

1991

# Killer Trees and Homicidal Grass: The Anthropomorphic Landscape in the American Prose Narrative of the Vietnam War

Timothy F. Poremba

*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [English](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

---

## Recommended Citation

Poremba, Timothy F., "Killer Trees and Homicidal Grass: The Anthropomorphic Landscape in the American Prose Narrative of the Vietnam War" (1991). *Masters Theses*. 2238.  
<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/2238>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

Please sign one of the following statements:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

August 21, 1991

Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis be reproduced because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Author

KILLER TREES AND HOMICIDAL GRASS:

---

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC LANDSCAPE IN THE AMERICAN  
PROSE NARRATIVE OF THE VIETNAM WAR

---

(TITLE)

BY

TIMOTHY F. POREMBA

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

---

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1991

---

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

8/21/91  
DATE

8/21/91  
DATE

## ABSTRACT

Reading the landscape of Vietnam (the climate, the jungle, the topography) as an anthropomorphic character in the American prose narrative of the war provides a unique insight into the inner landscapes of the men who fought there and now write about it. William V. Spanos writes that the urge to name--to anthropomorphize--is man's method for dealing with the existential nothingness of being. Zohreh T. Sullivan, in discussing the landscape of Joseph Conrad, perceives landscape as a projection of the author's own psychic turmoil. Furthermore, Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space recognizes the imaginative value that man places on space, and his work describes the psychological implications placed upon different spaces. Utilizing all of the above critical approaches, I examine five American prose narratives of the Vietnam War: two works of nonfiction--Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War and Michael Herr's Dispatches; and three works of fiction--David Halberstam's One Very Hot Day, Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato, and Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green. My thesis illustrates how the tendency toward anthropomorphizing the landscape of Vietnam is manifested in each work and attempts to explain how and why this occurs. Finally, I explore the cultural assumptions and biases that inform these works and their presentations of an "incarnated" Vietnam.

To

Specialist Fourth Class William J. Searle

and

Specialist Fifth Class Richard V. Poremba

My two Vietnam Vets

The first my mentor

The second my father

Welcome home

"Dad"

I've worn your jungle jacket;

I've worn your boots.

But I've never walked in your shoes.

I've seen your slides;

I've listened to your stories.

But I've never seen through your eyes

Or listened through your ears.

So how can I know how it feels--

Seeing the flare drops turn the night into day?

Hearing the machine gun bolt click back in the bush

Alone on the road?

Touching the "steel pot" that the sun has made

A frying pan?

Tasting the water and purification tablets?

Thinking of home 13,000 miles away?

Counting the days--waiting for the short-timer's ladder?

Still believing in Camelot . . .

I really want to understand.

I am the son of a Vietnam veteran.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people to thank and so little space . . .

I would like to begin by thanking my parents, Richard and Barbara Poremba for the love and support you have given me for the past twenty-three years; a guy couldn't ask for better parents. Thanks also to my sister, Mary Lyn Poremba.

Dr. William J. Searle, my Director, you have been a continual source of encouragement, direction, and food; I could not have done this without you.

I would also like to thank my readers, Dr. John Guzowski and Dr. Roger Whitlow: Dr. Guzowski, thank you for the insightful comments; Dr. Whitlow, thank you for the kind words.

I must thank my colleagues and friends--Andrea Campana and Pamela Masden for their understanding, patience, and typing ability. Andrea earns special recognition for her proofreading.

Thanks to Christopher Schuffler for saving my life on several occasions.

I would like to thank my uncle, Robert S. Poremba, for always accepting my collect calls.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Ginny Dibianco and Betty J. Hawkins, who, quite literally, unlocked the door to my future . . . on several occasions.

Thanks to John Sullivan for giving me a job and a great incentive to finish this thing.

Special thanks also go out to Dr. John Allison, Dr. Susan Bazargan, Rose Bock, Dr. Ann Boswell, Robert Gore, Stacey LaFeber, Suzanne McLaughlin, Dr. James Quivey, Dr. David Radavich, Dr. Mohammed and Rosemary Razeghi, Jim and Val Schuffler, Dr. Carol Stevens, Dr. Nell Wiseman, Dr. Anne Zahlan and everyone else who believed in a Polish kid from the Northwest Side of Chicago.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Amy Marie Razeghi for her love, support, understanding, patience, phone calls, letters, typing, and chocolate chip cookies. Most of all thank you for putting up with me through all this. You have all my love and what's left of my mind.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Dead Reckoning: Setting the Critical Context	1
Beaupre's Other Enemy	18
Caputo in the Heart of Darkness	30
<u>Dispatches</u> from the Heart of Darkness	45
"How the Land Was": Tim O'Brien's <u>Going After Cacciato</u>	57
What Does the Land Think about All This Anthropomorphosis Anyway? Stephen Wright's <u>Meditations in Green</u>	72
Mopping Up: Putting It All Together	89
Works Consulted	95



## DEAD RECKONING: SETTING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

The Vietnam War remains a stigmata upon the American soul: it has been over sixteen years since the shooting stopped, yet the sore is open and still bleeds. In fact, all the recent parades and celebrations for the returning Persian Gulf servicemen--the "One-Hundred-Hour-Heroes"--only remind Vietnam veterans of the welcome home that they never received, and this only rubs salt in the nation's wound. One way that America has been trying to heal itself is through its literature. America's authors of the Vietnam War, like medics, have been attempting to ease the nation's pain through the analgesic of their words; unfortunately, their efforts up until now have been about as effective as Doc Peret's M&Ms in Going After Cacciato: they are not much more than placebos for a nation in need of morphine. However, this is not due to any fault of the authors or of their works; in fact, several literary works cornering the Vietnam War have been critically acclaimed. The reason that the literature alone has not been able to foster the healing of the nation is, as Timothy J. Lomperis writes in "Reading the Wind" ". . . America is not ready to read it" (9): America still remains too close too close to the war to view it with any objectivity. So it only figures that as America's Vietnam War authors continue to write literature of the Vietnam Experience--

their experience, the American public must also continue to learn to read it.

Donald Ringnalda, one of the top scholars of America's literature of the Vietnam War, writes in "Fighting and Writing: America's Vietnam War Literature" that as Vietnam was an "unconventional" war, it demands an unconventional literature to accurately represent the experience (27-28). Furthermore, Ringnalda argues that while those authors who allow their hands to be tied by literary conventions "lose," because they fail to fully convey the Vietnam experience in their works, those authors who adopt more guerrilla-type tactics "win," because they are better able to recreate the experience (28). Though I agree whole-heartedly with Ringnalda, I would add that those who read and write about the war's literature must be just as "unconventional" as the authors they examine: the critic must look to those elements which are not often discussed, such as viewing setting as an active character. It is as such a counter-insurgent critic that I wish to enter the discourse of this literature.

## I

Tobey Herzog, another preeminent critic of American literature of the Vietnam War, writes in a 1980 College

English review-essay, "Writing about Vietnam: A Heavy Heart-of-Darkness Trip," that a reexamination of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darknes provides a vehicle for increased understanding of America's Vietnam War literature. Herzog believes that there is a connection between those Vietnam War narratives that are not content merely to aid understanding of the war, but go on to address the "basic truths of existence"--such as the innate nature of man, and Conrad's classic. Vietnam War writers borrow narrative techniques and experiences from Heart of Darkness because there is a plethora of shared themes between their Nam and Conrad's Congo: "rapacious, pitiless folly,' reversion to savagery, the conquering forces of the jungle, dissolution of certainties, and evil's fascination and repulsion" (683). Another similarity that the Vietnam War literature shares with Conrad's classic is that the jungle of Heart of Darkness is anthropomorphized--transformed into an active character; however, this does not come up in Herzog's discussion.

In the same review-essay, Herzog invokes the name of Paul Fussell, who is "the" authority on British and American war literature of this century. Fussell contends in his landmark work, The Great War and Modern Memory, that the writers of World War I spent much of the 1920s and '30s sorting out their shattered psyches

through their writing. Herzog believes that a similar phenomemon is occurring now as Americans attempt to deal with their feelings about the Vietnam War:

Although it may be too early to write about Vietnam with any measure of complete detachment and wholeness, the individual accounts now appearing are doing much to present necessary information that this war was not like any other war and thus had an unparalleled [sic] impact on the combatants and spectators. ("Writing About Vietnam" 682)

Just as the First World War was a horrifying introduction to modern warfare, Vietnam provided a similar, if somewhat more limited, welcome to guerrilla warfare that also shocked the psyches of many who were involved. Both wars left their participants disillusioned about politics and the very nature of existence. Herzog finds it only logical, therefore, that a connection can be found between the literatures of the two wars: both literatures reflect the insanity of war and attempt to come to terms with that insanity by imposing order upon war's war's memory (683). "Furthermore," Herzog responds to a criticism leveled at the above cited article, ". . . we might make a stronger case for the influence of the poetry and fiction of introspection and disillusionment emerging from World War I [on the literature of the

Vietnam War]" ("Comment and Response" 741). While Herzog finds similarities in the tripartite structure of the World War I memoir, as outlined by Fussell, and those memoirs of the Vietnam War, connections much deeper than mere form can be drawn between the two literatures.

Fussell, in The Great War and Modern Memory, writes of how deeply the trench and trench warfare came to be associated with the First World War. In fact, he writes, "The idea of 'the trenches' has been assimilated so successfully by metaphor and myth . . . that it is not easy now to recover a feeling for the actualities" (Fussell 36). I believe that a similar association can be made between the jungle and jungle warfare and the Vietnam War: just as it is nearly impossible to avoid seeing a trench while walking through the literature of World War I, it is nearly as impossible to avoid touching the vast underbrush of the jungle while humping through the literature of the Vietnam War. Again, Herzog and his application of Fussell can be taken a step further.

In "Chlorophyll Overdose: Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green," Donald Ringnalda examines the implications of the jungle in the American literature of the Vietnam War, with particular emphasis on the novel Meditations in Green. As evidence of the inescapable

presence of landscape in the literature, Ringnalda writes:

For many Vietnam veterans, the word "Vietnam" is virtually synonymous with the jungle and the color green--a green Vietnam that was at once sublimely beautiful and terrifyingly menacing, mainly the latter. In just about every Vietnam War novel one picks up, the author underscores America's adversarial relationship with the jungle.

("Chlorophyll Overdose" 126)

Ringnalda crystallizes my argument of the ubiquitous jungle in the American literature of the Vietnam War. He also discusses the symbolic implications of the color "green": "Green in Vietnam was like the all-consuming whiteness of Moby Dick. It came to symbolize everything that was inscrutable and therefore hateful" (127).

Ringnalda believes that because so much of the war effort went into fighting the jungle (defoliating and bulldozing it), it is only natural that "green" and the jungle should appear in the literature as powerful symbols and images. However, the jungle can be read as more than just symbolic; it can also be viewed as a "character" in the American literature of the Vietnam War.

Here Cynthia J. Fuchs picks-up the thread of my

thought in her essay "'Vietnam and Sexual Violence': the Movie." Fuchs asserts that many American films of the Vietnam War represent the land and enemy of Vietnam as female:

In American Vietnam movies, the unknown, unknowable alien that threatens the "system" of the American military commonly appears as the multiple and anonymous guerilla gook, feminine in stature and dress, appallingly amoral and unmanly in fighting technique and ferocity. (121)

Fuchs cites examples from several recent films of women functioning as symbolic of Vietnam. One film she discusses is Barry Levinson's Good Morning, Vietnam!, in which the American protagonist becomes enamoured of "an ethereally pristine, white-dressed Vietnamese girl-woman who represents the untouchable alien culture" (123).

However, Fuchs finds this presentation of the woman/Vietnam as an exception to the norm, wherein the woman/Vietnam usually functions as the object of male sexual aggression. Fuchs writes, "Rape surfaces as a metaphor for American action in the war" (123). For Fuchs, "Vietnam" can be read as a passive character that is violated by violent, American males.

However, though Fuchs goes further than Ringnalda by arguing that "Vietnam" can be viewed as a character

in many American films of the war, I will take her assertion a step further. The landscape (i.e., the jungle, the climate, and the topography) of Vietnam is anthropomorphized--made into a "human" character--in the American literature of the Vietnam War. Furthermore, while Fuchs suggests that "Vietnam" is a passive, female character, one that is violated, I contend that the "character" of Vietnam is active and in league with the enemy, the Viet Cong.

In order to illustrate my belief in an anthropomorphic landscape in America's literature of the Vietnam War, I will closely examine the "character" of Vietnam as it is depicted in five prose narratives of the war considered "classics" by the literature's scholars and that represent the full range of the literature from 1968 to 1983: David Halberstam's One Very Hot Day, Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War, Michael Herr's Dispatches, Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato, and Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green. I believe that an analysis of the anthropo-morphic tendency in each of the above works will not only offer a better understanding of America's literature of the Vietnam War, but will also offer an insight into the cultural assumptions that allow such anthropomorphosis of alien landscapes to take place.



## II

To prove that the landscape of Vietnam is transformed into an active character in five American prose narratives of the Vietnam War, I will utilize three different sources of criticism upon which to base my assertions: Zohreh T. Sullivan's "Enclosure, Darkness, and the Body: Conrad's Landscape"; William V. Spanos' "The 'Nameless Horror': The Errant Art of Herman Melville and Charles Hewitt"; and Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space. Taking this opportunity to chart my own critical course, using the above as guides, before embarking on the exploration of my primary texts is a necessary preparation for the voyage ahead.

As has already been discussed, Tobey Herzog believes that a reexamination of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness offers a vehicle for greater insight into America's literature of the Vietnam War ("Writing About Vietnam" 683). Nowhere is a comparison between Conrad's classic and the literature of the Vietnam War more profitable than when considering landscapes that come alive. Zohreh T. Sullivan, in his essay "Enclosure, Darkness, and the Body: Conrad's Landscapes," argues that Conrad's landscapes are an outward manifestation of his own psyche, particularly his fear of female sexuality: "Conrad's landscapes reflect internal conflicts and

ambivalences and that the struggles he portrays against sea, river and jungle correspond symbolically to expressed conflicts with the feminine matrix in general" (59-60). So Sullivan suggests that Conrad's landscapes are a product of his own fears of female sexuality. Of this phenomenon, with particular emphasis on the jungle, Sullivan writes:

The terror of darkness and the unknown might also be related to the male fear of the female as alien, hidden and irrational; the darkness of the jungle and its native women, then, is in part a nightmarish extension of every man's fear of self-loss and death that could result from the final journey into the black and bestial womb of the devouring mother. Underlying much of Conrad's terror of the sexuality of jungles, however, is a fear of literal darkness and blackness. (64)

According to Sullivan, then, it appears that Conrad's fear of losing himself in a woman is manifested in his artistic creation of a dark and fear-inspiring jungle. This corresponds quite well with the ideas of Cynthia J. Fuchs, who writes, "The insistent, unseeable vacuum behind this visible (feminine) otherness is death--again, the threat to virile manhood" (121). The feminine represents darkness, and darkness represents

death. Sullivan believes that men deal with this fear of death (manifested in the feminine landscape) by attempting to contain the fear with "repression and rejection" or by attacking it with "violation, conquest and rape" (65). Sullivan appears to explain Fuchs' finding that so many American films of the Vietnam War portray the American action in Vietnam as rape: not only was a country brutally violated by war, but it was also attacked by those who wanted to subdue the darkness of death.

Furthermore, Sullivan suggests that for Conrad, the jungle is "the place of threatening confrontation with savagery and sensuality," while the interior provides "the setting for encounter on the deepest level with alien forces both within and without" (69). The deeper one goes into the jungle, the deeper one goes inside one's self. So as the journey through the jungle of Heart of Darkness is really a journey for Marlow (whose story it is) within himself, the journey through the jungle of Vietnam is really a journey within each author's psyche. This, then, provides one way of examining the importance of landscape in the American prose narrative of the Vietnam War. William V. Spanos provides yet another context for reading the "character" of Vietnam.

Spanos, in his 1980 Boundary 2 article "The

'Nameless Horror': The Errant Art of Herman Melville and Charles Hewitt," discusses the phenomenon of anthropomorphosis as it occurs in Melville's Moby Dick.

Spanos asserts that Ahab "anthropomorphizes this living creature of the deep [the White Whale], gives his elusive being a human identity: 'Moby Dick'" (128).

Spanos argues that this anthropomorphosis allows Ahab to confront a tangible manifestation of "the multiple mystery of man's relationship to being at large gathered into a single, undifferentiated, inclusive, and predictable symbol or trope of Evil" that helps to explain "the human predicament" (128). Ahab's act, then, is that of Adam's in an existential world--naming the nothingness. Spanos further gives the reason for man's need to name--to anthropomorphize:

. . . Ahab reifies the "errant" temporality--the nothingness--of being, transforms its proliferating difference into Identity, its multiplicity into the One (Monos) in order not simply to understand--to comprehend--its elusive mystery, but to gain mastery over--to "take hold of," "to grasp". . . its elusive and thus dreadful mystery. (129)

Ahab's act of anthropomorphosis not only identifies the obscure problems that make up the "human predicament," but it also attempts to gain control over those

problems. Ahab's "monomania" is more than just a quest for personal revenge against the whale that bit off his leg, it is an attack upon the apparent meaninglessness of life.

Applied to the American prose narrative of the Vietnam War, Spanos' theory helps explain the occurrence of an anthropomorphized landscape in the literature as a means of naming the horror of the jungle: endowing the jungle with a human name incarnates the countless nightmares and ghosts that are as indigenous as the rubber tree and the bamboo shoot, the punji trap and the trip wire--the latter pair representing the flowering of Death. The jungle contains Death--is Death--for the alien American, just as the heat and the rice paddies are also Death. In fact, the entire landscape is Death for the American, who has not befriended it: the heat kills; the water infects; the insects bite; the foliage hides the enemy. Naming--anthropomorphizing--the landscape is a way of controlling the death it contains. Furthermore, as naming precedes taming, anthropomorphosis is a necessary step toward understanding the landscape; and if the landscape of Vietnam can be tamed in literature, the fear of death it inspires can also be understood or at least accepted--if only in the imagination.

However, Spanos does not stop by merely illustrating and explaining Ahab's anthropomorphosis of the White Whale; Spanos goes on to argue that Melville's novel is, in fact, a de-construction of the impulse to anthropomorphize, and this makes Melville "the precursor of the post-modern American writer" (133), and the American writers of the Vietnam War fall into this category--at least chronologically. Spanos describes Melville's de-construction of Ahab's impulse to anthropomorphize as

Ultimately an act of revenge against the temporality and transience of being and that it ends not in the fulfillment of his [Ahab's] unsatisfied desire for certainty and repose, but in a metamorphosis that transforms man into the monstrosity he attributes to the being he would subdue and his innocent victim into a retaliatory force. (134)

So Melville, according to Spanos, illustrates that anthropomorphosis does not succeed as a means of helping man come to terms with an existential universe because it necessarily transforms man into the image he forces upon the nothingness. In this way, Ahab becomes as much, if not more, of a monster than the one he is hunting.

Similarly, many characters in America's Vietnam

War literature, like Ahab, find themselves transformed into the very character that they have imposed upon the landscape of Vietnam. The most blatant example of this is James Griffin, the protagonist of Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green. Griffin, while in Vietnam, was responsible for looking at film and determining where defoliant should be applied. His sense of guilt for aiding in the "murder" of plants, that have done nothing to him, forces him to turn to a form of meditation wherein he imagines himself a plant: the anthropomorphic cycle is now complete as the image imposed by anthropomorphism is de-constructed. However, there is still one more theory that provides a way of analyzing the anthropomorphosis of landscape in the American prose narrative of the Vietnam War--Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space.

Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space is a study of, among other things, the value that the imagination imparts to the space outside of the human mind.

Bachelard writes of this phenomenon:

. . . Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. (xxxii)

Bachelard, then, argues that all space that is lived in acquires an imaginative aspect from those who have experienced it. Bachelard continues that the above "nearly always exercises an attraction" upon which he prefers to focus in his book--"hostile space is hardly mentioned in these pages" (xxxii); however, "hostile space" does exist, as he writes: "The space of hatred and combat can only be studied in the context of impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images" (xxxii). Vietnam definitely presents a "space of hatred and combat" that is quite literally "rifled" with "impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images." Applied to the landscape of Vietnam, which has already been shown to be hostile to the alien American, this theory will provide another critical perspective from which to examine the anthropomorphosis of that landscape in the American prose narrative of the war.

All three critical approaches--Sullivan's study of Conrad's landscape, Spano's study of Melville's de-construction of the anthropomorphic tendency in Moby Dick, and Bachelard's study of the imaginative influence of space--share a base in psychology: all examine how the mind internalizes and externalizes what is perceived and how this is manifested in literature. Where appropriate I will utilize these critical strategies to conduct successfully my own literary reconnaissance mission



deep into the landscape of Vietnam as it is manifested  
in the American literature of the war.

## BEAUPRE'S OTHER ENEMY

At first he had despised the heat,  
but now he feared it . . . . He had  
sensed when he just arrived that the  
heat was the enemy of all white men,  
but it was more an enemy of his. .  
. . [He now knew] that there were  
two enemies in the war.

David Halberstam, One Very Hot Day

David Halberstam published in 1968 one of the first examples of what would later become the American prose narrative of the Vietnam War. Halberstam served as a correspondent in Vietnam in the early part of the war, and his novel is set in those days before the war's escalation, when Americans were still only "advisors." The novel's title, One Very Hot Day, suggests that the climate will play a significant role in the story, which it does. Though ostensibly this is the story of "one" very hot day in the early years of the Vietnam War, the story is typical of the debilitating frustration endured by American advisors on any day in Vietnam--where they are all very hot. Halberstam's is a realistic work of fiction that intends to recreate the experience of Vietnam through the consciousnesses of three different

characters--Beaupre, Lieutenant Anderson, and the ARVN Lieutenant Thuong.

However, to further illustrate the experience of Vietnam--the agony, boredom, and exhaustion, Halberstam causes Beaupre to anthropomorphize the landscape of Vietnam, with an emphasis on the indescribable and oppressive heat. Beaupre functions as the representative American in Vietnam--an alien dropped into a hostile world--who must confront the landscape or be consumed by it. In the words of William V. Spanos (as he discusses Ahab's anthropomorphosis of the White Whale in Moby Dick), Beaupre "gathers" all that the unbearable heat of Vietnam represents "into a single, undifferentiated, inclusive, and predictable symbol or trope of Evil that, in 'explaining' the human predicament, enables him to actively confront its intangibility as if it were an object visible to his panoptic Adamic eye" (Spanos 128-29). Spanos' argument explains the occurrence of Beaupre's transformation of the hostile environment of Vietnam into an "enemy" as a necessary act of acceptance. Beaupre's concretizing of the "intangibility" of Vietnam into something more empirical does not only aid his own acceptance, but it also allows him to aid Lieutenant Anderson's acceptance of Vietnam. Where Beaupre anthropomorphizes the heat of Vietnam in order to come to terms with the trauma it

causes his old and out-of-shape body, a trauma manifested in his thirst, this same anthropomorphic tendency also becomes a means of helping Anderson accept one of the repulsive realities of Vietnam--the leeches. Finally, Beaupre's ability to transform the heat into an enemy results in his "victory"--his surviving to live yet one more very hot day.

The plot of this novel is simple enough: the story begins the night before a major operation is to take place; the remainder of the novel is a walking through of this operation. Initially there is not much action, the only real conflict being that of Beaupre's fight with his thirst. However, we are afforded the rare opportunity to observe Americans in their role as advisors at the start of the war in Vietnam. We are also given a look (though undeniably a biased one) at the South Vietnamese Army in action--a portrait of incompetence that would later become a commonplace of Vietnam War fiction. There is, of course, all the action that occurs in the minds of our three protagonist-protagonists: this is where the real story lies. Eventually, the physical action of the novel does pick up as we learn of Redfern's death and the massacre of his Vietnamese Rangers. Soon afterward Anderson crosses a canal and sets off into the brush attempting to locate a sniper. He is not successful. The climax of the novel

arises when Beaupre's unit is caught in a Viet Cong ambush: Anderson, Captain Dang, and countless other Viets are slain; Beaupre and Thuong, a Vietnamese lieutenant, manage to pull things together long enough to take-out the remaining enemy gun. That, with the exception of a few villages visited, is the story in a nut-shell. The real story, on-the-other-hand, focuses upon Beaupre's coming to terms with the land of Vietnam--coming to terms with the heat.

In Chapter Two, the narrator, in examining Beaupre's thoughts, first demonstrates Beaupre's incarnation of the heat of Vietnam. Beaupre is in a personal battle with the heat, and this conflict gives rise to his excessive thirst. At the very beginning of this very hot day, he has his first engagement with the heat: after breakfast he "covetously eyes" a pitcher of tomato juice, wanting a third glass, but knowing he should not have it because it will only make the heat more intolerable later. His discipline originally holds him back, but as Anderson sits down with him, Beaupre pours ". . . himself another glass, almost defiantly. . . . It was the first victory of the day for his real enemy, the heat" (18). As Ahab does with the White Whale, Beaupre "invests the heat with an "intelligent malignity" in order "to understand--to comprehend--its elusive mystery. . . ." (Spanos 128-29). Beaupre has made

the heat his enemy, and it will remain such until the end of the novel when he is forced to focus exclusively on his other enemy--the Viet Cong.

The narrator describes Beaupre's initial reaction to the sauna-like heat of Vietnam as a progression from loathing to fear: "At first he despised the heat, but now he feared it"(18). It is this terror that he must overcome to become the novel's "hero." It is in his fear of the heat that Beaupre becomes a character, similar to Ahab, in his "monomania":

He had sensed when he first arrived that the heat was the enemy of all white men, but it was more an enemy of his, he had less resistance and resilience; the others he sensed somehow managed to bounce back. (19)

Like Ahab and the White Whale, Beaupre and the heat battle on a personal level. And as Ahab loses a leg to Moby Dick, Beaupre loses ten pounds to the heat on every operation. The American captain does not want to be beaten by the primitive heat of Vietnam, but, old and out-of-shape, he is afraid. He does find some consolation when he observes that none are completely immune to the heat:

Later he learned that the Vietnamese thought it was a bad day too, and in the late afternoon when he helped take a lister bag of water

to the troops he had found the Viets sprawled out, unconscious as though they had been drugged. He had loaded six of them into the helicopter and carried them back. The touch of their almost lifeless bodies had made him feel better. . . . (19)

However, it is this same realization of the heat's effect on the native Viets that makes him aware "that there were two enemies in the war" (19); this only reinforces his monomania of an anthropomorphic Vietnam. This realization sets the stage for his constant struggle with the heat throughout the rest of the novel.

A bit further into the novel we learn a little more history of Beaupre's battle with the heat and his thirst: he began his tour with a strong enough will, but that quickly wilted in the hot Vietnamese sun:

When he had first arrived, he had set out to discipline himself. One canteen of water a day. The first sip after eleven in the morning. Not half finished before three in the afternoon which was the break-even point of the day, the cresting of the sun. No local fruit before noon. (30)

The reasoning behind his rules is simple: if he wants to avoid dysentery, cramps, and other ill effects, he must not drink too much nor too fast. The intense heat of

Vietnam demands adaptation by the foreigner. Though his fear originally helped him to stick to his rules, he proved less afraid than human and soon began to cut corners:

Within two weeks he had begun to cheat; he had proved more human than frightened; within two weeks too much of his war was fighting the sun instead of the enemy, walking along dry rice paddies in the sun, and thinking not of where the enemy was, but whether he could hold out on water, where the next water was. (30-31)

Again like Ahab, Beupre allows his personal battle with the sun (also known as "the heat") to distract him from his real mission--fighting the Viet Cong. Because his pride keeps him from carrying two canteens, which would have been the easiest solution to his problem with thirst, he is forced to scrap it out with the heat everyday.

Later we are told that Beupre feels captured by the heat: "But it was as if he were surrounded and enclosed by the heat, a prisoner of it" (67). Again, he views the heat as human and endows it with the ability to take him prisoner. Thus, much of the reason behind his anthropomorphosis of the heat is an attempt to bring himself to an understanding with it. There is not much else that he can do since his pride will not allow him



to stop walking operations.

Furthermore, Beaupre knows better than to complain about the heat--complaining will not eliminate it. However, when the idea of executing night operations was brought up, he quickly gave his consent. His motivation, though, was not related to a belief in the better success of night operations: ". . . his thoughts were not of catching little VCs stamping around overconfidently in the night--not that, he thought of the cool of the night and moving around without dying so many deaths from the hot sun" (81). Unfortunately, the night operation, once attempted, proved a great failure, and Beaupre was forced to continue slugging it out with the heat.

Beaupre appears to be beaten by the heat when he passes out; however, we know from the history that we are given of him that he is a fighter--especially of the elements. We learn that he was called up from his ROTC instructing duties because of his experience in Korea as a guerrilla fighter. But Beaupre does not see himself as a great infiltrator--only as a lucky survivor. Lecturing on the art of infiltration and guerrilla warfare at Fort Bragg, ". . . he found himself talking about how cold it was and pissing on his carbine. . . "; furthermore, "[h]is great miracle, his great act as an infiltrator, was staying alive and most of that was

beating the cold" (93). Beaupre's survival in Korea was a victory over the climate--the cold. It should come then as no great surprise that he will prevail over (survive) the extreme climate of Vietnam--the heat. Though it is more difficult for him than the others because of his advanced age and weight, he still has tenacity: he is a survivor; he is a soldier. Anderson, on-the-other-hand, lacks Beaupre's experience as a soldier and dies as a result. Beaupre survives because of his experience, and that experience also enables him to help Anderson cope with one aspect of Vietnam that Anderson has not yet been able to accept--leeches.

Near the beginning of Chapter Five while the Viets are taking another of their un-ordered breaks, Anderson asks Beaupre for a cigarette. Beaupre balks at the request because he knows that Anderson does not smoke. The latter informs him that he is not seeking a cigarette for a nicotine fix, but he wants to burn a couple leeches off his legs. The leeches attached themselves to him while he waded through a canal. He informs Beaupre that he hates leeches, and the narrator tells us how concertedly Anderson has attempted to keep the leeches off himself: he has employed elastic bands and inner stockings to keep them out, but to no avail. The leeches are the one thing about the war that Anderson has not been able to accept: he has accepted all the

death and human suffering, but he is still repulsed by the leeches. It is in an effort to ease Anderson's mind about the leeches that Beaupre demonstrates his ability to transform the uniqueness of the land of Vietnam into human form--he presents the leeches as medics:

"But you got to look at it from their [the leeches'] point of view," Beaupre said. "Just like in psy-war. You've got to understand them. Now they think they're medics. They've read all their own publicity and their history books, got themselves sure as hell brainwashed and they see themselves not as blood suckers, not that at all, but as life savers. They're here to save lives. They're improving relations with you. Giving you first aid, and they put on their very best for you, biggest ones they got. Biggest I ever saw, even in a country like this which is known for its small people and big leeches. You're a lucky boy for just a lieutenant." (138)

As he earlier does with the heat, here again Beaupre humanizes the not-human in an effort to aid understanding: he knows, as we do, that leeches are not really medics, but by portraying them as such, he is better able to grasp an otherwise alien experience by relating it to his own world--medics are more germane to the life

of an American soldier than are leeches. We must also remember that here Beaupre is not overtly attempting to aid his own understanding but that of Anderson.

Though Beaupre's "characterization" of the leeches as medics, for the benefit of Anderson, appears a much more positive one than his earlier "characterization" of the heat, both "characterizations" make the heat and leeches members of the camp of the enemy--the Viet Cong. The leeches, according to Beaupre, only "believe" that they are helping Anderson because they have been "brainwashed" into thinking so: "They've read all their own publicity and their history books"; though they see themselves as "life savers," they are, none-the-less, "bloodsuckers." In a strikingly similar way, the Viet Cong might be said to believe their own propaganda. Both the VC and the leeches are presented as parasites that feed off the blood of the Republic in the "brainwashed" belief that they are doing good. (Beaupre's comments might also be read as a cynical assesment of American soldiers like Anderson who also appear to be brainwashed into believing their own P.R.). Beaupre's presentation of the leeches as Viet Cong soldiers is further reinforced in the language he uses when making the following comment to Anderson: "He was so sure he was helping you, he really dug in. Dug in so much he's going to leave a scar" (139; emphasis mine). Leeches do

not "dig in"--soldiers do. So the leeches are humanized and cast into the role of an enemy soldiers.

Similar to the way Beaupre helps himself and Anderson, Halberstam helps the reader understand the war in Vietnam, what it is like to be there: the experience is foreign to us, so Halberstam's use of anthropomorphosis (via Beaupre) incarnates the experience of Vietnam. Beaupre is the out-of-place American that the reader would be if he were suddenly dropped into Vietnam, and it is through his dawning consciousness of the land--through his anthropomorphosis of the heat, sun, and leeches--that we are also made conscious of the Vietnam experience. Halberstam's is an early novel of the war, and its introduction to the land through the use of anthropomorphosis effectively conveys the experience of one very hot day in Vietnam; however, it is an oversimplification making the climate the "enemy" while making an American the "hero." The other narratives do not provide such a black and white reduction of the landscape of Vietnam.

## CAPUTO IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS

. . . We've lost a man, not to the enemy, but to the sun. It is as if the sun and the land itself were in league with the Viet Cong, wearing us down, driving us mad, killing us.

Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War

The above excerpt could quite easily be misattributed to Halberstam's One Very Hot Day; however, it comes from Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War. Published in 1977, A Rumor Of War is the highly crafted memoir of an English major who became a commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps and later served in Vietnam. Philip Caputo was a member of the first combat unit to be sent to Vietnam in March of 1965; as a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, he was also one of the last reporters to get out of Vietnam before Saigon fell in April of 1975. Caputo's work, in the tradition of the best memoirs of the First World War, shows a young man drawn to war by the irresistible force of romance only to be disillusioned by the sharp slap of reality ("Writing About Vietnam" 688). And it is reality that Caputo purports his book to be: "This book is not a work of the imagination. The events related are

true, the characters real. . ." (xx). So unlike Halberstam's novel, this is not intended to be a work of fiction. However, as Caputo tells his story, he, like  
 | all good writers, cannot avoid using his imagination. |  
 Though metaphors and other tropes are not inherently "factual," they do aspire to the more Universal Truth of Aristotle: their authenticity arises from a base in the probable rather than in the particular. Therefore, Caputo's "slightly fictionalized" account of the war--he writes from memory with all of the fictive elements that are inherent in recollection--becomes a more accurate document of what the war was really like for those who fought it than would a detailed transcription of "just the facts." One literary device that Caputo employs to present the more universal truth of Vietnam--the Vietnam of the probable--is anthropomorphosis, which will here be examined. Caputo begins, similarly to Halberstam, by anthropomorphizing the sun and its relentless heat which makes them appear of the enemy's camp. However, where Halberstam stops, Caputo goes on to depict a Conradian landscape. Caputo projects upon this landscape the blame for the lack of restraint that he and so many others demonstrated while in Vietnam.

Like Captain Beaupre of Halberstam's One Very Hot Day, Caputo is first struck by the intense heat of Vietnam. Caputo writes of the heat that "temperatures

were irrelevant" because a thermometer was as expressive of the intense heat as a barometer was expressive of "the destructive power of a typhoon" (Caputo 57). 100 degrees, 105 degrees, 110 degrees--the temperature was unimportant:

The only valid measurement was what the heat could do to a man, and what it could do to him was simple enough: it could kill him, bake his brains out, or wring the sweat out of him until he dropped from exhaustion. (57)

Like Beaupre, Caputo recognizes that the heat of Vietnam is outside the normal realm of understanding; thus, degrees on a thermometer cannot accurately convey the experience to the uninitiated--those who have not been there. Of this Caputo writes that "I wondered how this sun could be the same one now shining gently in the cool midwestern spring back home" (84). The experience of the incredible heat of Vietnam leaves Caputo feeling alienated from his Illinois home: those back in Westchester cannot possibly comprehend the blast furnace that is Vietnam. In an effort to relate it to those who are strangers, Caputo anthropomorphizes the heat:

...the heat pounded against our helmets and wrung the sweat out of us as we might wring water from a sponge. There were moments when I could not think of it as heat--that is, as a



condition of weather; rather, it seemed to be  
a thing malevolent and alive.

(80; emphasis mine)

Heat cannot "pound" or "wring," but Caputo endows it with these human capacities in order to convey the otherwise unconveyable. He also presents the heat with being ("it seemed to be a thing"), life (it is "alive"), and an evil intent (it is "malevolent"). Like Beaupre, Caputo has made the sun (and the heat) of Vietnam one with the enemy. Caputo writes, "It is as if the sun and the land itself were in league with the Viet Cong..." (100). This hauntingly echoes Beaupre's conclusion that "there were now two enemies in the war" (Halberstam 19). In fact, Caputo later refers to marines who suffer heat-stroke as falling "victim to our other enemy, the sun" (125). So Halberstam and Caputo agree in their vision of the Viet Cong sun.

Caputo's anthropomorphosis of "Vietnam" goes further than Halberstam's/Beaupre's; where the latter reserves animation for the climate, the former breathes life into the landscape itself. This incarnation begins during Caputo's very first night in Vietnam. "The landscape, so buccolic in daylight, gradually assumed a sinister aspect. To our inexperienced eyes, bushes began to look like men" (54). His observation of the evocative power of the imagination to transform shrub-

bery into something nefarious is reminiscent of Theseus' speech from A Midsummer Night's Dream on "poets, madmen, and lovers," all whose imaginations will transform a bush into a bear: "Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
/ How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!" (V.i.21-22).

Unlike the good people of Athens, Caputo's men have a more violent method of checking their imaginary bush/bears: they shoot into the bushes to see if the bushes shoot back (81). Such "reconnaissance by fire" reassured Caputo and his men: ". . . [it] made noise, and noise made us feel less afraid" (81). Caputo goes on to equate the machine gunning of bushes with "the gourds and rattles natives use to chase away evil spirits" (81). John Hellmann explains this phenomenon in American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam as "made in response to primordial human fears of wilderness. . . ." (114).

This "primordial human fear" of the alien landscape is reflected in his response, while looking down from a helicopter, of the ludicrousness of attempting to find an enemy battalion in an ocean of green:

Looking down, I wondered for a moment if the operation was somebody's idea of a joke. Our mission was to find an enemy battalion. A battalion--a few hundred men. The whole North Vietnamese Army could have concealed itself in

that jungle-sea, and we were going to look for a battalion. Crush it in a hammer and anvil movement. We were going to find a battalion and destroy it. Search and destroy. I half expected those great mountains to shake with contemptuous laughter at our pretense.

(77-78)

Hellmann explains the above as a direct indictment of General Westmoreland's strategy of Search and Destroy and as an indirect indictment of "America's belief in a destiny of ever adapting to and subduing the frontiers 'stretched westward'" (American Myth 113). Hellmann argues that Caputo is mocking the idea of Manifest Destiny--at least in its application to the Far East. On the other hand, Caputo's expectation of "those great mountains to shake with contemptuous laughter" at the pretense of the American military strategists seems like a direct allusion to Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, where a similarly anthropomorphic landscape could laugh at human pretense. Marlow recounts how Kurtz, near his death, had the audacity to believe that everything was his possession:

"My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my. . ." everything belonged to him [Kurtz].

It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious

peal of laughter that would shake the fixed  
stars in their places. (Conrad 49)

Conrad and Caputo each envision an anthropomorphic landscape that is only able to respond to man's hubris with laughter. Furthermore, Caputo's statement is also more than reminiscent of Marlow's description of the French gunboat firing into the African bush: "In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent" (17). Both Marlow and Caputo describe the vanity of man's belief of superiority over nature, especially over the jungle.

|Caputo explains the transformation of the landscape of Vietnam into an active character by discussing how his war was different from previous wars: the type of war that Vietnam was placed special emphasis on the land--the land was full of mines and punji traps and trip wires. | Unlike more "conventional" wars, in Vietnam the land could actually kill. Caputo writes:

We were making history: the first American soldiers to fight an enemy whose principal weapons were the mine and the booby trap. That kind of warfare has its own peculiar terrors. It turns an infantryman's world upside down. The footsoldier has a special feeling for the ground. He walks on it, fights on it, sleeps and eats on it; the

ground shelters him under fire; he digs his home in it. But mines and booby traps transform that friendly, familiar earth into a thing of menace, a thing to be feared as much as machine guns or mortar shells. The infantryman knows that any moment the ground he is walking on can erupt and kill him; kill him if he's lucky. . . . It was not warfare. It was murder. We could not fight back against the Viet Cong mines or take cover from them or anticipate when they would go off. Walking down the trails, waiting for those things to explode, we had begun to feel more like victims than soldiers.

(272-73; emphasis mine)

This guerrilla war in the jungle has turned the very "ground" into a "murderer," reducing the soldier to a "victim." It is only logical that a landscape that possesses such control over life and death should become an active, rather than a passive character in the American literature of the Vietnam War. Caputo, like Ahab with Moby Dick, has made a human enemy out of the deadly enigma of the landscape.

As Captain Beaupre before him, Lieutenant Caputo is a survivor. Reflecting upon his flight out of Vietnam, Caputo writes:

The plane banked and headed out over the China Sea, toward Okinawa toward freedom from death's embrace. None of us was a hero. We would not return to cheering crowds, parades, and the pealing of great cathedral bells. We had done nothing more than endure. We had survived, and that was our only victory.

(320)

So ends Caputo's "war story." In a war like Vietnam, a war we did not win, survival becomes the "only victory." Especially in a conflict with a hostile landscape, survival is a victory for the individual. Beaupre and Caputo, then are both victors: they have endured Vietnam.

Caputo's act of anthropomorphizing of the sun and heat of Vietnam can be explained by applying Spanos' study of the anthropomorphic tendency in Moby Dick, but this would amount to little more than a recounting of the application of Spanos' ideas in the last chapter. However, it is in Caputo's treatment of the landscape (or the landscape's treatment of Caputo) that another critical approach is brought into the discourse--that of The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard.

Upon participating in his first helicopter assault, Caputo concludes that "Happiness is a cold landing zone" (78). Not only does Caputo's epithet present an ironic

twist on the title of a Peanuts collection from 1962--  
Happiness is a Warm Puppy, but it also introduces the  
Bachelardian idea of hostile and non-hostile space.  
According to Roch C. Smith, Bachelard's idea of  
"topoanalysis" is, "in practice, . . . a phenomenolog-  
ical analysis of space, a means of inquiring into  
intimate space, into how space is imagined" (119).  
Smith goes on to state:

While he recognizes the possibility of hostile  
spatial imagery, Bachelard chooses to examine  
only those images in which man is at one with  
the world, a predilection for happy space  
which he labels "topophilia". . . . Bachel-  
ard's topophilia is a recognition that, unlike  
the quantifiable, neutral space of geometry, a  
lived-in space acquires qualities for the  
imagination. (120)

Caputo's belief that "happiness is a cold landing zone"  
expresses Bachelard's topophilia: a cold LZ is a "happy"  
space because it is not hostile towards Caputo; in fact,  
it is inviting.

Bachelard, by psychoanalyzing a house, demon-  
strates his theory of imaginative space. One room that  
Bachelard pays particular attention to is the cellar:  
"[I]t is first and foremost the dark entity of the  
house; the one that partakes of subterranean forces.

When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths" (Bachelard 18). This is so because "In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls" (19). The cellar, then, represents the unconscious, and the unconscious cannot be rationalized (19). Thus, when Caputo writes, "The air was heavy and wet, and the jungle smelled like a damp cellar" (78), not only is he bringing to mind, through simile, a "real" basement, but he is also invoking the archetypal cellar that imbues the jungle with an unconscious mind. In Bachelard's words, Caputo is "the cellar dreamer [who] knows that the walls of the cellar are buried walls, . . . walls that have the entire earth behind them" (20). The jungle represents to Caputo all those buried impulses and desires that he had safely locked away in the cellar of his own unconscious, that are now beginning to break out. Of this he writes: "Perhaps the war had awakened something evil in us, some dark, malicious power that allowed us to kill without feeling" (309). For Caputo, his own propensity for violence is the inhabitant of his cellar.

John Hellmann notes that Caputo "throughout his descriptions of combat . . . emphasizes the Vietnam 'bush' as a nature inherently hostile to the American



character" (113), an observation supporting the idea of Caputo's Bachelardian conception of "hostile spatial imagery." In the words of Tobey Herzog, Caputo avoids "telling just another Vietnam war story" by analyzing "the psychological landscape" of Vietnam ("Writing About Vietnam" 689); Bachelard's ideas, then, provide a "foundation" upon which to "topoanalyze" the landscape of Vietnam.

Hellmann writes,

In the Vietnamese bush Caputo portrays an American protagonist returning to the frontier to find nature not the reinvigorating and renewing friend of Leatherstocking and the Green Beret, but rather the terrible haunt of devils once envisioned by the first Puritan settlers. (114)

However, Hellmann does not go on to specify that Caputo's devils, like those of the Puritan settlers, are an outward projection onto the landscape of an internal conflict. Caputo, like his American forefathers, does not accept the responsibility for his own unspeakable sins but lays the blame, through projection and anthropomorphosis, on the land. Where the Puritans could project evil onto the woods of New England, Caputo can blame the jungles of Vietnam. Hellmann clarifies Caputo's investment of causation into the jungle:

As the Puritans remaining in England had predicted would be the fate of those going to America, and as Conrad had claimed in Heart of Darkness (1899) would be the fate of a European idealist left alone in the African jungle, Caputo shows the external wilderness calling forth the universal savage nature within man. (114)

Caputo explains this aspect of the controlling, correlative forces of Vietnam in the "Prologue" to A Rumor of War:

It was the dawn of creation in the Indochina bush, an ethical as well as a geographical wilderness. Out there, lacking restraints, sanctioned to kill, confronted by a hostile country and a relentless enemy, we sank into a brutish state. (xx)

Like Conrad, Caputo attributes an overwhelming power to the landscape: the landscape can turn men into brutes. When Caputo is brought up on charges of ordering the murder of two Vietnamese civilians, his defense is that the war--the land--tacitly caused him to wish for the death of the two. He only ordered the two Vietnamese to be captured and brought in for questioning, but he had "murder in his heart" when he told his men what he wanted. It is in his difficulty in accepting the

results of his men's foray as murder that illustrates the power that he attributes to the landscape:

And yet, I could not conceive of the act as one of premeditated murder. It had not been committed in a vacuum. It was a direct result of the war. The thing we had done was a direct result of what the war had done to us.

(309)

Caputo makes "Vietnam" responsible for the murders; "Vietnam" is the devil running around in the woods.

Zohreh T. Sullivan, in his essay "Enclosure, Darkness, and the Body: Conrad's Landscape," argues that white men portray the jungle as malevolent in order to vent their own repressed desires: ". . . the white man's reaction to the darkness as a fearsome other needs to be seen partly as a psychological projection of dark and violent forces within himself that he has been trained to repress" (65). Applied to Caputo, this explains his projection of a hostile "personality" onto the land of Vietnam. Sullivan further writes, "the jungle [is] . . . the place of threatening confrontation with savagery and sensuality, and the interior [is] . . . the setting for encounter on the deepest level with alien forces both within and without" (69). Where Marlow in Heart of Darkness is able to resist his own savage urges to "have a dance" with the natives, Caputo succumbs to his own

darker side when he implicitly orders the murder of the two Vietnamese civilians. His guilt is projected onto the landscape, making the landscape appear the cause, when the landscape's rendering is only a manifestation of his failure to control his own "heart of darkness." Whether or not Caputo "the author" is aware of Caputo "the character's" tendency to blaim the landscape for his own lack of resraint is up for debate. However, as Caputo "the author" is a gifted and introspective writer, I doubt that he would not recognise what appears to be a blatant attempt at rationalization by his "character." Furthermore, Caputo allows this unflattering depiction of himself to remain in his work in order to keep within the law of probability--to aspire for Universal Truth. To remove the rationalization would be to lie.

DISPATCHES FROM THE LIVING HEART OF DARKNESS

Forget the Cong, the trees would  
kill you, the elephant grass grew  
up homicidal, the ground you were  
walking over possessed a malignant  
intelligence. . . .

Michael Herr, Dispatches

The above words graphically illustrate the role that fear plays in anthropomorphosis: when people are scared enough they will readily endow trees and grass with humanity, imagining that it all is an agent of the fear. In the above excerpt, Michael Herr, a correspondent for Esquire who spent eleven months in Vietnam during 1967 and '68, describes his own reaction to the fear of being under fire in a combat zone. Though fear appears to be the impetus behind his violent characterization of the landscape, Herr stresses the importance of Vietnam's landscape throughout Dispatches. He begins with a recollection of an old French map of Vietnam that hung on the wall of his Saigon apartment. The map is like a photograph of the old, dead anthropomorphic Vietnam--it is a ghost: ". . . dead ground could come back and haunt you the way dead people do. . ."(1). And it does haunt Herr, as is evidenced by the important

part an anthropomorphic landscape plays in Dispatches.

Herr begins Dispatches with a vignette that describes that old French map: "That map was a marvel, especially now that it wasn't real anymore" (1). At first it appears that the "map" is the "it" that "wasn't real anymore"; however, not much effort is required to make the antecedent of "it" "Vietnam." For Herr and others who experienced the war firsthand, Vietnam could no longer be viewed as a country on a map--all objectivity was lost along with all the life that was also lost. Vietnam was no longer a place; it had become a being of almost human complexity. As Herr writes, "different pieces of ground told different stories to different people"(1). "Vietnam," then, became capable of telling stories. This prepares the reader to hear some of the land's tales and to pay particular attention to Herr's interpretations of them.

Almost a hundred pages later, Herr again returns to the idea of the inability of maps to represent Vietnam accurately. This time Herr focuses on the American military's imposition of a four corps map upon "Vietnam's older, truer being" (97). The four corps system is "a matter of military expediency" (97) because "it made for clear communication" (98); however, though "the language was used as a cosmetic, . . . [it was] one that diminished beauty" (98). Hence, what Herr is

doing, through his own version of anthropomorphosis, is introducing us to "Vietnam" so that we can recognize it by both sight and smell. Making Vietnam a living and breathing presence, Herr removes the barriers that readers have to geopolitics: for American armchair isolationists, "Vietnam" cannot be neatly filed under "History" and forgotten; as a living entity, Vietnam demands to be recognized and remembered.

As Halberstam and Caputo have both done before him, Herr begins by introducing us to the alien climate of Vietnam. Herr writes that there was no getting used to the climate:

. . . if you were one of those people who always thought they had to know what was coming next, the war would cream you. It was the same with your ongoing attempts at getting used to the jungle or the blow-you-out climate or the saturating strangeness of the place which didn't lessen with exposure so often as it fattened and darkened in accumulating alienation. (12-13)

So right from the outset Herr does not pretend that getting to "know" Vietnam is going to be easy: the climate is hostile and defies adaptation. Even when there is not direct engagement with the VC, there is always the constant combat with the climate: "The only

violence on Mutter's Ridge was in the heat. . ." (207-208). Even Saigon is not immune to the climate's suffocating breath: "A five-block walk in that could take it out of you, you'd get back to the hotel with your head feeling like one of those chocolate apples, tap it sharply in the right spot and it falls apart in sections" (44-45). The heat is inescapable--omnipresent.

Early on Herr places himself into the American tradition of fear of the wilderness as he describes the Highlands of Vietnam:

The Puritan belief that Satan dwelt in Nature could have been born here, where even on the coldest, freshest mountain tops you could smell jungle and that tension between rot and genesis that all jungles give off. (100)

Just as early Americans could not trust the darkness of the wilderness, Herr describes the Highlands as "spooky" as any New England wood of Hawthorne. Herr then relates the story of the Battle of Dak To, which occurred in the Highlands: "Oh, that terrain! The bloody, maddening uncanniness of it!" (101). Though 4,000 soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army were said to have been killed during the battle, only four bodies were ever recovered. Herr writes of this:

Spooky. Everything up there was spooky, and



it would have been that way even if there had been no war. You were there in a place where you didn't belong where things were glimpsed for which you would have to pay and where things went unglimped for which you would also have to pay, a place where they didn't play with the mystery but killed you straight off for trespassing. (101)

As Herr depicts them, the Highlands are hostile towards aliens--Americans. The Highlands "killed you straight off for trespassing." The "spookiness" of the Highlands also aids their anthropomorphosis when one considers all the attention Herr pays to "spooks"--those Americans that went into the as if it were home--near the beginning of the book. The Highlands, like the rest of the landscape, definitely appear to be on the side of the enemy by concealing thousands of his dead.

Herr also portrays the jungle as an active character; one that does not allow itself to be taken advantage of by aliens:

Maybe it [the jungle] really was what its people had always called it, Beyond; at the very least it was serious. I gave up things to it I probably never got back. (Aw, jungle's okay. If you know her you can live in her real good, if you don't she'll take you

down in an hour. Under.") (9)

Referring to the jungle as "her" calls to mind Cynthia J. Fuchs' argument for a violated female figure of Vietnam; however, though the jungle is presented as feminine, she is anything but a victim--she is the aggressor who holds power over life and death. Herr further discusses fear of the jungle as a projection of internal anxiety onto the exterior landscape. This feeling would often occur at night during short spaces of silence in the jungle, a fear that out in the jungle "hundreds of Viet Cong were coming and going, moving and waiting, living out there just to do you harm" (54). Such silences magnify fear until "You thought you heard impossible things: damp roots breathing, fruit sweating, fervid bug action, the heartbeat of tiny animals" (55). Fear again is a catalyst for anthropomorphosis.

In several of Herr's accounts, Vietnam is fitted with the epithet "motherfucker," which it wears as a bitter sweet (though more bitter than sweet) nickname. As naming is part of the anthropomorphic response, the application of such a "human" term to a country provides insight into the anthropomorphosis of Vietnam. Early in Dispatches, Herr describes the thoughts of a Marine who is grateful not for the food he is eating but for still being able to eat it: "There wasn't anybody he wanted to thank for his food but he was grateful that he was

still alive to eat it, that the motherfucker hadn't scarfed him up first" (15; emphasis mine). "Vietnam" is "the motherfucker," and motherfucker is a very special member of the lexicon of the grunt, according to Herr. Motherfucker appears as a term of endearment when used between the grunts, so its use here reflects the attraction/repulsion that the war has for them. Motherfucker is also used in reference to the situation at Khe Sanh, when it was surrounded and air support was not possible. When Mayhew, a grunt Herr befriends at Khe Sanh, suggests that the Army's First Air Cavalry Division would be conducting a relief operation of Khe Sanh, another Marine replies, "Man, ain' no Cav going' anywhere near this motherfucker'" (148). Though there does not appear to be any affection in the reference to the situation at Khe Sanh, "motherfucker" does suggest an anthropomorphosis of the landscape.

One of the most dynamic ways that Herr incarnates the landscape of Vietnam is in his description of the hills that surround Khe Sanh. In fact, Herr's presentation of the hills changes as the situation of the Marines changes: the more harrowing the situation, the more hostile the hills are portrayed; the more peaceful the situation, the more idyllic the hills become. For Herr, those highlands embody all "the death and mystery" that was Khe Sanh (114): they are sly

killers, secretive and deadly. These are qualities not usually attributed to hills--normally a hill is only dangerous if it looks as if someone could easily fall off of it. Herr's hills evolve into almost human characters.

The troubles at Khe Sanh take place during the spring of 1968 during the monsoon season, so a clear day is a freak accident. When one of these clear days "happens," Herr notices that the hills take on a completely different appearance:

The hills did not seem like the same hills that had given off so much fear the night before and all the days and nights before that. In the early-morning light they looked sharp and tranquil, as though you could take some apples and a book and go up there for an afternoon. (122)

The sinister aspect is temporarily removed from the surrounding high ground because the weather has granted those holed up at Khe Sanh a "reprieve." Herr writes, "Probably because the NVA knew that American surveillance and bombers would be working overtime on a morning like this, there was almost no shelling, and we all knew we could count on it" (122). The high ground, then, is the screen upon which Herr projects the feelings of himself and those around him. However, things could

only get worse.

The return of the monsoon brings back a hostility toward the hills that is reflected in Herr's narrative: "the Marines hated those hills . . . constantly, like a curse" (162). Herr comments that one grunt even called the hills "angry"--a very poetic observation. How can geological formations be "angry"? Their anger, is in part, a projection upon them of the burning anger that the grunts feel suffering so much at the "hands" of those anthropomorphized hills. Herr helps explain the Marines' hatred for the hills and their subsequent desire for revenge:

They had humped those hills until their legs were in an agony, they'd been ambushed in them and blown apart on their trails, trapped on the barren ridges, lain under fire clutching the foliage that grew on them, wept alone in fear and exhaustion and shame just knowing the kind of terror that night always brought to them. . . . (163)

In the terminology of William V. Spanos as he discusses Ahab's anthropomorphosis of the White Whale in Moby Dick, the Marines (via Herr) have gathered all the suffering, fear, and death that have happened within the hills into "a single, undifferentiated, inclusive, and predictable symbol or trope of Evil!" that transforms

and concretizes those feelings into something tangible (128-29). Like Ahab's response to the White Whale, the Marines seek revenge on the hills that have cost them so dearly; unlike Ahab, many succeed and live to taste that revenge:

So when we decimated them [the hills], broke them, burned parts of them so that nothing would ever live on them again, it must have given a lot of Marines a good feeling, an intimation of power. . . . [I]n April, something like revenge had been achieved.

(Herr 162-63)

Whereas Ahab was pulled under by his monomania, the Marines (with the help of the latest American firepower--a far cry from harpoons!) conquer their obsession, in part, because it is shared. Every man at Khe Sanh hated those hills, and it took no peg-legged captain to stir them up.

When the fighting is all over, the rugged terrain reflects the change. Before his departing Khe Sanh, Herr notices a soldier looking at that long hated landscape:

He sat there looking at the hills, and I think that he was all but hypnotized by them now; they were not the same hills that had surrounded him for most of the past ten

months. They had held such fearful mystery before for so long that when they were suddenly found to be peaceful again, they were transformed as greatly as if a flood had swept over them. (174).

Just as departing armies are supposed to de-activate their mine fields by digging up the explosives, Herr de-activates his hills by de-anthropomorphizing them: he transforms them from sinister enemy agents back into buccolic countryside. He leaves the hills as hills.

Finally, the image of Herr's that best anthropomorphizes the experience of Vietnam is that of a Christmas card he received from a Marine in 1968:

It showed a psychotic-art Snoopy in battered jungle fatigues, a cigarette clenched in his teeth, blasting away with an M-16. "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men," it read, "and Best Wishes for a Happy One-Niner-Six-Niner."

(278)

Bachelard writes in The Poetics of Space that "everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate" (39), and what could be more contradictory than Snoopy, that lovable pooch, acting the part of a killer of Viet Cong? The beauty of the analogy lies in its seeming impossibility--what irony there is. Did Vietnam turn Snoopy into a killer? Or was Snoopy always a killer and just

needed an excuse to vent his homicidal nature? The analogy works because it raises so many questions, and that is one purpose of the anthropomorphosis of Vietnam in the American prose narrative of the war--the raising of questions, questions such as "were we Puritans looking for new 'woods' to hold our devils now that the old woods were all full?"



"HOW THE LAND WAS": TIM O'BRIEN'S GOING AFTER CACCIATO

"The soldier is but the representative  
of the land. The land is your true  
enemy."

Tim O'Brien, Going After Cacciato

The above are the words of Li Van Hgoc, a North Vietnamese officer who has been sentenced to live ten years in the Viet Cong tunnels for attempting to desert. Li Van Hgoc--"just Van was fine" (105)--presents the above in answer to the barrage of questions from Paul Berlin, the novel's protagonist, who has so many queries about the enemy that he wants to make full use of his opportunity to ask them. O'Brien's novel is, in part, a fantasy that attempts to address many of these questions: from "how did the VC hide themselves?" to "why is the land so scary?" Going After Cacciato is composed of three distinct narratives. The first is comprised of what occurs during one night at an observation post in Quang Ngai when our protagonist, Spec Four Paul Berlin, keeps the watch by himself the entire night. The other two narratives are composed of memories of Berlin's experiences in Vietnam and a fantasy that Berlin is having about a deserter named Cacciato, who says he is walking to Paris. The fantasy

is a mental exercise for Paul Berlin, who imagines the good times and bad times following Cacciato 8,600 miles to the City of Light. The three narratives are interwoven to present many of the different perspectives from which to view the experience of Vietnam. The land emerges as an integral part of all three and is often the object of anthropomorphosis. Therefore, Paul Berlin's personal relationship with the land appears a good starting point.

"What Paul Berlin knew best was the land. He did not know the people who lived on the land, but the land itself he knew well" (O'Brien 289). So begins the chapter entitled "How the Land Was." The land of Vietnam plays an important role in Going After Cacciato, as it has in all the narratives so far discussed, and Paul Berlin's knowledge of the land helps us to better understand the "character" of Vietnam--"who" Vietnam really is. Berlin begins thinking about the land by first reflecting upon one province, Quang Ngai. "Quang Ngai was farm country" (298). We are informed that the farms are not personal ventures of private enterprise but are "village-owned and village-run" (298). The whole community participates in the planting and harvesting, and while some of the harvest is stored underground in clay pots, some of the harvest is sold in larger villages. However, Paul Berlin "did not know the

economics. What he knew was the land. He knew that the villages at the center of the land, were part of the land" (298-99). So for Paul Berlin, Vietnam truly is "the land."

Paul Berlin, through the novel's narrator, first introduces us to the paddies, where rice is grown: "Whenever he thought of the land, he thought first of the paddies" (299). He views the paddies as giving a depth to the land that he had never known in his Midwestern home: "not in Fort Dodge, where the land was smooth with corn in August, not in cities, where the land was concrete. In Quang Ngai the land was deep" (299). In Bachelardian terms the depth that the paddies give the land also endows it with an unconscious, as the cellar gives the house an unconscious. The land is deep because Vietnam's personality is also deep. This also prepares us for the difficulty that lies in trying to "get to know" Vietnam--characters with depth are always hard to "know." While others find the smell of the paddies offensive, "He knew from long days on the march that there was nothing loathsome about the smell of the paddies" (299). The smell, though not pretty, is a smell that refelected the plethora of life that thrives in the primordial slime--"bacteria, fungus and algae" (299). And as it is the smell given off by the anthropomorphic Vietnam, it is "no more evil or rank

than the smell of sweat." Furthermore, Paul Berlin appears to have made friends with the paddies: he has slept in them, peed in them, and once even drank from them. The latter two actions, peeing in and drinking from the paddies, Paul Berlin had been warned against if he wanted to avoid disease, but he was not afraid of the paddies.

Next, Paul Berlin (via the narrator) introduces us to the hedgerows. "They were not," we are told, "the hedges found in museum gardens or on the front lawns of old Iowa houses" (300).

They were thick, unclipped, untended tangles. Twice the height of a tall man, the hedgerows served the function that fences serve in richer countries: They held some things in other things out. But more than that, the hedges were a kind of clothing for the villages. (300)

It is as "a kind of clothing" that Paul Berlin's perception of the hedgerows helps to reinforce the idea of an anthropomorphic landscape: villages do not wear clothes--people do. (This presentation of the village as human suggests Paul Berlin's affection for Vietnam's villages. This is ironic because earlier in the novel, after Pederson's death, Berlin says, "Kill it," referring to the village off Hoi An; however, he said it

"without malice" [99-100]. The village was destroyed in retribution for Pederson, just as many enemy soldiers were killed in retribution for the deaths of friends. The village is no different than a man, subject to the same vengeance that men are.) Not only are the hedgerows "clothing," but they also express "the land's secret qualities" (300). The hedgerows gave Paul Berlin an unsettled feeling:

. . . cut up, twisting, covert, chopped and mangled, blind corners leading to dead ends, short horizons always changing. It was only a feeling. A feeling of marching through a great maze; a sense of entrapment mixed with mystery. The hedgerows were like walls in old mansions: secret panels and trapdoors and portraits with moving eyes. That was the feeling the hedges always gave him, just a feeling. (300)

Like the paddies, the hedgerows also add another facet to the personality of Vietnam--mystery. So Vietnam is deep and mysterious, very "subteranean" in Bachelardian terms. The hedgerows are "mysterious," or frightening (as the haunted house analogy suggests) because they obscure and confuse. They do not make Vietnam any easier for the American to understand.

The final adjective that Paul Berlin uses to

describe the landscape of Vietnam is "dangerous." He is discussing the trails, which he knows because "The war was fought with the feet and legs" (301). All grunts, because they are the legs of the army, know the trails; they have humped through every war and have become one with the ground they have walked on. As Caputo writes in A Rumor of War, "The footsoldier has a special feeling for the ground" (272). The trails are

Dusty paths connecting one village to the next, or the pressed mud along paddy dikes, or beaten-down grass of soldiers who had passed that way before. Sometimes the trails were roads, though never tar or concrete: The roads were called roads if they showed marks of cart traffic or the wear of wheeled artillery.

(O'Brien 301)

The trails of Vietnam are quite foreign to an American who is used to concrete sidewalks and asphalt streets. More disconcerting to the alien American, these trails are very dangerous: "It was best, of course, to stay off the trails" (301). The trails are perilous because the Viet Cong mined and booby trapped them: "No one was ever killed by a land mine or a booby trap unless it was along a trail" (301). Furthermore, trails were often the location of Viet Cong ambushes, because they were "exposed" and easily watched. Nevertheless, "There were

times when a fast march along a trail, however perilous, was preferable to a slow march through tangled, hostile country" (301). Sometimes men would rather take the risk of walking the trail, as it was less physically exhausting than humping through the bush. Sometimes, too, "missions required the use of trails"; and sometimes "it simply stopped mattering" (301). So the trails present the "danger" of Vietnam, while the paddies present "depth" and the hedgerows evoke "mystery" of the Vietnamese landscape.

What we have just learned of the land is the product of Paul Berlin's memory; we also learn about the land through his fantasy. In his fantasy, while traveling in pursuit of Cacciato, Paul Berlin and company all plummet through a hole in the road. They fall and fall and eventually land in an enormous tunnel complex where they meet Li Van Hgoc. Li Van Hgoc is a major of the Viet Cong who has been sentenced to spend ten years in the tunnels. He appears sincerely happy to have company: "'So,' Li Van Hgoc smiled. He poured brandy from an amber decanter. 'So now we shall talk of the war, yes?'" (106). Thus Paul Berlin (and we through him) is afforded the rare opportunity to "see how the other half lives." And Paul Berlin, who has so many questions to ask Van about the Viet Cong, begins: "How...did they hide themselves? How did they maintain

such quiet? Where did they sleep, [and] how did they melt into the land?" He goes on to ask about motivation, "the secrets of Quang Ngai," how they could "wiggle through wire," and the value they place on human life. He also asks where they bury their dead, and which villages are VC and which are not. All Paul Berlin's questions culminate into one: "Why was the land so scary--the criss-crossed paddies, the tunnels and burial mounds, thick hedges and poverty and fear?" (107). Paul Berlin asks, inadvertently, the question that has plagued the American conscience for over sixteen years, Why did we lose the war in Vietnam? Paul Berlin gets an answer to his question.

"The land," Li Van Hgoc murmured.

And sipping his brandy, the officer smiled.

"The soldier is but the representative of the land. The land is your true enemy."

(107)

Vietnam's anthropomorphosis is complete as Van reveals that "The land is your true enemy." Vietnam is not virgin territory waiting to be raped. No, Vietnam is an old and wise country that is going to fight. Vietnam will not submit to the will of the Westerner; Vietnam will fight him every step of the way.

Van, with the help of the beautiful, young,



Vietnamese refugee--Sarkin Aung Wan, goes on to better explain this idea of the land as enemy by using the word "Xa":

"There is an ancient ideograph--the word Xa. It means--" He looked to Sarkin Aung Wan for help.

"Community," she said. "It means community, and soil, and home."

"Yes, but it also has other meanings: earth and sky and even sacredness. Xa, it has many implications. But at heart it means that a man's spirit is in the land, where his ancestors rest and where the rice grows. The land is your enemy." (107)

The Xa has risen up against the American intruders because it reflects the spirit of the Vietnamese, North and South, who only want to live their lives as they have been. The people who work the land--the people who are the land--do not want anything the West has to offer: they do not want shopping centers or McDonald's. They only want to be left alone to work the land as their ancestors did. Because the land wants this, too, it is hostile towards the Americans who want to impose their Western ideas and technology upon it, while it is sympathetic to the Viet Cong, a fighting force composed largely of farmers. This alliance between the land and

the VC is suggested when Van asks, "Does the leopard hide? . . . Or is it hidden by nature? Is it hiding or is it hidden?" (108). The land definitely appears to be hiding the VC. Not only does the land appear to hide the VC, but as Donald Ringnalda points out, American soldiers did not do much to blend into the landscape:

Ironically, we were the ostentatious, easy-target Redcoats in Vietnam. Former VC and NVA have said that they not only could see and hear us coming, they could smell us. For one thing , as the war wore on, the grunts' clothing came more and more to reek of marijuana. And because we didn't eat the indigenous food of Vietnam, and because we used perfumed soaps and lotions (the preeminent weapons against the dirt of the organic inferno)--in short, because we in every conceivable way tried to superimpose America on Vietnam--even our very odor gave us away.

("Fighting and Writing" 32)

Ringnalda's argument that we did little to befriend the landscape of Vietnam explains why it would not show us any kindness. In light of our wanting to "superimpose America on Vietnam," the land has the force of the Xa behind it.

Paul Berlin explores this new concept, testing it:

"So the land mines--" [asks Paul Berlin].

"The land defending itself [replies Van].

"The tunnels."

"Obvious, isn't it?"

"The hedges and paddies."

"Yes," the officer said. "The land's own  
slough. . . ." (108)

So land mines and tunnels are only the land's way of defending itself. The land is alive and capable of fighting; it is also a representative of the people's spirit--the Xa.

After a short, pleasant visit, Lieutenant Corson decides that it is time for him and his men to depart. Van, however, believes otherwise; he believes the Americans to be his prisoners. He is quickly overpowered by the Americans who have him "outmanned, outgunned, and outtechnologized" (116). While he is tied up, Van is asked for the directions out of the tunnels. Unfortunately, Van does not know and responds, "If I knew . . . would I be here? Am I crazy?" (118). The interrogation continues, and Van breaks down: "Suddenly the man sagged. His smile was gone. He was sobbing. . . . The man wept. He shivered against his bindings. The weeping came in gasps, as snow breaks from cliffs. . . . Later, Li Van Hgoc told his story"

(119). His story is that of a brilliant young man with limitless possibilities who is forced to go to war. Attempting to run from his fate, Van is "condemned" to ten years in the tunnels. Of his time in the tunnels, Van says,

"Ten years," he murmured. "Ten terrible years." The man's lip trembled. "Ten years! An earthworm's existence. Snakes and maggots and bats, rats and moles, lizards in my bed. How do I describe it? Terrifying? Insane? 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. Buried in this vast stinking . . . How do I tell it? Filth! Ten years, and for what? What?"

(120-21)

By his emotional statements, Van appears as much, if not more, a prisoner than anyone else. He tried to escape during his first year, but discovered it was useless and decided to simply wait out the ten years. Van replies to their desire for escape, "Accept it. The land cannot be beaten" (121). Paul Berlin sums up the situation well: "The land, . . . [he] kept thinking. A prisoner of war caught by the land" (121). They all are caught by the land. But why is Li Van Hgoc also a prisoner

with the intruding Americans? What does "Vietnam" have against one of its own? Van had been "a brilliant student, a wizard in electronics" (119). Maybe "Vietnam" feared his imposition of Western technology upon the agrarian East. In that case, Van was as much of an intruder as the Americans; he, too, threatens the Xa.

Sarkin Aung Wan provides the way for the Americans to escape. She informs them that "The way in is the way out. . . . To flee Xa one must join it. To go home one must become a refugee. . . . We have fallen into a hole. Now we must fall out" (122). Van cries in response: "She prattles like a madman!. . . . Mystic nonsense! I warn you again, out there you will perish without hope. Lost forever. Accept it!" (122). The Americans offer to take Van with them, but he will not hear of it and responds, "Never. . . . Execute me, shoot me dead, but I won't step into that beastly hell. Never. . . . The land cannot be beaten. Accept it" (123).

As this occurs in Paul Berlin's fantasy, it is very possible that he is projecting his own fear of tunnels onto Li Van Hgoc. Zohreh T. Sullivan writes in his essay "Enclosure, Darkness, and the Body: Conrad's Landscape," that "Hollow space is threatening not only because it is void, empty, waste, and sterile, but because it can also be devouring, enclosing, female

space" (73). We learn enough of Paul Berlin's sex life to assume that he is a virgin, and even in his fantasy he never consummates his love with Sarkin Aung Wan. We also know that he is terrified of tunnels: if he would not have been so afraid of tunnels, he could have won the Silver Star. Therefore, Paul Berlin's incredible fear of tunnels, projected onto Li Van Hgoc, helps to explain the horror they contain: Paul Berlin is afraid of tunnels because they suggest not only the vagina, but also because he is afraid of the "devouring" darkness they contain--the tunnels are full of Death for Paul Berlin.

Vietnam, the "character," is depicted by the protagonist of Going After Cacciato, Paul Berlin, as deep, mysterious, and dangerous: the paddies are deep, the hedgerows are mysterious, and the trails are dangerous. Through his fantasy we learn that Paul Berlin thinks that the land is the enemy, and since we learn that he thinks that Vietnam is the land, the resulting conclusion is that Vietnam is the enemy. Other landscapes are presented in the novel: the sterile atmosphere of "home" back in Fort Dodge, the Wisconsin woods that represent fear and failure, and all the landscape that is traversed in Paul Berlin's fantasy. No landscape, in and of itself, presents the horror to Paul Berlin that the landscape of Vietnam does. Vietnam

is a land that is "scary" to him because he, like the other Americans, does not belong there. O'Brien makes clear that Vietnam was only defending itself against the New Pilgrims, like Berlin, who came to save Vietnam from itself. Like the "old" Pilgrims, ". . . the proto-Gringos who found the New England woods too raw and empty for their peace and filled them up with their own imported devils" (Herr 51), American soldiers went to Vietnam only to fill its jungles with their own evil, an evil that lurked in their deepest, darkest hearts. So though they thought they went to Vietnam to preserve and protect democracy, they succeeded only in repeating the mistakes of their forefathers. O'Brien appears to suggest, through his anthropomorphosis of the landscape of Vietnam, that if a land so vehemently protests our being there, maybe next time we should listen.

WHAT DOES THE LAND THINK ABOUT ALL THIS  
ANTHROPOMORPHOSIS ANYWAY?

STEPHEN WRIGHT'S MEDITATIONS IN GREEN

He could feel the jungle, huge and  
silent, move right up to the wire  
and lean its warm dark presence  
against his skin.

Stephen Wright, Meditations in Green

In Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green the anthropomorphosis of the landscape of Vietnam is deconstructed. Meditations in Green is the most recent work in this study and shares the current critical trend toward "deconstruction," which Terry Eagleton defines as "the critical operation by which such oppositions [as imposed by society] can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning" (132). In layman's terms, deconstruction takes our assumptions about a text and turns them inside out.

Meditations in Green is the story of James Griffin, a Vietnam veteran living in New York City who turns to meditation as a means of coming to a separate peace with his wartime experience. The novel is set in the present (the early 1980s), but it incorporates many reflections



of Griffin's tour in Vietnam. While in Vietnam, one of Griffin's duties was to examine reconnaissance photographs taken of the jungle and then determine where defoliation was necessary. Being a party, then, to the "murder" of untold numbers of plants, it appears strangely fitting that Griffin's post-war meditations involve pretending he is one. Through Griffin's meditations and his memories we, the readers, experience what it was like to be a plant in Vietnam during the war.

William V. Spanos, in his article on anthropomorphosis in Melville's Moby Dick, writes, "In the language of recent literary criticism, Melville's novel is a de-struction of the American Adam's nostalgic effort to name--to anthropomorphize--and domesticate the dreadful mystery of being" (128). Spanos contends that while the character of Ahab, through his monomania, attributes an "intelligent malignity" to the White Whale, Melville's novel is really a deconstruction of man's impulse "to name"--to anthropomorphize. Spanos argues that Ahab's ("central man's") act of anthropomorphosis, though ostensibly an attempt to domesticate "the dreadful mystery of being" (in particular the whale who has bitten his leg off), in part results "not in the fulfillment of his unsatisfied desire for certainty and repose, but in a metamorphosis that transforms man into the monstrosity he attributes to the being he would

subdue and his innocent victim into a retaliatory force" (134). In short, Spanos believes that Ahab specifically, and "central man" generally, becomes as much if not more of a monster than Moby Dick, the creation of his anthropomorphic impulse. In Meditations in Green a similar process is at work. In all of the American prose narratives of the Vietnam War that we have discussed so far, the authors have attributed an "intelligent malignity" to their anthropomorphic landscapes. What Wright does differently is not only turn the anthropomorphosis inside out by showing us a plant's eye view of the war, but he also illustrates what hostile, heartless monsters the Americans have become who first labeled-- "named"--the landscape of Vietnam as a hostile, heartless monster. Wright's novel, like Melville's, exemplifies the consequences of anthropomorphosis, which include becoming what one creates.

Wright begins his deconstruction of the anthropomorphic landscape of Vietnam right from the beginning of the novel. The novel begins with "Mediatation in Green: 1," in which James Griffin, our protagonist, is meditating on what it is like to be a house plant, at the mercy of his human owner.

Have you talked to a plant today, offered kindness to something green? These are crucial gestures. A plant is not free. It

does not know the delirium of locomotion, the pyramidical play of consciousness, the agonies of volition. It simply stands in the dirt and grows. Vegetable bliss. But trapped indoors a plant's pleasure becomes dependent upon human hands, clumsy irresponsible hands, hands that pinch and prune, hands that go on vacation, abandon their ferns to northern exposure, cracked beds stale air, enervations, apathy, loneliness.

Help! My stalk is starting to droop.

(Wright 3)

Though initially this introduction might make one wonder what sort of a novel one is about to read, it serves a very important purpose: Wright prepares the reader to leave all his own preconceived notions about plant life at the onset and open his mind to the idea of "vegetable consciousness." In order for Wright's deconstruction of the anthropomorphic landscape of Vietnam to work, he must first create empathy for the lowly plant. Not until empathy is achieved can the old anthropomorphic notions be re-evaluated. However, before discussing Griffin's--and our own rehabilitation--let us first come to understand, through Griffin's history, how the landscape of Vietnam (with emphasis on the vegetation) came to be anthropomorphized into such an evil enemy.

James Griffin is a draftee assigned to the 1069th Intelligence Group, the compound of which, when viewed from the air, resembles an American flag imposed upon the luxuriant Vietnamese jungle (41). Initially Griffin's responsibility is to view reconnaissance photographs to assess the damage inflicted on the landscape by B-52 bombers: he charts the bomb distribution. After noticing how quickly the enemy rebuilds what the American bombers have destroyed, he thinks: "There was no stopping these people, they took to craters like Americans to shopping malls" (57-8). The frustration of there being no apparent progress and playing "the bomb distribution games of connect-the-dots and see a smiling fish, a happy flower" (57) leaves him bored. However, Griffin is soon removed from this duty and given a new one of "top priority"--looking at aerial photographs of the jungle and determining which sections should be eliminated as they benefitted the enemy. The logic of this is "that peeling away sections of the enemy's green umbrella exposed his activity to the light of return fire, that crop denial disrupted his activity, that without food or a place to hide he could not win" (132). The Americans are going to win the war by killing Vietnam's landscape. "The land is the enemy"--we have seen this enemy anthropomorphic landscape before.

Griffin's instructor for his new military occupational service is "Specialist Fifth Class Ronald Winehaven master of applied science. Lessons in the detection and measurement of organic death. The physics of infrared, the chemistry of poisons" (131). Winehaven adroitly defends their mission to destroy the jungle because "it's not as if bushes were innocent" (132). He asks Griffin if he has ever been out on the perimeter, to which the latter responds negatively. Winehaven continues:

"Well, you ought to go out there sometime, sit on top of a bunker, stare at the tree line for a while. You have to concentrate because if you blink or look away for even a moment you might miss it, they aren't dumb despite what you may think, they're clever enough to take only an inch or two at a time. The movement is slow but inexorable irresistible, maybe finally unstoppable. A serious matter."

"What movement, what are you talking about?"  
[asks Griffin].

"The trees of course, the fucking shrubs. And one day we'll look up and there they'll be, branches reaching in, jamming our M-60s, curling around our waists." (132)

Clearly, Winehaven suffers from a monomania similar to

that of Captain Ahab: Winehaven has transformed a benign landscape, admittedly one the enemy knows and can use to his advantage, into a malignant being that is waiting to overwhelm the Americans in a Conradian apocalypse.

Winehaven's belief appears absurd, but such a contention is supported, though in varying degrees, throughout the text. Griffin, while sitting naked one night on top of a bunker "could feel the jungle, huge and silent, move right up to the wire and lean its warm dark presence against his skin" (298). He also imagines the jungle reclaiming the compound after the Americans depart:

Between the floorboards poke the tender tips of new life, shoots of marijuana, naturally. There is growth everywhere. Plants have taken the compound. Elephant grass in the motor pool. Plaintain in the mess hall. Lotus in the latrine. (146)

Donald Ringnalda describes why such an adversarial relationship to Vietnam's landscape in American literature appears only natural considering that

While in Vietnam, the United States spent more than \$150 billion trying to keep that country from dripping through its technological tines. It was a futile undertaking, considering that the landscape of Vietnam was perceived as a

never-ending cycle of growth and decay set on fast forward, a green monster of rioting vegetation, a botanist's madhouse, a florist's nightmare, a chlorophyll freakout, an organic inferno. ("Fighting and Writing" 28)

As the above points out, much (if not most) of the United States' efforts in Vietnam were used to combat the landscape. Therefore, it is a logical conclusion that America's literature of the war should also devote a substantial effort to treating the landscape.

Wright, along with the four other authors discussed (Halberstam, Caputo, Herr, and O'Brien), only follows such logic by stressing in his novel the importance of the landscape in the war.

Wright's Griffin originally has no problem with his new role in "vegecide"; in fact, after spending a little time in the bush himself he wants all the vegetation dead. Griffin winds up in the bush after volunteering to go search the site of a crash where two officers of the 1069th went down. His volunteering is very uncharacteristic of him, but he feels a need to actually do something--to see if he really is a soldier. Walking through the foliage, Griffin is fascinated:

He had never before seen a limb or a leaf this close or without the interdiction of a lens.

He felt like a spy in the camp of the enemy, a

judge locked into a prison of those he had  
condemned. (Wright 276)

From the above, Griffin might be expected to feel guilty after being face to face with so many of the same organisms he has sentenced to death. However all Griffin can think about is the Americans' vanity for believing that they can actually overpower the jungle; he also thinks about "getting out alive":

The effort to bring down this house [the jungle], of which Griffin was a part , seemed at this close distance to be both frightening and ludicrous. On the ground, crawling like a bug through the bed of those deceptive film images, he sensed a force the camera could never record, a chemical hardly subdue.

Getting out alive was the major priority now.

(277)

All Griffin's time looking at the jungle on film has not prepared him for the actual experience of the living jungle. Griffin is terrified by the jungle, and he feels claustrophobia setting in. In his fear and loathing of the alien landscape, Griffin realizes that he is like every other American--he, too, wants the jungle dead:

He was experiencing a vegetable overdose, a chlorophyll freakout. Then Griffin got mad,



indignant, why was he being forced to endure this unnecessary agony? The whole stinking forest should have been sprayed long ago, hosed down, drenched in Orange, leaves blackened, branches denuded, undergrowth dried into brittle paper. The mountain was surely overrun with VC and their camouflaged crops, secret manioc fields, banana groves, rice paddies, water wells. Who permitted these outrages, where was the technology when you needed it? No wonder we were losing the damn war. In spite of the sweat in his eyes, the raw sore rubbing open on his left heel, he discovered he was smiling.

Yes, you too, you fucking American. (278)

Griffin appears to be fully infected with Winehaven's monomania: Griffin can no longer view bushes as innocent; he, too, fears a botanical revolution. When Griffin returns to his duties over the herbicide maps, he dreams of "100 percent coverage," of wiping out the entire jungle (294-95). And this is how he feels for the remainder of his time in Vietnam.

Griffin returns to the United States a wounded man. Not only does he suffer from a physical wound that causes him to limp, but he also suffers the emotional wound of drug addiction and the spiritual wound of guilt

for what he helped do to the landscape of Vietnam. Griffin is under a physician's care for the physical wound, while he is under the care of Arden, a practitioner of holistic medicine (a.k.a. an herb guru), for his emotional and spiritual healing. Arden, whose name invokes the green world of Shakespeare's As You Like It, is "the messiah of the advent of vegetable consciousness" (88).

Arden was in the pacification business. He offered a service for those who suffered from rebellious nerves, insurgent thoughts. . . . Treatment began with a sustained verbal assault upon the infrastructure of the ego, a tactic designed to extinguish any coherent sense of self. (86-88)

After the old self is destroyed, the new self is "scolded, coaxed, and trained toward happiness in a series of private exhortatory sessions with Arden or one of his aides" (87). These sessions are followed by a routine of private meditation at home, where the client is given a flower to meditate upon. The flower chosen is determined by the desired result of the meditation:

If an individual was unable to love, then a rose was offered as the image of meditation. For innocence, the daisy; for optimism, the chrysanthemum; for a stronger ego, the

narcissus. Each image was presumed to inspire  
a sympathetic efflorescence of the soul. (87)

Arden came up with these "prescriptions" himself, and he put much work into formulating them. He compiled them all into his "magnum opus," The Psychology of the Plant, a book that "had to be kept in a vault for it was rumored large sums were available to anyone who could provide a privileged peek into its secret contents" (87). Griffin, somewhat reluctantly, allows himself to be counselled by Arden and devotes time to the daily meditations of plant life (examples of his or the narrator's meditations appear at the beginning of each chapter). Donald Ringnalda, in his essay "Chlorophyll Overdose: Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green," writes of the purpose of Griffin's meditations,

. . . on Griffin's new meditative track of being he is to become a humble plant, not an assemblage of the fragments of his prewar psyche. Instead of overdosing on drugs, he is now to overdose on chlorophyll. He is to become the locus of photosynthesis, to convert the waste of Vietnam into new forms of energy.

(137)

Furthermore, on a literary level, Griffin's meditations also give him the ability to deconstruct the anthropomorphic landscape of Vietnam. Through his meditations,

Griffin attains a peek through the "eyes" of the very vegetation he spent so much time and energy helping to destroy.

One of Griffin's meditations, "Meditations in Green: 3," explores the feeling of being a plant whose very home, the earth that holds its roots, is being bombed. The meditation begins pleasantly enough:

You stand in a field surrounded by family.  
Light falls from the proper angles, wind blows  
from the proper direction, shadows are  
composed of friendly shapes. Home. Simple  
nourishment, harmonious rhythms. A fertile  
tomb where the spirits of ancestors brood over  
the unbroken seeds of the future. Long green  
waves swell and ebb across time. The rustle  
of relatives is a melody. The weather is kind.  
Nothing will ever change. (36)

The life of a plant is portrayed as quite idyllic: "surrounded by relatives," "light falls from the proper angles," and "the weather is kind." Furthermore, the plant believes that this is the way life will always be: "Nothing will ever change." The meditation goes on to characterize the "feelings" of photosynthesis: "inner chemicals mix and bubble, there is magic brewing" in the light of day (36). The process is pleasant enough as "The rush expands into leaf after leaf, planes of

awareness, alchemist's shops to sweeten the day," and you "rise ecstatic into the blue-petaled sky" (36). "Centuries pass" this way (36). Suddenly, out of nowhere, the old certainties become uncertainties:

There is a vibration. Rolling in from the west comes thunder louder than the afternoon shower, a foreign key that silences the drone of insects. It advances swiftly, the tremors spread. Boom pause boom pause boom pause boom pause boom boom boom pause boomboomboomboom faster now, the heavy running feet of an animal new to the forest, boomboomboomboom-boomboomboom and a shadow swoops in and the sun swooshes out and a wind and you, you find yourself all at once chewed and torn, thrust head downward in smoking dirt while above in the hot air dangle your shocked roots already begun to blacken and curl at the touch of a light photosynthesis is hopelessly unable to transform. (36)

Although this meditation occurs near the beginning of the novel, its meaning and impact are not clear until we have finished Mediations in Green. The above meditation deconstructs, in Spanos' term, the anthropomorphic landscape by allowing us to realize how monstrous the United States had become in labeling the landscape

monstrous; for example, the "light photosynthesis is hopelessly unable to transform" is fire--the fire produced by exploding bombs. The meditation graphically proves Winehaven wrong--the bushes are innocent. They have done nothing to anyone but grow and live more peacefully than mankind. It is not their fault that the VC use them to hide and fight the Americans. They are just plants, and it is insane to endow them with a "malignant intelligence." Monomania is the sickness of a frightened mind.

Griffin seeks healing from the guilt and pain caused by the war, and appears to find it, but not through Arden. Griffin stops going to see the plant psychologist, but he does begin growing a garden in his fourth floor apartment. He does this by bringing in large wooden boxes, resembling coffins, filled with dirt. Gardening had been Arden's suggestion, but Griffin begins this of his own volition. The gardening gives him more understanding of plants than any amount of meditation. He becomes obsessed with gardening:

I rarely left the room anymore. The plants required attention, I required attending. I weeded, I watered, I whispered encouragement. I dragged the boxes one by one into the bright window light and out again. The seeds burst, and the soil broke

and I used to lean against a box, eye to the ground, and monitor a miracle as tiny separate shoots, tender as a baby's fingers, probed curiously through a wall of earth. The strength in such softness. The simple mystery. I could watch and watch. Later, I read dozens of botany books but diagrams and nomenclature couldn't satisfactorily explain the direct wonder of one growing plant. You had to feel your way into understanding. I could see myself stripped to the skin, lying in a box of my own, swollen root burrowing into the ground. Blossoming all over.

(311)

It is through Griffin's "feeling his way into understanding" plants that his guilt is relieved: his penance is to help those he previously hurt. Wright's novel, through characters such as Griffin and Trips, depicts the plight of the Vietnam veteran in today's society: short on funding and people that care, veterans are left to make out the best they can. Some, like Trips, do not make it and are left to flounder around hopelessly; others, like Griffin, stumble upon some way to healing that works for them. Griffin finds this in caring for plants. Considering that plants were what he hurt in the war, it is only logical that through them he should

seek reconciliation.

There is yet one more flower at the end of the novel: the Veteran's Day Poppy. This artificial flower is made by, and for the support of, the Disabled Veterans of America. The significance of the poppy, the "Veteran's friend," appears also to be its connection with helping those who have been hurt by war. The poppy's message, Wright's message, seems to be that only by helping the veterans of Vietnam can America achieve anything like reconciliation with its past.



## MOPPING UP: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

As I have attempted to illustrate, the anthropomorphosis of the landscape in the American prose narrative of the Vietnam War is both an exercise in understanding an alien and hostile environment and an expression, through projection upon the land, of the alien and hostile feelings that Americans brought with them to Vietnam. Therefore, anthropomorphosis tells us a great deal about the war and those who fought it. The works we have examined span a period of almost fifteen years, beginning with David Halberstam's One Very Hot Day (1968) and concluding with Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green (1983). Along with the remaining three narratives, we have witnessed an evolution, through anthropomorphosis, in the depiction of Vietnam's physical, as well as America's psychological, landscape. The "mutations" that occur in the progression of these presentations of the land of Vietnam reflect upon the American culture that spawned them. In a summary of our observations of the anthropomorphic landscapes in these narratives, let us stop to consider the cultural assumptions and biases that inform their re-creation of "Vietnam: the character"--the incarnated landscape.

Halberstam's One Very Hot Day utilizes Captain Beaupre's anthropomorphosis of Vietnam as a means of

educating its readers to the realities that the landscape presents to the Americans serving there.

Halberstam appears to represent the belief prevalent early in our involvement that Americans were crusaders in Vietnam: white knights braving a perilous forest to rescue incompetent villagers from their own ineptitude. Halberstam's "Vietnam," then, is a dragon that needs to be slain, and his American protagonists are errant knights of the late John F. Kennedy's Camelot.

Philip Caputo writes in the opening section of A Rumor of War: "If he [Kennedy] was the King of Camelot, then we were his knights and Vietnam our crusade. There was nothing we could not do because we were Americans, and for the same reason, whatever we did was right" (66). This appears to be in agreement with the assumptions that underlie Halberstam's novel. However, where Halberstam's hero succeeds in his "quest," Caputo, like Percival in Tennyson's "The Holy Grail," boisterously takes up the quest only to become disillusioned along the way. Caputo's presentation of the landscape of Vietnam debunks the earlier assumptions of Halberstam by depicting a "Vietnam" that is not inherently hostile, but one that becomes so through the projection upon it of the inner hostilities of the Americans who fight there. Caputo's story is not one that celebrates heroic knights confronting exterior manifestations of evil, but

one that painfully relates ordinary men battling with the evil that lurks within themselves.

Michael Herr's Dispatches does not call American assumptions about Vietnam into question so much as it emphasizes the inevitability of our involvement in Southeast Asia. Herr writes of the problem of determining when American intervention in the war actually began:

Anyway, you couldn't use standard methods to date the doom; might as well say that Vietnam was where the Trail of Tears was headed all along, the turnaround point where it would touch and come back to form a containing perimeter; might just as well lay it on the proto-Gringos who found the New England woods too raw and empty for their peace and filled them up with their own imported devils. (51)

According to Herr, as a nation we were doomed to fight in Vietnam: the quest was pre-programmed in our collective genes. There was no choice. From Herr's point of view of the war, a grunt's-eye-view, nothing could seem more superfluous than questioning the politics and foreign policy that sent Americans to Vietnam: the grunts were there, and all that mattered to them was getting back alive. Herr portrays the landscape as both attractive and repulsive; he is shocked by what he sees yet

cannot turn away. Herr suffers from "the fascination of the abomination" of the "heart of darkness" of the 1960s--he is addicted to Nam.

Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato, unlike Dispatches, does call our intervention in Vietnam into question. In the Viet Cong Li Van Hgoc's assertion that "The land is your enemy" (107), O'Brien typifies America's struggle in Vietnam not only as one against a hostile, alien landscape but also a landscape that represents the will of the people. According to O'Brien, the land had every right to defend itself against America's imposition of Western ideas upon its ancient Eastern culture. His novel stresses the cultural disparity that made Vietnam a lost cause from the onset.

Lastly, Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green calls into question the whole phenomenon of an anthropomorphic landscape in the prose narrative of the Vietnam War. Wright begins with the traditional portrayal of a "hostile enemy landscape," like those we have already discussed; however, Wright exaggerates his enough to appear ludicrous. And if poking fun at the anthropomorphic convention is too subtle, he makes us pay the price of endowing the non-human with "intelligent malignity": we are forced to witness the horror of being a plant in

a botanical holocaust. Nevertheless, Wright does indicate that there is hope for America if only she can learn to recognize and nurture what she has previously only destroyed and then ignored. The suggestion comes at the end of the novel in the form of a Veteran's Day Poppy, like the ones made by the Disabled Veterans of America. Now that the fighting is over, we must seek out and help those that are hurting as a result of our involvement in Vietnam. Meditations in Green is a plea to find forgiveness for the guilt of Vietnam by nurturing those veterans who bear the grim reminders of our mistake.

The five American prose narratives of the Vietnam War that we have examined all share an emphasis on the landscape of Vietnam; in fact, all present "Vietnam," to some extent, as a major character. We began with Halberstam's "Vietnam" as the villain that must be subdued and have ended with Wright's "Vietnam" that begs for forgiveness and healing. All five narratives attempt to come to terms with the experience that was and still is "Vietnam," for that is the purpose of the literature--to shed light and diffuse the shadows that surround the enigma of our longest and most painful war. John Hellmann concludes his "Epilogue" to American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam with a poignant and beautiful passage that illustrates the role of America's literature of the

Vietnam War in the healing process of the stigmata that is Vietnam. Symbolic of my debt to him, I leave you with Hellmann's words:

America has yet to be conquered, but it has inflicted upon itself a failure so spiritually wounding that its citizens have been compelled, of their own will, to open the landscape of the nation's capital with a Vietnam memorial that is a symbolic grave. In that memorial, and in the literature, we can search out the terrors of our own nature. We can see that the deeply flawed past, from which the nation began by declaring its independence, is truly our father. But we can also see that only a second failure, of nerve, would cause us then to draw back from the American frontier, from our own better dreams. Mythmaking is an active, not a passive, process. Perhaps, from the landscape of our Vietnam failure, we can find a new determination to brave the opening expanse. (224)

## WORKS CONSULTED

- Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1969.
- \*Beidler, Philip D. American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1982.
- . "Truth-Telling and Literary Values in the Vietnam Novel." The South Atlantic Quarterly 78 (1979): 141-56.
- \*Caputo, Philip. A Rumor of War. New York: Ballantine, 1972.
- Conrad, Joseph. Heart of Darkness. Ed. Robert Kimbrough. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- Fuchs, Cynthia J. " 'Vietnam and Sexual Violence': The Movie." America Rediscovered: Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War. Eds. Owen W. Gilman Jr. and Lorrie Smith. New York: Garland, 1990. 120-33.
- \*Fussell, Paul. The Great War and Modern Memory. New York: Oxford UP, 1975.
- \*Halberstam, David. One Very Hot Day. Boston: Houghton, 1968.
- Hellmann, John. American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.
- . "The New Journalism and Vietnam: Memory as Structure in Michael Herr's Dispatches." The South Atlantic Quarterly 79 (1980): 141-51.
- \*Herr, Michael. Dispatches. New York: Avon, 1978.
- \*Herzog, Tobey C. "Comment and Response: Tobey Herzog Responds." College English 43 (1981): 741-742.
- . "Going After Cacciato: The Soldier-Author-Character Seeking Control." Critique 24 (1983): 88-96.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Writing About Vietnam: A Heavy Heart-of-Darkness Trip." College English 41 (1980): 680-95.
- \* Jones, Dale W. "The Vietnams of Michael Herr and Tim O'Brien: Tales of Disintegration and Integration." Canadian Review of American Studies 13 (1982): 309-20.
- \* Lomperis, Timothy J. "Reading the Wind": The Literature of the Vietnam. Durham: Duke UP, 1987.
- McInery, Peter. "'Straight' and 'Secret' History in Vietnam War Literature." Contemporary Literature 22 (1981): 187-204.
- Melville, Herman. Moby Dick. New York: Grosset, 1945.
- O'Brien, Tim. Going After Cacciato. New York: Dell, 1978.
- \* Ringnalda, Donald. "Chlorophyll Overdose: Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green." Western Humanities Review 40 (1986): 125-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Fighting and Writing: America's Vietnam War Literature." Journal of American Studies 22 (1988): 25-42.
- Searle, William J., ed. Search and Clear: Critical Responses to Selected Literature and Films of the Vietnam War. Bowling Green: Popular P, 1988.
- Smith, Roch C. Gaston Bachelard. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- \* Spanos, William V. "The 'Nameless Horror': The Errant Art of Herman Melville and Charles Hewitt." Boundary 2 (1980): 127-39.
- Sullivan, Zohreh T. "Enclosure, Darkness, and the Body: Conrad's Landscape." The Centennial Review 25 (1981): 59-79.
- Taylor, Gordon O. "American Personal Narrative of the War in Vietnam." American Literature 52 (1980): 294-308.
- \* Wright, Stephen. Meditations in Green. New York: Scribner, 1983.