

Editor's Note: Farewells, Hails and A Brief Tribute

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As *War, Literature & the Arts* launches yet another volume of war-related imaginative writing, art, scholarship, and reviews, we're excited to usher in our thirty-fifth year of continuous operation with a bold new web design and several significant changes to our masthead. This year we also said farewell to several WLA staff members. Later, I'll have more to say about those WLA stalwarts as well as two recent additions to our editorial staff.

For all our recent transformation, WLA remains committed to honoring the clear-eyed strategic vision forged by Donald Anderson from the earliest days of the journal's existence. In his anthology, *When War Becomes Personal*, Professor Anderson, who recently retired after thirty-three years as WLA Editor, explained the journal's mission this way:

In the long haul of history, a stone ax crushing a skull is no different from a Tomahawk except in its efficiency. We have as much to learn—perhaps even more—from the *Iliad* as we do from *Blackhawk Down*. War and art have reflected each other forever. And it is this intersection the journal . . . has sought to illuminate.

Repeatedly, often brilliantly, Anderson and his crew succeeded in this endeavor. Donald continually expanded and refined his vision of what an international journal of the humanities dedicated to the subject of war might encompass and explore. Donald's aim stayed steady, true: to put a human face on war by showing how war becomes personal. This aim forced a reckoning with the ways we think about and represent war. This reckoning is predicated on the conviction that our stories, poems, films, and other forms of representing war must acknowledge the value and dignity of the individual, for the value of the human person is always under attack in war.

WLA attempts to unravel one of the thorniest contradictions at heart of the human condition. Humans make war. Humans create beauty. Of the two, war is a uniquely human invention. Only our species is capable of imagining and waging war. While *homo sapiens* have proven adept at being beastlier than every other beast, we are also, as Paul West notes, "the entity that paints, composes, makes sentences—a complex, daunting mix." Providing a forum where this daunting mix could be probed, illuminated, and interrogated was no mere avocation for Anderson; it was a vocation of the highest order.

Indefatigable in his commitment to creating a truly international journal wherein writers, artists, and scholars might parse the intersection of war and art, Donald's labor of love has been a form of consciousness-raising work, work that adjudicates the causes, costs, and long-lasting consequences of armed conflict. The kind of culturally-significant project I'm describing here embodies the definition of what Gary Snyder, in another context, once called the "real work." In the process of carrying out this vital enterprise, Donald helped elevate the journal to an esteemed position in the world of war-related writing and art.

Doing the "real work" of running WLA, Donald gradually grew the journal into a venue visited by literary lions. Just a few of the names published in WLA over the years speak volumes about the house Anderson built: Carolyn Forché, Paul West, Andre Dubus, Robert Pinsky, Robert Mezey, and Dana Gioia. This litany is reason enough to applaud Donald, but perhaps the best measure of Anderson's achievement can be found in the journal's demonstrated ability to produce genuine community and generative dialogue. Attend a WLA social gathering at AWP sometime to see what I mean. Or consider these words from a note Bruce Weigl sent me last month: "I'm excited about being in the magazine, and I appreciate your support because I feel a kinship with WLA."

Literary magazines and scholarly journals do create community, perhaps even something like kinship bonds. Donald's leadership has been indispensable in making WLA a space where professional relationships, and indeed friendships, could be forged and fostered. Nowadays, the journal connects contributors and readers across the globe. In any given month, we receive correspondence or submissions from people on three or four continents. WLA has truly become an international journal of the humanities.

In 2010 and 2018, WLA held conferences at which more than a thousand of the journal's readers and contributors from more than sixteen countries gathered for readings, panel discussions, paper presentations, film screenings, and camaraderie. WLA would not have gained the wide following it now enjoys were it not for the journal's sustained ability to inform, challenge, and inspire on-going conversations about the imbrication of war and art. Our international audience and conferences exemplify the impact Donald Anderson (affectionately called "The Godfather") has exercised and just how far his influence spiders throughout the war literature and art community.

Central to WLA's success was Anderson's knack for attracting and assembling exactly the right mix of seasoned and emerging voices. Taking Donald's lead, we're delighted to welcome to this issue more than a dozen first-time contributors. We hope you'll find these new voices as compelling and thought-provoking as we do. We're also delighted to welcome back many old friends whose names regular readers will be pleased to see.

Work from John Balaban (poet/writer/translator) occupies the 2022 Editor's Choice section. Balaban shares an elegant essay entitled "Passing Through A Gate," which details how he, as a young poet and conscientious objector, journeyed across war-time Vietnam recording samples of the ancient Vietnamese oral folk tradition of *ca dao*.¹ The story of the path John traveled to

find, record, and later translate this collection of *ca dao* reads like a literary hero quest. The rich composite of *ca dao* lyrics Balaban managed to preserve and publish is a holy grail of sorts, a vessel of traditional culture containing timeless, life-sustaining song.² We have also reprinted eight Balaban poems to complement his essay.

In our Author's Spotlight, Patrick Hicks, a past WLA contributor and long-time friend, shares a lively conversation he conducted with WLA-newcomer and celebrated Vietnam War poet, Bruce Weigl. Rounding out the Weigl spotlight, we're delighted to publish five remarkable new poems from the poet's hand. Here, I should mention Gary Mills' efforts to better showcase our authors and artists. You'll notice his influence across our new and improved website, but be sure to pause on his engaging layout of Balaban and Weigl's creations in the Editor's Choice and Author's Spotlight areas.

We're pleased to welcome back Terry Graff whose work also appeared in our 2019 issue. Terry's "Deployment of Warbird #5" adorns the landing page of this volume. In the Featured Artist slot, you'll find Terry's word and image essay called "Revenge of the Warbirds: The Impact of Armed Conflict on Nature." The term "warbirds" refers to Graff's uncanny, defamiliarizing drawings, collages, assemblages, and sculptures which depict a "phantasmagorical vision of bird/machine hybrids or avian cyborgs equipped with combat weapons."³

Gratitude and admiration goes out to two other recently retired WLA colleagues. This year we bade good-bye to Bill Newmiller (our longtime Electronic Publishing Editor) and Col Kathleen Harrington (our Managing Editor for the past eighteen years). Both of these consummate professionals were true believers in the WLA mission, advocating for and supporting the "real work" in so many ways. For decades, Bill did heavy lifting to establish and maintain the journal's online presence; he continues to serve in an advisory role. As Permanent Professor and Head of

USAFA's Department of English and Fine Arts, Kathleen supported the journal in myriad ways as both a contributor and editor. WLA is grateful for your contributions, Bill and Kathleen.⁴

We're also pleased to announce the recent additions of two impressive war literature talents to our editorial staff: Col Dave Buchanan (Managing Editor) and Hugh Martin (Poetry). Col Dave, who was my student in the late nineties, currently heads the USAFA Department of English and Fine Arts. Dave is a war literature scholar, an active duty Air Force pilot, and the author of *Going Scapegoat: Post-9/11 War Literature, Language and Culture* (2016). Hugh currently serves as an Assistant Professor at USAFA. He is an award winning poet and essayist, the author of *The Stick Soldiers* (2018) and *In Country* (2013), and a recipient of a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford where he studied under Eavan Boland.

As the year comes to a close and we bid adieu to one WLA generation while welcoming the next, I recall Ecclesiastes:

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth
abideth forever... The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to
the place where he arose...

Continuity amidst change. Interestingly, this passage served as one of the epigraphs for Hemingway's great post-war novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway placed the Ecclesiastes quote (his second epigraph for the novel) right below Gertrude Stein's famous lament about the toll the Great War had taken on Hemingway and his peers: "You are a lost generation." The difference between Hemingway's generation and the new crop of torch bearers at WLA is, of course, that we are no lost generation. We know exactly where we're headed. We'll stay the course Donald set and taught us to follow with his clear-eyed vision and leadership. We'll keep

doing the “real work,” aiming always to find and publish the best literature, art, and scholarship invested in the never-ending project of revealing how war becomes personal.

¹ Describing his *ca dao* project, Balaban told reporter Megan Barnard the following: “I gathered love laments, songs about birds and beasts, poems of social protest and social order (usually renegotiating Confucian obligations), patriotic poems, lullabies, courting songs with male and female replies, and children’s game songs. Most of the poems had never been written down before in Vietnamese, much less recorded and translated.” For an account of Balaban’s project and his archive at the Harry Ransom Center, see Barnard’s article at <https://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2022/04/26/archive-of-poet-john-balaban-acquired-by-the-ransom-center/>.

² Balaban’s efforts to translate the *ca dao* tradition complements the project Balaban pursues in his collection *Empires* (2019), a book of poetry which labors to contravene and outface the destructiveness of imperialism and war. In *Empires*, “the key word is ‘mayhem,’” Balaban writes. The poet suggests that sometimes the only adequate answer to such wreckage can be delivered by art, by poetry, “the delicate thing which lasts,” the thing that mingles and rises with the fragrance of acacias and “poplar fluff,” the thing that “floats over imperial rubble.”

³ Graff’s subject is, as he says, “the all-too-real killing machine of war where the culture of such destructiveness is not only a dominant influence on society, but on an ever-diminishing natural environment through extensive production of greenhouse gases and pollution, use of chemical and nuclear weapons, and depletion of resources.”

⁴ Col Harrington and Professor Newmiller were also key contributors to WLA outreach programs such as the David L. Jannetta Distinguished Lecture in War, Literature & the Arts as well as the 2010 and 2018 WLA Conferences.