

Clare Emily Clifford

**“Before I Was Domesticated”:
Delivering the Vietnam Moment
in the Fatherhood Poetry of
Bruce Weigl and John Balaban**

...yet another generation
is rudely about to discover
what their fathers never told them.

—W.D. Ehrhart, “Guns”¹

The literature bred by the Vietnam War is manifold in purpose. Many of the war’s early texts serve as personal testimonies from the jungle recounting youthful idealism and traumatic combat experience, only to realize the extensiveness of their war’s political corruption. Ultimately, the greatest challenge for the Vietnam War’s veterans was what came at the end of their tours—their settling and continued resettling into their lives back in The World. John Balaban’s 1974 collection of poetry entitled *After Our War* considers what awaits a “Spontaneous Generation” of dislocated soldiers upon their return from a war which seems simultaneously theirs and not theirs, a war experienced by individuals and masses, and a war adjudged by those responsible and irresponsible for what occurred there.² The title of Balaban’s collection carries heavy implications; “after” connotes not only a temporal and spatial shift, but also implies that these soldiers are searching for the understanding they are “after” about their experiences in Vietnam. We have all sought explanations and consolation after “our” war because the war in Vietnam affected even those who were never “in country,” like those who remained on the homefront and those who weren’t even born yet during the decade of that war, but born to veterans after their service in southeast Asia. Vietnam veterans’ children have lived in the complicated silences of this war, often curiously, for decades. Our veteran-writers and soldier poets demand that we individually and collectively find meaning in

another sense of the word “after”—that we find meaning *in spite of* our war. They insist on “our” need to find hope “*after our war,*” and in spite of the persistence of war more largely. Balaban ends his later version of the poem, with the revised title “After Our War,” by posing a challenge in the form of a question: “After our war, how will love speak?”³

In the lives of Vietnam veterans these last twenty years, expressions of love—whether in story, song, or silence—are nearly always entangled with and propelled by their experiences in Vietnam. Veteran and poet W.D. Ehrhart explained at the symposium on “War, Poetry & Ethics” that

Some of the poems I have written which people think are about the Vietnam War had nothing to do with the war, and other poems that no one would ever recognize as a Vietnam War poem in fact have everything to do with the war... all of my writing is politics, *is* the war. Because for better or worse that is the filter through which I now judge the world.⁴

Indeed, as Ehrhart explains, the war is a filter for many veterans, the foremost experience of their lives and that with which all else must vie for monumentality. The war is porous, filled with unanswered questions and fog-drenched memories; the war is a filter that is still filtering, still sifting through the past and dredging the present even these forty years later. The only recourse we now have is to examine that filter self-critically, as Don Ringnalda explains in *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War*, “we can study our own filters and change the way we think.”⁵

My aim in this study is to examine the aftermath poetry of Vietnam veterans not directly about the Vietnam War, but still directly concerned with the war’s legacy. I am interested in the poetry of Bruce Weigl and John Balaban that is either to or about their children. These poems rigorously interrogate the psychological and political legacy Vietnam veterans have available for their children and discover whether possibilities for human redemption exist in the war’s aftermath. These poems also seek to imagine the value for children in learning the atrocities of our past. In this respect, the speakers must face the lost opportunities of their youth while looking toward the prospects of their (and their children’s) future. While veteran poets don’t embrace and purport the reseizure of a prelapsarian garden from their own childhoods, they do look for new ways to scavenge their tangled and bankrupt jungle for renewable resources, discovering lessons in their past. These lessons cannot be wasted; indeed, there is urgency in love’s need to speak. These veterans do this by telling war stories (which are not exactly war stories)

in poems to their children—for their children. Their legacy, “our legacy,” is one forged from suffering, inspired by love, and told in compassion.

Wilfred Owen’s preface to his collection of poetry is primarily remembered for his pronouncement that “all a poet can do today is warn”.⁶ Yet this recommendation follows what seems to me a greater observation: Owen calls his war poems “elegies,” and says their function “to this generation [is] in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next”.⁷ It is this afterthought of Owen’s that catches me. In Owen’s terms the war poem—either as elegy for self or other—is exempt from the expected elegiac purpose of consoling those immediately affected by the conflict. In fact, as Owen implies, the only possibility for consolation comes with the *next* generation, with war poetry acting as a poultice for the wounds of our past.

In “Lessons Learned and Unlearned: The Aftermath Poetry of the War,” Dale Ritterbusch examines exactly how the Vietnam War has propagated a process of self-reflective assessment about the war and its place in our present:

[I]t is virtually impossible to escape our history and live fulfilled by the best we have to offer our wives, our children, our families, the world we must turn to for sustenance and healing when the larger world rejects the lessons we have learned.⁸

Ritterbusch believes that the veteran’s task to achieve a rewarding life is in reconciling opposing conclusions about the war through the education the war has given us, the “lessons” we have reaped but left collectively unacknowledged. No “sustenance and healing” will come, he asserts, from our “wives... children...families” because “the best we have to offer” has been subject to whole scale dismissal. Yet this seems, itself, dismissive. For in the work of many of our veteran poets it is clear that spouses and children do offer recuperative possibilities, if only in that they are testimony to the soldier’s fortitude and tenderness. Family, after our war, provides one circumstance to shed old roles of masculinity and heroism, revealing qualities of care-taking and nurturing valuable to veterans and their families. In contrast to the fiction of the Vietnam War, which has “often felt it necessary to add another layer of cover or camouflage... the poets have attempted to strip away layer after layer until the experience has been confronted and laid bare,” claims Ritterbusch.⁹ It is precisely this method by which the veteran-poets of the war have operated; while their jungles are often still triple-canopied, they have used language as a tool—sometimes a weapon—to uncover, understand, and unsilence their inner landscape.

The poetry of the Vietnam War continues to be written even today. In part this is because the war has “stayed with its respective generation of writers” longer than

other wars—in Vietnam our soldiers were so young, that even these decades later many of the veterans are only in their late fifties or early sixties.¹⁰ Additionally, these poets' lives were shaped by their early experiences as soldiers in Vietnam with the war as the lens through which they view their lives. While the early poems about the war recounted personal incidents of combat and comradeship, the subject matter and poetic maturity of the latter aftermath poetry has been finely honed and taken new directions as time has progressed. Easy clichés are no longer so readily available; or rather, the war's poets are less likely to rest on the ease of language's ready availability. Poetry by veterans in the last fifteen years is still often about the war, but it has become more so about life unfolding from—but always filtering through—the war. It is often poetry about war filtered backwards through the lens of their unfolded lives.

Using these filters, the aftermath poetry reaches “compelling insights” into the personal and cultural experiences of the Vietnam War.¹¹ Similarly, its examination of the war's effect on Veteran poets' lives is nothing short of comprehensive and illuminating. The speakers of these poems often surprise themselves with their own discoveries, as in Bruce Weigl's poem “1955,” which concludes, “This must be what my life is / Though I didn't know what it meant...I don't know why my hands should shake, / I'm only remembering something”.¹² The aftermath poetry is about the fallout of experiences in Vietnam, all these years since. Often aftermath poetry articulates a realization in the present occasioned by the memory of a past moment in Vietnam. The context of such a recollection is imperative to what Weigl calls “what my life is,” because much of the aftermath poetry about Vietnam is precisely about recognizing the ways in which one's life today is inextricably, inescapably tethered to and informed by the past.

It would be easy to generalize and say that the literature of war is about loss. But the aftermath poetry of the Vietnam War is only partly fueled by loss. Ritterbusch states that “loss in aftermath poetry is a given,” because it's the only “given” about aftermath poetry.¹³ More compelling to me is how the Vietnam war's aftermath poetry is about so much more than loss—it's about recovery, restoration, and revision. It's about excavation and recuperation. It's about the fragility of life and the way lives can be dishonored and ruined; but also how, in fragile moments, lives can be affirmed, salvaged, and honored magnificently. Ultimately, the aftermath poetry shows us how profoundly their experiences in Vietnam have delivered and defined their lives.

In the poem “Dogs, Dreams, and Rain,” John Balaban's speaker reminisces: “I remember a night below Xanh Son mountain / before I was domesticated like this dog”.¹⁴ The speaker's “old mutt” is so adapted to the comforts of humanity that it sleeps snoring in an “oblivion that resembles grace”. How greatly

Balaban's speaker—"domesticated" speaker—envies that dog, "unburdened by a past, / untroubled by memories," lost in a dream. As the speaker ponders the domestication of dogs brought inside by humans from the storming elements, he wonders about his own domestication and asks "who will shelter us caught in thunder / as storms sweep in from the past?" The title poem of Balaban's next collection of poetry, *Words for My Daughter*, closes with a near direct response to this desire for shelter and comfort. Holding his infant daughter in his arms, Balaban's speaker assesses that his new role of father offers shelter of an unexpected kind: "I suspect I am here less for your protection / than you are here for mine, as if you were sent / to call me back into our helpless tribe."¹⁵ Here, it seems, we are delivered a new kind of veteran war poet, one born of combat and fatherhood with each experience shaping the other. The aftermath poetry of the Vietnam War has been "domesticated," its authors are learning—for their children—how to speak a new language.

Lorrie Smith, in "What Shall We Give Our Children?: Fatherhood Poems by Veterans" argues that the responsibility of fatherhood offers a transformative opportunity for uncovering poetic truths:

[R]ecent poems by male veterans locate fatherhood as a central point of reference in their ongoing poetic project to discover, in [Bruce] Weigl's words, "what saves us." Partly, this reflects a cultural shift; many fathers in the Vietnam generation seem willing to "mother" their children—that is, to relinquish at least some patriarchal habits in favor of more culturally feminine expressions of tenderness, nurturing, vulnerability, and reciprocity.¹⁶

While Smith's suggestion that veteran fathers are more "willing to 'mother' their children," I feel displays of "tenderness" need not be tied specifically to gendered notions of parenting. What this "cultural shift" reveals to me is the viability of affection and compassion as useful tools for father veterans who search for ways to ensure that love can speak after our war. Especially valuable about Smith's argument though, is the emphasis she places on the veteran poet's role as father in his poetic project of discovery. The primary way for new discoveries to be made of familiar landscapes is to shift the parameters of perception, redefine the standpoint from which the world is viewed, and make new sense of one's place in its surroundings.

If Ritterbusch's observation that the "Vietnam war poet is concerned more with the legacy, the lessons learned and unlearned" about the war, then we can

understand why the role of father would be central in revising one's perspective while recouping a ravaged hope in the world.¹⁷ The poetry of concern here does just this: while meditating on a domestic scene the poem is interrupted by what I call a Vietnam moment, where the speaker is called into recollection of a prior event from his experience in Vietnam and its pertinence to the occasion at present. Stephen Hidalgo has noted in "Agendas for Vietnam War Poetry: Reading the War as Art, History, Therapy and Politics" that the "most common self-reflexive device is the violation of the imagistic poem with confessional intrusions".¹⁸ In the general poetry by veterans of Vietnam, Hidalgo sees this intrusion as serving a mnemonic function, it "obscures memory... erases [it]".¹⁹ But in the aftermath poetry, these intrusions actually do everything but complicate and erase memory. In fact, the Vietnam moment in a poem frequently serves as a moment of great clarity, even when it admits that answers aren't always available despite our longing for certainty.

Edward Rielly explains in an article entitled "Bruce Weigl: Out of the Landscape of his Past" that "the significance of the Vietnam encounter radiates out... transforming the poet and thus transforming all that is part of him," and it is in this manner, I believe, that the poet is able to speak usefully from his experiences.²⁰ One of the foremost struggles that we see voiced in the literature of the American/Vietnamese war addresses the difficulty of finding a significant legacy to pass on to our children. If there is any lesson to be learned from the aftermath of this war it is, as John Clark Pratt explains, "to inform students [and coming generations] about Vietnam and make sure they know what happened".²¹ John Balaban echoes this idea, reinforcing it even more explicitly in the title poem from his volume *Words for My Daughter*: "I want you to know the worst and be free from it / I want you to know the worst and still find good".²² Balaban places enormous value on the knowledge of what the "worst" is in order to ensure protection from it, but he continues beyond that. For him, knowledge of the "worst" is the only way to discover the best of humanity, as they dwell in such close proximity to one another. The courage to face the worst, in order to realize and understand the best, is the lesson of the Vietnam moment—the lesson that Ritterbusch would say is the "lesson we have so far failed to learn".²³

I would like to use the poem "The Teacher," by W.D. Ehrhart to segue into my discussion of Weigl and Balaban, because it deals explicitly with the heritage available to the generation of and after the Vietnam War. Ehrhart's poem is dedicated to his "students at Sandy Spring Friends School; September 1978"—the speaker explains that after the war he

carried
 anger like a torch
 to keep [his] heart from freezing,
 and a strange new thing
 called
 love
 to keep [him] sane.²⁴

While it is anger that keeps the heart warm and beating, it is love that is necessary to keep his mind healthy and rational. This juxtaposition between the war's effect on the physical body and metaphysical spirit embody the crux of this speaker's cause for worry, and yet as the poem continues we find that he is propelled to write in order to excavate the real dilemma. He explains that "I swore an oath to teach you / all I know— / and I know things / worth knowing". Echoing the sentiment of Pratt earlier, this poem of Ehrhart's is adamant about honestly fulfilling his duty as a teacher to educate his students as to what he has seen, experienced, and learned—especially in the war.

This is, the speaker says, "a desperate future / I cling to, and it is yours". What he has to tell gives his students a greater perspective of their future, yet he admits his fear of not having the right words to speak: "I am afraid; / I do not want to fail" he explains to them. Failure, at this point, would erase exactly what he hopes to achieve, and yet he cannot teach them what he knows without their guidance and strength. He even needs their silence, their patience, until he can find a way to speak and be understood:

I need your hands to steady me;
 I need your hearts to give me courage;
 I need you to walk with me in silence
 until I find a voice that speaks
 the language
 that you speak.²⁵

With his students' steadfast assistance and their "courage" he can brave the distance needed to find the language necessary for delivering, through speech, his students' future.

Like Ehrhart's speaker who is afraid to speak for fear of failure, Bruce Weigl's speaker in "Last First Cousin" explains that he no longer wants to fail at delivering his message as well: "when I try to speak / I only stutter, only lie".²⁶ Weigl's speaker needs assurance that he himself is "not a ghost / but here somehow... somehow

here, with a life".²⁷ The salvation he seeks can be found through any number of resources, and he explains in "Song of Napalm" that it is within the mind's power to "try to imagine... pain / Eases, and your pain, and mine" can disappear as well.²⁸ That pain *can* be eased, that the mind has the ability to assuage such wounds, is a feat of noteworthy attention for it grants deliverance to a poet who desperately wants to speak his story right. Earlier in the poem, he pleads to be recognized for his desire to speak truthfully when he says "I am trying to say this straight: for once / I was sane enough to pause and breathe".²⁹

Lorrie Smith argues that the Vietnam War poetry of fatherhood acknowledges its responsibility to tell of "almost unutterable atrocity, as if by speaking it [they] might ward off the worst" for their children.³⁰ Surely this is part of the compensation for the veterans' recounting of stories; yet, more apparently it is themselves they save through their metaphors for saving others. A poignant example of this is in Weigl's "Snowy Egret," when the speaker is awakened from his safely drugged sleep to find a neighbor's son in his backyard who has just killed a snowy egret with a shotgun. Weigl's speaker watches the young boy sobbing and scooping dirt, attempting to bury the bloody bird. Watching the child weep in shame and fear he discloses, "I don't know what to do but hold him. / If I let go he'll fly to pieces before me".³¹ It is clear that he identifies a shared experience with the child who has slain something "he hadn't even known he loved," yet what echoes in these lines for me is the desperation in which the speaker holds onto the young boy. Not only does he hold the child, who might "fly to pieces" in front of him, but due to the ambiguity of Weigl's use of "before" in this phrase, he also implies that the child might collapse prior to *his own* flight into pieces. What keeps them held together in this shared experience is their shared embrace, their mirrored commiseration in the face of loss.

Weigl finds a similar identification in "The Confusion of Planes We Must Wander in Sleep" as he helps his son strip a soiled bed, which causes the speaker to reflect on his own childhood struggles with bedwetting. He recognizes that as a child he was, himself, "not attached to the world" but only to his mother as she bustled about the bedroom assuaging her son's "grief" over his accident.³² It is at this moment that the speaker of Weigl's poem, now a grown man, recognizes himself in his child—how traits and legacies are passed through generations. The speaker explains that

what we pass on is not always a gift,
not always grace or strength or music, but sometimes
a burden, and we have no choice but to live
as hard as we can inside the storm of our years

because even the weaknesses are a kind of beauty
for the way they bind us into what love, finally, must be.³³

It is the accidents, Weigl assures us, that can enable the beauty of love to survive within a “storm”—not unlike Balaban’s reminder to “still find good” within what appears to be the worst that exists. And just as Weigl’s “weaknesses are a kind of beauty,” so too does Balaban note this paradox of aesthetics when he finds in “accidental beauties, the incidental / horrors”.³⁴

Balaban poses his (and our) dilemma in the poem “For Mrs. Cam, Whose Name Means “Printed Silk,” as such:

The war has blown away your past.
No poem can call it back.
How does one start over?³⁵

Ways of starting over—realistically and figuratively—are at the crux of Balaban’s poetry. This poem concludes that even “all broken, all beautiful, accidents” are materials that can again be brought together like “pieces of poems which made you whole”. By collecting fragments of poems, even fragments of oneself, it is possible to write your way into what Ehrhart called “the language that [the next generation] speak[s]”.³⁶ Nowhere is this example of experiential bricolage so apparent as in Balaban’s poem “Words for My Daughter,” which begins as the speaker recalls childhood memories of his violent friends, desperately incapable of finding—or giving—love in the face of violence. He explains to his daughter that he “loves them still” despite their awkward bravery and vehement love, and wants her to “know about their pain / and about the pain they could loose on others”. He wants her to understand the suffering of others, and realize her immunity from and proximity to that same suffering, that elsewhere people and even children “suffer worse”.³⁷

He continues by explaining that “Worse for [him] is a cloud of memories / still drifting off the South China Sea,” a memory invoked by a Halloween trick-or-treater dressed as a “tiny Green Beret” while the speaker holds his infant daughter in his arms. This intrusion, this Vietnam moment, resurfaces as a threat. Not a threat on the lives of this father and daughter, caught in an intimate moment in the comfort of their home; the threat exists because the speaker is in the midst of “start[ing] over” after the war, only to be confronted with another father perpetuating the violence of war in the form of his “evil midget” son’s Halloween costume complete with “toy knife for slitting throats”.³⁸ Balaban—himself not a soldier in the Vietnam war, but a conscientious objector who did two civilian

tours of duty helping war-wounded children—is prompted into urgently passing on what he has realized he wants his legacy as a veteran of this war to be: “I want you to know the worst / and be free from it. / I want you to know the worst and still find good”.³⁹ Just when we might expect the speaker to seize the available metaphor of father as protector, Balaban subverts the trope by inverting it. He is not the protector in this scene, only the “fool,” and instead he admits to the daughter in his arms, “I suspect I am here less for your protection / than you are here for mine”.⁴⁰ This tenderness, this moment of surrender bred from threat and fear, is what defines Balaban as such a remarkable poet writing in the sub-genre of aftermath poetry. He is able to look backward to his past and use it to educate himself and others in moving toward a future that offers hope, born from trauma. This poem epitomizes what Stephen Hidalgo describes as the veteran’s “desire to see things change for succeeding generations”.⁴¹

In “Mr. Giai’s Poem” Balaban brings the incongruity of time—how the similarity of present circumstances invoke a Vietnam moment—and places that into direct focus while illustrating the valuable legacy of the Vietnam war’s lessons for younger generations. Of particular importance is how Balaban continues to find new ways of framing the dawn of understanding; for in this poem we have the Vietnam moment occurring *in* Vietnam. As Mr. Giai sits with three American veterans, “each young enough to be his son,” we learn that his own son was just killed in Cambodia.⁴² Mr. Giai, himself a veteran of nine years of combat, recounts to the soldiers a moment of solace he experienced decades earlier in the midst of Vietnam’s forty years of occupation. He describes an instance after heavy bombing when he and three friends had sat after a long journey craving coffee, whiskey, and a cigarette that “miraculously” appeared for them. Sitting with the three other veterans in the present, sharing beer after a good meal, Mr. Giai says, “That moment... was a little like now”.⁴³ They recognize their individual wounds as collective, yet are able to see beyond those wounds into the common humanity they share in the shared combat, beer, and compassion of each other. This is the beauty of the Vietnam moment, it brings understanding and comfort to an aging Vietnamese man and American veterans of the Vietnam war *in* Vietnam, acting as a kind of beautiful grace. In their shared suffering they have achieved true compassion in recognizing the suffering of others as equal with their own suffering. Only in comprehending this can grace truly be of use to them. In seeking deliverance from their pain they have just now realized that “springs of grace flow easily everywhere. / Where is nirvana? / Nirvana is here, nine times out of ten.”⁴⁴

A wish for change—even if it is only a change in perspective, one that will enable us to find the good in the worst—is echoed in the closing lines of “In

Celebration of Spring”. The speaker meditates on his war’s end, which only brings about the recognition that other wars have begun. While this poem begins in the psychological landscape of Vietnam, it actually represents the inverse of the Vietnam moment; the speaker’s contemplation of the Vietnam War is interrupted by the blooming of spring. He recalls a chrysalis and children playing. It seems that this memory of war is what brings the speaker to his appreciation of spring and its new beginnings, and this is why he demands that we

Swear...
 that as we grow old, we will not grow evil,
 that although our garden seeps with sewage,
 and our elders think it’s up for auction—swear
 by this dazzle that does not wish to leave us—
 that we will be keepers of a garden, nonetheless.⁴⁵

To keep the garden we must become caretakers, we must filter its sewage and prove to our elders how capable we are of change; we can renew lost faith in opportunities for renewal. Balaban’s poetry is filled with moments of grace and vision—his speakers fiercely demand that we take responsibility for making the alterations to our world that would vilify it. This must be done by taking collective responsibility for educating ourselves and subsequent generations on how “not [to] grow evil”.

In his 1985 volume *The Monkey Wars*, Bruce Weigl explains that “It is enough to know / The wrong way of things”.⁴⁶ Ten years later John Balaban would take this acknowledgment even further by clarifying that, unquestionably, it is imperative to know the “wrong way of things,” because to know the brutality of the “worst” in humanity but “still find good” proves that the experiences nurturing this knowledge will not have been suffered in vain.⁴⁷ The Vietnam moment in the fatherhood poetry of Bruce Weigl and John Balaban confirms to us—from their lessons hard earned and learned in combat—that veterans’ children do not want silence from their fathers. A legacy of silence can teach no lessons. We are thankful for those who have struggled to discover language that speaks a legacy of wisdom and compassion to a new generation.

Notes

1. W.D. Ehrhart, "Guns," *The Distance We Travel* (Easthampton, MA: Adastra Press, 1993) 42-3.
2. John Balaban, "Carcanet: After Our War," *After Our War* (Pittsburgh: UP Press, 1974) 4. This poem—like many others of Balaban's earlier collections—is reprinted in Balaban's collection *Locusts at the Edge of Summer: New & Selected Poems* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1997).
3. John Balaban, "After Our War." *Blue Mountain*. (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 1982) 37.
4. Ehrhart's emphasis. Fom Kali Tal, John Clark Pratt, John Balaban, W.D. Ehrhart, D.F. Brown, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Dale Ritterbusch. "War, Poetry, and Ethics: A Symposium." *WLA: War Literature and the Arts* 10:2 (Fall/Winter 1998) 5-41. 8.
5. Don Ringnalda, "Poems 'Whittled from Bone,'" *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War* (Jackson: UP Mississippi, 1994) 136-205. 146.
6. Wilfred Owen, "Preface," *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*. Ed. C. Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1965) 31.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Dale Ritterbusch, "Lessons Learned and Unlearned: The Aftermath Poetry of the War," *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1996) 139-49. 145.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 139.
11. *Ibid.*, 140.
12. Bruce Weigl, "1955," *The Monkey Wars* (Athens: UGA Press, 1985) 13.
13. Ritterbusch, 140.
14. Balaban, "Dogs, Dreams, and Rain." *Blue Mountain*. (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 1982) 60.
15. John Balaban, "Words for My Daughter," *Words for My Daughter* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1991) 12.
16. Lorrie Smith, "'What Shall We Give Our Children?' Fatherhood Poems by Veterans," *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1996) 161-73. 163.
17. Ritterbusch, 140.
18. Stephen P. Hidalgo, "Agendas for Vietnam War Poetry: Reading the War as Art, History, Therapy, and Politics," *Journal of American Culture* 16:3 (Fall 1993) 5-13. 16.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Edward J. Rielly, "Bruce Weigl Out of the Landscape of His Past," *Journal of American Culture* 16:3 (Fall 1993) 47-52. 48.
21. Tal, 18.
22. Balaban, "Words for My Daughter," *Words for My Daughter*, 12.
23. Ritterbusch, 148.
24. W.D. Ehrhart, "The Teacher," *To Those Who Have Gone Home Tired* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1984) 48-9.

25. Ibid, 49.
26. Weigl, "Last First Cousin," *The Monkey Wars*, 7.
27. Bruce Weigl, "Winter Meditation, 1970," *What Saves Us* (Evanston, IL: TriQuarterly Books, 1992) 16.
28. Weigl, "Song of Napalm," *The Monkey Wars*, 47.
29. Ibid.
30. Smith, 167.
31. Weigl, "Snowy Egret," *The Monkey Wars*, 45.
32. Weigl, "The Confusion of Planes We Must Wander in Sleep," *What Saves Us*, 59.
33. Ibid.
34. Balaban, "Hand Painted Birthday Card: Abandoned Farmhouse," *After Our War*, 75.
35. John Balaban, "For Mrs. Cam, Whose Name Means "Printed Silk," *Locusts at the Edge of Summer: New and Selected Poems* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1997) 39.
36. Ehrhart, 49.
37. Balaban, "Words for My Daughter," *Words for My Daughter*, 10.
38. Balaban, "For Mrs. Cam, Whose Name Means 'Printed Silk,'" *Locusts*, 39; and Balaban, "Words for My Daughter," *Words for My Daughter*, 11.
39. Ibid, 12.
40. Ibid.
41. Hidalgo, 11.
42. Balaban, "Mr. Giai's Poem," *Words for My Daughter*, 40.
43. Ibid, 40.
44. Balaban, "Spring-Watching Pavilion," *Words for My Daughter*, 52. This poem was authored by Ho Xuan Huong, and translated by Balaban from the Vietnamese.
45. Balaban, "In Celebration of Spring," *Locusts*, 108-9.
46. Weigl, "Childhood," *The Monkey Wars*, 5.
47. Weigl, "Childhood," *The Monkey Wars*, 5; Balaban, "Words for My Daughter," *Words for My Daughter*, 12.

CLARE EMILY CLIFFORD is an Assistant Professor of American literature at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The daughter of a career Army aviator and Vietnam veteran, she is currently working on a study of poetry about suicide during the Cold War. Her most recent article, "Blazing Like Disease": John Berryman and the Dis-Ease of Suicide" was published in *The Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine*.