

HEROISM IN VIETNAM

HEROISM IN VIETNAM:
ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS IN SELECTED AMERICAN
PROSE AND DRAMA

By
FIONA M. WILKIE, M.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

AUTHOR: Fiona Wilkie, B.A. (Manchester University)
M.A. (McMaster University)

NUMBER OF PAGES: v1, 291

ABSTRACT

This study examines modern manifestations of archetypal heroism and immortality in selected American prose and drama of the Vietnam War. The technical innovations of Vietnam War writers have received substantial attention from critics and scholars but the writers' themes have had relatively little close attention. While my study does consider technical innovations, its main emphasis is on a particular thematic pattern. The writers I have selected -- Philip Caputo, William Eastlake, John Guare, Michael Herr, Arthur Kopit, and David Rabe -- exploit parallels with the Mythic Hero and it is in these thematic patterns that I am interested. Specifically, these writers dissect received notions of martial heroism and Mythic Heroism; they examine the media's influential portrayal of the soldiers and show its inadequacy; they probe into prevailing American cultural attitudes and their historical origins; and they actively pursue innovative techniques with which to present their own views of the soldiers and the war.

The most common controlling metaphor is the Hero's journey into the underworld. Variations on this basic theme include the role of the archetypal Fool as the Hero's guide, and archetypal myths of immortality. These writers juxtapose

and ironically compare the archetypal with the modern by using symbolism deriving from factors local to the Vietnam War. For example, the Asian jungle reveals the primitive in modern man; images of immortality on celluloid, in Art, and in archetypal mythology are brought into relationship with each other to distinguish modern simplified misconceptions from complex archetypal truths; and there is a close examination of the expectations and reality of martial heroism in this war.

The protagonist's journey leads him to discover personal and national mistakes. Each protagonist here varies in the degree of knowledge he attains and the ends to which he puts it. However, the parallels with the Mythic Hero's journey not only reveal one way for American society to assimilate the Vietnam experience into its consciousness and so regenerate itself, but the parallels also show the possible effects that may result from a failure to come to terms with the war and the soldiers who fought it.

The primary focus of this thesis is the symbolism and significance of martial heroism and Mythic Heroism. However, as a sub-theme, I also discuss literary innovations, and make an attempt in the final chapter to place the themes and techniques of this war literature in a post-modern context. The Vietnam War had such a profound, long-lasting and pervasive effect on America that it is only fitting that this war's literature should be placed within America's literary matrix.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my warm gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Alan Bishop, for his continuing encouragement, enthusiastic interest, and careful criticism. During the long preparatory stages of formulating this thesis, his inspiring conversations helped me clarify my ideas. I would also like to thank Dr. John Campbell and Dr. Norman Shrive for their canny observations and graciousness. More than anything else, I appreciate them all for having kept faith with me.

I thank my friends Mairi Fulcher, Margaret Steffler, Jim Blair and Royston Tester for their support in practical matters, for listening to me and for playing devil's advocate.

Finally, I dedicate this study to the late Sheila and Frank Wilkie.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: IMAGES OF WAR: JUNGLE, TECHNOLOGY AND HERR'S <u>DISPATCHES</u>	24
CHAPTER II: SHOW BUSINESS AND VIETNAM WAR DRAMA: <u>INDIANS, MUZEEKA, STICKS AND BONES</u>	81
CHAPTER III: IMAGES OF HEROISM: EASTLAKE'S <u>THE</u> <u>BAMBOO BED</u>	129
CHAPTER IV: THE FOOL AND THE UNDERWORLD: O'BRIEN'S <u>GOING AFTER CACCIATO</u>	192
CHAPTER V: ON THE BORDER: POST MODERNISM AND VIETNAM WAR LITERATURE	257
BIBLIOGRAPHY	287

INTRODUCTION

In his quest, the Mythic Hero seeks enlightenment -- both for himself and for his culture. Traditionally, the quest has a comfortable predictability inasmuch as the Hero always attains his goal despite hazards and adventures en route. The completion of the Heroic quest re-establishes a sense of order, structure, certainty, and the possibility of cultural renewal. It is for such qualities that the protagonists of the works discussed here are searching, amidst the disorder of the Vietnam War.

The purpose of this study is to examine several writers' manipulation of the heroic theme. The writers, however, would distinguish between the term "Hero" as it is used in mythology, and "hero" in common parlance, meaning someone who acts bravely. The hero's acts of courage do not necessarily have a purpose beyond that of, for example, saving someone's life. The Hero's acts, on the other hand, are directed towards providing spiritual cultural renewal: after his quest, he returns and imparts to society a wisdom that has a potentially transforming, regenerative effect. I will, therefore, maintain the distinction by calling the Mythic agent of regeneration a "Mythic Hero", while one who acts bravely will be termed a "martial hero." A further differentiation has to be made, however. Some writers question the

validity of the martial heroic image as it has been portrayed in fiction and in the cinema; therefore, I will distinguish the false representation of this image from Mythic Heroism and martial heroism by calling it "celluloid heroism."

Given the modern, increasingly cynical use of the term "myth" -- particularly when it is applied to the representation of soldiers and war heroes -- to denote a naive and distorted illusion, it seems necessary to define what I mean by the term. I use it in the sense of the Greek "mythos", meaning the codification and presentation of a Mythic Hero's actions in such a way as to present them as having a socially regenerative effect, and so, by extension, making the Mythic Hero the regenerative agent.¹ That regeneration may be resisted by society because it entails an intolerable upheaval, but **such** resistance does not invalidate the Mythic Hero's enlightenment.

I have not included Vietnam War poetry in this study because my primary interest is in the patterns of Mythic Heroic themes and writers' sustained exploration of heroism, in all its meanings, that can be best achieved in a longer work. Moreover, since the individual quest is an intrinsic part of the Mythic Heroic theme, I am primarily interested in a work's major protagonist as he makes his spiritual journey. Vietnam War poetry, whether in collections like Winning Hearts and Minds or in John Balaban's After Our War -- a collection of poems formed into a unified whole -- does not provide this kind of material and so I have omitted poetry from my study. I would, however, direct the

poetry-oriented reader to James Mersmann's excellent study Out of the Vietnam Vortex, a study of poets and poetry against the war and to the relevant sections in Philip D. Seidler's American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam.²

The Vietnam War, like earlier wars, inspired a broad range of literary themes and forms. Not all the literature establishes analogies with the Heroic quest, of course, and so it is useful to glance briefly at some typical examples from the entire range because such a survey provides some sense of context within which the myth-oriented works can be placed. Moreover, within this broad range, several themes and structural techniques recur, which the myth-oriented works share and which may be said to differentiate this war's literature from that of earlier wars. The most obviously distinctive form in Vietnam War literature is the oral history; for example, Robert Jay Lifton's Home From the War: Vietnam Veterans Neither Victims nor Executioners (1973); Mark Baker's Nam (1981); Al Santoli's Everything We Had (1981); and The Wounded Generation: America After Vietnam, edited by A.D. Horne (1981).

Other works belong more in the realm of fiction. There is a broad range of novels dealing with different aspects of the war from varying critical perspectives. Some, like William Turner Huggett's Body Count (1973), have little more to do with Vietnam than any war story would have. Huggett's protagonist, Hawkins, drops out of a Harvard Ph.D. programme and we follow him through basic training and into one violent scene after another in Vietnam until Hawkins discovers that killing gives him a great sense

of joy and fulfilment. The novel ends with the unanswered question of whether such joy is wrong. A more intelligent and satiric treatment of the theme of youthful military initiation is found in John Sack's M (1967). Here we follow a rifle company through basic training into a war-time education in brutality. The novel ends with a slightly sentimental but nonetheless effective roll call of the company members, who have become casualties, senseless killers or stunned survivors.

There are also novels that mindlessly glorify warfare as a great adventure. Robert Moore's The Green Berets (1965) is probably the best known of the type. The adventure theme is also found in John Briley's The Traitors (1969), where a group of American soldiers, captured by the NLF*, is enlisted by the enemy in a wild, hopeless, undercover mission in which all are killed. Neither of these novels has anything in particular to say about the Vietnam War, which merely provides topical background for a war story.

Similarly unquestioning are Charles Durden's No Bugles, No Drums (1976), and Larry Heineman's Close Quarters (1977). Durden's novel presents a young protagonist who survives his year in Vietnam by means of his wise practicality, earthy insouciance and congenital 'bad attitude', which is both his burden and his salvation. In Heineman's novel, a young armoured-cavalryman gets by on guts, comradeship and an acquired viciousness which he comes to regard as the war's only legacy to him.

* The North Vietnamese Army

A variation on this theme of the independent protagonist with admirable Yankee know-how is in Ward Just's Stringer (1974). Here the protagonist is a hardened, memory-haunted guerilla agent -- not an idealistic, impulsive youth whose irreverence stirs our reluctant admiration. Just's use of an older protagonist illustrates one of the more interesting changes in American war-literature. Often, the older, more mature perspective of the protagonist is exploited to introduce the theme of America's place in history. Just's novel conveys a sense of historical continuity commonly lacking in the innocence-to-maturity theme.

Older protagonists are also present in, for example, Josiah Bunting's The Lionheads (1972), Victor Kolpacoff's The Prisoners of Quai Dong (1967), and Gene D. Moore's The Killing at Ngo Tho (1967). These novels, like the ones already mentioned, share a despairing sense of the utterly futile death and suffering of the war. Yet, for all its apparently nihilistic bleakness, Kolpacoff's novel, for example, presents the beginning of a redeeming vision. The novel portrays the vicious torturing of an innocent Vietnamese boy at the hands of American soldiers. Initially, the protagonist, Kreuger, is a spectator, but more and more he comes to realize that he will be expected to take over the role of interrogator. Even as a spectator, he recognizes that he is as responsible for the torture as Buckley, who wants the promotion a successful interrogation will bring, and as McGruder, who wants the pleasure of beating the boy to death. Kreuger lies to save the boy, but his lie results in the destruction

of a village. The novel evolves like a Greek tragedy and when, through Kreuger's negligence, the boy kills himself, the circle of guilt is complete. Everyone is an accomplice and no-one is held legally responsible for the night's events in the interrogation hut. The hut is a microcosm of Vietnam and Kreuger recognizes that everyone is a prisoner there. Moreover, he realizes that everyone is morally responsible for the events in Vietnam even if, like himself, his participation is involuntary.

In Moore's The Killing at Ngo Tho, Colonel Leopard tries to undo the legacy of his predecessor's gross ineptitude. He becomes entrapped in the intrigues of the American military hierarchy and in the convoluted tangle of American-Vietnamese command and advisory relationships. Eventually he is discredited and relieved from duty, and only at the end does it appear that he will be vindicated. Even then, the moral and ideological tangle is so far from being straightened out that Leopard's achievement seems incidental. He does, however, make the attempt: he does not throw up his hands in despair at the apparent impossibility of his task.

Kolpacoff and Moore, to name but two writers, explore another relatively new war theme first developed in Heller's Catch-22. Any enlightenment a protagonist achieves is private and, for various reasons, cannot be shared with the majority. Although the works with older protagonists break away from the view of America as a nation immune to the errors of history, the protagonists' painful recognition of their part in a collective culpability is as private as their assimilation of that knowledge into their consciousness.

This 'private' quality of some of the better novels is in sharp contrast to the dramatic works inspired by the war. The American theatre of the 1960s and 1970s is generally marked by a vitality that had been missing since the agit-prop drama of the 1930s.³ O'Neill, Williams and Miller aside, there had been few thought-provoking, innovative playwrights to keep the theatre alive as an effective means of social commentary. With the 1960s, however, came Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Leroi Jones, Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy, Ed Bullins, Robert Anderson, John Guare, Arthur Kopit, David Rabe, and a host of others. Reintroducing expressionism and developing the theatre of the absurd, these dramatists moved away from earlier traditional structures and themes. The theatre became a valuable and effective mouthpiece for two central issues of the times: Civil Rights and the anti-Vietnam War movement.

For example, Ronald Rilsman's The Final War of Olly Winter (1969) shows a compassionate Black soldier's attempts in Vietnam to help others. Interspersed with his story are flashbacks to scenes from the past in America where he was the victim of others' inhumanity. Specifically against the Vietnam War is Thomas Parkinson's What the Blindman Saw: or Twenty-five Years of Endless War (1974).

This verse drama is partly based on the scene in Sophocles' Antigone where Antigone urges Creon to end war and reassert civilian control in the police state of Thebes (which, of course, stands for America in Parkinson's play). After a coup and countercoup, the republic is restored. Parkinson's application of a Greek tragedy to the Vietnam War illustrates what can be seen in some of the novels

too: the placing of American society in a broad historical context from which important points may be learned. His play presents a hope of ending warfare altogether that few other writers share. Megan Terry, in Viet-rock (1967), calls, like many other dramatists, for the end of this war. Terry also uses historical figures to condemn the war -- Christ, Roosevelt, and Cassius Clay being among the more notable figures in the play's American-Vietnamese senate hearing.

In much of the war drama and prose, there is a great concern with form and an implied conviction that traditional dramatic structures and traditional narrative methods are **ineffective**. Flash-backs, interleaving of scenes from different but related events, multiple points of view, and so on, are common. Even the oral history form of personal testimony exhibits a tendency to eschew one spokesman: each soldier's words are directly reported with little or no attempt by the editors to synthesize disparate **views**.

More than anything else, it has been the writers' innovative techniques that have captured the attention of critical commentators. One of the few book-length studies devoted entirely to Vietnam War literature is Philip D. Beidler's American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (1982). Drawing on various genres, Beidler covers in chronological order the attempts of several writers to make sense of the war; and specifically to make sense of it by mixing gritty realism with the imaginative to show the war's significance within the larger evolution of American culture as a **whole**.

While Beidler's principal interest is in literary technique, he is also concerned with placing the literature's themes within a context of popular American images of itself. Aware of the **morally destructive influence of the media's portrayals of America**, he suggests that the American historical and cultural memory serves as a symbolic prefiguration of the Vietnam War. He places the themes and techniques within an American literary perspective to illustrate his theory of how art imitates life and how, within the evolution of culture, life may also be said frequently to imitate art.

I have frequent recourse to Beidler's work--not for the simple reason that there is a paucity of full-length critical works devoted to this war's literature, but because I believe it will prove to be a seminal work. In much of the literature, techniques and themes are closely inter-related and Beidler's work, therefore, provides important groundwork for future studies.

Another full-length critical work is James C. Wilson's Vietnam in Prose and Film (1982). Wilson's theme is the distortion of the representation of the war. He regards many fictional works as perpetuating the evasive image of the war that the media established. He claims that a statement of the war's imaginative inaccessibility and inextricable confusion is an evasion that continues the mystification of an event that must be seen clearly. Wilson believes that there is a need for a social and historical perspective that sees the present as part of a coherent historical process. He discusses works that mirror the media's distortion of the war before considering works with an historical perspective

on the war that try to correct distortions and clarify moral and political issues.

Other recent commentaries on American war literature tend to include a final chapter on the Vietnam War and, more often than not, it is Michael Herr's Dispatches that is chosen to represent this war's literature. For example, Lt. Col. Peter G. Jones' War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel (1976) surveys the literature of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Wayne Charles Miller's An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction. A History of the American Military Novel (1970) ranges from Ambrose Bierce's Civil War fiction to Heller's Catch-22, and ends with a glance towards Vietnam. Jeffrey Walsh's American Literature: 1914-Vietnam (1982) surveys American prose and poetry of the Great War, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Walsh traces the different presentations of several themes in the literature of these wars and I have found his discussions of the importance of innovative language particularly useful.

While there is a paucity of full-length studies, there is a plethora of articles. Again, Herr's Dispatches has prompted most of the discussion but, more and more, other novels are becoming the subjects of enlightening consideration. The critical focus in articles is also often on technique rather than theme. Where there is thematic discussion, however, there is still evident a great deal of haranguing: the injustices of the war become the critics' central concern rather than the literature's various themes and its aesthetic merits.

My own focus of study here is the pattern of Mythic archetypes found in some of the literature. The two memoirs, two novels, and three plays that I discuss specifically, although representative of different genres, do share a compulsion to portray the soldier's war experiences on an epic scale. The war experience, it is implied, requires a particularly grand scale in order to counteract the diminishing effect of evasive media coverage of the war. Moreover, the Mythic Hero's quest into the underworld provides a potent symbol for a soldier's exploration of his own, and his country's, unexamined assumptions about a multitude of ideas related to warfare. Mythic symbology also provides a sense of historic continuity, thereby offering another perspective on this war's significance in American history and culture. Finally, while the literary techniques are sometimes different, these war works share the same Mythic concerns as much of post-modern American fiction. The war itself was such a large part of the 1960s that it penetrated the public's general consciousness over a longer period than perhaps any other war has. It is not surprising, therefore, to find similarities between war fiction and post-modern fiction in general.

Of the specific writers I discuss, William Eastlake (b.1917) is an oddity because he is of an older generation. He spent almost five years in the U.S. Infantry before he turned to writing. Before The Bamboo Bed was published in 1969, his three earlier novels, Go in Beauty (1956), The Bronc People (1958) and Castle Keep (1965), received mixed responses, the critics often finding his novels uneven. His short stories, however, have usually provoked enthusiasm. He has

published one collection of short stories, Portrait of an Artist with Twenty-Six Horses (1963), and other stories appear in many anthologies. Eastlake's mixture of the realistic and the bizarre is not always handled with sureness, but all his works are marked by a special quality of whimsical humour combined with a fundamental compassion that makes them compelling, if somewhat mannered. His novel The Bamboo Bed shares the strengths and weaknesses of his earlier works, just as it shares their often satiric tone and epic scope.

Philip Caputo (b. 1941), a B.A. graduate from New York, was with the Marines in Vietnam from 1964 to 1967, and then worked as a reporter for the Chicago Tribune. As a foreign correspondent, he covered the violence in Beirut, the Yom Kippur War, the Ethiopian Civil War, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and the fall of Saigon. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for his coverage of election fraud, and is the recipient of several other awards. Caputo's memoir, A Rumor of War (1977), was his first book and it quickly became a best-seller. It has recently been followed by a novel set in war-torn Ethiopia, Horn of Africa (1980).

John Guare (b. 1938), a graduate of Yale, spent a year with the U.S. Air Force Reserve in 1963. Many of his plays were successfully produced during the 1960s and 1970s, his best known being perhaps The House with Blue Leaves, which was chosen as the Best American Play of 1971. Most of his plays are characterized by a disregard for conventional modes of the theatre, and show a delight in the ridiculous -- qualities found in his Off Broadway award-winner about Vietnam, Muzeeka (1967).

Michael Herr (b. 1940) is a free-lance writer who, while working for Esquire, was a correspondent in Vietnam in 1967-1968. His experiences in Vietnam are recorded in Dispatches (1977), which received unanimous critical acclaim. He is also the author of the narration in Coppola's movie, Apocalypse Now! (1979), and he continues to contribute to several magazines.

Arthur Kopit (b. 1937), an engineering graduate, wrote several plays before Indians in 1969. Like Guare, he avoids the conventional, and his plays are characterized by a wry humour and a concern with cultural myths. Often, as in his Vietnam paradigm, Indians, his work has contrapuntal qualities. Many of his plays have been successfully produced in London as well as in New York.

Tim O'Brien (b. 1946), a graduate of Harvard, served with the U.S. Army in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. He became national affairs reporter with the Washington Post before writing his first book If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Send Me Home (1973), a collection of autobiographical anecdotes of his service in Vietnam. In 1974, he published Northern Lights, a novel about a returning Vietnam veteran, and, in 1978, Going After Cacciato. This novel won the National Book Award and has been generally applauded as a major achievement in "magical realism."

David Rabe (b. 1940), an M.A. graduate of Villanova University, served with the U.S. Army in a hospital support unit in Vietnam from 1965 to 1967. As a reporter with various newspapers and as a playwright, he has received several awards. Sticks and Bones (1971) is Rabe's second play, and along with The Basic

Training of Pavlo Hummel (1971), afforded Rabe the unusual honour of having two plays on Broadway simultaneously -- a feat matched only by Shakespeare. Most of Rabe's plays have an unremittingly despairing quality that arises from his theme of modern violence.

While the memoirs and novels I discuss afford their writers opportunities for lengthy consideration and elaboration of their themes, the drama aims to be piercingly shocking. Its purpose is the immediate instigation of change. It is only the second half of Guare's Muzeeka that takes place in Vietnam; the first act and the entirety of the other two plays are set in America. My concern in discussing these plays is to show that, beyond the Mythic parallels with the combat soldier in Vietnam, there is an extension of the Mythic theme into other, related aspects of American society.

Although the writers use parallels with the Mythic Hero to illuminate some aspect of the Vietnam War experience, they place their emphasis differently. Herr's Dispatches, Caputo's A Rumor of War, and Eastlake's The Bamboo Bed explore facets of the human psyche when it is exposed to the unusual pressures of war. Eastlake's novel also gives a most sustained and penetrating analysis of modern misconceptions of the soldier as martial hero. Like O'Brien in Going After Cacciato, Eastlake presents his protagonist finally in a Mythic Heroic light. The difference, however, is that Eastlake's is the archetypal view of the Hero, while O'Brien's is post-modern.

The post-modern's conception of a protagonist's place in society is not, in fact, very different from the archetypal Hero's standing, but it does have an unexpected twist that seldom appears

in Mythic Heroic tales: the role of the Hero and that of the archetypal Fool were once very similar, and it is this similarity that post-moderns reflect. The Fool is presented in O'Brien's novel, and with this figure O'Brien not only establishes Heroic parallels, but also places his novel firmly within the post-modern American tradition.

Rather than focussing primarily upon the political circumstances or the social repercussions of the war itself, Herr, Caputo, Eastlake and O'Brien depict a character's personal experiences that may or may not have significance beyond that character's private domain. The war's effect on society at large, however, is the main subject of Rabe's Sticks and Bones. Conversely, Muzeeka shows society's effect on the war. In a biting satire of television's role in the war, Guare, like most of the writers discussed here, shows the false image that television presented of the war. Drawing on Mythic Heroic themes, Guare's concern is partly with the concept of immortality, and he draws distinctions between Heroic immortality and that which is achieved on celluloid.

Kopit's subject in Indians is also the war's effect on society. Like the other writers here, his themes are the popular notions of Mythic Heroism and immortality, but he uses the Indian Wars, and, specifically, the popular image of Buffalo Bill Cody in a parabolic way to suggest parallels between this older historical event and the Vietnam War.

These writers, then, use different aspects of the Mythic Hero's quest to establish parallels with the modern soldier's exp-

periences in Vietnam; to debunk misconceptions of Mythic Heroism that have accumulated over the years; to show the Vietnam War and the American soldier in Vietnam **from an historical perspective**; to diagnose a social malaise; and to suggest the way to social recovery.

While these writers' symbols and metaphors connote the function and nature of the Mythic Hero, they also share much with Carl G. Jung's concept of archetypal images. My study does not adopt a strongly Jungian approach to the literature, but it does often employ Jung's terms. American technology and the American mode of warfare in the Vietnamese hills and jungles inspire archetypal images inasmuch as they are the "local circumstances"⁴ through which the soldier's Mythic quest is expressed. The technology and the environment represent, respectively, the modern and the ancient: the conflict between the two not only instigates the soldier's quest for self-discovery, but also exacerbates his dilemma and contributes to the difficulty of his quest.

These writers share a common interest in the concepts of the martial hero and the Mythic Hero: they show how the Vietnam War has modified the traditional Western view of the martial hero and, by extension, how this modification has affected his position in modern society. The martial hero of traditionally Classical, chivalric or Medieval tales was a fairly static type. He usually proved himself and gained honours in one-to-one combat; he lived by an accepted code of heroic virtue and was accordingly revered and idealized. He had the status of a demi-god, and a writer's interest

in him was primarily concentrated on the deeds he performed. Neither the psychological complexities that motivated him to act, nor the moral questions he may have asked himself prior to or after his action, were relevant to the writer's purpose. It seems safe to say that this was because the martial hero had an accepted, necessary and commendable role in his society, and so was to be celebrated in its literature.

Shakespeare, most notably in Henry V, contemplates the moral issues in fighting a battle, but such a consideration does not appear again in literature until the nineteenth century. Writers such as Stephen Crane and Ambrose Bierce in their Civil War tales shun the idea in Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" ("Theirs not to reason why,/ Theirs but to do and die") in favour of exploring those psychological complexities of men in war.

Increasingly in the twentieth century doubt has been cast upon the idea that soldiers have an accepted, necessary and commendable role in society. They are no longer certain of the traditional welcome that once accompanied the soldier's return because modern factors complicate the ambivalence with which they are regarded. Excitement and glory usually came through the extremity of the test of one-to-one combat, but military technology has increasingly prevented such meetings from occurring and so the battlefield no longer serves in the way it formerly did as a testing ground of a man's mettle. As a result, the test has become an impossibility in its traditional forms, and it has had to evolve new forms. Furthermore, because the traditional standard of assessment no longer exists,

martial heroism itself no longer has a stable, unanimously accepted meaning. These writers, aware of the erosion of traditional concepts of martial heroism, explore the tradition, and the mythology which once accompanied it, when martial heroism and Mythic Heroism were closely associated. Moreover, they consider the effects of the residue of traditional ideas on modern thinking.

The psychological workings of a soldier's mind when he recognizes the disparity between his expectations and the reality of combat are of especial interest to these writers. A soldier's initial enthusiasm and his subsequent disillusionment is a common enough theme in twentieth-century war literature. However, this innocence-to-maturity theme receives an innovative consideration in Vietnam War literature because the boundaries at each end of the scale have been extended. That is, innocence recedes to primitiveness, and maturity expands to include an almost intolerable knowledge of the darkness of the human soul, and an almost divine power over life. The accompanying responsibility, which in fact leads to true maturity, is to perceive this knowledge clearly and honestly and to regard this power with calm, ethical restraint. The necessity of facing this responsibility is recognized as imperative, even if this responsibility is not always accepted by the protagonist.

Often, in their frenzy, American soldiers in Vietnam reverted to a primitive anarchic state, but it was an uneasily maintained one. Since it was in complete opposition to their social and cultural education, they felt intense guilt. This is perhaps the first war in modern history which, by its very location in time,

has permitted both the atrocities and the guilt to be displayed publicly and contemporaneously. In earlier wars, the general public had really little idea of what actually happens to soldiers fighting a war; but Vietnam was, of course, 'the television war' and one could hardly help seeing the awful acts of human beings under stress.

The primitive condition to which soldiers would revert is one of the main sources of writers' metaphors. In another context it has been written that the "focus [of guilt]... is on the creation, maintenance, and repair of boundaries within society and ourselves," and that Freud's concept of unconscious guilt and the Greek notion of purification are similar in that they both involve the transgression of established boundaries, separation from society, restoration of old boundaries or the establishment of new ones. This reconciliation then leads to atonement.⁵

While not adhering strictly to this schematic stratification, these writers exhibit several of its components. The rituals, tribalism and animal aggression normally associated with a primitive state are regarded not only as the origins from which contemporary man evolved: the primitive state is also recognized as man's essential condition which has merely been camouflaged by modern cultural trappings. The war strips away these trappings and so facilitates the transgression of boundaries, thus leading to a return to the amoral primitive state. This darker side of human nature has to be accommodated because the pretense that it does not exist is potentially fatal.

Graham Greene's The Quiet American (1955) has often been mentioned in relation to Vietnam War literature. Greene's novel about Pyle's dangerous innocence is generally regarded as a foreshadowing of America's experience in Vietnam. Pyle's innocence makes him ignorant of the complexities of the French conflict with Vietnam, and leads to his murder. I have found, however, that it is Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1900) that writers most often invoke in the literature I discuss here. Conrad explores the effects of the primitive upon the civilized as Marlow journeys into a physical and spiritual heart of darkness. This novella provides compelling parallels with the American soldier's experience in Vietnam -- as can be seen in Apocalypse Now! -- and with my theme of the Mythic Heroic quest.

My opening chapter is more explication than exposition as it provides a general background to the nature of the Vietnam War. It pays particular attention to the influence of the jungle and the technology on American soldiers and establishes thematic parallels between these writers' portrayal of the Vietnamese jungle and Conrad's of the Congo. I also discuss Herr's Dispatches primarily from the point of view of technique because his innovations and struggle to find an appropriate form for his work reflect the problems faced by other writers.

In my central chapters I discuss writers who, exploiting the epic patterns of the Mythic Hero's quest, discredit the false images of martial heroism, Mythic Heroism, and immortality that have been fostered by the media. My discussion of the plays focusses

on several aspects of the Mythic Hero's quest as it relates to American society's response to the war. The plays also explore the disastrous results of accepting as true simplified, pseudo-Heroic images. William Eastlake in The Bamboo Bed also **exposes** false images of martial heroism and Mythic Heroism. But, after a close examination of the forces that create these false images, Eastlake presents the protagonist in the image of the Mythic Hero who attains the Hero's immortality. In Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato, I examine the figure of the archetypal Fool and his relationship with the Hero. The protagonist's final peripheral position is presented as the best possible one the ordinary individual could hope to achieve in this war.

Extending from these discussions is the place in American society of the soldier as Mythic Hero. Here I believe the protagonists of this war's literature, who survive to tell the tale, are in essentially the same position as many post-modern protagonists of non-war literature. For this reason, I broaden the scope of this study in my final chapter by placing these war works in their post-modern context.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹ Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 2nd ed. (1949; rpt. Princeton University Press, 1973), p.20.

² Larry Rottman, Jan Barry, and Basil T. Paquet (eds), Winning Hearts and Minds: War Poems by Vietnam Veterans (Brooklyn, New York: First Casualty Press, 1972). John Balaban, After Our War (Pittsburg: University Press, 1974). James F. Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex: a study of poets and poetry against the war (University of Kansas Press: Lawrence, 1974). Philip D. Beidler, American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (Georgia: University Press, 1982).

³ See Doris Auerbach, Shepard, Kopit and the Off-Broadway Theater (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), pp. 113-114.

⁴ Campbell, p.257.

⁵ Roger W. Smith (ed.), Guilt: Man and Society (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), Introduction, p.20.

CHAPTER I

Images of War; Jungle, Technology and Herr's Dispatches

In World War II, advances in military technology permitted a liberty of movement which totally reversed the helpless stalemate of World War I without the attendant frustration, as would later be the case in Vietnam, of sitting on a useless pile of nuclear weaponry while getting bogged down in a kind of tactical fighting for which the enemy was far better trained.

Gilbert Adair, Vietnam on Film, p.91

We have imprisoned our own conceptions by the lines which we have drawn in order to exclude the conceptions of others.

Tony Tanner, City of Words, p.17

They had already been where we were going, to that frontier between life and death, but none of us wanted to listen to them. So I guess every generation is doomed to fight its war, to endure the same old experiences, suffer the loss of the same old illusions, and learn the same old lessons on its own.

A Rumor of War¹

Philip Caputo's words were provoked by the remembrance of his innocently excited anticipation of his first combat in Vietnam. Having read the warnings of the Great War poets to future generations, he realized that he too had a fascination with combat that only direct experience could mitigate. But, however much each war may have the same "old lessons" to teach, the Vietnam War has its own peculiar ones too. Moreover, Caputo, like other Vietnam War writers, discovered that he had to find an arresting way in which to present effectively the poignancy of the "old lessons" and the horror of the new.

Caputo's memoir has a structure paralleling that of tragic drama: its division into prologue, three major stages, and epilogue parallels the five acts of tragedy. As one critic notes, this dramatic movement adds an epic quality to Caputo's chronicle. In particular, the three middle sections show

a version of Man's Fall, [and] the journeys of Odysseus, Aeneas and Dante to self-knowledge: there is a period of innocence and illusion ["The Splendid Little War"], followed by a voyage to the underworld ["The Officer in

Charge of the Dead"], and a chastened, disillusioned return to experience ["In Death's Grey Land"]. The "English major who enjoyed reading the Romantic poets" ... has written a² Vietnam War version of the romantic epic of the self.

While Caputo writes of the war in this epic form, he also undermines that form. There are no epic clashes of armies or the like and so his structure stands in ironic contrast to his themes. Yet, while he recognizes that America's entry into the war, and the war itself, were not gloriously noble and therefore worthy of epic treatment, the epic form still offers an appropriate structure for his own journey of self-discovery. Therefore, although he undermines the possibility of regarding the war as a romantic epic, his own experiences merit epic representation.

Two themes particularly engage Caputo's attention when he delineates his journey of self-discovery. His graphic descriptions of the jungle and American military technology show how man's morality can be stripped away, sending him on a nightmarish quest for values with which to sustain his humanity. In The Bamboo Bed William Eastlake also describes elaborately the context within which his characters' ordeals take place. Of the writers discussed in this study, Eastlake and Caputo are the most preoccupied with the effects of the jungle and technology on American soldiers. For this reason, I draw mainly from their works when discussing the external forces that propel a character into a discovery and re-appraisal of the self.

I

Technology and the Jungle

American soldiers arrived in Vietnam mainly because their draft numbers came up in the IBM machine. In The Bamboo Bed, a minor character tries to escape the tyrannical qualities associated with this machine. He is trapped because he is numbered and filed in it. The whole modern fear of identification by numbers which are slotted into central computers, and to which only a few have access, creates an aura of mystery and awe-inspiring power that seems to be the property of an elite cognoscenti and so results in the modern nightmare. Eastlake only mentions the IBM machine, and all it stands for, in passing,³ but the inexorable logic of the computerized paperwork of the war is the main theme of an interesting short story, "Troop Withdrawal -- The Initial Step" (1969) by Thomas Parker.⁴

The IBM machine suggests that there is a business aspect to this war and this is a theme that Caputo develops. In his early days in the war, patrols were on a regular, almost office-hour schedule. In effect, he says, "we commuted to and from the war" (RW, p.95). Although this regularity was disrupted later in the war, there still remained a habit of mind that ran the war as if it were a large corporation. The parallels between business enterprise and the fruits of war are familiar to those who have read Heller's Catch-22 and have marvelled at the business acumen of Milo Minderbender. Caputo comments on the effect of a business-like philosophy

when it is applied to actual warfare. Contrasting Major General Lew Walt and General Westmoreland, he says of the former that he

was one of those rare generals who believed it was his job to lead his army from up front, and not from a cushy command post so far removed from the action that it was almost desertion....Walt was leading his men from the cannon's mouth, where generals had positioned themselves in the days when they were fighting-men like Lee, and not business managers like Westmoreland.

(RW, pp.187-8)

Westmoreland's strategy, on the other hand, was one of attrition, and this had an important and unfortunate effect on the soldiers' behaviour:

Our mission was not to win terrain or seize positions, but simply to kill: to kill Communists and to kill as many of them as possible. Stack 'em like cordwood. Victory was a high body-count, defeat a low kill-ratio, war was a matter of arithmetic. The pressure on unit commanders to produce enemy corpses was intense, and they in turn communicated it to their troops. This led to such practices as counting civilians as Viet Cong. "If it's dead and Vietnamese, it's VC," was a rule of thumb in the bush. It is not surprising, therefore, that some men acquired a contempt for human life and a predilection for taking it.

(RW, pp.xvii-xviii)

For a while, Caputo's job is to maintain an accurate scoreboard because

the measure of a unit's performance in Vietnam was not the distances it had advanced or the number of victories it had won, but the number of enemy soldiers it had killed (the body count) and the proportion between that number and the number of its own dead (the kill ratio). The scoreboard thus allowed the colonel to keep track of the battalions and companies under his command and, quickly and crisply, to rattle off the impressive figures to visiting dignitaries. My unsung task in that statistical war was to do the arithmetic. If I had been an agent of death as a platoon leader, as a staff officer I was death's bookkeeper.

(RW, pp.168-9)

The emphasis on numbers bring Caputo to the point where he hates "the obsession with statistics" and the resulting "indifference toward the tragedy of death" (RW, p.202). Statistics also mislead the American public about their soldiers' effectiveness in Vietnam. Moreover, possession of superior technology heightens American confidence founded on these statistics. However, this too is misleading because that technology is in fact not only inadequate, because inappropriate to the Vietnamese terrain, it is also positively hazardous to those who use it.

The American public and military command expect their superior technology to win the war but the soldier, having been rapidly disabused of this notion by the realities of jungle warfare, still has to use inappropriate means to achieve the expected end. As Eastlake writes, it is a case of the incompetent ordering the unwilling to do the impossible (BB, p.50). Soldiers also have to cope with rifles that overheat and jam, as well as with being bombed, napalmed and shot at by their comrades, who, in the jungle, cannot see what they are doing. Moreover, given the guerilla nature of the war, finding the enemy is as much an ordeal as fighting him.

These daily frustrations -- not, of course, unique to war as it was experienced in Vietnam -- lead to a wearying, continuous debilitation; and there is little relief because there is no 'rear' to rotate to. Moreover, after a twelve-month tour of duty there are questions that cannot be answered. While in Vietnam, the "Peacemakers. Draft card burners. Deserters....make us feel like criminals," says one soldier (BB, p.217), but returning to the States is painful too.

Some cannot adjust and return instead to Vietnam:

...to the jungles of Asia to shoot and be shot at rather than stay in the land of the free and the home of the brave. Why? ... Because ... you're supposed to win a war. You remind them that it's still going on. You're supposed to win a war or get killed. You guys didn't do either. America has always won all the wars. What were you guys up to? (88, p.155)

One way or another, the soldiers are employed in a thankless task. The difficulty of explaining adequately why the American forces did not win the war, and quickly too, is caused by the difficulty of describing the incommensurable influence of the jungle on the men and the conduct of the war. In the literature, the jungle often becomes as much a character as the humans portrayed. Indeed, it is surely because of the overwhelming presence of the jungle that literary themes derive as much from it as from the technology.

In the first Western novel dealing with warfare in Vietnam, André Malraux presents the Asian jungle as a metaphor for "man's anguished alienation from an absurd society in a meaningless universe."⁵ This French novel, La Voie royale (1930), contains two of the main themes that are also to dominate the American experience in Vietnam. The vast jungle is where Malraux's protagonist gives up trying to distinguish between life that moves and life that oozes. The jungle has some unknown power assimilated into it. It also has the rudimentary creatures and steaming vegetation of Earth in the making. Here, Malraux asks, what act of man has meaning? While the more modern American writers do not share the extremity of Malraux's existentialism, they are con-

cerned with some of his themes. Malraux, like Conrad in Heart of Darkness, deals with the jungle in terms of a dark encounter with the terrifying 'irrational' aspects of life and the self. For example, Marlow says of Kurtz that

the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness ... seemed to draw [him] to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions this alone has beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations.

In the war literature of the 1960s, this "awakening" is compounded by the experience of war. The awakened memory of forgotten and brutal instincts, in some writers' visions, also applies to the American public in general and this is a theme I shall take up later. In the Asian jungle war, soldiers themselves are not necessarily depicted as having intrinsically "unlawful souls"; however, there is a lack of imposed moral restraints. In Heart of Darkness, Marlow lists the factors whose absence from the Congo jungle facilitate Kurtz's plunge into the amoral abyss (HD, p.50), and Caputo almost duplicates Marlow's list when he writes that in the Asian jungle, which at night seems like "a void ... the source and center of all the darkness in the world" (RW, p.237), there are

no churches, no police, no laws, no newspapers, or any of the restraining influences without which the earth's population of virtuous people would be reduced by ninety-five percent. It was the dawn of creation in the Indochina bush, an ethical as well as a geographical wilderness. Out there, lacking restraints, sanctioned to kill, confronted by a hostile country and a relentless enemy, we sank into a brutish state. The descent could be checked

only by the net of a man's inner moral values, the attribute that is called character. There were a few -- and I suspect Lieutenant Calley [of the My Lai massacre] was one-- who had no net and plunged all the way down, discovering in their bottommost depths a capacity for malice they probably never suspected was there. (RW, p.xviii)

Kurtz and Calley and, indeed, Caputo himself, who describes his own war-crime and subsequent court-martial, have presumably responded in similar ways to the experience of the jungle wilderness: that is, the environment has vibrated a hitherto untouched chord in their being and this prompts them to look within and thereby discover their capacity for violence. Of Kurtz, it is said that

there was something wanting in him -- some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last -- only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for that fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude -- and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. (HD, pp. 58-9)

Caputo endows the Asian jungle with having a similar effect upon himself and his fellow marines. Of the atrocities, he writes that "the evil [which caused them] was inherent not in the men -- except in the sense that the devil dwells in all of us -- but in the circumstances under which they have to live and fight" (RW, p.xvi). The qualification is important. While, in the same work, Colby says that in this war "one of the most brutal things in the world is your average nineteen-year-old American boy" (RW, p.137), Caputo adds:

I had come to recognize [the marines] as fairly ordinary men who sometimes performed extraordinary acts in the stress of combat, acts of bravery as well as cruelty.... There were more admirable men in the world, more principled men, and men with finer sensibilities, but they slept in peaceful beds. (RW, p.137)

Caputo's assumption is that man's in-dwelling devil has not been put there by the war or the wilderness; it is already present but only manifests itself under the pressures wrought by this combination of circumstances. Describing his own court-martial, Caputo says that the other men arraigned with him were also ordinary, good family men and that

if the charges were proved, it would prove no one was guaranteed immunity against the moral bacteria spawned by the war. If such cruelty existed in ordinary men like us, then it logically existed in [everyone], and they would have to face the truth that they, too, harboured a capacity for evil. But no one wanted to make that recognition. No one wanted to confront his devil. (RW, p.331)

This idea of ordinary men discovering their capacity for cruelty under extraordinary circumstances is not new of course. However, Caputo's emphasis on the devil within and the acknowledgement that some people are without a moral core appears often in Vietnam War literature. Be that as it may, the Kurtz-like figures of the Vietnam War are few. The image of an uncontrollable, monomaniacal, trigger-happy soldier who establishes himself in some vigilante capacity is more a product of the popular media than of the war itself. Instead, most soldiers are like Marlow, who had "peeped over the edge ... but had been permitted to draw back [a] hesitating foot" (HD, p.72).

The jungle is presented first and foremost as primeval. Its heat is almost liquid (BB, p.88); trees trip up soldiers like "some prehistoric and unknown animal-vegetable" (BB, p.118); the vines and trees are "tangled together in a silent, savage struggle for light and air. A war of plant life" (RW, p.83). Moreover, it seems as if the land, jungle and sun are "in league with the Viet Cong, wearing [Americans] down, driving [them] mad, killing [them]" (RW, p.106). In Going After Cacciato, a Vietnamese says that the Viet Cong soldier

is but the representative of the land. The land is your true enemy....There is an ancient ideograph -- the word Xa. It means...community, and soil, and home...but it also has other meanings: earth, and sky and even sacredness.... At heart it means that a man's spirit is in the land, where his ancestors rest and where the rice grows. The land is your enemy.

The land and the Viet Cong literally as well as figuratively become indistinguishable as the Americans' enemy, and so the Vietnamese Xa philosophy makes an impact on the Americans in only too tangible a way.

It was part of the standard American training that the jungle could be helpful to them if they knew how to take advantage of it. However, Caputo says that this opinion came from men "whose idea of a jungle was the Everglades National Park. There was nothing friendly about the Vietnamese bush; it was one of the last dark regions on earth" (RW, pp.111-2). Pursuing this theme a little further, it becomes clear that the jungle is not only a void and a darkness, it is

the great nowhere located between nowhere and nowhere, leading from nowhere on the road to nowhere. If you have ever wondered what nowhere looks like, it is a monsoon-shrouded clearing in the vast jungle called Vietnam, the inhabitants of nowhere dying and surrounded by the dead. (BB, p.50)

Whether one locates "the dawn of creation" (RW, p.xviii) in the Nothing which is the Chaos preceding Creation, or in the steaming, primeval state of the jungle, there is no doubt that modern man in Vietnam is presented as stepping into the very first moments of a world which still has to be formed. The jungle is a moral and geographical wilderness: it apparently extends in time and place into infinity. War, in any setting, will test morality's strength, but here the stress is increased by the environment:

Everything rotted and corroded quickly...bodies, boot leather, canvas, metal, morals. Scorched by the sun, wracked by the wind and rain of the monsoon, fighting in alien swamps and jungles, our humanity rubbed off of us as the protective bluing rubbed off the barrels of our rifles. We were fighting in the cruelest kind of conflict, a people's war. It was no orderly campaign, as in Europe, but a war for survival waged in a wilderness without rules or laws; a war in which each soldier fought for his own life and the lives of the men beside him, not caring who he killed in that personal cause or how many or in what manner and feeling only contempt for those who sought to impose on his savage struggle the mincing distinctions of civilized warfare -- that code of battlefield ethics that attempted to humanize an essentially inhuman war. (RW, p.229)

Morality is also under the duress caused by the weaponry. Just as the jungle exposes the soldiers to self-examination and revelation, so too "the war opens the curtain on us all and shows us what we are not" (BB, p.80). The effect of the technology and the

idea of man arriving at the dawn of creation with all his technological paraphernalia is suggested in this passage:

The choppers came in with ear-hurting noise like enormous insects from another planet. They came in bringing their hurricane winds and vibrations that shook the foundations of the earth. That's the way it is in Nam, you have the utter and absolute stillness of a primordial, an unrecorded and unwitnessed time -- such an awful silence of beauty that is fixed and hushed, such a magnitude of all of time, you cannot breathe. Then the choppers come. The world begins. Man arrives. (88, p.16)

Here we have simultaneously the past and the future because in The Bamboo Bed technology is associated with the twenty-first century (see 88, pp. 15,220).*

Although apparently incongruous bedfellows, the primeval jungle and modern weaponry serve similar functions in the literature inasmuch as they force the quintessential nature of man to reveal itself. Whether a devil is present in man or the core absent is, in the context of Vietnam War literature, a quibble of semantics. To fully comprehend the effects of the fighting on the men's morality, it is necessary to understand the nature of the war itself. Caputo wishes that he had been

the veteran of a conventional war, with dramatic campaigns and historic battles for subject matter instead of a monotonous succession of ambushes and

* Incidentally, the evocation of the next century furthers the similarity between this passage quoted above and the opening moments of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

fire-fights. But there were no Normandies or Gettysburgs for us, no epic clashes that decided the fates of armies or nations. The war was mostly a matter of enduring weeks of expectant waiting and, at random intervals, of conducting vicious manhunts through jungles and swamps where snipers harassed us constantly and booby traps cut us down one by one.

(RW, pp.xii-xiii)

More specifically:

For weeks, we had to live like primitive men on remote outposts rimmed by alien seas of rice paddies and rain forests. Malaria, blackwater fever, and dysentery, though not the killers they had been in past wars, took their toll. The sun scorched us in the dry season, and in the monsoon season we were pounded numb by ceaseless rain. Our days were spent hacking through mountainous jungles whose immensity reduced us to antlike pettiness. At night we squatted in muddy holes, picked off the leaches that sucked on our veins, and waited for an attack to come rushing at us from the blackness beyond the perimeter wire.

The air-conditioned headquarters of Saigon and Danang seemed thousands of miles away. As for the United States, we did not call it "the World" for nothing; it might as well have been on another planet.

(RW, pp.xviii-xix)

The realities of the fighting as described here are in marked contrast to the soldiers' expectations. Early in the American role in Vietnam,

counter insurgency was fashionable in military circles Combating insurgencies gave the services a special mission in the age of the New Frontier. The Peace Corps could go off to build dams in India or schools in Bolivia, but it was up to the War Corps to do the man's work of battling Communist guerillas, the new barbarians who menaced the far-flung interests of the new Rome. Finally, counter insurgency was still surrounded by the Kennedy mystique.... The glamorous prince of Camelot had given the new doctrine his - imprimatur by sending the first Special Forces detachments to Vietnam, glamorous figures themselves in their green berets and paratrooper boots. (RW, p.16)

Caputo's sense of fair play is in keeping with this initial glamorous image of the American role in Vietnam. Early in the war he thought the discrepancy between American and Vietnamese power unfair but later he could happily see an enemy soldier consumed by napalm (RW, p.117). The reasons for this volte-face are located mainly in the daily events and details that governed the method of warfare.

For example, not only men but weapons have to be parachuted into the jungle. Jeeps, tanks and all the other mechanical accoutrements are dropped from C-135s. Eastlake describes such a drop in terms of the C-135s giving "aerial birth to the gay parachuted junk of war" (BB, p.15). A parachuted tank swings too much in its descent and so overturns on landing to "lie on its back like a huge helpless turtle" (BB, p.14). These metaphors, coupled with the chances of a successful landing in the drop zone (BB, p.15), seem analogous to an event in nature. Young turtles, hatched on a beach, race frantically to the sea (and safety) before predatory birds can kill them. This survival of the fittest, and its mechanical counterpart, suggests several things. One is that machinery is no more in its natural element in the jungle than young turtles are on the beach (the repercussions of this misplaced machinery will be discussed later). Moreover, the depiction of the war rapidly becomes one of the jungle versus the machine, as if these two have a willed life of their own and man is but a superfluity caught between their conflict.

Just as the ordinary soldier is subsumed in the business aspect of the war, so he is overwhelmed by the eternal jungle that

grows back quickly no matter what damage man does to it. Man may try to assert himself in this world and "leave his mark" (BB, p.121) but it is a futile gesture in the indifferent and essentially unaffected jungle. Similarly, the war itself:

In getting through the jungle in Vietnam there is always a point where you want to lie down and hide and let the war go ahead without you. The war gets on surprisingly well without you as a matter of fact. You reach a point where you believe that the war could get on without anyone. As though it had a momentum of its own, as though the war were sentient and alive, although born of men it now has a life separate, unrelenting, without meaning, purposeless, without direction, feckless, willful and mad.

(BB, p.194)

The inconclusive nature of the war, which is suggested in this passage, is caused and exacerbated by several factors. Because the Viet Cong can steal almost as much of the American equipment as Americans themselves manage to salvage, they are better armed than they otherwise might have been and this contributes to the extension of the war. Moreover, there appears to be an unlimited number of the north Vietnamese. It is not uncommon for Americans to wipe out an enemy regiment only to discover themselves fighting that 'same' regiment again a few months later (RW, p.257). This failure to eliminate the enemy not only hinders the statistical war, but adds to the Viet Cong's enigmatic nature in Americans' imaginations.

The elusive, phantom-like Viet Cong, so expert in moving about the jungle that terrifies Americans, can appear and disappear like the mist -- much to the already heightened American uneasiness. Going out on patrol in search of these wraiths is like "sliding over

an edge" (RW, p.252). This expression, suggestive of a wary volitionless movement, is in marked contrast to the definite and purposeful 'going over the top' which characterized an earlier war. The "edge" is both physical and psychological. It is the edge that demarcates the known American outpost from the unknown enemy-controlled country beyond. **Like** Marlow's edge (HD, p.72), it is also the edge that separates two states of mind. One is the relatively calm and stable condition promoted by the known and familiar; but sliding over the edge precipitates one into the chasm inhabited by fearful expectation and nervous uncertainty. In Vietnam, however, when balancing on that edge,

you seemed to live more intensely under fire. Every sense was sharper, the mind worked clearer and faster. Perhaps it was the tension of opposites that made it so, an attraction balanced by revulsion, hope that warred with dread. You found yourself on a precarious emotional edge, experiencing a headiness that no drink or drug could match. (RW, p.230)

This balancing on an emotional edge while actually engaged in combat -- be it nocturnal or diurnal -- is a quite different sensation from the tension a soldier experiences on patrol. On a tangible level, for example, an infantryman landing in the jungle is glad to be out of a helicopter and back "where an infantryman belongs, on his feet and in the mud....in the foot soldier's natural element" (RW, p.112). The "natural element", though, is dangerous too because they are

the first American soldiers to fight an enemy whose principal weapons were the mine and the booby trap. That kind of warfare has its own peculiar terrors. It turns an infantryman's world upside down. The foot soldier has a special feeling for the ground. He walks on it, fights on it, sleeps and eats on it; the ground shelters him under fire; he digs his home in it. But mines and booby traps transform that friendly, familiar earth into a thing of menace, a thing to be feared as much as machine guns or mortar shells. The infantryman knows that any moment the ground he is walking on can erupt and kill him; kill him if he's lucky. If he's unlucky, he will be turned into a blind, deaf, emasculated, legless shell. It was not warfare. It was murder. We could not fight back against the Viet Cong mines or take cover from them or anticipate when they would go off. Walking down the trails, waiting for those things to explode, we had begun to feel more like victims than soldiers. (RW, pp. 288-9)

The infantryman is thus caught in a dilemma he cannot resolve. His "natural element" is hostile to him, but his only alternative method of fighting is worse:

A helicopter assault on a hot landing zone creates emotional pressures far more intense than a conventional ground assault. It is the enclosed space, the noise, the speed, and, above all, the sense of total helplessness....On the ground, an infantryman has some control over his destiny, or at least the illusion of it. In a helicopter under fire, he hasn't even the illusion. Confronted by the indifferent forces of gravity, ballistics, and machinery, he is himself pulled in several directions at once by a range of extreme, conflicting emotions. Claustrophobia plagues him in the small space: the sense of being trapped and powerless in a machine is unbearable, and yet he has to bear it. Bearing it, he begins to feel a blind fury toward the forces that have made him powerless, but he has to control his fury until he is...on the ground again. He yearns to be on the ground, but the desire is countered by the danger he knows is there. Yet, he is also attracted by the danger, for he knows he can overcome his fear only by facing it. His blind rage then begins to focus on the men who are the source of the danger -- and of his fear. It concentrates inside him, and through some chemistry is transformed into a fierce resolve to fight

until the danger ceases to exist. But this resolve, which is sometimes called courage, cannot be separated from the fear that has aroused it. Its very measure is the measure of that fear. It is, in fact, a powerful urge not to be afraid anymore, to rid himself of fear by eliminating the source of it. This inner, emotional war produces a tension almost sexual in its intensity. It is too painful to endure for long. All a soldier can think about is the moment when he can escape his impotent confinement and release this tension. All other considerations, the rights and wrongs of what he is doing, the chances for victory or defeat..., the battle's purpose or lack of it, become so absurd as to be less than irrelevant. Nothing matters except the final, critical instant when he leaps out into the violent catharsis he both seeks and dreads.

(RW, pp.293-4)

While this passage is as clear a description of the agonistes of battle as one could ask for, it is interesting to note that the internal conflict is first produced by the machinery. It serves as an intermediary focus for the soldier's hatred and fear before they are worked up into the passion that enables him to fight.

Helicopters themselves produce complex responses in the soldiers because of their variety of uses in the war. Besides being used in air assaults, they are used in Search and Rescue missions, and so technology becomes man's saviour too. But even this is not straightforward. In The Bamboo Bed, the Search and Rescue helicopter called the 'Bamboo Bed' is neutral, and despised as a result. Seeing the Bamboo Bed waiting over a battle site to rescue the wounded and airlift the dead, the remaining soldiers feel like murderers (BB, p.299). Its very presence suggests death and it hovers like a scavenging bird (BB, p. 284).

Helicopters have many functions in this war. For example, more than one soldier has tasted the almost divine power of calling .

in an air-strike and seeing it appear within minutes. This power of soldiers to deal death is compellingly presented in Coppola's 'Ride of the Valkyries' scene in Apocalypse Now! A fleet of helicopters flies over a Vietnamese village killing all, while, on the soundtrack, Wagner's music is heard. Whether Coppola was aware of it or not, it is a more than appropriate choice of music since the Valkyries are the handmaidens of the Scandanavian god of war, Odin, and their task is to choose who will die in battle. They conduct the slain to Valhalla, the palace of bliss, just as modern Rescue helicopters take the dead and wounded to safety. This dual function of the helicopters, as saviours and bringers of death, is repeated in The Bamboo Bed when Eastlake contemplates the martial hero.

Other aircraft, for different reasons, also wield horror over friend and foe alike. The B-52 bombers fly so high over the jungle that pilots cannot see what they are doing. The distance bombs have to drop makes the use of grid references for locating the target almost useless. The opposing forces are in such close proximity to each other that there is as much chance of the bombs falling on the "Friendlies" as on the "Unfriendlies." Operating from such a distance, it is as if the bombers are a law unto themselves, so far removed from things as to make them almost god-like (BB, p.267). Moreover, in a war where "ethics seemed to be a matter of distance and technology, you could never go wrong if you killed people at long range with sophisticated weapons" (RW, pp.229-230).

The bombs are indiscriminate in their destructiveness, just as commanders might be irresponsible in their use of them:

When all else fails you eliminate everything.
The bombs dropped. There is nothing like a
good bombing to solve everything. Save some-
thing by eliminating everything....

Wham!

Our Father...

Wham!

Who art in the B-52...

Wham! (88, pp.85-6)

Aircraft can also bring with them napalm, CBUs and defoliants -- all of which have an apocalyptic effect to one spectacular degree or another. Defoliants not only kill trees but all the animals living amongst them. Moreover, the cyanide poisons plants and the people who eat them. Eastlake asks if, using such methods, man can prevail. Man is destroying his planet and this war is not, like the Great War, 'the war to end all wars', it is "a war to end war. The end of man" (88, p.250).

Like the gas used in the Great War, napalm can drift so that it incinerates both friend and foe. But unlike gas, napalm is inescapable:

The napalm came in....The tunnel of jungle was consumed in a great flash. All the oxygen was sucked out and you could not breathe. There was nothing to breathe except a vacuum. Everyone died and then some came back again. Some came back to be eaten alive by the jellied gasoline that flew everywhere. It dripped from the wild burning banana trees and all the jungle turned into a dense red glow dripping with scalding deadly jellied gasoline. Some came alive again to be incinerated in the water. They have perfected the stuff now so that it will burn in water. Ask Chemical Warfare. Ask the man who drops it. No, don't. They don't want to know. Ask any man who was there....No, don't. There aren't any left. (88,p.280)

CBUs are cannisters filled with "huge steel tennis balls, each containing hundreds of bomblets; the bomblets contain millions of minibombs and each thing goes off in turn" (BB, p.282). When the CBUs are to rain down on people,

Air flashes in, Phantom jets. Brand-new bombers, steel fighters, the latest. The best. CBUS stream out their ass. Help prevent forests. Help prevent humans....Look at the world blow up. The world disappears this way. Do you want to see the world go? The world goes this way. It's quite beautiful if you're in on it. For those who aren't in on it, the world goes this way and that way and then makes a long slide to the wrong side before it goes where it did not come from because you are standing on your ass. The world is flat and wrong side up and then burning again. The world is on fire. (BB, p.282)

The violence of the technology does more than presage the end of this world: for Caputo at least, it removes the possibility of belief in a Christian hereafter:

The mutilation caused by modern weapons came as a shock....The horror lay in the recognition that the body, which is supposed to be the earthly home of an immortal soul...is in fact only a fragile case stuffed full of disgusting matter. Even the brain, the wondrous, complex organ that generates the power of thought and speech, is nothing more than a lump of slick, gray tissue. The sight of mutilation...burst the religious myths of my Catholic childhood. I could not look at those men and still believe their souls had "passed on" to another existence, or that they had souls in the first place. I could not believe those bloody messes would be capable of a resurrection on the Last Day. They did, in fact, seem "more" dead. Massacred or annihilated might better describe what had happened to them. (RW, p.128)

Despite the technology, or, some would say, because of the technology, Americans had little success in achieving their country's

objectives in Vietnam. One of the reasons for this failure is that they used inappropriate means:

You'd think with all these helicopters, airplanes, tanks, amtracks...that forty-five billion a year can buy you'd just have to press a button and the VC would run. But the jungle is on their side.... and all the junk we got is no match for the jungle.
(BB, p.191)

Eastlake's implication, however, is not just that military stupidity was to blame for this: it is the American habit of mind which is at the root of it all. For example, it is a commonplace that tanks did not do well in the Asian jungle and in The Bamboo Bed a character, somewhat, but not entirely, facetiously asks why Americans did not use elephants instead. To which the reply is that even though Americans know that they need equipment that does work successfully in the jungle, they will not adapt because

that would mean we had lost the war. That would mean we had lost faith in the future. America is nothing without faith in the twenty-first century. It is better to lose the war than to lose faith. Elephants are all right in their place, but the elephant's place is about the fourth century B.C. Better to lose the war than to admit the future was a mistake.
(BB, p.220)

The soldier's dilemma becomes more and more complex. Having to withstand the awesome jungle, fight an elusive enemy, endure the horrors of America's own misplaced weaponry as well as the insidious methods of the Viet Cong, and fight a war with inappropriate means for a little-believed-in ideology of anti-Communism, that very technology is the only familiar thing to give American soldiers comfort in this alien and hostile land. Caputo comments on this phenomenon.

Having been landed in the jungle, the helicopters leave the men there. The helicopters "had made [the jungle] seem familiar. Being Americans, we were comfortable with machines, but with the aircraft gone we were struck by the utter strangeness of this rank and rotted wilderness" (RWpp.83-4). Moreover, the eerie silence of the jungle is almost unbearable and so the Americans open fire simply for the sake of breaking the awesome silence: "it was as though rockets and machine guns were merely the technological equivalents of the gourds and rattles natives use to chase away evil spirits" (RW, p.86).

Caputo also presents the other extreme of the influence of machinery on men. Describing a fire fight, he vividly remembers a scene in which a Viet Cong runs for cover from an approaching aircraft. It seems to happen

with an agonizing slowness. It is a ballet of death between a lone, naked man and a remorseless machine....The rounds, smashing into the tree line and the rice paddy at an incredible rate...raise a translucent curtain of smoke and spraying water. Through this curtain, we see the Viet Cong behind the dike sitting up with his arms out-stretched, in the pose of a man beseeching God. He seems to be pleading for mercy from the screaming mass of technology. (RW, p.298)

This vision encapsulates all the men's predicaments: the Americans as much as the Viet Cong are equally at the mercy of the god, technology.

The jungle and technology have destroyed the moral and psychological points of reference brought by modern man to the primeval jungle. Eastlake provides perhaps the most succinct des-

cription of what seems like a conspiracy between the two against man. The novel's protagonist, Clancy, beckons us to

enter the forest of tropic and dark thoughts, of purple and black dreams, of innocence and ruthless silence. The forest, a high, splendid green sag, closing around all in deadly gay noose, dappled, ubiquitous and hushed. A friend of all the Unfriendlies.

The jungle, capricious, indifferent, the candescent forest stood rank on rank and rose tier on tier abruptly now, ominous, concerned. The low fronds closed webbed platoons around all, the trees in green army strength formed a camouflaged terror of no retreat, the vines tangled out to catch any man that moved, fell, stumbled or died in the green trap. (88, p.228)

On one level this is another description of Xa, the fusion of the land and the Viet Cong. In the first paragraph the jungle, like the "Unfriendlies", is "ubiquitous and hushed." It and they create in the Americans the nightmarish thoughts and "black dreams" that are part of the spiritual darkness each soldier finds within himself. However, the "webbed platoons" and "green army" are traits of the green-uniformed American army -- as opposed to the Viet Cong, who traditionally wore black. Moreover, the "no retreat" is the proud cry of the Marines and so the deadly "green trap", because of the colour association, would imply that the Americans have as much to fear from themselves as from the jungle. They have to fear their own technology in a practical sense as well as in the moral sense because it is often an uncontrollable and indiscriminate force: it is like Jupiter's thunderbolts in the hands of naifs. This, as much as the jungle and the Viet Cong, promotes the "dark thoughts" and "purple and black dreams." The "green" American army

is also green in the sense of its state of innocence. One may take this innocence as that which traditionally is associated with Americans; or in the sense that these are young men fighting the war; or that they are innocent victims of the Viet Cong, the jungle, the machinery, the politicians, or the American public; or that they, like the jungle, are innocent in the sense that they are at the beginning of creation and so their innocence is analogous to that of prelapsarian Eden. All these meanings are, in fact, applicable and are borne out in the novel.

All these applications, however, lead to the realization of one thing. As the quoted passage would suggest, innocence and ruthlessness are but two sides of the same coin, and it is this realization of the fundamental nature of man that is brought out by the war and the jungle. The discovery is that the innocent American dream is also the ruthless American nightmare and that the two are not mutually exclusive. To insist that they are or to deny the existence of one is to blind oneself to the complexities of any situation. If such a one-dimensional habit of thought prevailed, then Marlow's definition of life as "a mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose" (HD, p.71) would indeed be proven true.

To break out of this "merciless logic" that can compound the disasters it causes is depicted in the war literature as not simply a national necessity: each individual has to examine his reason-bound habit of thought. Essentially, the mode of perception has to be enlarged to include its opposite if man's lot is not to continue on its apparently inexorable journey towards annihilation. Eastlake

prefigures the end of the world and the end of man, but, in the novel's culminating fire fight, "that which had been dark became light and that which was silent became pandemonium" (88, p.318). These words suggest both an apocalypse (the pandemonium) and a creation (the dark made light). The duality of this vision is a crucial advance because, while it acknowledges man's destructive capacities, it also bears witness to his creativity. Man does, however, have to start from Nothing (88, p.269). His humanity rubbed off him, he has to create it again after peering into the heart of darkness.

That creation involves a process of continuous self-reassessment. It is a process that makes these war works' protagonists fully conscious of their distinction from the majority, in that they have looked into that heart of darkness and have been able to step back from the edge. Carl G. Jung describes this process of enlightenment in images and metaphors similar to those used by Conrad and the Vietnam War writers. The Mythic Hero of this literature is like Jung's "modern" man,

who has attained consciousness of the present [and] is solitary. The "modern" man has at all times been so, for every step toward fuller consciousness removes him further from his original, purely animal participation mystique with the herd, from submersion in a common unconsciousness. Every step forward means tearing oneself loose from the maternal womb of unconsciousness in which the mass of man dwells....He alone has a present-day consciousness, and he alone finds that the ways of life of those earlier levels have begun to pall upon him. The values and strivings of those past worlds no longer interest him save from the historical standpoint. Thus he has become "unhistorical" in the deepest sense and has estranged himself from the mass of men who live entirely within the bounds of tradition. Indeed, he is

completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and acknowledging that he stands before the Nothing out of which All may grow.

....To be "unhistorical" is the Promethean sin, and in this sense modern man is sinful. A higher level of consciousness is like a burden of guilt. But...only the man who has outgrown the stages of consciousness belonging to the past, and has amply fulfilled the duties appointed for him by his world, can achieve full consciousness of the present.

In The Bamboo Bed Clancy as Mythic Hero comes to just such a point when he realizes that he has outlived any usefulness he may have and when he is no longer interested in proving himself to others. He also comes to that edge from which "All may grow." He enters finally a nirvana-like state. Several other protagonists in the literature discussed in this study become solitary figures in the way Jung describes here, and their positions will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Moreover, Jung's idea of standing at "the very edge of the world" recurs in some of the war literature and in much post-modern American literature. What brings characters to the edge is the attainment of a "higher level of consciousness" which Jung has likened to the Faustian knowledge of good and evil, and which he terms "godlikeness."⁹

The war protagonist is often as estranged from the military world as he is from the civilian when he returns to America. The pre-existing society in which he must take his place again belongs to those earlier levels that he has passed beyond. Jung writes that someone who has achieved this "godlikeness" may feel like

a superman, holding in his hands the scales of good and evil. [But] it may also seem as though he were a helpless object caught between hammer and anvil; not in the least a Hercules at the parting of the ways, but rather a rudderless ship buffeted between Scylla and Charybdis. For without knowing it, he is caught up in perhaps the greatest and most ancient of human conflicts, experiencing the throes of eternal principles in collision. Well might he feel himself like a Prometheus chained to the Caucasus [forsaken of god and man], or as one crucified. This would be "godlikeness" in suffering.

The protagonists who attain this "godlikeness" in Vietnam War literature are more Promethean than Herculean.

II

The quest for literary form

One of the war writers' tasks is to find a language and style that will powerfully and freshly evoke the complex nature of a protagonist's experiences; and this without subsiding into tired and outworn narrative. Such innovation is seen in the works discussed here, where the creative process involves a delving back into personal memory and a simultaneous projecting into the imagination. The time structures in Going After Cacciato, The Bamboo Bed, and Indians demonstrate this process and will be discussed later. The general structures of A Rumor of War and Dispatches also demonstrate it inasmuch as both Caputo and Herr write their memoirs from the point of view of the older man recreating his youthful innocence while also commenting upon that innocence from a wiser perspective.

Michael Herr, more than any writer studied here, shows us his active search for a language to describe the soldiers' experiences. A more important point, however, is that this self-conscious quest is also the vehicle by which Herr explores the war's effect on himself.

Herr is particularly concerned with language inasmuch as it is a means of classification and simplification that creates a rationalized prison of words. Rigidity of thoughts and ideas results from this 'prison' and leads to stagnation and societal breakdown. Herr shares this interest in language with many post-modern writers whose main thesis is that, given the current mode of rational perception, man must break through this rational awareness which propels him along a circular route of hardening modes of perception. The rational is to be balanced by a way of seeing that can encompass and articulate the intangible. The powers of reason on which Western man prides himself can only comprehend and accurately express that which is rational. His principal means of doing this is through language: a rationalized code that can only express a certain number of experiences by means of a predefined pattern.

A writer trying to convey something irrational has to create a personal language, in itself codified, that translates thoughts, emotions and experiences in such a way as to be understood by the reader. Patterns of imagery, symbols and conventional poetics will aid him in this because they will establish a paradigm that corresponds with that which he is trying to express. The essential meaning is then behind the language, not in it.

Language can be meaningful only when there is a common body of understanding and when the relationship between word and referent is agreed to exist. Moreover, it is necessary for the words themselves, in the literary paradigm, to be accepted as symbols faithfully denoting something other than what a literal interpret-

ation of them would direct. The verbal symbols and the relationship between things has to be accepted as possible; to insist always upon purely literal meanings and observable links denies the poetic truth being expressed.

The literal meaning of words is of value too, of course, because irony can be conveyed by words whose literal meaning is opposite to that which is intended. Irony too can be created from the literal meanings of words that are over-used to the point where they lose their original force. If the relationship between symbolic meaning and referent collapses, or if that between literal meaning and referent collapses without ironic intent, there is deception, or, worse, abysmal chaos and silence because the connections are not agreed upon or the potential connections are denied. As one critic notes of Dispatches,

the relationship of a map to a territory is of course a common analogy in semantics for that of language to reality, and Herr's...use of the map symbol suggests not only the literal alteration of the landscape by American technology but also the self-deceiving alteration of that destructive reality by a deceptive language.¹¹

For Herr, the structure of conventional language has collapsed for the purpose of conveying a sense of the Vietnam War. He locates the collapse in the jargon that bears little relation to the events it describes and so results in the deception of the American public by the military and the mass media. However, Herr, as both narrator and character in his own work, shows that it is possible to revive language and meaning. My emphasis here is on Herr's book because he discusses within his work itself the problem

that many writers have when attempting to provide a form and language in which to describe war. For Herr, the discovery of that language is inextricably bound to his own personal discoveries in Vietnam. He is like many post-modern American writers in that his protagonist's quest for enlightenment is analagous to the writer's quest for a language in which to present that quest.¹² Herr himself becomes the protagonist of Dispatches, which is also a collective biography of combat soldiers, because he needs to find a language in which to express their courage and experiences.

In The Armies of the Night: History as Novel. The Novel as History, Norman Mailer writes that

[fiction] must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historical inquiry.¹³

Mailer's subject is the 1967 march on the Pentagon. Finding straightforward historical documentary inadequate to his task, Mailer "unashamedly enters that world of strange lights and intuitive speculation which is the novel."¹⁴

Herr, in Dispatches, faces the same problem as Mailer: that is, how to convey the sense of an experience that resists conventional methods. Herr's solution is what has come to be known as 'new journalism.' It affords "a writer peculiar strengths for surmounting those difficulties" associated with the objectivity of facts in journalism, and the necessity of establishing plausibility in realistic fiction.¹⁵ Herr combines the first-person journalistic method with

innovative fictional techniques. With this style he can approach his subject directly and offer "a meaningful way to explore its significance."¹⁶

Dispatches chronicles Herr's experiences as a volunteer war correspondent and it is also a testimony to his own response to the war, the soldiers and Vietnam. He tries to convey a hitherto relatively undocumented side of the war -- the day-to-day life of the soldiers. He is not concerned with the tactical or political aspects of the war so much as with what ordinary soldiers were like, what their preoccupations and thoughts were.

As noted earlier, Dispatches chronicles Herr's journey through his own consciousness. The articles on which Dispatches is based were written between 1967 and 1968, but Herr reworked them again and again before achieving the work's present form. The result is a series of tableaux and fables of different lengths that constitute Herr's fragmented memories of the war -- informed now by the perspective of the older, more knowledgeable man who can ironically comment upon himself as he was then. As one critic writes:

A metafiction, Dispatches is self-reflexively presented as the journey of its author through his own consciousness as he repeatedly makes the journey from innocence to experience in these fragmentary memories, searching for a truth that will be sufficiently central to the experience.... [Herr] constructs a self-reflexive fable -- a highly stylized and emblematic exploration of the images residing in his consciousness long after the actual events have passed. In this way, Herr makes the necessity of exploring and ordering the events in Vietnam, not the events themselves, his true subject.¹⁷

Herr's subject is the same as Berlin's task in Going After Cacciato. In both works there is a mutual clarification of inward and outward events. In Herr's case, this clarification acquires a form faithful to the simultaneity of introspective and documentary concerns. As one commentator writes of Dispatches and other works striving for a similar effect,

they spin double helixes of inward and outward observation, books necessarily and inextricably within the books. Such narrative seeks both to diagnose and to regenerate damaged mental and moral tissue, the personal to some degree representative of the national wound and prospect for recovery. And to the extent that such injury is irreversible, narrative regeneration occurs along altered generic, as well as mentally and morally "genetic," lines.

O'Brien achieves this effect in the differentiated memory and fantasy sequences in his novel; Kopit achieves it in the interleaving of scenes from Cody's rodeo show and the Indian Commission scenes; Eastlake connects the exploration of inner and outer events more closely than O'Brien or Kopit. He disrupts the linear chronology of his novel so that we have fragmented flashbacks originating either in Clancy's consciousness or in that of the omniscient narrator. In Herr's work, however, his is the only consciousness exploring the inner and outer events.

In the opening pages, Herr provides the symbol for the kind of task he has embarked upon. The old French map on his Saigon apartment wall is out-dated as far as the naming of regions is concerned. But it is as efficient a map as any because

even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind. We knew that the uses of most information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different stories to different people. We also knew that fgg years now there had been no country here but the war.

As Beidler writes, since there is no real country in Vietnam except the war, of necessity the consciousness itself becomes the terrain.²⁰

Herr mentions three maps in all. He describes also the military map that divides the country arbitrarily into Corps areas, and the National Geographic map of Indochina that he takes back to America. The old French map is not "real anymore" (p.3). As a guide to the countryside it is as mysterious and 'blank' as the map of uncharted Africa in Heart of Darkness that fascinated Marlow as a child. At the point in his life when Marlow begins his tale, Africa is a place of Darkness but, in his boyhood, the map had been a "blank of delightful mystery -- a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over" (HD, p.8). When, as a young man, Marlow goes to Paris en route to the Congo, he encounters another map of Africa with some of the space filled in where pioneers had opened up and settled the country. There are still, however, many unexplored regions. The point in Conrad's work is that Marlow is going into a relatively uncharted area that is both physically and mentally a heart of darkness.

In Dispatches, even with the charted terrain, Herr is still travelling in unknown regions of war and what war can do. As African explorers had to make paths through that continent, so Herr in his Vietnam War experiences has to search out and contrive "new

paths of connections to forge the link between personal witness and larger visions of history and culture."²¹

Establishing those connections, ordering his experiences, is difficult -- not simply because he did not know at the time the significance of what he saw but because

you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, and a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes. Time and information, rock and roll, life itself, the information isn't frozen, you are.
(p.20)

Describing his first day in Vietnam, he remembers his naiveté and ignorance about his role as a war correspondent:

If anything could have penetrated that first innocence I might have taken the first plane out....It was like a walk through a colony of stroke victims, a thousand men on a cold rainy airfield after too much of something I'd never really know, "a way you'll never be," dirt and blood and torn fatigues, eyes that poured out a steady charge of wasted horror. I'd just missed the biggest battle of the war so far, I was telling myself that I was sorry, but it was right there all around me and I didn't even know it. I couldn't look at anyone for more than a second, I didn't want to be caught listening, some war correspondent. (p.22)

This kind of ironic comment and perspective on himself is repeated many times in the work, and the double focus is apparent in more than just Herr's suggestion that he was younger then. For example, in the above passage, the description of the horror in the soldiers' eyes, and the suggestion of what caused it, is information that Herr acquired after the event and which he has retrospectively added to the scene. As he says, his only responses at the time were regret that he had missed the battle and a vague reluctance to look at the men.

His own subsequent experiences of something like the soldiers'

experiences will give him an intimation of what they have endured. But he knows, too, that he will never really know what they have gone through. This is as true for the innocent correspondent on his first day in Vietnam, when everything lies ahead of him, as it is true for the older Herr writing Dispatches, who knows that he will never know. Overcoming his timidity in listening to soldiers will help him recognize what is all around him, but his combat experience will be more vicarious than first-hand.

Early in the work, Herr comments on his decision to go to Vietnam. Often he was asked what he was

really doing there, as though I could say something honest about it except "Blah blah blah cover the war" or "Blah blah blah write a book." Maybe we accepted each other's stories about why we were there at face value: the grunts who "had" to be there, the spooks and civilians whose corporate faith had led them there, the correspondents whose curiosity or ambition drew them over. But somewhere all the mythic tracks intersected, from the lowest John Wayne wetdream to the most aggravated soldier-poet fantasy, and where they did I believe that everyone knew everything about everyone else, everyone of us there a true volunteer. Not that you didn't hear some overripe bullshit about it: Hearts and Minds, Peoples of the Republic, tumbling dominoes, maintaining the equilibrium of the Dingdong by containing the ever encroaching Doodah; you could also hear the other, some young soldier speaking in all bloody innocence, saying, "All that's just a load, man. We're here to kill gooks. Period." Which wasn't at all true of me. I was there to watch. (p.20)

Here is Herr's self-irony again and also his awareness of the difficulty of actually explaining his presence in Vietnam. He himself is not convinced by his cover story and knows that he is there to watch. As one critic notes, Herr echoes an "American classic of self-discovery, Huckleberry Finn"²² when he says that

"you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did" (p.20). The vicariousness he comments upon will not absolve him of responsibility for what is happening in Vietnam.

Herr is also aware that rationalizations for being there are mere facades that many people erect to conceal their fascination with war. While Herr would not align himself with his colleague, Page, who, badly wounded and semi-paralyzed, still finds glamour in war (pp.245-9), he does acknowledge that the intensity of some situations is pleurably exciting. Furthermore, he admits

All right, yes, it had been a groove being a war correspondent, hanging out with the grunts and getting close to the war, touching it, losing yourself in it and trying yourself against it. I had always wanted that, never mind why, it had just been a thing of mine... and I'd done it.(p.206)

The "John Wayne," "soldier-poet," "guts-and-glory Leatherneck" actions under fire (p.209), and Herr's own delight in the adventure of war bespeak an innocence that is founded mainly on illusion. As one critic notes,

in the largest terms, [Herr] suggests that a similar innocence lies behind the entire American perception of its mission and method in Vietnam, consistently expressed in terms of the stock wisdom of past wars with the Indians or Nazis, even more particularly our mythic versions of those wars. His perception of this power of the national consciousness [is that it can] create illusory "facts" out of mental visions. ...Herr's point is that for both individuals and the nation the previously formulated structures supplied by our culture prevented one from at first perceiving the reality of the Vietnam War, often even after experiencing it firsthand. And the epistemological implication is that even the most terrible facts will

not provide sufficient information for one to grasp truth unless the structures of consciousness organizing them are changed as well.²³

Herr's innocence is not presented as being dispelled in a single climactic experience as innocence often is in war literature. Rather, his journey from innocence to experience is repeated again and again because it is shown in every scene he presents. It becomes part of the structure of the scene and reveals "his mind's probing for a true comprehension of past experiences not yet properly assimilated and patterned."²⁴

His innocence never entirely disappears. For example, on his final mission, Herr recalls a Marine who, glaring and speaking with "the most awful urgency," tells Herr that he is "crazy" to be there. Herr writes:

I realized that after all this time, the war still offered at least one thing that I had to turn my eyes from. I had seen it before and hoped never to see it again, I had misunderstood it and had been hurt by it, I thought I had finally worked it out for good and I was looking at it now, knowing what it meant and feeling as helpless under it this last time as I had the first. (p.206)

Herr is referring to the soldiers' depth of response to volunteers. It is a response that goes beyond disgust for correspondents who make a living from soldiers' suffering (p.207). It does not come from anything "so messy as morality or prejudice, it had no motive, no conscious source" (p.208). Previously, when this look had come from a wounded soldier or from one whose friend had just been killed, Herr had justified his presence by saying

It could have been me just as easily. I take chances too....And then I realized that that was exactly what it was all about...another of war's dark revelations. They weren't judging me, they weren't reproaching me, they didn't even mind me, not in any personal way. They only hated me, hated me the way you'd hate any hopeless fool who would put himself through this thing when he had choices, any fool who had no more need of his life than to play with it in this way.

(p.208)

Herr makes the point several times that many of his experiences did not penetrate his consciousness at the time because they were not real to him. His double focus, however, permits him to show the significance of events now. Seidler says that many Vietnam War writers realized that to tell

just the "story" of Vietnam alone would always wind up a fable without a last line, some unwittingly²⁵ crafted exercise in chilling existential non-sequitur.

Herr avoids this trap by shunning the pre-established literary forms for describing war. He does not present episodes, scenes, and glimpses in a smoothly-connected narrative form: he presents self-contained tableaux in non-chronological order. Herr's spiritual autobiography takes a Romantic form as he recalls events -- even up to his final mission-- that impinge upon his innocence. Further Romantic influence can be seen in his usages and discussions of language in his testimony to the camaraderie and humanity of the soldiers and in his sharp criticism of institutions that shrouded the war's reality in illusion.

As has been noted by many critics, Herr was one of the first prose-writers to create an alternative language in which to describe the war. Jeffrey Walsh writes that Herr mixes idioms as, for

example, Wilfred Owen did in his poetry about World War I. Owen used the Romantic language of Shelley and Keats alongside modern technical language to create a live idiom counteractive to the dead rhetoric of slogan makers and politicians.²⁶ Herr fuses black slang, hippie catchwords, pop lyrics, military jargon, technical press terms, and the vocabulary and colloquialisms of the American youth and drug cultures to the same end. As Walsh writes, Owen and Herr, for example,

possess language resources, myths and imagery
powerful enough to counter the anti-language
conventionalized by the media and military
command.

Herr manipulates language to re-create the war for the reader and to re-explore it for himself. For example, there is a plethora of acronyms scattered throughout the book: VC, TAOR, H&I, APC, 80Q, COORDS, MACV, ARVN, DMZ, AFVN, LCU, JUSPAO, 1z, M-16, AK-47, C-123, and many more. There are also terms peculiar to this war: "grunts," "slopes," "spooks," "greasing," "fragging," "wasting": and there is the anonymity that results from naming hills, companies and geographical areas by their 'official' numbers. Some of the terms are understood because of their context, but not all of them are, and Herr explains none because he is using the private language of the initiated.

One of the effects of this reticence upon the uninitiated reader is disorientation, which, of course, serves as a linguistic paradigm for the war's effect on the newly-arrived soldier. The effect is paradoxical, however. Soldiers use these terms, and so Herr creates the impression of an elite group of people in a unique situation.

However, official numbering reduces everything and everyone to a standardized level and so creates anonymity. The terms are foreign to the reader, just as they were to Herr when he first went to Vietnam. Part of his purpose in writing his work is to remove the screen of standardization and to reveal the diversity of the situations and the people in them.

For example, Herr discusses the military map of Vietnam where "it had been a matter of military expediency to impose a new set of references over Vietnam's older, truer being" (p.92). Subsequent use of these new references makes

all in-country briefings...sound like a Naming of the Parts, and the language was used as a cosmetic, but one that diminished beauty. Since most of the journalism from the war was framed in that language or proceeded from the view of the war which those terms implied, it would be... impossible to know what Vietnam looked like from reading most newspaper stories. (pp.92-3)

The distance between word and referent increases to the point where all connections are broken. The discrepancy between events, the official language used to describe them, and the reductive "uniprose" of the media leads many soldiers to ask reporters to tell "the World" what is actually happening in Vietnam (p.206). Linguistic camouflage begins with the

cheer-crazed language of the MACV Information Office, things like "discreet burst" (one of those tore an old grandfather and two children to bits...), "friendly casualties" (not warm, not fun), "meeting engagement" (ambush), concluding usually with 17 or 117 or 317 enemy dead and American losses "described as light." (p.222)

One of the effects of this kind of language is, as the soldiers suspect, that

somewhere on the periphery of that total Vietnam issue...lost in the surreal contexts of television, there was a story that was as simple as it had always been, men hunting men, a hideous war and all kinds of victims. But there was also a Command that didn't feel this, that rode us into attrition traps on the back of fictional kill ratios, and an Administration that believed the Command, a cross-fertilization of ignorance, and a press whose tradition of objectivity and fairness (not to mention self-interest) saw that all of it got space. It was inevitable that once the media took the diversions seriously enough to report them, they also legitimized them. The spokesmen spoke in words that had no currency left as words, sentences with no hope of meaning in the sane world; and if much of it was sharply queried by the press, all of it got quoted. The press got all the facts...but it never found a way to report meaningfully about death, which of course was really what it was all about. The most repulsive, transparent gropes for sanctity in the midst of the killing received serious treatment in the papers and on the air. The jargon of Progress got blown into your head like bullets, and by the time you waded through all the Washington stories and all the Saigon stories...and the stories about brisk new gains in ARVN effectiveness, the suffering was somehow unimpressive. (pp.214-5)

This meaningless saturation coverage of the war left the issues confused rather than clarified because "conventional journalism" made the "most profound event of the American decade" into a "communications pudding." The "dripping, laughing death-face" remains as an "after-image that simply wanted to tell you at last what somehow had not been told" (p.218).

Herr traces the origin of the military jargon adopted by the press to the Irregular army that first occupied Vietnam before America sent advisors and regular soldiers. By 1967, these "spooks" had become anachronistic, "prim adventurers living too long on the

bloodless fringes of the action, heart-broken and memory-ruptured, working alone together toward a classified universe" (pp.51-2). The key phrase is "classified universe." "Spooks" is slang for spies and other Intelligence people who live in a "classified" world -- "classified" in the sense of a level of secrecy-- Restricted, Classified, Secret, Top Secret. They live in a secret world, using a secret language to maintain and extend that world into a "classified universe." They use language as camouflage to protect themselves: they have "imprisoned [their] own conceptions by the lines [they] have drawn in order to exclude the conceptions of others."²⁷

What they have done is essentially a Romantic act because they have appropriated a part of the world, "the New Frontier" (p.52), for themselves and have used language to do so. Even though the "spooks" section of American operations is "like a carnival bear now, broken and dumb, an Intelligence beast, our own" (p.52), the language lingers on. However good the original intentions of these "prim adventurers" might have been, they have become extreme in their attempt to impose the facade of order upon chaos, to rationalize the chaos in jargon. The result is a falsification that is further exacerbated because they continue in their original, but now obsolescent, tracks.

To counteract this kind of falsification, Herr adopts an equally Romantic tactic. He himself does it in writing Dispatches and he shows us combat soldiers doing it too: namely, they impose their own "unique consciousness against the imprison-

ing shapes of the external world."²⁹ Herr presents a language that contrasts with the deadened and deadening official war jargon. He revives language by showing its unique powers of expression when individuals use it. By so doing, he also suggests what the war experience was truly like.

Herr can state that official and journalistic jargon are ineffective modes of communication but he cannot state what it is that they so inadequately attempt to describe. He can only suggest it by rendering the impression of it as an artist would, and he achieves this in part by recreating the soldiers' language. In its own way, it too is impenetrable because the usual meanings of the soldiers' words have ceased to exist in the application to which they are put. However, the tone of delivery functions where conventional semantics fail. On one level, their language connotes the war camaraderie engendered by their mutual experiences. For example, "there were some Marines...calling each other Dude and Jive, Lifer and Shitkick and Motherfucker, touching this last with a special grace, as though it were the tenderest word in their language" (p.189). Other terms contain a wealth of unspoken meaning too. The "Vietnam verbal tic" of saying "good luck" is something of which most people cannot rid themselves

even when they actually meant to express the opposite wish, like, 'Die, motherfucker.' Usually it was only an uninhabited passage of dead language, sometimes it came out five times in a sentence, like punctuation, often it was spoken flat side up to telegraph the belief that there wasn't any way out....Sometimes, though, it was said with such feeling and tenderness that it could crack your mask, that much love where there was so much war. (pp.55-6)

These are everyday uses, born of horrendous experience, but used under relatively normal circumstances by relatively normal people. Recounting a particular fight, however, the language becomes laconic. Herr describes one man who has no hope left and whose paucity of words reflects this. Now on his third tour of duty, he needs drugs by the fistful -- "downs from the left pocket ... ups from the right, one to cut the trail for him and the other to send him down it" (p.5). During his first tour, he had been the only survivor when his platoon was wiped out. On his second, with the Special Forces, he had hidden under the bodies of his teammates after an ambush while the Viet Cong walked around them with knives "making sure" that all were dead. After these experiences he became one of the hopeless and the only thing left for him in the war was to join the Lurps. Regular soldiers, no matter how toughened by the war, avoid contact with Lurps, compared to whom they are innocents. This Lurp tells Herr a story:

"Patrol went up the mountain. One man came back. He died before he could tell us what happened."

I looked for the rest, but it seemed not to be that kind of a story; when I asked him what had happened he just looked like he felt sorry for me, fucked if he'd waste time telling stories to anyone dumb as I was. (p.6)

Herr keeps the retelling of the story brief too. His only comment is that to him it was as "one-pointed and resonant as any war story I ever heard, it took me a year to understand it" (p.6). By placing the Lurp's story at the beginning of Dispatches, and leaving it unexplained, Herr puts the reader in the same position

as himself when he first heard the story. The reader, by the end of Dispatches, should have the knowledge to understand the story as Herr did after a year in Vietnam.

The Lurp's eyes and laconic style suggest more about his experience than additional elaboration of his story could because there is a limit to what language can effectively describe. The same is true of Herr's depiction of the siege at Khe Sanh. The weeks of its duration, the uncertainty, nervous tension, omnipresent danger, despair and stunning fear make it the "home of the thousand yard stare" (p.122). Being relieved of this heightened tension produces the blunted consciousness that results in the unbridled aggression of the Lurp and the complete inertia of other soldiers. In such circumstances, language can describe, but silence is eloquent.

Presenting the reactions of normal people when they are introduced into the abnormal environment of war, Herr shows that the human test in Vietnam is the same as that in any war: whether or not one can transcend the bestiality one witnesses and to which one descends in combat. Both success and failure in this reveal tragedy. Herr says of himself that he had wanted to try himself against the war (p.206), but he also wonders what courage is:

How many times did somebody have to run in front of a machine gun before it became an act of cowardice? What about those acts that didn't require courage to perform, but made you a coward if you didn't? ... A lot of what people called courage was only undifferentiated energy cut loose by the intensity of the moment, mind loss that sent the actor on an incredible run; if he survived it he had the chance later to - decide whether he'd really been brave or just overcome with life, even ecstasy. (p.66)

"Courage" itself is just a word that can mean many things. Similarly, "heroic" is a word that can be manipulated to suggest a particular image. When it is falsely applied, as for example it is at Khe Sanh when the besieged Marines are seen as "heroic defenders" (p.105), it becomes drained of meaning. To Herr the Marines at Khe Sanh are heroes, but he does not want to use the word because of the preconceived and false image it would give. He has to find another way of saying the same thing so that the concepts of courage and heroism can be seen freshly.

Herr describes the "fraternal mystery" of the Marines (p.102); the often desperate and hopeless missions they were given, and "the madness, the bitterness, the horror and doom" that they knew as a result (p.103). Herr writes that the Marines

got savaged a lot and softened a lot, their secret brutalized them and darkened them and very often it made them beautiful. It took no age, seasoning or education to make them know exactly where true violence resided.

And they were killers. Of course they were; what would anyone expect them to be? It absorbed them, inhabited them, made them strong in the way that victims are strong, filled them with the twin obsessions of Death and Peace, fixed them so that they would never, never again speak lightly about the Worst Thing in the World. If you learned just this much about them, you were never quite as happy ...with other outfits. And, naturally, the poor bastards were famous all over Vietnam. (p.103)

Herr probes beneath the easy label of 'heroic, courageous Marine' and describes something that belies the image of Marines that the military intends to put forward, but, at the same time, reveals what courage and heroism are in this war. Herr also depicts

the human price of those qualities. The Marines are killers but they are not killing-machines. Their secret knowledge of violence makes them as aware of death as they are of peace. The Marines are an extreme example because they, more than other soldiers, experience the extremity of combat more often, but Herr also talks of the testing of humanity in other soldiers.

Herr shows the tragedy of all the soldiers, and it is tragedy in the classical sense of the discovery of self-knowledge. For example, if combat's effect on a sensibility is mental breakdown, then the tragedy is slightly less extreme and may be termed pathos. If, however, a man remains permanently at the animal level of killer long after it is necessary, then his tragedy may be defined as 'closed.' That is, there is pathos that he is reduced to this level, but there is more. His spirituality has been destroyed by his following of orders that constitute his duty to his country, and his insentient animality becomes his buffer against the cruel reality of killing. It therefore prevents and protects him from considering his actions in human terms.

The tragedy of the man who does transcend his situation is that the buffer against reality is unavailable. He has a finer awareness that enables him to acknowledge the existence of the pain he both inflicts and endures. He has known the animality of which he is capable, but he can go beyond it because he sees his actions in human terms. He descends to perform his national duty but, in so doing, he increases his capacity for suffering on the emotional, psychological and moral levels, but still he cannot escape his

dilemma. His finer sensibility prohibits him from remaining at the animal level even though this offers him a short-term panacea. By not remaining at the animal level, he transcends the moment but he also maintains the general pain. His is the 'open' tragedy, and his finer sensibility means that his is the more deeply tested humanity.

The same principle applies to the characters in Rabe's play, but the significance of it there is more far-reaching and will be discussed later. Herr presents a specific example of 'closed' tragedy in the Lurp (pp.5-6), and an example of the 'open' in his portrayal of the Marines at Khe Sanh (p.103), but he also sympathetically presents various general manifestations of these tragedies:

A lot of men found their compassion in the war, some found it and couldn't live with it, war-washed shutdown of feeling, like who gives a fuck. People retreated into positions of hard irony, cynicism, despair, some saw the action and declared for it, only heavy killing could make them feel so alive. And some just went insane, followed the black-light arrow around the bend and took possession of the madness that had been waiting there in trust for them for eighteen or twenty-five or fifty years. Every time there was combat you had a license to go maniac, everyone snapped over the line at least once there and nobody noticed, they hardly noticed if you forgot to snap back again. (p.58)

The effect of this war on soldiers is portrayed as being the same as in other wars. What makes Herr's account of it so compelling is that he presents an intimate picture of soldiers that is both compassionate and honest. He cuts through the official smokescreen and lets the soldiers speak for themselves, showing

in the process that they have a lively awareness of what is happening to them. Herr is a collector of graffiti and aphorisms that succinctly reveal this. The highly condensed phrases have a wealth of meaning. For example, "Vietnam, man. Bomb 'em and feed 'em, bomb 'em and feed 'em" (p.10); "How do you feel when a nineteen-year-old kid tells you from the bottom of his heart that he's gotten too old for this kind of shit?" (p.16); "I been scaled man, I'm smooth now" (p.28); "'How long you been in-country?'... 'All fuckin' day'" (p.179); "'Born to Kill' placed in all innocence next to the peace symbol... 'A sucking chest wound is nature's way of telling you that you've been in a firefight'" (p. 179).

Helmet graffiti, construction of elaborate calendars (p.118), theories of how to survive (p.8), war names with which soldiers re-christen themselves (p.74), clothes fetishes and lucky charms (p.57) are all part of the same survival process. That is, the soldiers impose themselves on an imprisoning external world. They do not conform in appearance, attitude or style to the military world: they go to great lengths, in fact, to establish their own unique identity and thus keep a standardizing influence at bay. In this way, they are Romantics in more than their use of language.

Michael Herr, too, is a Romantic. Celebrating the individuality and spirit of the soldiers, he does it in his own way. Not only does he abjure conventional journalistic methods, he describes his written work, Dispatches, as a movie (p.188). By describing it in this way, he does more than intimate that his work is a montage

of pictures, tableaux and still-lives. He takes up the theme of the unreality of the war: unreal in the sense of false (p.46), and unreal in that sometimes the war seems more like fiction than fact -- as when a wounded Marine declares "I hate this movie" (p.188).

More than this, though, Herr's 'movie' will counteract movie-based ideas of what war is like. He tells of "the kids who got wiped out by seventeen years of war movies before coming to Vietnam." They make "war movies in their heads" when they know there is a television crew present to film them --except the bullets are real and they are wounded or killed for the networks (p.209). Herr says that even though most people usually rid themselves of movie-based ideas of war after their first fire fight, the influence lingers on because "years of media glut had made certain connections difficult" (p.209). Scenes of death and destruction are so familiar that it is hard at first to realize that they are real, that actors will not get up to walk off the set (p.210).

Herr could have made a "prettier movie" about war correspondents but it might have been false because it could have degenerated into a simple movie from another war (p.188). What he does instead is present the war and the people in it, in all their contradictory nature,

Between what contact did to you and how tired you got, between the farout things you saw or heard and what you personally lost out of all that got blown away, the war made a place for you that was all yoursLife-as-movie, war-as (war) movie, war-as-life; a complete process if you got to complete it, a distinct path to travel, but dark and hard...until [you] reached the place where an inversion of the expected order happened, a fabulous warp where you took the journey first and then made your departure.
(pp.64-5)

Herr insists upon supplying the full context of the 'movie' he is creating (p.189). The soldiers and Herr's colleagues are characters in the work but Herr himself is the main actor. He describes himself as being "debriefed by dreams" when he returns to America, but the feeling of suspended animation does not leave him simply because he has left the war. It is not until the American military role in Vietnam is over that "one last chopper revved it up, lifted off and flew out of my chest" and he feels released from Vietnam (p.260). For Herr, the war's end is in fact just a beginning. He writes that

if you can't find your courage in a war, you have to keep looking for it anyway, and not in another war either; in where it's old and jammed until the rocks start moving around, a little light and air, long time no see. (p.259)

As he has said earlier, "the information isn't frozen, you are" (p.20). By sifting through resurrected events and images locked within his own mind, he can bring them to life again in such a way as to order and understand his experiences -- and perhaps to recognize among them his own courage. The object that helps him focus his thoughts is the National Geographic map of Indochina. This map becomes the condensed, perpetually suggestive chart of his personal experiences in Vietnam because "attached to every mark [was] the complex of faces, voices and movements" of all the people he had met and all the things he had seen, heard and done (p.255). It is a personal map, but one that becomes "real only in the distance behind me, faces and places sustaining serious dislocation, mind slip and memory play" (p.255).

Herr's use of two of the maps indicates the broken connections between word and referent, language and reality. But this last map is like a skeleton key that opens up his personal associations. As he has said earlier, different places mean different things to different people and he has shown us the significance of his private map, his private language in a work that recreates "emotion recollected in tranquility."

One critic perceives Herr's work as a paradigm of American culture, its competing value systems and tensions:

From the implications of such an insight the war, as well as being a military spectacle and existential wilderness, takes on the ritualistic impulses of social theatre. Developing this latter aspect, Herr forever tries to 'make connections,' to act as a semiologist of culture, reading the signs of war, observing its objects, tokens, mannerisms.³⁰

Throughout Dispatches, Herr comments on the energy of the people he meets and he regards all of it as misdirected (p.44). At the end of the work he describes the result of this misdirected energy:

Out on the street I couldn't tell the Vietnam veterans from rock and roll veterans. The Sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuit for so long they didn't even have to fuse. The war primed you for lame years while rock and roll turned more lurid and dangerous than bull-fighters, rock stars started falling like second lieutenants; ecstasy and death and (of course and for sure) life, but it didn't seem so then. What I'd thought of as two obsessions were really only one, I don't know how to tell you how complicated that made my life. Freezing and burning and going down again into the sucking mud of the culture, hold on tight and move real slow....

Maybe it was classic, maybe it was my twenties I was missing and not the Sixties, but I began missing them both before either had really been played out. The year had been so hot that I think it shorted out the whole decade, what followed was mutation, some kind of awful 1969-X. (pp.258-9)

Herr's image of the decade is Promethean: that is, the knowledge gained by the youth of the Sixties in America and in Vietnam led to a circularity of death and resurrected life endlessly repeated. His final view of American youth is that their knowledge has been gained at enormous cost and that "the dead had only been spared a great deal of pain" (p.259). He neither admires nor condemns the youth; he sympathizes with them in their struggle--and in paying the price of that struggle--against dehumanizing institutions.

Jung writes that "if a man is a hero, he is a hero because...he did not let the monster devour him, but subdued it, not once but many times."³¹ It is like a repeated spiritual death and rebirth--a process that Herr himself has had to undergo to bring to life again the events that had such a profound effect on him. It is a continuous cycle that several of the characters discussed in this study also undergo. Through their experience we can discern the modern manifestation of Mythic Heroism. Before going on to this subject, however, it is useful to consider some of the pseudo-images of modern times that masquerade as genuine examples of heroism and Mythic Heroism. The dramatists' dissection of these pseudo images reveal the images' falsity and frailty as well as showing the destructive effects on the society that accepts these pseudo-images as true.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p.81. Textual references are to this edition, cited hereafter as RW.

²Peter McInerney, "'Straight and Secret' History in Vietnam War Literature," Contemporary Literature, 22:2 (Spring 1981), p.201.

³William Eastlake, The Bamboo Bed (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p.129. Textual references are to this edition, cited hereafter as BB.

⁴Thomas Parker, "Troop Withdrawal -- The Initial Step," in Writing Under Fire, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer (New York: Delta Books, 1978), pp.90-107.

⁵Klinkowitz and Somer, pp.2-4.

⁶Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1900), ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1971, 1963), p.67. Textual references are to this edition, cited hereafter as HD.

⁷Tim O'Brien, Going After Cacciato, (London: Jonathan Cape; New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), p.86. Textual references are to this edition, cited hereafter as GAC.

⁸Carl G. Jung, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," (1928/1931) from Civilization in Transition in Jung's Collected Works, Vol. 10, trans. R.F.C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX Princeton University Press, 1964, pp.75,76.

⁹Carl G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," (1928) from Two Essays on Analytical Psychology in Jung's Collected Works, Vol. 7, Second essay, trans. R.F.C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX Princeton University Press, 1953, p.140.

¹⁰Jung, "Relations," p.141.

¹¹John Hellmann, "The New Journalism and Vietnam: Memory as Structure in Michael Herr's Dispatches," South Atlantic Quarterly, 79, p.144.

¹²Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p.19.

- ¹³McInerney, p.189.
- ¹⁴McInerney, p.189.
- ¹⁵Hellmann, p.142.
- ¹⁶Hellmann, p.142.
- ¹⁷Hellmann, pp.142-3.
- ¹⁸Gordon O. Taylor, "American Personal Narratives of the War in Vietnam," American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism and Bibliography, 52, p.298.
- ¹⁹Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York: Avon Books, 1978), p.3. Textual references are to this edition.
- ²⁰Philip D. Beidler, American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (Georgia: University Press, 1982), p.142.
- ²¹Beidler, p.143.
- ²²Hellmann, p.150.
- ²³Hellmann, p.150.
- ²⁴Hellmann, p.148.
- ²⁵Beidler, p.195.
- ²⁶Jon Silkin, Out of Battle. The Poetry of the Great War (Oxford: University Press, 1978), pp.197-248.
- ²⁷Jeffrey Walsh, American Literature: 1914 to Vietnam (London: MacMillan, 1982), p.204.
- ²⁸Tanner, p.17.
- ²⁹Tanner, p.16.
- ³⁰Walsh, p.205.
- ³¹Jung, "Relations," p.170.

CHAPTER II

Show business and Vietnam War drama:

Indians, Muzeeka, Sticks and Bones

Transformation or impersonation is as inherent to the theater as it is to mythmaking. In traditional mythology, deities personified natural phenomena: in the secular mythology of history, mortals impersonate what they are thought to be. ...Showbusiness has become our age's professional mythmaker.

Doris Auerbach, Shepard, Kopit, and the Off-Broadway Theater, (p.90).

Show business and the Vietnam War go hand-in-hand in the three plays discussed in this chapter. Arthur Kopit's theme in Indians considers what happens when "a social and political power imposes itself on a lesser power and creates a mythology to justify it, as we did with the Indians, as we tried to do in Vietnam."¹ Kopit's method is to use the theatre as a metaphor for highlighting the artifice of Buffalo Bill Cody's self-image. John Guare, in Muzeeka, presents an absurd view of television's and newspapers' role in creating transient heroes -- heroes whose life-span is either as short-lived as the interest in yesterday's headlines or as long as the immortality that celluloid can bestow. Even the celluloid image is of temporary interest because heroism and immortality are reduced to the level of interest generated by television re-runs. David Rabe, in Sticks and Bones, like Kopit and Guare, uses the metaphor of the theatre. He takes a well-known television situation-comedy family and exposes the vacuity of their lauded, standardized values.

The stylized, fanciful and exaggerated expression of the playwrights' themes is necessary to counteract the deeply ingrained image of the soldier as hero that American society holds. The playwrights believe that society's image of the hero is dangerously false and they expose this falsity. The prose works considered in this study shed society's preconceptions of the hero and allow

the hero image, as it is true of the Vietnam experience, to emerge unforced and unrestricted by comfortable illusions. From this basis, the prose-writers then go on to explore the war's impact on the American consciousness in such a way as to offer a means by which the war's complexities vis à vis American society may be maturely considered.

The dramatists, however, stop short of this final, important step. Their concern, and mine in discussing these plays, is to show the background influences that gave rise to contemporary American misconceptions of the hero image. These three plays are only indirectly concerned with the Vietnam War. However, they are concerned with the American habit of mind that made the war possible. The playwrights' use of the metaphor of the theatre leads to a double, sometimes triple, distortion, but a distortion that results in clarity.

Kopit places the Vietnam War within a larger context of American history and American mythology. He shows the dangers inherent

in the cosmeticizing of [American] history, of the creation of a mythology that enabled [Americans] to transform the brutal realities of the conquest of the West into the realization of the hopes and dreams that the West had always promised.

That cosmeticizing is taken to extreme, literal lengths in Guare's play, whereas Rabe is concerned with the removal of such facades.

Duplicity, impersonation and authenticity are themes that

arise from the theatre metaphor. Characters often play themselves. William Cody plays Buffalo Bill Cody, not only in the melodramatic play-within-the-play, but in his 'real' life too. He rapidly becomes unable to tell the difference between himself as a genuine frontiersman and the myth he creates. Kopit takes this theme a step further than Eastlake does with the Clancy-myth: Buffalo Bill becomes a mass-producible commodity and is trapped in his image; Clancy can step out of his role and keep his essential self intact.

Guare manipulates the theme of impersonation and authenticity too. He juxtaposes the immortality of Art as it is symbolized in the Etruscan vase, with the deceptive immortality conferred by celluloid. Moreover, he presents a satiric version of genuine war heroes playing a movie role of war heroes when he has soldiers fighting on behalf of the networks and attaining movie-star status. Rabe, in keeping with his theme of mask removal, bases the conflict in his play on the protagonist's refusal to play the role his family has assigned to him.

Permutations on the impersonation theme abound but, together with America's created self-image, this theme points to Americans' basic inability and unwillingness to separate disturbing fact from cozy fiction. Exacerbating this dilemma is the inadequate use of language to describe experience. Kopit believes that the American war with Vietnam was historically inevitable,

and he locates the reason in American habits of thought.³ It is with these habits of thought, and the images they foster, that I am concerned in this chapter.

I

Indians-- Cultural Mythologizing

Kopit's London 1968 production of Indians was in the style of a parody of a John Ford western,⁴ but the revised script of the 1969 New York production, considered here, aims for "nightmare" (Introduction). Kopit interleaves events from Cody's past with scenes of the U.S. Commission meeting with the Indians in order "to dramatize the feeling of simultaneous time" (Introduction). The non-chronological structure adds to the play's dream quality and suggests the uncertainty at the protagonist's core. The effect is a fusion of fantasy and reality that creates a more penetrating insight than could the facts alone.⁵

Indians does not so much dramatize a single phenomenon that occurred only once in American history as it dramatizes a

continuing process through which America is always shaping and altering her public image. (It is in this sense that the play is "about Vietnam" as much as it is about the winning of the West.)

Cody is the epitome of the American hero who personifies both America's genuine good intentions and their ultimate corruption. As one critic notes, Kopit sets his play in a time when the West was changing. The adventurous frontier days were giving way to industrial exploitation and profiteering. Most Indian hunting-grounds were already the property of the government, and the Indian custom of hunting with bow and arrow had disappeared.⁷ At this point, William Cody was being transformed from one of the last genuine frontiersmen into a businessman:

He is discovered, promoted, and developed by a new economy [whose spokesman is Ned Buntline] which claims him in the name of democracy while destroying the possibility of its enactment.

...Cody represents the ambiguity of the West. Once involved in the authentic agrarian expansion -- as scout, Pony Express rider, hunter-- he later turned to marketing the West's past in show business. His paradox, and the source of his paranoia, is his attempt to be cast in an heroic mold while being associated with capitalism.⁸

In "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," Cody makes a "personal comeback" (p.16) and replays events from his past that are now adorned with artifice and falsity of the highest order. This embroidering of reality provides an appropriate backdrop to Cody's reminiscences of Ned Buntline's construction of the Buffalo Bill pseudo-Heroic image. The manufacture of this image begins when Cody's friend, Spotted Tail, asks him why he shot a hundred buffalo as a marksmanship display for the Grand Duke of Russia and his entourage. Cody explains that times are changing and that he associates with these "dudes" because they are part of his plans for

the future (p.24). Cody kills the already-dwindling buffalo for exhibition's sake because he wants to help people, and

more--even--than that....and whatever--it is I do t'help..., these people may someday jus' possibly name streets after me. Cities. Countries. States! I'll--be as famous as Dan'l Boone!--An' somewhere, on top of a beautiful mountain that overlooks more plains n' rivers than any other mountain, there might even be a statue of me sittin' on a great white horse, a-wavin' my hat t' everyone down below, thankin' 'em, fer thankin' me, fer havin' done--whatever--it is I'm gonna--do fer 'em all. (p.24)

His own dream of glory declared, Cody is quite happy to help Buntline create an image to fulfil that dream. Buntline agrees that the West is changing and that Cody is an inspiration to people who want to be connected with the new ways. They need people like Cody "t' listen to, observe, identify with"(p.28). When the Duke asks Cody about his adventures, Buntline urges Cody to "tell'm what he wants t' hear. T'rough my magic pen, others will hear also.-- De nation needs men like me, too"(p.29).

The nation needs Heroes and people to create and present them but subsequent events in this scene highlight the betrayal and falsity of Cody's dream and Buntline's actions. The Duke fatally shoots Spotted Tail after hearing Cody's wondrous, outrageously tall tale because he wants to emulate Cody's killing of Comanches. In his death speech, Spotted Tail describes himself as part Sioux, Cherokee and Crow adding "no matter how you look at it, I'm just not a Comanche" (p.31). Cody translates this speech for the Duke as "I should have stayed at home in Texas with the rest of my Comanche tribe." Cody is stunned by his own deceptiveness and by

the discovery that his tall-tale has worked only too well and resulted in his friend's death. Buntline is delighted, though. The events, and deliberate misinterpretations of them, in this scene provide him with exactly the kind of material he wants in order to create a particular kind of Hero out of Cody.

Buntline's melodrama, performed for the President, perpetuates the Cody myth Buntline creates. His introduction to the melodrama makes the point that:

It's me who's brought Bill Cody fame.
 Wrote twenty-seven books with him the hero.
 Made'm better known than Nero.
 And though we sold 'em cheap, one for a dime,
 The two of us was rich in no time.
 As for my soul's redemption, it came thus:
 I saw the nation profit more than us.
 For with each one o' my excitin' stories,
 Cody grew t'represent its glories.
 Also helped relief its conscience,
 By showing pessimism's nonsense. (p.38)

Like Cody, Wild Bill Hickok stars as himself but baulks at the clichéd, self-glorifying farce in which Cody is involved. Cody justifies the play as entertainment. The plot-line of White Man saving Damsel in Distress from a Fate Worse than Death at the hands of the Lusty Indians who have no respect for the Sanctity of White Womanhood is presented in pure unvarnished and unabashed cliché. Cody, however, continues to argue that this image of himself as Hero and of the Indians as lecherous murderers is what his country wants. The President, enjoying the anything-but-virgin damsel, agrees (p.42). Cody says: "I'm not being false to what I was. I'm simply drawin' on what I was--and raisin' it to a higher level" (p.42).

The distortions of reality in the melodrama, in which Art supposedly renders an eternal truth about history while relieving uneasy American consciences, culminate in one Indian character's speech:

I am Uncas...recently killed for my lustful ways. Yet, before the white men came and did me in, I had this vision: the white man is great, the red man nothing. So, if a white man kills a red man, we must forgive him, for God intended man to be as great as possible, and by eliminating the inferior, the great man carries on God's work. Thus, the Indian is in no way wronged by being murdered. Indeed, quite the opposite: being murdered is his purpose in life. This was my recent vision, which has brought light to the darkness of my otherwise useless soul. (p.44)

Here, Art (that is, the melodrama) is used as a vehicle for a convenient religious justification of racism and genocide. Moreover, policies are celebrated whereby white Americans, in the name of Progress, can act as if with a God-given right to show "inferior" people their folly in not embracing the white American way. The speech's inexorable logic exposes the dangerous absurdity of white Americans' Indian policies and the tyrannical ends to which Art, in unscrupulous hands, can be put. The melodrama, however, is so bad that it hardly constitutes Art except for those like Cody, Buntline and the President who have a vested interest-- glory, wealth and political expediency, respectively--in seeing it as such.

The "ol' time president" of the play, with stetson, spurs and "On the Old Chisholm Trail" playing as he exercise on his mechanical horse, may well be a caricature of Lyndon B. Johnson, who was often portrayed in cartoons of the 1960s in cowboy regalia. The two presidents are in similar positions vis à vis the Indians

and the Vietnamese. The play's President cannot act to save the buffalo, and hence the Indians, because past events have limited his range of action. He inherited a situation which is a morass of confusion and bad faith and thus he can only send committees to investigate grievances. These, however, are merely token, face-saving gestures that perpetuate a vicious circle.

When it appears that Sitting Bull's Indians will not only be starved out of existence but massacred by soldiers too, Cody, in desperation to save his friends, turns to Hickok for help. Aware that he helped cause their starvation, Cody tries to excuse himself with "How was I to know the goddam buffalo reproduced so slowly?" (p.66). Haunted now by guilt and Indian ghosts because of his betrayal, he is frantic. Everything seems out of control and his worst fear is not so much of dying, but of "dyin' wrong--Dyin'--in the center of my arena--with make-up on" (p.68). So convinced has he been by Buntline's created image of him that he cannot separate William Cody from Buffalo Bill. The cosmetic mask of the rodeo show not only envelopes a hollow core but is in itself a mask of shame to Cody--hence his fear of dying in his arena, of dying with no self-respect.

Hickok's response to Cody's appeal is to bring on duplicate Codys. His plan is to spread the Buntline image of Cody across the world in many rodeo shows each with its own Buffalo Bill. Echoing Cody's words on the function of Art(p.42), Hickok plans to bring to everyone the ideals of America as they are personified in Buntline's Cody. The mass-produced imitation Codys would act for

the great national good....Some of you...would concentrate strictly on theatrics. Meanwhile, others of you would concentrate on purely humanitarian affairs. Save, well, not Sitting Bull, but--some Indian down in Florida. Another up in Michigan. Perhaps, expand into Canada. Mexico. Central America. SOUTH AMERICA! My God, there must be literally millions of people who could benefit by your presence! Your--simultaneous presence! (p.69)

Buffalo Bill, appalled by this nightmarish horror, shoots the duplicates: they fall to rise again repeatedly. His public image is out of whatever small control he once had. We also have a black comedy of immortality where 'Buffalo Bill' never dies-- a black comedy similar to the immortality theme in Guare's Muzeeka.

The Wounded Knee massacre of Sitting Bull and his Indians that Cody had tried to prevent is justified by the military as revenge for Custer's death fifteen years earlier. Told that some people consider the reservation killings a massacre, a Colonel says:

One can always find someone who'll call an overwhelming victory a massacre. I suppose they'd prefer it if we'd let more of our own boys get shot. (p.71)

The reporter pursues his point and asks the Colonel if he thinks the step he took was too harsh. Echoing General Westmoreland's words about Vietnamese civilians,⁹ he replies

of course, it was harsh. And I don't like it anymore than you. But had we shirked our responsibility, skirmishes would have gone on for years, costing our country millions, as well as untold lives. Of course innocent people have been killed. In war they always are. And of course our hearts go out to the innocent victims of this. But war is not a game. It's tough. And demands tough decisions. In the long run I believe what happened here at this reservation yesterday will be justified. (p.71)

The Indians were killed by Gatling guns and so had little chance of survival, as the Colonel probably knew. Moreover, they were the targets of a Government order and so it appears that his sympathetic words about innocent victims are mere camouflage for his "hawkish" orders. Furthermore, his belief that future events will justify his action is a poor argument. We have witnessed the farcical diplomatic discussions between the Senators and the Indians wherein patronizing Governmental bad faith has been exposed again and again. Military action is instigated after the token effort at peaceful settlement fails and we recognize the action as 'gunboat diplomacy.'

Interestingly, the Colonel describes the 'heathen' buffalo religion of the Indians as "their last straw" (p.71), and dismisses it as ludicrous nonsense. The Colonel's view of their religion exposes more of his own weaknesses--and those of other whites--than it does of the Indians'. Cody's show has an emasculated demonstration of the Sun dance. Once common to all the tribes, it was "their way of proving they were--Indians" (p.53). This excruciatingly painful test of manhood has been outlawed and so Cody has only an imitation of the ritual in his show. However, John Grass rescues the ritual from the meaningless entertainment it has become when he endures the real thing (p.54). This scene is immediately followed by one in which the President exercises on his mechanical horse and the disparity between genuine manhood and poor imitation is made clear enough by this juxtaposition. Grass' action counterpoints others too: one is the Colonel's idea of machismo, another is Cody's celluloid heroism and the displays of 'manhood' in his show.

Cody, trapped in his vaudevillian act, has tried at various points to end the show and his nightmare. Towards the end, the "Voice" which has controlled him like a puppet says that it is time to close. But Cody wants to justify himself. As the Indians die around him he reads a statement in defense of his country's Indian policy in which he completes his own betrayal of the Indians (pp.74-7).

Throughout the play, the Indians have been portrayed as having dignity, self-respect, loyalty and courage --the qualities that Cody wishes for himself. At the end, though, he embraces Buntline's caricatures of them. They have become entertainment but, as the parallels between the portrayal of the Indians and that of the Vietnam War in the media would suggest, something very serious has been turned into something very light. The rodeo show has a vaudevillian despair that is disguised by affability in action and language. There is the energy of vaudeville but the end of the play undercuts the affability by exposing Cody's hypocrisy.

At the very end, Cody offers Indian gewgaws for sale but inadvertently brings out a buffalo hide too. He pushes it back inside quickly because it symbolizes his betrayal and he wishes to evade not only the responsibility but even the knowledge of what he has done. This action further emphasizes Cody's complete entrapment in a fantasy and his awareness of the fantasy as nightmare. The play closes as it opens with all the razzamatazz of the rodeo show and Cody, it is suggested, will repeat the circular nightmarish recollections we have just witnessed and in which he is inextricably embroiled.

Cody's need to be a glorified Hero, and the image created

for him as such by Buntline, are dangerously out of control. As Beidler says of this play, it is a

complex, symbolic exploration of the [Vietnam] war's relationship with a larger body of collective mythic assumption...and an inquiry into the process of cultural myth-making itself.

Beidler goes on to identify Indians as prophetic of the Vietnam War because the connection between that war and the Indian wars is made by Kopit's summoning up a whole cultural legacy of heroism in war or Mythic Heroism defined in the ability to deal death. Cody is a murderer-showman who believes in destroying to save. He is the "socialized warrior"¹² trapped in a self-serving pseudo-Heroic delusion. Beidler also points out that Hickok's plans to save several countries with America's "simultaneous presence" constitutes an "endless 'Indian' war, waged by myth-haunted heroes out of date" -- a war "waged in all the wrong ways for all the wrong reasons in a grand tragedy of mass cultural misperception."¹³

Lahr notes that, even though the white man almost completely eliminated Indians from North America, the theatrical and literary emphasis in portraying the settling of the West has always been on the death toll of whites. He writes that this

paranoiac reversal stems from America's furious attempt to justify the means of colonization by the ends of democracy: to sustain the myth of unlimited economic horizons; the need of capitalism to maintain an enemy to function efficiently. Kopit's play is ostensibly about America's first "enemy," but the Indians are prototypes for our hysterical reaction to other "alien forces." Buffalo Bill dramatizes the schizophrenia that leads to scapegoats. Uncertain of the past, unhappy with the future,¹⁴ he blames not society but identifiable outsiders.

Cody accepts the official line on the Indians because he cannot deal with the reality of what the Indians are and he is not. He defuses the threat they present to him by having them impersonate themselves in a way that is harmless to him. For example, in the Wild West Show, a caged Geronimo, frothing at the mouth, unabashedly proclaims his lecherous, murderous crimes, and only Cody can "tame" him (p.34). The melodrama has Europeans impersonating the popular caricatures of what Indians are supposed to be like (pp.39-47).

Kopit uses the impersonation theme to make more serious points too. Sitting Bull plays himself in the show as whites would like to see him. Moreover, in a wily attempt to outwit the Senators, he lists all the material things Indians require to be like the whites they are urged to emulate. Tragically, however, Sitting Bull also realizes that he has already adopted white ways because he hunts with guns and horses (p.73). Thus, Sitting Bull's sorrow is doubled. Cody condescendingly lets Sitting Bull imitate his former glory, but that glory is based on white men's guns and horses; it is not original.

Chief Joseph also appears in the show in exchange for release from prison. He impersonates himself when he repeats "twice a day, three times on Sunday" the moving speech he made when he was captured (pp.52-3). It is a speech that Chief Joseph repeats again at the play's conclusion but this time with its original tragedy, dignity and grim horror restored.(p.78).

Cody can embrace official doctrine because its object has become entertainment and it is therefore no longer to be feared. The commercial show business of the play's conclusion suggests that "art" also endorses Cody's view--but only in Cody's eyes. We see the final scene as Cody's desparate whistling in the dark. He has reduced Indians to a level at which he can deal with them and thus the frightening has become familiar. "Drug-store Indians" are easily dismissed, and fiction becomes his reality.

As one critic notes,

the theatrical tradition upon which Kopit leans most heavily is the Brechtian epic. The purpose and technique of Brechtian theater is to make the audience aware of the historical processes by showing them... to be changeable and man-made, rather than immutable and natural. The audience...is to be exhorted to think and draw its own conclusions from the "evidence" presented.¹⁵

We, the audience, evaluate Cody in his true colours as someone who accepts manufactured images that camouflage brutal realities. His fidelity to those images and to the expediency of ridding the West of Indians, whose life-style impedes white men's industrial growth, facilitates his betrayal of his friends. Cody's thinking, arising from Buntline's image of him, makes "pacification as hopeless in the West as it is now in Vietnam."¹⁶ The Indians do not conform to the white man's idea of accepted moral standards so they, "like the Viet Cong, become 'savages'" to be eliminated in the name of democratic American progress.¹⁷ Kopit regards Cody's habit of rationalizing exploitation and cosmeticizing its results as the prevailing modern American way of thinking that made the Vietnam War inevitable, and may make a similar war possible in the future.

II

Muzeeka -- The Cosmetics of War

Counterpointing the media's artful deception with the truth of the immortalizing power of Art, John Guare presents a simpler and more stylized variation on the theme of manufactured images. In Muzeeka, Guare makes literal the pun inherent in 'shooting' (filming) a battle. The play's protagonist, Argue, is drafted into the army and comes to the aid of Number Two. Number Two's unit has had a contract with NBC but he has been transferred to a CBS unit and dare not be seen fighting for another network because this would violate his original contract.¹⁸

With this simple yet pointed theme, Guare calls into question television's influence on the general public's mindless response to the war as entertainment. Using the metaphor of the theatre, he simply casts news cameras in the role of movie-cameras and thus portrays the conflation of fact and fiction. It is easy then to make the next imaginative step where soldiers are living out a movie; they have movie-star status (p.74), and when there is no fighting, soldiers watch television re-runs of it (p.74).

The inability to distinguish fiction from reality, Guare implies, means that reality is subsumed under the painless associations an audience has with fictional war-movies. He is also, of course, literalizing a phrase like "the television war" so as to suggest that the only reason the war was being fought was for the news companies. By evoking this so-familiar phrase, he startles his audience into a re-examination of the war and its portrayal by the media.

The inability to distinguish appearance from reality carries over into other themes in the play. These deserve some attention here since they also stem from what Guare presents as the American determination to see things simply or not at all. For example, Argue does not want to return to the States because he feels so much more alive in Vietnam where he can kill (p.77). Killing soothes him (p.74). The contradiction here is not really a contradiction; his meaning is made clear through his job with the muzak-producing company he had worked for prior to the draft. In his job, Argue plans to lull his listeners into a false sense of security with bland music (p.55). He digresses for a moment to explain the deadening function of the brain's cortical overlay and then elaborates on his plan and its function:

I'll wait till all humans are inured to the ever-present, inescapable, background ocean blandness of my music, till everyone knows deep down I'll always be there, stroking that cortical overlay till it's as hard and brittle as the clay of an Etruscan pot and then...I'll strike....I'll pipe in my own secret music that I keep hidden here under my cortical overlay and I'll free all the Etruscans in all our brains. [The music will be] all bound together by drums that will fascistically force its way through the overlay and the country will remember its Etruscan forebears and begin dancing. (p.56)

The Etruscans, immortalized on a clay pot, are eternally alive and dancing unlike the Americans who, in Argue's view, are deadened by the bland and the mundane. They are alive to all of life, not merely existing. The blandly familiar is also the ever-present Vietnam War which, via the news, has become the "background" to Am-

erican life. Argue does not specify the war and its portrayal as that which the public needs to be awakened to: in his opinion, all of American life has to be revitalized. The audience, however, can easily infer that the war has become overly familiar and therefore disregarded when in fact it should command attention if it is not to go on indefinitely.

In Vietnam, the Etruscan aspect of Argue is given play in the excitement he experiences when he kills. He says "in violence I was reborn" (p.77). Because he enjoys killing, killing soothes him, but it does not asuage an uneasy conscience. He imagines that when he returns to America he will be persuaded that in his killing, which "didn't mean anything" (p.77), he did nothing wrong:

I'll go back and be convinced, the Reader's Digest will convince me, reassure me, and the newspapers and TV Guide and my Muzeeka will stick their hands in my ears and massage my brain and convince me I didn't do anything wrong. And life will be so nice. (p.77)

Having awakened and satisfied the elemental within him, he finds he has a guilty conscience and so needs a different kind of soothing, which is in fact a deadening of the pain he has sought. Full consciousness of life, as symbolized by the Etruscan vase, is too much for him: Art does not offer a life-line to Argue, who is drowning in the "river of moderation" (p.65). It is not so much the killing that provokes his guilt as his reluctance to take responsibility for his actions. He does not want Art to awaken him; he wants the media to deaden his pain and tell him that what he has done is right.

In this play, the Etruscan pot cannot play for Argue the role of the Grecian urn which assures Keats that "beauty is truth, truth beauty." The "art" forms to which Argue turns will tell him what he wants to hear, just as the news companies present the war as a painless, movie-like entertainment. Art, used to such ends, is not to be trusted--especially when, like Argue, one cannot see beyond ephemeral corruption. He is trapped in the "clay pot" consciousness he abhors. Early in the play, he toys with the radical fringe because he wants to "connect" with the hippie Village ethos (p.64), but he belongs neither with the Left-wing radicals (p.66) nor with the WASP (p.67). Having discovered in Vietnam that he does in fact want to be part of what is presented as the mindless status quo, he realizes too that he does not belong there either and so he decides to give up all causes and become an isolationist,

Earlier, Evelyn Landis has ironically said that what is written must be regarded as if it were true (p.61), and Argue, without irony, echoes her words: he wants the written word to make lies true (p.76). He prefers the distortions of truth because they are easier to live with than the loneliness of being outside his "clay pot" numbed consciousness. All his plans and actions have been in vain; he feels "looted" (p.80), exploited by the American way of life and looking at the world. A misfit without the courage of his visionary convictions, he kills himself with a machete.

His eulogy is provided, unwittingly, by Number Two, who, to the sound of rhythmic, ritual hand-clapping, speaks of muzak's

power. It has no highs and no lows; it is a bland plateau promoting nothing but a general, womb-like sense of well-being because nothing can disturb the cozy state of unfeeling and unthinking. Argue has dipped his toes into complex and troubled waters and, had he gone on, he might have fully recognized and scorned the analgesic presentation of the war and death administered by the media.

Going blindly on with falsity, ignoring the issues and seeking isolationism do not work for Argue. Guare's point is that each of these modes of conducting oneself is facilitated by the refusal to look at the reality of the war. This, in turn, is exacerbated by a presentation of the war that fosters pathetically child-like views of death. In this play, the deception that soldiers do not die is played upon the American populace and it is a heinous perpetration of misinformation.

Argue is as much a soldier as he is a representative of the American public. Like Cody, Argue accepts a created illusion despite his own war experience. Unlike Cody, however, Argue can make a final escape when the reality of what America is becomes too much for him. His participation in the movie-business paraphernalia of star-status, using camouflage paint as stage make-up and so on, protects him only for a short time. His failure to distinguish between a real war and a war-movie is disastrous for him personally. It also highlights a general trend whereby American culture removes the archetypal concept of immortality as a transcendent regenerative state into the realms of the grotesquely absurd and thereby trivializes death.

Kopit's concern with the abuse of language as a means of facilitating the acceptance of manufactured images is made obvious in Buntline's melodrama. Counterpointing the poetic, 'living' images and metaphors of the Indians with Cody's uneasy mixture of frontier idioms and profiteering jargon makes a similar point. Cody's language is a *mêlée* of cliché and its confusion highlights his own. Guare also presents the misuse of words to create false heroes/Heroes and false terms for analysing them. His point is made with astonishing simplicity in the scene where a girl leaps out of her Marine jumpsuit wearing a skirt made of torn copies of The New York Times. She sings the names printed thereon:

Hubert Humphrey
 & Jesus Christ
 Ronald Reagan
 & Jesus Christ
 Stokely Carmichael
 & Jesus Christ
 Richard Nixon
 & Jesus Christ
 LBJ
 Was Jesus Christ
 Timothy Leary
 & Jesus Christ
 Bonnie and Clyde
 & Jesus Christ
 Rocky & Romney
 & Jesus Christ
 Johnny Carson
 & Jesus Christ
 Television
 & Jesus Christ
 Eugene McCarthy
 May be Jesus Christ (p.82)

As one critic notes, "Heroes are born anew with each headline; and after each betrayal, the words that praised them lose some of their essence."¹⁹ Heroes are transient and the language used to

describe them becomes diluted. Argue's Etruscan vision is an attempt to release Art from the debased ends to which the media puts it. He attempts to restore the Heroic to its rightful status and uses the immortalizing power of Art to do so. However, Argue cannot sustain his vision and succumbs to the media's words and visual images.

Sinking back into an anaesthetized state, he wants to accept the words that tell him he has rightfully fought in a just war (p.77). In this way, he betrays himself as much as Cody betrays his friends.

III

"Sticks and Bones" -- Revealing Blindness

In Sticks and Bones, David Rabe exploits the familiar metaphor of the blind protagonist with moral insight to highlight the wilful blindness of other characters. While Kopit and Guare are concerned with blithely-adopted created masks, Rabe's concern, and that of his protagonist, David, is to strip away those masks. Rabe, like so many other Vietnam War writers, examines the efficacy of language in describing experience. In particular, he challenges the complacent acceptance of abstract terms that cause the moral downfall of people like Cody and Argue.

When Rabe returned from Vietnam, he found that "everyone seemed rather removed from the war....There was a total lack of involvement. The war was another world complexity. People were interested in the debate about the war rather than the experience of the war itself."²⁰ In his play, Rabe focusses on the causes and effects

of this remoteness. Like Michael Herr, Kopit and Guare, Rabe singles out the media as the chief culprit; but he also probes beneath the surface of American culture and finds there attitudes that make possible the kind of cosmeticizing Kopit and Guare examine. Rabe, however, does not simply present a culture that uses clichés "when there is no real wish to see what they hide"²¹: he presents primitive chaos. The war and protests against it threatened traditional values. When those values were protected with more of the same, they fell apart, revealing a void that either could not provide viable replacements or that resulted in those values reasserting themselves in an even more sinister way.

A major conflict between the play's characters is "a disagreement about the nature of the world in which they are living, or, in other words, about the kind of language that is used to define experience " (p.xx). Rabe presents not the nightmarish madness of the war but that of middle-class Americans. Moving the battleground to clean, respectable, materialist, comfortable, suburban, white America, he focusses specifically on one family's response to the war. In so doing, he also explores a prevalent social malaise. As Beidler notes:

[At issue] is not only the experience of Vietnam but also the nature of what passes for reality in America, and how the war is precisely the function of a culture holding fast, against a whole accumulation of geopolitical evidence to the contrary, to a sentimental, even banal complacency in some idiot sense of its own goodness and right.²²

Rabe's view is that what passes for reality in America is television's cozy portrayal of the family such as one would find in "Father Knows Best," "My Three Sons" or, in this case, the comfortable and popular Nelson family, Harriet and Ozzie, Ricky and David. By using a media-created family as his representatives of typical Americans, he explodes the delusion that all is well with this world. He reveals the hollowness of the family's materialist and commercially created values. His allusion to a television family and presentation of the play's family's values as those that the advertising world urges upon its consumers, creates a double effect: it is almost a play within a play, which heightens the artificiality of the family's values.

The play's motifs are greatly exaggerated and often move it from the realm of the symbolic to that of the absurd. Rabe writes that in the play

the simple real event is hidden by each character in the language he uses. A play is a world. The language of the play displays and defines the nature of that world. One of the major conflicts...is whether the world is ordinary, stereotypical, or poetic. As David is poetic, he tries to draw the others towards the poetry in themselves; but as there is madness in poetry, they are reluctant to go. (p.xx)

David, the blinded Vietnam veteran, returns to his American family at the play's opening. He is "the isolated poet dumped down in a world of prose, where language has been reduced to advertising slogans, religious platitudes and psychological jargon."²³ He has acquired a new philosophical vision which becomes even clearer to him as the play proceeds and which he tries to convey to his uncomprehending family.

His vision includes aspects of Emersonian Transcendentalism inasmuch as David's philosophy is similar to Emerson's concept of the Over-Soul.⁴ He calls it "connection," which for Emerson signified the unifying force amongst all people. In each person there is an inner impulse that is the intuitive communion with the Over-Soul. The recognition of this common humanity can be achieved in several ways but the one that is particularly appropriate to Rabe's play is the discovery of the inner self.

This is a Romantic spiritual inner journey necessitating individualism, non-conformity and self-reliance. When these qualities are achieved there will be revealed the man who has found "his own centre, [who], with perfect equanimity, [can] rest on himself and act from himself."²⁴ Such a person, who is akin to Jung's "modern man," need not adopt a role in life: he is autonomous and has a highly developed moral sensibility. This gives him his freedom while revealing to him his duty to the Universal Being and to himself. In short, he is the hero -- as Emerson defines the hero in "Heroism." The Transcendentalist heroic spirit is implicit in the play and David is its spokesman. However, it is also manifested in the other characters inasmuch as they are the converse of what Transcendentalism prescribes.

Essentially, Ozzie, Harriet and Rick play at happy families. Ozzie regards himself as misunderstood and unappreciated. Having

* The pertinent essays, written between 1841 and 1844, are "Self-Reliance," "The Over-Soul," "Heroism," "Experience," and "Nominalist and Realist."

missed the combat of World War II, he vicariously lives what he believes to be the war experience through David--except that it is the vulgarized, celluloid heroic bravery and machismo camaraderie of the John Wayne/Audie Murphy school of war drama.

Harriet is the stereotypical, self-sacrificing, martyred mother and the castrating wife. Rick's life revolves aimlessly and mindlessly around food, films, photography, one-night stands, and strumming the guitar. The three tacitly agree to let each other play his or her role, and so their lives jog along with each totally caught up in a self-appointed role and quite unconnected to each other. When David returns, he disrupts their game because he refuses to play according to the rules, and so facades begin to shatter. The family's values condition what they believe to be 'wrong' with David and a slowly-building inexorable movement culminates when they help David commit a ritualistic suicide.

Elements from ordinary life are exaggerated to the point of absurdity. For example, David is delivered home and the family signs a receipt for its 'parcel.' This procedure is repeated across America (pp.131-132) and serves as a wry example of the military's disregard for soldiers who have no further value. The military is seen as a huge machine disgorging its waste (and 'wasted') products. Later in the play, though, the symbolism assumes a further meaning. A second rumbling of trucks is heard and David says:

Don't you hear the trucks? They're all over town,
lined up from the centre of town into the country....
They've stopped bringing back the blind. They're
bringing back the dead now. The convoy's broken up.
There's no control--they're walking from house to
house...carrying one of the dead in a bright blue

rubber bags for which they have no papers, no name or number. No one knows whose it is. They're at the Jensens now....They'll be here soon. (p.214)

Subsequent to David's speech, no one doubts that when a knocking is heard, its cause is as he has described, and his family refuses to open the door. In David's vision, the soldiers' deaths in Vietnam have grown to uncontrollable proportions and the family turns its back on the anonymous dead. They believe that if they ignore the dead, they will go away; but David will not let them rest in this oblivion they seek to create for themselves.

He continues his description and addresses it to the ghost of Zung whom only David 'sees.' Ozzie and Harriet are racists and their one small comfort is that David did not marry Zung and give them "little bitty Chinky yellow kids" for grandchildren (p.174). Pointing to Zung, David says to his father:

Look at her. See her, Dad....Tell her yes, it's your house, you want her to open the door and let them in. Tell her yes, the one with no name is ours. We'll put it in that chair. We can bring them all here...all the trucks and bodies....We'll stack them along the walls....Pile them over the floor....They will become the floor...the walls...the chairs. We'll sit in them; sleep. We will call them "home." We will give them as gifts--call them "ring" and "pot" and "cup"....We will notice them no more than all the others. (pp.215-216)

Here, the theme of racism intermingles with the military and public attitudes to the dead soldiers. David forces Ozzie literally to face his racism but Ozzie does not acknowledge Zung as a fellow human being. Instead he says:

I'm sick of the sight of you [Zung] , squatting all the time. In filth like animals, talking gibberish, your breath sick with rot.--And yet you look at me with those sad pleading eyes as if there is some real thing that can come between us when you're not even here. You are deceit. (His hands, rising, have driven to her throat. The fingers close.) I'm not David.... The sight of you sickens me....I am speaking my honest true feelings. I spit on you, the both of you; I piss on you and your eyes and your pain. Flesh is lies. You are garbage and filth. You are darkness. I cast you down. (p.217)

Even as he kills her, she is as a spectre to him because his racism blinds him and reality does not impinge upon his preconceived ideas. The paradoxes and contradictions in Ozzie's speech highlight the difference between physically seeing and morally or psychologically recognizing: Zung is ignored, therefore she is not seen, therefore she does not exist.

Similarly when the no-name soldiers return. In David's satiric vision, the dead bodies do represent people who once lived because society regards them as mere objects. It will not acknowledge its debt to them: they, too are ignored. In David's vision, this is as true in the normal running of society as it is in the family. They will call the dead soldiers by other names --as with Zung--and so will not have to admit the connection. By **refusing** to acknowledge this, the family believes that turning away destroys what they do not want to see and so protects them.

Ozzie's rejection speech applies not only to Zung and their racism, the soldiers and their disavowal of obligation to them, but also to their son, David. Ozzie comments on Zung's eyes and pain, but David's blind eyes are also brought to mind; Zung is darkness, but

David reveals an abyss of darkness to them too. David and Zung, and all they represent, are deceit to Ozzie because, despite the evidence to the contrary, "flesh is lies."

Each family member follows a different route and, in the process, reveals variations on the theme of making or failing to make connections with others. Denials and misunderstandings begin as soon as David returns home. As Ozzie hovers uncertainly in the background, David cries out that he is lonely but Harriet has the answer for this. She decides that David has come home blind and unhappy because Ozzie had taught him sports and fighting. Primarily, this is the only possible explanation to Harriet for an otherwise inexplicable event. But her statement serves a dual purpose. Not only does she blame Ozzie for David's blindness, she picks out sports, on which Ozzie prides himself, and so belittles him as she will again later.

The family home is a cage to David and he prowls it restlessly in utter bewilderment. His loneliness and fear are extreme but Harriet has the answer for this too--Ezy Sleep (p.134). However, a chemist's pills of oblivion will not be the solution. Harriet's remedy for all difficulties, mundane or existential, is either food or aspirin. Her well-stocked fridge and medicine cabinet symbolize, for her, her perfection as the nurturing, caring wife and mother. Her self-created identity, however, is stripped away until all that remains is a huge void illuminated only by a spiteful pettiness of thought and action.

Her self-image is first shattered after David shows the film of war atrocities that they erroneously assume to have been perpetrated by the Vietnamese upon the Vietnamese (p.162). Harriet's response is disgust mixed with a knowing air that she would not have expected anything else from such people. The film is underexposed and out of focus. They cannot physically see it and this dramatizes their psychological blindness. Moreover, they cannot understand its relationship to themselves--just as they cannot with the soldiers or Zung, even though David makes the connection for them when he says that the death of the Vietnamese family is like the "disposal of garbage" (p.162). David's family's moral vision is as blurred as the screen they look at but David possesses a clarity of vision that can see the truth. Plunging into the labyrinthine maze of their myopic confusion and ignorance, he tries to explain:

David I am--a young--blind man in a room--in a house in the dark, raising nothing in a gesture of no meaning toward two voices who are not speaking--of a certain--incredible---connection!

Harriet What are you saying? No, no. We're a family, that's all--we've had a little trouble.... Just be happy and home like all the others.

David You mean take some old man to a ditch of water, shove his head under, talk of cars and money until his feeble pawing stops, and then head on home to go in and out of doors and drive cars, and sing sometimes. I left her [Zung] like you wanted---where people are thin and small all their lives. (The beginning of a realization.) Or did--you--think it was a --place--like this? Sinks and kitchens all the world over?...Water from faucets, lights from wires? Trucks, telephones, T.V. Ricky sings and sings, but if I were to cut his throat, he would no longer and you would miss him--you would miss his singing. We are hoboes. (And it is the first time in his life he has ever thought these things.) We makes signs in the dark. You know yours. I understand my own. We share--coffee! (pp.162-163)

As the stage directions indicate, David's discovery is "a hint of a new freedom that might be liberation" for him (p.163). However, the metaphor of the old man drowning foreshadows what will happen to him when, surrounded by the suffocatingly mundane things of life and his family talking of them, he is killed. The metaphor becomes actualized, the word becomes flesh, and even with David's death we can see Ozzie's idea that "flesh is lies" is maintained: Ozzie tells Rick that David is only going to "nearly die" (p.223).

As one critic notes, Ozzie's words are the culmination of the motif of denial and illusion-clinging that characterize the family's response to the soldier and to what he says, does and represents.²⁵ In David's speech above and in his death, the American ethos is shown as one where self-delusion leads to cruelty because

our cruelties (Vietnam, prejudice, insensitivity, lies) are what we use to hide ourselves from the void that we fear, that we deny,²⁶ but that we know to exist at the core of our lives.

Extreme self-delusion of this kind also creates an insurmountable obstacle to communication, and, as David says above, he and his family make their "own signs in the dark": they are each in their own solitude, confined by words.

During David's speech, Harriet is frightened by his attack on the trappings of her life, and, panicking, she retreats to her pain-killer, food. Ozzie is more obviously affected by David's speech and his whirling cane which makes Ozzie feel suffocated. David has begun to penetrate his consciousness and Ozzie can articulate more clearly than Harriet his feeling of panic. She ignores his fear

but he insists on making her respond to him. In response to Ozzie's fear of suffocation, she asks:

WHAT DO YOU WANT? TEACHING HIM SPORTS AND FIGHTING.
 (This moment--one of almost primal rage--should be
 the very first shattering of her motherly, self-
 sacrificing image.) WHAT--OZZIE--DO YOU WANT?
 Ozzie Well--I was--wondering, do we have any aspirin
 down here--or are they all upstairs? (pp.164-165)

Both have come close to some kind of realization: Ozzie almost opened the channels of communication with his wife; Harriet almost responded. It is a moment in which they might confront their confusion and pain. Ozzie suffers because he feels unwanted but he does not say this. Harriet, more nebulously, tries to communicate something from the depths of her primal rage, but Ozzie does not understand and so he asks for aspirin and the moment is lost. It is easier for them to skirt the issue than to establish connections and talk about their own dilemmas *vis à vis* David or each other.

Harriet's primal rage here represents her nearest approach to a moment of seeing, but this is the extent of her epiphany. Until the end of the play, her character develops only as far as spitefulness and platitudes will permit. She takes refuge behind these as she does behind commercial panaceas. She gives Ozzie the aspirin but as he swallows she tells him that aspirin makes the stomach bleed. Thus her apparent kindness is revealed as a mask covering her vindictiveness. Her poisonous mind and the destructive panacea are equated, and the suggestion is that the commercially lauded image of the perfect wife and mother is, as it were, sugar-coated poison.

In comparison with Harriet's process of revelation, Ozzie's journey of self-discovery is more complex. He had previously defined himself by the sentimental code of a 'buddy system,' and his hero is Hank Grenweller (p.143). When David debunks the falsely sentimental and idealized memory that Ozzie has of Hank, it marks the end of David's **acceptance** of his father's values. Furthermore, it initiates the process of stripping Ozzie of his illusions, and he begins to take stock of himself.

Ozzie tries to move out of his own world to establish a relationship with a solid base and to make himself self-reliant. Approaching Rick to teach him the guitar, Ozzie asks

How do you play it? I keep having this notion of wanting some---thing---some material thing, and I've built it. And then there's this feeling I'm of value, that I'm on my way--I mean, moving,---and I'm going to come to something eventually, some kind of achievement. All these feelings of a child---in me---They shoot through me and then they're gone and they're not anything---anymore. But it's---a---wall---that I want ---I think. I see myself doing it sometimes---all brick and stone---coils of steel. And then I finish---and the success of it is monumental and people come from far---to see---to look. They applaud. Ricky---teach me--- (p.167)

The irony is that music is a more exact form of expression than language. It could provide not a wall with which to isolate himself from others, but a window out of which he could see and express himself and into which others could look and understand. But Ozzie does not want to learn the chords of the guitar; he wants Rick to show him the trick of just picking it up and playing it. His bewilderment that this is not possible is poignant because he

does not realize that the creation of music, even of the vapid kind that Rick plays, involves a giving of himself.

Ozzie's glimmerings of self-recognition do not include an opening out of himself; he feels exposed and therefore he feels the need to protect his fragile self--to build his wall. Sinking into a morass of self-pity, he recounts the hardships of his childhood, the Depression when a man "proved himself...tested himself," when he first met Hank and Harriet. All he says is lathered with the machismo clichés and sentiment of a bad film but he yearns for the return of these, to him, halcyon days (pp.168-169). This is the last occasion on which his fictionalized vision of his past and his adherence to the equally fictionalized present life is articulated. Reality forces itself upon him and makes him see that this manufactured image of his life is false.

David denies him his comfortable world and Ozzie becomes his pupil. Ozzie has the feelings of a child (p.167), and now indeed, in the Romantic sense, the child becomes father to the man (p.195). David will teach Ozzie the way to recover his true self. The process is partially successful and for a moment the poetry in Ozzie is articulated:

I look inside myself. For an explanation. I mean, I
look inside my self. As I would into water--or the sky
--the ocean. They're silver. Answers--silver and elusive
--like fish. But if you can catch them in the sea--hook
them as they flash by, snatch them--drag them down like
birds from the sky--against all their struggle--when
you're adrift--and starving--they can help you live....
Rick Mom--Dad's hungry--I think. He wants some fish. (p.173)

Again, there is irony. It is not just that Rick interprets his words literally, but that poetry, the highest form of human expression, cannot bridge the gap in communication or provide the answers Ozzie seeks. Ozzie has found the answer but does not recognize it. He does not realize that there are no easy answers, and those that do exist apply relatively, not absolutely. If he did succeed in pinning them down, they might help him to live, they might provide the certainty and security he seeks; but they will also lead him into another form of the rigid stagnation he is already in because they will be external supports with which to prop himself up. He has no centre of his own.

Music and poetry, exact and elevated forms of expression, fail him. Rick has reduced music to insipid strumming and David's poetry is beyond Ozzie's comprehension and so he changes his mode of expression. He screams at Rick and Harriet, blaming the poison in her womb for having corrupted David to the extent that he has grown up capable of loving an Asian girl. Hitting David, Ozzie's hatred of his family, his own uncertainties and existential gropings are vented in his racism (pp.173-174). In the midst of his violent tirade, Zung enters and David's speech to her provides a pointed contrast to Ozzie's obscene language and thoughts. David says:

I will buy you clothing. I have lived with them all my life. I will make them not hate you. I will buy you boots....The seasons will amaze you...We will learn to speak. And it will be as it was in that moment when we looked in the dark and our eyes were tongues that could speak and the hurting--all of it--stopped, and there was total understanding in you of me and in me of youyet--I discarded you....Forgive me...."She's

the thing most possibly of value in my life," I said. "She is garbage and filth and I must get her back if I wish to live. Sickness. I must cherish her." Zung, there were old voices inside me I had trusted all my life as if they were my own. I didn't know I shouldn't hear them. So reasonable and calm they seemed a source of wisdom. "She's all of everything impossible made possible, cast her down," they said. "Go home." And I did as they told; and now I know that I am not awake but asleep, and in my sleep--there is nothing.... Nothing!--what do you want from me to make you stay? I'll do it. (pp.176-177)

David's "Sickness.I must cherish her" incorporates the ideas of Zung as a disease (in his family's terms), of embracing sickness as a part of life, and of accentuating the marriage vow to cherish in sickness and in health. David's parents see the equation of Zung and sickness as meaning that she is to be abhorred and shunned. To David, however, "sickness" is the world's term for the intuitive, private dream he maintains despite the opinion of others. To a society that no longer knows what is of value because it discards so much--its dead soldiers, for example--she is the dregs of life, but to David, she is the source of life, to be loved and cherished. By accepting Zung in this way, he flaunts his family's values. Ozzie recognizes this rejection, which exacerbates his own dilemma.

In the second act, Harriet and Ozzie attempt to identify the nature of their dilemma by appealing to outside forces of order: the police and the clergy. Harriet calls in Father Donald, a fatuous, patronizing and ineffective member of the church whom David rejects. The despair that Father Donald wrongly identifies in David has its source, he believes, in David's regrettable, but under the war circum-

stances, understandable sexual peccadilloes with a Vietnamese woman. He says that "the sexual acceptance of another person...is intimate and extreme; this kind of acceptance of an alien race is in fact the rejection of one's own race...it is sickness" (p.188). Again, there is the equation between Zung and sickness, and here it takes the form of a racism that has turned into a kind of tribalism.

Father Donald's theology is veiled by his faith in psychology, and, partly because of this, the image of the Christian God who embraces the leper, and the expansive love of Christian doctrine are obscured. He fails just as the police do because Harriet had turned them away. Music, poetry, theology, psychology and the representatives of law and order are to no avail and the family is thrown back on itself in the attempt to fathom what is happening.

Ozzie's journey of self-discovery continues, and he begins to see Harriet and Rick in a truer light. He feels ineffectual because he fears them, but he also needs them even though he can no longer compel recognition (p.203). David congratulates him on having learned this much, but Ozzie, confused, angry and scared, retracts his words:

Just let me alone....I don't really mean these things I'm saying. They're not really important. They'll go away and I don't mean them; they're just coming out of me; I'm just saying them, but I don't mean them. Oh, please, please, go away. (p.204)

His life is out of his control just as his words are: it means nothing, they mean nothing. The final comment is directed at David but Ozzie cannot get rid of him as easily as he dismisses Zung. He can refuse to acknowledge her existence because his racism blinds

him, but David is a reality whether Ozzie resents it or not. Aspirin and food will not take him into that state of oblivion he both fears and desires; he is forced to continue to see and what he sees is himself. But others do not see him and so he compiles a list of things he owns, which can be seen, to serve as indices of his own existence and as a "kind of commercial on the value of Ozzie" (p.211). This dramatization of his reacceptance of commercial values is the step back to his former way of life. His speech admits all that David has told the family but it is a source of terror to Ozzie and he does not know his way out of the labyrinth. He says:

I've decided to...combat the weariness beginning in me....A sense of hovering over a great pit into which I am about to fall. The sky. Foolishness and deceit, you say, and I know you're right--a trick of feeling inside me being played against me, seeking to diminish me and increase itself until it is larger than me, filling me and who will I be then? It. That feeling of being nothing. At first...I thought the thing to do would be to learn the guitar---But that I realized ...was a folly that would have taken me into the very agony of frustration I was seeking to avoid. The skill to play like Ricky does is a great gift and only Ricky has it. He has no acids rotting his heart. He is all lies and music, his brain is small and scaly, the brain of a snake forever innocent of the fact that it crawls. Lucky Ricky. But there are other things that people can do. And I've come to see the one that I must try if I am to become strong again in my opinion of myself.... What I have here is an inventory of everything I own... And opposite is its price....You each carry a number of these at all times.(He is distributing more papers to the chairs, his control, however, diminishing....)... pass them out at the slightest provocation. Let people know who I am, what I've done. (pp.211-212)

His self-marketing confidence is not yet fully re-developed and when Harriet enters after losing her confrontation with David (pp.207-210), she and Ozzie are both in need of aspirin and neither

wants to talk of David. But none of the familiar panaceas work and so they seek oblivion when they "hide by not moving" (p.213). David has reduced them to their most basic primitive level, and having done so, he takes possession of the house (p.210). They are at the animal level and he has taken away their territory. When he enters dressed in ragged battle fatigues, he says to his parents

when you finally see yourself, there's nothing really there to see....Do you know how north of here, on farms, gentle loving dogs are raised, while in the forests, other dogs run wild? And upon occasion, one of those that's wild is captured and put in among the others that are tame, bringing with it the memory of when they had all been wild--the dark and terror--that made them wolves. Don't you hear them? (p.214)

As David suggests in the dog metaphor, there is a parallel to what has happened in society and in the family. The question of whether the family hears refers equally to the imaginary wild dogs and the trucks. The suggestion is that war and death are the dark and terror of the primitive, and the trucks re-inforce the memory of their primitivism. Moreover, David, the primitive, has come back from the war and has evoked the primeval instincts of his family. The speeches quoted earlier from this section of the play where anything can be called by any name, contribute to this theme of the primitive in man. Words have been devalued to the point where they mean nothing: they cannot be trusted because they have been shown to be false. Man stripped of his only means of expression becomes primitive and, in this state, his only means of communication is violence, and so Ozzie kills Zung (p.217).

When primitivism is further reinforced by the reminder of the trappings of civilized life that had previously camouflaged

their true natures (Harriet's request for someone to go buy groceries), the three are able to overpower David. For most of the play David has been in his room, his own territory, but when he invades the family's milieu, he is exposed, and, from being the wolf among tame dogs, he now becomes the tame dog. It is not so much a reversal as a deepening of degree. The family is wilder than the wild dog; the commercially-determined trappings and values of their lives merely camouflaged this. In their "sophisticated tribalism" they use "ritual ...to define the insiders and the outsiders of the tribe and make the definition hold."²⁷

With Zung dead and the family re-formed, David is left with nothing. Rick says that if he were David he would have killed himself by now, that David is confused because he insists that people are valuable (p.221), and so he will be happier dead. As the family holds the saucepans and towels to catch his sacrificial blood, Rick guides David's hand as he cuts his wrist. They believe that David will only "nearly die" and that the bloodletting will make him "tame." Moreover, he will be happy according to their definition of happiness.

David forces Ozzie to reassess himself, his actions and his wishes. Ozzie approaches the chasm leading into a profound and painful self-exploration but he cannot bridge it. David's experiences in Vietnam, it is suggested, forced him upon this same journey: one of the most profound experiences of his life, it enabled him to remove the "veil of familiarity" that he might more clearly see himself, his values, those of his family and culture.

His failure to enlighten his family is caused by their deeply entrenched habit of replacing human values with commercialized substitutes. Their self-image is ~~that~~ of a standardized happy family normally only seen on television. In Dispatches, Herr criticizes this kind of standardization, manifested in the jargon and "uni-prose" of the media, because it gives a false impression of diverse situations and people. Both Herr and Rabe concentrate on a small group of people but one that also has parallels in society at large.

In Dispatches, Herr presents the opinion-moulding organizations of the military and the media as well as representatives of the counterculture who oppose these forces. In Sticks and Bones the family is the embodiment of these mass-produced opinions and David is in opposition to them. The connection between the war, television, and the falsity that is unreality is a major theme in Dispatches, and Herr shows how the three are brought together to give the public misinformation about the war. In Rabe's play, reality is over-turned, but it is done in terms of the unreality of the advertizing world.

The sky and Zung are both "foolishness and deceit"--reality is made unreal. But people are also objects that can be commercially touted inasmuch as Ozzie 'sells' himself, and the dead soldiers are 'no name' products of the war. The equation between the advertizing world of generic but anonymous products and the military world where American soldiers and the war itself are presented in terms that mask the reality, is seen to produce, and be caused by, a particular habit of mind.

The media classifies and simplifies and the public eventually accepts the world it sees on television as a true reflection of an actual event or way of life. In this way, the social and individual malaise become mutually self-reflecting and perpetuating. Rabe's picture of the family breakdown can be regarded as symbolic of society's breakdown. As one reviewer says of the play's climax, the wrist-cutting scene,

in the intimacy of the small theatre, was so much more real than all the blood that flooded the screen in The Wild Bunch. It is not a trick that would have been so effective--all those lowered eyes, turned heads, involuntary attempts not to look--had the play not been about the peculiarly American habit of refusing to see, to hear, to admit the ugly and the painful.²⁸

While David is the Oedipal character, inasmuch as he is blind but has the moral vision his family lacks, he is also the visionary poet. He is the creative principle in the play in that he shapes the lives of his family with his words and he also re-vives language as Herr does. His poetic symbolism functions successfully (for the audience) because he juxtaposes conventional ideas in a new way. His innovative use of the spoken word signifies a new mode of perception because in it the senses are inter-related: he speaks that others might see.

For the primitive, a word can only mean one thing, just as a person can only play one role and so words and people are forever fixed: there is no innovation that might lead to discovery. In the family, Rick's role is to play the guitar, but when David takes the guitar away from him he encroaches upon Rick's 'territory' (p.159). Because David refuses to observe the boundaries of roles

and words, he creates confusion in the family. By using synesthesia and by releasing words from their simplified one-to-one correspondence, he attempts to destroy the destruction of his family: to nothing nothing.

Similarly creative is the communicative silence he enjoys with Zung. For Ozzie, silence is a terrifying void of nothingness; but silence holds no fear for David. In it he sees the aboriginal essence that is the common denominator amongst all people, making speech unnecessary. To his family, however, this revealed aboriginal essence is primitive fear. David did not remain at their primitive level because his finer sensibility enabled him to ascend again. He does not lose his sense of humanity; and, with the knowledge of its value, for which Rick ridicules him, he reaches a higher plateau. His tragedy is that he miscalculates his family's nature. They, in their isolated, fragmented and alienated state, cannot recognize the immanent, all-pervasive, human loving-kindness amongst all people that David is able to appreciate.

The ineffable silence between Zung and David is part of the Orientally-influenced philosophy of the American counterculture, infused with Romanticism and Emerson's philosophy. David uses the 'irrational' as the means to counteract the stultifying effect of his family's mode of perception. Yet, while Emerson's philosophical influence is to be seen in David, he cannot live by it.

In Emerson, the contemplation of the ineffable abolishes the need to act because the autonomous man would have passed through the stages of being and becoming, which is the process of discovery

leading to ineffable nirvana. This is not the inert oblivion of Ozzie and Harriet: it is oneness with all things, the Hero's at-one-ment. David and Zung experienced this sense of union in Vietnam but it is extinguished in America.

All that the union of David and Zung represents is a challenge to his family's self-image. His new way of seeing and of speaking, his celebration of the spiritual and the irrational, his appreciation of the ineffable, and his advocacy of individuality are threats his family will not tolerate. Primarily the family destroys David and Zung because of its racism and tribalism but, although the family is directly responsible for the union's failure, it is suggested that the union would not have survived anyway.

During David's central speech to Zung describing their total understanding, she makes hesitant moves to leave (pp.176-177). His speech implies that she will adapt to American life and that they will learn to speak. The spirituality of their relationship would be destroyed by a return to the materialist influenced ways of America. Moreover, he tries to make others accept the compromise that he and Zung will represent and, because of this, they are destroyed. Rather than being autonomously content with his situation, David demands the recognition of society and it is not given. As Emerson writes,

it is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion;
it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the
great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with
perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.²⁹

Rabe has said that, in writing his play, he attempted to "diagnose...certain phenomena that went on in and around" him. It is not an anti-war, anti-family nor an anti-America play;³⁰ it is a description of the "phenomena [that are] permanently a part of the eternal human pageant... [and war is] an equally permanent part of that pageant" (p.xxv). Because of their moral amnesia, the family can re-form and materialist trappings hold a selfish existence together.

Intellectual and spiritual modes of expression and sustenance, which might enable the family to **regain** its humanity, are devalued by the family and rendered useless. Fragmented and alienated, they piece their lives together again with the commercially-lauded necessities of human happiness--Kleenex, sugar and milk. These are the fragments they shore up against their ruin.

As Emerson says, however, such a society is best left alone by one such as David. They will call his way of life a sickness; but Emerson says to such a person, "Thou art sick, but shalt not be worse, and the universe...shall be the better [for the sickness.]"³¹ David cannot leave the scorning world alone, though. Like Oedipus, his tragic flaw is in his character. His sense of honesty and integrity forces him to pursue the truth and to share it. In both cases, external events send the protagonists on this journey leading to moral vision but also to self-destruction.

Conclusion

For all that Kopit presents an unerringly critical portrayal of Cody, he does also make the audience sympathize with him.

Cody is not a tragic hero, though: at best he is a pathetically misguided sentimentalist whose nightmare Kopit vividly presents. And Argue is too much of a caricature and pawn in a game he does not understand for us to feel sympathy for him. In both plays, the dramatists include farce and hilariously funny scenes to point out the dangerous foibles of their protagonists. Their purpose is satiric and they warn the audience rather than offer cathartic release.

David, for all that we might applaud his efforts as a Romantic Hero living at odds with an existentialist world in which social Darwinism holds sway, does not finally reach the stature of the tragic hero. His arrogance falls short of noble pride; his raging at the universe more resembles a whining tantrum; and his vindictiveness remains vindictiveness. However, in this play, it is to Rabe himself that we must finally look. While the characters share similarities with Shakespeare's Lear and Gloucester and their families, it is Rabe as dramatist who takes the role of Kent, who ultimately advises the audience to "see better."

These playwrights explode any smug complacency American society may have about America's role and provenance of power in the world. They are not directly concerned with the war in the way that the novelists and memoirists discussed here are. Rather, they present a satiric view of unexamined habits of thought that made the war possible, that may make a repetition of it possible if wilful glossing over continues.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹John Lahr, Up Against the Fourth Wall Essays on Modern Theater (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p.154.

²Doris Auerbach, Shepard, Kopit, and the Off-Broadway Theater (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p.88.

³Judith Parker, "A Play has to Breathe," Harvard Magazine, March-April, 1979, p.91.

⁴Arthur Kopit, Indians (London: Methuen, 1970), Introduction, p.8. Textual references are to this edition.

⁵Philip D. Beidler, American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (Georgia: University Press, 1982), p.52.

⁶John Bush Jones, "Impersonation and Authenticity: The Theater as Metaphor in Kopit's Indians," Quarterly Journal of Speech 59 (1973), p.444.

⁷Lahr, pp.137-140.

⁸Lahr, p.140.

⁹Auerbach, p.87.

¹⁰Beidler, p.66.

¹¹Beidler, p.66.

¹²Robert Jay Lifton, Home From the War Vietnam Veterans Neither Victims Nor Executioners (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p.29.

¹³Beidler, p.69.

¹⁴Lahr, p.148.

¹⁵Auerbach, p.92.

¹⁶Lahr, p.149.

¹⁷Lahr, p.151.

¹⁸John Guare, Three Plays by John Guare: Cop-Out, Muzeeka, Home Fires (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p.77. Textual references are to this edition.

¹⁹Lahr, p.211.

²⁰Interview with David Rabe in The New Yorker magazine, November 20th, 1971, pp.48-49.

²¹David Rabe, The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel, Sticks and Bones Two Plays by David Rabe (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p.xvii. Textual references are to this edition.

²²Beidler, p.113.

²³Thomas P. Adler, "'The Blind Leading the Blind' Rabe's Sticks and Bones and Shakespeare's King Lear," Papers on Language and Literature 15, p.204.

²⁴Emerson's Essays. Introduction by Sherman Paul (London: Everyman, 1971), p.vii.

²⁵Samuel J. Bernstein, The Strands Entwined: A New Direction in American Drama (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1980), p.153.

²⁶Bernstein, p.34.

²⁷David Rabe, "Each Night You Spit in My Face," The New York Times, March 18th, 1973, p.3.

²⁸Gerald Weales, Commonweal, March 10th, 1972, pp.14-15.

²⁹Emerson's "Self-Reliance," p.35.

³⁰Rabe, "Each Night..." p.3.

³¹Emerson's "Experience," p.140.

CHAPTER III

Images of Heroism: Eastlake's The Bamboo Bed

I am a hero.....The true secret of being a hero lies in knowing the order of things. ...Things must happen when it is time for them to happen. Quests may not simply be abandoned.....The happy ending cannot come in the middle of the story.

(Peter S. Beagle, The Last Unicorn, p.212)

Making the familiar strange and the strange familiar are the respective purposes of parody and myth in William Eastlake's war novel, The Bamboo Bed (1969). His use of parody is ultimately regenerative because, while it debunks popular simplifications of the hero image, it also re-instates myth-making -- and hence the Mythic Hero -- as a valid means of coping with the reality of the Vietnam War. Through parody Eastlake shows that the significance of the martial hero and Mythic Hero can in fact still be celebrated meaningfully.

Eastlake's parody is of the kind that the early Russian formalist, Viktor Shklovsky, described as "ostranenie," or "making strange."¹ Ostranenie, Shklovsky argued, is the one goal shared by all literary devices. One philosopher sums up Shklovsky's theory thus:

The essential function of [poetic art] is to counteract the process of habituation encouraged by routine everyday modes of perception. We very readily cease to 'see' the world we live in, and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The aim of [poetic art] is to reverse that process, to de-familiarize that with which we are overly familiar, to 'creatively deform' the usual, the normal, and so to inculcate a new, childlike, non-jaded vision in us. The [artist] thus aims to disrupt 'stock responses,' and to generate a heightened awareness: to restructure our ordinary perception of 'reality,' so that we end by seeing the world instead of numbly recognizing it: or at least so that we end by designing a 'new' reality to replace the (no less fictional) one which we have inherited and become accustomed to.²

Parody, Shklovsky states, is part of this process too.³ Reality is "fictional" because, structuralists argue, man makes his world, and is in turn made by it. Man perceives reality in a way that enables him to cope with it although others might structure it differently. Hence the "fictional" nature of reality. It is not so much that "reality itself is relative, but that it is differently punctuated and categorized by participants."⁴ Or, as Appelfinger in The Bamboo Bed says, we each have a different sense of the order of things.⁵ Parody of "fictional" reality, then, must lead to a new mode of structuring given elements, and so to a new mode of perceiving them. Media representations of the Vietnam War, together with their over-exposure, have led to a numbing sense of familiarity thereby necessitating ostranenie so that the war may be seen clearly rather than "numbly" recognized.

Eastlake punctures contemporary notions and popular examples of heroism but he does not dismiss the cultural need for Heroes, the need to generate myths or the activity of myth-making. The traditional function of these last two was first described in modern times by Giambattista Vico in The New Science (1725). Vico said that man poetically renders his world into metaphor, symbol and myth so that he may understand it, at one remove.⁶ Man can thus cope with what would otherwise seem like a chaotic world of arbitrary events. The aim is to stabilize and structure. Vico recognized that such a way of thinking could eventually become numbing because that which man had first stabilized takes on a life of its own as if divorced from human influence.⁷ But, if

Vico's insight is correct, the recognition that all social institutions and cultural ideas are in fact man-made, not pre-existent, means that they are subject to change through human action.

In mythology such changes have been brought about through Mythic Heroes. Joseph Campbell describes the general function of the Hero thus:

The sword edge of the hero-warrior flashes with the energy of the creative Source: before it fall the shells of the Outworn....The mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming: the dragon to be slain is precisely the monster of the status quo.....The hero-deed is a continuous shattering of the crystallizations of the moment. The cycle rolls: mythology focuses on the growing point. Transformation, fluidity...is the characteristic.

In man's myth-making, then, there is the means of giving order to his world but, because Heroes are part of mythology too, man has also provided himself with the means of sloughing off obsolete ideas that were first structured by myth. When the stabilized no longer functions effectively in man's world, it may be subject to, for example, parody or the Mythic Hero's sword which destroys the "Outworn." Reality is then punctuated differently and freshly.

I

Clancy: The Making of a Hero

Vico's The New Science had an important influence on twentieth-century ideas of what a culture is, or more specifically, what it thinks it is. His concept of a world of nations includes the hypothesis that all nations share an underlying common denominator from which any particular nation at any given time in its history extracts the mode of perceiving, and thereby structuring, its world and beliefs. Vico's theory that myth serves the function of encoding these structural perceptions is akin to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. With Vico, as with Jung, the effect is like that of a self-reflecting mirror. A culture perceives, structures and so orders its world. That world-image then takes on an apparently autonomous existence and influences man's perception of himself and the things he values. It then carries the force of an unchangeable law as if that world-image had been imposed on man's culture by a supernatural force, a deity, say. The structured world-view dictates an individual's way of looking at the world but when expectations no longer conform to, or are not reflected in, reality (the structured world-view) the collision of expectation and actuality may lead to iconoclasm and a restructuring of reality.

Our expectations come to us by various routes. For example, vis à vis the soldier or warfare, they may come from first-hand experience, second-hand experience by way of family stories, documentaries on screen or in print, fictional recreations and so on. Second-hand modes are inevitably distorted--accident-

ally or not -- but it is from these necessarily fragmented images that the inexperienced garner their notions of what soldiers and war are like. And, if one sees a particular type of portrayal often enough, it can assume the status of unquestionable veracity -- whether it is 'true' or not. This section is primarily concerned with the need for Mythic Heroes, as Eastlake presents it; but first it is useful to look at the sources of the conception of heroism in the Vietnam War era that he manipulates, the sources that influenced the way in which ideas on war, soldiers and heroism -- in all its meanings -- were enshrined in American culture.

The image of the soldier as Hero has come to most of the present generation via the media, particularly the cinema and television.* For the most part, the cinema's purposes have been served by simplifying the very complex issues of what a man feels, thinks and does in war. The aim of most pre-Vietnam American war-movies was to promote patriotic propaganda or to provide escapist entertainment. Such movies created the impression that 'clean' wars can exist, where the issues of good and bad are as starkly differentiated as black and white. The simplified portrayal of soldiers, while it might retain a minimal similarity to actual soldiers and to the Mythic Hero ethos, reduces them to stereotyped and facile images of Mythic Heroism. For those men whose only knowledge of war, prior to actual combat, derived from the media, this was the

*The writers considered in this study focus primarily on the influence of the cinema and television, rather than newspapers and popular fiction, in creating the image of the soldier as Hero and so my emphasis lies in these areas also.

source of much of their bitter disillusionment about the soldier's life in particular and Heroism in general.⁹

The cinematic image of soldiers borrowed from reality but distorted it too. A good officer has to instil in his men the willingness to follow his orders even if this may lead to death. This unquestioning action by soldiers is still necessary in modern war. Obviously, armies cannot function effectively if each soldier makes individual and disparate decisions. Moreover, trust in and loyalty to one's officers and fellow soldiers have to exist. There must be faith that an officer knows his job well and is not careless with lives. Similarly, there must be a mutual faith amongst soldiers that all will do as they are ordered. In the ranks, more emphasis is placed on the reliability of others than upon self-reliance. This mutual dependence, with all the bonds resulting from it, is usually called camaraderie -- that distinctive moral code that exists amongst soldiers.

While the cinema shows examples of camaraderie, it does tend to give more play to the independent spirit of individual men than would generally correspond with reality. This independence strikes a pleasing chord in Americans brought up in the spirit of democratic independence and the frontier code. Besides the self-sufficient 'cinema soldier' as an example of the Hero, movies also exploit camaraderie to underline acts of bravery. The scenario usually involves a man rescuing a friend but having to put himself in danger to do so. The complex bond of camaraderie prompts such an action and whether or not the man succeeds is immaterial to the perception of his selfless act as brave and heroic.

In Eastlake's novel, there is no parody of camaraderie or the acts it prompts. In fact he celebrates several examples of such courage--most notably in Sergeant Pike's actions (pp. 58-68) and in the many instances involving the 'Bamboo Bed.' However, Eastlake does question whether selfless acts, unhesitatingly performed, are necessarily heroic. In so doing, he contemplates the nature of heroism and ultimately makes distinctions between premeditated acts of courage (heroism), unpremeditated acts,* and Mythic Heroism as Campbell defines it.

In The Bamboo Bed, there is, for example, a scene where Clancy tries to save Little Nathan, a Vietnamese boy. Clancy stands up to draw enemy fire away from the boy but he is unsuccessful and Nathan is killed. The narrator says that "this was no heroic action because no instant plan can be" (p.21). Clancy had tried the only thing possible to save Nathan, automatically and without thinking. It is not deemed heroic because he did not stop to think of the danger in which he was placing himself.

Elsewhere, Clancy is aware of the danger he is in--on Ridge Red Boy and Hill 904, the sites of the suicidal missions he knows he was deliberately chosen for. Sergeant Pike is aware of the danger to himself when he stays behind to cover his men's retreat, and Appelfinger is likewise aware when he helps Bethany and Peter find Clancy. In Eastlake's terms, these acts are heroic.

*Eastlake is not the first to contemplate the nature of heroism in this way. An early exploration of the subject is found in Stephen Crane's "A Mystery of Heroism" from his collection of Civil War stories, The Little Regiment (1896), and in The Red Badge of Courage (1895).

The incident with Nathan, it is implied, is of the kind familiar in movies where "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." This has more to do with Clancy's self-created, supermasculine John Wayne image,¹⁰ and so is more in accord with glossy machismo (celluloid heroism), than with true heroism as Eastlake defines it.

However, it is just such a glossy image as Clancy's here **initially** that the novel's other characters admire and he fulfils their heroic ideal. He is the free-spirited, charismatic officer, an embodiment of the American fighting spirit as that image has come to him via the cinema. He gets the job done in true laconic fashion. However, his zealous adherence to this celluloid image means that many of his men are killed and so the military want to remove him from action; but they also want to maintain the heroic example he has set. The paradox is that his heroic reputation was gained by foolish and careless actions: the military want the former but not the latter. One of the questions this situation raises is: when Clancy is ordered to gain a position at all costs, what does "at all costs mean"? The reason for Clancy's interpretations of his orders is explained in the novel and this, along with the military's desire for heroes who harm no-one in performing heroic acts, contributes to Eastlake's dissection of the nature of heroism.

Clancy is what Robert Jay Lifton would describe as a "socialized warrior."¹¹ Lifton argues that American soldiers in Vietnam cannot be seen in the light of energizing, regenerative Mythic Heroes because that concept has been "distorted, literalized

and manipulated" in recent times to the point where Heroes are merely killers.¹² Clancy would like to be a Mythic Hero but there is no place for him as such in the modern world and, moreover, his concept of Mythic Heroism has been warped by his culture. He is a socialized warrior, still cultivating skill and courage and hence still a martial hero, but he serves a lesser end than the Mythic Hero. As Lifton says, "The forces of entrenched power much prefer manipulable socialized warriors to more unmanageable [Mythic Heroes] who are dedicated to principles which go beyond themselves or their country's rulers."¹³

The military wants a hero and so do the civilian characters. Clancy is the chosen one and on him are foisted the others' images of heroes. While weaponry, tactics and ideas on the merits of war-making vary through time, the common need for a hero does not. As one critic says of Crane's "A Mystery of Heroism,"

Even in a world where nature herself does not recognize the meaning and value of heroism, it is a significant value if only because it fulfills some yearning in men.¹⁴

Eastlake's novel shows that the same need is present during the Vietnam War although modern weaponry must now join nature as the uncaring force making light of man's courage and heroism. It is precisely the nature of the war that prevents Clancy **finally** from being the kind of hero the other characters want. Eastlake's representation of the war reflects the reality of it on this point. It was not a war that allowed soldiers to be cast in either the traditionally Mythic or the celluloid image of heroism.

As Caputo points out in his memoir, the ordinary soldier's heroism was to have survived his tour of duty, and this was his only victory.¹⁵ Lifton's discussions with Vietnam veterans make the same point.¹⁶ To have 'merely' survived, though, is a poor substitute for the charismatic, exhilarating portrayal of the drama of heroism familiar to people from fictional representations of earlier wars or from early movies of Vietnam such as The Green Berets.¹⁷ The "yearning" for heroism still remains.

For the soldiers in Vietnam the opportunity to act decisively to further a desired end -- the traditional form of victory and opportunity for heroic acts -- was not available. In Vietnam, victory and heroism were more commonly equated with the number of enemy killed in a war characterized more by continuous fluidity than by set-piece, **periodic** battles. Yet patriotic biases can distort reality. For example, in The Bamboo Bed Americans are massacred on Hill 904. The ~~hill~~ hill has changed hands many times during the war and it becomes an American point of honour to retake it again:

So up the hill the Americans went, the same day the Unfriendlies decided to hold it, and the battle went on and on and on until the Americans had almost no dead to give. General Westmoreland...decided that this was the time to make the statement that we were winning the war. That did not help. So General Westmoreland decided that it was time to quit the field. For General Westmoreland to quit the field. So General Westmoreland got on an airplane with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and both of them went back to the United States of America and announced that they were winning the war. That did not help. Hill 904 was still held by the Unfriendlies. Then one fine day Clancy took it. It cost Clancy ninety-four men, but he took it when all had failed. General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker came back to Vietnam. (p.248)

When statements of victory are mere words with no referent in reality and massacres are called victories, the concept of success is drained of meaning. Clancy is the hero of Hill 904 and is given a medal for his achievement even though the cost in American lives for his success is excessive.

Later, the narrator undercuts the possibility of the reader seeing Clancy as a hero. In a general description of American war methods, the accretion of irony in the use of the word "encouraging" (p.250) reflects how dangerous someone like Clancy is. Listing Westmoreland's encouragement about man's progress in Vietnam, defoliants that encourage plants to grow too fast and thus choke themselves, and the general non-committal use of the phrase "everything is encouraging," the narrator concludes the list with "what is most encouraging is the spirit of men like Clancy. The man who got the men to take 904" (p.250). These words, in such company, can only be critical of Clancy.

However, Clancy has only done what any good officer should be able to do: fulfil orders and inspire his men to do the same. Eastlake does not so much criticize military methods as satirize Clancy. Clancy acts as he does on the Hill -- without the necessary air support-- because of his reckless ambition. In the image of the daring hero, he attempts the Hill with a sword (p.251). His free-spirited independence leads his men into a massacre and lives are squandered for the sake of Clancy's habit of going it alone. To fight under such circumstances as existed on the Hill, where the enemy not only outnumbered the Americans but also had the

tactical advantage, may be heroic, but Clancy's motives are dubious. He does, however, display the image of celluloid heroism that the military wants as an inspiration to others.

Civilians' "yearning" for acts of heroism to admire is central to the way in which real soldiers in Vietnam were regarded. Eastlake's fictional military seems to mirror real civilians' responses to soldiers. Civilians saw the war on television and it did not fulfil any preconceived, movie-based notions of what war or soldiers were like. By the late sixties, the ~~period-~~ setting of this novel, there was little martial bravura of the kind the sword-wielding Clancy displays on the hill because the method of fighting did not allow for stirring charges and so on, except with a massive loss of life.* Explicit film of the gruesome ~~things~~ soldiers do in battle exploded forever notions of clean, 'fair' killing. Moreover, the movies had not presented blood, mutilation, exhaustion and the like in accurate or extreme detail. Lifton quotes soldiers whose ideas of war, before actually experiencing it, must have been very similar to those of civilians:

The men began to contrast the bodily mutilations and especially the bleeding with the "clean" deaths portrayed by American mass media. As one ¹⁸ veteran put it, "In Flash Gordon no one ever bleeds."

* There may have been such opportunities earlier as Caputo describes in A Rumor of War, but, by the mid-to-late sixties, the nature of the war had changed. Beginning with the Tonkin Gulf incident in 1964, the American commitment of armed forces steadily increased. Moreover, the introduction of B-52s in 1966, and with them the massive, escalating bombing raids, radically changed the nature of the war during the remaining years of the decade.

Televised war reports did not show a "romantic, superficial...image of cleaned-up death."¹⁹ Returning soldiers were not greeted with public acclaim. This was not simply because they had not won the war; they had been seen committing horrific acts which appalled the public, and thus they had not been the celluloid heroes the public expected. If Caputo's definition of heroism in Vietnam as being survival is correct, then the public was short-changed twice. It did not get the charismatic clean heroes it wanted and what it did get was either soldiers who seemed like murderers or soldiers who 'merely' survived. The public's disappointment, reflected in the response to returning soldiers, suggests that there was still a need for an heroic ideal: the familiar celluloid image was untrue, the reality unacceptable, but the yearning remained.

Eastlake's novel shows how this apparent impasse can be circumvented. Colonel Yvor manufactures the image of the desired celluloid hero. Although Clancy's Alpha Company was massacred at Ridge Red Boy, Yvor tells the press that Alpha died after a full scale battle when they walked into a trap, but that a thousand Viet Cong were also killed. This, in fact, is far from the truth but, the story having been published, Yvor cannot retract because

"We don't want to make the whole press God damn liars, do we? So this is what we do, we dummy up, understand? I feel as lousy about losing all of Alpha Company as you do, but General Westmoreland's going to award them all the Iron Cross with Oak Leaf Clusters posthumously, and we'll do whatever else we can for them. I've seen a lot of men die ...and very few go out the way they did [as described to the press]. It's a rare opportunity to be remembered the way Custer is remembered, and that's not something we toss out lightly. (p.170)

Colonel Yvor takes this "rare opportunity" to polish and edit Clancy's career. He has the chance to gloss over the regrettable, and so recreate Clancy in the facile but familiar celluloid image of a hero. Thus the military uses the press to improve its image in the eyes of the American populace, providing in Clancy and Alpha an alternative to its less-than-flattering reputation.

The novel's characters ~~need~~ an image to admire too. In the novel's first chapter, Clancy embodies several types of heroes, both martial and Mythic, but they do not develop. The suggestion is that the images are mostly projected on to Clancy who has been entrusted with maintaining others' misconceptions of the Mythic Hero figure. Clancy does not shatter the images but Eastlake does show the reader their fragility.

The fragility lies in two areas. First, the images are static simplifications of the original Mythic Heroic models and, second, they are projected images. Clancy, as a public figure, is a composite of what other people say he is. It is also true, however, that he co-creates the image. He makes a public mask for himself and has the outer trappings of his own idea of what a Hero is. We therefore have a description of the Hero's need for a Hero who is in fact himself. Or, rather, Clancy, the public man, whom all the characters see, has a public, Heroic image; but it is false. There is also Clancy the private man, whom only the reader sees, and it is the private man who becomes a genuine Mythic Hero.

The origins of Clancy's public image are described in

Mike's reminiscences of his and Clancy's boyhood at Prettyfields, a home for boys. All the boys can trace their ancestry far into the American past:

That is, everyone but Little Clancy....We knew that Little Clancy had vaguely come from someplace in the Midwest, but no one visited him and no letters were received or sent. It was as though he had suddenly appeared as an apparition from nowhere and was going no place. (p.98)

Later, Mr Tuferino, a Scout leader at Prettyfields, asks young Mike if Clancy only has "Little Clancy" as a name. Mike knows of no other except "Iron Man." Mr Tuferino believes that Little Clancy never had parents, that he is "'Of no woman born'" (pp.102-3).

Traditionally, the folk Hero's origins are a mystery and so Clancy seems to fulfil one **criterion** for the mythological Hero. This is the first of several characteristics which actually link him with the genuine Mythic Hero. Running parallel with the genuine, though, is a manufactured image. "Iron Man" -- a name which has been given to him -- connotes an image he decides to live up to. The complexity of the portrayal of Clancy as genuine and manufactured Hero/hero is hinted at in Mr Tuferino's words.

The Shakespearian allusion, "of no woman born," suggests two things. First, Macduff is an avenger figure as well as a Hero, and so the application of the phrase to Clancy implies that he too is such a figure. However, the phrase contains, in Macduff's case, a literal truth which is Macbeth's downfall because he interprets it metaphorically. Mr Tuferino's allusion might alert us, then, to the deceptiveness of labels and to the fact that more than one description might be valid, or more than one meaning generated by

a phrase or label. Little Clancy, thus, is as much an enigma to his peers as the older Clancy is. He is sufficiently diverse to ensure that none of the characters will ever know who he is and thus they may maintain whatever public image they have of him.

At Prettyfields, Mike was full of clichéd, trite sentiments whereas Little Clancy was pragmatic to the point of ruthlessness (pp.97-8). Little Clancy has also a Tom Sawyerish imagination, sense of style and honour (pp.100-101). His sense of style, however, does not remain at the Sawyerish level for long. He discovers the power of style (p.97) and this will be to his great advantage in Vietnam.

Little Clancy finds Mike's notion of victory through pure hearts and minds insufficient, but he does have an honourable side inspired, it seems, by Shakespeare's Henry V at Agincourt (p.101). Added to Little Clancy's apparently contradictory qualities of ruthlessness and honour are style and daring. Moreover, his life at Prettyfields shows the roots of the innocent and dangerous simplicity that also characterizes his later life.

In Vietnam, Mike describes Clancy as one who, having been raised in an institution, had joined the army because he was afraid to live on the "outside" in a world where decisions were not made for him. Mike believes that Clancy knew before the Ridge mission that he was to be replaced and thus would find himself "outside." Clancy was afraid of

the threat of being a civilian, being lost again,
and that's maybe why they wanted him removed,
because he was trying too hard in a no-war. That
is, growing up in Prettyfields, he never quite
understood the language on the outside and so he

thought they meant fight when they said fight. And later they said no holds barred and he thought they meant that too. Never having been a civilian, never having been outside an institution, he did not know that we had never been told that people did not mean what they say. (p.108)

The implication is that when Clancy is told to attain an objective at all costs, he will do precisely that if it is necessary. It is this-- call it literal-mindedness, overzealousness, determination, irresponsibility, foolishness, courageousness--whatever, depending on one's perspective -- that makes the military privately regard him as dangerous and undesirable.

The novel provides several perspectives on Clancy's habit of thought. One is articulated by Mike (above), and is reinforced by Knightsbridge when he says that West Point training is ineffective because it does not teach men what they need to know to fight this war. The training emphasized sports and "games" of the kind Little Clancy had played at Prettyfields and had continued in at West Point. Knightsbridge concludes that "Battles are lost on the playing fields of children" (p.147), thus echoing ironically the opinion attributed to Wellington that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.* Because Clancy's games and sports did not prepare him for war, the implication is that a whole military school of thought, of the kind Wellington suggests and which is evidenced at West Point, is now outmoded -- and with it, the heroic image the school fostered.

Clancy himself also describes his naive singlemindedness but identifies it as a national trait too. He says:

* Attributed to Wellington by Montalenbert in L'Avenir Politique d'Angleterre (1855), though Wellington refuted it. See The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 2nd ed. (1953; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.564.

I went up Hill 904 simply because by this time, by this long endless time, it had become a habit. Taking hills today that are lost, given away, tomorrow had become a habit. Ask any man in Vietnam. It had become a habit like the women who go each Sunday to church but only because they have gone all the preceding Sundays....Don't you understand that anything else would be cowardice? That going up an idiot hill in a world of war is the only sanity? (p.279)

The Americans on the Hill, who are mown down like the British at Bunker Hill, had not learned the lesson that history could teach them: they continued trying for and dying on Hill 904 because it was a habit, they were "hooked on Hill 904. They climbed the mountain because the mountain was there" (p.247).

It is also force of habit that makes Clancy maintain his public image. He was expected to stand up and say "Follow me" (p. 279), and habit made him continue to stand up, and his men continue to follow him. He is, thus, a good officer but he is also being forced, and forcing himself, to perform the kinds of actions others expect even though his actions have disastrous results. On Hill 904 he is declared a success and it is the site of his greatest glory, but when he acts in a similar way on the Ridge, his company is destroyed completely. What one day is heroism, the next is murder; and Clancy becomes the victim of fickle fortune and an even more fickle military.

However, Clancy does aggravate his own predicament because he is so fearful of being outside an institution. He thinks that if he does not take the Hill, he will be thought a coward and therefore removed. Ironically, this fear increases the zeal which is in fact

his most undesirable quality. Habit and people's expectations of him (pp.279-80) force the maintenance of his public image and this frantic conformity becomes an end in itself -- as if it were one of his own personal Furies. However, disasters like Hill 904 and the Ridge occur because he feels more driven to act heroically -- as he understands it -- than to secure the positions in the best possible way with the least loss of American lives.

He had wanted to take Hill 904 without the necessary air support that, in his opinion, was getting too much credit in the war (p.277). He is finally forced to call in an air strike and napalm, but by this time his own men are too close to the strike zone and he loses his entire second platoon to napalm (pp.280-1). On the Ridge, Clancy miscalculates the number of enemy soldiers there and **tries** to force them to take him (p.29). When this **fails**, Clancy **makes** three suicidal attempts to take the Ridge but none succeed (p.25), and all but himself and Appelfinger **are** killed.

Miscalculation and suicidal attempts to redress his mistakes, so that he will be the hero others think he is, typify Clancy's actions. In his military determination lies one of the parallels between Clancy and Custer that the novel's characters note. What might be described as Clancy's "never say die" attitude is not in fact commendable because his simplemindedness leads him into situations where a "never say die" attitude is forced upon him.

It is implied that the same was true of Custer at his nemesis, the Little Big Horn. Comments on the Ridge battle usually include the refrain that "it was the biggest thing since Custer" (pp.24, 94, 170). But there is a difference between historical

descriptions of Custer's battle and the fictional cinematic ones that form Clancy's notion of, affinity with, and admiration for Custer. Mike is aware of the over-simplification of the fictional portrayal of the Indian Wars in a way that Clancy is not. Mike, however, has to deal with his own biases. Fictional Indians as underdogs appeal to his sympathies and, on first seeing the dead on the Ridge, he

had to watch himself. You tended to take the side of the Indians. You got to remember that this is not the Little Big Horn. This is Vietnam. Vietnam. Vietnam. They all died in Vietnam. A long way from home. What were the Americans doing here? The same thing they were doing in Indian Country. In Sioux Territory. They were protecting Americans from the Red Hordes. (p.24)

"Red Hordes" applies equally to American Indians and to Vietnamese Communists. The phrase also suggests that the Vietnam War was often regarded as a modern eastern Western -- a parallel Kopit exploits in Indians. In the novel, though, the war as a latterday Western with the too-easy celluloid division of 'goodies and baddies' is undermined when the lieutenant in charge of the Graves' Registration Squad (the Ghoulies) surveys the aftermath of the Ridge battle:

Clancy is dead but the crimes that Clancy did live after him. Custer too. Custer liked to destroy the villages and shoot up the natives too. Listen to this, the lieutenant told Clancy silently; what you did in the villages is not new. Collecting ears is not new. Listen, Clancy, to Lieutenant James D. Connors describing the massacre of the Indians after the battle of Sand Creek. "The next day I did not see a body of a man, woman or Indian child that was not scalped by us, and in many instances the bodies were mutilated in the most horrible manner. Men's, women's, children's private parts cut out..." I don't think you can top that, Clancy, I don't think war has come very far since then. (pp.35-36)

The above two quotations make complex points. First, the cowboy and Indian pseudomyth is exploded, which engenders a re-appraisal of one aspect of American history. Second, in Mike's thoughts, there is an equation between the empire-building of the Old West and similar American activities in Vietnam. Connected to this is the blind paranoia, stemming from oversimplifications of political and racial issues, which results in the propagandist label "Red Hordes" to describe Indians and Communists. The simplification of issues and purposes is reminiscent of children's stories where good and bad, right and wrong, are more easily distinguishable. Fighting a real war with a schoolboy sensibility is not just Clancy's failing; Eastlake implies that it is characteristic of all Americans. They emulate caricatures of the hero or Mythic Hero rather than the real thing. They believe that their image of the hero will fulfil the function traditionally associated with him; but, instead, their need for a particular kind of hero leads to disaster.

Mike makes this point about Americans' 'Peter Pan' syndrome: they never grow up and so they believe that what had sufficed in childhood will again in adulthood:

Everybody wants to play...Cowboys and Indians. But everybody wants to be the cowboys. Everybody wants to win....Clancy is still alive. Nobody wants to face that. We all want to believe that Clancy is safely dead. We want to make him a hero....It would make a lot of problems if Clancy were a survivor. Imagine what would have happened to...Custer if he had made it. We would have strung him up by his balls for blowing his outfit. Clancy too. How did Clancy get into this? The same way Custer did. The same way all of us do. The fantasy life becomes real. We never grow up, none of us do. (p.79)

If Clancy is alive, his actions on the Ridge, like those of Custer at his nemesis, will have to be accounted for. But if Clancy is "safely dead" then he can be made into a hero since the dead do not talk, Yvor's story to the press will not be challenged, and everyone can maintain the image of Clancy as the hero of his or her choice. No difficult questions will be asked and no aspersions will be cast on the heroic image Clancy ~~has~~ projected.

Clancy's boyish fantasy becomes real to him and he confuses martial heroism with "quasi-patriotic horseplay."²⁰ He believes in the manufactured image of himself, and, for a time, genuinely believes he is serving a public need in being what the public has been taught to want. He is, however, caught in a paradoxical situation. Modelling himself on traditional Mythic Heroes and genuinely having some of their qualities, he confuses the Mythic Hero with the manufactured image of this figure. Thus, not only is Clancy's public image out of date, it is false too.

II

Clancy's Masks

The Clancy-myth would destroy Clancy if it were not for his final realization that he has seen himself in a false and self-indulgent way. Initially, Clancy is a figure of terror because of his military actions, but he is made familiar, and therefore not terrible, because of his adopted Heroic masks which we and the other characters regard as beneficent. But these public masks also make

him an enigma -- thus reintroducing the aspect of terror. However, he is only a figure of terror now because he is strange to us and to the other characters. Finally, Eastlake performs the last transformation by parodying the public man, which removes the strangeness to reveal the private man to the reader alone. The private man muses and in his contemplations the reader recognizes Clancy's ordinary humanity. There is in fact a celebration of the Heroic aspect of the private Clancy when he sees his own falsity, but he is a Mythic Hero in the reader's eyes only: to the end of the novel, he remains a terror to the military and a celluloid hero to the other characters. The celluloid myth of Clancy obscures the true mythological significance that he discovers in private and which is available to anyone who can also remove the veil of familiarity.

Beidler begins his survey of Vietnam War literature with authors' use of the familiar. He writes that the war was "too dismal and botched and banal"²¹ to "make the grade of cosmic irony... it just couldn't be pumped up enough" to provide any "large significance" of the kind Heller, for example, achieved in Catch-22.²² Beidler notes that authors did not turn to the large, the sublime or the cosmic to describe the war and its effects; they used analogies from "the domain of the everyday and quotidian."²³ The analogies came from television "kid-vid" conventions and a "composite high-melodrama and low-comedy videotape."²⁴ The result, in Beidler's view, was that the portrayal of the war and the war itself "was always its own best and worst parody."²⁵ On The Bamboo Bed, in particular, Beidler writes that Clancy's

mission is American history. It is the old national habit, charging up the idiot hill, volunteering to take Paradise....But here is not Paradise, but only the beyond...[where] America's eternal adolescent innocence ²⁸ spends itself in terrible self-induced explosion.

While Beidler accurately identifies the self-parodic, mundane, children's television elements that do often provide effective literary analogies to the war, there is more than this in the war fiction, and specifically in The Bamboo Bed. His comment that Clancy's mission is American history is also true, but again there is much more. Many of Clancy's Mythic Heroic images do originate in aspects of life peculiar to America -- past and present. These indigenous elements uncover hitherto camouflaged and unsavoury parts of the country's history. However, they do not merely hold the past up to present-day public ridicule because this would promote little but a modern-day smug complacency and self-righteousness.

Destroying the values of the past and present without discovering replacements leaves us in the world of existentialism and the absurd and, superficially at least, in the world of The Bamboo Bed. However, absurd as this novel's world is, and local as some of its Heroic images are, whether debunked completely or left tottering under a barrage of irony, The Bamboo Bed has a wider scope than pure Americana. It is in this wider scope that facile notions of Heroism are debunked and an alternative suggested.

Much of what we learn about Clancy comes from the characters, who, in one way or another, are entranced by his aura. Our first view of him is through Mde Dieudonné's eyes. He "blossomed in the sky, a gift from the gods" and he wears

not only...a one-inch metal Roman crest riveted to his helmet but a red, white and blue jungle parrot feather stuck there too as a leader point. And something more. A drummer boy arrived, descended in a striped chute and began drumming as a rally point. (p.9)

The patriotic colours and feather in his hat lend Clancy the air of a modern Yankee Doodle Dandy; but there are also some of the elements of what will become a composite figure of Heroes from history. The idea of the gifts from the gods, the Roman crest, and the drummer boy, who, granted, could also be from any pre-twentieth century war, evoke the image of a Classical, semi-divine Hero. Additionally,

Clancy had what Mde Dieudonné called "panache".... or what the British called at Balaclava "pukka" and the Americans at base camp a "weird fucking outfit." The men would follow Clancy over a cliff, into a bottomless abyss. Cheerfully. Anyway with a great deal of style. Style. That's what Clancy had. If you can't win a war with that, then you can't win a war. (p.10)

Three things deserve particular attention here. First, the various words that define Clancy's style provide some historical perspective in that the Balacclavan "pukka" adds to the evolving image of Clancy as the soldier who transcends time to fight in many battles. Second, the terms might suggest that various cultures and eras have evaluated heroism differently. The French "panache" has overtones of contrived elegance whereas "pukka" connotes a more genuine, aristocratic pluck -- except that it is not just the "pukka" of the British in the Crimean war; it is specifically of Balaclava. The inherent allusion to the suicidal charge of the Light Brigade -- at once astonishingly brave and overwhelmingly foolish -- suggests that "pukka" applies to the kind of courage and style that perseveres

even in hopelessly futile situations, as in Vietnam. Apart from the American phrase which, out of context, does not mean very much at all, the terms have a certain theatricality, a dramatic exuberance suggestive of public display.

Third, the idea of Clancy's men following him anywhere, with style if not with cheerfulness, is a worthy enough comment on Clancy's esteemed position amongst his men. At this point in the novel, there is no reason to suspect that Clancy's style is anything other than the required leadership abilities of an officer. The emphasis on style, however, might lead one to wonder if style had not become an end in itself. Be that as it may, the theatricality is merely suggested here; but the next **paragraph** is explicit. Clancy also has

The ugly proud face. The sword....The captain had what Mde Dieudonné called something passing strange. ...With all the clown costumes and the theater drive, ...the drummer boy, the flashing sword, the arrival by cloud, there was a...supreme and ascending quality of life. In the inexorable march toward death there was life. The magic man. The magician. Not the taker but the giver of life. Clancy was the soldier magician. The magic man. (p.10)

Here Clancy is put firmly on centre stage and he is a magician in two senses. First, he can apparently perform military miracles. With his flashing, semi-mystical sword (p.20) he is like a modern Arthur with Excalibur. Second, he is the master of illusion in maintaining the popular image of Heroism others admire. His "theater drive" is not unlike Cody's vaudevillian energy in Kopit's Indians and the show-mask of both must never be allowed to slip.

Mde Dieudonné sees Clancy as a life force but, as a soldier, he is embroiled in the Hero's paradox: his function is to kill

in order to preserve. As one critic notes, Heroes emerge to fill ordinary people's needs; they appear at a crisis point when the rules of the mundane world do not apply or exist, yet there is an ambivalence towards the Hero. He is met with love and gratitude but also with fear and loathing because he brings death with him.²⁷ Mde Dieudonné herself comments on this duality in Clancy when she wonders if he has come to her plantation to destroy or to save.(p.10).

The inherent regenerative idea in this paradox does not come to fruition in Clancy as a soldier. In this, his public role, we only see him dealing death, but the regeneration is fulfilled in his personal quest, in which he has to "kill" the public self in order to "save" the private. In Clancy as Hero, the killing of the old, that the new might come forth, connects him with the rhythmic alternation in ancient rituals of regeneration. Given that drama is commonly thought to have originated in ritual, the descriptions of Clancy's theatricality and his role as the "magic man" also function in such a way as to suggest that Clancy is a Hero as well as a celluloid hero.

Clancy represents yet other Heroic types. From the world of cartoons comes the tough, macho Sergeant Rock type who gets the job in hand done first and only then turns his attention to the lady:

[Mde Dieudonné] invited Clancy down into the cellar of her villa....

Clancy ignored her. Clancy was here to do a job. Clancy noticed that she was built well and that somewhere, sometime, someplace, he had known her, and she was built well. He would get back to her later. (p.11)

The same type of image is evidenced at Mde Dieudonné's villa where the battle goes on in spurts

with a seeming divorce and anonymity, without concern or even relationship to what happened in another part of the jungle. In civilian life it is called chaos. In war it is called a battle.

There was one man now in the world who understood the indecipherable code of the chaos below. Clancy. The only man who could untangle in his mind the liquid Sanskrit of the blood below. Clancy. (p.17)

One can almost hear the fanfare as our redoubtable super-hero swings into action.

He also has "all sorts of Vietnamese retainers so that at base camp Clancy moved about like a prince" (p.16). The retainers and Clancy's princely stature recollect an indefinite but certainly a bygone age. Little Nathan is more than a retainer to Clancy. When he was "adopted" by the company, "Alpha became his mother. Clancy, who was the hero of the clan, became his father" (p.18). Furthermore, after Little Nathan wanders into the fire-zone in search of Clancy, we learn that

the thing that is important is that you can lose parts of A for Alpha Company and survive. But you cannot lose A for Alpha itself and still make it. You cannot lose Clancy. (p.20)

Clancy leads by example and this partly accounts for his importance to Little Nathan and the men who share the boy's need of Clancy:

Clancy moved from fire point to fire point, sometimes using the sword as a scythe or a machete to get through, sometimes as a cane, a walking stick, a pointer-out of hostiles, a remonstrance and a threat, a chastisement and encouragement to A for Alpha, an American and

secret weapon against the foe, but always
a flashing banner, emblematic of A for Alpha,
a scintillant promise and threat. (p.20)

The description applies equally to Clancy and his sword -- the latter is the emblem of the man, the former is the emblem of Alpha Company. Clancy is a semi-mystical force in battle who galvanizes the men into action.

The "Alpha" that Clancy stands for has further resonances suggestive of two things. If "Alpha" is understood in its Greek sense of "the beginning," then all things martial have their roots in Clancy. As Mde Dieudonné says, Clancy is the eternal warrior: he seems to have been "fighting for a thousand years, since long ago and far away" (p.14). Later, she says that "Time has no stop but time must have a beginning and you [Clancy] were the beginning" (p.120). The idea of Clancy as eternal and the beginning is echoed by Mde Dieudonné's son when he says that "everyone knows that Clancy has been fighting since the first caveman" (p.313).

Clancy as Alpha in this opening chapter foreshadows the later image of Clancy as a Christ figure -- Christ, the Alpha and the Omega. Colonel Yvor, complaining of his pilot's religious consolatory phrases, says "Everybody says Clancy and Christ...Clancy and Christ. It sounds like a law firm" (p.229). It is a bad pun but Yvor is, of course, correct. There are Christ's spiritual laws and Clancy's martial laws. The names, moreover, are linked as if they were on a par; but, more than this, the names themselves can be substituted for all that

Christ and, given the accretion of multifarious associations by this point in the novel, all that Clancy stands for. No more than the name has to be mentioned for a wealth of connotations to arise.

The connection between Christ and Clancy develops further. In the thick of the battle at the villa, Clancy is not a participant because he wants two of his officers "blooded properly" (p.319). However,

Clancy was there in spirit....Clancy loves you.
All. Everyone. Clancy will die for us all. Clancy
died for our sins. (p.320)

Christ might well be the subject of these sentences rather than Clancy. With the idea of Christ/Clancy dying for our sins comes the idea of the crucified Christ and, indeed, there is a symbolic crucifixion of Clancy. Appelfinger, Clancy's devotee, has dragged the wounded Clancy from the Ridge. When the Colonel finally finds Appelfinger and asks him what happened to Clancy, we discover that Clancy, "the remains of Alpha," was "pinned against a tree" as if in crucifixion (p.343).

The elements of ritual, sacrifice, purification and Clancy as a Christ figure are suggested also in the images describing Appelfinger's cleansing of Clancy's napalm wound. Clancy has been stoical under the pain of the wound but then

Clancy did something that anyone who has lived through any war or any peace will never forget. Clancy's body had been leaning rearward in the thornbush. Now he swung his body forward so that it touched the sand rock in an attitude of prayer and now...repeated in a high loud lament, each word coming across the soft jungle clear and separate: "Shoot me! Shoot me! Shoot me!" (p.294) [emphasis mine]

Before re-opening Clancy's wound, Appelfinger knocks him out. He

did not swing the M1 like an ax or even a hatchet, but like an instrument used in some ceremony. Clancy went down all the way and ceased his chant....Appelfinger shook his head like a priest, and wiped the blade...like a butcher. (p.295) [emphasis mine]

In this scene a ritual purification and a ritual sacrifice are simultaneously suggested, as if the cleansing were a killing. In effect, this is what Clancy undergoes on his path to Heroism. The "thornbush" may specifically suggest Christ who died for our sins and this links with Clancy's final acknowledgement of his own sins. The act of acknowledgement itself is a kind of purification and salvation for Clancy just as Christ became a saviour of acknowledged sinners.

In the novel's first chapter, then, Clancy is the Classical semi-divine hero, the Arthurian and ancient regenerative hero, the eternal warrior, the Christ figure and the princely soldier who leads by example. He is also akin to General Custer, a super-hero and a cartoon-hero as well as being a soldier magician who performs not only a "coup de guerre [but also] a coup de théâtre" (p.14).

Except for the Christ image, which is always a characteristic imposed on Clancy by the other characters or is suggested in the narrator's diction, these Heroic types are ones on which Clancy consciously models himself or in whose image others consciously see him. These role models suggest a continuity but we can also see a progressive decline of the Hero image as that image has been manifested in folk culture. The movement is from the regenerative force

-- supported by a deity -- to the modern adventurer, with the transition point probably being the princely soldier. Given his boyhood admiration of Shakespeare's Henry V, who won at Agincourt through the grace of God, it would be reasonable to assume that the prince with retainers in Vietnam is modelled on Henry V. Shakespeare's Henry is very much a human being but a human acting with divine help. The later heroes in the novel have lesser purposes because their actions are motivated by their nation's politics and are performed without divine intervention.

Whether mythic, real or fictional, Clancy's models do not help him because his image of them is static. He has not adapted mythological methods of action to his present circumstances; there is no deity to aid him in battle, and real war is quite different from celluloid portrayals of war. The progressive decline of the Hero seems to have come to complete disintegration in Clancy, the latest addition to the line and a travesty. This in fact is the case. Clancy as Hero is not only anachronistic but during his life he is an abysmal failure as a Hero. In his dying, though, he is not.

III

Modern and true images of immortality
and Clancy's Heroism

In antiquity departed warriors **did not**
fade away. They were decently cremated
or quietly stellified.²⁸

Immortality is the ultimate goal of the Mythic Hero's quest but it is not physical immortality that he seeks. While the Hero may bring a new cultural wisdom, and therefore the possibility of cult-

ural regeneration and immortality when he returns from his quest, the ultimate immortality he might attain is a personal one. Such an attainment **may** involve the dissolution of his physical body,²⁹ or he may fail to return to society because he has glimpsed a preferable greater beyond and chooses not to return.³⁰ Joseph Campbell describes the monomyth of the Hero thus:

The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization. As he crosses threshold after threshold, conquering dragon after dragon, the stature of the divinity that he summons to his highest wish increases, until it subsumes the cosmos. Finally, the mind breaks the bounding sphere of the cosmos to a realization transcending all experience of form -- all symbolizations, all divinities: a realization of the ineluctable void.³¹

The Mythic Hero's quest, then, symbolizes a spiritual or psychological journey. Thus his possible physical immortality, achieved when he enters the "ineluctable void," paradise, nirvana, or whatever the blissful state of at-one-ment is called, symbolizes his spiritual immortality. Campbell makes the point that physical immortality is, of course, impossible in reality and, moreover, the search for it is a misunderstanding of traditional mythic lore's symbology.³²

Just as Clancy is entrusted with the novel's characters' images of what a Hero is, so too their expressions of hope that he can come alive again are in accord with those images. Moreover, the kind of wishful thinking that each indulges in *vis à vis* Clancy's "immortality" reflects the way in which each copes with

the war. For example, Nurse Janine Bliss 'escapes' from the war by enjoying acrobatic sex with Knightsbridge in the Bamboo Bed helicopter. When she is told that Colonel Yvor sent Clancy on the impossible mission to the Ridge so that he would be killed, she believes she has found the solution to the events on the Ridge:

Love is the greatest survival device. It is the best. Love is the long-time ecstasy. Death is short but very sweet in the jungle. An escape route.

When you are surrounded on all sides and there is no direction to turn, when there is no love, you accept death. That is what happened to A for Alpha. There is no mystery. There was no plot....

She would tell [Mike] what caused the death of A for Alpha.

It would save Clancy. Clancy could live again.
(p.112)

She realizes, though, that she is deluded: there is no hope for Clancy (p.113) but she continues to hope anyway.

For Mike, Clancy is a father-figure who holds the key to his own identity (p.125) as well as the secret of the war (pp. 70-1). Mike's personal quest and his hope for Clancy's rebirth stem from, and are presented in images from, his boyhood. Playing a game of Hare and Hounds, Little Clancy had turned on Mike with a knife that had seemed to Mike like a sword. He had been so startled that he had not tapped Little Clancy three times and said "you are dead" as the game demanded. Now in Vietnam, Mike feels that he is trying to touch Clancy three times in order to lay a personal ghost to rest (pp.108-9). More than this, though:

All I have to do to end Clancy's agony is to touch him three times and after each touch say one word and it all adds up to You Are Dead. And then Clancy can get up again and run like new. Except that it's not Little Clancy now. It's not a game now. It's Big Clancy now. It's war now. (p.118)

Clancy's agony is in living up to the heroic image he knows he does not deserve. Mike knows that as a boy Clancy had been given a medal for bravery that he had not deserved (pp.103-4), but he had taken it anyway. This childhood event has influenced Clancy's image of himself, in his heart of hearts, ever since (p.279).

In Mike's way of wishing that Clancy might live again is the opportunity to touch Clancy as he had not done when a boy. He would thus be able to remove Clancy's haunting power over him. Moreover, Mike's language has a childlike quality. He wants Clancy to "run like new" as if he were a clockwork toy soldier. Mde Dieudonné uses similar terms. Clancy had first seemed to her like part of a "fairy game. A girlhood dream of olden and fairy times" (p.9). She wants the fairytale to continue and so, after hearing of the Ridge battle, she hopes that "there had been no Red Boy. All the soldiers that had been knocked down would get up again and live happily ever after" (p.119).

The ease of "killing" and bringing "alive" again in boyhood games and fairytale endings is a nursery version of immortality. It is in keeping with the novel's sub-theme of the 'Peter Pan' syndrome. Contrasting with this innocent, childlike wishful-thinking is the gruesome deception the lieutenant with the Graves' Squad perpetrates on the Ridge. Initially, army photographers record the positions of the dead so that Intelligence might determine how the battle was lost or won:

The army photographers alighted...holding their cameras at high port like weapons, and began to shoot away at the dead almost at random. (p.26)

It is as if Alpha Company is dying again for the cameras; as if there were the option of several 'takes' in which to get it right.

When the Graves' Squad itself is attacked, the lieutenant has his men use the dead Alpha as dummies:

The thing to do was to make the dead look like the living and the living look like the dead. The living would exchange roles with the deadClancy fights on. Clancy might pull this off yet. It was Clancy's second chance.... Clancy's company is still fighting a holding action. Clancy always said never say die. (pp.48,43)

The resurrection of Alpha Company here is a pragmatic but gruesome one that relies on illusion. It is, as Mike says, as if movie reels had been mixed up and that "this war would have to start all over again" (p.33). In the Graves' Squad section Eastlake's language often blurs the distinction between shooting a movie and shooting guns to show Clancy's and Alpha's 'immortality'. They are restored to life in order to fight again and thus the traditional idea of immortality (spiritual) has been transformed into the kind of illusion of physical immortality that only celluloid can create.

The lieutenant's act is necessary for the Ghoulies' survival and here we have a literalization of an idea central to the Hero's quest. In mythology, "the battlefield is symbolic of the field of life, where every creature lives on the death of another." This symbolizes the "inevitable guilt of life" which the Hero must overcome by realizing "the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all."³³ The Ghoulies do not kill their fellow Americans in order that they themselves might live, but they do take advantage of the already

dead Alpha Company for this end. Thus, the Graves' Squad's nickname becomes more grotesquely appropriate since, like ghouls, they prey on the dead for their own survival.

The chaotic scene on the Ridge, which Mike likens to disordered movie reels, introduces another image of immortality. The ability to replay reels and see once-dead soldiers fight again belongs with nursery ideas of painless death and resurrection. The photographers work for the military but they might just as well be working for a news company that will replay a fight to an American television audience. Just as the Ghoulies make Alpha fight again against real bullets, so, in the army photographs, the battle will be analysed and fought again. Eastlake implies that such blurring of distinction between fact and fiction in the Ghoulies' scene trivializes death and removes the concept of immortality to the realm of the facile.

The Mythic Hero's transcendent spiritual immortality is achieved in a personal quest that involves abandoning war and making a separate peace. To the novel's characters Clancy is a surrogate for many things but he cannot live this final goal for them. Eastlake presents Clancy's quest to the reader: the only other living things that witness it are a tiger, a python and a North Vietnamese rice-carrier on a bicycle. The animals 'talk' with Clancy, and, like the talking animals in traditional folklore, they aid him in his quest.

Clancy's quest and goal are succinctly symbolized at the beginning of the novel. Regaining consciousness under the tree, he remembers

fighting down the Street Without Joy, crossing the
Perfume River, storming the citadel of Hue, getting -
hit and entering the Palace of Perfect Peace. (pp.23-24)

The palace symbolizes his present situation of lying peacefully under the jungle canopy. Like the forest "chapel" that Henry Fleming enters in Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, the jungle here is initially a place of refuge for Clancy. Fleming discovers his sanctuary while fleeing from a battle and discovers there terrifying physical horrors. Clancy does not have to face something physically horrific but he does have to acknowledge the presence of something within himself that is as great a shock to him as the rotting body is to Fleming. The jungle, like Fleming's wood, appears tranquil but in reality is not. What Clancy learns there represents the last obstacle he must overcome before he can truly enter the perfect peace of physical death and spiritual atonement.

Campbell writes that spiritual immortality can be achieved in the here and now; it is not necessarily attendant upon physical death. It involves the paradoxical idea of recognizing the "god" within oneself which is also outside oneself.³⁴ Such recognition includes a process of growth which, in mythology, is symbolized by the Hero's adventures and the lessons he learns.³⁵ The Hero will then find the as yet unknown but immortalizing "font of life" within himself if he can remove the obscuring "coverings" that prevent him from seeing it, from recognizing it within himself. The "coverings" are like "personality-masks over the unnamed" ineluctable energy source of life that connects all things in the universal and eternal.³⁶ The masks are like the "figments" of a dream that appear as the manifest content hiding the latent meaning.³⁷ Clancy's first step,

then, is to remove his masks. He recognizes that he and others have a "cover": "We are all pretending to do one thing and working on something else" (p.37). Clancy's own coverings, though, are specifically the heroic postures he strikes for others. The removal of these masks will lay bare Clancy's "secret" that he is in fact a coward in his own eyes.

Because of the tenacity with which the other characters cling to their image of Clancy, it would be fruitless for him to tell them of his 'true' nature. Lying in the jungle with a fatal throat wound, he hears Appelfinger and others close by. What he wants most of all is to get to a clearing and "signal effectively [but] in a whole lonely life a man cannot signal effectively" (p.143). He knows he is dying and this prompts a sense of urgency because "I have something important to tell. I could such a tale unfold. Why don't they listen?" (p.143). The "they" is deliberately ambiguous here: it applies equally to the Bamboo Bed helicopter above him, Appelfinger and friends close by, and everyone he has ever tried to speak to.

Campbell writes that the Hero either penetrates to the "source" through his own efforts "or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal."³⁸ Clancy is not helped by people in his life but when he is dying he communicates more effectively than he ever has before. He 'speaks' with a tiger, python and Vietnamese who aid him on his route to self-enlightenment. That enlightenment, however, begins with a false start. He first experienced the desire to explain himself during his affair with Mde Dieudonné, prior to the battles on the Ridge and Hill 904. Then,

Clancy wanted to say he was the eternal warrior. ...He wanted to say that he had participated in all wars, that he had been a captain in some good wars. The side he had been on most times had been a good side. (pp. 309-310)

This is what he wants to say but he becomes entangled in deciding which is the good or bad side, and so he gives it up. It would not be inappropriate for him to give this speech, though: as a composite of several Heroes, he is the eternal warrior. He could make the Taliesin type of epic boast from the Mabinogi³⁹ that Dai, in David Jones' Great War work In Parenthesis, legitimately makes⁴⁰ but he does not because for him in Vietnam it would be false. The Taliesin epic boast is founded on the idea of the Hero as

the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is. "Before Abraham was, -- I AM." He does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment...as destroying the permanent with its change.⁴¹

Clancy cannot make this boast prior to the Ridge battle because he is still attached to the ephemeral and to the approval of others. The Hero seeking immortality must relinquish such attachments because

Man in the world of action loses his centering in the principle of eternity if he is anxious for the outcome of his deeds.⁴²

As an officer Clancy must, of course, be concerned about the outcome of his deeds, but over and above this military concern is a personal one. He takes Hill 904 without air support because he wants his men and himself to be seen as martial heroes (p.277) and he himself carries only a sword (p.251). Similarly, on the Ridge he makes a suicidal

stand because it would be a military feather in his cap if he were to succeed in taking the Ridge.

The initial step toward the relinquishment of Clancy's need for prestige comes when he talks to the tiger. He is still concerned about appearances when the tiger first arrives:

If my body had been found with all the other bodies then I would be a hero. Now I'm a deserter, a coward....I could crawl back to the other bodies and die a hero's death. I sure would be famous. The biggest thing since Custer.... Clancy told himself...don't live. If you live there will be a court-martial to find out how you lost the company....but if you die you have got it made. All the dead are heroes. (p.253)

Clancy wonders why he should try to impress a tiger (pp.255-6), and when a North Vietnamese arrives Clancy silently hopes that he himself will be killed. However, the North Vietnamese sees the tiger and flees. Clancy "now felt himself, not the victim, but the ward of the tiger" (p.258). Clancy, bored with dying, wants to die but the tiger does not oblige by eating him. On the contrary, the tiger "saves" Clancy again when it leaps at the Bamboo Bed which is about to rescue him (pp.258-9). Clancy has not completed his quest yet and, while the helicopter rescue might save his physical life, it would end his spiritual quest. The tiger thus aids rather than hinders him.

The breakdown of the falsely Heroic facade begins when Clancy articulates its artifice:

We were a people who had to make our world out of nothing, tigers and bullets, so we made it out of Roman helmets and toys....We were all trying to make our world out of nothing. (p.269)

This is addressed to Mike whom Clancy wants to understand the things he has done and why he has done them. It is not a justification of the same order as he had tried with the tiger. There, he wanted to impress with his credentials; here, he throws his lot in with all the other soldiers and it is his essential self he is explaining, not his military actions.

Having brought Clancy this far, the tiger leaves and is replaced by a python to whom Clancy tells the secret of the war. He speaks of the mistakes on Hill 904 and reveals that he is a coward who sought a way out of his heroic image in the death that should have resulted from his suicidal charge on the Hill (p.279). He pauses in his tale and tells the python that he is dying but

Nobody wants to die alone. Nobody wants to die a hero. The trouble with heroes is that no one believes in them. The trouble with heroes is that we are born in the wrong century. Lonely is the hero. Let me be a coward. Let everyone else on Hill 904 be a hero. If that's the way they want it. But make sure it's the way they want it. (p.284)

At this point in his spiritual growth, Clancy is juggling two mutually exclusive concepts. One is his common bond with ordinary humanity in that he does not want to die alone. Like most people, but unlike the Mythic Hero,⁴³ he is afraid of death. However, he still sees himself as a Hero --albeit an anachronistic one. Bridging these two states is his warning that people should not be made heroes against their wishes. This suggests that he realizes that he himself has only unwillingly accepted the role.

Clancy then goes on to tell the secret of Hill 904: it "disappeared." The phrases "eaten by tigers" and "disappeared" are

common military euphemisms for inexplicable events (p.298). In Clancy's story, an airstrike "overdid" the bombing of the Hill so that not only did the second platoon "disappear" but so did the Hill (p.298).

The story told, the python slithers away and Clancy is re-joined by the now fatally wounded rice-carrier who had fled into a Viet Cong ambush (p.300). In him, Clancy sees a mirror image of himself (p.302), and this foreshadows their eventual union. Clancy, however, is now at the point of false completion of the Hero's quest. Campbell writes that one way to deal with the inevitable guilt of living off the death of another in the symbolic battlefield of life is to refuse, like Hamlet, to go on living. Or

one may invent a false, finally unjustified image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as others are, but justified in one's inevitable sinning because one represents - the good. Such self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos. The goal of myth⁴⁴ is to dispel the need for such life ignorance.

Clancy falls prey to this kind of self-righteousness when he says

I want to tell everyone who thinks that Clancy made a mistake. I want to tell everyone who thinks the Americans are wrong. Before I die something must be saved for everyone who [fought] here, for everyone who died in a bamboo bed. (p.302)

This, followed in the novel though not in the events' chronology, by his eternal warrior speech, implies that Clancy and America, on the side of good, are justified in making war and specifically in burning Do Luc village. At this point in the novel, this self-justification

that Clancy and America act with beneficence, is a precariously held position, as can be verified by Clancy's own reaction to the burning of the village. Clancy had told his lieutenant to burn the village, "Told Americans to burn the world down beginning with Do Luc" (pp. 313-4). Clancy, however, turns cold and is frightened by what he sees he is responsible for (p.315).

In the novel's closing chapter, though, Clancy attains the true vision. The chapter begins with lines from William Blake's poem "The Tyger":

Tyger, Tyger burning bright in the jungle of
the night, did He smile his work to see? Did
He who made the lamb make thee? (p.346)

It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to look at the appropriateness of Eastlake's and Clancy's choice of this poem from Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul (1794). Some songs of innocence have a matched counterpart, or contrary, in the songs of experience. "The Tyger" of Experience is paired with "The Lamb" of Innocence. The pairing of opposites is suggested in "The Tyger" itself in line 20 of the poem which Eastlake includes here. In Blake's later writings, the "contrary states" that Eastlake alludes to become a dialectic of contraries according to which naive innocence must necessarily pass through and assimilate the opposing state of experience if it is to progress, by an act of the imagination, to the third state, comprehending but transcending both the others.

In the novel, Clancy's final wish indicates that he will achieve this transcendence. His wish is that Mike will tell the

whole truth about "what both sides did when Alpha was hit. The evidence is all there on Ridge Red Boy" (p.346). In "The Tyger", the tiger's "fearful symmetry" (lines 4, 24) refers to its terrifying, flaming, wrathful nature representing the darker side of the human soul (brought out in the novel by both the jungle and the war itself). Blake asks who "could", who "dare", "frame" the tiger's "fearful symmetry" (lines 4, 24). And Clancy's hope is that Mike will write of the jungle, tell of the battle, and that he will frame "Ridge Red Boy in all its fearful symmetry" (p.346). Clancy then realizes that if Mike does so, it will put him "out of business"; but this, Clancy sees, is necessary if "all the Alphas yet to come" are to be spared the experience of his own Company (p.346).

With this realization, Clancy attains the ultimate goal of the Hero-quest. He is unconcerned now about his function as a warrior: he has sacrificed himself and his function to the greater good. By relinquishing his need for public acclaim, his anxiety about the outcome of events that will bring him that acclaim, he has "died to his personal ego [and arisen] again established in the Self."⁴⁵ Clancy has truly become eternal, but not in the way he had first claimed himself to be. Then he had been attached to history; now he has transcended it.

More than this, though. To the military, Clancy is a tyrant who must be removed. He lost the battle on the Ridge, but this is a failure that belongs purely with the ephemeral world of phenomena, locked in a moment of time. More important to his achievement of

immortality is his own realization that he has "failed everyone utterly" and so has known "the towering darkness of [the jungle's] despair" as well as "concern and comradeship in the wild joy of life" (p.169). The tiger and the lamb have been assimilated and transcended. The assimilation involves his own destruction as a tyrant which is accomplished when he hopes that Mike will tell the story of the Ridge. As Campbell says of the Hero as Tyrant: "The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today."⁴⁶

Clancy does crucify himself. It would not be inappropriate at this point to recall the Heroic aspect of Clancy that is like Christ crucified. Clancy has been his own Hero and his own god. His masks have been torn off during his spiritual quest and in this sacrifice of himself he has sacrificed his god, which is himself. As Campbell says:

The adventure of the hero represents the moment in his life when he achieved illumination -- the nuclear moment when, while still alive, he found and opened the road to the⁴⁷ light beyond the dark walls of our living death.

In Campbell's view, the most eloquent symbol of the "thought-bewildering sublime paradox" of the discovery of the "God within, yet without" also is the crucifixion whereby the Hero becomes the means of his own dissolution. The symbol of this paradox is the "god crucified, the god offered, 'himself to himself.'"⁴⁸ Campbell quotes here from the dying song of the god Othin, the Germanic god of war, who penetrated the darkest recesses and "underwent for it the passion of a crucifixion."⁴⁹

The unification and transcendence of warring opposites is symbolically expressed in Clancy's physical death. He wants the fatally wounded North Vietnamese to "lie down in the bamboo bed and die beside him" (p.349)-- for all the world like the tiger and the lamb. Earlier, Clancy had ceased to differentiate between Friendlies and Unfriendlies: they were all people to him and so he had become ineffective in war (pp.321-2). Clancy's recognition of the common bonds of humanity is displayed in this lack of differentiation, which is repeated here with the rice-man. The "enemies" in life die together, hand in hand. What might appear as a sentimental cliché in this final image of Clancy is avoided because Clancy's gesture has overtones of the transcendence of opposites that leads to unification.

The Bamboo Bed helicopter

came in gently as death and quickly picked up Clancy and the peasant, and their hands were gripped together. The crew put their bodies on the Bamboo Bed leaving them with their hands together the way they found them together with their hands together because it seemed right. Exactly right. (p.349)

The novel's final scene is ambiguous. Mde Dieudonné, on hearing of Clancy's death, walks naked in the moonlight. She finds Clancy and the peasant and she too is picked up by the helicopter. The suggestion is that she is also dead but this scene is highly symbolic.

The narrative voice is the 'dead' Clancy's:

[Mde Dieudonné] is beautiful and she is here. All are here. The Bamboo Bed was making a final trip. That was nice. The war must be over. Over for me. And Mike, my friend Mike, caught up with me at last. At the last. The end. Mike does not have to remove me from command. I removed myself. Who do you blame for Red Boy? They? Clancy? All. Everyone. Clancy and all. We were all on Ridge Red Boy. Did He who made the lamb make thee? All. (pp.349-350)

This reiteration of the crucial themes in Clancy's . . . spiritual growth --removing (crucifying) himself, acknowledging a common responsibility for the Ridge battle, the unification of tiger and lamb -- precedes the trip into the void. The Hero who chooses not to return to society with his garnered wisdom remains in the state of transcendent bliss. The helicopter's disappearance into the monsoon is like a disappearance into the void, but the scene is open to many interpretations:

The Bamboo Bed was entering the monsoon. It got black-dark. Clancy tried to hold the Bamboo Bed together until it came out on the other side. It took everything he had left. When the Bamboo Bed came out the other side there was nothing left.

The copter soared up against the sun, aerial and light. The Vietnamese sun bore down with such a magnitude in the abiding Asian forest that the -- butterfly, the Bamboo Bed, the insect in the vastness, was for long seconds visible until it once again came into the long shadow of the monsoon and was forever lost, disappeared, eaten by tigers, enveloped in the gentle, tomblike Asian night. (p.350)

The phrase "there was nothing left" applies equally to Clancy's strength and to the expression of an apocalyptic ending. The heat of the sun is emphasized, as is man's miniscule size in comparison with the Asian jungle, yet the Bamboo Bed disappears into the Asian night -- symbolic perhaps of the darkness of eternity which Clancy as Hero has penetrated and compared to which he is an "insect in the vastness." Death is suggested by "tomblike" but the helicopter is not just lost forever, it has "disappeared," been "eaten by tigers" -- both are euphemisms, as already noted, for things that inexplicably vanish. If this passage is, as I argue, an intimation of the eternity into which Clancy has gone, these

euphemisms imply that it is only those who have no knowledge of eternity who would regard the disappearance as destruction, an example of man's futile endeavors. We cannot follow Clancy to the blissful goal of his personal quest; we have not seen eternity; we are still blinkered by the obscuring phenomena of the here and now; we have not penetrated the "tomblike" dark. But Clancy has.

This is the symbolic level, but the novel's final words belong to reality and to Mike. He has been entrusted to 'return' to society with the regenerative wisdom Clancy has learned but which he will not be able to transmit. Mike, like the Ancient Mariner or Taliesin, returns to tell the tale. The final words do tell the tale but not in the way one would expect:

Mike looked down past all the bodies, down to the peaceful and jewel-green and abiding jungle below. The assignation place. There was Hill 904. There was the villa. There was Ridge Red Boy. There was death -- she was our captain's bride. (p.350)

Mde Dieudonné has the blood of every country that has invaded Vietnam (p.309) suggesting perhaps that she symbolizes Vietnam and its history as Clancy does America: she is the "eternal whore" as Clancy is the eternal warrior (p.313). She is also Lady Death (p.333) and Clancy's bride (p.23). Mde Dieudonné and Clancy were bound to come together in Vietnam (p.313). The implication, of course, is that America's role in the Vietnam War has been determined by America's history -- just as the American defeat has been determined by America's view of its own history -- a view, as we have seen in Clancy as the representation of American heroes, that is false and self-indulgent. Only Clancy recognizes this.

In relation to mythological patterns, the novel's final words, quoted above, indicate that such an illumination is Clancy's alone. After the Hero's physical death, which usually follows quickly on his enlightenment, there is little left for those who remain behind because,

beyond life, these heroes are beyond the myth also. Neither do they treat of it anymore, nor can the - myth properly treat of them. Their legends are rehearsed, but the pious sentiments and lessons of the biographies are necessarily inadequate; little better than bathos... The moment the spirit passes to the hidden, silence alone remains.

Just as the myths about Clancy in his lifetime were inadequate to present the whole man, so, after death when his spirit has passed into the "hidden", the monsoon, the telling of his tale will also be inadequate. Mike names the places which to us, having read the novel, mean so much, but all he can do is name them: he cannot convey their significance. He can tell of death but not of what Clancy has learned about himself and his country in Vietnam.

IV

Illusion

Silence alone remains as far as the Hero is concerned. Clancy attains his spiritual immortality, but what of the other characters who, like the reader, remain on this side of the obscuring veil? Eastlake's answer is that they live in a world of illusion. At one point Appelfinger says:

There are many paths to heaven even if there is no heaven....And on the path you have chosen I do not believe there is any turning back. (p.213)

Essentially, Appelfinger's view is pessimistic: there is no final goal so choose whatever path you like; it will lead nowhere but you have to follow something. There is an important difference, though, between the kind of path Clancy chooses before his jungle meditation and those of the other characters. Clancy's "illusion" is not just a way of life adopted for the sake of getting through the war; it is a way of being. He creates his own personality and maintains it through childhood into adulthood. His Heroic masks are delusions about himself rather than an illusion in a world of no objective reality.

Most of the novel's minor characters' illusions cannot withstand the bombardments of reality, or, rather, circumstances force them to reconsider rigidly-held views. Sergeant Pike, for example, was saved by a white man and this act promoted the camaraderie typical of soldiers. The white man, though, had "ruined the game....There was not a God damn white guy [now] who was not a human being [to Pike]. Whitey had become people" (p.59). Pike wants to surrender his group of white men to the Viet Cong: he wants to say "Do with them what you will. I wash my hands" (p.59). But he cannot play the role of a black Pilate and, in the end, he dies saving the lives of five white men (pp.67-8).

Pike's political and moral choices were simple in the Detroit race riots, but in Vietnam there is the same "bond of

suffering" amongst the soldiers as there had been uniting black "soul brothers" in the States (p.64). In Vietnam, his abstract concept labelled "Whitey" is inadequate. The greater insight he has gained into his bond with humanity -- not just black humanity-- leads to his death. On a much smaller scale than Clancy, Pike sacrifices himself.

Bethany Quinn and Peter Scott, for all that they are caricatures of the 1960s hippies, deserve to be taken seriously. Bethany's badge reads "I have a dream." Awaiting her own certain death in the jungle she does not change "have" to "had." Her reason is that she "will make it out" of her present situation "because they can only kill us" (p.344). Physical death means nothing to Bethany and her dream of peace. As with Martin Luther King's familiar "I have a dream," the fulfilment of the dream of universal peace is not dependent upon his or her own continued existence.

Bethany's dream is simple and is steadfastly maintained, but her actions to inculcate the idea of peace are limited to distributing flowers. Appelfinger, on the other hand, equally determined to spread peace, has a much more active plan for mankind: moral evolution. Not inappropriately, the expounder of this theory is the radioman. Appelfinger is responsible for relaying information about the progress of any particular action Alpha is involved in. Beidler describes a radioman's job thus:

Sitrep. Anyone who went to Vietnam or has had any contact with the military services will recognize the term. Situation Report: a current analysis of a given operation or endeavor. The emphasis is on fluidity, ongoing development, continuing evolution. It proved to be an especially apt expression with regard to the experience of Vietnam: something always

going on, something in constant process with little promise or even prospect of significant conclusion. It is noteworthy, for instance, that most American veterans of Vietnam would find two related expressions -- "before-action report" and "after-action report"-- decidedly less familiar. They were things that they almost never heard except perhaps at the very upper levels of command, where the possibility of a certain abstraction, a sense that things could have a beginning, a middle, and an end was, if nothing else, an encouraging thought.

For most Americans in Vietnam, however, nothing in the war, it seemed, ever really began for any particular reason, and nothing in the war ever really ended, at least⁵¹ as it concerned those still living and unwounded.

The key words are "fluidity" and "continuing evolution." In Appelfinger's view, everything is in flux, with no beginning or end and so there is a need for continual adaptation.

Circumstances will not always permit Appelfinger to maintain his theory but this does not mean that it must be abandoned. In many ways, Appelfinger undergoes the trials of the Mythic Hero but, unlike Clancy's purely spiritual ordeal, Appelfinger's is presented in physical action. For example, after taking Clancy from the Ridge, he throws the radio into the river and begins "to live" (p.157). He wants to run from the war and so leaves behind him his emblem of the war. However, Clancy is his friend and he wants to help him and this means re-entering the war. He returns to the river for the gun he dropped when he disposed of the radio, but then begins to run:

He ran and he ran and he ran. He was not running toward anything but away from something so the idea was not to run in any particular direction but the idea was to keep going, to keep moving, to run and run and run past all recovering past all thinking. ...The important thing is you got to keep running, running, running. To run until you begin to run in

circles, smaller, smaller, smaller circles until
 you lean against the AK 47 and then drop. All
 fall down. To lie with the dead. (pp.161-2)

As with Janine and Knightsbridge who frantically try to dodge fire
 in the Bamboo Bed, however, "there is something in motion that is
 confused with life, that becomes ignorance of death" (p.53).

To stand still, in Appelfinger's opinion, means certain
 death and he convinces himself that

death is the easy way out. It takes courage to
 live. Death is the final refuge of the coward.
 Only the brave flee. Only the coward stands. (p.161)

There is more than a little self-justification in these thoughts.
 They contradict Clancy's idea that **not to** make a stand is cowardice
 and so, for quite different reasons, both men conclude that the
 only thing to do in this **topsy-turvy** war is to keep moving even
 when such movement is harried and desperate.

However, Appelfinger, stumbling upon Bethany and Peter,
 re-enters the war by retrieving the radio and joining the search
 for Clancy (p.164). In so doing he puts himself in a position where
 he may remove his "ignorance of death" and thus can fully embrace
 life which necessarily includes death. He will also be able to
 advocate his theory of evolution, though his theory is severely
 tried.

His theory is easily maintained while it remains untested
 but, caught in a fire-fight, he has to argue his theory with himself.
 An evolutionist believes "in everybody being happy so that the race
 can survive" and so Appelfinger should stop shooting back at the Viet
 Cong, who have as much right to survive as he does (p.213). In a

fight, though, this takes evolution too far; but, having committed himself to this theory, this path, there is no turning back (p.213). To maintain his theory, he should stop firing but does not because then he would die. He believes that, untampered with, evolution works to ensure human survival but when Appelfinger himself is the particular example of humanity at stake, he not unnaturally wants to tamper with the theory. He therefore goes against his idea that

there is only one true evolution, there cannot be different kinds of evolution to suit each person. You either have evolution and recognize the truth or you have no evolution at all. (pp.213-4)

He removes himself from his philosophical predicament by arguing that the rules of war demand that he return fire and so the problem really is to find a substitute for war and thus avoid a repetition of his dilemma (p.225).

Despite the obvious limitations of his theory in actual war, Appelfinger clings to it as the only way to improve humanity's lot. A moral evolution has to be started, Appelfinger believes, because "it's the only weapon we've got....The only tool man ever discovered....everything else is junk" (pp.341-2). Appelfinger is reluctant to die in the fire-fight, but his very return to the world of war means that he has accepted the possibility of his own death which, previously, he had fled. Maintaining his theory to the end, he dies; but in his death is heroism as Eastlake defines it and Mythic Heroism too.

Everyone has a different way of ordering his or her world. Sergeant Pike's enlightenment, Bethany's unshakeable faith in her

dream, and Appelfinger's shakeable but finally maintained theory illustrate some responses to the world of war in which they live. Their beliefs are illusions in the sense that these are ways they choose to punctuate reality and, finally, they become the novel's heroes. Earlier it has been said that

without war man doesn't stand a chance in this modern world. There is nothing to do. War is the opportunity for all sons of bitches to become heroes. War is the last great hope of the incompetent to order the unwilling to attempt the impossible. (p.50)

While Appelfinger and the rest await certain death in the jungle, they are all described as

the incompetent [who] had arrived to save the inept. The improbable to save the impossible. They were all the people in any war who will always find an indefensible position to defend. When they ran they should have been standing and when they stood they should have run. (p.338)

As far as their own physical safety is concerned they have done all the wrong things but, morally, they have made the right choices.

Clancy says that those who fight and die are heroes; Appelfinger says that those who fight and die are cowards. But he also says that

if you're lost in this jungle...I don't think either standing or running does any good. I think you end up right where you are no matter what you do, and where you are is where you die. (p.338)

Even Colonel Yvor, war-monger supreme, privately acknowledges the futility of action in the Vietnamese jungle (pp.341-2). Yvor articulates what all the people in the jungle do in order to cope with the war. Throughout the novel, his arms are in a cast and no

one is quite sure whether or not he actually has arms. At one point his pilot, knowing that Yvor does not have the use of his arms, sees him do something that implies that he does. Yvor explains the deceptive appearance with "we assume hands...then we extrapolate from an illusion" (p.180).

This, in essence, is what all the characters do: they assume a situation or cause and the illusion they extrapolate from it becomes their way of ordering their world and it prompts their actions. In Vico's sense, they all structure their worlds mythically: some, like Clancy, Appelfinger and Pike have had to readjust their world views, and in so doing have each become Heroes -- in the mythological sense as Campbell defines it or in Eastlake's sense. They each attain a degree of the Hero's enlightenment and each puts himself in a position of danger in order to save others.

The futility that Eastlake presents gives a sense of pessimism-- but not uncompromisingly. There is futility only because there is no final answer. Like the war itself, the characters' ways of dealing with the war have no beginning or end because there are no hard distinction about the purpose or method of the war and how they cope with it. Beidler quotes Pinter on the common wish that the "central problem in art and life" is the wish for final resolution. Pinter says that the wish is understandable but cannot always be satisfied because there are no hard distinctions

between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what false. The thing is not necessarily true or false. It can be both true and false.⁵²

As Beidler goes on to say, the truth of Eastlake's vision of the war is "art-truth. It is something that in its fashion just may be truer...than facts themselves can ever be."⁵³ The same is true of the characters' world views: their ways of coping contain an "art-truth" which is neither true or false. The only ones who achieve a resolution are Clancy in his jungle meditation and subsequent Heroism, and Appelfinger and Pike, who readjust their rigidly held views and so reach some eternally valid enlightenment.

Conclusion

The presentation of Eastlake's "art-truth" about the war and the "truth" that Clancy, Appelfinger and Pike attain takes a circuitary route. Just as the characters have to modify their original stances so too does Eastlake present modifications and refinements of the images of martial heroism and Mythic Heroism. He minutely dissects his culture's assumptions about the hero/Hero and shows the weaknesses resulting from the trivialization of all that heroism/Heroism mean -- a trivialization that has come from over-familiarity with modern, emasculated versions. But he does also show some of his characters achieving a full awareness of themselves and specifically of their culturally determined ideas on war, racism and heroism/Heroism.

Appelfinger's theory is one that is found amongst many of the anti-war poets of the 1960s. Their assumption, like Appelfinger's, is that human nature can and must change because "if we regard war as being inevitably implied by human character, we shall never be

rid of it."⁵⁴ Appelfinger's theory is tested in practice and found wanting, but Eastlake presents it as one way of creating enlightenment en masse. But it is with Clancy and his Heroic personal enlightenment that the final word belongs. Eastlake has debunked the pseudo-mythic image of Clancy and America which, it is implied, led to the disastrous war in Vietnam. He exploits the pattern of the Mythic Hero's quest to reveal that the concept of the Hero's enlightenment remains not only valid but necessary too if a repetition of the Vietnam War is to be avoided.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (California: University Press, 1977), p.62.

²Hawkes, p.62.

³Hawkes, p.72.

⁴Hawkes, p.32.

⁵William Eastlake, The Bamboo Bed (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp.206-208. Textual references are to this edition.

⁶Giambattista Vico, The New Science, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch from the third edition (1744), (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company Ltd, 1961), pp.5-6.

⁷Vico, p.7.

⁸Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 2nd ed. (1949; rpt. Princeton: University Press, 1973), p.337.

⁹Julian Smith, Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam (New York: Scribner, 1975). This work gives a detailed account of the role of the movies in portraying modern soldiers and wars.

¹⁰Robert Jay Lifton, Home From the War: Vietnam Veterans Neither Victims nor Executioners (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), pp. 223, 238, 245.

¹¹Lifton, p.29.

¹²Lifton, p.29.

¹³Lifton, p.30.

¹⁴Donald B. Gibson, The Fiction of Stephen Crane (Southern Illinois: University Press, 1968), p.92.

¹⁵Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p.337.

¹⁶Lifton, pp.40-41.

¹⁷Smith, pp.126-136.

¹⁸Lifton, p.223.

¹⁹Lifton, p.223.

²⁰Philip D. Beidler, American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (Georgia: University Press, 1982), p.68.

²¹Beidler, p.11.

²²Beidler, p.10.

²³Beidler, p.11.

²⁴Beidler, p.11.

²⁵Beidler, p.12.

²⁶Beidler, p.53.

²⁷Bill Butler, The Myth of the Hero (London: Rider and Co., 1969), pp.6-10.

²⁸John Steadman, Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition (California: University Press, 1972), p.6.

²⁹Campbell, p.123.

³⁰Campbell, p.207.

³¹Campbell, p.190.

³²Campbell, p.189.

³³Campbell, p.238.

³⁴Campbell, p.260.

³⁵Campbell, p.190.

³⁶Campbell, p.191.

³⁷Campbell, p.191.

³⁸Campbell, p.193.

³⁹The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales, translated, edited and introduced by Patrick K. Ford (Berkley: University Press, 1977), pp.172-173.

⁴⁰David Jones, In Parenthesis (1937; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.94.

⁴¹Campbell, p.243.

⁴²Campbell, p.239.

⁴³Campbell, p.356.

⁴⁴Campbell, p.238.

⁴⁵Campbell, p.243.

⁴⁶Campbell, p.353.

⁴⁷Campbell, p.259.

⁴⁸Campbell, p.260.

⁴⁹Campbell, p.191.

⁵⁰Campbell, p.355.

⁵¹Beidler, p.3.

⁵²Beidler, p.51.

⁵³Beidler, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁴James Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War (Kansas: University Press, 1974), p.251.

CHAPTER IV

The Fool and the Underworld: O'Brien's Going After Cacciato

Like the fool, the hero may have queer ideas (many heroes were once considered fools); [but] when the larger form of his action emerges to view, it is often clear that he has redeemed some part of chaos and some part of his own folly. That folly is negatively the possibility that he will foolishly fail in his role as hero. But positively it consists of qualities essential to his heroic purpose, such as his openness to the queer and unforeseen and his mockery of conventional opinions when they are shortsighted. He redeems his folly by finding the right relationship to it, by allowing it expression without letting it possess him completely.

William Willeford,
The Fool and His Scepter (p.166)

"Soldiers are dreamers", the epigraph to Tim O'Brien's novel, Going After Cacciato,¹ appropriately captures the thematic and structural qualities of this novel. O'Brien uses memory and fantasy to show that the real and the unreal are not only without hard distinctions, as Pinter says, but they can be interchangeable. In this novel, the protagonist, Paul Berlin, is led not so much to a readjustment of his views, as some of Eastlake's characters are, as to a focussing of them. O'Brien has said that Going After Cacciato is not so much a war book as a "long decision."² One of Berlin's difficulties in making that decision is that the facts of any given situation are one thing while the interpretation of them may be another. As Seidler says in relation to O'Brien's consideration of this discrepancy,

the task of the Vietnam writer...is to recognize the radicalness of this disparity yet in the same moment to realize that there may be a lens of consciousness, so to speak, through which it may be made to appear at least provisionally resolved. Somehow, the job will be putting "the facts in the right framework" [227], one in which the outlines of the two have become congruent and seemingly indistinguishable.³

Through the "lens of consciousness" which fuses memory and fantasy, O'Brien, like Eastlake, creates an "art-truth" about the war. By this fusion, the novel's "landscape of consciousness" is filled out into "larger configurations" than one would expect from the facts alone when they are baldly stated.⁴ The distinctions

between life and art, memory and fantasy, are dissolved; yet, paradoxically, it is this dissolution that then enables Berlin to focus his own thoughts. O' Brien says that

the central theme of the novel has to do with how we use our imaginations to deal with situations around us, not just to cope with them psychologically but, more importantly,⁵ to deal with them philosophically and morally.

Berlin would like to follow Cacciato's example and desert the war but he would also like to be unafraid and fight well. He believes he lacks courage, and he fears the war and the death it brings. More than this, though, he fears being thought a coward and a deserter; he fears the tunnels, the enemy, and losing control of himself. His ultimate fear is of death and the random manner in which it strikes. He wants order, he wants predictability, he wants self-control and he wants to understand death.

Assisting him in his "long decision" are several characters. In the fantasy sequences, these characters become spokesmen for the opposing tensions within Berlin's own personality. Cacciato's function in the general context of the fantasy has much in common with the role of the archetypal Fool, "who usually stands apart from the main action...having a tendency not to focus but to dissolve events."⁶ That dissolution having occurred, Berlin then undergoes the kinds of experiences familiar to us in Greek myths of journeys into the realm of Hades. Berlin's journey through the underworld symbolizes his exploration of his own psyche. The mythological symbolism and Berlin's alter egos are the subjects of my second section. First, however, I discuss the parallels between

'the Fool show' and the fantasy that provide the context within which we can see the significance of the other guides, the alter egos, whose contending points of view Berlin must resolve.

I

The Fool

The interleaving, and final fusion, of memory and fantasy in the novel reflect other fusions. Berlin's conscious and unconscious minds are inter-related, as are order and disorder, life and death. Berlin has a greater awareness of the world of memory, consciousness, order, and life than he does of their opposites until he enters the fantasy world. The underworld perspective derived from the fantasy helps him achieve that totality of vision he requires. The novel's world as a whole has much in common with the world of the archetypal Fool, which has no ordinary sequential chronology.

The structure of the novel itself reflects the unordered fluidity of the Fool's world. For example, the novel begins and ends in October 1968 (p.25) with Cacciato's flight from Vietnam. It is not until the second Observation Post chapter, however, that the reader learns that the Cacciato incident is a memory. The rest of the novel takes place within this framing device. Berlin's lone night-watch occurs in late November (p.48), and it is from this vantage point that he relates the Cacciato story, creates the fantasy, and recalls the events since his arrival in Vietnam in June 1968 (p.38). The novel, therefore, begins and ends in medias res.

The fantasy proceeds chronologically but Berlin's reminiscences do not because he has difficulty remembering the order of events. Moreover, the narrative double-focus of memory and fantasy mirrors his difficulty because, often, elements or images from the fantasy **prompt his memory and whatever has been suggested** is the next story, or part of a story, that is recalled. Reality's intrusion in his fantasy in this way sets in motion streams of . associations that make his fantasy more than just a fantasy. The associations take Berlin in a direction of their own that often pays little heed to his consciously willed thoughts. He is led into unexpected and disturbing situations as if he were in fact dreaming in his sleep rather than fantasy-spinning during his night vigil.

Berlin, at the Post, is concerned above all with tracing the possibilities of Cacciato leading the squad to Paris. Recalling the situation in the border hills where Cacciato had gone and they, in reality, could not follow, Berlin wonders what might happen if they did follow:

He wondered, not for the first time, about the immense powers of his own imagination. A truly awesome notion. Not a dream, an idea. An idea to develop, to tinker with and build and sustain, to draw out as an artist draws out his visions. (pp.27-8)

That night, during his watch, Berlin has time to think and time to consider possibilities. He asks

had it ended there on Cacciato's grassy hill, flares coloring the morning sky? Had it ended in tragedy? Had it ended with a jerking, shaking feeling -- noise and confusion? Or had it ended farther along the trail west?..... What part was fact and what

part was extension of fact? And how were the facts separated from possibilities? What had really happened and what merely might have happened? How did it end?

The trick...was to think through it carefully. ...look for motives, search out the place where fact ended and imagination took over. Ask the important questions. Why had Cacciato left the war? Was it courage or ignorance, or both? Was it even possible to combine courage and ignorance? How much of what happened, or might have happened, was Cacciato's doing and how much was the product of the biles....

No, it wasn't dreaming. It was a way of asking questions. What became of Cacciato? Where did he go, and why? What were his motives, or did he have motives, and did motives matter? What tricks had he used to keep going? How had he eluded them? How did he slip away into deep jungle, and how, through jungle, had they continued the chase? What happened, and what might have happened. (pp.28-29, 30)

Berlin's tinkering with possibilities is akin to the kind of thing the archetypal Fool does. William Willeford writes that

much of the Fool show is occupied with what might be called possibilities -- with what, on the one hand, might be but, on the other, is not, because, for one reason or another, it cannot be.

Willeford goes on to say that the Fool's concern with possibilities and what can be made of them has much in common with the non-Fool activity of fantasy-spinning. Someone engaged in a conscious task often has his concentration interrupted by daydreams, fleeting images, irrelevant thoughts and so on; but, Willeford argues, these are not all necessarily idle because

fantasy may be highly relevant to the conscious task. ... Fantasy may proceed in such a way that it is detached but not divorced from a practical interest in its products, as we ask ourselves whether or not they might be given form, whether they are realizable, and, if so, whether or not they are worth realizing.

Berlin's fantasy arises immediately from his need to pass time, to detach himself from the war for a few hours; but the form of the fantasy as escape addresses a greater, more pervasive, need in him. In the passage from the novel quoted above (pp.28-9,30), we see Berlin asking questions of the same tenor as Willeford ascribes to the fantasy process and which O'Brien himself has described:⁹ namely, in Berlin's case, what are the reasons for deserting?

Initially, Berlin regards Cacciato's journey and their pursuit of him as impossible. As his imagination works on it, however, he discovers that practical concerns of money, passports, food and the like are "trivial, beside the point." Means could be found by working, forging, stealing, lying: in fact there are

a million possibilities....Means could always be found. If pressed he could make up solutions -- good, convincing solutions. But his imagination worked faster than that. Speed, momentum....Since answers were possible, his imagination went racing toward more important matters: Cacciato, the feel of the journey, what was seen along the way, what was learned, colors and motion and people and finally Paris. It could be done. Wasn't that the critical point? It could truly be done. (p.125)

With these thoughts, Berlin dismisses any cynics who might be sceptical of his war story of Cacciato's journey. Even before this point in the novel, Berlin hopes that Cacciato succeeds (p.13). Willeford writes that, when we bring hope to our daydreams,

we enter an area between reality and fantasy and may find that we share it with the Fool. His play with the possibilities revealed by fantasy is less bound to the structure of what is than is the non-Fool's play with them. And the Fool may have powers that we lack and that will enable him to triumph over the impossibilities created by his fantasy in its divergence from reality or in its conflict with it.¹⁰

Berlin is in this area between reality and fantasy at the Observation Post. In fact, he imagines stepping into the safe world of fantasy while at the border between Vietnam and Laos when the squad is still searching for Cacciato. The border between reality and fantasy, between what is normal and what is not, possible and impossible, is the Fool's natural domain and is harmonious with his dual and ambiguous nature. It is appropriate, therefore, that Berlin should imagine entering such a no-man's land when he himself is at a border. He finds himself pretending

that before long the war would reach a climax beyond which everything else would seem bland and commonplace. A point at which he could stop being afraid....He pretended he had crossed that threshold. (p.25)

When Berlin pretends that he has crossed the threshold into an area where he can stop being afraid, the fantasy of doing just that is about to begin. His fantasy moves him into the Fool's no-man's land; but in many ways Berlin has been in just such indeterminate areas before. For example, on first arriving in Vietnam he did not know geographically where he was and had had to ask his father to consult an atlas to tell him (p.40). Berlin was also in a dreamy state before he arrived. When he was drafted he was not fully aware of what he was doing. He had seen the war on television (pp.255-6) and so the countryside was familiar to him but he "never thought of it as real" (p.228). He had drifted out of college, through basic training and on to Vietnam without having any clear sense of deciding to do anything or be anywhere.

Even the actual fighting of the war is filled with that

lack of clear knowledge that typifies Berlin's actions. Philip Caputo has described the moral no-man's land in which he fought the war, and the same ambiguities and ignorance exist for Berlin. O'Brien writes of all the soldiers that "they fought the war, but took no sides," and that

they did not know even the simple things: a sense of victory, or satisfaction, or necessary sacrifice. They did not know the feeling of taking a place and keeping it, securing a village and then raising the flag and calling it a victory. No sense of order or momentum. No front, no rear, no trenches laid out in neat parallels. No Patton rushing for the Rhine, no beachheads to storm and win and hold for the duration. They did not have targets. They did not have a cause. They did not know if it was a war of ideology or economics or hegemony or spite. On a given day, they did not know where they were in Quang Ngai, or how they might influence larger outcomes. They did not know the names of most villages. They did not know which villages were critical. They did not know strategies. They did not know the terms of the war, its architecture, the rules of fair play. When they took prisoners, which was rare, they did not know the questions to ask, whether to release a suspect or beat him up. They did not know how to feel. Whether, when seeing a dead Vietnamese, to be happy or sad or relieved; whether, in times of quiet, to be apprehensive or content; whether to engage the enemy or elude him. They did not know how to feel when they saw villages burning. Revenge? Loss? Peace of mind or anguish? They did not know. They knew the old myths about Quang Ngai -- tales passed down from old-timer to newcomer -- but they did not know which stories to believe. Magic, mystery, ghosts and incense, whispers in the dark, strange tongues and strange smells, uncertainties never articulated in war stories, emotion squandered on ignorance. They did not know good from evil. (pp.272-273).

Berlin is also in a kind of no-man's land between the primitive country in Vietnam and the civilized country from which he comes. He is not fully in the world of war in Vietnam and he spends most of his time fantasizing to ensure that he never feels that he is. But he is not in his native environment either. Willeford writes that

the notion of being completely in the world and not separated by the human condition with its burden of culture is as archetypal as is the notion of being radically divided from the world. This condition of being in the natural world -- and out of culture -- is often conceived as primitive, and the Fool is one^{11*} of the recurrent figures in which it is expressed.

The sense of alienation from Vietnam and from the world he has known is common to other protagonists in this war's literature. Berlin's sense of alienation is a two-fold phenomenon. Like Caputo's A Rumor of War and Eastlake's The Bamboo Bed, this novel presents the war and the countryside as the causes of the soldiers' sense of alienation. However, civilization in Going After Cacciato -- Mandalay, Dehli, Tehran and Paris -- provokes the same feeling. Just as Argue in Guare's Muzeeka and David in Rabe's Sticks and Bones are misfits in civilized

*Interestingly, Willeford cites Conrad's Heart of Darkness as an example. John W. Canario argues that the Russian harlequin, who introduces Marlow to Kurtz and tells Marlow of Kurtz's qualities, is so slightly exposed to civilization's influences that he approaches the behaviour of the Fool. He also has the inner strength of a man uncorrupted by greed and vanity to act humanely and responsibly even when he is not externally compelled to do so. Kurtz, however, for all his education and initial idealism succumbs to greed and vanity because those external restraints and inner moral strength are absent. Each of these men represents to Marlow different kinds of darkness: the darkness of ignorance represented by the primeval environment, and the darkness of undisciplined greed represented by Kurtz. Moreover, the Russian and Kurtz "exemplify contrasting stages of human development almost beyond the limits of vulnerability to the forces of evil." This is true of Kurtz because nothing can deepen his "horror"; it is true of the Russian because of his innate goodness. Marlow says that fools and saints are impervious to the powers of evil. The Fool is impervious because he is detached from the world of good and evil: he may induce chaos but it is for the final purpose of amelioration.

John W. Canario, "The Harlequin" in Studies in Short Fiction, IV (1967), pp. 225-233.

environments, so too Berlin does not safely and securely belong, or find refuge, in the cities he visits. Cacciato leads him from the primitive jungle of Vietnam to the unfamiliar Eastern civilizations *and* to the familiar Western civilizations but these, it transpires, are all just as inhospitable as Vietnam. Berlin's sense of alienation is therefore all the more acute because he expects security and a sense of belonging in these civilized cities.

Such, then, is the general ambiguous nature of the border world of the Fool in this novel. Reality and Berlin's imagination co-create the border land between civilization and the primitive, consciousness and the world of fantasy, in which the main Fool, Cacciato, acts out his Fool show. While the fantasy has several parallels with the Fool's world, it also shares some qualities with dreams. Its dream quality, like its Fool's quality, allows Berlin to surmount the laws of probability and logic that would interfere with the fantasy's progress. Moreover, just as there can be surrogates in a dream for the dreamer himself, so too are there surrogates in the fantasy. For example, the two deserters Berlin meets have qualities that he would like to have; but, more importantly, they suffer the consequences of desertion as if in the stead of Berlin himself.

The fantasy's dream quality is also apparent in the way that events and images from Berlin's waking life appear in the fantasy, turning it into a nightmare. These troubling intrusive images force Berlin to delve into his own psyche in the attempt to explain to himself why the fantasy does not proceed happily. He asks questions

of himself in the fantasy, in his memories, and at the Post. There is, thus, both a conscious exploration of the issues that trouble him and an unconscious exploration, expressed in the fantasy's symbolism, of those same issues.

The important symbols have to do with labyrinths, the underworld of Hades and the guide to the underworld, the Fool. The symbolism expresses two elements of the novel. First, the underworld symbolizes Berlin's own psyche, and, second, it provides him with the much-needed alternative perspective. His odyssey through his own past and his own psyche produces the nightmarish quality of the fantasy,* and he views the continuation of the inner quest with trepidation. As Jung writes of this kind of fear in relation to the inner quest,

the dread and resistance which every natural human being experiences when it comes to delving too deeply into himself ¹²is, at bottom, the fear of the journey to Hades.

Jung's words encapsulate Berlin's experience. The "journey to Hades" is an archetypal metaphor for a person's confrontation with the chaos and disorder, in the most general sense, that threaten the sense of order enjoyed in his everyday life. To delve into oneself, to journey to Hades, is to admit disquieting thoughts and realizations into a relatively calm state of mind. Usually such thoughts only intrude when the vigilant conscious mind is at rest: that is, when the unconscious mind is free to give play to latent thoughts in the form of dreams. Freud's belief was that the analysis of dreams would reveal

* That same odyssey through personal memory and the psyche is present too in Kopit's Indians, where Buffalo Bill endures his nightmare in the garish rodeo-ring.

the repressed sexual thoughts of the dreamer; Jung's belief was that dreams reveal, in archetypal images, the complexes of the dreamer. Both schools of thought brought dreams into the 'light of day' to gain more knowledge of things pertaining to the dreamer's day-time, conscious waking life.

Drawing on much of Freud's and Jung's work, James Hillman offers not so much a different approach to dream analysis as an extension of it. Hillman argues that dream analysis should view many dreams "in relation with soul and soul with death."¹³ The dream material is not brought into relation with day-time events as a means of explaining them; the dream is interpreted within the context of the unconscious, night-time world of death and soul that has little to do with living in the day-time world. What Hillman means by "soul" and "death" merits some explanation.

Soul, he says, is not a state of being as spirit is: it is a process. The more one delves into oneself to discover what soul is, the more soul is made because the process of trying to discover soul is itself the activity soul, and thus soul increases.¹⁴ Soul is something that is hidden: it is the invisible connection between what is human and what is 'other-than-human' in the sense of the supernatural, Fate, God, or any force that shapes one's life. To search for that "invisible connection" and so "arrive at the basic structure of things we must go into their darkness."¹⁵ The "basic structure of things" includes a knowledge of death, which, to the conscious mind, is the epitome of chaos and disorder. The "darkness" is, in psychological terms, the unconscious: mythologically, it is Hades.

The basic desire to understand this "invisible connection" shows itself in the dissolving and disintegrating processes that occur when someone analyses things by taking them apart -- as Berlin does in his memory of his friends' deaths. Freud called this dissolving process the death drive, and Plato presented it as the desire for Hades.¹⁶ Neither is a wish on the part of the dreamer for the physical death of his body, of course; rather, death dreams, in which the dissolving occurs, are initiatory and prepare the psyche for death.

Hillman's view is that since dreams originate in the unconscious mind, with its store of images from the collective unconscious, they should be left there to do their job of preparing the psyche for death. Death is anathema to the conscious mind but the conscious mind is only one part of the entire psyche. Hillman keeps death images within the unconscious realm to avoid using them as a means of interpreting daily, waking life. This does not exclude the necessity of bringing unconscious images into relation with the conscious mind because the two have to be brought together to create the total perspective required by the psyche. In Berlin's case, the dream quality of his semi-consciously created artifact, the fantasy, provides knowledge that balances and informs what he learns from his memories.

The symbolic expression of the underworld in his fantasy reveals the manner in which Berlin approaches a totality of vision, and this is discussed later. The specific role of the Fool as guide to the underworld perspective merits some close consideration because, in the novel, O'Brien has recreated an archetypal mythological figure.

Willeford writes that the Fool's function is to

add disorder to order and so make possible a whole;
to render possible within the fixed bounds of what
is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted.¹⁷

This, of course, is exactly what happens in Going After Cacciato.

Cacciato, the Fool, adds disorder to order by deserting and luring the squad into following him. Berlin, at the Post, begins his fantasy of what is not permitted by working out the possibilities of escape. During the fantasy itself, disorder is repeatedly added to order, and that which is not normally permitted becomes possible.

In the fantasy and in reality, Cacciato juggles impossibilities, ambiguities and illogicalities. As the overall guide, he leads Berlin into situations where the other guides show him one of the many possible perspectives on the war. Cacciato himself, however, seldom appears as an actor in the fantasy or the reminiscences. Yet, because Berlin is so preoccupied with the enigmatic Cacciato, he is felt as an omniscient presence and driving force in the novel. Unlike the other guides -- Doc Peret, Lieutenant Corson, Captain Rhallon in Tehran, Li Van Hgoc in the tunnels, or Sarkin Aung Wan, the Indochinese girl with whom Berlin falls in love en route to Paris -- Cacciato never talks to Berlin about war, desertion or what Berlin perceives as his own failings. The words he speaks are few, but in his appearance, his actions and the context within which he performs them, his elusiveness and his function as guide, we can trace the parallels between Cacciato and the Fool.

The Fool has a long history as a literary type, an even longer one as a character in folk tradition, and he is recognized

by modern psychologists as an important psychical figure.* The Fool's function in each of these areas is essentially the same, though his manifestation has varied somewhat. Modern circus clowns are the most recently evolved domesticated examples of what was once an important cultural figure. The clown's act now is completely divorced from the religious purposes which invested his forebears' performance in life-cycle ceremonies of fertility and death rituals. The clown's pratfalls, tricks and funny costumes now have a charm of their own, but his act still plays with ambiguities, illogicalities and the violation of the norm just as his ancestors' did.

Willeford writes that Fools are not created from tradition but that the figure appears "spontaneously afresh" as the society needs it. The basic assumption is that the original state of the world is chaos. Society and culture are the result of the imposition of order upon that chaos, and the maintenance of that order is a continuous struggle. The Fool belongs in the borderland between order and chaos. When he appears "spontaneously afresh" in that ordered society, it is to bring chaos with him because order has become stagnant and therefore meaningless. By disrupting the prevailing, but stale, sense of order, he instigates change and hence the process of

* David McClelland, for example, writes about the Fool as a guide to death, and he makes the same points as do Willeford and Hillman about the derivation of the harlequin figure. McClelland's article is concerned with the psychological connections dying women make between death and the harlequin -- particularly the harlequin as a lover who enters their dreams to escort them to death. See "The Harlequin Complex" in The Study of Lives edited by Robert W. White (New York: Atherton Press, 1963), pp.94-119.

revitalization -- just as the Hero does. Because the Fool is outside the normal rules of society, he also often "gives symbolic expression to the problems of human individuality in its relation both to rational norms and to what exceeds them."¹⁸

Cacciato is such a figure. In Berlin's memory of him, Cacciato violates the normal rules of the military world: he whistles during ambushes (p.214), he fishes in a rain-filled bomb crater (pp. 238-242), and, of course, he deserts. Berlin wants a rational, simple, cause-and-effect order in the world he inhabits. He also wants the discovery of his own courage to take that form of cause and effect. As he says in the tunnel, if he can untangle his own internal "circuitry," his courage will automatically be released (p.81). His difficulty is in discovering whether or not the "circuitry" exists, or, in Doc Peret's terms, if there is any materiel to order. Cacciato's actions in the fantasy and in reality show Berlin that there is no simple cause-and-effect order to anything. Cacciato constantly disrupts Berlin's simplistic views and, never letting him rest complacently, nudges Berlin towards the realization that complexities exist.

Cacciato's dress and features express externally his likeness to the Fool. It is a likeness that is also evident in modern clowns, who maintain the symbols of their forebears even though they are now emptied of their original meaning. For example, there are essentially two kinds of clowns. One is mute, has a white face and the symmetrically accurate costume of the harlequin. The patchwork pattern, which is chaotic, has been made harmoniously ordered -- symbolizing the emergence of order from chaos. His white face is the

remnant of the death-mask from the time in French Medieval folklore when the harlequin was called herleking (a form of Wodan, god of war) and had associations with the devil who leads the dead through the night skies.¹⁹

The other kind of clown has a painted face of some kind and ill-fitting, ragged or baggy clothes which disguise his human shape. In this clown's costume we see the chaotic unformed state more clearly. The costume also expresses the abuse and misfortune that clowns and Fools usually suffer. The clown face is not quite human just as his body, swathed in loose layers of material, appears to be not fully human. These not-quite-human qualities are external symbols of the Fool's ambiguous position in the 'normal' world: he does not quite belong in this world of order even though he has recognizable traits in common with the ordinary people of it. In the novel, Cacciato also has these characteristic costumes. For example, at the Vietnam/Laos border he still wears some of his army clothes but also has the look of a civilian (p.18): he is neither one thing nor another. The only times his clothes are described in the fantasy, they are "tattered robes" in Mandalay (p.120), and "misshapen" in Paris (p.316).

The 'otherness' suggested in the Fool's costume and painted masks can also be suggested by a vacuity of facial expression which usually accompanies mental deficiency. The important thing about the Fool's face is that it is either masked or not fully defined and this is a quality he shares with the mythological descriptions of Hades (and hence harlequin's association with the devil in Christian Europe)

and with Hermes Psychopompos. Hermes Psychopompos, in Greek mythology, is the messenger of dreams; it is his task to take the dreamer to his dream world -- the realm of Hades*-- and to transmit the dreams to the gods. He is described in the Homeric "Hymn to Hermes" as wearing a headdress -- a trait he shares with Hades. Hillman writes that the headdress symbolizes Hermes' and Hades' concealment of "their intentions and, because we can never discover what their covert minds intend, we consider them deceptive, unpredictable, frightening -- or wise."²¹

The white mask of the modern clown is the remnant of this headdress that symbolizes the mystery of death and dreams. Cacciato, though not wearing a mask, still shares this mysterious quality inasmuch as his face is never clearly seen. Berlin, in the occasional glimpse he has of Cacciato during the fantasy, sees Cacciato's "round face... like a lighted jack o' lantern" (p.122). The basic shape and features of a human face are there, but nothing else. Even in the newspaper photograph of him in Dehli, Cacciato's face is "grainy, partly blurred" (p.172).

In reality too, Cacciato's face is not clear. When he leaves them at the border, the squad only see his face as "fuzzy, bobbing in and out of the mist" (p.11). When Berlin recalls his first meeting with Cacciato, it is a long time before he sees his face (pp.213-214), and, even after seeing it, Berlin has difficulty remembering it (p.119). Moreover, like the Fool, Cacciato's features

* In the Odyssey, Homer locates dreams in the House of Hades as part of his realm. And Virgil, in the Aeneiad, has the entire brood of Night -- Old Age, Envy, Strife, Doom, Lamentation, Destiny, Deceit and Dreams-- living in the underworld.

suggest idiocy. Doc Peret says that Cacciato missed idiocy by a hair's-breadth; that

there was something curiously unfinished about Cacciato. Open-faced and naive and plump, Cacciato lacked the fine detail, the refinements and final touches....The result was blurred and uncolored and bland. (p.8)

Cacciato not only looks like a Fool, he acts like one too. There is something unfinished and hidden, and therefore mysterious, about his face and this air of mystery shrouds his actions too. The Fool's function generally takes the form of disturbing or ridiculing accepted notions of order and propriety; he engineers a situation or creates an illusion in which the improbable or the impossible happens; he defies the laws of logic, proportion and proper action; and he is not bound by the laws that govern life and social mores. Moreover, he always escapes the figures of law and order who pursue him because he violates the rules they enforce; and he never suffers the consequences of his actions when non-Fools would.

For example, Berlin recalls the time the squad planned to kill Lieutenant Martin, Corson's predecessor. It is to be done with a grenade which all must touch as a sign of unanimity of agreement and responsibility. Berlin is sent in search of Cacciato so that he too will touch the grenade. He finds him fishing in "the world's greatest lake country" -- the name Doc Peret has sardonically given to rain-filled bombardment craters. Cacciato refuses to touch the grenade but lets Berlin touch it to his hand (p.240). There is neither agreement nor refusal in Cacciato's action: he remains detached, though technically implicated.

Throughout their discussion, Cacciato continues fishing despite the obvious impossibility of catching anything. He smiles as he fishes, as if he had a hidden knowledge of something. Even his fishing bobber accentuates his air of mystery because it is made from a Secret aerosol can and the label is visible to Berlin as his gaze wanders from Cacciato's secret smile to his Secret bobber. At the crucial moment when Berlin touches the grenade to Cacciato's hand, Cacciato whispers "a bite...a real strong one" (p.241). Moments later, he says with a wink that the "sucker took my bait. But next time I'll nail him. Now that I got the technique" (p.241).

During the fantasy flight from Tehran, Berlin recalls the aftermath of the Martin incident. He wonders if his pressing the grenade against Cacciato's hand violated the code that all must touch it of their own volition. The day after Martin is killed, Cacciato says that it is a sad thing that has happened, and then he "shrugged, then smiled, and kept fishing in Lake Country" (p.249).

Cacciato's actions in this scene are strange even beyond the oddity of actually fishing in craters at all. He does not instigate the plot against Martin, he does not particularly want to be part of it, yet lets himself become implicated. He smiles when Berlin tells him what they are planning, and he smiles afterwards, even while saying how sad it is. It is as if he has a secret role in the incident-- a possibility that is emphasized by the touch of the grenade coinciding with Cacciato's words, which may well apply to Berlin as much as to a fish.

In this episode, Cacciato acts as the Fool does when reducing "order to chaos in a way that makes a farce of the mythical pattern" of the Hero's struggle to wrest order from chaos.²²

Cacciato does not foil the squad's plan to act Heroically in killing Martin: Berlin outwits him about touching the grenade and so gets away just as the 'fish' that takes Cacciato's bait does. Yet Cacciato's attitude to the squad's action remains a mocking one. He has no respect for their code, just as the Fool ridicules the idea that it is possible to achieve victory over chaos through the observance of rules of conduct.²³ Willeford writes that the Fool can "wrest life" from destructive chaos even while ridiculing the order of that life. He ridicules it because he knows the order or rules are short-sighted or without meaning. The purpose of the ridicule is to show that the prevailing order has no vitality. Willeford writes that the Fool

may look on passively, innocently, even benignly.
Though [he] may seem innocently detached from
 [the chaos he has induced], it may be an active
 form of [his] folly.²⁴

Standing apart from the action in this way, Willeford writes, "may emerge as the Fool's guiding spirit in a transvaluation of values."²⁵ The squad's action of killing Martin, whose adherence to the rules leads to wanton death, solves an immediate problem but since Martin is replaced and the war goes on, it has no long-term effect. Berlin has tried to stand apart from the action but his detachment is a shallow emulation of the Fool's. On arriving in Vietnam he had decided that he would "stay aloof. Follow the herd

but [not] join it...keep himself separate. To watch things" (p.212). In the Martin incident, Cacciato does what Berlin wants to do -- sit aside passively when a conscious act is desired of him -- and thereby shows Berlin that he cannot remain an observer: he must discover what responsibility is and take on the responsibility of responsibility -- the Hero's task.

When Berlin makes his decision to remain aloof, it is on his first day in Vietnam when Billy Boy Watkins has died of fright. Berlin refuses to join in the squad's telling of war stories and the conversation about Billy Boy. Such **pastimes** are the squad's way of not letting themselves dwell on the horror of Billy's death. Berlin shuns this escape route and imagines that by ignoring death he will make himself immune to the pain of loss. Moreover, he believes that by ignoring the fact that Billy Boy died of fright, he himself will "not be afraid ever again" (p.211) because he will be able to pretend that he is not afraid. Cacciato physically mimics Berlin's thoughts and shows him eventually that his detachment solves nothing.

The qualities of the Fool and his world that I have outlined here can also be seen in diverse Fool figures: the circus clown, the Charlie Chaplin type, the harlequin, trickster, court-jester, Shakespearean Fool, merry-maker and simpleton. The differences between the Fool and non-Fools, who either make up the audience or also perform in the show, create the humour. Each non-Fool has folly within him and it is periodically glimpsed, which is why audiences so readily accept the illusion the Fool creates as having possible veracity.

This view of human nature as being both foolish and non-foolish is often incorporated into the Fool show itself in the form of the comic pair -- the funny man and the straight man. Moreover,

the Fool is the image of ourselves, but he is this in a quite special sense. The jokes and tricks of his show are his equivalent of our action; it is informed with his equivalent of our knowledge. These equivalents may suffice for him --indeed, they must--but that does not mean they would for us. It may be true that our action and knowledge rest on beliefs which we assume to be more adequate than they are. Nonetheless, we know and act for a purpose, which belongs to our natures as much as the Fool's apparent purposelessness does to his. That purpose may be expressed as the realization of the human image: to find and affirm our individual destinies within the frame of society and of nature. The difficulties we inevitably have in achieving that purpose are expressed, for example, in Hamlet's *soliloquies* about the nature of man. Since the Fool may interfere with that purpose, and since he seems incapable of being transformed into a non-Fool, we must banish him or find an accommodation to him, a *modus vivendi* that allows²⁶ him and us a measure of freedom and yet of interaction.

In Going After Cacciato, we have such a comic pair: Cacciato, the funny man and Berlin, his dupe. Cacciato mirrors Berlin's actions and reveals the folly of them. Moreover, Berlin articulates his discovery of this folly in the Peace Talks. His own folly is his fearfulness and, somehow, he must come to terms with it in relation to staying in or leaving the mission. He finds such an accommodation -- as both Willeford says above, and Berlin himself says (p.81)-- within the limits of society. Cacciato interferes with Berlin's attempts to find a safe escape route inasmuch as he shows Berlin that, to have peace with himself, he must try to overcome his fears. Remaining aloof, or staying with Sarkin Aung Wan in exile in Paris, for example, will not bring Berlin the peace or freedom he desires.

Finding an accommodation for his fears is one of the main purposes of Berlin's journey to Paris. He expects to meet Cacciato there finally and talk with him about the advantages and disadvantages of desertion. What happens, in fact, is that Cacciato, before even getting to Paris, makes Berlin look inside himself for the answers.

II

The Underworld

James Hillman's emphasis on death-dreams arises from his belief that these kinds of dreams have been ignored by psychology in favour of the "happy optimism of growth psychology [Jung] or the secret delight of sexual desire [Freud]."²⁷ In his own approach to dream analysis, Hillman believes that

the [dream] interpreter's role is to help the [dreamer] adjust to his underworld milieu. The interpreter is a guiding Virgil, or Teresias, or a Charon.²⁸

Cacciato acts as this kind of guide. He lures Berlin first into the descent to Li Van Hgoc's meta-tunnel, and, while Berlin does eventually leave the tunnel, it is not really until the end of the fantasy that Berlin's underworld experience is complete.

Hades, death, is frightening to the conscious mind, which forgets that Hades' realm is composed of both Tartarus and Elysium. It consists of both fixed torment and disorder, and happiness, abundance and fertility. A living Hero's journey into

the underworld is often a necessary part of his quest as a whole. There he confronts horrors, the fear and mystery of death, and gains valuable knowledge. Writers such as Virgil, Homer and Dante, for example, present their Heroes' descent as literal, occurring in an 'identifiable' place. This kind of myth is paralleled in what happens in dreams of the kind Hillman discusses. The descent into the underworld is an archetypal image in itself-- nekylia-- and, in Hillman's view, we all make that journey when we dream.

The best example of this descent in O'Brien's novel occurs when Berlin and the squad fall through the hole in the road to Paris. At the beginning of their pursuit of Cacciato, they meet Sarkin Aung Wan and her two aunts -- all are refugees travelling west in their buffalo-drawn cart. Berlin is fascinated by the girl and she wants to accompany them to Paris (p.56). Corson, however, refuses her permission even though she offers herself as a guide. Extremely disappointed by Corson's decision, Berlin lies awake "searching for a happy ending" that will permit the girl to stay with him (p.74). He has a lapse of imagination, however, and finds no solutions. The squad had earlier found one of Cacciato's discarded maps on which was written "LOOK OUT, THERE'S A HOLE IN THE ROAD" (p.73). Now, when his imagination fails him, "it simply happened": they fall through a hole in the road (p.75).

The next two chapters reveal the associations of holes in the ground and tunnels for Berlin. Chapter 11 recounts the aftermath of Pederson's death. Paralyzed with fear, he is forced out

of the Chinook and wanders aimlessly until he is caught in the Chinook's cover-fire. He calmly turns on the ground and shoots back, 'wounding' the Chinook and taking chunks out of its underbelly (p.132) in much the same way as Stink Harris, in the fantasy, shoots one of the buffalo (p.52). After Pederson's death, the squad moves on to the deserted village of Hoi An and systematically destroys it. They do this with a complete absence of emotion and, when they are exhausted, "the village [is] a hole" (p.79).

Berlin, during this destruction, says "kill it", as if the village were a living enemy that could be killed in revenge for Pederson's death. Berlin knows that he has the same capacity to be immobilized by fear as Pederson or to die of fright as Billy Boy did. Thus his desire to kill the village seems like a desire to kill the source of his fear. The extent of the destruction the squad wreaks, however, is also frightening. The hole where the village was is evidence of Berlin's depth of anger and so this hole terrifies him as much as those other holes in the ground, the tunnels.

It is as if Pederson's shooting at the Chinook and the destruction of Hoi An suggest two elements in the fantasy. While the hole in the road to Paris is an escape route which allows Berlin and the girl to stay together, and conveniently gets rid of her two troublesome aunts (p.84), the escape also turns into a nightmarish trap. Chapter 12, at the Observation Post, clarifies the nature of the nightmare. Berlin's dilemma in the war is whether to flee

or fight; whether to give in to, or to control his "biles" -- a term Doc has coined for Berlin's excessive fear (p.29). Chapter 12 presents Berlin's view of his situation:

The issue, of course, was courage. How to behave. Whether to flee or fight or seek an accommodation. The issue was not fearlessness. The issue was how to act wisely in spite of fear. Spiting the deep-running biles: that was true courage. He believed this. And he believed the obvious corollary: the greater a man's fear, the greater his potential courage. (p.80)

Pederson had not acted wisely and Berlin wants to discover the process by which he, in a similar situation, may act wisely. He continues:

The real issue was the power of will to defeat fear. A matter of figuring a way to do it. Somehow working his way into that secret chamber of the human heart, where, in tangles, lay the circuitry for all that was possible, the full range of what a man might be. He believed, like Doc Peret, that somewhere inside each man is a biological center for the exercise of courage, a piece of tissue that might be touched and sparked and made to respond, a chemical maybe, or a lone chromosome that when made to fire would produce chain reactions of valor that even the biles could not drown. A filament, a fuse, that if ignited would release the full energy of what might be. (p.81)

Berlin's theory that courage is produced by a process analogous to nuclear fission is tested when the fall through the hole ends in the tunnels, confinement to which is Li Van Hgoc's punishment for desertion. This descent into his "few livable chambers in hell" (p.97) also symbolizes Berlin's delving into his own psychic underworld. The tunnels resemble the "secret chamber," the "biological center," which Berlin described at the Post. The chamber has elaborate equipment like the "circuitry for all that was possible."

Here Berlin confronts the noises, darkness and tunnels he fears (p.102), and he meets the embodiment of his own worst fear of what he himself might become, a deserter.

The actual fall through the hole is like Alice's fall down the rabbit-hole to Wonderland (pp.82-3). During it, Berlin is overcome by the sensations that characterize the biles, and "for a moment he was back at the observation tower" (p.82). He does not, however, achieve comfortable safety from the nightmarish descent by 'waking up' at the tower; instead, he dissolves into a giggling, uncontrollable mass of fear (pp.83-84) as he has done so often before.

Recovering himself, he follows "a tunnel complex...an inter-locking series of passageways....The tunnel curved, widened, and emptied into a large lighted chamber" where the squad meets the Viet Cong major, Li Van Hgoc. He sits at a "large periscope mounted on a console equipped with meters and dials and blinking lights" (p.84). Here is the manifestation of Berlin's secret chamber; but it is to disappoint his expectations because what he sees through the periscope is not his courage but his own cowardice and shame.

Having greeted the Americans as if they were expected visitors, Li Van Hgoc leads them to a food-laden banquet table where, over brandy, they indulge in a gentlemanly discussion of war. Berlin, however, is too frightened to participate and has the "falling feeling" that the biles promote,

a slipping, and again Paul Berlin had an incomplete sense of being high in the tower by the sea. It was a queazy feeling, a movement of consciousness in and out. (p.85)

He thinks for a moment of all the things he has not done or seen: he has never seen the living enemy or the tunnels before; he might have seen the tunnels but was too scared to go down, and Bernie Lynn had gone instead, winning the Silver Star for valor but also losing his life because the tunnel was booby-trapped.

Eventually, Berlin asks the major all the questions American soldiers in Vietnam would probably want answered (pp.85-86). The rest of the squad take no part or interest in the conversation and so, with Sarkin Aung Wan's help, Li Van Hgoc tries to explain the "Xa" philosophy. All Berlin's questions about the enemy, their methods and so on, are answered in this philosophy. There is a very close identification between the Vietnamese people and the land because "a man's spirit is in the land" (p.86). Land-mines, tunnels and so on are the land's means of defending itself (p.86): in short, the land is the enemy and can never be conquered.

On a tour of this underworld, Li Van Hgoc leads Berlin from chamber to chamber,

exploring the war's underground. Bats nested in beams like pigeons in a hayloft; the walls were lined with tapestries and mosaics of tile and stone; among winding roots and tubers were the makings of an army: kegs of powder and coils of fuse and crates of munitions.

The chambers were linked by narrow passageways, one to the next, and at last, they returned to the operations center. (p.87)

The ammunition amongst tree roots emphasizes Li Van Hgoc's point about the land being the enemy. Moreover, the twisting passageways connote the labyrinths of the underworld.

Li Van Hgoc then takes Berlin to the periscope and tells him, echoing Doc Peret's advice for controlling the biles, to "look closer. Concentrate." Berlin sees

several men [who] appeared to be grouped around the mouth of a tunnel. The forms were fuzzy. Some of them were talking, others silent. One man was on his hands and knees, leaning part way down into the hole. (p.87)

The chapter ends and the next one begins with a description of how Bernie Lynn and Frenchie Tucker died in a booby-trapped tunnel. Within the fantasy itself, Berlin's memory is stirred. His fleeting thought of Bernie Lynn earlier and the view through the periscope have prompted his memory.

When we return to the periscope scene after witnessing Berlin's fear of searching the tunnels, Li Van Hgoc says

So you see...things may be viewed from many angles. From down below, or from inside out, you often discover entirely new understandings. (p.91)

Berlin has seen again the deaths of his two friends who followed orders when he and the others refused; he has witnessed his own fear of going into the tunnels, and he has felt again the shame at being so afraid. What he makes of this we are not told. This kind of experience in the meta-tunnel is to be repeated before Berlin finally focusses a new perspective on himself.

Li Van Hgoc also shows the tunnel complex to Corson, and the two talk of military matters amicably. A problem arises, however, when the squad decides to leave and Li Van Hgoc tells them, with the politeness that has characterized the whole episode, that they cannot

leave because they are prisoners of war. Polite discussion does not solve the "puzzle" and so the squad destroys the chamber. Li Van Hgoc then explains that they are prisoners because there is no way out of the tunnels which are a

prison with no exit...a maze, tunnels leading to more tunnels, passages emptying in passages, dead ends and byways and forks and twists and turns, darkness everywhere. (pp.96-97)

He had tried to escape but eventually resigned himself "to wait out his ten years" with his small comforts in these "few livable chambers in hell" (p.97).

Some of the significance of this situation is straightforward. The tunnels epitomise the war, and just as there is no escape from the tunnels, there is no escape from the war. They are all prisoners of war even if there are no prison bars. They cannot escape the war even in fantasy because there are always reminders of it. Sarkin Aung Wan's suggestion that they can leave the way they came fills Li Van Hgoc with horror. He chooses to stay in his livable hell because, beyond his chambers, "it is a stinking hell. Filth you can't imagine! You would be lost in an instant" (p.98).

However, the girl does lead them out but through a veritable purgatory:

Down and down. Or up and up, it was impossible to know. Sarkin Aung Wan led them single file through the black tunnels. Bats fluttered in the dark. Rodents, snakes, cobwebs stretching like curtains. The stench of death. Strange creatures underfoot, the blindness of graves. They walked hand in hand. When the passages narrowed, they crawled. Like sappers, Berlin thought -- on hands and knees, on their bellies. At times the heat was unbearable. A molten, hissing heat that scorched his lungs. Then the cold would come....Then heat again. Then cold, But Sarkin Aung

Wan led them with the sureness that comes of knowledge. She moved swiftly. When their spirits flagged, she smiled and urged them on. Hours? Days? They slept in shifts, someone awake at all times to shoo off the rats. A maze, Paul Berlin kept thinking. Lost, condemned. He wondered what had gone wrong. (p.99)

The tunnels have acquired several associations. This underground is a major source of Berlin's fear and shame; it is a place of punishment, a place of war inasmuch as it is the land's means of defending itself; it is "the literal summary of the land, and of the mysteries contained in it" (p.86). It is a place of death: it causes death, Berlin has witnessed deaths there, it smells like death and has the "blindness of graves." It is, in short, like Tartarus, a place of fixed torment for both Li Van Hgoc and Berlin. However, it is also an operations center which shares qualities with Berlin's images of a "biological center" that contains potential courage. From here, Berlin views his fearfulness from another perspective.

Li Van Hgoc has served in this tunnel scene as a guide to Berlin in two ways. First, he shows Berlin a different perspective on the war, though without clear positive success. Second, he shows Berlin what it is like to be a deserter. He has chosen to wait out his sentence in his own form of hell, one that he knows he can live with. He is safely detached and isolated from the unknown horrors outside his chambers.

Li Van Hgoc's decision parallels the one finally made by Berlin. He chooses his own form of personal and metaphorical hell from the difficult choices facing him at the fantasy's close. He too chooses a hell he can live with: that is, to stay in the war

and try to live up to his own hopes and expectations and those of the people he wants to live his life with. He prefers this to living safely in exile with no peace of mind.

Sarkin Aung Wan's stamina and sure knowledge in the tunnels make her the perfect guide for leading them out of the Hadian world with its mysterious and unseen, but still felt, dangers. It is as if she is familiar with the route. This is the only occasion on which a guide physically leads Berlin: the other guides are more like Li Van Hgoc inasmuch as they lead Berlin to psychological insight.

The structure of the episode in the tunnel is to be repeated again. In Tehran, they witness the beheading of a young soldier who had gone AWOL but, as in the earlier incident, there is a delay between Berlin's witnessing of the punishment and the discovery of the nature of the crime: that is, he sees the effect before he knows the cause, and this non-sequential order is symptomatic of the general disorder that surrounds him in the fantasy and in the war.

In Tehran, they are confined in a comfortable basement jail similar to Li Van Hgoc's luxurious chambers; there seems no hope of escape from the jail until Cacciato miraculously appears, blows a hole in the wall and they leave through the hole, just as they did the tunnels. Moreover, the figure of the guide to the particular situation is repeated. Captain Fahyi Rhallon, the Savak officer who politely interrogates them, serves a function similar to, but more developed than, that of Li Van Hgoc.

Rhallon is a guide in the way that Lieutenant Corson also is. Both are professional soldiers and Corson discusses war with Rhallon as he has also done with Li Van Hgoc. Berlin listens to the conversation, in which Doc Peret plays a major role, as if to hear what it takes to be a good soldier. At the same time, however, he listens with some trepidation about what he hears. We are told that Corson and Li Van Hgoc talk of "military matters, shop talk" (p.91), but the discussion is not reproduced for us because the reader only hears what Berlin hears. In Tehran, Berlin overhears the conversation, and what he hears develops what he has already learned from Corson's example.

When the squad emerges from the tunnels into the streets of Mandalay and then travels to Dehli, we discover the kind of man Corson is. Unlike his predecessor, Martin, Corson is a popular leader. Martin had adhered to the letter of the rules, not the spirit (pp.45-46). One effect of this is that tunnels are searched before they are blown. Since they are usually booby-trapped, the search results in the deaths of one or more of the squad -- the scene Berlin has watched through the periscope is an example of what happens under Martin's rules. Corson is from a quite different mold:

Twice busted from captain, once unfairly, he still carried the twin bars in his pocket; a lifer, he still loved the United States Army. Like Sydney Martin, he believed in mission. But unlike Sydney Martin, he did not believe in it as an intellectual imperative, or even as a professional standard. Mission, for Lieutenant Corson, was an abstract notion that took meaning in concrete situations, and it was this that most separated him from other officers. Lieutenant Corson did not order his men into tunnels. He simply ordered the tunnels blown, or he blew them himself and he saw no incompatibility between this and his mission as a soldier. (p.144)

Berlin makes Corson a participant on the journey to Paris and during most of it he is in ill-health -- a mixture of his age, his dysentery and "something else too" (p.35). The "something else" is that Corson does not regard the war in Vietnam as his war (pp. 174, 307): his war was in Korea, where

the people liked us....Respect, that's what it was. And it was a decent war. Regular battle lines, no backstabbing crap....In Nam there's no respect for nothing. No heart. Nobody's got his heart in it.... Doves on their helmets. Faking ambushes. That's the real difference...no heart. (p.150)

Corson regards the pursuit of Cacciato as a kind of scapegoating. In one of Berlin's flashbacks, he recalls the long period of "imposed peace" along the Song Tra Bong (p.100). Then, Doc Peret had explained the "peace" and its unnerving psychological effects on the Americans as enemy tactics to reduce morale. The Americans have nothing to do, Doc explains,

nothing to order, no substance. Aimless, that's what it is: a bunch of kids trying to pin the tail on the Asian donkey. But no fuckin tail. No fuckin donkey. (p.105)

On the train to Delhi, Berlin allots these words to Corson, who describes the elusive scapegoat Cacciato as

a wild goose, the wrong donkey for the pinning of final responsibility. Responsibility. That was what was needed -- Somebody to take it as a solemn vow. (p.136)

To Corson, it seems that the pursuit of Cacciato has as much point as fighting the war in Vietnam: no one takes the responsibility of it seriously.

Doc Peret's view of the war is quite different from Corson's. Doc Peret is a pragmatist who "believes deeply in science" and the "rigorous verification of hypotheses by means of repeated empirical observation" (p.144). He is unconcerned by the label **of any given process:** to him, if it works it is good science. His advice to Berlin to control the biles is to concentrate until he realizes that his fear is only the "biles fogging things over," warping his sense of reality (p.29). Concentration on the scene before him will help Berlin distinguish between "what part was fact and what part was the extension of fact...what is truly happening from what only might have happened" (p.28).

At the beheading in Tehran, Berlin does not want to see the ritual execution, but Doc Peret tells him to "pay attention, look for all the pretty details" (p.187). The young prisoner is calm, modest, dignified and unafraid during the preliminary ceremonies of being brought out before the crowd, being shaved, the playing of marching songs, and receiving the salutations of the officers seated on the platform sipping drinks (pp.187-189). Berlin tries to be calm and to notice the details so that he can store them "for future understanding" (p.188). What he notices above all is a fly on the boy's nose and the boy's attempts to be rid of the small irritant that mocks his otherwise dignified death. Witnessing this beheading, Berlin is again looking at the consequences of desertion -- though he does not know it at the time. Later Rhallon tells the squad that the boy was punished for going AWOL and that the punishment for actual desertion is less lenient than ceremonious execution (p.202).

The topic of the shame of desertion and the fear of the consequences is presented in detail in the conversation between Doc Peret and Rhallon. As with Li Van Hgoc, this conversation about being prisoners of war is marked by courtesy, diplomacy and is a genteel statement of the situation (pp.191-196). Later, Rhallon speaks "passionately of the fraternity and community of a field soldier's life," but Berlin is unimpressed by this kind of talk (p.196). Members of the squad say that there is nothing new to be said about the Vietnam War, but Rhallon disagrees because "each soldier...has a different war. Even if it is the same war it is a different war." What follows is a discussion of war and the soldier: a discussion that Berlin feigns indifference to because often it comes too close to his own fears. His attention oscillates between the argument and the dancers in the bar yet he is always drawn back to the fascinating conversation.

Rhallon goes on to explain his statement about each soldier having a different war. He calls it a

perceptual set....In battle, in a war, a soldier sees only a tiny fragment of what is available to be seen. The soldier is not a photographic machine. He is not a camera. He registers...only those few items that he is predisposed to register and not a thing more....After a battle each soldier will have different stories to tell, vastly different stories, and ... when a war is ended it is as if there have been a million wars, or as many wars as there were soldiers. (pp.197-198)

Glancing at Berlin before he replies, Doc Peret agrees that each person remembers differently, but also that

the war itself has an identity separate from perception. ...The point is that war is war no matter how it's perceived. War has its own reality. War kills and maims and rips up the land and makes orphans and widows. These are the things of war. Any war. So when I say that there's nothing new to tell about Nam, I'm saying it was just a war like every other war. Politics be damned. Sociology be damned. It pisses me off to hear everybody say how special Nam is...how for the soldier it's somehow different from Korea or World War Two....I'm saying that the feel of war is the same in Nam or Okinawa -- the emotions are the same, and the same fundamental stuff is seen and remembered. (p.198)

Doc Peret obviously has a different view of the Vietnam War than Corson, who believes that Vietnam is different because no one has his heart in it. Except, however, they are talking about different things. Corson's point is concerned with the way the war is fought; Doc Peret's is concerned with the effects of war. They are both right. When Doc Peret says that the purposes of war are always the same, Rhallon replies:

But I understand that one difficulty for you has been a lack of purpose....An absence of aim and purpose, so that the foot soldier is left without the moral imperatives to fight hard and well and winningly. (p.198)

Doc says that this is both right and wrong:

True, it's sometimes hard to figure out what the hell's going on, but I'll wager that troops at Hastings or the Bulge had the same problem. I mean, if they stopped to think about it -- what the fuck am I fighting for? -- I'll bet they came up as confused and muddle-headed as anybody in Nam. And what about all the millions of soldiers who have fought bravely on behalf of bad purposes, evil aims? The Nazis, the Japs. They fought damned well (p.199)

Rhallon responds to this last point with the comment that the Nazis and Japanese lost. Doc says it was not because of lack of

purpose, but because they ran out of ammunition. Rhallon counters that the British could use American material because theirs was a good cause, whereas the Nazis could not make such an appeal because their purposes were evil and so they lost. Doc Peret regards this issue of purposes as a change of subject and he reiterates his point that "the common grunt" on the ground does not think of purposes, only of the possibility of being wounded, killed, or driven insane. Rhallon's argument belongs to the issue of winning or losing the war and what influences that; whereas Doc Peret adheres to his argument about the feel of war being no different for anyone in any war.

When Rhallon introduces the idea that the soldier also thinks about running away, Berlin looks away. Rhallon's point is that it is a sense of purpose that keeps a man at his post because "without purpose men will run. They will act out their dreams, and they will run and run, like animals in stampede" (p.200). Corson agrees, but Doc Peret adds fear, self-respect, reputation and ego to the factors that make a man stay. Rhallon sees these qualities as having to do with purpose too:

Does not the absence of good purpose jeopardize the soldier's own ego, thus making him less likely to fight well and bravely? If a war is without justice, the soldier knows that the sacrifice of life, his own valued life, is demeaned, and therefore his self-respect must likewise be demeaned. Is that not so? (p.201)

The question is left in the air and the talk turns to other matters. In this long and detailed conversation, several issues have been brought up that pertain to Berlin's dilemma. He needs to know if there is something within him that will make him stay--even

want to stay. Rhallon places that 'something' in an external force that has a bearing on the inner man, and this is the final view that Berlin embraces. He also knows, however, that, even with the best intentions and his best efforts, he may be denied the dignity and self-respect Rhallon speaks of -- just as the executed boy was cheated by the fly. His best may not be enough.

There has been a brief interlude on the train journey to Tehran that foreshadows this last point. Spending a night at the house of the Mayor of Ovissil the squad discovers that the Mayor is a history-teller who speaks only of history,

never of the future. Fortune-telling is for lunatics and old women. History is a stronger science, for it has the virtue of certainty without the vice of blasphemy. God alone tells futures. God alone makes history. (p.179)

He talks of Corson's past misfortunes and says that "'God's will is always stronger than man's will. We can live our lives...but we cannot shoo them like horses to a stable'" (p.179).

Later, Berlin asks the Mayor to tell him his history but the Mayor refuses because Berlin is too young to have a history. The Mayor's point that man does not have complete control over his life's direction and the events in it, no matter how hard he tries, is the same point demonstrated to Berlin by the beheading: there is always the unforeseen that can make a mockery of man's best efforts.

Berlin's memory provides him with the same information. In a long passage articulating the wrongs that he, as a member of the American forces fighting the war, has done, Berlin acknowledges the harm he has caused. He says that he is

guilty perhaps of hanging on, of letting [himself] be dragged along, of falling victim to gravity and obligation and events, but not--not!-- guilty of wrong intentions. (p.266)

External forces do impinge upon a man's actions, as Rhallon also says. How a man responds to them, however, is determined by internal forces. Doc's argument in the Tehran bar, that whatever it is that keeps a man at his post is personal, not political, is the position that Berlin also embraces. He is young and has no history, as the Mayor says, and he wonders if he has the materiel from which to draw. Berlin has heard a thorough airing of the issues but still does not know if he has what it takes and this uncertainty troubles him.

The structure of this scene in Tehran suggests something of Berlin's reaction to the conversation. O'Brien employs a technique of which Hemingway is the master: namely, what is not said by the central character, whose point of view the reader shares, can be more illuminating than what he does say. In this scene, the conversation is punctuated by descriptions of the dancers and other people in the room. Berlin's eyes are the camera, as it were, so that we see and hear what Berlin sees and hears. Moreover, the intensity of the music grows in relation both to the intensity of the conversation and at the points where the topic comes closest to Berlin's deepest fears. The general scene is described for a few moments as if to give Berlin a respite from what he is hearing. The only comments on Berlin's reactions are made in this oblique way. We do not know his thoughts but we can surmise their general nature by the frequency with which he looks away.

This scene has been a highly charged one for Berlin. The narration of the entire Tehran episode does not continue until Berlin, at the Post, has had a chance to analyse his fantasy and recall some advice his father gave him. At the Post, he says that

it was a matter of hard observation. Separating illusion from reality....Why, out of all that might have happened, did it lead to a beheading in Tehran? Why not pretty things? Why not a smooth, orderly arc from war to peace? These were the questions, and the answers could come only from hard observation. Doc was right about that. He was right, too, that observation requires inward-looking, a study of the very machinery of observation -- the mirrors and filters and wiring and circuits of the observing instrument. (pp.206-7)

Li Van Hgoc's periscope, and the tangled circuitry Berlin imagines as housing control of the biles, are brought to mind again here. But Berlin is still not sure of what it is he is looking at. He has, however, realized the necessity of "inward-looking" because the answers to his questions do not lie entirely outside himself. He wonders why his fantasy does not lead to "pretty things"; why it is forcing him to delve into himself, and is producing images and ideas he would rather ignore. At this point, he believes that he can pin down and order the factual events that have happened since his arrival in Vietnam. Such "empirical observation," he believes, will not only help him understand what is happening, but will also give him control over what is happening.

Back in Tehran, however, he discovers a major drawback in this method. The squad, arrested and imprisoned again, face several charges, the most serious of which is desertion. Doc Peret repeats the facts of their pursuit of Cacciato, but Rhallon sums

up these facts in such a way as to lead to the desertion charge being laid against them. Doc changes his stance about his faith in facts alone at this point and says facts are one thing but "interpretation is all" (p.227). The facts in themselves are meaningless. It is the ordering and interpreting of them that gives them meaning -- and this is something that Berlin never satisfactorily achieves about the facts of his friends' deaths (pp.324-5).

After giving his interpretation of the facts, Rhallon tells the squad to have faith in the purity of their motives. This, however, is of little comfort to Berlin who, shaved as the executed boy was (pp.266-7), awaits his doom and ponders his motives which,

as shapeless as water, washed through his imagination: a briny, sodden pressure that weighted him like gravity, layers of inclination pressing him deeper and deeper. His brain had the bends.

Things were out of control. Gone haywire. You could run, but you couldn't outrun the consequences of running. Not even in imagination. (p.227)

Just as he cannot control what happens to him in the war, so he cannot control what happens in his fantasy. He tries to follow his father's advice and look only at the good parts, but this still leads him back to his impasse:

A miracle, he kept thinking. Some saving grace. He lay with Sarkin Aung Wan at night, tracing possibilities. Sometimes he would slip back to the observation post by the sea, looking down, and he would be struck by a vision of doom. Desertion--wasn't that what it really was? And in the end weren't there always consequences? A calling to account? Crazy from the start. None of the roads led to Paris. (p.229)

The final blow to his hopes comes when another Savak officer comes to their cell, verbally and physically abuses the

already terrified squad, and, in a style reminiscent of both stereotypical Nazi interrogator and a drill-sergeant, has them repeatedly shout in unison that they are clowns (pp.231-2). This officer sounds their final knell, and, the last hope gone, Berlin prays for a miracle -- just as he did in an equally hopeless situation before falling through the hole in the road to Paris:

The long vigil began. A miracle, Paul Berlin kept thinking. It was all he wanted -- a genuine miracle to confound natural law, a baffling reversal of the inevitable consequences. He thought of his father for a time, and of his mother, and then he slept, dreaming of miracles. And deep in the night, as the moon rose, Cacciato's round face appeared at the window. The face seemed to float. Sarkin Aung Wan gasped and shook Paul Berlin awake. A miracle, he kept dreaming. But he blinked and reached out to grab the M-16 that came sliding through the bars. "Go," Cacciato whispered. He smiled. "Go," he said. And then it started. (p.243)

Explosions, gunfire, the flight through the maze of streets to a car, the nightmarish car chase until finally they are on the road to Paris again-- Cacciato having disappeared after leading them to the car. Cacciato, echoing Berlin's own words when he had first left (p.26), has performed the miraculous.

What he has sent them into from the cell, however, is another hell. Berlin is hurtled again into a labyrinthine nightmare. Fleeing through backstreets where "dark buildings loomed like jungle. Searchlights swayed through the night, and the city was full of sirens," they negotiate "vicious hairpin turns, chains of alleys and winding stone lanes." The car lights "plucked out statues and frozen animals." They are pursued and hunted by "planes and helicopters, sirens, search parties with guns and lanterns, floodlights swishing through the dark

and [the sight of] **soldiers silhouetted** behind high barricades." Berlin thinks of their flight as movement "down the depths of Tehran" (pp.244-245).

Reaching a rotary in the city, they are forced to drive around it several times before finally getting clear of it. They have to do this because "at the center of the rotary, as at the core of a merry-go-round, a dozen tanks and APCs were coming to life" (p.246). Roads are blocked and artillery fire and multi-coloured lights are everywhere. It is a nightmare of being on an autonomous, death-wielding merry-go-round -- made worse by a fireworks-like display that suddenly illuminates the terrifying darkness, but only to reveal the horrors the darkness conceals.

The imagistic and thematic similarities between this scene and the exit from Li Van Hgoc's tunnels are self-evident: the pervasive threat of death, twisting route, darkness, the panic and fear are the same. This scene, however, is given a particular relevance to Berlin's fears in Vietnam. As they say in the car afterwards, they have been ambushed. The gun-fire, tracers, distortion of time, inescapableness of being surrounded, and the screaming terror all belong to an unexpected and unprepared-for attack.

The descent into the underworld is an initiation. In the tunnels, the initiation takes the form of looking at death, but the description of that death takes the form of Berlin's reminiscence: it is not part of the fantasy. In the flight from Tehran, however, the initiation is specifically related to death in war and the various means by which it might happen. The only indication that the

feeling of being ambushed is being presented in images from an actual ambush in Vietnam, as opposed to another war, is the image of the buildings that loomed like the jungle.

Berlin's concerns are becoming more and more clearly expressed in the fantasy's symbolism. The talk in Tehran of soldiers in war is specific, not general as in Corson's talk with Li Van Hgoc. The underworld escape route is becoming one that is specifically presented in symbols from warfare in Vietnam. This process of clarification has one stage further to go before it is without doubt about Vietnam. In Paris, the Peace Talks scene **presents** Berlin's proposed desertion from the Vietnam War -- not just desertion in general; and the raid on Cacciato's hotel is described in images from a night-patrol in Vietnam. Here, the focus is finally sharp.

Before discussing the events in Paris, yet another perspective on war should be considered. Lieutenant Martin, while he is not a guide to Berlin, does offer another opinion about war and soldiers. Berlin recalls the climb up the hill to the major battle in which he knew beforehand that he would not fight well. The heat, dust, weight of his pack, and steep gradient of the hill exert a tremendous pressure on him -- so much so that Berlin ceases to think, he just climbs (p.162). For a while, he is acutely aware of the things that contribute to the arduousness of the climb but he slips out of himself and becomes completely unaware of himself. The reader has a double-focus on this scene: we know of both Berlin's state of mind and of Martin's feelings as he watches Berlin climb. Martin admires the "oxen-persistence" with which Berlin marches,

thinking that the boy represented so much good -- fortitude, discipline, loyalty, self-control, courage, toughness. The greatest gift of God, thought the lieutenant in admiration of...Berlin's climb, is freedom of will. (p.168)

It is important to realize the kind of man Martin is to appreciate his sentiments here. Prior to this episode, we have learned of his zealous adherence to rules and its results. O'Brien reveals yet more about Martin's personality to the reader. Martin, like Corson, knows there is something wrong with the war in Vietnam because of the "absence of a common purpose" (p.166). But he also knows that

in a war purpose is never paramount, neither purpose nor cause, and that battles are always fought among human beings, not purposes. He could not imagine dying for a purpose. Death was its own purpose, no qualification or restraint, and war was the way. He did not celebrate war. He did not believe in glory. But he recognized the enduring appeal of battle: the chance to confront death many times, as often as there were battles. Secretly the lieutenant believed that war had been invented for just that reason -- so that through repetition men might try to do better, so that lessons might be savored and applied the next time, so that men might not be robbed of their own deaths. In this sense alone,...Martin believed in war as a means to ends. A means of confronting ending in itself, many repeated endings. He was neither stupid nor full of bravado. He was quiet....He was a professional soldier, but unlike other professionals he believed that the over-riding mission was the inner mission, the mission of every man to learn the important things about himself....He believed that the mission to the mountain, important in itself, was even more important as a reflection of a man's personal duty to exercise his full capacities of courage and endurance and will power. (p.166)

Very few people, we are told, share Martin's views (p.165), and certainly, particularly if taken out of context, much could be adversely made of such beliefs as not wishing to rob men of their own deaths. Martin's theory may be sound that, in repeated confrontations

with the possibility of death, soldiers will develop their inner strengths. However, in practice, the imposition of his beliefs results in rebellion and his own death.

Although the reader is given this insight into Martin's ideals, and has been told the result of his acting upon them, the chapter's conclusion makes a much more penetrating point. We may have lauded the ideals and condemned the practice, but, at the chapter's close, the veracity of the ideals themselves is undermined. Berlin has made the climb even though he has tried to will his legs to stop moving (p.167). They do not obey him, and, after Martin's eulogy to what Berlin represents to him, Martin raises his arm to hail him:

[Berlin's] eyes were down and he climbed the road dumbly....He did not notice the heat, or the beauty of the country, or the lieutenant's raised arm. If he had noticed, he would not have understood. He was dull of mind, blunt of spirit, numb of history,-- and struck with wonder that he could not stop climbing the red road toward the mountains. (p.168)

Berlin here is an automaton and we recognize the ironic relevance of Martin's view of him as "oxen". We are also forced to recognize that Martin's ideals and what he sees as an example of them are at odds. Berlin's experience and Martin's view of it raise the question of whether courage and will power are conscious acts. If they are not, are they still courage and will power? We see a remarkable demonstration of something akin to will power in Berlin's climb, but it is distinguished from a conscious act of will because he cannot will his legs to stop moving.

After all their adventures, the squad arrives in Paris and the stage is set for the final denouement. Up to this point,

Berlin's guides have led him to points of view that merit his consideration, but, through all of this, it is Cacciato who has been in control. He has appeared at critical moments just when they are about to, or are almost forced to, give up the chase. It is as if something awaits Berlin that Cacciato insists he experiences. The quest cannot stop short of its goal, Paris. There is the immediate reason of the squad having to return with Cacciato to prove that they themselves are not deserters; but, more than this, Berlin has a personal stake in Cacciato because he believes that Cacciato knows the answers to his questions. It is as if Berlin can finally lay his phobias to rest if he can reach Paris.

One of the key events in Paris as far as Corson's role as a guide is concerned is the news of Eisenhower's death. Corson takes it personally and Berlin extends his condolences to Corson as if it were the death of a close friend (p.305). Berlin reads the news in a Parisian paper, which prints a photograph of Eisenhower riding in to liberate World War Two Paris-- just as the squad had marched jubilantly into Paris (p.295).

Berlin, however, cannot feel much about Eisenhower's death: "maybe his father would feel the right things," he says, but he himself does not. He supposes that this lack of feeling is a "generational thing," but he is also aware that with Eisenhower's death "an era had ended" (p.304). When Sarkin Aung Wan asks him who Eisenhower was, he replies "nobody," but, as an afterthought, he adds "a hero" (p.305).

It is not just that he cannot be bothered explaining to her

who he was; the suggestion is that to a twenty-year-old in Vietnam Eisenhower and the values that he, like Corson, represents can mean nothing to him because he is of a different generation. Similarly, Eisenhower is a hero, but the word does not mean anything to Berlin because a hero in World War Two or in Korea seems to be different from being a hero in Vietnam. Although Berlin does not know what is required to be a hero in Vietnam, he does know that these earlier wars and the military values and feelings they generated are utterly alien to his own situation. He does not denigrate or dismiss Eisenhower and all that he stands for but neither does he see the relevance of those values to himself.

With Eisenhower's death, Corson goes into a steady decline and unofficially hands over command to Oscar, the aristocratic preserver of rules who pretends he is from the black Detroit ghetto (p.137). Corson's era, it seems, has ended as well: it was not his war and he abdicates, as it were, in favour of the next generation. He is also thereby removed from the position of guide, as Berlin discovers when he seeks advice about whether to stay with the girl or the mission. Corson says he has retired from the mission and that he cannot make Berlin's decision for him (p.307).

Corson has shown Berlin a set of values by which he has been able to live until Vietnam. Specifically, he accepts responsibility and does his job with as much compassion as a situation allows. The question is: can Berlin emulate him? He can desert, live idyllically with Sarkin Aung Wan in Paris, accept the risk of being caught, and accept his own disappointment in himself for not being brave. Or

he can stay and follow the example set by Corson and Rhallon by learning to control his fear. The choices are troublesome.

To stay with the girl in Paris would be perfect, but he knows it is not possible. Unlike Hemingway's Catherine Barkley and Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms, he cannot make his separate peace and establish domestic bliss. The points at which Berlin's imagination seems to fail him are the ones where the idyllic dream is opposed by his fear. Just when he and Sarkin Aung Wan seem to be settling down, something happens that forces them to break off their idyll and resume the chase. It is as if Berlin's need to meet Cacciato intercedes at every point where he is about to give up the chase. He cannot decide which is the more important and the two alternate in demanding his attention. The climactic decision comes in the prelude to the Peace Talks section and its aftermath when Cacciato is found.

In the prelude, Berlin decides he has an obligation to finish the mission. Here we can see the influence of Corson and Rhallor, and the girl's persuasive arguments to the contrary. When she broaches the subject of their taking an apartment and giving up the pursuit, Berlin hesitates because of his sense of obligation. He asks for time to think about it, and she responds:

Thinking! Think and think and think! You are afraid to do. Afraid to break away. All your fine dreams and thinking and pretending...now you can do something. ...Don't you see? Why have we become refugees? To think? To make believe? To play games, chasing poor Cacciato? Is that why? Or did we come for better reasons? To be happy? To find peace and live good lives? No more thinking.... Now we can make it permanent and real. (pp.299-300)

To Berlin, however, staying with Sarkin Aung Wan has always been a nice possibility but not one he has taken seriously. He enjoys a strangely platonic relationship with her; they never make love (p.115) and Berlin does not want to because it would spoil the ethereal quality of their relationship (pp.74, 170-1). His role in this personal relationship, incidentally, is also Fool-like. Willeford writes that the Fool's sexuality is often indeterminate but when he is ostensibly male he is so without being able to establish an intimate and enduring connection with a woman.²⁹ The Fool may yearn for the woman, as Berlin in his own way does for Sarkin Aung Wan, but when the Fool does so, his love is thwarted because he has crossed purposes with the Hero, who traditionally wins the girl.³⁰

In Going After Cacciato, it is Corson, the traditional army man and hero who leaves with Sarkin Aung Wan -- both in the dream within a dream, the Peace Talks, and in the fantasy. Ironically, however, it is precisely Berlin's decision to pursue Cacciato and not the girl, that makes him the kind of hero who usually wins the girl. For Berlin, however, there will not be this traditional reward for his heroic/Heroic act of taking responsibility.

Having chosen "old obligations" (p.315), Berlin, like the Hero, has chosen to take the responsibility of responsibility.³¹ After he has made his decision, the denouement follows quickly. Berlin spots Cacciato, follows him, and, feeling no great surprise or emotion, discovers their long-awaited meeting to have happened "as it should have happened -- a simple easy thing" (p.316). Cacciato leads him to his hotel and "the road ended where it surely would have ended, a dead-end alley. No exits and no tricks" (p.317).

Cacciato meets him calmly as if it were a most commonplace event and offers no explanation for his past conduct (p.318). Berlin is very disappointed by the meeting because there are "no reasons and no answers" from Cacciato. He is left flat. More importantly, he is left on his own as far as discovering the answers to whether he himself will stay or not. It is as if Cacciato should have provided extra information to add to what Berlin has already gathered -- information that would clinch his decision to desert and enable him to justify that decision. But Cacciato does not provide it. Instead, there is the surreal Peace Talks scene.

To a certain extent, the structure of the Peace Talks has been foreshadowed. In Delhi, Berlin had wondered what he was doing on the mission at all. He has

a feeling of suspension....Not guilt, exactly. A need to justify. A sense that someday soon he would be called on to explain things. Why had they left the war? What was the purpose of it? He imagined a courtroom. A judge in a powdered wig, his own father, all the Fort Dodge townsfolk sitting in solemn-faced rows. He could hear snickers and hoots as the indictments were read. Shame, downcast eyes. He could feel himself sweating as he tried to explain that it wasn't cowardice or simple desertion. Not exactly. Partly it was Cacciato's doing. Partly it was mission, partly inertia, partly adventure, partly a way of tracing possibilities. But it was even more than this. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he knew it had to do with a whole array of things seen and felt and learned on the way to Paris. (pp.172-173)

This tension-filled public trial has a quite different atmosphere to the dignified Peace Talks or the dignified public execution in Tehran, but the issues are the same. Here, in Delhi, Berlin is confused because his motive is not clear-cut: it is made

up of several things which might explain his desertion, but, as he is aware, will not justify it in the eyes of authority.

At the Talks, there **are murmuring**, champagne, trumpets and drums and diplomatic flourishes, as at the beheading. The Talks room has tapestries and ornamentation as has Li Van Hgoc's chamber (pp.87, 91), and the proceedings are conducted with the calm diplomacy which has also characterized the discussions with Li Van Hgoc and Rhallon. This scene is the culmination of earlier conversations.

Sarkin Aung Wan, on the opposite side of the table to Berlin, cogently urges him to live as he has dreamed, to stop fleeing from all the happiness he has envisioned for himself, and energetically to "edge reality toward what he has dreamed" (p.320). She asks him to make the normality he has sought -- a nice home, a family and the chance to grow old (p.320). She tells him not to be afraid of happiness, "ridicule or censure or embarrassment...name-calling... [or] the scorn of others. For what is true obligation? Is it not the obligation to pursue a life at peace with itself?" (p.321).

Berlin, however, does not regard his obligation as the false one she tells him it is. Rather, he believes that

obligation is more than a claim imposed on us;
it is a personal sense of indebtedness. It is
a feeling, an acknowledgement, that through many
prior acts of consent we have agreed to perform
certain future acts. I have that feeling. (p.321)

He says that he was not gulled or misled into joining the army and going to Vietnam; but there is a slight discrepancy here because he did not actively seek to go either -- he drifted into it. He does,

however, make decisions and commitments to pursue Cacciato. Berlin's argument of past acts creating future commitments establishes the order he has wanted and sought throughout the novel. He has wanted to see a clear, direct and predictable cause-and-effect order to events where, once started, a course is inexorable.

He acknowledges the fears Sarkin Aung Wan urges him to ignore, but cannot abandon his sense of responsibility, which she says has been forced upon him by those fears:

More than any positive sense of obligation, I confess that what dominates is the dread of abandoning all that I hold dear. I am afraid of running away. I am afraid of exile. I fear what might be thought of me by those I love. I fear the loss of their respect. I fear the loss of my own reputation. Reputation, as read in the eyes of my father and mother, the people in my hometown, my friends. I fear being an outcast. I fear being thought a coward. I fear that even more than cowardice itself.

Are these fears wrong? Are they stupid? Or are they healthy and right? I have been told to ignore my fear of censure and embarrassment and loss of reputation. But would it not be better to accept those fears? To yield to them? If inner peace is the true objective, would I win it in exile? (p.322)

Unfulfilled ideas and principles, he says, cannot make reprisals, but people can. It is this that also stops him from making a full and complete break from the war as Sarkin Aung Wan asks. He says that

peace of mind is not a simple matter of pursuing one's own pleasure; rather, it is inextricably linked to the attitudes of other human beings, to what they want, to what they expect. The real issue is how to find felicity within limits. Within the context of our obligation to other people. (p.323)

Li Van Hgoc has said that "elastic rules are a poor man's tools" (p.93). Lieutenant Martin also adheres rigidly to rules (pp. 45-46). But Doc Peret and Corson use whatever works safely --

regardless of rules and labels. Berlin, here, states his "accommodation" (p.80) to what he perceives as an either/or decision. It is a decision made within limits; a framework in which he will try to act with honour and self-respect. He obeys the logic of what he has started (p.323), and will take the responsibility of continuing to do so despite any unforeseen turn of events, but not with wrong intentions. As the Mayor of Ovissil advises, Berlin can only live his life, he cannot "shoo" it in the direction he always wants it to follow.

At the end of the Peace Talks, Corson, in full combat gear, enters and Sarkin Aung Wan leaves with him. Corson has already ceased to function as the squad's leader and, here, his walking out foreshadows his departure from Paris with Sarkin Aung Wan. The reason for this "lifer for life's" (p.307) abandonment of his men is only partly that Vietnam is not his war. He is an army man who cherishes the virtues of camaraderie and the soldier's life. They are vital codes of conduct to him that still have meaning despite the nature of the war in which no-one takes responsibility as a solemn vow. Corson has revealed those values to Berlin in both word and deed. Having taken Berlin this far, Corson leaves the fantasy. Whether or not Berlin will also be able to make the values meaningful is a quite different issue. He makes a start by putting into action the responsibility he has accepted to finish the mission.

The disquieting alter ego voice of Sarkin Aung Wan has been silenced and he is able to make a conscious decision to overcome his fears (p.327). The members of the squad touch the M-16 to signify

their unanimity in pursuit--just as they touched the grenade that killed Martin. In fresh uniforms, the final strategy session completed, they march single file through the Parisian streets. In the darkness,

Oscar took the rifle from its blanket and carried it openly, patrol style, the barrel off to one side. No more pretense. Lead-colored turrets stood bare against the sky. Silhouettes, statues and gargoyles. The night seemed to move. Paris, Paul Berlin was thinking, but the feeling was Quang Ngai. He told himself to be brave.
(p.328)

The smells are of the paddies (p.328); they have the "wound-tight feel of an ambush" (p.328), and the hotel smells "like lake country" (p.331). Oscar does not want Berlin with them in the hotel because he might be paralysed or hysterical with fear again. Berlin, however, insists, and Oscar allows him to demonstrate his newly-found courage (p.331). Berlin has to enter the room first and Oscar yells "Go" -- echoing Berlin's own words when Cacciato first left and which Cacciato also uttered in Tehran. When Berlin enters, "the room [is] empty. Paul Berlin felt the emptiness before he saw it" (p.332).

Once again Cacciato has eluded them. He is the squad's proof that they themselves are not deserters. They need him as evidence for the military authorities and they need to capture him for the right kind of order to prevail. That is, if they, on a genuine mission, are perceived as deserters, the order that they are trying to uphold would be violated. Thus they are prepared to sacrifice Cacciato for their own sakes. However, Cacciato eludes them and is not their scapegoat. Not only has he, like the Fool, not been held accountable for his actions, he has left the squad in a chaotic position vis à vis authority. As Willeford writes

[Fools] have a magical affinity with chaos that might allow them to serve as scapegoats on behalf of order; yet they elude the sacrifice or banishment that would affirm order at their expense.³²

Cacciato has guided Berlin to the point where he decides to try to act courageously. This done, Cacciato's purpose in the fantasy is over and, like Corson, he leaves; moreover, like the Fool, he leaves unharmed.

Structurally, the raid on the hotel fuses with the scene at the novel's opening when Cacciato had tricked the squad with a red smoke grenade (p.20). At that time, Berlin, like the rest of the squad, thought it was a real attack. He had been paralysed at "the moment of truth" (p.21), and lay on the ground firing his gun randomly even after realizing that it was a trick. At the hotel, Berlin relives this experience. Red tracers fill the room and Berlin hysterically fires the gun. Calming down, he becomes aware of the red tracers and the smell of smoke, as he had in the opening episode (pp.20-21), and, disoriented and ashamed, he finds himself sitting around with the squad (pp.21, 333). The fusion leads the reader out of the fantasy that begins and ends with a trick, and we discover the real ending of Cacciato's story. In the opening chapter, it is implied that they let Cacciato go, report him as missing in action, and return to camp (p.10). This they now do (p.337).

Conclusion

In the final Observation Post chapter, Berlin can face the facts of his friends' deaths with a calmness that eluded him at the time of their deaths. Now, these deaths are emptied of emotion and are just facts which

did not bother him...and he could face them squarely. The order of the facts...the relations among the facts -- here he had trouble, but it was not the trouble of facing facts. It was the trouble of understanding them, keeping them straight. (pp.324-325)

He has taken a step towards controlling his fears by being able now to view these deaths with some sense of perspective. He remains, however, as confused about the randomness and haphazardness of death as he has always been. He has not found a framework within which these facts of death will be understandable--because, of course, there is not one.

The conclusion of the fantasy leaves Berlin disillusioned with Cacciato because he has not provided any answers. Berlin makes his decision after viewing all the perspectives provided by the guides. He has discovered the framework for the facts as far as his decision to stay is concerned. It cannot be a purely personal one because it must be lived out in a public arena. He has re-oriented his vision and gained a sense of perspective on his fears inasmuch as he has established order amongst his priorities.

What we are left with at the end of the novel is a state-

ment of positions which the Peace Talks present in a highly condensed way. All the arguments about soldiers and war are persuasive and O'Brien does not tip the balance one way or another by adding his authorial approval to any one view. He does not synthesize the views: he lets them stand in their own right.

There are few choices a soldier can make. He may flee the war and make his own peace, as Yossarian does in Catch-22. For Berlin, however, the price of such a glamorous and thrilling action is too high. Yossarian believes he is running towards responsibility to himself,³³ and he is prepared to keep jumping to avoid the vengeful pursuit of Natelly's whore. Told that his conscience will never let him rest if he deserts, Yossarian replies, "I wouldn't want to live without strong misgivings."³⁴

The final positions of Berlin and Yossarian disclose significant differences. Yossarian disengages himself from a bad society but he cannot define the next necessary step. Asserting the value of life, his best tactic is the avoiding leap. It is a leap away from all that threatens to extinguish his romantic spirit, and it is a leap into a hope of self-autonomy. He is in a precarious position because he cannot know if his Eden will provide the freedom he desires. His hope, therefore, remains fragile.

Berlin, on the other hand, has visited his haven, Paris, and has recognized that the safety it offers him is illusory. He too has disengaged himself from an oppressive American society but, while the other cultures he has visited have the order and certainty he desires, they are equally threatening to him. He is left on his

own without illusions. This position has been foreshadowed in the early Observation Post scene when he leaves the tower's safety, ventures out into the night sea, and, from this new perspective, sees the tower as "rickety and fragile and tottering": its safety an illusion (p.64).

He knows that safety is illusory and that threats exist everywhere and so no one situation is worse than any other. His moral standing, however, is important to him and he acknowledges the restrictions imposed upon him. Like Yossarian, he decides to be true to himself. He may not have the hope of self-autonomy that Yossarian has, but he does know the next necessary step after disengaging himself from society. He rejoins society as the Mythic Hero must.

The many perspectives on the war in O'Brien's novel create a similar effect ^{to} that in Michael Herr's Dispatches: namely, the parts become greater than the whole. As Seidler says of Going After Cacciato, the congruence of so many stories, in fact and fantasy, makes the picture of war truer than the facts themselves could ever be.³⁵ Berlin says "the truth is simple"; but it can also be complex. His final decision is essentially clear-cut and straightforward. The labyrinthine route by which he comes to it, however, embraces all the stories he has heard. To reach that final point, he has had to trace backwards into his memory and delve into his psyche, and we have seen the complex process leading to the final simplicity.

Perspective and relativity are central issues in O'Brien's

novel. The archetypal Fool, who dissolves the solidity of an entrenched point of view, opens the way to seeing many possible perspectives.³⁶ The Fool, like the Hero, destroys obsolete or myopic points of view and creates a new, vital one by which others can live. Cacciato, as the Fool, does this for Berlin. The fantasy's characters, by leading him through his own underworld, assist Cacciato. But it is Berlin, Hero as Fool, Fool as Hero, who finally "redeems his folly by finding the right relationship to it."³⁷

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹Tim O'Brien, Going After Cacciato (London: Jonathan Cape; New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978). Textual references are to this edition.

²Eric James Schroeder, "Two Interviews: Talks with Tim O'Brien and Robert Stone," Modern Fiction Studies, 30:1 (Spring 1984), p.144.

³Philip D. Beidler, American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (Georgia: University Press, 1982), p.172.

⁴Beidler, p.174.

⁵Schroeder interview, p.139.

⁶William Willeford, The Fool and His Scepter: A Study of Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p.55.

⁷Willeford, pp.69-70.

⁸Willeford, p.70.

⁹Schroeder interview, p.138.

¹⁰Willeford, p.70.

¹¹Willeford, p.79.

¹²Carl G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy from Collected Works, Vol. 12, trans. R.F.C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX Princeton University Press, 1959, para. 439.

¹³James Hillman, The Dream and the Underworld (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p.2.

¹⁴Hillman, p.26.

¹⁵Hillman, p.26.

¹⁶Hillman, p.27.

¹⁷Willeford, p.133.

- ¹⁸Willeford, p.13.
- ¹⁹Willeford, p.90.
- ²⁰Hillman, p.32.
- ²¹Hillman, p.29.
- ²²Willeford, p.101.
- ²³Willeford, p.101.
- ²⁴Willeford, p.101.
- ²⁵Willeford, p.101.
- ²⁶Willeford, p.47.
- ²⁷Hillman, p.34.
- ²⁸Hillman, p.108.
- ²⁹Willeford, p.175.
- ³⁰Willeford, p.188.
- ³¹Willeford, p.101.
- ³²Willeford, p.101.
- ³³Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), p.475.
- ³⁴Heller, p.476.
- ³⁵Beidler, p.76.
- ³⁶Willeford, p.29.
- ³⁷Willeford, p.166.

CHAPTER V

On the Border
Post modernism and Vietnam War Literature

I am I and my circumstance
Ortega, Meditaciones del Quijote

Allusions, echoes and parallels with the Mythic Hero's quest reveal several differences between this literature's and earlier war literature's images of the soldier as Mythic Hero. Perhaps the most distinctive difference is that the characters discussed here are often passive and ruminative. Unlike the Mythic Hero, who physically and actively performs deeds for the common good, these characters achieve at most the fulfillment of a private dream.

One must wonder, of course, what effect any war-writing can have on warfare and society. Philip Caputo probably speaks for all these writers when he doubts that his record of experiences in Vietnam will "prevent the next generation from being crucified in the next war."¹ None of the writers here has much hope of stopping war by writing about it. Although O'Brien wrote Going After Cacciato to make people think carefully before going to war, he does not believe that literature can be used as a "signpost saying 'do this' or 'don't do that.'"² However, the representation of men in his war shows not only personal enlightenment; it shows also a shift in American self-perception.

The works studied here fall into two groups as far as the theme of public and private illumination is concerned. Including Herr and Caputo, there are four protagonists whose stated purpose is to enlighten the public in some way. Caputo's work, besides being a memoir, is an elegy to two friends who died in combat. Furthermore, it stands as an indictment of a country which Caputo believes has

not honoured its dead. At the time of writing the work in 1977, Caputo viewed his country as unfaithful because

the country for which you [Sullivan and Levy] died wishes to forget the war in which you died. Its very name is a curse. There are no monuments to its dead heroes, no statues in smalltown squares and city parks, no plaques, nor public wreaths, nor memorials. For plaques and wreaths and memorials are reminders, and they would make it harder for your country to sink into the amnesia for which it longs. It wishes to forget and it has forgotten. (RW, pp.223-224)

Since there are no others, Caputo's work stands as a memorial. Moreover, quoting Sassoon's Great War poem, "Aftermath" (1919), Caputo challenges his country:

But the past is just the same--and War's a
bloody game...
Have you forgotten yet?...
Look down and swear by the slain of War
that you'll never forget. (RW, p.388)

Sassoon's poem is directed to a soldier and asks if he has forgotten his war experiences. The "world's events have rumbled on" since the Great War ended; "the green of the spring" signals hope but, even though life goes on, Sassoon warns soldiers and the public alike neither to forget nor to slip into a complacency where they might think that war could never happen again.

Just as Caputo's work as a whole is a memorial to the soldiers who died in Vietnam, so the work's epilogue shows that Caputo himself has not forgotten the war. He returned in 1975 as a journalist to cover the last days of the war. Even though he believes his friends died in a futile cause and that his own efforts were for nothing, he still has an emotional attachment to the war that compels him to be there at the end (RW, p.340).

A Rumor of War is the most traditional of these works in its representation of the effect of war on the soldier. The movement, also reflected in the chapter-heading quotations, is from youth and innocence to maturity and experience. It is a movement paralleled in the progression of the war itself. Caputo had gone to Vietnam in 1965 when it was still a "splendid little war." When he left in 1966, it had become a sprawling, amorphous, complex and brutal war. The war's metamorphosis, his own passage from innocence to experience, and his country's transition from initial confidence to the final humiliation of defeat are thus shown to be inter-related.

Caputo's work reminds Americans that they should not forget their dead soldiers and that somehow they must come to terms in a mature way with the fact that Vietnam is the first war they have lost. This is Michael Herr's point too. He strives to get behind the too-familiar image of the war that facilitates a turning away. He tries to tell a story --plain, simple yet awe-inspiring -- that he believes has not been told. Apart from creating a picture of the soldiers, events, and his own experiences, Herr makes clear to the public the media's major role in clouding the truth of the war.

The remaining protagonists seek to convey a more idealistic enlightenment to the public. Argue, in Guare's Muzeeka, wants others to recognize the symbolic value of the Etruscan vase where the dancers painted on it take part in an eternal dance of life. He wants Americans to break through the deadening effects of their society and join in that dance. The vase symbolizes primal, life-affirming movement in stasis. This symbolism is particularly post-

modern since the purpose and goal of dancing is to dance -- just as the purpose of living for many post-modern protagonists is to live, not merely to exist in moral and spiritual numbness. This is a theme I shall return to but, within the contexts of Vietnam War literature, Argue's vision of movement in stasis fails because he lacks the personal strength to make it a reality for himself and others.

In Rabe's Sticks and Bones, David's vision of uncritical love and the unification of all people is a noble one but it is also one that cannot penetrate his family's destructive tribalism and isolationism. His partial success in awakening them to their selfish existence is obliterated when they kill him. David is determined that the world should be as he sees it. In his own way he is as rigid as his family and this contributes to his downfall.

Argue is overcome by the image of America that Number Two describes to him. That is, America is characterized by, and consists of, cesspools. It is oriented towards decay, but Argue lacks the personal vigor to counteract this societal trend. David, on the other hand, while he too confronts a society that sees people as garbage, has enough strength of vision at least to make the attempt to redirect his family. Argue's suicide is voluntary and is the result of his own disillusionment; David's 'suicide' is forced upon him by his family, whose combined strength is stronger than his.

Those protagonists with private dreams, however, have more success than either Argue or David. In Eastlake's The Bamboo Bed, Clancy and Appelfinger achieve different but equally valid personal insights. Clancy's rigid image of the Hero is revealed as

inadequate to his own situation and he changes his self-conception accordingly. He achieves the status of Mythic Hero, but only at his death, and the lessons he has learned along the way die with him as far as the novel's other characters are concerned.

Appelfinger's theory of moral evolution is of great value too but in the novel only he recognizes this. He begins rigidly when he says that there can be only one evolution. His theory is tested in practice and proves inadequate, so he modifies it to suit his circumstances. This kind of flexibility is similar to the kind that Clancy finally achieves, but Appelfinger has to put it into practice while he lives. Like Berlin in Going After Cacciato, Appelfinger reaches a point where he can choose to leave or remain in the war. He chooses to return to it and it is to almost certain death. His flexibility makes him aware of the circumstances that have a direct bearing on his actions. His devotion to Clancy over-rides any other personal concerns because he cannot run and have peace of mind. His theory does not save his life but it is still a valid theory that provides him with an honourable field of action in which to exercise his own free will. That field of action contains contingencies that impinge upon him and that he chooses to acknowledge and honour.

Paul Berlin experiences the most private illumination. He seeks answers to personal concerns in a purely private endeavor shared in reality with none of his friends. Buffalo Bill Cody, in Kopit's Indians, like Berlin, embarks on an odyssey through his personal memory, but it is one that is rehearsed again and again in the public rodeo show. What Cody learns is valuable but it is also a

never-ending nightmare. Berlin learns to acknowledge externally imposed obligations before he hurts himself or others; Cody's enlightenment on this comes too late. In Berlin, we see a character who has learned to be flexible and who is able to live his life freely within limits; in Cody, we see the disastrous results when one does not so learn.

The characters discussed in this study can be evaluated in terms of rigidity and flexibility and each variation shows what can happen if rigidity or flexibility predominates. Appelfinger and Berlin alone achieve the best balance. The issue of flexibility is central to the archetypal conception of the Mythic Hero since the Hero is concerned with process and with breaking down hardened, stagnant, and outworn ideas. He introduces ameliorative change just as the Fool figure does.

Moreover, the idea of flexibility is central to the fiction of the post-modern era, even amongst writers who do not have war as their subject. And those writers who do deal with war and flexibility have taken a step beyond their American war-writing predecessors. Beidler writes that

American writers have often used the novel of war as a singularly appropriate metaphor of national initiation, of the passage from innocence to **experience** on a scale of possibility commensurate to the vastness of the American vision itself. Accordingly, the protagonists of Crane, Hemingway, Mailer, Jones, Heller and others have been images of their America: young, vigorous, ideologically unformed, perhaps, but at the same time at least implicitly suggestive₃ of a collective assumption of national innocence.

Beidler regards the protagonists of many Vietnam War novels as "tired men": they do not lose their innocence or youth in the war because they seem not to possess either at the outset.* Rather, the price they pay for their initiation in war is a "sad acceptance of a moral and spiritual exhaustion."⁴ We see this exhaustion in Lieutenant Corson as he is portrayed in the fantasy sequence of Going After Cacciato, and we see it in Clancy when he says that there is no longer a place for Heroes in this war.⁵

Beidler discusses novels with older protagonists, but that same exhaustion is seen in younger men too. Herr's image of the 'burned out' soldiers and civilian youth is perhaps the most eloquent picture of this exhaustion. The "sad acceptance" stems from an awareness of history and this signals a change in American perspective. In the works discussed here, Clancy is the character who is most obviously aware of his place in an historical lineage of Heroes. Moreover, Caputo's chapter-heading quotations from earlier war fiction and history suggest that he is trying to place the American defeat in Vietnam in an historical continuum from which he might learn. Beidler writes that America as a nation will have to learn

* See, for example, Victor Kolpacoff's The Prisoners of Quai Dong (1967), Gene D. Moore's The Killing at Ngo Tho (1967), David Halberstam's One Very Hot Day (1968), John Rowe's Count Your Dead (1968), Tom Tiede's Coward (1968), James Crumley's One Count to Cadence (1969), and Josiah Bunting's The Lionheads (1972).

the most burdensome lesson of all... which [will be] the requirement that we no longer see ourselves as exempt from the lessons of limitation taught by prior human history. This country founded, and for two centuries has continued to nourish, its moral idealism on the assumption that all that had gone before did not really count so far as our history was concerned. We would make it new. There were any number of points along the line at which we might have noticed that the design was not working out, that the time had come to check out the notion that, given a set of demonstrably sincere, decent motives, the old errors of human history could be undone. But it took the second half of the twentieth century in general and Vietnam in particular to drive home the lesson that, in terms of moral and spiritual legitimacy, we have proved to be historically no better and no worse than most nations that have considerable influence in the way the world runs. To borrow a phrase... the wrenching experience of Vietnam has brought about our collective "return into time," our acknowledgement as a people that, after nearly two centuries of hoping otherwise, we are in fact subject to contingencies, the limitations, the geopolitical risings and fallings that mark the course of human history.

Bending with the circumstances of one's situation and acknowledging contingencies beyond one's control is precisely what Berlin learns to do. His decision to stay in the war is one that belongs in the middle range of possibilities open to him. Given the realization that an individual, like America as a nation, exists in a world where others make demands that have to be considered, Berlin's is a mature decision.

Arthur Saltzman, in an article on Going After Cacciato, regards Berlin's decision as a capitulation to a false sense of duty and a betrayal of the imagination. The imagination, Saltzman argues, does not provide Berlin with the means to make his world anew: it does not provide him with salvation.⁷ In taking this view, I believe that Saltzman tries to force the novel into the mould of Catch-22.

Granted, Berlin is a 'dupe' of necessity but he is also a soldier in Vietnam and a character who, recognizing the external circumstances that influence his life, tries to make something of them. He does not flee like Yossarian or any of the array of American protagonists who leave when experience becomes too much for their innocence. Berlin stays and tries to assimilate what is happening without losing his integrity.

It appears that in this novel O'Brien deliberately summons up Catch-22 and Yossarian's flight "towards responsibility" to himself in order to discard it as a possible solution for Berlin's situation in Vietnam. Yossarian, aware of the maddening complexities and corruption in his world, leaves for Sweden, which is more of a symbolic haven than an actual one since Milo Minderbender Enterprises extend there too. Berlin says of his haven, Paris, that it is more a state of mind than a place.⁸ Berlin's secret hopes that it is more than this are disappointed and he has to depend upon his imagination to maintain that state of mind. The difference between Yossarian and Berlin is that Yossarian will have to keep jumping and physically moving to avoid the dagger of Natelly's whore and all the things she represents that threaten his integrity. Berlin, on the other hand, has an imagination that allows him to be detached from, yet connected to, his society.

The other novel that comes to mind in relation to Going After Cacciato is Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five (1969). Berlin's father has told him to look only at the good things --advice that coincides with Tralfamadorian philosophy-- but Berlin takes in the

full picture. Unlike Billy Pilgrim, who lives by the escapist Tralfamadorian code long after his experiences in Dresden, Berlin does not let himself escape fully into his fantasy. In Tehran, Doc Peret has had to urge him to look at the details, but in Paris Berlin does this by choice. His stance is mid-way between Yossarian and Billy Pilgrim: he neither flees responsibilities to others nor does he become mired in the entropy that swamps Billy Pilgrim in his 'normal' life as an optician. Berlin can function in a world of complexities. He in his decision, and O'Brien in his novel, accept the power of external forces but also retain hope. Berlin comes to a mature decision and still has his imagination which has not been deadened by his experiences. Moreover, Cacciato does leave the war. The hope and freedom he symbolizes, while eternally elusive, have not been extinguished. The important point here, and one that sets this novel apart from others of its kind where the protagonist engages in a life-long fruitless search for a utopian dream, is that Berlin no longer needs an external manifestation of the dream: he has his own inner resources.

Related to the idea of bending with circumstances is the idea of motive. Berlin knows that his motives for being in Vietnam and in pursuit of Cacciato are anything but straightforward. This lack of clarity occurs not simply because, as Rhallon says, there is no sense of purpose in the war. Political muddy waters certainly contribute to the uncertainty, as does not being able to tell Friendlies from Unfriendlies and so on. As has been said time and again in the works studied here, nothing is known for sure in this war. More than this, it appears

that the jungle, land, and general environment blur the soldiers' sense of right and wrong. Exposed to such conditions, soldiers discover unknown depths in themselves that complicate issues that had previously seemed simple and easy to live with. Michael Herr points this out when he talks of the various reasons Americans have for being in Vietnam and they boil down to the exceedingly unpleasant "We're here to kill Gooks. Period."⁹

The characters in these works find evidence that their own integrity and innocence are not as they had first believed. There is repeated emphasis on what the environment can do to the mind and morality of Americans. There is also the shocking discovery "that one of the most brutal things in the world is your average nineteen-year-old American boy" (RW, p. 137). These characters find themselves in positions where the 'right' decision or action is not at all clear. Yet, no matter what the motive, one has to accept the responsibility for the outcome of one's actions. Cody, for example, tries to excuse his wholesale slaughter of the buffalo with the argument that he did not know they reproduced so slowly. This is an unacceptable reason. For the other writers, too, ignorance and innocence do not justify exoneration.

There is no place in this war's literature for innocent purity. In For Whom the Bell Tolls (1941), Hemingway could celebrate the purity of violence and ignore its purpose: but there are few Robert Jordans in Vietnam. This Hemingway motif appears in The Deer Hunter (1978) with its emphasis on one bullet to kill a deer and one bullet in the Russian roulette game. This film is a rep-

resentation of war in Vietnam that has more to do with a nostalgic evocation of male initiation rituals of the Frontier myth--recalling, for example, James Fenimore Cooper's The Deerslayer (1841)--than with the complexities of the 'New Frontier' in Vietnam.

The issue here for many Vietnam protagonists and their authors is not so much the initiation from innocence to experience as the question of how to assimilate that experience and still live in society. In The Bamboo Bed, for example, the echoes of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1926) are relevant to this theme of assimilating experience into American innocence. Clancy, like Jay Gatsby, is from the Mid-west, has no known family, creates his own identity from "his Platonic conception of himself,"¹⁰ and has a rigidly-held view of an idealized figure from the past--Gatsby of Daisy, Clancy of the Hero-figure.

Jay Gatsby ignores the Valley of Ashes, an emblem of modern times, and focusses his eyes and mind on the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. The light is a symbol of hope for Gatsby that he can capture his "grail" and so relive the past with Daisy.¹¹ At the end of the novel, Gatsby's dream unrealized and he himself murdered, the narrator, Nick Carraway, tries to imagine the island as it was when the first settlers arrived, when America was the green land of hope and plenty, and he realizes that

for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked

out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way...and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know it was already behind him....

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter--tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further....And one fine morning--

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

Gatsby's romantic hope is dashed not simply because he cannot relive the past but because his image of Daisy bears no resemblance to her reality. Gatsby's innocent wonder on this matter is equated with the American Dream of a land of infinite possibility. Carraway, however, knows that that Dream eluded the first settlers and continues to elude Americans. He also knows that Americans will continually chase the Dream, like "boats against the current."

The crucial difference between the quests of Gatsby and Clancy is that Clancy comes to realize that his goal is unattainable. His adjustment of his own self-image is an indication that he has stopped battling against the current and is no longer being "borne back ceaselessly into the past." He lets go of inherited ideas of heroism and comes at last into the much older, genuine Mythic Heroism.

As Beidler says, for the protagonists of Vietnam War literature there is a "return into time," and this is further borne out in the 'green light' motif in Going After Cacciato. On the three occasions when someone urges "Go," the utterance is accompanied by green smoke or a green door--as if to emphasize the idea of movement forward. The last occasion is in the Parisian hotel when Berlin goes through the green door to what he thinks will be the long-awaited con-

frontation with Cacciato (GAC, p.332). Cacciato, however, is as elusive as Gatsby's dream; but as with Clancy, the failure to capture the dream does not matter because, by this point, Berlin no longer needs the elusive hope Cacciato represents. Like Clancy, Berlin has discovered something more meaningful.

The kind of description that Carraway gives above of man's awe in the face of inspiring nature **reflects a common** theme in American literature but it takes on a particular twist in post-modern and Vietnam War writing. For many post-modern writers, it is not just modern man's inability to be awed and inspired by nature that they deplore, it is man's inability to be awed by anything.¹³ To counteract this complacency the Vietnam War writers, for example, reactivate several literary techniques. The most obvious here is the use of the Mythic Hero's quest and its epic proportions to suggest parallels commensurate with the soldiers' experiences. The writers also provide stunningly graphic descriptions of the effects of modern weaponry, and powerful descriptions of the Vietnamese jungle and environment.

The war itself cannot produce a sense of awe in the general public because, as Herr and others point out, the war had become too familiar. Its power to produce awe in the non-combatant was reduced by several factors. Because we are all familiar with war from movies, it is harder to accept newsreels of warfare on television as being more truthful than war-movies. Moreover, the Vietnam War itself had been shown on television for so long that its impact had been diminished.

To create an image of the war that was not evasive, **writers**

used several techniques. One is the structural idiosyncrasies of their works which were discussed earlier. Another is to focus on an element of the war as a whole. The jungle as a source of awe is a common theme and it is perhaps for this reason that Conrad's Heart of Darkness is brought to mind so often. Moreover, writers use the image of the labyrinth, which, like the jungle, expresses the war protagonist's ^{journey to} self-discovery. This image was firmly established by Heller in Catch-22 as a potent symbol for the consciousness of men in war. It replaced the equally powerful metaphor from the Great War of the soldier's farewell to arms.

Conrad, like these Vietnam War writers, does not use the language of psychology to present his protagonist's journey but his imagery does anticipate Jung's. The effect of Conrad's symbolism is that

he concretizes the hidden world of the inner self. Through image and symbol, he evokes the well-known voyage of the hero who, in ancient epics, explores the lower world and, in so doing, probes¹⁴ the depths of his own and his nation's conscience.

The Vietnam War writers here may, like Eastlake, deliberately summon up the image of the Mythic Hero that befits such an epic journey, or, more commonly, they present an ordinary man's journey into the "lower world." The effect in either case is the same: that is, the conscience of protagonist and nation alike are probed. It takes the same form as that which Virgil depicts in Book 6 of the Aeneid where

Aeneas' descent is part of his initiation for the role of leader of the Roman people. Virgil emphasizes the fact that truth is to be found in the heart of darkness; thus the Sibyl who... "obscuris vera involvens" (hides truth in darkness), guides Aeneas. Moreover, just as Aeneas is about to enter Hades, Virgil interrupts his narrative to ask the very elements of hell, Chaos and Phlegethon, to allow him to reveal the secrets buried in the darkness and depths of the earth. Aeneas' voyage to Hades is one means by which he learns of the tragedy implicit in the affairs of men; this is the price he pays for fulfilling his duty as founder of Rome. In the lower worlds he looks both into the past and the future and, having observed the penalties for personal crimes, he is told of the bloodshed and cruelty which are to weigh on the conscience of his nation -- the cost of Rome's imperial power. Aeneas, the pious and worthy¹⁵ man, learns the truth through a descent into darkness.

The epic quality of Aeneas' descent is paralleled in Berlin's descent and in the self-explorations of Cody and Clancy. They see their pasts in a new light: Berlin becomes aware of his haphazard route to Vietnam and faces squarely his past acts of cowardice; Cody acknowledges his role in the Indians' decline; Clancy recognizes the dangerous falsity of his created self-image and the massacres that resulted from it. They also see the penalties for their personal crimes: Berlin twice sees the punishment for desertion and imagines his own court-martial for desertion; Cody's quest for immortality turns into a nightmare when Hickok creates mass-produced duplicate Codys that pop up like cardboard cut-outs when Cody shoots them, and he is condemned to re-tell his story every night in the rodeo show; Clancy becomes aware that the military deliberately sends him on suicidal missions in the hope that he too will die and so rid the military of his dangerous zeal. They also become aware, as if for the first time, of the bloodshed and cruelty that weigh upon

themselves and their society: Cody is aware of the cruelty to the Indians; Clancy and Berlin recognize the suffering of all those involved in the Vietnam War.

One crucial difference between Aeneas and these protagonists, of course, is that they are not being prepared for leadership. Their acquired knowledge from the "lower world" therefore puts them in a difficult position because their society may not accept the vision of truth they have attained. Their position in society, therefore, needs to be defined and here we find them sharing the same position as many other post-modern characters -- that of living on the edge of society.

For example, Norman Mailer in An American Dream (1965), has his protagonist, Stephen Rojack, leave for the jungles of Guatemala and Yucatan at the end of the novel. Tony Tanner writes of An American Dream that its theme is the idea of a universe struggling between the principles of Good and Evil, and that somehow man's imagination has ceased to be awed by such a battle. Rojack's journey into the jungles is made in the attempt to explore more fully the apprehension of this battle he glimpsed when he murdered his wife and during his long night's adventure afterward. Tanner writes of this embattled universe that

what Mailer feels is somehow we have lost the ability to respond to this awesome confrontation. "The primitive understanding of dread--that one was caught in a dialogue with gods, devils, and spirits and so was naturally consumed with awe, shame, and terror has all but been forgotten" [writes Mailer]

Primitive man had an instinctive sense of dread in his relationship with non-human nature; civilized man has disrupted this by believing himself to be permanently

elevated above animals and the jungle. As a result that sense of dread which is a requisite for psychic and spiritual health has been greatly attenuated. Related to this is civilization's "invasion of the supernatural" which takes the form of denying powers which it cannot see. The price of this, [Mailer] thinks, is to accelerate our sense of some indefinable but imminent disaster.

If man becomes aware of those dimensions of nature and supernature from which he feels that the rest of society has resolutely closed itself off, where does that leave him standing? By analogy we might say on an edge as precarious as the parapet round a balcony.¹⁶

The jungle in Vietnam promotes just this sense of awe that fascinates Mailer. For example, when Caputo and his squad go into their first combat, they cross the "line of departure between the known and the unknown" (RW, p.83). Left in the jungle they watch the helicopters leave and then are struck by "the utter strangeness of this rank and rotted wilderness." The jungle causes in them "that same instinct that makes us apprehensive of places like attics and dark alleys" (RW, p.85). As already noted, they are very relieved when an airstrike is called in because the noise makes them less afraid of the eerie jungle: "It was as though rockets and machine guns were merely technological equivalents of the gourds and rattles natives use to chase away evil spirits" (RW, p.86).

Tanner's immediate reference above to the "edge" is to the balcony edge along which Rojack walks to prove to himself that he can walk the fine line between the social architecture that threatens to crush him and the pre-social, mysterious darkness of a demonic nature. Rojack's knowledge of Evil sets him off from the majority, just as Caputo at his court-martial realizes that every-

one has the capacity to do what he did. He faces the truth of his capacity for evil but recognizes that others do not want to "confront their devil" (RW, p.331).

After such knowledge many protagonists take up a position in the border area between civilized and natural worlds. The most obvious example amongst these war works is in Going After Cacciato with its Fool who occupies the border area between chaos and order. Berlin takes on the aspect of the Fool inasmuch as he keeps himself in a metaphorical border area. As in Jung's definition of the modern man, Berlin comes to "the very edge of the world...and stands before the Nothing out of which All may grow."¹⁷

Berlin often finds himself at physical borders and at the border between fact and fantasy, the conscious and the unconscious. He has also a scene that is equivalent to Rojack's walk around the balcony edge, and that exemplifies Jung's edge of the world. During one of the Observation Post passages (GAC, pp.63-65), Berlin leaves the safety of the tower and walks down into the sea. Not only does he see the tower in its new light of being a "rickety and fragile and tottering" post instead of the sanctuary he had previously imagined it to be, but it is also an observation post from which there is nothing to observe. It is as if the tower is on the very edge of the world looking out into an infinity of darkness. Moreover, in this scene, Berlin has his bravest moment; he is in full control of himself as he moves between the tower and safety, and the night ocean with all the unseen forces that may threaten him. Even seeing the tower now from a new perspective and knowing that it is an illusory sanctuary does not unbalance him.

By the end of the novel, Berlin is in a position where he is neither part of an entropic society nor has he gone all the way over in the opposite direction to ~~exile~~ or death. Heller's Yossarian, the narrator of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1947), many of the victim-agent characters of Saul Bellow, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, and others are in the same position. What they do in that border area is keep moving. As Tanner writes, many post-modern characters are engaged in a flight from death. In Bellow's The Adventures of Augie March (1953), for example,

Augie March's friend Padilla was particularly fascinated by "the little individual who tries to have a charge counter to the central magnetic one and dance his own dance on the periphery." Ultimately that central magnetic charge turns into the gravitational pull towards the level of anonymity of death. The countermovement celebrated differently by Ellison, Bellow and Heller is a sort of private dance of life. Yossarian cannot avoid being involved with the existing structures of reality as it surrounds him...but at least he can...keep on spinning to avoid being trapped.... [These characters] aim to be invulnerable because elusive. The dance on the periphery may not be leading anywhere, but at least it celebrates a refusal to sleep, a resistance to arrest; a mode of motion turns out to be a way, perhaps the only way, of life.

One thinks of the elusive Cacciato, Berlin's ability to twirl and turn in his imagination, Clancy's masks that for a long time prevent him from being pinned down by himself or others, and his final ability to elude being used for propaganda purposes by the military. These characters retain their integrity and separate themselves from a society whose general tendency is towards entropy. When a society allows itself to move towards increasing disorder,

inertia and decay so that eventually people are consigned to a vast rubbish heap, the Hero has to stem the flow, or, at least save himself.

The alternatives to not finding a place on the periphery where one might have a "private dance of life" are grim. Argue has his vision of the Etruscan dancers eternally dancing, but he himself cannot emulate this movement in stasis and so he commits suicide. David's family is mired in the entropic movement towards death and this allows them to regard dead soldiers, Zung and eventually David as garbage to be disposed of. David's actions seem to spell "imminent disaster" and so the family disavows any connection with him. They hide by not moving and their entropy is, in Rabe's view, symbolic of the majority's that Argue also wants to reverse.

Buffalo Bill Cody is caught in his own self-image, realizes its fatality, yet has to live on in a circular nightmare controlled by "the Voice." The idea of man as a puppet expressed in Indians is a particularly American form of paranoia that results from an either/or habit of thought. Either one has complete control over one's destiny or someone else has that complete control. Cody's nightmare is the predominating American one. However, related to the idea of inhabiting a border area is a development of this idea of control. There is now being voiced the idea that within limits one can shape one's own life.

Finding a place on the periphery involves resisting the mindless acceptance of other people's version of experience. Avoid-

ing this recruitment is also a predominant theme in post-modern literature and its most thorough exposition is probably in Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (1968), where writer Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters travel through America making a movie. All types of people who are not in sympathy with the Pranksters and their mind-expanding acid trips are described as living in another movie. We each have our own way of looking at the world and the use of the term "movie" to describe it implies that we each live in a self-created fiction. To use the language, ideas and methods of someone in opposition to oneself is to be recruited into that other person's "movie."

An example of the nightmare this can lead to is the subject of Paul Brodeur's novel The Stunt Man (1970). Here, the protagonist, Cameron, goes AWOL while en route to an army training camp. He journeys through a forest, meets a Charon-like toll collector who guides him on his way to Canada and safety. However, figures of Fate seem to direct his life when he accidentally kills a stunt man, and through various circumstances, takes over the stunt man's job. Cameron, then, is always under the control of Gottschalk, the movie director, and is at his mercy for safety from the pursuing police. Cameron's precarious position becomes more and more dangerous until finally he has to play the role of the stunt man in a scene that recreates his accidental killing of the stunt man he has replaced.

This novel contains, undisguised, all the allegorical Mythic machinery of gods and Fates to whose will Cameron is always

subservient. Continuously under the directorial eye of Gottschalk, Cameron ends by being a spectator of his own life and an actor who relives an event on film from his own life. He cannot change his life's direction because it is already scripted in Gottschalk's movie. Like Cody's subjection to the "Voice," Cameron's subjection to Gottschalk becomes a circular nightmare. And, as in Guare's Muzeeka where the troops watch re-runs of yesterday's fighting, the distinction between reality and fiction is completely blurred. The fusion in The Stunt Man results in a complete loss of Cameron's essential self: his is a dissolution; whereas the fusion of reality and fiction for Berlin is a useful way of asking, and answering, questions.

However, one can resist being recruited into someone else's movie. Michael Herr calls Dispatches his "movie." It is his version of what the experience in Vietnam is like. He makes no claim that it is the only possible one, or the final one. Herr's disclaimer on this point allows him to avoid the disaster that meets David when he tries to recruit his family to his view of experience and they resist by killing him. It is not so much that there is no final objective reality as that few characters in post-modern literature struggle to perceive it fully. For example, Tanner writes that

Ralph Ellison's primary aim in writing is to challenge any 'patterning of life'--whether fictional, ideological or sociological--which is a falsification of existence as he has experienced it. Perhaps the best image Ellison has for the American writer is the one he takes from the story of Menelaus and Proteus. Eidothea's advice to Menelaus is to keep a firm hold on Proteus until, after all his changes of shape, he appears as himself, at which point he will reveal the name of the offended god and how they can make their way home without further interruption.¹⁹

Ellison borrows this image and writes in his collection of essays, Shadow and Act, from which Tanner quotes, **that,**

for the novelist, Proteus stands for both America and the inheritance of illusion through which all men must fight to achieve reality. Our task then is always to challenge the apparent forms of reality...and to struggle with it until it reveals its mad, vari-implicated chaos, its false face, and on until it surrenders its insight, its truth.²⁰

In Invisible Man, Ellison's protagonist does not emulate the Protean character, Rinehart, just as Berlin does not finally emulate the Protean Cacciato. Berlin learns from Cacciato but does not copy him because to do so would be to merge completely with the chaos which is the ultimate dissolution of the self. Berlin, like other post-moderns, neither lets himself be trapped in fixed patterns of perceiving experience nor does he succumb to Protean fluidity. Instead, as Tanner writes of others in Berlin's position, there is

a struggle with, a resistance to, both [fixity and fluidity], conducted in some 'border area' where author and hero alike attempt to create themselves and come into the meaning of their experience.²¹

Clancy struggles with the Protean images of himself until he does learn the ultimate truth but it is a truth that leads to ultimate at-one-ness. That is, when he realizes that his heroic self-image of today may make him a tyrant tomorrow, he sacrifices himself. In his death he achieves the at-one-ment that can only be achieved in death. Such a state of loss of all distinction and differentiation may be nightmarish, as it is for David's family and for Cody when he sees his immortal duplicates, but from an

Eastern point of view it is nirvana--that final state of universal quietude which is the goal of existence and which also betokens the end of all distinction, differentiation and individualism. It is not a nightmare--it is ultimate bliss.²²

For those who do not struggle with the Protean image of reality until it reveals its final truth, there remains the middle-ground, the border area. They do not go over the edge, they arrive at it and draw back a hesitant foot as Marlow does in Heart of Darkness, as the Merry Pranksters do at Edge City, and as Berlin does. In Acid Test, Edge City is a state of consciousness as Sweden and Paris are for Yossarian and Berlin. To go over the edge is to die as Clancy does. To arrive at the edge, however, is to reach a position where one may learn something about the relationship of individual identity to the "flow." The "flow" in Acid Test is the larger universal pattern of life: David and Argue call it "connection" with others, and it is evident in Emerson's Transcendental concept of the Over-Soul.

But one must not go all the way over because to do so is to die. One must return from the edge and tell the tale as Berlin, Herr and Caputo do, or have the tale told, as Mike does for Clancy. Telling the tale, however, presents problems because a language has to be found that will faithfully convey the complex and awe-inspiring nature of the experience. The innovative techniques used by the war writers here are also found in much post-modern literature. Vonnegut is concerned in all his novels with the relation between encountered facts and invented fictions, and

interweaves moments of each. Timothy Findley's The Wars (1977) makes the writer's problem obvious. Here the narrator, trying to capture the essence of Robert Ross' Great War experiences has recourse to photographs, letters, other people's reminiscences of Ross, and his own imagination to capture and piece together for the reader a sense of who Robert Ross was. The interleaving of past and present, fact and fiction, and the gathering together of many points of view that the war writers here use serve the same purpose as Findley's technique. That is, they alert the reader to the multi-facetedness and relativity of any perception of experience. Reality is ambiguous.

The writer is as engaged in a quest as his protagonist is. They both seek a middle-ground that is not so much a compromise as a transcendent position from which to view the larger pattern. Such a quest is Romantic. The character moves between his own conception of the world and that which others may try to impose upon him. Refining and discarding different views of experience, he may reach a third, nirvana-like, transcendent state of the kind the Romantic precursor, William Blake, intimates, but usually the character walks the precarious edge between two worlds.

Of the characters discussed in this study, Berlin achieves the best position, but the others, in their different ways, exemplify the errors that are best avoided if there is to be any hope of cultural renewal. Awareness of the larger patterns of history is an objective in this literature regarding America's first lost war. The writers use the structure and many of the elements of the Mythic

Hero's quest to show that larger pattern and the individual's relation to it. An obsolete and dangerous American self-image that obstructs what Americans have in common with the rest of the world has been torn down. Even though the war was lost, one such as Berlin shows a way to come to terms with that loss that does not involve a retreat into an isolationism of fantasy. He shows that there is still the possibility of redeeming hope if inherited illusions of infallibility are discarded and the fact of frailty accepted.

These writers have an epic vision of not so much the Vietnam War but what it means to the Americans fighting it and to America as a nation. They have brought ancient Mythic themes to bear on their recreation of the Vietnam experience not only to supply an awe-inspiring sense of the soldier in action but also to show the way that the soldier may return to society and that that society may "return into time." The writers have employed elaborate means to reveal the inglorious task that remains to the soldier and his society: to survive. The purpose of living, as these writers perceive it, is simply to live, not to exist in a state of suspended animation, but to live and to cling to a last sliver of integrity and a last vestige of life-affirming hope in the face of the majority's entropic trend.

The plays have parallels with Heroic conventions that reveal society's misdirection; the parallels in the novels and memoirs reveal the repercussions of that misdirection, but also suggest the route to change. There is not so much a celebration

of the soldier-as-Hero, although that is present, as an exploitation of the Heroic quest to show that knowledge and insight must be brought to bear on the whole Vietnam experience if American society is to acknowledge and assimilate the war in a mature and responsible way into its consciousness. Until that time, the few, like Berlin and others who have witnessed the dark side of human nature and American culture, will remain on the periphery of society.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

¹Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p.xix. Textual references are to this edition cited hereafter as RW.

²Eric James Schroeder, "Two Interviews: Talks with Tim O'Brien and Robert Stone," Modern Fiction Studies, 30.1 (Spring 1984), pp.140,146.

³Philip D. Beidler, "The Vietnam Novel: An Overview, with a Brief Checklist of Vietnam War Narrative," Southern Humanities Review, 12,1 (Winter 1978), p.45.

⁴Beidler, p.45.

⁵William Eastlake, The Bamboo Bed (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p.284.

⁶Beidler, pp.51-52.

⁷Arthur M. Saltzman, "The Betrayal of the Imagination: Paul Brodeur's The Stunt Man and Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction 22,1,p.34.

⁸Tim O'Brien, Going After Cacciato (London: Jonathan Cape; New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), p.300. Textual references are to this edition cited hereafter as GAC.

⁹Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York:A.A. Knopf, 1977), p.20.

¹⁰F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (Penguin, 1974), p.105.

¹¹Fitzgerald, p.155.

¹²Fitzgerald, pp. 189-190.

¹³Tony Tanner, City of Words. A Study of American Fiction in the Mid-Twentieth Century (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p.356.

¹⁴Lillian Feder, "Marlow's Descent into Hell," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, IX (March 1955), pp.280-292. Reprinted in Heart of Darkness. Revised Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1971, 1963), p.182.

¹⁵Feder, p.182.

¹⁶Tanner, pp. 356, 358-359.

¹⁷Carl G. Jung, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," (1928/1931) from Civilization in Transition in Jung's Collected Works, Vol. 10, trans. R.F.C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX Princeton University Press, 1964, p.76.

¹⁸Tanner, pp.83-84.

¹⁹Tanner, p.63.

²⁰Tanner, p.63.

²¹Tanner, p.63.

²²Tanner, p.383.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Caputo, Philip. A Rumor of War. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1977.
- Eastlake, William. The Bamboo Bed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.
- Guare, John. Three Plays by John Guare: Cop-Out, Muzeeka, Home Fires. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970.
- Herr, Michael. Dispatches. New York: Avon, 1978.
- Kopit, Arthur. Indians. London: Methuen, 1970.
- O'Brien, Tim. Going After Cacciato. London: Jonathan Cape; New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978.
- Rabe, David. The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones. Two Plays by David Rabe. New York: The Viking Press, 1976.

Secondary SourcesI. Books

- Adair, Gilbert. Vietnam on Film: From "The Green Berets" to "Apocalypse Now." New York: Proteus Publishing Company, 1981.
- Arlen, Michael J. Living-Room War. New York: The Viking Press, 1969.
- Auerbach, Doris. Shepard, Kopit and the Off-Broadway Theater. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982.
- Beidler, Philip D. American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam. Georgia: University Press, 1982.
- Bernstein, Samuel J. The Strands Entwined: A New Direction in American Drama. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1980.

- Briley, John. The Traitors. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969.
- Brodeur, Paul. The Stunt Man. New York: Atheneum, 1970.
- Bunting, Josiah. The Lionheads. New York: George Braziller, 1972.
- Butler, Bill. The Myth of the Hero. New York: Rider and Co., 1969.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949). Second Edition. Princeton: University Press, 1973.
- Cassirer, Ernst. Language and Myth. Trans. Suzanne K. Langer. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1946.
- Cohn, Ruby. New American Dramatists 1960-1980. London: MacMillan, 1982.
- Conrad, Joseph. Heart of Darkness (1900). Ed. Robert Kimbrough. (New York: Norton, 1971).
- Crane, Stephen. The Red Badge of Courage (1896). In The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane. Vol. II. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Introduction by J.C. Levenson. Virginia: University Press, 1970.
- , "The Mystery of Heroism" The Little Regiment (1897). In The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane. Vol. VI. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Introduction by James B. Colvert. Virginia: University Press, 1970.
- Durden, Charles. No Bugles, No Drums. New York: The Viking Press, 1976.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Emerson's Essays. Introduction by Sherman Paul. London: Everyman, 1971.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby (1926). London: Penguin, 1974.
- Gibson, Donald. The Fiction of Stephen Crane. Southern Illinois: University Press, 1968.
- Green, Graham. The Quiet American. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1955.
- Hawkes, Terence. Structuralism and Semiotics. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977.
- Heinemann, Larry. Close Quarters. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1977.

- Heller, Joseph. Catch-22. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.
- Hillman, James. The Dream and the Underworld. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.
- Horne, A.D., ed. The Wounded Generation: America After Vietnam. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1981.
- Huggett, William Turner. Body Count. New York: Putnam, 1973.
- Jones, David. In Parenthesis (1937). London: Faber and Faber, 1978.
- Jones, Peter G. War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1976.
- Just, Ward. Stringer. Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1974.
- Klinkowitz, Jerome and John Somer, eds. Writing Under Fire: Stories of the Vietnam War. New York: Dell, 1978.
- Kolpacoff, Victor. The Prisoners of Quai Dong. New York: New American Library, 1967.
- Lahr, John. Up Against the Fourth Wall: Essays in Modern Theater. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. Home From the War: Vietnam Veterans Neither Victims Nor Executioners. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales, The. Translated and introduced by Patrick K. Ford. California: University Press, 1977.
- Mailer, Norman. Armies of the Night. New York: New American Library, 1968.
- , Why Are We in Vietnam? New York: George Putnam's Sons, 1968.
- Mersmann, James F. Out of the Vietnam Vortex: a study of poets and poetry against the war. Kansas: University Press, 1974.
- Miller, Wayne Charles. An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction A History of the American Military Novel. New York: University Press, 1970.
- Moore, Gene D. The Killing at Ngo Tho. New York: Norton, 1967.

- Parkinson, Thomas. What the Blindman Saw; or Twenty-five Years of Endless War. Thorpe Springs Press, 1970.
- Polner, Murray. No Victory Parades: The Return of the Vietnam Veterans. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.
- Sack, John. M. New York: New American Library, 1967.
- Santoli, Al, ed. . Everything We Had. New York: Random House, 1981.
- Smith, Roger W., ed. Guilt: Man and Society. New York: Anchor, 1971.
- Smith, Julian. Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975.
- . Strangers at Home: Vietnam Veterans since the War. New York: Praeger, 1980.
- Tanner, Tony. City of Words: A Study of American Fiction in the Mid-Twentieth Century. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971.
- Tiede, Tom. Coward. New York: Trident Press, 1968.
- Vico, Giambattista. The New Science. Revised translation of the third edition (1744) by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. Slaughterhouse-Five. London: Jonathan Cape, 1969.
- Walsh, Jeffrey. American Literature: 1914-Vietnam. London: Mac-Millan, 1982.
- Willeford, William. The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969.
- Wilson, James C. Vietnam in Prose and Film. Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland and Co., 1982.
- Wolfe, Tom. The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968.

II. Articles

- Adler, Thomas. "'The Blind Leading the Blind' Rabe's Sticks and Bones and Shakespeare's King Lear," Papers on Language and Literature, 15, 203-206.
- Canario, John W. "The Harlequin," Studies in Short Fiction, IV (1967), 225-233.
- Feder, Lillian. "Marlow's Descent into Hell," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, IX (March 1955), 280-292.
- Jones, John Bush. "Impersonation and Authenticity: The Theater as Metaphor in Kopit's Indians," Quarterly Journal of Speech 59 (1973), 443-451.
- Jung, Carl G. "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man" (1928/1931), The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 10, pars. 148-196. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: University Press, 1964.
- ". "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology: Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious" (1928/1935), The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 7, pars. 202-295. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: University Press, 1953.
- McInerney, Peter. "'Straight and Secret' History in Vietnam War Literature," Contemporary Literature, 22 (2) (Spring 1981), 187-204.
- Rabe, David. "Each Night You Spit in My Face," The New York Times March 18th, 1973, 3,21.
- Review of Sticks and Bones, by David Rabe. The New Yorker, November 20th, 1971, 48-49.
- Saltzman, Arthur M. "The Betrayal of the Imagination: Paul Brodeur's The Stunt Man and Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction 22,1: 32-38.
- Schroeder, Eric James. "Two Interviews: Talks with Tim O'Brien and Robert Stone," Modern Fiction Studies 30,1 (Spring 1984), 135-164.
- Taylor, Gordon O. "American Personal Narratives of the War in Vietnam," American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism and Bibliography, 52, 294-308.
- Weales, Gerald. Review of Sticks and Bones, by David Rabe. Commonweal, March 10th, 1972, 14-15.