

REVIEW BY JAMES FAIRHALL,
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Ghosts of War in Vietnam

Heonik Kwon

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Not all wars produce large numbers of persistently undead, culturally meaningful ghosts. Legions of ghosts did not emerge from Europe's Napoleonic Wars or America's Revolutionary War. They were generated, however, by our Civil War and, in Britain but not here, by World War I.¹ Although the Vietnam War produced in the United States an unprecedented preoccupation with MIAs and the recuperation of their bodies, and though it shook America's sense of its identity, no surge of spiritualism occurred. But in Vietnam the American War gave life, in its long aftermath, to a subculture of war ghosts whose interactions with society proved to be quite different in form and meaning from those of ordinary ancestors and traditional gods.

The Korean-British social anthropologist Heonik Kwon's remarkable book, *Ghosts of War in Vietnam*, is a rigorous yet innovative and interweaving of anthropology, history and creative nonfiction. His accounts and interpretations of medium-facilitated contacts with ghosts, spirits and gods are intriguing and sometimes chilling, yet they always circle back to his primary themes. Overall he is interested in the cultural significance in Vietnamese society of a particular kind of ghost, which he distinguishes from ancestors to whom most Vietnamese pay reverence at their home altars. Rather, he is interested in subversive spirits

¹ See Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

and especially in wandering souls tied to the “wrong side” (as defined by the Communist government) of the American War. The invocation of these ghosts, often MIAs, provides many Vietnamese citizens with a way not just of reconciling themselves to tragic losses whose mourning is not sanctioned by the state, but of reinterpreting recent history and thus staking claims on a revised understanding of their socio-economic status in the present. Recognition of the claims on the living of wandering souls extends to American ghosts and foreign ghosts from earlier wars. Kwon’s earlier book, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai*,² grew out of his interviews with villagers in My Lai and a nearby site of mass killing by American and South Korean soldiers. A crucial element of the ripping of the social fabric of these areas by large-scale violent death was the disruption of family ties to ancestors. Traditionally, acceptable death took place in or close to the home (*chet nha*). The newly deceased family member entered into a stable, mutually reinforcing network of the living and the dead in which both sides needed and helped each other. Violent death and death away from home—literally death in the street (*chet duong*)—disrupted this network. Lacking the bodies of their loved ones, Vietnamese families could not conduct proper funeral ceremonies. They experienced their missing relatives as souls unhappily wandering outside of the kinship network.

Reinforcing this disruption was the binary attitude of Communist officials toward the war dead. The only legitimate, officially honored deaths were those of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army soldiers and their allies. In a move common to states that seek to strengthen and often mythicize their foundation in common sacrifice, the government built monumental (and invariably ugly) military cemeteries for those fighters who had fallen in the struggle to drive out foreign invaders—a theme in Vietnamese history that the authorities sought to appropriate. So-called “puppet” or “quisling” soldiers were seen as having died in the support of foreigners (seeing the American War as in part a civil war was and is not permitted). The ongoing discovery of bodies or body parts of some of Vietnam’s huge number of MIAs posed a problem for the government. Many of these recovered dead belonged to the wrong side and thus were non-persons in death. They could not be buried in Communist state cemeteries or the dwindling number of off-limits dilapidated ARVN cemeteries. Nor could they receive public religious funerals. Grief for such politically incorrect dead, whether they were

² Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

recuperated remains or (much more likely) wandering souls, was private, hidden and socially risky.

Following the immediate postwar period of Marxist-Leninist ideological purity, the economic loosening fostered by the *doi moi* decree (1986) led to unforeseen consequences. In the 1990s in the central part of Vietnam where Kwon did his investigations, a small entrepreneurial coffin-making industry sprang up as new construction unearthed human remains from both sides of the war. The practice of burning replica money at altars and shrines, no longer forbidden by the regime, grew popular, the American dollar in various incarnations becoming the favorite currency. (Kwon's chapter on ritual money and the "Bank of Hell" is worth the price of his book alone.) Disposable income earned by families whose members or ancestors were connected with the wrong side in the war contributed to the growth of these phenomena. Such families gradually became more assertive, though never publicly, about the legitimacy of both their own citizenship and that of their ancestors. They sought out mediums to contact their ancestors' wandering souls and find their bodies. Sometimes, unexpectedly, family members became the vehicles for wandering souls or new, non-traditional gods to make their presence known.

Thus Vietnam's gradual joining of the global economy loosened official control of the culture of commemoration and resulted in a continuing socioeconomic realignment of power that has subverted the government's binary division of the population, living and dead, into genuine citizens and reluctantly acknowledged semi-citizens. The grassroots revival of spiritual, religious and family mourning rituals (as opposed to patriotic state rituals) eroded distinctions between different kinds of ghosts. Not only did it equalize Vietnamese ghosts from opposing sides of the war, but it eroded differences between ancestors and strangers and—most surprisingly—between Vietnamese and foreign ghosts. In the area near Danang and Hoi An which Kwon researched, he found a special category of shrines devoted not to ancestors (*ong ba*) who have died at home but to strangers (*co bac*). These shrines were intended to make contact with and propitiate wandering souls who might well be American or even French or French colonial soldiers. According to wandering souls speaking through mediums, the dead do not remember which side they were on. They are reduced to equality in death much as bodies are mixed together, at sites of major battles, without regard for earthly affiliations. Moreover, those families whose ancestors include wandering souls heed the principle of reciprocity, hoping that their hospitality to the souls of strangers might be accorded to their own wandering kin.

Ghosts are of course not just (and not always) catalysts of sociopolitical transformation. They are disturbing and frightening. They are uncanny yet embody what Freud called the mutual relationship between the familiar and the unfamiliar (*heimlich* and *unheimlich*) in his famous post-World War I essay. In the aftermath of the American War, Vietnamese ghosts cross the borders between life and death, family and stranger, ally and enemy, native and foreigner. They also are real and unreal, somewhat like what the British child psychiatrist D.W. Winnicott called “transitional” objects and phenomena (e.g., the dolls, Teddy bears and invisible companions of young children). Although Kwon is a rigorous, theorizing social scientist, his accounts of encounters through mediums with wandering souls, spirits, and gods occasionally rise to the level of literature in the face of which the reader (like Kwon himself) must temporarily suspend disbelief.

If *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* were a collection of stories, the masterpiece would be Kwon’s dramatic case-study/tale of a ten-year-old girl drowned during the war. After her accidental resting place was disturbed in 1991, Lotus Flower entered the body of a sixteen-year-old village girl, Bien, to complain about the foul odor of onions that Bien’s family had planted near her remains. By the chronological end of the story in 1997, this shocking collision with the alien—shocking for both the living and the dead—has become part of a narrative of acceptance and growth. Kwon begins at the end: “The day of full moon in the last lunar month of 1997 was a special day for Lien Hoa (Lotus Flower) and the people of Cam Re who knew about [her].” Lotus Flower has morphed from invasive stranger to Bien’s adopted, honored sister. She is confident enough, after six years of association with Bien’s family, to undertake a long journey to a place in the other world where she will be educated to become a higher ranking, more powerful spirit—no longer a plaintive war orphan. As for Bien, Kwon recounts:

Ever since their first encounter, [she] had periodically spoken in voices other than her own, including the strong Hue dialect of Lotus Flower. In places she went to in Cam Re and beyond, different ghosts of war borrowed her body to express their personal grievances and histories. More than a dozen families in Cam Re and its environs discovered their invisible neighbors through Bien... Bien eventually became a kind of cognitive archaeologist who could excavate stories out of the sites of hidden death..., and her body-finding activity [enriched] the oral history of the village... She would simply go about her daily...movements, hit the

site of an unknown burial, start representing the dead in a trance, and forget everything she said on awakening.

More than any other example, Lotus Flower's (and Bien's) history illustrates the interchangeability and complexity of relationships between the dead and living in postwar Vietnam. I do wonder to what extent *Ghosts of War* pertains to all of Vietnamese society from Hanoi to the Mekong Delta. Kwon's years of field work in the central part of the country were heroic, and it would have taken him several lives to cover all of Vietnam. I can only say what I have seen myself. Recently, in a fifth-floor apartment in Ho Chi Minh City, my wife's Catholic family stepped effortlessly across a border on her father's death day as they chanted to his photo at the center of an altar lined with his favorite foods. Later that day, at the party to commemorate him, a hip middle-aged man, a hair stylist with blond-streaked hair, talked with him (or his photo, if you will) for five minutes. My late father-in-law spent three years in a "re-education camp" for having served as what the local government in his village near Hue termed (in my wife's family background document) a "quisling soldier." Supporting Kwon's research, his now honored ghost from the wrong side in the American War is playing a part in his family's long-delayed, partial socioeconomic resurgence and its claim to nearly full membership in the community of Vietnamese citizens.

To American readers, perhaps the most striking case history comes from Kwon's interview with a retired Vietnamese army officer. Angered when the men of his postwar unit made incense offerings to a foreign ghost and requested the help of a ritual specialist, he urinated on the site of the spirit's last manifestation. The ghost disappeared. Soon, however, the officer began to suffer from headaches so debilitating that a stay in a psychiatric ward was recommended. Instead, he followed the advice of a spiritual expert who alerted him that the ghost had been outraged by his insult. The ghost's body was located, determined to belong to an American officer shot through the head, and returned to the United States. The Vietnamese officer recovered, quit the army, and opened a motorcycle repair shop whose immediate success was attributed to help from the American's no longer wandering soul. In telling his history to Kwon, he observed in binary terms: "[The] American officer nearly defeated me, an officer in the Vietnamese Army, long after the war's end." An uncle, an elderly war veteran, reprimanded him: "Nephew, one does not fight with the dead. American or Vietnamese, the dead should be respected." In other words, the officer seemed to miss the point of his story, which was the need for reconciliation and respect between former enemies.

It would be trite to cite the uncle's comment as the moral of Kwon's rich, complex book. *Ghosts of War* is the work of a subtle mind in full, open engagement with years of field experience in postwar Vietnam. Sometimes the brilliance of Kwon's arguments is obscured by his overreliance on academic jargon; and surely Cambridge University Press could have afforded to hire a proofreader to help with Kwon's not completely fluent written English. Having said that, I must admit that his book fascinated me so much that I read it three times. You don't have to be a sociologist to appreciate his gemlike accounts of the social meaning of changes in ritual money, the hidden history of a missing leg and the Tiger Temple, the intertwined growth of Lotus Flower and Bien, the war between the ancient god Sharpshooter and the upstart Red Monster, and the flexibility of ordinary, uneducated Vietnamese people in acknowledging their kinship with all war ghosts regardless of affiliation. The American government, which spends millions every year to locate its MIAs, has indirectly participated in the flowering ghost culture of postwar Vietnam when its joint mission with Hanoi has used mediums to search for the bodies of our own wandering souls. A lesson that some segments of American society have yet to learn is that of respect and hospitality to all war dead, who after all do not care which side they fought on.

Wandering Souls: Journeys with the Dead and the Living

Wayne Karlin

Nation Books, 2009, \$25.95, cloth, 376 pp.

In March 1969, First Lieutenant Homer Steedly Jr. experienced an event so rare in the Vietnam War, there is a name for it: “a meeting engagement.” Turning a bend in a trail in Pleiku Province, he came face-to-face with a North Vietnamese soldier, his weapon shoulder-slung. Steedly’s weapon was ready at his side. By the time Hoang Ngoc Dam, a twenty-four-year-old medic from the village of Thai Giang in Thai Binh Province, had lowered his weapon, Steedly fired.

That Steedly came to know Dam’s name and birthplace is another rarity in a war where, as novelist Tim O’Brien writes, a largely faceless enemy left many of our soldiers with feelings of “faceless responsibility” and “faceless grief.” Like many soldiers, Steedly searched Dam for papers, and like many soldiers he turned the notebook he found into S-2, intelligence. But uniquely perhaps, Steedly that same night contacted a friend at S-2 and asked for the papers back. He sent them home to his mother in North Carolina writing that perhaps one day he would return them to the family of the man he’d killed.

In *Wandering Souls: Journeys with the Dead and the Living*, Wayne Karlin tells the story of Steedly’s doing so 40 years later. Writing at the height of his powers, novelist and memoirist Karlin brings 40 years of study and reflection about the war to bear on a story of a man with a “need to dig up the past in order to rebury it properly, with wisdom and compassion and proper commemoration.”

Why dig up the past? is a question many American families are perhaps asking of their returning Iraq and Afghan war veterans, or which they are hearing in reply when they ask of their sons’ and daughters’ service. Why dwell on trauma? homespun wisdom asks. Better to get on with our lives. But Steedly’s narrative of release and redemption confirms the lessons of trauma psychologists. “The ordinary response to atrocities,” writes Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman in her extraordinary book *Trauma and Recovery*, “is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally

as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.” [Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*]

Atrocity? Surely Steedly’s kill—a man in uniform with a weapon drawing down on him—was a good kill, in a war zone with few civilians and unambiguous. No doubt. But “atrocity”—a word that stems from dual roots meaning both *dark* and *fierce*—is also defined as the intrusion of an extraordinary event that breaks the life narrative, the story we tell ourselves to make sense of our lives. Steedly, a South Carolina farm boy who had come to Viet Nam to save the world from Communism came to doubt that meta-narrative. When he did, the lives lost under his command and at his side, and the lives he took began to make less sense. “The first casualty in war,” Karlin writes, “is not truth but the murder of one’s own heart.”

If so, the second casualty is one’s place in society. “Homer had returned to his native soil” we learn in a passage we need to attend to today for the sake of recent veterans,

but he was in a shifted universe in which everything had a different meaning to him than to the people around him. He had seen and done things that he knew the people around him did not want to know about, and because of that he knew he could never rejoin them. There were certain images burned into his brain, certain smells seared into his nostrils, certain tastes still on his tongue, and he felt they formed a wall between him and those who had not seen, felt, smelled, or heard what he had. He was afraid that difference made him monstrous.

After thirty years of life marked by “emotions . . . frozen into a defensive crouch,” Steedly retrieved from his mother the letters he’d written and the notebook he’d sent home to begin to make sense of and to tell his story on his website, <swampfox.info.> Dam’s notebook—filled with elegant line drawings—teaches him the counter-intuitive truth about war, that demeaning the enemy also traumatizes. This is a truth modern industrialized, ideological wars and their propaganda machines have denied. But demonizing the enemy dehumanizes us. With Karlin’s help Steedly finds Dam’s family and repatriates his notebook and then travels with

them to help locate, disinter and bring home Dam's remains, to literally bury the war. In humanizing the enemy, Steedly is rehumanized.

No one is better placed to have helped Steedly and to have told his story than Karlin, who for 20 years has led the effort to listen to the voice of the enemy and to normalize relations. In *The Other Side of Heaven: Postwar Fiction by Vietnamese and American Writers*, Karlin, himself a Vietnam veteran, brought together writing by all the war's participants. Co-edited with former North Vietnamese cadre Le Minh Khue and South Vietnamese émigré Truong Vu, the anthology was listed as a Critics' Choice for 1995-1996. He is American editor for Curbstone Press's Voices from Vietnam series. Karlin's contacts in Hanoi were instrumental in finding Dam's family. Knowing the culture as he does, Karlin knows the crucial importance to the Vietnamese of burying the dead, or at least their effects. To go unburied and uncommemorated is to be forever a ghostly "wandering soul." By returning the notebook, Steedly lays his victim's soul, and his family's, to rest.

But most important of all, Karlin gave to Steedly what he and what many veterans most need. He convinced Steedly he could tell his story and he listened. *Wandering Souls* is a kind of window into the future when 30 years post Gulf Wars, we can glimpse the suffering that will have ensued if we don't learn to listen to those who serve in our name. Only by doing so can we re-knit the fabric of our own nation torn by wars that tear asunder other nations.

REVIEW BY KEVIN MCCLURE,
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Armenian Golgotha

Grigoris Balakian

Translated by Peter Balakian with Aris Sevag
Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. \$35.00, cloth, 560 pp.

A*rmenian Golgotha* represents for author Grigoris Balakian the fulfillment of a promise. From mid-February to April of 1916, Balakian, a priest in the Armenian Apostolic Church, vowed to dying compatriots that he would survive and record the atrocities he experienced as a victim of the Young Turks' (Committee on Union and Progress, or CUP) efforts to exterminate the Armenian population of Ottoman Turkey. One elderly friend instructed: "...write the story of our suffering; let future generations know what a steep price was paid for the salvation and freedom of their nation."

Throughout this two month span of time, Balakian and a group of approximately one hundred Armenian men were deported from their homes and forced to march on foot in the direction of Der Zor. This desert city in modern-day Syria was one of several sites of mass murder during the Armenian Genocide (1914-1918), which took the lives of over one million people. As a survivor account, both tragedy and inspiration are prominent features in the text. Translated for the first time into English from Armenian, it will prove to be an accessible source of insight for students of the Armenian Genocide and contribute to debate regarding the place of memoirs in historical research.

The text flows chronologically from July of 1914 to September of 1918. Organized into two volumes within one book, each volume subdivided into three parts, Balakian maps the political environment of pre-World War I Berlin—where he studied as a student—and wartime Ottoman Turkey. In Volume I, Balakian describes the general situation of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey. Despite anti-Armenian discrimination from sultans like Abdul Hamid II, Balakian stresses the vital role Armenians played in Ottoman society and suggests their prosperity was a cause of envy. It is in Volume I that we see Balakian arrested, along with other notable Armenian males, and deported to a prison in central Anatolia. Hundreds of male Armenian elites are similarly arrested and deported in the following days,

and many of them are later executed in accordance with the Young Turks' genocidal aim of rendering Armenian communities leaderless. This is but one step of the Young Turks' plan, which Balakian outlines and analyzes, calling the Temporary Law of Deportation the "epitaph of the Armenian nation."

In between context and analysis, Balakian traces his own journey of deportation, which starts from prison and ends with his harrowing escape to work on the construction of the Berlin to Baghdad railroad. Each stop along the way receives Balakian's full attention. Leaving nothing to the imagination, readers relive victories, if they can be so termed, such as bribing of police officers to be able to purchase bread from Turkish merchants at unfair prices. More difficult to stomach are the persistent defeats, such as observing mass graves on the horizon and bribing police officers for protection from weapon-wielding squads of freed Turkish criminals.

Volume II offers incisive political commentary, particularly in the text's final part. In chapter 34, Balakian denounces newspaper articles in which Turks blame wayward "adventurers" for the slayings. However, Balakian dedicates a great deal of Volume II to his time working on, and escaping from, the German railroad project. German soldiers are depicted as unsympathetic and "inhumane" accomplices to the Turks' extermination plan, as they did not protect from deportation the Armenian laborers who had been using the project as a pretext to avoid death. He quotes two soldiers who in conversation call Armenians "Christian Jews" who deserve punishment for their lack of loyalty.

Balakian's account exemplifies the ever-growing genre of witness literature, documenting in gruesome detail what for Armenians amounts to the first case of genocide in history and for Turks constitutes, at minimum, a blood-tinted blemish on their controversial road to republic. In this way, beyond doubt, the text is about death; not death hidden and simplified by words like "massacre" or "annihilation," but rather death described in vivid, personal detail. He repeatedly paints the heart wrenching scenes of his daily reality, such as observing a man who, robbed of his possessions, labors on a railroad that will transport arms and munitions to war fronts (producing yet more death). However, this is also a text about compassion, generosity, and justice. After the armistice, Balakian hopes Armenians will finally be granted nationhood and the CUP leaders responsible for plotting and executing the mass murders will be punished.

Armenian Golgotha contributes significantly to our understanding of the history of the Armenian genocide. Although the text does not present altogether new information, it provides rich testimonial evidence that verifies many pre-existing

interpretations. Importantly, Balakian demonstrates that the extermination plan was premeditated at the highest levels of government and systematically executed by thousands of individuals, many of whom materially benefited from the killings. German complicity in the genocide is painfully obvious in the text. Striking are the feelings of vulnerability and resentment toward European powers that Balakian establishes as driving forces in the Young Turks' decision-making. The fact that the text is in English is significant because many documents on the genocide remain in Ottoman Turkish.

The text is called by its translators a memoir, but it could easily defy such categorization. While Balakian relies primarily upon his own memories, he also took time as a prisoner to write. After his escape from the German railroad project, Balakian immediately felt his duty was to give voice to his fallen comrades. But he finds the trauma too fresh. He assures readers (and skeptics), nevertheless, that it was a constant thought: ". . . I stored . . . all the principal events of my exile and all of the relevant details. I continually ruminated and mentally recorded everything." The result is testimony that is remarkable in its depth and breadth. As a church leader and multi-lingual scholar, Balakian provides a window into the belief systems of a wide spectrum of actors. On several occasions, he capitalizes on his captors' faith in impunity and extracts guarded information, giving the testimony confessional attributes.

Even if we question the veracity of memory-filtered testimony, Balakian's craft is instructive. Students will find numerous examples of effectively balancing contextual narrative and oral evidence, and it will surely facilitate lively discussions on methodology, or lack thereof. A thorough history of the conditions, structure, and aftermath of the genocide, *Armenian Golgotha* is part memoir, part oral history, and part promise fulfilled.

REVIEW BY JOHN DONOVAN,
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The War on Terror and American Popular Culture

Edited by Andrew Schopp and Matthew Hill

Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009, \$59.50, cloth, 300 pp.

Almost five years after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, London's *Daily Mirror* newspaper published an exclusive report that revealed the identity of a man who had either fallen or jumped to his death from the top of the north World Trade Center tower. The photo of the man, which had been released by the Associated Press and used in newspaper articles around the United States the day after the horrible events of 9/11, showed a man plunging head first to the ground below and became famous as the "Falling Man" photo. At the time, no one came forward to positively identify the "Falling Man." Estimates are that seven to eight percent of the people killed when the Twin Towers collapsed died as a result of either jumping or falling from the burning buildings. Many people complained about the images taken of people dropping to their deaths, often referring to them as "jumpers," and within days of the tragedy, the media downplayed the images and declined to use them, focusing instead on the heroic actions of rescue workers who put their lives in jeopardy to save others. In recalling the human suffering associated with the tragedy, people did not want to see or remember the images of falling people, so the photos have not been widely used in 9/11 memorial services or remembrance ceremonies. When the identity of the "Falling Man" was revealed by the *Daily Mirror* to have been Jonathan Briley, a 43-year-old restaurant worker, his daughter was quoted in the article as stating that "it's not about trying to find out who he is, but what his death says about all of us." The helplessness felt by those who witnessed the jumping, the refusal of the media to acknowledge or use the "Falling Man" photo—or similar images in recalling the events of 9/11—and the public's rejection of associating the images of death in favor of the heroic actions of others that day, are just one aspect of the cultural reactions to the horrible events of that September day are analyzed in a series of fascinating articles on 9/11 and its aftermath in *The War on Terror and American Popular Culture* from Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Edited by two Assistant Professors of English, Andrew Schopp from Nassau Community College in New York, and Matthew Hill from Coppin State University in Maryland, *The War on Terror and American Popular Culture* is a collection of essays that examines the “pre- and post-September 11 worldview” that has shaped popular culture, and how Americans have incorporated the impact of 9/11 into their perceptions and reactions to the violence witnessed that day. Divided into three sections, the book addresses the cultural role of images of the “Falling Man” and the towers collapsing, the idea of good and evil in identifying who is a “friend” or “enemy” of the United States, how technology has shaped the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, the political impact of policies and responses enacted by the U.S. government in the war on terror on a national and international level, as well as the “fear culture” evident in movies, television programs and music released since 9/11.

In the first section of the book, “Interrogating the “Passion for the Real,” author Todd Schack describes a “wartime epistemology” that has promoted a “for us or against us” mentality in dealing with other nations. In a fascinating essay entitled “Perpetual Media Wars: The Cultural Front in the Wars on Terror and Drugs,” Schack contends there is a “government/military/entertainment media nexus” that keeps Americans in a constant state of fear. He believes the War on Terror needs to focus on the deeper ideological or political reasons that could lead someone to commit terrorist acts such as 9/11 instead of depicting terrorist actions as only the work of evil people. This “ideological straitjacket” is also addressed by essayist Meghan Gibbons in “Representing the Real on *The Road to Guantanamo*” in which she discusses the political and ethical considerations surrounding the detention of Arab Muslim men at Guantanamo Bay. Americans confronting the dilemma of seeking those responsible for terrorist acts must also discern the reality of their crime. The essays in the second section of the book, “Back to Basics:” Reaffirming National Myths,” address questions such as: Are Arab Muslim men detained because they are actual terrorists, or because they resemble the profile of what we expect a terrorist to look like? Is the truth as obvious as Americans see on television shows and in the movies?

Television shows such as *24* make it very clear that terrorists are out to kill and maim Americans, and that we need heroes like the lead character, Jack Bauer, to protect us. In “Tom Clancy, *24*, and the Language of Autocracy,” author and editor Matthew Hill makes the case that just like the hero of Tom Clancy’s novels from the 1980s, Jack Ryan, who fought communists and drug dealers, the hero of *24* represents America’s war on terror. Taken to an even greater psychological

level, Hill contends that the actions of Jack Bauer are “violent retribution” for the “emasculating effects of victimization or failure” to stop the planes that crashed into the World Trade Center buildings. Hill also analyzes the use of military weapons and innovation in Clancy novels and *24* as a replication of the “technowar” used by U.S. military forces in the war on terror. Americans look to heroes who can take action and protect us from evil in the world. This desire for a hero is discussed in an essay by Justine Toh in “‘People have had enough tragedy:’ The Spectacle of Global Heroism in *Superman Returns*.” Toh makes the case that a mythic character such as Superman is a symbol of “American heroism” who can perform heroic acts on a global scale. While Superman may not have been able to prevent 9/11, we can still see the embodiment of hope that he engenders in his ability to act and overcome evil in the world. As Loh points out, the public revulsion associated with the “Falling Man” image resulted in the media focusing instead on the uplifting images of police and firefighters that day (our real heroes). This focus became a symbolic way to compensate for the helplessness felt by millions of Americans on 9/11. It is this perception of helplessness, and how we deal with the fear that it could happen again, that is the focus of the book’s third section, “Embracing the Complexity: Deconstructing the War on Terror.”

Essayist Paul Williams analyzes the criticism of the Bush administration’s response to 9/11 in “‘I Could Smell the Dawn of Armageddon When this Dick Was Elected:’ Hip-Hop’s Oppositional Voices in the War on Terror.” Williams cites the lyrics of Hip-Hop artist Mr. Lif to demonstrate that the War on Terror targets “non-whites,” that the Patriot Act suppresses freedom, that the actions of the Bush Administration were based on racist American history, and that the Department of Defense is using minority soldiers to fight and die in Afghanistan and Iraq to support profits for corporate interests. This chapter is one of the most controversial in the book, as it seeks to remind the reader that some Americans see the national and global actions taken by the United States over the past nine years not as targeted against those who perpetrated and supported the attacks that took place on 9/11, but, as Williams puts it, as “discarding non-white lives as it executes the War on Terror.” This questioning of means and motives is at the heart of editor and author Andrew Schopp’s contribution which closes out the book, “Interrogating the Manipulation of Fear: *V for Vendetta*, *Batman Begins*, *Good Night, and Good Luck*, and America’s “War on Terror.”

Schopp has the final word in this excellent anthology when he postulates that movies such as *Batman Begins* make us examine whether we can “challenge the control and power of fear” generated by 9/11 and the War on Terror. The reader is

urged to question whether the criminal actions of the Joker in *Batman Begins* (just like those of the terrorists in the real world) are the actions of an evil individual, or is it the actions themselves that are evil? Just like the other thought-stimulating essays in this book, Schopp urges us to confront some fundamental questions in our response to 9/11 and the War on Terror: “Who is the enemy?” “What makes one a criminal?” “What vision of justice should we embrace?” These questions and others are addressed in this outstanding book of well-researched scholarship and insight that is essential reading for all those interested in understanding the lasting impact of 9/11 and the War on Terror.

REVIEW BY STEVEN TROUT,
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*The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald,
Faulkner and the Fiction of Mobilization*

Keith Gandal

Oxford University Press, 2008. \$24.95 paper, 288 pp

Keith Gandal's *The Gun and the Pen* argues forcefully that classic works of American Modernism from the 1920s have less to say about the horrors of the First World War—horrors long thought to have shaped the so-called Lost Generation—than about the social and cultural upheaval introduced by wartime mobilization. Few who finish this study will find themselves in disagreement with Gandal's provocative thesis. Indeed, this is a book likely to change our conception of American World War I literature—or, more specifically, the relationship between the Great War and American Modernism—for good.

As Gandal reminds us, the three central Modernists of the interwar period (Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner) were all losers where World War I mobilization was concerned. For all his martial bluster, Hemingway entered the Great War via a non-combatant organization, the American Red Cross. The US Army rejected him because of his nearsightedness. Fitzgerald, on the other hand, successfully pursued a commission as a Second Lieutenant; however, his superiors judged him largely incompetent, and the war ended before he could reach the Western Front. As for Faulkner, his mobilization story is the most pitiful of all. Too short to serve in the American military, the Mississippian lied his way into an RAF training camp in Canada, allegedly by perfecting a phony British accent. Faulkner joined too late to see action in France (or even to experience actual flight training), but this inconvenient fact did not prevent him from dressing up as a fighter pilot and describing ferocious dogfights to gullible audiences in Oxford, Mississippi.

The anomalous nature of these writers' war experiences has not gone unnoticed by scholars. Never before, however, has a critic made "mobilization wounds"—Gandal's term for the emasculating trauma experienced by Anglo males who missed

out on the fighting—the focus of a sustained rereading of canonical Modernist fiction. As explored here, even familiar works such as *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *The Great Gatsby* suddenly become quite different from the Lost-Generation chestnuts that we thought we knew. Setting aside the notion that these novels explicitly express postwar disillusionment, Gandal instead unpacks the bundle of mobilization-related anxieties (and resulting plot similarities) that they share. In particular, he demonstrates that each text pits a character of impeccable WASP credentials (a traditional recipient, that is, of the prestige attached to frontline service) against a hyphenated “upstart” who has benefited in some way from Progressive wartime policies. Thus, in *The Great Gatsby*, Tom Buchanan, the quintessential old-moneyed New Englander, collides with Gatsby, a German-American who successfully uses America’s entry into the war as a springboard for his ambitions. And thus, in *The Sun Also Rises*, impotent Jake Barnes tussles with Robert Cohn, a Jewish-American who, while not a war veteran per se, utters the same chivalric language of chastity and righteousness absorbed by Gatsby in the AEF. For Gandal, such novels not only compensate in various ways for their creators’ embarrassing war records, they also lash out at ethnic veterans, implicitly condemning mobilization policies that led members of minority groups to achieve a level of recognition once reserved exclusively for Anglo warriors.

For many readers, this part of Gandal’s thesis may seem a stretch. After all, World War I historiography has long emphasized the War Department’s hostility toward ethnic and racial minorities. Bogus intelligence tests, we have been told, prevented non-Anglos from rising in the ranks. And then there is the AEF’s notoriously discriminatory treatment of African-American troops, most of whom served as laborers in uniform. Fortunately, however, Gandal’s rethinking of 1920s American Modernism coincides with an ongoing historical reevaluation of the US Army in World War I. Indeed, *The Gun and the Pen* is an excellent example of intellectual fertilization across disciplinary lines. Drawing upon the recent work of social historians such as Nancy Gentile Ford and Jennifer Keene, Gandal demonstrates that despite their built-in bias, World War I era intelligence tests actually gave many troops—particularly second-generation immigrants—unprecedented access to positions of authority. Of course, African-American soldiers benefited little from this progressive side of wartime mobilization; skin color trumped ethnicity where intolerance was concerned. Nevertheless, Gandal’s radical new construction of American Modernism dovetails persuasively with an equally revolutionary vision of The Great Adventure of 1917-1918 as The Great Opportunity for many hyphenated Americans.

Since the central argument in *The Gun and the Pen* rests so heavily upon social-historical evidence, Gandal understandably spends much of the book backing up his claim that American participation in World War I was, more than anything else, a *mobilization* event. He even goes so far as to suggest that War-Department policies pertaining to draft eligibility, progressive standards of soldierly conduct, and merit-based promotion ultimately mattered more, in terms of Twentieth-Century American history, than the (relatively brief) experience of the AEF in battle. However, the most exciting moments in this study come when familiar texts suddenly change before our eyes. Unlike lesser New Historicists, Gandal does not eschew close reading. On the contrary, he proves himself a master at bringing text and context into dialogue. Consider, for example, his detailed analysis of Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. As Gandal observes, “a common misreading” of Fitzgerald’s text “is to perceive Daisy as a traditional woman and a foil to Jordan Baker’s new woman” (108). Why a misreading? As it turns out, the object of Gatsby’s obsession is no less shaped than he is by the social and sexual turmoil of mobilization. However, while Gatsby embraces and absurdly exaggerates the AEF’s official standards of clean-living and selfless devotion to an idealized girl at home (a moral posture that he maintains even during his subsequent career as a bootlegger), Daisy discovers that mobilization brings sexual empowerment and variety. It is she, in fact, who makes Jordan aware of the erotic possibilities opened up in a society knocked sideways by total war. After marshalling evidence from passages in the novel that are rarely, if ever, discussed in detail, Gandal asserts that Daisy is “a romanticized version of the charity girl” (111); in other words, she bears a strong resemblance to the kind of woman (one overly susceptible to the charms of a man in uniform and thus likely to engage in promiscuity) specifically targeted as a threat by the US Army. Indeed, we learn that military authorities in 1917 and 1918 rounded up more than 30,000 such “charity girls” in a bizarre program of “misogynistic law enforcement” (112). Read in this way, Gatsby’s romance with Daisy is itself a mobilization event; the rapidly shifting social conditions of wartime bring the two characters together, but not, ultimately, in a way that will allow their relationship to flourish beyond the Armistice.

One can quibble with parts of *The Gun and the Pen*. Although always absorbing, Gandal’s close reading sometimes seem overly determined to draw everything back to the theme of mobilization, and his excessive defense of his methodology, an entire chapter in length, seems to have been, well, mobilized unnecessarily. But these are minor matters. By any standard, *The Gun and the Pen* is the most

important book on American Modernism and World War I to appear in decades. And no one who claims to know the works of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, or Faulkner can afford to ignore it.

REVIEW BY JASON ZIMMERMANN,
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

*The Marne, 1914: The Opening of
World War I and the Battle that Changed the World*

Holger H. Herwig

Random House, 2009. \$20.00, cloth, 416 pp.

Those familiar with the Great War will certainly have heard of the “Miracle of the Marne” of September 1914, the legendary battle that witnessed Parisian taxi drivers gallantly ferrying troops to the front lines to exploit a gap in the advancing German armies. In a new account of this battle, *The Marne, 1914: The Opening of World War I and the Battle that Changed the World*, Holger H. Herwig disrupts the conventional emphasis on Allied audacity and German surprise with a critical examination of German commanders’ correspondence and personal accounts from August to September 1914. Herwig asserts that far from being pushed back by Allied arms, the Germans unwisely made a tactical decision to withdraw to a more defensible position from the Marne to the Aisne River on 9 September. This decision yielded strategically disastrous results for the Germans, for it prolonged the war by making a quick victory on the Western Front impossible.

The book is more than what its title suggests, for it covers far more than just the series of battles that came to be called “the Marne”. Herwig details the diplomatic backdrop to the major powers’ military planning prior to World War One, as well as the July crisis that brought about the war in 1914. Herwig’s fresh look at events is welcome in that he dispels a lingering misperception surrounding the German war plan. Strategically, the Germans sought to destroy France in a swift campaign which would leave Germany’s rear secure during the subsequent attack on Russia. It was the Schlieffen Plan of 1905, subsequently modified by the German Chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke, which was to accomplish this aim. For all the later speculation about whether the unmodified Schlieffen Plan would have succeeded in capturing Paris is really beside the point, which Herwig convincingly argues: the German Army had actually *abandoned* the Schlieffen Plan by the end of August 1914. The reason was simple overconfidence, which Herwig demonstrates with examples too numerous to be coincidental, and which led Moltke and his

army commanders to conclude that the defeat of the French army was imminent, that all that need be done was roll them up from the west. It was this belief which led to the German First Army's infamous turn to the southeast, thereby leaving Paris (and the French Sixth Army) on its western flank.

The author also stresses how this overconfidence contributed to communications breakdowns and lackadaisical control by Moltke from his headquarters in Luxembourg, who expected his army commanders to act in accordance with his general "ideas" for the campaign. Admiral Horatio Nelson famously informed his captains of his "ideas and intentions" so that in the smoke of battle there would be less confusion. This was an admirable measure where communication was expected to be difficult or even impossible, but in 1914 the German army had no such excuse. Days would go by when the critical First and Second Armies would not communicate with each other, nor they with Moltke, an oversight unimaginable in a modern army. Major German attacks or movements were often begun without even informing neighboring formations. Only the complacency borne of assured victory can account for such actions. By contrast, Marshal Joffre was constantly on the move close behind the front lines directing the entire French effort. Even so, Herwig shows just how close the Germans came to winning this battle in 1914.

Valuable as this new look at the Marne is, Herwig's assertion that this was the most significant land battle of the twentieth century, and the most decisive land battle since Waterloo must, however, be contradicted. Even had the Schlieffen Plan worked in 1914, and enabled the German army to capture Paris, the question must then follow: would France have surrendered? The experience of 1871, when Parisians fought on after the defeat of the French army, suggests otherwise. And even if France had fallen in defeat, would England then have sued for peace? The experience of 1940, when England chose to continue the fight against Germany even without Russia, indicates that the British would likely have fought on. For all the European military planners' expectations of a short war decided by decisive battles, the Great War proved to be something altogether different. Perhaps it is indelicate to point out that while stalemate at the Marne meant that the Great War would continue, what Herwig fails to note in his otherwise admirable account is that German victory at the Marne would likely have meant the same thing.

REVIEW BY BENJAMIN F. JONES,
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

*Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu
That Led America into the Vietnam War*

Ted Morgan

Random House, 2010. \$35, cloth. 752 pp.

Anything that Ted Morgan writes about the French Army should be read, and read closely. His own experiences as a French officer in the Battle of Algiers shaped his views on war, and how the French waged their 20th Century wars. While born French, Morgan became an American and took an anagram version of his French name Sanche de Gramont, dropped any pretense of French nobility, and has been writing great works of literature, history, and biography ever since. A winner of two Pulitzer Prizes for Journalism and Biography, Morgan's writing moves quickly and succeeds at bringing the reader along with all the complicated characters involved in French Indochina from 1940 to 1954. And it was a complicated place as the nations involved were Vichy and Gaullist France and its international colonial army, the Japanese, the Americans, the British, the Nationalist and Communist Chinese, the Soviets, and of course the Vietnamese. Morgan's writing succeeds at bringing the personalities of those involved directly into the story, marking in the reader's mind the breadth of complexity and the depth of human suffering in this war. *Valley of Death* demonstrates that people and the interactions of all their foibles, weaknesses, strengths, and passions drive events. Misunderstandings pervade and Morgan argues that they are the main human weakness at fault for France's loss and America's tragedy in Vietnam.

Organized with an operatic flare, Morgan divides the book into *Acts* and comprises the *Acts* into small narrative scenes culminating in Dien Bien Phu's aftermath at the peace talks. The first Act describes the French, Japanese, American, and Vietnamese vying to achieve their aims as Germany defeated France in 1940 and then how the parties fared as the war came to an end. President Roosevelt's zeal to keep the British and French from reacquiring their pre-war colonial empires fizzled, first due to his own inability to juggle that war aim while winning the war and secondly due to his premature death. President Truman did no better in

guiding the region through to a successful independence, but instead wound up reversing Roosevelt's wishes in order to strengthen France's standing for the Cold War's pressing realities. The first three Acts relate the quickly paced events of Vichy's surrender, Japan's formal occupation followed quickly by their own surrender, the peace time occupation by Nationalist China and Britain, and France's fragile return. France successfully pursued its goal of control and then found itself amidst a brutal guerrilla fight in northern Vietnam with Ho Chi Minh's forces. While Bernard Fall's *Hell in a Very Small Place* describes the operational motivations and thinking of French commanders, Morgan fills in the gaps with his discussion of French domestic politics and the Cold War politics that are immediately relevant to the Indochinese jungles. Morgan deftly steers the narrative through the careening international politics of the French Communist Party power plays, to the American State Department's inability to keep up with events, to Ho Chi Minh's deft handling of his Chinese neighbors, to the French generals and their different operational philosophies. He includes the reasons for Vietnamese hatred of the French as their occupation and how the war starved thousands to death. The fourth Act describes the battle itself where one wonders where the guerrilla war went as Ho's army is now fully equipped and adequately trained with Chinese support. But ironically, the French government had decided to leave Indochina even before the fateful battle was joined. French commander General Navarre's goal was to sustain his position to gain the Geneva negotiators better leverage with Ho Chi Minh as well as with the rest of the world's great powers. The final Act describes the various governments' facing their different options now that they are going to deal with a new world in the wake of France's defeat. Additionally, we see the horrendous plight of the French Army prisoners and their victorious captors.

Morgan's powerful prose describes the human interaction of it all so completely it is hard to see how one nation, much less any one individual, could possibly get their way. Nevertheless, they keep trying as if they could, enfeebled in the fog of one misunderstanding after another. Morgan's underlying theme is the inexorable American tragedy that followed in the same place, and with the same enemy. However, that tragedy needs a different five act drama to explain it, for the fact that General Giap's forces defeated France does not mean that the United States was bound to suffer the same consequences. If there is a fault with the book, it is the sub-title. The United States is meaningfully involved and deeply concerned about Indochina from the book's first pages, but Morgan does not advance an argument that leads from Dien Bien Phu to the 1975 fall of Saigon. What he does, however, better than anyone else, is offer a concise discussion of Roosevelt's disgust with the

French government and the far-reaching implications of those sentiments. He also succeeds marvelously with his prose describing the soldiers and diplomats seeking to get what they want. So while *Valley of Death* describes the high level politics, it also brings out the combatants' experiences in compelling and tragic ways. Anyone interested in Vietnam's history, the early Cold War, and certainly the human aspects of warfare would do well to savor the rich work Ted Morgan provides here.

REVIEW BY MIRANDA S. BALDWIN,
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

*Citizens of London: The Americans Who Stood
with Britain in its Darkest, Finest Hour*

Lynne Olson

Random House, 2010. \$20.00, cloth, 496 pp.

Olson's third novel, *Citizens of London*, gives readers insight into the professional and personal lives of three American men— John Gilbert Winant, Edward R. Murrow, and Averell Harriman—who served as behind-the-scenes players forging the alliance between America and Britain at the onset of World War II. She accomplishes her goal of weaving their stories against the backdrop of war-ravaged London through incorporating personal memoirs, diary entries, interviews, biographies, and newspaper articles into her own narrative. Olson charges the reader to move beyond a factual understanding of the three Americans' struggle to maintain American allegiance while building relationships with their British audience and relate on a sympathetic level to the challenges that the two nations faced in building that alliance.

Olson opens with chapters dedicated to the respective backgrounds of John Gilbert Winant, the U.S. Ambassador to Britain; Edward R. Murrow, the head of CBS News in Europe; and Averell Harriman, the U.S. representative of Roosevelt's Lend-Lease program in London. In these chapters Olson weaves humorous anecdotes with the sobering reality of London these men faced as they began their assignments. The next chapters discuss the different relationships between Winston Churchill and the three Americans, focusing on both their professional and personal interactions. In fact, Olson blurs the distinction between personal and professional, claiming "rarely—before or since—has diplomacy been so personal." This personal diplomacy extended to joint Christmas celebrations between the Roosevelts and the Churchills; an open-door policy from Churchill to Winant, Murrow, and Harriman; and personal relationships formed between members of the Churchill family and the three Americans. Building on this foundation, Olson extends her narrative to those Americans living in Europe who acted on their passion for their adopted homeland by joining as members of the Home

Guard, as well as those who broke American laws and served as members of the RAF, the British Army, and as part of the Canadian forces in Britain. She extends her moniker “Citizen of London” to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force because of his insistence on American and British military forces working together against an imposing enemy. Olson’s narrative concludes with V-E day activities and the legacies of Roosevelt, Churchill, Winant, Murrow and Harriman still evident today.

Citizens of London details the complexity of the alliance between the United States and England, offering a different perspective of the war effort by the two countries than traditional narratives. Olson challenges a spirit of prevailing American nationalism to show the humanity of war and its implications for the soldiers and citizens bearing the brunt of the conflict. She does not disagree with holding fiercely to a spirit of nationalism, but she does show the repercussions resulting from maintaining this type of isolationist outlook. She uses examples of the U.S.’s unwillingness to enter the war in its early stages when London faced nightly blitz bombings; the disagreements spurred by non-understandings between American GIs and Britons; and the conflict inherent in allied relationships to show that education and understanding between nations are paramount to fostering alliances.

After reading *Citizens of London*, one cannot help but think how paramount understanding this message is as the United States with our British colleagues have again embarked on wars not held on our soil. Olson paints a vivid backdrop of war-torn London in World War II for her audience, and this reviewer’s reaction is to think of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and to envision those backdrops for its citizens and soldiers. When I served in Iraq, I watched the farmers and their sheep outside the wire of my base, but I’m not sure that I ever empathized with their situations. Olson’s narrative gives readers that perspective and opportunity. Lastly, *Citizens of London* opens a space to discuss post-traumatic stress syndrome as it relates to those not directly involved in combat operations. As she concludes her text by discussing the aftermath of the war for Roosevelt, Churchill, Winant, Murrow and Harriman, Olson allows an understanding that war exacts physical, mental, and emotional tolls on soldiers and citizens alike. Some men, like Murrow and Harriman, flourished in the post-war world. Others, like Roosevelt, Churchill, and Winant, suffered insurmountable physical and emotional distresses. War is an ugly thing, as the 19th century Englishman John Stuart Mill claims, and Lynne Olson deftly captures the effects of World War II on Britons and Americans alike.

REVIEW BY JOHN J. ABBATIELLO,
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

No Less Than Victory

Jeff Shaara

Ballantine Books, 2009. \$28.00, cloth, 449 pp.

Few authors write historical fiction better than Jeff Shaara, and his latest novel meets this expectation. The third book in his World War II trilogy, *No Less Than Victory* continues the masterful retelling of the war in Europe from the Battle of the Bulge to Germany's unconditional surrender. As his father did in *The Killer Angels*, Shaara creates a story that is both fiction and non-fiction at the same time. He reconstructs conversations about which no records exist, yet his extensive documentary research allows him to portray them accurately. In one chapter, the reader might experience General Dwight D. Eisenhower speaking with his senior commanders and staffers about strategic options relating to the campaign in Europe. In another chapter, the reader will see the war from the tactical level through the perspective of one of Shaara's fictional characters—perhaps in a B-17 cockpit or in a snow-covered foxhole in the Ardennes Forest. In this way, Shaara effectively weaves a narrative—employing both real and fictional personalities—that provides a top to bottom understanding of the final six months of the war.

What was it like to experience the intense cold of the December 1944 Battle of the Bulge or to bail out of a burning B-17 cockpit? In general terms, Jeff Shaara's visceral descriptions give the reader a historically accurate portrayal of combat conditions in World War II. This reviewer discovered a few minor historical inaccuracies in the story but they did not detract from the overall quality of the novel. For those readers seeking an entertaining and engaging book that describes good history, Shaara's *No Less than Victory* will not disappoint.

Warrior Writers: Re-Making Sense

Edited by Lovella Calica. Barre, Vermont

Iraq Veterans Against the War, 2008. \$14.99, paper, 208 pp.

Memorial day, 2010, and I'm rereading *Warrior Writers: Re-Making Sense*, a collection of artwork—essays, poetry, photographs, and letters from veterans of the War in Iraq. The book consists mostly of projects from five creative workshops that took place across the country in 2007. It is written by and about those who fought, many of whom are struggling to find meaning, direction, and peace in the aftermath of their experiences in Iraq. They speak for themselves, for those they fought beside, and for those who died alongside them. It is both a powerful and important book of war literature.

As a part of the Warrior Writers Project, the various writing workshops help veterans find expression through creative acts to help them reflect on their wartime experiences. Similar to *Operation Homecoming*, which emerged from the National Endowment of the Arts writing workshops with service members in 2004, *Warrior Writers* builds on the need for veterans to explore the trauma of war through artistic expression. It delves deeper, though, reflecting the resonance of war and its aftermath in the years that would follow the Invasion of Iraq. It picks up where *Operation Homecoming* left off, depicting the internal struggles that veterans of all wars confront at one time or another. They ask hard questions for both the writer and reader, pushing aside old assumptions of what it means to be a veteran of war.

These are not professional writers, and yet their words reflect an honesty and integrity that makes a mockery of mottos such as *Service before self* or *Be all you can be*. Whether it's a Marine reflecting on the systematic means in which he was taught to dehumanize Arabs, or a Soldier recounting how he was trained from his first day in the military to think of all Iraqis as Hajjis, Ragheads or Sand Niggers, these young warrior writers' ability to examine the truth deserves both attention and admiration.

The book is comprehensive in its depiction of the transformation wrought by war on the individuals who fight. Cathartic in its nature, the various workshops

helped the soldiers reflect on their experiences by writing about a single word, an image, the enemy they fought, and the demons that haunt them still. They express their hurt, pain, and reflections on lost idealism, write letters to their future selves, confront the need to apologize, to vent, to confess, and to accept and understand that they will never be the same. As Vince Emanuele, a former Marine, wrote, “Missing is a piece of me that I will never get back.”

We are given a snapshot of those who serve in our nation’s military, the poor, the hopeful, the uneducated, the destitute, and the patriotic (many of whom join as young men and women, and sign contracts, despite confusion about what the military expects from them). Nathan Lewis wonders, “Why did I know the difference between an M-16 and an AK-47 before I could compare a Hindu to a Muslim or a sonnet to a Haiku?” Neither do the writers shy away from condemning the war or the government that holds its servicemen hostage once they sign up to defend the nation. As Luke Austin, a public affairs photojournalist wrote, “With more laws to keep them in the military than to help them when they’re out, these patriotic citizens are given no choice but to stay.”

The directors of the Warrior Writers Project have succeeded on many levels. The book itself is a reminder of the need for art to transcend and shed light on the destructive nature of war, whether at the individual or global level. Among the many successes of this book, it clearly expresses a truth that is often overlooked: every soldier who ever goes to war dies a different kind of death, whether they come back home or not. The person they once were—the young man or woman who went off to war is no more. Afterward, the creative process must take over—needs to take over—in order for the pain and suffering of war to be endured.

On this Memorial Day, I’m reminded that it is a day to reflect on all those who have fallen in America’s wars. It is meant to honor the dead, but I can’t help but think about all those who’ve suffered in our wars as well—the ones who returned alive—the ones who’ve never been able to express their own pain and suffering. A 2008 Rand study stated that 20% of those who served in Iraq will have a form of PTSD, numbers that the American Military recognizes as a realistic estimate. While the statistics speak their own kind of truth, a short poem by Matt Howard, who served two combat tours in Iraq speaks another truth:

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

How is this a *disorder*?

What part of being emotionally and physically affected by gross violence is *disorder*?

How about a *going to war and coming home with a clear conscience* disorder?

I think that would be far more appropriate.

As Jan Barry writes in his introduction to the book, the works comprised in this anthology do much more than shed light on the realities of war, they also challenge “the mythology of military veterans as stoic saviors of civil society’s virtues and values.” This book is powerful not only for what it says, but what it achieves in the process of opening up the minds and souls of those who have served our nation. For those who hope to understand the sacrifices of war veterans and the individual costs of war, *Warrior Writers* is an invaluable resource.

REVIEW BY SONJA K. PASQUANTONIO,
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

Clamor

Elyse Fenton

Cleveland State University Press, 2010. \$15.95, paper, 77pp.

Amidst the litany of books received by our various *War, Literature and the Arts* editors, I did a little clamoring of my own to unearth this poetic jewel. As I pawed through the stockpile of books, what initially sold me was the title: *Clamor*.

As Elyse Fenton explains, clamor is a “noisy shouting,” a random mixture of visual and verbal stimulation that suggests an almost chaotic, frenzied fusion of two worlds. It can also stand for the “SILENCE” between worlds, places both alien and recognizable. They consist of the one going to war and the one left in Boston. It’s a deeply moving, impossibly tender, love-filled book of poetry that I have no business infringing upon, but continue reading because I can’t bear to put it down.

...And I love you more for holding the last good flesh

of that soldier’s cock in your hands, for startling his warm blood
back to life. Listen. I know the way the struck chord begins

to shudder, fierce heat rising into the skin of my own
sensate palms. That moment just before we think ...

Loosely broken into four sections, Fenton’s journey takes us from “The Beginning,” in which every sliver of civilization is an aching reminder of her lover/husband’s deployment to Iraq, to the narrative, conversational style of his return, in which their yearlong struggle, which amounts to “too much harm,” becomes a testament to the healing process. In the third section, Fenton struggles with her own Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, turning to nature to identify her husband and grapple with her new status as “War Bride.” In the final section, which Fenton purposefully refuses to label, the poem “Roll Call,” a dream sequence of “Twenty-

one triggers / and twelve-hundred bit-down tongues” where she gulps a “Last unmuzzled throatful of air.” “Roll Call” is the beginning . . . of the end.

Fenton’s writing is unique and universal in that we’ve all been imprinted by war. We equally relate and respond to the narrative, conversational style of the reintegration section and frenetic, pagan, spastic representation of their separation. As a war veteran, I understand how one of Fenton’s narrators “survived the war though the war would never be won.”

With mortality strewn like bullet holes through the pages, words are equally connected by an unbridled sexuality between Fenton and her absent partner. In “After the Blast,” Fenton visualizes her lover in the shower as he discusses an explosion in which a body hangs on concertina wire. She tries to mouth, “I love you,” but can only think about concertina wire and the image of a “body caught in the agony of climax.” Even in death, Fenton ekes forth a fervent sexuality to the words and worlds. Every word is edged in a longing for the corporeal presence her lover provides—a facet that left me, at times, uncomfortable. I vacillated between guilt and voyeurism for listening eagerly into what should clearly be a private dialogue. But isn’t that part of the pleasure of poetry? Ezra Pound believed it was the “human inside talking to the human inside.” It’s a glimpse at what lies beneath the machine, and it is not, as Fenton suggests, “SILENCE.”

In “Word from the Front,” Fenton, proud because she understands the “corkscrew landing,” a method used by pilots to avoid incoming rounds by sending the plane into a downward spiral, finds herself incapable of attending to the conversation. Instead, she synapses on her partner’s voice inflections, and what he intends to conceal.

...so I don’t yet register the casual solemnity
of newscaster banter

falling like spent shells
from both our mouths, nor am I
startled by the feigned evenness
in my lover’s tone, the way

he wrests the brief quaver
from his voice like a pilot...

And this is the elemental bond of Fenton's poetry. As her partner strains to depict the carnage, but mask his emotions, Fenton both desires and fears the truth. While her lover battles against the rigors of war, Fenton grapples with the chimera of maintaining control, best outlined in "Veteran's Day" where we trip across a "poppy-strafed" field, reviewing the "basketry of limbs" while watching the sun and clouds through a "bone-sawing" gap in the leaves. In every breath she delivers a dichotomy of life versus death, the barrenness of nature and nurture, and the ache of gut-wrenching loss.

Fenton, a graduate of the University of Oregon, married her now-husband, an Army medic who served in Iraq. She received the 2008 Pablo Neruda Award from *Nimrod International Literary Journal*, and has published poetry and nonfiction in *The New York Times*, *Best New Poets*, *The Iowa Review*, *Bat City Review*, and *The Massachusetts Review*. *Clamor* won Cleveland State University's Poetry Center First Book Prize.

With Fenton as the lens, readers see the raw, oozing scars of embattled Iraq, are witness to the mental and physical carnage each soldier carries, and are privy to the love that endures. The message is distinct, precise, and at times, volatile. I dithered between re-reading lines while shuddering with revulsion or running my fingers over a word, like the varied meanings of "wound" in "Commerce," where "each meaning...haunted...the next."

Despite the fidelity with which Fenton shapes her craft, there are a few sections where her poems lack the internal electricity I'd come to associate with her artistry, places where she squanders passion and temporarily displaces the reader. Even Fenton begs forgiveness for her small gaffe writing, "Some didn't make it through / our rough caging, some will never / bear fruit."

Ultimately, this is a work of love, both fiercely private and touchingly open. After nine years, approximately one million people have been to war, affecting perhaps ten times that number by association; yet Fenton illustrates how "the war is everywhere" and continues to affect two people living in a state of suspended animation. Her poetry is unexpected, ferocious, poignant, and lyrical and I, as one of the "Hopeless Returned" discovered "there are smaller prices for having survived."