

Dismantling Glory: Twentieth-Century Soldier Poetry. Lorrie Goldensohn. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. 372 pp. \$34.50 cloth.

Reviewed by Douglas Higbee, University of California, Irvine

Few books have enjoyed such scholarly longevity within the field of modern war literature studies as Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*. This is in part because it manages to be at once highly readable and well worth reading. More precisely, though, the book's impact and continued relevance stems from its then-unconventional method. As a whole it eschews a traditional chronological organization by author, while each chapter weaves a salient rhetorical-historical theme with analysis of poetry and memoir, covering such topics as war front/home front relations, war writing and pastoral, and the English homoerotic tradition, among others. In so doing, Fussell enlivened scholarship on war literature by injecting it with a provocative cultural history of modernity; rather than being a separate or parallel discourse, war literature was now understood to be integrally related to currents in culture at large. While more than a few critics, primarily feminists, have taken issue with Fussell's relatively restricted canon, it is his claim for the war's determinative influence on 20th century British identity that has received the most criticism, mainly from revisionists of the 'Myth' of the Great War. Nonetheless, the growth of the field of war literature studies in the last couple of decades has been powered in no small part by more tightly-focused cultural histories that often rebound off Fussell's historical claims.¹ Convincing or not, nearly thirty years after it first appeared, *The Great War* continues to have a salutary heuristic effect.

In the wake of these criticisms of Fussell, few scholars of modern war have been willing to hazard such temporally broad claims. Even studies with an explicit 20th century frame, such as the recent spate of 'end-of-the-century' books, were reluctant to offer summary theses.² Perhaps the last of these 'end-of-the-century' studies is Lorrie Goldensohn's *Dismantling Glory*, a lucid series of readings of major 20th century British and American war poets informed by relevant biographical and historical contexts. Her relatively narrow range of selection is augmented by frequent and fruitful connections to poets of other periods, ranging from Homer, Archilochos, Gascoigne, and Hardy. A central question Goldensohn traces is the extent to which, in our era of modern industrial warfare, soldier

poetry has revised glorified (i.e., traditional, or pre-modern) concepts of the heroic. While her intention to excavate the anti-war strains in this body of work is clear from the outset, to her credit Goldensohn is well aware of the ideological substrate in many purportedly anti-war texts that locates various attractions and consolations in war. Thus, if one of Goldensohn's principal historical interests is to "track the nature of antiwar feeling in soldier poetry," she also has one eye peeled to see the "reluctant but defensive reaffirmation of violence and bloodletting that so often resurfaces in these poems" (xii). As the title of her study suggests, then, the process of "dismantling glory" is a difficult and ongoing project.

Goldensohn's approach is a useful qualification of a common hard-and-fast moral absolutism that often obscures the fruitful ambiguities embedded in 20th century war writing by contrasting, to take a common example, the imperialistic narcissism of Rupert Brooke with the trench-borne outrage of Wilfred Owen. Both are more complex than this scenario allows. In his very last poems, written aboard ship en route to Gallipoli, Brooke strikes a more reticent, apprehensive note, while Owen's putatively firm anti-war position is often unsettled by an undertow of masochism and by Christ imagery awash in holy sacrifice. Indeed, Goldensohn's reading of Owen—her focus in the second chapter—homes in on the ways Owen's poetry often refuses a thorough-going rejection of war for the consolations and attractions of suffering in the context of male fellowship. As Goldensohn puts it, Owen's poetic language often "transforms anguish, pain, and suffering into a nobility of heroic endurance" (76).³ While this reading of Owen is not wholly original—for instance, over a decade ago Adrian Caesar's *Taking It Like a Man* convincingly elaborated upon Fussell's early reading of Owen's Decadent-inspired homoeroticism—Goldensohn's emphasis on Owen's redefinition of the traditional heroic in terms of a heroism of witnessing and suffering nicely encapsulates a longstanding scholarly preoccupation. If experienced readers of First World War poetry and criticism may not require another review of Yeats' instructively off-target censure of Owen's "passive suffering" or another reading of "Dulce et Decorum Est" that translates the Horace for us, readers interested in a robust introduction to the salient issues regarding Owen's work would benefit from Goldensohn's analysis.

Goldensohn's chapter on Keith Douglas, on the other hand, presents us with a long-overdue synthetic appraisal of a relatively neglected Second World War-era poet that moves beyond William Scammell's excellent but dated monograph.⁴ Bringing together readings of Douglas' verse from Oxford, North Africa, and pre-Normandy with a nuanced analysis of the prose memoir *Alamein to Zem Zem*, Goldensohn rightfully refuses Douglas' own claims—made in such essays as "Poets in this War" (1943)—that all Second World War writing was doomed to repeat the arguments of the Great War poets. On this last point, Goldensohn finds Douglas's poetry deflecting an Owen-esque emphasis on the sacrifice of

innocents by callous non-combatants and more squarely delineating the extent to which soldiers themselves are implicated in war's destructiveness. While in part this departure may be due to the real differences between trench warfare and tank warfare in the open desert, Goldensohn's main point is that Second World War poets like Douglas, writing in the shadow of Auden's ethical ambivalences of the 1930s, simply did not have available to them the ideological traction that informs Owen's disillusioned anger. In Douglas, this commonly results in a cooler, fatalistic tone: the soldier's dual role as both victim and victimizer draws Douglas away from questions of Why? and toward metaphysical ruminations cauterized with scenes of battlefield wreckage. Goldensohn brings out this strain in Douglas most clearly in her reading of "How to Kill," in which her tracking of the poem's parallels between the drama of combat and the metaphysical co-implication of death and life demonstrates her critical acuity. As Douglas's persona fires at the enemy:

Death, like a familiar, hears
and look, has made a man of dust
of a man of flesh. This sorcery
I do. Being damned, I am amused
to see the centre of love diffused
and the waves of love travel into vacancy. (130)

On the other hand, her contention that these lines express "more than a shade of swagger" rather misses their quiet tone and perhaps slights the emotional price such honestly-hewn ironies must have cost the author. Goldensohn is precisely on target, however, in relating the metaphysical focus in Douglas's war poetry to his own longstanding preoccupations with identity and mortality, a critical move convincingly demonstrated in her reading of Douglas' pre-Normandy "Bete Noire" poems. Noting Douglas' achievements in memoir and in criticism, Goldensohn's claim for his exceeding, in the span of a brief career, the rather restrictive category of "war poet" as a well-rounded "man of letters" is certainly earned and welcome.

Moving to the American side of the Second World War, Goldensohn finds in Randall Jarrell a retention of Douglas' emphasis on soldiers as killers combined with an Owen-esque political consciousness. Jarrell's status as a non-combatant flight instructor—which places him simultaneously near the war's center and at its periphery—informs an *oeuvre*, that, in essence, widens the circle of moral responsibility in order to include not only those who drop bombs on European cities but also those whom these airmen represent. While Owen focuses his outrage on accusations of civilians, Jarrell's implication of non-combatants refrains from excusing those doing the fighting; at the same time, Jarrell's broader scope produces a more politically pointed poetry than Douglas' metaphysical

ruminations. Though at times Jarrell over-emphasizes the extent to which modern war is the product of “the systems that have bred and empowered the modern state” (a sentiment that provides the bite of poems such as “The Death of the Ball-Turret Gunner”), for her part Goldensohn is especially interested in those poems which provide a more complex rendition of war’s moral calculus (225). In “Eighth Air Force,” Jarrell casts his soldier-victims as both murderers and Christ-figures, civilians as the “people” demanding blood, and his speaker (perhaps a stand-in for Jarrell himself) as an anguished Pilate. Goldensohn ably reads this tripartite network in terms of Jarrell’s general interest in the moral gray zones of twentieth century war. The speaker as Pilate concludes by considering the airmen as a collective Christ:

I will content the people as I can
And give up these to them: Behold the man!

I have suffered in a dream, because of him,
Many things; for this last saviour, man,
I have lied as I lie now. But what is lying?
Men wash their hands, in blood, as best they can:
I find no fault in this just man. (224)

While perhaps she could have spent more time unpacking the concluding line’s dense ironies, in which the complex status of the key terms “I,” “fault,” “just,” “man,” and the deliberately slippery syntax of “this just man”—the very terms of her discussion of Jarrell’s ethics—are all brought explosively together, Goldensohn’s illuminating connections between his life and work are an important contribution to Jarrell scholarship and the study of modern war poetry in general.

Goldensohn completes her study with an extensive discussion of four anthologies of Vietnam War poetry. Published from 1972 to 1998, each volume successively broadens in scope to include not only poetry by American veterans, but also work by civilians, non-combatant nurses, and Vietnamese writers, with the result that formerly implicit issues such as gender and race become increasingly more explicit. This emphasis is in line with Goldensohn’s overall task of excavating the complex inter-penetrations of peace and war: for instance, how the demarcation of wartime roles along strict gender lines—a major facet of the traditional heroic ethos—duplicates and often reinforces the gender hierarchies of peacetime. On another level, however, Goldensohn’s aesthetic criteria bear some examination. While arguing for the historical importance of the 1972 anthology, she argues that on the whole its poetry suffers from a lack of “polish,” claiming that “direct witness...constricts or oversimplifies many [of the] poems” (250, 253). Though many readers may concur with this judgment (including myself),

and though her claim is in keeping with her general argument for the thematic and formal evolution of the successive stages of Vietnam War poetry, perhaps Goldensohn doesn't sufficiently allow for the ways in which the achievements of the later poetry depend on those initial works. If, strictly speaking, the complexity of later poetry is visible only by dint of its comparison with prior works, then relegating early Vietnam War poetry to the aesthetic dustbin fails to underscore the dialectical relation between, say, the work of W.D. Ehrhart and Bruce Weigl. On this score, one may wonder whether Virginia Woolf would have retained her reservations concerning Sassoon's poetic achievement if she had considered the influence of his realism on what most agree are Owen's more elaborate and nuanced revisions.

Reservations such as these aside, and though we may still await a successor to Fussell's ambitious and influential work, Goldensohn's study convincingly brings together the complex and variegated body of 20th century war poetry by combining analysis of its major practitioners with exploration of overarching themes such as the evolving valence of the twentieth-century heroic. And as it seems fairly clear that the twenty-first century will continue to provide fresh occasions for interrogating the diverse inter-relations between war and heroism, it can't but help to have Goldensohn's work close at hand.

Notes

1. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* (1996), Allyson Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches* (1996), and Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003) are a few such studies. Hynes present a cogent summary of the Great War 'Myth,' while Brian Bond's *The Unquiet Western Front* (2002) is the most recent critique of the 'Myth' thesis.

2. See Margot Norris, *Writing War in the 20th Century*, pp. 9-10.

3. For example, see "Greater Love," "Insensibility," and "Strange Meeting."

4. *Keith Douglas*. Faber and Faber, 1988.

***Honoring Sergeant Carter:
Redeeming a Black World War
II Hero's Legacy.*** Allene G.
Carter and Robert L. Allen.
New York: Amistad , 2003,
ix + 212 pp. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Eric Ensley, United States Air Force Academy

Perhaps the highest cost of freedom is not so much how truth becomes cryptically lost or found, but how more often than not, it is crushed into some ideological can, then systematically manipulated, covered up, and purposefully forgotten. Such was the case with Sergeant Edward A. Carter, one of only seven African-American soldiers in World War II to posthumously win the Medal of Honor. The authors begin Sergeant Carter's story in September 1941, when he enlisted in the Army. Having risen within a few years to the rank of Staff Sergeant in his all-black company, in the autumn of 1944, Carter found himself driving trucks in England and southern France. Spurred by heavy losses during the Battle of the Bulge however, the Army began recruiting black soldiers for combat duty. Of the roughly 4,500 who volunteered, 2,221 became infantrymen, one of whom was Sergeant Carter. The only catch was that these volunteers, if they had them, had to turn in their stripes, for in those good 'ole days of sweet tea, Jim Crow, and separate-but-equal segregation, America's Great Christian God forbid a Black Sergeant from California from commanding a White Private from Georgia. Soon thereafter, Private Carter was charging towards the Rhine as part of the Fifty-sixth Armored Infantry Battalion in Patton's Third Army.

On March 23, 1945, during a mission to capture a bridge over the river at Speyer, Carter's column came under intense 88-mm artillery fire. Volunteering to lead his squad to attack the enemy position, what happened in the course of the next few hours changed his destiny. Shot seven times, hit in both legs by 88-mm shrapnel, all of his squad wounded or dead, in the space of a few hours Carter effectively destroyed one machine gun nest, killed a German mortar crew plus a dozen or so German soldiers, and took two German prisoners who provided his unit with valuable information on enemy-troop dispositions. But in keeping with the findings of a later study by Shaw University concluding that the Army's racism prevented black soldiers from receiving America's highest military award,

Carter received a Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross for his actions, even though he clearly should have won the Medal of Honor. As the authors so convincingly instruct their readers however, not receiving the Medal of Honor was a trifling, almost insignificant offense compared to the ordeal he would later undergo.

Strangely enough, Allene Carter did not learn about her deceased father-in-law's heroic actions until the Department of Veterans Affairs called the Carter family to inform them that the White House was planning to award him the Medal of Honor. It was only when she started gathering information for the White House that she started learning about and piecing together the darker side to Sergeant Carter's story—a side that had clouded his family's memory of him and filled them with bad blood concerning Carter's military experience. The strength of what follows lies in a narrative that bristles with Allene Carter's strong sense of retributive justice and fearless efforts to discover the redemptive truth about her father-in-law.

Allene Carter, herself a 911 dispatcher turned self-taught researcher, in what seems like a perfect case study in *Government for Dummies: How to Honor Your Fallen Heroes Instead of Trying to Disgrace Them*, describes the series of injustices she unearthed in her research. She uncovered how General Mark Clark, with his “when loyalty is doubted, the individual must suffer” philosophy, knowingly resisted Army policy by limiting black reenlistment and ensuring that Sergeant Carter, this “audacious, proud black soldier who shone wherever he was assigned,” was humbled (185); how Adjutant General Edward Witsell, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, and Johnson's assistant, James Evens, all had a guilty hand in using that all-too-common government memorandum smokescreen of “confidential information” to deny attempts by Carter and the NAACP to overturn the Army's decision to deny his reenlistment; how Sergeant Carter faced repeated insinuations of disloyalty by the Army throughout his efforts to learn the reasons behind this denial. As Allene Carter accurately deduced, every time an Army newspaper published a laudatory article concerning Sergeant Carter, the flood of investigations began anew.

In the late 1990s, when Allene Carter finally gained access to Eddie's Freedom of Information Act file, the only information to support the government's allegations against Sergeant Carter was that he had fought with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, grew up with his Christian missionary parents in India and China, and had a father living in Shanghai, China, and an Indian mother. On this so-called “confidential information,” Carter found himself repeatedly denied reenlistment. Too late to do Sergeant Carter any living good, Allene Carter angrily notes how “The institution that he so faithfully and heroically served...had betrayed him cruelly” (177).

The hard-won apotheosis of Allene Carter's work came after the 1997 Medal

of Honor ceremony, when, in 1999, upon learning—largely from Allene Carter’s research and aggressive advocacy of her findings—of what he called “the additional injustice [Sergeant Carter] had suffered by being denied reenlistment,” President Clinton issued a formal apology to the Carter family on behalf of all Americans. The postlude to Sergeant Carter’s story occurred on one of those typically hot and humid June days in Norfolk, Virginia, when his daughter-in-law stood in a shipyard for the christening of the Navy ammunition carrier, the *M/V SSG Edward A. Carter, Jr.* Admonishing her audience of 300 guests, Allene Carter reminded us of something we forget often and too easily:

When we go back to our respective communities, we can take back a legacy with us. We can change history. We can reopen the history books to make corrections. I would ask that you hold on to what the Carter family has started, and continue on with us as we make a journey to insure that the truth is recovered and preserved. (204)

In this day of corporate cover-ups and increasing governmental secrecy, we would be wise to remember that truth does not just happen; instead, it is fought and bled for, lied over, and comes with high costs. We should honor Sergeant Carter and his biographers for helping teach Americans of every color once more how important the battle for truth is—and that this battle can be won.

***The Vietnam War in History,
Literature, and Film.*** Taylor,
Mark. Tuscaloosa: University of
Alabama Press, 2003. 176 pp.
\$48.00 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

Reviewed by Matthew Hill, University of Maryland, College Park

Writing about the complex cultural reverberations of the American war in Viet Nam is never an easy task. The war, “America’s Longest War,” as George Herring aptly put it, is extraordinarily difficult to describe, much less understand. It was both a stunning military success and a dismal failure, a hard slog through jungles and rice paddies and a breakneck Huey flight over them, a “noble cause” and a quagmire. Writing and film on the war have only complicated the task: in many

ways, creative work on Viet Nam has created a new meta-history, a narrative apart from the facts and figures of the (supposedly accurate) historical record. The elusive thing called “Viet Nam”—both the country and the war—exists as a constructed “thing” somewhere between these often competing histories, its tenuous truth buried in layers of historical inaccuracy and poetic license. It is the analysis of this daunting problem that defines Mark Taylor’s 2003 book, *The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film*.

In a brief introductory chapter, Taylor offers a prospectus for his project, suggesting that the complex nature of the war (Frederic Jameson called it the first truly “postmodern war”) requires that one attempting to “understand” it consider both “historical” texts and “creative” ones:

In the context of the Vietnam War, questions about the usefulness of particular disciplines are particularly relevant because of the skepticism with which many attempts to portray the war have been received. History, it has been alleged by some, cannot fully explain this first “postmodern” war. The scale, confusion and “unknowability” of events in Vietnam require, according to this view, alternative forms of representation which writers of fiction are best equipped to provide (Taylor 2).

Attempting to resolve the perilous dichotomy between the writing of “history” and “literature” or “fiction” as it relates to the notion of “how it really was” is the core aim of Taylor’s book. Echoing Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*, Taylor argues that texts outside of conventional historical discourse may be able to provide readers with a different kind of “truth” about the war in Viet Nam. Not simply advocating an unqualified acceptance of creative texts as “sources of truths” (2), however, Taylor suggests a healthy skepticism, arguing that one should assess “what sort of dangers” are inherent in reading creative texts historically.

Awareness of the split between “historical” and “literary” representation, Taylor allows, is nothing new—readers for centuries have had to negotiate through complex layering of creative and “objective” representations of events, particularly in regards to warfare and the infamous “fog of war.” The Great War poetry of Sassoon and Owen, for example, is commonly held to be far more illustrative of the “real” truths of modern war than many conventional histories of the period, portraying more accurately both the abjection and suffering of soldiers on all sides and their resultant “modern” psychic isolation. The fact that this *is* such an old problem to me is the central weakness of Taylor’s book. The introduction seems to imply a binary (“history” vs. “literature”) approach to examining the war

that I feel only the most naïve cultural critics or historians would advocate. Many of the brightest scholars working in literature and history departments—and their respective course syllabi—often draw from both historical and creative texts in order to expand and complicate their work. In calling for an “interdisciplinary” approach to the war, then, Taylor seems to be advocating a solution that is already being implemented by many critics.

This is not to say, however, that *The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film* is not an important contribution to the scholarship on the war. While the exigency for the problem that Taylor posits might be a bit weak, his skill in working with texts is considerable. In an academic environment where “high theory” and overt political proselytizing are the fashion, working closely with actual texts is a skill not many critics possess; Taylor’s attention to detail—both in the historical and literary sense—is significant, as is his command of the body of secondary literature. The book is extraordinarily well-researched and offers genuinely insightful, sophisticated and accessible readings of each text that it examines.

The organization of the book is unique. Rather than organizing chronologically, by text, or by genre, Taylor structures his analysis thematically, grouping texts around common dominant motifs. Chapter 1, “Telling True War Stories,” interrogates the complex problems of understanding the historical “truth” of combat and offers a summary of the ongoing theoretical dialogue between fictive and “objective” representations of history. Chapter 2, “Heroes,” offers a particularly compelling interdisciplinary analysis of *The Green Berets*, in which Taylor examines the representation—in most cases celebration and mythologizing—of the U.S. Special Forces in both Robin Moore’s 1965 novel and John Wayne’s 1968 film. Taylor skillfully casts both versions of *The Green Berets*—commonly considered to be of questionable historical accuracy, yet extremely popular—as unintentionally valuable in imparting some level of “true” historical knowledge about the war, particularly in regards to the development of American *ideas* on guerilla warfare and counterinsurgency:

Determined to assert the heroism of the Green Berets, Robin Moore and John Wayne produced versions of the war that are highly flawed but historically valuable for reasons neither writer nor actor / director might have imagined: as reflections of the attitudes of Americans; as evidence of the appeal that the Special Forces and the mythology surrounding them continued to have, despite an increasingly peripheral role in Vietnam; and, individually, as indications of some of the views of a small group of soldiers in Vietnam and the avowed views of the American government in Washington (Taylor 54).

The novel and film, then, the book argues, are worth examining as cultural artifacts, as productions arising from a unique moment in American history. While Taylor’s reading of *The Green Berets* is indeed interesting—some of the best and most true criticism on the work that I’ve seen—its core assertion of the film and

novel being “artifacts” of ideas is fairly conventional: such premises underlie much of the current theoretical work on popular literature and culture.

Chapter 3 examines the contribution of cinema to the study and understanding of history, oddly enough through an analysis of Oliver Stone’s deeply speculative *JFK*. Taylor investigates both Stone’s use of historical documents as a means to advance his own theories on Kennedy’s assassination as well as the implications that use has—within the particularly persuasive genre of film—on the credibility of the film as “history” for popular audiences. Taylor ultimately sees value in Stone’s willfully misleading text as both an artifact of political consciousness and as an event provocative of dialogue on the Kennedy assassination, the war in Viet Nam, and the process of presidential decision making in the 1960s. “Battles,” the book’s fourth chapter, deals with “objective” representations of combat contrasted with those in literature and film, focusing on texts (*Dispatches* by Michael Herr and *Hamburger Hill* by John Irvin) dealing with the battles of Khe Sahn and “Hamburger Hill” in the A Shau Valley. Chapter 5, “Villains,” discusses the depiction of war crimes committed by American soldiers, paying particular attention to investigative accounts of the massacre at My Lai and Tim O’Brien’s narrative strategies *In the Lake of the Woods*. In a fitting coda to the work, “Veterans” traces the representation in film of the Viet Nam veteran in relation to cultural attitudes on the war. In this chapter Taylor discusses Hal Ashby’s anti-war drama *Coming Home*, Michael Cimino’s complex parable *The Deer Hunter*; and the ultimate examples of Cold War revisionism, the *Rambo* films.

While *The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film*’s overall point—that any serious scholar of history and culture needs to take an interdisciplinary approach to understand the war in any meaningful way—seems a bit conventional in the post-cultural studies age, the book’s analyses of both the creative texts and historical record are complex and well thought out, making the book a valuable resource for anyone seeking a greater understanding of how journalists, filmmakers, novelists, and historians have sought to represent the most complex conflict in American history.

Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film. Lawrence H. Suid. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2002. xvii + 748 pp. \$50.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Reviewed by Major Jeffrey C. Alfier, USAF, Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Film and military historian Lawrence H. Suid's *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* is an updated version of his original book published twenty-six years ago, one that now encompasses films produced in the last few years, including depictions of the Gulf War and the US intervention in Somalia. Younger readers will be pleased to see that movies such as *Black Hawk Down* (2002) and *Windtalkers* (2002) come under Suid's updated study. His chronological approach highlights the US military in the vicissitudes of Hollywood image making since the film industry's inception. As such, *Guts and Glory* is, at its crux, a study in cinematic sociology, with ramifications for political science. Suid's span runs from classics to lesser-known movies. He includes fantasies such as *The Final Countdown* (1980), smarmy failures such as *Pearl Harbor* (2001), the humorous—like *Stripes* (1981), assorted millennial and survivalist works, and those that otherwise suffer from “the ambiguity of conflicting images” such as *Pork Chop Hill* (1959) (201).

World events are often midwife to the film industry; hence, Suid discusses at length the effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis and growing atomic arsenals (229ff) in the making of the American military image. With extended implications for the American mythos, politics and popular sentiment impact the minds of producers and screenwriters. For most films, producers worked closely with the Pentagon, providing them scripts to get their comments. This has always been more for material than spiritual support.

There is a pleasing balance in Suid's analyses. He lauds films such as *The Killing Fields* (1984) and *Southern Comfort* (1981) for at least nominally standing “above the political issues” to let “the visual images of slaughter speak for themselves” (468). Throughout, he addresses issues surrounding whether or not certain films

proved effective or interesting, and why others did not—why *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) “became a strangely detached and uneven movie” (525), or why *From Here to Eternity* (1953) proved “one of the few Hollywood portrayals of the armed forces that ranks both as a great military film and a great American movie” (151). Several are cross-categorical, such as *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), a film that exemplifies one of Suid’s major themes: how each military service attempted to aid Hollywood in repairing or enhancing their respective images. In the course of his scrutiny, Suid includes some surprises, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), brought to light because of the Air Force’s staid approach to the existence of UFOs (494). Discussed at length are the movies depicting and interpreting the Vietnam War, a study worth a separate book. John Wayne and his role in military movies warrant two chapters (116-135; 247-277).¹

A work of this broad a reach bears a few criticisms. Suid seems a bit over-determined when he states that Spielberg did a “great disservice to the men he was trying to memorialize” (633) when he produced *Saving Private Ryan*. Secondly, Suid omits the Western genre in its portrayal of Native Americans and Mexicans in conflict with the US Cavalry. He discusses John Ford’s productions, and Ford made several movies where racist dynamics were bound-up with Cold War politics—such as *Fort Apache* (1948) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1950).² Finally, Suid could have briefly spoken to how Hollywood movies affected perceptions of America for international audiences.

Still, Suid’s research remains a paradigm of thorough inquiry. He includes a helpful index to the 220-some films that come under his purview. There is an interesting appendix delineating Suid’s vast number of interviewees, which includes dozens of directors, producers, screenwriters, actors, technical advisors, US military personnel, critics, and studio executives. In the end, Suid believes that Americans likely watch war movies not out of bloodlust, but to enjoy “watching other people challenge death” (673). This book will likely remain for years to come a major source for studying Hollywood and the American military image.³

Notes

1. Suid is also the author of the now out-of-print, *Scenes of Conflict: Hollywood, the Pentagon, and the Films of the Vietnam Era* (Madison Books, 1990). Also see William J. Searle’s *Search and Clear: Critical Responses to Selected Literature and Films of the Vietnam War* (Popular Press, 1988).

2. See John A. Price, “The Stereotyping Of North American Indians In Motion Pictures.” *Ethnohistory* 1973 20(2): 153-171. To say this genre is freighted with malign realities would be understatement. Suid only mentions Westerns in passing on the last page of his Epilogue. Overall, a wider study is needed of American military films in relation to the intellectual dynamics of modernism.

3. See also Frank J. Wetta and Martin A. Novelli, “‘Now a Major Motion Picture’: War Films and Hollywood’s New Patriotism.” *The Journal of Military History* 2003 67: 861-862. Suid falls into the

same trap that Wetta and Novelli do in asserting that war's *causus belli* be included in most, if not all war movies (On Suid, see 634). Films, like literature, need not foreground ontological issues to be effective.

***Billy Mitchell*. James J. Cooke.
Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner
Publishers, 2002, Illustrations,
introduction, notes, bibliography,
index. 305 pp. \$49.95 cloth.**

Reviewed by William Jeanes, Pass Christian, Mississippi

James J. Cooke, emeritus professor of history at the University of Mississippi, has done much to reduce the widespread confusion about United States aviation activity in World War I. In a previous work, *The U.S. Air Service in the Great War, 1917-19* (1996), his presentation of the U.S.A.S. included not only the over-glamorized pursuit units but also the observation, bombing and balloon squadrons. He did perhaps the best job extant of explaining how these elements were intended to function as parts of a unified war effort, and his book stands out among the massive body of work done by aviation historians of the “Curse you, Red Baron” school.

In *Billy Mitchell*, Cooke moves from history to biography and sets out to add dimension to an aviation legend. He achieves this without banging the drum of sensationalism and without in any way muting his subject's strengths. Rather, he is unfailingly even-handed in his treatment of Mitchell—who rarely accorded such fairness to objects of his own scrutiny. Cooke neither idealizes nor demonizes Mitchell, but he convincingly reveals a mercurial man whose qualities ranged from military greatness to personal pettiness. Cooke's many sources range from trial transcripts to unpublished Mitchell family papers—notably correspondence between Colonel Mitchell and his mother—and he draws the richest picture of Mitchell yet seen.

Beyond the realm of the U.S. Air Force and aviation enthusiasts, Billy Mitchell is all but unknown today, but there was a time when he mesmerized the American public. He orchestrated much of the U.S. Aviation success in World War I, including its first strategic bombing effort. Postwar, he proved that planes could sink battleships. His many and popular writings called for a unified air service and for a department of defense that would unite the nation's air, land, and sea forces

under a single cabinet officer. Both the separate Air Force and the Department of Defense became reality after World War II. Cooke demonstrates, however, that Mitchell's prescience was marred by a mulish conviction that only Billy Mitchell could conceivably head such a department.

Following the end of the 1914-18 World War, Mitchell's battleship-baiting and strident demands for a unified air service infuriated Army and Navy traditionalists. Almost never content with presenting his views through military channels alone, Mitchell wrote several books and a flood of magazine articles. He wrote for pay and without the prior approval of his commanding officers required by Army regulations.

Mitchell testified before several congressional committees and on each occasion let fly at his superiors. Cooke notes that Mitchell's constant sweeping criticisms, with the single exception of a stinging—and accurate—critique of the nation's Pacific air defenses, frequently lacked or shaded facts.

In the wake of the 1925 wreck of the Navy dirigible, *Sbenandoab*, Mitchell issued a 6,000-word statement containing this sentence: "These accidents are the result of the incompetency [sic], the criminal negligence, and the almost treasonable administration of our national defense by the Navy and War Departments." To no one's surprise, this insubordination led to his arrest and court-martial. President Calvin Coolidge referred to Mitchell as "lawless."

The politically incendiary court-martial of Billy Mitchell is a familiar story to aviation students, but Cooke brings it concisely alive. The court, among whose judges was General Douglas MacArthur, found Mitchell guilty and suspended him from the Army. Mitchell resigned his commission in February 1926, but continued writing and speaking—with diminishing effectiveness—until his death in 1936.

But what of Mitchell the person? Cooke humanizes Mitchell, though the process is frequently painful. He explores in depth and for the first time Mitchell's ugly divorce from his first wife, his constant financial troubles and his fiscal dependency on both his mother and his second wife. He examines Mitchell's drinking problems, his love of horses and the tweedy life of a Virginia gentleman—a life he could ill afford. We read also of Mitchell's estrangement from his first three children, his unwillingness to cooperate with anyone who could not further his causes, his political activities, his often-slipshod work as a writer and his constant willingness to ignore or, at best, twist reality.

Cooke also describes a young officer who showed exceptional merit in his pre-aviation years. As a Regular Army officer—though not a West Point graduate—Mitchell earned distinction in Cuba, the Philippines and Alaska and, at 33, became a major and the youngest officer on the General Staff, all before he took his first flying lesson. We learn that Mitchell could judge subordinates if not superiors. Three of his early disciples, each of whom remained faithful to Mitchell until the

end, were Henry “Hap” Arnold, Ira Eaker and Carl Spaatz. All rose to the highest levels of military aviation.

In a 1924 report made during a tour of U.S. bases in the Pacific, Mitchell savaged the Hawaii air defenses. When the Japanese attack of December 7, 1941 came, it set off new efforts to anoint Mitchell a “prophet without honor.” In the 1955 film, *The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell*, Gary Cooper, himself a legend, portrayed Mitchell. The script presents Mitchell as an apolitical, visionary saint. Cooke shows that he was nothing of the kind. Mitchell’s wealthy grandfather was well connected politically, and his father served Wisconsin as both a Congressman and U.S. Senator. Mitchell harbored a clear understanding of political clout and used it from the moment he donned an Army uniform in 1898. Additionally, Cooke does something rare for a historian: he argues that the movie, stunning in its inaccuracies and omissions, had an important positive impact on the public’s perception of Mitchell, even two decades after his death, and further blurred the true picture of the crusading airman.

Cooke succeeds in bringing to life a man often revered as a founder of the modern U.S. Air Force, and in so doing reminds us that even a crusader can benefit from restraint. *Billy Mitchell* is the history of a man who had none.

***Crossing the Sauer: A Memoir
of World War II.* Charles Reis
Felix. Short Hills, New Jersey:
Burford Books, 2002. x + 189 pp.
\$22.95**

Reviewed by George Monteiro, Professor Emeritus, Brown University

Many of the unheralded members of the Greatest Generation—the World War II generation celebrated by Tom Brokaw—have now written their own war memoirs. To mind come a number of accounts by non-professional combatants such as Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes, James Colvert, and Daniel Hoffman—all of them college teachers, by the way. But Charles Reis Felix’s *Crossing the Sauer* may well be the first such war memoir published by an American of Portuguese descent since Aristides Monteiro’s *War Reminiscences by the Surgeon of Mosby’s Command* (1890).

Born in 1923 in Southeastern Massachusetts, Felix was raised in New Bedford, attended the University of Michigan, graduated from Stanford University, and has lived in California for nearly sixty years. This memoir, his first book, focuses on his experience with the American military, including three months of service in France and Germany in 1945, where he arrived as an artillery man, was promptly reassigned to a rifle company, and just as promptly (fortunately for him, he says) turned into a radio man. As he says, by way of an epilogue, “[war] was a profoundly ‘good’ experience. But how can something so horrible be so good? I will leave that one to the philosophers.” What he does not refer to philosophy, however, is the narrative of his experience, of what he saw, thought, and felt as a draftee in combat, inspiring in the reader the conviction that this book tells us how things went, without adornment or aggrandizing, in the combat soldier’s daily life. Frequently under bombardment and seemingly the specific target of potentially fatal fire, he continued to live out the mundane details and often petty emotions of existence. Without *The Red Badge of Courage*’s (sometime) theatrics or its insistent overall irony, *Crossing the Sauer* occasionally calls to mind Stephen Crane’s writing. If the nostalgia Felix shares with his “Portagee buddy from Taunton” over the “hot juices” of linguíça making “a big chunk of Portagee bread” turn orange just before the first bite marks this autobiographical work as Portuguese-American, it also recalls the moment of absurdity in Crane’s story “The Open Boat” when straight out of the blue the cook asks the men about pie and other good things to eat.

Felix’s writing is clear and crisp, at times bordering on the aphoristic. The foot soldier’s prudence inspires a half-truth: “Thank God for the mind. It’s the only place where we have freedom of speech.” Freedom of speech is in the mind, yes, but sometimes it is on the page, too, as is the case in this highly commendable account.

***Armoured Guardsmen: A War
Diary, June 1944-April 1945.***
Robert Boscawen. Barnsley, UK:
Pen & Sword, 2001. 224 pp. \$34.73
cloth.

Reviewed by Brian Hanley, Williamsburg, Virginia

This estimable volume made its way into print quite by accident. Robert Boscawen, who was a Tory Member of Parliament from 1970 to 1992 and was

Government Whip throughout Margaret Thatcher's premiership, had never considered publishing his war diary. A fellow member of the House of Commons happened to mention its existence to the publisher—who then managed to persuade Boscawen to go forward with the project.

In addition to what probably will strike some as the author's astonishing reluctance to seek fame by making public his private observations, *Armoured Guardsmen* will impress readers as refreshingly unusual in other ways. To begin with, as a physical object the book is attractive. Pen & Sword Press, an English publisher that specializes in war literature, does not skimp, as many other commercial houses apparently do, when it comes to paper, binding, dust jacket, and illustrations, all of which are of a very high quality. Second—and of greater importance—is that Boscawen clearly benefited from an excellent education (Eton; Trinity College, Cambridge). He does not need to employ a ghostwriter or rely on an editor or literary agent to make his work presentable. His prose is expressive yet unadorned and matter-of-fact, characteristics that reflect the author's self-effacing disposition and critical discernment, though it should also be pointed out that the narrative is by no means destitute of memorably elegant passages, and here and there an ironical turn of phrase adds spice as well as nutrient to Boscawen's observations. Put another way, Boscawen's writing is free of the kind of sub-literate buncombe and self-admiring impulses that blight many autobiographical accounts by public figures that clutter the shelves of the chain bookstores nowadays. Boscawen kept up his diary in response to demands he placed on himself, that is, he sought to record wartime experiences that were to him deeply affecting or, at the very least, worth recalling; there are no traces of apologetic or self-aggrandizing sentiments here. On the whole, the temperament of this book brings to mind that of Cecil Lewis's World War I memoir, *Sagittarius Rising* (London: Peter Davies, 1936), which is no longer in print, unfortunately.

Armoured Guardsmen is unusual also on account of its arrangement. There are no chapters. The introduction, which follows an indispensable "Glossary," provides essential context but—and this is to Boscawen's credit—nothing more: a mention of the author's education and his military training and experience up to the point at which the diary begins in 1944. What follows is the author's journal of his experiences as a commander of a squad of Sherman tanks, divided only by the dates of the various entries and occasionally provided a gloss, or "Later Comment," which Boscawen added to the diary afterward to clarify or correct his on-the-spot observations. A "Sequel" (an epilogue) and a first-rate index complete the volume.

It must be said straight away that this book cannot be expected to compete with such titles as *The Forgotten Soldier* and the recently published compilation, *With Our Backs to Berlin: The German Army in Retreat, 1945*, works that emphasize to a much greater extent direct combat experience. *Armoured Guardsmen* is

largely a record of Boscauwen's day-to-day affairs enlivened occasionally by the author's commentary: waiting to be moved up to the line; bivouacking in the French countryside; attending tactical briefings; maintaining equipment; taking a couple of days of leave in recently liberated Brussels. This manner of proceeding has two advantages. First, the reader is given a reasonably full idea of the character of military life at the front—an admixture of boredom, anxiety, and miscellaneous petty vexations that is appended to the terror and exhilaration of actual combat. Second, the pedestrian spells in his tour of duty give Boscauwen the opportunity to impose some sort of order on the things he has seen and done, which adds a necessary element of humanity to his diary. The entries that are especially moving are, as one would expect, the eulogies. Sergeant Major Brough, killed when his tank was destroyed by a German self-propelled gun, is remembered in this way:

To me it meant the loss of a great personal friend. I made Brough troop Sergeant two years ago against a deal of opposition; he was then aged twenty-two. During that time he had become someone I could rely on for almost anything if I had wanted to. Many people had a different opinion especially the Sergeant Major, as he had several faults, but militarily he was a first-class tank commander and could read a map as well as anyone I know. He was keen to do anything, however pointless it may have seemed at the time. . . . It was part of his exceptional character that I never heard him swear once. With ample sense of humour he always smiled whatever happened, and as a friend I could always tell him what I felt. In action he was a brave man and in action he had a brave man's reward. (120-21)

Without reflections of this kind the author might come across as an impassive chronicler of the exchange of gunfire between faceless opponents.

Scarcely less important is that these reflections provide indispensable material for the historian (which is the chief value of autobiographical accounts). Witness his commentary on the first day of the battle for Caen, which, as Boscauwen points out, "was heralded by all the press as the great breakthrough towards Paris." In truth great numbers of allied tanks were destroyed while German losses were relatively light. From Boscauwen's point of view, the day's fighting "was not a real success, and by no means a breakthrough. It lost us a lot of confidence in our Shermans. We knew that their armour could stop nothing serious and their guns, except for the 17-pounder, could not knock out enemy armour" (40).

The diary ends abruptly on 30 March ("Good Friday") 1945—the day that

Boscawen's tank was destroyed by a German battery of 105mm anti-aircraft guns. An exchange of letters between Boscawen and an officer who commanded a tank operating nearby, written months later, gives an account of the event and makes for an absorbing read. Boscawen received disfiguring wounds, which required months of convalescence. He was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery.

Boscawen's diary, handsomely set forth in this Pen & Sword edition, is a necessary supplement to the literature of the Western Front in World War II. Those who enjoy reading the finest examples of first-person accounts of life on the front lines will find much rewarding material here.

***In Deadly Combat: A German
Soldier's Memoir of the
Eastern Front.* Gottlob
Bidermann. Lawrence: University
Press of Kansas, 2000. 344 pp.
\$34.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.**

Reviewed by Brian Hanley, Williamsburg, Virginia

While perhaps not quite as relentlessly enthralling as Guy Sajer's Eastern Front memoir, *The Forgotten Soldier* (what book is?), Gottlob Bidermann's *In Deadly Combat* is a lucid and altogether engrossing narrative of the author's experiences on the Eastern Front. Certainly it makes for a welcome addition to what seems like the ceaselessly-expanding inventory of World War II memoirs, not many of which can approach *In Deadly Combat* in their contribution to our understanding of the infantryman's life in its most distressed and brutal aspects. Bidermann began as a private in the Wehrmacht reserves and ended the war as a lieutenant and, like Guy Sajer, did his fighting on Russian soil. But unlike Sajer, who, having escaped the Russian onslaught on the Baltic ports of Memel and Pillau, managed to get himself captured by British troops weeks before Nazi Germany surrendered and was able to return to his Alsatian home immediately afterward, Bidermann spent three years in Soviet labor camps; he was repatriated in the summer of 1948, eighty-two months—nearly seven years—after his unit, the 132d Infantry Division, marched out of eastern Poland and into the Ukraine in the wake of the armored spearheads of Army Group South.

Bidermann's memoir is remarkable for the variety of experience it records. In

April 1942 Biderman fought in the battle for Daln-Kamyschi, the southernmost point of the Eastern Front; some months later he took part in the fighting around Lake Ladoga, east of Leningrad, the most northerly position held by the Germans. Bidermann's narrative begins with a recollection of the tiresome, but triumphant, march of his unit across western Russia in the summer of 1941. The latter portion of the book comprises accounts of increasingly grim and straitened, if not obviously hopeless, defensive warfare against a determined, better equipped, and much more numerous enemy that culminated in the encirclement, surrender, and nightmarish internment of the remnants of "Army Group Courland."

Bidermann's memoir gives new life to commonplace facts about the German war effort in the east. The Eastern Front produced something on the order of 90 percent of German combat casualties, an astounding statistic illustrated by Bidermann's experience. All twelve members of Bidermann's gun crew who crossed the Polish frontier on 30 June 1941 ended the war as casualties. Nine were killed in action, two others were severely wounded (one a multiple amputee) and discharged from the army in the early years of the war. Bidermann, who was wounded seven times, was the only one left of the twelve to surrender on 8 May 1945 (318-19).

One also finds in this volume no shortage of anecdotes that call attention to the general excellence, and the good discipline in particular, of German units at the tactical level. Directing the crew of a 37mm anti-tank gun, for example, Bidermann destroys three Soviet tanks at close range within a few minutes—in one case firing just as the gun barrel of the victim trained on the crew (77-79).

Equally well known is that one of the reasons Germany lost the war was because of insufficient mechanized transport: supplies regularly moved to the front by horse-drawn cart; the bulk of the infantry could not keep up with the panzer spearheads because they moved across the steppe on foot, thus endangering lines of communication and giving the Soviet army and industry time to recover from early defeats. The snail's pace of the Wehrmacht's advance is memorably illustrated by Bidermann's experience. His unit disembarked from rail transport in Poland on 30 June 1941; Bidermann and his fellow *landsers* then marched to the Kanev area, a distance of some 550 miles—one step at a time, sun-up till dusk, through thunderstorms and clouds of dust, covering as much as 35 miles but usually around 20 miles each day—until they reached their destination five weeks later.

Bidermann's narrative also throws fuller light on circumstances of the Eastern Front that are sometimes misrepresented. Often the war in the east is given an oversimplified if essentially accurate portrait by television programs and summaries designed for high school and collegiate history survey courses: the Germans destroyed opposing Russian forces with ridiculous ease until the advance stalled outside of Moscow in December 1941, but victories continued to pile up until

the tide turned against the Wehrmacht following Stalingrad in January 1943; the average front-line soldier's faith in a decisive victory evaporated following the defeat at Kursk; Germany was doomed for good when the Nazi leadership failed to seek peace in the summer of 1944, just as Russian troops began menacing Prussia. Bidermann's memoir leads us to believe that German infantrymen suspected in the opening weeks of the war, if only vaguely, that Russia's defeat was by no means a sure thing, and that, at the tactical level, the opponents were evenly matched from the start. In fact, there is an underlying sameness to the battle scenes in Bidermann's memoir, from beginning of the war to its end, that puts the lie to any idea that a Wehrmacht soldier's life in the early weeks of the invasion, as it was in the latter months of the conflict, was anything but an alloy of privation, dread, fierce exertion, and sorrow—most especially following the death of comrades. In the opening days of their march into the Ukraine, for instance, Bidermann and his colleagues note ominously the makeshift graves of Russian and German combatants; they also are "astonished" by the extent to which the Russian army was mechanized—the large numbers of "Lend Lease" American trucks were particularly impressive—as they pass the debris of battles fought by the advancing panzer units (15). In describing the aftermath of his unit's inaugural fire fight, an event of no significance that takes place west of Kanev six weeks after the war began, Bidermann touches upon the disquiet that, only weeks into the war, often overtook elation in the infantrymen's outlook. "With no joy of victory in our ranks, the feeling of excitement quickly drained away, to be replaced by an overwhelming sadness and longing to leave this place" (23).

Some twelve weeks later—following another isolated but fierce skirmish in which a fellow infantryman dies of a stomach wound, Bidermann makes an observation that echoes the kind of reaction one finds in the *Iliad*: "one could not escape feeling an intense pity for our brother in the gray tunic who had been struck; yet with these thoughts each man turned to concentrate upon himself, about how he could be the next to fall, the next to meet his destiny in Russia. We became at times possessed by these thoughts," Bidermann adds, "as helpless against them as against the death that had quickly enveloped our brother soldier. Thus began the realization that we were being consumed by this foreign land" (52). Bidermann ruminates in this way weeks before the Wehrmacht's assault on Moscow gets under way, and shortly after the surrender of the Kiev pocket—where two thirds of a million Soviet troops marched into captivity, bringing the Russian casualty figure to two and a half million scarcely 100 days after the first shots were fired. Strategically, the war at this point appeared to be approaching its end, but the ferocity and resolution of the Russian soldier, which Bidermann and his fellow soldiers encounter daily, suggests otherwise.

Readers will not find in this volume trenchant or sustained commentary on the Nazi cause, or observations on the German brutality toward civilians and POWs,

or discussions of grand strategy. These subjects are treated at encyclopedic length elsewhere, so their absence here cannot be considered a fault. What one can expect to find in this book are the bracing, insightful recollections of a veteran of the Eastern Front, set down in clear prose.

***Love After War: Contemporary Fiction from Viet Nam.* Edited by Wayne Karlin and Ho Anh Thai. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 2003. 626 pp. \$19.95.**

Reviewed by William J. Searle, Eastern Illinois University

“There is no mistaken love,” utters the narrator of Nguyen Huy Thiep’s “Love Story on a Rainy Night,” a belief reaffirmed by nearly every tale found in the superb anthology of Vietnamese short fiction, *Love After War*, edited by Wayne Karlin and Ho Anh Thai. Containing fifty stories by forty-six different authors published in either Vietnam or America between 1982 and 2001, this collection provides a window to contemporary Vietnamese culture for American readers. Although a handful, perhaps ten, of these stories has appeared in English elsewhere, the vast majority, some forty stories, appear for the first time in English, thus increasing our awareness of literary style, social issues, and ethical concerns of Vietnam’s most recent and successful authors. For readers committed to the virtues of cultural diversity, and especially for scholars studying Vietnamese narrative, this anthology is a vast trove of valuable resources, in which established writers, like Ma Van Khang, Duong Thus Huong, and Le Minh Khue join the newer voices of Y Ban, Phan Triue Hai, and Ta Duy Anh to comprise the largest sampling of Vietnamese fiction available in one volume.

As its title implies, this collection deals, on one level, with the emotion of love in its various manifestations, whether it be unconditional, self-sacrificing, spiritual, faithful, sensual, selfish, adulterous, frustrated, or abusive. More than once in this anthology, love becomes a commodity, as in Tran Thi Truong’s poignant story “The Bejeweled Maiden,” to be purchased or rented. Simultaneously, however, readers witness the many customs, rich heritage, and enduring spirit of the Vietnamese people. References to religious holidays, the Mandarin system, traditional theater, folklore, and legend are complemented by the lasting effects of the Land Reform Movement, the flaws of socialism, hardships during the French War, suffering

during the American War, and the perils of the struggle with the Khmer Rouge. But the daily grind also has its dangers, as couples, grandparents, and children endeavor to embrace the new while age-old values slowly slip from their grasp. Indeed, the fiction within *Love After War* invariably privileges individualism in the face of an often-stifling tradition.

In the five sections of this anthology, love's variety and vagaries often highlight the clash between the new and the old. In the first section, named after the title of the book, we read of the widowed Thom in Da Ngan's "The House without a Man," who, not wanting to appear self-centered, abandons her desire to remarry because the other four widows of the household—her grandmother, aunt, mother, and older sister—staunchly support the family tradition that a widowed mother remain single, in effect, sacrificing her own future for that of her offspring. "They had neatly plucked out of the young woman's heart," the author confides, "her natural passion for love, not understanding that this is the most important thing of all." The theme of her story is echoed by her male counterpart, Ma Van Khang, in "Mother and Daughter," a story which dramatizes how Dr. Huyen's self-absorbed daughter does all in her power to make certain her widowed mother does not remarry. Her favorite ploy, inflicted at the most inconvenient times, is to remind her of how her own mother-in-law remained single to devote all of her attention to Huyen's now-deceased husband. The constant mention of Vietnamese custom causes her guilty mother to forgo her best opportunity for a fuller life.

The nine stories of the next section, ironically entitled "Couples," deal with frustrated relationships, loneliness, and painful breakups. Doan Le's "The Last Night in our Double Bed" delineates the cruel impact of custom on the lives of its characters, especially that of its female protagonist who learns after twenty-eight years of marriage that her husband intends to bring a second wife into their home. During the evening, she reminisces about her current life with him, her profession as a maker of documentaries, and Vietnamese custom that so often favors males. In particular, she remembers that her mother became a wife at fifteen, and, after thirty years of marriage, had to participate in the arrangement of a second marriage for her husband to a much younger woman. In addition, her husband's affair is with a woman whose own husband has abandoned her for an attractive twenty-year old. "Clearly a vicious cycle," the protagonist thinks to herself. But the labyrinth becomes intriguingly complex when the film maker meets her rival, who reveals that before her own marriage and before that of our protagonist, the soon-to-be second wife had been lovers with the protagonist's husband, who, in turn, was rejected by her family for a more suitable match! Out of honor, the protagonist's husband feels he should fulfill his earlier vow to his first love. For her own sense of integrity, the protagonist intends to leave the next morning, though the pain of her husband's betrayal will always remain. The other stories in this section, fraught with adultery, abandonment, murder, and

their consequences make readers sympathize with and admire the courage of the victims.

“Love in the time of Renovation,” by far the longest segment, containing sixteen stories, captures the ambivalence of this time of flux, suggested in the title of the lead narrative, “Crying and Singing,” by Trang The Hy. The policy of *Doi Moi*, or renovation, was introduced by communist officials in 1986 to eradicate the country’s extreme poverty, a shadow that casts its pall over many of the stories in this section. The impact of grim economic times is readily apparent in Le Minh Khue’s “The Professor of Philosophy,” as we learn that female college graduates have to work as bar girls to make ends meet. When two of them learn that their roommate’s college professor is unmarried and has a coveted apartment all to himself, they urge her to start a relationship with him so that she might “move into the Philosophy Professor’s flat.” Because of the harsh economic realities in Hanoi, one of the “ex-students-present-bar-girls” stated, “I’d be ready to marry an eighty year old if he’d get me a job.” Not one to contradict her elders, young Ha slowly insinuates herself into her humble, yet slovenly teacher’s life. Soon she notices that she has rejuvenated the older man, who now not only cares about his appearance and acts more youthfully, but is also genuinely smitten with the college student, who admits similar emotions. “Love comes as suddenly as pain,” the narrator acknowledges. On the other side of the proverbial coin, as readers move from joy to misery, is Tran Thi Truong’s heartbreaking story, “The Bejeweled Maiden.” In this wrenching tale, a virtually non-existent job market in Hanoi forces two young lovers apart: the mining engineer to the western mountains for a three-year stint, while his beloved, a recent graduate from an Arts College, remains behind trying to find any job available. During an interview with the director of a theater turned pander, she learns that such luxuries as virginity and love “can also be useful in a market economy.” The insensitive Ph.D. who purchases her services, seeing her tears of shame, first announces, “Your private issues aren’t my concern,” and then later cruelly explains, “And now that there are no tools and no work for people, then human beings need to evolve back into orangutans in order to assume their proper place in the world.”

The concluding segments of the anthology—“Lost Love” and “Last Love”—while evoking the sentimental, romantic tendency within Vietnamese literature, also celebrate the persistence, indeed the resilience, of humanity’s undying need for its most complex emotion. Lost love in these tales is never forgotten and those of last love assure us that it can return. Nguyen’s Huy Thiep’s graceful rendering of the passion between and inevitable separation of two very different characters, the romantic, provincial outlaw with folk artist aspirations, Bac Ky Singh, and his practical, independent beloved, Muon, who’s inspired by wanderlust. Ironically, Muon, after marrying Bac’s rival, becomes a respectable wife and mother in the region she always wanted to abandon and vehemently denies having an earlier

relationship, while her first love, who once vowed never to leave his homeland, relocates to New York City, where he remains single, still suffering from the loss of Muon. Most representative of the final series of stories, those dealing with love late in life, is Nguyen Khai's "Sunlight at Dusk," in which a former suitor, rejected by his intended's family and now twice widowed, returns at the age of seventy to his sweetheart who never married. At first skeptical of their relationship that he saw as comical, the narrator gradually recognizes its warm authenticity, so much so that he praises the matchmaker who arranged the union: "Only a great human heart can re-germinate the buds of love." As in so many of the stories in this volume, the characters defeat expectations, defying tradition.

The twenty or so typographical errors, while mildly distracting, do not diminish the range, scope, and depth of this marvelous anthology, a welcome addition to Curbstone's excellent translations of important Vietnamese writers, all of which serve as pathways to the Vietnamese soul.

***Depictions and Images of War
in Edwardian Newspapers,
1899-1914.*** Glenn R. Wilkinson.
New York: Palgrave MacMillan,
2003. 185 pp, \$75.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Michael S. Niberg, United States Air Force Academy

This short (137 pages of analytic text) book has a rather unhelpful title that reveals little of the argument that the author really wants to make. That argument states that during the period under study images of war in the media became more positive and increasingly detached from the horrors of combat. Negative images appeared only rarely. Consequently, by July, 1914 a generation of young Englishmen had been exposed to images that showed war as a positive force with features that made it akin to safe, familiar pursuits like hunting, sports, and theater. Thus, the book contends, did England arrive at the scenes of that fateful summer, with large crowds volunteering to join the army, their youths lasting, in the famous words of poet Philip Larkin, "a little while longer."

"Attitudes," the author argues on page one, "make war possible." Perhaps, but unfortunately the attitudes of the men exposed to Edwardian media remain much less thoroughly examined than is the media itself. Wilkinson does not attempt to connect the images he analyzed with their actual impact on the men

of 1914. Neither has he consulted the major historical works on the myth of war enthusiasm in the early months of the Great War. Adrian Gregory, Jean-Jacques Becker, and Jeffrey Verhey are among the scholars who have worked to debunk the image of men naively and innocently joining the army, seemingly unaware of the death and gore that might await them. These historians have shown the danger of oversimplifying one's conclusions from photographs or from the pro-war poetry of the essentially unrepresentative Rupert Brooke. The dominant attitude of the volunteers of 1914 was more grim resignation to an odious but necessary task than an optimistic hope in winning the war by Christmas.

Thus this book has to be read less, as I think the author intended, as an explanation of 1914 than as an analysis of images from 1899 to 1914. Here the author is much more successful. War, he argues, came to be depicted as a potentially civilizing force when applied across the far reaches of the British Empire. British soldiers in Africa and Asia represented development, law, and order in contradistinction to the "barbaric" and "premodern" ways of foes like the Mad Mullah or even the quasi-European Boers. Images of British soldiers as martial, but civilized, also helped to calm the fears of Britons who suspected that the luxuries of the Edwardian age were sapping the essential strength of Britain's young men.

The images of war depicted it as a necessary, even beneficial, activity that could force an evil enemy to abandon his uncivilized ways. It could also induce social behavior among British soldiers and act as a kind of life lesson to teach civics. The physical training accompanying war, moreover, had obvious benefits for man and society alike. Images that likened war to sport endowed the former with an aura of gentlemanly conduct and honor that transcended class while removing the newspaper reader from the reality that war, unlike sport, kills those who either cannot play the game or who, like the injured athlete, fall victim to caprice.

The use of soldiers and images of war to sell products demonstrates that the author's point has much to offer. Advertisers, naturally, would not use an image like a soldier to make their products more appealing unless they believed that such usage improved the chances at sales. Thus soldierly images revealingly sold health products like medicines and tonics, as well as masculine products like cigarettes.

Newspapers also took great care to create layers of remove between the reader and the ugliness of war. Euphemisms like "cleared out," "swept away," and "fallen" disguised the horrific ways that large numbers of men died on the battlefield. Other phrases like "out of action" or the foreign "hors de combat" described the destruction of entire units in ways that minimized human suffering. Photographs rarely showed individual men in agony and often took great care to provide the "merciful soft focus."

From this book, the reader will learn much about how a rapidly expanding media saw the military and warfare in the Edwardian period. These images,

however, inform a change more closely connected to the Boer War than the First World War. To fully understand how the media may or may not have affected the young Britons who became soldiers in 1914 will require a deeper and more nuanced treatment than is offered in this brief but insightful book.

***Crossing the River: Short
Fiction by Nguyen Huy Thiep.***

Edited by Nguyen Nguyet Cam
and Dana Sachs. Willimatic, CT:
Curbstone Press, 2003. Pp.352.
\$16.95.

Reviewed by William J. Searle, Eastern Illinois University

Writing in a time of an evolving social context, in which contemporary Vietnamese are increasingly isolated from the bonds of the past, whether those strictures involve recent Marxist beliefs or ancient feudal hierarchies, Nguyen Huy Thiep captures the alienation, opportunism, and amorality of a country adrift, one that currently has only tenuous links with a rich cultural heritage. This new collection of his fiction, metaphorically titled *Crossing the River*, suggests a departure still in process, whereby the author examines both the mores of his people and the literary structures that preserve them. The clarity of his skeptical vision is reflected in the book's front cover art, a print of a portrait by Nguyen Trong Khoi, "Seed of Life," which depicts a boat's prow gently kissing the shoreline. In front of the prow, a very young child, no more than a year old, stands alone, appearing baffled; all the while an eye painted on the prow observes the infant without a trace of sentimentality. No more appropriate icon for the author's work could have been selected.

Of the seventeen stories in the anthology, the fewest in number might best be categorized as pseudo-historical. The three in this group—"A Sharp Sword," "Fired Gold," and "Chastity"—present, seldom in a flattering way, fictionalized versions of historical characters. The initial two merit special mention. In the first tale, Nguyen Phuc Anh, later known as King Gia Long, comes under satiric fire. Depicted as self-centered, politically obtuse, and limited in his ability to lead, the future king depends heavily on the wisdom, guidance, and good sense of his advisor, Dan Phu Lan, beheaded by Anh, regardless of his nine years of flawless service, because within the last three months his mentor's activities have been inconse-

quential. Thiep's addendum that new evidence implies that Lan may have eloped rather than returned to court, thus avoiding his execution, is a distinction without a difference, since it too indicates the unsavory nature of life at Long's court. The perfidy of Gia Long continues in "Fired Gold," where we see the king accepting Francois Poiree as both confidant and counselor, laying the foundation for European colonization of Vietnam. In his diary, Poiree is patronizing of the Vietnamese king, the poet Nguyen Du, author of *The Tale of the Kieu*, Vietnam's national epic, and Vietnamese civilization, which he compares to "a virgin girl raped by Chinese." As the story progresses, Thiep includes a fragment of an account by a Portuguese prospector who recounts an ambush of Poiree, himself, and other Europeans searching for gold. Since only a portion of the memoir survives, Thiep provides three possible conclusions—one in which only Poiree survives, one in which all the Europeans survive, and one in which all Europeans in the expedition are killed. After pointing out that Gia Long's dynasty was horrific, the author warns, "Please pay attention, dear reader, for this dynasty left many mausoleums."

Four of the stories—"The Winds of Hua Tat: Ten Stories in a Small Mountain Village," "The Salt of the Jungle," "A Drop of Blood," and "The Water Nymph"—appear to have been inspired by legend, folktale, and fable. As a unit, they reveal a variety of narrative strategies and thematic concerns. The aging protagonist of the finely crafted tale "The Salt of the Jungle" is juxtaposed with the more humane behavior of a family of monkeys. As the hunter loses the accoutrements of civilization, his rifle and clothing, and then abandons his quest for the kill, he is reborn into a fuller humanity. The more panoramic "A Drop of Blood," which spans several generations, is an extended exposé of the essential corruption within the Mandarin system. The ten stories which make up "The Winds of Hua Tat" present a wide range of human behavior—fidelity, greed, gullibility, pride, lust, irresponsibility, betrayal—based upon folktales that circulated among mountain villages where the young Thiep once taught. According to the narrator, however, they are worthy of preservation in print because "maybe these old stories will dwell on the miseries of human beings, but when we understand those miseries, then wisdom, morality, nobility, and humanity will bloom within us." As implied above, despite its often harsh depiction of contemporary Vietnam, at times, a much more refined sensibility is visible beneath the grim surface of Thiep's prose. Although "The Water Nymph" is, in part, inspired by the tale of a watery spirit, the beautiful, yet mischievous Me Ca, whom the first person narrator, Chuong, views as a symbol of hope amidst his own economic and sexual exploitation by those more fortunate than himself. "Only Sorrow is eternal," he remarks at one point in the story, a pessimistic tone that this vaguely picaresque tale shares with the anthology's largest group of stories, those starkly realistic tales of modern Vietnam.

Two of these harsh tales—"Crossing the River" and "The Woodcutters"—serve as bookends for the entire collection. In the initial story, a student on the ferry

establishes the atmosphere for all ten stories in this group when he utters: "The nature of human life is cruelty. People run after sexual passion, money, and vain glory." When one of the passengers on the vessel, a thief, outwits two gangsters in order to prevent the mutilation of a young boy foolish enough to get his hand stuck in their antique vase, the others on the boat label him a hero, a revolutionary. A discordant note punctures their praise, however, as the unimpressed ferry woman provides balance, revealing the truly dark soul of their impulsive and very transitory savior. "The Woodcutters" revolves around the motif of the trickster tricked, as laborers cheat their employer who in turn cheats them. The story's only bright spot occurs when the narrator, one of the laborers, interrupts the attempted rape of his employer's teenage daughter by his kinsman, another woodcutter. "I was full of hatred, hatred for all the transience of the conditions of my era," he confesses, but he continues that if we do not follow a system of morality, "There would be ruin."

In large part, eschewing sentimentality as though it were a pestilence, Nguyen Huy Thiep reverses a tendency prevalent in the literature of Vietnam. The luxuriant countryside, religious holidays, the perennial rhythms of daily life do not resuscitate, reinvigorate, or revitalize in Thiep's work as they so often do in the fiction of Duong Thu Huong or Bao Ninh. Instead we read in "The Remembrance of the Countryside" that "the afternoon empties the spirit of anyone who hopes to prove that anything has meaning." Thiep's characters, weighed down by the burden of living, exist in very a grim world, one in which self-absorption, hypocrisy, and greed reign supreme, as a country and its people try to establish a new identity and a means to express that identity in the midst of ever accelerating change, which, in turn, reinforces the loss of traditional ways.

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