Just What War Is: The Civil War Writings of DeForest and Bierce. Michael Schaefer. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1997. Pp. 172, including bibliography and index. $36.00

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Reviewed By Jack M. Shuttleworth, United States Air Force Academy

Readers of Civil War histories and fiction are well served by Michael W. Schaefer's *Just What War Is: The Civil War Writings of DeForest and Bierce.* Though focusing closely on the two writers, Schaefer adroitly extends their observations of that most destructive war into other times, other wars. The first of three parts of the book "Under Fire: The Components of Realism in Combat Writing" offers a healthy corrective to romanticized or cinematic versions of combat. These three chapters wisely dispense with the conventional fustian of glory, grandeur, and cardboard heroics with a clear eyed understanding that a soldier's first concern is almost always personal survival, dealt with in a variety of ways. "What veterans emphasize," he tells us, "is that the soldier's concern for personal survival is normally subsumed into an overriding concentration on the mechanics presently at hand: loading, aiming, firing"(11). Despite romantic historians' claims to the contrary, the *cause* for which troops fight has far less to do with their performance than the quality of their training and their concentration on the jobs to be done. And, with special pertinence to

the writings of DeForest and Bierce, Schaefer admirably treats the various manifestations of fear and its mastery, though recognizing as well the devastating effects of a forced or panicked retreat and more importantly the loss of unit cohesiveness (certainly a lesson there for contemporary DoD staffers). In a comment with special pertinence for writers, he points out the difference between observational accuracy, which many writers have, and literary realism which few attain: "Realism lies not in just getting the surface appearance right, but in imparting to it some kind of meaning or feeling" (17). As unfashionable as such a view may be in parts of the academic world today, readers seek meaning and significance from the books they read; they seek the interpretive insights of a qualified writer such as DeForest, Bierce, and Schaefer.

The other two parts of the book break not quite evenly into discussions of the writing of John W. DeForest, best known for being among the earliest Civil War writers as well as his novel *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867), and Ambrose Bierce, famous for his short stories like "Chickamauga" or "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Both took active roles in the war, both saw significant combat, both wrote extensively—DeForest under the influence of earlier writers and Bierce largely idiosyncratically—and each developed distinctive ways of seeing and reporting the war. Where DeForest thought a military writer could get to the truth in an accurate and reliable way, Bierce was far more skeptical (as one would expect from him). He saw that "those men who have successful military careers are the ones who ordinarily get to write the official histories" and that those who do, often have powerful personal reasons for not reporting objectively, an observation that anyone who has read more than two or three accounts of a single war or battle can understand easily.

Schaefer summarizes these two very interesting writers this way: "DeForest, however much he desired to tell the whole truth as he saw it, could not break completely free from either the romantic literary conventions or the traditional conception of military professionalism. . . . Conversely, Bierce's truth can be accounted for as the logical product of his more intense, idiosyncratic, iconoclastic temper, of his contempt for literary and military conventions of any sort. . ."(134). Fortunately, for students of the Civil War, Schaefer's book helps us see these two important figures clearly, free both from romantic literary conventions and fads and with a tolerant and discriminating insight.

Fragments. Binjamin Wilkomirski. Translated by Carol Brown Janeway. New York: Schocken Books, 1996. Pp. 155. $20.00.

All Rivers Run to the Sea. Elie Wiesel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. Pp. 432. $30.00.

Art from the Ashes. Edited by Lawrence Langer. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. Pp. 694. $30.00.

Facing the Extreme. Tzvetan Todorov. Translated by Arthur Denner and Abigail Pollak. New York: Henry Holt, 1996. Pp. 307. $27.50.

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Reviewed by Petra Gallert, United States Air Force Academy

It's been suggested that writing literature after World War II must inevitably occur in the shadow of the Holocaust. Such a claim might seem sentimental and

perhaps a bit grand (after all, did not Napoleon provoke the death of millions whose fates remain relatively obscure?), but a most welcome number of recent publications suggest that now, fifty years after the end of the war, we can begin to combine fugitive approaches and materials to form a clearer view of the nature and extent of that shadow.

By no means have all survivors of the prison and death camps cared to put into words their experiences and memories. In the face of those who would shrink back from a painful past or even deny that the Holocaust (or Shoah) ever took place we must be especially grateful to the survivors who agree to revisit what the human mind would surely rather forget. Among these survivors is Binjamin Wilkomirski whose *Fragments* delineate not only shreds of images, conversations, and experiences borne away from the concentration camp universe and its aftermath; indeed, one of this small volume's merits is the perplexity with which aspects of identity are laid bare. So, for example, the book begins with a personal meditation on the role of language. Trying to find his childhood voice, Wilkomirski recalls his own speaking to be linked with the Yiddish of his brother, then to be modified by whatever was spoken in the children's barracks, a pared down and utilitarian language exclusively in the service of survival, and finally to disappear altogether as if this child's universe had become inexpressible. Dream-like, nightmarish vignettes of cruelty and helplessness, combine with stark facts, such as the utter lack of a birth certificate for a person who grows to accept provisionally that he is Binjamin Wilkomirski, underscoring the instability of Wilkomirski's world. The "rules" for survival learned during camp life continue to operate as he stumbles through his rescued life in orphanages and, finally, a Swiss foster family.

The narrative proceeds mostly through flashbacks anchored to the more solid "present moment"; an event or image will trigger links with events or images from his ragged past and that past provides the stable matrix by which the boy evaluates his new world. For example, Chapter Five describes one instance of Wilkomirski's puzzlement during the early days of orphanage life where "I was always forbidden to stick to the most important rules of survi-val. . . . But the nurses and the other children seemed to have forgotten it all. . . . They did everything with such dangerous carelessness" (44-5). Indeed, Wilkomirski often seems arrested in time. While this small book itself may be an attempt to find a link between interior person and exterior voice, the unspeakable remains: no language Wilkomirski acquires in his "reconstructed" life can merge spirit and word adequately. He sees himself as alienated and unassimilated into the postwar world.

And, his book deftly matches in form and style the fragmentedness of the child's mind. But it does so better in the German of the original edition of this book than in its English translation. Curiously, the table of contents, with chapter headings that reflect a sense of types and categories in the German text, has been omitted from the English version. In the English text chapter headings are merely numerals. Somehow, the name of one of his very few friends is "Karola" in the German but "Mila" in the English text. Locally mistranslated images may perhaps be excused—translations, especially of literary texts, are notoriously problematic. But one wonders why "editorial" passages appear in the English version (and not the German) and one wonders especially whether they came from the author himself or from the translator. No foreword or footnote explains the changes. Content suggests some may be authorial. A lengthy passage added to the end of the final chapter in the English version seems

authorial; in it Wilkomirski's physics teacher, the only person he felt understood him, is described as an abiding mentor figure. Consequently, the consoling, "look on the bright side" effect of this addition permits the question whether (and in whose eyes) English-speaking audiences might require such notes of comfort. Given that language and its importance in articulating voice and identity are such pronounced issues in this book, it seems ironic that the text is even more slippery for obscure reasons of the present rather than of the fragmentarily remembered past.

Much like Elie Wiesel's *Night* (after *The Diary of Anne Frank* perhaps the most widely known piece of Holocaust literature), Wilkomirski's book is a view into the limbo of a child's experience almost without a sense of future. But where *Night* is the beginning of broad-ranging investigations pursuing responses to the Holocaust, Wilkomirski's step into the present is far more tenuous. Wilkomirski offers an afterword of humbler ambition: the confusions in memory and identity drove him to reconstruct the past; the book is his plea for support of others similarly distraught by the deeply unsettling experiences and memories of the concentration camps.

Elie Wiesel will, one hopes and anticipates gladly, continue his Nobel Prize-winning career of writing and speaking on behalf of Holocaust survivors and of humanity. In a sense, though, his recent memoir *All Rivers Run to the Sea* seems to set a closing bracket around a body of work opened by *Night*. *All Rivers Run to the Sea* returns to the subject matter of *Night* but goes much further by filling in context and details which seemed to have evaporated from the world of *Night*. In *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Wiesel fills in rich multitudes of stories and characters that shaped the young boy whose defining experience was that of a Holocaust survivor. We

learn of his extended family as well as of his surviving sisters, his gradual and often unsure new life in France and, later, the United States, as journalist, translator, and novelist. Wiesel's retrospective is especially moving when it deals with difficult and ambivalent issues, such as the fact that a member of his own family was a ranking member of a concentration camp hierarchy.

As usual, Wiesel emphasizes the symbolic importance of telling the story for remembrance, celebration, and instruction. Schooled not only in officially traditional Jewish culture but also steeped in the mysteries of the Kabbalah, Wiesel explains movingly the beginning fascination with language and metaphors with which to grasp at the unspeakable. Not surprisingly, writing becomes the predominant activity of his life. Very clearly, though, his writing serves purposes beyond itself. While one can read this smoothly written memoir for the sake of knowing more about Wiesel the private and public person, much material of historical interest (in his capacity as journalist and translator he interacted with several great minds and statesmen of the post-war decades) allows glimpses of his contemporaries. For Wiesel, the purpose is different: "Some see their work as a commentary on their life; for others it is the other way around. I count myself among the latter" (17).

For many years now Professor (now Emeritus) Lawrence Langer has been promoting the discussion of the literature of the Holocaust. Despite his long years of engagement with this material he brings to its study a deep distrust of art and of the adequacy of the human imagination. His voice is one of the clearest reminding us that sinking to the level of a Hollywood rendition and "pander[ing] to a hungry popular clamor for reassurance that mass murder had its redeeming features" (7) is morally (and not merely artistically) unacceptable. He adamantly disagrees that any event in human history may be

compared to the Holocaust; he insists that "reading and writing about the Holocaust is an experience in unlearning" (6) because it defies "precedent and analogy [in literature]; Edmund and Iago seem mild in comparison with Nazi savagery, and the choices available to traditional heroes bear little resemblance to the situations into which Jews were plunged" (7). Specifically, and contrary to those who would agree with Victor Frankl, Langer upbraids the "comforting notion that suffering has meaning" (5). Out of an apparent reluctance to hand over Holocaust "evidence" to literature emerges an idiosyncratic anthology sure to have a wide impact. *Art from the Ashes* will, not only because Oxford University Press is its publisher, but also because it brings together materials from several genres, no doubt become a staple in classrooms (and the price is right, too, though one wishes that a hefty volume of almost seven hundred pages had received a sturdier exterior than the now customary perfect-bound incarnation. A few bends of my copy quickly produced breaks in the spine.). Its idiosyncrasy will be useful in spurring on thinking and engaging with the material.

The form of the anthology is not unusual; Langer has made access to categories and individual writers easy by providing introductory material. The poetry section is impressive; the representative drama piece is the very rich *Ghetto* by Joshua Sobol. Twenty black and white drawings add a welcome visual dimension. His guiding editorial principle has been to include not only unfamiliar texts but to choose texts which, to him, dispense with "safe props for [their] impact" (7). For example, he alludes to a point George Steiner set up in *The Death of Tragedy* (though in a different context), that "tragedy" as a category is unsuitable in dealing with Holocaust literature; similarly, the familiar categories and assumptions of a Dante no longer apply. "The dubious feat of

wresting meaning from the murder of 5 to 6 million innocent men, women, and children I leave to more hopeful souls. The majority of the texts I draw on refuse that temptation, though many address the painful irony of the annihilation of European Jewry in a world where nature still flourished and love prevailed" (7-8). Some might wonder to what extent nature truly is flourishing and where indeed that place might be where love truly prevailed, but Langer's bitterness raises the issue of facile conclusions and must be respected.

A superb response to *Art from the Ashes* is Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the moral complexities surrounding concentration camps. Intrigued by the desolation of a Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, visiting scholar, critic and moralist Todorov began to discover for himself through meticulous research in survivor memoirs, historical documents, and critical commentary the story of the Warsaw ghetto and its uprising. The resulting volume *Facing the Extreme* manages to articulate and illuminate in a lively and accessible way such philosophically knotty issues as Hannah Arendt's concept of "the banality of evil" (as well as the parallel mystery of evil) as a kind of roadmap with which to explore not only Holocaust literature but the continuing frameworks within which we live. Todorov traces the characteristics of heroism, the motivations, patterns and limitations of the hero figure as exemplified in historical figures ("loyalty to an ideal" borne out in almost reckless acts of "courage," the tendency towards abstraction and binary opposition, the compelling fear of being afraid, and a peculiar, romantic view of death: "To the hero, death has more value than life" because only through it "is it possible to attain the absolute" (10). Against such "heroic virtues" Todorov posits examples of quiet "ordinary virtues" such as dignity, and caring, all the while stressing the importance of individual responsibility and individual will: "the real

difference comes down to the question of whether it is for people or ideas that one has chosen to die (or live)" (20). For Todorov the truer measure of courage and humanity is the responsibility and sacrifice shown towards another, very real human being. As he articulated his core intention in a previous book, *The Conquest of America,*

> I believe in the necessity of "seeking the truth" and in the obligation of making it known; I know that the function of information exists, and that the effect of information can be powerful. My hope is . . . that we remember what can happen if we do not succeed in discovering the other. (247)

The increasing wealth of writings about the Holocaust, spurred on no doubt by the urgency of a dying generation of survivors, has produced a number of memorable books and with them a remarkable set of questions more urgently put to Literature and Aesthetics than ever before. To the forefront have come, for example, questions concerning the reliability of memories and memoirs and the tension between silence and speaking out. As poet W.D. Snodgrass pointed out in an afterword to his *The Fuehrer Bunker,* "writers, of course, must try to be believable; events are under no such constraint." But perhaps most strikingly, Holocaust literature combines aesthetic and ethical questions with a call to individual responsibility and action. As Todorov writes in *Facing the Extreme,*

> To revive the stories of the camps today actually means to continue a struggle begun while they were still in operation. The proper functioning of concentration camps requires that neither the inmates—or wit-

> nesses—nor even the guards have precise knowledge of what is going on; therefore, the first weapon against them is the collection and diffusion of information. (254)

Such information and memory is of greater than merely historical interest. These books are vitally important if humanist values are important. The shadow of the Shoah continues to lengthen, but it grows not without brilliant minds drawing on profound conviction and considerable writing talent to define its features more and more clearly.

Works Cited

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Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America*. Trans. by Richard Howard. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

Wellington. A Personal History. Christopher Hibbert. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1997. Pp. 460, including illustrations, notes, and index. $30.00.

❑

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Muenger, United States Air Force Academy

Many historians will greet with slight surprise the new Christopher Hibbert biography, *Wellington. A Personal History.* In recent years, as military history itself has fallen on evil times, so too have the military giants of legend. Even the heavy industry of Wellington's great

foe, Napoleon, has slowed of late to mere cottage craft. What, then, is the purpose of a new study on . . . Wellington? Did not Elizabeth Longford get the job done with her magisterial two-volume biography of Wellington in the early 1970s? What more can be said about a general who introduced no particularly noteworthy innovations in warfare, who led no revolutions, who practiced no magnetism of personality in leadership, and who elicited none of the idealistic devotion that others of his age inspired? One might presume that the intellectual market for new archival research on the out-of-fashion Iron Duke would be next to extinct.

It is true that anyone who has read the earlier Wellington scholars—Fraser, Gleig, Oman, Fortesque, Guedalla, Ward, Petrie, Glover or Longford (and there have been many others)—will not find anything in Hibbert's book that dramatically changes the assessment of Wellington made in the past. The Duke remains much as he has always been, a slightly mysterious, stern and contradictory being, growing from a seemingly callow and ill-equipped youth into one of the most revered figures of early Victorian England. Even those who despised all he represented were often effectively cowed by his courage and his overwhelming presence. In an age that pressed for democratic reform, he remained classically Tory, and by doing so, perhaps did more for sensible political and social betterment in England than has ever been acknowledged.

What we have in Hibbert's biography is not a new Wellington, but an expanded and humanized Wellington, crying over the Waterloo casualty lists, assuring a young aide who had lost his arm that his position would be waiting for him upon his recovery, raising an assortment of children not his own, sitting patiently and comfortingly for weeks at the deathbed of the wife he had never been able to love. Hibbert uses Wellington's dry

wit, documented throughout his life, to illustrate his political acumen, often neglected by other historians. "A perfect walking sore" was his evaluation of Louis XVIII, one which competes in graphic detail with other assessments of the later Bourbons (161.)

Hibbert, in devoting fully half the book to Wellington's political career after Waterloo, emphasizes the duality of the man's service to his country. Almost half Wellington's life was spent, not on battlefields, but in government, where he occupied a variety of crucial positions for over three decades. Always conservative, he yet enjoyed a close friendship with Lord Melbourne, the foremost Whig of the day. Almost always sensible, he alone reminded the government, in the early 1820s, that glorification of the then-active South American revolutionaries cast into doubt the logic of the simultaneous vilification of the Irish rebel Daniel O'Connell (248.) Politically gregarious, he continued to "love being consulted and mixed up in messes," as the diarist Charles Greville noted, even into old age (245.)

His most selfless political acts came in the wake of legislative defeats, when three times he used his considerable influence to obtain the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829), the Great Reform Act (1832), and the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846.) These three acts dealt fatal blows to the continued preservation of much that Wellington believed in. His conviction, however, that legislative defeat for any of these bills would presage political chaos overrode his own political philosophy and moved the country into the reform era with minimum unrest and maximum grace. In Hibbert's work, finally, we understand and can admire Wellington's many contradictions, reconciling them with an appreciation of the courage and force of his character.

There is one area as yet unsatisfactorily explored by all Wellington historians, and that is the process by

which an ineffectual boy transformed himself into an ambitious professional officer, one whose well-studied military library reveals a serious scholar of his trade. When did this begin to happen? Why did this evolution take place in Arthur Wellesley, when in so many of his class, with their purchased commissions and lackadaisical careers, it did not? How did such an unremarkable flower of the minor aristocracy nurture his own acquiring of maturity, common sense, courage, and even a certain humility? These are questions which should interest us; an examination of them always is owed us in biography.

The book suffers occasionally from the assumption that the reader is well-versed not only in British subtleties of culture and history, but also in the art of untangling the occasional Medusa-like sentence. As a ploy to test the reader's parsing talents, Hibbert's narrative style is highly successful. In general, however, the sophistication of the prose is a welcome change from the current tendency to deal simplistically with our language.

The Flower of Battle: How Britain Wrote the Great War. Hugh Cecil. South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press,1996. Pp. 440. Photographs, notes, index. $32.00.

❑

Reviewed by Ross Gresham, United States Air Force Academy

The writers to whom Hugh Cecil devotes each of the central dozen chapters of his *The Flower of Battle* are the lesser known—Oliver Onions rather than Siegfried

Sassoon, Wildfrid Ewart rather than Wilfred Owens. There are writers who were best-sellers in their time but missed inclusion in the literary canon (R. H. Mottram, Ewart, Robert Keable, Gilbert Frankau, Onions, and Richard Blaker). There are those who never attracted much attention, including some who put forth just a single work (Ronald Gruner, V.M. Yeates, A.D. Gristwood, Herbert Read). There is the minorly famous Richard Aldington and the woman writer Pamela Hinkson, who published under the pen name of Peter Deane.

Such a list immediately impresses upon one the strength of the Cecil's book, which is his seeming omniscience of the postwar literary scene. And Cecil by no means limits himself to these dozen figures. Cecil, a historian at Leeds University, focuses more heavily on biography than literary analysis, and each chapter places the author among his or her influences—literary influences, family, friends. A cover-to-cover reading is an education in the literary atmosphere of a decade. Some major (and useful) generalizations Cecil draws explicitly, such as the "hopeful" novels predominating in the early twenties and 'disenchanted' in the later twenties." Some—for example, the workings of the publishing business at the time—a reader picks up simply from successive accounts, in a dozen different cases.

Twelve different lives—the book shows a lot through simple accretion of detail. It shows a lot about the combat experience, for example. Nearly all the featured authors fought in the war, and some of Cecil's chapters are almost exclusively attempts to reconstruct the men's war exploits. It shows a lot about societal morays of the time—the divorces, the affairs. It shows a lot about the veterans' post-war experiences.

It's important to note that Cecil labels his book social history rather than literary criticism. He is not trying to show these authors' neglected merits or make claims

as to their forgotten influence. Because most of his readers are unlikely to have read even their major works, to do any analysis, he must quote and summarize heavily. This limits what he can do, especially with the novelists, and many times his approach is to compare the author's work with his or her life, as best Cecil can reconstruct it.

Some of these biographies are poignant. Robert Keable served as a missionary to Africa before the war, then went to the Western Front as chaplain to a contingent of native South African laborers. Cecil explains how padres were often derided in accounts of the war as shirkers of combat and prudes. Keable at least proved himself innocent of the latter charge. Though married, he struck up a wartime affair, then after the war left his wife for his mistress. He wrote a somewhat scandalous novel entitled *Simon Called Peter* about an Anglican padre who has a passionate affair with a nurse at the front. He resigned his church living, converted to Catholicism, and soon retired to Tahiti, where he continued his scandalous behavior by speaking out for open marriages. He continued to write and live in Tahiti until he died in 1927.

Wilfrid Ewart was killed on a balcony in Mexico City by a stray bullet fired in New Year's revels below. Richard Blaker died in Los Angeles after a failed career as a screen writer. Ronald Gruner, headmaster at a prestigious school and a legitimate combat hero, committed suicide by drinking a bottle of Lysol.

Some of the lives are less interesting. Make no mistake, Cecil tackles his subject with the passion of a devotee, a fan, and to his palate, five or six pages on the extent to which Henry Williamson (another war novelist) influenced V. M. Yeates' *Winged Victory* is not excessive. Many times he discusses not only the author's history, but the history of his parents, certainly of his wife.

One can't begrudge a man his passions. But Cecil does occasionally suffer from the over-confidence of the

biographer. He can psychologize to excess: the introduction makes the blanket claim that "the first goal for those who wrote [was] to take back from the war, or to learn to live with, their all too frequent loss of their schoolchild's faith. . . ." Of course the accounts of the individual lives make it clear these people wrote for the usual reasons—money, fame, something to say. And at times Cecil knows more about his subjects than one would about a twin brother. Some figures Cecil knows so well he can offer marital advice:

> The deep undercurrent of frustration in their relationship might have been eased had he actively encouraged her to revive her musical interests and asserted his own views about where and how they should live. She tended the put these above the needs of his social life. Besides, her nature was to want him more to herself after the deep hurt of the breakup of her first marriage.

One can excuse Cecil a certain amount of nineteenth-century characterization because his book leaves no doubt that if anyone knows these people and this age, it is he. *The Flower of Battle* should be read by anyone interested in literary England for the decade or so after the Great War, anyone interested in a compelling biography of these figures, and anyone curious about the print that war can leave on the lives of its survivors.

Authors at Sea. Ed. Robert Shenk. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997. Pp. 318. Illus. $33.95.

❑

Mark D. Noe, United States Air Force Academy

One of the final excerpts in Robert Shenk's collection is a letter Kenneth Dodson wrote to his wife in early 1944. Dodson, author of *Away All Boats* and other fiction, describes Japanese dead on a beachhead, then an American pilot who tried, too late, to parachute from his damaged plane and instead hit the water just beside a small American naval transfer boat moving between two ships. The narrative is extremely simple. And horrific. Dodson's next lines to his wife are these:

> We are going to fight and work our heads off to win this war. But we are fighting because we bungled the last peace, and we must never let it happen again. They can't tell me war is a fine and noble thing. I wish they could see the difference between the Saturday morning parades at Alameda, and the stench of Kwajalein. General Sherman had no idea how right he was. He said, "War is hell." I heard a blinded veteran of the last war say that, low and bitter. It didn't sound like it reads in print. (296-7)

Dodson, already a twenty-year veteran of merchant marine and navy service, doesn't write these lines to glorify war. His next paragraph, a simple description telling of the transfer of wounded from his ship to a hospital ship, is gripping narrative, a personal story of a wounded man

who, it turns out, knew Dodson's brother back home. I can't condense the emotion, the horror, but I can quote Dodson's last sentence in the paragraph: "I hate war" (297). No bold, no italics, no exclamation point. No need for such: the paragraph's narrative implies them all, and more.

Authors at Sea at first seems like anything but anti-war literature. But its reiteration of war's horror grows more insistent as you read it, and its last page brings a sigh of relief that the terrible narratives it contains are at an end. It also concludes the story of the rapid maturation of an entire generation attaining instant adulthood, brought on by events beyond its control.

Shenk selects nonfiction excerpts by writers mostly renowned for their fiction. The authors comprise a Who's Who of American letters in the mid-twentieth century. Essays by Michener, Wouk, Auchincloss, Haley, and others capture the rapid changes in lives—the boredom, the wonder, the hilarity and horror—associated with routine training and actual combat. The complete collection provides an impressionistic view of the Second World War. While the narrative doesn't reach the hedgerows of Normandy, it lands on the beachheads; while it doesn't describe the fears of infantrymen, it fully captures the terror of near-death experiences of sailors and fliers.

Perhaps the key thing *Authors at Sea* does is make apparent the passage of time, the rapidity with which America went from vague preparations for war, through Pearl Harbor to Midway Island, to Guadalcanal, Omaha Beach, and Leyte Gulf, to (finally) Tokyo Bay. Lives changed. The world changed. Years later, middle-aged men wrote about their experiences during the war. And now, as those of us who as children listened to the war stories of that generation reach our own middle age, and as we bury the few of those combatants-turned-story-

tellers who survived this far, and as we reflect on the cataclysmic world of their young manhood and the far more peaceable late Vietnam and Cold War service of our young adult years, we recognize the gravity the war gave to life in the early 1940s.

Authors at Sea is an impressive collection of the memories of some major writers. These writers, and all the veterans of that war, are slipping away from us. The war itself is becoming cold history, no longer possessed of the flesh-and-blood it had in my youth. Shenk's volume becomes a valuable summary of the naval combatant's life in World War II. But, suddenly, it's also anti-war literature—something I never associated, during my upbringing, with World War II or its literary legacy.

Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945-1975. Edited by David L. Anderson. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1993. Pp. 240. $14.95.

❑

Reviewed by G. Dennis Conroy, DePaul University

Vietnam War literature—both fiction and non-fiction—is replete with authors attempting to shed light on haunting and persistent questions from the Vietnam era. How did the United States get involved? Who was responsible? Why did we stay stubbornly entrenched when it became painfully obvious that the war was a lost cause? Why did mass demonstrations and other fierce manifestations of widespread public opposition to the war fail to hasten the end of the bloody struggle? These and a host of other vexing questions from the war are addressed from the perspective of presidential leadership in *Shadow on the White House* (1993), edited by

David L. Anderson, chair of the Department of History and Political Science at the University of Indianapolis.

This compilation of essays by Anderson and other noted presidential scholars provides superbly researched and richly detailed accounts of how six successive US Presidents grappled unsuccessfully with the war in Vietnam. The extensively footnoted essays succinctly summarize the broad spectrum of strategic thinking that informed and guided crucial presidential decisions that determined the fate of America's involvement in Southeast Asia. Under Anderson's editorial tutelage, each of the authors demonstrates why we must look *specifically to the presidents* to discern the reasons why the United States intervened in Vietnam in the 1940s and stayed involved for thirty years. As an examination of presidential policy during the Vietnam era, *Shadow on the White House* is a superb companion piece for those studying traditional biographical profiles of Presidents Truman through Ford in relation to the subject of the Vietnam War.

Anderson anchors his basic premise that "the Vietnam War was manifestly a presidential war" in the fact that the war "was conducted without a congressional declaration of war" (1). One reason given why Congress did not assume a more dominant role relates to the historical pattern of chief executives who inexorably enlarged the office of the presidency. So powerful was this trend that government policies and initiatives came to be identified personally with the president. Anderson notes that "In no area of public life has the identification of presidents with particular policies been more apparent that in foreign affairs" (4). Historical precedents cited include Washington's Neutrality Proclamation from the early republic, up to the presidential "doctrines" of contemporary presidents (4-5). After World War II, at the time Truman initiated US involvement in Vietnam, presidential power was at its apex and foreign policy was

firmly guided by the executive branch. Anderson notes that at the time "through new and powerful executive instruments—such as the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff—presidents initiated and managed foreign policy" (6).

In concise language, the authors trace the presidential conduct of the ever-widening war. Robert J. McMahon, Professor of History at the University of Florida, examines how the Truman administration initiated the fateful first presidential steps to support the French campaign against the Communist led insurgency in Indo-China. According to McMahon, US foreign policy linked opposition to Ho Chi Minh's resistance against the colonial French within the context of "broader regional and global foreign policy goals in a deepening Cold War" (21). He points out that the Joints Chiefs of Staff had insisted on, and Truman concurred with, a policy that stipulated aid to France would not include the deployment of American troops in Southeast Asia (36). McMahon posits that this policy, embraced equally by the State Department and White House officials, presented a fundamental and unresolvable contradiction in US policy: "[I]f Southeast Asia was so vital that its loss to communism would deal a severe blow to the US National Security, how could the United States accept any limits on its actions?" (36). In time, this strategic contradiction proved to be one of the most enduring and controversial dilemmas of the entire Vietnam conflict as the debate raged on as to whether too much or too little force was being used in Vietnam. McMahon concludes that the Truman administration never reconciled strategy with tactics (38).

David Anderson's assessment of President Eisenhower's core policy decisions on Vietnam revealed that Eisenhower's fundamental stance mirrored the

Truman administration's prohibitions against the use of US troops and the conviction that a non-communist Viet Nam was of vital strategic importance for the United States (43). During his eight years in office he successfully kept the US from engaging its own troops, but Anderson concludes that President Eisenhower's wholehearted support of the unpopular South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem put newly elected Kennedy in a position of having to continue support of Diem or risk discrediting nearly a decade of US policy in the region (58-9). Gary R. Hess, Distinguished Research Professor at Bowling Green State University, asserts that since Kennedy was assassinated just three weeks after Diem was ousted from office and murdered, we cannot know how Kennedy would have faced the challenges ultimately placed squarely on Lyndon Johnson's shoulders. According to Hess, it is left to vastly divergent historical debate whether Kennedy would have steered the US into a full-scale military engagement, or if he would have managed to end America's long-term commitment (82).

The most passionate of the essays addresses the controversial leadership style of Lyndon Johnson. In the two chapters this book devotes to Johnson, both George Herring, Professor of History at the University of Kentucky, and Sandra C. Taylor, Professor of History at the University of Utah, conclude that the impatient, expansive Johnson was ill-suited to be a Commander in Chief in a limited war, and that his provincial background did not prepare him for the sophisticated world of world affairs and diplomacy. Taylor's commentary on Johnson is unsparing in its intense condemnation: "Johnson was ethnocentric, woefully ignorant of the outside world, and had no experience at all with traditional peasant societies. He did not call the Vietnamese gooks and slopes to their faces, but one can only speculate that he shared much of the mind-set of those who did" (125-6).

Melvin Small, Professor of History at Wayne State University, and Jeffrey Kimball, Professor of History at Miami University, chronicle Richard Nixon's handling of the war. Small documents the manner in which Nixon attempted to contain domestic opposition to the war and Kimball focuses on the close collaboration between Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the realm of diplomacy and negotiations with the North Vietnamese. Kimball exhaustively documents Nixon's secrecy, noting, "Nixon intended to control his elaborate foreign policy scheme from the White House which meant bypassing the State and Defense Departments" (156). In essence, Nixon ended up virtually micro managing the war.

David Anderson's concluding chapter reveals that Gerald Ford came into the presidency with " his long held convictions that US involvement in Vietnam was correct and that US goals could be achieved by . . . extending material resources to the beleaguered South Vietnamese and Cambodian governments" (187). After he left office, Ford maintained his belief that the US could have won the war. Anderson notes that "Ford's postmortems are an example of what scholars have since labeled the 'win thesis' namely that with more power . . . the United States could have prevailed" (203). Anderson's summation is that all presidents from Truman to Ford believed that "US intervention in Vietnam was merited and could be successful" (203). The debate continues between those who hold the "win thesis" versus those who contend no amount of outside force would have altered the eventual outcome of the war.

Regrettably, the essays do not examine the roles of the closest presidential aids that had critically important roles in the conduct of the war. However, Anderson offers an excellent section of suggested reading at the end

of the book for those interested in pursuing a broader analysis of leadership during the Vietnam War.

Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections. The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum. Edited by Eve Sinaiko. New York: Abrams. Pp. 256. $45.00.

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Reviewed by Michael Evans-Smith, Denver, Colorado

> Every day I have to work because the truce
> I have with darkness is delicate and peace
> requires constant maintenance.
> – *Richard Bartow*

> Vietnam is a loss of dignity, identity, and
> pride. It becomes a struggle from within–
> from the hunting of human lives.
> – *Ulysses Marshall*

As the literary canon of the Vietnam War continues to grow, the impact can be felt through the poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa, Kevin Bowen, Bruce Weigl, Nguyen Ba Chung, and Nguyen Quang Thieu; the photography of Horst Faas, Tim Page, and Sean Flynn; the short fiction of Ly Thi Lan, Ho Anh Thai, and Nguyen Vu. The writings of Tobias Wolff, Andre Dubus, Tim O'Brien, Albert French, Louise Erdrich, Robert Olen Butler, and Grace Paley also lend insight to our feelings about the war. Now, this list of artistic explorations must include the mesmerizing *Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections*, a book veterans and their extended families can turn to in their efforts to understand the personal transformations that took place in Vietnam.

In surveying these works of art, I am filled with despair. The works seem so alien and yet so personal to my

own experience of war and my response to the loss of life and the nobility of sacrifice. Excerpts from diaries, letters, and other writings scream from the murky edges of memory where spiders eat. This extraordinary collection includes a wide range of expressions by visual artists who served in the theater of Vietnam.

The titles of some works are themselves indictments of service. *War Songs: Safewater Buoy* by Grady Estle Harp, (black matte glazed porcelain vessels) are incised and inscribed with phrases such as: "That night after waving goodbye from the helicopter I sat and chuckled over your jokes while they killed you." *Dare to Enter 1965* by Joseph Clarence Fornelli (vitelline membranes on vellum painted with C-ration coffee and Chinese watercolors) is a querulous expression of grievance behind the red mist like the bread and wine at Christ's Last Supper. *Abandoned* by John McManus, (an alabaster and bronze robed monklike figure) is a renumeration of faith, emaciated, and unlike Dante, waiting to receive the counterbalancing intercession of three blessed women, this work shows that a soldier, and a child can be equally reprehensible whether they are the oppressor or the oppressed. *Ritual Suicide Mask* by Randolph Harmes (a gauze, paint, and wood mask) resembles herpes-simplexed ninth plague of Egypt; it conveys the palpable darkness that lasted three days, except there is no Moses, through whom God manifested his powers for restoring veterans. The apocalyptic *Portrait of a Soldier After War* by Cao Ba Minh intones, "My works are washed in the blood and tears of suffering—all the baggage of humanity's shame," like the vinegar raised to Christ's lips.

There is nothing dreamlike in the artworks' accompanying narratives but they are words that roar past the Devil and seek revenge in our consciousness. Christ was crucified, but in Ralph "Tripper" Sirianni's charcoal *Crucifixion/Nam* Christ's face is inside the tattered camou-

flaged shirt he wears, so that it becomes a shroud like the Shroud of Turin. Concertina and barbed wire crisscross the site of pain and suffering. This is not Golgotha but Hamburger Hill and Dismas is not beside him asking, "Remember me Lord."

With this book and the permanent exhibition which is housed in Chicago, work, time, space, identity, and body are given a small corner of comfort and freedom in a very cold crater. This art allows those of us who served a chance to trace the veins of progress in our rehabilitation, and away from the fear of night alone.

After Christ's ascension to Heaven, the Holy Spirit descended to the disciples on Pentecost with the sound of a rushing wind in the form of tongues of flame, infusing them with his power. *Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections* is a literary catechism, a religious education, and a book of common prayer.

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Since the release of *Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections*, David Alan Sessions, *Goodbye Vietnam*, Cleveland Wright, *We Regret to Inform You*, and Richard Russell Yohnka *This Is How You Died (The End)* have themselves died. They faced the challenges of life's truths. Lest we forget. *And*: "The gap on the white wall of the gallery reminds us that at the center of any exhibition or book about this war and its art lies the empty space that can never be filled: the missing art work by the artist who did not live to make it."

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The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum is located at 1801 S. Indiana Street, Chicago IL 60616; (312) 326-0270.