the road of trials in the belly of the whale.

On August 9, 1944, Flight Officer Red Darcy was at the controls of his "lumbering Lancaster, softening up Normandy." Among his crew of eight were Bill Kubiak, rear gunner; Mickey Quail, the "old guy" at 28; Reggie Swartz, bomb aimer; and the flight engineer, a smallish Englishman they called "Gnomie."

Red and his boys usually flew at 20,000 feet, altering course ten to twelve times to avoid the crosshairs of attacking Junkers and the flak the German anti-aircraft guns were throwing at them. But on this day, they were on the deck at 2,000 feet. No matter, with 50 missions already under his belt, Red knew his stuff. "I wasn't fighting a war," he says. " I was doing a highly specific job, doing what I had to do, never letting my crew down."

On January 3, 1945 Jim Krantz boarded a B-29 with a wholesome-looking gal mascot ("American Maid") painted on her fuselage, tail marking A Square Seven, along with his newly created harness. He hoped it would protect him, yet give him the range of movement he needed to

aim and shoot. The target that day was the docks at Nagoya, Japan. Before takeoff, Jim securely attached his new harness to the beam structure of his airplane. The lanky gunner from Tennessee was ready to go on his seventh mission.

With that the listeners gathered around that kitchen table were no longer in Wayzata. We were strapped in the belly of the whale with Red and Jim. The young people who came and went through the kitchen gave us smiles, but didn't stay. They didn't seem to notice the contrails and flak, hear the roar of laboring engines, or smell the smoke swirling around in the kitchen. Grandson Jay did say, "Someday I'm going to the Air Force Academy," as he left the room, his skies of adventure still ahead.

"Boom! Hit on the bomb bay! We're on fire," Red says as he leans forward over the dishes on the table. "Then we're hit on the aileron." Responding to our wha-ja-do-then look, Red says, "I told everybody to bail out"

When the left side blister of A Square Seven was blasted to smithereens somewhere over the Nagoya docks, Sergeant Jim Krantz was blown headfirst from the lukewarm, pressurized atmosphere of his Superfortress to 3.3 psi and freezing temperatures. "I went out fast and my gun sight went with me!" But his homemade harness held! So well, in fact, that it extended full length, dragging Jim alongside the airplane like a rag doll on a string. Now the airplane had two mascots outside: American Maid and Sergeant Jim Krantz.

The one thing that didn't go with Jim was his oxygen mask. "I was knocked unconscious almost immediately and without oxygen they said I should've been dead within 15 seconds." But Jim didn't die and his death-defying odyssey lasted over fifteen minutes. Back inside, his crewmates had their full attention on the bombing run. "Once they got off target they were able to get hold of my .45 pistol holster, pull me in, and give me a shot of morphine." They couldn't believe he was alive.

Once Red Darcy gave the order to bail out, his crew wasted no time following the skipper's advice. The engineers, Red, and the bomb aimer went out the front hatch at 1700 feet. The navigator and wireless operator went out the mid door. Remember Bill Kubiak, the rear gunner? He rotated his hatch and fell out into the waiting night sky, only to be captured on the ground. Everyone else evaded capture. Back at 405 Squadron, returning Lancaster crews reported seeing eight parachutes leave the ship.

"When I hit the ground I took a two-by-four inch piece of my parachute for a souvenir, buried the rest, and started to walk," Red says, as if he were telling you about yesterday's golf outing with his son Randy. "I knew I had to hide from the Germans, so I hid out in a six-foot crevice in some large rocks. My routine was to walk by night and hide in the big rocks by day." Not a scratch on him.

Flying with Jim's group that day in another Superfortress was a flight surgeon. He watched Jim's ordeal from a window and even took a picture. He radioed Saipan that there would be a corpse on board when A Square Seven landed. It took six hours to make it back to home plate.

Jim remained on Saipan until January 9, 1945 when the Army flew him to Hawaii. Once there he became an instant celebrity at the North Section Hospital at Schofield Barracks. Jim was the first frostbite case—ever—in the Pacific.

"Hardly any of the doctors had ever seen frostbite, so they kept coming in my room to see me, all bandaged up to my elbows." says Jim, looking down at his hands. "My ring finger just rotted off and the doctor in charge told me that if I didn't soon get some circulation going, they'd have to amputate." Amputate! Jim Krantz was twenty-two years old.

Red Darcy walked and hid and walked and hid, until "One day I spotted two men with rifles on a hill. All I had was my Smith and Wesson. But then I saw they had British uniforms on and I knew I was on my way home." The two men who beckoned to him were members of the 51st Highland Division from Aberdeen Scotland. Red was safe.

I could only imagine what a celebrity guest he must have been for the Highlanders. They had a little party for him before he left on magic wings. "They contacted the French underground and I got a ride back to England in a small single engine plane." At ten in the morning a little airplane touched down and Red's instructions were to run alongside, hop on board, and hang on for a quick takeoff. Nothing to it.

Jim's trip to Hawaii wasn't the end of his ordeal. But just as things were at a low point, a young doctor from Brooklyn showed up at the hospital looking for one of his friends. "He was just out of medical school, on his way from Philadelphia to report somewhere for duty out in the Pacific," says Krantz with a smile. "And by luck he comes in to see me and my frostbite."

Jim remembers his nurse was Ruth Hayse, "from Mississippi or Louisiana, I think." The young doctor said that even though he didn't know

much about frostbite "this just looks like a bad burn case." Treat it like a burn!

The doctor also remembered a new procedure he'd read about. So they rushed to the library in hopes of finding the journal that described the process. "They decided he might as well give it a try."

With Nurse Ruth Hayse reading from the journal, the medics went to work. "They didn't use any anesthesia, so I could tell them if I got a sensation when they injected 20cc's of this fluid into my shoulders with a needle that looked to be about eight inches long." They told him it would feel like somebody hit his funny bone.

"I did. I felt it. And in about four hours both my hands were nice and warm," says Jim reaching for his wife Mildred's hand. She was his new bride in 1945, waiting for him back in Clarksville, Tennessee. "It was on the radio and someone came to the house to tell her," says Jim. They wrote about it in the *Clarksville Chronicle* and in newspapers most everywhere else. Jim told his story to fellow GIs in *Yank Magazine*. By that time, a lot of gunners were wearing the Krantz harness!

Jim and Mildred have been married for 59 years. They hug each other like it was yesterday.

When Red Darcy got back to England they didn't quite know what to do with him. You just didn't send guys like that back up for more. Not even a Pathfinder. Red didn't really want to call it quits, especially because "I was having so much fun riding that old Harley around."

But, they sent him to HQ in London where they gave him two weeks leave. The best part, says Gil, was when Howard H. Morrison, Wing Commander, stamped the last entry in his logbook: Aircraft shot, on fire, wing off, parachuted to safety. "He stamped it. I saluted. And I walked away a full half inch taller. And I can look anybody in the eye and not flinch."

When he returned to 405 Squadron, they gave him more leave. It turns out that his brother Leycester was a bomb loader in the squadron. Ley had always wanted to go on a mission with his big brother, but Red told him, "We don't want our mother to lose two sons." After his reunion with his brother and squadron mates, Red headed for Scotland, where he ended up catching the Queen Mary for home. Like the classic heroes, Red endured the road of trials and returned from the belly of the whale with the freedom to live as he pleased. To look at him you know he's never flinched.

If you go to the village Great Gransden today you won't find Gil's old squadron, but you can pay a visit to St. Bartholomew's Church. There

visitors can see a beautiful window dedicated by the people of the parish to honor the memory of the 801 airmen of 405 Squadron killed in action. I forgot to ask Gil what became of the Harley. But Mrs. Darcy did get to keep both of her boys.

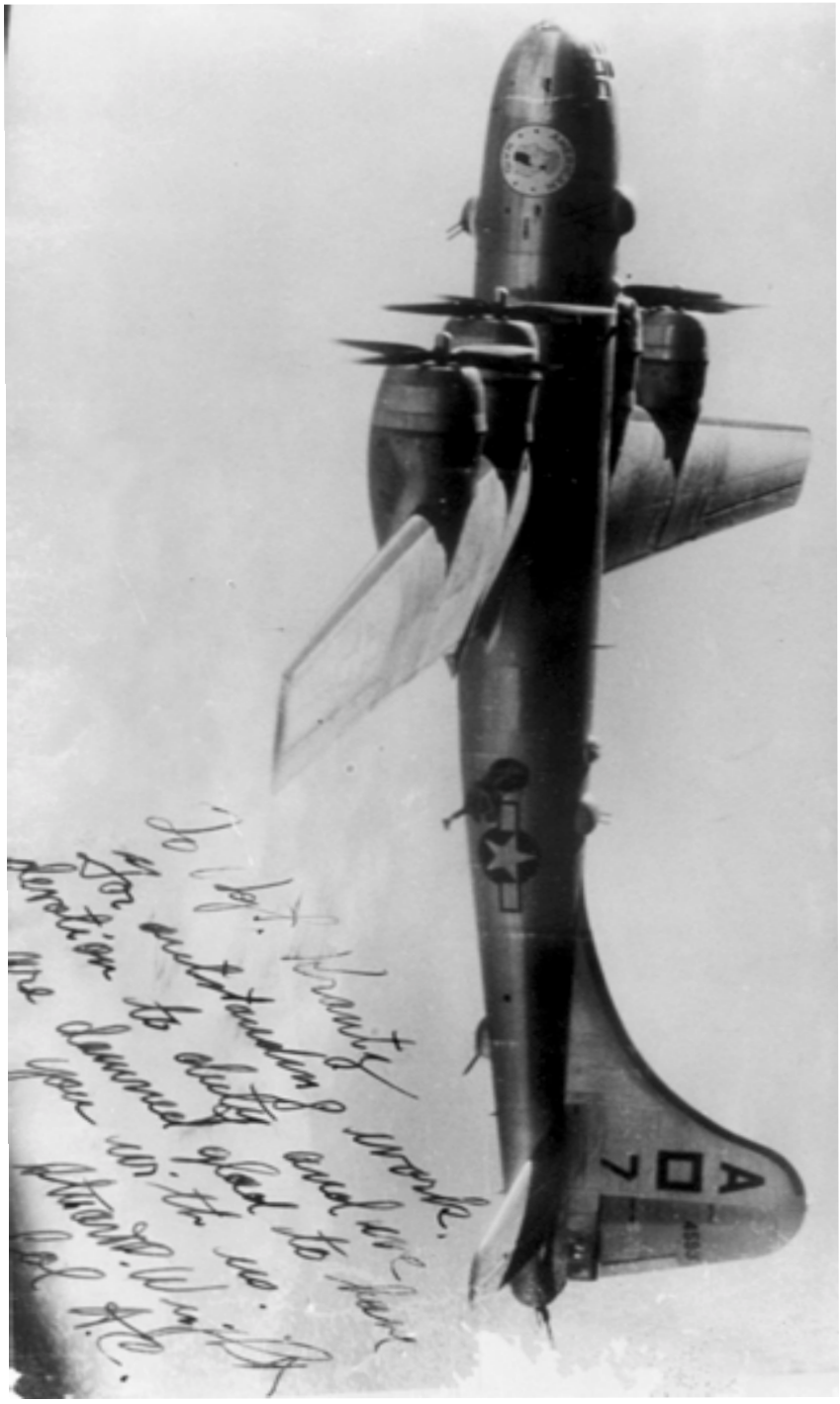
Jim Krantz stands proudly in daughter Cathy's living room and takes from the mantle a framed reproduction of the American Maid logo. And when Jim hands you that photo the flight surgeon took you can see that same American Maid logo painted just to the rear of and below the cockpit. Further back, midway between the wings and the tail, there's Jim being dragged through the freezing cold air. Written in a bold hand, below the airplane, on the right hand corner of the picture are these words***: "To Sgt. Krantz: For outstanding work, devotion to duty and we are damned glad to have you with us. Stewart P. Wright, Col, A.C."***

After the stories were told, the flak and smoke cleared from the kitchen. The sound of the engines faded. Outside, the birds were singing in Wayzata. The young people of the wedding were laughing and loading cars in the driveway. Taking the bet that I wouldn't know the lyrics, Red and I got up and sang some familiar lines together: "To the tables down at Morries, to the place where Louie dwells," and "Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, the long and the short and the tall." And as I stood there, singing along with the old Pathfinder I felt just like Jim's colonel did: Damned glad that Red and Jim were with us. And honored to have heard their stories.

So even though I've hung my own uniform up, the stories go on. There are tales of all kinds, told by the heroes and scallywags who lived them. Some are tall tales that got a little bigger with the years. In fact, there's a saying by the people of Zimbabwe: "Until the lion learns how to talk, the tale will glorify only the hunter." Time and memory do that.

I once sat on the grassy shore of a small lake in Columbia, South Carolina that the writer James Dickey lived on, listening to his stories about flying night fighters in the Pacific. Several of the canoes used in the filming of *Deliverance* were right there, dragged up on shore. My buddy Jim Gaston was there, too, and we both listened intently as Dickey told us good stories about Donald Armstrong, making rings out of coins during downtime in the squadron, and even how actor Burt Reynolds didn't know "a damn thing about handling a bow."

Gaston could relate to Dickey's flying insights more than I because he was a pilot. My Air Force operational specialty was radar intercept officer; I was struck by how Dickey so clearly understood the feel of


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working on the scope when he said, "I always thought a radar man might get a real sense of God-like omnipresence as he watches the radar sweep out the details of the world in glowing green and gold hues." That's exactly how he said it because I wrote it down as soon as I could.

Much later we found out that in fact Dickey was a "radar man," just like me. No wonder he understood the magic of what we called "The Crystal Ball." Truth was, he wasn't a pilot at all. Henry Hart's biography of Dickey talks about the tall tales Jim Dickey told, but I liked the old rascal's style anyway. Pilot or not, he did do his scope work from the back seat of that night fighter. He did serve his country. He did lay his life on the line on every mission he flew. Dickey and I exchanged letters after that visit to Columbia. The ones he wrote me are locked up in my safety deposit box at Air Academy National Bank. He was a good storyteller. They're right next to the letters from my correspondence with cosmic storyteller Gene Roddenberry.

Now there are new generations of young storytellers. My own son, Bill, amazes me with the recounting of his saga in Desert Storm. A tank commander in Second Marines, 2nd Tank Battalion, his colonel called me on the phone to tell me how valiantly Captain Bill conducted himself in battle. His scorecard: 25 fearsome Soviet T-72 tanks destroyed in face-offs with his inferior M60A1at knife-fighting distance. His WWI doughboy grandfather would have been proud.

Joseph Campbell did write about the astronauts and the wonders of their modern-day odysseys. Because I do some training for NASA, I've gotten to sit and listen to these space travelers spin tales of blast offs, zero gravity, and adventures in orbit.

I've been right there in the astronaut training room in Building 4S at the Johnson Space Center as a "flown" astronaut like Steve MacLean tells a new class of astronaut candidates what it's like to "fly on your first mission." Imagine, astronauts Steve Lindsey and Mike Bloomfield were students of mine at the Academy! Not long ago, Mission-to-Mir astronaut Jim Reilly shared this prize piece of high-pressure communication from a mission to Mir with me and Gil Darcy's son Randy: "There we were, two hundred and forty miles about the earth, traveling at 17,500 miles per hour, about ready to join up with Mir, and I had to fix a glitch fast," Jim tells us over breakfast at a Coca Beach pancake house. "So, in the interest of time, Terry Wilcutt, the skipper of space shuttle *Endeavour*, asks me three questions: "Do you have a plan? Is it working? Are you ahead or behind?" Wow. I've collected a whole bunch a great

stories from the astronauts I've known.

In fact, even before my work with NASA a young Jim Lovell told me about orbiting the moon. And before Jim Irwin passed away, he used to sit with me in my Air Force Academy office in Harmon Hall, spinning tales of the spirituality of space and what it was like to walk on the moon and how he drove the first rover along the front of Apennine Mountain on Apollo 15. Believe me, even Joseph Campbell would have given his eyeteeth to hear some of the things astronauts have shared with me.

An astronaut was once asked to make a speech to a group of archaeologists who were on a dig in New Mexico. Their base camp had been set up right at the foot of some rock structures that had ancient petroglyphs carved on them. The speech was to be delivered at night, at the campfire, under the stars. She wanted me to help her think out her speech strategy. As I did, I thought of the significance of that event. Campbell would have undoubtedly marveled at how that speech was so mystically connected to so many campfires over centuries of human storytelling.

Telling tales around the campfire. That's what it all boils down to. We're still doing it. We're still venturing out, slaying dragons, and returning home with the prize. Technology has expanded the territory, making the adventures even more perilous and exciting. Though the telling of the tales is carried to us by strange new voices, the message is always about the classic epic of the human spirit and the mother dust from which it sprang.

Not long ago I got this e-mail from an astronaut orbiting far above me: "Dear Bill, I would like to send you my best wishes and regards from space! It is absolutely gorgeous up here, of course because of our mission and because of the view of our home planet, a blue and white marvel in a black, black universe. But mostly it is so gorgeous because of my crewmates. There is no difference between Earth and orbit: It is the people who make the difference!! With kind regards from LEO, currently Atlantic Ocean, just offshore of Argentina. Gerhard. ***Ceterum censeo exploranda mortalibus astra***."

Ah, the stories they tell.

Lt. Colonel Bill Wallisch retired from the Air Force in 1984. He served as a radar weapons controller, squadron commander, public affairs officer, and tenure associate professor of English at the United States Air Force Academy.

Featured in our next edition

The Art of *Samuel Bak*



Distant Fire, 1998

Thomas Bonner, Jr.

Nurse

"No, Adrien is not home, not at the hospital either. She's in Vietnam." If I say that one more time, I'll scream. She has been gone five months, and my friends in school shake their heads. Why would anyone willingly go there? For God's sake, she's a woman and married. None of my explanations wash, and hers don't get a full sentence before the questioner shakes his head and walks away. I know why she went and I still wonder.

I'm in my second year of Ph.D. coursework in English. Unlike many of my friends, I actually like what I' m doing, but down deep I know it keeps me out of the draft. The major task this semester is working through *Beowulf* in Old English—this week the fight with Brecca. Our study group divides the work into sections of twenty-five lines a week for which each is personally responsible—context, translation, parsing, in other words, the works. Concentration comes hard when her letters arrive only every ten days or so.

Adrien is a surgical nurse in a field hospital near Cam Ranh Bay. Her health is good, but she sounds tired and distracted. Her letters describe the wounded and dying in vivid detail, almost as if she is writing to herself. More and more, I feel that I'm only the keeper of the records of her experience. She begins them in a personal, often intimate way but soon she enters another world, one in which I know I have no part.

Her account of Bryan Joseph is a good example. She had told me how much she missed me and our old studio apartment and her friends on the second floor at Ochsner Hospital. Bryan had an abdominal wound and was barely conscious as he was prepped for surgery to remove shrapnel and tie everything together in an orderly knot of organs and tissue.

The previous surgery was taking longer than expected and she would come by to encourage him and check on bleeding and shock. He began to tell her about his life in Memphis and got as far as his high school prom before he was taken in and put under. He didn't make it, so she wrote his aunt about what a nice fellow he was and that his suffering had been minimal and that he had had great hopes for life at home when all this was done. He had been a jeep driver mostly, and had been simultaneously relieved by rarely being near combat and yet vexed by its distance from his everyday experience. She wrote about the correspondence between him and his aunt, and soon I was nowhere in the letter.

Adrien is hard to explain, but I will try. Her dad had told her about a friend that he had made years ago and that this person had fought in World War II in the Pacific island campaign. Wounded on Iwo Jima, he had been evacuated to a ship and tended by beautiful nurses. When her father told the story as he did many times, even to me, the nurses grew more beautiful, more plentiful, and more nurturing. His friend survived, according to her father, only because of these wonderful women. The year after we were married her father died in a car accident, a head on collision, as he was taking his students to a basketball game. Adrien was devastated. She was a year from finishing her degree in nursing—she would study and work while I was in graduate school and then she would go for a master's degree.

She did finish the program, but her demeanor had been quiet. One day she told me that she thought that she could join the army as a nurse. It would not only be substantial experience but that the pay and allowances would cover our living expenses while I was in school. She knew that the separation would be hard, but that I could really concentrate on school and finish more quickly—after all, there were some weekends and many holidays. She made a strong case and I could not persuade her otherwise.

We did somewhat well through her training, the ardor for each other still being strong. Her initial assignment was at Fort Polk, an afternoon's drive away, and I got used to carrying a dependent's card for services at the nearby Navy base. Then she received orders to Vietnam, a shock to her and me. I railed against the move, but she said that unless she was pregnant there was no impediment to her assignment. She wasn't pregnant; she'd been on the pill even before we were married and impregnation comes slowly when one gets off it. I flew with her to San Francisco,

where we had four days together, and then she left for Southeast Asia and I came back to Tulane.

I have to admit the material aspects of my life were good, certainly in comparison with that of my classmates. A two bedroom unit replaced the studio with one room's being a study. I shopped at the commissary and exchange at the nearby Navy base and received medical attention there for the usual assortment of viruses and flues. The checking account actually had a small balance at the end of the month and a passbook showed a modest savings account. The VW bug with its well warmed back seat was still a used one, but it was only five years old.

It was not unusual for graduate students to be supported by their wives, but it was unusual for one's wife to be in the military service and even more so for her to be in a combat zone. Even though Adrien was a nurse, my classmates made comments about "baby killers" and napalm. Even among liberal students observations about her sexuality emerged in conversations. I was never in favor of the war, but I understood how we got there and how the loyalties and goals rooted in the Second World War were soon out of place and time in this one. What Adrien wrote and what I experienced grew far apart.

Yes, I love her, loved her for years, knew her when she played at tea parties with her sister and friends. She served me a cup of tepid tea one afternoon when I passed by her circle sitting on the grass. She sat surrounded by a swath of pink skirt and a white blouse with grass stains.

Two months ago she wrote me about storing her clothes to protect them from the moths and the roaches. Even in nicer apartments the roaches in New Orleans are omnipresent. The dresses and blouses hanging in the closet always assuaged the loneliness, but removing them made it seem as if she were dead. So I replaced her things with my athletic gear. She was right: her yellow frock had a tell–tale brown stain already.

So I had it cleaned, but a slight tan smudge persisted. In that letter, she recounted flying with a wounded Marine to the rear hospital because he couldn't be put out and his twisting and reaching dismantled all the life saving work that had gone into him. When she landed, her blood-soaked clothes were discarded, but her new jacket and pants were too large, causing the men in the nearby reception station to laugh. Her dark hair must still have been attractive because one of the soldiers waiting for transportation to a forward area asked her to join him for a beer. She went. He wrote her twice after that, according to her, but the letters

stopped. When she inquired about him, she discovered that he had stepped on a mine. The army had recovered his body and sent it home. She said that because she didn't know his family, she would write me about him. Other than a mild "how are the courses," there was little about me, even us.

When Beowulf was battling underwater, in such a foreign environment, there was the sense that it was the equivalent of Hades in the Greek epics and dramas. Our professor seemed less interested in the mythic parallels than in our ability to explain the linguistic constructions, especially the endings of the verbs. In the evenings I would walk home along St. Charles Avenue beneath the live oaks, whose leaves rarely dropped but only changed shades of green. The constant humidity suggested a mustiness, almost the smell of death, even in an environment in which everything from mold to weeds grew at paces beyond those of a field of runners. At Fern Street, I stopped for beer at Serio's. The odor of old beer and old wood permeated the darkness. Smells of tomato gravy drifted into the mélange. Dee Roberts from the Victorian poetry seminar walked in from the side entrance. So I had another beer. Around the conference table, I always stared at her long, often tangled and dirty red hair. That night she came home for supper under the pretext of going over some Browning. I tried not to think about sex then, even in the morning when I saw a thin red hair on a towel where once was a nearly coarse black one.

I had wondered whether I could have sex with another woman, and I had found out. I felt dirty, so I washed the sheets and towels. While waiting for them to dry, I wrote Adrien. I had much to say, but what I said camouflaged the real impulse for my writing. I said nothing about Dee, but I did write that I had stored the clothes and that there was a new emptiness. In order to get her to write about us, I interweaved various questions about her and the plans we had discussed long before we married. It felt different today, and I wondered whether she would be able to tell.

At the commissary on Saturday, I heard a group of Navy wives talking about their husbands, one of whom was patrolling rivers in the Mekong Delta. He had come down with a sexually transmitted disease. Her friends were consoling her and invoking the exigencies of war—not their word. I wondered. Adrien had come from a parochial school and believed in sexual abstinence before marriage. When we made love, she suffered and wrestled with her conscience, and when we were married,

she tried not to wear white, but her mother had insisted. When I was checking out, the clerk glanced at my card and asked if my father was overseas. I replied that my wife was. She looked at me in a lesser way and simply said, "Oh."

That week we read and talked about Browning's "Porphyria's Lover," in which a young man of lesser social standing meets his long haired lover and wraps her hair about her neck, strangling her, during an embrace to keep her all his own. I thought about Adrien's dark hair wrapped after a shower in a white towel that fell to her waist, but I saw Dee's long, nearly clotted strands of red falling into my face. It had been years since I had been to confession, but I thought it was time.

Before the evening Mass that day, I gathered myself up and drove myself into this dark booth at Holy Name of Jesus Church. When the screen opened, I spoke the ritual words memorized and exercised all through my youth. The priest cautioned me to think about faithfulness, asked that I say an "Our Father," and closed the screen. When I was a child, I'd always felt cleansed. Not this time. I wasn't really sorry. I wanted to see Dee again. And I did.

When Adrien's letter came, she chatted about the hot and humid weather—how similar it was to July and August in New Orleans and described a new friend in the ward, Henry, who had been wounded in the groin and who was concerned about the future of his sex life. She then moved through my queries. She worked Sundays, but had Tuesday off. She said it was quiet with nearly everyone in the quarters working and she slept soundly, in a manner that was not allowed most nights. She said the occasional shelling and the aircraft noise was not the problem; it was the sounds of radios and tapes trying to sweep out the day's debris. She remembered our plans to move into the Appalachians to live and work in a small town, where there might be a hospital and a college. She wondered whether this was still possible, whether anything was possible. It was a change from the growing distance between us into a fragmentation of her self. She wrote "As ever" and signed the initial A.

Dee moved in to the apartment on weekends and I moved my athletic gear back into the trunk from the closet, so she could hang her clothes. We talked about our courses and the small cafes that dotted the neighborhood. She asked about Adrien once and said that she must be strange: "After all, why join the Army at a time like this?" Dee was from New Jersey and had lived within sight of Manhattan for most of her life, even going to college at NYU. Tulane was part of needing a change in her

life, and she had heard that she could buy some time down here while thinking about what she really wanted to do.

At first we hardly left the apartment on weekends. In fact we lay in each other's arms on every available surface. After a month and two letters from Adrien, she came with me to the commissary. The clerk who had checked me out before asked if she were my sister. I said, "Yes." That night we had dinner at Serio's as the checking account was flush. Afterwards, we walked down St. Charles Avenue listening to the birds and the singing of the streetcar rails as the cars passed. Suddenly, when we were near riverbend, an ambulance with its siren shattering the evening harmonies crossed the median only to be rammed by a streetcar. A crowd quickly gathered from the college bars on the corners and official vehicles arrived to the continuing siren of the damaged ambulance. Uniformed aides transferred an inert body from one stretcher to another and then sped it away. The ambulance driver walked about throwing up his hands while the streetcar driver complained to a police officer. Finally, the siren quieted and trucks towed the vehicles away. We left the no longer crowded intersection and went to the apartment. I was tired that night. Two weeks later Dee moved back to her place with her three roommates.

Adrien's letter arrived before I left for class on Friday. A small dead bug fell from the folded paper. She was being discharged and would be returning to New Orleans in ten days. The prose was terse and economical: she was pregnant.

I met her at the airport on Monday, where we hugged each other. I carried her bag to the car and placed it lengthwise on the back seat. We talked quietly about inconsequential things like her complexion on the way to the apartment, where she replaced her uniform with jeans and a T-shirt. I then left for the Hemingway seminar.

Before she and I had to turn in our ID cards, we made a big run to the commissary. In the familiar local fashion, the clerk asked, "Well now, and who is this?"

"My wife," I said.

Thomas Bonner, Jr. has published fiction and poetry in *Negative Capability, Xavier Review, Potpourri*, and other literary magazines. A companion story appears in *Louisiana Review*, Volume 3 (Summer/Fall 2001). He teaches at Xavier University and at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado.

Beth Taylor

Crossing the Line: Finding Butch

I was raised a Quaker in the lush farm lands of Bucks County, just 25 miles north of Philadelphia. We were a family of first, second, and third cousins, many of whom attended the same Quaker schools and colleges, and joined each other in family reunions. Our parents were lawyers, teachers, doctors, and homemakers. We used the plain language—thee, thy, and thine. We eschewed TV and material gluttony. But most important we believed in non-violence, social reform, and finding God through the inner light in silent meeting for worship, without the necessity of a minister. In wars the men of my family proudly did their duty through alternative service, doing the work left behind by men who chose to fight. During World War II my father built roads in New Hampshire, fought forest fires in Montana, and supervised the violent ward in a mental hospital in Virginia. In 1965, as we became more aware of Vietnam as a "conflict," my older brother voiced his feelings about war during history class in his public high school and he was called a coward. Later a gang of boys cornered him in the hallway, and pummeled him with fists and names. Then, at a local Veterans Day parade, our neighbor was vilified for her antiwar views as the national head of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. When Norman Morrison, a Quaker, immolated himself in front of the Pentagon to protest the war, we were horrified. But we also began to understand that the problems of this particular war had become impossible to ignore.

During the late '60s and early '70s, I visited my neighbor in prison after he refused to register for the draft; I said goodbye to a boyfriend as he chose to make a new life at age 18 in Canada; and then I mourned

my favorite first cousin when his plane crashed in Viet Nam, where he was working for the Quaker hospital in Quang Ngai. Life seemed gritty and sad, and it was comforting for me to be as good a Quaker as I could—organizing moratoriums at my Quaker high school, standing quietly in peaceful demonstrations against the war, doing guerrilla theater with Vietnam vets in the streets of Washington to demonstrate what a raid on a Vietnamese village looked like. I was earnest, well meaning, and sure of my mission. Although most of the young men I knew were able to get college deferments from the draft, the few I knew or heard about who left for Vietnam as a soldier or medic, or for Canada as a resister in exile, or for prison as a draft card burner or antiwar protester, seemed a human sacrifice to a war that offered little redeeming value.

In October of 1969 I went to Washington, D.C. for the National Moratorium Against the War. I had heard recently that Butch Geary, an older boy I had loved watching in 4-H, had died in the spring fighting as a Marine in the war. I hadn't even known he had gone. Ensconced in my Quaker world, I had hoped I would never have to know someone actually lost to battle in that sad war. Now as I walked through the masses of worn blue jeans, handmade peasant blouses, and funky scarves along the mall I saw a group of veterans, dressed in fatigues, hunkered down around a campsite. In my mind's eye Butch's clear face grinned at me. But these men looked tired and old despite the youthful fuzziness of some of their beards. I studied their faces, trying to see—what, I don't know, but thinking, they've been there, they've seen it, and wanting to comfort each one of them.

Joan Baez sang that day in Washington. She introduced David Harris, her husband, just out of jail for resisting the draft. The crowd roared its approval. And then, suddenly, the mood broke. Screams and yells came from atop the grassy rise behind us as we faced the stage. The crowd seemed to push against us as if the middle was retreating, and suddenly we could see clearly a band of protesters dressed in black, running, slicing through the crowd, holding aloft huge North Vietnamese flags. "The Weathermen," somebody said. And I was scared. Their rude, out-of-control violence drowned out the peaceful recognition of sorrow and non-violence. It would be their picture that made the papers the next day. But I knew that most of us there saw them only as the school bully who had found one more way to upstage the peacemakers. Peacemakers like my older brother and the other young men I

knew who rejected violence. Peacemakers like Butch Geary. Or was he? Butch had seemed to me like an older version of my brother—tall, lean, freckled round face, a great grin, and a leader with smarts and humor. I realized that even though I had had a crush on him, watching him run 4-H meetings on beautiful sunny summer Saturdays out at Howes' farm in Bucks County, I didn't know him at all. Butch had seemed a peacemaker. But he went to fight in this awful war. I didn't have a clue as to why that handsome, strong young man had to be dead.

Years later, in the early 1990s I drove out to the Howes' farm to find my former 4-H Club leader. Eugenia greeted me like family and we sat in the sun with the fields stretching out around the Pennsylvania stone farmhouse, the old barn now looming empty and decrepit behind us. Together we remembered other sunny days and sewing projects and who had what champion dairy cow. I told Eugenia I was trying to write about the young men I had known who, one way or another, were lost to the war in Vietnam. She told me more about Butch, how he had been great with the younger kids in 4-H, how he was a poised and very funny public speaker, how he had taken the Howes' daughter on her first date, and later how they argued about the war—he was so sure the war was right; she—a Quaker—was adamant that it was "stupid." "Remember," Eugenia said to me, "as Quakers we often judged soldiers harshly." She said she would try to help me find Butch's family, but she didn't know how they might respond.

In 1995, twenty-six years after Butch's death, his family invited me to join them around the kitchen table of their small neat house in the working class neighborhood of Roslyn, Pennsylvania. Bill Geary, 72, was somewhat weakened by spinal-cerebella degeneration, which he developed—perhaps coincidentally—the year after Butch died. But he still flashed the grin I remembered on his son, particularly when he told a family joke. Polly Geary, 71, was still strong, working part-time as a salesperson at Sears, and as a volunteer at Holy Redeemer Hospital. Diane, training to be a nun when Butch was killed, was now 46, married to a public defender, and working as a full-time mom with three boys, living in upstate New York. Joan, 44, was an insurance adjuster living in nearby Glenside. John, 38, lived nearby, was married with three children, and working in computer maintenance and repair. Glenn, 31, was not at this gathering, but later, on the phone he told me he now lives with his companion—a Marine in Vietnam during 1968, in New Hope, not far from the Bucks County farms of Butch's youth.

As John pulled up extra chairs to the table, Polly said, "They want to know why you're doing this." "They" meant her children, and her tone said she would not suffer fools where her family was concerned. Her frank challenge startled me. I had sent her a report of my research; I presumed the family understood that I meant well. Suddenly I remembered the old tensions: I was on the other side; I must prove to the Geary family that I was not out to vilify their soldier-son. I told them of my memories of Butch out there on the Howes' lawn, and my infatuation with him as an 11- and 12-year-old girl. I described the young men I knew who were lost somehow to the war. I told them how each one seemed to have traveled a sometimes lonely but inevitable path because of who they were and because of the family they had been born into. I described the story by Tim O'Brien in *The Things They Carried*—about rowing out into the middle of the river on the border between the U.S. and Canada, facing that excruciating choice: Do I flee the war and risk ridicule or do I fight in a war I abhor? I explained how over time I had come to see that even though the young men I knew had made decisions they saw as brave—decisions to fight, to resist the draft, to leave the country, or to do Quaker service—the consequences they suffered had never seemed valued or redeemed in any way. I told them about reading a report of my research to faculty at Harvard and how many in the room—all of the Vietnam era but only one a veteran of the war, responded emotionally with stories of their own time of choice, or failure to choose. These stories, I said to the Gearys—Butch's story, my other young men—they are the stories of many American families. We didn't talk about them for a long time because we knew we had to get on with life to survive. But now it's time I think, to hear their voices again, and the voices of their families, to see what we can understand about that time, each other, and ourselves.

Polly told me it was the first time ever they had talked as a family—all together in one room—about losing Bill Jr., or Butch. I nodded, and registered deep in my brain, behind the questions I started to ask, that this was not going to be just a group interview; this would have to come carefully. I knew from other families who had lost a loved one that it was not uncommon to never gather as a whole family to grieve; that instead, twos and threes within families tended to have their occasional, often unexpected, conversations that remembered and sorrowed and cried.

Slowly now, in the trim white coziness of Polly's kitchen, the Gearys

started remembering for me who Butch had been, the Butch I remembered—his "Pepsodent smile," his smarts and energy, his enthusiasm and willfulness. By high school he was 6'3" and still growing, with light brown hair, and confident hazel eyes. His dad, Bill Sr., made nuts and bolts at Standard Pressed Steel, and each child got a job as soon as they were able. Butch raised goats and rabbits for our 4-H Club, and liked working on the farms of our Bucks County neighbors—feeding cows, milking, mucking out stalls. "He always stank when he came home," Diane said. At Council Rock High School, Butch sang in the chorus, wrestled, debated, and did well academically.

Diane and Joan remembered that as the oldest of five kids Butch ruled the roost. In fact he could be a "tyrant"—ordering the girls to wait on him, complaining if Diane ironed his shirt wrong, or making Joan wash his car without reward. But he was also generous—lending money, giving rides.

He was raised a faithful Catholic—even stopping somewhere for Mass when he went north to the Poconos or New York state on hunting trips with his farm buddies Steve and Rich Daniels. An altar boy since childhood, at 19 Butch served at the altar for a Mass at the 1964 World's Fair. Diane remembers Catholicism of the '60s as encouraging social activism, so when Butch went to Temple University, he helped run its Catholic Newman Club, helped some non-Catholic colleges start their own branches, tutored kids, and even sang once for Vietnam vets at the Valley Forge Military Hospital.

Butch was the first in the family to go to college even though, as Diane said, "we were trained to be worker bees," not to go to college. Butch earned his own way through scholarships and jobs. He had a "whole plan of how his life was going to go," Diane remembered. "He knew early on that he was going to major in political science at college. Until Vietnam and the military came along, he was going to law school. He wasn't getting married until he had $10,000 in the bank and owned his own home. His goal was to be a gentleman farmer and United States Senator—his hero was John F. Kennedy."

Butch graduated from Temple University in January of 1968 and immediately enlisted in the Marines. Bill Sr. remembers the recruiters saying they didn't see too many college grads down there at The Naval Yard in Philadelphia. But Butch had grown up hearing stories of his father's time in the Marines, and he was proud to be a Marine, to do his duty for his country, and to go to Vietnam. As Diane said, Butch's

options were those of most kids in working class America. "You knew a lot of people who came out of high school and went into the military."

In March of 1968, Butch headed for officers' training at Quantico, Virginia. Polly showed me Butch's letters and they took me into a world I knew little about—a world of arbitrary rules, harsh training, physical hardship, and presumed courage. To a noncombatant, it is the kind of information that spawns a sense of respect for any soldier, no matter who they are or what their views on war. Butch also told funny stories about training—"Did you ever see a 6'4" Marine curl up into a foxhole 2' by 2'? I'm told I look hysterical." And he followed the news of the growing antiwar movement, asserting "I'm a good guy (even though Marines aren't supposed to be good guys)." I paused at that line, knowing that at that time I too had been suspicious of soldiers: to want to go to war was unimaginable in my Quaker circle, and of course we presumed all soldiers wanted to fight; it wasn't until late 1969 or 1970, after Butch's death, that we began to understand that many soldiers in Vietnam were there under duress or they were struggling with a conflict between duty and belief.

Butch apparently never felt conflicted, and perhaps that is a blessing. By the time he graduated Basic Training, Butch was a "Second Lieutenant, Sir!" and thinking about the path ahead.

> I'll be responsible for the lives of men. That's kind of hard to picture. Human beings, Mom. I'm not afraid to admit that I'm a little bit on the nervous side. I already know that I'll be going to Vietnam. First of all, I'm a Marine; and secondly, I'm an officer. I think that's the only thing that really keeps me paying attention in classes. . . .

Butch knew the Marines needed officers desperately because they were being killed so fast. A friend who had been over already confirmed that the quick turnover of Marine officers meant that each new officer had to be taught by the grunts what to do; their inexperience made them easy targets. But Butch moved forward according to the script he had written. He wrote his parents,

> . . . No matter what happens, I just want you to be proud of me. I think it's my responsibility to more or less uphold the image that I've created of myself. Thanks for every little bit of

> encouragement and help you have ever given me. My family has got to be the best thing that ever happened to me.

Butch returned home for Thanksgiving and Christmas of 1968. He visited friends on the farms, from the Newman Club, and Temple University. Each time his usual good humor was tinged with poignancy. Friends remember he seemed to have intimations of his fate. He wanted to do things he hadn't done before—like see a boxing match in a rough area of Philly even though his buddies, the Daniels cousins, couldn't join him. When Rich Daniels did visit, Butch mused to his mother, "That may be the last time I see him." Nonetheless, Steve Daniels said later in a phone interview, their attitude was more bravado. "It was like, 'He'll be back.' The thought he could be hurt—you always thought it would be someone else."

In early January of 1969, Butch headed for Camp Pendleton in California for the final leg of training before Vietnam. On the flight out, the stewardesses invited Butch and a few other servicemen to fill vacancies in First Class, and served them filet mignon and drinks—a last feast before the trials to come. As a 2nd Lieutenant, Butch was put in charge of a unit of about 145 men, responsible for their final 15 days of training: 3 days for administrative details (updating service record books, handling personal problems, wills), 9 days of field training (search, evasion, patrolling, firing and cleaning the M-16, Viet Nam orientation), and 3 more days of administration (final updating of record books, ironing out embarkation details).

Butch described his men as "a bunch of clowns," but he noted "they always put out 100% especially in PT (Physical Training). As the PT officer for his unit, Butch had to lead his men through difficult conditions which they didn't yet know would seem easy compared to the actual war:

> This training is really hard. We usually walk 4-6 miles, one way, to the training area. And it often is up and down hills, which makes for good exercise, but also for tired bones. And to compound matters, it has rained every day, for about 17 days; 10 days in a row. . . .
>
> What a mess! Mud is everywhere, the men have colds, sore throats; all the staff are sick; four of them are on no-duty, and I have a sore throat, too. Last Friday, it rained, real hard, all day.

We fired the M-16 at the range, night and day.

Butch traveled off base a few times—to bowl ("they have a human pin setter!"), to see *Bullitt* and *The Split* for $2.00, and to San Francisco. Although he took pride in trying "to walk the straight and narrow" as he said in one letter, he also enjoyed wandering where his fellow Marines usually did not—into Haight-Ashbury and Fisherman's Wharf. He was surprised to discover hippies working as shopkeepers, cable car conductors, telephone linemen; less surprised when he saw hippies begging on the streets—for food, for a ticket to a rock show. San Francisco was truly the city of the young, he wrote his parents. While most of the wanderers he watched seemed "healthy-looking," there was also "a lot of sadness and sickness" in the faces of those who clearly needed a bath, a place to stay. Butch was cheered when he stumbled across a concert at the Fillmore by Chuck Berry, one of his childhood idols—"here he was, tearing the place up like crazy!" During the concert Butch watched as some Hells Angels created a small ruckus, and then on his way out he grabbed some underground newspapers to send home to the folks. "Be sure to keep them from John and Glenn and Joan—they are kind of risque! Just thought you'd like to see what the hippie press classifies as 'news.' " The next day, as if to cleanse himself, Butch went to church, bought his mother some sandalwood incense, and rode to the Top of the Mark to see the city from a more conventional view with a retired Army Master Sergeant he befriended on a cable car.

Butch finally got the word that the men of his unit were assigned to the 5th Marine Division, stationed at Pendleton. Only officers, like himself, were being sent to Vietnam at that point. Impatient to get going, he lobbied to get a flight out of California four days earlier than his allotted time slot. He landed in Vietnam on February 15th, 1969 and was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, India Company, of the 7th Marines. He was to be the Weapons Platoon Commander until a vacancy opened up in a rifle platoon. He went to booby trap school for a few days and then he got his gear—"jungle utes, boots, .45 pistol, pack, helmet, etc."

Butch wrote to his folks that Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, had started with an uneasy "truce of sorts" which both sides had already violated. Memories of the Tet Offensive of '68 kept everyone on edge. Already, he knew, the war was creeping closer. He told his parents a soldier he had known in the Basic School had just been killed by rocket fire "after only 8 days in country." Another friend was wounded after 14 days, but was OK. Butch asked his parents to keep such news in

perspective, and to have faith, as he tried to do.

> I hope this doesn't disturb you. If it is going to make you a nervous wreck, I'll "censor" the news, and save you the grief. It shouldn't bother you—what happens, happens, because it is God's will—and it doesn't bother me in the least. So let me know, OK? And don't worry, right?
>
> Well, I'm going to sign off for tonight. We have a briefing tomorrow at 0800. . . . Hope I can slip in Mass somewhere. I went to Church on Friday (yesterday), and received Communion, so I would have some "flight" insurance for today. I also said the Rosary last night, on Diane's beads, and will do the same tonite. I hope to keep them on my person at all times, and "make a trip around the beads," as Captain Anderson used to tell us, at least once a day.

Soon Butch went on his first combat patrol, joining another 2nd Lieutenant and his platoon.

> We swept through this nearby ville. It is considered a VC ville, with sympathizers. The people, especially the kids, eyed us cautiously. I understood from the platoon commander, that the kids will really come out to greet you, if it is a friendly ville. It was pretty quiet. They blew a couple of tunnels that looked suspicious. This particular ville had been hit by tank fire two nights ago, when the V.C. were on the move. I saw the damage—they blasted the roof on a few hooches, and the people were busy knocking the cement off, to replace them.

Despite this sobering view, Butch still felt like the good guy Marine—interested, caring, trying to understand the situation:

> Some of the people seemed friendly to me. I just smiled and bowed a little, and most smiled back. Nevertheless, the rest of the platoon was not happy with the villagers. It seems that we received hostile fire from them, and the guys don't like it. The condition of the place was, well, deplorable. You wouldn't believe the way they live. I believe the term for it is "cultural shock." Pretty appropriate, I think. The kids are real cute, but pretty dirty. Like all kids, they are somewhat shy, but they like an approving pat or smile.

> The people in our area of operations (AO) are generally considered friendly, with a few exceptions, like the ville above. They are very industrious . . . out in the fields—kids, babies, mothers, grandmothers—from early morning, until dusk. It is fascinating to watch them, cultivating their rice fields (cautiously looking for booby traps), and irrigating them with methods used centuries ago. Also fascinating is the water buffalo, commonly called the "water boo". The Vietnamese kids ride them everywhere, as they graze; but let an American come by, and look out! They act like a fresh cow who spots you with her calf—they charge in a rage. The theory is that Americans, who are primarily meat eaters, have this smell on them, which infuriates the water boo. The Vietnamese, you see, are fish eaters. More than one Marine has been gored by one of these gray beasts, who are short and stocky, about the body weight of a Guernsey!

And then, for Butch, the war began. On March 10th, 1969 he wrote he was "suddenly busy!" as the 3rd platoon commander. Butch felt lucky he had an experienced platoon sergeant—SSgt. Rivas of Nevada—who, with four years and a tour and a half in Vietnam behind him, helped Butch guide recruits who were barely newer than Butch. "The platoon is generally good," Butch wrote, "but we have a lot of new guys, who are careless, because they are not 'broken in' yet." His platoon had been on an ambush and done the blocking for two sweeps made by another platoon of a deserted ville that was heavily booby-trapped. In the sweeps several men were wounded or killed and for the first time Butch felt blind anger.

> Everybody is really bitter and mad. My platoon is fine, but we feel hurt for the other guys. It is so frustrating. They (the VC) use nylon line, like fishing line; the area is thick, so that makes it worse. No one was in there. There is a ville nearby, which is a VC suspected area. After the last guy left (by chopper; he was an emergency medevac), we finally moved out of that place. I hope they just bomb, nape, and bulldoze the area. What else—there is nothing else?

Butch apologized in this letter for his "poor use of words, and sentence structure." He wanted to write quickly, he said, "before something sudden happens, which would make writing impossible."

Although these last comments show that Butch was beginning to feel the pressure of the war, in his next sentence, he bounced back to his determination to make the best of it. He asked Joan to send tapes of his favorite albums—Big Brother, Supremes, Temptations, Miracles—along with his tape recorder. Of course, he included the money to buy the tapes. In the same week he sent requests to Philadelphia's Mayor Tate and Pennsylvania's Governor Shafer for a city and state flag for his platoon.

When he wrote that week to his buddy, Steve Daniels, Butch thanked him for a care package of cigars and reported "We should see some good contact in a week or so—they have us scheduled for a forty-day op, called "Oklahoma Hills," on April 1. Read your local paper for time and channel! Ha! Ha!" Reading that letter now, knowing "Oklahoma" was the operation that would kill Butch, makes his determined cheerfulness seem poignant, or blessedly innocent. But he knew his calm wasn't for long. To his parents he wrote:

> We are mobile battalion for the next eight weeks, which means we go where the trouble is, whenever it happens. I may not write for weeks, simply because I don't have the time. You'll be the first to know if I'm hurt . . . So don't make it worse on yourself, if you don't hear from me regularly, OK?
>
> . . . I say the Rosary every night for the whole family, that the good Lord gives you everything you deserve, & DON'T WORRY, OK?

On March 20th, Butch and his men were called out again. To his sister, Diane, he wrote from a small field where his company had set up a block to protect some nearby South Vietnamese soldiers who had pinned down a VC company—"no shave for five days, no showers, two meals a day ("C" rations), and B-52 sized mosquitoes." Later he wrote to his folks as he hunkered down under his poncho liner on bamboo stakes in a rice paddy in high 80s heat under a sun that reminded him, he said, of their family summers at Avalon, New Jersey.

Soon Butch's battalion was called in from the field and sent to round up deserters in Da Nang, in the slum called "Dogpatch" where refugees from the war torn countryside settled. The alleys were choked with shacks and people, including Americans who had gone AWOL.

> What we came for were about 25 hard-core deserters, some of whom have been there since 1965! All types of Americans—Marines, Army—and all colors. They have been suspected of various crimes in the area; eg. murder, drugs, prostitution, pimping, and even worse, collaboration with the VC. They had machine guns, grenade launchers, M-16s, etc, and they were reported to be willing to shoot it out.

Butch's company swept in by truck; another came by choppers. Once the cordon was set, the MPs and National Police swept the area. They captured 40 suspects and confiscated black market soda, weapons, and, to Butch's dismay, maps—"like the one we used!"

A few days later, back in the field, he reported the ongoing challenge of a typical day:

> Sunday we checked out a TOT (time on target—all the regiment's artillery, or some of it, fires on a certain spot or area). We had to sweep from south to north, along a stream, and then turn around, and go back, north to south. It was real hot, and the terrain was pretty rough, but the platoon did a good job, and worked well together. We came back at 1700, only to get a briefing at 1900, brief my squad leaders at 2000, hit the rack at 2200, and get up 0300 this morning! Whew.
>
> We left by truck, debarked, moved to a river crossing site, and crossed two platoons from India, as well as a platoon from Kilo [Company]. We had to drive stakes, and set up a quick rope. The river was about 100 yds. across, and about 20 M deep at the center. We had "rubber ladies" (rubber rafts), and put our gear on them, to keep it dry. Yet, we lost three M-16s, and over 50 magazines, when a raft tipped over. . . .
>
> We got two platoons on line, with Kilo 1 back, and swept an area about three and a half kilometers. When we sweep like this, we look for rocket sites, dud ammo and rounds, new bunkers or caves, and any materials. When we swept the TOT, we found medicine, bloody clothing, 50 lbs. of buried rice, and bunkers. We mainly look for rocket and small arms caches. The area is wild and desolate, with abandoned villes, long empty and bombed out. We rarely see people, and no suspects during the day. It is hard work, keeping everyone on line, and in con-

> tact, and you never see the enemy. But it must be done, and there is always that one time. . . .

Back at base camp, as he relaxed briefly, Butch took bets on the Temple University basketball game broadcast for GIs, and read in the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin about the antiwar demonstrations back home. To his parents he excoriated those "who desecrate my flag, disgrace my uniform, and destroy public buildings. These shameful events...make me doubly and triply proud to be an American, a fighting Marine, and a devoted Catholic." I wondered if he ever distinguished between those violent antiwar protestors and the greater number of peaceful demonstrators like myself, or if he understood both groups just wanted to bring guys like him home. To Butch it was probably a moot point as he continued to face physical and psychological trials he had only imagined before, trials which he had willingly signed up for, and about which he had no choice.

Soon he prepared to head out for his final trial, the operation called "Oklahoma Hills."

> They say we'll have to take 20 salt tabs a day, and drink ten quarts of water a day, or some high figure like that. Up there, it is all double triple canopy, with temperatures in the high 90s, or 100, in the day, and cool at night. Mosquitoes are a special problem, too, so it should be fun. Just the place to camp out!

The following is one of Butch's last letters.

> Dear Mom and the Gang,
>
> Hi! Here I am in the tropical paradise of Vietnam with its swaying palms and sunny beaches. The weather is beautiful. We've had solid monsoons for the past three weeks. My room is simply magnificent. It has genuine wall to wall mud with a little diversity of mud wall. Great, huh? Hey, listen. Remember when I told you about how horrible it was way back in O.C.S. [Officer's Candidate School]? Well, it really paid off. I do feel kind of moody sometimes. They told us to expect to be homesick. But it's not that, I lost two of my men last week and a friend of mine was killed right next to me. When I was still in the States, I thought I would never have it in me to kill. But I

can. You know, I think it's the idea I have to get him before he gets me.

Last night I was on guard duty. We are right on the front lines. A sniper had hidden in one of the trucks. He had a little boy with him and had him loaded down with grenades and explosives. He threw that kid into our ammo truck and not only blew up the truck but the kid with it! Mom, that's the first time I cried in a long time but I couldn't help it. Why is it that the innocent are always the victims of the worst hardships possible? Remember those fox holes I told you about? Well they're our permanent quarters now and I don't think I've climbed so many fences or under them or around them to get to my humble abode. Well, I have to go now. Duty calls. Bye.

Semper Fi,
Butch

On Saturday, April 5, 1969, Butch led his men out of a field toward enemy entrenched in the woods, and a sniper shot him cleanly through the head, just behind the ear. His commanding officer wrote to Butch's parents:

> On the afternoon of April 5, 1969, our company was assigned as part of a battalion size search and clear mission near the Song Tam Giap River, approximately eleven miles south of Danang, in Quang Nam Province. At approximately 12:30 p.m., our company encountered intense enemy automatic weapons and small arms fire from a nearby treeline. William was leading his platoon in an assault against a well entrenched enemy position in the treeline when he was hit by an enemy sniper round. He did not suffer as he died instantly from his wound at approximately 12:30 p.m., April 5, 1969.

Andy Kuhn, a soldier from Ambler, PA, with whom Butch had shared his Philadelphia Bulletin, and who had been with Butch on the day of his death, wrote to his parents that the Marines were outnumbered—200 of them against 600 of the North Vietnamese Army. Air support did not arrive until 5:30 that afternoon. The soldier from Ambler said it was the worst battle he had been in and that he never expected to walk away from it. He did, but in June 1969, he stepped on a booby trap and was killed.

The Gearys remember where each of them was when they heard the news, or saw the green military car drive up to the house. They remember the explosion in each of their hearts, and the disorientation, then the numbness, the disbelief, and finally the oppressive sadness. The funeral was packed. Butch's sister Joan remembers "he was such a Big Man on Campus that we had people from Temple, the Young Democrats, the Newman Club, Council Rock High School, family, friends, even Mayor Tate and Police Commissioner Rizzo!"

In the weeks after Butch died Polly Geary felt utterly whipped. Losing that smart, handsome boy challenged her sense of everything she had believed in—God's will, patriotic sacrifice, and common sense. A few months after Butch was buried, Polly read in the newspaper that Andy Kuhn, the soldier friend of Butch's from Ambler, had been killed. Polly went to visit Andy Kuhn's mother and heard more details of the battle that had killed Butch. Finally she sat down and wrote a letter to President Nixon as a mother who would not suffer fools when it came to her own children. She told Nixon, "THIS IS A DIRTY WAR." Why, she asked, was Butch's battalion left for so long without air support when they were so outnumbered? And,

> What good has the death of my son, and all the others done? You're pulling out the troops and heaven only knows what will happen to the remainder. In the meantime, The REDS progress a little more, and that's what my son fought to prevent. He wanted to save our country from further RED infiltration. Believe me, President Nixon, I am not a violent person, but I firmly believe the bombing should be resumed.
>
> So often I have heard the expression, "a politician's war", and I'm beginning to believe it. I'm beginning to doubt if my son's death was truly "God's will"—perhaps more like the "politician's will".

In February of 1970, Polly and Bill Geary came out of the Philadelphia Academy of Music after a concert to see a line of demonstrators protesting the war. One girl held a homemade North Vietnamese flag, and Polly could not contain her fury. She marched over and ripped the flag from the girl's hand. When the girl demanded her flag back, Polly said, "Not until I get my son back from the grave."

Now, in 1995, near the end of an intense afternoon, filled with memo-

ries and emotion and humor and thoughtful observation, Diane's husband Jonathan asks, "Was there ever a word uttered about not going, or a thought expressed about not going?"

"I thought it," Polly says quickly. "I wanted to say, 'Don't go, don't do this.' But the patriotism—and he was 21 and I felt that I did not have the right to say to him 'Don't do this.' "

Joan, who was 17 when Butch left, intercedes. "He was going to do what he was going to do. Mom has thought her and Dad's patriotism kind of led him, so he thought that was the appropriate thing to do. In one regard that's probably true. However, he was going to DO this."

Diane says, "I don't actually remember ever having a conversation about the war. It never occurred to me at the time that you could die." This is startling to someone like me who grew up discussing the war and who presumed that war meant probable, horrible death. But if the script for my kind of pacifist family was clear—work for peace, choose alternative service, the opposite script was just as clear for Butch. Diane explains:

> In retrospect I think Butch's decision was not a well-thought-out decision. There were two things to do. One would be to go. The other would have been to do the whole C.O. thing, which was so abhorrent an idea. Conscientious Objectors were long-haired hippie traitor-types. Then there might have been a whole other intellectual way to get deferments through [more] college. There are people who managed to get PhDs to avoid going.

As Diane says, the boys the Gearys knew who went to Vietnam were "ALL products of parents who had been in World War II or Korea." I think to myself this sounds so cut and dry, but some of those people in that Harvard faculty room the day I read my report were children of parents who served in WWII or Korea; they were also students who earned PhDs because of deferments. Sometimes their veteran fathers had even approved. Others of course had been furious. Butch was ambitious, but not in a way that would challenge the family script.

Bill Geary Sr. met Polly in September of 1942, entered the Marines in October, left for training at Parris Island, married Polly in March of 1943, and then headed overseas. I ask him to tell me some stories, and he grins, and then the whole family starts chuckling. "Which one do you want to hear?" Diane asks wryly. Joan smiles: "We've heard 'em all."

John says, "Once a Marine always a Marine." Diane explains that the stories are ongoing because friends made in the Marines became godparents to each others' children. "The fighting was over but the Marines go on."

Jonathan, Diane's husband, says to Bill Sr., "World War II is the place in your life where when you talk about your life that's your reference point. The whole world spins around your war experience."

Bill Sr. nods, considers for a moment, and then, just in case Jonathan was suggesting that Bill Sr. romanticized his war, he says, "I watched a TV program on Vietnam and heard an officer say, 'That was a bad war.'" Bill Sr. pauses again. Then he shakes his head, says, "There is no 'good' war. All are bad."

Nonetheless, going to war seemed to make complete sense to Butch. As Polly recalls, "He said to me, 'Ma, I'd rather go over there to fight the communists in THAT country as opposed to having them come to America.' "

Diane says, "He bought that propaganda line."

John: "Nobody understood exactly what it was. In the long run, you know, all those hippies at Kent State, they were right."

Diane: "We were too naive to know."

Polly: "Even Jane Fonda was right. We should not have gone to Vietnam."

John: "Wellllllll, she gave aid and comfort to the enemy. I don't care what you say."

Diane: "WHO was the enemy? WHAT were we fighting for?"

John: "We had just come from the Cold War, and that was the philosophy—You HAVE to stop the reds."

Bill Sr. remembers how gung-ho Butch was. "They wanted to put Butch in intelligence because he knew hogs [an important animal in Vietnamese culture]." Bill Sr. grins proudly. "Butch said, No he wanted his own platoon, he didn't want Special Forces." Butch got the job he wanted, and its awful consequence. The family was left to learn a new version of the Marine story.

John became a Marine in 1974, five years after Butch's death. Glenn was in the "Young Marines" when he was 12 and 13, in 1975 and 1976. As John explains it, being a Marine means the same training in each generation. "You were the elite. You had to SIGN UP. Only the Marines are called in for the toughest jobs—like D-Day." The Marines trained for 12 weeks while other branches of the military trained 8-9

weeks. And it was total immersion, John says. "You didn't get to make a phone call, you didn't have people come to visit you. As the old saying goes, "Kiss your ass goodbye because your body belongs to me."

John actually landed in the Marines by default. For several years after Butch died he frequently got stoned, drunk, into bar fights, and he defied his parents and teachers. Looking back, John says his rage and violence might have happened even if Butch hadn't died: "I always felt I couldn't measure up." John dropped out of high school in October of his senior year, knowing he had two options—get a job or join the military. "I had no real work skills so I joined the Service." He says now he "didn't give a shit" about anyone or anything, including himself. "I had a death wish. I mean one night I hung on to a speeding car by holding on to its windshield wipers for two miles!" It was 1974 and he knew he would not go to Vietnam, so he would just let the Marines do what they would with him. He would keep his mouth shut and do what he was told. It had to be better than school or home, where the tension of grief still reigned.

John walked into a Marine training program slightly more humane than in Butch's time and claims now it was no big deal, but his family remembers one phone call from him they've not been able to forget.

One day, during routine exercises, a drill sergeant came up to John and yelled in his face, "Did you have a brother, Geary!"

"Yes, Sir!" shouted John.

"Was he 2nd Lieutenant William Geary, Geary!"

"Yes, Sir!," shouted John.

"Well Geary, You'll never be the Marine he was!"

"Yes Sir!" shouted John.

John remembers the exchange, but he doesn't give it the weight his family does. Maybe the drill sergeant knew Butch, maybe he just searched John's file to find information with which to humiliate him—as he did every other soldier. "It was no true attack on my character," John asserts. "He just wanted to see what kind of spine I had. They break you down and build you back up." Actually, he says, "It woke a little bit of pride up in me." He explains he knew he wasn't stupid, that he could do this Marine stuff easily. In fact he says he angered one instructor because he slept through lectures on Marine history. When he got an A on the exam, the instructor yelled, "Geary, You're a high school dropout! How can you be so smart and so stupid at the same time!" John says, "I told him, 'I've been studying this stuff since I was 5 years old. It's not a

school subject for me. It's family lore!' "

At the end of the afternoon I ask, "Does it help at all, knowing Butch died doing something he wanted to do and that he believed in?"

Everyone is silent for a bit.

Bill Sr. shakes his head. "Nothing will help you."

Polly says grimly, "You just learn to live with it. That's all you do."

John raises his arms and crosses them behind his head, as if to help himself breathe. "I felt cheated."

Polly nods her head. "He lost the brother who was big and handsome and he admired."

Diane says, "That was a great loss. I don't think any family should ever have to go through this—go through the death of any sibling, for whatever reason."

There is another pause.

John seems to regain his jaunty composure. "You grow up and you grow old."

Joan adds, "And you move on."

Diane's husband Jonathan, like the lawyer in the courtroom that he often is, tries to tease out the complexities here. "That phrase 'you move on' needs explanation." He looks at me and alludes to my description of Tim O'Brien's story about rowing out to the middle of the river between America and Canada:

> The point of your writing is you don't move on—that some piece of you is grounded right at that moment. This generation—those faculty in that Harvard room, the Vietnam veterans on-line in chat rooms, everybody I know, is stuck in some respect in 1968 in the middle of that river—or you made that decision, and there's a piece of everybody not going anywhere. You're getting older but you're not moving on.

Joan: "There's always going to be a piece that's lost there, but my life does not revolve around that, at all."

John: "No, but it's always there."

Diane: "It's like the seed that your life grew out of."

Joan: "It certainly altered everybody's direction, but who's to say that some other thing wouldn't have done that that wasn't necessarily negative."

I say, "You mean accidents do happen and change families. But the

ways Vietnam destroyed, and disturbed family dynamics is something certain families share."

John says, "I think it's more 'distorted.' The death doesn't obliterate what was there, but it's a whole new spin. You still go on. I always have something I can touch back to."

Sometimes, John says later, he'll be having a bad day—too many irritable computer customers let's say, and he'll be driving along, tired, and he'll talk to Butch:

"What am I doing?" I'll say to him.
"Give me some patience here!" I'll tell him. . . .
He's my tie to God (Now I'm sounding religious!). . . .
"See what you can do for me," I'll tell him. . . .
You try not to ask for much. I just try to be grateful for what I got.

Now at the kitchen table Diane, who has been listening carefully to her siblings, says,

> The bullet that shot Butch shot right through the center of my life and all my understanding. It changed me more than having children. . . . I knew so little about Vietnam. Butch's death was like a slap in the face, a "get with the real world," you know. It was: from this moment is how I will see life from now on.

A few years after Butch died, Diane stopped training as a nun. Before she left the convent, she started working toward a degree in Urban Studies at Temple University. One day in 1973 she sat down and wrote a column for the *Temple News* in which she tried to honor Butch's memory for an audience she knew had grown cynical about the prolonged efforts to end the war. In the column she described Butch's upbringing, his love of Temple University, his enthusiasm for Glee Club, the Catholic Newman Club, his service fraternity, his part-time jobs, his dream to be a lawyer, and then his training as a Marine. "He was proud to be a soldier and felt a strong sense of duty to his country and his men," she wrote. "Even though our values have changed so much since then I will not apologize for his values and ideals." Nonetheless, she wrote, when she thinks about his death sometimes she says, "'What a waste!' Here was an idealistic young man who hoped to contribute something to

society." And then she remembers the outpouring of sorrow, pride, and admiration for Butch at his funeral, and she knows those who knew and loved him were indeed changed by his life and death. Finally she asks the question any of us ask as we try to honor the young men whose lives were changed or lost one way or another to the decisions they made about the Vietnam War: "Why have I written all this?" Her answer:

> Our value systems have changed so much since 1963. Fighting a war has become ugly, no more a source of pride. Maybe many of you consider Bill Geary a fool, but some values don't change.
>
> If searching for truth, finding joy in others, being concerned for another's happiness and working for peace are foolish then perhaps we are all fools.

Searching for truth, finding joy in others, caring for their happiness, working for peace. That was Butch in Vietnam, and Diane working with Catholic service in the streets of Philadelphia. But those words were also used to describe those of us in the peace movement. Some thought us fools too—called us names, told us to get a job, or to leave our country if we did not love it. The point was we did love our country and that's why for some of us our job was to try and keep more friends like Butch from dying in a war that lost a clear mission early on. Robert McNamara talks now about three times when, if a phone call had been taken, a memo read, or a meeting held, the war would have ended sooner; those three moments all happened before 1965. Diane is right: "what a waste" of so many idealistic, productive young men.

Since we cannot bring them back, the one thing we can consciously do is heal, close the rift. During Vietnam most of us stopped at a rather simplistic logic of either/or—you were for the war or you were against it. You were a peacemaker or you were a warmonger. Butch spouted generic right-wing slogans just as I spouted generic left-wing slogans. But the truth of who we were went deeper: Only superficially were we the person we were taught to be by our parents, religious belief, and neighborhoods. More profoundly we were both fighters—acting assertively on our beliefs, and pacifists—desiring an end to conflict. We were both soldiers with limited vision who followed the cause we had been born into, and we were humanists who wanted the values of decency, fairness, and good will to reign no matter which banner we followed. In

the end it was the impossibility of the war itself—militarily and morally—that corrupted the simplistic prejudices that each of us followed so confidently. If we were fools, it was because we were blind: we could not see the other in our selves.

Butch's siblings have gone on to create productive lives for themselves, but they are each changed in determined ways. After years of being what her mother describes as "the rock" at home with the younger boys, Joan worked her way through college and became a rare female in a top position at a predominantly male insurance company; as she did in the years after Butch's death, she is still checking in, following up on everyone, even making sure that I stick to the facts as I ask questions of her family. John, finally settled, sober, and once again church-going, talks to his teenage children about how painful experiences are sometimes the only way to understand something important. Diane has moved the furthest away geographically, and perhaps politically. She says she still attends church with her husband and children, but they do not keep a flag in the house, they have kept toy guns away from their three boys, and, if there were a draft, she would take her sons to Canada in a minute.

Although I will always be proud of my Quaker heritage, over time I found my complicated life needed more than the secular musings that silent worship allowed. I joined a mainstream Protestant church because the service centered on the complexities of Biblical narrative, which, in my study of literature, I had come to see as central to the vision of most writers who spoke truth to me. The young woman minister seemed to know what Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor had taught me: That we are all Christ and we are all crucified; but we can easily become the crucifiers—usually in the name of a religion or philosophy.

I have learned some things which I hope make me a more alert parent and constructive citizen. I have learned that religion, even pacifism, can be blind-sided. I have learned that a child imitates a parent even though the parent thinks they have offered the child free choice. I have learned that some truths I once held as self-evident just aren't. And I have learned that to truly understand an issue, one must genuinely imagine how others come to totally different conclusions. I came to understand that many people—even some, like Butch, who go to war—also believe that "there is that of God in every person." And I learned that to live as I once thought a Quaker should—to be proudly "in the world but not of it," sometimes inhibits one from participating in crucial parts of our

democracy—in legislatures, boardrooms, and public school systems, for example.

Most important, I have lost my faith in unequivocal pacifism—particularly as I discovered how it can suppress healthy anger and as I raise three boys and see what they sometimes face in the schoolyard. There are ideals and there is reality; I choose finally to live somewhere in the middle—both / and, not just either / or. Like my Quaker father, I do keep an American flag on the porch; I did let my sons play with toy guns when they cared about such games; and if there were a draft, I would tell them about Butch who went bravely to war, about my father who bravely fought forest fires as alternative service in WWII, about my cousin who died bravely doing Quaker service in Vietnam, about my neighbor who bravely went to prison in protest of the draft, about a boyfriend who resisted the draft and bravely went to Canada for good, and about my many friends who, in the face of such a questionable war, understandably went to college instead. Now, I would have to tell my sons, like all of them, you must choose which role model fits you.

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David Lawrence

Alive and Well and Behind Enemy Lines

I looked down the road, past the puddles I knew didn't exist, to see the house at the end wafting in the afternoon heat. I was 12 years old and was mowing my neighbor's overgrown lawn with my father. I looked behind me as I made my way through a particularly thick section and noticed that I was leaving large clumps of grass. I removed the plastic chute to find it filled with wet grass. I dumped the chute's contents into the catcher, then reached into the mower to remove the remaining grass clumps. *ThmmpPANG* went the mower blade as it removed a finger just above the top knuckle and slung it against the metal cutting deck. Blood streamed darkly down my hand and arm. My father ran to me, pulling his shirt off. He wrapped his white T-shirt around my hand and lay me back on the grass. He killed the mower's engine, ran across the street to the car, drove it up onto the neighbor's lawn and lifted me into it.

I lay for some time in a bed in the hospital's emergency room. The panic and shock of my accident had passed, but what remained was a pulsation that radiated throughout my body. I longed for something to suppress the pain. I could think of nothing else. I asked my father if there wasn't anything the doctor could do. He looked at me and simply shook his head. *Was he mad at me for doing something as stupid as putting my hand under an operating lawnmower?* I wondered. My head swam. "Man, war must be terrible," I said, apropos of nothing. My father stood up from his chair and approached my bedside. He looked at me, his jaw set tight. My father is no sentimental man—his personal diary, my mother once told me, bore no mention of my arrival into this world. As a high school teacher, however, he lost more former students to the war in Vietnam than he cared to remember. I braced myself for some kind

of rebuke, but received none. Instead, he explored my eyes, stroked my hair, and departed the room to the noise of what sounded like a cough.

I recount the above story because its memory was conjured after I completed Robert E. Gajdusek's *Resurrection: A War Journey*. I will concede that there's nothing particularly novel (or arguable) in the assertion that war is indeed terrible. However, the horror of war is given a personal treatment in Gajdusek's narrative. His story chronicles his role (if it can be called that) in his division's attack on the French city of Metz in November 1944.

I must confess that I recall my lawnmower incident perhaps to Gajdusek's chagrin. "Let this time of your reading be time of your life absented from your life, a life apart as it were," he challenges his readers at the beginning of his book, a noble exhortation, yet a futile one, perhaps. He insists that all good reading is an out-of-body experience of sorts, and at some level I suppose that's true. But another mark of good reading, or, more to the matter, good writing, is that the reader cannot help but project himself into the situation being described. How would I react in this situation? Would I have had the presence of mind to do or say that? At least, these are the questions I quietly ask myself as I read Gajdusek's story. As they pertain to a conversation regarding war, however, these are questions that I admittedly eschew; they demand an honesty of myself that I'm reluctant to provide. The fact that it took Gajdusek some 50 years to write in detail his narrative reflects the enormity of his endeavor. Indeed the entire book is arrayed in such a way as to re-present the struggles with which Gadjusek has wrestled in the years since the incident: historical background, both of the battle of Metz and of other epic (and similarly pointless) battles waged on that same ground; clinical, objective accounts of incidents occurring immediately preceding and simultaneous to Gajdusek's travails; a fellow infantryman's account of the attack; and finally Gajdusek's narrative, along with earlier endeavors of the author's which tried to make sense of the experience. The elements of the book that are not Gajdusek's own serve as a foil to his story. The former are cold and passionless; they traffic in such lifeless phrases as "halted further advances;" "sustained heavy casualties;" "launch reserve formations." The account of John Loomis, an army private who attacked Metz alongside Gajdusek, is similar to the Army Department's account in its objectivity, while not as didactic. "In one fraction of a second I saw the flare of the shot," Loomis drones, "the tracers going by my head as I hugged the ground, and

heard and felt the bullets go by and crunch into my buddy, Jim Northrup, immediately behind me. I called to him. No reply. Then Santi, Knuth, and I shifted left into a slight depression to get out of the line of fire" (75-76). No more mention of Northrup; no mention of fear, despair, horror. The human condition, as it were, is checked at the door, not to be picked up on the way out.

The clinical objectivity comprised in the beginning of the book serves as an appropriate and much needed point of departure for the remaining 3/4 of the book, aptly subtitled "My Battle." Over the course of these 170-some pages Gajdusek gives the reader a sense of immediacy that is too often lacking in war narratives. When his platoon is chosen to spearhead an attack on some high ground, the simultaneous despair and excitement is palpable: "It was like having the sense of probable catastrophe (that so many had) utterly annulled and moved to inevitable necessity. It was numbing. And [. . .] it was enormously exhilarating"(47). The exhilaration stemmed not from the fact that the assignment was a thrilling one. Rather, the assignment all but annihilated the element of chance; any vestiges that remained of that element were now in his platoon's hands, not in that of the monolith's, the Army's. Finding the silver lining in this quasi death-sentence is also evidently a skill of Gajdusek's: "I actually was glad I wasn't going in the second wave," he concludes, thankful for the simple fact that at least the first element had surprise working to its advantage. "I didn't let myself think of where I might be when the second 'wave' advanced" (48).

This selective projection of the future is a prudent move by the young soldier, because what follows is a detailed description of fear, impulse, and horror. Gajdusek presents in black and white the temporal distortion that is said to occur in these types of surreal, dire circumstances. His fellow soldiers are killed and wounded indiscriminately as his platoon attacks. He himself comes under heavy gunfire and is then wounded, a few feet from cover in the woods, semi-protected by a slight depression in the field in which he lay. The hyperconscious thoughts of the wounded Gajdusek are mesmerizing:

> [The German's] guns' cyclic rate had always appalled me: while we stuttered and pattered along with our 30's at 350, they were throwing 550 at us with the sound of a ripping sail, a giant canvas sail tearing itself across in the wind; and even with the decreased accuracy, enough lead must have flown across my back

> to have sewn an intricate seam. . . . But as I lay there at last "under the guns," I found on an instant lost and atavistic senses that had been numb since my birth: every minute centimeter of my body, my flesh, was alert, apprehensive, waiting for the impact of its bullet; each pore totally sensitive to and sensing the flight of those bullets towards me, into me. It was only gradually that the mind apprehended that the mounted guns, fixed for their killing zones, undoubtedly could depress no further in their mounts, and that it was to the almost invisible, indistinguishable contours of that land that I owed my momentarily saved life. (53)

Alas, this is only the beginning of the ordeal that Gajdusek is to capture over the ensuing pages. From contour to shell hole, where, after being mistaken for a German "digging in" he's flushed out to another shell hole, only to be stepped on by an unperceiving German soldier, to an abandoned farmhouse, to captivity, to a Dantean field hospital, to liberation, Gajdusek's story is indeed an odyssey. I'm reminded of *Invisible Man*, where Ellison's unnamed narrator moves frantically from one absurd episode to another. So it is with Gajdusek, who, once taken captive by the Germans, uses his limited (though exceptional by American foot-soldier standards) German to stay an otherwise certain death. At times the effect of his German is a testimony to the transcendent beauty of language—some of his captors admire and even cherish him for his abilities which, Gajdusek elegantly suggests, allow for them to be "released to human moments" together. On another occasion, however, he is baited into a war within a war, this one of words, with a German SS officer. The exchange is a heated one; the officer demands to know where Gajdusek has learned his German. His response of "high school" fails to satisfy the officer. Gajdusek then lies, telling the officer that he'd studied a semester of German at university before being drafted, in an effort to appeal to the officer's snobbishness. "And it worked. By God it worked," Gajdusek exclaims incredulously. "I knew that I was, I would be, probably, finally safe from him," he correctly concludes.

The reader is exhausted and frustrated by the time Gajdusek is taken to the cellar room, the aforementioned field hospital. The grievous wounds Gajdusek suffered and has been nursing pale in comparison to that which he witnesses in the clinic. To this point the reader has been quietly suffering with the narrator as he's detailed his trials. But in the

cellar room the curtain is thrown back, both literally and figuratively, on the grisly horror of war that Gajdusek previously thought belonged solely to him.

> I saw the sudden hemorrhaging of a man lying before me, blood pumping out his mouth. I saw the truncated ends of torn away limbs, the torn faces where wads of cloth were held in place where no flesh was. Some were, it seems, young yet hardened veterans of the line, others old men, too old surely for the uniforms they wore, the wounds they bore. Still many, too many more, were boys, no more than fifteen at the best. (184)

The view is a revolting one. But the stares he receives are even more unbearable: "Each set of eyes was like a sharp blow." For an instant Gajdusek is "the enemy;" he bears for the entire U.S. Army the malice of the room full of wounded and dying Germans. His sense of guilt and grief is incalculable. A nun's inquiry as to whether there's anything she could do for him is almost more than he can bear.

I earlier remarked about Gajdusek's ability to find the silver lining. My instinct would tell me that with time one could only become bitter at having had to endure such a horrifying experience. Not so for Gajdusek. For him, a keen sense of and appreciation for nature is an invaluable by-product of his skirting death. "The earth had become sensualized, dramatized, and more intimate to me," Gajdusek concludes in his book's postscript.

> . . . I had dug into it, been sheltered by it, had hidden in it, had covered myself with it and rubbed it upon me that it might be both my warmth and camouflage. . . . This intimacy with gross and basic nature was for me an unpredictable gift; and no one receives such a gift without coevally receiving the gift of a certain eloquence when nature, which is the source of our imagery and language, informs and pours itself full-bodied into our abstractions and thoughts. (213)

This admission of Gajdusek's is redemption for the reader. Some meaning, as simple and perhaps out of balance as it may seem, is given to the ordeal.

I remember taking a poetry class at a university located near a military base at which I was once stationed. On occasion I'd dash from

work to class, and if time were a factor I'd attend class in my uniform. I remember writing a paper which examined the treatment of war in poetry, and how the glorification and righteousness of war, seen in full color in "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," for instance, wanes as weapons of mass destruction proliferate. I offered as evidence for my inverse proportional theory the works of the trench poets of World War I. The conclusion of my paper, as I recall, was a cautionary one; the horrors of war, I suggested, can become lost in this world of advanced, "antiseptic" weapons systems. My teacher had, in general, laudatory remarks for my essay, but concluded, "Given your attitude towards war, I'm puzzled that you're in the service." A blush ran to my cheek as I read his remark. *Does he have a point?* I instinctively asked myself. But shame quickly gave way to indignation. *Who would he rather see in the profession of arms?* Would he rather see an army full of men like Tex, the foul-mouthed, Cro-Magnon roommate of Gajdusek's in the cellar room? Trigger-fingered men with mastadonic egos controlling the destiny of the human race, if they were so inclined? No; it takes former soldiers the likes of Gajdusek to give us intimate details of the grim reality of war. And it takes servicemen and women of similar sensibilities to do their very best that the realities of the past do not become the realities of the future.

David Lawrence is a U.S. Air Force Civil Engineering officer who teaches English at the United States Air Force Academy.

RESURRECTION
A War Journey

Robert E. Gajdusek

A Chronicle of Events During and Following the Attack on Fort Jeanne d'Arc at Metz, France, by F Company of the 37th Regiment of the 95th Infantry Division, November 14–21, 1944. Robert E. Gajdusek



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"[Gajdusek] provides an in-depth, multi-layered, and personal memoir of his combat experience and its aftermath. *Resurrection* takes many turns and twists in time and space and is filled with surprising revelations such as finding peace of mind while being a prisoner of war. . . . The ultimate lesson of *Resurrection* is pro-humanity, not anti-war. That is why stories like these need to be told and read." —*North Dakota Quarterly*

"Gajdusek's story, written 50 years after the events, has both the immediacy of a journal written on the spot by a boy, and the maturity of that boy grown into a poet. Gajdusek's introspection is a grenade; it shatters even the possibility of being glib about war.This rough-fragile memoir belongs, honorably, on everyone's not very crowded shelf of war books." —Paul H. Stacy, Professor Emeritus of Modern Literature University of Hartford

Robert E. Gajdusek

—from *Resurrection: A War Journey*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997

Germans Searching For the Wounded (pp. 60-62)

Suddenly, in the darkness he heard an out cry on the field and burp guns simultaneously erupting. He lay, clutched back into himself, shrinking into the earth under him, convulsing back into and under it and the network of branches over him. He lay in unbreathing silence and then heard slow rushing movements on the field near him. There was another series of cries and a sustained firing: he lay rigid and shocked with horror. They were sending out squads to locate those they could find hiding or wounded on the field. They were shooting the wounded!

For a long while there was no further sound, then the rushing movement sounds further up the field and then a sustained shouting and crying and shouting and then the guns again, the guns. He was as though slapped, stricken with horror. It wasn't that it struck him as a violation, just as a fact, a fact.

He and his buddies were, after all, "enemy" soldiers, he and the others now lying within German lines, and more dangerous for being concealed and wounded, unable to do anything but strike at anything that came near them—if they had weapons. He felt this because he knew his own dangerousness had he a gun should any German come near him. It was just the sudden recognition that they were searching for him, looking for him, probing for him in the darkness—that was the terror. He smeared black mud and dirt on his hands, over his face and neck.

For a long while there was silence and then he heard slow, furtive new sounds, now in the wood where he was, but far. And as he listened, his

scalp as though capped with a numbing hand, he could make out the slow, scattered, occasional but continuing and nearing sounds of some who were edging their way in the almost total darkness towards his end and fringe of woods. Suddenly, a stick snapped, hard, sharp, clear, not twenty yards away. He did not breathe, only desperately trying to press back his exposed hands into and under the earth and branches. It was as though his ears were points, that the silence was a great complete weight and space and that he was focused like the point of a steel probe to quiver to life with the minutest scratch, touch, breath in the world: the whole universe come down to that focused space. And then, the sounds. He no longer heard those further off—oh, they were there—but really heard only the slow sliding brushing movement of something, someone angling towards him through the night.

How many hours in how many seconds—long, long silences with only an occasional wind or a far outcry, occasional gunfire far up the field, and then the slow sliding, occasional crinkling heaviness near him, approaching him in the darkness. He was as though one dead, his eyes straining, pushing against darkness. And then it was seemingly just at his feet, a sense of a mass in the darkness, a sensed presence of something huge and looming and coming over him. And then he saw, just near his feet, not moving, a new outline of darkness discernible now as it had moved up to be able to blot out a rash of stars that had suddenly by cloud movement been revealed, a black mass of darkness.

His eyes were hard squinted down to the barest line of sight, lest they might be seen looking up as he lay on his back in the hole and under the brush and mud, but he saw carefully and slowly the unmoving outline of a man just standing there. And then that darkness moved, the soldier moved forward and upon him. He was prepared to cry out and kick, thrust up and out at his death, to cry out, to scream out, in German, but the man, sliding stepping a foot forward, stepped down noisily into the shell hole edge though the branches. The foot was drawn back and up in a flash, the man instantly freezing in his movement, stifling his own muttered in-cry. And there he stood, directly over the wounded man beneath him now, dark and silhouetted against the night stars, neither of them breathing now, neither moving. Nothing. After a long while, the soldier leaned, crouched, and probed down and into the shell hole—he was searching for his feet!—turning, reaching towards his knees, missing his uncovered but branch-concealed feet, probing, touching the mud, the rocks, the dirt above him where he lay. Probing, probing. Then he

stood back up, neither of them breathing or having breathed. Carefully, a foot moved forward, delicately, like a living night creature, and it came down directly on his hand, on his hand where it lay under the mud and dirt. A huge crushing, enormous breaking weight of a steel shoe on the back of his right hand. And there the man stood, rearing like an obelisk in the night, his entire weight bearing down into the earth upon that broken hand.

For how long, for how long did he stare up at this now very clear black shape of a German soldier, a machine pistol cradled in his right arm, his helmet against the stars, standing there like some outgrowth of his own body mirrored up and against the skies. For how long—it was as if someone had driven a spike through the back of his hand!—the unchanged breaking weight on the back of his hand, the man above him trying to peer down, stare down into his eyes, he staring up and against the eternal night? He would forever after be lying there staring up at this darkness against darkness, at this death against living stars. In how many dreams through how many years would he confront this ambivalent shadow of himself rearing up and as though from his own body and placed like a shadow against blackness upon the night? And then the man moved, moved, as slowly as he had come, on, away, joining other faint sounds like his own that were moving off to his right further in the woods, joining the sounds, faint but able to be interpreted, of others like himself slithering, drifting, probing through the woods. At last "they" were down in the far woods beyond his head, and he took his first breath.

Terms With Death in the Shell Hole (pp.69-70)

In the later afternoon, there was a soft golden light in the air, and in it, he was certain that he was going to die. The day was beautiful, the air fresh and, now, even warm, but he had no feeling in his hands or in his lower body, and he could not see any way in which he might be able to survive. If he did not die by the shells or the Germans, he would die of hunger, thirst, cold, sickness, the breaking down of his nerves and his strength. He wanted desperately to live, and he cast through his mind to find the

terms on which life would be possible, to see himself in any fashion possibly returned to life. When he had written his last note, he had made a list on the back of the page, which placed him in history: it began with his identity, name and address, military outfit, his age, 19, the year, and day, and placed this time of his life in his galaxy in the universe and descended down to his world, the earth, and to Europe, and France, and to a field outside Metz near Gravelotte and to the hill of Forts Driant and Jeanne d'Arc and to this field and wood's edge and this shellhole.

Now he similarly ranged through all those he knew and all the experiences he had known and had. He realized that his legs could not be saved, one was shattered, but both were long ago frozen and without feeling, probably in unarrestable gangrene, but he well knew that life without his legs was a question of amputations and adjustment. He accepted that—if only he could live. He had also largely lost feeling in his torn and frozen hands, and he wondered if, indeed, it was a sentimentality to believe that he would be willing to live life as a quadruple paraplegic. He considered that question soberly and long and knew that, yes, he could accept that—if only he could live. But he knew that life was more impossible than that, that after this long time of freezing he probably had pneumonia and, to judge by his chest pain and his occasional lapsing away towards unconsciousness, he probably was ill and shattered in some way beyond reparation, and he wondered if he was willing to accept his quadraplegic life if he were not surrounded by the love of those he loved.

So one by one, he thought of those he loved: of Lee, who was his girl, who was the center of his life—and he knew that he would be willing to live, if he lost her, without her, for could he, after all, wish upon her what he would be if he survived? And, similarly, he thought long and carefully about his brother and mother and father, and slowly, reluctantly, let each fall from his hands, fall from his consciousness, knowing that life, to be had at all, had to be had at that severe a cost, the loss of all and every one of them. It was not as though he were falling into death so much as though he was releasing them, one by one, to a great darkness, letting them fall like irreplacable jeweled stones of solid weight irretrievably through space and away into an impenetrable darkness. They were the sacrifices and the cost. Not he. At last then, seeing himself alone, in an empty room in a ward somewhere, and without a soul about him, near him, caring for or aware of his existence, he asked, BUT

WHAT IF you were not only a quadruple amputee but also blind? Could you accept life on those conditions? Yes, yes, said his heart. Yes. But what if you were not only a quadraplegic blindman but also deaf and dumb? You know what I am saying, you hear what I am saying? And he, inside himself, shouted yes, yes. Even then, Yes! All right, You, You Nameless, you Trunk of Body, you Flesh, you Thing, what if you were only Torso, to be propped by day against the rotting doorway of a shitted mud hut in the wastes of Siberia, and deaf and dumb and blind? Would you truly settle for life on those terms? And he felt the soft wind of evening go across his cheek, and he said yes, yes, if only to feel the warmth of sunlight in the morning move across the side of my face, to be able to feel the coolness coming on of evening; if only to feel the wind touch my hair, touch my cheek, if only that. Yes! And at that moment he knew he began to live.

SS Officer in the Orchard (pp.118-121)

"Nahh?" The sergeant stood up, They all stood up, hauling me to my feet, and began to buckle up. One asked their leader "Wo?" and he gestured with his head towards a field and young orchard hard on the other side of the road. I was slung again between two of them, and we, in a straggled group went on down the road to where an opening appeared in the matted tall hedgerow on the other side of the lane. Into this we turned, where the indentations of car and wagon tracks had made a primitive orchard road, and we moved on it and along it to the right towards what I saw was again a young relatively new orchard. As we entered this, suddenly ahead were large numbers of soldiers, lying about—at least a company on break. But we continued forward, angling towards what I saw must be a field set up, with table and chairs and a field telephone—what must have been the C.P.—near which stood two tall well uniformed men, undoubtedly officers, smoking. As we had made our obvious way through the orchard, groups of soldiers had attached themselves to us, exchanging some words with my captors, or joining us as we advanced. Here was an American, captured and being brought in. As we neared the heart of the matter, one of the officers broke off and ad-

vanced on us, and as he did so, my captors no longer half carried me, but stopped, and, half supporting me where I stood, awaited his command.

"Warum haben si Ihn nicht geschiessen?!" [Why didn't you shoot him?] The words cut through like a knife, and I was chilled to the bone. Without waiting for my captors to irresolutely or indecisively reply, perhaps sensing that this officer was different stuff and was not to be trifled with, I myself took my fate into my own hands. Reaching back into whatever high school German I had, desperately reaching for articulateness in the midst of my ignorance, I blurted out, directly to him, "Denn si können das nicht tun. Es gibt die Genevische Conventionen, und ich bin ein Kreigsgefangene und verwundet, and ich habe kein Gewähr. Ich benutze Hilfe, Medezin, und, bitte, etwas zu essen." [Because you can't do that. There are the Geneva Conventions, and I am a prisoner of war, and wounded, and I have no gun. I need help, medical help, and, please, something to eat.] All this improbable speech poured out. Undoubtedly, there was method in my madness—for I wanted to impress him with my value, as a person, as a human being, as someone who could communicate and arbitrate the conditions of my capture, as someone who understood the situation and could discuss it. After what he had said, I simply wanted, I suppose, to immediately seize the moment, to direct it away from the fate he had suggested. Perhaps I somewhere understood that in verbalizing this in this way before the crowd of my captors and the others, I could win support and create sympathy and embarrassment, and in some way cease to be unnecessary baggage and be a person. "Warum haben sie Ihn nicht geschiessen?" It still rang in my ears, like the death it told of.

He studied me, while the other officer came up and joined the group, and in that moment I studied him. I could see that for the first time in my life I was confronting an SS officer—I read the dual red lightning bolts upon his lapel. He was everything powerful that the "Why We Fight" films had warned me of, and he met the image I had been given. He was in his thirties, meticulously dressed for someone "at the front," and manicured and polished in his manner, icy in his rigor. And yet I had, I saw, impressed him, intrigued him. "So . . . you speak German?" "Ja, ich habe ein bischen in HochSchule studiert. Nur das." [Yes. I have studied it a little in high school. Only that.] "Nur das?" he echoed, and then, cajoling me, "aber es ist *parfait!* Sie sprechen gut Deutsch." I wasn't going to let this become an "after you Alphonse" exchange of pleasantries masking malice, so I refused the denial and instead continued, "Ich

habe ein bischen in Universität auch studiert, und dafur kann ich mit sie etwas sagen." I lied. I hadn't studied German at Princeton, where I had gone for one semester before being drafted, but I was reaching for all the straws I could grasp to draw him away from his first idea. I was shamelessly appealing to his snobbery, to that sense in him I might stimulate that indeed we could talk together, I was trying to snare his curiosity and his interest.

And it worked. By God, it worked. I watched the exchange of a glance and a smile he gave the other officer. The group of soldiers about us was thick but I think he and I now never took our eyes off one another. "Slowly he articulated, mocking me, "Die Ge-ne-vi-sche Conventionen! Aber es gibt keine hier! Hier ist Krieg. Wir sind ins Mitte des Kreigs. Verstehst??" [But there are none here! Here there is war. We are in the middle of a war. Do you understand?] I had to continue where I had begun. To lapse now and leave the initiative to him might be fatal. "Nein. Hier sind wir ins Mitte eine Feld an die Grenze, und ich bin sicher deine Kriegsgefangene." [No. Here we are in the middle of a field on the border of a war and I am certainly your prisoner of war.] He was back at me, "Es gibt keine Grenze in Krieg." [There are no borders in war.] And I was back at him: "Wir können unser Grenze selbst machen. Hier." [We can make our own borders. Here.] And his repart was immediate, "Und hier können wir unser Krieg selbst machen. Auch!" [And here we can ourselves make our own war. Also.] Perhaps trying to shift the basis of our exchange and give me greater leeway, I sidestepped," Aber si können Englisch vieleicht sprechen, besser als ich Deutsch?" "Nein," he demurred, "Ihrer Deutsch is gut genug." [But perhaps you can speak English, better than I can speak German? No. Your German is good enough.] From the way he was enjoying our exchange, I knew that I was, I would be, probably, finally safe from him.

The Cellar Room (pp.182-86)

The door was opened, I was helped through the doorway and into the hands of two aid men who advanced up a set of narrow descending stairs on the other side of the door. They arm-lifted me and brought me down those badly lit stairs to the wall at its foot, propped me to the left of the stairs where

I briefly balanced on one foot, and I was in the Cellar Room. . . .

Here, in the large basement room that opened out at the foot of the stairs, better but starkly and frighteningly lit with candlelight and acetylene torches, was hell itself. Before me, about me, pressing against me on my left shoulder, at my feet and standing, propped as I against all available wall space, lying on stretchers, on the stone floor, almost on top of and against each other, was an army, a defeated army, a ravaged and destroyed army of bodies, of alive or barely alive shattered soldiers.

The floor before me and leading forwards towards a blanket and canvas curtained area beyond was glistening red with blood, the men about me were daubed everywhere, on their torn faces, their wounded or missing arms, about their bodies and missing or torn legs, with mad scarlet and striking insulting reds—as though a mad painter had swept his demonic brush over all surfaces. The smell was deafening, the smell of blood and bodies and of guns and dynamite and smoke, of every visceral foul smell the world has. It was really, however, as though my eyesight had grown inordinately intense, as though every sensation informed me through my eyes. There was sound—my God!—a steady undertone of moaning, of cries, punctuated by shrieks underwritten by a steady drone of a never-ceasing voice, like the needle of a record stuck on a demented chant, coming from behind the curtain wall where, I instantly knew, the "business" of the cellar was being transacted. But I only really saw!

Mostly German field uniforms of infantry soldiers, mud marked and cancelled, but also a wild array of uniforms of those of all branches—engineers, tank corps, arfillery—including non coms and privates, officers: All were piled indiscriminately on the stone cellar floor and against the limestone cellar walls of that enormous room. It was at once too large and too small. Everywhere was the mass of writhing, turning, agonizingly moving bodies—striking the air in pain, beating against the floor, or just lying inert and as though for nothing, nothing—so that the room seemed a field or a cellar-full of broken torn men: all waiting for what care they could find. And the numbers that were there, pressed against and upon one another, so that it seemed jammed and filled to bursting with these maimed! Many of them still held, cradled, or were lying with or beside their guns, and most were still clothed as they were when hit, in their stained and clotted and blood drenched clothing.

Even as I stared, aid men were bringing another soldier down the stair—a man, his right arm torn away, in tourniquet and shock. And there was another, who came in with him, a grim-faced corporal cra-

dling his machine pistol. Why is it that my memory is of these guns, still seemingly hot to the touch, and, even, smoking? It could not be so, but that is how I remember it, probably because they brought with them the sense of being just minutes from the place of their wounding, moments away from the battle in which they had been hit. I have what must be an invalid memory but one that is distinctly "there," of, as I stood there, at the bottom of the stairs, my arm being touched by the flash protector of a machine-gun barrel and wincing back from its heat.

Going about, as they could through the many bodies on the littered cellar floor, aid men and occasional nurses—German (French?) Sisters of Charity, some in huge incongruous white winged bonnets—moved hurriedly and sporadically. Even as I stood there, the curtain flap raised and I could see the more brightly lit interior of what was the "operating" space or room, with its blood-glistening floor, its glint of light on steel, the doctors, most in regular uniform and others in hospital garb, bloodspattered and drenched white. Screams and shrieks from behind these curtains were intermittently or sustainedly there. Sisters or medical assistants moved in and out from this inner space, unconscious (or dead?) or stricken operated-upon men being moved out on stretchers and away. Where? Others were quickly picked from among those before me and brought in to their own saving or destroying ordeal.

And I, among the others, standing there, waiting. For what? For my turn behind the curtain? For someone to question me, deal with me? I was now weak and laboring to continue standing, propped as I was, trying to keep my weight more on one leg, though there was no pain. I grasped an otherwise useless wall bracket and so took my weight off my legs. I saw the sudden hemorrhaging of a man lying before me, blood pumping out his mouth. I saw the truncated ends of torn away limbs, the torn faces where wads of cloth were held in place where no flesh was. Some were, it seems, young yet hardened veterans of the line, others old men, too old surely for the uniforms they wore, the wounds they bore, and many were no more than boys, fifteen at the best.

Far more incisively I saw the eyes of those who stood propped near me and beside me, of those who lay grim and silent and watching, the faces of broken and dying men whose eyes seemed to strike and probe and come to rest like nails, like bludgeons, like bullets, in me. I saw some, unaware of me suddenly recognize me, the enemy among them, others who steadily smoked in stoic relentless silence while watching me. And I could not bear it, I could not bear it. Each set of eyes was a sharp hard blow.

And then, the man who stood to my left across the stairs at the foot of the stairs, apparently wounded through his left arm, rummaged in his upper pocket, took out a cigarette with his right hand and placed it in his lips; the man to his left lit it for him, and he deeply dragged, exhaling a cloud of blue-gray smoke. His eyes were watching me watching him, slowly, silently, relentlessly. The sense I realize I increasingly had was of a great well of silence, an inverted bell-cone of some oppressive sealing force and form, holding us all, in this whole scene like one organism, down in a great wail and shriek of sound that had gone beyond sound, through broken eardrums on into a muffling encapsulating silence. And it was in this great shock of silence that I saw and felt.

The cellar room was like an icon, a sign of ultimate hell. It was a vision of pain and death and terror and violence brought up to a breaking point of intensity: it was *felt* pain, *felt* agony, *felt* madness, *felt* delirium, *felt* death, and, in its fragmented fractured images of dripping and spasming bodies, of sticky pools of fresh blood, of bright lights beyond the blanket bearing down on screaming amputated men, it was one single integrated image of utter devastation. And I saw the faces, like white disks of judging searchlights playing upon me and over me. I saw the young faces, the human faces, the near and comprehended faces of my enemy in agony. And I saw myself, standing there, large and portentous and dominating in that increasingly narrowing closed in space as the single and only source and cause behind their suffering. I saw myself as though I were looking with their eyes, as I stood propped there like an insulting revenging reminder of what had killed *them,* and my mind shrieked "Kill me! Kill me! Kill me! Kill *me!" I* could not bear any more!

Suddenly, the smoking man reached across the interval between us and held out his cigarette to me—to me! to Me! to ME! I felt as though every eye in every head in that convulsed and spasmed room was watching—in a total silence. I reached out what felt like my totally naked arm and took the cigarette from his hand, my eyes not leaving his level eyes, and I took a deep long and unending drag on the cigarette. Then, I kept the smoke in my lungs, letting it fill me, and reached back across to his hand with the returned cigarette. I slowly released the deep draught I had taken: "Danke!" The room reeled. I steadied myself to keep from falling.

A Sister detached herself from somewhere and was before me, touching my arm, the wide-spread flanges of her bonnet reaching up like

white wings above me. "Is there something I can do for you?" "Do for you?" "Do for you!" "Do for YOU!" "DO FOR YOU!" It was as though the whole room had risen up in a great bloody wave of concrete and flesh and slapped me in the face: "Do for YOU!" I looked steadily at her through my tear-smashed eyes. "Do for ME?" How would I ever speak again? I could not see, for tears.

"Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!" How could I answer her?

The Language of War Tales (pp. 54–56)

Some may ask just why it has taken me until now, my 62nd year, to begin to tell this tale? I suppose because I have had to go first through a series of disillusioning awarenesses and beyond a cynicism fostered inevitably by the vast gulf between tales of truth and *truth*. However urgently a tale seeks to be true, it necessarily at last resorts to the imprecision of the imperfect vehicles of words, and whereas words in ordinary interchange are remote enough and abstract enough to help our usual fastidious desires to be remote while talking, and hidden while revealed, and deceiving while confessing, they are too rude and imperfect a means for the most important communications. That's why the most important things we have to say find their way into poetry, which usually must "do" something to language, as it uses it carefully and sparingly, to get it to be "true." I suppose one might define poetry as supremely important communications hovering on the limits of language's imperfect means. And therefore I have been forced over many years to admit that what I had to say about my war could not be confided to language, yet. Now, I see, as I look back over a paragraph or two of what I have written, that it has been written only because I at last am willing to accept the compromises my youth and earlier years could not. I seem to be easily using terms like "action," "advanced," "pierced by," "cries from my wounded . .. buddies," "my movements," the "next wave," "I considered." They are all false, false, false. They are totally untrue—NOT because they intentionally distort truth but because they inevitably distort truth. Nothing, nothing is sensed so simplistically, monistically, in such isola-

tion from other apprehensions, sensations, or recognitions. Nothing is done so or perceived so. And my experience in my war has been too valuable to me to be translated into lies, to become what it was not. I suppose, always, our reallest truths are never spoken or written, and the love poem received is really an ominous sign that the love can look at itself in its linguistic surrogate and find satisfaction there. Usually, we confide dying or dead values to words, or use words to slay them, while waiting for the writer who presses at the edge of his unwilling compromise to force feeling back towards its sources, which it will only know in an escape from its medium. Living values are lived, and when the values are thus true, they seem like my war experience, untranslatable, too true for language. That's what the poet is trying really to say as he stammers over and over about the insufficiency of stars to compare to his mistress' eyes. It is true: to write something is to be rid of it. I think that the one thing of which I never wished to be rid was my war, my battle, myself on that field, myself as I was and became, there.

Then why have we, over these many centuries settled for, as we seemingly have, this imperfect means of transmission of what is most vital? Because, I suspect, the business of life must always remind us that it is business, and sensibility must be kept in its place, back where it belongs, inside the sensibility. And the bluntness of language itself as vehicle is one means of keeping us human and ungodlike, or of keeping us within importantly insensitive human dimensions. Sensitivity is not a primary desideradum but rather sensitivity in a functioning human being, and functioning implies a certain callous disregard of most things. The millwheel does not ask how many fish it crushes, nor the hot water heater, who died of silicosis young to hack coal from damp and dark corridors in slagheaped mines in Pennsylvania. "IF we move," says D.H. Lawrence, "the blood rises in our footsteps." How utterly right he is, but most people, or "mostpeople," as e.e. cummings would choose to say, couldn't care less or refuse the recognition: "What in the world are you talking about?" they say, wiping their bloody hands off on the bloody sheets. Our sentimentalities are outrageous. That's why I would much rather have a General look after our peace than any politician who has small consciousness if any of his culpability and bloodletting.

Robert E. Gajdusek is a widely published Hemingway scholar. *A Voyager's Notebook: Selected Poetry of Robin Gajdusek* was published in 1989.

Ted Engelmann

A Photo Essay

I was born in Bloomington, Indiana, January 3rd, 1947. I spent time living in places such as Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where my father was stationed during the Korean conflict. I had a taste of the life of an army brat, and later a university brat, moving around and attending several schools before I finally graduated from Johnstown High School in upstate New York.

Both my parents were educators, and my father was a photographer and public relations officer, first for RCA in Bloomington, Indiana, then the State University of New York in Oneonta.

I spent a year in Viet Nam as an air force sergeant, from March 1968-March 1969. As a ground-to-air radio equipment repairman, I was sent to work with a forward air control team located at a forward observation location for the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, *The Big Red One*. Lai Khe was unique in that we had a Vietnamese village within our base camp perimeter, and Highway 13 came right through the base camp. In October 1968, I was given orders to join Advisory Team 55 in the Delta village of Rach Gia. In Viet Nam, I always had a half-frame 35mm Olympus Pen EES-2 camera with me in my side-pant pocket.

I returned to the U.S. to spend nine months active duty in the air force at Robins AFB, Georgia, and took an early out in December 1969 in order to attend a community college in upstate New York. In June 1977, after several years attending Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, I received my undergraduate degree in Earth Science and Biology with a teaching certificate from the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley.

I took photographs of everyday life during my tour of duty. I have

images depicting the culture and people of Viet Nam. To help make the images of the war more fully meaningful, in the mid-1980s I started documenting the process of healing in the U.S. by photographing the public rituals of dedicating monuments and memorials, parades, walks, marches, and the like.

My first venture to document the effects of the Vietnam conflict outside the U.S. was in September 1987. I attended the first "Welcome Home" parade for the Australian soldiers in Sydney. Interestingly, the Aussie *diggers* arrived in Sydney wearing their sport coats, slacks and ties, but kept their medals in their pockets, lest the public jeer them, as was the case some years earlier. This time the public was in full support. The Mayor of Sydney even offered free public transportation to anyone wearing his or her service medals.

I returned to my base camp at Lai Khe, about 30 miles north of Bien Hoa, in early 1989. I have returned to Vietnam six times, living there for several months at a time.

Since there were more than 300,000 South Korean soldiers in Viet Nam, I wanted to research the Korean soldier's experience. I secured a position as visiting professor at Han Nam University in Taejon, South Korea from 1990-91. I have since visited Korea three times. I have images and insight depicting an Asian and a Western perspective, an American experience, and the changes in the land and culture where the conflict took place, from the early 1960s to 1975.

Over the years, I have created about 30,000 slides and several thousand black and white images covering four cultures.



The Vietnam Veterans National Memorial Chapel, Angel Fire, New Mexico, May 1986



Laundry drying at the Palace Hotel, Saigon, Viet Nam, March 1989



Statues along Highway 1, near Xuan Loc, Viet Nam, August 1999



Monsoon in Hue, Viet Nam, March 1989



The Holy See of the Cao Dai Temple, Tay Ninh, Viet Nam, July 1997



Polio Braces, Saigon, Viet Nam, March 1989



Amerasian Boys and their Mother, Saigon, Viet Nam, March 1989



Repatriation of American Remains, Noi Bai Airport, Ha Noi, Viet Nam, January 1999



Buddhist Temple, near Da Nang Viet Nam, March 1989

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Art Grillo

We Do Normandy

I finally say "Normandy" and let my bags drop and let the word hang in our space. Val looks at me. We are standing on the main concourse of the Gare St-Lezare. Parisian train stations have a way of sparking all kinds of drama that might so conveniently be resolved elsewhere.

"Normandy?"

"Yes. Let's go there. Instead of Switzerland. Seriously."

She removes her sunglasses so that she might better study me, this odd traveling partner whom she hardly knows. "Who was the one insisting on no more side trips?"

"Okay. We can blow off Southern Italy."

"You don't want to connect with your roots anymore?"

"Not really. I'm only half-Italian."

"What about Montreux? The jazz festival?"

"I'll buy you some records."

This earns me a laugh, a deep, good-natured laugh that promises her eventual surrender to my whim. The two of us met six months ago in Washington, D.C., at the annual shmooze-fest of the Modern Language Association. Let me describe Val: voluptuous, five-foot-three, dark hair cut in what apparently is known as a "Julia Roberts bob," and very dark eyes—orbs, if you will. To me these orbs are windows to a wise, generous, and sexually dominant soul. She is assistant professor of English at a small university in California, an avid golfer, a native of Brooklyn. "The baddest and horniest Foucauldian in town," according to one of her more erotic emails. Mainly we've communicated through cyberspace or on the telephone. It was her idea to "do some damage on the Continent together." We drew up a three-week itinerary, we bought

EuroRail passes. It would be your basic European lark by two relative strangers. Despite all the excitement, I knew the trip would be a test for me—a bachelor without a track record of long relationships. Twenty-one days spent constantly or near-constantly in the company of the same woman would be a personal best.

"The Norman countryside is beautiful," I say. "Quaint stone farmhouses. Cows. Hedgerows. There's even something called the Omaha Beach Golf Club. You'll be able to work on your game." The irony is I never suggested Normandy during our heady days of planning; now I am beckoned irresistibly by the sea and the beaches and the echoes of GI heroism, all chronicled by historian Stephen Ambrose, whose over-the-top tome about D-Day I picked up at the Brentano's on Avenue de la Opera. Being in Normandy will cure the malaise that is traveling with me, a malaise that grew especially uncompanionable last night in our hotel room as Val and I lay in a dead zone of failed intercourse. Normandy will ease my jet lag and my constipation and my performance anxiety. Maybe it even will distract me from this odd tendency of mine to imagine my father burning his tongue on hot soup whenever I am at the climax of lovemaking. I'm not making this up. I'll be having intercourse with Val, and I'll be picturing Dad as he was at the dinner table, raising his spoon, his face already red, his eyebrows arched absurdly high on his forehead, a look of terror in his eyes just before his tongue touches the broth that he has insisted Mom serve piping hot, always hot, hotter, hottest, so he could renew this pointless painful ritual of his.

We gather up our bags.

"It'll be fun," Val says.

"I'll be able to relax," I say.

Bayeux, liberated by the British early in June, 1994, is a town that begs the adjective "charming," if for no other reasons than the natives are friendlier than Parisians and everything is less expensive. Bakeries and delis and sidewalk cafes line the main commercial boulevard, with flags of the world strung between the buildings. A banner reading, "Welcome to Our Liberators" greets you at the cash machine. There is a towering cathedral from the eleventh century and hordes of German tourists. Our hotel is at the edge of the lawn surrounding the Musée Memorial de la Bataille De Normandie. On our first morning in Normandy, as Val finishes her free-room-service coffee and croissant, I

stand at our window and gaze down at a Sherman tank.

She asks, "Your father wasn't at D-Day? Was he?"

"No. He was a bomber mechanic. He was never in combat himself." My words drift down to an imaginary audience of French citizens collected on the lawn. "He never even made it to Europe."

"Was that an issue for him?"

"Not being in Europe?"

"Right. And perhaps not being in combat."

"I don't know. No. He never said it was. He had plenty of other issues to deal with." For instance, alcoholism. Career frustration. Guilt. He went through life with a lot of guilt from defying his mother by marrying a Protestant girl, and from whatever other reasons the sons of overbearing ethnic matriarchs have for feeling guilty.

Val comes up behind me and slips her arms around my ribcage and nuzzles the nape of my neck. Then she tightens her grip and actually lifts me a few inches off the ground.

She leads me over to the bed. Undoes my belt buckle. We kiss. The malaise overtakes me again, that jet-lagged, constipated, burnt-tongue feeling.

"Are you glad we came to Normandy? Are you relaxing?"

"Yes. Let's take a bus trip."

A van trip, to be precise. There are five of us—me, Val, a fortyish couple from Wisconsin, and the driver, a twentysomething Englishwoman named Fiona who says "bloody weather" as drizzle collects on the windshield. Her dialect will rub off on me, an anglophile. Val considers the Brits repressed and passive-aggressive and snotty. I say they were heroes for fighting off the Luftwaffe. When Fiona stops for petrol, we chat with the Wisconsin couple, who happen to be schoolteachers. They are both wearing purple T-shirts with a little smiley-face and the word, "Summerfest"—some kind of annual Milwaukee concert and beer-blowout.

At Pointe-du-Hoc, we go strolling out to a grassy bluff overlooking the English Channel. The barrel of a cannon protrudes from under the ruins of a concrete fortification. Children frolic in the wide craters made by naval guns. Val and I sit together on the roof of a bunker, staring out at the sea. I'm imagining a destroyer emerging from the mist. She's maybe thinking sex, which is maybe what I too should be thinking, I mean, she is a reasonably attractive woman and we are together in France,

and what we're doing traipsing through the battlefields of Normandy is really an extended form of foreplay, as even your typist with his malaise and his Ambrose text realizes.

"Come inside," she says.

"No."

"You're getting wet."

"If the Rangers can scale a cliff in the face of machine gun fire, I can get wet."

"You're nuts, you know that? You're absolutely nuts." She laughs, as if she's still amused. As if she thinks I'm still on the right side of the line separating delightfully eccentric and deeply troubled.

As Val goes inside, I take out Ambrose and peer at a photograph of my exact location. When I look up, a boy of maybe five years is standing before me in a New York Yankees cap.

"Bloody weather, eh son?"

No response. Is he thinking eccentric? Or crazy?

I read to him:

> At dawn the men of the 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions were scattered in small pockets. Few men knew where they were. The groups were usually mixed, containing men from different companies, battalions, regiments, and even divisions, strangers to the leaders who were trying to get them to move on objectives to which they had not been assigned and for which they had not been briefed.
>
> Lt. James Coyle was with a battalion that took possession of the quiet little village Ste.-Mere-Eglise. A Frenchman came out of his house to talk. He spoke little or no English and Coyle spoke but a little French, but the lieutenant understood him well enough to sense his concern: He wanted to know if this was a raid or if it was the invasion.
>
> Coyle reassured him. "*Nous restons ici*," Coyle said. "We are staying here."

The boy smiles at me. We are determined to brave the elements. After all, what if we were pinned down in a foxhole and it started to rain? What could we do except get wet? *What if America were at war?* my father would say when I complained about getting wet during my paper route. *What if you were in the Army? What if things were* really *tough?*

Then he would tell one of his stories, and I would act bored and disdainful. Not being in combat was an issue only for *me*. As you know, he had plenty of his own. He was neurotic. "A worry-wort," Mom called him. They seemed not to have the best marriage. It was difficult to imagine their having sex. They would never kiss. I mean really *kiss*.

I raise my hand, and the boy and I give each other a high-five.

"We are staying here!"

The boy's mother arrives.

"Komm her, Franz!" she says.

The rain stops by the time we reach the American cemetery at Omaha Beach, where we wander past rows and rows of white crosses and scattered stars of David and thick wet grass. The stillness seems to conjure up images of battle courtesy of Stephen Ambrose: mortar shells raining down onto exposed Higgins boats, tanks sinking in too-deep water, GIs swimming and wading and staggering ashore like shipwreck victims. Many lost their rifles and helmets in the churning sea, and had to borrow these basics from their dead comrades on the beach.

My eyes moisten. Across the grounds, the schoolteacher husband blows his nose. At the edge of one row, a general is buried next to a private.

"You can't beat America," as Dad would say.

Val and I slip our arms around each other. It occurs to me that I've never visited his grave. Ten years and I've never done that. I don't do graves, except for in places like this. Tourist cemeteries.

"He was never in combat."

Val smiles. There is an ineffable beauty in her smile, a sense of all-knowing, all-powerful femininity that makes me feel like a putz for having rebuffed her advances this morning. "From what you tell me about him, I think he was."

In the darkened cinema at the Musée du Debarquement she cuddles next to me, and later we sit in the van and kiss while Fiona shoots the breeze in French with one of the museum people and the schoolteachers wait in line at the souvenir store. Back in Bayeux, as Val and the schoolteacher wife exchange addresses, the husband asks me how long we are staying in Normandy.

"As long as it takes."

We have sex. Try to have sex. I mean intercourse. As things turn out, I can't get it up. I almost get it up. I get very close.

"It's these bloody condoms that are the problem."

"Oh, please!"

"Condoms were issued by the millions in the days preceding D-Day. The soldiers put them over the muzzles of their rifles to keep out sand and water. They would not have to be removed before firing."

We lie together, spoon-style, with Val behind me.

She says it doesn't matter. "I just like being with you. I like how you touch me." Sure. There is in fact ample evidence that she wants me inside her, that having me inside her will make a qualitative difference in her overall enjoyment of the experience. She has said this during phone sex. On email, too. Her exact words are back home, in my inbox. *I can feel you inside me already, filling me, making me swell, making me hot and wet and whole.* This happens to be the language of someone raised a strict Catholic, someone who is now very lapsed (as my father was), and yet who retains the earthiness of Catholicism, at least as viewed by a Protestant. Where am I going with all this religious stuff? I'm merely telling you that Val's earthy email rap both titillates and scares me. It makes me crave the safe maternal realm of my very Protestant mother, which in terms of sexual performance means I find myself playing the part of the girl. The girl who doesn't want to fuck.

"What if I *had* to do it? What if we were the only two people left on Earth after World War III? What if the human race depended on our making a baby?"

Val sighs. It's not like Val to sigh. Sighing means she is drifting away, thinking about going home, preparing her fall syllabi, applying for Sept. 1 deadline grants. "Then I'm sure you would perform magnificently, dear."

Dawn. The cloud cover has lifted, and a line of trees are casting long shadows over the Sherman tank. Val asks me what we're going to do.

"I know what *I'm* going to do. *I'm* going to take the train to Cherbourg, and then rent a car and drive around the Cotentin Peninsula, retracing the steps of 82nd Airborne and the 101st. That's what I'm going to do."

Her eyes flash daggers. We're way beyond sighing.

"You and your hard-on for war."

I shrug. "What are *you* going to do?"

"Who knows? Play golf! I'll have to try renting a set of lefthanded clubs, for Chrissake!"

"I'm sorry."

My plans are thwarted when I miss the train to Cherbourg. So instead I spend hours in the Musée de la Tapisserie with its celebrated hundred-meter-long hand-woven take on William the Conqueror's own personal D-Day back in 1066. Same concept, except the boats had sails and they traveled in the other direction. After the tapestry, your typist does the cathedral and does a ceramics museum and then walks around munching on a baguette. Dinner is beef bourguignon and cider at a sidewalk place. At the next table sits an elderly American couple. The man is small and grinning, with an oversized bald head, a putty face, thick glasses and a handful of French phrases he uses to flirt with the waitress. His wife reminds me of Margaret Dumont. The man and I get to talking. His name is Al, and—wouldjabelieveit?—he turns out to have been with the 101st.

Showering him with the kind of rapt attention that you-know-who never got, I sit nodding and oh-my-goshing as Al spins a succession of service yarns, including the one about "Cowboy," who was this big tough guy from Texas, the best guy in airborne school until it came time for the first practice jump, whereupon Cowboy panicked right at the head of the line of guys waiting to jump from the plane, he got all stiff and pale, he clutched the sides of the doorway with all his strength, and the jumpmaster tried to coax and threaten and push and kick him from the plane, all to no avail, and Cowboy was washed out of the airborne, disgraced.

"You never know about guys," Al says. "They can start out like world-beaters and then completely choke. Something in them freezes. There's no explanation for who it will happen to or why."

In D-Day, we have what is known as a historical event. Let me explain what happened on D-Day. In the early morning hours of June 6, 1944, after months and months of planning and training, months of arguing about when and where to invade and whether to do it at high or low tide, months of inventing and manufacturing various gadgets of mobility and death, and stockpiling ammo and cigarettes, and months of reconnaissance flights and espionage and code-breaking and fabricating a fake invasion to the north, the Allies launched an armada of some 2,700 ships of varying size and speed toward the same country where the British had been Dunkirked four years previous. These vessels were filled with what are sometimes affectionately referred to as "boys." Most of the American boys had never been in combat. Few had ever fired a

shot in anger or seen a man killed. Yet the historical event in which they were wrapped required them to be warriors, and so upon landing on the foreign shore the American boys sought out German boys and killed the German boys by shooting them, slitting their throats, throwing grenades into their tanks and flames into their pillboxes. The American boys perpetrated the kind of mischief that Tom Sawyer's gang only talked about. Despite some casualties—4,900 Allied troops killed, wounded and missing on this single day that historians and movie producers would call the longest—it all ended happily, and the hated Nazis were destroyed, and the American boys who survived became peaceful again, got themselves college degrees, wives, became husbands and fathers and commuters on the Long Island Railroad, spent their weekends mowing the lawn and playing golf and telling stories.

Maybe I'm oversimplifying, maybe I'm lapsing into jingoism, maybe my critical abilities are going south and my sensibilities are rotting in the sun, but D-Day was just awesome. What's more, it all happened a mere fifty-some years ago. The historical event still hangs in the air. The whole war does. The war lives in people's memories, and in movies and books and old songs, and in the comic books you read as a kid and the television programs you watched. Being a baby boomer means you live in a postwar era, pure and simple. There is the war, and then there is you. There is a big bang, and then there is you. There is a mountain of history, and then there is you, trying to crawl up the mountain face. It doesn't matter that your father wasn't in combat. He served his country well, he was in on a once-in-a-lifetime war, a good war. So what if the rest of his life was anticlimactic? There are some historical events you just can't top.

Okay. You're a baby boomer and you find yourself in Europe, a place where your father (no combat experience) never made it to, and you come upon the Mother of All Historical Events, an Armageddon of sorts, and you feel the weight of the past like never before, you feel its flesh and blood, its bones, its arms and legs and eyes and mouth and genitals. What do you do? Do you drive around, see a few sights, take a few pictures, buy a few souvenirs, eat a baguette and say, "Well, that was nice, now let's go to some other country and see other Historical Events, let's see a few Roman ruins, let's see where Leonardo da Vinci lived, let's see where Michelangelo hung out!"? Is that what you do? Is that really an adequate response to the first country's Historical Event? Course not! What you do—and never mind what the woman wants—is drop

your bags and stay. You walk the streets, you strike up conversations with strangers, you observe, you stay alert, stay awake, you read, taste, feel, improvise, engage, and mainly you *stay*. And after the sun has set and the day is won and the beach is strangely quiet, you drop to your hands and knees and wait there for History to have its way with you. You are naked—the force of History has done that. You are defenseless too, and tense and expectant and hopeful, and you wait and wait until finally History comes up behind you and violates you. You feel History hard and fast, slipping in and out as you cry. Painful as it is, you will learn to like it.

The above, more or less, is what I tell Val in the morning as she packs.

"I appreciate your weight," she says. "I'm still leaving."

I'm waiting with Val for her train and watching our taxi return to town, the driver's head growing smaller and smaller until it and the taxi are lost behind a curve in the road. As a toddler I would watch my father drive off to work in the morning and feel sorry for him because he couldn't be with me and Mom all day, and I would feel sorry for myself because I wasn't with him. It is difficult to imagine him at D-Day. He would have thrown up over the side of the landing craft (but then again, who didn't?). He would have been struck cold with fear as he splashed into the surf—(but who wasn't?). He would rather have been with his Mommy (but who wouldn't have?).

Val is watching me, sensing something. We each take a step forward and embrace. I really ought to be a man about this and follow her through Europe. Why be stuck up like my Protestant mom? And why always be picturing my father burning his tongue?

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. There's nothing to be sorry about."

"It's the weight of history, and all that. It's standing between us. I thought coming up here would be liberating, and in a sense it has been. There's just too much to process, too much to sort out. I'm being stimulated beyond my comfort zone. I'm being overwhelmed, flooded. Raped."

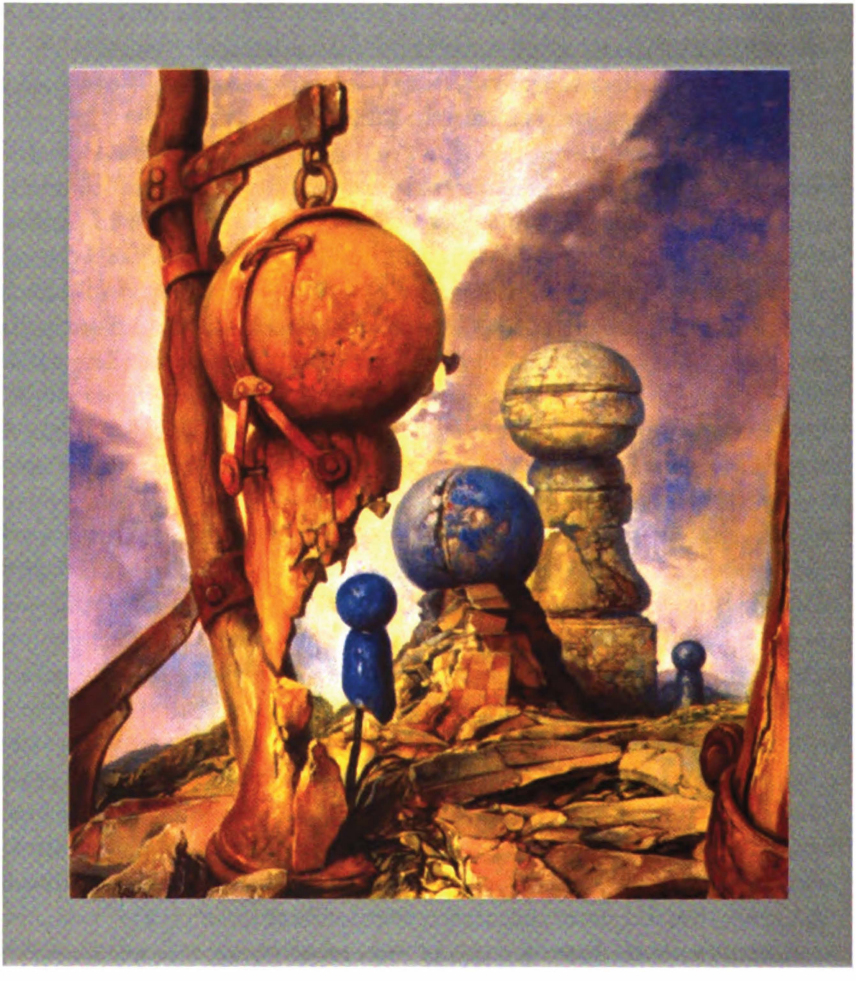
The train comes. We hug and kiss and wish each other safe journeys. She hoists her bags and boards the train.

Maybe he would have been okay in combat.

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Featured in our next edition

The Art of *Samuel Bak*



Study for Greatness, 1998

David Keplinger

On Bruce Weigl: Finding a Shape for the Litany of Terror

In the poetry of Bruce Weigl, we encounter two voices within the one. *This is my secret to keep*, a voice says. *I want to tell you this*, says the other. "The fate the world has given me," he writes in his memoir *Circle of Hanh,* "is to struggle to write powerfully enough to draw others into the horror." The author of some 15 books of poetry, criticism, and translation over the past two decades, Weigl has established himself as a major voice of his generation, having reached beyond his early marginalization as a "Vietnam War" poet. Rather, the contradictions from which his poetry was first born—of war and return—permitted Weigl the forum in which to first experiment with the themes and issues that have since become his trademark.

Horror, though perhaps difficult for the man, is surely the source of vitality in his work. If horror is his subject, he is an explorer, not an exploiter, of it. His first chapbook, "Executioner" (1976), is a stark collection of irreconcilable matter-of-fact dualities. Many of the poems, marked by their imagistic non-judgment, achieve a strange balance between everyday, colloquial language and high climax:

> You're taught to walk at night. Slowly, lift one leg,
> clear the sides with your arms, clear the back,
> front, put the leg down, like swimming.
>
> *—from "Mines"*

When, in the early stages of his career, Weigl sent this piece to James Wright, the elder poet responded with a line of patented succulence:

"Out of the horror," Wright told him, "there rises a musical ache that is beautiful." In Wright's recognition of Weigl's early gift, it's the quality of the utterance that transcends the horror. Beyond the horrific and the comic there rises a beauty which renders the entire world a thing of wonder.

I was so in love with Weigl's music that I spent seven years of my tutelage with him—first as an undergraduate and then as a graduate student—trying to capture the magic formula that would translate my own experiences through his diction and sound. Unlike many workshop teachers, Weigl guided me away from his voice and, gradually, towards my own. When I graduated with an MFA in poetry writing from Penn State University in the mid-90s, I had taken away from Weigl's workshops primarily a sense of the importance of clarity and an awe for the sounds of words. I'm still applying those lessons today. I have had no other teacher show me so absolutely that writing good poems is not at all about *what* you have to say, but *how* you say it.

The final lines of his poem "The Impossible," which graphically describes the adult speaker's sexual molestation by a pedophile, lay the groundwork for our study of Weigl's craft:

> That afternoon some lives turned away from the light.
> He taught me how to move my tongue around.
> In his hands he held my head like a lover.
> Say it clearly and you make it beautiful, no matter what.

Clarity here is found in the sound underneath the words: where a most horrific thing is taking place, the speaker is falling in and out of blank verse meter: "He taught me how to move my tongue around." Underneath the wrongness, there is rightness. The rightness is a dull insistence beyond anger and trauma. There is a kind of necessity informing what need not have happened, and the speaker must go back, he tells us, must take us with him, to try to give it shape and life. With sparing vocabulary and no easy answers, he calls us towards that.

Years after studying with Bruce, I met a man at the gates of Birkenau in Poland. He was visiting the camp for the first time since the war. In his short sleeves, he showed me the fore of his arm and, quite calmly, the tattoo the SS guards had put there. Someone from our group asked him why he hadn't removed the thing. "It's out *there* now," the man said, and tapped his finger against his forehead, "It's not in here."

In his voice there was precious little anger. He struggled to find the words for his story. He wanted to get the story right. He recognized the incredible importance of the story and how it was told. Certainly, the man's experience had put him through unimaginable hell, but it also placed him in the presence of a truth mostly incomprehensible to us in our comfortable, everyday worlds. At the height of contradiction, somewhere between the polarities of life and death, he had witnessed the immensity of the impossible-come-true. This is the birth of art, as I've learned it. This is what separates art from social criticism, journalism, propaganda. The look of wonder on his face is what I remember. Amazed that he stood there at all, the man was 65; he was not a boy prisoner anymore; people had survived this; others had not.

Like the man at Birkenau, Weigl casts his stories into the "out there." Of the survivor of torture, Miss Tao, to whom he dedicated his 1988 book *Song of Napalm*, Weigl has written: "I imagine that her only way of staying on this earth is to keep one part of herself in the tiger cage. The horror of that year must have taken so much of her that she needs to go back there in her mind to stay whole."

Here, honesty is the highest mark of beauty. Contained within the utterance is forgiveness, no matter what. By revealing the source of their conflicts, Weigl's personae earn our compassion, our tolerance for the bad things they do, because, as Tim O'Brien has remarked, they do bad things for love.

"The war took away my life," writes Weigl in *Circle of Hanh*, "but gave me my poetry in return. The war taught me irony. That I instead of others should survive is ironic." Though his innocence was taken away, he was born into a new consciousness after the war. His work as a writer has forced him to identify not with the self but with the cycle of which the self is a part. I think of late Whitman: does he identify with a crippled body? "I pass death with the dead and dying," he proclaims even in the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*, "and birth with the new-washed babe…and am not contained between my hat and boots." Whitman's great poem is an identification with Walt Whitman, yes, but also with all things and beings. Whitman celebrates grass in the plural as much as in the singular. He "contains multitudes."

Two of Weigl's most recent books, *Circle of Hanh*, a memoir, and *Archeology of the Circle* (selected poems), meditate in their titles on this theme of death and rebirth. In the circle, end and beginning occur all at once. Violence is rendered powerless. The non-attachment of these later

books is an indication of both Weigl's growth and achievement as a writer. Not linear, not doomed inside the hell of time's straight unwavering line, the circle stands outside time and suffering:

> In my life that's left I want to find a shape for the litany of terror to bring it into comprehension. The impossible and terrible beauty of our lives: that we use them up, that the hunger fades.
>
> What endures is the story. The story circles back on itself if you let it have its way, and if you care for the words as if they were living things whose care your own life depends upon, because it does.
>
> —*from: Circle of Hanh*

Paradoxically necessary, death is a medium by which we recognize life, life's preciousness. I believe this is what George Herbert meant when he wrote that "the Fall furthers the flight in me." In the West, because of our religious rejection of nature and our scientific objectification of it, and because our hyper-rational thinking is aligned to the Cartesian understanding of causes and effects, we inevitably search for meanings behind the mad facts. When we cannot find them, we curse God, or each other. The existentialist movement, born out of that scientific materialism we have inherited, suggests that our lives are nothing more than a death-bound straight line of suffering in which there is no rebirth, no cycle at all.

Probably Weigl's love for Whitman and perhaps his introduction to Buddhism upon his several returns to Vietnam have acclimated him towards another point of view. Or maybe he let the story "have its way." Despite the abuse he suffered at home and during the war, there is a consciousness here which deeply struggles, if I can borrow a phrase from an early prose poem, to "rise violently upward."

Related to his subject matter is the violence and finality of his early line. Someone once said of Weigl's prosody that the line breaks *snap*, and I think that's exactly right. They contain the softness and the sudden sharpness of a towel being cracked in the air. In Weigl's earliest poems, we see this effect manifesting itself in long lines with frequent end stops. From 1979's *A Romance*:

I don't know how to say I tried again.
I saw myself in the mirror and couldn't move.
In her fist she crushed the paper money,
She curled in sleep away from me
So I felt cruel, cold, and small arms fire
Cracked in the marketplace below.

—from: "Song For the Lost Private"

The flat, testimonial voice—nearly journalistic—recalls for me Frost's epic blank verse combined with everyday diction: "He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath." In Weigl's later poems, as he became a more accomplished prosodist, he began to break lines without nearly so many end stops, eliminating commas and periods altogether in some cases. His lines also shortened; he used rests and white space more frequently for dramatic effect. Most notably this change can be sensed in the final lines of "Meditation at La Grange":

and he could kill or love

the blinding slats of light
cut through the god damned

branches of the dying elms,
and he could kill or love the lark.

—from: Sweet Lorain

With the introduction of silence and repetition, here is a musical lightness that counteracts the heaviness of the subject matter.

During our interview, which was conducted in late February of 2001, Weigl and I, via email, tried to flesh out some of the questions I've carried with me since I left his workshop almost eight years ago. He was hesitant to talk about his aesthetic or his beliefs as they inform the poems, because I believe Weigl's aesthetic is always in the process of becoming. Any writer who can't understand that—who believes in his ideas before all else, and not in the voice of the poem—may be a therapist or a priest, but not a poet. Poets are not good therapists. If poetry does wake the poet up, he wakes into a world of conflict and pain, the

source of which he can never quite grasp. Why bring this into the world? This is the question we all come to ask, if we are worth our salt. I remember Weigl saying in one of those workshops that poetry "makes us better." These were his exact words. I wrote them down. I told them to my parents, to provide them with a little encouragement. But I had no idea what he meant.

Richard Hugo talks about this, too, in his magnificent little book *The Triggering Town.* Poetry forces us to accept ourselves, as is. The act of writing a poem, I have come to understand, is the affirmation of the human life despite its imperfections. If poetry writing is to be separate from journal writing, from dream logs, from psychoanalysis, it must wake up the patient and listener alike. Stretching beyond the personal unconscious, Weigl's poetry touches us, I'm certain, on a collective level that transforms his experiences into ours. He achieves a kind of speech that impels us to remember our moral responsibility for each other.

I am doubly fortunate, because he has been my teacher on and off the page. When I first walked into his workshop in 1988, fancying myself what I called then "a Poet," Bruce couldn't have cared less about my "style." He didn't spend a minute scouring through my teen years' *oeuvre* for salvageable tidbits. He didn't want to hear about my ideas for the poems. He told me to be clear. He said that poems are made of words. He said these things over and over until I started to listen to him.

Sometimes he would tenderly egg me on. "Not clear what's going on" or "interesting and ambitious, but what is happening here?" would appear scrawled in his inscrutable handwriting in the margins of my returned copy, and I would go back diligently to look again at what I had tried to say, and I tried to say it better. Though my ego suffered tremendously during those years, I can say that when I left his classroom I knew what I was becoming. Sometime later I found myself living in Boston, and, after a long week of slammed doors during my post-MFA job search, I sought solace on the steps of Grolier Book Shop just before Louisa, the proprietor, had arrived. When she appeared on Plimpton Avenue and saw me sitting there in my blue suit with a briefcase (I was going out for another day of it), she asked me: "Are you a poet or a sales representative?" I said a poet, and she let me inside.

Recent Books By Bruce Weigl

What Saves Us (1992)
Sweet Lorain (1996)

After the Others (1999)
Archeology of the Circle: Selected Poems (2000)
Circle of Hanh (2000)
The Unraveling Strangeness (Forthcoming)

The following interview was conducted February 2001.

DK: I know that you spent a number of years in school before you ever began to write about the war. When did you first feel it was appropriate to write poetry about Vietnam? What finally got you started?

BW: I must say it did not occur to me to write poems about the war for a long time. It wasn't exactly that it hadn't occurred to me, but I wondered why anyone would want to read about the war because it was already terrible enough, and it had already been in the press for almost fifteen years, and over forty thousand Americans and probably a half million Vietnamese had already died. I also wrote a few early poems about the war when I first came home from the war, and even tried sending them out to magazines. They must have been terrible, this is before I had any formal education at all, and I got a few nasty notes back from editors saying things like: This has already been done by Bly and Levertov and Kinnell and Ginsberg, and no one wants to read about this anymore, so I made a more or less conscious decision not to write, not even to talk about the war. I know this will sound overly dramatic, so I'll try to tone it down a bit. One night I was walking past the office of a young poet, Tom Lux, that Oberlin had hired to teach the poetry workshop on a temporary basis. I loved Tom and I learned a great deal from him. That night I looked into his lit-up office window and saw him in there working so I went into the building and knocked on his door. He invited me in and after a few minutes of conversation he took out a bottle of Jack Daniels from one of his desk drawers and two plastic cups and offered me a drink. We drank and talked awhile and then he started asking me questions about Vietnam, which, at the time, was very unusual because most folks just didn't want to hear about it. I told him the story of being in a helicopter once in the Central Highlands

and seeing some NVA soldiers moving through the jungle on bicycles. As soon as I finished the story he pushed a yellow legal pad in my direction and then a pen and said, Write that down, just like you told it to me. I did, and then wrote my first more or less accomplished poem about the war called "Him, on the Bicycle." More importantly, at that moment this door opened up in my brain and I saw the enormous possibilities for a poetry at hand, and I remember too being frightened by the responsibility to get it right. That's where it started.

DK: You said in your response that "the war was already terrible enough." How have you come to reconcile the paradox that your best art has risen out of the horrific and wrong?

BW: I don't know that I ever have reconciled that; that's why it's a paradox. There are worse fates for writers than going to a war and more or less having that subject crammed down your throat. There is not having any subject at all. That's a real tragedy for a writer. Most of the writers whom I know well don't seem to have that much of a choice about what their subject matter is. I'm the same way. An accident of history put me right up against some brute facts of history and when I sat down to write, stories about that time came to me. I think now that the long period of time I spent writing about the war, fifteen years perhaps, represents on one hand a very personal struggle to try to understand what had happened there, and what had happened to me and to my people and to my country. I hope too, and perhaps this is naive or childish, but I hope too that there's some kind of miraculous way that if you work hard enough to get the words right, that which you call "horrific and wrong" is defeated. But that's just my Romanticism showing through.

DK: Your obsession with getting the words right, this recurrent theme in your poems and essays, is stated beautifully in "The Impossible," in which you write, "Say it clearly and you make it beautiful, no matter what." That poem, written in the early 1990s, follows closely the prosodic structure of your earlier work: long lines, loosely accentual, with frequent endstops. In the more recent poems *of Sweet Lorain* and *After the*

Others, there is a marked turn towards lyricism, most notably in your use of unpunctuated lines, repetition, and a much more mysterious "I" persona. Have those changes taken place due to a shift in your relationship to your subject matter?

BW: Twenty-five years ago I heard Phil Levine say that the most important thing you could do to get better was to always make it difficult. I understood then just enough to know that it's relatively easy for one to become accomplished at writing a certain kind of poem. You reach a plateau where things are easier. The danger is staying there, because the ease with which we come to write our poems is very seductive, and you can end up writing the same poem over and over, which I've done on occasion, I'm sure. In *Sweet Lorain* and *After the Others* I was making a conscious effort to make it hard again, to try to solve more difficult problems in terms of the speaker of the poems, as you suggest, the diction, as well as the form. In some ways I wanted it to feel like I was starting all over again. The forces of my life also had some influence on why and how my poems began to change. I was unhappy with my job, my family was struggling with the usual family struggles, made more difficult by the presence of an adolescent in the house, and on the other hand Buddhism seemed to be making its way deeper and deeper into my life until it finally reached the place where my poems must come from, so I think a kind of calm came into my writing that wasn't there before. In the book that follows *After the Others*, which I'm calling *The Unraveling Strangeness*, and which will be out next year, I tried to start all over once again, only this time the changes were made easier by the fact that I had moved back to where I grew up after being gone for over twenty years. All the old ghosts, as it turned out, were still waiting for me with open arms, and all of them were full of stories.

DK: Yes. I think what you're suggesting is similar to what Miles Davis started to say in the late-60s: "I don't play ballads anymore because I like to play ballads so much." Are the poems from *The Unraveling Strangeness* markedly different—in form, diction, subject matter—from the previous two books? In what way are they, as you say, like starting all over once again?

BW: They're different fundamentally because of how I came to see the world a little differently as the result of some considerable professional adversity, and as the result of coming home after being away for twenty years. I can say that several of the poems are longer than I've usually done. My sense was that I wanted to try and wring the narrative out as tightly as possible. I'm trying, in these new poems, to think about the music of the line (in mostly an accentual way) and think about the music of the sentence at the same time. In order to do that I had to find new ways to tell my stories, and I had to find new stories to tell. So, like any romantic worth his salt, I tried to broaden the range of subjects I found appropriate to poetry. I went back to the advice my great teacher Charles Simic gave me many times: Trust your hunches. Trust your judgment about where the poem wants to go, or about where to find the poem in the first place. That kind of meditation, combined with a certain willingness to see only opportunity and not failure laid out before me, led to the kind of poems I'm writing now; or at least was when I finished *The Unraveling Strangeness*. Here's a poem called "Meeting Mr. Death" that maybe addresses your question in a more practical way:

Meeting Mr. Death

You could say I
kept my cool
when I met Mr. Death.
I even made him
laugh
by offering my
hand to shake
in the bullet torn
morning hours,
and then I said
Are you looking at me?
and he got the joke. Death
gets the joke
or else
our whole lives
are a lie and a waste.
He didn't take my hand,

but he laughed at my jokes
and he made me feel
welcome inside the grace
he still wore,
shawl of the ghostly
angel he had been
but could not remember.
Mr. Death,
he was hanging around some
pals of mine, some
boys of the unspeakable
rapture of war. He
could have had me that morning
too, when I looked away
to the monsoon heavy
river
where the bodies
had come to rest
in the last eddies,
but he changed his mind.

DK: You've referred to yourself as a Romantic more than once already. It makes a lot of sense, since, as you say, a growing interest in Buddhism has played an important part in your life. "Mr. Death" is an acceptance of death's terms, as much as Keats' great line to Autumn is an acceptance of the beauty of every part of the cycle: "Where are the songs of Spring? Think not of them, thou hast thy music too." And what I find most interesting: even though death is much more absurd, more detached here, he nevertheless "gets the joke" that affirms the purpose and truth of our lives, that saves them from being a lie. Do you find that, despite having lived out the latter half of the twentieth century, your best insights (told to you by the poem and not the reverse) have persisted to awaken you, to bring you a greater sense of wonder?

BW: When you bring Mr. John Keats into the picture then the stakes are raised, and I am humbled, maybe a little like Keats was humbled when he visited the tomb of Burns and wrote "I sin against thy native

skies" to describe his own attempt at poetry in what he thought of as an almost sacred place. The presence of death, you're right, plays an very important role not just in the poetry of Keats and Wordsworth and Coleridge, but in the way they saw the world, and ultimately lived their lives. They believed that the fierce beauty of our lives existed only because of the inevitability of our deaths. The fact that we all die is why our lives are beautiful. But what I learned from Keats, I hope I learned this right, is that what the presence of our imminent deaths calls for is a more ironic regard for our lives: an openness to possibility instead of a devotion to failure. So yes, I have that affinity with the some of the British Romantics, along with some others. Now let me try to answer the last part of your question, which is very complicated to me. Two things happen simultaneously in the writer's life: as you work more and more and get older, you begin to recognize more and more the enormous possibilities at hand, and at the same time your own human limitations. That's another one of those wonderful paradoxes that leads us to poetry I think. That, and the fact that your first responsibility as a writer is to recognize the inherent failure of language to say a thing straight.

DK: Could you say more about what you mean by "an openness of possibility instead of a devotion to failure?" How has that openness worked itself into your own poems? I'm thinking of the shift from a poem like "For the Luminous Woman in the Trees," from *What Saves Us*, to the kind of pieces you're writing now.

BW: What I meant by cultivating an "openness to possibility instead of a devotion to failure" is really very simple once you get the hang of it. It's about being able to stay focused on very precise moments, and at the same time being open enough to see many, many possibilities for imaginative expression. If you believe that there is something worthwhile in every image and in every instinct that occurs to you, and you follow them all, you'll eventually deliver yourself to more and more interesting literal and figurative landscapes. Here's another poem from *The Unraveling Strangeness* that speaks to what I'm trying to get at here:

The Super

I met the super
on the battleship
gray painted
stoop
of the five floor walk-up,
Macdougal street, back
when it was neighborhood
and I'd
hooked up with a woman
who had money
from her folks and a job
that paid good
and who told me
Come stay with me, honey, that
nearly forgotten summer
in the post-war
black grief and loss and
all I had to do was
sleep up there
on the fifth floor with her and
love her some nights.
We ate dinner together in restaurants.
But that first morning
I got there ahead of her
and met the super
on the stoop
on Macdougal street. I
was twenty. I
had already seen
inside the storm of shit,
but this woman
said with a nasal screech
that she was the super and
that I couldn't get in
no how, as it wasn't my place, and
she called some Puerto Rican
young men to her aid

when I barely resisted
in defense of my
stupid rights
and of the rights
of the not yet arrived
woman who expected me, she
expected things of me if
I were to get this walk up
room to write in or
no, I never wrote, I couldn't
write when I heard her
breathe at night so close,
although there was some
loveliness there too I recall.
The tough guys said
they'd cut my fucking
heart out if I didn't
leave the super alone and
get the hell back
to wherever
I was supposed to be,
a question, I believe,
they had no idea
how to answer. I know
that I didn't. Later
when the would be
keeper of me
finally showed up,
the super relented, and
later still,
once summer
had become something
we could both bear,
we got to talking
one evening on the stoop.
August night time traffic and
lovers I watched, unworthy,
and in the middle
of the super's

winter story about
how the heat went off
one night in the place
so she nearly froze and
so dragged her chair
to the gas stove's
open door, propped
her tired feet there and
fell hard to sleep, she
lifted her dress
to show me. Like you
I could hardly believe the
scars on her legs from
where they'd caught fire,
open sores still oozing
that human acid and this
eight months after the fact.
Give us back our lives, I say.

I had no idea where this poem was going when I started writing it. It began after I had visited my son in New York where he lives, in Queens. That visit caused me to remember a summer I had lived in the city, so I started writing, when I got home, a poem about the city. It was too general and not very interesting and I couldn't really find a moment that could bear the weight of what I wanted to do until I remembered the super. I stayed with her story and hung on for dear life, and this is how it spun itself out. Whether you like the poem or not, you have to grant me the fact that from the beginning to the end the poem stays open to possibility and opportunity. That's what I was trying to do in these poems.

DK: In "Mr. Death," you write that the war is a *rapture*. Tell me if I'm off here: but the best writers about war—Crane, O'Brien, and I think Remarque—are able to somehow elucidate that beyond the horror, beyond even the loss of life, the war puts us in the presence of a kind of prodigious energy that calls us directly into the moment, with all of its attendant contradictions. But we're alive. The soldier wants to live; and

at the moment he loses his life, his face is filled with astonishment. What do you tell students who claim they haven't had such experiences of contradiction and rapture? And what are you doing these days in the classroom to help them tap into their own stories, their own moments of astonishment?

BW: Your description of how I mean the word "rapture" in that poem is frighteningly close to what I had in mind. It's the rapture of power, and the rapture of otherness; the knowledge that there are others out there who want you dead. And it's the rapture of the dead, rapture in my mind the only chance that those who die in war have to make it out of whatever shit hole they ended up in. Whatever jungle or beach or bombed city. I heard Robert Stone talk once about what he called the aesthetic of violence. A lot of people in the audience were obviously upset about what he was suggesting: that, somehow, beyond the pain, beyond the suffering, beyond even the human life, there is a kind of beauty to violence, a kind of majesty to the mushroom cloud. Now, he wasn't calling for violence or advocating violence, he was simply pointing out that it seems to be part of our nature to at least be interested, and maybe even compelled by violent imagery. So you see, if you come to it from that direction, there really is no contradiction. Stone wants us to see the clarity of the act. Like the scene near the end of *Apocalypse Now*, when Kurtz tells the story about the VC coming into a village soon after the American troops, who had been there to inoculate the children, had gone. The VC cut off the arms of everyone who had been inoculated by the Americans. It's a horrible, almost unimaginable thing, but Kurtz goes on and talks about the clarity of the gesture, the total absence of ambiguity about what is meant, which is beautiful. For me to write "the unspeakable rapture of war" is simply an extension of the idea that says "If you say it clearly, you make it beautiful, no matter what." Now, in terms of my own students, I don't feel it's necessary for them to have been traumatized somehow before they arrive in my classroom so that they can understand the depths to which they must sink to find and write poetry. Some of them come to the classroom that way, and some come as truly innocent, almost unscathed young men and women, and they all have the same opportunity as far as I'm concerned. You mentioned their "stories," and that's the key to my relationship with my writing students here, or anywhere. I'm most concerned with

getting them to the point where they can trust the class and me, and most importantly, themselves, enough to tell their stories, as they occur to them, brought to the surface of consciousness through acts of the imagination. Once they're willing to enter that realm, then there are enough contradictions to go around, and enough problems that need to be solved. When we're lucky and it works, they do discover what you call moments of astonishment. But there's enough terror in letting go that way; it's frightening enough to give yourself up to words; that's rapture enough.

DK: What are you reading these days?

BW: A great deal if not all of my reading during the semester is related to my teaching, so for the poetry I've been reading Bill Stafford's essays and poems, and Charlie's essays on writing. I've also been teaching and reading and studying Basho lately, and Horace, who I'm trying to translate. I read from the Buddhist texts on a regular basis, and I read and reread Peter Harvery's wonderful introduction to Buddhism, and finally, I've been reading a great deal of Elaine Pagel lately, and am now reading her book about Adam, Eve and the Serpent that's very rich and complicated.

DK: Last, I'd like to know where you stand on comedy: remember James Dickey's comment? "In poetry there's no time for whimsy."

BW: I'm afraid I don't have much to say about comedy. It's a shame, really, because I am a very funny person I think. I mean, I can still make my wife laugh until she cries, and that's after twenty eight years of marriage. I can still make my parents laugh, and my sister and her husband, and some of my colleagues, and most of my friends. I can even make myself laugh. It sometimes occurs to me that what I'm writing is funny, but when I read the poem at the reading, or publish the poem, it becomes clear that others don't see the humor. Something gets lost in the translation from one sense of irony to another. I don't agree with Dickey; I think there's plenty of room in poetry for whimsy; there's plenty of room in poetry for any damn thing.

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David Keplinger

memorial concert on a sloped clearing

Of the humming
Air raids of years ago
Over Hukvaldy and more east,
American bombs, or German,
No one got the story right.

The rain brought down
The high nests
Of storks and falcons,
Brought up the sewage with the mud.
From our hill, a spruce sang curves: the sun.

What do we know about what happened?
Our day along the hill:
Think violins. Think
Brass horns and banjos, hilarious
Oboes lined in a row.

We know about the one
Kind of light, which is the mind's light. Enough
Of that. On flimsy chairs the tubas
Nearly fell down,
Playing.

From the author of *Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur* and *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier & President*



Acclaimed biographer Geoffrey Perret offers the first new, in-depth life of Eisenhower in decades, offers fresh perspectives, not only on World War II and the Korean War but also on the Cold War, the civil rights movement, McCarthyism, the U-2 crisis and Vietnam.

"Strong in portraying all aspects of Eisenhower."

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Commentary by Brian Hanley

Writing Lives, not Histories: Geoffrey Perret's *Eisenhower* and the Art of Biography

> . . . it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges.
>
> —Plutarch, "Life of Alexander"

> . . . the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue.
>
> —Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* 60

The first thing that strikes the reader of Geoffrey Perret's recently published *Eisenhower* is the pair of black-and-white photographs that grace the dust jacket. The image on the back of the jacket is a familiar one, a head-and-shoulder picture of the fifty-four-year-old Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, wearing his U.S. Army-issue trench coat and service hat, framed by a grayish, indistinct but certainly outdoor background somewhere in France, as the jacket credits tell us. The photograph offers a side-view of General Eisenhower, his face turned toward the camera, sporting a grin. So famous is Ike's expression here that it represented then, as it does even today, what many prospective

buyers of Perret's volume might think of as the moment of High Noon in our country's history, a period in which America's exalted view of herself was more than justified by her achievements. Perret's narration of Eisenhower's arrival in England as commander of the European Theater of Operations, 24 June 1943, illustrates the point:

> They had been waiting a long time for him; nearly three years, in fact. The British never expected to destroy Nazi Germany on their own. It would take the mightiest coalition in history to do that. But there were two related thoughts that sustained them through the darkest times. Hitler would never defeat them, and the United States could not stay out of the war indefinitely. One day, an American general would arrive an avatar in khaki, brass buttons and a rainbow smear of medal ribbons, the manifest form of the assurance of victory, with all the power of America at his back, and the forces of democracy would then possess the amassed strength that would save the world. (162)

Similarly panegyrical things have been said about Eisenhower's two-term presidency (1952-60), which seemed to follow naturally from his achievements as architect of V-E Day and as the inaugural commander of NATO. A selection of items from Ike's own survey of his presidential accomplishments demonstrates that his eight years in the Oval Office proved to be nearly as exceptional as his military career: statehood for Alaska and Hawaii; the end of the Korean War; the largest reductions in taxes to that time; the first Civil Rights law in 80 years; prevention of Communistic efforts to dominate Iran, Guatemala, Lebanon, Formosa, South Vietnam; initiation of a Space Program with successful orbit in less than three years; initiation, and great progress in, the most ambitious interstate program by any nation in all history; the slowing and practical elimination of inflation; the initiation of a strong ballistic missile program; the use of Federal power to enforce orders of a Federal court in Arkansas, with no loss of life; the establishment of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (605-06).

The photograph gracing the front cover of Perret's volume is equally significant, but for a set of completely different reasons. Taken in 1915, the image is a profile of twenty-four-year-old Cadet Eisenhower, a senior at West Point of indifferent military and academic standing who very nearly was discharged from active duty because of a football injury. What vexed Cadet Eisenhower wasn't so much the prospect of not serv-

ing in the regular army—more than once he'd thought about leaving West Point—but that his damaged knee deprived him of the glories of college athletics (31, 34, 50). The Eisenhower pictured on the cover of Perret's book, then, is as ordinary as the Eisenhower on the back cover is mythogenic.

The historian is inevitably drawn to the Eisenhower depicted on the back of the dust jacket. Did General Eisenhower encourage pioneering logistical techniques in order to sustain his armies as they moved across France? To what extent was Eisenhower's command hamstrung by political considerations that are with us still today? Did Eisenhower's knowledge of the technological superiority of a handful Germany's weapons—the Messerschmitt 262, the V-1, the Tiger tank—alter allied strategy in important ways? The historian explores these issues, weighing the judgments of commanders and heads of state against the context in which they were made and, of course, the consequences of these decisions. We read history to firm our understanding of the world we live in by way of its antecedents, and to inform the political and economic choices we come to on contemporary issues. A well-written history also lays claim to our attention because we relish an intelligently conceived, dramatic narrative that is factual but as remote from our private lives as fable. We gain a vicarious thrill from reading about the exploits of motor torpedo boats in the Pacific Theater, without being immolated when a stray bullet hits the fuel tank, devoured by sharks when pitched overboard, or starved to death in an Imperial Japanese Army POW camp.

The biographer takes into account the work of the historian, but is driven to ask different sorts of questions, the answers to which encourage the newly-minted second lieutenant or the applicant to one of the service academies to discern the habits of mind, the qualities of character, that actuated the undistinguished cadet on the cover of Perret's book to become the five-star general. And—scarcely less important—the biographer's inquiries offer the non-specialist reader worthy lessons on human nature that transcend time, place, and profession.

No "species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition," observes Samuel Johnson in his *Rambler* commentary on biography. "We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure" (320).

The juxtaposition of the image of the youthful Eisenhower and that of the older on the dust jacket of Perret's biography is thus aptly chosen, profoundly expressive. Very few of us will ever experience the specific problems that confronted General or President Eisenhower, but the lives we lead or may lead are shaped by daily human pressures not much different from the ones that Ike understood himself as facing at nearly every stage of his life, as Perret's biography so amply demonstrates.

Ike's early life in particular proves that there is much more to the cultivation of greatness than the mere pursuit of image and credential building which modernity seems to prize so, what with the popularity of college guides that focus on the celebrity of a school at the expense of what is actually taught by professors and expected of students, career advice books that encourage readers to agonize over incidental things (should a vita be printed on ivory or saffron paper? Regimental and paisley ties are out, prints are in), and the like. By conventional standards Ike should not have amounted to anything special, at least as far as the army was concerned: he wasn't always a "team player," and he didn't much care about "looking the part." Perret's biography shows that Ike's illustrious career resulted from an admixture of courage, perseverance, ambition, as well as traits that are not obviously conducive to success in public life.

The years at the United States Military Academy were the most important of Eisenhower's early life, though this was not immediately apparent to Ike. As Ike grew older, his attitude to West Point went from frigid indifference—his graduation was a forlorn experience, as no family or friends attended the ceremony—to "pride and identity that no other place, not even Abilene, quite managed." On his deathbed, the seventy-eight-year-old Eisenhower talked mostly of West Point, saying nothing about his years as President, or his astounding career as an officer. That Ike's memoirs begin with the West Point years, Perret notes, is "an indirect way of saying that *here* was where his life really began—not in Abilene but at the Academy. He leaves Abilene till later; it becomes a flashback to the ritual and drama of the point" (45, 252). West Point had allowed Eisenhower to escape the narrow horizons which life in Abilene offered him. Even so, Ike remained uncertain as to what the future held for him or even whether he wanted to remain in the army.

At the time of his graduation Ike seemed largely unconscious of the extent to which his experiences as a West Point cadet had formed, or finished forming, the ways in which he viewed himself and the world.

"Sometimes he thought about quitting. Just walk away," Perret writes as he discusses Eisenhower's frame of mind in the fall of 1913, after injuring his knee. "Go to Argentina, maybe, and become a gaucho. Or how about the stage?" Ike mused. "He might even have a talent for it." Ike decided to "stick it out" because the education was free; in fact his pay, however meager, allowed for him to "graduate with hundreds of dollars in savings, savings that he was steadily augmenting with his poker winnings." Midway through his third year at West Point, that as Ike "looked to the future he saw only an invitation to hang on and plod through the next eighteen months and he was sure to graduate somewhere around the middle of his class—the Point's equivalent of the gentleman's C" (52-53). Cadet Eisenhower's commitment to military service, then, did not burn quite so ardently as we might have imagined; nor would Ike's love of gambling fit any quixotic image of the gestating Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, who was later known for his abstemiousness—he insisted on modestly appointed living quarters in Tunisia, London, and France—perseverance, and, to a lesser extent, priggishness, an example of which being his refusal to stop by for afternoon drinks with Truman at the White House because, "in his buttoned-up way," he looked upon the practice as sordid (424).

Nevertheless, West Point managed to inspire young Ike in ironical ways, firing his latent, exuberant ambitiousness with its procrustean understanding of good order and discipline. Ike's passive acceptance of the merits of staying on "didn't allow for the itch," Perret argues, for the Ike who as a child relished fighting his older and much stronger brother Edgar,

> to be daring, to test his limitations and the boundaries of the world around him, to prove in some way that he was bigger than the dull curriculum, the tedious routines, the uninspiring faculty. Cadet regulations treated men like himself—old enough to vote and get married and sign legally binding contracts—as if they were incorrigibly shallow and dim. (53)

The cadet experience informed Ike's perceptive understanding of leadership in similarly self-contradictory fashion. As a cadet corporal, Perret tells us, Ike was "authorized, even expected, to torment Beast Barracks plebes [newly enrolled cadets] as he had been tormented." A particularly inept underling accidentally ran into Ike, and fell flat on his face.

Ike scornfully asked what occupation the cadet had worked at before entering West Point, adding a conventional dose of ridicule with the remark, "You look like a barber!" Acutely embarrassed, the cadet responded, "I *was* a barber, sir." As Perret relates,

> Ike walked away ashamed. He had pulled ice in a creamery at nights and made grain bins from galvanized metal in the midday sun. The plebe was like him, a working stiff who had gotten here the hard way. Back in his room, he told Hodgson [his roommate], "I'm never going to crawl another plebe as long as I live. I've just done something that was stupid and unforgivable."

Perret adds, "Half a century later, it still bothered him that he hadn't apologized" (48-49). Thus, the general who reproached high-ranking subordinates, generals Mark Clark and Carl Spaatz, for reserving the best resorts in Capri and Sorrento for themselves and other officers while doing practically nothing for the enlisted men had taught himself vital lessons in the chivalric code some thirty years earlier (249).

In fact, Eisenhower's life as Perret tells it can be read as rebuke to shopworn ideas about what it is that greatness in public life demands. It seems that nowadays commonly accepted formulae for eminence might very well be modified or debunked by Eisenhower's example. There is, to begin with, Ike's modesty and bookishness, which put him at odds with the picture our modern world has of the great military, business, or athletic warrior, who is often thought of as the flamboyant practitioner of daredevil heroics who says little apart from the catchy kiss-off line ("Go ahead, make my day;" "Asta la vista, baby"). We see this idea reflected in the popular veneration of Donald Trump and Jesse Ventura, of certain sports figures known for their "trash talk," in the motion picture industry's casting of action heroes: John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Chuck Norris, Clint Eastwood, Lou Gossett, Jr., Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwartzenagger, Stephen Segal. The alternative view of the effective leader which has emerged in the past few years is that of the "Ten-Minute" manager, the bureaucrat, the Rolodex jockey who recites fluffy bromides of the sort one sees advertised as posters in airline general merchandize catalogues ("Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing;" "a ship is safe in its harbour, but that's not what it was built for;" "teamwork is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon

results;" "if you're not riding the wave of change, you'll find yourself beneath it," etc.).

Eisenhower fits none of these profiles. "The picture of Dwight, or Little Ike, does not show the rough-and-tumble jock that he yearned to be," Perret writes, describing Eisenhower's high-school yearbook photo, which is reprinted in the volume. "It is the image of a sensitive, watchful youth, a pouting and good-looking teenager who seems alert and intelligent. The caption under his picture says, 'Best Historian and Mathematician;' " the yearbook editors predicted that Ike "would become a professor of history at Yale" (31, 34). Ike also excelled in English class, a virtue that had more to do with his rise through the ranks during the inter-war years than any other trait, as Perret makes clear. "The War Department did not need a Hemingway or a poet laureate," Perret observes in discussing Ike's underlying worth from the perspective of his commanders, "but at a time [early 1930s] when the public was hostile to the military and its budget shrank from year to year, it desperately needed people who could explain what it was doing in language free from the irritating pomposity and irrelevant details that serve as mental props for the typical military bureaucrat" (108-09). Perret devotes a chapter, "The Flaming Pen," to the ways in which Ike's gifts as a careful reader and a writer of lucid prose helped him move from major to brigadier general, but his scholarly qualities plainly served him well throughout his career. It was Ike's passionate interest in famous commanders he'd read about in school—Hannibal, Napoleon, Washington—that propelled his interest in West Point (38). And as Perret informs us, President Eisenhower encouraged staff work that reflected the importance Ike attached to solid learning and eloquence. "Eisenhower was always interested in new ideas," Perret explains. "He regularly told his staff, 'I'm not the only person around here who gets ideas.' He filled his White House with writers and college instructors and bright young lawyers, hoping they would provide the intellectual ferment that would drive the new administration into the future" (435).

Ike's disciplined yet lively mind also led him to despise the primacy of regulations in army culture, which in his view generated a drab, unthinking conformity. As Perret notes, Ike's stubborn refusal to be hidebound by regulations anticipated the direction military management would take over the next decades—Admiral Rickover's tenure as head of the Navy's nuclear-propulsion program in the 1950s comes to mind, as does the USAF's successful drive in the early 1990s to shrink the size of

its regulations as part of its "Paperless Air Force" campaign—but it almost brought his career to a disgraceful end. In 1920, Major Eisenhower had unknowingly collected a greater housing allowance than he had been entitled to. The Inspector General of the Army wanted to crucify him even though Ike apologized for his mistake and offered full restitution. Ike's assertion that he hadn't bothered to read the relevant regulations—he believed that intelligent officers would be better off relying on common sense and their own idea of prudent conduct—only aggravated matters. What saved Ike was his reputation for intellectual resourcefulness. Some time earlier, Ike had favorably impressed Brigadier General Fox Conner, a scholarly man himself, who asked the Army Chief of Staff to release Ike for duty on his staff. "Spinning around so fast that he nearly tied himself into a slipknot," the IG decided that Ike "shouldn't face a court-martial after all. Repayment and a formal reprimand would do" (82-83). Ike took away all the right lessons from the incident: as a five-star general, he is known to have advised at least one officer to ignore regulations for the same reasons Major Eisenhower did. The story should be considered carefully by soldiers who think that reading great books and perfecting the art of composition are activities unworthy of their time and who believe in the omniscience of writers of regulations.

Ike's career, moreover, offers universally valid instruction in the antagonisms between professional aspirations and private life. Ike loved the army—in the late 1930's when a military career might have seemed a dead end, Ike turned down a lucrative offer to write for the Hearst newspaper company—he venerated West Point, but he never allowed himself to become completely swallowed up by his profession. Even so, as promotion followed promotion, Ike found it increasingly difficult to keep the responsibilities of command from undermining his relations with his family (116-17). Less than a year after graduating from West Point, Ike was offered the chance to join the glamorous, better-paying aviation section of the Signal Corps; he turned down the opportunity because his fiancée wanted him to have nothing to do with the risk-laden flying business (63). Nearly three decades later, we find that generalship had changed Ike in subtle but decisive ways. In early 1944, Ike returned to the United States for a brief visit after a prolonged absence. To his family and friends he seemed edgy, aloof, emotionally distant; everyone could see that Ike was anxious to get back to his work even though he had not seen his loved ones in many months and, once

he left, would not see them for many more (250-54). Perret discusses the episode sympathetically but the lesson, clearly enough, is that such tension is inevitable. That it didn't wreck the Eisenhower's marriage or lead to the estrangement of Ike from his son John, who was a senior at West Point at the time, is a testament to Ike's underlying wisdom and humanity. Lesser men and women—who might be Ike's managerial equal or superior—are defeated by challenges of this sort every day. That Ike managed to retain a robust private identity finds expression in the arrangements he made for his funeral and interment. Ike asked to be buried in a "standard eighty-eight dollar Army coffin," and he assumed that there would be a state funeral held in Washington, D.C. But Ike also insisted that a second funeral be held in his native Abilene, Kansas. He would be laid to rest in a cemetery near his family home, with adjacent plots for his wife, who died in 1979, and his first-born son, Doud Dwight, who had died in 1921 at the age of thirty-nine months (607).

The focus of my essay thus far has been on Perret's subject and, correspondingly, on the value of biography as a genre. Here and there I have referred appreciatively to Perret's skill as a biographer, but I have paid scant attention to the specifics of his craft. Eisenhower's life may have been an engrossing one for all of the reasons discussed previously, but the prospective book buyer might very well ask: why shell out $35 for Perret's book given that Stephen Ambrose's comprehensive two-volume biography, which appeared in 1984, stands as the definitive work on Eisenhower? Perret's answer in his acknowledgments page is that the recent availability of consequential primary materials and the emergence of fresh scholarship together offer "valuable new insights into Eisenhower's extraordinary abilities as both a military commander and as a President" (ix). Perret makes great use of interviews with Ike's son, John S.D. Eisenhower, for instance, and lately published studies of Montgomery, Churchill, and others, which along with his sparing references to Ambrose's biography—Ambrose's *Eisenhower* appears in twelve footnotes out of a total of some 1,400—remove any serious suspicion that Perret's volume is derivative of its authoritative predecessor in substantive ways. But there are additional, equally valid justifications for reconsidering the life of Eisenhower which Perret doesn't mention, though his volume does a fine job addressing these reasons.

To begin with, the likely readership of Perret's *Eisenhower* differs significantly from that of Ambrose's biography. The book-buying public

almost certainly includes a smaller proportion of men and women who lived through the Eisenhower years as adults and who could say that they experienced Eisenhower's leadership firsthand. It is well known that the World War II generation is now departing the scene—a thousand members, or so of Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation" pass away daily. Thus, Perret's diligently researched and lucidly written account is most welcome if it manages to introduce Ike to a generation of Americans who, in all probability, know next to nothing about him if the many recent surveys documenting the monstrous historical ignorance of college-aged men and women are anything to go by.

More importantly, the intervening sixteen years have given both Perret and his readers a more refined perspective on Eisenhower and his age, showing Eisenhower to have been prescient on some issues and unduly worried about others to a degree that Ambrose, given the historical moment when he wrote his biography, could not possibly have apprehended. Take, for instance, Ike's disquiet at the arrival of what we think of nowadays as the "Sixties" culture. Perret's penultimate chapter begins with Ike riding in the back of the presidential limousine, July 7 1959, musing about the disheveldom that seems to have sprung up suddenly as he surveys the tourists crowding the National Archives building. "In the Army, he had learned to tell a lot from a little," Ike thinks to himself, and what "he sees now trouble him. Why are they so badly dressed? And why don't they stand up straight, walk with their shoulders squared? From the look of it, something bad is happening to Americans' self-respect" (585). The nascent social slovenliness which troubled Ike matured and then ran amok between 1968 and 1975, but it had receded somewhat by the mid 1980s, when Ambrose's biography appeared. It is worth recalling that while Ike's successor John F. Kennedy was the first President not to wear a hat to his inauguration, thus reflecting and extending sartorial informality, Ronald Reagan refused to remove his suit jacket while in the Oval Office. And it was not at all unusual in the early 1980s for the up-and-coming business executive to make sure he dressed in a three-piece suit every day, the buttoned-down corporate culture in those days being gloriously exemplified by IBM, whose founder Thomas J. Watson was a friend of Ike's. Even so, today there is good reason to respect Ike's point of view given America's growing discomfort with the nation's studied amnesia in regards to conventional good manners and appearance—in some quarters of the business world "Dress-down Friday" has now metastasized into "Casual Thursday"—as

expressed in the increasingly noisy calls to bring back public school dress codes, the robust sales of etiquette guides, and so on.

On other subjects Ike is less perceptive than he might have appeared in 1984. Eisenhower's denunciation of what he termed in his farewell address as the "military-industrial complex" doubtless seemed enduringly relevant to readers of Ambrose's biography (599). After all, Pentagon procurement scandals—the $1,000 toilet seats; the $600 hammers and the $18 nails they were meant to strike; the Babylonian price tags that accompanied missile systems that supposedly could never be programmed to shoot straight—were something of a staple of nightly news broadcasts, a circumstance given further notoriety by President Reagan's massive military build-up between 1981 and 1985. Readers of Perret's biography may rightly interpret Ike's outlook as plausible at the time but, all things considered, the circumstance he bemoaned proved to be an aberration in American history. The end of the Cold War brought with it the collapse or consolidation of many of the giant corporations that specialized in military hardware; the armed services are about one-third smaller than they were even nine years ago—the U.S. Air Force today stands as about the size it was at its creation in 1947, following the post-World War II demobilization; there hasn't been a military draft in nearly thirty years; and, increasingly, fewer members of Congress have any direct experience with military life. Indeed, experts often compare the diminished standing of the modern military with the armed forces of the quiescent 1920s and 1930s.

Perret's manner of proceeding is straightforward, beginning with Ike's birth in north Texas and his early life in Abilene, Kansas, proceeding to the West Point experience, and his rise through the ranks during the inter-war years. Ike was promoted to brigadier general in the autumn of 1941, a few weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack and twenty-six years after graduating from West Point. Three years later he was awarded his fifth star, five months or so before Germany surrendered. The remaining two-fifths of the six-hundred-page narrative is taken up largely by Ike's service as President. In the latter portion of the book Perret also touches upon Ike's indifferent performance as president of Columbia University and his tour of duty as commander of NATO in the late 1940s. The biography concludes with a short chapter on Ike's retirement years, spent mostly on his farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Eisenhower is worth anyone's money—student of history, military buff, and the avocational reader alike. Perret's scholarship is thorough and

reliable, yet free from even the slightest trace of pedantry. For those familiar with the events of World War II, chapters twelve through twenty-six provide a neat review of the major events of General Eisenhower's various commands, delivered for the most part in limpid prose. The non-specialist reader, meanwhile, is given a substantive introduction to the material without being overtaxed by drawn-out discussions of battles, strategies, and the like. The commentary on the allied army's breakout from Normandy in the summer and autumn of 1944, for instance, is disposed of with exemplary deftness. Perret's delineations of Eisenhower's contemporaries are similarly efficient and discerning. Winston Churchill "could be as funny as a professional comedian, as moving as a great actor, witty if the occasion was ripe for wit, nostalgic to the point of tears when in a reminiscent mood, and armed with both a memory for poetry and an orator's gift for the inspirational utterance," Perret writes. "He had lead a life crammed with drama and incident, and was romantic even at his most calculating and manipulative. Bald, pink and cherubic, in his siren suit [an azure blue coverall] he looked like an overgrown baby who had somehow picked up a cigar" (167).

Perret's evenhandedness also warrants praise; he plainly admires Ike and doubtless means to encourage us to do so as well, but he does not shrink from illuminating Ike's weaknesses and misjudgments. Ike, whom we prefer to think of as genial and placid, was given to outbursts of anger that went beyond all reason. "Behind the friendly grin there was another man," Perret explains in his commentary on Ike's White House years, "one who didn't simply shout and swear when he got angry but seemed almost on the verge of a sulfurous vanishing act, disappearing in the flames and smoke of spontaneous combustion." Perret goes on: "Such Bessemer incidents might erupt at almost any time, triggered by trivial incidents more often than not" (529-30). Ike's emotions could swing in the opposite direction. General Eisenhower, for instance, allowed sentiment to infect his understanding on gravely serious matters. "Eisenhower repeatedly lectured senior commanders that they must be ruthless with officers who had failed and put friendship aside, yet he was deaf to his own advice when it came to Mark Clark," who attended West Point with Eisenhower. "Clark had done nothing to curb his overweening vanity, but Eisenhower looked the other way. His Salerno plan was abysmal and courted disaster. Ike ignored that. Under pressure, Clark had shown terrible misjudgment. That, too, was ignored," Perret points out.

"Ike indulged the mistakes of Major General Lloyd Fredendall in much the same way" (205, 239).

Eisenhower is neither captious nor adulatory, but apologetic. Perret controverts defamatory legends surrounding Ike, even as he does not refrain from exploring less commendable aspects of his life. The canard that Ike and his English driver, Kay Summersby, conducted an affair is refuted with an avalanche of evidence. Summersby herself advances the idea that she and Ike were lovers in her memoir, *Past Forgetting* (1976). Perret's judgment of her claim is blunt, devastating. "The back story to *Past Forgetting* was that Kay was dying of cancer and, in the grip of certain death, was reviewing a life that was a tale of failure and disappointment. She had wasted so many opportunities and privileges that her life almost cried out for a redeeming experience, something powerful enough, dramatic enough, to lift it above the dismal truth" (216). Perret is similarly persuasive in his evaluation of Ike's alleged indifference to the civil rights crusades of the 1950s. Evidence can be found in the social isolation the Eisenhower's faced in the aftermath of federal enforcement of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. On the Eisenhower's "first visit to Augusta National [their favorite vacation spot] following the forced integration of Little Rock Central High, he and Mamie had been met with hostile glances, not spontaneous applause, by sullen silence instead of southern hospitality" (542-ff; 602). Perret makes clear that segregationists could never have looked upon Ike as a friend to their cause.

Perret's *Eisenhower* is, like its subject, certainly praiseworthy but not without faults—all of which, however, can be characterized as venial rather than mortal. The index is on the whole adequate but, for at least a few items, irritatingly idiosyncratic. We are given the page numbers for Ike's promotion to brigadier general and to four-star general, but no reference is provided for his selection to five-star general, an achievement Ike shared with only a handful of other commanders in American history. The "United States Military Academy" receives four references, yet page 45—which contains Ike's deathbed remarks about the primacy of West Point in his life—is not listed, though aspects of his day-to-day life discussed on pages 44 and 47 are. The Battle of the Bulge is not to be found, though Bastogne and Saint-Vith appear: why not list these two locations under the more familiar battle name?

Perret writes very well indeed; his prose carries a considerable amount of information while almost never calling attention to itself. Even so,

Perret now and then capitulates to the histrionic impulse. Unfortunately for the bookstore browser, who may put the volume down after spending twenty seconds with *Eisenhower*, the opening sentence illustrates very well Perret's occasional rhetorical flamboyance: "Under a starless sky that heaved and cracked, every crash of thunder that broke over Denison, Texas, that October night [14 October 1890, Ike's birthday] rolled down the broad valley of the Red River, shaking the cheap little clapboard houses plunked down beside the steel tracks that followed the river's course" (3). Perhaps it might not have sufficed to say that Ike was born on a stormy October night in a cramped, squalid bungalow in Denison, Texas? The tone here seems more appropriate to a Gothic novel or worse, a parody of a Gothic novel. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that grandiloquence of this sort appears rarely in *Eisenhower*; its presence is highlighted by Perret's otherwise clear, expressive, unlabored prose in the service of an estimable study of a consequential public figure.

Perret's volume represents an achievement greater than its necessarily limited but wholly meritorious contribution to our understanding of Eisenhower and his age—Ambrose's biography remains, as Perret himself acknowledges, *sui generis*. Perret's *Eisenhower* exemplifies the value of biography to the common reader—most especially the intelligent young who mean to attend or who do attend the nation's military academies or who serve in the armed forces as junior officers.

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Don Kunz

Rehearsing For Vietnam

I never figured agent orange for a truth serum. But now I've got to tell somebody or the story dies with me. Looks like you're it.

Thirty three years ago I was a sophomore in high school, the youngest reporter for its newspaper, *The Frigate*, and I had been assigned to preview the spring talent show. When I stopped off on the way to auditions to get a notebook, I found an envelope stuffed into the crack of my locker door like something waiting to crawl out. It was stained with mud and motor oil, and as I walked down the empty hall, I tried to think how I could open it without getting my hands dirty. By the time I reached the auditorium I thought the hell with it. As I crossed the threshold and the big double doors banged shut behind me, I ripped one end off. There was a death threat inside. It made me sick. I couldn't know then that the threat was bogus; the fear was real. I see now everything that followed was a rehearsal for what happened to me in Vietnam.

The auditions were closed to the general student body. Mr. Cuddy, the Vice-Principal, would have turned me away if Miss Blocker hadn't remembered me from her speech class. With the death threat stuck in my throat, I stammered out something about a deadline. She gestured toward the right and said "well, have a seat down front, then, dear, but don't rattle your papers."

Miss Blocker was six feet tall, so she could look down on most of her students and many of her colleagues. During World War II she'd been a Captain in the Women's Army Corps, and she still had a commanding voice and a posture that made everyone around her seem to slouch. I was waiting for my growth spurt at fifteen. At just over five feet tall

and a hundred and fifteen pounds I think I brought out Miss Blocker's maternal instinct.

I sat in the first row, which put my eyes at stage level, folded the lap top desk over my legs and laid out my spiral notebook and pens. The auditorium felt empty. I could hear students milling around in the wings back stage and saw a delicate tracery of cigar smoke hanging in the air. Then Mr. Botwinik, the janitor, opened the red velvet curtain.

Being a reporter, I knew most everyone auditioning, but I searched their faces carefully. For the first time I was being forced to distinguish enemies from friendlies, something that never got easier even with practice. Janie Lang and Madeline Beamer seemed perky even without their cheerleader pompoms. Jimmy Perkins resembled a lethal Elvis with his oily hair raked back, a snarl on his lips, and a black guitar in his hands. Paul Sanjek smiled broadly as he practiced card tricks for Linda Ekberg. With her back toward me Linda's waist was so narrow and skirt so tight that her rear end flared out like a heart on a greeting card turned upside down. Cy Bertrand stood apart from the rest, not so much leaning against the back wall of the stage as appearing to be its principal means of support. Standing six foot three with a face riddled by acne, a nose curling into a hook, and forearms like Popeye—he might have made a good gargoyle on a medieval cathedral. I don't know if his face had ever stopped a clock, but it had certainly stopped opposing linemen in the interscholastic league. What was his talent? Scaring people to death? My older sister Kris was up there, too, looking beautiful and shy and nervous. She rubbed her right shoulder where an arm should have been if she had been born with it then gave me a little left-handed wave like a person who is having a heart attack but too polite to make much of a fuss about it.

Never mind who I am. I've changed all the names anyway. I don't mind dying, but I don't want to get sued.

The auditions began when Janie Lang stuck her pixy face out and lip synched her way through "I Enjoy Being a Girl"—a routine she had performed in the fall senior play. Then Jimmy Perkins, strumming his Sears & Roebuck guitar, sang "You ain't Nothin' but a Hound Dog," with a sneer on his face and slow undulating hip movements. Miss Blocker and Mr. Cuddy twitched in their seats while the girls in the wings huddled and whispered. Finally Miss Blocker leaned down and spoke to Mr. Cuddy. A moment later he rose waving his arms, and Jimmy drawled out "you ain't no friend of mine" before grinding to a halt.

Mr. Cuddy straightened his tie. "I think we've seen enough Mr. Perkins. Remember that parents will be present as well as younger brothers and sisters. We want a good, clean show!"

As Jimmy collected himself to defend rock and roll against the guardians of public decency, the double doors at the rear of the auditorium blew open, and Frank Steiner swept in followed by his two understudies—Vance Wilson and Sal Mancini. With their hair greased back into ducktails, their t-shirt sleeves rolled up to display their tattoos, and their pegged levis tucked into black leather motorcycle boots, it was as if rock and roll had invented them.

While Mr. Cuddy stood paralyzed by what Jimmy Perkins had conjured up, Miss Blocker rose quickly. Striding brusquely down her row kicking seat bottoms up, she reached the center aisle where she turned to glare at Frances Willard High School's three thugs in residence. Her voice was about two decibels under the threshold of pain. "Mr. Steiner, you are disrupting the auditions. You and your friends will have to leave." She gestured toward the doors of the auditorium in what I recognized from a stained glass window in church as the posture God assumed when banishing Adam and Eve from paradise.

Frank stood his ground. He wasn't any bigger than I was, but he seemed to swell up with malevolent energy. He looked Miss Blocker up and down. It took some time, but she waited patiently and seemed happy to be measured. When Frank finally spoke, he moved his mouth broadly as if he expected everyone in authority was deaf and had to read lips. "But we have an act."

"You certainly do. But do you have talent?"

Frank hooked his thumbs in his front pockets and tried to look hurt, but a surly tone betrayed him. "Why don't we find out?"

"Just what do you plan to do, Mr. Steiner? Spray paint a graffiti mural on the proscenium arch or beat somebody up to a jazz score?"

I think Frank liked Miss Blocker. She was somebody worth fighting with. "Which one suits you?" he smirked.

"Neither. The talent show is for acting not acting up, Mr. Steiner. It does not suit your obvious gifts."

"We wanna audition. Why don't you give us a shot?"

"I would be happy to oblige you, Mr. Steiner. Unfortunately, when I resigned my commission, I had to turn in my service revolver."

Frank pretended to mop his brow. Even he could suck up to authority when it suited him. "Whew. If we got us a cease fire here, maybe you

and me can be friends, Miss Blocker."

"That's not my job, Mr. Steiner. However, if you really want to audition, you will have to go last."

"Miss Blocker, I had to go last all my life."

"Frank, you break my heart!"

Frank Steiner may have been small, but his gang's reputation was enormous. As they disappeared through the stage door, students in the wings herded together toward the back wall and looked over their shoulders; then they saw Cy Bertrand and sidled back. Sitting alone with a death threat in my pocket, I found that fearful little group comforting. Finally, Linda Ekberg clomped out to center stage in her tap shoes and began to do shuffle ball changes and buffaloes to "Sweet Georgia Brown."

Tap dancing has always seemed comic to me. I began to grin as Linda did a buck and wing with a frantic grace that showed off some nicely developed thigh muscles beneath her very short skirt. In the wings Frank had his arms extended and his feet shuffling in a spontaneous parody. I had to laugh in spite of myself until he turned his right hand into a gun and pretended to shoot me. Meanwhile, Linda kept shuffling and ball changing happily oblivious to what anyone thought, completely absorbed in her own rhythm. Later in college I read Yeats' poem about not being able to tell the dancer from the dance, and thought of Linda that day and the way it looked as if she might dance right off the stage, pick up the books in her locker, shuffle down the front steps and do the ball change right up Euclid Avenue all the way home and buck and wing her way through dinner and buffalo her way past her civics homework. Then, perhaps she would dance through the rest of her life learning a few new steps every year and end up a limber old lady with great legs and a permanent smile which only faded when she danced across all the other graves in Forest Park Cemetery and laid herself to rest with one last dramatic ball change into her own coffin.

As Linda shuffled off her mortal coil stage right, Paul Sanjek emerged from the opposite wing sporting a long black cape and a shoe-polish mustache and began to do card tricks that nobody could see beyond the third row. He tried to lure Miss Blocker from the audience to participate, but she said "I'll pass." Then I heard her whisper to Mr. Cuddy "which is probably more than that poor boy will do." And Mr. Cuddy looked like he might allow himself to laugh for the first time in about ten years.

Rising from his seat, Mr. Cuddy waved to get Paul's attention and

asked: "Do you have any tricks that are a little bigger?"

"Bigger, Mr. Cuddy?" Paul's cape seemed to droop around his shoulders.

"Yes, Paul, tricks that might be seen in the last row of the auditorium."

Paul seemed to search some book on magic whose pages flitted just behind his eyelids. Then he drew his cape about him and swelled up like an enormous bat. Frank Steiner elbowed Vance Wilson in the stomach and pointed toward Paul. Paul's arms rose beneath the cape, and suddenly from its black folds two white doves exploded in a flutter and flash of wings. They swooped into the orchestra pit and up toward the ceiling where they chased one another among the chandeliers.

"Well, I'll be darned," Mr. Cuddy said. "That's a great trick, but how are you going to get them down?" Cy Bertrand came unstuck from the back wall; his eyes followed the flight of the doves like the creature in *Frankenstein*, getting his first glimpse of fire.

Frank swaggered onto the stage. "Hey, Mr. Cuddy. I've got a twelve gauge pump. How about Paul sets 'em loose, and I shoot 'em down?" He clapped his hands sharply three times. The doves darted frantically.

Paul glanced uneasily at Frank, then at Mr. Cuddy. "They usually come right back," he whined. "But they're afraid. I think I can get them down later when it's quiet."

Mr. Botwinik, waddled out from behind the curtain, drew heavily on his short wet cigar, removed it from his mouth, looked up and slowly blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "I know two things," he rasped, holding up two pudgy fingers on his left hand. "One, I ain't goin' up there on no ladder for them birds. Two, anybody comes to this show better wear a hat." Then, he clamped his cigar between his teeth, jammed his hands in the front pockets of his bib overalls and retreated slowly behind the curtain with that graceful floating motion which gives dignity to obesity.

The rest of us stood mesmerized by the doves' airborne ballet. A mistake had become a show stopper. Then, Miss Blocker stood balancing a steno pad on top of her head like a mortar board. "Paul, get some bread crumbs from the cafeteria and a cookie sheet to scatter them on. We don't want to mess up Mr. Botwinik's nicely waxed linoleum floor. Now, what's the next act here? Let's see," she said lowering her steno pad and riffling its pages, "number five I think. Hurry. The buses will be here at four."

I watched Kris approach the microphone like the condemned ap-

proached the guillotine in *A Tale of Two Cities* which I was reading in Miss Shaw's tenth grade English class. It towered over her. There was no way she could adjust it with one hand. Mr. Cuddy was looking at Miss Blocker's list while she was eying Frank who had become interested in the ropes controlling the curtain. Before I could rescue Kris, Cy Bertrand wrapped his big hands around the microphone's silver throat and wrestled it into submission. She gave him a little smile and took a deep breath.

Her soprano was a rising wind saying nothing in particular, just an instrument in perfect pitch. I had heard her sing in the church choir accompanied by an organ, but this was the first time I had heard her solo a cappella on "Amazing Grace." Mr. Cuddy took his glasses off and closed his eyes. Miss Blocker steepled her fingers together and stared out the window where new gold-green leaves on a willow tree swayed above the asphalt parking lot. Jimmy Perkins lifted his guitar and quietly ran his fingers over the frets trying to follow every note she hit. Linda Ekberg kept her feet perfectly still on the gray and green linoleum squares of the auditorium. Janie Lang seemed to be contemplating the value of the word perky. And Paul Sanjek stood in the back of the auditorium with a cookie sheet full of bread crumbs like some part-time deacon in a small-town church ready to celebrate communion. Even the doves had settled on a window sill and begun to coo pleasantly.

Kris' voice was rich and resonant. When she paused for breath, silence hung in the air like light. It was her control over silence that made the air so full. She wasn't afraid of silence. Her life had been so full of it, so little chit chat, so few phone calls, so little attention from boys who had no use for a shy, slender girl with no right arm. And on the second chorus as Kris hit a high note on "wretch like me" and varied the rhythm, not holding the note but dropping it suddenly like a curtain, Frank Steiner's voice rang out in counterpoint. What all of us heard as clearly as Sal Mancini for whom it was intended was "Fuck the crippled cooze!" Then there was a heavier silence, dead air time, as we wondered what next? Frank Steiner grinned at having sabotaged an audition with so little effort. Acknowledging his own importance, he did a little half bow at the waist, which was why he didn't know what hit him. As Kris sang "I once was lost," Cy Bertrand straightened Frank out. His left hand pulled Frank's head up by the hair. His right hand sunk into Frank's crotch. Pivoting quickly he lifted him over his head, and while

Frank's arms windmilled like broken wings, Cy took three quick steps and deposited him head first into the metal trash can to rest with the dust bunnies, the orange peels , and Mr. Botwinik's smelly cigar butts beside the stage back door. Then Cy exited the stage door as Frank's understudies rehearsed their parts. Sal Mancini, mistiming his pursuit, broke his nose on the slamming door and turned back toward his audience blood gushing between his fingers. Vance Wilson, rushing to extricate Frank from the trash, took a boot in the solar plexus. He fell hard and leaned over to vomit near Mr. Botwinik's heavy black work shoes. The rest of us sat stunned. Even Miss Blocker was speechless. Wednesday afternoon auditions were over.

For the next two days Frank and his gang were absent. This was not unusual. But now it seemed ominous—like the smell of sulfur dioxide from the chemistry laboratory. We expected an explosion any minute. Paul Sanjek said Frank had bought a 45 caliber derringer to conceal in his boot and kill Cy some night when he emerged tired and groggy from football practice. Jimmy Perkins said he knew for a fact that Frank was using money he earned selling marijuana to hire professionals from back east to break Cy's legs with baseball bats. None of this seemed to trouble Cy Bertrand in the least. I watched him most of Thursday. He chewed thoughtfully on the inside of his cheek as he worked quadratic equations in eight o'clock algebra, plowed through his chop suey while looking out the window during first lunch, and walked slowly and steadily down the hallway toward his two o'clock civics lesson. It almost took my mind off my own problems. Afterall I had received the death threat, and it was in writing. That morning before my first class I worked up the nerve to show it to the principal.

Mr. Albright's watery old blue eyes looked down through his gold rimmed glasses at the crudely printed note, then back up at me. He smiled sadly. "He misspelled ignoramus. It says, 'you write any more lies about me you little egoramis, and your dead.' And your should not be possessive case. It should be the contraction for you are, you're. See?" Mr. Albright leaned forward to show me plainly where the writer had erred.

"Yes, I see that. I write for *The Frigate*, sir."

"Well, there it is!" He slumped back into his swivel chair and waved the letter above his head.

I crept forward on my seat. "I'm afraid," I whispered.

"You understand," he insisted, "you have nothing to fear from such a

person. Anyone who writes like this lacks the discipline to carry out such a threat."

"Well, I don't know, sir."

"Of course you know," he shot back. "You write for the school paper. Writing something is not the same as doing it. You are going to be just as safe as . . . as anyone can be at Frances Willard High School." Mr. Albright seemed to be looking over my head at a large wall calendar. Perhaps he was counting the days until his retirement. As I turned to go, an orange and brown picture of the Grand Canyon beckoned above the month of April. It made me a little dizzy to look into the abyss.

That night after dinner Kris followed me when I took out the garbage. She wanted to know what a cooze was. So I pushed the leftover scraps into the galvanized can beside the garage, and I lied. I said it was a nickname for Bob Cousy who played guard for the Boston Celtics. "It's a name for short people," I said.

Kris bit her lower lip thoughtfully. "Well, I don't see what's so bad about that. I'm not really short. Not for a girl. And the word fudge. I don't think Frank even knows how to swear. It's not much of an insult, if you ask me!"

"Maybe Frank had an off day. It's hard work being evil all the time. He was probably taking it easy."

"Why did Cy get so upset, then? He's never even spoken to me before. Then, he helps me with the microphone, and he humiliates the biggest thug in the whole school." She twirled the ends of her long black hair and looked up to where a few stars were beginning to sprinkle themselves across the sky.

"Frank did call you crippled."

"I think Cy has a crush on me. In fact, I'm sure of it. I'm going to write him a thank you note . . . on perfumed stationary . . . a pretty pastel . . . maybe with my monogram on it.

"Cy's expecting a death threat, and you send him a love letter. It may give him a heart attack.

"It's not a love letter . . . not exactly. Of course, you'll deliver it for me. I don't want seem too eager.

"I'd like to keep my distance. It can't be healthy getting close to Cy right now. Like say gunfire were to break out suddenly. Besides, you don't really want to become the Bride of Frankenstein do you?"

"Why, I'm surprised at you. Cy's not a monster. Of course, he's huge. That's not what I mean. But he's gentle and kind. A woman likes to be

able to look up to a man," she said staring down at me.

"Let's compromise," I said. "I'll buy the stamp."

But I'd used up my allowance, so I spent Friday stalking Cy Bertrand through the halls of Frances Willard High School. In one pocket I had my sister's elegantly calligraphed love letter on blush pink stationary that smelled of White Shoulders perfume, and in the other I had someone's badly misspelled death threat childishly scrawled in black crayola on newsprint. And although the author of neither, as a budding writer, I seemed prepared for any extreme.

What I wasn't prepared for was Cy Bertrand. The closer I got, the bigger and uglier he looked. I was beginning to feel mighty small tracking a monster while trailing the signature of my sister's perfume. After taking role in my ten o'clock physical education class, Coach Gauling had delivered a spontaneous lecture on the feminizing influence of colognes, all the while glaring at me. Afterward he tried to restore my manhood by singling me out to climb the huge rope to the top of the gym. No sweat. I could scramble like a monkey. Back then you couldn't give me enough rope for me to hang myself. And when I came in third on the wind sprints, coach eased up. But after lunch as we stood in front of our lockers, my friend Roger Mackie sniffed my shirt and pretended to faint with delight. And by two o'clock, just before the last class of the day, I almost was convinced that a love letter could be as dangerous as a death threat.

I was in the southwest corridor trailing Cy and thinking what I was going to say when I whipped around a corner and bounced off his chest like a slap shot off a goalie's mask. His enormous hands caught me in a loose embrace on the ricochet. "Okay, Dickhead," Cy rumbled. "Why are you following me?"

Luckily I had my speech prepared. I swallowed once, took a deep breath, held out the note and said, "here."

His arms gripped me like steel bands, but he unlocked them to accept the letter and held it up gracefully to the light. He breathed deeply. I could see the fragrance working on him like a drug. There was a softening around his eyes which were gray as weathered tombstones. Wedging his left index finger under a corner of the envelope flap, he carefully tore it open and began to read. A blush about the color of the note itself suffused his face and dampened the fiery glow of his acne. Embarrassment made him handsome. "Okay," he croaked. "Who are you, Dickhead?"

"No need to be so formal. Most people just call me Dick. I'm her

brother, and I was wondering if you would do me a favor?"

"To tell you the truth," he sighed, turning his back into the wall and speaking down to me over his shoulder, "I'd like to ask you for one. Look, Dick," he said fumbling his notebook open and beginning to write, "I'd like you to take her this."

"My name's not really Dick. That was a joke."

"You're a funny little guy, aren't you, Dick? Tell me, does dwarfism run in your family?"

I didn't say anything. I didn't want to break his concentration as he printed neat block letters all square and sturdy like the foundation of a house. It was quite a contrast to those loopy swirls that I had traced through the outside of Kris' envelope—dark shadows through the pink blush.

"I see you're trying to read my message. Don't. I haven't got an envelope, but I'm gonna fold it over twice. And, Dick, if I find out you read it, I'll put your nuts in the woodshop vice and crack 'em. Understood?"

"I won't peek. I got my own letter to worry about." I handed him the death threat which was much creased and smudged by now. I had studied it a lot.

Cy shook it open roughly like a grocery bag. "This guy can't spell for shit, and he's got poor eye hand coordination. Any idea who it is?"

"Well I write for *The Frigate*, so . . . I guess . . ."

He nodded. "Yeah. It could be anybody."

"I suppose we could find out who failed English."

"That's not going to narrow it down much." Cy folded the letter and tapped one edge against his front teeth.

"Don't eat the note. If I get killed, they could get a handwriting expert to look at it."

Cy lolled his head lazily around on his neck, loosening up his muscles in that casual way athletes have. "If it'll make you feel better, we'll trade places. I'll follow you around for a little while."

"Cy, you read my mind."

"Dick, it wasn't much work. You got a face like a topo map."

That afternoon on the way home from school I got beat up. After making up an algebra test, I left about four and walked down Garfield Avenue past the football field where Frances Willard was scheduled to hold a spring scrimmage against Westport that night. I had been assigned to do the write up for *The Frigate*, so when I passed the fifty yard line, I turned my back to the street, set my books down, put my fingers

through the chain link fence, and stood examining the field. The new mown grass was thick and lush. White chalk stripes crisply outlined the boundaries and yard markers. Behind the equipment shed Forsythia blossoms glistened like gold coins from a wrecked frigate. Purple iris perfumed the air. I took a long slow breath of spring and watched a crumpled examination paper all torn and dusty skitter along the track that ringed the field. The low rumble of a glass pack exhaust and slamming car doors turned my head.

Frank seemed happy to see me, like an older brother getting ready to teach his younger sibling a lesson in how to act. Sal and Vance were just supporting players; they probably had rehearsed frowning in front of a mirror, Sal peering cross eyed over his nose splint. Frank was the real talent, a natural. The south entrance to the school was about 150 yards away. I could see Mr. Albright and Mr. Cuddy strolling toward the faculty parking lot. Then they disappeared around the corner of the building. Frank's hands were dirty and scraped like he had just changed the oil in his car. He balanced on his toes like a boxer. "You're the brother of that crippled cooze sings religious crap. You're the little egoramis writes for *The Frigate*."

My legs and arms felt heavy. Only my lips and tongue could move, and they betrayed me before they knew what they were doing. "You write lousy fan mail. You can't spell for shit. And you have no taste in music."

Frank smiled at Vance. "Smart mouthed little bastard ain't he?" He shook his head sadly. "Well, maybe that's true. But guess what? I don't give a rat's ass!" Vance and Sal looked down in unison and scuffed the grass with the toes of their boots—a bit of choreography they had been required to master for membership in the union of thugs. "Sure, I got arrested for assault. But it wasn't like you wrote. We was dancin' an' she fell down. Ask Vance."

Vance smiled. "That's right. Plus, she was black."

"Right. See no big deal. She deserved it. Black an' she can't dance for shit. Just another dumb cooze. Know what I mean?"

"Frank, I report what happens. I don't make the news."

"I can change that," he said and hit me in the mouth. Then Sal kneed me in the stomach and my breath rushed out over my ruined lip and broken front tooth. As I doubled over, a fist cracked against my right ear, and I was on the ground not hearing much but a roaring sound and feeling their boots thud against my back and chest as their anger rose

and crashed down on me. Then someone was pulling on my right arm and someone else splayed my fingers out, and then a boot heel slowly ground them through the grass and into the dirt, and the hand got very hot and very big and I blacked out.

Coach Gauling found me sprawled in the weeds next to the fence when he came out to pull the yard markers from the equipment shed around 4:30. The school nurse had gone home, so he helped me into the trainer's room where he cleaned the dirt from the cuts, felt my ribs and fingers for broken bones, and iced down my lip and hand. Of course, coach wanted to know what had happened. Unable to speak or write, I couldn't do much to enlighten him. He had his own suspicion anyway. It had something to do with wearing cologne.

My mom cried, and my dad wanted to call the police, and my sister wanted to meet Cy after the Westport scrimmage and ask him to beat up Frank and his gang. Of course, none of what anybody wanted happened exactly that way. But Kris did go to the scrimmage with Linda Ekberg; they were even talking about becoming a song and dance act after graduation. Great, I thought, gospel tap. After my mother made an appointment with Dr. Harriman for me for the next morning, she sent me to bed early.

I may have been in bed by 7:30, but I was out the window and onto the porch roof by 7:45. When I jumped to the ground, it was softer than I had imagined, and I left some big footprints in the flower bed next to the drain pipe. I had expected to feel sick and scared like when I had first opened the greasy envelope and thought about getting killed. But actually being beaten up had changed all that. Now I wanted to kill somebody. I was going to need help.

Five minutes before kickoff I was standing in the shadows beneath the grandstand, which is a good place for a reporter. I listened to the band play a medley of fight songs as the teams did calisthenics in opposite end zones. I could smell hot dogs and popcorn. My stomach rumbled. I hadn't been able to get much dinner down. My upper lip hurt like hell. It stuck out so far I thought I could probably pull it back over the top of my head and go trick or treating. And my right hand throbbed steadily beneath the gauze; I kept trying to hide it my pocket where it didn't fit. Finally, I thought, the hell with it; let it stick out. The pain dulled. The anger sharpened.

I had always gone to church; I had thought of myself as a Christian; I had been taught to be long suffering. And as I stood in the shadows

that night beneath the grandstand where the spectators sat watching, as I stood outside the field where the players prepared to compete following a set of rules, I knew I didn't belong anymore. I knew I was not what I had thought and that I would never be that way again. I knew in my heart that I wanted to kill Frank Steiner and Vance Wilson and Sal Mancini if I could. And so I waited in the dark and thought about my chances.

During the opening coin toss I heard the rumble of the glass pack exhaust on Frank's '49 Mercury. His car entered the parking lot as I stepped into the darker shadows of the equipment shed. A few minutes later just as the kickoff was beginning and a cheer went up in the stands, Frank and Vance and Sal strolled into the stadium entrance carrying gym bags like players arriving too late to get into the game. Vance paused, darted his hand into the gym bag, pulled out a can, and spray painted a red swastika on the door of the equipment shed as casually as a dog pissing on a tree. Sal had not been able to get his bag closed; the handle of a baseball bat protruded around the zipper. They passed within ten feet of me and headed up the concrete ramp to the stands. They never saw me. I had become part of the darkness where I stood. Halfway up the ramp Frank met Paul Sanjek on his way to the snack bar and relieved him of the five dollar bill in his hand, saying "thanks for the donation; don't forget it's tax deductible." Then they disappeared into the crowd.

I turned and walked out into the parking lot. It was an old pasture that had been bulldozed and scattered with gravel to keep the dust down. It was deeply rutted and chunks of stone stuck up like bone fragments in a bombed out cemetery I later saw near a relocation hamlet in Songmy. The gravel crunched under my sneakers. I didn't try to be quiet. I had tiptoed around for too long. I had as much right as anybody else to walk there. The lot was full of parents' Ford Fairlanes and Plymouth Bellaires, students' Nash Ramblers with reclining seats and some customized street rods. Frank's '49 Mercury was in the last row backed up against the fence. I could barely make it out. The car was perfect for a young gangster. Stripped of all chrome and covered in dull black primer, it first appeared as part of the darkness itself, a gap in the row of respectable family transportation. But up close with the front lowered and rear raised, it looked like a shark bearing down on me.

I didn't have a plan. I wasn't even thinking. I was alone in the dark, but I was finding my way. And this is what I had come to. I realized I

was off balance. One foot was resting on a stone. I stepped back and reached down with my left hand. The rock was flat and jagged and about the size of Cy Bertrand's fist only heavier. One of Frank's tires must have dislodged it from the dirt. I knelt beside the left front wheel, feeling the gravel bite into my knees. I didn't mind the pain I was inflicting on myself. Oddly pleasurable, it made what I was doing real to me. I was on dark, rough ground beyond the artificial daylight that showed the rest where the sharp white boundaries were that divided us from them. I was rehearsing for Vietnam.

The stone lay across my left palm anchored by its own weight. I reached behind the tire and touched it once to where the brake line entered the wheel. Then, I drew my arm back in a wide arc in front of the tie rod and swung it forward smashing the stone against the fitting. I did that again and again until I felt the line break and heard the soft drip of brake fluid as it bled out. The stain I left did not show in the dark.

I set the stone back in place, stood up, and brushed the gravel from my knees. All Frank had to do was act like Frank, and he would kill himself and his understudies. It didn't occur to me at the time that he might kill someone else in the process. I threaded my way back through parked cars listening to their cooling engines tick in the gloom, moving on a zigzag course toward the warm glow of the lights. It took a long time. Somewhere along the way I noticed that a crescent moon had popped above the trees like the blade of a scythe.

I hadn't missed much. It was still the first quarter and no one had scored. I paused on the concrete apron of the west ramp where it spilled out into the stands by the visitor's end zone. Our Pirates were at their Tigers' twenty yardline. Absorbed in the game, nobody paid any attention to a short, skinny kid with a fat lip and a gauzy fielder's mitt for a right hand coming in late. I sat down by Roger Mackie and listened to his profane summary of the game's first seven minutes. Then he looked at me.

"Jesus Christ, what happened to your face? And your hand is all fucked up, too."

"I feh dowb," I managed as a thin string of drool ran from the corner of my mouth and fell between my knees to puddle on the concrete. I noticed some blood was leaking through the knees of my chinos.

"You what?"

"I feh dowb."

That's what I thought you said. What the hell. You bite your tongue or what?"

Jimmy Perkins turned from the row in front to interpret. "He says he fell down, stupid!"

"Well, shit. You break your fall with your lip or something?"

I shrugged and raised my right hand.

"He tripped over a gasoline can, fell on his face, scraped his knees, set off a spark and set his hand on fire," Jimmy explained.

Roger stared at Jimmy. "I don't believe that shit for a minute."

"Why not? It makes perfect sense. He's full of clues. Can't you see the guy's a walking booby trap?"

"Loob, I god a doob a ride ub on du gabe." I pretended to scribble on an imaginary notepad then waved one hand toward the field where Lance Hartley trotted out to the twelve yard line and prepared to kick a field goal by swinging his right leg high above his head.

"Crap," Roger said. "Those pussies don't have the guts to try for the TD."

Jimmy pinched Roger's knee. "He wants you to write his sports column for him, Roger."

"No shit? Can I say anything I want to? Can I tell the truth?"

"Yeb." I leaned over and spit carefully. It came out pink and frothy.

"I can say any shit I want to, and I get to sign your name?" The snap from center sailed high over the holder's outstretched hands, bounced once at Lance Hartley's feet, hit him in the chest, and ricocheted into his hands. The crowd sat stunned. Lance began running to the right along the twenty yard line. Just before he ran out of bounds, he stopped, looked up, and lofted a pass to the left side of the end zone where Cy Bertrand stood waiting alone. "My pleasure," Roger said slapping me on the back.

The rest of the game was poor entertainment. After our broken play scored, it became a defensive contest. Coach Gauling paced and gestured on the sideline. At the beginning of the fourth quarter he kicked over the ice bucket. Then with 2:07 left in the game we got down to the Westport 36 yard line. With fourth down and five yards to go, he sent in Hartley to set up for a field goal. But everybody knew it was a fake. Hartley was out of his range. So was coach; imagination was not his strong suit. He wanted to recreate a happy accident. Westport blitzed and Hartley was thrown for a ten yard loss. Then Westport went into their two minute drill, going long on every play, and got just past midfield

when the clock ran out on them.

As the teams left the field, I saw Kris rise from behind our bench and wave to Cy Bertrand. His cleats sent up a shower of sparks on the concrete runway leading to the tunnel beneath the grandstand. He pulled his helmet off and tossed his head back. A ring of wet dark curls framed his face and neck where the tendons stood out like mooring lines tethering him to the earth. He made a graceful little pivot toward her, pulled his mouthpiece out flicking the saliva off neatly in the same motion, gave her a big gap toothed smile, and disappeared beneath the stands. As far as I was concerned, Cy Bertrand was a troll returning to the underworld, but Kris stared after him with a look of pure yearning that would have inflated the ego of a Greek god. I thought her faith was misplaced. Where had he been while I was getting beat up?

The crowd slowly emptied the grandstand. I wanted to get out to the parking lot where I thought sure I would get to witness a terrible accident, but I got held up. Roger did an extemporaneous oral sports column that must have lasted ten minutes. He wasn't a bad ghost writer. If I deleted the profanity and melodrama, it would run about one column. On her way out Miss Blocker saw my puffed lip and wanted to know what had happened. She listened to Jimmy Perkins' preposterous explanation with great restraint. Saying nothing, she gave my shoulder a reassuring squeeze that was enough to take my mind off pain anywhere else in my body. If I could have spoken clearly, I would have asked her to be my bodyguard. By the time I had freed myself of these pleasantries, Kris and Linda were very nearly the only others in the stands.

Kris was dancing around behind the iron railing that separated the stands from the playing field. I thought she might be drunk. "I'm going out with Cy after he showers," she squeaked. "We're meeting by the snack bar!"

"Goob for oo," I enthused trying to talk with one hand behind my back.

Linda reached out to touch my lip gently. Her nails were long and gleamed with bright red polish. "Oh your poor face." I felt a little tingling that began in my cheek and ran to my toes. She looked even prettier from the front. Just over her shoulder I saw a miniature Frank Steiner emerge from the ramp on the other side of the field then turn and descend from sight.

As we meandered slowly toward the snack bar, Kris bubbled along in praise of Cy Bertrand, Hero of the Westport game, Defender of the

Weak, Prince Charming of the Decade. Linda joined in, noting how broad and manly his shoulders were and how big he was, probably real big all over. I thought I might be sick. But as we entered the tunnel beneath the stands, Linda slid her arm around my waist, and I began to feel a little better. Ahead of us the snack bar gleamed with light. Mr. Botwinik had the register open and was counting his cash. As I looked over my shoulder, I saw three guys jump onto the cinder track that circled the football field, cross it, and drift our way across the thirty yard line. One was swinging a baseball bat, decapitating dandelion heads that the mower had missed. The other two carried gym bags.

Mr. Botwinik looked up from counting and squinted against the cigar smoke wreathing his swarthy, stubbled face. "You kids want one a these soft pretzels? Take 'em. They don't keep. They go hard overnight, and the salt drops off." Linda slid her arm from around my waist and leaned way over the counter to snag two pretzels while giving Mr. Botwinik an eyeful through the open collar of her blouse. He gave a long pull on his cigar and winked at me. "Ain't life full of surprises, kid?" he rasped. Then, he paused and looked at my face. "Wha'd you do, try to kiss yourself to death?" I'd never thought of that. It sounded like a good idea.

Kris and Linda chewed thoughtfully on their pretzels. Mr. Botwinik stuffed dollar bills into one white bag and dropped coins into another. I leaned my back against the wall and expected trouble. Stepping from behind the counter Mr. Botwinik set the money bags on the concrete floor. Then he reached up, pulled the metal grate down across the counter, and locked it with a grunt of relief. "I'd like to hang around and talk, but I got to turn them lights out now, kids."

"But we're meeting someone here," Kris said. "Can't you wait just a few minutes?" Three shadowy figures emerged from the gloom of the tunnel. They were wearing Halloween masks. One was tapping a baseball bat rhythmically against the wall. When he got closer, I could see it was a Louisville slugger. It looked used.

Mr. Botwinik turned at the sound. "Well, I'll be damned. Meeting someone, huh?"

"Oh, not them," Kris said. "It's not Halloween."

The masks were works of art. The guy with the bat had the face of withered crone, all moles and wrinkles and wens with a hooked nose and jutting chin. The one hanging back in the darkness was dressed entirely in black except for a white skeleton's face that reflected the light from

the snack bar. The shortest wore an alien mask with funny little antennas that stuck out where eyebrows should be and stepped right into the light as if he were the featured player in the show. He reached into his front pocket, pulled out a switch blade knife, and flicked it open. Masks are not always disguises. I recognized them in turn as Sal, Vance, and Frank.

Kris gasped and slipped behind Mr. Botwinik. Linda let out a little squeal and quickly wormed between me and the wall. Behind every good man, there was a good woman. I was hoping that behind every thug there was a hero waiting to mete out justice, but from where I was standing, I could see only darkness, and it looked empty. The alien and the crone inched closer. When I saw how slowly they took their pleasure, I realized simple robbery was not going to be enough entertainment. They were eager to see how we would react and what chance that might offer for displaying their talent.

The crone stood just to my left where she rested her bat on the wall above my head. The skull hung back in the tunnel. The alien stood to Mr. Botwinik's right; he raised the knife and placed it above the middle button of Mr. Botwinik's damp white shirt. He slid the blade downward half an inch. The button fell to the floor and bounced. Mr. Botwinik wheezed, "take the money, boys."

"We aren't boys," the alien sneered. He cut another button off with great deliberation as if it were something he had studied in school. He probably had.

"What's that behind him?" the crone said. "He looks like he's got three arms or something."

The alien stretched his neck to one side. "Yeah, you got something hidin' behind that ugly fat body besides money?" He glared at Kris. "It's that uppity one-arm cooze."

Let's take that, too," the crone said. "Teach her some new songs."

The alien's antennae fluttered and danced. "Maybe we'll take the little rat with the fat lip, too. Let him watch."

I felt Linda stir behind me. "What about me?" she said indignantly.

"Maybe we'll double date. Ever been out with an alien? It'll loosen you right up."

Back in the tunnel the skull hung silently in the darkness like some spirit of the evening. Then behind that death mask I saw the massive head and shoulders of Cy Bertrand at the entrance to the tunnel. For a moment I was amazed at how much he looked like the crone beside me.

He could have been her brother. "Frank," I said, "the only thing you know how to loosen up is teeth." Only it came out "Frab, un ody feng youb o ow loo ub i eef." This prompted the crone to grab the bat at either end, place it across my throat, and push me up against the wall. I felt Linda slip away, then, under my left arm and heard her running toward the parking lot. Double dating had not appealed to her.

As if Linda's escape were a signal, the skull jumped forward and hurled itself into the side wall of the tunnel. This sounded like a butcher's cleaver smashing bone. Cy had eliminated any threat Vance posed. And Kris, who never had any doubt about being rescued, screamed her savior's name like an answered prayer. As the alien turned toward the sound of bone shattering, Mr. Botwinik reached down, grasped the bag full of coins in both hands, and swung it against the side of his attacker's head. The alien staggered, and his knife went skittering down the tunnel. I decided I had taken about enough from an old crone, and being deprived of all other forms of self expression, I kneed her in the groin. Sal groaned, doubled over and dropped the Louisville Slugger just as Mr. Botwinik turned out the lights.

Suddenly it seemed like everyone was running for the parking lot. But they weren't. In the tunnel Vance lay unconscious. And beside the snack bar Cy shielded Kris with his massive bulk. I heard about that later. I think that's when I started to like him. But that night it was all a broken puzzle; we had to piece it together in the morning.

The alien overtook Linda just where the stands emptied into the parking lot. As he ran past, she stopped suddenly, and the old crone, who was bent over and scrabbling like a crab, knocked her flat. Having no desire to spend any more time in the company of thugs, I had hung back. But, then, curious about the outcome, I ran after them and tripped over Linda in the dark. I just lay there. It was the most comfortable position I had been in for three days. Linda latched onto me and we clung together like a couple of orphans at sea while Mr. Botwinik bore down on us like a poorly lighted cruise ship. He listed to port with the weight of the bag full of coins in his left hand and the bag full of bills in his right. Getting hit in the head and buried in singles and fives in the dark while lying with a woman who was happy to see me was not the worst experience I had in high school. Mr. Botwinik charged on, and with his load somewhat lightened, reached the parking lot in time to see the grand finale which I had a hand in arranging earlier.

All I got to see was the glowing tip of his cigar. But according to what

Mr. Botwinik told everyone afterward, Frank ripped off the alien mask as he ran through the parking lot. Pursued by the old crone doubled over holding her crotch, Frank jerked open the door to his Mercury, slid behind the wheel, and started up. Just as he shifted into gear and hit the gas, the crone slipped and went down. Frank's car fishtailed to the left, its right front wheel lurching over the crone's legs. She screamed and jerked upright just in time to be slapped in the face by the rear fender. Unmasked, Sal's face was just a red grimace in the glare of Frank's tail lights.

Frank gunned it toward the south entrance, spewing gravel like broken teeth. He shifted into second gear and wound that up to about forty by the time he got to the gate. There his brakes failed as he tried to turn west on Euclid, and his ride slammed straight into an elm tree. By the time Mr. Botwinik had waddled the 100 yards to the street, Frank's car had burst into flames sure as hell.

We all told our stories to the police. Mine must have been unintelligible as I mumbled and drooled through my ruined mouth. But it didn't make any difference in the end. The police heard what they wanted, and that's the way I wrote it up for the school paper. Finally all the authorities could do was identify Frank from his dental records because the rest of him was ashes and small bone fragments. Still, there was plenty to go by. For such a tough guy he had very bad teeth.

Back in school on Monday Mr. Albright and some of the teachers tried to pretend Frank's death was a great loss to the school. They wore long faces all morning, especially while being interviewed by reporters. But when asked about the armed robbery and the other two students in the hospital, they declined comment on advice of counsel. We all observed a moment of silence during the opening-of-school announcements over the public address system. However, by the time third lunch period was over, so was the charade. The air began to feel as light and warm as the week before summer vacation.

Thursday a lot of people went to Frank's funeral out of curiosity. Not me. I went to shovel dirt onto his ashes. The only relative in attendance was an uncle on his mother's side. A short man with a pock-marked face, he chewed tobacco and looked like his biggest worry was finding somewhere to spit. He was on probation having served two years for attempted rape. Probably Frank's role model. The truth is nobody mourned the death of Frank Steiner except maybe his dentist.

If you go to church regularly like I used to, you'll learn that every life

is sacred and every human being has good in him, and we should forgive one another and mourn the loss of any life for it diminishes us all. I stopped believing that when I was fifteen. And what I saw in Vietnam later was like losing my religion all over again. I was only there writing for *The Stars and Stripes* so I got to watch while everybody else was winning hearts and minds, and I have to tell you the scale and persistence of the slaughter convinced me that there never was any light at the end of the tunnel, only shades of gloom. The masthead under which I reported the sanitized version of our war in Vietnam eventually seemed less like a reference to Old Glory than a description of some instrument of torture forged in the name of a self destructive crusade during the dark ages.

I found out early there are a lot of evil people in the world whose whole happiness consists of doing some meanness. And if you let them, they'll take something from you—your money, your family, your self respect. They aren't going to back off, and most of those supposed to be in charge are too civilized to be any help. About the best you can hope for is to catch the devil off balance. A really evil person will create such an aura of destruction around him that he gets caught up in it. The devil stands on the edge of darkness, and when he loses his footing, it won't take much for you to push him over. But you've got to stand real close.

In Vietnam we discovered that we couldn't follow the rules of warfare we brought in country without losing. So, some of us abandoned them and realized too late that it had been just another way of losing. Anyone who crossed the line that had been drawn stepped into the twilight and got a long, painful look into a mirror. The fact is some of us became what we went there to destroy. It was easier for me. I had rehearsed.

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David J. Piwinski

My Lai, Flies, and Beelzebub in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*

The literary reputation of Tim O'Brien has steadily increased since his Vietnam novel *Going After Cacciato* won a National Book Award in 1978. In 1991, the year that O'Brien's short story collection *The Things They Carried* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and a National Critics Award, one critic offered the following assessment: "Tim O'Brien is widely considered the best of a talented group of Vietnam veterans who have devoted much of their writing to their war experiences" (Naparsteck 1). O'Brien's fifth book, *In the Lake of the Woods*, a novel called "The Best Work of Fiction in 1994" by *Time* magazine and awarded the James Fenimore Cooper Prize for historical fiction in 1995, has further solidified his standing as America's finest writer of fiction on the Vietnam War.

In the Lake of the Woods returns to a subject O'Brien has treated in previous books: the haunting, often malignant, effect that combat in Vietnam has had on American infantrymen. While receiving nearly universal acclaim from reviewers and critics, *In The Lake of the Woods* has also been called "O'Brien's bleakest novel yet" (Kerrigan 20), an opinion based, in part, on the author's decision to use the My Lai massacre as one of the novel's central events. As Tobey C. Herzog, author of a book-length study of O'Brien's writing, has pointed out, American writers have avoided using the atrocity at My Lai in works of fiction (150). O'Brien, in breaking new ground for Vietnam fiction, not only fictionally dramatizes the notorious massacre, he also makes it the novel's moral lynchpin as he explores the corrosive effect of protagonist John Wade's unsuccessful attempt to repress the evil he witnessed at My Lai.

In various interviews O'Brien has justified his thematic use of the My

Lai incident. He has said that in writing this novel he was taking "a stab at trying to understand evil" (Mort 1991), and, in commenting on his decision to use the My Lai massacre specifically, O'Brien has told another interviewer, "If I was going to have an atrocity or have an act of real evil, the My Lai thing presents itself with such rich possibilities and such unresolved possibilities in the national psyche and in the human psyche" (Herzog 151). *In the Lake of the Woods*, which grapples with the mystery of evil, is O'Brien's fictional treatment of those possibilities.

O'Brien's sense of My Lai as a site resonating with evil goes back to his having served in a combat unit in the My Lai area one year after the infamous massacre, an experience he describes in his war autobiography *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973). The considerable research he did in writing *In the Lake of the Woods* reinforced his conviction that the My Lai incident was, in his words, a "grotesque, monstrous, obscene evil" (Herzog 153), but he has also expressed his outrage that his feelings about this shameful incident are no longer shared by many Americans, who, he fears, have grown indifferent to the moral lessons of the Vietnam War in general and My Lai in particular. "All this is history. Dead as those dead women and kids" (52), O'Brien has written in "The Vietnam in Me," an essay in which he vents his disgust with America's apparent desire to forget the evil of My Lai. Readers of *In the Lake of the Woods*, however, will not be allowed the comfort of such historical amnesia, for O'Brien's horrifically graphic description of the butchery at My Lai is meant to re-prick America's conscience about the Vietnam War's most morally repugnant incident.

If, according to O'Brien, "The only way the horror of war can mean anything to us is through small detailed vignettes of episodes of evil" (Kaplan 102), then one of his most notable, albeit unsettling, achievements in *In the Lake of the Woods* is his ability to make the evil perpetrated at My Lai palpable and thus real for his reader. The following passage, told from the point of view of the novel's protagonist John Wade (nicknamed "Sorcerer" by the men in his platoon), is representative of the visceral quality of O'Brien's prose describing the carnage at My Lai:

> Sorcerer watched a red tracer round burn through a child's butt. He watched a woman's head open up. . . . The bodies did twitching things. There were gases. There were splatterings and

> bits of bone. . . . Kids were bawling. There were shit smells. (214-215)

In this and other similarly harrowing passages, O'Brien brutally recreates the physical horrors of the massacre; however, in his evocation of evil at work during this atrocity, O'Brien does more than employ sickeningly graphic imagery. He also repeats an allusive motif reverberating with maleficent overtones: flies feasting on the corpses of the victims. The preponderance of such fly imagery in this novel is intended, in my opinion, to allude to a traditional symbol of evil—Beelzebub, the "Lord of Flies."

The name "Beelzebub" can be traced back to the Old Testament. In *II Kings* 1:2-16 (King James Version), the god of the Philistine city of Ekron is given the name "Baal-zebub," meaning "Lord of Flies" in Hebrew. In post-Biblical Hebrew, the name became transformed to "Beelzebul," which can be construed as "Lord of Dung" (Gaster 374). This connotation, along with the name's etymological association with flies, probably accounts for the fact that in certain Jewish religious texts the fly is considered an impure creature symbolic of corruption and evil. The Berakhot of the Talmud, for example, states, "The evil spirit lies like a fly at the door of the human heart" (Barton 299).

In the New Testament, Beelzebub is described as an actual devil. The Gospels of Mark (3:22) and Matthew (12:24) refer to him as "the prince of the devils," thus establishing for future writers Beelzebub's character as a demon in the service of Satan. Accordingly, Milton in *Paradise Lost* assigns Beelzebub a rank second only to Satan, while in Canto 34 of the *Inferno*, Dante makes him synonymous with Satan himself, referring to Lucifer as "Beelzebub" in one passage.

Beelzebub's etymological origins as "Lord of Flies" has also been retained in Western literature and folklore. For example, in Part I of *Faust*, Goethe's titular character addresses Mephistopheles as *Fliegengott* (Fly-God), and two 18th century magical handbooks, *Grimorium Verum* and *Grand Grimoire*, claim that Beelzebub, when summoned through black magic, will appear as a gigantic fly (Cavendish 211).

Perhaps the most notable example of a modern literary work using Beelzebub as a symbol of evil associated with flies is William Golding's 1954 *Lord of the Flies*. In offering the severed head of a pig to the "Beast," the novel's schoolboys, Golding implies, are unwittingly externalizing the evil within themselves. The "Beast," speaking through the fly-covered pig's head, later identifies itself to one of the boys as the "Lord of

the Flies" and is thus to be identified with Beelzebub (171-72). However, the Lord of the Flies also makes clear that this "Beast" the boys fear as a source of evil actually lives within all of them, for, whether personified as the Devil or Satan or Beelzebub, the "Beast" is a metaphor for the ever-present potential for evil that lies within the human heart.

As an allusive evocation of Beelzebub at the My Lai massacre, Tim O'Brien's use of fly imagery in *In the Lake of the Woods* recalls Golding's symbolism in *Lord of the Flies*. Similarly, O'Brien is not implying the Devil's actual presence at My Lai in a traditional religious sense, but in his conflation of fly imagery with allusions to Beelzebub, O'Brien has created a powerfully disturbing symbol of the human capacity for evil in war.

In addition to detailing those "vignettes of episodes of evil" that O'Brien says are a necessary ingredient in brutally honest war fiction, the novel's narrative sections describing John Wade's involvement in the My Lai massacre are permeated with references to flies, which, in suggesting the symbolic presence of Beelzebub, imbue these scenes with an intensified aura of evil. As his platoon prepares for its assault on My Lai on the morning of March 16, 1968, Wade's vague sense of anxiety foreshadows his confrontation with evil during the massacre: "The air was wrong. The smells were wrong . . ." (104). Even the sunlight that morning, with its "rusty, metallic flavor" (105), adds to this foreboding feeling of "pure wrongness" (105). Wade's intuitive sense of evil in the air is hellishly realized when the carnage begins at My Lai. Watching in horror as his fellow soldiers systematically slaughter the men, women, and children of the village, he thinks, "This was not madness. . . . This was sin" (107). Wade then becomes aware of "a low droning buzz that swelled up from somewhere deep inside the village" (108); it is the sound of flies, announcing the allusive appearance of Beelzebub as the "Lord of Flies." Disoriented by the poisonous atmosphere of evil all around him, Wade shoots an old man whose hoe he mistakes for a rifle. All the while, flies continue to surround him.

Shortly afterwards, still traumatized by the relentless butchery he has witnessed, Wade finds himself "caught in the slime" (110) of dead bodies at the bottom of an irrigation ditch. The slime in which he finds himself immersed is literally the corpses' effusion of blood and excrement, a possible evocation of Beelzebub as the "Lord of Dung." Figuratively, of course, he has been plunged into the slime of moral depravity.

Then, in what he later thinks of as "an accident, the purest reflex"

(68), Wade shoots Weatherby, a member of his platoon, as he approaches him in the ditch. Whether this act was, to quote from Wade's thoughts at the start of the massacre, "madness" (hysterical reflex?) or "sin" (intentional evil?) is one of the many ambiguities of this novel; nevertheless, Wade clearly has been infected by the murderous evil that he will continue to associate with the flies at My Lai.

As his platoon leaves the hamlet that afternoon, for example, he "tried to push away the evil. It wasn't easy. The buzz had gone into his head. Flies, he thought. . ." (204). And that night Wade and Thinbill, another member of the platoon, sit in the darkness, "listening to the flies, the deep droning buzz all around them" (206), an aural reminder of the eruption of evil during the massacre.

The next morning their platoon is ordered to return to My Lai, and, upon entering the village, Wade sees that the wounds on the badly bloated corpses "bubbled with flies" (210). Lieutenant Rusty Calley scoops up a handful of flies and, holding them to his ear, says to his men, "You hear this? Fuckin' flies, they're claiming something criminal happened here" (210). Calley puts the flies up against Thinbill's ear, asking, "You hear any murder talk?" After Thinbill answers no, Calley does the same to Wade, who replies, "Deaf, sir." "The eyes," Calley says to Wade. "Notice any atrocities lately?" Wade answers, "Blind too" (211-12). Having badgered Thinbill and Wade into declaring that they have neither seen nor heard any evil, Calley is satisfied that they will speak of no evil to military authorities. The scene ends with Calley crushing the flies in his fist, but the flies of My Lai, demonized in their association with corpses, excrement, and Beelzebub, continue to haunt Wade, for he has internalized their buzzing and the evil they signify.

In his life back in the States after his return from Vietnam, Wade is unable to exorcise the ghosts of My Lai and, consequently, suffers from periodic bouts of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. His PTSD occasionally surfaces in feelings of rage accompanied by an "electric sizzle" (5) in his blood and, significantly, a "furious buzzing noise" (51) in his head. The most prominent example of this combination of rage and "buzzing" occurs on the night of his wife's mysterious disappearance from the lakeside cabin in northern Minnesota, where the couple has retreated after Wade's landslide defeat in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate. In a surrealistic episode of temporary insanity, Wade, humiliated by his election defeat, acts out his PTSD-induced fury by killing houseplants in the cabin. He later recalls hearing "a savage buzzing sound"

and repeating the phrase "Kill Jesus" (131) as he poured boiling water on the plants; it is as if Wade's inner demon, the "Lord of the Flies," had also assumed the role of the Antichrist on that night.

Did Wade then go on to kill his wife as he did the plants? The postmodernist, deliberately ambiguous nature of this novel does not allow a definitive answer to this question, for, as O'Brien's author-narrator tells the reader in a footnote, ". . . if you require solutions, you will have to look beyond these pages. Or read a different book" (300). Nevertheless, the demonic buzz in Wade's head during this night of uncontrollable rage suggests the distinct possibility that he did commit this act of evil.

References to flies are also prominent in the novel's "Evidence" chapters, parts of which include quotations from American soldiers, both fictional and real-life, recalling the My Lai massacre. In all but one of the seven "Evidence" chapters, the fictional character Richard Thinbill recalls, in nine separate instances, the unsettling presence of flies at My Lai. Like Wade, Thinbill's PTSD takes the form of nightmares: "All I remember now is flies. . . . I can't stop dreaming about them" (135). One of his statements, "Flies everywhere. They glowed in the dark. It was like the spirit world . . ." (199), hints at another allusion to Beelzebub in its suggestion that these flies were the manifestation of spiritual evil. Commenting on the possibility that John Wade, having murdered his wife, then staged his own disappearance and is therefore still alive, Thinbill says in the novel's last reference to flies, "No matter where he is, though, I bet he's still got nightmares. I bet he's out there swatting flies" (298). Thinbill believes that Wade will never be able to erase the haunting memory of the atrocity at My Lai, evil made palpable by the carrion-feasting flies.

In referring to America's seeming desire to forget the My Lai atrocity, O'Brien has written, "Evil has no place, it seems, in our national mythology. We erase it" ("The Vietnam in Me" 52). For the reader of *In the Lake of the Woods*, however, such erasure is impossible. In his use of flies as a symbol of murderous malevolence resonating with allusions to Beelzebub, Tim O'Brien has given us a harrowing reminder of the My Lai massacre in his attempt to restore a sense of evil to America's evolving national mythology about the Vietnam War.

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Benjamin F. Fisher

The Red Badge of Courage under British Spotlights Again

These pages provide information that augments my previous publications concerning discoveries about contemporaneous British opinions of *The Red Badge of Courage*. I am confident that what appears in this and my earlier article [**WLA** Special Issue 1999] on the subject offers a mere fraction of such materials, given, for example, the large numbers of daily newspapers published in London alone during the 1890s. Files of many British periodicals and newspapers from the Crane era are no longer extant, principally because of bomb damage to repositories of such materials during wartime. The commentary garnered below, however, amplifies our knowledge relating to Crane's perennially compelling novel, and thus, I trust, it should not go unrecorded. If one wonders why, after a century, such a look backward might be of value to those interested in Crane, I cite a letter of Ford Maddox Ford to Paul Palmer, 11 December 1935, in which he states that Crane, along with Henry James, W.H. Hudson, and Joseph Conrad all "exercised an enormous influence on English—and later, American writing. . . ." Ford's thoughts concerning Crane's importance were essentially repeated in a later letter, to the editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*.[1] Despite many unreliabilities in what Ford put into print on any subject, he thoroughly divined the Anglo-American literary climate from the 1890s to the 1930s. His ideas are representative of views of Crane in British eyes during that era and, for that matter, views that have maintained currency to the present time.

Here's a keynote opener: "It takes [him] by the throat and keeps him motionless, horrorstruck, with great distended eyes, till the last lurid page is reached." This passage may initially suggest that the topic is a

piece of fiction by Mrs. Radcliffe or Poe, or, perhaps, one of the many parodies of Gothic fiction. In fact, it comes from an 1896 review, by "Barbara," of *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Woman*, a popular weekly from the 1890s. To give proper context for the passage, a more extended version ought to clarify. Crane's book is called

> [O]ne of the most extraordinary novels of modern times. Only it is not a novel at all! It is merely an account rendered, with ruthless veracity, of a young soldier's experiences in battle. It takes the reader by the throat and keeps him motionless, horrorstruck, with great distended eyes, till the last lurid page is reached. The war pictures in Zola's *La Débacle* are milk and water beside it, and Tolstoi's *War and Peace* surpasses it only in breadth of view, a quality which Mr. Crane evidently did not aim at. The writing is extremely vivid. Take this: "The sun was a red wafer pasted on the sky." I believe Mr. Crane is an American; America has reason to feel proud of him.

"Barbara" would again acclaim *The Red Badge* not only a "startling success," but a production "that would add glory to the literature of any country." Still later "Barbara" used Crane's book as a norm against which Frank Wilkeson's *The Soldier in Battle, or, Life in the Ranks of the Army of the Potomac* (Bellairs) "reads just a little tamely."[2]

This early review of *The Red Badge* contains opinions which would reverberate throughout responses from the British on through the reissue as part of the collection published by Heinemann in July 1898 entitled *Pictures of War*—with an "appreciation" by George Wyndham, who had earlier commended the book in the columns of the *New Review*—and those separate appearances in 1900, one published by Heinemann in England, and in America by Appleton, this latter introduced by Ripley Hitchcock, who had read Crane's manuscript as Appleton's literary adviser.[3] Without great changes, many opinions found in these contemporaneous readings of *The Red Badge* still stand as eminently credible viewpoints; therefore, placing them on record is worthwhile. Critical explications of the sun as red wafer passage alone, for example, have mounted to great proportions.

Overall, British advocates of *The Red Badge* highlighted its excellence as a war novel that matched or outshined those of Tolstoi and Zola, and that ranked with Kipling's *The Light That Failed*. Indeed, a *Leeds Mer-*

cury writer thought that Crane had "leaped suddenly to fame not long ago as the Rudyard Kipling of military romance in America." Psychological excellences also distinguished this novel from much other war fiction. Repeatedly, too, *The Red Badge* was called a "study," a term which by the 1890s had become synonymous with psychological fiction. Close to this mode of thinking, Spencer Leigh Hughes, writing in the *Gentlewoman*, commended *The Red Badge* thus: "The reverse side of the picture of [military] glory has been given with great point and incision, vividly and lucidly described." Apparently, one "needs the fascination and excitement of actual bloodshed to overcome the instinct of unreasoning panic which attacks the recruit when the bullets first rain about him and the cannon mow down his fellows in scores." The story has "great descriptive power, and more than average merit."[4]

Hughes also analyzed *The Red Badge* so as to align it with the increasing interest in the non-rational emotions "which impel humans to hostility, violence, and, at times, indifference toward the wounded and dying." Just so, the emphasis on charact*er* instead of numerous charact*ers* meshed with a clamor *for* and accomplishments *in* brevity within novels. As is evident in the opinion of Barbara quoted above, many readers found in *The Red Badge* no genuine novel at all; instead, as if citing Crane's own subtitle, they read it as an "episode," another familiar literary term in the era, as was "sketch" for a brief work of fiction. *The Red Badge*, as well as most of Crane's other work, was representative of 1890s miniaturizations in the arts. In such evaluations of the novel as these, we may detect backgrounds of the British interest in soldiery and, a related subject, the empire. Such concerns were likewise reflected, for example, in the writings of Kipling or the poems of A.E. Housman and Henry Newbolt, not to mention the continual outpourings of jingoistic verse and other writings, which highlighted imperialism and the military, in the British press. The brevity in *The Red Badge* would also have appealed to those spearheaders of the end-of-the-century efforts to do away with the ponderous triple-decker novels that had for years domineered the fiction marketplace.

Next we return to remarks earlier quoted about "vivid" writing, that is, pictorialism, in *The Red Badge*, as well as Crane's being an American and an author of whom his nation could be deservedly proud. Such distinctions also recurred among British commentators. The Anglo-American cultural world had witnessed minglings of written word and visual art from the emergence of the Pre-Raphaelites and others, such as Laurence

Housman, Whistler, or the *Yellow Book* coterie, who on through the 1890s contributed materially to the collapsing of literary genres and combinations of literature with other arts. An example of what were then deplored as the extremes to which such new art could be taken, Stanley V. Makower's experimental novel, *The Mirror of Music* (1895) in places substituted musical scores for words to express the heroine's emotional vicissitudes which eventually ran to madness. Crane's visual effects and his fragmentary language, in *The Red Badge* and elsewhere, resemble those in contemporaneous novels like Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* (1897) or Ernest Henham's weird tale of vampirism, *Tenebrae* (1898), which many reviewers thought was incoherent, and it adumbrates such impressionistic techniques as those employed by Ford Maddox Ford, Virginia Woolf, Henry Miller or Thomas Pynchon during the twentieth century.

Moreover, Crane's being an American brought his works under another type of scrutiny from British critics who found American literature worth attention (even when they were not wholly won by its aims or methods) and, under that umbrella, what they deemed the decidedly American language features within a particular specimen. Crane's, and other Americans', language was often spotlighted by British reviewers, who were quick to point out diction and syntax imbued with what they thought were regionalisms and colloquialisms. Such attentiveness to diction and regionalisms was not confined to notices of American writings. British writers like J.M. Barrie and others, who were seen as members of the "Kailyard School" (Scots regionalist), or Edith Nesbit, whose short-story collection, *In Homespun* (1896), one of John Lane's notorious Keynotes Series volumes, was cited for its south Kentish dialect, also came in for strictures about their language. Several years later, evaluating another of Crane's war novels, *Active Service*, Desmond B. O'Brien found everything but its style enjoyable; most of Crane's "Americanisms will seem to you barbarous," he wrote, but such barbarism is a "small matter compared with the real, and sometimes dazzling, brilliancy of the novel," a compliment that might also be paid to *The Red Badge*.[5]

An interesting laudatory and extended notice from early 1896, which foregrounds some of the features already acknowledged, and which should not be ignored, appeared in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*.[6] First, the reviewer credited Crane with contributing "a new and important chapter in the literature of war," which supplemented those novels, by Tolstoi

and Zola, already mentioned in other notices. Tellingly, the Newcastle journalist added: "We are apt to think less of the glorious charge than of the sickening things under the hoofs." *The Red Badge* also makes us realize "how the soldier feels. The theory of the loss of consciousness in the rage of battle—of the martial inspiration that comes with the thunder of the captains and the shouting—no longer accounts for everything in the days of long-distance fighting when there is so much slow work amidst the smoke." *The Red Badge* "is a penetrating study of the psychology of the modern soldier under fire. The book does a ruthless work of disillusionment, but it is convincing at bottom. . . ." Next, Crane's expression is considered: his "style is unconventional. It tries to appear unliterary. It is plain and hard, summary and brutal. It is as if he had written, so to speak, not with a pen but with the end of a charred stick." This bit of expression very much resembled Crane's own.

Henry is, of course, the "subject of a psychological study," the "thing that looks on from within the soldier and notes everything that is passing within him and around, while the thing that the soldier knows in ordinary life as himself, works like an automaton." We in the era of the millennium may need to be reminded that stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue were, a century ago, not yet developed and refined to the degree that twentieth-century writers like James Joyce or William Faulkner were to take them, and so this contemporaneous description of Crane's methods is important. Similar effects were being singled out in some critiques of fiction by George Meredith or Henry James, among older writers, or, from the 1890s proper, by fiction from the pens of Ella D'Arcy, "George Egerton" (Mrs. Golding Bright), Gertrude Hall, or May Sinclair, to name but a few.

The Newcastle critic remarked two more imposing specifics in *The Red Badge*:

> This book is full of powerful pictures. It is indubitably one of the things that influence literature; and it is safe to say that any man of brains writing about battles will write somewhat differently after reading "The Red Badge of Courage." We do not say that it contains the truth. But the unconvincing touches are very few; and it contains a very great deal of the truth.

Once again attention is directed toward Crane's accomplishments in pictorialism and in realism and, implicitly, to what has indeed proved to

be the influence of his novel. Anent this type of evaluation, we might turn to the *Yorkshire Post*, which found *The Red Badge* "a striking story of the American Civil War. It offers but a glimpse or two; and is rather a study in cowardice and courage than in anything else. But its realism lays hold of the reader, and makes him wish the author had given us more story and less analysis."[7] This commentary touches on staccato effects in *The Red Badge*, as well as foregrounding its realism. Like thinking informs T.P. O'Connor's "A Book of the Week" critique in the *Weekly Sun*, where, along with an extensive plot summary, *The Red Badge* was complimented for rousing deserved enthusiasm, adding that the "keynote" is struck on page one to bring down war to "its true, prosaic, everyday level." Here is a "fine piece of literary work which strips the battlefield of all its false glory, and shows it in all its foulness and bestiality. . . ."[8] O'Connor's concluding remark might well enter Crane's novel into the camp of Naturalism set up by George Moore or Arthur Morrison, whose works created a ruckus among British readers and critics during the last years of the nineteenth century. Concurrence sounded from the *Leeds Mercury* reviewer of *The Third Violet*, who thought that Crane's reputation had "been honestly won by a distinction of style and a certain dramatic realism of a remarkable kind." Similar outlook was expressed by "Lector," in the *New Age*, several weeks later: Noting that Crane's work (his "good verse" was also noticed) defies tradition, he stated that the American had "revealed the utter hideousness of warfare as no writer has yet done."[9]

Other evaluations were more chary in their commendation. The *Bradford Observer* viewed *The Red Badge* as an "episode of the American Civil War . . . which gives evidence of much careful work . . . but it is questionable whether an analysis of the feelings of a soldier in time of war will do more than interest a limited number of readers." This newspaper did not review many books, and so its objectivity in measuring excellence and weakness indicates that British response to *The Red Badge* was not so consistently wholehearted as some more recent scholars suggest. Nonetheless, one wonders what the Bradford writer might think, were he writing a century later about war fiction, and had he read Hemingway, Heller, and many more fiction writers whose subject is indeed the "soldier in time of war." In *Pictures of War*, according to the *Liverpool Daily Post*, and "[f]ar transcending the other six [sketches] in length," *The Red Badge* is "marked by a microscopic attention to detail—analytical, indeed, almost to tediousness." Nevertheless, "remarkable abil-

ity" is evident. Assessing the same version of *The Red Badge*, Desmond B. O'Brien stated: "The fault you would find . . . [is] that it makes its hero all eyes and ears and nerves, and that only a biograph, or whatever the camera for taking animated photographs is called, could record so many and transient and vivid pictures in so short a time. But the pictures themselves are wonderful. If they have a fault it is that of a constant and conscious strain at effect, which . . . sometimes defeats itself." Furthermore, as I have noted elsewhere, the *Lady's Pictorial*, no matter what accolades it accorded Crane's books, never missed an opportunity to hit at his use of profanities. Conversely, the *Weekly Sun* reviewer thought that *Pictures of War* displayed how Crane managed "to see and hear, and record much that would escape the eyes and ears of the average soldier."[10]

Whether the British found *The Red Badge* wholly artistic or guilty of blemishes, reviewers seldom failed to compare Crane's other works with that book. The *Leeds Mercury* critic of *The Third Violet* found validity in the old saying about a cobbler sticking to his last, and deplored the falloff in "strength and imaginative form" from *The Red Badge* in the later novel. Spencer Leigh Hughes likewise deprecated *The Third Violet*: "coming from the author of 'The Red Badge of Courage,' this story is a disappointment," despite its being "an original work and well put together." Later, Hughes would measure approvingly with the same yardstick: "To say that the author of 'The Red Badge of Courage' has given us another of his excellent productions is the best recommendation of 'The Open Boat'." Kindred sentiments echo in an obituary notice in the *Daily News*, where *The Red Badge* was applauded as an intensely "realistic study of the psychology of war. . . . The book is full not only of vivid and harrowing descriptions, but of the keenest analyses of conduct and motive and emotion. Similar powers of psychological portrayal permeate "[The] Open Boat."[11]

What unfolds above shows some overlooked parts of what Joseph Conrad dubbed the "noisy recognition" in Great Britain of *The Red Badge*, the book which, as the *Dundee Advertiser* forecast, "the late Stephen Crane will be remembered by . . . it remains a remarkable piece of literature, and the best example of that style of writing in which its lamented writer excelled." Hard upon Crane's death, the *Morning Post* reviewer of *Bowery Tales* praised *Maggie*, calling it "as admirable in its own field as 'The Red Badge of Courage' in another." Certain parts of *Wounds in the Rain* also compared favorably with *The Red Badge*, a reviewer for the *St.*

James's Gazette believed, although the later stories did not attain the "same irresistible sequence of things, nor the pauseless, violent sweep of thought and deed which made 'The Red Badge' wonderful."

The general British feeling toward *The Red Badge* at the time is perhaps well summed up in the *Daily Chronicle* shortly after Crane's death: "There is to be a sixpenny edition of the late Mr. Stephen Crane's best-known and best book, 'The Red Badge of Courage.' Mr. Heinemann first issued this book in his Pioneer Series in the autumn of 1895. The result was the 'discovery' of Mr. Crane in the larger sense, for it means beyond all doubt that the 'Red Badge' only 'boomed' in America after it had made a hit here."[12] Thence we might turn, fittingly, to a critique of the Heinemann edition of 1900. There, Crane's pictorial achievements and his excellent psychological portrayals of men in battle are centralized as interlocking techniques. We are made aware, offered this commentator, of "all that passes through the mind of the lad, the ambition, the cowardice, the sinking of heart, the shame, the recovery. We begin to understand how panics arise, how battles are won and lost, and how in the stress of fight men become possessed with fierce abnormal strength, and with the passions of heroes and brutes." These observations epitomize much that was expressed elsewhere. On occasion, long after they were set forth, such century-old opinions, time and again, reveal anticipations of much that have emerged as continuing valid approaches to the work of Stephen Crane. Forty years ago Walter E. Houghton wrote that "to look into the Victorian mind is to see some primary sources of the modern mind."[13] What I have outlined above upholds that precept, and, I trust, contributes bibliographically and critically to Crane studies.

Notes

1. See my "*The Red Badge of Courage* under British Spotlights," *War, Literature & the Arts* [*Stephen Crane in War and Peace* special issue (1999)]: 72-81; and my "Transatlantic Stephen Crane," *English Literature in Transition*, 42.3 (1999): 349. Ford's opinions appear in *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Richard M. Ludwig. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1965: 248, 302. Elsewhere, Ford designated Crane as the "immensely successful author" of *The Red Badge*, noting, too that that book was a "best seller of fantastic proportions." See Ford's *Return to Yesterday*. New York: Horace Liveright, 1932: respec-

tively 66, 56; and, allowing for its imperfections in other respects, R.W. Stallman's confirmation of the great attention accorded *The Red Badge* in Great Britain, in *Stephen Crane: A Biography*. rev. ed. New York: George Braziller, 1973: 181-187. I acknowledge the kindness of Professor Donald Vanouse in offering me a forum during a session of the Stephen Crane Society in May of 1999, for the ideas expressed here. I also acknowledge gratitude to Professor James H. Meredith for encouraging my continuing explorations of the British on *The Red Badge*; and to my wife, Julie A. Fisher, for technological assistance.

2. Barbara, "Book Chat," *Woman*, 1 January 1896: 6; 26 February 1896: 6; 8 April 1896: 7.

3. Wyndham, "A Remarkable Book," *New Review*, 14 (January 1896): 30-40. The question of superiority between Appleton's 1895 version of *The Red Badge* and the version found in manuscript has continued to provoke controversy among Crane scholars.

4. "Literary Arrivals," *Leeds Mercury*, 2 August 1897: 3; Sub Rosa, "Under Cover," *Gentlewoman*, 1 February 1896: 123. Davenport Adams, in "Books and Things Bookish," *Whitehall Review*, 26 September 1896: 13-14, also called *Maggie* a "study."

5. "Letters on Books," *Truth*, 21 December 1899: 1567.

6. "In All Moods. Some Recent Novels," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 28 January 1896: 4.

7. "Books to Read and Books to Use," *Yorkshire Post*, 4 March 1896: 6.

8. "A Book of the Week," *Weekly Sun*, 8 March 1896: 1-2.

9. "Literary Life," *New Age*, 19 March 1896: 390; cf. the *Leeds Mercury* citation in n4` above.

10. "Some Recent Books," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2 November 1898: 7; "Fiction," *Bradford Observer*, 21 January 1896: 6. Despite this stinting portrayal, the *Bradford Observer* characterized Crane as "the author of The Red Badge of Courage" in reviewing *The Little Regiment*, "Literature," 2 April 1897: 6, and also quashed a rumor that Crane had died in a shipwreck. See also Desmond B. O'Brien, "Letters on Books," *Truth*, 1 September 1898: 557. O'Brien found the style in the *Pictures* overdone: "Such phrases as 'red cheers,' 'a crimson roar' (confirmatory, by the way, of the idea of that blind man cited by Locke who thought red was like the sound of a trumpet) seem forced; while there is neither dignity nor expressiveness in such images as this: 'They were ever upraising the ghost of shame on the stick of their curiosity.' I begin to despair of ever seeing the last of the misusage of 'ilk'—which means simply 'the same'—in such sentences as this: 'In battle every one would surely run, save forlorn hopes and their ilk.' This, however, is mere pedantry, and so fine a book as Mr. Stephen Crane's 'Pictures of War' is not to be judged pedantically."

See also my "*The Red Badge of Courage* under British Spotlights," cited in n1: 76; and "Pictures of War," *Weekly Sun*, 4 September 1898: 2.

11. "Sub Rosa," "Under Cover, *Gentlewoman*, 25 April 1897: 383; 30 July 1898: 140. See also the review of *The Third Violet* in the *Leeds Mercury*, cited in n4 above; "Death of Mr. Stephen Crane," *Daily News*, 6 June 1900: 7.

12. Conrad's words are quoted by Frederic Whyte, *William Heinemann: A Memoir*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1928: 170, wherein *The Red Badge* is also designated "one of Heinemann's outstanding successes in 1895. . . ." The Scottish columnist's acclaim ap-

pears in a review of Heinemann's 1900 sixpenny edition—"General Literature," *Dundee Advertiser*, 16 August 1900: 2. See also "The Last of Stephen Crane," *St. James's Gazette*, 27 September 1900: 6; "Fiction and Fact," *Morning Post*, 28 June 1900: 2; "Writers and Readers," *Daily Chronicle*, 6 July 1900: 3. The *Daily Chronicle* review might have been more tempered toward Americans on *The Red Badge*, had its author read, for example, "Books and Authors," in the *Boston Courier*, 20 October 1895: 2, the ideas in which dovetail with those in many British commentaries. Stallman cites, but does not annotate, this interesting review—*Stephen Crane: A Critical Bibliography*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State UP, 1972: 84, note at the beginning of entries for *The Red Badge*.

13. Outlaw, "Holiday Literature," *New Age*, 16 August 1900: 517; Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*. New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1957, p. xiv.

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Commentary by Edward W. Wood, Jr.

On Judging World War Two: The Greatest Generation?

How does that generation born after World War Two best judge the films, the books about that war—fiction and nonfiction—pouring from the media today, a virtual fountain of information interpreting and re-interpreting what is clearly the most important event of the last century: a media event which surely will continue well into this new century just as Civil War books and TV spectaculars continue to appear a hundred and forty years after that war which changed the nation?

As John Keegan, the military historian, has so clearly stated, there are no standards for judging the quality of battle books and films: "The treatment of battle in fiction is a subject almost untouched by literary critics. . . ." (And even less touched in both film and nonfiction, I would add.)

This lacunae in this critical judgment of war art was so clearly illustrated in the Oscar selections in 1999: Why did *Saving Private Ryan* receive all the accolades and *The Thin Red Line* none? The starting difference between the films was never clearly explored, nor was the basis for choosing Steven Spielberg's film over Terrence Malick's. The criteria determining a "good" war novel are just as difficult to ascertain. In fictionalizing WWII, which writer is best? Norman Mailer? James Jones? Why? What of the novel, *The Thin Red Line*, on which the film is based, how does it fit into the equation of war narratives?

In areas of nonfiction, is the author, Stephen Ambrose, to be trusted in his worship of the "Citizen Soldier" as the primary weapon in achieving American victories in Europe in WWII? Is Tom Brokaw to be trusted when he calls the generation that won WWII "The Greatest

Generation?" What of the war memoirs bursting from the press? Which are true? Which, bluntly, lie? How can we discover reasonable answers to these questions? As important as they are, why are they seldom asked? What critical frame, beyond myth and hero worship, can be formed to help us make such judgments?

As a replacement into the Seventh Armored Division, and severely wounded by Nazi artillery fire during the liberation of France in the late summer of 1944, I have devoted over fifty-five years of my life to developing a critical frame for judging the art of WWII, reading war fiction and viewing war films, writing books about war, struggling, always, to develop reasonable criteria beyond myth, hero worship, and sentiment.

Seeking such discernment, quite simply, has been a matter of life and death for me. I was hit in head, buttock, and back after only a day and a half of combat. That wound shredded not only my body but also my emotions: I spent many, many years in recovery. *I had to understand war, what it was, what it did to me, to other men in battle if I, myself, were to come to terms with what happened to me at nineteen and rediscover my sanity.*

Out of that time in combat, those days and nights in the hospital, those memories of terror, confusion, gravel biting me from exploding shells, machine gun fire as we crossed a canal on a broken bridge, mortar fire shredding leaves above my head, men at my side slammed into the earth by shrapnel, blue holes of rifle fire punched into the night, a dead German boy at my feet—out of that time, those years, I reached the conclusion that I had penetrated the darkest levels of the unconscious, places where men became animals, places no human should ever be asked to enter, the center of war a vast womb of silence, a place of pitiless forces, dominated by death and killing's harsh mystery, a place where soldiers become inarticulate: grunts, shouts, screams, ordinary words, meaningless forms of expression in the chaos of terror in which they floundered.

This belief in war as a place without pity led me to my life-long examination of memoirs, fiction, films, and nonfiction of WWII, led me to form my critical frame for judging those works of that war. This frame was rooted in my certainty that such judgment, above all, must root itself in a few simple and cogent questions which a work must answer in a meaningful and positive fashion if it is to be accepted as a successful and authentic rendering of battle:

Does the work of art—fiction, non-fiction, memoir or film—give a sense of war's animal nature, a mysterious and ruthless place: a killing zone, where men live with the certain fear of death?

How is the act of killing treated? Is the haunting reality of imminent death or massive crippling from men's violence shown in all its brutality and finality, dismemberment of flesh, and does that destruction, in the deepest bodily sense, resonate with the quality of overwhelming mystery and grief, linked in anger, almost a sacrament?

Is the extraordinary complexity of human reaction to death and killing in combat adequately presented beyond the clichés of courage and comradeship? Death from violence in war puts many faces on the human being, ranging from fierce rage, "Ill get that son of a bitch," to longing for flight, acts of betrayal, emotions of shame and guilt, sometimes, refusal to participate through cowardice, self-wounding, refusal to fire, firing into the air, combat exhaustion.

What meaning is given to comradeship under fire? Is it real, how long does it last? Could the notion of comradeship be mythical, the creation of a courageous reality to deny the horrors of wounding, death, and killing?

Is the inane quality of dialogue in combat accepted so that action and monologue and emotion are given greater weight than the spoken word, silence more important than speech?

Do these complexities of war resonate through time far into the future, where their real meaning is determined, impacts over future decades?

It has taken me 55 years to boil my pain and my emotions into these few critical questions which, when seriously answered, help me judge those books of fiction and nonfiction, those films and memoirs about WWII and, even more important, may help a generation which has never known war to reach some real understanding of the war their

fathers and grandfathers fought, its terror, its complexity, sometimes its majesty, and even why sometimes men loved it.

Two authors—Stephen E. Ambrose and Tom Brokaw—and two films—*Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*—have recently attracted the greatest attention in the stunning revival of interest in World War Two. Since 1993, Ambrose had published *Band of Brothers, D-Day, Citizen Soldiers*, *The Victors*, and *Americans At War* while Tom Brokaw has given us *The Greatest Generation* and its sequels, *The Greatest Generation Speaks* and *An Album of Memories.* To understand these books, these films, the stories they tell, to reject what appears to be false, accept what appears to be true, is an effort that is likely to bring us to an understanding of that war.

That generation—my generation—which knew the war's agonies and its delights over fifty years ago is dying at the rate of thousands of men a year. Soon who will be left to ensure that a just and accurate story be told and passed on to future generations of potential soldiers? I believe that the truthful core of that story may be found in the nexus of the books and the films I mention.

Tom Brokaw and Stephen Ambrose tell us one story about the American men who fought in WWII, Steven Spielberg in *Saving Private Ryan* a second, and Terrence Malick and James Jones in both the film and novel, *The Thin Red Line*, a third.

For Brokaw and Ambrose the American men who fought WWII were heroes. Given a dirty job, they did it. Among these thousands of soldiers there were few cowards, no betrayal, little shame or guilt, great comradeship. Most remarkable is the manner in which both Brokaw and Ambrose tell us of these young men in battle. Both writers employ the words, "kill and wound," over and over again yet the reader never really senses the blood, never—is this the problem?—smells it, so sticky sweet in the air.

Ambrose is more sophisticated than Brokaw. He tells us of replacements, castigates the Army for its replacement policy. Death is present, killing, sometimes a haunted reality, yet the reader senses that Ambrose is so stuck with the "heroism" of the American combat infantryman, the "citizen soldier," that he refuses to penetrate the ruthless quality of the killing zone, the "combat numbness" of which James Jones writes so tellingly in his *The Thin Red Line:*

> A crazy sort of blood lust, like some sort of declared school holiday from all moral ethics had descended on them. They

> could kill with impunity and they were doing it...But John Bell for one...could not help wondering if any of them could ever really become the same again. He didn't think so. Not without lying anyway.
>
> Perhaps long years after this war was done they could pretend to each other that they were men . . . and avoid admitting they had once seen something animal in themselves that terrified them.

> So Doll had killed his first Japanese. For that matter his first human being of any kind. Shooting well, at anything, was a pleasure . . . And Doll hated the Japanese, dirty little yellow Jap bastards . . . But beyond these pleasures there was another. It had to do with guilt. . . He had done the most horrible thing a human being could do, worse than rape even. And nobody in the whole damn world could say anything to him about it. . . He had gotten away with murder. . . .

James Jones understood and shows us the animal nature of combat, the combat numbness that so inhibits and destroys moral choice. He recognizes and explains the ease with which some American men learned to kill, the highest standard of truth. Neither Ambrose nor Brokaw ever achieve his brutal honesty about the things the "citizen soldier" actually did in combat (perhaps because, never having been in combat themselves, they finally cannot grasp its dark meaning?), a reality they mask with saccharine sentimentality.

Ambrose opposes Jones' reality with his faith in the "citizen soldier," the young American in his teens or early twenties who "stood to the test," and through courage and comradeship won the war, far from the Pacific Theater which so concerned Jones, the enemy there the "bestial Jap," atrocities so easily committed by the American soldier.

Other evidence beyond the work of James Jones raises troubling issues about American men in combat. In *America's Forgotten Army* by Charles Whiting and *Closing With The Enemy* by Michael Doubler, high levels of combat exhaustion are emphasized. Desertion in Europe was around 40,000, Whiting writes. Paul Fussell in *Wartime* points to the maximum combat the American soldier could take, around 200 to 240 days. Gerald F. Linderman in *The World Within War* indicates that some participants thought this figure was entirely too high: the limit of battle

could be reached within as few as twenty or so days.

Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall hypothesizes in *Men Against Fire*:

> (In World War Two). . . In an average experienced infantry company in an average stern day's action, the number engaging (firing). . . any and all weapons was approximately 15% of total strength. In the most aggressive infantry companies. . . the figure rarely rose above 25% of total strength. . .

Though this conclusion has been bitterly contested (See *The Secret Of The Soldiers Who Didn't Shoot*, Fredric Smoler, *American Heritage*, March, 1989; *The Deadly Brotherhood* by John C. McManus; *The Men Of Company K*, Harold Leinbaugh and John Campbell), combat exhaustion, the replacement policy, desertions, self-inflicted wounds cannot be ignored: combat is a far more complex reality than most of us dare admit.

In *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* Russell Weigley emphasizes the force of American artillery in winning World War Two. German soldiers testified to its overwhelming power.

High turn over rates in many frontline Divisions, sometimes exceeding 200%, desertions, combat fatigue, sometimes refusals to fire, the enormous force of the artillery, each and all question the conclusions Ambrose and Brokaw come to in the case of the American combat soldier. These harsh realities of war also make us pause when the claim of comradeship in combat is put forward, particularly by Ambrose. Since illness, woundings, killings, and combat fatigue so decimate frontline troops, it is difficult to understand how the bonds of caring are maintained: men simply disappear to be replaced by others who, in their turn, vanish. The problem of the frontline soldier comes down to survival in the harshest of realities where only peace, wounding, or death mark the path to escape.

The emphasis of Stephen Ambrose on the courage and comradeship of the young "citizen soldier" and the glorification of the "greatest generation" by Tom Brokaw do little to help us understand what the war was really about. Paul Fussell has stated: "America has not yet understood what the Second World War was like and has thus been unable to use such understanding to re-interpret and re-define the national reality and to arrive at something like public maturity." Insights of far richer complexity and far greater sophistication than those of Ambrose and Brokaw are needed to reach that re-interpretation and maturity.

At war's end, Ambrose's and Brokaw's soldiers return to the U.S., seemingly untouched by what they had seen and done in combat. They shut up, do not complain, and go about their business of building a new America. According to Ambrose:

> They had seen enough destruction; they wanted to construct. They built the Interstate Highway system, the St. Lawrence Seaway, the suburbs (so scorned by the sociologists, so successful with the people), and more. They had seen enough killing; they wanted to save lives. They licked polio and made other revolutionary advances in medicine. They had learned in the Army the virtues of a solid organization and teamwork, and the value of individual initiative, inventiveness, and responsibility. They developed the modern corporation while inaugurating revolutionary advances in technology, education, and public policy . . . they supported NATO and the United Nations and the Department of Defense. They had stopped Hitler and Tojo; in the 1950's they stopped Stalin and Khrushchev. . . .

Brokaw clearly agrees. His Greatest Generation "helped convert a wartime economy into the most powerful peacetime economy in history. They made breakthroughs in medicine and other sciences. They gave the world new art and literature. They came to understand the need for Federal Civil Rights Legislation. They gave America Medicare."

Of course, other conclusions can be drawn about the world created by Americans since WWII. With eight percent of the world's population, we use 40 percent of its resources to create our consumer economy. We plunge into greed and glut while children in third world nations starve. Our technology leads to the destruction of the globe's air, water, earth, animals, fish, insects and has formed the Mega-City, urban sprawl, congestion, pollution. Our distribution of income creates a permanent domestic underclass. In the 1950's our domestic purge of those believed to be Communists, largely initiated and carried out by veterans of WWII, led to the destruction of a generation of liberals and the loss of our East Asian experts with tragic consequences in Vietnam. Veteran organizations led vicious attacks on Paul Robeson. Many of those who opposed Civil Rights legislation in the south were veterans who helped lynch, beat and kill African Americans, many of whom were discharged

soldiers themselves. Veterans all, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, either initiated or led us deeper into the morass of the Vietnam War.

The nature of the America the veteran of WWII created has a far darker side than that proposed by Ambrose and Brokaw, and is rooted in the sins of gluttony, avarice, prejudice, and violence. In their cleaned-up stories, the GI is, in the oddest kind of way, so pure and so courageous he seems bloodless, with little of that animal nature of which Jones so movingly writes.

In his book about the Civil War, *Embattled Courage*, Linderman helps us understand the purification of memory, the startling change in the way combat is remembered by the veteran thirty years after the War. By 1890, service in the Civil War had become the icon for political and economic success, the war sentimentalized into something it never was: fear, death, brutality, killing denied.

Siegfried Sassoon, the British war poet of WWI, tells us the same story about his war:

Songbooks Of The War

In fifty years when peace outshines
Rememberance of the battle lines,
Adventurous lads will sigh and cast
Proud looks upon the plundered past.
On summer morn or winter's night,
Their hearts will kindle for the fight,
Reading a snatch of soldier-song,
Savage and jaunty, fierce and strong;
And through the angry marching rhymes
Of blind regret and haggard mirth,
They'll envy us the dazzling times
When sacrifice absolved our earth.

Some ancient man with silver locks
Will lift his weary face to say:
"War was a fiend who stopped our clocks
Although we met him grim and gay."
And then he'll speak of Haig's last drive,
Marvelling that any came alive
Out of the shambles that men built

And smashed, to cleanse the world of guilt.
But the boys with grin and sidelong glance,
Will think, "Poor grandad's day is done."
And dream of lads who fought in France
And lived in time to share the fun.

Ambrose and Brokaw pursue the same falsification of memory. The generation which follows the war generation apparently must turn their father's war into a neater, cleaner experience than that thankless place which lies at the heart of battle.

Not so with parts of *Saving Private Ryan*.

Spielberg's war resonates in such contrast to the war of Ambrose and Brokaw. The only soldier shown to come home in *Saving Private Ryan* is Private Ryan himself—to a life that must have always been so painful that, at the end of the film, he asks his wife if he had been a "good man."

Private Ryan's whole life must have been haunted, night and day, by the memory of the men who died to give him a chance. War—with me, with Private Ryan, with James Jones, with, I believe, all men who survive serious combat—always shadows the future. Spielberg's film is to be given the highest marks for his grasp of war's resonance over time. The film otherwise, though, does not rise to such benchmarks.

Spielberg's war is noisy, literally bursting with sound, from the invasion on Omaha Beach to the final firefight at the bridge. The silence of battle is what I remember: tanks fired ten feet from me and I did not hear a sound. The silence of war, its terrible isolation and loneliness, is lost amidst the loud rattle of the film. Moreover, the fact of death and killings slips away. What Spielberg offers instead is a war of loud and murderous firepower—incessant gunfire—and a place where men talk too bloody much in sentences unlikely to be formulated in the center of battle.

In my experience, men near death are quiet, quiet and alone, for words cannot bridge such distance. Perhaps a touch, an embrace, tears, sobs, but not words. Articulate language is too sophisticated for the facts of death and the emotions which throb with killing.

Though to be fair, Spielberg renders many scenes with a realism laced with brutal irony, but always missing is that aura of silence that so dominates the place of killing where spirits of those just killed seem to writhe through the air, spirits of the dead and dying, the pain they leave behind them in this ominous, brooding place of terror.

The film *The Thin Red Line*, from its opening scene to its conclusion, broods in that place of death where strange and wonderous events occur, mystery, even majesty, a darkness that verges on the beautiful.

In this film, men talk but seldom to each other; rather they ruminate or hear voices about this place of war they have come to inhabit. In Malick's take, the beauty of the natural world—its destructive capacity—is forcefully shown: the silent wind sweeping over the fields of grass in fading summer sun, men dying in those fields of fire, nature and men juxtaposed in the rage of war to give a sense of evil: a personification of the darkness in the human soul, yet that darkness shown in a way that breaks the heart: Lieutenant Colonel Tall driving his soldiers so he can obtain his General's star; the corporal extracting gold teeth from dead Japanese, a darkness revealed in scenes as brutally realistic as those in *Saving Private Ryan*.

But Spielberg's film, though also visually realistic, finally reinforces those clichés we learn form Ambrose and Brokaw—issues of sentimental comradeship and bravery. Malick's art offers the mystery, the poetry and the pain, which always lie at war's hard core. Perhaps *The Thin Red Line* excels because it rises from what, for me, is the best novel about WWII, James Jones' book by the same title. *Saving Private Ryan* is a Hollywood concoction, having little to do with the war and its most fundamental meanings.

In his novel, Jones depicts a company in combat, a hundred fifty men dealing with their essences and who they are as humans in the terrible center of war. A few of these soldiers are courageous, some cowards, some murderous, some cruel, some kind, most doing what they have to do. But most seem multidimensional and marked by their experience. They seem real, not figures of literary irony. They seem men changed by war.

And perhaps it is this fact of being crippled in ways they cannot articulate that makes both the novel and the film, *The Thin Red Line*, so much more powerful than other attempts to deal artistically with WWII. Some of us may have come back like the heroes Ambrose and Brokaw describe, but more of us never really recovered, never became the men we might have been, a part of us lost forever in the world of combat where we discovered truths about ourselves that changed us in ways we never truly understood.

The generation born after WWII has a choice of stories it can use to understand and interpret the war of its fathers and grandfathers. It can

select the tales of Ambrose and Brokaw, the "hero," the man unafraid in war, surrounded by comrades, competent in peace. It can follow Spielberg, the veteran, haunted forever by what he saw and did, war never all it really seems, but a place of hidden truths, sudden turns, instant ironies, exposed by the most brutual realism. Or with Jones and Malik, it can search that brutalism for powerful statements of good and evil, for acts of violence intimate to the human and natural world, even visions of beauty born from conflict, to discover a place of mysterious and terrible silence which lies at the core of life, all we may never know of the divine.

It is in this vision of war that war's deepest meaning may be best discovered.

The story a generation elects to tell about the war of their fathers will determine in part the nature of the next war, the one their children will fight, and my guess is that the story this generation selects to pass ahead will be a combination of the tales of Ambrose and Brokaw, the courage and comradeship of the "Citizen Soldier," mixed with the realism and irony of Spielberg. The meaning of *The Thin Red Line* as film or novel may slowly disappear over time, too uncomfortable a tale for a generation bred outside of war, the mystery of death and killing at the core of war, that pitiless place from which there is no return. It is not the war story people wish to hear.

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W.D. Ehrhart

Setting the Record Straight on William Wantling

Readers of *War, Literature & the Arts* may recall an essay of mine not too long ago, "Soldier-Poets of the Korean War" (9.2 Fall / Winter 1997), in which I asserted that the poet William Wantling had been seriously wounded in combat in the Korean War, that he had been given morphine for his wounds, that he had subsequently become addicted, and that he had ended up in the California State Prison at San Quentin as a result of his addiction.

In the course of additional research, however, I began to come upon a number of observations and reflections on Wantling that made me start to wonder. Author Samuel Zaffiri, who had known Wantling in the late 1960s and early 1970s at Illinois State University, said of Wantling, "He was a manipulator and all with whom he came in contact, whether best friend or casual acquaintance, were game for his wiles. He wheedled, begged, lied."[1] Wantling scholar Kevin E. Jones wrote that "Wantling lied, cheated, ripped off his friends, shat in their bathtubs."[2]

But by the time I became suspicious and began to dig deeper into the life of this fascinating but deeply troubled man, I had already repeated—in print and on more than one occasion—a number of falsehoods concerning Wantling that I had picked up from other published sources. Indeed, a good deal of what little we thought we knew about Wantling turns out not to be true.

We do know that he was born on November 7, 1933, in what is now East Peoria, Illinois (it was then the twin towns of Robein and Valley View). After graduating from high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in Korea for most of 1953. Released from active duty in 1955, Wantling soon settled in southern California. He mar-

ried a woman named Luana and they had a son. He ran afoul of the law and was sentenced to San Quentin in 1958. While he was in prison, Luana divorced him and he lost custody of his child. He also began to write poetry, taking creative writing classes offered at the prison. Released in 1963, he returned to Peoria, married Ruth Ann Burton nee Cooper—a woman he'd known in high school, herself now divorced and with two sons—in 1964. In 1966 he enrolled as a student at Illinois State University in Normal, earning BA and MA degrees over the next seven years. He was teaching at ISU, apparently on a one-year nonrenewable appointment, at the time of his death on May 2, 1974.

The official cause of death was heart failure, but this was certainly brought on by years and years of massive drug and alcohol abuse, for Wantling's post-San Quentin life in Illinois, according to Zaffiri, was "a constant search for things which would get him drunk or high."[3] What Wantling did to get sent to prison in the first place, however, we do not know. Both Jones and Wantling biographer John Pyros say it was for possession of narcotics—as does A.D. Winans of Second Coming Press,[4] who published Wantling's posthumous collection *7 on Style*—and possibly forging prescriptions. The ultimate source of this information, however, seems to be Wantling himself. In a letter to Edward Lucie-Smith, quoted in Lucie-Smith's introduction to *The Awakening*, Wantling said he was "imprisoned for forgery and narcotics."[5]

Wantling claimed that his addiction and subsequent incarceration were the result of combat injuries he sustained during the Korean War, further implying that his later drug problems also stemmed from that initial addiction. "When I was in Korea," Wantling said, "they gave me my first shot of morphine. It killed the pain. It was beautiful. Five years later I was in San Quentin on narcotics."[6] War injuries led to addiction led to prison and a lifetime of problems, according to Wantling.

But what happened to Wantling in Korea? "I think he got hit with a flamethrower but I'm not sure," says Len Fulton of Dustbooks, who published Wantling's book *The Source*, "I think he was the youngest sergeant in Korea (17)—or I remember him writing that somewhere."[7] In his letter to Lucie-Smith, Wantling wrote, "Enlisted US Marine Corps age seventeen. Volunteered for combat duty and sent to Korea War Nov. 1952. Was youngest Marine Sgt. in combat (eighteen) during winter campaign '52-'53 . . . Morphine in Korea field hospital due to burns[.]"[8] "Wounded in Korea," Pyros writes of Wantling, "ten days in a coma, eight weeks in a hospital, a leg which remained permanently

scarred[.]"[9] More recently, Zaffiri wrote that Wantling "had a large scar on his leg. He claimed he got it when the jeep he was riding in hit a landmine, which also caused a 50-gallon barrel of gasoline on the jeep to ignite, burning him. He claimed then that he got hooked on morphine recovering from his wounds. This, in turn, he always claimed, caused him to get hooked on heroin."[10]

But again the sole source for all of this information is, finally, Wantling himself. Fulton, Lucie-Smith and Pyros all published accounts of Wantling's Korean War service (Zaffiri's comments came in a private, unpublished letter) based on Wantling's word alone. These accounts were then accepted at face value by anthologist Walter Lowenfels, scholar H. Bruce Franklin, critic Robert Peters, doctoral candidate Jones—and myself—and reproduced in one form or another in a number of other published sources spanning more than thirty years.[11] Everyone, until now—again, myself included—simply took Wantling at his word, and this in spite of the fact that at least some of these people knew Wantling to be, however likeable, a liar.

Wantling's own military records, which I obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri after my suspicions were finally—if belatedly—aroused,[12] reveal that Wantling enlisted in the Marine Corps on January 23, 1952—when he was 18 years, two months, and two days old, not 17 as he claimed—and did not actually begin active service until March 4, 1952. He was trained and deployed as an aircraft radio repairman. He did not arrive in Korea until January 7, 1953, at which time he was assigned to Marine Composite Squadron 1. According to the squadron's command diaries, provided by the Archives Unit of Headquarters Marine Corps,[13] the squadron was engaged in electronic countermeasure warfare. Wantling himself was not on flight status and did not serve as air crew. The squadron was based at an airfield designated K-3, which was located at Pohang, a city on the southeastern coast of Korea about 150 miles south of the 38th parallel and the front lines, which had become fixed and static by mid-1951.

Wantling, therefore, served "in combat" only in the most loosely defined sense of that word, since all of Korea was considered the war zone. His claim to have been in a jeep that struck a landmine is doubtful. While a certain amount of communist guerrilla activity did take place behind the lines in the earlier stages of the war, most guerrilla activity had been eradicated by 1953.[14] In addition, had he been wounded in

combat or as a result of enemy action of any kind, he would automatically have been awarded a Purple Heart Medal, but his decorations are listed as these: the National Defense Service Medal, the Korea Service Medal, the United Nations Service Ribbon, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, and the Good Conduct Medal. There is no Purple Heart. Lastly, the record indicates that Wantling spent his entire time in Korea—January through November 1953—as a private first class; he did not make corporal until January 1954, and did not earn his sergeant's stripes until October 1954.

It is within the realm of possibility that Wantling sustained some sort of non-battle injury that led to hospitalization and the administering of morphine (his medical records from the Marine Corps are not available under FOIA, being subject to federal privacy laws), but even this is questionable at best. In any case, we now know with reasonable certainty that he was never wounded in battle, that he was never a sergeant during the Korean War—let alone the youngest Marine combat sergeant—and that he greatly embellished his wartime experiences in relating them to those who knew him only well after the fact.

Indeed, those who have tried to reconstruct Wantling's biography prior to his return to Peoria, Illinois, after his release from San Quentin in 1963 have relied entirely on Wantling himself and on those who knew him after he returned to Illinois. A good deal of what happened to him in the last eleven years of his life can be verified by people who knew him in those years, but of the years Wantling spent in the Marines, in southern California, and in prison, there is no one to offer corroboration.

Wantling did serve in prison, this is certain. Though I have been unable to obtain any court records for Wantling, and thus cannot ascertain what he was charged with or convicted of, the California Department of Corrections does have an inmate number for him (A45522) and a discharge date (September 1963). Various letters and documents among Wantling's papers—which are housed at the McLean County Historical Society in Bloomington, Illinois—corroborate his incarceration and the fact that he took courses and began writing in prison.[15] As to Wantling's first marriage and subsequent divorce while in prison, Jones writes, "there are a series of letters in the archives in which Wantling, post divorce, pleads for custody of Cardo [his son]. Probably wisely, the state of CA sent him to foster care."[16]

Wantling's later behavior would certainly suggest an addictive per-

sonality, but whether he became a heroin addict in the mid-1950s, how and why he became an addict, and what exactly got him sent to prison, we simply do not know and may never know. Contrary to his own accounts, however, it was almost certainly not the result—directly or indirectly—of combat injuries sustained during the Korean War. Says James Harbaugh of *Dionysos: The Journal of Literature & Addiction*, "It's not unusual for people who abuse pain medication to make up lies like that."[17]

Does any of this invalidate his poetry, especially his Korean War poetry? Not necessarily. It is possible that Wantling was indeed affected by his Korean War service, even if he never heard a shot fired in anger. "Many vets feel a sense of guilt to this day because they did not share the sufferings of the grunts [infantrymen],"Patience H. C. Mason writes in *Recovering from the War*. "I discovered that [many veterans] often had extremely painful traumatic experiences or entire tours, but feel that by comparison with the grunts, it was nothing—so they have no way to deal with the pain except to discount it, and, by discounting it, bury it."[18]

Did Wantling actually see a Korean civilian summarily executed, as he suggests in his poem "The Korean"? Did other Marines tell him stories about their own fighting experiences that Wantling transformed into art, as Bryan Alec Floyd did so successfully in *The Long War Dead*?[19] Maybe he was simply able to apply his own imagination creatively and effectively. Certainly Wantling came closer to war than Stephen Crane had at the time Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*. And Korean War poet William Childress readily admits that he was never in combat, yet we value his Korean War poems no less for that.

The difference, perhaps, is that Crane and Childress and Floyd never tried to represent themselves and their own actual experiences as anything other than what they were; they did not conflate their personal lives and the art they created. "It is always dangerous to confuse the various voices of poetry, to insist that the speaker of the poem is indeed the author of the poem, and that the persona is the person," warns Jones.[20] Yet he too falls prey to that confusion, as has everyone else who has written about Wantling until now, as did I in a number of the inferences and conclusions I drew in "Soldier-Poets of the Korean War."

Perhaps even Wantling himself began to believe his own stories. "I'm not at all surprised you found some bullshit on Wantling," Fulton wrote when apprised of Wantling's actual service record, "He was a long-tall-

story teller trying to lift lying up to mythmaking."[21] Be that as it may, it is no excuse for bad scholarship, and I offer none. I can only try to correct the erroneous record I have helped to perpetuate.

Among the poems Wantling left behind at his untimely death are more than a few that are worth keeping alive, and some that should be treated as genuine classics. "Initiation" is a harrowing poem about the life of an addict. "Poetry" is one of the best prison poems ever written by anyone, compelling enough to be quoted in full by both Franklin in *Prison Literature in America* and Peters in *Where the Bee Sucks*. And "Korea 1953" and "I Remember" are among the most memorable poems of the Korean War.[22] Nevertheless, it is important to set straight the historical record on Wantling because what little we know about his life has already become distorted and mythologized, fiction made fact by constant repetition.

Notes

1. John Pyros, *William Wantling: A Biography & Selected Works* (Peoria, IL: Spoon River Press, 1981), 27.

2. E-mail from Jones to WDE dated May 7, 1999. Jones's doctoral dissertation on Wantling is "Finding Jewels in the Awkward Mud: A Reconsideration of William Wantling and His Poetry," Illinois State University, 1994.

3. Pyros, 27.

4. November 15, 1999 letter from Winans to WDE.

5. Quoted in the introduction to *The Awakening* (London, UK: Rapp & Whiting, 1968), 7.

6. *The Source* (El Cerrito, CA: Dustbooks, 1966), 3.

7. E-mail from Fulton to WDE dated February 12, 1997.

8. *The Awakening*, 7.

9. Pyros, 13.

10. Letter from Zaffiri to WDE dated December 5, 1999.

11. At a minimum, in addition to *The Source, The Awakening* and *William Wantling: A Biography & Selected Poems*, the list includes *Penguin Modern Poets 12* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1968)*; San Quentin's Stranger* (Cardiff, UK: Second Aeon Publications/ Dunedin, NZ: Caveman Publications, 1972)*; Small Press Review* #19; *William Wantling: A Commemoration* (Normal, IL: Babbitt's Books, 1994); *Prison Literature in America* (London, UK: Oxford UP, 1989)*; Where the Bee Sucks* (Santa Maria, CA: Asylum Arts, 1994)*; War, Literature & the Arts* 9.2; *American Poetry Review* 27.6, *Poetry Wales* 34.2, *Retrieving Bones* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1999), and *The Encyclopedia of the Korean War* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2000), along with Jones's unpublished doctoral dissertation.

12. Records were sent to WDE in three batches dated April 28, 1999; October 14, 1999; and November 22, 1999.

13. The records were sent to WDE on November 24, 1999.

14. See Chapter 6 of General Paik Sun Yup's *From Pusan to Panmunjom* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 1999), especially 179-194.

15. See Jones's doctoral dissertation and his e-mails to WDE dated May 7, 1999, and October 27, 1999.

16. E-mail from Jones to WDE dated May 7, 1999.

17. Quoted in a letter from David Roskos of Iniquity Press/Vendetta Books to WDE dated January 16, 2000.

18. Mason (New York, NY: Viking, 1990), 37 & 38. Mason is writing about the Vietnam War, but her suppositions apply equally to the Korean War—or to World War Two or any modern war, for that matter.

19. Floyd was a chaplain's assistant based at Quantico, Virginia, during the Vietnam War. The 44 poems in *The Long War Dead* (New York, NY: Avon, 1976) are based on stories told to him by Marines who had fought in Vietnam; Floyd himself never served there. See also W.D. Ehrhart's *Unaccustomed Mercy* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech, 1989), 69.

20. "Finding Jewels in the Awkward Mud,"33.

21. Letter from Fulton to WDE dated May 21, 1999.

22. "Initiation," "Poetry," and "Korea 1953" first appeared in Wantling's *Down, Off & Out* (Bensenville, IL: Mimeo Press, 1965). "I Remember" first appeared in Walter Lowenfels's anthology *Where Is Vietnam?* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1967). "The Korean," referred to earlier in this essay, first appeared in Wantling's 1966 *The Source*. All of Wantling's Korean War poems are reprinted in *War, Literature & the Arts* 9.2.

W.D. Ehrhart's most recent books are *Ordinary Lives: Platoon 1005 and the Vietnam War*, *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War* (with Philip K. Jason), and *Beautiful Wreckage: New & Selected Poems*, all three published in 1999. His website may be reached at <http://www.wdehrhart.com/>.

Reviews

The GI Generation: A Memoir. Frank F. Mathias. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2000, xiii + 257 pp., photos, postscript. $25.00.

The Greatest Generation Speaks. Tom Brokaw. New York: Random House, 1999, xxii + 237 pp., photos. $19.95.

Reviewed by Stephen Rippon, United States Air Force Academy

The titles are telling: Mathias' stands out for its lack of pretension, perhaps a gentle rebuke to Brokaw. Unfortunately, the University Press of Kentucky's publicists needlessly invoke Brokaw's first work by titling their press release for *The GI Generation*, "The Making of 'The Greatest Generation.'" Mathias, a professor emeritus of history at the University of Dayton, will have none of that. With characteristic candor, he notes, "I have written this book as the historian I am, and not as an 'old-timer' intent on gilding the lily" (xii).

Putting the titles aside temporarily, I must admit that Brokaw opens *The Greatest Generation Speaks* promisingly with a section called "War Stories," where he compares the well-known World War II literature with the array of memoirs by common Americans who fought in the war:

> Those memoirs, many of them self-published or simply bound manuscripts, add to the rich body of literature from World War II. The best of that literature—the works of James Jones, Norman Mailer, Kurt Vonnegut, William Manchester, Joseph Heller, and Paul Fussell, for example—is well known. The homespun books will likely never be read outside the authors' immediate families. Still, the memoirs of infantrymen, fliers, sailors, and chaplains get at the essential truths of war in their own memorable and deeply personal fashion. (3)

To underscore his commitment to bringing out these people's stories, Brokaw adds a few pages in the front of the book for war veterans to inscribe their own memories. It is merely a gesture, though, and one

that helps me realize just why I found this book so unsatisfying. How can one summarize "What I remember most about the war years" in just eight lines, or reminisce about "When the war was over" in just eleven? If Brokaw is trying to adhere to a formalist aesthetic theory of how creativity within fixed limits can actually enhance pleasure and beauty, he is sending an awfully mixed message here.

Would that Brokaw heeded some limits! Instead, he bowls us over with story after story received in the wake of his bestselling 1998 book, *The Greatest Generation*. I could not bear to read more than three or four of these episodes at a time; perhaps this book is best suited for hospital waiting areas and coffee tables. Interestingly enough, Brokaw himself admits the problems of his method:

> When I shared some of these stories with a friend, he was moved and then, after a moment, he commented on the nature of the world in which we live: 'You hear something like that and you're resolved to keep it in your mind forever, but twenty minutes later you're wondering what's for lunch.' It was a thoughtful and perceptive comment on the pace of modern life and the selfish agendas that preoccupy too many of us. (167)

If Brokaw really sympathizes with his friend's observation, then why does the method of his book mirror the frenetic "pace of modern life" he laments?

And why does Brokaw stubbornly insist on calling them "The Greatest Generation" when the subjects of his new book are rather ambivalent? Some of those featured in his book attempt to correct the assumption that their generation lives up to his moniker. A former Deputy Secretary of State, John Whitehead, writes Brokaw: "I've read your book with great interest. I'm not sure that those of us who served our country in World War II deserve to call ourselves the 'greatest' generation. Like any group of Americans, we were a mixed bag" (14). And if Brokaw does not heed feedback from Whitehead, he certainly does not probe the implications of these words from Nancy Keister of South Yarmouth, Massachusetts: "I was not brave like the people in your book and felt very scared and disheartened at being separated from my husband and baby [when she caught scarlet fever and had to be quarantined]" (95). Keister speaks for many honest people who would not identify themselves among the "greatest." Such comments, however, do not faze Brokaw from using the superlative.

The GI Generation is superior to *The Greatest Generation Speaks* in part because it does not claim greatness; instead, Mathias describes life in Carlisle, Kentucky, in the years between the World Wars. When Mathias needs an outside source to verify his memory, he looks to old friends and to the *Carlisle Mercury*, the newspaper for that town of 1500 located between Lexington and Maysville.

Mathias lets us know from the start that his memoir's focus is not the war itself; he described his own war experiences in a 1982 memoir entitled *G.I. Jive: An Army Bandsman in World War II* (University Press of Kentucky, reprinted in 2000). Instead, Mathias' focus here is on life in the prewar years:

> Like Einstein's realization that a falling man feels no force of gravity, we whose youth fell within these disordered decades lived reasonably happy lives, with little or no sense of the ever-mounting gravity of each prewar year. Who was I to know that ten of my playmates or pals would be killed in action just a few years down the road? (x)

The war, retrospectively, casts a shadow over Mathias' entire narrative. Mathias reflects that on the day he left for the war, "I was concerned enough to wish that some sort of 'red mark' would appear above those destined to die. If such marks had hovered over the heads of those boarding the bus, one would have shown itself above my classmate Marion Letcher and another over my older friend Nick Feeback" (266). Mathias supplies those red marks for us throughout the memoir, and also lists in the postscript the names of his friends who were war casualties. For example, in a chapter called "Major and Minor," Mathias explains how his older friend Andy Metcalfe

> introduced me to swing, showing me the way as usual. . . . Many of the boys and even some of their parents labeled him as a 'sissy,' but his many girlfriends knew better, as did I and my pals. It made us mad to hear it. But Andrew was to prove himself as one of the finest of the GI Generation.
>
> A decade later, on April 22, 1945, S/Sgt Andrew B. Metcalfe, 349th Infantry, 88th Division, single-handedly attacked two Nazi machine-gun nests with rifle and grenades in the Italian mountains. The German gunners had pinned down his platoon. Metcalfe knocked both guns out but not before the second one shot his life away. (76)

In contrast to the stories falling under Brokaw's hackneyed headings ("War Stories," "Bonds," "Loss," "Faith," "Reunions," "Love Stories," "Appreciation," "Children," "Lessons"), the stories in *The GI Generation*, like that of Andy Metcalfe, emerge naturally from the narrative.

While the references to future war deaths invoke the war overtly, through much of Mathias' memoir the war is a persistent shadow. On a visit to Cincinnati, young Frank visits a friend whose mother requests, "Go up to the corner and get me a loaf of bread from Ben Greenstein the Jew." Mathias qualifies this episode significantly with the phrase, "in perhaps typical pre-Holocaust innocence" (221). Another example of how the war touches the narrative comes when Mathias explains how he got heavily involved in swing music (thanks to his red-marked friend Andy Metcalfe) and played saxophone in local bands. His mother's investment in a top-of-the-line sax may have saved his life because it encouraged him to practice so much that, "just seven years after opening my new sax," he left G Company, 145th Infantry, 37th Division, to serve in an Army band (80). Two-thirds of his former unit was later killed or wounded in Luzon.

Even in the swing music young Frank loved, the shadow of war emerges. At the end of a chapter called "Hammering Catfish" (referring to Frank's childhood practice of stunning and catching fish by hammering on the ice above them), Mathias quotes from a swing tune called "Shantytown": "I'll be just as sassy as Haile Selassie / If I were king, wouldn't mean a thing, / Keep my boots on call, / Read th' writin' on th' wall" referring, as Mathias recounts, to the antifascist hero and Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, who resisted when Mussolini invaded in 1935 (59 – 60).

Contrast this episode with a passage from a section of Brokaw's book, "Loss":

> The snappy patter of Bob Hope and the soothing baritone of Bing Crosby, the boogie-woogie of the Andrews Sisters, the jazz of Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller's distinctive melodies—all are on the sound track of the memories running across the mind's eye.
>
> However, the stark reality is that 292,131 Americans were killed in action in World War II. (77)

In place of mere adjectives like "snappy" and "soothing" and "stark," followed by a statistic, Mathias gives us song lyrics and characters who are connected to a real place—Carlisle, Kentucky. Mathias populates a

small piece of the world with characters such as his father, Lucky, whose autodidacticism, twisted kidney, and ambivalence towards travel I will remember long after the flurry of stories from Brokaw's book subsides. After reading in Mathias' memoir about the first few war deaths, I tensed in anticipation whenever a new contemporary of Frank's entered the narrative, sensing the anxiety that Frank felt on that day he boarded the bus and wondered who would die. I think the reason for my emotional involvement with the fates of Mathias' friends is that he recreates such a complete and convincing world—the result of working within a limited scope.

A final passage expresses the difference between Brokaw's and Mathias' books. Mathias remembers his red-marked friend Andy Metcalfe, who made candy to give away as Christmas gifts:

> He specialized in walnut loaded fudge, caramel rolls, divinity, and various types of cream candy. And he had special concoctions of his own which he named after the people receiving his gift. His gifts, at most, were wrapped either in red, green, or white tissue paper, for the more costly paper designs of later decades had not arrived. We never missed what we did not have. (64)

The principle Mathias admires in his friend's gift-giving during the Depression is the same principle that makes his memoir more effective than Brokaw's in capturing that generation. Mathias keeps his story simple and local—a Kentucky childhood seen through the lens of the war that ended it. Brokaw, on the other hand, has compiled a book of sound bytes that, in trying to capture an entire generation's voice, leaves the reader with little to remember. Reading through even a section of Brokaw's book is like gorging on penny candy, while reading Mathias's memoir is like savoring an appropriate portion of Andy Metcalfe's divinity.

Zone of the Interior: A Memoir, 1942-1947. Daniel Hoffman. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000, 127pp., $22.50.

Reviewed by Michael S. Neiberg, United States Air Force Academy

Shortly after the release of *Saving Private Ryan* I had a discussion with a colleague who observed that if one truly wanted to make a movie about the men of World War II, one ought to make a movie about the process of training clerks. To be sure, such a movie would be terrible for popcorn sales, but my colleague had a point. The United States military of the World War II period trained thousands of men to do the unglamorous jobs that nevertheless make significant contributions to victory. Indeed, Allied success was due in no small part to America's dedication to selecting and training talented men and women for work in crucial support functions, even if such work rarely appears heroically on the silver screen.

While you should not expect to see Tom Hanks in the starring role any time soon, Daniel Hoffman's *Zone of the Interior* provides wonderful insight into the wartime experiences of one such clerk. In Daniel Hoffman we have no ordinary clerk. Hoffman served as America's Poet Laureate, then designated Consultant in Poetry of the Library of Congress, from 1973 to 1974. Who else, when asked to write an article on abortive experimental designs for helicopters, would consult the works of Leonardo da Vinci? And who else could have written a form love letter to meet the needs of his tormented and hard-pressed colleagues at Officers Candidate School?

Hoffman is one of a very few writers who could turn his memoir of writing technical and scientific abstracts into a thoroughly enjoyable book. During the course of the war, Hoffman went from a struggling student at Columbia to a private writing technical manuals to an officer to a student once again. But by 1945, Hoffman had acquired confidence in himself and a better understanding of the world and his place in it. As was true for many veterans, Hoffman's return to civilian life, while welcome, left him with a sense of unfulfillment. "To handle responsibilities in civilian life comparable to those I had held in service," he wrote, "would take years and years of apprenticeship" (118). Indeed, many veterans never completed their civilian apprenticeship, leaving them with a strange void and, for some, an unwelcome longing for the war they had once been so happy to leave behind.

Hoffman and the men and women with whom he worked understood the guilt they felt at living safely in the zone of the interior (the Army's term for the continental United States) while peers were fighting and dying across Europe and Asia. But they also understood the importance of the work they were doing, and they handled their guilt by working harder. With a poet's sensitivities, Hoffman captures the drudgery, the occasional excitement, and the ambivalence of a desk job at an Ohio air field in the midst of history's most destructive war.

But even service in Ohio provided opportunities and challenges impossible to experience in civilian life. Near the end of the war, Hoffman was assigned to escort the renowned Hungarian mathematician Theodore von Karman and his top-secret work (handcuffed to Hoffman's wrist) to a two-star general's office at the Pentagon. "Thus it was that a youth who couldn't pass college calculus was courier for the greatest mathematician on the Allied side, perhaps in the world" (113). Where else but in the topsy-turvy world of World War II could that happen? Where else could that same youth engage in a series of political discussions with famed socialist economist Lewis Corey or watch a fellow enlisted man spar with Billy Conn to raise unit morale? The zone of the interior may have lacked the movie-making material of Normandy or Guadalcanal, but Hoffman proves that it nevertheless opened doors to alert and interested young men and women.

Zone of the Interior's most important contribution may well be its demonstration that even a relatively unexciting role in World War II could nevertheless be a life-changing experience. One did not need to storm the beaches at Omaha or fly missions over Tokyo to understand the war as a personal watershed. It is appropriate that Hoffman's memoir ends with the beginning of his career as a poet. His first article in the *Antioch Review* resulted from an Army assignment while in Ohio. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine his career taking the path that it did without the war and what it taught him. So read and enjoy *Zone of the Interior*. Just don't expect it to appear at a theater near you.

Her War Story: Twentieth-Century Women Write about War. Sayre P. Sheldon. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999, 370 pp., bibliography, index. $55.00.

Reviewed by Kathleen R. Binns, United States Air Force Academy

Although women have always written about war as observers, the literature of war is predominantly male. "The reason," Sayre P. Sheldon explains, "is one of definition: war literature is traditionally about being in war, more precisely about being in combat. Women are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of war" (x). However, as the domain of war in the twentieth century has expanded to include women in greater numbers and wider capacities, war literature has expanded to reflect those changes. In *Her War Story*, Sheldon has assembled a collection of women's war writing that covers World War I, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, and the periods between these wars. The historical and narrative pieces anthologized here include fiction, poetry, journalism, and diaries penned by women of various nationalities. Some of the contributors, like Toni Morrison, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Martha Gellhorn, and Margaret Thatcher, are well known; others are less so. This anthology is not a glorification of women's experiences on the home front or, later, at the war front, nor is it a request for recognition; rather, it is an insightful and compelling record of those experiences.

Each of the four sections begins with an introduction to the war and the women writing about it. The first section, "The Great War," reflects women's entrance into what Sheldon terms a "forbidden zone" for women of the early 1940s: authors such as Wharton, Stein, and Mansfield

> wrote about bodies and their hitherto unmentionable functions, about mutilation and appalling suffering, about lice and lack of sanitation, about cleaning the shit and vomit out of ambulances, about being sexually attacked by maddened wounded men. They learned to swear and speak in the language they heard from the men they nursed. To write about all this meant using new language and forms.... Women writers could claim not only a place in the lost generation but in creating its new literature. (6)

Although they weren't fighting, they were near the front covering the war, writing propaganda, and maintaining diaries, and the closer they got to the front, the more graphic their writing became (5). In an excerpt from her novel *The Forbidden Zone*, Mary Borden recounts the appalling, sometimes ludicrous, conditions in a hospital near the front: "We conspire against his right to die. We experiment with his bones, his muscles, his sinews, his blood. We dig into the yawning mouths of his wounds. Helpless openings, they let us into the secret places of his body. To the shame of the havoc of his limbs we add the insult of our curiosity and the curse of our purpose, the purpose to remake him. We lay odds on his chances of escape, and we combat with Death, his saviour" (23).

The writings of the second section, "Between the Wars," reflect the changes not only for women but also for men as a result of women's participation in World War I. Critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have highlighted, for example, "the resentment men felt towards women for surviving and even bettering themselves during the war years" (76). These selections reflect not only the personal and emotional impacts of the war on women, but also the political and social. Jane Addams, like many women, attempted through her war writings and social activities to understand and, she hoped, to prevent war. In helping found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, she and her co-organizers even went as far as to try to outlaw war (77). In a selection from *Peace and Bread in Time of War*, Addams describes the wretchedness she encountered upon her return to Europe after the war to search for her nephew's grave: "Our experiences in the midst of widespread misery, did not differ from those of thousands of other Americans who were bent upon succor and relief and our vivid and compelling impressions of widespread starvation were confirmed by the highest authorities" (83). Naturally, survivors looked to the recently created League of Nations. As Addams explains,

> Could it have considered this multitude of starving children as its concrete problem, feeding them might have been the quickest way to restore the divided European nations to human and kindly relationship. Was all this devastation the result of hypernationalism and might not the very recognition of a human obligation irrespective of national boundaries form the natural beginning of better international relationships? (83, 84)

Not all women, however, were as tactful or optimistic. In "Apostrophe to Man," Edna St. Vincent Millay urges, "Detestable race, continue to expunge yourself, die out. / Breed faster, crowd, encroach, sing hymns, build bombing airplanes; / … / Put death on the market" (89-90).

Given the size of the armies and the advances in technology in World War II, women were far more active; although still not classified as combatants, their roles broadened to include entertainer, commentator, and spy in addition to nurse and reporter. This third section, "World War Again," contains the largest selection of women's war diaries, including those by Elizabeth Vaughan, an American who was imprisoned in the Philippines when the Japanese invaded; Winifred Ellerman (Bryher), who helped smuggle German Jews into Switzerland; and American Mary Lee Settle, who joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Not surprisingly, "The experience of the German death camps produced a new genre of literature," and that, too, is included in this anthology. However, as the writings of Dutch Jew Etty Hillesum, Polish journalist Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, and French activist Charlotte Delbo attest, "Women's camp experiences differed somewhat from men's. Jewish women of childbearing age were especially targeted for annihilation, and there are indications that more women died than men…. Some Holocaust scholars have suggested that women actually coped better than men, forming 'families' even as their own were destroyed or separated from them—sharing food and celebrating holidays" (133). As Nomberg-Przytyk recalls in "Friendly Meetings,"

> In Auschwitz we often organized such friendly get-togethers. I remember that for the first few months of my stay here those get-togethers struck me as being indecent. How was it possible that we could sing while the sky above was red with the flames of the crematoria. "How can you joke, dance, and tell stories," I asked, "when we are enveloped in a sea of suffering, pain, and tears?" "You will get used to it. Then you will understand." So said the old prisoners. (220)

The final section, "The Cold War and Beyond," was, according to Sheldon, "the most difficult to compile as much of the writing is only beginning to emerge along with our historical perspective on the events" (xi). Women involved in the Korean and Vietnam wars "demonstrated their consciousness of the wider effects of war and the inadequacy of

purely military explanations for it" (271), often in their writings blaming men, all men, "for carrying out warfare on innocent populations" (272). Particularly powerful, though, are the selections relating to the children in war. In her poem "One Cannot Kill a Baby Twice," Israeli Dahlia Ravikovitch mourns the 1982 slaughter of Palestinian infants in refugee camps: "'Go back to the camp, march!' the soldier commanded / The yelling women from Sabra and Shatila. / He had orders to follow. / And the children were already laid in dung puddles / Their mouths wide open / Calm. / Nobody will hurt them anymore. / One cannot kill a baby twice" (326- 327).

Sheldon perhaps best explains the importance of this anthology:

> Many of the small wars in the last decade of this century were fought for a country's independence or for the overthrow of a repressive dictatorship. Women were involved at every level of these grassroots uprisings, often playing crucial roles in their success. The accounts they give show pride at being included. However, at a war or revolution's end, men usually reclaim both the power and the credit for what has happened, hence the importance of preserving these accounts and attempting to give these women a role in the rebuilding of their countries. (273)

Her War Story is comprehensive and powerful, offering a women's perpective on what has traditionally been "men's work."

Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory. Lisa Yoneyama. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, xiii + 217 pp., notes, bibliography, index. $45.00, cloth; $19.95, paper.

Reviewed by Max Despain, United States Air Force Academy

Lisa Yoneyama takes on the dialectics of memory about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima with all of her academic guns blazing. Addressing the important role memory plays in the post-war reconstruction of Hiroshima and Japan in *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*, she describes survivors' memories and the impact those memories have had on rebuilding a new Japan. Her work does not address American responsibility or memories except as a barely present periphery in the emotions of some survivors; however, her ultimate lessons about critical vigilance of our own realities and her warning against complacency are important.

The well-known critics of memory theory such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Theodor Adorno provide the theoretical basis of Yoneyama's argument. Absent from her effort is any mention of Asian theorists on memory, begging the question whether such theorists exist or were not sought out. What is clear is that her discussion of Asian forms of memory is based entirely on European memory theorists' work. Despite this disconnect, Yoneyama artfully addresses memory within her chosen context.

Yoneyama begins with a discussion of the winning design for Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park, a design that is nearly identical to the plan proposed by the same designer for a pre-war "Commemorative Building Project for the Construction of Greater East Asia" (1) celebrating Japan's imperialist efforts. The similarity of the two projects underscores Yoneyama's claim that, whether the majority of Japan remembers Hiroshima's atomic bombing as "victimization experienced by the Japanese" or in a "universalistic narrative… [as] an unprecedented event in the history of humanity" (3), these memories are based on forgetting the imperialist role of the prewar Japanese Empire.

The dialectics of memory about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the self-proclaimed city of peace, emerge in Part One, "Cartographies of Memory," as opposing impulses. The first is toward a "brightness" that seeks to cover up all associations with the bombing; the second dwells on the gloomy memories of devastated Hiroshima and retards the city's movement into the future. In Chapter 2, "Memories in

Ruins," Yoneyama gives the dialectic concrete embodiment in her outline of the community debate over whether to renovate, destroy, or maintain three different structures that remained standing after the bombing. The arguments for destruction or renovation again indicate a need to move forward while the arguments for maintaining the sites claim the move forward requires forgetting the past.

Part Two: "Storytellers," serves up the testimony of atomic bomb survivors and is perhaps the most interesting part of Yoneyama's work. She intends the chapters to "contemplate the nature of knowledge produced through [*hibakushas'* or atomic bomb survivors'] storytellings" (86), a knowledge that turns out to be anything but fixed and stable. A large number of *hibakusha*, she reports in Chapter 3, "On Testimonial Practices," have been reluctant to tell their stories because of discrimination against atomic bomb survivors. Despite this discrimination, however, and their own dismay at "the incommunicability of their experiences," the survivors were so "disappointed by both visual and written representations of nuclear holocausts" (89) that they felt compelled to tell their stories. The multiple perspectives represented by the narratives in Chapter 4, "Mnemonic Detours," Yoneyama suggests, compel "audiences to envision the possibility that the suffering and agony of an enormous number of war victims…might have been averted, that they were never inevitable" (135).

The book's third and final part, "Memory and Positionality" addresses the memories of people outside the dominant Japanese sphere. In Chapter 5, "Ethnic and Colonial Memories," once again a physical monument crystallizes the problematic role of the Japanese in the events surrounding the bombing. The memorial for Koreans killed by the atomic bomb, Yoneyama argues, reflects the debate over the current status of Koreans choosing to live in Japan. The memorial has been placed outside the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in a seldom-traveled area, and a portion of the controversial inscription outlining Japan's colonialism in Korea has been blacked over. Says Yoneyama, the way the Japanese government has handled this memorial raises the question of "how the Japanese government should face its responsibilities for colonialism and the war of invasion" and represents "yet another attempt to contain and domesticate some of the many memories that threaten to disrupt the seemingly self-evident knowledge in contemporary Japan about the nation's past" (154, 176).

Yoneyama's final chapter, "The Feminization of Memory," extends

the previous chapter's analysis revealing the links between Japan's marginalized groups and atomic bomb discourse. As was the case with the various memorials discussed earlier in the book, we see that Japanese women, in the aftermath of the bomb, themselves became the battleground for opposing cultural representations. One version saw them as liberated from the "patriarchal authority of the state, from militarism, and from the prewar household system" (188). On the other hand, women activists developed a platform based on their maternal protective instinct and became associated with the ordinary as housewives. Ultimately, Yoneyama argues that despite the tropes of "peace, statehood, motherhood, anti-imperialism, and the quotidian" placed on Japanese women, female support of imperialist activities in prewar Japan as well as their activity in postwar Japan show them to be not merely "[i]nnocent victims of the prewar and wartime imperial system, of masculine militarism, and the postwar U.S. nuclear dominance in the region" (208).

Yoneyama concludes her detailed work with a statement based on Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, saying "we must also explore the promises and alternative historical trajectories that were never realized" (210). The theme of the unrealized permeates her work. She urges us to critically engage our reality to help prevent things like "the ghastly experience of atomic obliteration" (214) from ever taking place. Instead, we can realize the "promise of alternative historical trajectories" through our own vigilance about our present realities.

I do have one criticism for Yoneyama. Despite her detail and thorough research, her high academic prose makes reading the book more difficult than it might be—a flaw she seems to acknowledge when she thanks her Japanese editors for "constantly reminding me of the scholarly responsibility to reach as broad an audience as possible" (x). She needed to take those reminders more to heart.

As I read this book on August 6, 2000, I caught a short sound bite on CNN discussing the Japanese memorialization of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. A mere 55 years after the fact, the event has nearly disappeared from the American consciousness and warrants only cursory treatment on national television. Fortunately, Yoneyama's talented and thorough discussion of the ever-present effects of the bomb's devastation on Japan, particularly Hiroshima, serves to remind us that the aftershock of one U.S. bomb continues to be felt today.

The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present. Michael Paris, Ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 267pp. $52.00 cloth; $20.00 paper.

Reviewed by D. A. Boxwell, United States Air Force Academy

While the Great War was not the first conflict to be recorded by the motion picture camera (a distinction that belongs to the Boer War and the Spanish-American War), it was the first war, as Michael Paris tells us, in which "cinema was used as an agent of mass persuasion by the governments of the combatant nations" (1). For this reason, this critical anthology is important, for it is the first such book to really attempt to show how combatant nations have, with varying degrees of efficiency and success, developed national film industries as a direct consequence of the War. Paris has rounded up an impressive international roster of film historians to tell the story of the profound interconnections between film, national identity, and the Great War in Britain, France, the U.S., Canada, Australia, Germany, Russia, Austria, and Poland. The contributors focus on both fictional film narratives and documentary films, in some cases showing how the convenient distinction between the two is blurred when representing (and, even, reconstructing) the experience of war on film.

Reading these twelve essays in sequence, one is struck by how combatant nations' political and military elites had to be educated about how effective the new medium could be; for most, it wasn't self-evident. One of the very best contributors, Nicholas Reeves, tells the story of how it wasn't until the middle of 1916, almost halfway through the war, before the British War Office made an effective propaganda film. Reeves adduces, very plausibly, two main reasons for this unwillingness to exploit the power of moving visual imagery: class snobbery regarding the popular medium and, once the Brits were aware of the power of the medium, fear of what it could show. Thus, the British government in August 1914 put in place strict censorship constraints, and it took several years for filmmakers to learn how to work within them. But once the government realized how effective the medium could be, 240 propaganda films were released, with an additional 152 issues of official newsreel. The Italian film industry, by contrast, independently jumped on the bandwagon almost immediately when the country entered the war in 1915, releasing fictional film romances within 3 months. Giovanni Nobili Vitelleschi's essay reveals how the industry benefited from a lack

of official interference, popularly expressing the mass audience's desire for fantasies of team spirit and undying patriotism until the end of the war. To tell another contrasting story, in Russia, the 1917 Revolution put an end to Czar Nicholas's efficient deployment of the film industry for patriotic purposes (Denise Youngblood informs us that nearly half of the 103 Russian feature films produced in the latter half of 1914 concerned the war).

The wide-ranging scope of Paris's anthology is useful in demonstrating that while literature influenced the educated elite to "imagine" the First World War after 1918 in certain specific ways, it was the medium of film that influenced the masses. And, as Paris points out in his introduction, "film continues to provide the dominant popular national interpretation of that War for most people" (2). The essays centered on post-1918 fictional film narratives effectively show the War is revisited time and again to forge national identities, but, again, with varying degrees of engagement. The Soviet cinema for 60 years, with very few exceptions, as Youngblood shows, almost completely ignored the Great War as an occasion for fictional narratives. By contrast, Poland's film industry has produced almost 40 feature films thematically centered on the war. An especially interesting essay is Ina Bertrand's critical analysis of the construction of the nationalist myth of the "digger" combatant, a hardy and brash hero who symbolizes the Australian national spirit. Paris's anthology, in sum, succeeds in telling the story of how war and technology gave birth to national cinema, which of all forms of storytelling and representation, most changed how the world imagined war.

What Should We Tell Our Children About Vietnam? Bill McCloud. 1989. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000, xviii+ 155 pp., $12.95, paper.

Reviewed by Ross Gresham, United States Air Force Academy

What Should We Tell Our Children About Vietnam? is a collection of 128 answers to that question by various figures involved with the war. Bill McCloud, a teacher of eighth grade social studies in Pryor, Oklahoma, and a Vietnam veteran himself, originally began to assemble these responses in order to teach his class about the war. His hand-written inquiries elicited replies from a surprisingly illustrious list of people: William Bennett, Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger, Jimmy Carter, John McCain, William Westmoreland, Kurt Vonnegut, Allan Ginsberg, George Bush . . . name after famous name. Alongside these are responses from veterans, war protestors, refugees, parents of soldiers who died, and concerned citizens.

The answers vary in length from a short paragraph to several pages. Many of them read like an eighth grade history textbook, laying out historical generalizations. William Colby: "We insisted for many years in fighting a soldier's war, while our enemy was fighting a people's war." This sounds like something junior high students might have to memorize and parrot back on a test. A limitation to these responses is that they *tell* junior high school students what is true, rather than trying to *prove* or *demonstrate* it. They assume the authority of someone who can tell something to children and have it believed. I'm not sure that eighth graders know who Ken Kesey is and why they should listen to what he has to say (though McCloud does provide brief, relevant bios before each entry). Most of the letters suggest what McCloud should teach his class, assuming that he will then do the legwork to assemble the actual history.

But what's exciting about this book is that while the individual entries may present a simple line of history, this line is then contradicted twenty pages later. Peter Braestrup, a correspondent of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, writes "The South Vietnamese ally was caught up in a civil war..." Phillip Davidson Jr., "author of *Vietnam At War: The History, 1946-1975*" wants the eighth graders to know "First, the Vietnam War was *not* a civil war, nor a South Vietnamese insurgency." Jack Foisie, *"Los Angeles Times* Bureau Chief, Saigon, 1964-66" writes: "To those who contend that America could have won the conflict by greater

commitment had it not been for a home-front protesters and a disloyal press in Vietnam, nonsense." G. Gordon Liddy won't have any of that: "The American press helped the Communists do in the Vietnam War what the Nazi 'Fifth Column' could not do in World War II—destroy the morale and fighting spirit of the American home front." Veteran and author Larry Heinemann: "...there is nowadays circulating the oddly revised notion that the United States could have won the war. Where did this notion come from?" One answer would be Admiral Stockdale: "First, we lost it. Second, we could have won it easily if from the start we had fought the real enemy."

There is no moderator to pair these contradictory views, to mediate between them, or even to keep the writers on topic. The letters don't enter into conversation with each other. Country Joe McDonald follows John McCain alphabetically. Imagine an eighth grader curious about the nobility of the United States' motives for entering the war. He or she skips through the book and must negotiate between Allen Ginsberg's claim that "Vietnam was a schizokarmic mistake"; Timothy Leary (identified in his bio as a "Producer of psychedelic celebrations"): "It was a disastrous, insane, imperial invasion of a weirdo Third World country"; and Peter Kann, of the *Wall Street Journal*, "...America's motives in Vietnam were entirely honorable. To help defend a society under attack." Of course, McCloud intends the book to be used in conjunction with a class, where the instructor could choose entries, introduce them, and provide context. But it is exciting to imagine a youngster trying to wrestle with these disparate views on his or her own.

McCloud must be a great teacher. Even to thirteen-year olds, history should be taught as it is here, with many voices. Instead of memorizing an answer for a test, the student should decide upon an answer after entertaining different points of view. So while individual entries may have their limitations, the collection itself serves as a primary source for a point that David Dellinger ("antiwar activist") articulates: "...it is important to remember that honorable people sincerely differ in their opinions and judgements on such matters."

***War, Technology, and Experience Aboard the USS* Monitor.** David A. Mindell. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 224 pp., bibliographical essay, index. $14.95, paper.

Reviewed by William J. Astore, United States Air Force Academy

Growing up in Brockton, Massachusetts, I remember being fascinated by a painting in city hall that memorialized the duel between the USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*. Since Brockton's main contribution to the war effort was to shoe the feet of Union soldiers, it was unclear to me why the city fathers chose to memorialize the *Monitor*.

Plumbing the depths of the *Monitor's* meaning and influence is precisely the goal of David A. Mindell's fascinating study, *War, Technology, and Experience Aboard the USS* Monitor. The *Monitor's* meaning, Mindell shows, was not defined primarily by its performance in battle, which was ambiguous; rather, it was negotiated within a complex milieu of interested parties that included naval officers, engineers, entrepreneurs, journalists, various publics, and government leaders.

Mindell recounts the experiences of people who came in contact with the *Monitor*, and how they and other commentators symbolically represented the ironclad. His account includes a close reading of William F. Keeler's letters (Keeler served as assistant paymaster aboard the *Monitor*). In these letters, the *Monitor* emerges as a capricious and dangerous vessel. Except for its turret and pilothouse, the *Monitor* was often completely submerged. Totality of enclosure, in an environment hostile to man, was new to sailors. Poor ventilation meant that temperatures reached 156° F below deck. Fumes from the coal-fired engine made breathing difficult. During combat, the crew faced more danger from their ship than from enemy fire (the *Monitor* proved virtually invulnerable to cannons firing shot). As the crew toiled in their "sweltering prison" (Keeler's description), inglorious death by suffocation was the greatest danger they faced. Crew endurance—rather than steadiness under fire—became the new measure of bravery. Yet old measures endured. In well-selected photographs, Mindell shows that crewmembers posed next to dents in the *Monitor's* armor, thereby asserting they had indeed braved enemy fire.

Like the *Mercury* astronauts depicted in *The Right Stuff*, crewmembers' morale and manly self-image suffered the more they perceived themselves as "Spam in a can." For Keeler, reassurance came with rustling petticoats. Female visitors entranced by the *Monitor* restored his sense

of self. Even after their desultory and ultimately inconclusive campaign on the James River in 1862, crewmembers discovered they had retained their luster in the eyes of dignitaries and their ladies. Indeed, in clambering up and down ship's ladders, ladies revealed (inadvertently?) more than a glimpse of petticoats, to the delight of Keeler and crew.

Maintaining public support, Mindell notes, was as important to the Union as the *Monitor's* combat effectiveness. At Lincoln's urging, the navy pursued a "low-risk" strategy for the *Monitor* as Union forces struggled in the field. Union difficulties encouraged sponsors to tout the *Monitor's* putative victory over the *Virginia* to persuade the navy to fund more monitor-class ironclads. Meanwhile, naval officers extolled its technical virtuosity both to intimidate the Confederacy and to impress foreign observers. An issue left unexplored by Mindell is whether the North exploited images of the *Monitor* to persuade the British that intervention in the war would incur undue risk to the Royal Navy.

Representations of the *Monitor*, Mindell concludes, demonstrated dissonance. Often referred to as a coffin by its beleaguered crew, who knew all-too-well its technical flaws and limitations, the *Monitor* was nonetheless portrayed in public as a miracle weapon. Its iconic status was in part carefully constructed and then safeguarded by its inventor, the naval architect John Ericsson, who attributed technical flaws to crew inexperience.

Ericsson had dissenters. Mindell revises conventional narratives that depict naval officers as purblind or hidebound Horatio Nelsons fighting a futile rearguard action against visionary inventors. In fact the "steam generation" of U.S. naval officers supported ironclads and other innovations. Yet it was not obvious which of several technical innovations would prove effective in combat. New machinery, moreover, undermined traditional naval practices while introducing disturbingly new forms of expertise.

Ericsson, Mindell shows, promoted a vision of naval warfare in which machines would supplant sailors, and engineering skill would obviate seamanship and warriors' gallantry. Visionary Ericsson was, but he was also strong-willed, close-minded, and arrogant. By insisting that engineering calculations outweighed first-hand experience at sea, he alienated even those naval officers who sympathized with mechanical expertise and technical knowledge. Small wonder he failed to create an infrastructure within the navy that would sustain the ironclad experiment.

Foreshadowing the postbellum navy's conservatism were ruminations

penned by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. With the *Monitor*, Hawthorne wrote, "All the pomp and splendor of naval warfare are gone by." Melville agreed, writing that sailors were becoming operatives of machines, and sea warfare a passionless struggle between engineers and their creations. Some naval officers doubtless agreed with Hawthorne's description of the *Monitor* as ugly, suspicious, and devilish. Officers with aristocratic pretensions could only see their self-image sinking as they became increasingly beholden to bookish engineers.

Towards the end of his stimulating book, Mindell makes suggestive use of Paul Fussell's concept of irony from *The Great War and Modern Memory* (curiously, Fussell's name is misspelled as Fussel or Fusell). The *Monitor* was in fact a harbinger of mass killing with machines that eroded notions of progress and bravery in Western industrialized society. Mindell's analysis here would have profited from John Ellis's *The Social History of the Machine Gun*. Robert O'Connell's *Of Arms and Men* is also missing from an otherwise useful bibliographic essay that concludes the book, as is a discussion of the *Monitor's* impact on naval doctrine along the lines of I.B. Holley's classic *Ideas and Weapons*. But errors and omissions are minor and do not detract from an original and stimulating study that raises serious questions about relations between warriors and their death-dealing machinery.

Singing the New Nation: How Music Shaped the Confederacy, 1861-1865. E. Lawrence Abel. New York: Stackpole Books, 1999, 352 pp. $29.95.

Reviewed by Ann Reagan, United States Air Force Academy

Since the mid-nineteenth century, music in the United States has been a curious mix of the European classical tradition and popular styles, including the music of immigrants and slaves, folk and concert, and that of many church denominations. The nineteenth century, with its waves of immigration after the 1848 revolutions in Europe, saw the establishment of orchestras and opera houses across the United States and into the western territories. Concomitant with performances of Wagner's music at the newly founded Metropolitan Opera in New York were the beginnings of jazz, resulting in a unique, complex musical life.

Because the United States is a true melting pot, it is often difficult to draw boundaries between art music and folk idioms and categorize varying styles. After all, even the notation and instruments of jazz had their roots in European music, and the growth of jazz was spurred by a surplus of affordable brass instruments left over after the Civil War, while the rhythms of Africa had freely mixed with European harmonies in the church services of slaves.

Within this milieu, there exists a special category which is rather more a study of sociology than of music per se. In *Singing the New Nation: How Music Shaped the Confederacy, 1861-1865*, E. Lawrence Abel provides a remarkably detailed and in-depth study of the music which accompanied troops into battle and comforted those left behind.

The range of music discussed is quite varied, so if ever there were a case of music reflecting the mores and needs of a society, one finds it here. However, the reader must take into consideration one caveat: this is not a typical musicological work. The author is a professor of psychology whose other publications reflect his interest in American history. There are no musical examples, and no theoretical analyses. In fact, the music itself is quite simple, often based on existing tunes, in simple strophic form, with its most interesting attributes being political and sociological.

Abel's study consists of three major parts. The first, predictably, centers on both the familiar and the obscure songs of the South in their various manifestations. Here is the story of "Dixie," a song written by Daniel Decatur Emmett for a minstrel show in 1859. It quickly

became a popular tune throughout America; to the composer's dismay, Jefferson Davis chose it, at his wife's urging, as the national anthem for the Confederacy. Another familiar example, still heard today, is "Maryland, My Maryland," which was called "the lesser Marseillaise." Abel attributes the popularity of this melody to Southerners' juxtaposition of their rebellion with the French Revolution. Especially popular with Louisiana's French citizens, the "Southern Marseillaise" (Armand Blackmar's lyrics) appeared at the outbreak of the war. By 1862, five editions existed, one even decorated with Confederate and French flags, side by side.

> Sons of the South awake to glory
> A thousand voices bid you rise,
> Your children, wives and grandsires hoary;
> Gaze on you now with trusting eyes
> Gaze on you now with trusting eyes,
>
> March on! March on!
> All hearts resolved on victory or death,
> March on! March on!
> All hearts resolved on victory or Death!

Abel also points out that Northern songs did not emphasize brotherhood and country in the same way. Southerners tended to think of the Confederacy as a Mother- or Fatherland, and according to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Southerners were descended from "persons belonging to the blood and race of the reigning family [in Great Britain], belonging to the race of Cavaliers." Northerners, in contrast, descended from Britons and Saxons defeated by Norman the Conqueror in 1066. Many songs, therefore, extol the honor of Southern gentlemen and the virtues of Southern women. Texts proclaim the relationship between the upper classes and society, their version of courtly behavior, and how their sense of history (and bloodlines) helped fuel the sentiments of the Confederacy. Clearly, they had the sole purpose of defending the status quo, and justifying the continuation of slavery. The "Southerners' Chaunt of Defiance" is a fine example of such sentiments:

> You have no blood such as ours
> For the shedding;

In the veins of Cavaliers
Was its heading
You have no such stately men
In your abolition den.

Not all lyrics were concerned with glory and sacrifice; some clearly intended to perpetuate the notion of racial inferiority. The so-called "Southern Song," published by an anonymous author, went as follows:

To a husband who quietly submits
To the negro equality sway,
The true Southern girl will not barter
Her heart and affections away.

We girls are all for a Union,
Where a marked distinction is laid
Between the rights of the mistress,
And those of the kinky-haired maid.

In the second major part of his book, Abel thoroughly explores the music of the war and the various compositions which had a distinct military purpose: to march, to rise in the morning, to raise morale, enhance camaraderie, or even to entertain. He points out that many of the troops were young, even teenaged, which made the music an even more important aspect of their lives.

Robert E. Lee once proclaimed, "I don't believe we can have an army without music," so it is not surprising that brass bands added to the pageantry of parades and marching in review. Officers even offered bonuses or supplements to talented musicians, urging them to join their units. Patriotic music heralded the entry of victorious troops (on both sides) as they marched into defeated towns. Foreign dignitaries and civilians were impressed; some parades were nothing short of spectacular, including generals at the head, followed by staff officers, with colonels and majors marching behind them. And, when the exhausted soldiers marched to Gettysburg, General Robert Emmett Rhodes ordered that music be played to lift their spirits and enable them to go forward. According to one eyewitness, the effect was "magical."

In the final part, Lawrence examines a lesser-known facet of this history: the music publishers of the Confederacy. Biographical infor-

mation on important publishers in numerous cities is included, as well as details on the lithographic industry and the problems publishers faced. One was the demand for paper, and another was finding engravers and printers. Most citizens in the trade worked for the government, where wages were higher than in private industry and where there was exemption from military service. Confederate music publishers, therefore, sometimes resorted to sailing blockade-runners to England and Scotland to find the expertise they needed.

Readers will also find two thorough appendices; the first includes a complete listing of all the regimental and brigade bands taken from diaries, memoirs, and regimental histories. A second comprehensive appendix lists the imprints of southern music publishers, complete with histories, ownership, locations, and important compositions published. Finally, there is a bibliography, which by itself is a fine contribution to the literature. These alone make the book an invaluable resource for those researching this topic, recommended to anyone interested in music and social history.

The Medic: Life and Death in the Last Days of World War II. Leo Litwak. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2001, 240 pp. $22.95.

Reviewed by Ceclia Morris, Washington, DC

Leo Litwak's timing could scarcely have been worse, for he came of age in the midst of the war that signaled a world gone mad on a scale unparalleled in human history. Drafted in February, 1943, just after completing his first year at the University of Michigan, he was sent to train as a medic in South Carolina. The son of Russian Jewish immigrants, he'd majored in literature and now was thrown with a mishmash of American boys that included Southern crackers who despised niggers, Jews, and smart-asses, though not necessarily in that order.

At a comparable age, my own generation and I, some 10 years later, had only to deal with the standard problems of late adolescence and the challenges of a big state university: a far wider range of people than we'd known before, unprecedented freedoms, new responsibilities, and so on. Litwak had to come to terms with terror, betrayal, deceit, and devastating failure, along with death at its most raw and hideous. In short, at a time when most American adolescents are simply growing up, Litwak came face to face with Evil.

Based on his World War II experience, *The Medic* is an intriguing variation on the autobiographical form. It grows from a memoir published in May, 1995, in the *New York Times Magazine's* issue celebrating the 50th anniversary of VE Day, but here he appropriates the standard techniques of fiction.

He dramatizes scenes rather than simply describing them; creates characters who are composites of the men and women he knew then; invents dialogue, merges impressions, modifies, compresses. And he does all this to convey more vividly what he calls "the transforming intensity of war—the shellings, the entrenching, the wounded and dying, the Sauer crossing, marching fire, the sex, the loot, the Paris leave, Marishka [a young Parisian prostitute], the encounter with the Russians, the war's end." Without glorifying or sentimentalizing war, he suggests the excitement a motley collection of men feel while banding together to defeat a true and common enemy.

The result seems to me wholly successful. Litwak is a master of the plain style: his sentences tend to be short, his descriptions spare, his words chosen with a diamond-cutter's precision. If one looked for antecedents, the leaner Hemingway might come to mind—the subject war

and its aftermath, all excrescences pared away. But Litwak is far more interested than his great predecessor in exploring the intricacies of the moral life, along with the cruelties of racism, anti-Semitism, and fascism, so that all through the book the reader finds cameo scenes that reflect yet another aspect of one or another of those hard facts of life.

Early on, for example, he has an exchange with a southerner named Cooper to whom he'd complained about their captain. Cooper told him "to pay no mind to the JB."

"What's a JB?"

"A Jew Bastard."

Lucca [the sergeant] said, "Roth's no Jew. He leads us to mass."

"He looks like an MOT," Cooper said.

I asked Cooper what an MOT was.

"Member of the Tribe."

"What do you mean he looks like an MOT?"

"You know. The nose and the big mouth."

"The captain's no Jew," Lucca said again.

"He might as well be," said Cooper.

Later I asked Lucca if Cooper knew I was a Jew.

"What does that redneck know besides rednecks? Don't worry about the captain, Leo. I'll keep him in line."

"Cooper remained my friend," Litwak adds. "It didn't matter to him when I told him I was a Jew. I bullied him and cursed him but couldn't alter his map of the world where the Jews he didn't know were located at the outermost boundary among the serpents and the dragons."

Nor does *The Medic* offer material for a new "Papa" cult—a cool style that signals a sophisticated nod to intractable cruelty and injustice. For Litwak doesn't offer himself as a romantic figure but, on the contrary, unsparingly probes his own vulnerabilities. In the prologue, for instance, he describes a 1960s experience at the Esalen Institute in southern California, where he agreed to drop the usual journalistic distance—he was there to do a magazine piece for *The New York Times*—and during an encounter workshop found himself howling over the memory of a young German he'd watched his buddies wantonly kill. For more than 20 years he'd blotted out his memories of slaughter, and now he knew that this had stunted him emotionally.

As the book progresses, we see the young Leo hanging out with a guy he knew was a crook and con man because he too "wanted to be carefree and pitiless, able to cross into forbidden territory." While struggling

with a young man's sexual confusion, he shows far more sympathy than most male writers with women's special vulnerability in times of war.

The longest literary work I know that powerfully limns the horrors of war is also the oldest: Homer's *The Iliad*. The shortest is Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," which ends by warning the reader:

> If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
> Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
> Bitten as the cud
> Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
> *Pro patria mori*.

Leo Litwak's *The Medic* falls between and stands up handsomely to the competition.

Please send book review inquiries to Lt Col Mark S. Braley at mark.braley@usafa.af.mil.

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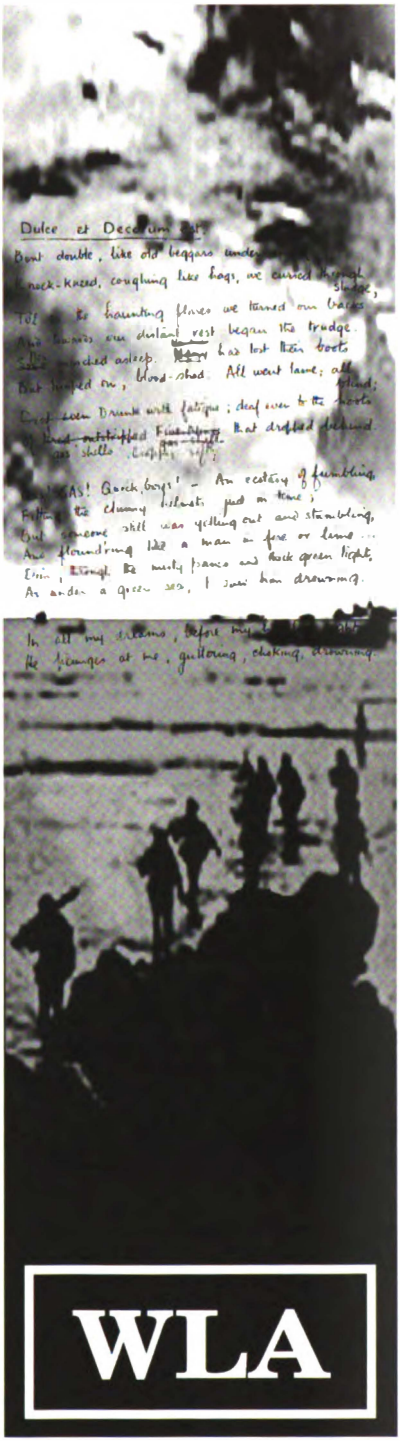
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– Robert Hauptman, Editor,
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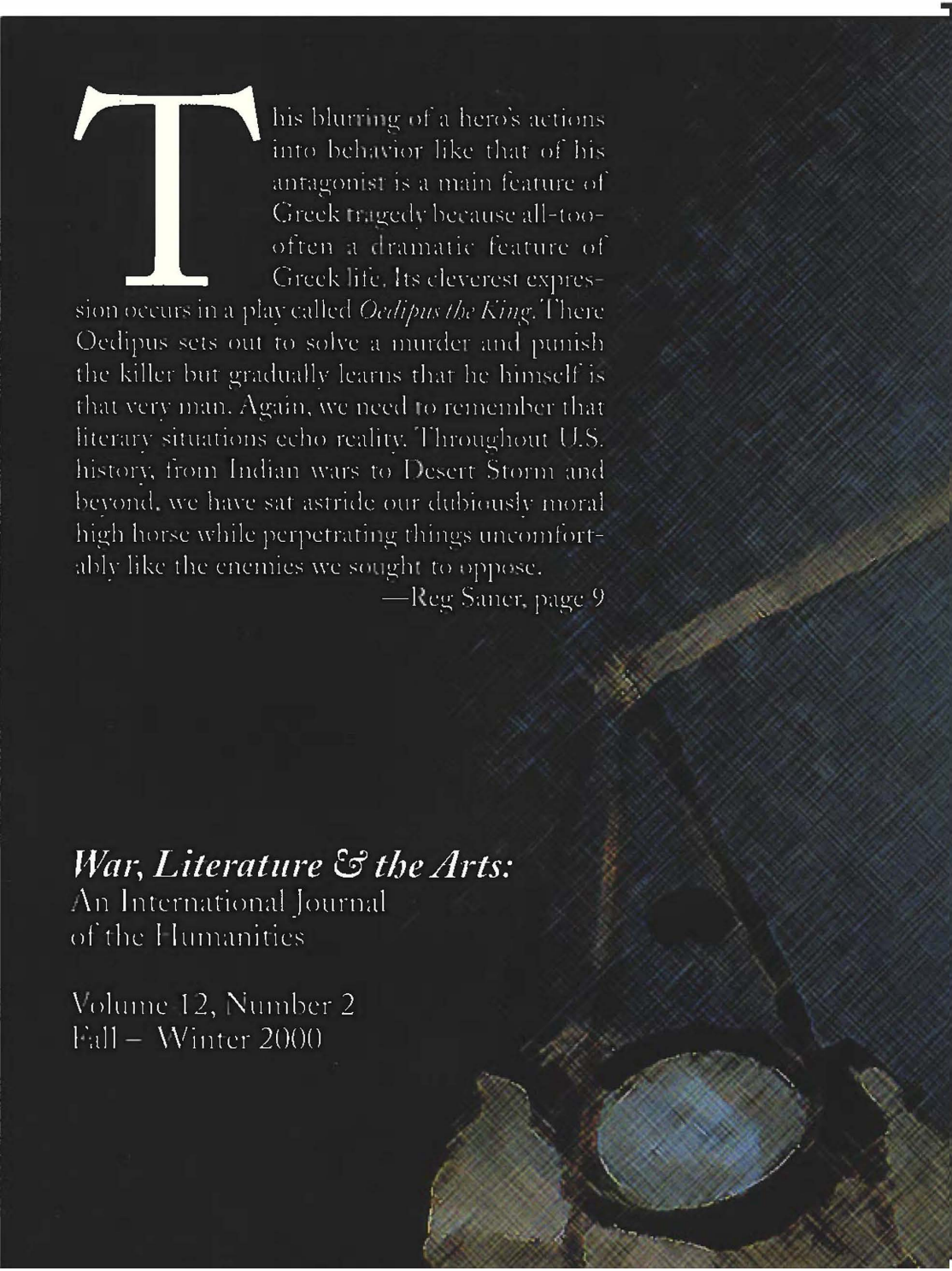
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This blurring of a hero's actions into behavior like that of his antagonist is a main feature of Greek tragedy because all-too-often a dramatic feature of Greek life. Its cleverest expression occurs in a play called *Oedipus the King*. There Oedipus sets out to solve a murder and punish the killer but gradually learns that he himself is that very man. Again, we need to remember that literary situations echo reality. Throughout U.S. history, from Indian wars to Desert Storm and beyond, we have sat astride our dubiously moral high horse while perpetrating things uncomfortably like the enemies we sought to oppose.

—Reg Saner, page 9

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