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Introduction

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans – born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage – and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. (John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address,” 20th January 1961)

Something isn't right here. Something has gone desperately wrong. And those in charge cannot be trusted to fix it.
(Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* xiv)

Vietnam. When John F. Kennedy stepped onto the podium to make his inaugural address in 1961, the word suggested nothing but the promise and infinite possibility of “the American Century.” As Kennedy would proclaim, this was to be a new age, one characterised by the exceptional American values of democracy and liberty, and one in which the United States would continue to fulfil its Manifest Destiny. Few could have foretold that less than fifteen years later “Vietnam” would become a phrase that Americans everywhere would come to hear ‘not as a name of a country but as a word for death and disgrace’ (Emerson 48).

Yet long before the last of the helicopters left Saigon in 1975, and long before a multitude of veterans and journalists attempted to expose their nation's hubris in literary form, two novels had already epitomised the exceptionalist ideology which would lead the United States into an unnecessary war in Southeast Asia. Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955), a text narrated in the first-person and describing a litany of events matching many of the author's own well-documented experiences in Vietnam, depicted a native people reluctant to embrace a foreign culture being forced upon them. Three years later, *The Ugly American* written by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer and, according to statements by the authors, 'based on fact' (180), demonstrated the widespread inefficacy of the "American Way" in an agrarian Asian nation not unlike Vietnam. But both of these narratives were fictional. The decision by Greene to incorporate fictitious characters into his narrative, and that taken by Lederer and Burdick to situate their collection of accounts in the imaginary "Sarkhan", meant that the significance of the political messages contained within these narratives was often undermined and trivialised.

But what if Greene had decided simply not to name Fowler, an act which would have left his protagonist as an arbitrary "I" whose voice may or may not have been that of the author? What if *The Ugly American* had been written as nonfiction as originally intended?¹ If each had been framed to the reader as creative nonfiction, as an autobiography or a memoir, a piece of reportage or an oral history, would the ominous tidings contained within these narratives have had greater significance to a

¹ While these questions may seem frivolous given that both *The Quiet American* and *The Ugly American* were both presented as works of fiction, there is much within each text that allows the reader to at least entertain the thought that each work was in some way referentially valid. In his autobiography and in many subsequent interviews, Greene admits that 'there is more direct rapportage in *The Quiet American* than in any other novel I have written' (Greene, *Ways* 139), and that many of the scenes were represented in the text exactly as they had occurred. Similarly, in an article written for the *New York Times* in 2010, Michael Meyer reveals that *The Ugly American* had originally been commissioned as a work of nonfiction by publishers W.W. Norton but that editors 'suggested it might be more effective as a novel' (Meyer). *The Ugly American* received attention from many political luminaries, the most prominent of which being future president John F. Kennedy, which resulted in its subsequent use by U.S. tourists and diplomats as 'a sort of how-not-to-travel guide' (Meyer). However, remarks such as those by Senator William Fulbright, that *The Ugly American* was 'sterile, devoid of insight, reckless and irresponsible' (qtd in Meyer) challenged such praise in the eyes of many.

generation of Americans moving inexorably towards one of the most tragic wars in their nation's history? I argue that although written too late to counteract the catastrophic effect that the war would have on both American and Vietnamese societies, the creative nonfiction inspired by the conflict went some way towards correcting the exceptionalist ethos which had pervaded the American psyche since the Indian Wars of the 1800s. As such, the central argument of this study is to show that not only did creative nonfiction assist this corrective process, but that it did so by depicting the events of the Vietnam War in a narrative form which encouraged the American people to revisit their preconceived ideas about the war by presenting an equally plausible alternative.

'As a City upon a Hill ...'

The interpretative lens through which U.S. society viewed the conflict in Vietnam differed drastically in the years before, during and after the war. However, the perception of America as an "exceptional" nation was not one which originated with the onset of the Cold War. It had first entered the public lexicon in 1630 in a sermon given by John Winthrop on board the *Arbella* en route to the New World. As leader of one of the earliest groups of European settlers to arrive in America, Winthrop had urged his fellow colonists to behave with morality and integrity as their actions would become the example by which all others who came to the New World would be judged. Over the following centuries, the mantra that America was 'as a city upon a hill – the eyes of all people are upon us' (Winthrop) took a firmer hold on the national psyche. As the United States grew in stature, the prevailing

myth was that it was the laudable aspects of its culture, liberalism, individualism and egalitarianism, which had “allowed” it to evolve from a British colony into a global superpower. This belief was amplified in the nineteenth century by the view that America’s on-going expansion was not motivated by a desire for territory, but rather the nation fulfilling its Manifest Destiny. This decreed that the United States was ‘the instrument of Divine Providence for bringing liberty and democracy to all of humanity’ (Guggisberg 268). The exalted nature of this task resulted in what Martin Seymour Lipset describes as a ‘utopian orientation’ in the American people, a trait which caused them ‘to view social and political dramas as morality plays, as battles between God and the devil, [in which] compromise is virtually unthinkable’ (22).

Such a Manichean outlook would prove to be a critical characteristic of the American ethos throughout the following century. It allowed the United States to view any party it deemed to be “un-American” as inherently wicked, a stance which also provided the moral justification for total war against those parties. This type of warfare deliberately targeted the social structures of a people. Destroying towns and settlements, and making no differentiation between soldiers and their kin, its intent was to annihilate the chosen enemy. Such a strategy was used to its fullest during the Indian Wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Landmarks such as Sand Creek and the Marias River became synonymous with the slaughter of defenceless women, children and the elderly by the U.S. military.² The primary consequence of this total warfare was that the nation’s first Anglo-Saxon inhabitants settled on what

² The massacre of the Cheyenne at Sand Creek (Colorado 1864), and of the Piegan Blackfeet at the Marias River (Montana 1870) resulted in the combined deaths of approximately 306 Native Americans by the U.S. military. Atrocities of this kind were so commonplace during the American-Indian Wars that they number too many to mention here. However, the aforementioned were amongst the most infamous. Each involved the unprovoked attack on a defenceless tribal settlement consisting primarily of women and children, the sick and the elderly, and played a crucial role in the demise of each tribe. For a more comprehensive account of these and other such incidents of the American-Indian War, see Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. While his narrative focuses primarily on the American-Indian War from 1860 to 1890, Brown does refer to the events preceding the final decades of this one-sided conflict. Most significantly, by comprehensively detailing the almost complete annihilation of a native population by an alien race who generally thought it ‘right and honorable to use any means under God’s heaven to kill Indians’ (87), his account also gives an indelible insight into the Frontier-heritage ideology which would go on to shape American values and beliefs for centuries to come.

was largely stolen land, exploited and enslaved both the native population and other indentured peoples, and frequently murdered or waged war against anyone else who opposed them. But the collective memory of these times didn't view such conflicts as the virtual genocide of another race. Akin to the manner in which Jay Winter saw 'the individual's memory [being] fashioned by the social bonds of that individual's life' (25), the barbarity of American actions during this period were rationalised by what Slotkin calls 'the Indian-War model' (493).

Echoing the bipartisan mind-set between good and evil mentioned by Lipset, this paradigm 'insists that when faced with such a reversal of historical destiny *compromise is unthinkable.*' Slotkin goes on to state that "'progress" can and must be defended by "savage war," prosecuted until one side or the other is annihilated or subjugated' (493 my emphasis). In keeping with America's mythic vision of itself, those responsible for any atrocities committed against the native population were only able to carry out such acts by imitating the "evil savage". This characteristic of the genocidal process was crucial. It sanctioned American barbarity against the native Indian as a cathartic act, one which was subsequently mitigated by the perception of a victory over evil. Slotkin refers to this practise as 'regeneration through violence' (352). Never has Walter Benjamin's edict that history empathises with the victors rung so true. Yet such a belief became an intrinsic part of the national narrative for many Americans. As a consequence, war, and all other similar forms of government-sanctioned violence, came to represent 'the only valid path to historical progress' (493). Motivated by a sense of Manifest Destiny, the Indian Wars were not viewed as a unique occurrence in the history of the United States, but as proof of the moral rectitude of its national philosophy, one which proclaimed America's singular place as the epitome of enlightenment in a hostile and uncivilised

world. Because of such rose-tinted views of the nation's origins, all subsequent acts of military aggression, and particularly those in Southeast Asia, became interminably linked with the idea that the U.S. 'stood only for what was true, good and right and [its people] were the great liberators of the world from totalitarian tyranny' (Caputo, *Writing 4*).

Vietnam presented the United States with an obstacle similar to those it had so successfully overcome in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, it was assumed by virtually every one of the powerbrokers in Washington that the conflict in Southeast Asia would follow the nation's traditional blueprint of war. As described by David Halberstam in *The Best and the Brightest*, his acerbic account of the political machinations which led to the escalation of the Vietnam War from counterinsurgency to one of the longest and bloodiest wars of the twentieth century, 'the American military command thought [the Vietnam War] was like any other war: you searched out the enemy, fixed him, killed him, and went home' (185). It was the final characteristic of this intervention which made the American approach so unique in comparison with other First World nations. Whereas the latter had fought colonial wars in order to conquer and keep, the U.S. soldiers 'were fighting in order *to go home*' (Halberstam 185 my emphasis). Complying with the principles of its Manifest Destiny, American involvement in Southeast Asia was motivated purely by moral and ideological concerns. Needless to say, because the United States had been a 'work of Providential design' (Ignatieff 14) since the moment of its inception, the prospect of defeat was never even countenanced. Just as it had been against all others who had resisted the American brand of civilisation, victory against Communism in Vietnam was assumed to be inevitable.

This assumption was buoyed by the words of such prominent political figures as John F Kennedy, whose “City on a Hill Speech” in Massachusetts in January 1961, as well as his inaugural address in Washington eleven days later, provided a familiar lexicon for Americans to interpret all future geopolitical crises. Any pending conflict between the United States and its enemies was subsequently suffused with a ‘transformational grammar’ (Pease 157) derived from the same mythic designs which had both described the “battle” for the American frontier, and justified the Indian Wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his presidential speeches, Kennedy spoke of ‘a perilous frontier’ (“City”), of revolutionary beliefs, and of God-given purpose as his nation assumed ‘the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger’ (“Inaugural Address”). The tone of this new idiom, by a president later described by Philip Caputo as ‘the glamorous prince of Camelot’ (*Rumor* 16) for the idealism of his rhetoric, subsequently influenced the American people’s understanding of virtually every significant historical and political event of the decade thereafter. However, the Indian War model which was the basis of the American mythic vision began to come apart during and after the Vietnam War. The fabled image of the United States which had orchestrated and influenced its intervention in Southeast Asia became ever more inconsistent with the reality being reported by the independent media both domestically and internationally. Reports coming home from the war told of the widespread indifference, and even of the resentment, of the ordinary people to the presence of American personnel in Vietnam, of the general ineffectiveness and ineptitude of the military, and of numerous atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers in what quickly became ‘the world’s most intense brush-fire war’ (Halberstam 164). These revelations, combined with increasing anti-war sentiment at home, and the growing awareness that the prevailing

hegemony was a fallible entity, meant that the United States was becoming more associated with massacres such as My Lai than its Constitutional ideals of liberty, democracy and freedom.³

The disintegration of this paradigm was ultimately compounded by the ever-increasing realisation that an American victory in Southeast Asia was highly unlikely. The immediate impact of this pending loss for a nation whose mythic vision was based on military strength and success was that there could now be no regeneration in Vietnam, no self-fulfilling justification of the millions of lives lost, or of the wanton destruction of an agrarian nation. For a country which had imbued its storied vision of itself with a messianic truth, there was now only ‘an inability to reconcile myths of national virtue with the history of the conflict’ (Walsh, “American Writing,” 229). The result was an ideological crisis within American society unlike anything seen since the time of the Civil War. As the U.S. intervention in Vietnam came to a close, a new vision of America was needed, one which would acknowledge ‘what was shameful about [its] historical past,’ and most significantly, ‘enable its victims and oppressors to take up a different position about the future’ (Pease 73). While many attempts were made to achieve this goal, few were as successful, as powerful, or as widely available as the creative nonfiction written by the veterans and journalists who witnessed the war in Vietnam at first-hand.

‘A Special Kind of Fiction ...’

³ On March 16th 1968, a company of American soldiers attacked the village of My Lai in the Quang Ngai province of Vietnam. Between 347 and 504 innocent men, women and children were murdered. Countless other incidents of rape and mutilation were also reported as having occurred during the assault. Initially covered up by the American military, reports of the atrocity came to light eighteen months later as several U.S. Congressmen were contacted and informed of the truth of My Lai by a helicopter door-gunner who had served in the area at the time. An investigation was launched which resulted in the conviction of just one man, Lieutenant William Calley. Details of the My Lai Massacre can be found in virtually every history of the Vietnam War, but probably the most comprehensive are *My Lai: A Brief History with Documents* by James Olson and Randy Roberts, and *My Lai: An American Atrocity in the Vietnam War* by William Allison. While the My Lai Massacre was without argument one of the worst *confirmed* atrocities of the Vietnam War, it was by no means the only incident of this kind committed by American soldiers during the conflict. For further insight into the full extent of U.S. military action against the civilian population of Vietnam, see Nick Turse’s *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*.

But before such claims can be substantiated, questions must be answered regarding creative nonfiction as a literary form. The most prominent of these is what *exactly* is creative nonfiction? Often overshadowed by more literary and poetic forms, creative nonfiction is a genre which portrays actual people, places and events using the techniques of fiction. Since the mid-1700s, the genre is one which can be best described as having ebbed and flowed throughout history. Considered to represent what Truman Capote would later describe to George Plimpton as ‘a failure of imagination,’ it was seen as offering little in the way of cultural worth and frequently marginalised by academia as a consequence.

Creative nonfiction has, however, existed in several other guises over the centuries, and since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a shift of opinion which has allowed it to re-emerge as a significant American literary genre. Literary journalism, long-form journalism, new journalism, the nonfiction novel, the nonfictional narrative, the personal essay, life-writing, memoir, and autobiography are all terms that have been used to describe creative nonfiction at some point.⁴ Consequently, definitions of the genre are many, but few offer any conclusive insight into its actual make-up. Despite this variety of titles, each manifestation has generally presented an account which the author believes to be an accurate and unadulterated retelling of events. A closer examination of the genre’s current title does nothing to shed any further light on this description.⁵ Juxtaposing a pair of terms which would appear to resist any form of dialectic, “creative” suggests something imaginative, new and previously unseen while “nonfiction” would seem

⁴ Just as with creative nonfiction however, many of these generic titles have also been the subject of criticism regarding their suitability to accurately describe their respective narratives.

⁵ Having only been brought into common usage in 1983, “creative nonfiction” is still a relatively new title for the genre. Considered to be ‘the godfather behind creative nonfiction’ (Gutkind 10), Lee Gutkind introduced the term “creative nonfiction” in the late Seventies. However, this generic label was not officially recognised by the American National Endowment for the Arts until 1983 in order to bestow creative writing fellowships to authors of the nonfictional form.

to be a binary opposite. Instantly striking the reader as the antonym of fiction, it implies a narrative derived from a pre-existing series of facts which can be referentially verified. Thus, rather than definitively indicating the nature of the genre, its most recent label of “creative nonfiction” would appear to perpetuate an intrinsic generic which allows it to be interpreted as either fact or fiction.

Nonetheless, citing creative nonfiction’s dependence on a number of poetic literary techniques for the construction of its narrative, the majority of critics insist on viewing creative nonfiction as ‘a species of fiction’ (Foley, *Telling* 41).⁶ But characterised by a verisimilitude amplified beyond that found in traditional realistic or historical novels, each theorist interprets works of creative nonfiction as quite unlike *conventional* works of fiction. I see this view of the genre as the most logically appropriate, and one that can be rationalised quite easily.

In “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse,” John Searle attempts to differentiate between fiction and traditional nonfiction (newspaper reportage, documented histories, and educational texts, etcetera) using a model of vertical and horizontal rules.⁷ These indicate whether a work should be interpreted as fact or fiction. Although Searle applies them to a piece of “straight” journalism and an obviously fictional text, they can also be brought to bear on the ontologically uncertain creative nonfiction. The vertical rules ‘establish connections between language and reality’ (326). They are literal and empirical, and encourage the referential reading of an account. Such precise, unambiguous constructs are at the

⁶ While many theorists endorse this view, Barbara Foley’s *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practise of Documentary Fiction*, Ronald Weber’s *The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing* and John Hellman’s *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* do so more capably than many other comparable texts on creative nonfiction. Their view that creative nonfiction was a unique form of fiction finds further support in Paul John Eakin’s description of autobiography in *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* as ‘a special kind of fiction’ (25). This autobiographical understanding of the genre will be comprehensively examined in chapter 2.

⁷ These traditional sources of nonfiction are described as ‘noncreative nonfiction’ (xxvii) by Robert Root Jr in *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*. This term is used by Root to describe ‘all nonfiction outside [creative nonfiction]’ (xxvii).

core of creative nonfiction's narrative. However, Searle accompanies these vertical rules underscoring the referentiality of an assertion with a set of horizontal rules. Defined as 'a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world' (326), they allow the author to use words 'without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by [their literal] meanings' (326). More concisely phrased, these horizontal rules refer to any method of poetic description, such as metaphor, omniscient narration or free indirect discourse, available to an author. These literary devices are rarely found in conventional referential texts. But as a genre which emphasises the craft of its narrative as much as the content, they are common in creative nonfiction. Therefore, although describing empirically legitimate entities, the expressive language used within the genre to represent the experiences of the author transforms the nonfictional narrative into the 'non-deceptive pseudo-performance' (325) which Searle views as the identifying trait of fiction, despite the illocutionary intentions of the author of creative nonfiction being committed to the portrayal of a referential truth.

Because, as Weber states in *The Literature of Fact*, 'all forms of writing offer models or versions of reality rather than actual descriptions of it' (14), the world portrayed by creative nonfiction should be viewed as one *analogous* to the actual world rather than an identical reproduction. Very much like Baudrillard's simulacra, it is both real and unreal. The goal of the creative nonfictional author is that his or her work be read as an empirically viable text. Yet for it to exist, the narrative must first pass through the interpretive lens of both memory and the mind's eye. Immersed in such subjectivity, the world represented in the narrative is transformed from the reality which Baudrillard saw as the source of representation due to 'the principle of

the equivalence of the sign and of the real' (6). Highlighting quite clearly the tension between fact and fiction that is intrinsically part of the genre, such an interpretation is ideally suited to the generic hybrid that is creative nonfiction. While the narrative is posited to the reader as being empirically legitimate, the manner of its construction means that the discourse can only ever be described as being closely similar to, or derived from, accepted fact. This duality was one of the characteristics of the genre which made it so attractive to those who sought to challenge the version of events being disseminated by the American government during and after the Vietnam War. Its hybridity dovetailed perfectly with the radical ideology that sought to demonstrate that the cultural depiction of certain events in U.S. history was extremely susceptible to distortion by specific ideological or hegemonic forces.

However, viewing creative nonfiction as a type of fiction does give rise to further questions. What distinguishes creative nonfiction from other fictional discourses, and what is it about the genre that encouraged readers to believe that it possessed a "truth" lacking in other fictional forms? Creative nonfiction's most noticeable feature as a fictional genre is its commitment to only representing people, places and historical events which have actually occurred. Offering a different trope of suspense to that found in standard fiction, its narrative structure is generally one which reveals *how* and *why* certain events occurred more so than presenting a dramatic retelling of events. This approach means that the 'textual elements' of creative nonfiction can be understood as 'possessing referents in the world of the reader' (Foley, *Telling* 26). As many of these entities can be verified by the public, they amplify the existing verisimilitude of the narrative. However, as quite often occurs in creative nonfiction, these 'historical realemes' (McHale 87) are frequently located in the uncertain temporal zones defined by Brian McHale as the 'dark areas'

(87) of history. These are ‘the aspects [of history] about which the “official” record has nothing to report’ (87). This characteristic of the genre means that often less tangible “facts,” such as the inner thoughts of characters or the private conversations of the persons documented, are presented in the text. But it must be stated that regardless of whether their narratives are referentially “hard” or “soft,” portraying the trivial details of an old friendship or the revised version of a widely-known event with potentially widespread consequences, the authors of creative nonfiction consider their respective accounts to be as accurate as those found in any piece of newspaper journalism or historical text.

This empiricism is primarily derived from creative nonfiction’s status as an experiential genre. It is important to note that while this trope is usually derived from the author’s own involvement in an event, it can also refer to the process of documenting one’s experiences of researching an event that has passed.⁸ As noted by Linda Hutcheon in *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, it is this assertion of personal testimony within creative nonfiction that provides the basis of the genre’s claim that its narrative is a replication of truth or historical fact. A consequence of this trait is that authorial subjectivity is thus an intrinsic part of the narrative’s composition. In

⁸ Some critics of the genre have suggested that there exists an absolute identity between creative nonfiction and all other forms of life-writing, most commonly, the autobiography and the memoir. However, this is only partially accurate. Although located towards the softer side of the fact-based spectrum characterising the genre, *all* works of memoir and autobiography should be considered works of creative nonfiction. This is because, by definition, the constitutive elements of each of these forms of narrative should have corresponding loci in the real world. However, the inverse rule does not apply. This is primarily because of how creative nonfiction presents and portrays events, both public and private. Despite the experiential texts having a noticeably autobiographical tone, the self-reflexivity which characterises autobiography and memoir is not always present in creative nonfiction. Authors of the genre frequently have not directly experienced, or are immediately affected by, the incidents contained within the narrative as much as a person documenting the personal emotions and experiences which have shaped their lives. In the context of this study of Vietnam War creative nonfiction, examples of such works include Neil Sheehan’s *A Bright Shining Lie*, David Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest* and C.D.B Bryan’s *Friendly Fire*. This associative property of autobiography correlates with the author of creative nonfiction’s desire to document his or her experiences of an event, either as participant or independent observer. However, memoir and autobiography generally do not utilise excessive or unnecessary bibliographic material to corroborate the verifiability of their texts to the same extent as the more factually-derived works of creative nonfiction. While personal dedications and photographs are occasionally integrated to encourage a referential reading, authors of autobiography and memoir rely more on an ‘implicit or explicit contract’ that Paul John Eakin refers to in the introduction of Lejeune’s *The Autobiographical Pact*. This pre-established arrangement between author and reader ‘determines the mode of reading of the text and engenders the effects which [...] define it as autobiography’ (xi). More concisely phrased, this contract implies that the reader subconsciously agrees that the documented events occurred as they have been portrayed in the text. Ultimately, autobiography and memoir should be understood as part of the biological subgenre within creative nonfiction’s ‘generic umbrella’ (Bradley 204) rather than either offering any kind of verisimilar rival.

Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction, Sondra Perl considers this aspect of creative nonfiction to be as important as the ‘factual truth’ (81) of the narrative. Incidents are portrayed as they would be in referentially-assured texts. But for Perl, the goal of the creative nonfictional author is *to represent his or her own personal responses* to these events as much as represent the events themselves. The ‘who, what and where that most people agree upon’ is thus counterpointed against ‘the experience seen through the writer’s eyes’ (81). Daniel Lehman summarises this idea quite clearly when he states that ‘the writer of nonfiction produces a document for an audience that reads history as both text and experience’ (*Matters* 2-3).

Significantly, however, while Lehman’s statement reiterates the genre’s refusal to prioritise between the rival elements of its narrative, it also offers an alternate means of understanding how the portrayal of authorial experience reinforces the empirical viability of the text. The accuracy of the events documented within the nonfiction novel is assured to the reader in what can be understood as an outward exertion of referential pressure. Its textual elements are ‘phenomena [...] available to and experienced by the reader outside the written artefact’ (*Matters* 4). As the places, people and events experienced by the author exist in actuality, bar the most extreme instances of violence or war, it is not outside the bounds of possibility for the *reader* to engage with these elements of the text on their own terms. A corollary to this potential for a shared narrative experience external to the text is that the “names” in the text are often real names. Unlike the arbitrary signifiers found in fiction used to describe a character whose existence is directly linked to the author’s imagination, these “names” have the power of reply. Should the account drastically differ from the accepted version of events (as most infamously was the case in 2003

with James Frey's addiction memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*), those documented in the narrative 'can talk back to their authors,' enabling them to either 'endorse [...] or undercut' (Lehman, "Proper Name," 68) the integrity of the account.⁹ Creative nonfiction can thus be said to exist on what Lehman calls 'a multi-referential plane' (*Matters* 4), one which occupies a common realm between the narrative and the experiential world, and which bolsters the veracity of the text.

In any discourse claiming to represent reality, there is controversy surrounding the manner in which it portrays both the verifiably historical and the unquantifiably private parts of its narrative. By deliberately using methods drawn from fiction, creative nonfiction's claim that its account is a mimetic representation of historical reality means that it is one of the genres most susceptible to these kinds of criticisms. The artifice begot by the use of these techniques is most commonly demonstrated by extended periods of authorial reflection and a belles-lettres style of prose, both of which emphasise the sensory details of that being described, whether it be person, place or event. For example in *The Armies of the Night*, Norman Mailer's nonfictional account of the Pentagon Peace marches in 1967, Mailer's description of Robert Lowell's physical appearance is noticeably infused with his own emotions for the poet laureate:

His features were at once virile and patrician and his
characteristic manner turned up facets of the grim, the

⁹ James Frey achieved notoriety after it became known that he had lied about many of the incidents he had described in his memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*. Having been lauded by Oprah Winfrey on her *Book Club* television show, Frey's harrowing tale of the depths his drug and alcohol abuse had taken him to had sold over 3.5 million copies. However, *The Smoking Gun*, an exposé website which specialises in uncovering the truth behind events often overlooked by mainstream media using legal records and police documentation, found that much of Frey's narrative had been massively exaggerated. The sources of their investigation, and that of subsequent investigations by many other media, were the "characters" of the narrative who testify to many of the incidents described by Frey as being entirely fraudulent. For further information, see *The Smoking Gun's* "A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Fiction Addiction" and Laura Barton's interview with Frey in *The Guardian* in 2006, "The Man Who Rewrote His Life."

gallant, the tender and the solicitous as if he were the nicest
Boston banker one had ever hoped to meet. (29)

In James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, something as routine as farmland is portrayed with similar poesis:

Fields are workrooms, or fragrant but mainly sterile work-
floors without walls and with a roof of uncontrollable
chance, fear, rumination, and propitiative prayer, and are as
the spread and broken petals of a flower whose bisexual
centre is the house. (124)

In Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, even an event as terrible as war is related with literary finesse:

Every fifth round fired was a tracer [...] everything stopped
while that solid stream of violent red poured down out of the
black sky. If you watched from a great distance, the stream
would seem to dry up between bursts, vanishing slowly from
air to ground like a comet tail [...] It was awesome, worse
than anything the Lord had ever put down on Egypt, and at
night, you'd hear the Marines watching it, yelling, "Get
some!" [...] The nights were very beautiful. (132-133)

Although most commonly a poetic description of actual reactions and experiences, these literary devices include the selection, omission and manipulation of certain scenes by the author, omniscient and anterior forms of narration, free indirect discourse, the inclusion of unverifiable interior monologues and an inconsistent

movement of time throughout the narrative. Such artifice is also demonstrated by a host of other poetic approaches. The most extreme of these were most famously brought to public attention in Tom Wolfe's "New Journalism." Where the traditional tenets of who, what, where and how had provided the raw data for traditional journalism, the New Journalists sought 'to report events from the inside out' (Staub 55) in order to convey a true and absolute historical reality which encompassed the emotional responses of the actors. This was done with the unorthodox use of a host of grammatical constructs, literary pyrotechnics described by Wolfe in his anthology of New Journalism as 'the lavish use of dots, dashes, exclamation points, italics, and occasionally punctuation that never existed before :: :: :: :: :: ' (21).

The presence of multiple accounts of the same event in a narrative was also very much a characteristic approach of New Journalism's underlying poiesis. Most commonly found in events written during or after the Counterculture, authors of creative nonfiction sought to make their readers aware that they were only viewing a partial, and by no means absolute, account of events. C.D.B. Bryan's *Friendly Fire* illustrates this technique with great clarity. Documenting the struggle of grieving parents seeking to find out the truth about their son's accidental death during the Vietnam War, their investigation only reveals several "versions" of the events which occurred, each as inadequate as that which preceded it. The effect of this trope is often replicated in creative nonfiction by an authorial switching of the narrative stance from the first to the second, and even to the third person. A practise which also extended to the switching of narrative *voice*, this strategy subtly encouraged the reader to integrate their own opinions and beliefs into the nonfictional text by inferring the malleability of written fact. While such meta-narrative tendencies are exemplified quite clearly by Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July*, they are also

evident in a more subtle fashion in nonfictional narratives such as Susan Sontag's "Trip to Hanoi" in the form of a series of diary entries, and in *The Armies of the Night*, where Norman Mailer juxtaposes for the reader "history as a novel" and "the novel as history." By no means a definitive list, these techniques demonstrate why many critics of the genre cast doubt on the accuracy of events portrayed in creative nonfiction.¹⁰ Described as 'strategies of dramatic immediacy' (323) by Eric Heyne, these methods are crucial to creative nonfiction. Not only do they distinguish its narrative from traditional nonfictional discourses, they provide one half of the ontological bedrock upon which the genre is based.

Regularly found counterpointing such obvious poiesis in creative nonfiction, however, is a multitude of extraneous literary and non-literary material. Integrated into the body of the text, these entities are unessential to the narrative. Yet they create a referential frame which associates the details of the account with independent sources of 'empirical validation' (Foley, *Telling* 26), thus encouraging the reader to interpret the narrative's truth-claims as real. Most commonly found in the guise of fore- and after-words, these literary devices have several functions. They allow the author to personally reassure the reader of the verity of the account. They inform the reader of the (often unusual) lengths undertaken by the author to adequately research the text (For example, as the conflict began to reach its height in 1966, the preface to Frances Fitzgerald's *Fire in the Lake* outlines how the author spent nine months in war-torn Vietnam so that her narrative could be read as an authentic account of events in Southeast Asia). Lastly, by acknowledging people in the text using their proper names, the reader is also provided with yet another source

¹⁰ Many of the theoretical texts on creative nonfiction acknowledge or briefly discuss the varying techniques of fiction used in the genre. However, the most comprehensive analysis and demonstration of these methods is in Gay Talese and Barbara Lounsbury's anthology of the form, *Writing Creative Nonfiction: The Literature of Reality*.

of ‘living partners and/or contestants in the production of historical meaning’ (Lehman, “Proper Name,” 68) whose acquiescence can be interpreted as an endorsement of the narrative.

In addition to the fore- and after-words, these literary devices can include a number of other bibliographic materials ranging from bibliographies to personal dedications. These are in turn often complemented by a host of non-literary materials such as photographs, maps, and newspaper articles. Comprised of empirical elements often taken from historical sources or other similar works, and combined with an authorial commitment to only represent that which had occurred, creative nonfiction is thus also intrinsically capable of educating its reader. This attribute is remarked upon by Lee Gutkind. He states that the ‘information derived from mundane legwork, research, and scholarship are the roots of creative nonfiction; they constitute the important teaching element, the informational content’ (53) of the genre. Dating back as far as the 1700s, this intention to educate its readers on the world around them is apparent as an integral part of creative nonfiction’s portrayal of reality. In *History and the Early English Novel*, Robert Mayer notes how for centuries a number of periodicals and journals argued that Defoe’s *A Journal of a Plague Year* should be interpreted as a referentially viable plague-response manual because of the abundance of historically verifiable, real-world details contained within it.¹¹ This didacticism was also an attribute of nineteenth-century American literature in slave narratives which sought to heighten public awareness of the barbarity of the slave trade still existing in the United States at the time. A century later, it was one of the key aspects of the genre which made it so attractive to a

¹¹For further information on how Mayer outlines in great detail how Defoe’s *A Journal of a Plague Year* was interpreted as a referentially sound document from the mid-eighteenth century up until early stages of the 1900s, refer to *History and the Early English Novel* 210-213.

Countercultural movement looking to highlight what it saw as an attempt by the administration to convince the American public of the rectitude of its war in Vietnam. Instilling legitimacy into the retelling of events, unlike any other fictional discourses, these nonessential entities encourage the reader to believe that the account is a ‘narrative that intersects with actual lives’ (Lehman, *Matters* 153). Deliberately inserted, the cumulative effect of these constructs is thus a realignment of the reader’s perceptions of the narrative from that of an apocryphal recollection of events to one which could be considered as referentially viable as an empirical text.

‘A Tableau of Experience...’

Yet for this study to demonstrate how creative nonfiction attempted to assist this reconstruction of the American ideology in the years during and after the war in Vietnam, as comprehensive a tableau of experience as possible is required. Several critics of Vietnam War literature have approached this task tangentially. However, many of these efforts have been limited to investigating either the referentiality of an allegedly nonfictional account of the conflict, or, how the war and its after-effects are portrayed in contemporary American literature, fictional or otherwise. Philip Beidler’s *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam* is one example of the latter. Examining the full spectrum of writing inspired by the war, from David Halberstam’s pseudo-fictional *One Very Hot Day* to Bruce Weigl’s war poetry, Beidler’s text examines a variety of literary responses which were used as a ‘sense-making’ (Beidler 100) mechanism for those who still remained troubled by their wartime experiences.

Donald Ringnalda's *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War* surveys a similarly broad scope of literature. However, his text goes beyond the traditional literary media to encompass the attempts to encapsulate the war both theatrically and using a selection of war monuments. Significantly, rather than demonstrating how those who experienced the conflict in Indochina made sense of the many traumatic events they witnessed there, Ringnalda's analysis contends that instead of simply trying 'to make America's experience with Nuoc Vietnam behave by smelting it down into traditional mimetic transcriptions' (Ringnalda 5), these fictional and nonfictional cultural artefacts should be re-examined so that their didactic potential can be truly realised. *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* by John Hellmann is perhaps one of the best and most comprehensive attempts to demonstrate how America's mythic past influenced its approach to the war in Vietnam. But Hellmann's broad survey of American literature does not differentiate between the rich assortment of fictional and nonfictional works he examines in terms of their generic structure, thus neglecting to determine how each text demonstrates its ideological currency.

Hellmann does attempt this task to an extent, however, in *Fables of Fact*. In this theoretical text, he discusses several of the stylistic approaches which allowed Michael Herr's *Dispatches* to be identified as a work of literary journalism. However, limited to one short chapter, his analysis is confined to a theoretical understanding of *Dispatches* and unfortunately does not include the cultural criticism that his later work would go into such great detail to explain. This strategy of using Vietnam War literature to scrutinise the various traits of creative nonfiction is one also used by a selection of other theorists of the genre. Daniel Lehman examines the empirical viability of the works of Tim O'Brien in a chapter-length study in *Matters*

of *Fact*, while Ronald Weber briefly highlights a number of shortfalls of creative nonfiction pertaining to the subjectivity of the author in *The Literature of Fact* using C.D.B. Bryan's *Friendly Fire*. Yet neither critic extends his analysis beyond the structural and ontological issues surrounding the specific texts chosen in their respective studies.

This confusion lies at the heart of much of the scholarship relating to Vietnam War creative nonfiction found in peer-reviewed journals. Tobey C. Herzog, John Timmerman and Marilyn Wesley all offer different approaches to how and why the "truth" of the conflict in Southeast Asia is portrayed in the works of veteran-authors such as O'Brien and Herr, Herzog going to the point of interviewing several authors in *Writing Vietnam, Writing Life: Caputo, Heinemann, O'Brien, Butler*. Others, such as William V. Spanos in "A Rumor of War: 9/11 and the Forgetting of the Vietnam War," engage with Hellmann's attempt to coordinate America's exceptionalist ideology with the literature of the war. However, none attempt to do so in tandem with a specific genre study to establish how the structure of that particular genre enabled such a correlation to occur. Focussing solely on the creative nonfiction of the Vietnam War, this project not only demonstrates the negative effect the exceptionalist ethos was having on the American mind, but it also highlights how the nonfictional genre was ideally suited to the task of convincing the American public to reconsider the widely accepted view that the United States stood apart from all other nations. To do so would require an analysis of the three forms of creative nonfiction most commonly used by authors of the conflict: autobiography/memoir, literary journalism and oral history.¹²

¹² There exists some uncertainty as to the difference between autobiography and memoir. Autobiography, as defined by Philippe Lejeune, is a 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is

Works from the first category generally prioritised the private thoughts and personal affairs of the author which were previously unknown to the reader. Describing a pattern of plot which '[takes] its shape from the birth, life and death of an actual individual' (Scholes 214), such narratives were what Robert Scholes saw as examples of 'the biological form' (214). Narrated in the first-person, these texts were frequently derived from diaries or letters sent home by the author during their time in Vietnam, and provided the reader with an account of events founded in what James Campbell refers to as 'combat gnosticism' (203). Campbell describes this as 'a connection to Reality, an unmediated Truth to which only those who have undergone the liminal trauma of combat have access' (207). As a result, many of the people, places and events contained in this type of account are quite difficult to verify. But based on personal testimony, this medium has been described by Jeffrey Walsh as having 'long been a persuasive kind of witness, since their author's experience authenticates them as credible texts both ideologically and epistemologically' ("American Writing" 233).

The emphasis on personal experience was frequently a deliberate approach by the author which allowed him or her to 'move beyond a mere factual understanding of the events [of the war] to a level of illumination, consideration, and learning' (Herzog, "Heavy," 683). While this strategy did place the empirical validity of these narratives under duress, any doubts regarding the veracity of the account were allayed by the author's status as a participant in the war, one in which he has risked his life taking enemy fire and experienced up-close the death of some of his dearest friends. As noted by Kate McLaughlin, the unquestionable integrity of

his individual life' (4) However, I view Lejeune's definition as being equally applicable to the memoir. The forms are only differentiated by the latter's concern with 'a particular period and place in the writer's life' (Zinsser 3). The author remains 'the unifying idea' (Gornick 131) between the events of the narrative and the documented emotional responses in both.

war literature is thus taken from the veteran-author's 'need to keep the record for others' (*War* 19).

In order to decry the myth of exceptionalism, those authors seeking to inspire a Countercultural change frequently highlighted the detrimental effect the ideology was having on American society. In the years following World War II, American foreign policy was motivated by an increasingly expansive sense of Manifest Destiny, and subsequently sought to spread their exceptional ideology to foreign shores. As had been the case in the American-Indians Wars, reluctance by other nations to adopt this belief-system was frequently met with explicit or subversive military aggression. Across Central and South America, Africa and the Middle East, such violence enabled victory, and with victory came the sense of progress that subsequently justified or "regenerated" the American ethos.¹³ However, in keeping with the spirit of the anti-hegemonic Counterculture, the autobiographical creative nonfiction of the Vietnam War tended to refute this approach.

Portraying the perspective of a drafted conscript, an unwilling and temporary combatant 'who belonged by desire and identification to the civilian world' (Cole 31), Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* presents an "everyman" character representative of the majority of draftees in Indochina. A product of the ordinary, everyday Middle America, his ethical struggles and empathy for the Vietnamese people belies the image of the U.S. soldier as an uncaring and often brutal agent of a neo-colonial power, and instead conveyed an image of someone pressured into serving by societal structures beyond his control. John Sack's *M* offers a similarly humane insight into the Marine infantry, depicting a body of men whose over-

¹³ In *Why Do People Hate America?*, 92-101, Ziauddin Sardar counts 133 different military interventions by the United States at home and abroad. Occurring between 1890 and 2001, they range in scale from America's part in Allied Victory in World War II to the role the Marines took in quelling the infamous 1992 Los Angeles Riots.

arching concern is fear and survival rather than supposedly fulfilling the Manifest Destiny of their nation.

In addition to highlighting the immense racial divide which continued to exist in American society throughout the twentieth century, David Parks' *GI Diary* also emphasised the depths of barbarity that many soldiers sunk to while serving in Vietnam, a level so low that it brought into question whether the exceptionalist ideology upon which the United States had been founded was truly regenerated in Vietnam. Providing an unadulterated insight into the horrors of war, *Home Before Morning*, Lynda Van Devanter's narrative detailing the experiences of an American field nurse serving in Vietnam, operates to similar effect. Revealing the true fate of those injured pro patria, the nation's exceptionalist ideology and the unrelenting pressures it exerted on those it often forced to serve in its name are brought unequivocally to the fore. While Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* is initially marked by a patriotic fervour on the part of the author, it demonstrates how quickly this idealism begins to fade when faced with the harsh realities of war, and also the ease with which Kovic moved from a hegemonic to a radical belief-system as he realises the flawed vision of the America he knew and grew up with.

The trope of mindless, self-defeating violence continues in Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*. An ideologue of the Kennedy age, the author initially envisioned himself 'charging up some beachhead, like John Wayne' (6) to liberate a beleaguered nation from a tyrannical oppressor. However, this patriotic zeal is soon overwhelmed by Caputo's experiences of civilians being tortured and murdered as their homes and livestock are needlessly destroyed by American soldiers. *A Rumor of War* closes with no obvious sense that Vietnam has been "civilised" as a result of the U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. As with the majority of these nonfictional

narratives, there is only relief by Caputo that he has managed to survive unscathed, at least physically.

These autobiographies and memoirs aren't confined however just to the devastating effects that the American intervention in Vietnam was having on the American people. Both Mary McCarthy's twin set of memoirs, *Vietnam* and *Hanoi*, and Susan Sontag's essay "Trip to Hanoi" in *Styles of Radical Will* clearly illustrate a functional Vietnamese society that did not see American assistance as a prerequisite for survival. In each of her narratives, as a consequence of America's allegedly righteous undertaking in Vietnam, McCarthy describes a culture, society and people being slowly destroyed as both North and South Vietnam are placed under siege by a foreign army with little or no understanding of the task they faced there. Sontag is perhaps more candid in her questioning of the exceptionalist ethos which was supposedly guiding the American intervention in Southeast Asia. Although written at the height of the conflict in 1969, in "Trip to Hanoi" she states that

One can only speculate about the consequences of this defeat for the United States. It could be a turning point in our national history, for good or bad. Or it could mean virtually nothing – just the liquidation of a bad investment that leaves the military-industrial establishment free for other adventures with more favorable odds. (268)

Synopsising the sentiment of the majority of those who opposed the war in Vietnam, Sontag explicitly challenges the thinking that led the United States into Southeast Asia, asking whether it will actually be realised as the catalyst which could turn the superpower away from such conflicts in the future, or would it simply be re-

assimilated by the exceptionalist ideology which glorified such wars as an expression of the United States' continuing Manifest Destiny.

The second type of creative nonfiction, literary journalism, differs slightly. A more referential and discursive narrative reflecting on past events, the second grouping is characterised by incident-inspired accounts that often proclaim what is an unknown but factually accurate and rigorously researched insight into an accepted historical truth.¹⁴ The details of these accounts are frequently reinforced by named sources, and other forms of "evidence" linking the text to the real world, such as maps, photographs, and other non-literary material. Often dealing with public rather than personal experiences of the war, the narrative is a noticeably mediated and structured discourse. However, despite the differences in structure in these nonfictional narratives compared to the personal testimony found in the works of O'Brien, Kovic, Sontag et al, they were still utilised to similar effect by those seeking to radicalise American society. Having worked as journalists in Southeast Asia, in the years before and during the war, many of the authors had directly experienced the horrors of the conflict in Vietnam. Those who hadn't spent time in Southeast Asia also bore 'witness to the experience of the war in the dimension of personal memory' (Beidler 153) by using corroborated witness reports and other accepted forms of evidence.

In perhaps one of the most affecting of all Vietnam War texts, *Friendly Fire*, C.D.B. Bryan demonstrates the irreparable damage caused to the psycho-structures of American society by both the duplicity of the administration and the acquiescence

¹⁴ An insight into the amount of research involved in writing a nonfictional narrative can be garnered from an interview between Truman Capote and George Plimpton in *The New York Times* in January 1966, Capote speaks of how it took him six years to research and write *In Cold Blood*. Approximately half of this period was spent solely interviewing the townspeople of Holcomb, Kansas where the murder of the Clutter family took place. By the time he had finished the narrative, Capote reveals to Plimpton that his research was so extensive that the accumulated 'files would almost fill a whole small room, right up to the ceiling.'

of the American people through Peg and Gene Mullen's struggle to uncover the truth about their son's death. Similarly, in *A Bright Shining Lie*, Neil Sheehan offers a global view of the negative impact the altruism of American bureaucracy had on the Southeast Asian country. Efforts which were supposedly stymying the spread of Communism are condemned by Sheehan as nothing more than 'the lies and vaporings of foolish men' (781). Reports of saturation bombings, destroyed villages, murdered civilians and mutilated corpses contradicted the government rhetoric which eulogised American efforts in Vietnam.

David Halberstam's narratives, *The Making of a Quagmire* and *The Best and the Brightest*, continued to expose this false optimism, and more than just that, directly linked it to noted political figures such as Dean Rusk. Theirs were values which were derived from the Old Frontier, whose 'blending of [...] religion and [...] sense of military duty' had created 'a code which taught that if evil stalked, you did not turn the other cheek; if you were soft or tolerant of evil, it would devour you' (*Best* 315). Adherence to such an ideological outlook left little mercy for those caught in its Old Testament crosshairs.

In *Dispatches* Michael Herr reveals a similar awareness of the influence of the Frontier myth on the events occurring in Southeast Asia. A fragmented insight into the war, *Dispatches*' narrative structure consists of 'a succession of iconic scenes and images, encyclopaedic in their references, and includes all the elements integrated into the mythic tradition of how America began and the condition which it came to be' (Sardar, *Nightmare* 32). Comparisons to John Wayne and other figures of the Old West, and to landmarks such as the Alamo and Fort Apache, are littered throughout. But rather than glorifying these symbols used to such devastating effect by the ruling elite, Herr adheres to the dictates of the Counterculture by using them

to underscore the hollow truth of America's mythic self-image. Instead of being a bastion of peace and democracy, Herr portrays the United States as a nation perpetually at war, with itself or with others, and Vietnam as the culmination of this history of aggression. A text awash with references to the Frontier history of the Old West, the insights *Dispatches* reveals into the Vietnam War deliberately interrogate the historical paradigm of the United States which had manufactured 'a very particular kind of history, narrow in focus and short on acknowledgement of what these "triumphs" depended on and how they were affected by the affairs of other people and nations' (Sardar, *Nightmare* 11). Offering another contrast to the conjured reality of Vietnam being propagated by the American government was the insight into Vietnamese society provided by Frances Fitzgerald's Pulitzer Prize winning *Fire in the Lake*. Rather than portraying the American government as helping a beleaguered young nation to resist Communist invasion and repression, Fitzgerald goes to great lengths to show that the United States was actually hindering the attempts of the ordinary Vietnamese people to overcome a corrupt and totalitarian regime which had been imposed upon them by forces out of their control.

The third prominent type of creative nonfiction describing the events of the Vietnam War was the oral history. An amalgamation of many of the theoretical concepts that were found in the autobiographies and works of literary journalism, the oral histories of the conflict were characterised by the disparity of voices contained within each. Every one of the authors of these "mini-memoirs" had personally experienced or lived through the events they described. Representing an auto-diegetic or first-person account of war time experiences, many of the events retold were hugely subjective and thus quite difficult at times to verify. However, the existence of bibliographic material in many of these narratives, extraneous entities

such as prefaces, and the proper names, photographs and personal details of the interviewees meant that each account was presented to the reader in such a fashion that he or she was actively encouraged to interpret it as a referentially valid retelling. This air of credibility was often reinforced by a chronology similar to that of the conflict itself, or accounts retold in the exact same phraseology or dialect of the speaker. The resultant narratives were a significant part of the attempt to decry the myth of exceptionalism which had led the American nation into such a disastrous war. Each succeeded in bringing the voice of the normal infantryman to the fore. A distant cry from the blinkered rebuttals of Nixon, McNamara or any of the other fabled “Wise Men,”¹⁵ the men and women in each of these oral histories represented an American “everyman,” ordinary citizens who had been entrusted with a responsibility by their government only to be later vilified for their actions.

Many of these oral histories began to emerge at a pivotal time in American history as the ordinary people of the United States began to finally recognise both the sacrifices made by their countrymen and the failures in leadership by their administrators during the years of the Vietnam War. The most prominent of these were Al Santoli’s succession of Vietnam oral histories, *Everything We Had* (1981), *To Bear Any Burden* (1985), and *Leading the Way* (1993).¹⁶ Each of these, to varying degrees, describes the human cost of America’s intervention into Vietnam. *Everything We Had* sought to dispel the hegemonic notion that “peace with honour” had been achieved in Vietnam and show that the veterans had been affected by the

¹⁵ The “Wise Men” was the nickname given to the collection of senior U.S. government officials who developed much of the U.S. foreign policy from the late 1940s until the Vietnam War. The most prominent amongst their number were Generals Omar Bradley, Matthew Ridgway and Maxwell Taylor, Dean Acheson, McGeorge Bundy, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr, Abe Fortas, Arthur Goldberg, George W Ball, Cyrus Vance and John J. McCloy. This group played a pivotal part in prolonging the war in Vietnam by advising President Johnson in 1967 that America should remain in Vietnam. For further information, refer to David Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest*.

¹⁶ Santoli actually wrote four oral histories in total between the years 1981 and 1993. However, the third in his series, *New Americans* (1988), focuses on the many different nationalities seeking refuge in the United States rather than the war in Vietnam and its ramifications for the American nation.

war as badly as those they were sent there to protect. *To Bear Any Burden* conveys a similar message. Yet in the second of Santoli's oral histories, his gaze shifts to the many Indochinese, the Vietnamese, the Lao and the Cambodians, affected by American actions during the war. *Leading the Way* realigns Santoli's focus once more to the United States, specifically its armed forces, as it attempts to deal with a lingering effects of the Vietnam War in the aftermath of the First Gulf War.

While Santoli's narratives stretched into the early 1990s, and were often the most famous, or at least, some of the most widely read, they were pre-empted by Gloria Emerson's *Winners and Losers*.¹⁷ Published in 1976, the National Book Award winning narrative was one of the very first of its kind as it gave voice to many of the issues in American society that arose specifically as a result of the Vietnam War. Demonstrating the price many Americans had to pay for their nation's exceptionalism, problems such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Agent Orange, the inadequate standard of Veterans administration (VA) hospital care, anti-war resistance and desertion, in addition to the questionable rectitude of the U.S. intervention, are all brought to the fore in Emerson's narrative.

The oral histories of authors such as Wallace Terry (*Bloods*) and Mark Baker (*NAM*) also cast an unyielding light on real-world consequences for the veterans of the war and their families so that future mistakes could be avoided. Describing the experiences of many African-American soldiers of varying classes upon their return from Vietnam, Terry highlights the manner in which the war pervaded all aspects of American society. This sentiment is compounded by Baker's *NAM*. Although his interviewees are anonymous, when viewed as a cohesive unit, the narrative

¹⁷ Nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award, *Everything We Had* reached number 15 on the New York Times best sellers list on July 5th 1982.

represents a polyphonic entity which mirrored the kaleidoscopic composition of the United States as a nation.

The resurgence of creative nonfiction and its use to achieve these ends during the tumultuous Sixties and early Seventies was not incidental. In addition to the theoretical suitability of creative nonfiction and its longevity in the American mind, several critics have also noted how periods of ideological unease have regularly provided the most fertile environments for new literary genres to emerge. While Richard Slotkin describes this process in *Gunfighter Nation*, where he states that ‘the development of new genres, or the substantial modification of existing ones, can be read as a signal of active ideological concern’ (8), Mas’ud Zavarzadeh was the first to actually comment on the link between creative nonfiction and times of cultural unrest. He viewed it as the literary response to ‘the matrix of reality in extreme situations’ (47). For many, creative nonfiction presented the means for disenfranchised parties to represent a commonly held view by ‘[bringing] into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction’ (Jameson 82). Although its narrative is totally symbolic, its empirical footing means that creative nonfiction, more so than many other contemporary genres, has the ability to ignite a previously untapped sense of purpose or awareness in an oppressed class. This property allowed an individual text to subsequently enter into a larger discourse on social order. Playing a pivotal part in both the genre’s ontology and its critical heritage, ideological unrest can be understood as the primary catalyst enabling creative nonfiction’s continued re-emergence.

The Vietnam War can thus be seen as having inspired an unprecedented wave of literature as those who witnessed it attempted to make sense of what had occurred there. But in order to reduce this vast corpus of literature down to a

manageable selection for the purposes of this study, the following criteria were introduced:

- Each text had to be an experiential narrative. Personal witness was essential if the reader was to interpret the respective accounts as historically valid.
- The chosen texts had to reflect more than just the views of those who served in the military. While the experiences of the draftees and voluntary conscripts were of vital importance, so too were the concerns of those who reported the war, both in Vietnam and at home.
- A third parameter which further reduced this sample was a mark of demonstrated quality regarding the author. This could involve either a significant literary award or award nomination, or career longevity as a published author or journalist.

All of the authors represented in this study, Tim O'Brien, Philip Caputo, Neil Sheehan, C.D.B. Bryan and Al Santoli, adhere to these criteria. While this particular corpus of authors is one dominated by Caucasian males, this was not a deliberate strategy. Rather it was a by-product of the circumstances of the war. While African-American soldiers did form a significant percentage of the overall forces who served in Vietnam, the men from these ethnic groups were frequently of working class origins with little or no education beyond high school. Although there were white soldiers from similar socio-economic backgrounds, the latter were of a much greater proportionate number than their African-American comrades.¹⁸ As a result, the

¹⁸ 88.4% of the men who served in Vietnam were Caucasian (This figure included men of Hispanic origin because as Geroge Mariscal notes in *Aztlán and Viet Nam*, the latter were listed as Caucasian by military authorities). 10.6% were African-American, while 1% were of other races. In *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers & Vietnam*, Christian Appy goes into significant detail about the socio-economic breakdown between African-American and Caucasian soldiers, 76% of all the men who served in Vietnam were from the same lower middle/working class background. However, while Appy acknowledges

likelihood of a Caucasian soldier going on to further education upon his return to the United States and subsequently documenting his experiences in a literary fashion was much higher than his African-American equivalent. There are accounts written by African-American authors on the war, but their number is far outweighed by those written by their white counterparts. Similarly, the total amount of narratives written by women is also much lower than those written by male veterans. The primary reason for this is simply that bar enlisting as nurses or as Army support personnel, women were not allowed to serve in the American armed forces during the Vietnam War.¹⁹ However, as can be gauged by the notable prominence of texts written by female and African-American authors, and the literary criticism of Hispanic theorists such as George Mariscal in this study, the remaking of America's mythopoeic structures was not solely a Caucasian male endeavour

It must also be noted that the works of literature chosen for this study are in no way representative of *all* of the nonfictional literary works written about the Vietnam War. The conflict resulted in the publication of the greatest volume of war writing in American history. Numbering in the tens of thousands, the works found in such a corpus ranged from government-sanctioned histories demonizing the Vietnamese as merciless Communists to the tortured poetry of veterans such as W.D. Erhart and John Balaban.²⁰ Rather, my overall aim is to demonstrate that the creative

that the majority of enlisted men were from what he calls 'the bottom half of the social structure' (22), he also states that '90% of black soldiers in Vietnam were from working-class and poor backgrounds' (22). Thus, for the vast majority of the latter, already proportionately outweighed by their Caucasian peers, an education that extended beyond High School (and in some cases even less) was simply not an option. While some of the most celebrated works on the war were written by African-American authors, a list which includes David Parks' *GI Diary*, *Memphis-NAM-Sweden* by Terry Whitmore and Richard Weber, *Brothers: Black Soldiers in the Nam* by Stanley Goff and Robert Sanders, and Wallace Terry's *Bloods*, it is a paltry number when compared to their white counterparts. As of 1989, Jeff Loeb comments that in Sandra Wittman's bibliography of Vietnam war literature, 'of the almost 400 self-generated memoirs by American Vietnam participants, only seven – less than two percent – are by African Americans' (106). For a much more extensive insight into this issue, refer to Appy's *Working Class War*, 11-43, and Jeff Loeb's "MIA: African American Autobiography of the Vietnam War."

¹⁹ This fact is borne out by the number of female names on the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Out of the 58,272 names on the wall, all are male bar the names of eight nurses who died in Vietnam. This number includes only military personnel however.

²⁰ In *Kill Anything That Moves*, Nick Turse notes that 'there have been more than 30000 *nonfiction* books published on the Vietnam War since the conflict began' (257 my emphasis).

nonfiction inspired by the conflict played a pivotal part in the attempt to show that America was mistaken in its intervention in Vietnam, and that such a mistake was directly linked to the nation's exceptional ideology. In doing so, those who opposed the Vietnam War hoped to prevent the nation's participation in such unnecessary wars in the future. In Chapter 1, I contend that creative nonfiction had been used in American culture for centuries to depict many of its most significant beliefs and events, and argue that as a result, many Americans were conditioned to view the genre as possessing an intrinsic ideological validity lacking in other genres. Having achieved such a lofty cultural status, I then demonstrate how creative nonfiction was utilised to instigate a new myth-making process by those who opposed the war. As a genre which emerged from times of ideological uncertainty and unrest, it was only natural that creative nonfiction would gain a foothold in the turbulent Sixties and the Counterculture that occurred during that decade. I clarify how the American ethos fostered the spirit of creative nonfiction more than any other literary genre and demonstrate how it grew in relevance because of the Vietnam War and the various manifestations of the genre that consequently began to appear as a result of the administration's erroneous reporting of the war.

The first of these manifestations, autobiography and memoir, is examined at length in Chapter 2. Using Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, I illustrate how America's exceptionalist ideology was actually having a detrimental effect on the ordinary Americans who had been conditioned over the centuries to conform to such beliefs. Using autobiographical and narratological theory to demonstrate how they were instilled with a sense of referentiality absent from more traditional kinds of fiction, I argue that these

particular narratives came to represent a collective voice which spoke for all Americans in the aftermath of the war.

The literary journalism of the conflict is the focus of Chapter 3. Using Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie* and C.D.B. Bryan's *Friendly Fire*, I highlight the hubris of the American government and the devastating effect it had on the people it claimed to represent. The suggestion by journalists such as Bryan and Sheehan that the American government was the true enemy of the ordinary people of the United States was one of immense cultural capital to those attempting to instigate a change in the American psyche. Using the theoretical workings of critics such as Genette, Sontag and Foucault, I contend that while poiesis is an integral attribute of creative nonfiction, by the inclusion of extraneous bibliographic material, the authors of these nonfictional narratives can thus be seen also to *create* the literary context which predisposes the reader towards an empirical interpretation of the events documented within.

The final chapter acts as a capstone to the previous three. Focussing entirely on *Everything We Had*, Al Santoli's oral history of the war reveals how the veterans of the war were as much victims of the American government's manipulation of its people as the "great silent majority" who had been beguiled by the false information that had been fed by the same bureaucratic hand. Depicting the veteran as an injured party, this final chapter shows how *Everything We Had* and narratives like it were in their essence a synthesis of "everyman" experiences very much in keeping with the zeitgeist dominating the American psyche in the early Eighties. It demonstrates how these oral histories gave voice to a desire to overcome a decade of guilt and shame that had arisen because of Vietnam to become a vital part of any desired process of healing in the aftermath of conflict.

As an event which inspired an unprecedented outpouring of nonfictional literature, no other issue encapsulated the ideological turmoil of twentieth-century America more than the conflict in Southeast Asia. It was a war that was supposed to have been the stage upon which the United States fulfilled its Manifest Destiny, the foundational myth of American culture. But in keeping with the initial spirit of the Counterculture, and those radicals who continued to protest the totalitarian nature of the government well into the Seventies, the creative nonfiction written by the soldiers and journalists, these “true stories” of the war, often contradicted the “realities” being propagated as fact by the prevailing authorities. Regardless of whether they were works of autobiography or memoir, literary journalism or oral history, as the conflict in Vietnam drew to a close, there was an increasing awareness in America that the nation ‘had failed some sacred image of itself’ (Caputo, *Writing* 34-5). The nonfictional narratives written by soldiers and journalists with personal experiences of the conflict played a pivotal role in this dawning realisation.



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Please note that Chapters 1-4 (pp.38-192) are unavailable due to a restriction requested by the author.

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Conclusion - A Story Told

The war was about names, each name a special human being who never came home. (William Broyles, qtd in *To Heal a Nation*, Scruggs,7)

E Pluribus Unum – Out of Many, One. (Original Motto of the United States)

In “The War That Never Seems to Go Away,” George C. Herring cites one possible reason for the Vietnam War’s lasting ‘hold on the national psyche’ (336); it had ended with ‘most of the major issues unresolved’ (336). Questions such as ‘was it a good war or a bad war, a noble cause or essentially immoral?’ (345) remained unanswered, and the only ones who could truly provide such answers were the veterans, the men and women who had witnessed the deeds and misdeeds of the U.S. forces fighting there.

However, post-war America was a far cry from the halcyon days of the Kennedy Administration, when a nation had stood as one ‘to play cop to a Communists’ robber’ (Caputo, *Rumor* xii). Having lost a war for the first time in its history, the 1970s saw the United States divided into opposing and seemingly irreconcilable factions. But if the nation was ever to move on from the Vietnam War, to learn its lessons so that future “Vietnams” could be avoided, reconciliation between the veterans and the society which had mostly vilified and alienated them was essential. For historians such as Patrick Hagopian, the starting point of such a

process was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The monument was intended as an apolitical attempt to separate ‘the warrior from the war’ (Hagopian, *Vietnam War* 82). To be placed in Washington, this brainchild of ordinary conflict veterans such as Jan Scruggs was privately funded and sought to rehabilitate the memory of the Vietnam veteran in the consciousness of both the American people and their politicians.⁷⁶

Despite never receiving an official seal of approval from the White House, its unveiling in November 1982 finally brought about the societal recognition which the veterans had desired for so long, and enabled them to begin reintegrating once more into American society. The effect of this monument on the national psyche cannot be underestimated. It listed every one of the names of those Americans who died in Vietnam, and in doing so, connected the ‘veterans’ emotional wounds with society’s wounds’ (Hagopian, *Vietnam War* 401). Those names were not empty signifiers, devoid of meaning. They represented real people with real lives. Each was a father or a son, a mother or a daughter, a brother or a sister who had died simply because they, like virtually everyone else, had believed in the ‘the fantasy of American exceptionalism’ (Pease 12). As such, the monument became a centrifugal force which radiated across the United States, affecting not just those who served in Southeast Asia, but also their friends and family, their neighbours and colleagues. The creative nonfiction of the war also contained such names. Commemorating those who answered when called, they too spoke to the American people of those who

⁷⁶ Although situated in Constitution Gardens alongside memorials to World War II and the Korean War, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was *not* a government funded endeavour. Its purpose was not to commemorate the Vietnam War, but rather to honour the American men and women who had served and died in the conflict. While the construction of the monument was supported to some extent by prominent Washington figures, and had to meet with the approval of statutory bodies such as the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, it was a privately funded memorial which was never formally sanctioned by the White House. At all times, the impetus guiding the monument towards completion lay with the veterans who had served in Vietnam, and without their persistence, it is highly unlikely the project would even have been undertaken at the time. Ultimately, while historical sources indicate that President Reagan was in favour of the memorial, his desire not to isolate particular political supporters meant that he never actually gave the Vietnam Veterans Memorial an official endorsement. For the most comprehensive insight into what was a hugely contentious and complicated political situation, see Hagopian’s *The Vietnam War in American Memory* 79-110.

sacrificed themselves for what Norman Mailer would later describe as ‘the hubris of the American vision’ (*Vietnam* 96).

Like the aforementioned monument, the status of these nonfictional narratives as cultural artefacts of ideological worth was derived from the emphasis each placed on the “proper name,” the semiotic construct that connects an arbitrary collection of signs and letters with a fellow human being. Both the monument and these works of creative nonfiction shared with the American public the names of those who served their nation. No longer ‘mute signifiers’ (Hagopian, *Vietnam War* 146) confined to the pages of a text or to the surface of a wall, they were now ‘redolent with meaning’ (Hagopian, *Vietnam War* 146). They imbued the accounts that contained them with an authenticity absent in traditional works of fiction. The horrifying and often tragic experiences within these texts suddenly mattered much more. If nothing else, these names were a testimony. They spoke for ‘those who were there and can no longer speak for themselves, and those who were not there and need to be told’ (McLoughlin, “War and Words,” 19). Thus, while not mounted on a plinth amongst other stones of similar ideological stature, the nonfictional narratives written by Caputo, O’Brien, Sheehan, Santoli and Bryan were noticeably imbued with a gravitas very much akin to that which characterised Maya Lin’s monument. They too had the potential to be used as cultural artefacts capable of instigating what many saw as a much needed change in American society.

The autobiographical accounts written by O’Brien and Caputo unequivocally underlined the fallacy of the long-held belief that war was an intrinsic part of the American psyche. Rather than describing his wartime experiences as something to be lauded, Tim O’Brien portrays them as aimless, ineffective and nothing less than terrifying. It was not strength of conviction that brought O’Brien to Southeast Asia.

It was fear of society's censure. He had been drafted into the Army. His decision to fight in Vietnam was not one motivated by a sense of patriotism, but by a sense of shame. As the Tim O'Brien narrating the metafictional *The Things They Carried* would later state, 'I was a coward. I went to the war' (55).

In contrast, Philip Caputo was a voluntary conscript and one of the first soldiers to land in Vietnam. Yet his narrative, *A Rumor of War*, offers a similar message to the reader. He insists that the true nature of war was a far cry from that which had been portrayed with such confidence and poise by Hollywood supermen like John Wayne. In reality, it had been a grief-stricken experience, one which had brought the veteran-author to the brink of madness by exposing him to death on an unforeseen scale. Caputo portrays Vietnam as a place which had exposed the venerated tenets of American culture – duty, honour and sacrifice pro patria – as nothing more than 'the myths with which old men send young men off to get killed or maimed' (xiv). For so long a cornerstone of the American belief-system, Caputo refutes the concept of "regenerative violence," revealing it to be little more than an ideological cosmetic masking centuries of invasion, murder and injustice.

In a similar fashion to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the authors of *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and *A Rumor of War* utilised 'artmaking in the service of a social purpose' (Carroll 10). Presenting the reader with a version of events deliberately constructed to encourage a referential interpretation of the text, authors of autobiographical accounts of the war transplanted the sacrifices made by American personnel from a psychological on to a physical plane. By crystallising the suffering of those who fought in Indochina, the narratives of both Caputo and O'Brien refuted the hegemonic glorification of war which had become such a prevalent part of American culture. Demonstrating how the United States as a nation had been

beguiled for centuries by the myths of the Old Frontier, and wrong to intervene in Vietnam, each veteran vocalised the thoughts of a greater consciousness and spoke from the political present to critique the historical past in the hope of a better future.

The creative nonfiction of the war written by journalists was frequently used to similar ends. However, such journalistic narratives often lacked the premium of first-hand witness so prevalent in the works of the veteran-authors. Although imbued with an authenticity derived from a litany of photographs, prefaces, maps and letters which linked each account directly to the zeitgeist of the Vietnam era, challenging the cultural valorisation of war with the same efficacy as their autobiographical counterparts remained an issue. Yet such a shortcoming did not prevent them from highlighting the need for a radical change in American society. Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie* and C.D.B. Bryan's *Friendly Fire* were two such texts which repeatedly highlighted the growing divide which had emerged between the American government and those it claimed to represent.

Using the life of John Paul Vann as a template, the former provided the American people with a blueprint of their nation's involvement in Southeast Asia. But it was far from an edifying description. Analogous to the portrayal of a John Vann becoming increasingly more lost in a fog of arrogance and delusion, Sheehan depicts an America straying ever further from the self-affirming ideals of its forefathers as those who governed desperately sought to maintain the erroneous belief that 'America's cause was always just, [and] that while the United States might err, its intentions were always good' (Sheehan 8). In many ways, the untimely death of Vann, the one who 'exemplified [the U.S.] in his illusions, in his good intentions, in his pride, in his will to win' (Sheehan 3), conveyed a clear message to the power-brokers of Washington responsible for guiding the nation into an

uncertain future; unless they found some way to temper the hubris which had somehow been subsumed into American culture, the nation was destined to waste generation upon generation of future American lives in meaningless conflicts.

Friendly Fire is laced with a similar political intent. But rather than citing the U.S. government and its military as the sole cause of the nation's failings in Vietnam, Bryan also identifies the "great silent majority" as being *equally* responsible. While he is unerring in his criticism of the administration, for Bryan, it was the silence of the ordinary people which had allowed the U.S. government to act as they did. Describing *Friendly Fire* in an interview with Eric Schroeder as 'propaganda in the purest sense' (*Vietnam* 85), Bryan's narrative is essentially an invective aimed at these Middle Americans as much as their government. He was more than cognisant of what the United States had become by the mid-twentieth century, a nation marked by apathy, arrogance and excess. Using Peg and Gene Mullen as archetypes, *Friendly Fire* demonstrates that not only are the humble values and beliefs of the ordinary people which had made the United States the most powerful nation on the planet still existent in the national psyche, but that they were also a panacea to the passivity which had crept into the American mind. Capable of effectively challenging the exceptional egotism that had come to dominate the thinking of those on Capitol Hill, Bryan underlines the huge importance of these core American values to any hope of a "new" America. Like the monument in Washington, works of creative nonfiction such as *Friendly Fire* and *A Bright Shining Lie* played a significant part in any hoped for 'reconstruction of social order' (Carroll 5) in the years after war. Not only did they remind 'audiences of culturally important events and persons and of the commitments, values, virtues, and beliefs, for which they stand' (Carroll 7), each also emphasised how far the primary governmental

institutions of the United States had drifted from those they claimed to represent during the Vietnam War years.

These homespun virtues weren't confined however to those who had remained behind. Many narratives, particularly the oral histories of the war such as Al Santoli's *Everything We Had*, sought to convey that these attitudes were equally prevalent in the mind-sets of those who served, and that as a consequence, the veteran was someone to be celebrated as a worthy part of American society, not reviled. Presented in the words of the ordinary servicemen and women, Santoli was able to demonstrate the human consequences of the conflict. The men and women who fought the war were not disturbed or dangerous to themselves or those around them, but rather often frightened and alone as they struggled to make sense of what they had been forced to live through. The government's war might have ended with the fall of Saigon in 1975. But as they continued to deal with the multitude of physical and psychological injuries they had suffered in Vietnam, the veteran's war was still on-going.

Emphasising the 'narrative of societal neglect' (Hagopian, *Vietnam War* 156) that they had to endure upon their return from Vietnam, creative nonfiction in the guise of oral histories such as *Everything We Had* functioned in more ways like a traditional monument than virtually all other narratives of the war. By conveying a newfound awareness in the American people largely absent until the events of the war in Southeast Asia unfolded, they transformed 'individual experience into an icon of communal redemption' (Clark 199). Drawn from a multiplicity of voices, their historiography of the war demonstrated that conflict didn't create heroes, only victims. It revealed that the true source of American morality was to be found within

the ordinary people who served, not those who sought to lead, and that despite being a nation divided, it showed how, in reality, America was truly only one.

The Vietnam War was a war which *should* have re-affirmed the nation's Manifest Destiny. But for the first time in its history, the United States had tasted military defeat. As a consequence, unyielding faith in government had been replaced with cynicism and mistrust, and those once regarded as national heroes were now largely looked upon as cold-blooded killers. But as the years rolled by, governments changed. The broken promises of past administrations were frequently forgotten as new vows of prosperity and change took their place. However, the veterans were unable to erase the stain of Vietnam with such ease. They felt they had been betrayed by their government, and rejected by their countrymen. Even though they had fought and died for their nation, there had been virtually no recognition for the sacrifices they had made. But as 'living embodiments of the war' (Hagopian, *Vietnam War* 49), it was they who continued to bear the brunt of society's blame for America's failures in Vietnam. They were the ones most often associated with the images of brutality and murder. They were the ones held most responsible for the mistakes America had made in Vietnam. Most importantly of all, they were the ones that many Americans simply wanted to forget. But the men and women who served there would never forget the trauma they endured in Vietnam. They were the ones who had taken the nation's teachings closest to heart, and as a result, they were the ones who had been forced to endure the harshest consequences.

If every other American was to realise the lessons learnt by those men and women who suffered for their nation, a means would have to be found to nurture a new cultural ethos, one far removed from the blinkered exceptionalism which led the nation into war in Southeast Asia. Fusing fact with experience, history with raw

emotion, creative nonfiction's disparate collection of autobiographies and memoirs, works of literary journalism and oral histories told a story of the war that few would have believed possible in 'the age of Kennedy's Camelot' (Caputo, *Rumor* xii). In the closing pages of *Dispatches*, perhaps the most celebrated Vietnam War narrative of them all, Michael Herr encapsulates this mood, those feelings of confusion, frustration, anger and disbelief. He simply states that the Vietnam War 'didn't end like any war story I'd ever imagined' (262). In hindsight, maybe that was for the best.

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