

IAN EDWARDS

An “Uncompromising Allegiance to Obscenity and Evil;” *Dispatches*, the *Jouissance* of War, and the Responsibility of Spectatorship

A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest morals of proper behaviour, nor restrain men from doing the things they have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.

Tim O'Brien¹

If the Second World War was unprecedented in the number of lives it *directly* affected, we might say that the Vietnam war entailed, for the first time, the *indirect* participation of millions of Americans through the media spectacle enabled by television. This article will locate Michael Herr's *Dispatches* on an interventional level, as a representation and critique of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the media coverage of the war, and the responsibilities they placed on wider society. The existing criticism, as will be briefly indicated, tends to fall between the stools of either emphasising the literary genres of *Dispatches* in isolation (thus negating some of their ideological-political implications), or assessing the text in terms of the “New Journalism” paradigm *without* relating its particular journalistic form to its

antagonistic counterpart, the “conventional” journalism explicitly rejected by Herr. This reading will proceed through two theoretical optics, addressing the subjective vicissitudes of Herr’s narrative positioning through the work of Lacanian cultural critic Slavoj Zizek. However this author’s wider concerns with some of Zizek’s assumptions, too numerous to be invoked here, necessitate a more nuanced reading of the text’s placement within its cultural field. To condense my differences with Zizek in a single sentence, it seems dangerously essentialist to maintain, as he does, a like-for-like equation of the Lacanian Symbolic with the wider cultural manifold.

As a counterweight to this tendency, I insert my readings of the various subject-positions enacted in *Dispatches* within a notion of the cultural field and its antagonisms as developed by Pierre Bourdieu. In *lieu* of a rough paraphrase I would rather his work speaks for itself at some length at this point:

The literary (etc.) field is a force-field acting on all those who enter it, and acting in a differential manner according to the position they occupy there... and at the same time it is a field of competitive struggles which tend to conserve or transform this field. And the position-takings... which one may and should treat for analytical purposes as a ‘system’ of oppositions, are not the result of some kind of objective collusion, but rather the product and stake of a permanent conflict. In other words, the generative and unifying principle of this ‘system’ is the struggle itself.²

My wider thesis is that in order to locate *Dispatches* on an ideological-interventional level we must in the last instance express its latent “positioning” of “struggle” and “conflict” *qua* the other positions enumerated, in opposition to it, within its own field(s). And despite my concerns with Zizek’s universalising tendencies, his approach can be useful in unpacking the specifically *subjective* modalities which mediate between Herr’s narrator-protagonist, the cultural field, and his implied readership. In the first instance, though, I will approach some of the manifest positions offered in *Dispatches* through their antecedents within U.S. war writing,

insofar as the existing criticism tends to ignore its inter-canonical links to the genre as a whole (that is, insofar as *Dispatches* is in part a literary text, it would seem worthwhile to assess it in the light of the U.S. literary war canon).

O'Brien's epigram above provides a useful focalising point for approaching Herr's technique, via its relationship to preceding U.S. war narratives. John Limon points to an "early" (*The Naked and the Dead*, *From Here to Eternity*, and *The Thin Red Line*) and a "late" (*Catch-22*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, and *Gravity's Rainbow*) paradigm of post-WW2 war fiction, and the epistemic break between the two paradigms is pertinent to several of Herr's strategies.³ Despite the ostensibly critical stance adopted by the early paradigm towards war and the military institution, their narrative style in enacting these positions can lead to a sense of "a remarkable degree of moral, political and aesthetic confusion" that can be read as *repeating* the "old and terrible lies" of "morality and rectitude" referred to in O'Brien's epigram.⁴ The genesis of U.S. war fiction from *The Naked and the Dead* to *Slaughterhouse Five* was one which served gradually to revoke some of the more ideologically dubious elements of the earlier paradigm: namely, the relationship between notions of heroism, will and agency, and the distinctly monolithic, masculinised narrative positions taken up to express them, which constitute a level of Instrumental Reason in the earlier paradigm in their synthesis between content and form. We might therefore say that literature's power to make *subversive* statements on war is directly correlative to its *formal* ability to *forestall* or *foreclose* the desire of culture to recapitulate some "small bit of rectitude from the larger waste." This view stresses the centrality of form in literature's critical purchase on war. So, while we might say that *The Naked and the Dead* or *From Here to Eternity* tend, in Bourdieu's terms, to "conserve" traditional ideologemes within the field of cultural representations of war, the satirical and

humorous strategies of *Catch-22* or *Slaughterhouse Five* tend more towards their “transformation” by way of the comic effect’s critical distancing.

Herr’s literary technique is clearly intended as subversive, and pointedly problematises the kind of cultural re-appropriations signifying “rectitude;” firstly (at the level of form) in its combination of genres and narrative positions—oral history, literary reportage, memoir, cathartic ‘working through’ of traumatic personal material—and secondly (at the level of content) in its steadfast refusal of idealism and its “allegiance to obscenity and evil” in representing the death and brutality of war, unadorned and un-“rectified.” This results in a *series* of positions rather than a single one, and it is my contention that through analysis of the subjective trajectories implicit within—voyeurism, “acute environmental reaction,” violent acting-out, and trauma—we can infer a strong sense of wider critique also. In essence, Herr utilises his narrative figure as a subjective medium to transgress and transcend the bounds of traditional journalism, and it is in this sense that I wish to address *Dispatches* as a literary work on its primary level. My working thesis is that Herr’s narrative voice enacts a form of split subjectivity in a sharp distinction he establishes, between the observer/participant figure empathising with and attending the perspective of the “grunt” in the field, and the military bureaucracy and media networks who are approached through a much more editorial/critical perspective.

As *Dispatches* is specifically framed by Herr as a work of memory and/or cultural history assembled retrospectively in the mid-/late seventies, it is interesting in the light of its relationship to “standard” Military History. Until the revolution constituted within the field by John Keegan’s 1976 book *The Face of Battle*, in the words of John Ellis “military history has been ‘the Commander’s tale’ and the role of the ‘poor bloody infantry’ has been marginalized to a remarkable extent.”⁵ Herr’s text

is notable by way of contrast, in its wide-ranging expression of the rigours of war from the point of view of the ‘poor bloody infantry.’ Insofar as *Dispatches* constitutes itself as historical, I would therefore contend that it posits itself as a “bottom-up” re-historicisation;⁶ indeed, the profusion of oral material issuing from the ‘poor bloody infantry’ in Vietnam is partially to be credited with inviting the kind of Military History practised by the likes of Keegan and Ellis (note in this context that the oral histories produced by Vietnam were published in the 1980s, thus making *Dispatches* a pioneer in the field⁷). Contrary to the journalists who “talked about ‘no-story operations...,’” Herr’s narrative places the GI’s own words as centrifugal to its movements:

Those were the same journalists who would ask us what the fuck we ever found to talk to grunts about, who said they never heard a grunt talk about anything except cars, football and chone. But *they all had a story*, and in the war they were *driven* to tell it.⁸

It is important in the context of the following arguments to note that Herr’s perspective is set up, from the start, *in opposition to* the journalists who assume the grunts have “no story” to tell. Herr places the figure of the “grunt,” in terms of the various “stories” they felt “driven to tell,” as the primary catalyst for his narrative. Indeed, on at least two occasions Herr portrays himself as being strongly invoked by the GI to “bear witness” on his behalf: “His face was all but blank with exhaustion, but he had enough feeling left to say ‘Okay man, you go on, you go on out of here you cocksucker, but I mean, you tell it! You tell it, man. If you don’t tell it....’”⁹ To cite an illuminating passage from Žižek on this point; “one must insist on the opposition of the appropriation of the past from the standpoint of those who rule... and the appropriation of that which, in the past, remained its utopian and failed (repressed) potentiality.”¹⁰ While Herr’s technique would tend to forestall the

“utopian” register suggested here, there is a strong sense in which his narrative articulates the *repressed* aspects of the war within the grunt’s stories (both in the sense of the trauma *they* repress individually, and equally importantly the “truth” repressed by the bureaucratic narratives of Vietnam), and the interventional *imperative* to oppose his discourse (and that of the GI) to “the standpoint of those who rule.” So, while Philip Beidler fastens onto the centrality of the motif of “bearing witness,” I am not sure if he assesses it correctly in the context of *Dispatches*’ emphasis on the “stories” the grunts were “driven to tell” Herr, and their insistence that he relay them. In Beidler’s words:

“Witness” then becomes the enabling act of conscious and creative mediation between the thing experienced and the thing mythologized, the means by which reality itself is *realised* by honouring the role *myth* plays in its creation, just as myth is *mythologized* by honouring the role *myth* plays in its creation.¹¹

It seems to me, in the light of passages such as “you go out of here you cocksucker but I mean, you tell it! If you don’t tell it...,” that Herr’s act of bearing witness is firstly in debt to that kind of traumatised, insistent request *from the other*, a burden of responsibility quite separate from the poles of “reality” and “myth.” After all, whatever the properties of reality, it cannot in itself sit up and beg one to tell its tale. As with many approaches to *Dispatches*, Beidler foregrounds its literary form at the expense of the contextual exigencies which can be seen to precipitate that form, and to denote in Herr’s acts of witness a primary relationship between reality and myth is to obfuscate the properly ethical injunction which Herr repeatedly cites as a touchstone. Not only does Beidler’s portrayal of the witness-actor neutralise the perspective of the soldier-subjects who implore him, it also neglects the subjective dimension of trauma operative in Herr’s technique (as is discussed below).

Foremost among its several modes of address, *Dispatches* is intimately bound up with the speech-patterns and lexicon of the grunt; the intermingling of his reported speech and its echoing within the narrative voice creates a properly dialogical effect within the text, with several implications. Particularly noteworthy for the purposes of this section is the fact that the soldiers are given a form of embodiment through their own language, and it is pertinent to allude to some of the objective historical factors particular to the troops fighting in Vietnam. It is a commonplace of war in general that for the men on the frontline to be even remotely motivated, either (a) a clear cause and set of objectives to fight for or against, or (b) volunteer status, should be in place.¹² Failing those, the best option to get troops to fight at all is the kind of massive coercion common in (say) Soviet Russia, generally unpalatable to Western liberal democracies. With the draft introducing a certain level of coercion, the average soldier in Vietnam was in the historically interesting position of being an involuntary participant in one of the most mismanaged, objectiveless, haphazard wars ever. Combine those factors with a home-front popular dissent never before or since shown in the U.S, an availability and consumption of narcotics unique to modern war, and an enemy who seemed invisible—with concomitant effects on U.S. frustration—and it might be fair to say that the “average” soldier in Vietnam was almost submerged in bitterness and *ennui* even when he was not drowned in abject terror. Thus was the morale of the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam “with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any other time this century,” its troops “drug-ridden and dispirited where not near-mutinous” and prone enough to outright mutiny, that one source suggests as many as 5 per cent of U.S. officer casualties were at the hands of *their own men*.¹³

Bearing in mind the kind of contradictions incumbent upon the average foot soldier's position, as hinted at (albeit briefly) above, it is interesting to note how they are reflected in the speech represented in *Dispatches*. In the first unsegregated U.S. Army the “melting-pot of language” effect was pronounced—many African-American speech patterns entered white culture as a result of their dissemination through Vietnam—and what emerged was almost akin to a dialect in its own right. Herr places this dialect at the very centre of his text, both in direct representation and in the way his own narrative utilises grunt inflections and vocabulary (such as “Airmobility, dig it”) by way of free indirect discourse. This provides a formal analogue to the ideologically-weighted focus on the common soldier within the text.

Some of the more common verbal motifs apparent in *Dispatches* help to focalise the contradictions Herr locates at the centre of the soldier's existence, not least in the almost astonishing profusion of euphemisms for death that emerged. In the words of O'Brien:

They used a hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness. *Greased*, they'd say. *Offed*, *lit up*, *zapped while zipping*. It wasn't cruelty, just stage presence. They were actors. When someone died, it wasn't quite dying, because in a curious way it seemed scripted, and because they had their lines mostly memorised, irony mixed with tragedy, and because they called it by other names, as if to encyst and destroy the reality of death itself.¹⁴

As this citation suggests, there is a close relationship between the impending death that is the potential fate of every combat infantryman, and the verbal means he enlists in order to rationalise his position. While O'Brien's grunts are described as “actors,” they and their counterparts in *Dispatches* are “acting out” very different “lines” to those commonly ascribed to their position within popular culture. Most notably, there is a pronounced refusal of the kind of “rectitude” traditionally attached to the soldier's death—Hemingway's famous aversion to the expression “in vain” comes to mind

here¹⁵—whereby the verbalisation of a comrade’s death is overtly geared towards expressing its *futility* (Vonnegut’s use of “so it goes” in *Slaughterhouse Five* is not dissimilar). The epistemic difference between the positionings enacted in *A Farewell to Arms* and *Dispatches* is instructive here. Henry’s jaundiced, defeated humanism, and ultimate self-withdrawal into passivity, is starkly contrasted with the pathologies represented in Herr’s grunts; in place of the retreat to Switzerland, *Dispatches* portrays the “acting-out” of cruel humour and violence *as an active response* to individual powerlessness.

In the same way that the euphemising of death for O’Brien involves a displacement of emotion through the off-handedness of the soldier’s vernacular, the presence of an off-hand humour in soldiers’ speech is a popular *leitmotif* in narratives of the common soldier. While a commonplace in many modern soldiers’ histories, Vietnam narratives are particularly notable for the consistent black tone of humour adopted, and the verbal *habitus* of the grunts represented in *Dispatches* transpires as an ongoing reaction to the ambiguities of their position:

There was a joke going around... ‘What’s the difference between the Marine Corps and the Boy Scouts? The Boy Scouts have adult leadership’ Dig it! the grunts would say....¹⁶

Dark humour was one of the key means by which the texts of the “later” World War II novel paradigm distanced themselves from their forebears, and Herr extends this move in two main ways, firstly in the directly represented speech of the grunts themselves. The recurrent black humour of the troops throughout *Dispatches* is directly linked by Herr either to the pointlessness, absurdity or outright brutality he witnesses:

There was a famous story, some reporters asked a door gunner, ‘How can you shoot women and children?’, and he’d answered, ‘It’s easy, you just don’t lead ’em so much.’ Well, they said you needed a sense of humour, there you go...¹⁷

Herr's uses of grunt humour enact a complex relationship between the language of everyday life for the U.S. soldier, and the malaise that attended that daily life for many of them, whereby a profound *ambivalence* in the psychoanalytic sense is often implicit. Strictly in contrast with "traditional" cultural narratives of the heroism, humanity and courage of men in battle, *Dispatches* goes to some lengths to display their baseness, brutality and fear:

It was that joke at the deepest part of the blackest kernel of fear, and you could die laughing. They even wrote a song, a letter to the mother of a dead Marine, that went something like, 'Tough shit, tough shit, your kid got greased, but what the fuck, he was just a grunt....'¹⁸

Herr's "true war stories" are therefore far from "moral" or "encouraging virtue:" on the contrary they portray men doing "the kind of things men have always done" through use of the kind of humour which Herr portrays. This exemplifies the point at which Herr's narrator distances himself from the GI; his humour is invariably more in an ironic vein, typically at the expense of the military bureaucracy, with positional implications to be discussed shortly. Herr plays grunt-apologist to some extent, but his refusal to participate in the darker comedy is manifest. A key moment is the fragment where a soldier offers Herr a bag which he assumes to contain "prunes or dates," and then realises it is a bag of Vietcong ears; the soldier's comrades, and then the soldier himself, react sheepishly, and the tale suggests that Herr was unsuited, or unwilling, to indulge macabre grunt humour to that extent. This recalcitrance is fundamental in distancing Herr from the GI, and although many of the means by which he *identifies* with him will be analysed shortly, this fundamental distance should be stressed.

Herr's specific location of *fear* in relation to the black humour he represents has further implications for his ontology of the combat soldier. The infinite depths and varieties of fear are articulated in *Dispatches* every bit as exhaustively as the

excitations of combat or the absurdity of the U.S. military bureaucracy. Herr's portrayal of the GI is therefore distanced from popular-culture and war-propaganda stereotypes by representing "opportunities" for death, terror and maiming, over and above those for valour or heroism: "Because, really, what a choice there was; what a prodigy of things to be afraid of! The moment you understood this, really understood it, you lost your anxiety instantly."¹⁹ Far from a lantern-jawed, stoical, martial archetype, Herr's "typical" grunt is reduced to a Pavlovian stimulus-response where *praxis* in combat alleviates the organic tension pertinent to constant fear, by way of bodily hexis. Thus the "heroism" of the lone soldier's mythical machine-gun charge is tellingly reversed by Herr: "So you learned about fear; it was hard to know what you really learned about courage. How many times did somebody have to run in front of a machine gun before it became an act of cowardice?"²⁰ The "heroic" charge is here reduced to an almost automaton-like drive for fulfilment, not of the mythical ideals of culture, but a kind of self-negating adherence to the military machine; in Zizek's terms *Dispatches* repeatedly represents scenes where "the subject accepts the void of his non-existence."²¹ The tales of Herr's "environmentally traumatised" Marines implicates the U.S. intervention along similar, masochistic/self-negating lines, conveying also a *subjective* dimension to that involvement which is key to analysis of Herr's positioning, with regard to both the GI and the wider military system.

Heroism, or at least the practical acts which are taken to constitute heroism in popular culture, is therefore given a particularly masochistic, reflexive slant by Herr. This must be balanced, however, with the sense of what Zizek calls "excess enjoyment," continually represented in *Dispatches* within the soldier's reaction to combat and death, which provides the fantasmatic link through which Herr's narrator establishes an identificatory matrix with the men he portrays. The black humour

already discussed displays this “excess of enjoyment” to a certain extent, and Herr furthers the implication in his often-exhaustive representation of the existential excitation surrounding combat (many of the more purple sections of Herr’s often terse prose are concerned with this motif, conveying an insistently emotive register). It is crucial to note, therefore, that Herr asserts the fear of groin wounds as the acme of the soldier’s terror in combat:

Some feared head wounds, some dreaded chest or stomach wounds, everyone feared the wound of wounds, the Wound. Guys would pray and pray—Just you and me, God, right?—offer anything, if only they could be spared that: Take my legs, take my hands, take my eyes, take my fucking *life* You Bastard, but please, please, please, don’t take *those*.²²

The motif of castration-anxiety is overwhelming here as at other points in the text, and Herr’s treatment of the strictly ambivalent nature of the combat soldier’s psyche also carries the reverse implication of a particularly phallic *jouissance* of enjoyment.

Another common war fiction conceit is mobilised here, in the motif of the “perverse” God-figure, in Zizek’s Lacanian terms the persecuting/castrating “Big Other” *to whom* the subject must submit, in order to attain “enjoyment” *through* the “other.” A long section merits substantial quotation here, to convey the full implications of Herr’s technique:

‘Quakin’ and Shakin’,’ they called it, great balls of fire, Contact. Then it was you and the ground: kiss it, eat it, fuck it, plough it with your whole body, get as close to it as you can without being in it yet or of it.... Pucker and submit, it’s the ground. Under Fire would take you out of your head and your body too, the space you’d seen a second ago between subject and object wasn’t there anymore, it banged shut in a fast wash of adrenalin. Amazing, unbelievable, guys who’d played a lot of hard sports said they’d never felt anything like it, the sudden drop and rocket rush of the hit, the reserves of adrenalin you could make available to yourself, pumping it up and putting it out until you were lost floating in it, not afraid, almost open to clear orgasmic death-by-drowning in it, actually relaxed.... Maybe you couldn’t love the war and hate it inside the same

instant, but sometimes these feelings alternated so rapidly that they spun together in a strobic wheel rolling all the way up until you were literally High On War, like it said on all the helmet covers. Coming off a jag like that could really make a mess out of you.²³

Herr's metaphor in this passage segues from the sexual to the narcotic and back again almost imperceptibly, from "humping the ground" to "High On War" to the "rapid strobing of love and hate in the same instant." The common denominator in its ontology is one which posits the modality of the *drive*, in the psychoanalytic sense of an object-less ("the space you'd seen a second ago between subject and object wasn't there anymore," the drive for psycho-analysis functions "as its own object") and distinctly irrational immersion of the subject within his bodily being, with the modality of "surplus enjoyment" being engendered in the subject by the "indivisible remainder of *jouissance* provided by blind mechanical exercise."²⁴

For while fear is annotated by Herr in its many variations, as befitting any "true" representation of men in combat, it would be a travesty of the "truth" of hundreds of soldiers' anecdotal evidence to deny that many men fundamentally "enjoy" combat in the adrenal, sensual sense portrayed above:

And every time, you were so weary afterwards, so empty of everything but being alive that you couldn't recall any of it, except to know that it was like something you had felt once before.... It was the feeling you'd had when you were much, much younger, and undressing a girl for the first time....²⁵

One of the early reviews of *Dispatches* puts this neatly: "Herr dared to travel to that irrational place and to come back with the worst imaginable news: war thrives because enough men still love it."²⁶ "That irrational place" stands here for both Vietnam and the unconscious register of enjoyment located by *Dispatches* in the soldiers there, and the "daring" shown by Herr is in "travelling" to *both* of those "places." He goes to some lengths to establish the danger of his position, both by

extension from his descriptions of fear, and in the scenes he repeatedly depicts of soldiers expressing amazement that he is a “volunteer” correspondent: “what, you mean you don’t *have* to be here?” Further, the insistent “you” of the narrative address confronts *Dispatches*’ audience with their *own* investment in the “irrational places” visited.

As is often noted by critics, in the course of his opening chapter, Herr gradually broaches the boundary between voyeur and participant. His initial frame of reference for war and death is intensely voyeuristic-sexual: “You know how it is, you want to look and you don’t want to look. I can remember the strange feelings I had when I was a kid looking at war photographs in *Life*.... I didn’t have a language for it then, but I remember now the shame I felt, like looking at first porn, all the porn in the world.”²⁷ This position is repeated on the next page in one of Herr’s most arresting passages, on “each other’s stories about why we were there.” From “the lowest John Wayne wetdream to the most aggravated soldier-poet fantasy,” Herr sweeps through the “standard” explanations in pastiche form, the “overripe bullshit” of “tumbling dominoes, maintaining the equilibrium of the Dingdong” and so on. This is then undercut spectacularly by the “other” (truth?) “you could also hear” from “some young soldier speaking in all bloody innocence, saying ‘All that’s just a *load*, man. We’re here to kill gooks. Period.’” The “other” which is prioritised as a “story” over the “overripe bullshit” of official explanations implies that both indiscriminate violence and racism lie at the heart of America’s Vietnam complex, with Herr, as so often, deferring to the authenticity of the common soldier’s perspective. The conclusion to this passage turns the screw further: “Which wasn’t at all true of me. I was there to watch.”²⁸

This voyeuristic positioning is altered in the course of the text, whereby *through his representation of his own praxis* Herr extends the identificatory matrix from the GI to his narrator, and from his narrator to his spectatorship at large and spectatorship in general. In articulating the ways the war could be both adrenally stimulating, and aesthetically enticing (“And at night it was beautiful. Even the incoming was beautiful at night, beautiful and deeply dreadful”),²⁹ Herr reveals in his narrative voice the same existential reaction to war as the men he portrays fighting it; in stressing its aesthetic pleasures, the text demands of the reader an examination of their own, active role in the cultural representation of war. *Dispatches* is to some extent a “working through” of trauma for Herr—he underwent analysis as a result of his experiences—but it is essential to note that these traumata are related both to what Herr has observed, *and to what he has done*. Chapter 1, “Breathing In,” ends with his

firing cover for a four-man reaction team....
 we were in the Alamo, no place else, and I wasn't a reporter, I
 was a shooter....
 In the morning there were about a dozen dead Vietnamese
 across the field where we'd been firing....
 I was looking at the empty clips around my feet behind the
 berm, telling myself that there would never be any way to
 know for sure. I couldn't remember ever feeling so tired, so
 changed, so happy.³⁰

In Žižek's Lacanian terms the “fundamental fantasy... serves as the ultimate support of the subject's being,” but in its traumatic dimension must be “disavowed” in order for the subject to make a “symbolic identification” that works on a social level. In keeping with the traumatic nature of the “fundamental fantasy” of violence traversed by Herr in this incident, his obvious curiosity as to whether he has killed is balanced by an auditory faculty which insists he would never “know for sure;” he introduces *and then forecloses* the epistemological status of such an action having contemplated its possibility, and his almost post-coital satisfaction remains at the end of the

fragment, but this *passage à l'acte* has definitively shattered the illusion of Herr's passivity as a witness. The text almost instantly shifts temporal perspective from this "one last war story," to 1975 and Herr's traumatic dream of his array of "dead faces," strongly reminiscent of Yossarian's in *Catch-22*: "when I got up next morning I was laughing."³¹ Once again the motif of death's reality "encysted" by an ambivalent laughter appears, not only linking Herr's reaction to the grunt's "joke at the deepest part of the blackest kernel of fear," but also placing *Dispatches* in the context of the "subjective destitution" of its narrative figure.³²

"Breathing Out," the final chapter and formal counterpart to the first, positions Herr "back in the world, and a lot of us aren't making it," trapped in the stereotypical malaise of the alienated Vietnam veteran, and framing the text as a whole as enclosed within his narrator's *bildungsroman*. Insofar as Herr's initial frame of reference for combat exists on a phantasmatic level (with his "first porn" analogy and the way he depicts himself making "faces and moves he would never make again" in the mirror when first trying on his army fatigue uniform³³), his passage from voyeur to participant as outlined above is strongly suggestive of Žižek's notion of "traversing the fantasy" through praxis: "in accomplishing this act, the subject suspends the phantasmatic frame of unwritten rules which tell him how to choose freely—no wonder the consequences of this act are so catastrophic."³⁴ In Herr's own words, he spends the interim period between Vietnam and the composition of *Dispatches* "thinking about what happens *when you pursue a fantasy until it becomes experience, then afterward you can't handle the experience.*"³⁵ In Žižek's terms the "fundamental fantasy" is necessarily disavowed as unconscionably traumatic to the subject. *Dispatches* similarly displays several instances of Herr's turning away from, or foreclosing outright, the "traumatic" content of his reactions to combat, and its

“catastrophic” consequences are replayed retro-actively through the temporal frame established by his setting the narrative in 1975.³⁶ The complex displayed in Herr’s narrative positioning is between the traumas arising from *both* “watching” *and* “acting;” as both acts are mutually implicated, a sense emerges of Herr’s *dual* complicity with the horrors he relates, with a strong element of guilt structuring the complex. On this basis it is difficult to concur with Beidler’s proposition that “Herr’s chief work in the book is the work of keeping his moral and mythic bearings in a world of war.” Keeping one’s morals would seem to be impossible bearing in mind the dual complicity of watching and acting (and the centred, “moral” subject would presumably adapt sufficiently well to what he has witnessed that he would not suffer the type of traumata of Herr’s narrative voice); and Herr repeatedly undermines American mythologies of war as perpetuated by the master narratives (John Wayne, Cowboys and Indians, the omnipotence of technology, etc.).³⁷

Whilst Herr’s trajectory within *Dispatches* is distinctly akin to “traversing the fantasy” in order to undergo “subjective destitution,” the intention of the final section of this essay is to locate the structural significance of this process in ideological terms. Herr’s partial sense of complicity serves, effectively, to announce his location within the field in the Bourdieusian sense of openly avowing the subjective avatars of his dis/position, and the interplay between his narrator’s registers of *complicity* and *criticism* is fundamental in establishing the text’s ideological stance. Herr’s identification with the grunt is far from unambiguous, and he makes few efforts to idealise the men he “stood as close to... as possible without actually being one of them, and then I stood as far back as I could without leaving the planet.”³⁸ Whilst his narrator shows an affinity with their camaraderie and their often-solicitous attitudes towards him, this is coloured by a frank acceptance and articulation of the inhumanity

of many grunts' actions: "Disgust doesn't begin to describe what they made me feel, they threw people out of helicopters, tied people up and put dogs on them. Brutality was just a word in my mouth before that."³⁹ Notwithstanding the unequivocal articulation of this skein of inhumanity, the most critical tone of *Dispatches* is seldom, if ever, directed at the GI:

It seemed the least of the war's contradictions that to *lose your worst sense of American shame you* had to leave the Dial Soapers in Saigon and a hundred headquarters who spoke goodworks and killed nobody themselves, and go out to the grungy men in the jungle who talked bloody murder and killed people all the time.⁴⁰

That Herr cites a specifically "American" sense of shame to be "lost" indicates an inclusive and accusative gesture of "shaming," intended to encompass both narrative voice *and* readership in the collective identification of the "your" and "you." The opposition between the bureaucratic, rear-echelon, headquarters military, and the "field grunts" is constantly alluded to by Herr, and this results in a demonisation of the former, even if he defers from fully canonising the latter.

The officers in *Dispatches* are not only portrayed in inevitably unflattering contexts (that is, they tend to indict themselves pretty spectacularly in their own words), but with an attendant editorial commentary that bespeaks a critique in the proper sense of the word. Herr's officers therefore tend to represent two main "types," either the blandly bureaucratic, or the almost insanely Thanatic. On the one hand, then, we are presented with those such as the "information officer" whose job it is to describe the "long, slow fire, wasting hundreds of acres of cultivated plantation and wild forest alike, denying the enemy valuable resources and cover;" his "enthusiasm made you feel his letters home to his wife were full of it, it really showed what you could do if you had the know-how and the hardware."⁴¹ Here the large-scale destruction of the Vietnamese landscape is played out in the context of a practical

solution befitting American “know-how and hardware,” a mechanised plague superintended with a boy-scout’s diligence. On the other hand, Herr portrays officers whose sense of bloodlust eclipses that of the most atavistic foot soldiers, and which is entertained on a much wider scale:

That night I listened while a colonel explained the war in terms of protein. We were a nation of high-protein, meat-eating hunters, while the other guy just ate rice and a few grungy fish heads. We were going to club him to death with our meat; what could you say except, ‘Colonel, you’re insane’? It was like turning up in some black looneytune where the Duck had all the lines.... Domsday celebs, technomaniac projectionists; chemicals, gases, lasers, sonic-electric ballbreakers that were still on the boards; and for backup, deep in their hearts, there were always the Nukes, they loved to remind you that we had some, ‘right here in-country’. Once I met a colonel who had a plan to shorten the war by dropping piranha into the paddies of the North. He was talking fish but his dreamy eyes were full of mega-death.⁴²

Whilst Herr makes no suggestion that in instituting the infamous “body count” approach, the U.S. military came closer than any modern army to institutionalising and symbolically ratifying genocidal practices in its troops, the “dreamy mega-death” in Vietnam is clearly represented by *Dispatches* as issuing from the upper echelons of the military command-structure.

Herr’s editorial reactions to this tend to be framed as humour in the face of the absurd, but it is important to recall that the presence of humour in *Dispatches* invariably indicates the “joke at the deepest part of the blackest kernel of fear” and death, alluded to previously. Colonels seem to attract the greatest portion of disdain, as when in Chapter Five Herr follows the description of one prepared to let a soldier die from heat exhaustion rather than order a medevac chopper, with the bizarre insistence of another in taking his Styrofoam cup. Herr’s reaction is to “exchange the worst colonel stories we knew,” from the “colonel who threatened to court-martial a spec-4 for refusing to cut the heart out of a dead V.C. and feed it to a dog,” to the one

who believed all men under his command should have combat experience, and got all his cooks “wiped out on a night ambush.”⁴³ A constant theme therefore emerges, of the command-structure imposing utterly unrealistic practices and expectations on the basis of misplaced prejudices: “The belief that one Marine was better than ten slopes saw Marine squads fed in against known NVA platoons, platoons against companies, and on and on, until whole battalions found themselves pinned down and cut off.”⁴⁴ Myths of American nationhood are therefore shown in *Dispatches* to be fundamental to the conduct of the war in Vietnam, and Herr’s approach continually undercuts them, as seen in one short fragment that expresses the ambivalence of the ‘benevolent’ intervention; “Vietnam, man, bomb ’em and feed ’em, bomb ’em and feed ’em.”⁴⁵

Counterposed with the sense of brutality represented in the combat soldier, *Dispatches* therefore posits that in U.S. officers a particularly warped “tyranny of reason,” *alongside* that kind of gratuitous brutality, is structuring the prosecution of the war by the higher reaches of command. Herr’s point is that the violence latent in command-structures was rarely articulated other than in unguarded “unofficial” instances, and there is a further aspect to the military machine’s conduct against which *Dispatches* reacts violently. On an anecdotal level, reports of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam’s (MAC-V’s) falsifying both casualty figures and kill ratios are so common as to be pretty much accepted fact, and Herr makes frequent reference to this phenomenon:

while the official number of dead was listed at 3,000, I never met anyone who had been there, including officers of the Cav, who would settle for anything less than three or four times that figure....⁴⁶

A twenty-four-year-old Special Forces captain was telling me about it. ‘I went and killed one VC and liberated a prisoner. Next day the major called me in and told me that I’d killed

fourteen VC and liberated six prisoners. You want to see the medal?⁴⁷

The “tyranny of reason” is never more pronounced than when Herr addresses the bureaucratic offerings of the U.S. military’s “version” of the war, and this receives his most critical treatment. Saigon, centre of most military communications, becomes a metaphor for the military-bureaucratic modalities that engender in Herr the “worst sense of American shame,” and again it is worth citing at some length:

Saigon, the centre, where every action in the bushes hundreds of miles away was fed back into town on a karmic wire strung so tight that if you touched it in the early morning it would sing all day and all night. Nothing so horrible ever happened upcountry that it was beyond language fix and press relations, a squeeze-fit into the computers would make the heaviest numbers jump up and dance. You’d either meet an optimism that no violence could unconvince, or a cynicism that would eat itself empty every day and then turn, hungry and malignant.... These men called dead Vietnamese ‘believers’, a lost American platoon was a ‘black eye’, they talked as though killing a man was nothing more than depriving him of his vigour.⁴⁸

Contrary to the official reports which would speak of helicopters shot down “as an expensive equipment loss, as though our choppers were crewless entities that held to the sky by themselves, spilling nothing more precious than fuel when they crashed,”⁴⁹ Herr’s discourse repeatedly seeks to re-appropriate the very grimness of death and mutilation, so mutilated by the official narratives where “the spokesmen spoke in words that had no currency left as words.”⁵⁰ The U.S. fetishisation of machinery in war, ostensibly motivated by the desire to “sell American lives dearly” and prioritise spending on machinery to protect American lives, is here reversed into the kind of instrumental reason which can value those lives all too cheaply by equating them *with* their machines. By way of contrast Herr seems to take to heart Heller’s observation that “man’s truth lay in his entrails.” Whilst the *act* of killing is seldom directly represented within *Dispatches*, there is a marked profusion of dead bodies to which

Herr's narrator bears witness, and whose prevalence establishes the text as adopting an *oppositional* stance with regard to the military bureaucracy's approach: "only eighty GI's dead in combat in a week, and you'd felt like you'd just gotten a bargain."⁵¹

As the Bourdieu quotation earlier suggests, a literary (or other) work should be placed in context of the "positions" offered to it within its field, and Herr's positioning must finally be expressed firstly in terms of its relationship to the other forms of journalism it describes, and secondly in terms of the implications his form carries for both his narrative figure and his spectatorship. The military-bureaucratic versions of the war are extensively satirised and criticised, but perhaps the bleakest implication of *Dispatches* is that they were, for the most part, the "accepted" narratives that passed into culture. So whilst Herr excoriates the "Command that rode us into attrition traps on the back of fictionalised kill-ratios, and the Administration that believed the Command," there is a further, and crucial, cog, in disseminating this "cross-fertilisation of ignorance:"

A press whose tradition of objectivity and fairness (not to mention self-interest) saw that it all got space. It was inevitable that once the media took the diversions seriously enough to report them, *they also legitimised them.*⁵²

In opposition to his identification with the grunt in the field, and his assertion of his own "elite" group of combat correspondents as an authentic subculture, Herr locates a vast proportion of the media in Vietnam as being explicitly aligned with the perspective of the military bureaucracy: "there were a lot of hacks who wrote down every word the generals and officials told them to write." His use of the word *legitimised* is key, implying both that the bureaucratic explanations *needed* the "legitimising" aspects of their expression in the media, and equally that the media

played an *active* role in transforming the raw material of MAC-V, often mind-numbingly trivial or euphemistic, into “legitimate” cultural narratives. While Herr’s positioning as the intrepid combat reporter, stressing the dangers of his environment and close attunement to the ways of the combat soldier, carries a touch of self-aggrandisement—“Herr thus proposes that the central drama of *Dispatches* is his daring to enter deeply into his memories of the war”⁵³—it is crucial to note that his positioning is frequently contrasted with the “hacks” who stayed in Saigon and “wrote down everything the generals told them.” The fragmentary, oral-dialogical style of *Dispatches* similarly evolves in opposition to the bland linearity of official narratives, and Herr’s stylistics should be read as oppositional in that sense, as well as forming a continuum with the “New Journalism” paradigm:

Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it, all it could do was take the most profound event of the American decade and turn it into a communications pudding, taking its most obvious, undeniable history and making it into a secret history.⁵⁴

In adopting his “unconventional” stance Herr directly *equates* “conventional journalism” with the “conventional firepower” of the generals, and posits the kind of “re-historicisation from below” referred to at the beginning of this piece, as an antidote to the “communications pudding” resulting from the two “conventional” approaches. In terms of the journalistic field, Herr is therefore explicitly antagonistic, and positions himself in relation to it *by obverse*; his fragmentary, dialogical, colloquial style can be seen as a formal counterweight, on ideological grounds, to his antagonistic objects within the field.

The kinds of critique described thus far would suffice to establish *Dispatches* as a text with a distinct set of ideological-critical agendas from Herr’s more “editorial” perspectives. It is my contention that the process of “subjective

destitution” he portrays extends this critique through his more *subjective* modality also. Herr’s suggestion is that “it took the war to teach it, that *you were as responsible for everything you saw as for everything you did.*” This implies a certain *complicity* within his representation of the act of “seeing,” and he makes a critical connection between the war as *spectacle* and the role of *spectatorship* in general, which is given a link beyond the obvious etymological one.⁵⁵ As his narrative gradually collapses the *false* distinction between voyeurism and participation—expressing the *active* role of the spectator—Herr comes to an understanding of the *productive* role of his position in engendering the various spectacular excesses he witnesses: “when a Colonel found out we were reporters he started to get his whole brigade cranked up to go out and kill people, and we took the next chopper out of there.”⁵⁶ In another of his most famous passages, media networks in general are implicated in the soldiers’ propensity towards self-negating acts in wartime:

I keep thinking about all the kids who got wiped out by seventeen years of war movies before coming to Vietnam to get wiped out for good. You don’t know what a media freak is until you’ve seen the way a few of those grunts would run around during a fight when they knew that there was a television crew nearby; *they were actually making war movies in their heads*, doing little guts-and-glory Leatherneck tap dances under fire, *getting their pimples shot off for the networks.*⁵⁷

While at the level of subjectivity Herr is shown to “traverse the fantasy” surrounding the act of killing, I would suggest that in his journalistic positioning there is a more culturally-specific fantasy being addressed, that of the “objective” observer whose spectatorship is strictly secondary to the events he witnesses. His evolution from voyeur to participant therefore transgresses primarily the *generic* bounds of the “conventional” journalist’s position, and the frequency of his direct address to the reader extends this transgressive implication still further. As so often, in the passage

above Herr uses the inclusive “you” to encompass *both* the specific “I” form of his narrative voice, *and* the universal “one” of his implicit reader. The text begins with such an instance, “Going out at night, the medic would give you pills,” and the insistence of this technique leads to Herr’s narrative “I” serving as a conduit, wherein the readerly “one” can be directly addressed and formed into a collective “you.” This interpellative gesture serves as a formal means of mediating between Herr’s position and that of his wider audience, implying a collective responsibility for the Vietnam war as a whole.

As a conflict specifically framed by President Kennedy as being in defence or promotion of U.S. “prestige,” the Vietnam war assumes very quickly the dimension of geopolitical spectacle. The implication of this is, of course, that a spectacle is inert without the *validating gaze* of the spectator, and assertions of the American approach to war as media spectacle therefore need re-inscribing within the wider administrative policy of geopolitics-by-display. The “fantasy” of objective journalism traversed and undercut within *Dispatches* is therefore supplanted by a “supplemental” fantasy which the text rejects, that of *objective spectatorship*. If Vietnam is, for the U.S., as William V. Spanos states, “a national anxiety, a collective trauma,” *Dispatches* suggests that this is due to the web of complicity radiating from the pervasive media networks, whereby “you were as responsible for everything that you saw, as you were for everything you did.”⁵⁸ Quite apart from the debate on the media networks’ critical or uncritical approaches to the conflict, the simple fact of their ever-presence in Vietnam and their dominant role in disseminating the war to the American public established the conflict’s news items as units of exchange in the cultural industry. Herr demonstrates that the troops in Vietnam suffered and died not only on behalf of U.S. “national prestige,” but also on behalf of the ongoing consumption of the war as

media spectacle. The grunt therefore assumes the thankless role of *product* in this matrix, and Herr's "subjective destitution" dramatises the interplay between media apparatuses and the active gazes that animate them. The narrator's identification with the GI, and the "acting-out" of his fantasies and praxis, can be seen as an enactment of *Dispatches*' entry into its cultural field: on an objective level, in distancing itself from popular-media and government portrayals of the war, and on a subjective level, as both announcing its own complicities with those media-structures, and forcing the reader to identify with those complicities also. In undergoing the kind of "subjective destitution" that it does, Herr's narrative voice plays a version of Jean-Baptiste Clamence's "game" in *The Fall*: "The more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you. Even better, I provoke you into judging yourself, and this relieves me of that much of the burden."⁵⁹ The destitution of Herr's "I" therefore serves as a medium for the projection of his trauma from the individual to the collective level, whereby the insistent "you" of address can segue into the "we" of the text's final line, and Herr's complex of guilt through spectatorship/participation is extended indefinitely: "Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam; we've all been there."⁶⁰

The registers of complicity discussed above indicate a reflexive awareness in the text played out on the manifest level—most notably with "your worst American sense of shame" and "you were as responsible for what you saw, as for what you did"—but it seems to me that there is a further level of complicity either latent or repressed within *Dispatches*. Whilst Herr can be said to ask rather different questions from those asked by conventional journalism, whilst he gives a voice to those normally marginalised (GIs), and whilst he questions his own complicity, nonetheless, as so often in U.S. representations of Vietnam, there are huge questions left unanswered and a perspective that is definitively foreclosed. If, as Hellman says, Herr

“contribute[s] to our understanding of the Vietnam war as, in part, a product of the American consciousness,” it is also clear that the text makes next to no allowance for the consciousness of the Vietnamese people, and the unfathomable sufferings inflicted upon them. The Vietnamese appear sparingly in the text and we are never invited to attend their point of view in the same exhaustive way Herr portrays the common American soldier.⁶¹ In terms of its entry into the cultural field, *Dispatches* is thus sited very much in the *American* field, and its antagonistic objects are approached very much within those limitations—in some way, repeating the Orientalising gestures of the men who instigated and prosecuted the war. On the domestic level Herr’s soldiers may “literally get their pimples shot off for the networks,” but to extend that analogy to the geopolitical field, millions of Vietnamese dead might be seen as being “literally” massacred on behalf of American “prestige.”

If, to this day, American comprehension of what the Vietnamese call “The American War” is limited, if indeed, in Spanos’s words, there is “some indefinable thing” about the American war on Vietnam which perpetuates its traumatic dimensions still, perhaps it resides in this marginalisation of the Vietnamese Other, the “bafflement presented by the Other’s invisibility... the inability to name and contain the mysterious Other.”⁶² Without assuming their ethical responsibility for the destruction and suffering inflicted upon the Other (could the contrast between American responses to their sins in Vietnam, and German responses to Nazism and the Holocaust, be any more instructively different?), and whilst the debate is continually framed in terms of “American consciousness,” we can assume that the dead hand of history will continue to weigh on American representations of Vietnam in this marginalised, spectral form.

Notes

- ¹ Tim O'Brien, "How to tell a true war story" in *The Things They Carried* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 68.
- ² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 232.
- ³ John Limon, *Writing After War; American War Fiction From Realism to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ⁴ Nigel Leigh, *Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 1.
- ⁵ John Ellis, "Reflections on 'the sharp end' of war" in Paul Addison and Angus Calder, eds., *Time to Kill: the Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994); John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976).
- ⁶ "...when an official army historian came onto the field after a fight, it was usually the commanders and higher officers to whom he talked.... you can read the history of a campaign in which you served, and find the history doesn't at all tally with the campaign you remember." James Jones, *World War II* (New York: Ballantine, 1975), 70.
- ⁷ Al Santoli, ed., *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War By Thirty Three American Soldiers Who Fought It* (New York: Random House, 1981); Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden: The Vietnam War and its Aftermath in the Words of Americans and Southeast Asians* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1985); Mark Baker, ed., *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women who Fought There* (New York: William Morrow, 1981); Wallace Terry, ed., *Bloods; An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).
- ⁸ Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 31, my emphasis.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.
- ¹⁰ Elizabeth and Edmund Wright, eds., *A Zizek Reader* (London: Verso, 1999), 20.
- ¹¹ Philip D. Beidler, *Rewriting America: Vietnam Authors in their Generation* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia University, 1991), 166, emphasis in original.
- ¹² To make the contrast on the most basic level, the Allied soldier of World War II could look to his side's cause and objectives without too much moral ambivalence. Whilst his counterparts in Iraq as I write may not have those luxuries, their common refrain of "We don't worry about the political issues, that's the politician's job, this is what we joined up for, it's our job" indicates a certain phlegmatism on the part of U.S. and U.K. soldiers of volunteer status, denied to the grunt in Vietnam.
- ¹³ Col. Robert Heintz, Jr., "The Collapse of the Armed Forces" (*Armed Forces Journal*, 7 June 1971).
- ¹⁴ Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried", in *The Things They Carried*, 17, emphasis in original.
- ¹⁵ "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, sacrifice, and the expression in vain," Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, (London: Granada, 1977), 133.
- ¹⁶ Herr, *Dispatches*, 86.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ²¹ *A Zizek Reader*, 281.
- ²² Herr, *Dispatches*, 110, emphasis in original.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 56-7.
- ²⁴ Zizek, *Reader*, 106.
- ²⁵ Herr, *Dispatches*, 111-12.
- ²⁶ Paul Gray, "Secret History" (*Time*, 7 November 1977).
- ²⁷ Herr, *Dispatches*, 23.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 109. "The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance, that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat." O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story," 77. The aesthetic, in addition to the libidinal satisfactions of combat, is a recurring theme of Vietnam histories.
- ³⁰ Herr, *Dispatches*, 60.

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- ³¹ Ibid., 61.
- ³² “I can assume my fundamental fantasy only insofar as I undergo what Lacan calls ‘subjective destitution.’” Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 36.
- ³³ Herr, *Dispatches*, 26.
- ³⁴ Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 29.
- ³⁵ Herr, *Dispatches*, 60-61, my emphasis.
- ³⁶ For example, whilst there is only one *directly* represented instance of the act of killing in the text, Herr again turns away from it: “‘Man, did you *see* that?’ And I said ‘yes (lying) it was something, really something.’” Ibid., 117.
- ³⁷ Beidler, *Rewriting America*, 267.
- ³⁸ Herr, *Dispatches*, 59.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 41, all my emphasis.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 12.
- ⁴² Ibid., 54-55.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 165.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 81.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 141.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 155-6.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 173.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid., my emphasis.
- ⁵³ John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 152.
- ⁵⁴ Herr, *Dispatches*, 175.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 24, my emphasis.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 14.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 169, my emphasis.
- ⁵⁸ William V. Spanos, *America’s Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 132.
- ⁵⁹ Herr, *Dispatches*, 103.
- ⁶⁰ Herr, *Dispatches*, 206.
- ⁶¹ John Hellman, *Fables of Fact The New Journalism as Fiction* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 138.
- ⁶² Spanos, *America’s Shadow*, 154.