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## **Woodstock Nation: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement in Postwar American Fiction**

*“Out on the street I couldn’t tell the Vietnam veterans from the rock and roll veterans. The Sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuit for so long they didn’t even have to fuse. . . . What I’d thought of as two obsessions were really only one.”*

—Michael Herr in *Dispatches*

*“I am an orphan of America. . . . I live in Woodstock Nation.”*

—Abbie Hoffman in *Steal This Movie*

**I**n 1998, in one of the many celebrations of the coming millennium, the U.S. Postal Service invited American citizens to vote for representative American events and images of each decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Millions of ballots were cast, on the Postal Service website, and at 40,000 post offices and 300,000 public school classrooms around the country. The resulting issues were colorful sheets of 33¢ stamps—fifteen for each decade—commemorating what average American citizens selected as “the most significant people, events, and accomplishments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” For the stamps of the “rebellious Sixties,” as the accompanying narrative labeled the decade, nearly a million citizens voted to acknowledge such ’60s icons as the Barbie doll, the Ford Mustang, and the Super Bowl—and Martin Luther King, Jr., the Beatles’ yellow submarine, a large black and yellow peace symbol pinned to a denim shirt, a helicopter dropping American soldiers into the jungle of Vietnam, and the familiar poster from the 1969 Woodstock music festival of a dove perched on the neck of a guitar.

Surely we are not surprised that five of the fifteen unforgettable images of the tumultuous 1960s are representations of the Civil Rights movement, the antiwar movement, the Vietnam War, and the counterculture—in short, of

contemporary memories of the turbulent 1960s. And we can probably assume that the predominately young Americans who selected those icons—even baby boomers who came of age in that decade—would be hard-pressed to explain intelligently the intersections and relationships among those powerful metaphors of this complex period in American history. Is it fading memory or lack of understanding, even at the time, of the complexities of that era that account for the simplistic representation of the 1960s in contemporary American culture?

In Marylouise Oates' 1991 novel, *Making Peace: A Novel of the Sixties*, the protagonist, Annie, is a television journalist preparing a documentary on the 1960s for a 1980s Democratic National Convention. Though Annie welcomes the documentary assignment as an opportunity to "indulge in the luxury of her own past," she is surprised that the "vibrant colors" of the news film of the era belie her black and white memories (3). And she has struggled to find "some original film, some footage that hadn't appeared on the air in the nostalgia trips the network loved to take: a speech by Dr. King that didn't say he had a dream; a clip of Bobby Kennedy in which he wasn't walking on the beach; JFK without his daughter and not saying, 'Ich bin ein Berliner'; black students before Afros, hair all slicked down with pomade; antiwar protesters who weren't from Berkeley or Columbia" (5-6). Are our inaccuracies and stereotypes due to protean memory or cultural simplification?

'60s activist and, now, '60s scholar Todd Gitlin, in his 1993 Preface to the revision of his 1987 book *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, asserts that "perhaps no decade has suffered" the inevitable and unfortunate reductionism that simplistically labels all historical periods "more than 'the Sixties,' which in popular parlance has come to stand for a single seamless whole" (xiii). H. Bruce Franklin, in his recent *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, more specifically decries the simplification, demonization, and denial of the Vietnam antiwar movement, which he calls "the . . . movement we are supposed to forget" (47). The late 1990s brought a spate of new books (not to mention websites) about the 1960s—including work by a new, younger generation of academic commentators who offer a revisionist, often conservative, assessment of that long-ago era.<sup>1</sup> And though their appraisals present a more balanced and sophisticated interpretation of the decade than Franklin's overstated thesis implies, he does have a point. More than a few of the retrospectives on the '60s that appeared in the popular press around 1998 suggest that we are lucky to have outgrown the political and cultural upheaval of the era. Walter Goodman, for instance, reviewing "The Whole World Was

Watching,” a 1998 ABC documentary on the thirtieth anniversary of 1968, opines that the show offers us “the happy news . . . that some of the antiwar radicals of the time, blessedly forgotten now, are busying themselves with worthy causes” (B5).

Such revisions and misperceptions matter. Some of us are like Oates’ Annie, who recognizes that she, “like many others in her generation . . . [is] a captive of her youth, her personal history” (3). Gitlin goes further, claiming that the issues raised in the 1960s—“civil rights and antiwar and countercultural and women’s and the rest of that decade’s movements”—offered fundamental challenges to our culture and values that remain relevant today. Annie, as she witnesses the 1980s convention floor fight over the Democratic platform, recognizes that “the controversial planks were the same issues that had caused such violent and widespread reaction in the Sixties—race, war, civil rights” (8). Her documentary film is promoted as “a revealing look at how the problems of the Sixties have become the politics of today” (8).

Because I am who I am largely because I came of age in this momentous decade; because one of the most important movements of the period—the Vietnam antiwar movement—is an integral (if poorly understood) component of that era and of the Vietnam War and our perceptions of it; because it is too easy to accept the antiwar movement as accurately represented by denim and drugs and peace signs; because the cultural texts that present it both reflect and create our perceptions of that movement, I propose to analyze a variety of these texts—popular novels and films from the 1980s and ‘90s—that speak to us about the controversial, painful, and exhilarating efforts to “bring the war home” in the Vietnam era.

The cultural texts that, in the years after the Vietnam War, offer commentary on the antiwar movement are as numerous and diverse as those that attend to the war itself; and as varied as the groups and goals that made up the antiwar movement. Many (perhaps most) traditional texts now accepted as the Vietnam War canon—novels like Winston Groom’s *Better Times than These* and Philip Caputo’s *Indian Country*, for example; memoirs such as Ron Kovic’s *Born on the Fourth of July* and those by W.D. Ehrhart—include some attention to the antiwar movement—often brief scenes of young, unkempt, callous civilians abusing recently-returned veterans. My interest here is in creative fiction that offers a more sustained and sophisticated commentary on the constituency, goals, and repercussions of the antiwar movement. For most of these authors and their characters, involvement in the movement to end the war in Vietnam is—like participation in the war itself for countless

real and literary veterans—an experience that defines one's life forever. In many of these novels, the antiwar experience is long past, or the protagonist's sympathies for efforts to end the war did not extend to active participation in the movement, or the turmoil of the era is merely context for a traditional coming-of-age experience. But even these texts in which the Movement is more contextual than central proffer usually simplistic, but interesting—and often similar—representations of the antiwar movement.

Several of James Carroll's Irish family sagas incorporate thematic consideration of the antiwar movement. In his 1980 novel, *Fault Lines*, protagonist David Dolan, draft dodger and former antiwar leader, returns home from a twelve-year exile in Sweden to try to come to terms with his former life. Though the novel suggests (when David unsuccessfully seeks a teaching job) that the price of his antiwar activity will be higher than he thinks, it quickly turns into a love story and veers away from any narrative interest in David's antiwar past. *Prince of Peace*, a 1984 Carroll novel, more fully integrates the antiwar material throughout the novel. Narrator Frank Durkin relates his life-long friendship with Fr. Michael Maguire, Korean War hero, Catholic Church liaison in Vietnam in the early years of the Americans' presence there, and ultimately virulent Berriganesque antiwar activist. Extensive material on the involvement of the American Catholic Church with the Diem regime, and later, on the activities of antiwar clergy provide the backdrop for the brother-like bond between Durkin and the glorious celebrity priest, and for the narrator's betrayal of their deep friendship.

The 1983 novel *A Country Such as This* is another popular, historical saga—this one from a much more conservative author, Vietnam vet and former secretary of the Navy James Webb, best known for his accomplished combat novel, *Fields of Fire*. *A Country Such as This* recounts the lives from 1951 to 1976 of three Naval Academy graduates and their wives—Red, a fighter pilot, who is shot down and taken prisoner in Vietnam; Judd, who rejects a career in the FBI to become a minister and, later, a member of the House of Representatives; and Joe, a military, then civilian missile defense engineer who marries a strident antiwar activist-feminist whose activities explain the novel's grudging interest in the Vietnam antiwar movement. Negatively and superficially, Webb recounts the major events of the peace movement and the media's complicity in glamorizing what Judd dismisses as “the Spoiled Baby Brigade” (470). Webb pushes all the usual buttons: the protestors' signs and chants, the major marches (which he calls “the Semiannual Temper Tantrum”), the argument that the movement prolonged the war by embold-

ening the North Vietnamese. Joe's wife, Dorothy Dingenfelder, is a singularly unappealing character. She is intelligent and committed and successful, and she has the last word in the novel; but she is the character who embodies the sins of the era and the central theme of Webb's elegiac novel, which is the title of Part Four of the book: "We Are Not Ourselves Anymore" (307).

Caryl Rivers' simplistic but spirited 1987 novel, *Intimate Enemies*, is the story of 35-year-old, divorced, smart, and ambitious Jessie McGrath and her unlikely but passionate relationship with Army major and Vietnam veteran Mark Claymore, who is now ROTC coordinator at the small Boston college at which Jessie serves as provost. The typical stereotypes emerge: Jessie's success in her career is contrasted by her failure in relationships with men. And her determination to avoid the risk and vulnerability of another romantic relationship (this, of course, before she meets dashing Mark Claymore) is mitigated by her ticking biological clock. Mark, who despite losing a leg in Vietnam seems remarkably healthy, well-adjusted, and successful, begins—once his long-controlled emotions are set loose by his love for Jessie—to experience flashbacks and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The novel gives us as well a fairly one-dimensional portrait of the antiwar movement as well, through Jessie's diary from her years at Boston University, and through the contemporary residue of the movement at Jessie's nearby current college, Kinsolving, which in the Vietnam era was, the narrator tells us, "competing with Boston University for the title of the Berkeley of the East" (7). Twenty years later, Jessie's faculty meetings are enlivened by the hostility between two former Rubin and Hoffman-like movement leaders—Brian, who still sports jeans and a (now graying) ponytail and teaches courses called "From Marx to Mao" and "The Counterculture"; and Jake, who has gone corporate and now runs three-piece weekend success seminars that are part business philosophy, part pop psychology, and part est.

As Charles DeBenedetti, Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, and others have shown, the antiwar movement was not populated primarily by young, upper-middle-class college students looking for a way to reject their parents' values and lifestyles. Yet the popular image of antiwar protestors as carefree college kids or grungy, drugged hippies out for a good time remains—and prevails in many of the texts considered here. And indeed Rivers, in *Intimate Enemies*, gives us—through Jessie's memories—a movement that looks more than anything else like a lot of fun. Jake and Brian, the notorious radicals, are famous for pranks like putting a papier mâché head of Ho Chi Minh on Mt. Rushmore. And Jessie's college friend remembers that her final exam was can-

celled when she and Jessie called in a bomb threat to the department office. “I gave peace a chance, and I got an A minus at the same time,” Andrea remembers happily.

Yet Jessie’s mid-sixties diary entries present—yes, a naïve, self-absorbed college girl whose commitment to the antiwar movement is removed and safe—but also a young woman who believes sincerely that the Vietnam War is morally wrong. Neither pacifist, Marxist, nor Yippie, Jessie remembers that all those years ago “she felt there was a great moral choice to be made by her generation over Vietnam, and she wanted to be part of that choice. She was proud of her role in the movement, always would be, and she made no apologies” (21). Yes, Jessie and Mark have to overcome mutual wariness about the other’s role in that war, but the point of *Intimate Enemies* is that the *real* enemies are those who have forgotten the entire experience. One of Jake’s young clients sneers at love-beaded Brian—“Nobody told him that the Age of Aquarius dawned twenty years ago”—but Brian, unlike Jake, has not sold out; he’s merely frustrated: “I try to tell them, the kids, what it was like, that we had a dream we could make things better. . . . And we did good things, for a while. We ended a war, and things got better for poor people and Blacks and women. . . . I try to tell them that, about the passion, and they just sit there and stare at me, as if I’m speaking Greek” (156, 157). Late in the novel, a traumatized Mark learns of the unexpected, war-related suicide of his best friend; when Jessie tries to comfort him, he spits back the retort directed at the sympathetic wife or girlfriend in virtually every Vietnam novel: “You weren’t *there*. Nobody knows who wasn’t there. We’re the only ones who know. Not you people” (205). But the central thesis of *Intimate Enemies* is that Jessie does know. She wasn’t *there* in Vietnam, but she was *there* in the Vietnam era. Importantly, it is Mark who utters that greater truth earlier in the book: “It’s funny, you and I would have been on opposite sides of the barricades, throwing rocks at each other. But we understand each other better than people who didn’t get involved in it” (94).

For Rivers, the Vietnam era and the antiwar movement are long gone. Twenty years later, no one remembers and no one cares. But for those who lived through it—even on opposite sides of the barricades—the strangely shared experience is the defining (if sentimentalized) one of their now-busy, complicated lives. “Jessie wondered if her generation would always measure their lives against that time?” (60)

William Cowling, the protagonist of Tim O’Brien’s 1985 novel, *The Nuclear Age*, recognizes too that the Vietnam era is over. “It’s finished now,” he notes

as a middle-aged man in 1995, “no more crusades. . . . Times change. . . . Who among us really cares?” (8). Yet like Rivers’ characters, William measures his life against that time, though for him “that time” begins well before the Vietnam era. William is a baby boomer, a duck and cover kid whose childhood is defined by the Cuban Missile Crisis, fallout shelters, and what will become a lifelong “conviction that the world wasn’t safe for human life” (9). By the mid 1960s, college student William senses “that things were accelerating toward the point of hazard,” and in his one-man crusade to alert his fellow students to “the coming fracture,” he reluctantly falls in with a motley group of antiwar activist misfits, called “the Committee” (66, 74). Throughout the late 1960s, the protestors’ activities escalate: teach-ins and pep rallies for peace (“half protest, half party”) metamorphose into darker, more mysterious actions—but always William holds back: “what disturbed me was the outlaw mentality. Too reckless, I thought” (99, 113). Graduation evokes a draft notice, and William’s decision to become a draft evader is “not honor, not conscience,” but a desire for “safety”: “I was running because I couldn’t envision any other way, because the dangers exceeded the reach of my imagination. . . . All I wanted for myself was a place to ride out the bad times” (149).

Cheerleader Sarah, William’s activist girlfriend, arranges his underground adventure—flight to Key West and a pleasantly indolent beach life; when the bill comes due, it’s basic training in Cuba for the revolution to come. Then for two years, William skirts commitment and danger by paying his dues as a “network delivery boy,” as Sarah (whose enthusiasm for the antiwar cause makes William’s reservations seem all the more pronounced) and the others raid Selective Service offices, bomb National Guard armories, and become famous. By the mid-1970s, with the waning of the war and his father’s death, William wants out; he returns home to Montana, studies Geology, finds uranium, buys its remote location, sells it for twenty-five million dollars, and shares the riches with his antiwar comrades. Years after the end of the war, Sarah dies of cancer, and the rest of the Committee, hoarding a nuclear warhead, die in a shoot-out, “a TV spectacular” (295). Years later, in 1995, the future, William, convinced since childhood that “when there is nothing, there is nothing worth dying for, and when there is nothing worth dying for, there is only nothing,” digs a hole in his yard, determined to retrench from a dangerous world (303). Though William’s undeniable love for his wife and daughter inspire a conclusion to the novel that grudgingly affirms endurance and engagement, the story that O’Brien tells in *The Nuclear Age* is one of twenti-

eth-century madness; the Vietnam War merely the most unnerving evidence of “a general ungluing of things . . . the fundamental process of our age: collapsing valences and universal entropy,” the antiwar movement a feeble response to lunacy of modern times (230).

*Home Front*, Patti Davis’ 1986 novel, is a co-written (but poorly-written), plodding, autobiographical *Bildungsroman* interesting only because it was written by Ronald Reagan’s daughter at the height of his presidency. In the mid-’60s, Beth, the narrator, is in boarding school and then college while her father serves as governor of California. Beth’s sexual awakening and rejection of her parents’ (especially her mother’s) conventional values are predictable. The antiwar movement is a convenient instrument for Beth’s adolescent rebellion, and at the exact mid-point of the novel, at a 1969 campus rally, moved by news of the My Lai massacre, Beth commits herself to the fight to end the war. Her relative celebrity makes Beth a popular speaker, and she is delighted to ignore her parents’ admonitions against her participation in the movement.

What saves Beth’s story and Davis’ novel from hopeless banality is Davis’ presentation of Beth’s relationship with her high school boyfriend, Greg, who is serving in Vietnam as Beth protests the war at home. Implicitly, Beth’s sympathy for the soldiers fighting the war explains her rejection of some of her fellow activists’ calls for more dramatic action. “These Weathermen tactics will destroy everything we’ve been working for. They play right into the hands of the hawks who want the public to see us as mindless lunatics,” Beth asserts, echoing an appraisal articulated throughout these antiwar novels (122-123).

Similarly, late in the war, against the backdrop of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War Dewey Canyon III protest in Washington, Beth befriends a young antiwar veteran, who introduces her to amputee vets at the local Veterans Hospital. Beth now feels “compelled to relate the experience of seeing boys whose lives had been irrevocably changed, who had come home only to be shunned by the country that had sent them off to fight its war” (185). At the end of the novel, Beth reaffirms her commitment to Greg, now home from Vietnam, bitter, and (like Rivers’ Mark) just beginning to come to terms with his Vietnam horrors. Davis and Rivers, writing in the 1980s, offer a typically Reagan-era appreciation for the Vietnam veteran; and Davis, like Rivers, affirms the importance of the shared bonds of protestors and vets. Davis dedicates her antiwar novel to her husband and “to all Vietnam vets.”

Marylouise Oates’ 1991 novel, *Making Peace*, extrapolates on Davis’ glance at the tensions within and the diverse constituencies of the antiwar move-

ment. Oates was the Deputy National Press Director for the Vietnam Moratorium, and her novel is a detailed behind-the-scenes fictional presentation of the issues and people in the more-or-less “official” peace movement. It is as well a complicated political mystery novel whose stereotyped and simplistic characters cannot sustain her complex plot. It is, in short, a novel whose potential as a serious exploration of a significant historical and political era is undermined by its author’s limitations as a novelist. Yet *Making Peace* is another interesting retrospective literary representation of the Movement and its participants.

To an extent, the plot of *Making Peace* turns on the diversity of constituents and goals of the unwieldy antiwar movement that Davis and Marge Piercy mention, but that are beyond the more simplistic and revisionary presentations of the movement that most of these novels offer. DeBenedetti, Garfinkle, Tom Wells in *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam*, and others have explored the tensions within the formal antiwar movement and the often conflicting goals and strategies that, most commentators agree, ultimately compromised the movement’s effectiveness as a coherent social movement. As an umbrella under which pacifist and religious groups, civil rights activists, disarmament groups, the Old Left, and varied student groups jostled for space, the antiwar movement was, as Zaroulis and Sullivan state, “a loose, shifting, often uneasy coalition of groups and individuals who often disagreed on every issue except their hatred of the war” (xii).

*Making Peace* proposes that a covert group of CIA affiliates and elder statesmen, all old-style Liberals who are committed to incremental change within the system, having successfully tamed the Civil Rights Movement by sowing the seeds of dissension within that movement and expediting blacks’ ejection of white activists from its ranks, works surreptitiously to undermine an antiwar movement that is becoming increasingly visible, vocal, radical—and therefore threatening to the Liberal establishment. It is this persuasive and powerful coalition, and Tom Burnett, its representative in the antiwar leadership, that execute the intricate political conspiracy that drives the fictional plot of Oates’ novel. Only at the end of the novel, some fifteen or twenty years after the fact, do we learn that union-organizer, “red diaper” baby Kapinski—who worries in the ’60s about the “balkanization of the peace movement”—is equally committed, not to the revolution, but to the preservation of the Liberal status quo (79).

Oates also adds to the overview of the antiwar movement presented by these myriad texts some treatment of the relationship between the Civil

Rights Movement of the earlier 1960s and the antiwar movement. Annie, Pisano, Burnett, and Kapinski—the major players in the planning for the Offensive Against the War—are veterans of 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer. Black, upper-middle-class Civil Rights activist Bitsy Clark is the novel's voice for the position that the war, and African-Americans' involvement in the antiwar movement, undermine LBJ's Great Society programs. Though Oates understands the important issues that energized and problematized the antiwar movement, her inability to present a compelling, serious story finally ranks *Making Peace* with the more popular and superficial literary treatments of the subject.

There are a number of thematic features (and of course many literary and aesthetic characteristics) that distinguish these popular, mostly flawed fictional treatments of the 1960s and the antiwar movement from more complex, literary, and successful representations of the same subject and themes in Marge Piercy's 1979 novel *Vida*; Sidney Lumet's 1988 film, *Running on Empty*; Elizabeth Spencer's 1991 novel, *The Night Travellers*; and Philip Roth's 1997 Pulitzer-Prize winning novel, *American Pastoral*. Among them are these more sophisticated texts' presentation of characters who do more than flirt with the antiwar movement. In these texts, the characters' dramatic antiwar activities are violent, felonious actions that drive them underground and that change their lives, and those of the people they love, abruptly and forever.

Piercy's *Vida* is a long, third-person novel, set in the late 1970s, when its mid-thirties protagonist has lived underground for a half dozen years. Though the novel moves back in time to the late '60s and early '70s, describing *Vida*'s antiwar activities and the other members of Students Against the War, the fictionalized SDS in which *Vida* is a major player, the book is most interested in—and most successful at presenting—*Vida*'s exhausting, difficult life as a fugitive. *Vida* disdains her former compatriots who have allowed themselves to be discovered and arrested, or who have turned themselves in. "Every day you defeat them by continuing," she insists (55); and indeed *Vida* remains active in the now subterranean network, at the end of the novel proposing an anti-nuclear platform for her organization, and planning and implementing the bombing of a local power plant.

*Vida* is a singularly unsympathetic protagonist—though I suspect that Piercy means for her to be attractive and admirable. Piercy offers little explanation for her heroine's passionate anti-establishment beliefs, and indeed little character development at all. *Vida* emerges as a self-pitying, self-absorbed woman whose choices have earned her a life of hardship and transitory per-

sonal relationships. Her inability to acknowledge the end of her marriage to her husband Leigh, a sympathizer who has remained marginal to the movement and who continues his life above ground, underscores her unwillingness to admit that her movement and her network are crumbling; she is, in short, a remarkably naïve character.

Piercy's novel is interesting, however, for its sustained—even laborious—presentation of the vicissitudes of Vida's life on the run. It captures the labyrinthine machinations and constant vigilance in which Vida and her fugitive friends must engage in order to elude capture. Vida must avoid New York City, her home, because surveillance is greater and more fugitives are caught in large cities. And cities mean other dangers as well; Vida lives with special fear of being raped, since a visit to a hospital would mean certain capture. She travels constantly, exhaustingly, staying with strangers and carrying all her possessions; and interacting with Leigh, and her mother and sister, only through pre-scheduled telephone calls. Vida admits to being tired of the constant movement and vigilance, but the novel ends with her assertion that the good war rages on and that she will stay in the battle: "No great problems in this society have been solved, no wounds healed, no promises kept except that the rich shall inherit. What swept through us and cast us forward is a force that will gather and rise again. Two steps forward and a step and a half back. I will waste none of my life" (412).

Like Oates', Piercy's protracted novel also includes a fairly well-developed if heavy-handed fictional presentation of the diversity of, conflicts within, and tactics and activities of the antiwar movement. At an October 1967 "Smash the State Fair" in New York, Vida notes the carnival, countercultural atmosphere of the proceedings: "This year the earnest idealists and organizers of SAW had cross-fertilized with the gypsy hoards, and no one knew yet what the hybrid armies in the parks would turn out to mean. The organizers were smoking dope and growing their hair, and the flower children, weary of being beaten by the police, were beginning to talk about the war, but mistrust between the two tribes remained" (106). Vida welcomes the hodgepodge of agendas represented in the movement. "SAW was a fiercely, totally democratic organization open to anyone," she notes. "Every person in SAW had their own politics—anarchist, liberal, communist, democratic-socialist, syndicalist, Catholic-worker, Maoist . . . but what mattered was the politics of the act. Decisions rose from solving problems in struggle. Everyone was accommodated in the vast lumbering movement" (110). The flashback chapters include tedious arguments among SAW members about strategies and priorities for their work. Compare

O'Brien's more cynical commentary on the conflicts within the antiwar movement in *The Nuclear Age*; activist Ned Rafferty recites the litany: "Classic worm can. Slimy creatures, very messy. Panthers here. Weather guys there. Shades of red . . . SDSers and Quakers and . . . the People's Coalition for Peace, Dwarfs for a Non-Violent Solution. You name it. Lots of moral hairs to split. . . . The famous network" (158). By May 1970, Vida knows, the carnival has become for mainstream America a frightening freak show: "People in the other world viewed them as barbarians . . . [and] called them beasts when they ran in the streets with NLF flags and broke windows" (196). Even after years underground, in what she acknowledges is an "off period" for the movement, Vida remains convinced of the sanctity, viability, and patriotism of her cause: "Maybe nobody loves this country as much as fugitives running before the wind, back and forth across it," Vida somewhat sentimentally asserts. "Nobody knows this country like those who hide in its folds and crevices. Our land. Our country. That's what the screeching paper won't say" (250, 255, 256).

*Vida* is a novel that wears its—or Piercy's—politics on its sleeve, and one of her more politicized concerns in the book is her somewhat oblique indictment of the deep-seated misogyny of the antiwar movement. In *The Wars We Took to Vietnam*, his 1996 study of "Cultural Conflict and Storytelling" in interpretations of the Vietnam experience, Milton J. Bates discusses what he perceives as the sexism of the young male members of the New Left in the Vietnam period. Bates interprets many young men's participation in the protest movement as a Freudian rejection of the father; further, he asserts, having eschewed both military service and a conventional career path as means of establishing their masculinity, men in the movement adopted a distinctly macho attitude that included a dismissal of women—who were already spurned because they did not have to face evading the draft or risking their lives in combat. The attitude toward women in the earlier Civil Rights Movement, as embodied in Stokely Carmichael's infamous 1964 pronouncement that "the only position for women in SNCC is prone," only reinforced this underestimation of the role of women in the antiwar movement (136). Todd Gitlin devotes a chapter in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* to "Women in the Revolution." He discusses women's second-class status in the organized movement and early feminist women's need to decide whether their own liberation issues should be considered secondary to the goals of the revolution—as well as their understanding, by the late '60s, that "the male-run movement was moving nothing but itself," and their subsequent defection to the women's movement (373).

In *Vida*, the mostly-male Board of the Students Against War convenes in

1974 to try to resurrect a “mass movement” that is, they know, “becoming invisible” (310). Though they are worried about the women’s movement, the male leaders demonstrate no understanding of the forces that propelled so many activist women into their own organization as the antiwar movement waned. Similarly, Piercy’s exploration in *Vida* of the role of women in the Movement is compromised by her peculiarly myopic title character. *Vida*’s definition of a women’s issue is deciding whom she will sleep with tonight; she is, in fact, somewhat perplexed by her sister Natalie’s heightening feminist consciousness. When a young *Vida* speaks at an SAW national convention, offering a report from the first SAW women’s caucus, she is upset that the men stop listening as soon as they learn her subject—yet *Vida* herself admits that she doesn’t care much about day-care facilities either.

Several of the women novelists considered here similarly present these and other examples of women’s lesser status in the antiwar movement. *Intimate Enemies*’ Jessie McGrath’s college diary notices, not women’s roles within the movements, but reactions to antiwar women from unsympathetic bystanders at a Boston rally. Roughed up, strip searched, female protestors were, Jessie understands, especially suspect because they were stepping out of their assigned place in society. Fifteen years later, Jessie knows that between “bomb thrower” and “’uppity woman . . . the last one is the big sin” (92).

Press liaison Annie O’Conner is the only woman in the inner circle of organizers for the 1967 Labor Day Washington rally—the Offensive Against the War—that is the setting for Oates’ *Making Peace*—and even she, as a woman, is excluded from the steering committee meetings. Women’s Strike for Peace activists and a few women who are “saying ‘Off our backs,’ and wanting part of the action” hover in the background of the Offensive and the novel, but Oates’ antiwar movement is essentially men only (113). And the middle-aged 1980s Annie wryly dismisses a souvenir button from the movement that claims that “Girls Say Yes to Boys Who Say No” as “another ideological failure” (5).

In a 1969 essay entitled, “The Grand Coolie Damn,” Marge Piercy calls for women to recognize and reject their second-class citizenship in the Movement. In an argument that presages Bates’ thesis, Piercy maintains that the antiwar movement’s glamorization of the charismatic male “professional revolutionary” reinforces a system that relegates women to what she calls “shitwork”: “Shall the professional revolutionary haul garbage, boil potatoes, change diapers, and lick stamps?,” she asks, rhetorically (425, 424, 426). Piercy ends with a call for women to repudiate the movement’s insistence that

“women’s liberation is a secondary issue, to be dealt with when the war is won. . . . No more arguments about shutting up for the greater good should make us ashamed of fighting for our freedom,” she asserts; “. . . if we wait for the males we know to give up control, our great-grand-daughters will get plenty of practice in waiting, too” (437-438).

Though *Vida* concentrates narrowly, if exhaustively, on Vida and the lives of others radical activists who are driven underground by their antiwar actions, Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*, Sidney Lumet’s *Running on Empty*, and Elizabeth Spencer’s *The Night Travellers* are more interested in the devastating effects of their activists’ behavior on his or her family than on the protestor or the actions themselves. The Vietnam War and the protest movement are late-career new territory for Elizabeth Spencer, a Southern novelist best known for her 1956 novel about race relations in small-town Mississippi, *The Voice at the Back Door*, and for her 1960 innocents-abroad novella *The Light in the Piazza*. Spencer’s protagonist, fragile Mary Kerr Harbison, is a talented dancer who complicates her already-difficult relationship with her volatile mother when she meets and falls for Jefferson Blaise, a graduate student whose involvement with the antiwar movement grows increasingly violent. After giving birth to a daughter and a failed suicide attempt, Mary ends up, alone, in Montreal, waiting for her fugitive husband, who floats in and out of the novel and in and out of Mary’s life. Her loneliness punctuated by letters and an occasional, fleeting and surreptitious visit from Jeff, who eventually goes to Vietnam to avoid prison, Mary struggles to sustain a life of endless waiting. The novel concludes with the still-separated protagonists’ reaffirmation of their commitment to each other.

Issues surrounding the war in Vietnam and resistance to it are central to *The Night Travellers*. Ethan Marbell, Jeff’s professor and mentor, must give up his high-level career in a Washington think tank after he discovers a secret plan to use nuclear bombs in Vietnam. Mary’s unsympathetic mother, Kate, works in a university laboratory that has a Department of Defense contract to test chemicals for a defoliant. And Jeff’s antiwar activities include writing articles for alternative newspapers, protesting at the Chicago 1968 Democratic Convention, and bombing a weapons factory outside San Francisco. But all of this is backgrounded to Spencer’s real interest, which is the curiously vapid Mary and her relationship with the nomadic Jeff. In this political novel, the protagonist is avowedly, insistently apolitical. As another character says of Mary and Jeff, “his purity was his stand against the war, a stand that Mary, for all he treasured her, was not very much involved in tak-

ing. . . she wasn't like that. She came from somewhere. She knew somewhere else. Her mystery was in that" (213). Finally, Spencer is intrigued more by the effect of Jeff's antiwar activities on Mary's life than on the political and moral motivations for those actions. The wages for Mary of her great love is a life that is ascetic, unsettled, and isolated; she is a modern-day Penelope, patiently waiting for her antiwarrior-turned-warrior husband's return.

In the 1988 movie *Running on Empty*, director Sidney Lumet and writer Naomi Foner present the peripatetic lives of Annie and Arthur Pope, who have lived underground since their 1971 bombing of a University of Massachusetts military research lab, in which an unexpected janitor was accidentally blinded and paralyzed. The Popes, played by Christine Lahti and Judd Hirsch, are complex and sympathetic characters—good, committed people who continue to work for social justice even as they are forced over and over to uproot their family in order to stay a step ahead of the FBI.

The movie poignantly portrays the lingering cost of what was, as far as we know, Annie and Artie's single violent action, and their stolid commitment to it. Artie learns only a month after the fact of his mother's death, and Annie has not seen her bitter, perplexed parents for fourteen years. Their lives—and those of their ten and seventeen-year-old sons—are, much like Piercy's Vida's, a continual rehearsal of dyed hair, searches for cash-under-the-table jobs, falsified school records, and abrupt departures. Assisted by the underground network, members of whom offer necessary medical services and occasional money, the Popes are nonetheless essentially hunted and alone. They are heroic and stoic, as the network dentist plaintively attests when he tells Annie, admiringly, "you're living it." And because they're living it, as Artie insists throughout the movie, they have only each other to depend upon.

Which is crucial to the central subject of the film, the inevitable coming-of-age of Danny, the elder son, played by River Phoenix, a talented musician (like, we learn in the course of the movie, his mother and maternal grandmother) and a boy preternaturally sweet and good, who at seventeen experiences first love and the prospect of an opportunity to study music at Julliard. Like Faulkner's Flem Snopes in the 1938 story "Barn Burning," who reinforces his son's loyalty by reminding him that "You got to learn to stick to your own blood," Artie insists that his family remain together; and Danny understands of his father that "without us, he can't keep it going. He needs us to hold him up" (503). But Annie, who knows, as her husband does not, that "there's nothing to win. It was over as soon as the war ended," plans to turn herself in when her younger son is grown. Annie recognizes the hard-

ships and injustice of their difficult lives for her sons: “look what we’re doing to these kids,” she pleads to Artie. “They’ve been running their whole lives like criminals, and they didn’t do anything. It isn’t fair.” Annie arranges for her parents to care for Danny, so that he can go to Julliard, and at the end of the movie, as the family prepares to flee once more, Artie releases Danny to his own life. “Now go out there and make a difference,” he tells his son. “Your mother and I tried, and don’t let anyone tell you any different.”

Though *Running on Empty* focuses on Danny and his journey toward adulthood, the most successful scene in the film is another one that portrays the toll that the fugitives’ actions have taken on family members. Near the end of the movie, Annie arranges a meeting with her long-estranged father, a successful industrialist played by Steven Hill. As Annie struggles to maintain her composure, her angry and wounded father confronts her with his life of pain as he lives not only without his child but *with* the knowledge that “it’s your child that’s pulling the triggers, setting the bombs . . .” His beautiful, talented daughter has not only “thrown it all away”; she has thrown it in her father’s face: “The last thing I remember you saying to me was that I was an imperialist pig, personally responsible for the war, the spread of poverty, racism. . . .” Annie’s response—“I was young”—is convincing, but it is nonetheless obvious that her father, a man who clearly loves her, will live with his daughter’s betrayal for most of his adult life.

In *American Pastoral*, Philip Roth puts Annie’s father center stage. Seymour (Swede) Levov is too a successful business man, an assimilated New Jersey Jew who has ridden his high school athletic prowess and fame, and his golden boy good looks, into a pleasant, if delusory, upper-middle-class life in a beautiful country home in suburban New Jersey. As presented (in the first part of the novel, before the narration and point of view shift to Swede) by Nathan Zuckerman, Philip Roth’s familiar narrator/author, Swede Levov is a tragic hero who has outlived his time. He is a decent man, an idealist, a late-twentieth-century Jay Gatsby who has lived by the values of post-World War II America only to find, in late middle-age, that those values of hard work, commitment to family, and confidence in the American dream are spent currency in an America that has gone truly crazy. The novel ends with an acknowledgement that Swede’s world “is rapidly going under . . . [that] the rampant disorder” is spreading, and with the plaintive and quizzical inquiry, “What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?” (423)

The evidence of the decay of late twentieth century America is the detritus that clutters this haunting, deeply conservative novel. Liberal but stubborn

Swede refuses to move his glove-making business, built by his immigrant father and lovingly nurtured by Swede, the dutiful eldest son, from the downtown Newark, New Jersey location that is now a post-'60s-riots urban wasteland; the blacks who work for him now willfully sloppy and irresponsible. And what, after all, are the prospects for such a business in a world in which no one even wears fine gloves anymore?

Swede's bitter, aging father Lou rails against the decay of an America that he loves as only an immigrant could. ". . . where will it end? . . . We grew up in an era when it was a different place, when the feeling for community, home, parents, work . . . well, it was different. The changes are beyond conception. I sometimes think that more has changed since 1945 than in all the years of history there have ever been. I don't know what to make of the end of so many things. . . how did this happen?" (364-365) Lou hates Catholics, Richard Nixon, his younger son Jerry's talent for multiple marriages; by the end of his life, he is both puzzled and repelled by the world around him. Swede's wife Dawn, Miss New Jersey 1948, a woman who has spent her adult life proving that she is more than just a pretty face, has by the end of the novel demonstrated that she is after all just that, as she resorts to a face lift and an affair with a shallow, ersatz architect to assuage the disappointments of her ruined, now empty life.

Doomed business. Physical deterioration. Raging father. Unfaithful wife. "The outlaws are everywhere," Swede discovers. "They're inside the gates" (366). Swede, like Zuckerman, has many reasons to deplore the betrayal of his life by time, everyone he loves, and "the indigenous American berserk"; but the one, true, and only villain in this hate-filled book, the single action and character that bring Swede Levov's perfect American life crashing down into the sordid streets of Newark, New Jersey is his outlaw daughter, the merciless, monster Merry and her inexplicable, brutal statement against the Vietnam War—and against everything her father is and stands for.

The ironically named Merry. Meredith. Who enters the world screaming, which evolves into stuttering, and ends with sixteen-year-old Merry, spewing renunciation of "her meaningless manners, her petty social concerns, her family's 'bourgeois' values" and demonstrating her rejection of it all by bombing their small-town post office and inadvertently killing the local doctor who has stopped to mail a letter (101). Swede is obsessed with his lost, adored daughter and flummoxed by her repudiation of him and the life that he has built. "There wasn't much difference, *and she knew it*, between hating America and hating them. He loved the America she hated and blamed for everything

that was imperfect in life and wanted violently to overturn, he loved the 'bourgeois values' she hated and ridiculed and wanted to subvert, he loved the mother she hated and had all but murdered by doing what she did. Ignorant little fucking bitch! The price they had paid!" (213-214; emphasis Roth's).

Swede's anger is fleeting, though. While his brother Jerry urges him to spurn his evil, maniacal daughter—"Miss America . . . [of] America amok"—Swede grieves for her, puzzles over her incomprehensible action, and, after five years, in 1973, finds her, living right under his nose in the slums of Newark. The fugitive Merry is a reclusive mystic, unwashed and placid, who has come to a near non-existence after more bombings, more murders, rape. . . . what her father finds an unspeakable life. And found, she has no interest in returning to her family and her repudiated former life.

Roth's Merry is a despicable child; venomous, unloving and unlovable. And yet, to Roth, she is representative of her generation, which has sent the glorious America of his own boyhood spiraling into madness. Roth—through Zuckerman—is fascinated by the horror of Swede Levov's life and "that mysterious, troubling, extraordinary historical transition" between the "triumphant" postwar years of his childhood and "the disorder occasioned by the Vietnam War" (88). Finally, for Roth, there is nothing wrong with the Levovs' life, and no explanation for Merry's betrayal of it. It is the diseased times that are to blame: "All that public display. The dropping of inhibitions. Authority powerless. The kids going crazy. Intimidating everybody. The adults don't know what to make of it, they don't know what to do. Is this an act? Is the 'revolution' real? . . . What's going on here? Kids turning the country upside down and so the adults start going crazy too" (69). The antiwar movement is merely "angry, infantile egoism thinly disguised as identification with the oppressed" (134). It is the symptom, not the cause; only a part of the ultimate destruction of a once magnificent world: "Three generations. All of them growing. The working. The saving. The success. Three generations in raptures over America. Three generations of becoming one with a people. And now with the fourth it had all come to nothing. The total vandalization of their world." (237). Compare Marylouise Oates' disquisition, in *Making Peace*, on "the American way. One generation in the factories, the next one in the offices, and the third one anxious to get done with college so they could begin tearing down the whole system that got them there in the first place" (126). Merry is a child of her time, and what happens to her is "the sort of thing that *does* happen to the wonderful perfectly normal kids" in a world gone mad (272). As James Webb insists, "We Are Not Ourselves Anymore" (307).

Swede's secret and his tragedy, the defining fact of his adult life, is that, through his daughter's incomprehensible, capricious act, "he had learned the worst lesson that life can teach—that it makes no sense. And when that happens the happiness is never spontaneous again. It is artificial and, even then, bought at the price of an obstinate estrangement from oneself and one's history" (81).

Philip Roth is a major American novelist, *American Pastoral* a Pulitzer-Prize-winning book. Even if it were not as well a powerful, if flawed, novel, it would sound loudly among the late-twentieth-century jeremiads that bemoan the decline of American civilization and that see the roots of that decay in the excesses of the 1960s. Its own overwritten excesses aside, Roth's novel proffers an indelible portrait of a family destroyed by the youthful passions of its youngest child. Finally, however, the novel—by far the richest, most sophisticated text considered here—fails as a cultural document about the Vietnam antiwar movement. Roth's, and his narrator's and protagonist's, rage about the disappearance of the America they grew up in precludes any true interest or insight into the manifestations of the social forces that effected the decline.

Probably we will never fully understand or appreciate the Vietnam antiwar movement. Arguably, it was simplistically presented by the popular press at the time. And despite serious, comprehensive (but politicized) scholarly studies in recent years, it is today a nearly forgotten, or at least misunderstood, part of America's involvement in the war in Vietnam. It has been argued that among the thousands of novels, films, and cultural texts that Americans have produced about the Vietnam War, no title has emerged as the definitive fictional treatment that captures the agonizing complexities of that protracted event. Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that the antiwar movement similarly lacks a compelling narrative voice. I suggest, however, that the novels and film discussed here do, taken together, offer an interesting presentation of the antiwar movement precisely because they so accurately reflect our society's limited, unsatisfactory apprehension of the experience.

#### Notes

1. See David Faber's article, "The 60's: Myth and Reality," (*Chronicle of Higher Education*; December 7, 1994) and Rick Perlstein's "Who Owns the Sixties?: The Opening of a Scholarly Generation Gap" (*Lingua Franca*, May/June 1996) for overviews of trends in late 1990s scholarship on the 1960s.

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