

FACT, FICTION, AND THE VIETNAM WAR

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the power of the literary works written on account of the Vietnam War to explain a number of factors that factual political documentation has not been able to. This is partly due to the fact that the already imposing corpus of literature on the Vietnam War permits a full appreciation of the war's complexity. The contradictory thesis explained by works written at different periods of the conflict serve as barometer of the morale of the writer, the body intellectual and in general public opinion regarding the conflict.

PROLOGUE: IMAGE RESOLUTION

On April 30, 1975 three North Vietnamese tanks slammed through the gates of Saigon's Presidential Palace –and hoisted Hanoi's flag atop the courtyard flagpole. Just hours earlier "Huey" helicopters plucked the final line of American refugees from the rooftop of the U.S. Embassy in Operation Frequent Wind. viewing newsclips of these jarring last images of the Vietnam War, then President Gerald Ford remarked to an aide, "It's over. Let's put it behind us."¹

Whatever else Americans have done with Vietnam, they have certainly not put it behind them. It is the living ghost they carry with them whenever in the Third World the remotest prospect for American intervention in some local contretemps looms. As killings, headlines, and pressures on the U.S. mount, there comes the inexorable declaration and benedictiori: El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Peru, Afghanistan, and the Philippines –is "another Vietnam." But the meaning of these benedictions remains in disarray. As just one example, in taking up the issue in the fall of 1983 of whether to grant President Reagan a resolution permitting the continued presence of U.S. Marines in Lebanon, senator after senator invoked the memory of Vietnam– to

justify opposite votes. Senator Charles Percy (R., Ill.) said he favored such an explicit resolution because he didn't want "to stumble into another Vietnam." Senator Joseph Biden (D., Del.), on the other hand, said he opposed the resolution because he didn't want the current generation "to suffer another Vietnam like my generation did."² Again, in the Congressional debates over whether to grant President Bush the right to use force in the recent Gulf War, the invocation of Vietnam as a dread warning, by both sides, was in full flower.

The point of this prologue, then, is that Vietnam is one historical residue that still matters. People continue to draw lessons from it. They draw their lessons from their memories, or, really from a set of images drawn from their memories. Some, with Ronald Reagan, invoke the image of Vietnam as a "noble crusade," while others relive, with Daniel Ellsberg, his nightmare of the war as a heinous "crime."³ And, albeit in some confusion, Senators Percy, Biden, and others cast votes based on their own views on the "facts" of Vietnam.

Despite a clear societal need to sift through the wreckage of the Vietnam War for those images offering a genuine resolution of this residue, it is by no means clear that such a task is also a responsibility of the more subjective student and writer of literature.⁴ Whether a responsibility or not, it is the basic argument of this article that literature can play a prominent role in resolving the ambiguities left over from this conflict and help to "cure" America of her Vietnam Syndrome. Two general conditions pertaining to our current confrontation with this past trauma highlight the talents of literature for such a resolution. First, having recovered from an initial postwar period of numbing amnesia, Americans have lurched on to rushes of premature generalization. Though numerous instances abound, the already mentioned votes of Senators Biden and Percy are, sadly, not atypical.⁵ Second, what these rash generalizations illustrate is a profound need to get beneath the surface facts and tease out the *subterranean* facts of motives. The problem with observable facts is that you can pick the ones you want (ignoring others) and arrange them into any pattern you choose. What is important for understanding these patterns or "factual explanations," then, is not the patterns themselves, but why they were arranged in the particular ways they were; in other words, the motives of the arrangers. Here is where literature's contribution can come into play.

This article will first cite some good examples of this ability to reveal the motives that can illuminate a broader political or nonfictional understanding. Second, however, it will take this growing literary canon to task for largely failing to address the culture and context of the Vietnam War. In this regard, there is much that literature can borrow from social science. Third, it will offer some ideas for the resolution of this problem and call attention to the challenge of societal healing that remains as this canon's final calling.

LITERATURE AND "YORK HARDING'S" SHATTERED VISION

The nonfictional foreign policy of containment flew a self-confident America into Vietnam aboard sleek jetliners. But in the war's long agony the policy shattered in slow-motion, and in 1975 it could only furtively pluck its survivors from rooftops in the middle of the night aboard "Huey" helicopters. The clarity afforded by literature in depicting this downward spiral is vividly illustrated by the paired novels of

Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955) and John Clark Pratt's *The Laotian Fragments* (1974). A recent work by social scientists Ole Holsti and James Rosenau has noted that since the fall of Saigon the views of the American foreign policymaking opinion-making elite have clustered into three quite distinct and mutually incompatible sets of beliefs about the world.⁶ What has been noted by professors Holsti and Rosenau as an observable pattern is vividly explained by these two novels.

In the background of both novels (one written really before the war, 1955, and one after it was all but over, 1974) is the elusive but guiding intellectual presence of Professor "York Harding," a high priest of Containment. His books, in the first novel, inspire the young Alden Pyle to pick up the fallen baton of Western civilization tainted by colonialism and bring to the Orient the message of democracy, even if local champions for this cause are scarce and a tad unsavory. Pyle's amateurish "baton" is bludgeoned from his hands by a Viet Minh assassin. At a much later stage in the conflict, a far more perplexed but professionally savvy Major Blake picks up this baton in Laos, a contiguous but even crazier war than the one in Vietnam. In the second novel we hear nothing of the professor's guiding vision. Rather the Major, a fighter-pilot of deftly deadly skills, tries to puzzle out the politics of his war and has been led to seek the silent professor's help. Before this can happen, the pilot (and his country's foreign policy, seemingly) become Missing in Action. The professor receives the pilot's "fragments" of a journal and other discollected musings, and then has to meet The Wife, as Marlowe had to do with Kurtz's Intended in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The shattered professor has nothing to say (which is at least more honest than Marlowe's eloquent lies to Kurtz's Intended, of which Pratt's scene is reminiscent).⁷ Gradually, in the interwoven saga of these two novels, the reasons for the fragmentation of containment becomes clear. Through these novels, Holsti's and Rosenau's emergent patterns can be understood.

LITERATURE'S INSIGHTS

The already imposing corpus of literature on the Vietnam War permits a full appreciation of the war's complexity: that it was a different war in different geographical places, that it became a very different war as it traversed through time from 1955 to 1975, and that it even has been viewed differently in different moments of writing. In any case, this literature certainly now has sufficient diversity, breadth, and poignancy to offer invaluable insights on the war itself.⁸

Something it has been able to do with sharp poignancy is to capture the *feelings* of the war. Feelings, clearly, are far beyond (or beneath) the scrutiny of the social scientist, and yet feelings certainly account for an admittedly indeterminate, but yet significant, amount of behavior. Social scientists and historians have catalogued the declining performance of the American military in the field,⁹ but it is Larry Heinemann, the novelist who unveils the descent from self-confident to survivalist feelings that excused prisoner abuse and combat avoidance when the wizened trooper Cross explains to his befuddled "new guy":

Dossier, look: the only thing more fucked up than being here, is getting killed here. Savvy?¹⁰

Many feelings in war can be readily assumed and be easily predictable. A soldier can be counted on to hate his enemy and fear death, but maybe love glory or at least the affection of his buddies more. Sometimes, however, feelings are even more complex, producing strange connections that leap across political barriers, often in unsettling ways. Some of these strange “truths” require an *imagination* usually well beyond the vision of the social scientist. For these disjunctions, you need the artist. Consider this soliloquy by a “grunt” in Gus Hasford’s *The Short Timers* (1979):

I love a little commie bastard man. I really do. Grunts understand grunts. These are great days we are living bros. we are jolly green giants walking the earth with guns. The people we wasted here today are the finest individuals we will ever know. When we rotate back to the world, we’re going to miss having somebody around who’s worth shooting. There ought to be a government for grunts. Grunts could fix the world up. I never met a grunt I didn’t like.¹¹

Politics, obviously, is something to which the political scientist devotes a great deal of his attention, but even with politics literature can make its contribution. For all his expertise on political institutions, structures, feedback loops, opinion-sampling, issue salience, and the like, often the purely human dimension gets trampled underfoot. By writing about “fictitious” characters that must grapple and live with all these themes, this human component can return with the artist’s pen. At the start of the war, Morris West’s *The Ambassador* (1965) tells the story of an American ambassador caught up in the imbroglio of Saigon politics in 1963: the Buddhist crisis and the assassination of President Diem. He makes a game attempt to learn Zen metaphysics to guide him, but it proves too much for this culture-bound emissary. From this intellectual struggle, it is a fast journey to Bernard and Marvin Kalb’s *The Last Ambassador* (1981) where in 1975 America’s last ambassador has lost all pretense of an interest in Oriental philosophy in his prudential desperation to find some political device to salvage American prestige as the doors firmly close on any kind of light at the end of the tunnel. The juxtaposition of these two novels shows that something has gone terribly wrong.

FACT AND FICTION

The point of all this is not to banish the social scientist completely from “truth-telling” on the Vietnam War. Social Science does have methods for arranging information in patterns that can shed light on aspects of a phenomenon, and ask questions that it can at least partially answer. There are superb interpretive works on the Vietnam War, and they are sufficiently diverse now to satisfy all political palates. If it is a given, in the Vietnam literature anyway, that politics cannot be fully separated from art, then the writers of this literature can profit by becoming better informed about the political side of the war. For general histories of Vietnam, we are fortunate to have the writings of Joseph Buttinger, William Duiker, Bernard Fall, David Marr, Truong Buu Lam, and Alexander Woodside. On the appeal of Marxism-Leninism to the Asian peasantry, the best works are by the China scholars Lucian Pye and Richard Solomon. Frances Fitzgerald’s *Fire in the Lake* (1972) applies some of their insights to Vietnam.

A more academic treatment of the Vietnamese peasantry is Samuel Popkin's pathbreaking *The Rational Peasant* (1979). On the organization of the Viet Cong itself, there are the illuminating works of Douglas Pike (1966) and William Andrews (1973). In this writer's view, no one has yet done a better job in laying out the conceptual struggle between the Viet Cong and the Americans than Jeffrey Race in his *War Comes to Long An* (1972).

In addition to these grand themes, there is a rich literature on many of the key figures in the war. Memoirs or biographies are now available on such principal figures as Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Kissinger. Works are also out on Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Duan, William Westmoreland, and Maxwell Taylor. Moving away from these more visible personalities, all of the military services have oral history libraries with tapes of the debriefings of the senior American and South Vietnamese military officers. For the Viet Cong there are the incomparable 1,500 RAND interviews with communist prisoners and *Chieu Hois* (ralliers to the government side).

There are documents literally everywhere. Besides the *Pentagon Papers*, every government agency once involved in Vietnam is now busy compiling its history from this sea of documents. For its eighteen volume study, the U.S. Army's Center for Military History has an entire warehouse of largely uncatalogued documents in Suitland, Maryland. With all this raw information, it cannot be said that the Vietnam experience is closed to us, but it certainly is scattered.

The real problem in understanding is not a dearth of information or facts. There are facts aplenty, even about the Vietnamese. The problem lies in bringing all these scattered bits together and arranging them into patterns that have meaning and can tell a coherent story. Not all facts are arithmetically equal. Some facts are more important than others; some ironies more instructive. Just as fiction writers edit and select in telling their stories, so, too, do social scientists weigh facts and information, and count some more important than others. Sorting it all out to some rendering of a truth requires several things: it takes an enormous mastery of all sources of information (not just his own experience) so that a writer has the breadth to grasp the obvious and the depth to sense the ironic, and from the obvious and the ironic to make those creative leaps of insight that strike home at the war's very soul. Sorting it all out, then, requires a marriage of the social scientist's theorizing about all the patterns of behavior he sees through his several conceptual lenses with the insights the artist derives from the power of his imagination to tease out motives and evoke feelings.¹²

“READING THE WIND”

Having called for a renewed quest for an understanding of the Vietnam War based on a marriage of “artistic” and “scientific” approaches, taken together both traditions still have shortcomings. Mostly these shortcomings revolve around *culture* and *context*.

With respect to *culture* the big missing ingredient is Vietnamese culture, though here the heavier blame lies with literature rather than with social science. The comments of the poet John Balaban, in this regard, are telling:

It seems to me that a lot of our fiction talks about Vietnam as if it were something that went wrong in Alabama... something that we just couldn't figure

out. We ought to know what happened in Vietnam, if only for patriotic reasons, especially when we are concerned about possible analogies between Vietnam and Central America. To understand the Vietnam War more fully ... we have to understand the Vietnamese.¹³

Generally speaking, the images of Vietnamese presented in the literature are so muted that there really are no dominant images. Thus if any misperceptions of the Vietnamese have grown out of the literature, they have come most fundamentally from the literature's very lack of perceptions of the Vietnamese. In the literature to date, they are either simple and childlike or devious and treacherous, which is to say mysterious—which is to say nothing. Michael Herr summed up the problem in getting beyond these cardboard characterizations when he lamented, in his *Dispatches* (1978), that reading the faces of the Vietnamese “was like trying to read the wind.”¹⁴

In fairness to this literature, however, if most of it is still an exercise in American cultural narcissism, it only reflects the way in which Americans conducted the war itself. For journalists, the only events worth reporting were American actions. In the Easter Invasion of 1972, for example, with virtually all the American ground combat troops withdrawn, it was the American air strikes that got all the attention, even though South Vietnamese soldiers on the ground played a critical role in turning back the North Vietnamese invasion. Almost to a man and woman, none of these journalists knew Vietnamese. For the military, especially after the large units arrived, Vietnam was all “Indian Country.” Except for superficial and awkward episodes in the towns, the troops kept to themselves. They gave everything around them American names, and, when not on their intensive patrols and sweeps, stayed in their bases drinking beer and watching movies. Equivalent patterns of cultural sheltering were erected in the rear areas. The major exceptions were for forays of whoring and, though seldom reported, for playing with kids in Vietnam's far too numerous orphanages.

Despite this lamentable dearth, some notable works have grappled with Vietnamese culture. Without doubt, the most sensitive is the poetry of John Balaban.¹⁵ As for novels, prominent in this category are Robert Butler's *The Alleys of Eden* (1981), Charles Collingwood's *The Detector* (1970), Loyd Little's *Parthian Shot* (1973), and Charles McCarry's *The Tears of Autumn* (1974). Donald McQuinn's *Targets* (1980), however, still stands in a class by itself. McQuinn weaves a spell-binding tale of an elite joint Vietnamese-American intelligence unit intent on smashing the shadowy Viet Cong substructure in Saigon. Spearheading this effort is the American hero Major Charles Taylor. In the course of his exploits, the choking chaos of Saigon receives one of its best descriptions ever. Also, the labyrinth of the Viet Cong organization and modus operandi is peeled apart with the same eye for detail as Francis West, Jr.'s nonfictional *The Village* (1972). In addition, the cultural barriers to the romantic interludes between Vietnamese women and American men are explored in ways that are only hinted at in other works like Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955). More politically, the often difficult Vietnamese-American “counterpart” relationship is plumbed more thoroughly than even in David Halberstam's *One Very Hot Day* (1967).

In the story, McQuinn's unravelling of Vietnamese culture becomes an irony. The hero Taylor proves to be a virtuoso in grappling with the Byzantine Viet Cong labyrinth in Saigon. In addition to his American military prowess, the maverick and ill-disciplined Taylor is fluent in Vietnamese and has developed an appreciation of Vietnamese fortune-telling and other subtleties of their habits that makes him seem to be a clairvoyant

of members of this culture. Thus armored, he pursues the shadowy Binh, mastermind of Saigon's Bolshevik cobweb. Layer by layer, Taylor peels apart Binh's intricate organization, until a single Vietnamese man stands revealed, no longer as faceless cardboard, but as an oriental human—scrutable and vulnerable. Though the struggle is grim and realistically portrayed, Taylor's triumph is so much larger than life that, almost for the first time, one sees, nonfictionally, how truly hopeless the struggle was—and how nearly inevitable were the events in *The Last Ambassador*.

About this war in Vietnam, thus far, in English, there has been very little from the Vietnamese. Among the devotees of Vietnam anyway, the works of Thich Nhat Hanh, both in fiction and nonfiction, have been known for some time.¹⁶ Douglas Pike, in his *Indochina Chronology*, has made heroic efforts to make known what works the Vietnamese are producing.¹⁷ Two works that have already come to stand out are Nguyen Chi Thien's *Flowers from Hell* (1984), a collection of poems by an escapee of Hanoi's prisons, and Nguyen Ngoc Ngan's *The Will of Heaven: The Story of one Vietnamese and the End of His World* (1982), which highlights a critical difference of the war for Americans and their Vietnamese allies. For the Americans, the war amounted to a few pages in its historical chronicle; for the Vietnamese, it was the whole book.¹⁸ One particularly interesting recent work is Stephen Fleming's *The Exile of Sergeant Nen* (1986) which is entirely about the travails of a South Vietnamese paratrooper in his adaptation to American society after Saigon's fall. This is a task other American writers said they never would attempt.¹⁹ However, the Vietnamese scholar Nguyen Manh Hung, director of George Mason University's Indochina Institute, has undertaken the supervision of a massive translation project of the literary works of 20 South Vietnamese writers. The scholarly community has much to anticipate in its publication.

Beyond this failure to incorporate the Vietnamese and their culture in the literature, missing also from this literature, and this time equally from nonfiction and fiction, is a context to provide standards of comparison for meaningful, relative judgments. The Vietnam War is all too often rendered in particular and absolute terms, that is, its particular incidents and experiences are immediately given absolute meanings. A series of questions, for which a context is desperately needed, are worth briefly considering. Why do many Americans think that Vietnam was a uniquely evil war? Was it the means used? Despite Cornell University's study of gross bombing tonnage dropped in Vietnam as exceeding by many times over the tonnage dropped in all of America's previous wars, the actual physical damage was far less than that inflicted on Germany or Japan in World War II or on the American South during the Civil War. For all the talk of napalm and the searing image of Kim Phuc running naked down Highway 13 near An Loc from a misdirected strike of the "white fire," civilian casualties were much lower in Vietnam, both absolutely and proportionately, than in World War I, World War II, or Korea. In Korea, as Guenter Lewy (1978) has pointed out, every major city was left in ruins, and perhaps three million civilians lost their lives. This figure, incidentally, is greater than all deaths suffered in Indochina during both the French and the American phases of the war.

Was it the end, or dubious cause, for which the war was fought? Vietnam, however, was not the first dubious war for the United States. The Mexican-American War (1846-48) was not the most moral of interventions. Aspects of our Indian Wars were "unspeakably evil." Our various ill-starred attempts to conquer Canada displayed thinly disguised venality and opportunism. The Spanish-American War (1898-1900) was hardly an exercise in unvarnished altruism. Even the "limited war" in Korea stirred

up its ambiguities. Nor is Vietnam the first time we have looked foolish. General John Pershing only partly redeemed himself in World War I after his fruitless pursuit of Pancho Villa throughout northern Mexico in 1916.

So why was it so terrible? Was it something unique about Vietnam? Or was it that the sensitive generation of the 1960s had had so much consciousness-raising about the horrors of warfare that they would have turned against any war, and Vietnam happened to be the only war lying around at the time? Would the flower children of the 1960s have spurned the crusade against fascism in the 1940s as well?

With respect to the literature, the core of it, remains bogged down in the fog of combat. Works of surrealism have begun the process of “dusting off” from this atomistic chaos. Indeed the struggling minions of this literature might become further airborne if, like Aristotle on his deathbed, they begin turning to the myths. It is Paul Fussell’s profound point that in war a country, and, of course, its soldiers, confront “recognition scenes” in which the trauma reveals to a society its unburied soul in what the country does during the conflict.²⁰ What a society does is to act out, almost unconsciously, its self-images or myths: stylistic larger-than-life representations by which its members try to idealistically define themselves.

John Hellman has recently taken up this task head-on. “No nation,” he writes, “can survive without a myth” and no myth can survive “that cannot plausibly include recent historical experience.” The myth splintered by Vietnam was the Special Forces soldier popularized by John Wayne, who was a Western hero. Hellman sees America’s new myth congealing around “Star Wars,” representing a healing and new myth built around America’s mighty technology.²¹ Certainly the Gulf War can be seen as this myth’s apotheosis.

The problem with such a futuristic myth is that it, perhaps quite intentionally, leaves out the Vietnamese. A better mythic representation of America’s tragedy can be found by looking much further into the past to either Homer’s Iliad and the siege of Troy or to Athens’ ill-starred expedition to Syracuse in the Peloponnesian War. This would go well with the all-time classic of Vietnamese literature, *Kim Van Kieu*, written by Nguyen Du at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is in the Kieu that all Vietnamese still find their identity. In the Kieu, Nguyen Du takes a threadbare Chinese story and turns it into a Vietnamese masterpiece. He portrays a young heroine’s attempts to maintain her virtue in a world turned topsy-turvy. When the world is finally righted, although her virtue is restored, a happy ending cannot be fully effected. Too much has happened to be completely forgotten or forgiven.

As the story goes, Kieu is a young Vietnamese beauty betrothed to the noble Kim. A sudden reversal of fortune forces Kieu into a life of prostitution to save her father. Political upheavals follow on Kieu’s misfortune, and she finds herself under the protection of the romantic bandit chieftain, Lord Tu. Tu offers her an opportunity for revenge on her several tormentors. Kieu is mostly generous, but not completely. Tu has a big heart, but he is brutal. Ultimately he is killed. Kieu is finally reunited with both her father, proving herself to be a filial daughter throughout her travails, and with Kim, her still noble but somewhat languid suitor. Kieu is left with some burdens from her past, including memories that the mechanics of her profession were not always “a fate worse than death.” She agrees to stay with Kim, but not to live with him conjugally. For this side of life, she allows Kim to marry her sister. *Kim Van Kieu*, then, is hardly a fairy tale. It is a cultural war story. For the Vietnamese, the torments of the modern age are all in the Kieu.²²

Surely there is a grand novel in the making here that could mesh a frame around the Kieu and the Iliad and Peloponnesian War. since between Americans and Vietnamese, other than the killing, the interaction was largely male-female, one can redirect the Achilles-Patroclus attraction to the handing of the gorgeously tragic Kieu from one fallen American warrior to another, as her life resonates between a noble Achilles and a reprobate Alcibiades.

JUST IRONIES, NOT LESSONS

With myths, we are back to motives, and the reason for dragging literature into this discussion in the first place. The social scientist can observe behavior and put it into patterns. He can describe, from these patterns or models, what is happening, but not why it is happening, or at least not with absolute confidence. Truthfully, neither, absolutely, can literature. Motives are hidden to everyone. We all, in St. Paul's words, "see through a glass darkly." our motives are wrapped tight in our souls, but glimpses can come from intuition, from creative leaps of human empathy unlocked by artistic muses, such as has been briefly described in some of the works noted in this article.

The residue of the Vietnam War is not facts, but motives charged with passionate feeling. Why, for example, do doves want to make the war out to be so terrible? Are they fighting against the cowboy, hardhat, truckdriver ethic? We know all their favorite facts, but why are they trying to destroy this macho image? What is the point? Is it that, because of the ignorant hubris of the Vietnam War, the American Samson must now be purified into a Solomon? Solomon, "in all his glory," however, also had a strong army, as did Athens a powerful fleet.

On the other hand, why do hawks cling to the "rightness" or "nobility" of American might? Again, we know their favorite facts. But why are they saying them? Does Vietnam mean that our Wyatt Earps, Kit Carsons, and Daniel Boones weren't mean and tough enough? Is the American Samson now to be transmogrified into a high-tech Rambo? History is also replete with powerful nations drowning themselves in their folly, as the Athenians did at Syracuse with their mighty fleet and the Romans did at Parthia with their legions.

The "facts" of Vietnam, for resolving the war, will make no difference until our hawks and doves come out of their motivational closets and tell us, beyond the fronts of their trumpeted facts, what they are really trying to do: what they want America to be after, and as a result of, Vietnam. Until this time Vietnam is better left as a series of mysterious ironies than as a set of falsely sharp lessons.

Fred Downs, a Vietnam veteran who has written two books on the Vietnam War—*The Killing Zone* (1978) and *Aftermath* (1984)—recently made a trip to Vietnam, and, in his meeting a people now at peace, he achieved a peace in his own soul over a stored legacy of bitter feelings. The conclusion of his report—perhaps—provides hope for America's own catharsis:

Any soldier who has been in combat knows that there comes a time after the battle, when the smoke has blown away and the dust has settled, when you must lean down and give your foe a hand. For in that moment of generosity, the war is truly over.²³

We can rejoice that the war is over for Fred Downs. For America it won't be over until its hawks and doves of those bitter war years extend to each other the hand of peace.

Despite the Gulf War and the glitter of the Fourth of July parades which followed, this peace has not yet come. As the armored columns of "Stormin Norman's" Hail Mary Play came upon the ancient waters of the Euphrates River, they halted. Beyond them lay their quarry in Baghdad. But there also rose the specter of another Saigon, and the game was called before the troops could try for the end zone. America's divisive nightmare lives on.

Notes

1. Hugh Sidey, "The Presidency: Ending a Personal War," *Time* (May 12, 1975): 28.
2. Cited in Timothy J. Lomperis, "*Reading the Wind*": *The Literature of the Vietnam War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) 55.
3. Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972) 9.
4. For a raging debate over the artist's responsibility to the truth or just to a good story, see Lomperis, "*Reading the Wind*" 51-54.
5. I have made this point elsewhere. Specifically, I have argued that two of the strongest emerging generalizations for Vietnam lessons do not hold up under close scrutiny; namely, that the North Vietnamese victory was a virtuoso demonstration of people's war, and that the U.S. was wrong to focus on the conventional threat of the North Vietnamese army (it was wrong for the first half of the war, but not for the second). See my "Giap's Dream, Westmoreland's Nightmare," *Parameters* 18.2 (Summer 1988): 18-32.
6. Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, *American Leadership in World Affairs: Vietnam and the Breakdown of Consensus* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984).
7. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955); and John Clark Pratt, *The Laotian Fragments* (New York: Avon Books, 1974). For a full reading of Marlowe's saga, see Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973 [1902]). This "heart of darkness" motif is central to one of the major films on Vietnam, *Apocalypse Now*.
8. John Clark Pratt encompasses these differences in a highly compressed overview of this literature in which he manages to discuss nearly 200 works. See his "From the Fiction, some Truths," in Lomperis, "*Reading The Wind*" 115-154. Two other bibliographies in my possession illustrate the growing size of the corpus. By 1986, Tom Ferguson of the University of Hawaii had compiled 416 entries in his "Vietnam Conflict Fiction" and Ken Lopez of Hadley, Mass. had 734 entries in his May, 1987, "Vietnam War Literature." Both of these are unpublished.
9. As in Shelby L. Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1985).
10. Larry Heinemann, *Close Quarters* (New York: Viking Penguin, (1986)[1977] 63.
11. Gustav Hasford, *The Short Timers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985) 93. The movie *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) is based on this novel.
12. One novel that explicitly draws heavily from works of nonfiction is Bernard and Marvin Kalb, *The Last Ambassador* (1981) The rich detail that makes the story so full of dramatic tension is taken from Frank Snepp's account of the last days in the Embassy, *Decent Interval* (1977) and the North Vietnamese *Great Spring Victory* (1977).
13. Lomperis, "*Reading the Wind*" 68.
14. Cited in Philip D. Beidler, *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1982) 3.

15. See especially his *After Our War* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1979); *Blue Mountain* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1982); and *Ca Dao Vietnam* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1980). A moving and poetic account of the war from the unique perspectives of two women—one Vietnamese and the other American—and of their friendship is Wendy Wilder Larsen and Tran Thi Nga, *Shallow Graves: Two Women and Vietnam* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).
16. Among his works of poetry, see his *The Cry of Vietnam* (Santa Barbara: Unicorn Press, 1968); and *Zen Poems* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1976). His most well-known piece of nonfiction is *Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). It is worth briefly noting that the Vietnam war appears to have attracted more than its fair share of authors who have produced respectable works in both fiction and nonfiction. Certainly to be included in such a list are Charles Collingwood, David Halberstam, Bernard and Marvin Kalb, Ron Kovic, and Tim O'Brien. John Clark Pratt, furthermore, has compiled a unique collection of fictional and nonfictional accounts of key events which he has placed side-by-side. See his *Vietnam Voices* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).
17. Published by the Institute of East Asian Studies of the University of California, Berkeley, it is distributed *gratis* to scholars of the Vietnam War.
18. I am indebted to the former Vietnamese ambassador to the United States Bui Diem for making this point at a conference on the Vietnam War held at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. in January, 1983.
19. For a discussion of these difficulties, see Lomperis, "Reading the Wind" 22-23, 63.
20. Paul Fussell, *The Great War in Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975).
21. John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 222, 38, and 57.
22. Nguyen Du, *The Tale of Kieu*, trans. Huynh Sanh (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).
23. Frederick Downs, Jr. "Vietnam: My Enemy, My Brother," *The Washington Post* (January 31, 1988): D2.