PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL ASPECTS OF SELECTED VIETNAM WAR NOVELS

by

KAMALUDDIN AHMED

429914

A dissertation submitted to the University of Dhaka
in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of
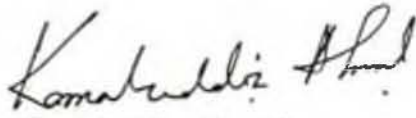Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of Dhaka
_____ 2006

Declaration

I declare that the dissertation "Psychological and Moral Aspects of Selected Vietnam War Novels", submitted to the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is entirely my own original work, completed under the Supervision of Dr. Kaiser Md. Hamidul Haq (Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka. I further affirm that no part or whole of the dissertation has been submitted in any form to any other university of institute for a degree or diploma.

My Ph.D. Registration No. is 54 / 2005-2006(পুন)

Kamaluddin Ahmed
Associate Professor
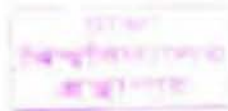Department of English
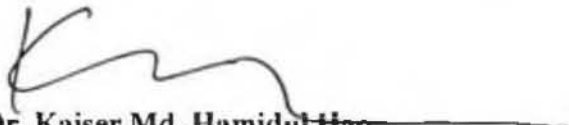University of Chittagong

Dated: April 18,2006

429914

Dedication

This Dissertation is dedicated to all the Freedom Fighters who sacrificed their lives in 1971 for the Liberation of Bangladesh

Certificate

This is to certify that the research work for the present dissertation titled "Psychological and Moral Aspects of Selected Vietnam War Novels" was carried out under my supervision. It is further certified that the work presented in the dissertation is entirely original and ready for evaluation for awarding of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Dr. Kaiser Md. Hamidul Haq
Professor
Department of English
University of Dhaka

Dated: 13/4/06
Supervisor
Ph. D. Programme
Department of English
University of Dhaka

429914
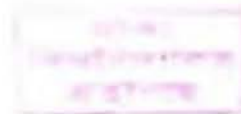
Abstract

This study examines the psychological and moral aspects of the novels by American writers that have emerged from the Vietnam War. These novels are placed in the literary-historical context of Anglo-American and World Literature dealing with war. Out of the large body of Vietnam War novels, five have been selected for detailed examination because of their representative character and literary merits. The dramatic and narrative structures of the novels derive from their moral preoccupations out of American war aims, military tactics, and individual soldiers' psychological reactions to them. My main argument is that the Vietnam War novels discussed in this study mainly deal with the process of protagonists' maturation through their initiation and experience in the army and the war. I argue that this maturation comes from their awareness of the differences between what they believe and what they actually see, between what they should do and they are compelled to do. The authors selected, all of whom are Vietnam War veterans, are not simply concerned with portraying the horrors of war but more importantly they depict the moral and psychological complexities of the individual characters caught in the war. I show that they achieve some measure of truth, self awareness and judgement after their engagement with these complexities.

C o n t e n t s

Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not have been completed but through the good graces of a number of people in and out of academe. Dr. Kaiser Mohammad Hamidul Haq, without hesitation, signed on to the writing of this dissertation. I wish to express my deep appreciation for the advice and encouragement given by him.

I am grateful to the University of Chittagong for the support it has generously provided. I am also grateful to Dr. Serajul Islam Choudhury for his valuable suggestions.

I am appreciative of my colleague, friend Professor Golam Sarwar Chowdhury for his kind assistance.

My deepest thanks also to the USIS (now American Center), Dhaka for sponsoring my visit to the American Studies Research Center (now Indo American Center for International Studies), Hyderabad. India. Actually during my visit to this center back in 1998, I happened to do some preliminary work on the topic of this dissertation. Professor Rashmi Talwar, member of the Governing Council of the IACIS, deserves my special thanks for allowing me to use IACIS library again in the year 2002.

The debt I can never hope to repay, however, is to my wife Rezina Sultana. I owe her a lot for keeping me away from typical household matters for a certain period. To my father late Mahiuddin Ahmed who always wanted such a scholarly achievement from me.

And, above all, my special gratitude goes to the Department of English and Faculty of Arts, University of Dhaka for allowing me to work on this thesis.

Introduction

Since the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam, Americans have agonized over the physical and psychological suffering caused by the war. They have questioned the policies and values that led the US into Vietnam and sought to extract lessons from the experience. This effort to make sense of the Vietnam experience has prompted an outpouring of creative writing, including novels, short stories, poetry, personal accounts, and oral histories. Until recently this growing body of literature received relatively little attention, though it provides powerful and lasting perspectives on America's involvement in Vietnam. But gradually it is increasingly being viewed as an important development in contemporary American literature.

Though much American prose and fiction of undeniable literary merit grew out of the Vietnam War, the quality of poetry, whether written by civilians or soldiers, was not very high. To me the Vietnam War novel as 'War Novel' can be thought of as one of the dominant and shaping literary forms of troubled 20th century America. Let us first see what a War Novel is. Twentieth century technology, which was continuously shrinking distances on earth, forced mankind into more intimate mutual awareness and interdependence. Technology also produced conditions that aggravated existing tensions in human relationships. War has been virtually incessant during recorded human history, but in this age we are instantly aware of every minor skirmish and major encounter around the world. Whether human nature is dynamic or is a constant ratio of qualities, war, with its destructive potential expanded to the indefinable limits of technology, becomes a logical metaphor for the plight of "civilized"

society in the 20th and 21st centuries. In this regard Peter G. Jones says: "Actually aware of their times and fully familiar to literary traditions these authors seek to point out a moral or to explicate aspects of one paradoxically fascinating aspect of human endeavour – war. Their combined efforts have produced a body of literature which demonstrates that the war novel is a medium appropriate for exploiting universal human problems" (Jones, 1976: 15-16).

The war novel has not only played a part in defining the historical profile of a country, but has also shaped the techniques, the flavour, the artistic essence of the modern and modernist and indeed the postmodernist novel. It has become one of the most logical ways of writing about life in the 20th century. It is a medium appropriate for exploring universal human problems. The war novel has developed into a distinguishable genre: war is the network, forming the general background for a particular action ; it is also a metaphor for the human condition, as in the novels of Hemingway. The war novel has come of age as a means of literary expression. At the same time it is apparent that qualities belonging to the atmosphere of war are becoming increasingly applicable to the atmosphere of modern technological society. Three major wars fought by the Americans in the 20th century – World War I, World war II, and the Vietnam War – had significant impacts on contemporary American culture and society. Each shaped a cultural era of modern American history. In the body of imaginative war literature, the American war novels are major documents defining these cultural eras.

Contemporary literature does seem to depict man in a "crisis of identity". The overwhelming moral and metaphysical preoccupation of the Western Mind of the 20th century is the integrity of the individual because that is where reality

2

and value are thought to lie. If the individual is of prime interest, then we wish to know what the character of one's individuality and integrity is. It follows, too, that one of the basic queries of the western mind is, not only "What I am?" but "Who I am?"

Literature written in response to the Second World War marks a sharp contrast to the literature coming out of the First World War. The writers of the First World War, like Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, had revolted against the principles of their parents, in fact against the innocent idealism of Progressivism. As Malcolm Cowley observes: "They revolted because their elders had betrayed them and slaughtered their friends and because they believed that the world would be better if all the principles of the elders were set aside" (Cowley, 1955: 38). Soldiers had gone to war with a sense of high excitement, with lessons of honour, courage and heroism to save the world of democracy. There was a sense of adventure and relief from boredom that drove them to fight on alien soil for the sake of the Europeans and it always remained as "their war" for the Americans. But the novelists of the Second World War like, Heller and Mailer, strongly reacted not so much against war as against the fruits of victory, against the discrepancy that lay between their aims and endeavour on the one hand and the military machine that sent soldiers to be killed. They were cynical about the very motives of the military machine.

In spite of these differences the two World Wars had enabled writers to recreate in their art a universe that still made some kind of sense. They had a share of loss, suffering, and alienation, to be sure, but human dignity was still largely preserved and, implicitly at least, there was still hope for man. Axelsson

writes:"After the senseless slaughter and human degradation of World War II, in a post war world where relativity and the uncertainty principle reigned and the fate of mankind soon seemed to hang in the balance of megadeath, such hopelessness became harder to believe"(Axelsson,1990: xvi).

Axelsson's prediction is correct when America's involvement in the Vietnam War became embrioled in controversy from the very beginning. The controversy divided Vietnam veterans themselves and coloured the way in which interested parties viewed Vietnam veterans and their deeds. So in the eyes of Gruyter and Scot: "World War II was a 'good war' – legitimate, heroic, and triumphant – whereas Vietnam was a 'bad' one – divisive, substandard, and shameful"(Gruyter & Scot,1993: xvi).Misra agrees with Scot and Gruyter when he says: "The Vietnam warrior became a 'distorted,literalized and manipulated version of the hero as warrior' who measured success in terms of 'body-count'. The high technology and inventiveness of Americans in killing and destroying the 'human element' in warfare and worked against the warrior ethos. The soldiers fought the war without any definite sense of script that could lend a meaning to their sufferings. This was a war where enemy could be anybody and everybody. In the absence of the traditional front-line, the reality tended to melt into layers of unknowability" (Misra, 1984: 78).

Another characteristic in the American War novel after World War II is the emergence of the non-hero. In classical terms the hero is a Promethean figure embodying the enduring elements of the human spirit – a man who faces adversity without thinking of retreat and is ready to strike heaven in the face, to curse the gods and be destroyed. The non-hero, while remaining the center of the

4

action, has a personality that is less inspiring. He tends not to fit into the pattern of the leader or the martyr or to devote himself to the principle of staying alive rather than sacrificing himself in a noble cause. Aichinger says: "the traditional viewpoint – 'the loss of a war is an ultimate and irreversible fact; the impairment of a given civil liberty may be considered as the necessary sacrifice of a part for the sake of the whole, and even then a purely temporary affair as a matter of military expediency' – is not acceptable to the non-hero, specially since he is painfully aware that the civil liberty which stands in danger of being impaired is his right to go on living" (Aichinger, 1975: 90). The actions and attitudes of the non-hero, although they conflict with accepted patterns of conduct, are not selfish and cowardly. Rather they represent a new approach to the problem of individuality in a world where traditional values, specially the concept of heroic action, have become deceptive. It is the desire to live fully that causes the non-hero to break with the institutions of his society.

In contrast to the traditional American obsession with winning, to the non-heroes of the absurd, winning is utterly unimportant. To them the conflict is an internal one; living or dying depends on the individual's ability to evaluate the ruthlessness and absurdity of the system and stand in opposition to it, or, better still, opt out of the system entirely. The non-hero accepts the idea that the hazards of war may be rooted in the nature of life itself, or at least in the organization of society, but he feels that during his lifetime he must not allow himself to be exposed to those hazards. The non-hero does try to say that "survival at all costs is the end of existence" without being "morally dead". To him the spiritual and moral degradation would result from continuing to serve the establishment when they know it is corrupt. His purpose is to find a life that involves neither heroic

death nor involvement in the system. The delineation of this mode of existence is neither heroic nor cowardly, and is a specifically American contribution to the War novel after World War II.

The first postmodern war began in Vietnam. What makes this war so important is that it reversed the hundreds of years of European victories, and not just in one battlefield but in the minds of millions of people around the world. True, indigenous people had won many battles in the past, but they had lost all the wars. And, true, Japan had defeated Russia in 1905, but Japan was an industrialized power and it had never been colonized. In the Vietnam struggle, a small agricultural country defeated, first, France, its colonizer, and then the most powerful empire in history, by framing war in basically political terms. This was not a totally new strategy. In part it was George Washington's approach during the American Revolution, as the Vietnamese knew well. It also was an approach that drew strongly on the hundreds of years of Vietnamese resistance to colonialism and on the experiences of the Chinese Red Army. Politics became war by other means for the Vietnamese. Not that military skill and courage were not needed; they were crucial to keep the struggle going until the eventual political exhaustion of the invaders. Gray says: "The theory of 'people's war', as the Chinese and Vietnamese call it, was so sophisticated that it even laid out the transition between the lowest levels of military resistance on through to eventual victory through conventional confrontations" (Gray, 1997: 157).

The Vietnam War was a confrontation of the self of the individual soldier with the horrors of war. It was a soldier's journey into the moral, emotional and psychological ambiguities of a war fought in an alien environment and culture

6

against an unseen enemy. Many works examining the war appeared in the first few years following America's withdrawal from Vietnam, but in the late 70's and early 80's the number of works gradually increased. The bulk of these accounts are personal narratives which focus on the experiences of combat infantryman – the grunt or foot soldier. Most of these come from people who were actually there – soldiers, reporters, and medics. These first-person narratives usually tell anti-heroic stories which assert the moral ambiguity of America's involvement in Vietnam and deflate notions of patriotism or glory sometimes associated with war. In fact, many of these accounts emphasize the difference between Vietnam and World War I and World War II. Not only did America's involvement in World War II – sometimes even called "the good war" – seem morally justified, unlike their involvement in Vietnam, but the war in Vietnam was fought differently as well. It was a guerilla war and American soldiers found themselves in unfamiliar, jungle terrain. There were no clear arenas of battle; many were killed in ambushes, sniper attacks, and by bombs connected to trip wires. In addition, American soldiers had difficulty in distinguishing the enemy – the Viet Cong – from South Vietnamese loyalists, a predicament adding tension and fear to everyday life. These eyewitness accounts often attempt to grapple honestly with the horror that many Americans experienced in Vietnam. The stories they convey are frequently brutally graphic and relate atrocities committed both by the Viet Cong and by American soldiers themselves. For the most part, however, these accounts do not blame ordinary soldiers for their horrific behavior. The ordinary soldier is usually presented, instead, as someone at the mercy of forces greater than himself. He is the victim of a failed American policy in Vietnam, of uncaring or glory-seeking officers and politicians, or of the natural and tragic

hardening that would take place in anyone exposed to brutality on a daily basis. These Vietnam War accounts have had a significant impact on contemporary American culture and society. A body of novels that emerged from the Vietnam War are among the major documents defining this impact. Yet dealing with the war novels of Vietnam is not an easy task because of the diversity of the accounts. These diverse accounts look upon the war as a game of survival in which the struggle was reduced to an individual confrontation between two opposing human entities.

In this study I have selected five Vietnam War novels i.e., Charles Durden's *No Bugles,No Drums* (1976), Gustav Hashford's *The Short-Timers* (1979), James Webb's *Fields of Fire* (1978), Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1978), and Dell Vecchio's *The 13th Valley* (1982). They involve a variety in terms of methodology, ranging from the novels of Tim O'Brien, and Del M. Vecchio to personal memoirs in a first person narrative like Charles Durden's *No Bugles, No Drums*. I have selected these five novels to study them from a single perspective – the moral one, which is a useful method of interpreting fiction. The reason of my choosing these novels is that they try not only to recreate the actual experience but also to probe the complex and psychological impact, thus making the war a "heart-of-darkness" experience.

Furthermore, these novels have been selected because they encapsulate the symbolic meaning about the Vietnam War. In particular, they highlight the theme of the loss of innocence of the protagonist. War not only inflicted great sufferings on the American soldiers; it also left pernicious effects on their minds, hindering them in their efforts to develop normally. For the purpose of this study,

8

I would like to define the war novel in relation to the concept of "morality" that I am using. Peter Aichinger defines the war novel as "any long work of prose fiction in which the lives and actions of the characters are principally affected by warfare or the military establishment" (Aichinger, 1975: p.x). But I think the war novel should be more than that. An insightful definition is given by Richard Olmstesd. He defines the war novel according to its "dominant intention" to "explain the war" through realistic description of war, through analysis of its political and social aspects (Olmsted, 1970: 11). What deserves our special attention is his mention of the war novel's "intention". I think, however, that the war novelist's intention is not merely "to explain the war"; his intention is not only to describe the reality of war, but also to suggest something to the reader – to convey a message in an instructive way. That is to say, the war novel has a "moral intention" (Frankena and Cliffs, 1963: 5). In this connection, I define the war novel as a novel in which a writer with a serious moral intention portrays war, the military organization and their impact upon human minds.

This definition explains why the war novels, particularly the Vietnam War novels should be read from the moral perspective. As I use the term "moral perspective" I mean that the war novel can be viewed from the individual moral perspective, in that it engages in making moral judgements about the conflicting ethical principles to which people adhere. Thus the individual aspect of a moral perspective in the war novel usually focuses on the individual in a moral dilemma. With these definitions of the war novel and the moral perspective, I propose that the American war novels of three wars, especially the Vietnam War novels, have developed a distinctive thematic pattern and the different moral issues of the Vietnam War are responsible definitively for shaping this pattern.
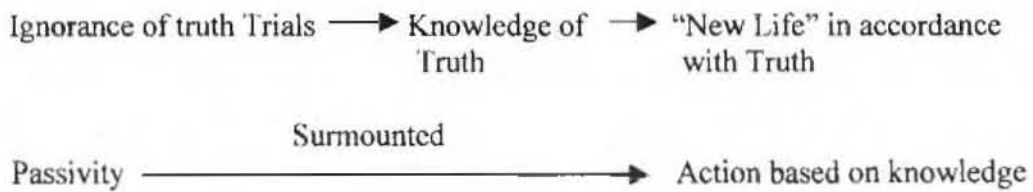
The great majority of Vietnam War novelists recount their war experiences as a traumatic nightmare. This nightmare came from an ethical wilderness in which man's brutality had no limit. The Vietnam War novelists in many cases accept the army as an institution in which human values are affirmed, while they reject the war as both unjust and tragic. These novels have a common formulaic structure – the structure of apprenticeship (or *Bildung*). The core of this structural pattern is based on the concept that the American war novel essentially deals with the protagonist's attainment of knowledge or maturation through his initiation into war and the army. This attainment usually comes from his awareness of the existing discrepancies between what one believes and what one actually sees, between values and forms, between ideals and practices, or between what one ought to do and what one ought not to do but is somehow compelled to do.

In explaining the structure of the war novel, Susan Rubin Suleiman's theory of structural patterns in the *roman a these* provides an insightful model. Her theory can be applied to the analysis of the war novel because "the two genres have several important similarities in their realistic mode of description and their moral intention" (Suleiman 1983: 64). Suleiman lays down two main structures of the *roman a these*: "the structure of apprenticeship" and "the structure of confrontation" (ibid, p.64). I think that the structure of apprenticeship is the basis of the structure of the *Bildungsroman* and, along with the structure of confrontation, constitutes the main structural pattern applicable to American war novels, specially the Vietnam War novels.
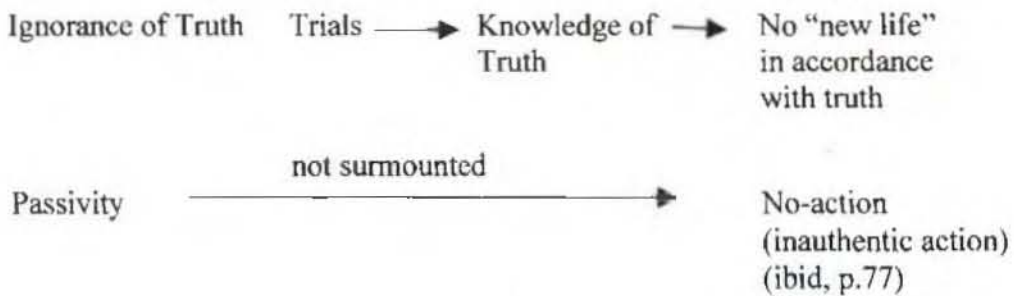
The structure of apprenticeship in the *roman a these* basically follows the

structure of the *Bildungsroman*. In that the "protagonist's story is defined by two parallel transformations: ignorance (of self) $\rightarrow$ knowledge (of self), $\rightarrow$ passivity action" (ibid, p.76). In this progress, the protagonist undergoes a series of trials, and his attainment of knowledge results from such experiences. Suleiaman outlines two main schemas of the apprenticeship structure as follows:

Positive apprenticeship

Ignorance of truth Trials $\longrightarrow$ Knowledge of $\rightarrow$ "New Life" in accordance
                            Truth   with Truth

                    Surmounted
Passivity $\longrightarrow$ Action based on knowledge

Negative apprenticeship

Ignorance of Truth   Trials $\longrightarrow$ Knowledge of $\rightarrow$ No "new life"
                                          Truth   in accordance
                                                             with truth

                    not surmounted
Passivity $\longrightarrow$ No-action
                                                             (inauthentic action)
                                                             (ibid, p.77)

According to Suleiman, the positive apprenticeship "leads the hero to the values propounded by the doctrine (moral intention) that founds the novel" and the negative apprenticeship "leads him to opposite values, or simply to a space where the positive values are not recognized as such" (ibid, p.67).

Many novels of World War I and the Vietnam War follow these structures. When applied to these war novels, the positive apprenticeship structure presents the protagonists who go through the ordeals of war and finally

11

come to affirm the moral ideals involved in war. This structure also presents the protagonists who despair of the horror of war, but redeem their manhood by making a "separate peace". On the contrary, the negative apprenticeship structure presents the heroes who, overcome by such trials, exist with war and within the army at the cost of their manhood. For example, James Webb's *Fields of Fire*, and Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* closely follow the positive structure while Charles Durden's *No Bugles, No Drums*, and Gustav Hashford's *The Short-Timers* follow the negative structure. Lt. Hodges in Webb's novel goes to Vietnam with the belief that war is a proving ground for manhood and, having gone through the ordeals of combat, he emerges as a competent leader, affirming human nobility in an inhuman war. On the other hand, Pvt.Hawkins in Durden's novel goes to Vietnam imbued with vague romantic idealism; but he does not overcome the ordeals of war and leaves Vietnam only to subject himself to psychiatric rehabilitation. Tim O'Brien's Paul Berlin's decision to stay in the war and not follow Cacciato's examples follows the positive structure, because he feels 'obliged' to be present in the war. John M. Dell Vecchio's *The 13th Valley* partakes of the thematic tone of both the groups. It tries to combine the Vietnam War experience in a larger pattern of epic envisioning the nation's frustrating and humiliating war experience in a company's struggle in the valley of Vietnam.

The structure of confrontation is the second frequent pattern in the *roman a these*. Suleiman sums up the general form of this structure: "It is the story of a struggle, or of a series of struggles, between two adversaries who are not on the same ethical or moral plane – whose conflict, for that reason, can not be considered as simply a question of prestige or glory. The antagonistic hero fights, in the name of certain values, against an enemy who is defined as such by the fact

12

that his values are diametrically opposed to those of the hero. In a very general way, then, we may define a story of confrontation as a conflict between two forces, one of which (the hero's) is identified as the force of good, and the other as the force of evil" (Suleiman, 1983: 102).

In the war novel this structure tends to be more concerned with the conflicts between two individuals or opposing groups within the same community yet differing from each other in their ideologies, rather than with the struggles between warring nations. The core of this structure is the thought and action of the "antagonistic hero" who Suleiman defines as follows: "he espouses, from the beginning, the values defined as good, and is ready to expound on them; he represents, or is part of, a group that fights for the triumph of those values; and as far as his adherence to those values is concerned – that is, in terms of his most fundamental outlook on life – he does not change in the course of the battle"(ibid.,p.106). Suleiman outlines the schema of the structure as follows:

Victory of hero = Triumph of Good ⟶ future battles?

Engagement Progressions outcome

Of conflict reversals of conflict

Defeat of hero=Delayed

Triumph of Good ⟶ future battles

(ibid., p.111)

As the two schemata of apprenticeship and confrontation show, the structure of apprenticeship is concerned with "the psychology or the personal

development of the hero", whereas, the structure of confrontation is concerned with "the outcome of the conflict in which he is engaged" (ibid., p. 112).

Each different experience of war and the army has created a distinctive moral vision towards war, the army, and society. From these different moral visions emerge the novelists' different attitudes towards war and the army: in the Vietnam War, war is rejected but the army is not, in World War II the army is condemned, but the war is not, in World War I novels both war and the army are totally rejected. Despite their different and distinctive qualities, the war novels of the three wars have a common theme: a protagonist's search for meaning in life. The Vietnam War novels are not merely concerned with portraying the horrible nature of war or the army but also with illuminating and defining the contemporary men caught in all their psychological and moral complexities. In this way the novels selected in this study show a closer relationship between morality and psychology. Owen Flagan says: "morality would benefit by knowing how the mind works when assimilating ethical dilemma, and psychology in turn would benefit by knowing what exactly constitutes an ethical dilemma" (Flagan, 1991: 15-16). So the better we understand the psychological effects of the Vietnam War environment on a soldier, the better we would be able to understand what motivated or failed to motivate the soldier morally.

The Vietnam War has exposed human nature in its extremity, even to the point of its being interchangeable with war itself. The internalization of war in the individual becomes a major feature of the psychology of war, and, I think, the most distinctive feature of the Vietnam War novel compared with those of the previous wars. The evil of war is internalized in the individual in the Vietnam

War novel. We notice this process of change in the minds of the Vietnam War novelists because the Vietnam War in the eyes of the American soldiers was an individual war fought for individual purposes. In this regard, Cornelius A. Cronin's remarks point to the core of the internalization of war in the individual. He writes: "The veterans of World Wars I and II who turned their experiences into literature tended to see 'the war', 'the State', or 'the System' as the evils with which they must come to terms, while Vietnam veterans who have written about their experiences tend to see themselves as evil" (Cronin, 1983: 119-30).

The reasons why the war is conceived of as an individual (or private) war can be multiplied: the absence of larger ends, the different motivations of soldiers for coming to Vietnam, the repeated battles in the same place, the isolation in the jungles, the moral responsibility for the individual action, and so on. In the absence of any justifiable ends, the question of retaining moral integrity is constantly on the minds of the characters in the Vietnam War novels. Also, in these novels, war is not engaged in on behalf of a legitimate cause; it is reduced to a purely human encounter in which only survival matters; an individual soldier is caught between the choices to kill or be killed. The psychology of war deals mainly with the soldier-protagonist's psychic and moral transformation worked out by a war that they considered both ethically wrong and devoid of acceptable ends. The Vietnam War novels selected for this study frequently equate this process with the protagonist's loss of innocence, which is interpreted as a sign of his moral and psychological regeneration or degeneration. They speak in the language of the war and they let us know what it was like. As in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) these Vietnam War novels portray the individual attempts to retain moral certainties to overcome their dark, destructive emotions; to master

their fear; and to control the creeping madness and chaos. Conrad's key question – what spiritual darkness resides in our hearts and minds? – becomes a fundamental question in these novels.

I have tried to show above how the structural patterns in the *roman a these* analyzed by Susan Rubin Suleiman provide an insightful model for the selected Vietnam War novels. Suleiman identifies two main structures of the *roman a these*. They are "the structure of Apprenticeship" and "the structure of Confrontation". The novels belonging to the structure of Apprenticeship are concerned with the psychology or the personal development of the protagonist, whereas the novels belonging to the latter are concerned with the outcome of the conflict in which he is engaged. I have also discussed the importance of Vietnam War novels in American War literature. The main body of the study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter entitled *"No Bugles,No Drums*: Jamie Hawkins' Growing Disillusionment with War" reveals Hawkins'deepening sense of disillusionment and his reluctant and gradual surrender to change in the course of his discovery of the insanity of war. He has no readiness for the experience of war and begins to realize that he is encountering a situation where one has to "kill or be killed"(Durden,1976: 55). With the passage of time Hawkins himself is forced to kill in order to survive. He feels disillusioned at this change; he feels that he is no longer what he was. Hawkins is deeply troubled as he says: "My eyes were filled with tears. Not from gratitude. From pain – I'd slaughter people and symbolically earned my 'manhood' (Durden, 1976: 235). Chapter 2 entitled *"The Short-Timers*: A Tale of Moral and Mental Disintegration" discusses the darker impulses in the Vietnam War. Hashford's narrator, Corporal Joker, and his buddies are recipients and emblems of all that is dark within a tradition. Hashford

makes it clear that the myth of the Marine Corps and of Hollywood is so deeply embedded in the popular American belief system that its application to new historical configurations is not even questioned. The figures who become principal characters in Vietnam are trapped within themselves. At the end of their war experience in Vietnam, the troops are actually the prisoners of the war themselves. This imprisonment leads to their moral and mental decay. Chapter 3, entitled "*Fields of Fire*:: Regeneration at the cost of Innocence" discusses how the American soldiers lose their innocence in the battlefields of Vietnam. Lt. Hodges goes to war with a belief that "man's noblest moment is one spent on the fields of fire" (Webb, 1978: 29). He suffers the various stresses that war involves and in this process loses his innocence and illusion. But he emerges as a competent leader at last. Through grim descriptions of combat, and the moral dilemma faced by men in combat, Webb portrays the Vietnam War as a 'heart-of-darkness' we endure with the novel's characters. Chapter 4, entitled "*Going After Cacciato*: Learning Important Things about Oneself" shows how Paul Berlin, through the ordeals of war, learns the important things about himself. *Going After Cacciato* is set in the battlefield of the mind. O'Brien's narrator reports the actual violence of the war only in passing; at the center stage is the drama of uncertainty and waiting and the toll they take upon the soldier's psychic well being. Paul Berlin's elaborate fantasy pursuit of Cacciato represents his attempts to turn his experience inside out in order to discover new understandings as well as O'Brien's attempts to 'teach' something 'important about the war'. After learning a lesson Paul Berlin's only goal "was to live long enough to establish goals worth living for still longer" (O'Brien, 1978: 24). Chapter 5, entitled "*The 13th Valley*: Achievement of Manhood" is concerned with Cherry's overcoming his fear of

combat. And like other Vietnam War protagonists Cherry frequently questions the morality of war. Del Vecchio portrays the soldiers' psychological condition while they wait for the combat assaults, humping over the hills or sitting in a foxhole on night ambushes. The novels discussed in separate chapters deal with a variety of experiences representing a fairly uniform moral stance toward the Vietnam War. They show how the characters and narrators faced with psychological complexity take a journey towards some measure of truth and self-awareness.

Chapter One

No Bugles, No Drums:
Jamie Hawkins' Growing Disillusionment with War

In his novel *No Bugles, No Drums* Charles Durden is concerned with an individual soldier's psychological and moral transformation through his involvement in the war, and he sees the transformation negatively. He sees in war man's psychic and moral disintegration and, in such a change, he finds war's ultimate face. This novel is also a strong indictment on American war aims in Vietnam. Here Durden criticizes the war as politically, economically, militarily and morally unjustifiable. The novel is, in Philip D. Beidler's words, "something like a reality warp, a dimension where the actual itself seems to have become at one with stoned chaotic imagining" (Beidler, 1982: 169). At many points in the novel, as Beidler says, war becomes "a crude combination of 'farce' with 'some fuckin' far-out reality" (Beidler, 1982: 163). The novel is a perfect example of what Zalin Grant called the "dope-and-dementia interpretation of Vietnam" (Grant, 1978: 24) in which war is portrayed as insane, incomprehensible, unrealistic and distorted.

In many ways, the novel resembles Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*(1962).In *Catch-22* Heller had "the military-industrial complex" in mind with its "potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power", the fear that public money "could become the captive of a scientific technological elite". He had Major Danby comment on the relationship between Minderbinder and Cathcart: "Milo and Col. Cathcart are pals now. He made Col. Cathcart a Vice President and promised him an important job after the war". The novel as it looked at the early 60's, also

chronicled the events of that period and spoke of the rise of military conservatism, "the ordered serenity" of the West Point Community. In the book itself there was little mention of Hitler or the war against him. Heller spoke of conflicts that existed between a man and his superiors, between him and his institutions. The dramatic conflict between them persists throughout the novel until it is finally resolved by *deus ex machina* or by the author's moral choice. In most cases of such struggle, the main victim is the individual soldier who is given a choice of having either to relinquish his rights to authority or to rebel against it at the cost of his life. Whether the individual soldier fails or not, there persists in the novel an impression that the values and principles he represents are morally right. Yossarian is morally right when he fights back, seizes his freedom, and refuses to be a mindless cog in the machine. The Hellerian black humor and the description of farcical reality in the novel counterbalance the monotony coming from Durden's condemnation of the war.

According to James Wilson, "*No Bugles, No Drums* describes well the dilemma of the American soldier who has been trapped in the enigmatic and seemingly purposeless world of Vietnam" (Wilson, 1982: 49). The novel describes an infantry company sent to Vietnam to protect the Song My Swine project, an assignment that guards a pig farm near Da Nang that has been a source of supplies for the VC. However, the novel focuses on the actions of a platoon and its members. The platoon is a melting pot unit: Lt. Levine, a Jewish platoon leader; Sgt. Ubanski, a Polish platoon sergeant; Luke Davis, a farm-boy from Iowa; Garcia, a Mexican bullfighter from San Diego; Angelo Bruno Cocuzza (Crazy Dage), a Sicilian immigrant; Jinx, a black from Philadelphia; Henry Longfeather, an Indian; Poe, a Senator's son from Virginia, and so forth.

The protagonist of the novel, Jamie Hawkins, a twenty-year-old southern boy from Georgia who speaks in a heavy colloquial dialect reminiscent of Huck Finn's, is confronted with the statistics, not to mention the absurdity, of war as soon as he enters Vietnam. On their way to the Song My Swine Project, where they are to guard a pig farm, his company is ambushed by the Viet Cong: "Seventeen Dead, just like that. Welcome to Vietnam" (Durden, 1976: 23). The foolishness of war is evident in the soldier's reactions to the ambush. Instead of carrying guns, the soldiers are armed with their personal recreational possessions and instead of remaining alert in case there is an attack, they smoke dope. One man has brought his surfboard so that he can surf in Vietnam's South China Sea, supposedly only thirty miles away, but as Hawkins expresses it, in Vietnam thirty miles is "Three to five hours on a truck, if you made it at all" (Durden, 1976: 13). Another soldier is weighted down by a set of bagpipes, which he plays when the American troops finally decide to counterattack the Viet Cong. As for Hawkins, in a baptismal ritual, he shares a C-ration can of peaches and cake with another newcomer before accidentally recording the men's whimpering, cursing, and crying during the battle on a tape recorder that he has stolen from another soldier. When the tape is played back, he can only think, "What would John Wayne say?" (Durden, 1976: 25).

The novel is structured around Hawkins' initiation into the war. Hawkins, the first person narrator, vaguely dreams of John Wayne wading ashore on an exotic island. Yet, disgusted by the absurdities of the war after months of fighting in Vietnam, he walks away from it, starting for Atlanta. In the process, Hawkins, who failed to fire his rifle at first, becomes a hardened veteran. "I had grown up," says Hawkins at one point, "I'd slaughtered people and symbolically earned my

manhood" (Durden, 1976: 235). The events of the novel are framed in this initiation structure.

Throughout the novel Hawkins comments on a number of situations in Vietnam that do not make sense. Why, for instance, is America fighting such a war to begin with? The United States military certainly realizes that such a jungle war is almost impossible to win:

> You didn't have to be two days in Army basic before you heard the first, or the fifth, or the fiftieth story about how completely fucked up Nam is. The cadre, as they're called, our drill sergeants 'n' platoon leaders, all had been here, killin', burnin' blowin' away everything in their path. Damn near everyone of 'em, even the ones that think we should light up Hanoi with A-bombs, say Uncle Ho's children will sit down to dinner in Saigon six months after we finally get out. So why'n hell should I go around shootin' up the dinner guests? (Durden, 1976: 72-73).

Hawkins notices the difference between this war and previous wars. For instance, "we didn't capture towns or take control of anything further than a rifle shot from where we were dug into our holes" (Durden, 1976: 206-207). Difficult, also is the inability to distinguish between friendly and enemy Vietnamese: "You never knew," states Hawkins, who was your side or not "unless one of 'em pointed an AK at you (Durden, 1976: 207). It particularly does not seem logical to fight communism when the United States practices daily discrimination. As Hawkins notes,

> We were s'posed to be out here killin' people so what was left could live with . . . what? Dignity? The right to choose their own governments?

> Shit if we still go round callin' each other niggers, kikes, waps, spies, frogs, krauts, honkies, what 'th' fuck's the good of killin' people because they're communists (Durden, 1976: 183-84).

Durden's protagonist realizes that the government especially preys on minorities and undereducated people. He cites "McNamara's 100,000," a programme that provides minimal education for people merely to enable them to meet the bare literacy requirements for joining the military. According to Hawkins, "McNamara's 100,000" involves "retrainin' the retards," teaching people "to write their name so they could sign their own death warrant" (Durden, 1976: 43). "McNamara's 100,000" is as absurd to Hawkins as the military's TOC (Tactical Operations Center) Rules designed to protect American soldiers who kill "Friendlies, South Vietnamese soldiers", by mistake:

> You fire off a salvo of 155, and they fall short right into an ARVN infantry country; you drop your bombs in the wrong place 'n' wipe out a platoon of ARVN grunts; you ambush some slopes and they turn out to be on Saigon's payroll – right away, first thing, you scream TOC Rule, TOC RULE!! It's a little like King's X in a game of tag. The TOC Rule – They're only Gooks – has kept a helluva lot of round-eyes out a trouble. And it applies to civilians, too (Durden, 1976: 69).

Generally euphemisms are created to cover up the accidental (or otherwise) destruction of South Vietnamese property. Hawkins points out that any native hootches or huts that are knocked down become "enemy structures" if destroyed. Such euphemisms also inflate the importance of military operations. An "enemy bridge" may in reality be only "Two fallen logs across a stream", "an enemy pack

animal" only a "big pig" and an "enemy base camp" only "eight grass huts" (Durden, 1976: 11). As Durden's characters note, the soldiers in this war shoot houses and pigs, not enemy soldiers. "Too bad we ain't fighting hog growers 'n' meat packers," one soldier drawls. "Slaughterhouses 'n' hogs'd be easy" (Durden, 1976: 74).

Other figures in the war are also exaggerated. Since progress was measured in Vietnam by body counts instead of conquered territory, the kill ratio was frequently inflated. The ridiculousness of this situation is pointed out in a passage where Hawkins' platoon is credited with 109 kills, even though the only enemy they encountered is in a Vietnamese mass grave. When the Army bombs a graveyard next to a hamlet or village, Durden plays on words and parodies Shakespeare by making an absurd reference to the gravediggers scene in *Hamlet*. One soldier picks up two Vietnamese skulls, announcing, "Alas, poor Yin and Yang. I know them, but not well" (Durden, 1976: 132).

The soldiers' long marches into the jungle lack any real combat activity, and with the actual enemy rarely in sight, the war becomes a "strange game of hide 'n' seek" (Durden, 1976: 87). Hawkins suggests that the lack of any significant activity in the war contributes to the incidences of fratricide that occurred in Vietnam. The long periods of boredom with no purposeful activity keeping them gainfully employed caused the men to provoke each other. Hawkins, for instance, almost kills a lieutenant who frightens him in the darkness of the base one night. The realization that he might have murdered Simmons or that he still has the potential to harm him in the future causes him to realize further that the government breeds soldiers to kill not only the enemy but also

each other:

> They, put us here like this, all bunched up, nothin' to do but wait to get killed. They give us guns, cannons, airplanes, bombs, every fuckin' kinda shit they can shipin' here. Then they wait. Sooner or later, man, you're gonna kill somebody. I might kill Simmons. Ubanski. May be some dude I don't even know, just somebody who fucked me over at the wrong moment. But sure's shit stinks, man, I'm gonna end up killin' somebody (Durden, 1976: 105).

That fratricide is readily accepted by the men is evident in another soldier's offer to eliminate Simmons for Hawkins: "Listen, y' want me t' get rid of Simmons? I can have him y' know, scratched off by tomorrow night" (Durden, 1976: 105).

Durden's work is, as Philip Beidler and others have noted, an initiation novel where a young man moves from innocence to experience. However, as Beidler also notes, the novel is a "tract in madness" (Beidler, 1979: 149) where the "mad logic" of writers such as Heller, Pynchon, and Vonnegut is clearly evident in the "nexus of absurdities" that has become Vietnam (Beidler, 1979: 154). Beidler states that the novel implies that such absurdities extend beyond the immediate environment of Vietnam into

> the world of Air America and the CIA, the sinister world of John Yossarian, Billy Pilgrim, Tyrone Slothrop. It is a world of paranoiac congruencies, where Hawkins, like Yossarian in his tree, driven to madness, spends an entire day searching the base camp for place to "cover his shit" in a literal acting-out of his superiors' institutionalized chicanery (Durden, 1979: 154).

25

Unfortunately, Durden's protagonist is too reminiscent of a World War II literary figure from *Catch-22*. Kim Willenson comments that *No Bugles, No Drums* "seems like a ripoff of Hellers'. Hawkins can be read as Yossarian. Pvt. Angelo (Crazy Dago) concuzza comes across like Mile Mindbinder's younger brother. He arrives on a motorcycle in the middle of a mortan barrage and hardly pauses for breath before he starts organizing a racket in which the payoff number is the daily total of dealing in cumshaw, he organizes a scheme to ship 240 pounds of Thai marijuana to the States in a dead friend's coffin" (Willenson, 1976: 71).

As in so many other traditional initiation and descent myths, the protagonist of *No Bugles, No Drums* undergoes a series of tests or ordeals. In this regard we can mention Stephan Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Peter Jones has labeled this as the first modern war novel, the archetypal book for "any American who sets out to write of a young man going to war in the twentieth century" (Jones, 1976: 6). Crane changed the way American authors wrote about war. He moved away from the traditional romance or diary-like realism found in previous war literature. Like Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (1888), he presents an imaginative psychological portrait of a soldier's reactions to the confusion, horror, and death associated with combat. As Peter Aichinger puts it: "The war is a closed system – a device that permits Crane to manipulate his protagonist, to observe his reactions, and to draw conclusions" (Aichinger, 1975: xxi). Henry Fleming, whom Crane labels the "Youth" throughout the novel, has joined the army fueled by his Homeric notions of battle: "He had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had breathless deeds" (Crane, 1895: 12). His vision of heroism and a visible badge of courage also excite him: "As he basked in the smiles of the girls and was patted and

complimented by the old men, he had felt growing within him the strength to do mighty deeds of arms" (Crane, 1895: 15). Henry experiences fear, he runs away, he is ashamed, he returns his to comrades and fights bravely; in the end he marches away with them. Fear of death, humiliation, cowardice and shame are all issues that make Henry Fleming a very human protagonist of the kind that exists in every war. Like Henry, Hawkins is at first frightened and fails to react. He doesn't feel ready for the experience of war and begins to realize that he is encountering a situation where one has to "kill or be killed" (Durden, 1976: 55). He has had the same typical heroic notions and fantasies as other war protagonists, "But" as he states, "I'd never fantasized killin' people" (Durden, 1976: 88). Hawkins' main problem during his early days of the war is that he cannot fire a shot. It is not until the final third of the novel when a child with a grenade almost kills one of the buddies that he can actually kill; ironically, it is the traditional embodiment of innocence, a child, perverted to evil by the adults behind the war, that Hawkins kills first. His reaction to his initiation into the world of murder is that of insane laughter:

> Way off in the distance of whatever was left of my rational mind a younger, angrier version of me started yellin' . . . laughin' 'n' laughin' a craze puke-smellin' punk with spittle droolin' from his mouth, his clothes crusted in mud, his hands smeared with dried blood cracked 'n' peelin', the right hand wrapped round the rifle grip, finger on the trigger . . . laughin' and laughin' and laughin (Durden, 1976: 231).

But when his insane laughter ends, Hawkins' eyes contain tears, "Not from gratitude. From pain" (Durden, 1976: 235). At this point, he realizes that he has

successfully completed his initiation into the world of war. But the way he describes his achievement indicates that the concept of initiation has been treated ironically. He observes, "I'd slaughtered people and symbolically earned my manhood" (Durden, 1976: 235).

Charles Durden in this novel tends to allude more to Dante than to anyone else. The protagonist of *No Bugles, No Drums*, for instance, states that "Tryin' to describe the country we moved through is like what old what's his name musta felt tryin' to describe the circles of Hell" (Durden, 1976: 45). According to Charles Jamieson Gaspar, "Dante's *Divine Comedy* is alluded to by more than one Vietnam War writer" (Gasper, 1983: 133). He is correct in noting the use of Dantesque images and allusions by Vietnam War writers. Like *No Bugles, No Drums*, Gustav Hashford's *The Short-Timers* also uses the *Inferno* as a central thematic device at some point in his narrative. "In "Descent to Hades" we find descents into the underworld taking on additional purposes; some descents are to obtain good luck, some merely for curiosity, and some to free the damned" (Hastings, 1958: 651-53). Perhaps most importantly, some are for the purposes of initiation: "to descend into hell alive, confront its monsters and demons, is to undergo an initiatory ordeal" (Eliade, 1958: 62). For the archetypal hero the journey is a moral and psychological journey and through this journey he is initiated into manhood. This journey motif closely follows the structure of a *Bildungsroman* whose main concern is the protagonist's initiation into manhood. For Hawkins, Dante's *Inferno* becomes a metaphor for the experience of Vietnam that is regrettably overused. Allusions to Dante begin early in the novel when the landscape of Vietnam reminds Hawkins of the terrain of the *Inferno*:

> Foliage thick as hair on a sow's ass. Lots of times you couldn't see ten feet to either side of the track, or twenty feet straight up. Two 'n' three layers of green growth, vines the size of soda bottles, some the size of whiskey jars, sixty to seventy feet long running' down trees 'n' across the ground. You'd bust your ass at least once or twice a day. Thorns like twenty-penny nails. Rip you to shreds, rake your glasses off, hang you up 'r tear your weapon right out a your hand (Durden, 1976: 45).

In addition to the thick undergrowth, the men must fight in muddy rice fields as populated with corpses as Dante's Inferno is with dead souls: "Twenty, fifty, a hundred bodies. You couldn't tell. There were pieces everywhere. An Arm here, a leg minus a foot there, scraps of clothes, pieces of metal, bone . . . with 'n' without flesh. The smell was putrid" (Durden, 1976: 132). The landscape is not all that is reminiscent of such an underworld. Hawkins' language is frequently punctuated with the word "hell" and little things in Vietnam remind him of an Inferno. For example, he describes C-4, a plastic explosive, as "hotter" than "the fires of hell" (Durden, 1976: 20).

The allusions to hell remind us most of Dante when the war begins to effect a change in Hawkins, who learns that he is changing before he even kills anyone. Like Dante, Hawkins has a guide, but unlike Virgil, a fatherly figure who has to remain in Limbo because he lived before Christianity, Colonel Eric Levine, a young Jew who wears a Star of David that proclaims his faith, is more of a brother than a father to Hawkins. Levine takes an interest in "Hawk" and begins to guide him through the war, an act that enables Hawkins to notice his change:

There's times when you can look back 'n' see a point at which you changed some single simple minded shit made a difference and forever after you weren't o way the same. Other times, rare I think, you know right then, at exactly the moment mayhem strikes. Course, most often I don't think you know diddly-dork. You just change and if you're lucky maybe somebody'll tell you a month or a year after. I changed 'n' I knew it that instant. I still didn't know if the Army'd won. I did know I had to get my shit together (Durden, 1976: 118).

Hawkins knows that he will not be the same person after his journey through the war. However, unlike Dante who learns and profits from his ordeals, Hawkins does not. It is the lowest reaches of Hell, where Hawkins is forced to actively participate in violence and evil that eventually scar the Vietnam War protagonist beyond repair.

Unlike Dante, Hawkins is permitted a break from his journey at one point. It is rare for a Vietnam War protagonist to ascend from Hell and re-enter "the world" (the United States) in the middle of his descent, but Durden permits his main character to do so. And it is Hawkins' guide, Col. Levine, who arranges for Hawkins to briefly escape the war. In the hope that Hawk will go AWOL(Absent Without Leave), he arranges for him to accompany the body of another soldier to the U.S. for burial, an incident reminiscent of the classical descent into hell. Garcia, the dead soldier, had been killed by a water buffalo in a rice field while pretending to be a matador.

Perhaps earlier Hawkins would have deserted the war, and while he still doesn't believe in it, he has come to believe in his guide, Col. Levine, or Eric, as

he now calls him, who has become a personal friend. After the so-called funeral (Garcia's body is disposed of and the coffin filled with marijuana that the soldiers sell in the U.S.), Hawkins enjoys several days of drinking and whoring in Las Vegas, but he cannot bring himself to desert Eric. When his Las Vegas prostitute suggests that he flee to Canada, Hawkins replies, "It's not that. I got a friend in Nam. Coupla friends, I guess. I s'pose we're sorta in this together" (Durden, 1976: 167). Thus, he returns to the war out of a sense of loyalty to a friend, rather than a sense of patriotic duty; such loyalty continues even when Eric dies.

After his return to the underworld of Vietnam, Hawkins undergoes his worst experiences of the war and the final stages of his descent into hell. Shortly after the incident where Hawk kills the booby-trapped child, Col. Levine takes Hawk and a few other soldiers into the jungles of Laos on a surveillance mission. This journey results in the simultaneous maturity and insanity of the protagonist.

The landscape of Laos that Durden describes again echoes Dante's *Inferno*. Early in the mission the patrol climbs to a ledge-like clearing reminiscent of one of the ridges of the "bolgia" or deep ditches in the lower reaches of the *Inferno*. Upon reaching this ledge, Hawkins immediately falls asleep, just as Dante falls asleep in the dark wood prior to his descent into Hell. Visible at the base of the valley are minute, barely distinguishable figures, similar to those that Dante sees in his valley. After descending the hell, the patrol locates a river, appropriately named the River Styx after "'The River of Hell, in Dante's Inferno. The Vietnamese call it Bang Mot'" (Durden, 1976: 265).

Hawkins' assumption at this point that "down river means we're gettin' deeper 'n' deeper into trouble" (Durden, 1976: 265) is accurate, for he is

beginning his descent into the deepest reaches of Hell. Just as the Ninth Circle of Dante's *Inferno* contains those who are traitors, so do the lowest reaches of Hawkins' hell concern the idea of treachery. Part of his mission in Laos is to track an American traitor named Jinx, who has defected from the Army in order to assist the Viet Cong. When Jinx, the traditional embodiment of evil, and the enemy virtually annihilate all of Hawkins' patrol, the protagonist is driven into madness and revenge.

During the battle between the patrol and the Viet Cong, the valley once more becomes the epitome of Dante's Inferno . . . "a mass of human sefferin" (Durden, 1976: 269). The imagery in this section of the novel parallels the grotesqueness of Dante's scenery almost literally. For instance, Eric, Hawkins' colonel and friend, is beheaded by shrapnel during an encounter with the Viet Cong. That grotesque event, coupled with the archetypal image of fire falling from above (from the firefight) reminds Hawk of "a prophet's threats of Hell" (Durden, 1976: 272).

A main image of Canto 28 in the *Inferno*, the ninth ditch of Malebolge, is mutilation, and Durden relies on this same image near the end of his novel. While Eric has been mutilated, he differs somewhat from the schismatics in the ninth "bolgia" or deep ditches, whose bodies are mutilated and torn because they did not work together in life for the unity of an institution. Eric has supported the institutions in his life. The Star of David that he wears indicates his devotion to the Jewish faith, and his active duty as an officer in the U.S. military signifies his loyalty to his country in spite of its flaws. In fact, Eric seems to symbolize the rents and tears in the institution that he represents – the military itself. He fights

in a war where there is no clear moral purpose, where institutions are divided and separated. Vietnam is not a unified nation; it is split into two states: North and South, and its natives support whichever side is convenient at the moment. And the U.S. military is divided over the issues of the war . . . body counts and promotions mean more to most than the saving of a democracy for a group of people.

Although now nihilistic, Hawkins cannot bring himself to abandon the dead Eric:

> No fuckin' weapon, twenty miles from nowhere. It coulda been two hundred for all I knew. I didn't have the first idea of how to get out of there, or how to get back if I did. The 175s had turned back, down the hill. I grabbed Eric's body, up 'n' over my shoulder . . . I couldn't leave him. Stupid. Goddam stupid, bastard. I managed to get up, balanced, expectin' to be shot and not carin'. It didn't matter anymore. One more death just didn't matter. Not even mine (Durden, 1976: 273).

At the time of his rescue, effected by mooning, a helicopter pilot, Hawkins thinks of the Vietnam generation, "the pepsi generation," now "Throwaway people" (Durden, 1976: 274), victims born during the age of war. Hawkins manages to physically survive the war, but like so many other Vietnam War protagonists, he becomes insane.

As he states it, "this is what our army has come to, from Valley Forge to Vietnam, two hundred years of tradition to produce a madman" (Durden, 1976: 276). Hawkins' first act is to seek revenge on the traitor, Jinx, for the death of Eric. On a rampage, he kills Jinx as well as fourteen Vietnamese, burns part of a

village, threatens U.S. officers, and goes AWOL (Absent Without Leave).

According to Wallace Fowlie, the last ditch of the *Inferno* is characterized by disease,"demonstrating the inner disintegration and perversion of the physical body of the man who has perverted the physical processes and order of nature. Whereas in the ninth bolgia the human organism is seen as rent and cut, in the tenth bolgia it is seen as sick and destroyed from within" (1981: 183-84).

Durden imitates this same pattern in the novel. The reader first witnesses the physical mutilation of Eric, followed by the mental disintegration of Hawkins, and it is the sight of the physical destruction that clinches the inner perversion of the protagonist. In such an absurd environment, he feels he has no strategies left for remaining sane.

The end of *No Bugles, No Drums* reminds us of Heller's *Catch-22* with Hawkins walking away from the war. But Durden mixes his signals. In spite of a positive message advocating recovery left to him by Eric in the event of Eric's death, Hawkins is left with his "unshakable bad attitude" (Durden, 1976: 287), a fact that somewhat confuses the novel overall because it cancels the newly found maturation that Hawkins has demonstrated during his friendship with Eric. Just when we think that Hawkins is changing to a dynamic character, he becomes static once more. More than one critic finds this frustrating. James C Wilson, for instance, states that "Hawkins fails to correct the distorted focus, he fails to achieve a stance that would reveal the war in its proper perspective, and he loses his 'ambitions' to 'make soemthin' outa life that's worth the goddam effort' (Durden, 1976: 142). The same thing can be said of the author, for Durden does not overcome his narrator's inability to penetrate the inscrutability of Vietnam"

34

(Wison, 1982: 50).

Hawkins' view of war, we come to learn, was "romantic" (Durden, 1976: 33). From the first time his company lands in Da Nang, Hawkins begins to see the discrepancy between the wars he has seen in the movies and the one he now sees in Vietnam. "None of us looked like John Wayne," Hawkins thinks:

> Like it'r not, we'd all been raised on late-night TV movies that glamourized Americans wadin' ashore under an umbrella of palm fronds 'n' canon fire from the fleet. And the only guys who got killed were extras. It was dangerous and exotic. But Da Nang war only dirty 'n' overcast. It was rainin'. All we could see were rows 'n' rows of American planes. And row 'n' rows of American hangars (Durden, 1976: 3-4).

Hawkins tries to find the "real thing" – "anything that didn't say MADE IN AMERICA" (Durden, 1976: 4). However, Hawkins thinks, "the hard thing to understand was that none of it, the trenches, the wire or the people, were anything like what I, at least, had expected" (Durden, 1976: 28).

Hawkins' difficult introduction to a new job comes when his company is ambushed on its way to Song My Base Camp. This incident is important in the development of his character and his attitude toward war. In this first encounter, most of the soldiers are panicky and, when they are ordered to fire back, they fail to do so. They even fail to take the safety catch off their rifles. Durden's description of individual reactions is comic: Hawkins is crouching over his haunches, moving like a crab, holding his rifle in one hand, the tape recorder under his arm; a soldier with no rifle and no helmet is running along with only his

35

surfboard (because he was told that his unit would be located near the ocean); Lt. Whipple, a Boston bookkeeper in his civilian days, crawls up in a "textbook style" which, in Hawkins' view, "works okay but . . . looks dumb as hell" (Durden, 1976: 14). Moreover, the Lieutenant is humiliated by his sergeant for his failure to remove the safety catch when he orders a counterattack to the sergeant at gunpoint. What makes Hawkins more confused is that, amid the chaos, an Indian soldier blowing the bagpipes as he marches toward the VC initiates the counterattack which eventually repels the enemy. In this episode, Durden seems to show how American soldiers have a mistaken initial attitude towards the Vietnam War – the war as something like a picnic or sight-seeing tour (indeed, the soldiers on their first patrol take automatic cameras with them), how their combat performance is ineffectual, and how the textbook-standard does not work in Vietnam.

After the battle, Hawkins has difficulty placing the whole incident within his mental framework. "This can't be real," he thinks, "that shit was like a badly made movie. The focus was all fucked up" (Durden, 1976: 19). Seeing the seventeen dead, Hawkins decides that the war has gone wrong:

> I couldn't think of anything. Not a fuckin' thing. The first verse of "Flanders Field" came to mind. And that Pepsi ad . . . *You've got a lot to live, a Pepsi's got a lot to give.* Maybe, that's the thing, the epitaph, I guess it's called, for this war shit it's all wrong anyway. They didn't die in defense of their country (Durden, 1976: 23).

They were consumed because they were the "disposable goods," "extras" and "throwaway people" (Durden, 1976: 3). From the first he does not find any sense

in the war. What he sees is only the absurdities of war. Indeed, *No Bugles, No Drums* begins from a large absurdity: the American army goes to Vietnam to guard a pig farm. Hawkins thinks,

> I can't believe it. Guardin' a pig farm. Swear t' Christ, every time I think about it I laugh. It's a long way to come at a cotta expenses tome it woulda been cheaper to baby-sit a buneha pigs. Seems 'n' ship em here. Course, that rainse the fuckers at home wouldn't win any hearts 'n' minds. I mean, what good are we if we can't guarantee Third World people the right to raise pigs under a democratic system? (Durden, 1976: 36)

Thus, to Hawkins, American war aims become totally wrong. By the same token, the means of war are also wrong. In Hawkins' view, American soldiers have to kill people who have done nothing to them in the name of guarding a pig farm. Further, he sees that the Army is applying absurd rules for justifying the military necessity. Hawkins wages his personal war against such absurdities. In this sense, James C. Wilson may be right when he says that "Hawkins tries to correct the distorted aim of war by penetrating the large absurdities that he finds everywhere" in Vietnam (Wilson, 1982: 49).

In Kathleen Puhr's words, Hawkins is "a clever young man determined to disobey every order simply because he is a rebel" (Puhr, 1984: 109). Aware that "Life is all bullshit," Hawkins says to himself at one point: "I got these ambitions. I want to change it. Make somethin' outa life that's worth the goddam effort I put into it" (Durden,1976,141-142). In this respect, Hawkins is one of those romantic rebels portrayed in the novels of previous wars. Yet Hawkins does

37

not merely determine to disobey every order or to "correct" a certain wrong aim "simply because he is a rebel." I think that Hawkins is a rebellious apprentice transformed into a disillusioned veteran. Durden carefully draws this process of Hawkins' transformation. That is to say, Hawkins comes to war with "a bad attitude," earns "a Vedas' view of life" in it, and leaves it with "his unshakable bad attitude" (Durden, 1976: 21, 80, 287). What is meant by "bad attitude" is a rebellious one. Despite this rebellious attitude, however, Hawkins' failure to fire his rifle in several engagements do not come from his determination to "disobey" firing orders. Nor do they come from his conscientious objection (though a soldier refers to it as the reason for Hawkins' failure to fire). As shown above, in the first battle Hawkins does not fire because he is terrified of being killed. Later, Hawkins fails to fire his rifle for fear of killing someone when his unit engages with nine VC playing frisby in the river. The moment is described in these terms: "my rifle was pointed at "em but I couldn't squeeze the trigger . . . I was covered in sweat. My stomach turned 'n' twisted like a snake in a trap" (Durden, 1976: 52). But in the course of the novel Hawkins slowly responds to the military necessity not only by firing his rifle but also by taking the initiative in combat. Then, it can be said that Hawkins is caught between his rebellious attitude toward the absurdities of war and his gradual adoption of the necessities of the situation. On the one hand, Hawkins believes that "there orta be some sense t' things" (Durden, 1976: 95); and, on the other, he keeps it in his mind: "count your days, 'n' keep your ass covered" (Durden, 1976: 142).

Thus the novel reveals both Hawkins' deepening sense of disillusionment and his reluctant but gradual surrender to change in the course of his seeing the insanity of war. As first-person initiation stories generally do *No Bugles, No*

Drums presents several characters who educate Hawkins, the protagonist: Luke Davis, Crazy Dago, and Lt. Eric Levine. Through these three mentors, Hawkins comes to realize that the realities of war deepen his belief in its futility, and finally accepts his soldiership though he finds himself transformed into a "madman" (Durden, 1976: 276). What is common to the other three soldiers is that they also find no sense in the war, and yet each of them has earlier found a way to escape or overcome such senselessness: Davis quickly accepts the reality and adopts survival as his supreme concern, Dago perceives the corruptions of war and exploits them to run his own profitable business (reminding one of Milobinder's business in *Catch-22*), and Lt. Levine, a West Point graduate, finds army discipline collapsing in such a futile war and fights to save the army, his profession. Hawkins is well liked by his comrades because they regret their loss of innocence and ironically seem to see in him what they wish they were. A conversation between Hawkins and Davis summarizes their forthcoming relationship:

> "Why's everybody bein' so good to me? You cleanin' my weapon so I can blow away people. Dago tryin' to educate me to the ways of the world so's I can make a bundle of money. Let'tenant Levine tryin' to make me a soldier so I can redeem the honour of my ancestors. Y' all just too good to this ol' boy."
>
> "We love you, Hawk. You what we are wish we was."
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "A nine-year-ol' kid who still thinks there orta be some sense t' things" (Duredn, 1976: 94-95).

Pvt. Luke Davis, an ignorant farm-boy from Iowa, cannot understand why they have to guard the pig farm, nor the economic illogic that says "the Vietnamese have to raise the rice to feed the hogs and sell the hogs to buy rice" (Durden, 1976: 38). Unable to find any justifiable causes for the war or to understand its absurdity, however, Davis has earlier made a decision that survival is the most positive value for which to fight. Thus, to him, Hawkins' cynicism is nothing but useless. One day Davis says to Hawkins:

> "What y' all want? You 'n' Poe. Y' all wanta make sense from some 'n' at don'? Or you' all want ever'body to ah'gree with y' all? Ah ah'gree. Don' make no more sense'n whistlin' up a pig's ass. But we heah. So we might's well fo'git the philla . . . ah . . .."
>
> "Philosophical."
>
> "Yeah. An' deal with the real shit."
>
> "It still don't make no goddam sense."
>
> "If you dad, you think hit'll make any mo' sense?"
>
> "Fuck you" (Durden, 1976: 41-42).

Despite his dismissal of Davis' words, Hawkins is surprised to find truth in them: "And he's right. Bein' dead sure's hell ain't gonna answer nobody's questions. I think I was getting' scared" (Durden, 1976: 42). After the river fighting in which nine VC playing frisby are killed, he feels Davis' advice more keenly. Looking back at his combat performance in both the ambush and the river fight, Hawkins wonders, "Wha'th fuck am I gonna de if I can't start shootin' these cocksuckers"

40

(Durden, 1976: 55). For the first time he is faced with a choice between the two: "kill or be killed" (Durden, 1976: 55). And yet Hawkins is not ready to make the choice: "beyond the point of academic choosin'," thinks Hawkins, "I couldn't say I was ready for either one" (Durden, 1976: 55).

To Hawkins, who is unable to reconcile reality and sensibility and who is hesitant to choose between "kill" and "be killed," Davis insists on his acceptance of reality and stresses the necessity of killing?

> Hawk . . . Ah don' know man. What you think we doin' heah? We come a long ways jus' t' sit on ou' asses 'n' advice. Ain't often Ah feel hit's mah place. But Ah'm goan give you a lit'le. Git yo' shit together, man. This heah 's the real thing. We heah t' kill people, t' hunt 'em down 'n' waste 'em. You a soldier ain't no way to change lit less'en you git lit up. This ain't no sightseein' trip you on (Durden, 1976: 87).

Hawkins takes these words seriously, and yet, he confesses, "I sure's hell had a great reluctance to admit it" (Durden, 1976: 87). Even so, the necessities of the situation continuously impose on him the acceptance of reality and killing. Even his frequent escape into fantasies does not alleviate such pressures, because, surprisingly enough, he sees himself committing innumerable killings in them. Rather he blames himself for such happenings: "The only reason I could see for that kinda fantasy would be acceptance," Hawkins muses; "If I kill, I'm one of the boys" (Durden, 1976: 88).

But the necessity of the situation proves too much for Hawkins' effort to maintain his moral purity. Hawkins surrenders himself to the reality by

41

committing his first killing. The incident occurs when Davis takes him to a village to sample some Vietnamese food. Davis symbolically leads his people to the scene of practice as if to prove his theory. Durden uses a three-year-old child for the education of a "reluctant warrior" (Durden, 1976: 85). On their way to the village, they see a little girl running towards them with a grenade wired on her hand. Dumfounded at the sight especially because she is the one whom he used to treat very carefully in the village, Davis freezes. Hawkins kills the girl and at the same time the grenade goes off. He describes the scene of his first killing – one of the most brutal scenes in all the Vietnam War novels: "I fired one round . . . the gun boomed and slammed back into my hip . . . her tiny chest turned to bloody jelly, the bone, flesh, 'n' blood flying . . . the grenade exploded and she disappeared in a ball of smoke 'n' orange flame, blown to bits" (Durden, 1976: 228).

In an ensuing fight, Hawkins frantically fires his rifle and kills a VC and an old woman who is wailing out of terror. After he and the wounded Davis are rescued by their platoon, Hawkins feels disillusioned at his change; he feels that he is no longer what he was. He writes of his being dehumanized:

> Way off in the distance of whatever was left of my rational mind a younger, angrier version of me started yellin'. He ripped off his helmet 'n' threw it down between us – a gauntlet, maybe – but it was comical, a stupid, idealistic throwaway kid in Levis, W. C. Fields sweatshirt 'n' headband. I started laughin'. Shakin' 'n' laughin', a crazy puke-smellin' punk with spittle droolin' from his mouth, his clothes crusted in mud, his hands, smeared with dried blood eracked 'n' peelin', the right hand

42

wrapped round the rifle grip, finger on the trigger . . . laughin' and laughin' and laughin' (Durden, 1976: 231).

By killing, Hawkins loses the innocence which he has been trying to maintain; in spite of himself, he surrenders himself to the military necessity. To Hawkins, as this passage shows, the loss of innocence corresponds to psychological and moral disintegration. Through his first killing, he finds himself transformed into the new self – the dehumanized being. Amid the compliments of his fellow soldiers, Hawkins muses, "I had grown up. I'd slaughtered people and symbolically earned my manhood" (Durden, 1976: 235).

If Hawkins comes to realize the necessities of accepting reality through Davis, he learns the hidden truths of war through Dago: how the war has gone corrupt. The secrets are revealed in Dago's black humor through which Hawkins learns the logic of "Catch-22" or inverse truth: insanity becomes sanity, wrong becomes right, and even death becomes life. In this parody, Hawkins also learns how the war reduces human life (both American and Vietnamese) to a mechanism of consumer society (Wilson, 1982: 71).

Crazy Dago is portrayed as a comic figure. While the company is under a heavy mortar barrage he arrives riding a Honda motorcycle. Like Davis, he has early found a way to survive the absurdity of war. "Man, I'd come here a cherry," he says to Hawkins; "I never seen nothin' like that. Napalm, rockets, machine guns" (Durden, 1976: 67). Dago establishes a numbers game based on the number of dead ARVN (Army of The Republic of Vietnam). He uses the game for his money making business: He makes people bet any numbers they want; the winning number of a day is decided by the number of the ARVN body counts of

the day; then he pays out money to the person who hits the winning number. But Dago can manipulate the number of the dead by blowing up the ARVN outfits anytime so that he may not pay out. What makes this project possible is the strange TOC(Tactical Operations Centre) rule which pardons American killing of the friendly Vietnamese. The Vietnamese can "get wasted" under the rule, for it makes American soldiers get out of trouble when they accidentally or deliberately kill the Vietnamese people. Under the rule, the dead Vietnamese, enemy or friend, are "only Gooks" (Durden, 1976: 69). "This ain't a war," he says to Hawkins; "This is high finance" (Durden, 1976: 91).

One of the climactic episodes takes place when Garcia is killed and Dago and Hawkins escort the dead body to his parents in San Diego. Garcia is disemboweled by a waterbuffalo on a patrol. Dago exploits the trip for smuggling marijuana. To Hawkins' shock, Dago throws away Garcia's body and instead fills the coffin with the dope. Dago's reply to Hawkins' protest is significant: "Garcia's body don't mean nothin' to nobody. He's fuckin' dead . . . No *one* gave a damn about him when he was livin'. So how come it matters now?" (Durden, 1976: 149). Here Garcia becomes one of the "throwaway people": as a Vietnamese is wasted by the *TOC rule*, an American soldier is consumed for a business; even Garcia's death cannot get him out of Vietnam. To Hawkins' inability to "reconcile the intellect and the emotion," Dago says, "Ya gonna learn, baby. Ya gonna be just as goddam stinkin' fucked up as we are. Kill gooks an' pray y' get a chance to get rich off it just like us: Ya days of bein' a nine-year-old are over (Durden, 1976: 150).

Hawkins' effort to retain sanity gives way to Dago's brutal logic. At

44

Garcia's home, Dago lies that Garcia is not dead but on a secret mission to Laos. All of a sudden, Garcia becomes a living hero, and his parents are joyful. In the face of such unbelievable reality, Hawkins is choked with rage. What is more shocking to him, however, is his awareness of the truth in Dago's logic: "I shuddered. There was a certain logic in what he was sayin'. It was against everything we been taught about right 'n' wrong, truth, whatever. But he was right . . . . They wanted to believe their son was alive" (Durden, 1976: 153). In this confusing world of absurdity, the only way to maintain sanity is paradoxically to lose it, and the right-thinking people *are* the "war profiteers, black market mother-fuckers, the ego-centred, bigoted bastards lookin' to get promoted" (Durden, 1976: 210). The more Hawkins penetrates into the war, the more he learns the absurdities hidden in it. Dago's teaching further deepens Hawkins' sense of disillusionment.

Finally, the relationship between Lt. Levine and Hawkins is concerned with Lt. Levine's effort to make Hawkins a soldier and the latter's resistance to it. Unable to find ways to channel his frustrations, Hawkins directs them towards the army (Wilson, 1982: 49-50). It is for this reason that early reviewers saw the novel as describing Hawkins' personal war with the army (*Newsweek*, August 9, 1986: 73; *New York Times*, July 23, 1976: C19); *Library Journal*, June 1, 1976: 1308). Indeed Dago at one point mocks at him, saying "Y' fightin' the Army? Hawk, why don't y' take on somethin' more your own size?" (Durden, 1976: 105). Granted this, Hawkins' "war" with the Army is torn between his hatred of it and his love for Levine revolves around this contradiction upon which the moral center of the novel is placed.

Lt. Levine, a Jewish West Pointer, sees the Vietnam War as "morally" wrong, but he fights because to do so is his profession. Despite his emphasis on the Army principles, he tries to befriend his men; he even smokes dope with Hawkins when he is frustrated. By his personal warmth and affection toward Hawkins, Levine wins his mind. Levine even appoints Hawkins his RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) to place him at his side or, more probably, to make such "a disbelieving child" a soldier (Durden, 1976: 258). To Hawkins' frequent complaints, Levine only says, "You're going to be a fine-looking soldier, Hawkins. A real poster child" (Durden, 1976: 84). Levine makes every effort to convince him of the aims of fighting, sometimes by giving him a lecture or advice, at other times by saving him from the troubles involved. Yet Hawkins is always cynical and rebellious toward the war and the army. At the same time, however, Hawkins likes Levine. This conflict within himself is well expressed in these terms: "the thing is . . . I like him. And if I get suckered I don't get pissed, but it hurts. Like fallin' in love with a liar, or findin' out your mother tried to abort you" (Durden, 1976: 85). We learn that Levine deliberately puts Hawkins in the escort team taking home Garcia's body because he wants to give him a chance to go AWOL (Absent Without Leave). But Hawkins returns to the platoon, though a whore in Las Vegas offers him a ride to Canada, because he misses Levine.

The conflict between them is another version of the debate found in many Vietnam War novels: in this novel, it takes the form of Hawkins' effort to make sense out of what they are doing in Vietnam and Levine's effort to convince him to think of the war as something to be done. A conversation between them summarizes their respective views of the war:

"Why kill dinks, man? I mean, why don't we go out 'n' sit in some comfortable bar, get half in the bag, then wander back. Who's gonna know where we been or we ain't been?"

"I'll know. Listen, I don't give a damn about the Vietnamese, one way or the other. They could be pop-up targets for all I care."

"They're human, man. They got a right to somethin' besides this shit."

"Sure they do."

"So why kill 'em?"

"Because they're there. If they don't want to fight let 'em go home."

"But this is their country. They are home."

"Home. Hawk. Back to the rice paddies and fish boats. Hawk, they're because they're playing the same game we are. If we leave tomorrow – I'll be happy to leave – but if we do, do you believe they'll be free or happy, or without some other kind of misery. Life is all bullshit. We happen to be the active ingredient at the moment" (Durden, 1976: 141).

In Levine's view, war is inevitable because its cause is inherent in human nature itself. It is for this reason that Levine tries to "save the US Army" (Durden, 1976: 267). For, he says to Hawkins, "this is not the only war we're going to have to fight. Not so long as people are what they are" (Durden, 1976: 267).

With his killing of the little girl, Hawkins symbolically undergoes a transformation. But he resists accepting it, partly because of his feeling of guilt

for what he has done and partly because of his bitterness for his unconscious refusal of moral integrity to usefulness. Out of this mixed feeling, he declares "the war is over" and "the goddam fuckin' Army won!" (Durden, 1976: 237). Here Durden introduces two American cult heroes to give an explanation of Hawkins' character: James Dean and John Wayne. While James Dean, who starred in the movie *Rebel Without a Cause*, was a symbol of social rebellion, John Wayne, who starred in many war movies, was a symbol of masculine valor and patriotism. Lt. Levine thinks that Hawkins is playing "James Dean." Angered at Hawkins' cynicism as such Levine retorts upon him: "You made a decision today (by committing yourself to killing). You can't go back. Your life is changed, for better or worse. Accept it. And accept yourself, however you see it" (Durden, 1976: 239).

Another incident is noteworthy because it leads Hawkins to his psychological conversion. It involves his witnessing of Jinx leading a VC unit during the patrol. Jinx, once a close friend of Hawkins', is a product of McNamara 100,000, which, in Hawkins' view, is "the biggest fuckin' comedy of errors" (Durden, 1976: 206). Jinx's view of war is as cynical as Hawkins': "Get the young blacks off America's city streets and into Nam's backwoods. They finally figured a way to kill spades 'n' slopes at the same time" (Durden, 1976: 123). His defection to the VC leads Hawkins to a moral dilemma. For, though "changing sides is bad form," it seems to Hawkins that the only right thing to do in Vietnam is to change sides" (Durden, 1976: 216). Thus, Jinx's defection has resided in him as something like a moral conscience. During the patrol, however, Hawkins happens to see Jinx and finds that the mortar barrage his team has received was guided by Jinx who had located the team's coordinates by detecting

its radio frequency. Hawkins decides to kill him because, though Jinx's cause was right, he betrayed his comrades. The moment of his repentance is the moment of Levine's success:

> "I'm a sonofbitch."

> "No, I don't think so. He is. Maybe I am. You're more like a disbelieving child."

> "Thanks" (Durden, 1976: 258).

With his resolve to kill Jinx, the importance of survival begins to be reinstated in Hawkins' mind, perhaps because his survival may enable him to execute his decision. After the incident, Hawkins, a "reluctant warrior," takes an initiative to go on the patrol. On one occasion, he saves his team from enemy detection at the risk of his life. With mixed feelings amid the compliments by his fellows, Hawkins accepts his change: "Terrific. That's all I need. Now I'm a fuckin' soldier" (Durden, 1976: 263).

Hawkins' transformation is completed in a last fatal patrol in which Levine is killed and in an ensuing incident in which he kills Jinx. Ironically only Hawkins survives unharmed while his three mentors are killed or wounded (Dago and Levine are killed in the patrol, and Davis is evacuated in an earlier incident). The novel comes to a violent conclusion when the team encounters the hunted NVA regiment in a valley which Durden identifies with Dante's Circles of Hell. Hawkins' team is overrun by the massive enemy forces, and Levine is killed by his own side's 175s aimed at destroying the enemy's run on the team's position. Hawkins is deeply angered at the thought that they as well as the enemy were

thrown away by the Colonel who wanted high body counts. Hawkins' escape carrying the headless body of Levine is one of the most horrible scenes in all Vietnam War novels. He is no longer human; his mind stops functioning (Durden, 1976: 272). He even identifies himself with the body of Levine, saying "we" (Durden, 1976: 273). Presenting the body to the Colonel back at the base, Hawkins comments: "This is what our Army has come to, from Valley Forge to Vietnam, two hundred years of tradition to produce a madman" (Durden, 1976: 276). Levine's effort to save the Army is nullified by his own death. More ironically, his death is caused by the Army that he was trying to save. Hawkins sees in Levine's death and his own madness the symbolic collapse of the whole military tradition. Hawkins becomes a soldier who can recover the mutilated body of his fallen comrade; but he is no longer a moral being; morally and psychologically he has degenerated into a "madman." In a state of humbleness, he kills Jinx and fourteen other VC and, out of total despair, he starts for Atlanta. Later Hawkins is discharged from the army with a recommendation to report to the VA hospital for "psychiatric rehabilitation" (Durden, 1976: 286).

No Bugles, No Drums is, in short, a story of Hawkins' gradual disintegration from a rebellious newcomer to a hardened and disillusioned veteran. In terms of the transformation itself (*the loss of innocence*), the novel is similar to *Fields of Fire*. As William J. Searle has noted, however, this novel differs from Webb's chiefly in that the protagonist shows "negative reaction to [his] transformation" (1981: 88). As shown above, Hawkins loses hope of his change, eventually to the point of making a "separate peace", with his soul dead. To Durden, war only produces a "madman" who should be taken care of by a psychiatrist. While Webb sees the war as a *rite de passage* through which a male

youth earns his manhood, Durden sees it as an evil disabling the human body and soul. Unlike Webb's soldiers who try to find human dignity in their solidarity, Durden's are all of them "throwaway people" or "disposable goods" in a consumer society. They have no sense or hope of human dignity in such an absurd war. The positive aspect of war – the myth of army buddies or comrades – is outweighed by the horror that war brings to man's mind. At one point, Hawkins mentions this myth in these terms: "But the fact of it is, generally, once you've shared that moment the last thing you want is to remember it" (Durden, 1976: 248). Permanently disillusioned, left only with his "bad attitude", Hawkins has been thrown away just as effectively as his dead comrades. He can only say, finally: "Fuck his country, my country. It sucks. Political pigs, corporate pigs, corporate dictators . . ." (Durden, 1976: 210). The next chapter dealing with Gustav Hashford's *The Short-Timers* continues this theme of disillusionment established by Durden.

Chapter Two

The Short-Timers:
A Tale of Moral and Mental Disintegration

Gustav Hashford's *The Short-Timers* shares many of the features of *No Bugles No Drums*. This novel was the basis for director Stanely Kubrick's 1987 Vietnam War film *Full Metal Jacket*, for which Hashford shared the Academy nomination as a co-screenwriter. Like Hawkins, the protagonist of Durden's novel, Hashford's first person narrator is also a man with a sense of humour; in fact, he is named for it – Joker. Hashford's humour is perhaps even more unpleasant than Durden's, and it incorporates similar images showing in the contradiction between the mass market culture of the U.S. and the reality of life during war time. Both use as their refrain advertising slogans, and it's hard to imagine that Hashford was not speaking directly to Durden when he chose for his motto, the phrase "Things go better with Coke", – doubtless an answer to Durden's slogan, "You've Got a Lot to Live and Pepsi's Got a Lot to Give". Both employ the device of a "John Wayne" character – the best friend of the narrator – who does not survive the war. In Hashford's case this is, literally, Cowboy, whose need to adhere to the wartime "script" ("Marines never abandon their dead or wounded") is the cause of his death. *The Phantom Blooper* (1990) the second novel by Gustav Hashford continues the story of Joker, who is forced to kill his friend Cowboy when Cowboy is pinned down and repeatedly shot by a Vietnamese sniper. His third novel *A Gipsy Good Time* (1992) is the first-person narrative of Dowdy Lewis, Jr.,hardboiled, gun-toting Vietnam Vet bounty hunter and book dealer who gets mixed up with the usual leggy redhead with a mysterious secret.

The Short-Timers which took its name from the term that soldiers used to refer to men nearing the conclusion of their one-year tour duty in Vietnam – was short, intense work that generated a mixed critical reception. Joker breaks this mythic cycle very clearly and in great detail – he puts a bullet through Cowboy's head, putting him out of his misery as one would kill a beloved, but now mad dog. For Durden, this character is "The Boy Ranger", killed in a foolish heroic gesture which Hawkins both understands and rejects, and which motivates his decision to walk out on the war altogether. Both Hashford and Durden retain their apparently truly unshakable bad attitudes, even in the novels written more than twenty years after the war. It may be mentioned that both Hashford and Durden were correspondents in Vietnam. Hashford was a combatant correspondent who served with the First Marine Division in 1968, and Durden was a freelancer in 1966-67. Both *No Bugles No Drums* (1976) and *The Short-Timers* (1979) move their narrators from innocence to experience in the tradition of the *bildungsroman.*

The Short-Timers is a first-person narrative in three parts, recounting the picaresque progress of a young existential hero from Marine boot camp to his final destination as an infantry squad leader. Hashford's existential hero initially comes to Vietnam as a combatant correspondent as one of the privileged few to promote the officially sanctioned view of the war. It is in this capacity, as an official spectator, that he early on finds in the violence of the war no meaning beyond that which he acts to create. This is Hashford's "Joker", the narrator whose real name, James T. Davis, we learn only in the novel's second part. He explains toward the end of the novel, in response to his first confirmed kill, the unnecessary murder of an unarmed Vietnamese farmer:

After my first confirmed kill I began to understand that it was not necessary to understand. What you do, you become. The insights of one moment are blotted out by the next. And no amount of insight could ever alter the cold, black fact of what I had done. I was caught up in a constricting web of darkness, and, like the ancient farmer, I was suddenly very calm, just as I had been calm when the mine detonated (a reference to the first combat death he witnessed), because there was nothing I could do. I was defining myself with bullets; blood had blemished my Yankee Doodle dream that everything would have a happy ending; and that I, when the war was over, would return to hometown America in a white silk uniform, a rainbow of campaign ribbons across my chest, brave beyond belief, the military Jesus (Hashford,1979: 112-113).

By the time we get to this passage, we realize that this has been the pattern throughout Hashford's novel. Joker moves from one situation to another, investing his experience with meaning through his own actions. Hashford's Vietnam (and even the Marine basic training that precedes it) is a totally absurd and meaningless world where the only meaning is that which the individual acts to create, but in which the individual is still responsible – if only to himself – for the choices he makes. "What you do, you become" (Hashford, 1979: 64), Joker's verbal tic in the novel, speaks finally beyond the context, establishing both the novel's tone and Hashford's moral frame of reference.

Because of the psychological impact of brutal and impersonal guerilla warfare, the theme of combat is very prominent in *The Short-Timers*.Hashford

54

centers the plot and characterization in this novel on soldiers' callousness conditioned by the brutal Marine Corps basic training – "Our rifle is only a tool; it is a hard heart that kills" (Hashford, 1979: 13) – and reinforced by the savagery of the battles. Emerging from this "nurturing" environment, one of his characters, Private Pyle, mechanically murders his drill instructor and commits suicide; another, Rafterman, eagerly eats the flesh of a fellow–soldier killed by a mortar; and Joker, the narrator, describes the deaths, mutilations, and his own mercy killing of a best friend through a mask of black humour and indifference enabling him to survive the psychic trauma.

The Short-Timers is regarded as a powerful examination of war and the darker human impulses. The initiation story in this novel differs from that in the traditional combat novel of Vietnam. As Margaret Stewart notes: "in a novel such as *Fields of Fire* war is vital to the determination of manhood, but in *The Short-Timers*, it is a devastating experience that leads to moral and mental disintegration" (Stewart, 1981: 81). It examines two dramatically different, yet undeniably linked, phases in a Vietnam marine combat reporter's life: basic training and combat. The basic training segment of the novel takes place at the Marine training facility in Parris Island, North Carolina; the Vietnam action is centered on the city of Hue, site of some of the Tet Offensive's bloodiest fighting. The novel focuses on William "Joker" Dolittle, the marine combat reporter, who refuses promotion to sergeant and insists on wearing a peace button. With his time running "short" – only forty-nine days left on the tour of duty – Dolittle's insubordination angers a superior officer, and he finds himself reassigned to a vulnerable combat unit. Supposedly fighting for freedom, the troops are actually prisoners of the war itself. This imprisonment leads them to

the moral and mental disintegration.

Unlike many Vietnam War novels, including Durden's, *The Short-Timers* does not begin *in medias res* in Vietnam; instead, the novel begins in the hell of boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. Walter Clemons denotes "This brief, extremely ugly first novel" as "the best work of fiction about the Vietnam War" that he has read (1979: 60), and Mardena Bridges Creek terms the book "a finely honed novel whose imagistic nightmare quality slowly immerses the reader in an American season in hell" (1982: 110). A hellish theme of madness prevails from the opening pages of the novel, where boot camp soldiers become insane and perverted before they even arrive in Vietnam.

Parris Island, the Marine Corp Recruit Depot, is surrounded by a swamp, a locale which is almost similar to some of the swampy settings created by Dante in his *Inferno*. Hashford describes Parris Island as "symmetrical but sinister like a suburban death camp" (Hashford, 1979:3), portraying an environment where violence is commonplace. "Beatings, we learn, are a routine element of life on Parris Island" (Hashford, 1979: 7), and the soldiers' training is geared toward making the recruits "fearless and aggressive, like animals" (Hashford, 1979: 14). To instill a killer instinct into the recruits is a primary aim of the Marine Corp.

The first section of the novel, "The Spirit of the Bayonet" is a struggle between the drill instructor Gerheim and a slow recruit named Leonard Pratt, a figure who is given the nickname "Gomer Pyle". The hellish theme of madness begins in this section when the agony of boot camp drives one soldier Leonard Pratt over the edge of society. Private Leonard Pratt, at first a recruit who can do nothing right, becomes a model soldier after he is brutalized by his officers and

56

fellow recruits. However, in spite of his newly found perfection, the brutality changes him into a soldier whose words are "coughed up from some deep, ugly place" (Hashford, 1979: 22). After the graduation ceremony on Parris Island, Leonard loses control. Obsessed with his rifle, whom he names Charlene, he kills his sergeant, who tries to take the gun from him, and then commits suicide. Leonard's descent into the inner recesses, the hell of himself, reveals that this same descent is taking place in all of the newly graduated recruits. With the bloody bodies of the sergeant and Leonard still on the floor, Hashford paints an unpleasant picture of death. Joker imagines the remaining soldiers lining up with "Cold grins of death" (Hashford, 1979: 32) on their faces, standing at attention, and reciting their Marine pledge to their instruments of death, their rifles. This incident serves to foreshadow the behaviour of the man later in the war. Hashford demonstrates the inability of the soldiers to be heroes or defenders. Instead they become "'weapons' – passive objects in the hands of others, or 'ministers of death' – agents whose mission is confined to macabre ends" (Hashford, 1979: 97). Pratt becomes a true standard bearer of Hashford's "newly minted Marines" (Hashford, 1979: 32) who go to Vietnam in their nation's dark reverie.

Section two of the novel, "Body Count," opens *in medias res* in Vietnam in 1968, when two boot camp graduates, the narrator, now identified as Joker, and Cowboy reunite. Joker's job as Marine correspondent is

> to convince people that war is a beautiful experience. Come one, come all to exotic Viet Nam, the jewel of Southeast Asia, meet interesting, stimulating people of an ancient culture . . . and kill them. Be the first kid on your block to get a confirmed kill (Hashford, 1979:45).

"Body Count" relates the descent of the characters, in this case the narrator, his friend "Rafter Man", into a hell of smiling death and lunacy. Joker's experiences at Parris Island and in Vietnam have already hardened him to the war, but Rafter Man, a combat photographer, has not yet been fully initiated.. He receives his first glimpse into the evils of the war when Joker almost kills an MP who orders them to fill sandbags. Horrified at his friend's actions, the still naïve Rafter Man tells Joker that he " would have killed that guy. For nothing" (Hashfrod, 1979: 54). Joker warns Rafter Man that Vietnam " is a slaughter. In this world of shit you won't have time to understand. What you do, you become. You better learn to flow with it. You owe it to yourself" (Hashford, 1979: 55).

Rafter Man is initiated into the war through a series of perversions and lunacies. Hashford portrays Vietnam as a world where Vietnamese orphans are teased by soldiers with rubber Hershey bars, where soldiers occupy their free time by burning and mutilating rats in their bunkers, where a soldier tries to rape a thirteen-year-old girl, his rationale being, "If she's old enough to bleed, she's old enough to butcher" (Hashford, 1979: 91), where "a day without blood is like a day without sunshine" (Hashford, 1979:66), and where when a child is run over by a tank "their American saviors' love crushed the guts out of a child" (Hashford, 1979: 78), the father's only concern is that he receive compensation for his water buffalo which was also killed. When Rafter Man and Joker are given their first assignment, their commander tells them,

> "Get me photographs of indigenous civilian personnel who have been
> executed with their hands tied behind their backs, people buried alive,
> priests with their throats cut, dead babies – you know what I want. Get

me some good body counts. And don't forget to calculate your kill rations. And Joker . . .."

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't *even* photograph any naked bodies unless they're mutilated" (Hashford, 1979: 61).

Later the commander receives his atrocity pictures after Joker and Rafter Man plunder a mass grave and assemble a family of dead Vietnamese with parents, children, and a dog, to photograph. This incident illustrates the way in which things that take place in Southeast Asia defy normal definitions of conscience or morality.

The atrocities that occur in Vietnam terrify Rafter Man. He is paralyzed with fear when, after the men in the platoon pretend that the rats in their bunker are Viet Cong and kill them, one soldier eats part of a rat murmuring, "Umm . . . love them crispy critters" (Hashford, 1979: 70). Such degraded behaviour in the war goes beyond the killing or even the eating of animals, of course. *The Short-Timers* records at least two instances where civilians, usually Vietnamese farmers are killed for no reason, except perhaps as revenge for the death of American soldiers. Also, as in many other Vietnam War novels, there is the killing of an American officer whom the men dislike. When Mr. Shortround risks his life to try to save one of his men, he is fragged (i.e., deliberately killed with a hand grenade) by other members of his platoon.

After his first experience with combat, when Winslow, a fellow lance corporal is killed, Rafter Man begins to exhibit the same strange behaviour as the

59

other soldiers, in perhaps even a more perverse manner. In his initiation into the madness of war, he turns to cannibalism:

> Rafter Man looks up with a new face. His lips are twisted into a cold, sardonic smirk. His labored breathing is broken by grunts. He growls. His lips are wet with saliva. He's looking at Mr. Payback. The object in Rafter Man's hand is a big piece of flesh, Winslow's flesh, ugly yellow, as big as a John Wayne Cookie, wet with blood. We all look at it for a long time.
>
> Rafter Man puts the piece of flesh into his mouth, onto his tongue, and we think he's going to vomit. Instead, he grits his teeth. Then, closing his eyes, he swallows (Hashford, 1979: 74).

Part of the animalism results from the excessive dehumanization that the soldier experiences in Vietnam. Joker compares the Marines to "werewolves with guns, panting," who "run as though impatient to sink into the darkness that is opening up to swallow us. Something snaps and we're past the point of no return" (Hashford, 1979: 99). The Marines have obviously descended into a heart of darkness. Here they are swallowed up by the atrocities of the war and practise such perversions that, as Joker further states, the men are not human, but animals who feel like gods. Their initiation into the world of war changes them in the worst possible ways. In a World War II novel such as James Jones' *The Thin Red Line* (1962), the characters wonder why men kill, and they feel a certain amount of guilt over their participation in manslaughter. An example is Pfe Doll, who feels guilty over his first kill, even though that guilt is mingled with the knowledge that in war murder goes unpunished. However, Vietnam war

protagonists neither analyze their abominable behaviour nor express guilt or regret.

Prior to Canto VIII of the *Inferno*, the environment is a natural one, but when Virgil and Dante approach the city of Dis, it changes to a man-made one – an organized evil city. Reminiscent of earlier works, such as *No Bugles No Drums*, *The Short-Timers* also reflects such a change in the environment. Midway through *The Short-Timers*, the characters move from their locale of heat, jungle, and bunkers to actual civilizations within Vietnam. According to Wallace Fowlie, the entrance into the city of Dis in the *Inferno* is extremely important:"In a geographical sense, the passage marks a shift from a country landscape to that of city. In terms of morality, it marks the passage from incontinence to malice. In a psychological sense, it is a change from a passive will on the part of the sinners to an active will. And finally it would seem to indicate a change from a passive will on the part of the sinners to an active will. And finally it would seem to indicate a change from an individual sin, affecting one person, to an organized sin deliberately will and affecting more than one" (Fowlie, 1981: 68).

Roughly these same shifts occur in Hashford's novel. As the protagonists move from isolated incidents of the war in the jungle to organized sniper searches and destruction of Vietnamese cities, the ugliness of the war is revealed in greater intensity – with intensity but with little else to distinguish the text. As one reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* states, "Hashford's recounting of the horrors of Vietnam isn't enough to sustain his novel" (1978: 52). Instead, it has the effect of distancing the reader, not involving him more intensely in the story. While such horrors are graphically portrayed, the reader has seen them too many times before

in novels that are notably similar in form and theme.

For instance, the Citadel near Hue in *The Short-Timers* physically resembles Dante's city of Dis. It has "zigzagging ramparts thirty feet high and eight feet thick, surrounded by a moat" (Hashford, 1979: 96) and consists of "black stone against a cold gray sky, with dark towers populated by shadows that are alive" (Hashford, 1979: 97). Whereas Dante and Virgil had a hard time gaining entrance to Dis, the soldiers have no difficulty entering the Citadel. Modern warfare has provided them with the necessary equipment to not only enter, but destroy the area: steel helmets, heavy flak jackets, magic weapons, F-4 Phantom jet fighters, napalm, high explosives, and white phosphorus. As the narrator states, "With bombs we are expressing ourselves; we are writing our history in shattered blocks of stone" (Hashford, 1979: 97). The "scented lotus ponds," "landscaped gardens," and "bridges linking delicately structured pagodas" (Hasford, 1979: 108) are ripped by gunships that disturb the "peace and quiet like dogs fighting in a church" (Hashford, 1979: 108). Furthermore, the condition of the city of Hue after the American assault reflects the outstanding paradox of the war . . . the destruction of a country in order to grant it salvation. The main sins found in the City of Dis in Dante's *Inferno* are Violence and Fraud, the same sins that, by this point, one would expect to find in the assault on Hue in *The Short-Timers*. Some of the novel's worst scenes of violence appear in this section. In addition, the theme of Fraud is shown in the fraudulent purpose behind the war; centuries of Vietnam's history and culture must be devastated in order to supposedly salvage a civilization.

Like the sinners in Dis' whose sins are moral ones, the characters in *The*

62

Short-Timers break the moral law. Their actions in the war go far beyond what their duties as U.S. Marines require them to do. Shortly after "liberating Hue," they engage in some of the worst atrocities of the war. They visit a Vietnamese mass grave for fun, play disrespectfully with the bodies and then mutilate the body of a female sniper. While their sins have always been worse than self-indulgence they now move from violence to malice. Thieving is common as they loot corpses, taking everything from personal possessions to actual pieces of the bodies. Their treachery is basically against mankind in general. Those who have been psychologically passive learn to be active, as individual sins become collective ones. For example, during the assault on the Citadel, the company's officer, commanding is fragged to death by an American grenade. One character, Animal Mother, supposedly threw the grenade, yet the entire company knows of and endorses the murder. (Animal Mother's name is, symbolic, for he is the mother who leads the rest of the squad into participating in his animalistic atrocities.) In addition, whereas earlier in the novel only Animal Mother looted Vietnamese bodies, now the squad loots them together, and they all participate in tormenting and mutilating the female sniper. According to James Wilson, Hashford's novel, "indulges in an overdose of surreal fantasies of carnage and machismo that became absolutely pointless" (1982: 50-51). Such sensation serves only to numb the reader rather than to "engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself" (Iser, 1974: 275).

The epigram for Dante's *Inferno* is quoted early in "Grunts," the third section of the novel: "ALL HOPE ABANDON YE WHO ENTER HERE" (Hashford, 1979: 148), a statement which the Marines profess to believe. The locale again is the jungle, the usual hellish environment where

63

Thorny underbrush claws our sweaty jungle utilities and our bandoleers and our sixty-pound field packs and our twelve-pound camouflaged helmets and our six-and-a-half-pound fiberglass and steel automatic rifles. Limp sabers of elephant grass slice into hands and cheeks. Creepers trip us and tear at our ankles. Pack straps rub blisters on our shoulders and salty water wiggles in dirty worm trails down our necks and faces. Insects eat our skin, leeches drink our blood, snakes try to bite us, and even monkeys throw rocks (Hashford, 1979: 150).

Here the squad's treachery even extends to God, who they believe made the jungle especially for Marines: "God has a hand on Marines because we kill everything we see. No slack. He plays his games; we play ours. To show our appreciation for so much omnipotent attention we keep Heaven packed with fresh souls" (Hashford, 1979: 150).

The novel ends with the familiar act of fratricide, the assassination of wounded American soldiers by their own squad members. When a lone Vietnamese sniper begins to wound or kill the American soldiers one at a time, the company has to retreat before all of the men are killed. However, to retreat means to abandon the last wounded grunt, something that Marines never do. Since they cannot leave while any wounded soldier is still alive, the squad leader chooses to execute his friend who is wounded while trying to save two other squad members who he eventually must kill so that the rest of the squad can retreat and survive. At the beginning of the novel, Cowboy had "killed" Joker in a mock drill; now the situation is ironically reversed, and Joker must actually kill Cowboy. After shooting Cowboy, Joker comments: "Everybody hate my guts,

but they know I'm right. I am their sergeant; they are my men. Cowboy was killed by sniper fire, they'll say, but they'll never see me again; I'll be invisible" (Hashford, 1979: 178).

The fratricide in *The Short-Timers* is an example of the difference between the moral climate in Vietnam and that of other wars. In James Jones' *The Thin Red Line*, for example, the other soldiers cannot bring themselves to murder a wounded soldier who they are not able to rescue. They think of giving Tella, the suffering man, an overdose of morphine, but the medic refuses to do so. One soldier, Stein, thinks of shooting Tella, "But the vision died sickly away, unfulfilled. He wasn't the type and he knew it" (Jones, 1962: 239). Finally, a character named Welsh manages to reach Tella long enough to leave him a number of morphine syrettes. The men compromise the situation by leaving it to Tella to give himself the overdose of morphine because it is not within their moral sphere to actually murder him. The incident in *The Short-Timers* also contrasts starkly with an episode in Mailer's World War II novel, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), where a squad is also responsible for a member's death. When Ridges thinks of leaving a wounded soldier behind, he feels morally guilty for even considering such a decision:

> He too was playing with the idea of deserting Wilson, but he pushed it
> away in a spasm of disgust. If he left him it would be murder, an awful
> sin if he left a Christian to die. Ridges thought of the black mark it
> would be on his soul. Ever since he had been a child he had imagined his
> soul as a white object the size and shape of a football, lodged
> somewhere near his stomach. Each time he sinned an ineradicable black

spot was inked onto the white soul, its size depending upon the enormity of the skin. At the time a man died, if white football was more than half black he went to hell. Ridges was certain that the sin of leaving Wilson would cover at least a quarter of his soul (Mailer, 1948: 672).

And when Wilson dies, Mailer's soldiers still do not abandon his body; rather, they work very hard to secure the corpse on the walk home. Then when the body is accidentally swept away while they are crossing a rough stream, they collapse and weep over their loss. Another character, Gallagher, also feels responsible for a soldier, Roth, who missed a step and fell to his death when Gallagher had taunted him to jump over a gap on the trail. Gallagher now torments himself with guilt, feeling that "He had sinned and he was going to be punished" (Mailer, 1948: 687).

Previous wars, while certainly not free of killing and brutality, centered around a different type of morality. For example, Martinez in *The Naked and the Dead* is consumed by guilt over his killing of a Japanese soldier:

> Toiling up the first slopes of the mountain, Martinez brooded about the Japanese soldier he had killed. He could see his face clearly, for more vividly now in the cruel dazzle of the morning sun that he had the night before and in his memory he traced over every motion the Jap had made. Once again Martinez could feel the blood trickling over his fingers, leaving them sticky. He examined his hand, and with a pang of horror discovered a dried black thread of blood in the webbing between two of his fingers. He grunted with disgust and the excess of fear one feels in crushing on insect (Mailer, 1948: 638-39).

66

Martinez feels that he has committed a 'sin' for which he cannot be absolved because there is no priest available to hear his confession. In contrast, *The Short-Timers* reflects no strong feelings of guilt or remorse over the atrocities that take place. When a soldier hesitates to leave a wounded female sniper, his squad leader appropriately named "Animal Mother", orders him to "go on and waste her" and leave her for the rats. The atrocity does not stop, though, with the execution of the sniper. Her already mutilated body suffers further humiliation from the hands of the American soldiers:

> Animal Mother spits. He takes a step, kneels, zips out his machete. With one powerful blow he chops off her head. He picks the head up by its long black hair and holds it high. He laughs and says, 'Rest in pieces, bitch'. And he laughs again. He looks around and sticks the bloody ball of gore into all our faces (Hashford, 1979: 120).

The sniper's body is then further abused as one soldier takes her feet for souvenirs, chops off her fingers, and steals her gold ring, while another photographs her mutilated corpse. A similar scene occurs in *The Naked and the Dead*, but with some differences. In Mailer's novel, a group of soldiers go hunting for souvenirs from dead Japanese soldiers. Martinez "prodded with his shoe the genitals of the charred corpse. The genitals collapsed with a small crispy sound as if he had stuck his finger into a coil of cigar ash" (Mailer, 1948: 211). Then he decides to steal the gold teeth from the corpses and in doing so he is engaged in a more violent form of souvenir hunting:

> An unguarded rifle was lying at his feet, and without thinking he picked it up, and smashed the butt of it against the cadaver's mouth. It made a

67

sound like an ax thudding into a wet rotten log. He lifted the rifle and smashed it down again. The teeth spattered loose. Some landed on the ground and a few lay scattered over the crushed jaw of the corpse. Martinez picked up four or five gold ones in a frenzy and dropped them in his pocket (Mailer, 1948: 214).

Mailer's World War II characters obviously share the same lust for gold and violence that Hashford's Vietnam characters do.

But in *The Short-Timers*, Hashford reveals no guilt, no moralizing. Joker realizes that retreating is "a shitty thing to do" (Hashford, 1979: 171), but that the situation must be accepted. And when retreating involves killing his wounded comrade, he accepts it as a necessary fact and wastes no time regretting his actions. He merely leads the squad back toward their base. The Vietnam War protagonists, Joker states, follow the law of the jungle,

> which is that more Marines go in than come out. There it is. Nobody asks us why we're smiling because nobody wants to know. The ugly that civilians choose to see in war focuses on spilled guts. To see human beings clearly, that is ugly. To carry death in your smile, that is ugly. War is ugly because the truth can be ugly and ugly is very sincere. Ugly is the face of Victor Charlie, the shapeless black face of death touching each of your brothers with the clean stroke of justice (Hashford, 1979: 175-76).

Even more ironic is the sarcasm with which human loss is acknowledged. After shooting Cowboy, Joker remarks to the squad, "Man-oh-man, Cowboy looks like a bag of leftovers from a V. F. W. barbeque. Of course, I've got nothing against

68

dead people. Why, some of my best friends are dead" (Hashford, 1979: 178-79).

The simple view, so boldly stated, that war is ugly and must be accepted as such, becomes a major flaw of the novel. Hashford's portrayal of reality or truth is also one-dimensional. The squad members exist only as paste- board figures who contribute little, if any, depth to the novel. According to one critic, Hashford's characters "are frieze figures, insufficiently differentiated. One must read the book twice to remember that the man whom the narrator kills at Khe Sanh was his first friend in training camp" (Clemons, 1979: 60). That the characters become ridiculous at times is illustrated further by their taking on of generic names typical of a whole group of things. Hashford's borrowing from the naturalistic tradition stereotypes a character such as Animal Mother, whose name suggests the brutality that he demonstrates in the novel. Then, in addition to Daytona Dave, a surfer bum from Florida, and Chili Vendor, a Chicano from East Los Angeles, we have other hollow figures such as Cowboy, a Texan who wears a grey Stetson, Rafter Man, an initiate who earned his name by falling out of the rafters while drinking in the enlisted men's club, and Joker, the narrator who received his name from his tendency to make clever remarks. According to Roger Sale: *"The Short-Timers* has a central figure, and we see only what he can see, but neither he nor Hashford has a point of view. Everything just happens. Joker goes to Parris Island, writes for Leatherneck, goes to Da Nang, he and Rafter Man go to Hue right after the Tet Offensive. Joker then goes to Khe Sanh, and later goes on patrol with his pals Cowboy and Alice and New Guy and some others. Most of them get killed" (Sale: 1979: 19).

One can only wonder how these characters really feel. How has this war really affected them, and what stories do they have to tell that are being left

untold?

The protagonists of *The Short-Timers* are obsessed with their one-year rotation dates, a fact that is aptly illustrated by Hashford's title for the novel. Their conversations frequently centre around the issue of how much time they have left in-country's and their thoughts are consumed with "bright white color visions of that glorious rotation date circled in red on all of our short-timer's calendars – different dates – but with the same significance: Home" (Hashford, 1979: 154). For those who physically survive their ordeal and return to the United States, "home won't be there anymore" (Hashford, 1979: 176), and neither will the soldiers, for "Upon each of our brains the war has lodged itself, a black crab feeding" (Hashford,1979: 176). This viewpoint, states one reviewer, is the main weakness of the novel. *The Short-Timers* "is so meagerly imagined. The tragedy of the war was that it destroyed full human beings with psyches torn by conflicting loyalties and fears, not the mannequins Hashford offers us, spouting their Spartan dialogue, enacting the Marine cult of cruelty and silence and dying, their cardboard deaths, unmourned, unmissed" (Review, *Newsweek*, 1979: 40).

A typical concept that emerges from this novel is the unimportance of winning the war to its non-heroic protagonists, who sense the absurdity of America's involvement in such a meaningless war. The novel also represents a moral and ethical vacum a place without externally imposed limits and where almost any standard of behaviour or conduct is possible. This moral and ethical vacuum is noticed in Joker's speech when he is told he will be promoted to sergeant. He turns down the promotion and tells his commander, Captain January,his feelings about the nature of the war:

70

We bomb people, then we photograph them. My stories are paper bullets fired into the fat black heart of Communism. I've fought to make the world safe for hypocrisy. We have met the enemy and he is us. War is good business – invest your son. Vietnam means never having to say you're sorry (Hashford, 1979: 59-60).

So the lack of a clear spiritual or moral mission is well illustrated in this novel. Supposedly the Vietnam War was fought to save a democracy for a group of people, but as writers like Hashford demonstrates, such a mission is apparently absurd. In order to save the country, it must first be destroyed and its people slaughtered. This paradox is revealed by Joker, who after an attack on Hue, a Vietnamese city, remarks:

The sun that rises in Hue on the morning of February 25, 1968, illuminates a dead city. United States Marines have liberated Hue to the ground. Here, in the heart of the ancient imperial capital of Vietnam, a living shrine to the Vietnamese people on both sides, green Marines in the green machine have liberated a cherished past. Green Marines in the green machine have shot the bones of sacred ancestors. Wise, like Solomon, we have converted Hue into rubble in order to save it (Hashford, 1979: 122).

Hashford, by and large, seems to hold the experience of war to be extra literary and beyond verbalization, but in a number of marvelously tight and idiomatic passages he comes as close as anyone can do to capturing the psychology of the experience. The following is a case in point:

Lieutenant Shortround blows his whistle and then we're all running like

71

big-assed birds. We don't want to do this. We are all afraid. But if you stayed behind you would be alone. Your friends are going; you go too. You're not a person anymore. You don't have to be who are anymore. You're part of an attack, one green object in a line of green objects, running toward a breach in the Citadel wall, running, through hard noise and bursting metal, running, running, running... you don't look back . . . (Hashford, 1979: 99).

Hashford's "hard noise" suggests a paradox, which reminds us of Milton's celebrated "darkness visible"in *Paradise Lost, Book I.* As the tone of the entire novel bears out, Hashford, obviously conceives of Joker as a sort of anti-hero locked in an uncertainty on the plains of a contemporary hell; and as the enthusiastic tone of the above passage would indicate, Joker is fast approaching some sort of climax. Within the present scene, that climax takes the form of a literal fall just after Joker has passed through the breach in the wall. As Joker recounts the experience:

And then your feet no longer touch the ground and you wonder what's happening to you. Your body relaxes, then goes rigid. You hear the sound of a human body erupting, the ugly sound of a human body being torn apart by a high- speed metal. The pictures blinking before your eyes slow down like a silent film on a defective reel. Your weapon floats out of your hands and suddenly you are alone. You are floating. Up. Up. You are being lifted up by a wall of sound. The pictures blink faster and faster and suddenly the filmstrip snaps and the wall of sound slams into you – total, terrible sound. The deck is enormous as you fall. You merge

72

with the earth. Your flak jacket absorbs much of the impact. Your helmet falls off your head and spins. You're on your back, crushed by the sound. You think: Is that the sky? (Hashford, 1979: 101)

On their trip to Hue they witness the destruction of Vietnamese civilians and property. After an American tank runs over a Vietnamese child, Joker cynically describes the incident: "Chattering Vietnamese civilians pour out of the roadside hootches, staring and pointing. The Vietnamese civilians crowd around to see how their American saviors have crushed the guts out of a child" (Hashford, 1979: 78). The tank driver's reaction is somewhat different: "What do they think they're doing, crossing in front of me like that? Don't these zipperheads know that tanks got the right-of-way?" (Hashford, 1979: 79) Later this same tank driver, to prove he does not discriminate, runs over Rafter Man.

Outside Hue, Joker deals with the horror of war by resorting to bitter humour. Pointing to a North Vietnamese soldier rotting in the barbed wire near the city, Joker tells his friend Rafter Man: " War is a serious business, son, and this is our gross national product" (Hasford, 1979: 83). To friends in his squad, Joker clearly characterizes the meaninglessness of America's war aims in Vietnam: "It's better that we save Viet Nam from the people who live here. Of course they love us; we'll kill them if they don't. When you've got them by the balls, their hearts and mind will follow" (Hashford, 1979: 93).

Hashford, through Joker, dwells on the abilities of the Allied troops. He recognizes and laments the incompetence of the South Vietnamese Army, and has Joker voice one of the most biting attacks on the ARVN (South Vietnamese Soldiers):

73

Anytime you can see an Arvin you are safe from Victor Charlie. The Arvins run like rabbits at the first sign of violence. An Arvin infantry platoon is about as lethal as a garden club of old ladies throwing marshmellows... Arvins are not stupid. The Arvins are not stupid when they are doing something they enjoy, like stealing. Arvins sincerely believe that jewels and money are essential military supplies... Arvins are always shooting at chickens, other people's pigs, and trees. Arvins will shoot anything except transistor radios, Coca-Colas, sunglasses, money and the enemy (Hashford, 1979: 82-83)

In Contrast, Joker presents a moving description of the American soldiers as they march through the jungle of Khe Sanh:

We think about things we will do after we rotate back to the World, about silly high-school capers we pulled before were sucked up into the Crotch... about picking popcorn kernels out of our teeth at the drive-in movie with ol'Mary Jane Rottencrotch, about the excuses we'll have to invent for not writing home, and specially and particularly about the number of days left on each of our short-timers calendars.

We think about things that are not important so that we won't think about fear – about the fear of pain, of being miamed, of that half expected thud of an anti-personnel mine or the punch of a sniper's bullet, or about loneliness, which is, in the long run, more dangerous, and in some ways, hurts more (Hashford, 1979: 151-152).

In the jungle the squad is ambushed, and several of the men are shot by a sniper who laughs at them as he shoots off pieces of their bodies. Joker takes over as

74

squad leader and insures that those Marines trapped by sniper wounds are killed so the sniper can no longer torture them and so the rest of the squad can escape.

Joker is able to survive the war and to preserve his sanity by perceiving the absurdity of it all. In this way Joker attains the knowledge through his initiation into war following the structure of the *bildungsroman*.. Joker says, "Those of us who survive to be short-timers will fly the Freedom Bird back to hometown America. But home won't be there anymore and we won't be there either. Upon each of our brains the war has lodged itself, a black crab feeding" (Hashford, 1979: 176). This is called "negative apprenticeship" which leads Joker to opposite values.

Hashford's "grunts" swagger, and appear awful, but, unlike Yossarian of *Catch-22* who opts for Sweden, they find no escape or release from the forces that condone their most extreme practices without providing a valid explanation for them. For Joker and his troops Vietnam becomes not a worrying interruption of their lives but a permanent state of mind, recurrent nightmare as a sole reality. Joker says: "No, back in the world is the crazy part. This, all this world of shit, this is real" (Hashford, 1979: 123). The grunts behave themselves like the werewolves of legend, spreading and extending the dark joke in which they reside, but they are also aware of the individual and collective price for living too long and too obsessively in a historical event that presents itself not as cultural necessity but as self-justifying violent ferocity. When national purpose drops from history like a husk, the individual soldier is forced to provide his own explanations, to create a personal centre where larger ones explode. As spokesman for all of Hashford's grunts, Joker offers the terrible lesson behind the

joke telling; recalling at one point his first confirmed kill, the needless shooting of an old farmer, he says:

> I was defining myself in bullets; blood had blemished my Yankee Doodle dream that everything would have a happy ending, and that I, when the war was over, would return to hometown America in a white silk uniform, a rainbow of campaign ribbons across my chest, brave beyond belief, the military Jesus (Hashford, 1979: 133).

Hashford's "grunts" are excluded from their society: "Lifers are a breed," says Joker. "A lifer is anybody who abuses authority he doesn't deserve to have" (Hashford, 1979: 63), a remark that indicates that Vietnam is more a study in class warfare than an American collective effort, more a steady hostility between jailers and inmates than a rightful cultural enterprise. Even in basic training Joker learns enough of his true position to assert that "Marines are not allowed to die without permission; we are government property" (Hashford, 1979: 13), but as the Tet Offensive is breaking as both real and symbolic news, a character called Chili Vendor intensifies the collective apprehension; reducing large, anarchic history to a smaller, accessible one, he summarizes, "We're prisoners here. We're prisoners of the war. They've taken away our freedom and they've given it to the gooks (an NVA soldier), but the gooks don't want it. They'd rather be alive than free" (Hashford, 1979: 67). This imprisonment is the cause of the moral and psychological complexities for the American soldiers in Vietnam have to suffer.

Part III of *The Short-Timers*, entitled simply "Grunts", opens with an epigraph familiar to virtually every English major, Thoreau's somewhat academic comment on Marines:

> Behold a Marine, a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man
> laid out alive and standing, buried under arms with funeral
> accompaniments. (Hashford, 1979: 141)

From a certain standpoint, the epigraph is literally appropriate. Joker and his comrades in Part-III suffer a horrifically inhuman and ultimately dehumanizing experience. But in the final analysis, the decision Joker makes in the face of that crisis reveals him to be anything but the mindless sort of robot Thoreau deplored in his essay "Civil Disobedience". Thoreau, 19th century American Transcendentalist, in this essay pleaded for a man who is dictated by his own conscience. He is not robot; he is self-governed and he who is self-governed is governed by none except himself. No tyrant can rule such a man who is self-ruled and obedient to one's own sense of goodness. Like Joker in his final scene, Hashford seems to be saying, America found itself faced with the problem of whether to continue to expend lives in a futile attempt to uphold a sentimental set of ideals and tradition or to simply cut their losses and leave. And that was a great psychological problem for her. America, like Joker, eventually opted for the latter. So throughout *The Short-Timers* there is an undercurrent of bitterness, a continuous tone of hopelessness and despair suggesting a deep sense of personal trauma. This personal trauma leaves the grunts of *The Short-Timers* in a state of moral and mental disintegration.

Chapter Three

Fields of Fire:
Regeneration at the Cost of Innocence

James Webb's *Fields of Fire* is an episodic work that seeks to convey the moral ambiguities and dark disillusionment that dogged American soldiers in Vietnam. It's a work grounded in Webb's experiences as a combat Marine in Vietnam. Lauded for its battlefield realism and sympathetic characterization of the U.S. soldiers who served in Asia during that conflict, the novel is also notable for its unflattering depiction of the American anti-war movement. His other novels include *A Country Such as This* (1983), *Something to Die For* (1991), *Emperor's General* (1999), *Lost Soldiers* (2001). *A Country Such as This* is a novel about three midshipmen-turned-officers. It neatly lays out some of the key events within the period of 1951-76 using characters that come alive with each crisp dialogue, paragraph and page. *Something To Die For* is a bitter stinging satire and warning about today's Somalias, Bosnias, and many so-called "operations other than war". *Emperor's General* is a fascinating historical novel. Not only does the author present an insight into MacAurther's world at the end of World War II; he examines the morality of events from the rigged war crimes trial of a Japanese general to the personal troubles of a young junior officer. *Lost Soldiers* is a well-plotted story about Americans and Vietnamese in Vietnam more than a quarter-century after the war's end.

James Webb's *Fields of Fire* and Charles Durden's *No Bugles, No Drums* provide a good contrast for understanding the loss of innocence in the Vietnam War which is interpreted as a sign of the individual soldier's moral and

psychological disintegration. On the one hand, Lt. Hodges in Webb's novel goes to Vietnam with the belief that "man's noblest moment is the one spent on the fields of fire" (Webb, 1978: 29): he undergoes various ordeals of war; in the process, he loses his innocence and illusion; but he emerges as a competent leader, affirming human solidarity in an inhuman war, though he does not survive the war. He accepts his transformation as a sign of being a man, and in the process he becomes aware of human nobility. On the other hand, Pvt. Hawkins in Durden's novel goes to Vietnam with vague romantic idealism; facing the absurdities of war, he tries to maintain his integrity, but he is forced to kill people and symbolically earns his manhood; yet he leaves Vietnam only to be discharged with a recommendation to undergo psychiatric rehabilitation. He is disillusioned with his transformation. To Hawkins, war only produces a psyche that needs psychiatric care.

The novel's title comes from a maxim that Webb offers us early on in his work and repeats often, "Man's noblest moment is the one spent on the fields of fire". It details the experiences of the episodic journey of one squad of soldiers stationed in the An Hoa Basin in the Arizona Valley of South Vietnam. The group is led by Lt. Robert E. Lee Hodges, Jr., a skilled officer who – like – ebb hails from a long line of military men. Other significant characters include Snake, a hardened young man, whose difficult prewar life in the streets of America ironically makes him a valued member of the platoon out in the bush, and Goodrich, a sensitive Harvard dropout who joined the Marines in the mistaken belief that he would be able to sail through the war in the service's band. As the novel's action unfolds, the size of Hodges' squad is diminished by a succession of violent events. Goodrich – a shaky soldier with antiwar leanings – becomes

increasingly alienated from the rest of the squad. After witnessing an event in which Snake and a few other Marines shoot a Vietnamese couple suspected of being VC, Goodrich reports the incident and an investigation is launched. In the mean time, the squad clashes with the enemy in a fierce firefight. Goodrich's poor performance during the battle leaves him injured and helpless and results in the death of another Marine, but Snake sacrifices his own life to save him. A troubled Goodrich subsequently returns to America, where he angrily chastises a group of anti-war protestors who disregard the sacrifices being made by their countrymen in the war.

Through gruesome descriptions of combat, moving dialogue, and an effective recounting of the tension and the moral dilemma facing men in combat, Webb makes the Vietnam War a "heart of darkness" experience that we endure with the novel's characters. Critics have complimented *Fields of Fire* for its realism in character, dialogue, and action and consequently have viewed the novel as being in the tradition of Mailer and Jones. They cite its inclusion of the melting pot platoon and its emphasis on the comradeship of the men in combat. One of the principal conventions of World War II novels and films was that of the American melting pot platoon – "the myth that Catholic and Jew, intellectual and labourer, the disenfranchised as well as those to the manor born, all put aside their differences and pulled together for the common good" (Palm, 1983: 105). In the tradition of earlier war novelists, Webb includes a variety of characters in this platoon and their psychological relationships to Vietnam.

Webb's primary character is Lt. Robert E.Lee Hodges, Jr. is a poor, rural Kentuckian who grew up in a small tar-paper house. Hodges, we are told, does

not look like a warrior. His main physical features are his dirt farmer's hands which " shot out almost embarrassingly from his pencil-thin wrists. He liked to keep them inside his pockets. He felt they accentuated his thinness" (Webb, 1978: 28). Before Hodges leaves for Vietnam, he visits his grandmother who recounts the exploits of other Hodges who fought in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, who took part in Pickett's Charge and who served in World War I and World War II. Her emphasis is on the positive side of combat: "Oh, but it was glory in them fields. Fields of fire, boy." Her stories have had their effect on Hodges, we are told: "After fifteen years of it, it was engrained. It was the fight that mattered, not the cause. It was the endurance that was important, the will to face certain loss, unknown dangers, unpredictable fates." Hodges goes to Vietnam with a head full of romantic ideals created by a foolish woman. He fights not because of a political idea, but because of a family tradition of military service.

Another important character in the novel is Snake, a big-city misfit who is a master of violence before Vietnam. Like Hodges, Snake is hardly the recruiting poster soldier; rather, he is small with a narrow face and a twisted nose. Snake's slum neighbourhood is described as unappealingly as he is: "Concrete wasteland, beaten by the years of neglect into crumbling uselessness. Piles of garbage and broken appliances on the sidewalks. Signs advertised pornoshops and liquor stores and bars and grills and pawnshops" (Webb, 1978: 13). The people of Snake's world are the waste of society. The military, however, views these humans differently: "There was a recruiting station at the wasteland's edge. It fed on creatures from the run-down row houses. They were vital sustenance" (Webb, 1978: 16). Snake offers himself up as a food for the recruiting station, but his

motive for joining the Marines is clear and is not based on romantic notions: " He had chosen the Marines for one reason: everybody talked about how bad they were. And I'm ba-a-ad, he laughed to himself. We belong" (Webb, 1978: 17).

Other than Snake, a ghetto toughie; Dan, a Vietnamese scout; Goodrich, a Harvard student; Cannonball, a black grunt; and Phoney, a grenade specialist there are also many lesser-known figures, such as Wolf Fnan, Water bull, Ogre, Cat Man, a Mexican immigrant and Doc Rabbit, whose names suggest naturalistic tendencies. These naturalistic tendencies are enhanced by frequent descriptions of characters in terms of figures of speech involving animals. For instance, when the men first meet Lieutenant Hodges, they are "like hesitant, wild animals inspecting their latest zoo-keeper" (Webb, 1978: 68) and are later described as "zoo-kept animals turned loose in the wilderness" (Webb, 1978: 115). Conversations between these characters are convincing, even when dialogue involves the use of words and acronyms peculiar to the Vietnam War. By including a glossary of Vietnam War terminology at the end of the novel, Webb strives to convince the reader of the authenticity of the characters' speeches.

A main focus of the novel is the atrocity committed by the characters, whose actions detail a number of perversions. In not diverting attention from the madness inherent in the war, Webb seems to be commenting ironically on James Jones' World War II novel *The Thin Red Line*, where the thin red line is the only measure that differentiates between those soldiers who are sane and those who are mad. Webb writes of "this thin green line" (Webb, 1978: 246) when he has Hodges, by then initiated, compare himself to other lieutenants who are as yet not

82

initiated. The "thin green line" though seems to symbolize more than newness, perhaps it also indicates that in Vietnam there is no red line between sanity and madness, but a green line. Whereas, red implies "go", and Vietnam protagonists are frequently portrayed as going further in their atrocities than did soldiers in other wars. For example, the fragging that recurs frequently in other Vietnam War novels also occurs in *Fields of Fire*. When Sergeant Austin arrives in the bush of the Arizona Valley, he places the men's lives in danger by assigning them a ridiculous task in an area of enemy attack. A soldier immediately decides that Austin must be eliminated: "Austin's going, man. Boom-boom" (Webb, 1978: 111). In another incident, a soldier molests a young, dying girl, his rationale for his behaviour being, "So what, Lieutenant? She's gonna be a whore, any way" (Webb, 1978: 183) Webb particularly details the abuse of prisoners, describing such atrocities through the point of view of Will Goodrich, a *neophyte* (a learner), horrified by the dehumanization of the enemy:

> He had watched Wild Man shoot a bottle off one prisoner's head, on a dare. The prisoner had fainted, then shit in his pants when he was awakened. He had seen Bagger try to talk a wounded soldier into killing himself, handing him a bayonet knife and placing the tip of it into the soldier's belly. He had been amazed to see Waterbull, normally a nonparticipant in the abuses, toss a prisoner into the water of a bomb crater when he had tired of carrying the enemy soldier, who had been shot through the knee (Webb, 1978: 167).

A difference between *Fields of Fire* and earlier war fiction is that Vietnam War protagonists are allowed to torture prisoners without fear of punishment from

their superiors. In previous war novels, the officers at least pretended to rebuke their soldiers for abusing prisoners. When one soldier in James Jones' *The Thin Red Line* kicks a wounded Japanese, the colonel sharply reminds him not to molest the man. Even though the colonel really does not particularly care about the fate of the prisoner, he at least gives the appearance of disapproval. In Vietnam, even the dead bodies of the enemy are abused. After one firefight, a soldier kicks the body of a dead Viet Cong and fires eighteen rounds of automatic fire into the carcass as he screams, "You gook *motherfucker!*" (Webb, 1978: 217). Other acts of atrocity are collective, such as when the platoon members set fire to a Vietnamese village after losing two of their own men in a firefight:

> . . . like random torches, the hootches of the nearest village spent themselves in orange rages. The flames rose anonymously, but it was the platoon's collective act of passion, a substitute for not being able to fight the enemy that had ravaged them. The hootches burnt like funeral pyres. That one is for Big Mac. That one is for Stork (Webb, 1978: 208).

Webb demonstrates an additional absurdist characteristic of Vietnam, that of the body count, which changed their entire concept of killing. Vietnam was the first American war whose progress was measured by the body count instead of the taking of land. According to Edward Tabor Linenthal,

> In previous wars both soldiers and the public had viewed the killing of the enemy as regenerative, necessary for the survival and rebirth of the nation. The ritual of combat killing, even the mass casualties of bombing in World War II, were part of the symbolic process of war. In Vietnam, the popular phrase, "If it's dead, it's VC," reveals the degeneration of

ritual combat to the illusive quantitative principle of death. One does not recognize the enemy and then kill him in combat, but first kills him and then proclaims him the enemy (1983: 240).

This degenerative process is clearly illustrated when Webb has his characters stand around and wait for wounded prisoners to die: "If they died there would be two more kills, parity for their own deaths the night before. If the prisoners lived, they would not make the tote board that tallied ratios" (Webb, 1978: 223). The philosophy of the body count itself contributes heavily to a lack of morality in the war.

Two novels *Fields of Fire* and *No Bugles, No Drums* provide a good contrast for understanding the Vietnam pattern. On the one hand, Lt. Hodges in Webb's noblest moment is the one "spent on the fields of fire" (Webb, 1978: 29).; he undergoes various ordeals of war; in the process, he loses his innocence and illusions; but he emerges as a competent leader, affirming human solidarity in an inhuman war, though he does not survive the war. He accepts his transformation as a sign of being a man, and in the becomes aware of human nobility. On the other hand, Pvt. Hawkins in Durden's novel goes to Vietnam with vague romantic idealism; facing the absurdities of war, he tries to maintain his integrity, but he is forced to kill people and symbolically earns his manhood; yet he leaves Vietnam only to be discharged with a recommendation to undergo psychiatric rehabilitation. He is disillusioned with his transformation. To Hawkins, war only produces a psyche that needs psychiatric care.

Webb structures *Fields of Fire* clearly by dividing it into three main sections, each of which, though somewhat episodic, contributes to the overall

85

action. The first part, "The Best We Have," explains the backgrounds of two of the most integral characters, Snake and Lt. Hodges. The inclusion of the histories of the soldiers' lives is the continuation of a technique that emerged in World War II fiction. As Peter Aichinger points out, little, if anything, is known about the pasts of World War I protagonists, but in World War II fiction the soldiers' past lives are frequently examined in relation to the present war (Aichinger, 1975: 44). For example, Norman Mailer uses this technique in *The Naked and The Dead*. The second part of *Fields of Fire* "The End of the Pipeline," covers most of the combat action in the novel, detailing the initiation of Lt. Hodges and a third integral character, Will Goodrich, into the world of war and showing the interaction of the platoon members with each other. In the third part, "Vestiges: Virtues Rewarded and Other Crimes," Webb concentrates on Will Goodrich's return to the United States and his readjustment to society. In dealing with a returning veteran, Webb includes an aspect of the war that sets his novel off as somewhat unique. Few Vietnam novels treat the adjustment of the veteran to the U.S.Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters* (1977) deals briefly with this subject. What unifies the three separate sections is a Prologue at the beginning of *Fields of Fire* showing the Platoon preparing for combat and in a sense foreshadowing the action of a battle near the end of the novel. Webb's description of the landscape of Vietnam is hellish. Like Marlowe's voyage into the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*, the trip to An Hoa is "a journey into darkness and primitivity" (Webb, 1978: 43), into "a wounded countryside swollen with anger" (Webb, 1978: 44). In this journey to hell, Lt.Hodges symbolically earns his manhood. So war is a proving ground for Lt. Hodges' manhood and having gone through the ordeals of combat, he emerges as a competent leader following the structure of

the *Bildungsroman.*

Webb frequently relies on the word "hell" to describe the terrain and environment of Southeast Asia. The Arizona Valley where the soldiers are stationed is referred to as a "hell" (Webb, 1978: 45), and a new officer is told that he will go as "Wild as hell" (Webb, 1978: 59) after spending a month in this region. "A plain of scraggled grass and brittle bushes" (Webb, 1978: 64) and "a forest of devastated trees" (Webb, 1978: 289) constitute the landscape. Much of the combat action takes place in and around graveyards with mist swirling and enveloping the characters.

Nature is also described as an *inferno.* The land and the men are rendered miserably thirsty by the scorching rays of the sun, and night brings not relief but instead a hell of another type. Webb portrays the onset of evening in epic terms as if it were a wicked and devilish ritual:

> The god of night pulled his shade across the sky, unleashing all his demons as the gray set in. The platoon moved quickly down the sawdust trail, racing him, hurrying to beat the black. The black belonged to those others, the night god's children, who frolicked, even murdered under the romance of starlight. Night for the platoon was hiding time, time to dig deep holes and wait in fear for the loneliest of deaths, the impersonal, shattering projectile that would just as soon kill tree or air as man (Webb, 1978: 235).

While the men are in combat, the sky lowers over them, "gray and ominous, weeping on them. The treelines loomed, thick with vegetation, each inch holding promise of some unseen danger" (Webb, 1978 : 298). Webb's use of nature to

mirror the hell of the war is similar to Stephen Crane's use of nature in *The Red Badge of Courage* to mock Henry Fleming as he runs from battle. In Crane's novel, the creepers and vines of the forest embrace and entangle Henry, hindering his progress.

Lt. Hodges' journey to Vietnam is "a journey into darkness and primitivity" (Webb, 1978: 43). This journey into darkness or the descent into hell motif has existed since the beginning of literature. Hastings says: "Termed 'catabasis' by the Greeks, the archetype of the journey into hell has been present in many cultures since primitive times and is thought to have originated in the myths of savage men who dreamed of going to another world to rescue their loved ones" (Hastings, 1958: 648). As these myths evolved, "the descents into the underworld took on additional purposes; some descents were to obtain good luck, some merely for curiosity, and some to free the damned" (Hastings, 1958: 651-53). Perhaps most importantly, some were for the purposes of initiation: "to descend into hell alive, confront its monsters and demons, is to undergo an initiatory ordeal" (Eliade, 1958: 62).

The most famous example of the descent-into-hell motif in literature is that of Dante's travels through his *Inferno*. But the journeys of Dante and other archetypal figures differ greatly from those of descents portrayed in Vietnam War fiction. Earlier figures, such as Aeneas and Paul, descended into the underworld to help found civilizations at the request of a divine power, Aeneas founding the Roman Empire and Paul the Church. Christ, too, descended into hell to prove the ultimate power of God. Therefore, these early journeys had a definite moral purpose. Even Dante's 13th descent into hell was willed by the Heavenly Powers.

88

In almost every canto of the *Inferno*, Virgil refers to Dante's journey as being decreed.

The journey of the Vietnam War protagonist is also decreed, but not by a heavenly power. Instead, the Vietnam War soldier is sent by the United States government to fight a war opposed by most of the Americans. On the surface, his mission appears to be similar to those of earlier figures, such as Aeneas, Paul – the saving of a group of people. However, what the Vietnam War protagonist soon learns is that his descent does not involve a definite moral purpose. Paradoxically, in order to save a country, he must first destroy it and slaughter its people. Moreover, twentieth century literature, spanning two World Wars and the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts, has relied heavily on the pattern of The Heart of Darkness. Most readers are familiar with the contemporary hells dramatized by T.S.Eliot and Joseph Conrad. In poetry, T.S. Eliot 's *The Waste Land* (1922) became one of the biggest influences on modern writers who were searching for ways to reveal the absence of communication in modern society. In fiction at the turn of the century, Joseph Conrad developed the archetypal pattern of the descent motif for modern literature in his *Heart of Drakness*, where the heart of Congo symbolizes the black heart of corruption in all of mankind as well as the modern world and, more specifically, the colonial world. Like Conrad's Africa, the country of Vietnam represents Hell, although as in *Heart of Darkness*, the geography of Hell is naturally somewhat altered.

Unlike in Dante's *Inferno*, there are no clearly defined seven deadly sins in the Vietnam War novels; however, there is a strong emphasis on the concept of sin and moral wrongdoing in general, and the protagonists of the novels are guilty

of various moral lapses. As they descend deeper into hell, they meet characters whose sins correspond roughly to those of the figures in Dante's *Inferno*. The novelists include such perversions as greed, violence, adultery, lust, fratricide, and even cannibalism. The actual geographic landscape in Southeast Asia contributed heavily to the idea of the Vietnam experience as a horrifying descent into hell. The traditional idea of hell is "a dark, forbidding one, with certain landscape characteristics: a river barrier; a deep valley, with perhaps fire on one side and cold on the other; barren, parched plains; a dark wilderness; and a thorny path, all accompanied by a horrible stench" (Patch, 1970: 131, 189). Such hellish conditions have been described by the Vietnam War writers. For instance, in the Prologue to *The 13th Valley*, John Dell Vecchio describes the landscape as containing rugged terrain, steep mountains, and a deep valley which is "difficult to enter, hard to traverse". According to the members of *Charlie Company* (1983):

> Their Vietnam was a platoon of fire ants devouring your arms and thirty or forty leeches sucking blood from our legs. It was heat so oppressively constant that you stopped feeling it until you started to move, and rain so heavy that you could set your helmet and collect enough within an hour to make yourself a whole pot of hot chocolate. Its indelible smells...were sulfur, diesel, death and burning excrement (Goldman and Fuller, 1983: 129).

> The rapid change from the United States to such environment contributes to the

idea of the journey into the Vietnam War as a descent into hell. All continuity

with the soldier's previous life is suddenly broken as he emerges in the dusty climate of Vietnam, an environment whose scorching heat, not to mention its ambushes and other dangers, qualifies it as a hell. In fact, the soldier's trip from the US into Southeast Asia was commonly referred to as a "descent into 'Nam'".

The modern, absurd hero reacts to such an environment by treating it as a grotesque joke in order to hide his horror and fear. According to Northrop Frye, "At a certain point, perhaps when the strain… is becoming unbearable, there may be revolt of the mind, a recovered detachment, the typical expression of which is laughter. At such a moment, a tragic work is supposed to change to a comic one" (Frye, 1976: 129-30). However, in the Vietnam War novel, this is not true. There is laughter, but not the laughter of comedy or satire. Instead, the laughter is that of madness, of a mind that can no longer differentiate between reality and unreality, between horror and humour.

At the end of his descent into hell, the fictional protagonist is confronted with what Frye terms the "accusing memory", which is demonic for one reason:

It has forgotten only one thing, the original identity of what it accompanies. It conveys to us the darkest knowledge at the bottom of the world, the vision of the absurd, the realization that only death is certain, and that nothing before or after death makes sense. The white goddess may sweep on to a renewed life, take another lover, and forget her past, but man can neither forget nor renew (Frye, 1976: 124-25).

The memory of the horrible experiences that he has undergone takes the Vietnam

War protagonist even lower in his descent. Instead of the usual cyclical voyage of descent and ascent that one finds in archetypal literature, one frequently finds a one-way journey without a complete return in the Vietnam War novel. If the protagonist does return, he is not merely a "sadder and wiser" man as was Sir Gawain, but a "Life-in-Death" figure of a far more serious nature than the Ancient Mariner or other such figures in older literature. Frequently the earlier quest was a search for either rebirth or order; the quester had a distinct goal in mind. If the journey into hell in the Vietnam War novel represents a search of any kind, it is only for physical and mental survival in a world full of chaos. Furthermore, this survival excludes traditional heroic virtues, such as nobility, bravery, and courage. The primary means of survival – if it can be called survival – in a world devoid of meaning, in a war in which nothing important or purposeful happens, is for one to adopt the defense mechanism of madness.

Hemingway's heroes, for instance, although psychologically scarred from the war, look to a more hopeful future. Nick Adams of "Big Two-Hearted River" uses camping and fishing as a means of therapy to help him cope with his post-war stress. Even in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), although Frederick Henry is stunned and bewildered by the time his involvement in the war comes to an end, he has learned to discern "liars that lie to nations" (Hemingway, 1929: 191) and has begun to develop a personal code of ethics by which to survive a naturalistic world. The protagonists of the Vietnam War novels have been conditioned by society to desire such affirmation, for as one comments: "We're kids who've dreamed of far lands and exotic places of the land, and wars of Hemingway and Mailer" (Del Vecchio, 1983: 132). In Vietnam, though, there are no heroes, only anti-heroes, static personalities that degenerate and deteriorate. The protagonists,

in most cases, do not even strive towards the goal of winning the war. Their journeys are descent into hell, but not of a Dantesque kind. From Dante's purgatory, there is an exit into a Paradise; from the hell of Vietnam there is none. If there is some form of a paradise, then it is what Northrop Frye terms a "False paradise", where one does not desire to escape the night world (Frye, 1976: 123). Some protagonists simply do not want to leave the war when their tours of duty are over. Instead of returning to the United States, they re-enlist until they eventually die in combat. These characters are so involved in the absurdity of the war that they cannot cope with the idea of returning home and to reality. And even more importantly, for those who desire to escape the war, there is no Dantesque celebration of a future.

429914

Even novels like *Catch-22* ultimately offer affirmative statements, despite their surface pessimism, but the Vietnam War does not. When, for instance, Yossarian descends to the underworld of Rome in *Catch-22*, "his descent leads to a moral redemption for him. His journey into the hell of a war-torn, bombed out Rome culminates with his realization of the value of human life as he struggles to save, without success, the life of Michaela, the innocent maid" (Doscow, 1973: 497). And at the end of the novel, he can leave for Sweden, frequently interpreted as a potential symbol of a better life. In contrast, the Vietnam War fiction differs from *Catch-22* in that very little humour offsets the horrifying vision of the Vietnam books, and what humour does exist is usually so black as to be indistinguishable from the pain and horror, a kind of insane crackling" (Wilson, 1982: 44). The Vietnam books, Wilson further says, " almost without exception, fail to arrive at Yossarian's partial reconciliation at the end of *Catch-22*: "the affirmation of life, in spite of everyhing…" (Wilson, 1982: 44).

This affirmation of life is absent in *Fields of Fire*. The characters are portrayed as being hellish. One soldier, Phony, wears a red-devil tatoo inscribed "Born to Raise Hell" on his arm and is referred to by another grunt as one who is "as crazy as hell" (Webb, 1978: 73). As the characters set up camp, Webb depicts them as "preparing for another night in hell" (Webb, 1978: 71). When the characters discuss the lack of any front lines and the circular nature of the war, the randomness of the war itself is referred to as being "as crazy as hell" (Webb, 1978: 191). The frequent use of the word "hell" is in itself quite "hellish," and the effect may be to distance the reader from the text instead of actively engaging him in the process of its creation.

If this obvious physical inferno is focused on too extensively, the morally hellish aspect of war is also repeated many times. Many of the hellish moral dilemmas that arise in the novel are portrayed through the interaction between two of three main characters, Snake, Hodges, and Goodrich. Snake, the product of a ghetto, projects an image of toughness from the beginning of the novel when the reader views him beating and robbing a junkie. People mean nothing to Snake, even before he goes to war: "They were all the same to him: dead. They'd merely forgotten to stop breathing" (Webb, 1978: 16). Vietnam is the one place where he feels a sense of comradeship and loyalty. This sense of being needed by others leads Snake to extend for a second tour of duty. War becomes the ultimate high to him:

> He sensed that, beyond the terror that was today, there was a fullness
> that no other thing in the remainder of his life would ever equal. That,
> beyond doubt the rest of his life would be spent remembering those

agonizing months, revering their fullness. That, yes, he was now twenty – well, almost twenty – and what would always have been the greatest, the most important experience of his life, had almost passed. If he were to go back now – when he did go back – there was nothing, not a thing, that would parallel the sense of urgency and authority and need. Of being a part of something. And of being needed and being good (Webb, 1978: 275-76).

Perhaps Snake adapts better than most characters to this devilish environment in Vietnam because of the hellish situation in which he was raised, a "Concrete wasteland" (Webb, 1978: 13), where there were

> Zombie people, regurgitated by the gluttonous monster. Hostile young, running and hunting in wild packs, like the dogs that owned the alleyways. Dudes and chicks, brightly dressed, looking for action. Stolid, broken groups outside liquor stores. Addicts in their tows and threes, many younger than Snake, scratching and sniffing, searching for the bagman (Webb, 1978: 13).

He has learned to adjust to a variety of situations, many involving perversions. Even his nickname, Snake, which evolved from the serpent tatoo gliding his arm, suggests the mental toughness that enables him to survive a brutal environment. Unfortunately, Vietnam becomes a false paradise for Snake. He chooses to remain there when his official tour of duty is over and thus denies himself the chance to escape when the door is finally open for him to return to the United States.

> For Lt. Robert E. Lee Hodges, Vietnam is the continuation of a family

tradition. "a litany. Pride Courage. Fear. An inherited right to violence" (Webb, 1978: 27) as another soldier in a family of warriors. Inspired by memories of his father who was killed in World War II and Saturday afternoons of John Wayne movies, Hodges realizes that "had there been no Vietnam, he would have had to invent one" (Webb, 1978: 29): "It was the fight, not the cause that mattered" (Webb, 1978: 29). His eagerness to prove himself on the battlefield appears to be partly nurtured by the war movies. Webb writes:

> And the movies. They were their own communion. If John Wayne wasn't god then he was at least a prophet. Hodges and a half-dozen friends would walk the five miles into Hillsville on Saturday afternoons and sit in awe through *The sands of Iwo Jima, The Bridges at Toko-Ri, The Guns of Navarone, Anzio, The Battle of the Bulge,* and dozen of others. It was all there on the screen standing up and fighting back (Webb, 1978: 29).

Because war to Hodges is a testing ground for his manhood, his journey to it becomes "a journey into darkness and primitivity" (Webb, 1978: 43). Indeed, Webb describes Hodges' arrival at his combat base as a journey to hell — "the hell that was known as the Arizona Valley" (Webb, 1978: 45). Upon his arrival at the combat base, Hodges is told that the Vietnam War is not World War II and that in the bush an individual soldier is not a person but "an animal" (Webb, 1978: 59). Once in the bush, Hodges leads his platoon in numerous patrol missions and wins the total confidence of his men. At one point Hodges reminisces about his transformation into a hardened figure:

> I do these things, experience these things, repeatedly, daily. Their terrors and miseries are so compelling, and yet so regular, that I have ascended

96

to a high emotion that is nonetheless a crusted numbness. I am an automation, bent on survival, agent and prisoner of my misery. How terribly exciting (Webb, 1978: 172)

Despite his love of war and his desire to prove his manhood, Hodges cannot hide his nostalgic despair over his loss of innocence. When he meets a classmate from the Basic School who is newly arrived in Vietnam, Hodges finds in the eyes of his friend an "innocence" of his own childhood. And he muses, "this was me . . .. But it isn't any more" (Webb, 1978: 282).

Following Hodges' psychological transformation Webb reveals something of the distinctive nature of the Vietnam War. Through Hodges' experience, Webb chiefly focuses on the morality of war. In Webb's view, the Vietnam War is a personal war fought individually; because of this personal nature of war, an individual soldier becomes concerned with his own safety and survival; and, as a means of survival, he becomes brutalized but he also develops a keen sense of solidarity – the myth of army buddies.

That the Vietnam War is a personal war is seen in the fact that, in Webb's view whatever the ends of the war may be, every battle is fought on an individual basis. As Hodges reasons earlier, "a man cannot choose his country's enemy" (Webb, 1978: 30). In Hodges' view, war cannot be fought between an individual and a nation-state. Thus war is always reduced to a battle fought on the level of individual consciousness. More importantly, the absence of larger ends in Vietnam contributes to this thinking. A soldier in Hodges' platoon who consistently speaks of national objectives, communism or winning a war becomes aware after months of fighting that "in the bush, they were irrelevant" (Webb,

1978: 182). Webb frequently uses such phrases as "my very own Vietnam," "someone else's war," and "your war" (Webb, 1978: 45, 133, 215, 303). With no fronts and with an omnipresent enemy, American soldiers, says Webb, fight innumerably repeated wars fought by "someone else" in the same places.

One incident that makes the personal nature of war clear is a scene in which Snake and Goodrich are pinned down by enemy fire. As a platoon leader, Hodges rushes to rescue them. On his way he catches a glimpse of Lt. Kersey, the battalion staff officer. Kersey's indifferent face seems to be saying, "I got mine already . . . I already proved I'm a hero and that mess out there is your war" (Webb, 1978: 303). In that moment Hodges realizes the meaning of the words of Sgt. Gilliland who left the Marine Crops out of disillusionment: "that Vietnam had done something to us all, even to the Corps. That there was no great effort for anything anymore, only thousands, no millions, of isolated, individual wars. That it broke down even here. If they die it's not my problem. They're yours" (Webb, 1978: 303). The one-year tour of duty makes the war a personal war. To the soldier who completes the tour, the war is over; "it happened only to individuals" (Webb, 1978: 194). Therefore, staying alive through the period becomes the prime concern of the individual soldier.

Webb suggests that the sense of abandonment felt by an individual soldier thrown into the jungle makes the Vietnam War a personal war, a war only of survival. This sense of isolation is caused primarily by the helicopter and secondarily by the hostile environment of the Vietnam jungle. Indeed the helicopter in the Vietnam War is the lifeline linking the jungle and the base – the "deus ex machina" bridging life and death (Webb, 1978: 207). Helicopters take

individual soldiers to the wilderness of the jungle, and once there they are responsible for their own survival until they are carried back to the base. Webb captures this as part of the war in scenes of vivid images. In one, he writes:

> In minutes the resupply helicopter powered through the mist, driving it away with rotor wash, shipping the must as winter wind drives chimney smoke. And they cringed, naked on the terraced hillside, feeling new horizontal rain that was driven by the helicopter's blades, lifted from long leaves of greening sawgrass. Then the bird was gone, the moment of brief, fierce communication with the Other World had passed and they were again abandoned (Webb, 1978: 194).

In this situation, the individual soldier has to find ways of overcoming the sense of isolation, one of which is to develop brutality. Yet the development of the individual soldier's brutality, Webb suggests, comes not only from his prime necessity to look out for himself but also from his frustrating experience of combat. For example, the abiding rule among the soldiers for remaining alive is "look and shoot" because, if you "look twice," "You're dead" (Webb, 1978: 85). The frustrations characterizing the typical psychology of the soldiers in Vietnam arise especially out of seeing that most of their casualties come from sniper fire, booby traps, and ambushes. The frustration is one of the chief factors that lead the individual soldier to develop brutality and commit atrocities.

At one point Webb shows the process of this psychological erosion through Hodges' failed mission. On a patrol, Hodges' platoon suffers heavy casualties from sniper fire and booby traps with no body counts. A captured village woman turns out to be an NVA male soldier in female disguise. Deeply

frustrated by his failure in combat performance and by his guilty feeling for having his men killed and wounded at his direction Hodges feels a deep rage against both the enemies and the REMFs (Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers):

> . . . he felt a surge of deep, undirected anger and desire to kill. Kill everything mused Hodges. We're a floating islet waiting to be killed just because these Bustards think we should be killed so they can have more bodies on their tote boards when the React (a unit assigned to aid another until which had become in capacitated) pulls us out from where we never should have had to go. Those Bastards sit somewhere with air conditioners around them and Coca-Cola inside them while we drink this goddam them worry water. We're closer to being gooks than we are to being Them and yet here we are wanting to kill gooks, any gook because of this ulcerous anger that eats the inside of my guts . . . (Webb, 1978: 136).

Therefore, when he sees his men brutally hitting the prisoner they have taken, Hodges turns his head because he understands "the prisoner was the only tangible enemy to focus their frustrations on" (Webb, 1978: 135).

These are some examples of the atrocities. Like many novelists of the Vietnam War, Webb deals with the dehumanization of individual soldiers. That process is seen even in their nicknames. In Webb's view, their sane identities with human names are unbelievable in the fearful situation of the bush. Most of their names transform them into nonhuman entities; or abnormal personalities: Snake, Cannonball, Baby Cakes, Waterbull, Phony, Homicide, Wild Man, Cat Man, Rock Man, Beggar, Crazy, Combread and so on. Their real names remain

unknown throughout the novel. In the novel the nicknames are given because the "grunts" in the Vietnam War felt "abandoned" or thrown away, because the brutalities they commit cannot be done in a normal state of mind, and because the horror of such an inhuman war cannot be met with human names. With such names, the soldiers are not human; they symbolically lose their normal human identities as they become identified with the war itself. This identification is a good example of the internalization of war into individual. The random violence and insanity of war in Vietnam make it difficult for the soldiers to keep their human identities. For, sooner or later, they are forced to surrender themselves to the situational demand and commit brutalities, thus dehumanising themselves. Rather they feel safe behind their nicknames. From another perspective, Webb gives such names to elicit the feelings of intimacy and closeness among the soldiers sharing miseries together. In Webb's view, calling such names is a sign of the fraternal bond between men.

One of the combat scenes shows how an individual soldier develops his vengeful brutality out of fear and the extent to which he can be cruel. On a patrol, Snake's squad is ambushed. Wild Man, then at point, is shot and severely wounded. In the ensuing cross fire, the squad kills the ambushers. In the mean time, Bagger, having been frozen to death by fear, is gradually filled with anger at seeing Wild Man in an agony of pain. Webb describes the scene:

> The ambushers were dead. One sagged inside his spider hole, his head
> blown apart. The other was draped outside. Bagger stood up and peered
> at the ball of agony that was Wild Man, and could not control his anger.
> He walked to the trail bend gazed at the dead ambushers. With a violent

grunt he kicked one sprawling body back into its spider hole. Then he stood over the hole and fired a magazine into the body, eighteen rounds of automatic fire that sprayed all parts of the carcass. Bagger's face was drained. "You gook motherfucker!" (Webb, 1978: 217)

This detailed description of brutal action marks one of the major differences between the novels of the Vietnam War and those of the previous wars. Equally remarkable is that the description of the dead is cruelly precise. Such precision shows the extremity of man's brutality. A description of a dead American soldier killed by the enemy is a case in point:

Baby Cakes' skin was tawny, as if burnt in a frying pan. His eyes were gone. Squarely in the middle of his forehead was a bullet hole. The matted black behind his head was where the bullet had blown the back of his head away (Webb, 1978: 242).

This precision with which killing and being killed are depicted shows the extent to which the individual soldier symbolically internalizes the evil of war into himself. In fact, many killings and brutalities in Vietnam are committed in a direct face-to-face fashion. In such cases, the individual soldier can see what he himself has done. In the process, he comes to think that he is no longer a morally and psychologically sane being; finding in himself his potential to be insane, he comes to recognize himself as evil. In this world of sheer brutality, no human rules work, nor does human reason. The individual soldier has nothing to fight for except "some animal sense of numb survival" (Beidler, 1982: 162).

Despite his description of man's brutalization brought on by the war, Webb does not necessarily think that the war is totally futile. Rather he tends to

view the war as a human ordeal or test. At one point, Lt. Hodges questions the combat skills that he has acquired through his innumerable battles. To Hodges, these are frightening things to think about, yet they are not totally futile. Hodges muses,

> And how, to what purpose, will these skills serve me when this madness ends? What lies on the other side of all this? It frightens me. I haven't thought about it. I haven't prepared for it. I am so good, so ready for these things that were my birthright. I do not enjoy them. I know they have warped me. But it will be so hard to deal with a life empty of them (Webb, 1978: 172).

Further, Webb conveys to the reader the selfless love between soldiers – the fraternal bond forged through the ordeal of battle. Webb values this bond as the most positive thing that emerges out of the inhuman war. In the world of ethical and psychological nakedness, Webb suggests, the only consolation is the comradeship which can be understood only by those who have gone through the baptism of fire. Bagger who frequently speaks of his responsibility for his wife and newborn baby, extends his tour of duty, because, he says, "people in the bush are real, are my people" and "I never had a home in my life till I came out here" (Webb, 1978: 201). The friendship and loyalty shown to Hodges by Snake is a typical example rarely seen in the novels of previous wars. When Hodges is evacuated from the bush because of his wound, Snake says to a soldier about his return: "He'll be back. He likes it. I mean us. You know, I been in trouble all my life, man, cause I never been able to work for anybody. I can work for him. I *like* the son of a bitch. And I just know he'll come back" (Webb, 1978: 208).

While recovering in Okinawa, Hodges is offered a job as an officer in charge of the recreation centre there, but he refuses to take it and returns to his platoon. Webb writes of the reason:

> He missed the people in the bush, more than he had ever missed any group of people in his life. There was a purity in those relationships that could not be matched anywhere else . . . there was a common goal, and a mutual enemy. And the stakes were high enough to make each minor victory sweet, each loss a cause for grief (Webb, 1978: 245).

In this way Hodges' initiation into war is completed in a total affirmation of human goodness and in an achievement of his manhood. He is regenerated through violence but at the cost of his innocence. Clearly Webb, through Hodges' experience, places a high value on such transformation that war brings to man. This message becomes clearer in the description of the relation between Snake and Goodrich.

Alongside Hodges' initiation, Webb skillfully inserts in his narrative a structure of confrontation and eventual reconciliation between two characters – Snake and Goodrich – each representing the respective moralities of the Bush and the World. Much of their conflict does not come from the humanitarian concerns about the war. That is, their conflict is chiefly focused on the means by which war is fought. Webb deliberately molds them from socially opposite origins. What holds our special interest in their relationship is that Snake, coming from a socially unprivileged class, becomes an example in his display of courage and sacrifice for Goodrich, highly educated and a member of an affluent, socially elite class. Further, the disparity in their social backgrounds heightens the dramatic

effect of the novel.

Through Hodges' initiation into war and specially his relationship with Snake, Webb shows something of human brotherhood emerging on the battlefields. Not long after his arrival in An Hoa, Hodges begins to wonder about his own sanity when he agrees to photograph one of his men posing with a Vietnamese corpse. He also soon learns that the lack of a clearly defined enemy in Vietnam does not allow for moral choices. Like his men, he feels a desire to kill – to kill any Vietnamese, not just those he is sure are enemies. When he thinks of blowing a "treeline all to hell," he realizes that innocent people could be destroyed:

> There's mamasans and babysans in there I know that but what the hell I didn't ask to do this dangling and if I don't blow them anyway I'll hit a goddam company of NVA and I'll never live long enough to be glad I didn't kill any mamasans besides they have family bunkers and anyway there you are again it's them or us and that my friend whether you'll admit it or not isn't any choice at all (Webb, 1978: 136).

While he lacks battle experience, Hodges understands why men would want to frag an incompetent officer:

> If I'm bad, he mused, while making small talk and tentative attempts at humour with them, they die. It's that simple. Remembering the stories from Basic School, he understood immediately why an individual would want to wound an incompetent officer with a grenade. It's not vindictiveness, he reasoned. It's self-preservation (Webb, 1978: 69).

Hodges becomes as involved in the camaraderie of the war as Snake. When Hodges is wounded and sent to recover in Japan, he does not have to return to combat, yet he chooses to do so. "I hate it," he states, "But I miss it" (Webb, 1978: 246). On one hand, he feels guilty for not having yet contributed enough to his platoon or shared enough of their misery. In thinking seriously about the idea of responsibility and commitment to the war, Hodges is also like the character of Paul Berlin in Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*. However, unlike Paul Berlin, Hodges never thinks of desertion. The decision that Hodges has to make in regard to returning to the war is not whether or not to go Absent Without Leave from the military, but whether or not to return to the Arizona Valley to lead his men in more dangerous journeys in the bush or to accept a safer job in a noncombat zone in Japan. He chooses to return to battle out of a "sense of guilt. He has not yet contributed enough" (Webb, 1978: 257). This issue is one of social commitment to his fellow soldiers, not the issue of social conscience versus personal freedom that emerges in O'Brien's novel. Hodges also realizes that his life would be anticlimactic without the war: "What does a man do when his war is over, wondered Hodges, except keep fighting it?" (Webb, 1978 : 258). Snake and Hodges both share a similarity here. Both have opportunities to declare a separate peace and quit fighting. In Japan as he reflects on his situation, his thoughts become part of Webb's constant us – versus – them message to his readers: "Nobody gives a rat's ass whether any of us live or die. They've sold us out back in the World" (Webb, 1978: 245). He also echoes Phony's earlier comments about the brotherhood of the bush : "He missed the people in the bush, more than he had ever missed any group of people in his life. There was a purity in those relationships that could not be matched anywhere else" (Webb, 1978: 257). But,

like Snake, he realizes just how attached he has become to combat. This career soldier answers "no" to this opportunity for a separate peace; the result is a quick return to his unit in An Hoa and an unheroic death while guarding the disabled tank introduced in the "Prologue".

It is through Hodges that Webb reveals a standard combat theme: "Man's noblest moment is the one spent on the fields of fire" (Webb, 1978: 22). *Fields of Fire* is very much a typical initiation novel where the status of the war is not as important as the individual soldier's reaction to that war. Even the title of the novel, as Andrew Rutherford points out, has "symbolic overtones, with its punning use of the military technicality to suggest infernal, or perhaps purgatorial experience" (1982: 206).

The most morally complex character is Will Goodrich, a Harvard man, whom the other characters nickname Senator. It appears, however, that Goodrich, bored by the monotonous life inside the Ivory Tower, wants to experience the "world he had never touched at his feet" (Webb, 1978: 90). He tries the Peace Corps but he is rejected on the ironical grounds that he is too "militant" (Webb, 1978: 90). A musician, Goodrich enlists in the Marine Corps with a hope that he might be in the Marine Band, but he is made a grunt in Vietnam. He is revealed as having a very naïve and romantic view of war. He believes that war is fought under chivalric rules and with gentlemanly conduct. At one point, Webb writes:

> Goodrich had come to Vietnam with a Miniver Cheevy view of war, believing that reason would rule over emotion, that once a combatant had been removed from the fray he would be accorded a certain sum of dignity. He had also thought North Vietnamese soldiers and the fabled

Viet Cong would face captivity with a sort of gallantry (Webb, 1978: 167).

Hence the subsequent conflicts with Snake and even within himself arise from his awareness of the discrepancy between what he thought and what he actually sees in Vietnam. The point, however, is that, despite his awareness of such discrepancy, he insists on maintaining his moral purity. The war is seen through the sensibility of an intellectual who stubbornly resists change.

Goodrich's presence in the platoon surprises Snake and other members because they have never expected that a Harvard man would come to the bush. By the same token, Goodrich is surprised to see the chaotic nature of the war from his first exposure to combat. His first conversation with Snake is significant in the way that it affects his future course of action: "Hey, man this is scary. Where the hell are *we* and where the hell are they?" Snake put his finger to the dirt. "We are here." He then made a circle in the air. "*They* are everywhere else" (Webb, 1978: 66).

Soon he begins to feel the senselessness of war which is chiefly fought against the Vietnamese civilians. In a village fight, Goodrich mistakenly wounds a middle-aged woman. He is deeply sorry for his deed. What horrifies him, however, is Snake's callousness in justifying his shot and blaming the mishap on her. "A hundred NVA deaths tallied in a newspaper column would draw on absent nod," Webb writes sarcastically, "but one stinking, suffering old wretched woman who bled from his own bullet . . . turned his stomach" (Webb, 1978: 88).

Everyday in combat Goodrich only sees the absurdity of war in which atrocities inflicted on the Vietnamese civilians and their properties are condoned

in the name of necessity. On the other hand, he also sees the futile deaths of American soldiers by sniper fire, booby traps, and ambushes. What makes him more angry is that nothing is changed "beyond the tragedy of the immediate event" (Webb, 1978: 166). What he sees in the war is only killing and being killed without any reason. In many places, Goodrich sees the Russian Roulette nature of war. At one point, Goodrich muses:

> The victims were selected so randomly. You could be 100 percent right and still be 100 percent dead, or permanently scarred, like phony. There's not a goddam thing you can do about it . . .. It enforced his sense of the complete randomness of it all. Like existentialism . . . suffering without meaning, except in the suffering itself (Webb, 1978: 209).

Totally unable to make any sense of the war, Goodrich becomes more cynical and thus more alienated from his fellow soldiers. One day on a patrol, Snake severely criticizes Goodrich for his selfish and pedantic aloofness. Snake says to him in a cold manner: "If anybody dies, I hope it's you," and, he continues, "When's the last time you did something for somebody besides yourself, Senator?" To which Goodrich retorts:

> Do you realize how ridiculous it is? Can you truly comprehend, Snake? You're doing for each other and you're dying for each other. That's all. I mean *all*! And the lousiest thing in the world to die for is another sucker who's only for you. Do you get what I mean? The only reason any of us are dying is because we're here. It's like two scorpions in a jar. They'll kill each other, but only because they're in the jar (Webb, 1978: 168).

Edward F. Palm gives a shrewd interpretation to this passage: "Through

109

Goodrich, Webb at this point manages to give ironic expression to a much noted facet of the war, the refreshing absence of ideology that virtually forced a redefinition of the war in the most basic of human terms. In the absence of larger ends, Goodrich cannot accept what the other characters seem to have intuited: that the means have become ends in themselves, as they serve to ensure the primary end of survival" (Palm, 1983: 112). In addition, Goodrich's analogy of war to "two scorpions in a jar" well reflects the nature of war as a natural phenomenon: war is caused by man's biological and instinctual needs: since the cause of war is in man himself, there can be no reason or meaning in his suffering "except in the suffering itself" (Webb, 1978: 209). For Goodrich, Vietnam is definitely a hell to which he cannot adjust. Whereas other characters such as Snake and Hodges accommodate themselves to the moral atrocities, Goodrich does not, yet he is the one character who physically survives the war. Hodges and Snake both succeed well in the restricted environment that the combat novel presents due to their backgrounds, one of actual violence and one of an inherited violence and the other by virtue of birth, has the right to participate in it.

Despite his awareness of this nature of war, his problem lies in his insistence on reason which, he thinks, can rule over emotion – in his inability to compromise reason and emotion. Throughout the novel, especially through Hodges and Snake, Webb suggests that one should undergo transformation through ordeals of fire, so that he may experience the fraternal bond in a group which cannot easily be understood in a rational state of mind. Goodrich neither accepts such a compromise nor a transformation. Thus, he cannot belong to the platoon and even becomes an object of hatred. A soldier in the novel criticizes him in the following terms: "Senator doan' do shit except he talk, you know, like

he really give a shit" (Webb, 1978: 225). Ironically, Goodrich is the *only* person among the grunts who has a human nickname, suggesting that he is going to fail because human reason cannot explain such an inhuman war.

Like some World War II novelists, Webb describes Goodrich's soldiering and his intellectual reasoning as ineffective. In his first battle, he fails to fire his rifle by jamming it; out of terror, he does not help his wounded mate and lets him bleed to death. On another occasion, when Snake is pinned down by enemy fire, Goodrich does not rescue him, but is only "contemplating" while another soldier brings him back to a safe place (Webb, 1978: 169). Another incident shows another aspect of his intellectual ineffectiveness. Lt. Kersey, the battalion staff officer who only thinks of his promotion, plans to set up an LP (Listening Post) outside the perimeter of the platoon. Aware of its extreme vulnerability to enemy attack, the members of the platoon object to the plan; but, unable to persuade the lieutenant, they decide to go directly to the colonel, the commanding officer of the Regiment. For this, they choose Goodrich as their spokesman because he is a "school" man and his education, they think, can cope with the colonel's intellect. But Goodrich backs down, saying it is a "mutiny," and tries to evade the point by making it abstract. "I don't care, really I don't . . .. None of this makes any sense to me. As far as I'm concerned, let's go to the Colonel and demand he send us home" (Webb, 1978: 111).

Yet Goodrich's refusal of transformation gradually gives way to Webb's structural scheme. His changing awareness begins from the time when he sees Snake and other members deeply depressed at the losses in a combat in which Hodges and Phoney are severely wounded and evacuated. Here Goodrich begins

to question his insistence on maintaining moral purity. He thinks: "a vote against burning a hootch would have been a vote against the memory of those who had been lit" (Webb, 1978: 210). At this point Webb's comment is significant in that it indicates the beginning of Goodrich's change: "Noticing their frailties, Goodrich for the first time thought them human" (Webb, 1978: 210).

Despite his effort to be "realistic," however, Goodrich has yet to wait in order to get a full realization of what he calls "bush justice" (Webb, 1978: 277). Two incidents are crucial in the transformation of his character. One incident occurs when Snake brutally murders two Vietnamese civilians. After Hodges is evacuated, Snake completely assumes the command of the platoon and joins the operation of the battalion. During the mission, two teammates – Baby Cakes and Ogre – disappear. Assured that they are dragged away by the VC, Snake insists on searching for the missing comrades, dismissing the objections of the platoon members. Webb's description of the scene captures the heart of the moral message of the novel:

> Snake lit another cigarette. No one said anything. "We can't leave Baby Cakes and Ogre out here." The tenor voice was soft, reasoned, modulated, but filled with underlying strength. "Baby Cakes ran straight at ten damn gooks to try and save Vitelli. Baby Cakes would *still* be out there looking for *you*." He stared at each man. Each man nodded self-consciously, agreeing, "Well as long as there's a chance, we gotta try and find 'em (Webb, 1978: 236).

Eventually, they find that the two missing soldiers have been brutally killed and buried in shallow graves beside a village house. Both in revenge and out of rage,

they put two civilian suspects they have captured around the house in the same graves and kill them in the same manner. Goodrich's actions are noteworthy. Sensing the impending atrocity Goodrich, after feeble protest walks away from the scene. Further he reports the incident to the Regimental legal officer. What is important, however, is the tone of Webb's description of the incident. In every way, the reader is led to believe that the two civilians are responsible for the deaths of two-squad-mates and that the "*bush* justice" – an eye for an eye – is right.

Another incident takes place in a village fight. In this incident, Webb also indicates that the bush justice is the only one applicable to the Vietnam situation. While Goodrich's team is manning an OP (Outpost), he sees one of his teammates aiming his rifle at a little girl. Surprised at this, he knocks it down. But, at that moment he sees his teammate blown away by the fire of a sniper who used the girl as bait. And he is also seriously wounded in his leg. In this incident, Webb makes it clear that the "World Justice" cannot apply here. At the same time he puts his blame on the VC for the inhumanity of their use of an innocent child as a means of war. The justice *in* the Vietnam War, he seems to say, should be discussed in connection with such inhuman VC tactics rather than American atrocities.

More dramatic and even more ironic is that, in this incident, Snake is killed while bringing the wounded Goodrich back to safety. Goodrich is rescued through the sacrifice of a person whom he once betrayed. Hodges is also killed in his effort to rescue both of them. This moment of their sacrifice is the dawning of Goodrich's final awareness. Looking at the blood streak on his leg staining the

paddy waters, Goodrich, in a half-conscious state, mutters to Snake before the latter is killed:

> . . . it's clear now. Blood and water mix it's all the same like paddies empty without rain and when it rains you think it's always wet but when the rain stops it's gone and you never even know. It's like blood. I know now. The mix (Webb, 1978: 302).

Now he understands that, in a symbolic sense, reason and emotion mix and that, in a physical sense, he *can be* an anonymous self in a group as blood emerges with water.

With his maimed body, Goodrich is a "sort of Ishmael-like survivor." He returns to Harvard (Palm, 1983: 106), where he is met by two organizers of an anti-Vietnam War rally who try to exploit him for their purposes. In his conversation with them, Goodrich makes himself a spokesman for "the 100,000 marines who became casualties in Vietnam" and the "others who became casualties upon their return." He is deeply disappointed at the two organizers' ignorance and misunderstanding of the realities of the Vietnam War and especially of the American soldiers who fought there. Aware they are oversimplifying the issues of the war, Goodrich says, "What you guys are missing is the confrontation. It loses its simplicity when you have deal with it" (Webb, 1978: 336). And he continues:

> You drop someone in hell and give him a gun and tell him to kill for some amorphous *reason* he can't even articulate. Then suddenly he feels an *emotion* that makes utter sense and he has a gun in his hand and he's seen dead people for months and the reasons are irrelevant anyway, so

pow. And it's utterly logical, because the moment was right. This isn't murder. It's not even atrocious. It's just a sad fact of life (Webb, 1978: 336).

Goodrich completely identifies himself with those in the bush. Here he even reverses his former position that reason rules over emotion. He explains to them that the rules of morality and the standards of the world can never apply in Vietnam. "A little babysan sucked me right out into the open so the NVA could start an ambush," says Goodrich, "I was a team leader. I had a kid who was going to shoot her. I knocked his rifle down. Just in time to see him shot in the face" (Webb, 1978: 336). In this unfair game, Goodrich seems to suggest that reason cannot work. What makes him more disappointed is the absence of a mood of seriousness in the rally. All the participants, he sees, are full of "merriment" as if they were on "a picnic" (Webb, 1978: 337). Feeling personal bitterness, Goodrich explodes on the platform:

"LOOK AT YOURSELF. AND THE FLAG, JESUS CHRIST. HO CHI MINH IS GONNA WIN. HOW MANY OF YOU ARE GOING TO GET HURT IN VIETNAM? I DIDN'T SEE ANY OF YOU IN VIETNAM. I SAW DUDES, MAN, DUDES. AND TRUCK DRIVERS AND COAL MINERS AND FARMERS. I DIDN'T SEE YOU. WHERE WERE YOU? FLUNKING YOUR DRAFT PHYSICALS? WHAT DO YOU CARE IF IT END? YOU WON'T GET HURT" (Webb, 1978: 338). Walking down the platform amid the hostile stares of the crowd, Goodrich feels a sense of satisfaction as if he has paid the debt he owed to Snake. At this moment he seems to see the epiphany of Snake: "Snake would have loved it, would have grooved on the whole thing. Senator, he

would have said, you finally grew some balls." (Webb, 1978: 339). Only after Goodrich returns to school can he begin to understand the moral corruption that occurred in the Arizona Valley. When some anti-war protestors approach Goodrich and ask him to publicly speak against the immoralities he saw in Vietnam, he tells them that their ideas are "all a bunch of shit" (Webb, 1978: 336), that only someone who served in that hellish environment has the right to make judgements. Webb plays Snake and Goodrich off against one another in an attempt to entrap us in a moral dilemma. The moral center of the novel is the cold-blooded summary execution of two Vietcong suspects – an act which Goodrich deplores and eventually decides to report.

The novel ends with a full recognition of those who fought in Vietnam. The final message here is that the fighting engaged in by American soldiers in Vietnam was not futile, not because the war was justifiable, but because it produced revelations of human nobility. Through Hodges and Snake and their selfless love for each other, Webb shows the reader the possibility of human solidarity caused by war. In this sense *Fields of Fire* (1978) is a novel affirming man's regeneration through his initiation into war; it has no political or ideological implication; its concern is only with war and the development of human nature in it. In Webb's system of morality, right and good are with those who have fought "over there". Goodrich's survival and his return to Harvard reflect this element of Webb's message. It would be easy, Webb suggests, for everybody to say that the war in Vietnam is unjustifiable and that the atrocities being committed there are wrong. What is important, however, is that the nature of the Vietnam War cannot easily be understood by those who have not gone through such ordeals of war. It may never be understood through reason.

Therefore, Webb suggests through Goodrich's speech, it is wrong to malign those who fought in Vietnam. The novel itself seems to make understandable the agony of Vietnam veterans.

Chapter Four

Going After Cacciato:
Learning Important Things About Oneself

Long after receiving his honorable discharge from the U.S. Army in March 1970, author Tim O'Brien struggled with his feelings about the Vietnam War and the events that he witnessed and participated in. The moral and philosophical implications of service in a war that he came to hate became a central theme in much of his subsequent literary work, from his first book, the autobiographical *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1972), to the 1990's *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994). In the years following his tour, O'Brien gave considerable thought to the forces that "seemed, almost physically, to push me into the war", as he told Larry MaCaffery for the *Chicago Review* (1982: 129-49). These emotional pressures included the expectations of his family and community, and the complete understanding that flight from the draft meant exile from the people he loved. Nonetheless, he thought at length about the attraction of deserting once he had arrived there.

Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* deals with the Vietnam War on many different levels. The narrative structure of the novel is a complex one. The novelist intertwines three levels of psychological reality: the present meditative reality of the guard tower; the disjointed factual reality of the remembered past; and the fantastical creation of alternative past and future realities. Ten chapters , each entitled "Observation Post" contain the meditations of the novel's central character, Specialist Four Paul Berlin , as he stands guard one night in a tower adjacent to the South China Sea near Quang Ngai, South Vietnam. During the

hours Berlin stands guard , from near midnight until dawn , nothing of any physical significance occurs; however, a great deal of mental activity takes place as Berlin tries to cope with his fear and make it through the night .

The solitary Berlin not only muses upon his doubts about the legitimacy of the war and the nature of duty and morality, but he also spends much of the night recalling the chaotic violent events of the past few months and fantasizing about pursuing Cacciato, a private who has gone AWOL(Absent Without Leave), all the way to Paris. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the latter fantasy – although profoundly influenced by the war (it includes an encounter in the bowels of a North Vietnamese tunnel and a heated debate on the merits of desertion at the Paris negotiation table) – serves as an escape from the traumatic events that have left Berlin with a feeling of sadness over the preceding months. "We live in our heads a lot, but especially during situations of stress and great peril," O'Brien said in an interview with Eric James Schroeder for *Modern Fiction Studies*, "It's a means of escape in part, but it's also a means of dealing with the real world – not just escaping it, but dealing with it... The central theme of the novel has to do with how we use our imaginations to deal with the situations around us, not just to cope with them psychologically but, more importantly, to deal with them philosophically and morally" (Schroeder, 1984: 134-64).

The novel consists of three distinct types of narrative: the memories of the main character, Paul Berlin; his imaginary, fantasized pursuit of the deserter Cacciato; and the present reality of the Observation Post where he is on guard duty. Of Paul Berlin, Robert M. Slabey says, "Sensitive and confused, he is not a

disaffiliated youth, but he is still a postmodernist protagonist for whom the lines blur between dream and reality" (1990: 205-12). The story centres on the idea of desertion, the separate peace motif that we have seen so often in war novels. Mark Busby observes that "Unlike ... Frederick Henry, Paul Berlin makes no separate peace. And unlike Yossarian in *Catch-22* (1962), Paul Berlin never learns to see clearly the absurdity in which he is caught. Berlin's relationship to Cacciato parallels Yossarian's to Orr" (1982: 64). It is not that Berlin fails to see the absurdity of the war, but he certainly draws a different conclusion from it all than Yossarian does. Edward F. Palm seems to have a shorter memory than Busby when he writes, "O' Brien 's novel represents a rejection of a literary response to war which has been dominant now for more than twenty years: separate peace motif as refined by Heller" (1983: 121). Palm is partly correct in that Berlin rejects a separate peace, but those in the novel who choose it are not denounced. There is a sense that O'Brien defers to individual choice in the matter. Desertion has always been an issue during wartime, and consideration of it is a natural focal point for individuals trying to take responsibility for their own lives. Not surprisingly, given the controversial nature of the Vietnam War, desertion and unauthorized absences were widespread phenomena. Historian Michael Maclear informs us that before 1968 the desertion rate in the US armed forces was below that of World war II and Korea. But between 1969 and 1971, compared with the three previous years, the number of desertions doubled, then doubled again. He says: ". These desertions were both in Vietnam and at US bases world-wide, indicating the wider military demoralization... [The combined desertion and AWOL numbers meant that about one in four of the US forces worldwide had mutinied or were defying military orders" (Maclear, 1981: 280).

Turning one's back on the war was something every thoughtful, draftee, American male had to consider, particularly from 1968 until the war's end. Many found ways to avoid being drafted in the first place, but once one was caught up in the military's web, desertion, dishonour, or death were about the only ways out before one's term of service expired. There was a distinct challenge to young men to define their values and principles. It is quite appropriate, then, that O'Brien uses the desertion of Cacciato to explore themes of individuality, free will, responsibility, and commitment. Cacciato himself does not appear much in the novel. His desertion, we are told, "occurs in October 1968". (O'Brien, 1978: 23). The other soldiers consider him to be "brave" (O'Brien, 1978: 15), but also dumb as "a month-old oyster fart" (O'Brien, 1978: 2). His one major appearance in the novel finds him fishing in a water-filled bomb crater with string and a paperclip while Berlin tries to convince him to touch a land grenade as symbolic assent to the fragging of Lieutenant Martin (O'Brien, 1978: 238-41). Cacciato does not touch the grenade , though, the only soldier in the squad who declines to do so. No one ever really knows why he decides to leave the war and walk to Paris . None of the troops have any particularly strong political convictions about the war: "They fought the war, but no one took sides" (O'Brien, 1978: 272). Cacciato appears no different from the others in this respect, so his reason for leaving is probably not political, nor is cowardice a likely motive. Perhaps it has something to do with the death of Lieutenant Martin, but O'Brien never explains Cacciato's reason. Thus, Cacciato remains a mystery, and John Hellmann identifies the dilemma the reader is left to ponder. He says: "Cacciato is on the one hand the quintessence of the desired American self-concept; a solitary, independent, innocent, optimistic and determined character who, having set for himself a goal,

exhibits on his journey west cunning self-reliance while stripping himself of the baggage of his past identity...On the other hand he poses the problem of whether this new man is boldly showing the way to a better world or regressing into the self-indulgence of childhood" (Hellman, 1986: 164-65).

This problem, then, expresses the dilemma of self-image that the main character, Paul Berlin, struggles with throughout the novel. As O'Brien himself tells Eric James Schroeder, the "sense of war that I'm trying to get at...[is] Internal war, personal war" (1984: 143). The question is not only whether or not he should desert, but what will be the effect of his decision on his self-esteem? Is he going to be self-reliant or self-indulgent? Is he going to exercise free will or be forced into compliance? Furthermore, can the modern individual's situation ever be reduced to an either/or proposition? By examining Berlin's decision, we can ascertain O'Brien's view of the relationship between society and the individual in late twentieth-century America.

In *Going After Cacciato* O'Brien portrays the war with depth of moral vision. He also projects the war's moral complexities. The novel is significant in that it goes beyond the war to discuss ways of seeing – the nature of reality, a process that engages both the protagonist and the reader. Paul Berlin cannot distinguish between what is real and what is imagined in the war just as the reader cannot differentiate between what is real and what is imagined in the novel. The problem is that Berlin's imagination keeps brushing up against reality, just as the imaginary progress reports of military and State Department officials kept smashing against the reality of Vietnam. The 3rd squad confronts repeated obstacles that threaten to derail their escape from the war. As their journey takes

them further away from Vietnam, they experience a series of encounters that inevitably bring them to the war. Even in his imagination , Berlin retreats into official slogans and platitudes, unable to either imaginatively or intellectually transcend the propaganda of his own government. Berlin can no more escape his own confusion than his government can.

O'Brien says: "It was a matter of hard observation. Separating illusion from reality. What happened, and what might have happened?" (O'Brien, 1978: 247). Paul Berlin is forced , as is the reader, into an attempt to distinguish between illusion and reality and in doing so creates a continuous critical dialogue between himself and the world around him. This critical dialogue contributes to the dramatization of the inner life of Paul Berlin as he seeks psychic escape from the war. Like Stephen Crane, O'Brien explores a foot soldier's various fears, his self-conscious attempts to define courage and manhood and his fundamental doubts about whether to flee the battlefield altogether or stay and fight.

The novel's ambivalence is reinforced by its ambiguity of style and structure. What exactly is *Going After Cacciato* in terms of technique? It is a combat novel , yet it is not a combat novel. It is also a blend of traditional forms such as picaresque adventure, fantasy, allegory, realism, and internal monologue (Herzog, 1980: 693). The technique has also been termed "magical realism", although O'Brien himself rejects any notion of "magic". He considers "*Going After Cacciato* in terms of actual realism because even daydreams and imagination contain a type of reality. What takes place in the world of the brain is real whether or not it actually occurs in the physical, mutable world" (Schroeder, 1984: 138). The ideas overall are not always chronologically organized. O'Brien views *Going*

After Cacciato more "as a novel about the writing process than about the war. Imagination and memory, two central ideas developed in the work, are also two of the major components relied on by the fictional writer" (Schroeder, 1984: 143). In examining them so fully and in providing so many layers of technique in one novel, O'Brien looks into the origins of fictional creation. In the words of Philip Beidler, the "form" of Cacciato becomes "its content" (Beidler, 1982: 172).

O'Brien's awareness of the war's general complexity is well illustrated in the portrayal of an enemy rarely seen and encountered in a terrain where technology was ineffective. In fact, the real enemy was the land, called "Xa" which "means community, and soil, and home" (O'Brien, 1978: 77). The land is an enemy of the American soldiers who use modern technology to fight a war in a land with which they have no real relationship and against an enemy who relies on the land to protect them. Air strikes are ineffective against an enemy that disappears into tunnels and monitors the Americans from underground.

Moreover, the real reasons for the war are unknown, a fact that Paul Berlin, the protagonist, comments on in the novel. In what is considered to be one of O'Brien's best chapters, "The Things They Didn't Know," Paul Berlin cites a series of concerns denied explanation to the soldier in Vietnam:

> They didn't 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 the neat parallels. No Patton rushing and win and held for the duration. They did not have targets. They did not have a

cause (O'Brien, 1978: 240).

Furthermore, the men have no understanding or real knowledge of the people that they are fighting:

> Not knowing the language, they did not know the people. They did not know what the people loved or respected or feared or hated . . . Not knowing the language, the men did not know whom to trust . . . Not knowing the people, they did not know friends from enemies (O'Brien, 1978: 232)

Since the soldiers do not know the people, they also do not know how to act toward them:

> 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 (O'Brien, 1978: 240).

As Vietnam is a war that denies explanations and contains no simple truth, ironically, there may not be anything that the soldier knows in the war.

The war that O'Brien describes is in one sense the same war that other writers describe, with the same perplexing, traumatic experiences. O'Brien suggests for example, a casual relationship between the soldier's total moral confusions in this war and the uncommon brutality that ensues – deaths that occur through perversions or insanity, deaths that are deliberate acts of malice that could have been avoided. Paul Berlin reveals, for example, that his Lieutenant,

Sidney Martin, dies at the hand of his own soldiers. Martin insists that his men search Vietnamese tunnels, a highly dangerous task that results in the deaths of two of his men. After Frenchie Tucker and Bernie Lynn die while searching a tunnel, Paul Berlin's squad decides that Lieutenant Sidney Martin should die from an American grenade. Their participation in such a perversion is a collective act of atrocity, for while only one soldier, Oscar, will supposedly throw the grenade, all of the men endorse the murder by their knowledge of the act as well as by their actively touching the grenade in a type of ritualistic ceremony. The soldiers justify the murder as being committed out of necessity: "Preservation" or "The survival of the species" (O'Brien, 1978: 209). When one soldier, Cacciato, does not want to support the atrocity, Paul Berlin presses the grenade into Cacciato's hand in order to make the act unanimous.

Such an incident adds another example to the list of horrific realities usual to the Vietnam War. Soldiers in the literature of other wars certainly think of harming their officers but rarely carry the action through. For example, in *Catch-22*, Dobbs, a pilot, wants to murder Colonel Cathcart, who has continually increased the number of missions that the men have to fly before they can return home. But when Dobbs mentions the idea of fratricide to Yossarian, the latter can not bring himself to participate in the murder:

> Look. Nothing would please me more than to have the son of a bitch break his neck or get killed in a crash or to find out that someone else had shot him to death. But I don't think. I could kill him (Heller, 1962: 222).

Like Sidney Martin, Colonel Cathcart is placing his men in dangerous situations

where they may lose their lives: to the soldiers in *Catch-22*, flying extra missions is equivalent to searching tunnels in *Going After Cacciato*. However, unlike the soldiers in O'Brien's novel, Yossarian concludes that Colonel Cathcart has "a right to live too" (Heller, 1962: 222). At one point he almost consents to the murder until he learns that Dobbs does not plan to stop with Cathcart's death, but also intends to murder other soldiers he dislikes as well. Later, after Colonel Cathcart has increased the number of missions further and Yossarian is willing to agree to the murder, Dobbs has changed his mind about the situation. Thus, the killing is never seriously planned and never takes place.

The protagonists of Eric Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) seek revenge on one of their superiors whom they dislike. But instead of killing the officer, they wrap him in a sheet and beat up him in an alley one night. The act, while involving physical force, is meant more as a trick than anything else. Murder is certainly not an alternative for Remarque's characters just as it ultimately is not for Red in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, who cannot bring himself to kill Croft, his superior.

As Katherine Kearns has pointed out, "the most specific instances of violence in *Going After Cacciato* are those of Americans against Americans" (Kearns, 1982: 119). Other incidents of atrocity involving officers are revealed in the novel. One soldier, Pederson, is shot and killed by American helicopter gunners who fire into the same rice paddy into which they have dropped the soldiers. The gunners are annoyed because Pederson is too frightened to exit the helicopter as fast as the other soldiers. Upon first shooting Pederson in the legs, the gunners do not stop but continue to fire methodically until Pederson

collapses. Pederson's reaction to being gunned down by his own countrymen is to take careful aim and return fire at the gunship in an effort to make it crash and kill the pilots on board. The incident with Pederson demonstrates well the corrupting effect that the war has on Paul Berlin's squad. Eleven chapters after Pederson's death, we see an image of him that totally denies an inherently violent nature. In Chapter Twenty-two Pederson is portrayed as a peaceful figure, one whom the other soldiers see as having a "Moral Stance" (O'Brien, 1978: 128). Pederson "gave first aid to a dying VC woman" (O'Brien, 1978: 128), and wrote a letter of condolence to the parents of a dead soldier. He also treated the Vietnamese villagers kindly. Pederson's death at the hands of his fellow Americans serves only to incite Paul Berlin's squad to further violence. After Pederson's body, which "WAS A MESS" (O'Brien, 1978: 69), is removed, the soldiers reduce a Vietnamese village to rubble. Ironically, while Pederson had previously prevented the squad from burning a village, they now channel their frustrations over his death into callously doing just that. In fact, they are not content with just burning it, but must savagely fire into it as well:

> They lined up and fired into the burning village. Harold Murphy used the machine gun. The tracers could be seen through the smoke, bright red streamers, and the Willie Peter and HE kept falling, and the men fired until they were exhausted. The village was a hole (O'Brien, 1978: 71).

O'Brien's war, then, is just as hellish as that of his Vietnam contemporaries. The war's uncommon nature, its diversity and heinous savagery, leads O'Brien to pose a problematical question related to the novel's moral and psychological

concerns. "Is Vietnam really different from other wars," as some have said? Is the physical and mental hell of this war worse than that of previous wars? The question provokes one character, Lieutenant Corson, to state that Vietnam is different from the Korean war because the latter " was a decent war. Regular battle lines, no backstabbing" (O'Brien, 1978: 134), but " In Nam," he adds, " there's no respect for nothing. No heart" (O'Brien, 1978: 134). However, another character, Doc Peret, rejects the idea that Vietnam is significantly different from other wars. According to Doc,

> The point is that war is war no matter how it's perceived. war has its own reality. 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 (O'Brien, 1978: 176)

No two soldiers perceive the war the same way. As the Iranian Captain tells Paul Berlin's squad, "Each soldier, he has a different war. Even if it is a different war" (O'Brien, 1978: 176). This concept is termed "Perceptual set," where

> In battle, in a war, a soldier sees only a tiny fragment of what is available to be seen . . . He registers, so to speak, only those few items that he is predisposed to register and not a thing more . . . after a battle each soldier will have a different stories to tell, vastly different stories and that when a war is ended it is as if there have been a million wars, or as many wars as there were soldiers (O'Brien, 1978: 176).

Such a problematical war as Vietnam needs new structures in order to accommodate it, and it is primarily through structure that O'Brien portrays complexity in *Going After Cacciato*. He manages to create a skilful ordered form

to portray the typically disordered and chaotic world of war, a form that brings a number of viewpoints into both the war and the novel, without writing a typical combat novel. It is not the bulky structure through which the psychological and moral issues of *Meditations in Green* (1983) are illustrated. The sections of Wright's tripartite structure do not always relate clearly to each other (the plant meditations, for instance, appear to have little connection with the rest of the novel). But O'Brien's sections merge skillfully. For example, in Chapter Thirteen, Paul Berlin looks through Li Van Hgoe's periscope and views several men "groups around the mouth of a tunnel" (O'Brien, 1978: 76). From this scene in a fantasy section of the novel, obviously a reference to the shooting of Frenchie Tucker and Bernie Lynn that took place prior to the novel's beginning, O'Brien immediately moves the reader into a chapter discussing the deaths of the two soldiers as a result of Sidney Martin's required tunnel search.

O'Brien divides *Going After Cacciato* into several types of chapters: there are chapters entitled "The Observation Post," where Paul Berlin stands guard duty for six hours near the sea; there are chapters that deal with the actual events of the past six months of the war and with Paul Berlin's previous life; and finally there are chapters about "Going After Cacciato," which tell of Paul Berlin's imaginary six-month journey to Paris in search of a soldier, Cacciato, who is absent from the war without leave (AWOL). O'Brien structures the novel "as a teeter-totter, with the 'Observation Post' chapters as the fulcrum – the present of the book. The teeter-totter swings back and forth between reality (the imagined trek to Paris)" (McCaffery, 1983: 269-70). Supposedly the real Cacciato walks away from the war in Chapter One, and the reader has no way of knowing which events, if any, are real and which are imaginary. If the journey to Paris is only

imagined, then do the other events of the war also take place and does Paul Berlin actually stand guard duty in an observation post, by the sea? Is, in fact, anything in the novel real? It is O'Brien's refusal to allow us final knowledge, the suspension of final judgements through the very ending of the novel, that is so skilfully executed, and which contributes to this novel's distinction.

The epistemological uncertainty in the novel is mirrored by the fact that O'Brien presents events that take place in a fragmented form rather than in a straightforward, linear fashion. The reader has to piece information together, such as the circumstances surrounding each of the characters' deaths, in the same manner that Paul Berlin must piece together reality. For instance, in the beginning of the novel, we receive what O'Brien terms a "threnody" (McCaffery, 1983: 274) of the many soldiers who have already died:

> IT WAS A BAD TIME. Billy Boy Watkins was dead, and so was Frenchie Tucker. Billy Boy had died of fright, scared to death on the field of battle and Frenchie Tucker had been shot through the nose. Bernie Lynn and Lieutenant Sidney Martin had died in tunnels. Pederson was dead. Buff was dead. Ready Mix was dead. They were all among the dead (O'Brien, 1978: 1)

While the characters are listed as dead on the opening page, O'Brien brings them to life through flashbacks in other parts of the novel so that we can see who these characters are, what they are like, and how they die. For instance, the first reference to the shooting of Frenchie Tucker and Bernie Lynn is made in Chapter Four of the novel, but the story behind their deaths is not told in detail until Chapter Nine and is not elaborated on further until Chapter Fourteen. The

assassination of Lieutenant Sidney Martin is also given in fragments. That something will happen to the Lieutenant is briefly suggested in Chapter Four when Paul Berlin comments that any disobedience in the war "became fully organised" (O'Brien, 1978: 40) after the deaths of Frenchie Tucker and Bernie Lynn. Much later, in Chapter Twenty-Seven, the soldiers mention the need to find serious solutions to end the dangerous tunnel searches, and in Chapter Thirty-Four, O'Brien discloses that the men are planning to kill Lieutenant Martin. Finally, in Chapter Thirty-Six the reader learns that the Lieutenant has died when Paul Berlin flashes back to the touching of the grenade and states: "And, then Lieutenant Corson came to replace Lieutenant Sidney Martin. The way events led to events and the way they got out of human control."A sad thing," Cacciato had said on the day afterward."Accidents happen," said Paul Berlin (O'Brien, 1978: 220).

Underlying the various chapters and providing a kind of traditional unity to the work is the same descent-into-hell motif that dominates the Vietnam War novels discussed. However, because O'Brien handles this journey into the dark heart of Vietnam subtly, ironically, and ambiguously, his use of the descent motif enriches the narrative instead of detracting from it. The descent motif is an artifice in other Vietnam War novels, and it offers new dramatic effects and thematic meanings in *Going After Cacciato*. The author wants to drive the reader into the hell of the war along with the protagonist so that he will be engaged in the process of creation that takes place in the novel. Even more than is achieved with characterization in *On the Way Home* (1982), as Tobbey Herzog comments, in *Going After Cacciato* the reader is enabled "to move deep into the heart and mind of the book's central character, Specialist Four Paul Berlin" (Herzog, 1980:

132

693).

In keeping with the tradition of the descent-into-hell-motif, O'Brien describes the landscape of Vietnam as if it were the landscape of an *inferno*, but a landscape ultimately unknowable. The air contains a low mist which blends "the elements into a single gray element" (O'Brien, 1978: 1), and even in midmorning there is a feeling of "endless dusk" (O'Brien, 1978: 4). In addition, the soldiers, who are described as being "all among the dead" (O'Brien, 1978: 1), sometimes experience rain and fog while camping at the brink of a deep valley. There is "no sense of change or transition" (O'Brien, 1978: 43), and the environment is both that of heat and cold, the ambiguity of which is commented on by Paul Berlin: "Cold already, he thought. Funny how in the hottest place on earth, hell itself, there was still such cold" (O'Brien, 1978: 93). Furthermore, the red Vietnamese landscape has been turned into a burnt inferno by the war:

> . . . the trees were stumps burned to the colour of coal. No underbrush, no grass. Everywhere the earth was scorched and mangled, bombed out into bowl-shaped craters full from a week of rain. The water was gray like the sky (O'Brien, 1978: 208).

While these physical aspects of O'Brien's descent into hell are vivid and important, the complex moral aspects of this novel's descent into a heart of darkness hold center stage. But again, the moral landscape is as difficult in character as its physical counterpart. Polarities of right and wrong, of good and evil, become impossible to distinguish.

That absolute truth or polarities of right and wrong do not exist is in one respect illustrated by the incident involving the American girl in the VW van with

133

whom the squad gets a ride in Zagreb, in one of the fantasy chapters of the novel. Like the owner of the appliance store or the veteran in the bar in *On the Way Home* the girl is a minor character but provides another perceptual dimension, another window on the ever-illusive reality of the war. Even though the girl is sympathetic towards the squad, they dislike and reject her because she tries to divide the world too simplistically and neatly. Her either/or fallacy classifies people into either good or bad and concepts into either good or evil. She automatically assumes that Paul Berlin and his fellow soldiers are resisters and deserters who "saw evil" (O'Brien, 1978: 245) and walked away from it and who, as a result, are suffering tremendous guilt. However, the war has taught the Third Squad how childish and unrealistic the girl's views are. They have been initiated into the collective heart of darkness of humankind, and, therefore, believe in shades of grey instead of realms of only black and white.

Going After Cacciato is a novel about the imagination, and pretending; it is a novel more about the discovery of the meaning of such things than a simple inquiry into the nature of evil.Even the meaning of culture, the definition of "civilization," differs according to vision. The beheading in the fantasy visit to Tehran, for instance, certainly what Americans would consider an inhuman and barbaric act, is "one of those true spectacles of civilization" (O'Brien, 1978: 165), complete with an unruly, applauding crowd, officers in dress uniforms, martial music, and lots of ceremony. To the people and the military in Tehran, the incident is equivalent to one of the horrors in Vietnam. Doc comments, "Can't get away from it . . . You try, you run like hell, but you just can't get away" (O'Brien, 1978: 165). The situation involves what Joseph Conrad referred to in *Heart of Darkness* as "the fascination of the abomination" (Conrad, 1902: 69).

The beheading illustrates that the heart of darkness in mankind does not exist only in areas involved in war, but in peaceful cities that are supposedly civilized as well. One does not have to go to war to descend into hell.

Especially in warfare, no two people see things the same way and no two people may know what goes on in the mind of the other. Perhaps O'Brien's best illustration of this idea can be found in Lieutenant Sidney Martin whose view of soldiering differs considerably from that of Paul Berlin. Lieutenant Martin is a professional soldier who believes in mission and in war. War, he feels, was invented "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" (O'Brien, 1978: 148). Lieutenant Martin watches Paul Berlin march on the way to battle, seeing Paul Berlin "as a soldier. Maybe not yet a good soldier, but still a soldier" (O'Brien, 1978: 147). From his perspective, Sidney Martin admires Paul Berlin with pride, thinking that the youth is steady and persistent:

> Lieutenant Sidney Martin watched him come. He admired the oxen persistence with which the last soldier in the column of thirty-nine marched, thinking that the boy represented so much good . . . fortitude, discipline, loyalty, self-control, courage, toughness. The greatest gift of God, thought the lieutenant in administration of Private First Class Paul Berlin's climb, is freedom of will.
>
> Sidney Martin, not a man of emotion, felt pride. He raised a hand to hail the boy (O'Brien, 1978: 150).

However, O'Brien points out that Paul Berlin does "not have the lieutenant's

advantage of perspective and over-view and height" (O'Brien, 1978: 149). Paul Berlin is not thinking of a mission or of winning battles; instead, "He knew he would not fight well. He had no love of mission, no love strong enough to make himself fight well" (O'Brien, 1978: 149). Ironically, Paul Berlin lacks the very qualities that Lieutenant Sidney Martin thinks he possesses:

> He marched up the road with no exercise of will, no desire and no determination, no pride, his muscles contracting and relaxing, legs swinging forward, lungs drawing and expelling, moving, climbing, but without thought and without will and without the force of purpose (O'Brien, 1978: 149).

What O'Brien states in this passage is that the reality in a person's mind, his own subjectivity, may have no connection with what is happening in the external world. People project their own personal understandings onto the world at large, just as the pragmatic Lieutenant Sidney Martin projects his heroic attitudes about war onto the unsuspecting Paul Berlin, who really has no will, no heroic goals. In fact, long before this passage, the reader is told that Paul Berlin's "only goal was to live long enough to establish goals worth living for still longer" (O'Brien, 1978: 43). He is more interested in survival than in a military victory.

Lieutenant Sidney Martin is not the only character who sees with a singular vision. When the Third Squad is about to capture Cacciato in the fantasy section in Paris, Oscar insists that the situation be handled one way – his. When the other soldiers don't explicitly follow his orders, he considers them "genuine yo-yos . . . Dipsticks in the overall slime" (O'Brien, 1978: 293). Oscar's singleness of vision is symbolized by the sunglasses that he wears, even in the

dark, an anomaly that causes Paul Berlin to ponder "the miracles of vision" (O'Brien, 1978: 293). In *Going After Cacciato*, the "miracles of vision" have a dual meaning. Since vision is subjective, what a person sees may have no relationship to what anyone else sees and as such is limited to a person's impressions of it, to what is colored by his own mind. Vision as imagination, though, may be powerful enough to transform or remake reality.

Thus, along with subjective ways of seeing, *Going After Cacciato* also focuses intensely on the imaginative process. We see Paul Berlin's imagination at work in the many questions that he asks himself: "Where was it going, where would it end?" (O'Brien, 1978: 13); "Had it ever ended? What, in fact, had become of Cacciato?" (O'Brien, 1978: 25); "Where did it tilt from fact to imagination? How far had Cacciato led them? How far might he lead them still?" (O'Brien, 1978: 13). The dialectic is far more important than resolutions to the questions posed. In fact, the whole situation, states Paul Berlin, "was an idea. It was a working out of the possibilities" (O'Brien, 1978: 27):

> It was a way of asking questions. What become 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? (O'Brien, 1978: 27).

This passage becomes a type of introduction for the entire novel, a prelude to the action which takes place between Vietnam and Paris. The imaginative process at work is revealed when "Cacciato's ROUND FACE became the moon" (O'Brien,

1978: 24). In Chapter Two, O'Brien cites the general formula for every writer: "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" (O'Brien, 1978: 24). Ironically, Paul Berlin has always had an active imagination. Much of his childhood has consisted of pretending, of "Pretending he might become rich and then travel the world, pretending memories of things he had never witnessed" (O'Brien, 1978: 218). What is important is that the formative process of Paul Berlin's creative imagination is at work.

O'Brien paints a segmented portrait of Cacciato, the character in the imaginary journey who is described frequently, yet who is not really described fully. Unlike the other soldiers who, in spite of some occasional ambiguities, are more clearly defined, Cacciato is as intangible in description as he is in action. "O'Brien deliberately omits any fine detail about Cacciato in order to keep him from being too familiar" (Schroeder, 1984: 150). We know only that he is "A smudged, lonely-looking figure" with a "broad back" and "a shiny pink spot at the crown of the skull" (O'Brien, 1978: 6). He has "big and even and white" teeth (O'Brien, 1978: 256), "short, fat little fingers with chewed-down nails" (O'Brien, 1978: 212) and a "pulpy" face "like wax, or like wet paper. Parts of the face, it seemed, could be scrapped off and pressed to other parts" (O'Brien, 1978: 212). Cacciato's face is "curiously unfinished," lacking "fine details" (O'Brien, 1978: 21), and the images surrounding him are always indistinct . Most frequently, Cacciato is described in negative terms. As "Dumb as a month-old oyster fart" (O'Brien, 1978: 2), he "missed Mongolian idiocy by the breadth of a genetic hair" (O'Brien, 1978: 7). Furthermore, he is a "dumb slob" (O'Brien, 1978: 32), as "Dumb as milk" (O'Brien, 1978: 107), "a dumb kid" (O'Brien, 1978: 54), a

"sleezy little creep" (O'Brien, 1978: 93), and a "gremlin" (O'Brien, 1978: 112).
"But who was he?" (O'Brien, 1978: 107) asks Paul Berlin.

Everyone has something different to say about Cacciato so that the reader
sees him from a various of points of view. Cacciato reminds us of Fitzgerald's
Gatsby, who takes on a variety of viewpoints. Like Gatsby, Cacciato is many
things yet no one particular thing. He is, on the one hand, a supposedly real
soldier who has deserted from the war, but from yet another viewpoint, Cacciato
is also, in part, at least in the fantasy sections of the novel, a figment of Paul
Berlin's imagination. Even in imagination Cacciato takes on many forms and
shapes. In Mandalay he emerges as a brown-robed monk, in Tehran as a supplier
of guns and escape tactics, in Paris, as a shopper. At other times he leaves a note
on a scrap of paper on a mirror. In spite of his presence and his clues, the squad
can never manage to capture him. Just when they think they have him cornered,
he dodges them again. Perhaps the impulse to capture Cacciato is the impulse to
capture reality in some form – the need for certainty, the need to deal resolutely
with the diversity and chaos of the war, a reality that is different to everyone who
experiences it and thus a reality that cannot be summed up. Cacciato therefore
may even stand for the ambiguity of the imagination itself.

Ambiguous images of Cacciato pervade the novel. For example, in
Chapter One when the squad begin their pursuit of the real Cacciato, he waves to
them from the summit of a mountain, swinging his arms with "wide spanning
winging motions" (O'Brien, 1978: 11). Cacciato's flying motions have been
interpreted as Christ-like (Roundy, 1981: 188). However, Cacciato also exhibits
the traits of an anti-Christ. His actions can be compared to Satan, the great

tempter who must beat his wings in Canto 34 of Dante's *Inferno* while crunching traitors in his mouth. And, in a sense, Cacciato is a Satanic figure while he guides the squad and rescues them from perils on their imaginary journey; he also serves as the temptation which leads them further into their ironic descent into hell and their possible desertion of the war, an act that would condemn them as traitors to their country. Thus, Cacciato can be viewed as both a symbol of good and evil. How does one distinguish between the two polarities? Such ambiguities draw the reader into the search for Cacciato along with the characters.

The characters each have a different reason for trying to track Cacciato down. To Oscar, catching Cacciato is at first a "responsibility" that must be carried out and later a necessity to prove that the soldiers just did not desert. To Harold Murphy, who ends up abandoning the mission before it has progressed very far, the mission is "nuts, chasing after the dumb slob, it's crazy as hell" (O'Brien, 1978: 32). To Paul Berlin, the mission is ambiguous and uncertain. From one vantage point, he is not sure why the squad is chasing Cacciato, but would prefer to justify the trip by saying, "It's been sort of a mission. It's not like we just ran away" (O'Brien, 1978: 271). Yet at the same time, Paul Berlin sees the mission as Lieutenant Corson does as "A wild goose, the wrong donkey for the pinning of final responsibility" (O'Brien, 1978: 122). Cacciato is in a sense a scapegoat on which he can pin his longing to escape the reality of the war. To Lieutenant Corson, a veteran of past wars the search for Cacciato is as futile as the Vietnam War itself: "A wild goose" perhaps symbolizes a lost cause, a war without a "heart" (O'Brien, 1978: 134).

Cacciato is also the antithesis of Paul Berlin. One issue that O'Brien

which still contains his foot, Billy Boy dies of a heart attack. The method O'Brien uses to inform the reader of the details of Billy's death is an example of the way in which a fragmentary presentation of reality – in bits and pieces – takes on power through its cumulative meaning. In Chapter Five, we learn that Billy Boy died of fright in "June, the first day at the war" (O'Brien, 1978: 43), but it is not until Chapter Thirty One that the events of Billy's death are revealed in full. In between these chapters, Paul Berlin occasionally mentions Billy Boy's death of fright but never elaborates on the circumstances. The technique that O'Brien uses is similar to that used by Heller in revealing the death of Snowden in *Catch-22* . We have references to Snowden's injury and death as early as Chapter V and then regularly throughout the novel, but it is not until chapter XLI that Snowden's secret is described in full, detail. However, as Edward Frederick Palm points out, "unlike Heller, O'Brien insists the urge to make any of these incidents into an epiphany. He indulges in no editorializing, attaches no morals to any of the deaths. They are simply catalogued along with the war's lesser unpleasantries" (1983: 173).

It is obvious that the first death that Paul Berlin witnesses in Vietnam haunts him, perhaps due to the fact that it was so anti-climactic. In a war where the enemy is rarely seen, a death experienced in face-to-face combat is rare. Instead, soldiers die in more degrading ways, through mines or booby traps, friendly fire, or snipers. As Michael Herr points out in *Dispatches* (1977), there were numerous ways to die in Vietnam:

> You could die in a sudden blood-burning crunch as your chopper hit the ground like dead weight . . . You would die in the last stage of malaria . .

. You could end in a pit somewhere with a spike through you . . . You
could be shot, minced, grenaded, rocketed, mortared, sniped at, blown up
and away (Herr, 1977: 142-43).

And, as in Billy Boy's case, a soldier could die of fear.

The complexity of issues such as courage and fear is entangled even
further by the fact that while a character such as Cacciato is portrayed on one
hand as brave the reader is led from yet another angle to question that bravery.
Are some of the things Cacciato does really heroism or just plain stupidity? For
instance, when Frederick Tucker is shot in the tunnel, Cacciato would readily go
down after him at the risk of his own life if Oscar would let him. And why has
Cacciato left the war in the first place? Is there, in fact, a possibility that he
deserts out of fear?

Cacciato's complexity as a character and the problematical nature of
issues such as good and evil are further complicated when we are presented with
an image of Cacciato as both compassionate and unfeeling. On the one hand, he
is kind to Paul Berlin, offering him gum and talking to him after Billy Boy's
death. Also, he is the one soldier in the squad who does not want to see
Lieutenant Sidney Martin die, stating that Martin "not all that bad" (O'Brien,
1978: 213). However, O'Brien makes Cacciato even more problematical by
showing us a horrific side of him that coexists along with the compassionate part.
While the real Cacciato does not want to participate in the fragging of Lieutenant
Sidney Martin, evidence indicates that he certainly is not adverse to atrocity. His
perverse nature is revealed in the photograph of "Cacciato squatting beside the
corpse of a shot-dead VC in green pajamas, Cacciato holding up the dead boy's

head by a shock of brilliant black hair, Cacciato similing" (O'Brien, 1978: 107).

Significantly, the complexity of Cacciato's character corresponds with events in the fantasy sections of the novel. In Chapter Thirteen, for example, Cacciato leads Paul Berlin and his squad into a Vietnamese tunnel complex, a descent into hell that occurs when both characters and reader least expect it, although it is vaguely foreshadowed by Cacciato's drawing of what appears to be a diagram of Dante's circles of hell. Ironically, while walking on the map of hell, the soldiers ask, "What the hell is it?" (O'Brien, 1978: 65), and then their Lieutenant decides, "Hell I don't like it either. It's thick stuff we'll be going through" (O'Brien, 1978: 66). Their descent occurs imaginatively – earthquake style, with sudden shaking and shuddering as the earth tears itself open, and they fall. Cacciato leads characters and the reader alike into this tunnel that in its "maze-like" structure echoes the very structure of the war and its ambiguities as well as that of the novel and its complexities. The tunnel becomes a multi-dimensional window that elucidates various aspects of the war and its problematical nature.

From one perspective, the tunnel complex demonstrates that even the Vietnamese side of the war can be multidimensional. The complex is inhabited by Li Van Hgoe, a Vietnamese major, who, in a sense, mirrors Paul Berlin and the squad. Theoretically, the soldiers have one main factor in common with Li Van Hgoe: they are all deserters from the war. In contrast to many of his comrades, Li Van Hgoe has resisted serving his country, an action that has condemned him to the tunnels for years. Now all that he has are "A few livable chambers in hell" (O'Brien, 1978: 87), "a stinking hell" (O'Brien, 1978: 88), a

"beastly hell" (O'Brien, 1978: 89). Perhaps Paul Berlin has the most in common with the Vietnamese major. He, too, has gone to war for some reasons beyond his control: "Because he believed in law and law told him to go . . . because it was expected" (O'Brien, 1978: 235).

The tunnel, "the literal summary of the land, and of mysteries contained in it" (O'Brien, 1978: 78) symbolizes some of the ambiguities surrounding the war. Prior to his fantasy descent into the tunnel, Paul Berlin had never seen a North Vietnamese soldier in person: "He had never seen the living enemy. He had seen Cacciato's shot-dead VC boy. He had seen what bombing could do. He had seen the dead. But never had he seen the living enemy" (O'Brien, 1978: 76). Li Van Hgoe leads Paul Berlin to think of all of the questions that he has surrounding the complexity of the war:

> How . . . did they hide themselves? How did they maintain such quiet?
> Where did they sleep, how did they melt into the land? Who were they?
> What motivated them – ideology, history, tradition, religion, politics,
> fear, discipline? . . . How did they wiggle through wire? Could they fly,
> could they pass through rock like ghosts? Was it true they didn't value
> human life? (O'Brien, 1978: 77)

In response to Paul Berlin's many curiosities, Li Van Hgoe poses a question of his own: "Does the leopard hide . . . Or is it hidden by nature? Is it hiding or is it hidden" (O'Brien, 1978: 78), a puzzle that can relate to the mythical Cacciato as well. Is he hiding, or is he hidden in Paul Berlin's imagination, a catalyst that sparks his investigations of the war and its complexities? The tunnel is an important representation of Paul Berlin's imagination. The squad is not only

tunneling into Li Van Hgoe's complex itself, but in their search for Cacciato they are also tunneling into themselves, into the imagination. Cacciato compels these people into a descent with the same power that Kurtz compels Marlowe into a search for the nature of morality, only in an excitingly different way. The subtlety with which O'Brien creates this parallel between *Going After Cacciato* and *Heart of Darkness* is ingenious, for the reader has been so steered away from any neat correspondences between Cacciato and Kurtz that he may have never suspected the connection. Like Marlowe who cannot abandon his quest for Kurtz, Paul Berlin's squad are powerless to give up their search for the mythical Cacciato.

Imagination can also provide the vision and the will to tunnel out of hell. Escaping the tunnel is difficult, for as Li Van Hgoe points out, there is no exit: "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" (O'Brien, 1978: 87). They are all "Prisoners of war" (O'Brien, 1978: 83), a statement that can be interpreted symbolically. On the literal level, the squad is trapped in Li Van Hgoe's tunnel, but on another level, the squad is trapped in the war itself, "a stinking hell" (O'Brien, 1978: 88) which seems to wind on forever in a deadly maze and from which there is no escape. However, whereas Li Van Hgoe perceives his reality as inescapable, The Third Squad can themselves escape his tunnel complex through the power of Paul Berlin's imagination. Their ascent parallels Alice-in-Wonderland, where "The way in is the way out . . . We have fallen into a hole. Now we must fall out" (O'Brien, 1978: 88). Later in the story the squad can again escape their imprisonment and possible execution in Iran through Paul Berlin's imagination of Cacciato as a magical dispenser of rifles. And, of course, imagination can also

help Paul Berlin tunnel out of the hell of the Vietnam War itself through his creation of the fantasy pursuit.

Perhaps the most important lesson that Paul Berlin learns from his descent into the tunnel complex is that "things may be viewed from many angles. From down below, or from inside out, you often discover entirely new understandings" (O'Brien, 1978: 82), a statement that becomes a major theme for the novel and an idea that helps O'Brien transcend a mere discussion of the horrors of the war. The story becomes more than a trip through the hell of the war, or a journey from Vietnam to Paris. As Lieutenant Corson tells Paul Berlin, "Cacciato? Hell, he's small potatoes. There's bigger fish behind this thing" (O'Brien, 1978: 121). The vitality of the text ensures that the dialogue between the perceiver and reality is never-ending.

In the fantasy sections of the novel, the descent into hell functions ironically. As both the squad and the reader learn, the imaginary trek to find Cacciato is by no means free of the horrors or warfare. Near the beginning of their fictional journey to Paris, the soldiers must cross a river from Vietnam and Laos, a task that would not expect to become comparable to the River Styx in archetypal literature. However, instead of leading the squad away from hell, walking across the river only leads them deeper into the perplexities of the war. Then, after the squad experiences the fall into the tunnel and progresses further on their journey, the confrontations with horror grow in intensity. In Tehran the soldiers witness the gruesome end of an Iranian deserter, "one of those true spectacles of civilization" (O'Brien, 1978: 165), complete with music, speeches, and a large crowd. In this regard Martin comments: "O'Brien uses ghastly

incident much a Vonnegut uses the bombing of Dresden in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and Heller uses the death of Sweden in *Catch-22*, as one of the most horrifying events in the novel" (Martin, 1985: 8). If there is one incident in *Going After Cacciato* that stands out in the reader's mind, then perhaps it is the execution in Tehran, not so much because there is a beheading but because of the way that it is described: the panicky atmosphere , the sparkling silver instruments, the shaving of the youth's neck, the sherry. Most horrifying is the fly on the boy's nose, the pesky little insect that degrades and humiliates the previously dispassionate youth in his last moments of life. Ironically the youth's crime is not murder, as the squad ironically guesses, but going AWOL, a crime for which they, too, share guilt, even though they are supposedly pursuing Cacciato for the same offense. The spectacle of the beheading serves to reinforce the reality that the inhumane acts of civilization, such as war, cannot be escaped. For a time, the squad, too, is arrested by the Iranian government, charged with desertion, and faces execution before the fugitive Cacciato miraculously appears to help them escape. In Greece, they face possible arrest as they disembark from a ship. The hunters are always the hunted, a fact that is clearly brought home to them before their journey progresses very far. As Doc Peret mumbles, "You try, you run like hell, but you just can't get away" (O'Brien, 1978: 165). By countering the reader's expectations and moving, the soldiers are closer to hell instead of away from hell. O'Brien uses the descent motif more originally and involves the reader more deeply in the text, challenging him to discover why the journey to Paris is not totally the escape that one would expect it to be. We are led to question the ideas behind the journey. Why, for instance, does the journey to Paris contain horror? Is it because the more tortured the journey becomes the

more we would like it to cease? Does it suggest that this is a moral journey? Does it indicate that reality cannot be captured in any shape or form? Does it suggest that the imagination can have both constructive and destructive effects, depending on how it is used? Again, the questions posed are far more important than any definite answers or resolutions.

A major issue examined in *Going After Cacciato* is how the war affects the imagination and how the imagination affects the war. O'Brien feels that it is psychologically important for an individual involved in such a brutal experience to be able to create some kind of order out of the extreme disorder that exists (McCaffery, 1983: 273). Thus Paul Berlin uses his imagination as a positive means of coping with the harsh realities of war and his fear of them. For example, when Buff dies, Paul Berlin moves away from the reality of Buff's death by pretending that "he was at the bottom of a chlorinated pool...a green pool in summertime" (O'Brien, 1978: 249), a "warm deep pool" (O'Brien, 1978: 251). The one thing that he cannot "pretend away" is the relief that the death was not his own, that "it was Buff and not you" (O'Brien, 1978: 251). In another instance Paul Berlin imagines when on a march that "he was not in the war. Pretending he had not watched Billy Boy Watkins die of fright on the field of battle . He was pretending he was a boy again, camping with his father in the midnight summer along the Des Moines River" (O'Brien, 1978: 186). He also pretends that his steps on the trail "were dollar bills and that each step through the night made him richer and richer, so that soon he would become a wealthy man" (O'Brien, 1978: 187). Pretending helps him to cope not only with the death of Billy Boy, but also with the presence of the fear that caused Billy to die.

However, while the imagination can be positive, it can also be negative as well if it leads a person away from his responsibilities. Paul Berlin uses his imagination to help him escape the fact that he participated in planning the death of Lieutenant Sidney Martin. When every member of the Third Squad, including himself, disobeys search a tunnel and Lieutenant Sidney Martin must search it himself, Paul Berlin pretends "it wasn't war. It was Lake Country" (O'Brien, 1978: 208). Then when the men touch the grenade in a collective ritual to eventually seal the fate of Lieutenant Martin, Paul Berlin pretends that he is not in Vietnam, but instead in "the Wisconsin woods. Indian Guides. Deep green forests, true wilderness" (O'Brien, 1978: 209). Paul Berlin here uses his imagination to keep from confronting his own moral heart of darkness. Because he refused to obey the order to search the tunnel and because he touched the grenade, he is just as guilty as the rest of the squad of Lieutenant Sidney Martin's death. The difference between using the imagination to cope with Buff's and Bill Boy's deaths and to cope with Sidney Martin's is that Paul Berlin played no role in causing the deaths of the two enlisted men. Buff and Billy Boy were war casualties , not murder victims of their own American allies.

The imagination also has the power to help set goals and determine purposes in life. O'Brien states that

> Paul Berlin is using his imagination to figure out whether he would be happy running from a war or not, if he'd be happy living in exile. Would he find peace of mind and contentment, would he feel that he had betrayed his country, that his reputation had been undermined, his family? And this imagined journey is a way of asking himself the

question: Could I really do it in this other world, this world of physical

reality? Could I physically do it? It's a test of how to behave and what to

do. (Schroeder, 1984: 138)

According to O'Brien, the imagination plays a large role in determining human

destiny (McCaffery, 1983: 266). If Paul Berlin were to run , for instance, his life

would not take the same direction as it would if he did not run. Thus, his

imagination, in helping him to explore the moral and psychological issues

involved in desertion, aids significantly in determining the shape of his life.

O'Brien views the imagination as "a heuristic tool that can be used in establishing

goals and in handling the philosophical, moral, and psychological aspects of

situations" (Schroeder, 1984: 138-39). While the imagination cannot replace

reality, it can help one discover more about how to deal with it.

Ultimately, Paul Berlin learns that reality cannot be completely escaped,

even in imagination. Paris, which should be the height of the squad's journey, is

ironically both the zenith and the nadir. When they finally reach Paris, "It comes

like a ghost" (O'Brien, 1978: 259). That true happiness cannot be found there is

perhaps foreshadowed by the rainy weather and the "long shudder of thunder,

deep thunder rolling from horizon to horizon" (O'Brien, 1978: 259). Yet Paul

Berlin invents his own Paris, one with illusions of peace and grandeur. Paul

Berlin contemplates, through his own vision, his own way of seeing, the peace

and promise that Paris might represent, but through the use of an impressionistic

haze, O'Brien reveals how difficult reality is to know in any absolute sense. The

detail that Paul Berlin concentrates on is not always clear, but sometimes

"tangled and fuzzy" (O'Brien, 1978: 258). When the train arrives in Paris, Paul

Berlin wipes his window so as "to see cleanly" (O'Brien, 1978: 257), the remnants of the damage and destruction of World War II. However, Paul Berlin chooses to disregard the ugly aspects of France, an extension of horrors just arrived from Vietnam:

> He ignores the soot and coal dust, all the artifacts of industry strewn like a child's toys along the tracks – rusting flatbeds and switching gear, timbers, heaps of mangled iron, incinerators, tin cans, crushed old automobiles, tank cars and abandoned warehouses and barbed wire (O'Brien, 1978: 257).

Instead, through that imaginative power nurtured since childhood, Paul Berlin invents his own Paris. He sees what he needs to see, transforming the ugliness of the countryside to a more pleasant scene – "the blossoms of dainty white flowers" (O'Brien, 1978: 257). There are days when Paris sparkles, when Paul Berlin tours museums, strolls hand-in-hand by the river with Sarkin Aung Wan, drinks wine, and dances, but eventually intrudes. Imagination cannot totally lead him away from the world of social events and obligations, a fact that is illustrated more and more as the novel progresses. The further the journey advances, the more the memories of the war have emerged and dampened the fantasy. According to O'Brien, "One of the important themes of the book is how one's memory and one's imagination interpenetrate, interlock" (Schroeder, 1984: 138). The hole in the road on the way to Paris therefore causes Paul Berlin to think of the holes made in Pederson's body, and the journey through the Vietnamese tunnel complex reminds Paul Berlin of the tunnel deaths of Frechie Tucker and Bernie Lynn. When the squad tries to escape Tehran, the "Dark buildings loomed up like

jungle" (O'Brien, 1978: 216), and the memories of Lieutenant Sidney Martin's death intrude upon the relief felt at escaping the Iranians.

Paul Berlin, who "did not think beyond Paris" (O'Brien, 1978: 226) cannot think only of Paris. The pursuit of Cacciato weighs heavily on his mind, and even if he could bring himself to desert the squad, they will not let him. Earlier, when Sarkin Aung Wan had questioned Paul Berlin as to the necessity of the search for Cacciato, he had replied, "'Missions are missions, you can't back away'" (O'Brien, 1978: 103). Later, when he plays at setting up housekeeping with Sarkin and thinks of abandoning the missions, Oscar reminds him, "Good times are gone an' a billion fuckin chickens are comin' home to roost. Now get upstairs an' pack we chekin' out" (O'Brien, 1978: 274).

The tension resulting from the contrast of desertion versus moral commitment emerges most fully in the chapter near the end of the novel where Paul Berlin and Sarkin Aung participate in a mock version of the Paris peace talks. In these talks, Sarkin Aung Wan urges Paul Berlin to "'Give up this fruitless pursuit of Cacciato. Forget him. Live now the dream you have dreamed'" (O'Brien, 1978: 284). To Sarkin, it would be a courageous act for Paul Berlin to give up his mission and to commit himself to her. However, the situation is more complex to Paul Berlin psychologically and morally. It would be cowardice for him to ignore the promises he has already made to his family, his friends, his town, his country, his fellow soldiers. The mock debate is important because it reinforces the idea of the potency of imagination to move or shape reality in various directions. Ultimately, imagination must wed itself to action through personal values. Again, the value of this interplay of contradictory

opinions between Sarkin Aung Wan and Paul Berlin is that it challenges Paul Berlin to rethink established attitudes and encourages, through the vitality of its dialectic, new possibilities.

The decision-making process ends in Paris for several reasons; "it is known for truth and justice, the Peace of Paris was signed in Paris, and it symbolizes civilization" (Schroeder, 1984: 144). For Paul Berlin, Paris embodies the purest form of civilization. When approaching Paris, he wants to "let civilization suck him in, splash over him like a waterfall" (O'Brien, 1978: 257). Paul Berlin views Paris as an image of rebirth, a utopia where all will be "order and harmony and justice and quiet" (O'Brien, 1978: 247). It is Paul Berlin's imaginative capacity that leads him to this vision of a constructive and humanistic future – a sense of the true meaning of the word "civilized". Unfortunately, he also learns that the world is devoid of a utopia, an ideal civilization. According to O'Brien, Paris represents both the absence of and an antidote to war. To Paul Berlin and Sarkin Aung Wan, "It was the peace of Paris that was a conceived antithesis to all the brutality and uncivilized behaviour of war" (McCaffery, 1983: 276). Yet, as O'Brien illustrates in the novel, the shadows of earlier wars hang over France in the broken-down villages outside of Paris. What O'Brien tries to do in the Paris Chapters as well as in the novel overall is "to hint at the roots of war in peace. War always grows out of peace. Always, as the soldiers in my novel run away from war, they encounter many of the same evils which they had hoped to leave behind – avarice, injustice, death, brutality. Unhappy things occur on their own peace march, which is a way of saying that one can't just run away and expect a happy, magical ending. There are consequences in the real world to any kind of escape. There is no utopia to run to.

The so-called peaceful world is full of butchery and tyranny" (McCaffery, 1983: 276).

The pursuit of Cacciato had started out innocently enough with "No harm intended" (O'Brien, 1978: 121), but eventually "Things were out of control. Gone haywire. You could run, but you couldn't outrun the consequences of running. not even in imagination" (O'Brien, 1978: 201). Even Sweden is not a viable alternative as it was for Heller's characters. When one character, Eddie Lazzutti, asks Oscar what would be wrong with going to Sweden, Oscar relies, "Sweden's for candy-asses" (O'Brien, 1978: 277).

Through the search for Cacciato, Paul Berlin realizes that imagination is used to invent rather than to discover the meanings of reality and that such invention must be executed with responsibility and obligation. In "Going After Cacciato" or going after the imagination, the meaning of imagination and the meanings brought to mind are a matter of morality and psychology but ones that involve thought and commitment and being answerable for one's decisions. Therefore, as a powerful tool of invention, the imagination can be used productively to stop war or destructively to create it. "Peace of mind", states Paul Berlin, "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" (O'Brien, 1978: 286). "Peace of Mind" is not an absolute but a moral responsibility. The "they" that Paul Berlin refers to in terms of other human beings could be any people or race the Americans, for example. When the imagination stops, dialogue stops, people start shooting. Thus, where imagination leaves off, violence can begin. O'Brien explores more fully than does Del

155

Vecchio the impact of imagination on creating war. We invent reality and therefore we had better be very careful about the ideas of reality. O'Brien echoes what John Milton stated centuries ago in *Paradise Lost*, that the mind can be a heaven or a hell. Mankind has created Paris, but the have also created a Vietnam, and the Vietnam War was perhaps a destructive consequence of the imagination.

Paul Berlin has himself worked out the possibilities of the imagination as a force for remaking reality. In the statements he makes, we see how he comes to these possibilities: "Pretending was his best trick to forget the war" (O'Brien, 1978: 9); "He tried to imagine a proper ending" (O'Brien, 1978: 22); "He wasn't dreaming, or imagining; just pretending. Figuring how it would be, if it were" (O'Brien, 1978: 23); "each step was an event of imagination" (O'Brien, 1978: 28). The use of past present subjunctive and other indefinite verb forms provides an additional clue to the fact that Paul Berlin is only pretending, only working out the possibilities. He states that "it might have been done" (O'Brien, 1978: 22), "IT WOULD NOT HAVE ENDED that way" (O'Brien, 1978: 242), and "It could be done" (O'Brien, 1978: 45). He never advocates that it actually has been done. Instead, it is all merely a possibility.

Going After Cacciato is not so much a novel about war as it is a book about the possibilities of achieving peace. Like Bausch in *On The Way Home*, who suddenly shifts his point of view to focus on Dale, O'Brien moves his reader in a curve from war to peace. As Paul Berlin states, "Why not a smooth, orderly arc from war to peace? These were the questions, and the answers could come only from hard observation," an observation that "requires inward looking" (O'Brien, 1978: 184). According to Doc Peret, "What you remember is

determined by what you see, and what you see depends on what you remember" (O'Brien, 1978: 184), particularly if what one remembers and sees is as devastating as war. To break the cycle requires "concentration on the process itself: Focus on the order of things, sort out the flow of events so as to understand how one thing led to another, search for that point at which what happened had been extended into a vision of what might have happened" (O'Brien, 1978: 184-85).

One of the most vital aspects of *Going After Cacciato* is that as an open text that allows for the possibility of a number of conclusions it perfectly assumes the form of its thesis. The fantasy sections merge with a supposedly actual scene in Vietnam, where a terrified Paul Berlin prematurely fires his rifles and alerts the real Cacciato, allowing him to escape the squad's pursuit of him in the Vietnam mountains. Paul Berlin's allowing Cacciato to remain uncaptured is consistent with his discovery that the imagination must remain free from imprisoning structures. Since it is Cacciato who fires the imagination, who arouses it and restricts it to a consideration of possibilities, the capture of Cacciato would have suggested cessation of the imaginative process. Like Proteus, the mythical sea-god who had the power to assume a number of forms, Cacciato is always changing shape and is out of the reach of his pursuers. The mythical Proteus would answer any question put forth to him if the questioner could manage to grasp him in spite of his transformations. Cacciato, who is pursued and who vanishes or changes shape at the point of capture, but whose pursuit leads people to a greater self-awareness or to an awareness of the nature of commitment and morality, parallels Proteus.It is important that he not be caught, that he serve an ironic and contradictory function, because the questions that would be posed to

him are those for which there are no definite answers or resolutions. More importantly, because Cacciato remains free, the imagination of those in pursuit remains free, allowing for larger and changeable possibilities.

By the end of the novel Berlin has been able to examine his own motive, his fears, and courage. As the day starts in the real world represented by the guard tower, Berlin discovers that he has found a way to combat his fear and survive in Vietnam. Early in the novel Berlin realizes "the real issue was courage, the power of the will to defeat fear". By the novel's end, Berlin displays a measure of self-knowledge. He has the facts about himself: "The war was still a war, and he was still a soldier. He hadn't run. The issue was courage, and courage was will power, and this was his failing." Through Paul Berlin, we have also learned the 'fact' about the Vietnam War. But, as Berlin says, "It was not the trouble of facing facts , it was the trouble of understanding them". The structure of O"Brien's work helps us understand the facts about the war.

The significance of Berlin's six-hour imaginary journey through a physical and metaphysical darkness is that this soldier turned author, who before this night might have endured without understanding, ponders from various perspectives the consequences of fleeing and confronts his fears of exile and cowardice. He is no longer an unthinking soldier helplessly dragged along by the Third Squad, the war, and his fears. During this night of observation, he journeys into his heart and mind attempting to explore and release the potential of what he might be. It is a journey that Paul Berlin, through his own consideration of courage, has undertaken. Finally, it is an activity that Lieutenant Sidney Martin believes is a soldier's most important mission: "The overriding mission was the

inner mission, the mission of every man to learn the important things about himself" (O'Brien, 1978: 148). True, Berlin does not achieve complete understanding, but through imagination he briefly establishes order in and control over his life . He also realizes the limits of this power: "The war was still a war, and he was still a soldier. He hadn't run. The issue was courage, and courage was will power, and this was his failing" (O'Brien, 1978: 288). His final assessment reveals his weakness, yet at the same time it also highlights his newly found strength of character and the extent of his change from an unthinking soldier to one who has completed the spiritual mission. The truly courageous act might have been for Berlin to follow the dictates of his heart and leave the war. But, despite doubting the rationale for the war and knowing about his physical embarrassment on the battlefield, Berlin refuses to flee. So *Going After Cacciato* follows the positive structure of the *Bildungsroman*. Through the ordeals of war Paul Berlin has "learned the important things about himself" (O'Brien, 1978: 148).

Chapter Five

The 13ᵗʰ Valley:
An Achievement of Manhood

Del Vecchio writes about a later period, 1971, after the beginning of the gradual withdrawal of American troops. His combat episodes are very realistic, but he has also written extended passages in which his characters engage in debates on the state of the war and of American society, especially with regard to racism. Like Webb, Del Vecchio does not have answers; he just presents all the sides of the issues and leaves it to the readers to decide what they want to make of them. *The 13ᵗʰ Valley* does not state the possibility of the manifestation of human worth that war brings as has been described in *Fields of Fire* nor does it accuse the absurdity of war for causing man's moral and psychic disintegration as described in *No Bugles, No Drums* Perhaps it may be right to say that *The 13ᵗʰ Valley* shares the thematic tone of both novels. More correctly, the novel combines the experiences portrayed in both novels.

Unlike the two novels previously discussed, John M. Del Vecchio's novel is not much concerned with dramatic conflicts mainly caused by war's violation of individual integrity. According to Kathleen M. Puhr, Vietnam War novels in general present "four fictional faces: realism, propaganda, absurdism and black humour, and documentary fiction" (Puhr, 1984: 99). Del Vecchio's novel contains all of these elements. To put it briefly, the novel, above all, is a realistic account of infantry soldiers in the jungles; it discusses in depth politics, history, ethics, and especially the causes of the war. For this reason, a critic even asserted that the novel "deserves to be called a novel of ideas" (Rollins, 1984: 425). Like

many other Vietnam War novels, Del Vecchio's novel also uses a lot of black humour. And finally, the novel is a well researched one to the extent that the line between fact and fiction are sometimes made indistinct.

John M.Del Vecchio was drafted in 1969 after graduating from Lafayette College. He served as a Combat Correspondent with the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam in 1970 and '71 and earned a Bronze Star. In *The 13th Valley* Del Vecchio aims at two important things: "What-it-was-really-like" – and to mold it into a larger pattern of what Philip Beidler calls "cultural myth-making" (Beidler, 1982: xi). The story of the novel, set in late 1970, describes an infantry company (A Co, 7th/402d Airmobile) on an operation in the Khe Ta Laou river to impose a symbolic importance to the operation, Del Vecchio deliberately uses the number "13" in an unlucky way: the operation begins on the "13th" of August 1970 and lasts for "13" days in the " in "the 13th" valley. The novel's structure closely follows Alpha's combat assault into the valley center in search of the giant NVA Front Headquarters.

The novel is unusual in that the operation it depicts is a large, battalion-sized operation that sets soldiers against soldiers, with no civilians involved. Most Vietnam War novels portray smaller units(generally squads or platoons) undertaking prolonged jungle patrols and interacting with Vietnamese civilians. The combat assault is mainly seen through the eyes of three main characters, James Vincent Chelini, the protagonist, nicknamed "Cherry" who majored in psychology; Daniel Egan, the tough platoon sergeant with a degree in engineering; and Lt. Rufus Brooks, the intellectual black company commander possessor of a Master's degree in philosophy who persistently tries to define the

cause of the war. Here again the company becomes a melting–pot unit composed of members coming from various ethnic groups: El Paso, a Chicano with a degree in history and a year of law school; Silvers, a Jew and aspiring writer from New York; Jax, a black from rural Mississippi; Doc Johnson, a city black from Harlem; Minh, the Vietnamese Scout. They all represent

> a collective consciousness of America. These men, Chelini, Egan, Doc, Silvers, Brooks, all of them, were products of the Great American Experiment, black brown yellow white and red, children of the Melting Pot. Their actions were the blossoming of the past, blooming continuously from the humus of decayed antiquity, flowering from the stems of living yesterdays (Del Vecchio, 1982: 132).

Del Vecchio goes to great lengths to make the conversations between these characters authentic and persuasive, including, as Webb does, a glossary of specialised Vietnam terminology at the close of the book to explain the many abbreviations and the technical language used to punctuate the characters' speeches.

The 13ᵗʰ Valley also demonstrates a clear sense of structure. The novel progresses evenly from the arrival of Cherry, the initiate, in Vietnam until the final climactic scene of battle. "Much of the sense of structure comes from Del Vecchio's meticulous attention to daily activities and his entitling of some chapters by dates" (Gasper, 1983: 86). In addition a Prologue describes the valley where much of the action is to take place and foreshadows the disruption of life there later in the book. By including such a Prologue to foreshadow the events in the Valley, Del Vecchio follows the tradition of James Webb in *Fields of Fire* (1978), who

uses a Prologue about the An Hoa Basin to foreshadow the action of a climactic battle near his novel's conclusion. Like Webb, De Vecchio centers the novel around three main characters: Lieutenant Rufus Brooks, the black commander of Alpha Company, James V. Chelini, Jr. (Cherry), the new "boonierat" and neophyte who must be initiated, and Sergeant Daniel Egan, a devoted infantryman.

What is noteworthy is that most of Del Vecchio's soldiers are not Vietnam stereotypes of "throwaway people". Although they feel isolated from the homefolks, their frustration is directed toward the soldiers in the rear position. Moreover, Del Vecchio's melting-pot company consists of some highly educated members in such fields as psychology, philosophy, engineering, history, law, and politics. This characterization enables the author to give meanings to the narrative when it alternates between the actual details of combat assault into the jungle valley and the night-time bull sessions discussing the war.

As noted by some early reviewers like Joe Klein, William Plummer and Anatole Broyard, *The 13ᵗʰ Valley* is a truthful account of combat soldiers and their life in the jungles of Vietnam. As to the birth of the novel, Del Vecchio gives his acknowledgement to a soldier with whom he was associated when he was a combat correspondent in the A Shau Valley in 1971. Del Vecchio's sense of mission to tell the truth is further illustrated in a conversation between two soldiers about their previous battle:

> "Ah'll tell you, that was the only time Ah ever heard a the 101ˢᵗ losin
> men. But Ah wasn't gonna write home about it. The way Ah heart it, the
> ah was wounded left behind." "Yeah," Silvers said. "That's somethin
> that should be written about. Man, I just write notes to myself so I'll

remember what this place was really like. I don't want to be spreadin any bullshit when I return. That's the whole trouble with this war. Everybody's tellin war stories and nobody's tellin it the way it is" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 139).

Ironically, however, Silvers does not live long enough to describe "the way it is"; instead he leaves his mission to his creator-author.

Del Vecchio focuses on the description of the life of what he calls "boonierats." In the glossary attached to the novel, the term simply means "infantrymen" coming from the word "boonies" which means "the field, the bush, the jungle, any place the infantry operates not a firebase, basecamp or ville" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 592). Like Webb's "grunts," Del Vecchio's "boonierats" are a group of soldiers emerging from the life in the bush. Yet, to Del Vecchio, they are the unique groups who share "a separate culture" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 405). In his R and R Lt. Brooks says to his wife who does not understand the word: a boonierat is "more than a grunt. Marines are grunts. Soldiers from the Big Red One are grunts. We're boonierats. We live in the boonies, we don't visit. The jungle is our home" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 378-79). And, he continues, "They worked together, they fought together, they shared life and death. How can those words mean anything to someone who has not experienced it" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 80). Even, to Daniel Egan, boonierats becomes "a race" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 405). Thus, in the life of boonierats, such conflicts as come from the differences of color, creed, education, and social status do not matter because they are overweighed by this unique shared existence.

Peter L. Stromberg saw the natural environment of Vietnam as one of the

most hostile of the "nonlethal threats" which start a process of killing though they are not necessarily causes of death (1974: 218). Del Vecchio's jungle exemplifies Stromberg's proposition. At one point, Del Vecchio writes, "The NVA had the good sense to leave the Americans with nothing to fight but the mountain and the jungle, and the terrain took its toll in wounded" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 22). In the jungles, while American soldiers have to fight the unseen enemies, they also have to suffer from vegetation, heat, rain, leeches, mosquitoes, dehydration, immersion foot, and diarrhea. A scene in which the company is taking a break at its night defense perimeter will suffice to describe the miseries of the boonierats:

> During the afternoon Compobasso turned into a hot fetid swamp. The boonierats who had been rovers attempted to sleep. They were weary, wet, as odorous as the swamp itself. Their eyes had sunk deeper into the sallow hollow sockets of their faces. Tongues swelled in dry mouths. They were out of decent water. They were filthy. The slack period gave them the time to realise it and the heat highlighted it. CP soldiers pulled LP/OP, a platoon personnel who had remained at Compobasso pulled berm guard. Mosquitoes rose in swarms by early evening. The place, like the entire north valley floor, was infested with land leeches. And the insect repellent had again run out. The sleeping boonierats wrapped ponchos around their heads and over their hands. The mosquitoes and the leeches found their way in. the entire company was nauseous and spent (Del Vecchio, 1982: 536).

The jungles not only take their toll in bodies but also in minds. The soldiers are totally disoriented in the jungles, even to the point that time is measured not in

165

days but in shifts and resupplies. Del Vecchio portrays the soldiers' psychological state of mind especially well while they are waiting for the combat assaults, humping over the hills, or sitting in the foxhole at night ambushes. The waiting "minutes" become "millennia" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 131). The contagious nature of fear and anxiety can lead them to panic at any time. Especially the undurable horrors of night lead them to wild imagination. The author writes,

> During Nam nights boonierats often feared someone somehow would devise a method of eliminating daylight and daytime would never again arrive. It was always a relief when the sky changed and a relief when the sky changed and a boonierat could see his brothers still there (Del Vecchio, 1982: 316).

In the jungles, one way of channeling fear and anxiety is to develop "themes" to which the soldiers can condition their minds (Del Vecchio, 1982: 55). Indeed, like Norman Mailer's soldiers, most of Del Vecchio's soldiers have their female counterparts (girl friends or wives) back in the States to whom they frequently extend their imagination. Except for counting on such imagination, the soldiers seem to have no other means of escaping the alarming situations of the jungle. Del Veechio's soldiers are also frequently engaged in accusing the absurdities of war. But as Thomas Myers has said, "individual protest and disengagement occur only on a theoretical level within the think-tank debates" (Myers, 1984: 132), for such ideological concerns lose their power in the presence of immediate danger. For this reason, as in many novels of the Vietnam War, here survival also becomes the most positive value. Early in the novel, Lt. Brooks warns his members: "Some people back here are on fire . . .. Anti-war, anti-government,

anti-white, anti-black. Leave that stuff back there. I want you to be anti just one thing – and that's anti-getting killed" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 87-88).

Del Vecchio's achievements in the novel are not only in his detailed and authentic description of the jungle warfare, but also in his attempt to mythologize the Vietnam War experience in the larger context of American war literature. As Thomas Myers points out, "the mission in the Khe Ta Lou is symbolic of the entire American presence in Vietnam" (Myers, 1984: 125). Though Myers fails to develop fully this premise, his remarks point to the heart of the novel. The entire operational process of Alpha Company – plunging into the river valley, encountering hostile enemies in it, and hurriedly evacuating out of it – in one way or another reflects the nation's war experience.

At the opening of the operation, the battalion commander stresses its importance in these terms: "Gentlemen, it is up to us. We are about to embark upon a historic mission. We must take the world . . . as we find it and make it like we want it" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 69). Thus Alpha becomes contemporary America emerged from the historic past and entrusted with an "historic mission." This symbolic identification of Alpha with the American nation is clearer when Del Vecchio describes the Company awaiting combat assault:

The restless infantrymen in the trenches and their clustered sergeants and lieutenants and captains on the landing strip represented a collective consciousness of America. These men, Chelini, Egan, Doc, Silvers, Brooks, all of them, were products of the Great American Experiment, black brown yellow white and red children of the melting-pot. Their actions were the blossoming of the past, blooming continuously from the

humus of decayed antiquity, flowering from the stems of living
yesterdays. What they had in common was the denominator of American
society in the '50s and '60s a television culture, the army experience
(Del Vecchio, 1982: 132).

And the battle in the Khe Ta Laou Valley becomes an Armaggeddon (a battle
between good and evil) in which "all the collective lessons of ten years of
American involvement" confront "the enemy with a mind-set developed by tens
of billions of man-years of war" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 162-63).

The 13th Valley contains a variety of symbols of which the Khe Ta Laou
valley is the dominant one. It is a symbol of both impenetrable nature and
Vietnam itself. First, the symbolic significance which Del Vecchio renders to the
valley in the Prologue constitutes the entire mood of the novel. In it there is a
careful forewarning about man's forthcoming violation of the primitive jungle
valley which has remained intact throughout all history, maintaining "a stable
symbiotic balance." In a sense, Alpha's assault into the valley becomes a symbol
of man's struggle against nature (Myers, 1984: 124). The NVA soldiers are even
transformed into "ants." When Alpha is caught by enemy fire while waiting to be
evacuated at the end of the novel, Del Vecchio describes the scene, "It is as if
Alpha has ripped off an anthill" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 562). Indeed throughout the
operation, human enemies are hardly seen in the valley except in some sporadic
skirmishes. Furthermore, Del Vecchio writes, "the valley itself was a malicious
adversary" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 450).

Secondly, the valley is a symbol of the land of Vietnam itself. Alpha's
combat in the valley is one against the land itself. This metaphor of land as

enemy was already used by Tim O'Brien in his book *Going After Cacciato*. A VC Major in O'Brien's novel says to an American soldier whose squad is trapped in the tunnel complex, "The soldier is but the representative of the land; the land is your true enemy" (O'Brien, 1978: 86). Implied in his words is that America cannot win the war because the land itself cannot be beaten. Likewise, Del Vecchio suggests that the American presence in Vietnam with all its technological superiority will be futile, because its enemy is the land itself. In the earlier phase of the operation, American units pour enormous amounts of explosives into the jungle for preparation fire. But, Del Vecchio writes, "For all the explosive force and shrapnel it had received the jungle looked unscathed" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 156).

The metaphor of land as enemy becomes clearer in the tunnel episode. The "tunnel" is one of the significant metaphors representing the American dilemma in Vietnam (Mangold and Penycate, 1985: 100). It symbolizes the confusing nature of the Vietnam War. The entire valley appears to be interconnected with innumerable tunnel complexes. Alpha Company discovers one of them and tries to uncover it by blowing smoke into it. But for all their efforts to pump gas and fumes into it by using the biggest blower they have, there is not a sign of smoke rising. The implication deepens when Del Vecchio comments, "The hole accepted it all" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 298). Amid the soldiers' surprise at its incomprehensible vastness, Minh, the Vietnamese scout, points to the core of the nature of the Vietnam War, seeming to predict the future of American withdrawal: "I do not think we should try. If we find they are so extensive as you say, your government will withdraw. They will say Vietnam is a lost cause" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 303). His prediction comes true: America lost the

war as Alpha did. The violent conclusion of the operation – the withdrawal of Alpha from the valley by helicopters – is symbolic of the lost American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975. At the end of the novel, Alpha receives the enemy's all-out counterattack when the Company is waiting to be taken out from the valley center. In this incident, the wounded Egan and Brooks are left behind facing brutal deaths by approaching enemies, and a platoon leader is killed by his own sergeant who refuses to obey his order to defend the perimeter. This ending of Alpha's failure symbolizes the failure of America's mission in Vietnam.

As in many Vietnam War novels, the physical landscape is first described as a hellish environment. The Khe Ta Laou river valley is portrayed as "difficult to enter, hard to traverse" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 75), with trails leading "Almost straight down" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 434). Furthermore, the valley, which is "multiple shades of grey" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 434) carries thick, sticky fog and fetid odor, conditions that lead the soldier to wonder if "the valley itself was a malicious adversary" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 613).

Even more imitative than the physical descent into hell, and reminiscent of *Fields of Fire*, is the moral heart of darkness within the novel portrayed familiarly in the form of the traditional initiation story. The main theme of *The 13th Valley* is the loss of innocence which is portrayed through Chelini/Cherry's experience of war. Symbolically, the process of Chelini's initiation is that an innocent boy plunges into what he calls "virgin" jungle, loses his "cherry" and finally returns a man. "From that day on they called him Cherry and from the night of that day and on he thought of himself as Cherry"; thus begins the novel, and it ends with Cherry's complete transformation into a veteran hardened

enough to laugh off the deaths of his comrades (Del Vecchio, 1982: 1589). The statement "From that day on they called him Cherry and from the night of that day and on he thought of himself as Cherry" denotes innocence and newness. Even Cherry's name symbolizes a neophyte, a combat virgin, who must be initiated, and when he is finally indoctrinated into the world of war, De Vecchio speaks of Cherry as having had "his cherry busted" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 252). In this framework, the novel follows a traditional pattern of initiation added with Vietnam cliches. That is, within the Vietnam content, Del Vecchio's handling of Chelini's initiation is quite similar to Crane's treatment of Henry Fleming's. Like Henry Fleming, Cherry thinks of war in heroic terms.

The main part of Chelini's initiation is concerned with his psychologically overcoming his fear of combat, and yet, like so many Vietnam protagonists, Chelini frequently questions the morality of war. The novel is unique in that the protagonist and the author are not in according with each other in their view of initiation. Chelini is satisfied with his psychological transformation as an achievement of manhood, whereas the author tends to see it as a temporary retreat of the human psyche to the primitive state in time of war; an act which will not survive in peace time. This ambivalence constitutes the initiation of Chelini as well as the tone of the novel.

Chelini, a neophyte from an Italian-American family in Connecticut, has no particular motivation for going to Vietnam. All we know is that he allowed himself to be drafted because he wanted to "reestablish the family's honour" which, he thought, was debased by his draft evading brother (Del Vecchio, 1982: 2). As a wireman in the army, he decides to experience and learn about the war

without exposing himself to combat. Even so, like many common soldiers in American war novels, he is also a young adventurer imagining himself a hero charging across the field and a member of crusaders coming to aid the beseiged allies as has been in the World War II movies.

In Vietnam, Chelini is absurdly assigned to an infantry company though his MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) is wireman. Yet this assignment does not affect his attitude toward war. He positively accepts it and decides to learn the war as an infantryman. Chelini undergoes a similar psychological experience to Fleming in his socialization into "the new culture" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 89). In the company he is a "Cherry"; he becomes "a new cell" which will grow; he feels alienation from the old-timers who enjoy drinking beer, talking about their previous battles, and discussing war and politics; he deeply worries about the coming operation and about what his actions will be like in it (Del Vecchio, 1982: 86). Though he asks a soldier of how to act in combat, he is only told to do just what others do. Further, to Chelini, the way they are talking about war sounds totally absurd. Yet, Cherry decides, "I will know war, I will learn from these crazy men" who say "Death is not a sin and neither is killing" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 89).

Though he is unsure of himself at first, Chelini manages to survive his baptism of fire. After this experience, war to him does not seem to be so dangerous or bad. So, he concludes, "he was in combat. It *was* wonderful. It would be wonderful. It was all that simple" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 191). Yet Chelini's conclusion comes too early. As the operation continues, Chelini is caught between confidence and fear. Despite his vacillation between the two he

frequently succumbs to fear and panic. One day, Egan explodes at Chelini:

> "You're such a dumb fucking innocent Cherry, I can't hardly believe it.
> You ain't got o war brains at all. None. Zero." "I'm sorry," Cherry
> apologized sincerely. "I really thought I'd be okay at this. I didn't think
> I'd be scared" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 207).

One day on a night march through the jungle, Chelini and Silvers, with whom he has developed a buddy relationship, are so scared that they even exchange the addresses of their relatives to whom their personal possessions may be sent in case of their deaths.

Yet Chelini's encounter with death plays a decisive role in his transformation. In this regard, two incidents are important: one is his first killing of an NVA soldier and the other, the death of his buddy Leon Silvers. His act of killing leads him to question the morality in war and witnessing his buddy's death leads him to develop vindictiveness.One day on an ambush, Chelini detects an enemy soldier approaching his position. Though he feels temporarily panic-stricken, he regains his control and kills the soldier with precise firing. Del Vecchio describes the moment of his firing:

> The soldier moved forward another step and all thoughts vanished from
> Cherry's mind. Cherry's arms steadied, the soldier's nose rested above
> the front sight post of Cherry's M-16. The man stepped forward into
> clear view. Slowly, Cherry squeezed the trigger and a volley of eight
> rapid shots cracked from his weapon (Del Vecchio, 1982: 243).

His first killing of an enemy is praised by the old-timers especially for his

precision of firing. However, the incident makes him feel guilty and leads him to discuss the ethics of war with Egan. Here Chelini becomes a moral philosopher, like Goodrich, and Egan a realist, like Snake. The essential difference between them comes from their definition of "a combatant." Chelini sees the combatant as "a man" whereas Egan sees him as "a soldier."

> "I could a just nicked him. I killed him. I killed a man today."

> "You killed a soldier," Egan said softly. "Since when is a soldier a man?" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 254)

This short exchange of conversation points to the core of the ethics of war. The implications here may roughly be summed up in these terms: killing a man is murder, but killing a soldier is not; a man is a moral being, but a soldier is not; a man can be a soldier, but a soldier cannot be a man. In Vietnam War novels, the logic of a moralist position usually loses its strength in the face of necessity. According to Egan's logic, if American soldiers are "baby burners," the same is true of people back home who support and condone such killings by making weapons. Egan stresses the importance of survival and insists on Chelini's acceptance of being a soldier:

> "You'd be dead. Look asshole, this is a clean war out here. There's no villes, no women, no children. No civilians. You got friendly forces and enemy forces. There's no My Lais up here. When someone's killed he's a combatant. And whether he wanted to be here or not ass goina abide by the consquences."

> "Shee-it."

"That's the way it is, Breeze. Nice-en-clean. Nobody here but soldiers. Man to man. You beat your man today. Maybe he'll eat you tomorrow" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 255).

Since he kills the enemy soldier, Chelini becomes cynical, even to the point of conjuring up the campus phrase, "fighting for peace is like fucking for virginity" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 304).

Still Chelini is unable to accept his killing until he sees his best friend Leon Silvers killed beside him by enemy sniper fire. Ironically, Silvers used to comfort him by saying that "the first rule out here is survive. That means kill em before they kill you" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 329). Del Vecchio's description of his dead body is even more graphic than similar descriptions in the novels like *No Bugles, No Drums*, and *Fields of Fire*:

> There was a splat of blood in the center of Silvers' throat. Working quickly yet gently Doc lifted Leon's head. The neck no longer had a back. The bullet had entered through the soft flesh below Silvers' chin then tumbled and ripped its way out the nape of the neck carrying most of the cervical vertebrae, the surrounding muscle tissue, the trachea, esophagus, arteries, veins and a tremendous amount of blood (Del Vecchio, 1982: 356).

His death deeply affects Chelini. Silvers' death arouses in him an anger and hatred toward the enemy. Thinking about Silvers whose death he can hardly believe, Chelini vows revenge, "I'm goina kill every motherfuckin gook slope I see. For you, Leon, you poor bastard" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 388).

These experiences of killing and being killed (through his buddy's death) awaken Chelini; morally he becomes aware that neither the campus propaganda nor the government indoctrination applies in the jungle of Vietnam; psychologically he feels protected from the horrors of combat. Writing to his brother, Chelini undergoes a complete change. He enjoys viewing the enemy carnage caused by an artillery outburst; he courageously fights in a close combat, even saving the veteran Egan at the risk of his own life. He comes to realize combat camaraderie coming from sharing discomfort, death and victory. He feels he has seen the mythic domains of his deeper soul. Like Fleming Chelini finally enjoys his being "a mangod" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 428).

Yet Chelini goes further than Fleming in his transformation, following one of the main characteristics of Vietnam War novels – psychological disintegration. When we see him toward the end of the novel, Chelini is no longer a human being. He cuts the ears off a dead NVA soldier for his souvenir, and he brutally kills an enemy soldier who feebly begs for his life. A scene will suffice to show his complete dehumanization:

> Cherry charge the trench from below, his eyes blazing. He has enemy
> soldiers in his sights. He fires killing one. The other is fleeing. Cherry
> leaps. He is on top of the enemy. The soldier falls. He is small, lean,
> hard, but no match for Cherry. Cherry is on him gouging his eyes.
> "Chou Hoi," the enemy yells cries into Cherry's madly punching fists.
> The man gashes at Cherry defensively. Cherry is infuriated. He digs his
> fingers into the enemy's face. The soldier bites Cherry's hand. Cherry
> bites his face, the nose crushes, Cherry bites, mad-dog, bites and rips the

soldier's neck simultaneously thrusting his bayonet into the enemy stomach. Blood explodes in Cherry's mouth. He freezes. He feels Egan standing over him, staring at him (Del Vecchio, 1982: 556).

Chelini's combat performance arouses an awe and admiration among the old-timers. A conversation between Doc Johnson and Lt. Brooks seems to sum up the process of Chelini's transformation:

> "L-T. That Cherry. He gone nuts. He crazy, L-T. You can see it in his eyes. L-T, Cherry becomin a animal." Brooks looks at Doc and sighs, tired. "That potential exists in every man," Brooks says. He shakes his head. "The line between man and beast is very thin. He'll come out of it" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 571).

But there is no sign that Cherry is going to come out of what Lt. Brooks suggests is a temporary retreat. Despite Chelini's feelings of confidence and of achieving manhood, Del Vecchio's reaction to his transformation is negative. At the funeral service, Chelini sees two wounded comrades Egan and Brooks who are left behind dismissed as MIAs (Missing in Actions) when they are soon to be brutally killed by the approaching enemies. Yet "Cherry" Chelini has become hardened enough to laugh off such things, saying that "Fuck it, Don't mean . . ." (Del Vecchio, 1982: 589). In Del Vecchio's view, Chelini sense of achievement is an expression not only of his loss of innocence but of his psychological degeneration as well. However, Chelini's story is not over. The ending of Chelini's initiation, Del Vecchio seems to suggest, is the beginning of Egan's second tour: the hardened Chelini is going to be Egan, once a "Cherry" who has undergone the same process as Chelini's and become what he is.

According to William Plummer, Del Vecchio's characterization becomes too "glaring" because "In the course of things, 'Cherry' Chelini develops from sensitive plant haunted by his first kill to mad dog of war hacking off ears in his zeal to exterminate the brutes" (Plummer, 1982: 71) John Hellmann suggests that "it is Cherry's original guilt over his first kill that causes him to lose his moral center and to become twisted and reversed to the point where he can only think and act brutally" (Hellmann, 1986: 133).

Ironically, if any good comes out of Cherry's descent into madness, then perhaps it is Egan's realization of the monster that Cherry has been turned into by the war and the attitudes of the other soldiers. Egan himself is no stranger to combat, and his early war experiences are similar to those of Cherry. After learning to kill, Egan's own actions become savage. We learn that in one battle

> . . . he insanely charged the bunkers with fragmentation grenades. He
> destroyed two emplacements and killed four NVA soldiers. His thoughts
> began to slide backwards, to become primitive . . . He became the
> machine, hard and invulnerable (Del Vecchio, 1982: 21).

Daniel Egan's first appearance in the novel begins with his words "Don't mean nothin" addressed to Chelini who is protesting against his absurd assignment to an infantry company at the Division Replacement Station (Del Vecchio, 1982: 20). Egan is a tough platoon sergeant. But he was once also a neophyte, who after experiencing the ordeals of combat in Vietnam, "became the machine, hard and invulnerable" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 21). Now he is a veteran fighter as if he were "born for the jungle valley, raised for a jungle valley war" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 547). As a soldier points out, Egan's charging against the

enemy bunkers is so skilful and fierce that it even becomes a "beauty" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 22); he is a sharp-shooter who kills four enemies with four rounds; he makes a jungle vichyssoise (a type of soup) and beef béarnaise (sauce) out of C-ration. In a word, Egan is "a soldier's soldier, the boonierat" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 85). Yet, despite his similarities to Croft, Warden, and Snake in his soldiership, Egan is a college graduate having a degree in Engineering, the knowledge of which he puts into the discussion of war and politics. In this sense, Thomas Myers is right when he says that "both killer and erstwhile saint, Egan is a hybrid character, a unique Vietnam frontiersman standing midway between Cooper (James Fenimore) and Mailer and partaking of both" (Mayers, 1984: 129).

Egan's view of war is a good example representing the Vietnam War as a natural phenomenon. It is a curious mixture of masculine primitivism and nihilism. His view is based on two concepts: war is a testing ground of manhood, and war is caused by "war-like" human nature. These two concepts lead him to view war as both inevitable and natural.

Egan is a symbol of masculinity. He voluntarily enlists to learn the war. To Egan, war is a rite de passage that a man must go through. Like Snake and Lt. Hodges in *Fields of Fire*, Egan also believes that man's noblest moment is the one spent on the battlefields. Thus, to him, war is "good," "wonderful," and "beautiful":

> "War," Egan said forming his lips into a trumpet and sensuously blowing the word at Cherry. "They send you to the far corners of the earth. You hear the blasts of artillery and bombs. You get weapons,

helicopters. You can call all heaven down, all hell up, with hour radio, war. It's wonderful. It don't make a gnat's ass difference who the enemy is. Every man, once in his life, should go to WAR" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 146).

Egan loves war because in it he can see something of fundamental human passions longing for power, intensity, adventure, romance, and destruction. Egan enjoys the thrill of being alive among the many deaths. In war neither purpose nor cause matters; all that matters is fighting for fighting's sake. Thus, to him, wars are only fought between two opposing entities "us" and "them" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 146). Despite the horrible aspect of war, Egan thinks it "beautiful" not only because in it he finds himself enjoying carnage and destruction but also because he sees emerging on the battlefields human ideals such as solidarity, sacrifice, love, and responsibility.

Egan's view of war comes from his pessimism about human nature. Opposing the idea that human nature is essentially against war, Egan rather argues that "man's nature is intermittently warlike" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 490). Therefore, he says, war is "inevitable" in human society (Del Vecchio, 1982: 488). In a discussion with Lt. Brooks, Egan argues the inevitability of war from the technological and ecological point of view. That is, technological development leads to societal progress which brings population growth; the increase of population yields pressures which in turn stimulate man's "warlike" nature. Therefore, war has nothing to do with politics or ideology. "War's its own justification," Egan says to Brooks, "the only justification you need for Nam is we're doin it" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 490). At this point, Egan's view is not

different from those of Goodrich in *Fields of Fire* and Lt. Levine in *No Bugles,*
No Drums. The absence of larger ends in the Vietnam War forces them to
redefine the war in American terms. Here there is an echo of David M.
Kennedy's observation. Kennedy says: "Wilson's idealism was perfectly fitted
for these concepts of war when it figured the war in terms to the American mind
in such terms as 'a war for democracy, a war to end war, a war to protect
liberalism, a war to redeem barbarous Europe, a crusade" (Kennedy, 1980: 51).
College students were even offered a war issues course, presenting the war as "a
life-and-death struggle between democracy and autocracy, upon whose outcome
the future of civilization depended" (Kennedy, 1980: 57). John Aldridge has also
observed that "many Americans were sentimentally affected by the patriotic
slogans and catchwords…They left colleges and jobs to find, in what seemed a
glorious adventure, escape from boredom and a cause worthy of belief"
(Aldridge, 1951: 3).

Egan goes even further: to him, war becomes a "natural state," war is an
inalienable part of human life. Earlier in the novel, Egan retorts to his fellow
soldiers who argue for peace:

> "Shit. Maybe we oughta eliminate all the ways to die," Egan snarled.
> "No more war. No more cars. No more fires or heart attacks. We'll
> outlaw all that. Pass a law. Nobody can die on Sundays. Then everybody
> can get cancer and sit around and watch their bodies rot. War ain't so
> bad. It's natural, a natural state. Why is everybody fuckin with nature?"
> (Del Vecchio, 1982: 89).

Though Egan's view of war is severely limited, it is the conclusion at which Lt.

Brooks also finally arrives at the end of the novel after his persistent attempt to define the cause of war.Lt. Rufus Brooks is highly competent as company commander and well liked by his men. Unlike those authoritarian commanders in many novels of previous wars, he persuades his men, befriends them, and listens to them with a belief that "every man has the capacity for very complex thought" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 34). Rufus Brooks, Alpha Company's college educated lieutenant, is a democratizing force who works hard to see that his men are treated fairly by viewing them as individuals who can be instrumental in assisting them in his decision making process. The type of officer who instructs his men by example, Brooks does not assign his men jobs that he would not do himself, and he provides a positive viewpoint for them to follow. In one passage, Del Vecchio demonstrates the capability of Brooks to be a superior officer:

> Brooks maneuvered his unit into and out of difficult enemy areas without sustaining casualties. His men CAed [combat assaulted] into the middle of firefight and no one was wounded. They were inserted onto hot LZ, red smoke, their birds would take fire and their LZ would be booby-trapped and they would come through unscathed. Other units would come in behind them and a sniper would blow one of them away or a pop-up mine would level a squad. He brought out the best in his men (Del Vecchio, 1982: 33, 34).

If there is one man in Alpha Company who has a clear insight into the effects of the war on man, it is Brooks.

However, Brooks is more concerned with the causes of war than with the changes that war imposes upon man. In fact, his interest in the philosophy of the

war would truly be a strong point of the novel if integrated more convincingly with the novel's main action. In between the long marches and the scenes of combat, Brooks leads the men into lengthy discussion of reasons for warfare, discussions which unfortunately seem unnatural and contain too much unconvincing dialogue. The enlisted men are engaged in academic discussions about any battlefield.

We notice these academic discussions also in Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*. The novelist tells the story of the coming of the Americans through the eyes of his narrator, Thomas Fowler. The quiet American Alden Pyle looks to Fowler as though he had just walked out of some campus lecture hall. Serious and extremely self-righteous, with his crew cut and his "wide campus gaze", Pyle seems "incapable of harm". But appearances prove deceptive, and Pyle's innocence proves anything but harmless,as Fowler soon discovers. At first Fowler's instincts tell him to protect Pyle, but then he learns "that there was greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection, when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it; innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm" (Greene, 1955: 40). "God save us always",Fowler remarks, "from the innocent and good" (Greene, 1955: 15). Pyle as a State Department man for "secret" mission has learned nothing about the world except what he has read in books and heard in lecture halls, and he has come to Saigon armed only with academic abstractions. This kind of abstraction is also noticed in Chelini of *The 13th Valley*. Fowler repeatedly chastises the quiet American for believing that he can shape the world according to his own "romantic" ideas; and for being so self-righteous about his right to shape the world. Pyle's problem in the novel is perceptual: to

him the world and other human lives are raw material to be manipulated according to his abstractions. But even more importantly, his arrogance and insensibility to human life lead him to use any means of political power at his diposal, including violence, to create his own reality. Pyle's failure, and the failure of all quiet Americans like Brook, Celini, results finally from the absence of moral vision – the failure to imaginatively and sympathetically identify with others. As Fowler realizes, Pyle proves "incapable of conceiving the pain he might cause others" (Greene, 1955: 74). Just as Pyle imprisons himself in his own abstractions, American officials were never able to free themselves from their own propaganda, so that the war came to seem as insane abyss.

Brooks advocates that the potential for war is in each individual, but is ultimately a cultural phenomenon. The only way to prevent future wars, he believes, is to understand why war exists in the first place. In contrast to Lieutenant Hodges in *Fields of Fire* who accepts the presence of war, Lieutenant Brooks questions the reasons for such conflict. Is war against human nature? Do wars exist to control population? Each soldier has his own view of the reality of the situation. For example, Egan,like Lieutenant Hodges in *Fields of Fire*, believes that "Every man, once in his life, should go to WAR" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 146), that "'War's its own justification'" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 490), whereas Brooks questions the need of every generation to have a war. Why must history repeat its past mistakes on a larger scale? After months of fighting in Vietnam, however, Lt. Brooks suffers from what is called "Nam Syndrome" – a sense of loss of innocence, a break up with his wife, sexual impotence, and a sense of being alienated from homefolks. Through Brooks' conflict with his wife, Del Vecchio points out a problem that the soldiers felt came not from actual war

activity, which soldiers in the rear perhaps never saw, but from the separation from their spouses and other loved ones that was imposed upon them by the distance between the United States and Vietnam and by the alienation that they felt from others due to their service in an unpopular war. According to Lieutenant Brooks, women leave their men in all wars, but they particularly did so in Vietnam:

> The story was as old as mankind, as old as war: the Dear John story. for American soldiers in Vietnam the story was probably more common than for GIs in earlier wars. The war was unpopular. Could any soldier really expect something more from his woman? The war was immoral, wasn't it?, with the indiscriminate killing, the bombings, the napalm, the defoliants. By extension then, were not the soldiers immoral too? Could anyone expect any righteous woman to stand by a barbaric man? By 1970 it had almost become the patriotic duty of a wife or girl friend to leave her man if he went to Vietnam (Del Vecchio, 1982: 100).

This dilemma is illustrated by the conflict between Rufus and his own wife Lila, whose relationship disintegrates after the two are reunited during Brooks' R and R(Rest and Relaxation) trip to Hawaii. Lila has not even told her stateside friends that she is married to a soldier in Vietnam because denial "almost seemed the patriotic thing to do" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 435). Lila's hostility toward the war is further illustrated by her refusal to listen to Rufus' stories about Vietnam. When he tries to tell her about the men he leads and his experiences in the war, she reacts with indifference or anger. Lila files for divorce prior to the end of Rufus' tour of duty.

Brooks develops "a semantic determinant theory of war" which, he thinks, is "the most important lesson" he may learn from Vietnam (Del Vecchio, 1982: 105). While leading Alpha's assault into the valley center, Lt. Brooks, an MA student of Philosophy at Berkeley, holds the bull sessions in which his key members participate in active debates over war and politics. Del Vecchio's key question through Brooks' search for the causation of war, it seems to me, is to ask whether war is, in Quincy Wright's words, "deterministic" or "voluntaristic" (Wright, 1967: 1). That is to say, is war a natural phenomenon determined by universal conditions of human life, or is it an "act of free choice" to achieve the particular ends of the various states? Is it then inevitable or arbitrary? And is it unavoidable or avoidable?

The bull sessions produce a variety of perspectives: Chelini, a BS in Psychology, explains war from the psychological point of view, arguing that war, an expression of man's retreat to animal instincts, is biologically determined; Egan, as mentioned above, says that war is inevitable because of warlike human nature itself; El Paso, who majored in History and Law, analyzes the cause of war from the legal point of view, arguing that the Vietnam War is a product of the American President's arbitrary use of power; Jax, from the sociological point of view, criticizes American social deformities such as ethnocentrism, class conflict, or economic disparities causing conflict and war; and Minh, the Vietnamese intellectual, from an Oriental philosophical viewpoint, sees the war as a part of the movement of the natural universe which is not static, saying that "Things happen. People die. That is the flow of reality" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 502).

186

Lt. Brooks' theory of war is a synthetic product of the discussions. Both from their various viewpoints and from his experience in Vietnam he concludes: "War is predetermined from the format of languages and culture. If we could unstructure the language then restructure it on a less rigid format . . . see? War would not be conceived in our speech" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 503). According to Brooks' thesis, "An Inquiry into Personal, Racial and International Conflict," war is a product of language and thought patterns which are determined by our cultural upbringing. That is, war is caused because "we think ourselves into war" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 506). Thus the way to end war, Brooks suggests, is to restructure "the antecedents" in our minds inherited from generation to generation – the violent lexicons relating to war (Del Vecchio, 1982: 506). In the novel, it is as if Del Vecchio tries to add a new theory of war – the rhetorical point of view – to the study of human war.

To return to the question asked above, Brooks' view of war is definitely "deterministic." Despite his suggestion of the way to end war, Brooks knows that war cannot be avoidable because the restructuring of human languages (here English) is almost impossible. In the end, Brooks comes to accept the conclusion which Egan has suggested: war is inevitable and natural as long as "people" exist. In a climactic scene toward the end of the novel, Lt. Brooks resignedly says to Egan lying wounded and immobile:

> Maybe you got it right. What causes war? People cause war. People being people. It's that simple (Del Vecchio, 1982: 575).

And he continues,

> When there are no more people . . . then there will be no more war. War

is part of being human. It's like love and hate and breathing and eating. And living and dying. Just like you said, Danny. "It just is." It is natural to strive for peace and not to achieve it. But Danny, it does mean something. The striving means something (Del Vecchio, 1982: 575).

Minh, the Vietnamese scout, for whom war has always been an integral part of life, feels that it is best to accept war, that perhaps even good can come from it. If anything, the Vietnamese have progressed and learned from having access to American technology. Minh also points out while Americans respect and obey civil laws they do not have inherent moral laws inside them. American culture lacks the development of "inside principles" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 503). As a result, the answers to American problems are "rhetorically achieved" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 503), an idea that leads Brooks to conclude that "War is predetermined from the format of languages and culture. If we could unstructure the language then restructure it on a less rigid format...see? War would not be conceived in our speech" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 503). Del Vecchio does not provide an answer to the issue of war, but instead explores the subject from multi-layered viewpoints in an effort to make us think about the larger issues involved. Why does war even exist in the first place, for example?

Each of the soldiers has his own method of dealing with the reality of the war's existence. The method used by the more intellectual soldiers, such as Silvers and Brooks, is to actually write down their ideas about conflict. For instance, Silvers keeps a journal in which he muses about the morality of the war and other issues in random comments. Brooks, on the other hand, writes a lengthy discussion about conflict, specifically "AN INQUIRY INTO

PERSONAL, RACIAL, AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT". In this thesis, he studies the different layers of reality that have emerged from the war, such as the ineffectiveness of language to express the reality in Vietnam, the political systems that influence conflict, the individual soldiers' views for the reasons for conflict, marriage as a personal conflict (Brooks is experiencing marital problems himself), and the American need to define the war in terms of conflict and the damage that such a view causes. The solution to end war, concludes Brooks, would be to "alter our perceptions of reality" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 564) from man's birth so that peace becomes easier for man to engage in than war, something that is easier said than done.

Through the character of Minh, Del Vecchio also includes a perspective of the war that has been the most overlooked – the impact of the war on the Vietnamese people themselves. Timothy J. Lomperis argues that even novels containing Asian dimensions do not probe deeply enough into the Vietnamese aspects of the war (1987: 78). As Lomperis points out, Vietnam "was also a clash of culture, ideologies, and societies in different stages of historical development. How these larger themes have been played out in the United States has received some attention in the literature, but their play in Vietnam, by and large, has not" (Lomperis, 1987: 78).

Del Vecchio perhaps transcends this problem better than some authors. Minh, the Vietnamese translator for Alpha Company, participates actively in Brooks' philosophical discussions, and through Minh, the soldiers learn of aspects of Vietnamese culture and history that are necessary to an understanding of the war. This cultural and historical dimension is revealed in Minh's

189

commentary on Vietnamese life. The war in Vietnam goes further back in time than American involvement; before the threat of communism there was the child slavery of colonialism. Vietnam has been devastated by war for years, and the Vietnamese both want and resent American intervention. As Minh remarks, the Americans are needed for supplies, moral strength, and comradeship, but the actual presence of American soldiers is unwanted. In addition, the American dollar and standards of living have inflated the Vietnamese currency and affected the economy. "Before a man could make 1000 piasters a month and feed his family" Minh states. "Your money comes and prices go up. Now he makes 10,000 piasters a month and he must steal to even feed himself" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 304). At the same time, Minh sees the ambiguity of the situation, that in spite of its detrimental effects American involvement can also be positive. When asked if he accepts a war that has almost continuously ravaged his country, Minh replies:

> I can do nothing else but accept it. It is. Perhaps it is not all evil we go to war. America sends her technology to my country and we learn and we will never again be so backward. May be this war is good (Del Vecchio, 1982: 502).

It is obvious, though, that Minh does not totally trust American involvement. By the end of the novel he feels that the Americans he is serving with have started to view him as a "gook" or North Vietnamese. Minh faces a real dilemma: if he stays with the Americans, he fears they may eventually kill him, but if he tries to join the Viet Cong, he may also be killed, maybe even tortured first. His misjudgement of his colleagues perhaps indicates that the ambiguity the Americans feel toward the

Vietnamese is also felt by the South Vietnamese toward the Americans. When Minh is killed in combat, the American soldiers try desperately to revive him, even giving him artificial respiration. It is a sad fact of human communication that Minh is left unaware of their respect for him and their loyalty toward him.

The-heart-of-darkness motif becomes most intrusive, perhaps, at the novel's conclusion. When the soldiers reach the heart of the valley, it is obvious that they have symbolically descended into the lowest reaches of hell. The physical landscape at the base of the valley reminds us of Dante's "Inferno" even more so than do other aspects of the novel. As well as being surrounded by mist, Alpha Company must travel a trail made of "thickslick mud" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 526) and must lie in a "foul quagmire" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 526). In this "remote rotting valley of death" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 543), "The valley stench clogged their throats like sputum in the throat of a derelict" (Del Vecchio 513). Furthermore, "The entire valley floor was wet swamp" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 574), and the knoll in the valley was covered as with "thick undergrowth" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 613). Like Dante and Virgil in *The Inferno*, Alpha Company must cross rivers and climb cliffs, and also like the shades in hell, they feel as if crossing the river means the inability to return to the land from which they came. "Ain't none of us gonna come back we cross that river again" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 590), comments one soldier. In the men's disorientation with time, we are additionally reminded of Dante's difficulty to distinguish time in his funnel deep beneath Jerusalem. According to Del Vecchio,

> For days they [Alpha Company] had lost themselves in thorn thickets and beneath mist. For days they had paid no attention to time. They had

become disoriented. Time had lost its sequential pace. Beneath the mist day and night lost contrast. The bonnierats slept when the sky was coal black and when it was slate gray. They moved with equal ease day or night. Within their sections they pulled guard in shifts, ate in shifts, slept in shifts.Each shift lasted no more than two hours. Had they been on a spaceship with night or far beneath the sea with no day they would have been equally time disoriented (Del Vecchio, 1982: 577).

Several events take place in the valley which contribute further to the idea of the war as a descent into a heart of darkness. First, the soldiers fight a massive destructive battle with the Viet Cong when they discover that the knoll at the base of the valley hides an NVA stronghold. Uncovering the enemy base is, as one soldier states, like "taking the top of an anthill" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 616). During this battle, many of Alpha Company's best men are either killed or seriously wounded, and their rescue is made impossible when as American helicopter explodes, turning the valley into a raging "ball of fire" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 634).

The battle at the novel's conclusion is rather anticipated because the reader has been led to envision such a climactically hellish scene from the beginning of the text. Del Vecchio relies heavily on the words "descent" and "descend", making periodic comments such as "From there until they reached their objective eleven days away the inertia of their forward motion would keep them in motion, never stopping, never slowing, gradually accelerating in their spiral descent into hell" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 287) and "During the descent to the valley floor Brooks was plagued with doubt" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 512). In fact, as Brooks leads his men into the valley, he comments, " Step by step. Down into

a tiny hell I struggle to go. May the gods pardon me for leading seventy-five men into this inferno" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 512).

Of the men who are killed or wounded, Egan's fate in particular is predictable. Del Vecchio includes a series of dreams that Egan has in which a Vietnamese "sapper" lowers a bayonet closer and closer to Egan's chest. When Egan last dreams of the "sapper", it is clear that his death is imminent:

> Then darkness and in the darkness the sapper. The star twinkled on the silver machete in his hand. It glittered on the blade as the dark form raised the huge knife higher, higher, cocked his arm and struck. Egan tried to move. He was immobilized, trapped in the poncho. The machete hit his face, it hit him across his eyes. Now he watched it from outside his body. The motion slowed. The blade severed his nose, his eyes, impacting on his brain slicing through severing the top half of his head cleanly (Del Vecchio, 1982: 593-94).

One also senses that Brooks' remark that "this is the last time. This is the last time I will lead an infantry company" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 606) refers to more than the fact that Brooks' year-long tour of duty is almost officially over in terms of military obligation.

As one would expect, the men's actions become more demonic as they descend further into the valley. Alpha Company looks forward to the battle, cleaning their weapons with "hate" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 512). When the battle begins, the men, although afraid, fight savagely, firing and leaping at the enemy. Prior to the end of the novel, the act of fratricide is mentioned rarely at all, and no one in Alpha Company thinks of killing his commander. However, by the climactic

battle, one sergeant murders a lieutenant in cold blood when he does not wish to obey an order that is given to him in combat. Sergeant McQueen's face becomes "An ugly mask of hate" as he "lowers his M-16, squeezes the trigger and puts three rounds into Lt.Larry Caldwell's heart" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 635). The deeper the men descend into the valley, the more inhuman their actions become.

Within the chaos in the valley we are led to a vision of what Cherry has become in his initiation in the war. When the Americans are far outnumbered by the enemy and must make their escape, they can only leave by abandoning their wounded and dead. Cherry at first acts heroically by trying to save Egan, but is pulled onto an evacuation helicopter by the other men who realize that there is no time for bravery. The other soldiers cry or vomit because they had to leave their comrades behind to endure torture or death from the Viet Cong, but Cherry, who just seconds before had tried to save a human life, now reacts coldly, "breathing hard. He looks at Jax. He says at him, a smirk on his face. 'Fuck it'. He burst out laughing. 'Don't mean nothi'" (Del Vecchio, 1982: 637). His actions illustrate what his initiation into the world of war means – he can exhibit attempted heroism and human emotion in one breath and display utter nihilism in the next. When a service is held for the dead and missing, Cherry is the only soldier who does not cry, and the others stop him before he can once again echo his nihilistic battlecry: "'Fuck it. Don't mean nothin'".

Despite its complexities, the cause of the war in Vietnam is reduced to such a simple dictum: "war is part of being human". Here I refer to World War I American novelist Dos Passos's Preface to his 1945 edition of *One Man's Initiation: 1917*. He writes: "To us, the European war of 1914-18 seemed a

horrible monstrosity, something outside of the normal order of things like an epidemic of yellow fever had never been heard of before. The boys who are fighting these present wars got their first ideas of the world during the depression years. From the time they first read the newspapers they drank in the brutalities of European politics with their breakfast coffee" (Dos Passos, 1920: 36-37). And he continues.

> War and oppression in the early years of this century appeared to us like stinking slums in a city that was otherwise beautiful and good to live in blemishes that skill and courage would remove. To the young men of today these things are inherent deformities of mankind. If you have your club foot you learn to live with your club foot. That does not mean they like the dust and the mud and the fatigue and agony of war or the oppresiion of man by man any better than we did. But the ideas of these things are more familiar (Dos Passos, 1920: 36-37).

Like Dos Passos, James Baldwin, though he does not refer to war novels in particular, alludes to the process of war's internalization in the society since the First World War in these terms: "During World War I, we were able to be angry at the atrocities committed in the name of the Kaiser; but it was scarcely possible in World War II to be angry over the systematic slaughter of six million Jews; nor did our performance at Nuremberg do anything but muddy the moral and legal waters. In short by the time of World War II, evil had entered the American Eden, and it had come to stay" (Baldwin, 1962: 1,38). More concretely, after finding that "most men in all services in World War II accepted the war as they might have accepted an earthquake" and that even their rebellions

were not directed toward the war itself but toward the social discrepancies justified in the name of war. Malcolm Cowley concludes that "the novelists write as if they were wholly immersed in the war and as if, instead of being an exterior event to describe, it had become an inner condition of their lives" (Cowley, 1954: 27-29). Therefore, the World War II novelists "could neither escape nor protest and necessarily used war as an environment much like any other for their social . . . dramas (Cooperman, 1967: 237). In an article "Why Men Love War", William Broyles, a Vietnam veteran offers a reasonable account: "The love of war stems for the union deep in the core of our being, between sex and destruction, beauty and horror, love and death. War may be the only way in which most men touch the mythic domains in our soul. It is, for me at some terrible level the closest thing to what childbirth is for women: the initiation into the power of life and death. It is like lifting off the corner of the universe and looking at what's underneath. To see war is to see into the dark heart of things, that no man's-land between life and death, or even beyond" (Broyles, 1984: 61).

This is the reason why Lt. Hawkins of William Turner Hugget's *Body Counts* (1973) loves war, saying that "there is no greater joy than in battle victory, no greater joy in all the war" (Hugget, 1973: 431); this is the reason why Lt. Hodges of *Fields of Fire*, despite his regret for his loss of innocence, cannot think of life without having such "terribly exciting" experience (Webb, 1978: 172); and this is the reason why Daniel Egan in *The 13th Valley* views war as "wonderful" and "beautiful" (Vecchio, 1982: 146).

In Del Vecchio's novel as well as other Vietnam War novels, war is in a broad sense a natural human phenomenon. As I have said earlier, war is

internalized into the human being as if it were an integral part of himself. Thus, especially in Del Vecchio's novel, there are implications that any effort to eliminate war is only futile and that attempts to probe for the cause of war will end up with nothing except for the knowledge that the human being himself is the source of evil.

Conclusion

War and Literature alike, Paul Fussell observes, are profoundly traditional activities. Every war, in at least its early stages, tends to "replay elements of the preceding war". Every soldier tends to assimilate his experience in terms of the last war "he knows anything about" (Fussell, 1975: 314). Similarly, literature is remarkably traditional in its epistemological function. There meanings are invariably proposed in terms of literary supremacy. In the case of World War I, the writer found himself faced with the problem of assimilating the unprecedented events of modern mass warfare. The World War I novelists' response to the war is basically an aesthetic one and their moral judgements arise from their concepts of beauty arising from their different views of culture. Thus, to these writers, the two concepts – culture and beauty – are the important criteria of their moral considerations. To them, the concept of beauty depends upon the question of whether it is right or wrong to defend the established culture in a war conceived as a cultural crisis. In this respect, the main crux of this type of morality is how the war novelists equate their respective concepts of beauty with their moral ideal in relation to the war. The older writers see the sacrifice for defending civilization as moral beauty in which they find the ultimate value of human dignity. The younger ones see it as morally wrong because they find the source of evil in the civilization for which they were told to fight. Instead, these younger writers find moral beauty in their freedom from the traditional culture and in their search for a new world of values and order. As shown in *Three Soldiers*, the affirmation or rejection of the established cultural values serves as the standard of the moral ideals for the World War I novelists as they portray their war experiences.

World War II serves as a catalyst for the war novelists to realize the moral reality of society and its institutions as revealed in the military organization. In their novels system (specially the military system) becomes the criterion of their moral judgements. War seems to serve only as an appropriate tool for solving the conflict between the individual and the system occurring in the problems of military command. In these novels, war is not fought with the enemy out on the battlefield but with the "enemy" within the military organisation who holds enormous power that oppresses the individual. At the heart of their morality, the World War II novelists focus on the conflict between the individual's insistence on his rights as a man and the institutional demand of compliance upon him as an organization man. In *The Naked and the Dead* Mailer implies that it is absurd to condone the system in the name of war because winning the war means another victory of the system at the cost of the individual. In *From Here to Eternity* the system is not necessarily a repressive tool of an evil society. Jones views it as a social organization with which the individual should agree whether he likes it or not.

While beauty and system are the respective moral criteria of the World War I and World War II writers, the moral criterion of the Vietnam War writers is the individual's psychological transformation wrought by war. Because of the absurd moral reality of the war and because of the absence of larger ends the Vietnam War is reduced to a purely individual matter – the war as a mere game of survival. The war in Vietnam is primarily viewed as a simple biological or instinctual struggle between two opposing human entities. Thus, the question of good or bad in the Vietnam War novels is asked not primarily about the war or the system but about the individual himself and his loss of innocence in his

ordeals of combat: some novelists see this process as a sign of moral disintegration.

Emerging from each of the five novels covered in this study is a sense of Vietnam as but the latest adaptation of Northrop Frye's "demonic vegetable world" (1976: 112), reinforcing certain structural as well as moral parallels between those novels and a work such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. An apparently unprecedented experience is once again being included under a known type. The protagonist of the Vietnam War novel finds himself plunged into a quest modeled remarkably after those associated with medieval romance. Fussell, describes the familiar archetypal pattern by saying:

"The protagonist, first of all, moves forward through successive stages involving miracles and dangers towards a crucial test... The landscape is 'enchanted', full of 'secret murmurings and whispers'. The setting in which 'perilous encounters' and testing take place is 'fixed and isolated', distinct from the settings of the normal world... There are only two social strata: one is privileged and aloof, while the other, more numerous, is 'colourful but more usually comic or grotesque'. . . . Finally, those engaged in these hazardous, stylised pursuits become 'a circle of solidarity', 'a community of the elect'" (Fussel, 1975: 350).

Unlike the previous two American wars of the 20th century i.e., World War I and World War II, with their frequent large-scale battles and clearly defined front lines, Vietnam was a small-unit war lacking a definite frontier. A majority of the soldiers that we have encountered in the selected novels viewed the struggle from an individual rather than a unit perspective. Surviving, not

winning, became an overriding concern, especially as the war dragged on. Certainly, the primary goal of the common soldiers became more and more disillusioned with their experience in Vietnam and they frequently questioned the purposes and progress of the conflict, with their diminishing morale. Traditional war stories often tell of some warriors' difficulties in returning home from the battlefield as they carry the physical and psychological scars of combat and struggle to adjust quickly to strange civilian life. The Vietnam veterans suffered survivor guilt, feelings of alienation, a nostalgia for the war, unresolved questions about the meaning and validity of the conflict, and nightmares about the horrors of war. Their aftermath stage was particularly traumatic. For these troubled individuals, psychologists have labeled their post-war emotional and psychological reactions as Post-Vietnam Syndrome (PVS) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Victorious American soldiers had returned from World War I and World War II to victory parades, thanks and respect. These wars, especially World War II had a positive image, and the soldiers who fought in them were embraced as honourable men. Vietnam veterans encountered a highly charged atmosphere of hostility, fear or suspicion. There were anti-war protests across the country. Also, because television news brought this war into American homes on a nightly basis, many Americans found the reports as well as the war disturbing: death, destruction, atrocities, and little apparent progress. As Herzog puts it "a widely accepted notion was that American involvement in Vietnam and the conduct of American soldiers had given war a bad name" (Herzog, 1992: 57).

Whatever else the Americans have done with Vietnam, they have

certainly not put it behind them. Everywhere in the Third World where the remotest prospect of American intervention in some local conflict looms, the ghost of Vietnam again and again casts its shadow. Today the "lessons" of Vietnam are invoked by both sides in the debate over the proper extent of American involvement in the Gulf War, and Afganistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq. People draw lessons from memories, from the set of images which stay with them the longest. Some, with Ronald Regan, remember Vietnam as a "noble crusade", while others like Chomsky and Said regard the war as a "heinous crime" (Lomperis, 1987: 3). World War I is over; the Korean War is forgotten; World War II is a historical epic; but Vietnam still festers twenty-seven years after, as "the war that won't go away". The energy crisis, the national debt, the ticking international debt time bomb, September 11, Middle East terrorism, ethnic troubles, and other distractions of our time have not been strong enough to extinguish American memories of the Vietnam conflict.

This war was not only fought against the enemy soldier; it was also waged against the elements – heat, rain, and cold; against the land – jungle, elephants, grass, rice paddies, rainforests, mosquitoes, and leeches, dust and mud; and even against the civilian population. American soldiers who for the most part did not understand the Vietnamese language or culture, often found themselves fighting an unseen enemy easily assimilated into the towns, villages and hamlets. As a result they had difficulty in deciding whether Vietnamese civilians, including women and children, were friends, foes, innocent bystanders, indifferent observers, or active participants in the war. Rules of engagement were ambiguous. Was a farmer by day a Vietcong at night? Was a quiet village a support-base for a Vietcong Unit? Was any running Vietnamese a fair target? The

results of this confusion were often disastrous for both groups: innocent civilians killed by callous or confused American soldiers and sympathetic Americans killed by innocent-looking civilians. The guilt, moral dilemmas, brutality, and darkness of the human spirit emerging from these confrontations haunt the novelists discussed in this study.

The Vietnam War novel, because of individual variations, reflects an unconscious borrowing of the medieval romance pattern as it has passed down to the writer through countless personal narratives and novels of modern warfare since World War I. But the romance pattern of the Vietnam War novel is inevitably an ironic romance quest for enlightenment in the wake of lost innocence and disillusionment.

The protagonist of the Vietnam War novel progresses along an almost Blakean path from innocence and trust to disillusionment and despair and finally on to a higher or reorganised innocence. The protagonist finds the war as much a threat to his belief and his values as to his physical survival. At the centre of each of the novels is a sense of innocent trust betrayed. It would be an overstatement to imply that any of the central characters are tricked or even forced to participate in the war. O'Brien's Paul Berlin is a draftee, but he in the end goes willingly, viewing military service as an obligation. He, however, considers himself to have been inadequately prepared and fundamentally misled in some way as the war begins to disturb his most deeply-held convictions. Webb's Goodrich thinks excessively about the war's apparent lack of fairness and order as well as over his inability to reconcile the conduct of the war with his enlightened moral standards. Hasford's Joker likewise feels manipulated and exploited by an institution that

would use him for its own aims but which denies his deepest needs. After his first kill, Joker reports, he gave up trying to understand and agreed to its violence. To paraphrase his own words, Joker became what he did. Finally, Paul Berlin's imaginative journey betrays his anxious attempts to reconcile his trust in those who sent him with his disillusionment of finding the war an aimless game of "pin the tail on the Asian donkey" (O'Brien, 1978: 95) in which the players could locate neither the tail nor the donkey.

What emerges from the novels is hypocritical and volatile war. The search and destroy strategy mocks the professed goal of winning hearts and minds, and none of the characters are quite certain how to pursue such a confused goal given the maddening hesitant and the ambiguous nature of American allies. In the absence of larger ends, the ends became means in and of themselves in the Vietnam of the novel. One of the first lessons the protagonist must learn upon reporting to Vietnam is the need for ruthlessness if he is to pass the test and survive. "Look twice and you're dead, Senator" (Webb, 1978: 85), another of Webb's characters warns a very careful Goodrich. Webb's Goodrich fails to heed this lesson of the war, ultimately paying the price for stubbornness. Hashford's Joker not only heeds the lesson; he internalises it, reacting with efficiency to each challenge. Even a character as gentle as Paul Berlin at least resigns himself to the savagery, accepting Sidney Martin's death without judgement as simply "a waste among infinitely wider wastes" (O'Brien, 1978: 7). The war occasions a fall from innocence with the realization that the rules of civilized conduct and the principles of conventional morality simply do not apply. The importance of survival becomes the only victory and the only common goal.

204

The great test faced by the protagonist of the Vietnam War novel is that of maintaining his integrity within an amoral universe. The crucial test in the medieval romance takes place in an "enchanted" landscape isolated and "distinct from the setting of the normal world". In the literature, as it did in the real life, Vietnam inevitably takes on mythical attitude. The protagonist of the Vietnam War novel finds himself transported to a dangerous jungle inhabited by an alien and impenetrable culture. To add to the protagonist's confusion, the setting outwardly exhibits the charm of a pastoral land of peace and happiness, but beneath the appearance, lies a threatening reality. The civilian populace proves treacherous, American allies undependable and ambivalent.

The psychology of war in these novels views the conflict in Vietnam as a natural phenomenon. This concept of war is closely related to the distinctive aspect of war in Vietnam in which the moral deadlock that the individual soldier comes to cope with leads him to view the war as caused solely by the factors inherent in human nature and in the nature of things itself. This natural phenomenon is opposed to the concept of "arbitrary" or "voluntaristic" which was applicable to the war phenomena of World War I and II. The arbitrary or voluntaristic view of war is based on the idea that "embarkation upon war is an act of free will, and its consequences change the course of history" (Wright, 1967: 115). From this point of view, World Wars I and II were fought for the particular ends, interests, or political objectives of the various states. Though the same can be said of the Vietnam War, yet the dominant fictional image of the Vietnam War is not of one initiated by the voluntaristic act but of one coming from unavoidable elements, both human and non-human. In every sense, war is seen as inevitable and fatalistic.

That the combatants in these novels believe that the Vietnam War is a natural phenomenon comes from the sense that it had no justifiable causes. To the American soldier, it appears that killing or be killed takes place for nothing. In his view, neither the political propaganda nor the campus catchwords apply to the bushes and jungles in Vietnam. All that matters is that before being killed by a sniper, he should kill the enemy first. Thus, the war appears to be a game of survival between two opposing human entities, "us" and "them", both of whom happen to be there in Vietnam.This view of war is frequently by the major characters in the Vietnam War novels discussed in this study. The absence of the justifiable causes leads the American soldiers to see the war in purely human terms. To them, war is always fought among human beings, not for purposes; it is an expression of man's instinct for self-preservation and his aggressive and warlike instincts.

Vietnam exists in the novels, both past and present, as metaphor for the cultural disorder that was general throughout the sixties. The war in the novels is invariably made to reflect back on the Americans and on the cultural crisis that the war occasioned. The war not only threatened their lives; it called into question their way of life. Each of the five novels acknowledges in some sense a peculiar form of American arrogance for which the war stands. Paul Berlin's underground Viet Cong control room in *Going after Cacciato* foretells American inability to conceive of such success as the Vie Cong enjoyed without a technological base. Webb's *Fields of Fire* and Hashford's *The Short-Timers* exploit the symbolism of real life, using tanks, in one case, to symbolize the irrelevance of American technology, and, in the other, the promise ingrained in that technology for careless misdirection and abuse. "There is a point of View',

Michael Herr writes, "that says that the United States got involved in Vietnam, commitments and interests aside, simply because we thought it would be easy" (Herr, 1977: 95). Once again, however, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* offers the most valuable medium for perceiving the events of the war.

The story of Conrad speaks far beyond its content, displaying the essence of Western cultural arrogance. In Vietnam, the Americans attempted to bring technology to bear upon a problem that did not admit a technological solution. The Americans did, as the novels affirm, believe the task would be easy given their vast technological resources. But when it proved more difficult than anyone had anticipated, they gave into doubt.

Predictably, the Vietnam War novels until now contain neither balanced nor sympathetic portrayals of the protest movement back in the United States. One of the emerging conventions of this literature is to acknowledge, in one sense, the effect the lack of popular support at home had upon the morale of those who fought. But the treatment of the protest movement itself seems to be superficial at best in those novels. Protestors, by and large, are either dismissed as naive, and showy, such as O'Brien's San Diego State University dropout, or disciplined as cynical and self-serving such as Webb's Kerrigan and Braverman. The novels, by and large, depict a misunderstood minority that has closed ranks against those who defame and speak ill of them at home as well as those who threaten their survival abroad. In the face of the war's manifold threats, life in the novels takes on an elemental clarity and a primal simplicity that would be impossible in any other setting. The primary moral reference point in the novels becomes the ethic of mutual dependence and selfless cooperation that encourages

the common goal of survival, and selfishness becomes the unpardonable sin. In Webb's *Fields of Fire* Goodrich is guilty of this sin. Snake's summary execution of two Vietcong suspects, Oscar Johnson's murder of Lieutenant Sidney Martin: these exist in the novels to dramatise the principal moral and psychological problems of the war. The novelists in the final analysis merely acknowledge these confusions, they do not undertake the defense of the indefensible. The novels, for the most part, depict such acts without apology, as merely sad realities, as the inevitable result of situations in which human emotions run high. What the novelists do seem to insist upon is that there is an economy of pain. Hence, the "circle of solidarity" closes around those who feel an almost existential compulsion to commit acts of murder and vengeance, virtually preventing the tragedy from widening.

Joker kills the wounded Cowboy rather than let his men commit suicide for an empty ideal, and no one objects. Everyone but Cacciato (because of what he represents) touches the grenade with which Oscar Johnson intends to kill Lieutenant Sidney Martin, and even Cacciato does not attempt to mediate. This ethic of mutual cooperation and interdependence is finally revealed to be alarmingly ambivalent, presenting a serious challenge to the reader's satisfaction. The excesses portrayed in the novels are tragic, but tragedies on an even larger scale, the novelists seem to be saying, spring from selfishness as well as moral and ethical stubbornness. Lieutenant Kersey's domineering ambition in large part accelerates the tragic turn of events in *Fields of Fire*. Hashford's Animal Mother and his Cowboy would both throw good lives after bad in attempting to rescue the victims of a particularly deadly sniper. Lieutenant Sidney Martin's uncompromising insistence that the men thoroughly search tunnels costs lives

beyond that of their own survival. The major characters of the Vietnam War novels form a "circle of solidarity" against anything that seems a threat, including their own command structure.

This is not to suggest that the moral vision underlying the novels is purely the reflection of a desperate will to survive at any cost. The redemptive side of the experience, the novels insist, is that intense spirit of fellowship and the primal loyalty that must of necessity be short-lived and which cannot be recaptured in later life. Webb's Snake, in keeping with the moral idea of this community, unhesitatingly attempts to rescue Goodrich from the enemy, even though he and Goodrich detest one another personally. Hashford's Joker in a very short time becomes closer to Rafter Man than he is to any one at home, genuinely grieving at his death. Doc Peret is moving in his attempts to ease Paul Berlin's embarrassment at losing control of his bladder. The Vietnam novels seem bent upon illustrating the truth of a maxim, the old observation that extreme situations tend to strip away vanity and affectation, forcing men to deal with one another honestly and to accept themselves and one another for what they really are.

The novels, on the whole, present no major battles, no decisive victories. The only real victory portrayed in the novels themselves is that of surviving a Vietnam tour and rotating back to the "World". Taken as a whole, however, the novels do represent a victory of a different order. With the Vietnam War novel, war literature seems to have grown beyond the criticism of Heller and Mailer, reaffirming what American Veteran authors take to be the traditional relationship between war and literature.

The novels at the centre of this study do not pretend to communicate the

essence of war – an impossibility, the novelists seem to agree – nor do they pretend to any improved function. They take war as a given, as part of the lasting experience of human- kind, and they insist that the reader make an important distinction. The war in Vietnam is primarily viewed as a simple biological or instinctual struggle between two opposing human entities. Thus, the question of good or bad in the Vietnam War novels is not asked primarily about the war or the system but about the individual himself and his loss of innocence in the process of ordeals of combat; some novelists see this process as a sign of moral regeneration and others view it as a sign of moral disintegration. *Fields of Fire* and *No Bugles, No Drums* have opposite views of this psychological transformation in war as an expression of this regeneration into manhood and the individual's acceptance of it as a moral good, whereas Charles Durden views it as an expression of moral degeneration and the individual's rejection of it as a moral good. Del Vecchio takes the war novel to a new level of literary realism in portraying the gruesome realities of war, as well as the disturbing psychological truths about the soldier's instinct to kill and to survive. The novelist in *The 13th Valley* is more or less ambivalent in his attitude toward the psychological transformation: despite the protagonist's confidence in his psychological change as an indication of his moral regeneration, the author tends to see it as a temporary psychological deviation. As a whole, the individual soldier's psychological transformation, whether maturation or disintegration, becomes the important moral standard for these novelists to decide their attitudes towards the war.

That the three wars have yielded three distinctive patterns does not necessarily mean that war itself basically differed in its impact upon the minds of

different generations of Americans. In fact, every war as a human phenomenon is horrible to those who fight it and is considered the worst by them. As Paul Fussell rightly observed in a similar context, every war is "ironic because every war is worse than expected" (Fussell, 1975: 6). The war novelists of three wars share the view of war's sheer horror, though there are differences in degree. Philip Caputo also writes of the impact that every war brings to its war generation: "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 of its own". In this connection, the second conclusion of this study is that the three different patterns have emerged not simply in reaction to the distinctive aspect of each war but more so out of the contemporary American cultural and social climate surrounding each war. The war novelists of the three wars in question are not merely satisfied with portraying war as it is, but they also project their war onto the ethos of contemporary America. That is to say, the three distinctive patterns – the culture oriented one of World War I, the society oriented one of World War II, and the individual- oriented one of the Vietnam war – directly reflected the attitudes of the three war eras. As a social and cultural document, the war novel reveals the particular ethos of the period and tensions at work within it.

Despite their different moral visions arising from the different cultural and social backgrounds of three war eras, the novelists of three wars have an underlying shared concern: That is, the unifying factor of the three patterns is that the American war novel of the three wars is largely an expression, whether positive or negative, of the ideal embedded in the American war aims – the American ideal that war must have a moral imperative. In this regard, the third

conclusion of this study is that the underlying theme of the American war novel comes from the novelists' response to this American way of justifying war. In fact and fiction, the official American views of the three wars see them as moral crusades. In World War I the American participation was "to make the world safe for democracy" as well as to defend civilization; in World War II it was to destroy Nazism and Fascism; and in the Vietnam War it was to "contain" Communist aggression. To Americans, thus, these wars were fought for world peace, not for the self-interest of the United States. Samuel P. Huntington connected this American attitude towards war with the American ideal based on a liberal ideology: "American idealism has tended to make every war a crusade, fought not for specific objectives of national security, but on behalf of universal principles such as democracy, freedom of seas, and self-determination. Indeed, for the American a war is not a war unless it is a crusade" (Huntington, 1957: 152). This concept of a moral crusade has made every American war an ideological one – a "war to end all wars" or a war to defend freedom and democracy; and it has taken on a Manichean or dualistic view of war – the war of good opposed to evil.

The war novels discussed here affirm or criticize the validity of the crusading ideology from their different moral perspectives. The point is that in these novels the validity of the ideological ends of war is determined by the means of war. The means by which the war is conducted, as the war novelists portray them through their fictional characters' experience in war and the army, become the standard of their moral judgements about the ends of war. Thus at the core of the American war novel lies the moral tension between ends and means. And this tension contributes a dominant motif to the narration of the American

war novel.

The negative or critical war novels such as *Three Soldiers, The Short-Timers, The Naked and the Dead* and *No Bugles, No Drums* reject the ends of war as morally wrong because the means of achieving the ends cannot be justified. On the contrary, the positive or affirmative war novels such as *A Son at the Front* (1923) *The Caine Mutiny* and *Fields of Fire* accept the means as necessary for achieving the ends of the wars. In the negative or critical novels, the army as a means is condemned, though there is a difference in degree, because it is an undemocratic, machine-like system which deprives the individual soldier of his right to be a man. In the affirmative or positive novels, the army is also condemned for the same reasons. Yet in these novels the ends take precedence over the means. For example, in *The Caine Mutiny* Captain Queeg's eccentricity (or harshness) may be intolerable in peacetime, but it should be tolerated in wartime because the war (World War II) must be won. Wouk's moral choice is that individual rights, though important, can be ignored when national security is at stake. Further, Webb in *Fields of Fire* suggests that the army is a social institution which generates comradeship and solidarity among the soldiers. Such novels as *From Here to Eternity, The 13th Valley, Going After Cacciato* largely share with the critical novels certain common themes and attitudes, yet they are different from the critical novels in that they also find some positive aspects in what the critical novels view negatively. These novels seek the ways of compromise between two positions or leave their moral judgements ambivalent.

The final conclusion of this study is that, despite the different thematic patterns and different moral perspectives, the American war novels of the three

wars are largely concerned with the protagonist's search for the meaning in life through his initiation into war. The war novels are not merely concerned with portraying the moral tension involved in war's ends and means, but also with defining the values and meanings of humanity caught in war. Thus the significance of the war novel is revealed by how the protagonist defines the "meaning in life" and how he comes to attain his self-knowledge in the process of the search. In most cases the "meaning" that the protagonist seeks originates from his initial war motivation. Despite their various war motivation, most of the protagonists discussed here go to war out of their personal reasons – to prove their manhood, to seek adventure, to learn things in life, to escape from boredom, to search for self-identity, to find a shelter in the army to satisfy curiosity, or to fight for the nation. During and after the ordeals of combat, all of them focus on one single catalytic question: what constitutes human dignity or human value in the inhuman war? At this point, the war novelists go beyond the mere description of the moral tension. They provide abstract and apparent answers for the question so that the answers may affect the reader in an instructive way.

The affirmative war novels like *Fields of Fire, Going after Cacciato* find human nobility in one's sacrifice for the collective ideals, for the nation, or for their comrades. In these novels, such moral values as self-renunciation, loyalty, responsibility, and solidarity are highly valued. The protagonists in these novels attain their self knowledge as social beings by accepting the social reality as revealed in war and the army. And they believe in man's moral regeneration or maturation through the ordeals of war. To them, self-denial is not the betrayal of individual integrity; it is moral good. On the contrary, the critical war novels like *Three Soldiers, The Naked and the Dead, No Bugles, No Drums, The Short-*

Timers find human dignity not in upholding such moral virtues as are valued by the affirmative novels but in the denial of them. These novels imply that human dignity can be retained only when the individual freedom and human rights are guaranteed. The protagonists in these novels try to regain the manhood that they have lost by submerging themselves into the mass or by surrendering to the necessity. Though they attain their self-knowledge as social beings, yet they refuse to accept it because they think that their acceptance is the betrayal of their moral purity. They do not believe in war's regenerative power; instead they see in war man's moral degeneration.

As a whole, the novelists of the three wars, specially, the Vietnam War novelists have been provided with opportunities to illuminate and redefine their culture, their society, and themselves in their portrayals of the impacts of war. In the process of writing, the Vietnam War novelists have been specially concerned with what the human worth should be in the face of inhumanity. The search for meaning in Vietnam War novels has focused on this intriguing question and this quest will no doubt continue in future war novels.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Caputo, Philip.   1977. *A Rumor of War*.Reprint 1996. New York. Owl Books.

Conrad, Joseph.   1902. *Heart of Darkness*. Reprint 1985.New York: Penguin

Crane, Stephen.   1895. *The Red Badge of Courage*. Reprint 1951.New York: The Modern Library.

Dos Passos, John   1921. *Three Soldiers*. Boston. Houghton.

---.   1920. *One Man's Initiation: 1917*. Ithaca. Cornell UP.

Durden, Charles.   1976. *No Bugles No Drums*. New York.Viking

Eliot, T. S.   1970. "The Love Song Of J.Alfred Prufrock" *T.S.Eliot: Collected, Poems 1909-1962* San Diego:Harcourt.

Grass, Gunter   1961. *The Tin Drum*. New York: Penguin

Greene, Graham.   1944. *The Ministry of Fear*. New York: Barnes & Noble

---.   1955. *The Quiet American*. New York: Penguin

Hashford, Gustav.   1979. *The Short-Timers*. New York: Bentam

Heller, Joseph.   1962. *Catch-22*.Reprint 1994. London. Everyman's Library.

Hemingway, Ernest.   1926. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York. Scribner's.

Hemingway, Ernest   1929. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York. Scribner's.

Herr, Michael   1977. *Dispatces*. New York. Avon.

Hugget, William Turner.   1973. *Body Counts*. New York. Dell.

Jones, James ed.,   1951. *From Here to Eternity*. New York. Scribner's.

Jones, James.   1962. *The Thin Red Line*. New York, Dell.

Mailer, Norman.   1948. *The Naked and the Dead*. New York. Rinehart.

Moore, Robin.   1965. *The Green Berets*. New York: Crown.

O'Brien, Tim   1973. *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. New York. Dell

O'Brien, Tim.   1978. *Going after Cacciato*.New York:Dell

Remarque, Erich Maria.   1929. *All Quiet on The Western Front*. New York. Fawcett

Robinson, T.M. Trans.,	1987. *Heraclitus's: Fragments*. Text and translation with commentary. University of Toronto P.Toronto
Vecchio M. Del John.	1982. *The 13th Valley* .New York: St. Martin's
Vonnegut Kurt, Jr.	1969. *Slaughterhouse-Five*.New York
Webb, James.	1978. *Fields of Fire*.New York: Prentice-Hall
Wharton, Edith.	1923. *A Son at the Front*. New York. Scribner's
Wouk, Herman.	1951. *The Caine Mutiny*. New York. Doubleday
Wright, Stephen	1983. *Meditation in Green*.New York. Scribner's

Secondary Sources:

Aichinger, Peter.	1975. *The American Soldier in Fiction 1880-1963*. Ames. Iowa State University Press.
Aldridge, John W	1951. *After the Lost Generation*.New York. McGraw-Hill
Anisfield, Nancy ed.,	1987. *Vietnam Anthology*. Ohio. Bowling Green State Univ.Press
Axelsson, Arne.	1990. *Restrained Response :American Novel of the Cold War and Korea* 1945-52. London. Greenwood Press.
Baker, Mark.	1981. *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women who Fought war There*. New York. William Morrow.
Baldwin, James.	1962. "As much Truth As One can Bear" *New York Times Book Review*, 14 January 1962 .pp 1. 38
Baldwin, Neil.	1983 "Going after the War" *Publishers Weekly*. 11 February, 1983 pp. 34-38
Baskir, Lawrence M. and Strauss William A.	1978. *Chance and Circumstance:The Draft, the War and the Vietnam Generation*.New York.Vintage
Bausch, Robert.	1982. *On the Way Home*. New York. Avon
Beidler, Philip D.	1982.*American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*. Athens Ga: The University of Georgia
Beidler, Philip D	1979. "Truth-Telling and Literary Values in the Vietnam Novel". *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 87 (1979), 141-156
Bell K. Pearl.	1978. "Writing About Vietnam". *Commentary* Vol-66 Issue 4 October, 1978.

Bergonzi, Bernard.   1972. "Vietnam Novels: First Draft". *Commonweal*,27 October, pp.82-88

---.   1996. *Heroe's Twilight - A Study of Literature of the Great War* Mancester. Carcanet Press Ltd.

Brosman, Savage Catherine.   1992. "The Functions of War Literature". *South Central Review*. Vol-9, Issue 1, Spring, 1992

Brownmiller, Susan.   1975. *Against Our Will – Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Broyles, Jr., William   1984. Why Men Love War". *Esquire*, 102 (November), 1984. pp.55-65.

Bryant, Jerry.   1970. *The Open Decision*. New York.Free Press

Buchan, Alastair.   1966. *War in Modern Society- an Introduction*. New York: Harper & Rowe

Busby, Mark.   1982. "Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato: Finding the End of the Vision". *Conference of College Teachers Of English Studies*. 47(1982): 63-69

Campbell, Joseph.   1949. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. N.J: Princeton UP

Chomsky, Naom.   1970. *At War with Asia*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Clemons, Walter.   1979. "Killing Ground". Review of *The Short-Timers* by Gustav Hashford. *Newsweek*. January, 1979:60

Cooperman, Stanley.   1967. *World War I and the American Novel*.Baltimore. John Hopkins.

Cowley, Malcolm.   1954. *The Literary Situation*. New York. Viking

Creek, Mardena Bridges.   1982. "Myth, Wound, Accommodation: American Literary Response to the War in Vietnam". Diss. Ball State University

Cronin, Cornelius A.   1983. "Historical Background to Larry Heinemann's *Close, Quarters*". Critique 24(1983) pp. 119-30

Dewey, John.   1930. *Individualism Old and New*, New York: Minton, Balch.

Dittmar, Kurt.   1993. "Of Rats and Soldiers on a Topas of Modern War Literature". *American Studies* (Germany)

Doskow, Minna.   1973. "The Night Journey in *Catch-22*".Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*: A Critical edition.Ed. Robert M. Scotto. New York, Dell pp. 491-500.

Eisinger, Chester E.   1963. *Fiction of the Forties*. Chicago. The University of Chicago Press.

Eliade, Mircea.   1958. *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*. New York. Harper and Rowe.

Fenton, Charles.   1960. "A Literary fracture of WWI". *American Quarterly*, XII (Summer 1960) 119-132.

Flanagan, Owen.   1991. *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism*. Harvard University Press.

Fowlie, Wallace.   1981. *A Reading of Dante's Inferno*. Chicago. Chicago University Press.

Foucault, Michel.   1978. *The History of Sexuality.Vol I: An Introduction* Trans.Robert Hurley. New York. Pantheon

---,   1978. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York. Pantheon

---,   1980. "Two Lectures".Trans. Kate Soper. *In Power/ Knowledge:Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*. Colin Gordon, ed., New York Pantheon

---,   1990. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and otherWritings*. Lawrence Kritzman ed. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York. Routledge

Frankena, William K.   1963. *Ethics*. N.J. Prentice-Hal, Inc., & Cliffs, Englewood

Fromm, Erich.   1976. *Escape from Freedom* New York. Holt.

Frye, Northrop.   1976. *The Secular Scripture*.Cambridge. Harvard University Press.

Fussell, Paul.   1975. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York, Oxford.

Gaspar, Charles Jamieson, Jr.   1983. "Reconnecting: Time and History in Narrative of the Vietnam War".Diss. University of Connecticut

Goldman, Peter and Tony Fuller.   1983. *Charlie Company*. New York.William Morrow.

Grant, Zalin.   1978. "Vietnam as Fable". *The New Republic*. 25March, 1978.pp.21-24.

Gray, Chris Hables.   1997. *Postmodern War: the New Politics of Conflict*. New York. The Guilford Press.

Gruyter, Aldine De and Scot Wilbert J.	1993. *The Politics of Readjustment, Vietnam Veterans Since the War.* New York
Hastings, James ed.,	1958. *"Descent to Hades".Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. 13 Vols.* New York. Scribner's.
Healey, Robert C.	1952. "Novelists of the War: A Bunch of Dispossessed" in Gardiner, Harold C., ed., *Fifty Years of American Novel.* New York. Scribner's. pp. 257-271
Hellmann, John.	1986. *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam.* New York: Columbia University Press
Herzog, Tobey C.	1992. *Vietnam War Stories -- Innocence Lost.*London. Routledge.
---.	1983. "Writing About Vietnam: A Heavy Heart of Darkness Trip". *College English* 41(1983):680-95***
Hillstrom, Laurier Collier and Kevin Hillstrom.	1998. *The Vietnam Experience.* Westport:Greenwood Press.
Hoffman, Frederick J.	1951. *The Modern Novel in America, 1900-1950..* Chicago. Henry Regnery Comp.
Horne, A. D. ed.,	1981. *The Wounded Generation: America After Vietnam.* New Jersey:Prentice-Hall.
Howard, Michael.	1978. *War and Liberal Conscience.* N.J. Rutgers Univ. Press.
Huntington, Samuel P.	1957. *The Soldier and the State.* Cambridge.Harvard Univ. Press.
Hyman, Stanley E.	1958. "Some Trends in the Novel". *College English,* XX (October 1958) 1-9
Iser, Wolfgang.	1974. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett.* Baltimore:John Hopkins
Jeffords, Susan.	1989. *The Remasculinization of American Gender and the Vietnam War.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Johnson, T. J.	1975. *Ideology, Reason and the Limitation of war: Religious and Secular Concepts 1200-1740.* New York: Princeton.
Jones, Peter G.	1976. *War and the Novelist - Appraising the American war Novel.* Columbia. University of Missouri Press.
Kazin, Alfred.	1942. *On Native Grounds.* New York. Harcourt.

---. 1978. "Vietnam It was US vs. US Michael Herr's *Dispatches*: More than just the best Vietnam book". *Esquire*. Vol-89 Issue 3 March 1978

Kearns, Katherine Sue. 1982. "Some Visions of Violence in Three Contemporary American Novels: John Irving's *The World According to Garp* Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*, and Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*". Dissertation: University of North Carolina

Kennedy, David M. 1980. *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*. New York. Oxford University Press.

Lane, Mark. 1970. *Conversation with Americans*. New York. Simon and Schuster

Langer, Lawrence. 1978. *The Age of Atrocity*. Boston. Beacon

Lewey, Guenter. 1978. *America in Vietnam*. New York. Oxford University Press

Lifton, Robert Jay. 1971. "Victims and Executioners" in Falk, Richard A. et.al.eds., *Crime of War*. New York. Random House.

Lillie, William. 1948. *An Introduction to Ethics*. New York. Barnes & Noble.

Linenthal, Edward Tabor. 1983. "From Hero to Anti-Hero: The Transformation of the Warrior in Modern America".*Religion and Politics in the Modern World*. Eds. Peter H.Merkl and Ninian Smart. New York: New York UP

Lomperis, Timothy J. 1987. *Reading the Wind: The Literature of the Vietnam War*. Durham:Duke UP.

Maclear, Michael. 1981. *TheTen Thousand Day War, Vietnam: 1945-75*. New York.St.Martin's. Mangold, Tom and

Penycate, John. 1985. "Down, Dirty and Deadly". *Life*,(April 1985), 98-112

Marin, Peter. 1980. "Coming to Terms with Vietnam: Settling Our Moral Debts". *Harper's*. Vol- 261 Issue 1567, December 1980.

Martin, Robert A. 1985. "*Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*". *Notes on Conetemporary Literature* 15.4(1985); 8-10

May, Henry F. 1959. *The End of American Innocence*. New York. Oxford University Press.

McCaffery, Larry. 1983. "*An Interview with Tim O'Brien*". *Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary Novelists*. Eds. Thomas Le Clair and Larry McCaffery. University of Illinois Press Urbana

McFadden, Neis Judith
and Erwin Knoll, eds.   1970. *War Crimes and the American Conscience.* New York. Holt Rinehart and Winston.

McKean, F. Keith.   1961. *The Moral Measure of Literature.* Denver: Allan Shallow.

McInerary, Peter.   1981. "Straight" and "Secret" history in Vietnam War Literature. *Contemporary Literature.* Vol-22, Issue 2, Spring 1981.

Miller, Wayne Charles.   1970. *An Armed America.* New York.New York University Press.

Millgate, Michael.   1964. *American Social Fiction: James to Cozzens.* Edinburgh and London. Oliver and Boyd.

Millis, Walter.   1956. *Arms and Men.* NJ. Rutgers University Press

Misra, Kalidas.   1984. "American War Novel from World War II to Vietnam" *IJAS,* January 1984. Hyderabad.

Moore, Henry T., ed.,   1964. *Contemporary American Novelists.* Carbondale. Southern Illinois University Press.

Moscos, Jr., Charles C.   1969. "Why Men Fight: American Combat Soldiers in Vietnam". *Trans-Action.* Nov 1969 ,13-23.

Myers, Thomas.   1984. "Driving into the Wreck: Sense Making in the *13th Valley*". Modern Fiction Studies,30(1984),119-134

---.   1988. *Walking Point – American Narratives of Vietnam.* New York:Oxford UP.

---.   1982. "Interview with Tim O'Brien". Chicago Review 33.4 (1982): 129-49

Nagel, James, ed.,   1974. *Critical Essays on Catch-22. The Dickenson Seminar Series in Criticism.* Encino,CA. Dickenson

Nanda.   1998. *War in American Fiction.* Meerut. Anu Books.

O'Brien, William V.   1969. *War and/Survival.* New York: Doubleday and Company.

O'Connor, J. John.   1968. *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam.* New York: The World Publishing Company.

Olmstead, Jr., Robert T.   1970. *The American Novel of WWII as Social Criticism.* Diss. Stanford University.

Olson, S. James.   1993. *The Vietnam War - the Handbook of Literature and Research.* London: Greenwood Press

Palm, Edward F.   1983. "The Search for a Usable Past: Vietnam Literature and the Separate Peace Syndrome".*South Atlantic Quarterly* 82.2 (Spring 1983): 115-28

---.   1983. "James Webb's *Fields of Fire*: The Melting-Pot Platoon Revisited". *Critique Studies in Modern Fiction.* (Winter 1983): 105-117

Patch, Howard Rollin.   1970. *The Other World.* New York. William Morrow.

Phillips, M. M.ed.,   1967. *Erasmus and His Time.* Cambridge University Press.

Pizer, Donald.   1982. *Twentieth century American Literary Naturalism:* An Interpretation Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques/New Series. Carbondale.Southern Illinois UP.

Plummer, William.   1982. "*Moby Dick* in Vietnam". *Newsweek*, 26 July, 1982. p.71

Polenberg, Richard.   1972. *War and Society: The United States 1941-45.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company.

Pratt, John Clark.   1987. "Bibliographic Commentary: From the Fiction Some Truths", *"Reading the Wind" The Literature of the Vietnam War* Ed. Timothy J. Lomperis. Durham, NC: Duke UP,1987.

Puhr, Kathleen M.   1984. "Four Fictional faces of the Vietnam War". *Modern Fiction Studies.* 30 (Spring 1984) 99-117.

Review of
The Short-Timers   by Gustav Hashford *Publishers Weekly*, 25 December 1978: 52

Review of
The Short-Timers   by Gustav Hashford. *Newsweek*, 27 Feb, 1979: 40

Ringnalda, Don.   1994. *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War.* University Press of Mississipi.

Robinson, Jo Ann.   1976. "Novels and Vietnam" *Peace and Change* 4(1976): 12-18

Robinson, M. T. Trans.   1987. *Fragments* by Heraclitus. University of Toronto. Toronto

Rollins, Peter C.   1984. "The Vietnam War: Perceptions Through Literature, Film and Television". *American Quarterly*, 36 (Bibliography 1984), 419-443

Roundy, Peter Edward.   1981. "Images of Vietnam: *Catch-22*.New Journalism and the Postmodern Imagination". Dissertation. Florida State University

Russell, Bertrand.

1967. *War Crimes in Vietnam*. London. George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Rutherford, Andrew.

1982. "Realism and the Heroic: Some Reflections on War Novels".*The Year Book of English Studies* 12, 1982: 194-207 Rutherford, Andrew

and Dr. Joseph.

1967. *Post World War II American Literature – An American Literature Symposium*. Herbert Baumgartner, USIS, Bombay.

Ryan, Maureen.

1994. "The Other Side of Grief: American Women Writers and the Vietnam War". *Critique*. Vol- XXXVI. Issue-1 Fall, 1994

Sale, Roger.

1979. "Love and War : Review of *The Short-Timers*"by Gustav Hashford. *New York Review of Books*, 22 Feb, 1979, 19

Santoli, Al.

1981. *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam. War by Thirty- Three American Soldiers Who Fought It*. New York. Ballantine Sarte, Jean Paul. *Les Chemins de la Liberte*

Scheurer, Timothy E.

1981. "Myth to Madness: America, Vietnam and Popular Culture". *Journal of American Culture*, 4 (Summer 1981) 149-165.

Schroeder, Eric James.

1984. "Two Interviews: Talks with Tim O'Brien and Robert, Stone". *Modern Fiction Studies*. 30.1(Spring 1984) 134-64

Searle, William J.

1981. "The Vietnam War Novel and the Reviewers". *Journal of Popular Culture*,4(Summer 1981) 83-94

Silberner, Edmond.

1939. La gurre dans la pansee economique du XVI au XVIII siecles. Paris.

Slabey, Robert M.

1990. "Going After Cacciato: Tim O'Brien's Separate Peace"America Rediscovered:Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War. Eds. Owen W. Gilman Jr. and Lorrie Smith. New York. Garland. pp 205-12

Sparshott, F. E.

1963. *The Structure of Aesthetics*. Toronto. University of Toronto.

Spencer, Nicholas

1999. "The Law of Simulated War in *Garvity's Rainbow*" Oklahoma City University Law Review Vol.24 Number 3

Stanley, Karnow.

1983. *Vietnam: A History*. New York. Viking.

Stanley, Lynn.

1991. *Writing War, Fiction, Gender and Memory*. Massachusetts. University of Massachusetts Press.

Stromberg, Peter Leonard. 1974. *A Long War's Writing: American Novels about the Fighting in Vietnam Written While American Fought.* Diss. Cornell University Press.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. 1983. *The Authoritarian Fiction : The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre.* Columbia University P. New York

Surtz, Edward and Hexter J. H. ed., 1965. *Thomas More Complete Works. Vol IV.* Yale University Press.

Tetlow, Joseph. 1980. "The Vietnam War Novel". *America.* 19 July 1980.pp 32-36.

Tuchman, Barbara. 1985. *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Viriglio and Lotringer. 1983. *Pure War.Viriglio,Paul and Lotringer Sylvere.* (Trans. Polizotti Mark). New York.Semiotext(e)Inc.

Volpe, Edmond L. 1964. "James Jones – Norman Mailer" in Moore Harry T., ed. *Contemporary American Novelists.* Carbondale. Southern Illinois University Press.

Waldmeir, Joseph J. 1958. "Novelists of Two Wars". *The Nation* CLXXXVII (November 1958) 304-307.

---. 1969. *American Novels Of the Second World War* The Hague, Muton.

Walsh, Jeffrey. 1982. *American War Literature: 1914 to Vietnam.* New York. St. Martin's.

Walzer, Michael. 1977. *Just and Unjust Wars.* New York. Basic Books.

Wilson, James C. 1982 *Vietnam in Prose and Film.* Jefferson, N.C. Mcfarland & Company, Inc

Willenson, Kim. 1976. "Catch-23". *Newsweek,* 9 August, pp 72-73

Wright, Quincy. 1967. *A Study of War* (abridge ed.), University of Chicago.