CULTURE UNDER STRESS:

AMERICAN DRAMA AND THE VIETNAM WAR

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation undertakes an analysis of the dramatic literature engendered by the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, and illustrates how the dramas of that period reflect the stresses and anxieties that assailed contemporary American society. It investigates the formative influences on the drama, the various styles in which it emerged, and the recurring themes and motifs. The thesis proceeds from the premise that the events of the 1960s fractured American society in a manner unknown since the Civil War. It demonstrates that the social, political, and intellectual divisiveness that characterized the society was interpreted in the theatre by dramatic metaphors of fragmentation of the individual and collective psyche, and that this fragmentation was reflected in characters who experienced a collective and individual sense of loss of cultural identity, cohesion and continuity.

Included in the examination of the drama is a description of how the social upheaval of the period influenced playwrights to undertake a reassessment of American values and ethics, and to interpret in dramatic form the nature of the trauma of Vietnam for American society. The study includes a discussion of how individual and collective reality is based on cultural conditioning, and how the challenging of cultural myth in an extra-cultural milieu

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This work is respectfully dedicated to the
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February 24, 1924 - February 8, 1988

Teacher, Mentor and Friend

Your ignorance will be whipped with wind until it is pure as mist above the mountains. . . . We will never be perfectly inscrutable to you till we have killed you and you do not know why.

Amlin Grey: *How I Got That Story*.

CHAPTER I

CULTURE UNDER STRESS

This study deals with the response of the American theatre to the Vietnam War. Theatre in its broadest sense is a descriptive term which encompasses many elements of artistic endeavour, including the literature, the theory and the practice of dramatic art. Rather than dealing with a specific aspect and application of drama, the present work is primarily concerned with how an event, which shook a nation to its very foundations, was interpreted in playscripts and performances. It examines how, under the stress of social upheaval and disintegration, the drama functions as a vehicle for social protest and criticism. It also investigates the process through which the individual and collective psychological disequilibrium occasioned by such a traumatic event is interpreted in a dramatic context. Also included is an analysis of how dramatizations on the part of individual authors reflect the social conditioning underlying the ethnocentric perspectives of members of a particular culture.

Many excellent books have been written about the reasons for American involvement in Vietnam;[1] it is, however, neither essential nor profitable, given the central purpose of this work, to discuss or recapitulate the many complex social,

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[1] For a selection of pertinent works on the social, political, and military background to the war, consult the Bibliography.

political and military events that led to the greatest debacle in modern American history.[2] Active American interest and involvement in Vietnam dated from the immediate post-WW II period, continued through France's attempt to reclaim its pre-WW II colony (1946-1954), and effectively ended on April 30, 1975 when the last helicopter left the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon.[3] For some twenty years (1945-1965)[4] American involvement in the affairs of Vietnam was of little interest to the general American public; events transpiring in Asian areas, other than Korea, were generally of peripheral interest in what was known as the "Cold War."

The many reasons for American involvement in Vietnam are

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[2] The social, political, and military events relative to American involvement in Vietnam that are discussed in this chapter are recapitulated in capsule form in Appendices A and B: Appendix A covers events in Vietnam from 1945 to 1975; Appendix B concerns significant events of the same period in America and elsewhere. Events in American drama of the period are outlined in Appendix C.

[3] The first "unofficial" American casualty of the Vietnam conflict occurred on September 26, 1945. As there was no declaration of hostilities, other than the Tonkin Gulf Resolution signed on August 10, 1964, dates and figures pertaining to the conflict are confusing. See Appendices A, B.

[4] Astute political observers, such as Bernard Newman and David Halberstam, noted that because of such circumstances as the depredations of the Diem regime, American interests in Vietnam were doomed to frustration by the end of 1962. See Bernard Newman, *Background to Vietnam* (New York: Signet Books, 1965), *passim*; also, David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York: Random House, 1965), *passim*. Graham Greene's fictional *The Quiet American*, published 1955, gave an uncanny and prescient portrayal of the failure of American machinations in Vietnamese politics. See Graham Greene, "The Quiet American," in *Graham Greene: The Collected Edition* (London: Octopus Books, Ltd., 1977), pp. 531-654.

not a principal concern of this work; what is, however, is the impact of the conflict on American culture and society, and how it was interpreted in the theatre and in the dramatic literature of the time. This study proceeds from an analysis of the trends in American theatre in the 1960s, and illustrates how contemporary social stresses and anxieties were reflected in the drama that emerged during and after the Vietnam War. It further examines how the Vietnam experience induced crises of cultural identity, cohesion and continuity in the American consciousness, and illustrates how these disruptive influences were interpreted in works designed to be performed on the public stage.

America in the sixties was indeed a society under stress.[5] Many problems were a continuation of those of the fifties which saw the rise of McCarthyism and the Civil Rights movement. Senator Joseph McCarthy raised to hysterical levels American fears of a communist plot to dominate the world. Events of the time, such as the Chinese Communist Revolution, the Berlin Crisis, the Korean War, and the arrest of State Department officials and the Rosenbergs for various acts of espionage, appeared to justify his claims. His cause was espoused by J. Edgar Hoover, and the F.B.I. began a

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[5] The data included in this section is based upon newspaper articles from *Chronicle of the 20th Century*, Chronicle Publications, N.Y., 1987, and citations in Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. *Britannica Book of the Year*. A full outline of these events is given in Appendix B.

surveillance of American citizens which continued into the years of the Civil Rights movement; the investigation of anti-war protestors itself attained the fervency of the McCarthy anti-Communist "witch hunts."

The early fifties also saw the testing in the courts of laws pertaining to race relations and segregation. Traditionally a problem in America, race relations were clarified by a May 17, 1954, decision of the Supreme Court abolishing segregation in schools. Other legislation in the fifties involved the banning of segregation in other public access facilities such as bus depots and restaurants. Violent acts of assassination, arson, and rebellion, and confrontation, such as freedom rides and marches that promoted the process of integration, were to characterize American society until anti-war demonstrations contended with them, and later surpassed them as a cause of social disobedience in the middle sixties. The violence associated with integration appeared initially to stem from the white sector of the population that included vigilantes and local police forces; however, as Blacks met with increasing frustration in their efforts to attain equality, elements of the movement became radicalized and coalesced into groups, such as the Black Panthers, which espoused violent revolution as their principal aim (Heath *passim*).

Another disrupting influence in the America of the sixties was the emergence of "counterculturalists," who, in a

reaction against the materialism of the affluent post WW II society and the authority of the older generation, created a sub-culture characterized by opposition to the values, morality and ethics of the establishment. Influenced by the writings of such figures as Kerouac, Ginsberg and Marcuse, the adherents of the movement pursued the ideal of freedom in the form of social and political anarchy.

The counterculture movement also had a presence on university campuses, where, beginning in the late fifties, student groups emerged to challenge the cultural, political, and intellectual foundations of their society. Groups such as the S.D.S. (Students for a Democratic Society), F.S.M. (Free Speech Movement), and S.N.C.C. (Students Non-violent Coordinating Committee), originated at various university campuses. These groups, which typically evolved under the aegis of civil rights principles, increasingly became radicalized as the pressures of the sixties, particularly those generated by the War, encouraged more demonstrative acts of social dissent (O'Neill 23).[6]

Both individually and collectively, the opposition to the War took many forms. For individuals acting alone, it included the writing of letters to elected officials, refusal to pay taxes, fleeing to Canada and other countries, draft refusal, desertion from the armed forces, and even public and

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[6] For a chronology of student protests on campus, see Appendix B.

private acts of suicide.[7] On the collective level, opposition involved petitions, advertisements in newspapers, strikes on campuses and in the work-place; mass demonstrations and protest marches that resulted in beatings, arrests, and detention. The decade of the sixties was also characterized by acts of extreme violence such as assassination, the bombing and burning of buildings, and the destruction of public monuments and records.

Contrary to allegations by the F.B.I. and other agencies responsible for internal security, the anti-war movement was neither a movement inspired or led by foreign powers, cowards, anarchists, or licentious counterculturals, nor was its philosophical motivation traceable to an omniscient malevolent power, nor was it even anti-American. The individuals who wrote, marched, and demonstrated against the policies of their government came from all walks of life and religious and political persuasions. Typically, these protestors were overwhelmingly patriotic, and their numbers often included the best and brightest people from a wide variety of professions and vocations. Hundreds of high-profile organizations espoused the anti-war cause at various times, and the number of minor or splinter groups, including

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[7] At least eight protest suicides are directly linked to the anti-war protest movement in the period 1965-1970. See Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest against the War in Vietnam* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984), pp. 4-5.

those composed of radical elements, remain uncountable.[8] Never since the Civil War had American society been so divided and so fragmented socially and politically, and never had the recourse to violence become so prominent in civil protest.

Previous to 1963, there was little or no opposition to American involvement in Vietnam, although 109 Americans had died there since 1959.[9] The first organized demonstrations took place in August 1963, in conjunction with the annual commemoration by American pacifists of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings (Zaroulis and Sullivan 12). These demonstrations were largely inspired by the June 11 self-immolation of the Buddhist *bonze* Thich Quang Duc in South Vietnam. The social, political, and military situation in Vietnam at that time, however, was only a very peripheral concern of the American public, whose attention was primarily focused on civil rights issues.

In the same month of 1963, the Civil Rights movement was approaching its period of greatest activity. After more than a decade of sit-ins, boycotts, and freedom marches, the

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[8] See Appendix D for a partial list of anti-war and Civil Rights groups.

[9] Actually, the first American killed in Vietnam in the post WW II period was Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey, who was shot by the Viet Minh near Saigon on September 26, 1945. Two U.S. miliary advisors were killed on July 8, 1959, near the Bien Hoa airport outside Saigon. Specialist 4, James T. Davis, was killed on December 22, 1961. Various sources regard any of the above as the first casualties of the Vietnam War. See Appendices A and B.

protests culminated in one vast demonstration involving 200,000 to 250,000 people marching on Washington for "Jobs and Freedom" (*Chronicle* 902). Martin Luther King presented his "I Have a Dream" speech, which won him national prominence. His subsequent assassination remains a symbol of the racial violence that characterized America during the 1950s and 1960s.

The first joining of the Civil Rights and the anti-war movements came immediately after the first Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. Mourners at the funeral of three slain civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, displayed placards quoting President Johnson's words, "Shoot to kill in the Gulf of Tonkin" (Zaroulis and Sullivan 24). The demonstration was a protest against Johnson's refusal to send federal marshals to Mississippi to protect civil rights workers, and the mourners drew a connection between the violence that the government was tolerating in Mississippi and its threatened violence in the Asian Gulf.

By 1965, anti-war demonstrations had become highly organized affairs. The first International Days of Protest took place on October 15-16, and extended from coast to coast. In Berkeley, California, 10,000 gathered to stage a teach-in; in New York, 20-25,000 marched down Fifth Avenue and were pelted by tomatoes, red paint and eggs. The first report of a person burning his draft card after Johnson had signed a bill making such an act a felony coincided with the

demonstration. The year 1965 was a watershed in the development of anti-war protests. A wide range of methods of protest were evident: individual acts of suicide, public testimony, and refusal of the draft, and collective efforts involving mass marches, rallies, demonstrations and confrontations. Zaroulis and Sullivan note that "by the end of the year the two sides were arrayed: the U.S. administration was committed to the war in Vietnam; the opponents of that war were committed to ending it" (67).

On January 3, 1966, the Civil Rights movement and anti-war protest were again linked after the shooting death of a Black S.N.C.C worker, who attempted to use a white washroom at a gas station in Tuskegee, Alabama. S.N.C.C. issued a statement claiming that the United States government was equally as deceptive in its claims of concern for the Vietnamese people as it was for the welfare and freedom of Black people in the United States and other countries, including the Dominican Republic, South Africa, and the Congo (*Ibid.* 69).

The anti-war movement assumed a national identity when, at a conference in Cleveland on November 28, 1966, plans were made for a huge country-wide mobilization. Set for April 15, 1967, the Spring Mobilization (Committee) to End the War in Vietnam attracted such speakers as Dr. Benjamin Spock. In February 1967, civil rights and anti-war protests became synonymous as Martin Luther King began to attack the war in

Vietnam in earnest. Addressing a conference in Los Angeles, he claimed that, "the promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefield of Vietnam" (Ansbro 253). His remarks became even more vitriolic later in the year, when he condemned a war in which Black Americans "kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in their own schools" (*Ibid.* 259). Consequently, he was censured by the N.A.A.C.P.[10] for his association of civil rights and anti-war issues, since the American public at that time was still strongly in favour of the War. A month later, on May 13, 70,000 marched in New York in support of the administration's policies in Vietnam (*Chronicle* 963-4).

A foretaste of the violence that was later to mark anti-war demonstrations occurred on June 23, 1967, in Los Angeles. Police smashed the windows of a sound truck used by the PL(P)(M),[11] and beat the occupants (Zaroulis and Sullivan 119). The summer of that year also saw outbreaks of racial violence that were unprecedented in American society. On July 16 a race riot in Newark, New Jersey, resulted in twenty-six dead, 1,500 injured, and 1,000 arrested; a week later, a similar event in Detroit saw nineteen dead, countless injured, and 700 arrested (*Chronicle* 967). Domestic violence appeared to keep pace with that of Vietnam, as 1967 was also

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[10] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

[11] Progressive Labor (Party) (Movement).

marked by an increasing determination to continue the War: 465,000 troops were engaged, and 9,378 were killed (Terry 297).

The year 1967 also gave an indication of how widespread the opposition against American involvement in Vietnam had become. In January, a group of Rhodes scholars wrote the President asking for explanations of America's foreign policy; in March, 800 peace corps workers petitioned the administration; in April, 1,000 divinity students formally objected to America's actions in Asia. On October 21, a march in Washington, D.C., included the participation of Norman Mailer, who commemorated the occasion in his *Armies of the Night*. Also involved in the demonstration was a contingent of "counterculturals," who were determined to levitate the Pentagon (*Chronicle* 971). The protest, estimated to have involved 50,000 participants, was marked by violence, and some 250 people were arrested. The occasion also presented "the largest mass draft card burning in the history of protest against the Vietnam War" (Zaroulis and Sullivan 139).

In 1967 public opinion was still very much divided over Vietnam. A December poll indicated that 58 per cent of Americans were in favour of the War, and 63 per cent opposed halting the bombing of North Vietnam. Public opinion, however, was beginning to shift. In 1968 the American commitment in Vietnam reached its peak with 536,000 troops engaged, and casualties of 14,592 killed (Terry 296).

Zaroulis and Sullivan note that 1968

> was a year in which events happened so quickly, hammer blow after hammer blow, that in retrospect it seems astonishing that the national psyche survived intact. Perhaps it did not. (149)

The year started badly with the seizure of the surveillance ship *Pueblo* by the North Koreans on January 23; the Tet offensive followed a week later on the night of January 30-31. Mark Baker noted that, in 1968, "some unmarked threshold of pain was crossed in March" (214). One in five Americans previously supporting the War switched to opposition. On March 10, the news that Westmoreland had asked for 206,000 more troops that would bring total American forces to nearly three-quarters of a million men shocked the nation into a state of disbelief about the optimistic forecasts of military success in Vietnam. On April 4, King was shot in Memphis, which triggered race riots across America and in U.S. military camps in Vietnam. Later that month, students staged a sit-in at Columbia University, which provoked a police action in which 711 were arrested and 120 charges of police brutality were laid.

Assassination, riot, civil disobedience and other forms of protest continued to rack American society during the remainder of the year and into 1969 and 1970. Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles in June of 1968; Dr. Benjamin Spock and three accomplices were sentenced to jail terms for counselling draft evasion; and university protests increased and continued into 1970, which culminated

in the shooting of four students at Kent State on May 4. The Vietnam Moratorium observance day on October 15, 1969, saw millions of people across the country wearing black arm bands; a WW II veteran was quoted, "This war is costing America its soul" (Tuchman 351).

The academic year of 1969-1970 witnessed a wave of terrorist bombings and arson spreading across the United States, both on and off campuses. Over 250 bombings resulted in at least six deaths, and 247 cases of arson were reported, the most spectacular being a $320,000 fire at the Berkeley campus library of the University of California (Chronicle 1301). This period marked the peak of university protest: over four million students and five hundred institutions were involved. Of these, fifty-one remained closed during the latter part of the year (Zaroulis and Sullivan 320).

Although the fury of the war was abating in 1970 (troop levels in Vietnam were down 200,000 to 334,600 by the end of the year), it was some time before the effect was felt on what now was aptly described as "the home front." Finally goaded to action in 1970, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee recommended repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution; it was approved by the Senate on June 26, and by the House on December 31. President Nixon, however, gave notice that he would pay no attention to the repeal and, on this occasion, he proved true to his word. Yet, even then, the prosecution of the war in Vietnam remained a divisive issue in society.

New York "hard hat" construction workers attracted an estimated 60,000 participants in a series of protests lasting from May 11 to May 20, as they demonstrated in favour of the administration and its policies in Vietnam (*Chronicle* 1020).

In the years of 1970 and 1971, the anti-war movement as a whole began to disintegrate. Nixon's revelation of his new "Vietnamization" policy for the War, and various other announcements concerning negotiations softened public dissent. Although the War was to continue in its several disguises for another five years, the emphasis on air warfare in preference to ground commitments seemed to lessen the impact of the conflict on the home front. In the oxymoronic language that came to typify the administration's description of events, Nixon proclaimed a "war for peace" (Herring 244).[12] After the peace agreements of January 1973 were concluded, the period which military analysts call "the post-war war" began, and lasted until 1975 (*Ibid.* 252). Ironically, the war did not realistically come to an end until May 7, 1975, when President Ford signed a proclamation terminating the eligibility for war benefits of men serving in the area. He proudly proclaimed the end of the Vietnam era, stating, "America is no longer at war" (*Chronicle* 1094).

Yet, for many, the war was just beginning. Still to be fully realized was the cost of the conflict--the damage to American prestige, the physical and psychological trauma

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[12] Cf. Nixon's earlier "Peace Offensive."

suffered by the combatants and those who had fought on the home front, and above all, the devastating effect of the social fragmentation that the issues of the War had engendered. Problems of reintegration were acute for both veterans and members of the home community alike. For the latter, the veterans were embarrassing reminders of an undeclared, misunderstood, ill-conceived war--and its ignominious conclusion. The veterans, acutely aware of the attitudes towards the War--attitudes which had radically changed since its beginning--felt anger and hostility at being rejected by a society for which they had endured much and made so many sacrifices. Their situation, that of men attempting to gain or regain a place in a cultural construct, became the most dominant and popular thematic motif in Vietnam drama.

In theatre, the response to the turbulent sixties emerged in several distinct forms. The decade saw the proliferation of small ensemble companies which often regarded themselves as micro-cultures having a dual purpose of theatrical experimentation and social protest. This period also saw the revitalization of documentary drama, which underwent significant changes as it attempted to interpret contemporary events in dramatic form. Chapter II of this work examines both the ensemble companies and the genre of documentary theatre, and illustrates how both were direct responses to the social conditions of the time.

The sixties also saw works written for the traditional theatre evolve in style and form in reaction to the increasing tensions, anxieties and crises of society. For diverse reasons, some authors abstracted their social criticism in plays of analogy, allegory and allusion; in addition, they sought answers to contemporary problems in the roots of American culture itself. An analysis of such plays is undertaken in Chapter III.

The fragmentation of society as a result of the many divisive issues of the time became individualized in the men who went to war. The extra-cultural experience and perception, which came with service overseas, led the individual to question those precepts which had determined his sense of cultural reality and formulated his ideas of behaviour. Plays that attempted to come to terms with the war experience itself, and to stress its significance both for the society and for the individual, tended to be written by those who had direct knowledge of the War, such as veterans, correspondents, doctors and medical or psychiatric case workers. These plays are typified by Rites of Passage motifs--initiation, experience, and reintegration. Plays dealing with these motifs are discussed respectively in Chapters IV, V, and VI.

It is neither possible nor desirable, given limitations of space and focus of any study, to include an encyclopedic treatment of all the theatre companies, playwrights, dramas

and theatrical events that can somehow be traced, if tenuously, to the Vietnam War. Certainly, some twenty-seven plays are discussed in varying detail which, in the opinion of this writer, reflects their importance in the dramatic genre of Vietnam plays. Further, an examination of the main theatre companies and their improvised works presented to American audiences of the sixties and seventies, serves to place the plays in their proper perspective *vis à vis* the American theatre scene of the time. The titles of a few plays which have been excluded, together with the reasons for their exclusion, are outlined in the closing pages of Chapter VI. Other dramatic works written in this period are not readily obtainable, nor would they necessarily deserve inclusion in the study.[13] Accordingly, that circumstance in no way militated against the completeness, effectivness and essential nature of Vietnam drama as presented here. This writer maintains that the works selected for analysis are not only the most representative of dramatic works on Vietnam, but are also definitive of the genre of dramatic literature and theatrical presentation that emerged as a response to the War.

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[13] Ruby Cohn, writing in 1980, notes, "Only a small fraction survives (in print) of the many plays performed in the United States during the last two decades." See Ruby Cohn, *New American Dramatists: 1960-1980* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), p. 4.

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CHAPTER II

DRAMATIC TRENDS OF THE SIXTIES

1. *Ensemble Theatre.*

One artistic manifestation of the cultural self-questioning of American society in the 1960s was the emergence and proliferation of experimental drama groups. These groups produced a theatre that, in keeping with the social dynamics of the decade, was characterized by its revolutionary zeal. Theodore Shank observes that this theatre was driven by "the moral energy of social causes and the spirit of artistic exploration" (3). Under the strain of social tensions that were exacerbated by the growing awareness of the Vietnam War, the emerging artistic liberation found expression in social and political criticism. This freedom fostered many lines of critical thought that would resurface in the dramas confronting the War directly.

Many of the philosophies and techniques of the experimental theatre were to have a significant impact on the War dramas. It is therefore necessary that an examination of some of the more famous (and infamous) groups and their works be undertaken, in order to identify the influences that shaped the theatre of the 1960s, and to appreciate how the social and cultural anxieties of the time gave rise to the artistic impulses affecting the development of American drama.

The decade of the 1960s produced major changes in the perception of what theatre was and how it should be presented to an audience. Productions of the period were characterized by innovations in organization, selection of subject matter, and dramatic techniques. Allan Lewis notes that some of the most significant changes were the rise of the Black Theatre, the growth of regional repertory theatres, and the breakdown of psychological realism, together with a predilection for examining aspects of instinct and experience (243). Shank notes that the experimental theatre

> gave rise to two perspectives from which artists viewed human experience. There were those who looked outward, exploring human beings in society, analyzing social institutions, considering political issues, and sometimes advocating social change. The other perspective was inward-looking and involved a consideration of how we perceive, feel, think, the structure of thought, the nature of consciousness, the self in relation to art. (3)

C.W.E. Bigsby has observed that the American theatre of the period was often distinguished by "the urgencies of political, social and moral revolt" (1985: 292-3). It soon became obvious, however, that the rebellion was not only directed at social issues, but also at the traditional structure and function of theatre itself.

The dynamics of the evolving theatre were quite evident before Vietnam became a significant factor in the artistic and public consciousness. Megan Terry, who worked with the Open Theatre, and whose *Viet Rock* (1966) was to be one of the first plays to deal with the subject of Vietnam, observed:

> Just as we were on the brink of major breakthroughs in acting, playwrighting and directing, we had to throw all our energies into stopping the war in Viet Nam. Much work got postponed, other work accelerated out of the necessity of dealing with the problem of war. (1977: 17)

Towards the end of the decade, the social and cultural issues raised by Vietnam were to attract the talents and energies of those artists involved in reworking the nature of American theatre. It took some years, however, before full-length dramas dealing directly with Vietnam were to appear on the commercial stage. The works of the experimental theatre, as Terry suggests, were aimed at stopping the War, while the plays that confronted the War directly were written primarily either by returning veterans who saw the drama as a prime means of conveying the experience, or by those who had personal contact with these men.

Many of the talents and ideas that were to influence the form and substance of American drama are found in the matrix of the experimental groups. The dynamic nature of the ensemble provided an opportunity for emerging talents to train and practice their craft, and new groups were often formed by individuals who had departed from the parent company in order to test their personal theories of dramatic art. Moreover, the cross-pollination of techniques and ideas among members of these groups lent impetus to the exploration and proliferation of new artistic concepts.

Many European influences, both in playwriting and dramatic theory, are evident in the philosophy, training and

orientation of a number of individuals who both created and participated in the experimental productions. The effect of bringing together talents, energies and ideas in these ensembles was to alter substantially the nature of American theatre from that time to the present. Not only did such formative influences and impulses help shape and direct the substance of the drama, they also heavily influenced the critical edge of the works dealing directly with the War itself.

Arthur Sainer observes that there was "a radical loosening in theatre" in 1959, a phenomenon that he associates with the Living Theatre's production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection* that same year (15). This "loosening" was accompanied by the rise of ensemble acting companies rebelling not only against social conventions, but also against those of the contemporary theatre as represented on Broadway. The ensemble offered a communal approach which opposed the inequities of the traditional "star" system, and encouraged in its place dramatic productions representing collective efforts and interests. As Bigsby observes,

> the theatre offered itself as a paradigm of community at a moment when society seemed more fragmented than usual. The civil rights movement, student activists, and anti-war activity emphasized a fundamental disagreement over values, while encounter groups, communes, and proliferating religious and spiritual cults stressed an uncertainty over personal and social relationships. (1978: 353)

In their repudiation of the "Establishment," these groups dedicated their artistic efforts to both theatrical and social reform, and the critical edge of their works was typically directed against such social and moral issues as the material excesses of contemporary theatre and society:

> A significant number [of artists] who were disaffected with the myth of success ... discovered that the ensemble not only allowed for a serious critique of the culture, but also for sustained serious work. (Sainer 17)

The communal nature of the ensemble tended to shift focus from the individual and enhance the identity of the group, and many of these bodies of acting, writing and directing talent envisioned themselves as microcosmic cultures with a collective sense of identity, purpose and function. Consequently, as a result of their attitudes concerning the freedom of expression, many of these groups regularly collided with the forces of law and order.

The social discontent of the early sixties fueled a drive for innovation in dramatic style, as both dilettantes and serious practitioners of theatre coalesced in theatre companies whose *raison d' être* was to express social and political beliefs in the form of critical dramatic statements and protest demonstrations. In carrying forward its examination of contemporary social and cultural mores and values, the experimental theatre quickly responded to the anxiety about the War with a fervour in keeping with the magnitude of the event itself.

Many of the groups were in place before Vietnam came to occupy the public and artistic consciousness. The San Francisco Mime Troupe (SFMT) was forming in 1959; Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre in 1960; The Open Theatre, which counted Megan Terry and Jean Claude van Itallie among its early playwrights, was established in 1963; the Pageant Players had its first production in 1965, and Richard Schechner's New Orleans and Performance Groups emerged in the middle and late sixties. Of considerable importance was Malina's and Beck's Living Theatre, which dated from the late forties: well-established and productive during the fifties and early sixties, it was to become the model and inspiration for experimental theatre groups both in America and Europe.

Judith Malina and Julian Beck began producing plays together in 1946. In 1945, Malina studied under Erwin Piscator at the New School Dramatic Workshop (Biner 20); Beck was a dedicated anarchist-pacifist who had dropped out of university and followed the teachings of Thoreau and Gandhi (Shank 9). They married in 1948, and in 1951 founded the "Living Theatre," choosing this name because their theatre was to be "one that would emphasize contemporary plays performed in such a manner as to move the spectators" (Biner 24). Beck gave his personal credo at the time, claiming that there were three requirements for a total theatrical

experience: "physical participation by the spectator participant, narrative, and transcendence" (*Ibid.* 25).

The aesthetics and techniques of the Living Theatre changed considerably over the course of its relatively long history. Initially, the revolution that Beck and Malina wanted to see in the theatre was similar to what had taken place in sculpture and art. As Beck notes,

> we wanted the theatre to accomplish a revolution, eventually, one that had already transformed the other arts--music, painting, sculpture." (27)

Shank observes that the Becks "were reacting against naturalism and were primarily interested in experimenting with poetic language" (9). Between their debut in 1951 and their production of *The Brig* in 1963, twenty-two productions were staged, involving twenty-nine plays, most of them in verse. Of the early productions, Beck notes, "we chose marginal plays that placed their emphasis on language, on a certain fantastic quality" (Biner 33). As the deliberate title of the company suggests, the group was determined to break down the separation of art and life: the dramatic action on the stage was to have an immediate relevance to what was happening outside the theatre.

Shank notes that in 1951 the Becks' radicalism was only aesthetic (8); however, in the course of artistic experimentation and the consequent confrontations with the authorities, they came to use their theatre as a vehicle for social criticism, and worked towards bringing about social

change by non-violent means. Since 1964 they "committed their lives and their work to an anarchist-pacifist view" (Shank 9). The company was to have a significant influence on the development of American drama in the sixties, as the life-style of the ensemble, their production techniques and philosophies, and their critical attitudes became models for individual artists and other groups.

The history of the Living Theatre in America was marked by a constant struggle for survival. Having staged their first production--an evening of four short plays--in their apartment on August 15, 1951,[1] they moved to the Cherry Lane Theatre in the West End of New York in December 1951. There they produced eight works, mostly by contemporary playwrights. They were evicted from the theatre by the Fire Department in August 1952 because of unsafe conditions.[2] The Becks' anti-establishment sentiments were reinforced as various government departments closed other theatres that they subsequently occupied. Their initial playing space, a basement in Wooster Street, was raided in 1946 by the police,

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[1] For a chronology of productions by the Living Theatre, other experimental groups, and plays of the Vietnam War era, see Appendix C.

[2] The Fire Department's concern with the fire hazard at the Cherry Lane coincided with the production of John Ashbery's *The Heroes*, a controversial play with homosexual overtones. Beck claims that the Department acted "at the request of the vigilantes" (Beck, *TDR*, 183). Kenneth H. Brown's *The Brig*, a virulent anti-establishment work was in performance at the Living Theatre Playhouse when the IRS seized assets valued at $267.00 and closed the building.

who insisted that it was a front for a brothel (Beck 1965: 19). Their Broadway attic was closed by the Building Department in 1956, and their Living Theatre Playhouse was seized by the Internal Revenue Service in 1963, during the production of *The Brig* (1963). These experiences helped to radicalize their opinions of structured society, and their theatrical efforts were to become increasingly political.

The first production at Cherry Lane was Gertrude Stein's *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights* (1938). Beck states that Stein's work "was like a manifesto and would always stand at the head of our work, saying take the cue from this" (Beck 1965: 8). Stein's work was attractive to the Becks because in it they perceived the use of language as a tool for revolution. According to Beck,

> it [Stein's work] never ceased being part of the revolution of the word, a period in international literature of the first couple of decades of this century which tried to revivify language, which did revivify language, and with it the structure, the form, of literature, by erasing the platitudes and exploring and pushing at the boundaries of meaning in writing. (Beck 1965: 7)

Beck saw language in the form of linguistic platitudes and its rigid structure as a sustaining force of socio-cultural prisons, and symptomatic of the authoritarian nature of society. He adds: "How can you enlarge the limits of consciousness if language atrophies? How can you approach real conscious being if the language is just hanging around?" (*Ibid.* 7).

Starting from the position that language was a substantial force in the definition of cultural reality, Beck sought to transform his culture and society. He exhorted, "Weaken the fabric of the system wherever you can, make possible the increase of freedom. . . ." (*Ibid.* v). Thirteen years after the first production at Cherry Lane, Beck was asked to sum up his philosophy and purpose in less than twenty words. His response: "To increase conscious awareness, to stress the sacredness of life, to break down the walls" (*Ibid.* 18).

The assault on the walls was not long in coming. The production of Paul Goodman's *Faustina* (1952) in 1952 at Cherry Lane marked the beginning of direct audience confrontation in the Living Theatre. In the final movement of the play, as the set of ancient Rome disintegrates, the actress playing Faustina addresses the audience directly:

> We have enacted a brutal scene, the ritual murder of a young and handsome man. I have bathed in his blood and if you were a worthy audience, you'd have leaped on the stage and stopped the action. (Biner 32)

The company continued to produce plays designed to engage and shock the audience; they included Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896), and John Ashbery's *The Heroes* (1952).

The short stay at Cherry Lane was an important formative time for the company. There they established the foundations for a repertory theatre and inaugurated Monday evening gatherings where poets, writers and playwrights met to read

their works (*Ibid.* 32). The company also initiated and developed the techniques that were to become its trademark, and which other experimental companies were to imitate. Beck noted that "there is no difference between actor and spectator" (1965: 22), and the traditional aesthetic and spatial relationships between performer and audience were thus transformed. The spectator became participant as well as observer when the actors made the theatre auditorium a working part of their stage, and moved among the audience, communicating with individual members by touch, voice and gesture. Such acts of communication were to characterize the company's work for over thirty years.

After the closing of the Cherry Lane in August 1952, the Becks found a new location in a third-floor loft on 100th Street and Broadway in March 1954. Continuing to attack the illusion of reality through the reality of illusion, the group performed Luigi Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise* (1930) in 1955. Biner notes that Pirandello was particularly suited to a Living Theatre production, as

> the manner in which the company rendered the ambiguity, incommunicability, the hopeless gropings of consciousness and words toward capturing the unconscious . . . resulted in a remarkable success. (36)

Other productions staged in the attic included Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1926) and August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* (1907). The last play to be produced there, in November 1955, was Paul Goodman's controversial play, *The Young Disciple*.

Goodman's play was a "shocker": it was an adaptation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, and dealt with the problems of a youth in search of wisdom (*Ibid.* 37). Predictably, the Building Department served notice, demanding that the loft capacity be reduced to an uneconomic eighteen seats, and the theatre was forced to close.

From the loft, the company moved to a vacant Manhattan department store on Sixth Avenue and Fourteenth Street, in July 1957. After more than a year of renovations, they opened the Living Theatre Playhouse. Between January 1959 and October 1963, they staged nine productions, involving ten plays. Among the first productions in the Playhouse were William Carlos Williams' *Many Loves* (1938), a playlet about a "pessimistic relationship between articulate and inarticulate persons" (Guimond 146), and Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1958). Those plays were to incorporate the company's concept of denying the fourth wall of the theatre. In the opening sequence of *Many Loves*, the audience enters the theatre to find electricians and actors on stage attempting to repair a blown fuse. When power is restored, the play begins (Shank 10). Williams' play was viewed as a success, but *The Connection* was the production which that radically changed the direction of theatre in America--and elsewhere--in the 1960s.

The Connection was a play set out to dispense with the fourth wall entirely. When the audience enters, several

individuals, ostensibly "heroin addicts," are sitting on the stage. A man steps from the proscenium into the audience and announces that he is the "producer." He introduces Jaybird, the "author" of the work, and explains that they have invited several genuine heroin addicts to come to the theatre and create a documentary play, which is to be recorded by two photographers present in the theatre. The addicts, it is suggested, have cooperated in return for a promised "fix."

The uncertainty of what is real and what is contrived continues throughout the play. Four jazz musicians waiting for their fix begin to entertain the audience by improvising music. During a hiatus (the intermission), some of the addicts panhandle in the audience. Eventually "Cowboy," a Black drug-dealer arrives and distributes what appears to be drugs to the waiting addicts. The author protests when the action does not go according to his scenario, and asks Cowboy: "You cats are actors?" Cowboy responds: "I'm not acting. You should have thought of that when you hired us" (Gelber 82). Theatrical continuity appears to break down when Jaybird, realizing that events are not going according to his "script," protests, and insists that all the elements of theatre must mesh together.

> We wouldn't be on stage if it didn't fit. That's what I had in mind in the first place. I didn't learn anything. I knew it. Find a horror. Then you tell people it isn't a horror. And then I have the gall to be horrified, Well, if it wasn't junk, I would have been involved with something else. (*Ibid.* 95)

The audience is not only drawn into the play, but for the credulous, anxiety is heightened with the recognition that they are party to a highly illegal undertaking.

Verisimilitude in the production was so well-established that the audience spontaneously applauded upon being introduced to the "author"; in addition, over the three-year run of the play, some fifty members of the audience fainted when an actor playing "Leach" inserted a hypodermic needle in his arm (Biner 48). Many people were taken in by the 'play within a play' techniques used by the Living Theatre and demanded their money back at the box-office; they explained that they had come to see a play rather than what appeared to be a spontaneous and random event (Beck 1965: 22).

In directing the play, Judith Malina took every advantage of the potential offered by the title and the construction of the piece. "Connections," outside the immediate connotation of obtaining drugs, are encouraged between the actors and the audience and between the actors and the musicians. In the play, Jaybird notes that if the audience makes the connection between drugs and jazz, that is their own affair (Gelber 68). There are also implied connections between the psychologically liberating effects of improvised jazz and drugs. Malina notes that, although the actors were indeed actors and did not let their roles influence their personal lives, the situation in which they

found themselves put them entirely at ease, and "allowed them to play themselves" (Biner 48).

Bernard Dukore noted in 1967 that *The Connection* was "an example of the 'New Realism'," since Gelber "uses so many devices of the non-realistic theatre" (161). "The basic setup is not actors who are going to play junkies, but junkies who are going try to be actors" (162). He further acknowledges Gelber's debt to Pirandello. Theodore Shank notes a tendency of the Living Theatre towards producing plays which

> involved experiments with putting actuality on stage which led eventually to eliminating the separation between art and life, between dramatic action and social action, between living and acting, between spectator and performer, and between revolution and theatre. (9)

The breaking down of the fourth wall brought the audience into the production and made them, if not somewhat responsible for much of the action, at least party to it by implied acquiescence. This insistence on confronting the audience with a reality that it would most likely prefer to avoid echoes many of the ideas inherent in the theories of Antonin Artaud.

The Living Theatre was not directly influenced by the work of Artaud until 1958, when the Becks obtained a translation of his *Theatre of Cruelty* (Beck 1965: 24). Thereafter, however, there was a discernible shift from Pirandello, as the Living Theatre

> chose the way of Antonin Artaud, who regarded the obstinate adherence to rational means in fighting

> barbarism and 'evil' as the major flaw of Western culture. (Biner 49)

Beck declared,

> The ghost of Artaud became our mentor and the problem that we faced . . . was how to create that spectacle, that Aztec, convulsive, plague-ridden panorama that would so shake people up, so move them, so cause feeling to be felt, there in the body, that the steel world of law and order which civilization had forged to protect itself from barbarism would melt. (1965: 24)

The exposure to Artaud was to have a direct effect on the nature of the works produced by the Living Theatre. Upon reading Artaud's work, the Becks found that he expressed many of their own ideas about what theatre should attempt. They believed that the purpose of theatre should not primarily be to entertain, but to bring about a cathartic effect through the shock of confronting an audience with horrors of reality of which they had previously been unaware. Artaud wanted to put an end to theatre that was mere play-acting without consequences, and he echoed the Becks' ideas of social repression in his cry, "We are not free" (Artaud 79). Consequently, under the added stimulus of Artaud's theories, the Becks intensified their battering of the walls.

The Becks continued their campaign against an oppressive society with their presentation of Kenneth Brown's *The Brig* (1963) on May 15, 1963. Biner notes that it was "the most dazzling act of rebellion against Establishment theatre" in the history of the Beck group, and that it was "another manifestation of the spirit of the World Wide General Strike

for Peace, which the Becks had organized one week before the premiere" (63). Beck noted, "*The Brig* is the Theatre of Cruelty. In that it is the distillation of The Living Theatre's history" (1965: 34).

Beck decided to produce *The Brig* after his first reading of the play; he found it to be ideally suited to an expression of the Living Theatre's philosophy. He notes that the production was "a scrutiny of actuality," and that the essence of the work is embodied in a military intent "to punish with language" (1965: 6, 4). Under the title of "Storming the Barricades," Beck gives his interpretation of the work.

> *The Brig* itself is a kind of Hell. . . . It is not a theoretical Hell, not imaginary, not theological . . . it is the Hell of everything that puts people in cages and that draws rigid lines. (*Ibid.* 8)
>
> *The Brig* assaults. A total assault on culture. (*Ibid.* 9)

Brown had been a prisoner in a U.S. Marine Corps prison in Japan, and his play deals with the numbing routine of daily life in such a facility. The floor has white lines painted on it, and prisoners must request permission to cross them. Talking to other prisoners is forbidden, and errors in the performance of duties result in physical punishment. Shank observes that "it is the epitome of an anarchist's hell" (12). For the Becks, the prisoner in the military stockade was the ideal dramatic metaphor for the plight of the individual in an oppressive society: the physical

confinement and psychological isolation was on a level with that experienced by a spiritually oppressed individual in the authoritarian exterior world.

The action of the play consists of little more than the daily routine of the prison. Prisoners have numbers rather than names and they must respond instantaneously to all commands. The only breaks in the routine occur when Prisoner Six experiences a nervous breakdown and is carried off in a straightjacket, and one prisoner is released and another admitted. The time-frame of the play encompasses the events of only one day, from early morning to late evening. Shank notes that the play has no conventional plot and is structured only by the prison routine (12). The piece incites a psychological horror when it becomes obvious that each day follows the next in a never-ceasing monotony.[3] The men are trapped within a social system that is totally authoritarian; the only escape is the insane asylum.

The dramatic tension of the play is derived almost entirely from the use of precise instructions to be observed in the performance of the most trivial acts of daily routine. Every action, however insignificant, is orchestrated by the

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[3] This scenario evidences a very strong similarity with that of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), in which "Ivan is a universal symbol of the restricted dulled consciousness that develops in a man anywhere such conditions prevail." See Vladimir Rus, "*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*: A Point of View Analysis," in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* XIII, 2 & 3 (Summer-Fall 1971), pp. 176-177.

sadistic guards. All other forms of self-expression are precluded. Any deviation or failure to comply exactly results in verbal abuse and physical punishment. The men are not permitted to talk to each other and do not do so; the dialogue consists only of the formalized and ritualistic interchanges between the inmates and the guards, and language, in its rigid and institutionalized aspect, becomes a tool of oppression. As the deranged inmate is led away to incarceration in an unspecified asylum, his desperate parting cry is, "My name is not Six. It's James Turner" (*Brig* 73).

The Brig, while of doubtful dramatic merit because the monotony of the routine is likely to be quickly and indelibly impressed upon the audience, was the ideal vehicle for the expression of Beck's perception of his contemporary society as cruel and oppressive. A dominant feature of the production was a barbed-wire barrier between the audience and the stage, and Beck noted,

> *The Brig* condemned and exposed the barricades which divide us into victims or executioners. Barricades, a play of barricades, a play of prisons, prisons which have entered briefly yet decisively into our experience. (*Ibid.* 33)

Reality in the guise of life imitating art caught up with the Living Theatre, when, during the run of the play, the Establishment in the persona of IRS agents seized the paltry assets of the Living Theatre Playhouse, and consequently terminated the production.

Following their trial and conviction for "impeding Federal officers in pursuit of their duties,"[4] the Becks took their Living Theatre company to Europe for four years. They continued to create ensemble works and returned for an American tour in September 1968. In Europe they built on many of the ideas that they developed in New York, and they continued to influence American theatre until the 1970s. Two major pieces that they had created in Europe and staged across America in 1968-1969 were *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964), and *Paradise Now* (1968).

Created by the Living Theatre in France and performed on the group's American tour, *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* was typical of their European productions (Shank 14). Its nine segments consisted of exercises and improvisations, described as "a public enactment of ritual games" (*Ibid.* 13). The play was unscripted, with no definitive set; the actors wore street clothes or performed in the nude; there was little characterization; and the actors encouraged spectators to participate in the production. When nothing happens on stage at the beginning of the play, the audience is expected to

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[4] Neff indicates that, although the Living Theatre's assets were seized on account of unpaid taxes and interest, the Becks were never charged with those offenses. The charges evidently stemmed from the Becks' occupation of the theatre building after the Federal agents had placed seals on the doors (8). At that time, Richard Schechner conducted an interview with Judith Malina from the street, through a megaphone, while she was entrenched on the third floor. See Schechner's "Interviews with Judith Malina and Kenneth H. Brown, *TDR* 8, No. 3 (Spring 1964), pp. 207-219.

become provoked and shout insults at the actors. The actors move into the audience, some chanting the words from a U.S. dollar bill, others carrying sticks of incense, which they give to the spectators. (*Ibid.* 14). They also encourage members of the audience to mount the stage with them, and a "Chord" is formed.

The technique of the Chord was an exercise developed by Joseph Chaikin, in which people joining hands, form a circle, swaying, and humming a tone in harmony. It was evolved by Joseph Chaikin primarily as a conditioning exercise for his actors. His student, Lee Worley, introduced it to the Living Theatre where it became a performance technique, expressing a "coming together," or symbolizing an act of communion in human society (Biner 88-91). Another exercise developed by Chaikin was incorporated in the work. Two lines of actors face each other, one actor improvises sound and movement, which is passed down the line, with each actor adding his own interpretation and expanding the action (Shank 14).

A concluding scene of *Mysteries* embodies Artaud's "plague" metaphor. Drawing on his analogy between the effect of theatre on an audience and that of a plague on a community, where "beneath such a scourge, all social forms disintegrate" (Artaud 15), the Becks improvised a scene in which

> the actors, shrouded in dim light, groan and cry out in the grip of the dreadful disease, wrestling death. Long-repressed vices are suddenly awakened in the tormented wretches and they try to possess

> their fellow-victims. . . . But soon, death prevails over them. Then, very slowly, a few survivors rise up; in silence they remove the boots of the dead, line them up in the front of the stage, and heap the corpses into the well-defined shape of a wood-pile. . . . The last image that registers on the eye is the pile of corpses. . . . Whether it symbolizes specific death--the concentration camp or war itself--is of small import. (Biner 91)

Not only is the audience confronted with the fact of their own mortality, but also that of their culture. At the time of presentation in America, it emphasized a reality behind the battlefield statistics. First created in 1964, the play was developed during the four-year self-imposed exile of the Living Theatre in Europe, and was staged across America in the 1968-69 tour.

Also included on the tour program were peformances of *Paradise Now*. Because the players often obtained a positive response to their exhortations to the audience, in which they invited its members to shed their clothes and inhibitions, performances of the work caused much friction between the company and the authorities. The action of the play is structured on the concept of a ladder having eight "rungs". Ascending the ladder leads the group to a state of "permanent revolution." As the action progresses, actors move about in the audience uttering statements such as, "I don't know how to stop the war," "I'm not allowed to take my clothes off," and "You can't live if you don't have money" (Shank 21).

The actors encourage the audience to participate, and further rungs involve actors and audience members sitting

with their sexual organs touching, the shedding of clothes, and the caressing of audience members by the actors. The eighth and final rung concludes with the actors leading the spectators out of the theatre into the street, where they celebrate their freedom from conditioned sexual and social repression. It was evident that, even after a four-year absence from the theatre scene in America, the Living Theatre had not deviated from its anti-establishment stance, its ideas of incorporating spectators into a production, and its determination to use theatre as a tool of social change.

The insistence on the idea of theatre as an agent of social change brought the group into direct confrontation with the theatre establishment in America. On March 21, 1969, Judith Malina and Julian Beck were invited to a meeting hosted by the "Theatre of Ideas," a society of drama theorists and practitioners who met to exchange their views on theatre. With the theme, "Theatre OR Therapy," the evening debate brought together various members of the New York literary scene, including Robert Brustein, Susan Sontag and Norman Mailer. The uninvited actors of the Living Theatre also showed up (Biner 221).

The members of the Living Theatre immediately found themselves at odds with Brustein's aesthetic theory of theatre which allowed that "the theatre can't change the world and doesn't have to try to change it" (*Ibid.* 221). The debate quickly descended into a typical Living Theatre

production as the troupe members engaged the intellectuals and audience members collectively and individually, and confronted aesthetic idealism with the tactics of guerilla theatre. The meeting deteriorated into a general *mêlée*, in which theatre theory and theatre practice met in rowdy confrontation.

The evening gave evidence that there was a distinct polarity of thought in American theatre. Although by 1969 many significant experimental theatre groups had been formed, the Establishment was still well entrenched. While the aims, ideals and examples of the Becks had spawned and encouraged a host of radical theatre companies that tackled social issues, the traditional theatre still abstained from directly confronting such issues as the Vietnam War, which was now at the height of its intensity.[5]

By the early 1960s, the Becks had introduced into the American theatre many of the philosophies and techniques that were to characterize the work of the experimental groups that emerged during the decade. The idea of theatre as a vehicle for social change, the direct confrontation with the audience (and the insistence on its participation), the notion that transformation and revolution should be the goal of a dramatic production, and the Artaudian concept of confronting

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[5] By December 1968, American forces in Vietnam totaled 536,000. Combat fatalities for the year were 14,592. See Appendix A for American troop involvement in Vietnam, Appendix B for demonstrations on the home front.

the audience with terrible truths about themselves and their existence, were to characterize the radical theatre of the sixties.

In 1970 the Living Theatre returned to Europe and announced that it was splitting into several "cells." One located in Paris, another in Berlin. One went to India, and the Becks themselves went to Brazil (Biner 225). Of the separate entities, only the one which included the Becks themselves seems to have survived (Shank 26). The Becks' work was influential for theatre in many ways, not the least of which was the interchange of ideas between theatre artists who worked with them at different times. Joseph Chaikin and Peter and Karen Weiss, for example, were at one time members of the company (Neff 15).

In 1962 the Living Theatre produced Brecht's *Man Is Man* (1926). In its cast, playing Galy Gay, was Joseph Chaikin, who was to become a founding member and the artistic inspiration of the Open Theatre. Established in 1963, the Open Theatre was to have a significant impact on both the experimental and traditional stage; Chaikin himself was to make a significant contribution to the popularization and consolidation of the Off-Off-Broadway genre of theatre.[6] He

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[6] The term "Off-Broadway," according to C.W.E. Bigsby, was "an aesthetic and social rather than a geographical description." It applied to theatres anywhere in New York that had fewer than three hundred seats and was formally recognized in 1949 when Equity members became eligible to appear at non-Equity rates. "Off-Off Broadway" came into being with the opening of "coffee-house" theatres such as Joe

had worked in London as a consultant to Peter Brook's *US* workshop at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and also with Jerzy Grotowski in the same capacity (Pasolli 97). Chaikin had acted in plays of Pirandello and Brecht produced by the Living Theatre, and Pasolli observes that "from the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre inherited a distaste for the established, bourgeois norms, professional and social" (31).

Chaikin's influence extended both to the form and substance of the theatre of the sixties. His workshops provided many emerging actors and playwrights with opportunities to develop their techniques and to practise their craft. The work of the Open Theatre group relied on a collective improvisation of ideas and experiences from which a script might ultimately be developed, and which also reflected Chaikin's philosophy of "an existential bias [taking] behaviour rather than ideas as the source of insight into the world" (Pasolli 36). He incorporated the rigorous exercises developed by Grotowski into the training of his actors and developed his own "psycho-physical" acting technique theory (*Ibid.* 97). Some of the many performers, writers and critics who participated in Chaikin's explorations were Megan Terry, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Richard Gilman, and Sam Shepard.

Cino's Caffe Cino (1958) and Ellen Stuart's Cafe La Mama (1960) (Bigsby 1978: 347-48).

Asked by Richard Schechner in 1964 to define the goals of his group, Chaikin responded "To redefine the limits of the stage experience or unfix them. To find ways of reaching each other and the audience" (Schechner 1964: 191). His philosophy of acting was rooted in the Stanislavsky "Method" school, but he declared that in North America Stanislavsky's theories had become stultified and even moribund. Chaikin interpreted the Method system as an evolving organic process which needed to be constantly tested "against great plays and new ones" (*Ibid.* 193). Chaikin acknowledges his debt to the Becks: his first major acting roles were with the Living Theatre in productions of *Many Loves*, *The Connection*, *In the Jungle of Cities*, and *Man is Man*, the last of which won him a *Village Voice* Obie (Chaikin 1972: 49, 212).

During his initial three-year stint with the Living Theatre, Chaikin became converted to the Becks' idea of a politically-oriented stage. Chaikin notes, "I used to say to them again and again, 'Are you a theatre or are you a political movement? You can't be both'" (Blumenthal 12). Prolonged exposure to the Becks, however, changed his perspective: "I began to feel that the political aspect of the Living Theatre, which had looked so ridiculous, was very necessary" (*Ibid.* 12). When the Becks went overseas to their self-imposed exile, Chaikin opted not to go along, but to develop the Open Theatre, which was still in its formative stage.

Chaikin places production emphasis on the ensemble and its collective presence on the stage. He envisions two major principles operative in ensemble performances: empathy between actors, and the dynamics of rhythm. He notes that actors should not take focus individually, and a point should come where "you no longer know exactly which actor is in support and which actor initiated the action: they are simply together" (*Ibid.* 59). In reference to rhythm, Chaikin notes,

> if you would let the body go with the rhythm, you would discover that there is a pattern and a dynamic and an intensity that would change as experience changed during the day (*Ibid.* 59).

While Chaikin stressed acting methods and actor training exercises, many of his innovations became, as noted in the case of *Mysteries* (the Chord), performance techniques.

For the first seven years of its existence, the Open Theatre "remained a loose conglomerate of more or less discrete projects" (*Ibid.* 15). It was primarily a testing ground for exercises and improvisations, and its only commercially-oriented works of the period were Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* (1966), and Jean Claude van Italie's *America Hurrah* (1967) of the 1966-1967 theatre season.

The playscript for *Viet Rock* originated in Megan Terry's workshop where the members improvised short skits from material that "bombarded us every day from television and newspapers" (Terry 1967: 21). The play opened at Cafe La Mama on Armed Forces Day (May 21) 1966. It featured the acting

technique of "transformation," a dramatic representation in which the actors, concentrating on

> a theatre of abstraction and illusion, delineated consecutively and concurrently, concrete objects, stereotyped individuals, human relationships, impartial observers and abstract actions. (Pasolli 54)

A basic assumption of this technique is that the actor and plot will rely less on the definition of character and situation, and will emphasize instead impressions and experiential sensations. Terry explains that, outraged by the stereotyped casting of actors that was part of her introduction to theatre, she "set to work to write plays so it wouldn't matter what type you were as long as you had talent to play the part" (17).

The concept of the portrayal of multiple entities by an actor formed the basis of experimentation in her Open Theatre workshop, and this style of acting eventually materialized in her later full-length plays, notably *Viet Rock*, where transformation provided the basic performance technique. Referring to Terry's two earlier plays, *Calm Down Mother* (1965) and *Keep Tightly Closed in a Cool Dry Place* (1965), Pasolli notes that in the former,

> the characters and abstract characterizations change from scene to scene, but the same three actresses use the transformation device to do them all. As the characters change, so do the relationships between them, the locales, the dramatic actions, the tone of the scenes, the moods. (Pasolli 65)

The relationships between the individuals themselves, and between them and their environment, provide the informing reality in this work. In essence, Terry creates a series of micro-environments on the stage.

Of *Keep Tightly Closed*, Terry notes that she took the idea for the play from a news item about three men who had been convicted of a murder and assigned to the same cell. The men devise various ways to manipulate one another by trying to fix the blame on a single individual, and

> at the end of the play it is clear that the three men will stay together in a prison defined as much by their characters and relationships as by the geographical situation. (Pasolli 66)

In a situation similar to that of *The Brig*, the men are in a psychological prison that has been effectively created by the cultural context in which they find themselves conditioned and programmed.

Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* was the first full-length play to be presented by the Open Theatre. The work was structured by a series of episodes, or "action blocks" (Schechner 1967: 11), which developed variations on a wide variety of war themes. According to Pasolli,

> the troupe looked into the impulse of the individual toward aggression, hostility, and destructiveness, and tried to understand the fears and insecurity which trigger it. Gradually a pastiche of patriotic skits, scenes of warfare, and dramatic comments emerged. (75)

Although the play would seem to confront the fact of Vietnam directly, its anti-war message is abstracted by the

transformation technique which demands that character be subsumed to experience--a natural extension of the ensemble method. In addition, the theatrics of the piece tended to blunt its critical edge.

In transformation, reality is interpreted in terms of relationships with a group--the cultural condition--rather than by the viewpoint of either an individual or an objective perspective. Transformation thus functions as a positive process of acculturation, since it draws the actors and audience together in a communal celebration of togetherness. This sensation is enhanced by a "celebration of presence," as the actors, at the conclusion of the play, circulate through the audience in an act of blessing, touching people on their hands, heads, faces and hair (Shank 39). The dramatic effect is thus one of reinforcement for the individual in terms of performer-audience relationship, rather than that of allowing the audience the privacy afforded by the fourth wall.

The transformation technique of acting denies many of the more effective means of social criticism generated through dialectical argument. In formulating its particular social message, however, the play makes use of anti-illusionistic devices designed to constantly remind the audience that they are watching a contrived performance. As Pasolli notes,

> In plays like *Viet Rock*, character is seen to be dispensable, for the actors put it on and off many times in the course of the play. *Viet Rock* is done without sets, costumes, or props, except for some

> benches where the actors sit when they are not involved in a particular scene. We look at them as actors, then as actors-as-characters, then as actors again. The play is more theatrical than dramatic. (76)

A good deal of the criticism surrounding *Viet Rock* has been offered by those who deem it to be inadequate as a critical social statement because of its distracting performance techniques and its general lack of focus on specific political issues. Yet, born in the cultural matrix of the sixties, it exposes many of the divisive issues that assailed the society of the time.

The opening scene consists initially of actors entering the playing area, and, through sound and gesture, creating impressions drawn from subliminal, cultural, historical and individual realms of consciousness. The actors evoke images of flower petals blown by the wind and caressed by the sun, and then, in rapid succession, create images of childhood experience, war, and motherhood, all the time increasing their sounds and actions until a climactic "explosion" leaves the players scattered about the performing area (Terry 1967: 30). The initial movement of the work invokes archetypal images and thus implies a transcendance of particular times and places.

A series of transformation scenes follow, where actors represent characters of either sex, roles of interrogators, witnesses, soldiers, mothers, and camp followers. Dialogue is

presented in lyrical form as recruits undergo a physical examination as part of their induction into the military:

> DOCTORS (*Sing*): Jump cough bend.
> MEN (*Sing*): Stick him in the arm.
> Stick him in the end. (*Repeat*)
> WOMEN (*Sing*): U.S. Government Inspected Male!
> (*Ibid.* 32)

The mothers of the inductees wait outside the examination room, and the image of soldiers as "meat" is reinforced when one mother, uncertain about army nomenclature, observes, "My Ralphie's A-1, er I-A" (*Ibid.* 34).

In a swirl of motion, the actors and the scene are metamorphosed into a representation of a Drill Instructor Sergeant and soldiers undergoing the routines of basic training. Into this setting come a group of war protestors, who accost the Sergeant:

> HEAD PROTESTOR: Sir, I hereby inform you that you are hereby under citizen's arrest by a citizen of these United States. You are charged, Sir, with genocide, criminal conspiracy, and carrying on a full-scale war under the guise of an expeditionary force. (*Ibid.* 43)

In response to the Sergeant's "Take that pink mitt off this government property," the demonstrators chant repeatedly, "Stop the war in Vietnam. Make love, not war, Bring our boys back home" (*Ibid.* 44). The Sergeant responds,

> The army is the instrument of the will of the people. That's "consensus" to you mushheads. Go back to U.S. History 101. Have you forgotten the Indian Wars already? What country are you really from? (*Ibid.* 45)

The demonstrators and the soldiers join in a shouting argument, each group bombarding the other with platitudes and slogans appropriate to their points of view.

As the two sides become subdued, the Sergeant steps forward and addresses the audience. His extended speech is a conglomerate of specious arguments and jingoistic rhetoric; however, he makes some incidental points which lend a degree of credibility to his harangue. Mixed in with emotionally charged statements such as "These punks, these commies, these bleeding hearts. They're so dumb, they're tools of the pinko reds," and "You have to fight now to prevent the big one," are some very pragmatic observations:

> Do you see them throwing their bodies down in front of the Detroit assembly lines? That's where some bellyaching is needed. I'd help them protest the frigging motorcars. . . . . More bastards bleed their guts out and grind their bones on the cement of our highways than ever lose a piece of snot in Vietnam. (*Ibid.* 47-48)[7]

He adds: "Let me ask you where we'd be if we hadn't fought in World War I, World War II, and Korea?" (*Ibid.* 48). The Sergeant's rhetorical question elicits no answer. He implies that an integral part of American values derives from the righteous application of force of arms. Inherent in his speech are many of the ambivalent attitudes of the society which were prevalent at the time that the play was written.

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[7] The Sergeant makes a telling point: deaths on U.S. highways in the eleven-year period of the war were ten times the battle fatalities of Vietnam. See *Historical Statistics of the United States.* Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Statistics.

Following the Sergeant's address, the women actors assume the shape of an airplane and transport the soldiers to Vietnam; but, "*the plane has overshot the Vietnam border, and deposited our boys in Shangri-La*" (*Ibid.* 51). One soldier is transformed into the High Lama, and invites the men to "feel free to rest in the arms of our mother bodies and trace your names on the breasts of time"; however, the Sergeant appears to reclaim his men: "Let go a' the tits of human kindness and fall in!" (*Ibid.* 53).

The play then turns to a parody of a wide range of attitudes and opinions concerning the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In the form of a Senate enquiry various "witnesses" in the persons of the Madonna, Cassius Clay, General Curtis LeMay, Eleanor Roosevelt and Jesus Christ come forward to testify. Schechner notes that the American way of "investigation," and the idea of "consensus of opinion" are put to a test in which "neither right nor left is spared" (1967: 12). The opinions given represent a wide spectrum of thought, ranging from absurdities of the political extremes embodied in generally meaningless rhetoric to theories of abstract and occult philosophy.

Some witnesses are treated with reverence, while some are silenced. Witness Number Seven only manages to air some of his views before he is forcibly subdued:

> The war ain't there, it's right here, here and now in this obscene, cancerous glare of the TV lights and tranquilized television dinners. Television,

> the tremendous masterbator [sic] of the masses. (*Ibid.* 62)

The last witness, Number Twelve, is an unabashed radical patriot who succeeds in rousing the crowd of actors to a religious fervour, and the cast exits singing "America the Beautiful" to close the first act (*Ibid.* 68).

The second act is set entirely in Vietnam. Scenes depicted include a battle in which a GI dies, a bar scene which culminates in everyone being destroyed in a great explosion, and a Vietnamese village, where Viet Cong execute prisoners. A counterpart of the Sergeant's address in Act I is given by "Hanoi Hanna" in the second act. In a manner similar to that of the Sergeant's, her address is also couched in the rhetoric of her social and political orientation; but she too, like the Sergeant, manages to incorporate some astute observations into her remarks.

Hanoi Hanna initially attacks the GIs in sexual terms, noting how other men are now making love in the back seats of cars to the GIs' girlfriends. She then moves to a description of how the Vietnam conflict is breaking down American society:

> You must understand that everything is divisible--especially the colossus of the United States, especially the immoral giant of U.S. imperialism. Everything is divisible, my tiny GI. Your head may be divided from your trunk, your arm from your shoulder, your heart from your head, your sex from your soul. (*Ibid.* 91-92)

Both the situation at home and the war experience have created stresses in American society that have resulted in

the disintegration of the social order. Shortly after Hanoi Hanna's speech, a GI observes, "Next battle, I'm gonna get up on the high ground and put a bullet through the back of the Sergeant's neck" (*Ibid.* 95).

The scene shifts to "Saigon Sally's" bar where GIs are dancing with Vietnamese girls. The GIs provoke the Sergeant's anger as they shout invectives at President Johnson: "Barbecue today with L.B.J."; "I got syphillis [sic] today, courtesy L.B.J."; "Moral decay with L.B.J." (*Ibid.* 99). The atmosphere becomes "phantasmagoric," as the actors begin to enact the Sergeant's nightmares:

> *They alternately accuse and attack him with images that have occurred throughout the play--drill, salutes, pushups, bayonetting, the Madonna, Jerry's death, Vietnamese mothers.* (*Ibid.* 100)

The scene culminates in a huge explosion, in which everyone is killed.

After a period of time, from the pile of bodies on the stage, come sounds which become disjointed terms and phrases that are linguistic distillations of a fractured cultural consciousness. The words uttered in the play by the many characters and the points of view that they represent are jumbled together in a chaotic pile of random, isolated impressions which reflect the anxieties engendered by the War. One of the recurring themes of this collage of images is the physical, spiritual and psychological *cost* of the conflict:

> Doves. War. Take away. Treasure lost. Lost our treasure. Lose our treasure. Spend our natural resources. Cannon fodder. The cost is high. And our boys our dollars. . . . Hear my prayer dearest God. I will give all my dollars to bring my boy back home again. . . . I fought for you upstairs. Loony tunes. Hi ya doc! Humphrey's voyage of reassurance. But Gandhi's dead. (*Ibid.* 102-103)

The scene and the play ends with the actors inventing variations with the word "who": "Who needs this. Who needs war. Who needs this shit. I'm in the shit. Who needs me. Who. Who needs. Who" (*Ibid.* 104). The cast then become angels, who move out into the audience to touch the spectators' faces, hands, hair and heads.

Viet Rock was praised for its production values and for its creation of a theatre experience, but was condemned as an anti-war piece which failed to make its point. Richard Schechner suggests that "for most of the play, Miss Terry represents and disparages *all* points of view" (Schechner 1966: 17). Robert Asahina noted that the intellectual thrust of *Viet Rock* was itself unclear, and that the work was "not pragmatic or dogmatic," but

> randomly disparaged militarism, pacifism, nationalism, patriotism, and the Left and the Right, as well as the Center (and even the North Vietnamese, in a surprising deviation from orthodox opinion). (32)

Asahina adds, however, that *Viet Rock* "was about the only avant garde production in which the [Vietnam] issue was even raised" (32).

Terry herself makes no greater claims for the piece than

that it had simply grown "out of improvisation, combined with the exploration of acting techniques," and that,

> to deal with the bewilderment, shame and confusion created by this war, I felt we had to explore our negative feelings, drives, and fantasies. I worked to expose these qualities, then formalized them. Also, we explored loss, grief, and regret. We tried to get at the essence of violence. (1966: 21)

The actors strove to express emotions rooted in anxiety, and to interpret their sensations through a communal sharing of experience. Hence, rather than assuming the posture of an anti-social or anti-political diatribe, the work attempts to formalize those sensations within a theatrical context. If its songs, dances and surrealistic transformations blurred its political message, it nevertheless constitutes a manifestation of the anxieties and concerns of a segment of the theatre community. As such, it is a transition piece filling in the lacunae between street protest productions and those works designed for the legitimate theatre.

A work that followed on the heels of *Viet Rock*, and owed much to it both in thematic stance and production techniques, was Gerome Ragni's and James Rado's *Hair* (1967). Produced by Joseph Papp and directed by Gerald Freedman, *Hair* was a New York Shakespeare Festival production which opened at the Public Theatre Off-Broadway in New York on October 7, 1967, for a limited engagement of eight weeks. This "tribal love-rock musical" was an instant success, presenting scintillating entertainment in a contemporary mode. The work was moved to another theatre, subsequently revised by the

authors, and re-presented on Broadway from 1968-70; it had some 1750 performances (Atkinson and Hirschfeld 290). It was another transition piece, moving from the realm of experimental theatre to a full-fledged Broadway production. Exemplifying the rock and "Hippie" culture of the sixties, it subsequently achieved international success.

While the appealing songs and controversial subject matter tend to steal the focus of the work, it does have a basic story-line, derived from anxiety about Vietnam, which provides a linking thread between the revue-like scenes. Claude, a drop-out from middle-class society, has received his draft notice. The action of the play develops around his impressions leading up to the morning, when, at 8:30, he departs on a train for induction into military service. Claude's agony, however, is buried within a voyeuristic insight into the life-style and philosophy of the hippie movement.[8] The appeal of nudity on the stage, the entrancing songs ("The Age of Aquarius"), and the blasting rock music that often caused hearing impairment among the performers (*Ibid* 290), represented an entirely new direction for the American musical. The opening production was coolly received by Robert Brustein, but he grudgingly admitted that "It will be very hard in the future to compose a Richard Rodgers-type

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[8] Reviewing the show two weeks after its première, Clive Barnes commented on the predominantly middle-aged audience. See *New York Times* review, October 30, 1967.

work with quite the same confidence and equanimity as before" (63).

Yet, the thematic thrust of the work is quite sound. Although tainted with the negative aspects of the "hippy" movement, such as the drug culture, free love, and the anti-patriotic sentiments that some derided as symptomatic of a "mindless revolution" (Atkinson and Hirschfeld 290), the work echoes many of the themes to be found in the contemporary works of Lowell, Kopit, and Feiffer. While presented in the context of the hippie rebellion against organized society--a rebellion typified by "snappy rejoinders to serious statements" (*Ibid.* 290)--the work treats serious themes, such as the conditioning influences of society and the mythic background that forms part of the cultural consciousness.

An often-repeated emphasis of the work is that the performers represent an independent and homogeneous ethnic group which, at times, is threatened by an external culture--the conservative Establishment. Preliminary stage directions stress "*The Kids should be approached, directorially, as a 'tribe'*" (*Hair* viii). The cast engages in "group-tribal activity," and must defend itself against "puppet policeman," who are, indeed, represented by huge puppets that are ten feet tall (*Ibid.* viii). Other threats to the society are depicted through wall projections of "FBI, CIA, dark mysterious men, and Mom and Dad" (*Ibid.* x). The threats to the group are countered and diffused by communal expression,

the chanting, song, and dance that express the sustaining mythology of the tribal culture.

Following the opening hymn, a communal expression of faith in a cosmic order ("The Age of Aquarius"), individuals define themselves within the larger context of the tribe. Claude gives his name and numerical identity, "My name is Claude Hooper Balowski. I'm human being number 1005963297 dash J, Area Code 609," but, launching into song, he adds, "I BELIEVE IN GAWD / AND I BELIEVE THAT GAWD BELIEVES IN CLAUDE" (*Ibid.* 4). Berger, his androgynous companion, joins in with, "MANHATTAN BEGGAR / MANHATTAN GYPSY / MANHATTAN INDIAN / I'M A WHOLE NEW THING" (*Ibid.* 5). Hud, a Black, adds, "I'M A COLORED SPADE / A PICKANINNY / JUNGLE BUNNY JIGABOO / NIGGER COON AND COTTON PICKER / . . . UNCLE TOM AND AUNT JEMIMA" (*Ibid.* 8). The pejorative nomenclature, however, merely serves to identify themselves to the audience in terms that the audience can understand; the members of the tribe are expressing their own cultural solidarity through song and ritual which have a meaning particular to their own ears.

In an exorcism of its cultural ghosts, the tribe undertakes a psychedelic trip back through its popular mythology. Claude, Berger, Hud, and another tribe member, Woof, invoke the ancestral gods:

> *Claude, Berger, Woof, Hud join hands and start "humming" a chord. The rhythm from the band under this. The chord grows in volume, moves up in pitch, increases in intensity; The Tribe gradually joins in; the rhythm from the band becomes more rapid and driving; the crescendo reaches its peak as the*

> *"Culpepper Minute Men" flag lowers rapidly behind the four guys. (Ibid.* 12)

The Tribe searches its collective memory and produces the emblem that marks the genesis of their culture:

> *The flag: it is large, covers practically all the stage. It is a replica of an authentic American flag dating from approximately 1776. On it is a huge rattlesnake, coiled, ready to strike. Above it reads: "The Culpepper Minute Men." In the middle reads: "Liberty or Death." At the bottom reads: "Don't Tread on Me."* (*Ibid.* 12)

The hippies, in essence, are reading new meanings into old symbols. The "Don't Tread on Me" revolutionary flag is appropriated to represent the cause of the new freedom.

The Tribe commences singing the "Ain't Got No" song that demonstrates their cultural poverty: among other things they "ain't got" are home[s], shoes, money, class, pot, faith, mother, culture, and mind (*Ibid.* 12-13). Into this cultural vacuum comes Mom, who along with Dad, represents the older generation which suppresses, with its traditional values and expectations, The Kids's new-found physical and spiritual freedom. Mom admonishes Claude to get a job, and also to "take off my beads" (*Ibid.* 19). The humour implicit in the beads proceeds from their selective use as cultural signifiers. In the hippie culture, the beads are a badge for all the movement represents; however, the same beads worn by the mother, reflect the conservative nature of the older generation.

The subsequent scenes and songs of *Hair* develop the differences of perspective between the two generations. The

problems that adolescents have with the law, the government and educational authorities, are contrasted with their easy solutions to questions of drugs, homosexuality, free love, and perpetual war. Interspersed with these scenes are Claude's introspective moments that reflect his concern with going to Vietnam, where, it is agreed, he will surely die. Claude perceives himself as a classical tragic hero: his lament, "I'm not going to die for my country, I'd rather live and rot in jail a few years," is followed by "Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt" (*Ibid.* 86-7). Claude's heroic struggle, however, will emerge from the tensions generated between the ideas instilled in him in his previous cultural conditioning and the urgings of his fellows to accept the principles of free love, to appreciate drugs, and to disavow military service and the war.[9]

Claude's difficulty in accepting the standards of the new culture is exposed as the group gather to burn their draft cards. Under the Rattlesnake banner, a tribal maiden, Sheila holds aloft a flaming Maxwell House coffee can, and strikes a pose imitating that of the Statue of Liberty.

> *One by one, each guy comes forward, lighting their draft cards, dropping the remains into the can. As each card is burned, The Tribe cheers. Sheila gives each guy a daffodil in exchange. Claude is last; he approaches the can, hesitates a moment, holds his card above it, it catches fire and he pulls it back quickly, extinguishing the flame.* (*Ibid.* 117)

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[9] The struggle between the two cultures is similar in many ways to that presented in David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, discussed in Chapter IV.

Claude is unable to take part in the ritual, and his action isolates him from the group. His following song, "Where do *I* go," marks a break from the group song, "*We* love," that immediately preceded the ritual.

The social issues raised by the Vietnam war resurface periodically throughout the play to underscore the divisive effect the conflict is having on the society. Hud observes, "The draft is white people sending black people to make war on yellow people to defend the land they stole from the red people" (*Ibid.* 74). Dad comments,

> We're fighting a war. Use atomic weapons and win it for Crissake. Get China now, before they get us, and have faith in God and Nation and the Military-Industrial Complex. (*Ibid.* 110)

Mom observes, "I say, support our fighting, short-haired men in Vietnam" (*Ibid.* 114). Hair assumes the status of a Swiftian cultural signifier: friend or foe can be identified by its length: the short-hairs are on the side of the conservative war mongers; the long-hairs represent the transcendentalists.

Claude's cultural epiphany occurs when the tribe distribute sticks of marijuana, singing "OUR EYES ARE OPEN / OUR EYES ARE OPEN / WIDE WIDE WIDE" (*Ibid.* 146). The stage directions note, "*Lights down on stage during last part of this song. Spot on Claude. The following is his trip*" (*Ibid.* 146). Claude's trip takes him backward into the cultural memory of his race. Scenes and figures from the American past appear. The first of the chronologically disjointed sequence

of historical events depicts paratroopers dropping from the skies circa Korea or WW II; this is followed by an appearance of George Washington, who exhorts his men, "Kill the Redcoats. Into the Delaware. Grab your muskets. For God, for Country, for Freedom, for Liberation, for Mother" (*Ibid.* 148).

The stage action continues, plotting American history through the violent events that forged the country into a nation. Juxtaposed, and often in montage, the scenes reflect the random impressions of a fragmenting mind. Washington flees as Indians appear and attack the Revolutionaries. Crazy Horse, Cochise, Geronimo, Sitting Bull, and even the cartoon character, Little Beaver, appear, shrieking, "White Man Die," and massacre Washington's men (*Ibid.* 149). General Grant appears and calls roll: Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, Calvin Coolidge, Clark Gable, Scarlet O'Hara, Teddy Roosevelt, Colonel Custer respond. Spanning two hundred years of internecine warfare, the figures represent a mixture of fictive and non-fictive elements that formed the historical background and the cultural mythology of the American nation.

The final sequence represents the conflicts that are creating stress in contemporary America. Le Roi Jones and a band of Negroes appear under a banner proclaiming "Black Power," and attack and kill the white soldiers. The stage immediately becomes a battlefield where Buddhist monks are strangled by Catholic nuns, who, in turn, succumb to laser-

firing astronauts. The astronauts are dispatched by machine-gun wielding Chinese, who are subsequently tomahawked by American Indians. Two Green Berets arrive to shoot the Indians, and The Tribe, prompted by the carnage, chants words evoking images of Vietnam battlefields (*Ibid.* 153-156).

Upon recovering from his "trip," Claude becomes aware of his alienation from the hippie community. He recalls Hamlet's words of distraction:

> I have of late--but wherefore I know not--lost all of my mirth . . . this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. (*Ibid.* 159) [*Hamlet* II,ii,295-303]

Claude is aware that "the time is out of joint" (*Hamlet* I,v,196), and that he is caught up in an inexorable set of circumstances over which he has little control. His isolation from The Tribe is underscored as his friend, Berger, informs him, "I feel lonely already, Claude"; Claude responds, "Start facing reality . . . sometimes I think I'm going crazy . . . out of mind" (*Ibid.* 160) [ellipses in text]. The mental stresses incurred from being exposed simultaneously to the conditioning of two distinct cultures, each with its conflicting values and perceptions, destroys Claude's equanimity.

The conditioning of the Establishment culture proves to be the stronger. Berger notes, "They've sucked you in"; Claude responds, "They've fucked me" (*Ibid.* 163). On the

morning of Claude's departure, Mom and Dad produce a representation of their son, a suit and mask on a frame. Mom kisses the mask and admonishes it to write a letter tonight; Dad expresses his pride in his son, and shakes the empty sleeve. Transformed into a sergeant, Dad reads off a list of troops, not by their names, but by the ethnic or tribal origins that comprise the American "melting pot": Irish, Italian, Jew, German, Polish, etc. Claude presents his shorn hair to Berger, observing, "Maybe I can have a wig made when I get out" (*Ibid.* 200). The Tribe's concluding song, "Sentimental Ending," envisions Claude's demise in Vietnam.

In treating its serious themes, the consequences of cultural conditioning and the fragmentation of society under stress, *Hair* exposes the plight of the individual caught in a psychological trap. Claude resists the process of becoming acculturated into the hippie society, and experiences culture shock as the perceptions resulting from his early conditioning conflict with the attractions of the hippie lifestyle. Claude's equanimity fractures in much the same way as the stresses incurred by Vietnam have a divisive effect on the larger society. The psychological stresses incurred from being simultaneously exposed to the conditioning of two distinct cultures, each with its conflicting values and perceptions, result in alienation from them both.

Hair also treats the problems of differences in perspective between the two generations. The hippie culture

expresses its sustaining mythology in the chanting, song, dance and transcendental experiences which counterpoint the hackneyed axioms, predictable behaviour, and the stultified world of Mom and Dad. The older generation represents a culture which suppresses The Kids's physical and spiritual freedom with its traditional values and expectations. In exorcising its cultural ghosts, The Tribe searches its collective memory and instills new meanings into its symbols. The cultural signifiers of the Rattlesnake flag, beads, and hair are given new values in the fledgling culture; while both cultures have a common ancestry, they are as distinct from each other as geographically distanced ones might be. Discrepancies in definitive values, acceptable modes of behaviour, and even physical characteristics mark the respective members of the tribes.

Hair was a theatrical phenomenon, since it made the transition from an Off-Broadway production that bore many marks of the experimental theatre, such as Chaikin's "chord" and Terry's transformational acting techniques, to a fully orchestrated production on Broadway. Even so, its basic anti-war message was muted by the novelty of nudity on the stage and the voyeuristic insights into what the Establishment willingly conceded was a sub-culture with values antithetical to those of the larger society. Its appealing songs tended to obscure the social tensions that were beginning to rend the society apart.

If the commercial stage resisted producing plays about the Vietnam War, the radical groups were quickly drawn to such motifs, as the awareness of the war and its ramifications for American society and culture grew in the public consciousness. The 1960s saw a proliferation of such companies motivated by a revolutionary fervour which largely defined the artistic development of the decade. Many groups were founded before Vietnam became a significant factor in everyday life, and with the growing awareness of the war, channeled their efforts towards exposing the cultural complacency of the general public.

The roots of the San Francisco Mime Troop can be traced back to 1959 when R. G. Davis developed an ensemble from the San Francisco Actor's Workshop. The group was creating "an open-stage form where social subjects can be bounced around and not reduced to 'adjustment psychology'" (Sainer 29). The group relied heavily on a *commedia dell' arte* format, as they rewrote classical comedies in order to give them a contemporary significance. The political orientation, according to Joan Holden, was initially anarchistic, but later revealed Marxist leanings: "We thought of ourselves as outside agitators; outside the establishment, obviously, but also--in our roles as artists--outside the movement" (Sainer 29). Given the provocative and controversial nature of their approach, it was inevitable that the companies felt a need to take performances to an audience rather to rely on the

convention of having patrons come to the theatre. As a consequence, the Mime Troupe realized, as did other radical theatre groups, the necessity of moving outside the theatre building and taking its message to the people by performing works in the parks and on the boulevards of San Francisco.[10]

The form and style of these outdoor theatricals were shaped to a considerable degree by an underlying ideology that provided their motivation and impulse. In the strong reaction to the values and attitudes of the establishment, the Mime Troupe not only rejected the traditional playing space, but also spurned the traditional theatre patrons who were regarded as supporters of conservative social institutions. In his introduction to R.G. Davis' book on the Troupe, Robert Scheer notes that it was constantly preoccupied with the fear of "selling out" to the establishment, and that "there was almost a religious reverence about the company's search for a process that would free it from the powers that be" (9-10). Davis recounts that, in searching for relevant material on civil rights, he told his company, "We are going to unearth the garbage of our culture and sort it out" (Davis 49). As an expression of such attitudes, the resultant theatrical product tended to become characterized by inherent political and social polemics, and

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[10] This is not denying the economic factor. The Living Theatre exposed the problems inherent in funding productions that were antithetical to the interests of the Establishment.

the productions often displayed the characteristics of "agit-prop" theatre.[11]

The distinct approach of the Mime Troupe in its early years under Davis' tutelage was its focus on works performed in a style appealing to the "popular taste," or "common man." In contrast to the psychological realism of the conventional stage, and the audience confrontation techniques of the Living Theatre, the SFMT used techniques from carnivals, music halls, minstrel shows, and other popular forms of sidewalk entertainment.

In keeping with its title, the company initially concentrated on creating works in the tradition of the popular mimes of the twentieth century. The company

> performed silent mime in the common man tradition of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton--not that of the more aesthete Marcel Marceau. They focused on the use of body movement to convey action, character, and attitude, thus already forming the basis for a unique style. (Shank 60)

Very quickly, the group began adding addresses and dialogue to their presentations, and their performance techniques became allied with those of the *commedia dell' arte*, with stock characters, masks, costumes and situations. The traditional methods of staging, however, were given a contemporary cast with the introduction of contemporary references at strategic points. Thus, the group managed to

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[11] Derived from the Russian *agitatsionnaya propaganda*, the form derives from early Soviet productions of skits explaining the principles for which the troops were fighting during the Russian Civil War.

incorporate the visual aesthetics and wide appeal of traditional popular theatre into their statements of social protest.

The SFMT had a stormy history of confrontation with the law as a natural consequence of its provocative subject matter and "anti-bourgeois" stance which offended the sensibilities of the Establishment. In August 1965, the attempted production of *A Minstrel Show* (sub-titled *Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel*) in Lafayette Park, San Francisco, resulted in the arrest of several members of the Troupe. The work dealt with race relationships and featured a mimed seduction scene between a black "stud" and a white "chick" (Davis 60-61). At Christmas, 1966, the group made a dramatic statement in front of the Bank of America against the materialist nature of American society, and again arrests were made. Subsequently, the group went on tour and members were arrested in Denver, Colorado (September 1966) and Calgary, Alberta (March 1967) (Davis 73-5).

With the growing awareness of the atrocities associated with the Vietnam War, the group turned its energies to the performance of anti-war plays. In December, 1967, it performed an adaptation by Joan Holden of Carlo Goldoni's *L'Amant militaire* in New York. The revised work played on the theme that American troops in Vietnam were in a situation similar to Goldoni's Spaniards in Italy. The General is determined "to pursue peace with every available weapon," and

Arlecchino disguises himself as a woman in order to avoid military service (Shank 60). In the final scene, the *soubrette*, dressed like the Pope, appears above the stage and ends the war; she then tells the audience, "if you want something done my friends--do it yourselves" (*Ibid.* 60). A reviewer of the performance described it as "anti-patriotic," "anti-militarist," and "pacifist" (Davis 93), and thus succinctly brought together the terms that would reflect the fragmentation of American society during the Vietnam War: to be pacifist, or against the War, for whatever reason, was to be un-American.[12]

It is worthwhile to note that even a radical group like the SFMT was at that time inclined to approach the dramatic portrayal of American involvement in Vietnam through the analogy of the Goldoni play. Shortly before the SFMT production in New York, Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven* had had its first production at Yale, and it is evident that plays written for the contemporary theatre were still dealing with the War through works which portrayed analogous situations and abstracted ideas. An examination of the underlying reasons for such an approach will be undertaken in Chapter III.

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[12] These terms and ideas are, of course, remnants of the McCarthyism of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The House on Un-American Activities was not disbanded until the early seventies.

Beset by internal idealistic conflicts, the SFMT itself fragmented as the politics of individual members of the group became points of contention. In the period between 1962 and 1969, the company moved from a general anarchist attitude to a Marxist philosophy (Sainer 29), this approach being much more efficacious and realistic in terms of achieving goals of social revolution. The director, Ronnie Davis, wanted to slant the productions of the group toward "young middle-class intellectuals," while other members of the group wished to court the working classes (Shank 61-62). Davis, and others of his ideological persuasion, left the Troupe, and those who remained turned from producing works of intellectual commentary on the contemporary situation to more strident demonstrations of political activism.

Another theatrical group that achieved a certain notoriety in the Vietnam years was The Bread and Puppet Theatre, whose founder was Peter Schumann. Schumann had directed experimental theatre in Germany, and remained in the United States after a visit in 1961, because of the receptive attitudes and freedom of artistic expression that he found there (Bolton 13). Sainer notes that the people who originally came together in the Bread and Puppet Theatre under the direction of Schumann were essentially non-theatrical people--students and professionals from diverse disciplines (22).

Schumann viewed his concept of theatre as distinct from those of other contemporary radical and experimental groups. He did not believe in making audience confrontation a primary concern of his productions, noting,

> You can't simply try to shock an audience. That will only disgust them. And it is cheap. If you reach out to an audience with want you want to get from them you're hung up [*sic*]. (1968: 64)

He also reacted against what he called the "professional protest theatre," and wanted audience reaction to his works expressed in the form of spontaneous outbursts of emotion rather than responses preconditioned by aggressive presentation. He comments, "I don't think our business is to protest but to say what needs to be said or what feels good to say" (*Ibid.* 66). He disliked companies which specialized in political protest, since, "a person protests because he feels bad about something and he gets up and shouts. When it becomes a profession it feels wrong" (*Ibid.* 66).

The Bread and Puppet Theatre was so named, according to Schumann, because the group believed that "theatre should be as basic as bread" (*Ibid.* 64). Bread was distributed and eaten at performances as a symbolic communal sharing of emotion and experience. Schumann envisaged his theatre as a vehicle for general social protest, "a social action theatre," but he observed that the only specific ideological orientation that the group exhibited was its later anti-war posture (*Ibid.* 64). In outlining his group's manifesto, he notes,

> We want to invoke a direct emotional response to what is happening--like protesting the War or urban society, or telling kids about violence in our children's plays. We have a show--*The Dead Man Rises*--which doesn't prescribe a thing. It's much stronger than protest. It's a clear expression of outrage and disgust with city life. (*Ibid.* 69)

In its early years the critical works of the group were primarily directed against shortcomings in the immediate social and physical environment. Motivated by its avowed purpose of social protest, the group's early productions dealt with the evils of materialism and urban pollution; however, as the intellectual and artistic communities--and the communications media--became increasingly preoccupied with the issues that the war raised, the productions of the ensemble increasingly became more oriented towards anti-war demonstrations.

The first New York production was a dance piece, *Totentanz (1962)*, a ritualistic "Dance of Death" and resurrection. The play is a celebration of life and death as the individual becomes immortalized through his participation in the ongoing experience of the race. Within the dance, people die and are reborn, as

> we see the death of man and simultaneously see one man, each his own man, from death to resurrection, the resurrection of all to that of each. In some way the death embodies us so that we begin to partake of it, and also the resurrection. (Sainer 46)

The dance is performed by young men and women, and some children. All are dressed in black garments, and to a

rhythmic beat, they circle and leap about until they fall, symbolically dead. After death, they rise to die again, creating a cycle which repeats itself with harmonic regularity.

In 1963 Schumann was inspired by a presentation of Sicilian puppetry theatre at a festival in New York. Impressed by its earthiness and sincerity, he found it more vital and relevant than contemporary displays which were "plush and latex and Walt Disney-y, and basically about funny and bunny-rabbits" (Schumann 1972: 261). The presentation led him to experiment with larger puppets, with which the dynamics of expression and movement could be better illustrated. The medium was attractive because "the artists invented a way of telling, a way of translating and creating a reality, that first of all defines reality" (Schumann 1968: 62).

Schumann saw something archetypal in the presentation and manipulation of stylized figures.

> Masks are older than actors, faces of wood and stone are older than mimes. Masked dancers and the effigies they carry are certainly at the origin of theatre. (1972: 260)

While Schumann saw something more essential and definitive in the presentation of life on the stage through puppets and masks, as opposed to imitations by actors, he also observed, "when you walk a white elephant through the streets of New York it has a different effect than when you drive a taxi" (1968: 67). Sainer notes that the performances of the group

were characterized by "the use of massive puppets, raw humour, and 'archetypal' violence" (23).

The group's production of *Fire* (1965) in 1965 was a work inspired by the self-immolation of three Americans (Alice Henry, Roger LaPorte and Norman Morrison) in imitation of the suicides committed by Buddhist bonzes in Vietnam. A woman tears a length of red tape into small strips and attaches them to herself. When she is covered with the paper "fire," she collapses. A bell rings to signify the end of the act. Depicting a violent act of self-sacrifice, the work underscores the relevance of such desperate acts as those of the bonzes and the students.

The most frequently staged production of The Bread and Puppet Theatre in 1968, according to Schumann, was *A Man Says Goodbye to His Mother* (1968), an anti-war piece set in an Asian village. The action is detailed by a narrator who tells the story of a young man who leaves his village and travels to a distant land where he engages an enemy in battle. He bids goodbye to his mother who subsequently assumes the role of a woman of the embattled land. There, her infant child is slain by a soldier who poisons the grass and burns villages. The woman stabs the soldier who had previously been represented as her son. The body is carried off by the narrator and the woman, both wearing death masks.

The play has implications that transcend specific references to Vietnam. Schumann, like the Becks, was a

pacifist, and the play presents a broad anti-war statement. The transference of the mother figure from the soldier to the murdered infant stresses the universality of the destruction and suffering of war. The dynamics of performance inherent in the presentation--large puppet-costumes, skull masks, drums and trumpets, as well as performance venues incorporating cultural associations such as the Lincoln Memorial often evoked intense emotional responses to the performances.

In the early years of their outdoor presentations, the troupe often capitalized on the presence of spectators by performing in association with parades and other public events that were already in progress. Bolton observes that the group's first outdoor protest piece that dealt with landlord and police brutality was staged in a "modest, quiet parade for voter registration on the Lower East Side in New York City in November 1964" (36). Subsequent anti-war pieces were performed during the International Days of Protest (March 25-26, 1966), and on Memorial Day in 1966 the group performed in a parade in New York, with the Veterans and Reservists to End the War in Vietnam (*Ibid.* 37).

The provocative anti-establishment stance taken by the radical theatre groups often influenced their performing techniques. In December 1966, the Bread and Puppet group demonstrated at St. Patrick's Cathedral in opposition to Cardinal Spellman's victory rally for Vietnam. Joe Flaherty notes that the masks which the actors intended to wear were

carried on poles instead, since the police had threatened to arrest the puppeteers by invoking an 1888 ordinance concerning the wearing of masks (1). Huge pole puppets and faces were to become a hallmark of the Bread and Puppet Theatre.

As the numbers and reputation of the radical theatre groups increased, they periodically assembled at rallies and festivals to perform their works in concert. At the Newport Folk Festival of July, 1967, the Bread and Puppet Theatre and the Teatro Campesino were both represented. The First American Radical Theatre Festival of March, 1968, saw the Bread and Puppet Theatre, The Performance Group and the Open Theatre all participate. In September of the same year, Bread and Puppet, Teatro Campesino, and the SFMT performed concurrently in San Francisco, again demonstrating the popularity of the radical theatre companies (Bolton 49, 59, 63).

As anti-war demonstrations increased in popularity during the middle and late 1960s, the radical theatre groups experienced a heavy demand for their productions, and subsequently organized a booking agency to handle their commitments. The Universal Movement Theatre Repertory agency emerged in the late 1960s to handle bookings and operated until its bankruptcy in 1973 (*Ibid.* 60).

Concurrent with the evolution of the social protest theatre groups, other ensembles with strong political

orientations emerged in the atmosphere of artistic and intellectual freedom that followed the McCarthy era. These groups saw theatre primarily as a vehicle for the promotion of the views of the emerging Left Wing which believed that social decay was primarily attributable to class inequalities. Often these groups were loose associations of professional and amateur theatre practitioners and people from other diverse disciplines. They came together on an *ad hoc* basis to make dramatic statements of social and political criticism. Henry Lesnick observes that

> a number of them meet regularly and become fairly well defined in terms of membership, political perspective and style, but most are more ephemeral: members get together to prepare a play which advances a specific struggle or helps build for a demonstration; they perform it for a while, and then disband to attend to other political tasks until the need for new material and performances brings them together again. (11)

The type of theatrical demonstrations presented in the streets and parks by these groups became known as "Guerilla Theatre," a term coined by Peter Berg of the SFMT to describe the "hit and run" tactics of the performers who were often harassed by the police (Davis 71). The numbers and occasions of performances proliferated with the growing public concern about American involvement in Vietnam, and anti-war protest became a *cause célèbre* with most of these theatre companies. Typical of these loosely structured groups were the San Francisco Red Theatre (1970), Mass Transit (1971) and The American Playground (1969). Other group names associated with

agit-prop performances in the streets are Burning City Theatre-New York, Liberation News Service, San Francisco Women's Street Theatre, and Rapid Transit Group Communications-Chicago (Lesnick *passim*).

In addition to the presence of such militantly political theatre groups, many major universities spawned radical theatre associations that codified student social and political protest.

The Pageant Players group was typical of the militant dramatic movement, since it was comprised of young people who saw theatre as a public forum for the expression of their left-wing political beliefs. According to Sainer, "The political orientation was primarily Marxist, the predominant view was that the U.S. was imperialistic abroad and repressive and smothering at home" (23). As with the Mime Troupe, the group eschewed traditional performance locales and spaces, and moved outside the theatre building to perform at political demonstrations, sit-ins, and in park and street venues. Their first performance was *The Paper Tiger Pageant*, presented in November, 1965. It was described by Michael Brown, a founder of the group, as an "anti-imperialist analysis" designed to be staged at peace demonstrations. Another work, *The Laundromat Play* produced in 1966, dealt with U.S. involvement in Vietnam in allegorical terms (Sainer, p. 24).

Many of the works improvised both at outdoor locations and in buildings not generally resembling theatres, fell under the general rubric of "Happenings." Beginning in the 1950s, with the productions of the Living Theatre, and other companies, the alternative theatres staged productions in situations where the spectator was not only very much aware of the physical environment, but the environment itself was a functional aspect of the work. Shank notes that there are two main types of environmental theatre productions: those which use natural settings, such as beaches, parks or streets, and those where the environment is created for a specific work (93). He regards the latter typical of the productions of Richard Schechner's Performance Group.

Schechner organized what was to become the Performance Group in 1968, after his move from Tulane to New York University. Like Chaikin's Open Theatre, the group was not formed primarily for the mounting of a production, but to explore and develop acting and theatrical possibilities (Bigsby 1982: 125). In fact, the group only produced two works in the 1960s: *Dionysus in 69* (1968-1969), and *Makbeth* (1969-70). Neither production attempted to deal with Vietnam, but the efforts of the group were directed to challenging the psychological complacency of its audience by forcing it to re-examine its cultural ideas.

Schechner's first major effort in New York was a "guerilla theatre" piece staged simultaneously at twenty-

seven locations in theatres and on the street. In March, 1968, the group performed an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, entitled *Dionysus in 69*. The work was improvisational and ritualistic, and encouraged audience participation. The performers made biographical references to themselves, and vacillated between formalized ritualistic sound and movement on the one hand, and non-theatrical action and colloquial language on the other. Sainer observes that in *Dionysus* and the later *Makbeth* and *Commune*, the group was "concerned with the social mores and the political scene" and wanted the audience to participate actively in the performance (27).

A radical theatre group in which environment was a critical part of production was *El Teatro Campesino* (Peasants' Theatre). Initiated by Luis Valdez, the group was an offshoot of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Valdez was a graduate in drama from San Jose State College, who had gone to Cuba in 1964 where he had seen theatre being used for social and political purposes (Taylor 294). The *Teatro* grew out of a 1965 confrontation between farm workers and grape-growers in California, and was unique among theatre groups since it was made up primarily of farm laborers. The group, whose audience was also Chicano farm workers, improvised skits that reflected their economic situation. The *Teatro* initially followed the mimetic techniques of the parent Mime Troupe, but gradually turned to mysticism in the belief that

political action cannot liberate the human spirit, and that "the forms of action needed to make a free society entail more than labour, the picket line, and political awareness" (Sainer 34).

In creating skits and scenes drawn from the immediate economic and related social situation, the *Teatro*, of all the experimental groups of the 1960s, came the closest in spirit and practice to reviving the protest theatre of the 1930s. The theatrical form that emerged from the group's work was the *acto*, "a short bilingual skit of perhaps fifteen minutes dealing in a comic way with situations in the lives of Chicano workers" (Shank 75). In length, they were ideally suited for performance on a picket-line; alternatively, skits could be presented as parts of a longer entertainment piece (*Ibid.* 75).

Teatro's activities in the sixties culminated in a work produced for the Thanksgiving gathering of *huelguistas* (strikers) and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) in 1970. *Vietnam Campesino* (1970) is a well-constructed presentation of one-act length that shows a high level of sophistication in writing and production. It consists of five scenes entitled, "The Military-Agricultural Complex," "Pesticides in the Fields," "The Farm Workers and the Draft," "Vietnam Campesino," and "The Chicano at War" (*Teatro Campesino* 239). The work touches on several issues, notably the hazards of pesticides for farm workers, and the

theme that Vietnamese peasants and Chicano farm workers have a common enemy in the American military-agricultural-industrial complex.[13]

The opening movement of the play sees Butt Anglo,[14] an owner of a large agricultural complex that relies on large government subsidies, conspiring with General Defense to fix prices on military purchases of some surplus non-union lettuce. The lettuce is contaminated with pesticides that have blinded and disabled the farm workers. A tall figure with a death mask and an American flag for a shroud enters. It is The Draft, which has come for Butt Anglo's son. General Defense appears just in time to intercede, and directs The Draft to "stick to the minorities, go draft some Mexicans, some Indians, some Blacks, some Asians, some Puerto Ricans" (*Ibid.* 237).

In the second movement of the play, Vietnam peasants sit on one side of the stage, with Chicano workers on the other. Parallels are drawn between their two situations. The Chicanos are in the middle of a boycott of non-union agricultural produce, and General Defense conceives a plan to

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[13] The scenario has echoes of Eisenhower's farewell speech of January 17, 1961, when he left the office of the presidency. A central part of his speech concerned a warning about the emerging power of the military-industrial complex in the U.S. See dated item in Appendix B.

[14] Butt Anglo, i.e., brute English, the English-speaking boss.

destroy their organization. When Butt Anglo doubts that the American public will tolerate such action, Defense replies,

> Of course they won't, at first. You gotta build up to it. And the first step is to attack the leadership. Now over in Vietnam, we got a thing called the National Liberation Front. But do you think we call it that? Hell no, we give it an ugly-sounding name. A name you want to kill, you want to destroy! Like Cong. Viet Cong! Dirty Asiatic bastards, I could kill 'em all right now. (*Ibid.* 239)

Defense asks the name of the Chicano's union, and finds it to be "too clean, too decent"; he then asks for the name of the leaders. Anglo replies, "Cesar Chavez and Larry Itliong" (*Ibid.* 239). Suddenly inspired, the General shouts, "The Chavez-Itliong gang! The Chong! The Communist Mexican Chong!" He surmises that having some "phoney political allies" would help their case, and suggests the formation of a puppet union, the A.W.F.W.A., the Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association. The rallying cry is to be "El Big Mac": "Mothers Against Chavez" (*Ibid.* 241). Don Coyote, Anglo's tame, or "Uncle Tom" Chicano, dresses as President Diem and moves about the stage encouraging the workers and receiving largess from the General. When the workers prove reluctant to join the puppet union, the General summons American troops to burn down their shacks.

The American military arrives in the person of a drafted Chicano, Hijo (son), who is unwilling to burn his comrades' homes. He is redirected by the General to the other side of the stage to burn down the Vietnamese huts. That he does, but

upon leaving is shot in the back by a Vietnamese villager. When the General returns to the campesinos in order to recruit more men to avenge the Chicano's death, the community shows itself united in its rejection both of the military and of Anglo. Hijo, bloodied, re-enters, and leads the campesinos in rebellion:

> HIJO: The war in Vietnam continues, *asesinando familias inocentes de campesinos. Los Chicanos mueren en la guerra, y los rancheros se hacen ricos,*[15] selling their scab products to the Pentagon. The fight is here. *Raza! En Aztlan.*
> MADRE (*Rises*): *En Aztlan.*
> VIETNAMESE MAN (*Rises*): *En Aztlan.*
> PADRE (*Rises*): *En Aztlan.*[16]
>
> THEY ALL RAISE THEIR FISTS IN THE AIR IN SILENCE. (*Ibid.* 248)

The fists raised in the air in the communist salute symbolize class solidarity and international brotherhood.

Vietnam Campesino makes a strong statement in drawing parallels between Chicano field workers who suffer from the effects of pesticides and the peasants of Vietnam who are victims of defoliants and other atrocious methods of warfare. Both represent peoples of the lower classes whose enemies are perceived to be incarnate in the huge American military-

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[15] "Assassinating the innocent families of the peasants. The Chicanos [Mexican-Americans] are dying in the war, and the ranchers are becoming rich."

[16] *La Raza* (the Race) incorporates in its meaning the pride and identity of the Mexican people. *Aztlan* refers to that indigenous area, the Valley of Mexico that is perceived to be the origin of Mexican civilization and culture. Together, the terms are an expression of fervent nationalism, solidarity and humanity.

industrial-agriculture complex. It was true that young men from lower-class minority groups formed a major part of the military contingent in Vietnam (and Korea), and suffered disproportionately high casualties compared with white troops.[17] As the play concludes, the *campesino* audience is left with a ring of strident militancy in their ears, with the cry of En Aztlan, and the raising of fists in a display of solidarity and defiance.

2. *Documentary Theatre.*

The radical left-wing fervour expressed in the works of *El Teatro Campesino* was not a new phenomenon in the United States. Workers' theatres dated back to the 1920s, predating the Stock Market Crash of 1929. In 1926 a workers' strike at a textile plant in Passaic, New Jersey, prompted radical artists to mount a play in support of the workers who had suffered an arbitrary ten percent cut in pay (Taylor 5). Michael Gold's, *Strike* (1926), describes the interruption of a financier's board meeting by a chorus of workers who proclaim their rights and demand remedial action. At the end of the play, the chorus approaches the audience and

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[17] Wallace Terry notes that in the early years of the fighting, Blacks made up 23 percent of the battle casualties. At the time of the first troop withdrawals in 1969, Black combat fatalities had dropped to 14 percent, which was still proportionately higher than the 11 percent which Blacks represented in the American population (xiv).

encourages it to join them in singing "The Internationale" (*Ibid.* 6).

In the same year, a group of radicals under Michael Gold's leadership founded the New Playwright's Theatre. Financed by an indulgent millionaire patron, Otto Kahn, the group included Communist sympathizers, anarchists, and those of bohemian leanings (*Ibid.* 7). The Theatre, looking to the East, adopted Meyerhold's constructivist staging as the best means of expressing their philosophy. The general theme of plays produced in the company's second season in 1927 was

> how increasing industrialization--the assembly line, the speeding up, economic imperialism--could be stopped from mechanizing the hearts and minds of people. (Taylor 12)

Resembling very much the Soviet critique of the workings of U.S. capitalism, the subject matter of the plays was concerned with the socio-economic life of the labouring classes. Paul Sifton's *The Belt* (1927) dealt with the dehumanizing effects of the assembly line, and Emjo Basshe's *The Centuries* (1927) captured life in the tenements and sweatshops of New York.

The New Playwright's Theatre failed to find a responsive audience and folded in its third season; however, many new radical theatre groups rose to protest social and economic conditions. Taylor notes that during 1928 and 1929, some dozen workers' theatres, most using foreign languages, were springing into and out of existence (31). In April 1931 the Workers Theatre League, an organization of communist working

class theatres around the country, was sufficiently well-established to found a monthly magazine (*Ibid.* 36).

The Great Depression of the 1930s saw many non-politically oriented theatres emerge under the stress of social and economic disintegration. Typical of such groups was Harold Clurman's Group Theatre which was established in 1931 and lasted for ten years. Glenn Hughes notes, "The binding element among members of the group was youthful unrest and radical dissatisfaction with the social order" (422). The motivation for the coming together of young people to produce theatrical protest works bears a marked similarity to that which was to characterize the theatre protest movement in America some thirty years later.

Another project born of the Depression, the Federal Theatre Project, emerged in 1935 and lasted until it was dissolved under political pressure by the Senate Committee on Appropriations in June 1939 (Hughes 426). Two of the off-shoots of the FTP were Orson Welles' and John Houseman's Mercury Theatre, established in 1937, and the Living Newspaper, a pet project of Elmer Rice (*Ibid.* 424). Rice conceived the Living Newspaper as an opportunity for unemployed newspapermen to present dramatizations of current events in the news (Rice 159). Zilliacus notes that its "editions researched history as it occurred" (234). The delay incurred during the writing and staging of the works, however, made the events outdated by the time that they were

presented in dramatic form, and the Newspaper quickly shifted to discussing events of a broader topical nature, such as the agricultural situation, the slum problem, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (*Ibid.* 159). Hughes notes that Rice was the first casualty of Washington interference, for he resigned in January 1936 as a consequence of government censorship (424).

Both the radical theatre of the 1930s and that of the 1960s in America had their genesis in a society that was under severe stress. While the radical theatre of the 1930s was fostered by the adverse socio-economic conditions of the time, that of the 1960s not only had a social and political bias, but even a cultural one. The extremist theatre of the Vietnam era was also typified by a rebellion against the form of the theatre as well as the society in which it played. Theatrical style itself responded to the psychological stresses of the culture, and dramtic presentation, its production techniques and playing spaces, evolved to accommodate the new methods of dramatizing social protest.

When the focus was on themes of injustice and inadequacy perceived to be inherent in the American community, both the reaction of the public and of the dramatist were strident and acute. As Henry F. Salerno notes,

> during the sixties, the hostility and frustration of the growing body of political dissenters erupted into a series of staged political events--the sit-ins and teach-ins, the demonstrations in Washington and on college campuses, the confrontations between anti and pro-Vietnam groups. The one event gave

> birth to the other--the political dissent gave birth to the political theatre and the proliferation of theatrical styles: the common denominator in all of these was the anger and frustration generated by the apparent breakdown of the democratic process, the inability of the people to influence important political decisions, the effort to make potent what seemed impotent, the maddening sense of trying to make the blind see and the deaf hear. (192)

Thus, the impulses of the theatre accommodated the strongest of human emotions: a sense of frustration, impotence, injustice, and, most important, a sense of cultural insufficiency and inadequacy in terms of identity, purpose and worth.

The growing concern about Vietnam in the artistic and public consciousness put an increasing strain on the psychological equilibrium of American society, and in theatre, this stress was reflected in the radicalization of the experimental theatre groups. According to Bigsby, the war

> radicalized companies formerly concerned with aesthetic experimentation and it contributed to that sense of a problematic reality which invaded the work of a number of writers. (1985: 311)

Contemporary dramatists began to extend the concept of dramatic reality that was part of the staging process to one of cultural perception, and examined the cultural identity and values of America from the perspective of its self-defining myths and rituals. Robert Lowell's trilogy, *The Old Glory* (1964), examined the American character through a mythic treatment of the Revolutionary period in American history; Arthur Kopit's *Indians* (1968) examined American

morality from the perspective of the Indian Wars; and Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven* (1967) played upon the distinction between the unreality of a distant war and the quotidian life of the average American. These plays contained not only tangential thematic references to Vietnam, but also exhibited the cultural self-examination that was to play such a significant role in the plays that attempted to come to terms with the effects of the conflict on the men who fought it. In addition, they explored the ramifications of the prosecution of the War for American society itself.

A common characteristic that typified virtually all the performances of the radical theatre groups was a ritualistic interpretation of social behaviour and perception. Sainer's view is that the best work of the groups was motivated not by the need to make ritual, "but to understand the nature of events, and sometimes to change circumstances" (42). In that sense, theatrical ritual was used to challenge social ritual. Characteristics of ritual presentation include the formalization of actions which set them apart from normal behaviour, and the use of repetition which tends to make the action sacramental (Sainer: 42, 43). However, the repetition of social formula--such as those depicted in Megan Terry's *Calm Down Mother* (1965) and van Itallie's *America Hurrah!* (1966), in which characters repeat pat phrases and mimic accepted modes of behaviour--exposes the absurdities of daily life. Patterns of social behaviour taken out of their

ritualistic context are stripped of their essential meaning and organizing function.

As evidenced in the works of Beckett, Ionesco, Pirandello, Genet and others, the emphatic repetition of familiar acts is socially and politically subversive because stripping the meaning from ritual exposes the arbitrary organizing function of social and political power structures. This leaves the individual rudely aware of the arbitrary nature of his identity, his place in his community, and, ultimately, of his own existence. In reference to *The Balcony*, J.L. Styan notes that "the power structure of society is seen to be based upon fantasies as outrageous as those in the brothel" (151). Similarly, the mindless ritualistic repetition of glib phrases in *The Bald Soprano* attacks the basis of human communication by proving conversation meaningless.

When the socially stabilizing processes of ritual behaviour are exposed as being as arbitrary as theatrical conventions of belief, the tenuous underpinnings of a society's moral and ethical standards are also revealed. In reference to the Vietnam War dramas, playwrights recognized that the creation of metaphor in the theatre was similar to the process of cultural conditioning observable in the external society, and they attacked the shortcomings that they perceived in American culture through the technique of metaphorical abstraction. By drawing attention to the

similarities between the creation of theatrical metaphor and the formulation of the cultural consciousness of a society, the playwrights were able to cast into bold relief some of the more contentious issues assailing the public sensibilities. This comparison of theatre and culture typifies many of the Vietnam war dramas of abstraction which will provide the basis of discussion in Chapter III.

A singular development in the evolution of the American experimental theatre was its turning away from the generalized Absurdism of Beckett and Ionesco in favour of existential themes viewed from a more precise, directed, and specifically American cultural perspective. This gave absurdist themes a distinctive American twist in dramas dealing with contemporary social problems. In place of the general existential void evident in the works of Beckett and others, the void in the American plays, such as that found in Edward Albee's *Zoo Story (1958) and The American Dream* (1960), was that of cultural alienation. The playing out of social anxieties in the streets, the critical reappraisal of collective myths, and the deliberate anti-establishment stance all worked toward an absurdist vision of a decadent America.

In examining the influences and residual effects of the radical theatre groups, it becomes apparent that the plays dealing with the cultural effects of the Vietnam War were not products of the war itself, but were an extension of the

process of cultural self-questioning that formed part of the socio-political turbulence of the era. The weaknesses and incongruities perceived in American society at the time emerged in dramatic form as statements of self-doubt and self-criticism. The questioning process was exacerbated by the war experience, but was not entirely derived from it. Vietnam, as portrayed in the dramas that treated it directly, was seen to be a proving ground for American culture rather than American technology, and the War was an ordeal that served to reveal the fallacies inherent in the self-image and in the definitive values and mores of the society. Yet, while the far-reaching examination process was evident before the Vietnam War, the fact of the war itself gave rise to a new, and more intensive re-evaluation of the validity of the idealistic principles underlying American culture. In essence, cultural values were tested in the crucible of the war as the news media brought home its reality in excruciating detail.

The communications media themselves provided the impulse for the development of another trend in drama that was to characterize the theatre of the sixties. As the ensemble theatre groups became more radicalized in their philosophies and their protest demonstrations, they began relying on documentary information to provide a basis of fact for their plays. In adapting the form to the substance of their work, dramatists and directors began incorporating material from

newspapers, film documentaries, television news, and journal articles into the dramatic *mise en scène*; often, a dramatization of specific events provided the basic thematic material for the presentation. With the growing public awareness of the Vietnam War and the concomitant attention given the conflict in the communications media, the commercial theatre also began to exploit the dramatic value of what was known by the generic term "Documentary Theatre." Under that broad classification, sub-genres and theoretical divisions were identified and categorized under a confusion of rubrics including "Theatre of Fact," "Theatre of Commitment," "Theatre of Actuality," "Tribunal Drama," and "Docudrama." Such theatrical works emulated the format and methodology of the news media.

In its basic form and broadest sense documentary drama purports to illustrate historical events on the stage. John Grierson is credited with the first use of the term "documentary" with reference to film in 1926; he described the form as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Mast and Cohen 367). In theatre the concept was used by such dramatists as Vsevolod Meyerhold and Erwin Piscator. In the West, the form was popularized in the theatre in Erwin Piscator's experimental productions, which were once described as "one huge montage of authentic speeches, articles, newspaper clippings, slogans, leaflets, photographs, and films" (*Ibid.* 368). At a very early stage in

its development, however, documentary drama was to take many forms and to express diverse philosophies.

The recounting of historical events in dramatic presentations was hardly a theatrical innovation of the twentieth century. The earliest bardic tales purported to relate accounts from the past, and dramatists from the Greeks to Büchner often based their works on actual events; however, only since the advent of twentieth century technology, enabling the facsimile reproduction of current and historical events, did documentary theatre challenge late nineteenth century Realism in its attempts to present actuality on the stage.

Much of the difficulty in arriving at a precise definition of documentary theatre stems from the conscious or unconscious confusion between theatrical style and the determining philosophy of a given work. In the same manner that Symbolism and Naturalism-Realism exist both as dramatic philosophy and dramatic technique, documentary theatre may comprise, in flexible proportions, both the method of staging and the thematic underpinning of a work. Symbolism as a philosophical concept, for example, is manifested as a cosmic force in Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (1891) and *Les Aveugles* (1891), and is a functioning element of the plot. However, symbolism may also be evident on the stage in the form of properties which function simply as prosaic cultural signifiers--a cane and top hat, for example, representing the

social class of a character. Similarly, the philosophy of Naturalism inherent in Zola's Darwinism is a concept distinct from David Belasco's "dinner theatre" as an arbiter of reality on the stage. Synge, meanwhile, combines both the philosophical and *mise en scène* functions of Symbolism in *Riders to the Sea*. The term Documentary Theatre, then, might similarly apply to works which feature the mechanical representation of historical events on the stage, a thematic reconstruction of events that does not rely on actual personages or quotations, or varying combinations of both.

Implicit in the term "dramatization," the enhancement of current events for the theatre inevitably involves the manipulation of facsimile material. The process of selection, editing and arrangement of segments of actual events itself involves a certain bias in the work, and as the process of dramatization takes over, a theatrical representation may be created that has little aesthetic relationship to the event that provided the original source documents. Augusto Boal, writing in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, notes some dozen ways in which news items can be presented to generate commentary on actual events. These include reading two items simultaneously so that incongruities between fact and representation become obvious; counterpointing the read article with contradictory visual statements; reinforcing the abstract ideas in news items with graphic detail, such as scenes of torture or despair, or mimed action that contrasts with statements read

in the news; and enhancing the documentary text with rhythmic or contrapuntal tones (143).

C.W.E. Bigsby distinguishes the type of theatre defined as Theatre of Commitment as the presentation of dramatic material concerned with, or committed to, the immediate social situation prevailing outside the theatre building. He notes that the resurgence of this type of theatre in the early 1960s "coincided with an increasing politicization of the culture" (291), and that

> American theatre from the late 1960s onwards was characterized by an energy generated in part at least by the urgencies of political, social and moral revolt. (292)

The popularity of Theatre of Commitment coincides almost exactly with the dominance of Vietnam in the national consciousness. Bigsby notes that the "committed decade in the theatrical sense ran from 1964 to 1975," and identifies its beginning with the production of Robert Lowell's *The Old Glory* (1964) (294).

As outlined by Bigsby, Theatre of Commitment is identified as a sub-category of documentary theatre not through its methodology, but in terms of the particular focus of the playwright on immediate problems. *The Old Glory*, for instance, veils any immediate reference to Vietnam in analogy and historical distance, but it does challenge the morality and ethics of American culture on the basis of America's indiscriminate use of power against those who are perceived to be its enemies.

Particular distinctions between the methodology and dramatic interpretation of documentary theatre are more often obscured rather than clarified by the terminology used to describe artistic productions incorporating documentary material in the *mise en scène*. A qualification of the terms "documentary" and "factual" is given by Mast and Cohen in reference to film:

> The documentary is distinguished from the factual film by its sociopolitical purpose, its "message." It attempts to fuse two concerns that often prove incompatible in art: medium and message. (369)

They add that "the factual film lacks a specific message," and if it does happen to have one, "it does not necessarily take precedence over the other aspects of the film" (370). This distinction between the cinematic versions of "documentary" and "factual" works conflicts with those offered by Freed and Isaac below with reference to stage productions.

As the cinematic camera views with the "subjective eye," so, too, the dramatist selects and organizes his material into a unique dramatic statement. The distinction between the documentary and factual approaches to a particular work may be influenced by the specific dramaturgy of a theatre company. Gregory Mason observes a distinction in the directions followed by the various experimental theatre groups in the sixties in noting that the productions of the Living Theatre tended to be designed and performed in accordance with Piscator's desire that the audience be

aesthetically involved in the work. Such writers and directors as Rolf Hochhuth, Peter Weiss and Heinar Kipphardt, however, generally followed a preference for aesthetic distancing (Mason 267-268).

Incorporating many principles and techniques of the works of Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht, documentary theatre was given a contemporary cast in the 1960s by British and European dramatists such as Joan Littlewood (*Oh What a Lovely War*, 1963), Peter Brook (*US*, 1966), Peter Weiss (*Vietnam Discourse*, 1967), Rolf Hochhuth (*The Deputy*, 1963) and Heinar Kipphardt (*In the Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, 1969). The form appeared almost simultaneously on the American scene with the dramas of Saul Gottlieb (*American Atrocities in Vietnam*, 1967), Daniel Berrigan (*The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, 1969), Donald Freed (*Inquest*, 1970) and Stanley R. Greenberg (*Pueblo*, 1971). The latter group of plays will be discussed below.

The adaptation of documentary material for dramatic purposes unleashed a plethora of statements and counter-statements of philosophy and purpose that attacked and defended the legitimacy of such productions. Peter Weiss notes that the realistic "Theatre of Actuality" incorporates such terms as political theatre, documentary theatre, protest theatre, and anti-theatre. In focusing on documentary theatre, he defines it simply as theatre that is concerned with documenting an event.

> Documentary theatre is a theatre of reportage. Records, documents, letters, statistics, market-reports, statements by banks and companies, government statements, speeches, interviews, statements by well-known personalities, newspaper and broadcast reports, photos, documentary films and other contemporary documents are the basis of the performance. (Weiss 1971: 41)

While suggesting that documentary theatre relies on truth since it "refrains from all invention" and "takes authentic material and puts it on the stage, unaltered in content, edited in form," he admits that it is politically and dramatically partisan:

> Documentary theatre is a reflection of life as we witness it through the mass media, re-defined by asking various critical questions. (Weiss 1971: 41)

Weiss outlines some other definitive aspects of documentary theatre. He notes that "documentary theatre . . . represents a reaction against the contemporary situation, and a demand for explanations"; that it "is concerned with what is typical as opposed to mere externals"; and that it does not deal with characters and their backgrounds, but "is concerned with groups, with areas of influence, with tendencies" (Weiss 1971: 41, 42). He adds that the presentation technique forms the thematic thrust of the documentary work, since

> reports, and parts of reports, [are] divided rhythmically into carefully timed sections. Short moments, consisting of just one fact, one exclamation, relieve longer, more complicated sections. A quotation is followed by the enactment of a situation. By quick cutting, the situation is switched to another, contrasting with it. Single speakers oppose a number of speakers. The scenario

> consists of antithetic pieces, of sequences, of similar examples, of contrasting forms, of changing values. (Weiss 1971: 43)

Donald Freed's *Inquest*, with its divided playing areas, documentary material projected onto screens above these areas, and the juxtaposition of scenes portraying the Greenberg's private lives and courtroom appearances, exemplifies this type of dramatic technique.

Weiss' treatment of his basic material, however, represents only one vision of the documentary and its function. Eckhard Schulz observes that "while the documentary theatre avoids all fabrication," the stage presents a critical selectivity that concentrates on a "specific, predominantly social or political topic" (12). Referring to the Theatre of Fact, and the treatment of documentary material, Donald Freed states that "the increments must be thrown into a cruel relief" and that "reconstructions can and should be drawn from them" (5). He points to the work of Peter Weiss as being representative of the Theatre of Fact, in which the primary characteristic is its revolutionary stance; he typifies Weiss' approach as "the rebellion inside the straight jacket of rotting ideas" (1967: 121); and he argues that the struggle between the individual and the state becomes a central issue in Theatre of Fact, since

> the 'revolutionary' assumes the inequity of the trial with the liberal, shares an identification with the victim as does the radical, but for him the innocence of the victim is less weighty than the guilt of the state. (1969: 3)

The situation of the individual contending with the State is carried to an extreme when the individual becomes a victim. In illustration of his point, Freed's *Inquest* portrays the persecution rather than the prosecution of the Rosenbergs.

Dan Isaac also regards the essence of Theatre of Fact as embodied in the particular philosophical approach of man contending with his society, but differs from Freed in his emphasis on the freedom of assertion on the part of the individual. For Isaac, this type of theatre portrays modern man as a victim of a mindless bureaucracy that dictates his notions of reality and against whose machinations he is impotent.

> Every instance of Theatre of Fact, beginning with the Living Newspapers in the thirties, dramatizes the victimization of the individual by the state. (Isaac 132)

In the struggle against the suffocating power of the State, the individual must fight against the effects of social, economic and cultural determinism, since, in the schema of Isaac:

> the individual can become aware of complexity only when he is alienated from the State, from the means of production, from the family, and finally from himself. The unhappy prerequisite for political consciousness, then, is alienation. (132)

Isaac's approach is particularly significant for the study of the dramas of the Vietnam War since the same cultural conditioning and demythologizing effects of extra-cultural

perspectives form such an essential thematic underpinning of the works conceived in the "Vietnam vortex."[18]

Documentary theatre and the Theatre of Fact have received much criticism concerning the validity and morality of the dramatic embellishment of current and historical events. Kipphardt invents monologues for major characters in his plays, and Hochhuth admits that "pure documentation can never be more than a bunch of documents. Something must always be added to make a play" (Esslin 133).

The problematic ability of docudrama to represent "truth" is discussed by H.L. Nieburg in reference to problems inherent in the dramatization of news reports on television.

> The presentation of news achieves its power of evocation by its 'symbolic truth.' The picture and the sound are not facts, but symbols . . . the real child and its crying become symbols of all children. It is not a lie when video clips are re-arranged in false sequences or out-of-context. It is not a lie when old film clips and pre-recorded sound effects are added to give the narrative 'symbolic truth.' (Nieburg 86)

Truth, then, is "symbolic" and subject not only to arbitrary presentation through such techniques as the subjective camera, but is also arbitrary in its subjective perception by the individual.

The Theatre of Fact first assumed an American identity in the productions of The Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspaper mentioned previously. The productions were

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[18] See James F. Mersmann, *Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry against the War* (Wichita: The University Press of Kansas, 1974).

conceived first as "a sort of animated newsreel" that depicted current events (Mason 265). The form that subsequently evolved was "the dramatization of a *problem*--composed of many news events . . . interlarded with typical but non-factual representations" (*Ibid.* 265). In reference to the unique nature of the Living Newspaper productions, Isaac observes that

> the Living Newspaper put aside fictive theatre, a traditional form always concerned with the progress of the *individual*, in order to *dramatize a problem*. As a result, these plays were all exposition and argument: an abundance of information that the traditional theatre of myth and poetry either could not or did not wish to handle. (133)

The problems described in these works covered a wide range of Depression issues such as housing, energy, the unions, farm subsidies, and health care. Mason notes that when Congress terminated the funding of the Federal Theatre Project in 1939, it ended documentary drama as a serious theatrical form in America until 1963 (265).

The characteristics of documentary drama, however, had changed significantly between the 1930s and the 1960s, both in America and Europe. The new wave of documentary theatre productions revealed the influence of the Absurdist theatre that had emerged in the post-WW II period in Europe, and also reflected the very different nature of contemporary social concerns. Isaac notes that the new post-Absurdist Theatre of Fact appeared in Germany in the 1960s with Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (1963) and Peter Weiss' *The Investigation* (1965)

(133). The new wave of Theatre of Fact, picking up on *The Investigation*'s use of courtroom documents, reflected the individual and collective anxiety of the nuclear age and the political hysteria that accompanied the Cold War. Heinar Kipphardt made the trans-Atlantic connection between Europe and America with *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1969); and Donald Freed's *Inquest* (1970), dealing with the trial of the Rosenbergs, appeared a year later. Meanwhile, under the direct stimulus of the Vietnam War, the Theatre of Fact had reasserted itself in America with Saul Gottlieb's *American Atrocities in Vietnam* (1967). Given the significance of the historical connection between cultural and social stress and the popularity of the documentary form of theatre, its re-emergence at this particular time on the American stage would suggest a definite relationship between a high level of social anxiety and the productions of documentary style drama.

While following the generic form, the documentary dramas born of the social anxiety of the 1960s bear little resemblance in a philosophical sense to those of the Living Newspaper productions of the 1930s. The drama had made a subtle shift to accommodate the new psychological stresses of both the individual and his larger society, as well as new socio-economic and political problems. Isaac observes that

> after World War II, the Theatre of the Absurd came as a psychological response to complexity and alienation, describing this response in surrealistic terms. But the emphasis was on the

> interior predicament of the individual rather than the exterior condition that occasioned it. (133)

Documentary theatre was also influenced by the changes in theatrical style that had virtually become conventions since its early days. Works such as Greenberg's *Pueblo* and Freed's *Inquest* are both "Courtroom" dramas and documentary pieces which contain verbatim dialogues and references to times, people and places; but their aesthetics are derived from a reliance on surrealistic and expressionistic techniques. While the dynamics of the Living Theatre arose primarily from problems of economics and the physical environment, those of the protest pieces of the 1960s were derived from crises in individual and cultural identity.

The Courtroom or "Tribunal" style of drama was ideally suited to the expression of the philosophy of victimization of the individual by the oppressive machinery of the State; it also provided an ideal dramatic format in terms of its built-in dramatic tension and structure. The tribunal, or trial format has been a popular dramatic genre since the time of Aeschylus, since it capitalizes on the basic conflicts inherent in the legal process of proof and argumentation. Zilliacus notes that

> the tribunal has become one of the favorite locales of documentary dramas; this is also where their dialectic ambitions are most easily discerned. The agons and the dialectic of individual cases are infused with a dramatic structure: both form and content are ready-made. (230).

The dialectic inherent in court procedure provides dramatic conflict, while at the same time the individual attains an heroic aspect as he stands virtually alone against the massed resources of the State.

Nieburg observes how the tribunal dramas of the sixties demonstrated a distinct evolution in social psychology from the time of the Greeks. In observing how the individual has become the victim of the State, he notes that the State has replaced both the Greek concept of man at the mercy of the gods, and the concept of disaster that results from a moral fault or failure in understanding (92).

> In the 'tribunal' dramas of the sixties, the dominance of cultural prerogatives becomes the satanic force which stands in the path of individual action and fulfillment. (*Ibid.* 92)

The tribunal drama took a strong hold on the American stage of the 1960s with Daniel Berrigan's *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (1969), Donald Freed's *Inquest* (1970) and Stanley Greenberg's *Pueblo (1971)*. Although only *Catonsville* deals directly with the concerns about Vietnam, the others were also written in the period of Vietnam anxiety, and reflect many of the psychological stresses evident in works addressing particular concerns of the war.

While *Inquest*, *Pueblo* and *Trial* are similar in their use of the tribunal style of drama and the inherent dramatic dialectics of accusation and denial, guilt and innocence, justice and injustice, and the process of argument associated with courtroom proceedings, they differ radically in

aesthetics and ideology. *Pueblo* traces the proceedings of the U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry involving Commander Lloyd Mark Bucher subsequent to his repatriation to the United States. Bucher's captivity was a result of the seizure of his surveillance ship *Pueblo* and her crew by the North Koreans. *Pueblo* evinces many of the techniques of documentary theatre in its presentation of the facts of Commander Bucher's experience, but of more importance for the present work, the play reveals many of the attitudes and ideas that were so prevalent in the Vietnam War dramas. The date of writing and performance of *Pueblo* coincide with the period of greatest anxiety about the Vietnam War, and the work reflects many of the questions and problems concerning American society that were issues in the war plays.

In reviewing *Pueblo*, the critic Mel Gussow notes that

> since the play is based on--and limited to--the public record, the playwright offers no answers. *Pueblo* is, by definition, Theatre of Fact. (51)

But the play does take a philosophical stance: while Greenberg draws upon material from the news media--such as TV interviews, newspaper reports, and the proceedings of congressional committees--he fashions them in the form of a Memory play in which "events posited in the present create associational links to the past" (Isaac 110). Isaac suggests that the Greenberg interpretation of the Pueblo incident is predicated more on generating aesthetic effect than political debate, and that the work tends to argue "the degree to which

governmental policy and bureaucratic process can become a man's fate" (110).

The first scene is expressionistic; there is only an implication of a press conference in which Bucher stands alone in the centre of the stage area, answering imaginary questions. He directs his responses to the audience, while lights suggesting photographers' flashes punctuate his statements. Bucher gives his name and biographical information concerning his childhood and navy career. His responses contain an exposition of the American cultural paradigm whose values and perceptions are subsequently revealed as the cause of his predicament. He is depicted as a victim, much like Arthur Miller's anti-hero, Willy Loman, who lives in a society which has somehow failed to fullfil the expectations of the individual. Isaac notes that

> Bucher reminds one inevitably of the fictional Willy Loman who so whole-heartedly believed in American values that he tried to turn the promise of the American dream into the reality of his own personal achievement--only to discover much later the contradictions implicit in these values that would destroy him. (111)

Isaac adds that the similarity between Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Greenberg's *Pueblo* does not extend to the matter of depth psychology in the protagonist, but rather is

> particularly concerned with the problems and passion of Commander Bucher in a particular situation that has far-reaching political consequences. (112)

The play is significant for the study of Vietnam War drama since it depicts the military bureaucracy as an

organism that has become independent of, and insensitive to the society that engendered it. As the dialogue goes on to document and illustrate the weakness of the military bureaucracy, a definite position is taken towards the mindless authoritarianism of the military machine. Errors of judgement and omission and commission in the fitting out of the ship and the selection of its complement are evident in the almost verbatim transcriptions of the statements of individuals questioned in the affair. Evidence is submitted which illustrates "the unwillingness of individual members of the bureaucracy to accept personal responsibility for the decisions they have made" (Isaac 113).

Pueblo is particularly interesting as a play that anticipates or reflects many of the idiosyncrasies of cultural perception that were to characterize the plays written by veterans of the Vietnam War. A good third of the play deals with the internment of the Pueblo crew and their treatment at the hands of the North Koreans. The probability of error in the Pueblo's location is significant for Greenberg's purpose since it tends to legitimize the North Koreans' case against the Americans. Greenberg includes sufficient evidence from the transcript to indicate that the Pueblo in all likelihood did indeed intrude into the territorial waters of North Korea, although that conclusion is left for the audience to deduce and interpret. The testimony of Lacy, a *Pueblo* officer, states that the closest

that the Pueblo approached the North Korean Coast was 12.8 miles (Greenberg 18), which was dangerously close to the international territorial limit of 12 miles that had been established at the Geneva Conference of 1954. Subsequent testimony states that the navigation system of the Pueblo was inaccurate and subject to errors of five miles either way (27).

Greenberg's dramatic technique includes the understatement of some of the more critical points in the Inquiry. He leaves much to the audience to interpret concerning the American attitude towards the North Koreans. While assuming a sympathetic attitude towards Bucher's personal situation as a Navy Commander undergoing an investigation, Greenberg nevertheless subtly points out the injustices inherent in the discrete perceptions of "truth" that exist between the American and Asian cultures. In defense of his enforced confession, Bucher reveals his attitude towards the North Koreans: "I was convinced they were animals" (23). An American negotiator with the Military Armistice Commission at Panmunjom comments upon the Korean national character:

> The North Korean people just don't have any feelings. They do not follow the Geneva Convention in dealing with prisoners of war. What do you say to a Mongolian savage who holds 82 of your countrymen as hostages? (29)

Understatement continues to provide a counterpoint to the mass of factual evidence in the work, as the North

Koreans' case is presented by their commander in a single speech in which he outlines the position of his country:

> There is no South Korean government, there is only American imperialism. In 1950 we of the North worked to reunify our country while in the South your fascist puppet Rhee killed thousands of patriots and jailed tens of thousands with American arms and American money. There was an election and Rhee's party lost and so, to preserve his illegal government, Rhee invaded us, killed our children, raped our women. . . . Even today you continue your constant aggression. What gives you the right? (33)

Perhaps the pointed allusion to the contemporary situation in Vietnam was lost on an unsuspecting audience, but the simple directness of the speech contrasts defiantly with Bucher's allegation of "animals" and the American negotiator's contention that the North Koreans, like Mongolian savages, totally lack human sensitivity.

In spite of his obvious personal and cultural prejudices against the Asians, however, Bucher retains the sympathetic aspect of hero-victim. It is the blind and insensitive military bureaucracy that has put him into the position where he must choose between concern for the lives of his men and upholding the pride and prestige of the American Navy and nation. In such a position, Bucher assumes the posture of a classical tragic hero, as his individual morality comes into conflict with the interests of the State. Isaac notes that "*Pueblo* is primarily concerned with the passion of a man who is sacrificed by the system that he believes in, and is totally committed to serving" (123). If the parallels between the Pueblo situation and Vietnam were not consciously

contrived by Greenberg, then it is doubly ironic that the very issues inherent in the conflict between cultural and individual perception, and the cultural and individual morality that Greenberg's *Pueblo* was addressing in reference to the Korean situation, were identical to those comprising the dialectic in the dramas about the Vietnam conflict.[19]

In reference to the philosophical ideas informing *Pueblo*, Zilliacus notes that there was an implicit confession of guilt, but that

> the question whether spying had, in fact, occurred, is regarded as almost irrelevant. The play treats psychological, existential problems in a situation of far-reaching political significance. The villain of the piece is the military bureaucracy, but the play does not set out to make such comments on U.S. involvement in the Far East as could have been made by means of the evidence made available by the case. (Zilliacus 244)

Pueblo thus demonstrates Isaac's idea of the individual as a victim of an oppressive, insensitive bureaucracy that has put him in an impossible situation. Although the text represents a verbatim transcript of statements and documents emerging from the enquiry, the treatment is essentially that of an expressionistic drama that explores Bucher's feelings. In relating *Pueblo* to Theatre of Fact, Isaac notes that Theatre of Fact "may prove to be a very productive way of working in

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[19] At the time of writing, Lieutenant-Colonel Oliver North was making an identical case for himself in testimony before the Senate and House inquiry into the Iran-Contra arms scandal. Irony, and perhaps pathos, is evident in the present situation in Central America. Neither the lessons of Korea nor Vietnam seem to have impressed themselves on the formulation of American foreign policy.

the future, for it deals with the primal complexity of the way we perceive and understand the material world that stands against us" (135).

Daniel Berrigan's *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (1969) was a drama that had many similarities in form and substance to Greenberg's *Pueblo*. As with *Pueblo*, the dialogue in *Catonsville* was a distillation of testimony presented in the form of courtroom procedure. The action of the play followed the record of the prosecution of two Jesuit priests, Father Daniel Berrigan and his brother Philip, and seven co-conspirators, for the offense of burning draft records at Catonsville, Maryland, on May 17, 1968. The philosophical underpinnings of the work, however, differ radically from those of Greenberg's play.

In his Introduction, Berrigan explains his concept of how documentary material is transformed when it is incorporated into a dramatic form. He notes that while dealing with the material in the manner of the new "factual theatre," it assumed a new shape and identity:

> In condensing such a mass of material, it was predictable that a qualitative change would occur, almost by the law of nature, as the form emerged. And this of course was my hope: to induce out of the density of matter an art form worthy of the passionate acts and words of the Nine, acts and words which were the substance of the court record. (viii)

Berrigan recasts the documentary evidence into poetic form and insinuates himself into the text as a choral spokesman, introducing the play and commenting periodically on the

action. A transcendental element is added through the infusion of prayers and spiritual references into the documentary material, and the text is also punctuated by fictive and non-fictive quotations from persons such as Camus, Castro, Brecht, Anouilh and Sartre.

A primary movement of the work consists of a detailed description of the process by which the members of the group had become radicalized, primarily through extra-cultural experience. Isaac notes that

> with perhaps one exception, every member of the Catonsville Nine spent a number of years working with people--frequently in another country--who were underprivileged and impoverished. For more than a third of them that other country was Guatemala. (125)

Daniel Berrigan attributes in part his action at Catonsville to his witnessing of the American bombardment of civilian centres in North Vietnam, where he saw horribly burned children and babies (Berrigan 89).

An exchange between Daniel Berrigan and the Judge reveals a primary dialectic of the play. Berrigan challenges the Judge on the grounds that the Judge's Oath of Office which requires his adherence to the legalities of the case must necessarily conflict with his personal moral reservations about the war. Berrigan suggests that he, himself, in his capacity as an ordained priest of the Catholic church, faces a similar dilemma: his concern for the sanctity of human life and the necessity of obedience to his church superiors, who have disavowed his actions, place him

in an untenable moral position. Berrigan and the Judge thus occupy antithetical positions: the Judge's actions, his duty in prosecuting the nine conspirators, conflict with his personal sentiments, Berrigan's actions, predicated on his personal sentiments, conflict with his duty, the obedience to his ecclesiastical superiors.

Both men are bound by oath to perform certain duties in prescribed ways that now involve moral and legal conflicts. Berrigan further suggests that, since the law is subject to interpretation, and the process of law is to serve the people, the Judge must temper the demands of legal necessity with considerations of moral conscience. The Judge responds:

> Well I think there are two answers to that. You speak to me as a man and a judge. As a man . . . I agree with you completely. [But] the basic principle of our law is that we do things in an orderly fashion. People cannot take the law into their own hands.
> (*Ibid.* 115)

The dialectic reflects the position with which the average American had to come to terms in his own way: by what authority and to what degree is any individual bound by law when adherence to that law conflicts with the moral issues sustaining both the law and the individual? Which law takes precedence? Can a moral individual either explicitly or implicitly acquiesce in the reprehensible policies implemented by his government, or engage overtly or covertly, in word or deed, in acts of political and civil disobedience? The dialectic of *Catonsville* thus essentially brings into

conflict the morality of the Christian individual against the legal authority of the State.

In opposition to the authoritarian legalism of the court stand the personal morality and ethics of the defendants. Cast into poetic form, the body of the defense testimony comprises a series of personal impressions that express the humanitarian instincts of the accused and illustrate how those instincts led to their actions at Catonsville. The subjective, emotionally intense statements of the defendants counterpoint the mechanical process of law in a way that throws into stark relief the opposing forces in the courtroom. As the defendants tell of the inequities that they see in the society around them, they constantly bring into question the validity of the institution that is trying them.

The first defendant to give testimony is Philip Berrigan. In response to the defense attorney's question concerning his early education, he responds with a description of the poverty and social injustice that he saw in America as a child.

> During the depression years I remember my mother / welcoming people from the road / There were many men in those days travelling the roads / impoverished and desperate (*Ibid.* 22)[20]

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[20] Berrigan casts the defendant's speeches in poetic form, while those of court officials and jurors are in prose. The defendants' speeches are given without punctuation and have lacunae in the text. These lacunae suggest the defendants' individual spiritual (and grammatical) freedom as opposed to the rigid structure and organization (also in a linguistic sense) of the authoritarian society.

In his descriptions of his mother's treatment of the indigent poor of the Depression, he evokes images of the Good Samaritan giving succour to the needy.

Continuing his testimony over the objections of the Prosector that such material is irrelevant, Philip tells of his early involvement with the poor Blacks of the South, and of his early work in the area of civil rights.

> Very early in New Orleans / I became deeply involved / in the civil rights struggle / We did voter registration work / We worked with the poor / in the slums of New Orleans / We tried to provide / some sort of bridge / between the Black and the White communities / We tried to attack racism at its roots / We tried to open minds a bit (*Ibid.* 24)

Daniel Berrigan does not allow the Prosecutor to intervene again. After Philip makes his statement concerning his civil rights work, and another describing his anxiety over Cold War concerns, Daniel Berrigan inserts a quote from Sartre's *Condemned of Altona* concerning man's inhumanity to man (*Ibid.* 25). In recasting the documentary evidence into playscript form, with the addition of extraneous material, Daniel Berrigan succinctly assumes the role of controlling Judge in his own court, where evidence that is non-legalistic, but nevertheless most relevant by virtue of its humanitarianism, may be admitted.

David Darst's testimony follows that of Philip Berrigan. Darst tells of how the "napalm" used to incinerate draft files was manufactured. He likens his actions to a

> man in his home who sees a crime / someone is being attacked outside / His impulse I think his / basic human impulse / is to cry out to cry for help (*Ibid.* 34)

Following Darst's brief testimony, Berrigan inserts a quotation of Bishop Defregger of Munich, a World War II clergyman who passively acquiesced in the execution of Italian villagers: "I tried to save what could be saved. It was not possible for me totally to prevent the terrible deaths" (*Ibid.* 35). Berrigan compares the anguish of the Bishop--who realizes that he did not do enough--to that of Darst, who does what he must, although it will inevitably bring him into conflict with the authorities. In comparing Darst's situation with the Bishop's, Berrigan may be obliquely criticizing other responsible community leaders in the U.S., since the consequences for demonstrating against the depredations of the Vietnam War were significantly less than those for making similar statements in occupied Europe.

Carefully selecting quotations given by witnesses at other real or fictional trials, Berrigan punctuates the testimony with many of the questions--and responses--that have challenged men in other periods of history. The charges and defenses implied in the Bishop's statement are reminiscent of Nuremberg; other citations, such as those from Brecht's *Galileo*, Anouilh's *Becket*, and Camus' *The Unbeliever and the Christian*, evoke other cases in which principled individuals have confronted the vested interests of monolithic social institutions. A quote from Kafka's *The*

Penal Colony, in which a disobedient prisoner is to have carved on his body "HONOR THY SUPERIORS," illustrates the price to be paid by those who would challenge the system (*Ibid.* 102).

Thomas Lewis' testimony deals with the impossibility of getting anyone in authority to acknowledge responsibility for actions undertaken in the public name.

> We had visits / with Maryland congressmen and senators / We wrote letters to them and delivered them personally in Washington / We met with silence / from all of them / We met / with hostility and apathy (*Ibid.* 41)

Lewis testifies that approaches to politicians have been fruitless, since no single or corporate entity will accept liability for the prosecution of the war.

> We were saying to the military / This is wrong This is immoral This is illegal / And their response to this was / they were only obeying orders (*Ibid.* 42)

Unable to obtain a response either from the political or military authorities, yet believing that atrocities are being committed in their name, Lewis, as a concerned American, acts according to his own instincts and judgement.

Lewis' testimony underscores the point that, while he lives in a society which is evidently not required to answer for its actions, that society insists that he, as an individual, is responsible for his. Given that situation, he believes that he must act according to the dictates of his conscience and his Christian ethics and values. While such values and ethics are not necessarily antithetical to those

of the State, according to the Judge, they are inadmissable and irrelevant as evidence, or as mitigating factors involving infractions of the law.

Thomas Melville and his wife Marjorie, formerly religious workers in Guatemala, give testimony that documents American involvement in the political system of that country. The couple's testimony draws parallels between the situation in Guatemala and that in Vietnam.

> THOMAS MELVILLE: If any peasant movement does not conduct itself according to their wishes . . . they start screaming 'They are communists!' and begin executing these people
>
> JUDGE: You mean to say that the United States government is executing Guatemalans?
>
> THOMAS MELVILLE: Yes Your honor
>
> JUDGE: Has the United States government sent troops into Guatemala?
>
> THOMAS MELVILLE: Yes Your honor
>
> JUDGE: When?
>
> THOMAS MELVILLE: At the end of 1966 and in January of 1967
>
> JUDGE: And you say that the United States executed people there?
>
> THOMAS MELVILLE: It was reported even in *Time* magazine
>
> JUDGE: Well, we are not trying the series of Guatemalan revolutions.
>
> THOMAS MELVILLE: No the court is quite busy trying us. (*Ibid.* 57-58)[21]

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[21] U.S. involvement, through advisors and proxies (mercenaries) in Guatemala dates from 1953-54. Subsequent to the expropriation of 234,000 acres of land from the United

The Judge, his curiosity piqued by Melville, has digressed from the strict procedures of the trial. As Berrigan presents the case in the play, it becomes a constant struggle of the Judge to confine the case within the strict legal parameters required by jurisprudence.

Dramatic conflict in the play continues to be generated by the conflict between basic ethical and moral concepts and the case as presented by the Prosecutor. The presiding Judge is continually driven to frustration by the Berrigans' insistence on conducting a defense based on humanitarian principles rather than on points of law. Isaac observes that the Judge

> is concerned only with a single event, the burning of draft files, and seeks to isolate this event from all other considerations of cause and conscience. (129)

The Judge, and collectively the State, is opposed by the intensely passionate spiritual presence of the Berrigans who respond to the charges with statements of moral simplicity:

> So I went to Catonsville and burned some papers
> because the burning of children is inhuman and unbearable
> I went to Catonsville because I had gone to Hanoi
> (Berrigan 92)

Daniel Berrigan has, as a consequence of his first-hand, extra-cultural experience, assumed roles both as a secular and clerical protestor. He sees issues not from an occluded ethnocentric perspective, but from a position of objective

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Fruit Company for land reform, the U.S. abetted the overthrow of the *elected* government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman.

evaluation of current events. He has attained that extra-cultural clarity of perception that many of the veterans-turned-playwright expressed in their post-war experience dramas.

The revolutionary aspect of the American character inherent in his cultural mythology is evoked in a statement by Philip Berrigan:

> From the Boston Tea Party
> through the abolitionist and anarchist movements
> through World War I and World War II
> and right on
> through the civil rights movement
> we have a rich tradition
> of civil disobedience. (*Ibid.* 29)

He adds that "we defendants will have been proven right / in choosing revolution over reform" (*Ibid.* 29). Isaac notes that the "explosive power" of the work is derived in part from the Berrigans' resurrection of "Christianity as a revolutionary tradition" (128).

The courts in *Catonsville* are portrayed as existing and functioning in isolation from the immediate society much as the military bureaucracy was in *Pueblo*. Within the parameters of the court's jurisdiction, truth, justice and morality are subservient to the application of the letter of the law. The presiding official in the play has only the appellation of "Judge" and, while in reality he wept while sentencing the nine defendants (Simon 340), in the text one finds only his grudging concession to Daniel Berrigan in recognizing the moral motivation for the latter's actions. The Judge is

transformed by Berrigan into an abstracted entity embodying and symbolizing the legalistic authority of the State. In doing so, Berrigan emphasizes the polarity of the issues confronting the average American.

In his charge to the jury, the Judge stipulates that neither conscience nor religious conviction are to be recognized as justification for the commission of a crime. One of the defendants, George Mische, asks for clarification:

> GEORGE MISCHE: My question, your honor, concerns conscience. Did you tell the jury they could not act according to their conscience?
>
> JUDGE: I did not mention conscience. I did not talk about conscience. I do not mind saying that this is the first time the question of conscience has been raised in this court. (Berrigan 113).

The remark contains many layers of irony: in questions of law, morality implicit in conscience is invalid in mitigating the essence of a criminal act; yet the court, the representative and instrument of social order, enforces laws which would seem to exist independently of, and even to conflict with the values and mores of the society that engendered it.

The defendants attempt to reach the jury on the basis of their common humanity; the Judge, however, cannot allow this, and warns the Defense, "If you attempt to argue that the jury has the power to decide this case on the basis of conscience, the court will interrupt and tell the jury of their duty" (*Ibid.* 113). Daniel Berrigan responds:

> Your honor, we are having great difficulty in trying to adjust to the atmosphere of a court from which the world is excluded, and the events that brought us here are excluded deliberately by the charge to the jury. . . . Our moral passion was excluded. (*Ibid.* 113-114)

The interchange illustrates another dialectic operative within the work: the defendants' spiritual passion standing in opposition to the purely mechanical administration of a justice that has lost contact with the moral energy from which it derives its identity, authority, and purpose.

The Trial of the Catonsville Nine is unique in documentary drama since it is a theatrical piece that was virtually scripted *before* the actual event upon which it was predicated. The conspirators knew that they would be arrested and tried for their acts, and they fully intended to use the courtroom as a forum to publicize their opposition to the Vietnam War. This makes the play distinct from other dramas of Theatre of Fact, since the choices and plan of action of the conspirators were conscious and deliberate, and, in essence, they created a piece of theatre to be played upon the public stage.

Both *Pueblo* and *Catonsville* reveal theatrical techniques that reflect functions of the mind. In the former, there is an expressionistic interpretation of the inquiry proceedings, and in the latter there is a reliance on surrealistic devices to enhance the dramatic effect. One of Berrigans's choral interjections is a citation from the "Mafia Handbook" concerning an initiation ritual:

> *The recruit is led through candles to the image of a saint. His blood is drawn and sprinkled on the effigy. He then takes an oath and is required to carry out a murder.* (*Ibid.* 33).

It is not specified in the script whether such a scene is staged or not, or whether it is a presentational address or voice-over; nevertheless, the interjection, as with the references from Anouilh, Sartre and others, counterpoints the procedural regularity of the question-response format of the trial.

In addition to the surrealistic devices, the casting of the statements of the defendants in poetic rhetoric (as opposed to the verbatim prose of the Prosecutor and Judge), the choral interjections, and the spiritual references and prayers enhance the surrealistic and transcendental character of the work. However, where *Pueblo* infers its points through intellectual interpretation of dialectical incongruities inherent in the testimony, *Catonsville* becomes a poetic statement of faith that is enhanced by a spiritual and moral commitment that supersedes the legal jurisdiction of the court. In contrast to Bucher's situation in *Pueblo*, where the individual is victimized by the legal authority, the members of the "Catonsville Nine" triumph in the assertion of their individual and collective spirit against the dogmatism of judicial procedure.

Differences between the two works are also evident in other respects. Isaac notes that *Catonsville* diverges from the standard dictates of Theatre of Fact because it does not

explore the reasons behind American involvement in Vietnam, as the Living Newspaper of the Federal Theatre Project might well have done (134). He is essentially saying that a predominant concern of the Theatre of Fact is the origin of social problems, rather than the plight of the individual who is caught up in them.

John Simon's review of *Catonsville* noted that the Berrigans "come very close to success" in reaching the Judge on basic human terms, "but finally founder on the Law: inflexible, immutable, inaccessible to mere common sense, humanity and horror of useless bloodshed" (341). He adds that the terrible message of the play is that

> we are not, and probably never will be, citizens of one land. Not only cannot the people's will end this war--it is not even enough people's will to end it [sic]. We feel vividly that we are the victims of dual citizenship . . . one is also, alas, a citizen of a realm of fools (341-42).

In his evaluation of the work, Simon appreciates how the issues concerning the War produced such a divisive effect on American society.

Donald Freed's *Inquest* (1970) deals with the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1951, and is similar to *Pueblo* and *Catonsville* in its portrayal of individuals victimized by the oppressive machinery of the State. *Inquest* expands upon the dialectic inherent in the documentary tribunal form by utilizing two distinct playing areas, Stages "A" and "B." Stage A represents the public domain of news media reporting and the courtroom forum, while Stage B presents scenes

depicting the private lives of the characters. This method provides an "incessant dialectic" by throwing public documents into "cruel relief" against the welfare of the individual (Freed 1969: 7, 5).

The effect of Freed's play is to challenge the documentary form of drama by exposing the duplicity of the news media, characterizing it with the superficial argot and dubious authenticity of sensational headlines designed to sell newspapers to the public rather than to inform it. The play examines the effect of such commercially oriented techniques of news presentation on public opinion, and incidentally demonstrates the myth-producing capability of the popular press. Gregory Mason notes that the treatment of documentary material in *Inquest* creates a product that is "a far cry indeed from such drama as Living Newspapers" (272).

In reference to the relationship between the public and the press, Freed observes that in the post-war period "we in the public received our mythology from the front pages" (1). However, *Inquest* not only undermines the credibility of the news media, it also casts aspersions on the intelligence and morality of politicians, officers of the court and the general public. In addition, the play examines the role of the press in the generation of social and political hysteria and its consequences for the Rosenbergs. It also demonstrates the socio-cultural perceptions that emerged as a consequence of the the anti-communist rhetoric and paranoia which a

decade later made the Vietnam War politically acceptable for the American people.

The portrayal of the Rosenbergs as victims in Freed's play proceeds from the position that there was no factual evidence introduced at the trial to incriminate Julius Rosenberg and his wife Ethel in any way. Freed implies that the couple was convicted on evidence prefabricated by the F.B.I. in response to the maniacal ravings of J. Edgar Hoover and was condemned by the innuendo inherent in the anti-Soviet rhetoric of the government and the press. Stage A is dominated by a large screen on which is projected sequences of newspaper headlines, pictures of prominent scientists and politicians, atomic bomb explosions and their victims, and other facsimile reproductions from the news media.

Much in the style suggested by Augusto Boal, the screen projections form subtle commentary through their being juxtaposed with scenes depicting intimate moments in the private lives of the defendants. At the beginning and the end of the first act, a disclaimer is projected on the screen:

> EVERY WORD YOU WILL HEAR OR SEE ON THIS STAGE IS A DOCUMENTED QUOTATION FROM THE ORIGINAL SOURCES OR A RECONSTRUCTION FROM ACTUAL EVENTS. (*Inquest* 22)

This disclaimer is particularly ironic, since it will transpire that the FBI case against the Rosenbergs is a reconstruction or interpretation of actual events worthy of a creative dramatist. The audience area is designated as the jury box and actors representing the jurors are placed

throughout the auditorium. Addresses that would normally be made to the jury are thus directed at the audience.

Freed hazards the dramatic intensity of the first scene by indulging in the monotonous mechanics of Court procedure. The process of Jury selection is followed by the presentation on the overhead screen of the list of Jurors and alternatives. This is followed by a recital of the Court Clerk of a seemingly interminable list, published by the Attorney General, of "subversive" organizations, to which the jurors must admit or deny membership, association or support. The list is so inclusive, and represents such a wide range of organizations that reflect the origins and concerns of the many ethnic groups that comprise the cultural "melting pot," that the jurors would necessarily be familiar with many of the organizations and their members. While extremely ponderous from a dramatic point of view, these opening moments of the play illustrate very firmly the weakness of the government's case with its reliance for conviction on the cultural paranoia surrounding Communism, rather than on evidence concerning the innocence or guilt of the defendants.

As with *Catonsville*, the forces of law and administration in *Inquest* are abstracted nameless entities who stand in opposition to the people before them in the Court. The dialectic is drawn between the anonymous agents that act for society and the individual who is placed in opposition: while the characters acting as the defendants and

witnesses assume the names of real-life people, the prosecuting agency is represented by nomenclature such as "The Government" and "The Court." The shifting of the action between Stage A and Stage B often involves transitional scenes that take the form of "man on the street" interviews in which people are asked inane questions covering a wide range of topics such as whether they prefer baseball to football, or whether they think the Rosenbergs are guilty (Freed 1970: 34). The implication is that the average person will bring the same subjective judgement to decisions of guilt or innocence as he will to personal preferences. By extension, perceptions of reality become an arbitrary and subjective function of the individual mind.

Although *Inquest* does not deal with Vietnam *per se*, it is significant that this play was written some time after the event when cultural stresses were exacerbated by the fact of the War. The play itself contains no explicit nor implicit references to the War, but Freed makes a tacit recognition of the particular psychology of the times in outlining his reasons for writing the play when he did:

> There were two reasons why there could be no play then [at that time]. First, there was the frozen, frightened political climate and secondly, in my opinion, there was no coherent aesthetic vocabulary yet available. (1970: 2)

Writing in the very late sixties, he was aware of the nature of the radical change in terms of the freedom of artistic expression in America, and the significance that it had for

the society. What Freed might have added was that the anti-communist paranoia of the fifties, while having severe repercussions for the hapless individuals caught up in the hysteria of the times, was not a threat to the society as a whole. The prosecution of the Vietnam War, however, raised serious doubts in many artists as to the actual threat of world-wide communism.

Freed saw the missing element of "aesthetic vocabulary" as a form of dramatic and literary expression which was needed to counteract the effects of the rigid thinking dictated by a cultural mythology that had dominated American consciousness in the post-World War II period. He notes that

> in a time when the very breathing is poisoned by the ideas of the past, it is a part of the burden of the writer, through fact and cruelty, to help in the construction of these new anti-myths--whether plays or films or books--that are meant to be a revelation and a therapy. (1970: 2)

Referring to the process of reconstructing the American mythology, Freed notes that "the anti-myth must have a reflexive structure: it is the double of the myth that it is confronting" (2). In explaining his motivation for writing the work, he states, "It was not the 'old left' of the day that first cracked my own particular mythology of virtue and patriotism, it was the well-known legal experts that fascinated me" (*Ibid.* 1). In such personalities as Roy Cohn, Irving Saypol, and Irving Kaufmann, the prosecuting attorneys and judges in the communist hearings of the fifties, Freed saw a malevolent social force at work.

The trial of the Rosenbergs fostered much of the anti-Soviet hysteria in the United States which left the culture so vulnerable to the Machiavellians of the McCarthy persuasion and which fueled the anti-communist rhetoric that made the Vietnam War possible in terms of public opinion, and politically expedient from the point of view of the military and the administration. Freed notes that Roy Cohn and Joseph McCarthy "were the agents of the Government and the authors of its new religion: anti-communism" (*Ibid.* 2). Expanding on a quote by Morton Sobell, a co-conspirator charged in the affair, "the future determines the past" (*Ibid.* 2), Freed explains: "The past becomes received myth unless or until artists and critics begin a revision or de-mythologization" (4). Such a movement in the theatre was to emerge with the works of Robert Lowell, Arthur Kopit, Jules Feiffer, and others, who examined American culture from the perspective of its treatment of the minority cultures that had come into contact with it.

In explaining his views concerning cultural myth and its effects, Freed explains the dynamics of what he calls the "vocabulary of the myth of the twentieth century":

> Film, tape, trials, technology, confessions--in short the State and its visible paraphernalia. The infrastructure of the myth is the agony and confrontation between Science and Magic. The anti-myth to the magic of the state is Theatre of Fact. The anti-myth to the science of the State is Theatre of Cruelty. (*Ibid.* 4).

Freed perceives the Theatre of Cruelty arising from the psychological necessity of accommodating the mass of exponential data that inundates the consciousness of contemporary man. If he hopes to come to terms with such phenomena as facts, figures, places, statistics, death camps, purge trials and the atomic bomb, "the spectator must be given a choice in order to retain any hope that he can influence the monstrosities that lie before him" (*Ibid.* 4). Freed essentially ranges the destroyer of the myth against its creator, a mutually-destructive dialectic: while he views the communications media on the one hand as the formulator of myth, on the other, it "can also explode the myths of the status quo and make rending gaps in the credibility of the 'establishment' of lies" (*Ibid.* 6).

Freed envisions the dramatist and the dramatic form as playing a vital role in exposing the dangers of cultural ethnocentricity, and determines that one function of the concerned dramatist should be that of a debunker of cultural myth. He notes that "[American] myths are invented and received and have made us sick," and adds that

> racial and political myths can best be subverted, perhaps, by those who should know the most about storytelling--the playwrights. So the play is an anti-myth; it means to disenthrall. (*Ibid.* 8)

Thus, succinctly, he identifies the process and direction of American drama of the 1960s. The dramatic productions of social discontent manifested in street theatre demonstrations attacked those same cultural myths as the dramas destined for

the commercial stage. Both the improvisational groups and the established playwrights became increasingly concerned with what they saw as destructive instincts in their society.

One of the more strident productions that resulted from the increased awareness of Vietnam was staged as part of the "*Angry Arts Against the War in Vietnam Week,*" that took place in New York City during the period January 29 - February 5, 1967. Saul Gottlieb's *American Atrocities in Vietnam,* was inspired by Eric Norden's article of the same name printed in *Liberation* (February 1966). The play drew upon statistics of casualties, logistics, statements of victims and perpetrators of atrocities, and descriptions of battlefield conditions that were reported daily in the news media.

The action of the play follows the direction of a "Narrator," whose lines consist mainly of portions of news items extracted from such publications as David Lyle's *Plague and War,* the *New York Times,* the *New York Herald Tribune, The Nation,* and *Newsweek*; there are also excerpts from letters written by GIs to their families. Film clips and slides showing dead and mutilated bodies accompany and punctuate the action. As the Narrator reads quotes from the dispatches of war correspondents and soldiers describing the torturing and murder of Vietnamese civilians, members of the cast act out the atrocities and interpret the pain and suffering. One particularly poignant moment occurs when the narrator reads a letter written by a GI, expressing his horror at watching a

Vietnamese family being tortured for information by the application of electrodes to their sexual organs. The soldier writes that he has been ill ever since, and that "my sergeant tells me I'm suffering from battle fatigue" (171).

Gottlieb acknowledges the influence of Living Theatre techniques in the formulation and presentation of the work (178), and while the play is essentially an improvisation on the documentary material, it nevertheless represents one of the earliest serious attempts on the part of American theatre to come to terms with the reality of the war and, more particularly, the effect of the experience on the American soldier. The piece effectively combines the resources of documentary theatre with subjective interpretations that detail the human suffering behind the newspaper headlines. Some scenes of *Atrocities* were filmed by William Klein for the full-length documentary *Far From Vietnam*, which was shown at the New York Film Festival in September 1967. Several torture scenes were cut in anticipation of censorship (Gottlieb 178).

The experimental theatre in America during the sixties thus shows a distinct evolution in its dramatic techniques, philosophy, and form and structure. At the start of the decade, the experimental groups were preoccupied with the presentation of works dramatizing social problems. As the cultural stresses associated with Vietnam became more and more evident, those groups that were initially apolitical

quickly became radicalized. Their work became increasingly characterized by its revolutionary zeal, and social dissention strengthened into open rebellion. The theatre that dealt with inequities in the contemporary society and adopted an anti-establishment stance in the early sixties expanded its objectives to include a critique of the culture when the process of self-examination continued to be felt in dramatic productions.

As part of their anti-establishment stance, the radical theatre groups moved outside the theatre building in an attempt to engage a new popular audience. Both the traditional theatre audience and that which had little previous contact with the live stage were given the opportunity to become committed and involved in theatrical productions. Taking their message to the streets, these radical companies made the audience a part of the performance, and when the revolution spread to the commercial theatre, the documentary style invaded the productions and introduced the realities of the street to the theatre of illusion.

The documentary style of news presentation itself became both the instrument and the object of criticism. While incorporating facsimile representations of current events into their works, dramatists often seized the opportunity to reinterpret historical events in the light of contemporary issues. As the dramatists attempted to ascertain the "truth"

behind the reality, they often reflected, and even catered to the attitudes of audiences that had now begun to doubt the veracity and ethics of their political and military leaders, and even the underlying values of the society itself. In plays such as *Catonsville*, *Pueblo*, and *Inquest*, the individual stood squarely in opposition to the State, and in that sense, the traditional theatre began to assume the social and political orientation of the experimental theatre.

Strongly influenced by European theatre practitioners and theorists, the American commercial theatre of the decade became increasingly aware of the absurdist interpretation of alienated and isolated man. In its distinctively American form, Absurdism assumed the individual to be not only isolated from a cosmic sense of order, but also from his society and culture. Existential problems associated with the examination of collective and individual identity and purpose were exacerbated by a social and cultural fragmentation induced by the controversies surrounding the prosecution of the War. Issues that fractured the social structure had not arisen since the Civil War--itself primarily a war between two cultures--had divided the country.

When the controversies associated with Vietnam began to be reflected in the arts, several major literary figures, among them Robert Lowell, Arthur Kopit, Joseph Heller and Jules Feiffer, turned to the dramatic form to express their moral indignation. In their examination of the values and

perceptions of their contemporary society, they probed for the sources of contemporary social problems in the history and mythology of American culture itself. Regarding the process by which dramatic metaphor is created on the stage as being analogous to that which is operative in the external world, they attacked what they saw as dangerous fallacies of perception in the real world by showing this same process operative in the theatre: the suspension of disbelief in the auditorium was similar to what was manifest outside it. In examining the reasons for the plight of the individual, they challenged the cultural myths and rituals which sustained both the individual and the collective consciousness. Shaken in his cultural identity, the American was portrayed as suspended in an existential limbo, not as in Beckett, where he is generic man distanced from his God and a rational universal order, but, rather, as a particular individual unsure of his own value and identity.

The American drama involving Vietnam was permeated by the dramatic themes and techniques of the early sixties, but there were indications of a distinctive evolution in dramatic style as the war gained prominence in the public mind. Playwrights who had little or no first-hand experience of the war, for both personal and aesthetic reasons couched their criticism in plays of abstraction and analogy. Chapter III will examine those plays of abstraction and analogy that were written during the Vietnam period, and will discuss reasons

for the emergence of that type of drama. An analysis of the phenomenon of the fragmentation of the American cultural psyche, as it is treated in these works, will also be provided.

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CHAPTER III

PLAYS OF ABSTRACTION

One possible reason why the dramatists who first attempted to deal with the intrusion of Vietnam into the American consciousness chose to abstract the situation in dramas of analogy, allegory or allusion, was that the war existed at first for them and for the average American as a conflict of principles rather than a military confrontation. Distanced by geography and culture, the war experience was transmitted primarily through newspapers, journals and media events which, as Freed has suggested, have a reality distinct from that of everyday life. The military and cultural catastrophe suffered by America was still in the future as was a general awareness of the physical cost of the war evidenced by the maimed bodies of returning veterans.

While the experimental theatre companies eventually turned to war themes as natural extensions of their critical attitude toward American society, the conventional theatre--and established playwrights--remained curiously distanced from the war. Robert Asahina has noted that, with the exception of Ron Cowen's *Summertree* (1968),

> the subject of Vietnam was not even raised in American theatres until 1971, six years after the escalation of conflict, three years after the peak

> of American involvement, and well after public opinion had turned against the war. (33)[1]

No doubt part of the reason was that conventional theatre is traditionally conservative in nature; another might be that the established playwrights and practitioners of the theatre were reluctant to be associated with the activities of the radical groups which tended toward excesses in their expression of anti-social statements.[2]

Yet, many of the plays written and produced by very competent dramatists of the sixties contained scathing social and cultural criticism, some striking at the very essence of Americanism, challenging the legitimacy of the country as a civilized nation, and questioning the very principles upon which the culture was founded. The social crises of the sixties led many members of the artistic community to an examination of the American past in order to find explanations for current problems and attitudes. These dramatists, familiar with the function of metaphor on the stage, saw a similar force operative in real life where there

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[1] Asahina distinguishes between the commercial theatre, the avant garde, and the radical/guerilla theatre groups. The radical groups were performing anti-war plays before this period. Note also his observations on Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* (1966) in Chapter II.

[2] An interesting case in point is Sam Shepard, who was a prolific playwright in the sixties and seventies. References to Vietnam, either overt or tangential, are virtually non-existent in his works. The overwhelming thrust of his plays, however, was the decline of American cultural mythology. See J. Fenn, "Myth in Decline: Sam Shepard and the American Dream." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1983.

existed a suspension of disbelief on the level, as John Lahr suggests, of "cultural amnesia" (1969: 19). Several playwrights of the period, notably Arthur Kopit, Robert Lowell, and Jules Feiffer directed their efforts at probing the source of this protective amnesia and at effecting a catharsis by revealing the cultural misconceptions on which it was based. In doing so, they went to the roots of the cultural consciousness and exposed the incongruities and false assumptions that had led to the contemporary cultural paralysis.

A recurring theme observable in the Vietnam War plays is the failure of the American cultural myth. When a society comes under stress and its cultural myths are brought into question, one consequence for both the collective and individual psyche is a sense of disequilibrium. American culture itself was a belligerent and a casualty on the battlefields of Vietnam: the political principles of freedom and democracy which made America unique; its technology; its fighting men who had won victories on many other battlefields; the presence of Communism which America abhorred and saw antithetical to everything that it stood for; and the necessity for America to demonstrate its willingness to come to the aid of the oppressed, were all at stake there. To appreciate fully the extent of the failure of the American myth in Vietnam, the very essence of the War

dramas, it is necessary to examine certain aspects of the mythic process itself.

The interrelation between myth and ritual has been the genesis of much scholarly debate. Robertson Smith, in his assertion of the primacy of ritual, states that myths are "verbal explanations of ritual," and are essentially of a non-religious nature (79). Mircea Eliade, on the other hand, posits that, as all myths contain a "creation" element, they are of a religious nature and contain an esoteric knowledge which one "experiences" through ritual (18). Annemarie de Waal Malefijit notes, "early psychoanalysts, including Freud and Reik, tended to agree that myth was a description of ritual" (187). Other mythologists, such as Stanley Hyman and Fitz Roy Raglan attach much importance to the fact that rituals often "fade away," while the engendering myths survive, thereby implying that myths may be a degraded residue of forgotten rituals (*Ibid.* 188).

The distinction between myth and ritual and their relationship to one another may be clarified in terms of thinking and doing. Ritual, above all else is a demonstrative act; myth, paradoxically enough, depends on a belief or faith. Malefijit notes,

> It is the aspect of belief that gives myth its power. Without belief, myth cannot function as "a charter of social reality," nor can it uphold moral values or motivate human behaviour. Belief makes myth sacred and relates it directly to dogma. Dogma appeals to myth to explain and sanctify its truths, and all stories which are not rooted in dogma are not myths. (186)

Malefijit points out that moral values and ethics owe their substance to cultural myths, which, in a practical sense, become dogmatic principles of a society, thus providing a sense of social cohesion and continuity. When a given society is subject to internal stress and its cultural myths are brought into question, a consequence is a destabilization of social equilibrium.

Myth as a "charter of social reality" is a postulation of Bronislaw Malinowski, who regards myth as having an essential "functionalist" nature in primitive societies. Malinowski observes,

> Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensible function; it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficacy of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is . . . a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (101)

While Malinowski directs his remarks to primitive societies, the implications for contemporary societies are quite evident.

Joseph Campbell, in his extensive analysis and treatment of myths and their indispensiblity to the psychological well-being of humanity, has outlined some functions of myth, and their role in human consciousness. According to Campbell, there are four primary characteristics of myth. These are: a mystical aspect, which inspires in the individual a sense of the cosmos; an acceptable explanation of the perceived universe; a validation of the existing social and moral

order; and a guide that will provide a means of harmonic intercourse with the metaphysical and prosaic world (222). Campbell's position is that, through myth, man places himself in context with his surroundings and that the comforting presence of myth is the basis for psychological equanimity. Myth is simply man's way of coping with an environment that at times can be hostile, frightening or, at the very least, uncertain.

Campbell notes that ritualistic behaviour provides the medium through which the individual expresses his identity and his affiliation with his society. He adds that such standards of conduct, such as business ethics, legal procedure, and the many forms of social intercourse formulate "game rules" that are essential to the conduct of any society (59). Disruptions in normal behavioral patterns, which are dictated by myth and ritual, alter accepted perceptions of reality. This discordance between the individual and his cultural mythos is exacerbated when changes in social structure--such as induction into the army--and altered environments, both psychological and physical, upset the individual's precarious psychological equilibrium when those norms which comprise his sense of reality and stability undergo changes. Reality becomes fractured and begins to disintegrate when cultural myths no longer provide the psychological needs of the individual to cope with the changed environment. Only with the establishment of new

cultural myth--army routine and sense of purpose, for example--is psychological balance restored.

Myth thus functions in a society by providing the infrastructure through which individual and communal ideas of identity, cohesion, and continuity are expressed. This system is composed of a corpus of beliefs which include ontological ideas of the culture--both historical and metaphysical; self-images, both of the individual and his social group; the social mores and values of the society; and virtually all conditions of social intercourse which are defined through cultural perspectives. This system provides a cultural mythos through which the society perceives itself, and it is so pervasive and definitive in nature that many forms of social interaction are directly expressed in mythological terms.

On the collective level, the cultural mythos may be so strong that it totally determines the psychological perspectives of the individual. The influence of the many communications media in a modern society can and does form a good part of the collective consciousness. In remarking upon the effect of the media as a formulating aspect of cultural mythology and its effect on American dramatic literature, George Stambolian notes that

> Contemporary playwrights share with artists Warhol and Lichtenstein and novelists Barthes and Barthelme the knowledge that our own and therefore our country's identity is largely determined by the figures, images, and myths of our popular culture. And like these artists and writers they have in their efforts to modify our consciousness naturally turned to an exploration of those cultural factors

> that daily alter and mold our consciousness. Through parody, satire, and even cool analysis they hold up to America the image of a land in which human presence and truly individual response have been all but crushed and eliminated by the models and structures projected by the media. (79-80)

The criticism of American culture that so characterized the theatre of the 1960s was consequently directed against the cultural myths that provided the foundations of cultural reality.

Charles Musès, co-editor of *Consciousness and Reality*, observes that the accumulative effect of socio-cultural "givens" is often so complete as to replace objective reality with an artificial or received reality. He notes that there is no such thing as an "ordinary state of consciousness"; that everyone is governed to a degree by "acculturation, upbringing, and value system development"; and that this process results in the individual existing in a form of "waking trance" (3). He adds that this process is greatly intensified in highly propagandized or emotionally affected communities (*Ibid.* 3) The process by which an individual is conditioned by his social environment is that of acculturation. Working on many levels and in different modes, the process may be so subtle as to go unnoticed. As Musès further suggests:

> Acculturation is slow hypnosis, as in all conditioning and behavioristic manipulation. One of the most naïve failures of behaviorism has been . . . the failure to see itself as a very efficient set of techniques for slow hypnosis and the implantation of suggestions and values by the stressing of certain lines of behavior. (3)

This acculturation process is responsible for the psychological phenomenon known as "culture shock," which occurs when an individual is exposed to an alien culture and is frustrated by behaviour which appears to be incongruous and inconsistent with that to which he has become conditioned. In the Vietnam War dramas, soldiers are exposed to the culture shock experience several times: when they join the army, when they go overseas, and when they return home.

Through the process of acculturation, reality within a given society is predicated on what Campbell calls "facts of the mind." He observes,

> Traditionally . . . in the orthodoxies of popular faiths, mythic beings and events are generally regarded and taught as facts. . . . Historically, however, such facts are now in question; hence the moral orders too, that they support. (10)

Objective reality is subject to interpretation by the senses, and dogmatic ideas defining a state of awareness emerge. Dogmas are expressed through myth, which in turn, relies on ritual for expression. Conditioned or received reality is predicated upon these beliefs and behaviours. However, due to the probability that those dogma were interpreted with prejudice to a certain time, place and position in the evolution of a culture, fallacies of perception occur. The evolution from objective to perceived reality is the process of acculturation described by Musès; the factor of belief which relates myth to dogma is that expounded by Malefijit; the fallacies are those described by Campbell. The

evolutionary process accommodates the functionalist aspects of Malinowski, since myth is an integral element in the forming of social consciousness. The dramas of experience dealing with the Vietnam War show time and again the failure of cultural mythology when the clarity of perception afforded by extra-cultural experience denies the validity of all that America takes for granted.[3]

In an investigation of the mores and values of American society, poets, philosophers and dramatists attempted to find clues to the American psyche in the roots of its cultural history and identity. The social disequilibrium engendered by socially disruptive events, such as political assassination and the violence associated with racial integration, became more acute with the Americanization of the French Indo-China War in the early sixties. In response, several dramatists turned to historical paradigms to illustrate the curious paradoxes they saw inherent in the American character and national image. C.W.E. Bigsby notes that for a number of poets, novelists and playwrights,

> Vietnam was not best understood as an aberration but as part of a historical logic. The challenge to American moral values was seen as a piece with other such challenges. What was at stake was not merely America's sense of itself as a defender of democratic freedoms but, beyond that, a model of human nature which proposed cruelty and callous violence as aberrant. (320)

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[3] For a comprehensive analysis of American cultural myth, see James Oliver Robertson's *American Myth, American Reality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).

Typical of those works which examined the past in order to explain the present were Robert Lowell's trilogy *The Old Glory* (1964-65) and Arthur Kopit's *Indians* (1969). These plays sought to find in America's history the social and psychological factors that had determined American perception and behaviour.

The use of historical paradigm to highlight contemporary problems was a phenomenon neither new nor peculiar to America. As Herbert Blau observes,

> Since World War II, even before, theatre has been fulfilling a new analytical function in respect to historical process. . . . The theatre has provided the social sciences with a conceptual apparatus for interpreting the reality from which, paradoxically, it draws its substance as a form. The old metaphor of the world as a stage has entered the rhetoric of social analysis to assess what it is being derived from and what, in turn, it must be assessed by. (9)

The plays of analogy and abstraction assert what Bruce Kuklick in another context refers to as a paradigm which involves "symbolic generalizations," "large-scale beliefs about the universe," and "analogies and heuristic maxims" (610). Through a process of distancing, in time and cultural history, the authors of these plays sought to dramatically rephrase the incongruities of their immediate society. In their theatre, the dramatic elements that give a work its cultural perspective in terms of symbol, ritual, and structure, were utilized as analytical tools in an attempt to expose the inconsistencies of the society, and to reflect them in their dramas.

Robert Lowell's trilogy of *The Old Glory* carries the examination of American culture to its historical roots. In a poetic and often nightmarish vision, Lowell explores the formative influences of the fledgling society that became, in his eyes, the cultural determinants of his contemporary society. The work presents a re-interpretation of American history written during the growing awareness of the American involvement in Vietnam. The three plays that comprise the trilogy, *Endecott and the Red Cross, My Kinsman, Major Molineux* and *Benito Cereno* examine in an historical context the psychology of the American character by organizing the antithetical impulses inherent in human nature and fixing them within the context of American society and culture. Robert Brustein suggests that in the work

> American history takes on the quality of metaphor and ritual; traditional American literature begins to function like Greek mythology as the source and reflection of contemporary behaviour. (256)

The trilogy is significant for a study of the drama engendered by the Vietnam War because, although it did not confront the fact of the war directly, it focused on American society in an examination of what compelled it and the individuals who comprised it to carry out imperialistic policies against other countries and cultures. The critic John Simon observed that "Lowell is trying to capture the ironies, cruelties and inconclusiveness on which America was built" (182). He further notes that in *Endecott*, the

ambiguities are chiefly religious; in *Molineux*, they are political; and in *Cereno*, they are racial (182).

The plays focus on the dialectics inherent in American society by showing the paradoxical nature of ideals and events which brought it into being: spiritual and civil freedom and repression; law and order and revolution; individual right versus the State; and the definition of God's will with particular reference to the New World. In an interview with A. Alvarez in 1965, Lowell posits many of his own views and those that he perceives in the artistic community concerning the state of his contemporary society. He points out the conflict that art and artists in the America of the period have with the State:

> I have a feeling that the arts are in a very funny position now--that we are free to say what we want to, and somehow what we want to say is the confusion and sadness and incoherence of the human condition. Anyone running a government must say the opposite of that; that it can be solved. (40)

Lowell became increasingly concerned about the preoccupation with violence and power in the American character. He noted that there was an air of unreality about America, since violence and idealism in the country seemed to have some occult connection, that somehow the American character had become associated with the use of force (41). He adds,

> We were founded on a Declaration, on the Constitution, on Principles, and we've always had

> the ideal of "saving the world." And that comes close to perhaps destroying the world. (42)[4]

Lowell thus places in context the two driving forces that underlie American foreign policy: a messianic quest to save the world [from Communism] and the exercise of military power which has at its command the products of a technology inspired by that same mission.

The Old Glory trilogy consists of two short plays, *Endecott and the Red Cross*, and *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, that were based on short stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and a longer concluding piece, *Benito Cereno*, based on the novella by Herman Melville. Although Mark W. Estrin notes that the unifying metaphor of the trilogy is the American flag (411), and Baruch Hochman suggests that "the Old Glory is central to each play--will it be flown, where, and by whom?" (127), the key element in the trilogy is not the American flag itself, but its assertion against other flags and the conditions under which it comes to dominate them. The titles of the three plays are the names of central figures who have specific symbolic relationships with the various

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[4] Lowell's words are curiously reminiscent of those uttered by an American Army Major concerning the Vietnamese hamlet of Ben Tre. In order to deny the resources of the village to the Viet Cong, the Americans obliterated the village and the Vietnamese government resettled its inhabitants in refugee camps. In the words of the Major: "We had to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it [from the communists]." See *American Dreams, American Nightmares*, ed. David Madden (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 11.

flags, which become demonstrative symbols of specific revolutionaries. In *Endecott* the flag is the Red Cross of St. George; in *Molineux*, it is the "Don't Tread on Me" banner of the revolution; and in *Cereno*, there are three: the Lion and the Castle of Spain, the American flag, and the Skull and Crossbones. The trilogy reveals the nature of man and his need for flags, and how those banners come to represent the ideals and values of the particular countries which fly them. Lowell draws on the distinctions between flags to develop his primary points, which are the nature of patriotism and its effect on those for whom it is a motivating principle.

In reference to *Endecott and the Red Cross*, Richard Sterne summarizes the historical points which provided the factual basis for Hawthorne's story and Lowell's play. He describes how, in 1625, an English barrister and adventurer, Thomas Morton, established the "Bohemian" colony of "Maremount" on the present-day site of Quincy, Massachusetts (847). The colonists erected a huge eighty-foot pine Maypole which became the focus for the May Day celebrations of 1627, festivities which included debaucheries of drinking and fornication, with the participation of Indian women (*Ibid.* 847). For mixed motives, which included the economic factor of the colony's dominating trade in liquor and guns with the Indians, Captain Miles Standish was sent to subdue the colony in the spring of 1628 (*Ibid.* 848). Morton was sent back to England to answer charges of violating a proclamation of the

late King James against the sale of arms to Indians (*Ibid.* 849). A few months after the expulsion of Morton, John Endecott and his followers arrived from England to establish a colony at Massachusetts Bay. One of his first official acts was to visit Merry Mount, cut down the Maypole, and rebuke the remaining inhabitants of the colony for their devious ways (Ibid. 849).

Lowell combined the events of the period in formulating the basis of his work. Set in Massachusetts of the 1660s, the action unfolds as Mr. Blackstone, a representative of the Church of England, is sent by King Charles to Merry Mount to advise Thomas Morton of the Crown's appointments of a new Royal Governor and Archbishop, both unsympathetic to the Puritan sect. Morton obliges Blackstone to anoint the "King and Queen" of the May, and to take part in the pagan rituals that are said to date back to the days of King Arthur (*Endecott* 14). The festivities are interrupted by Governor Endecott and his Puritan troops who come to end the trade of guns and liquor with the Indians, and to terminate the May Day antics.

Endecott has had a transcendental experience as the consequence of a fever: he has seen a vision where Christ has appeared as an old man, drooling, and looking like a "dirty old Italian Pope" (*Ibid.* 33). Endecott interprets the vision as an indication of the decadence of the Roman Church, and his ideas are reinforced by the sight of drunken revellers

dressed in animal costumes prancing about in uncontrolled Dionysian ecstasy, apparently with the tacit consent of Morton and the Episcopalian minister, Blackstone. In the Bacchanalian doings of the May Day celebrations, white men fraternize with Indian women, while the Indian men are incapacitated by liquor. Morton suggests that Endecott will have to learn to like the state of affairs, and taunts him with the knowledge that the new Governor and he "are like brothers" and that when the Governor arrives, he, Morton will "be at his right hand" (*Ibid.* 47).

Endecott reacts strongly and decides to assert his Puritan "iron will." He assembles his soldiers and addresses them: "Like many of you, I have served three sovereigns / I have carried our flag, the Red Cross of England,/against the Spaniard and Rochelle" (*Ibid.* 51). The soldiers respond with enthusiasm, shouting "England, England" until Endecott continues:

> Shall Charles Stuart stop us?
> Charles is a Scotchman and a pin-headed tailor's model.
> His father was James. He slobbered,
> he liked to have young boys about him.
> James' mother was Mary.
> Mary was a whore, a Papist and a criminal murderess,
> who blew her husband up with powder. (*Ibid.* 53)

His speech associates the repressive nature of the Crown with allegations of sexual perversity, thus he succeeds in turning his men's sympathies against England.

Endecott's anger is fired by the threat of religious suppression that he anticipates is coming in the person of the newly-appointed Archbishop, and by the corrosive immorality inherent in the widespread debauchery of the colonists at Merry Mount. In keeping with the implications of his vision, Endecott sees the decadence of the church, sexual debauchery, alcoholic dissipation and an ungracious sovereign all undermining the Edenic virtues of the New World. He orders the Red Cross cut from its standard and cast into the dirt, and pronounces: "Before God and man, I stand by my act! / We shall have no pope nor tyrant or mother-country in New England! / No flag shall stand between us and our God!" (*Ibid.* 55).

In this first segment of Lowell's trilogy, there is no banner to replace the discarded Red Cross. Only Endecott's faith in his purpose remains to guide his actions, but, consumed by a sense of power and by religious fervour, Endecott orders the drunken Indians, who have been incarcerated in an ice-house, to be shot. He then orders the settlement of Merry Mount to be put to the torch. His sense of self-righteousness leads him to destroy (with the same rationale as at Ben Tre) what is antithetical to the idealistic principles that he perceives to constitute the mandate of the American colonies.

Endecott lays out in intimate detail the loss of innocence that was present even at the very beginning of "the

great experiment." Bigsby notes that the play is a re-enactment of the Fall of Man, since

> Endicott [sic] and his soldiers take upon themselves the responsibility for their own fate. They sunder the links between themselves and England and seal this act with the ritual killing of the Indians and the destruction of Merry Mount. They thus claim their freedom at the cost of a sense of guilt. (1985: 302)

Daniel Hoffman observes that the inherent message of *Endecott* and of the next play in the trilogy, *Molineux*, is an extension of Hawthorne's ironical assertion, "Their own rebellion led them to become tyrants themselves" (221).

In examining the disparate elements inherent in patriotism, and the significance of a flag, Lowell indicates that flags are sustained by social ritual. The desecration of the Red Cross is associated with the formal address to the soldiers; when sentiment turns against the English, the flag is brought to the ground. Endecott's first assertion of power in Merry Mount was to disperse the May Day ritual dancers. In a demonstration of his power and as an indication of the changed circumstances at the end of the play, however, Endecott calls back the dancers. With the long hair of the ritual King shorn, and all the revellers attired in Puritan grey rather than animal skins, he now bids them to dance "the last [masque] that will be seen on this continent" (*Endecott* 56). The dancers perform "*pathetically and wiltingly*" (*Ibid.* 56), and the dance becomes an anti-masque. Unlike the Old World masques that celebrated the release of "lovers bound"

and the restoration of harmony, the dance performed by the subdued colonists is sullied by the slaughter of the Indians and the suppression of the traditional Dionysian festivals.

The disparate works that comprise the trilogy are consistent in their display of deliberate desecration of cultural symbols and the profanation of both secular and religious ritual. George Ralph notes that Lowell consistently deals with social alienation--"tribe against tribe," "culture against culture," and "race against race"--rather than with the isolation of the individual (156). In his exploration of the psychological makeup of the American character and the inconsistencies between the ideals and the actions of the society, Lowell underscores the importance of ritual and the social myth which it both supports and embraces.

The second play of the trilogy, *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, is set at another critical time and place in American history; it depicts the town of Boston immediately before the outbreak of the American rebellion. The essential movement of the play shatters the mythology surrounding the ideals and principles inherent in the mystique of the Revolution. Residents of Boston become gross caricatures of humanity; mercenary, lascivious and hungry for power, they are moved to violence in the assertion of their own interests against those of the British Crown. The mise en scène is surrealistic, and evokes a hellish atmosphere. Buildings on the set are grotesquely distorted, and provide, as Bigsby

suggests, "an expressionistic analogue for their twisted inhabitants" (1985: 303).

Into this surrealistic and nightmarish landscape intrude two innocents from pastoral Deerfield, Robin and his brother. The young men are seeking their cousin, Major Molineux, a British administrator. They engage a ferryman, an obvious representation of the mythological Charon, boatman of the river Styx, to take them across the river to Boston. In accepting the fare for their journey, he remarks "No one returns, for this is the city of the dead" (*Molineux* 66). The action continues with a series of surrealistic scenes as the boys meet the grotesque inhabitants of Boston, including a tavern-keeper, barber, clergyman, effeminate aristocrat, and prostitute. All of the latter utter pompous maxims expressing their complaints against the Crown, but the subtle nuances of speech and attitude reveal their personal corruption. The hero of the resistance, Colonel Greenough, is, like Endecott, depicted as a grotesquely masked ambiguous figure. His mask changes complexion during the course of the play; it turns from a neutral gray to a violent red symbolizing the intensity of rebellious fervour. His idealistic facade clothes a power-hungry entity; as the fury of revolt increases, he claims "I am a king" (*Ibid.* 96). While expressing many of the Revolution's idealistic principles, he is nevertheless shown to be arrogant, corrupt and bloodthirsty.

The dramatic progression of the play reveals a descent into apocalyptic catastrophe, as the mob under Greenough--designated in the text as "Man with Mask"--becomes increasingly more violent and irrational. Parading under the banner of a coiled rattlesnake with the motto "Don't Tread on Me!" the mob resembles a society in disarray rather than a band of patriots. In a demonstrative act of assertion, they tar and feather Molineux, and at the climax of their revolutionary fervour, they kill and rob him. The innocent bystanders, Robin and his brother, are drawn into the revolution. Believing that he can help his cousin, Robin takes up the Rattlesnake banner; his brother is ordered to get some dirt, which is subsequently thrown by another at Molineux; against the best of intentions, yet trapped by circumstance, family members become involved on opposite sides of civil strife.

In *Molineux*, Lowell shows the innocent becoming involved either through ignorance or circumstance, and the very process by which internecine strife breaks out when cultural ideals and values become blurred. The ambiguity of principle and action inherent in the theology of revolution is a source of confusion when compounded by doubts about social values and purpose. Problems of cultural identity are exacerbated by social stress arising from current events. Thus, while distancing his work in mythology and history, Lowell succeeds in describing those very factors of cultural ambivalence in

the American consciousness that were to re-emerge in other historical crises such as the Civil War and Vietnam.[5]

As with *Endecott*, *Molineux* also displays characteristics of the anti-masque. The caricatures presented in *Molineux* wear various disguises that blur their true identity. Inflammatory rhetoric and idealistic fervour mask the self-serving nature and corrupt principles constituting the justification for violence. The Colonel is said to tell the truth, but obviously lies; as Hochman notes, "Truth is equivocal in this city of revolutionary dolors--'Reality' is established by fiat" (128). The stabilizing effect of structured ritual and established modes of communal intercourse that afford a society its psychological equilibrium is negated when, under the influence of revolutionary zeal, those traditions are cast aside in the interests of establishing a new social order. As Grant notes, the defeated and disbanded revellers of Merry Mount turn into a wild mob in *Molineux* (334).

The antithesis of the therapeutic nature of social ritual demonstrated in the festivities of the original inhabitants of Merry Mount is now revealed in *Molineux*. The value of the stabilizing effect of communal rite which was denied and suppressed in *Endecott* re-emerges in a violent

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[5] The Civil War itself may be perceived as a conflict between cultures as well as an internecine struggle. The social fragmentation that occurred in the 1850s and 1860s was remarkably similar to that occurring in the 1950s and 1960s, as families became divided within themselves.

blood orgy of social disintegration. *Molineux* continues the pattern of profane ritual when a clergyman joins the rioting in the streets and invites Robin to observe a bloody festival: "Now we'll strip the scarlet whore, / King George shall swim in scarlet blood, / Now Nebuchadnezzar shall eat grass and die" (*Molineux* 107). At the conclusion of the play, the crowd and the revolutionaries intone the phrase now meaningless in the ironic presence of Major Molineux' body, killed by mob violence, "All tyrants must die as this man died" (*Molineux* 110-111). In the very crucible of American nationhood, Lowell suggests, lies corruption, violence, and a distorted sense of perception.

The final play in the trilogy, *Benito Cereno*, is a reflection of the destructive forces inherent in Lowell's contemporary society. While on one level the work deals with philosophical problems of freedom and responsibility, and racial guilt, the unbridled use of power and underlying aspects of ethnocentrism reveal the arrogance and cultural blindness that characterizes American foreign policy. The Random House Dictionary offers two distinct definitions for ethnocentrism, both of which are evident in Lowell's *Cereno*, and by implication, also in his contemporary America. Random House notes that ethnocentrism consists of "a belief in the inherent superiority of one's own group and culture accompanied by feelings of contempt for other groups and cultures," and "a tendency to view alien groups and cultures

in terms of one's own" (489). In the figure of Captain Amasa Delano, Lowell concentrates much of America's chauvinistic attitude towards other cultures, and demonstrates how that attitude can lead to calamitous acts.

Benito Cereno is set aboard the vessel *San Domingo* off the island of Trinidad, on Independence Day, about the year 1800. It details a situation in which an American merchant captain, Amasa Delano, offers assistance to a plague-ridden ship whose captain, Don Benito Cereno, is gradually perceived by the bosun, Perkins, to be a captive of his obsequious Negro servant Babu. The slaves have taken command of the ship and killed the former captain; however, as they are unskilled seamen, they do not have the necessary expertise for sailing the vessel back to Africa. Delano, in his naïve self-assurance and limited outlook does not perceive the signals that Don Benito and the few surviving Spanish crewmen are sending him.

In this play as in the others of the trilogy, Delano is given a confidant with whom he can externalize his thoughts and attitudes. Delano's bosun, Perkins, is both a confidant and an alter ego; between them the pair represent the two extremes that Lowell sees in the American character. Perkins is a seaman with the austere character of a New England Puritan, and in the opening scene, Delano chides him good naturedly: "You don't believe in slavery or Spaniards or smoking or long cruises or monks or Mr. Jefferson! You are a

Puritan, all faith and fire" (*Cereno.* 125). In response to Perkins' acquiescence, Delano ironically observes, "God save America from Americans!" (*Ibid.* 125).

From his opening statement in the play, with reference to the American flag, "There goes the most beautiful woman in South America" (*Ibid.* 119), Delano voices countless cultural platitudes. As George Ralph notes, Delano moves through an entire catalogue of national characteristics (157). His complacent "everybody trusts us" (*Cereno* 154), his petulant "it's always the man of good will that gets hurt" (*Ibid.* 171); his pride in being the product of a melting-pot society which, he perceives, manifests the best qualities and none of the defects of all the Caucasian ethnic groups; and his presumed encyclopedic knowledge of foreign customs (and women) based on a few days in port--all characterize him as an individual totally conditioned within the precepts of American culture. Ralph notes of Delano that he increasingly betrays the fact that he is indeed the product of his culture, in his self-protective insularity, his inability to understand alien habits, and in the predictability of his thoughts and actions (158).

While the naive Delano banters with Don Benito and watches the rebel slave Babu holding a razor to Cereno's throat as he shaves the Captain, Perkins investigates the true condition of the ship: he sees a former African king, Atufal, without chains, and discovers a Skull and Crossbones

flag. He also discovers the dead body of the former Captain of the *San Domingo*, Don Aranda, whom the Blacks have murdered. Perkins has the foresight to summon armed sailors from Delano's ship, and is able to forestall disaster when the crisis occurs.

What finally arouses Delano's suspicions that all is not well aboard the San Domingo is not a perception of the actual situation, but that the crew does not respond gratefully to the American aid in the form of food and water. The climax occurs as Babu, irritated and frustrated by Delano's condescending manner towards him, attempts to demonstrate his own power. He shows his command of the situation by forcing Don Benito to trample on the Spanish flag and to kiss the "lips" of the skeleton of the dead Captain Aranda. He then demands that Delano do the same. Delano, however, is armed with a pistol and resists. Babu gathers the rebellious slaves; they are confronted by the armed sailors who have now arrived. As the sailors begin shooting the Negroes, Perkins attempts to save lives by demanding surrender: "We want to save someone" (*Cereno* 194). Don Benito is astonished by the naïveté of the Americans: "My God, how little these people understand!" (*Ibid.* 194). When the unarmed Babu shouts, "The future is with us," Delano responds, "This is your future," and empties his pistol into him (*Ibid.* 194).

Delano's perception of other cultures is revealed by his arrogant New World attitudes. He reveals the ambiguous nature

of American culture with its roots in the Old World but its belief that it is unique among nations, and in addition, that its people are a distinct race of beings. In pontificating to Perkins, he explains,

> Spaniards? The name gets you down,
> you think their sultry faces and language
> make them Zulus.
> You take the name *Delano*--
> I've always thought it had some saving
> Italian or Spanish virtue in it. (*Ibid.* 126)

His words reveal the ambiguity of his character. He recognizes his roots in the Old World, yet he perceives that world as decadent and weak. He sees his own race as a people who, while retaining the noble aspects of older societies, have a new vitality and sense of purpose.

An ambivalent creature of mixed cultural backgrounds himself, Delano decries what he sees as impurities in racial distillations. On seeing the rundown nature of the Spanish ship, he notes, "A Spaniard isn't a negro under the skin,\ particularly a Spaniard from Spain--\ these South American ones mix too much with the Indians" (*Ibid.* 126). In response to Perkins' observation, "Thank God our Revolution ended where the French one began," Delano observes,

> Oh the French! They're like the rest of the Latins,
> they're hardly white people,
> they start with a paper republic
> and end with a toy soldier like Bonaparte. (*Ibid.* 122)

Delano's arrogance extends to the political structure of other nations as well. The failure of the French Revolution is contrasted to that of the American, and the implication

remains that the decadence of the French and their military failures forestalled the evolution of a new social order.

The reference to the French, and particularly to the military aspect, has a very close parallel with the attitudes of the American military and politicians in the period in which the play was written. Lowell was quite aware that American intervention in Vietnam came about largely as a consequence of the events in Vietnam of March 1954, and later at Geneva, following the French defeat by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu.[6] The implication was that American force of arms could succeed where the French did not.

Benito Cereno, like the two other plays in the trilogy, expresses what seems to be a peculiarly American fascination with the gun. In response to the decay and slovenliness he perceives aboard the Spanish vessel, Delano observes

> you have to watch your step
> this hulk, this rotten piece of finery,
> will fall apart. This old world needs new blood
> and Yankee gunnery to hold it up. (*Ibid.* 178)

Thomas M. Grant observes that the kind of people that Lowell believes the Americans to be is symbolized by the omnipresent gun in the trilogy (333). One of Endecott's quarrels with Merry Mount is over the colonists' selling guns to the Indians, and Robin's brother comes to Boston in search of a

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[6] History gives an ironic twist to Lowell's rendition of *Benito Cereno*. The artillery used to crush the French at Dien Bien Phu was largely American ordnance that had been given to Chinese Nationalist troops and sold to the Viet Minh by corrupt army officers. See Bernard Newman's *Background to Vietnam*, third ed. (New York: Signet, 1965), p. 109.

flintlock. Delano's response to the slaves' rebellion is a general massacre of black women and children, which is followed by the deliberate shooting of the unarmed Babu into whose body Delano "*slowly empties the five remaining barrels of his pistol*" (*Ibid.* 194).

Delano's action represents more than that involved in defending his life or suppressing a rebellion: it indicates a moral stance implicit in his personal and cultural superiority. The threat to the security of Delano and his men has been quickly defused; however, the implied threat to his cultural superiority remains, and he fires into the body in an attempt to subdue that challenge. David Knauf notes:

> Amasa Delano unwittingly reacts to the outbreak of violence without recourse to those humanitarian convictions he so firmly believes he holds. His thoughtless eagerness to be the good Samaritan, his unconscious sanction of a double moral, social, and political standard, and his fitful failure to see beyond the end of his nose leaves him finally with no alternative but to employ blind force against the aggressive Negroes. (45)

The use of an overwhelming and indiscriminate force to subdue a weaker opponent denies the ethic of sportsmanship and egalitarianism which Delano believes separates his culture from the European. In Delano's words and gestures, the Americans are revealed to be equally as vulnerable as the older cultures to fits of pride and vanity, and these, in turn, also lead the fledgling culture to catastrophic actions.

In keeping with the major themes of the other plays of the trilogy, *Benito Cereno* deals with the nature of the American character and the limiting aspect of ethnocentric perception of other cultures. Delano's first instinct upon sighting the crippled vessel is to bring to her, uninvited, relief in the form of water and fresh fish (*Ibid.* 126). Subsequently, he offers cider to Don Benito, and also proposes to sell him fresh rigging and chandler's supplies "at cost." His generosity, however, is neither graciously accepted nor reciprocated by Cereno, which annoys Delano rather than alerting him to the true state of affairs. Mark Estrin notes that what Melville and Lowell see in Delano is "an archetypal Americanness: good-natured complacency, determination to resist unpleasantness, and a relentlessly limited frame of reference." (413).

In reference to the trilogy as a whole, Daniel Hoffman observes that in each play, a character intended to be a typical American confronts a situation in which, "despite his native wit and manly independence, he cannot distinguish good from evil or truth from illusion" (224). The names of characters in the titles suggest the connecting link between the plays: in each segment of the trilogy, there is a flag of rebellion with which the protagonists are associated in some way. Endecott rips the flag of King George from its standard, and the colonials of Boston conspire against the Crown, represented by Molineux, beneath the standard of the coiled

rattlesnake with the motto "Don't Tread on Me." In *Cereno*, the Spanish Ensign is desecrated by being walked upon and replaced by the Skull and Crossbones, but the rebellion is subdued by the indiscriminate use of "Yankee gunnery." Ultimately, Lowell offers neither explanation nor justification for the slaughter. The tale is played out on the stage, according to Hoffman, as "a genuine American tragedy, a clarification through purgation by terror and pity" (228).

In *Cereno*, Lowell demonstrates the process of new cultural ritual replacing the old, and symptomatic of the new order are the rites based upon the cult of the gun. In reference to Delano's observation concerning "Yankee gunnery," Grant notes that

> power politics, backed up by the murderous efficacy of pure force is made to sound like some kind of natural and healthy transfusion. This attitude, so close to modern brinkmanship, inevitably emerges from the suppression and abolition of true redemptive ritual, those ceremonies through which peoples have traditionally bound themselves harmoniously together. (334)

Grant identifies some of the ethnocentric impulses that can provoke cultural conflict on a global scale. The flags of the Old World, symbolic of its religious, and cultural values are superceded by new ones which are authenticated by rifles and cannon. The power politics associated with guns and flags have metaphorical equivalents in the replacement of the rituals on which the reality and identity of the old cultures was predicated. To bring forth a new culture means creating

new ritual, and the banner that symbolizes the old ways must be destroyed in favour of the new one--a process that is evident in all three plays. The plays of the trilogy are consistent in their deliberate parody of social, political and religious ritual. In Endecott, the Dionysian Maypole ritual is abolished and replaced by a formalized intercourse overshadowed by rigid Puritan dictates. *Molineux* demonstrates the desecration of the old flag which is replaced by the rattlesnake flag of violence and retribution; *Cereno* has failing flags--both of Spain and of the rebels which challenged the Spanish power, and the omnipotent American flag that replaces the Skull and Crossbones in the suppression of the slaves' bid for freedom. The force of arms necessary to overthrow an oppressive yoke is seen to carry with it the inherent danger of becoming oppressive to other cultures, and cultural paranoia coupled with ethnocentrist perspectives lays the foundation for oppression and global conflict.

Lowell's predilection for formulating contemporary social commentary by distancing his work in historical analogy necessarily precluded specific references to current events. The obvious implications of his work, however, could not fail to be discerned by his audience. Lowell had made his opinions concerning the conduct of the war in Vietnam quite clear; he made headlines in the *New York Times* in 1965 as a

result of his rejecting an invitation by Lyndon Johnson to a gathering of artists at the White House (Podhoretz 56).

By focusing on the spurious nature of cultural mythology, Lowell casts the events of his time into historical relief where they demand comparison with the fictional scenarios of his dramas. The trilogy essentially challenges the complacency of Lowell's contemporary audience by forcing it to re-examine American values through a process of desymbolization. By stripping away the psychological insularity afforded by historical mythology and by reversing the function of ritual that normally sustains the mythology of a culture and reinforces the psychological equilibrium in the members of the society, Lowell destabilizes their cultural complacency. He sees such attitudes as being detrimental to an objective appreciation of the empirical world. At the same time, he offers an extra-cultural perspective on the American character that invites at least a spirited defense, if not a determined re-evaluation of the values and ethics of the society. In taking up arms against cultural myth, Lowell also reverses a traditional function of chauvinist theatre, which is that of aggrandizing events of the past in order to establish and enhance cultural identity, cohesiveness and continuity.

Lowell's examination of American culture was soon followed by another in Arthur Kopit's *Indians* (1968). First performed in London on July 4, 1968, the play stems, Kopit

says, from an idea that occurred to him in 1966 during a statement by General Westmoreland about the casualties suffered by Vietnamese civilians as a consequence of indiscriminate American bombing (*Indians* v). Unlike Lowell, Kopit linked his play directly to the Vietnam War with his reference to Westmoreland. The latter's words are echoed in the play by a Colonel Forsyth in reference to the massacre of American Indians at Wounded Knee.[7]

Indians presents a pastiche of theatrical aesthetics: it is expressionistic in style, polemical in theme, documentary in form, and surrealistic in presentation. In the preface, "Chronology for a Dreamer," Kopit lists important dates in the Indian suppression campaigns of the late nineteenth century, which provide the historical background for the work (xiii-xiv). The play also includes recreations of theatrical events of the past, notably the Wild West Show, established in 1883, and the command performance at the White House in 1878 of Ned Buntline's *Scouts of the Plains* (Billman 255). The portrayal of historical figures and actual events, however, provides only one of the bases for the play's structural pattern.

Indians is essentially a political allegory, although Robert Asahina suggests that "the parallel was so tenuous (or

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[7] In 1969 a Major-General George Forsythe was the outgoing commander of the 1st Armored Cavalry Division (ACAV), then operating in Vietnam. See James R. Arnold, *The Illustrated History of Armor: The Vietnam War* (New York: Bantam, 1987), p. 128.

the allegory so strained) that audiences, and even critics missed the point" (34). The play deals with the guilt of William Cody resulting from his part in the extermination of the American Indian, and implies an analogy with the politically expedient but atrocious actions of the American government in Vietnam. Despite Kopit's well-publicized avowal that his motivation for writing the play came from General Westmoreland's statement, the exploitation of the "Wild West" motif in the play tends to divert its focus in both thematic interpretation and aesthetic appreciation to the callous treatment afforded American Indians by the U.S. government, rather than to criticizing contemporary U.S. foreign policy.

The main thrust of the criticism of American society and culture in *Indians* is directed at a government that is ethnocentric, ruthless, hypocritical and insensitive to humanitarian concerns. Kopit exposes the arbitrary and self-serving nature of government policy towards both its own people and those it perceives as cultural inferiors, the facade of senatorial inquiries and investigations, and the problems inherent in the selection for office of politicians on the basis of charisma rather than integrity. Kopit states, "I wasn't primarily concerned with the Indians or the plight of the Indians today but the way in which our treatment of them was rationalized and how this gave birth to the myth of the West" (Andrea Lahr 6).

John Lahr identifies a source of the misinterpretation of Kopit's intentions, noting that *Indians* is

> not so much a protest play, but a process play [that] enabled us to transform the brutal realities of the conquest of the West into the realization of the hopes and dreams the West had always promised. (John Lahr 67)

In essence, the thematic thrust of the work lies in the exposure of the insidious process of rationalization that enables a moralistic culture to justify such policies as methodical genocide. Such a process had implications for the Vietnam situation in the stance of the American military *vis à vis* its objectives in Vietnam and the rhetoric purporting to explain the political purpose of the war.

The action of *Indians* is developed through a series of scenes that function as a structural equivalent of the dialectics employed in *Pueblo* and *Catonsville*, and also evidenced in the separate playing areas of *Inquest*. The dualistic nature of existence in which man is aware both of himself as an individual and also as part of a homogeneous culture and society--and where he realizes the dichotomy inherent in divisive loyalties and concepts such as individual and collective responsibility and guilt--is developed in *Indians* through a juxtaposition of scenes which alternate in style from expressionistic and surrealistic movements to those of documentary realism. The dialectic of *Indians* resides in the comparison and contrast of cultural mythology and historical fact. The series of thirteen scenes

that comprise the play present alternately the public domain of the show arena and the introspective thoughts of the protagonist Buffalo Bill Cody.

An analysis of the formal structure of the play is conducive to an understanding of Kopit's conception of how metaphor in the theatre resembles the mythologizing of history. This analysis demonstrates how the metaphor of theatre, inherent in the art of impersonation and role-playing, informs the play's structure, and illustrates how the creation of cultural mythology is similar to that inherent in the production of a theatrical event. Theatricality and reality play against each other in creating an irony that enhances the dialectic of the play and its controlling principle. The creation of illusion on the stage parallels that of the historical process, and the play functions on many levels that draw attention to the similarities of the metaphors of the theatre and those of real life.

The basic structuring principle involves the opposition of theatrically enhanced scenes to realistic ones, while concurrently, the action alternates between the external world of the showman and the mind of Bill Cody. The opening scene reveals a museum-like display of human figures and historical artifacts in glass cases: they are cultural memorabilia frozen in time. Cody appears on a theatrical horse and a Wild West Show enclosure arises around him,

framing the exterior action and establishing the theatrical metaphor of a play within a play. Scene Two is a realistic depiction of the meeting of Sitting Bull and John Grass with representatives of the United States Government; Scene Three is a surrealistic sequence in which Indians dressed as buffalo are shot and killed by Cody, while the Grand Duke of Russia shoots an Indian for sport, and Ned Buntline records the events for posterity. Scenes Four, Five and Six are short interludes alternating between fact and abstraction: they form a montage of realistic and surrealistic sequences where Cody puts the Indians' case before the Senators, the Indians are depicted as caged savages in the Wild West Show, and conditions of the Indian treaty are discussed.

The seventh scene of *Indians* is both the structural and thematic core of the play. The action takes place in the White House where the Wild West Show, imaginatively written and choreographed by Ned Buntline, is performed for the President. The scenario depicted in the play-within-a-play involves the rescue of a Crow Maiden, played by an Italian actress, from an "evil Pawnee Chief," played by an actor with a guttural German accent (*Indians* 36). Wild Bill Hickok is coerced into playing himself, a role which he sees as humiliating. Much to the glee of the President and First Lady, the actors all improvise on their roles; Hickok, thus encouraged, seizes the opportunity to murder Buntline and to sexually assault the "Indian maiden" (*Ibid.* 47).

The concluding sequences of scenes, from Eight to Thirteen, continue the pattern of alternating realistic and surrealistic presentations. Scenes Eight and Eleven feature discussions between the Senators and the Indians, and focus on problems arising from ambiguities in the treaties. Alternating scenes treat play-acting on several levels: Scene Nine has the Indians performing in the Wild West Show; Ten shows the President playing cowboy on a mechanical horse in the seclusion of the White House. Scene Eleven is a brilliant example of compounded irony in its depiction of U.S. Senators challenging the identity and authority of Chief Sitting Bull by denying the validity of the mythology from which his power derives, an obvious echo of what Kopit himself is undertaking in reference to American culture. Scene Twelve is a montage of surrealistically distorted presentations featuring the creation and mass-marketing of cultural icons. The concluding scene moves from a reportage of a real event, the massacre of the Indians at Wounded Knee, on December 25, 1890, through an expressionistic sequence in which the dead Indians return to haunt Cody, to a final tableau of the glass cases featured in the opening movement of the work. The last two movements of the last scene duplicate those in the opening sequence.

The structural alternation between realistic scenes and expressionistic and surrealistic ones sets up a counterpoint of internal/external realities, both of which are implied to be fraudulent. In fact, while the opposing scenes differ in

style and substance, there is a constant thematic underpinning that unites them, that of impersonation or play-acting. The theme of impersonation controls the structuring metaphor of the play. As John Bush Jones observes, "Impersonation, duplicity, disguise and just plain 'play-acting' are frequently at the heart of the historical facts" (445).

The opening scene immediately introduces and develops the many counterpointing and interacting themes of the play. It brings together such diverse ideas as that of cultural memory and identity, inherent in the figures and artifacts in the museum display cases; the mythical and public figure of Buffalo Bill Cody; the sensational thrill of circus; Bill as an individual beset by both personal and cultural ghosts; and the anxieties that are the products of individual and collective perceptions of guilt and betrayal. The play frequently draws upon a dialectic similar to that of *Catonsville*, as individual conscience is thrown into conflict with social values. While in *Catonsville* the conflict is between the individual and the state, *Indians* reveals the dilemma that arises when such opposing forces are concentrated within a single personality. The movement in the play follows Cody's growing awareness of himself as a cultural figure, who, as a representative of his society, has committed grievous crimes in its name. His ultimate

realization of his guilt is not unlike that acknowledged by American soldiers about their role in Vietnam.

In the initial sequence, a disembodied voice summons Cody, and the level of consciousness shifts between memory and reality as the museum cases "*glide into the shadowy distance and disappear*" (*Indians* 1). Cody emerges dressed as the figure in the glass case, in full costume, and sitting on an artificial horse. The image holds momentarily, and then the mood is shattered by the raucous intrusion of *"loud brassy music"* and *"It's a WILD WEST SHOW!"* and bright lights flood the stage (*Ibid.* 2). Cody adopts his showman demeanour in anticipation of the performance, but is interrupted by the voice of conscience calling him to judgement, drawing him away from the Wild West Show, and forcing him to relive and re-examine his past.

The ghostly figures of Indians appear outside the show ring and stand in silent witness as Cody attempts to justify himself: "My life is an open book. I'm not *ashamed* of its bein' looked at!" (*Ibid.* 5). Vera M. Jiji notes that "these Indians derive from Bill's imagination [and] loom out of the darkness, embodying his guilty conscience" (231). Cody immediately sinks into a confusion of self-doubt, "I'm sorry, this is very . . . hard . . . for me t' say. But I believe I . . . am a . . . hero. . . . *A GODDAM HERO*!" (*Indians* 5) [ellipses in text]. The first scene ends and the theatre is left with Cody's desperate assertion unanswered and echoing

in space as he stands in the show ring, the focal point of both the theatrical and actual performance. Cody embodies a classical tragic configuration: represented in his character are the heroic values, the mythic identity and the inherent guilt of his society. In Kopit's psychodrama Cody is forced to undertake a painful analysis of himself under the stress of historical responsibility, and the implications for the returned veteran of Vietnam are direct and acute.

The expressionistic thrust of Scene One is immediately counterpointed in Scene Two where, in a realistic documentary style, members of a senatorial committee interview Sitting Bull and John Grass. John Grass is an ambivalent figure: he is an Indian who has become physically acculturated to the world of the Whites, and he wears a cutaway suit, although it is "many sizes too small," on which is pinned the medal that he has been awarded. More important, however, he is able to articulate the problems of the Indians in a language that the Whites understand. Grass is aware that the duplicity of the Whites is inherent in their language. He notes that the Great Father

> told us to give up hunting and start farming. So we did as he said, and our people grew hungry. For the land was suited to grazing, not farming, and even if we'd been farmers, nothing could have grown. So the Great Father said he would send us food and clothing, but nothing came of it. So we asked him for the money he had promised us when we sold him the Black Hills, thinking with this money we could *buy* food and clothing. But nothing came of it. (*Ibid.* 9)

Grass's monologue demonstrates his awareness not only of the intent of the government to deceive its people--as it now proclaims sovereignty over the Indians--but also of the ethnocentric aspect of white society, which in its ignorance attempts to remake other cultures in its own image. His depiction of the Indians' situation has many analogies with the situation of the sixties, since, from one point of view, the American people have again put a blind faith in a government which is conducting an ethnocentric and genocidal war.

Scene Three involves a long surrealistic sequence that exemplifies the American obsession with guns and with the cult of death. The thematic thrust of the scene is that Indians and buffalo are hunted with equal enthusiasm, for sport and demonstration of prowess with a rifle. Cody will eventually come to acknowledge his complicity in genocide; in slaughtering the buffalo, he has condemned the Indians to death by starvation. At this point, however, he reckons that people will "jus' possibly name streets after me. Cities. Counties. States! I'll . . . be as famous as Dan'l Boone!" (*Ibid.* 14).

Cody is guiding westward the expedition of the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, an actual event of 1872. The Duke is impressed with Cody's prowess with a rifle and views it in terms of its military potential. Intrigued by Cody's bragging--to a great degree provoked by Buntline--about his

imaginative exploits in the Indian Wars, the Duke,through his interpreter, intimates that he, too, would like to shoot a Comanche. The Grand Duke fires into the darkness of night and Spotted Tail, Cody's confidant in the play, emerges mortally wounded. Spotted Tail is not a Comanche, for the expedition is in Missouri, not Texas; but Cody, in a state of shock, fraudulently interprets Spotted Tail's last words: "I (*Pause*) should have . . . stayed at home in . . . Texas with the rest of my . . . Comanche tribe" (*Ibid.* 23) [ellipses in text]. Cody's rationalization of why Spotted Tail is in Missouri is echoed in later scenes in which the military, in terms reminiscent of those used by Westmoreland, explains the need to exterminate the Indians.

Scene Three is followed by three short scenes that reveal social reality being subsumed to cultural myth. As Cody and John Grass plead the Indians' case before a board of Senators, the Indians are exploited in "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show." In this Show, the obvious discrepancies between objective reality and cultural myth reveal complex ironies. In Kopit's fiction that follows historical fact, figures of the Old West represent themselves in the circus ring. Neither in actuality nor in Kopit's work, however, do they play their historical selves, but present instead fictionalized versions of their characters. Indians are exploited for their savagery, and sensational gunfights are presented to titillate the audience.

The ironies of cultural self-delusion assume a more sinister note when, in the subsequent and central scene of the play, cultural myopia is evident at the highest levels of the administration. The scene involves the staging of an exaggerated melodrama at the White House. Ned Buntline directs the show: he has made periodic appearances throughout the play "documenting" Cody's various exploits, which are, of course, either grossly exaggerated by Buntline, or are simply his own outrageous fabrications. Buntline is a creator of the cultural myth that is accepted as reality both in the Wild West Show and in the drawing-room of the White House. The set is amateurishly theatrical, with a cardboard moon and a childishly painted backdrop intended to represent a forest (*Ibid.* 36). The dialogue is a grotesque parody of theatrical text, and the scenario of the rescue of an Indian princess is absurd; the President and First Lady, however, are enthralled.

Cracks begin to appear in the theatrical facade when, in the middle of the fiasco, Hickok accuses Cody of being a fraud, saying, "This ain't a *proper place* for a man to be!" Cody rationalizes his portrayal of fraudulent events and caricatures of reality in both the White House and the circus ring:

> Well, I THINK IT *IS*! I think I'm doin' a lot o' good up here! Entertainin' people! Makin' 'em *happy*. Showin' em the West! Givin' 'em somethin' to be *proud* of! (*Ibid.* 40)

Hickok, however, finds playing himself to be degrading; he objects to Buntline "'bout havin' to impersonate myself. 'Bout the humiliation o' havin' to impersonate my own *personal self*" (*Ibid.* 45). Hickok is not opposed to theatrics, he has come to play Bat Masterson, but he is not prepared to face the myth of himself. In anger, he says that if he must play himself, he will, and he murders Buntline, the creator of myth, and prepares to rape the actress playing the Indian Princess (*Ibid.* 46-48). He perceives what Buntline is doing and resents the hypocrisy of it: he is the only character in the scene who is able to distinguish myth from reality, and who recognizes the distinction between acting in real-life and play-acting on the stage.

The most pronounced irony of the central scene, however, resides in the obvious parallel between the fictional First Family and that of Lyndon Johnson. Preferring to be known to his electorate as the "Ol' Time President," Kopit's character is an obvious caricature of Johnson in his homespun western role. In Kopit's work, the President and his wife are caught up in the White House melodrama; as Hickok prepares to rape the "Indian Princess," the First Lady notes, "We must invite this theatre crowd more often" (*Ibid.* 47). Yet, in reality, Johnson was often embarrassed by artists and entertainers who either refused White House invitations, or used them as opportunities to criticize the President personally over his

policies in Vietnam.[8] *Indians* thus draws the distinction between earlier times in America when cultural myth was in its infancy, and the contemporary world where those myths are revealed to be the source of social and political misconceptions.

The concluding sequence of scenes, numbers Eight to Eleven, continue and qualify the themes established in the first movement of the work. John Grass and Sitting Bull confront Senators who have been sent to investigate the Indians' complaints; the Senators refuse to give money to the Indians, using the rationale that the Indians will spend the money on liquor. They ask why the Indian does not imitate the white man in his lifestyle. Grass responds, "Tell the Great Father, who says he wishes us to live like white men, that when an Indian gets drunk, he is merely imitating the white man he's observed" (*Ibid.* 52). The Indians are caught up in the process of acculturation: while they have been deprived of their traditional methods of survival, they have not been assimilated into the white culture. This type of cultural alienation, where individuals are stripped of their cultural signifiers, yet are not fully assimilated into another culture, is remarkably similar to that depicted in the "separation" plays dealing with Vietnam. There, inductees

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[8] One is reminded, for instance, of Eartha Kitt's well-publicized outburst at the White House on January 18, 1968, and Robert Lowell's earlier refusal to attend an artistic function. See *Chronicle, op. cit.* above, pp. 976.

into the military are stripped of their civilian identities, but have not been integrated fully into the military system.[9]

The facile and desultory nature of the society which dominates the Indian culture is portrayed in Scene Ten. Cody arrives in the capital to make a last desperate plea on behalf of the Indians. He wants the President to go to the reservations personally in order to observe the plight of the Indians first-hand. Kopit sets the scene in the White House, where the President is acting out his private fantasies:

> *Lights up on the* OL' TIME PRESIDENT, *dressed like* HICKOK *and astride a mechanical horse. Near him sits an old Victrola, "On the Old Chisholm Trail" is playing. Nearby hangs a punching bag.* (*Ibid.* 62)

The President is caught up in the mythology choreographed by Buntline. Dressed in his cowboy suit and astride an artificial horse, he gallops in the seclusion of his mansion. He refuses Cody's request to intercede on behalf of the Indians, but makes him an offer:

> Tell ya what. 'Cause I'm so *grateful* to you. . . . For your Wild West Show. For what its *done*. For this country's *pride*, its *glory*. (*Pause*) I'll send a committee in my place. (*Ibid.* 65)

The Chief Executive of the United States of America has become enmeshed in the *ersatz* mythology of a pulp fiction writer and an opportunistic showman. His condescension

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[9] See David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, Chapter III.

towards ascertaining the reality of the Indian situation is reflected in the appointment of a Senatorial Committee.[10]

The concluding movement of the play outlines Cody's personal sense of guilt and responsibility in the deaths of the Indians. In a surrealistic sequence of events that reflect elements of Cody's consciousness, shadowy figures emerge from the darkness and surround him. Essentially, his guilt stems from his part in the extermination of the buffalo, which he carried out while in the employ of the railroads:

> I wiped out their food, ya see. . . . Didn't *mean* to, o' course. (*He laughs to himself.*) I mean IT WASN'T MY FAULT! The railroad men needed food. They *hired* me to find 'em food. Well, how was *I* to know the goddam buffalo reproduced so slowly? *How was I to know that?* NO ONE KNEW THAT! (*Ibid.* 79)

He meets Hickok, who has developed a scheme to sell clones of Cody, "takin' what you were and raisin' it to a . . . higher level" (Kopit 81) [ellipses in text]. Cody is surrounded by clones of himself and, screaming, fires his revolver at them, trying to kill what he has become. The scene depicts the psychic fragmentation of Cody: duplicates appear and he tries to shoot them but they will not die. Not only has the myth

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[10] Kopit's repeated references to the various Senatorial Committees which purported to investigate the plight of the Indians but interpreted the situation through their own preconceived perceptions demand comparison with the endless "fact-finding missions" concerning the state of affairs in Vietnam, which were commissioned by the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations. See David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1969), *passim*, and also Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), *passim*.

supplanted the reality, but the fragments indicate that Cody has become a larger person than his private self. Cody cannot kill his image, nor can he deny his guilt.

The concluding scene opens with reporters interviewing Colonel Forsyth, the officer in charge of exterminating the Indians at Wounded Knee. When asked if he believed that his measures were harsh, he replies, echoing the words of Westmoreland in a similar context:

> Of course it was harsh. And I don't like it any more than you. But had we shirked our responsibility, skirmishes would have gone on for years, costing our country millions, as well as untold lives. Of course innocent people have been killed. In war they always are. And, of course our hearts go out to the innocent victims of this. But war is not a game. It's tough. (*Ibid.* 84)

Forsyth presents here the ultimate argument for killing innocent and guilty alike: cost effectiveness in the pursuit of military goals. Kopit thus firmly unites Forsyth with Westmoreland through their respective and virtually identical rationales of their military conduct.[11]

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[11] Many of the United States' military and administrative policies carried out with respect to the Indians, particularly their confinement to reservations, had their counterparts in Vietnam. In 1962 the Diem government, with U.S. approval and financing, relocated and contained segments of the population to "Strategic Hamlets." In September 1962 the Diems announced that 4,322,034 people were allocated to such settlements, although one commentator observed that this was the kind of "statistical razzle-dazzle" designed to please McNamara. See Stanley Karnow *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), p. 256. Also, the later defoliant program had the effect of denying food to the populace. See Francis FitzGerald *Fire in the Lake* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), pp. 321-349 *passim*.

In the final moments of the play, Cody reveals that, as an old man, he has come to believe fully in the myth of himself and his government. He can rid himself of guilt by subsuming his personal identity in cultural myth. In justification of the government's actions, he becomes its spokesman and makes an extended speech which represents an involved rationalization of the policies of the administration. He notes, among other things, that the Indian deaths suffered during the forced removal of the Cherokee nation from Georgia to the Mojave desert occurred mainly among the ill; that the policy of exterminating the buffalo was good because it encouraged the Indians to become farmers; that the false translations and interpretations of treaties by the government encouraged the Indians to learn English in order to read them themselves; that the Americans had prior claim to Indian lands by right of discovery; and, citing a Supreme Court decision, that treaties could be revised unilaterally by the government if doing so was in the interests of the American people (*Ibid.* 89-91).

Throughout Cody's extended speech, the Indians come forward individually, and pronounce their death. Cody is now oblivious to their presence, and Chief Joseph makes his famous farewell speech, including the lines, "Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more, forever" (*Ibid.* 94). His final words are lost in the raucous blare of the sounds

of the Wild West Show, and his image is lost in the glare of coloured lights. Cody circles the ring waving to the crowd, and the vision dims as the glass museum cases, one containing an effigy of Cody, reappear on an empty set to close the play.

The analogies between *Indians* and the contemporary situation in Vietnam are manifold; however, under directoral prerogative, some productions may emphasize particular references to the War. The reporters interviewing Colonel Forsyth, for instance, have been attired in 1970s clothing, and repeated allusions to "body counts" reflect contemporary military terminology. Cody has revealed a fear of dying in the middle of the arena with his makeup on (*Ibid.* 88), and his sentiments recall those of soldiers in combat camouflage paint in the Vietnam theatre of war. The Ol' Time President burlesques Lyndon Johnson, and Colonel Forsyth is a direct representation of Westmoreland.

On a philosophical level, the connections are less pronounced but quite valid. Cody's acknowledged responsibility and guilt concerning his role in the death of the Indians are reflected in the self-doubt that plagued many of the GIs that served in Vietnam, and also the civilians who objected in various ways to the prosecution of the War. The moral blindness of political leaders in respect to their administrative policies is revealed, as is the willingness of the military to carry out those policies, and the references

to the situation at home and in Vietnam are easily recognized. In performance, however, the plight of the Indians tends to elicit the empathy of the audience and divert its attention from the political analogies. If there is a weakness in Kopit's abstract rendition of the War in Vietnam, it lies in his treating the symptoms rather than the disease. He deals with the atrocities and guilt associated with the War rather than the reasons for American intervention.

A major theme of the play, as indicated earlier, is the process through which a society is able to rationalize manifestly illogical and immoral policies. Cody has become isolated and trapped within the confines of a cultural mythology for which, in a large part, he was personally responsible. Here Kopit reveals the manner in which the individual becomes part of the psychological prison of cultural traditions, which themselves have an equivalent in theatrical conventions. Dieckman and Brayshaw note that

> in a 'metatheatrical' or Pirandellian sense, the theatrical form itself serves as a metaphor for imprisonment. The actors are trapped within the fabricated 'masks' of their characters and exposed to the critical gaze of 'watchers' who peer at them through the 'window' of the proscenium arch. (195)

Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, and by extension, the theatrical process itself, thus provide an audience with the opportunity to observe the myth-making system at work, and objectively to evaluate their own myth-laden perceptions.

Dieckman and Brayshaw add that psychological prisons are constructed by various social forces in Kopit's plays, and that "imprisonment leads to fragmentation of the characters, violence, and ultimate paralysis" (196). This fragmentation and paralysis of the psyche under cultural stress is relevant to the themes that emerge in the dramas of abstraction by other playwrights, and is, in fact, virtually a definitive aspect of the genre of Vietnam War plays. Dieckman and Brayshaw further posit:

> To be watched fragments the individual into conflicting personality components or social roles. This loss of identity and accompanying sense of powerlessness causes the character to release his frustrations in desperate violence, consequently freezing the individual into an inflexible position and effecting a kind of psychological paralysis. (197)

Kopit's audience is presented with a dilemma similar to the one that the characters in *Indians* face: under the stress of individual and collective guilt, it must somehow come to terms with its own responsibility, and with the legitimacy of the values by which it lives.

In *Indians* the theatre becomes a metaphor for the creation of history, although, as Jones suggests, myth-making and play-making are two discrete processes:

> In mythologizing history, the process is to fictionalize what is real and then attempt to pass off the fiction as the reality that actually existed--the kind of thing that Kopit points to in Cody's Wild West Show. (451).

In myth-making, the myth becomes the reality. In play-making, on the other hand, the distinction between fact and

fiction is always maintained. Like the myth-maker, the playwright may begin by fictionalizing, i.e. dramatizing, what is real, but he does not then try to pass off his theatrical creation as actuality; rather, the work remains an artistic re-shaping of reality. In this way Kopit not only retains the distinction between myth and play-making, but contrasts and enhances the difference between reality and the stage. This distinction clarifies what might be considered an oxymoron inherent in the term "Documentary Theatre."

Kopit also draws attention to the discrepancy between myth and objective reality, and the process of myth-making in the theatre is demonstrated to have its equivalent in cultural conditioning. The audience is faced with the proposition that their own cultural myths are based on "truths" as fraudulent as those created for the stage. A theatrical production represents a form of truth that in a certain time, place and context is definitive of reality, and the conscious suspension of disbelief granted the theatre is similar to the unconscious process that forms the basis of daily life in any given culture.

After an examination of only a few plays of the Vietnam War era, certain recurring themes emerge which characterize a wide variety of plays that examine the values of American society in abstract forms. Thomas M. Grant notes that

> Bill is a buckskin version of Lowell's Delano--a genial, superficially attractive, well-intentioned do-gooder who is also, like Delano, a dutiful employee of corporate capitalism . . . he is

> selling a national dream of progress and profit. (337)

In *Indians*, the government of the United States, represented by its senators, attacks the identity and validity of the Indian culture by denigrating its spiritual beliefs and its rituals. A similar process is observed in *Endecott and the Red Cross*, where Endecott, at the point of a gun, disbands the May Day revelries of the Merry Mount colonists. Those who stand in opposition to the dominant forces in American culture counter the inflamed cultural rhetoric with simple, straightforward logic: there is, for example, a good deal of similarity in tone and substance in the speeches of Sitting Bull and the North Korean commander in *Pueblo*.

Jules Feiffer wrote several plays that echoed Kopit's *Indians* in their criticism of the American government and society. These included *Little Murders* (1967), *God Bless* (1968), and *The White House Murder Case* (1970). Of these, *Murder Case* comes closest to dealing with the issues and anxieties that were associated with Vietnam. Like Lowell and Kopit, Feiffer couches his criticism of American involvement in Vietnam in allegory, parable and abstraction; however, his approach differs from that of Lowell and Kopit, since he does not look into America's past for the causes of contemporary problems, but depicts his society as being in a state of physical and spiritual disintegration. In his depiction of the social decay of America, Feiffer directs his acerbic satire at both the moral complacency of the American public

and the moral blindness of elected officials and decision-makers.

Little Murders deals primarily with domestic violence in the family unit; it presents a reductive view of the modern American family in disintegration. The central metaphor of the play presumably resides in the most obvious stage property, an on-stage toilet. The main characters in the play are a mother, father, son and daughter, and the boyfriend of the daughter, a photographer, who, sensing the moral decay about him, takes "pictures of shit" (*Little Murders* 16). The daughter becomes the victim of a stray sniper's bullet, and the father, in frustration, fires his rifle at people passing by on the street.

The work presents problems of social turbulence and distorted morality that are reflected in the headlines of daily papers. The connection to Vietnam issues is tenuous, since the play deals with general attitudes rather than specific problems. John Lahr notes of *Little Murders*, that,

> fascinated with the nation's moral myopia [Feiffer] concocts situations which trace the confusions to their source. *Little Murders* becomes a parable for our Vietnams. (1970: 80)

Lahr's implication that Feiffer regards American involvement in Vietnam as a corollary of the moral decadence of the culture is substantially reinforced in Feiffer's *God Bless*, in which a similar condition is evident among the political leaders and the intellectual idealists of America.

God Bless is a much more cleverly crafted piece than *Little Murders*, although it has little dramatic action. In dealing with the intellectual causes underlying the thinking that resulted in American involvement in Vietnam, the work relies primarily on the semantics of argument for its theatrical value. This fact gave rise to some acerbic commentary on the part of drama critics (Lahr 1970: 91). The action of the play consists of an intellectual discussion of political principles taking place within the library of presidential advisor Brackman, while the violent overthrow of the American government by revolutionaries can be seen and heard outside the window. The work has distinct echoes of Max Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (1953, 1958) in its portrayal of William Brackman and its condemnation of a liberal intellectualism that is oblivious to the violent forces that threaten social order.

The plays are typified by the biting satire that Feiffer directs at what he sees as a moribund political hierarchy and liberal permissiveness in American culture. In an interview with John Lahr at the time of writing *God Bless*, Feiffer notes,

> I was trying to show what our heritage of pragmatic liberalism has brought us to in the last twenty years. . . . Vietnam is one of its major betrayals. (Feiffer/Lahr 41)

He also talks about the "climate of random violence" which he regards as being prevalent in the America of 1967, a condition that he interpreted as being a by-product of the

Cold War (*Ibid.*: 39-40). In reference to *God Bless*, Feiffer notes, "I wanted to do a political play . . . of the Cold War and Vietnam and how innocent people, nice people, can become murderers" (*Ibid* 42-43).

God Bless is structured around a process of rationalization similar to that noted in Kopit's *Indians*. Consisting of a sophisticated and witty Shavian discussion of socio-political issues, the dialogue traces the development of the central character, an "Uncle Sam" figure (Lewis 210), from a humanitarian philosopher to an unconscionable murderer. William Clarke Brackman, 110 years of age, is an advisor to presidents, a Nobel Prize winner, a college professor, and an internationally famous liberal.

Brackman is the quintessential American: his roots go back to an Edenic America, the town of Bucolia, Indiana, where, Brackman reminisces,

> people produced their own foodstuffs, weaved their own clothes, educated their children themselves, tended their sick, buried their dead. Married their children off to the neighbors. There was nothing called capital and labor then. There were no Negroes then. (*smiles contemplatively*) No Jews. (*longer smile*) No Irish. Everybody spoke the same and said the same things . . . no problems in communication. (*God Bless* 35)

Brackman is indestructible: in all his years, he

> hasn't been sick one single day. He's like that mythical giant [Antaeus] who fought Hercules. He keeps falling to earth only to bounce up again, more liberal than ever. (*Ibid.* 35)

He has gained prominence by being the ideal arbiter: his

politics are middle-of-the-road, and consequently the radical elements on both fringes respect him but hate him.

The single setting of the play is Brackman's library in Georgetown. The dramatic action consists of two intrusions: in the first act by two revolutionaries, a Black, Rx, and a Caucasian, Ames; in the second act, the refugee President enters. In the room secluded from the catastrophic events of the outside world, debates take place concerning socio-political theory and practice, humanistic principles, and the nuclear extermination of selected American cities undertaken to secure a balance of power in the post-revolutionary society. Feiffer explains that he wanted to "get at" the "escalation of barbarism overridden with humanistic terms" (Feiffer/Lahr 42). Thus, the play shows how the process of rationalization, proceeding from the most humanistic of principles, makes the destruction of American cities politically and morally justifiable.

Brackman represents the ambivalence inherent in American society. He grew up in a family of divided principles, where his father used to hide slaves, but his mother would turn them in (*God Bless* 36). Brackman adds that

> mother maintained that whether we agreed with it or not, the Dred Scott decision was still the law of the land. Every slave who came our way was a test case, and though every last one was turned in by my mother, our little family Court of Appeals was still hearing cases into my ninth year. (*Ibid.* 36)

While the family argued, the slaves were returned to bondage. As a consequence of his attempts to arbitrate early labour

problems, his father was lynched by miners who were enraged by his printing editorials that treated both sides of the issue. His mother, who noted that the miners should not be condemned for their homicidal action "without first trying to understand their backgrounds," was trampled to death by his father's friends, who insisted on lynching the miners. Brackman thus grew up being able to see both sides of a question; unfortunately his conditioning also included the presence of violent action in the resolution of social problems.

The sounds of gunfire and battle increase outside the window, the Washington Monument is seen toppling in the distance, and Ames and Rx appear. They are members of the American Liberation Front and former students of Brackman. They say that they are waiting to shoot the President, whom they know will come to Brackman for advice. They relate the story of how the enlisted men of the 82nd Airborne Regiment joined the rebels, and cut off the ears of the "career non-coms and officers" (*Ibid.* 38). Brackman denies the validity of their actions, noting that "conditions are not ripe for revolution . . . you are dealing with a contented middle class"; Ames counters with "not contented, just paralyzed" (*Ibid.* 39). References are made to the "Tri-continent" war in which America is currently engaged (Latin America, Africa and Asia). Rx's "prescription" for the resolution of the conflicts is to renege on all military commitments. Brackman

suggests that this will "leave their peoples to the scourge of Communism." Rx replies rhetorically, that that is better than inflicting the scourge of "Americanism" on other peoples (*Ibid.* 39)

Brackman goes on to list problems of social and political inertia inherent in the society:

> I am not out of sympathy with your complaint. Young people do feel powerless today. And intellectuals feel powerless. And negroes feel powerless, And the Far Left feels powerless. And the Far Right feels powerless. And the Secretary of State feels powerless. And the President feels powerless. We all live in a state of participatory powerlessness. It is one of the unwelcome by-products of a representative democracy. (*Ibid.* 39)

Brackman, however, is denying the presence of the armed revolutionaries in his room--and the consequences of the riot occurring outside the window. Nor is he totally conscious of events transpiring about him; he continually falls asleep during conversations, and wakes up to deliver his pronouncements, which are generally irrelevant to external events.

The President of the United States arrives: "Christ, am I in trouble" (*Ibid.* 42). His trouble, it transpires, is not the revolution that is destroying his capital, but concerns his failed attempts to pass his military appropriation bill. The President has "gone to the people" to resolve his dilemma, and has hired the two revolutionaries as *agents provocateurs* to foment a popular demonstration against Congress. The revolution that was meant to be a threat

against which the government could react, however, has succeeded beyond all expectations. Unfortunately, Ames and Rx, seeing the possibility of power within their grasp, decide to assume control of the country.

Within the confines of the library, the various factions represented by Ames, Rx and the President meet under the benevolent aegis of Brackman to decide how the country shall be divided. In an atmosphere of academic civility, the men discuss the disposition of territory and the allocation and use of atomic weapons. The new arbiters of power intend to imitate the actions of the former administration and continue "bombing and mutilation programmes," without which, Ames insists, he will not negotiate (*Ibid.* 50). The scene invites direct comparison with the controversy in Feiffer's contemporary America concerning the bombing of North Vietnam.[12] An argument ensues over whether prior warning should be given to inhabitants of the cities to be bombed. The decision is in the negative, but the President reserves the right to pick the targets (*Ibid.* 50). The events of the world outside the window are secondary to the *Realpolitik* of the library as the leaders determine their respective spheres of influence.

God Bless has many similarities with plays that deal obliquely with problems associated with Vietnam. The administration conducts foreign wars for political purposes

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[12] See Appendices, A, B, and C.

under various subterfuges, and the work follows the pattern of the analogy plays as it deals with the indiscriminate use of power. Other textual references to Vietnam include the taking of ears by U.S. soldiers, interdiction bombing, the problems of passing military appropriation bills, and the Tri-continental war. Again, the process of social fracturing is observable in the division of the territory of the United States into three power blocks.

The themes developed in *Little Murders* and *God Bless* resurface in *The White House Murder Case*, a play that treats problems of cultural and political paranoia with definite references to the war in Vietnam. The operative term in the play is "national security." *Murder Case* presents a fictional war, whose nature is unknown to the American people, being fought by the American military in Brazil where the chaos on the battlefield is equalled only by that of the White House. *Murder Case* is a particular landmark in Vietnam drama as it is the first play of the era to depict scenes of battle on the stage.

In *Murder Case* Kopit directs his satire at political and military leaders. He focuses on the ineptness of American politicians and the absurdity of the situation in Vietnam. He posits a rhetorical question in the Lahr interview:

> Is I.F. Stone prophetic because he saw we were in miserable shape in Vietnam three years before Robert McNamara? It was just that McNamara was stupid. And misled by his own bullshit. (Feiffer/Lahr 40)

Together with the theme of fragmentation, the art of misleading is a central issue in *Murder Case,* where, in the interests of national security--which translates as security of political jobs--deceiving the American public has become a fundamental exercise of politics and an obsession of politicians. Lahr observes that *Murder Case* "shows us a world in which no historical event, no public image, no emotional relationship is authentic" (1973: 107). The chaos of the battlefield is echoed in the halls of the White House where political partisanship forms the basis of intercourse between members of the administration.

Structured like Kopit's *Indians, Murder Case* consists of two acts of seven scenes each. With time overlaps, the action alternates between the battlefield and the White House, and the physical fragmentation of bodies on the battlefield is reflected in the breakdown of identities within the government. Feiffer's play remains well within the bounds of abstraction and analogy. The battlefield action is set in Brazil where, in battling "Chico" (the boy),[13] misuse of a "nerve gas" by the Americans results in casualties in which the troops, feeling no pain, experience pieces of their bodies falling away. The battle scenes make no attempt to imitate the authenticity of combat experience found in such

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[13] Kopit's use of "Chico" (the boy) may have reference to the pejorative "boy" that was once a popular usage of white Americans in addressing members of the Black race. The implication is that the war in Brazil has racial overtones.

later works as David Berry's *G.R. Point* or H. Wesley Balk's *The Dramatization of 365 Days*; rather than dealing with the war in a direct way, Feiffer creates an anti-war piece in the satiric tradition of Aristophanes.

Scenes One, Three, Five and Seven of Act I are battlefield scenes, as are Two, Four and Six of Act II. The play commences in the middle of a battle, with "sudden flashes of light in sync with bombardment"; men charge across the stage, there is a sound of machine guns and a man falls (*Murder Case* 5). Lieutenant Cutler tells Colonel Dawn about the situation:

> Sir, we've hit 'em with twelve air strikes: napalm, defoliants, antipersonnels, fragmentation, seminukes. But hardware don't impress Chico. These are fanatics, sir. Lives don't count. (*Ibid.* 6)

Crouched in a foxhole, the men are surprised by General Pratt, who demands: "What are American troops doing on their knees in front of a bunch of goddam Brazilians?" (*Ibid.* 7). Cutler snaps upright to attention and is promptly shot. Incoherent as a result of his wounding, he mumbles the term "CB97," the designation of a toxic nerve gas. General Pratt, uncomprehending and soothing, reassures Cutler in a fatherly manner: "Easy lad. You'll get all the CB97s you want" (*Ibid.* 8). Mistaking this statement as authorization for deployment of the prohibited weapon, Colonel Dawn orders the gas to be used against the Brazilians. The gas, however, blows back across the battlefield and some eight hundred Americans become casualties.

The sequence of battlefield scenes shows the progressive effects of the gas in the dismemberment of the Americans' bodies, and the fragmentation of their individual and cultural sense of identity. Amid the green glow of the gas, Cutler is tended on the battlefield by an American army doctor, Captain Weems. Cutler has lost a leg, which has simply detached itself from his body and rolled away. He feels no pain, and greets the doctor with suspicion:

> CUTLER: Are you sure you're not Chico?
> WEEMS: I'm an American.
> CUTLER: Are you sure you're not CIA?
> WEEMS: I'm an American.
> CUTLER: Are you sure you're American?
> WEEMS: I'm an American.
> CUTLER: Are you sure you're loyal? (*Ibid.* 38)

In the act of disintegration, the euphoric effects of the gas lead the men to fantasize about a universal brotherhood of man. Cultural distinctions are lost in the reduction of man to his basic psychic and physical elements, as heads, sexual organs, hands, feet and legs litter the battlefield.

In their limbo-like world Cutler and Weems attain perceptions that transcend cultural and societal differences. In the reduction of man to a condition of pure consciousness, cultural and physical distinctions are blurred, and the motivation for war is lost. As their disparate parts litter the battlefield, the men trade stories from their past and note similarities of experience:

> CUTLER: I think you've got my past. I must have yours.
> WEEMS: We've traded our pasts.
> CUTLER: We've shared our pasts.

WEEMS Everybody has the same history. That's the secret. (*Ibid.* 92)

In the warmth of their new knowledge, the men talk about taking their message to the world:

WEEMs: If we did talk about it, what do you think would happen?
CUTLER: I think it'd end all war.
WEEMS: It would end all violence.
CUTLER: It would end mental illness.
WEEMS: All men would be brothers.
CUTLER: There'd be universal love.
WEEMS: And equality.
CUTLER: And generosity of feelings. (*Ibid.* 93)

The transcendental state comes to an abrupt end, however, when it becomes obvious that there are more pasts floating about the battlefield. Cutler starts to describe a rustic scene of a family working in the fields planting coffee and a mother named Consuela. Weems reacts violently: "That's not my past" (*Ibid* 93), and accuses Cutler of being a Chico. Cutler suspects that his ideas and sensations are emanating from Weems' mind and makes a counter accusation. The play dissolves into farce in the final battlefield scene when the accelerating conflicts between the men culminates in disembodied hands grasping weapons and firing them at disembodied heads (*Ibid.* 95).

In his satirical mode, Feiffer uncannily anticipates a major thrust of the Vietnam war plays that were written by veterans who had experienced first hand the effects of combat, or by those who had dealings with these soldiers. The fragmentation of the psyche that had its metaphorical equivalent in the dismemberment of Cutler's and Weems' bodies

was to be characteristic of the experiences related in many of the Vietnam dramas. Uncertainties about cultural identity and sense of purpose led to the self-questioning and examination that was typical of the men who went to the Asian war. The divisiveness of opinion in American society over the conduct of the war was to appear repeatedly in the drama in metaphors of cultural dissociation and physical dismemberment.

Counterpointing the action of the battlefield in *Murder Case*, is the action occurring within the White House. The primary concern arising from the use of the illegal gas is the effect it will have on U.S. voters: the events of the play take place immediately before a national election. Postmaster General Stiles mentions the use of the gas to a presidential advisor, Professor Sweeney:

> STILES: Six weeks before the presidential election is no time to test out poison gas.
> SWEENEY: That's top secret information. . . . This discussion is in violation of national security!
> STILES: The gooks know about the gas, the Postmaster General isn't supposed to. That's America for you. (*Ibid.* 14)

Reprimanded for his use of the term "gooks" as opposed to "Chico," Stiles observes, "I lose track of the wars, they come so fast" (*Ibid.* 14). Stiles' observations echo the "Tri-continental" war of *God Bless*, and the general attitude toward whatever war is current in Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven*.

Oxymoron is evident in the confused terminology employed in the White House, and points out the contradictions inherent in the process of formulation and implementation of policy. The nerve gas is referred to in White House parlance as "peace gas," incidentally evoking echoes of Nixon's "peace offensive" of 1969. The administration is concerned about the "peace riots" that are being provoked by "peace conspirators" (*Ibid.* 17). The effects of the nerve gas were "counterachieved" by a sudden shift in the wind; the gas is referred to as an important weapon in the "peace arsenal," and its use, "a procedural oversight" (*Ibid* 27-30).

The developing action in the White House focuses on the need to keep the details of the attack secret from the American public. As Lahr notes, "One way to control history is to make it up" (1973: 105), an extended discussion ensues in which the various ways that the "truth" of the matter can be fabricated for the public are examined. The suggestions include: blaming the use of the gas on the Brazilians; fabricating intelligence reports alleging that the Brazilians were about to use the gas, and the response was pre-emptive; or, more plausibly, that the gas was stored behind American lines for research purposes, and a "suicide patrol" of Brazilians destroyed the facility, releasing the gas (*Ibid.* 33-36). The ultimate claim is a variation of the last suggestion, i.e., a "gas leak" occurred after an attack of

unknown nature. Details of the gas leak are to be leaked to the press in a controlled release of information.

As the cultural fragmentation is taking place on the battlefield, a similar process is observable in the First Family. President Hale's wife challenges him with the immorality of his actions when he tries to pass the fabricated story off on her. She is unable to accept his lying to her as an individual, as a marriage partner and as an American. When Hale uses the exigencies of war as an excuse, she retorts:

> I'm not talking about lies to Brazilians--I'm talking about lies to Americans! This is the government of the United States you're running, not an advertising agency! (*Ibid.* 48)

The last scene of Act I ends with Mrs. Hale's threatening to sue for divorce, picking up the telephone, and placing a call to the *New York Times*. Mrs. Hale's action is serious: for the manipulators of power in the White House, the American public is a more threatening and immediate enemy than the Chico in the distant jungles of Brazil.

Act II commences with the news that Mrs. Hale has been murdered; she has been impaled by a picket sign reading "make love not war" (*Ibid.* 60) The President intends to "delay an announcement of Mrs. Hale's death until this crime is solved and an explanation decided upon for the public" (*Ibid.* 60). Attorney General Cole suggests that "in the interests of national security," the investigation should be dropped, since,

> Mrs. Hale's death was an error. No doubt about it. Some one of us panicked. . . . His motive was misguided, possibly half-mad, but rooted in a love for this country that the First Lady did not share, rooted in a belief in the continuity of this administration, *your* administration, that the First Lady tried unceasingly to divide. (*Ibid.* 73)

The Attorney-General fears that the investigation will become a "witch hunt, replete with rumor, lie, half-truth, and innuendo," and "by this route, we will destroy ourselves more successfully than our worst enemies dream" (*Ibid.* 74).

As the process of mythologizing takes over, the Secretary of Defense, Parson, suggests that the "Brazilian suicide squad" be blamed, and other culprits charged with the gas leak. Various members of the Cabinet put forth suggestions that peace groups, students, blacks, the John Birch Society, or a car, hunting or aircraft accident be blamed (*Ibid.* 89). They finally settle on an incident of food poisoning that takes place outside the White House.

Before the announcement can be made, however, Postmaster General Stiles admits privately to the President that he killed Mrs. Hale by mistake in a darkened room, as he had taken her for the President. Stiles had earlier recruited Hale as a politician because he had the "right image"; now he feels that the President cannot win another election because the polls have indicated a slip in his popularity. Realizing the political jeopardy that they are in, the President agrees to appoint Stiles as Secretary of State in the post-election Cabinet, and they jointly announce Mrs. Hale's death to have

been caused by food poisoning. As they do so, the set takes on the hue of the green gas deployed on the battlefield, and the actors freeze into a final tableau (*Ibid.* 197).

A side effect of the gas on the surviving soldiers has been a general paralysis of the body, and the dictates of political survival are seen both in a physical and administrative sense as inflicting the same paralysis on the mechanics of government and the morality of the individual. Truth is a function of political expediency, and the embattled politicians in the White House create scenarios much in the manner of Madison Avenue advertising agencies. In the interests of political survival, the resort to misinformation is an instinctive response of the politician.

A central theme of *Murder Case* is that of psychic fragmentation. In the case of the soldiers, the catalyst nerve gas temporarily dissolves the distinctions between individual and collective cultural pasts, and man, reduced to basic experiential sensations, perceives his universal nature. Only when consciousness takes over and cultural distinctions are evident, do xenophobia and cultural paranoia lead the individual to conflict. The fractionalizing of reality exists in the decomposition of perception into its basic components, and cultural conditioning disintegrates when confronted with its own irrationality under the stress of battlefield conditions.

Collectively, Feiffer's three works deal with the fragmentation of society on many levels: in the area of politics and administration, within the family, between the family and society, between individuals, and within the individual himself. Social stress threatens cultural cohesion, identity and continuity as current events appear to be increasingly irrational, and the uncertainties of daily existence threaten individual and collective psychological equilibrium.

As a consequence of his predilection for graphic portrayal of American society in journals and newspapers, Feiffer has often had to answer charges that his plays were cartoons rather than dramas.

> For the first 6 or 7 years of doing cartoons, people used to tell me these weren't cartoons at all. To be recognized as a cartoonist, I had to start writing plays. (Feiffer/Lahr 38)

Feiffer adds that the American stage at that time was unaccustomed to satire in this particular form, but that the Living Theatre functioned much in the same way as his works, simply attempting to lead the audience from one point to the next in a reconstruction of experience. Feiffer notes that for him

> satire is an attempt to get at the root of a situation, and expose it to the extension of logic. Taking logic to the point where it becomes ridiculous; revealing certain truths about situations that otherwise might not be evident. (*Ibid.* 39)

In exposing what he perceived to be the irrationality of his society, Feiffer uses the very broad strokes of acerbic satire to further his purpose. Consequently, while his technique may arouse critical anger, his message is seldom mistaken.

Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven* (1967), on the other hand, presents a blurred picture of society because of its very broad and blunted satirical nature. While serious in its satirical intent, its style of farcical theatricality detracts from both its dramatic and thematic value. Contained in the ambivalent title are the concepts of a war fantasy--the scenario concerns an operational bombing squadron based in New Haven--and theatrical disaster, "bombing" being the theatrical term for a poorly received production. The audience is so consistently reminded that it is in a theatre that the aesthetics of performance are never fully developed. However, the piece stands as an anti-war statement in the theatre at a time when such items were rare. Although performed at the height of American involvement in Vietnam, the work tends to be more anti-war in general rather than anti-Vietnam war in particular. Perhaps this is because Heller sees the Vietnam conflict basically as an extension of the Cold War confrontations in Korea and the Bay of Pigs, since *New Haven* was conceived and written before the major military escalation in Vietnam. In any case, Heller leaves

the audience to assess the significance of the play for current events.

The method of abstraction used in *New Haven* is the universalizing of the fact of war. In his introductory note, Heller directs that the action should be set in the theatre, city and country wherever the play is being performed; that the time is always the present; and that "the soldiers are American only because New York is American" (*New Haven* 5). On occasion, actors use their real names and refer to previous plays that they have performed in that area; the audience is repeatedly addressed, and entrance, exit and line cues are often deliberately missed or stressed.

The action of the play incorporates the use of broad farce in demonstrating the ludicrous nature of war. The single setting of the play consists of an American Air Force operations room from which esoteric targets such as "Constantinople" (as opposed to Istanbul) are attacked. The style imitates that of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) in its confusion of reality and illusion as actors determine the roles they will play, but the wide swing from farce to tragic consequence in the work threatens the aesthetic homogeneity of the piece.

The many confusing levels of reality are established and played upon in the first act. Stage hands are surprised in arranging the set as the curtain raises half way, and then stops. When the set is arranged, the curtain rises to its

full height, and The Major is discovered working on a play script that will "*eventually turn out to be a copy of the script of the same play that is now being performed*" (*Ibid.* 8). Throughout the course of the play, The Major will edit the script, detailing who will go on the operations, and who will be killed. He is questioned by Captain Starkey who wants to know "who is running the show?" When The Major responds that the Colonel is, Starkey pushes the point:

> But who tells the Colonel? The general. Who tells the general? I know--another general. Major, let me in on the biggest military secret of all. Who's really in charge, and who's really responsible? (*Ibid.* 11)

Smiling enigmatically, The Major dismisses the question. The point of whether the question should not be asked or cannot be answered is not addressed.

In consultation with his script, the Major orders the men of the bombing group to be assembled.

> CAPTAIN STARKEY, *who is reciting his lines without interruption, and with considerable self-satisfaction, speaks first to the* Men *as they enter and then directly to the audience. THE MAJOR continues studying his manuscript, turning a few pages every few seconds as though reading along with the spoken words.* (*Ibid.* 13)

The men make an obvious show that they are actors who are uncertain of their characters and the actions that they should mimic. Among the Men are five actors who act as "Idiots" throughout the play; they utter no words and obey orders in a mechanical and uncomprehending manner (*Ibid.* 12).

Orders are cut for the men to undertake a bombing raid on Constantinople, they are to "bomb it off the map." One man observes that it is no longer on the map, and that they should just bomb the map. Typical of the tragic/farce nature of the play is the rejoinder on the need for new maps to bomb, and Starkey's observation, "Henderson, *ours* not to reason why, It's *yours* but to do as you're told . . . and die" (*Ibid.* 18) [ellipses in the text]. The terrible reality that stands behind heroic words such as honour, duty, patriotism and sacrifice underlies the thematic stance of the work, but the distinctions between truth and reality are so confused that the first act of the play stands in danger of aesthetic collapse.

Diversions incurred by the blurring of reality and drama continually impede the progression of the action. When one man asks another whether he is worried about the upcoming raid, Henderson's response is:

> Nah, not me. And should I tell you why? Because I'm not really a soldier, that's why. I'm really something else. I'm an *actor* . . . playing the part of a soldier. (*Indicating the audience.*) They know that. (*Addressing the audience directly.*) Right? It's only a little game. It's only a play. (*Ibid.* 23)

The actor then tells the rest of the crew and the audience that his part is too small and that he has done better work in the area. The cast join in the discussion until The Major restores order.

The play resumes a Pirandellian stance as Sinclair, a character who is to die at the end of the first act, indicates that to dramatically enhance his role, he would prefer to die at the end of the second. The Major confides to Starkey that Henderson is going to be killed on the next mission, but that he is saving the identity of the man that will be killed at the end of the play as a surprise. Henderson re-enters and reports Sinclair's death to Ruth, a composite factotum/character who provides coffee and donuts to the actors and functions as a Red Cross girl in the play.

The pair discuss Sinclair's qualities as an actor and the previous parts that he has played. When the cast as actors cannot find Sinclair, Starkey informs them:

> He wasn't real. I'm not real. I'm pretending, and I'm sure that all of you-- (*To the audience altering the details of his speech to correspond to his actual experience as an actor.*) and all of you out there, have seen me act many, many times before in many different roles. (*Ibid.* 48)

The actor playing Starkey goes on to summarize his career for the audience, and to avow that Starkey never existed either as a person or a character in the play. The final movement of Act I occurs in a scene where the men throw a bomb about between themselves and into the audience. It is only a prop, they suggest, but when it is thrown into the wings, a large explosion ensues.

Although dramatically flawed, the first act does have a strong thematic underpinning. The presentation of many levels of reality that confront the audience suggest certain

correlations with perceptions in the outside world. The parody of theatrical conventions illustrates the tendency to accept certain givens in the external world without questioning them; for example, who is controlling the production or scripting the war? The inference is that theatrical terms and conventions formulate the reality of the external world as well as that of the stage. Theatrical terms used in a jocular sense formulate commentary on political and military philosophy.

The second act continues the assault on the audience. A young man appears who has come to be a soldier; he is a cast member's younger brother who has shown up to replace Sinclair. The members of the cast clown about, usurp each others' speeches, and discuss who will be killed and who will be promoted. While absurd in the context of the stage, the conversation is uncomfortably like that of men who are resigned to the conditioned demands of military life, and compelled to succumb to the inevitability of a controlling destiny or script.

Henderson, however, rebels. He is scheduled to die at take-off on the next mission, which is the bombing of Minnesota. He informs the audience and cast,

> I'll tell you all something. (*To audience and the Men on stage.*) I'm not going to go out now and get killed just because I'm expected to. I don't like the Major. And I suddenly don't like any part of this either. Because after I get killed, you get killed, and after you get killed, you get killed, and after-- (*Ibid.* 66)

Henderson presumably points alternately to members of the cast and audience. He subsequently disappears and the action of the play stops as a search for him is begun; he is eventually discovered hiding in Ruth's dressing room. Refusing to go on the mission, Henderson the character is shot; the actor is also perceived as being dead.

Against the roar of aircraft engines, Starkey's son appears on stage and meets his father:

> STARKEY'S SON: What's going to happen to me?
> STARKEY: You're going to be killed, son. You're going to go away in an airplane and be killed in an explosion.
> STARKEY'S SON: Pop . . . I don't want to go. (*Ibid.* 92)

Starkey attempts to hide his son, but The Major keeps calling out different names from a long list, and Starkey's son responds to each call.

Resigned to playing his military role, Starkey sends his son on the mission, the latter cursing Starkey as he leaves. In acknowledging the full dramatic moment of the role that he has been forced to play because of the dictates of the script, Starkey addresses the audience:

> STARKEY: (*To the audience.*) Now, none of this, of course, is really happening. It's a show, a play in a theatre, and I'm not really a captain. I'm an actor. (*His voice rises a bit, defensively.*) I'm ..... (*He uses his real name.*) You all know that. Do you think that I, ..., (*Repeats his real name.*) would actually let my son go off to a war to be killed . . . and just stand here talking to you and do nothing? (*With severe anger and indignation, to drown out the truth.*) Of course not! There is no war taking place. (*Pauses a moment to listen.*) There is

> no war taking place here now! (*He sags, losing conviction, and his voice begins to trail away listlessly.*) There has never been a war. There never will be a war. Nobody has been killed here tonight. It's only make believe . . . a story . . . a charade . . . a show. (*Bitterly, giving up the attempt.*) Nobody has ever been killed. (*Ibid.* 97) [ellipses in text]

The play thus turns bitter in its final moments: the ultimate reality that is mimicked and satirized in the play now attains a malevolent intensity. The personalizing of the experience brings a shock of realization: play has become reality, and death is no longer distanced through abstraction.

The play's anti-war message by this time, however, has become irretrievably blunted. The aesthetic relationship between actors and audience is difficult to establish given the constant breaching of the fourth wall. Consequently, in the final moments of the play where audience empathy is necessary in order to communicate the pathos of war, the dramatic moment is diminished by the abruptness of the reversal in attitude. While the thematic point is made that an individual must inevitably accept responsibility for his actions and come to terms with reality, the dramatic problem remains, since the events described are so farcical. Weales points out a problem should the actors take a curtain call, "We are thrown back on the comfortable reminder which the play had been designed to by-pass--that it is, after all, only a play" (207).

The work's thematic strengths and weaknesses stem from the same basic premise. In addition to the farcical presentation, the reality of war is distanced geographically and metaphorically when the actors/characters leave on their mission to bomb Constantinople. Yet, even as obviously fictitious characters are sent to bomb obviously fictitious targets, they gain status as actors attempting to come to terms with what it must be like to be a soldier and to engage in the irrational act of war. As Weales suggests,

> the absurdity of war is too real and too terrible to be taken seriously in the theatre. If war and the forces that wage it are outrageously irrational, unbelievably mad, how can a stage present its reality, its terrifying presence? How can the audience be jolted through laughter into comprehension? (209).

It is this distinction that Heller is attempting to present to his audience; i.e., the farcical nature of war presented in the theatre is no different from conducting an unprincipled war in their everyday world.

Another work which casts its anti-war message in abstraction is Romulus Linney's *The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks* (1971). Exploring the nature of individual guilt and responsibility, the play is structured like *Pueblo*, in the form of a military inquiry. The action of the piece stems from the recapitulation of events leading to the ritualistic suicides at Schofield Barracks of its Commander and his wife Sheila. Schofield Barracks, situated in Hawaii, was the conditioning school for troops destined for Asian duty.

Included in its facilities was a mock-up of a Vietnamese village, replete with various types of "booby traps," where soldiers could rehearse military tactics and generally become acclimatized to conditions that they would encounter in Vietnam.[14] The action of the play is set at the scene of the suicides, in the Ballroom of the Officers Club at the Barracks, two days after the event. Following the format laid down by the dead General, the unofficial inquiry is ghost-scripted by him in a double sense, as he uses it to explain the reasons for his actions.

At a Halloween party, the General and his wife had performed a traditional Japanese play, a *shinju*, in which, "lovers, who cannot bear the cruelty of the world, commit suicide together" (*Love Suicide* 11). According to the General's secretary, Miss Nomura, "Their life becomes a beautiful poem they leave behind. . . . They are taken into heaven and reborn on lotus leaves" (*Ibid.* 11). It transpires that the General and his wife have left their entire estate to an Oriental- American orphanage (*Ibid.* 9).

A witness at the inquiry, General Evans, mentions that "Mike" talked about a new Code of Military Justice that is required because of the current civilian image of the military: "They will laugh at us. Laughter, drugs and field

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[14] See Robert J. Lifton, *Home From the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 44.

officers shot in the back" (*Ibid.* 19). The implication is that military morale has disintegrated to the point where the American officer corps needs a new code of ethics similar to that of the *Code Bushido* of the Japanese military.

According to the testimony of a Regimental Sergeant-Major, Ruggles, just before his suicide the General has had to suppress a mutiny of the Black troops under his command. A Black PFC had been brutalized by a white Sergeant from Georgia, and a race riot was imminent. The General, on the advice of Ruggles, gives prominence to a negro retiree by having him stand beside him on the reviewing platform, thus defusing the potentially explosive situation.

The incident sets the stage for Ruggles and the General to have an introspective talk in which the former destroys the latter's military idealism. An admirer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and also an aspiring poet, the General is revealed as somewhat out of touch with the realities of modern warfare. Ruggles relates how, in the prosecution of the Asian wars, the American soldier has become a degenerate, brutal destroyer of lives and cultures. He tells the General of atrocities committed by the troops in Korea, where American soldiers gave hand grenades to Korean children and gambled on which one would pull the fusing pin out first (*Ibid.* 25). The Sergeant-Major adds that the real essence of soldiering is bloody, unprincipled murder, and in sensing the General's idealistic blindness to the realities of

contemporary soldiering, affirms that he "would rather have the common virtue of a killer than the glory of a fake like you" (*Ibid.* 25).

With further testimony from a series of witnesses, the stripping away of the General's illusions about his world and his attempts to find spiritual fulfillment are documented. One witness, a poetess, Lucy Lake, reveals that the General and his wife have attended her poetry-writing workshops. She notes that he had a flair for "bringing disparate elements together" in the construction of a poem (Ibid. 27). Lucy has introduced the General and his wife to the Oriental theatre, particularly a work of the Japanese playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725), entitled *The Love Suicide at Sonezaki.* Lucy observes that in the inquiry, the General is simply bringing all his disparate elements together. He had given the orders for the inquiry before his death, and is dramatizing the procedures from his grave. In response to the query of the Commanding Officer (C.O.) concerning her assessment of the General's behaviour, she explains how the latter came to be obsessed by feelings of guilt:

> LUCY LAKE: Because he came to believe, literally now, something dreadful. And his wife had the courage to agree with him.
>
> C.O.: And what was that?
>
> LUCY LAKE: That he was a sort of child murderer. That he had murdered his son. (*Pause*)
>
> C.O.: Miss Lake, the General's son was a grown man. A combat Marine. He was killed in action in 1965, near Danang.

LUCY LAKE: Precisely. (*Ibid.* 30)

Lucy's testimony reveals another aspect of the General's guilt; his son, raised in the military tradition, became a Marine and died in the course of his duty.[15]

In explanation of the General's interest in poetry, Lucy suggests another reason why an American playwright might approach the subject of the Vietnam War through abstract interpretations.

> We Americans so love abstractions. Adore to escape into them. Where we don't have to face the dirty details, specifics of reality. . . . For the American, the abstraction is pure action: ball game. Government. We worship it the way the Romans worshipped Rome. . . . It is our religion. (*Ibid.* 31)

Lucy implies that the consequence of a cultural awareness based on such abstract ideas as patriotism, duty and loyalty, is moral blindness.

The psychological acuity realized by the General through his attempts to put his thoughts into concrete form led him to question the values of his society, his occupation, and his religion. Lucy explains that

> the General began to live on a different, unfamiliar level of perception. It is not abstract. It can be very pretty, but also extremely ugly, because it relishes these specifics and details: these dirty particular realities of existence. It

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[15] It is noteworthy that many military officers who saw duty in Vietnam bore familiar names such as those of Patton and Stilwell, and also those of many other officers of World War II. See Robert Pisor's *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh* (New York: Ballantine Books), p. 51.

> has many names. Poetry is one of them. The General had to consider things which had never before crossed his mind. (*Ibid.* 31)

Lucy implies that the *process* of abstraction inherent in the creation of a work of art is more significant for the artist than the abstraction or completed work itself, since it must incorporate both the ugly and the sublime into a completed scheme of things, into an objectivized art form in the creative sense. In the case of the General, he found in art a means of expression that he failed to realize in his conditioned world, for the art of creation brings greater clarity of perception than that of interpretation or analysis.

The process of abstraction leads the General to a full awareness of his guilt. He realizes that in an abstract way he is guilty not only of the death of his son, but of all the atrocities committed by the soldiers under his command. Following the General's acknowledgement of this guilt, Lucy admits to the inquiry that she is in some part responsible for the death of her son. She evokes images of Kent State when she tells of her loss: "I too had a son who died. In an Ivy League university. A battlefield he ran to, to please me. Where he perished" (*Ibid.* 34). Through the process of abstraction, both Lucy and the General come to realize their respective guilt; the General, however, assumes a larger burden than does Lucy; he embodies the collective guilt of

American society that stems from the prosecution of its Asian wars.

The General's final disillusionment occurs when, during a visit to New York, he is accosted and robbed by three men whose expertise in disarming him indicates that they have had military training. Humiliated and forced to plead for his life, he suffers "the final disgrace of the soldier, who will kill like Ghengis Khan from an airplane, and then beg on the ground for his own life, like any poor peasant" (*Ibid.* 51) The General finds solace in a translation from *Ajax*, which deals with the warrior's thoughts before he falls upon his sword:

> Now, when the pride of this our noble race,
> Wanders, distraught, in darkness and disgrace,
> When honour's day has set in cold decay,
> Better to go to sleep, than linger on,
> When the life of that soul is gone.
>
> Farewell, my best beloved, by inward furies torn,
> I leave the deepest, bitterest curse
> This house has ever borne. (*Ibid.* 52)

An observer at the inquiry notes that, "in an age where everyone else is innocent, Michael [the General] claimed the right to be guilty" (*Ibid.* 52). The suicides are referred to by another officer at the inquiry as "psychological casualties of war" (*Ibid.* 53).[16]

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[16] The phenomenon of collective guilt is noted by Podhoretz in reference to the My Lai massacre. He observes that some of Lieutenant Calley's most ardent defenders came from the ranks of the anti-war faction, because they felt that assigning guilt to Calley or other individuals, the truly guilty parties would escape responsibility. Podhoretz cites the findings of three psychiatrists connected with the

The General has ordered a re-enactment at the inquiry of the events of the Halloween Ball, in concert with the playing of an audio tape made at the time. The scene changes to a surrealistic sequence in which the general and his wife appear in Noh masks and costumes, and repeat the events of the evening. To the words of Chicamatsu's play, the General and his wife enact the scenes of the *shinju*; the skit culminates with the General's shooting his wife in the neck with an arrow, and killing himself with his sidearm. It is suggested at the inquiry that Sheila's wound by itself is not fatal, and she commits suicide by grasping the arrow and working it from side to side in her neck, in order to induce fatal bleeding (*Ibid.* 62).

As the re-enactment takes place, various members of the stage audience interpret the general's actions. Some reserved chairs indicate where the President of the United States was to sit when he called at the Club during an inspection tour. It becomes obvious that in the course of the play, the General had intended to kill an Oriental-American boy and drench the President with his blood. The General's plan has been aborted only as a consequence of a change in the President's itinerary.

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case: *The major responsibility and guilt for the massacre lie with the elected officials who make U.S. policy in Vietnam and with the high military officials who have misled both elected officials and the general public as to what they have been doing under the name of those policy directives.* See Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were in Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1982), p. 189.

The play abstracts themes of murder and suicide by elevating them to a cultural level. One culture making war on another and the assassination of a political leader (in effect, the General's Commander-in-Chief) by a senior officer, are symptomatic of deep social ills, as is suicide instigated by the perception of a collective guilt. The act of suicide itself is abstracted in the ritual of the *shinju*, as a gesture of dying, as the General's secretary surmises, "for the cause of love and truth and beauty" (*Ibid.* 59). The General's final comment is in the form of a statement to be read at the end of the inquiry.

> If you have conducted my inquiry, I thank you. It represents a battle I lost, and the end of my lifelong dream of serving my country. My maneuvers here, many of them devious, may suggest the forces that defeated me. I hope so. I leave you to decide what duty to our country, and to ourselves finally is. It was a choice I chose not to make. (*Ibid.* 61)

The forces that defeated the General relate to the act of abstracting ideas from perceptions that are themselves abstractions. For all his attempts at self-fulfillment--attempting to find in poetry, for example, a vehicle for the expression of his guilt--the General remains idealistic to the end. He has substituted the perverted idealism associated with political assassination, and self-destruction in the name of truth, love and beauty, for the idealism in the abstractions that he has lived by: honour, duty and patriotism, all of which are culturally conditioned and culturally dependent. The couple's final statement in the act

of their suicides becomes an abstract act that draws its essence from other abstract ideas.

Another problem with the General's solution is that he attempts to expiate his guilt through the ritual of another culture. His suicide lacks both the dignity and the honour associated with the ritual in Japan, where cultural beliefs reinforce the noble demeanour of the act. Out of context with time and place, the General's act brings contempt from his military colleagues. Colonel Robertson H. Moore, the General's Chief of Staff who has deplored the lack of military discipline in the General, and disagreed with him "on just about any idea he every had," observes:

> He was a baby, an overgrown American Boy Scout, and they're the terrors of the earth!! (*To Lucy Lake.*) And don't you hand me any more of this shit about love and poetry and child sacrifice, or anything like that! He was a baby, a goddamned Boy Scout baby!! (*Ibid.* 61)

General Evans, the General's personal and professional friend dismisses the significance of the couple's suicide with, "I have loved these people all my life. But they were psychological casualties of war, and that's all they were" (*Ibid.* 53). Evans leaves the inquiry in a fit of temper, and it becomes obvious that the General's act has threatened his own sense of well-being.

In playing with the discrepancies of perception involved in dealing with abstract concepts, Linney treats problems that arise in the process of attempting to find the truth behind abstractions. Robert Asahina, remarking on the failure

of the intellectual avant garde to come to terms with the reality of the Vietnam War earlier than it did, observes that

> the avant garde could offer only images of images; its facile abdication of the sovereignty of the sensibility in favour of the journalistic mode of instant communication involved a confusion of form with function that left the avant garde (perhaps to its relief) twice removed from the disturbing reality of Vietnam. (32)

Problems inherent in abstracting ideas from ideas which are themselves abstractions are thus transferred to the stage because theatre is itself an abstraction of events occurring in the external world.

The plays discussed in this chapter represent a broad sampling of the plays written when the American public was only just beginning to become aware of Vietnam and what it represented. Many other dramatists wrote plays that dealt with Vietnam in a tangential fashion, and dramas treating issues associated with Vietnam continued to be written into the 1970s and 1980s. Daniel C. Gerould's *Candaules, Commissioner* (1965), Ron Cowen's *Summertree* (1968), Gloria Gonzales' *Moving On* (1971), Robert Patrick's *Kennedy's Children* (1973), Christopher Durang's puerile *The Vietnamization of New Jersey* (1978), and Mary Orr's *Women Still Weep* (1980), are examples.

The reasons for abstracting the reality of the war in allusion and allegory may be attributed to many causes. Some established playwrights most likely did not want to become directly embroiled in the controversy for either aesthetic or

financial reasons, since commercial theatre is heavily funded by conservative institutions, and traditional theatre is by nature quite conservative. In addition, the society was divided in its support for the War, and many elements found justification for it. Even though events of the War were reported in the news media, the reality was softened by exposure to the fictional violence of movies and television. For some, the war, because of its geographical distance, was approachable primarily as a conflict of principles predicated on the abstract notions of freedom, self-assertion, honour and duty. It may also be argued that abstract philosophical concepts are best discussed in abstract theatrical terms. Some dramatists no doubt actually did regard their contemporary society as decadent and corrupt, and this attitude led them to search for the causes in the cultural record.

A significant argument explaining why the first plays attempting to come to terms with Vietnam couched their message in abstraction is that the *process* of dramatization in which reality is transformed into theatrical metaphor was seen by dramatists as essentially being a duplicate of the process of the definition of cultural reality in the external world. They recognized that the creation of metaphor in the theatre was similar to that of the process of cultural conditioning observable in the external society, and they attacked the shortcomings that they perceived in American

culture through the technique of metaphorical abstraction. By drawing attention to the similarities between the creation of theatrical metaphor and the formulation of the cultural consciousness of a society, the playwrights were able to cast into bold relief some of the more contentious issues assailing the public sensibilities.

The most probable reason, however, that playwrights tend to abstract their messages in allegory and allusion was that this method allows the author to approach a given situation from what is essentially an extra-cultural perspective. Distancing an event in time, geographical location, or analogous circumstance replaces the emotional subjectivity associated with personal involvement in a situation with a broader objective viewpoint. The distancing of experience through the various methods of abstraction avoids the cultural mesmerism that occludes impartial judgement.

An analysis of the dramas that emerged as a direct consequence of first-hand war experience reinforces the idea that the cultural conditioning upon which perceptions of reality are based is similar to the process of dramatization in the theatre. The dramas written by returning veterans or by others who had first-hand experience with them, inevitably couched their messages in surrealistic and expressionistic forms, and depicted the reality of the external world as being as arbitrary as that of the stage.

The critical insight of Dieckman and Brayshaw concerning fragmentation and paralysis of the collective psyche under socio-cultural stress, in reference to *Indians*, and applied to *Murder Case*, is not only relevant to dramas of abstraction, but also typifies works dealing with the war directly. However, there is an essential difference in the dramas written as a consequence of the war experience and the abstractions of the early dramatists: the fragmentation and paralysis that were evident in the broad context of American society and culture were now to become concentrated in the individual.

The direct experience of war created stresses in the individual that were personal concentrations of those extant in the larger society. Members of many racial groups came together in psychologically confining living spaces and the ground rules that governed behaviour in their former environments were replaced with those of a new one. The use of drugs gained popularity as the realities of the battlefield demanded increasingly effective escape mechanisms, and the distrust of authority in the civilian world was carried over to that of the military. The war experience thus exacerbated and stretched to intolerable limits in the individual the process of fragmentation that had heretofore existed as a phenomenon of general dissatisfaction with the culture. Chapters IV, V, and VI will undertake an examination of the major war plays and

illustrate how the basic themes of the abstracted dramas re-emerge, concentrated and intensified, in the plays of initiation, experience, and homecoming.

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CHAPTER IV

PLAYS OF INITIATION

The significant dramas dealing with Vietnam were written by playwrights with some firsthand experience of the war; they were able to dramatize the ordeal and its consequences for both the combatants and the home community. These authors confronted the fact of war directly and chronicled in dramatic terms its psychological horror. Their plays, which attempted to portray the magnitude of the event and its immediate and long-lasting effects on both the individual and the collective American psyche, best illustrate how the theatre eventually managed to come to terms with it.

The dramas examined in chapters IV, V, and VI, are essentially of three types and are characterized, both thematically and dramatically, by variations on structural principles first described in van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*. In the plays dealing with the men who served in Vietnam, a tripartite pattern is observable--that of separation, experience, and reintegration. Typically, these plays document the consequences for an individual as he undergoes the transitional stage of induction into the army, the extra-cultural exposure overseas, and reintegration into the society from which he has been alienated as a consequence of his military training and experience. Major themes of these pieces include the replacement of the cultural signifiers

that comprised an individual's consciousness before he was inducted into the military and his indoctrination into a new social order; the trauma of his overseas experience; and the problems associated with reassimilation into a society whose ethics and values, perceptions, and modes of behaviour have become alien to him.

A recurring motif associated with the Rites of Passage theme which typifies all of these plays is that there is a failure of myth and ritual to support and sustain the process of transition, which invariably creates problems of adjustment in the men who undergo the ordeal. The novitiates find themselves in an existential void, isolated and alienated, separated by their experience from the old order, but never fully integrated into the new. Man's attempt at gaining or regaining a place in the cultural construct is prevalent in virtually all major plays dealing with Vietnam. Works focusing on the theme of separation rites are represented by David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1968) and *Streamers* (1976);[1] those describing rites of experience include H. Wesley Balk's and Ronald J. Glasser's *The Dramatization of 365 Days* (1972), David Berry's *G.R. Point* (1975), and John DiFusco's (*et al*) *Tracers* (1980).

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[1] Rabe completed the first draft of *Hummel* in 1968, but it was not produced until 1971, by Joseph Papp. *Sticks and Bones* was written after *Hummel*, but was produced in 1969, at Villanova University. See David Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. xix.

Rites of reintegration are prominent in David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* (1969), Adrienne Kennedy's *An Evening With Dead Essex* (1973), Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag* (1975), James McClure's *Private Wars* (1979), and Emily Mann's *Still Life* (1980).

In his Introduction to Monika Vizedom's and Gabrielle L. Caffee's translation of van Gennep's work, Solon T. Kimball observes that the term "passage" in *Rites of Passage* is better rendered in English translation as "transition" (van Gennep vii). Van Gennep undertook an analysis of the ceremonies that accompanied an individual's "life crises" and noted that a pattern, or *schema*, was present. He distinguished three major phases of this *schema*: separation (*séparation*), transition (*marge*), and incorporation (*agrégation*) (*Ibid.* vii). In the general pattern of transition from one state of existence to another, van Gennep noted three main phases: the act of separation from the previous environment of "the world of women and children"; instruction and a gradual education as the novitiate is taught the "ground rules" of the new social order; and a process of reintegration into the society in which he will function as a fully-accredited individual (*Ibid.* 74-75). The relation of the individual to his collective group or society is dependent on modes of social intercourse that are established through such rites.

In dramas dealing directly with the Vietnam War, plays

of separation depict the military as a self-contained social unit, as distinct from the society that it serves as one culture is from another. Draftees undergo rites of initiation that replace the social codes of the civilian order with a new set of behavioral patterns predicated on the needs of a different set of requirements for survival. The recruits are effectively integrated into a new social hierarchy through a systematic desymbolization and replacement of the signifiers of their former cultures, and they are assimilated into a new society which has its own distinct reality. The recruit is stripped of his pre-military identity, programmed with new criteria of desirable behaviour, and in essence is acculturated to a new social order predicated on a cultural mythology separate and distinct from that of the civilian world.

David Rabe was a war veteran, who, after his tour of duty was over, intended to return to Vietnam as a press correspondent. A writer before his military service, his attempts at recording his impressions on the battlefield failed through the inability of language to describe them: "In no way could I effect the canon, the shuddering tent flaps."[2] He notes that trying to describe the events at the time was similar to attempting to replay "desperate and painful events in your skull while they continued to occur in

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[2] David Rabe, Introduction to *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), xvi.

front of you" (*Ibid.* xvii). In his Vietnam plays Rabe does not attempt to reconstruct the events of the battlefield, but describes instead the painful psychological transformations undergone by the individual who faced the mind-wrenching experience.

Both of David Rabe's "initiation" plays, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1968) and *Streamers* (1976), deal with the process of induction into the military and the irrevocable changes that the men undergo in this process. The set of mythic constructs upon which reality is based is shown to be every bit as arbitrary and unreliable as those of the civilian world. Both plays illustrate the concerns that became so prevalent in the works dealing with the consequences of Vietnam for both the individual and his society: the stress resulting from the social conflict put excruciating and irresistible pressure on the fabric of reality itself. The overwhelmingly dominant themes of the War plays became those of both individual and social disintegration, internecine conflict, psychological fragmentation, alienation, and isolation; and a loss of cultural identity.

Many of the ideas inherent in Vietnam War plays were brought together in the opening scene of *Pavlo Hummel*. A grenade, later identified as a "M-twenty-six-A-two fragmentation" type, is thrown into a bordello in which the title character is consorting with a prostitute. The grenade,

it transpires, has been thrown by a Sergeant Wall, with whom Pavlo, a PFC, has had an altercation concerning rights to a prostitute, Yen. "Fragging" was a term used in Vietnam to describe the shooting of an officer by his own men, and was a more frequent occurrence than army officials still care to admit.[3] The fragmentation of social order implicit in such an act corresponds well, in a thematic sense, to the destructive mechanism of a fragmentation grenade, the resulting physical dismemberment, and the psychological fracturing that accompanies the breakdown of cultural myth. The nature of the weapon and the state of Pavlo's mind create a raw irony, as physical and mental disintegration occur simultaneously.

The subsequent action of the play consists of a series of flashbacks drawn from Pavlo's fragmented consciousness, a disjointed collection of his perceptions that date from his childhood, and mark his progress through his army training and war experiences. These disjointed expressionistic flashbacks chronicle the soldier's conditioning as a civilian, as a recruit in basic training, and as a frontline soldier. Emerging from the dying Pavlo's mind, these flashbacks are orchestrated by a choral figure or alter-ego named Ardell, a Black sergeant who appears immediately after

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[3] See Al Santoli, *Everything We Had* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), p. 262, for a description of "fragging." The motion picture *Platoon* recognized this syndrome, but did not properly come to terms with it. The internecine conflict was depicted as occurring between two men of equal rank, both sergeants. See discussion below of David Berry's *G.R. Point* with reference to fragging.

the explosion, and returns periodically during Pavlo's military indoctrination to comment on his situation and to advise him on his course of action.

Ardell orders Pavlo to attention, and the soldier springs from his dying position to answer in ritualized military terminology questions concerning his identity and status. He names the officers of his company, battalion, platoon and squad, and gives his height, weight, and complexion (*Hummel* 11). Ardell takes Pavlo to task about the method of his death and his failure to avoid being killed by the grenade:

> ARDELL: You had that thing in your hand, didn't you? What was you thinkin' on you had that thing in your hand? [sic]
>
> PAVLO: About throwin' it. About a man I saw when I was eight years old who came through the neighborhood with a softball team called the Demons, and he could do anything with a softball underhand that most big-leaguers could do with a hardball overhand. He was fantastic. (*Ibid.* 11)

Pavlo's death is a consequence of his confusing cultural realities. In his mind, the grenade becomes a harmless baseball, and rather than throwing it away as his military training would demand, his action was delayed because of his confusion about the cultural situation in which he was functioning. In effect, his out of context "basic training," or cultural conditioning, has killed him.[4]

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[4] Similar cultural cross references were reported in case histories. In reference to the My Lai massacre, Lifton notes that one soldier, seeing a small boy who already had

The paralysis associated with the cultural flashback supports the observations, noted in Chapter III by Dieckman and Brayshaw, concerning Kopit's plays. Conflicting social roles or personality components associated with confused behavioral conditioning, which essentially constitute an individual's perception of reality, lead to the fragmentation of his psyche, and ultimate mental paralysis. The individual becomes confused when, under stress, he must react instinctively. In the presence of the grenade, Pavlo regressed to the conditioning of his former culture rather than to the survival instincts programmed during basic training.

There are also sexual implications concerning Pavlo's inaction. Ardell's "You had that thing in your hand, didn't you?" may well refer to Pavlo's presence in the bordello. In his fight with the sergeant, Pavlo kicks Wall in the groin, and the incapacitated sergeant uses the grenade. The internecine war arises from sexual frustration, which becomes a constant source of anxiety as the men are exposed to altered codes of behaviour in new cultural conditions. In

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one arm shot off, found the motivation to act by assuming that, if a foreign army invaded America, a foreign soldier would kill an American child in a similar circumstance. He shot the boy. "In this intense moment his conditioned cultural paranoia asserted itself and the soldier acted accordingly." See Robert J. Lifton, "America's New Survivors." *Ourselves / Our Past: Psychological Approaches to American History*, Robert J. Brugger, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 376.

Rabe's plays, as well as many others dealing with the War, the sexual repression of the American male emerges as a major and consistent theme.

At the blast of a whistle, the scene changes to the period of Pavlo's basic training, and Ardell acts as a focusing mechanism for Pavlo's conscious recall of events. Sergeant Tower appears: he is the Drill Instructor who will supervise the men through basic training. The rite of passage to manhood associated with the army and sexual maturity is regarded as an integral part of this training, and sexual perceptions and expression are reordered along military lines. Tower draws the recruits' attention to his "left tit-tee" over which is inscribed "U.S. Army" (*Ibid.* 14). On the muscle of his arm is the symbol of sergeant, the stripes which give him both his name and identity. Recruits are referred to as "motherfuckers," an expletive used repeatedly by the sergeant and enlistees alike. This term has several connotations, the most significant being the reduction and denial of the female authority figure from the previous culture. The predominant marching tune, "Ain't no use in goin' home / Jody got your gal and gone," underscores the men's sexual isolation from the women of their former life, and their reliance on the army for identity and status within the context of the new social hierarchy (*Ibid.* 14).

The sergeant quickly draws a distinction between the men's former status and their present one. "The only

creatures in this world lower than trainees is civilians" (*Ibid.* 14). "You live in the Army of the United States of America" (*Ibid.* 15). All aspects of the men's lives are regulated "by the numbers," including bowel movements:

> You are gonna fall out. By platoon. Which is how you gonna be doin' most everything from now on--by platoon and by the numbers--includin' takin' a shit. Somebody say to you, "One!" you down; "two!" you doin' it; "three!" you wipin' and you ain't finished, you cuttin' it off. (*Ibid.* 16)

This "toilet training" is symbolic of Pavlo's rebirth in a new life where even biological functions must be relearned in accordance with the rules and demands of the new culture.

The process of basic military training is revealed to be a paradigm of the conditioning mechanism of the larger culture, and its most obvious and significant ramification is the equation of sexual maturity and vitality and the exercise of martial power. Rifle training is couched in sexual references:

> This an M-sixteen rifle, this is the best you country got. . . . You got to have feelin' for it, like it a good woman to you. . . . You got to love this rifle, Gen'lmen, like it you pecker and you love to make love [*sic*]. (*Ibid.* 83)

Sexual passions and the passions of killing are a popular equation in the Vietnam War dramas, and also in non-fictional accounts, where soldiers have reported having orgasms in the heat of battle.[5]

A major thematic strain evident in the subtext of Rabe's

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[5] See the discussion of *G.R. Point* below.

Vietnam trilogy--as well as in most other Vietnam War dramas--is the sexual repression of the American male. For most of the recruits, initiation into the military is closely related to rites of puberty, where the power inherent in the gun is readily interpreted in terms of sexual libido. A corporal who has been to Vietnam, arouses Pavlo with the observation,"Can of bug spray buys you all the ass you can handle in some places . . . You give 'em a can of bug spray, you can lay their fourteen-year old daughter" (*Ibid.* 41). For many of the men, in fiction as in fact, their first sexual encounter takes place in the context of military experience. Staged concurrently with the sergeant's instruction on the use of the rifle is a brothel scene in which Pavlo is making love to Yen. Rabe's stage direction suggests, "*Something of Pavlo's making love to Yen is in his* [the sergeant's] *marching*" (*Ibid.* 83).

Pavlo's death in the brothel results from the fragmentation of his lower body and genitals, and the mutilation of the sexual organs is a frequent theme in the dramas and in non-fictive accounts of battle. That phenomenon, while representing a serious danger under actual war conditions, is closely associated with the subliminal fears of the human male. Freud's "castration complex," for example, is a basic part of his anxiety theory.[6] The

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[6] See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, tr. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), *passim*.

mutilation of the sexual organs is also prominent in certain of van Gennep's analyses of rites of passage, and changes in social status, particularly maturity, are often accompanied and demonstrated by such mutilation.[7] In the War dramas injuries of this kind assume a symbolic significance, as they apply not only to the emasculation of the individual, but also to the enervation of his culture.

Pavlo is revealed to have been a misfit in civilian life, and his problems follow him into the army. Unsuccessful with women in the civilian world, he also has problems with rifle drill:

> You mother rifle. You stupid fucking rifle. Mother! Stupid mother, whatsamatter with you? I'll kill you! Rifle, please. Work for me, do it for me. I know what to do, just do it. (*Ibid.* 27)

His inability to cope with women is reflected in his lack of coordination in handling his rifle. Threatening, then cajoling, his references to his rifle assume the attributes of an adolescent's linguistic foreplay. He talks of an affair that he had with a girl before joining the army, but it is unclear whether the story is contrived in order to enhance his manhood in his comrade's eyes.

In an effort to belong, to become one of the group, he creates stories calculated to elicit the awe and respect of his fellows. He tells of his uncle Roy, who has been executed

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[7] See Chapter VI, "Initiation Rites," in Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage*, tr. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Cafee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 65-115.

at San Quentin:

> He killed four people in a barroom brawl usin' broken bottles and table legs and screamin', jus' screamin'. He was mean, man. He was rotten; and my folks been scared the same thing might happen to me; all their lives, they been scared.. I got that same look in my eyes like him. (*Ibid.* 23-24)

Pavlo also tells the men of his criminal exploits: he has, he says, stolen twenty-three cars. In response to his juvenile bragging, he elicits the comment, "Shut up, Hummel! . . . you don't talk American, you talk Hummel! Some goddamn foreign language!" [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 24).

Pavlo genuinely tries to become part of the new system; he studiously memorizes his General Orders; he volunteers for menial duties, and undergoes supplementary physical training. His actions, however, have the opposite effect intended. Failing to realize that the assimilation of an individual by a group can only be realized through proper ritual, he fails in his attempts to integrate with his fellow men and with the military system. Pavlo's problem is that he attempts to accomplish through a process of rationalization what must be undertaken subconsciously, by surrendering to the rituals of incorporation inherent in the drill and its cadence.

In *Pavlo Hummel* the conditioning process of the military is a product of the repetitive mind-numbing but habit-forming process of close-order drill. The rational aspect of the mind must be subsumed to the process of conditioned automatic reflex. In the rhythms and lyrics of the drill cadence are expressed the recruits' identity, situation and sense of

purpose. The Drill Sergeant commands: "I GONNA DO SOME SINGIN', GEN'LMEN, I WANT IT COMIN' BACK TO ME LIKE WE IN GRAND CANYON--AND YOU MY MOTHERFUCKIN' ECHO" (*Ibid.* 16). Marching refrains include: "LIFT YOUR HEAD AND HOLD IT HIGH / ECHO COMPANY PASSIN' BY"; "MOTHER, MOTHER, WHAT'D I DO? / THIS ARMY TREATIN' ME WORSE THAN YOU" (*Ibid.* 19); "SAW SOME STOCKIN'S ON THE STREET / WISHED I WAS BETWEEN THOSE FEET"; "STANDIN' TALL AND LOOKIN' GOOD / WE BELONG IN HOLLYWOOD" (*Ibid.* 70). Even the passage of time is measured collectively: "LORD HAVE MERCY I'M SO BLUE / IT SIX MORE WEEKS TILL I BE THROUGH" (*Ibid.* 47). Through the rhythms and the repeated chants expressed communally by the men as they march, they are molded into an homogeneous society.

The first act of the two-act play presents Pavlo's problems in becoming assimilated. In an expressionistic scene, he fantasizes with his psychological mentor, Ardell, about aspects of biological warfare training. In testing Pavlo's reactions to hypothetical situations, Ardell vividly describes a "radiation attack." Pavlo recoils in horror, "No, no," but, as men rise about him, the denial becomes a response to an accusation of a stolen wallet. Pavlo's stories of theft have now been taken at face value, and he is severely beaten by the recruits (*Ibid.* 43-44). His failed attempts to integrate into the new society stem from his insistence on his individuality which negates his becoming regimented in the military order. He finds that integration

is not a function of individual, but collective assent.

In his search for belonging, Pavlo desperately wants to be privy to the esoteric knowledge that he believes is part of the military mystique. He senses that association with the military will make him a man and will give him the self-esteem and sexual prowess that has eluded him in civilian life. In a conversation with the returned corporal, he is told of an event which happened in Vietnam: an old Vietnamese with a young girl approach a U.S. patrol; the girl is crying. As they draw near, according to the corporal, a U.S. sergeant drops to his knees and

> lets go two bursts--first the old man, then the kid--cuttin' them both right across the face, man you could see the bullets walkin'. It was somethin'. (*Ibid.* 42)

Pavlo does not understand why the sergeant shot the two Vietnamese, and the corporal explains: "Satchel charges, man. The both of them front and back. They had enough TNT on them to blow up this whole damn state" (*Ibid.* 42-43).

The incident becomes the source of a consuming passion for Pavlo; he must understand how the sergeant was aware that the pair were carrying explosives. In wonderment, he accosts a fellow recruit,

> Can you imagine that, Hinkel? Just knowin'. Seein' nothin', but bein' sure enough to gun down two people. They had TNT on 'em, they was stupid slopeheads. That Sergeant Tinden saved everybody's life. (*Ibid.* 48)

He is sure that integration into the army, and experience in action, will lead him to a knowledge such as Sergeant Tinden

posseses, a knowledge which has eluded him in civilian life.

In the course of his repeated and frustrated attempts at integration, Pavlo becomes spiritually lost, and confides to Ardell that he is contemplating suicide. He consumes a large bottle of aspirin and crawls into his bed. A montage scene then ensues, in which the Drill Instructor is giving a lecture to the men on how to find their way by the North Star. He explains the process of locating the Big Dipper and the "pointer" stars, and concludes,

> They them two stars at where the water would come out the dipper if it had some water and out from them on a straight line you gonna see this big damn star and that the North Star and it show you north and once you know that, Gen'lmen, you can figure the rest. You ain't lost no more. (*Ibid.* 56)

Reinforcing the central metaphor of the play--the individual attempting to gain a place in a social and cultural construct--the colloquial lecture of the sergeant illustrates how to find one's way in the physical world.

The sergeant's exhaustive description of how to navigate by locating the North Star is counterpointed by an extended metaphor introduced by a Sergeant Brisbey, which concerns problems of psychological and metaphysical orientation. Brisbey is a patient who, Ardell explains, has stepped on a mine, a "Bouncin' Betty," which has blown off an arm, both legs, and his genitals (*Ibid.* 79). Brisbey is contemplating suicide and relates to Pavlo, who is at the time a medical orderly, a parable concerning Magellan.

Brisbey presents the central and definitive metaphor of

the work. His parable illustrates the problem of trying to fix one's place in time and space. He confides to Pavlo,

> I keep thinkin' about ole Magellan sailin' round the world. . . . So one day he wants to know how far under him to the bottom of the ocean. So he drops over all the rope he's got. Two hundred feet. It hangs down into the sea that must go down beyond its end for miles and tons of water. He's up there in the sun. He's got this little piece of rope danglin' from his fingers. He thinks because all the rope he's got can't touch bottom, he's over the deepest part of the ocean. He doesn't know the real question. How far beyond the rope you got is the real bottom? (*Ibid.* 89)

Brisbey, his body and sexual organs mutilated by war, still lacks a sense of direction and a sense of purpose. The esoteric knowledge of experience evinced by Sergeant Tinden has somehow eluded him. He is a seventeen-year veteran of the army, and his experience has led only to the formulation of his own existential question.

Pavlo responds to Brisbey's philosophical statement with an improvised account of a sexual experience, in the course of which, in orgasm, he "just about blew this girl's head off" (*Ibid.* 89). He suggests that he wouldn't have had that experience had he killed himself in a suicidal state such as the one which Brisbey manifests--a doubly ironic statement given Brisbey's condition and Pavlo's own very limited frame of reference. In order to ameliorate Brisbey's suicidal tendencies, Pavlo creates what he thinks is a comforting myth for him.

An indication of the origins of Pavlo's problems in civilian life is revealed in Act II. Pavlo had never met his

father, nor had the family known a father figure. His mother evidently had such a number of lovers that the identity of Pavlo's father is unknown even to her. Recognizing that he is failing to establish himself in the military, he again attempts to orient himself with his family. He calls his mother on the telephone, and asks her what is evidently an often-repeated question, who his father was. She responds:

> MOTHER: You had many fathers, many men, movie men, filmdom's great--all of them, those grand old men of yesteryear, they were your father. The Fighting Seventy-sixth, do you remember, oh I remember, little Jimmy, what a tough little mite he was, and how he leaped upon that grenade, did you see, my God what a glory, what a glorious thing with his little tin hat.
>
> PAVLO: My real father!
>
> MOTHER: He was like them, the ones I showed you in movies, I pointed them out. (*Ibid.* 75)

Pavlo has the designation "R.A." before his name, indicating that he is Regular Army, an enlisted man rather than a draftee, and that point has been the cause of some of the friction between him and his fellows. It seems that he has joined the army in search of identity; his mother has given him many celluloid images of a heroic military father, including James Cagney, but he seeks the reality behind the screen image.

Pavlo's suicide attempt is brought to the attention of his barracks-mates, and, for them, his act triggers an attitude of acceptance. As they strive to revive him, one squad member, Kress, refers to him as, "Weird, chimney-

shittin', friendless, gutless, cheatin'. . . ," but the squad leader, Pierce, responds, "NOOO! NOT IN MY SQUAD, YOU MOTHER. GET UP!" (*Ibid.* 59). Almost by default, Pavlo has found acceptance. His death, in the context of the larger civilian society, would pass blameless and unnoticed; in the microcosmic world of the small military unit, it would reflect badly on the squad. In a move to protect both the integrity of his unit, and that of his leadership, Pierce summons aid and thus effects both Pavlo's spiritual and physical recovery.

His acceptance finally acknowledged by the men, they approach him and ritualistically attire him in his dress uniform. Under Ardell's direction, they bring his clothes and gather about him in order to create an image of the proper military figure. Rabe's stage direction notes: "*It is a ritual now: Pavlo must exert no effort whatsoever as he is transformed*" (*Ibid.* 61). Ardell comments on Pavlo's new demeanour:

> You startin' to look good now; you finish up, you gonna be the fattest rat, man, eatin' the finest cheese. You go out on that street, people know you, they say, "Who that?" Somebody else say, "That boy got pride. (*Ibid.* 62)

Ardell adds, "They gonna cry when they see you. You so pretty, baby, you gonna make 'em cry. You tell me your name, you pretty baby." Snapping to attention, Pavlo responds, "PAVLO MOTHERHUMPIN' HUMMEL! (*Ibid.* 62-63). Ardell observes, "Who you see in that mirror, man? Who you see? That ain't no

Pavlo Hummel. Noooo, man. That somebody else. An' he somethin else" (*Ibid.* 62). Believing that he is accepted and acknowledged by the army and his comrades, Pavlo goes on leave in his street uniform in order to exhibit his new status and identity before his friends and family.

The two realities and attitudes of the civilian and the military world conflict, however, since the self-images inspired by the military and its uniforms are not necessarily perceptions that are reflected in the mirrors of the alternative civilian culture. Pavlo does not realize the expected sexual fulfillment that he expects on home leave: his former girlfriend Joanna has married without even acknowledging their relationship, which possibly was also a figment of Pavlo's imagination. His sexual fulfillment must wait for the extra-cultural context of Vietnam where force of arms and the enhanced value of the American dollar facilitate the obtaining of sexual favours.

Pavlo soon encounters the equivocal attitude of the civilian world in its perception of the military. His half-brother, Mickey, casts doubts about whether Pavlo is really in the Army, and about whether there really is a place called "Vietnam."

> MICKEY: For all I know you been downtown in the movies for the last three months and you bought that goddamn uniform at some junk shop.
>
> PAVLO: I am in the army.
>
> MICKEY: How do I know?

PAVLO: I'm tellin' you.

MICKEY: But you're a fuckin' liar, you're a fuckin' myth-maker.

PAVLO: I gotta go to Vietnam, Mickey.

MICKEY: Vietnam don't even exist. (*Ibid.* 66)

Pavlo tells Mickey embellished stories about his experiences in basic training, in much the same form as his stories to his fellow recruits about his civilian past: the "uncle" in San Quentin now belongs to a fellow trainee. Mickey, though, is quite aware that his brother tends to create his own version of reality.

Both Pavlo's civilian and military lives are portrayed as a series of disillusionments as "facts of the mind" continue to be contradicted by the immediate experience. The central dramatic metaphor of the play continues in force as Pavlo resumes his quest to gain esoteric knowledge and to establish definitive parameters of existence. When he is shipped overseas to Vietnam, he is designated a medical orderly, but is dissatisfied with that posting because he is denied the battle experience that he feels will lead him to the desired knowledge. Fellow members of his medical unit treat him with distain when, in an attempt to demonstrate his battle expertise, he suggests setting up "fields of fire" about the camp hospital (*Ibid.* 91). It is only after he goads his Captain about the latter's training as R.O.T.C. rather

than O.C.S. that he is transferred to an active combat unit.[8]

The later movement of Act II consists of a surrealistic montage of scenes of battle, demonstrations of Sergeant Towers's drill instructions, events occurring in the bordello, and periodic appearances by Ardell. The juxtaposed and overlapping scenes illustrate the quickening pace of Pavlo's psychological disintegration as his consciousness becomes reduced to elemental incidents in his life which appear to have neither cause nor effect, nor chronological order or continuity.

The avid pursuit of his quest leads Pavlo to distinguish himself on the battlefield, as he rescues the wounded and the bodies of the dead. In retrieving the body of a comrade, he himself is wounded by a knife thrust from a fleeing Viet Cong. As he lies, bleeding, Ardell appears and chastises him over his quest for the knowledge that he thinks will give him critical insights into the nature of existence. As Pavlo moans in agony, Ardell comments:

> The knowledge comin', baby. I'm talkin' about what your kidney know, not your fuckin' fool's head. I'm talkin' about your skin and what it sayin', thin as paper. We melt, we tear and rip apart. Membrane baby. Cellophane. Ain't that some shit. (*Ibid.* 96)

Ardell points out the distinction between innate knowledge,

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[8] R.O.T.C. (Reserve Officer Training Corps) refers to an officer selection and education system incorporated into university studies; O.C.S. refers to Officer Candidate School, a military institution for training officers in the regular forces. Implicit in Pavlo's observation is that the university-trained officer lacks the instinct of the "real" soldier.

the knowledge of the "kidney," and the arbitrary perceptions which are products of the mind, and limited to it.

In a subsequent montage, Sergeant Tower repeats his lecture about finding one's way by the North Star, and Ardell continues to pursue Pavlo:

> ARDELL: You ever seen any North Star in your life?
>
> PAVLO: I seen a lot of people pointin.
>
> ARDELL: They a bunch a fools pointin' at the air. "Go this way, go that way."
>
> PAVLO: I want her man. I need her. (*He touches her.*)
>
> ARDELL: Where you now? What you doin?
>
> PAVLO: I'm with her, man. (*Ibid.* 98)

And Pavlo is back with Yen, she reappears as he drifts in and out of the disparate scenes depicting the fragments of reality that structure the play.

Under the stress of battle experience, Pavlo's sensations become more distorted and jumbled. He shoots a Vietnamese farmer believing the latter to be approaching with satchel charges under his clothes, but his judgement call is never vindicated. Ardell notes, "You don't know what he's got under his clothes" (*Ibid.* 99). Pavlo's mental condition totally disintegrates in a confusion of images when, believing he is shooting at the Vietnamese farmer, the target image changes to a fellow soldier, and ultimately he incurs the wounds himself. Taking aim at the farmer, he cries:

> I fuckin' shoot him. He's under me. I'm screamin' down at him. RYAN, RYAN. And he's lookin' up at me.

> His eyes squinted like he knows by my face what I'm sayin' matters to me so maybe it matters to him. And then, all of a sudden, see, he starts to holler and shout like he's crazy, and he's pointin' at his foot, so I shoot it. (*He fires again.*) I shoot his foot and then he's screamin' and tossin' all over the ground, so I shoot into his head. (*Fires.*) I shot his head. And I get hit again. I'm standin' there over him and I get fuckin' hit again. They keep fuckin' hittin' me. (*Ibid.* 100)

Pavlo's mental disintegration is complete as he can no longer distinguish either cause from effect, illusion from reality, or friend from foe.

The problem of being able to identify one's enemy is further revealed when, Ardell, noting Pavlo's confusion between the farmer, the soldier, and himself observes, "When you shot into his head, you hit into your own head, fool" (*Ibid.* 101). Ardell adds that Pavlo shot the farmer not because he had made a judgement call, but because the Viet Cong had shot his comrade, Ryan, two weeks earlier. Pavlo's action is not based on an intuitive and esoteric knowledge, but purely on blind, brutal vengeance. The Drill Sergeant tells of an incident that happened in the Korean War, where a group of American POWs cast one of their wounded into a snow bank to freeze, because his screaming disturbed their sleep. He tells the men, "You got to watch out for the enemy" (*Ibid.* 103).

The essence of Ardell's and Tower's speeches is that war so conditions men to brutality that discernment is neither problematic nor necessary. The men are conditioned to react automatically to a given situation, and judgmental values

have no place in war. Sergeant Tindale, in the tale recited by the corporal, would have shot the old man and young girl in any case, either on pure suspicion, or in an act of vengeance. The esoteric knowledge that has inspired Pavlo's quest is revealed to be that of unthinking, conditioned brutality. Knowing and identifying one's enemy is the key to survival. For the soldier, the enemy is the indecision and uncertainty that springs from humanistic instincts that are incompatible with the realities of war.

The scene is counterpointed by another demonstration of power: Sergeant Tower lectures to the men about the capabilities of the M-26-A fragmentation grenade:

> This is a grenade, Gen'lmen. M-twenty-six A two fragmentation, Five-point-five ounces, composition B, time fuse, thirteen feet a coiled wire inside it, like the inside a my fist a animal and I open it and that animal leap out to kill you. Do you know a hunk a paper flyin' fast enough cut you in half like a knife, and when this baby hit, fifteen metres in all directions, ONE THOUSAND HUNKS A WIRE GOIN' FAST ENOUGH! (*Ibid.* 105-106)

In a world of so many variables and where reality and illusion are so confounded, the performance specifications of a military weapon have a reassuring predictability, much like the North Star. The objective mathematical reality inherent in ballistics and navigation provide a reassuring counterpart to the fragile perception of reality which is a function of the mind.

After being wounded three times in the line of duty, Pavlo ironically meets his end fielding the grenade thrown

into the brothel by his rival, Sergeant Wall. His attraction for Yen is hardly quixotic, it is a purely an exercise of power demonstrated in a sexual way. As the two soldiers contend for Yen, Pavlo warns,

> I don't know who you think this bitch is, Sarge, but I'm gonna fuck her whoever you think she is. I'm gonna take her in behind those curtains and I'm gonna fuck her right side up and then maybe I'm gonna turn her over, get her in the asshole, you understand me? You don't like it you best come in pull me off. (*Ibid.* 105)

His attitude towards Yen is clarified when it becomes apparent that he believes he is degrading himself by using her, and by doing so he is taking revenge on his mother.

Pavlo's insecurity can be traced back to his childhood conditioning in the family environment. At the time of Pavlo's leave, after his basic training, Mickey taunts him with, "You know, if my father hadn't died, you wouldn't even exist," and, in reference to the mother, adds,

> All those one-night stands. You ever think of that? Ghostly pricks. I used to hear 'em humpin' the old whore. I probably had my ear against the wall the night they got you goin'. (*Ibid.* 69)

Pavlo's search for identity has a very real base in a legalistic as well as in a psychological sense, and it becomes further apparent that his motivation for joining the army was the result of a direct confrontation with his mother.

In the bordello, after Pavlo has kicked Sergeant Wall in the groin, he turns to Ardell, and boasts,

> Did I do it to him Ardell? The triple Hummel? Got

> to be big and bad. A little shuffle. Did I ever tell you? Thirteen months a my life ago. . . . What she did, my ole lady, she called Joanna a slut and I threw kitty litter, screamin'--cat shit--Happy Birthday! She called that sweet church-goin' girl a whore. To be seen by her now, up tight with this odd-lookin whore, feelin' good and tall, ready to bed down. Feelin'-- (*Ibid.* 106)

Evidently the mother, in response to Pavlo's first association with a girl, Joanna, has projected onto Pavlo's relationship those same attributes that she may well be accused of herself. In having sex with a Vietnamese girl, in the most degrading manner possible, Pavlo is taking revenge on all that is implied in his mother's idolization of the screen images that have portrayed America's heroic exploits in former wars. In addition, given Pavlo's imaginative nature and the unsubstantiated, tenuous truth of the relationship between Joanna and Pavlo, the mother may well have not been attacking the relationship itself, but her son's self-sustaining *myth* of the relationship, his own "life-lie."

Pavlo has fled into the army in search of all the things that have eluded him in civilian life. What was unattainable in his previous existence, however, remains even elusive in his new life, as the grenade explodes, and Ardell relates the subsequent events involving the preparation and transport of Pavlo's body home. At the end of his speech, he turns to Pavlo and asks whether he has anything to say:

> ARDELL: What you think a gettin' your ass blown clean off a freedom's frontier? What you think a bein' R.A. Regular Army lifer. . . ?
>
> PAVLO: Shit!

> ARDELL: And what you think a all the 'folks back home,' sayin' you a victim . . . you an animal . . . you a fool?
>
> PAVLO: They shit! [ellipses in text]. (*Ibid.* 107)

Pavlo then expands his observations into his own existentialist philosophy: "It all shit" (*Ibid.* 107).

Pavlo has found neither purpose nor substance in his military career and faces the same existential void that he found in civilian life. Substituting one form of conditioning for another has neither increased his knowledge nor made him more capable of coping with existence. Like many other plays of the period and genre, *Pavlo Hummel* deals less with the actualities of the War than with the problems of the individual in the given social structure that creates the War situation. Problems of integration, of belonging, of identity, purpose and function are exacerbated but not caused by the external conflict. The conclusion, "It all shit," reflects the absurdist existential condition that results when supportive individual and collective cultural mythology fails.

Jerrold A. Phillips has described a central philosophical stance in several of Rabe's war plays. He notes that an important aspect of Rabe's work lies in

> his vision of existential nothingness as the core of all experience. Indeed, the plays can be seen as structured around a character who is led slowly, inexorably, and against his will to a recognition of this nothingness. (Phillips 108)

Philips adds that the only constant in man's life is his

biological limitations, and that

> behind these biological realities there is nothing. All meanings, all values are completely arbitrary and fall away under intense scrutiny. There is simply a great abyss, and those individuals who are unfortunate enough to pursue this dark knowledge must learn the meaninglessness of all life. (*Ibid.* 117)

Pavlo's search has led him to just such a conclusion, "It all shit!" which reflects his ultimate enlightenment.

Rabe's later play, *Streamers*, while similarly depicting problems of initiation into a new cultural construct and the existential limbo which surrounds all of human experience, portrays characters who seem to be unaware of the process in which they are entangled, and fail to arrive even at Pavlo's conclusion concerning the nature of existence. Rodney Simard acknowledges Phillips' observations concerning the operative philosophy in *Streamers*, and adds that

> there is no social problem in Rabe's drama because there is no level of social communion; individuals are isolated in their own consciousness and must come to terms with their own sense of meaninglessness by subjective and personal means. (Simard 118)

Simard also notes that "each character functions on the level of individual perceptions of reality, which never impinge upon those of any other character," and that

> both people and society are in a state of fragmentation and decay, and his [Rabe's] readers see the dissolution of ordinary individuals as they give in to meaninglessness and the void. (*Ibid.* 118)

As will be demonstrated below, Rabe's philosophy owes much to the existentialism of Beckett, and *Streamers*, in particular,

is heavily indebted to *Waiting for Godot*.

Although *Streamers* is an extremely complex work in its examination of the relationships between individuals in a given society, it is technically the most realistic play of Rabe's Vietnam trilogy. Rather than springing from the mind of a dying soldier, the action is chronologically structured according to the dictates of the well-made play. Dialogue is realistic, the setting natural, and the situation credible. It is that very facade of normality, however, that serves as a counterpoint to the subliminal aspects of the play. Although the events are grounded in an objective realism, the characters themselves exist within individual subjective frames of reference between which there is little communication, resonance, or empathy.

The title and central metaphor of *Streamers* is a parody of Stephen Foster's song *Beautiful Dreamer*. An adaptation of Foster's lyrics expresses the existentialist philosophy of the work: "Beautiful Streamers" is sung by two alcoholic Regular Army sergeants who have become totally acculturated to the routine of army life, and who unconditionally accept the parameters of life experience as defined by military protocol. The lyrics reveal the veterans' fatalistic attitude and are an expression of bravado; they represent a verbal denial of the presence of death that lurks in the minds of airborne troops, for whom the thin ribbon of fabric trailing from a pack identifies a parachute which has failed to

deploy. The men attempt, through a communal liturgical expression, to overcome the ever-present terrors associated with their military calling.

> Beautiful streamer, / Open for me,
> The sky is above me, / But no canopy.
> Counted ten thousand, / Pulled on the cord.
> My chute didn't open, / I shouted "Dear Lord."
> Beautiful streamer, / This looks like the end,
> The earth is below me, / My body won't [b]end.[9]
> Just like a mother / Watching o'er me,
> Beautiful streamer, / Ohhhhh, open for me.
> (*Streamers* 43)

An expression of resolution in the face of of death, the lyrics reflect the existential philosophy of the soldier, a man who has supposedly been conditioned to his own mortality by his army training. In the context of the play, human experience is limited to the short intense moment that lies between the emergence from the secure matrix of the airplane and the impact that signals the end of mortal existence.

The image owes much to Beckett, as the umbilical cord or "streamer" symbolizes the link between the womb of the airplane and the tomb of the earth. As Vladimir observes in *Waiting for Godot*, "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps . . . the air is full of our cries."[10] In the face of an unremitting existentialism, the human condition is

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[9] Erratum (end) in Knopf edition. Corrected (bend) in *Coming to Terms: American Plays & the Vietnam War* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), p. 28.

[10] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 58.

predetermined by a force as relentless as gravity.

The single set of *Streamers* is a barracks-room in an army camp in Virginia. The action involves recent boot camp graduates held in a "holding company"--the transitional stage between the completion of basic training and assignment overseas. The unit ensconced in the room is a microcosm of American society: men of disparate backgrounds are forced into a crucible by the dictates of military necessity incurred by the omnipresent war. Vietnam provides justification for such military installations, since the fighting of wars requires their continued existence; in terms of philosophical symbolism, it is also the source of an ominous, all-encompassing fear which dominates the lives of the soldiers. In this miniature world reside men whose tensions and anxieties are normally dissipated in the larger civilian culture: within the confines of the claustrophobic barracks environment social distinctions and inequalities that are normally regulated or diffused are exacerbated and erupt into chaotic violence as social order disintegrates under the stress of the War.

The furniture of the room consists of three bunks and footlockers which belong to Billy, Roger, and Richie. The inhabitants of the room represent a cross-section of American society: Roger is a Black, Billy represents a prejudiced, white middle-class America, and Richie is an upper-class homosexual. Other men resident in the same complex who

periodically enter the room are Martin, a maladjusted neurotic, and Carlyle, a ghetto Black. Carlyle and Richie represent figures that have been socially alienated; both have been abandoned by their fathers. They are the fragmentation-inducing force in the play: Carlyle is filled with hatred for American society as he perceives himself alienated from it because of his coming from a broken home, his race, education, social status and his street life. Richie sees himself socially disfranchised because he views himself as the object of social prejudice due to his sexual orientation. As a consequence, he tends to play games with people, a process which intensifies his social problems.

In the opening scene Martin shows Richie a bloodied bandage on his wrist, and it becomes apparent that Martin has tried to kill himself. Martin is an enlisted man, a fact which implies that he has joined the army in search of some form of fulfillment; however, the army experience and the threat of Vietnam have destroyed his psychological equanimity. He complains, "I vomit every morning. I get the dry heaves. In the middle of every night" [sic] (*Ibid.* 4). Finding Richie unreceptive to his plight, he takes his case to Billy who has just entered the room. The act sparks a display of homosexual jealousy by Richie, over Martin; he intercedes between Martin and Billy, and forces Martin from the room. As Martin leaves, both Richie and Billy follow him (*Ibid.* 8).

Billy's stance does not involve homosexual rivalry for Martin; rather, disliking everything Richie stands for, he is protective of Martin. He exposes his prejudices further, when upon his return to the room he finds Roger, who has entered and flopped down on his own bunk. He immediately accosts Roger with thinly-veiled dislike, using the pejorative, "boy": "You come in this area, you come in here marchin', boy: standin' tall" (*Ibid.* 9). While he dislikes Roger on the basis of race, he admires his military demeanour: "You and me are more regular army than the goddamn sergeants around this place, you know that?" (*Ibid.* 9). Both draftees, they exchange confidences about their fears of going to war, and establish a tenuous empathy drawn from their mutual apprehensiveness.

On Richie's return to the room, he deliberately attempts to provoke Billy by relating to Roger an account of how, in reference to Martin,

> I did this simply wonderful thing for a friend of mine, helped him to see himself in a clearer, more hopeful light--little room in his life for hope? And I feel very good. Didn't Billy tell you? (*Ibid.* 12)

But clarity of perception is an elusive goal for the occupants of the room. As Simard suggests,

> Each character is ultimately shown to be living within the scope of his own perceptions, in a separate, subjective reality that has little to do with the level of reality they all seem to share. (126)

Hope and anxiety are significant psychological factors in the

men's lives. They are under tremendous stress, knowing that their overseas assignments could be either Vietnam, or one of the other relatively secure non-combatant stations of American forces around the world.

This stress of uncertainty exacerbates the anxieties incurred through normal social intercourse and, in turn, these anxieties put enormous stress on the social cohesion of the micro-culture. Temporarily unneeded by the army, the men have neither communal purpose nor social rituals to reinforce the short-term effects of basic training. The myth and ritual of military life are not sufficiently established to provide the psychological equanimity that is evident in the two sergeants. When tensions run high in the room, the men devise make-work projects, essentially rituals for ameliorating the social stresses. When Billy and Roger attempt to discuss homosexuals and their perceptions and proclivities, the conversation stalls from embarrassment, and Billy seizes upon a diversion: "I'll go get some buckets and stuff so we can clean up, okay? This area's a mess" (*Ibid.* 17). In his stage directions describing the set for the barracks-room, Rabe notes that "*the floor is wooden and brown. Brightly waxed in places, it is worn and dull in others*" (*Ibid.* 9). The floor itself reflects individual attempts at diversionary ritual rather than the concerted results of military discipline or barracks maintenance.

The relationships among the men are typified by an

uncomfortable detente which often erupts in violence. It becomes evident that they have not taken their basic training together and have no common bond other than their military identity. The men have not been in the army long enough to become acculturated to the social order of the military hierarchy, and it is significant that the unit is a holding company: the enlisted men are held awaiting assignment in a transition camp, neither civilian nor active army; they have surrendered their inherent individuality to the collective identity symbolized by their uniforms, but have not attained a full military function and status.

In this limbo-like, indeterminate and transitory world, basic human prejudices and anti-social proclivities find expression without the conditioned restraint of a controlling social order.[11] The men have been stripped of the protective organizing myths of the civilian world, but have not yet found a compensatory mythology for the military society. They will be offered this later in the form of the histrionic bravado and the drunken refrains (*Beautiful Streamers*) presented by the two sergeants.

In addition to the social tensions generated by race and class differences and those by the fear of Vietnam, are others relating to the men's sexual insecurity. With the

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[11] "Limbo" has many symbolic resonances with the men's situation; the term is defined as "a supposed region on the border of hell or heaven, serving as the abode after death of unbaptized infants." See *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 1966 ed.

possible exception of Richie, the men are all revealed to be extremely insecure in their sexual identity; even Richie's flaunting of his sexual preference is strained. The recognition and fear of latent homosexuality that is couched in innuendo and ambivalent gesture comprises the subtext of the play, as the men, drawn from such different social backgrounds, are reduced to interpreting in sexual terms the basis of organization and interaction in their new cultural environment.

In an attempt to establish a workable power hierarchy within the military system, the men search out and exploit each other's weaknesses. Knowing Billy's prejudices against gays and the Black race, Roger (a "straight" Black) speaks to him in homosexual innuendo, "Ain't you a bitch?" (*Ibid.* 9). Richie, aware of Martin's anxiety over combat duty, offers him consolation within a homosexual context; Billy attacks Richie by attempting to isolate him from Martin. Richie antagonizes Billy by constantly implying that there is a homosexual relationship between them: "Can I help it if I love you?" (*Ibid.* 15). Roger exacerbates Billy's insecurity, when, in response to Billy's question of whether he had ever sat down and 'rapped' with a gay, he states:

> Some of them are okay guys. . . . But then there's these others, these bitches, man, and they're so crazy they think anybody can be had. Because they been had themselves. So you tell 'em you're straight and they just nod and smile. You ain't real to them. They can't see nothing but themselves and these goddamn games they're always playin'. (*Ibid.* 17)

Roger further shakes Billy's sense of complacency when he expresses doubts about Richie's homosexuality: he notes that Richie has a picture of "a little dolly" in his locker, and that perhaps he is only playing games.

In order to establish working relationships within the room, it is necessary, under the threat of homosexual proclivities, to identify the sexual orientations of each particular member. Uncertainty about any specific individual makes all relations in the room suspect. Billy is unsure whether it is Richie or Rodger or both who are playing games, and what the precise nature of their games is. He seeks some reassurance from Roger:

> BILLY: I mean, I just think we all got to be honest with each other--you understand me?
>
> ROGER: No, I don't understand you; one stupid fuckin' nigger like me--how's that gonna be? (*Ibid.* 17)

Roger rejects Billy's attempt at integration, and Billy defuses the tension by inventing a waxing job to do.

Tension within the Black community and between the Blacks and the Caucasians is generated and intensified as Carlyle, the hostile ghetto Black, enters the room in search of Roger. He has heard that a Black is resident there, and his visit is also an attempt at integration. Carlyle's suspicions are aroused, however, when he finds Roger gazing at the "dolly' on Richie's locker:

> CARLYLE: Boy . . . whose locker you lookin' into?
>
> ROGER: Hey, baby, what's happenin'?

> CARLYLE: That ain't your locker, is what I'm askin', nigger. I mean you ain't got no white goddam woman hangin' on your wall. (*Ibid.* 18)

Explaining, somewhat incongruously, that this is "the locker of a faggot" (*Ibid.* 18), Roger puts Carlyle temporarily at ease.

The calm is short-lived, however, as the inner tensions in Carlyle are obvious in his statements and compulsive mannerisms. He offers Roger a drink of whiskey and, imitating the movements of a caged animal, launches into a tirade which expresses his isolation, claustrophobic fear, and the terror associated with going to Vietnam. He notes, "I been all over this place and don't see too many of us . . . we got few brothers here I been able to see" (*Ibid.* 19). He asks about the attitude of the white soldiers,

> They give you any sweat? What's the situation? No jive. I like to know what is goin' on within the situation before that situation get a chance to be closin' in on me. (*Ibid.* 19)

Carlyle is clearly paranoid about being trapped in a white society, which his on-the-street conditioning has taught him to distrust. He importunes Roger to escape with him, urging, "I got wheels. Let's be free" (*Ibid.* 20).

Under the added stimulus of alcohol, Carlyle's mental equilibrium disintegrates as he perceives his attempt at integration is failing. When Roger refuses Carlyle's suggestion to go AWOL, the latter rushes at Roger and pulls at him wildly, trying to get him to the door; irrational and

distraught, he confides to him:

> I had a bad scene in basic--up the hill and down the hill; it ain't somethin' I even enjoyed even a little. So they do me wrong here, Jim, they gonna be sorry. Some damn body! And this whole Vietnam THING--I do not dig it. (*He falls to his knees before* ROGER. *It is a gesture that begins as a joke, a mockery. And then a real fear pulls through him to nearly fill the pose he has taken.*) Lord, Lord, don't let 'em touch me. Christ what will I do, they DO! And they pullin' guys outta here too, ain't they? (*Ibid.* 22)

Between playing games and his overriding fear, Carlyle is strained almost to the breaking point, but Roger offers him little consolation. Instead, he explains that the sergeant down the hall, Rooney, has just been selected to go to Vietnam.

With Richie's return, Carlyle finds an opportunity to release some of his hatred and tension. He asks, "Where is Martin? That cute little Martin?" (*Ibid.* 23). Richie refuses to be baited, however, and Roger declines to share the joke with Carlyle. The latter leaves, his bitterness intensified by a strong suspicion that Roger is comfortably at home with his barracks-mates, and may even prefer their company to his. Designated an outsider, he harbours resentment against the occupants of the room.

Tensions among the residents of the room become aggravated when frustrations arising from an inability to read the suggestive sexual innuendo underlying their communication becomes externalized. When Billy accosts Richie about using baby powder, Ritchie responds, "But I'm so

pretty" (*Ibid.* 25). Billy cannot tolerate Richie's ambivalence: he wants a frank and candid admission from him that he is indeed a homosexual. He transfers this need for reassurrance to Roger: "Now! (*Pointing to* ROGER. *He wants to get this clear.*) Tell that man what you're sayin', Richie" (*Ibid.* 25). Richie remains complacent and asks Roger if he thinks that Richie is pretty. Refusing to clarify his position, Roger responds, "I tole you--you fulla shit and you cute, man. Carlyle just tole you you cute too" (*Ibid.* 25).

Frustrated by this gambit, Billy attempts once more to obtain a confession from Richie. He creates the impression of having had a previous conversation with Roger, in which he, Billy, had identified and fixed Richie as a homosexual. This revelation is shattering to Richie; it occasions the first crack in his flippant facade:

> BILLY: It's like I tole you, Rog.
>
> RICHIE: What did you tell him?
>
> BILLY: That you go down; that you go up and down like a Yo-Yo and you go blowin' all the trees like the wind. (RICHIE *is stunned. He looks at* ROGER, *and then he turns and stares into his own locker. . . .* RICHIE *walks to where* BILLY *is working. He stands there, hurt, looking at* BILLY.)
>
> RICHIE: What the hell made you tell him I been down, Billy?
>
> BILLY: It's in your eyes; I seen it. (*Ibid.* 26)

Richie senses that he is in danger of being undone: the cleverly contrived game he is playing to keep his roomates off-balance is in great danger of becoming real. Taken aback,

but not beaten, he returns to the attack with an injured innocence, and drives Billy to utter distraction.

In a desperate exhibition of one-upmanship, Ritchie must demonstrate that he will, indeed, play the game. He mounts his counterattack on Billy, as he assumes an air of hurt pride, kneels on his bed in a suggestive position, and remarks "it's not such a bad thing," and, "I can give it a try, if that's what you want." He adds, "Can I think of you as I do?" (*Ibid.* 26). Howling, Billy rushes from the room; his own insecurity bars him from participating in Richie's game. He soon re-enters, however, and demands "straight talk." Richie responds, "How . . . do . . . you want me to be? [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 28). Richie implies that he is ready to fullfil Billy's fantasies, that he is willing to be anything that the latter perceives him to be.

Billy is stymied, but Richie's actions arouse doubt in Roger, who up to that time has appeared to be quite secure in his identity and sexual orientation. He now begins to express his uncertainty about Richie.

> ROGER: You ain't sayin you really done that stuff, though, Rich.
>
> RICHIE: What?
>
> ROGER: That fag stuff.
>
> RICHIE: Yes.
>
> ROGER: Do you even know what you're sayin', Richie, do you even know what it means to be a fag? (*Ibid.* 28)

Roger's anxious query and willingness to deny Richie's

admission underscores the disruptive effect that alien behaviour has in society. The men are not so much disturbed by the presence of homosexuality in the barracks-room, but they require the reassurance that comes from positive identification and acknowledgement of the fact. Uncertainty about the sexual orientation of one of their number prevents them from establishing some sort of power hierarchy. If Richie would remove all doubts about his proclivities, the others could adopt a position towards him based upon common agreement about his place in their society. An indication of Roger's concern about the truth behind Richie's homosexuality, and the relevance of that aspect for the play, is the almost verbatim repetition of Rogers's question some time later, and the restatement of the same concern in the closing moments of the work.

The situation of men in a barracks-room is reminiscent of that involving Inez, Estelle and Garcin in Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*. Both situations are existential hells where each of the characters needs the others to create an illusion of existence and identity for himself. When Sartre's Garcin observes "Hell is--other people!" (Sartre 47), he echoes the torment of the members of the holding company. Richie's ambivalent attitude towards sex creates tensions within the social unit. Coupled with the ever-present fear of Vietnam, such tensions threaten the entire social cohesion of the group.

Unwilling to accept Richie's admission, Roger launches into an account of how he, as a child, saw a homosexual beaten up in his neighborhood and a man stabbed in a telephone booth. Linking the two images, he expresses his horror over the incident: it appears that violence and homosexuality are indelibly etched into his consciousness as vivid, concomitant impressions (*Ibid.* 29). The men interpret Roger's experience each in his own way; they appear immersed in their respective thoughts, and attempt to place his experience within some particular frame of reference. In order to re-establish a common bond between the men, Billy poses the question that is never far from their minds: "How long you think we got" (*Ibid.* 30). Roger responds, "Maybe tomorrow, maybe next week, maybe never." Rabe's directions note: (*The war--the threat of it--is the one thing they share.*) (*Ibid.* 30).

The fear of Vietnam constitutes the primary emotional bond between the men. Richie, however, tries to use it as a means of determining social order. He seizes the opportunity to attack Billy once more:

> Those Vietcong don't just shoot you and blow you up, you know. My God, they've got these other awful things they do: putting elephant shit on these stakes in the ground and then you step on 'em and you got elephant shit in a wound in your foot. The infection is horrendous. And then there's these caves they hide in and when you go in after 'em, they've got these snakes that they've tied by their tails to the ceiling. So it's dark and the snake is furious from having been hung by its tail and you crawl right into them--your face. My God. (*Ibid.* 31)

Half-comic, yet half real, the account disquiets the men. Rabe underscores its implications in the subsequent text:

> BILLY: They do not. (BILLY *knows he has been caught, they all know it.*)
>
> RICHIE: I read it Billy, they do.
>
> BILLY: (*Completely facetious, yet the fear is real*) That's bullshit, Richie.

In order to dissipate the tension, Roger revives the ritual of the waxing job, suggesting, "We can be doin' it to the music," and plugs in a radio (*Ibid.* 33).

The make-work exercise is interrupted by the arrival of the two sergeants, Rooney and Cokes. In their fifties, Regular Army, and veterans of WW II and Korea, they are products of a long career in the military. White-haired, pot-bellied and drunk, they represent what the enlisted men in the room might become. Cokes has been overseas in Vietnam, and is now suffering from terminal leukemia; Rooney is responsible for the men in the barracks-room. Cokes is almost comatose from the effects of alcohol, but Rooney has brought him to the room in order to demonstrate their long comradeship to the men, and to bask in the awe of the uninitiated.

In recalling their war experience and evoking the mystique of the military, the two sergeants exemplify the social cohesion and continuity which the men in the barracks-room so desperately seek. In paradoxical contrast to their grotesque physical appearance and drunken state, the two

sergeants symbolize the heroic aspect of old warriors and the romantic myth of military exploits. In spite of their comic appearance, they evoke an image of the soldier fearless in the face of danger and death, and their presence in the room arouses the men to awe and admiration. Rooney draws attention to Cokes' combat boots:

> The army ain't no goddamn fool. You see a man wearin' boots like that, you might as well see he's got a chestful a medals, 'cause he been to the war. He don't have no boots like that unless he been to the war! Which is where I'm goin' and all you sloppy motherfuckers, too. Got to go kill some gooks. (*Streamers* 37)

The pair are veterans of the One Hundred and First Airborne, the "One-oh-one Screamin' goddamn Eagles!" (*Ibid.* 38).

The new recruits attempt to join with and share the enthusiasm of the sergeants. Richie asks Cokes if he might have a drink from his bottle (*Ibid.* 38); Billy "*comes up to them, almost seeming to want to be part of the intimacy they are sharing*" (*Ibid.* 44). The overtures of the men are rejected, as Cokes and Rooney, aware of their privileged status, relive past experiences and indulge in bizarre antics. They imitate actions of leaping from aircraft and parachuting to earth, give "screaming eagle" war-cries, sing their "Beautiful Streamer" song, and relate incidents drawn from their battle experience (*Ibid.* 38-43).

Upon sensing the repeated attempts of the men to share in their reminiscences, however, the sergeants turn vicious and verbally and physically threaten the men. Jealous of

their relationship, they move to protect it. They insist that it is "lights out" time, and as the men scramble for their bunks, Rabe notes, "*There is fear in the room.*" Cokes demands:

> Shut up. And that's an order. Just shut up. I got grenades down the hall. I got a pistol. I know where to get nitro. You don't shut up, I'll blow . . . you . . . to . . . fuck. [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 46)

Under the threats of violence associated with the assertion of military order, the men retreat to their beds and the sergeants leave, uttering curses, threats and punishments.

The threat of external violence that has permeated the room leads the men to make renewed attempts at forging some kind of social order within their group. The act ends with Billy turning in his bed to face Roger and revealing some intimate details of his "gay baiting" experiences in his home town. Billy tells how he and a friend would allow gay men to pick them up and buy them liquor and food. They would then insult them and threaten them with violence when the latter attempted to become intimate. Billy's friend, Frankie, was a brutal type, and if the gay men remonstrated, he would "put them down" (*Ibid.* 48)

Frankie had a relationship with a girlfriend, but exposure to homosexuals altered his sexual orientation. He started going home with the men, and, eventually, "got his ass hooked."

> He had never thought he would and then one day he woke up and thought he was on it. He just hadn't

> been told, that's the way I figure it; somebody didn't tell him somethin' he shoulda been told and he come to me wailin' one day, man, all broke up and wailin', my boy Frankie, my main man, and he was a fag. He was a faggot, black Roger, and I'm not lyin'. I am not lyin' to you. (*Ibid.* 47-49).

It is uncertain whether the motivation for Billy's speech is generated from his fear of his own latent homosexuality; from a desire to unite with Roger against Richie, arousing a fear of contamination and thereby establishing a political order in the room; or from an attempt to pacify Richie with implications that homosexuality is a natural impulse that overrides social conditioning. Underscoring the emotional intensity of Billy's speech, however, is the need for telling the truth, to establish a verifiable reality.

Before any of the men can elaborate on any aspect of Billy's revelation, however, Carlyle bursts into the room, drunk, and verbalizing his paranoia about Vietnam and the incomprehensibility of military life. His speech reveals his isolation and fears:

> You got it made. I don't got it made. You got a little home here, got friends, people to talk to. I got nothin'. You got jobs they probably ain't ever gonna ship you out. . . . They are gonna kill me. They are gonna send me over there to get killed, goddammit. WHAT'S A MATTER WITH ALL YOU PEOPLE? (*Ibid.* 48)

Carlyle enters seeking the commiseration and acceptance of the men. His perception is that they are an homogeneous group, but his ignorance of the tensions in the room renders his actions and sentiments ironic. When it becomes obvious that Carlyle is too drunk to return to his own quarters,

Roger, out of compassion, offers him a blanket, and he curls up on the floor. Billy follows Roger's lead in a show of solidarity, and Richie, to Billy's disgust, pats the now unconscious Carlyle's arm (*Ibid.* 53). The lights fade on the set to mark the end of the first act.

In Rabe's microcosmic society are reflected the stresses inherent in the greater American culture. Tensions created by wide distinctions among the disparate elements of society in terms of economics, class, education and race; stresses created by the mechanics of authoritative control; paranoia generated by the presence of both internal and external threats; and anxieties associated with problems of sexual maturation and self-awareness--all of these combine to put an enormous strain on the social order. Within the confines of the barracks-room are concentrated those forces which are antithetical to social equilibrium. Given an uncertain sense of direction and identity and the removal from one cultural context without complete assimilation into another, the social unit begins to disintegrate.

The men have not been in the army long enough to posess an *esprit de corps* such as the sergeants exhibit with their "screaming eagle" totemism that provides them with a sense of historical continuity and a sense of identity. As part of an embryonic micro-culture, they have no compensatory mythology to provide for the establishment of philosophical, racial, or sexual comradeship within the larger army structure.

Unsustained by ongoing ritual, social cohesion and continuity disintegrate. The rites of passage implicit in the induction of young men into the military are ineffective for many of the novitiates because, while the new cultural order inculcates the dilemmas of the old, the new recruits, as evidenced by their rejection by Rooney and Cokes, do not have access to the stabilizing myths and rituals of a society conditioned by time and tradition. The men have not yet been "baptized" by the fire of war, and lack the benefits of any organizing function, other than that of basic training, to mould them into an homogeneous society.

Act II presents the rapid descent and destruction of a society stricken by a cultural *malaise*. Roger attempts to engage Billy by suggesting that they do physical workouts together, but Billy begs off with the excuse, "I don't know what it is I'm feelin'. Sick like" (*Ibid.* 59). Richie sprays Billy with his cologne and the latter rushes from the room. He also unintentionally sprays Roger, who does likewise (*Ibid.* 61). Carlyle reappears, looking for Roger, and, in a way similar to his dealing with his room-mates, Richie initiates a homosexual teasing of Carlyle. The latter, however, is not offended by this: he not only returns Richie's advances, but does so in such an aggressive manner that Richie is taken aback (*Ibid.* 65).

Carlyle spreads himself out on Richie's bed, and his aggressive gestures drive Richie from the room. At this point

there is a good deal of ambiguity in Carlyle's actions. It is uncertain whether Carlyle is indeed a practising homosexual, or whether he is taking the opportunity to take revenge against white society by debasing Richie and, by extension, the race and social class that he represents. Billy returns and is faced with Carlyle's question concerning Richie, "Is he the only punk [in the room]?" (*Ibid.* 67). Under the provocative assertion that either he or Roger or both share Richie's proclivities, Billy is forced to deny Richie's homosexuality: "He's not queer, if that's what you're sayin'" (*Ibid.* 68). Under the accusation of being a homosexual, Billy takes refuge in what he hates most, lying in the interests of social harmony. On his own level, he is creating myths to distance himself from uncomfortable realities.

Either intuitively, or merely by speculation, Carlyle exposes Billy's worst fears:

> CARLYLE: I can see your heart, Billy boy, but you cannot see mine. I am unknown. You . . . are known.
>
> BILLY: (*As if he is about to vomit, and fighting it*) You just . . . talk fast and keep movin', don't you. Don't ever stay still.
>
> CARLYLE: Words to say my feelin', Billy boy. (RICHIE *steps into the room. He sees* BILLY *and* CARLYLE, *and freezes.*) [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 69)

The relationships between the men and their sexual orientation remain ambivalent, as each eyes the other in an attempt to ascertain the real power structure behind the linguistic facade.

With racial slurs and other ill-selected remarks, Billy and Richie unite to drive Carlyle from the room. In reference to the latter, Richie observes, "He's one of them that hasn't come down far out of the trees yet, Billy, believe me" (*Ibid.* 69). Carlyle offers a self-effacing apologetic speech, seemingly superfluous, but with a subtext larded with cold foreboding menace, and leaves. The rapport between Richie and Billy is short-lived, however, as the former quickly moves to challenge the latter. Referring to Billy's speech in which he described the sexual conversion of his friend, Frankie, Richie asks, "Was it . . . about you? (*Pause*) I mean, was it . . . ABOUT you? Were you Frankie (*This is difficult for him*) Are . . . you Frankie? Billy?" [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 71). Billy's response is violently negative.

In establishing the tensions and anxieties that underlie both the individual and the collective sense of identity and purpose of the military camp, Rabe creates the conditions that precipitate the inevitable violent climax. The two sergeants leave for town to celebrate their reunion; the men of the barracks-room go to town in an attempt to establish some sort of camaraderie. The mind-altering effects of alcohol destroy the last behavioral restraints, and become the catalyst for the eruption into violence of the tensions which have threatened the psychological balance of the society.

As the men drunkenly fall into place in their cots and

on the floor, Carlyle and Richie make sexual overtures to each other. As Billy remonstrates and attempts to assert himself as a power in the room, Carlyle regresses to the laws of the street, and marks him by cutting his hand with a knife. Not recognizing that this is Carlyle's method of establishing social order within his own sphere of influence, Billy interprets it as an attack on his race and social class. Accusing Richie of being responsible for allowing Carlyle access to their society, he attacks the former verbally, with, "You gay little piece of shit cake," and, turning to Carlyle, somewhat paradoxically offers: "You are your own goddam fault, SAMBO!, SAMBO!" (*Ibid.* 88). In response, Carlyle now repeatedly stabs Billy in the stomach, as Hertzbach suggests, "in a bloody, fatal parody of the sexual act" (Hertzbach 184).

Into this scene of carnage, reminiscent of a Shakespearean clown's intrusion into a tragic sequence, comes sergeant Rooney, intoxicated, and looking for his friend: "Cokesy? Cokesy wokesy?" (*Streamers* 93). Seeing Carlyle with a knife in his hand, and through his alcoholic haze sensing danger, Rooney instinctively emits his "screaming eagle" war-whoop and smashes a bottle to use as a weapon, in the best tradition of a cinema antagonist. The bottle, however, splinters and gashes his hand (*Ibid.* 100). His bravado out of place, his body out of condition, and his mental reflexes occluded by drink, Rooney also falls victim to Carlyle's

knife. By the time that Cokes arrives, the Military Police have arrested Carlyle, and Roger has attempted to mop up the blood.

Rooney and Cokes epitomize superannuated and decadent aging veterans, the backbone of the Regular Army. They represent an element of continuity in American culture with their careers spanning three wars. Cokes is terminally ill, but, aided by the mind-numbing effects of alcohol, he approaches death with an equanimity worthy of a "Beautiful Streamer" disciple. His presence in the room is ironic, as in his blissful, unconscious and hermetically-sealed reality, he is oblivious to the fact that the room, the microcosmic world of the army, has turned into a shambles around him. His existential philosophizing is ironic in the context of the bloody barracks-room; he rationalizes life and death in fatalistic terms: and the play ends with his sitting on an army cot in a drunken stupor, mouthing senseless sounds in accompaniment to the theme song (*Ibid.* 66).

In his drunken condition, he sits on a cot and describes to Roger and Richie the wondrous workings of fate. He and Rooney have been drinking and have triggered a series of four accidents, from which, Rooney gloats, they have "got out clean" (*Ibid.* 106). After this sequence of incidents, they arrive back at the base and, under the effects of alcohol, mentally regress into a childhood state, playing a game of hide-and-seek. Evidently, Rooney had encountered Carlyle in

the room while looking for Cokes. Unaware of the effect of his tale on Richie and Roger, Cokes expands on the unfathomable workings of destiny. For the moment, the inevitability of the fall to earth eludes him.

Cokes is, in fact, a "beautiful dreamer." Reality for him is defined by the parameters of army existence and by the fact that there is a war somewhere for him to fight. The presence of war gives him men to train and lead, and thus provides him with a sense of identity and purpose. He differentiates neither between "krauts," "gooks," or "dinks," nor the European, Korean, or Vietnam wars. He is totally acculturated to the military social order and frame of reference, and, for him, any world outside it does not exist. It is also ironic that his cultural and alcohol-induced trance-like mental state renders him the most care-free and adaptable of all the characters in the work.

In *Streamers*, Rabe creates a microcosmic world that reflects the problems extant in American society when the stresses associated with Vietnam were beginning to erupt in violent confrontations in the street. In a sense, this work is also an analogy, as it describes, in terms of the barracks-room, the situation in contemporary America where racial strife, doubts about the society--and Vietnam--occupied the individual and collective consciousness.

For the men in the barracks-room, however, social tensions are real, immediate, and personally threatening. Not

yet comprising an homogeneous group, they continually attempt to cope with the mental stress of cultural isolation. In the dramas of battlefield experience, that isolation becomes internalized, as the stresses of actual war undermine the psychological equanimity of the individual himself.

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CHAPTER V

PLAYS OF EXPERIENCE

One of the first plays to bring home to the American people the absolute horror of the war was H. Wesley Balk's adaptation of Ronald M. Glasser's *365 Days*. Entitled *The Dramatization of 365 Days* (1971), the play was an experiment in "Chamber Theatre," which opened at the University of Minnesota on November 9, 1971. Chamber theatre is explained by Balk as "theatre which uses literature not written for the stage and presents it, abridged but not rewritten, in theatrical form" (Balk 4-5). Incorporating many performance techniques similar to those developed in Chaikin's experimental workshops, this type of theatre places less emphasis on characterization, plot and the dialectics of argumentation, and relies instead on creating dramatic metaphors by augmenting the text with mime, music (or harmonic and/or discordant musical sounds), rhythmic movement, and a stylistic representation of both physical experiences and psychological impressions.

Glasser was an army medical doctor who had spent time in military hospitals in Japan treating the wounded of the Vietnam War. His book presents graphic descriptions of the horrendous injuries to body and mind suffered by the troops, and describes their physical pain, mental anguish and death. It is the story of a generation of young men brutalized by

the War, presented while it was still in progress.[1] Many audience members, offended either by the verbal crudity or the ghastly injuries described in the text or depicted on the stage (obscenity assumed a new meaning), left in the middle of the performance.[2]

Glasser's book included descriptions of the actual battlefield events which led to the injuries he treated. From these accounts Balk extracted material for twelve scenes representing a cross-section of the war experience: actual battlefield maneuvers, the pervasiveness of death and injury, the evacuation of wounded to field hospitals, treatment of the injured, their deaths, and the shipment of the bodies back to the United States for burial. Balk also includes scenes depicting the psychological cost of the war: the brutalization of the soldiers and the breakdown of military order in the field, and the psychological trauma resulting from war experience.[3]

Balk admits that such an evening of theatre was not entertainment: "It was stark and austere and ultimately exhausting."

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[1] Wilson observes that some 519,000 Vietnam veterans have been officially classified as disabled. See Appendix B.

[2] This act itself divided the audience. It was reported that people leaving were booed by other audience members. One comment was recorded in the *Washington Sunday Star* of April 30, 1972: "People like that should be chained to their seats and be made to watch the play three times."

[3] Wilson also notes that approximately 350,000 men received "less than honorable" discharges. (p. 4).

> There was no intermission, there was no relief. One saw the dead lying there when entering the theatre; the dead were the last thing one saw when the theatre emptied. The performance became for everyone involved a kind of sacramental act, a ritual performed in order that the events it represented might be purged form the realm of the necessary. (*Ibid.* 17)

Yet, while the work in one respect represented a threnody for the mutilated and the dead, its presentation at a time when the War was still being actively pursued (156,000 troops were still in Vietnam) was an utter condemnation of the political and military policies of the government.

A primary concern in staging the work was the "physicalization" of the war experience. The Minnesota production involved a cast of a Guitarist and fourteen "Speakers," four of whom were women. The Speakers utter lines from Glasser's book, while other actors, usually the women, gesture and gyrate rhythmically about them, portraying and enhancing the experience. The lines are often cast in the third person, which enables the actors, through inflection and gesture, to endow their statements with a non-dramatic commentary.

A typical example of the interpretation of Glasser's lines is found in the Scene 3 movement entitled, "Medics." An actual account is read of a soldier who is struck by a bullet which knocks the firing pin from a grenade attached to his webbing. Unable to detach the grenade, he panics and runs. According to the stage directions, the women surround the soldier,

> *kneel on all four sides of him and place their hands on his waist. They set up an undulation in his body, which is accompanied by a gradual build-up in the repetition of "running" by the rest of the cast.* (*Ibid.* 51)

A Speaker describes the action, and at the moment when the grenade explodes, a woman touches the soldier in the chest and utters the line, "Until it went off" (*Ibid.* 51). Accompanying the sounds and movements of the actors, the Guitarist strikes chords that increase in intensity until the climactic moment, when after a final crashing chord, the silence accentuates the destruction.

While there were no female parts to be played in the work, Balk used the actresses in many roles. He observes that "their aesthetic function proved one of the central metaphors of the piece" (*Ibid.* 12). In opposition to the aggressive, martial aspect of the soldiers, the women portray the passive, feminine role of the Vietnamese civilians. They also represent Viet Cong troops, who constantly surround and isolate the American soldiers. In addition, they mime wounds, fears, anxieties, compassion, the use of weapons, and even elements of the environment, such as jungle vines and other impediments to the army's advance.

At the beginning of the performance, as the audience enters, the cast is found lying on the stage in two neat rows, suggesting the arrangement of bodies in a cemetery or morgue. In response to chords from the guitar, they rise, form a circle as if around a campfire and sing, "Tonight I'm

with myself again, / I'm talking with my mind"--a song suggesting a resurrection of the dead for a post-mortem reassessment of the War and their roles in it. A speaker reads Glasser's introductory comments concerning his service at the Zama army hospital in Japan and the number and types of casualties that were treated there.[4] The women list various weapons used by the Viet Cong and the types of injuries they have inflicted; they approach and circle the men lying in their hospital beds, and

> *as each woman speaks, she drops rapidly on one of the men, not touching him, but holding herself just above him with her arms, speaking the information sensuously but rapidly into his head.* (*Ibid.* 39)

With gestures almost sexual in nature, the women implicitly convey a seductive passion-death relationship between the soldiers, their weapons, and the war.

Another speaker reveals the ambivalent attitudes of the doctors towards their patients. One doctor, Lenhardt, approves of the war: "It's better to fight the communists in Vietnam than in Utah" (*Ibid.* 43).[5] Speakers 1 and 2 precisely identify the polarities of thinking about the war, when 1 notes,

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[4] The Zama hospital unit averaged some six to eight thousand cases per month, rising to eleven thousand after the Tet offensive. See Glasser, p. 34.

[5] This specious argument has become a cliché both in fact and fiction. Wilson disposes of it, noting that Ho Chi Minh had never expressed an interest in occupying San Diego. Herr also derides it: "Maybe we could beat them in Pasadena," p. 60.

> If you see the patients, broken and shattered at eighteen and nineteen, as something necessary in the greater scheme of things, then there are no complaints. (*Ibid.* 43-44)

This is obviously Lenhardt's position. Speaker 2, Doctor Peterson, appears to voice Glasser's sentiments, as he observes,

> But if you see these kids as victims, their suffering faces burned and scarred, their truncated stumps as personal affronts and lifelong handicaps, then you may take a chance on doing what is right. (*Ibid.* 44)

Peterson is regarded as keeping patients in hospital longer than necessary, if their active service time is sufficient to warrant their return to the States.[6] Lenhardt is for discharging the men as soon as possible for further service. The adaptation obviously retains the philosophy of Glasser's book, and is reflected in the viewpoint of Speaker 2.

Subsequent scenes depict events in the field, the incidence of wounding and death--depicted in acute detail--and the men's treatment in various medical facilities. A mine detonates and three troopers are injured; as the Speakers describe the wounds, the women approach and touch the men:

> One (*Speaker 14 touches the head of Speaker 6 and keeps contact*) had the whole bottom half of his body sheared off; the second (*Speaker 11 touches the head of Speaker 6 and keeps contact*) lay crumpled against a tree, a huge gaping hole in the very center of his chest; the third (Speaker 10

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[6] According to Glasser, the men had to serve a total of ten months and five days in Vietnam and a hospital before they were rotated home. See Glasser, p. 44.

> *touches the head of Speaker 6 and keeps contact*), half of his bottom jaw blown off, flapping around on the ground, blood gushing out of his neck and spilling into what was left of his mouth. (*Ibid.* 50)

The Guitarist represents collectively the wounded men, and the actors lower him to the floor. A description of a morphine shot is given, and "*the Guitarist becomes the hypodermic needle*" (*Ibid.* 51). In the stylized interpretation of psychological and physical experiences, the actors are transformed from enemy to weapon, from wound to hypodermic needle, from a creator of pain to a soother and comforter.[7]

Scene 4, entitled "Final Pathological Diagnosis," traces in clinical, impersonal terms, the injury and death of a soldier. After an army-manual description of the mines used by the V.C. (Viet Cong) and the N.V.A. (North Vietnamese Army), the text continues in a post-mortem style, outlining the injuries and the cause of death:

> One. Death eight days after stepping on a land mine. Two. Multiple blast injuries. / Traumatic amputation of lower extremities, distal right thumb, distal left index finger. / Blast injury of anus and scrotum. / Avulsion of testicles. / Fragment wounds of abdomen. / Laceration of kidney and liver, transection of left ureter. / Three. Focal interstitial myocarditis. / Right heart failure. / Congestion of lungs and liver. / Four. Patchy acute pneumonitis. / Five. Gram negative septicemia. / Six. Surgical procedures. / Hip disarticulation with debridement of stumps, bilateral. / Testicle removal bilaterally. / Exploration of abdomen, suturing of lacerated

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[7] The acting techniques displayed in the production obviously owe much to Chaikin's Chord and Terry's transformation theory.

> liver. / Removal of left kidney and ureter. / Multiple blood transfusions. (*Ibid.* 57)

Completing the medical report is a description of the external appearance of the body; it is also noted that on the fourth day of the soldier's hospital stay, he tried to kill himself.

The clinical tone of the "Final Pathological Diagnosis" reflect Lenhardt's viewpoint; in performance, however, the account is emotionally disturbing. The recital of the wounds suffered by the soldier is accompanied by harmonic monotones strummed on the guitar, which end in protracted silence upon completion of the report. During the speaking of the lines, there is little action. The silence is broken by a strident guitar chord that announces the theme song, and the cast begins humming and, again, sings, "Tonight I'm with Myself Again" (*Ibid.* 57).

Scenes depicting battlefield events and the inevitable deaths and injuries are punctuated by descriptions of the psychological effects of constant stress on the soldiers. After a harrowing patrol, the men encounter an old Vietnamese peasant who has cans of Coca-Cola in a container on the back of his scooter. When the old man demands fifty cents for a can, the troops become enraged, shoot him, and calmly drink the sodas. They have become dehumanized by the War. Their former socio-cultural sensibilities are out of place in the new situation: now conditioned to death and murder, they are no longer governed by former standards of behaviour, morals

or ethics. Inured to their own pain and anguish, the men have little sympathy for that of other people, cultures or races.

The soldiers' loss of ethics is evident even in their own social unit. The death of friends in battles that seem inconclusive and ill-planned lead the men to doubt the ability of their commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Bosum, a veteran of WW II and Korea, finds this war "confused and muddled"; he has spent his first five months in country[8] "trying to understand what was expected not only of the South Vietnamese Army but of the Americans as well" (*Ibid.* 98). Bosum's errors, however, have cost the lives of many men, and after a particularly disastrous battle, "somebody rolled a grenade into his tent" (*Ibid.* 106). A subsequent scene has the men conspiring to kill an unnamed officer, but it is not certain at this point if the later scene is anachronistic or whether a different officer is involved. The fragmentation of the social order within the military, however, is evidently widespread. The fragging of Bosum reflects the dominant theme of much of Vietnam drama--internecine warfare and the breakdown of military discipline under the stress of battle.

Scene 11 reveals yet another failure in High Command strategy, which intensifies the men's distrust of their commanders. The defoliation program, intended to reduce the chance of ambushes along roads, has backfired. Speaker 4

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[8] This term, variously rendered "in country," or "incountry" refers to the length of time a soldier has spent in Vietnam.

observes that after the roads have been sprayed, "there's nothing left except some dead bushes for fifty or even 300 meters on both sides of where the road or track used to be" (*Ibid.* 110). The problem is, Speaker 4 adds, that the V.C. and N.V.A. use guns in their ambushes instead of bows and arrows:

> So the gooks will start shooting at you from 300 meters away, instead of five, only now you're the one that ain't got no place to hide. Ever try running 100 meters or 200? It takes time, and they're firing at you the whole way. (*Ibid.* 110)

Tactical failures cast further doubt on American strategic planning governing the prosecution of the War, and the men's confidence in their leaders is further shaken by such incompetence.

An incidental but significant effect of the War is the deadening of some aspects of individual and collective consciousness, as well as conscience. In a situation akin to that in which an individual suffers amnesia induced by a terrifying experience which he cannot psychologically accommodate, a culture may suffer a collective amnesia as a consequence of truths which upset its equilibrium and self-image. Scene 8 is a flashback scene which not only reveals such an effect upon a particular individual, but also presents the central metaphor of the work: a mind fractured and numbed by a shocking experience, selectively blocking out occurrences harmful to its equilibrium, while in a process of disintegration.

Scene 8 is spatially and chronologically incongruous in the sequential development of the play. The only scene set in the United States, it is a flashback segment honoring the gods of Science and Medicine. Entitled "Gentlemen, It Works," it describes the psychological wounds associated with war and the response of army psychiatrists. The War, it seems, has fortuitously provided an abundance of raw material for the research, development, and advancement of Clinical Psychology. Counterpointing the subjective pain of experience that forms the body of the play, the scene is one of total and passionless objectivity. Included is an army psychiatrist's evaluation of the case history of a soldier who suffers total amnesia after an enemy tank attack. His condition, by analogy, reflects on certain attitudes prevalent in contemporary American society.

Colonel Griger, "Psychiatric Medical Adviser--Vietnam," attempts to allay the anxieties of a contingent of physicians destined for that country. They are greatly relieved when they are assured that

> your chances of getting hurt or killed--unless you do something foolish or are somewhere you shouldn't be--are much smaller than right out here on the Streets of San Antonio, Texas. (*Ibid.* 86)[9]

Griger's statement is ironically counterpointed by mini-scenes of men dying on the battlefield, obviously as a result of being somewhere that they "shouldn't be." For Griger, the

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[9] See above the note concerning the sergeant's observations in Megan Terry's *Viet Rock*.

War has presented an ideal opportunity to test old theories of psychiatry, and to develop new ones. He claims that

> a major achievement has come out of the chaos of Nam. It is still controversial, but I believe over the years it will prove itself, not only in the military but in civilian psychiatry as well." (*Ibid.* 86)

He subsequently announces a "breakthrough" in battlefield psychiatry that has emerged from a re-examination of previously accepted theories on the subject.

In presenting his case, Griger refutes established principles in his discipline, as he notes that previously accepted theories, notably those developed by Captain Newman in WW II, are now obsolete. He cites and deprecates the latter's claims that battle fatigue must be regarded as an incapacitating injury, requiring appropriate treatment. He also castigates Newman's view that the utterances of mentally traumatized patients, such as those suffering from shell-shock, have a special logic:

> Don't think they all babble gibberish; most of them make sense, if you listen to their vocabulary long enough and hard enough. They're using English, but speaking a foreign language--the language of suffering, which requires special symbols. (*Ibid.* 92)

Griger claims that not only are Newman's theories unacceptable in terms of psychiatric medicine, but that they have resulted in "declaring a frightening number of healthy men incapable of military service, to be discharged to the V.A. hospitals nearest their homes" (*Ibid.* 94). Discharges

for reasons of battle fatigue, he suggests, are a constant drain on military resources and must be stopped.

As he explains his new theory, the carnage and confusion of a field hospital is created around him, as citations from Glasser's book are pronounced and "physicalized" by other members of the cast. Amidst the images of I.V. tubes, abdominal packs, shredded flesh, suction tubes, muddy uniforms and blood-spattered corridors, the psychiatrist presents a typical case study in his special field. The case he describes comes to life around him, as the patient traumatized by the tanks appears. He is physically incapacitated, but there is "no neurological reason for his paralysis" (*Ibid.* 88). The treatment, the "new psychiatry," is to ignore the patient, for if you

> label a soldier as mentally ill, support that illness, show him that it is what interests you about him . . . he will be ill and stay ill. Expectation, gentlemen, expectation. It became obvious that the evacuation of combat neurosis from the front was not a cure--but part of the disease; that it was best to treat these boys as far forward as possible; that their unit identification should be maintained (*Ibid.* 95)

Griger maintains that if the traumatized patient is kept in the war zone, he will become conditioned, or psychologically inured to the events occurring around him and retain his identity and function as a soldier. Removal from the zone only intensifies the effect of the experience.

Griger's expectation is that the patient will be promptly returned to duty. As the psychiatrist explains his

theory, other cast members dramatize the situation of the paralytic, who is denied food in order to encourage him to rise from his bed. When such treatment results in the patient concealing himself under a bed and refusing to come out, the prescription is "a nice big chocolate malt and some cookies" left in an exposed place (*Ibid.* 93). It is anticipated that the biological demands of hunger will prevail over the effects of psychological trauma.

The Army's solution to the problem of the mental afflictions is to deny the reality of the condition and to construct a convenient compensatory myth in order to cloak the real situation. Mental trauma suffered in combat is simply redefined and relabeled, and there is, therefore,

> no need for psychiatric contortions, no shock waves; no need to conjure up deep-seated anxieties and conflicts. It is combat exhaustion--instead of something ominous and mysterious. (*Ibid.* 96)

The basic underlying principle of the new psychiatry is in accord with the army's preference for ignoring any more complex reasons for the fragging of its officers, the massacre of civilians, and the attitude of the troops in the field other than "combat fatigue."[10] The army seeks solutions to the problem of disintegration of order on the battlefield by inducing a selective amnesia--simply ignoring the mental stresses in the individual--and relying instead on the

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[10] This is the precise term offered by the sergeant in *American Atrocities in Vietnam* to explain the soldier's revulsion at seeing prisoners tortured. See Chapter II.

natural course of biological urges, where appetite will prevail over psychological problems.

The psychological numbness or insensitivity evident in the soldiers, the army psychiatrists, and the army doctor, is implied to be resident in the society that is prosecuting the War. Doctor Lenhardt's observations cited earlier--one should overlook the individual costs of the war and view it as part of a larger process--preclude concern for the specific individual. Should one side with Peterson, however, and see the injuries and lifelong handicaps of the victims as a personal affront, then one "may take a chance on doing what is right."

The concluding scene brings together the main threads of the play. A horribly burned soldier is dying a lingering death in a hospital in Japan despite desperate efforts to save him. His treatment and reaction are revealed in vivid literal detail, while other cast members mime the events. The process of preparing cadavers to be shipped home, and the accompanying protocol, are carefully described:

> Be sure that if the body you are escorting is being carried by Coastal Airlines that the caskets are loaded head down: this will keep the embalming fluid in the upper body. If the body is loaded incorrectly, namely feet down, the embalming fluid will accumulate in the feet and the body may, under appropriate atmospheric conditions, begin to decompose. (*Ibid.* 115)

Attempts are made by the army to pick an officer from a similar racial and economic background to escort the body,

and he is severely cautioned that caskets with "non-viewable remains" must not be opened (*Ibid.* 116).

The play concludes with the death of the burn victim, the lowering of his body to the floor, and the arrangement of the cast members about him in a configuration identical to that of the opening scene. As the cast assemble themselves around the body, they sing the theme song, "Tonight I'm with myself again / I'm talking with my mind." Displayed again, like corpses in a morgue or graveyard, they remain in position until the audience leaves. The final rendition of the song indicates the end of a reliving of a War experience that is part of a cultural stream of consciousness.

While the play lacks any definitive overall structure save the progression of episodic events depicting battle scenes and the men's injuries and deaths, many of the lines offered by the Speakers are designated "inside the head" speeches, implying that there is a single consciousness governing the work. A belated attempt is made in the last scene to endow the work with a storyline, and additional details are given to provide a denouement. The Guitarist reads a letter addressed to the head of the Burn Unit at the Japanese hospital from the doctor's brother Grant, a First Lieutenant fighting in Vietnam. The sequence proves to be chronologically aberrant, however, since the doctor is subsequently revealed to have just returned from the United

States, where he has attended the "non-viewable remains" funeral of his brother.

The controlling metaphor of the work is that of the fractured mind. However, unlike *Pavlo Hummel*, where the fragmentation occurs in the mind of a dying individual, the episodes in *365 Days* reflect elements of a multi-faceted cultural consciousness that derives from the whole of the American Vietnam experience. The fragmented collective consciousness is reflected in the chronologically incongruous scenes depicting Bosum's fragging, in those random and indiscriminate scenes of the battlefield, in the flashback psychiatric sequence, and in the final movement involving the doctor's brother. In addition, the use of Terry's transformation technique of acting that counterpoints the factual statements of the Speakers, enhances the work's expressionistic technique. The cyclical aspect of the rising of the dead in the opening scene, and their return to the grave in the last, implies a temporary awakening of a collective cultural consciousness, summoned by the chords on the guitar to relive, for a brief moment, the agony of its past.

Another of the "mind" plays which interprets the Vietnam experience from the perspective of a central but fractured consciousness is Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story* (1979). Gray, a conscientious objector, served in Vietnam as a medic in 1966. His play also deals with distinctions in cultural

perception, but rather than portraying the confused consciousness of multi-cultural conditioning and experience, he proceeds from a position of *tabula rasa*, and reveals the process by which a single unencumbered mind attempts to relate to a new culture and society about which it has no prior knowledge.

A naive but perceptive Reporter arrives in "Am-bo Land" to cover the War. What he sees, however, is confusing, since the official interpretation of events seem to conflict with his own. Lacking the cultural conditioning that provides a basic knowledge of reality in this society gives the Reporter an extra-cultural objectivity. His particular quest aimed at distinguishing reality from illusion results in his rejection of truth as defined by consensus, and he determinedly seeks to discover the realities of the society and the war. Denying the artificial realities of the various cultural constructs that he finds in Am-bo Land, he rejects the Ambonese government's version of events, those of both the American military and media, and also that of the Psychological Warfare Officer, who explains the realities of war to the peasants. As the Reporter lingers in the land, he defies the forces of acculturation about him, but as a consequence, any ultimate definition of reality eludes him.

There are only two designated roles in the play, the Reporter and the News Event, although incorporated in the latter are many diverse characters. The News Event is an

abstract entity which represents anything and everything that is going on around the Reporter. Only the Reporter and one other actor are on stage at any given time, and where extra characters are necessary to complete a scene, they are addressed as being present, though invisible to the audience. The News Event is both the happening, and the people who make it happen: the Reporter is the central consciousness which perceives it.

Gray's play contains fifteen scenes, each titled and announced by a slide projected on a screen before its enactment. The Reporter confides in the audience, describing in a stilted, simplified English actions, impressions and the setting in which the actions take place. The sequence of scenes marks the progression of the Reporter from an attitude of naive innocence to perceptive insights into human nature.

The initial movement of the play establishes the distinction between the observing consciousness and the events that occur about it. The first scene is entitled simply,"News Event," together with the name of the actor presenting it projected on the screen, and the Event himself, who

> *walks into the playing area, stands utterly impassive, and his mouth moving minimally, begins to articulate a strange and Asian-sounding musical piece.* (*Story* 81)

A blackout marks the transition to the second scene, under the title "Accreditation," which depicts the innocent's arrival in the country. He gives the exposition and

characterizes himself in an introductory speech to the audience:

> Hello there. This is Am-bo Land. My new job with the TransPanGlobal Wire Service brought me here. It's not the safest place right now . . . If you add up Am-bo Land, it's everyplace. It's *it*. It's what the world is like. If I just keep my eyes wide open I can understand the whole world. (*Ibid.* 82).

The Reporter is sincere in his statements and lacks the cynicism normally associated with his profession. In drawing a parallel between Am-bo Land and Vietnam, Gray plays on the situation prevalent in that country before 1963.[11]

In the Reporter's meeting with the first News Event character, Kingsley, the head of TransPanGlobal news service, the latter observes that he chose the Reporter for the job because he knows that he is impartial, and "views all sides and then writes the truth as he believes it" (*Ibid.* 83). The Reporter remonstrates, saying, "What I try to do is *see*, then write the truth" (*Ibid.* 83). In attempting to explain to the newsman the niceties of reporting in Am-bo Land, the chief persists: "You don't allow some pietistic preconception to subvert your objectivity . . . on the other hand, you don't write *everything* you see"; he adds, "If your wife farts in church you don't run it on the human interest page" (*Ibid.* 83). The intricacies of observing, perceiving, interpreting,

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[11] For accounts of the cynical reception given the official military reports of events in Vietnam by the reporters based there, see David Halberstam's, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York: Random House, 1965), and Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (Winnipeg: Universal Printers, 1978).

and believing "facts," and defining truth and selectively reporting it, are major concerns for the chief, who is the arbiter of reality in Am-bo Land for his home-country audience.

The chief's uneasiness about the selective objectivity required in reporting events in the fictional country has a factual basis in the power configuration of the Diem government in Vietnam, which included the infamous Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, sister-in-law to President Ngo Dinh Diem.[12] Madame Nhu (Dinh Ngo) exercised absolute control over press reports emanating from Vietnam until the ousting of the government in November 1963. Journalists who wrote reports unfavorable to the government were summarily expelled from the country. Coupled with the pressure on American editors from their own conservative establishment to print optimistic articles on the progress of the War in this period, journalistic reporting from Vietnam assumed "a fairy-tale quality" (Herr 39).[13] The chief of the news service in Gray's play

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[12] Gray's timing is slightly askew. He sets the play in Vietnam in the "mid 1960s" (Gray 80), although the Diem government was overthrown Nov. 1-2, 1963. For an account of the depredations of the Diem regime, see Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), pp. 206-239, and 270-311. Some astute commentators believe that the War was irretrievably lost in this period, as early as 1962. See Bernard Newman, *Background to Vietnam* (New York: Signet Books, 1963), See Appendices A and B for pertinent dates.

[13] The situation was so bad that in times of crisis such as the Buddhist immolations, news reports had to be written anonymously and smuggled out of the country in the hands of people such as airline pilots and commercial businessmen. In America, editors rewrote filed articles, sometimes completely

rationalizes the situation by observing, "When we applied for permission to set up an agency here, we didn't apply to the guerrillas. Its Ing who allowed us to come here" (Gray 83).

The Reporter is summoned by Madame Ing (Ngo)[14] after he has filed an objective report, unflattering to the government, on the self-immolation of a Buddhist *bonze*. The naive Reporter comments to the audience:

> The most amazing thing has happened! I'm about to talk to Madame Ing! She summoned me! Reporters have waited years without getting an audience. I can't believe this is happening. (*Ibid.* 86)

Madame Ing refutes the Reporter's objective analysis of the burning and presents several other hypotheses to explain it. She accuses the Reporter of bribing the monks to sacrifice one of their fellows in order to generate a news story: "A reporter puts this barbecue on ticker tapes that go to every land. Is this not good for his career?"[15] (*Ibid.* 87). She implies that the *bonze* was drugged or hypnotized and uses specious arguments and "chop-logic" to "prove" that the Reporter himself is responsible for the act.

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contradicting the conclusions of the reporters. See Halberstam, *passim*.

[14] Ing and Ngo are different transliterations of the same Vietnamese name.

[15] The use of the term "barbecue" conclusively identifies Madame Ing with Madame Ngo, the latter being widely quoted as using this term in reference to the burnings. Her counter argument that the event could have been inspired by news reporters is not inconsistent with the Buddhist bonzes' notification of the press before such events took place.

Madame Ing plays upon what she regards as the American fascination with (and ignorance of) the Orient. Reminding the Reporter that she has a paramilitary palace guard composed entirely of girls,[16] she performs a dance for him:

> *She strikes the stance of a tall, fierce woman. In the dance that follows--a solo version of the entire Peking Opera--the Paramilitary Girl fights with the guerilla and defeats him.* (*Ibid.* 88)[17]

The Reporter, however, responds that he not only finds the Orientals inscrutable, but also the Americans involved in the affairs of Am-bo Land. Ing responds:

> Soon you will understand even less. Your ignorance will be whipped with wind until it is pure as mist above the mountains. . . . We will never be perfectly inscrutable to you till we have killed you and you do not know why. (*Ibid.* 88)

The Reporter, exemplifying the ironic truth in Kingsley's suggestion that the former had no "pietistic preconceptions" about Vietnam, understands neither Ing's nor the Americans' attitudes toward each other.

Bent on learning the truth, the Reporter interviews a G.I. in a bar and then takes a trip to the "Field," where he

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[16] Madame Nhu also had such an organization.

[17] It is uncertain whether this is a conscious or unconscious irony of Gray's, or just his demonstration of the confusion of illusion and reality in Am-bo Land / Vietnam. The dramatic genre of Peking Opera is not only specifically Chinese, rather than Vietnamese, but is also a post-revolutionary phenomenon representing a modern Communist reworking of the classical form.

sees an American advisor and Ambonese troops in action.[18] He innocently exposes a protective myth of the G.I., which for the latter, reduces his anxieties before going into battle. With a fatalism reminiscent of that of the two sergeants in *Streamers*, the soldier remarks that if a bullet has his name on it, he will die; if not, he will survive. The Reporter asks if the G.I. "ducks" when the firing starts, and the latter replies, "Man, you hug that ground like it was Raquel fuckin' Welch" (*Ibid.* 90). The Reporter points out the inherent contradiction in the philosophy and its application, since if the bullet does not have one's name on it, there is no sense in taking evasive action. In order to test this theory further, he joins a combat unit in the field.

Here the Reporter fares no better in his search to make sense out of the events that he is witnessing. His naive but straightforward questions to the men on patrol elicit rhetorical questions in response: "Is this your first patrol?" "Do pigs shit ice-cream?" / "Are you afraid?" "Do cows have titties?" (*Ibid.* 92). The Reporter makes a note on his cassette recorder to investigate the answers. When the Lieutenant advisor addresses his men with a volley of expletives, the Reporter informs the audience,

> He has to win the absolute confidence of the men in his command. If he's not able to, in combat when

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[18] The play takes place in the "mid-sixties," about the time the U.S. presence in Vietnam consisted of some 23,300 Military "Advisors." The first Marine combat unit arrived March 8, the Army, on March 19, 1965.

> he's giving them an order that requires them to risk their lives, it's possible that one of them may shoot him in the back. The soldiers call this "fragging." (*Ibid.* 91)

The Lieutenant is unappreciative of the Reporter's clarification of this point to both the audience and his men, and attempts to reassert his authority: "If I give any of you men an order that requires you to lay down your life, it's because I'm wearing army green" (*Ibid.* 91). A single shot rings out and the Lieutenant falls dead.

After a short stay with the platoon, the Reporter is wounded and, in a scene entitled "Imprintment," he convalesces in a hotel room. The bemused Reporter is visited there by an Ambonese bar-girl, Li, and he seizes the opportunity to interview her, in the hope that he might gain some awareness and understanding of the Ambonese people. The girl, however, has had to play many roles in her time and misinterprets the thrust of the Reporter's questions. In response to his invitation, "Tell me your story," she responds initially with sexual fantasies, then with a rote-learned tale of how the Americans came to her village and saved herself and her family from the guerrillas, and finally with a story to the effect that she, herself, is actually a guerrilla fighter (*Ibid.* 96). Any, all or none of the girl's tales may be true. The Reporter, however, rejects all of them as improbable fictions and, musing, persists in his attempt to divine the real situation:

> I saw a man burn with a lot of people watching. I saw Ing dance. I was in the jungle and a piece of flying metal flew so fast you couldn't see it but it stopped inside my body. I'm in Am-bo Land. (*Ibid.* 97)

Li disappears and Kingsley enters. The latter assumes that the Reporter has learned to appreciate the resources of the land, as represented by Li, and turns to a discussion of how the story of the Reporter's wounding can be embellished for the home market tabloids. The Reporter remonstrates and it becomes clear that he has not adapted in the manner that Kingsley assumes:

> REPORTER: What makes you possibly even imagine that I like it here?
>
> KINGSLEY: By this point in their tour, we've found that most reporters have experienced imprintment.
>
> REPORTER: What's--
>
> KINGSLEY: Imprintment. A reporter goes to cover the country and the country covers him. (*Ibid.* 99)[19]

In essence, Kingsley implies that reporters quickly become acculturated to the situation in the country and start accepting the situation as normal, even the official versions of what is happening there.

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[19] According to Silverman, Imprinting was first recognized and reported (1935-1970) by Konrad Lorenz, a German zoologist. Lorenz noted that a unique learning process occurs in birds in a critical period after birth. In this super-sensitive period, the bird will form an attachment to any object that is placed before it. See Robert E. Silverman, *The Science of Psychology*, third ed. (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), p. 74.

Counterpointing the process of mental imprintment in this scene is that of physical imprintment, which is developed in the next. Refusing to accept the "reality" of Am-bo Land, the Reporter intends to leave, but meets the Photographer at the airport who dissuades him from embarking. The scene is entitled, "Planes," and at the airport the Reporter is given an opportunity to go along on a bombing mission. "Planes," however, comes to represent the many levels of reality constituting the thematic essence of the work.

The consequences of his experience in Am-bo land are evident on the Photographer's body. According to Gray,

> *He is missing an arm. One foot is in a huge cast. His clothes are multi-layered and multi-colored, and include a Clint Eastwood-style serape. Sundry cameras, lens cases, filter cases hang from straps around his neck and shoulders. A sign on his floppy field hat reads "SAY CHEESE."* (*Ibid.* 100)

In his "coat of many colours" the recorder of reality has become physically "imprinted" by his exposure to the rigours of his environment. He explains how he suffered some of his injuries:

> A German paper that I sometimes sell my snaps to wanted pictures of a minefield. Who knows why, right? Only . . . the thing about a minefield is it looks like any other field, I mean, that's the whole idea, right? So I tramped a lot of paddies before I found one. Got an action shot, though, KRUUMP! (*Ibid.* 101)

Much like the Reporter, the Photographer seeks reality. It does not occur to him that what is required is simply a picture of a sign designating a minefield; he must find the

real item. It appears that the only way that a minefield can be substantiated--its location, definition and potential--is the damage that it can wreak upon the human body. Describing another incident, he adds, "I got an incredible shot of that arm flying off. WHOOSH! Little bit underexposed, but something else, man" (*Ibid.* 101). The experience of war is relayed to distant readers through pictures of marred, dismembered bodies. While the Reporter searches for his truth in the depths of the mind, the Photographer records the external reality.

The Reporter is exposed to truth presented and interpreted in a variety of forms after the bomber in which he is riding is shot down and he experiences village life in Am-bo Land. His first encounter in the peasant environment is with the Psychological Warfare Officer, an Ambonese government agent who justifies the ways of the Americans to the peasants. In a stilted, play-acting scenario, the Officer explains to the villagers the benefits of defoliants used by the Americans. He holds a can of defoliant and explains that the Americans use it to "improve" the jungle by denying cover to "our" enemy:

> The enemy has told you that this harmless liquid poisons you and makes your babies come out of your stomachs with no arms and legs. This is not so. You will see for yourself when I have poured some defoliant in this bowl. (*He does. Then "acting" stiffly*) My, but it was hot today. My face is very dirty. I have need to wash my hands and face. (*He does so, dipping and turning his hands in the green liquid, then splashing it on his face. He looks as*

> *happy as the people in TV soap commercials*) Ah! That is refreshing! (*Ibid.* 104-105)

The Officer also demonstrates how the defoliant may be used as a substitute for fish sauce on rice, and as a cooling drink. He concludes with the ringing statement: "The guerrillas are liars. The Government speaks the truth. Goodbye" (*Ibid.* 105). The effect of the presentation on the villagers is unrecorded; one suspects, however, that they receive it with the same equanimity as the Reporter.

The latter gains an insight into the complexities of the situation in Am-bo Land when he is confronted by the Guerrilla Information Officer whose company occupies the village and takes him prisoner. When accused of being an agent of imperialist propaganda, the Reporter claims that he is only an observer rather than a reporter, because he "never found out anything" (*Ibid.* 108). The Guerilla, however, further suggests that the Reporter's interest in Am-bo Land--and, by implication, that of his home audience--stems from an opportunity vicariously to experience the suffering, death and destruction of war:

> GUERRILLA: You love to see us kill each other.
>
> REPORTER: No. I don't. . . . It does excite me that the stakes are life and death here. It makes everything--intense.
>
> GUERRILLA: The stakes cannot be life and death unless some people die.
>
> REPORTER: That's true. But I don't make them die. They're dying anyway.
>
> GUERRILLA: Your standpoint is aesthetic.

REPORTER: I'm filled with pain by things I see.

GUERILLA: You are addicted. (*Ibid.* 108)

The accusation elicits reluctant agreement from the Reporter: he is indeed fascinated by the intensity of life around him. He has moved from his initial intention of objectively reporting events to the sensation of experiencing them; however, his ability to express his feelings and communicate them to others suffers in the process.

The meeting with the Guerrilla Information Officer marks a turning point in the Reporter's life. Admitting defeat in his attempts to ascertain and objectively report the truth about the War, he intended to return to the United States after his bomber flight. Now the Guerrilla has aroused in him a desire for introspective examination, to explore his own *raison d'etre* in the context of Ambonese society.

The Reporter's quest meets with a succession of failures. He offers marriage to the prostitute Li; she initially accepts but then reneges when she realizes that the Reporter wants to stay in her country rather than return to his own. Having given up reporting, he is reduced to scavenging about the "City," an untitled Asian metropolis ravaged by war. In the concluding scene, when "*the lights come up, it is as if--from the Reporter's point of view--they came up on the audience*" (*Ibid.* 116). Suddenly aware of the observers, he remarks, "Hello. You look familiar. I believe I

used to talk to you." He then gives a rambling explanation of his situation, and reveals the futility of his search:

> Last night I found a refrigerator carton that would shelter a whole family with their pigs and chickens. Next to it a trash pile I can live off for a week. If I can find my way back. I kind of get lost on these streets sometimes. (*Pause*) Sometimes I can stand like this and drift off in all directions through the City, soaking up the sounds. . . . (*Ibid.* 116)

Adrift in an Oriental wasteland, the Reporter has been reduced to totally subjective consciousness, living only on sensations, and incapable of judgement, decision, or any form of expression or assertive action.

For the Reporter, the interpretations of truth and reality offered by the various military, political and commercial figures fail to provide an adequate rationale for the state of affairs in Am-bo Land. Yet, the totally subjective appreciation of that world likewise offers few immediate or profound insights. An irrational war defies logical analysis and comprehension, and no sense can be made of it either from an individual or collective perspective. The diverse points of view that are offered as rationales for the war are only valid within the parameters of their application. Perceived reality is derived from a commitment to a particular cultural construct which provides an organizing philosophy for individual and collective consciousness.

In the last moments of the play, the Reporter slumps into a posture that is "*almost too awkward to be sleep; a*

position that suggests a drunken stupor or a state of shock" (*Ibid.* 117). The Photographer, now legless, arrives on the set, propelling himself on a wheeled dolly; upon seeing the "body," he steadies himself to take a picture.

> *Simultaneously with the flash, the stage goes black and the picture appears on the screen. It is the head and shoulders of a body in the same position as the Reporter's, and dressed identically. The face is that of the* EVENT. *The picture holds for several seconds, then clicks off.* (*Ibid.* 117).

In this last moment, Gray effects a fusion of the perceiver and the perceived: the Reporter becomes the Event.

Gray highlights the distinction between the perceptions of those who go to war and those who are distanced from it. When the Reporter attempts to understand Am-bo Land from an objective point of view, he finds it incomprehensible, because truth is limited to a particular perspective; when he becomes involved, his subjective point of view likewise fails, because it is inconsistent with the reality about him, represented by the News Event. The Photographer is confronted with a similar paradox. In order to distinguish a minefield from an ordinary field, he must "experience" it, i.e., have his leg blown off, which conclusively indicates the nature of the field. Capturing the event on film creates an objective reality, yet it is a reality that is lost for those who have not experienced it. A distinction is made between experience and objectivity, and, by extension, the audience, too, is implicated in the process.

Gray's *How I Got That Story* may, as in the case of other works dealing with the War, also be considered a play of analogy, since Am-bo Land, albeit a thinly disguised parody of Vietnam, is essentially a mythic construct. The pain of injury and death has no real substance; the objectivity of the Reporter stems from his naiveté, and he is unable to relate his subjective experiences to others in terms they can understand. Am-bo Land is a world where reality is predicated on cultural perspectives and political viewpoints.

One of the few full-length plays dealing with Vietnam that is openly and entirely set in that country is David Berry's *G. R. Point* (1975). It can be distinguished from other Vietnam plays by its strong emphasis on realistic techniques. Berry, another Vietnam veteran-turned-playwright, observes in his Preface,

> *"Stagey" effects, self-conscious "arias" or stage movement, any stylistic razzmatazz whatsoever will devastate the rhythms of the text, weaken the characters, and imbalance the simple architecture of the play. Simple naturalism in acting and design is what's called for.* (*Point* 5)

Berry's advice to the actors also provides a clue to an understanding of the effect of stresses resulting from exposure to a new cultural situation: "Remember that this environment strips away pretense, subterfuge, and dissembling. It is a survival situation" (*Ibid.* 5). Typical of the Vietnam genre of plays, the central metaphor of the work is resident in the mental fragmentation that accompanies physical dismemberment. The action of the piece evolves from

the psychological adjustment required when perceptions of reality and governing rules of behaviour are distorted in emotionally intensified, extra-cultural situations.

G. R. Point is structured as a rite of passage played out in the context of war experience. The action traces the term of service in Vietnam of its central figure, Micah Bradstreet; it covers the period between Easter and Thanksgiving in 1969, and reveals the process through which Micah becomes acculturated to the new social and physical environment. The play deals with Micah's initial acceptance by the group, his recognition as a sustaining member, and his exemplification of the ultimate goal of the collective: survival and rotation home.

War experiences make extraordinary demands on the men, since they must constantly adjust the ground rules of association with their fellows as the stress of battle affects their perceptions and behaviour. The unifying force--the overwhelming fear of Vietnam--that counteracted the divisive tensions in *Streamers* emerges in *G.R. Point* as the collective instinct for survival. While the tensions generated among the men of the army unit threaten the social order of the group and occasionally erupt in internecine violence, the men's communal sense of purpose--to survive their tour of duty--is recognized as being best served by mutual support.

The play is set in the living area and mortuary of a Graves Registration Unit (the G. R. of the title), and portrays the lives of men whose duties involve the reclamation and identification of American dead. The men's jobs include reassembling corpses that have been blown to pieces and placing identity and invoice tags on them for shipment back to the United States. Deacon (Sgt. Jesse Wilcox), the Black sergeant in charge of the G. R. unit, states its motto: "You frag 'em, we bag 'em" (*Ibid.* 11).

The problem of divisiveness in the American forces emerges in reference to the fragging of officers. A G. R. man, Tito (Pfc. Raphael Orona), explains the system to the newly-arrived "cherry,"[20] Micah: "One sixteen round in the back of your head . . . We get about five of them mystery murders a month in G. R." (*Ibid.* 14). Micah is warned about becoming too "cozy" with officers, as Shoulders (Cpl. Milton Samuels), another Black in the unit, admonishes him about the new conditions governing military behaviour: "You ain't back in the world. You got to lose your cherry real fast on some things" (*Ibid.* 14).

The forced adaptation to the new cultural environments--both the war situation outside the "hooch," or bunker, and the interior world within it, creates severe mental stress in the soldiers. The physically dismembered bodies that the men

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[20] New arrivals in Vietnam were referred to as "cherries" to indicate their "virginal" status. Any soldier with less than ninety days incountry was so designated.

work with become the "objective correlative" of the psychologically disordered minds of the men engaged in packaging the dead. Truth becomes arbitrary and relative when one's perceptions are disoriented by geography and drugs. The soldiers refer to the United States as "the real world," but a pragmatic mortuary worker, Zan (Sp/5 Alexander Zorkizein), explains, "This is about as real a place as you'll ever find" (*Ibid.* 23). Noting the commonplace use of drugs as a means of psychological liberation, men equate their psychedelic effect with the pyrotechnics of war; they refer to Vietnam as "Disneyland West" (*Ibid.* 16).

When confronted with the type of work performed by the unit, Micah, a college graduate who was drafted but enlisted to avoid the infantry, announces, "I intend to remain civilized" (*Ibid.* 11). The new culture in which Micah finds himself, however, has entirely different rules of conduct from those with which he is familiar. Initial integration is no problem for Micah: he accepts an invitation to smoke "grass" when he is reassured that officers, wary of "friendly fire," will not interfere (*Ibid.* 14). He ingratiates himself with the Black sergeant when he expresses a preference for Miles Davis, and offers the money to buy a Davis record tape for the unit.

Micah soon runs into trouble, however, when his attempt to impose his notion of social ethics on other members of his unit results in a violent confrontation with the Black

sergeant. Micah takes exception to Deacon's verbal abuse of a middle-aged Vietnamese camp factotum, Mama-san, noting, "It's *my* strong opinion, Deacon, that you don't treat *anybody* like a slave--especially a woman" (*Ibid.* 21). Deacon moves quickly to assert his leadership, not in terms of the military order (his NCO status outranks Micah's Specialist 4), but of the street. Deacon turns from verbal abuse of Mama-san to sexual abuse, and Micah intervenes:

> MICAH: She's not a whore, Deacon!
>
> DEACON: How you know, asshole? Outta my way. . . .
>
> MICAH: Let her go, you fucking pig!
>
> DEACON: (*Quickly unsheathing his belt knife, slashing at Micah's arm, very slightly knicking it.*) I only tell a man once to climb outta my shit. You had your time. (*Ibid.* 22)

Deacon's attack is not meant to be lethal; much like Carlyle's initial attack on Billy in *Streamers*, it is a symbolic gesture intended to establish order in the social hierarchy.

Micah is forcibly restrained by his friend, Zan, who quickly moves to enlighten the former on the ground rules of the micro-society.

> ZAN: You wanna buy that lady's virtue with your *life*? 'Cause that's what you're gonna pay! You wanna play John Asshole Wayne and be a hero, man?
>
> MICAH: But I'm *right*!!
>
> ZAN: Uh-huh . . . But you're alive, and so's Deacon and so's Mama-san. (*Ibid.* 22)

Coming from disparate backgrounds, the college-educated Micah, and the Black sergeant, Deacon, bring different standards of ethics to their new culture. Micah is devastated by the passions that have taken control of him:

> MICAH: What the hell is going on? He's on my side and I wanted to kill him. Jesus . . . what am I thinking?
>
> ZAN: Get out of your head. Try livin' in your belly.
>
> MICAH: I could have killed him. That didn't come out of my head! (*Pause*) I feel like I'm nowhere.
>
> ZAN: You're here man. This is about as real a place as you'll ever find. (*Ibid.* 23)

Micah is totally disoriented by the changed values and ethics of the new culture. The constructs that provided order and normality in the former society are no longer functional, and Micah senses the unreality of his new world. Zan recognizes Micah's difficulty and offers to help him adjust to the new situation: "Look, people can help each other gettin' their shit together. So don't be afraid to ask" (*Ibid.* 23).

Micah's total assimilation is some time coming. For almost two months (still within his "cherry" period), Micah remains celibate while the other men partake of the fleshpots of Vietnam. Micah has a strong mother fixation, and appears to be sexually repressed as a consequence. He alarms the other men with his insistence on relating to his mother in acute detail the repulsive nature of his job in the mortuary

unit, the horrors associated with the prosecution of the War, and the dehumanizing nature of military life:

> MICAH: I'm writing my mother *everything* . . . everything that happens here and everything going on in my head.
>
> TITO: Hey, why do you do that?
>
> MICAH: I want her to know what this place is all about.
>
> TITO: She's your *mother*. Lay off the lady, man.
>
> MICAH: She can handle it. In my house, it's stiff upper lip all the way. The queen never cries.
>
> TITO: Jesus, man, if you didn't tell her anything, she could pretend it's okay here.
>
> MICAH: Why should I lie? (*Ibid.* 27)

It would seem that Micah is exacting a cruel revenge on his mother. He admits that when the question of joining the army and going to Vietnam arose, his mother acquiesced, noting, "Every man in every generation of the family had to deal with something like this" (*Ibid.* 27). He appears to take a sadistic delight in exposing his mother to the same agony that he must endure, and dismisses Tito's plea to insulate her from the immediate reality of the war.

Micah's pontificating on truth, reality, and the meaning of what the unit is doing draws irate responses from the men. Even Tito, his confidant, is driven to remonstrate:

> Listen, Micah, I'm tired of your fucken preacher raps. You is like a priest--always fucking with people's heads. Your mother and us, we got enough shit without having you tell us all the time this place is a bummer. (*Ibid.* 27)

Micah is an unwelcome prophet: he deals in reality and truth. Tito compares Micah's hands with those of a priest, noting, "You even got hands like a priest. They always got clean white hands and long fingers" (*Ibid.* 27). The image growing in his mind, Tito goes on to describe the essential role of a priest, the creation of a magic that transcends reality:

> Hey, Zan, when you was a kid going to Mass, did you think the priest's hands was magic, huh? . . . I did, I was an altar boy, an' I really believed all that wine and wafer shit. Man, I used to watch the priest real close, an' sometimes I did it so hard, I slowed everything up, an' I could see the flakes of the host floating down from his hands like a tiny snowstorm. You know what I would say to myself? "Tito, don' move. The priest's hands is making God. You will see the flesh and the blood becoming." They was magic times. . . . (*Ibid.* 27-28)

The ritual of transubstantiation represents the true function of a priest for Tito. The priest is not the arbiter of a prosaic reality; rather, he demonstrates the ability of the mind to transcend the factual world and to encompass the tranquility of a super-reality, a mythical construct that insulates the psyche from the terrors of daily life.

Micah's epiphany comes as a result of experiencing a heightening of passions, which occurs when his unit comes under attack. Emotions triggered by the frenzy of killing in the heat of battle open up new worlds of sensations:

> Man, I fucken *begged* Charlie to come for me. Come for me, you motherfuckers, I'm gonna tear your throats! Get near me, you bastards, and I'm gonna eat you, gonna cut open your fucken stomachs 'n wrap your steaming guts around my neck 'n rip your veins wide open and drink your warm blood 'till there's nothing fucken left of you for G.R. to

> shovel into the truck and take to the dump and push into a hole and pour diesel on and burn, you motherfuckers. BURN!!! (*Ibid.* 33)

In the midst of the carnage on the battlefield, he experiences emotional and physical climaxes, and his passions and tensions overwhelm him after the event:

> MICAH: I've never been alive like that . . . I was alive . . . I have to wash . . . so alive . . . and I . . . (*He suddenly grabs Zan, then lurches away.*) . . . I had . . . I killed all those people and . . . I had . . . I had . . .
>
> ZAN: *What*, Micah? What?
>
> MICAH: I CAME!!! (*Pause*) In the middle of that . . . I came. Like some animal. (*Ibid.* 33) [ellipses in text]

Combat for Micah releases the repressed sexuality that is implicitly part of his social conditioning. In an attempt to reassure him, Zan observes, "It isn't dirty, for Christ's sake. So you came. Your were *alive*. Maybe your cock voted for the truth" (*Ibid.* 33).

The process of acculturation asserts itself upon all the men in the unit. Micah's earlier sense of self-worth, implicit in his avowed intention "to remain civilized," metamorphoses in the crucible of war, and in coming to terms with his sexual instincts, he eases his condemnation of his comrades when they pursue the delights of the bordellos of Vietnam. When Zan is ordered to perform other jobs because lulls on the battlefield result in fewer corpses to process, he bitterly complains: "Jesus, laundry duty is for shit. We

got no bodies so Johnston is making us do laundry" (*Ibid.* 36).

Efforts at coming to terms with the reality about them, however, become an ongoing process for men caught up in the changing circumstances of war. Deacon develops a penchant for photographing battle casualties: in recording them, he says to Micah, "These is *history*, and you helped make it" (*Ibid.* 38). Micah is repulsed by the photographs, and tells Deacon so in front of the others. Nevertheless, when they leave, he surreptitiously offers him money in exchange for a set of the pictures. Believing that he is alone, he peruses them; Mama-san, however, has lingered in the background:

> (*Oblivious to Mama-san's presence, Micah crosses to his bunk, opens the photo envelope, removes photos. Repulsed and attracted, he loses himself in the remembered passion and horror of battle. Mama-san moves slowly toward him. He sees her with a start. She reaches out with both arms and pulls him toward her.*) 'I do good for you, Micah san.' (*She starts unbuttoning his fatigue trousers, and as she begins to push them down and bend to his waist*) Blackout (*Ibid.* 39)

For Micah, the erotic aspect of battle and sexual stimulation have become one. Mama-san, recognizing his arousal and stimulated by his lust, responds with her own rejuvenated passion. Micah's sexual repression is overcome by the combined erotic rapture of sex and war. When teased by his mates about his relationship with Mama-san, he dismisses the jibes with, "Fuck you, she's old enough to be my mother" (*Ibid.* 41).

Micah's passions are intensified in another way when some of his friends are killed by "friendly fire." In the confusion surrounding a night action, an American tank mistakenly fires a "beehive" round into a bunker defended by the G.R. unit.[21] Johnston awakes Micah to help him sort out the devastation, and the latter becomes enraged, threatening to "kill the bastards" responsible (*Ibid.* 45). The Lieutenant, Johnston, replies:

> No you won't. The tank's been sent off the post already. Brigade got rid of it fast . . . tried to pass it off as incoming. But the medics knew as soon as they saw the bodies . . . all those fucking puncture marks . . . goddamn stupid mistake. (*Ibid.* 45) [ellipses in text][22]

Among the dead is Micah's close friend and confidant, Zan.

Shattered by the experience, Micah enters the mortuary late at night and performs a macabre dance of death with Zan's corpse in a body bag: (*He gently lifts Zan's bag from the reefer and swings the bag around and around.*). As they dance, Micah implores the corpse, "Help me, Zan. You never lied to me you never did, talk to me, how can I do when there's nobody to talk to like we did. . . (*Ibid.* 46). He sinks into utter despair: "Zan . . . please . . . I'm scared.

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[21] A "beehive" round is an explosive artillery shell that delivers thousands of small projectiles, "like nails with fins." See Mark Baker's *Nam* (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), p. 297.

[22] The description of the attack in *G.R. Point* agrees precisely, in minute detail, with that of an actual occurrence involving a G.R. unit. See Baker's *Nam*, pp. 218-221.

I want . . . I want . . . I want to be . . . whole! (*Ibid.* 46). Micah's equilibrium is as shattered as the bodies occupying the morgue, and for Micah, Zan's loss is something irreplaceable. Zan had mentioned that he arrived in Vietnam in November, and therefore the incident must have occurred just as his tour of duty was nearing completion.

The ultimate shock for Micah comes with news of his mother's death. In response to his letters describing in acute detail the atrocities inflicted and suffered by him and his fellows in Vietnam, the mother has replied with heartbreaking expressions of contrition and helplessness:

> Dear Micah . . . I don't know what to say to you. All your life I've wanted only the best for you and your brother. Since your father died, it hasn't been easy, but I've always tried to help. Now I'm so far away . . . what can I do? If I could trade places with you, I would. I would bring you home if I could find the way. [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 40)

His mother's hope is ironically realized, for she effects his redemption by exchanging places with him: her death from a cerebral haemorrhage terminates his tour of duty on grounds of compassion, and he is cleared for immediate evacuation. The irony does not escape her son. Stricken with grief and resentment, he bitterly curses her and himself:

> Had to die, didn't you. Gave yourself a fucken stroke to bring me home! Found a way to trade, didn't you? I'm fucken good at it aren't I Mother?! All my fucken letters, every one, every one plugged a different vessel in your brain!! I got you, didn't I, Mother?!! (*Ibid.* 52)

He is about to be thrust back into society burdened by a guilt which is essentially a product of his own insensitivity rather than of the events in Vietnam.

His treatment of his mother has been a sore point between him and Zan, when it becomes obvious to the latter that he receives a good deal of perverse satisfaction from his mother's anguished letters:

> MICAH: That's the second one like that I've received.
>
> ZAN: She's feelin' rotten. You've got *her* sweatin' out your tour.
>
> MICAH: She's startin' to whine.
>
> ZAN: You've been whinin' for weeks. Quit hurtin' her.
>
> MICAH: I'm just lettin' her know who I am.
>
> ZAN: Oh? And who is that? (*Ibid.* 40)

Micah's quest to find himself in his new environment has involved a sharing of the agonizing experience with his mother, and, indeed, she and Zan are obviously the two people closest to him.

Micah's experience in Vietnam has led him to place the guilt on his mother for several complex reasons. Her simple acquiescence and mild encouragement for his going to Vietnam would seem to be an insufficient motivation for such behaviour. There is no evidence that he harbored any ill-feeling toward her upon his arrival there, and his defense of the mother-surrogate, Mama-san, was one of his first acts in the unit. His being marked by Deacon at the time leaves no

trace of resentment between the two, which therefore also seems to be an unlikely cause. The reading of the second letter takes place approximately a month after his epiphany in battle, his perusal of the pictures, and his seduction by Mama-san, and thus it is unlikely that she was the source of his resentment.

A circumstance that does stand out in reference to Micah is his strong cultural conditioning and sexual immaturity. His long period of celibacy after arriving in Vietnam was a source of commentary for his mates, and it was only the bizarre coincidence of the heightened emotions of battle and the reliving of those emotions through pictures that triggered his solo climax and subsequent conjugal encounter with Mama-san. Micah has also shown an insistent urge to interpret what is happening about him in terms of his previous conditioning. Tito has been cited above, noting that if Micah would refrain from commenting on the actual conditions in Vietnam, his mother could retain her illusions about Vietnam and, consequently, would not worry so much. Micah was also reproached by several members of the unit, notably Zan, for being too "preachy."

Micah destroyed his mother by sharing the horrors of Vietnam with her, without any compensatory filter or myth to soften the experience. She was vicariously involved in the ghastly events, and her anxiety was heightened by her concern for her son. While war scenes from Vietnam were viewed by

American citizens on television, the impact was softened by geographical distance and media dramatization. The mother's cerebral haemorrhage is symbolic of the psychic fragmentation resulting from the war, both in the men involved and in the divisive effect of the conflict on Americans at home. The work of the G.R. Unit reflects not only the physical correlative of such fragmentation, but also the need for reconstructing the identity of the dead, an ironic counterpoint to Micah's attempts at reconstruction of the identity of the living.

Another play which focuses on the Vietnam experience and uses the fragmented consciousness technique as its organizing structural element is John DiFusco's (*et al*) *Tracers* (1980). A throwback in style to the ensemble and improvisational theatre of the 1960s, this work was composed entirely by a group of veterans who created scenes based upon their individual impressions of the war.[23] Relying heavily on songs and choreographed routines, the piece presents fragments of experience expressed in memory "tracers," which attempt to establish connections between the present and the past.

As a collectively inspired piece, *Tracers* lacks the guiding consciousness and intensity of *365 Days*, the

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[23] John DiFusco conceived the original idea of *Tracers* and directed it in the improvisational process involving the seven original members of its cast, all Vietnam War veterans: Vincent Caristi, Richard Chaves, Eric E. Emerson, Rick Gallavan, Merlin Marston, Harry Stephens, and a contributing writer, Sheldon Lettich, also a veteran.

individual perspective of *G.R. Point*, or the thematic unity of *How I Got That Story*. The scenes are a montage of memories of induction, experience, and homecoming situations. Typical of the style of the work is the evocation of the "Saigon list," in which the members of the cast, alternating words, phrases and levels of vocal intensity, evoke images of the Vietnam experience:

Saigon	Dink	Sorry 'bout that shit
Da Nang	Victor Charles	Wasted
Phu Cat	November Victor Alpha	K.I.A.
Cam Rahn Bay	Skivvie Girls	Head wound
The Nam	I souvenir you, G.I.	Stomach wound
Hootch	La Dai, motherfucker!	Medevac
Bunker	Mos Skosh!	Dustoff
Sandbags	Deedee Mou!	Hueys
Concertina		
Wire	There it is, G.I.	Cobra gunships
Gook	I can't feel my legs	Freedom bird!

(*Tracers* 167)

The verbal associations no doubt mean much to those who have had to fill sandbags and crouch behind them, and who have personal memories of particular places. The images must remain vague to the uninitiated, however, and the scene would seem to appeal primarily to an audience of veterans rather than to a general theatre audience.

Attempts are made to describe the situation in Vietnam from a military point of view. After a basic training sequence, the Drill Instructor confides to the audience:

> The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics trains its infantry for eighteen months. We train ours for eighteen weeks. Charlie Cong has been at it for twenty-six years. We issue them the most sophisticated equipment in the world; but we do not teach them how to use it. We commit them to the

> combat zone in units so large that their support facilities become targets for insurgents. They are now eighteen and nineteen years old. Before they are twenty-one, nearly half of them will be killed or wounded. (*Ibid.* 169)

The presentation of the statistics, while interesting enough in themselves, lacks the drama that such figures represented in *365 Days*.

The piece does have some introspective moments, but most occur in an epilogue, where the men look back to see where the tracers have led. One veteran has returned to Bangkok to relive his sexual experiences, another has found a woman who will "dance with him in a wheelchair," another owns nightclubs in Manhattan and Miami, while yet another, a father of two deformed girls, himself dying of cancer, awaits the outcome of an Agent Orange lawsuit (*Ibid.* 171). The work, like *365 Days*, presents post-mortem impressions of Vietnam experiences, but lacks the overall artistic or thematic direction essential to the creation of a definitive dramatic statement.

Terence McNally's *Botticelli* (1968), a very short piece that is little more than a skit, does make a significant statement concerning the prosecution of the war in Vietnam. The title derives from the parlour game in which a person thinks of the name of a famous figure in the history of mankind, while others, by asking leading questions, attempt to determine his (or her) identity. The scene is set in Vietnam where two American soldiers, Wayne and Stu, await the

emergence of a Viet Cong soldier from his "spider hole." The soldiers know that he is in the hole, and patiently wait to kill him the moment he comes out. To offset the boredom, the soldiers play "Botticelli."

Both soldiers demonstrate a highly sophisticated knowledge of the cultural history of western civilization. The identity to be discovered has "P" as the last initial. The questions and answers highlight the crowning achievements of western civilization, as enquiries about dates and characteristics of famous figures lead to such identities as concert pianists (Paderewski), Russian poets and novelists (Pushkin, Pasternak), other literary figures (Dumas *père*, Pepys, Pinero, Pope, Pirandello, Petrarch, Plutarch), composers (Purcell, Palestrina), painters (Pissarro, Poussin), sculptors (Pisano) and philosophers (Plato). (*Botticelli* 73-75)

After some time, the quarry emerges and the soldiers fix their gunsights on him. The game carries on as "*the Man [comes] out of the tunnel. He's young, emaciated. He pauses at the entrance, quivering like a frightened rabbit*" (*Ibid.* 75). In response to Stu's question, "Did you write a famous '*Lives*,' Wayne responds, "I'm not Plutarch," and shoots the Vietnamese: "*Man's face contorts with pain as he is cut down by a seemingly endless volley of gunfire. He falls, twitches, finally lies still*" (*Ibid.* 75). On the way back to camp, Wayne admits that he is "Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Italian

painter, sculptor and goldsmith, 1432-1498" (*Ibid.* 76). As the men leave the set, a spot of light remains on the face of the dead soldier.

McNally's commentary is bitterly ironic. In their education and cultural background, the Americans represent the epitome of cultural achievement; their knowledge spans some twenty-five hundred years of intellectual thought and artistic accomplishment, yet they are absolutely insensitive to the human condition. Some of the masterworks of Wayne's alter-ego, the Italian painter and sculptor Pollaiuolo, Wayne notes, are "Portrait of a Man," "The Labors of Hercules," "David," "The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian," and "Tobias and the Angel" (*Ibid.* 76). In counterpointing the heroic and aesthetic aspects of literary and artistic works of the West, the calculated extermination of the Vietnamese youth is brazenly unworthy of a culture which is ostensibly fighting to protect its own way of life against other social systems.

Much of the conflict and anxiety that generates the dramatic tension of playscripts dealing with Vietnam emerges from the frustrations caused by the clash of cultural perspectives. The plays of war experience focus on themes that are extensions of those detailing the cultural conditioning in both the plays of initiation and "homecoming." The latter plays typically focus on how cultural attitudes complicate the process of reintegration, when the veterans' altered perspectives impede the

psychological adjustment necessary for a harmonious reunion with those in the extended society. An examination of these "homecoming" plays will serve as the focus of Chapter VI.

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CHAPTER VI

PLAYS OF HOMECOMING

The significant toll of lives and financial cost of the War pale in comparison with the staggering cost in physically and mentally disabled men. The financial cost was put at between $109 and $180 billion; the death toll at between 56,925 and 57,939; the wounded at 303,640; M.I.A. about 1,300; and 519,000 were officially classified as disabled.[1] The figures for the disabled and the wounded are open to interpretation, since they include both the psychologically and the physically incapacitated: they do not reveal how many soldiers were wounded but not disabled, and, in the case of psychological disablement, the figure is based on the number of officially recognized cases. The psychological cost of the War, however, both to the returned veterans and the culture itself, is proving to be one of the most difficult and continuing consequences of the conflict.

An early investigator into what would eventually become

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[1] Figures vary according to the source. Part of the problem arises from disagreement on when the war began, and even when it ended. The first official American death was recorded in December 1961, the last in January 1973; however, American service personnel were in Vietnam before and subsequent to those dates, and suffered casualties. If the bombing of Laos and Cambodia is viewed as part of the Vietnam War, it lasted until 1975. Similarly, deaths are often attributed to combat and non-combat causes, and dollar amounts vary in terms of non-military aid to the Saigon government, aid to the RVN forces, and the actual expenses of the U.S. military. See Appendices A, B.

designated as "post-traumatic stress disorder," or "post-Vietnam stress syndrome," was Robert J. Lifton, a professor of psychiatry at Yale. In a study of the men who were involved in the atrocities of My Lai, Lifton realized that his conclusions about them revealed many similarities with those that he had made about the survivors of Hiroshima. He notes that both groups of survivors exhibited

> a vast breakdown of faith in the larger human matrix supporting each individual life, and therefore a loss of faith (or trust) in the structure of existence. (Lifton 1973: 67)

Lifton identifies the source of the anxieties observed in both returning Vietnam veterans and members of the civilian culture:

> This shattered existential faith has to do with remaining bound by the image of holocaust, of grotesque and absurd death and equally absurd survival. Even Americans who have not seen Vietnam feel something of a national descent into existential evil, a sense that the killing and dying done in their name cannot be placed within a meaningful system of symbols, cannot be convincingly formulated. The result is a widespread if, again, vague feeling of lost integrity at times approaching moral-psychological disintegration. (*Ibid.* 67).

His observations help to explain the animosities that arose between the returnees who rightfully expected some degree of recognition of the sacrifices that they had made, and unsympathetic citizens who felt either a sense of betrayal or moral embarrassment as a consequence of the war and its outcome.

In explaining the reasons for the different attitudes of

the returnees and many American citizens, Lifton notes that the extra-cultural experience created seemingly irreconcilable differences of perception between the two groups.

> What distinguishes Vietnam veterans from the rest of their countrymen is their awesome experience and knowledge of what others merely sense and resist knowing, their suffering on the basis of that knowledge and experience, and, in the case of anti-war veterans, their commitment to telling the tale. (*Ibid.* 67)

In many cases, particularly in the form of the drama, that telling of tales was not only abhorrent to many ears, but was even an affront to the sensitivities of those who preferred to adopt a selective amnesia in such matters.

Problems of reintegration for the veterans were exacerbated by the unusual nature of duty in Vietnam. Unlike other wars in which men joined individual units, fought with them overseas, and returned with them, the Vietnam draftee was isolated within the structure of the military itself. After completing basic training, men were assigned as needed to military units, served their one-year term in Vietnam, and returned individually when that term was completed. General Westmoreland approved of such a system, and noted that "it gave a man a goal" (Goldman and Fuller xiv). In addition, Vietnam experience was so essential for career officers desirous of promotion that competition for assignment in the field was intense; consequently, their overseas service was limited to six months' duration (*Ibid.* 21). The individual

rotation of officers and men frustrated the development of an *esprit de corps*, and the men often served in the field without any sense of cohesive identity, unity, or communal purpose.

As a consequence of the one-year rotation, men returned singly, and experienced as little as a forty-eight hour time differential from combat in the jungle to walking the streets of San Francisco (*Ibid.* 135). There were no homecoming rituals of public recognition, neither military nor civilian, and little or no psychological adjustment time. As Lifton notes,

> They have fought in an undeclared and therefore psychologically illegitimate war, without either ceremonies of departure or parades of victorious return. Rather, the men speak of "sneaking back" into society, just as they were "sneaked" into Vietnam by higher authorities spinning (and caught in) a web of deceptions about whether American troops were to go to Vietnam, how many, how long they would stay there, and what they would do there. (Lifton 1981: 100)

The veterans experienced the transition from a brutal survival situation to a relatively complacent civilian life in a few days, and that circumstance served further to emphasise the differences in the perception of what the War was about on the part of the veterans and their countrymen. In essence, the returnees encountered a form of reverse culture shock upon their return, as exposure to the home culture created stresses and anxieties as severe as those generated by the overseas experience.

The problems inherent in the psychological readjustment

of both the War veteran and his society comprise the dramatic conflict of virtually all of the homecoming plays. Many works, such as Adrienne Kennedy's *An Evening with Dead Essex* (1973), Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag* (1975), and Emily Mann's *Still Life* (1980), resemble--and in some cases are--adaptations of case studies of psychiatrists working with veterans. Others, such as Terence McNally's *Bringing It All Back Home* (1969), and Ronald Ribman's *The Burial of Esposito* (1969), are short pieces dealing with family responses to the return of the bodies of their sons. The plays, to a greater or lesser degree, all deal with problems of reintegration and acceptance; yet, of all the homecoming works, David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* (1969), is the most essential to a study of the problems of cultural alienation and the difficulties faced by the American veteran in the process of reassimilation.

The best-known, most often performed Vietnam play, *Sticks and Bones* has been the focus of much criticism. Some of it, unfortunately, appears to have an emotional rather than an intellectual basis and generally proves to be inane, insensitive and resentful. An extreme case is Christopher Durang's puerile and ill-conceived parody, *The Vietnamization of New Jersey* (1977).[2] On the other hand, a very competent

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[2] This conclusion is based on the premise that Durang's play is essentially a line-for-line, idea-for-idea, scene-for-scene imitation and parody of Rabe's work, and has little artistic merit of its own, either as an independent dramatic work, or as intelligently argued satire. Durang apes Rabe's

review of the play and of the criticism taken as a whole is that of Samuel J. Bernstein in *The Strands Entwined: A New Direction in American Drama*. Since Rabe's work does reflect so many of the themes, attitudes, techniques, and philosophies of homecoming drama, some discussion of those characteristics is in order in the present study.

An initial and essentially reactionary criticism of *Sticks and Bones* was that it was not only anti-war, but also anti-American. Both premises are misleading. In respect to the former, Rabe notes of his trilogy,

> I don't like to hear them called anti-war plays. Works like that, like some of the social-action plays of the thirties, are designed for immediate effect. All I'm trying to do is *define* the *event* for myself, and for other people. I'm saying in effect, "This is what goes on" and that's all. (Berkvist 3).

With respect to the anti-American charge, the play was performed in an unauthorized pirate production in 1973 at the Sovremennik Theatre in Moscow.[3] In a letter to the *New York Times*, Rabe accused Oleg Yefremov and Andrzej Wajda of the

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words much as a child might imitate events in the world about him--superficially, spontaneously, and with blissful unawareness.

[3] David Rabe, letter to the editor: "Each Night You Spit in My Face," *The New York Times*, 18 March, 1973, II, pp. 3, 20. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the Soviet Writers' Union weekly newspaper, responded by noting that if the play were so universal in character, why did the Papp production for CBS encounter such extreme censorship? See Hedrick Smith, "Soviet Sticks and Stones for David Rabe," *The New York Times*, 12 April, 1973, p. 56.

Sovremennik of misappropriating the play and misinterpreting its message for propagandistic purposes:

> It is about distortion of perception for the sake of personal need, which is what you have done to it--distorted it for personal political need. The play is about you and your people, or it is about nothing. (Rabe, *NYT*)

Rabe added that if the play were to have any validity in Russia, it would deal with the return of a Soviet soldier who had experienced a similar cultural conflict, for example, one arriving home after service in Hungary.[4]

Although the play in many respects does criticize the shortcomings of American society, the weaknesses are expressed in terms of problems resulting from conditioned ethnocentric attitudes and perception, and from cultural myopia. Rabe notes that *Sticks and Bones* is "a play about sophisticated tribalism in which ritual is used to define the insiders and outsiders of the tribe, and to make the definition hold" (Rabe 1973: 3). In clarification of the returned veteran's dilemma in the play, and of the thematic thrust of the piece itself, Bernstein observes,

> While the play is concerned with adjustment, it is not an adjustment which results directly from the wound. Rather, it is the mental and emotional adjustment that David has made because of his war experience; it is his cultural ethos and spiritual vision that have changed, far more than his body and his physical vision. More precisely, Rabe employs David's physical condition and the new relationship with his family as a springboard for

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[4] One wonders, for example, how a dramatic adaptation dealing with a Soviet soldier's return from Afghanistan might be received in the Soviet Union.

> examining American values: the standards and assumptions by which we live, our motivations to go to war, what happens to those who go to war, the American ethos, and what hope we can have for the future. (Bernstein 22)

Bernstein's observations point to what many of Rabe's critics have overlooked: the work is essentially a psychodrama in which an alienated consciousness attempts reintegration with a cultural construct with which it was once familiar. The characters, with the exception of David, are one-dimensional, stereotyped figures embodying aspects of a cultural consciousness, complete with collective perceptions and conditioned behaviour. The dramatic and thematic conflict of the work is the struggle between irreconcilable points of view in which, for the sake of social and psychological equanimity, only one can prevail.

The play deals with the return of a blind American serviceman, David, whose reassimilation with his family and culture is thwarted when his return exposes the fallacious preconceptions upon which the family bases its identity, cohesion and continuity. The conflict between David and his family is exacerbated by David's blindness, his aggressive attitude, his miscegenation in Vietnam, but actually stems from his debunking of the myths which support the psychological equilibrium of the family unit. The cloistered perceptions of the family are extended to middle-class America in the cultural analogue of the television family of Ozzie and Harriet, in which David and Rick are sons. David's

return destabilizes the family, since his altered physical and mental state forces an agonizing reappraisal of the family relationships. Deceptively realistic in its familiar and natural living room setting, the play is essentially a psychodrama involving diverse aspects of individual, social and cultural consciousness.

Rabe presents the many-faceted nature of consciousness at the outset of the play with slides portraying members of the Nelson family.

> *Slides appear on both sides of the stage: the first is a black-and-white medium close-up of a young man, mood and clothing of the early 1900s; he is lean, reasonably handsome, black hair parted in the center.* (*Bones* 119)

The visual splitting of images implied in this direction reinforces the idea of a divided or fragmented consciousness: simultaneous projections of a slide on *both* sides of the stage split audience [and actor?] focus. Also, the chiaroscuro effect of the black-and-white slides presents shades of definition, and hair parted in the middle recalls the shifting consciousness of a bicameral mind.[5] Styles in the photographs draw distinctions between past and present, memory and reality, and ancestral and contemporary family members. The sequence of family photographs fuses past, present and future: a black-and-white picture of "Grandpa

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[5] For a description of the many aspects of consciousness, see Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.

Oswald" and his family, Ozzie and Harriet, and David and his brother, are followed by "*a color close-up of David from the last moment of the play*, [with] *a stricken look*" (*Ibid.* 120). The incongruous and anachronistic picture of David is unrecognized by the family, and is referred to as "somebody sick" (*Ibid.* 20). The identity of some of the people in the older pictures is established by their proximity to known family members, which indicates that an individual's identity is often based on his social context.[6]

The sequence of pictures also suggests the informing structure of the play. Bernstein points to Rabe's use of tragic strains in the work, which reveal, if not the proportions, at least the mechanics of classical tragedy. Reminiscent of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, there is a blight on the land. Some members of the family depicted in the photographs have died at a young age, of disease, and the final picture in the sequence reveals "someone sick." Socially and genetically determined, the blind David has somehow paid a price for an ancient curse, and Oedipus' literal and figurative blindness is reflected in David, his family, and his culture.

The several generations of Oswalds shown in the pictures reveal a genetically-based susceptibility to disease and affliction: Grandpa Oswald's brother died at a young age of

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[6] A sequence of photographs is again projected on a screen at the start of Act II, and there too, identification is predicated on context rather than direct knowledge.

scarlet fever; Ozzie himself, it is implied, is physically weak; and David's blindness may be the consequence of a third or fourth-generation illness rather than a battle injury.[7] Bernstein points to the similarities between the Osvald of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* and those of Rabe's play (Oswald the grandfather, and Ozzie himself), since in both cases inherited social disease blights the life of subsequent generations (Bernstein 24). In Ibsen's work, the disease becomes a metaphor for the maladies of the greater society, and, similarly, in *Sticks and Bones* the controlling metaphor is physical and moral corruption.

The family is beset by multiple ghosts which reside in the individual, family, and cultural subconscious. The metaphor of individual and social illness is substantiated and reinforced by the ghost of Hank Grenweller, a presence that, through David's resurrection in the family consciousness, totally destroys the family equilibrium. David's presence also evokes the spectre of Zung, a Vietnamese woman with whom he has had a liaison, and whose people have suffered so terribly at the hands of the Americans. Under the threat of such alien intruders, whose energies are channeled through David, the equilibrium of the family disintegrates.

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[7] The woman's voice, ostensibly Harriet's, describing the pictures, identifies "Grandpa Oswald as a young boy." Whether that reference is to Harriet's or the children's grandfather is uncertain.

The primary tragic character of the piece is not David, but Ozzie, the head of the family. The action consists of the stripping away of the protective myths that define Ozzie's identity, status, and moral worth; as a consequence of the process, he experiences psychological fragmentation and, ultimately, total mental collapse. By extension, the family is placed in the same situation and, for its survival, it collectively moves against David. The condition that David Berry perceived in Vietnam, in which an extra-cultural situation demands new codes of behaviour, now becomes valid for the home front: "Remember that this environment strips away pretense, subterfuge, and dissembling. It is a survival situation" (Berry 5). It becomes apparent that David has brought another ghost back with him, that of the War itself.

The omnipresence of Hank Grenweller constitutes a pervasive force in the Nelson household; in his various manifestations he provides the unconscious frame of reference that defines the family, and is also its role model. David's altered perceptions challenge the validity of the social and psychological constructs which give the family unit its substance by contesting the mythological base upon which the micro-society is built. Grenweller is part of this base, and for the family, he virtually assumes the role of a controlling destiny; references to him throughout the play trace the pre-Vietnam history of the family and fix it within its cultural context.

In both a literal and a figurative sense, Grenweller has introduced Ozzie to Harriet. In a speech to the audience, given at a critical moment in his mental collapse, Ozzie relates a phantasmagoric dream in which Hank appears as a determining agent of his consciousness. Ozzie is riding on a train during the Depression; Hank, a brakeman, throws him off, but subsequently befriends him, awakens his sexual instincts, and introduces him to women:

> We become friends, Hank and me, have good times even though things are rough. He likes to point young girls out on the street and tell me how good it feels to touch them. I start thinking of their bodies, having dreams of horses, breasts and crotches. (*Ibid.* 169)

The introduction of Harriet is encased in romantic myth, as Ozzie, riding on the train, hears Hank calling behind him:

> I turn to see him coming, Harriet young and lovely in his hand, weaving among the weeds. I feel the wonder of her body moving toward me. She's the thing I think I'll enter to find my future. "Hank," I yell, "you sonofabitch! Bring her on." Swollen with pride, screaming and yelling, I stand there. I stand: "I'm ready. I'm ready." (*Ibid.* 169)

In this scene, Hank appears to be a function of Ozzie's subconscious: almost a mythic presence or an archetypal symbol, Hank is associated with Ozzie's basic drives and instincts. Yet, within the context of the family, myth and reality are fused, since, in family conversation Grenweller is referred to as any longstanding friend might be.

The initial mention of Grenweller is made before David's arrival. Ozzie and Harriet reminisce about a picnic that the family had about the time that David was four or five years

old, and Grenweller had informed the pair that he was leaving town:

> OZZIE: We were all happy. Except he'd come to tell us he was going away, leaving. And then we had that race. Wasn't that the day?
>
> HARRIET: I don't remember.
>
> OZZIE: Hank and me! Hank Grenweller. A foot race. And I beat him. I did it; got him.
>
> HARRIET: Noooo.
>
> OZZIE: It was only inches, but--
>
> HARRIET: Ozzie, he took it easy. He wasn't trying. (*Ibid.* 124-25)

Initially attempting to feign ignorance of the race, Harriet eventually suggests that Hank allowed Ozzie to win in order to enhance the latter's self-esteem, noting, "He didn't want to make you feel badly" (*Ibid.* 125). Grenweller is revealed as occupying a significant position both in the conscious and subconscious worlds of the family: in addition to introducing the couple to each other and enhancing Ozzie's public and self-image, Grenweller, it transpires, has also chosen the couple's residence. "Do you remember when he showed us this house?" asks Harriet (*Ibid.* 125). Subsequent revelations indicate that Ozzie had intended to abandon his family and run away, but was dissuaded from such an action by Grenweller (*Ibid.* 204).

Some days after his return, David deliberately and systematically sets out to destroy the Grenweller myth. In his psychic rage, he intuits the effect that that will have

on his parents, and pursues Grenweller's destruction with a fanatic vengeance. When David is presented at the Nelsons' door by an army sergeant, the former's sensations are those of isolation and alienation. He states. "It doesn't feel right" (*Ibid.* 128); when the sergeant insists, David bristles: "GODDAMN YOU, SERGEANT, I AM LONELY HERE! I AM LONELY!" (*Ibid.* 132). Completely alienated from home as a result of his experience, David senses the fear and anxiety that his condition and presence arouse in his family. Internecine warfare breaks out immediately: Harriet attacks Ozzie by implying that David's condition is a consequence of "teaching him sports and fighting"; Ozzie responds in self-defence, attempting to prove that David was always vicious by mentioning his torturing a cat as a child; David replies with the accusation that Ricky was, in fact, responsible (*Ibid.* 133).

In a sequence reminiscent of the dramatic genre of Symbolism, the door is mysteriously blown open by a strong gust of wind.[8] Zung, David's Vietnamese girlfriend enters, invisible to the family members. Harriet intuits Zung's presence; she has heard David call out her name in the middle of the night:

HARRIET: I heard you call.

DAVID: I didn't call, I was sleeping.

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[8] See, for example, Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (1891).

HARRIET: I'll bet you're glad you didn't bring her back. Their skins are yellow, aren't they? (*Ibid.* 135)

David has indeed brought back Zung, though; his very presence implies hers, and the family cannot cope with the miscegenous relationship. As tensions heighten in the family as a result of David's altered perceptions and behaviour, and the inability of the family to accommodate them, Zung and Grenweller become vulnerable targets for attack on the part of the respective sides in the conflict that ensues.

Stung by Harriet's observations about Zung, and particularly by her comment that Asians "eat the flesh of dogs," David responds by invoking the image of a diseased Grenweller. Coming downstairs some days after his return home, David introduces his topic:

DAVID: He was a big man, wasn't he?

OZZIE: What?

DAVID: Hank. You were talking about Grenweller, I thought you were. (*Ibid.* 139)

Grenweller, however, has not been discussed since before David's arrival, and the latter delves into the collective memory to attack the family's sustaining myth.

DAVID: He was here once and you wanted me to sit on his lap, isn't that right? It was after dinner. He was in the chair in the corner.

HARRIET: That's right.

DAVID: His hand was gone--the bone showed in the skin.

OZZIE: My God, what a memory--did you hear that, Harriet? You were only four or five. He'd just

had this terrible, awful automobile accident. His hand was hurt, not gone.

DAVID: No. It was congenital and none of us knew.

OZZIE: What?

DAVID: That hand. The sickness in it.

OZZIE: Congenital?

DAVID: Yes. (*Ibid.* 139)

Grenweller has both a specific and an abstract role in the life of the family: his physical presence and influence in the affairs of the family is acknowledged by all its members, yet he is also a paradigm for American culture, its essence and its potential.[9]

In response to Ozzie's repeated assertion that Hank's parents "were good, fine people," David presses his attack by relating an account of his meeting with Hank in California, just before his departure for Vietnam. He implies that some secret knowledge passed between them:

> He was dying, he said. The sickness was congenital. We had a long, long talk. . . . Why did you make me think him perfect. It was starting in his face the way it started in his hand. (*Ibid.* 141)

Grenweller has come to symbolize for David the moral corruption of the society that permitted the prosecution of the War. In the confusion of concrete and abstract ideas surrounding Grenweller, distinctions between reality and

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[9] One cannot help but remark on the similarities between Grenweller, Ozzie, and David, and Uncle Ben, Willy Loman, and Biff in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In both plays there is corruption of an ideal that is closely associated with the essence of American culture.

illusion are blurred, and through a process of transference and association, David implies that the corruption touches the family itself. When he is attacked for his miscegenation, he responds by challenging Ozzie's identity as his father.

A good part of David's mental turmoil stems from a guilt resulting from his sexually-oriented cultural conditioning. On a Sunday picnic, Harriet has seen a mixed couple, a Caucasian male and an Oriental woman, together with a child, and David reminds his mother:

> You spoke to us . . . Dad and Rick and me, as if we were conspirators. "I feel so sorry for that poor man--the baby looks like *her*," you said, and your mouth looked twisted as if you had been forced to swallow someone else's spit. (*Ibid.* 209)

In his intense and sincere relationship with Zung, David has had to live with the knowledge of his mother's revulsion. He attempts to explain the purity of his love for Zung: "There was this girl with hands and hair like wings. There were candles above the net of gauze under which we lay" (*Ibid.* 144). In response, David is bitterly attacked by Ozzie,

> Who the hell do you think you are? You screwed it. A yellow whore. Some yellow ass. You put in your prick and humped your ass. You screwed some yellow fucking whore! (*Ibid.* 144).

When Harriet joins in the attack, David accosts her, "Why didn't you tell me what I was?" and Harriet collapses in a fit of vomiting. (*Ibid.* 145).

In his attack on the Grenweller myth, Ozzie, and his mother, David implies that he himself may be an illegitimate offspring of Grenweller's, a product of a pre-marital

relationship between Hank and Harriet. Whether David himself believes it is uncertain, but its effect on Ozzie lends substance to his innuendo. There are many ambivalences and symbolic constructs in the work that give credence to such an hypothesis. Hank has displayed an extraordinary concern for the welfare and continuity of the family, and knew Harriet before he introduced her to Ozzie. Given his characterization, it would not be incongruous for him to have such an affair; Harriet's character is inconclusive in this regard, but her reactions to the innuendo are pronounced. There is no explanation of David's blinding; in all other respects he seems physically whole, and details of the war situation in which he suffers such a selective injury are not given.[10] His blindness contains implications of both the physical and symbolic aspects of certain congenital diseases of the human reproductive system.

Less circumstantial, however, is the effect of such innuendo on Ozzie. Recurring references to Grenweller mark the father's psychological disintegration. As his equilibrium starts to decay, he asserts himself sexually before Harriet:

> OZZIE: Don't you know I could throw you down onto this floor and make another child live inside you . . . now! . . .
>
> HARRIET: I . . . doubt that . . . Ozzie. (*Ibid.* 149) [ellipses in text]

Left alone, Ozzie, under the pressure of Harriet's refusal to

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[10] C.f., for example, Glasser's clinical description of such injuries in *365 Days*, *op. cit.* above.

support him, directs his anger towards his family:

> They don't know how I feel. . . . How I'd like to beat Ricky with my fists till his face is ugly! How I'd like to banish David to the streets. . . . How I'd like to cut her tongue from her mouth. (*Ibid.* 150) [ellipses in text]

The possibility of Grenweller's being diseased also plays upon Ozzie's mind, although he never inquires about the *precise* nature of the affliction. He asks Harriet,

> You think its possible? I don't myself. I mean we knew Hank well. I think it's just something David got mixed up about and nobody corrected him. What do you think? (*Ibid.* 152)

His anxieties intensifying, he later accosts Harriet, "Christ how you must have beguiled me," and sees the love that he gave her being turned against him, "To imprison, detain, disarm and begin . . . to kill" (*Ibid.* 203). Confusion and uncertainty over the role that Grenweller has played in his life adds to his distress, and ultimately leads to his mental crisis.

As Ozzie approaches complete psychological collapse, he experiences an inability to function, disorientation, and a loss of identity. Even the furniture in the room appears alien to him: "I . . . don't like that chair. I think it's stupid . . . looking. . ." (*Ibid.* 180) [ellipses in text]. Someone throws an egg at him on the street; he views it as a calculated plot against him: "That egg had been boiled to just the right point so it was hard enough to hurt but not so hard it wouldn't splatter," and he increasingly displays symptoms of paranoia (*Ibid.* 199-200).

Ozzie's most sympathetic and tragic moment, however, arises when, in a scene reminiscent of King Lear's trying his daughters in absentia, he gathers three items of furniture, "*perhaps two chairs and a footstool,*" representing the members of his family, and holds a board meeting to explain and define his identity.[11] With his patriarchal role in jeopardy, Ozzie is reduced to distributing invoices listing all of his possessions, "every stick of furniture, pot, pan, every sock," with their corresponding dollar values, among the chairs.

> Two or three copies at all times, and you are to pass them out at the slightest provocation. Let people know who I am, what I've done. Someone says to you, "Who are you?" You say, "I'm Ozzie's son," "I'm Ozzie's wife." Who? they'll say. "Take a look at that, you tell 'em. Spit it out, give 'em a copy, turn on your heel and walk right out." (*Ibid.* 212)

His perceptions heightened in his chaotic and ecstatic mood, Zung materializes before him, standing in David's room; he shouts at her, "Let him alone. Let David alone" (*Ibid.* 212). With the clarity of perception of a mind under intolerable stress, he perceives in her all that stands between the family and David, and her presence permeates the household.

The climactic scene of the play is comprised of a surrealistic sequence of events culminating in Ozzie's grappling with Zung and strangling her. David, dressed in his combat fatigues, evokes sounds and images which invade the

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[11] See *King Lear* (III,vi.).

room and terrify its occupants. He talks of convoys of trucks approaching with dead bodies to distribute, and parodies Ozzie's meeting-of-the-board scene, in which the latter attempts to establish his identity through his materialistic possessions, with one creating a social identity predicated on invoices of the dead:

> They will become the floor and they will become the walls, the chairs. We'll sit in them, sleep. We will call them "home." We'll give them as gifts--call them "ring" and "pot" and "cup." No, no, its not a thing to fear. . . . We will notice them no more than all the others. (*Ibid.* 215)

Concurrent with David's speech, a sinister rumble of trucks invades the room, and a supernatural knocking is heard at the door. Driven to utter distraction, Ricky brings his guitar down on David's head, and Ozzie attacks Zung, strangling her.

The concluding scene portrays David's ritualistic murder-suicide, as the family, moving to protect itself, insists on his destruction. The act transforms him from antagonist to tragic figure, since, in a scapegoat ritual, he is sacrificed for the welfare of the community.[12] The family

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[12] John Holloway notes a similar aspect in *King Lear that reflects* the tragic genre of literature concerned with the ritual sacrifice of the scapegoat hero. He argues that the protagonist undergoes a metamorphosis from the status of a paragon of society to that of an outcast, and experiences a process of increasing alienation from his society which culminates in his being identified with its inherent evils. His death at the hands of his fellows fulfills the ritualistic function of the "expulsion of a scapegoat, the sacrifice of a victim, or aspects of both." Similarly, David has come to represent the collective guilt and liability of his culture, and his expulsion constitutes a therapeutic ritual designed to restore the equilibrium of the society. See John Holloway, *The Story of the Night* (London: Routledge

ritually provides him with a razor, towels and bowl to catch his own blood; his brother Rick helps him cut his wrists, and the family members witness the deed with satisfaction, noting, "He's happier," "We're all happier" (*Ibid.* 223). *Sticks and Bones* thus culminates in a rite of exorcism, as the family, identifying David as an diabolical threat to their well-being, expel him from their midst in a scapegoat ritual that restores the social and psychological equilibrium of the family unit.[13]

David's experience overseas has altered his perceptions, and his attempted reintegration into his former society results in his questioning of the tenets comprising the basis of the social cohesion and continuity of his community. Undermining the myths that the family lives by destroys its identity, its definitive relationships, and ultimately the fabric of reality itself. As Ozzie's world collapses around him, he cries out,

> I got a minor problem of ambiguity goin' for me here, is all, and you're exaggerating everything all out of proportion. You're distorting everything! All of you! (*And he whirls to leave.*) If I have to lie to live, I will! (*He runs*) (*Ibid.* 197)

For its very existence the family relies on a sense of a

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and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 135-54.

[13] An exorcism has been attempted earlier, with the introduction of the priest, Father Donald. That exorcism fails because David no longer shares the socio-psychological precepts giving credibility and power to both the priest and the ritual. (*Bones* 185-189)

shared past, shared experiences, social communion, and a sense of unity with which it confronts the outside world. David's extra-cultural perspective renders him alien and threatening, and his destruction becomes necessary for the family's continued survival.

David's perception of life and society is irrevocably altered precisely by experiences *associated* with the War rather than with actual battle situations. His truculent attitude towards his culture reflects the position taken by many veterans-turned-playwright who dealt with issues raised by Vietnam. When stripped of patriotic sentimentality and political doctrine, the Vietnam conflict appeared foolish; when it became obvious that America could not win, further continuation of the War became preposterous. It is little wonder, then, that the playwrights, and the characters whom they created, not only challenged the values and morals of the society that sent them into the conflict, but sought retribution in violent confrontation with that society. In several plays of homecoming, however, the playwright and the protagonist were one and the same, and the violence that Rabe had interpreted in dramatic form with fictional characters, eventually came to be acted out in the street. In these works, the real-life actions of returned veterans provided the material for dramatization.

Two homecoming plays based on fact were Adrienne Kennedy's *An Evening with Dead Essex* (1973) and Tom Cole's

Medal of Honor Rag (1975). Both plays are dramatizations of actual events involving the violent deaths of returned Vietnam veterans. Kennedy's work relies much more on theatrics than does Cole's, and the dramatization is a very clumsy and inept attempt at presenting the case of Mark Essex, who was killed by police after he had shot ten people dead and wounded thirteen from the top of Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge in New Orleans.[14] His former pastor noted, "Something happened in the Navy. After it, he just hated white folks" (*Chronicle* 1061).

Cole's work, on the other hand, is a sensitive treatment of the "post-Vietnam stress syndrome," based on the case of Sergeant Dwight D. Johnson, a Medal of Honor winner in Vietnam. Johnson's last act was an attempt to hold up a grocery store: according to reports, he drew a pistol, but never fired as the owner emptied his own revolver into him.[15] Cole's protagonist is Dale Jackson, whose story closely follows that of Johnson. Of the fictional character, Bigsby notes that he died "in some sense to neutralize the absurdity

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[14] A news account reads: "On January 9, 1973 New Orleans police killed a sniper, Black Vietnam veteran Mark Essex, after he had killed 10 people and wounded 13. Ballistics indicated that his rifle had killed a N.Y police cadet and wounded a policeman on the previous New Year's Eve." See Clifton Daniel, ed., *Chronicle of the 20th Century* (Mount Kisco, New York: Chronicle Publications, 1987), p. 1060.

[15] Lifton cites the case in "America's New Survivors." See Lifton 1981, and *The New York Times* obituary, May 26, 1971.

of both his own survival and of the whole war of which he was an ironic hero" (Bigsby 1985: 331).

Both Black veterans committed a form of suicide when problems of reintegration appeared to be insurmountable, and their situation, in many respects, is quite similar to that of Rabe's fictional David. The dramatizations of the last days of Johnson and Essex, however, differ radically in their interpretation of how the Vietnam War experience affected the American soldiers. Cole's protagonist experienced a "survivor guilt," which stemmed from his accidentally escaping his comrade's fate; Essex' problems are left undefined and unexplained, and his actions are never ameliorated or rationalized by any insights into the causes of his psychological anguish. Kennedy's *Essex* stands in relation to Cole's *Medal of Honor* much as Durang's *Vietnamization* does to Rabe's *Sticks and Bones*, but while Durang consciously parodies Rabe's philosophies, Kennedy unconsciously parodies the documentary form of drama.

The action of *Essex* proceeds from the premise that a theatre group is about to produce a play dealing with Essex and his death. The actors use their real names, and the director, his; the set is defined in white and black, the actors, with the exception of the Projectionist, are Black, and are dressed in light colours; the Projectionist is a Caucasian, dressed in black (*Essex*. 66). The dialectic of the work is established when the Projectionist flashes pictures

of Essex, his family, and newspaper headlines on a screen, while the Director reads excerpts from statements made by Essex, members of his family, and people associated with him.

The theatrics of *Essex* are very heavy-handed. As a picture of Essex's mother is shown on the screen, an actor cites a statement by a member of a Black dissident group after it was raided by the FBI on suspicion of plotting revolution:

> We wished we had a plot to kill white people--we had a lot to say to each other--about our confusions about the deep racial significance of the war between the U.S. and Viet Nam, white against non white--about our joblessness--we did want to kill but we had no plot--we had a lot to say and we still have a lot to say--about Mark Essex--to us he is a hero--we believe he was carrying a banner--we believe he was trying to save us--we believe he saw himself as a soldier of mercy--we have a lot to say about dead Essex. (*Ibid.* 68)

Neither in the immediate context nor in any subsequent action is the statement proved to be ironic, and it remains a basic premise of the work. As the director and the actor attempt to find the motivation for Essex' deeds, the actor notes, "After going over this material I do believe Essex was so deeply religious that he was torn to bits in spirit by having to serve alongside his white enemy" (*Ibid.* 68).

In order to bolster the theme of loss of innocence, various scenes are shown from Essex' childhood and juxtaposed with readings concerning the Vietnam War. The set requires a flag, which the Director suggests must be "the kind of flag that years ago was used in public schools" (*Ibid.* 69). The

set lights dim, a shot of Essex as a young boy is shown on the screen, and the cast sing a rendition of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" (*Ibid.* 69). The actors recite psalms and other passages from the Bible, and the conclusion is that the church has failed Essex, since "Christianity is a white man's religion" (*Ibid.* 72).

Subsequent scenes unsuccessfully attempt to equate the violence in Vietnam with that of American streets. The Director wants the readings about the War and reports about Essex' death to run into one another, and has reports of daily bomb tonnages dropped on North Vietnam followed by a description of the police shooting of Essex on a rooftop:

> Jimmy Essex was literally ripped apart by at least a hundred bullets. The police kept firing even after he went down, his body twitching with the impact of each slug and his rifle shattered behind him. (*Ibid.* 71)

The Director asks the Actress to "think of him riddled with all those bullets, think of him in Sunday School--Palm Sunday or Easter" (*Ibid.* 70). The play ends with a large picture of Essex on the screen and the entire cast reciting passages from the Book of Luke.

An Evening with Dead Essex merits a certain amount of attention in a discussion of the homecoming plays, since its abysmal failure to generate any sympathy for its protagonist (unless one shares his radical position) leads to comparison with others that do. Although Essex has been culturally conditioned in terms of religion and patriotism, and has

eventually turned against his society, no indication of his altered perspective is given other than his learning to hate white people in the Navy. Servicemen in the Navy, however, seldom came into contact with either civilian or military Vietnamese. His hatred of whites and American culture appears to have evolved within the social context rather than outside it, and thus his case differs significantly from that of protagonists such as Rabe's David, whose problems of reintegration arose primarily as a result of confrontation with their families.[16] Attempts to equate the violence in Essex's case with that of Vietnam are entirely gratuitous, and despite the psalm-singing, the play fails to present Essex in any light other than that of a conscienceless murderer.

A play that stands in rich contrast to Kennedy's play is Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag* (1975). While the authors of both works regard their protagonists--much as Rabe envisions his David--as sacrificial victims of a society that is embarrassed and threatened by the alienated returnees, Cole's play, like Rabe's, reveals the mental processes leading to homicidal and self-destructive acts. In *Medal of Honor Rag*, the stresses of daily life in a non-combat environment are exacerbated by those of Vietnam, and Cole presents another

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[16] For many non-fictional accounts of the problems that returned veterans faced in family situations, see the chapter entitled "Homecoming" in Mark Baker's *Nam* (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), pp. 239-268.

case in which a veteran's war experience impedes his social reintegration. Dale Jackson (D.J.), a soldier who has won his country's highest military award, faces intolerable psychological problems resulting from his sense of guilt about his own survival.

Cole's protagonist is fictional, but the events described are all drawn from experiences and testimony of the period. The setting is a psychiatrist's office in the Valley Forge Army Hospital, Pennsylvania, and the characters consist of D.J., a Doctor, and a Guard. The action covers a sixty-minute interview between the patient and the psychiatrist, and the discussion is dominated by the central image of the Medal of Honor, and the differences of perception about its bestowal and possession.

D.J. initially adopts a truculent and resentful attitude towards the Doctor, since the former has obviously been the focus of much psychological analysis on the part of other members of the psychiatric facility. D.J.'s initial commentary is, "They keep changing doctors" (*Rag* 123). The patient evidently has an elevated status in the hospital by virtue of the distinction associated with his award, and he is being passed around as a medical oddity. The present psychiatrist is a specialist in "impacted grief," and D.J.'s case exemplifies the "survivor guilt syndrome" described above by Lifton.

Confusion between doctor and patient arises almost

immediately as both, in attempting to establish the ground rules of communication, misinterpret the implications of "it."

> D.J.: The other doctor talked a lot about depression.
>
> DOCTOR: What did he say about it?
>
> D.J.: He said I had it.
>
> DOCTOR: Oh? And?
>
> D.J.: He thought I oughtta get rid of it. . . .
>
> DOCTOR: Why don't you get rid of it?
>
> D.J.: Sometimes that's what I want to do! Sometimes I want to throw it in their faces! (*Recollecting himself*). Now ain't that stupid? Like, whose face? (*Ibid.* 125)

The possession of the medal is quickly identified by both doctor and patient as the source of D.J.'s anxiety. The award has proven a mixed blessing: D.J.'s opinion is that his condition would be ignored if he did not occupy such a prominent place in the public consciousness:

> I'm a special case! Well I am, I am one big tidbit. I am what you call a "hot property" in this man's army. . . . I am a credit to my race. Did you know that? I am an honor to the city of Detroit, to say nothing of the state of Michigan, of which I am the only living Medal of Honor winner! (*Ibid.* 126).

While his award earns D.J. the attention of medical practitioners and the public, it has become a symbolic albatross hanging about his neck.

In attempting to describe how battlefield experiences altered his perceptions, D.J. recounts incidents that he witnessed in Vietnam. Once, shortly after arriving, D.J. was

riding in a truck, when small Vietnamese boys gave the troops "the finger." He muses, "Now where did they learn to do that? That ain't some old oriental custom. They musta learned it from our guys" (*Ibid.* 137). The soldiers, however, become incensed at the gesture and shoot the boys. D.J. feels implicated in the murders, although he had no part in them. He also relates how, in the middle of a battle, after prolonged and intense gunfire, men would suddenly stand up and allow themselves to be shot. He has no explanation for such irrational acts committed by the men in the field, or for his own actions that merited the award.

D.J. was given his citation for "conspicuous gallantry," after a tank, in which he had been a former crew member, was struck by enemy gunfire and destroyed. Arriving on the scene, and seeing the mutilated bodies of his dead comrades, D.J. went on a violent rampage, shooting enemy soldiers, and clubbing them to death when he ran out of ammunition (*Ibid.* 133). Invalided home as mentally deranged, he was subsequently awarded the medal some nine months later in a ceremony at the White House. He notes, "I got that medal because I went totally out of my skull and killed everything that crossed my sight" (*Ibid.* 143). The Doctor observes, "So, your mother was hugging you in the White House for doing what she had trained you all your life not to do--for being a killer" (*Ibid.* 143). D.J. is struck by the resemblance of his irrational killing of Vietnamese soldiers with the slaughter

of the children by his mates: both were unpremeditated, irrational acts that had little significance beyond the immediate circumstances. Neither the heroic nor the atrocious acts could be differentiated by any organizing logic or philosophy. In the context of his cultural conditioning, however, both were inexplicable barbaric acts.

The dramatic tension of the work is generated through D.J.'s alternating acceptance and rejection of the Doctor's efforts to help him. In one crisis, when D.J. challenges the Doctor's competence in treating conditions that he himself has not experienced, the latter confides that he, too, suffered from survivor guilt. As a young Jewish boy in WW II Poland, he was picked out of a group of people that included his family, for assignment to a labour unit. The rest of the group perished in extermination camps.

> I didn't know why I hadn't died when everyone else did. I thought it must have been magic, and that it was my fault the others were dead--a kind of trade-off, you see, where my survival accounted for their deaths. (*Ibid.* 136)

His personal confession eases the professional relationship between the two, but although he and D.J. have had similar experiences, D.J's guilt is compounded by his actions in Vietnam.

The symptoms of D.J.'s mental condition are an insensitivity to what is happening around him, a "numbness" of emotion, and a lack of concern for his life or that of others. In bouts of his worst depression, he experiences a

total inability to function. He is unable to rekindle his relationship with his former girlfriend, and observes, "My girl, Bea, might just prefer a man what can see and hear and think and feel things. And *do* things!" (*Ibid* 140). Apparently D.J.'s insensitivity extends to his sexual instincts and urges, and stems from anxieties about the behaviour of other returned veterans.

> You know that a vet down the block from me flipped out last week--jumped up in the middle of his sleep and shot his woman in bed, because he thought she was the Vietcong laying there to ambush him? (*Ibid.* 141)

D.J. is haunted by fears that his subliminal rage will erupt spontaneously, in uncontrolled violence, much as it did in Vietnam: "Man, if I lose my cool again--just freak out--what's to stop me from going up and down the streets of Detroit killing everything I see?" (*Ibid.* 141). D.J. was evidently not a violent person before his Vietnam experience, but now lives paralyzed by the fear that his Vietnam experience has unleashed those primitive instincts in him that had been dormant in his own culture.

The psychological stress that D.J. endures results in a paralysis of both his mental and physical functions. Commenting on the fact that D.J. wept openly as he received his medal, the Doctor observes:

> You wept for your dead friends, you wept for your dead self, for your whole life that slid away in the first fifteen seconds of that ambush on the road to Dakto. You were choking on your grief, a grief you couldn't share with anyone, and you became paralyzed by your guilt, and you still are,

> and you're going to be until *you* decide to make your own journey back through that membrane in some acceptable reality. . . . Some real life of your own. (*Ibid.* 143)

D.J.'s "dead self" is his irretrievable loss of innocence that sets him forever apart from his home culture. The mental and physical paralysis that accompanies psychological disintegration has been noted in other plays discussed earlier in this work. The mind, overloaded with conflicting and confusing perceptions of reality, inhibits normal mental and physiological functions.

Sensing that a major source of D.J.'s guilt is the acceptance of a medal that was earned at the cost of his comrades' lives, the Doctor attempts to lessen its significance for him. Instantly alert, D.J. shouts: "You want to take that medal away from me, don't you" (*Ibid.* 146). The Doctor replies:

> I don't want to take that medal, or anything else away from you. But when the time is ripe, when you are ready, you may not need it anymore. (*Ibid.* 146)

The full impact of the medal on D.J.'s sense of self-worth, and its significance as a complicating factor in his stressful condition, becomes apparent:

> Throw it away!? (*Angrily*) You're the one who's crazy. You know what I'd be without that medal? I'd be just another invisible Nigger, waiting on line [sic] and getting shit on just for being there! I *told* you about that man! You just don't *listen*! (*Ibid.* 146)

D.J.'s new cultural identity has become irretrievably linked with the very source of his guilt and anxiety, and the

conflicting impulses generated within him are a source of constant frustration. Being the guest of honor at fund-raising and recruiting affairs has raised him from obscurity into the limelight, but he is continually haunted by the ghosts of his comrades and the memory of his actions in Vietnam.

In support of his thesis, the Doctor asks D.J. whether he saw a "miracle-scene" on television a few nights previously. "Vietnam vets. Heroes? in wheelchairs, some of them; on crutches? At the Capitol steps? Washington? Throwing their medals away" (*Ibid.* 147).[17] In a scene of spiritual healing reminiscent of Lourdes, the veterans are attempting to effect their recovery through a rejection of the symbols that reflect the source of their crippling affliction. Momentarily taken aback, D.J. considers, then responds, "Doc, those dudes on TV are white" (*Ibid.* 148). Rejecting the Doctor's suggestion that he join one of the veterans' "Rap" groups, he maintains that the medal, for him, represents the transition "from rags to riches" (*Ibid.* 146). Because of complications in his perception of his own blackness and his place in society, he isolates himself not only from his own community, but also from the company of other returned veterans. His dilemma remains unresolved, and as the sixty-minute interview ends, he asks the Doctor to think of the

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[17] This scene has a basis in fact. On April 23, 1971, some seven hundred Vietnam vets demonstrating against the War threw their medals down on the Capitol steps. See Appendix B.

consequences should the Blacks rise up in revolt against the white society. At that point, D.J. comes perilously close to the viewpoint and stance of Mark Essex.

Distinctions between the two Black veterans, however, are deftly drawn in the remainder of the play, which consists of the Doctor's recounting the events of D.J.'s death. Armed with a revolver, he entered a store where the owner was known to possess a gun and the willingness to use it: "He took out a pistol, but never fired a shot while the manager emptied his own gun, at point-blank range into D.J.'s body" (*Ibid.* 149). The play ends with a quote from D.J.'s mother: "Sometimes I wonder if Dale tired of this life and needed someone else to pull the trigger" (*Ibid.* 149).[18] In his last act, Dale commits suicide in a passive manner, and incidentally makes his commentary on his society and his place in it.

The incidents and quotations in *Medal of Honor Rag* and *An Evening with Dead Essex* are all drawn from actual events, some reported in the newspapers of the time, others derived from case studies of returned veterans. The psychological trauma suffered by the veteran exacerbates the problems of reintegration with both his family and his culture; his experience overseas has altered his perceptions and his modified vision not only inhibits his personal acceptance of

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[18] The quote is taken from the obituary in *The New York Times*. See note 15 above.

the values of his society, but also makes him suspect in the eyes of its members with whom he must interact.

Both as an individual and a collective entity, the returned veteran represented an intrusion and a reminder of an unpopular war that had an ignominious conclusion. In the case of Mark Essex and Dwight Johnson, the problems of reintegration faced by white veterans are compounded by those associated with the Black community. Having shared equal risk and responsibility with the whites in their collective military duty and commitment, the returned Blacks saw intolerable injustices in the civilian world, for whose socio-political ethics and principles they and their comrades had contributed more than their just portion. Thus their return to their society made them more than ever aware of their minority status.

Two short plays that deal with family response to the return of the bodies of veterans are Ronald Ribman's *The Burial of Esposito* (1969), and Terence McNally's *Bringing It All Back Home* (1970). Both plays were written and performed at a time when public opinion was conclusively turning against the war. Ribman's work reveals family warfare erupting at the funeral reception of a soldier, Anthony Esposito, which is attended by his father, mother, and uncle. The father, Nick Esposito, sequesters himself from the gathering and addresses his son's casket. He rebukes Anthony in death for destroying his dream of a son joining in the

family barbershop business, and making it into the success it has failed to become. The immigrant Italian families have met with various degrees of prosperity in America: Nick's brother-in-law, Carlo, is a wealthy businessman; Nick himself ekes out a subsistence living, but does not have enough money to pay for his son's funeral.

In the scene, Nick places a tape-recorder on the coffin, and replays the funeral sermon. As the father expresses his grief, the voice of the minister invokes what appears to be almost a curse on the society:

> I am reminded of the English poet who said of those who died in another war that if the cause for which they died was not good, then those that sent them to it will have a heavy reckoning to make, that if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for those that led them to it. (*Esposito*. 67)

Nick talks to Anthony as though he were alive, explaining the family's adverse financial situation and the reluctance of Rudy, the dead soldier's brother, to wear his slain sibling's clothes. Nick reveals that Anthony has gone to war against his father's wishes, but the latter's depiction of the family's desperate financial straights indicates that Anthony had few other options in life.

Carlo enters and triggers a bitter confrontation. He offers to pay for the funeral, and coincidentally reveals that he is presently financing Rudy's education. Nick believed that Rudy was paying his way with a scholarship. Carlo castigates Nick for an old-country sense of pride

precluding his acceptance of financial help which would have kept Anthony in school and out of the army. When Nick indicates that he will not allow Rudy to accept Carlo's money, the latter responds:

> You go and tell him that. Go ahead! You go out and tell him he's not going to school. Maybe you send him into the Army like Tony. Okay? You send him into the Army. (*Ibid.* 73)

He adds: "You're living in another world, Nick," and departs, leaving the father alone with his sense of failure, and guilt over his son's death.

Mentally distraught, Nick envisions the covering flag sliding off the coffin, the lid rising, and his son emerging to speak to him. Raising himself up, Anthony reassures his father that all will be well:

> It's all right, papa. I saved a lot of money in the Army.I can pay for everything now. Rudy and I will go to school together and when we graduate we'll both be doctors and we'll make a lot of money and you and mama can move to Long Island and live in a big house with me and Rudy. (*Ibid.* 75)

Anthony continues with inspiring promises of prosperity and future happiness, and the father, capturing the dream, embraces his son. The outer world reasserts itself when, after Anthony returns to his coffin, Carlo and Nick's wife, Angela, enter the sanctuary. Refusing to relinquish the vision, the demented father hammers on the casket, summoning the son to repeat his promises to the rest of the family: "*His rage increases each time his fist slams down, each time he calls out.* Tony! Tony! Tony!" (*Ibid.* 76). The box,

however, is tightly sealed, indicating that it is a "non-viewable remains" consignment.

In *The Burial of Esposito*, Ribman creates a vignette of the grief endured by the family of a dead soldier. Nick's response to his son's homecoming is particularly interesting in the light of Lifton's comments above regarding survivor guilt. While such plays as *Medal of Honor* deal with the guilt of the returned veteran, Ribman shows how that guilt becomes a disruptive factor in the minds of survivors who never went to war, yet had to deal with a personal sense of loss. The survivor guilt syndrome affects the bereaved parent in much the same way as the veteran feels guilt about his own survival in the face of his comrades' deaths. Nick's guilt extends to the entire society, as the priest observes in his service.

Esposito's death and burial invites an examination of the principles upon which the war is based, in order to ascertain whether, indeed, he died for a just and worthy cause. If he did not, the shadow of the priest's invocation looms over all who send men to a dishonorable death. While the work does not address any of the issues surrounding the prosecution of the war, such as patriotism or anti-Communism, its pathos is embodied in the price that many American families paid for their country's pursuit of abstract political goals in Asia.

Terence McNally's *Bringing It All Back Home* gives a

completely opposite family perspective. Leaning towards heavy-handed farce, its abstract characters--titled Son, Daughter, Mother, Father--are essentially negative stereotypes representing facets of a superficial and inconsequential culture. While the play's unrelieved cynicism limits its treatment of the ideas raised, its unflattering picture of the American family is intended for an audience which would see itself reflected in the attitudes and responses of the cardboard characters. Its presentation in a largely anti-war atmosphere underscored the complacency with which the prosecution of the war was being treated by some segments of the community.

The initial action of the piece depicts sibling rivalry within a middle-class family in "Milford Haven." Although the family has received notice that a coffin bearing the body of a slain son, Jimmy, will arrive that day, life appears to be quite normal. Son is smoking marijuana and talking on the telephone with a girl; he is discussing various adolescent concerns such as drugs, acne, who is pregnant, and who is deviant. Daughter, referred to by Son as "slut," enters: she has had her first abortion some months earlier, and Mother proudly notes, "Some of the nicest girls in town have had abortions" (*Home* 34). Daughter chides Son because he is still a virgin, and suggests that perhaps he is a homosexual. Son responds to her taunts by implying that she has had sexual relations with the entire football team. Mom is "in the

dryer" preparing her hair for the arrival of a news team, which intends to cover the family's reception of their son's remains as a "human interest feature" for the "Six O' Clock News" (*Ibid.* 34, 40).

The arrival of Jimmy's casket occasions little emotional response from the family. Son flips the delivery men a coin, noting, "What kind of tip do you expect from a minor?"; Daughter regards them with a sexual interest: "And hi there to you!" (*Ibid.* 27). Regarding the coffin, the pair try to remember what Jimmy looked like, but, unsuccessful, they admit that he was "a hell of a guy," and turn to a discussion of the merits of LSD. Father enters, dressed in his bowling shirt. He ogles and fondles his daughter, criticizes his son for not being out on the street, "playing football, knocking around, getting your nose bloodied" (*Ibid.* 29). Upon noticing the casket, Father remarks that Jimmy was the

> most masculine son a father ever had. And now he's dead. You know, that land mine tore his stomach right open. He never knew what hit him. (*Ibid.* 30)

Neither sibling pauses to reflect on this, but turn instead to a discussion of their respective neuroses. Daughter is undergoing psychoanalysis, supposedly for the trauma suffered during her unwanted pregnancy, and Son suggests that he would like to try it too. Father dismisses his request on the grounds that psychoanalysis is not masculine, and also because, "the next person in this house to see an analyst is your mother" (*Ibid.* 30).

Father's concept of masculinity reflects the worst stereotypes of the middle-aged American male. He offers a description of an evening with his bowling team:

> A bunch of men, real men, regular guys, drinking beer, horsing around. The cigar smoke gets so thick in there, you can hardly see the pins for it. And oh brother, let me tell you our talk gets rough! (*Ibid.* 30)

In support of his claim to masculinity, Father recounts how, on the previous night, he "killed" thirteen cans of beer, a big one-three!" (*Ibid.* 30). His statement that he admires the army because "it really straightens these boys out" (*Ibid.* 38), creates a raw irony, given the fact that his son all the while is laid out in the coffin behind him. In search of sexual titillation, he makes obscene phone calls to numbers selected at random from the telephone directory.

Mother also elicits little sympathy. She enters deploring the state of society, the burning of draft cards, men wearing long hair, dirt, and "rampant liberalism" (*Ibid.* 31). In response to a query, she notes, "Did I see Jimmy?! I'll say I saw Jimmy! I'll probably trip over it and break my neck" (*Ibid.* 31). Pondering the coffin, she observes,

> The most patriotic son a mother ever had. And now he's dead. They say he never knew what hit him. That dirty Communist land mine tore his stomach right open. It's such a big box. I don't remember him being so long. Maybe he grew more over there. (*Ibid.* 31)

The Mother, like the other members of the family, appears to be obsessed with the manner of Jimmy's death, rather than its significance for the family. There is a subtle implication

that Americans are more interested in the process of events--the how rather than the why--than in their ultimate motives or consequences.

After the family leaves to change for the upcoming interview, Jimmy emerges from his coffin to "clear the air" and "get the facts straight" for the audience. Addressing it, he apologizes for the family's forgetting what he looks like, noting, "I couldn't answer the same questions about them" (*Ibid.* 32). He takes exception to the family's often repeated statement, "he didn't know what hit him," and observes, "When I stepped on that mine, I knew something had hit me, I'll tell you that" (*Ibid.* 32). He expresses no more sense of loss than does his family. While attempting to clarify the manner of his death, he does not imbue it with any particular meaning other than that of personal inconvenience. Giving a peace sign, he lies back in his box.

The concern with process is also prominent in the production of the human interest segment for the Six O' Clock News. Miss Horne and her production crew arrive to interview the family--a task that they have evidently performed many times before. A svelte Black interviewer, Miss Horne, otherwise known as "Fatima, beloved of Ali X," refers to the family as "honkies," but accepts a drink from Father, noting, "What the Muslims don't know won't hurt 'em" (*Ibid.* 36). As the cameras roll, Miss Horne attempts to elicit some human interest responses from the family in terms of their

recollections of Jimmy: Son suggests that he was "cool"; Daughter replies that "he had the usual interests"; Father posits that "he was a real man"; and Mother adds that "he was a real American" (*Ibid.* 37). In response to Horne's question, "Is this a moral war?" Son replies, "Don't look at me"; Daughter responds, "I'm just in high school"; Father retorts, "Real men don't ask questions like that" (*Ibid.* 37).

Desperate to interpret the significance of the event for her viewers, Horne probes for some expression of grief or philosophical rationalization on the part of the family in order to lend some significance to Jimmy's death. In response to such questions as "Can you describe your emotions when you got the news about Jimmy?" and "Why did Jimmy die?" she obtains only the aforementioned platitudes about Jimmy's being a man, dying like a man, and being a real American. Mother, however, does muster some emotion: she sheds a few tears, and announces, "My son died an American! Mothers of the World, may you live to see the day your sons die American!" (*Ibid.* 39). Son is able to add that Jimmy died because he stepped on a land mine and "had his stomach ripped open," and Daughter thinks that it is all a matter of "civics" (*Ibid.* 39).

Driven to frustration, Horne turns from sarcasm to cruelty in her addressing the family. She asks if the family knows that Jimmy indeed did know what hit him, and that his last moments were "forty-five minutes of pain and terror

before he lost consciousness"; she adds, "He sat under a tree holding his large intestine in the palm of his hand" (*Ibid.* 40). In response to Horne's continued attack on the family's complacency: "Your son never knew *why* he was over there"; "Do any of you know *anything*"? Father responds, "Look, lady, take your left wing politics somewhere else" (*Ibid.* 40). Leaving the house, Horne retorts, "You can see yourself at six o' clock" (*Ibid.* 41).

Crude and harsh in its caricature of social attitudes towards the war, McNally's piece seems designed to remove any remaining doubts about the validity of the conflict at a time when public outrage was reaching its peak. Jimmy emerges for a final statement, noting, "The main reason I wish that I was alive is so I could figure out why I was dead" (*Ibid.* 42). His parting words leave a challenge for the living, but, reconsidering his audience, he observes "Do us all a favor. Don't watch the six o'clock news (*He starts to make the peace sign, decides not to this time and lies back slowly*)" (*Ibid.* 42). In his parting commentary and gesture, Jimmy indicates that the dead are irrevocably alienated from society by the insensitivity of television (and theatre) viewers to the circumstances surrounding war deaths. Responding to Horne's final utterance that "your life has been relatively unaffected by Jimmy's death," Father observes, "Well, you know, life continues. That's the beautiful thing about death, life continues" (*Ibid.* 38). He thus unconsciously reinforces

his son's perception of a society insensitive to the reasons of death and destruction in Vietnam.

The last play of reintegration to be discussed in this chapter is Emily Mann's *Still Life* (1980). Mann bases her work on a distillation of interviews of Vietnam War veterans, and others who had close contact with them. She comments that "a specialist in the brain and its perceptions" told her after seeing a performance, that the play is constructed as a "traumatic memory" in which each character struggles with his traumatic recollection of events (*Mann* 215). There are three characters: Mark, an ex-marine, Cheryl, his wife and mother of his children, and Nadine, his friend, a divorcee, and some ten to fifteen years his senior. Both Mark and Nadine are artistically inclined and share an appreciation of aesthetic works. Mann suggests that each character can occupy a separate stage area, since, apart from the plays's last moments, they direct their lines to the audience (*Ibid.* 214).

The play is a sensitive treatment of problems of reintegration seen from the perspective both of the veterans and those who encountered them after their return. It is also one of the best presentations in dramatic literature of Vietnam, of the effects of the War on the American soldier, and for American society. Cast in poetic form, the statements of the three characters intersect and overlap, clarifying, and commenting on their own and each other's mental state and perceptions, and establishing relationships between them.

There are very few extended speeches in the work; most are less than five or six lines in length, and many are only two or three. Thus, there is a very intricate weaving of impressions and experiences that constitute the action of the piece. The ubiquitous slide presentation that serves as a dramatic mainstay for many plays of the time, frames the work, and occurs several times within it. In *Still Life*, however, the slide presentation represents the work's thematic thrust, and its central metaphor.

The play has a complex structure, since it relies on a "stream of consciousness" motif based on the reminiscences and observations of the characters. Typical of such an informing structure, the dramatic development tends not to be linear, but evolves from a montage of images and impressions. Rather than exploiting the drama inherent in face-to-face dialogue, with the associated emotion of stimulus/response and linguistic one-upmanship, the work relies instead on presentational statements which create a multi-faceted picture of the past and present lives of the characters. The sequences of intersecting internal monologues reveal personalities that, while interacting within a social context, are essentially isolated; the characters speak out at the world from behind a protective emotional anonymity.

The central theme of the work concerns the role that violence plays in the human consciousness, how that violence emerges as a consequence of cultural conditioning, and how it

is incorporated into social relationships. The nature of violence associated with war is compared to that of contemporary American society, and the manner in which the social stresses in that society foment domestic conflict is shown. Social phenomena such as courtship, marriage, childbirth, divorce, alcoholism, sexual frustration, religious upbringing and patriotism, contrasts in perspective between members of different generations, all create stresses that have the potential to erupt in some form of aggressive and hostile behaviour. Often the characters reveal what appears to be a sado-masochistic form of relationship: life is an ongoing experience of hurting and being hurt, of arbitrarily seizing power and relinquishing it. Violence, in its various psychological and physical aspects, is portrayed as an inevitable integer in male/female equations.

The central metaphor of the play is the art of portraiture, which stems from the human need to externalize, to render in concrete form, psychological stresses. The characters create impressions of one another in both a literal and a figurative sense; they also attempt, through a process of totemism, to maintain psychological equanimity and to forge a link between their inner consciousness and the material world. Mark opens the play with a series of slides depicting Cheryl in her pregnancy; a photograph of himself, taken by Cheryl, that has a "halo of light around his head"; and a picture of a leg and boot, which, Mark claims, he made

"because if I ever lost it, / I wanted to remember what it looked like" (*Ibid.* 218). According to Nadine, when she first met Mark, "he said that one of his major projects / was to face all the relationships he'd been in / where he'd violated someone" (*Ibid.* 219). Upon his return home, Mark has become intrigued with photography, and has opened a supply shop that Nadine patronizes.

Mark's fascination with reproducing his war and post-war experiences and sensations has evolved into a bizarre obsession. Cheryl discovers that Mark keeps jars in the basement in which he creates small psychoscapes:

> He had a naked picture of me in there / Tied to a stake with a string. / And there was all this broken glass, / and I know Mark. / Broken glass is a symbol of fire. (*Ibid.* 221)

The jar also contains "a razor blade and some old negatives of the blood stuff." Cheryl assumes that the jar is some sort of hostile statement directed at her, but Nadine notes: "Those jars he makes are brilliant, humorous. / He's preserving the war" (*Ibid.* 222). Neither assumption is accurate.

Later in the play, Cheryl reveals that Mark has had her pose nude for a series of "blood" photographs:

> There's a kitchen knife sticking into me, / but all you can see is reddish-purple blood. / It's about five feet high. / He had it hanging in the shop! / In the street! (*Ibid.* 241)

The graphic expressions of Mark's inner turmoil are viewed indulgently by Nadine and Cheryl as products of his

therapeutic hobby, and also as a form of commentary on society. Mark, however, has brought home many photographs of war scenes, and his fascination with reproductions indicates that he is attempting to translate the psychological horror of war experience into a form that can be comprehended both emotionally and intellectually by his society. He does this by interpreting that experience in a medium which utilizes particular cultural referents, translating, as it were, the group photographs taken in Vietnam into graphic reproduction portraying the experience behind the picture. For himself, Mark is externalising, encapsulating, and controlling that violence in a *still life* form in order to ameliorate its presence within him.

Mark's jars, however, are also symptomatic of a deeper psychological response, both to the new cultural situation of Vietnam, and of his homecoming. The ritualistic fetishes represented in the jars are indicative of a primal function of a mind that attempts to neutralize evil forces through a fixation and manipulation of concrete images of abstract supernal forces.[19] Michael Herr gives accounts of the oddities displayed by soldiers who attempted to avert death and injury in war by wearing various costumes (including Batman outfits), and by a multitude of other fetishes:

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[19] For a detailed analysis of the social function of the fetish and totem in myth and ritual, in reference to a given society, see J.W. Fenn, "Taiwanese Folk Ritual: The Social Physics of Drama," unpublished M.A. thesis, Soochow University, Republic of China, 1981.

> Guys stuck the ace of spades in their helmet bands, they picked relics off an enemy they killed, a little transfer of power; they carried around five-pound Bibles from home, crosses, St. Christophers, mezuzahs, locks of hair, girlfriend's underwear, snaps of their families, their wives, their dogs, their cows, their cars, pictures of John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Martin Luther King, Huey Newton, the Pope, Ché Guevara, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, wiggier than cargo cultists. (Herr 57)

In a manner similar to that in which cultural fetishes and tokens serve as an intermediary between the metaphysical and material worlds, Mark's psychoscapes are a product of his attempts to readjust to his home environment.

The use of fetishes and totemistic devices to establish and assert one's potency has been a part of Mark's life both before and during the War. He reveals that he was uncertain about his behaviour in battle, but that he had "read his Hemingway" (*Ibid.* 220).[20] As he attempts to define what a marine is, he comments on those aspects which distinguish marines from civilian Americans, and particularly focuses on the rigorous training and indoctrination:

> There was this whole trip that we were really special. / And our training was really hard, / like this whole Spartan attitude. / And there was this whole thing too / I told Nadine about that really knocked me out. / There was this whole ethic: / You do not leave your man behind on the field. / I love that. (*Ibid.* 226)

As a counter to the uncertainties of the battlefield, the men

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[20] Perhaps Mark has read Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1932), in which the victor in a bullfight is awarded the bull's ears. The taking of enemy ears is a common occurrence in real-life accounts of the Vietnam War. See Mark Baker's *Nam, op. cit.* above, p. 63.

create a sense of security even there through a camaraderie which is not present in civilian life. As part of the definition of the military sub-culture, the bodies of the fallen are endowed with a sacred quality, which not only enhances the communal spirit of the group, but also informs the society with a workable ethic.

After a battle, great care is taken to retrieve the bodies of the dead, since corpses become objects for desecration on both sides. Mark talks about the mutilated body of a comrade that was left behind:

> They had tied him to a palm tree, / and his balls were in his mouth. / They'd opened up his stomach and it had been pulled out. / And I knew . . . / Nobody was going to do that to me. (228)[21]

Mark relates the bizarre behaviour of his fellows who responded to the sub-culture of the battlefield by indulging in regressive totemism and bizarre ritual: his friend, R.J., carries a machete in order to cut off the head of a dead enemy, and there is fornication with the dying and the dead. In reference to the act of raping, and then killing the woman, Mark notes, "It was an abuse of the dead. / We got very sacred about taking the dead" (*Ibid.* 240).[22] In response

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[21] Members of the American forces engaged in the practice of cutting off ears to serve as proof of enemy casualties. Some developed this into a fetish and wore strings of ears about their necks. See Mark Baker's *Nam, op. cit.* above, p. 243.

[22] The practice of raping a woman and killing her has a solid basis in fact. The term "double veteran" designated a soldier who had carried out such an act. See Mark Baker, *Nam, op. cit.* above, p. 298.

to the absence on the battlefield of the organizing social and cultural myths of their former society, the soldiers develop a "death cult" mentality based on the sharing of arcane knowledge and experience.

The cult's vitality is enhanced by the tremendous power that the men experience in their individual and communal acts of violence. Mark expresses his affection for his gun: "I took that gun everywhere I went. / I just couldn't live without that gun" (*Ibid.* 256). The legitimacy of the cult, however, is limited to a certain time, place and experiential matrix. Upon returning home, the exhilarating experience of the war is much reduced by a reassessment of the morality of the deeds perpetrated in the light of the values of the civilian culture. In reference to his actions in Vietnam, and his subsequent feelings, Mark notes,

> It's become a *personal* thing. The guilt. / There IS the guilt. / It's getting off on having all that power every day. / Because it was so nice. / I mean, it was power . . . / I had the power of life and death. / I'm sitting here now deep down thinking about it . . . / It's like the best dope you've ever had. / The best sex you've ever had. (*Ibid.* 230-231)

Unfortunately, the indiscriminate use of power and unbridled sex are not conducive to order on the home front, and the dynamics which gave the battlefield cult and its members substance and validity are no longer valid.

It is most likely that Mark is not aware of his altered perceptions while in Vietnam, and that he acts unconsciously when he sends home relics of his wartime "accomplishments."

Cheryl, however, notes,

> I don't know anyone who cares so much about his parents. / He's trying to save them. / Like he sent home this bone of a man he killed, from Nam. / It was this neat attempt to demand for them to listen, / about the war. (*Ibid.* 223)

This is probably Cheryl's naive and ironic interpretation of Mark's act, since he also sends home other relics for his own personal satisfaction. He proudly demonstrates a grenade belt to the audience:

> This belt is an artifact. / I took it off somebody I killed. / It's an NVA belt. / I sent it home. I think it was some kind of a trophy. / This is the man's blood. / That's a bullet hole. / This particular fellow had a belt of grenades / that were strapped to his belt. / See where the rust marks are? (*Ibid* 242)

Rather than holding the relics to be some kind of an anti-war statement, as suggested by Cheryl, Mark views them as cult marks which reflect his proficiency in battle.

On his return to the United States, Mark attempts to carry forward the ideas behind the experiences that formed such a large part of his life in Vietnam. He organizes a drug-dealing gang because he is exhilarated by the thrill of clandestine exercises, and his Vietnam friend, R.J., joins him. Mark notes, "We were doing the war all over again" (*Ibid.* 229). Their escapades fail, however, as Mark is arrested, and R.J. is shot to death in a bank robbery in Chicago. As a well-decorated veteran of the War, Mark expects that his achievements will carry over into the civilian society, and allow him a special status within it; he is

therefore genuinely surprised by his treatment at the hands of the local authorities: "I was really highly decorated, awards, / I was wounded twice. / I looked really good" (*Ibid.* 244). His rejection by his society generates feelings of alienation:

> I was kind of paranoid. / I thought everybody knew . . . / I thought everybody knew what I did over there, / and that they were against me. (*Ibid.* 251)

Distanced from his society by his experience and perceptions, his sense of guilt and isolation leads him to express his anxieties in the form of "blood" portraits and miniature psychoscapes.

Upon returning home Mark had to deal not only with the problems of his own readjustment, but also with those of the members of his society. Nadine is a person whose consciousness is dominated by a reaction against her Catholic upbringing, and she generally considers anxiety and frustration to be products of hapless religious conditioning. She insists that Mark is angry because "your good Catholic parents sent you to slaughter," and she claims that his father is ashamed of himself: "When you let your son go to war / for all the wrong reasons, / you can't face your son" (*Ibid.* 255). Mark, however, gives his own reasons for his disagreement with his parents. When they hear that someone has gone on a rampage and shot a lot of people, they suggest that the man should be executed. Mark's response is, "Hell, what the fuck, / why didn't you ever listen . . . / You want

to hear what I did? / It's a real confession" (*Ibid.* 268) [ellipses in text]. Mark's sense of guilt stems not from his religious upbringing, but from his actions in Vietnam--yet a guilt complex is something both he and Nadine share.

Mark interprets the presence of crime on the streets in the light of his military training and experience in Vietnam. His perception contrasts with that of his parents:

> Sometimes I look at a news story. / I look at something someone goes to prison for here, / I think about it. / There's no difference. / It's just a different place. / This country had all these rules and regulations / and then all of a sudden they removed these things. / Then you came back and try to make your life / in that society where you had to deal with them. / You find that if you violate them, / which I found, / you go to jail, / which I did. (*Ibid.* 267)

The transition from the status of one who, as a combatant, defined cultural behavioral parameters, and one who is perceived as a social pariah has complications for both the veteran and the society which he represents. Aggressive action, while commendable and necessary for survival in the heat of battle, is unacceptable at home, and violent instincts must be suppressed and restrained, or rechanneled.

The suppression of the natural behavioral responses of the returned veterans has a parallel in the civilian population. Nadine views herself as a victim of her Catholic upbringing; she believes that her natural impulses were suppressed, that she was kept ignorant about sexual matters, and that she was limited in her creative aspirations. Of particular concern to Nadine are the terrors associated with

childbirth. Interspersed with Mark's observations on the horrors of war, Nadine offers her own perspective:

> You know what war is for women? / A friend of mine sent me this line: / I'd rather go into battle three times than give birth once. / She said Medea said that. / I stuck it on my refrigerator. / I showed it to Mark. He laughed for days. (*Ibid.* 223)

The terror and fear that she associates with childbirth is as real and intense as that experienced by soldiers in battle.

Nadine's account of her delivery is as emotionally intense as Mark's description of events on the battlefield. Nadine claims that she knew nothing about pregnancy: "I was a good Catholic girl / and nobody talked about such things" (*Ibid.* 224). The experience was shattering for her,

> They had to give me a tracheotomy. / My trachea was too small. / They went running out of the operating room to get / the right equipment. / Everyone thought I was going to die. (*Ibid.* 225)

She adds: "I woke up in the hospital room with tubes in my throat, / stitches in my belly. I could hardly breathe" (*Ibid.* 225). She experienced such a difficult birth that her fear of subsequent pregnancies led to complications in her married life.

Nadine's fear of sex leads her to alcoholism and the externalization of her anxieties in aggressive, violent acts against her husband. Under the influence of alcohol, Nadine beats him, and a sado-masochistic relationship develops:

> My husband and I were / *grooving* on our fights. / I mean really creative. . . . Okay, I hit my husband. A lot. / See, I'm capable of it. / Okay--I was really drunk, really mad. / And I beat him up and do you know what he said to me? / He turned to me

> after he took it and he said: / I didn't know you cared that much. (*Ibid.* 234)

In the domestic situation, violence becomes the mode of communication between husband and wife. It defines a relationship in which beatings are interpreted as demonstrations of affection, and forms the basis of the common bond between the couple.

In a curious distortion of perception, Mark's association with violence in the war, and his bizarre renditions of internal anxieties have an enormous appeal for Nadine. He tells her that he beats his wife, and in his presence, Nadine becomes masochistic, as if his greater violence somehow transcends her own, and subsumes hers to his. In her own mind, she sees military and domestic violence as being of a kind, as having common roots in a guilt associated with repressive religious conditioning:

> You know why they went crazy out there? / It's that totally negative religion. / It makes you fit to kill. / Those commandments . . . / Take an infant and start him out on the whole world with / THOU SHALT NOT . . . / and you're perpetually in a state of guilt / or a state of revolt. [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 240)0

There are strong implications in the play that Nadine, fascinated by Mark's aura of violence, has separated from her husband in order to have a prolonged affair with Mark. She eventually separates from her husband, and signs the divorce papers because the "last time he came over, I knew if there'd been a gun around, I'd 've killed him" (*Ibid.* 236).

Cheryl's situation is in many ways similar to that of

Nadine's, since her life is also dominated by the presence of violence, and she is likewise inhibited by her religious upbringing. Mark met Cheryl when he returned from Vietnam; he was attracted to her because "she had this long hair and she was really thin. / I thought she was really, uh, / really American" (*Ibid.* 224). In an attempt to recapture the permissive lifestyle of the sixties, they lived communally with another couple, and Cheryl conceived her first child in this milieu. Their subsequent marriage rapidly deteriorates, but Cheryl, because of her Catholic background, refuses to divorce Mark, which leads Nadine to observe that Cheryl is punishing him in some way for the illegitimate offspring (*Ibid.* 248).

Cheryl lives in constant fear of Mark: she is terrified by his portraits and his jars, and by his irrational violent outbursts. Both Cheryl and he are near alcoholics, and he admits beating her: "I see the war now through my wife . . . / I mean I've hit my wife. / But I was always drunk" (*Ibid.* 233). Cheryl, however, disregards Mark's excuse for the violent outbreaks, noting, "He blames it on the war . . . but I want to tell / you . . . don't let him" (*Ibid.* 221). The basis of her reasoning is that her brother, who has not been to the war, also beats his wife, and that the wife, driven to distraction, has shot her two-year old son in an act of revenge against the father. Cheryl assumes a physiological basis for the condition, noting, "They think something

actually changes in the blood or the lungs when you feel this way" (*Ibid.* 230-31). Like Nadine, she also contemplates violence: she says that she will kill Mark if he beats her or her son again (*Ibid.* 233).

In keeping with the central metaphor of the play, the monologues of the characters gradually create a portrait of a society in which violence is a basic, ubiquitous form of expression. It is inherent in the individual, and underlies the relationships between him and other members of the community; by extension, such violence proceeds from the home culture to embrace others. The monologues are intermeshed to such an extent that, whether individually, socially, or culturally generated, violence appears as a common and constant function underlying all human actions. Accounts of battlefield violence are intertwined with those of domestic violence on the home front, and it indeed appears that the veterans are entering another war zone upon their return. Nadine gives her view of the veterans' predicament:

> We took away all their toys . . . their armor. Now we look at a man in uniform-- / a Green Beret, a marine-- / and we're embarrassed somehow. / We don't know who they are anymore. / What's a man? Where's the model? They were programmed to fuck, / Now they have to make love. / And they can't do it. / It all comes down to fucking versus loving. / We don't like them in the old way anymore. / And I don't think they like us much. / Now that's a war, huh? (*Ibid.* 238-9)

The survival conditioning of both front line soldiers and of those who remained home inevitably involves coming to terms with violence in its many forms.

The violence of war and problems on the home front are masterfully incorporated in the military euphemism for describing an engagement with the enemy. After relating how a man won a Purple Heart for being wounded in a bordello after refusing to pay a woman for her services, Mark notes, "To me, a Purple Heart meant it was something you got / when you were wounded, and you bled, / You were hurt during a contact" (*Ibid.* 241). In the play, injuries suffered during "contact" refer to both military engagements and male/female relationships on the home front. As Nadine observes, "You know, all Mark did was-- / He brought the war back home / and none of us could look at it" (*Ibid.* 259). Contact on the battlefield is no less destructive than that at home.

After establishing that violence lurks in the background of much of human experience and forms the basis of a wide range of relationships, the play moves to a resolution by showing how each of the characters comes to terms with his own aggressive instincts and those of others. Mark, also a Catholic, is haunted by the guilt of one particular experience in Vietnam, and is obsessed by a fear for the well-being of his children, and for his relationship with Cheryl:

> The war is the base of all our problems. / It's guilt . . . / It's a dumb thing . . . / It makes no sense logically . . . / but I'm afraid this karma I built up / of hurting . . . / there are children involved . . . / like it's all going to balance out / at the expense of my kids. [ellipses in text] (*Ibid.* 267)

To free his conscience, he makes a public confession of his sins. After his friend had been killed by a booby-trap, he accosted a Vietnamese family:

> I knew that they were working with the VC infrastructure. / I demanded that they tell me. / They wouldn't say anything. / I just wanted them to confess before I killed them. / And they wouldn't. / So I killed their children. / and then I killed them. With all the power I had. / I couldn't beat them. / They beat me. (*Ibid.* 269)

Mark realizes that his vengeful "act of justice" alters nothing; it does not change the fact of his friend's death, nor does it provide a just retribution for the circumstantial guilt of the Vietnamese. Violence is only an expression of an inner anguish perpetrated solely for its own destructive end.

Mark, Cheryl and Nadine all experience the healing effect of his confession. Nadine acknowledges the violent aspect of her own inner struggle, and also Mark's therapeutic effect on her:

> Mark has become a conscience for me. / Through him --I've come to understand the violence / in myself . . . and in him, and in all of us. / And I think if we can stay aware of that, / hold on to that knowledge, / maybe we can protect ourselves / and come out on the other side. (*Ibid.* 271)

Cheryl has separated from Mark, and intends to return to the Church for stability and order; she has considered herself to have been part of the radical, rebellious, free-love sub-culture, but now senses a lack of social identity, cohesion, and continuity:

> I'm past the sixties. / I want to go back to the Church. / And Mark just will not understand the importance of this for me. / I mean, when there's

> no father around, / the Church shows some order you know. (*Ibid.* 266)

Mark, though, does not desert her: "It's like the Marine Corps. / Cheryl is like a comrade. She's walking wounded now. / You don't leave a comrade in the field" (*Ibid.* 261).

The closing moments of the work reveal a spiritual communion among the characters, their society, and their past. Mark recites a list of his dead comrades, and Nadine expresses her love for him; her eyes and Cheryl's meet for the first time, as the latter describes the devastation that the War period has brought to their lives and their society. Cheryl states that the generation of men and women that came of age during the war suffered the most: "So I think our generation, / the hippie generation, shortly before and after, / are gonna be the ones that suffer. / Because ninety percent of the men never straightened out"; she also affirms, however, that "for every woman who has her beliefs, / there's a man that matches" (*Ibid.* 272), and sees in that simple philosophy the means of salvation for her and her generation. For Cheryl, the prospect of reconciliation resides in a reaffirmation of the family unit, and the society and the culture.

The last image of the play is a "still life" projected on the screen: Mark points to his photograph of two grapefruit, an orange, and a broken egg, with a grenade in the center on a dark background. There is also some fresh bread, and a fly on the fruit. From far away, Mann suggests,

it looks like an ordinary "*Still Life.*" Mark notes,

> My unit got blown up. / It was a hard contact. / We got hit very hard. / The Marine Corps sends you / this extra food, fresh fruit, bread, / a reward / when you've had a heavy loss. (*Ibid.* 274)

While the play is a powerful and moving piece, it is not an exorcism of social violence such as that of other homecoming dramas, because in this case the violence is an integral part of the social fabric. The play is an accommodation of that violence, a temporary coming to terms with the complexities of human consciousness.

Cheryl's need for reconciliation also reflects what was so desperately needed by the larger culture in the post-war period. With the War's end, Americans felt the consequences of the sixties: the effects of the rebellion against the social order and institutions; the breakdown of communal identity and purpose which a fragmented society left its citizens; and the physical and psychological cost of the War itself. For many, the decade was perceived as a descent into madness, and the seventies presented, at least, some opportunity for the process of healing. Mark's urge to construct his miniature psychoscapes reflects the creative impulses of those playwrights who realize the therapeutic value of writing about and dramatizing the anxieties that derived from the Vietnam experience. Although only time will effect a complete healing, these artists, by translating the anxieties and stresses into concrete form, by externalising individual and collective guilts, can perhaps hasten the

process of recovery.

The homecoming plays continue the thematic thrust of those of initiation and experience, since the characters encounter similar problems of adjustment to a new cultural environment. The individuals portrayed in the works of initiation and experience are hampered in the adaptation process by vestiges of their former cultural perception and behaviour; those in the homecoming works similarly suffer from the same problems. In all of these works, the characters must contend with stresses resulting from multi-levels of perception and the need for adapting to an alien cultural construct.

There are a number of dramas which deal with the Vietnam experience in a tangential manner that are not included in this study. In these works, the War is often treated from a Symbolist perspective that reflects a cultural experience fraught with mysterious and uncertain implications about what had transpired. Many of the plays of the 1970s and 1980s that treat post-War life in America represent the Vietnam experience as an awkward interruption of the lives of adolescents: their post-Vietnam problems, such as family relationships and social identity, are generally an extension of pre-War problems. In these works an individual has, most typically, suffered physical and emotional trauma as a consequence of the experience, but his cultural perspective is generally left intact. Here, reliance is on themes that tend

to treat problems of human relationships that are exacerbated by Vietnam, yet are predicated on circumstances well within the conditioned cultural parameters of American society. The events associated with Vietnam are essentially reduced to the fateful capriciousness of an unfortunate car accident or serious illness. War experience often defines and limits particular characters in these plays; and perhaps to a certain extent explains their attitudes and perceptions, but ultimately the work will pass over or downplay the origins of the injury itself; the event merely provides background colour or character prehistory. Typical of such plays are Ron Cowen's *Summertree* (1968), Lanford Wilson's *5th of July* (1978), James McLure's *Lone Star* (1979) and *Private Wars* (1979), Stephen Metcalfe's *Strange Snow* (1982), and James Duff's *Home Front* (1985).

As the trauma and tragedy of the event dims in the individual and cultural consciousness, the experience itself becomes part of the mythic background of American society. Plays continue to be written with characters--now part of a post-war generation--for whom the Vietnam experience represents a disruption in their lives. This disruption, in many respects, is similar to the way in which the Depression of the 1930s influenced the lives of their parents. In both situations, the stresses and anxieties of daily living engendered a re-examination of the values and ethics of the culture, and the role of the individual within it.

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VII. CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

The observations and conclusions relating to the works discussed in this thesis reflect the artistic response, specifically that of the drama, to a particular cultural experience. If art is indeed a mirror of nature, it gives, even at its best, an imperfect reflection, since, as in this specific case, works designed for the stage are interpretations of experience distilled and filtered through the creative artistic process. The attitudes evident in the dramas that dealt with contemporary issues are, from an aesthetic perspective, symptomatic rather than socially or politically definitive of the malaise that afflicted the American society of the sixties. Yet, even as dramatists interpreted the experience from a poetic rather than from a particular historical or political point of view, their works reveal a persistent concern with the vulnerability of social cohesion and continuity to disruptive forces.

The drama of the turbulent years of the 1960s and 1970s reflected the traumatic stresses and anxieties of that time. The breakdown of social order and the fragmentation of society were translated by dramatists into theatrical metaphors that reflected the devastating psychological impact of the Vietnam War experience. The attitude of rebellion and social protest extant in American society carried over into the form and substance of theatre, and ensemble groups, which

often became sub-cultures themselves, participated in a determined revolt against traditional theories, functions and aesthetics of drama. The theatre of the period was also characterized by a prominent revival of documentary forms of theatrical presentation, through which the traumatic events occurring both in America and Vietnam were interpreted for the stage.

The violence that erupted both domestically and overseas led playwrights to examine the very foundations of a society that seemed vulnerable to such expression, and the validity of the morals and ethics of American culture itself became the focus of dramatic works. It has been noted that many dramatists view the creation of dramatic metaphor on the stage as similar to the process of cultural conditioning, and that social conventions rely on no less an arbitrary base than theatrical conventions. Thrown into such perspective, the underlying social and political principles which ordained the deaths and injuries on the battlefields of Vietnam were compared to the arbitrary renditions of reality inherent in the illusion of theatrical productions.

The significance of cultural myth and ritual has been discussed with a view to establishing how they function in terms of supporting individual and collective psychological equilibrium and acceptable behaviour, and the thesis notes how the drama associated with the Vietnam War treats the consequences of challenging that myth and ritual in an extra-

cultural context. It has been demonstrated that, when the validity of cultural myth is threatened, breakdown and disintegration of individual and collective equanimity result, and that that particular theme is one of the definitive characteristics of Vietnam drama. When American culture itself--its ideals, ethics, values and technology--was perceived as a belligerent on the battlefield, the inevitable failures and setbacks suffered overseas brought into question the collective American identity and purpose. Veterans who became playwrights focused on the psychological disorientation of the individual when cultural disintegration, exacerbated by battlefield conditions, left him isolated and alienated from his society.

The condition of an individual attempting to gain or regain his rightful place in a socio-cultural construct remains a basic theme of the Vietnam War dramas. Plays of initiation deal with problems of desymbolization of the old culture and conditioning to the new; plays of experience treat the consequences for individual equanimity when new social constructs must be developed under the stress of battlefield events; and plays of homecoming present problems of reintegration when the extra-cultural experience alters the perspective of the individual, and forces both himself and members of his former community to establish wholly new relationships.

Plays relating to Vietnam continue to appear. These

plays, however, almost to a piece, treat the experience as background material for character prehistory or general dramatic content, and tend to overlook the broader social and cultural aspects of the conflict. Contemporary dramatic interpretations of the experience and its cost for American society now seem primarily to be the province of the cinema. While such puerile presentations of the "Rambo" genre reflect a desperate attempt to recreate the myth of the American warrior for commercial exploitation, others, such as Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, represent serious artistic efforts at coming to terms with the social and political reality of the War itself.

Few of the plays dealing with the War, either in terms of abstraction or experience, are being staged at the present time. The reasons for this can be traced to several circumstances. Many artistic directors feel that the experience is too fresh in living memory to appeal to a wide audience; for others, the event and its consequences are no longer theatrically topical, although occasionally a production is mounted by a university theatre. As a generation or two passes, however, it is certain that such plays will be revived for their potential of offering profound insights into the society and events of the time. As historical pieces created in the crucible of experience, they represent an avenue for understanding the trauma and devastation that racked contemporary America.

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

IN THE VIETNAM WAR

September 2, 1945	After the departure of Japanese occupation forces, Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh Independence League establish the Government of the Democratic Republic of South Vietnam in Hanoi.
September 22, 1945	French troops return to Vietnam.
September 26, 1945	American OSS member, Lieutenant Colonel A. Peter Dewey, is killed by the Viet Minh near the Saigon airport.
December 19, 1946	The Viet Minh begin an eight-year war against the French occupation with attacks in the North.
June 27, 1950	President Truman announces the dispatch of a 35 member military mission to Vietnam, which is followed a month later by an economic aid mission.
May 7, 1954	The survivors of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu surrender to the Viet Minh.
July 1954	The Geneva Agreements were signed, partitioning Vietnam along the 17th parallel and establishing an International Control Commission to supervise compliance.
October 11, 1954	The Viet Minh took formal control over North Vietnam.
October 24, 1954	President Eisenhower advises Premier Ngo Dinh Diem that the U.S. would provide assistance directly to Vietnam rather than channeling it through the French.
May 10, 1955	South Vietnam makes a formal request for U.S. military advisors.
July 20, 1955	South Vietnam refuses to participate in Vietnam-wide elections as called for by the Geneva Convention on the grounds that elections would not be free in the North.

April 28, 1956	A U.S. military advisory group replaces French training of the South Vietnamese Army.
January 3, 1957	The International Control Commission declares that neither North nor South Vietnam have complied with the Geneva Agreement.
June 1957	The last French military training mission leaves South Vietnam.
July 8, 1959	Two U.S. military advisors are killed at Bien Hoa.
May 30, 1960	A U.S. Special Forces team arrives in Vietnam to assist in training.
December 31, 1960	American forces in Vietnam total 900.
January 29, 1961	Radio Hanoi proclaims the formation of the National Front for Liberation in South Vietnam.
March 19, 1961	The NLF announces an offensive to prevent presidential elections.
May 11, 1961	President Kennedy dispatches 400 Special Forces troops, and 100 additional military advisors, and authorizes a campaign of clandestine warfare against North Vietnam to be carried out by South Vietnamese personnel.
October 18, 1961	A state of emergency is declared in South Vietnam by President Diem.
November 1961	The U.S. enlarges the military advisory mission and assigns combat support missions to South Vietnam.
December 22, 1961	Specialist 4 James T. Davis of Livingston, Texas, becomes the first American soldier to die in Vietnam (Baker). See June 8, 1959 above.
December 31, 1961	U.S. forces in Vietnam totals 3,200.
February 8, 1962	The U.S. establishes the Military Assistance Command in Saigon. Meanwhile, U.S. Special Forces are training

	Montagnards for combat against Viet Cong guerrillas.
December 29, 1962	South Vietnam proclaims that 39 percent of its population are living in fortified "strategic hamlets."
December 31,	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 11,300.
May 8, 1963	Twelve people are killed in Hue in rioting during a celebration of Buddha's birthday. Rioting and anti-government demonstrations spread elsewhere in the following weeks.
September 2, 1963	President Kennedy criticizes the Saigon government for being out of touch with the people, and says that the U.S. will play only a supportive role.
November 1, 1963	A military coup with tacit U.S. approval overthrows President Diem. Diem is assassinated with his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu.
November 4, 1963	The U.S. recognizes the new government in Saigon.
December 31, 1963	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 16,300.
February 4, 1964	The Viet Cong launch an offensive in Tay Ninh province.
June 20, 1964	General William C. Westmoreland takes command of MACV (Military Advisory Command, Vietnam).
August 2, 1964	North Vietnamese torpedo boats attack the U.S. destroyers *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, prompting the U.S. Congress to adopt the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, endorsing measures needed to repel attacks on American forces.
December 11, 1964	The first North Vietnamese Army regulars appear in South Vietnam. U.S. forces in Vietnam total 23,300.
February 7, 1965	The Viet Cong attack the U.S. base at Pleiku, killing eight Americans.

March 2, 1965	"Operation Rolling Thunder," a sustained American aerial bombardment of North Vietnam, is launched.
March 8, 1965	The first U.S. Marine battalion arrives.
March 19, 1965	The first U.S. Army battalion arrives.
April 7, 1965	President Johnson proposes negotiations to end the war and offers $1 billion in aid to Southeast Asia; Hanoi denounces the plan.
July 28, 1965	President Johnson announces his decision to greatly increase U.S. combat forces in Vietnam.
October 1965	U.S. troops launches the month-long Ia Drang campaign, which is the first major confrontation between U.S. and North Vietnamese forces.
December 31, 1965	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 185,000.
January 31, 1966	Bombing of North Vietnam resumes after a 37-day pause.
April 12, 1966	B-52s from Guam bombs North Vietnam for the first time.
October 24, 1966	President Johnson meets Premier Ky and leaders of five other nations involved in the war and pledges a 4-point "Declaration of Peace."
December 31, 1966	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 185,300.
August 1, 1967	President Johnson announces an escalation of troops and requests a 10 percent income tax surcharge to finance the war.
September 3, 1967	General Nguyen Van Thieu is elected President of South Vietnam with 35 percent of the vote.
December 31, 1967	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 465,600 and those killed in combat total 9,378 for the year.
January 30, 1968	The month-long Tet Offensive erupts throughout South Vietnam, raising

	questions about the capacity of U.S military forces to end the war.
February 24, 1968	The royal palace at Hue is recaptured by Marines and South Vietnamese troops after 25 days of struggle.
March 16, 1968	The My Lai massacre takes place; at least 450 unarmed South Vietnamese are killed.
March 31, 1968	President Johnson orders a partial halt in the bombing of the North and announces that he will not seek reelection.
April 6, 1968	Relief forces arrive at Khe Sanh, ending the 77-day siege of the Marine combat base.
May 13, 1968	Delegates from the U.S. and North Vietnam hold their first formal peace meeting in Paris.
October 31, 1968	President Johnson announces a cessation of all bombing of North Vietnam.
November 1, 1968	Hanoi announces that the Paris peace talks will be expanded to include South Vietnam and the National Liberation Front, but Thieu refuses to participate.
December 31, 1968	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 536,000 and those killed in combat total 14,592 for the year.
March 1969	President Nixon secretly authorizes bombing raids over Cambodia.
May 12, 1969	Communists launches some 200 attacks against military and civilian targets.
June 8, 1969	President Nixon announces the first U.S. troop withdrawal.
October 4, 1969	According to the Gallup Poll, 58 percent of the American public believe the war was a mistake.
December 31, 1969	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 475,000 and those killed in combat total 9,414 for the year.

March 27, 1970	South Vietnamese forces, supported by U.S. helicopters, attack Communist camps across the Cambodian border.
May 1970	Demonstrations opposing the Cambodian bombing take place on U.S. college campuses. The protest intensifies after National Guardsmen killed four students at Kent State University.
December 1970	The U.S. Congress repeals the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and approves an amendment barring U.S. military personnel from Cambodia.
December 31, 1970	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 334,600.
February 8, 1971	South Vietnamese forces invade Laos to interdict North Vietnamese supply lines.
June 13, 1971	The *New York Times* begins releasing the "Pentagon Papers," a study of U.S. involvement in Indochina.
December 1971	U.S. planes stage heavy bombing raids over the North.
December 31, 1971	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 156,800.
January 25, 1972	President Nixon reveals that Henry Kissinger, his national security advisor, have been conducting secret Paris peace talks since August 1969.
March 30, 1972	North Vietnamese forces launch an offensive against South Vietnamese bases throughout the country.
April 16, 1972	B-52s resumes bombing raids around Hanoi and Haiphong.
May 8, 1972	President Nixon orders the mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese harbors.
August 12, 1972	The last American ground troops leave South Vietnam; airmen and air support personnel remain.
October 26, 1972	Kissinger announces that "peace is at hand."

November 7, 1972	President Nixon is reelected. His opponent, Senator George McGovern, has offered a plan to end all bombing and withdraw forces.
December 18, 1972	President Nixon orders resumption of full bombing and mining of North Vietnam.
December 31, 1972	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 24,200.
January 23, 1973	Secretary of State Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho initiate an agreement to end the war and provide for the release of the POWs.
January 27, 1973	A cease-fire goes into effect at 7:00 p.m., Paris time [6:00 a.m. in Vietnam].
April 1, 1973	The last American POW arrives at Clark Air Force Base.
January 4, 1974	President Thieu announces that the war in South Vietnam has resumed.
April 17, 1975	Phnom Penh falls to Communist insurgents.
April 30, 1975	North Vietnamese troops enter Saigon while the remaining Americans are evacuated.
March 26, 1976	Kissinger announces that the U.S. is prepared to normalize relations with Hanoi.

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APPENDIX B

CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT AMERICAN AND WORLD EVENTS

1949-1975

March 4, 1949	Judith Caplan, U.S. Department of Justice employee, and Valentin A. Gubitchev, a Soviet U.N. aide are arrested on suspicion of espionage.
June 14, 1949	Bao Dai, former Emperor of Annam, proclaims himself Emperor of Viet Nam.
October 1949	The Chinese Revolution consolidates in Beijing.
January 6, 1950	Britain recognizes the government of Communist China. The United States and France are outraged.
January 25, 1950	Alger Hiss, a top State Department official is sentenced to five years imprisonment for espionage.
February 7, 1950	Senator Joseph McCarthy makes speech claiming that communists have infiltrated the State Department: "I have here in my hand a list of 205 that are known . . . as being members of the Communist Party."
March 26, 1950	McCarthy names ex-State Department advisor Owen Lattimore as Soviet spy.
March 30, 1950	Truman denounces McCarthy as saboteur of U.S. foreign policy.
May 8, 1950	President Truman announces the first direct grant of military aid to France and the Associated States of Indochina in the amount of $10 million.
June 25, 1950	North Korean troops invade South Korea.
June 30, 1950	Truman authorizes use of American forces in Korea.
July 5, 1950	U.S. forces in first major battle.
September 23, 1950	U.S. Congress passes the Mundt Bill, overriding Truman's veto. The law is designed to "root out Communists" by

	requiring Communist organizations to identify their officers and reveal their dispersement of funds.
December 9, 1950	Harry Gold is sentenced to 30 years for atomic bomb spying.
March 30, 1951	Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are found guilty of espionage.
June 20, 1951	A New York federal jury indicts 21 Communist leaders "for conspiracy to teach and advocate overthrow of the U.S. Government by force and violence."
December 13, 1951	After meeting with J. Edgar Hoover, Truman pledges a new effort to purge disloyal government workers.
November 5, 1952	Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected President of U.S., Richard Nixon elected Vice-President.
May 31, 1953	American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles says that if the Viet Minh are successful in defeating the French, the rest of Southeast Asia will "fall like dominoes, under Soviet domination."
June 19, 1953	Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed.
July 27, 1953	Armistice signed in Panmunjom takes effect in Korea. American deaths amount to nearly 25,000.
November 24, 1953	McCarthy claims the Truman administration "crawls with Communists" in response to Truman's warning to Americans to protect themselves against "the onslaught of fear and hysteria which are being manipulated in this country purely for political purposes."
February 10, 1954	Eisenhower says that he can think of no greater tragedy than the U.S. becoming involved in Indo-China.
April 5, 1954	Dulles warns China that the U.S. will react to aggression in Indo-China.
April 7, 1954	Eisenhower warns that a Communist victory

	in Indo-China will set off a chain reaction in Asia.
April 20, 1954	U.S. begins flying French paratroop reinforcements from Paris to Vietnam.
April 28, 1954	Dulles reiterates "Domino Theory" in reference to Indo-China.
May 8, 1954	Dien Bien Phu falls.
June 16, 1954	Ngo Dinh Diem is selected by Emperor Bao Dai as Prime Minister of South Vietnam.
July 21, 1954	France and Viet Minh sign Indo-China truce. Vietnam is divided along the 17th parallel.
September 29, 1954	U.S. announces Vietnam aid will by-pass that of the French, commencing in January 1955.
October 4, 1954	White students march against school integration in Washington and Baltimore.
October 22, 1954	Eisenhower approves plan for intensive training of South Vietnam army.
January 1, 1955	U.S. gives $216 million in aid to South Vietnam.
May 16, 1955	U.S. signs treaty granting military aid to Cambodia.
October 26, 1955	Ngo Dinh Diem declares South Vietnam a republic, and himself as its first president.
December 5, 1955	Bus boycott begins at Montgomery under Martin Luther King.
May 2, 1957	McCarthy dies.
September 2, 1957	Violence escalates at Little Rock, Arkansas, and Birmingham, Alabama, as school desegregation begins.
September 24, 1957	Violence spreads to Tennessee; Eisenhower federalizes Arkansas National Guard.
October 22, 1957	In Saigon, 13 U.S. servicemen are injured by a bomb.

January 16, 1959	Fidel Castro assumes power in Cuba.
July 8, 1959	Two U.S. military advisers are killed by Communist guerrillas at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. Some sources (Zaroulis, e.g.) consider these the first official casualties of the conflict. Others (Baker) cite James Davis as the first soldier killed. See December 22, 1961, below.
February 1, 1960	Four Negro students begin sit-ins at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Violence escalates through the month.
April 25, 1960	Racial violence escalates in Mississippi as the worst race riot in state history results in the shooting of 8 Negroes and 2 Whites.
November 5, 1960	U.S. official ambushed in South Vietnam.
November 9, 1960	John Fitzgerald Kennedy elected President of United States, Lyndon B. Johnson is Vice-President.
November 16, 1960	In New Orleans, Louisiana, 2000 riot against desegregation.
December 20, 1960	The National Liberation Front is formed in South Vietnam to oppose Diem regime.
January 17, 1961	In his farewell address to the nation, Eisenhower warns it to be vigilant against the "disastrous rise of misplaced power" represented by the military-industrial complex.
March 21, 1961	Kennedy increases aid to Southeast Asia, and sends military advisors to Laos.
May 4, 1961	Freedom rides to desegregate buses begin in South, many are beaten with clubs.
May 28, 1961	U.S. increases efforts to stop Communist infiltration of Vietnam. Hamlet-based operations begin.
August 1961	Berlin crisis: Berlin wall begins to be erected August 20.

September 25, 1961	Rev. Martin Luther King opens vote drive for Negroes in South.
October 2, 1961	South Vietnam's Diem declares struggle against Communists to be a War. U.S. gives intention to raise current 700 military advisors to 16,000 in the next year.
December 22, 1961	James Davis becomes the first U.S. soldier to be killed in South Vietnam.
January 4, 1962	The U.S. and South Vietnam announce a broad economic and social program designed to raise South Vietnamese living standards.
September 30, 1962	James Meredith becomes the first Negro to enroll at U. of Mississippi. The result is massive rioting.
October 21, 1962	Cuban missile crisis.
February 25, 1963	U.S. Supreme Court frees 187 Negroes convicted in protest in South Carolina.
April 25, 1963	Kennedy and Wallace meet to discuss desegregation problems. Kennedy leaves in frustration, noting, "It's like a foreign country. There's no communication."
May 9, 1963	Diem initiates "strategic hamlet" program in South Vietnam.
May 18, 1963	Kennedy sends federal troops to Alabama; Malcolm X castigates Kennedy's racial policy.
June 9, 1963	King denounces Kennedy's civil rights policy.
June 15, 1963	Medgar Evers, Negro civil rights leader is slain in Jackson, Mississippi.
August 1963	Massive demonstrations against Diem regime headed by Buddhists.
August 13, 1963	A Buddhist monk self-immolates in Saigon in expression of opposition to the Diem regime.

August 28, 1963	In Washington, 200,000 demonstrators parade for civil rights legislation. King gives "I have a dream" speech.
September 10, 1963	Kennedy federalizes Alabama National Guard. Violence continues with desegregation.
September 11, 1963	U.S. tells Diem to oust brother or face cut in aid.
November 1, 1963	Diem overthrown and assassinated in military coup headed by Major General Duong Van Minh.
November 22, 1963	Kennedy assassinated. Johnson assumes presidency.
January 30, 1964	Another military coup in Vietnam gives power to Major General Nyuyen Khanh.
June 20, 1964	General Westmoreland assumes command of U.S. forces in Vietnam.
June 11, 1964	King and 17 others jailed in Florida, attempting to integrate a restaurant.
June 28, 1964	Malcolm X founds Org. for Afro-American Unity to seek independence for Negroes in the Western Hemisphere.
August 2, 1964	South Vietnam Communist P.T. boats reportedly fire on U.S. destroyer in Tonkin Gulf.
August 7, 1964	In response to Johnson's demand for approval of "all necessary action" to defend American forces in Southeast Asian, the House passes the "Tonkin Gulf Resolution" by a vote of 88-2.
August 27, 1964	General Nguyen Khanh agrees to share power in South Vietnam in army triumvirate.
September 14, 1964	Attempted coup against Vietnam leadership.
September 18, 1964	U.S. destroyers fire on imaginary targets in Tonkin Gulf providing the second "Tonkin Gulf Incident."

October 4, 1964	Another of many bombing incidents in the American South destroys a Negro church being used as a voter registration centre.
November 3, 1964	Johnson wins the presidential election by "one of the most lopsided elections in American history."
November 18, 1964	J. Edgar Hoover calls King "the most notorious liar in the country."
November 25, 1964	Saigon imposes martial law in response to student riots.
December 7, 1964	Mario Savio, leader of the Free Speech Movement is dragged from his podium on the Berkeley campus by campus police.
December 31, 1964	U.S. Forces in Vietnam total 23,300.
January 6, 1965	The U.S. Military Mission in Saigon announces that 136 Americans died in Vietnam in 1964, 1022 were wounded, 11 were M.I.A.
January 16, 1965	In Mississippi, 18 people are arrested for the murder of 3 civil rights workers.
February 21, 1965	Malcolm X is murdered.
February 25, 1965	Lt. General Nguyen Khanh, the military strongman who seized power in South Vietnam 13 months ago is overthrown.
March 2, 1965	Operation "Rolling Thunder" commences in Vietnam.
March 8, 1965	The first American combat troops arrive in Vietnam, bringing the present total of American servicemen to 23,500.
March 28, 1965	King leads 25,000 civil rights demonstrators from Selma, Alabama to the state capital of Montgomery.
April 17, 1965	15,000 protestors picket the White House demanding the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam.
May 15, 1965	A sit-in halts the Armed Forces Day parade on 5th Ave., in New York.

June 8, 1965	L.B.J. authorizes the commitment of U.S. troops to combat in Vietnam.
June 8, 1965	17,000 attend anti-war rally at Madison Square Gardens in New York.
June 14, 1965	A military triumvirate seizes power in Saigon, Nguyen Cao Ky is named premier.
July 4, 1965	King calls for end to Vietnam War.
July 28, 1965	L.B.J. orders 50,000 troops to Vietnam, bringing total to 125,000.
August 11, 1965	Race riots break out in Watts and Newton, in Los Angeles.
August 2, 1965	A rash of U.F.O. sightings covers 4 states.
September 8, 1965	American battle fatalities in Vietnam total 650.
October 16, 1965	10,000 anti-war protestors march in New York.
October 18, 1965	The F.B.I. arrests a college student for burning his draft card.
November 2, 1965	Quaker Norman Morrison self-immolates at Pentagon during anti-war protest.
November 9, 1965	Roger Allen LaPorte, a member of the Catholic Worker movement self-immolates at the United Nations building in N.Y.
November 24, 1965	Record set for U.S. casualties in one week: 240 dead in Vietnam fighting.
December 3, 1965	National Council of Churches asks Washington for halt in bombings of North Vietnam.
	3 KKK members are convicted by an all-white jury in Montgomery, for the murder of a Negro civil rights worker.
December 29, 1965	U.S. troops in Vietnam total 154,000; deaths since 1961 are 1,636.
January 19, 1966	In Saigon, 50 military officers are

	arrested in a plot to overthrow the military regime.
March 18, 1966	In Saigon, Buddhist General Thi is ousted; 10,000 march to protest corruption in Ky government.
March 22, 1966	The president of General Motors apologizes to a congressional committee for conducting an investigation into the private life of Ralph Nader. Some 50 to 60 of Nader's friends and relatives were questioned concerning Nader's sexual habits, political beliefs, and attitudes towards Jews.
April 3, 1966	In Saigon, 3,000 RVN troops march in protest against corrupt Ky government.
April 5, 1966	Mississippi police rout 1,000 civil war demonstrators with gas and clubs.
May 5, 1966	Senator Fulbright insists U.S. "is succumbing to the arrogance of power" in Vietnam.
May 12, 1966	University of Chicago students seize administration building.
May 13, 1966	New York City College students seize administration building.
May 15, 1966	8,000 anti-war protestors, described as "intellectuals," circle White House.
May 25, 1966	Anti-U.S. riots forcibly quelled in Saigon.
June 4, 1966	Largest political ad published: 6,400 sign an appeal against the Vietnam War.
June 6, 1966	James Meredith is shot leading a civil rights march, King takes his place.
June 8, 1966	130 faculty and students walk out in protest at N.Y.U. as Robert McNamara receives an honorary degree.
July 31, 1966	Negroes have battled police in the streets in Chicago, New York, and Cleveland in July: the toll is 6 dead and hundreds wounded.

August 1, 1966	A student sniper at the U. of Texas kills 12 and wounds 33 people.
September 12, 1966	Police allow a mob to attack Negroes trying to integrate Grenada schools in Mississippi.
October 9, 1966	The Vietnam War is costing the U.S. $2 billion per month.
December 1, 1966	5,000 students boycott classes at Berkeley to protest Navy recruitment.
December 5, 1966	Comedian Dick Gregory goes to Hanoi.
December 31, 1966	U.S. troops in Vietnam total 185,300.
January 15, 1967	462 Yale faculty call for an end to the bombing of North Vietnam.
January 12, 1967	Cassius Clay refuses draft call for service in Vietnam, stating "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Congs."
February 14, 1967	L.B.J. orders the C.I.A. to cease funding of the National Student Association and other student groups.
May 13, 1967	In New York, 70,000 marchers demonstrate in support of the Vietnam War.
May 17, 1967	Negroes riot at Southern Texas U., a policeman is fatally shot.
July 16, 1967	Race riots in Newark, N.J. result in 26 dead, 1,500 injured, 1,000 arrested.
July 24, 1967	Race riots in Detroit result in 38 dead, 700 arrested; H. Rap Brown is arrested for inciting riots.
August 1, 1967	Stokely Carmichael calls for a Black revolution in the U.S.
August 3, 1967	L.B.J. announces 45,000 more troops to be sent to Vietnam.
October 16, 1967	Thousands of anti-war protests take place throughout the U.S. Anti-draft rallies are held in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati and Portland; Joan Baez arrested in Oakland.

October 21, 1967	Hundreds arrested in Washington peace rally held by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Arrested include novelist Norman Mailer.
October 22, 1967	In N.Y., thousands march in support of Vietnam GIs.
October 27, 1967	Philip Berrigan and two accomplices pour blood over draft files in Baltimore, Md.
October 30, 1967	Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu assumes South Vietnam presidency.
November 14, 1967	Secretary of State, Dean Rusk says there is no turning back from Vietnam.
December 30, 1967	546 people arrested in anti-war protests in N.Y. Included are Dr. Benjamin Spock and poet Allen Ginsberg.
December 31, 1967	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 465,600 and those killed in combat total 9,378 for the year.
January 13, 1968	U.S. reports shifting bombing targets from North Vietnam to Laos.
January 23, 1968	North Korea seizes U.S. intelligence ship *Pueblo*.
January 18, 1968	Eartha Kitt denounces Vietnam War in the White House.
January 31, 1968	Communists launch Tet offensive.
March 9, 1968	Westmoreland calls for 206,000 more combat troops in Vietnam.
March 16, 1968	Between 550-600 residents of the South Vietnamese Hamlet of My Lai were slaughtered by U.S. troops. No military-aged males were found there. The U.S. public will not become aware of the incident until November 1969.
March 22, 1968	L.B.J. names Westmoreland Chief of Staff.
March 31, 1968	L.B.J. announces he will not seek re-election; a Gallup poll indicates only 26% of Americans support his handling of the War.

March 1968	Eldrige Cleaver, Black Panther leader publishes *Soul on Ice*.
April 4, 1968	Martin Luther King is shot in Memphis; Confederate flags break out in military camps in Vietnam; race riots erupt throughout the U.S, 31 die.
April 24, 1968	Blacks occupy Boston U. administration building.
April 25, 1968	Columbia U. campus closes due to protests.
April 26, 1968	In N.Y., 200,000 university and high school students cut classes in anti-war protest.
June 3, 1968	Artist Andy Warhol is shot by Valeria Solaris, the founder of S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men).
June 5, 1968	Senator Robert F. Kennedy is killed by an assassin in Los Angeles.
July 10, 1968	Dr. Benjamin Spock and 3 accomplices are sentenced to 2 years in jail for counselling draft evasion.
August 8, 1968	Republicans name Richard M. Nixon and Spiro T. Agnew as presidential election candidates.
September 21, 1968	150 militant students halt registration at Columbia U.
November 5, 1968	Nixon and Agnew win a close election. U.S protestors demonstrate nationwide on election day.
December 24, 1968	*Pueblo* crew arrives back in U.S. from detention in North Korea.
December 31, 1968	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 536,000; those killed in combat total 14,592 for the year.
February 13, 1969	Race riots rock U of Wisconsin and U. of North Carolina.
April 3, 1969	Vietnam War deaths total 33,641.

April 5, 1969	Thousands march down the Avenue of the Americas in N.Y., protesting the war.
April 10, 1969	400 police remove students who have occupied buildings at Harvard U.
April 19, 1969	Blacks occupy Student Union building at Cornell U.
May 22, 1969	Students occupy university campuses across the U.S. in mass demonstrations.
June 8, 1969	Nixon announces first troop withdrawals from Vietnam.
July 3, 1969	Stokely Carmichael resigns as Prime Minister of Black Panther Party.
July 15, 1969	Eldrige Cleaver castigates Carmichael, and breaks parole to flee to Algeria.
August 17, 1969	An estimated 500,000 people attend the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival in rural N.Y. Cases of nudity were reported.
August 25, 1969	Company A of the 196th Light Infantry in Vietnam refuses to go into action.
September 3, 1969	Marine chief Leonard Chapman is ordered to suppress racial violence in the Corps.
September 4, 1969	Ho Chi Minh dies.
October 13, 1969	Nixon vows not to be swayed by anti-war protests.
October 15, 1969	The Vietnam Moratorium becomes the largest protest in the history of the anti-war movement. Millions of people across the U.S. wear black arm bands in protest. A WW II veteran is quoted as saying, "This war is costing America its soul."
November 30, 1969	The incident of My Lai becomes known to the American public.
December 15, 1969	Nixon announces the 3rd round of troop withdrawals from Vietnam.
December 31, 1969	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 475,000; those killed in combat total 9,414 for the year.

March 10, 1970	Captain Ernest Medina, Lt. William Calley, and 3 others are charged with offenses relating to My Lai.
May 1, 1970	Police use tear gas to disperse a rally of 12,000 Black Panther supporters.
May 4, 1970	The National Guard kills 4 students at Kent State U during a protest over U.S. intervention in Cambodia. California Governor Ronald Regan was previously quoted in reference to quelling student demonstrations: "If it takes a blood-bath, then let's get it over with."
May 8, 1970	New York construction workers beat up anti-war protestors.
May 12, 1970	Six blacks are shot in the back and killed at a rally in Georgia.
May 15, 1970	Police open fire on a women's dormitory at Jackson State U., killing 2 and wounding 12.
June 24, 1970	The U.S. Senate repeals the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution by a vote of 81-10.
July 7, 1970	Riots in Ashbury Park, N.J., result in 46 people shot.
July 29, 1970	Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers obtain contracts with 26 grape growers.
August 2, 1970	First known interracial marriage in Mississippi is performed.
August 23, 1970	Agnew says U.S. cannot pull out of Vietnam if Cambodia falls to the Communists.
August 29, 1970	Under a court order, Black Vietnam veteran Poindexter Williams is allowed burial in a White cemetery in Florida.
September 28, 1970	Students burn draft cards in a memorial at Kent State.
December 31, 1970	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 334,600.
March 31, 1971	Lt. William Calley is convicted of committing atrocities at My Lai.

April 23, 1971	Over 700 veterans demonstrating in Washington throw their medals on the steps of the Capitol building.
April 24, 1971	Over 200,000 anti-war demonstrators rally on Capitol Hill carrying placards reading, "Out Now!"
April 30, 1971	Dwight D. Johnson, a Black Vietnam veteran, 23 years old, and a Congressional Medal of Honor winner is shot in a grocery store robbery.
May 3, 1971	Thousands of marchers are arrested in Washington demonstrations.
June 10, 1971	Nixon ends 21-year-old trade embargo with Communist China.
June 13, 1971	The New York Times publishes the Pentagon Papers, a secret Pentagon appraisal of the Vietnam War.
October 3, 1971	Thieu, the only candidate running, is re-elected for a four-year term in Saigon.
December 26, 1971	A band of 16 Vietnam veterans seize and occupy the Statue of Liberty and make a statement opposing "the indiscriminate bombings of the peoples of Indochina."
December 31, 1971	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 156,800.
January 25, 1972	Nixon airs peace plan for Vietnam.
January 26, 1972	Anti-war protest leader Daniel Berrigan is paroled.
February 12, 1972	Senator Edward Kennedy advocates amnesty for Vietnam draft-evaders.
April 1972	North Vietnamese invade South Vietnam in large numbers.
May 3, 1972	The northernmost South Vietnamese province of Quangtri is abandoned as 150,000 Vietnamese flee to the south.
May 19, 1972	A bomb detonates in the Air Force section of the Pentagon.

June 17, 1972	Five men are arrested in connection with a break-in at the executive headquarters of the National Democratic Committee in the Watergate apartment complex in Washington, D.C.
August 8, 1972	Pat Nixon rebukes Jane Fonda for the latter's anti-war stance.
August 20, 1972	The South Vietnam district capital of Queson falls to the Communists.
August 23, 1972	Miami police arrest 900 anti-war demonstrators.
September 23, 1972	Martial Law declared in the Philippines.
October 17, 1972	Martial Law declared in South Korea.
November 7, 1972	Nixon and Agnew win re-election by a "landslide." B-52s drop a record day's bomb-load on North Vietnam.
December 31, 1972	U.S. forces in Vietnam total 24,200.
January 9, 1973	New Orleans police kill a sniper, Black Vietnam veteran Mark Essex, after he has killed 10 people and wounded 13. Ballistics indicate that his rifle has killed a N.Y police cadet and wounded a policeman on the previous New Year's Eve.
January 27, 1973	At 7 p.m. a cease-fire in Vietnam goes into effect.* American casualties amount to 45,997 killed in combat, 10,928 killed in non-combat situations, 303,640 wounded, 600 captured, and 1,300+ are listed as M.I.A. The cost of the War was set at $109.5 billion. The last American to die is Lt. Col. William Nolde, at An Loc, on January 28.+
February 28, 1973	Some 250 members of the American Indian Movement occupy a trading post at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.
March 29, 1973	The last American troops leave South Vietnam and the remaining POWs are released by the North Vietnamese.
April 16, 1973	U.S. bombs a Laos village, claiming that Hanoi has abrogated terms of the truce.

May 8, 1973	Indians end occupation of Wounded Knee.
May 11, 1973	The White House vows to continue with "right policy" of bombing Cambodia.
May 12, 1973	Poll indicates that Americans oppose bombing of Cambodia 2 to 1.
May 31, 1973	U.S. Senate halts funds for bombing of Cambodia.
June 21, 1973	U.S. Supreme Court sets obscenity standards.
June 27, 1973	Nixon vetoes Senate ban on Cambodian bombing.
August 7, 1973	U.S. planes bomb a Cambodian village by accident, killing 400 civilians.
August 8, 1974	Faced with impeachment, Nixon resigns.
September 16, 1974	President Ford offers conditional amnesty to draft-evaders who agree to work 2 years in public service.
January 7, 1975	North Vietnamese troops take Phaoc Binh in a new offensive in South Vietnam.
March 31, 1975	North Vietnamese forces sweep towards Saigon after taking the Central Highlands area of Vietnam.
April 30, 1975	Saigon surrenders to North Vietnamese Forces.
May 7, 1975	President Ford effectively ends the Vietnam War by signing a proclamation terminating wartime veterans' benefits. He proclaimed the end of the Vietnam era, stating, "America is no longer at war."

* In Vietnam, the Cease Fire took effect at 0600 hours [6:00 a.m.], January 28, 1973.

+ Figures on the cost of the war, both in men and matériel, vary significantly. Wilson notes that the costs were: 57,605 dead, 519,000 officially classed as disabled, and $165 billion in total dollar costs. There are 57,939 names on the Vietam War monument in Washington, D.C.

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APPENDIX C:

CHRONOLOGY OF THEATRE GROUPS, PLAYS, AND PRODUCTIONS

1947	Judith Malina and Julian Beck create the Living Theatre.
August 1951	The Becks perform four plays in their appartment: Paul Goodman's *Childish Jokes*, Bertholdt Brecht's *He Who Says Yes and He Who Says No*; Frederico Garcia Lorca's *The Dialogue of the Manikin and the Young Man*, Gertrude Stein's *Ladies Voices* (1916).
December 2, 1951	Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (1938), produced by the Living Theatre at Cherry Lane.
December 30, 1951	Kenneth Rexroth's *Beyond the Mountains* (1951) produced by the Living Theatre at Cherry Lane Theatre, New York.
March 2, 1952	Pablo Picasso's *Desire Trapped By the Tail* (1941), Gertrude Stein's *Ladies Voices*, and T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* produced by the Living Theatre at Cherry Lane Theatre, New York.
May 25, 1952	Paul Goodman's *Faustina* produced by the Living Theatre at Cherry Lane Theatre, New York.
August 5, 1952	Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, John Ashbery's *The Heroes* produced by the Living Theatre at Cherry Lane Theatre, New York.
January 3, 1953	Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* debuts in Paris.
March 18, 1954	W.H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.
June 3, 1954	August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.
September 30, 1954	Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (1926) produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.

December 2, 1954	Claude Frederick's *The Idiot King* produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.
February 17, 1955	Luigi Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise* (1930) produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.
May 27, 1955	Racine's *Phèdre* produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.
October 12, 1955	Paul Goodman's *The Young Disciple* produced by the Living Theatre at the attic on 100th St., New York.
January 13, 1959	William Carlos Williams' *Many Loves* produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
June 30, 1959	Paul Goodman's *The Cave at Machpelah* produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
July 15, 1959	Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1958) produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
November 6, 1959	Luigi Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise* (1955) produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
1959	The San Francisco Mime Troupe forms.
June 22, 1960	Jackson MacLow's *The Marrying Maiden* (1960), Ezra Pound's *The Women of Trachis* (from Sophocles) produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
December 20, 1960	Bertholdt Brecht's *In the Jungle of Cities* (1921-1923) produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
1960	Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre forms.

Summer 1961	The Living Theatre tours Europe (Rome, Turin, Milan, Paris) with Gelber's *The Connection*, Williams' *Many Loves*, and Brecht's In the Jungle of Cities.
December 7, 1961	Jack Gelber's *The Apple* (1961) produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
1962	The Bread and Puppet Theatre forms. *Totentanz* produced in New York.
April/May, 1962	The Living Theatre's second tour of Europe (Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland), with Gelber's *The Connection* and *The Apple*, and Brecht's *In the Jungle of Cities*.
September 18, 1962	Berthold Brecht's *Man is Man* (1926) produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
February 1, 1963	Seventeen actors and four writers meet in the auditorium of the Living Theatre and declare themselves to be a distinct theatre group. Joseph Chaikin forms a workshop that will become the Open Theatre.
May 15, 1963	Kenneth H. Brown's *The Brig* produced by the Living Theatre at the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
October 18, 1963	Federal seizure of the Living Theatre Playhouse, 6th Ave. at 14th St., New York.
1964-1965	Robert Lowell's trilogy, *The Old Glory* produced at the American Place Theatre. It wins five Obie Awards, including best play.
1965	*Fire* produced by the Bread and Puppet Theatre.
August 1965	San Francisco Mime Troupe's production of *A Minstrel Show* (*Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel*) in Lafayette Park, San Francisco.

August 1965	Luis Valdez organizes El Teatro Campesino.
1965	Pageant Players theatre company forms.
May 21, 1966	*Viet Rock* opens at Cafe La Mama.
October 7, 1967	*Hair* opens at the Public Theatre Off-Broadway, New York.
November 1967	Jerzy Grotowski runs a four-week workshop at New York University.
November 1967	Richard Schechner forms the Performance Group.
December 1967	SFMT production of Goldoni's *L'Amant militaire* in New York.
1967	Saul Gottlieb's *American Atrocities in Vietnam* is produced.
	Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven* is produced
	Jules Feiffer's *Little Murders* is produced.
1968	*A Man Says Goodbye to His Mother* produced by the Bread and Puppet Theatre.
March 1968	The Performance Group presents *Dionysus in 69*.
	Terence McNally's *Botticelli* is produced.
September 9, 1968	Living Theatre ensemble returns from Europe.
September 16, 1968	Beginning of Living Theatre's American tour. *Mysteries* performed at Yale, New Haven.
September 26, 1968	*Paradise Now* performed by Living Theatre at Yale, New Haven.
1968	Arthur Kopit's *Indians* is produced.
	Jules Feiffer's *Little Murders* is produced.

	David Rabe writes *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel.*
March 4-10, 1969	Living Theatre performs *The Rite of Opposite Forces,* The Brig Dollar, *Antigone, Frankenstein, Paradise Now* in San Francisco.
December 7, 1969	Ronald Ribman's *Passing Through from Exotic Places* (*The Burial of Esposito*) opens.
1969	The Performance Group produces *Makbeth.*
	The American Playground Theatre Group forms.
	Daniel Berrigan's *Trial of the Catonsville Nine* is produced.
	David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* is produced.
November 1970	El Teatro Campesino presents *Vietnam Campesino.*
1970	San Francisco Red Theatre Group forms.
	Donald Freed's *Inquest* is produced.
	Jules Feiffer's *The White House Murder Case* is produced.
	Terence McNally's *Bringing It All Back Home* is produced.
November 9, 1971	H. Wesley Balk's *The Dramatization of 365 Days* opens.
1971	The Mass Transit Theatre Group forms.
	Stanley Greenberg's *Pueblo* is produced.
	Romulus Linney's *The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks is produced.*
1973	*Adrienne Kennedy's An Evening with Dead Essex is produced.*
April 1975	*Tom Cole's Medal of Honor Rag* opens.
January 1976	David Rabe's *Streamers* is produced.

April 1979	Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story* opens.
November 1979	David Berry's *G.R. Point* is produced.
October 17, 1980	John DiFusco's (*et al*) *Tracers* opens.
October 1980	Emily Mann's *Still Life* opens.

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APPENDIX D

ANTI-WAR AND CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS

BEMVP	Business Executives Move for Vietnam Peace.
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
NAG	National Action Group.
NCAWRR	National Coalition Against War, Racism and Repression.
NCC	National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam.
NCNP	National Conference for New Politics.
NLF	National Liberation Front.
NMCEWV	National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam.
NPAC	National Peace Action Coalition.
NSA	National Student Association.
NWRO	National Welfare Rights Organization.
PCPJ	People's Coalition for Peace and Justice.
PEACE	People Emerging Against Corrupt Establishment.
PL(P)(M)	Progressive Labor (Party) (Movement).
PPC	Poor People's Campaign.
RYM	Revolutionary Youth Movement.
SANE	Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.
SAS	Student Afro-American Society.
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

SDS	Students for a Democratic Society.
SLAP	Student Labor Action Project.
SLID	Student League for Industrial Democracy.
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
SPU	Student Peace Union.
SWP	Socialist Workers Party.
UAW	United Auto Workers.
UFT	United Federation of Teachers.
VVAW	Vietnam Veterans Against the War.
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
WIN	Workshop in Nonviolence.
WRL	War Resisters League.
WSA	Worker Student Alliance.
WSP	Women Strike for Peace.
YAWF	Youth Against War and Fascism.
YSA	Young Socialist Alliance.

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