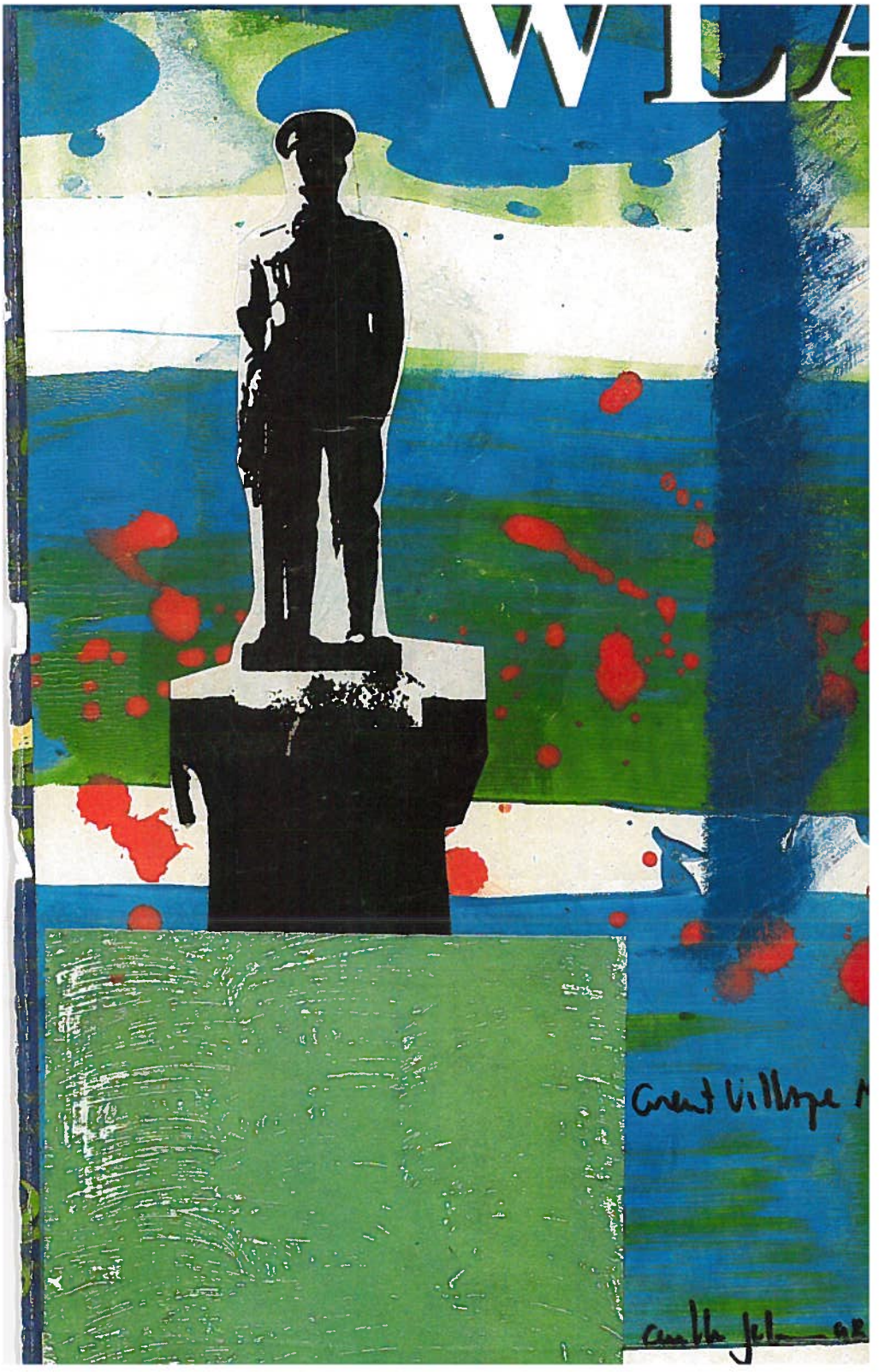
WLA
Great Village

Cover artist Kathleen Carlton Johnson is a poet and visual artist who has completed a showing of her paintings in Sacramento, California. Her graphic art has appeared in *The McGuffin* and *The Connecticut Review*. Currently living in Northern Michigan, her rendition of the Great War memorial in Great Village, Nova Scotia resulted from a journey to Elizabeth Bishop's childhood home places.



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

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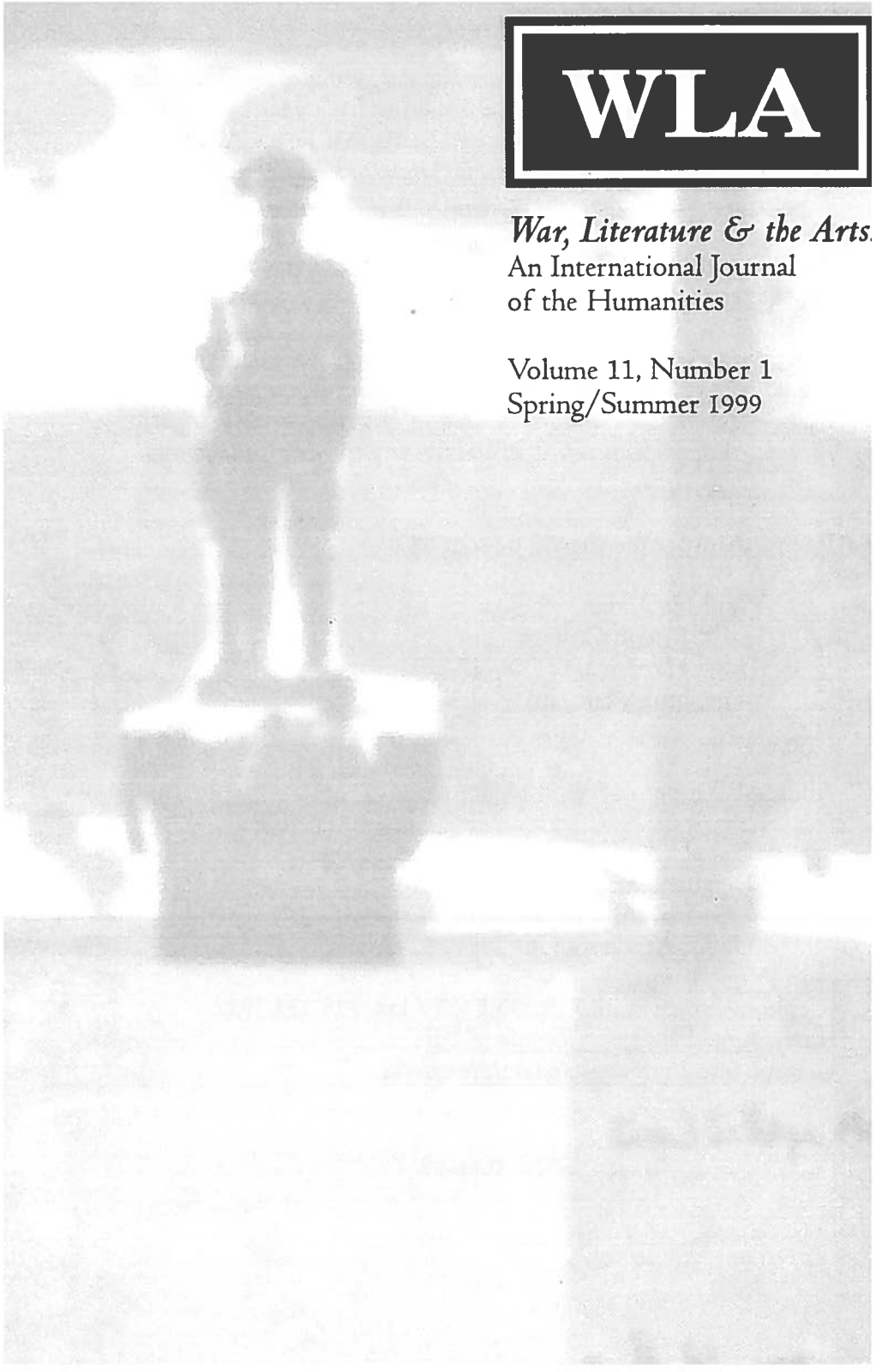

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"The Middle Generation" of American Poetry

Wars in the Private and Public Realms

❦

When she was five, the poet Elizabeth Bishop saw her widowed mother for the last time. It was 1916 and Canada was at war. As children do, she protected herself from reality by pretending Gertrude had died: "My mother was not dead. She was in a sanatorium, in another prolonged 'nervous breakdown.' I didn't know then," she later wrote in "The Country Mouse," "and still don't, whether it was from shame I lied, or from a hideous craving for sympathy, playing up my sad Romantic plight. But the feeling of self-distaste, whatever it came from, was only too real." She was never again to see her mother, who was immured in the sanatorium in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia until her death in 1934. As contributor Sandra Barry tell us, in a violent obsessive episode in the spring of 1916, Gertrude Boomer Bishop believed *she* was the cause of the First World War. Now, in essence, an orphan, young Elizabeth began the first of the many uprootings in her life, as she was spirited away to her father's family in Worcester, Massachusetts. War and madness, war and suffering, war and dislocation: the intimate interconnections between the political and the personal, the public and the private were crystallized in Bishop's traumatic childhood.

This issue of WLA features, as its special focus, seven essays on the effects of the two World Wars and the Cold War on the life and works of Bishop and her contemporaries— a nexus of mid-century poets we have come to call "The Middle Generation." These poets— including Bishop, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Gwendolyn Brooks— have come into prominence since the 1940s for their ability to give utterance to either private confessionals (especially Lowell and Bishop) or public statements

about race (Brooks) and war (Jarrell). What these seven essays do is underscore how valuing these poets has, in effect, reinforced a bifurcation between private and public, personal and political.

But these convenient classifications of The Middle Generation, as either public or private poets, ill-serves a fuller understanding of how these poets, however much they are "private" on the surface, in effect, may at least also offer a meditation on, or critique of, the phenomenon of war in the twentieth century. Our seven essayists together provide insight into how the experience of war in the twentieth century smashes the boundaries of the private and the public. Camille Roman's essay on Bishop's almost— but not quite— disabling tenure at the Library of Congress, at the height of anti-Communist hysteria, exemplifies a current critical trend in historicizing the supposedly "private" lyric voices of The Middle Generation. Bishop's anomalous status as a government official, a public servant, was a source of the utmost private anguish. Going further back in time, to the Great War, Sandra Barry and Gary Fountain give due attention to the upheavals occasioned by the events of 1914-18 to recreate the parallel traumas between Bishop's childhood and a world undergoing Total War. Indeed, Bishop understood the degree to which modern war provides a fundamental way of knowing about the self. By the same token, Thomas Travisano explores how Lowell's meditations on war are densely interwoven with a history of personal family conflicts. The domestic *agon* in the panelled drawing rooms of Boston's Back Bay was, for Lowell, a kind of refined "boot camp" training for a high profile, and troublingly manic and exhibitionistic, conscientious objector and Cold Warrior in the public realm.

On the other hand, as Steven Gould Axelrod shows in his comprehensive survey of The Middle Generation's response to World War II, public poets like Brooks, who speak on behalf of marginalized or excluded groups, can also embed more personal responses to the destructive effects of war, even ventriloquizing across gender boundaries (as Brooks does in "Negro Hero"). In her essay on Jarrell's ambivalent responses to a war which covered its heroic Allied combatants with both shame and glory,

Lorrie Goldensohn analyzes how, at the level of the individual male body, the State at War both creates and destroys the private individual's identity as a participant in the geopolitical realm. The Ball Turret Gunner is only the most well-known of the individual victim-heroes in Jarrell's pantheon of Everymen who exist, and perish, in public history, by offering the most personal, and private, of testimonials to the havoc wrought by what e.e. cummings punningly dubbed "this busy monster, manunkind."

This special focus on The Middle Generation grew out of sessions at a 1997 conference devoted to Elizabeth Bishop at Worcester Polytechnic. We were mindful of the appropriately rich irony of convening a celebration of Bishop at this venerable institution of technological education in her first place of motherless exile. Bishop's poetry, since it responded to wars from the Great War ("In the Waiting Room") to Vietnam ("12 O'Clock News"), is compelling for its artful, and subversive, engagement with the fusion of public and private history in the lyric poem. By placing her at the center of a generation, we can see how her contemporaries also used poetry as the vehicle to articulate how poets, as witnesses to history and warfare, also exist in, and are formed by, the wars of this, our most blood-soaked century. Special thanks go to Camille Roman and Thomas Travisano for sparking the special feature focus of this issue into being. And gratitude to Michigan artist Kathleen Carlton Johnson for her rendition of the Great War memorial in Great Village, Nova Scotia— a poignant link between Bishop's girlhood village and the world of war to which the poet was to bear witness as an adult. ❦

— D.A. Boxwell
Guest Editor

STEVEN GOULD AXELROD

THE MIDDLE GENERATION AND WWII
Jarrell, Shapiro, Brooks, Bishop, Lowell

❦

for my father, Dr. Bernard Axelrod (US Army Air Corps 1942-46)
and in memory of my mother, Martha Gould Axelrod
their eyes saw

❦

The meanings of WWII seem clearer now, more than half a century after the event.[1] We understand what the agreements are and what disagreements still remain. We've moved into a period similar to the one that occurred about a half century after the Civil War, during which many tributes were created or enacted: Augustus St. Gaudens' memorial to the 54th Massachusetts regiment of free African American soldiers; Daniel Chester French's Lincoln Memorial; Gutzon Borglum's Sitting Lincoln; the 1913 restaging of Pickett's charge; the Confederate Memorials at Arlington and Stone Mountain; the Lincoln Highway; and even, in a sense, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage.* In a similar vein, we have recently witnessed or are now witnessing the completion of the Holocaust Museum and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, DC; President Clinton's commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day in Normandy; the publication of Studs Terkel's *"The Good War"* and Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*; and the release of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line.* All of these recent commemorative efforts reveal a national wish to recall and to re-narrativize one of the climactic events of American and world history, in which an American generation now slowly passing from the scene sacrificed hundreds of thousands of its young in order to intervene successfully and—many of us believe— beneficially in history. The impulse is to try

to understand anew a trauma in our past as well as to honor a heroic generation while many of its members are still alive.

During the war itself, however, narratives of support and dissent were not so clearly defined. In the cultural confusion that accompanies the political and military fog of war, American poets occupied a diverse range of subject positions, arguing with each other, past each other, and with themselves. They produced a variety of texts whose complexities and contradictions are at odds with the simpler structures of even our most sophisticated present-day narratives of WWII. In this essay, I propose to look closely at texts by five poets belonging to what has been termed "the Middle Generation."[2] These poets, all born between 1910 and 1920, occupy a literary space between the great Modernist enterprise of Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and Langston Hughes (all of whom were born between 1874 and 1902 and who published their classic texts from the teens through the forties) and the Postmodern project of such poets as Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Sylvia Plath, Amiri Baraka, Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Frank Bidart, Wanda Coleman, Charles Bernstein, and John Yau (all of whom were born between 1926 and 1950 and who produced their classic texts after 1955). Nevertheless, the "Middle Generation" poets do not so much stand between the two (Post)Modernisms as beside them. Whereas the Modernists and Postmodernists tend to foreground language, pattern, and style, the Middle Generation poets foreground public and private history. Their texts oscillate between the space of appearance (the *polis*) and the space of introspection and domesticity (the *oikia*).[3] Ranging in age from about twenty-five to thirty-five in the early 1940s, and prepared to contemplate culture in both its communal and personal aspects, the Middle Generation poets were especially well positioned to make poetry of the Second World War experience. Their poems reflected the conditions and stakes of the war back to their readers. The significances they identified were more immediate and cathected than the schematic notions we are apt to repeat today.

Certainly other generations of poets wrote importantly about WWII. Among the older poets, Marianne Moore's eloquent and turbulent "In Distrust of Merits," William Carlos

Williams' chilling "These" and elegiac "Paterson V," Hilda Doolittle's "The Walls Do Not Fall," T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," Charles Resnikoff's "Holocaust," Langston Hughes' many poems combining anti-Nazi and anti-Jim Crow themes, and Richard Eberhart's "The Fury of Aerial Bombardment" and "Brotherhood of Men" come to mind, along with—from the other side—Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos*. Among the younger poets we might think of James Dickey's "The Firebombing," Lewis Simpson's "Carentan O Carentan" and "The Battle," W. D. Snodgrass' *The Fuehrer Bunker*, poems about the Holocaust by William Heyen and Sylvia Plath, poems of the Japanese-American internment by Mitsuye Yamada, and John Yau's beautiful "Cenotaph." But the Middle Generation composed most of the discordant poems through which the age represented itself to itself.[4] If we wish more than a superficial or presentist gloss on the history of WWII, we do well to listen to those voices again.

Of the five poets I shall consider here, two were soldiers (Randall Jarrell and Karl Shapiro); two were civilians (Elizabeth Bishop and Gwendolyn Brooks); and one was a conscientious objector (Robert Lowell).[5] Jarrell wrote the best-known and most devastating poem to emerge from the war: "The Death of the Ball-Turret Gunner." The war poems of Shapiro, though little read today, were widely disseminated and appreciated during the war itself. Brooks composed the most resonant evocations of African American soldiers in WWII: "Negro Hero" and "Gay Chaps at the Bar." Bishop wrote the most dazzling critique of the war in "The Roosters," which she immediately complicated in "The Fish." And Lowell wrote perhaps the most complex and unsettling poem of all: "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket." Typical of Middle Generation poetics, many of these poems place human beings at the center of their discourse, and all of them put public and private realms in relation to each other. Moreover, they all refuse to glorify war. Despite these similarities, the poems provide sharply divergent perspectives on the war. Their hallmark as a group is not unity but difference.

Randall Jarrell (1914-1965), a sergeant in the Army Air Corps and a celestial navigation tower operator at Davis Monthan Field in Tucson, Arizona, never saw combat himself.[6] Yet his biogra-

pher William Pritchard suggests that his "safe distance from battle helped make his poems happen" (110). That is so because Jarrell did not write about himself but about the airmen he observed and, even more, about what he imagined would happen to them. The keynote of his nine poems about Air Corps flyers is an ironic and haunting interplay between experience and separation. Danger explodes in their faces, yet they remain eerily apart from the earth, from the enemy, from each other, from the blood of battle. In these texts WWII functions as a metonym for the impersonal and destructive elements of modernity itself. The poems suggest the detached and mediated nature of modern air war, in which combatants sit nestled in a technological cocoon. The poems explore the aspect of war that would eventually, in the Persian Gulf War, come to resemble a video game, but one in which real human beings die.

"The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" exemplifies this ironic juxtaposition of distance and immediacy, game and reality, modernity and ancient sacrifice (*Complete Poems* 144). The poem reads in its entirety:

> From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
> And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
> Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
> I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
> When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

This brief dramatic monologue is a far cry from Horace's "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country" (*Odes* 3.2.13). The speaker resembles an objective reporter more than he does a patriotic or ennobled warrior. The poem reveals what has happened to the discourse of war in the twentieth century, after Wilfred Owen and Ernest Hemingway, after the Somme and the Normandy invasion. What it shows is not the glory of war but the random horror.

Paralleling the fall from innocence in Eden, the "I" asserts that he "fell" from his mother's womb to the care of the State and then to the womb or "belly" of a bomber plane. The State has become a modern "double" or opposite of the life-giving mother—not just a "harbinger of death," as Rank and Freud had it (Rank 76; Freud, "Uncanny" 235), but death's active

agent. Chilled at an altitude of 30,000 feet, sweating and perhaps urinating with fear, the "I" is less an individual human consciousness than a wet and terrified furry animal, a "foetus in the womb" (as Jarrell puts it in a note [8]), or Eliot's "infinitely gentle / Infinitely suffering thing" ("Preludes"). He wakes from his "dream of life" only to encounter the "nightmare" of history, of combat, of violent death. The poem's final verse resembles the eerie moments in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* when we realize that the dead do speak— and indeed narrate the very words we are hearing. The shock of death thus appears at the heart of Jarrell's poem as a discursive event readers are forced to undergo as they read. War death is enacted as a textual trap from which there is no escape. Because readers generally identify themselves with narrators, an effect this poem does everything to encourage, it is we ourselves who symbolically die. We are forced to feel what was to be a young man blown to smithereens in the ball turret of a bomber plane. We move with him from the maternal womb to the brutal, phallic order of planes that bomb, guns that kill, and hoses that scour. The reader must share the young gunner's journey from being a barely conscious animal, at once hardly human and all too human, to being mere physical debris, aborted blood and body parts needing to be washed away. The poem's succinct interplay of separation and immediacy, modernity and sacrifice, ends not with a whimper but a bang followed by silence.

Another poem in which a dead airman speaks is the eloquent "Losses," which evokes both the pity of individual death and the sheer scale of the casualties (145). The narrator, at once a singular "I" and a pluralized Everyman, again inhabits the body of a naïve young man, really a boy:

> We died like aunts or pets or foreigners.
> (When we left high school nothing else had died
> For us to figure we had died like.)

Like the previous poem, "Losses" emphasizes ironies: the soldier's physical involvement in and psychic separation from his actions; youthful unawareness juxtaposed with sophisticated technological power. Such ironies appear most starkly toward the end of the poem:

In bombers named for girls, we burned
The cities we had learned about in school—
Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among
The people we had killed and never seen.
When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;
When we died they said, "Our casualties were low."
They said, "Here are the maps"; we burned the cities.

We see here, again, a Thoreauvian anti-institutionalism, a skepticism or even cynicism toward the State, here represented by the faceless and nameless "they." The war-making State is a machine designed to use the individual for its own ends and to trivialize individual losses. As in "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," the narrator does not seem to understand why he was called on to fight, why he agreed to do so, or why he died. His death is equated to the deaths of the civilians he had "killed and never seen." The poem ends in mutual incomprehension as the bombed cities ask: "Why are you dying? / We are satisfied if you are; but why did I die?"

Jarrell consistently de-heroicizes WWII. In his discursive realm, soldiers and civilians function as automatons, pawns, and victims, never as conscious agents. The war for them is a dream. They themselves are more dreamed than dreaming; and the boundaries between dream and actuality, life and death, map and territory, one soldier and another, and one nation and another, are forever dissolving. For Jarrell the war is suffused with pathos and blankness, and it reflects a dehumanized drive quite apart from those who fight, kill, and die in it. The poems de-idealize almost everything concerned with the war. They pay no attention to principles of patriotism, democracy, and self-defense, and they postulate individual soldiers as dream-like and interchangeable. What they highlight— in the manner of Herman Melville, Stephen Crane, and Wilfred Owen— is the sheer carnage of war. Jarrell's themes are the irony and sorrow of war, the impersonality of modern warfare, and the stunning losses of civilians and of young soldiers who had not yet learned to live.

Apart from the poems about crew members on aircraft and carriers, Jarrell wrote thirty-five additional poems about soldiers, civilians, and children during WWII. The poems written in the first years of the war foreground the daily activities of

American enlisted men: "the night K. P.'s / Bent over a G. I. can of beets," the mail calls, the mopping of corridors (147, 170, 174). These texts articulate the soldiers' moods of resignation, boredom, and depression, and their quiet sense of futility. Although the poems attempt to give attention to individuals who seem to have become mere cogs in the war machine, the characters are frequently abstract or composite, which has the ironic effect of further dissolving their individuality. A typical poem in this genre is "Lullaby," in which the generalized enlisted man, like the airmen in "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" and "Losses," silently sacrifices his existence to "the State" and its nameless representatives, "they":

> For wars his life and half a world away
> The soldier sells his family and days.
> He learns to fight for freedom and the State;
> He sleeps with seven men within six feet. . . .
>
> Recalled in dreams or letters, else forgot,
> His life is smothered like a grave, with dirt;
> And his dull torment mottles like a fly's
> The lying amber of the histories. (169)

These poems appropriately evoke the melancholy and bitterness of men (never women) plunged into regimentation, routine, and the possibility of a premature death. Nevertheless, they capture little of the soldiers' humor, camaraderie, and distinctiveness—the qualities that make the life of men in groups tolerable and recognizably human.

In the last years of the war and in the years following it, Jarrell wrote poems focusing on American military prisoners and on the victims and survivors of Nazi death camps. "A Camp in the Prussian Forest," "In the Camp There Was One Alive," "Jews at Haifa," and "Protocols" are among the first poems about the Holocaust written by a major American poet. "A Camp in the Prussian Forest" begins:

> I walk beside the prisoners to the road.
> Load on puffed load,

Their corpses, stacked like sodden wood,
Lie barred or galled with blood

By the charred warehouse. No one comes today
In the old way
To knock the fillings from their teeth. . . . (167)

The "I" observes that a million souls were killed in this camp: "Here men were drunk like water, burnt like wood." He makes a grave marker in the shape of a star of David, but thinks it befouled by the "smoke," the "ash," and the "filmy trash" still seeming to curl from the "monstrous chimney" of the crematorium (167-68). Finding no words or actions fitting for the scene of horror, the narrator-observer is reduced to compulsive and tragic laughter:

. . . I laugh aloud
Again and again;
The star laughs from its rotting shroud
Of flesh. O star of men! (168)

This is surely one of the most powerful poems Jarrell wrote about the war. Yet the "I" remains almost entirely uncharacterized, as do the murdered Jews. The narrator attempts to connect himself to the seen and the felt, to become more than the distanced, dazed subject familiar from Jarrell's other war poems, but his success in inhabiting his own psyche and in finding a language for what he has encountered remains limited. Such silences as his, however, are endemic in Holocaust poems by Nelly Sachs, Paul Celan, Sylvia Plath, and Dan Pagis. The holes in rhetoric suggest the impossibility of writing poetry "after Auschwitz."[7]

Jarrell, a child of divorce who grew up "as alone as children ever are" (*Letters* 64), wrote his most enduring war poems about issues of separation and loss. William Carlos Williams wrote that "Divorce is / the sign of knowledge in our time" (*Paterson* I), and that was certainly true of Jarrell's own way of articulating experience. His sense of modern war's technological and social separations taps into his traumatic memories of being "betrayed and confined" as a child (Flynn 17). WWII provided conditions perfectly adapted to the kind of poem, and the kind of

pain, he was prepared to write. The words he wrote describing one character, a pilot, could be applied to many: "He is alone; and hangs in knowledge / Slight, separate, estranged: a lonely eye" (*Complete Poems* 153). Jarrell's strongest poems about WWII construct isolated and denatured voices confronting a landscape of injury and death that they are involved in yet apart from, "trapped in pain" (153).

Karl Shapiro (born 1913), a nascent poet drafted into the Army in March 1941, soon found himself attached to a medical unit stationed first in Australia and then in New Guinea.[8] In his autobiography he asserts that he was not a "war poet" but "a poet who happened into a war, and how could you write poetry in the middle of a war and leave the war out?" (*Younger Son* 167). Nevertheless, it was precisely as a war poet that Shapiro made his mark. *V-Letter*, published in 1944 while its author was a corporal serving in New Guinea, won the Pulitzer Prize and was an immediate critical and popular success. Shapiro's later poetry and prose, devolving to egotism and crankiness, gradually lost him his audience, and the early poetry was ultimately swallowed up in the wreck he made of his career. Yet *V-Letter* and *Trial of a Poet* (published in 1947) contained the most popular and rewarded war poems of their time. They deserve another look.

Shapiro's war poems are at once more conventional than Jarrell's and more rhetorically bifurcated. They veer between hard-headed reportage— which, as Hemingway recommended in *A Farewell to Arms*, eschews such grand abstractions as "glory" and "honor"— and a sentimentalized discourse of national ideals and simplified personal emotions. The lachrymose word "tear," always a danger signal, appears with Henry Mackenziean regularity. Yet despite such manifestations of the poet as a "man of feeling," the poems are remarkably free of compassion or empathy. Hemingway's Jake Barnes recommends "irony and pity" as a Modernist response to war. Shapiro's poems show little of either quality. What they do offer, in their best passages, is complex and specific observation of the events and scenes of the war in the Pacific.

"Troop Train" evokes and then contemplates the train ride of soldiers to their war-bound ships (*Collected Poems* 57). The poem begins with a burst of vital description:

It stops the town we come through. Workers raise
Their oily arms in good salute and grin.
Kids scream as at a circus. Business men
Glance hopefully and go their measured way.
And women standing at their dumbstruck door
More slowly wave and seem to warn us back,
As if a tear blinding the course of war
Might once dissolve our iron in their sweet wish.

This writing is at once more boisterous, more heterosexual, and more overtly sentimental than anything in Jarrell. Are those feminine "tears" that threaten to dissolve the masculine wills of "iron" a wish-fulfillment fantasy— or a projection of the narrator's feelings, across a rigidly sex-stereotyped border, from the male self to the female admiring gaze? Whichever the case, the figures of maternal care are almost immediately transformed in the soldiers' imagination into sexual objects sprayed with the men's "catcalls" and "leers." Once deprived of their female audience and spectacle, however, the soldiers, in the narrator's representation, lose strength and purpose:

And on through crummy continents and days,
Deliberate, grimy, slightly drunk we crawl,
The good-bad boys of circumstance and chance,
Whose bucket-helmets bang the empty wall. . . .

In the second part of the poem, the evocation of the soldiers' departure and deflation yields to a two-part meditation on their fate. Initially the narrator contemplates the possibility of the soldiers' deaths: "Luck also travels and not all come back." Then his thoughts shift from death to "that survival which is all our hope." The poem ends with a vision of the flag and peace:

. . . O flag! At last
The place of life found after trains and death—
Nightfall of nations brilliant after war.

This is a kind of uplift almost unknown in serious twentieth-century writing and certainly absent from Jarrell's somber, ascetic

lyrics. The conflicting motives and troubling emotions "Troop Train" so powerfully evokes dissipate here in platitudes. The poem jumps the track and smashes up just before reaching its destination— a pattern of repressing a destabilizing insight that recurs in many of Shapiro's poems.

Although the poems in *V-Letter* effectively suggest the day-to-day quality of Army life in the South Pacific, they often succumb in the end to a drive for ringing affirmation. As Hilene Flanzbaum rightly says, "In *V-Letter*, Shapiro steadfastly attaches himself to an idea of American unity, victory, and cultural vitality" (259). The poem called "Aside," for example, focuses on "mail-day," almost in the manner of Jarrell's "Mail Call"; but it soon transfers attention from the "bundles of letters" and "our faces / Of total absorption" to higher considerations: "In agony too there is time / For the growth of the rose of the spirit astir in the slime" (*V-Letter* 3-4). In his introduction to *V-Letter*, Shapiro writes that he is preoccupied with "the spiritual progress or retrogression of the man in war" (vi), and that interest often interrupts and weakens the powerful current of the verse. In "The Gun" a soldier addresses his gun, at first almost erotically— "the kiss of your blast is upon me, O friend"— but ultimately in a moralistic and even legalistic manner: "I absolve from your name / The exaction of murder, my gun. It is I who have killed" (*Collected Poems* 67). In "Full Moon: New Guinea" the sound of falling bombs disturbs the soldiers' sleep:

> The small burr of the bombers in our ear
> Tickles our rest; we rise as from a nap
> And take our helmets absently and meet,
> Prepared for any spectacle or mishap,
> At trenches fresh and narrow at our feet.
> (*Collected Poems* 66)

The poem concludes in a tone of awkward, though for once not uplifting, eloquence: "Breathe and wait, / The bombs are falling darkly for our fate." "The Leg," in which a soldier's limb has been amputated, begins harrowingly, but ends, like so many of the poems, in rhetorical high gear (82). The amputee prays to God for the "understanding" that would allow him to say that

even "if Thou take me angrily in hand / And hurl me to the shark, I shall not die!"

The major poem of *V-Letter* manifests the same strengths and weaknesses as the shorter poems. "Elegy for a Dead Soldier" commences with a richly detailed description of the funeral of a fallen soldier, in which "a white sheet on the tail-gate of a truck / Becomes an altar" and the blood of the fallen man recalls "hibiscus that a marching man will pluck / To stick into his rifle or his hat" (*Collected Poems* 89-92). The narrator recalls seeing the soldier die while being transfused: "And then the strangulation, the last sound" (90). Scorning quantified methods of understanding death, for "nothing political" impinges on "this single casualty," the narrator attempts to depict him in his uniqueness. A man of few ideals, the soldier was a gun-loving racist, yet no one can say what he would have meant to his children or how he might have advanced the causes of "toleration" or "peace" (91-92). The burial and mourning necessarily take little time because "we know that others on tomorrow's roads / Will fall, ourselves perhaps, the man beside" (92). Up to this point the poem is sharply detailed in its scene-drawing and convincingly objective in its representation of the fallen man. Yet the soldier, in common with the other characters in Shapiro's war poems, is not allowed to speak in anything approaching his own voice. Absorbed by the narrator's observations and meditations, these monological texts provide no space for the voice of the other. And whatever conflicts manifest themselves in the monologues are ruthlessly pruned and reshaped by the end. "Elegy for a Dead Soldier," like "Troop Train," stills its tensions in a jaw-dropping display of conventional wisdom. An "epitaph" advises the reader:

> And passing here, if you can lift your eyes
> Upon a peace kept by a human creed,
> Know that one soldier has not died in vain.

One need not be a soldier or a poet to write lines like that, merely a person with a pencil. In his war poems Shapiro has an evil genius for undoing his own best effort, for trying to spoil all the good that has come before, for repressing the frightful insights his poems continually approach.

Shapiro's subsequent volume, *Trial of a Poet*, includes two poems that bring his poetic discourse of war around full circle. The first, "Homecoming," serves as a bookend with "Troop Train," describing the soldiers' return from war (*Collected Poems* 95). The narrator remorsefully asks "forgiveness of the things that thrust / Shame and all death on millions and on me." The ship reeks with "the stench of humiliation"; some of the returning men are dead or insane; and even the majority, "untouched by steel / Or psychoneurosis," stare "with eyes in rut." This is an amazingly inglorious, sullen, and guilt-ridden homecoming. It points to monsters in the male soldiers' psyches. Yet once more, all that is powerful, original, and strange in the poem dissipates at the conclusion. When the ship enters American waters, a "terrible joy" liberates the soldiers in a "burst of love."

"The Conscientious Objector" in a sense supplements all of the poems of *V-Letter*, for it pays surprising tribute to those who opposed the war (96). Indeed, it is more positive about conscientious objectors than any of the poems on that topic by Robert Lowell, who was himself one. The poem concludes:

> Well might the soldier kissing the hot beach
> Erupting in his face damn all your kind.
> Yet you who saved neither yourselves nor us
> Are equally with those who shed the blood
> The heroes of our cause. Your conscience is
> What we come back to in the armistice.

In his war poems Shapiro, like Jarrell, refuses to castigate the enemy. The words "Japan," "Germany," and their variants do not even appear. In a similar vein, this poem insists that the war-hater is just as "heroic" as the warrior. Shapiro's early texts express an interest in reconciliation rather than division. Yet "The Conscientious Objector," so humanly attractive in its spirit, displays the same limitations that mark the war poems. It simplifies and reduces, finally closing out competing voices, ideas, and feelings. It speaks confidently of what "your" conscience is and what "we" come back to. Each is one transcendent thing, and the narrator knows its essence. The boisterous human contact of the opening sections of "Troop Train," the seedy modernity of trucks and ships and the moments of terror and

confusion in other poems— those passages of discursive, psychological, and cultural power regularly get overwhelmed by a wave of "spiritual progress" at the end. The duality of Shapiro's WWII poems is that they promise to give us vivid images of the war, and then they airbrush the images that begin to appear.

Gwendolyn Brooks (born 1917) was, like the other poets discussed in this essay, a fledgling poet in her mid-twenties when WWII began.[9] Unlike the others, however, she was a black poet in a dominant culture that, consciously or unconsciously, marked blacks and women as minor or anomalous artists, inhabiting at best the galleys and domestic spaces of the ship of poetry. Up to that time, for example, there had never been a Pulitzer Prize awarded to an African American writer, though many such writers were more than worthy. Although she took no formal part in the war, Brooks had male friends and relations who served in the armed forces, some of whom ultimately died in combat. Unlike other civilian poets such as Roethke, Berryman, and Schwartz, she had a vital interest in the war and a stake in an Allied victory. At the same time, her personal relationships with black soldiers, as well as her own position as a struggling young black poet, gave her a consuming interest in the role race played in the military. Like her precursor Langston Hughes, she portrayed the war as dual: a battle waged against foreign totalitarian forces and a battle waged against white supremacist practices within the American armed forces themselves. Like Hughes, she noted the bitter irony of battling injustice and racism abroad while maintaining only somewhat less virulent varieties at home. Also like Hughes, she sought to foreground that political irony as a weapon for social change— as a tool for making the armed forces and, ultimately, American society more just. As Hughes wrote in 1944, in the voice of a black G. I:

> You can't say I didn't fight
> To smash the Fascists' might.
> You can't say I wasn't with you
> In each battle.
> As a soldier, and a friend.
> When this war comes to an end,

Will you herd me in a Jim Crow car
Like cattle?

Or will you stand up like a man
At home and take your stand
For Democracy? ("Will V-Day be Me-Day Too?")

The effort eventually bore fruit as President Truman culminated a series of incremental improvements during the war years by integrating the armed forces in 1948, as the United States Supreme Court integrated civilian public spaces in the mid-1950s, and as the black-led Civil Rights movement accomplished additional progressive change in the succeeding decades. Writing at about the same time as Hughes, Brooks wrote two major poems about the war that highlighted its racial dilemmas: the well-known "Negro Hero" and the less-read but even more complex "Gay Chaps at the Bar," both of which appeared in Brooks' first book, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945). She returned to the topic once more in "Memorial to Ed Bland," which appeared in her next book, *Annie Allen* (1949), the book that brought down a racial barrier by winning a Pulitzer Prize for its author.

"Negro Hero" evokes the life story of Dorie Miller, a black galley cook in a ship bombed at Pearl Harbor (*Blacks* 48-50). Consigned to the lower decks by the Navy's discriminatory practice of the time, Miller violated orders by going on deck, shooting down several of the attacking planes, and saving the life of a crew member (Kent 71; Schweik 117). Years later Miller died in battle. Brooks' poem takes the form of a dramatic monologue spoken by a black soldier who resembles Miller. He speaks in six- or seven-line free-verse stanzas, in which the third to last line and the very brief last line rhyme, a single harmonic grace note in a text of discord. The poem swerves powerfully from its chief precursors. Unlike Hughes' "To Captain Mulzac," addressed to a "Negro Skipper" of a ship with a mixed crew, Brooks allows her black sailor to speak for himself, and what he portrays is not Hughes' idealized ship of "Freedom, / Brotherhood, Democracy" but a vessel wracked by discrimination and violence. Unlike Marianne Moore's "decorous frock-coated Negro" in her poem, "The Hero," Brooks' "Negro Hero" is undecorously frank in addressing the racial dimension of a war

that is not simply "inward," as Moore put it in her great "In Distrust of Merits," but historically situated as well.

The poem begins by forcefully establishing racial defiance as a form of national duty: "I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to save them" (48). Trapped in a polity in which the law is not "ours" but "theirs," the Negro Hero must violently disobey commands if he is to help repel violence from without. Under attack by two distinct antagonists, foreign and domestic, he must aggress against both in order to defeat the first and to save the second. Ironically, his rebellion reveals a desire for national commonality that members of the white power elite simply do not feel. Anti-institutional in a manner that goes back at least to the abolition movement, the Negro Hero must commit civil disobedience against his nation in order to rescue it. He escapes punishment only because his valor cannot be denied:

> It is good I gave glory, it is good I put gold on their name.
> Or there would have been spikes in the afterward hands.
> But let us speak only of my success and the pictures in the
> Caucasian dailies
> As well as the Negro weeklies. For I am a gem.
> (They are not concerned that it was hardly The Enemy my
> fight was against
> But them.) (48)

Stanzas three and four represent the deeply ambiguous heart of a poem that might at first seem transparent. In stanza three the Hero deprecates his motives for fighting as merely a "boy itch to get at the gun" followed by a "swallow of the liquor of battle" which made him "wild." In stanza four he counters this admission by claiming a higher motive as well:

> I loved. And a man will guard when he loves.
> Their white-gowned democracy was my fair lady.
> With her knife lying cold, straight, in the softness of her
> sweet-flowing sleeve. (49)

The critique of black masculinity in stanza three and of white femininity in stanza four destabilizes the text, subverting any uncomplicated notion of the poem's positioning on war, race, or

gender. In stanza three, is the hero speaking sincerely, as Susan Schweik thinks (*Gulf* 120-21); or is he sardonically mimicking anti-black-male stereotypes, as Harry B. Shaw thinks ("Perception" 138)? In stanza four, is he representing himself appropriately, as Shaw thinks; or is he reduplicating "the most misogynistic figures" of masculine war poetry, as Schweik thinks? By making both of these mutually exclusive interpretations possible and plausible, the stanzas expose aporias about nation, race, and gender that are latent throughout the poem and indeed in the national symbolic as well. These stanzas are an abyss that draw the rest of the poem into it. Once one realizes how unstable they are, one begins to notice contradictory elements elsewhere. Recall, for example, that even in the seemingly straightforward second stanza, the Hero declares that his fight was against "Negro weeklies" as well as "Caucasian dailies," implying that he resisted not only white discursive power but trans-racial misapprehensions and injustices. Similarly, the potentially misogynistic female "knife" of stanza four transforms itself into (potentially misandrous) male "knives" in stanza seven. In such passages the dramatic monologue form works particularly well to reveal the contradictions and limits in any single perspective, even a Hero's, and of course to separate the narrator's position from the text's.

In stanza five the Negro Hero explores the dangerously liminal space he inhabits in the Navy. He asks: "am I good enough to die for them," "am I clean enough to kill for them," or "is my place . . . / In the galley still?" (49). Must he stay "still" (in the senses of silent, immobile, and always)? Or may he begin to move and speak as a member of the *polis*? And must he outperform in order to be allowed to perform at all? An interpellated white supremacist voice, speaking parenthetically in repetitious, monosyllabic rhymes that suggest his rigidity, then affirms the Hero's worst fear, that no performance, however heroic, will suffice:

> (Indeed, I'd rather be dead;
> Indeed, I'd rather be shot in the head
> Or ridden to waste on the back of a flood
> Than saved by the drop of a black man's blood.)
> (49)

Nevertheless, the Hero remains undeterred. He avers, in the seventh and last stanza, that "the important thing is, I helped to save them, them and a part of their democracy" (50). His heroism lies not only in his physical courage but in the moral courage of loving men too small, greedy, or afraid to love him back— and in understanding their slogan of "democracy" better than they do themselves. Indeed, he understands *them* better than they do themselves. His heroism is finally intellectual as well as emotional and physical. No longer liminal, he feels "well and settled" in himself

> . . . because I believe it was a good job,
> Despite this possible horror: that they might prefer the
> Preservation of their law in all its sick dignity and their knives
> To the continuation of their creed
> And their lives. (50)

The poem thus ends in achieved and justified self-esteem for the African American Hero. But it leaves white patriarchy suspended between realizing its ideals at long last or abandoning them to face what James Baldwin called "the fire next time." More importantly, the unruly questions the poem has raised about war, racism, and sexism have received none of the "tidy answers" Brooks characteristically disdains (see *Blacks* 79).

"Gay Chaps at the Bar," a sequence of twelve slant-rhymed and unmetered sonnets, examines black participation in the war by means of a fragmented and elliptical series of monologues (*Blacks* 64-75). Brooks labels the poem a "souvenir" for her brother, a staff sergeant in the Army, and for "every other soldier" (64). The title derives from a letter from the front she received from her literary friend, Lieutenant William Couch, who wrote of young soldiers, recently "gay chaps at the bar," now returning from battle "crying and trembling." The beginning sonnets focus on the swift transition these young black men had to make from late adolescence to jeopardized adulthood. As one such soldier puts it:

> . . . No stout
> Lessons showed how to chat with death. We brought

No brass fortissimo, among our talents,
To holler down the lions in this air. (64)

Another tells himself to keep his nourishing dreams in little jars "till I return from hell" (66).

In the middle and ending sonnets, various soldier-speakers reveal their overwhelming feelings of grief. Wounds in the object-world, Freud tells us, may become a wound in the subject ("Mourning" 247-49); and wars especially give rise to "traumatic neuroses" in which experiences of fright and loss result in flashbacks and a deepening, possibly suicidal, melancholy ("Beyond" 12). In Brooks' fifth and sixth sonnets, a soldier imagines a postwar future similar to that of Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith. His projected self, incapable of sexual or aesthetic rejuvenation, drowns in a sea of homosocial mourning:

My best allegiances are to the dead.
I swear to keep the dead upon my mind.
Disdain for all time to be overglad. (69)

Just as Freud asserts that "the shadow of the object" may fall on "the ego" ("Mourning" 249), so the soldier pledges fealty to his dead comrades, takes their "ghosts" as his mentors, and vows to live henceforth in "the midnight that is mine and theirs."[10] Immediately following this evocation of post-traumatic despair, the seventh sonnet describes white soldiers who find their racist assumptions crumbling "when the Negroes came" (70). This surprisingly hopeful interpellation yields, in the remaining sonnets, to voices of black soldiers questioning their faith in God or indeed in anything:

This morning men deliver wounds and death.
They will deliver death and wounds tomorrow.
And I doubt all. . . . (73)

The sequence concludes darkly. The voice of the last sonnet, speaking for many others, examines the price he has paid for survival:

Still we applaud the President's voice and face.
Still we remark on patriotism, sing,
Salute the flag, thrill heavily, rejoice
For death of men who too saluted, sang.
But inward grows a soberness, an awe,
A fear, a deepening hollow through the cold.
For even if we come out standing up
How shall we smile, congratulate: and how
Settle in chairs? Listen, listen. The step
Of iron feet again. And again wild. (75)

The voice describes an unfillable emptiness in the self, an inability to smile or relax, and a dread that the "iron feet" of totalitarians will return, and with them a need yet again for the liquor of battle that makes one "wild."

This powerful monologue concludes not only the sequence but Brooks' first volume. Her second volume begins with one last WWII poem, an elegy for her friend Ed Bland, a budding poet and critic killed in Germany at war's end, on March 20, 1945 (*Blacks* 79-80). The elegy is a moving tribute to a gifted and irreplaceable man. But Brooks' deepest meditations on war, it seems to me, appear in the earlier and longer poems. Far from the battlefront, which she visited only through the discourse of her correspondents and through her own vast and imaginative empathy, Brooks created WWII texts as responsive to war experiences and as subtle about psychological and political issues as any ever written.

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) worked briefly in the optical department of the US Navy in 1942-43 but had no close friends in the military and had no deep connection to WWII issues. She did, however, write two poems that touched on the war.[11] These poems are central to the canon of this poet, who is now perhaps the most widely admired of her generation (see Travisano, "Bishop Phenomenon"). The poem that bears most directly on WWII is "Roosters," completed in October 1940 when the war was barely a year old and before the United States had entered it. "Roosters" appeared initially in *The New Republic* in 1941 and then in Bishop's first volume, *North and South*, in 1946. The second

poem, which functions as a companion piece, is "The Fish," written at about the same time and published in *Partisan Review* in 1940 and then in *North and South*.

"Roosters" may be the most brilliant poem to emerge from WWII (*Complete Poems* 35-37). Indebted to a mode that M. H. Abrams termed "the greater Romantic lyric," in which natural description frames a philosophical meditation, and employing insistently rhymed tercets, the poem contemplates the early-morning crowing of roosters in a ramshackle village modeled on Key West, where Bishop lived between 1938 and 1947. The poem's emotional charge immediately signals that it has more than roosters in mind. Descriptive phrases like "gun-metal blue," "cries galore," and "green-gold medals" link the description of roosters to the discourse of war, implying that the two verbal realms must be thought of together, as tropes for each other. The impassioned evocation of the roosters becomes an indictment of war and of the warrior mentality, which the poem attributes to an ethos of hyper-masculinity. In contrast to the desexualized perspectives of Jarrell, the unselfconsciously masculine orientations of Shapiro and Lowell, and the empathic qualities of Brooks, "Roosters" boisterously and disdainfully satirizes war as a specifically male practice. The poem begins:

> At four o'clock
> in the gun-metal blue dark
> we hear the first crow of the first cock
>
> just below
> the gun-metal blue window
> and immediately there is an echo. . . . (35)

The roosters' crowing figuratively suggests the echoing sounds of gunfire and bombs, portrayed as a phallic activity. (The word "cock," like so many other words in the poem, does double duty.) The roosters, mindless and primitive, glare at each other

> with stupid eyes
> while from their beaks there rise
> the uncontrolled, traditional cries.

The cries— emanating from "protruding chests, / in green-gold medals dressed, / planned to command and terrorize the rest"— impose a "senseless order," an order of pain and cruelty, over the town (35-36). In a letter to her mentor Marianne Moore, Bishop defended the poem's "'violence' of tone," explaining that it was intended "to emphasize the essential baseness of militarism" (*One Art* 96). She wrote that she was thinking in the poem not only of Key West but of "those aerial views of dismal little towns in Finland and Norway, when the Germans took over" and of the "violent roosters" appearing in Pablo Picasso's antiwar and anti-Fascist masterpiece *Guernica*.

As the poem proceeds, its application to WWII becomes ever more manifest. Perched on the village's churches is not a cross, or even a star (as in Moore's "The Steeple Jack"), but a "tin rooster" (36), reminiscent of a tin dictator or the "tin wreath" in Pound's anti-WWI "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly." "Glass headed pins" (36), as Bishop explains in *One Art* (96), evoke not only the rooster's eyes but the pins on a war map. Eventually, in an apostrophe to the roosters, the narrator explicitly names— rather than figures— war:

> . . . you whom they labeled
>
> "Very combative . . ."
> what right have you to give
> commands and tell us how to live,
>
> cry "Here!" and "Here!"
> and wake us here where are
> unwanted love, conceit, and war?" (36)

After directly referring to war, for the only time in the poem, the text immediately returns to its master trope of roosters, who now "fight each other" by twos, exhibit "raging heroism," and cause injury and death (37). Throughout these increasingly violent evocations, the narrator punningly portrays war as an archetypally masculinist activity caused by the "cock"— an "excrescence" that makes a "virile presence" and possesses a "vulgar beauty" but causes brutal aggression, tyranny, and destruction (35, 37). Domesticity, conversely, is the realm of females who, in a

complicit fashion, "admire" the males while being subjugated and "terrorized" by them:

> the many wives
> who lead hens' lives
> of being courted and despised. (35)

If war is clearly gendered as male, it is also classed (the warriors wear a red "crown") and even raced (the warriors are admired for their proper color). This conflation of gendered, classed, and raced hierarchies finally results in mass death. A "fallen" rooster, flung on the ash-heap, lies in dung, "with his dead wives" and "with open, bloody eyes" (37).

The poem concludes with a meditation on Christian art and narrative that inspires the narrator to think that the dreadful rosters might change into a sign of "forgiveness," that " 'deny deny deny' / is not all the roosters cry" (38). In the final lines, day breaks, the narrator wonders how the night could have come to such "grief," the cocks become "almost inaudible," and the sun climbs into the scene, "faithful as enemy, or friend" (39). This conclusion might be read as an effort at uplift better managed than, but not inherently different from, those in Shapiro's poems—though Schweik makes a compelling case for its ambiguity (*Gulf* 227-29).

Considered as a linguistic construction "Roosters" is, to my mind, one of the great poems of the century, every vivid, resonant word echoing gorgeously off of every other word. Yet the poem has its limitations as well. Bishop agreed with Stéphane Mallarmé's celebrated rejoinder to Edgar Degas that poems are made of words, not ideas (*One Art* 94). But words, in their function of terms and tags, convey ideas. And in its web of ideational implications, "Roosters" has two interrelated features that trouble me, as they seem to have troubled Bishop herself. First, the poem's initial twenty-six stanzas fall into the category of what Yeats (in *Mythologies*) termed rhetoric rather than poetry: a quarrel with others rather than with oneself. The text scorns base male militarists, but it occludes from view the aggression that is not so easily ascribed solely to others but exists within the observer as well, even the observer whose identifications set her apart from the privileges of masculine power. The initial section

of "Roosters" scapegoats others in just the way that Moore's "There never was a war that / was not inward" does not. In Bishop's text the war is outward, a product and activity of others, with whom the poem displays not a shred of empathy. Bishop's narrator-observer occupies no liminal or potentially complicit space but one that seems to me unexamined.[12] Moreover, "Roosters" may be the first antiwar poem that expresses no compassion for victims.

The second problematic feature of "Roosters" is its ethos of moral equivalence. Despite Bishop's epistolary reference to the Nazi occupation of Northern Europe, the poem itself makes no distinction between opposing forces. All "roosters," in this text, are equally culpable; indeed they are interchangeable. The poem treats war as an essence— a timeless and inevitable result of masculine folly. The unchangeable story is that both sides in a war are primitive, trivial, and destructive. The poem thus de-historicizes war, situating it in ever-recurrent myth. Brett Millier, in her fine biography of Bishop, calls "Roosters" Bishop's "first politically relevant poem, and the only one that addressed World War II at all directly" (*Elizabeth Bishop* 159-60). But it seems to me that the poem is not political at all, if politics means taking sides in public controversies. When Mercutio shouts "A plague o' both your houses!" in *Romeo and Juliet* (III.1), it is a wrenching and profound political assertion because he had previously identified himself with one of those houses. But when individuals who have never affiliated themselves with any enterprise larger than themselves proclaim of political parties or forces at war, "a plague on both your houses," it is only a facile and complacent gesture. Bishop's poem in effect sits out the war by reducing both sides to the status of "roosters"— small-brained, irritating creatures with whom it would be impossible to identify oneself.

Bishop began to compose "The Fish" after "Roosters" was underway but before it was completed, and when she published both poems in *North and South* she positioned "The Fish" several pages after "Roosters." These facts suggest that this animal poem responds to or even compensates for the other. Considered together as a dialogue, the poems achieve a complexity and openness lacking in "Roosters" alone. In "The Fish" the textual subject employs a series of magnificent figures to evoke a

"tremendous fish" she has caught and ultimately decides to free (*Complete Poems* 42-44). In the first sections of the poem she ambivalently projects her own aggressivity onto the fish: his gills are "frightening," his lip "weaponlike." Although she herself is the invasive character in the scenario and the fish the passive one— "he hadn't fought at all"— her suspiciousness of others and her repressed awareness of her own hostility lead her to posit her own drives in him. As the poem progresses, however, her understanding of the fish, and therefore of herself, deepens. Among the multiple tropes involved in her evocation of the fish, the figure of the military veteran is crucial. The fish is "battered and venerable," a survivor of many battles. From his lower lip hang five old pieces of fishing-line, vestiges of his past triumphs over human antagonists, which the narrator describes in wonder-struck awe:

> Like medals with their ribbons
> frayed and wavering,
> a five-haired beard of wisdom
> trailing from his aching jaw. (43)

As the narrator just stares at the fishing-lines that have become medals and beard, "victory" fills up the little rented boat, and she lets the fish go (43-44).

This poem, which valorizes a fish grown too old to fight and a fisherwoman's decision to free it, shares the pacifist orientation of "Roosters." Nevertheless, it revises "Roosters" in several antithetical ways. Whereas "Roosters" portrays aggression as other, "The Fish" acknowledges it within the self. And whereas "Roosters" aligns the will to destroy with the phallic father, "The Fish" suggests no simple gender marking. Indeed, it associates the fish, figured as male and military, not with senseless cruelty but with its opposites: pacific wisdom, stoic suffering, dignified survival. Bishop's use of the culturally cathected word "victory" at the poem's turning point is especially significant. Whereas she implicitly distances "Roosters" from the American "victory culture" of WWII— the desperate desire for national triumph against odds that spoke through such phenomena as Victory Gardens, Victory Boulevards, V-Letters, and V-E and V-J Days— she participates in that narrative in "The Fish."[13] The

poem positions the "I" in such a way that she may mobilize not only pacifistic values but also the value of fighting, if required, for survival and freedom.

In 1942 and 1943 **Robert Lowell** (1917-1977) composed a series of poems opposing WWII, and then he served time in prison for refusing the draft.[14] However tempting it may be, we must resist the simple narrative of Lowell as a gentle and idealistic pacifist-poet, because it does not fit the facts and the emotions of Lowell's career. In the early 1940s there was nothing gentle or simple about him. Lowell exhibited a variant strain of what Tom Engelhart has called America's "victory culture," but Lowell contemplated not a victory *of* America but a victory *over* it. The defiance, fury, and grandiosity he displayed in the early 1940s, and episodically for the rest of his life, were richly overdetermined— partly a psychic malady for which he found no cure, and partly a confluence of social attitudes and positionings. Lowell was brought up in an anxiety-ridden, authoritarian, upper-class milieu skeptical of democracy and of non-whites. Initially obedient to his class perspective, he published in his prep school magazine an article called "War: A Justification," arguing that Northern nations had a duty to wage war on other lands:

> Why should Germany be limited to a population of seventy million? . . . The most progressive and advanced peoples should have the most territory, the largest population, and the greatest wealth. . . . The benefits of war are so great that [its] temporary misfortunes and horrors, important as they are, can be forgotten . . . . War is the greatest maker of nations. ("War" 157-58)

Although as he grew older he explicitly rebelled against his family culture, he continued implicitly to conform. In a letter to his mother in 1940, for example, he wrote of taking "aristocracy and family tradition seriously" (Lowell Collection, Harvard). At the same time he felt abandoned and disowned by his family. His resentment reveals itself in a "joking" bit of doggerel he and two friends sent to his mother in 1936:

We wish you joy
We wish you health
But would destroy
You for your pelf.
(Lowell Collection, Harvard)

Lowell's anger and sense of superiority were reinforced in his college years by his association with members of the Agrarian movement. In the 1930s, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren—all of whom tutored Lowell—mounted an assault from the right on American capitalism and democracy, promoting an elitism that had anti-urban, racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic components. Lowell's assumption of cultural privilege, which he had lived with since birth along with feelings of neglect and instability, was thus strengthened by his mentors as well as by the writings of rightist intellectuals such as Pound, Eliot, Christopher Dawson, and Jean de Ménasce and perhaps even by the reactionary radio broadcasts of Father Coughlin (see Mazzaro, "Apocalypse" 322-26; Mariani, *Lost Puritan* 87-116). Under these influences, Lowell's initial "justification" of war transformed itself into opposition. At least he opposed a war against Germany, one of the Northern nations he had earlier hoped would rule the world.

Although Lowell volunteered for the armed forces in the months following Pearl Harbor, by the time he was drafted in August 1943 his patriotic fervor had changed to resistance. Citing "family traditions," he sent President Roosevelt a "Declaration of Personal Responsibility," which he simultaneously released to dozens of relatives and friends and to the press (*Collected Prose* 367-70). Echoing the position of Lowell's friend Jarrell, the Declaration idealistically denounces the Allied bombing of civilian centers such as Hamburg (367). At one point it calls the American war effort "patriotic" at its inception (370), though at another it states that Lowell only "imagined" the country was in peril after Pearl Harbor (368). At its climax, however, the Declaration accuses President Roosevelt and the Allies of aiding and abetting the Soviet Union (370). The document's master phobia is not against war but against Communism. It begins with the dubious premise that the war has already been won by mid-1943: "Today these adversaries are being rolled back

on all fronts and the crisis of war is past" (369). It confidently asserts that the demand for unconditional surrender means that the Allies "intend the permanent destruction of Germany and Japan" (370). And it concludes by hitting home its chief geopolitical idea: "If this program is carried out . . . it will leave China and Europe, the two natural power centers of the future, to the mercy of the USSR." Therefore, the United States is "collaborating" with the most "unscrupulous and powerful of totalitarian dictators"— Stalin— in a war that constitutes "a betrayal of my country" (370). This is not the argument of a pacifist. In my judgment, this is the argument of someone who wishes Nazi Germany to survive, for strategic or other reasons. Lowell's Declaration accuses the President, the armed forces, and the nation's majority of "betrayal"— of treason (370). Although the statement foreshadows Senator Joseph McCarthy's "twenty years of treason" speech, it goes far beyond anything the senator would ever say.[15] It could have been read verbatim on the Rome wireless by Pound or on the Berlin wireless. Perhaps it was.

At about the same time as Lowell was composing his defiant statement, he was also writing the antiwar poems that he published in his first small book, the privately printed *Land of Unlikeness* (1944). These poems, like the Declaration, depended on a mix of contradictory motives. A passionate, though temporary, convert to Roman Catholicism, Lowell undoubtedly felt a deep moral horror at the American bombing of non-combatants (though he was quiet about civilian killings by the Axis powers). He may also have tended toward pacifistic views as a reaction formation against his own anger and propensity toward violence. Beside those moral and psychological considerations was the political aim to preserve Nazi Germany as a bulwark against Communism. Linked to that goal was a distinct indifference to the fate of those trapped in Nazi slave-labor and death camps— Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled, political dissidents, and others. And beneath the political agenda existed an even more fundamental motive: fear. Lowell was legitimately afraid of dying or of being injured. Perhaps he was even more fearful that military discipline would precipitate the narcissistic and bipolar disorders he spent so much energy in the 1940s combating, ultimately unsuccessfully. The poems, like the Declaration, also reveal the grandiosity, exhibitionism, and self-certainty that

alternated with feelings of abjection, paralysis, and self-doubt throughout his adult life. Finally, these early poems, whatever their defects, prefigure Lowell's ultimate triumph in turning his psychic deficits into a struggle with language that would alter the course of twentieth-century poetry.

Lowell's poems about WWII in *Land of Unlikeness*— none of which he later chose to reprint— narrativize the war as a melodrama of beset Christianity. The protagonists are Christ, Mary, and their followers. The villain is generally America in its many incarnations: individuals like "Eisenhower" or "goggled pilots"; ironic abstractions like "Democracy" or "the State" (this last a Jarrellian touch); and analogues such as "Satan," "Cain," or "Caesar." A subsidiary negative character, appropriated from the discourse of Pound and Eliot, is "the Jew," who is described in one poem as "hog fatted." With the sole exception of "Cistercians in Germany," which criticizes the Nazi regime for persecuting the Cistercian order, all of the war poems vituperate the United States:

> So, child, unclasp your fists,
> And clap for Freedom and Democracy;
> No matter, child, if the Ark Royal lists
> Into the Sea;
> Soon the Leviathan
> Will spout American. ("Boston Nativity")

Yet for all of their anger at the American role in the war, these poems express little concern for human casualties. Even the diatribe "The Bomber" remains abstract:

> Bomber like god
> You nosed about the clouds
> And warred on the stormy sod;
> And your thunderbolts fast as light
> Blitzed a wake of shrouds.

Unlike Jarrell's poems, Lowell's texts reveal no interest in the death of pilots, gunners, or concentration camp victims. Unlike Brooks' poems, they are oblivious to the fate of Negro heroes or ordinary chaps. Even the German dead are reduced to

metonymic "shrouds." Lowell frames the conflict as an impersonal myth, in which actual human beings play a negligible role. As Hugh Staples says, "the events taking place around him are merely reflections of the greater cosmic conflict. . . . Military disasters are rehearsals for the impending Day of Judgment" (*Robert Lowell* 26). The last poem of the volume, "Leviathan," constructs the Allied cause not simply as a betrayal of America but of Christ: "The Ship / Of State is asking Christ to walk on blood."

Land of Unlikeness was published in July 1944, while Lowell was still on probation after serving five months of a year's sentence for draft refusal. In succeeding years he began to complicate his world-view, though he periodically reverted to prophetic hysteria during attacks of mania. For example, in 1949 he led a McCarthyite witch-hunt against Elizabeth Ames, the administrator of the Yaddo writers' colony (Hamilton 143-48; Kazin 204-205; Mariani 177-78). In later manic episodes he obsessively read *Mein Kampf* and kept it under his pillow at night. (Hamilton 204, 209-12, 315, 356, 449, 465; Mariani 269, 329-30). But in his balanced moments, Lowell wrote thoughtfully about his own Jewish ancestor (*Life Studies* 11-12, 45), and he both "stood on" his draft refusal and mocked it as a "silly bombastic statement"—"a manic statement, / telling off the state and president" (Meyers 164; *Life Studies* 85). He now interpreted his Declaration as purely a protest against the bombing of civilians, downplaying its geopolitical concerns (Meyers 143, 164). By the late 1960s he was portraying the American and Soviet governments as similarly flawed though potentially salvageable, and he was opposing war, injustice, poverty, and genocide wherever he saw them (see Axelrod, *Robert Lowell* 176-83, 186-91, 196-202).

Two years after the publication of *Land of Unlikeness*, Lowell published his first widely distributed volume, the highly acclaimed and Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946). The poems about WWII in this book are far more complex than the ones in the earlier book. They show Lowell in the process of change, beginning to quarrel with himself rather than with others. "The Dead in Europe" and "The Exile's Return," for example, contemplate the war's effect on Europe. The former poem, a prayer of the dead, bespeaks the suffering of civilians killed in the war, almost as a complement to Jarrell's poems about American

pilots and gunners: "After the bombs unloaded, we fell down / Buried together . . ." (*Lord Weary's Castle* 68). The poem movingly expresses something new for Lowell: a palpable identification with victims of war. The latter poem depicts Germany's postwar rebirth with an attention to detail that is startling, given that Lowell had not yet visited Europe (*Lord Weary's Castle* 3). The openness and objectivity of "The Exile's Return" may reflect the influence of Jarrell, who helped to edit *Lord Weary's Castle*. In this poem a German refugee cautiously returns to his home town, now occupied by American armed forces:

> . . . Fall
> And winter, spring and summer, guns unlimber
> And lumber down the narrow gabled street
> Past your gray, sorry and ancestral house
> Where the dynamited walnut tree
> Shadows a squat, old, wind-torn gate and cows
> The Yankee commandant. (3)

According to this verbal construction, the war has "dynamited" both the landscape and the "ancestral" way of life. The contrast between militarized present and lost past arises in the form of semantic and sonic play. The metonymic American guns "un*limber*" (detach their wooden foreparts from their carriages) as they "*lumber*" (move as clumsily as stacked lumber) down the ancient "ga*bled*" (timbered) streets. The "unseasoned" liberators now dominate all seasons. Yet these young Americans, described with almost affectionate mockery, bear no resemblance to the cold-hearted bomber pilots or imperial generals of Lowell's earlier work. Moreover, the poem does not report "the permanent destruction of Germany." Quite the contrary. The country is already confronting a future ambiguously composed of danger and hope: ". . . already lily-stands / Burgeon the risen Rhineland, and a rough / Cathedral lifts its eye." The narrator concludes by warning the exile, and presumably all of the war's survivors, that "your life is in your hands."

"In the Cage," a sonnet, memorializes Lowell's wartime imprisonment (*Lord Weary's Castle* 53). Viewing the experience from the inside, the poem alludes to none of the high moral aims mentioned in Shapiro's "The Conscientious Objector" but rather

to labor, tedium, sexual frustration, fear, and dementia. The prisoner-subject observes his fellow inmates returning from underground work to the mess hall. Troped as desperate "canaries," the jailbirds figuratively "beat their bars and scream." Imprisonment has stripped away any innocent illusion they might still possess:

> It is night
> And it is vanity, and age
> Blackens the heart of Adam. Fear,
> The yellow chirper, beaks its cage.

The narrator here, unlike the self-assured "I" of *Land of Unlikeness*, conceives of himself as vain, sinful, and frightened. Revising the poem thirty years later, Lowell made the point even clearer: "I am night, I am vanity" (*History* 129). The textual subject of "In the Cage," far from solving the moral and political dilemmas of his age, cannot even fathom or approve of himself.

Humility and complexity also pervade the longest and perhaps the greatest poem of the volume, "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" (*Lord Weary's Castle* 8-14). This elegy mourns the death of Lowell's cousin Warren Winslow, a naval officer killed at sea in January 1944.[16] As Stephen Fender has explained, Winslow, a lieutenant on the U.S.S. Turner, died along with 137 other officers and enlisted men when a series of explosions rocked and sank the ship at the entrance to New York harbor (Fender 188). Because the disaster resulted from a "mishap on board" rather than enemy action (189), Lowell's poem is freed from the necessity of assigning blame. Instead, it explores the consequences of violence, domination, and loss in human history. Reprising descriptive phrases by Thoreau and Melville, Section I vividly evokes the burial at sea of a sailor who is not literally Winslow (who died off New York rather than Rhode Island and whose body was not recovered) but who metonymically represents him—and all the war dead. The section begins:

> A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket,
> The sea was still breaking violently and night
> Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,
> When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light

Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,
He grappled at the net
With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:
The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,
Its open, staring eyes
Were lustreless dead-lights
Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk
Heavy with sand. We weight the body, close
Its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came. . . . (8)

The narrator here is himself a sailor, assigned to "our" fleet, which again evidences a significant shift in identification from Lowell's earlier rhetoric. The brilliant yet reportorial language emphasizes the abrupt transition from life (suggested in such verbals as "grappled," "coiled," and "hurdling") to death (evoked by noun phrases like "marble feet," "lustreless dead-lights," and "stranded hulk"). At the section's conclusion, poetic language yields to the finality of military ritual:

. . . ask for no Orphean lute
To pluck life back. The guns of the steeled fleet
Recoil and then repeat
The hoarse salute.

In succeeding sections, brief apostrophes to the dead "Sailor" trigger meditations on human aggression and aloneness, nature's indifference, and God's mysterious and dreadful silence. In Section II the textual subject asks, "Sailor, can you hear / The Pequod's sea wings?" (9), explicitly connecting the Sailor's fate to that of the doomed whalers in *Moby-Dick*. Section III begins, "All you recovered from Poseidon died / With you, my cousin" (10), a startlingly intimate address that foregrounds the narrator's familial connection and his grief. In Sections V and VI the narrator evokes the Sailor as his double. In anaphoral lines, he projects onto the Sailor his own anguish about aggression, mutilation, and corruption ("*Sailor*, will your sword / *Whistle* and fall and sink into the fat?" [12]) and his own hopes for salvation ("*Sailor*, you were glad / And *whistled* Sion by that stream" [13]). Lowell has found a way to turn his conflicted relations with

himself and others into images of great sensuous and associative power.

In the poem's seventh and final section, the narrator locates himself in a graveyard, beside a cenotaph that may suggest Winslow's, and he meditates the unlikely possibility of redemption in a world recently at war. The poem ends in this way:

> You could cut the brackish winds with a knife
> Here in Nantucket, and cast up the time
> When the Lord God formed man from the sea's slime
> And breathed into his face the breath of life,
> And blue-lung'd combers lumbered to the kill.
> The Lord survives the rainbow of His will. (14)

This eloquent but disturbing conclusion leaves the fate of humankind entirely unsettled. Lowell no longer writes like a poet who finds the world's problems easy to solve, nor like one who can divorce himself from what he observes. Confused and pained by the deaths of so many, the textual subject reviles the human drive to dominate and to kill, and he looks toward an uncertain future.

Like other Middle Generation poems written in the war's aftermath, "The Quaker Graveyard," with its rainbow sign, evokes a sense of having come through. But like Jarrell's "A Camp in the Prussian Forest" and Brooks' "Memorial to Ed Bland," it also puts into motion a counter-dynamic of absence and fear, an awareness of millions killed, a sense of having lost what can never be found again. ❦

Notes

1. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Rise B. Axelrod, Jeremiah B. Axelrod, Bernard Axelrod, Martha Brown, David Boxwell, Francis Carney, Mark Landis, Camille Roman, and Traise Yamamoto for various sorts of help and ideas, and Deckard Hodge for his excellent research assistance.

2. I believe that the term was invented by one of its members, John Berryman, in his review-essay, "From the Middle and Senior Generations" (1959). More recently, Bruce Bawer has employed it in *The*

Middle Generation (1986) and Thomas Travisano refers to it in *Exploring Lost Worlds* (1999).

3. The concept of the *polis* as a space of "exposure" or "appearance" derives from Hannah Arendt's landmark study of public and private realms, *The Human Condition* (35, 50). The terms "introspection" and "domesticity" respectively derive from two studies of post-Middle Generation poetics, Alan Williamson's *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry* and my own *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words*. Arendt argued that in the modern world the classically distinct worlds of politics and household "constantly flow into each other" (33).

4. It is also true that some of the Middle Generation poets wrote sparingly or not at all about the war. For example, Delmore Schwartz—privately opposed to a war he thought "obscene," but publicly neutral—wrote nothing (see Atlas 202-203). John Berryman wrote a handful of poems, the most memorable being "The Moon and the Night and the Men," which laments the Belgian surrender, and "Boston Common," which uses the war's "fiery night" as a backdrop for its contemplation of humanity and heroism (*Collected Poems* 36-37, 41-46). In his private discourse Berryman alternately supported and opposed the war. Like his friend Schwartz, he resented it as an intrusion on his career aspirations (Mariani, *Berryman* 125-26, 139-43; Atlas 148-50, 202-204, 228). It should be noted in this context that in the 1940s and 1950s many readers interested in poems about WWII consulted Oscar Williams' anthology, *The War Poets* (1945), which included almost every poet who wrote a word about the war and more than a few who didn't.

5. Because of space limitations, I must exclude other poets who properly belong in this discussion: for example, John Ciardi, a sergeant in the Air Force, who wrote such (anti)war poems as "Sea Burial," "V-J Day," and "The Health of Captains"; Muriel Rukeyser, who worked in the Graphics Division of the OWI and wrote "Letter to the Front"; and William Everson, a conscientious objector, who protested the war in "Eastward the Armies" and wrote of his alternative service in "Chronicle of Division." Nevertheless, I believe that the five poets I have chosen to emphasize are the most notable Middle Generation (anti)war poets. My understanding of these poets—and of this field of study—is indebted to, though divergent from, two excellent earlier studies: Richard Fein's dissertation on the WWII poetry of Ciardi, Jarrell, Shapiro, Eberhart, and Lowell (1960); and especially Susan Schweik's germinal *A Gulf So Deeply Cut* (1991), which analyzes WWII poetry by American women, including Brooks and Bishop.

6. Jarrell's poems have been gathered in *Collected Poems*. For biographical information about his war years see Pritchard's lucid and informa-

tive literary biography and Jarrell's *Letters*. For critical commentary on the war poems see Ferguson, Flynn, Quinn, and Pritchard.

7. Theodor Adorno wrote "No poetry after Auschwitz." George Steiner has elaborated: "Because their language had served at Belsen, because words could be found for all those things and men were not struck dumb for using them, a number of German writers who had gone into exile or survived Nazism, despaired of their instrument.... But this sense of a death in language, of the failure of the word in the face of the inhuman, is by no means limited to German" (51; see also 53). Nevertheless, Steiner affirms the necessity of writing poems that "counter the general inclination to forget the death camps" (301).

8. Many, but not all, of Shapiro's poems have been gathered in *Collected Poems 1940-1978*. Although there is as yet no biography, the first volume of Shapiro's autobiography, entitled *The Younger Son*, includes information about his war years. For critical commentary on the poems see Flanzbaum and Reino. Flanzbaum acutely shows how Shapiro's ambivalence toward his Jewish identity in the 1940s left him unwilling or unable to write about the Holocaust— unlike Jarrell, who was not Jewish.

9. Most of Brooks' poems have been collected in *Blacks*. For biographical information consult Kent's helpful literary biography and Brooks' autobiographical *Report from Part One*. For critical commentary on the war poems see Kent, Gilbert and Gubar, Madhubuti, Melham, Mootry and Smith, Schweik, Shaw, and Wright.

10. In her illuminating study, *A Gulf So Deeply Cut*, Susan Schweik faults sonnets five and six for privileging the soldier's "masculine" despair over the "feminine" pleasures of civilian life (132-34). This seems to me a provocative insight, but as Schweik herself observes, it is a female poet who has appropriated the male voice and perspective, a fact that ironizes any gender stereotyping the monologues may contain. For yet another perspective on this problem see Gilbert and Gubar 244-45.

11. In 1950 Bishop began a third antiwar poem, initially called "Desk at Night," but completed and published it during the Vietnam War as the now-celebrated "Twelve O'Clock News." Bishop's poems have been collected in *Complete Poems*. For biographical information see Millier's literary biography, Fountain and Brazeau's oral biography, Kalstone's group biography, letters in Bishop's *One Art*, autobiographical writings in her *Collected Prose*, interviews in Monteiro, and memoirs in Schwartz and Estess. Valuable commentary on Bishop's wartime poetry appears in Costello, Gilbert and Gubar, Goldensohn, Harrison, Lombardi, Millier, Schweik, Schwartz and Estess, and Travisano.

12. Schweik, partially conceding this point, counters with the helpful but (to my mind) inconclusive point that the poem's hidden narrative of lesbian love and estrangement, implied by the "we" of stanza one, associates the narrator herself with the rooster behaviors she describes. See Schweik 231-34.

13. The terms "victory culture" and "victory narrative" derive from Tom Engelhardt's *The End of Victory Culture*. My own involvement in the cathexis of the word "victory" is indicated by my middle name, "Victor," bestowed on me by my grandmother at my birth three weeks before D-Day. It is now no longer used, though vestigially present in the "v" of my first name.

14. There is as yet no complete collection of Lowell's poems, though Frank Bidart is assembling one. Of the two major biographies of Lowell, by Hamilton and Mariani, Mariani's is the more informative and even-handed. For additional biographical information see Lowell's *Collected Prose* and Meyers. Extended critical commentary on Lowell's early poetry appears in Axelrod (*Robert Lowell*), Bell, Cooper, Fein (*Robert Lowell*), Mazzaro (*Poetic Themes*), Perloff, Staples, Williamson (*Pity the Monsters*), and Yenser.

15. McCarthy's speech was delivered on Lincoln's Birthday in 1954. It similarly accused the Roosevelt-Truman Administrations and all Democrats of "an historic betrayal" (Rorty and Decter 84-85).

16. The classic studies of this poem's elegiac form are by Perloff (140-45), Ramazani (227-30), Staples (45-52), and above all Dubrow. The pioneering effort to situate the poem historically is by Fender. Among notable claims for the poem, see Gelpi, who calls it Lowell's "best poem" (61), and Hass, who praises its "originality and grandeur" (66).

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RANDALL JARRELL'S WAR

Driven on the one hand by his large doubts about the ethics of twentieth-century war, and on the other seduced by the glitter of the high heroic style, Randall Jarrell in his war poetry stands pivotally between Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, who came before him, and the American poets of the Vietnam War, who came after. Sassoon and Owen memorialized the Great War soldier by counterpointing his agony against the callousness and indifference of the chateau generals who sacrificed him. As middle-level officers who had actually inhabited the No Man's Land which, by policy, was emptied of the presence of high-level command, Sassoon and Owen each, in his own way, stopped short of any project to abort the military altogether. Finally, the earlier poets merely shifted glory away from the generals and onto the shoulders of the bloodied brotherhood of the combat soldier. Later poets like Bruce Weigl and Yusuf Komunyakaa, veterans of the Vietnam War who dismantle glory, reported instead on a troubled soldier brotherhood bonding over rape, pillage, and arson, as well as the pity and terror of combat.

Unlike these soldier poets, Randall Jarrell served entirely in a noncombatant capacity, mostly as a stateside flight instructor. Mute on wartime sexuality, but articulate on military cruelty, Jarrell wrote both shame and glory into his view of his mates. Perhaps only an airman with an outlook both cerebral and idiosyncratic could maintain the contrary measures of distance and intimacy to the soldier clans that would produce Jarrell's tender celebrations of murderous innocence. In Great War poetry, the soldier is the dominant victim, hostage to the plans of others. But in WWII, Jarrell makes a crucial alteration, making room for the suggestion that the soldier is as much agent, as pawn of his society, although eventually, the responsibility for prosecuting and accepting war reverts to all of us, combatant and

noncombatant. It is Jarrell's accomplishment— before, during, and after WWII— to stretch the war poem to accommodate the larger civilian politics gestating it.

Beside Jarrell's explorations of the ethics of war, set at the distance where temperament and circumstance installed him, I'll briefly pose another set of responses. Most notably, Elizabeth Bishop's "Roosters" (35) and Marianne Moore's "in Distrust of Merits" (136) contrast the different poems that noncombatant women, neither encased in uniform nor in the direct track of war as victims, might produce by way of either heroic elegiac (Moore) or anti-militarist myth (Bishop).

His nearly fifty war poems did not come smoothly or evenly to Randall Jarrell. The least successful poems most directly approach battle, in dramatic settings concentrating not on character but on dilemma. As an instance of what I mean, consider the opening of "A Pilot from the Carrier" (153)[1], where all the war words wind up tight to boost the protagonist into an atmosphere commensurate with ennobling elegy. The poem begins Jarrell's *Little Friend, Little Friend*, a book written during the war, but published at war's end. In the opening lines of "A Pilot from the Carrier," a fine image is nearly brought down by the weight of detail wrapping it:

> Strapped at the center of the blazing wheel,
> His flesh ice-white against the shattered mask,
> He tears at the easy clasp, his sobbing breaths
> Misting the fresh blood lightening to flame,
> Darkening to smoke; trapped there in pain
> And fire and breathlessness, he struggles free
> Into the sunlight of the upper sky—
> And falls, a quiet bundle in the sky,
> The miles to warmth, to air, to waking:
> To the great flowering of his life, the hemisphere
> That holds his dangling years.

It is an image Jarrell will use again: an airman-fetus born into the new life of death into which danger, injury, and extremes of suffering have catapulted him.

In this poem's fussy over-qualification, even the nervous straining to get flight details and all the mechanics of carrier

combat right cannot destroy the sweep of the initial conception. That the pilot should be centered on that wheel, that the sky at that altitude is not lower but upper, that the clasp should be easy, the cycling precise by which the blood lightens, fires, then smokes— all these touches do not manage to blunt the image, as the description finally clears and steadies:

> a lonely eye
> Reading a child's first scrawl, the carrier's wake—
> The travelling milk-like circle of a miss
> Besides the plant-like genius of the smoke
> That shades, on the little deck, the little blaze
> Toy-like as the glitter of the wing-guns,

Swung between immensities of sky and water, and high above the sharply miniaturized landscape of his launching point, the hurt pilot is reduced to a child's helplessness. At just that invocation of the child, the bite of description becomes direct, accurate and simple. Yet the finish never meets the initial stake raised by the beginning, and the terminal couplet settles for an elegant, aestheticized irony:

> Shining as the fragile sun-marked plane
> That grows to him, rubbed silver tipped with flame.

Later poems like "Pilots, Man your Planes" (154) and "The Dead Wingman" (157) share the same faltering and stalling out. Even in the '50s, other war poems similarly struggle for altitude, as Jarrell splits between two antithetical attitudes towards soldier death. In the heroic economy, death is a large but justifiable expense, affirming our belief in bravery and existential daring, although Jarrell consistently shows the bitterness of the sacrificed in preference to any resigned pride and acceptance. But in the non-heroic economy of the war-resistant, soldier death is horrifying waste, and a re-immersion in the blood mesh of violence that the armed state perpetuates.

Jarrell's need to glaze the war event, to sustain that "great flowering" of the heroic, is reflected in the composition of *Little Friend, Little Friend,* which opens with "A Pilot from the Carrier," but finally denies heroic economy by closing with "The Death of

the Ball Turret Gunner" (*CP* 144). In the last bald, anti-heroic, and utterly unforgettable fetal image, the gunner flowers only as a corpse born into meaningless death:

> From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
> And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
> Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
> I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
> When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

Blind and helpless, part child-warrior, part neglected pet, he is the whelp of a cowed nature colonized by totalitarian politics.

From "The Death of The Ball Turret Gunner" to the writing of "Losses" (145) and "Eighth Air Force" (143), Jarrell made a still bigger leap away from glorifying heroic sacrifice to projecting killers killed, and to writing about boy-pilots who were both victims and makers of victims. From the 1940s on, Jarrell labors for an ethical reconciliation with a war his reason regarded as justly anti-Nazi and anti-fascist, and that his principles showed him led to the murderous Allied bombing campaigns of industrialized war. Often it is the jar of stateliness against individual rage and suffering, the smack of the aureate against the vernacular diction, that clues us into Jarrell's ambivalence about this war.

The best poems reject the solemn, highminded style, costive with unuttered reference, and take on a diction capable of the ingenious and striking fusion of formal and colloquial that served Jarrell so expressively elsewhere. As an older homefront soldier whom combat had bypassed, Jarrell's anxiety over his own masculinity may have pushed him towards a vicarious celebration of the glory and suffering of the combatant. Ultimately, however, his own lived life as a soldier began to supply more and more data for work that kicked free of reflex patriotism, even as war *did* link him to larger communities, giving him an immense and fruitful subject away from "that short disease, myself."

In a letter to Robert Lowell, Jarrell writes:

> I've never written a poem about myself in the army or war; unless you're vain or silly you realize that you, except insofar as you're in exactly the same

> boat as the others, aren't the primary subject of any sensible writing about the war. (RJ *Letters* 151)

But keen insight into issues did not automatically guarantee his putting into his poems something fuller than newspaper anecdote or newsreel symbol.

From the very beginning, character in Jarrell's poetry tended to flatten. Delmore Schwartz complained that Jarrell saw his people from the distance of an opera glass (184). It is certainly true that the force of the image in which the dead tail gunner is flushed out of his ball turret by a hose does not lie in the memorable particulars of the gunner's person. He, and the other child-warriors subject to the greater and lesser injustices of the State are merely vessels to the poem's thought. But that thought, neither boring nor irrelevant, is very much an evolving part of Jarrell's politics of the war poem.

Even in 1943 at the outset of his service, Jarrell built from his own experience in barracks, but to imply a larger war, nested within a larger history. "A Lullaby" croons: "He learns to fight for freedom and the State ; / He sleeps with seven men within six feet. // He picks up matches and he cleans out plates; / is lied to like a child, cursed like a beast." And finishes: "his dull torment mottles like a fly's / The lying amber of the histories" (169).

In all of these poems generated by Jarrell's enlistment, he shares a common sense of the army and the state fusing to produce an inherently totalitarian institution. Within it, individual identity and moral agency are torn away by mass crowding within narrow space, demeaning labor, institutional clothing, and control by a command hierarchy indistinguishable from prison, also an experience of fixed service. Within such a prison, a terrible longing grows to waken beyond the nightmare term, only then to feel disconsolately that the endless doldrum of the military sentence makes civilian life the dream into which one escapes from the army.

Unlike his friend Robert Lowell, Jarrell was not a pacifist, and chose to enlist. But as a poet whose memory clung to the helplessness of childhood fears and losses, Jarrell fits with predetermined ease within the anti-militarist recognition that industrial, mechanized warfare returns the soldier to a child's fatal dependency. In the army's rigid hierarchy, the tiny cog moves

within the wheels of a giant engine, itself only remotely, if murderously, connected to field operations. The passive, suffering figures that rise from Jarrell's poems are first, orphans within the family, then orphans within the bowels of the army. Eventually, however, even such a child, so negligently reared, must awaken to the consequences of his own moral choices.

As a three-year part of the great predatory mechanism of the army, Jarrell was not silent about being pinioned within it. The English poet Keith Douglas described the view from inside a tank column as what "a body would look to a germ riding in its bloodstream"(17). Pritchard notes that Jarrell, when writing to his first wife, Mackie, uses a similar figure: "Being in the army is like being involved in the digestive process of an immense worm or slug or something—[. . .] it doesn't seem terribly stupid or at all malicious, just too big to have any sense or meaning—a mess rather" (99). In another letter to his wife written during the last frantic months of his army career, trying to expedite his re-entry into civilian life, Jarrell was less temperate:

> the atmosphere was entirely one of lying, meaningless brutality and officiousness, stupidity not beyond belief but conception—the word for everything in the army is *petty*[.] (*Letters* 120)

Jarrell's impatience with military regimentation fits what the English historian Michael Howard marks as a difference between European and American perspectives on war. In the pre-WWI literature of Britain and Europe, cultural roots are sunk in "a bellicist past" little eroded (184-5). It is a tradition "at once terrible and comforting"; in it lies the European idea "that in the endurance and overcoming of suffering there is something that is ennobling, an idea that had reconciled the Christian and warrior ethic since the end of the Dark Ages" (185-6). Howard notes that "together with the yet older tradition of the classics that man should maintain dignity and serenity in spite of the wildest caprice of the gods—all this has disappeared" (186). For Americans, dignity and serenity don't necessarily emerge from submission to gods or god surrogates dressed in uniform.

Nor did Jarrell identify the gods with the state. Toward the end of the war, and during the postwar years, like everyone

learning more about the realities of Nazi atrocity, he moved towards a greater acceptance of the necessity of the war— everybody's war— but struggled perpetually to find the dignity of a sacrifice called for by a grinding industrial mechanism devaluing and degrading the process of rendering it.

Along with Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore show the raw ends of war logic as it played out for American poets who flourished or came to maturity during WWII. The historical reality penetrating discussion of WWII poetry names an enlarged theater of war eliding the boundaries between civilian and soldier, as soldiers bombed and civilian populations worked, and survived or died, within the arc of their missions. Inside the circle of that mobilization, the customary distinctions between what men and women do also shifted. Women, still in defeat treated as sexual booty, nevertheless slid out from under protected, neutral status to active defense work.[2] While total civilian fatalities in WWI were fifteen percent of the whole of what Wellington called "the butcher's bill," in WWII civilian fatalities, including Holocaust victims, shot up to sixty-five percent (Ehrenreich 206).

Correspondingly, as more civilians were threatened, more soldiers were not: the majority of soldiers— like Jarrell, like many soldier poets— who were posted in increasingly extended rear echelons, or even stationed in occupied countries, rarely or never saw actual combat. In Charles Carrington's memorable phrase: "The teeth of a modern army are more formidable than they were in 1916 but the tail is much longer" (15).

World Wars I and II saw further alterations in the class and status of the soldier. As Paul Fussell has observed, the writing and fighting classes were no longer separate, and mass conscription took over modern armies (*Thank God* 237). But changes in gender coding are harder to read. Traditionally, the war elegist from Wordsworth to Kipling to May Wedderburn Cannan gratefully applauds the doughty soldier's efforts from the shelter of the first-person plural "We." Any lesser acknowledgment of what the third-person singularly heroic "He" is spilling for "Us," looks meanminded. But now the "He" is split into a himself commenting on the terms of his sacrifice, and a "He," hidden as "Us," receiving it. Only the "She" part of that deserving "We" appears to be staying in place.

All protest against war still crashes into this division between fighters and fought-for, protecting and protected, so long as those seen receiving fire are male, whatever their class. Surely the desperate adoration that the soldier grants mother, wife, sisters, or daughters must be tinged by the apparent female exemption from war, his parting tears to be mutinously balanced somewhere in the mind against any too-ready female encouragement for him to leave, to fight. But in a twentieth-century war, the boundaries re-configure, in the opening years of WWII especially, the various duties and feelings incumbent on each side melted and changed, as men and women alike developed convictions about war in ways that revealed the particularities of their own exposure, or lack of it.

While the '30s saw Moore publish staunchly anti-militarist pieces like the one ironically entitled "To Military Progress" (82), by 1943, with "in Distrust of Merits," Moore knelt in a guilt-tinged fealty to the heroic "fighting, fighting, fighting." In 1940, her younger friend Elizabeth Bishop, still footloose as a recent college graduate on an independent income, wrote "Roosters" in devastating opposition to imperial codes of masculinity. Randall Jarrell dropped his burgeoning career as a writer and cultural journalist, like Moore, for a life in the army that initially bumped along from one low-level position to another. At least in part, the distinctive features of his anti-militarism emerged in response to his subsequent military experience, alongside an ingrained skepticism mostly denying the heroic. Nonetheless, Jarrell finished his army service as a flight instructor and trainer in celestial navigation, by then persuaded of the modest, practical utility of his service. The war continued only indirectly to touch either Moore or Bishop.

Living at the edge of combat operations, Jarrell was never a Luddite opposed to the machine. In 1938, he startled Robert Lowell by discoursing glibly on the superiority of British planes to German equivalents, and showed Lowell how a bombing attack might plausibly work over Kenyon College (Lowell, Taylor, Warren 107). Late in life his passion turned toward sleek, expensive racing cars. But his first, early fascination with the airman is in perfect harmony with the visionary-ecstatic mode about flight familiar in American poetry since Hart Crane on the Wright brothers in *The Bridge,* or Muriel Rukeyser's celebration of

them in *The Outer Banks.* Jarrell's poetry quickens to say what it means to send earth-hugging flesh upward in the exhilaration of flight, but also moves towards understanding the Faustian daemonic inherent in those planes and engines.

In *Fields of Battle,* the military historian John Keegan divides America's romance with the airborne into one strain of boyish exaltation lifting Americans skyward, and yet another and darker in which the lift holds a payload of destruction, that lift constituting a bargain always tinged with our least-confessable urges for dominion:

> The madness which seized Europe in 1940-42, the madness of nihilism, ultimately seized the U.S. Army Air Force also, and at the end of the war it bombed and bombed as if bombing were an industrial process, a form of work, the human activity at which America excels above all other nations. (332)

But beside his penchant for the elegiac, Jarrell shared the leftward politics of the journals in which he published. In 1941, Jarrell's view of "The war aim," or what he paraphrased from his newspaper reading as "Great Britain and the United States as the armed police force of the world—" was something "surely beyond any parodist's talents or dreams" (*Letters* 49).

Although the younger Jarrell readily flung out opinions about capitalist excess, life in the Air Force checked his tendencies to apostrophise or abstract. In the titles alone of certain poems—"The Sick Nought," "Mail Call" (170), "The Lines" (198), and "Absent with Official Leave" (171)— one can see the growth of a homely, deflationary realism about army life, at variance with the battlefield detail or pastoral filler of Great War poetry. There is a heartfelt candor about what it means to go to sleep in a crowd of other beds, someone breathing or sighing audibly all night long, or to stand around for hours to wait in line for shots or to fill out forms; or especially, to be the bored or restive member of a herd of men only partially assenting to their captivity.

Being in the Air Force and reading Ernie Pyle instead of Allen Tate only pushed Jarrell's poems away from the brassy generality. Where Great War poets like Ivor Gurney saw mother

England in leafy embrace (51), Jarrell glimpsed an overmastering State. At work beside the many other men shipping out for active duty in Europe, for him, the familiar pieties of soldiers as honorable ransom for the continuities of civilized life withered, and doubts grew about the necessity or value of their sacrifice.

Both Jarrell's distance from and compassion for these men and the "commodity" of their lives is visible in so many poems. Living within a sense of his own life as suspended for the duration of the war, Jarrell saw the soldier's life as an otherness, a dream of being in which glimpses of different and better realities were intermittently and achingly present. As a poet, Jarrell turned inordinately to liminal being, and a remarkable number of his poems rest in the turn between sleep and waking, night and day, where palpable and impalpable fuse and drift. Not surprising, then, that his war poems on airmen, prisoners, and concentration camp inmates should follow the contours of these states, adding a sense of the fantastic against the commoner drive towards naturalistic representation.

In poems of the mid '40s like "The Death of The Ball Turret Gunner" and "Second Air Force" (177), war betrays all optimism, operating from within a crucial deception about the nature of its politics. As one answer to Clausewitz's famous dictum about war as an extension of politics by other means, "A War" says (208):

> There set out, slowly, for a Different World,
> At four, on winter mornings, different legs . . .
> *You can't break eggs without making an omelette*
> — That's what they tell the eggs.

But already in "Losses" (145), originally published in 1944, Jarrell is not simply responding to the pilot as victim; here, compassion and keen insight blend into the muddled distributions of guilt and innocence that characterize everyone drawn into wartime event:

> We read our mail and counted up our missions—
> In bombers named for girls, we burned
> The cities we had learned about in school—
> Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among

The people we had killed and never seen.
When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;
When we died they said, "Our casualties were low."
They said, "Here are the maps"; we burned the cities.

It was not dying— no, not ever dying;
But the night I died I dreamed that I was dead,
And the cities said to me: "Why are you dying?
We are satisfied, if you are; but why did I die?"

Critically, there is a distinction between the victimage of the soldier and the civilian, even if the politics embedded in these poems tends to the diffuse. Jarrell never resolved— as if it could be resolved— the morality of our behaviour in the bombing firestorms of Dresden and Tokyo with his own sense of the larger justice of the Allied position in WWII, a justice which he acknowledged directly and simply in 1961 at a reading of "Eighth Air Force" at Pfeiffer College in North Carolina (*Randall Jarrell Reads*). Speaking with immense sympathy for the pilots, he says quietly: "These people were our saviours. I mean if people like this hadn't murdered other people and died why we would be under a Nazi government and there would be a concentration camp over at High Point and so on."[3] By this time, when Jarrell appears to have switched wholly to thinking of WWII as the good war, what soldiers do still stands under the name of "murder."

Jarrell did not see his gift in poetry as necessarily discursive, and described his own mind as "poetic and semi-feminine" (*Letters* 19). At the edge of war, both within and without it, he found in himself the womanly loving-kindness which he denied first to government and then to nature itself, meting out a stingy, largely sentimentalized tenderness to the actual women in his poems. "Second Air Force" looks with affection and wry clarity at the planes, which have the same property of a clumsy humanity as the soldiers climbing into them:

Fortresses, all tail
Stand wrong and flimsy on their skinny legs,
And the crews climb to them clumsily as bears.
The head withdraws into its hatch (a boy's)
The engines rise to their blind laboring roar,
And the green made beasts run home to air.

But the watching mother in this vivid, dusky scene remains numb and speechless in the world in which for the boy-bears "the bombers answer everything."

Arrogating all feminine forgiveness to himself as disembodied speaker, Jarrell holds wives and mothers at a stern distance from emotional sustenance. In his war poetry, a brooding, maternal tenderness for boy pilots is matched by his tenderness for the cities that went up in flames under them. Yet when women appear in poems like "The Sick Nought" (174) or "Protocols" (193) they and other civilian survivors present a featureless passivity. "The Truth" (195) burns with vivid circumstance: here, a displaced, fatherless boy calls up Jarrell's acute empathy for a childhood of denial and betrayal. But in a return to traditional war lyric, it is usually Jarrell's young airman who flares in memory, as Christ and hero, damaged, damaging, and consecrated.

From another kind of tenderness, stemming from traits temperamentally, historically, and psychologically different, Wilfred Owen in an earlier war draws the parallel between Christ's and the soldier's sacrifice in ways that later soldiers were bound to modify. In a much-cited letter to Osbert Sitwell on July 4th, 1918 Owen unburdens himself, while he helps in the training of troops and prepares himself to return with them to the Front:

> For 14 hours yesterday I was at work—teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine he thirst till after the last halt. I attended his Supper to see that there were not complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails. I see to it that he is dumb, and stands at attention before his accusers. With a piece of silver I buy him every day,

and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha. (*Letters* 337)

Dominic Hibberd in *Owen The Poet* documents in Owen's art his *fin de siècle* despair, and its fatalistic resignation; Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* comments as well on the theme of the love-death, or *Liebestod*, for which such a view of an officer's charges provided the psychological underpinning, in so many of these poems, the noble, eroticized death of the handsome soldier demonstrably has its roots in the underground Uranian, or homosexual, literature which Owen had discovered before the war.

This apotheosis of the doomed youth becomes the broader story of the holy company of the dead which living women enter only as mourners of a more and more masochistic and death-driven Christian hero. But when Christ appears as soldier in WWII, as he does in Randall Jarrell's "Eighth Air Force," the ambivalence and ambiguities of the parallels knot them with ironies of a lesser splendor. Here is the first stanza:

> If in an odd angle of the hutment,
> A puppy laps the water from a can
> Of flowers, and the drunk sergeant shaving
> Whistles O *Paradise!* — shall I say that man
> Is not as men have said: a wolf to man? (143)

In four stanzas, Jarrell sets a deliberately and cozily domestic scene. The puppy laps water from the flower can in one of the minor indiscretions of the dog world, and the sergeant drunk in his own minor indiscretion whistles "*O Paradiso*!"[4] The whole set-up undercuts the major darkness of the poet's query, meant to vibrate throughout, posing animal innocence in answer to animal brutality. At this still innocuous moment, these bomber pilots stationed in England are by implication not so very wolf-like. And yet, by the second stanza:

> The other murderers troop in yawning;
> Three of them play Pitch, one sleeps, and one
> Lies counting missions, lies there sweating

Till even his heart beats: One; One; One.
O murderers! . . . Still, this is how it's done:

Jarrell puts us exactly where he wants us: confronting "murderers" who troop in yawning not like soldiers but like Boy Scouts playing games back at the den, until the poem slews around finally to the sweating insomniac turning over and over on his cot who counts the missions left that he has to fly. (Jarrell's note explains that this man has "one to go before being sent home.")[5] But it is as if piccolo notes were being replaced in the score by deeper brass, as guilt and distress occupy the remaining lines about the exiled playfellows of the poem. Here are the final stanzas:

This is a war. . . .But since these play, before they die,
Like puppies with their puppy; since, a man,
I did as these have done, but did not die—
I will content the people as I can
And give up these to them: Behold the man!

I have suffered in a dream, because of him,
Many things; for this last saviour, man,
I have lied as I lie now. But what is lying?
Men wash their hands, in blood, as best they can:
I find no fault in this just man.

For Owen and Jarrell, the boy status of the soldiers is held in mitigation of their blood guilt; but for the distressed, lying, and complicit speaker, boyishness inevitably becomes a property of infantilization, a retarded sense of responsible agency.

Initially for Jarrell, this quality has been the clear outgrowth of the menacing control that the super-state imposes on a diminished, Orwellian citizenry. Jarrell's later poem allows a critique of boyhood, a part of the larger critique of the impact of cultural codes of masculinity, wholly absent from Owen's work.[6] For Jarrell, to an even greater extent than it does for Owen, blood guilt appears as an issue, both for the primary actors, *and* for the witnesses and pledges of that action. "This is a war"; and still resembling Owen's tender and tormented officer who sells out his charges to their time on Golgotha, the poet of WWII

steps inside Pilate, washing his hands of, and sending on his way, the murderous God-man to be himself crucified and killed. Quite differently from Owen's passage, Jarrell's final lines, with a terrible irony, echo Christ's presentation to the people, unsoftened by Jarrell's own explanation of what he intends. Jarrell's note (8) says: "The phrases from the Gospels compare such criminals and scapegoats as these with that earlier criminal and scapegoat about whom the Gospels were written." The complicated set of synoptic references render the bomber pilots as one with Christ.

And yet—there is no denying that men's hands are washed in blood, not water; or that Pilate's hand-washing in the Biblical text symbolizes a cowardly evasion of judgment; no denying the premise that whatever justification for murder that there is lands in human courts, not holy ones, and erupts there with undermining force. If Christ and man are one, and spilled blood and the water of absolution and abandonment are one, crime and sacrifice still join, reverberating in hopelessly dissonant chords of meaning. Wolf/dog/man, and soldier/Christ, the triplet and the pair, fuse in a tense balance of elements that the poem asks us to question and pleads with us to resolve.

Jarrell's poem echoes the query about man's wolfish behaviour that he found in Moore's "In Distrust of Merits," although his reading of her poem was both trenchant and cruel. Wilfred Owen, writing "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*" ["it is sweet and noble to die for one's country"] and scolding Jessie Pope for her patriotic invocations, assaulted her with his irony. Dealing a similar blow, Jarrell seems to punish Moore for being a sheltered bystander daring to write about war at all. Moore charges herself in these lines:

> I must
> fight till I have conquered in myself what
> causes war, but I would not believe it.
> I inwardly did nothing.
> O iscariotlike crime!

What seems to have set Jarrell off are these lines:

If these great patient
dyings— all these agonies
and woundbearings and blood shed—
can teach us how to live, these
dyings were not wasted (138).

For Moore, indirectly honoring a brother on active duty in the Navy, soldiers hold their ground in acts of "beauty." Like Owen, Jarrell takes particular offense at ascriptions of nobility in war, of "beauty," and for a too-ready civilian acceptance of wasteful dying. The question of waste, of course, has been particularly burdensome. Thundering at Moore that "passive misery" is the sum "of that great activity. War," he says:

> she distrusts her own merits, but trusts, accepts almost as if she were afraid to question, those of the heroic soldiers of her poem. She does not understand that they are heroes in the sense that the chimney sweeps, the factory children in the blue books, were heroes: routine loss in the routine business of the world. She sees them [. . .] *fighting fighting fighting;* she does not remember that most of the people in a war never fight for even a minute—though they bear for years and die forever. (Jarrell, *Kipling* 129)

Indignantly, with a confidence born of his army vet status, Jarrell sweeps away the distinction between front line and rear line, and shoos Moore away from war and back to her animal Baedekers, pointing to her morality as a weakness of her politics: "We are surprised to find Nature, in Miss Moore's poll of it, so strongly in favor of Morality; but all the results are implicit in the sampling—like the Literary Digest, she sent postcards only to the nicer animals." He ends crushingly:

> Both her economic practice and moral theory repeat wistfully, *Laissez faire, laissez aller.* Poor private-spirited citizen, wandering timidly but obliviously among the monoliths of a deadlier age, will they never let you alone? To us, as we look skyward to

> the bombers, this urban Frost, the frequenter of zoos, calls *Culture and morals and Nature still have truth, seek shelter there;* and this is true; but we forget it beside the cultured, moral, and natural corpse. . . . At Maidanek the mice had holes, but a million and a half people had none. (Jarrell, *Kipling* 128)

Moore's "private spirit" blinds her to the complex fusions of the universal warfare state, in which victory continues to maintain bombers overhead. Under Jarrell's baselisk stare, nature, partner to culture and morals, remains pure only to those who limit their intercourse with animal ferocity to the zoo.

Unlike Owen, Jarrell faced a war in which censorship could not wholly conceal the impact of bombing and tank campaigns on non-military targets. The blind, averted gaze of noncombatants of WWI, which had so outraged Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, was for many painfully and/or knowingly sighted and re-directed in WWII. Besides the journals for which Jarrell wrote like *The Nation* and *The New Republic,* he had reading access to various official materials. To Lowell he writes in August 1945: "You should see a diagram of the latest type incendiary (it's literally impossible to put *it* out) they use, on the Japanese cities. What a nightmare! [. . .] I wrote this about two weeks ago, before the atom bomb and the peace. You can guess how I feel about both— especially about Nagasaki, which was bombed simply to test out the second type of bomb" (*Letters* 129)

Jarrell's reaction to Moore's "In Distrust of Merits" only heightens the spectacle of his unqualified admiration for Elizabeth Bishop. In writing "Roosters," Bishop evinced an antimilitarism like Jarrell's; yet her poem acknowledges more extensively than Jarrell's war poetry ever did, the social injury that a pure worship of heroic masculinity engenders. A ripe decade into their acquaintance, Randall Jarrell wrote to Elizabeth Bishop warmly but deferentially merging both his own and her poetic enterprise. He said:

> I like your poetry better than anybody's since the Frost-Stevens-Eliot-Moore generation, so I looked with awed wonder at some phrases feeling to me a little like some of my phrases, in your poems; I felt

> as if, so to speak, some of my wash-cloths were part of a Modigliani collage, or as if my cat had got into a Vuillard. (*Letters* 420)

There's no indication that Bishop reciprocated these feelings. In 1948 she remarked to Carley Dawson: "Jarrell at his best has a remarkable dark, creepy Grimm-Wagnerian quality" (*One Art* 173). In the same letter, she notes that his interest in the French poet Tristan Corbière brings out "more and more of his rather maudlin, morbid streak." To Robert Lowell and others she is often picky and grudging about Jarrell's poems, in the early years especially offering the rapid fire of disapproval with which one sibling might spray another too close to treading on his feet. On May 5th, 1959, she writes to Lowell: "Have you ever read Capt. Slocum's books? They are wonderful— but please don't breathe a word to Randall because I'm sure he'd like them, too, and immediately write a poem about Slocum, and I really think I'd like to try one myself— " (Bishop to Lowell correspondence, Vassar Library)

The same uneasy, joky competitiveness governed her estimate of Jarrell's war poetry, with which in 1956 she saw herself in unfortunate collision for the Pulitzer Prize, which she went on to win. In June she wrote to Lowell again, saying "I honestly feel from the bottom of my heart that it should have gone to Randall, for some of his war poems, and I don't know why it didn't" (*One Art* 319). The "honest" note, with its self-conscious protest creeps in to Jarrell himself on October 7th of the same year. Again lamenting the disposition of the Pulitzer she says, "I really cannot for the life of me understand why they didn't give it to you." She adds: "Some of the war poems are surely the best ever written on the subject, honestly— and as far as our wars go, the only ones. But re-reading them I began to think that perhaps that's just why; that's why they settled on someone innocuous like me. The war is out of style now and they want to forget it?" (*One Art* 324). Bishop attempts to be soothing here— "surely" she never considered her own poetry "innocuous"— and to patch over, at least with Jarrell personally, the ongoing discomfort of valuing highly his praise of her work— from the very first always given generously— which rubbed continually against her private judgment of his poems.

Other reservations might stem from her settled dislike of his representation of women and from her own suspicion of anything resembling a public rhetoric, or a capitulation to conventional sentimentality about war, a subject inviting from so many the "maudlin" and the "morbid." It is worth noting that in her consolatory message to Jarrell, she merely notes that war is now unfashionable, refusing to sort out the complexity of what exactly his poems in their singularity did do with war.

Bishop ranked her own responses to war with Virginia Woolf's antiwar themes in *Three Guineas.* With Woolf, Bishop shares what she characterizes as a distaste for war's "terrible *generalizing* of every emotion" (*One Art* 113). For Bishop, one of war's corruptions is the rhetorical reduction and oversimplification of experience, and an appropriate resistance to war seems to extend to even allowing it house room in the life of the imagination— so susceptible is art to its deformations.

Unlike many European, Latino, Asian, and African women, but very like most North Americans, Elizabeth Bishop's direct experience of war was marginal. When she found herself in the middle of insurrection in Brazil in 1956, and then again more sharply in 1964, Robert Lowell first worried about her safety, and then in letters couldn't resist egging her on to write the war that clearly his mouth was watering to follow:

> I am still reeling as I try to imagine the stir of the last few days and surely the last weeks or months.

Indeed, his mind already leaps ahead to possess her conflict:

> As I flew home, there was a clear sky across the Atlantic when we reached it, and I pictured the same moon, thousands of miles south, shining on the same ocean, everything strangely nearer because the sandy shore led like a road to you, and in the mind one might walk it, and be lost as I then thought in conflicting knots of thin helmeted soldiers. (Lowell to Bishop correspondence, Vassar Library)

Bishop's amused response deliberately undercuts these dreamings and imaginings in cool and domestic detail; "thin helmeted

soldiers" are replaced by an incongruously childlike image of Brazilian marines in military regalia:

> Another division of marines held the sort of park where Goulart's "palace" is, protecting him— but there are also big apartment houses in it where several of our friends live. They couldn't go out at all for a couple of days. There's a small playground in the middle, and at 2 AM the friend looked out and saw marines (they're the ones that wear the pretty uniforms and Scotch bonnets with streamers) swinging in the swings, "pumping away," he said to swing as high as possible. (Bishop to Lowell correspondence, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

She sidelines combat, and derides a show of "pretty uniforms."

Similarly, her vision of "thin helmeted soldiers" in "Brazil, January 1, 1502" ends not with the men in creaking armor, but with those "maddening" women in tormenting retreat before them. Her reworking of Civil War extracts, "From Trollope's Journal," again dismisses imperial glory, focusing on a shabby Washington, "The White House in a sad, unhealthy spot," and poxy cattle for the Army quartered deep in mud. She ends with a croaking surgeon, himself diseased:

> "Sir, I do declare
> everyone's sick! The soldiers poison the air.
> (*CP* 132)

Infection and disease, domestic realities for massed armies, and which up until the moment of penicillin accounted for as many or more deaths and casualties as direct battlefield hits (Cowdrey 3), come to the forefront in Bishop's poem. But the final line suggests the contagion of militarism itself.

But "Roosters" provided the most open feminism of Elizabeth Bishop's career. Although she swept away Marianne Moore and Moore's mother's improving suggestions with as much dispatch as an affectionate and genuine respect for these ladies would allow, she sounds quite firm about the slant of her poem. With unusual defensiveness she writes to Moore: "I

cherish my 'water-closet' and the other sordidities because I want to emphasize the essential baseness of militarism" (*One Art* 96). Much later, when she speaks to George Starbuck in 1977 about the poem's tendency towards "feminist tract"— a tendency that "history" has shown her— she intuitively distrusts such abstractions. Admirable or not, poem centering on war stir her ambivalence.

Tardily, in a letter to Moore she acknowledges receipt of a copy of "In Distrust of Merits," saying that it

> overawed me into another two months' silence. Oh Marianne, all my congratulations. It seems to me so intricately impressive, with a kind of grinding caterpillar tread that is almost too upsetting. (*One Art* 113)

This intricate impressiveness indeed weighed heavily. The caterpillar tread of Moore's tank-like poem shadows her reality only in metaphor, as Bishop refuses to give an inch to any open acknowledgment of martial necessity. Her reaction is full of self-conflict. Bishop's pre-publication letter in January 1945 to her editor, Ferris Greenslet, taken up with other last minute details about her first book of poems, says anxiously: "The fact that none of these poems deal directly with the war, at a time when so much war poetry is being published, will, I am afraid, leave me open to reproach" (*One Art* 125).

In 1945, not to write about war appeared unpatriotic or worse, obtuse; yet for any woman not in nurse's or war-worker's shoes, and not being bombed or interned or on the run as a refugee in the dominant narrative of the time, the literary options are dubious: from a woman sensitive to her position *hors de combat* a wary response was requisite. An American woman could play a latter-day Jessie Pope, and cheer on the soldier laddies aggressively from her sheltered corner, cry for an absent lover, or employed, single and unencumbered, bank the swollen checks drawn from a booming war economy. In any case, as war spread more and more deeply into a working and thinking life, it could have brought Bishop a deeply unstabilizing sense of her own irrelevance at the site of others' pain, grief, and confusion. But while the proliferating war struck her as the responsibility of

masculine others, female anger and frustration at being unable to change the river in its bed and send it elsewhere brought her to stinging protest of the whole gendered system.

In "Roosters," written in 1940 in response to Axis bombing, war is inextinguishably the territory of the male; and in this poem, war for Bishop becomes the always compromised subject of the heroic, in which strutting cocks

> brace their cruel feet and glare
>
> with stupid eyes while from their beaks there rise
> the uncontrolled, traditional cries. (*CP* 35)

In "Roosters," whose "sordidities" were so stoutly defended by Bishop, tradition, roused in "the gun-metal dark," becomes a fouled (certainly fowled) presence rising from "the water-closet door, / from the dropping-plastered henhouse floor," and the allegorized male ego thrusts "Deep from protruding chests / in green-gold medals dressed, / planned to command and terrorize the rest." Each "Very combative" rooster is "an active / displacement in perspective;" one rooster flies "with raging heroism defying / even the sensation of dying." Yet another rooster "lies in dung / with his dead wives." In this poem, war is a fundamentally dirty enterprise, and the hero takes the women dumb enough to constitute a compliant harem along with him. "Virile presence" is comic grotesque, and any civilians submissive to its appeal go down in terror and ignominy with it. Significantly, for feminists claiming a special female innoculation from the vice of war, when men can be brutal, women can be weakly complicit.

By concentrating on civilians, Bishop shares a subject with both early and late Jarrell. But while she grapples allegorically with the gender economy that produces rooster fighters and hen supporters, with both suffering, her poems do not attempt the comprehensive scope with which Jarrell is both so partially and strikingly successful. Jarrell's war poems gather breadth of reference from his removed status as a noncombatant, in weaker poems translating into the wooden heaven of authorial omniscience. Both Bishop and Jarrell sit out the war in American safety. But dressed in soldier's khaki, Jarrell finally brought himself to critique the Old Boy's ideology of adventure, while

Bishop, unable to change the deeper dress of gender, perfected her single strike against the drape of masculinity itself.

From Jarrell's first to almost his last book, his opinions about war and society nonetheless match Bishop's anti-militarist assessments in many particulars. Even in the war poems most addicted to the grandiose or Bishop's dreaded *"generalizing— "*, Jarrell's work takes surprising turns. The greatest temptation, to surrender to the blind patriotism that inflates friend and degrades enemy, that moves to flat binarism and cartoon or posterboard motivation, never compromised his choices. By the time that the Phony War of 1939-40 was over, Jarrell had found his stride, and the chameleon sensitivity— however incomplete— with which he slipped inside the skin of refugee children, the wife of a dead pilot, the mother of a returning airman, and other assorted wartime identities of all genders, ages and geographic stages of wartime posting— had begun.

That Randall Jarrell, as man and soldier, had a soldier's ticket of admission as an authentic war witness, did not prevent various critics from dismissing his war poetry on the grounds of either sentimentality or bad style. While poets and critics like R.W. Flint and Karl Shapiro were strong in their praises, others like James Dickey and Donald Hall, were doubting or hostile. Even friendly testimony like William Pritchard's notes (120) that there are war poems in which "Each teeters on the edge of the lugubrious [. . .] poems which in their reiterated insistence never let up, but purchase their intensity at the cost, perhaps, of wearing out the reader— for all the vividness of individual passages."

R.W. Flint, a veteran himself, generously rejects expectations for a more familiar kind of war poetry; Jarrell's virtue

> was obscured from some of us who had been closer to the action and wore a veteran's foolish pride not quite lightly enough, forgetting that the civilian Whitman and Melville had been the Civil War poets, resisting a repetition of the mud-soaked griefs of Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg in WWI, looking perhaps for [. . .] something abrupt and hard-bitten, steeped in romantic disillusion and military slang; brief, sweeping, dismissive ironies, like

> the crushing out of a last cigarette before take-off. (Lowell, Taylor, Warren 79)

Ultimately, Flint looks at Jarrell's work as an advance in the subject matter and thinking of war lyric. In his useful writing on these poems, Flint considers what Jarrell did to enlarge both subject and point of view in war writing:

> He moves beyond the avuncular-idyllic manner of Whitman's *Drum Taps,* beyond the lovable Kipling fantasy of marching, campfires, and taverns, beyond even the comradeliness of Owen, to a place that mixes pity and philosophy, exact knowledge of war and sympathy for its victims, on a grand scale; a fresh visionary tension. (83)

Randall Jarrell grasped the implications of late twentieth-century industrial war-making, but in the best of his work he also tucked his conclusions inside a language as homey and direct as a pump handle. *The Complete Poems* constructs an encircling map of twentieth-century consciousness: in wildly ambitious categories, its Table of Contents swings from "The Graves in the Forest" to "Bombers" to "Carriers" to "Prisoners" to "Camps and Fields" and to "Children and Civilians," and so on. In perhaps the least persuasive, many of the poems, especially the mid-war poems like "A Pilot from the Carrier," try to fly. In the manner of the traditional elegiac and transformational heroic, they want to soar, leaving material death behind or beyond in some ether of the poet's coruscating and embalming language.

But poems like "Losses" and "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," acknowledging a truth about the youth and expendability of airmen and soldiers by a ruthless state, also link his pilots and gunners to the postwar existence of the "aging machine part," Jarrell's name for the anonymous speaker of "The Woman at the Washington Zoo." The aureate diction of some of his poems creates a dignity for wartime sacrifice in keen opposition to what Bishop evaluates as war's impact, a dignity suspiciously close to what Jarrell condemned in Marianne Moore's poem. Jarrell's poems encompass *lager* and prison camp, and the whole horrifying, global reach of burning city, fortified desert,

and mined atoll; one man, he couldn't load up all that pain and terror onto his poetry, and manage unwavering insight and investment in reality, too. Is it that lyric particulars must break under epic necessity, or is it the larger need to acknowledge that even the ambition to represent war's range is to give play to suffering that should stay unspeakable and unaffirmable in depletion? At the least, the reverse side of Jarrell's coin provides a tough and bitter antidote to Moore's parochialism: the evil that created WWII recurs in the fret of postwar life.

No judgment of Jarrell's war poetry is complete that does not account for his difficult mix of irony and elegy, or of the magnitude of his vision, one having the further intelligence to settle war itself within the disquieting borders of the modern peace. When Jarrell scolds Moore he says: "she should have distrusted the peace of which our war is only the extrapolation. It is the peace of which we were guilty" (Jarrell, *Kipling* 129) War/peace, remembrance/forgetting, and most potently, innocence/guilt— these are only some of the binaries which Jarrell's brilliance exploded in a war poetry not quite like any other. ❦

Notes

1. All page number citations for Jarrell's poems follow the numbering of Randall Jarrell, *The Complete Poems*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1969.
2. Susan M. Hartmann gives this information: "During World War II 25 percent of military personnel never left the United States and only about one in eight actually saw combat. In World War II only 34.1 percent of army personnel was engaged in purely military occupations. Thus, the increasingly 'civilian' nature of many military duties, more than 10 percent of which were administrative and clerical, made possible the employment of women in the defense establishment" (34).
3. Jarrell was no doubt acutely aware of the high risk life that WWII pilots led. John Keegan gives these numbers in *Fields of Battle:* "The Army Air Forces lost 52,173 aircrew in combat in the Second World War, four-fifths of them in Europe and the majority of these from the Eighth Air Force bomber crews who flew from Britain. [. . .] There was roughly, an even chance of surviving the course; put the other way about, there was an even chance of not" (331).

4. Jarrell notes at the Pfeiffer College reading that the aria is drawn from Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Vasco da Gama*, celebrating the vision of the New World. That the denizens of the New World paradise were returning to bomb the Old World seems an irony Jarrell is plucking at us to notice.

5. Hastings, Wright, and Glueck comment that combat fatigue for airmen was strictly correlated with numbers of missions flown, not to any previous record of emotional distress. In the European Theater of Operations, 25 missions were at first standard, which was upped to 30, with the worst tension occurring in anticipation of the final mission. Their restricted report, *Psychiatric Experiences of the Eighth Air Force*, had been issued to Air Force flight surgeons in August, 1944. Other reports possibly familiar to Jarrell include a piece by Brendan Gill, interviewing a pilot, in *The New Yorker* for August 12, 1944. Hallock, the pilot, is quoted saying: "It was getting close to the end and my luck was bound to be running out faster and faster. [. . .] The twenty-ninth mission was to Thionville, in France, and all I thought about on that run was 'One more, one more, one more.' "

6. James Dickey's work in mid-career and earlier provides an interesting comparison with Jarrell's treatment of boyhood. Dickey, who claimed to have flown one hundred combat missions in the Pacific, feels the urgency of dealing with war guilt in "The Firebombing" (69). This poem, written in the free verse forms of the 1960's but dealing with WWII, points towards the anguish of guilt expressed in Vietnam War veteran poetry. Other Dickey poems like "The Sheepchild," and "Cherrylog Road," in which the speaker adolescent is "wild to be wreckage forever," also deal with an untamed sexuality and exultant adolescent destructiveness that is never part of Jarrell's take on boy pilots.

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THOMAS TRAVISANO

WARS CIVIL AND UNCIVIL
Family, Culture, and the Child in Lowell's Poetry

❦

When Robert Trail Spence Lowell IV was born on 1 March 1917 at his grandfather Winslow's Chestnut Street townhouse on Boston's genteel Beacon Hill, his father, a naval officer, was away on sea duty, and the United States, its Atlantic shipping the target of unrestricted attack by German U-boats, hovered on the brink of war. One month after Lowell's birth, on 2 April 1917, Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany and Germany's allies, announcing that "the world must be made safe for democracy." Four days later, Congress passed the declaration, and the United States entered the Great War and made it global.

Lowell would later remark in an eloquent posthumous tribute to Randall Jarrell that this intimate friend's key subject was his "lost, raw childhood, only recapturable in memory and imagination. Above all, childhood! . . . For Jarrell this was the divine glimpse, lifelong to be lived with, painfully and tenderly relived, transformed, matured— man with and against woman, child with and against adult" (*Prose* 96). Lowell's preoccupation with childhood was as pervasive as Jarrell's, and Lowell's treatment of war, another key subject of Jarrell's, was if anything still more pervasive. Lowell's preoccupation with war, a cultural phenomenon that dominated both the public world of his growing-up years, and his own troubled childhood family circle, reached into every era of human history, and an engagement with the problem of war had a shaping influence on every phase of Lowell's artistic development. The themes of childhood and war are insistently linked in Lowell's poetry, which constantly sets images of war against images of domestic conflict, "man with and against woman, child with and against adult."

Lowell, in his poignant, early, neglected "Buttercups" from *Lord Weary's Castle*, or in the vivid childhood passages in "Mills of the Kavanaughs," would presage his own lifelong need to painfully and tenderly relive childhood experience, a need that led Lowell to write many published and unpublished autobiographical sketches in prose, to craft an autobiographical sequence in *Life Studies* that roots itself deeply in childhood, to write the many child-centered poems in *History* and *Day by Day*, and to weave frequent allusions to childhood through dozens of other poems throughout his oeuvre. These include the emotionally ambiguous opening of *Near the Ocean*'s "Waking Early Sunday Morning," where the poet yearns "to feel the unpolluted joy / and criminal leisure of a boy / — no rainbow smashing a dry fly / in the white run is as free as I" (11-14) and the equally complex opening of "For the Union Dead," where Lowell recalls the moment when, as a boy, "my nose crawled like a snail on the glass" of the "old South Boston Aquarium," while "my hands tingled / to burst the bubbles / drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish" (5-7). The yearning to return to the innocence and freedom of a remembered childhood is ironically— and characteristically— undercut in these famous poems by undertones of betrayal, violence, and imprisonment, and both "Waking Early Sunday Morning" and "For the Union Dead" soon drift toward inward encounters with the outward images of a world dominated by war.

Childhood experience reemerged powerfully as a subject of continuous exploration in the work of a wide range of poets born after 1910 including Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman Theodore Roethke, Gwendolyn Brooks, Dylan Thomas, Philip Larkin, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath and many, many others for the first time since the first generation of English and American romantics. This startling reemergence goes unremarked in such conventional accounts of the poetry that followed modernism as M. L. Rosenthal's *New Modern Poetry*, James E. B. Breslin's *From Modern to Contemporary*, and David Perkins's *History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*.[1] Yet this is a phenomenon of unusual importance and persistence: our leading poetry reviews remain full of poems that return memorably to scenes of childhood, recreated as the site of formative and (often) traumatic early experience. This recurrent preoccupation

with childhood in the several generations that have followed modernism demands more considered study. I propose to read Lowell's preoccupation with childhood through the lens of childhood studies, a newly emerging, multidisciplinary field of study of potentially enormous scope and importance that concerns itself with the ways cultures construct and have constructed childhood. Childhood studies aims to explore, among other things, the diverse ways that writers and other creative artists represent and have represented childhood. A diverse range of postmodern poets, including such first generation postmodernists as Robert Lowell, lend themselves to readings from the perspective of childhood studies because they display an extraordinarily persistent concern with exploring the processes and anomalies of individual childhood development.

The difference between modernist poets, who tend to elide childhood, and postmodernist poets, who richly and variously represent it, is quite marked. From the perspective of childhood studies, one feels compelled to argue that a renewed preoccupation with the marginalized child or adolescent as he or she passes through crucial stages in the painful and uncertain processes of individual human development emerges as a distinguishing feature of several of the most vigorous branches of postmodern poetry. In Lowell's case, this preoccupation with childhood links very strongly to an equally powerful and persistent preoccupation with war, perhaps because, in Lowell's imagination, the process of growing up was something very much like war, and because from childhood through adulthood the personal and cultural landscapes he inhabited were engulfed on the one hand by unresolved conflicts and losses from childhood or adolescence and on the other hand by the presence of war or the lingering threat of war.

In 1927 Robert Lowell, a ten-year-old boy growing up in a three-story brick rowhouse at 91 Revere Street on Boston's Beacon Hill, was facing many of the issues— loss, abandonment, emotional abuse, and feelings of powerlessness and moral confusion— that were simultaneously confronting such then-youthful colleagues-to-be as Jarrell and Elizabeth Bishop. On the face of it, Lowell's situation might seem safer and more stable. His parents remained together and would never divorce. He descended, on both sides, from prominent Boston families and

his future education was already marked out for him at such exclusive schools as St. Marks and Harvard University, each of which could claim an ancestor or living relation as president. Still, his first ten years had been haunted by feelings of marginalization and dispossession that would only intensify. In "91 Revere St.," Lowell recalled his feelings about attending

> the boarding school for which I had been enrolled at birth, and was due to enter in 1930. I distrusted change, knew each school since kindergarten had been more constraining and punitive than its predecessor, and believed the suburban country day schools were flimsily disguised fronts for reformatories. (*LS* 28)

As Lowell recalled his life on 91 Revere Street, "I felt drenched in my parents' passions." These passions took the form of ongoing, nightly verbal warfare overheard by the young poet-in-the-making during "the two years my mother spent in trying to argue my father into resigning from the Navy" (*LS* 19). Lowell recalled the "arthritic spiritual pains" of this period, during which "Mother had violently set her heart on the resignation. She was hysterical even in her calm." The wrenching effect of this not-altogether-civil domestic combat went deep into Lowell's psyche, and his father's ultimate defenselessness, which led him to mumble "Yes, yes, yes," in nighttime conversations with his wife overheard by their eavesdropping son, made it clear that his father would not be able to defend his son in case of aggression from a mother whose threatening presence in various subtle forms was a daily reality for Lowell: "I grew less willing to open my mouth. I bored my parents, they bored me" (*LS* 19). When, in 1927, Lowell's father finally did resign from the Navy, the one institution in which he seemed to have a place, an identity, and a recognized history, Lowell saw this act as marking his father's voluntary renunciation of the last threads of his masculinity and personal identity. Of his father's attempts to explain his resignation to his naval friends, Lowell recalled "Those dinners, those apologies! Perhaps I exaggerate their embarrassment because they hover so grayly in recollection and

seem to anticipate ominously my father's downhill progress as a civilian and Bostonian" (*LS* 43).

Lowell's conflicted feeling about the military, about his native Boston and about his father's lack of authority— his moral and emotional absence— in the face of Lowell's threatening, all-powerful mother, are indirectly represented in "Christmas Eve Under Hooker's Statue," published in 1946, when the poet was twenty-nine and just after WWII came to a close. Lowell's ill-matched parents never divorced, but because of their emotional rejection of him— Lowell would learn from his first psychiatrist, the poet Merrill Moore, that, though an only child, he had been "unwanted" (Mariani 27)[2]— he experienced an early "expulsion from paradise" without ever leaving the Lowell hearthside. "Christmas Eve Under Hooker's Statue" begins with a modern scene darkened by the Second World War— "Tonight a black-out"— then moves immediately to an explicitly Biblical framing of the theme of expulsion from paradise, juxtaposed against the celebratory rituals of Christmas.

> Twenty years ago
> I hung my stocking on the tree, and hell's
> Serpent entwined the apple in the toe
> To sting the child with knowledge. (1-4)

Here a hidden serpent lurks inside a childish token of reward and abundance, the Christmas stocking. But unlike the serpent in Genesis or Milton, Lowell's version of "hell's serpent" is under no obligation to argue a reasoning *adult* into sin. This lurking serpent can strike from a hidden point of vantage without warning, at a child innocently going about his business, and thereby "sting the child with knowledge." Lowell transforms a familiar figure associated with a child's playful and reassuring ceremonies of innocence— a Christmas stocking— and literally "loads" it with original sin, as emblematized by "hell's / serpent" which entwines "the apple in the toe." In this revisionary parable, then, the Christmas tree, conventionally associated with the birth and enduring life of the redeemer-child, is perverted into a bitterer tree: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil whose fruit condemned men and women to labor, sin, and death. The gigantic and imposing bronze figure of General Joseph

Hooker, decked out in Civil War officer's tunic, sword, and broad-brimmed cavalry hat and mounted on an impressive stallion, stands on a lofty and massive granite platform, outside the Boston Statehouse, a few blocks up Beacon Hill from Lowell's 91 Revere Street. This visually imposing, yet martially hollow figure now enters the poem, with emphatic, ironic finality.

> Hooker's heels
> Kicking at nothing in the shifting snow,
> A cannon and a cairn of cannon balls,
> Rusting before the blackened Statehouse, know
> How long the horn of plenty broke like glass
> In Hooker's gauntlets. (4-9)

Despite the massive statue erected in his honor, Hooker was a disaster in his most important Civil War role. For when Hooker, though an effective divisional and corps commander, was briefly appointed commander of the Grand Army of the Potomac, he was grievously mauled by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at the Battle of Chancellorsville on 1-3 May 1863 and forced to retreat, at the loss of 17,000 Union casualties, despite commanding more than twice as many men. Thus, under Hooker's leadership, the Union suffered perhaps it most humiliating defeat of the Civil War— and Lee won his most glorious victory. When, a month later, Hooker offered his resignation on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg, it was promptly accepted by President Lincoln, to Hooker's surprise and chagrin. General George Meade, awakened in the field in the dead of night to receive his command, went on to win a decisive Union victory (Foote 450-51).

When the Union ultimately won the war, Hooker, despite his very public failure at the highest level of command, was given the monumental treatment by his native state— an irony by no means lost on Lowell, who positions Hooker as a hapless figure uncomfortably yet fixedly representing established cultural and parental authority. Held in apparent honor by society, he is really feckless, "kicking at nothing in the shifting snow." Lowell's Hooker, by analogy to Lowell's father, is a "blundering butcher," his butchery not the consequence of deliberate malice but of hapless incompetence in the face of a more brilliant and deter-

mined tactician. For, in Lowell's view, his father, as a naval officer, was overwhelmed and defeated by Lowell's mother as clearly as Hooker was outgeneraled by Lee and Stonewall Jackson, leaving Lowell to be "mowed down" like the Union volunteers at Chancellorsville. Lowell's father, firmly identified in Lowell's mind with "the mob of ruling-class Bostonians" ("Commander Lowell" 64), is inadequate, despite the apparent advantages resident in patriarchal authority, to match the insistence, will, and verbal adroitness of Lowell's mother Charlotte. In Lowell's world, as in Melville's, "all wars are boyish" and thus in Lowell's ironic critique of romantic myths of war, children are by no means exempt either as targets of violence or as perpetrators of violence. For figures of social or martial authority can themselves be shown to act from a truculent innocence or naïveté that results in human suffering on a massive scale. In this cold, dark world "I ask for bread, my father gives me mould." And, on the cold, dark Boston Common, alongside the "blackened Statehouse"—blackened to prevent Allied shipping from being silhouetted against a lighted skyline and thereby sunk, as many were, in the first year of US involvement in WWII, by prowling German U-boats—the threat of premature knowledge lurks much as the threat of a sinful fall had lurked for Lowell's Puritan forebears. In evoking the motif of expulsion from paradise in "Christmas Eve Under Hooker's Statue" in 1946, Lowell was deliberately placing himself at the end of a long tradition of Western literature and thought. In retrospect, one can also see that Lowell was placing himself amidst the still-emerging and intellectually radical mode of understanding childhood that had already engaged poets like Bishop, Jarrell, and Berryman and that would, in the next several decades, emphatically and decisively reconfigure the postmodern poet's mythic and personal encounters with childhood.

Lowell's "Hooker" alludes to Christmas as a time of anxiety and conflict, implicated in the knowing recognition of one's own inherent sinfulness and potential violence. Lowell's Christmas in 1936 marked a sharp turning point in his life and led quite directly to his meeting with Jarrell (and more indirectly to his meeting with Bishop, to whom Jarrell introduced him in 1947). In December 1936, the 19-year-old Lowell was halfway through his second year at Harvard, whose president was his

cousin Lawrence Lowell, and living in college rooms not far from his parents' townhouse at 170 Marlborough Street— a three story brick structure with plate-glass front doors on a quiet, tree-lined street in Boston's fashionable Back Bay. Lowell had been engaged in a running battle with his parents for years, and lately these relations had undergone steadily increasing strain. One bone of contention was Lowell's determination to become a poet. His parents intended that he graduate from Harvard, settle into a profitable business career, and marry a woman of the Boston social elite.

His mother Charlotte, who by all accounts focused almost entirely on externals and in the process persistently denied the emotional life of her son, claimed, as she wrote in a letter, that "Neither Daddy nor I wish in any way to force you into our way of life or behavior." Still, they would withhold any future financial support unless he complied.[3] In his late poem "Art of the Possible" from *Day by Day*, Lowell recalled his mother complaining of "Your profession of making what can't be done / the one thing you can do. . ." (1-2). Lowell resented that Harvard had been chosen for him by his parents, chiefly his mother, just as she had chosen his boarding school, St. Marks, and, before that, the Brimmer School— which was primarily for older girls. Lowell recalled that, while there, "I wished I were an older girl. I wrote Santa Claus for a field hockey stick. To be a boy at Brimmer was to be small, denied, and weak" (*LS* 27). Lowell would remark of his five months in prison as a conscientious objector in 1943, "I was thankful to find jail gentler than boarding school or college— an adult fraternity." Lowell noted that he "grew congenial with other idealist felons, who had homemade faiths" and added slyly that after reading Samuel Butler "and God knows what . . . a thousand pages of Proust[,] I left jail more educated— not as they wished *re*-educated" (*Prose* 279). Seven years before his imprisonment, Lowell, who had yet to publish a poem, had already developed his own homemade faith— in poetry. And he had already dedicated himself with an almost religious fervor to becoming a poet: a plan that, of necessity, and perhaps by intention, set him at odds with his family.

Not only did Lowell's parents reject Lowell's plans to become a poet. They moved to break up his "unsuitable" engagement to Anne Dick, a woman of middle-class origins, six

years Lowell's senior. (The engagement would burn itself out of its own accord in a few months.) On 22 December 1936, urged on by Charlotte Lowell, Lowell's father wrote a stiffly formal and disapproving letter to Anne Dick's father, objecting to her visits to his college rooms. "Such behavior is contrary to all college rules, and most improper for a girl of good repute." Paul Mariani observes that "If the letter was meant to wound, it certainly succeeded."[4]

Lowell, who had long displayed signs of the manic-depressive disorder that would remain undiagnosed into the 1950s, responded with bewilderment and rage when Anne Dick handed him the letter on 27 December. As a small child, Lowell had worried that "to judge from my father, men between the ages of six and sixty did nothing but meet new challenges, take on heavier responsibilities, and lose all freedom to explode" (*LS* 28). On that day, Lowell himself exploded. He asked Anne Dick to drive him to his parents' house and there he knocked his father down, after formally presenting him with the note his father had sent to the parents of Anne Dick. In a poem from *Lord Weary's Castle* explicitly titled "Rebellion," Lowell would make the first of a series of attempts to come to terms with this event, the symbolic and practical import of which would take him a lifetime to unravel.

> There was rebellion, father, when the mock
> French windows slammed and you hove backward, rammed
> Into your heirlooms, screens, a glass-cased clock,
> The highboy quaking at its toes. You damned
> My arm that cast your house upon your head
> And broke the chimney flintlock on your skull. (1-6)

Despite the vivid tumble of nouns and active verbs that rescues the poem's initial sentence, the passively voiced clause— "There was rebellion"— at the poem's beginning may seem less than forthright. Does it reflect an implicit attempt on Lowell's part to relieve himself of responsibility for his own actions? The fact that the "mock / French windows" providing entrance to 170 Marlborough St. "slammed" before his father "hove backward" makes clear that in this version Lowell enters the house violently.

The poem, while still addressing "my father," then shifts to a dreamlike and wishful fantasy:

> Last night the moon was full:
> I dreamed the dead
> Caught at my knees and fell:
> And it was well with me, my father. (5-8)

On this moonlit night, the speaker's dream seems to take him to a Vergilian underworld, where the dead reach out in supplication, "And it was well with me, my father." Is there a feeling almost of triumph here? Has the rebellion succeeded? And will the apocalyptic process continue?

> Then
> Behemoth and Leviathan
> Devoured our mighty merchants. None could arm
> Or put to sea. O father, on my farm
> I added field to field
> And I have sealed
> An everlasting pact
> With Dives to contract the world that spreads in pain. (8-18)

Yet this wishful dream of personal beneficence, in which one tries to sign a pact with the great merchant (Dives) to shrink the world's spreading miseries, falls apart when the son contemplates his past action: "But the world spread / When the clubbed flintlock broke my father's brain." The poem now no longer addresses the father, and it moves ever farther afield from biographical fact and, perhaps more important, dramatic credibility. Lowell didn't hit his father with a "clubbed flintlock" but with his fist, and of course he did not break his father's brain. The sense of contrivance here is palpable in a way that has been completely eliminated in his later treatments of his relations with his father. This poem suggests an impulse to explore his own experience in verse, but he has not yet mastered a means of presenting such experience with a fully effective sense of scale. By sheer persistence and skill, Lowell would one day master this difficult art. In any case, this poem remains a remarkable docu-

ment of a son's ambivalent feelings toward a father who can rebuke but not protect him.

It is worth comparing Lowell's treatment of this incident in 1946 with his more artistically mature treatment in *Notebook*. In the first version of that volume, *Notebook 1967-68*, Lowell addresses his memories in an unrhymed sonnet spoken to his former fiancée, Anne Dick, exploring the crisis that would soon lead to his departure to Kenyon College and Ransom's tutelage. Lowell's poem opens with Proustian detail, quieter memory-traces that gather toward a traumatic center:

> My father's letter to your father, saying
> tersely and much too stiffly that he knew
> you'd been going to my college rooms alone—
> I can still almost crackle that slight note in my hand.
> I see your outraged father; you, his outraged daughter. (1-6)

Then the scene shifts to Lowell's own deeply troubled isolation, to his memory of reciting Milton's "Lycidas," a poem he was already turning to in times of trouble. And, then, suddenly, a shift to irrevocable action:

> myself brooding in fire and a dark quiet
> on the abandoned steps of the Harvard Fieldhouse,
> calming my hot nerves and enflaming my mind's
> nomad quicksilver by saying *Lycidas*—
> then punctiliously handing the letter to my father.
> I knocked him down. (7-12)

Lowell's great physical strength here frightens even him. As Jahan Ramanzani notes,

> Because of its highly wrought form, the elegy ["Lycidas"] calms and cools the young rebel. But it is not merely a brake on his oedipal episode: it also plays the opposite role, "enflaming" the poet's restless imagination. . . . Far from pacifying him, the recitation of the elegy is an act of symbolic rebellion that prepares for and parallels the physical act. (227)

Yet the style of this passage is far from the floridly wrought diction of "Lycidas." Each image is like a little snapshot and together they form a disconnected sequence. The reader has to infer the transitions and the connecting motivations. As Ramanzani suggests, "whereas Milton displaces the struggle for power from the domestic realm to the literary, Lowell redomesticates and literalizes it" (227). But the action is by no means merely literal, and here the implied connections between the form and fire of poetry and of domestic rebellion are surprising and cogent. For Lowell's family viewed his devotion to poetry as an act of rebellion. And in Lowell's poem, the act of knocking down his father follows almost immediately upon the recitation of "Lycidas," interrupted only by the formal gesture of "punctiliously" handing over his father's offending letter. Lowell's phrasing suggests that in his own former mind he was acting as if presenting a gentlemanly challenge in a duel. Except, of course, one doesn't challenge one's own father and in fact this particular fight took place without the formal controls and courtesies of a duel. Here, the awkward and awful just happens, and there is no way to return to the consoling rhythms of social formality. Then Lowell has to deal with the immediate consequences of his impulsive violence: consequences for his father, his family, his planned marriage, and himself.

> He half-reclined on the carpet;
> Mother called from the top of the carpeted stairs—
> our glass door locking behind me, no cover; you
> idling in your station wagon, no retreat. (11-14)

The carpet on which his father half-reclined links to the carpeted stairs his mother calls from. Then the objects seem to take over "our glass door locking behind me, no cover." His parents, now protected, can see out at him, exposed. Will he ever see his way back in to their house? And with "you / idling in your station wagon, no retreat"— his fiancée is also behind a glass shield— he alone is exposed. Her claims on him and her own function as a witness to this humiliating domestic violence actually cut off his immediate escape from humiliation. One encounters no claim to authorial privilege here; the author renounces both the grand style of "Quaker Graveyard," which had once been native soil,

and the privileges of implied moral superiority over the parents against whom he rebels. Whatever their own abuses, he knows this is an act that he cannot justify. This young poet may know "Lycidas" by heart, but his emerging command of poetic tradition does not help him deal with the stresses and conundrums of ordinary life. This poem may be read as a kind of elegy for the concept of the privileged author. Yet it is by no means what M. L. Rosenthal termed the "most naked kind of confession," either ("Poetry as Confession" 154). For all its elements of literalness, it may best be read as an exploration of memory rather than a confession of self, inquiring without sentimentality, rationalization, or posturing into an event that the reader might relate to his or her own awkward and impulsive actions, actions that he or she might review amidst the private watches of humiliation and grief. As Lowell puts it in *Notebook*'s immediately subsequent poem, "I struck my father; later my apology / hardly scratched the surface of his invisible / coronary . . . never to be effaced" (12-14). Despite that ancestral relic "the chimney flintlock," Lowell's (now retired) father is not represented in these poems in the context of the martial or naval marks of rank and station that so largely defined him in "91 Revere St." or the "Life Studies" sequence. On the other hand, the domestic realm is presented both as "the scene of the crime," complete with station wagon serving as the most prosaic of getaway cars, and as an emotional battleground. And as is true throughout Lowell's poetry, the child or adolescent is here dramatized as an isolated and embattled individual, enlisted in a struggle toward selfhood and independence in a context fraught with peril, guilt, and uncertainty.

Lowell's impulsive explosion, his act of striking his father to the floor, would precipitate the first in the series of connections that linked Lowell with Bishop, Jarrell, and Berryman in an unofficial network. Lowell's conflict with his parents over his fiancée was only the most recent in a long line of mysterious and disturbing actions by a son who would not be diagnosed manic-depressive and treated for nearly two decades. Dr. Merrill Moore, a thirty-three-year-old psychiatrist and a member of the Nashville Agrarians who was already treating Charlotte Lowell, was called in to consult on Robert's case. Moore's diagnosis might be summed up as too much family, too much Harvard, too

much Boston. And his prescription, to send Lowell to visit Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom at Vanderbilt University, would have lasting implications for literary history. Dr. Moore provided good personal and literary advice, but not much psychiatry; he didn't get at the root causes of Lowell's problems. But he set Lowell on a course that would shape his career and lead directly to his meeting with Jarrell at Kenyon College in the fall of 1937, where these young poets, both refugees from unwelcoming homes that were the scenes of emotional violence, would share the more welcoming upper story of Mr. Ransom's home at Kenyon.

Lowell's "For the Union Dead" vastly expands the context of individual experiences of loss presented in more concentrated form in the previous poems under discussion, exploring, in a succession of subtly linked vignettes, the personal, intellectual, cultural, and political ramifications of an array of locally defined losses. Vanished buildings, displaced monuments, misplaced childhoods, crumbling traditions, frayed dignity, and annihilated cities are represented in successive quatrains through the eyes of a historically aware individual— apparently a dramatized avatar of Lowell himself— reviewing the changes rapidly overtaking his native city and its once-dominant Brahmin culture. The texture of the poem fluctuates between graphic, hypercharged super-realism and a curiously distanced, dreamlike reverie. It alludes to Lowell's childhood tellingly in its second stanza, and a "cowed," childlike confusion in the face of unfathomable experience is invoked again later in the poem. But perhaps most tellingly, Lowell objectifies the process of loss by his persistent attention to visual objects.

Often these visual objects are monuments of some public note. After a Latin epigraph that slightly but significantly alters the motto to the St. Gaudens statue dedicated to Colonel Shaw's regiment (the altered version reads "They relinquished everything to serve the Republic" instead of "He relinquished . . .") the poem proper begins by examining visual evidence of other forms of relinquishment. This examination starts with a public monument whose significance seems largely personal, the "old South Boston Aquarium." Not yet torn down, this structure has relinquished its old function. It "stands / in a Sahara of snow now. Its broken windows are boarded. . . . / The airy tanks are

dry" (1-2, 4). A diminished survivor, the aquarium is just the first of many attenuated monuments that populate the poem. Soon center stage shifts to St. Gaudens' "shaking Civil War relief," now "propped by a plank splint against the garage's earthquake" (23-24), and then to the neighboring Statehouse, also a monument that has relinquished its own traditional centrality and dignity. Braced and held upright by girders and gouged out underneath to make room for a parking garage, it appears as a symbolic victim of the modern, mechanized dynamism that persistently displaces the traditional past.

Such local cultural attrition provides the context for losses of a different order. These begin, of course, with reflections on the death of Colonel Shaw and his black regiment during the Civil War, a loss that, despite its horrors, had a lofty social purpose. But this is balanced by modern destruction of still more horrifying proportions, represented by a picture of "Hiroshima boiling" (56), a visual object which points towards two central postmodern fears, the threat of nuclear holocaust and the onset of what the poem portrays as a devouring commercialism, anxieties that similarly disturbed such friends as Bishop, Berryman, and Jarrell. For example, the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki dismayed Randall Jarrell almost as profoundly as the firebombing of Hamburg did Lowell. The age of nuclear anxiety that followed (so vividly crystallized in Lowell's "Fall 1961") provides a backdrop for Lowell's mature poetry as well as for the poetry of Berryman and Jarrell. And there is evidence in the polemical essays of Jarrell's prose collection *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket* and in poems like "Next Day," as well as throughout Berryman's *Dream Songs*, of the degree to which the burgeoning commercialism of the fifties and sixties disturbed them. During these same years, Bishop moved to Brazil in part to evade the mass-production culture that was increasingly dominating her native land.

As the poem presents its catalogue of losses, it also presents a peculiar, and parallel, catalogue of survivors: almost nothing mentioned in the poem quite disappears. The aquarium stands in ruins, but it stands. Its "cowed, compliant fish" may be no more, but a "bronzed weathervane cod" (3) still sits atop the roof, even though it "has lost half its scales." Later the fishes

reappear, in the angry final lines of the poem, having suffered metamorphosis into dynamic, mechanical monsters:

> Everywhere,
> giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
> a savage servility
> slides by on grease (65-68).

These two versions of the fish-as-survivor characterize the two opposing types of survivor in the poem. Survivors appear either as static and attenuated simulacrums of their former selves, or as brutal mechanistic transformations. Some of the poem's many figures have lost all but a vicarious existence, and live on in the form of monuments, statues, pictures and other visual objects, icons that remain static except in the sense that they suffer physical erosion and a parallel erosion of their dignity, whether through desecration, displacement, or neglect. But there is a different order of survivor, like the extinct dinosaurs, who reappear as devouring steam shovels, or the Mosler safe, the commercial viability of which overshadows in the minds of its promoters the human losses at Hiroshima, or the new mechanical fish, already described, that end the poem. Each of these survivors embodies the new, aggressively commercial, but mindless and mechanistic order.

By contrast, the displaced St. Gaudens statue is the central image linking the first group of survivors. It exists, preserving its "bronze Negroes" in a curious simulation of life. William James could "almost hear [them] breathe" (28), a half-life mirrored by the "stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier[s]", who "doze over muskets/ and muse through their sideburns" (45, 47-48). But the St. Gaudens statue differs from all the other static monuments in one sense: it "sticks like a fishbone in the city's throat" (29)— because it is an uncomfortable survivor, reminiscent of values, such as heroism, sacrifice, and racial equality, that no longer seem relevant in downtown Boston. This is true in part because racism and racial tension also survive, as does a replica of the ditch in which Colonel Shaw and his soldiers were rudely buried by the Confederate soldiers who mowed them down at Fort Wagner, in the form of that very "underworld garage" (16) being gouged underneath the Statehouse. The

continuing reality of racism is imaged again in "the drained faces of Negro school-children" whom the narrator observes on television attempting to integrate southern schools. Colonel Shaw is the central figure in the poem and his predicament bears more than a passing resemblance to the protagonist of "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid." He is seen largely in terms of the way heroic death is memorialized and in terms of a culture that is on the verge of utter disappearance, at least in its urban manifestation. His heroism is uncomfortable even for the narrator who mourns its passing. This

> Colonel is as lean
> as a compass needle.
>
> He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,
> a greyhound's gentle tautness;
> he seems to wince at pleasure,
> and suffocate for privacy.
>
> He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely,
> peculiar power to choose life and die—
> when he leads his black soldiers to death,
> he cannot bend his back. (31-40)

His moral intensity as well as his rigidity, his wincing at pleasure, derive from a culture that has its roots in Puritan beliefs in sobriety and election, beliefs that seem incongruous amidst the pleasure-seeking of contemporary culture. He understands the value of sacrifice for a higher good, inflexible though he may be in its pursuit. Ultimately, Colonel Shaw's maturity and high-mindedness, as well as his moral certainty, seems "out of bounds now," even to this peculiarly sympathetic contemporary observer.

Opposing the public representation of inflexible but purposeful maturity that appears in "St. Gaudens' shaking Civil War relief" of Colonel Shaw and his "Negro infantry" (23, 24), the private world of childhood remains a constant presence in this urban landscape, and the gestures and wishes of childhood persist in the adult. The child's awareness is introduced in the second stanza, which generates much of the imagery of the rest of the poem. The child whose "nose crawled like a snail on the

glass" of the aquarium parallels the adult who "pressed against the new barbed and galvanized / fence on the Boston Common" (12-13). The child's impulse "to burst the bubbles / drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish" (7-8) suggests a temptation toward violent gesture that is echoed throughout the poem. Of course, fish don't have noses or make bubbles, so this must be a memory, that, like so many of the objects in the poem, has suffered metamorphosis. Though the impulse to violence is later transferred to other figures, we see it first in the speaker himself. His yearning "for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom / of the fish and reptile" (10-11) is a yearning to reach beyond the pre-moral awareness of early childhood to the amoral awareness of the lower orders of vertebrates. The body of the poem frequently echoes this yearning to escape from cognition and the pain of historical awareness, self-consciousness, and responsibility, an escape into pre-consciousness that the leaders of Boston seem already to have achieved. It might also imply a yearning for the freedom to act on baser instinct, a freedom shared by the lower orders but rejected by Colonel Shaw. The "parking spaces" that "luxuriate like civic / sandpiles in the heart of Boston" (17-18) suggest this lingering childishness in the minds of the city's urban planners. But the speaker of the poem is not exempt, for when he "crouch[es] to his television set" to watch "the drained faces of Negro school children" (59-60), he is mimicking his own action as a child peering through the glass of the fish tank, and the school children's faces, as they "rise like balloons" (60), echo the bubbles the child saw in the fish tank. They seem just as trapped as the fish. The child is thus complexly imaged as both aggressor and victim, in a separate world from the adult and yet inexorably linked to adult consciousness by the power the adult world has over the child.

Dream textures weave in and out of the poem, despite its prevailingly gritty, realistic tone, and dream-logic knits together the various strands I have been discussing. The poem's logic resembles the logic of dreams in its subtle, associational movement, its many surrealistic images, and its curious pairings and transformations. The "abstract Union soldier" is lost in a dream, but the central dream-figure is Colonel Shaw himself. He is last seen

riding on his bubble,
he waits
for the blessèd break. (62-64)

The bubble he rides survives, with subtle dream logic, from the fish tank, and from the faces of the school children that "rise like balloons." Colonel Shaw's yearning is to escape the vicarious simulation of life in which he is trapped, to depart a world that has no stable place for him in its awareness, and to achieve the privacy for which he now suffocates. Shaw's final heroism may be the fact that he lingers still, in spite of his yearning to depart.

Randall Jarrell revealed his understanding of Lowell's pairing of war and the embattled child when he concluded his study of "Fifty Years of American Poetry"—delivered at the National Poetry Conference in Washington in October 1962 under the nuclear shadow of the Cuban Missile Crisis—with praise for such then-recently-published poems as Lowell's "For the Union Dead." Jarrell reads this poem as suggesting that for his intimate friend Lowell

> his own existence seems to him in some sense as terrible as the public world—his private world hangs over him as the public world hangs over others—he does not forsake the headlined world for the refuge of one's private joys and decencies, the shaky garden of the heart; instead, as in his wonderful poem about Boston Common, he sees all these as the lost paradise of the childish past, the past that knew so much, but still didn't know. (Jarrell 333)

His friend saw clearly that Lowell understood the individual as a figure inextricably bound up both in public and private history, and particularly in the recovery of childhood. Jarrell suggests this and more in his magical yet elusive closing phrase. Clearly, for Jarrell—as for Lowell—war and the child remain inexorably linked, interwoven with several of the most intransigent problems of human history. In fact, Jarrell anticipates a childhood studies approach when he pairs the recurrence in Lowell's work of the isolated and embattled child with the simultaneous recurrence in his work of a preoccupation with war and the relics of war which

dominate both Lowell's private world and the "terrible public world" that hangs over all of us.

Lowell's friend Elizabeth Bishop certainly shared these perceptions and preoccupations, and her case for the value of Lowell's poetry refers to the power with which Lowell explored such themes and problems. In "Some Notes on Robert Lowell," a 1962 introduction, in Portuguese, to the Brazilian publication of a selection of Lowell's poems (an essay recently discovered and translated by George Monteiro), Bishop explains to her Brazilian readers that the title of Lowell's first major collection, *Lord Weary's Castle,*

> comes from the old ballad about a poor stonemason named "Lambkin" who built a castle for one Lord Weary, but who was deprived of his just payment. In this legend Lowell sees a parable for the modern world— the "castle"— the crushing superstructure of our civilization.

In her 1962 introduction, Bishop underlines Lowell's postmodern tendencies, noting for her Brazilian audience that although his artistic "means" may seem traditional, Lowell resembles "our 'action painters' " in that he

> expresses, with the same energy and beauty, the problems that any citizen of the United States who is over forty, has already faced and continues to face: the Depression, the War (or Wars), the Affluent Society, the ethics of foreign relations, the Bomb.

Three years earlier, she had praised Lowell's *Life Studies* (on its book jacket), for its literary refinement and social insight, noting that "A poem like 'My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow,' or 'Skunk Hour,' can tell us as much about the state of society as a volume of Henry James at his best."[5] Bishop read Lowell, then, in terms of his complex response to how the "crushing superstructure" of a culture can weigh down the individual, and his analysis of the subtle demands domestic intercourse, especially through the family, places on that same

individual. She responds, that is, to the way his poetry explores with dramatic, yet probingly psychological insight, the inextricable involvement of the individual with a problematic, frequently controlling, and violent culture.

The romantic poets may have aspired to transcend suffering, and the modernists may have raged to give it order, but Lowell and such colleagues of Bishop, Jarrell and Berryman sought chiefly to survive suffering with selfhood more or less intact, and, if possible, to "change." For these poets, what Bishop termed in a letter to Lowell the "real real protest"[6] was directed not against any single public issue or injustice or institution, whatever the explicit or implicit references to these in their work, but at something possibly more terrible and strange and intractable and surprising: at the problem of selfhood in the postmodern world, a problem deriving both from life's immemorial fatality and from "the crushing superstructure of our civilization." This crushing superstructure, still under mortgage, has magnified certain aspects of human fatality even as it minimizes others. For Lowell, the struggle of the child to emerge from under the weight imposed by contemporary cultural norms and expectations, as required by both the family and the state, was the issue that most persistently engaged his imagination.

In poem after poem Lowell was attempting to recover and explore "the lost paradise of the childish past," a world that remains forever outside the range of one's certainties and that may only be recreated through the painful and elusive processes of memory and art. His explorations within, and his wide-ranging sallies beyond, the shaky garden of the individual human heart lead him to inquire into history, culture, politics, and gender, as well as into books, retrospection, observation, and dreams, and into childhood, parenthood, adolescence, aging, and death. And throughout these inquiries his work, at its exploratory best, loses neither its emotional acuteness, nor its piercing insight and unlikely compassion. It loses neither its dry, witty, and curiously unbridled respect for human frailty and courage, nor its faculty for continuing surprise. Jarrell, who recognized that Lowell "bullied his early work" into existence, noted that, despite the vigor of his friend's intelligence and will, Lowell's "own vulnerable humanity has been forced in on him" (Jarrell 333). It is the "vulnerable humanity" in the work of Lowell—and

of such colleagues as Bishop, Jarrell and Berryman—emerging sometimes with delicacy, sometimes with wit, sometimes with pathos, sometimes with "barbarous immediacy," and embodied frequently in the experience of the embattled child, that provides the common ground across which they observed one another and frequently met. And this remains, for me, at least, the source and basis of their continuing relevance and value. ❦

Notes

1. The best treatment of childhood's importance for a member of this generation is, without question, Richard Flynn's *Randall Jarrell and the Lost World of Childhood* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990).
2. See also Lowell's "Unwanted" (*Day By Day*).
3. Charlotte Lowell to Robert Lowell, n.d. but early August 1936. Cited in Mariani, 55.
4. Robert Lowell, Sr., to Evans Dick, 23 December 1936. Cited in Mariani, 56.
5. Elizabeth Bishop, book jacket blurb for Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (New York: Farrar Straus and Cudahy, 1959).
6. Elizabeth Bishop to Robert Lowell, 25 June 1961, in Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS AM 1095. Quoted from Victoria Harrison, *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 30.

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SANDRA BARRY

ELIZABETH BISHOP AND WORLD WAR I

In 1964 Elizabeth Bishop wrote Anne Stevenson a long letter about her childhood memories of Great Village, Nova Scotia. Among them was a vivid recollection about World War I: "It was during the first World War— the village boys (a kilted regiment) would come to say goodbye and their clothes were wonderful, of course. Most of them were never seen again— almost every boy in that tiny place, from 18-22, was killed in one of the big battles— Canadians first, of course— and the whole village was in mourning" (23 March).[1]

When most scholars consider Bishop's response to war, they do so based on her experiences of WWII, during which she lived in Florida and New York City.[2] Moreover, when discussing Bishop's perception of war, scholars deal principally with poems written at this time, such as "Roosters"[3] and "Wading at Wellfleet," or poems post-dating the Second World War, which have military themes or imagery, such as "View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," "Visits to St. Elizabeths," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," "From Trollope's Journal," and "12 O'Clock News."[4]

The first eight years of Bishop's life occurred concurrently with the lead up to, outbreak, progression, and conclusion of World War I. She wrote a great deal about her early childhood, and if these poems and stories are not directly about the Great War, she was keenly aware that "The War was on" (*CP* 161), not only subsequently with an adult's sense of history, but also in the moment with a child's sense of curiosity. Poems such as "Britannia Rules the Waves" (1935), "Casabianca" (1936), and "Sleeping on the Ceiling" (1938) offer military or imperial themes but pre-date WWII. A principal source must then be Bishop's encounter with "the war to end all wars." Moreover, an extensive

body of autobiographical writing (published and unpublished) is set between 1914-1918. Placed in chronological order (not of composition but of historical progression) this work charts her earliest memories: "A Drunkard" (1914), "First Death in Nova Scotia" (1915), "In the Village" (1916), "Reminiscences of Great Village" (1916),[5] "Sestina" (1916), "Primer Class" (1916-1917), "The Country Mouse" (1917-1918), "In the Waiting Room" (1918) and "Manners" (1918).[6]

This list reveals that the family drama Bishop so vividly remembered also occurred concurrently with World War I. When the time-lines are merged, it becomes clear that the private tragedy of Bishop's maternal family (the Bulmers) resonated with "the world tragedy of 1914" (Wells 849). Such was the case for countless other families in Canada— no part of the Dominion was untouched by the upheaval of these years. The Bulmer family did not send any sons to fight and die in the trenches in France (however, they knew well all the young men from Great Village who enlisted); but the devastating mental illness which overtook Gertrude Bulmer Bishop during this time, resulting in permanent hospitalization, speaks to the "madness" (Roper 85) which gripped the world. As so many young men went away never to return, as the entire country was in mourning and forever changed by "the years of agony" (Craig 1), so too did Gertrude Bulmer Bishop go away never to return; so too did the Bulmer family spend years in mourning and were changed forever: "A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village. No one hears it; it hangs there forever" (*CPr* 251).

It is not possible here to explore in detail Bishop's childhood memories or to analyze the full impact of World War I on Bishop's life and work.[7] Instead, this essay offers a chronology of private and public events in order to illustrate the convergence and resonance between them. Such a chronology provides only punctuation marks in complex texts, but it shows how individual and collective history interconnect to influence art. This essay concludes with a few observations about the impact of the war on Bishop's poetics and world view.

1905-1908— Incidents in the Balkans and Morocco cause tensions between Germany/Austria and France/Russia/Britain.

22 June 1908— William Bishop of Worcester, Massachusetts, and Gertrude Bulmer of Great Village, Nova Scotia, marry in New York; honeymoon in Jamaica and Panama. Bishop wrote Stevenson, "My father had married a poor country girl" (23 March 1964).

1911— Second Moroccan crisis. Tensions in Europe increase.

8 February 1911— Elizabeth Bishop born in Worcester, Massachusetts.

13 October 1911— William dies.

14 April 1912— *Titanic* strikes iceberg and sinks. This disaster had no direct bearing on the War, but the ship's designation as "unsinkable" symbolizes the optimism and arrogance of Europe and North America "still under the tranquil inertias of half a century of peace" (Wells 853). The calm waters of the Atlantic hid the iceberg more surely than if there had been a storm. Bishop's family was not involved in the disaster, but it "strongly affected" her maternal uncle, Arthur Bulmer, and through him Bishop. "When I was left alone in the parlor . . . I could scarcely wait to take out the *Titanic* books . . . and look at the terrifying pictures one more time" (*CPr* 245-46).

1912-1913— Gertrude and Elizabeth travel between Massachusetts and Nova Scotia. Gertrude, in deep mourning, is emotionally stable but restless. Elizabeth's earliest memories are of learning to walk in her maternal grandmother's kitchen in Great Village and riding with her mother in a swan boat in the Boston Public Gardens. A swan bites Gertrude's gloved hand; Bishop remembers, "The finger was split. Well, I was thrilled to death!" (Spires 126).

1912-1913— A "fragile equilibrium of European statecraft" keeps the lid on the "point beyond which none of them could see" (Stokesbury 21).

1914— Early in the year Gertrude has a breakdown and is hospitalized for about three months in a private sanatorium in Norwood, Massachusetts. Elizabeth is cared for by maternal aunts, Maude Shepherdson and Grace Bulmer, who live in Revere and Boston, respectively.

25-26 June 1914— Great Salem Fire. Gertrude and Elizabeth, together in Marblehead, witness the blaze across Salem Harbor. Gertrude assists refugees fleeing the burning "Witch City." "A Drunkard" records Bishop's memories of this event.

28 June 1914— Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife are assassinated in Sarajevo.

30 July 1914— Russia mobilizes.

1 August 1914— Germany declares war on Austria and begins invasion of Luxembourg and Belgium.

4 August 1914— Britain declares war on Germany. "When Great Britain is at war, Canada is at war" (Craig 50). Canadian mobilization begins immediately. The First Contingent leaves for England in October 1914 (Mathieson 3). Canadians no less than the other Allies believe the war will be over by Christmas and "march off to the great adventure" (Stokesbury 34).

1915— Late in April Gertrude and Elizabeth return to Great Village.

1915— Late in April "the six terrible days" of the Second Battle of Ypres (Gwyn 149), Canadian troops' first major engagement and first encounter with mustard gas. The reality of war hits home: more than 6,000 Canadian casualties; 66 officers and 1,784 other ranks killed (Gwyn 160).

7 May 1915— *Lusitania* torpedoed off Ireland; 2,000 die, including "numerous Canadians" (Gwyn 157).

23 June 1915— Frank Elwood Bulmer, son of Arthur and Mabel Bulmer, dies at the age of two months. His death is the subject of "First Death in Nova Scotia."

November 1915— Gertrude visits New Brunswick and Massachusetts. Elizabeth remains in Great Village.

January-February 1916— 193rd Battalion, authorized and designated a Highland Brigade Battalion, recruits from the six eastern counties of Nova Scotia: Cumberland, Colchester, Hants, Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough (Hunt 130). Bishop refers to the 193rd in "The Country Mouse": "In Nova Scotia the soldiers, some of whom I actually knew, wore beautiful tam-o'-shanters with thistles and other insignia on them. When they got dressed up, they wore kilts and sporrans" (*CPr* 28). The Battalion mobilizes in May and embarks in October (Hunt 131).

21 February 1916— Battle of Verdun begins. "Nineteen sixteen was the year when the war stopped being an aberration and turned into a constant, a nightmare" (Gwyn 295).

March 1916— Gertrude suffers a violent episode triggered by a "business paper," probably relating to the custody of Elizabeth. In her illness Gertrude believes she is going to die for her country and that she is the cause of the war (NSH 21).

May 1916— Gertrude goes to Massachusetts for medical treatment. Elizabeth remains in Great Village.

20 June 1916— Gertrude voluntarily admits herself to the Nova Scotia Hospital, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, where she remains until her death on 29 May 1934. Elizabeth does not see her mother again after June 1916. "In the Village" and "Reminiscences of Great Village" recall events from May 1915 to June 1916.

July-November 1916— The eight battles of the Somme, including an engagement by the Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel, in which only 68 of the 801 members of the Regiment survive (Gwyn 304). Bishop visits Newfoundland, still a British colony, in 1932. Newfoundland becomes a province of Canada in 1949.

July 1916-September 1917— Elizabeth lives in Great Village with her maternal grandparents, William and Elizabeth Bulmer. "Sestina" is about this period.

Fall-Winter 1916-1917— Elizabeth attends the Great Village school. "Primer Class" recalls this experience.

February 1917— Elizabeth sick with bronchitis.

6 April 1917— United States enters war.

9 April 1917 (Easter Monday)— Canadian troops capture Vimy Ridge. Some historians view this victory as a rite of passage to Canadian nationhood, "Canada became a nation" (Gwyn 343); but it came at great cost: 10,602 casualties, 2,600 of them fatal. The massive Canadian National Memorial at Vimy Ridge invokes "The Spirit of Canada," "the cloaked and hooded figure of a woman, standing alone overlooking the Douai Plain" (Gwyn 343). In "Reminiscences of Great Village" Bishop re-names her mother, "Easter."

Mid-September 1917— John and Sara Bishop arrive in Great Village.

Mid-October 1917— John and Sara Bishop and Elizabeth leave Great Village and return to Worcester. "The Country Mouse" recalls Bishop's time living with her paternal grandparents, "Now I felt like a traitor. I wanted us to win the War, of course, but I didn't want to be an American" (*CPr* 26).

July-October 1917— Passchendaele. "The Great War reached its nadir of horror" (Gwyn 389). Canadian troops see action in October with 15,634 casualties (Gwyn 400).

6 December 1917— Halifax Harbour Explosion. Most powerful man-made, non-nuclear explosion in history, caused by the collision of the French munitions ship, *Mont Blanc*, and the Belgian relief ship, *Imo*. Over 1,600 die instantly, more than 9,000 wounded; immediate area of destruction 325 acres; impact felt as far away as Cape Breton Island (Kitz 26). Nova Scotia Hospital, especially women's wards, heavily damaged but no deaths. It functions as a station for treating wounded. Massachusetts organizes largest single relief effort, sends a train loaded with supplies, doctors and nurses on the night of the 6th (Kitz 84). Blizzard hits the city on the 7th (Kitz 71). Newspapers headlines in Toronto, "HALIFAX CITY WRECKED" (Gwyn 411).

5 February 1918— Elizabeth visits dentist's office in Worcester and experiences highly disorienting identity crisis. "In the Waiting Room" recalls this event.

May 1918— A seriously ill Elizabeth ("I felt myself aging, even dying," *CPr* 31) taken to live with Aunt Maude in Revere, Massachusetts. She begins a slow, steady recovery to health. "Manners" is dedicated "For a Child of 1918."

August-November 1918— "The Hundred Days." Final assaults and breakthroughs by Allies.

11 November 1918— Armistice.

Fall-Winter 1918-1919— Spanish influenza epidemic, which "killed more than died in the war" (Gwyn 485). Bishop's Aunt Grace, a nurse, cares for the sick in Massachusetts during this epidemic. Bishop does not contract the influenza.

1919— Demobilization and return of Canadian troops from Europe.

8 August 1919— Elizabeth returns to Nova Scotia for the first time since her removal in October 1917. She and Aunt Grace travel aboard the steamer *North Star*, which grounds off Yarmouth, N.S. All passengers and cargo are safely removed. The ship is lost; Bishop's shipwreck.

The following discussion focuses on three themes: 1. patriotism, 2. tradition/modernity, and 3. grief/mourning. These themes further illustrate the way in which private and public realms intersected for Bishop, in both her life and art.

Being such a small child at the time, Bishop, it might be assumed, could not have experienced the Great War as a political event. It is clear from her work, however, that she was affected by the public debate about Canada's roles in the British Empire and the war. An outline of these roles will set the stage. In 1914, the Canadian confederation was not yet fifty years old. As a nation, Canada was in its infancy. Domestic policy was more or less of Canadian invention, but Whitehall in London still controlled foreign policy for all its dominions and colonies. Thus when Britain declared war Canada, Australia, India, and the rest of the Empire, were automatically engaged. And, indeed, overall public opinion in Canada concurred; but not everyone agreed. Many historians[8] argue (with shades of variation) that Canada's involvement in the war, its immense sacrifice on the battlefields of France, fundamentally shifted Canada's relationship with Britain, "The relationship could no longer be one of mother and child: henceforth it would have to be an alliance between independent and equal partners" (Craig 9). This shift was not immediately absolute. Tensions between imperialists and nationalists continued for decades. The war also helped solidify internal divisions between French- and English-speaking Canadians. The climax occurred during the Conscription Crisis and Khaki Election of 1917: "By tragic miscalculation and misunderstanding we hardened ourselves into two solitudes" (Gwyn xviii).[9] The rhetoric of Empire, duty and sacrifice predominated during the war years, but many people in Canada and many Canadians in Europe questioned inevitability and debated limits. The war was a rite of passage to full nationhood for Canada; the tragedy changed Canadian identity profoundly.

Bishop undoubtedly witnessed active discussion about the Empire and the war in her grandparents' home. The Bulmers appear to have been "for the Empire." "First Death in Nova Scotia" notes the collection of royal chromographs hanging on the parlour walls. Such decoration was standard fare in the

homes of a Dominion still very much a colony of the "mother country," but their presence does indicate a certain world view. Moreover, on the "home front" during the war, "there was just one great event every day— the coming of the mail" (Montgomery 80). It brought not only letters but also the daily newspaper. Reading it was a communal activity during which the progress of the war was discussed at length. In addition, every community held patriotic concerts, suppers, parades, sermons, and picnics.

When Gertrude and Elizabeth returned to Nova Scotia in April 1915, the war was well under way. It was inevitable in a climate of heightened patriotism that, for the years she lived in Great Village, Bishop received a conventional imperialist and nationalist indoctrination. "Primer Class" records her encounter with one of the most important tools of this pedagogy,

> Over the blackboard, were two rolled-up maps, one of Canada and one of the whole world.... On the world map, all of Canada was pink.... I was so taken with the pull-down maps that I wanted to snap them up, and pull them down again, and touch all the countries and provinces with my own hands (*CPr* 10).

The pink of the British Empire— later Commonwealth— coloured maps well into the twentieth century.

Bishop also learned the songs of Empire ("God Save the King") and nation ("The Maple Leaf Forever"). She also learned many war songs, reporting, "I liked 'Tipperary' and 'The long, long trail' and 'Every nice girl loves a sailor' much better than the Worcester songs. I particularly hated 'Joan of Arc, they are calllll-ing you' " (*CPr* 28). So thorough was her indoctrination that when she was taken back to the United States, Bishop horrified her paternal grandmother (whose ancestors fought for the patriots in the American Revolution) by declaring that she "didn't want to be an American." Interestingly, Bishop was removed from Nova Scotia, Canada, and the Empire and returned to Worcester shortly after the *deus ex machina* of American intervention, which many Canadians and Britons resented because they desperately needed it. Bishop was immediately debriefed and began indoctrination into the Republic:

> Shortly after, I was presented with a white card with an American flag in color at the top. All the stanzas of "Oh, say, can you see" were printed on it in dark blue letters. Everyday I sat at Grandma's feet and attempted to recite this endless poem. (*CPr* 27)

This battle for Bishop's loyalty and patriotism, played out on public and private levels, may account for her adult ambivalence towards nationality ("Actually, I feel rather countryless," Bross 60) and exile and expatriation ("I am not, never, never an EXPATRIATE," *One Art* 37; "Exile seems to work for me," *One Art* 312). Though she observed in 1966, "I am a completely American poet" (Brown 19), Bishop continued to regard herself as "half-Canadian" (Ribeiro 17), making this observation throughout her life in letters, interviews, and conversations.

The impact of the war and imperialism/nationalism is found in one of Bishop's most haunting poems, "First Death in Nova Scotia." This poem is about Bishop's initiation into the rites of death and grieving on a very private level. It records the death of her infant cousin, Frank Elwood Bulmer (Arthur in the poem), in June 1915. However, "First Death" is also a war poem. It offers an intriguing representation of the changing relationship between Britain and Canada brought about by the war.

The poem begins "in the cold, cold parlor," the official room for visits and ceremonies in Nova Scotian homes—the interspace between private and public realms. The pictorial entourage represented Empire for most Nova Scotians. The royal family oversee, indeed, tower over, the room, where the dead son and loon reside. The "cold and caressable loon" and "little cousin Arthur" in his "little frosted cake" coffin are profoundly fascinating objects for Bishop, herself a child witness. The loon and son are figures of sacrifice and the first three stanzas imply that such a state is not only inevitable but also "much to be desired." The flower of young Canadian manhood rushed to do their duty for Empire and were sacrificed to the cause.

In the fourth stanza Bishop introduces "Jack Frost" and "the Maple Leaf (Forever)," hints of a national consciousness.

The ordinary soldier ("Jack Frost") served not the Empire but his country. This allegorical figure puts his indelible mark on the literal son of the family: "Jack Frost had dropped the brush / and left him [Arthur] white, forever" (*CP* 126). Significantly, Bishop stresses this color, "all white," "white, forever"—a color related to purity, innocence, death; but also during the war to cowardice. White feathers were given to men who hesitated to do their duty. Bishop's context is highly ambivalent.

The poem concludes with a subtle but powerful shift. The acceptance of duty is questioned, "But how could Arthur go, / clutching his tiny lily, / with his eyes shut up so tight / and the roads deep in snow?" Here, she questions the blind, automatic acceptance of following the Empire, implying that the cost is too high. Such questioning was not absent in Nova Scotia during the war. One observer in the *Truro Daily News* wrote in 1917,

> Looking at the long lists of casualties, and thinking of the weight of woe that the war is causing, one can only hope that, in addition to the securing of any nation's liberty, there may be other great and lasting benefits born in the throes of this immense anguish; benefits that would compensate in some measure for the fearful price being paid, in blood and treasure. (5 January: 3)

"First Death in Nova Scotia" is a remarkable exploration of how the private and public merge; an examination of the debate about sacrifice, loyalty, duty, and death, which took place in Canada during World War I (Canada was no longer willing to be "the smallest page at court"); and a complex evocation of the impact of the war on Bishop's and the Canadian psyche.

World War I is generally regarded as a cataclysm which altered the public and private realms fundamentally. Many political, cultural, economic, and literary historians view the war as a rift, a distinct break with the past. The horror of "this immense anguish" shattered the sense of continuity people had experienced for much of the nineteenth century; ushered in an unstable, discontinuous dynamic; destroyed innocence. Historians argue that the war undermined, even eradicated, tradition, fueling what has become known as modernism. However, some historians

attempt to go beyond this paradigm "of the Great War as a phase in the onward ascent of modernism" (Winter 3) and show how tradition and modernity were not so much an opposition— an either/or— but were a complex interaction, processes which complemented, informed and critiqued, rather than excluded each other.

The tension between tradition and modernity was central to Bishop's poetic program, and she learned a good deal about their complexities in Great Village during the war. In the private realm Bishop struggled with the (dis)continuous events of her mother's illness and encapsulated the impact of those events in "In the Village," in a manner which reflected the global impact of the war: "The dress was all wrong. She screamed. The child vanishes" (*CPr* 253). The child— and the world— vanished in many ways between 1914-1918. The loss of innocence was real. No one could be and behave in the same way ever again. The poem "In the Waiting Room" explores the devastating realization that purpose, identity, relationship and perception are unstable and subject to disintegration. It offers much discontinuity. Yet, at the same time, Bishop clearly realizes that she is connected to her history— her family's and humankind's. She was and was not of them in the same instant: "How— I didn't know any / word for it— how 'unlikely' " (*CP* 161). Yet it was likely that she could be at the same time both separate from and connected to something. Indeed, this experience was characteristic of many people on the "home front," who at once felt that the war was alien and distant yet appallingly close and oppressive. Bishop's "big black wave, / another, and another" resonates with others' experiences. For example, L.M. Montgomery writes, "There were moments when waiting at home, in safety and comfort, seemed an unendurable thing" (144).

For Bishop tradition and modernity were often reflected in other dualities such as rural/urban and home-made/mechanized. "Manners" (set in 1918 at the close of the war) exemplifies the way these dualities played out in her childhood and how she incorporated them in her poetics. The poem describes Bishop's apprenticeship in manners with her beloved maternal grandfather. Travelling around the village on his horse-drawn wagon, Bishop received a home-made education in human relations, which emphasized courtesy, consideration, and good

cheer. The passengers in the automobiles rush by (on the road and on the page) ushering in technology and mechanization, which leaves the wagon behind in the dust.[10] World War I brought major technological advancement to Canada and intensified the already general movement (since the turn of the century) of population from rural areas to cities. "Manners" suggests the inevitability of this shift and lightly parodies grandfather's old-fashionedness— but it is a sympathetic parody.

Throughout her life Bishop preferred rural to urban environments ("I don't much like the city," Bernlef 64), but she often lived in cities (New York, Paris, Rio, San Francisco, Boston). She wrote about countrysides, but she also wrote about the metropolis. Bishop valued and honoured the hand-crafted and the primitive ("Home-made, home-made! But aren't we all?" *CP* 164), but she was also fascinated by and used modern technology (e.g., typewriters and airplanes). Bishop employed traditional poetic forms (sonnets, sestinas, villanelles, etc.), but often subverted them. The point of this list is to show that Bishop experienced and engaged in what she would late in life call a "dazzling dialectic"— the past was not supplanted by the present; rather, past and present were in constant dialogue and merged to create "those years between," an interstitial space where tradition and modernity complemented, informed, and critiqued each other. Bishop extracted what she needed from tradition and modernity and created "interspace" in her art.

Perhaps the most important point of convergence between private and public tragedy occurred in the realm of grief, in the simultaneity of individual and communal mourning. "In the Village" is an elegy for the bewildered child and for the deeply grieving mother who simply cannot surface out of her mourning:

> "There's that mourning coat she got the first winter," says my aunt.
>
> But always I think they are saying, "morning." Why, in the morning, did one put on black? How early in the morning did one begin? Before the sun came up? (*CPr* 254)[11]

These words prefigure a late poem, "Five Flights Up," in which an unnamed speaker imagines the questions of an "unknown

bird" and "little dog," which arise at night (in mourning?), and are answered by morning: "Questions— if that is what they are— / answered directly, simply, / by day itself" (*CP* 179). For the speaker, however, answers are problematic burdens, "— Yesterday brought to today so lightly! / (A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)"

Gwyn observes of the impact of the war, "Remarked upon less often is the fact that the experiences Canadians underwent during the Great War cut a pattern for their society for roughly the next half-century. 'Why is he dead? And why, when he is dead, do I remain alive? Why?' " (xvii-xviii). Such questioning is endemic in Bishop's art. Its source was principally the mystery of her mother's illness and disappearance. In "Reminiscence of Great Village" Bishop assessed the impact of these circumstances in a way which also characterizes the response of many Canadians to the war and its aftermath:

> The hardest thing about it now— the sadness of it must be borne, of course— but harder to do— is to realize that it ever happened. Sad things[,] sudden things, awful things— seem always, a minute afterwards, so *unnecessary*, so unreasonable. What I had done before, & have done since, and what has happened to us all— it is understandable— if you think about it long enough it makes sense and you feel [it] . . . like a light moving behind a window pane at night, a certain reason, to it— an illumination— or like an inscrutable aloof face, lit up by a smile. But this— what happened to her— throws the picture all off— . . . the music all out of key. Denies the answer to every question. (10)

Bishop's experience of World War I is inseparable from her experience of Nova Scotia and her family. Though not equivalent (the dialectic is not a linear equation) the progression of private and public history were parallel, and their nexus was Gertrude Bulmer Bishop. As a child, Bishop absorbed a multitude of sensory stimuli in her environment. She remarked about childhood, "You are fearfully observant then. You notice all kinds of things, but there's no way of putting them all together"

(Spires 125). As "In the Village" records, her world comprised many beautiful and terrifying events, people, places, objects, textures, sounds, smells, and sights. Bishop's engagement with this highly complex mix was perhaps embodied in a gift:

> On the bureau is a present that has just come, from an uncle in Boston whom I do not remember. It is a gleaming little bundle of flat triangular satin pillows— sachets, tied together.... Each is a different faint color; if you take them apart each has a different faint scent. But tied together the way they came, they make one confused, powdery odor. (*CPr* 266)

In many ways, growing up is a lesson in ordering the "confused powdery odor," in putting things together and taking them apart. (For the adult this process devolves to the realm of memory; for the writer it devolves to the realm of language.) Bishop's private experiences take precedence in her autobiographical stories and poems— this context was the focus of her "infant sight"— and affected her artistic development most directly. Her engagement with and understanding of two of her most central themes, love and loss, originated in her relationship with her mother. However, the larger cultural and political contexts were important conditioners of her memory and vital (re)sources for her art. The Great War of 1914-1918 profoundly influenced Bishop's world view; it was, as Jay Winter describes, a "site of memory, site of mourning." ❦

Notes

1. Of the seventy men from Great Village who enlisted between 1914-1918, 21 were killed. The number of non-fatally wounded is not known (*History* 104-05).
2. She also spent time in North Carolina and Mexico during WWII.
3. Written in the early 1940s, "Roosters" is a response to the military presence in Key West and to militarism generally. In 1956 Bishop told May Swenson, "I started it and wrote all the beginning, and bits here and there, much more directly at 4 or 5 a.m. in the back yard in Key

West, with the roosters carrying on just as I said" (*One Art* 316). However, a brief passage in an unfinished novel about her childhood in Great Village, written in the mid-1930s, shows that the rooster also had a much earlier source: "At half-past twelve a silly rooster had crowed . . . [a] yawning sort of crow to begin with, then a convinced loud one, then a third which broke off abruptly. Had he been dreaming? His wives were probably tittering, nudging each other . . . up and down the length of the perch" ("Reminiscences" 23).

4. Dickie traces Bishop's interest in war to World War I, but does not explore this source in detail. Schweik focuses entirely on the impact of the Second World War and subsequent wars on Bishop's work.

5. This title was supplied when the document was catalogued at Vassar College and for convenience will be used here.

6. "Gwendolyn" also has an indirect link to World War I. Gwendolyn Patriquin's brother, Clyde Patriquin D.C.M., was a casualty of World War I. Bishop would have known him.

7. I offer further exploration and analysis in my forthcoming biographical study, *Lifting Yesterday: Elizabeth Bishop and Nova Scotia*, and it is hoped other scholars will more fully examine this subject.

8. See Craig, Gwyn, and Mathieson.

9. Not all English-speaking Canadians were imperialists. Many were federalists and strongly nationalistic. Moreover, not all Francophones were absolute anti-imperialists or avid *nationalistes*. Labels are necessarily simplistic. Reality was much more subtle and complex.

10. This onset of technology affected others in Nova Scotia at the time: "The past twelve months has seen Canso and vicinity invaded by the automobile" (*Truro Daily News*, 5 January 1917, 3).

11. Gertrude Bulmer Bishop's mourning pre-dated the war, but by 1915 it coincided with a mounting communal grief: "By now [1915], many Canadian women were wearing mourning, or at least, eschewing bright colours. . . . Yet it was frowned upon to show pain in public" (Gwyn 162).

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GARY FOUNTAIN

"BLINKING MY FLASHLIGHT OFF AND ON"
Elizabeth Bishop's Internal Battlefield

❦

"There was no question in her mind of her own rightness, or of her being at the center of her own world and of her being able to find her way through it. She was absolutely sure of that in a way which at that age not many people are" (Fountain and Brazeau 28). So seemed the adolescent Elizabeth Bishop to a high school classmate, Joan Collingwood Disney. Yet Disney also observed a vexing discontent about Bishop, particularly during one vacation from school:

> There was this big gap in Elizabeth's life. Elizabeth didn't talk much about her childhood. It was too difficult. . . . A terrible sadness would cause her to be despondent. I remember exactly how she looked one time when she was leaving our house in Plymouth, Massachusetts, after a visit. It was a very sad look that stayed with me. Maybe the right word would have kept her there. (28)

The young Elizabeth Bishop, seemingly equipped with precocious self-asurrance, could also experience aching moments of homelessness. Or, worse, moments of radical disorientation, for even when she was a child, as "In the Waiting Room" tells us, Bishop's command "of her own world" could give way abruptly to a sensation of "falling off / the round, turning world / into cold, blue-black space" (*Complete Poems* 57-59). "The War was on" (95), Bishop writes in the final stanza of this harrowing poem, referring to WWI and, one suspects, to the initial skir-

mishes of an internal battle that she was to fight throughout her life.

As Disney suggests, Bishop's sense of homelessness was imprinted on her character in childhood, perhaps when she was shuttled back and forth between Canada and the United States, the native homes of her parents. Many who knew Bishop later in her life identified her feeling of displacement with her ambivalent sense of national identity. According to the pianist Arthur Gold, the Elizabeth Bishop he and his partner Robert Fizdale first met in the 1940s was "very soignée" and her clothing "always suggested a tiny bit of English elegance— not an American jazzy elegance" (Fountain and Brazeau 136). On the other hand, as Gold also observed, "Elizabeth was very provincial.... She was always the slightly Henry Jamesian character in a cosmopolitan atmosphere" (138). Joseph Frank found Bishop curiously transnational in character when he met her in Washington DC in 1949:

> I didn't even know if Elizabeth was American or not. I wasn't quite clear because she spoke so much about Nova Scotia. I had the feeling that she didn't feel at home in this country somehow, that she was rather alien . . . because [of the way her] early years had shaped her sensibility.... She wasn't a regular fellow— she was more Canadian and more English than she was American. Probably the more formalized Latin culture that she lived in in Brazil [beginning in 1951] suited her much more than ordinary life in the States. (116)

How did Bishop's "early years . . . [shape] her [alien] sensibility"?

In her autobiographical story "The Country Mouse," Bishop writes of her early alienation, as she describes the months in 1917 and 1918 (she was six and seven) when she lived in Worcester, Massachusetts, with her paternal grandparents. She had been living with her mother's parents in Great Village, Nova Scotia, following her mother's being admitted to an asylum for the mentally ill in Dartmouth (her father had died within the year after Elizabeth's birth), when the Bishops decided that Elizabeth would have a better life with them and brought her to the United

States. Bishop describes feeling as if she "were being kidnapped" ("The Country Mouse" 14) from Canada by her Worcester grandparents:

> I had been brought back unconsulted and against my wishes to the house my father had been born in, to be saved from a life of poverty and provincialism, bare feet, suet puddings, unsanitary school slates, perhaps even from the inverted *r*'s of my mother's family. (17)

As Bishop describes her towering, "god-like" (13) grandfather, John W. Bishop, Sr., on the train from Halifax to Boston, with his suspenders and "thick silver hair and short silver beard," he resembles a disgruntled Uncle Sam, come to whisk Elizabeth off to the superior United States, where her grandmother, who traced her roots deep into United States soil and was probably a member of the D.A.R., will indoctrinate her in new loyalties:

> I was presented with a white card with an American flag in color at the top. All the stanzas of "Oh, say, can you see" were printed on it in dark blue letters. Every day I sat at Grandma's feet and attempted to recite this endless poem. (27)

In fact, a significant element of the drama of Bishop's writing is the struggle of identity resulting from a conflict between nations, a war on the battlefield of her consciousness that she survived through cautious rhetorical strategies.

Bishop's was a layered national experience during her youth, for during her months living in Canada, she had avidly pledged her allegiance to the English Crown. She tells us in "The Country Mouse" that she had grown used to starting each school day with "God Save the King" and "The Maple Leaf Forever." Thus, singing the "Star-Spangled Banner" in Worcester made her feel "like a traitor" (26). Surrounded as she was in these months by an invigorated patriotism in the United States during WWI, Bishop felt, "I wanted us to win the War, of course, but I didn't want to be an American." One favorite schoolmate was "a beautiful boy named Royal Something. His name made him

doubly attractive to me, stuffed as I was with the English royal family, although I realized he wasn't really royal" (24). So, while in Worcester, where she hoped for a United States victory, she longed for Canada, where she had revered an imaginary, regal England, as degree compounded degree of separation in Bishop's childhood psyche.

In "First Death in Nova Scotia," Bishop explores the mythic— if not religious— power that nationality and national symbols held for her when she was a child. The scene is the death of her cousin Arthur (actually her cousin Frank) when she and he were both children, as Bishop describes her mother laying out Arthur's body and coaxing her to place a lily of the valley into Arthur's hands. Arthur's body lies "beneath the chromographs: / Edward, Prince of Wales, / with Princess Alexandra, / and King George with Queen Mary" (2-5). Below the regal portraits, hovering above the coffin like religious icons,[1] "stood a stuffed loon . . . on his white, frozen lake, / the marble-topped table" (8, 15-16). Thus Bishop draws our attention to two cultural symbols that are oddly aligned. The red glass eye of the loon ("much to be desired," 20) and its paradoxically "cold and caressable" (18) white breast find their counterparts in the "red [velvet] and ermine" (42) in which the royal couples are draped. The lineage of royalty is echoed by a simpler lineage of "Uncle / Arthur, Arthur's father" (9-10), as the contrasting worlds of England and Canada (London and Great Village), royalty and farmers, the colonizer and the colonized, are— perhaps comically?[2]— juxtaposed and aligned.

A doubling, echoing effect is also present in the language of the poem, in the "cold, cold parlor" (1) and the repeated " 'Come' " (21-22) of Bishop's mother: " 'Come,' said my mother, / 'Come and say good-bye / to your little cousin Arthur' " (21-23). There are two kinds of stylistic repetition in this poem: one representing stasis and resistance, associated with death ("cold, cold"), the other suggesting a child searching for correspondences, familiarities, a kind of relief from one world provided by an echo of elements in another. In fact, linguistic repetition is the stylistic trademark of Bishop's poems about national identity through which she presents the dramatic interaction between the renewal that can come through relationship between different places and the static, deathlike ennui that can

overpower the exile. "Crusoe in England," was we shall see, Bishop's most unremitting example of the latter.

Each national symbol in "First Death in Nova Scotia"— the Royal Family, the Canadian loon, Jack Frost— offers Elizabeth its own wisdom, its own mythology of transcendence, its own solution to the problem of death at the center of the poem. The loon possesses a mysterious knowledge— "He kept his own counsel" (14), about death, one would assume, in this down-home, humorous aside—and the Royal Family dwells self-confidently in its world of security, grace, comfort, and wealth. The latter "invited Arthur to be / the smallest page at court" (45-46), but Elizabeth wonders how Arthur will find his way "with his eyes shut up so tight / and the roads deep in snow?" (49-50). Closer to home, Jack Frost, whom Elizabeth imagines painting the maple leaf symbol of Canada, might transform Arthur into a lovely doll, as her taxidermist Uncle Arthur has the loon, but Jack Frost has left Arthur incompletely rendered, adding only a few touches to his hair: "Jack Frost had dropped the brush / and left him white, forever" (39-40). This "forever" echoes that in the Canadian anthem, which Bishop diminishes by parentheses: "the way he always painted / the Maple Leaf (Forever)" (35-36). Arthur may not find "forever" in either place. Is there a "forever"? Elizabeth seems to be asking.

Arthur inhabits a limbo of mysterious affiliations and ultimately ineffectual, or at least indeterminate, powers. His death raises questions about the different states of Bishop's childhood loyalty, one immediate, another imagined. Does one "belong" to these nationalistic realms? How does one "inhabit" them? On what terms do they correspond to each other? And what of that enigmatic loon eyeing Arthur's coffin— just as, we imagine, Uncle Arthur had eyed the loon itself through his rifle's sight? Does her dead cousin Arthur represent some way in which Bishop felt herself ambushed, caught in the problematical crossfire between nationalities, as a child?

Bishop presents herself as the victim of nationalistic hostility in her narrative of the lonely childhood months in Worcester, "The Country Mouse." At the conclusion of this memoir, she describes the "[t]hree great truths that came home to [her] during this stretch of [her] life" (31). One is a "feeling of absolute and utter desolation" (32) that she experiences one day

while she is sitting in the office of her aunt's dentist, a microcosm, with its unsettling aura of pain, of the Worcester into which she had been displaced. Here she experiences an abrupt and startling sense of her self, her individuality: "I felt . . . *myself*" (33). On the one hand, this sense of selfhood creates for Elizabeth a kinship with the "two men and a plump middle-aged lady" (32) with her in the office. Yet this perception of self in relation to others, a new sense of belonging that, one imagines, could offset the misery of her isolation in Worcester, is accompanied by confusion and falseness:

> I felt *I,I,I,* and looked at the three strangers in panic. I was *one* of them, too, inside my scabby body and wheezing lungs. "You're in for it now," something said. How had I got tricked into such a false position? I would be like that woman opposite who smiled at me so falsely every once in a while. (33)

In the waiting room of this alien country— a space that also has the psychological resonance of a claustrophobic, abrupt transition from childhood and adulthood, without any adolescence for adjustment— Elizabeth finds herself trapped, like a player in a psychological game of chess, in a complex, paradoxical position. On the one hand, she senses that "inside" she possesses characteristics of the other people in the waiting room, that she somehow belongs or "fits" in Worcester because everyone is similarly human. On the other hand, Elizabeth finds herself alienated from this basic human self, condemned to present it falsely, "tricked" into a life of inauthentic facades. " 'You're in for it now,' something said"— in for one crack-up of false identity after another, apparently— because coming to the realization that "you are you and you are going to be *you* forever . . . was like coasting downhill . . . only much worse, and it quickly smashed into a tree."

Incident after incident in Worcester conspires to disorient and displace Elizabeth, to make her fake. From the first, she senses that she does not speak the language in this new place. Her "country" language is perceived as humorous: her grandfather laughs at her when, while on the train to Boston, she vomits "into something I referred to— probably thinking of farm

accoutrements I was more familiar with than bathrooms— as a 'hopper' " (14). Elizabeth hears language she has not known before, like the phrase "*apple-pie order*": "it baffled me" (22). And, finally, a new language reduces her to an abstraction and her life to play, as she relates in a droll passage that smacks of Lewis Carroll:

> . . . if only grandma hadn't had such a confusing way of talking. It was almost as if we were playing house. She would speak of "grandma" and "little girls" and "fathers" and "being good"— things I had never before considered in the abstract, or rarely in the third person. In particular, there seemed to be much, much more to being a "little" girl than I had realized; the prospect was beginning to depress me. (16)

In one haunting echo of imagery, after Bishop has described herself on the train, "stretching my tiny bones on what they had called a 'sofa' " (14), she describes the lace-like neck of her grandmother's dress as "a small structure of the net stretched on little bones . . . like a miniature fish weir" (15). Elizabeth was ensnared in this new world.

There are some comforting correspondences in Worcester: her Grandfather Bishop is walleyed, a characteristic that "seemed all right and natural, because my grandmother on the other side in Canada had a glass eye" (13); his practical temperament is "like (one gathers) the Duke of Wellington" (15); and one day, in a tender attempt to soothe his granddaughter's homesickness for farm life in Great Village, John Bishop buys Elizabeth "two little hens and one rooster" that made her feel that she "could have cried with pleasure" (30). John Bishop was himself an immigrant from Canada, and his United States veneer was thinner than his wife's. However, Elizabeth finds her only true comfort in the other immigrants in the house, particularly Agnes, the maid, who is constantly lectured to polish the mahogany dining room table "*With* the grain" (20). Elizabeth is attracted to Agnes "because Grandma fought with her constantly" (20).

Bishop's narrative of her sad tenure in Worcester is characterized by references to fighting, violence, and warfare. Her

grandmother and Uncle Neddy argue every Sunday morning: "I was frightened; I thought they were really fighting and were about to come to blows" (28), she says, although these battles always end amicably, with Uncle Neddy kissing his mother and sending her off to church. Bishop's grandfather argues over religion with his neighbor: he would "demolish her logic" (23) after tricking her by seeming to accede in to her arguments. His strategy echoes Bishop's notion that Worcester "tricked [her] into . . . a false position" (33). At breakfast Uncle Neddy "would insist on making jokes [Elizabeth] couldn't understand, and talking about spankings and other horrors" (30). Plus there is the daily presence of World War I: Ronald, the chauffeur, who with his uniform looks like "a new kind of soldier" (16) and tells Elizabeth about his son in the army; Aunt Jenny's "War Work"; the marching and the singing of patriotic songs at school; and the books of war cartoons with "German helmets and cut-off hands" (27). The numbing effect of all of these is compounded by Elizabeth's perception of the unsettling confluence of nationality and death stirred by her thoughts about her father's death in Worcester. As Bishop notes, when she sings " *'Land where my father died / Land of the pilgrims' pride'* "— for a long time I took the first line personally" (24). In the national anthem, the lines " *'Between his loved home and the war's desolation'* made me think of my dead father, and conjured up strange pictures in my mind" (27). In these lines her moment of "absolute and utter desolation" (31) in the dentist's waiting room is echoed by the song's reference to "war's desolation." Agnes, the hardy immigrant who created a happy community of servants in the house, kept up the fight, resolutely refusing to go "with the grain," but even she, finally, in effect, concedes and goes home, returning to Sweden to marry. At this point, Elizabeth loses the war in Worcester: "After [Agnes left], things went from bad to worse. First came constipation, then eczema again, and finally asthma. I felt myself aging, even dying" (31).

Bishop's body was under assault throughout her time at Worcester. She was forced against her will to ingest the codes of a new country, and thus her vomiting on the train from Halifax, an action repeated by Beppo, her aunt's dog, who "adopted" (21) Elizabeth. Beppo "begged for sympathy and understanding" and developed a "delicate stomach" because of his nervousness over

"imaginary dangers." Bishop's final reference to her eczema and asthma, her "scabby body and wheezing lungs" (33), brings to mind mustard gas and trench warfare. Stunned in the crossfire of these various nationalistic and psychological forces, Bishop describes herself lying in her sick bed at night, "blinking my flashlight off and on" (31), like a wounded soldier on the battlefield flashing an SOS.

Bishop deepens and darkens her paradigm of struggle with nationalistic identity in "In the Waiting Room." The pictures Bishop describes seeing in the *National Geographic*— the American "Osa and Martin Johnson / dressed in riding breeches, / laced boots, and pith helmets" (21-23) juxtaposed to cannibalism and the tribal customs of "[b]abies with pointed heads / . . . black, naked women with necks / wound round and round with wire" (26, 28-29)— all have colonialist overtones and the final stanza of the poem repeats a line from "The Country Mouse": "The War was on" (95). Between these references to the alien, bodily distortion, and violence, Bishop offers a different rendition of her experience in the dentist's office: rather than seeing herself primarily as desolate, Bishop imagines herself globally homeless, without any national center of gravity, "falling off / the round, turning world" (57-58). As she stares at the magazine in an attempt to keep herself from falling, we sense her grasping for some national geographic, some orientation in a place or nation. At the conclusion of the poem, Bishop manages to relocate herself, to regain some geographical footing: "Then I was back in it. / The War was on. Outside, / In Worcester, Massachusetts . . . " (94-96). How unsettling that the location and condition of her exile (Worcester and war) become Bishop's points of stability and orientation— cold comfort, indeed.

Bishop's poetic style in this and other later poems is a response to her exile, a rhetoric of universal identity and tentative correspondence that establishes her fragile accommodation in this alien, violent world. "The Country Mouse" foreshadows this style in Bishop's description of the other people in the waiting room, a style characterized by a general, impersonal pronoun, italics, and a question: "I was *one* of them, too. . . . *Why* was I a human being?" (33). Bishop's mature style asserts a general identification with others, yet questions the reason for this identification— she locates herself in a community then dislocates

herself in this community's more complex philosophical perspective. In this play with grammar we find Bishop, in effect, balancing the two elements in her personality that Joan Disney had noticed when Bishop was young, a simultaneous confidence or assertiveness of "being at the center of her own world" tempered by an abiding sense of homelessness.

In "In the Waiting Room," Bishop establishes a sense of community through a rhetoric of assertion, repetition, and correlation. Her statements build from a specific pronoun, to a proper noun, to a general pronoun, all accentuated by italics: "But I felt, you are an *I*, / you are an *Elizabeth*, / you are one of *them*" (60-62). This affirmation is qualified by skepticism: "*Why* should you be one, too?" (64). Question follows question, as Bishop searches for correspondences: "Why should I be . . . ? What similarities . . . ? How had I come . . . ?" (75, 77, 86). An interrogative adverb introduces a question, is interrupted by a qualifying statement, then the interrogative is repeated, until finally an assertion is offered in quotation marks followed by an ellipsis, all of these rhetorical and grammatical twists creating degree upon degree of qualification: "How—I don't know any / word for it—how 'unlikely'. . ." (84-85). Tenuous correspondence, often at one or two degrees of remove, maps the terrain of Bishop's geographic no-man's land.

Bishop's deepest fear is that there are no correspondences for the exiled, that everything is lost in translation. She contemplates this situation in "Crusoe in England." Bishop herself said that in this poem she wanted to rewrite the Crusoe story without its Christianity; she also rewrote it without its colonizing vigor. Her Crusoe is locked into the monotonously repetitious life of one for whom there are no echoes of his prior experiences, where the world before him multiplies itself in endless, meaningless repetition. "The sun set in the sea; the same old sun / rose from the sea, / and there was one of it and one of me" (65-67), says Crusoe, echoing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." There is a face-off between Crusoe and this place: at one point, frustrated by the incomprehensible and deadeningly repetitious "*Baa, baa, baa* and *shriek, shriek, shriek, / baa . . . shriek . . . baa . . .*" (104-105) of the goats and gulls, he grabs the beard of a goat and stares into its eyes: "His pupils . . . / . . . expressed nothing" (122-123). Correspondence is lost in layer upon layer of remove, and

memory fails on this island: a group of snails reminds Crusoe of irises, which remind him of daffodils, thus bringing to mind Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud": " 'They flash upon the inward eye, / which is the bliss . . .' Bliss of what? / One of the first things that I did / when I got back was look it up" (96-99). Even Friday participates in the island's static, infertile repetition of having "one kind of everything" (68): "Friday was nice, and we were friends. / If only he had been a woman! / I wanted to propogate my kind" (146-148).

"And then one day they came and took us off" (153), says Crusoe, and we hear the echo of a kidnapping from Great Village. Back in England he says, "I'm bored" (159), and we hear a lonely child in Worcester saying, "I was *bored* and lonely" ("The Country Mouse" 31). Crusoe finds that in England objects from the island have lost their meaning and life: the parasol that protected him from the island's sun "looks like a plucked and skinny fowl" (179), the "living soul" (169) of the knife that had come to hold meaning for him "like a crucifix" (162) has "dribbled away" (169), and Friday was killed by a disease of the dominating, civilized world: "— And Friday, my dear Friday, died of measles / seventeen years ago come March" (181-182). Death of the innocent, childlike Friday, whom Crusoe identified with the baby goats that he carried around and raced on the island, is a haunting echo of other childhood deaths in Bishop's work (Cousin Arthur's, and Bishop feeling herself dying in Worcester). In this poem Bishop reflects on her lifelong struggle with exile, as Crusoe, her older self (Bishop after her exile from Brazil following the death of her sixteen-year companion there), contemplates the death at the hands of an invading nation of Friday, her younger self. Even if one were to return home, after years of exile, Bishop suggests in this her darkest take on her nationalistic paradigm, one would still be in exile— or as she puts it in "Questions of Travel," " *'home, / wherever that may be?'* " (66-67).

Nationalism and warfare rise to the surface as the overt subjects for contemplation in a number of Bishop's poems: "Roosters," "View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," "Visits to St. Elizabeths," and "From Trollope's Journal"— which ends with the pointed critique, "The soldiers poison the air" (28)— to name a few. The issue of warfare, though, lies close to Bishop's heart, as her reflections

upon her early life suggest. In fact, Bishop hints in more than one piece that warfare may be endemic to the psychology of the human heart, to being human. "*Why* was I a human being?" (33) she asks at the conclusion of "The Country Mouse." What does it mean to be human? "The Armadillo" suggests that one answer to this latter question is inevitable war within oneself.

Love and war, as if locked in combat, begin and conclude a single line in "The Armadillo": "Venus going down, or Mars" (12). Once the illegal fire balloons that are released to celebrate St. John's Day (June 24) in Brazil climb far into the sky, they are difficult to distinguish from these two planets. These fiery emblems of rebellion ("illegal," 3) and religious aspiration, "rising toward a saint / still honored in these parts" (5-6), can either ascend into a calm sky and "steer between / the kite sticks of the Southern Cross" (15-16) or "suddenly [turn] dangerous" (20), when they become caught in a downdraft, exploding like fire bombs against the hillside, displacing the owls, rabbits, and armadillos that live there. Thwarted aspirations and longings produce violence. The wise ("ancient" owls, 29), the "innocent" (a baby rabbit), and the "ignorant" (an armadillo, 40) suffer displacement at the hands of the more powerful: "*O falling fire and piercing cry / and panic . . .*" (38-39).

This "*piercing cry*" resonates throughout Bishop's writing, echoing both the "*oh!* of pain" ("In the Waiting Room" 37) from Aunt Consuelo that disorients Elizabeth in the waiting room of the dentist's office in Worcester and the mad scream of Bishop's mother during the years of her mental decline, while Bishop was a child, as described in "In the Village": "The scream hangs like that, unheard, in memory— in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. It just came there to live, forever— not loud, just alive forever" (251). In some ways, then, this poem addresses those moments of displacement and exile, of loss of home, family, and, specifically, mother, that haunted Bishop throughout her life. One senses particular personal poignance in the line, "Last night another big one fell" (21). What specific, immediate defeat, one wonders, generated this haunting meditation?

Mars dominates this poem of love's sacred longing, of fire balloons that "flush and fill with light / that comes and goes, like hearts" (7-8). Bishop presents two possible outcomes of such

longing. Neither, however, offers fulfillment. The balloons that climb steadily "forsak[e] us" (18), and we hear Christ's last words in this saint's day poem: unimpeded desires abandon us to our lonely crucifixions on this earth. Venus, after all, is "going down" (12). Those longings that are caught in the "downdraft" (19) of the gravity of human conflict turn "dangerous" (20) and spread their venom, descending like Venus: "The flame ran down" (24).

Bishop offers three reactions to this psychological fire bombing. First, there is complete displacement and homelessness, as the owls' nest is destroyed and these birds "shrieked up out of sight" (28). It also seems that a part of the self— childlike, innocent, caressable, and imaginative (those "ignited eyes")— can survive, phoenix-like risen from, or actually composed of, the ashes of destruction: "and then a baby rabbit jumped out, / *short*-eared, to our surprise. / So soft!— a handful of intangible ash / with fixed, ignited eyes" (33-36). And, finally, Mars is met on his own terms, if not with equivalent power, in the figure of the armored armadillo: "*a weak mailed fist / clenched ignorant against the sky*" (39-40). Each creature represents a characteristic of the mature Bishop: the first haunted and periodically disoriented her; the second, magically and inexplicably, kept her vibrant and creative; and the third, given a certain prominence in this poem by its concluding position, gave voice to frustration and provided some defense against defeat. This weak, clenched fist of the frustrated armadillo returns us to Joan Collingood Disney, with whose observations we began, and who at Walnut Hill noticed that Bishop periodically fell prey to a bitter cynicism: "Occasionally she was close to cynicism. . . . She was trembling on the brink of being rather harsh when it was unnecessary" (Fountain and Brazeau 28). Of course, it was necessary, to survive the war. ❦

Notes

1. For a discussion of the implications of iconography in this poem, see Bonnie Costello's deft analysis in *Elizabeth Bishop, Questions of Mastery*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991. 193-98.

2. The naïve, young Elizabeth seems simply to note these two objects, but one also senses a certain irony or satire in the Royal Family being juxtaposed to a loon. Bonnie Costello draws attention to the rich dual perspective of this and other of Bishop's poems (see above).

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CAMILLE ROMAN

WASHINGTON DC, 1949-1950
Bishop on WWII & the Cold War

Elizabeth Bishop—from her attic office at the Library of Congress during her year as poetry consultant in 1949-1950—could literally see the Capitol every work day as the national government began to formulate the Cold War and to commit the nation to the Korean War in 1950.[1] She therefore had a "privileged" insider's view of the Cold War's "arrival" in, or invasion of, daily US life. Official Washington rhetoric overflowed with visions of the postwar nation's power to vanquish Communism and to save the world. The US international news magazine *Time* reported an example of this emerging dominant national discourse in its May 29, 1950 issue as it quoted a government spokesman on Cold War "containment" policy:

> It is the only war in history where the question of destruction doesn't enter into it at all. Everything we are doing is building up. We have rebuilt Europe, not destroyed it. . . . Now, if we carry on a smart, resourceful, cold war, the kind of war free people can carry on, Russia will be contained. . . . All we have to do is carry on intelligently, and at extremely low cost, the political, economic, military and informational measures already under way. (1)

While official Washington saw itself in mythical proportions and persuaded most of its citizens, as well as much of the world, to view it this way, it is not surprising that Bishop was not among the supporters in spite of her "insider's" government post. She had dissented with US militarism in WWII. This placed her in opposition to the goals of the federal government,

which was appropriating WWII's victory narrative to legitimize a Cold War narrative. As Cold War scholar Tom Engelhardt contends, "the immediate war story within which Americans, from the president on down, still generally cared to live was that of World War II" (11). Bishop, in contrast, found little in the WWII "story" to justify such emulation. In this essay I want to explore two related questions about her political positioning on militarism and war: How did Bishop respond to the WWII-Cold War victory narrative being developed during 1949-1950? How might we understand why she turned to these rhetorical strategies? I will begin by framing the discussion with her reaction to WWII and then focusing especially on her previously unpublished and unexamined archival fragment about V-Day. I will move on to the private resistance recorded in her correspondence, her unpublished and little examined journal of 1950, and her one public statement in the published poem completed at this time entitled "View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress." Then I will reflect upon her rhetorical decisions as strategies of dissent. My goal is not to provide an authoritative, comprehensive, or exhaustive view of this period in her life and writing, but to suggest an "entry" into it. In addition, I want to emphasize that while I read Bishop in relation to militarism in the WWII-Cold War narrative here, I view the war story as one national discourse among many competing national discourses and not as a single governing cultural paradigm. This view is informed by Antonini Gramsci's general cultural theories of "hegemony" in which the dominant culture is never without contestation (see *Selections from Prison Notebooks*) as well as Milton Bates' identification of the Cold War competing national discourses of territorial expansion, race, class, gender, and generational difference in his *The Wars We Took to Vietnam*.

Bishop's well-known poem "Roosters" published in the April 1941 issue of *The New Republic* placed her anti-militarism and anti-totalitarianism in WWII on public record. By her own admission in a letter to her poetry mentor-sponsor and friend Marianne Moore, her depiction in the poem of the roosters who "command and terrorize . . ." was meant as an attack on the baseness of all militarism:

> I want to emphasize the essential baseness of militarism. In the first part I was thinking of Key West, and also of those aerial views of dismal little towns in Finland and Norway, when the Germans took over, and their atmosphere of poverty. . . . (I also had in mind the violent roosters Picasso did in connection with his *Guernica* picture.) (*One Art* 96)

Then she fell publicly silent after this, just as so many poets became more active than before in writing war poetry (i.e., her friends and mentor/sponsors Moore and Robert Lowell). Thomas Travisano has observed correctly that "the case can be made that the war daunted her creatively: she published nothing at all in either 1942 or 1943 and her production during the war was limited by even her own standards" (*Elizabeth Bishop* 73).

Does this mean that she changed her ideology? Quite the contrary. This silence seems more like a strategic rhetorical move when one considers, for instance, Bishop's many appearances in the leftist *The Partisan Review* until this time. As Victoria Harrison has pointed out, "Unbeliever" and "Quai" were published in the August-September 1938 issue alongside Leon Trotsky's "Art and Politics" and Victor Serge's "Marxism in Our Time"; and "The Fish" followed Stephen Spender's war chronicle "September Journal" in the March-April 1940 issue (77). Margaret Dickie speculates that in her WWII silence Bishop may have wanted to avoid tension with such poetry mentors and allies as Lowell and Moore who were writing war poetry (106). Lorrie Goldensohn, in contrast, offers another perspective: that Bishop may not have wanted to compromise on her anti-militarism and preferred silence instead (157). I think that Bishop was concerned with both.

Private correspondence during the period of public poetic silence reveals an interrogating and resistant Bishop. On April 2, 1942, for example, she wrote Charlotte Russell about her anger over military appropriations of civilian Key West and her political action against it:

> Marjorie [Stevens] and I are leaving for Mexico on the fifteenth. . . . It is impossible to live here any longer. The Navy takes over and tears down and

> eats up one or two blocks of beautiful little houses for dinner every day. . . . And the point is that it is *unnecessary*. . . . Key West will be more ruined than ever— nothing but a naval base and a bunch of bars and cheap apartments. Pauline [Hemingway] and I are now conducting a campaign to write [Senator] Pepper about it. . . . I don't want to be unpatriotic about it. . . . but it *is* unnecessary, I'm sure. . . . Spring is coming, interwoven with the constant sound of airplanes. . . . (*One Art* 106-107)

Bishop also realized, however, that her lack of explicit war poetry during this time brought ramifications in the literary and cultural marketplace. In a letter dated January 22, 1945, she asked her publisher Ferris Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin to explain her silence when it published her poetry collection *North & South:* "The fact that none of these poems deal directly with the war, at a time when so much war poetry is being published, will, I am afraid, leave me open to reproach" (*One Art* 26). She then goes on to apologize for this, saying that she works very slowly (26). But correspondence with her friend, the poet Lloyd Frankenberg, dated June 29, 1942, provides another contradictory perspective. It indicates her concerns about the potential complicitous role of poetry in war. Discussing his statement of conscientious objection to the war, she writes: "I only wish poetry hadn't had to be brought in at all— but then I suppose there's no use in trying to protect it, either . . ." (*One Art* 112).

A barely decipherable handwritten poetry fragment entitled "V-Day August 14th, 1945" in the Vassar College Archives further reveals that Bishop had not in fact changed her anti-militarist views about WWII and thus needed to position herself not only in relation to her own conscience but also in relation to the national politics of war that interrelated with the literary and cultural climate and marketplace. In fact, this archival fragment indicates that Bishop would hardly have been considered part of the "faithful female nation" waiting for the return of the victorious WWII military if the fragment had been known. When the war ended and the US returned as winners, thousands on V-Day cheered in the ticker-tape parades like the widely photographed parade held in New York City. Bishop was not

one of them. She writes in her fragment about standing at a "window-sill":

> (— of the paper.)
> streamer
> floated upright, drifted slowly, clung & then
> wing its — sighed & rocked
> fell despairing
>
> torn bit
> (like flake in —
> turned like a flock of birds
> *blinked* quarried
>
> A.M.
> at 7 o'clock the imitation maypole & the
> boys & girls with *sparklers* in the dim light
> watching (box 75, folder 3a, p. 73, VC)[2]

Instead of evoking the parade streamers of the "victorious" and "saved" national hegemonic war narrative in which women and families greeted the honorable returning US soldiers, Bishop's "despairing torn bit" of "wing" that "clung" reminds one of the remnants of civilian human skin and clothing reported at Hiroshima and Nagasaki following the atomic bombings as well as the remains of bombed planes. Indeed the imagery of "torn bit" and "quarried birds" recalls imagery evoked from an earlier window sill at "the gun-metal blue window"— in "Roosters" with its imagery of roosters (or fliers and planes) who are seen as doomed:

> and one is flying,
> with raging heroism defying
> even the sensation of dying.
>
> And one has fallen . . .
> his torn-out, blooded feathers drift down. . . .
> (*Complete Poems* 37)

This national ceremony of a victory peace parade thus is intertwined with war's violence in her poetry fragment. The nation's demonization and feminization of Japan in WWII as an enemy that must be "mastered" and "controlled" lest it attack US women and children had resulted in allied and enemy military casualties as well as the unprecedented large-scale targeted deaths of thousands of enemy civilians. So when Bishop broke her silence at least in private to witness the "peace," she offered only the barest kind of "piece" in an impoverished, stripped-down, "quasi-invisible" rhetoric that contrasted sharply with the public bravado of the victory culture's discourse. Indeed, in relation to Bishop's own fully fleshed-out poem of "Roosters" about the view from a window sill, this fragment offers a kind of linguistic/visual depiction of a world and language left in tatters.

In her anxieties about the new emerging US postwar era she was not alone. Her poetry friends Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell were attacking in their poetry not only the air bombings of such cities as Dresden, Germany, but also the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By 1950 a conclave of leading clergymen on the federal Dun Commission issued the statement: "War is the culture of our age and the culture is war" (Boyer 348).

Yet Bishop was publicly silent in general about the victory culture while in the poetry consultant's office at the Library of Congress. Indeed her tenure has been read as an unimportant period in her writing by Dickie and biographer Brett Millier (Dickie 112; Millier *Elizabeth Bishop* 219-227). Her public silence, however, at a time when the nation was returning to war seems too deafening to overlook. Her very absence from the public site/sight of "speech" when she was at the center of its cultural power in Washington asks us to ponder and probe what might be behind it, to consider more closely what might be omitted from the "received" mainstream history and national memory of this period, and to search out what has been submerged. What did she need to negotiate as a poet, for example, in the public spotlight for the first time—and in her first nine-to-five job (Millier, "The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol," 60)? In other words, what was the "received" historical context of this period in her life? From her private world in Key West, Bishop found herself at two major centers of cultural power and confronted with the thorny issue of what Cary Nelson has described

as the possible debasement of the public space of poetry in time of war (42).

First of all, the holder of Bishop's poetry consultancy office probably would have been expected to produce public patriotic poetry. Archibald MacLeish had set a precedent for this when he spearheaded WWII propaganda efforts among writers while he held the poetry consultant's office at the beginning of the war and then became director of war information. Edna St. Vincent Millay, who became known as the ideal patriotic woman poet in WWII with her major propaganda poem *The Murder of Lidice*, reappeared prominently in the public eye as the Cold War's ideal patriotic woman poet. She was the focus of the feature article "Poet's Kitchen" in the February 1949 issue of *The Ladies Home Journal*; and she appeared again in the November 1949 issue with the publication of her famous sonnet "An Ancient Gesture" about the Western classical war figures of Penelope and Ulysses (Taber 56-57, 183-185; Millay 89).

In addition to negotiating these patriotic expectations based on her office, her writing profession, and her gender, Bishop also confronted a fresh uproar around the issues of state patriotism and treason in both her Library of Congress post and her residency at the prestigious Yaddo Colony for artists and writers. As is well-known, her friend Robert Lowell arranged for her poetry post and supported her Yaddo residency; so she was greatly indebted to him for bringing her to these centers of cultural power in the poetry world. However, he also was largely responsible for the two well-documented major incidents about patriotism and treason. He, along with Flannery O'Connor, his future wife Elizabeth Hardwick, and others at Yaddo, accused the director Elizabeth Ames of Communist involvement shortly before Bishop arrived there (Hamilton 143-145; 152). Bishop was nervous enough about Yaddo that she told Loren MacIver in a letter: "... I'm scared of writing Cal about where I am ..." (*One Art* 248). After she received his approval for her stay, she wrote MacIver again to say "he was glad I was at Yaddo, so that's a relief— however I really feel Mrs. Ames will never get over his attack on her and he shows absolutely no remorse about that" (*One Art* 260). As these two letters indicate, Bishop was very anxious about negotiating an amenable position in relation to Lowell's politics. Moreover, by the time that Bishop took over

the poetry post, the Bollinger Prize that her office had administered was no longer housed there because of another well-known incident involving Lowell. A joint congressional committee had transferred the award to Yale University's administrative oversight as a result of the furor created by Ezra Pound's receipt of it while he was incarcerated at St. Elizabeths Hospital on treason charges for his pro-fascism. Lowell had played a major role in the award selection.

Given these explosive historical contexts, where could the Bishop who had written the "V-Day" unpublished poetry fragment position herself in the public arena? Or had her thinking about militarism between V-Day and 1949 changed? A 1949 letter to her trusted friend Pearl Bell Kazin reveals that Bishop's anti-militarism had not abated. To the contrary, it indicates just how treasonous Bishop would have sounded if she had expressed her views publicly. With Kazin she deflates official Washington's power of ideological representation through her derision of its architecture. Her use of the letter— a personal and private form of writing— indicates the extent to which she felt the need to express herself, but in a way that did not place her under scrutiny and at risk:

> Washington doesn't seem quite real. All those piles of granite and marble, like an inflated copy of *another* capital city someplace else (the Forum?). Even the Lincoln Memorial, which I went to see, affected me that way. . . . (*One Art* 194)

Instead of viewing Washington's architecture as the stirring patriotic site of the unique savior-nation of the world in Cold War "containment" mythology, Bishop sees it, first, as merely "piles of granite and marble," drained of any inherent patriotic "romance" to stir the hearts of US citizen-patriots. Second, her image of "piles of granite and marble" evokes cemetery markers, the deadly reality behind the bravado of Cold War militarism. Then she tosses the city with the unique "messianic" Cold War mission aside as an "inflated copy" of a "someplace else" that she cannot quite place. Even the Lincoln Memorial fails to stir her.

As I am arguing with this example, her major challenge in her tenure at the Library of Congress, then, was to find covert ways of expressing such high-risk viewpoints during the nation's most intense era of political surveillance in recent history. The year's public silence cannot be taken at face value as only the result, as Dickie and Millier have argued, of the fact that she did not respond to Washington architecture as she had earlier to Paris architecture, or that the year provided many personal and medical problems (associated, for instance, with her alcoholism), but few "subjects for poems" (Dickie, 112; Millier, *Elizabeth Bishop* 219-227 and "The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol" 54-76).[3] Indeed, I find it uncanny that Bishop spent so much of her time in withdrawal or on the sidelines in the two poetry "hot spots," politically encumbered by anyone's analysis at both Yaddo and the Library of Congress. In today's terms, the historical contexts of both poetry centers would be described as the sites of stress-induced illness resulting in the need for abundant medical leave. Bishop's medical record bears out this analysis, even if we allow for the importance of her other long-standing physical and medical issues. She spent time in 1949 in a sanitorium for alcoholism, missed many days in her poetry post due to asthma attacks and alcoholic illness, and underwent treatment during Christmas Week in Saratoga Hospital (Millier, "The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol," 59-61).

In spite of the many difficult political and personal issues, I think that Bishop succeeded in finding several covert ways to articulate her emerging views on the Cold War during her year in Washington that reveal that the basic shape of her resistance to it was formed during 1949-1950. Her handwritten unpublished diary of 1950 at the Vassar Archives records several of her experiences and thoughts during this year, with many of the entries written in the same tone on topics similar to what we find in her letter to Bell. This journal holds the drafts of "A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," the only poem officially completed in 1950, revealing that she commented upon the capitol building lengthily and muted her politically charged views in the published version of the poem. In addition, the diary includes remarks about Bishop's private life and her female-centered circle, a risky rhetorical move given the era's conflation of Communism with homosexuality while she held public office

and the government's penchant for the surveillance and private investigation of government employees (see Bérubé and Edelman). In more concrete terms, new anti-homosexual activity took place in Washington almost weekly beginning in February 1950. From a dismissal of an average of five homosexuals each month, the rate grew to more than sixty per month (Bérubé 266, 269).

"View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress" offers Bishop's ideological critique of both militarism and her equally important concern about military domination of the homefront and private citizens. The poem can be read as simply an amusing anecdote on the ways that the trees block the sound of the Air Force band playing at the Capitol— and indeed it has been generally overlooked in published Bishop scholarship. Bishop's playfulness in the poem possesses a "fairy tale" tone that presents a kind of heightened "romantic" response to the music. In a first scanning, one might interpret the poem as one listener's enthralled rapture with the patriotic music attempting to woo citizens into war support and national solidarity:

> I think the trees must intervene,
>
> catching the music in their leaves
> like gold-dust, till each big leaf sags.
>
> . . . .
>
> Great shades, edge over,
> give the music room.
> The gathered brasses want to go
> *boom— boom*. (*Complete Poems* 69)

But as one begins to re-read the text, one realizes that Bishop finds the trees, not the band, magical. Indeed the national patriotic music cannot be heard clearly so its courting or persuasion among the citizen-listeners falters. Millier's and Dickie's recent assessments that the published poem represents Bishop's skeptical perspective on military life are quite correct. As Dickie argues, Bishop seems to criticize the Air Force band's "feeble"

efforts to "declare its own glory or even assert its military presence" (Millier 223; Dickie 112-113).

Bishop's fragments and working drafts to this poem in her diary for 1950, together with her correspondence during her 1949-1950 year in Washington DC with her good friends, the artist Loren MacIver and the poet Lloyd Frankenberg, support anti-militarist readings of the poem as a whole. She enclosed the final poem in a letter dated only as Sunday morning in October 1950 with the comment, "I'll wind up this spiel by sending you a little number I turned out the other day." She had apparently agreed to send them postcards of the Washington sights/sites while she worked as poetry chair and hoped the poem would suffice as a substitute for a card (*One Art* 210).

Her preoccupation with the patriotic and political sights/sites of the national capitol during 1950 indicates the extent to which she was studying the city from her writing desk, documenting the arrival of the Cold War—and the Korean War—just as she had observed the arrival of the Navy in WWII in Key West from her writing room overlooking the harbor. She described Washington to Frankenberg in a letter dated August 21, several weeks after the US troops arrived in Korea, as though it had been invaded and overtaken by the military. An Air Force base seems to have suddenly sprung up and obliterated the spring landscape. Indeed her depiction recalls her letter during WWII to Charlotte Russell describing a spring, "interwoven with the constant sound of airplanes." Her description to Frankenberg masculinizes the metallic apparatus of militarism and suggests the feminization of nature more explicitly through her depiction of spring as beautiful, but also fragile:

> Washington seems composed of equal parts of airplanes, starings, electric drills, and thick, oily storm. The beautiful spring lasted exactly one week. (21 August 1950 VC)

Because of the way that the poem grows out of her observations during 1950, I want to focus primarily on its intertwined development with Bishop's other commentary in the diary on national patriotism and politics. She began the poem on January 13, recording her fascination with the mossy facade of

the US Post Office building: "How wonderful this place would look if all the facades were like this" (box 77, folder 4, p. 3, VC). Other lines sketched in this entry combine physical observation with political commentary. She depicts the "harsh, stiff Justice" on the Capitol dome with an implied eroticized deadly masculinization of feminized nature reminding us of her letter to Frankenberg describing the military occupation of Washington DC:

> Justice on the Dome like a leaf
> stiff
> The moss harsh stiffened, —
> (box 77, folder 4, p. 3, VC)

On January 26, she noted that the "flying flags" in Washington seemed like "horny insects," another masculinization of the nation's most patriotic symbol (box 77, folder 4, p. 4, VC). Then she added on the same page:

> The light moves from left to far left & off
> around on the highest tier of little windows
> on the Capitol dome . . .
> giving an effect of a big old wall-eyed white horse

Her depiction of the light illuminated on the Capitol dome suggests that the Capitol, the architectural symbol of US national government because it houses the Congress, seems awry. The light reminds her of a "big old wall-eyed white horse," with one eye that squints to the side rather than straight ahead. Here the problem seems to be that the Capitol light can only move "left to far left," intimating that the Capitol has limited vision. Is this just a physical observation by Bishop, or a political observation? Given her comment on January 13 about the "harsh, stiff Justice on the Dome," one is tempted to read this as a very well-camouflaged comment upon the HUAC hearings led by Senator Joseph McCarthy at this time that attacked many private citizens, especially targeting homosexuals, liberals, intellectuals, and cultural producers as a whole (see Bérubé and Edelman). Moreover, the "white horse" here is not the heroic horse one expects to see depicted, but a horse with abnormal vision veering off course as it fixates on the "left to far left."

While the images of the light, Capitol dome, and horse remained in the published version of the poem, the most caustic statement about this military-dominated Washington DC in this fragmented piece of writing did not. In a strong, direct sexual language atypical of her, Bishop personifies the national Capitol dome as the food source for the military. Bishop calls the dome "an elaborate sugar-tit for a nation that likes sugar." Moreover, the "airplanes" settle themselves gingerly "down" so near the "Dome" in her working draft that it looks like the airplanes are trying to land on the "sugar-tit." The image suggested here by the airplanes with their wings is of bees— pursuing their nectar or sugar from the dome, the metaphorical flower with the petals down and "tit" exposed in full view. Is this a fanciful observation by Bishop, or political commentary? When one considers that the military draws its "sugar" or "food source" from Congressional financial appropriations, it is difficult to see this as mere whimsical imagery. The Congress— as represented by the Capitol dome— functions not only as the Cold War nation who remains faithful and welcomes home her troops wholeheartedly, but also as the "good faithful patriotic mother" who nourishes her military forces:

> (Washington poem) airplanes always setting themselves gingerly down
> Dome — also an elaborate sugar-tit for a nation that likes sugar (box 77, folder 4, p. 4, VC)

Bishop's January 27 entry indicates her desire to remove the flag, the nation's major patriotic symbol, from the scene altogether:

> . . . put the flags away
> . . . pull down the flags (box 77, folder 4, p. 5, VC)

But by February 17 the flags were reinserted and remained permanently in the poem, conveying a meaning similar to that of the discarded "sugar-tit":

> The flag flows worringly into the air

flags flow
feeds its stripes into the air (box 77, folder 4, p. 12, VC)

While Bishop had removed the "sugar-tit" image from the poem, she retained her interest in suggesting that the nation, as represented by the red and white stripes of the flag, still "feeds" into the air. The red and white stripes remind one of candy canes being fed into the air, where Air Force planes come and go.

On February 23, she was still preoccupied with the flags. With March winds, she wrote, "flags going at higher speed." She then critiqued their use on holidays:

> On Washington's Birthday the trolley-cars had 2 small flags stuck on either side of the front, on top– they fly them on most holidays. The flags are very small and the effect is rather silly, "cute"— or manifestation of the same sort of decorative impulse that the Romans used when they decorated. (box 77, folder 4, p. 14, VC)

Several months later, on June 23, she returned to the poem and added in the band, describing it as "unreal" as the architecture she had deplored to Pearl Kazin in an earlier letter. In addition, her image of the band with its "short burst" and "vol. or volume/volley" links music to gunfire and cannon volley in war, for patriotic music is used both to mobilize and direct soldiers against the enemy and to mask the horrifying sounds of actual warfare:

> The band playing on the steps of the Capitol— it sounds unreal, a sort of *imagined* band, in short burst, Vol. There isn't any wind, and looking out one has the sensation that this effect is being caused by the great masses of the trees between the band and here. (box 77, folder 4, p. 16, VC)

Bishop's June 24 entry records the poem's title for the first time in a complex sketch that reveals that she will combine her derisive views of the patriotic architecture with those of the

patriotic music played by the military band. Patriotic or nationalistic music is supposed to achieve its wooing of its citizens through group identification with the music, not brute force; but Bishop sees the band's desire to coerce fully with its "boom-boom" war-like sound:

View of the Capitol from the L of C - title
on the steps, the military band uniforms
imagine any such thing,
since there is no haze
trees —

Great shades the small eye on the capitol
Big trees, big shades, edge over
give the music room I think the band is wanting
to
go more *boom-boom*
to go boom-boom
I think it wants to go
more boom boom boom.
(box 77, folder 4, p. 16, VC)

On June 25 she records the final fragment of the poem-in-progress. It continues to focus on the music, which wants to exert its military strength in warlike sounds, indicating that the trees block and overpower it. The reference to the fact that music "must do" this as well as "wants to do" it ("boom: boom:" or "umpty-umpty") gives it a masculine and highly sexually charged edge, to which the feminized "trees" must yield. The parallel between this masculine/feminine binary and the Cold War militarism's conquest of the private feminized citizen sphere is uncanny:

great shades, edge over, let the band come through
give the music room let the music through
to — umpty-umpty if that's what it wants to
do
to go *boom*: *boom*:
if that's what it must do
(box 77, folder 4, p. 17, VC)

It is significant that Bishop interweaves discourse about her personal life between the prose and poetic passages of the poem. She notes, for example, in her January 13 entry with the poem's first fragment that her Key West and travel companion and lifelong friend "Louise Crane just called— I'm seeing her tomorrow." Then on June 23 as she adds the band into the poem, she records "Going to Jane D's this afternoon, thank goodness." She spent much of her time relaxing at Jane Dewey's home in Maryland while in Washington and inscribed her poem "A Cold Spring" in the 1955 volume *A Cold Spring*, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize, "for Jane Dewey, Maryland" (*Complete Poems* 55). Then she records a highly private emotional moment of turbulence and insight:

> I think when one is extremely unhappy— almost hysterically unhappy, that is— it is one's time to lie down. All that long stretch— several years ago— it wasn't just a matter of not being able to accept the present, that present, although it began that way possibly. But the past and the present seemed confused or contradicting each other violently and constantly, and the past wouldn't down.
> (box 77, folder 4, p. 17, VC)

In the final June 24 entry she describes Jane's party for the writer John Dos Passes with its thunderstorm and fireflies that become part of the poem "A Cold Spring." As these sporadic entries indicate, Bishop intertwines her discourse of the intimate with writing destined to become public, thereby inscribing her subjectivity as a lesbian into her dialogue with the nation's Cold War "containment" narrative.

While the subject position of the journal writer is identified readily as female and as lesbian by those who know about Bishop's life-text or biography, the published poem's speaker bears nonspecific or universal social markings, a visible compliancy with dominant Cold War culture's denial of social differentiation (see May). Yet the reader tends to refer to the poem's speaker as female, drawn into this identification by conflating the speaker's gender and sexual coding with the poet's and/or coding

the poem's language ("one small lunette," "gold-dust," "little flags," and "great shades") as feminine by following tradition mid-century views of language put forth by such linguistics scholars as Robin Lakoff that describe this kind of language as "talking like a lady"(280-291).

Lesbian concerns are present as well in the published poem, however, in spite of the fact that this culture marginalized homosexuality— or, in the words of lesbian theorist Terry Castle, tried to render it invisible (7). In the poem the speaker listens to impotent patriotic music that "doesn't quite come through" in spite of being played "hard and loud" by an all-male Air Force band:

> the Air Force Band
> in uniforms of Air Force blue
> is playing hard and loud (*Complete Poems* 69)

Apparently the sound does not carry because the feminized landscape of "the giant trees stand in between" and "must intervene" by "catching the music in their leaves . . . till each big leaf sags." In contrast to the power of the trees to absorb the weight of the music, the "little flags / feed their limp stripes into the air, / and the band's efforts vanish there." Because "the gathered brasses want to go / *boom— boom*," a reference to the military commanders or "brasses" who want to go to war as well as a caustic comment on the infantilism of war in the use of "boom— boom," the speaker urges the "great shades" to "edge over" and "give the music room," a physical impossibility. Equally important, the speaker says that it's "queer" that the music does not come through. Moreover, the word "queer" flanked on two sides by dashes— the only instance in the poem— appears visually in stanza two to block the music.[4] Given the Cold War ostracism of lesbianism from the "body politic," it is not surprising that the poem's speaker has difficulty hearing the patriotic music designed to "court" her citizen loyalty.[5]

Other important readings of this blockage of the music must be considered as well. The military music— like the fascist roosters in "Roosters"— is intent on "capturing" its own citizens. Under the guise of "courting" patriotic music is the harsh reality that the "brasses want to go boom-boom" into the citizen crowd.

In other words, the patriotic music camouflages a kind of warfare against citizens. The patriotic wooing is clearly rebuffed— or resisted— by the private citizen speaker and listener in the poem as well as by the trees representing the feminized private sphere of the nation.

What makes this poem an even more forceful anti-militarist statement about the dangers of the nation's "courting" of its citizens is the juxtaposition of the visual discourse against the aural discourse. What one sees is not what one hears for the listener can see the band playing but not hear the music clearly. This seems an apt cultural representation of the citizen-listener who ostensibly listens to the patriotic music and thus conforms to the image of a patriotic citizen. Simultaneously, however, the music fails to penetrate the ear and thus to enter into the citizen's body. Moreover, this juxtaposition highlights the duplicity in Cold War militarism's patriotic music. The music camouflages and sanitizes the unseen grim reality of war and suffering.

So how can we understand her rhetorical decisions about the WWII-Cold War victory narrative as strategies of dissent and not simply consent when it appears that she was publicly silent and censored herself, that the ultimate result is apparent visible collusion? In other words, is she really like the citizen at the concert in her poem who sits— and outwardly complies— but remains untouched by the patriotic music? I think that the evidence presented in this essay supports reading her writing as a conflicted doubling in which consent and dissent are intertwined. She interweaves both the complicitous and oppositional together so finely that one can not easily detect "which was which," to use some of her own memorable poetic language elsewhere.

Yet it is difficult to interpret this. Like so many of my academic contemporaries, I have been trained to define political resistance in terms of the explicit and open protest poetry of the Vietnam era and to overlook the less easily discernible strategies of dissent. The dominant interpretation of Bishop's anti-militarist poetry reflects this problematic directly because she has earned her well-known place in the history of war poetry with the openly antimilitarist "The Roosters" before Pearl Harbor in WWII and the Vietnam-era "12 O'Clock News" in the early 1970s.

Balanced against this training in reading Bishop's political protest, however, is the longstanding construction of Bishop as a brilliant rhetorical strategist capable of speaking multivocally and contradictorily within a given text by feminist, lesbian, and culturally focused readers, scholars, and critics of Bishop. It is a commonplace that Bishop employs a wide range of subversive tactics in her writing. As Travisano has suggested accurately in his essay "The Elizabeth Bishop Phenomenon" tracing the rise of Bishop's poetic reputation, her contradictions and complications "might function in the context of a broader examination of [her] as a poet of history, culture, and politics." His citation of the following strong tradition of treating Bishop's rhetorical complexity supports his perspective:

> Adrienne Rich's reading of Bishop as an "outsider," Lee Edelman's reading of a poet who "rips the fabric of the cultural text," Jackie Vaught Brogan's and Adrian Oktenberg's readings of Bishop as a "conscious resister," Harrison's reading of a "double point of view," and Barbara Page's reading of her "unofficial and unstable positionings." (226)

In addition, Lynn Keller's and Cristanne Miller's 1984 essay, "Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Rewards of Indirection," set the stage for interpreting Bishop's related rhetorical strategies of complication and subterfuge such as camouflage and indirection; and Dickie's *Stein, Bishop & Rich* has drawn attention to universalized heterosexual dominant texts and lesbian subtexts in Bishop's work (85). Finally, Bishop's interrogation of the duplicity of language has received much attention from readers like Keller and Mutlu Blasing (*Remaking It New* 12; *Politics & Form* 88).

I am indebted to the thinking of Michel de Certeau in chapter six of his *The Practice of Everyday Life* for providing a useful framework for helping me to consider Bishop's anti-militarist politics. Not surprisingly, his articulation of strategies of dissent fit in with dominant Bishop scholarship on her rhetorical prowess. He points out here that a writer or cultural producer can openly struggle with politics in a climate of free discussion. This was the general tenor of the historical "moment" when Bishop

published the well-known "Roosters." The nation was in the midst of national debate about whether or not the US should enter the war on the side of the Allies. The poem was positioned fortuitously, then, in a national "moment" of openness, in sharp contrast to the wartime period of stringent pressure to produce war propaganda that followed the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the nation's official entry into the war as well as during the intense political surveillance of the early Cold War period. Crucial for understanding her resistance to the nation's WWII-Cold War victory narrative of militarism, then, is Bishop's private and unpublished writing because this allowed her to express concerns that risked public censure.

As de Certeau goes on to state, writers must search out other subversive strategies for dissent during suppression that are difficult to observe but not completely hidden (quasi-invisible). These strategies include: 1) rewriting or parodying earlier poems, songs, newspaper clippings, or reporting on specific historical and cultural events, thereby creating "readerly" poems; 2) writing but not publishing in order to preserve the "moment" of suppression for a later, more open "moment" and audience; 3) multiple codings of published texts; 4) strategic self-censorship; and 5) silence. So if readers are to interpret subversion more fully, they must draw upon a different conception of open speech, subversive language, and silence.

Bishop's rhetorical decisions, as I have presented them here, anticipate de Certeau's framework and are clarified by an appropriation of it as an interpretive lens. "A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress" offers a good example. It reports on a specific historical event—an Air Force band concert, thereby creating a "readerly" poem. Yet Bishop also codes this published text so that the "readerly" poem does not yield its subversion readily. Indeed the published poem "View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress" offers such a fanciful tone that readers, including most Bishop critics until recently, have treated it as a minor "occasional" poem in Bishop's canon. At the 1997 Elizabeth Bishop Conference in Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, several participants who heard my paper briefly treating this poem and my discussion of Dickie's treatment of it in her book *Stein, Bishop, & Rich* said that they always had found the poem "quirky" and "unimportant." This so-called

"readerly" poem on one level, then, is "reader-resistant" on another.

And while in the post-Cold War 1990s we can discern the poet's resistance as well as consent in the published poem, the diary of 1950 offers a companion text, creating an intertext with it, that reveals that Bishop censored herself. She muted her resistance for the purpose of publication during this troubled "moment" but left behind several substantive poetry drafts and journal entries in her archives that delineate her ongoing, quasi-invisible dissent with WWII and the early Cold War. While Bishop did not revise her poem later, she obviously wanted to hold onto these drafts for later generations to read, thereby assuring them an eventual, "more open" audience and possible publication.

Another strategy of dissent, silence— longterm silence— surrounds this poem. One might say the silence between publications of anti-militarist poems lasts from pre-Pearl Harbor "Roosters" to the 1950 "A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress." This silence draws our attention, as I discussed earlier, to questions about what else might be occurring that cannot be brought to the foreground without high risk and leads us into the surviving archival writing and poetry fragments, the journal entries, and correspondence. It is here that one finds the expression protected by the public silence— the halting "V-Day" fragment that breaks down so that we can see not only what she did write against the victory-day parade but her fall into silence as her ultimate response to the horror of atomic warfare.

Bishop's fall into silence!— this "moment" keeps recurring before the horrific realities of militarism and war. First, we have the fall into silence after "Roosters." Then, we read in "V-Day" the attempt to break the silence, only to find cultural representation collapsing into fragments. This is followed by more silence with episodic speech in journal entries and correspondence until "A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress." Then here we have watched how she silences herself attempting to speak, once again revealing silence as her ultimate response to the new emerging Cold War culture personified by atomic warfare. Silence about her politics, then, was often her language of dissent, surrounding and nearly overpowering the moments of representation, reminding us that the "said" must be

read together with the "not-said" if we are to read more fully her poetic narrative about the WWII-Cold War victory narrative. ❦

Notes

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2. Excerpts from the unpublished writings of Elizabeth Bishop are used here with the permission of her estate, ©1998 by Alice Helen Methfessel and with the permission of Special Collections at Vassar College Libraries. I begin here to use VC to refer to Vassar College archives.
3. I do not wish to oversimplify the complexity of Bishop's life situation at this time by arguing that everything can be traced to her anti-militarism or political anxieties. However, I do not think that her politics has been considered sufficiently in examining the pressures of her life during this period.
4. I wish to thank Thomas Travisano for encouraging me to continue interrogating this aspect of the poem.
5. For a reading of Bishop's lesbianism in relation to Canadian and US nationalisms, see David Jarraway's " 'O Canada!': The Spectral Lesbian Poetics of Elizabeth Bishop."

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GEORGE MONTEIRO

POETS ON THE BOMB

The ship belonged to the bombardier
who opened his little bay,
He saw the target the lovely target,
and suddenly "Bombs away."
—*Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart,*
"The Bombadier Song" (1942)

That bomb had more power than twenty thousand tons of TNT. It had more than two thousand times the blast power of the British Grand Slam, which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.
—*Harry S. Truman (1945)*

God suddenly averted His eyes at 8:15.
—*Fujikawa Genshi (haiku, Hiroshima)*

❦

Wait Till Next Year is the title the historian Doris Kearns Goodwin gives her recent memoir of growing up in New York in the 1950s and rooting for the Brooklyn Dodgers. It takes on a decidedly non-baseball meaning when we read what she has to say about the impact the existence of the atomic bomb had on the lives of the children of her generation, especially after the Soviet Union had exploded its own nuclear device.

> Now that America no longer had a monopoly over nuclear weapons, the devastating power which had brought the Japanese to their knees might be turned against us. The threat of an atomic attack not only changed the course of the Cold War; it produced reactions that filtered down from the offices of

> government into the lives of an entire generation of young people. To us, the Cold War was not an abstraction. It was the air-raid drills in school, the call for bomb shelters, and exposure to the deliberately unsettling horror of civil-defense films. Our generation was the first to live with the knowledge that, in a single instant, everyone and everything we knew—our family, our friends, our block, our world—could be brought to an end. If a bomb exploded in Manhattan, which was considered a likely target, its fireball would vaporize everything from Central Park to Washington Square, and produce deadly fallout over a twenty-to-thirty-mile radius. On the basis of some obscure calculation, we were informed that the bomb's impact would reach Rockville Centre [her home] in twelve minutes. (157-58)

The impending threat of such sweeping destruction called for plans and drills of preparation:

> The air-raid drills conducted by our school were treated with the utmost seriousness. When the shriek of sirens interrupted our studies, we practiced two different drills. On the assumption that the bomb was close by, we were to fall to the floor, face down beneath our desks, elbows over our heads, eyes shut. Although I could never figure out how my flimsy desk, with its worn inkwell and its years of name-scratching, could protect me from the atomic bomb, I did what I was told, and kept absolutely still while we awaited the shriek of the falling missile. In the second drill, designed for situations in which there was time to take cover, teachers led us into the hallway and down into the basement, where they directed us to lean against the wall and fold our arms over our heads. (158)

It was their own government, of course, that taught American children of the 1950s to react as victims in the face of the possi-

ble use of the atomic bomb by America's enemies. Since it was all part of the Cold War, they were not instructed in how the rest of the world might survive the destructive explosion of such bombs initiated by America itself. Pretty much glossed over in such schoolroom training was the fact that the United States had been the first nation to explode atomic bombs or that Hiroshima and Nagasaki children had not had the benefit of such instruction.

August 1945, immediately after the first atomic bombs were dropped on those two Japanese cities and the unconditional surrender of Japan that followed shortly thereafter, was a time for celebrating victory, not for the raising of moral and practical questions about the destructive power unleashed by the splitting of the atom. Yet it was not long afterwards, in 1946, that John Hersey, who had been a correspondent filing feature pieces on the war in the Pacific theater, reported on "Hiroshima," a magazine piece that took up an entire issue of the *New Yorker*. Seeing immediately beyond the narrow moral focus demanded by the victory-at-all-costs mentality that had fueled the war, Hersey's piece had an immediate impact on readers. Influential as it was, however, Hersey's *Hiroshima* probably did not achieve its fullest moral impact, not even when published as a widely disseminated book in the same year, because at that very moment the (as yet barely named) Cold War had already taken its hold on public opinion in America as well as on the nation's foreign policy. The Cold War was fired up by George Kennan's then top secret report on the USSR, which became the blueprint for diplomacy toward the USSR and, in a more public way, by Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain Speech" in Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946. "From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across Europe," announced Churchill, making widely known some of the darker implications of the Soviet Union's decision to cut herself and her satellite countries in Central and Eastern Europe off from the rest of Europe. Moral concerns over the very decision to build the bomb, let alone its use in warfare, did not, of course, disappear. But those concerns were largely overridden by incoherent arguments that the bomb was necessary to successful diplomacy, that the threat to use it worked for peace, and that its use would

destroy whole populations while enhancing the chances for the survival of Americans.

My concern here differs somewhat from that suggested in Doris Kearns Goodwin's account of her worries about the bomb as she was growing up. Poets, like novelists and other writers, took up the theme of the bomb, referring to the effects resulting from its existence and the long-range implications of its uses. My subject is the way poets reacted to the bomb, with a focus on representative poems in English, running from the 1940s to the 1960s. The poets selected, standing for many others, are a mixture of the famous and not so famous: Robert Frost, Daniel Hoffman, Richard Wilbur, Paul Roche, and Olga Cabral.

In *Steeple Bush* (1947), his eighth and penultimate book of lyric poems, Robert Frost, who was born in 1874, refers to the atomic bomb directly in two late poems. "U. S. 1946 King's X," first published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1946, needles America's exclusive policy on the bomb. Writing before the Soviet Union demonstrated that she too knew the "secret" of atomic energy, he continues to think within the spirit of competition and free play among nations that he always advocated:

> Having invented a new Holocaust,
> And been the first with it to win a war,
> How they make haste to cry with fingers crossed,
> King's X— no fairs to use it any more! (362)

Interestingly enough, the poet distances himself from those making international policy on the bomb. Objectifying the policy-makers of the nation, he refers not to "how *we* make haste," but to "how *they* make haste." Frost, who to the end of his life believed in the salubrious effects of international competition in all areas— science, sports, the arts— sets aside, for the sake of his own notions of proper and effective diplomacy, the bomb's threat to planetary life itself, not to mention the immediate loss of human life and the long-range effects of radiation poisoning.

As the tone of "U. S. 1946 King's X" suggests, Frost's impulse in the years immediately following WWII was to treat the matter of the bomb satirically. After all, the bomb might have its uses, even as bureaucrats and scientists were rushing to define

and promote the peaceful uses of the atom. It might be the answer to the mounting though rapturous anxieties brought on by new knowledge, especially in science. The bomb might be the means, even, of personal and national relief, through the act of what he called, "Bursting Rapture," the title of another late poem in *Steeple Bush*:

> I went to the physician to complain,
> The time had been when anyone could turn
> To farming for a simple way to earn;
> But now 'twas there as elsewhere, any gain
> Was made by getting science on the brain;
> There was so much more every day to learn,
> The discipline of farming was so stern,
> It seemed as if I couldn't stand the strain.
> But the physician's answer was 'There, there,
> What you complain of all the nations share.
> Their effort is a mounting ecstasy
> That when it gets too exquisite to bear
> Will find relief in one burst. You shall see.
> That's what a certain bomb was sent to be. (362)

In the penultimate poem of *Steeple Bush*, "The Broken Drought," Frost looks prophetically at the human condition that includes not just bombs but natural disasters (defined so by mankind) as drought. Although this poem was written prior to 1944, its placement in *Steeple Bush* suggests the nature of its relationship to the two atomic bomb poems that accompany it in the final pages of the volume.

> The prophet of disaster ceased to shout.
> Something was going right outside the hall.
> A rain though stingy had begun to fall
> That rather hurt his theory of the drought
> And all the great convention was about.
> A cheer went up that shook the mottoed wall.
> He did as Shakespeare says, you may recall,
> Good orators *will* do when they are out.
> Yet in his heart he was unshaken sure
> The drought was one no spit of rain could cure.

It was the drought of deserts. Earth would soon
Be uninhabitable as the moon.
What for that matter had it ever been?
Who advised man to come and live therein? (363)

Frost belongs to an older generation that was already middle-aged when it was horrified by the way modern warfare was conducted in 1914-1918. By the time Frost was in his sixties and seventies there seemed to be nothing new under the sun for him. He could not, of course, really take the existence of the atomic bomb in stride, but there was a sense in which his familiar Wordsworthian way of accommodating the discoveries of science and explaining the swerves of history would do. Taking the long view of history and myth, he simply would not fall in with the sweeping notion that "the use of nuclear energy as a weapon" had given poets a shared "sense of peril," causing them to "speak in despair about the triumph of 'the bomb' over life" (Rukeyser 55).

It is to such prophets of disaster, as adduced by Frost in "The Broken Drought," that Richard Wilbur, born in 1921, nearly a half-century after his closest New England precursor, addresses his own words. In "Advice to a Prophet," Wilbur takes a Frost-like tack, pretending to instruct *his* prophet on how, when he comes, to put his message across. Only in terms of the realized things of Wilbur's (and our) imagined world will humankind gain any apprehension of his potential fate in the atomic age. It is a matter of qualities and colors, not numbers.

When you come, as you soon must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us
In God's name to have self-pity,

Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,
The long numbers that rocket the mind;
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,
Unable to fear what is too strange.

Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.
How should we dream of this place without us?—

The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,
A stone look on the stone's face?

Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,
How the view alters. We could believe,

If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip

On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn
As Xanthus once, its gliding trout
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,

These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken?
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken

In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean
Horse of our courage, in which beheld
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
And all we mean or wish to mean.

Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close. (12-13)

The poet advises the prophet, whose visit is inevitable and whose message is certain, that he must speak out in our language, that he must not try to scare us with talk of weapons, of "long numbers that rocket the mind," but rather with naming the things of this world that have appealed to the human imagination, of the altering and loss of the "dreamt" world we know as reality. Many years ago, a colleague (who was also a poet) complained that one

could not talk about the atomic bomb in this fashion adopted by Wilbur. Yet, with the passing of the decades, it seems to me, we have come only closer to Wilbur's way of talking about our fears of nuclear holocaust. Quantification of loss and potential loss has long since lost its early hold on human minds.

The third poet I would invoke in this consideration of poetic responses to the advent of the bomb is Daniel G. Hoffman, who was born in 1923. The first poem under consideration, published in 1950, has a title that runs directly into the body of the poem:

The Seals in Penobscot Bay

hadn't heard of the atom bomb,
so I shouted a warning to them.

Our destroyer (on trial run) slid by
the rocks where they gamboled and played;

they must have misunderstood,
or perhaps not one of them heard

me over the engines and tides.
As I watched them over our wake

I saw their sleek skins in the sun
ripple, light-flecked, on the rock,

plunge, bubbling, into the brine,
and couple & laugh in the troughs

between the waves' whitecaps and froth.
Then the males clambered clumsily up

and lustily crowed like sea-cocks,
sure that their prowess held thrall

all the sharks, other seals, and seagulls.
And daintily flipped the females,

sea-wenches with musical tails;
each looked at the Atlantic as

though it were her looking-glass.
If my warning had ever been heard

it was sound none would now ever heed.
And I, while I watched those far seals,

tasted honey that buzzed in my ears
and saw, out to windward, the sails

of an obsolete ship with banked oars
that swept like two combs through the spray

And I wished for a vacuum of wax
to ward away all those strange sounds,

yet I envied the sweet agony
of him who was tied to the mast,

when the boom, when the boom, when the boom
of guns punched dark holes in the sky (453-54)

Hoffman's poem is about love, the kind of natural love the existence of which, embodied in the seals, is under the impending threat of destruction by the atomic bomb. It is against no twenty-one gun salute fired off into the sky by this destroyer (on trial run) that the seals gambol away in their naturally sexual play. The seals do not hear the poet's warning (nor would they heed it, one can safely presume, if they did hear it). The poem is big with a question: what does it matter to Nature that the bomb exists? Is it only the poet's human self-love that makes him envy "the sweet agony / of him who was tied to the mast" (either the Greek or the boy who stood on the burning deck will do), a rather self-serving longing that exposes itself as such before the easeful sexuality of the seals? Or does that longing expose the lusty human cock-crowing signified by guns that punch "dark holes in the sky" and the possession of atom bombs that is aped in Nature by seals who are "sea-cocks" sure "that their prowess

held thrall / all the sharks, other seals, and seagulls" and "sea-wenches" who look at the Atlantic as if the ocean were their looking-glass?

The poet immediately follows up his poem about the unhearing, uninformed seals with "At Provincetown," a seascape-inscape poem about seagulls.

> Over the wharves at Provincetown
> we watched the hooded gulls maneuver.
>
> As one last gull, in late arrival,
> flung his wings before our face
>
> crying "Wait!," . . . "Wait!," in a race
> to ride their aerial carousel,
>
> we saw his dark-dipt head, eye-bead,
> each individual grace recede
>
> as all swooped up, then spun, and fell
> unmoving in motion. Here was pure flight,
>
> free from all bird-appetite.
> Then the highest soarer saw
>
> the *Mary Magdalena* yaw,
> laden low with mackerel.
>
> * * *
> Beauty is the moment moving
> toward unpremeditate perfection.
>
> Over the wharves at Provincetown
> the gulls within our arteries soaring
>
> almost complete the great mobile
> that all but froze gullsblood to steel.
>
> Other wings across the harbor
> flash like swords and dive for garbage. (454-55)

Here is something of this world, both moral and aesthetic, that must not be destroyed. Note that it is not the contemplation of the imagined things that most matters but the destruction of "the great mobile" itself. Placing "At Provincetown" immediately after "The Seals in Penobscot Bay," the poet does not have to make explicit in the second poem what the existence of the bomb puts in harm's way.

It is with sober resignation, however, that another poet in the mid-1950s sees the inevitable employment of the bomb. Paul Roche, who was born in 1927, voices his lamentations within the ordered lines of a villanelle published in *The Listener*, the BBC's weekly print publication, for June 23, 1955. Knowing that warriors will always be warriors and that they, like the poor, will always be with us, the poet of "Villanelle for a Modern Warrior" settles, ironically, for what seems to be a minor concession—that modern warriors not "sing" their songs of warfare.

Young soldier, airman, sailor—king,
The earth is trembling at your potency.
Celebrate but do not sing.

The world's eyes plead while worshipping.
Your body's strong in fighting livery,
Young soldier, airman, sailor—king.

A Titan everywhere you swing
The earth a trinket at your wrist. You're free.
Celebrate but do not sing.

Kisses on your blossoming!
Rapine in atomic latency!
Young soldier, airman, sailor—king.

Watch a mushroom moonfire fling
A town in fountained ashes to the sea.
Celebrate but do not sing.

Spread thick your lustihood, your wantoning,
To match that power to blast. Your lonely
Laughter afterwards will ring

As homeward echoes vanishing.
Young soldier, airman, sailor— king,
Celebrate but do not sing. (1114)

To conclude this brief sampling, I shall turn to two poems by Olga Cabral, who is now in her late eighties. The first poem, "In the Shadow of the Mushroom," is taken from *The Evaporated Man*, her second collection of poetry, published in 1968 and described as "a new book of anti-war and other poems" (Cabral cover). It is not at all incidental that the book's appearance coincided with the peaking of war in Vietnam.

In the shadow of the mushroom
the pinball machines
declare wars, set armies
of missiles in motion
and trading's brisk
in new swastika pins
made of gold fillings
from the teeth of cadavers.

In the shadow of the mushroom
heads filled with hydrogen
the gray balloons ponder maps
and sewer rats sell shares
in underground survival
to trousered rodents
who know where the next boom
in real estate will come.

In the shadow of the mushroom
monks from the Rand lamasery
shoot craps with neutrons
keep prayer-wheels running
and cities prepare
for the time of disaster
warehouses stuffed with shrouds
none will have time to need.

In the shadow of the mushroom
seconds tick the countdown
on the galactic clock
and the era's monument
is the evaporated man
who left his shadow sitting
on some steps in Hiroshima
for the Age of Overkill. (14)

The poem seems to say that living with the threat of the bomb hanging over mankind itself engenders war. To call them pinball-machine wars seems appropriate in a world that refers to the explosion of nuclear bombs as "setting off devices." The poem counters, too, those promotions of "Duck and Cover" aimed at 1950s schoolchildren as described by Doris Kearns Goodwin. For the larger truth, as Olga Cabral prophesizes, is that "cities" will "prepare / for the time of disaster / warehouses stuffed with shrouds / none will have time to need."

One last poem, again by Olga Cabral, addresses rather evenly the best-case scenario surrounding the building and employment of family bomb shelters. In the United States, mounting hysteria over the bomb seemed to peak when Governor Nelson Rockefeller embarked on a feverishly inclusive program for the construction and stocking of such shelters throughout the state of New York. Survival of an attack of atom bombs by a bomb-sheltered family of four (at the time's ideal zero reproduction rate) insures life lived, as the poet characterizes it, "Through a Concrete Window":

On the day they locked the world out the wax orange bush
provided by the decorator for a morale builder
continued its sterile gibber of blameless blossoms,
for it, like the occupants, was disaster-proof.

In sub-suburbia the four lived on
though warned by the stuffed canary of arrested development,
for they had nowhere to go but the Exercycle—
trips through old travel folders muscularly provided.

The radio worked throughout, prayers by Conelrad
and celestial choirs broadcast from the iron mountain
whose inaccessible bank-vaults housed for (if any) posterity
the epic chronicles of AmCan and AmTelTel.

Outside it rained. Human ashes fell
above their bunker for fourteen days and nights.
They tried to quiet Junior. It was their last bottle of Coke.
Nobody knew if this mortal debris was brown or black or white.
(18)

Thirty, forty, fifty years later, these somewhat neglected poems by Frost, Wilbur, Hoffman, Paul Roche, and Olga Cabral though constituting but a handful of the thousands undoubtedly that have been written down through the decades, may strike some readers as little more than faded snapshots from a now distant past. It may even be, perhaps, best that way. Yet there is still something to be said for heeding the warnings of prophets whose prophecies have not come true, at least not yet. Just wait. Wait till next year. ❦

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ROBERT MORGAN

THE WELCOME

Dutch had promised himself he would not cry when he got off the bus in Tompkinsville. He had not cried when he left Lena at the bus station almost three years before. And there was no reason for tears now: he was coming home.

He had felt his eyes get moist when he saw the blue chain of mountains to the west as the bus swung through the foothills. And when he swallowed there was something stiff behind his tongue. He had been softened by the months in the camp, but he would not let that show. He set his jaw, and felt the firmness of the fillings and crowns the army dentist had given him after he was released and returned to England.

The bus station in Tompkinsville had once been a dry goods store, and its false front loomed like a building in a western. The bus lurched into the parking lot and Dutch saw his daddy's pickup. It was a wonder Daddy had kept the truck running through the war, with tires and gasoline, spark plugs and everything else rationed. There was no one in the truck, which must mean Mama and Daddy were inside the station waiting. A crowd had gathered near the platform where the bus roared to a stop, but Dutch saw nobody he knew.

As he stood up in the aisle and took his duffel from the overhead rack Dutch's knees trembled. This was the moment he had waited for since parachuting out of the burning Liberator and finding himself somehow alive in a muddy German cabbage patch. Now that he was here he felt it was happening to someone else: he was just a spectator to his homecoming. He couldn't feel the elation, could only try to observe it in himself.

As he stepped out into the spring sunlight, the town looked both strange and familiar. The buildings on Main Street, the dimestore, the brick movie theater, the courthouse with is silver dome, looked smaller than he remembered. Compared to

the churches he had seen in England and Germany, the steeple of the First Baptist Church looked like a toy.

There were hugs and clapping and yelps of joy as the boys came down the steps of the bus. A girl jumped up and down and screamed, "It's Ross, there he is. It's him." It took a second to see Mama and Daddy. They stood near the steps at the edge of the little crowd. Daddy waved to him and sunlight glinted on the lenses of his glasses. Mama had her hand over her mouth, as she always did when she was excited. Dutch made his way to them.

Mama wore the same black dress she had worn to church before the war, and the same hat that appeared to be made of black fish scales. Her hand pressed her lips as though holding in an outburst. Dutch set his face in a smile and lunged forward to hug her. He felt the brooch on the front of her dress press through his uniform like a thick medallion.

"Oh Dutch," Mama said and shook her head. It was all she could say.

"Where's Lena?" Dutch said.

"She's waiting for you," Daddy said. "There was no room in the truck." Daddy put a hand on Dutch's shoulder and they started walking toward the pickup. Mama took a handkerchief from her sleeve and wiped her eyes.

"You look so pale," Mama said.

"I've gained ten pounds since March," Dutch said.

"Is that all your things?" Daddy said.

"This is it," Dutch said, and heaved the duffel bag into the bed of the pickup. "I was in a prison camp, not any place to get souvenirs."

"I'm so happy," Mama said as they climbed into the cab. "I prayed every night for you."

"I knew I would make it," Dutch said.

"We Garners are tough," Daddy said. He jerked the truck into gear and swung the steering wheel toward the street. Daddy had never really learned to drive well. He had bought the pickup when he was near sixty and driven it home without any lessons.

A sign stretched across Main Street in front of The Highland Hotel: WELCOME HOME OUR HEROES. Cars were driving up and down the street honking their horns and

people leaned out of car windows and shouted. Others standing on the sidewalks clapped.

"Boys have been coming home for the past two weeks," Daddy said. "There is going to be a ceremony at the courthouse at the end of the month."

"And some have not returned," Mama said. She dabbed at her eyes and held Dutch's arm below the shoulder.

Daddy pushed the button in the middle of the steering wheel and added the oogah-oogah of the pickup horn to the random chorus of honks and blasts.

"What happened to Bumgarners?" Dutch said. There was a gap in the row of buildings on Main as if a giant tooth had been pulled.

"Burned down last year," Daddy said. "They thought somebody must have set it."

At the south end of town they passed a lot with many colored pennants strung around it. A number of structures stood in a space that had been a field of weeds the last time Dutch had seen it. "What's all that?" he said.

"That's Billy Joe Williams's new outfit," Daddy said. "He's got a hotdog stand and a miniature golf course. And he sells used cars and real estate."

"That's what he did instead of going to the army," Mama said.

"He has one leg shorter than the other," Dutch said. "Everybody knows that."

"Didn't stop him from making money," Mama said.

"Lonzo has to work today," Daddy said. "The cotton mill wouldn't let him off."

"They'll be laying off hands soon," Mama said.

"Just when returning boys need jobs," Daddy said.

"Don't worry about me," Dutch said. "I have almost two years' pay they saved for me."

"I'll fatten you up," Mama said.

They drove by the big pine trees in Flat Rock and passed Fletcher's store. Everything was just as Dutch remembered it, except it had shrunk. He had thought every day while he was in the camp of this ride back from town. Dutch knew his happiness must be so strong he could not feel it. Instead he felt little spurts and squeaks of joy that spilled from the overload of exhilaration.

They passed Ansell's garage where Dutch had worked one summer before the war.

"I talked to Roy the other day," Daddy said. "He said they would make every effort to give you your old job."

"I'm in no hurry," Dutch said.

"You need some rest," Mama said, "before you even think of going back to work."

"I'm rested," Dutch said. "I've had nothing to do but rest for six weeks."

"You need to get over what they done to you," Daddy said.

"I know they starved you," Mama said.

"They didn't feed us on T-bone steak and gravy," Dutch said.

"What did they give you?" Mama said. They drove past the brick schoolhouse. It was recess time and children were playing around the swings and slide. Children had been playing there the day he left for the army.

"They fed us potato peelings," Dutch said. "And sometimes cabbage soup."

"No wonder you lost weight," Mama said.

"It's a good thing we won the war," Daddy said.

Beyond the school they passed the cotton mill with its chainlink fence around the warehouse and front office. Steam climbed from the window of the mercerizing room, and Dutch thought he could smell the chemical dampness inside, though it was probably just his imagination. Before the war Dutch had wondered if he would ever get out of the mercerizing room. In the camp he had wondered if he would ever get back to it.

"Did they hurt you over there?" Daddy said.

"Now don't start that," Mama said. "Dutch is trying to forget all that."

"Nobody got hurt if they didn't try to escape," Dutch said.

As they passed Leland's Lunchroom, Dutch saw Hendrix standing outside by his Ford roadster. Daddy hit the pickup horn twice and Hendrix waved and reached inside the roadster and tapped the horn. Hendrix was only three years older than Dutch,

but he had been turned down by the army because of a trick knee.

"People are glad to see you," Mama said.

"Not as glad as I am to see them," Dutch said.

As they approached Davis's filling station Dutch noticed a number of cars in front. The yard looked like a used car lot. There was a sign over the gas pumps, a long sign made of cloth and fluttering in the breeze.

"Has Davis gone into the car business?" Dutch said.

"Look at the sign," Mama said.

Dutch saw the "WEL" at the left side of the banner, and knew it said "WELCOME HOME DUTCH." His heart kicked in his chest and something turned strange in his gut, like a funny bone had been hit. He felt as if his skin was turning silver.

And then he saw there were people in each of the cars and trucks. There was Ed Jones in his old Model-A and Jack Gordon in his pickup. There was Adger Eggar in his black Chevrolet and Bill Johnson in the little Ford with the rumble seat. They all waved and horns began beeping and howling and oogah-oogahing.

"You mean they were all waiting for us?" Dutch said.

"No, they was waiting for the Fourth of July," Daddy said.

"They heard you was coming home," Mama said.

"They should all be at work," Dutch said.

"Don't you know, it's Saturday?" Mama said.

Daddy pounded the horn and Dutch waved to his friends in the cars. "Ain't you going to stop?" he said.

"Why do that?" Daddy said and grinned.

Dutch looked back and saw the cars and trucks at the filling station begin to pull into the highway behind Daddy's pickup. Daddy slowed down and the vehicles formed a line behind them. Their lights were on and all the horns were sounding. Dutch swallowed. "This is like a funeral procession," he said.

"More like a victory parade," Daddy said.

Daddy turned off at the Green River Road, and the train of cars followed. The valley echoed and trees appeared to shiver with the sound of the horns, doubling and tripling and answering each other. There was no one in the yard of Lena's house.

Maybe she was in one of the cars behind, though Dutch had not seen her Daddy's green Dodge.

"Look at the thrift in Ophelia's yard," Mama said. Thrift cushioned the bank above the road like luminous colorful pillows. The thrift was even brighter than Dutch remembered it. Lena's mama had always grown the most impressive thrift in the valley.

The bin of the sandpump stood like a roofless barn on the river bank below the road. The structure looked awkward and ugly on its poles where trucks backed underneath to take on loads of sand.

"The sandpump looks deserted," Dutch said.

"Construction had to stop during the war," Daddy said. "They'll be pumping sand again now."

Cattle stood in the pasture above Riley's house, grazing and ignoring the racket of the line of cars. But a horse bounded across the lower pasture, spooked by the noise. A rooster sat on the fence behind Riley's barn, its neck feathers flashing in the sunlight.

"Looks like Riley has more cows than ever," Dutch said.

"The government paid him to produce milk," Daddy said. "He got a contract to sell milk to the army base in Greenville."

There were more cars parked in the churchyard. Dutch saw Alvin Green's pickup there, and Robin Oakes in his strip-down. They hit their horns as Daddy's pickup passed. The church needed a coat of paint. In places the white had scaled off the steeple, showing patches of weathered wood.

"Is everybody out in their cars today?" Dutch said.

"We'll just have to see," Mama said.

Beyond the church it was less than a quarter of a mile to their driveway. Dutch saw the weeds and broomsedge had been trimmed around the entrance. The white wagon wheel Daddy had placed by the mailbox had lost most of its paint. The tracks of the driveway were deeper, and the grass in the middle taller than he remembered.

As the pickup bounced on the ruts Dutch saw there were already several cars in the yard. One was Lena's daddy's green Dodge, and there was a Studebaker he didn't recognize.

As soon as the pickup stopped he saw Lena standing by the steps going up to the front porch. She stood with her hands

in front of her, palms pressed together. She looked slimmer than he remembered. But she had always been slim, even looked frail at times. It depended on the way she stood, and how tanned her face was.

Dutch was out of the truck as soon as Daddy stopped. He skipped and then paused, stepped slowly toward Lena. This was the moment he had been waiting for for three years. Lying on the cold planks in the prison barracks he had visualized this meeting so many times it was memorized. But the event was unfolding beyond his control. He was watching it happen to another person.

"Hello, Lena," he said. She waited, as if expecting him to say more.

He took her hands, and then dropped them as he spread his arms. Dutch hugged her, knowing all those in cars stopped along the road were watching. He saw himself embracing her and heard himself say, "Long time no see."

When he pressed his cheek against Lena's he felt a warm tear crush between their skin.

"You never answered my letters," Lena said.

"What letters?" He stepped back and held her hands.

"I wrote you at least once a month," Lena said, pretending to be stern.

"I never got any letters," Dutch said. "The Germans must have throwed them away."

"I sent you a cake, too," Lena said, "at Christmas."

"I bet the Germans eat it up," Dutch said.

"Or the Red Cross eat it up theirselves," Lena's daddy said. Dutch turned and shook hands with him.

"Welcome home," Mr. Allison said.

"I feel like it's somebody else coming home," Dutch said.

"Who else would it be?" Mr. Allison said.

"Somebody else with my name," Dutch said.

Everyone who arrived brought a plate of something. Lydia Green walked up the driveway carrying a casserole dish of banana pudding, and John Coleman brought a gallon jar of iced tea. There were platters of fried chicken and creamed potatoes, sliced picnic ham and quivering bowls of Jell-O with pieces of fruit suspended inside.

Dutch's cousin Everett, who had served in the coastal artillery, came out of the house carrying a chair in either hand.

"Let me help you," Dutch said.

"You old son of a gun," Everett said. "Did you bring me a German Luger?"

Dutch had brought gifts for Mama and Daddy and Lena, but they were in his duffel bag, and he could not bring them out until the other guests were gone. "I wasn't near any souvenir shops," he said.

Mama brought a tablecloth from the house and spread it on the grass under the oak tree. The ground in the yard was swept clean of pebbles and acorns. People said Mama kept her yard neat as the kitchen table.

"I'm glad to see the end of rationing," Johnny Carlisle said as they set the dishes and bowls on the white cloth.

"Now that the war is over, the depression will come back," John Coleman said.

"Don't say that," Lena's daddy said. "This is a happy day."

"Our years of trial are not ended just because the war is over," John said.

"Don't be such a sad sack," Mrs. Coleman said. "What will Dutch think, after two years as a prisoner."

"Dutch will know he's back among his own complaining kin," John said.

"I'm just glad to see my folks," Dutch said, "and to not have a fence around me."

He looked at Lena. They had not been exactly engaged when he left, but they had had an understanding. Lena had been only sixteen then. Dutch wasn't sure what he would say to her when they were alone. It was clear everyone expected him to marry her. And it was what he had planned in the camp. But he had no idea how he would ask her.

"I think it's time to eat," Daddy said, after the plates and silverware had been placed on a bench beside the tablecloth. "Let Deacon Green lead us in prayer."

The men took off their hats. Dutch removed his overseas cap. He had not heard anyone pray since MacAbee the tailgunner used to lead in prayer in the camp. MacAbee planned to be a minister when he got home and he held services in one of

the barracks every Sunday morning. MacAbee didn't really know how to preach, but he had a torn Bible he read from and a good many boys attended the services because there was nothing much to do.

"Oh Lord, we want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for sparing Brother Dutch from the harm of war and returning him to those who love him. We know that you who see the fall of a sparrow will look after all . . ."

While the deacon was praying Dutch heard a car door slam down by the road. He opened his eyes to a squint and saw Roger Jarvis get out of his pickup truck. Roger was always a practical joker. At Christmas he threw firecrackers in people's yards, and once at prayer meeting on Halloween he had dropped a cherry bomb in the stove at church.

Roger took something out of the bed of his truck that looked like an ammunition belt. Dutch saw the flare of a match.

"Go with Dutch and bless him as he takes up his life again," Deacon Green was saying. The first firecracker sounded like a bark, but then the others went off in drum rolls and machine-gun bursts. The firecrackers must have been of different sizes for some yelped and others boomed. Roger lit another string and threw it on the lawn below the picnic. Everyone forgot Deacon Green's grace.

"Brother Roger has his own way of giving thanks," the deacon said, and they all laughed. Smoke from the firecrackers drifted up the hill under the oaks.

"Roger likes to enter in a cloud of glory," Steve Jeter said.

"With a hundred and twenty-one gun salute," Ed Jones said.

"I've noticed draft dodgers like to be loud," Lena's mother said.

"Shhhh," said Lena.

Mama brought a jar of lemonade from the house, and Lena handed Dutch a cup. Someone passed him a plate with fried chicken and potato salad on it. It was only when he looked at the chicken, at the crisp greasy skin, that he knew he wasn't hungry. His stomach felt like a question mark.

"You must be starved," Lena said, "after that long bus ride."

Dutch wished he was doing something else. He wasn't sure what. He wished no one had been there when he got home. He wished he could have arrived secretly and taken off his uniform and put on work clothes. He wished he was out in the mountains fishing. He wished he could go sit on the side of the mountain and look out over the valley. In the camp he had often thought of a place where he used to rest, while hunting squirrels. It was a pit his great-grandpa had dug, looking for zircons. Under October leaves it was a kind of shelf to sit on and watch the trees. He wished he could just go up there and rest under the quiet woods.

Dutch stuck a fork into the potato salad and brought it to his mouth. He could not refuse to eat after all the work these neighbors had gone to to fix the picnic. They assumed he had to be hungry, and he must not disappoint them. He chewed the cold diced potato and took a bite of the chicken leg. Lena had remembered that he preferred dark meat.

"What do you think of this Truman?" Deacon Green said to him.

"I never heard of Truman till I was brought back to England," Dutch said.

"Let the boy eat," Lena's daddy said. "He don't have no interest in politics."

"Polly who?" Dutch said, and everybody laughed.

"Bet the Germans didn't give you no fried chicken," Roger said and punched Dutch with a mock blow on the shoulder.

"No fried chicken and no Co-colas," Dutch said.

"We'll soon fatten you up," Lena's mama said.

"New potatoes will be in soon," Mama said.

Dutch was not only not hungry. He was a little sick at his stomach. He had ridden the bus all night and only slept in snatches. But he wasn't sleepy. He just wished he could be alone. He hadn't even gotten into the house since he arrived. His duffel bag lay on the ground by the path to the back porch. He wished he could walk to the edge of the yard and stand in the woods and try to feel like he was really here.

"Did you like the looks of them frauleins?" Mitchell Jones said.

"What a question," Roger said.

"What frauleins?" Dutch said. "I didn't see any frauleins in the prison camp."

"How about some coleslaw?" Mama said.

"Just a second," Dutch said. He saw what he had to do to get away for a few moments. He had not gone to the toilet since he got off the bus. He edged toward the pumphouse and put his plate on the pumphouse roof. As soon as people saw he was headed toward the outhouse they pretended to ignore him. All eyes turned back to their plates.

Daddy had mowed the back yard with the push mower, and the path was a sunken trail with bare spots where grass had not covered the flagstones. The toilet was out of sight around the edge of the smokehouse. Dutch noticed his fishing pole still resting on nails under the eave of the smokehouse where he had left it three springs ago.

When he reached the toilet Dutch looked back to see if anyone had followed him. No one was in sight. Instead of going into the outhouse he stepped past the little weathered building toward the hogpen. He had forgotten the particular stench of the hogpen, and the smell blossomed against his face in the bright air. The scent was so foul it was almost sweet: manure and rotten mud and fungus, and putrid water.

"Ooof," the pig said behind the planks, expecting some slop poured down the chute. Three pigs had been raised and fattened and killed since he left, but this one sounded and smelled like the shoat that had been there when he was drafted. The stink of the hogpen was the realest thing Dutch had encountered since getting off the bus. He almost felt like himself smelling it.

Dutch skirted the lush, giant weeds around the hogpen and slipped into the edge of the woods. A crow heckled from the top of an oak tree. A spider web was strung between two saplings. Dutch pissed on the web until the strands looked decorated with amber beads.

After buttoning his pants Dutch stood listening to the breeze in the trees above him. He thought he heard a hawk whistle. But there were too many voices from the back yard for him to be sure. He thought he could hear the falls over on Cabin Creek, but it might have been a truck on the highway a mile away.

As soon as Dutch stepped out of the woods he saw Roger and Mitchell standing by the outhouse. "There you are,"

Roger said. "We wondered if you had fell through the hole." He pulled a pint bottle from his hip pocket.

"We thought you might be a little dry," Mitchell said.

"After your long bus ride," Roger said.

Dutch took the bottle and unscrewed the top. The scent of the whiskey was the fumes of very ripe fruit in a cellar. It was cheap rye and he took a long swallow with his eyes closed. The dram burned his throat so fiercely tears sprang into his eyes. But as the liquid sank into his belly he felt the world get lighter. The sunlight was a little brighter.

"Good stuff," he said, and handed the bottle back to Roger.

"We figured you might want to celebrate with something stronger than iced tea," Mitchell said.

"There is more where this come from," Roger said.

"I know where there's a whiskey spring up on Pinnacle," Mitchell said.

"A whiskey spring?" Dutch said.

"Sure, the liquor just flows out of the mountain clear and ninety proof."

"Like hell," Dutch said.

"Let's drive up there and we'll show you," Roger said.

When Dutch got back to the picnic Mama handed him a plate with banana pudding and coconut cake on it. They had always been his two favorite desserts. Dutch took the plate and thanked Mama. But he wasn't hungry for sweet things. The drink had made him feel lighter. He only wanted another drink.

"Would you like some coffee?" Lena said. She was holding a pot she must have brought from the kitchen. A tray of cups had been set on the bench.

"Maybe later," Dutch said. He didn't want any coffee to counteract the lift the rye had given him. He wondered if Lena could smell the drink on him. She had once said she would never marry a man who drank. Maybe she would not recognize the scent of the rye. Lena would expect him to go back to her house after the picnic, to sit on the porch and talk, or maybe go for a walk down by the river. He didn't want to be alone with her just yet. He didn't know what he would say to her.

There was an explosion nearby that washed over the crowd and out to the rim of the mountains, then returned as an echo. Dutch almost dropped the plate with pudding and cake on it. Everybody looked downhill and saw Roger standing beside his pickup holding a shotgun pointed to the sky. He fired again, and the blast jolted the air.

"This is like Christmas," Lena's mama said.

"It's better than Christmas," Lena said.

"Hey, Dutch, let's go for a ride," Roger called.

"Let's go up on Pinnacle," Mitchell said and winked.

"You don't want to go now," Daddy said and looked around at all the guests.

"I just want to see the valley," Dutch said.

"He wants to see if the old valley is still there," Lena's daddy said. "I can understand that."

"You can go later," Mama said.

Dutch set the plate down on the bench. He had to get away. He couldn't say anything more to the crowd standing around the yard. Riding with Roger and Mitchell up the valley to Pinnacle was as good an excuse as any to escape the crowd.

"We'll be back in a jiffy," Dutch said over his shoulder. He didn't really look at Lena. He didn't want to see the look of disappointment or confusion on her face. If he didn't look at her, he wouldn't have to respond.

Several boys followed him down to Roger's pickup. Roger and Mitchell and Dutch got into the cab and Adger and Hendrix and Ed Jones and Jack Gordon climbed into the bed. "Whooopeee," Adger called out and banged on the roof as they started.

"Yiiiipee!" Ed Jones yodeled. That was the way the boys acted when they won a game for the cotton mill baseball team. Mitchell reached out the window and slammed the outside of the door like a drum. "We're going to have us some fun, now old Dutch is back," he said.

The bottle was passed between those in the cab and then handed out the window to those standing in the bed. The second drink tasted even sweeter to Dutch, and he felt the extra illumination in his veins.

"Say, Dutch, did you get any over there?" Mitchell said.

"In prison camp?" Dutch said.

"We heard they had Russian girl prisoners," Roger said.

"That must have been another camp," Dutch said.

"You wouldn't lie to us," Mitchell said.

"Only woman I seen in all those months was the colonel's wife," Dutch said. "She weighed about three hundred pounds."

The truck rumbled on the bridge over Cabin Creek. "How's fishing been?" Dutch said.

"The trout have been on strike, waiting for you to come back," Roger said.

"Roger don't know how to fish except with dynamite," Mitchell said.

"At least I don't use a tow sack for a sein net," Roger said.

Most of the fields along the creek had been plowed and many had been planted in corn. They passed a patch where last year's stubble and corn stalks sparkled in the sun. "Looks like Corbin ain't planted yet," Dutch said.

"Only thing Corbin is planting is the graveyard," Roger said. "He died last fall."

"And his boy Mark?"

"Mark is still in the Pacific."

The Corbin house looked deserted. Grass and weeds grew up to the level of the porch.

"I still can't believe I'm back," Dutch said.

"Maybe you ain't," Roger said. "Maybe somebody else come in your place."

The bottle was handed back into the cab, but it was empty. "Thanks a lot," Mitchell shouted and tossed the dead soldier out the window.

"Look under the seat," Roger said.

"Old Roger always goes prepared," Mitchell said, "like a good Boy Scout." He reached beneath and pulled out a quart mason jar. "Look at this, my children, look at this," he said.

When Dutch put his lips to the rim of the jar, he could tell from the oily roily look how powerful the corn liquor was. The jolting of the truck made beads rise to the surface. "This ain't liquor, this is airplane fuel," Dutch said.

"Don't I save the best for my buddies," Roger said.

As the moonshine sank into him Dutch felt a great weight shift within, independent of the way his body moved. It was the shift of intoxication, as if great masses were trading sides in his head.

They passed Mountain Valley Baptist Church and Dutch saw the paint on its steeple was cracked and scaling. "Has everybody forgot how to paint?" he said.

"Where could you get any paint?" Mitchell said.

"Paint all went to army barracks and ships and government hospitals," Roger said.

"I'll paint the church," Dutch said, "now that I'm home."

"Maybe they will make you a deacon," Roger said.

A blast roared in the back of the truck. One of the boys had fired Roger's shotgun. "Put that thing down," Roger yelled out the window.

"Hendrix was shooting at a bumblebee," Adger called.

Dutch heard himself laugh. It was all so funny he couldn't resist laughing. He couldn't remember what had been said, but he knew it was funny as hell. Mitchell handed him the fruit jar again.

"If I keep drinking this stuff I'm going to be drunk," he said.

"A man's got to do what a man's got to do," Mitchell said and giggled.

"A man has a right to wet his whistle," Dutch said.

"Wet his whistle and his pizzle," Roger said. Roger swung the pickup onto a smaller dirt road and they began to climb a steep ridge. The ruts were rocky and full of potholes. The truck bounced and lurched, and limbs swished on the windshield. There were yells in the back. Dutch's right shoulder crashed into Mitchell and his left shoulder hit Roger.

"Yiiipeee!" Adger called in the back.

Roger shifted into low on a switchback, and the truck spun and bucked on gravel. Sourwood limbs leaned across the road and slapped the windshield.

"Slow down," Ed Jones called. "This ain't no rodeo."

"Throw their asses off," Mitchell said and chuckled.

Dutch found he was laughing again. He must have been laughing all along.

"Maybe we'll see a bear up here," Roger said.

"If we see a bear we'll offer it a drink," Mitchell said.

"What if it don't drink," Dutch said.

"Any bear that don't drink ain't fit company," Mitchell said.

When they came out on top of the mountain and Roger stopped the truck, Dutch did not even notice the view until Mitchell opened the door. There were mountains rolling away to the edge of the world on every side.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the pinnacle of Pinnacle," Roger said.

Those in the back of the truck jumped off the tailgate. A great boulder stood beside the road and they scrambled to its top. Mitchell passed the jar around.

"I hear Brother Dutch is going to preach for us," Ed said.

"Only if the spirit moves me," Dutch said.

"We could take up a collection," Jack said.

"Looks like something is on fire," Hendrix said and pointed to a twisted column of smoke to the west. The valleys and ridges below them progressed in steps from brown and new green to darker green to hazy blue. The far peaks of Pisgah were almost lavender.

"Must be a house burning," Roger said.

"Or maybe just a big brush pile," Mitchell said.

"Look at the new road to Brevard," Jack said. Where he pointed Dutch saw a strand of red clay partly hidden by trees.

Directly below them a small lake sparkled like a sapphire among trees.

"Bet I can throw a rock into the lake," Adger said. He picked up a rock from the road and hurled it hard as he could into the air beneath them. The rock disappeared into the trees on the steep ridge below.

"That's the lake the new Florida people built," Hendrix said.

"Bet I can roll a rock into the lake," Ed said.

"The hell you preach," Mitchell said.

There were dozens of rocks that had been bulldozed out of the road lying on the shoulder. Most were flat and gritty with red dirt.

"Watch this," Hendrix said. He stood a rock up on its side and gave it a push. The rough wheel wobbled and almost

fell over, but as it gathered speed on the steep bank below it gained stability and stayed upright. As it accelerated the rock bounced and blurred and disappeared into the trees below. But they could hear it skipping on the leaves and banging on saplings. A hollow sound told them it had hit a tree. They listened like hunters do to their hounds far out in the woods. A crash told them the rock had hit a boulder far below.

"That ain't nothing," Adger said. He grabbed a bigger rock out of the dirt of the shoulder and rolled it to the lip as though pushing a calf. With a shove he let it go over the edge. But the rock had a flat place on one side and instead of rolling it just flopped over.

They all clapped. "You really showed us," Mitchell said.

Adger grabbed the rock again and set it upright. This time the rock took off and continued to roll until it disappeared into the brush below them.

Everyone rushed to seize a rock and set it rolling. Dutch found a rock that was more a triangle than a wheel, but after several tries he got it to roll away. He found a rock the size of a suitcase and made it spin and soar. He dug out a rock that was almost round as a ball and sent it down the steep slope. He was clearing off the top of the mountain. It was satisfying to get rid of all the rocks in sight, as if he was putting the world in order.

"We will bomb the lake," Ed shouted. The woods rang and shivered below them. The scattered avalanche of rocks shook trees and broke saplings far down the mountainside.

"Bombs away," Roger shouted.

Dutch dug out bigger rocks and smaller rocks. He got dusty and sweaty, and he scraped a knuckle so it bled. The whiskey made him as hot as if it was midsummer. He worked further down the road to locate better rocks. This was the best welcome yet.

Hendrix and Adger found a rock so big it took both of them to set it upright. They shoved it off and the rock lurched sideways and staggered. Hendrix gave it a big push and it rolled over Adger's foot.

"Hell!" Adger screamed, "you trying to break my leg?"

"Your damn foot's too big," Hendrix said.

Adger's face was pale and sweaty. "I didn't go to hurt *you*," he said.

Hendrix dusted his hands off and wiped them on his pants. "You should have sense enough to get your foot out of the way," he said, so calm all the friendliness had gone out of his voice.

"You should have sense enough not to push a damn rock over on me," Adger said. He limped closer to Hendrix, his hands on his hips.

"Ain't you got brains enough to see where a rock is going?" Hendrix said. He wiped his forehead with his sleeve. All the others had stopped rolling rocks.

"You been riding my ass all day," Adger said. "You been riding my ass since Dutch got home."

"Nobody is riding your skinny ass," Hendrix said.

"Are you showing out for Dutch?" Adger said. He shoved Hendrix's chest.

"I don't need to show out for Dutch," Hendrix said.

"Are you afraid you won't be such a big boy around here, now that Dutch is back, and Lena will go out with him?" Adger said.

"That's enough of that," Roger said. All the boys gathered around the two who were facing each other.

"If you had tits we could see you was a girl," Hendrix said.

Adger's fist caught him on the chin before he had finished the sentence. Hendrix staggered back, braced himself, and lunged for Adger. They went rolling and grunting down the bank into the brush. The others stood on the bank watching them clawing and kicking among the briars.

"You shit-sucking coward," Hendrix yelled as he emerged on top. He kicked at Adger in the weeds, staggered back, and kicked him again.

"Stop it!" Roger yelled. "Stop it, or I'll leave you all to walk home."

Adger stumbled to his feet and faced Hendrix. Blood ran from their noses and mouths, and from cuts on their arms. They were so exhausted they could hardly stand. Both crawled back up the bank into the road. Dutch had seen them fight many times before. The fight made him feel he had almost not been away. Now that the anger had gushed away in their fight, both looked a little embarrassed.

"Have you been dating Lena?" Dutch said to Hendrix.

"Hell no," Hendrix said. "I just drove her home from a basketball game once is all."

Dutch dropped to the ground and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. He loosened his tie and saw his hands were dirty and there was dust and blood on his uniform. His shoes which had been polished like brown mirrors were scuffed and covered with dust.

The others flopped down on the bank of the road and Roger passed around the jar until it was empty. Now that he was sweaty and dirty Dutch felt a lot more like himself. But he was suddenly so tired he could hardly sit upright.

"Man, we can have some fun, now old Dutch is home," Hendrix said.

Dutch looked out over the long valley below. He could see as far as Asheville. A smokestack wrote a black scrawl on the horizon.

"Everything is going to be different, now the war is over," Mitchell said.

"You mean people will have three eyes and talk with their assholes?" Roger said.

"What's different about that?" Hendrix said.

"I mean it won't never be the same," Mitchell said.

"I feel the same," Adger said.

"That's because you ain't been nowhere," Jack said.

Dutch wished he could just go to sleep. The momentum had gone out of the day. He wished he didn't have to go back to the house. He knew Mama and Daddy and Lena would be mad because he had left the picnic. He didn't know what he wanted to say to Lena. He wished he could just be by himself. ❦

WENDY BISHOP

THREE POEMS

Soliloquy: An American Bride Remembers Japan

for L. H. B.

Your nurse had silver hair ornaments,
A brocade obi, rare sashes
Pulled tightly about her waist.
You were a baby with a round face
Like other babies. Your father fought
In the Korean war and brought home
Presents and stories on leave.
Too often, it seemed, he left too soon.
I tried, as always, to be strong.
One day, we sat together
And he told me of the Korean snows,

Compared the Japanese fogs to spring.
I thought that fog was as cold
As anything I had ever felt.
I number one dawn among my worst.
Waking from dreams, you were screaming,
Your cries like small ax blows.
I grabbed for you as the floor rolled.
From the front door frame, I saw
The sunrise flaming across our horizon.
Fuji shook and the landscape floated
And billowed toward me. The nurse's tears
Streaked her fine white face powder.
Fear kept us quiet in that silence
As tremor after tremor tensed
Through the valley. Sirens were sounding

When I finally felt you swinging
Upside down in my hands, your thin
Baby hair fanning toward the floor.
The nurse took you from me: kimono swish
And your round red face, bobbing, retreating.
We had a table made to our design
With intricate wood carvings: tall bamboo
Fuji in fog, pine branches, fluted border
Of chrysanthemum and leaves, sun above
Orchards of cherry blossoms. So much carved
It is almost ugly. Yet nowhere did we inscribe
The cold, the earthquake, the empty thin-walled rooms,
And I'm shaken when I clean the covering glass
And see a wailing child reflected there
Who has never gone entirely away.

[Originally published in *Colorado-North Review* 15.2 (1985): 18.]

V-MAIL

Passed by Base 083 Army Examiner

Somewhere in Iceland
1940-1943

Today

TWO YEARS AGO AT SIX IN THE MORNING I BROUGHT THE FIRST WORKING PARTY ASHORE IN ICELAND. WE WENT OVER THE SIDE OF THE TRANSPORT ON LANDING NETS AND USED LANDING OR HIGGENS BOATS TO COME ASHORE. IT WAS IN POURING RAIN AND WAS ONE OF THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE DAYS I HAVE EVER PUT IN.

TODAY IS CLEAR AND THE SUN IS SHINING BUT THE WIND IS COLD.

TODAY IT IS RAINING LIKE THE DEVIL.

TODAY IT IS SNOWING AND RAINING AT THE SAME TIME.

IT IS RAINING PITCHFORKS TODAY.

IT IS A VERY DEPRESSING DAY ANYWAY, DARK, AND RAINING, AND THE RAINY SEASON IS HERE AGAIN SO WE WILL PROBABLY REVERT TO BEING DUCKS.

TODAY I START MY THIRD YEAR IN ICELAND.

I HAD HOPED TO HAVE A LETTER FROM YOU TODAY.

Getting the Silver Fox

THE MINK SKINS IF I GET THEM WILL BE THE WHOLE SKIN.

I AM GETTING SEVEN SILVER FOX SKINS FOR SURE.

THE FELLOW THAT WAS GOING TO GET ME THE BABY SEAL SKINS GOT THERE TOO LATE.

BY THE WAY, I CAN GET THE BABY SEAL SKINS AFTER ALL. AS SOON AS THE SKINS ARE TANNED I'LL SEND THEM TO YOU.

ABOUT YOUR SEAL SKINS, THEY ARE ON THE WAY, AND YOU CAN HAVE THEM MADE INTO ANYTHING YOU WANT.

I AM QUITE SURE THAT I CAN GET ENOUGH MINK SKINS FOR A COAT. IF YOU WANT THEM SAY SO RIGHT AWAY.

BY THE WAY, IF YOU CAN'T USE THE SEAL SKINS FOR A COAT OR IF YOU DONT WANT TO, JUST KEEP THEM UNTIL I GET THERE AND WE WILL FIND A SUCKER TO UNLOAD THEM ON OR TRADE THEM FOR SOMETHING YOU CARE FOR.

This Letter

THIS LETTER IS BEING INTERRUPTED VERY FREQUENTLY.

I AM HAVING MORE DIFFICULTY WRITING LETTERS.

THE LAST LETTER I WROTE YOU HAD A NOVEMBER DATE. PLEASE DISREGARD THE SAME.

I AM WAITING FOR THE LETTERS YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO SEND. I THINK YOU HAD BETTER KEEP WRITING THROUGH NOVEMBER.

THERE ISN'T MUCH IN THIS LETTER BUT IT BRINGS YOU MY LOVE.

I JUST SAW THEM UNLOAD TWENTY-SIX HUNDRED BAGS OF MAIL. IN A DAY OR TWO I SHOULD HAVE A LETTER.

NOW MAYBE I CAN WRITE YOU A MORE INTERESTING LETTER.

IT TAKES ME THE BETTER PART OF AN HOUR TO TYPE A LETTER. YOU PROBABLY DO YOURS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.

I ALMOST FORGOT TO USE CAPITALS FOR THE CENSORS WHEN WRITING LETTERS.

TODAY IS A RED LETTER DAY.

I JUST READ THIS LETTER OVER.

SO FAR TODAY I HAVE RECEIVED FOUR LETTERS.

I IMAGINE THAT I REPEAT MYSELF IN THESE LETTERS BUT SOMETIMES MY MEMORY GOES BACK ON ME AND I FORGET WHAT I WRITE TO YOU.

I OWE ALMOST EVERYONE LETTERS.

AFTER MY LONG LETTER THE OTHER DAY I REALLY AM AT A LOSS FOR SOMETHING TO SAY.

THE COLONEL WAS JUST IN. HE FOUND ME WRITING THIS LETTER BUT HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. ALL OF THE CLERKS IN HIS OFFICE WERE DOING THE SAME.

I HAVE JUST RUN OUT OF WORDS FOR THIS LETTER.

WELL, HERE IS ANOTHER DAY AND ANOTHER LETTER.

I WISH I KNEW WHAT I WAS GOING TO PUT IN THIS LETTER TO FILL UP THE PAGE.

I'M VERY HAPPY THAT YOU ENJOY MY LETTERS. IF I EVER STOPPED TO PROOFREAD THEM, YOU PROBABLY WOULD NEVER GET THEM.

DARLING, I DON'T ALWAYS FEEL LIKE THIS LETTER.

Cross Your Fingers, Don't Worry

DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR RING.

I DON'T KNOW OF A THING THAT YOU CAN DO BEFORE I GET THERE.

TO ME YOU ARE GETTING BETTER LOOKING IN EVERY PICTURE THAT YOU SEND. I'LL BE GLAD TO MEEET ALL OF YOUR NEW FRIENDS.

YOU SOUND AS THOUGH YOU ARE GETTING JITTERY ABOUT MY COMING HOME.

DON'T WORRY. WE ARE GOING TO DO PLENTY OF DANCING AND ANY THING ELSE THAT WE DARN PLEASE.

I HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT WALKING IN ON YOU ONE OF THESE EVENINGS AND TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE REACTION WILL BE.

I WOULD GIVE A LOT TO BE ABLE TO GO OUT TO THE LAKE WITH YOU AND SPEND A WEEK-END THERE DOING NOTHING BUT MAKING LOVE, AND IF THERE WERE A NICE BIG FIRE IN THE FIRE PLACE AND RAIN ON THE ROOF SO MUCH THE BETTER.

YOU WILL JUST HAVE TO BE PATIENT AND WAIT UNTIL I GET THERE THERE IS NOTHING THAT WILL HURRY ARMY PROCEDURE.

YOU ARE NOT TO OPEN IT UNTIL I GET THERE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

SHE IS CERTAINLY A FINE HEALTHY LOOKING LITTLE GIRL. SHE WILL CERTAINLY HAVE TO GIVE UP SLEEPING WITH YOU.

I HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST IDEA OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE STATES. I STILL THINK I'LL JUST WALK IN ON YOU.

I LOVE YOU LIKE CRAZY. DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU ANY DIFFERENT.

CROSS YOUR FINGERS AND NOTHING CAN GO WRONG THIS TIME.

[Originally published in *American Poetry Review*, 17.5 (1988): 7-8.]

Souvenirs

for R. L. B.

1

Beyond Reykjavic on a country road,
He watched the piebald horse
Measure itself against his jeep.
Reckless stride, its hooves beat
The rocky field and seemed to beat
The very coldness back into the ground.

He stopped beside a cottage
And bought a plum-colored, woven blanket
From a grinning farm wife.
It was impulsive, a foreign act.
Later, when he mailed it home to his wife,
He didn't explain. She thanked him.

2

A small room in Iceland.
A metal night stand
With ashtray, vase and tags.
On his cot the farm wife's blanket.
He dreamed of Korea.
He dreamed of war, of bivouacs,
Of how he woke once in the hollow
Of his mummybag
Adrift on an unknown field
A storm of snow
Coming down and down
And melting on his cheeks
And burning.
Encased in ice that was his breath,
He wanted to break it off, to scream.

How to get through days
He could not understand?
Still in his barracks room
Something heavy upon his chest,
He was suspended between
Waking and sleeping,
Injury and recovery
While the arched curve of his rib cage
Hurt. An object resting there, cold
In spots and warm in others
Where his fingers held—
It was the vase.
He traced its design:
Mother-of-pearl inlay,
Some birds and vines,
One butterfly.
With apologetic hands
Koreans fixed them there,
Months or years before
Across that empty gunner's shell.

He set the vase back beside the bed
And waited hours for dawn.
When he got up, rest at an end,
He put his souvenirs
Into an army trunk
Stenciled with his name.

[Originally published in *Quarry West* 16 (1982): 102-104.]

H. Palmer Hall

Two Poems

The Collector

I knew a murderer, a long time ago, and eyeing for eyeing
toothing for toothing— oh, yes!— murdered, in time, by the State,
a time I kept the vigil, damned nice guy when you got to know him

went to Killeen with him and to Vietnam, all that training, yes,
he didn't kill anyone there, no, called hardly anyone a Gook, just
read quietly, all day, every day, unless working, listening to dots and

dashes, ditty-bops, in the commo hut, yes, Americal Division,
20th Infantry, Chu Lai, Vietnam, Republic of, Calley's group. He
was gentle, with a ring of scars, ridged, on his shaved smooth scalp.

Successful guy, ten years later, car dealership, richer, yes, than
either you or me, married well, big car, very quiet, head still sunk
in books except when selling other cars or buying yet one more auto

dealership. A quiet dealer with poetry in his soul, he fell
from love one day, a normal, dry day, the kind of day when
all things being equal he would have read or, yes, reread books.

He'd become a collector— Victoriana— Browning, Tennyson,
A little Clough, and, yes, Swinburne for his wilder moments,
all the Rossetti circle, a small Whistler hanging by his desk

though he did not own a single peacock feather— warm day,
hot Texas sun blazing overhead, not like a wafer, no moment
of communion, the kind of day, when, when he has fallen out

of love and does not want to divide his art, his Tennysons,
wants his Brownings safe at Baylor, his Christina to move in,
long white dresses, perhaps he isn't thinking straight. He's been

trained for this, not for subtlety. He'd stopped the day before,
bought an AK-47, a magazine, gold-tipped bullets, just enough,
to do the job. It's what he's dreamed about, the scene is fresh,

and when she wanders in, he smiles. The action moves easily,
a too large pattern, he thinks, should have zeroed in. He does not
see blood spatter on the wall, hardly hears her scream. He pulls

a copy of *Oenone* down, fingers the dark green cloth. He thinks
he'll read a while and then go back to work. He sits in his favorite
Queen Anne chair, the Whistler near. He doesn't even know he cries.

Had We a History

In France that sense of history is a part of everyone's consciousness; it doesn't matter if they're writers, intellectuals, or journalists, or people who are not at all politically involved: the greengrocer, the mother and daughter running a clothing shop.
—Marilyn Hacker on Carolyn Forché's *The Angel of History*

I'm sure you're right. Were I in France, history
would collapse into a certain vanished era, a war
that passed me by. But we are not bereft by any means

of substance for all that. We see them every day,
men and women on the street trapped in images of the past,
though of a different war. They do not, like so many French,

paint pointilist arguments of pinprick intent
about *le grand famille* Ngo or the brazen brass
of the soldiers' statue at the National Assembly.

And yet, with no grand architecture, in three bedroom homes,
they wake at night to see small children playing with grenades,
thin strips of wire that cross their trails— dark nights of wet terror.

They work at the corner store, a Stop 'n Go, a 7-11,
they wash your car, hold their hands out in the streets with
bundles tied upon their backs, mobile homes to the nth degree.

Some are on third wives (there's history there!), and behind it
all, the wives, the streets, memories swirl just out of sight, out
the corners of their eyes where spots gather and dance. They

reach out and touch what they can never find, refight old battles
wonder if any kind of war is ever won, not just theirs. When they
think of WWII, they do not see puttis glazed in gold along a wall,

do not see an Arc of Triumph, no chocolates or nylons to buy
women cheap, just cold hard cash, the currency of their generation.
But, I suppose you're right. History's more than reliving an old present.

Why I Am Not a Saint

Statistics show that saints have a higher rate of cancer than the general population. (from a National Public Radio interview)

Because I am incapable
of altruism, of laying
down my body as sacrifice.
Because I fear
the feel of leprosy,
the smell of human waste,
the eyes of an infant
whose father is a prisoner of war
and whose mother holds him,
weeps into his downy hair,
and thinks I can unlock the gates
of hell. Because I cannot be
a pacifist, fast to protest
O.J.'s freedom, Saddam Hussein,
genocide of Serbs, genocide of Croats,
metal pipes, knives, machine
guns, terrorists blowing up
temples. Can't refuse to raise my fist
or voice in anger. Can't bear
the long flights, witnessing
wars, protruding ribs, amputated arms,
swollen ankles, ostentatious weddings,
choirs of strained voices.

Denial sustains optimism.
No body can bear the weight
of the robes forever—the long, silken, flowing
robes. How tall one must be to carry them,

to keep them from dragging
the ground, prevent the tattered ends.

Paul Woodruff

Where the Tune was Going

harmonicas are in the news
today: a picture shows
three young men waiting

in desert battle-dress—
one head-in-hand, one
staring into space

the third, dead center,
holds the metal to his mouth
and plays old tunes

I remember hearing
how my mother found
Nathan's mouth-worn Hohner

cold silver metal
on rumpled brown paper
returned with blue-

jeans, t-shirt, belt,
no longer needed,
she closed the drawer

training for U.S. marines
had sent the old life home
to build a new man

who listens to their drumbeat,
learns to kill, if not
to love the Corps, and who

will breathe warm air
in metal reeds again,
years before he finds the tune

— not the old one, that's
too easy, coming home—
but where the tune was going

when it died, his head
was shaved, and my brother
headed for Da Nang

THE SEVENTH WAVE *

In the aftermath of war it all swept around him.
The silence. No one mentioning where he's been.
He told a couple of people. "Korea," he said.
Both both looked blankly, then grow embarrassed.

A younger friend, from Viet Nam, said later,
"Hell, least they didn't spit on you!" He
couldn't say anything then, feeling the younger
man's pain too much to tell him silence
can be a way of spitting.

Years went by and he came to hate Veterans'
Day when "Korea" was never mentioned, or
briefly in passing. He would know then one of his
own people was speaking, nervously adding
this unmentionable war to the list of horrors.

"Did you know more people died in Korea
than in Nam? That it lasted longer?
That it hadn't ended, ever?"
People smile uncomfortably wonder why
he is dragging up that old subject again.
He wonders, too, drawn more into himself.

Trouble was, his bunch didn't organize
felt, one guy said, like ghosts drifting
around a society who lived in news bites,
had no long-term memory at all, seeing all
wars as Desert Storms, made for TV. He said

he didn't care much anyway, we're almost
all dead now anyway, the Vet's Hospitals
mostly closed by Reagan. "At least we get to die
our own way, by ourselves, thinking of buddies
who didn't get that chance. Fuck 'em," he
said and walked away.

***Sealore: in a gale, all the waves are high and dangerous but the seventh wave will be a monster and wash you overboard unless you keep a weather eye open.**

ARCHEOLOGY

We keep improving
what we know of the past. Digging.
One yard deeper, flat like a cake layer, a hundred
years lies land-locked. The underworld allows no
mourning, no passions, only the earthen colors
of time crushed like dry leaves through dirt, only
stories and shattered pots silenced
in a common grave.

Downward, rearward, we find what earth
had not devoured. In the moist dark beneath
grass' seeds a tear-shaped jewel stone, a bulb,
a tooth, a dagger, a spider caught in amber
are scrutinized for secrets as if the past were
a cryptic prophecy we dreamed and fear
forgetting. And the past comes fragile and broken,
unwilling Lazarus unearthed

from what was left anonymous, behind;
a tin canister, a wine filled amphora,
an earthen jar half full with honey,
a broken bone, the rags of what once was
a spiffy uniform, a skulk entangled
in an old tree's roots. Most often we find
what remained unclaimed from armies gone
through wars and gravel; rusted buttons,
bayonets still sharp,

few broken pistols, arrows, medals. Sometime
we might remember soldiers' names and faces,
might still struggle to win their battles. We dig,
almost entomb ourselves, share the rain

and the grains' roots with the dead,
and from eternal ruins we build our past
with amulets, saints' relics,
to make this unmarked graveyard
a never-ending altar.

MARIANNE POLOSKEY

TWO POEMS

Hate

I heard you tell
many a night, stay away,
but the door
was pushed open anyway
and the uniform
burst into our room.
I could hear you begging
in a little girl's voice,
but one boot dropped
anyway, then the other.
As, moving over,
you thumped
against the wall,
I felt an ache
in my shoulder.
And when the rhythm
of the assault
wired my feet
to your headboard,
I wanted to leap
from my bed
and grab the gun
he always leaned against
the door.
I wanted to shoot him
with his own hate.
I imagined
yanking you up by an arm

like a doll,
pictured us slipping out
of our bodies
as if they were clothes.
No longer targets,
we would float
through the window
into the wide-open
summer night—
bruised clouds,
you and I,
rising purple in the sky.
But I wasn't as brave as you.
I didn't even sob.
All I could do was
crawl deeper.

Buildings

Don't ever tell them
that your father listens
to the news in French or English

and don't repeat
what your parents talk about
behind closed doors.

Don't let on that you're scared
of your own shadow
blotting out more and more light

or of the sirens
that interrupt your play
a little earlier each afternoon.

Don't, as the bombs rain down,
tell the shelter any secrets
just to hear your own voice.

But if the building falls
and you survive,
shout loudly through the stones
that you're alive.

GLENN MILLER WAS MISSING

Glenn Miller was missing. Somewhere over the English Channel,
his plane went down in December 1944. Mother was upset
because you'd been drafted, even with a wife and two daughters
to support and day work in a defense plant and night work in the clubs,
your teeth clamped onto the reed of a saxophone, chin tucked in,
neck thrown back under the black and silver clarinet.
Even in your tuxedo, you were slated for war.
If Glenn Miller could die, you could die.
I don't know what it looked like, you two too scared to be
separated. They say your bags were packed for many months.
You had to be ready to go. Even the birth of a third child
couldn't stop it now.

By Springtime in Berlin Hitler was dead, or so it was reported.
The war camps were being emptied of some, and filled with others.
The boys were coming home, but no one was sure
whether to celebrate or not. No one knew if you might still go or not.
The war with Japan continued; scientists were speeding their experiments.
Khaki uniforms crisscrossed the globe. Drop the bomb.
Alternative plans on the political front. Pressure from the Allies.
Hurry before they do it first! Americans were sick of war.
In August were Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and I was born
forty days later. In the hospital Mother counted all
my fingers, all my toes, a baby whose father never had to go.

It's as though it was set like a bomb fifty years ago,
and now it goes off when the phone rings and it's my mother
calling to ask me if I know
that she is leaving by air transport. She says,
I'm leaving for the war, and her 85 year old voice begins to tremble.
Will you take care of the children? she begs me, warning
it's a big job. She is making these last requests of me,
this woman forever in fear of what the neighbors would say
this woman whose faults I am sick to death of listing
and won't.

I think
how brave she is, this warrior, packed for the end,

ready to give her all for her country. So I lie to her,
and I tell her of course I will take care of
the children, they are such good girls. I thank her
for the sacrifice she is making for us all.
I pray you'll be home by Christmas, I say over the phone,
and I mean it.
I hope so, she whispers.
I imagine her head down, phone to her ear, talking into her breasts,
loose now in a loose gown. And then it is quiet.
I am lost in all of this when she starts to laugh nervously.
I've been sitting here with the other girls, she tells me.
Jane had a date last night. I just don't know why Daddy
hasn't come to pick me up. She begins
talking about you.

You over there on her dresser in the white tuxedo
with the black bow tie, your wavy hair so light,
your green eyes young in smoky shades of sepia.
And folded in the other photo next to you,
as you two were in the mahogany bed,
is this delicate young dark-eyed woman,
a farm girl pretending sophistication, a studio portrait,
something taken in the thirties, hinged there forever
looking out, not at us, not at each other, you have become
not even you, but Youth, so sweet so strange
to me to hear my mother now asking for you,
when the last time I saw you, your neck muscles
were finally surrendering to the pillow.
Then Anita wrapped your dentures in Kleenex, and
I tried to tie my silk scarf around your head
to keep your slack mouth shut, but the weight was too much
or the scarf was too narrow, or my will to force the act was too weak,
and we dragged home to tell our mother.
We lied to her that your death had been painless.
Now we conspire again to protect her
and I wonder if that's what you did
when she says she saw you just the other day and you acted
like you didn't even know her. I would never
cheat on Jimmy, she says to me now, I love him so much,
but I don't know if he loves me. Why doesn't he
come and get me?
her voice more and more desperate.
So I tell her you are nearby and she is safe right where
you want her to be, and she agrees that it's all for the best.
She lifts her voice, calls me by her sister's name, pauses and asks me,
and how are the children?

One thing I can't explain is how I feel when people say
it must be so hard to see your mother's mind fail,
when I feel like finally, finally,
all of her places and years come pouring out to me.
And I think it is me she tells these things to
only because I am here, and because

when Glenn Miller was missing and
she was afraid of war and so were you,
you comforted her all night long,
so that now, nine months and fifty years later,
when I walk through the door
with my trench coat folded over my arm,
her searchlights scan the dark waters of my green eyes,
still searching for you.

— dedicated to the memory of Peggy and Jimmy Sheaffer

PARATROOPERS' NIGHT OUT

Sashaying down the Rue Pigalle,
holding the flowers that bloom in the dark
(Marie and Jeune, Fifi, Bette and Lola),
goaded by hormones and cunning Pernod,
we are bombs ready to go off.
and in a bar called L'Elephant Blanc,
we do go off. Goddamn Brits,
what are they doing here,
strutting on our turf with their
asshole Aussie buddies?
We'll show them American paratroopers
are the best— maybe kick some
frog soldiers' asses to boot.
An accented remark, and the brawl is on;
ambassadors in uniform,
we wade into the fray.
Gutsy Disharoon is a small buzz saw;
he puts the boots to a downed
Frenchman; Baxter, a black trooper,
punches smoothly at all who come
before he disappears under three Union Jacks.
Me, I'm punching and getting punched
(strike anywhere in such fights
and you'll hit someone).
There's screaming from *les filles,*
(Marie and Jeune, Fifi, Bette and Lola)
as they cringe from the flailing fury
of the soldiers making this war.
A bottle sails through the air,
and Madam cranks the telephone
as cognac murals a wall.
"Gendarmes! Gendarmes!" she screams,

and *shit* that hurt, the grim French cop's
hard baton, his silly whistle.
Now the brass trill of big MPs,
wooden dances on our skulls, the smell
of blood and leather. Disharoon
goes down for a nap, Baxter can't be
seen, and the last thing I'm aware of
as the clubs come down again,
is Marie and Jeune, Fifi, Bette and Lola,
huddled in a corner,
excitement on their sweet French faces.

D. Melissa Hilbish

Advancing in Another Direction
The Comic Book and the Korean War

> "JUNE, 1950! THE INCENDIARY SPARK OF WAR IS-GLOWING IN KOREA! AGAIN AS BEFORE, MEN ARE HUNTING MEN... BLASTING EACH OTHER TO BITS . . . COMMITTING WHOLESALE MURDER! THIS, THEN, IS A STORY OF MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN! THIS IS A WAR STORY!"

❦

With the January-February 1951 issue of E-C Comic's *Two-Fisted Tales*, the comic book, as it had for WWII five years earlier, followed the United States into the war in Korea. Soon other comic book lines joined E-C in presenting aspects of the new war in Korea. Comic books remain an underutilized popular culture resource in the study of war and yet they provide a very rich part of the tapestry of war and cultural representation. The Korean War comics are also important for their location in the history of the comic book industry. After WWII, the comic industry expanded rapidly, and by the late 1940s comic books entered a boom period with more adults reading comics than ever before. The period between 1935 and 1955 has been characterized as the "Golden Age" of the comic book with over 650 comic book titles appearing monthly during the peak years of popularity in 1953 and 1954 (Nye 239-40). By the late forties, many comics directed the focus away from a primary audience of juveniles and young adolescents to address volatile adult issues in the postwar years, including juvenile delinquency, changing family dynamics, and human sexuality. The emphasis shifted during this period from super heroes like "Superman" to so-called realistic comics that included a great deal of gore, violence, and more "adult" situations. Five major genres emerged within the new

emphasis on "realism": Crime comics, romances, horror, satire (e.g.. *MAD*) and, by 1950, the war comic.

Given the context of the Cold War and the strident anti-communism of the early fifties, the Korean War would seem to provide an exciting new direction for the war comics. The constant threat of infiltration and subversion intensified by the HUAC and Senate hearings and the well-publicized Alger Hiss spy case made the communists an even more dangerous and insidious enemy than the Nazis. The "loss" of China to the Communist Revolution in 1949 and the Soviet's successful test of an atomic bomb preceded the North Korean invasion of the South in June 1950. These events confirmed for many the existence of an international communist conspiracy. The suddenness of the new war took the comic book industry and the rest of the country by surprise, but by January 1951 the Korean War became the focus for a number of comic producers. E-C Comics was the first with a war line, but other producers, among them Marvel, Toby, and DC, were soon on the scene with a wide range of titles.[1] The readership for these comics included all ages, but the comics had a special appeal for a young adult, mostly male, audience of those looking forward to deployment for service in Korea. By using comics like *Combat Kelly* (Marvel, 1951-1957) and *Two-Fisted Tales* (E-C, 1950-1955), the complexities of a limited war fought for ambiguous political objectives can be examined in a very serious light. Both comics specifically address the war in Korea and both were influenced by the changes in the comic book industry and new demands placed on the publishers. Yet the two comics reflect very different editing styles and philosophies in how the war should be depicted.

In general, the patriotic nationalism of the WWII comic book is replaced in the Korean comics by more ambiguity and ambivalence about the war. The men worry about life and death, and they die in great numbers. Whole squads are killed, and with the loss of life there is little discussion of the overall rationale for fighting the war. When compared to WWII, the Korean War comics are far more likely to examine the dehumanizing aspects of the war, and the problems with incompetent leadership in the field. The soldier could really trust no one over the rank of sergeant. In addition, basic underlying concepts in the war comics genre were questioned and explored, particularly the issue

of patriotism and courage. As one character in *Battle* (Marvel, January 1952) admonishes an overzealous soldier,

> Yelling that you want to get into combat doesn't mean you're a brave man . . . it means you're foolish. . . . Every G.I. up on the line is praying and fighting for his life . . . cursing the day he was sent into combat.

Many of the soldiers suffer from battle fatigue and psychological stress. The environment provides problems as well, and with story titles like "Muck," "Mud," and "Rocks," the Korean landscape itself became a metaphor for the war in the comics. In other ways, the Korean War comics were no different from WWII. We are still fighting a brutal enemy, and the communists are portrayed as savage and barbaric, breaking the rules of civilized warfare. The international communist conspiracy is firmly in place as the North Koreans take their orders from the Chinese, and the Chinese do the bidding of the Soviets. The Communists do not value human life. They torture and assassinate prisoners of war, but are just as likely to brutalize their own troops by sending them in human waves of futile assaults against United Nations positions.

Combat Kelly (Marvel Comics, 1951-1957) featured a tough, brawny private by the name of "Combat Kelly" and his loyal but scrawny buddy, "Cookie." Kelly is a fighting man, brave, courageous, prone to taking too many chances, but always able to fight his way out of difficulty. Kelly and Cookie are intensely loyal to each other, and many of the stories feature the two helping each other out of scrapes and close calls. *Combat Kelly* re-plays the conventions of the WWII comic for Korea with recurring characters and the same contrived plots. The enemy is brutal, sadistic, and stupid, but despite this, Combat Kelly and Cookie together or singly are captured and tortured before outwitting their captors to walk arm and arm into the sunset and back to the unit. The endings for the stories are always uplifting and victorious. There is no sense of an organized war effort, or commentary on the nature of this war, or the individual battles of the Korean War. Instead the focus is on these two men going it alone against an easily slaughtered enemy who they butcher by

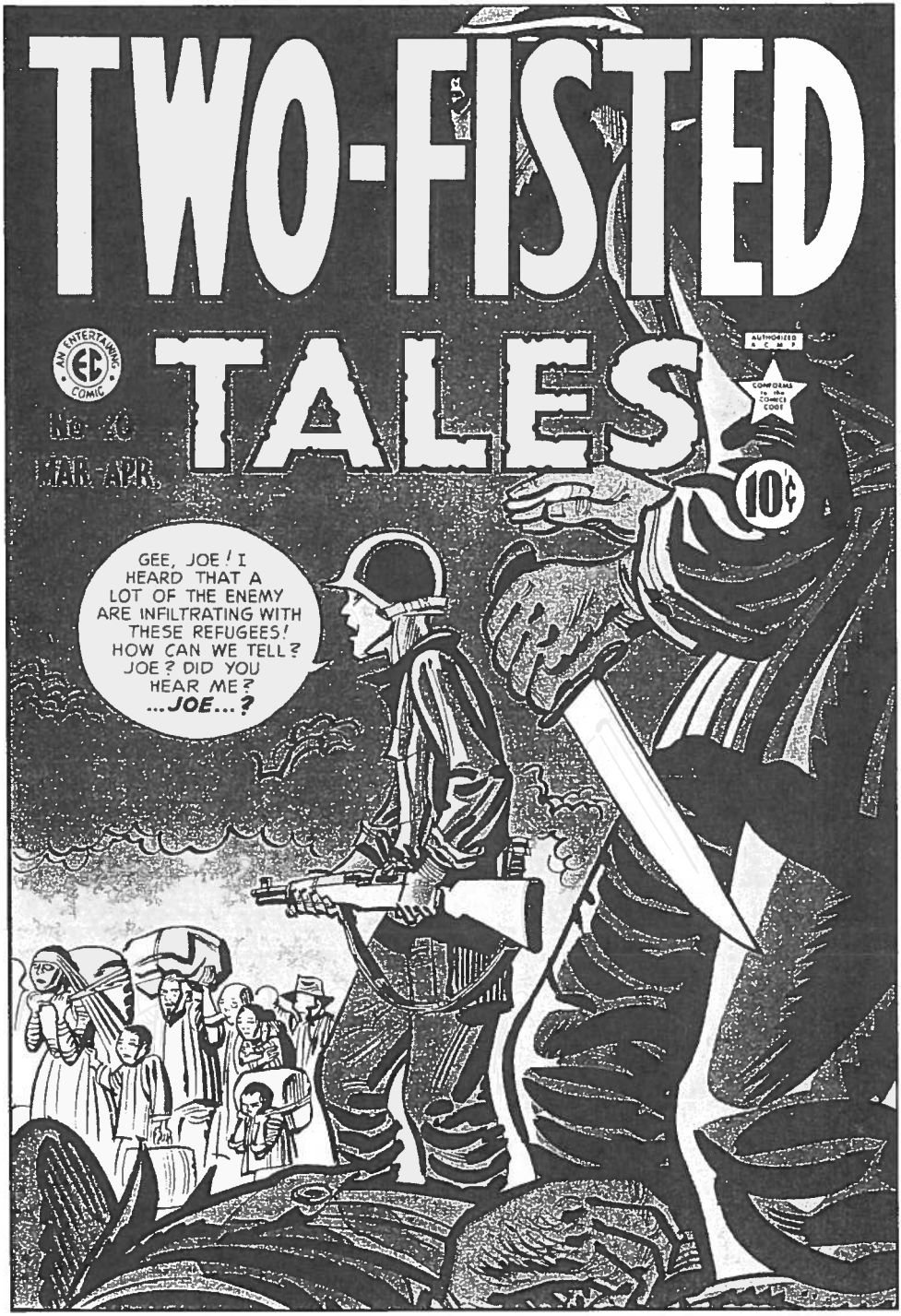


["Mud!"—Jan-Feb 1952 (Vol 1, No 25)—1st panel.]

the hundreds. The war is presented as a grand adventure as the men fight and romance across Korea.

One other theme that *Combat Kelly* shares with many of the other comics of the period is the inclusion of women in the combat zone. Women appear as combat photographers, USO troupe entertainers, and as nuns. In the January 1952 issue of *Combat Kelly*, Kelly and Cookie crouch in a foxhole avoiding enemy fire when suddenly a flash of light blinds the men. They feel an enemy presence in the foxhole and Combat Kelly, always ready for battle, grabs a thrashing figure. Suddenly, a female voice admonishes: "Hey! Lay that fist down, you big lug . . . Don't you know how to treat a lady when she drops in on you?" Combat Kelly is astonished, ". . . Holy Smokes! It's a Dame!" "Not a dame, dog face . . . Kitty Klick, Female War Photographer!" The flash that blinded the men was not from mortar fire, but from her camera, and after the three are trapped behind enemy lines, they use the flash to blind the enemy causing them to fight and to shoot each other while Combat Kelly and his friends slip away. *Combat Kelly* also includes a regular female character: a North Korean femme fatale by the name of "Yalu River Rosie," who regularly outsmarts the men: "Combat Kelly knew all about war, but he didn't know that the Devil wore skirts!" (Vol. 1-January 1952). In another *Combat Kelly* story, Kelly and Cookie enter a Buddhist temple controlled by female North Korean soldiers. These buxom women, like Kitty Klick, are dressed provocatively, and Kelly outsmarts them by finding swing music on the radio. When the rest of the squad arrives they find Combat Kelly and Cookie dancing with the women. The formerly austere stonefaced woman approaches the major with a promiscuous smile and an invitation, "Major, wishie jitterbuggie, huh?" The men defeat the enemy and hold the temple. Some comics contain the so-called "Good Girl Art" of pin-up pages, which feature scantily clad women. *Tell it to the Marines*, *Fighting Leathernecks*, and *Monty Hall of the U.S. Marines* identify the US serviceman as the intended audience, and often include a pen pals section for the lonely GI. These comics were obviously not for children.

The earliest of the 1950s war comics, *Two-Fisted Tales*, was issued by E-C comics as a bimonthly publication, and edited by Harvey Kurtzman. The first issue of *Two-Fisted Tales* was dated

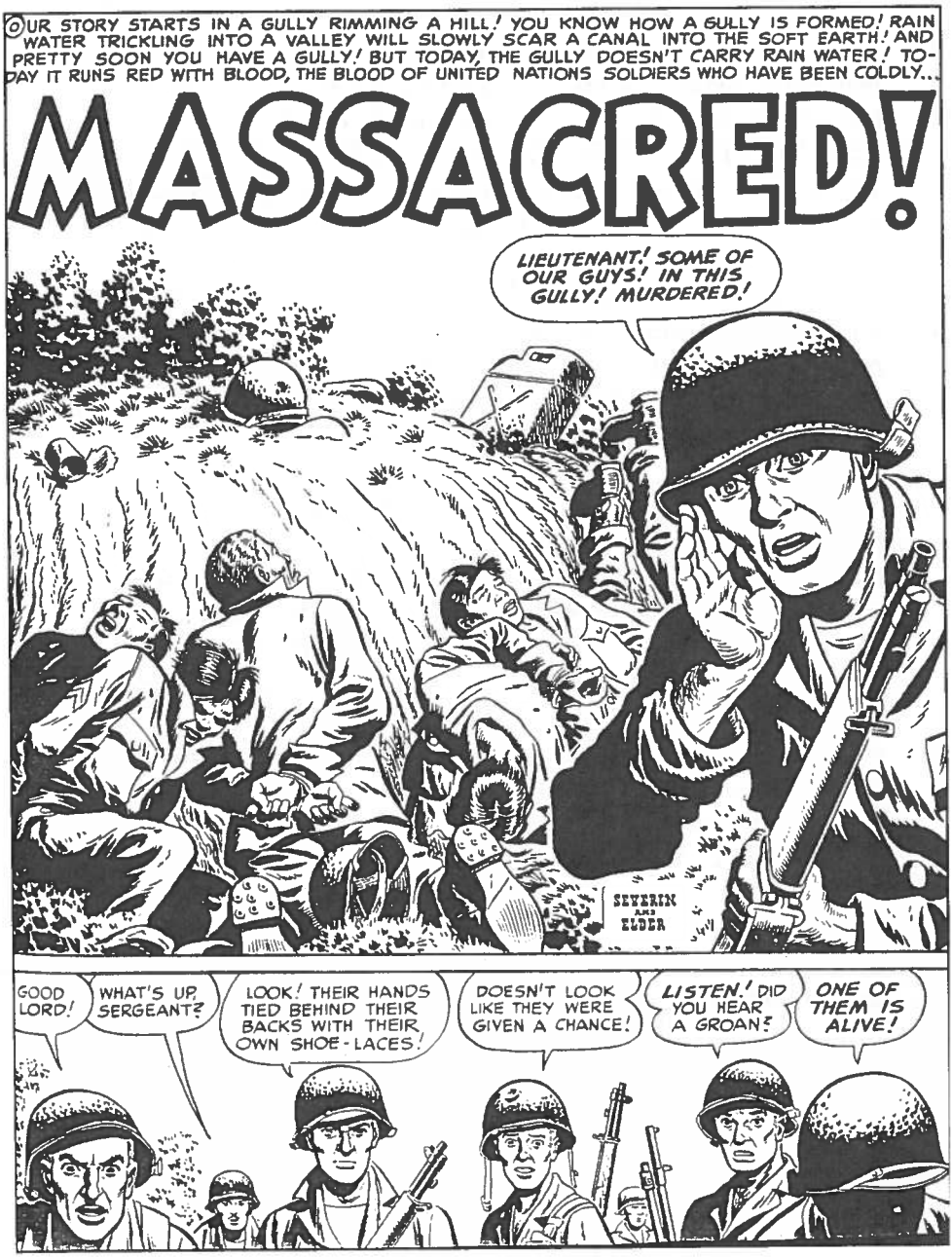


[Front Cover—Mar-Apr 1951 (Vol 1, No 20)—Infiltrating refugees.]

November-December 1950, and by the January-February 1951 issue, Kurtzman turned to the Korean War for stories. Kurtzman also edited E-C's "companion mag," *Frontline Combat*, which focused exclusively on the presentation of combat in fifteen issues from 1951 to 1954. The first issue of *Two-Fisted Tales* (No. 18)[2] was not about Korea at all because, according to Kurtzman, when he invented the title he intended to present "blood and thunder tales and rip-roaring high adventure" (Benson Interview, Preceding No. 19, January-February 1951). The first cover included the side bar "He Man Adventure," and while retaining a number of adventure stories, Kurtzman turned to a focus on combat by Number 23 (September-October 1951), and the "He Man Adventure" side bar was changed to "War and Fighting Men."

The editorial policy of *Two-Fisted Tales* differed considerably from comic books like *Combat Kelly*. The editors identified themselves to readers, individual artists were profiled, and the editors requested comments and suggestions for future stories. Kurtzman believed in a serious approach to comics, one based on "authenticity," and his interest "had something to do with history and historical dates and places, and processes" (Benson Interview, Preceding No. 19, January-February 1951). He researched the history of specific campaigns and the details of combat using the Korean Consulate, public library, and interviews with those in service. While *Combat Kelly*, and other comic books of the period, presented the Korean War as a glorious crusade against the evils of communism, *Two-Fisted Tales* retained a dark, violent, pessimistic tone enhanced by starkly drawn panels and introspective internal dialogue. Despite the dark tone of many of the stories, Kurtzman carefully balanced the need to fight in some situations with the waste, futility and loss of innocence of war:

> Although war is horrible, I feel that there are times when you have to fight.... To some degree I guess we have an obligation to support war. Although if we ever stand up on a hilltop and look at that kind of reasoning it all gets to look pretty weird (Benson Interview, Preceding No. 25, January-February 1952).



["Massacred!'—Mar-Apr 1951 (Vol 1, No 20)—1st Panel.]

With the first Korean War story, "War Story!," Kurtzman begins with the June 1950 invasion and, like many of the Korean War feature films, the story returns to WWII to create a moral framework for the Korean War. The lesson for the new kid is presented by an old WWII retread who tells the story of twin brothers; one good and one a killer. Duke fails to follow even the most basic rules of humanity, even to the point of murdering a Japanese soldier carrying a white flag (Got 'im in the gut. Look at 'im wiggle!"). The killer pays for his rage when he accidentally kills his own brother while trying to murder a captured Japanese officer. The moral: "War's a tough deal! We kill men not because we wanna, but because we gotta! It's a dirty job we have to do . . . but it doesn't mean we have to enjoy doing it."

The artists associated with *Two-Fisted Tales*, among them Jack Davis, Wally Wood, Johnny Severin, and Will Elder, served during WWII, and this became a credential for the authenticity of the comic. Although Kurtzman was stationed stateside, many of the other writers and artists were combat veterans and very concerned with getting the details right. By the March-April 1952 issue, the unique contours of the Korean War began to take shape within the comic book. The stories treat the Korean War as a United Nations action, explore the effect of the war on civilians, outline atrocities committed during wartime, and explore the human condition and issues of fear, courage, and luck. Each story ends with a moral or a lesson.

Interestingly, *Two-Fisted Tales* never included a story on the prisoner of war experience, which by 1953 had become a major issue in the press. "Massacred!" (No. 20, March-April 1951) effectively incorporates many of the themes, and, true to Kurtzman's philosophy, the story adds a twist. It begins as an American squad finds assassinated United Nations soldiers in a ditch. The lone survivor tells a strange story of being captured by a North Korean officer, "Colonel Jun," described as a "man without conscience." Jun assassinates all but two of the captured squad, and then decides on special treatment for captured soldiers and issues the order that "Col. Jun's soldiers will not take prisoners!" He then strips the dead UN soldiers, and dresses himself and his squad in the clothes in order to scout a minefield. The squad is subsequently captured by some of Colonel Jun's own North Korean forces, and even though Jun tries to identify

himself to the North Korean officer, the officer, remembering Jun's standing order, kills Jun and his men. This deus ex machina is common in *Two-Fisted Tales* as the editors try to make a point about the brutality of the war and man's inhumanity to man.

Kurtzman believed that previous comic books had done a disservice to children by failing to present the negative aspects of war: ". . . you have a responsibility, and these guys feeding this crap to the children that soldiers spend their time merrily killing little buck-toothed yellow men with the butt of a rifle is terrible. . ." but he also admits that you have to tell a "story," because that is what people expect (Benson Interview, Preceding No. 21, May-June 1951). He deals with the loss of innocence, and profiles the soldier as a complex human being with real fear and courage. The definition of courage did not include running willingly into the jaws of death as a part of a noble crusade, and the comic is effective because of the anonymous quality of the soldiers. *Combat Kelly* featured regular characters, but both *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* used the ordinary infantryman, representative in their everyman quality. Sometimes they live and sometimes they die. Some stories are about courage in the face of certain death, while others question the conduct of the soldier under horrible stress. Often the very definitions of cowardice and courage are called into question. Even when a man dies a hero's death, the focus is on the loneliness and waste, rather than the glory. Two stories are representative of Kurtzman's style and perspective. In "Hill 203" (No. 24, November-December 1951), the sun comes up behind a UN soldier slumped over a machine gun. The panels ask, "What happened here?" "The soldier won't tell you! He's dead!" The following panels relate the story of the defense of the hill against continuous waves of Chinese soldiers. The UN soldiers are killed off one by one until one man is left to defend the ridge. The lone survivor dies at sunrise slumped over the gun as the planes pass over the carnage of death and destruction on "Hill 203." The moral: The Hill is held but there is a large price to be paid "for death treats all men equally." "Corpse on the Imjin!" (No. 25, January-February 1952) begins as "a lonely corpse floats with the rubble down to the sea." A lone American soldier sits on the bank watching the corpse float by ("Why then do we fasten our eyes on a lifeless corpse? . . . Life is precious and death is ugly and never passes unnoticed."). And he wonders



["Korea!"—Sept-Oct 1952 (Vol 1, No 29)—"Every life is important."]

what caused the death. As the soldier eats and watches the river, another man, an enemy soldier "wet and scared and hungry," watches the man and then leaps. As the two men circle each other preparing for battle, the soldier wonders, "Where are the wisecracks you read in the comic books? Where are the fancy right hooks you see in the movies?" Instead, it's just brutal hand to hand combat and then one man dies. The final panels admonish:

> Have pity. Have pity for a dead man. For he is now not rich or poor, right or wrong, bad or good! Don't hate him. Have pity . . . For he has lost that most precious possession that we all treasure above everything . . . he has lost his life!

In some stories, the green kid, fresh from the States, learns the rules of warfare and becomes a seasoned and competent soldier, and sometimes the young man dies horribly in a storm of bullets or mortar fire. Often it is just a matter of luck rather than competence or courage that determines who lives and dies. In "Enemy Contact!" (No. 22, July-August 1951), a soldier develops appendicitis and is operated on by a medic who gets instructions over a walkie talkie. The operation is a success but the victory over this death is short-lived as an enemy mortar round lands near the position. Although the men are saved by the timely arrival of US "flyboys," the story concludes with the discovery that the soldier had been killed in the mortar attack. In the final frame, the men walk away from the body as the blood transfusion bottle hangs ineffectively in the foreground. In "Ambush" (No. 21, May-June 1951), a soldier depends on the luck of a kewpie doll wedged in the top of his helmet. He is the sole survivor of an enemy encounter and thanks the kewpie doll for his great luck only to discover that his helmet had somehow been switched with his buddy's helmet. He finds his dead buddy with a bullet through "the helmet, through your good luck charm, and through Pretty Boy's face." For the soldier, luck is a relative term reserved for those safe back home, so beware of those who tempt the fates. In the story "Luck!" (No. 27, May-June 1952), a lieutenant deliberately, and unnecessarily, draws fire to locate

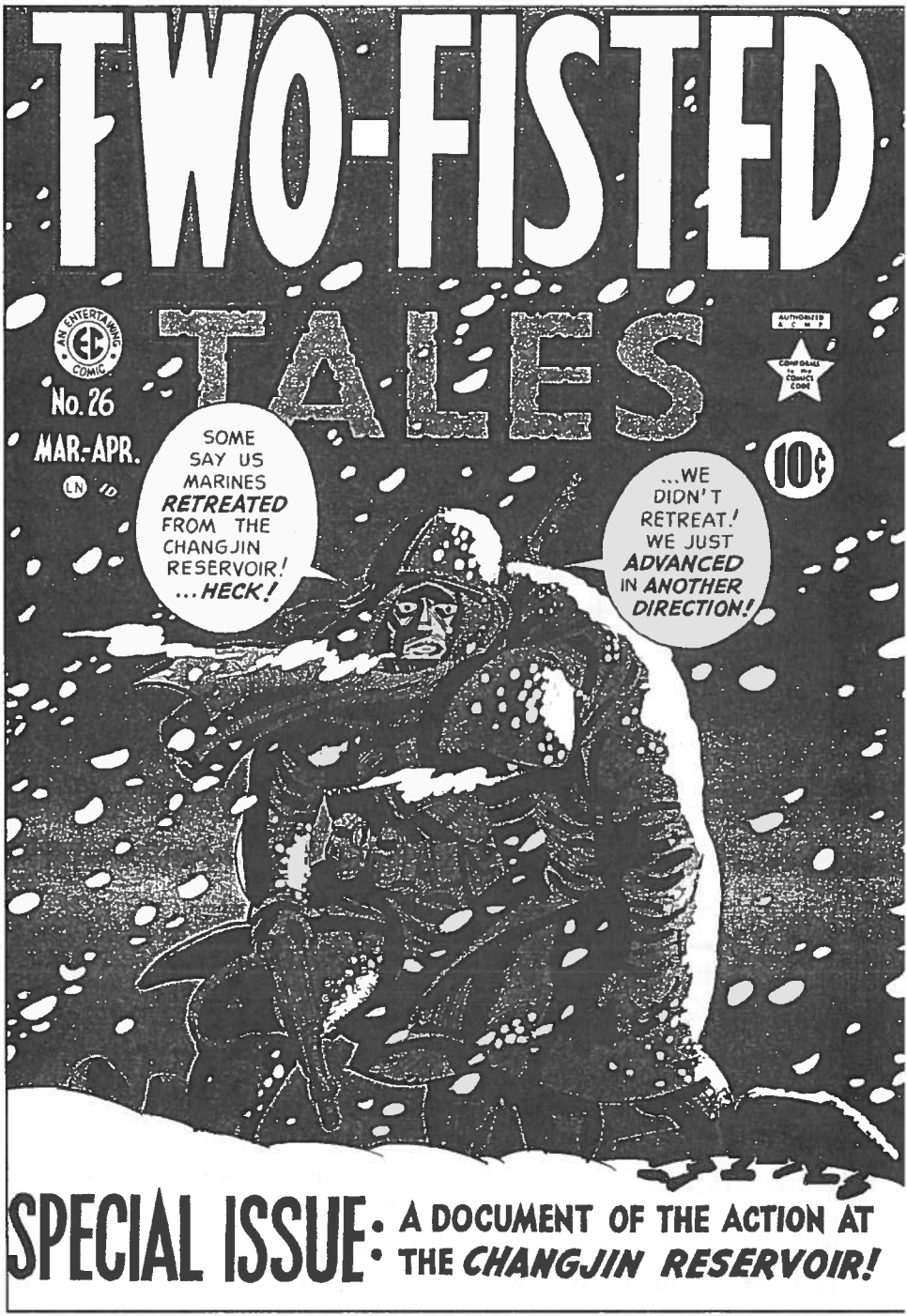
snipers. He survives numerous close calls ("As long as I dare 'em to shoot me, sir, I'll never get hit!") but his speech is interrupted by a sniper's bullet. The story ends with close-up of a helmet with a bullet through the back of it.

By July-August 1951 (No. 22), the editors instituted a "Combat Correspondence" page. From reader comments it is clear that the war stories proved to be the most popular, particularly for American servicemen. The editors printed a letter from a soldier in Korea who commented on the "Realism of the battle sequences," and then offered to send in some personal stories which the editors readily accepted. The readers continued to suggest topics and the editors used reader ideas and concepts throughout the run of the comic book. There seems to be a great deal of interchange between the editors and the soldiers serving in the Korean War, regarding both detail information and the presentation of real battles: "Your letters are truly a rich source of material for our war stories" (No. 24, November-December 1951). Many letters address certain inadequacies in presentation (that "is not a '45' at all"). How did the artist make "the mistake of drawing Navy F9F Panthers as ground support planes for the army in your story, Enemy Contact?" (No. 24, November-December 1951). Or "you should have had Sgt. Shadburn carrying his M-1 upside down in the rain" (No. 27, May-June, 1952). Sometimes there was a collision between the story telling and the documentary aspects of the war. While the editors had intended Hill 203 to be fictitious and representative, a reader wrote to complain that the editors had located Hill 203 in the wrong place: "It is 21 miles southeast of Seoul, and south of the Han River. I was on that hill myself . . . we lost almost all of C Company" (No. 21, March-April 1952). Another commented on a missing ammo belt on one of the machine guns. The editors also received suggestions for future stories. Evidently some readers were disturbed by the sad endings of many of the stories, and the editors responded: "We agree . . . that war is needless. We have no solution. We can only hope that by showing how ugly war is, YOUR generation will work hard to find the solution" ("Combat Correspondence," No. 24, November-December 1951). Many readers agreed that the sad endings made the comics more realistic by showing how horrible war really is. The "comic mag gals," as differentiated from women of the armed

forces (WACS, WAVES and the Women Marines), also emerged as a part of editorial policy: "We've made it a practice not to show beautiful women running around on a battle-field with the lipstick and silk stockings nicely in place! . . . it just ain't so" (No. 29, September-October 1952).

Some of the more interesting stories present the insanity of war on both sides, and the effect it can have in driving men over the edge of reason to become, not soldiers, but killers. In "Kill!" (No. 23, September-October 1951), the American, "Abner," is shown constantly sharpening his knife in anticipation of gutting a Chinese soldier ("I'm gonna rip that Chinese wide open from stem to stern . . . I'm gonna slice 'im like a herring!"), while on the other side, the Chinese soldier, "Li," cleans and re-cleans his gun. Li and Abner come face to face and in a final battle, and in a bloodthirsty rage, kill each other. In "Bug Out!" (No. 24, November-December 1951), a soldier loses touch with reality as the horror of war takes over his mind. He escapes an ambush that annihilates his entire squad, kills four North Korean soldiers for their rice, eats the rice out of one of the American helmets, and then survives the bombing of a village. He loses his sanity: "What happened to me? What happened to all my fine civilized instincts? What did all this civilization mean?" The story is told through flashbacks as the young man sits in a catatonic state in a hospital: "I'm a killer! I'm an animal . . . Running through the dark with my tail between my legs. Growling around and killing for food! Hiding in the cracks between rocks." Other stories feature Korean civilians trying to survive the war ("Rubble!" No. 24, November-December, 1951), and the effects of the environment ("MUD!" No. 25, January-February 1952). The issue of "fragging" is also introduced in "MUD!"

No. 25 represents a transitional period in *Two-Fisted Tales*, as Kurtzman became even more involved in the details of particular campaigns including the new technologies (the "Willys Jeep" in No. 27), changes in the conduct of the war (the truce talks) and the integration of the armed services. In "Bunker," (No. 30) black soldiers are included for the first time. The artists and editors also developed a particular style and approach. Kurtzman was the master of understatement with simply drawn comics and well-written, simple prose. In March-April 1952, a Special Issue (No. 26) is devoted to the Changjin Reservoir



[Front Cover—Mar-Apr 1952 (Vol 1, No 26)—"Retreat, Heck!"]

retreat, undeniably the most brutal campaign of the Korean War, and an early defeat of US forces in December of 1950. A rough unpublished cover of the March-April 1952 issue (No. 26) proclaimed that "this issue is a documentary" but by the publication of the issue the editors backed down from the documentary claim to offer, "A document of the action at the Changjin Reservoir!" The series of stories opens with a detailed "War map of Korea," and the story presented in four parts, "The Trap!" "Hagaru-Ri!" "Link-Up!" and "Hungnam!" Of course in the presentation on the Changjin Reservoir, Kurtzman did make one little change in General Smith's famous statement: "Retreat? Retreat, Hell we're just advancing in another direction," by changing the "Hell" to "Heck" because of external pressures on the comic book industry.

Kurtzman also focused on the chaos and horror of other wars. He devoted two issues of *Two-Fisted Tales*, (January-February 1953 and October 1953), to the Civil War, which generated a great deal of critical mail from Southern readers who thought the editors were biased in favor of the Union. He also did stories on WWI, WWII, the Civil War, and the Revolutionary War, and while these stories too were somber, the violence and horrible loss associated with a "Bunker Hill" or a "D-Day" was presented as necessary and part of a laudatory goal. This contrasts greatly with the representation of the Korean War in which the war is not placed within a greater good to be won. Survival is the key to the Korean War, and loyalty to fellow soldiers, but the overall need for the war is not as clear. With the signing of the armistice on 27 July 1953, the Korean War ended, and Kurtzman moved back in time to the old West and Victorian India. Kurtzman concludes his association with *Two-Fisted Tales* with the May-June 1953 issue on the Atomic Bomb to devote full attention to *MAD! Magazine*.

By the mid-fifties, cultural critics became increasingly concerned over the influence of the comics, particularly the more violent and gruesome ones. Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent* argued from a so-called scientific basis that the children's comic, particularly the horror genre, led to juvenile delinquency, and he centered much of his attack on E-C Comics. For Wertham, "Comics are supposed to be like fairy tales" (Wertham, 212-214), and many of the comics of the late 1940s

and early 1950s were gory, violent, highly misogynist (including rapes, for example) and clearly not appropriate for children. But the cause-effect relationship that Wertham claims to have proven, and which can still be seen today in arguments over the effects of violence in television shows and in the movies, remains in doubt. So, while the goals of protecting the nation's children were laudatory, it would appear that Wertham and the Kefauver Hearings, which began in the spring of 1954, had a decidedly political and moral slant which overrode aesthetic considerations. By 1954, the "Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc." went into effect, and this self-censorship by the comic book industry effectively banned crime, violence, and gore in comic books and penalized some offenders by denying the publishers access to distribution (Sabin, 157-170).[3]

Because the violence and gore were considered realistic in the presentation of war, the "Code" had little effect on the war comics. While Wertham objected to the presentation in *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*, the objections related to the liberal political orientation of the strip rather than the aesthetics of presentation. *Frontline Combat* ceased publication in January 1954 due in part to the signing of the armistice ending the war in Korea and a corresponding decline in interest in the war stories, and to a period of decline in comic books generally. In a letter to the readers of *Two-Fisted Tales*, the editors note that in September 1952, there were over 500 different comic "Mags" being produced. By March 1953, the industry had collapsed under the weight of so many titles. Public concerns and declining readership forced E-C to abandon its horror and crime comics, most notably *Haunt of Fear*, and then *Frontline Combat*, *Weird Science*, and *Weird Fantasy*. The *New Two-Fisted Tales* with an "Adventure" sidebar struggled along with a "little emphasis on war . . . a big emphasis on the old west, history, and tales of high adventure" (No. 36, January 1954). Readership, however, continued to decline and No. 41 (March 1955) featured an "In Memoriam." According to the editors, *Two-Fisted Tales* succumbed to competition with the "more 'stimulating' " type of comic book. Even with the "New Direction" comic line, E-C barely survived the post-1954 period, and ended up with only one surviving title, *MAD!*, and that only because they changed its designation to magazine rather than comic. The whole industry combusted with

a decline in the number of titles from 630 in 1952 to 250 by 1956 (Sabin, 157-170). Meanwhile, *Combat Kelly* too fell to the combined pressures of declining readership and censorship, and by January 1954 (Vol. 1, No. 18), *Combat Kelly* returned to WWII. The other surviving war comics also returned to WWII, which had always proven to be a far more popular, and easily represented war, and other tales of adventure and conquest. The Korean War was over, but in one of the final issues of *Two-Fisted Tales*, America's next war is indirectly introduced. "Dien Bien Phu" may be the first and only American popular culture artifact to examine the French experience and defeat in Vietnam. The survivor of a final Legionnaire outpost is killed and "In a daze I watch my red blood spreading over the pictures.... Even as the red tide is spreading over Indo China!" (No. 40, December-January 1955). ❦

Notes

1. *Battle* (Marvel, 1951-1960); Battle Action (Marvel, 1952-1957); *Battle Attack* (Stanmor Publications, 1952-1955); *Battle Cry* (Stanmor Publications, 1952-1955); *Battle Stories* (Fawcett, 1952); *Battlefield* (Marvel, 1952-1953); *Battlefront* (Marvel, 1952-1957); *Battleground* 1954-1957; *Combat* (Marvel, 1952-1953); *Combat Casey* (Marvel, 1953-1957); *Combat Kelly* (Marvel, 1951-1954); *Fightin' Marines* (St. John, 1951-1984); *Fighting Fronts Comics* (Harvey, 1952-1953); *Fighting Leathernecks* (Toby, 1952); *The Fighting Man* (Farrell, 1952-1953); Fightin=Marines (St. John, 1951); *Frontline Combat* (E-C) 1951-1954; *General Douglas MacArthur* (Fox, 1951); *G.I. Joe* (Ziff-Davis, 1950-1957); *Joe Yank* Better, 1952-1953); *Men in Action* (Marvel, 1952-1953); *Men's Adventures* (Marvel, 1950); *Monty Hall of the U.S. Marines* (Toby, 1951-1953); *Navy Combat* (Marvel, 1955-1958); *Our Army at War* (DC, 1952-1977); *Star Spangled War Stories* (DC, 1952-1977); *Tell It to the Marines* (Toby, 1952-1955); *Two-Fisted Tales* (E-C, 1951-1955); *U.S. Fighting Air Force* (Superior, 1952-1956); *U.S. Marines in Action* (Avon, 1952); *War Action* (Marvel, 1952-1953); *War Adventures* (Marvel, 1952-1953); *War Combat* (Marvel, 1952) then continues as Combat Casey; *War Comics* (Marvel, 1950); *War Adventures* (Marvel; 1952-1953); *Warfront* (Harvey, 1951-1958); *Young Men on the Battlefield* (Marvel, 1951-1953).
2. *Two-Fisted Tales* begins with Volume 1, Issue No. 18 due to a series of title changes. *Fat and Slat* became *Gunfighter* which then shifted to

Haunt of Fear with Volume 1, Issue No. 15. *Haunt of Fear* then changed to *Two-Fisted Tales* with #18. *Haunt of Fear* will eventually be revived as a separate title.

3. See also Martin Barker, *A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign* (London: Pluto Press 1984).

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See also "Ross Cochran Presents The Complete E-C Library." This collection includes 13 sets of the titles in E-C's New Trend and New Direction comic books. The individual issues of the comics are faithfully introduced and repackaged with interviews and commentary. Included in the collection are the complete collections of Weird Science, *Weird Fantasy, Weird Science Fantasy, Crime Suspenstories, Shock Suspenstories, Two-Fisted Tales, Frontline Combat, Tales of the Crypt, The Haunt of Fear, The Vault of Horror,* Special Collection (*Piracy, Valor, Extra!, Aces High, Impact, M.D., Psychoanalysis, Panic*) and *Mad.*

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COMMENTARY
by Thomas G. Bowie, Jr.

DERELICTION OF DUTY OR THE WRONG WAR?
Learning the Lessons of Vietnam

❦

McMaster, H. R. *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam.* New York: HarperCollins, 1997. 446 pages. $27.50.

Record, Jeffrey. *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 217 pages. $27.95.

❦

It has been said that the war in Vietnam was so fully photographed that it was the one war we learned the truth about. Which truth did we learn, and who learned it?" (171). The female professor and narrator in Stephanie Vaughn's "Kid MacArthur" asks these questions as she tries to come to grips with the gift of a human ear that a Vietnam veteran in her class has just handed her, and as she tries to understand the psychological undoing of her carefree brother, Kid MacArthur, after he returns from the Vietnam War. This fictional character's questions are questions we continue to confront thirty years distant from a tragic war in a far-off land, one waged with dubious honor for often suspect purposes, questions dealing with the aftermath of conflict, with the very human remains of what must always be a dehumanizing process. And they are questions that each of the stories, like "Kid MacArthur," in Donald Anderson's anthology of post-Vietnam fiction, *Aftermath*, seeks to answer in its own way. Introducing this volume of fourteen stories, Anderson remarks that

> these stories are more complex than I have described them. They are about memory and love and resentment and loss and disbelief and defiance and humiliation and earnestness and blame and shame and blood and sacrifice and courage and sorrow. These are stories that, even if set in a past, seem to be written in an urgent and immortal present. Such stories are about what we must live with after any fought war, soldier or no. They identify us, these stories. *They are about us.* (xxxi)

Such stories are about us because we *are* a generation still struggling to reconcile itself with Vietnam, still examining key questions that illuminate our long-ago objectives and strategies—or lack thereof—and still troubled by the long shadow of Vietnam in every conflict we engage in overseas, from Somalia to Kosovo. Such stories are also about competing interpretations of the war—about the "blame and shame and courage and sacrifice"—about the complex meld of reactions that somehow comes to represent "the truth" we learned about Vietnam, both as individuals and as a society. To understand that senior leaders, both military and civilian, might have been derelict in their duty to our country, or that Vietnam may have well been the "wrong war," does not dishonor the ultimate sacrifice made by the 58,000 names on a black granite wall in Washington D.C. Bearing witness to Vietnam will necessarily include assessments of blame and shame, as well as courage and sacrifice: the key is to recognize the difference. Indeed, to fail to understand the full implications of our involvement there, to ignore the lessons we must learn, to improperly assess the limits of military power in the future, would dishonor any death already considered to be in vain. For the Vietnam War, its stories and its history, is finally about us, the "survivors," as well.

It's understanding the complex history surrounding our plunge into Vietnam that H. R. McMaster devotes himself to in *Dereliction of Duty*. Although the title permits little doubt about McMaster's conclusions concerning the senior leaders who took us into Vietnam, he says early that

> assessing blame for the disaster in Vietnam, however, is beside the point. Much more important is to determine how and why key decisions were made, decisions that involved the United States in a war that it could not win at a politically acceptable level of commitment. (xi)

We'll return to McMaster's notion of level of commitment, but first let's pause to consider "who" learned the truth behind the how and why of key decisions that forced us into the war.

H. R. McMaster is a 1984 graduate of the Military Academy at West Point, New York. He's a decorated warrior from the Gulf War, and a careful student of American history, holding an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Major McMaster taught history at West Point from 1994-96, and recently completed the Army Command and General Staff College at Leavenworth, Kansas. A probing student and an accomplished soldier, McMaster lays siege to an overwhelming number of primary documents in his quest for the truth behind "the lies that led to Vietnam." His research is thorough and commendable. Ranging from manuscript collections at the Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston to the Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, from the Joint History Office in the Pentagon to national archives around the country, McMaster has clearly done his homework for this text. Methodically researched, carefully collated, sincerely pursued ("I thought that to better prepare myself to lead soldiers in combat it was important to learn from the experiences of others," ix), he thoroughly charts the terrain of the complex national security process that led our nation into Vietnam. From the outset, McMaster is clear about his purpose:

> I wondered how and why Vietnam had become an American war— a war in which the men fought and died without a clear idea of how their actions and sacrifices were contributing to an end of the conflict. (x)

Well beyond the rhetoric of the Nixon catch-phrase, "peace with honor," McMaster desperately seeks to reclaim honor for the

thousands of soldiers who sacrificed so much in Vietnam. Yet McMaster also knows that it's not that simple, that the quest for honor is caught up in notions of duty and country as well, that civil-military interactions will govern the terms of such honor, such sacrifice. In the Epilogue, for example, he cites approvingly a course on American civil-military relations taught at West Point as a reminder that the Chiefs "must be careful not to undermine their credibility by crossing the line between advice and advocacy" (331). And McMaster's book is a cautionary tale about what happens when this line is crossed, this credibility undermined, this lesson in civil-military relations— that even cadets at West Point presumably understand— is misunderstood or ignored.

Because McMaster meticulously charts this erosion of credibility through his extensive research, his book has gained high praise from national reviewers. And such praise is well deserved. As he confesses in the Preface, his timing was just right:

> Recently declassified documents, newly opened manuscript collections, and the release of the official history of the JCS during the Vietnam War shed new light on the subject. I gained access to thousands of documents that had previously been unavailable to researchers and historians. (x)

Piecing together the evidence, McMaster painstakingly maps the national security decision-making process from 1963, when Johnson becomes president, until 1965 when the US *Americanizes* the war and commits ground troops to what proves to be a hopeless cause. Although little in McMaster's text will surprise students of the conflict, the overwhelming pattern of deceit and duplicity that leads to our commitment is depressing nonetheless.

Fully aware of "the question of responsibility," and perhaps personally outraged by the blame and shame attendant to such responsibility, McMaster doggedly turns his focus "to determine how and why key decisions were made" (xi). Tellingly, the quest for how and why frequently leads McMaster back to issues of shame and blame, particularly as he assesses political acceptability and the key players who determined the parameters

of acceptability. The villains in this story are clear, and no surprise: a deceitful President Johnson, more consumed with domestic programs and his Great Society than lives lost in Southeast Asia; a slippery Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, whose *In Retrospect* notwithstanding, still must shoulder a huge burden for the senseless loss of over 58,000 American lives and some three million Vietnamese; the conniving and duplicitous Maxwell Taylor, cast successively as presidential military advisor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and finally as Ambassador to South Vietnam, yet never a trustworthy counselor in any of these positions. Of course, a number of lesser villains emerge as well, Bundy, MacNaughton, all of the Joint Chiefs, and so on.

In the end, it's a sordid tale, full of dismaying details, with a tragic plot. The following passages catch the flavor of McMaster's presentation:

> McNamara was persuasive. . . . McNamara's strategy of graduated pressure seemed not only to reconcile the administration's need to intervene against Communist insurgents with its need to minimize the risk of escalation, but it also reconciled Johnson's desire to get elected with his need to address the difficult situation in South Vietnam. (78)

Issues of duty or honor seldom seem to concern key decision-makers such as McNamara, and other highly placed advisors—such as the Joint Chiefs—merely acquiesce in the politically motivated recommendations. During the congressional hearings following the Gulf of Tonkin incident (6 August 1964), the pattern is the same.

> Although Wheeler [Chairman of the JCS] did not make any false statements to the senators or congressmen, by not revealing the truth he showed the president that he would go along with his and McNamara's attempts to mislead Congress and the American people. (135)

McMaster is clearly appalled by Wheeler's dishonorable conduct, barely restraining his contempt in passages such at this: "Wheeler,

dressed in his uniform, the light from the Capitol's crystal chandeliers reflecting off his brass insignia, lent indispensable credibility to his defense secretary's remarks" (135). In October of 1964, George Ball warns the president about the flaws in his strategy, cautioning that "once on the tiger's back, we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount" (qtd in McMaster, 167). McMaster laments that "although the JCS held views consistent with those of Ball, they, too, failed to press their case for reexamination. Their silence helped to impel the very strategic concept they opposed" (167). Within the growing "quicksand of lies," McMaster painfully exposes the way the JCS continued to endorse plans they knew to be misguided or flawed militarily, with the tenuous hope that some day Johnson would unleash the military might they consistently recommended he use. Describing Johnson and the JCS as "the coach and his team," McMaster examines how the US plunged into a war without direction, with shifting strategies and objectives, and with little or no hope of winning.

Yet in charging the "five silent men," the JCS "who made possible [Johnson's] deceit and manipulation of Congress and the American people" with dereliction of duty, McMaster's fine analysis makes what seems to be a fatal assumption. In short, he assumes that the JCS indeed had reasonable counsel to offer the president concerning the military conduct of the war and that Johnson and McNamara were denied such counsel. Perhaps, but the jury is still out on such a conclusion. McMaster summarizes the civilian position in this way: "based on the assumption that carefully controlled and sharply limited military actions were reversible, and therefore could be carried out at minimal risk and cost, graduated pressure allowed McNamara and Johnson to avoid confronting many of the possible consequences of military action" (326). McMaster's careful analysis argues that the JCS "were unable to articulate effectively either their objections or alternatives" because of interservice rivalry and an undaunted belief that more might would make right:

> They hoped that graduated pressure would evolve over time into a fundamentally different strategy, more in keeping with their belief in the necessity of

> greater force and its more resolute application. (328)

And as McMaster leaves his book disgusted with the JCS' lack of honor, their failure to consider country above parochial service views, and their collective dereliction of duty, he too seems to believe that greater force and more resolute application might have been the answer. Indeed the closing lines of his text seem to make this case:

> The war in Vietnam was not lost in the field, nor was it lost on the front pages of the *New York Times* or on the college campuses. It was lost in Washington, D.C., even before Americans assumed sole responsibility for the fighting in 1965 and before they realized the country was at war. (333)

Perhaps it is only natural for a decorated combat commander like McMaster to believe in a military solution to the complex tangle of Vietnam, and perhaps his lingering hope that the generals charged with tendering military advice to the president were indeed offering valid alternatives is understandable. But what if the JCS had done their duty according to McMaster's light, only to discover that more might did not make right, that military force was never a viable alternative after 1963, or 1964, or even 1965? What if the United States had entered the "wrong war" unknowingly and military officers of great character—full of duty, honor, country—had led us instead, what then?

Once again we must ask, what truth did we learn and who learned it? For although McMaster is surely right to deplore the lack of character he so convincingly prosecutes in *Dereliction of Duty*, we must be careful to understand the legitimate options available to key advisors, be they civilian or military. In 1996, Robert McNamara himself suggests "it is clear our nation has neither fully understood nor fully come to terms with Vietnam. The wounds remain unhealed and the lessons unlearned" (Preface to Vintage Edition of *In Retrospect*, 1996). Who then will teach us these lessons, who then will help heal our wounds? McNamara volunteers to teach us, but one must be wary of the tutelage of a public figure so calculatingly deceitful and so consistently

wrong during his tenure as Secretary of Defense. In his mature, thoughtful, and wide-ranging consideration of the conflict— *The Wrong War*— Jeffrey Record makes his own offer, an offer students of the war, both military and civilian, need to consider seriously.

Indeed McMaster himself calls Record's book "a rare blend of relevant personal experience and impeccable scholarship. *The Wrong War* offers trenchant, well-balanced, and compelling analysis of the most critical issues surrounding the war in Vietnam" (dust jacket). Yet one wonders if he understands how Record's impressive analysis undercuts one of his own basic assumptions. But Record is out for much bigger game than McMaster, apportioning blame liberally— and, I believe, correctly. Consider this:

> Most of the blame was directed, and continues to be directed, at civilian policy-makers, the so-called "best and brightest," who made the key decisions that propelled the United States into Vietnam and set the parameters of U.S. military power's application. The military, in contrast, has more often than not been portrayed as the innocent victim of not only misguided, even malevolent, White House and Defense Department civilians, but also a hostile media and perfidious antiwar movement. (viii)

Record is out to set these misguided impressions straight. His method is heuristic, well suited to the complex issues under investigation. And he brings the sure hand of a career defense analyst (one who served as a legislative assistant to both Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Lloyd Bentsen, as a professional staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, at the Brookings and Hudson Institutes, and as a State Department civilian-military advisor in the lower Mekong Delta) to the task.

Yet Record does more than ask tough— and insightful— questions. Never one to mince words, he renders judgments that are as well reasoned as they are scathing. For example, one critic's views about the nobility of our enterprise in Vietnam are dismissed with "unfortunately, nobility of purpose does not redeem an otherwise disastrous enterprise" (ix). Later, reviewing

Nixon's claim that the US was never beaten in Vietnam, Record is equally clear:

> I reject this judgment. . . . The fact remains that the United States failed to avert a communist takeover of Vietnam, and that it suffered defeat's attendant humiliation, loss of prestige, and domestic recrimination. The real questions are why the United States lost in Vietnam, who was responsible, and whether defeat was avoidable. (xii)

Record addresses these questions in the next 200 pages of lean, lucid prose.

Perhaps one of the chief virtues of this compelling text is its ability to frame clearly the central questions surrounding our involvement in Vietnam. On the issue of winning:

> The war may indeed have been winnable; it was certainly within U.S. capacity to destroy the state of North Vietnam and most of its people. The real issue is whether it was winnable at an acceptable moral, material, and strategic cost. (xv)

Whether you accept Record's conclusions or not, one leaves this hard-hitting text wishing he had been advising key civilian leaders in the White House or Department of Defense rather than slogging through rice paddies during Vietnam. Virtually no one is spared Record's incisive probing:

> On the matter of apportioning responsibility for defeat, I contend that, whereas the primary responsibility for the U.S. share of the war's outcome clearly rests with civilian decision-making authorities—which were, after all, Constitutionally and politically responsible—the military's accountability was significant and cannot and should not be overlooked. (xviii)

And if this weren't clear enough,

> the interests of neither history nor the future formulation and implementation of foreign policy are promoted by a portrayal of the military as innocent and hapless victims of civilian perfidy. (xix)

Blame and shame enough for all, Record intelligently orchestrates the inquiry necessary to assess appropriate responsibility.

Moving astutely and rapidly through a daunting array of evidence, Record examines the reasons why the US intervened in Vietnam, the relative fighting strength of all participants, the war in the South, then in the North, the "hollow client" we chose to support in South Vietnam, the divisive war waged on the Potomac in the Pentagon, and finally the issue of how the war was lost. Pithy prose alternating with persuasive evidence gives Record's argument force and direction, while his internal summaries cogently recap large and complex issues. Listen to his summary of the policymakers' misunderstanding of each side's fighting stamina:

> by failing to understand the asymmetry of commitment between the United States and the Vietnamese communists, they paved the way for committing the most egregious error a country going to war can make: underestimating the adversary's capacity to prevail while overestimating one's own. (28)

Or on the military's perception that more destruction would guarantee success: "the military was no less confident in its abilities. If anything, it suffered from the disease of victory, that hubris bred by repeated success on the battlefield" (48). Or this telling comment on the nature of the war:

> insistence throughout the struggle in Indochina that the war was simply a case of transnational conventional military aggression did not make it so, though it certainly comforted those who wished to wage a conventional war. (61)

Throughout his text, Record goes to the heart of the matter, summarizes competing views, then leads the witness to see the problem with new eyes.

Although Record's book presents little new evidence on these compelling issues, his thoughtful presentation of the problems and insightful analysis of them brings many of the popular myths about the Vietnam War under harsh scrutiny—scrutiny long overdue. Exposing the insidious lapse McMaster makes into the myth that more military power would have been decisive is but one example of the service Record provides through *The Wrong War*. But merely exposing prevalent myths isn't enough for Record, he also refuses to allow us to supplant common myths with unproven alternatives. His consideration of potential strategies for the war in the South is illuminating:

> That the MACV wrongly chose attrition does not make right the counterinsurgency alternative, although that alternative was certainly more relevant than attrition to the predominantly insurgent character of the war until the Tet Offensive. If adoption of attrition against communist military forces was boneheaded, a pacification-first strategy vis-à-vis South Vietnam's peasantry was, if more sensible, ultimately irrelevant. (96)

Or the notion that enough military pressure in North Vietnam would achieve victory once we reached their breaking point:

> If Hanoi did indeed have a political "breaking point" during the Vietnam War, it was probably reachable only through an invasion of the country, or perhaps a bombing campaign aimed at the destruction of North Vietnam's agriculture or the North Vietnamese people themselves. Neither of these options, however, could pass the tests of political and moral acceptability. (115)

In light of such compelling evidence, and the systematic inquiry of potential alternatives, one leaves Record's exceptionally

readable book convinced with him that indeed the United States chose the wrong war. In short,

> there is simply no convincing evidence that an earlier and less restrained American use of force in Indochina, absent the subsequent emergence of a politically and militarily viable South Vietnam, could or would have dissuaded or blocked Hanoi from successfully pursuing its goal of reunifying Vietnam under communist auspices. (183)

His argument is more nuanced and complex than I have outlined here, and in its fuller form even more compelling.

Given the long shadow of Vietnam, and the truths we supposedly learned from our devastating experience there, the time is right for compelling interpretations of our actions during and after the war. The aftermath of any war, but especially a war that seems to have been waged "at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy," by national figures who lacked a true sense of duty or honor, is bound to be complicated, especially for those who sacrificed greatly during it. The aftermath of Vietnam, in our stories and histories, is full of "resentment and loss and disbelief and humiliation and blame and shame." But it is also characterized by "memory and love and earnestness and courage and sorrow." As individuals, and as a nation, we must recognize its conflicted nature, and we must embrace the conflicts. Both H. R. McMaster and Jeffrey Record, each in his own way, do so. As we continue to examine what truths we learned from Vietnam and who learned them, we are well served by their efforts. ❦

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JON VOLKMER

TELLING THE "TRUTH" ABOUT VIETNAM

Episteme and Narrative Structure in *The Green Berets* and *The Things They Carried*

Robin Moore's *The Green Berets*, published in 1965, is one of the earliest novels of the Vietnam conflict. Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990), is one of the more recent. Nevertheless, there are many similarities: both are novels-in-short-stories; both focus on American soldiers; both employ mainly jungle settings; and both feature a first-person narrator who is both one-of-the-guys AND separated from them by the status of being a writer. Moreover, each book makes an explicit claim that it tells the "truth" about the Vietnam conflict, a truth which each claims is only accessible through a fictive presentation of action and events.

My purpose is to interrogate the claims to ownership of "truth" in these two novels, and discuss how presumptions about the nature of "truth" affect the fictive shaping of the novel. By this comparison, I hope to show how these two novels form what might be called a set of bookends of the Vietnam era, with Moore's work reflecting the simplicity and naïveté of a country embarking on war, and O'Brien's work living as testament to the complexity and hard-won, although limited, knowledge from the perspective granted by a quarter of a century.

I started with some similarities that make these books ripe for comparison. The rest of my essay is devoted to their differences. A look at the titles reveals much. The synecdoche of *The Green Berets* (GB) is not accidental. Throughout the book, Moore's characters are described solely in terms of their qualifications as fighting men. Hence,

> Sven Kornie was the ideal Special Forces officer. Special Forces was his life; fighting, especially unorthodox warfare, was what he lived for. He had no career to sacrifice; he had no desire to rise from operational to supervisory levels. And not the least of his assets, he was unmarried and had no attachments to anyone or anything in the world beyond Special Forces. (23)

While man and mission are submerged into the same "truth" in GB, the title of *The Things They Carried* (TTC) signals the separation of man from mission. The war, and all its paraphernalia, are the unhappy load carried on the back of the foot soldiers. The first and eponymous chapter lists pages and pages of things that soldiers carried in the war, listings which are used to highlight the soldiers' individualities as much as their commonalities:

> Henry Dobbins, who was a big man, carried extra rations; he was especially fond of canned peaches in heavy syrup over pound cake. Dave Jensen, who practiced field hygiene, carried a toothbrush, dental floss, and several hotel-sized bars of soap he'd stolen on R&R in Sydney, Australia. Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried tranquilizers until he was shot in the head outside the village of Than Khe in mid-April. (4)

Later in the chapter, the list of "things they carried" is enlarged to include the abstract and metaphysical. "They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing" (20). There is one thing they do not carry:

> They had no sense of strategy or mission. They searched the villages without knowing what to look for, not caring, kicking over jars of rice, frisking children and old men, blowing tunnels, sometimes setting fires and sometimes not. (15)

O'Brien pays little attention to his characters as soldiers. As foreshadowed by the title, O'Brien's truth is always individual; it lies in the idiosyncrasies of individuals. Robin Moore, as I will show, believes in a common and objective Truth; his emphasis is on the soldierly qualities that his characters share, as idealized and symbolized by their head gear.

"*The Green Berets* is a book of truth." Thus Moore begins his introduction. He explains that while he had originally planned a nonfiction work, two things convinced him that he should employ a fictional presentation. The first is a kind of names-changed-to-protect-the-guilty routine. "Time and again, I promised harried and heroic Special Forces men that their confidences were 'off the record' " (2).

Moore's other reason is more ambitious. He praises other reporters for giving "detailed incidents," but his idea, he says, is to give "the broad overall picture of how Special Forces men operate, so each story basically is representative of a different facet of Special Forces action in wars like the one in Vietnam" (1).

Notice that Moore claims veracity for his portrayal not only of the Vietnam engagement, but of all wars like it. How does he presume to so generalize? Through Cold War Manichaeism, of course. The presumptive "truth" that underlies GB is the vision of the world as a giant struggle between Good (freedom, democracy, America), and Evil (tyranny, Communism, the Soviet Union). Moore is quite happy to employ the metaphor of an encircled jungle outpost for the state of the world, not only in his own time, but seemingly for all time:

> In essence, these stories will be true of the political problems and combat situations Special Forces men are facing in 1965, or for that matter 1975, wherever Americans must fight to keep the perimeter of the free world from shrinking further. (13)

The crucial failure of the book (and, it might be argued, of America's early involvement in the Vietnam), is a refusal to see or acknowledge how this Manichaean episteme influences the perception and construction of narrative events. Robin Moore was in Vietnam. He claims much firsthand experience of the war,

including, presumably, all the ambiguity that accompanies such experience. And yet, when that experience is translated into what the author promises is a higher fictive "truth," the reader finds it first suspiciously, and sometimes laughably, unambiguous.

In Moore's book, shades of gray are strained out in favor of broad swatches of black and white. The Special Forces men are uniformly lionized for their courage, strength, and intelligence, while the North Vietnamese are demonized as vicious and fanatical Communists. The South Vietnamese allies are treated with suspicion and contempt. These sentiments are broadened still further in lines like: " 'Now we get the Oriental mind at work,' " Stitch said wearily to the Americans in the room. " 'If we stay here twenty years we won't change them, and God save us from getting like them' " (46-7).

While Asians are routinely described in phrases such as "the sinister little brown bandit" (36), the ethnic ideal for the Special Forces men is chillingly Aryan. Talking about "the ideal Special Forces officer," the narrator states with pride that Sven Kornie, "joined the German Army and miraculously survived two years of fighting the Russians on the eastern front" (22). Thus, in the strict dualism of the Cold War, the character's possible Nazi past is not only pardonable but praiseworthy, because he was fighting Communists. Kornie's men—given the names Borst, Schmelzer, Stitch, Bergholtz—seem to have a lot in common with their commander, a fact not lost on the narrator: "He introduced me to Sergeant Bergholtz, and I sensed my guess was correct that a Germanic-Viking crew had indeed been transported intact to the Vietnam-Cambodia border" (25).

Moore's plots are as predictable as his characters. In each of the nine stories, the heroic Green Berets are beset by overwhelming odds, or treachery, or the restrictions imposed by short-sighted career army officers who don't understand the dictates of "unconventional" war. The linear narratives rise to dramatic climaxes that usually take the form of a battle where a smashing victory is snatched from the jaws of near certain defeat.

In one story Moore even employs his own version of a Fisher King myth. "Home to Nanette" has the Green Beret hero, Arklin, sent to singlehandedly transform a peaceful Meo village "into an orderly paramilitary operation" (177). The villagers treat Arklin as a demigod, presenting him the choicest

young virgins. He at first resists this heathen practice, but finally "bowed to the inevitable" (173) and accepts a beautiful fifteen-year-old girl "much lighter colored than the others, smaller breasted, and more delicately boned" (172). (She turns out, of course, to be half-French, conveniently blending a Western epitome of sensuality with the native allure.) Arklin, a married man, stoically refrains from sex with the willing native. However, he finds the Meos surly and uncooperative because of this rejection. So Arklin, a true Green Beret, must do whatever it takes to fulfill his mission. As Moore tells it:

> Out of desperation born of his inability to circumvent his morals and nearly inflexible sense of responsibility, Arklin drank three gourds of Meo liquor. The alcohol produced the release and Arklin consummated his 'marriage' to Nanette. Once breakthrough had been effected, Arklin so thoroughly pleased and satisfied his young bride that the Meos, seeing her the next day, knew at once that the American was finally one of them . . . .
>
> Tasks were accomplished much more quickly now. The weapons room was finished. . . . Sandbags were filled and molded into bunkers, and on the firing range the Montagnards worked hard to improve their marksmanship. (175-6)

Thus the erect penis of the Green Beret restores vitality to the stagnant community. Besides the poorly concealed prurience, there is also the irony, apparently lost on Moore, that the "fertility" his Fisher King instills portends unmitigated catastrophe for the village. By the end of the story most of the Meos are dead, the village is on the brink of being overrun, and the survivors must be evacuated by airplane. But in the book's perspective, the operation is a success because, in Arklin's words, "They [the Meos] inflicted heavy damage on the Communist buildup" (220).

Robin Moore's fictional imperative, as it turns out, is to strain out the moral ambiguity of war, as well as the tactical ambiguity of jungle warfare, in favor of his vision of Morality (Green Berets are always the good guys), and Justice (they always win). This formula of rendering the Vietnam war as a series of

gritty but simplistic action-adventure narratives probably accounts both for the novel's pop culture presence[1], and for its dismissive treatment by scholars of Vietnam war literature.[2]

Robin Moore attempts to use the fictive constructs to present the truth about Vietnam. As I have tried to show, Moore betrays, and is betrayed by, those selfsame constructs. *The Green Berets* is, at best, a part of what Neil Sheehan calls the "Bright Shining Lie" of Vietnam. At worst, it is gruesome comedy, a testament to the naïveté, self-delusion and arrogance that launched the United States into its Vietnam nightmare.

As GB demonstrates, while the traditional plot structure— rising action, climax, denouement— is well suited for war literature, it is not politically neutral. By imposing order and coherence on events, the plot invests them with significance. Whether the plot culminates in triumph or tragedy, the plot tends to bless its subject with meaning, even glamor.

In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien makes the problem of locating truth the central theme. Instead of promising the truth, O'Brien spends most of his time hacking away at the very idea of "truth" when it comes to war. The term is too closely aligned with "meaning," "coherence," and "significance" for his liking. O'Brien's strategy, throughout the book, is to hook the reader into an engaging story, then radically disrupt the narrative. O'Brien wants to pull the rug out from under the reader, explode the complacencies, keep the reader on edge and guessing. This state of never coming to conclusions, never being allowed to settle into a truth, paradoxically provides a "truer" sense of the experience of Vietnam than a consistent narrative could do. Responding to this point in a letter to me, O'Brien writes, "Thing is, I *do* state conclusions. Many, many conclusions. But as I say at one point, 'the truths are contradictory.' They swirl. There are varieties of truth, angles on truth, reports of truth, etc." He continues:

> In general, I guess, I'm saying that "truth" does not seem to be . . . something we can touch and eat for breakfast. Take a look at the Rat Kiley stuff about story and believability and truth in "Sweetheart"; take a look, too, at the fat bird colonel thing in "How to Tell a True War Story": how we *hear*, what

> we *bring* to a report of truth (say a story being told) determines in part our judgments about "truthfulness." (How can a thing *be* true if we don't *believe* it's true? No way, unless you accept the notion of noumenon.) The fat bird colonel has wax in his ears, wrong frequency—i.e. military rank and rear-echelon-ness and officerlike values add up to the inability to hear or listen to or believe what those six guys experienced up in the mountains. For the colonel, that cocktail party in the fog *cannot* be true—not literally, not metaphorically. Same-same with Rat's "Sweetheart" story: nobody believes him because they've come to the story with certain values and conventions about women and combat. Rat explicitly disputes these conventions, yet doesn't convince his buddies—the guys never do believe him, though he claims to have witnessed certain events with his own two eyes. (August 1993)

As illustrated in this quote, O'Brien brings an ingenious arsenal of weapons for disrupting reader expectations and complacencies. His narration is recursive rather than linear. He happily contradicts himself.

A strategy which O'Brien uses over and over again is the invitation to and the denial of the authorial fallacy. This begins even before the reader gets to the first story, and discovers that the narrator's name is "Tim O'Brien." The front matter of the book contains the routine disclaimer that, "all the incidents, names, and characters are imaginary." But a page later, the author "lovingly" dedicates the book "to the men of Alpha Company, and in particular to Jimmy Cross, Norman Bowker, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Henry Dobbins, and Kiowa"—that is, to those selfsame names and characters we have just been assured are imaginary.

In many places the narrative claims to be dropping the pretense of fiction in order to tell the reader what "really" happened, only to snap the fictive trap. Nowhere is the reader more thoroughly indicted than at the end of the chapter called "How to Tell a True War Story." Here the narration of an

episode in the setting of Viet Nam makes one of its frequent meta-narrational jumps into a more familiar time and place, only this time the reader is given an actual stand-in:

> Now and then, when I tell this story, someone will come up to me afterward and say she liked it. It's always a woman. Usually it's an older woman of kindly temperament and humane politics. She'll explain that as a rule she hates war stories; she can't understand why people want to wallow in all the blood and gore. But this one she liked. The poor baby buffalo, it made her sad. Sometimes, even, there are little tears. What I should do, she'll say, is put it all behind me.
>
> I won't say it but I'll think it.
>
> I'll picture Rat Kiley's face, his grief, and I'll think, *You dumb cooze.* (90)

The meta-narrator's voice continues in this indignant tone, damning the kindly woman (and by extension, all readers) for accepting the writer's earlier portrait of a moving moment in a horrible war. Now he insists, "Beginning to end, . . . it's all made up. Every goddamn detail—the mountains and the river and especially that poor dumb baby buffalo. None of it happened. *None* of it" (91).

And then the O'Brienesque quick reversal: "And even if it did happen, it didn't happen in the mountains, it happened in this little village on the Batangan Peninsula, and it was raining like crazy" (91).

At this point, the poor woman might be forgiven if her temperament became less kindly and she demanded of the author, *What in the hell do you want from me?* It seems that both writer and reader are caught in a double bind. As any Vietnam vet will tell you, you can't know what it was like unless you were there. But O'Brien adds that you can't know what it was like even if you were there, and even when a writer succeeds in touching the reader's emotions, there is still the ever present danger of melodrama and sentimentality. In this section, more than anywhere else in the book, the writer's frustration is evident.

In "How to Tell a True War Story," O'Brien most directly attacks the romantic treatment of war. Here's the plot: a soldier is killed; his friend writes a long letter to the dead man's sister; she never writes back. Interwoven with the fragments of this narrative are didactic pronouncements on the nature of a "true" war story. Among them:

> A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. (76)

O'Brien is, as usual, talking only indirectly about war itself; his contempt is reserved for the *stories* of war.

Throughout TTC, one finds a preoccupation with epistemology, so that it turns out to be as much a book about a man trying to write a book as it is a book about the war. O'Brien never forgets, or lets the reader forget, that no reader ever has direct experience; the "experience" we read is always mediated through the memory and imagination of the writer, which complicates the search for truth:

> In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed. (78)

The metaphors weave in and out. In an earlier chapter, "Spin," O'Brien compares the process to a traffic circle:

> You take your material where you find it, which is in your life, at the intersection of past and present. The memory-traffic feeds into a rotary up in your head, where it goes in circles for a while, then

> pretty soon imagination flows in and the traffic merges and shoots off down a thousand different streets. As a writer, all you can do is pick a street and go for the ride, putting things down as they come. (38)

In "How to Tell . . ." he employs the metaphor of the weave of cloth:

> In a true war story, if there's a moral at all, it's like the thread that makes the cloth. You can't tease it out. You can't extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning. And in the end, really, there's nothing much to say about a true war story except maybe, "Oh."
>
> True war stories do not generalize. They do not indulge in abstraction or analysis. (84)

After all the generalization and abstraction, the reader must do a double take at that last line. What then, is O'Brien saying about Truth? Where is the locus of reality? I believe O'Brien's book points to a complicated and dynamic version of reality: it can never exist in the details, for details are whimsical and accidental. It can never exist in generalizations, for they are prey to politics and romanticism. And yet, those are the only two choices, the only constructs at hand, so they must be used. But the undercutting of the authority of either one is just as important as its authoritative delivery, and real truth exists, if at all, in glimmers and glimpses, in an unstable ethereal place that occurs just above the rabble of raw detail and below the Olympian realm of generalization and abstraction. There is never a conclusion, there is only endless process: "You can tell a true war story if you just keep on telling it" (91).

In comparing Moore to O'Brien, it is instructive to look at the one story in TTC in which the Green Berets play a prominent role. "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" is one of the longest pieces in O'Brien's book, and the one that most resembles a typical "war story." The plot concerns a medic who ingeniously contrives to bring his girlfriend all the way from the United States to the Vietnamese jungle, just to be with him. The

girlfriend is happy with him for a while, but then becomes fascinated with Vietnam, with the war, and with the Green Berets who are encamped on the other side of the outpost. Eventually the boyfriend who brought her loses her to the Green Berets. She goes on their ambushes, and goes further, leaving even them in the end, to become a jungle creature, a preying cat almost, that spooks the Green Berets themselves.

O'Brien's book is about grunts, common fighting men who for the most part didn't choose or want to be in Viet Nam, not about elite Green Berets, and it's curious to see how O'Brien presents them in his book as something ghostly, otherworldly. Curiously, the enemy is often referred to in the same terms of ghosts and mystery and otherworldliness. In "Sweetheart," we come the closest to Moore's view: the Greenies, as O'Brien calls them, have adopted the ways of the enemy, and are engaging the enemy in ways that the regular grunts don't know and don't care to know. O'Brien's common soldiers are almost as wary of the Greenies as they are of the enemy. Moore would probably be comfortable with this view.

But O'Brien undercuts this credibility by making "Sweetheart" more a story about storytelling than a paean to the Green Berets. The story of the girl who goes native is not presented straight out; the book's first-person narrator gets it from another character, Rat Kiley, who is branded unreliable— an habitual liar and gross exaggerator. Other characters respond to the story as Rat Kiley tells it, providing a metafictional commentary about the story as story, what stories accomplish, and the rules that stories must follow. For example, at the point where Rat Kiley tells the others that the girl has disappeared, he pauses to gauge the audience response:

> When he first told the story, Rat stopped there and looked at Mitchell Sanders for a time.
>
> "So what's your vote? Where was she?"
>
> "The Greenies," Sanders said.
>
> "Yeah?"
>
> Sanders smiled. "No other option. That stuff about the Special Forces— how they used the place as a base of operations, how they'd glide in and

out—all that had to be there for a *reason*. That's how stories work, man."

Rat thought about it, then shrugged.

"All right, sure, the Greenies. . . ." (112)

In this interchange, we see an example of the complicated way that O'Brien sees story and reality working together. Rat has previously sworn again and again this is a true story he's telling, although the narrator has told us not to trust Rat. In his response to Sanders, it is almost as if Rat is making it up, agreeing with Sanders that the facts of the story dictate that the girl ran off with the Green Berets, and so he will agree to that and continue the story with that as a "fact" even if it hadn't occurred to him before. The way O'Brien italicizes the word "reason," it's clear he has Sanders using the word in the sense of "rule," as in the rules of storytelling.

Near the story's conclusion, Rat shrugs and says he doesn't know whatever became of the girl. This infuriates Mitchell Sanders, whom O'Brien uses throughout as spokesman for the rules or obligations of storytelling. These obligations are not only not arbitrary, but alleged to be connected to something essential, to "human nature" itself:

"You can't do that."

"Do what?"

"Jesus Christ, it's against the *rules*," Sanders said. "Against human *nature*. This elaborate story, you can't say, "Hey, by the way, I don't know the *ending*. I mean, you got certain obligations." (122)

Once again, O'Brien is using italics to link the most important parts, "rules . . . nature . . . ending," as if there is some organic, inviolable structure to storytelling.

Rat fulfills his obligation, but of course O'Brien undercuts it with Rat's disclaimer that he doesn't know the conclusion of the story from his own experience, but "I heard it secondhand. Thirdhand, actually" (124). He then goes ahead and gives the story a most romantic, sensational, and unbelievable ending:

> If you believed the Greenies, Rat said, Mary Anne was still out there in the dark. Odd movements, odd shapes. . . . She had crossed to the other side. She was part of the land. She was wearing her culottes, her pink sweater, and a necklace of human tongues. She was dangerous. She was ready for the kill. (125)

After reading O'Brien's "Sweetheart," one can't help but think of Moore's earnest narrator as a less self-aware Rat Kiley. The reader is ever more cognizant of Moore's manipulation of details in slavish adherence to conventional rules of narrative structure. Each of Moore's stories rises to such a clear climax, conclusion and closure, with such clear good guys and bad guys, that the reader cannot help disbelieving him, because the shaping hand of the author is too much in evidence making everything come out right for the sake of story every time. In "Sweetheart," O'Brien makes the machinations of storytelling itself the central aspect of the story.

Despite the superficial similarities, *The Green Berets* and *The Things They Carried* are novels that come not only from opposite chronological positions, but from opposite ends of the war's epistemological spectrum as well. Robin Moore claims to possess Truth at the cosmic level (Good vs Evil), and at the empirical level. However, he imposes fictive constructs, characterization and plot, with such programmatic rigidity that he violates a reader's common sense apprehension of the ambiguities and chaos of real life, and ends up being disbelieved despite all his claims.

While Moore tries (and fails), to make sense out of the chaos of the Vietnam conflict, O'Brien promises (and succeeds), to portray the war as a cacophony of competing truths, but not one that reduces itself to chaos or meaninglessness. O'Brien writes, "Complication isn't chaos. I was after *clarity*, of a sort" (letter to the author, August 1993). While Moore tries to bring the suspense and satisfaction of traditional plot structure to strengthen his claim on the reader, O'Brien attacks reader expectations. He distrusts any large claim of truth. He distrusts any simple explanations or answers. He even distrusts his own memory.

And yet, for all his disclaimers and disruptions, O'Brien's episteme is not nihilistic. He does believe in truth, but in his conception it's a slippery thing, dynamic, tentative, tenuous, transforming itself into untruth as soon as one gets complacent with it. Whenever he explicitly tells the reader that something is "true," the reader learns to expect that truth to be contradicted or undercut somewhere else in the book.

The transcendent concept for O'Brien is not "truth" but "story":

> Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story. (40)

At the beginning of this essay, I referred to GB and TTH as "bookends" of the Vietnam era. Moore's experience in Vietnam was in the first half of 1964, a time the United States was precisely on the cusp of the massive political and social upheavals often referred to as the counter culture revolution. Domestic opposition to the Vietnam war was central to this inter-generational American conflict, both as a cause and an effect. That Moore's book could be a best seller reflects, I believe, its publication during the last stages of society's WWII-era combination of glorified patriotism and pervasive paranoia over the threat of a worldwide Communist hegemony. A few years later, in 1968, John Wayne's attempt to bring GB to the big screen was a famous flop. The most often cited moment in the movie is the ending, where The Duke, hand in hand with the tiny orphan Vietnamese boy, walks into the sunset on the beach. Except in Vietnam the coast faces east. A western beach sunset could only happen in someplace like . . . California. Which is where, as the wags always say, this movie is really set.

The most serious and successful film statements about the Vietnam appeared in the late 1970s, and tried to make sense of the war in mythical or archetypal terms. Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) cross-reference war scenes with, in the former case,

archetypal small-town America, and in the latter, Joseph Conrad's mythical vision of evil and the human heart.

Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1975) fits into this category. In this novel, the scenes of Vietnam warfare are interwoven with a preposterous but almost believable plot of a deserter being tracked, on the ground, all the way from the battlefield in Southeast Asia to Paris, France. Thus the longing of the frightened homesick soldier becomes transmuted into an epic and archetypal quest.

I have noticed, however, that many Vietnam veterans express dissatisfaction with these three highly acclaimed works of art. It's as if the artistic qualities of the construction interfere with the down-to-earth realism that those who experienced the Vietnam war demand. And once again we are back to the conundrum formulated earlier in this essay of generalities versus details. *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter* and *Going After Cacciato,* although liberally infused with gritty, even gory realism, finally exist more at the level of generalization, of mythic or aesthetic statement. At the other extreme, some of the finer works of journalism, Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, say, offer extraordinary glimpses of the details of the war, but leave it up to the reader to provide any overarching meaning or point.

Which brings me back to *The Things They Carried.* This book arrived on the scene in 1990, coincidental with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Evil Empire, and the end of whole Manicheaen dualism that dominated political discourse since the end of WWII. What is left when the Evil Empire is gone? The story of how some men once believed in it. And how others who didn't were sent to fight a war in a faraway country by those who did. And the Truth, or Truths, or truths of the war can only be found in the reverence for story.

Reverence for story is what ultimately separates GB from TTC, and, I would argue, what raises O'Brien's book above nearly all of the imaginative representations of the Vietnam War. Whereas Robin Moore's book is a failed attempt to make story serve his version of "truth," Tim O'Brien finds truth in allowing it to serve the needs of story. In the narratives that he weaves around "Tim O'Brien," around Jimmy Cross, Norman Bowker, Kiowa, and the rest, without glamorizing the obscenity of war, he achieves the beauty of art, and the ring of truth. ❦

Notes

1. Moore co-wrote the hit song "Ballad of the Green Berets" with Sgt. Barry Sadler; John Wayne starred in the movie.
2. Moore's book is not even mentioned in Arthur Casciato's comprehensive article, "Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War" (*Review*, Vol. 9, 1987).

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CHALLENGING THE LAW OF COURAGE AND HEROIC IDENTIFICATION IN TIM O'BRIEN'S *IF I DIE IN A COMBAT ZONE* AND *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*

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In his autobiographic text, *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me up and Ship Me Home*, and in his novel, *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien questions the presumed sanctity of the oldest male law. Courage and masculinity, so-called "professionalism," the "old order" (*If I Die* 192), grace under pressure, or the collective male psyche could, O'Brien writes, blind a man into stupidity during the Vietnam War. Not that he could always rely on published information or even rationally determine a wise course in the call of duty, but a citizen had the obligation to discover whether business leaders, politicians, and military officers had moral, legal, and therefore truly evident causes for sanctioning violence in Vietnam. Blind or obsessive duty for the sake of honor, God, and country might be bravery to a fault, or nothing more than "manliness, crudely idealized" (*If I Die* 142).

Courage is only one part of virtue, O'Brien explains, alluding to the warnings of Plato. Courage cannot be separated from wisdom, temperance, and justice. Once a man sheds heroic identification and merit deeds; once he refuses either to compromise his morality, to kill illegally, or to entrap himself in the futile sacrifice of "a war fought for uncertain reasons" (*If I Die* 135); once he seeks inwardly and deliberately for the meaning of courage (an obligation more frightening and dangerous than prescriptive duty), he escapes mechanical bravery and the spiritual death that blind conscription can produce. That is, the soldier who responds not to what he really believes but to the expectations of indoctrinated parents, small-town neighbors, sergeants,

and lieutenants is charged, O'Brien writes, with the passion, the ignorance "merely" of "a well-disguised cowardice" (*If I Die* 135).

Throughout gender history, men have been pressured to react to deadly crisis according to the sacred rules of a male honor code. From Odysseus to King Arthur, from Ulysses to George Washington, and from Aeneas to Norman Schwarzkopf, clearly the most widely accepted values of integrity, dignity, respect, self-respect, valor, and thus unquestioned masculinity hinge upon a commissioned response to fear and duty. Rational control over the emotion of fear or doubt; strength not only of body but also of mind—the tangential strength, that is, of the gifted athlete and military wizard; appropriate aggression fed by a competitive spirit; full-pitch confidence to win against overwhelming odds; and utter loyalty to duty, to God, to country, to family, and to friends collectively define the classic male hero. Here is the meaning of inventiveness, resilience, and endurance in the male universe. Here is the legendary crisis crusher, the icon of national and international glory and fame, the Captain, my Captain of moral common sense and duty, the human bush hog cutting the memorial path to higher truth. "It's the old story," Major Callicles insists in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. "Guts to stand up for what's right.... It's not standing around passively hoping for things to happen right; it's going out and being tough and sharp-thinkin' and *making* things happen right" (194-195). Clearly, undaunted courage lies at the heart of this "crucible of men" and epic "events" (22-23).

A "blond, meticulously fair, brave, tall, [and] blue-eyed" Captain Johanson would be recognized traditionally and yet blindly as his "nation's pride" for his classic masculinity when in "the steady, blood-headed intensity of Sir Lancelot" (*If I Die* 131, 144) he charges across a rice paddy to kill a Vietcong soldier nearly at point-blank range. Did he act for the benefit or the safety of his platoon? Was his deed an act of self-sacrifice? Was this an "ag-ile, mo-bile, and hos-tile" man "resigned to bullets and brawn" (*If I Die* 44, 91)? Or was this mission nothing more than an adrenalin rush—not bravery, not courage really, but mindless aggression? "It's the charge, the light brigade with only one man" sailing neither with fear nor with regret into harm's way, O'Brien cautions, that typically comes to mind "first" in the classification of heroes. Men who charge the enemy despite their

fear of death "are remembered as brave, win or lose." Here are the sacred heroes forever tall, true, and tough— forever rough, ready, and rugged— and men like Johanson confess that they would "rather be brave" in this way "than almost anything" else in life. These men are truly "heroes forever" in war history and in literature, but we must not conclude that "courage" presupposes the bloody "charge" (*If I Die* 131).

"Courage is nothing to laugh at, not if it is proper courage and exercised by men who know what they do is proper" (133), O'Brien writes in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, arguing that if we are not thinking, we are not human. If we are not thinking, by extension we are not brave in the human dimension. "Proper courage is wise courage," O'Brien explains, alluding to Plato's dialectic of noble bravery in "Laches." "It's acting wisely, acting wisely when fear would have a man act otherwise. It is the endurance of the soul in spite of fear— wisely" (133).

Mindless charge has its place in war— indeed, force can generate the power necessary to win a deadly conflict. But we must not confuse crude aggression with the noble cause enlivened by courage. Doing the best that any individual can do, according to his own conscience, keeps common sense and meaning in the acts of courage. Routine physical acts, the thing to do at the time, raw valor, doing what everyone else is doing to avoid shame, acting bravely "out of a spirit of righteousness . . . necessity . . . resignation" (*If I Die* 45), merely following orders— is that acting gallantly? What might be classified or even decorated with the Congressional Medal of Honor as courageous mentality could like the "endless march" of duty honestly be reduced to a physical response to stressful experience with "no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was anatomy . . . a kind of inertia, a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and hope and human sensibility" (*Things* 15).

Human courage comes not from the hypothalamus, not from the anterior pituitary or adrenal glands, and not from any other direct or indirect influence on a fight-or-flight response to stress, including the central nervous system and the testicles, but from the clear thinking cortex of the brain. "Men must *know* what they do is courageous," O'Brien argues in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*— that is, "they must *know* it is right, and that kind of

knowledge is wisdom and nothing else" (137). Be it Plato's rationalism or Heidegger's and Sartre's existentialism, acting knowingly and thoughtfully is the human condition.

Within this self-limiting vision of courage, O'Brien hesitates to celebrate many brave men. "Either they are stupid and do not know what is right," including one Alpha Company soldier who had no thoughts about his participation in the war—certainly, no high thoughts about morality or politics—and who only wanted to get out of Vietnam alive. "Or they know what is right and cannot bring themselves to do it. Or they know what is right and do it, but do not feel and understand the fear that must be overcome" (*If I Die* 137). Holding ground on principle, or for no other reason than to hold it, as in the example of a cow taking countless rounds from O'Brien's company in a free-fire zone, is neither courage nor endurance. It is mortal stupidity.

Of course, O'Brien is not the first writer to challenge the law of courage, warning that mindless assault, even for honorable causes, loses the human dimension of bravery. Although Hemingway vehemently opposed the psychoanalytic view popular in his day that each individual suffers a point at which his mind or body will break down under pressure, Colonel Lum Edwards explained that even during the most frightening combat of the 1944 Hurtgen campaign Hemingway was never "impressed by reckless bravado." While he "admired the man who could see clearly what was necessary to do and had the courage to do it, regardless of the percentage of risk involved," never did Hemingway identify "raw courage," or suicidal aggression, as honorable or even as desirable "unless it was the only way of getting the job done." Impressed by Hemingway's love of direct action over diction, Edwards concluded that his friend practiced his honor code sincerely each of his eighteen days in Hurtgenwald:

> I never saw him act foolishly in combat. He understood war and man's part in it to a better degree than most people ever will. He had an excellent sense of the situation. While wanting to contribute, he knew very well when to proceed and when it was best to wait awhile. (qtd. in Baker 435)

Despite the attractive filter that Hemingway placed on courage— essentially, that a life-threatening event in war (or in any deadly crisis) is merely a test, a test not only of courage and endurance but also of dignity— O'Brien notes in *If I Die in a Combat Zone* that simple stoicism is not a consistently adequate measure of bravery under any circumstance in war:

> It's too easy to affect grace, and it's too hard to see through it. . . . Grace under pressure means you can confront things gracefully or squeeze out of them gracefully. But to make those two things equal with the easy word "grace" is wrong. Grace under pressure is not courage. (142-143)

If Hemingway had lived under the daily grind of a combat soldier for a year or more, rather than drifting in and out of deadly conflict as a correspondent, the law of averages would have shattered his stoicism and thus his own law of courage, as the ironies, uncertainties, and cruelties of the war theater would contradict any man's inflexible belief.

Shoved or hit in his childhood school yard, any man of Alpha Company would fight. Rather than lose dignity or the appearance of courage, he would scream and snarl and flail the air and flail his enemies in the cruel power and glory of male potency. Indeed, public confessions about the fear of death were more than "bad luck" or "the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy," all of which was strictly "taboo" (*If I Die* 138) for any soldier in any combat platoon during the Vietnam War. The collective male honor code precludes the contemplation of fear. Admitting fear is simply illegal or shameful in the male universe. The men of Alpha Company were nurtured in the same laws of masculinity as any other soldier in any other war. A man must not cry. He must not whine or complain. Worse, he must not lose control over his emotions or run in the heat of crisis. He must at least wear the mask of bravery in all conflict. The burden of fear and the shame that he would have to suffer if he let it creep into his face haunted even the toughest soldier of Alpha Company. Everyone "carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained, the instinct to run or freeze or hide." Certainly, under the crushing weight of stress, violence, and ordnance, the male

role "was the heaviest burden of all, for it could never be put down." Carrying "the soldier's greatest fear," the terror not of death but "the fear of blushing," the men of Alpha Company "were too frightened to be cowards." No high "dreams of glory or honor" threatened their dignity, merely "the blush of dishonor." They might even sneer at death in order not to be embarrassed by it. Indeed, men "died so as not to die of embarrassment" (*Things* 20-21). Here we see to what extent soldiers are driven in war, the bright center stage of the collective male psyche, not only by the Darwinism of androgen, testosterone, and adrenaline that inflames their aggressive spirits but also by the far more imperial grip of social Darwinism.

The "secret" to success in all crises, Bill brags to Jake in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, is "never be daunted." Of course, we can presume that Bill has been frightened by the violent experiences that any boy or man must endure in social reality, but he must always be politically correct, and thus he will not show his fear. "Not in public. If I begin to feel daunted I'll go off by myself" (73). The silly Lion believes that he will be king over the forests of Oz if he develops not heart and not mind but courage. Ironically, Juno fails to realize in Virgil's *Aeneid* that men value courage over life and safety; thus, her effort to save Turnus from certain death in fated battle with Aeneas only frustrates the man beyond either the fear or the pain of death. "The horror of it!" Turnus shrieks, realizing that he has fled the battlefield in pursuit not of his rival but only of an apparition of Aeneas. Here for the classic soldier is "a fault so grave," a "disgrace" and "shame" so unforgivable and "terrible" (271-272), that only Juno can restrain her mortal from instantly killing himself on his own sword or foolishly attempting to swim back to land in order to regain his dignity in the heat of war.

In order to protect themselves from shame and forbidden fear, some soldiers in Alpha Company "carried themselves with a sort of wistful resignation." Other soldiers wore the masks of "pride or stiff soldierly discipline or good human or macho zeal." All of them were inwardly "afraid of dying," the bravest leaders like Captain Johanson and the toughest grunts like Rat Kiley, "but they were even more afraid to show it" (*Things* 19).

"All of us, I suppose, like to believe that in a moral emergency we will behave like the heroes of our youth," O'Brien

writes—that is, "bravely and forthrightly, without thought of personal loss or discredit." Alan Ladd and Humphrey Bogart had impressed O'Brien's childhood dreams in the formidable way in which a hero responds to crisis. In his impressionable childhood, O'Brien incubated the belief that he "would simply tap a secret reservoir" of his "moral capital" (*Things* 43) and conquer mounting evil as if he were the new generation's Frederick Henry, Captain Vere, or Shane (*If I Die* 139). However, the "old image" of himself "as a man of conscience and courage" (*Things* 60) collided with the Darwinian forces of the Vietnam War. Would his decision to go either to Canada where he could live according to his conscience or to Vietnam where he would answer his call to duty despite his conscience result in an honest act of courage? If he did succumb to national pride, would he find the path to truth and honor promised by his culture or merely kill the citizen's obligation to follow his inner voices in matters of political dispute?

Despite respected warnings from Ezra Pound that soldiers have entrapped themselves in war "from fear of weakness" or "from fear of censure" (qtd. in O'Brien, *If I Die* 37), or from fear of not being manly, and despite O'Brien's research into the political contradictions of Ho Chi Minh, the Gulf of Tonkin, the Geneva Accords, SEATO, and the division, if not the "moral confusion," among "smart" American politicians who "could not agree on even the most fundamental matters of public policy," O'Brien suffered the gnawing pressure to abandon his belief "that you don't make war without knowing why" (*Things* 44). This "moral split," he explains, caused him to experience "a kind of schizophrenia" (*Things* 48), even to the degree of hallucinating the faces and voices of his parents, his hometown friends, alien neighbors and civic leaders, Civil and World War veterans, high school cheerleaders, his best friend who died in her childhood, a memory of his cowboy hat and mask, Jane Fonda, Gary Cooper, and a myriad of other polar impressions. Although the events "On the Rainy River" are invented in *The Things They Carried* only to evoke O'Brien's confusion and anguish that he more autobiographically expresses in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, the feeling of psychic warfare draws us into a haunting truth:

> I couldn't make up my mind. I feared the war, yes, but I also feared exile. I was afraid of walking away from my own life, my friends and my family, my whole history, everything that mattered to me. I feared losing the respect of my parents. I feared the law. I feared ridicule and censure. (*Things* 48)

Cleanth Brooks writes that moral pressure is exerted as "the essential ether" (52) in American small towns. Indeed, aliens to community codes risk the deadly loneliness not only of spoken and unspoken ridicule but also of self-doubt. Besides his mother and father, whose hurt over a son's resolution to go against the stream he could vividly imagine, O'Brien could picture the emotional violence of town leaders and gossips if they were to discuss his decision to follow his conscience:

> My hometown was a conservative little spot on the prairie, a place where tradition counted, and it was easy to imagine people sitting around a table down at the old Gobbler Café on Main Street, coffee cups poised, the conversation slowly zeroing in on the young O'Brien kid, how the damned sissy had taken off for Canada. At night, when I couldn't sleep, I'd sometimes carry on fierce arguments with those people. I'd be screaming at them, telling them how much I detested their blind, thoughtless, automatic acquiescence to it all, their simple-minded patriotism, their prideful ignorance, their love-it-or-leave-it platitudes, how they were sending me off to fight a war they didn't understand and didn't want to understand. I held them responsible. By God, yes, I *did*. All of them—I held them personally and individually responsible—the polyestered Kiwanis boys, the merchants and farmers, the pious churchgoers, the chatty housewives, the PTA and the Lions club and the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the fine upstanding gentry out at the country club. They didn't know Bao Dai from the man in the moon. They didn't know history. They didn't know the first thing about Diem's tyranny, or the nature of Viet-

> namese nationalism, or the long colonialism of the French. (*Things* 48-49)

Of course, O'Brien could not discuss his inner turmoil with anyone so heavily locked into conservative beliefs about men, heroes, and war. And even though he recognized the irony of giving up honest feelings about himself in order to live a life without conflict with people whom he did not know or care about intimately, he could not tolerate the anticipation that these underinformed citizens would condemn him to the leagues of cowards and traitors.

When the heart is squeezed, the intellect cannot always make decisions according to what O'Brien idealizes as "an act of pure reason" (*Things* 54). Rather than make decisions inwardly—that is, trusting an internal barometer and therefore being true to ourselves— O'Brien learned that fear of public condemnation might determine what we finally do. Under the "terrible squeezing pressure" (*Things* 59) that attacks the human conscience, we can succumb to whatever society says that we must do and thus judge ourselves according to what other people say or do "as we make our choices or fail to make them" (*Things* 62). Under the "great worldwide sadness" that "came pressing down" and the "weight" that kept "pushing [him] toward the war" (*Things* 54, 59), O'Brien suffered "a moral freeze" on the Rainy River. "Canada had become a pitiful fantasy," not a solution to the pressure but a "silly and hopeless" dream of escaping his gnawing pressure:

> I couldn't decide, I couldn't act, I couldn't comport myself with even a pretense of modest human dignity.... Right then, with the shore so close, I understood that I would not do what I should do. I would not swim away from my hometown and my country and my life. I would not be brave. That old image of myself as a hero, as a man of conscience and courage, all that was just a threadbare pipe dream. Bobbing there on the Rainy River, looking back at the Minnesota shore, I felt a sudden swell of helplessness come over me, a drowning sensation. (*Things* 59-60)

Facing the strange and alien moment in his life when he was "ashamed of [his] conscience, ashamed to be doing the right thing" (*Things* 55), ashamed of the philosophical and political convictions that made him doubt his ability to make a moral decision ironically to fight what he believed to be an immoral war, O'Brien confesses that the boiling rivers of "hot, stupid shame" (*Things* 54) finally determined the currents of his inner struggle. National and hometown patriots would not know that they sent a "coward" to fight their war in Vietnam. "It had nothing to do with morality," good thinking, and courage, O'Brien finally writes. "I would go to the war—I would kill and maybe die—because I was embarrassed not to" (*Things* 62-63).

Although we cannot expect ideal or even rational consistency in the contemplation of courage, O'Brien learned first in the war that raged between his heart and his intellect and then in the bush of the Vietnam War "that manhood is not something to scoff at"—indeed, that "soldiering . . . is something that makes a fellow think about courage, makes a man wonder what it is and if he has it" (*If I Die* 136, 202). In the honesty of mental toughness, no man is a total hero. No man is a total coward. Working toward his own perspective on bravery, O'Brien explodes the popular cliché: "A coward dies a thousand deaths but a brave man only once." The error in this false assumption, O'Brien explains, is that no man is either "once and for always a coward" or "once and for always a hero." Operating as a foot soldier in the area of Chu Lai, including the villages of My Khe and My Lai one year after the well-known My Lai Massacre, O'Brien learned the tough reality that in the bush

> . . . men act cowardly and, at other times, act with courage, each in different measure, each with varying consistency. The men who do well on the average, perhaps with one moment of glory, those men are brave. (*If I Die* 143)

So ambiguous is the truth about courage, so intense and forgivable are the inconsistencies and contradictions of real men in crisis, a classic honor code—no matter how ideally projected, distorted, and perpetuated in gender history—deconstructs its

own pressures in the hideous violence of war. In no literature about the war theater do we come to this intersection of courage more honestly than in the example of Alpha Company struggling under the fire of bullets, duty, pride, and self-preservation in *The Things They Carried*:

> For the most part they carried themselves with poise, a kind of dignity. Now and then, however, there were times of panic, when they squealed or wanted to squeal but couldn't, when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said Dear Jesus and flopped around on the earth and fired their weapons blindly and cringed and sobbed and begged for the noise to stop and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and to God and to their mothers and fathers, hoping not to die. In different ways, it happened to all of them. (18-19)

Unlike the inspiring and yet coolly unrealistic cowboys, soldiers, and celebrated heroes of our childhood dreams and movies, taking fire— actually taking rounds intended to kill us, to kill the trembling flicker of perception that stands between us and dusty death— gives us vision about our vulnerability in crisis. We are never more alive, O'Brien is saying in *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and in *The Things They Carried*, than when we are almost dead. War gives us this mirror of our mortality, this truth about our humanity and courage:

> Afterward, when the firing ended, they would blink and peek up. They would touch their bodies, feeling shame, then quickly hiding it. They would force themselves to stand. As if in slow motion, frame by frame, the world would take on the old logic— absolute silence, then the wind, then sunlight, then voices. It was the burden of being alive. Awkwardly, the men would reassemble themselves, first in private, then in groups, becoming soldiers again. They would repair the leaks in their eyes. They would check for casualties, call in dustoffs, light

cigarettes, try to smile, clear their throats and spit and begin cleaning their weapons. After a time someone would shake his head and say, No lie, I almost shit my pants, and someone else would laugh, which meant it was bad, yes, but the guy had obviously not shit his pants, it wasn't that bad, and in any case nobody would ever do such a thing and then go ahead and talk about it. They would squint into the dense, oppressive sunlight. For a few moments, perhaps, they would fall silent, lighting a joint and tracking its passage from man to man, inhaling, holding in the humiliation. Scary stuff, one of them might say. But then someone else would grin or flick his eyebrows and say, Roger-dodger, almost cut me a new asshole, *almost*. (19) ❦

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R.J. Fertel

Vietnam War Narratives and the Myth of the Hero

❦

> The better explanation of the army's optimism was that it was a trusting army. It believed in the reassurances proffered by the staff who, to be fair, believed them also. It believed in the superiority of its own equipment. . . . It believed in the dedication and fearlessness of its battalion officers and was right to so believe. But it believed above all in itself.
>
> [so wrote John Keegan (*The Face of Battle*) of the British army before the Battle of the Somme wherein 21,000 British died on the first day]

❦

The quest for rebirth— the hero's quest— charges the Vietnam war's literary record with a deep emotion. Joseph Campbell's mythic paradigm of the hero can help elucidate the shape of many Vietnam combat narratives: at their stories' thematic center many fictional soldiers long for rebirth and for the kind of death paradoxically they must first experience. That death is at bottom the demise of the illusion of heroic competence, an illusion to which Americans with their can-do spirit seem especially prone. Examining five combat narratives— by "Eric Helm," James Webb, Philip Caputo, Tim O'Brien, and Francis Ford Coppola— in light of the quest for competence and the repudiation of that quest can help us understand and appreciate many Vietnam veterans' deepest yearnings.

The basic outline of Campbell's monomyth[1] is this: the potential hero leaves a place of safety which, however, is desolate and in need of renewal. The hero then travels to a place of

danger and darkness, down into hellish regions, or outward to landscapes peopled by demons and characterized by ashes and desiccation. Often aided by a guide of questionable nature, the hero in this dark place receives a wound. This wounding, the thing most feared, becomes a source of power, a boon, which he can now bring back to the civilization he forsook. The hero uses this gift to renew society.

Such a myth is largely foreign to the mythic world the soldiers of the Vietnam war grew up with. The "boys" who went off to war cut their eye teeth on the heroic, narcissistic myth that John Wayne stood for and embodied in war movie after war movie (and western after western), the myth of regeneration through violence.[2] One of the most characteristic gestures of Vietnam narratives is their bitter salute to their first recruiter, John Wayne. Many like Philip Caputo almost blame Wayne and his Hollywood image for getting them into this fix:

> [T]he heroic experience I sought was war; war the ultimate adventure; war, the ordinary man's most convenient experience for escaping from the ordinary. . . . Already I saw myself charging up some distant beachhead, like John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima,* and then coming home a suntanned warrior with medals on my chest. The recruiters started giving me the usual sales pitch, but I hardly needed to be persuaded. I decided to enlist. (5)

But it is equally clear that Wayne merely tapped deep urges already at work in America's youth, as in all youth, the urge to heroism, to be born again to a larger self, to do grand things and to be part of grand actions. Psychologically, the hollow version of this heroic ideal is based on the wish fulfillment structures of archaic narcissism: fearing the world and unable to meet his or her fears, the archaic narcissist builds an outward if hollow shell of self-sufficiency, the belief that one's "heroic" self can meet any and all challenges. In sum, small back, big front: the frailer the self, the more puffed up the presentation of self. My beauty, says Narcissus, is sufficient unto itself, and he falls into the pool of his own self-admiration and drowns. My quest for truth, says Oedipus, is honorable and true, and can free the city from this

plague; but he blinds himself when he must learn of truths that go beyond his ken, that it is his own acts that brought the plague on Thebes. Adolescent dreams of self-sufficiency must yield in true maturity to a more realistic sense of one's abilities and of the world's threats: life holds challenges that simply are beyond our humble means to face down. Sometimes we best meet such challenges not by a strong front but by applying the leverage of our weakness. Our wound becomes the boon we employ to meet the challenge.

Among the many traumas Vietnam will present the young man, it is the traumatic death of this idealized vision of the hero that must first be undergone if he is to enter into a true hero's quest. They must abandon what lies at the heart of the John Wayne myth, the myth of competence: that we can achieve our goals through our efforts alone. The guide figure, who so often accompanies the true hero across the threshold from the known world into unknown dangerous realms, symbolizes the budding hero's relinquishing this notion of self-competence and self-consequence. That the guide's nature is questionable, sometimes godly like Hermes but often demonic, suggests that the hero puts behind him not only his own adequacy but also the adequacy of the normal world's notions of good and evil.[3] In sum, the hero's first task is not, as he expects, to don the accoutrements and pride of greatness, but rather to take on the ashes of humility. Only then can true greatness come, a greatness far beyond John Wayne and America's hollow vision of heroism.

The whole debate about Vietnam can be seen in these terms. On the one side are those who insist ever and anon that we could have won the war if only the military's hands had not been shackled by the politicians or if they had not been "stabbed in the back" by the media and the Left. The burden they carry still is the felt need to prove, or at least to insist, that they *were* competent, that it was not through the military's fault that we lost. This is understandable. They participated in America's first loss. Seen from the perspective of the need to prove and display one's competence—the hero's imagined duty—what a heavy burden that must be. But that perspective contributes to the "stuck" feeling such men and women often convey. Stuck there, such veterans miss, I believe, the opportunity to enter into the true hero's path, a path that relinquishes the myth of competence.

At the least, this overweening burden to prove their competence obscures from many such veteran-writers the central moral question: should *any* competence have been expended in *this* war? Their most typical posture is to insist that once you've committed to a war, don't pussy-foot. Yes, of course. But that begs the prior question that Robert McNamara's book has finally definitively (if gracelessly) answered: should we have been there at all? The paradox that the legacy of Vietnam presents and that America has largely failed to confront is that the very acts of competence with which American military might prides itself ("you never defeated us on the battlefield," puffs Colonel Harry Summers to a North Vietnamese counterpart[4]) was itself a kind of moral and spiritual wounding. Competence that never should have been employed only serves to wound our national pride. The "best and the brightest" sent the best trained and armed soldiers in history into a war to soothe the wounded ego of Kennedy after Vienna and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and of Johnson and Nixon who were both determined not to be the first American president to lose a war. As George Herring remarks, Nixon especially was "[h]aunted throughout his political career by a near-obsessive fear of defeat and humiliation" (228). And yet it is only by accepting the anointment of ashes that one can begin to achieve, according to Campbell, true heroic stature.

The narrative record of the Vietnam War confirms the structure and the importance of Campbell's monomyth: that we achieve true heroism only when we question and abandon our longing for competence. But in speaking of "true heroism" in this mythic way, I hasten to add, I do not mean to question the many heroic deeds and sacrifices that the war called upon its soldiers to make. Nor do I mean to question their competence. I know my efforts here will be heard that way, however much I protest to the contrary. Still, though it may pain some and anger many, the theme of a higher heroic quest is an important one. Exploring it can help us understand at least the nature and structure of much Vietnam narrative. It might also help someone somewhere to address that feeling of "stuckness" that continues to plague his or her days and nights.

I will look at four narratives to demonstrate a continuum of possible responses to this mythic structure, from the failure of competence to the ready willingness to let go of it. Eric Helm's

Warlord, which I've chosen somewhat at random from the 25 plus novels in the *Vietnam: Ground Zero* series, will serve here as the most conservative, unCampbell-like pole on this continuum of responses. Marred by wooden dialogue and cliché after cliché, *Warlord* has little to recommend it as literature; nonetheless, it can serve to set the near benchmark in its treatment of the themes of heroism and competence against which more distinguished literary treatments of the myth can be measured. "Eric Helm," significantly, is the pseudonym of two Vietnam veterans who as the back cover notes are "men who saw it all, did it all and lived to tell it." The name they chose suggests their sense of why they "lived to tell it": Eric *Helm.* These, and the men they write about, are men *at the helm, in charge.* They are in charge perhaps not of their destiny, because they have a war to fight that is being directed by untrustworthy politicians and staff officers who tie the hands of the men in battle. But they are in charge of themselves, first and last and always.

The special ops mission the novel sends them on represents another kind of "taking charge." The secret mission, like Rambo's, is a kind of frustrated Vietnam veteran's wet dream: everything the military wasn't allowed to do overtly, these men will do covertly. Hands tied because of international boundaries? Well, let's go into Laos to install electronic guidance equipment that will help direct bombing on the Ho Chi Minh trail and on Hanoi. Limited by finicky rules of engagement? Well, let's make a total commitment of men and materiels. Tired of aimless search-and-destroy patrols that take ground only to give it up again? Well, let's take and fortify a ridge *on high ground where for once* we will have the advantage when, *for once,* the set-piece battle against main force regulars takes place.

And if in reality the military was plagued by problems in personnel, both in leadership and in the ranks, here Special Forces Captain MacKenzie K. Gerber leads a team of complete specialists, most of them Nordic in feature and build and all of them competent and unquestioningly committed to their mission. The competence of his master sergeant, Tony Fetterman, for example, is all but unfettered,

> coolly professional, the epitome of the career combat soldier. He liked to work alone because he

> trusted his own judgment, and he lived by the axiom that the only way to get killed in combat was to make a mistake. (65)

There is a bitter irony in these words, though flowing from Eric Helm's pen the irony is inadvertent— "The only way to get killed in combat was to make a mistake" here is meant deadpan: our competence can keep us alive in combat. (Compare Tim O'Brien's DI in *If I Die in the Combat Zone:* "You troops pay attention to the trainin' you get here, and you'll come back in one piece, believe me. . . . The Nam, it ain't so bad, not if you got your shit together" (59). But it could also mean the "best way" the "preferred way," which indeed is closer to reality. Such an "axiom" is really no better than a wish, a day-dream from a John Wayne movie: we'd all love to think that our efforts, good or ill, will determine the outcome of every situation. (There's a sense of consolation and safety even in the thought that in our failures we author our own harm; at least we are in control and not subject to fate's fickle finger). In combat, of all places, with all its freak occurrences, nothing could be further from the truth. Nonetheless, *Warlord's* narrative of course bears out Fetterman's wish-fulfillment axiom.

In *Warlord* just about everyone involved is the epitome of something:

> The radio operator had spent his first tour in Vietnam as a B-Detachment radio operator and had limited field experience, but if his scores on the Army aptitude exams were any indication, he could probably build a working radio from a Coke bottle, a coat hanger and a set of Tinkertoys. (36)

The Nordic stature of the unit contributes to their appearance of conventional heroism; but the main point is that they were chosen because, we are meant to believe, their features will help them become allies with the primitive Hmong warriors against the hated Pathet Lao.

The weaponry put at their disposal is of course the very finest:

> Fetterman was relieved to find out that the weapons available to them would, at least, be first class hardware and not a bunch of worn-out retreads left over from the Second World War and Korea. . . . More esoteric weapons [besides M-16s and CAR-15s] would be available, too: Browning 9 mm parabellum pistols instead of Colt .45s; Swedish-made Karl Gustav Model 45 submachine guns, known as Swedish Ks, fitted with silencers; and Israeli Uzi submachine guns. If a particular mission required a sniper rifle, an M-21, the most accurate sniping weapon in the world, would be made available. For close-range ambushes there were Remington semiautomatic shotguns fitted with twenty-inch barrels and eight round extended magazines. (58)

Despite this commitment of men and materiel—materiel so awesome that merely describing them stops the narrative—the mission fails. They are outmanned by the Pathet Lao. Eric Helm, after all, was constrained by historical reality: if this communications base had been so effective in directing sorties against the Ho Chi Minh Trail and Hanoi, then the success of the mission might have affected the course of the war. But Helm does not need his valiant men to succeed in order for him to complete his authorial mission: to celebrate the nobility and sacrifice and competence, even in the face of insurmountable odds, of his valiant special ops team.

James Webb's *Fields of Fire* represents a more thoughtful, though still conservative exploration of the issue of competence. Like Eric Helm, the competence of Webb's characters answers the problem of the war's loss: we lost it, he seems to say, but it wasn't our fault. Lieutenant Hodge and Corporal Snake, two of his three main characters, are competent in the best tradition of the Marine Corps (as is Cat Man, a minor character whose competence plays a key role); Private Will Goodrich (Senator), his third main character, embodies the incompetence that is ruining the Corps and losing the war.

Hodge's competence has a kind of spiritual, mystical dimension. Like so many, Hodge is inspired by the movies which "were their own communion. If John Wayne wasn't God then

he was at least a prophet" (35). But Hodge's true inspiration lay in the legacy of arms that, Kentucky-bred, he receives through a family tree that dates back to the Revolutionary War. The ghosts of his forefathers haunt him and it is for them and through them that he learns the warrior's ways. Inspired by his ghosts, Hodge attains a competence much appreciated by the men who serve under him. Invoking his ghosts, Hodge muses:

> And I have learned those things, those esoteric skills and knowledges, that mark me as one of you. That loose-boweled piles of shit, too much shit from overeating, plopped randomly around the outer dikes of a ville, mean trouble. . . . I can tell from the crack of a rifle shot the type of weapon fired and what direction the bullet is traveling. I can listen to a mortar pop and know its size, how far away it is. I know instinctively when I should prep a treeline with artillery before I move into it. I know which draws and fields should be crossed on line, which should be assaulted, and which are safe to cross in a column. I know where to place men when we stop and form a perimeter. I can shoot a rifle and throw a grenade and direct air and artillery onto any target, under any circumstances. I can dress any type of wound, I have dressed all types of wounds, watered protruding intestines with my canteen to keep them from cracking under sunbake, patched sucking chests with plastic, tied off stumps with field-expedient tourniquets. I can call in medevac helicopters, talk them, cajole them, dare them into any zone. I do these things, experience these things repeatedly, daily. Their terrors and miseries are so compelling, and yet so regular, that I have ascended to a high emotion that is nonetheless a crusted numbness. I am an automaton, bent on survival, agent and prisoner of my misery. How terribly exciting. (205-06)

But another of the things he learns is not to question the war:

> My war is not as simple as yours was, Father. People seem to question their obligation to serve on other than their own terms. But enough of that. I fight because we have always fought. It doesn't matter who. (25)

Fields of Fire is perfectly clear on the questionable nature of the way the war is fought. It is first and last a war where competence doesn't suffice. After Hodge shows off his ability to call in artillery and to lead men in taking the village, Phu Phong (4), things quickly "turn to shit" in ways he cannot control. Returning to what should be safer duty at the "Old Bridge," his platoon is beset by careerist "chickenshit."[5] A new platoon sergeant, Angus Wilson, is all spit and polish but has spent his 13 years of service anywhere but the bush. He delivers First Lieutenant Kersey's order to set up a listening post (LP) a hundred meters out beyond the concertina wire, an order that seems to be motivated by revenge for a fragging attempt Kersey suffered at the platoon's hands. Not only will the wire make retreat impossible, if needed, but worse happens: friendly fire rains down on the LP. Competence can be efficacious in Vietnam, but not for long.

And sometimes competence backfires. Cat Man, like Hodge, has an almost mystical level of competence in fieldcraft. Often chosen to walk point, Cat Man's perspicacity often serves to invite danger rather than to avoid it. When he sees stalks missing from a clump of banana trees—a sign of recent NVA presence—Cat Man sends the platoon into action. Phony bitterly underscores the point, echoing the tradition of Hollywood heroics: "Cat Man and his damn bent grassblades" (246). In fact Cat Man's fieldcraft sets in motion a mission that leads to Phony's losing an arm and Big Mac his life to a booby trap. Later, disaster strikes again because Cat Man is so good at what he does:

> He was in such harmony with the subtleties of combat, was such a natural master of those things that others had to struggle to assimilate and use, that he would have had to force himself not to prowl. He walked with his head slightly tilted, his sensuous, small-boned face constantly in motion,

> examining bends and crevices, piles of litter around hootches, contours of bomb craters. The regularities of even devastated earth were so understandable to him that they could be suspicioned and inspected. (279)

Such care leads to his discovery of a dud 250-pound bomb during the dismantling of which Baby Cakes and Ogre are taken prisoner; they are later executed. Still later, in revenge, Snake and his men commit the worst atrocity of the novel. What sets all this in motion is Cat Man doing his job— *very well.*

Webb is clear that competence is insufficient to win or even to survive such a war as this; still he can't seem to shake free of its allure. In a moment of epiphany that leads to his extending his tour, Snake, a "bad-assed" inner city kid constantly in trouble in The World, realizes that for all their faults the Marines and Vietnam are where he belongs:

> He sensed that, beyond the terror that was today, there was a fullness that no other thing in the remainder of his life would ever equal. That, beyond doubt, the rest of his life would be spent remembering those agonizing months, revering their fullness. That, yes, he was now twenty— well, *almost* twenty— and what would always have been the greatest, the most important experience of his life, had almost passed. If he were to go back now— when he did go back— there was nothing, not a thing, that would parallel the sense of urgency and authority and— need. Of being a part of something. And of being needed and being *good.* (332-33)

But this sense of belonging, of his skills being needed, does not prepare him to face the moral complexity of his situation. Not only do the moral and political dimensions of the war itself go unquestioned, but the passage that immediately follows also displays, apparently without irony, the consequence of such belonging:

> He sensed that it was all here, everything, and there was none of it there. All of life's compelling throbs, condensed and honed each time a bullet flew: the pain, the brother-love, the sacrifice. Nobility discovered by those who'd never even contemplated sacrifice, never felt an emotion worth their own blood on someone else's altar. The heart rending deaths. The successes. All here. None there, back in the bowels of the World. Except for the pain, and even that numbed, daily pain, steady, like blue funk, not the sharp pain of an agonizing moment, capable of being purged, vindicated, replaced by a beautiful, lilting memory: Baby Cakes was a Number One dude, you know? He'd a died for me. And I killed 'em back for him. (333)

Here the noble sentiments of belonging and of participating in something larger than self is vitiated by his blindness to the moral dimension of his revenge— however well motivated, it is still revenge and an act of atrocity, which Webb seems at once to acknowledge and to condone. Snake receives a boon from his experience in combat, he achieves a broader self. But it is not necessarily a deeper self, one that can handle life's complexity or its moral demands; and it is not necessarily a boon that would serve civilization upon his return.[6] Perhaps sensing this, Webb kills him off: there's no place for Snake back in the world. Better to let him go out heroically saving the wounded Senator— whom he detests and who most readers probably feel doesn't deserve the sacrifice.

Like Webb, Philip Caputo in his memoir *A Rumor of War* employs the same pattern of competence displayed then frustrated. But his memoir explores the moral dimension of the problem of competence more thoroughly. The issue of competence hovers at all points behind and above the narrative in *A Rumor of War:* competence is in a way *the* spring of action because Caputo above all else is determined *not to screw up,* not to be found *unsat*[isfactory]. He reflects:

> I don't know about the others, but I endured these tortures [in boot camp] because I was driven by an

> overwhelming desire to succeed, no matter what. That awful word— *unsat*— haunted me. I was more afraid of it than I was of Sergeant McClellan. Nothing he could do could be as bad as having to return home and admit to my family that I had failed. It was not their criticism I dreaded, but the emasculating affection and understanding they were sure to show me. . . . I was so terrified of being found wanting that I even avoided getting near the candidates who were borderline cases— the "marginals," as they were known in the lexicon of that strange world. They carried the virus of weakness. (10-1)

Caputo here acknowledges the moral dimension of his foible, how it leads him to dehumanize those who don't measure up. The issue of dehumanization will come back to haunt him. But not before he has a chance to display his competence. On his first operation the assault he leads is

> nothing like those choreographed attacks we had practiced at Quantico or on Okinawa. The marines were more or less on line, bunched into knots in some places, spread apart in others. (109)

Later, however, he gets it right, again during an assault:

> "On line," I said! "On line here. First on the left, third squad on the right. On line and start putting fire into the ville."
>
> Bent low beneath the enemy fire, the marines quickly shook themselves into a skirmish line, wheeling like skaters playing crack-the-whip, extending their front along one leg of the river bend. Then the line surged across the clearing, the men firing short, spasmodic bursts from the hip and the whole line going down when it reached the riverbank, going down and opening up with an unrestrained rapid fire. (252-52)

But, as so often in Caputo's memoir, the nature of the terrain prevents complete success:

> If we could get across the river, we could finish the job. I wanted to get across the river in the worst way. I wanted to level the village and kill the rest of the Viet Cong in close combat. (253-54)

Nonetheless, he knows that this was the kind of competence he sought to achieve:

> Still, I felt a drunken elation. Not only the sudden release from danger made me feel it, but the thrill of having seen the platoon perform perfectly under heavy fire and under my command. I had never experienced anything like it before. When the line wheeled and charged across the clearing, the enemy bullets whining past them, wheeled and charged almost with drill-field precision an ache as profound as the ache of orgasm passed through me. (254)

Caputo's next act underscores the adolescent nature of this imagery. Not wanting the firefight to be over he tries to draw fire by putting himself in danger:

> "C'mon and hit me, Charlie," I yelled again, firing a burst into the tree line with my carbine. "YOU SON OF A BITCH, TRY AND HIT ME. FUCK UNCLE HO. HANOI BY CHRISTMAS."
>
> I was John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima.* I was Aldo Ray in *Battle Cry.* No, I was a young, somewhat immature officer flying on an overdose of adrenaline because I had just won a close-quarters fight without suffering a single casualty. (255)

But it is not only Vietnam's terrain and his own shortcomings that limit the effects of his competence. In a now familiar pattern, Caputo underscores how easily things turn bad in Vietnam despite everyone's best efforts. Within a page of this grand success, his platoon digs in only to be bombarded by

friendly fire (256-57). Within ten pages a Christmas cease-fire is called, but returning to the rear his platoon is decimated by a "an ambush-detonated mine." What precipitates this act of VC treachery is a simple act of miscommunication. As the platoon struggles to climb an embankment, slipping and sliding, Caputo orders them to "Pass it back not to bunch up" (264). This order is misheard and soon a hut is set aflame: "Somebody said you passed the word to burn the hut, sir." The roaring of the detonation follows and nine men are wounded. Much to his horror, Caputo's leadership is found to be *unsat:*

> "Charley Two," said Neal, "you must not have been supervising your men properly. They must have been awfully bunched up to take nine casualties from one mine." (269)

After the medevac is called in, revenge is the first order of business:

> All right, I thought, tit for tat. No cease-fire for us, none for you, either. I ordered both rocket launcher teams to fire white-phosphorus shells into the hamlet. They fired four altogether.... About half the village went up in flames. I could hear people yelling, and I saw several figures running through the white smoke. I did not feel a sense of vengeance, any more than I felt remorse or regret. I did not even feel angry. Listening to the shouts and watching the people running out of their burned homes, I did not feel anything at all. (270)

Here Caputo expresses the sense of psychic numbing articulated by Hodge and Snake in *Fields of Fire.* The big difference is that Caputo has a sure sense of how much of his humanity has been lost. He makes it clear that this state of numbness leads to the near-crazy quest for revenge that results in the act of atrocity that climaxes the memoir. For, motivated by shame, frustration, and the wish for revenge, Caputo is "seized by an irresistible compulsion to do something":

> "Something's got to be done" was about the clearest thought that passed through my brain. I was fixated on the company's intolerable predicament. We could now muster only half of our original strength, and half of our effectives had been wounded at least once. . . . It was madness for us to go on walking down those trails and tripping booby traps without any chance to retaliate. *Retaliate.* The word rang in my head. *I will retaliate.* . . . I will take matters into my own hands. (298-99)

Acting on intelligence, he sets an ambush for two suspected VC, because "Out there I could do what I damned well pleased. And I would. The idea of taking independent action made me giddier still" (299-300). His independent action includes "snatching" the suspects from the village, an act well beyond the parameters of his orders and the rules of engagement. It also includes an open, though tacit invitation to murder:

> "Sir," [asks rifleman Allen], since we ain't supposed to be in the ville, what do we say if we have to kill 'em?"
>
> "We'll just say they walked into your ambush. Don't sweat that. All the higher ups want is bodies." (300)

Even though the full implications of his order are left unspoken, Caputo in a sense takes full responsibility: "I saw the look in his eyes. It was a look of distilled hatred and anger, and . . . I knew he was going to kill those men on the slightest pretext. . . . It was my secret and savage desire that the two men die." Caputo is devastated when the wrong men are snatched and murdered and when charges are brought against him and his men. But in another way that has at least equal force in the narrative, Caputo takes no responsibility at all. It's all the war's fault:

> [. . .]I wondered why the investigating officer had not submitted any explanatory or extenuating circumstances. Later, after I had time to think things over, I drew my own conclusion: the explanation or

> extenuating circumstance was the war. The killings had occurred in war. They had occurred, moreover, in a war in which those ordered to do the killing often could not distinguish the Viet Cong from the civilians, a war in which civilians in "free-fire zones" were killed every day by weapons far more horrible than pistols or shotgun. The deaths of Le Dung and Le Du could not be divorced from the nature and conduct of the war. They were an inevitable product of the war. As I had come to see it, America could not intervene in a people's war without killing some of the people. (306)

There is much to support these views and one can fully sympathize with Caputo in his feeling of being scapegoated. But the point is neither to condone his act or to argue with his explanation for it. Rather the point is to understand the moral and narrative contortions he feels compelled to go through. Caputo in his Prologue presents his memoir as having no ax to grind. His book, he says,

> has nothing to do with politics, power, strategy, influence, national interests, or foreign policy; nor is it an indictment of the great men who led us into Indochina and whose mistakes were paid for with the blood of some quite ordinary men. In a general sense, it is simply a story about war, about the things men do in war and the things war does to them. (xiii)

Now we see that the whole has been marshaled as a brief to persuade his readership to acquit him. Caputo's failure to accept complete responsibility marks his failure to benefit fully from his spiritual wounding. Perhaps his problem stems from the fact that the only guide in sight (and guide figures are conspicuously absent in "Eric Helm" and Webb) is his JAG lawyer. The nature of Caputo's boon, could he fully articulate it, would be his condemning the war and the evil it engenders:

> If such cruelty existed in ordinary men like us, then it logically existed in the others, and they would have to face the truth that they, too, harbored a capacity for evil. But no one wanted to make that recognition. No one wanted to confront his devil. (313)

But his attorney knows Caputo's only hope of acquittal lies in silence, in *not* putting the war on trial.[7] That this means telling an untruth and putting the men in his command in jeopardy bothers him; still he does it:

> In time, he almost had me convinced that on the night of the killings, First Lieutenant Philip Caputo, in a lucid state of mind, issued a clear, legitimate order that was flagrantly disobeyed by the men under his command. . . . There were qualifying phrases here and there— "to the best of my recollection," "if I recall correctly," "words to that effect"— but there wasn't a single lie in it. And yet it wasn't the truth. Conversely, the attorneys for the enlisted men had them convinced that they were all good, God-fearing soldiers who had been obeying orders, as all good soldiers must, orders issued by a vicious killer-officer. And that was neither a lie nor the truth. (312-13)

In this climactic episode Caputo turns the issue of competence inside out when he *competently* manipulates the rules to *competently* send his men on a mission that should not take place. *Competently,* they cross a line they should never cross, entering a village they have no right to enter, and taking and killing hostages that turn out to be the wrong men. Ironically, it is through the competence of his lawyer that Caputo avoids punishment, earning for him instead the burden of guilt that the memoir is written to assuage. So much for the American can-do spirit: for Caputo it is the worst of guides, a spiritual trap.

Webb's heroes never give up on competence and thus never pass over into a higher heroism, a fact which helps us understand the sense we have of Webb's characters' spiritual

narrowness. Caputo exemplifies a middle ground, dramatically exposing the powerful lure of competence and the moral trick-bag that temptation can trap us in. Tim O'Brien, by contrast, embraces his inadequacy early in *The Things They Carried*: that he went to war meant not that he was a hero but a coward. Thus the O'Brien narrator embodies the perhaps odd heroism, so common in the Vietnam warrior experience, of doing one's job despite not believing in it. But that this gesture is in essence the Nuremberg defense— "I was just following orders"— points to the O'Brien character's true heroism, that he *carries* the burden of this shame and makes art of it, "a true war story" in the words of one of the volume's essay-narratives, that can hope to benefit society.

The O'Brien narrator (hereafter, O'Brien,[8] then, is a version of Campbell's "hero with a thousand faces." In the story "On the Rainy River," he is guided to the threshold of his wounding, by a mythic guide figure, "a silent, watchful presence" (51). It is characteristic of this upside-down story of heroism ["I was a coward. I went to the war." (63)] that the ironies are laid on thick. O'Brien reaches his moral and spiritual nadir at the "*Tip Top* Lodge"; where Fisher Kings usually long for a rejuvenating rain, this one finds a moral death on the "*Rainy* River"; and his guide, though designated the "hero of my life" (51), is anything but heroic in outward stature: "eighty-one years old, skinny and shrunken and mostly bald" (51). Elroy Berdahl's spiritual stature, however, is made clear in a way that prefigures O'Brien's wounding:

> In one hand, I remember, he carried a green apple, a *small paring knife* in the other. His eyes had the bluish gray color of a *razor blade,* the same polished shine, and as he peered up at me I felt a strange *sharpness,* almost painful, a *cutting sensation,* as if his gaze were *somehow slicing me open.* (51 emphasis added)

The green apple looks forward to O'Brien's temptation and fall, the many cutting instruments to his wounding. Berdahl— whose first name, "the king," has Christian overtones— saves O'Brien as

all true guides do, not by guiding but by mirroring, by eliciting the hero's best self:

> What I remember more than anything is the man's willful, almost ferocious silence. . . . The man's self-control was amazing. He never pried. He never put me in a position that required lies or denials. . . . Simple politeness was part of it. But even more than that, I think, the man understood that words were insufficient. The problem had gone beyond discussion. During that long summer I'd been over and over the various arguments, all the pros and cons, and it was no longer a question that could be decided by an act of pure reason. Intellect had come up against emotion. My conscience told me to run, but some irrational and powerful force was resisting, like a weight pushing me toward the war. (52, 54)

Rationality has reached the limits of its competence to resolve conflict. What motivates his action instead is, in a word, shame, the cowardice that sends him to war and that represents his heroic wounding. That Berdahl functions as mirror, not guide, is crucial because for the true hero the wounding is never merely the result of an external force, never mere victimization. O'Brien's tragedy springs from his conscience's not informing his sense of shame but rather, reason being no longer a guide, being at battle with it:

> What it came down to, stupidly, was a sense of shame. Hot, stupid shame. I did not want people to think badly of me. Not my parents, not my brother and sister, not even the folks down at the Gobbler Café. I was ashamed to be there at the Tip Top Lodge. I was ashamed of my conscience, ashamed to be doing the right thing. (54-5)

Still, Berdahl functions as guide in O'Brien's final confrontation with his demon, taking him fishing on the Rainy River and bringing him within reach of Canada:

> It struck me he must have planned it. I'll never be certain, of course, but I think he meant to bring me up against the realities, to guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself. (58)

The life he chooses comes from the realization that

> That old image of myself as a hero, as a man of conscience and courage, all that was just a threadbare pipe dream. Bobbing there on the Rainy River, looking back at the Minnesota shore, I felt a sudden swell of helplessness come over me, a drowning sensation, as if I had toppled overboard and was being swept away by the silver waves. Chunks of my own history flashed by. . . . My whole life seemed to spill out into the river, swirling from me, everything I had ever been or ever wanted to be. (60)

O'Brien here dies to John Wayne's America. He is visited at this moment with a Dantesque purgatorial vision where dead and unborn, fictive and real, from past and future come to haunt him: cartwheel-turning cheerleaders and dead G.I.s; LBJ and Huck Finn; the Joint Chiefs and "Jane Fonda dressed up as Barbarella"; and

> a million ferocious citizens waving flags of all shapes and colors— people in hard hats, people in headbands— they were all whooping and chanting and urging me toward one shore or another. . . . All those eyes on me— the town, the whole universe and I couldn't risk the embarrassment. It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl of faces along the river, and in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! they yelled. Turncoat! Pussy! I felt myself blush. I couldn't tolerate it. I couldn't endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule. Even in my imagination, with the shore just twenty yards away, I couldn't make my-

self be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that's all it was.

And right then I submitted.

I would go to the war—I would kill and maybe die—because I was embarrassed not to. (61-2)

This passage functions so well as O'Brien's special kind of surrealistic realism, as individual experience lived at a high pitch, that it does some damage to our experience of it to insist upon the mythic component that suffuses it. But following out the mythic thread that binds it together also helps us understand why *The Things They Carried* strikes so many readers as such a representative piece of fiction, a fiction that captures America's spiritual truth and not just O'Brien's. It is by facing his wounding that O'Brien rises to a place where he can rightfully carry the mantle of representative man and bring home truths back to the desiccated society in need of spiritual rebirth. Again, it does some damage to our experience of this text to see the allegory that is there, but it *is* there: embarrassment led America *too* into the Vietnam War (think of Munich; think of Kennedy returning from Vienna with his wounded ego from the meeting with Khruschev; think of Sputnik; think of Cuba); embarrassment too made us stay there too long (think of "peace with honor"). It is by his death on the Rainy River, his dying to the adolescent dream of John Wayne and John Wayne's America, that O'Brien can be reborn. Death means accepting one's helplessness, the limits of one's efficacy and courage. It is a death America has been slow to accept and, because of that, a rebirth America has been slow to achieve.

This is largely Coppola's point in *Apocalypse Now!* Coppola's flawed masterpiece offers examples of each of the three points on the continuum of mythic heroism that we have here explored. Kilgore (Robert Duvall) is the omni-competent narcissistic hero who inhabits another plane of existence like the heroes of Eric Helm's *Warlord.* Like Achilles he is untouchable, "one of those guys," says Willard (Martin Sheen), "that had that weird light around him. You just knew he wasn't going to get so much as a scratch." But his inability to be wounded is paradoxically his Achilles heel: untouchable, he is inhuman, willing, like Lear's gods, to kill men in their sport (in this case, surfing). It is

thus no surprise that he joins battle with the charge of the Valkyrie, the Norse demi-gods ringing in his ears. But he lives his heroism at the expense of his humanity. When not organizing a surfing outing, he has sympathy for his own men, demanding that a medevac get his men out immediately. But the enemy are just "fucking savages": inhuman, beneath his regard and undeserving of his respect or mercy.

Kilgore represents one of Willard's guides into the heart of darkness. The swiftboat captain represents another. It is significant that, where heroes' guides are usually marginalized because they, like Mephistopheles, for example, come from a realm beyond good and evil, the captain is marginal exactly because he does not. The captain is a complete straight arrow: a good officer who is there to do a job unquestioningly and to keep his men alive by competently following his training and the regulations. He knows nothing of the world beyond the pale that Kurtz represents and it is inevitable that he be killed before Willard and the swiftboat cross the final threshold into Kurtz's realm of darkness and ashes.

Kurtz (Marion Brando) sees the limits of competence yet can't give it up, willing to drop the big one to "annihilate them all." Kurtz longs for the rebirth that forsaking competence might bring but he is stuck in the myth of the military's adequacy. Like the nation of which he is the completion and fulfillment (as in Conrad), Kurtz cannot give up. Unable to be reborn, he must settle for the self-annihilation at Willard's hand that promises no rebirth. Even so, he finally serves as Willard's guide, ushering him into the rebirth that brings about the boon, the narrative of *Apocalypse Now!,* that Willard brings back to civilization. As the natives offer their obeisance to this new Kurtz-god, Willard instead drops his machete, and takes Lance's hand (Sam Bottoms), taking on the mantle at once of guide and true hero. Rain comes to renew the land. As he pulls the swiftboat from the shore Coppola overprints a close-up of Willard sliding onto a massive Bottisattva icon: Willard becomes the Buddha, now-enlightened, who must return to society with his message of darkness and tragedy and hope. Coppola's point, like Campbell's (and Conrad's for that matter), is that only that man who is riddled with the seeds of evil, *and only that man who knows and accepts it,* is adequate to the task of life. The hope? That by

relinquishing our trust in our self-competence we can attain an answerable competence— one fit to the measure of life's untold challenges. It is only through death of the self that we can embrace our fellows; it is only by embracing the darkness in us that we can find the light. Just so. Pat Barker in her brilliant evocation of another war characterizes the power of her protagonist, psychiatrist William Rivers: "his power over people, the power to heal if you like, springs directly from some sort of wound or deformity in him. He has a lot of strengths but he isn't working from strength" *(The Ghost Road,* 110-11).

That Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece should lend itself so readily to mythic analysis is not surprising since Kurtz is seen reading Frazier's *The Golden Bough* and since Coppola himself says in *Hearts of Darkness* that he shaped the feature film to conform loosely to the structure of Homer's *Odyssey.*[9] But my larger point is in part that the mythic patterns here discussed pervade far less self-consciously mythic narratives, such as Webb's, Caputo's, and O'Brien's, and many others, writers who might object to the mythic readings I have offered.

The myth of the hero furthermore helps us to understand not only the challenge that Vietnam *narratives* face, but the challenge faced by Vietnam *veterans*: to die to the crass and hollow notions of heroism and regeneration through violence that many carried to war; to be reborn to a truer heroism based not on competence but on the empathy that springs from accepting one's wound. The veterans task then is to rip through the pasteboard mask which the myth of regenerative violence relies on for its power, to find beneath it the true rebirth that comes only from compassion, from I-thou relationships with nature, and even with the enemy. This truer regeneration starts with a death that many veterans and many writers about the war have failed to achieve. But if reborn, veterans bring a boon back to the World, the tragic recognition that the myth of competence will continue to get us into wars that competence alone will not enable us to win. Here's Campbell, gnomic as usual, but profound:

> It is by means of our own victories, if we are not regenerated, that the work of Nemesis is wrought: doom breaks from the shell of our very virtue.

> Peace then is a snare; war is a snare; change is a snare; permanence a snare. When our day is come for the victory of death, death closes in; there is nothing we can do, except be crucified— and resurrected; dismembered totally, and then reborn. *(Hero* 16-17)

They carry too a tragic vision of civilization's thin veneer, of man's capacity for evil, and of man's (and especially America's) love-hate relationship with violence. In sum, what veterans of America's longest and perhaps most tragic war bring us is a vision of man's frailty, not a defeatist vision, but a true humanist's sense that man's strengths and weaknesses— like the good and evil we do— are so finely interwoven that they cannot be disentangled. ❦

Notes

1. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero -with a Thousand Faces.* "Myth" has been much discussed regarding Vietnam narrative but usually in the sense in Hellman's words, of "stories containing a people's image of themselves" in *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam,* ix. See for example Beidler, Meyers, and Ringnalda. See also Slotkin's magisterial, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* where myth is seen to have "the power of symbolizing [. . .] society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness," 5. I mean myth instead in Campbell's quasi-Jungian sense that it expresses deep structural understanding of the human drama. On Campbell's complex, sometimes uneasy relation to Jungian depth psychology see Segal, "Introduction: In Quest of the Hero" in *In Quest of the Hero,* xvi-xxii. My interest in applying Campbell to Vietnam War narratives is not theoretical in nature. This is an essay in practical criticism: his myth of the hero, I find, illuminates their deep structures. Still, the fit is so good, the insights so compelling, in my view, that in effect this essay is a brief for Campbell's approach to myth.

2. See Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* and on the "John Wayne Syndrome" *Gunfighter Nation,* 319-20.

3. We often forget that Dante's Virgil, who is Dante's guide into the underworld, embodies both: he embodies poetic greatness, and, the writer of the Fourth Eclogue which seemed to prophecy Christ's birth, divine inspiration; but to the medieval mind of Dante's audience he was

also closely associated with the dark world of necromancy. On Virgil as magian to the medieval mind see Butler, 7.

4. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War,* p. 1.

5. "Chickenshit" is a term which, according to Paul Fussell "refers . . . to behavior that makes military life worse than it need be: petty harassment of the weak by the strong; open scrimmage for power and authority and prestige; sadism thinly disguised as necessary discipline; a constant 'paying off of old scores'; and insistence on the letter rather than the spirit of ordinances," 80.

6. Thus Snake inscribes a contradiction at the heart of the novel which as Philip Beidler argues is a brief for complex moral awareness, complexity that the anti-war left of course fails to achieve. See *Re-writing America,* p. 69.

7. One can sympathize with Caputo in his practical decision not to insist that his lawyer make the nature of the war the issue of the case. His life and career were on the line and it was 1966, quite early in the nation's dawning awareness of the war's ambiguous character. Still it should be noted that such a defense was in fact mounted at just about that time by a physician, Dr. Howard B. Levy, who refused to support the war by training Green Beret aidsmen. Charges were brought in 1966 and he was court-martialed in 1967. See Strassfeld. My thanks to Professor Strassfeld for pointing this case out. Critics differ on how close is the identification between O'Brien and his narrator. My own take is that O'Brien more than most invites the identification and does little to subvert it. Usually such identification between author and limited narrator is dangerous because there is ironic distance between them: the author knows more than the speaker who impersonates him. But the point here is just the opposite: the author is no more competent than his impersonation. One can trust neither teller nor tale.

8. And also, not least because *Apocalypse Now!* was originally conceived by George Lucas whose mythic and interest in and commitment to Campbell and myth are well known.

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DERMOT MCCARTHY

THE LIMITS OF IRONY
The Chronillogical World of Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow*

As a work of Holocaust fiction, Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* is as moving and disturbing as it is ingenious; indeed, it is Amis' narrative ingenuity that is responsible for the work's moral and emotional impact. What moves and disturbs the reader is the multitude of ironies that result from the reversal of time—the "narrative conceit" (Diedrick 164) that structures and drives the novel.[1] In *Time's Arrow* the normal present-to-future progression becomes the movement from present to past and the normative convention of realistic fiction—the inability to foresee the future—becomes the inability to recall the past. A narrator in Amis' *Einstein's Monsters* describes the 20th-century as "the age when irony really came into its own" (37) and *Time's Arrow* is an ironic tour-de-force if ever there was one.

The minor and major ironies generated by the time-reversal all follow from the most important effect of the trope—the reversal of *all* normal cause-effect relations. (The minor become major as the reverse becomes increasingly *perverse*.) The irony is structural-formal when the reader recognizes that the novel is an inverted *Bildungsroman*—detailing the *de*volution of the protagonist—and an autobiography told by an amnesiac; but as might be expected, the trope results in an array of more locally comic, and then, grimly dark ironies. Indeed, the work's most disturbing effects are the epistemological and, ultimately, ontological uncertainties which are the cumulative impact of the narrative method.

Time's Arrow raises the same moral and aesthetic questions about the nature of mimesis and the literary representation of atrocity which have always troubled Holocaust fiction.[2] Also, even though Amis himself seems to suggest, in his Afterword to

the novel, that one motive for writing *Time's Arrow* was to contemplate "the nature of the offence" (176), any reader expecting profound revelations about the nature and origins of the evil committed by the Nazis will be disappointed.[3] Amis is hardly original in his view that what was "unique" about the Nazi genocide was

> not . . . its cruelty, nor . . . its cowardice, but . . . its style— . . . its combination of the atavistic and the modern. It was, at once, reptilian and "logistical". And although the offense was not definingly German, its style was. The National Socialists found the core of the reptile brain, and built an autobahn that went there. (176)

Nevertheless, there is no denying that Amis' novel re-sensitizes us to this particular history in a century of continuing mass violence; moreover, it is the way he tells the story that effects this sensitization. But the relation between Amis' understanding of "the nature of the offence" and his narrative method in *Time's Arrow* is more complex than this. The narrative method based upon time-reversal expresses more than Time set backwards by the moral enormity of the Holocaust.[4] Amis' sense of the nature of that offense is that it was a *prelude* to an even more unthinkable death and destruction.

The narrator-protagonist of *Time's Arrow* is a Nazi who participated in the atrocities of Auschwitz and then escaped to the United States following the war, where he has lived out his life under a number of aliases—the most recent being Tod Friendly. (His original name was Odilo Unverdorben.) As time reverses at the moment of his death, he resumes consciousness but with no memory of his former life and it is only as this narrating consciousness (re)lives Tod's life, backwards from his death, that it—and we—come to know his "terrible secret" (12). However, one of the subtlest ironies in the book that follows from the time-reversal coupled with the narrator's amnesia is that Amis can sublimate a post-Holocaust into a *pre*-Holocaust perspective. In *Time's Arrow* the past becomes the future and the future disappears—and that is Amis' "terrible secret." For Amis' representation of the Nazi Holocaust in *Time's Arrow* needs to be

understood in relation to what was clearly his over-riding concern in the 1980s: the threat of nuclear holocaust. If *Time's Arrow* is read in the context of Amis' other writing contemporaneous with it— the essays and short stories in *Einstein's Monsters, The Moronic Inferno*, and *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov and Other Excursions*— then the way he depicts the Holocaust makes sense in relation to his larger vision of this century's monstrosity. (If a comparative can be used in relation to the Holocaust, I believe it is in relation to the possible destruction of *all* life.) The Holocaust that is inescapable for Tod Friendly is related to the one which Amis fears is a certainty in his and his children's future. The narration in *Time's Arrow* works back from Amis' own historical moment to the Holocaust of WWII as the *moral* origin of his generation's postmodern condition.

Because of the extremes of its own effects— most disturbingly, perhaps, when genocide is "replayed" as genesis during a chapter set in Auschwitz (128-29)— *Time's Arrow*, ironically, has the power to move the reader beyond pathos to feelings of utter hopelessness. An obvious effect of the disappearance of the future that comes with time-reversal is a rigid determinism. But *Time's Arrow* is not simply another whimper of the species in the face of the history it tries unsuccessfully to explain. To use the vernacular for a moment, the book chokes more than it whimpers; and what chokes it is Amis' rage at what has transpired since WWII *despite* our knowledge of the Holocaust. For our civilization's response to the Nazi genocide has been to perfect techniques of global destruction. It is this combination of deep rage and profound despair which ultimately sets the limits to the ironies in *Time's Arrow*; but the same emotions also impel Amis to take the artistic risks he does in this novel which ultimately reaffirms the capacity of narrative fiction not only to mirror a world of terrifying absurdity, but also to hold that world accountable.

According to Lawrence Langer, "No apparent rationality" is a major characteristic of literary representations of the Holocaust (22) and the time-reversal in *Time's Arrow* clearly falls into this tradition. For it produces a world that is irrationally chronological and illogically rational— a *chronillogical* world which not only captures "the atmosphere [and] the landscape of atrocity"

(Langer 22) but enthralls the reader with its continuous transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar. In this respect, *Time's Arrow* is an excellent example of the Russian Formalist concept of "defamiliarization." In "Art as Technique," Shklovsky argues that literature does not imitate the world so much as make it strange; the purpose of art is to help us "recover the sensation of life" (20) lost because of the numbing effect of our daily routines. In *Time's Arrow*, what Amis' technique recovers is a *moral* sensation; his method defamiliarizes a specific moment in modern history for us—the Holocaust—and in the process re-sensitizes us to the magnitude of human evil manifested in it. The narrative proceeds toward this moral goal by steadily rendering life in general, as well as particular phenomena, uncannily familiar.[5]

The scale of ironies in *Time's Arrow* moves from the simple to the complex and begins with the comic. Tabloid newspapers are delivered to their readers by garbage trucks (20). A meal occurs when

> you select a soiled dish, collect some scraps from the garbage, and settle down for a short wait. Various items get gulped up into my mouth, and after skillful massage with tongue and teeth I transfer them to the plate for additional sculpture with knife and fork and spoon. (19)

Shopping involves taking the various items to the supermarket, where "I am promptly and generously reimbursed for my pains. Then you tool down the aisles with trolley or basket, returning each can or packet to its rightful place" (19). Tod bolsters his income by taking from children:

> Tod'll come on up. The toy, the squeaky duck or whatever, will be offered to him by the smiling child. Tod takes it. And backs away, with what I believe is called a shiteating grin.... Then he heads for the store, to cash it in. For what? A couple of bucks. Can you believe this guy? He'll take candy from a baby, if there's fifty cents in it for him. (23)

As the comic ironies become darker, however, they become satiric. A "Crisis Centre" is where women go *looking for* trouble:

> If you want a crisis, just check in. The welts, the abrasions and black eyes get starker, more livid, until it is time for the women to return, in an ecstasy of distress, to the men who will suddenly heal them. Some require more specialized treatment. They stagger off and go and lie in a park or a basement or wherever, until men come along and rape them, and then they're okay again. (39)

In this chronillogical world, pollution *is* progress:

> People all have jobs now, at the steel mill and the auto plant. They wash the wind. Just as they clean up all the trash and litter, they also clean up the earth and sky, transmogrifying cars, turning tools, parts, weapons, bolts into carbon and iron. They've really got to grips with their environmental problems . . . . (57)

This kind of satiric irony becomes more pointedly thematic when such apparent progress leads Tod to conclude that, for industrial laborers, "Work liberates: Friday evenings, as they move off towards it, how they laugh and shout and roll their shoulders" (57). The echo of the motto on the gate to Auschwitz, "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" (131), is a chilling reminder of where the novel is heading. So, too, are what could be called the prescient echoes of Nazism in Tod's thinking that

> when the world war comes— we'll be just right to fight it. We are, after all, a superb physical specimen. . . . We're not club-footed or marxist or nuts. We have no conscientious objections or anything of that kind. We're perfect. (59)

Amis does not avoid the obvious scatological ironies that would result from the reversal of normal cause-effect relations in

the physical world. In fact, he develops them along a scale which moves from the comic to the thematic and which ultimately expresses an "excremental vision" Swiftian in scope.[6] At the outset of his journey, Tod intuits that the "secret" he is moving toward has to do "with trash and shit" (73). He is struck by the "weird" fact that "All life . . . all sustenance, all meaning (and a good deal of money) issues from a single household appliance: the toilet handle" (18).[7] Before he becomes Odilo, as Hamilton de Souza, Tod "dreams he is shitting human bones" (116). The motif reaches its apocalyptic nadir when Odilo arrives at the "Anus Mundi" (133), the "fiercely coprocentric" world of Auschwitz: "It was *made* of shit" (132).

In the Auschwitz chapters, the chronillogy produces ironies that are best described as obscene.[8] Uncle Pepi, the Dr. Mengele character, like Shelley's Frankenstein "can knock together a human being out of the unlikeliest odds and ends" (142). The guards supervising the *dressing* of the women have a habit of touching them, usually to *give* them jewelry, but "at other times quite gratuitously. Oh, I think they mean it well enough. . . . And it definitely has the effect of calming them down. One touch, there, and they go all numb . . ." (130). But it is the pathetic image of the young girls, surrounded by parents and grandparents, "Just made, and all raw from their genesis" (131) which ushers in the most obscene irony generated by Amis' defamiliarization technique— the reversal of death and life.

At Auschwitz genocide becomes genesis: "Our preternatural purpose? To dream a race. To make a people from the weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire" (128). In an apotheosis of the reversed pollution metaphor from earlier in the novel, human bodies are sucked down into the ovens from the sky:

> Thence . . . the bodies were stacked carefully and, in my view, counter-intuitively, with babies and children at the base of the pile, then the women and the elderly, and then the men. . . . I always felt a gorgeous relief at the moment of first stirring. Then it was ugly again. Well, we cry and twist and are naked at both ends of life. We cry at both ends of life, while the doctor watches. It was I, Odilo Unver-

> dorben, who personally removed the pellets of Zyklon B and entrusted them to the pharmacist in his white coat. (129)

Amis' irony pays unthinkable dividends of pain here as the narrator explains the separation of the men from the women, children and elderly:

> The men, of course, as is right, walk a different path to recovery.... There they go, to the day's work, with their heads bent back. I was puzzled at first but now I know why they do it, why they stretch their throats like that. They are looking for the souls of their mothers and their fathers, their women and their children, gathering in the heavens— awaiting human form, and union .... (131)

The Auschwitz scenes extend motifs that appear earlier in the novel, most obviously those of excrement and of Tod's dream of the doctor in the white coat and black boots. But the most important motif repeated here is that of "making sense." At Auschwitz the narrator expects all his questions to find their answers: "How many times have I asked myself: when is the world going to start making sense?" (123) From the beginning of the story he has been a (dis)embodied voice: "My condition is a torn condition" (103). He speaks both from within and outside the character he represents. The always user-friendly names he goes by— Tod Friendly, John Young, Hamilton de Souza, Odilo Unverdorben— construct the self as always *alias*:

> He is travelling towards his secret. Parasite or passenger, I am travelling there with him. It will be bad. It will be bad, and not intelligible. But I will know one thing about it (and at least the certainty brings comfort): I *will* know *how* bad the secret is. I will know the nature of the offence. Already I know this. I know that it is to do with trash and shit, and that it is wrong in time. (72-73)

Chronillogy makes dreams into acts of memory; the narrator's sense of himself as dreamer is of himself as another. Amis, who has been described as "the latest of Anglo-America's dualistic artists" (Miller 410), creates a narrator who speaks from and to himself as an embodiment of an other whom he knows but does not recognize. It is this separation that makes Amis' use of the dream into a metaphor of *anamnesis*, knowledge as *re-cognition*.

In the *Meno*, Plato defines *anamnesis* as the recovery of latent or unconscious knowledge which the soul carries from life to life (81C-D). The gap between knowing and understanding is expressed in *Time's Arrow* through the metaphor of the narrator's amnesia. Tod Friendly (re)discovers his history, from which he is, in a sense, a kind of exile. His pathology is very much that described by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

> in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (qtd. in Langer 78)

Camus' sense of a lost home and of a lost future is at the heart of Amis' sense of the post-Holocaust generation to which he belongs. In Elie Wiesel's *The Fifth Son*, the protagonist, a son of Holocaust survivors, says: "Born after the War, I endure its effects. I suffer from an Event I did not even experience" (qtd. in Fine 41). Amis' narrative structure and method express this post-Holocaust perspective but in a way that complicates it even further by adding to its retrospective angst a sense that it is being robbed of the future as well. For Amis, his generation suffers from an event it did not experience, and will expire from one it seems powerless to prevent. Ellen Fine describes the post-Holocaust generation as "confronted with a difficult task: to imagine an event they have not lived through . . ." (41), but Amis' sense of his generation's situation and of his own task as a writer leads him to imagine the unthinkable of human extinction.

Following the episodes at Auschwitz and Treblinka, where the narrator and we come to know Tod/Odilo's role in the

Holocaust, "the ironic prophecies" (148) of Tod's dreams are fulfilled. The narrator's "premonition" that "Tod's cruelty, his secret, had to do with a central mistake about human bodies" (48) is confirmed and the world of nightmare begins to make nightmarish sense to us. The parallel between the narrator's movement from amnesia to Platonic anamnesis and the reader's gradual recognition of the plot is cemented by the need for understanding which links them. The narrator's question—"when is this world going to start making sense?"—is also the reader's. For Amis' narrative method of "making strange" forces us to share in the narrator's process of making sense, forces us to imagine the unthinkable, and so implicates us in the (re)discovery of horrors we already know but must acknowledge yet again.

This important and powerful motif of "making sense" in Tod's narrative derives its power, paradoxically, from the way Amis' chronillogical method takes the world and makes it strange. However, the constant manufacturing of the uncanny in *Time's Arrow* ironically tends to subvert the complicity which Langer (22) considers a moral-emotional effect of Holocaust fiction by undermining the credulity upon which the complicity depends. For, as Amis builds upon the possibilities of the chronillogical world, the effect is more than uncanny. When people attach nail clippings to their fingertips and a car accident is an intentional act; when an emergency ward doctor performs his duty by driving a nail into someone's head; when earthquakes erect cities and childbirth is "the long goodbye to babies" (41); when letters emerge from the fireplace or garbage can, or arrive from Tod himself, whose pen moves across the page erasing the words while tears rise from it and are taken into his eyes, then the irony begins to generate ontological instability. This instability reaches critical mass as the epistemological doubt which has characterized the narrative voice from the beginning of the novel reaches its apotheosis in the Auschwitz sections, and the ironies produced by the reversal of time's arrow generate a similar disorientation in the reader, who experiences a similar ontological uncertainty during these climactic episodes.[9]

There is a paradoxical moral logic behind Amis' rendering our own history strange to us. While the chronillogy in *Time's Arrow* produces a narrative world that constantly draws attention to itself as fictive, and as a consequence, generates a distance

between it and the reader; and while this distance militates against a sense of moral complicity, it does not need to be seen as a moral lack in Amis' novel. Rather the chronillogy in *Time's Arrow* can be seen as expressive of Amis' sense of the historical gap between his post-Holocaust generation and its predecessor, and of his sense not only of his generation's relation to the Holocaust—which is *not* one of complicity—but also of the Holocaust's relation to the postwar world. The chronillogy puts us in precisely the same relation to 20th-century-history as the narrator finds himself vis-à-vis Tod; it is simultaneously our history and an other's. The "terrible journey" back into WWII and the Nazi Holocaust taken by the narrator is a mirror inversion of the journey Amis sees his own generation taking *toward* nuclear holocaust. It is at this point that we can see Amis' narrative method in *Time's Arrow* as expressive of one of the earliest theorizations of the postmodern condition—Lyotard's sense of "the crisis of narratives" (xxiii) in postmodern culture. According to Lyotard, "The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal" (xxix). Amis' reversal of the alpha-omega linearity of Aristotelian plot reflects the cancellation of the future by the threat of nuclear destruction; as he puts it in *Einstein's Monsters*—"The A-bomb is a Z-bomb" (22). Hence, in *Time's Arrow* the once and future hero is a mass-murderer, the great danger is moral consciousness, the great voyage is escape, the great goal, death. As a postwar "baby boomer," Amis writes from *his* side of that historical divide. He is a *victim* of the world that produced the Holocaust and that the Holocaust produced; he sees that catastrophe as the beginning of his own postwar moral environment: the world of the Cold War and its aftermath. For Amis, the diabolical conundrum of the Nazi Holocaust is also the unthinkable but clearly imaginable horror of his own generation—the invention, use, development and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Amis' narrative method in *Time's Arrow* is a high risk gamble because the chronillogy not only defamiliarizes the historical world it imitates, it destabilizes the fundamental conventions of mimesis upon which all narrative relies. That instability is the cause of powerful aesthetic effects, but it also jeopardizes the

project by subverting our faith in the capacity of narrative to encode meaning within representation. There is a danger in *Time's Arrow* that the reader ultimately could be rendered morally numb to the shocks the novel delivers by the despair or nihilism which its narrative method also produces. This would be post-modern irony with a vengeance. But, to follow out the illogic of Amis' system of ironies, perhaps the failure to make sense here *is* success. To *explain* the Holocaust would be a crime of art in which the nature of the offense would be, ultimately, mimesis itself. Moreover, explanation seems less Amis' concern than *warning*.

Irving Howe has remarked that

> There is little likelihood of finding a rational structure of explanation for the Holocaust: it forms a sequence of events without historical or moral precedent. To think about ways in which the literary imagination might "use" the Holocaust is to entangle ourselves with a multitude of problems for which no aesthetic can prepare us. (175)

But while it would be misleading to say that, in *Time's Arrow*, Amis has "used" the Holocaust as narrative material in the sense of reducing it to a "subject" or "theme," his approach to that "sequence of events without historical or moral precedent" is to understand it as itself *becoming* a precedent for nuclear holocaust.

For Howe, as for Geoffrey Hartman, the problem facing the fiction writer who attempts to write about the Holocaust is one of conceptualization, not representation; it is the problem of "making sense":

> the novelist . . . must— precisely in order to tell a story— "make sense" of his materials, either through explicit theory or, what is usually better, absorbed assumptions. Otherwise, no matter how vivid his style or sincere his feelings, he will finally be at a loss. (Howe 188-89)

As his remarks about the docu-fiction of Capote and Mailer suggest, Amis himself is clearly aware of this problem when writing about a historical subject:

> What is missing [from their work] . . . is moral imagination, moral artistry. The facts cannot be arranged to give them moral point. When the reading experience is over, you are left, simply, with murder— and with the human messiness and futility that attends all death. (*The Moronic Inferno* 39)

The "nature of the offence" that Amis encounters in the Holocaust is that the Germans transformed "the human messiness and futility that attends all death" into a terrifying human order and purpose. Amis would seem to agree with Howe that, in art, what transforms the messiness and futility of death into the order and meaning of fiction is "a structuring set of ethical premises, to which are subordinately linked aesthetic biases, through which [the novelist] can form (that is, integrate) his materials" (Howe 188).

In Langer's view, "the literature of atrocity, by design and by its very nature, frustrates any attempt to discover a moral reality behind the events it narrates; its questions compel not 'answers,' but a reliving of the nightmare that inspired them" (120). There *is* a "moral reality" in *Time's Arrow*, however; it does not frame the narrative in the sense of providing the reader with a secure basis from which to understand and judge the events and actors; nor does it emerge from the narrative, created from the process of representing and re-imagining the events as story, and ultimately providing the fictive world with an ethos that renders it comprehensible. Rather, the moral reality in Amis' novel is a spectral presence, a fragment of memory, a nagging sense of *déjà vu*, the dream that vanishes with the act of waking. It is a *terrified* moral reality: the same outraged and overwhelmed sensibility that speaks against the nuclear terror in his other writing of the period— and which seems to speak from a similar position of self-conscious weakness. The moral reality in *Time's Arrow* is to be found in the *awe* that attends Amis' sense of the "nature of the offence"; and what needs to be emphasized is that, for him, the same "combination of the atavistic and the modern" (176) which

characterize the Nazi genocide is present in the strategies of the Cold War nuclear powers. High-tech reptiles brought mankind low in the Nazi era, and their successors pose an even greater threat to-day. The Nazi industrialization / institutionalization of evil as a system of genocide has its counterpart, for Amis, in the planning of nuclear warfare by the super-powers. At the end of his 1987 essay, "Nuclear City: the Megadeath Intellectuals," Amis writes: "However far you go into nuclear weapons, there is no understanding to be had, only more knowledge" (*Visiting Mrs. Nabokov* 32); and the same can be said for the Holocaust.

The narrative method and structure in *Time's Arrow* follow the conventions of the detective or mystery novel— the movement forward that is a going back, the "reconstruction of the crime." To use a video metaphor, the narrative structure of the novel is the "reverse scan" implicit in the detective's quest: *Time's Arrow* is a "replay" of an action that has already happened. The I/him split in the narrator's consciousness perfectly expresses the gap between amnesia and anamnesis which the narrative closes when the narrator as amnesiac detective discovers that *he* is the criminal he has been seeking. In terms of the myth that underwrites the detective's quest, Theseus recognizes himself in the monster he discovers, and the monstrosity at the center of the maze is as much the mirror of narrative itself as it is the self reflected within it.[10] His narrator's condition may be Amis' comment on contemporary historical sensibility, the woeful historical ignorance amongst contemporary youth, or the ignorance/indifference of their educators, but the narrator-detective's belatedness is also the necessary precondition for his ironic knowledge. The dissociation of sensibility from which he suffers is, chronillogically, both cause and effect of his forgotten knowledge: ". . . Tod can't feel, won't connect, never opens up, always holds something back" (61) from himself, the narrator.

In *The Information* (1995), the novel Amis wrote after *Time's Arrow*, the narrator spends his days anxiously seeking information he knows exists but which he cannot access. He must wait for it to unfold in time. And this is precisely what Amis' narrative trope in *Time's Arrow* enacts: the unfolding or unpacking of time. Moreover, once we recognize how the template of the detective mystery underlies the narrative struc-

ture, it is also possible to see behind Amis' construction of the narrator the figure of the interrogator. The chronillogical method, however, inverts the paradigm and its conventions: the interrogator interrogates himself and undergoes his own torture. *Time's Arrow* moves from history to the end of history, but as the narrative development turns on the greatest of all possible reversals, the reversal of time, the end of history is its beginning. Paradoxically, the linearity of the narrative method reveals a terrifying circularity, terrifying because beginning and end coincide at a point of identity and repetition.

Repetition and identity are figures in another interrogative paradigm of our century: psychoanalysis, "the talking cure." The mystery genre is a major narrative form in the 20th-century in which epistemological issues are dominant, but so, too, is the psychoanalytic "case history," and the latter also seems to underwrite Amis' form in *Time's Arrow*. Although a character tells Tod that "he has no soul" (62), the narrator could be considered as just that, Tod's soul, or a level of consciousness that is as gradually informed by the preconscious as it is constantly tormented by the repressed unconscious. The psychoanalytic nature of the narrator's quest for understanding becomes explicit when he complains that "There's another language, a second language, here in Tod's head. We sometimes dream in that language too" (15); but, of course, he does not understand the language of the dream. Like the analysand, Tod must wait for the information to arrive, information which when it does come clear, is as much produced from within himself as it is received from the other who is also himself. But as with everything else, chronillogy makes *Time's Arrow* an ironic form of the "talking cure" because it produces narration that mimics as it undermines the therapeutic norm— moving as it does from the articulate to pre-articulate. The end is a terrible silence, the muted significance of smoke above a crematorium.

Amis' narrator-as-detective discovers that he is not only the criminal he seeks but the victim as well. The narrator, however, is not only the protagonist's double and the reader's secret sharer; as (almost) self-conscious storyteller, he is also the figure of the novelist-within-the-novel, and it is here that the metafictive consequences of Amis' ironic method begin to play havoc with his project. Amis' method ultimately critiques all the

narrative structures and methodologies which underwrite it—literature, myth, religion, psychoanalysis—and leads to the novel's self-defeat: the recognition that its subject remains beyond the power of narrative—is untellable. From a postmodernist point of view, this self-defeat is necessary. There are no credible master narratives any more, only usable—and so disposable—fictions. For Amis, to have attempted to render this history as narrative in any traditional sense would have been to repeat the original crime of the Final Solution, which was to emplot genocide, to make the unthinkable imaginable within the frame of a *grand récit*—the Third Reich. The narrative flight of *Time's Arrow* ultimately disappears into thin air because it knows the limits of emplotment, the limits of making sense. It should be emphasized, however, that the novel does not do this to mystify the history, for the effect is quite the contrary: through its many and complex ironies, *Time's Arrow* reaffirms the mystery of fiction (in the older sense of "mystery") as a practice whose value to the species depends upon the recognition of fundamental limits. As Amis himself has asserted: literature represents "The best that humans can do. . . . The best moral thought" (McGrath 196). There are some things which, to tell *as story*, would put our very humanity at risk.

This helps explain, perhaps, the profoundly troubling ambiguity in the final sentences of the novel, an ambiguity which is only partly caused by the chronillogical trope itself. The narrator reports that

> When Odilo closes his eyes I see an arrow fly—but wrongly. Point-first. Oh no, but then. . . . We're away once more, over the field. Odilo Unverdorben and his eager heart. And I within, who came at the wrong time—either too soon, or after it was all too late. (173)

"Too soon" and "too late" are temporal markers impossible to stabilize by this point in the novel. What time zone do they refer to? There is no way that the narrator could have stopped Tod *in time* from becoming Odilo or Odilo from becoming Tod Friendly. On the metafictive level, this inevitability points to the impotence of strictly historical narrative to be anything more than

repetition. At one point in his ironic anamnesis, the narrator speculates about the nature of mimesis and so about the art form in which he is himself an unconscious figure:

> Like writing, paintings seem to hint at a topsy-turvy world in which, so to speak, time's arrow moves the other way. The invisible speedlines suggest a different nexus of sequence and process. That thought again. It always strangely disquiets me. I wonder: is this the case with all the arts? (95)

The hermeneutic vertigo that this passage creates— in looking into the world of art, the narrator is looking outward to the world of the reader— is an instance of what McHale means when he describes how a postmodernist novel can push epistemological questions so far that they tip over into ontological questions. The passage raises exactly the kind of questions that McHale argues the postmodern novel asks:

> What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? How is a projected world structured? (*Postmodernist Fiction* 10)

The "topsy-turvy" world of art that Amis' narrator notices is in fact *our* world, and at this point, Amis' irony blows a heuristic fuse. The narrator speculates that his world might not make sense until understood in the inverted image of art; that inverted image, however, would be the world of history that Amis has attempted to make intelligible through the "topsy-turvy" chronillogy of the narrative. But *neither* "nexus of sequence and process," fiction or history, makes sense in the ways the narrator and we need them to. The arrow of time the narrator sees flying at him "wrongly. Point first" is arriving from *our* world. The ironic limit here is that if the narrator's world of horror is reality, then our world, its strangely disquieting reflection, is the moral and metaphysical nightmare which makes sense of it. This, of course, is the beginning point of Amis' metafictive

experiment, but as this passage shows, the novel cannot progress beyond its own circularity. Amis' narrative structure makes mimesis into a trap; there is no progress, only the regress of endless repetition. The metafictive horror in *Time's Arrow* is the narrative equivalent of the visual conundrum of an Escher drawing, in which foreground-background distinctions are impossible to fix: the past seems to emerge from the present, the present to move into the past. There is no escape from history because it is always about to happen.

In his collection of short stories dealing with the nuclear threat, *Einstein's Monsters* (1987), Amis asserts that "Our time is different" (17) because a different time sense was created with the atomic explosions that ended WWII; a new clock began ticking.[11] In the "Introduction: Thinkability," it's clear that, for Amis, this new time-sense is running backwards: the nuclear clock is counting down to the end of time. "The A-bomb is a Z-bomb." The future has been foreshortened; time and the universe are contracting, not expanding. *Time's Arrow* expresses this terror by literally reversing what Stephen Hawking calls the thermodynamic and psychological arrows of time (145, 147).[12]

The Holocaust of WWII and the fear of nuclear destruction seem to come together in Amis' imagination around the metaphor of time: both represent the disappearance of hope, of belief in a future. For Amis, the potential for nuclear holocaust emerged from the actual Holocaust of the Second World War. What he describes as "the evolutionary firebreak of 1945"—i.e., Hiroshima and Nagasaki (*Einstein's Monsters* 18)—was glimpsed already in the Dresden Fire Storm earlier in the war.[13] (It was this traumatic event that Vonnegut made the center of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.[14]) The two holocausts, the one real and historical, the other potential but no less real, converge in Amis' mind in terms of their "thinkability."[15]

In *Einstein's Monsters* Amis asserts that "Art celebrates life and not the other thing, not the opposite of life" (19), and yet *Time's Arrow* looks steadfastly at mass death, its victims and the monsters who killed them. The protagonist, Odilo Unverdorben, is one of those monsters. But is he also one of *Einstein's* monsters? The question seems outrageous and yet, in as much as Odilo is one of the "doctors" who justified their barbarism under

the rubric of "Nazi science," he derives from the same narrative archetype as does the figure Amis deploys in his book about the bomb. Einstein's monsters are the bombs but also the bomb-makers. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is behind both Odilo Unverdorben and Amis' representation of Einstein:

> All peculiarly modern ills, all fresh distortions and distempers, Bujak attributed to one thing: einsteinian knowledge, knowledge of the strong force. It was his central paradox that the greatest—the purest, the most magical—genius of our time should have introduced the earth to such squalor, profanity and panic. (*Einstein's Monsters* 37)

Amis connects the unthinkable—total destruction of life on earth—with what he describes in *Einstein's Monsters* as "einsteinian knowledge," but this "knowledge of the strong force" is not the new physics so much as a diabolic metaphysics: the "knowledge of the strong force" is the lesson of the Nazi Holocaust, the knowledge of the human capacity for evil. If a nuclear explosion, for Amis, is like the face of Jehovah—to look directly at it is to invite destruction, was the Nazi Holocaust another face of God? What kind of God? Looking into the face of God, into the face of total annihilation, these are the limits of the thinkable, but the unthinkable first confronted us, in this century perhaps, when we discovered the scope of human amorality in the death camps of the Final Solution. The nuclear age is a continuation of the "strong force" that mankind discovered there; in effect, nuclear holocaust will be the final end of that Nazi "project." Thus, in *Time's Arrow* and *Einstein's Monsters*, Amis deals with the terrifying fact that our century has twice confronted us with the limits of the "thinkable"—the Holocaust of WWII and the potential holocaust of the end of the world.[16]

Amis published his short story, "Bujak and the Strong Force," in 1985. It ends with a paragraph of time-reversal clearly influenced by the "famous" paragraph in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*.[17] Two years before this, in 1983, Amis interviewed and wrote a piece on Vonnegut for the *Observer*. In it he describes *Slaughterhouse-Five* as "a cunning novella" and judges it "a dazzling minor classic" (*The Moronic Inferno* 135). What Amis admires

about Vonnegut is his daring "to attempt the impossible: to write a funny book about Nazism"; "to write about Dresden, about war, violence and waste, with maximum irony" (*The Moronic Inferno* 133-34). Presumably, Amis saw the potential for his own kind of "maximum irony" in Vonnegut's time-reversal technique. At the close of his *Observer* article, however, Amis reports a devastating exchange:

> "There was Dresden," said Vonnegut, "a beautiful city full of museums and zoos—man at his greatest. And when we came up, the city was gone. . . . The raid didn't shorten the war by half a second, didn't weaken a German defence or attack anywhere, didn't free a single person from a death camp. Only one person benefitted."
>
> "And who was that?"
>
> "Me. I got several dollars for each person killed. Imagine." (*The Moronic Inferno* 137)

In daring to go further than Vonnegut, Amis must have recognized he was not only upping the moral ante set by the earlier novel, but maximizing the moral ambiguity of his own project as well.

When genocide is seen to make sense as genesis, *Time's Arrow* reaches an ironic limit that is the limit of the narrative project itself—the novel whose genesis has been the Nazi genocide. In Chapter 5, Tod begins his account of arriving at Auschwitz Central with the ironically hopeful expectation that now "The world is going to start making sense . . ." (124); following the detailed description of the activities in the camp in the chapter, he begins Chapter 6 with: "Well, how do you follow that?" (146) The rhetorical question is an ironic reprise of Adorno's famous remark: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34); and the narrator's answer: "you can't. Of course you can't," urges the reader to consider the metafictive dimension of the novel.

Langer paraphrases Adorno's concern to be that art which deals with the Holocaust risks making "moral chaos into aesthetic form" and so "misrepresent[ing] that chaos and creat[ing] a sense of meaning and purpose in the experience of

the Holocaust" (22). But Irving Howe has a more interesting response to Adorno's admonitory *caveat*:

> Adorno, perhaps with only a partial awareness, was turning back to a "primitive" religious feeling— the feeling that there are some things in our experience, or some aspects of the universe, that are too terrible to be looked at or into directly. In ancient mythologies and religions there are things and beings that are not to be named. They may be the supremely good or supremely bad, but for mortals they are the unutterable, since there is felt to be a limit to what man may see or dare, certainly to what he may meet. Perseus would turn to stone if he were to look directly at the serpent-headed Medusa, though he would be safe if he looked at her only through a reflection in a mirror or a shield (this latter strategy . . . being the very one that the cannier writers have adopted in dealing with the Holocaust). (181)

Amis' chronillogical method in *Time's Arrow* shows that he is one of these "cannier writers": the reverse chronology of his fictive mirror-world allows us both to look at history obliquely and to think about the unthinkable. But although Howe's reading of the myth of Perseus and Medusa as an allegory of mimesis is profoundly suggestive, it is surprising that he does not consider a form of the unapproachable/inexpressible closer to the culture and myths of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust— namely, the Tetragrammaton, the four consonants of the name of God— "Yahweh"— which cannot be pronounced but must be said only through a substitute, "Adonai." When written, the four vowels of the latter are combined with the four consonants of the former to produce "Jehovah."[18] The sign "Jehovah" *covers* its referent by simultaneously expressing and concealing it and this ironic signification is a precise analogue to the narrative form of *Time's Arrow*, which presents the Holocaust *through* a veil of irony. Of course, to connect the Holocaust and the name of God in this way— except in the darkest of theologies— is more absurd than blasphemous,[19] but in a sense there is something heretical in a

line of thought which connects the Nazi genocide and the threat of nuclear holocaust and which regards the Holocaust as an event in the moral history of the human species more than as an exclusively Jewish catastrophe.

It should be pointed out as well that the connection in Amis' thinking between the Nazi Holocaust and the threat of nuclear holocaust also would have been strengthened by his reading of Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors*. Diedrick has pointed out how "virtually every aspect of *Time's Arrow*—historical setting, plot, characterization, even language—is informed by [Lifton's book]" (173); but what is not recognized is that Amis' reading of Lifton's study of the psychopathology of Nazi genocide would also have strengthened the connection in his mind between that history and an eventual nuclear apocalypse. Lifton suggests that the value of his study of the Nazi doctors is that it may lead to a more general psychology of genocide:

> If there is any truth to the psychological and moral judgments we make about the specific and unique characteristics of Nazi mass murder, we are bound to derive from them *principles* that apply more widely—principles that speak *to the extraordinary threat and potential for self-annihilation that now haunt humankind*. (417 emphasis added)

Lifton too, it seems, sees a continuity between the Nazi Holocaust and the threat of nuclear holocaust; and the "megadeath intellectuals" Amis interviews and describes in his essay, "Nuclear City," in *The Moronic Inferno*, clearly exemplify Lifton's description of what occurs when professionals in the arms race undergo the "doubling" that produces a "nuclear-weapons self" (464-65).[20]

Blasphemous, heretical, Swiftian, absurdist—however we label the irony in *Time's Arrow*, the effects Amis' chronillogy produces are fundamental to the novel's artistic success and significance. Some of the effects are comic and, to a certain extent, there is a comic element in *all* the inversions which result from the narrative method. In "Holocaust *Laughter*?" Terence Des Pres distinguishes between realistic and comic mimesis: the former is compelled, paradoxically, to reproduce the world it

seeks to displace; while the latter generates a laughter which "is hostile to the world it depicts and subverts the respect on which representation depends" (219). While Amis' narrative method in *Time's Arrow* subverts mimesis, it does not express a disrespect for the history it represents; moreover, within the limits it probes and discovers, the irony— even when obscene, *ironically*— is appropriate for the moral and aesthetic goals the novel seems to have set itself.

Des Pres argues that the tragic mode is mimetic and "elevates *what is*," whereas "the comic spirit proceeds in an antimimetic mode that mocks *what is*":

> Tragic seriousness, with its endorsement of terror and pity, accepts the terrible weight of what happens. There is thus a connection between solemnity and reverent regard for the burden of the past, a sense of responsibility, perhaps also of guilt, that unites us with the scene of suffering and quiets us with awe. (220)

Amis' ironic method in *Time's Arrow* is simultaneously mimetic *and* anti-mimetic, and consequently, places the reader, uncomfortably, uncannily, *between* the tragic and comic poles of moral/aesthetic experience.[21] The effect of this awkwardness is that the reader is *not* moved, in the tradition of tragic experience, to *accept* "the terrible weight of what happens." The last thing Amis wants to do with *Time's Arrow* is *quiet* the reader with awe in the face of this century's terrible history; rather, he wants to awaken the reader to the terrible continuity between the Nazi Holocaust and the imminent holocaust of nuclear war. ❦

Notes

1. Langer remarks that "the Holocaust assaulted the very notion of temporal sequence.... [T]he kind of atrocity at issue here assaulted the very coherence of time and led to the breakdown of 'chronology' as a meaningful conception" (251). Along with the "famous" paragraph in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* which seems to be the primary literary inspiration for Amis' narrative experiment (see *Time's Arrow* 175), other

literary antecedents would include *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alejo Carpentier's *Viaje a la Semilla*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Benjamin Buttons," Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*, Brian Aldiss' *An Age*, Philip K. Dick's *Counter-Clock World*, and J.G. Ballard's "Mr F. is Mr. F."

2. Lawrence Langer discusses the characteristics and themes of Holocaust fiction in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975); for extensive consideration of the moral and aesthetic issues raised by the literary representation of the Holocaust, see also *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (1988) and *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedlander (1992).

3. Indeed, Amis simply seems to combine Hannah Arendt's famous "banality of evil" with the stereotype of the "good German." The narrator describes the protagonist as a product of his culture: "I've come to the conclusion that Odilo Unverdorben, as a moral being, is absolutely unexceptional, liable to do what everybody else does, good or bad, with no limit, once under the cover of numbers. He could never be the exception; he is dependent on the health of his society . . ." (164-65).

4. Lang makes the point that the "moral enormity" of the Holocaust "could not fail to affect the act of writing and the process of literary representation" (1) and Amis' use of a narrative method that alters the fundamental laws of the universe with regard to our perception and understanding of cause-effect relationships in the physical world would seem to derive as much from an empathic imagination as from literary wit.

5. Diedrick uses Freud's concept of the uncanny— "a return of the repressed"— to describe the structural relationship between "the two 'halves' of *Time's Arrow*— the Auschwitz and pre-Auschwitz sections" (168). Amis achieves the same effect in *Time's Arrow* that Adorno ascribes to Picasso's *Guernica*— which is "not the transfiguration of empirical reality . . . but its *dis*figuration, the conscious and deliberate alienation of the reader's sensibilities from the world of the usual and familiar, with an accompanying infiltration into the work of the grotesque, the senseless, and the unimaginable, to such a degree that the possibility of aesthetic pleasure . . . is intrinsically eliminated"; see Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, 2-3.

6. See Norman O. Brown's discussion of Swift's 'excremental vision' in *Life Against Death*, 179-201.

7. Amis seems indebted to Brown for the connection between excrement and money, which is developed later in the novel when Tod has become the Nazi, Odilo Unverdorben. He and the other escaping war criminals take the gold they have plundered from the victims of the camps and bury it beneath a compost heap: "Of course, the act was

merely symbolic: the gold's temporary return to the earth.... When he swears, Odilo invokes human ordure, from which, as we now know, all human good eventually emanates" (123); see Brown, 191.

8. Diedrick comments that "Before long, this inverted world becomes comprehensible, because it follows predictable rules" and that eventually its "crazy logic" prepares the reader "to confront another inverted world: Auschwitz and its obscene logic" (164).

9. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale uses epistemological and ontological issues as defining markers to distinguish modernist from postmodernist fiction; he also points out how some narratives can straddle the divide: "push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions" (11). Such is the case with *Time's Arrow*. Amis' narrative method "pushes" in just this way and the epistemological confusion it generates gives way, eventually, to the kinds of ontological questions McHale argues underlie postmodern narratives: "What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?" (10) See, also, his more recent *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992).

10. Or, to use another myth relevant to the detective-mystery genre and more specifically to *Time's Arrow*, Odilo is like Oedipus, who also makes a journey back into his mother's womb to discover that he is the criminal he has been seeking. (I am indebted to my colleague, Peter Hyland, for this observation.) The mystery/mythic framework that underlies *Time's Arrow* also structures another postmodern British novel concerned with history and the *end* of history, Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983). Amis has worked in the detective/mystery genre with his most recent novel, *Night Train* (1997).

11. See also, McGrath, 194.

12. There is a chapter in Hawking's *A Brief History of the Universe* titled "The Arrow of Time" in which he contemplates a contracting rather than expanding universe, and what he describes is quite obviously the narrative world of Amis' novel: "People in the contracting phase would live their lives backward: they would die before they were born and get younger as the universe contracted" (150). Hawking's book appeared to much acclaim in 1988, the year before Amis began seriously "considering the idea of telling the story of a man's life backwards in time" (*Time's Arrow* 175). But Amis was thinking in terms of time-reversal before Hawking's book, presumably as a result of the "certain paragraph—a famous one" in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* that he acknowledges as an influence on the narrative method of the novel (*Time's Arrow* 175). Amis' short story, "Bujak and the Strong Force," appeared in the *London Review of Books* in June 1985 (and later in *Einstein's Monsters*) and in it the narrator recalls Bujak's Einstein-inspired

fantasy of a contracting universe in which time moves backwards (see *Einstein's Monsters* 47); the final paragraph describes time-reversal in a way that clearly presages the experiment in *Time's Arrow.*

13. Amis has described the nuclear age as "the one evolutionary thing I'm absolutely clear has happened in this century. Post-1945 life is completely different from everything that came before it" (McGrath 194).

14. In "Bujak and the Strong Force *or* God's Dice," Amis uses the holocaust metaphor to link the Nazi death camps, the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the irrational violence that suddenly destroys the protagonist's family (see *Einstein's Monsters* 28, 30, 36); that is, the metaphor seems to represent the unthinkable coming to pass, either at the individual or the collective level.

15. Also in terms of imagery: the motif of the smoke-filled sky above the camp crematoria in *Time's Arrow* recalls the haunted post-apocalyptic sky of "The Time Disease" in *Einstein's Monsters.*

16. Diedrick writes that "A determination to think the unthinkable unites [*Time's Arrow, London Fields,* and *Einstein's Monsters*]" (132).

17. For the "famous" paragraph in question, see *Slaughterhouse-Five,* 74-75.

18. See Metzger and Coogan, 738.

19. Terence Des Pres makes an apposite allusion to a parallel tradition when he expresses the problem of mimesis and the Holocaust: "in the presence of this awful godlike thing, no graven image is permitted" (218).

20. Lifton's theory of "doubling"—the division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self" (418)—is particularly relevant to an understanding of Amis' construction of the narrator Tod Friendly. And one only has to recall the career of Wernher von Braun, the Nazi rocket scientist who joined the American missile program after the war and rose to become a top administrator in NASA by 1970, to see how the metamorphosis of Odilo Unverdorben into Joe Young/Tod Friendly is a doubling that reflects historical reality as well as Lifton's psychoanalytical theory.

21. Amis has described himself as "basically a comic writer. The shape of my novels are [sic] all comic, or anti-comic, but certainly not anything else, not tragic or even satirical" (McGrath 191).

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Saving Private Ryan, directed by Steven Spielberg, DreamWorks SKG, 1998

Reviewed by Milton A. Cohen, University of Texas at Dallas

In the many interviews Steven Spielberg has given accompanying the release of "Saving Private Ryan," he constantly stressed that he was after a kind of realism that had never been achieved in American war films—a realism that would finally pay due homage to what American GIs faced—and surmounted—at Normandy. Spielberg has never concealed the awe in which he holds these GIs, and his long-standing personal fascination with WWII was strengthened by several excellent books on the European Theater of Operation by Stephen Ambrose, who was the movie's technical advisor (and frequent interviewee himself). In fact, the film is virtually a collage of characters and situations Ambrose has described in these books: Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) is closely modeled on Captain Richard Winters, the supremely competent leader of E company, 501 Battalion of the 101st Paratroopers in *Band of Brothers* (note that Private Ryan, also of the 101st, refers to the men of his company as his brothers and refuses to leave them). Jackson, the platoon's Bible-quoting sharpshooter, likewise, recalls "Deacon" Wray, a crack shot Ambrose briefly describes in *Citizen Soldiers.* Even the plot's central premise—that the Army decides to find and send home a soldier, who in the space of one week had lost his three brothers in combat—came from a small Normandy episode mentioned in several Ambrose books, only here Spielberg took liberties that will be discussed below. Significantly, Ambrose, like Spielberg, does not hide his admiration for the American troops he describes; he reiterates often that they were ordinary citizen-

soldiers, who learned on the job how to match and surpass (in Ambrose's view) the tenacity, courage, and skill of the *Wehrmacht*.

Already, one senses a contradiction lurking between the intent to convey "how it *really* was" and to celebrate the American soldiers who persevered under those conditions. While this contradiction is not inevitable— capturing the hellishness of the first wave hitting Omaha Beach itself pays homage to those who went through it— Spielberg pursues the homage theme explicitly and increasingly as the film progresses. The tone of his film is thus fissured.

Virtually everyone writing about this movie, professional critics and ordinary viewers alike, describe the film's first 25 minutes, or rather, their experience of it, as one of spellbound awe for the enormous realism it gives to the D-Day landing and for the way the film locates the viewer *in* the visual action and especially in the deafeningly aural chaos of that first day's devastation. Technical analysts note the jittery hand-held cameras, making views rise and fall with the waves or with running on the beach; the low camera angles; the lenses with filters intentionally removed to bleach the color into metallic grays; the cacophonic layers of battle noise that make even closeup dialogue between Miller and those around him nearly inaudible.

But other impressions intermingle with this sense of immersion into a maelstrom: Finally, someone has shown the GIs' nightmare that morning of dropping off the landing craft, heavily laden, into waves over their heads and fighting against being drowned before they could fight the Germans. Under water, one GI struggles to get out of his pack, then drifts, drowned. How was it that in this most meticulously planned of invasions no one anticipated this problem? No previous film depiction has shown the German fire on Omaha to be so withering, so prolonged, and so accurate. In Miller's landing craft, as soon as the gate clanks down, we *hear* (since we are further back) machine-gun bullets smack into the entire front row of troops, then into those behind them. The sound is sickening. (Ambrose notes that the entire personnel of some craft were virtually wiped out before they could get out.) When the camera shifts to the German machine-gunner's view atop the bluff, the reason for this accuracy is self-evident: his position is shocking close to the landing GIs. From that range, he cannot miss; his only problem

is too many targets. The one-sidedness of the fighting is agonizing; we wait what seems a long time before a GI starts firing back (wildly), and even longer— much longer— before anything like a coherent attack begins (led, of course, by Captain Miller) with bangalore torpedoes and with the company's sharpshooter finally, carefully, picking off a gunner. By this time, we are ready to scream cheers for our side in sheer cathartic relief, like kids at the Saturday matinee, so relentlessly and frustratingly has this one-sided action held us in its grip.

The beach taken, the action downshifts into a delineated plot— Miller's assignment to rescue Private Ryan— and into character development, as we gradually get to know the individual soldiers he picks for this mission. This is familiar ground in a war movie: the small group given a difficult mission with lots of time for characterization between episodic actions. But familiarity breeds cliché: like the typical war movie made during the war, this one has a soldier from Brooklyn. Here, too, the sterling realism of the D-day scene begins to tarnish a bit as Spielberg's other motive, homage, asserts itself and undermines the plausibility of particular actions, even whole scenes. The small gesture of Ryan's mother half falling-half sitting down as she gets the hideous news of three sons KIA is touching, especially seen respectfully from a distance, through a screen door, and from behind (we are not permitted— not worthy— to see her grief face-on). But there is something a little too apple-cheeked about the long-range shot of the Ryan farm and road in heartland USA. Similarly, Captain Miller's peacetime occupation as English teacher seems intended, like the Ryan farm, to underscore the Ambrose/Spielberg theme that ordinary, pacific civilians could make themselves into effective fighters when their country demanded it. Compare this didacticism to Kurt Vonnegut's caustic rendering of the schoolteacher in *Slaughterhouse 5*, who clumsily preaches about the war's meaning to men who don't listen and then stumbles into his own pointless execution for casually picking up a relic of the Dresden fire-bombing.

The one scene that seems especially false shows General George Marshall, no less, convincing skeptical aides that Private Ryan must be saved; he reads aloud Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby. With the music hinting of Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* and the chiaroscuro lighting behind the good

General, we understand that even those at the top have a heart. All very moving, except that it's phony. Marshall was not known as an especially warm person; it is not the business of the Army chief of staff to involve himself in individual cases; and as one subordinate (who is made to look self-serving) points out, there is no sense in sacrificing eight men to save one. In fact, the entire mission is an implausible invention: "saving" the real Private Niland required no major search or risk. And while a quixotic mission is conceivable under an impulsive romantic like Patton (who did order an out-of-the-way mission to liberate a POW camp containing his son-in-law), Standard Operating Procedure and common sense argue against this one. (Ambrose, himself, conceded as much in one interview.) Only Miller's men— and, ironically, Private Ryan himself— recognize the foolhardiness that risks their lives unnecessarily; to them, however, it is merely another army FUBAR.

Yet, I believe that Spielberg wants us to buy into the General's position. Somehow, in saving Private Ryan, the logic goes, the troops save themselves, because they are all brothers. Tellingly, when one of Miller's men threatens to walk away from the mission, the only way Miller can stop the mutiny is by revealing his long-held (and much bet-upon) secret: his civilian status as a teacher. Not only does this response fail to address the real issue; it is dubious in its own right (why should it carry such weight at this crucial moment of the mission?). Yet Spielberg, deus ex machina, makes it succeed because it represents for him the mystical citizen-soldier theme: the disgruntled soldiers are somehow supposed to feel this.

Other implausibilities crop up. Miller orders the men to take out a machine-gun nest they could easily have bypassed. When one soldier reasonably objects that this is not their mission, Miller responds that their larger mission is to win the war (i.e., destroy the German army). The obvious and inevitable rebuttal to his answer is never posed: "But we don't need to win it all by ourselves [especially being lightly-armed]." Miller's unwisdom prevails and thus loses one of his men unnecessarily.

Some smaller details also ring false— surprisingly, given Spielberg's concern for accuracy: Would experienced soldiers spend as much time in enemy territory not wearing their helmets as these soldiers do? Would a captain show the bars on his

helmet? Both actions invite a sniper's bullet. When one of their group does fall to a sniper, Miller organizes no rescue attempt. The soldier is bleeding to death, calmly calling for help. Instead, the group's sharpshooter slowly maneuvers to take out the sniper; by the time he does, the wounded soldier has died. This Western-style one-on-one substitutes drama for actuality: surely, putting massed fire on the sniper would have enabled a rescue. Was this Miller's failure or Spielberg's?

The concluding battle culminates the implausibilities even while containing brilliant mini-scenes and touches, such as the grinding, creaking, ever-louder, ever more ominous sounds of the approaching German tanks. Miller's men have chosen to join Ryan's in their impossible task of holding a bridge— the only one standing— against what looks like an entire mechanized German battalion. Unlike the Normandy landing, however, the Germans now become poor marksmen for the simple reason that the narrative now has very few Americans to lose and must extract maximal action— hence, maximal effectiveness— from each before paying out his death. Except for the useless translator, each American takes out 10, then 20 Germans (not to mention, collectively, several tanks and an armored car) before a German tank, or 20 mm. gun, or Mauser, or bayonet finds him. This "good guys survive longer" logic is as old as bad war movies and doesn't distinguish "Private Ryan" from, say, "Bataan."

The battle's culmination is even more clichéd. We see a dying Captain Miller, in a final gesture of contemptuous futility, calmly emptying his popgun pistol at an oncoming tank (which curiously fails to fire at him). With his final shot before the tank will crush him, the tank explodes, and over a stupefied Miller zoom P-51 "tank-busters." The cavalry has arrived! The good guys (what few are left) are saved! Whether or not similar events actually happened in Ambrose's *Pegasus Bridge* is beside the point: dramatically, it is the classic plot manipulation of deus ex machina.

What saves this scene— and the movie— are not the P-51s, but individual subplots, gestures and flashes of characterization that leave an indelible impression because they are so brutally honest and so well-realized. Two related ones occur in the climactic battle. Two Americans manning a machine gun in the top of a bell tower are out of ammunition. A German soldier,

having climbed up, takes out one of the Americans, but loses his own rifle in the fight. Now he goes hand-to-hand against the remaining American, one we've come to like. At first the American seems to be winning, but something is wrong: he is clearly exhausted and slowly, inexorably, the German begins to dominate and control the all-important bayonet. Pinned under the German and too weak to throw him off, the American cries for help as the German raises the bayonet. At this very moment, help is nearby: the American translator, Corporal Upham, is half-way up the stairs; though physically small, he could make the difference and save his comrade. But he is literally paralyzed with fear. We then see the German lowering the bayonet, while the desperate American (and the agonized viewer) pleads with him not to. At this point virtually every other filmmaker would have reversed the inevitable: the translator would overcome his fear and fall on the German; the doomed American would, with a supreme effort, throw him off. Nothing of the sort intervenes: we see the bayonet go in (I heard anguished cries from an otherwise quiet audience); we see the German put his weight behind it as he slowly, slowly pushes it deeper; astonishingly, we hear him croon in unsubtitled German, lover-like, as pushes it in to the hilt, while the American feebly resists, then writhes, then goes limp. This agonizing scene (surely, the stuff of post-movie nightmares) ends with a bizarre, but totally credible, fillip: the German passes Upham on the narrow stairs. They look at each other, and then the German keeps going.

That encounter anticipates another a few moments later, as Corporal Upham cowers in a shell hole, unseen, near a handful of Germans, including the bayoneter (whom Spielberg carefully marks by making him bareheaded). The Germans seem finally to have found their aim, and we see the bayoneter in particular shoot two Americans, including Captain Miller. Here again, the translator could become a hero by tossing a grenade into the group. We silently beg him to. But he simply huddles in fright, uselessly. When the translator does act, Spielberg is clearly making a point. Once the rescuing Americans and P-51s have gained the upper hand, Upham takes the Germans next to him prisoner. The bareheaded bayoneter recognizes Upham as the coward on the stairs, whereupon Upham matter-of-factly shoots him.

The double irony, here, is that this German is the very one whom Upham had helped to free, in an earlier encounter. Preparing to execute this prisoner (who helped kill one of his men in their assault on the machine-gun nest), Miller finally yields to Upham's idealistic objection and frees the prisoner, over the protests of the others, who argue that the German may likely rejoin his troops and soon be fighting GIs again— which in fact he does. The translator is thus portrayed as a soft, "bleeding-heart liberal" who must learn the hard way that idealism is useless in combat. In releasing the German, Captain Miller seems uncharacteristically sentimental, for he is moved by the German's desperate efforts to ingratiate himself by calling out all the Americanisms he can think of, concluding with "Fuck Hitler!" The dénouement is anything but subtle: the German proves to be cold-blooded killer; Upham betrays his idealism by shooting him; and Miller ultimately pays for his impulsive softness with his life. Spielberg here seems to echo Mailer in *The Naked and the Dead* and Shaw in *The Young Lions*. Mailer's Hearn and Shaw's Whitacre, both philosophical liberals, learn that they must become as hard-bitten as the enemy (including the domestic enemy) if they are to prevail. But the issue of distinguishing toughness from brutality, softness from decency, remains as problematic and unresolved in the film as it so often seems to be in combat.

Finally, we should look at the framing scenes beginning and ending the film: Private Ryan some fifty years later comes to visit the American graves at Normandy with his wife, children, and grandchildren. Stopping at Captain Miller's cross, he breaks down. Some critics have attacked the scenes, especially the latter, as sentimental and superfluous. They are neither if this film is a homage to the young men who were denied full lives and families—precisely what Ryan has enjoyed. But once again, the emotional issues may be more complex than Spielberg intended. For if Private Ryan has been saved, we must ask "saved for what?" What does being "saved" mean? Miller once remarked, half-facetiously, that Ryan had better invent a new cure, do something magnificent to justify all this slaughter. And his dying words to Ryan are: "Earn it." At Miller's grave, Ryan, crumbling under this remembered enjoinder, pleads that he's been a good father and husband, has lived a good life. But what a burden he must have carried all these years! How can *anyone* justify his life

knowing that a half-dozen soldiers gave up theirs so he could live it? The guilt that any soldier feels about surviving when his buddies did not here echoes and reechoes in Ryan's final breakdown. These questions make the scene—and film—far more than a homage. They offer no answers and leave only unresolved memories, memories Spielberg has brilliantly converted into searing images.

Cold Mountain. Charles Frazier. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997. 356. $24. (Paperback, 1998, Random House Vintage, $13.)

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Reviewed by Charles Clerc, Stockton, California

As Civil War novels go, this one ranks right up there with Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* (1974). It's much less about battlefield combat, however, and more about survival on the back roads: one man's retreat from war and the struggle of two women to save a farm. A mortar mixed of love and determination holds the two separate stories together until their final conjoining.

While I recommend this novel for its engrossing narrative skills, its finely honed style, its masterful understatement, its truly remarkable treatment of period details, its gripping dual points of view, I also find its ending infuriating. A magnificent book is brought low—if not grievously so, then at least scarred—by a single conclusive defect. I'll explain later, but first:

The male mover and shaker, Inman, is a confederate soldier seriously wounded in the neck at Petersburg. While recovering in a Raleigh hospital, he concludes that after "four years gone warring" (it's now 1864) he must return to his home at Cold Mountain. He never seems like a deserter because he has been involved in so much killing and horror (other battlefields include Malvern Hill, Sharpsburg, and Fredericksburg) that he has been emptied, left hollow, but not quite enough to destroy the romantic impetus of reuniting with his loved one, Ada. Thus begins his return westward across North Carolina, one filled with extreme dangers and hardship, brutal encounters, and colorful

characters. At his destination is Ada Monroe, a strong willed, well born woman from Charleston, who had given him enough cause to believe that she will be waiting for him. Ada faces difficult problems of her own, having lost her tubercular father, a clergyman. The refined Ada has the inner resources to maintain the large mountain farm inherited from her father, but none of the technical skills. Into her life comes the drifter Ruby, a wonderfully shrewd and talented worker/friend who guides Ada into restoring the farm. They are joined, in turn, by Ruby's ne'er-do-well fiddle-playing father, Stobrod.

These, then, are the basic alternating stories of motion and stasis: Inman's Odysseyan struggle to return, consisting mostly of macho male mayhem and violence, with slight interludes of quiet and recuperation along a tortuous route of a couple hundred miles (some of it backwards when he's taken prisoner), and, as counterbalance, nurturing but tough feminine restoration and resistance as Ada and Ruby fight to regenerate the farm and to protect themselves.

Frazier immersed himself in research of the period for years, having as his own lodestone the family-told story of a distant relative, W. P. Inman, and his trials during the Civil War. As specific accompaniment during the soldier's trek home, Frazier has Inman rely for reading pleasure upon the delightful Part Three of *Travels* by the 18th century pioneer naturalist William Bartram.

In a book distinguished by sense of place, memorable characterization, authenticity of language, exciting action sequences, only a few selective highlights can be mentioned: the exact details of battle in a phrase like "the slap of balls into meat"; knowledge of weapons, particularly Inman's formidable LeMat's; the poignancy of having to kill and slaughter an orphaned bear cub; the viciousness of the Home Guard, especially by the villainous leader Teague, a ruthless searcher of outliers; authorial familiarity with flowers, fruits, vegetables of the region; Inman's methodically efficient extermination of three Federals who steal Sara's hog; the musical elegy of fiddle and banjo by Stobrod and Pangle; the kindly pipe-smoking goat woman who cared for Inman; the late but welcome comical dialogue that follows when Ada loses her balance, crow-hops on one leg, britches caught low:

— Turn your back, she said.

— Not for every gold dollar in the Federal treasury, Inman said.

At this apogee, we reach the virtual ending that spoils an otherwise superb novel. After 350 pages of tremendous, touching, moving, powerful work, the author resorts to cheap-shot, piss-ant irony. Forgive the crudity, but no other vocabulary is better suited to put the way I feel about those three final pages before the Epilogue. I am obliged not to divulge the climax, but it certainly belies tragedy, a term which some readers have used for it. Others have found the ending inevitable, fitting, perfect. Not I. *Perverse* is an apter word. To my mind, it would have taken more courage to end the novel satisfyingly, given all that Inman has *already* been put through.

The book has become a marketplace bonanza. Moreover it has been garlanded with prizes, and, at this writing, awaits film translation. Are these successes deserved? Yes, of course, but don't forget one stubborn proviso: Ohh, that authorial choice of an ending. The challenge for the prospective reader now is: read the book and make up your own mind.

Soldier-Scholars: Higher Education in the AEF, 1917-1919. Alfred E. Cornebise. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997. 200 + xvi. $25.00.

❦

Reviewed by Mark Noe, USAF Academy

The toughest task in Europe after WWI was occupying the occupiers: after November 11, there were too many American GIs in France and occupied Germany, and they had too little to do. Late in the war, foreseeing such a potentiality, General Pershing directed the initial work for an A.E.F. University. For some time after hostilities stopped, Europe was quiet because of a cease-fire rather than a peace treaty, and the troops had to stay in position, prepared for more fighting. But by February 1919, some doughboys were moved to Beaune, France, and other

locations, where they began a semester of work on a fully functioning university campus.

Alfred E. Cornebise's history of that university, including all its programs and outreach campuses, is a detailed record of the program. It captures well the advances in educational theory put forth in the process. The leaders built the university in thirty days and opened it to qualified doughboys who could gain release from their operational units. (In addition, extension classes were made available at field locations to immigrant troops for rudimentary English as a Second Language training and to illiterate troops for fundamental reading and writing training.) Cornebise traces the military and academic groundwork preliminary to opening the school, along with the logistical process of providing facilities and support functions, in good but not overwhelming detail. He provides some rather thorough biographical data on the faculty and administrators of the school, suggesting the academic quality of many of the members of the Expeditionary Force, enlisted as well as officer. His study is a thorough yet readable "unit" history.

Some specific points Cornebise makes are significant, especially for those of us in military education (or in academia more generally) today. The school was built on the ideas of progressivism. It offered open enrollment, common now but not then, with the idea that the students (soldiers who had been in the trenches only weeks before) were more mature than typical college-age students and were more inclined to know what they really wanted to study and would thus stick to the work. The school used non-professional educators (including enlisted men, often teaching officers through the rank of major). From a military perspective, the opportunity for education became both a recruiting tool (self-improvement) and a national defense tool. Indeed, the educational director of the school, Dr John Erskine, on leave from Columbia University, later used the example of the school in arguing for a national Education Department, combining it with the War Department to make a Department of National Defense. He even went so far as to suggest a vocational "draft" to give all citizens a year of post-secondary education so they might be both better citizens and better candidates as warriors. Some (including General Eisenhower, in May 1945) insisted that the elements of this theory which survived the

immediate post-WWI years were the basis for the American successes in WWII. While Cornebise is clear in showing the dreamy quality of some of these ideas, he is likewise clear in explaining that they were indeed a part of the discussion of the US military and government long before the advent of the GI Bill, open universities, continuing adult education, community colleges, and, yes, even AmeriCorps.

The institution ran into two problems centered on academic freedom. One was the military regulation forbidding political activity: military personnel were not authorized to participate in political activities of any sort, and the university had to work around this prohibition, especially in political science courses. While student newspapers which attempted to run straw votes on upcoming national elections were actively censored, classroom debates on the League of Nations and the future of Germany went on unimpeded, with an admonition to faculty to use good judgment (and, apparently, keep the talk in the classroom). The other freedom came at the intersection of academic and personal morality: some influential community leaders from the States questioned the moral laxity of the occupation army, especially that of A.E.F. University students, worried that they might come home "infected" with the looser morals of, for instance, the French. School officials argued that the doughboys were not infants but adults, seeing a bigger world. They felt the education (through combat as well as through the university) would quite naturally cause the doughboys to question whether they would want to stay "down on the farm, after they've seen Paree." Clearly, the doughboys' many experiences, in the trenches and in the classrooms and in new countries, would affect the outlook of these men; university and army officials understood, as perhaps some civilian leaders did not, that returning veterans would have a different view of their world.

Cornebise also brings out some of the more stereotypical elements of college life which surfaced even in this institution. At one point, a diphtheria-inoculated pig came up missing from a science lab, and authorities were quite concerned about the possibility of hungry GI-students eating bad bacon. (A warning memo actually brought the return of two pigs, the second not known to be missing.) In another instance, when General Pershing planned an inspection visit, the school's military chief,

trying to avoid unnecessary star-level interruption of the academic work, ordered baseball and football games to be scheduled to coincide with the beginning of the visit, sure that Black Jack would stay and watch those most of the time he was on campus. (The ploy worked.) Even without fraternities— banned by the military authorities for their exclusivity— pranks and scheming were a part of the collegiate life.

Soldier-Scholars is an unusual view of a little-considered element of WWI. Informative and readable, it shows the central role played by the military as one of the "laboratories" of twentieth century educational advance. It is a nice capstone for any student of the American WWI experience.

Colder than Hell: A Marine Rifle Company at Chosin Reservoir. Joseph R. Owen and Ray Davis. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996. $32.95.

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Reviewed by William H. Gibson, USAF Academy (formerly: Major, US Marine Corps and Commander, Chaplain Corps, US Navy)

Telling a true story about a war is a daunting task. Yet Joseph Owen, recognizing the difficulties of memories revived and compared after 45 years, tells the story of Baker Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (Baker-One-Seven) with a straightforward simplicity that is stark and powerful in its total impact. Marines and sailors have regaled one another with sea stories, myths, and legends throughout their shared histories. These treasured stories bear a measure and quality of truth that often eludes other historical accounts. More than sea stories or legend, Owen's account of the breakout from the Chosin Reservoir illuminates facets of the truth of one of the brightest episodes in the most dismal period of the Korean War— a war some now call America's "forgotten war".

Joe Owen's recounting of Marine accomplishments is candid in setting out not only moments of extraordinary discipline, valor, and devotion to duty, but also moments of mistaken

judgment, failures of courage, and disgraceful conduct. Mistakes in positioning or aiming guns exposed Marines to "friendly" fire; sleeping on watch allowed Marines to be killed in their sleeping bags; hasty retreat by a mortar section left the company vulnerable to attack and branded a Marine sergeant as "yellow"; atrocious killing of an old Korean man brought shame to a Marine and outrage to Lieutenant Owen. However, these incidents do not eclipse the achievements of the vast majority of Baker-One-Seven as, in sub-zero cold, they repeatedly attacked superior numbers of Chinese soldiers positioned on the hills overlooking their only possible direction of breakout. These Marines were "ridgerunners" who fought their way from Yudam-ni to Hagaru-ri via Turkey Hill, Hill 1520, and Fox Hill. They then leapfrogged with other companies into Koto-ri and led in the breakout from Koto-ri.

It is easy to recount the exploits of a company as if it were an entity which came through intact. But through accounts such as Joe Owen's, we see that there was a fearful human price to be paid. Owen reports that, of 215 initial members and 75 replacements, the count was 27 when Sergeant Richard took the final muster after the breakout. Owen accounts for many who died in his presence and provides a bare notion of the many ways death announces itself in combat. Nichols died with a "rattling sound", Luppacchini with a "grunt", while "Joe Kurcaba's dead eyes stared at me for several seconds" after "a small black hole appeared in his forehead." Scenes such as these contributed to the fear that welled up and had to be overcome.

It is difficult for me to criticize the telling of a story as magnificent as this one, but there are some considerations which perhaps would help us understand it in more depth. In addition to this spare recounting of the facts of the matter, it would be interesting to learn something of the subsequent reflections of the survivors on the personal meaning of these experiences and their wider significance for us all. Also, it would have been helpful to have more sketch maps of the principal actions of Baker-One-Seven, particularly, of the action at Sudong-ni. Finally, only a carping critic would note that the words, "and into the valley of death rode the six hundred," are from Tennyson not Coleridge.

In an age when all of our Armed Services are reflecting on their core values, this story provides us a fine case for reflecting on the meaning of the Marine Corps values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment.

About This Issue's Guest Editor

D. A. Boxwell has been an associate editor for WLA for the past four years. His research focuses on the interconnections of gender, moderism, and war. He is completing a book-length study of British popular culture in the Great War and his most recent publications on Stephen Crane's and Virginia Woolf's Orientalism in *American Literary Realism* and *Twentieth Century Literature*, respectively. An article on anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in New York will appear in *Intertexts* 4.1.

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Sandra Barry is a poet and independent scholar from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her book, *Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide to Her Life in Nova Scotia*, was published by the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia in 1996.

Thomas G. Bowie, Jr. is managing editor of WLA and is Professor and Head of the English Department at the United States Air Force Academy. He has written on the literature of WWI and the Vietnam War. Most recently, he was guest editor of WLA 10.2, an issue with a special focus on Vietnam.

Wendy Bishop teaches writing at Florida State University. Her nonfiction appears in *When We Say We're Home* (University of Utah Press, 1999) and her poetry in *Mid-Passage* (Nightshade Press, 1998), *My 47 Lives* (Palanquin Press, 1998) and *Touching Liliana* (Jumping Cholla Press, 1998). Author and editor of several textbooks, her book on writing poetry in forms, *Thirteen Ways of Looking for a Poem* will be published this year by Longmans.

William Childress published his first poems, about the Korean War, in *POETRY* in 1962. After two books, he gave up poetry for journalism, enjoying a career as a columnist for the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, from which he retired in 1997. An 1100-word poem about rafting on the Snake River will appear in *River Magazine*'s May issue. Childress is one of six poets featured in

WLA's special issue *I REMEMBER: Soldier-Poets of the Korean War* (Fall/Winter 1997).

Ana Doina was born in Romania when the country was under communist regime. Due to increasing political pressures and social restrictions, she and her husband left Romania. She is now an American citizen and lives in New Jersey with her husband and two children. In Romania, some of her poems were published in the national literary magazines: *Romania Literara*, *Muguri* and *Sapatmina*. Recently her poems have appeared in *The Rift*, *El Locofoco*, *Icarus*, *Timber Creek Review*, *Salt River Review*, WLA, and *Chily Verde Review*. She holds an MA in Philosophy and History from the University of Bucharest.

R. J. Fertel, adjunct professor of English at Tulane, received his PhD from Harvard and has been teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War since his teaching fellowship day there in the late '70s. He was executive director of the Tulane conference on the 25th anniversary of the disclosure of the My Lai Massacre. He is currently completing a book on "The Aesthetics of Literary Improvisation."

Gary Fountain teaches at Ithaca College. He is the author (with the late Peter Brazeau) of *Remembering Eliabeth Bishop, An Oral Biography* and numerous articles on Elizabeth Bishop. He is currently completing a biography of the writer, editor, and cultural critic Selden Rodman.

Lorrie Goldensohn's books of poetry include *The Tether* and *Dreamwork*, the most recent of which, *East Long Pond*, was co-authored with her husband, Barry Goldensohn. Her critical study, *Elizabeth Bishop/The Biography of A Poetry*, appeared in 1992. Ms. Goldensohn is currently writing a book on twentieth-century English and American war literature. She has taught at Vassar College since 1982.

H. Palmer Hall directs the library at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. He edited *A Measured Response: poems of Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War* (Pecan Grove Press) and is the author of

From the Periphery: poems and essays. A Vietnam veteran, this is his second appearance in WLA.

D. Melissa Hilbish is an Archivist and Special Collections Project Manager for the National Trust for Historic Preservation Library Collection located at the University of Maryland, College Park. She holds a Masters and Doctorate in American Studies and teaches courses in popular film, literature, and culture.

Carl S. Horner, Associate Professor of English at Flagler College, has published *The Boy Inside the American Businessman*, a socio-economic study of 20th-century American novel and drama, as well as reviews and poetry in national journals.

Dermot McCarthy teaches Canadian, Irish, and 20th-century British Literature at Huron College, London, Ontario. He is the author of *A Poetics of Place: The Poetry of Ralph Gustafson* (1991) and several volumes of poetry, the most recent being *A Rumour of Music* (1998).

George Monteiro has most recently published *The Presence of Pessoa* (University Press of Kentucky, 1988). *The Blue Badge of Stephen Crane* is forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press. His essay "Patriotism and Treason in *A Farewell to Arms* appeared in the Spring/Summer 1997 issue of WLA. His work also appeared in WLA's special edition, *Stephen Crane in War and Peace*, 1999.

Robert Morgan, Kappa Alpha Professor of English at Cornell University, is author of 17 books of poetry, fiction, and essays. His new novel, *Gap Creek*, has just been published, as has his collection of new and selected stories, *The Balm of Gilead Tree.* A new book of poems, *Topsoil Road* is forthcoming in 2000.

Marianne Poloskey was born in Berlin, Germany. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry Forum, Garland Court Review, North River Review* and others, and frequently in the *Christian Science Monitor.* She lives with her husband in Englewood, New Jersey, where she works as a translator and interpreter.

Camille Roman is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Washington State University. Her essay is drawn from a book manuscript entitled *Elizabeth Bishop & the Cold War.* In addition to writing on Bishop, she also has published essays on other twentieth-century poets, including Sylvia Plath, Frank O'Hara, and Robert Frost. She has edited nearly a dozen texts. The most recent is *The Women & Language Debate* from Rutgers University Press.

Jacqueline St. Joan received a 1998 Fellowship in Literature for Poetry from the Colorado Council in the Arts and Humanities. Her poetry has been published in *Ms., The Denver Quarterly, Tumblewords: Writers Reading the West,* and *Texas Journal on Women & the Law.* She is Assistant Professor of Law at University of Denver.

Thomas Travisano, professor of English at Hartwick College and first president of the Elizabeth Bishop Society, is currently editing the complete letters between Bishop and Robert Lowell for Farrar Straus Giroux. He is the author of *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell, Berryman* (Virginia, fall 1999) and *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* (1988).

Jon Volkmer is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Ursinus College, where he teaches a course on Imaginative Representations of the Vietnam War in Literature and Film.

Jennifer Wheelock teaches writing and literature at Kennesaw State University. Her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in several journals. She received honorable mention in *Negative Capability*'s 1996 Eve of Saint Agnes Poetry competition and placed third in the 1998 poetry competition sponsored by *So to Speak: a feminist journal of language & art.*

Keith Wilson is Professor Emeritus and former Poet-in-Residence at New Mexico State University. He has published some two dozen books and his work has been recognized by numerous awards. A graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Wilson served three tours in Korean waters between 1950 and 1953. Wilson is one of six poets featured in WLA's special

issue *I REMEMBER: Soldier-Poets of the Korean War* (Fall/Winter 1997).

Paul Woodruff served with MACV in Vietnam in 1969-70, and since 1973 has been teaching philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. He has published translations of Plato, Thucydides, Euripides and is working on verse translations of Latin, Greek, and Chinese poets. He is currently finishing a book about the concept of reverence as a virtue.

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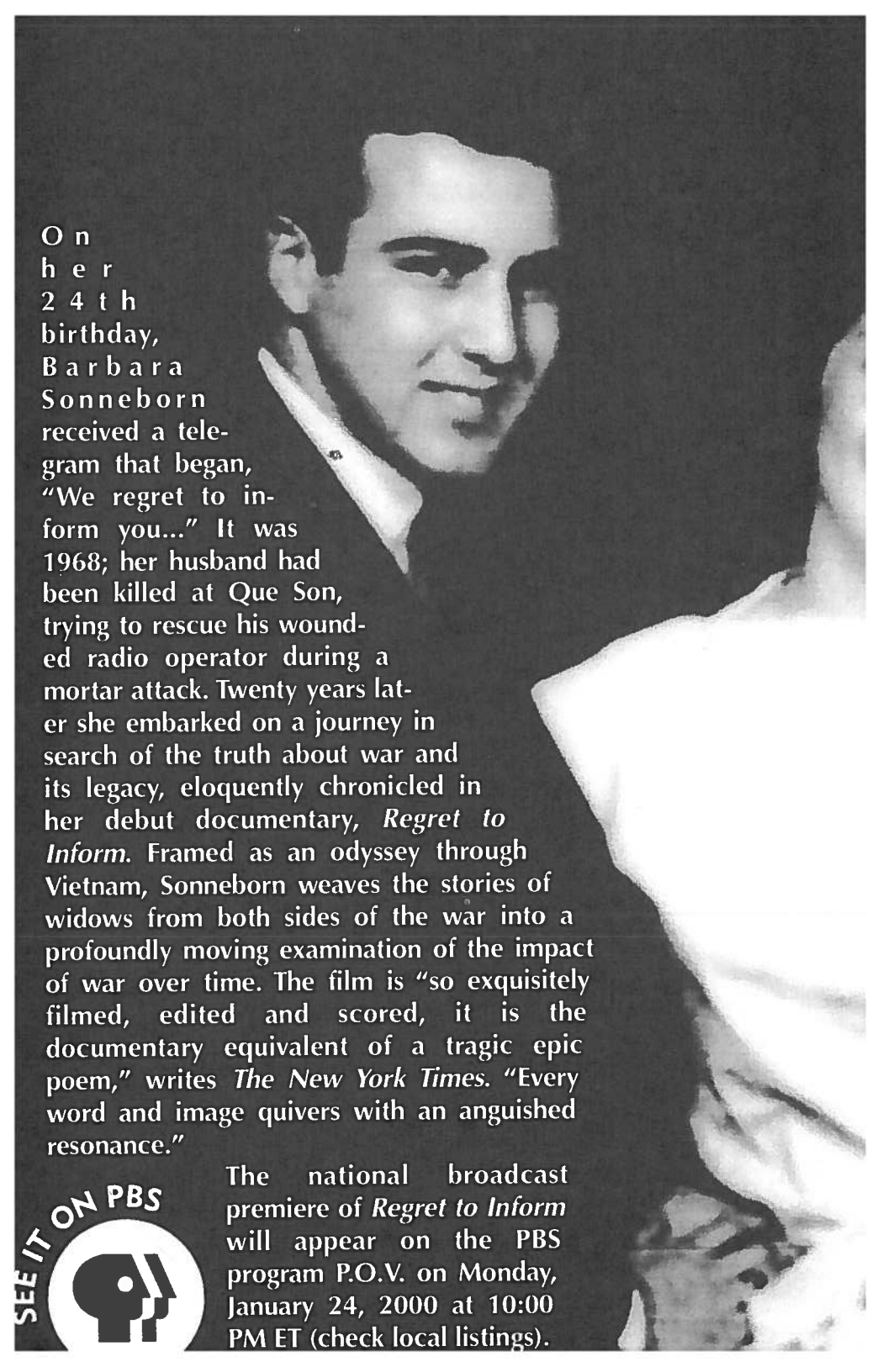

On her 24th birthday, Barbara Sonneborn received a telegram that began, "We regret to inform you..." It was 1968; her husband had been killed at Que Son, trying to rescue his wounded radio operator during a mortar attack. Twenty years later she embarked on a journey in search of the truth about war and its legacy, eloquently chronicled in her debut documentary, *Regret to Inform*. Framed as an odyssey through Vietnam, Sonneborn weaves the stories of widows from both sides of the war into a profoundly moving examination of the impact of war over time. The film is "so exquisitely filmed, edited and scored, it is the documentary equivalent of a tragic epic poem," writes *The New York Times*. "Every word and image quivers with an anguished resonance."

SEE IT ON PBS

The national broadcast premiere of *Regret to Inform* will appear on the PBS program P.O.V. on Monday, January 24, 2000 at 10:00 PM ET (check local listings).

In *Regret to Inform*, widows from both sides speak out, putting a human face on the al too-often overlooked casualties of armed conflict: the survivors. Intercut with beautifi scenes of the serene Vietnamese countryside and shocking archival footage from the wa years, the voices form an eloquent international chorus calling for peace. *Regret to In form* is a powerful meditation on loss and the devastation of all war on a personal leve It is a love story, and a deeply moving exploration of the healing power of compassion



At the time Ms. Sonneborn began this project, she had met only one other American war widow. Propelled by her desire to find other women who had experienced the same loss and to understand what could be learned about war through their stories, Ms. Sonneborn put together a production team and wrote several thousand letters searching for widows. The women were difficult to find. With the help of many veterans, the press, and other widows as she found them, Ms. Sonneborn talked with more than 200 American widows during preproduction for the film. "Many of these widows—as well as the veterans and children of soldiers killed in the war—shared their experiences in ways they couldn't before," she says. "I was overwhelmed by how the suffering from the war continued. As one widow, whose husband died after the war from the effects of Agent Orange, told me, 'It's not like the

In 1992, Sonneborn traveled to Vietnam, accompanied by Nguyen Ngoc Xuan, a South Vietnamese woman whose first husband was killed in the war fighting for South Vietnam. Xuan later married an American soldier and moved to the U.S. in the early 70's. She agreed to serve as Sonneborn's translator on the trip and to share her own story in the film. On their journey through Vietnam—where some 2 to 3 million people were killed during the war—they found women everywhere who wanted to be interviewed. "They were quite surprised and very moved that an American widow wanted to hear their stories," Sonneborn recalls. "The women recounted in painful detail the human and environmental damage caused by what they call 'the American war' in Vietnam." One woman in the film describes, "The cruelty we experienced was longer than a river, higher than a mountain, deeper

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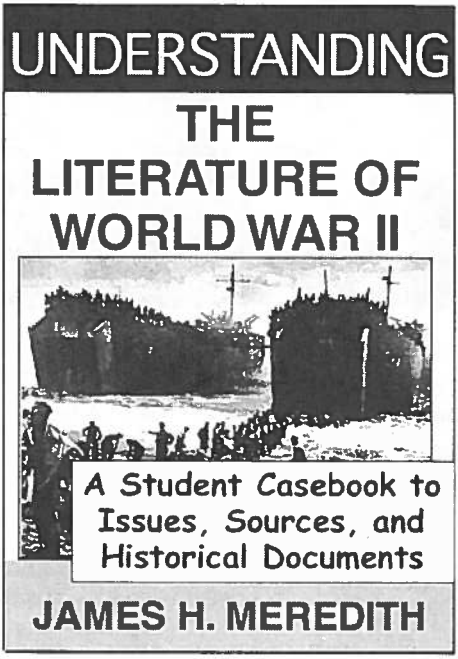

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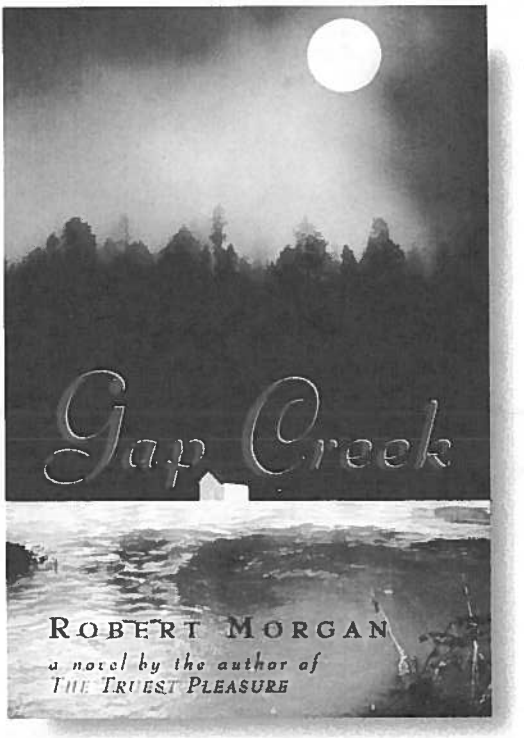

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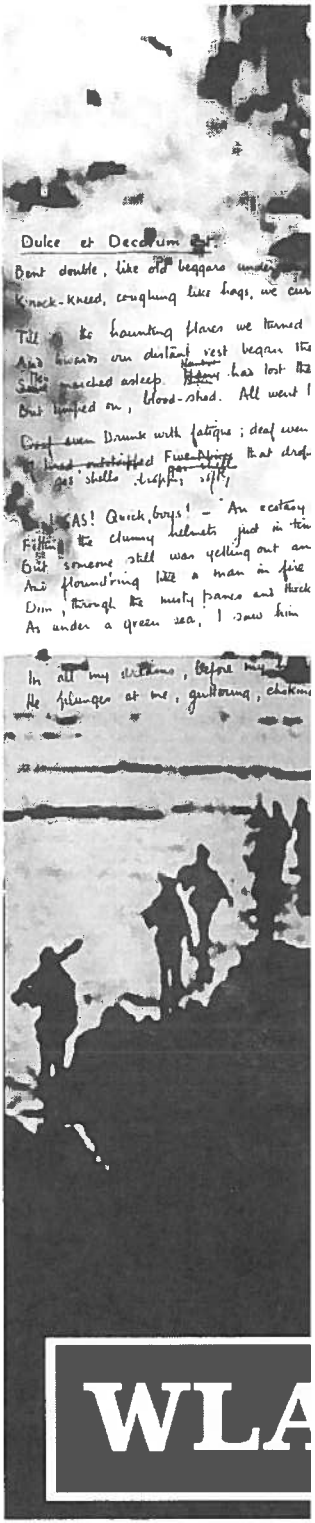

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— David Boxwell, page i

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