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## Transnational Gestures: Rethinking Trauma in U.S. War Fiction

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Transnational Gestures: Rethinking Trauma in U.S. War Fiction

A Dissertation Presented

By

RUTH ANNE HARIU LAHTI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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English

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A Dissertation Presented

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RUTH ANNE HARIU LAHTI

Approved as to style and content by:

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DEDICATION

To Adam, now and always

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At this final stage of my dissertation project, I first want to express my gratitude to the members of my committee. Warm thanks to Laura Doyle, Stephen Clingman, and Sara Lennox for their guidance during this project and for the ways in which their own scholarship has inspired me. My special thanks go to my chair Laura, who has been an extraordinary mentor in all ways—helping me find my authentic voice as a literary scholar and teaching me that the spirit with which we undertake our work in this profession is as critical to our success as the content of that work. Thanks also to Deborah Carlin, who has been a generous mentor throughout my graduate career and whose influence has shaped this project.

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ABSTRACT

TRANSNATIONAL GESTURES: RETHINKING TRAUMA IN U.S. WAR FICTION

MAY 2014

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This dissertation addresses the need to "world" our literary histories of U.S. war fiction, arguing that a transnational approach to this genre remaps on an enlarged scale the ethical implications of 20th and 21st century war writing. This study turns to representations of the human body to differently apprehend the ethical struggles of war fiction, thereby rethinking psychological and nationalist models of war trauma and developing a new method of reading the literature of war. To lay the ground for this analysis, I argue that the dominance of trauma theory in critical work on U.S. war fiction privileges the "authentic" experience of the white, male American soldier-author, which inadequately accounts for total war's impact on women, ethnic minorities, non-Americans, and non-combatants on all sides of the battle. The literary text, I contend, can restore a view to the diversity of war experiences, and my methodology provides a model for recovering these overlooked perspectives: close-reading characters' bodily gestures. I develop this method to resituate war as relational, always involving two or more participants who in the local encounter are differently vulnerable to operations of national power. In three sections of paired chapters, this method illuminates the transnational dimensions of canonical war fiction by Ernest Hemingway and Tim O'Brien alongside

fiction by authors not as fully associated with the genre: Susan O'Neill, Toni Morrison, Chang-rae Lee, and Jayne Anne Phillips. These authors represent World War I through Vietnam; yet, in order to emphasize my reorientation of trauma theory, the chapters are organized around particular stages of war trauma: the event of war, homecoming from war, and war trauma across generations. By prioritizing war's embodied interactions, this study moves away from trauma theory's grounding in a universal view of the singular subject toward a conception of war trauma as intersubjective and inflected by uneven material realities. In doing so, "Transnational Gestures" contributes a new perspective to current scholarly debates about how American literary studies can intersect postcolonial, world, and empire studies in ways that better attend to complex legacies of global violence and inequality.



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## INTRODUCTION

### TRANSNATIONAL TRAUMA AND THE BODY OF AMERICAN WAR FICTION

*Far from being an inert, passive, noncultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual, and intellectual struggles.*

--Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*

*As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power.*

--Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*

#### A. Overview

Hurling headlong into the twenty-first century, American literary studies has encountered the pressing need to "world" its literary histories, to situate the significance of American literature within its global contexts. The boundaries of our national literary landscape have been transformed by the ethical exigencies of 9/11, as a realization of the porosity of these conceptual boundaries also opens a view to the ways in which U.S. literature is imbricated in complex global landscapes of power. Thinking in this enlarged scale also prompts us to acknowledge another enlarged scale that fires the urgency of global thinking: that of total war, particularly as Clausewitz's mid-nineteenth century description of total war has encountered the potentiality of total destruction in our nuclear age. Indeed, William Faulkner pointedly vocalizes this urgency to his global audience at the mid-point of the last century upon his receipt of the 1949 Nobel Prize, "There is only the question: When will I be blown up?" The enlarged scale of total war signals the ways in which the battlefield has converged with and increasingly depended upon the home front, as soldiers and civilians alike across national contexts have become participants in and victims of war. Attending to the event of war on a global scale promotes important insights about what Jean Luc Nancy has called our global "violent relatedness" (xvii), yet

what often falls out of view when thinking in models of totality is the force of the particular—the deep textures of individual human experiences that can evince the ethical consequences of asymmetrical political and economic relations and imperial histories. Along this line of thinking, this study of U.S. war fiction seeks to take up the questions: how can we honor the humanitarian impulse of conceptualizing war on a world scale while simultaneously attending to drastically uneven positions of individuals' experience within the event of war? How does one apprehend the presence of the "world" in war fiction?

In this balancing act between attending to the universal and to the particular, recognizing the framework through which U.S. war fiction imagines the world is a first step. This frame can often be deceptively small, as compellingly illustrated in one of the last century's most important works of war fiction. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut includes a scene that powerfully captures humans' limited vision of reality in contrast to the expansive vision of the alien species, the Tralfamadorians; in this scene, the Tralfamadorians use a metaphor to give Billy Pilgrim a sense of what he has been missing:

But among them was this poor Earthling, and his head was encased in a steel sphere which he could never take off. There was only one eyehole through which he could look, and welded to that eyehole were six feet of pipe. This was only the beginning of Billy's miseries in the metaphor. He was also strapped to a steel lattice which was bolted to a flatcar on rails, and there was no way he could turn his head or touch the pipe. The far end of the pipe rested on a bi-pod which was also bolted to the flatcar. All Billy could see was the little dot at the end of the pipe. He didn't even know he was on a flatcar, didn't even know there was anything peculiar about his situation. (115)

In a novel principally focused on the senselessness of war, this image dramatizes the poverty of human vision. I begin with Vonnegut's cutting critique of human perception in

order to draw a parallel to another form of envisioning the world in a diminished scale: in a globalized era, scholarship on U.S. wars likewise has largely missed the full scale of human suffering involved in these wars. Unlike Billy Pilgrim, however, whose vision is hopelessly blinkered, the expressive capacities of fiction offer us glimpses into war in a more global context. This returns us to the initial question, *how* does one apprehend the presence of the "world" in war fiction?

This study provides one answer to this question in the particular case of U.S. war representation by arguing that a transnational approach to this literary genre reveals the world in American wars while simultaneously attending to the ethical exigencies of particular traumatic experience. I turn to the generative site of the human body to differently apprehend the ethical struggles of war representation, thereby rethinking psychological and nationalist models of war trauma and developing a new method of reading the literature of war. In what follows, I demonstrate that the literary text can capture a glimpse of the diversity of war experiences, and my methodology provides a model of critical practice through which we can recover overlooked textual presences: reading characters' bodily gestures. Influenced by postcolonial, feminist, and performance theories, I develop this method to foreground war as a relational event, always involving two or more participants who in the local encounter are differently vulnerable to operations of national power as these structure war. By prioritizing war's embodied interactions, this study moves away from trauma theory's typical grounding in the singular subject toward a conception of war trauma as co-produced and inflected by material realities. In her work *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Anna Tsing describes how one can harness the ethical power of universal thinking—such as

that entailed in trauma theory—by imagining universal concepts as unfinished aspirations, as "engaged universals." These

aspirations for global connection...come to life in "friction," the grip of worldly encounter. Capitalism, science, and politics all depend on global connections. Each spreads through aspirations to fulfill *universal* dreams and schemes. Yet this is a particular kind of universality: It can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters. This explores practical, engaged universality as a guide to the yearnings and nightmares of our times. (1)

Working from this vantage, we can imagine how literature presents a picture of the universalizing concept of trauma as it comes into the sticky material encounter involved in war. Reading the gestures of war fiction, attempting to see the diverse, clashing worlds of war in the literary text, is to attune ourselves to U.S. war fiction as the fiction of "friction."

As we see even in the passage from Vonnegut above, characters' bodies work expressively in fiction as tools of signification: their movement helps establish the temporal, spatial, and cultural dimensions of literary worlds through particular forms that I call gesture. Especially in war fiction, in which the trauma of battle and its aftermath largely defies other forms of representation, characters' gestures become a crucial mode through which an author tells a trauma story. Characters enact what Kurt Vonnegut calls "a duty-dance with death,"<sup>1</sup> war's painful brand of choreography. This story about war, however, is not just one about personal, military, or national suffering; what readings of gesture insistently point to is the radically transnational character of war. After all, wars constitute a time and space in which boundaries of the nation are most imperiled yet most fiercely recapitulated, and, correspondingly, characters' gestures in war fiction literally flesh out this transnational chronotope.

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the subtitles of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

In this study of U.S. war fiction, the framework of the "transnational" serves three functions outlined in this introduction: first, it allows an intervention into studies of this genre that troubles the discipline's reliance on national borders as an organizing mechanism; second, it enables a theoretical intervention that opens up the delimited subject of trauma theory and thus the ethical significance of characters' interaction in wars; and third, it frames a methodology—the interpretation of gesture in literature—that allows us better to discern uneven forms of power working within fictional texts. My overall aim in this dissertation will be to emphasize war's transnational dimensions through readings of gesture in order to widen the generic boundaries and thus ethical implications of American war fiction. At times, these gestures mark characters' trauma, but what they consistently express is a character's relationship to national power, a constant, albeit shadowy, presence in American war fiction.

## B. Background and Methodology

In our era of questioning literary canons, the canon of war fiction has been one of the most unchallenged and thus most unresponsive to matters of difference (Hanley 20). Accordingly, the genre of war fiction consists of works predominantly by white, American, male, soldier-authors, which has resulted in a nationalistic body of literature largely focused on the perspective and/or trauma of the American soldier.<sup>2</sup> The influence of both modernism's interest in psychological interiority and the development of trauma theory has led, over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to a shift in the genre from the traditional model of portraying the soldier as heroic toward posing him as the

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars of American war literature (for example, see Jones and Ryan) identify Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* as the first modern war novel, followed by works by authors such as Dos Passos, Hemingway, Heller, Vonnegut, Mailer, Herr, O'Brien, Heineman, Robert Olen Butler, and, most recently, Karl Marlantes.

psychological victim of war (Jones 10-11). While this shift has produced the important outcomes of promoting forms of healing for certain communities of veterans and generating a broader social awareness of the plight of the returning soldier, the merging of trauma theory and war literature has created a model of experiential authentication that preserves this rigidly nationalistic and male-centered war canon. The critical response to this problematically gendered, raced, and American-oriented war canon has begun to develop,<sup>3</sup> but these studies have not addressed how trauma theory itself has shaped a canon that marginalizes a range of war writing.

The presupposed centrality of the U.S. soldier establishes yet simultaneously obscures war fiction's entanglement with the concept of nation. One effect of this obscuring has been the conflation of "war fiction" with "military fiction," an instance of blurring which signals larger ways in which war fiction contributes to our national imaginary. As Benedict Anderson has shown, national literature has played an instrumental role in shaping the imagined community of a nation's time and space, elements indispensable to the fantasy of bounded nation. Many authors and scholars face the challenge of dealing with the chaotic and ungraspable subject of war in literature by preserving a tight focus on the perspective of the soldier, yet in doing so recapitulate the literary bounds of the nation to which that soldier "belongs." A point in case is Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, which is widely hailed as the first modern American war novel and which was published in 1895 as the U.S. initiated imperial conquests abroad. That is, as the U.S. increasingly assumed a dominant position among empires and others states, U.S. authors increasingly wrote fiction that zeroed in on the U.S.-affiliated

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Maureen Ryan's excellent 2008 book, *The Other Side of Grief: The Homefront and the Aftermath in American Narratives of the Vietnam War*.

soldier as the psychological victim of war. Thus, we can place war fiction among those other print forms that Anderson shows have constituted the national imaginary. In this way, despite a long history of women, multi-ethnic, and non-Americans' war writing, the dominant critical view of war literature excludes these alternative fictional perspectives. The scope of literature we consider in "U.S. war fiction," therefore, represents a problematic conflation between discursive boundaries and boundaries of the nation.

In terms of the fiction itself, even while the major works in the genre may openly criticize the military and the American nation (as does much fiction dealing with Vietnam<sup>4</sup>), their forms can unwittingly reproduce the problematic power relations that underwrite the nation-state. Relating to the dominance of the soldier-author, representing battle scenes or the aftermath of war solely through a first-person point of view or the soldier's focalization sustains a specific vision of whose experience counts in war, lending to the widespread belief that only soldiers can accurately write about war. This also feeds the mistaken assumption that women are somehow absent from spaces of war and that certain non-Western countries are empty, non-populated, war zones.<sup>5</sup> Forcefully summarizing all these points about national power and forms of fiction, Lynne Hanley identifies war literature written by men as complicit in war itself: "Historically, war has always been a patriarchal project, and unless we undermine the soldier's monopoly on representing himself at war, our memories of war will overtly or covertly serve his interests" (124).

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<sup>4</sup> In this study, I follow other scholars in using the term "Vietnam" when referring to the constructed American experience of the Vietnam War and the term "Viet Nam" when referring to the country in its own right.

<sup>5</sup> Hanley argues in her book *Writing War: Fiction, Gender, Memory*, these ways of demarcating parts of the globe as remote, far away spaces in which American men wage war feed the misconception that wars are "an aberration rather than a habit of culture" (33).



Without underestimating white, American men's ability to write about war in ethical, political ways, I will "undermine the soldier's monopoly" by reading across a wide range of fictional texts that deal with war. "War fiction," as I more expansively define it for this transnational project, refers not only to representations of armed conflict or the lives of soldiers, but also to representations of civilian life within regions of conflict and within nations at conflict, and to representations of the traumatic aftermath of this conflict. This expansion better attends to the wide reach of war in an era of total war. I wish to note that I do not include novels dealing primarily with the Holocaust, so as to distinguish between the categories of war and genocide. Holocaust literature has a distinct relationship to trauma theory that I do not want to collapse into my investigation of war literature and trauma theory, so I have chosen my primary texts in order to respect this different literary history. In my selection of both canonical and lesser known works of war fiction, this study seeks places where literary language pushes back against hegemonic, nationalistic formations within war fiction.

Thinking outside the canon and the national also entails a reappraisal of the concept of trauma and how it is distinct from yet overlaps trauma theory. Trauma theory as it has emerged over the last three decades establishes that literary texts can facilitate a reader's affective yet respectful encounter with another's overwhelming experience of pain.<sup>6</sup> In its emphasis on the ethical relationship between testimony and witness, trauma theory is in many ways an ideal avenue into war fiction, and it informs my approach here. Yet it needs revision, for "trauma," too, has become implicitly constricted by nationalist boundaries insofar as it focuses on "the" suffering soldier. Therefore, the rest of this

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars influential in defining the field of trauma theory include Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, Judith Herman, E. Ann Kaplan, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, Ruth Leys, Nancy J. Peterson, Elizabeth Scarry, Kali Tal, Laura E. Tanner, and Allan Young.

introduction offers a rethinking of trauma theory and outlines the ways that a "gestural" reading of war fiction can carry us beyond its subjective and national limits.

Whether one understands the phenomenon of trauma through scientific, psychoanalytic, psychological, medical, artistic, or social terms, it is clear that "trauma" has emerged over the course of the last century as a, if not *the*, major framework through which Western societies have come to understand the experience and effects of overwhelming violence. In a widely-noted passage, Cathy Caruth writes: "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (*Unclaimed* 1). Because the traumatic event in its overwhelming immediacy is one to which the individual does not have direct access, the event is not available for representation through forms that rely on truth or referentiality; rather, the mode through which one attempts to convey the incomprehensibility of the event, the imperiled status of memory, and the affective force of trauma must be through indirect or literary language. Caruth locates the strength of trauma narrative in the performativity of its language. Following a Butlerian understanding of the performative ("Performative" 528), the literature of trauma moves beyond representing or expressing trauma to *constituting* the reality of traumatic experience, becoming the very mode by which trauma becomes intelligible. Caruth applies this concept of the performative specifically to the literature of trauma in its textual ability to enact the very incomprehensibility of traumatic experience, stating "the text no longer simply knows what it says, but indeed does more than it

knows” (*Unclaimed* 89-90). In literary language’s indirect reference and partial failure, it encapsulates the knowing and not knowing associated with traumatic experience.

While trauma scholars have made indisputable advances in bringing marginalized writing into our larger historical awareness, the very performativity of traumatic narrative makes it important to examine the discourse we use to talk about trauma: what kinds of assumptions, ideologies, and power relations structure our understanding of the experience of trauma? When does the language of "trauma" tip from its open performativity into a regulatory discourse that recognizes certain humans' suffering and not others'? With its dominant reliance on singular subjectivity, psychoanalysis, legalistic modes of discourse, and a rhetoric of healing, trauma theory has promoted a kind of insular healing that muffles the political message of war literature and leaves unanswered larger ethical questions surrounding the global scale of war's consequences.

Current critiques of trauma theory link it directly to uneven global power relations and object to its discursive reliance on psychoanalysis, the work of Sigmund Freud, and trauma theory's—and more particularly PTSD's—rhetoric of healing. Psychoanalysis not only relies on largely European models of universal subjectivity, but the discourse itself also reflects language that is entangled in power. Indeed, even in the metaphor that Freud uses to illustrate trauma and the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he uses bellicose language to describe the way that trauma is a result of "an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (*Beyond* 35). Freud posits a libidinally-driven model in psychoanalysis in which the norm is this shielded, protected subject, leading to trauma theory's privileging of a singular form of subjectivity. In a 2011 article that explores the question of whether trauma theory can be adapted for the

purposes of postcolonial studies, Irene Visser states that because of its problematic imbrication in Western systems of knowledge and power, "[t]he hegemonic trauma model ... obstructs entry to meanings underlying vital cultural non-western practices and beliefs" (279). Visser's point affirms that trauma theory's current reliance on subjectivity via psychoanalysis makes it inadequate to address postcolonial and transnational literature, calling for a reformulation of trauma's subject.

I would add that in the case of war fiction, we need to further nuance the ethical purposes of representing trauma beyond that of personal healing for the author. Trauma theory's current rhetoric of healing, with its metaphoric image of a wound vanishing, is a palliative vision bound to the needs of powerful nations which belies the struggles of all survivors who have been changed by their experiences. As literature evinces more forcefully than the popular discourse of trauma, war is an experience that recreates selves and cultures across the long view of time: people, acting in violence against one another, create new realities in physical and psychical space on both the level of individual and collective senses, and it deforms and transforms them in ways that cannot be restored to prior states through discourses of healing. I do not make this point to situate trauma in a fully melancholic or pessimistic light; instead, I argue that this preoccupation with "healing" trauma masks the ethical and political dimensions of trauma's message: at the behest of states, people are irreparably hurt or changed by other people in war, and under the weight of nationalistic norms are expected to "heal" and thereby rejoin the imagined community. However, against the other metaphorical illustration of trauma as the wound that never heals, I am more interested in the model of posttraumatic growth informed by clinical work around the globe that points to more useful ways to acknowledge and deal

with the painful consequences of trauma while retaining their political edge.<sup>7</sup> Visser's article on trauma theory grew out of a recent conference in which postcolonial scholars grappled with the issue of how to apply trauma theory responsibly in their field; this desire to draw on trauma theory reflects its continued promise for many areas of scholarly work. Visser concludes that "trauma theory's foundation in Freudian psychoanalysis may be acknowledged as a point of departure that invites further expansion as well as emendation to enable an openness towards non-western, non-Eurocentric models of psychic disorder and of reception and reading processes" (280).

This study regards trauma theory at this "point of departure" and cultivates a more radical sense of openness within a conception of trauma. Against a dematerialized and limited view of the "subject" of trauma, I will insistently situate trauma as relational, reminding us that war trauma is always an experience with an Other, whose acknowledgment or presence may vary from text to text. This version of trauma takes seriously the performative dimension of the literature of war trauma, drawing attention to the ways in which this literature generates new forms of knowledge about the painful experiences entailed in war. Such a conception of war as relational reorients both the subject of trauma and the uneven material realities of war, and in what follows I trace both reorientations through a transnational approach to bodily gesture.

Sharpening our view of the body's centrality in war fiction is paramount to discerning the performative dimension of war trauma's literary language. This turn to the body in order to reinterpret the event and effects of war has become the subject of recent

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<sup>7</sup> In therapeutic, sociocultural, and economic fields, the concept of "posttraumatic growth" is one of the latest models for rethinking the aftermath of trauma. See Weiss and Berger's *Posttraumatic Growth and Culturally Competent Practice : Lessons Learned From Around the Globe*, and Calhoun and Tedeschi's "The Foundations of Posttraumatic Growth: New Considerations."

literary scholarship, such as that by Santanu Das and Sarah Cole on Anglo-European and Indian representations of war. However, this emphasis on the body at war has not been applied to any full-length study of American war fiction.<sup>8</sup> In a 2010 study *Conflict, Nationhood, and Corporeality in Modern Literature: Bodies-at-War*, European scholar Petra Rau argues that representations of bodies are crucial sites of signification in war fiction; in contrast to normative visions of bodies that erase their social significance,

[b]odies in war, however, are neither respectable or inconspicuous, not least because war is a rupture of cultural norms on so many levels. The body-at-war, then, becomes precisely the site in which such ruptures first become manifest. As a result, modern war writing remains obsessed with the physical ordeal and the indignities war imposes on the body... (3)

These "ruptures" that Rau describes also constitute the traumatic register of the text; as textual spaces that enact self-making or—as in the case of war—self-unmaking, these ruptures evince the affective force of traumatic experience. We are thereby called to locate "the site in which such ruptures first become manifest" in representations of the body. In other words, in war fiction the *performative* dimension of traumatic language often takes shape in *performances* of the body. Characters' bodies choreograph new forms of knowledge about the experience of war trauma, and in the embodied interactions of war these gestures move away from an exclusive interest in the psychological interiority of one character and toward war trauma as relational and embedded within transnational contexts.

The generative capacity of representations of the body and its movement has been an enduring feature of studies in literature, gender, the postcolonial, the visual and

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<sup>8</sup> Per a search for "body" and "war" and "American literature" on MLA International Bibliography and WorldCat conducted on 4 March 2014. Books such as Lisa Long's *Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the Civil War* (2004) and Christina Jarvis's *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (2004) consider the representation of the body from a cultural studies or a historical standpoint rather than a specifically literary perspective.

performing arts, history, and rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> Studies of bodily gestures in antiquity reveal that gestures constituted a commonly accepted "network of knowledge" in themselves (Corbeill 12), providing a far removed historical standpoint from which to step back, defamiliarize, and reinterpret the gestures of our own times. The knowledge that adheres to bodily gesture moves beyond an imitation of the verbal, and of gesture in architecture, sculpture, painting, dance, and especially poetry, R.P. Blackmur contends that "the language of words most succeeds it *becomes* gesture in its words" (3). In more recent cultural and performance studies, bodily gestures play out social relations, such as in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" and Elin Diamond's feminist reinscription of Brecht's theory of Gestus. The latter, Diamond argues, is "not a mere miming of social relationship, but a reading of it, an interpretation by a historical subject who supplements (rather than disappears into) the production of meaning"(90). This body of scholarship shares the conviction that representations of gestures do not merely mimic reality but that they bear communicative capacity in their own right that can reshape social relations.

The body's particular significance in modern war fiction underlines the importance of critically attending to this "network of knowledge" that gesture indexes in a work of war fiction. Against the drastically dehumanizing methods of modern warfare, gesture can instate a dissonant *ethos* within warfare's deadly scheme of calculations. In this way, gesture in war fiction also preserves testimony that is imperiled by trauma's

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<sup>9</sup> Most recently, Guillemette Bolens explores the significance of gestures in literature in a 2012 book, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative*. Stressing the reader's cognitive interaction with literature, Bolens argues that "[l]iterature is powerful because, more than any other type of discourse, it triggers the activation of unpredicted sensorimotor configurations and surprises the mind with its own imaginative and cognitive potentialities" (17). While sharing the commitment to the importance of gesture in literature, my study differs from Bolens's in that I aim to call into question the idea of universal subjectivity on which his idea of the cognitive subject depends.

evisceration of memory and by social repression and forgetting. Giorgio Agamben writes that "the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language; it is always a *gag* in the proper meaning of the term, indicating first of all something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech, as well as in the sense of the actor's improvisation meant to compensate a loss of memory or an inability to speak" (58,9). In war fiction, the representation of gesture joins other formal techniques of trauma fiction such as narrative gaps, dislocations in time and space, and unreliable narrators, as witnesses to and placeholders of the trauma produced by war.

Gestures most forcefully reveal that war's suffering does not confine itself neatly within the boundaries of nations, and recent work on the transnational opens uncharted terrain for both trauma theory and American war fiction by inviting us to imagine how "war" constitutes physical and psychological spaces beyond the nation. Transnational methods of reading call critical attention to the way national power embeds itself in literary and scholarly writing, and my readings likewise attempt to de-naturalize the presence of national power in both canonical and non-canonical works of war literature. In their article "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way usefully compare the commonality of transnational approaches to the commonality of feminist approaches: "'transnationalism' can do to the nation what gender did for sexed bodies: provide the conceptual acid that denaturalizes all their deployments, compelling us to acknowledge that the nation, like sex, is a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction" (Briggs 627). This transnational "conceptual acid" helps erode the American frame that has become naturalized in representations of war.



As suggested in the analogy to "gender," transnational approaches alert us to the porous boundaries of the nation and the ways in which the "nation" mediates bodily norms. This mediation of the body extends to its representation in literature. In detecting places within literary texts to apply the "conceptual acid" of the transnational, I am guided in part by Sara Lennox's useful question: "Is it possible to read the text against the grain to discern suppressed sub- or supranational aspects that draw national or transnational hegemonies into question?" (24). Following this, I seek places where the "text situates itself with respect to the coloniality of power" (Lennox 24), doing so by zeroing in on certain gestures that signal the uneven terrain of power within war. Often, I locate these moments in the literary text by focusing on gestures that are dissonant within the narrative and that appear to push back against the text's structuring logic.

Joining the concepts of "trauma" and "the transnational" in war fiction moves us from purely psychoanalytic models of trauma toward a view that balances trauma's ethical force with the material conditions produced within, between, and across national powers. A transnational approach to war trauma brings to the fore war trauma as a dialectical process, one always tied up in a relationship between multiple subjects. Drawing on phenomenology, this study understands war as a limit case event in which the body finds itself highly vulnerable to an Other, thus revealing the unexpected intersubjective relation of openness between subject and object that Merleau-Ponty describes as "a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open" (132). Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeality links to more current work in intersubjectivity through Jean Luc Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, in which he describes "being-with" as the origin of meaning and the condition for Being itself. In their

emphasis on the body and being as one entity always open to the Other, these theories posit relational, embodied subjects. This idea of intersubjectivity helps us imagine trauma more fully in its dialectical dimension as a process of painful interaction.

Rather than being solely concerned with the universal subject of psychoanalysis, then, this intersubjective viewpoint reinscribes war trauma as a relational process of mutual constitution in which embodied subjects shape one another in acts of war. These embodied subjects have a distinct relationship to a network of material realities, as Laura Doyle explains,

Under these conditions [of subjects caught-up-alongside each other], every act is a witnessed inter-act, a slightly off-kilter exchange with unpredictable outcomes yet which is also delimited or supported "from behind" by the associates of the actor and the actor's own body and called out 'from afore' by the surround of other actors or material obstacles and resources. In truth, no 'subject' enters the exchange; rather, the exchange continually makes the subject—as socially encircled intersubject. ("Toward" 20)

The "off-kilter exchange" alerts us to the uneven power dynamics between "intersubject[s]" that link intersubjectivity to transnational concerns. Trauma's intersection with intersubjectivity grounds it in corporeal experience more responsive to matters of historical, political, and material conditions. From this viewpoint, we can reenvision war as a series of "witnessed interact(s)" in a transnational context.

This intersubjective reorientation of the traumatic experience in a transnational context is not an equation of universal bodies or an idealized form of connection; instead, it is one that dismantles the binaries of mind/body and victim/aggressor and allows an openness to a multiplicity of traumatic experiences. Stephen Clingman's work on the connections between language and the transnational also explores how the transnational relates not just to the crossing of physical borders but also to the crossing of

borders of "self" through the generative space of language, which ties intersubjective trauma more fully to the transnational in fiction. In its connection to and movement across borders, the transnational is a transitive construct that maps itself onto a transitive grammar of identity. This grammar of the self usefully overlaps the openness and mutual constitution that I stress in an intersubjective reconception of trauma, and Clingman notes that transnational movement can potentially be rupture or pain (28). This transitive grammar relates to the performative language of trauma in fiction, as "the text no longer simply knows what it says, but indeed does more than it knows" (Caruth 89-90). Transnational grammar and the literary language of trauma both emphasize movement across known boundaries of meaning, creating new referential realities.

To return to Tsing's idea of "engaged universals" in the beginning of this introduction, gesture gives grip to the disembodied idea of war, reinstating a relational view of war as "friction [which] reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" (Tsing 5). Following this model of an engaged universal, a theory of transnational trauma must be a self-reflexive and provisional structure. While I have surveyed a body of Euro-American critical work here in my discussion of trauma and the transnational, in what follows I will consistently emphasize the ways in which my formulation of transnational trauma is a *working* model that constantly seeks to expose, interrogate, and revise its reliance on certain forms of Euro- and American-centric systems of knowledge. Overall, in aiming to stress the performative, dialectical, and transformative strengths of trauma theory and the transitive emphasis of the transnational, my formulation of transnational trauma is one always

leaning into its status as a provisional structure from which to highlight ethical and political dimensions of war fiction.

In “Transnational Gestures,” I limit my focus to American authors to assert more rigorously that U.S. war literature need not concern only American characters or themes; rather, it should be understood as a transnational genre in itself. A transnational approach need not undo the category of American literature, but should highlight the constitutive connections that this category has with other world literatures. Wai Chee Dimock usefully outlines a transnational methodological approach of building new sets of “aggregates” in our study of American fiction: “In order for American literature to be nested in them, these aggregates would have to rest on a platform broader and more robustly empirical than the relatively arbitrary and demonstrably ephemeral borders of the nation. They require alternate geographies, alternate histories” (5). My readings demonstrate the ways in which American fiction reveals these alternate perspectives, “worlding” war fiction and uncoupling the conflation between boundaries of the nation and the discursive boundaries of American literary studies.

To expand the parameters of “war fiction” in my work, I examine fiction by canonical war writers Ernest Hemingway and Tim O’Brien alongside fiction by authors not as fully associated with the genre: Susan O’Neill, Toni Morrison, Chang-rae Lee, and Jayne Anne Phillips. This fiction represents multiple wars in which the United States took part, from World War I through Vietnam, and though these texts invoke historical events, I do not group my analyses along a progressive historical timeline. This organizational approach follows historian Michael Rothberg’s model of “multidirectional memory” in which “memory can represent a nonfetishistic form of work that turns back on pain,

recognizes its claims, and seeks to transform the social and political conditions that continue to produce it" (171). Accordingly, in order to emphasize my reorientation of trauma theory, I group my chapters as the fictional setting of each work radiates from the happening of war. Specifically, each section of paired chapters focuses on representations of a particular stage of war trauma: the event of war, homecoming from war, and war trauma across generations.

Part 1, "Situating the Survivor-Author," tracks the ways that the U.S. veteran-author frames the event of war in fiction. In Chapter 1 on Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and Chapter 2 on Susan O'Neill's *Don't Mean Nothing*, I read from a central point of departure: the survivor-author writing about the Vietnam War. After examining the way that each text affirms the centrality of the traumatized American soldier to varying degrees, I zoom in on their gestures in order to trace the bodily interaction of the American characters with one another and with the Vietnamese characters. I argue that O'Brien stages interactions structured by an American anxiety best understood through Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry. In contrast, O'Neill choreographs the transnational in its gendered dimension as a shared precarity across national lines among women facing the violence of American military men.

In Part 2, "'The World-In-The-Home': The Aftermath of War and the Problem of Homecoming," I bring together Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Toni Morrison's Korean War novel *Home* to show how their representation of postwar trauma dismantles the imagined security of the home front and gestures toward the longer histories of slavery and empire building. In Chapter 3, I argue that Hemingway's collection creates parallels between characters' gestures at war and at home, which ultimately critique American

prosperity as secured through the violent displacements of others. In Chapter 4, I reveal how Morrison's 2012 novel revisits and revises the gestures of *In Our Time* to draw into view the "Africanist presence" in Hemingway's collection, a presence that Morrison discusses in *Playing in the Dark*.

Part 3, "Transpacific Postmemory: The Afterlives of War Trauma," reenvision trauma theory's conception of multi-generational trauma, or postmemory. Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* and Jayne Anne Phillips's *Lark and Termite* both include transnational families whose bodies express the deforming effects of war trauma on family circles over time. I argue that Lee's novel critiques the inadequacy of universal applications of "war trauma" that fail to account for the displacements and diasporas that structure Asian American postmemory following U.S. wars in the Pacific. Extending the section's focus on the transpacific, I argue that Jayne Anne Phillips draws upon the radical traditions and forms of magical realism by linking the gestures of precarious bodies in poverty-stricken U.S. Appalachia to the war-torn realities of 1950s Korea.

The conclusion makes a case for war literature and gesture studies' central inclusion in interdisciplinary scholarly projects that aim to rethink the pasts, presents, and futures of world studies. Literature's expressive forms capture the omissions and silent presences lost in other forms of scholarship, affecting the way we understand a longer history of American wars and pointing to the generative possibilities of our research and teaching on world scales. At the same time, such studies can affect our geopolitical actions and perspectives in the present. A sharper understanding of U.S. fiction's struggle to make transnational sense of war can extend current insights within literary studies about how nation-framed representations of war make us more ready to do battle.

Revising trauma theory and breaking the national framing of war, a transnational view of war literature invites us to *see* the gestures of nurses, soldiers, and civilians. We can thereby reflect more broadly on the global impact of war in the “American century.”

**PART 1**

**SITUATING THE SURVIVOR-AUTHOR**



## CHAPTER 1

### GESTURAL MIMICRY AND BREAKING THE FRAME OF *THE THINGS THEY*

#### *CARRIED*

*Just as the "matter" of bodies cannot appear without a shaping and animating form, neither can the "matter" of war appear without a conditioning and facilitating form or frame.*  
--Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*

"You had to be there" communicates war's unspeakable horror as well as its inaccessibility to those who were not "there." It has become a kind of touchstone for the genre of war fiction, yet while having the ring of truth, this phrase simultaneously closes a circle around a legitimated group of war survivors. That is, it centers the narrative of war primarily on survivor-authors who write fiction based on their personal experiences of war. However, this widespread belief that survivors or military veterans of war possess the "right" kind of experience to authentically write about war immediately raises questions: Does this mean that soldiers somehow all react the same way to war? Are the forms of violence that take place under the cover of war restricted to the battlefield, or do they have a relationship to forms of violence outside of war? What about the noncombatants caught up in the event of war, particularly those who were "there" because war was fought on their home soil? And finally, if we do believe that there are valid perspectives on war other than the soldiers', why does the literary genre of American war fiction so heavily favor works by white, male soldier authors?

If one of the ethical stakes of war fiction is to generate a greater awareness of the global destructiveness of war, then we must ask ourselves if and how this fiction may simultaneously delimit our readerly sympathies. In the case of American war fiction, this means we must face the predominance of the survivor-author and situate this figure

within war's complicated web of power relations; therefore, the focus of this first section of paired chapters is the American veteran-author and the ethics of how he or she frames the event of war in fiction. Specifically, I focus on works by two veteran-authors, Tim O'Brien and Susan O'Neill. O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is widely known and taught, and since its publication in 1990 has quickly become a collection not just about the experience of war but also about the process of writing about war. As a counterpoint to O'Brien's text that troubles the reliance on the authority of the soldier-author, I include Susan O'Neill's little-known 2001 collection about the Vietnam War, *Don't Mean Nothing*. While the rest of the chapters in this dissertation include multidirectional history in terms of the wars they cover, in this section I read from a central point of departure: the survivor author writing about the Vietnam War. Veterans from this particular conflict rallied for public recognition of their war trauma more visibly than had veterans of previous wars, and in so doing, initiated the official recognition of PTSD;<sup>10</sup> in this way, the Vietnam War has most solidified our current conception of trauma and the survivor-author. After examining the way that O'Brien and O'Neill's texts affirm the centrality of the traumatized American soldier to varying degrees, I will turn to readings of gesture in order to show that the rendering of characters' bodies communicates war as an interactive phenomenon, evoking the transnational nature of war rather than simply the warring psyche within the American soldier.

Specifically, in these two works I trace the ways in which American characters bodily interact with one another and with the Vietnamese characters, a reading that not only highlights the uneven national power dynamics structuring the Vietnam War but

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<sup>10</sup> This official recognition entailed the American Psychological Association's codification of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in the 1980 version of the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual*, an inclusion which opened financial benefits to veterans seeking medical and psychological treatment for their war trauma.

also resuscitates the presence of Vietnamese characters who are largely overlooked both by authors and critics. Overall, I argue that the guiding gestures of both collections—the carrying, possessive hand and the open, extended palm—are emblematic of the authors' different approaches to the tradition of anchoring of the narrative focalization in the soldier characters; thus, we can trace a link between gesture and form in these literary works.

As a highly influential work of American war fiction, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* reproduces and generates many of the nation-focused blind spots that I describe above. I begin with an examination of the figure of the soldier-author in O'Brien's text as understood within a version of trauma theory that stops short of traversing the boundaries of the nation. I then zoom out from the figure of the American soldier and focus instead on the few, though central, scenes of interaction between the American and Vietnamese characters, at which I turn to the figuration of transnational trauma through gesture. Critical scholarship on *The Things They Carried* has not adequately addressed these perplexing moments in the text; yet, I argue that these scenes reveal the text's own struggle with its national U.S. frame. Discerning this gesture beyond the national frame requires us to develop new ways of reading the experience of war, and reading characters' bodily gestures in these scenes of interaction foreground the way that *The Things They Carried* offers a glimpse into war as a relational event, always involving two or more participants. This approach brings into view a heretofore unnoticed pattern of mimicry between the American characters and Vietnamese

characters that reshapes our scholarly understanding of the text's representation of war trauma.

Published in 1990, *The Things They Carried* contains twenty-two stories or chapters that circulate around the experiences of the American men of an Alpha company during and after the Vietnam War. Though both literary critics and the author Tim O'Brien resist definitively classifying the work as a novel or a collection of short stories,<sup>11</sup> it is clear that the sections within *The Things They Carried* link to one another through a recurring cast of characters, the stories' referencing of one another, and, importantly for this chapter, what most critics see as the organizing yet indeterminate center of the character named Tim O'Brien, a character who is also a writer. The text characterizes this figure through his repeated, and perhaps self-soothing, statement that, "I'm forty-three years old, and a writer now, and the war has been over for a long while" (32). This character named Tim O'Brien (hereafter "character Tim") is the first-person narrator and focalizing perspective for all but four of the stories in the text: three third-person stories "The Things They Carried," "Speaking of Courage," and "In the Field"; and one story at the literal center of the work<sup>12</sup> "The Man I Killed," in which a discernible narrative perspective completely gives way to pure focalization, a technique I explore in more detail below. Though the character and the author share a name, similar Vietnam War experiences, and the occupation of writer, numerous studies have traced the biographical differences between the character Tim and the actual author Tim O'Brien (hereafter "author O'Brien"). Therefore, it is generally accepted that the character Tim who speaks

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Kaplan writes, "In a recent interview I asked Tim O'Brien what he felt was the most adequate designation [novel or collection of stories]. He said that *The Things They Carried* is neither a collection of stories nor a novel: he preferred to call it a work of fiction" ("Undying" 52, n1).

<sup>12</sup> "The Man I Killed" runs from pages 124-130 in a work that is 246 pages.

from the "I" perspective and self-reflexively describes writing the stories in the text is not coextensive with the author O'Brien. However, in a telling slippage, the critical work on *The Things They Carried* takes for granted that when the character Tim describes his impetus for writing fiction about his war experiences, that he also expresses the author O'Brien's motivations for writing fiction.

This critical slippage deserves discussion in relation to trauma theory's conception of the survivor-author and its rhetoric of healing, for the slippage reflects the often unquestioned privileging of soldier-authors in the genre of American war literature more generally. From the standpoint of trauma theory, the identity of a survivor-author and authorial intention play a much more prominent role in the reception of trauma fiction than in other genres of contemporary fiction. In general, because the nature of traumatic experience as understood in trauma theory renders ideas of "truth" or "fact" problematic, survivors find fiction, with its more flexible, expressive links to the real, more appropriate than other traditional non-fiction forms of writing. As Kali Tal emphatically writes of trauma literature: "Bearing witness is an aggressive act. . . . If survivors can retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure" (7). Therefore, when survivors of certain traumatic experiences write fiction about similar experiences, there often remains a strong link between the fictional content and the author's past. War fiction has increasingly converged with this field of trauma fiction, as the last century of American war literature has marked the conversion of the soldier-character from the hero of the traditional war story to the psychological victim of war.<sup>13</sup> An examination of the genre of American war

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Fleming from the 1895 *The Red Badge of Courage* is a remarkable early instance of a soldier character being depicted as the psychological victim of war. Interestingly, while many American war

fiction reveals that the "survivor" author in this field has largely been conflated with the "soldier" author, leading to its privileging of authors with past military service.<sup>14</sup> This tendency, I argue, emerges partly from the command that the idea of trauma has on the American imagination, especially in the case of Vietnam War fiction forward, since Vietnam veterans played a prominent role in the American Psychological Association's formal recognition of PTSD in 1980. Central to both trauma theory and the clinical treatment of PTSD is a belief, although to varying degrees, in the healing power of narrative. Putting the war experience into words can promote a recognition and sense of coming to terms both personally and collectively, and trauma narrative often entails this rhetoric of healing wherein the reparation of personal and/or national identity becomes an end. I agree that the role that literature can play in both the healing process and in bringing to light suppressed, painful histories are extremely important. But, I also want to insist that this is not *all* war literature offers us, that it's important to ask ourselves where the lens of trauma crops our view of war literature's generative potential.

Apart from the obvious shared name Tim O'Brien, I suggest that trauma theory's conception of the survivor-author partly conditions the critical tendency both to see the character Tim as the organizing link across all the stories in the text (operating metafictionally as a writer of those stories in which he is not present) and to see a seamlessness between character Tim's ideas on writing and those of author O'Brien. A critical vortex opens between fiction and fact, and suddenly what was seen through

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literature scholars (for example, see Jones and Ryan) identify *The Red Badge of Courage* as the first modern American war novel for this reason, Stephen Crane himself was not a veteran of the Civil War and composed the novel based on interviews with veterans.

<sup>14</sup> A brief survey of major writers in the genre of American war fiction includes authors with military service such as Dos Passos, Hemingway, Heller, Vonnegut, Mailer, Herr, O'Brien, Heineman, Robert Olen Butler, and, most recently, Karl Marlantes.

biographical distinctions as separate (character "author" and author) becomes mapped directly onto one another through the figure of the univocal survivor author. This blurred distinction through the occupation of survivor author has generated the untroubled assumption that both Tim O'Briens share the same motivation for writing fiction: narrative's healing power. In the final story of *The Things They Carried*, "The Lives of the Dead," character Tim describes the restorative power of incorporating his dead war buddies into narrative, "But this too is true: stories can save us. ... They're all dead. But in a story, which is a kind of dreaming, the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world" (225). Not only does the character believe that writing will restore his lost comrades, but he also sees the process of storytelling as a way to reconnect his current identity with his past, pre-war self. Of the process of writing, the character Tim says, "I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story" (246). The identity-restoring power of narrative, a tenet so central in trauma theory, becomes the impetus for the process of writing on the diegetic level of the text. The healing power of narrative thus becomes one of the central messages of *The Things They Carried*: "While much Vietnam War literature expresses the 'incommunicability' of war trauma ... O'Brien's work expresses the exact opposite: that through imaginative acts of storytelling and reading, the atrocity of war can begin to be understood and thus can begin to heal" (Farrell 20).<sup>15</sup> In this line of thinking, the character Tim becomes a screen for the survivor-author O'Brien, a screen that we as readers are constantly trying to look around to see what really matters in the book: the dynamic survivor-author.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark A. Heberle most fully expresses this viewpoint that trauma is the central shaping force of all of Tim O'Brien's writings in his book *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam*.

I suggest that we shouldn't overlook what I see as a productive tension between the two survivor writers, the character Tim and author O'Brien, by assuming their motivations for writing are the same. Not only does the desire to read for a univocal survivor author install the reparation of [American] subjectivity itself as the central stake of the text, it also tends to introduce an uncritical dimension of irreproachable representational choices in war texts; because the fiction functions as a process of healing for the survivor author, one is loath to criticize its investment in distinctly American, male considerations. For example, in his book *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Tim O'Brien* Alex Vernon writes,

We should not fault O'Brien, or any war novelist, for failing to present the larger context beyond...well, beyond what the soldiers carried [...] soldiers frequently don't know the full story of their situation--they often know very little about the political, the strategic, or even the operational purposes for which they are being used. (59)

Here, Vernon makes an easy substitution between "war novelist" and "soldier." While my aim in reading *The Things They Carried* is not to fault O'Brien on the level of authorial intention or dismiss the importance of personal healing, what I do suggest is that looking for the way that this highly influential war text succeeds or fails in presenting the "context beyond" the soldier's perspective is integral to a transnational reappraisal of the genre of war literature itself.

One way *The Things They Carried* limits a view of this larger context beyond is its sparse representation of Vietnamese people, whether civilian or soldier. Apart from a few scenes, the Viet Nam of the text is simply peopled by the American men of the Alpha company. When the enemy does appear, it's generally as a haunting, disembodied presence, as in the story "The Ghost Soldiers" when character Tim says of Viet Nam: "It



was ghost country, and Charlie Cong was the main ghost" (202). While character Tim's description refers to guerilla warfare, it also makes the Viet Cong invisible and already dead, rhetorically repeating centuries of erasure of non-white "Others." As Judith Butler points out in *Frames of War*, representational strategies that cast a certain population as somehow nonhuman are steeped in issues of power, and in this case of war fiction, very much tied up in American power; Butler writes, "the frames through which we apprehend, or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. They are themselves operations of power" (1). Character Tim's focalizing viewpoint, which directs much of what we see and know of the war, constantly redirects the reader away from the larger, relational contexts of the Vietnam War back through an American-invested perspective. While this American perspective is one saturated with guilt and trauma, from a transnational perspective there is something terribly suspect about literarily effacing the people and terrain of Viet Nam in the service of an American lesson about guilt; disturbingly, this oversight of the specificity of Viet Nam reproduces an American political mindset that functioned as a rationale for the war itself.

We can plumb the ethical consequences of the American frame in *The Things They Carried* by turning to a troubling scene in the story "The Man I Killed," the work's first material representation of the Vietnamese enemy. This story, placed in the middle of the work and spanning seven pages, functions as a center of gravity in the text where the soldiers' actions that drive the other stories come to a standstill in a static, startling scene of death. More specifically, the layers of telescopic perspective through which we have been receiving stories in the work collapse onto a scene of direct visual intensity with no

perceptible focalizing character: apart from the title and the identical phrase substituted for name of the Vietnamese enemy ("The Man I Killed"), the word "I" falls out of the story completely, a point not explored in any critical work on the book as yet. What the story presents is a descriptively photographic image of a destroyed body, an imagined backstory for the dead man, and a one-sided pantomime of surrounding American characters' actions and monologue directed at a seemingly absent character Tim. Even while inviting sympathy for the dead man, as one of the only representations of the enemy in *The Things They Carried*, this gruesome scene heightens the dehumanization and imaginative appropriation of the Vietnamese. "The Man I Killed" opens with this detailed description:

His jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth were gone, his one eye was shut, his other eye was a star-shaped hole, his eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's, his nose was undamaged, there was a slight tear at the lobe of one ear, his clean black hair was swept upward into a cowlick at the rear of the skull, his forehead was lightly freckled, his fingernails were clean, the skin at his left cheek was peeled back in three ragged strips, his right cheek was smooth and hairless, there was a butterfly on his chin, his neck was open to the spinal cord, and the blood there was thick and shiny and it was this wound that had killed him. (124)

Crucially, *all* we are presented with in terms of narration here is pure focalization, positioning the scene as hyper-visual and tightly-framed in an exclusive, though absent, line of vision. This technique of presenting the body can certainly gesture toward traumatic shock, as Mark Heberle and others have suggested. However, the formal absence of the Tim character calls for an additional reading, as this narrative technique inevitably calls up the aesthetic situation of the photograph, invoking a relation that Susan Sontag puts most clearly: "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—

and, therefore, like power" (4). While this literary description is *not* a visual image, its coroner-like detail of bodily destruction mimics the form of a photograph, and Sontag's work provides a way to discern the complicated power relations at play in this scene. Further, the cataloguing of physical detail in this image follows Sontag's assertion that photographs "make an inventory" (22) and parallels the opening story's central metaphor, the detailed list of the tangible and intangible things that the soldiers carried. These carried items elaborate the soldiers' identities, and as a parallel to the opening story, the "Man I Killed" scene mercilessly objectifies the dead Vietnamese man's body in order to elaborate the viewing soldiers' guilt. A further level of objectification comes through in Azar and Kiowa's comments to the absent Tim character, whom they address as "Tim" but, again, who does not appear in the narrative. Azar lays out the brute fact of killing's literal objectification when he congratulates, "Oh, man, you fuckin' trashed the fucker" (123). In less explicit terms, Kiowa draws attention to the objectifying narrative gaze by his repeated urgings to "stop *staring*" (126, 128).

From this photographic image of destruction, "The Man I Killed" then links the objectification of the man's body to the process of narrativization in its presentation of an imagined life story for the body: "He had been born, maybe, in 1946 in the village of My Khe near the central coastline...He was not a fighter....He liked books...He imagined covering his head and lying in a deep hole and closing his eyes and not moving until the war was over. He had no stomach for violence" (125-6). Critics agree that the backstory created here of a scholarly man with an aversion to war and fighting applies less definitively, if at all, to the dead man and more so to the character Tim (and in many

ways, to author O'Brien).<sup>16</sup> This fantasized backstory casts the Vietnamese man as a projection of the character Tim's identity while simultaneously revealing character Tim's anxiety about his own relationship to nation and normative gender constructions within the military; Tim's feelings of being unpatriotic in wanting to dodge the draft<sup>17</sup> mirror the dead man's covert "pray[ing] with his mother that the war might end soon" (127). This relationship to patriotism is specifically gendered: the image refers repeatedly to the man's body as being "like a woman's" (123) and the backstory notes that the dead man had been teased for being "pretty" and having a "woman's walk" (127). Tim's anxiety about his own national manhood is charged with racial overtones through the story's feminization of Asian men.<sup>18</sup> Here, in a close-up of the most fundamental relation specific to war—the soldier facing his enemy—national power structures vision and narrative, positioning the relationality of war as moment marked by a troubled boundary between empathic identification and an appropriative, violent gaze that figures the "Man I Killed" as radically unknowable apart from American terms. This presents a question: is this scene an indication that author O'Brien is willing to trade on a Vietnamese person's trauma in order to narrate American trauma, even in the service of exposing American guilt? I would argue not wholly. In order to see how this might be, we need to preserve the distinction between character Tim and author O'Brien.

The formal choice that author O'Brien makes in his removal of the character Tim in this scene can signal something further, allowing us to reread "The Man I Killed" as a

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Heberle writes, "O'Brien's narrator tries to resolve his feelings both by re-creating the young Vietnamese soldier in his own image, especially his sense of obligation to others, and by imagining that his victim's death will find some redemption" (202).

<sup>17</sup> This anxiety is detailed in the story "On the Rainy River" (39-61).

<sup>18</sup> There have been many feminist readings of *The Things They Carried* that explore the gender dynamics of the text and its relation to military discourse; for example, see Lorrie Smith, Susan Farrell, Pamela Smiley, and, more recently, Ah Oh Seung. Brian Jarvis connects the discussion of gender to its alignment with Asian men and more specifically the discourse of psychoanalysis.

direct dramatization of the ethical issues surrounding the viewpoint of the survivor-author, a point to which I will return in my conclusion. In order to substantiate this claim that *The Things They Carried* establishes a critical perspective on the American survivor *writer* apart from those perspectives expressed by the character Tim, I move now to close readings of scenes in which the characters push out of the American frame. Specifically, in the few scenes where American soldiers interact with Vietnamese civilians we see through gestures that the text makes the limitation or inadequacy of the American narrative frame visible. In this way, *The Things They Carried* carries out Butler's mandate "to call the frame into question" in order to show that "[s]omething exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality" (9), thereby destabilizing the normativity of national power as a structuring feature of war stories. When we read for these moments in the text when a Vietnamese person becomes apprehendable as a life, against the hyper-visual dead body of the "Man I Killed," we set the objectifying, still image of the body into motion, breaking the frame of O'Brien's work.

Attention to characters' bodily gestures in *The Things They Carried* opens a previously unexamined dimension of the text that moves us toward an understanding of war trauma as a transnational concept rooted in the violent relatedness of Americans and Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. In *The Things They Carried*, close readings of gesture specifically demonstrate that the interactions between the American characters and the Vietnamese characters are those in which the Americans mimic the gestures of the Vietnamese. This mimicking, which has distinct links to postcolonial theory, reveals

not only an American imperial anxiety about the war but also enacts the way that certain literary frames inscribe Vietnamese presence in colonizing American terms.

Parody, imitation, and mimicry permeate *The Things They Carried* on fictional and metafictional levels. Most visibly, the American soldiers of the Alpha Company, young men unprepared for the action of war, keep fear at bay in the field by acting like the movie stars that they have seen in war films and westerns; the character Tim describes, "You think of all the films you've seen, Audie Murphy and Gary Cooper and the Cisco kid, all those heroes, and you can't help falling back on them as models of proper comportment" (207). In the first story in the collection, Jimmy Cross describes this "proper comportment" as the need to "police up their acts" (25), highlighting the way that the mimicry of an ideal soldier's gestures adheres to authoritative, disciplinary norms. This idea of parody also ties in author O'Brien's use of metafiction in his incorporation of character Tim. In discussing these levels of parody, Wenping Gan writes, "O'Brien takes another form of parody, bantering the authority of an author and revealing the limitations of the author in creative writing" (190). Here, I extend Wenping Gan's thinking a step further and emphasize that through its use of parody, we can read the work as "revealing the limitations" of the American author, and even more particularly, the American survivor-author.

O'Brien introduces the theme of mimicry in relation to a Vietnamese character in a brief section of the third story "Spin." Among the many short vignettes about the Vietnam War that the character Tim relates in this story is one about "the time we enlisted an old poppa-san to guide us through the mine fields out on the Batangan Peninsula" (33). Interesting in the word "poppa-san" used to describe the man, who

remains nameless in the story, is the term's ambivalence. "Papa-san" is a word of Japanese origin meaning "a father or other man in a position of authority (sometimes as a form of respectful address)," that traveled with American military personnel following World War II to Korea and Viet Nam, becoming along this route a more derogatory name for any older man from East Asia, usually with some sort of connotation of menial labor or sexual overtones like the term "madam" (*OED*). This second, disrespectful use of "poppa-san" in the story "Spin" comes through in the lines that the American soldiers' sing as they follow the old man to safety through the fields, "*Step out of line, hit a mine; follow the dink, you're in the pink*" (33). Despite this clearly offensive racial language, it is also clear in "Spin" that the men endow this "poppa-san" figure with that kind of paternal authority noted in the original definition, which is clear in the language used to describe his gestures:

He had a tightrope walker's feel for the land beneath him—its surface tension, the give and take of things. Each morning we'd form up in a long column, the old poppa-san out front, and for the whole day we'd troop along after him, tracing his footsteps, playing an exact and ruthless game of follow the leader. (33)

The necessity for soldiers to exactly reproduce the old man's steps gives him authority, both in physical position and power as "the leader." The men's lives literally depend on this Vietnamese man, and in a childlike way, the men "all learned to love the old man" (33). While from one perspective, this scene contributes to the text's more obvious and problematic tendency to reduce Vietnamese characters to the land of Viet Nam itself, we can also read here the traces of a power relation that complicate a binary view of war through the vital role (and even presence) of civilians. Most importantly for O'Brien's text, in its gestures' staging of the dire necessity of mimicry, this early scene establishes a

way to read for the interdependency between these soldiers and the Vietnamese people, both allies and hostile.

The significance in the men's gestures of "playing an exact and ruthless game of follow the leader" emerges in reference to the postcolonial work of Homi Bhabha, which traces the longer history of mimicry and its relationship to colonial power. Of the way that mimicry becomes a sign of a power relation, Bhabha writes,

[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. ... Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers. (86)

Bhabha's work addresses the colonized mimicking the colonizer's discourse here, but this ambivalence plays out on several levels in the literary scene in the minefield above. On the one hand, the men's normative, derogatory language subjugates the old man, becoming painfully clear at the end of the scene when the chopper comes to take the American soldiers away. Hugging Jimmy Cross with tears in his eyes and then turning to the Alpha Company, the man says, " 'Follow dink,' he said to each of us, 'you go pink'" (33-4). However, there is an additional meaning displayed in the tender affect and gesture of this scene at the choppers, and the literal meaning of what he says to the men ("follow/acknowledge me and you'll stay alive, healthy," etc) contains a host of other messages such as a concern and care, a call for the importance of mutual recognition, a call to follow his example and avoid violent death, and even marks the man's experiential knowledge that signals a reversal of power relations of the military situation. Moreover, the literal meaning of the phrase reinforces the gesture of the men tracing the footsteps of



their "leader," copying his footsteps. In essence, in this gesture of following, the men are mimicking the man's authority in this land, reversing the power dynamic of Bhabha's formulation.

In this way, a pattern emerges in which *The Things They Carried* uses characters' bodily gestures to stage scenes where the authority of the American military discourse comes into friction with those material realities it cannot contain. Further, this reading of gestural mimicry in Bhabha's terms works against the American grain of the text and points beyond a Cold War framework by registering the much longer anti-colonial struggle in Viet Nam that often falls out in contemporary understanding of the war. This important transnational shift recorded in gestures of mimicry emerges forcefully in the two short stories "Church" and "Style," which come before and after the two stories ("The Man I Killed" and "Ambush") that represent the dead body of the Vietnamese soldier. By contextualizing "Church" and "Style" as an alternative frame for "The Man I Killed" story, an even more nuanced, transnational view of O'Brien's critique of the survivor writer emerges.

The work's eleventh section (barely five pages long), "Church," describes the Alpha Company encountering a nearly abandoned pagoda along the Batangan Peninsula where they meet the two remaining Buddhist monks, one old and one young. As the character Tim describes, "They spoke almost no English at all. When we dug our foxholes in the yard, the monks did not seem upset or displeased, though the younger one performed a washing motion with his hands. No one could decide what it meant" (119). Like the civilian earlier in the story "Spin," the presence of the Buddhist monks in this story also parallels historical circumstances of the Vietnam War that complicate a binary

vision of the war; Buddhist monks occupied a space of tension during the war as they were not tolerated by either the communist government of the North or the Catholic government of the South. The mysterious "washing motion" that the Buddhist monks perform is suggestive of a *mudra*, hand gestures in Buddhist practice which form an integral part of yoga and meditation. The meaning of these gestures, which help "eliminate negative thought forms and aid mood elevation" (Menen 23) falls outside the scope of the text; the story never reveals what the "washing motion" means but includes the phrase, "No one could decide what it meant," to register the movement's depth. While the character Tim describes the monks as they "giggled" and "smiled happily" (119), the *mudra*-like motion suggests a breaking of their inner equilibrium and their ill feelings toward the American soldiers, signaling to us that there is something more complex going on in the monks' reactions that is not fully discernible within the focal frame of the story.

The monks supplement the "washing motion" of their hands with actions of literal washing; early in the story they bring buckets of water for the men to use to bathe (119), and then they engage in a tedious process of disassembling and cleaning Henry Dobbins's machine gun part by part (120-122). While the soldiers interpret the monks' acts as helpful service, in the context of Buddhism, the gestures convey ablution and ritual purification, necessary upon their entrance into the space of the pagoda. This ritual takes on a heightened meaning through the monks' relationship to Henry Dobbins:

Though they were kind to all of us, the monks took a special liking for Henry Dobbins.

"Soldier Jesus," they'd say, "good soldier Jesus."  
Squatting quietly in the cool pagoda, they would help Dobbins disassemble and clean his machine gun, carefully brushing the parts with oil. The three of them seemed to have an understanding. Nothing in words, just a quietness they shared. (120)

Strikingly, when read through Buddhist practice, the monks' response to Henry Dobbins may not be based on "a special liking" for him; rather, as the machine gunner of the Alpha Company, Dobbins would have generated the most negative karma through killing and would thus be in most need of purification. In the only words the monks speak in this story, "good soldier Jesus," they repeatedly appeal to Henry Dobbins through what they assume to be his Christian background by invoking the words of 2 Timothy 2:3: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (NIV). While Saint Paul's words here have been misconstrued throughout history to serve military needs, these Biblical lines call for one to suffer the world's consequences for adhering to the model of Christ's life of nonviolence. This shared emphasis on the practice of nonviolence becomes an "understanding" between the men as they work together to purify the machine gun. Importantly, as this understanding is based on "nothing in words," the story positions this moment of mutual recognition between the Vietnamese monks and Henry Dobbins as outside the American frame of Tim's perspective. The irony, of course, is that while the soldiers are in the pagoda with the monks they are unaware of the fact that they are taking part in religious rites, though they realize that "it was mostly a very peaceful time" (119). The character Kiowa, an American Indian and devout Baptist, is the only character who recognizes the space as "still a church" (122) and has objected from the beginning to their setting up camp in the pagoda.

This story "Church" ends with Henry Dobbins breaking the peace established between the monks and the American men when he resumes his soldierly status and orders them to leave the pagoda:

When the two monks finished cleaning the machine gun, Henry Dobbins began reassembling it, wiping off the excess oil, then he handed each of them a can of peaches and a chocolate bar.  
"Okay," he said, "*didi mau*, boys. Beat it." The monks bowed and moved out of the pagoda into the bright morning sunlight.  
Henry Dobbins made the washing motion with his hands.  
"You're right," he said. "All you can do is be nice. Treat them decent, you know?" (123)

The gestures in this scene choreograph an interaction between the soldier and the monks constructed around a central ambivalence and indeterminacy that further complicates a simple reading of these Vietnamese characters. First, Dobbins's gesture of taking the machine gun from the monk's hands and replacing it with the C-rations of chocolate and canned peaches has layered meaning. In the act of reclaiming and reassembling the gun, Dobbins signals his intention to return to fighting, counteracting the purification rites. Further, there is kind of circuitous irony in Dobbins's act of handing them the rations of chocolate and peaches, both of which foods have histories of colonial expropriation. The canned peach has a particular significance in the context of Vietnam, as peaches and the peach flower are traditionally associated with the celebration of the eighteenth century victory of the Vietnamese against the Qing Dynasty invaders from China.<sup>19</sup> The act, then, of presenting the Buddhist monk with a canned, mass-produced version of a native fruit steeped in Vietnamese cultural meaning shifts the gesture from an objectionable bribe to an enactment of an unequal power relation. The first story in the text, "The Things They Carried," describes the soldiers' possessions, like the canned peaches, in terms of their relationship to the United States and to the war: "[i]t was the great American war chest--the fruits of science, the smokestacks, the canneries, the arsenals at

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<sup>19</sup> Having originally grown in China and in others areas of Asia such as regions of Vietnam, the peach traveled through the Mediterranean to Greece and Rome and then later became widely available in Europe and America (Janick 68)

Hartford ... and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry" (16). Henry Dobbins's gesture of giving the monks these rations may have its roots in a good intention, and in a sense it mimics the Vietnamese tradition of offering food or a peach blossom branch to signify good wishes; however, it is an act simultaneously weighted by the American soldier's ignorance of Vietnamese culture and becomes a sad marker of a power relation specific to the material conditions of the American war in Vietnam. This power relation plays out in Dobbins ordering the monks to leave their pagoda, using Vietnamese slang "*didi mau*," which means approximately "go quickly."

Most significant, the story closes when Henry Dobbins repeats the "washing motion with his hands," which, whether intentionally mimicked or not, registers a genuine anxiety about his role in relation to the monks and to the war. The phrase that follows the gesture, "'You're right,' he said. 'All you can do is be nice. Treat them decent, you know?'" is indeterminate as the dialogue tag "he" is unclear: is this Dobbins or Kiowa speaking? In the context of the passage, it makes more sense for the speaker to be Dobbins, but the inclusion of "you're right" throws off this possibility, as Kiowa has not previously said that they should treat anyone decently; those were Dobbins's words (121). If it is Dobbins or Kiowa speaking here about their conduct as American soldiers, the words ring hollow, as they have not been decent to the monks they just forced off of their land. Another option is that Dobbins is speaking belatedly to the monks through his use of their gesture; the "you're" here could be plural, and Dobbins could be putting into words the previous moment of shared understanding and agreeing with the *monks'* treatment of the American soldiers and their peaceful departure. If we read the gesture

and phrase this way, Dobbins is forming a coalition with the monks, distancing himself from the American soldiers by referring to the soldiers as "them" instead of "us."

However, it's important that Dobbins repeats the gesture after the monks have left; the gesture misses its moment to become a shared movement or point of communication.

Despite the failure of the gesture to either relieve Henry Dobbins's guilt or become a mode of communication with the monks, the interaction staged in the story makes perceptible a possibility for a transnational relation of resistance to war. By this, I'm not suggesting that this story forwards a religious transcendence of war, but it does mark a moment in which the characters, through the generativity of gestures, slip the noose of normative American military authority. However one interprets the phrase about being decent, Dobbins's gesture still resolutely signals that he has literally been moved through the interaction with the Vietnamese monks. This idea of resistance extends to composition of the narrative itself; just as the focalizing narrator of the story doesn't yield the meaning of the monks' gesture ("no one could decide what it meant"), the text embeds Dobbins's use of the gesture in narrative indeterminacy. In other words, both the soldiers' mystified response to the gesture and the narrative's resistance to attaching meaning to the gesture signal that there is "something beyond" the frame of the story. Even the title of the story calls attention to this: "Church" dramatizes this urge to reframe the sacred space of the Buddhist pagoda in Western terms.

Shortly hereafter, the story "Style" depicts the soldiers' reactions to and the crude and malicious mimicking of a young Vietnamese woman. The soldiers watch her dance in the smoke of her recently burnt-down village, perhaps set afire by the Alpha company: "There was no music. Most of the hamlet had burned down, including her house, which

was now smoke, and the girl danced with her eyes half closed, her feet bare. She was maybe fourteen. She had black hair and brown skin. 'Why's she dancing?' Azar said" (135). Presenting what is absent (the music, the hamlet), the story opens with a negative structure , underscored by its reference to "her house," before we have met the dancing woman or even know that she will be the subject of the story. "[H]er house," of course, is now nothing but smoke. In effect, the story begins in the passive voice with a kind of dismantling--both the music and perhaps the house that could have been used to try to understand this young woman are absent. Thus, the soldiers and the story approach the woman from a position of lack, and the lone figure of the dancing girl emerges against this background of destruction. The gaze of the focalizing perspective begins to categorize her features, as "maybe fourteen" and having "black hair and brown skin." Against this objectifying gaze that positions the girl as Other,<sup>20</sup> Azar's question shifts the story back to the movement of her dance. Immediately after his question appears the line, "We searched through the wreckage but there wasn't much to find" (135). However, we learn later that her family had all perished inside the burnt house, which may have prompted her dance (135). The phrase "there wasn't much to find," then, continues the pattern of negative phrasing and belies this horrific discovery of corpses in the burnt homes.

Rather than acknowledge what they *did* find in the rubble, the story goes on to describe the young woman's gestures in more detail: "The girl danced mostly on her toes. She took tiny steps in the dirt in front of her house, sometimes making a slow twirl,

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<sup>20</sup> Jen Dunnaway's article "'One More Redskin Bites the Dirt': Racial Melancholy in Vietnam War Representation" discusses that O'Brien's decision to largely omit considerations of race from *The Things They Carried* leads to the assumption of the characters' unity through whiteness and "reinforces (rather than challenges) the centrality of a white imperialist perspective" (123).

sometimes smiling to herself. 'Why's she dancing?' Azar said, and Henry Dobbins said it didn't matter why, she just was" (135). The focalizing perspective cannot ascribe meaning to her dance, which Azar's curious or frustrated repetition of "Why's she dancing?" mirrors. Henry Dobbins's response seems more resigned to the inaccessibility of her gestures from their American perspective, saying "it didn't matter why, she just was." Dobbins again here is open to forms of expression outside of the American standpoint, as his assertion that "she just was" affirms the young woman's presence without seeking to classify her in Western terms or otherwise understand her.

Azar's frustration with the dancing continues when the men discover the badly burned corpses of her family in the house:

When we dragged them out, the girl kept dancing. She put the palms of her hands against her ears, which must've meant something, and she danced sideways for a short while, and then backwards. She did a graceful movement with her hips. "Well, I don't get it," Azar said. ... A while later, when we moved out of the hamlet, she was still dancing. "Probably some kind of weird ritual," Azar said, but Henry Dobbins looked back and said no, the girl just liked to dance. (135-6)

In addition to the continued description of her movements, the focalizing narrator here connects the phrase "which must've meant something," which is similar to the phrase used in the earlier scene at the pagoda when the character Tim cannot interpret the monk's gestures but perceives their significance ("no one could decide what it meant"), likewise signaling a meaning beyond the American frame of the text. Azar's responses in this passage demonstrate the way that he deals with the mounting frustration of not being able to answer "why is she dancing?" by coming to conclusion that he cannot understand the dance ("Well, I don't get it") and then dismissing its importance ("Probably some kind of weird ritual"). Again, the disagreement over the significance of the dance takes place



between Azar and Henry Dobbins, though Dobbins's speaking for the young woman here is problematic in its own way as it ignores the dance's setting beside the burnt corpses of the girl's family. His assertion that "the girl just liked to dance" is very possibly as much of a misreading as Azar's, and, in effect, both Azar and Henry Dobbins dismiss the context of the girl's gestures, a context that they in one way or another had a hand in creating.

The absurdity of this dismissal creates a tension that lingers within the Alpha company even after they leave the scene of the dancing woman behind them, a tension that breaks into mimicry and then results in a continued hostility between Azar and Dobbins:

That night, after we'd marched away from the smoking village, Azar mocked the girl's dancing. He did funny jumps and spins. He put the palms of his hands against his ears and danced sideways for a while, and then backwards, and then did an erotic thing with his hips. But Henry Dobbins, who moved gracefully for such a big man, took Azar from behind and lifted him up high and carried him over to a deep well and asked if he wanted to be dumped in.

Azar said no.

"All right, then," Henry Dobbins said, "dance right." (136)

Here, Azar's mimicry of the girl's dance, unlike the pagoda scene, is clearly a hostile form of mockery that reveals Azar's uneasiness about the war. Not only does he (and the narrative) repeat the movements of her dance in a "funny" way, but he also sexualizes the young woman (who was "maybe fourteen") by substituting her original dance movement with "an erotic thing with his hips." Through Azar's reinterpretation of the woman's dance in front of the other men, he asserts a universalizing logic of sexual politics that attempts to reassert the homosocial purity of the American military company. The rendering of the gestures in this scene (Henry Dobbins "took Azar from behind ..."),

however, injects an important sexual ambiguity that destabilizes Azar's attempts to shore up American masculinity. The homoeroticism in the gestures' phrasing then shifts to violence, and Dobbins's order to "dance right" instates the imperative in the military of difference being subsumed under American heteronormativity.

We see that the narrative skirts the destructive violence of the Alpha soldiers and its effects by training an eye on the figure of the young woman. "Style" dramatizes through the woman's gestures and their effect on Azar and Dobbins the way in which the body of the Vietnamese woman becomes the locus of anxiety for the American soldiers. The mimicry here illustrates the tension that Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes within a Western discursive construct of the "third-world woman" as a human caught in the dissonant ideas of "'Woman'—a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses ... and 'woman'—real, material subjects of their collective histories" (382-3). The friction of these two identities accounts for Azar's inability to fully inscribe the Vietnamese woman in American terms. We need remember that this woman has somehow survived the destruction that befalls her entire village, and her dance positions her as *not* passive. Her dance, which she performs "with her eyes half closed" resists the presence of the soldiers: she is not performing for them, and she continues to dance against the atrocity even as they march out of the smoking village, unnerving the American men's feelings of supremacy. The detailed descriptions of the dance effectively unsettle the structure of the story itself, as the narrative of the men's process of destruction is constantly interrupted by the action of her dance. In this way, we see the fiction of "friction" take dissonant, bodily form through this dancing woman, as the movement of her gestures textually disrupts the survivor-author's narrative.

Both "Church" and "Style" present bodily gestures that express Vietnamese civilians' grief that the American soldiers see but cannot fully comprehend, grief that is a response to circumstances that the soldiers have in some way created or provoked (the destruction of the land around the pagoda and the burning of the village). Whether sparked by guilt or some other form of anxiety, the soldiers turn from the sight of the Vietnamese and mimic their gesture, re-enacting in American terms the expression they do not understand. Although the focalizing character Tim and the other soldiers cannot make sense of the Vietnamese civilians' gestures, the civilians' movements resolutely mark their place in the text as indications of that to which we do not have access through the American frame of the text itself.

Thus, these gestures and their mimicry mark the double articulation of the national frame, both in its success as it delimits the sphere of appearance but also in its failure, as it cannot contain that which unsettles and subverts the American perspective upon which it depends. Overall, the interaction of these gestures recover a limited sense of the transnational, relational dimension of the war in *The Things They Carried*. A consideration of these two stories as alternative frame within the American frame of the work as a whole informs a new reading of that other tightly-framed, hyper-visual story, "The Man I Killed." Embedded in this new context, we see that this story follows the same pattern as "Church" and "Style": that is, the American turns in anxiety from the sight of the expression of pain or death he has inflicted on a Vietnamese person and resorts to a form of conflicted self-expression. In the case of "The Man I Killed" the form of self-expression is the narrative of the imagined backstory for the dead man. In this way, *The Things They Carried* stages at its very center the situation of the survivor author

as he turns from the anxiety provoked by the relational grounds of violence in war to the one-sided refuge of fiction; this reading allows us space to envision the author O'Brien dramatizing through the character Tim the ethical danger that confronts the survivor writer in this turn from war experience to narrative. Despite the character Tim's final assertions that stories save lives, the ironic distance between author and character writer in "The Man I Killed" story reminds us that certain stories also simultaneously destroy other lives.

Finally, rereading "The Man I Killed" from a transnational perspective also reminds us about our position as readers. The removal of the Tim character from the story's focalizing frame positions the reader as the direct onlooker--many of us are that American looking on at the lifeless body; in this way, Kiowa's repeated urgings to "stop *staring*" (126,8) carry a new meaning, becoming a performative moment in the text that invokes the ethical dimension of reading. Kiowa, who in a work without heroes comes the closest to representing the voice of moral reason, speaks out to us from the fictional page, making us aware, perhaps, of a readerly anxiety that projects itself onto the figure of the authentic survivor author and, more generally, onto the figure of the Vietnam veteran.

By reinstating the writerly tension between the author Tim O'Brien and his character, we see that O'Brien's purpose in writing and the purpose stated by his character do not have to be coextensive, and the scenes above critique the limited narrative scope that American survivor writing often instates. The pattern of mimicry inserts a provocative concurrent meaning into central gesture of "carrying" in this work; rather than only seeing the soldiers' act of carrying as the burden of trauma, "carrying" also

holds the meaning of appropriation, both through American culture and through the process of American war writing. When non-Western characters are cast as ghosts and thereby rendered invisible or unreal, we face the ethical demand of tracing the active, dynamic, vibrant Other in the works themselves. In other words, to read transnationally here is to find the material, interactive, and plot-determining presence of the Other, to read against the grain of a text exclusively focused on American soldiers and the survivor writer. In this way, the friction sparked by the overlap of authorial frames in *The Things They Carried* briefly glints off the contours of transnational trauma entailed in the Vietnam War. In the next chapter, the more relational aspect of this war emerges into view, figuring the fully fleshed-out form of transnational trauma.

## CHAPTER 2

SUSAN O'NEILL, WOMEN'S VIETNAM WAR EXPERIENCE, AND *DON'T MEAN*

### *NOTHING*

*...hospital personnel—and female veterans in particular—served in a war that was substantially different from the one fought by male soldiers. ... Soldiers were trained—and expected—to kill the enemy. We were trained, and expected, to save anyone who came through the hospital doors, which often included the enemy. They lived with the killing; we, with the guilt of surviving.*

--Susan O'Neill, *Don't Mean Nothing*

Vietnam War veteran Susan O'Neill's fictional collection about Vietnam, *Don't Mean Nothing*, opens with a story "The Boy From Montana"<sup>21</sup> that interestingly parallels O'Brien's "The Man I Killed" in its absence of a focalizing narrator and thus its direct address to the reader. In this story, a nurse named Agnes Reedy shares a smoke break with an addressee, presumably a new nurse, with whom Agnes has just experienced a particularly gruesome day in the Phu Bai combat hospital. In order to sympathize with the new nurse, Agnes decides to tell the story of her own first hard day in a combat hospital. Agnes says to the new nurse, "You know, I've never talked about it, really. I just feel like now, right now, it's time—I've had it in my head so long, and I've got to tell somebody about it before I go back where nobody'll understand, nobody'll want to hear" (4). Because the addressee is missing here from this first story, Agnes is, in effect, also speaking directly to us as readers, and the urgency for her to relate her untold story "right now" becomes the narrative occasion not only for Agnes's story but also for the collection itself. Going back to this section's opening idea that "you had to be there" to understand the experience of the Vietnam War, we see that Susan O'Neill begins *Don't Mean*

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<sup>21</sup> In 2010 Serving House Press published a revised edition of *Don't Mean Nothing* that opens with a different story "Through the Looking Glass." Here, I use the original 2001 University of Massachusetts Press edition.

*Nothing* with a story that formally brings the reader "there." Yet, O'Neill transforms the dominant view of what being "there" in Viet Nam means, as this chapter will trace how her characters' gestures choreograph the shared precarity of American and Vietnamese women within violent, male-dominated warsapes. In essence, these transnational gestures make discernible a dimension of women's war experience that complicates a typical binary view of war as us/them. Instead, the gestures offer a way to recognize the Other of war, and as Jean-Luc Nancy describes, "Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness" (xiii).

The eighteen short stories included in the collection are structured around the experiences of men and women serving in three combat hospitals in Phu Bai, Chu Lai, and Cu Chi during the Vietnam War. Divided into three sections according to these locations, the stories loosely follow the character simply called "the Lieutenant" as she is reassigned over her year-long service in Viet Nam. What distinguishes O'Neill's book from O'Brien's is that it contains a diversity of focalizing characters that flesh out the enormity of the American war machine in Vietnam, giving us the perspective of women and men serving in a wide range of positions from medical personnel, USO entertainers, soldiers, and desk staff to even a night course professor and a chaplain's assistant. Also important is that O'Neill represents the consistent presence of Vietnamese, and more generally non-American, men, women, and children as support staff of various types, patients in the ward, and, crucially, inhabitants of the war zone. In summary, these stories range in topic, such as a male nurse's paternal attachment to an injured Vietnamese boy, the Lieutenant's experience of being haunted by the ghost of an old Vietnamese man, a

female nurse who tries to kill a senior officer's pet monkey, the various sexual relationships between medical personnel, a young nurse's decision to help a severely wounded soldier die, an entire hospital compound getting stoned after unknowingly eating steak sauce laced with pot, an anesthesiologist who causes a wounded Viet Cong soldier to undergo surgery without enough morphine, and other stories that range from humorous and mundane events to the horrific and cruel realities of the war.

In this second chapter, my critical readings of *Don't Mean Nothing* demonstrate the important contribution that an inclusion of women veteran<sup>22</sup> and non-combatants' fiction can make to our conceptualization of war fiction. First, I will examine the way in which O'Neill's self-referential introduction not only positions her work as a challenging fit within the genre of war fiction but how this personal introduction situates the experiences of the characters within as equally traumatic as those of the soldiers. As I will show in my more detailed reading of "The Boy From Montana," however, this trauma is not one that forms the center of the work; though the figure of "the Lieutenant" becomes a guide through various war-related locations in Viet Nam, this character does not monopolize the focalizing viewpoint. Here, I will first discuss O'Neill's introduction to the book and how it resituates the conception of the survivor author of war fiction through its connection to the little understood historical context of women in Vietnam. Then, I will move to close readings of gesture in the stories themselves, concentrating on those that we receive through a first-person narrator. Specifically, close readings of *Don't Mean Nothing* reveal that while O'Neill's narrative does not speak for the Vietnamese characters, gestural interactions between the American and Vietnamese characters

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<sup>22</sup> In addition to Susan O'Neill's collection, women veterans such as Elizabeth Scarborough and Terry Farish have written fiction based on their service during the Vietnam War.



choreograph the relational aspect of war that both generates the potential for mutual recognition across national lines and charts the destruction of this possibility under war's heavy-handed assertion of American national power.

The author's self-referential introduction to *Don't Mean Nothing* enacts the tendency described at the beginning of this section to authenticate war fiction by tying it to the author's military service; O'Neill writes, "I served as an army operating room nurse in Vietnam from May 1969 to June of 1970" (xii). While in general the issue of authenticating fiction in this way has a problematic edge in its privileging of soldier-authors, here, this move to ground the fiction of *Don't Mean Nothing* in "authentic" experience represents a move to widen the category of survivor author to include the voices of non-combatants. This expanded view of the survivor author of war fiction opens into a more transnational vantage of war, one that acknowledges the complex web of the American war machine in Vietnam,<sup>23</sup> a web that consisted of a large number of military support staff behind each soldier in the field both abroad and in the United States. Fictional representations of the Vietnam war from the soldier's perspective seldom address this larger experience of the war, and O'Neill self-consciously positions her book in reference to the traditional soldier's story about Vietnam:

*Don't Mean Nothing* has little in common with these [books written by men about Vietnam] because hospital personnel—and female veterans in particular—served in a war that was substantially different from the one fought by male soldiers. . . . Soldiers were trained—and expected—to kill the enemy. We were trained, and expected, to save anyone who came through the hospital doors, which often included the enemy. They lived with the killing; we, with the guilt of surviving. (xiii)

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<sup>23</sup> The "American" side was transnational in its own composition; for example, Christian Appy notes that "The United States persuaded, and in several cases paid for, a handful of nations to enter the war on behalf of the South Vietnamese government. South Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines supplied a total of more than three hundred thousand troops who fought in Vietnam" (*Patriots* xxv).

Thus, the authenticity of O'Neill's fictional writing challenges the normative conceptions of war writing and trauma that emerge from the discursive boundaries the soldier author. From the first pages, then, we begin to see that the literary project of this book will dislodge the simple cultural myth of nurses as the "ideal witnesses" of the war.<sup>24</sup> In this way, O'Neill steps into the frame of the American survivor author perspective and transforms the view from within.

This transformed view of the war highlights the complicated and often precarious position that women, both American and Vietnamese, have in relation to the hypermasculine culture of the American military. In her introduction, O'Neill underscores the presence of gender discrimination and violence in American women's Vietnam experiences:

But by far the biggest, most dynamic difference between females and males of all ranks and job descriptions was sex. Men lacked it, craved it, sometimes paid for it. Women were inundated with it, whether we wanted it or not. ... Many of us were betrayed; some, raped and abused. Some of us, too, did our own share of betraying and abusing. Revered as goddesses, Madonnas, and sisters or denounced as whores, we were none of these. We were mere humans. Most of us were young and naïve, rocked by adolescent hormones, ill equipped to play Eve to a thousand Adams. (xiii-xiv)

Against this heteronormative perspective within which women were revered or denounced, O'Neill asserts the reality of their situation as young women faced with sexual violence and "ill equipped" to deal with the intense gender dynamics of the military.

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<sup>24</sup> This cultural myth of female combat nurses as merely witnesses to the war experience emerges in studies of Vietnam that seeks to promote their voices; for example, Michael Zeitlin, in his collection edited with Paul Budra *Solider Talk: The Vietnam War in Oral Narrative*, describes women nurses as the "ideal witnesses" to the war, saying, "These women were called upon to bear witness to vast suffering while serving as sources of perfect empathy for the soldiers in their care" (200). This kind of reductive and romantic vision of women veterans serves to situate them outside of traumatic experience and depoliticizes the very affective power of their testimony.

Gender disparity was just one of the factors that contributed to women's painful experiences during the Vietnam War. Because the traumatic experience of women in combat zones continues to be so little understood,<sup>25</sup> I will briefly provide historical context here to provide insight into the conditions under which women served during the Vietnam War specifically, the conditions out of which O'Neill writes. Women's traumatic experience during their military service was extreme and stemmed from both combat violence and from gender violence within the military. In terms of the women nurses, a large part of this traumatic experience originates in the secondary trauma of hands-on, ceaseless exposure to the carnage of combat. Simon Philo writes, "Crucially, whilst 80% of enlisted men never saw action, nurses who served in Nam were pretty much guaranteed direct exposure to its horrifying consequences" (239). Their professionalism as nurses and doctors, too, often led to the assumption that they were not affected by these sights, and there was a general practice of not discussing their feelings (Rothblum 56). Further, because of the structure of treatment, the medical staff closest to combat was unable to witness the outcome of their care, as most patients expected to recover were usually evacuated to Japan or the U.S. (Rothblum 8). Women nurses in Vietnam, then, suffered an onslaught of wounded and dying soldiers and civilians, often with the feeling that their efforts were ineffectual. This feeling of helplessness emerges in many of O'Neill's stories, particularly "Prometheus Burned."

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<sup>25</sup> In a 2009 article, *New York Times* author Damien Cave describes the solo battle that many women veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to face upon returning to the U.S.. The prevailing assumption has been that women are not on the front line and thus do not face the same kind of horrors as men during wartime; however, this has proven false, particularly in the current war, as "the military has quietly sidestepped regulations that bar women from jobs in ground combat" (Cave 1). However, women continue to struggle with the V.A. to get funding for treatment for their PTSD symptoms.

These women veterans were also confronted with direct traumatic experience from the danger of combat. Contrary to the popular opinion that medical units were stationed well behind the front lines, thus putting women out of harm's way, women stationed in these units were often in danger of enemy attack: "But ever since World War II there has been less of a distinction between the 'front' (where men are) and the 'rear' (where women are said to be). The whole function of MASH (mobile army surgical hospital) units is to put nurses and doctors as close to combat as possible" (Rothblum 109). Particularly in a situation like the Vietnam War, where the nature of combat was less clearly structured in traditional formations, there were not zones free from the threat of attack, as O'Neill's story, "The Perils of Pappy" illustrates.

As Susan O'Neill points out above when she describes that "[m]any of us were betrayed; some, raped and abused," one of the most unrecognized forms of traumatic experience that women suffered during their service in the Vietnam War is the sexual violence that was made possible by the intense gender hierarchy of the military. Men in the military often viewed nurses as sexually available, and this presumption licensed harassment and even violence.<sup>26</sup> This reality of sexual violence was recognized even in some of the earliest studies conducted with military nurses. In a 1984 article in *Newsweek* Vincent Coppola writes, "For some, Vietnam was also a sexual battleground. More than half the 137 former Vietnam nurses surveyed by Louisiana's Northwestern State University reported being sexually harassed, the abuses ranging from rape and assault to insults and unwanted attention" (36).

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<sup>26</sup> This kind of militaristic misogyny has a long past, as described by Joy Livingston: "[...] there has historically been a fine line between being a military nurse and a prostitute. The presumption is that you sleep with soldiers. The long effort to professionalize military nursing has always struggled with the stigma that 'you may be a professional, but we know what you really are'" (Rothblum 112).

Being an American woman veteran author, then, entails having navigated through a distinct intersection of traumatic situations, and this navigation can inform the creation of a fictional perspective equally as distinct. Susan O'Neill describes her own turn to fiction as one that was politically charged, which importantly repoliticizes the discourse of trauma in a new way as she refuses to sever the ties between traumatic experience and the politics of Vietnam. While she couldn't initially write about the war because, "I was too angry, back then. I wanted to forget about it and get on with life," she describes that she couldn't forget it, "The war was always there; it was an integral part of who I was" (xii). The way that O'Neill talks about her subsequent ability to write about the war links O'Neill's war experience with trauma theory's formulation of traumatic experience; Cathy Caruth describes the nature of trauma as paradoxical, as the intense immediacy of a traumatic event can only be experienced belatedly (7). O'Neill describes the sudden belated experience, "One day, I found myself holding my newspaper at arm's length, and it hit me: I had reached the stage in life where distance makes things clearer. So at last, in middle age, I began to put Vietnam down on paper" (xii). The language here performs the conversion of the war experience from one that was out of time ("always there") and outside of/too close for representation ("integral part of who I was"), to one experienced belatedly, as seen through the jarring realization of the trauma ("One day...it hit me"), its sudden availability for representation ("distance makes things clearer"), and the relief of testimony ("at last...I began to put Vietnam down on paper").

As O'Neill provides literary testimony, she simultaneously asserts this testimony as political, refusing to eschew the stories' descriptions of psychological and physical carnage from their political causes. Tellingly, in the passage above, O'Neill comes to the

realization that she can write about her experience upon "holding my newspaper at arm's length;" it is significant that O'Neill is holding a newspaper here, as we assume she is reading a current report of national and international events framed by American national interests. Not simply looking at a calendar, then, O'Neill realizes the "pastness" of her Vietnam experience within the tension and thus connection it has to contemporary politics and events, in a newspaper form that Benedict Anderson notes for being one of the first print forms that helped construct an imagined sense of national identity. Immediately invoking the form of the newspaper alongside this reference to the act of composition, then, O'Neill's text enacts a refusal of a dematerialized vision of trauma and firmly situates war trauma within a transnational context.

Holding something "at arm's length," of course, suggests a degree of skepticism, so this passage conveys that O'Neill's resolve to write about her experience emerges in part as a form of resistance in which she distances herself from and takes a critical perspective on reportage that feeds into a sense of being American. This critique becomes clear when she writes of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese,

This country, these people, posed no real threat to us. It was a strange place to send our youth—not to learn a new culture or to enjoy the beaches, but to kill and be killed, to be maimed and to patch up the maimed. I am convinced that, to our government, Vietnam really, truly Didn't Mean Nothing. As an American, I find this embarrassing. As a human being, I find it deeply, heartbreakingly sad. (xvii)

O'Neill trumps the status of "American" with "human" and reinscribes the political history with the affective knowledge of shame and sadness, enacting a refusal of a nationalist justification of the war. Moreover, instead of the depoliticized version of trauma that PTSD often instates with its rhetoric of healing, O'Neill reclaims the political edge of war trauma and stages the stories as a form of resistance.

In her move to fiction, O'Neill makes it clear that the collection is not a reflection of her own experience, and that the traumatic situations in the novel do not point back to her as the author. She writes, "the settings were real. What I wrote about them, however, is pure fiction. As are my characters, every one of them ..." (xvi). O'Neill severs any stable connection one might attempt to make between the characters and her own actual experience, which turns on its head that tendency, described in Chapter 1, to read war fiction as a screen for the survivor-author. This starkly contrasts with Tim O'Brien's decision to include a character, albeit fictional, named Tim O'Brien. Accordingly, *Don't Mean Nothing's* narrative structure emphasizes the settings while de-emphasizing the American characters. The locations serve as the organizing grid of the collection: Part I—Phu Bai, Part II—Chu Lai, and Part III—Cu Chi; each of these sections becomes a contained, fictional microcosm of recurring characters, and the stories within each section emerge from a variety of focalizing perspectives within that location. The use of the Vietnamese name for each location/section creates a tension within the narrative, though, as the stories contained under the Vietnamese heading largely remain inside the military bases that are bounded as American space within Viet Nam. This boundary, though guarded, is a permeable one, and not only do we see the influx of the injured (both American and Vietnamese), but there are also stories that trace the Americans' ventures outside the perimeter of the camps. What we see in this conflicted yet permeable boundary, then, is the way in which the space of Viet Nam is inflected with American presence and vice versa, counteracting the American tendency to position war as always elsewhere and tying the violence of war explicitly to constructed American settings.

Only two of the characters appear in all three sections: the Lieutenant, a female nurse whose journey to various combat hospitals determines the setting for each section, and Scully, a military clerk known for his dark and often cruel sense of humor. Though these recurring characters serve to tie together the stories as bounded by a certain space and time, we never receive the narrative through their first-person perspective. *Don't Mean Nothing* employs the first person perspective in only three stories with three very different focalizing characters. In this section, I will concentrate on readings of these first-person stories in order to show how O'Neill's collection upends the nationalistic tendency to approach the experience of war through the perspective of the American soldier. In addition to the direct contact we have with Agnes Reedy through the narrative structure of the first story, these first-person stories bring the reader closer to the situation of war from an intimate viewpoint, while staging gestures that mark the complicated interactions among men and women, Americans and Vietnamese.

A close reading of the gestures within the stories themselves elaborates the collection's articulation of and often resistance to a complicated intersection of power relations that constitute the American military's presence in Vietnam. The first story mentioned in the opening of this section, "The Boy From Montana" jolts both the Lieutenant character and the reader into this complicated reality. This story's primary character, Agnes Reedy, becomes the first-person narrator of "One Positive Thing" in Part I—Phu Bai, so a reading of "The Boy From Montana" not only provides a significant starting point for the collection but also reveals greater depth to the first-person narrator we receive a few stories later. In this story, veteran nurse Agnes Reedy describes her first horrific encounter with a dying American soldier (originally from Montana ) in the



bloody world of the military operating room, as the hospital staff hopelessly tries to save the life of this mortally wounded soldier. It is critical that Agnes is telling her story within the story in order to sympathize with the listener who has just experienced a similarly gruesome day; Agnes says, “ ‘I’m sorry you had to go through something like that so soon,” she said. “You’ve been here what—two, two and a half weeks? It’s a hard lesson. . . . Nothing prepares you for this”” (3). Key here is that “nothing” is indeed what has prepared the reader for this. As the functional addressee, the reader has literally missed "this" hard day that occasions Agnes’s story; the collection begins after this traumatic day in the combat hospital has taken place. Therefore, as we begin to read O’Neill’s collection, we partially experience the "not knowing" or the missed event that characterizes traumatic experience itself. Rather than seeing the carnage that has inspired the shock of the new nurse, we receive this operating room description from the past through a scene of storytelling.

By dramatizing a story within a story in its opening, *Don't Mean Nothing* casts the process of storytelling itself as a form of relational coping that always includes its listener, informing the way that we read the rest of the stories in the collection. The direct address in this story constitutes a performative and ethical dimension of trauma fiction in its enactment of testimony. Dori Laub stresses the critical importance of this type of address to a "thou" figure to establishing a relationship of ethical witnessing:

The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. By extension, the listener to the trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma himself. (Felman 57)

Against the forgetting and disavowal of women's wartime trauma, this story positions the reader as a listener and thereby a co-owner of this testimony about Vietnam War suffering. O'Neill's text, then, opens by hailing this community of listeners, inviting us to bear witness.

Agnes's gestures in "The Boy From Montana" alert us to this relational dynamic of storytelling. The story's direct address becomes visible through Agnes offering the listener a cigarette: "She sat down heavily on the tabletop and drew out her pack of Salems, held it out. 'No? Sure?'" (5). Agnes speaks directly to us, the reader, consistently using the term "you," and her movement of holding out the cigarette pack, which she repeats toward the end of the story, is an act of sympathy of literally reaching out, an invitation to share in the comfort of both the cigarette and her story. Perhaps the absence of the focalizing character in this story registers some of the same traumatic shock that emptied out the first-person perspective of the Tim character in O'Brien's "The Man I Killed;" after all, both absent characters are or have just witnessed a death for which they feel partly responsible. Rather than presenting a descriptive catalogue of the dead body, however, "The Boy From Montana" avoids objectifying the body and instead mirrors the traumatic impact of death and its continuing repercussions in Agnes's story and gestures.

Agnes's gestures do not position this impact as just a personal or solitary psychological struggle but as one embedded in a network of relations specific to the war situation. Specifically, Agnes's use and description of hands alert us to intersecting power relations that she regards as organized around the idea of the American nation. Apart from the operating room flashback contained in Agnes's story, the present scene of the storytelling includes paralleled gestures, both of which form ritual practices that signify

the gesturer's relationship to the U.S.. The first of these gestures appears in the opening paragraph of the story, as Agnes settles herself in to tell the listener her story:

She squinted as she took a last drag on her cigarette, dropped the spent butt, and ground it out with her sneaker. Then she picked up the crushed filter and slipped it into the pocket of her bloodstained operating room scrub shift, a strange gesture of tidiness amid the stark disarray of the dirt-bound hospital compound. (3)

The significance of this "strange gesture" comes into fuller view against another ritual that takes place as Agnes tells her story: "On the other side of the dirt road, a man in fatigues hauled on the ropes of the hospital's flagpole as a clutch of soldiers stood to attention. A twilight ritual, putting the flag to bed" (4). The story presents these paralleled gestures—of tidiness and of saluting the flag—as bodily rituals that enact the discordant, often conflicting aims of the military within the larger structures that constitute the American presence in Viet Nam.

All of these odd actions suggest her determined yet futile attempt to create order in a chaotic environment; on a small scale, this act mirrors the often futile attempts Agnes makes in the operating room to preserve the lives of mortally wounded soldiers and civilians, a mirroring suggested by the inclusion of the blood on her scrubs. The act of putting the butt in her pocket conveys several meanings. First, Agnes's refusal to litter shows a consideration or respect for the space that they inhabit, this space being the hospital compound specifically or more largely the land of Viet Nam. This gesture has a more troubling significance, too. Smoking the cigarette is a way for Agnes to deal with the stress of her work, yet it is also a self-destructive practice with negative health effects; later in the collection, O'Neill directly addresses this destructive aspect of smoking by describing it as "marvelous, deadly smoke" (229). The trace of self-destruction or self-

harm emerges in her gesture of dropping the butt in her scrub pocket, incorporating it rather than contributing to the "dirt-bound hospital compound." While Agnes's act here demonstrates a respect for others and for a shared space, this consideration comes at a price for her. This self-sacrifice signals the destruction that she takes onto her own body, and it lends credence to a symbolic reading of her name; Agnes is the name for both Saint Agnes of Rome, a martyr figure and patron saint for young women associated with Roman Catholicism and for Agnes Le Ti Thanh, a nineteenth century martyr in the Vietnamese Catholic tradition (Ramsay). In either tradition, then, Agnes figures as a martyr, a status that deepens the meaning of Agnes Reedy's gesture.

That self-sacrifice stands against the proceedings taking place "[o]n the other side of the dirt road" where the men take down the flag. The "dirt road" here represents a line of demarcation and a sense of separation between the women nurses and the soldiers, forming a boundary between their two rituals. The use of the term "clutch" to describe the group of soldiers is also significant; "clutch" is a condescending term for a group of people (and from examples used in the *OED* entry, usually women) originating from the same term used to refer to a group of chickens. Therefore, this aspect of the term suggestively reverses the standard gendered application of the phrase. Of course, the term "clutch" also recalls the hands within the story; yet here, "clutch" refers to the talons or claws of a "beast or bird of prey" and can be used "contemptuously of a human hand" (*OED*). In either the sense of a claw or hand, the "clutch of soldiers [which] stood to attention" in the face of the American flag brings to mind the flag's association with the eagle and/or presents the soldiers as in the grip of something powerful. The personification of the flag continues in the description of the lowering of the American

flag as "[a] twilight ritual, putting the flag to bed" (4). The language of this passage conveys a biting tone in its description of the soldiers' care for the flag, which gains fuller significance as the story continues.

Agnes goes on to tell the story about trying to save the life of the mortally wounded American soldier, and her tale specifically revolves around the involvement of a new enlisted man in the combat hospital, a self-identified Black Panther named Tewksbury. After Tewksbury initially resists taking part in any procedures that would aid the white people in the hospital, the staff forces Tewksbury to help in the desperate situation of the boy from Montana by putting a blood pump in his hand while they operate on the man's heart; Tewksbury clenches and unclenches the pump so frantically while the young man dies that the blood bag bursts, spraying the entire staff and operating room with blood. Tewksbury's hand here, which Agnes describes as "a separate thing, the only thing really alive about him" (9), returns to significance of hands in the story as a whole as Tewksbury's gesture of clenching and unclenching signals his ambivalence in the uneasy power dynamics that constitute the American military operating room. Agnes's story describes the way that Tewksbury mentally breaks, as someone else has to remove the blood pump from his hand long after the bag had burst and lead him out of the room, his hand continuing to pump.

O'Neill also parallels the breakdown of the Black Panther Tewksbury with the death of the soldier from Montana, presenting an important dimension of racial politics within the story, as Tewksbury "made it absolutely clear from day one that all of us—all us whites, and the black guys, too, guys like Sam, say, who cooperated with us whites—we were all The Enemy" (7). By preserving the radical black politics of the time period

within this character, O'Neill embeds the Vietnam experience in its greater global context, generating, as Thomas Bender puts it "a new awareness of subnational, transnational, and global political, economic, social, and cultural processes" that trouble the vision of "the nation as hermetically sealed, territorially self-contained, or internally undifferentiated" (3). Tewksbury's gestures of mechanically pumping the blood bag until it bursts testifies to the cooption of his body by the U.S. military in ways which he aims to politically resist yet in which he is ultimately compelled to participate to the destruction of his own identity. Paralleling the death of the boy from Montana with the breakdown of Tewksbury, Agnes ends her story with both bodies being taken out of the operating room.

The conclusion of Agnes's story within the story returns to the gestures with the cigarette and the flag, attaching further significance to the concurrence of these two rituals. Of that past day, Agnes describes having left the operating room of the hospital and standing in the same location where she and the absent listener now stand:

"I was just standing there, watching them take the flag down, folding it up into that little triangle. Just another day. Business as usual."  
She shook her head. "I looked down at all that blood on my scrub dress, and I thought about the boy from Montana." ...  
"And I thought about Tewksbury."  
She squinted as she took the last drag, then dropped the butt. "Just another day for the flag." She stood and ground out the cigarette. "Business as usual."  
Agnes Reedy bent over and picked up the flattened filter. "Between you and me," she said as she dropped it in her pocket, "I haven't saluted the flag since then." (11)

While the soldiers look up and salute the cloth of the flag and what it signifies, Agnes looks down at the cloth of her bloody scrubs and thinks about what it signifies. In the relation between the two cloths, Agnes sees the devaluation of human life when pitted

against the ideological power of the American flag; the care that the soldiers take "putting the flag to bed" and "folding it up into that little triangle" are ceremonial gestures that parallel the hospital staff's attempts to care for the bedridden, dying body of the soldier from Montana. The concurrent gestures stage an incongruent relationship to power, however, as the importance of the flag trumps the life of boy from Montana when his death is chalked up as "just another day for the flag." The power of American military nationalism symbolized by the cloth of the flag stages the absurdity of the nurses' acts of trying to heal bodies within a larger system of war that seeks to destroy them, and ultimately, the persona of the flag comes to replace the body of the dead soldier.

Agnes's gesture here (" 'Between you and me,' she said as she dropped it in her pocket, 'I haven't saluted the flag since then'" ) is couched syntactically inside the sentence, tying the gesture directly to her refusal to salute the flag and positioning the gesture as an act of resistance. While the military idealism woven into the flag and in the soldiers' gestures ultimately condones the wastage of lives like the boy from Montana and Tewksbury's, Agnes's "strange gesture of tidiness" represents a single yet determined act to curtail the waste, as hinted to in the collection's consistent use of the Vietnam War vernacular term "litter" to refer to injured or dead bodies. As an act of resistance, then, we can also read Agnes's refusal to litter as an enactment of personal responsibility in a war setting characterized by the displacement of personal responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the gesture calls in O'Neill's readers, signaling the potential for the relational process of storytelling ("between you and me") to counteract the national logic

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<sup>27</sup> Margot Norris in *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* identifies this displacement of agency and responsibility as characteristic of modern warfare: "The agency of killing--always already dispersed among politicians, strategists, and soldiers--becomes so extremely dispersed with the deployment of weapons of mass destruction as to become virtually unlocatable. ... In some significant way, atomic bombs are thought to kill populations without a corresponding human image" (18).

represented by the flag. This logic glorifies the narrative of the "ultimate sacrifice" as the common, uniting purpose that elides difference among all Americans in defense of the flag in Viet Nam; after all, it's important that the title of this story is "The Boy From Montana," which prioritizes the death of the boy against the ideology of the American flag that outside of the story would reinscribe his death in its own terms, quite literally with a representative of the military handing "that little triangle" to his family members.

The gendered divide within the Vietnam war experience takes on heightened proportions when Agnes Reedy appears again in Part I—Phu Bai as the first-person narrator in the story "One Positive Thing." Here, the self-determination that Agnes displays in the face of the American flag wavers in her negotiation of the gender dynamics of the military, exposing the violent consequences of the transnational gender and sexual politics of war. "One Positive Thing" details Agnes's sexual relationship with the combat hospital's surgeon Steve, who has a wife and children back in the United States. Agnes's interpretation of her relationship with/to Steve is fraught with troubling power differentials, reflecting a larger cultural approach to sexual politics not just restricted to the military setting:

*I became his shelter--nurturer, mother. But it was an act, and I was a fraud. ... I have no illusions. The Steves of this world don't mate with my kind. A surgeon doesn't marry an overweight, over-frank farm girl. ... He did what he did because he had to; he didn't do it to hurt me. It was a matter of survival. And it's not like I didn't get anything from it; even loners sometimes need comfort. (39)*

Through physical gestures of intimacy, Agnes performs the role that Steve assigns for her with the full knowledge that their relationship is not reciprocal. Within this dynamic, Agnes understands her body as a site of physical survival for Steve and suggests that she performs a hollow choreography of sex with him. By casting herself in the role of



mother, Agnes cannot occupy the mutual space of lover, which is even further emphasized by her use of the phrase "mate with my kind." She conveys herself as animalistic to accentuate her position in relation to Steve and to his wife whom Agnes sees in a photograph is clearly "born to wear a little black dress" (39). The language she uses to express that Steve "did what he did because he had to; he didn't do it to hurt me" suggests that Steve *did* hurt her, and tying the necessity of his actions to surviving the carnage of the war further tinges this sex with violence, whatever pleasure she may have derived from the affair. Thus, the language here ties sex and war, and the American gender norms within the military context invade and occupy Agnes's body, rendering her a "shelter." Importantly, this story demonstrates how American sexual politics travel to and become intensified in American military spaces of war. Just as she recognizes the power dynamics behind the alluring cloth of the flag, however, Agnes also resists romanticizing these normative gender roles having "no illusions" or romantic expectations about her relationship with Steve.

The gestures of this story heighten the violence suggested by the power dynamics within Agnes and Steve's relationship, as Agnes physically enacts self-destructiveness. Her feelings of powerlessness in relation to Steve multiply when she learns that she is pregnant, and she desperately tries to keep her condition secret from all the others in the hospital in order to protect Steve, as they "would've figured out who the father was" (40). In this determination to "shelter" Steve from the consequences of their affair: "I beat my fists on my stomach, at first. ... I don't have anything against abortion, philosophically. But philosophy be damned, here, it would've been simply impossible to do [without the other hospital staff finding out]" (40). This desperate gesture sets into startling motion a

collusion between the sexual discourse of women's submission and the military discourse of self-sacrifice that constitutes Agnes's war experience. What "fighting a war" means for Agnes is struggling against the intensification of the gender politics that determine her relationship to her very own body, as her hands turn warlike against her own flesh.

O'Neill parallels the gendered violence against American women to that directed against Vietnamese women. After arranging to secretly have an abortion, Agnes decides against the procedure after an encounter with a badly injured Vietnamese woman in the hospital's operating room. This woman is a civilian who is injured after an explosion destroys the massage parlor where she is a sex worker, primarily for the American soldiers; Agnes claims that she "wouldn't be surprised if a soldier blew the place up, someone who was unhappy with the service" (41). As the surgical staff searches for shrapnel within the woman's flesh, they make a horrifying discovery: "Steve had opened the woman's belly, then her uterus, hunting for a piece of shrapnel. And there it was—the baby. A little girl, fully formed, about as big as Steve's fist, still inside her mother" (41). It is significant that Steve is the surgeon operating: his surgical gestures of penetrating the woman layer by layer in the process of "hunting" figures the surgery in similar terms as a sexual conquest that similarly opens and objectifies Agnes (in casting her as a shelter). As Agnes watches this process, she makes the telling approximation of the "little girl" to "Steve's fist," reprising the narrative significance of the warlike hand but this time attributing it to Steve; the image of Steve's closed fist here in proximity to the Vietnamese woman's uterus echoes violence of the pummeling fist that Agnes directed at her own uterus. The parallel between Agnes and this Vietnamese woman through the link of their pregnancies highlights the shared precarity—though to much different degrees—

that these women both have in relation to the American military men in Viet Nam, soldiers and noncombatants alike. The explosion in the massage parlor, of course, emphasizes the much heightened risk that this Vietnamese woman runs at the hands of American men. However, the narrative concurrence of their pregnancies (perhaps both at the hands of the American military men) aligns them however contingently in this moment at the combat hospital.

Once the language effects this parallel, the narrative shifts abruptly in a transition from the past tense to a single paragraph of present tense that describes Agnes looking more closely at the baby, whose tiny side is pierced by a protruding piece of shrapnel. The paragraph concludes, "The baby, so neatly folded, everything in miniature—clamped eyelids, clenched fists, feet no bigger than my thumbnail—is dead" (42). The transition to the present tense in this passage uncouples the description of the dead baby from the narrative time and space of the military operating room, evoking a sense of shock. The description of the baby's body as "folded," "clamped," and "clenched" does not register safety of the maternal womb but rather suggests restriction from the outside. This suggestion that these "clamped eyelids, clenched fists, feet no bigger than my thumbnail" represent "everything in miniature" also presents a possibility to read this female child as a reflective of Agnes's diminished capacity for self-determination within the limitations of a sexist American military.

The shock of this sight sends Agnes running outside to retch on the ground; however, a change comes over her after recovering: "When I stood up at last, my legs surprised me; they were strong. ... I touched my belly, and I pictured a cluster of cells, faintly babylike—the fetus, my baby-to-be, floating uncrowded, enjoying the freedom.

No need yet to fold itself into a fist. Amid all the death, one positive thing" (43). Agnes's decision at the end of this story can lead to several critical appraisals. In general, the parallel between Agnes and the prostrate, voiceless Vietnamese woman and her mortally wounded baby reintroduces the ethical problems of representation that emerged in Tim O'Brien's "The Man I Killed;" that is, an American character grapples with his or her own traumatic situation through the process of gazing at the body of the wounded or dead Other. Further, the story's resolution of Agnes finding self-fulfillment and her body's "freedom" through her pregnancy does little to overturn that era's repressive visions of biological determinism.

However, the ethically-fraught moment of self-discovery that Agnes experiences in the operating room also arises from the contingent connection of the two women's shared precarity, a transnational narrative positioning that challenges, in however limited a way, the hypermasculine sexual politics embedded in the American military. It is significant that after watching Steve operate on the body of the Vietnamese woman that Agnes decides to cease sheltering him through an unconsidered decision to have an abortion for his sake. Agnes's gestures here offer readings of self-possession that contrast the self-destructive gestures of the first part of the story. Against the sense of herself as a shelter for another, she recovers her substantiality when she stands and realizes "my legs surprised me; they were strong." This description of standing on two strong legs repositions her body as a support for her self, rather than as determined from the outside through repressive desires of men such as Steve. In contrast to the child that perished, Agnes sees the fetus inside her "floating uncrowded, enjoying the freedom. No need yet to fold itself into a fist." Again here we see the prominence of the fist, but in Agnes's

strengthened position she imagines her body as a space of freedom. Also, the meaning of "[o]ne positive thing" remains indeterminate, not definitively referring to her pregnancy. "Positive" here could be inflected in another sense of the word: "Of liberty, freedom, etc.: facilitating personal development or self-realization; characterized by the empowerment of individuals to fulfill their potential, rather than simply by the absence of constraint" (*OED*). In self-realization against the constraints around her, then, Agnes herself stands resolutely as "one positive thing" in a violent situation of war which threatens to impress itself upon the body.

A story from Part II of the collection, "Medcap," focalizes the issue of Vietnamese and women's precarity within military spheres through an American soldier-narrator, whose viewpoint ultimately indicts the paternalistic social uplift projects of the American military. This narrator startlingly reveals his own lack of the mental capacity with which to grasp his situation in Vietnam, and his narration is riddled with misogynist and racist overtones. Spanning only three pages, this is the shortest story in the collection and is formally the center of the collection, being the ninth of eighteen stories. It is the only story in the collection whose events take place outside the American military base and which is narrated in the first-person by a male character.

"Medcap" provides an account of the services provided through the Medical Civic Action Program, an American military humanitarian program designed to improve South Vietnamese perceptions of the United States and decrease the threat of local insurrection (Neel 606). In this program, and in the context of O'Neill's story, its form as a MEDCAP-II unit,<sup>28</sup> U.S. Army personnel including individuals from medical staff, companies, and

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<sup>28</sup> Other Medical Civilian Action Programs included those in which the US military would supply NGOs who carried out the medical work, those in which the military worked alongside the ARVN troops, and

battalions would travel into South Vietnamese villages to offer medical services to the civilians (Neel 607). In contrast to the humanitarian nature of the MEDCAP units, the narrator uses violent, derogatory language to refer to his civilian patients. While this narrator remains anonymous, the text suggests his gender by differentiating him from the medical staff and including him in a group of men who visit the Vietnamese sex workers. The story also bears a strong vernacular tone, parodying an oral war story; it opens, "So we go out in the jeeps an a deuce-and-a-half, cause you gotta have something big for all of us an the tables an the chair--the portable dentist chair, see" (131). This perspective is immediately tinged with racism, recalling that "Gooks love wintergreen oil" (131).

Along with the racism of this American perspective, the action of the story presents a troubling picture of the MEDCAP's interaction with the civilians. The MEDCAP sets up in a local building, and while the doctors and nurses work on the Vietnamese patients, the soldiers and their interpreters try to reassure the people that the medical procedures are safe. Specifically, this soldier describes the process of giving the children shots:

Always lotsa little kids hangin out, pullin the hair on our arms an laughin an stuff. Cute little fuckers; we bring em candy. The docs and nurses, they try ta give the kids shots for cholera an typhoid an stuff, an we go around with the interpreters an tell em it's good for em an safe. [...] But still, howya sposed to tell some mama-san we ain't gonna kill her little kid stickin this big-assed fuckin needle in that little skinny arm, even if you got the words in Vietnamese. (132)

The language here furthers confirms that this soldier does not view the civilians as fully human, using words like "fuckers" and "mama-sans" in reference to them. While the MEDCAP unit doesn't force the children to have shots, this scene presents a troubling

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programs where the American combat hospitals opened their doors to Vietnamese civilians for procedures like corrective surgery (Neel), which is detailed in O'Neill's story "Butch."

interaction in which the American doctors and nurses administer shots to children whose parents are upset and not fully aware of the procedure taking place. And, from the level of language presented in the narrative, it's doubtful that the soldier in this story would be able to competently explain to the parents, through the further mediation of an interpreter, what the doctors are doing to the children. In a 1967 issue of *Military Medicine*, Colonel Spurgeon Neel proudly asserts of the MEDCAP program, "Medicine is a universal language, and provides immediate high-impact communication within any culture, anywhere in the world" (605). The story "Medcap" sadly shows that what this medicine communicates between cultures here is American dominance; the violence of the action here of Americans injecting something into children while their baffled, scared parents look on in alarm joins the larger violence of the war, becoming yet another manifestation of Americans imposing a unilateral vision of "good" onto the Vietnamese people. It's no coincidence here that soldiers accompany these units, blurring the distinctions between the "immediate high-impact" of a medical shot and a gun shot.

At the end of this story, the narrator dimly wonders about the usefulness of the MEDCAP's services, including thoughts like, "Maybe we cure some a the whores so they don't give us back the drip or the syph" (133). From his thoughts, it's clear that he doesn't have a good sense of what he is doing in these villages. However, he describes that the service most popular with the Vietnamese people is the dental procedures, and he believes that this is their most successful program: "But for my money, when it comes ta winnin hearts an minds, man, I say hands down no shit absolute Numba One no contest, it's gotta be that fuckin dentist chair" (133). The narrator describes that the dentist doesn't bother filling cavities; he simply pulls out teeth "[r]ight an left" (133). The description of

the dentist's indiscriminate actions reflect his assembly-line mentality in reference to his Vietnamese patients. That O'Neill chooses to focus on this procedure as the most successful in the American campaign to promote goodwill among the civilians is cutting; there is a terrible and telling irony here in that "winning hearts and minds" is reduced to pulling teeth.

The dubious nature of the American military's MEDCAP endeavor compounds yet another problematic "social-uplift" military program captured by the nearly-inaccessible orality of the story's narration. One wonders, why does O'Neill present this story about a program that specializes in the social uplift of the Vietnamese through the soldier's narrative voice and not through the voice of one of the doctors or nurses who undoubtedly would have more ably narrated the MEDCAP's proceedings? The soldier's lack of education and cloudy view of his situation calls up another ethically-fraught social-uplift program *within* the American military during the Vietnam War. Christian Appy, in his book *Working Class War* describes how the American military sought to boost its numbers through a thinly veiled social uplift program called "Project 100,000," which extended the draft to include men who, before 1965, would have been declared unfit to serve in the military according to its mental examination standards (31-33); startlingly, of this new group of the drafted, "80 percent were high school dropouts, and half had IQs of less than eighty-five" (32).<sup>29</sup> The narrator's first-person perspective in "Medcap" reflects his inability to mentally process or clearly describe his situation, and it begs the question: how it can be ethical for the military to send young men who would

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<sup>29</sup> More fully, Appy describes, "Beginning in 1965, however, hundreds of thousands of category IV men were drafted [the second lowest scorers on the mental examination]. Most were from poor and broken families, 80 percent were high school dropouts, and half had IQs of less than eighty-five. Prior to American escalation in Vietnam such men were routinely rejected, but with a war on, these 'new standards' men were suddenly declared fit to fight" (32).



today qualify as having "borderline intellectual functioning," a cognitive impairment, into war? O'Neill's inclusion of this soldier's narration sharply contrasts the narrative voices typical of other veteran-authors who, like Tim O'Brien, are typically better educated than their soldier counterparts. In this sad parallel between the Vietnamese civilians not comprehending the medical treatment they are receiving and the soldier-narrator whose mental capacity blocks him from understanding his wartime role, "Medcap" presents the disastrous effects of the American military imposing its nationally-invested view of the "social good" onto the relatively powerless.

The final first-person story in the collection returns to the intricate interaction of characters' hands to reprise how this deeply flawed structure of the American military plays out from the standpoint of gender. In the story "Psychic Hand," nurse Joanne Cesak is summoned by two military policemen to conduct a strip search of a young Vietnamese woman whom they suspect of carrying explosives somewhere on or inside her body. After the men insist that they can perform the search themselves if necessary, Joanne reluctantly agrees to conduct the search, and the men leave her and the other young woman alone in the room. Joanne's racist and nationalist attitude toward the woman is immediately perceptible, calling her a "little gook" (222) "who was pretty, in a Vietnamese sort of way" (223).

Despite this hostile and derogatory coding of the Vietnamese woman, the narrative turns to a scene of bodily interaction between the two women that inscribes a different relation between them. Joanne decides not to conduct the search and instead passes the time with the other young woman, whose name is Phuong, by reading her palm:

My mother, who was born in Poland, reads palms. ... I grabbed Phuong's hand and turned it palm up. ... I noticed right away that hers was no ordinary hand. It was a classic Psychic Hand: smooth, tapered fingers with pointed tips, elegant little thumb. ... Psychic hands denote philosophers, prophets, poets, and saints. (224)

The interpretation of Phuong's palm reverses Joanne's initial hostile reading of Phuong: originally read through Joanne's focalizing perspective as a dangerous, bomb-carrying prostitute, Phuong takes her place among "philosophers, prophets, poets, and saints." As a bodily practice associated with women (in this scene and as a skill passed to Joanne through her mother) and as not an exclusively American practice (from Poland and expressed in a Vietnamese body), the scene of palm reading resists the hypermasculine and nationalist discourse of the U.S. military; in part, this explains why Joanne "hadn't read a palm since I joined the army; I hadn't had time to think about it" (224). The bodily orientation of the scene also challenges Joanne's military affiliation, as the two women stand clasping hands behind a closed door which male authorities police from the outside.

Joanne's transformed recognition of Phuong through the gesture of touching hands enacts Merleau-Ponty's conception of intersubjectivity. Against Joanne's initial objectifying view of Phuong, the gesture of touching hands introduces the surprising mutuality of their shared subjective positions; of the special quality of hands to make this relation between two people palpable Merleau-Ponty writes, "I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching...There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching" (142-3). Here, this initial moment of contact secures a contingent sense of Joanne and Phuong's interconnection.

Joanne's recognition of the reversability of their bodies in this intersubjective connection sparks the realization of her own vulnerability to the violence of the military

system, which is played out in her nervous gestures. As Joanne delves into the tale inscribed upon Phuong's hand, she discovers Phuong's disturbing fate: "Death by violence. My own hands began to sweat; I wiped them on my skirt and glanced at my watch. The hands had barely moved. I didn't know whether to be pissed or thrilled by that. Part of me wanted to halt this nonsense *now*—but the rest of me was pinned. Titillated. I wanted to know more" (225). Joanne's inability to decide if she should be "pissed or thrilled by that" seems to refer to the slow passage of time, but it simultaneously shows her conflicted reaction to the prospect of Phuong's death by violence. Her own hands nervously sweating, Joanne breaks the gesture of holding hands and returns to a problematically objectifying view of Phuong. This potential pleasure that Joanne experiences through the other woman's potential pain reinforces Joanne's questionable motives and explains why Joanne feels "pinned" and "[t]itillated" by the prospect of pursuing the reading further. Joanne's desire to read Phuong's body replaces the men's more invasive strip search, yet in the palm reading's context within the war situation, it constitutes an equally invasive form of subjective violence. In not being able to speak for herself in the narrative frame of Joanne's focalizing perspective, Phuong becomes exposed and defined by Joanne through the life story on her vulnerable, upturned hand.

The power relations staged in this reading result in the American woman's temptation to read Phuong through a universalizing, Western gaze. As Joanne continues to read Phuong's palm, she discovers that Phuong has been in love and that she has or will have three children. This realization provokes Joanne's empathy, overwriting her initial hostility toward Phuong, and reframing her vision of the young woman:

But what I saw was a frightened young woman in black pajamas. Someone who had, in her brief life, been in love; someone who'd had three kids, or would have three kids, but whatever the case, now had only one and loved the hell out of it. I wanted to talk to her, to say I understood. But, of course, I couldn't. And what the hell did I know of her life? What the hell could I understand?" (228)

Joanne's urge to tell Phuong that she understands Phuong's plight emerges from an over-identification with Phuong's traumatic situation that is based on a universal logic devoid of its underlying social and historical contexts, a situation discussed in trauma theory of "vicarious trauma" or "empty empathy" (Kaplan 95). Joanne enacts, the danger of "whitestream" feminism here as well, trying to reformulate Phuong's existence into the understandable, universal categories of "woman as lover" and "woman as mother" reflecting the universal sisterhood that Western feminism so often instates upon the subaltern woman (Grande), which elides important power differentials between the two women and downplays Joanne's complicity in the violence. However, Joanne recognizes the limits of her understanding through her ultimate affirmation that "of course, I couldn't," allowing the war context of this scene to resurface; not only does the situation of not sharing a language remind Joanne of her inability to tell Phuong that she understood, but Joanne also rejects her interpretation of Phuong's palm. In Joanne's turn away from her reading of Phuong, she converts the scene of palm reading to one of reaching out, holding Phuong's hand, and through that contact understanding the violent potential in Joanne's own touch.

In Joanne's acknowledgement of Phuong's distinct and ultimately unreadable subjectivity, the narrative moves away from Joanne's troubling reproduction of American dominance toward Joanne's manipulation of this dominance. Joanne's recognition of her problematic, limited viewpoint is what differentiates O'Neill's story from the narrator's

objectifying story for the dead man previously discussed in O'Brien's "The Man I Killed."

Rather than sustain the relation of empty empathy, Joanne recognizes and then subverts this relation. In order to protect Phuong, Joanne purposefully stages her military duties:

Why not make the last thing I did in this wretched, bug-infested room a humane act, however misguided. I reached down and twisted her waistband. And she looked at me with a wounded dignity that surprised me, precisely because it *didn't* surprise me. What human being wants to be messed with? She reached for the elastic, to right it, and I stopped her. I pointed to the door and shook my head, and I ruffled her hair a little. She looked puzzled. Then, she lowered the hand, that beautiful psychic hand, that she'd raised to smooth it. I smiled, and slowly, like dawn breaking over stone, her face softened. (228)

Joanne's gestures of staging the scene of the strip search acknowledge her ultimate complicity in the war situation. Phuong's look of "wounded dignity" indicates a two-way line of vision between the women, replacing Joanne's previous domineering gaze, and it marks a narrative moment in which Phuong's misunderstanding of Joanne becomes discernible, better conveying the friction of the women's encounter. The moment of mutual understanding occurs when Phuong "lowered the hand, that beautiful psychic hand," and the description of interactive gestures assumes narrative priority over Joanne's explanatory narration—we read the interaction through the body language, as do the two women in the scene. As the women's gestures displace and decenter Joanne's narration of the event, so does the story ultimately offer a different kind of relation between the women. Together, the women work against the differentially repressive authority represented through the figures of the military policemen by knowingly taking advantage of the normative gender and nationalistic expectations that structure their situation.

The story does not end in an optimistic note, however. After Phuong leaves, Joanne describes, "I looked at my hands. They were shaking, so I poured a quarter cup of

whiskey, lit another cigarette, and filled my lungs with the marvelous, deadly smoke" (229). Here we have a reversal of the palm reading scene, one in which Joanne stares at her own hands, and the shaking suggests a realization of both her vulnerability and her complicity. In the transformation of gestures over the course of "Psychic Hand" the narrative choreographs the risk involved in the intersubjective connection to another. Joanne's turn away from defining Phuong toward the openness of a compassionate act, enacts a disruption, however temporary, of Joanne's complicity with the American military. As Jean-Luc Nancy describes, "Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, not is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness" (xiii). The "violent relatedness" adhering to the scene of palm reading here also dramatizes the ethically-fraught process of Western women's narrativization of Vietnamese women's lives. In this way, "Psychic Hand" recalls a similar power relation that in Tim O'Brien's "The Man I Killed," one of an American gazing upon the body of an Other in order to narrate that Other's story. Both stories show that this attempt results in casting of the Vietnamese individual in American terms. In contrast to O'Brien's story, however, "Psychic Hand," lays bare the delusion of universal empathy behind this narrative impulse.

*Don't Mean Nothing* reinforces how fleeting the possibility of transnational connection becomes under the conditions of war in the final story "Commendation." Again, hands figure as central signals of transnational connection's possibility or impossibility. In this story, the recurring female character the "Lieutenant" finds out that she is the only nurse in her station overlooked for a Bronze Star at the end of her service, and she tells another woman at the military base's bar that it is "Because I don't wear my

combat boots when I dance. Because I dated an EM” (247). The other recurring character, the notoriously callous, dark-humored military clerk Scully, learns of the oversight, and from his post in Chu Lai he sends her a package containing a severed human hand. As two other nurses look on in disgust and confusion, the Lieutenant opens the package and attempts to explain the dark joke:

The paper fell away. The Lieutenant’s jaw dropped.  
Then she began to laugh. . . . The Lieutenant collapsed into the chair, tears running down her cheeks. . . . The Lieutenant tried to pull herself together. “S-s-somebody’s finally given me a—” She began to laugh again, bit her tongue. “—a *hand* for my performance in Vietnam. (251-2)

This macabre ending invokes the well-documented practice of American soldiers’ dismemberment of the Vietnamese, mutilating them and keeping their body parts as souvenirs. The appearance of a hand here also represents the Lieutenant’s traumatized status; as Carol Acton notes, women’s writing about war since World War I has often represented the fragmentation of bodies in order to parallel the fragmentation of the nurses’ identities. In the scene above, we see the Lieutenant’s horror and attendant speechlessness as her “jaw dropped” turn into the nearly meaningless admixture of laughter and tears. Her shattered sense of self at the end of the story comes through in her broken, struggled speech. Also, in an ominous gesture that foreshadows the fate of her ability to testify to war experience upon returning to the U.S., the Lieutenant “bit her tongue.” Here, the intersubjective promise generated in Joanne and Phuong’s gestures in “Psychic Hand,” one that affirmed the humanity of the “enemy” and countered the militaristic coding of bodies, becomes destroyed under the war’s heavy-handed assertion of U.S. national power. By literally disjuncting this Vietnamese hand from its lived story, O’Neill’s ending enacts the way in which the uneven power relations within and around

the American military have reduced the Vietnamese people to objects and the lieutenant's testimony as a woman to nothing. In this way, the end of the book performs the title itself; the presentation of a mutilated hand rather than a military medal signifies not only the lack of official recognition for the female veteran, but also affirms that in the aftermath of Vietnam, women's war experiences "Don't Mean Nothing."

The closing of the collection with the severed hand also reminds us that the act of storytelling becomes a fleeting relational moment, bringing us back to Agnes's initial urgency, in "The Boy From Montana," "to tell somebody about it before I go back where nobody'll understand, nobody'll want to hear" (4). In O'Neill's introduction to the collection, she foregrounds the limitations of language's ability to meaningfully reflect the lived reality of the war situation on the ground, particularly for those who were not American soldiers. This becomes most startlingly apparent in one "authoritative" story about the war, the government's records about who it sent to Viet Nam: "The government doesn't have hard figures for how many women it sent to Vietnam, but trust me: We were vastly outnumbered by men, and it defined us and governed our existence" (xiv). O'Neill's collection represents a move toward repairing that outnumbering by men, at least in the genre of war literature by not allowing the writing of male survivor-authors to solely define and govern representations of women in war fiction.

What it means to survive the experience of war and ultimately live to write about it are central questions in both *The Things They Carried* and *Don't Mean Nothing*, and O'Brien and O'Neill approach the question from different angles. In each, a certain gesture of the hand captures its vision and reveals the differences between the two



collections. The gesture of *carrying* that Tim O'Brien emphasizes throughout *The Things They Carried* evokes not only the soldiers' burden of traumatic memory but also reveals the underlying formal logic of ownership or possession in a collection exclusively centered on the soldiers' experiences of the Vietnam War. By contrast, Susan O'Neill's *Don't Mean Nothing* stages the recurrent gesture of the reaching, outstretched palm. The vulnerability and openness of this gesture reflect the inclusive range of focalization in the stories that allows a view of trauma's transnational dimension to emerge across the boundaries of battle. These literary characters make palpable the contradictory and muddled lines of war, as their bodies variously engage in hurting, protecting, killing, and healing one another.

The survivor-author's testimony to war trauma represents an important move away from the valiant hero of traditional war stories. Yet, an exclusive emphasis on the traumatized U.S. soldier stops short of fully interrogating the nationally-invested frames through which we understand war experiences. There are real stakes in this limitation; for example, in 2011 political scientist John Tirman concluded that "the system of knowledge in war time disallows, in effect, a serious and sustained effort—a politically consequential effort—to regard the human costs ... because it challenges fundamentally Americans' self-regard, our mission, our place as a city on the hill" (366). That literary studies of war reproduce this one-dimensional "system of knowledge" compels us to reconsider the ethics of exclusion in a narrow view of whose lives matter in war fiction.

In Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story," the narrator insists that a war story is not about war at all—that it is a love story (85). When asked in an interview about what war taught him about love, O'Brien responded, "Love of one's limbs. Love

their presence because in war there's always the proximate danger of their absence. No hands. No legs. No feet. No testicles. No head ... Those are things we take for granted. We don't look at our hands and take a shower and say, 'my hands.' But war teaches you to value those hands" (Herzog 108). The shock of having survived war lodges itself in the flesh, regenerating the recognition of one's own body through a fierce form of love. And, as we have seen in the reversibility of touch's ontological recognition, this love transmitted through the hands can extend to other bodies as well, both American and non-American. Moreover, these hands give grip to a transnational trauma that was otherwise disembodied and depoliticized, fleshing out what it means to "be there" in the complex situation of war.

**PART 2**

**"THE WORLD-IN-THE-HOME": THE AFTERMATH OF WAR AND THE  
PROBLEM OF HOMECOMING**

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HOMECOMINGS OF TOTAL WAR AND HEMINGWAY'S *IN OUR TIME*

*In the stirrings of the unhomey, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomey is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world.*  
--Homi Bhabha "The World and the Home"

*War is the opposite of what we want, even though we pay for it, vote for it, and trust in it. Our word for peace is security, the confession that the only quiet we know is perpetually armed and prepared to be ruthless. In short, our actions might say otherwise, but we like to understand war and peace as opposites to one another.*  
--Nick Mansfield, *Theorizing War: From Hobbes to Badiou*

Trauma is most widely understood as a crisis of memory, personal and collective. In light of this, and in drawing together in this second section the concepts of trauma, memory, homecoming from war, and fiction, the image of an ancient memory palace is a compelling point of departure. In ancient Greece, the art of memorizing complex narratives was practiced through imagining walking through a house and having objects in each room call up different parts of the story. Memory's ordering through narrative, in this way, arises from placing oneself within a home and thereby ties to the architecture of that home. Conversely, though, what happens when the walls of this imagined "home" or memory palace cannot keep its narrative in order? When the body that we attempt to place within the walls pushes against seams of the home's architecture, troubling our sense of inside and out? When the memory palace violently polices its doors and windows against some and not others? These questions may beckon toward why the rupture of memory, the dis-order of memory that trauma effects, often takes shape in the form of the uncanny, or "un-homelike" (Freud's *unheimlich*). And, perhaps, this

contributes to Bhabha's assertion above that it is the "unhomely" that moves our understanding of literature toward a world perspective.

This section of paired chapters deals with a second stage of war trauma, that of the vicissitudes of homecoming from war. Rather than focus, as is trauma theory's tendency, on the difficulty of war participants' testimony to their home cultures about the war experience (thereby positioning the soldier as maladapted to that home), I differently direct my attention toward a transnational sense of the participant's return to a home nation. This transnational approach demonstrates how certain literary works powerfully present the falsity of a secure homeplace during an era of total war and thus transform our view of soldier-characters' seemingly traumatic behavior and the boundaries of the nation. In Hemingway and Morrison's treatment of the postwar experience, they do not simply present the shockwaves of war trauma as a single soldier's struggle with flashbacks in the midst of a peaceful home setting; rather, through the linkage of bodily gestures, both authors testify to war's imbrication with the American home, illustrating, as Bhabha describes above, "the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world."

The trauma of war, I argue, more broadly takes shape in this section as the trauma of *total* war, constituting a human response to the grinding workings of a transnational network of military and industrial systems that supported U.S. wars and imperial pursuits. This section opens by considering a collection that represents World War I because this event marks the global historical emergence of two tightly intertwined concepts within this section: "total war" in modern warfare and the use of the term "home front." While the practice of total war—as a form of warfare in which soldiers and non-combatants

alike are military targets—stretches far back into history, this term takes on a new connotation within modern industrial warfare: "...from World War I onward, wars became conflicts that mobilized total aggregated strength. In total wars, all activities became inextricably intertwined. The consumption of massive amounts of war materials stimulates domestic production while the battlefield and home front become an integrated whole" (Fujitani 11). This interlocking system of national resources generates the current usage of "home front" during World War I, designating war's omnipotent reach into the activities of national citizenries (Tai-Yong 371).

Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Morrison's *Home* effect this link between the war front and home front through bodily gestures that tie the violence of war to the violent policing of non-normative bodies on the home front. Specifically, doctor characters function in both works as figures who enact forms of bodily harm in the works' U.S. settings. In this second section I excavate the significance of the villainous doctor characters in this war fiction, arguing that the history of trauma opens a view to the ways in which medical practice in both military and civilian contexts becomes a technology that imposes racist, gendered, and classist ideologies upon vulnerable populations in order to serve national needs. Hemingway and Morrison represent their soldier-characters' postwar trauma alongside violent scenes of doctoring at home in order to overlap the psychically painful effects of war and the disastrous effects of U.S. capitalist expansion. In effect, soldier characters in these texts do not return home with maladapted, trauma-induced behaviors from the battlefield; rather, through their experience of war abroad, these soldiers return home better able to identify the elusiveness of national peace

and with a keen eye to the ways in which the violence within U.S. settings ties to global contexts.

Current conceptions of trauma theory that stem from psychoanalysis and the influence of theorists like Cathy Caruth posit trauma as a belated experience, one recognized only after the traumatic event. The diagnosis of PTSD or invocation of the phrase "war trauma" often occurs after an individual has left the phenomenal space of war; thus, the event of "homecoming" is particularly wrapped up in the concept of trauma. The alluring concept of homecoming from war, however, participates in a logic of geographical displacement that, in our time, is uniquely American and distinctly connected to imperial projects, both of which a transnational view makes visible. This transnational view of "the world-in-the-home" reverses a longstanding and highly influential vision of the relationship between war and peace that follows from Hobbes, that civil society and war oppose one another and that civil society (in this modern case, in the form of the nation-state) organizes itself to distance the contradictory force of war (Mansfield 9). While trauma theory often entails a *telos* of personal or national healing in a soldier's ability to return to the United States and offer his story to a sympathetic audience (most fully expressed in concepts like Dominick LaCapra's "empathic unsettlement"), what we see in Hemingway and Morrison's fiction is a forceful rejection of a U.S. "home" in which citizens are removed and innocent onlookers to the war. Rather, they portray an American nation whose citizens are in various ways complicit in or battered by the very political projects that contribute to violent war abroad. Reading Ernest Hemingway's fiction alongside Toni Morrison's, who is an author keenly aware of how troubled and violently contested the notion of "home" is in the United States, attunes

us to all of the stateside violence that Hemingway includes and excludes within *In Our Time*. In this chapter, I turn first to Hemingway's collection, to explore how his depiction of home settings troubles an easy partition of war and home front.

From a transnational standpoint, one would be hard pressed to find a fictional collection more structured by concepts of travelling, crossing, and movement than Hemingway's *In Our Time*.<sup>30</sup> Consisting of thirty-two sections, sixteen titled stories and sixteen numbered vignettes, the book is replete with scenes of transition, movement, or the sudden arrest thereof. From its inclusion of piers, trains, funicular cars, walking, carrying, entering, and breaking into, to name a few, the idea of movement becomes an apt characterization of the organizing logic of the book. Also, unlike so many other works of war fiction, *In Our Time* contains a diversity of focalizing characters, perspectives, and depicted characters. While some of the sections have a more traditional omniscient third-person narrator, other third-person sections are tightly focalized within a limited perspective and employ free indirect discourse, while still others are structured through first-person narrators, some with distinctly oracular or reportage qualities like slang.

Hemingway's style of objective writing and his descriptions of war experiences constitute generative literary sites through which to rethink the body's relation to war and postwar trauma's relation to the nation. The iceberg theory of writing that pervades Hemingway's *oeuvre* particularly foregrounds the bodily movement and gestures of characters. In an interview, Hemingway describes how this movement generates his storylines themselves: "Everything changes as it moves. That is what makes the

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<sup>30</sup> The edition of Hemingway's *In Our Time* that I am using is the fullest and third edition published in 1925 that includes the "The Quai at Smyrna."



movement which makes the story. Sometimes the movement is so slow it does not seem to be moving. But there is always change and always movement" (Plimpton).<sup>31</sup> In Hemingway's literary works, the idea of movement is also global, as his expatriate characters create transnational microcosms abroad that invite us think about the fluid ways that U.S. power operates within and without the boundaries of the nation after war.

Since the opening of the Hemingway archive at the JFK Library during the 1980s, Hemingway scholarship has undergone a sea change, as work like *The Garden of Eden* and his personal papers reveal a Hemingway far more attuned to the power, performance, and permeability of constructions like race and gender. For example, the gender-bending love triangle at the center of *The Garden of Eden* displays Hemingway's interest in the malleability of gender, challenging readings of his work that position his work as unredeemably masculinist. Rather than condemn Hemingway for his overtly white, masculinist public presence and creation of similar fictional characters, recent scholarship demonstrates the ways in which his work testifies to social and cultural powers' imbrication with categories such as race and gender. Scholars like Amy Strong and Marc Dudley position race as *the* central problematic for Hemingway and his fiction, objecting to the dominant scholarly view that positions Hemingway as "one of the whitest writers in the American literary tradition if you read through the criticism of the last seven decades" (Strong 11). Further diversifying Hemingway scholarship, Thomas Strychacz reevaluates Hemingway's construction of masculinity in his texts, highlighting how his male characters enact gender as constituted by public performances, rather than stable attributes tied to biological sex. This work recovers a politically salient dimension of

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<sup>31</sup> Hemingway himself most often wrote standing up, shifting from one foot to another in a kind of dancelike channeling of creativity, which, from one view, links the moment of literary creation to what he found to be his own generative gesture (Films for the Humanities).

Hemingway's fiction, and I argue that we can employ this kind of critical energy to return to another of the most taken-for-granted adjectives associated with Hemingway:

American. How do the concepts of "nation" and "American nation" (both of which entail issues of privileged race, class, and gender) serve as structuring concepts of Hemingway's fiction? And, how do national imaginaries interplay through crossing, clashing, and constructing forms of power(s) within his texts?

Specifically for this chapter, I will focus on how *In Our Time* develops a critique of national power as it shapes and is shaped by the transnational forces of World War I. Through the linkages of gestures across the stories, Hemingway builds a grammar of painful connection, one that recasts war trauma as a transnational affective response for which American concepts of national allegiance and medical/scientific discourse insufficiently account. First, I examine how Hemingway's consistent use of American doctors in his fiction illustrates a troubling overlap between technologies of war and U.S. capitalism, tying this overlap to the historical class dimensions of trauma associated with both rank-and-file soldiers and U.S. industrial workers. Then, I turn to close readings of the stories within *In Our Time* most frequently associated with war trauma—"Soldier's Home" and "Big Two-Hearted River" Parts I and II—to elaborate how the bodily gestures of Hemingway's characters revise dominant conceptions of postwar trauma. Ultimately, *In Our Time* dismantles any stable distinction between the war front and the home front, as the stories insistently tie American settings to settings abroad and thereby foreshadow the ascendance of U.S. imperialism in the "American century" and prepare the way for Hemingway's populous cast of expatriate characters.

Intriguingly, Hemingway's fiction of World War I consistently includes negative characterizations of American-associated doctors and medicine.<sup>32</sup> Doctor figures in *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms* are intimately tied to normative conceptions of the body, alerting us to the historical implications of the body and "trauma" in Hemingway's time. In these representations, Hemingway casts American doctors and medicine as inept, suspect, callous, and problematically powerful. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Book Two opens with Frederic being transferred to "the American hospital," which Hemingway characterizes as absurdly unprepared to treat wounded servicemen; the ambulance drivers and the hospital porter further injure Frederic's legs as they crumple him into a tight elevator, after which Nurse Walker nonsensically insists that she cannot put Frederic in any of the vacant hospital rooms as "[t]here isn't any patient expected" (83). Frederic's legs only heal once he has ignored the hospital's three ineffective doctors and called in an outside Italian doctor, Dr. Valentini. A later notable scene is the American Miss Van Campen's accusation that Frederic "produc[es] jaundice with alcoholism" so that he will not have to return to the front, an application of a clinical term of alcoholism that, while accurately describing Frederic's abusive drinking patterns, jars the reader with its coldness in completely ignoring drinking's role in helping Frederic cope with the horrors of the war. These figures of the American medical establishment differ from Rinaldi, an Italian field surgeon who is Frederic's roommate at the front, drinks rakishly with him, and shares an unabashed brotherly love. Overall, Hemingway starkly contrasts the attitude and behavior of the Italian medical personnel who have a more organic sense of

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<sup>32</sup> A note of particular significance here is that Hemingway's father was a physician.

healing and coping, with those clinical attitudes of the Americans, who, of course, do not yet have a direct national military stake in the war and its heavy tolls.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of *In Our Time*, there has been much attention paid to the figure of Dr. Adams and his problematic behavior in "Indian Camp" and "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife." The doctor's crudely performed Caesarian section on an American Indian woman in "Indian Camp," and his statement to Nick that "her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important" (16) have generated a flurry of criticism about the doctor's impersonal at best, and racist at base, attitude toward the mother.

Importantly, the story "Indian Camp," as Thomas Strychacz notes, stages this violent attitude alongside scenes that recall colonization and American violence: "Boats beached, Indians waiting, whites debarking: the scene of whites arriving in the New World is strong in cultural memories, pictured over the centuries in scores of illustrations and books. The similarities continue, for the narrative reenacts a subsequent history of dispossession, annexation, betrayal, and death" (55). Seen in this light, the Indian camp more appropriately becomes a refugee camp, thematically joining "On the Quai at Smyrna" and Chapter II in their portrayal of violent evacuations and displacements associated with the clashing of empires and nation-building. Why in this story and in *A Farewell to Arms* does Hemingway so explicitly indict these doctors?

Hemingway scholars have often sought the answer to this question in Hemingway's personal life. As in the case of all aesthetic questions such as these, Hemingway's biography has historically and continues to dominate research in all areas of his fiction; Strychacz describes that "nothing has been more characteristic of

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<sup>33</sup> Though the newly formed U.S. Chamber of Commerce and leaders of U.S. industries had already been passing policies and undertaking procedures toward war mobilization even before 1914 (Koistinen 380-2)

Hemingway scholarship than its reliance on biographical material in order to mediate aesthetic and philosophical problems in his work" (2). There has been a long-running debate among Hemingway scholars about the relationship between Hemingway's experience during his service in World War I and the content of his fiction. Matthew C. Stewart characterizes this "war wound" debate as one between, on the one hand, scholars such as Malcolm Cowley and Philip Young, who influenced a generation of critics that considered Hemingway's wartime experience and wounding as *the* events that shaped his entire *oeuvre*; on the other hand, later critics such as Kenneth Lynn and Frederick Crews suggest that Hemingway "fabricates the idea that the war affected him" after the fact as part of his public persona (148). Relying on some sort of universal notion of war trauma, these critics minutely historicize Hemingway's life for signs of trauma, rather than contextualizing the notion of war trauma itself.

This often contentious debate about Hemingway's relationship to his war experience and his resultant trauma at base remains speculation, speculation that, while perhaps uncovering important synergies between Hemingway's life and his work, posits a far too causal link between Hemingway's personal experience and his fiction, one that squeezes out the generative capacity of his imaginative creation. As I discuss in my first chapter, this kind of scholarship reinstates a kind of critical cult around the authenticity of an author's trauma rather than attending to how the fiction as its own form of knowledge builds a unique vocabulary around the pain of war. To need to know the degree to which the war influenced Hemingway (for it seems obvious that it did in some way) instates scholarly aims that are less considerations of the event of war itself and more a consideration of the man, an eclipsing of purpose that even the self-centered Hemingway

rejected in the 1950s when learning of these early war-wound approaches to his work (Stewart 141).

Turning our gaze away from Hemingway's biography and returning to the puzzling figure of the doctor, these nationally-inflected scenes of doctoring suggest something beyond a simple reading of Hemingway's personal war trauma. Rather, these scenes employ medicine as a trope through which specifically American associated technologies and knowledge inadequately enter and, in fact, colonize non-white or non-American spaces, leading to inadequate care of and disastrous effects for others. Even in "Indian Camp" where Dr. Adams succeeds in saving the American Indian mother and her baby, the way in which the gestures of the scene stage Dr. Adams's discovery of the father's slit throat in the bed above casts Dr. Adams as somehow complicit in the Indian's suicide: "His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets" (18). The passive phrasing "his throat had been cut" rather than "he had cut his throat" mingles ambiguity with the mention of the razor, an instrument more appropriate for the doctor's simultaneous Caesarian section than the jack knife Dr. Adams uses, further links the doctor and the Indian's death. Without claiming causality, we can detect Hemingway's hint of culpability.

These scenes' pattern of medical violence evinces the historical intersections of war and medicine during World War I: the investigation and medical experimentation around the appearance of trauma neurosis in soldiers. While it is important to keep in mind the beneficial role that so many doctors and nurses played during the war, the history of medical experimentation during and after WWI may partially account for the

suspicious figure of the doctor in Hemingway's work. Hemingway's use of this trope of cruel medicine recuperates for contemporary readers an important aspect of military medicine of the time that partially led to the development of PTSD's precursor, shell shock. In his genealogy of the development of PTSD, Allan Young describes that

[o]ne of the ironies of the World War is that the developments in certain fields of medical science were accelerated by the carnage of the killing fields...the conflict would provide medical scientists with thousands of natural experiments of the sort that they would rarely encounter in peacetime or, more likely, would ordinarily encounter only in experimentation involving animals. (85)

The advancements of science on the backs of soldiers in bodily and psychic pain joins the bitter irony at the heart of military medicine in its aims to patch up the wounded and send them back out to fight. The coldness and clinical approach of Hemingway's doctor characters, then, takes on a more meaningful role in the light of trauma's history.

More specifically than medical science, the public responses to war trauma during this period often cast trauma as a problem of national allegiance, viewing trauma as a sign of moral weakness or, as the Nurse Van Campen example attests, malingering that threatened the nation itself. Anthropologists Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman explore the links between national power and the rise of the concept of trauma in their provocative 2009 study, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry Into the Condition of Victimhood*:

[T]he image of the soldier traumatized by combat revealed the limitations of patriotic rhetoric. For it was above all the moral qualities ascribed to trauma patients, their lack of national or patriotic pride, their weakness of personality and the suspicion in which their medical condition was held, that determined the social and medical responses to trauma that were established during the war years. (45)

Historicizing of the concept of trauma in this way is crucial to a consideration of *In Our Time* as transnational because it connects Hemingway's fiction of trauma to nationalism. In other words, scenes that we would now recognize as describing the symptoms of PTSD within our contemporary "language of the [traumatic] event" generated around 1980 (Fassin 6), may have been, in Hemingway's time, much more radical challenges to the idea of the American nation.

The class dimension of trauma neuroses that connect rank-and-file soldiers to industrial workers of the period is also relevant to a reconsideration of war trauma within *In Our Time*, as it partially accounts for Hemingway's inclusion of details about the decline of the Horton's Bay lumbering industry, for example, alongside descriptions of World War I. The debate about trauma came to the forefront during the turn of the century with a rise in the claims filed by workers injured in dangerous industrial work environments, generating national suspicion about their motives and authenticity of their symptoms. This suspicion later extended to rank-and-file soldiers, whom the psychiatric community believed couldn't have suffered "real" trauma because they lacked the intellectual capacity to analyze the totality of their situation (Fassin 47). Therefore, at this point in history, trauma was largely diagnosed and accepted only in educated men. Fassin describes the class asymmetries that characterized these diagnoses:

The history of claim neurosis affects specific groups: first workers, later immigrants, and, of course, rank-and-file soldiers (rather than officers)--the workforce in a rapidly expanding industrial society and cannon fodder for its great international conflicts. It is the reluctance of these patients to accept their allotted role in society that renders their psychological illness suspect. (39)

Thus, the concept of trauma was tied to issues of class, race, and national status during this period, bleeding across the lines of war and industry.



This link between the industrial worker and the soldier gestures toward a larger system of medical knowledge that was mobilized in both war and industrial expansion to differentially regulate the very bodily safety of citizens in order to serve national interests.<sup>34</sup> Within this context, Hemingway's American doctor characters and their gestures signal a more sinister relation that resituates traumatic experience as a transnational form of suffering generated by the frictions within U.S. global expansion. Dr. Adams's crude caesarian on an American Indian woman and his proud pronouncement, "That's one for the medical journal..." (18), instates a relation of objectifying experimentation that also often characterized that between military doctors and traumatized soldiers. Exposing the interconnections of industrial and military movements, Hemingway's text reveals how systems of knowledge, violence, and economics mediate individuals' relationship to the American nation. *In Our Time's* invocation of this history should thus temper the critical desire to read the collection through a medical or psychological (in either case, diagnostic) theoretical framework.

The transnational suffering expressed by the characters' bodies in Hemingway's text takes shape not only in American characters but includes soldiers and civilians caught in the crossfire of the rising and falling imperial powers around World War I. The story "Indian Camp" is between two other early sections "On the Quai at Smyrna" and Chapter II that depict the violent evacuations of citizens from Smyrna and Adrianople. For example, the narrators of these sections describe, "*Women and kids were in the carts crouched with mattresses, mirrors, sewing machines, bundles* (21), and "The worst, he said, were women with dead babies. You couldn't get the women to give up their dead

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<sup>34</sup> This differential regulation illustrates an instance of the Foucauldian concept of "biopower" in the nation-state's exercise of power over its subjects' bodies.

babies" (11). These sections' particular emphasis on the bodily suffering of women and children extends the suffering of the American Indian mother in Michigan. This movement of refugees recalls the history of the population exchange from Turkey and Greece and the shifting balance between imperial powers predicated in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which effectively dismantled the Ottoman Empire under the oversight of the Western powers of the British, French, and American nations.

Hemingway's decision to open *In Our Time* with violent postwar dislocation rather than with the violence of World War I itself overturns both a progressive narrative timeline and the notion of a lasting peace secured by the Allies. The text most simply rejects the latter notion with its omission of "peace" in the title itself: the title comes from the British *Book of Common Prayer*, from the well-known, oft-recited prayer, "Give us peace in our time, O Lord," (Tetlow). The violent aftermath of a total war, then, destabilizes a view of World War I as a bounded historical event and unravels a concept of "post"war trauma—the violence and attendant traumatic experiences inherent in total war shift from purely military spaces to systems within civilian life following formal treaties. Accordingly, the text's opening constellation of refugees and American Indians immediately introduces the violent policing of "home" spaces in both European and U.S. settings. Seen in this light, the opening stories "Indian Camp" and "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" are about more than Nick Adams's fall from childhood and the violent tendencies of his doctor father; the transnational grammar built in the organization of the stories, chapters, and vignettes surrounding the Nick Adams stories insistently reminds us that the Michigan setting was never Nick's "home," but, rather, his privileged family's

vacation spot. As explored later in this chapter, this realization also redirects a reading of the trauma detectible in the final "Big Two-Hearted River" stories.

The total war networks and their incursions into home spaces throughout *In Our Time* forcefully denaturalize the our current conceptions of trauma by bringing to the fore how the traumas involved in war have counterparts in American society. "Soldier's Home" and "Big Two-Hearted River" Parts I and II are among the most affecting stories in American literature dealing with the difficulties of returning home after war. Not surprisingly, they have also generated a body of recent scholarship that appraises the characters Harold Krebs and Nick Adams from the perspective of trauma theory. For example, Craig Carey writes in 2012 that "Nick becomes for Hemingway not just a casualty of the war, but a figure whose postwar trauma and healing also function as an objective correlative for the process of postwar reconstruction" (15). However, in Carey's article and others, "postwar reconstruction" applies largely and often implicitly to the American psyche and American nation. In a fictional collection that opens by constellating the locations of a pier in the new nation of Turkey and the banks of a lake in Michigan, and ends with an exiled king and a self-exiled Nick Adams, I argue that the transnational dimensions of postwar trauma are central to a reconsideration of in Hemingway's *In Our Time*.

A close examination of the structure of the collection and the bodily gestures of the characters Harold Krebs and Nick Adams unearth the transnational ground of trauma within *In Our Time*. Nick Adams appears in nine of the sections,<sup>35</sup> and despite the collection's fractured organization and nonlinear vignettes, critical scholarship often takes

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<sup>35</sup> Characters who appear in more than one story are Dr. Adams, Marjorie, Bill, the bullfighter Maera, and Nick Adams. However, Hemingway also reuses names like George and Helen across more than one story.

for granted that the Nick Adams stories progress linearly. This supposition isn't wholly supported by close inspection of the text. In fact, several scholars note that in his reworking of the collection between 1923 and 1925, Hemingway downplayed the centrality of Nick Adams so as to diminish his role as an organizing protagonist; along these lines, Robert Paul Lamb points out that Nick Adams "served an enabling function for Hemingway in his stories but never as a protagonist in a novel" (169).

The tendency to read across the sections for the linear development of Nick Adams enacts the desire described in Chapter 1 to establish an "authentic" war trauma story by pinning the Nick Adams character to the timeline of Hemingway's own biography and to the narrative development of a "healing" *bildungsroman*. While, of course, it is safe to say that Nick is a child before World War I in "Indian Camp" and "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," the temporal setting of the rest of the Nick Adams stories are not directly pinpointed in the text, though historicization of references in the stories allows for relative positioning. Scholars generally assume that because Nick's sole appearance in the vignettes happens in Chapter VII, where he is wounded and sitting against a wall with Rinaldi during the war, that the stories that precede this, "The End of Something" and "The Three Day Blow," happen *before* the war. However, if we take Hemingway's experimentation with time seriously in this collection, we should not so readily assume linearity here, especially since Nick's placement in the war happens within the vignettes that are so obviously disoriented from linearity.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> We can place the decline of the lumber industry in Horton's Bay around the turn of the century; (*Bay Township Master Plan 2006*); also, if we recognize the source for Ad Francis as Ad Wolgast, it's important to note that his guardianship and end of his career didn't happen until 1920 (Strong 49), disrupting an easy placement in time of the "The Battler" before the war.

Therefore, the readings here suspend judgment about the timelines across the text, in order to detect how the nonlinear organization effects a transnational sense of war trauma. As Dr. Adams's gestures in "Indian Camp" reveal, bodily gestures throughout the collection reorient the ethical implications of Hemingway's text, prompting us to ask: where do the characters physically stand in relation to these vastly growing networks of commercial/colonial capital and industrial warfare and the trauma they engender? What do the highly stylized bodies within the dizzying constellation of *In Our Time* gesture toward? In the following readings of "Soldier's Home" and "Big Two-Hearted River" Parts I and II, these questions open into transnational views of postwar trauma and homecoming. Specifically, Harold Krebs and Nick Adams's bodily gestures within home spaces reprise gestures enacted elsewhere in the text in ways that articulate their divergent relationships to war, U.S. economic expansion, white masculinity, and, ultimately, their position in regard to the dawning of U.S. dominance in the twentieth century.

Coming after Chapter VII of *In Our Time* (the last section that directly describes actions of WWI), "Soldier's Home" serves as a pivot point in the collection. Reflecting an abrupt turn in the narrative organization, it is also the section most specifically situated in time: in the summer of 1919 "after [Harold Krebs] had been home about a month (73).<sup>37</sup> "Soldier's Home" and its central character Harold Krebs come to mind most readily when thinking about Hemingway's depictions of postwar trauma. Indeed, the story has produced a body of critical scholarship that focuses on Krebs as a traumatized war

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<sup>37</sup> Apart from historical allusions that may be traced outside of the work, Hemingway only time-stamps three of his stories at the middle of the work, "Soldier's Home" (after the summer of 1919), the Chapter VIII vignette about the robbery of the cigar store ("At two o'clock in the morning"), and "The Revolutionist" (in 1919).

veteran whose depiction dismantles the notion of the war hero's glorious return home to an appreciative American public. A question remains, however: why does Hemingway create the character Harold Krebs, rather than tell this homecoming story through Nick Adams?

Extending the story's departure from the organizing logic of *In Our Time*, the character Harold Krebs, I contend, also serves as a foil for Nick Adams. The inclusion of Krebs reminds us that we cannot read "the soldier" as monolithic category. The authorial decision to not use Nick Adams—for whom we have been developing a readerly sympathy over the stories—as the primary character in "Soldier's Home" suggests that we should perhaps take a more critical view of Harold Krebs. Here, I argue that in contrast to Nick Adams, Harold Krebs functions within *In Our Time* to display the psychic grounds upon which military logic roots itself in U.S. soil to violently enforce nationalistic ideologies that interlock with the war mentality abroad.

Hemingway's choice of the Oklahoma setting for this story is replete with implications about violence and American society. As Margaret E. Wright-Cleveland describes in her article on "Soldier's Home," the city of Tulsa was the most "affluent African American community in the United States" during this period and in 1921 was the site of the Tulsa Race Riot (162-3). Moreover, as not previously discussed in relation to this story, Oklahoma was the endpoint of the Trail of Tears, the brutal removal during the 1830s of American Indians from their homelands in the southeastern U.S. to what was then known as Indian Territory in present-day eastern Oklahoma. When Oklahoma was admitted as a state in 1907, Indian Territory was dissolved (Perdue). Also, we know that Harold served in "the second division returned from the Rhine," a group of Marines

historically known as "The Indianheads," which was assembled in World War I and was among the most fearless and ruthless divisions in the American military, gaining a decisive and unlikely victory at Belleau Wood that was a turning point in the war against the Germans (U.S. Army). Of course, this division's famous appellation of "The Indianheads" furthers the tone of violence in the story's Oklahoma setting and links Krebs's war experience to this violent past of his "home." Thus, in the orbit of displacements and forced evacuations that constitute much of the movement within *In Our Time*, these histories of violence against black Americans and American Indians differently inflect a reading of "Soldier's Home." This prompts a reconsideration of the dominant critical claim that Krebs's war trauma renders him out of place within his home setting. Within a transnational view of the connections that *In Our Time* establishes between nation-building and forms of violence on racial, ethnic, or religious bases, one could consider Oklahoma as quite the appropriate place for Krebs's soldierly presence, with the rest of his community living within a kind of traumatic amnesia about the past.

Throughout "Soldier's Home," Hemingway documents Krebs's life on the war front and home front. This documentation begins with the first factual sentence, "Krebs went to the war from a Methodist college in Kansas" (69), followed shortly by, "He enlisted in the Marines in 1917 and did not return to the United States until the second division returned from the Rhine in the summer of 1919" (69). These statements straightforwardly establish the place and date of Harold Krebs's whereabouts before we encounter him in the Oklahoma setting. In a further form of substantiation, the narrative confirms each of these whereabouts through the detailed presentation of photographs: "There is a picture which shows him among his fraternity brothers, all of them wearing

exactly the same height and style collar...There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal" (69). Most critics read the contrast in these two pictures as emblematic of his pre- and post-war lives and transformation into a traumatized veteran. Yet, the photographs' presentation of the bodies purposefully blurs the lines between war and home front, with the college men effectively wearing uniforms that mark their white, masculine privilege and with those in the German setting striking the pose of a casual double-date. Also, the factual presentation of the photographs and repetition of the phrase "There is a picture which shows him" establish a flat, evidentiary tone; the photographs visually document and substantiate Krebs's experience in the way that photographs appear within a history book. This tone continues with the identification of the areas and battles in which Krebs had taken part: "... Krebs, who had been at Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in the Argonne..." (69). Overall, this informative structure recalls the "really good histories" of war that Krebs so enjoys reading (72).

The historical context behind these various details of Krebs's military service establish a portrait of a soldier that sharply differs from the dominant view of a traumatized soldier. In the second photograph, Krebs appears with "another corporal;" this, along with the fact that Krebs's enlisted from college, suggest his rank of a non-commissioned officer (NCO) within the Marines, a rank level of E-4 that oversees, leads, and directs soldiers in the lower ranks of E-1 through E-3 (US Army). Therefore, he would have been instrumental in the training of men and the analysis of battle movements. This position within the Indianheads establish Krebs as an analytical leader and fearless warrior, contrasting the critical readings that look to the photograph of Krebs



in his ill-fitting uniform as a sign of "Krebs's chronic inability to live up to the expectations or to play the role of the hero" (Kennedy 217). Rather, the uniform being too small for Krebs could indicate a bodily bulking up, a transformation that military experience had created in him since being fitted for his uniform upon enlistment.

The dissonance between Krebs's viewpoint and the viewpoint of those within his hometown is clear; yet, in reference to the point about his officer status above, this separation need not result only from his internal psychic trauma. Krebs feels his community's rejection of his attempts to discuss the war: "Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities" (69). Here, Krebs draws a distinction between war stories/lies and actualities. While the term "actualities" is ambiguous, I contend that his interest in history books may inform his perception of this term. Perhaps Krebs in his expression of "actualities" delivers historical or tactical analysis of the war, which would better explain why when his mother tried to listen to him talk about the war "her attention always wandered" (71). Critics generally assume that when Krebs "felt the need to talk" that this indicates an urge to unburden himself of his traumatic wartime experience, drawing from a scene where in his conversations with other soldiers Krebs says he was "badly, sickeningly frightened all the time" (70). Yet, this interpretation is based on a persistent misreading<sup>38</sup> of what Hemingway actually writes in this scene:

Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration, and when he occasionally met another man who had really been a soldier and they talked a few minutes in the dressing room at the dance he fell into the easy pose of the old soldier among other

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<sup>38</sup> Tetlow importantly misreads this passage (73) in his influential book-length study of *In Our Time*, a reading which has dominated subsequent work on the collection; Milton A. Cohen also identifies this persistent misreading of this quote in a 2010 article.

soldiers: that he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time. In this way he lost everything. (70)

Strikingly, this passage indicates that *among* the lies Krebs tells is that "he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time." This phrasing suggests that Krebs was, in fact, not frightened by his experience in war yet "fell into the easy pose of the old soldier among other soldiers," which made him tell this lie. Further, this "easy pose" taking place at a "dance" emphasizes Krebs's posturing in these interchanges with other soldiers. This helps account for his previous statement that his war experiences were "the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them" (69). Those around him in Oklahoma, like the other soldiers and his mother, seek to elicit his emotional confession about the war, which is precisely what Krebs resists and that triggers his nausea. Understanding Krebs's relation to the war as a positive memory against a negative present setting of those around him helps us account for his behavior and gestures in the story.

Hemingway's description of Krebs's actions in "Soldier's Home" further supports this view that the war was a positive experience for Krebs. The story traces in detail his routine gestures and movements in Oklahoma:

...he was sleeping late in bed, getting up to walk down town to the library to get a book, eating lunch at home, reading on the front porch until he became bored and then walking down through the town to spend the hottest hours of the day in the cool dark of the pool room. He loved to play pool.  
In the evening he practised on his clarinet, strolled down town, read and went to bed. (70)

This precisely choreographed routine actually seems fairly ordered and active compared to the dominant analysis of Krebs's "passive" behavior (Fenstermaker 309), and "inability to cope" (Tetlow 72). From the description of his gestures, Krebs seems to reward

himself upon his return from war: sleeping late, reading, playing pool, playing the clarinet, and strolling downtown. The only indication in this routine that Krebs may somehow be disturbed is his lack of a job (not unusual when only being home from the war for a month), which points to our own expectations of "normalcy" proceeding along the same economic lines as his parents; like his family and community, we tend to see Krebs as a kind of employment-malingerer.

If we understand Krebs's behavior differently by not immediately attributing it to psychic trauma, it also transforms our view of his analysis of the people around him, particularly the way he watches the young women walk by his house. Here, I emphasize the way that the narrative, focalized through Krebs, objectifies and analyzes the young women's gestures as "such a nice pattern" (72), following Krebs's general interest in patterns reflected in his preference for orderly practices like the predictable vectors within pool or the notated precision of music (De Baerdemaker 62) and in his reading of progressively-narrated, objective history books. In regard to watching the women on the street, Krebs analyzes them as he would soldiers in his division: Krebs "liked to look at them from the front porch as they walked on the other side of the street...He liked their bobbed hair and the way they walked" (71). Krebs likes women when they move in orderly patterns resembling men in marching formations (with their "bobbed hair"), but does not like them when their behavior is "too complicated" while socializing in "the Greek's ice cream parlor" (71). Krebs calculates what he likes and does not like about the women, coolly concluding in a war-like vocabulary that he "did not want to get into the intrigue and politics" (71). He insists that in his view of actualities, "you did not need a girl" (71), and emphasizes through repetition twice within a single paragraph that "he

learned that in the army" (72). Krebs's removed bodily position on his porch in order to analyze the young women's movements on the street sets up a physical relation wherein an officer's military logic replaces or distorts heteronormative desire. One could interpret this bodily separation as a passivity induced by trauma; however, we can also read here this separation as one reflective of power, of the distance between officers and rank-and-file soldiers, a relation that is supported by Krebs's monolithic and analytical view of the women. Further, this rejection of women may stand as an attempt to restore the homosocial, hyper-masculinity associated with the U.S. military.

"Soldier's Home" doesn't just position this behavior as unique to Krebs and as resultant of experience in World War I. In Krebs's desire to "live along without consequences" (71) and make sure that "none of it had touched him" (77), Krebs's behavior actually parallels that of his father, who is described as being emotionally "noncommittal" (70) and distanced from women in the "home" space (and, tellingly, physically absent from the story itself). Related to the Oklahoma setting and the displacement of American Indians, Krebs's father actively participates in and profits from the U.S. national appropriation of Indian Territory through his profession as a real estate agent who needs to have the family car on hand to "take clients out into the country to show them a piece of farm property" (70). Krebs's father also works in "the First National Bank building, where [he] had an office on the second floor" (71), further tying him to nation-building institutions. The segmentation of Indian Territory into parcels of property suggests that Krebs's father, like Krebs, has a need for order and patterns, as we further learn from the mother's worried statement that "[y]our father can't read his *Star* if it's been mussed" (73). The car conversation between Krebs and his mother also indicates

that Krebs's father now approves of his soldier son's use of the car and that Krebs's war experience somehow legitimizes Krebs in his father's view, as long as he uses the car to find a job and a girlfriend.

The allying of the father and son in viewpoint against the women in the story plays itself out in the painful scene between Krebs and his mother, where he denies loving her, causing her to break down emotionally. The curious physical movements in this scene cast Krebs in a theatrical role of playing the good son as with other gestures in *In Our Time*. Once his mother starts crying, "He went over and took hold of her arm. She was crying with her head in her hands" (76). This description of Krebs touching his mother here, "took hold of her arm," doesn't strike a tender tone; rather, the scene of Krebs holding the mother's arm while she grasps her head and cries positions the mother as Krebs's victim. The gesture of the mother crying with "her head in her hands" allies her with other figures within *In Our Time* that are associated with defeat or condemnation; this same gesture describes, for example, the Indian man who slit his throat, Ad Francis's first appearance in "The Battler," the cabinet minister from Chapter V whose head hung on his knees when they execute him, and one man from the group of prisoners that "were very frightened" to see Sam Cardinella executed, who "sat on his cot with his head in his hands" in Chapter XV (143). The scene's continuation with "Krebs put his arm on her shoulder" and "Krebs kissed her hair," are empty gestures matching his over-done performance of childlike devotion, culminating in his condescending use of "Mummy" and "I'll try to be a good boy for you" (76).

His defeated mother's fear culminates in her request to pray with Krebs, an gesture that emptily recalls the collection's title (along with its inability to restore

"peace"): "They knelt down beside the dining-room table and Krebs's mother prayed...So his mother prayed for him and then they stood up and Krebs kissed his mother and went out of the house" (76). This act of praying reprises the gestures of the soldier and Luz praying in the Duomo in wartime Italy from "A Very Short Story" and the soldier praying to Jesus for his life in the trenches in Chapter VII. These gestural correspondences connect his mother's desperate praying to similar acts of praying overseas during the war. Establishing this prayerful pattern overturns the dominant critical readings of the mother's ineffectual Midwestern religiosity in coping with her son's experiences, instead positioning this U.S. mother among the other suffering war victims throughout *In Our Time*. Importantly, it is not Krebs who prays but his mother, showing that she is the fearful one in this scene; indeed, though he admits to having "felt sorry for his mother" (77), he insists that "still, none of it had touched him" (76-7). In coolly analyzing the interaction with his mother and devising a plan of action to leave soon for Kansas City, Krebs reinstates an emotionless order against the pulls of family. This return to patterns concludes the story, as Krebs "would go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball" (77). His plan to go see Helen perform in an orderly sport fulfills Krebs's preference for predictable patterns.

Hemingway's method of describing the gestures on this single day signals how we can read Krebs's interactions with his mother as a kind of skirmish, an incident that creates too many complications for Krebs and spurs his retreat to Kansas City. Reading Krebs in this way is reinforced by the narrative's inclusion of Krebs's own reading practices. In a telling moment of metafictional layering, *we* read about *Krebs* reading about *himself* in the war, as he reads war history on his porch: "[H]e was reading about

all the engagements he had been in" (72). Krebs's only thought of the future is that "[h]e looked forward with a good feeling to reading all the really good histories when they would come out with good detail maps" (72). Hemingway's inclusion of this detail should prompt us to ask ourselves if "Soldier's Home," so tightly placed in location and time against the rest of the stories, narratively functions as one of these histories, performing the soldier's skirmishes with and analysis of his interactions with his family and community.

While readings of traumatic detachment in this story certainly have merit, I argue that the detachment here is also a complex performance of the workings and analysis of a military officer's inner mind. Along these lines, if we feel sympathy for Harold Krebs, it is not because he is tormented by an inner psychic pain but because Hemingway so startlingly portrays in free indirect discourse the tight, third-person perspective of Harold Krebs as the man built by military discipline. The story is so affecting because it reveals what the nation's military training can do to young men's "hearts and minds," instilling a instrumental view of other humans as "patterns." While those of us who have not served in the military may recognize this mentality as a symptom of trauma, a military tactician may recognize here the artful employment of an officer's coordinated movement and analysis. In this story, then, the narrative performs in the tightly wrought, clinically calculating viewpoint of Harold Krebs the very violence that comes to structure the military mind.

Hemingway presents here the danger of the convergence of military logic and certain forms of writing. How does personal experience translate into history, and what types of violence does historiography exclude? The prominence of Krebs's preference for

history in this story alerts us to the importance of historicizing the story's setting of Oklahoma; the absence of this history (like that which had been provided in "The End of Something" about the economic downturn of Horton's Bay) textually performs the very exclusion of this history of the violent treatment of American Indians. Crucially, this story bears the last mention of the violence of World War I in *In Our Time*, and instead we read violence through settings like the bullring, the racetrack, and dysfunctional relationships, all of which shift us away from U.S. settings. This narrative shift indicates a kind of displacement or purposeful forgetting of the violence of World War I itself. This linkage continues the structural reversal in the collection of violence in America in the second half of the novel, with "Soldier's Home" functioning as the turning point in this movement. In the first half of *In Our Time*, the stories with U.S. settings are dominated by Americans pursuing leisure (vacationing in Michigan, fishing in Horton's Bay, drinking, riding the rails, a returned soldier pursuing leisure activities), while the settings abroad detail war experiences (forced evacuations, battles, execution of cabinet ministers, injured soldiers); by contrast, in the second half of the collection, the few U.S. settings before the "Big Two-Hearted River" stories are characterized by violence (Hungarian robbers being shot, execution of Sam Cardinella), and the scenes of leisure or sport take place abroad, many among Americans (bullfighting scenes, vacationing, skiing, horse racing). The settings' safety and proximity to violence, then, geographically and textually reverses, as the violence of the war manifests itself in an American society. As "Soldier's Home" centrally evokes, *In Our Time* buries explicit references to World War I as the collection works its way to the end; yet, the effects of violence persist in the patterns of characters' bodily actions.



This pattern takes center stage in the solitary gestures of Nick Adams in "Big Two-Hearted River," as he enacts yet struggles to resist in the Michigan setting the bellicose, masculine, and nationalist gestures that characterize wartime. While Harold Krebs displays a kind of orchestrated purposefulness in his actions and resolve to leave his hometown and obtain a job in the city, Nick Adams as he appears in "Big Two-Hearted River: Part I" and "Big Two-Hearted River: Part II" (hereafter "Part I" and "Part II") is a lone, gesturally unsteady figure wandering across a destroyed landscape. The opening of "Part I" recalls the opening of "The Battler," with Nick having just disembarked a train. The two stories contrast in Nick's gestures, however. "The Battler" opens with the sentence, "Nick stood up. He was all right" (53), whereas "Part I" describes in the second line "Nick sat down on the bundle of canvas and bedding the baggage man had pitched out of the door of the baggage car" (133). The movement of sitting down, suggesting that Nick is not all right (when paralleled to the standing up in "The Battler"), may arise from his discovery of the destruction of the town of Seney, "where he had expected to find the scattered houses of the town..." (133). The burnt down houses, of course, draw us back to the scene of Nick's injury in the war in Chapter VI where "Nick sat against the wall of the church" and looked upon the destroyed houses (63).

In the correspondences of gestures and burnt settings, *In Our Time* ties the European theater of the war and the destroyed American landscape—locating the epicenter of this destruction on the home. This overlap emphasizes the deleterious effects of nation-building, and in the case of "Part I," American nation building; the violent struggle between nations and their alliances in World War I leads to the same disastrous

effects in the narrative logic of *In Our Time* as the American timber industry's exhaustion and consumption of the land produces in "Part I." Seney's lumbering history parallels that of Horton's Bay (outlined earlier in "The End of Something") in that it experienced a boom in the late nineteenth century with the felling of white pines, a boom that was unsustainable and that dwindled with the emptying of the forests by the 1910s (Kilar). Historical context for this decline in lumbering and its violent consequences further ties the lumber industry to the war in the 1917 strikes of lumbermen labor unions and their violent repression by state governments, most notably in Minnesota, but extending to lumber industry in Michigan (which tie U.S. industrial unrest to international unrest). These states jointly passed a "criminal syndacalism law" that tied the prosecution of labor unions to antiwar radicals and "alleged intimacies between the Wobblies and the Kaiser or the Bolsheviks" (Haynes 172). With this context in mind, Hemingway's pairing of the landscapes of war-torn Europe and industry-worn American land—a pairing especially coupled by Nick's gestural reaction of sitting down in the face of both—signals more than postwar trauma. Nick's wartime determination—made while sitting down and surveying the destroyed European setting—that in being injured he had "made a separate peace" (63), is reenacted here in "Part I" as he sits upon his "bundle of canvas and bedding," falling at the sight of burnt-down Seney. Thus, his subsequent actions in "Part I" and "Part II" may chart Nick's efforts to similarly secure a "separate peace" in a U.S. setting, attempting to slip out of the totalizing reach that the war and the interlocking national economy has swept across the countryside.

This uncanny pairing of war in Europe and Nick's attempt at leisure in the States continues through Hemingway's elaborate descriptions of Nick's gestures, which in "Part I" resemble the actions of a soldier in war:

He walked along the road feeling the ache from the pull of the heavy pack. The road climbed steadily. It was hard work walking up-hill. His muscles ached and the day was hot, but Nick felt happy. He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him. (134)

This scene is often taken as Nick's relief as he escapes from society into the wilderness; however, the gestures here have the unmistakable echo of soldiering with a heavy supply pack, particularly as he moves through the burnt landscape, which suggests that Nick is returning to something from his past, not escaping. After all, Hemingway does not go to such great lengths to describe the walking or Nick's pack in the earlier similar story, "The Battler." The distillation of his energies in bodily movement and this activity's ability to clear Nick's mind of all other needs also links to the war, perhaps reminiscent of Krebs's earlier assertion that the wartime included "the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them" (69). Just as Nick's thoughts turn away from the routines of his life back at home, the narrative details his physical exertions as he moves through the burned land, his sitting to rest and smoke, and then his setting up his camp. Having retreated from his U.S. home, as Krebs planned to do, Nick carves out a "homelike" space for himself in the wilderness (139).

Enacting a similar wavering momentum as Nick's movement, standing, and sitting as he staggeringly deals with the terrain, the story itself cannot formally sustain itself, breaking into two sections; this gestural and formal instability enacts an instability within the nationalist logic that underpins a particular view of masculinity. Tellingly, the

Chapter XV Sam Cardinella section that Hemingway inserts between "Part I" and "Part II" centers on the implications of a man standing versus sitting. Sam Cardinella, a man condemned to be hanged, ignores the exhortations of the priests to "Be a man, my son" (143), and he must be strapped to a chair in order to be executed: "When they all stepped back on the scaffolding back of the drop, which was very heavy, built of oak and steel and swung on a ball bearings, Sam Cardinella was left sitting there strapped tight, the younger of the two priests kneeling beside the chair. The priest stepped back onto the scaffolding just before the drop fell" (143). Here, the dynamics of Chapter VIII intensify: rather than the police officer Boyle shooting and killing the Hungarian robbers of the cigar store, we have the formal legal (and physical) machinery of the state executing a leader of the equally organized Chicago mob. Sam Cardinelli was historically known as "The Devil," which makes the younger priest's position of "kneeling beside the chair" sacrilegious in its overtones. Also significant in the historical context for this story is the mysterious and unsuccessful attempt the mob made to raise Cardinelli from the dead after the execution took place (which Hemingway omits from his story), taking his body to an ambulance after the execution and injecting it with various stimulants (McNamara). The execution depicted in this chapter dramatizes the ultimate power of the American state and its ability to control and destroy individuals or groups deemed adversaries for operating outside of the nation-state's economic interests. The racial overtones in this short section are also significant, furthering the way that *In Our Time* presents national power establishing itself at the expense, expulsion, or execution of Others: this execution significantly takes place as other men look on: "Five men sentenced to be hanged...Three of the men to be hanged were negroes" (143). The unequal distribution of state violence

along the lines of race emerges here in Hemingway's inclusion that more than half of the men to be hanged are black (the other remaining racially unmarked).

Nick Adams's ability, in the ensuing opening of "Part II," to awaken in the relative safety of the wilderness and continue with his fishing trip stands in stark contrast to the Sam Cardinella section. This differential bodily agency between those imprisoned and those who have the ability to move freely evinces the racial and class hierarchies that structure the United States of Hemingway's fiction. As Ian Marshall notes of Hemingway's heroes like Nick Adams, "They are not blacks and they are not whites of the working class. These are omitted, giving way to—and exposing—the white space" (179); and in reference to those characters who we see moving freely across the stories, "only white characters are granted the capacity for the exercise of will" (Marshall 200). In the shadows of the italicized chapter, Hemingway retains the trace of the racial disparity within the quintessential American exercise of freewill, a disparity that makes Nick's journey into the wilderness possible. This exercise of freewill also allows Nick to decide against going to fish in the swamp, and significantly, the text embeds this in a mire of racial overtones: "...in a stream like the Black, or this, you had to wallow against the current and in a deep place, or the water piled up on you (153)" and then "Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today...He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits..." (155).

Instead, Nick cleans the fish he has caught, and his gestures that recall those of his father in "Indian Camp" (the doctor's repeated washing of hands) and "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" (the mention of logs in the river): Hemingway details that "He washed his hands" (155) and "His knife was still standing, blade stuck in the log. He cleaned it on

the wood and put it in his pocket" (156). Nick's gestures here mirror his father's in a way that emphasizes at the end of *In Our Time* Nick's inheritance of privilege, while at the same time calling up the racial violence that characterized his father's use of the jack knife on the Indian woman at the beginning of the collection. This gestural correspondence textually secures itself through the fact that in "Indian Camp," Dr. Adam's closed up his crude entry into the woman's body with "nine-foot, tapered gut leaders," a material trace that directly and literally ties the colonizing implications of the Caesarian section to Nick's act of fishing, thereby tying the opening of *In Our Time* to the ending.

Though Nick's gestures waver between the poles of enacting and resisting his social and national privilege, the final scenes of the story testify to the intimate and ultimately inescapable reach of total war's violent legacy. Nick's bodily fluctuation between sitting and standing (respectively signifying the options of "a separate peace" or "be a man, my son") signals the ethical and emotional duality also encoded in the narrative structure of the two-parted, "Big Two-Hearted River." Yet, the final lines of "Part II" sketch a bodily image, a tableau of the "American Adam," that cedes the territory of Nick's "separate peace." This tableau establishes itself in closing lines that are dense with allusions to masculinity, capitalism, and war:

Nick stood up on the log, holding his rod, the landing net hanging heavy, then stepped into the water and splashed ashore. He climbed the bank and cut up into the woods, toward the high ground. He was going back to camp. He looked back. The river just showed through the trees. There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp. (156)

As standing up signaled in "The Battler," Nick's gesture here emphasizes his recovery from his uneasiness at the sight of the swamp ("He was all right"), further reinstating his

masculinity with the phallic intonations of "holding his rod." Nick stands on a log, the very object of capitalist profit over whose ownership Dr. Adams had fought the American Indian character Dick Boulton in the early story "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife"; Nick's gesture recapitulates and resolves the racial tension of this earlier scene in its clear articulation of his inherited dominance. Further, against the waning resources implied by the burnt land of Seney and the historical context of deforestation, Nick's net of fish is "hanging heavily," signaling abundance.

These racial and economic textual allusions interlock with the overarching logic of total war in Nick's determination to head "to the high ground," a climbing gesture attuned to military logic; the phrase "high ground" is traditionally associated with the position of tactical advantage—part of a basic tenet that, as Alex Vernon notes, "soldiers have always known: Terrain dictates" (*Soldiers* 12). From this advantageous bodily position, Nick "looked back" and surveyed the river below him, the river already having been textually cast as "Black." This final image of Nick standing on the hilltop in the wilderness recalls the colonial conquest of land, and—like the early scene from "Indian Camp" in which white men arrive in boats—recapitulates the gestures of Manifest Destiny: the white man standing on the hilltop surveying the untamed land below.<sup>39</sup> Nick's solitude here furthers the imperial tone of the ending, as *In Our Time* textually disappears the non-white characters in the service of forwarding the quintessential American, rugged individual in a "white space."

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<sup>39</sup> This image, I will argue in a future publication, plays out the visual rhetoric of Emanuel Leutze's mural *Westward The Course of Empire Takes Its Way* (1862) that adorns the west stairway of the U.S. Capitol. This mural includes several scenes that link to Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Leutze's detailed artist's statement links to an 18th century poem by George Berkeley, "Introductory to America: On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America."

Hemingway's inclusion of a final italicized section tempers the nationalistic triumphalism encoded in Nick's mountain-top finale. "L'Envoi" details the exiled Greek king dreaming of coming to the United States. Again, through this exiled king, *In Our Time* emphasizes displacement as the result of the rise and fall of nations and empires following World War I. The imprisoned Greek king's dream of coming to the United States follows on the heels of the lengthy descriptions of Nick Adams's freedom in the American wilderness, posing a stark contrast between war's winners and losers. What these final stories choreograph is the American nation taking its place on the world stage; economically, in this second half of *In Our Time*, we see expatriate Americans, primarily couples wealthy enough to live leisurely in Europe, signaling the expansion of imagined American national boundaries afforded by American wealth and the dollar's strength against European currency after the war. The theater of war and its late-arriving American troops that dominate the first half of the collection come to be replaced by the theater of the bullring, sport, or other forms of leisure peopled by American pleasure-seekers. In this way, Hemingway links the gestures of war with those of a rapacious American consumption and figures the nation's prosperity as its has been secured through violent displacements of others.

In opening the larger global contexts that shape *In Our Time*, it seems appropriate to also to ask: who is the "our" to whom Hemingway refers? Does he refer to all of humanity? Though the book as a whole covers a broad sweep of nationalities, the patterns and gestures establish a critique of a distinctly American power. With the collection ending with Nick standing up and climbing to high ground, and his feeling that "there were plenty of days coming" for him (which echoes his childhood feeling that he



would never die), along with the final vignette that portrays the displaced King Constantine I in a garden peaceably dreaming of going to America, we can largely understand the coming dominance of the United States, "the American century," as the "our time" to which Hemingway presciently refers. What Hemingway stages in these scenes of homecoming for his veteran-characters of WWI is not simply the trauma of living in a U.S. society in which the soldier's painful experiences of war are misunderstood; rather, the characters within *In Our Time* bodily respond to the shocks of transnational trauma, the "recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" which structures the staggeringly destructive modern era of total war.

## CHAPTER 4

### TONI MORRISON'S *HOME* AND THE "ORIGINATING RACIAL HOUSE"

If I had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled, impenetrable container from which no cry could be heard, but rather an open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors. Or, at the most, it became imperative for me to transform this house completely.  
--Toni Morrison, "Home" in *The House that Race Built*

The violent complexities of homecoming and war are inextricably linked in Toni Morrison's fiction, as the concept of home is always uneasy for individuals affected by diaspora. Taking up the problem of displacement in her 1998 essay "Home," Morrison restores the African diaspora to the very center of the nation-state and the situation of modern warfare:

The overweening, defining event of the modern world is the mass movement of raced populations, beginning with the largest forced transfer of people in the history of the world: slavery. The consequences of which transfer have determined all the wars following it as well as the current ones being waged on every continent. The contemporary world's work has become policing, halting, forming policy regarding, and trying to administer the movement of people. Nationhood—the very definition of citizenship—is constantly being demarcated and redemarcated ... The anxiety of belonging is entombed within the central metaphors in the discourse on globalism, transnationalism, nationalism, the break-up of federations, the rescheduling of alliances, and the fictions of sovereignty. Yet these figurations of nationhood and identity are frequently as raced themselves as the originating racial house that defined them. (11)

I quote this passage at length here not only for Morrison's crucial tie between slavery and modern war and its implications for the American context, but also because this passage clearly emphasizes mass movement and forced transfer of raced populations as a central determinant of war, which compellingly calls up Hemingway's opening with the violent Greco-Turkish population exchange at the beginning of *In Our Time* and that collection's more general theme of displacement. Also, the idea of citizenship that Morrison discusses

here clearly invokes the nation's bodily stakes, as "[t]he contemporary world's work has become policing, halting, forming policy regarding, and trying to administer the movement of people." National belonging effectively scripts the range of possible movements of its citizens along racial lines, emphasizing the centrality of gesture as both a register of oppression and a mode of resistance.

This raced, nationalist policing of the body serves as a shaping force of Morrison's 2012 novel *Home*. While Hemingway positions postwar trauma of as a response to U.S. participation in nation-building, industrial capitalism, and imperial conquest, Morrison takes up many of the same issues in this novel and links them more directly to the concepts of race and gender as they facilitate these forms of violence both in the United States and abroad. The paucity of scholarship that brings together Hemingway and Morrison's fictional works is surprising, particularly in light of Morrison's extended discussion of *To Have and Have Not* and *The Garden of Eden* in her collection of essays *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (69-91).<sup>40</sup> Yet, this critical oversight in the face of Morrison's directly-stated interest in Hemingway's fiction testifies to the racial and gendered expectations that structure the genre of war fiction. In this chapter, I argue for the importance of bringing Morrison's fiction more fully into the orbit of war fiction, particularly as her work highlights how race participates in the formation of war trauma. In the case of *Home*, Morrison's representation of trauma is specifically transnational, as black male characters' traumatic

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<sup>40</sup> Amy Strong also recognizes this curious absence of scholarship despite the synergy between their work: "As if playing into Morrison's hands, Hemingway touts the iceberg principle as a crucial element of his own narrative technique, a method of composition in which the author consciously excludes significant material. And one can't help but wonder: are these two authors talking about the same thing? Is it possible that much of Hemingway's fiction is structured by an invisible or nearly invisible racial presence? How often might that seven-eighths of the iceberg conceal an interest in racial issues?" (Strong 29)

experiences in war intersect their traumatic experiences of living within violently racist U.S. home settings. In both the war setting and U.S. settings, this trauma plays out differentially along gendered lines, as female characters become the target of heightened violence in both locations. Significantly, in the U.S. setting this violence against women occurs at the hand of a dangerous white doctor, reprising the theme from the previous chapter on Hemingway of medicine as an intimate technology through which racial ideologies police bodies. Ultimately, I argue that in *Home* Morrison resists a triumphalist view of the postwar period in African American history by presenting the gendered dynamics through which black women lacked access to the empowering rituals that granted black men agency following the Korean War.

Morrison's fiction has frequently taken up the topic of war and its aftermath. As Jennifer Terry points out, *Sula*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise* all include characters who are veterans of war, and Terry notes that *Paradise* was even originally titled "War" (96). More specifically, the war veteran as a seer figure in reference to the violence of American society is not a new theme for Morrison. Most notably, the World War I veteran Shadrack, who appears in *Sula* as "[b]lasted and permanently astonished by the events of 1917" (7), is powerful precursor to Korean war veteran Frank Money in *Home*. Morrison figures Shadrack's resistance to the "unexpectedness" of death he finds all around him in his black community of Bottom through his bodily performance of "National Suicide Day," during which "[o]n the third day of the year, he walked through the Bottom down Carpenter's Road with a cowbell and a hangman's rope calling the people together. Telling them that this was their only chance to kill themselves or each other" (14). Far from positioning Shadrack as a violent, crazy veteran ("he never touched anybody" [15]),

Morrison depicts him as a resistor to white domination through the tragic invocation of black agency in the act of suicide.<sup>41</sup> Shadrack's annual bodily performance comes to mark time in the black community of the Bottom, and the ex-soldier ritually reminds the community of the violent oppression in their midst.

From the opening pages of *Home*, this emphasis on the body as a register of transnational trauma emerges through the veteran character Frank Money. Frank immediately expresses the nation's power over the black man's body when he finds himself in a precarious position on a public street:

Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or walking without a clear purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would contradict 'purposefulness' and standing still could prompt a complaint 'loitering.' Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move--with or without shoes. (9)

In this, we see Frank Money's keen awareness that "men with or without badges" scrutinize his every gesture (carrying a book, standing still), and that the violence of these men reach into the very private recesses of the African American home. The nation-state's power functions not only imaginatively as a national fiction but has very material consequences as it plays out in collective violence and also locally as the raced body

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<sup>41</sup> Morrison furthers Shadrack's function as a resistor or figure of moral higher ground through his tie to the Biblical figure of Shadrach who in the book of Daniel survives being thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol.

becomes caught up in policing by national power, directing, deforming, and compelling the body's very gestures.

In this 2012 novel *Home*, Morrison reprises the topics of war and homecoming, this time in reference to the Korean War through the figure of black veteran Frank Money. Frank describes a childhood in the American South that was riddled with violence, from his family's harrowing expulsion from a violent white community in Texas to their uneasy home in Lotus, Georgia under the roof of his cruel step-grandmother Lenore. The novel's present narrative unfolds as Frank journeys from his postwar, temporary home in the North with his lover Lily back to the South to rescue his sister Ycidra, known as Cee, from her life-threatening employment as a domestic in the home of a white doctor and his wife. Cee has been the unsuspecting victim of the doctor's horrific medical experimentation, as he co-opts her body to test out a cruel device that allows him to see deeper and deeper into women's wombs. After removing her from this house, Frank takes Cee back to Lotus where they confront secrets from their past and finally set up a home together on their own terms.

Morrison's choice to represent memories of the Korean War in this novel is especially important because it is a conflict that has been largely wiped from the collective memory of U.S. society, widely known as the "forgotten war," which positions *Home* as pushing back against the more general process of American national amnesia. Of the novel's 1950s U.S. setting, Morrison remarks: "I wanted to rip the scab off that period. There's all this Leave It to Beaver nostalgia. That it was all comfortable and happy and everyone had a job. Oh, please. There was violent racism. There was [Joe] McCarthy. There was this horrible war we didn't call a war [Vietnam], where 58,000

people died" (Minzesheimer 4). Using bodily terms she to describe her recovery of the past of this violent era, "rip[ping] the scab off that period," she also recalls the conflicted position that the Korean War holds within African American history.

Race was a conflicted issue for African Americans in the U.S. military at the onset of the Korean War. While at the start of the war, the military was still segregated, many recognize the Korean War with the distinction of being the war in which desegregation of the U.S. military formally commenced in the spring of 1951 (Green 110). Moreover, because of the relative freedom that African Americans experienced in the military, after the Korean War the military unexpectedly become a "vanguard of civil rights reform" (Green 140). However, this desegregation proceeded from a racial logic that sought to cordon off desegregated U.S. forces to particular "non-white" parts of the globe:

The rapid desegregation of the army in Korea nourished this professional interest [in military enlistment] although the military initially attempted to keep the program under wraps. High-ranking officers recognized that their orders to desegregate would be less difficult to carry out in Asia—where there were no off-base Jim Crow laws and few opportunities for black-white heterosexual intimacy—than in the United States or Europe. (Green 140)

Indeed, before the outbreak of the Korean conflict black soldiers were disproportionately diverted away from positions in postwar Europe to positions in occupied Japan (Green 109). Because the U.S. was caught off guard by the onset of hostilities in Korea and had to quickly route their forces from Japan to the Korean peninsula, African American soldiers constituted higher proportions of the battling forces than in previous wars (Green 110). This higher rate of service also had tragic consequences; in his study, *Black Yanks in the Pacific*, Michael C. Green notes that "Black soldiers were overrepresented among

ground forces throughout the war, and their casualty rates remained disproportionately high" (124). After facing a heightened precarity in the U.S. military, then, black soldiers like Morrison's main character Frank Money's return home to a structurally and culturally segregated United States from the relative racial integration of the military.

The formal structure of *Home* recalls the process of a veteran testifying to his painful war experiences, as it includes italicized chapters where Frank Money speaks directly to and often resists in a hostile tone an author who is writing about his life experiences. In the Korean War context, black veterans like Frank Money experience war trauma that is shot through by the structural violence of race, and Morrison employs these textual spaces to testify to this multi-faceted instance of war trauma. Discussing both his childhood and his experience during the Korean War, in these interview-like sections Frank includes challenges like, "*Since you're set on telling my story, whatever you think and whatever you write down, know this*" (5), "*Describe that if you know how*" (41), and "*I have to say something to you right now*" (133). These italicized chapters interrupt others that are told through the third-person but are focalized through the characters Frank, his sister Cee, his step-grandmother Lenore, his lover Lily, and very briefly in one chapter, the house servant Sarah. From the tenth chapter to the seventeenth, however, the narrative shifts to the italicized chapters sharing textual space with third-person chapters focalized only through Frank and Cee.

The structure of the novel undoubtedly privileges Frank's perspective, and in one way or another, the text only sustains the women's narration for as long as they support or elaborate Frank's journey and his testimony of traumatic war experience. The earlier inclusion of Lily and Lenore's perspectives are significant because they are women who



provide temporary homes for Frank: Lenore when Frank's family was displaced by violent eviction at the hands of a white neighborhood in Texas and Lily when Frank returns home from the war. Despite the masculinist presentation of war trauma in the novel, Morrison's inclusions of the italicized interview sections reveal Frank's status as an unreliable and hostile narrator.

The centrality of the body in *Home* stands out as the novel opens and closes with the burial of a murdered black man's body; further, the novel's affective force emerges from its presentation of a series of horrific gestures: a still-moving black-skinned foot emerging from a grave, a hand of a young Korean girl grasping at both discarded food and at the genitals of U.S. soldiers for survival, a white doctor repeatedly inserting a torturous device into a young black woman's vagina to gaze into her womb, and a horrific, forced battle royale between father and son. The novel opens with one of these painful gestures, as the first-person narrative voice of Frank describes a scene that he and Cee witnessed at a nearby farm during their childhood in the South:

*One foot stuck up over the edge and quivered, as though it could get out, as though with a little effort it could break through the dirt being shoveled in. We could not see the faces of the men doing the burying, only their trousers; but we saw the edge of a spade drive the jerking foot down to join the rest of itself. When she [Cee] saw that black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave, her whole body began to shake. I hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling into my own bones because, as a brother four years older, I thought I could handle it (4).*

The gestures in this scene startlingly portray an African American man being buried alive by a white lynch mob. This initial memory illustrates the way that Morrison elaborates Frank's trauma through a visual memory characterized by synecdoche; all of his painful memories locate themselves in the gestures of a particular body part, and it isn't until the

final scene of the novel that Frank reassembles the vision of a full man, or himself as a full man, through healing acts of ritual. The fragmentation of bodies in Frank's memories recalls Morrison's earlier novel *Beloved*, in which, as Semiramis Yağcıoğlu identifies, there is "the theme of piecing-together the fragments and reconstituting a whole, so that the black subject fractured under the dehumanizing system of slavery is welded and fused into a new body" (126). The fragmented black body and fragmented black subjectivity associated with the traumatic legacy of slavery structures Frank Money's mental landscape, taking form in the quivering black foot in this first scene.

The implications of the dismembered black body deepen in the context of Frank's Korean War memories, as he struggles with the trauma of seeing "his homeboys" Mike and Stuff killed on the battlefield: "...when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails in, holding them in his palms like a fortune-teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama" (20). The ripped open stomach and hands along with the demolished face, and the gestures of both (trying to hold in guts and trying to speak) are two more instances of the fractured body that lead Frank to recognize his own physical vulnerability, as he tries both physically during the war and mentally in his precarious postwar psychological state "to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under that oh-so-thin sheet of flesh" (20). Rather than blame the U.S. military for this painful experience, Frank claims, "The army hadn't treated him so bad. It wasn't their fault he went ape every now and then. As a matter of fact the discharge doctors had been thoughtful and kind, telling him the craziness would leave in time. They knew all about it, but assured him it would pass" (18). The military

doctors' diagnosis demonstrates the inadequacy of medical treatment to address black Americans' experience of the war, as it recognizes only the experience of the war itself and disregards the complexity of racial trauma at the heart of Frank's life experience. "Shell-shock" or "war neurosis" as it would have been understood during this time period, is an insufficient model for a type of traumatic experience that is wrapped into both horrors of the war abroad as well as the racial violence of his homeland. It is little wonder that Morrison includes Mike and Stuff with Frank on the war front, to further blur the lines between the battlefield and the hometown. Morrison presents these scenes from the war at the beginning of the novel and increasingly excavates the meaning of the memories of racial violence as the novel progresses, a textual illustration of the way that war trauma, which is largely seen in universal terms as a collective or public pain, is more culturally visible than the more publically unintelligible truth of racial violence within the boundaries of the nation. Also, as Frank recovers more of his memories about his childhood home, we also see that the italicized sections that relay from the first-person his war experiences become more truthful, increasingly admitting to his complicity in violence against Koreans.

As the narrative of Frank's journey toward the rescue of Cee progresses, we learn more from the first-person sections about Frank's painful war memories. The use of synecdoche continues as he describes one of the Koreans who came to the military base in search of food:

*It was a child's hand sticking out and patting the ground ... I saw her face only once. Mostly I just watched her hand moving between the stalks to paw garbage. ... Sometimes her hand was successful right away, and snatched a piece of garbage in a blink. Other times the fingers just stretched, patting, searching for something, anything, to eat. (95)*

Here, Morrison registers the presence of the Korean civilians through this figure of the young girl. The girl's presence recalls the horrific plight of Korean civilians at the onset of the war, as streams of refugees flooded south toward U.S. military bases, particularly in Pusan, and were forced to live in the squalor of shanty towns with little of the bare necessities for survival. In stark contrast to this poverty, the U.S. military bases were brimming with "American abundance," as the military advocated soldiers' consumption to keep up morale (Green 113). This young Korean girl's gestures of sifting through the Americans' garbage calls up this disparity, and Morrison links the gesture to one of Frank's earlier memories about his own lifelong struggle with poverty and hunger: "*Talk about hungry. I have eaten trash in jail, Korea, hospitals, at table, and from certain garbage cans*" (40). The girl's hand, then, not only demonstrates the desperate situation of the Korean citizens during the American war, but it also intersects Frank's personal experience as an African American, as it "*reminded me of Cee and me trying to steal peaches of the ground under Miss Robinson's tree*" (94). Frank's sympathetic feelings about the plight of the girl recalls the social context of the early days of the Korean War, when there was a common conflicted feeling among African American soldiers about fighting in a white, imperialist war against fellow "colored" people (Green 120).

This solidarity that Frank feels with the young Korean girl heightens the horror of the next narrated episode, as the fracturing of the young girl's body becomes real. Frank says that another man in his unit, his "relief guard" also sees the young girl going through the garbage:

*As he approaches her she raises up and in what looks like a hurried, even automatic, gesture she says something in Korean. Sounds like 'Yum-yum.' She smiles, reaches for the soldier's crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-yum? As soon as I look away from her hand to her face, see the two*

*missing teeth, the fall of black hair above eager eyes, he blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange. (95)*

The young girl's "automatic gesture" of speech and reaching out to touch the American soldier's genitals bespeaks desperate measures of sexual servitude to which the young girl has to resort in order to survive. That the automatic sexual gesture is a matter of survival for the girl arises from her hand's simultaneous grasp of the orange. Like Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, in Morrison transfers the consequences of war by omitting scenes between American soldiers and live enemies and instead evoking the pain of the war through American soldiers' killing of civilians. We see this in more detail in an earlier section where Frank accuses himself of taking revenge after the deaths of Mike and Stuff: "And all that killing you did afterward? Women running, dragging children along. And that old one-legged man on a crutch hobbling at the edge of the road so as not to slow down the other, swifter ones?" (21). As I argue in Chapter 1, this presentation of civilians is important in a more global reappraisal of the pain involved in war, yet here, as in O'Brien's text, the deaths of civilians serve to elaborate a participating American soldier's guilt. In this way, Morrison's text also remains problematically invested in the representation of Americans' traumatic war experiences.

This emphasis on Americans' war experiences results in Morrison's narrative ties between men's treatment of women in war and at home. In order to foreground the way that black American men's responses to war abroad are intricately tied to the legacy of slavery on the U.S. home front, Morrison parallels Frank's pain during the war to Cee's simultaneous betrayal by her husband Prince and subsequent physical torture under the roof of Dr. Beauregard Scott—a place where she confronts a parallel danger to war in her

work as a servant in a white couple's Atlanta home. Morrison aligns Cee's service in the white household to Frank's military service through her description of Cee's uniforms as "Two nicely starched uniforms [that] saluted from their hangers on the wall" (63).

Katheryn Nicol describes this pattern in Morrison's earlier fiction of paralleling war experiences with violence within the U.S.:

By creating equivalences between international warfare and racial conflict within the nation, Morrison's novels do not merely challenge the identification of the nation as a place of life and peace rather than death and violence. She also destabilizes distinctions between the legitimate, political nature of national conflicts and the illegitimate, personal nature often ascribed to conflicts over racial differences within the nation. (170)

Indeed, Cee's physical torture is of the most "personal nature" that can be imagined, that of the white doctor prying open her body as far as possible to stare into her vagina. We learn through the brief perspectival addition of Sarah, a fellow Scott-household servant, what Dr. Scott had specifically done to Cee: "[Sarah] knew he gave shots, had his patients drink medicines he made up himself, and occasionally performed abortions on society ladies ... What she didn't know was when he got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them. Improving the speculum" (113). Similarly to Morrison's invocation of the historical figure of Margaret Garner in *Beloved*, Morrison grounds Cee's horrific experience in the actual treatment of black women at the hands of the medical establishment in American history, deriving the character Cee from Harriet Washington's 2007 history entitled *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans From Colonial Times to the Present* (Minzesheimer 1). This racist structure of medical knowledge in *Home* also provocatively links to Hemingway's fiction as I described in the previous chapter, as the doctors in *Home* are also cast as racist and dangerous. In another example of Morrison's

use of dangerous doctors, in the second chapter, the Reverend John Locke congratulates Frank for having escaped from the mental hospital down the road, suggesting that Frank would have met an untimely death there; Locke informs him of the hospital's practice of selling bodies to the local medical school, contemptuously adding, "Well, you know, doctors need to work on the dead poor so they can help the live rich" (12). Locke, whose name secures his status as the voice of reason in the opening of the novel, immediately confirms the dangerous position that a racially marked body occupies in a white medical establishment. The racial implications of selling bodies to the local medical school recalls the scene from Hemingway's "Indian Camp" in which Dr. Adams proudly remarks that he should publish his jack-knife Caesarian section on an American Indian woman's body in a medical journal. Bodies, and especially raced bodies, are instrumentalized in the service of larger imperial "progress" projects in the hands of the white medical establishment in both Hemingway and Morrison, which takes its most disturbing form in the figure of Dr. Beaugard Scott's experimentation on Cee.

Cee further functions to shore up Frank's injured black masculinity through his mission "save" Cee from gendered violence in the U.S.. Upon discovering Cee's dire circumstances through a letter from Sarah, Frank's determination to rescue his sister serves as the catalyst for his journey back to the South. Frank's desire to save and comfort his sister returns him to the affective bond that had structured his identity during his youth: the love between the brother and sister. We earlier encounter this bond between the two during the scene of the quivering foot, where "*When [Cee] saw that black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave, her whole body began to shake. I hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling into my*

*own bones because, as a brother four years older, I thought I could handle it" (4).*

Assuming this role of the protective older brother endows Frank with purpose and personal worth, and his gestures here of trying to quell the shaking of Cee's body at the sight of the violent crime come to characterize his protective behavior of her as they grow up; whenever Cee becomes shaken by the violence around them, "Frank put one hand on top of her head, the other at her nape. His fingers, like balm, stopped the trembling and the chill that accompanied it" (52). This recurrent, protective gesture establishes an insular world between brother and sister that shields them from the pain of their harried, poverty-stricken parents' neglect, as well as from openly hostile family members and the menacing white community. Frank and Cee develop their gendered identities in the orbit of one another, and the protective gesture becomes a ritual through which Frank asserts a positive identity as a black man in a hostile white, Southern U.S. war zone.

These ritualized gestures between Frank and Cee enable them to navigate the tempestuous racial currents of their hometown and steer the critical appraisal of their relationship away from one structured by a dominant conception of trauma and more toward a generative, Africanist understanding of how to differently negotiate the press of racism within the nation. As K. Zauditu-Selassie argues, it is important to decenter European thinking in our approaches to Toni Morrison's texts, asserting that "spiritual expression is an essential principle in the lives of African people, [and] critical models inbred from linear worldviews are inadequate tools to examine African American literature" (19). More relevant to gestural ritual and the forms they take in *Home*, Zauditu-Selassie argues of Morrison's earlier fiction, that in "the power of continuous spiritual journeys, characters traverse the past in search of the meaning of the present.



Linking the narrative to ritual is an attempt to restore balance in both the visible and invisible realms through the harnessing of spiritual energy" (36). In reference to this Africanist perspective on Morrison's work, we can trace how her later novel takes shape around a traversal of the past and present, as the narrative structure of the novel includes Frank's first-person oral testimony unfolding between past and present scenes of pain. While I read these ritual gestures between Frank and Cee as spiritually balancing in this tradition, I maintain in what follows that Morrison, through the use of bodily gestures, marks a clear distinction between black men's access to and black women's lack of gestural traditions that open a successful home space to the characters.

Frank's gestures of rescue parallel those in the last scene of the novel, a repetition that ultimately restores Frank's black masculinity but that reinscribe Cee within normative gender roles that fail to grant her meaningful agency. Frank enters the Scott household, and after the doctor's gun ineffectually misfires, Frank finds his sister unconscious and removes her from the house: "Then he knelt by Cee's bed, slid his arms under her shoulders and knees, cradled her in his arms, and carried her up the stairs" (112). The doctor and Frank face off over Cee's inert body, a masculine posturing that establishes their power in relation to one another through the control of a black woman's body. Morrison makes this gendered negotiation of power visible in Frank's recognition of the standoff's empowering dimension: "Mixed in with his fear was the deep satisfaction that the rescue brought, not only because it was successful but also how markedly nonviolent it has been ... the doctor had felt threatened as soon as he walked in the door. Yet not having to beat up the enemy to get what he wanted was somehow superior—sort of, well, smart" (114). The way that the rescue restores Frank's identity

emerges in the last phrase that identifies the power relations of the scene as "smart," as Frank's nickname is "Smart" Money. Describing the violence against the "enemy" here reinforces the link between this confrontation with Dr. Scott and Frank's battlefield experience, confirming this rescue's partial reparation of his postwar self. The gesture of carrying Cee, then, becomes a marker of his victory and dominance over the white doctor in regard to his sister.

Cee physically heals under the ministrations of the women of Lotus, also psychologically healing under the counsel of the wise elder Ethel Fordham. Here, *Home* reanimates the strain that Zauditu-Selassie identifies of *The Bluest Eye* that "Morrison advances how the power of African indigenous culture, healing, and female authority combine to chart a course toward new levels of liberation" (36). In a more measured way than offering "new levels of liberation," Ethel tells Cee: "You young and a woman and there's a serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world" (127). As part of Cee's final stages of physical treatment, the women force her to be "sun-smacked, which meant spending at least one hour a day with her legs spread open to the blazing sun" (124). Ethel describes this measure as "a permanent cure. The kind beyond human power" (124). In this sun-smacking scene, Cee literally takes her injury into the public sphere, at last ceasing to care about anyone seeing her as "she forgot about whether anybody was peeping through the Bantam cornstalks in Ethel's garden or hiding behind the sycamores behind it" (125). In the conversion of this gesture of vulnerability to one of self-sufficiency, Cee brings her personal torture directly into

public light, gaining within the circle of women in Lotus a degree of healing, joining them in their quilting circle and finding herself content to remain in Lotus. Yet, this agency only succeeds within the cloistered sphere of women, failing to transform her position within the racist and gendered crosshairs of the U.S. South.

Despite this ritual of sun-smacking, Cee's body continues to function in the narrative as a source through which Frank expiates his own painful memories. In a troubling way, it is the recognition of his sister's scarred body that prompts a further confession from Frank about the war: "His sister was gutted, infertile, but not beaten. She could know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting. Frank tried to sort out what else was troubling him and what to do about it" (132). Inspired by his sister's resiliency, Frank searches for his own answers, but Cee recognizes the inability of their rituals as brother and sister to lead to any meaningful freedom for her: "Frank alone valued her. While his devotion shielded her, it did not strengthen her" (129). After talking to Cee about how she will never have children, the first-person Frank confesses in one of the interview-like sections:

*Then Cee told me about seeing a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, the clouds. It hit me. Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how.*

*I shot the Korean girl in her face.*

*I am the one she touched.*

*I am the one she said 'Yum-yum' to.*

*I am the one she aroused. (133)*

The repetition of "I" in each statement not only implicates Frank in this act of violence, but it simultaneously marks a recovery of his agency. After having dissociated from his own violent actions, Frank's confession here rejoins his body and memory, untangling his confusion from the war and allowing him to move further into his past to discover "what

else was troubling him and what to do about it." Following this confession, the next chapter details Frank's attempts to reconstruct the story of what happened to the man he had seen buried alive as a child. He goes to his grandfather Salem and a group of old war veterans who tell him the story of the local farm where for years the white men had forced black men to fight one another, and specifically, they tell him about a gruesome episode where the white men force a father and son to fight to the death in a horrific battle royale. This story finally provides context for the partially buried foot that Frank and Cee witness as children: one of the victims of these battles, injured but still clearly alive, being hastily buried by the white men who forced the fights. With this inclusion, Morrison forcefully brings the violence of the war—and specifically the violence of powerful white men against citizens who are cast as racially Other—to the American homeland.

The penultimate chapter in *Home* includes a ritual journey of brother and sister that in many compelling ways revisits and revises Nick Adams's journey in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." While I do not aim to cast Toni Morrison's ending here as simply a response to Hemingway, there are striking resonances between the ending of *Home* and *In Our Time* that clarify the political and ethical stakes of each text. Like Nick Adams, Frank and Cee return to the location of a childhood scene of violence, and, then onward to the river. After agreeing to accompany an insistent Frank with quilt she had made, Cee remarks of their journey, "Perhaps anyone who saw them would think they were going out to fish. At five o'clock? With shovel? Hardly" (142). Cee's offhand remark about fishing here seems deliberate, as Morrison previously links fishing and a textually submerged black figure in *Playing in the Dark*; in her discussion of

Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, Morrison describes a nameless Africanist presence on Harry Morgan's fishing crew, thereby associating fishing with the erasure of black identity in Hemingway's fiction (70-1). Moreover, of Hemingway's fiction in general, Morrison writes about "how Hemingway's fiction is affected by an Africanist presence—when it makes the writing belie itself, contradict itself, or depend on that presence for attempts at resolution" (70). Morrison's statement here reminds us of the buried stakes of better contextualizing how power-saturated that final scene of "Big Two-Hearted River" really is, how Nick Adams's ability to stand on the high ground in the position of manifest destiny comes at a very specific price.

Rather than fishing, Frank and Cee return to this land to unearth the body of the black man who had been murdered by the group of white men. The place where the brother and sister find the body echoes Hemingway's description of Nick's encountering of the burnt town of Seney:

As soon as Cee recognized the place, she said, 'It's all burned down. I didn't know that, did you?'  
'Salem told me, but we're not going there.' Frank shielded his eyes for a moment before moving off, tracking what was left of the fencing. Suddenly he stopped and tested the earth, trampling through the grass, tamping it in places, until he found what he was looking for. (143)

What Frank finds, of course, are the bones of the man who had been killed by the group of white men, and the siblings perform a ritual reassembly of the bones and find him a more appropriate final resting place:

Carefully, carefully, Frank placed the bones on Cee's quilt, doing his best to arrange them the way they once were in life. The quilt became a shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow, and dark navy blue. Together they folded the fabric and knotted its ends. Frank handed Cee the shovel and carried the gentleman in his arms. Back down the wagon road they went, then turned away from the edge of Lotus toward the stream. Quickly they found the sweet bay tree—split down the middle, beheaded, undead—spreading its

arms, one to the right, one to the left. There at its base Frank placed the bone-filled quilt that was first a shroud, now a coffin. (144)

Frank marks the grave of the now dignified "gentleman" with a marker that reads, "Here Stands A Man" (145). This marker, followed by the final short, italicized chapter in which the first-person story-teller Frank tells the author that "I stood there a long while, staring at that tree" emphasizes that in many ways, the marker on the tree refers to Frank's reconstructed identity at the end of the novel, with Frank as the novel's last man standing. Of course, this emphasis on standing reprises the texture of Hemingway's recurrent gesture for Nick Adams, that of standing up and its connection within *In Our Time* to self-determination. More importantly, though, the synecdoche that had characterized Frank's relation to his memories and to his own body following the war moves away from fragmentation toward bodily wholeness and assertion: Frank standing up and (to again reprise Hemingway) being all right.

However, the reparation of black masculinity generated through this ritual of bodily reconstruction has limited applicability for black women like Cee, and even less so for the murdered Vietnamese girl who ultimately remains effaced in the novel. Morrison's representation of this Vietnamese girl parallels O'Brien's use of the destroyed Vietnamese man's face in "The Man I Killed," likewise revealing the problematic ethics of articulating U.S. soldiers' guilt through dead Asian figures. Further, there is a troubling correspondence in Frank's gestures of carrying out Cee's body, his "motionless burden" (112), from the Scott's house and Frank's carrying of the murdered black man's body to its burial place. This paralleling of gestures reveals Cee's limited agency at the end of the novel, as black women's roles (as Miss Ethel reminds her) remain circumscribed through their objectification as sexual objects or through biological determinism. Through

Morrison's paralleling of Frank's gestures of carrying, Morrison reminds us that in significant ways during this postwar period, Cee remains socially dead; the consequence of the doctor's violence to Cee's body that has left her infertile bars Cee from "status of motherhood" (129). This social death for black women links to the death of the young Vietnamese girl (as they are linked in Frank's mind) and mirrors the narrative structure of *Home*, as the women characters' appearance is, in many ways, contingent on Frank's proximity to them. Moreover, the italicized interview sections self-reflexively insert the author as a silent, shadowy presence in the novel, which positions the writing of the narrative itself as originating in the sometimes hostile and resistant testimony of Frank Money. In this way, the content and structure of *Home* remind us that this limited recovery of an American home still depends upon the violent erasure of certain deaths, to which the haunting presence of the Korean girl testifies. The suppression of these Asian victims of war is largely effect of American attitudes toward its Pacific wars, an issue that I take up more explicitly in the third section of this study.

Yet for Frank, in the completion of the spiritual ritual of reassembling the black man's body and respectfully burying it, the visible and the invisible realms indeed come together; Cee looks across the river and notices the same mysterious and haunting figure that Frank has also seen at various points in the novel, the apparition of the zoot-suited black man: "It looked to her like a small man in a funny suit swinging a watch chain. And grinning" (144). In his zoot suit and with his knowing grin, this figure unmistakably calls up Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In this move Morrison's novel, through its ending's gestural parallels to Nick Adam's solo journey in the wilderness, does much more than simply restore a view to the Africanist presence at the heart of Hemingway's work; the

ending of *Home* brings an African American literary tradition into contact with and thereby troubles the very grounds of Hemingway's white, modernist literary tradition. The invisible man, the restless spirit, becomes the uncanny, unhomely (*unheimlich*) figure rising from his previous subterranean hibernation, swinging his watch and grinning as if to tell us, "I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless. And I suppose it's damn well time" (Ellison 581).

This notion of "damn well time" is a compelling corrective for the simplistic understanding of that which constitutes "our time" as Americans. Morrison's novel resurfaces the racial dimensions of war trauma and reconnects this trauma to the politics of racism and displacement within the American home; yet, this *Home* accomplishes this by way of another racialized and erased violence against non-Americans. While contemporary representations of war often employ the rubric of trauma to explore its chaos and inexpressibility, the traumatic aftermath of war prompts different aesthetic responses that are entwined with the ethical project of testimony as a stage of homecoming. Not only does much war literature portray the difficulties of homecoming and the difficulty of conveying one's experience as a major thematic thread, but literature itself becomes a form of testimony (as discussed in Chapter 1). As Hemingway and Morrison's fiction both attest, the concept of "homecoming" provides a deceptively tempting endpoint to the war experience, an endpoint whose very possibility arises from the asymmetrical relations of the last century's global wars in which the United States has been able to outsource its conflicts to foreign soil. Thus, models for "war trauma" that emerge from these asymmetrical power relations need to be transnationally



recontextualized and moved away from their current conception of trauma as a universal psychological experience.

In a statement that ties Hemingway's narrative and artistic style to the ancient memory palace and exclusion, he says, "Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over" (qtd in Lamb 179). Yet, the simplicity of prose in his works, the architecture of his fiction, depends upon what is left unsaid, the space within and without. In returning to the issue of collective memory and the trouble of homecoming, Toni Morrison reminds us that "figurations of nationhood and identity are frequently as raced themselves as the originating racial house that defined them" ("Home" 11). The American memory palace, that "originating racial house" that shapes and sustains the narrative of our national collective memory, becomes a dangerous, strange place, a strangeness of both being cast out and belonging that Morrison aptly expresses in her preface to *Home*:

Whose house is this?  
Whose night keeps out the light  
In here?  
Say, who owns this house?  
It's not mine.  
I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter  
With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;  
Of fields wide as arms open for me.  
This house is strange.  
It's shadows lie.  
Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?

**PART 3**

**TRANSPACIFIC POSTMEMORY: THE AFTERLIVES OF WAR TRAUMA**

## CHAPTER 5

### CHANG-RAE LEE'S *A GESTURE LIFE*, THE ASIAN AMERICAN BODY, AND THE CROSS-CURRENTS OF POSTMEMORY

*For me, that is what fiction should do--bring home for the reader not just an act, historical or not, but the aftereffects, what happens in the act's wake. And, most interestingly, how people live in that wake.*  
--Chang-rae Lee, in interview with Ron Hogan

*The act of laying bare the components of silence can allow for something new to come forth in its place, but that is not to say that it exposes a singular truth.*  
--Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*

The passing of trauma from one generation to the next often becomes visualized through the image of an outward-stretching ripple, and this image is instructive for the next two chapters in which I trace these ripples in and across the waters of the Pacific. As Chang-rae Lee puts it in the quote above, these chapters seek to reorient our understanding of war's aftermath by focusing on generations that "live in that wake" of their parents' war experiences across the Pacific. These chapters address the question: in our readings of U.S. war literature, how do we decenter our view of this "rippling out" of war trauma from its dominant locus in the psyches and families of American soldiers and instead understand how American war fiction grants a view to the repercussions of war on all shores of the Pacific Rim? Here, I will explore the ways in which Chang-rae Lee's novel *A Gesture Life* and Jayne Anne Phillips's novel *Lark and Termite* grant such a view of war trauma in its transpacific contexts, what I call "transpacific postmemory." Specifically, my aim is to open up the concept of transgenerational trauma—trauma that children experience as a result of their parents' traumatic experiences—in order to move away from universal notions of children's experiences toward an understanding of trauma

more responsive to the particular historical, geopolitical, and economic realities of wars in and across the Pacific and how these shape families' lives after war.

The transmission of traumatic memories from one generation to the next generation has become an overlapping concern of trauma theory, memory studies, cognitive studies, Holocaust studies, and war studies, one that explores the many ways that memories from a parent or other family member's past may structure a child's life to the degree that she seems to "inherit" the traumatic experience. This inheritance has generated a range of heated debate and has been studied by scholars who have variously termed this form of memory as absent memory, prosthetic memory, *memoire des cendres*, vicarious witnessing, received memory, and haunting legacy (Hirsch 3). Much of the controversy surrounding the lingering generational effects of trauma deal with the cognitive aspects of how memory transfers from a witness or victim of a traumatic event to a non-witness and what ethical questions and historical elisions may arise when a child claims to have memory of an event that her parent has experienced. While these questions are important to consider, in this chapter, I am less interested in tracing the cognitive mechanics of traumatic memory and how it is transmitted from parent to child; rather, I will explore how literature powerfully represents the ways in which war literally *shapes* families, informing their gestures and structuring children's futures as they negotiate the physical and psychical spaces within geopolitical coordinates haunted by war.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" is the most useful for a transnational analysis of war's radiating effects. Hirsch's term emphasizes not the cognitive mechanics of memory but rather the ways in which memory operates as a structure that realizes

itself differently in different cultural environments. This structure of postmemory, Hirsch argues, is one flexible enough to accommodate and even invite the ethical comparative work of transnational studies, one flexible enough to think multidirectionally both in terms of chronological time and geographical space. Postmemory, Hirsch emphasizes, is not an answer in and of itself, but a method of addressing a challenge:

The challenge may be how to account for contiguous or intersecting histories without allowing them to occlude or erase each other, how to turn competitive or appropriative memory into more capacious transnational memory work...Such a reparative approach to memory would be open to connective approaches and affiliations—thinking different historical experiences in relation to one another to see what vantage points they might share or offer each other for confronting the past without allowing its tragic dimensions to overwhelm our imagination in the present and the future. (Hirsch 20, 24-5)

What is so useful in Hirsch's model is that here, comparison does not collapse into competition, but, rather, comparison functions positively as "connective." In its capacious and nonlinear reach across space and time, the concept of postmemory elucidates overlapping strands of memory as they may constitute literary narrative and thereby usefully challenge or offer new insight to singular, official histories of war.

Combining the concept of postmemory with that of the transpacific is central to this section's consideration of transgenerational war trauma in literature. Beyond the transpacific's literal reference to movement across the Pacific, this term also captures the energies of co-formation. In this latter, conceptually rich sense, the "transpacific" anchors the energies of transnational methods more specifically in the region of the Pacific as a space of dynamic interaction between competing national and imperial powers and the ways this dynamic interaction inflects national identities. Simultaneously with the rising tide of interest in postmemory at the turn of this century, there has been the strengthening

interest in the space of the Pacific, the Pacific Rim, and this related concept of the transpacific. As scholars like Rob Wilson, Arif Dirlik, John Carlos Rowe, David Palumbo-Liu, Shu-mei Shih, Yunte Huang have productively shown, the space of the Pacific allows one to differently apprehend the geopolitical operations of nations and empires over modern history, the cultural and racial encounters between the U.S. and Asia, and the circulation of cultural discourses and forms (Shu 274) Specifically, the framework of the transpacific opens a new path for transnational work on the U.S. that better attends to complex legacies of violence and inequality as they intersect postcolonial, world, and empire studies. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's term "America's Pacific Century" clearly expresses (*Foreign Policy*), the twenty-first century space of the Pacific displays the ongoing operations of U.S. empire, and it offers an alternative view of U.S. power than is presented in national narratives drawing on Atlantic frameworks. Additionally, the transpacific is a dynamic space that in a twentieth-century U.S. context better captures what Laura Doyle calls the "inter-imperial" dimensions of empires, one that can attune our scholarly attention to the complex ways in which many Americans live as "intersubjects" of crossing imperial legacies and presents ("Inter-imperiality").

What the transpacific opens in terms of the literature described in these chapters is a more interactive view of the way that Pacific has been a space of both clash and competition not only in geopolitical terms, but also in imaginative terms, and that literary representations of war can usefully illuminate how these political and imaginative terms combine to form veritable gulf streams of nationally-invested poetics as they structure literary representations of war. Yunte Huang most usefully defines the "transpacific

imagination" as a way to rethink the relationship between history and literature as it seeks to represent interaction in the Pacific, offering the imaginative oscillation entailed in the transpacific imagination as a "counterpoetics":

As a counterpoint to imperial visions that always claim some version of historical teleology as their *raison d'être*, such poetics hover between the literal and the metaphoric, the historical and the mimetic. And in contrast to the master narratives, these works of counterpoetics turn away from any meta-discourse on the transpacific; they move instead toward the enactment of poetic imagination as a means to alter memory and invoke minority survival in the deadly space between competing national, imperial interests and between authoritative regimes of epistemology serving those interests. (5)

Particularly in light of the wars addressed in the following chapters, World War II and the Korean War, this kind of imaginative oscillation generates new knowledge about war by being responsive to multiple versions of history on the one hand and the ethical call of individual experience on the other.

I therefore use "transpacific postmemory," to reorient our reading of U.S. war fiction in ways that better account for the strong hold that the violent legacy of war in the Pacific has on American representation of war. *A Gesture Life* and *Lark and Termite* help us look beyond trauma that moves only through generations of American families and beckons us to see war trauma as it radiates within and without American circles as a transnational link. Further, in reading Lee and Phillips's novels I aim to reverse the flow of influence within a view of traumatic experience, arguing that war participants' intimate experiences as and interactions with Asians during World War II and the Korean War are what come to structure the texture of the trauma that their families experience in the United States. The reversal of this flow of influence is important because, as Steven Yao writes, far too many literary critics

continue to view the 'Orient' in general and East Asia in particular as static and unchanging...In doing so, they have largely reproduced the long-standing, unfortunate Hegelian conception of the 'East' as divorced from the movement of History. Thus, in this work, the directionality of cultural interaction implicitly flows from an unchanging 'Orient' to a dynamic and innovative "West..." (Yao 10)

In attuning my critical work here to the multidirectionality of cultural interaction as represented in these novels, I pay particular attention to Asian and Asian American scholarship on war to inform my readings of the texts, looking always for the ways in which this scholarship redirects the ethical implications of American war literature. What this expansion proves, is that the legacy of these Pacific wars is far from over, and that Lee's and Phillips's novels testify to continuing consequences of military occupation of psychic and physical spaces. Drawing from the flexibility and open-endedness of the conceptual models of Hirsch and Huang, "transpacific postmemory" as an object for critical practice, then, is a structure that holds in view for a moment the intersection of painful pasts that are always diverging through complicated vectors of war representation, to pause for a moment of ethical reflection in the Pacific waters before they radiate outward into expanding ripples of memory, or move outward in waves to reach far-flung shores of the Pacific Rim. I argue that Chang-rae Lee and Jayne Anne Phillips float their novels in this space of possibility, representing war trauma as interactive, as a relation not only between soldiers but also between the full circle of participants of war and even the generations that follow this inner circle.

In Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*, Franklin Hata's experiences in the Pacific Theater during World War II continue to haunt him, and in many ways, this novel fits into the framework of troubled homecoming explored in the second section of this study.



Yet, in contrast to these texts, Hata's postwar identity in *A Gesture Life* takes shape through his movement along and across the Pacific, and thus the novel's elaboration of his war trauma—which constitutes the novel's primary narrative arc—offers a view of trauma in a transpacific context. Hata's postwar experience further affects his adopted daughter Sunny, and her experiences in *A Gesture Life* reveal the ethical implications of war's transnational postmemory. Importantly, Sunny also lives within the wake of her own experience of transpacific war trauma, which the novel only obliquely addresses; likely the child of a Korean sex worker and an American G.I. born in the aftermath of the Korean War, Sunny was abandoned and lived her young life in a squalid orphanage in Korea before being adopted by Franklin Hata and brought to the United States.

Hata's personal story—the history of World War II and specifically the history of comfort women—overshadow and ultimately overwrite Sunny's experience resulting from the Korean War. Below, I will argue that *A Gesture Life* demonstrates the ways in which a parent's traumatic experience can distort and occlude a child's life story, even when that child's story includes its own struggle with war trauma. Tellingly, Hata's sidelining of Sunny within the narrative textually performs the self-erasure that postmemory can sometimes impose upon the next generation, as "[t]o grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors" (Hirsch 5). Sunny lives within the fallout of unspoken memories of two wars—her adopted father's silence about his service in World War II and her absent mother and father's experiences during the Korean War. Yet, despite her parents' silences, these wars shape her young life, both in the way that her father's

memories condition his relationship with Sunny and in Sunny's voracious appetite for narratives about war. Of her rebellious teen years, Hata notes that "the only thing she had continued to do, strangely enough, was study, particularly her history books and world literature, piles of which always littered the surfaces and furniture of her room" (97). Hata's silence and the vacuum created by her biological parents' absence sparks Sunny's attempts to understand the past through narrative.

At the same time, the present pressures of being Asian American further inform Franklin Hata and Sunny's struggles with trauma. Chang-rae Lee zooms in on these pressures most fully in his first novel *Native Speaker*, yet in *A Gesture Life*, Lee explores the difficulties of being Asian American in a mostly white 1960s suburb of New York. Franklin Hata describes his deep concern for "how people will stop and think (most times, unnoticeably) about who you may be, how you fit into the picture, what this may say, and so on and so forth" (21). Like Frank Money in the previous chapter, Franklin Hata's postwar experience is shot through with the trauma attendant on American racism. Through his meticulous self-fashioning as "the model minority" so frequently cited within Asian American studies, Franklin Hata achieves the position within his town Bedley Run where "[m]ost everyone in Bedley Run knows me, though at the same time I've actually come to develop an unexpected condition of transparence here, a walking case of others' certitude, that to spy me on my way down Church Street is merely noting the expression of a natural law" (22). The pressures of assimilation join the problem of memory associated with his traumatic experience of serving the Japanese Imperial Army during the war, to heighten the import of Hata's performances of his Americanness. As the closest spectator to these performances and the object of Hata's critical scrutiny,

Sunny grows up frustrated with Hata's empty performances that conceal his past; it is her angry accusation against her father that contributes the novel's title: "You make a whole life out of gestures and politeness" (17).

By representing characters whose experiences of war trauma and postmemory are also marked by ruptures of national identity, family ties, and racial belonging, Chang-rae Lee's novel critiques the inadequacy of formulaic or universal applications of "war trauma" that fail to account for the violent displacement of vulnerable non-American populations during war and that inadequately address the vicissitudes of diasporic life for populations in the United States whose war trauma remains publically unintelligible. Specifically in reference to postmemory, I argue that in Sunny's bodily presence and gestures, she unsettles both Hata's attempts to determine her life premised on his notions of the model minority and his attempts to overwrite her own personal history with his life story. On the narrative level, I will also argue that in *A Gesture Life*, Lee specifically draws upon constructions of the body in order to enact a tension within Asian American studies regarding the singular construction of Asian American identity and its elision of multiple, uneven Asian American realities. Because the story of Hata looms so large in Sunny's life, I will first establish the transpacific contours of Franklin Hata's life story within its historical and geopolitical contexts. Then, I move toward a consideration of how Sunny Hata's bodily gestures build a transpacific counterpoetics of trauma, destabilizing any formulaic sense of the trauma narrative or Asian Americanness within *A Gesture Life*.

Franklin Hata's meticulous self-fashioning corresponds to the structure of the novel itself, as Hata carefully controls the narration of *A Gesture Life* in a tightly-framed

first-person point of view. At the outset of the novel, Hata clearly identifies the narrative occasion for his story as one of finally breaking his silence about his past: "Indeed, I have long felt that I ought to place my energies toward the reckoning of what stands in the here and now, especially given my ever-dwindling years, and so this is what I shall do" (5). The novel opens with the details of Hata's daily routine during retirement in the suburbs of New York City and the description of his grand house and his former medical supply business with its current owners. However, the precise control of this singular point of view gradually gives away under the encroaching pressures of memory. In his interactions with other characters, the narrative reveals aspects of Hata's life that complicate his reliability; as the novel progresses, we gradually learn of Hata's adoption and life with Sunny, that Hata had served in the Japanese Imperial Army in Burma during World War II, and that while in the military he oversaw the medical treatment of Korean comfort women—and that one of these women named Kkutaeh, whom he calls K, was of particular importance to him. The revelation of these characters and memories unfurl within the narrative alongside the novel's present-day action of Hata accidentally setting fire to his house and ending up in the hospital.

In the story's gradual unraveling, the transpacific historical contexts of *A Gesture Life* come to the fore. In Lee's invocation of Japan's colonization of Korea during the early twentieth century and presentation of the Pacific front of World War II from Hata's Japanese perspective, the novel importantly resuscitates the inter-imperial texture of twentieth-century wars in the Pacific. In the article, "Inter-Imperiality: Dialectics in a Postcolonial World History," Laura Doyle proposes the analytical framework of "inter-imperiality" as a way to enlarge the critical concerns of postcolonial studies and world

systems from a core of Anglo-European empire toward a fuller sense of multiple world empires as they have shaped global history over a *longue duree*. In this sense, inter-imperiality

names a political and historical set of conditions created by the violent histories of plural interacting empires and by interacting persons moving between and against empires. This reoriented political imaginary—which is in effect an enlarged postcolonial imaginary—habitually registers the full 360-degree global horizon of political manoeuvres among contemporaneous empires and all kinds of other states, and of these with a range of subordinated and dissident populations. (2)

This fuller view of interacting empires also dismantles longstanding visions of modernity as linked to the rise of Europe, thereby destabilizing the binary of East and West within world historiography. In the time period discussed here, a critical view of "inter-imperiality" particularly supplements the aims of transnational scholarship in the shared emphasis on thinking beyond "nation" in order to trace legacies of violence and inequality in an enlarged scale.

Specifically in the case of *A Gesture Life*, the characters' converging personal experiences illustrate history in its inter-imperial dimensions. Literary critic Hamilton Carroll describes how Franklin Hata's life story "exposes the interconnections between Hata's Japanese and American histories and explores the continuities between the twinned imperialisms (Japanese and American) at the heart of the traumatic events Lee's novel narrates" (595). This "twinning" of imperial histories also displaces the U.S.-invested perspective of the Pacific War dominant in American war literature, as Lee draws upon the conventions of this genre to map out the psychological depth of those serving in the Japanese Imperial Army.

As a character whose personal history bridges that of two WWII powers, Franklin Hata calls up complex histories of colonial pursuits made necessary by states' need to expand their populace during eras of total war. We learn that Hata was born as an ethnic Korean in the Japanese empire, and was removed from his poverty-stricken Korean parents by the Japanese government and adopted by wealthy Japanese parents, the Kurohatas, who later sent him to officers' school and off to the war. In his later life, Hata would have been able to relocate to the United States through the relaxation of U.S. immigrant laws following World War II, as the U.S. altered its legislation to expand its labor force as it began to embark in further conflicts in other parts of Asia (Lowe 7). In this way, Hata's transpacific identity is bound up in the global economics of war. As Takashi Fujitani explores in *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II*, war became a central driver of imperial expansion and changing views on the concept of race during this period of total war, during which nations needed to harness all the resources of their citizenries: "[T]he U.S. and Japanese regimes experimented with the new postcolonial models of imperialism—the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Atlantic Charter, with its rejection of territorial 'aggrandizement'—that operated on the principle of the right to self-determination of all peoples and that therefore fit well with the declarations of racial equality" (7). In this way, these new models of accomplished the ends of imperial expansion under the cover of nationalism and racial belonging. This fraught link between state violence and ideologies of racial equality in both Japan and the U.S. form Franklin Hata's subjectivity and fuel his lifelong conflicted feelings about the status of his national citizenship and his identity. As Hata puts it, "It must be the question of genuine sponsorship that has worried

me most, and the associations following, whose bonds have always held value for me, if not so much human comfort or warmth" (229). Hata's development, then, displays the inter-imperial texture of a transnational identity forged through war and its enabling ideologies of race.

This layering of imperial pasts becomes further complicated through *A Gesture Life's* inclusion of the character Sunny, whose birth follows events during the Korean war and the economic devastation that follows. Despite the novel's beginning that promises an immigrant story celebrating the triumphs of the American Dream, this narrative unravels into a complex overlay of national histories and violence that is distinctly transpacific and that problematizes longstanding images of the Asian American in U.S. national culture as immigrants from "stable, continuous, 'traditional' cultures" (Lowe 16). Lee plays upon this American assumption about Asian immigration in the complete omission from the novel any mention of Hata's life in the destroyed, postwar Japan, never giving the reader a sense of Hata's immediate motivations for moving to the U.S.. Hata arrives in the U.S. in 1963, and Lee's decision to focus on the portions of Hata's life as a Korean-Japanese and a Japanese-American invite a comparative perspective of historical points of imperial interaction.

This multidirectional view foregrounds the curious way that, after his initial birth into a Korean family, Hata always seems to be able to reposition himself in the uneasy seat of imperial power. Hata is not only caught in the double bind, described above, as an Asian American trapped in the U.S. histories of war and the racialization of Asians in the U.S., but Hata also bears the guilt for his involvement in the treatment of comfort women during the war: "Hata's convoluted ethnic, national, and social background problematizes

the Manichean difference between colonialist and the colonized in the critical discourse of mimicry. As colonizer and colonized, Hata embodies the disciplinarian and the disciplined" (Cheng 560). In other words, in *A Gesture Life*, Hata occupies the uneasy position of both victim and perpetrator, clearly displaying the problematic conceptions of trauma that assume a clear partition between these positions that do not account for interacting empires within frames of war.

In addition to this transpacific imperial history, the history of comfort women's public acknowledgment during the 1990s is crucial to an understanding of Lee's composition of *A Gesture Life*. As interviewers and other scholars note, Chang-rae Lee originally planned to write the novel from the perspective of comfort women, having studied their history and the emerging contemporary testimony (Kong 9). During the 1990s, comfort women began to finally speak out publicly about their horrific experiences during World War II; in 1991, the Ha Koon Ja was one of the first women to come forward as a former comfort woman (*wianbu*) forced into sex work for Japanese Imperial Army (Cho5), sparking fierce denials from the Japanese government and public shame within Korean society. Grace Cho, in her powerful book *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, describes the linkage between the comfort woman and the broader term *Yanggongju*, which refers to a Korean woman who engages in a sexual relationship with Americans, extending even to the relationships that take place today under the continued U.S. military occupation of South Korea. Cho writes,

As an embodiment of the losses of Korea's colonial and postcolonial history—the deracination from indigenous language and culture under Japanese imperialism, the loss of autonomy under U.S. military dominance since 1945, the decimation of the peninsula and its people



during the Korean War, and the deferral of the war's resolution—the yanggongju is the embodiment of the accumulation of often unacknowledged grief from these events. (5)

The figure of the yanggongju is inextricably tied to the geopolitical contexts and economic devastation of wars in the Pacific during the twentieth century, and this link between comfort women and the later "bar girls" or sex workers during and after the Korean War has important implications for *A Gesture Life*, in that it connects K and Sunny's birth mother through their shared, unacknowledged pasts within the context of Korean culture.

Despite this linkage of yanggongju in the contexts of World War II and the Korean war, dominant critical readings of the history invoked within *A Gesture Life* often center on the figure of K and the history of comfort women during World War II, rather than attempting to inscribe Sunny within this longer history of gendered violence during wars in Asia. Literary critics such as Anne Cheng, Belinda Kong, and Kandice Chuh have written compellingly about the importance of the comfort woman Kkutaeh, known as K, and her vital role in the novel of embodying this suppressed history of the war. Of Lee's decision to create the character of Franklin Hata rather than present the story through a comfort woman's perspective, Kong writes, "*Gesture*, then, reflects Lee's decision to abandon not just the narratological technique of inhabiting the comfort women's psychology but the epistemological impulse to know their history from an insider's perspective, one that would have erased the distinction between victim and witness" (Kong 17). Hata's narrative not only becomes an outsider's perspective of comfort women's psychology, but I argue that it further willfully distorts the female characters' pasts. The laying bare of these distortions as the novel progresses adds an

overlooked, additional layer to Lee's ethical storytelling technique here: Hata's suppression of the women's stories and particularly his continued sidelining of Sunny's past reveals what kinds of trauma stories can be publicly acknowledged or intelligible within U.S. society. Hata's cultivated American masculinity, in other words, allows for his admission of certain traumas while foreclosing other traumatic pasts, reminding us that Americanized remembrance of war often entails a purposeful forgetting of non-American suffering. Lisa Lowe describes this sharp political edge to the seemingly private experience of becoming American:

But for Asians within the history of the United States—as for African Americans, Native Americans, or Chicanos—"political emancipation" through citizenship is never an operation confined to the negation of individual "private" particulars; it requires the negation of a history of social relations that publicly racialized groups and successively constituted those groups as "nonwhites ineligible for citizenship." ...[T]his negation involves "forgetting" the history of war in Asia and adopting the national historical narrative that disavows the existence of an American imperial project. (27)

Through the figure of Franklin Hata, then, we see the way that interpretations of the novel that position his silence as a universal trauma unmoored from the gendered, transnational geopolitical realities of U.S. wars in the Pacific unwittingly participate in the very conditions of Western erasure of that memory. Prioritizing psychological explanations for Hata's silence elides the transpacific transformations of memory that accompany U.S. involvement in wars in the Pacific and the aftermath of Asian American struggles with national identity.

In a point not yet fully explored in the critical work on *A Gesture Life*, Franklin Hata's performance of his American masculinity also emerges at the structural level of the novel in its intertextual collage. For example, critic Hamilton Carroll has noted that

Hata's use of the phrases about his life history as "always unspoken, always unsung" (289) draws from Whitman's "Song of Myself." The novel, I argue, bears several other important narrative correspondences to major works of American fiction, further drawing our attention to Hata's deliberate use of storytelling and invention to establish a selective view of his past. This selective view further critiques U.S. literary icons and tropes of masculine selfhood. His name links to Benjamin Franklin (as critics have noted) and thus to Franklin's autobiography, which likewise presents the details of a self-improving routine and the gestures of public life—and notably omits the more unflattering facts of Benjamin Franklin's life. *A Gesture Life* opens with a Melvillean indeterminacy ("Call me Ishmael") in the first line "People know me here" and the setting in a town "I will call Bedley Run" (1). Later, Hata specifically makes reference to a story he found in Sunny's old school books about a man who swims in other people's pools, a reference to John Cheever's story "The Swimmer." The distinctive inclusion of the forest clearing moment of connection between Hata and his American lover Mary Burns evokes Hawthorne's forest scene in "The Priest and His Parishoner" between Hester Prynne and Dimsdale, which also links the symbolic functions of the Hester's scarlet letter and Hata's black flag. Toward the end of the novel, the scene of Mr. Hickey fleeing from the graveyard unmistakably resembles the closing scene in Updike's *Rabbit, Run*. Lastly, Hata's pivotal rescue of his grandson Thomas from drowning at the beach parallels Rabbit Angstrom's rescue of his granddaughter in *Rabbit at Rest*, except that in Lee's version it is not Franklin Hata who suffers a heart attack (as does Rabbit), but Renny Bannerjee, whom Hata considers to be "a very American sort of man." In support of these last parallels to Updike, Lee notes in a 2014 interview that Updike is one of his favorite authors (Lee

"By"). This melange of literary sources serves not merely as an homage to great works of literature, but importantly, these works represent a very masculinist canon of American literature. Thus, Franklin Hata's narrative should also prompt us as literary scholars to be self-reflexive about our discipline, particularly about the political edge of narrative and the ways in which literature participates in or challenges selective views of the past.

In this move toward thinking disciplinarily, a gap in the critical conversation regarding the character Sunny prompts my specific examination of her role in *A Gesture Life*. Just as the narrative consistently circles back to Franklin Hata's war experience with K at the expense of developing the character of Sunny, so does the critical scholarship on *A Gesture Life* reproduce this emphasis. Critics generally acknowledge that Hata appropriates both K and Sunny's stories, yet all of the studies turn from this assertion to an exploration of K and comfort women's history. Particularly emblematic of Sunny's bracketing within critical discourse on the novel is Christopher Lee's assertion that "at the level of form, the novel mitigates Hata's unreliability and reaffirms its commitment to historicity by endowing K (as well as Sunny) with the ability to discern sociohistorical truths and their moral consequences ..." (108). I agree with Lee that the inclusion of K's testimony to the horrors of the comfort woman experience is a vital ethical component of *A Gesture Life*, but I also call into question the method of focusing on this history rather than linking it (as does Grace Cho) to the history of women and children during the U.S. military occupation in South Korea that stretches from the Korean War up until today, and to a longer, layered view of inter-imperial history, more generally.

In essence, for many critics and even for Franklin Hata himself, Sunny's function is to reflect, relive, or redirect us toward an understanding of the character K. To illustrate

the way the logic of the narrative consistently turns from apprehending Sunny toward an elaboration of the figure K, I present here a lengthy—though telling—moment from the text. This scene takes place toward the end of the novel when Franklin goes to the mall to visit Sunny (where she works in a clothing store) and to sneak into the daycare to visit his grandson Thomas. In this scene, Hata reflects upon an interaction that he witnessed in the mall between a young boy and girl, who are helping their family members pack up a Halloween store that has recently gone out of business. Hata's fixation on this scene is curious, yet the gestures in this scene enact a crucial pattern in the narrative:

In my car in the parking lot, I sat for a few minutes with the engine running before I drove away. A particular sight was arresting me—and not of Tommy or Sunny ... [As the girl and boy pack up boxes] She was picking up another square of cloth from the bin and beginning her procedure, when he reached over and meanly picked at it, causing it to fall to her feet. She paused, then retrieved it and started over. But again he messed up her work. This happened twice more until finally the girl took the cloth and shook it open and placed it over her own head. The boy was confused. She sat there with her face covered in black, and he yelled at her once and then rose abruptly and left her.

The girl remained there, under the veil, unmoving for some time. And as I sat parked in the mostly empty lot in the long shadow of the mall, I felt I understood what she was meaning by her peculiar act, how she could repel his insults and finally him by making herself in some measure disappear. As if to provide the means of her own detachment. It was because of this notion—as well as the simple cloth itself, similar enough to the swath [of black cloth] Sunny once found in a lacquered box in my closet—that I remembered the girl again, Kkutaeh, the one I came to call simply K, and the events in our camp in those last months of the war (220-2).

Most obviously, right after Hata has met with his estranged daughter, it is "not of Tommy or Sunny" that he thinks. Rather, the interaction in the mall ultimately leads him to recall "the girl again, Kkutaeh, and the events in our camp in those last months of the war."

Here, the reference to Hata's black flag is important. The full surname of his adoptive Japanese parents is Kurohata, which translates to "black flag." During the war when Hata

was charged with the medical care of the comfort women in the army camp in Burma, his superiors played upon his last name by requiring him to hang a black flag outside the medical station in order to signify when the comfort women were too physically injured to continue being raped by the soldiers. I will comment more on the significance of the black flag at the end of this chapter, but in terms of the structure of the passage above, the way that it breezes over Sunny demonstrates the extent to which Hata's own traumatic past conditions his view of his current relationships, thereby writing Sunny out of his first-person narrative under the overwhelming weight of Kkuteah's tragic death.

Also in the above passage, the girl's gesture productively links to Sunny's gestures and how they remove her from the narrative. In the scene where "the girl took the cloth and shook it open and placed it over her own head" and "remained there, under the veil, unmoving for some time," her acts don't directly resist or accommodate her brother. Instead, in putting the cloth over her head, she removes herself from a relation with her brother at all. Hata undertsands "how she could repel his insults and finally him by making herself in some measure disappear. As if to provide the means of her own detachment." In the section that follows, I will discuss how Sunny's bodily gestures function in a similar way to allow her to escape her father's domination, while her body also testifies to the asymmetrical historical relations between Japan, Korea, and the U.S. during a postwar period. On a textual level, in her bodily gestures, Sunny effectively "provide(s) the means of her own detachment" from Franklin Hata's dubious narrative.

Though *A Gesture Life* opens with a tone of indeterminacy with Franklin Hata's Melvillean references, the narrative truly begins to question Hata's reliability upon

Sunny's very first appearance in the text. Importantly, this moment marks not only the subject of Sunny coming up in conversation, but her very bodily appearance in the form of a photograph. One of the current owners of Hata's former medical supply store, Mrs. Hickey, finds an old box of photographs left behind in the store that depict Hata and Sunny together. In this way, it is Sunny's body that initially unsettles both the carefully crafted narrative that Hata has been telling to the townspeople around him and his reliability as a narrator of the novel. The exchange between Mrs. Hickey and Hata over the photographs reveals his evasions and outright lies regarding Sunny:

"I noticed there's a young woman in many of them," Mrs. Hickey said.

"She's very pretty. She's in quite a few, with you. Is she a relative?"

"Yes," I heard myself reply, accepting the box from her. "You must be talking about Sunny."

"Sunny? Did you name the store after her?"

I said, "I suppose I did."

"Where is she now?"

"She came from Japan," I said, "many years ago, and stayed for some schooling. She went back."

"Well, she's certainly lovely. She must be a grown woman by now."

"Yes," I said, taking my leave. "I haven't seen her in quite a long time. But thank you." (13).

Immediately after this exchange with Mrs. Hickey, Hata admits to having "spoken inaccurately about Sunny" (14). Following the conversation, Hata gradually begins to weave thoughts about Sunny into his narrative, and as in the scene above, these remembrances rise from a person or occurrence in the present day setting of Hata's old age.

By piecing together the fragments of Franklin Hata's evasive stories about his daughter Sunny, we understand that Franklin adopted Sunny when she was seven years old (27) after bribing an American adoption agency (73) to find him a daughter, preferably Japanese (74), from a Christian orphanage. Sunny comes to him from a

destitute kind of "halfway house," where she lived after being abandoned by her birth parents in Pusan, Korea (335), and Sunny joins him at his large home in Bedley Run. Hata's motivations for adopting Sunny are murky, though he states that he hopes raising her "will mark the recommencement of my days" (74). Despite his ambition to cultivate Sunny into a businesswoman who will one day take over his medical supply business (92), Hata realizes that Sunny continues to feel ill at ease with him in his home and, more generally, in Bedley Run (55). As Hata develops a romantic relationship with a neighborhood woman named Mary Burns, Sunny increasingly has a mother figure in her life, yet this fails to ease her acclimation to Hata's household (53). Departing from her studious and piano-playing filled youth, Sunny turns in her teenage years to rebellious behavior, having run-ins with the local police and beginning to hang out in a seemingly unsavory section of town. After being attacked and nearly raped by a young man named James Gizzi, her boyfriend Lincoln Evans stabs Gizzi and he and Sunny run away together to New York (148). Sunny becomes pregnant and Hata arranges a late term abortion for her by bribing a doctor, after which Sunny disappears from his life (343). Near the beginning of A Gesture Life, Hata has just learned that Sunny and her son Thomas live in a neighboring town and that she has been managing a women's clothing store at the local mall (83). Over the course of the novel, Hata reconnects with Sunny, who eventually lets him babysit Thomas during the day.

These points about Sunny's life are buried beneath Franklin Hata's domineering focalization of the novel, which requires us to detect Sunny's significance in the narrative through different reading strategies. My study's emphasis on reading bodily gesture is just such a strategy to recover the testimony that Sunny's experience of postmemory offers a



transnational view of war trauma. As I mention above, there has been much warranted attention to the character K and the history of comfort women in which she is tragically caught up, and here I will add a new thread to this work on women and the effects of war by considering how Sunny's presence in the novel allows a view toward the ways in which war's rupturing of identity cuts to the very core of the following generation. Put simply, this section seeks to answer: what happens if we read Sunny as the central character of this novel; how does this reconfigure our view of war trauma's postmemory? I will argue that Sunny Hata's bodily gestures in the narrative work against the organizing logic of this narrative, physically pushing back against the intensely first-person focalization of this novel's form. Lee presents Sunny's "pushing back" in a more sustained way in *A Gesture Life* than what we see, for example, in O'Brien's description of the dancing Vietnamese woman in *The Things They Carried*. In terms of the transpacific context that Sunny's presence calls up, she unseats the easy application of the term "post"memory in the novel; against a dominant Western view of wars in the Pacific as discrete historical occurrences (Hunt 2), Sunny's articulations of postmemory reveal how interconnected the wars in Asia have been over the twentieth century and how their effects are far from over. Moreover, her bodily resistance to the vision of Asian Americanness that Hata attempts to impress upon her also critiques a monolithic vision of Asian American identity that fails to account for diversity of ethnic and racial Asian identities, the issue of gender in these identities, and the layering of inter-imperial pasts.

Hata's motivations for adopting Sunny each, in some way, spring from his own past experiences, including his desire to better a child who has grown up in destitute circumstances, as his Japanese parents purportedly did for him. In paralleling his own

gratefulness to the Kurohatas to his adoption of Sunny, Hata states, "My Sunny, I thought, would do much the same. Not be so thankful or beholden to me, necessarily, but at least she'd be somewhat appreciative of the providence of institutions that brought her from the squalor of the orphanage—the best of which can be only so happy—to an orderly, welcoming suburban home in America, with a hopeful father of like-enough race and sufficient means" (73). Hata's expectation that Sunny be "somewhat appreciative" of his rescue of her from Korea reflects his desire that she model/relive his own gratitude and while simultaneously expressing a view shaped by both Japanese and American imperial ideologies.

This stated "providence of institutions" that brings Sunny to Hata has a very specific meaning within the historical context of the adoption taking place in the 1960s. As anthropologist Eleana Kim describes in "The Origins of Korean Adoption: Cold War Geopolitics and Intimate Diplomacy," intercountry adoption between the U.S. and Korea in this period functioned as business and form of diplomacy between the countries to fulfill childless Americans' growing demand for babies during the baby boom, while financially managing South Korea's social welfare crisis and socially managing the seeming crisis that "mixed-blood GI babies" represented to the new country's ideal of racial purity. Hata's comparison of his own adoption from Korea and his adoption of Sunny links the colonial history of the Japanese empire in Korea (in Hata being removed by the Japanese government from his own poor Korean parents) and the neocolonial relation of the U.S. and Korea (in Hata's adoption of Sunny in his new position of being an American).

Hata's fantasy of saving Sunny and creating a family, however, is one that overwrites the dark side of these colonial relations; as Kim describes, "Ever since the 'war orphans' of the 1950s, the orphan in Korean and other transnational adoption has obscured the structural violence of the Cold War and neoliberal economic policies, permitting Americans in particular to 'save' children who are themselves often victims of American foreign policy decisions" (20). As Korean, Japanese, and American, Hata's fantasy of salvation for Sunny highlights the way that Sunny's precarity in Korea has been conditioned by decades of Japanese colonization in Korea, and more directly by U.S. involvement in removing the Japanese at the end of WWII and U.S. participation in the Korean War. The "providence of institutions" that Hata hopes will secure Sunny's gratitude actually constitutes a complex, oppressive system from which Sunny emerges, suggesting a harrowing childhood history for Sunny that the novel never addresses. Indeed, we learn that Hata never even asked Sunny about her life before coming to him. Late in the novel when Sunny is an adult, she discusses the orphanage she had been in: "Before I came to you they had me in a place like this [the medical supply store], but much worse, of course. I know they told you I was at a Christian orphanage, but really it was like a halfway house, I guess. I wasn't put up for adoption. I was abandoned" (335). Sunny's painful admission here points to the fact that Hata attempted to quickly usher her into his American household, attempting to bury her past in Korea.

In the economic, political, and social destruction wrought by the war, South Korea faced the problem of "10 million separated families and left half a million widows and tens of thousands of orphaned or needy children in South Korea alone" (Kim 5). Further, U.S. military occupation of South Korea, which continues to this day, led to a

range of relationships between U.S. military men and Korean women and the births of what was known as "GI babies" or "war babies," mostly multiracial children who were tracked by the police bureaus across the country and classified as white, black, or yellow (12). Often unacknowledged by their American fathers, these children represented a threat to the new South Korean nation: "According to CPS's [Child Placement Services] successor organization, Social Welfare Society, President Rhee's ideology of 'one nation, one race' (*ilguk, ilminju*) and a particular form of postcolonial Korean ethnonationalism (*tanil minjok chongsin*) made the situation of mixed-race children an urgent concern for the government" (Kim 12). This urgency was redoubled by South Korea's inability to fund social welfare programs for children and families within a weak economy whose principal concern was defense (18).

This social "crisis" in South Korea became a highly publicized story within the 1950s and 1960s U.S. media, with news stories about and photographs depicting young Korean "waifs" and "mascots" circulating within popular magazines and newspapers. The plight of these children met a receptive audience within the baby-boom era of American society, in which adoption agencies "reported that prospective parents outnumbered available [American] children by as many as 10 to 1, and in 1955, *The Washington Post* found that children were being bought and sold for up to \$2,000 on the black market" (Kim 10). Buttressed by the American ideologies of the nuclear family and of the humanitarian impulse to rescue of third world children, Americans created a demand for adoption of Korean children that spurred the development of a veritable industry of intercountry adoption. Within this system of adoption, "the articulations of biopolitical and geopolitical projects depended upon a coordinated set of technologies that mobilized

American paternalism, Christian Americanism, and a 'global politics of pity' that, in turn, made it possible for children to be objectified as 'orphans,' identified as adoptable, and transferred to new families" (20). Disturbingly, studies estimated that nearly 70 percent of the Korean children living in orphanages had Korean parents (18). Particularly during the mid to late 1960s—the time period in which Hata adopted Sunny—adoption agencies would regularly persuade poverty-stricken parents to give up their children in order to provide the children with a better life in the U.S., thereby supplying a demand that increased the flow of U.S. dollars into South Korea and the profits for the Korean adoption agencies (18).

In light of this history of the international market for Korean children's bodies, we see the degree to which Sunny's body has been commodified within this adoption system, the dubious nature of which emerges in *A Gesture Life* with the adoption counselor's acceptance of Hata's "large donation to the agency, this beyond the regular expenses, as well as a like sum for the woman [...]" (73). What this history also reveals is the dual fantasy that Sunny represents to Hata: not only does her Asianness promise to fulfill his fantasy of a masquerading as a biological family (reenacting his own Japanese upbringing), but in his adoption of Sunny, Hata further conforms to *American* society, participating in the trend of adopting Korean "war babies" that was saturated with nationalist and paternalistic ideologies. In other words, in his adoption of Sunny, Hata reaffirms both his Japanese and his American identities, at the expense of his and Sunny's repressed Korean origins. As a single man who would not have generally been eligible to adopt an American child during this period, Hata profits from the exploitation of Korean children made possible by the war's devastation of South Korea; yet, his impulse to

secure the fantasy of a Japanese family explains why, in the conversation with Mrs. Hickey above, Hata lies that "[s]he came from Japan."

The lies that Hata tells Mrs. Hickey in this conversation also reveal an unsettling side to the process of naming in the novel. Hata suggests that he named Sunny Medical Supply after the character Sunny. In another form of commodification of Sunny's body, I would argue that the opposite is true: based on the timelines represented in the book, Hata was able to move to what was then Bedleyville in 1963 and open a business because the area had not yet become prosperous. When the town becomes the more affluent Bedley Run, developers build the neighborhood in which he has one of the most prominent homes—the home to which he brings Sunny upon her arrival in the U.S.. Therefore, it would appear that he opened his medical supply business *before* adopting Sunny, making it likely that Hata actually named the child Sunny after his medical supply store (unless he renamed the store, which the novel never indicates). Further, this name for both the business and child has a distinct link to Hata's desire to project a Japanese American identity, as critics like Kong have noted the connection between the name Sunny and the imperial Japanese appellation of the Empire of the Rising Sun (18). This naming of Sunny mirrors the Japanese overwriting in his own identity, as his Korean birth surname "Oh" becomes buried within his Japanese name "Kurohata" (Kong 4), then severed again in his American identity as "Hata."

This issues of naming and representation contextualize Sunny's first appearance in the novel through photographs, as Eleana Kim describes that photographs of Korean children were one of the primary technologies of intimacy that sustained both actual adoptions and fictive adoptions (the latter of which references "sponsoring" a child living

at the orphanage) (16). This circulation of images of Korean children in order to boost profits for orphanages represents a further level of commodification of children's bodies. As we saw in Chapter 1 of this study with the photographic image of a Vietnamese man's body in Tim O'Brien's text, so with Lee's novel does Sunny's initial appearance in a photograph signify her appropriation, both imaginatively by Hata and physically through the system of adoption that brings her across the Pacific to Hata.

Yet like *The Things They Carried*, *A Gesture Life* also breaks this photographic frame in regard to Sunny, as her actual physical presence in the novel gradually overturns the fantasies that Hata attempts to impose upon her. Though Hata doesn't admit this point until late in the novel, from the time she appears with the adoption agent at the U.S. airport, Sunny's body displaces Hata's desire to be "a hopeful father of like-enough race":

But of course I was overhopeful and naive, and should have known that he or she would likely be the product of a much less dignified circumstance, a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl. I had assumed the child and I would have a ready, natural affinity, and that my colleagues and associates and neighbors, though knowing her to be adopted, would have little trouble quickly accepting our being of a single kind and blood. But when I saw her for the first time I realized there could be no such conceit for us, no easy persuasion. Her hair, her skin, were there to see, self-evident, and it was obvious how some other color (or colors) ran deep within her. And perhaps it was right from that moment, the very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, the blighted hope in my eyes. (204)

Hata's marking of Sunny's body as "some other color (or colors)" immediately troubles his hopes that he and Sunny would appear to the Bedley Run community to be "of a single kind and blood." Hata consistently describes Sunny as "dark," suggesting that one of Sunny's parents was at least partially African American, a view which literary critics of the novel generally accept.<sup>42</sup> Chang-rae Lee's decision to portray Sunny as multiracial

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Christopher Lee writes, "Hata adopts an orphan girl named Sunny, the daughter of an African American GI stationed in South Korea and a sex worker" (99).

especially aligns Sunny with the so-called "social crisis" that fueled the system of U.S.-Korean intercountry adoption at this time, and troublingly, we see the rejection that Sunny would have suffered within South Korea duplicated in Hata's disappointment with her physical appearance. Yet, her appearance also insistently embodies a history of imperial relations within Korea that Hata would also like to repress, as the "wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl" that he surmises led to Sunny's birth calls up his own questionable sexual encounters with the comfort woman K.

That Sunny notices Hata's reaction to her appearance, coupled with the history of rejection she likely experienced in South Korea, partially accounts for Sunny's cold reaction to him in the airport. Hata describes that "(w)henever I looked around to acknowledge my new daughter, to try to catch her eye, she neatly tucked in her chin and pushed on, as if she were headed into a long and driving rain" (55). In this gesture of tucking in her chin, or rather looking down, Sunny refuses to reciprocate Hata's stare, and whether this rises from fear, shyness, shame, or pride, the gesture deliberately turns away from Hata's "acknowledgment." In particular, what Sunny resists by turning down her head is Hata's gaze that attempts to inscribe her as his "new daughter." This gesture that refuses acknowledgment becomes a pattern in the novel, as Sunny physically enacts a distancing from Hata that reprises the actions of the young girl in the mall who covers her head to remove herself from an antagonistic relation.

The antagonism of this relation emerges early on in the novel in reference to Sunny's piano playing. Hata describes her ability: "Sunny was mostly magnificent, but it seemed that there were always a few difficult and even strangely blundering moments in her performances, perplexing passages marring what was otherwise wholesale surety and



brilliance" (29). The narrative increasingly reveals the violence within Hata's interpretations of Sunny, and these "blundering moments" take on an even more critical tinge in Hata's vision. Hata later admits that when he and Mary Burns watched Sunny play the piano

Mary would comment again how talented and skilled Sunny was, how dexterous and precocious, and I never thought to correct her appraisals, even though the performances were in fact maudlin and probably insulting to her, as they certainly were to me. I found them quite shaming. And as much as I tried, I couldn't inculcate the same sense in Sunny, as she pretended not to know what I was talking about. (71)

Mary Burns, as a purportedly unbiased outsider, reads Sunny's performance in a positive regard, instilling a troubling dissonance in relation to Hata's judgment of Sunny. Hata's assessment of Sunny as "maudlin" criticizes the level of emotion that she displays in her playing, as this term designates that which is "characterized by tearful sentimentality and effusive displays of affection" (*OED*). This emotional expressiveness as somehow "insulting" or "shaming" indicates the way that Hata assumes that the performance reflects negatively on him, rather than the performance being an authentic conduit of Sunny's emotions. This example establishes a pattern in the novel of Hata seeing Sunny in terms of himself, of coopting her body not only in the process of adoption but in trying to police her behavior and identity in service of his own interests. Yet, in Chang-rae Lee's decisions to incorporate Mary and Hata's divergent views and to hint at the emotional overtones of her playing, the text obliquely preserves Sunny's authentic, bodily engagement in this act of artistic expression. However, as she matures, Sunny detects Hata's judgments regarding her piano playing, and she again responds by removing herself from the orbit of Hata's judgments: "Early in high school she ceased practicing seriously, and eventually she dropped playing altogether" (29). Repeating the act of

distancing emblematic of her initial encounter with Hata of refusing his gaze, Sunny detaches herself from another source of Hata's criticism of her.

The cessation of her piano playing parallels physical changes in Sunny's body, and Hata warily notices the ways in which Sunny's body itself increasingly signals her disengagement from him. Of the changes he notices in Sunny during her teenage years, Hata remarks, "It was her bodily presence, the sheer, becoming whatness of her limbs and skin and face and eyes. She was beautiful, yes. Exceptionally so. But it was also the other character of her beauty, its dark and willful visage, and with it, the growing measure of independence she would exercise over her world and over me, that she had hoped to keep hidden a little longer (62). While Hata's response to Sunny rings with the sincerity of a father's reluctance to see his daughter grow up, his response is also tinged with a strange negativity toward her body. His qualification of her beauty through his recognition of "the other character of her beauty, its dark and willful visage" has a decidedly negative overtone. Reading this closely, we can surmise that "other character" Hata sees here, following the usual pattern of his narrative, is the young woman K. Also, the invocation of "character," with its alternate meaning of a sign or symbol, and "dark and willful visage" that oppose her name of "Sunny," suggests she is somehow marked in a way that opposes his fantasy of projecting Japanese Americanness. In associating her growing distance from him to the "dark" side of her, Hata instates a racial coding of Sunny that I will explore in a later point in this chapter.

Sunny's bodily representation in *A Gesture Life* and its invocation of the overlapping histories that structure her experiences of trauma joins a tradition of the body's expressive significance within Asian American literature. Representations of the

Asian American body are particularly entangled with conceptions of race and nation, as literary scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen describes in *Race and Resistance: Literature & Politics in Asian America*:

For Asian American writers, a deep interest in representing the body, through a variety of fashions and over a range of time and situations, is almost always evident in the literature. This is not surprising given the way that dominant American society has historically used derogatory, bodily centered representations of Asians and Asian Americans in order to facilitate capitalist exploitation and foment racial hatred. Asian American writers, as a result, have turned to the representations of the body as a method of exploring and possibly countering the consequences of such exploitation and hatred. (6)

Chang-rae Lee follows this tradition of Asian American writers, and very mindfully so in a novel titled *A Gesture Life* with a main character Franklin Hata who has a keen self-awareness about how his own body succeeds or fails in representing his Americanness. Yet, Nguyen also critiques the body of Asian American critical work that seeks to understand the political significance of Asian American literary characters' bodies through the "polarizing options" of either resistance or accommodation (4); instead, he argues that close attention to characters' bodies attests to the "flexible textual and political strategies...and [the authors] represent a wide range of diverse ideological opinions" (vi). In other words, Nguyen seeks to turn away from interpretations of literary characters' bodies that primarily position themselves in reference to dominant American readings of them as "resistant" or "accommodating" and instead attempt to intellectually apprehend these expressive bodies in their own terms.

Heeding Nguyen's invitation to open up the reference of the Asian American body in critical scholarship, we can follow Sunny Hata's gestures in ways that don't simply position her as a "bad child" of a successful "model minority character," which would

situate Sunny only within poles of resistance and accommodation. This opening up of bodily signification to a "range of diverse ideological opinions" necessitates deconstructing Hata's narrow interpretations of Sunny in order to see Sunny in her own terms. This allows us to read the ways in which her relationship to the intersecting histories of Japan, Korea, and the US inform her bodily orientation to the world and reorient conceptions of postmemory. Linking to the girl in the mall who covers her head to remove herself from her brother's taunts, Sunny's body similarly functions in the text to "to provide the means of her own detachment" (220) from Hata's restrictive framing of her.

In order to detach from Hata's focalization, I specifically locate scenes where Hata cannot understand Sunny's body, which therefore allows the narration of her physical actions to stand on their own within the text. Hata recognizes the way that Sunny's body expresses a mysterious and irrepressible challenge: "She wasn't the kind of bad girl who cursed or talked back, there being little of that loudness and bluster to her [...] but rather she was intimidatingly and defiantly quiet. She just looked at you, or more accurately, she made it that you looked at her" (86). To draw a parallel to instances of Hata's confusion within Sunny's piano performances, "there were always a few difficult and even strangely blundering moments in her performances" (29). These "difficult and even strangely blundering moments" mark the limitations of Hata's overbearing narration, *and* mark places in the text where Sunny is able to establish independence in her own bodily terms.

Sunny's unusual fixation with fire prompts the gesture of positioning herself dangerously close to the fire, and in her repetitions of this gesture enact her vexed relation to Hata, the racial and gender ideologies of the family home, and her sexuality:

When she was young, she would ask me nightly if we could light one [a fire], even when the weather wasn't cold enough to do so, and often I would oblige her. She would spend hours in front of it, letting her face and limbs grow hot to the touch, and I would have to ask that she move back, for fear of her getting burned. She never wanted to use the fireplace screen because it dulled the heat, and that night of her brief return to the house, she pushed it aside as well. I used to lecture her on the dangers of flying sparks, reminding her that even one fiery mote could set a house ablaze, but she never seemed to hear me, only propping the screen to one side, happy to shield but a small corner of the room. (151)

Sunny's preoccupation with fires and fire-setting, evident in Hata's remark that she would "ask me nightly if we could light one" and then "spend[ing] hours in front of it" has a range of significance. Most visibly, Sunny's behavior in this scene displays characteristics of pyromania, in that her actions can be seen as "an impulsive behavior leading to fire setting without an identifiable motive other than taking pleasure in viewing the fire and its effects" (Germain 255). Hata's inclusion here that Sunny asked for a fire "even when the weather wasn't cold enough to do so" affirms the lack of "identifiable motivation" entailed in the definition of pyromania.

Though pyromania is clinical term—like PTSD—used in the American Psychological Association's *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* that rises from a universalizing and normative view of Western subjectivity, the tendencies that accompany pyromania help to contextualize Sunny's puzzling behavior in this scene. Classified as an impulse control disorder, fixation on fire may indicate one's inability to confront someone or difficulty communicating, and it occurs more frequently in troubled

homes—especially homes without fathers.<sup>43</sup> Positioning this obsession with fire as a mode of "communication," particularly on the narrative level of the text, signals Sunny's use of her body here as a form of expression, one that subverts direct confrontation with or resistance to Hata. Further, the idea of associating Sunny's expressions of pyromania specifically in relation to a broken home calls up her troubled young life in South Korea and her abandonment by her Korean mother and father. In this way, Sunny's gestures in this scene may mark a reaction to the series of homes that have rejected her.<sup>44</sup> My aim in establishing this link to pyromania here is less about trying to "diagnose" Sunny and the cognitive dimensions of her trauma; rather, I bring these characteristics into my reading of Sunny's bodily gestures in order to make sense of her character function, to draw out what Sunny's curious gestures may signify on a textual level. From this standpoint, Lee's choice to include Sunny's mysterious behavior and the fraught relationship that pyromania has to issues surrounding the home may call up the troubled, crossing histories of Sunny's racialization in South Korea and in the U.S.. Especially in light of Lee's later novel *The Surrendered*, Sunny's attraction to fire has a special significance in its parallel to his later character June Han, who similarly grows up in an orphanage in postwar South Korea that she ultimately burns down.

Extending these ideas on the gestures' link to the idea of home, Sunny's fixation on fire also bears symbolic importance in within the narrative logic of *A Gesture Life*,

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<sup>43</sup> According to studies cited in a 2010 manual on *Impulse Control Disorders*, those who take pleasure in setting and watching fires "could be unable to confront people directly and could channel their aggression into fire-setting behavior as an attempt to influence their environment and improve their self-esteem where other means have failed. Geller (1987) explained fire setting as an attempt at communication by individuals with few social skills" (Germain 259). Further, of those who had been diagnosed with pyromania, "broken homes, with divorced parents, especially absence of the father, were frequently found" (Germain 262).

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, long before the formulation of the *DSM*, pyromania had historically been associated with young women forced to leave their homes because of economic circumstances: "In nineteenth-century Europe, the typical arsonist was thought to be a female domestic in her teens, uprooted from her home and family and suffering from nostalgia" (Germain 255).

particularly in the novel's emphasis on Franklin Hata's house as a sign of his American identity. Literary critic Hamilton Carroll rightly identifies how Hata's negotiation of his traumatic past weaves between the two opposing substances that structure the metaphorical world of the novel: fire and water (608). These emerge from the consistent references to Hata swimming in his pool and in the novel's current action rising from his own accidental burning of his living room when he tries to burn documents and photos in his fireplace (34). Especially as many of the photographs that Hata is trying to burn when accidentally setting fire to his house are those of Sunny's body, her youthful gestures of sitting so close to the fireplace are harbingers of the destruction of his home, the ultimate conflagration of his fantasy of having a family. One need only think of the traditional association of the phrase "hearth and home" with the American family to see how Lee invokes its dark underside, and the hearth also has a prominence within a Japanese conception of family, "the meaning of 'hearth,' signifying people who belonged to the same descent group" (Peletz 24). This Japanese conception of "hearth" entails racial purity, or for Hata, "like-enough race" (73). Sunny's gestures of sitting dangerously close to the fire communicates the ways in which "family" with its underlying racial ideologies in Korean, Japanese, and American contexts, threatens to engulf her.

Yet, Sunny's gestures do not directly participate in the racial logic represented by these visions of family by directly resisting or accommodating them. Rather, they testify to the harm of specific constructions of "hearth and home" while the near self-destructiveness of her actions has the tenor, yet again, of a "means of her own detachment." This detachment from Hata emerges in this scene in Sunny's ignoring him as he instructs her about fire: "I used to lecture her on the dangers of flying sparks,

reminding her that even one fiery mote could set a house ablaze, but she never seemed to hear me, only propping the screen to one side, happy to shield but a small corner of the room." As if in a trance, Sunny blocks Hata's presence in the room as she takes in the fire, and in her gestures of pushing aside the protective screen demonstrates indifference to danger of bringing down the house, so to speak.

Finally, Sunny's attachment to the fireplace and fire have a decidedly sensual tone, a point that will lead me into the next consideration of her teenage gestures. Indeed, to link back to the clinical parameters of pyromania, the fixation on fire very often becomes associated with the emergence of an individual's sexuality. Freud's work on pyromania has distinct links to psychosexual development, and in a recent interview Lee notes that he took a particular interest in Freud's case studies ("By" 4). This link between fire and sexuality Sunny's awakening sexuality emerges in the sensual tone of Sunny's practice of "spend[ing] hours in front of it, letting her face and limbs grow hot to the touch." Lee's use of "hot to the touch" evokes the sensual edge to Sunny's body, and his alignment of female sexuality with fire is a significant one, particularly in that it challenges the phallocentrism of Freud's reading of pyromania. Additionally, in this phrasing "hot to the touch," Sunny's skin threatens to singe Hata when he attempts to touch her, an even more direct illustration of her willfull distancing from him.

The textual and contextual significance of Sunny's gestures further emerge in a representation of her bodily gestures from her teenage years. Having abandoned her piano playing and other performances geared toward pleasing her father, Sunny frequently absents herself from home and takes up residence at a local youth's house, James Gizzi, notorious for his trouble with the law. Fed up with her behavior, Hata



storms into one of Gizzi's parties intent on finding Sunny and bringing her home, only to stumble upon a scene where Sunny is dancing half-clothed for Gizzi and her boyfriend Lincoln Evans. Hata finds himself paralyzed as he stands unseen in the shadows watching the scene evolve:

She wasn't playing anything for them, performing. She was simply there, moving without music, hardly looking at them as she swayed and twirled and pushed out her hips, her chest. I kept myself far enough from the window to remain hidden. I could hardly bear to watch the scene, much less allow it to go on. And yet each time Sunny turned my way I stepped back and quieted myself and hoped the darkness would camouflage me ... They [the two men] weren't forcing her, or even goading her, or doing anything to coerce. She was moving and dancing with every suggestion, and then finally she was touching herself in places no decent women would wish men to think about, much less to see. (114)

What Hata finds so startling is the authenticity of her performance, which even his judgment-laden narration cannot subsume; in Sunny's gestures "[s]he was simply there, moving without music, hardly looking at them as she swayed and twirled and pushed out her hips, her chest." As she had done with Hata's appraisals of her piano playing and fire watching, Sunny moves here without regard for the male spectators in the room, "hardly looking at them" and "touching herself." While it is Hata's distinctly male gaze ("But to gaze upon her like this" [114]) that ushers this moment into the text, the styling of her gestures preserves the presence of Sunny's radically alternative subjectivity. Here she is not "playing" a role for the men in the room but eking out her space in the text. Her turn away from any sort of performance in reference to the men arises in Hata's assertion that "no decent women would wish men to think about, much less to see" her dance. His use of the word "decent" (so close to "descent," invoking again Hata's obsession with blood lineage) is a term rooted in the body: "Satisfying (in character, mode of living, behaviour, manners, etc.) the standard of one's position or circumstances; respectable" (*OED*). In her

authentic dance, Sunny departs from "gestures" as manners—the kind of gestures so important to Hata—and stages a reclamation of her body and sexuality in a way that overlays Hata's narrative viewpoint. The point here is that *A Gesture Life* insistently represents at length the very gestures that challenge what "men [would want] to think about, much less to see." Yet the irony remains that Hata both thinks about and watches Sunny's body in the scene he describes. That Sunny dances freely here without any coercion also displaces the narrative pattern of associating Sunny's body to K's. Sunny's gestures here are distinctly *not* those of a comfort woman, problematizing readings that locate Sunny's dancing as an evocation of K's coerced sexual exploitation in the comfort stations. This scene, then, allows Sunny to stand in her own terms within the text, disrupting the form of Hata's masculinist narrative.

Sunny's self-determining and self-pleasing gestures also insistently return us to questions of race, calling for us to recognize her in her own bodily terms. While within Hata's enforced fantasy, Sunny is primarily cast as Asian American, this undercuts her multiracial identity that which the novel obliquely identifies as Korean and African American. It is significant that Lee stages this moment after 1968, a pivotal year for Asian American solidarity and literary history. While scholars like Yen Le Espiritu celebrate the coalition of ethnic groups within what she calls Asian American panethnicity, other scholars have critiqued the way that this construction of Asian Americanness instates a homogeneity that privileges more powerful ethnic groups with longer histories within the U.S., most notably East Asian ethnic groups (Koshy 1049). This concern about race and class adhere to Sunny's precarious position as multiracial within Hata's insistence on the performance of Japanese identity, again resurfacing the

history of U.S. military occupation of Korea and intercountry adoption. In what constitutes the novel's most extended representation of a character acting according to her own desires, Sunny's gestures in this scene dismantle static conceptions of race.

Lee's historical setting in mid to late 1970s ("in the period after the Vietnam War" [146]) of Sunny's performance of individual identity dovetails the Civil Rights era for black Americans and the women's movement. While the novel largely excludes Sunny's negotiation of her multiracial and sexual identities, the scene at Gizzi's house party introduces Sunny's affiliation with minority groups in her community. As he enters Gizzi's house, Hata observes, "What struck me immediately was that a number of the partygoers were black and Puerto Rican; colored people were a rare sight in Bedley Run, especially at social events, and never did one see such 'mixed' gatherings" (101). Sunny's ultimate substitution of this diverse home for Hata's home signals her withdrawal from Hata's racial construction of her as his "Japanese" daughter. In the this scene's mid to late 1970s setting, Gizzi's alternative home may function as a site of non-conformity to normative 1960s culture. This scene's expression of Sunny's sexuality calls into question the novel's reductive construction of her as Asian American, as her alliance with other people of color, and particularly with her African American boyfriend Lincoln, revive Sunny's multiracial identity.

The end of Sunny's scene of dancing extends a critique of the novel's representation of her body to a textual level. The scene includes speech from the two men, but Sunny never speaks. Instead, at the end of the scene "...Sunny began laughing at [Gizzi], first in chortles and then maniacally, in a dusky tone that seemed illiberal and vile ... And it was then that I wished she were just another girl or woman to me, no longer

my kin or my daughter or even my charge ..." (116). Again, Hata's description of Sunny's voice as "dusky" recalls her dark skin, a descriptor he turns away from and refuses to acknowledge. Yet while he watches the scene of Sunny's dancing and sex with Lincoln, it is specifically her laughing at Gizzi that drives him from the house and that incites his desire to cut ties with Sunny. That the narrative must turn away from Sunny's body at this point of laughter calls up Helene Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" and its bold challenge to the vision of masculinist writing. In this groundbreaking 1975 essay from the same period as Sunny's dance, Cixous writes, "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885). She calls for women to write themselves and specifically locates an *écriture féminine* in representations of women's bodies: "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (880). While contemporary feminists widely note the insufficiency of Cixous's universalizing treatment of women's bodies, we can see how this scene of Sunny's dancing does enact the kind of self-reclamation that Cixous describes. Sunny's gestures in this scene counteract her body's cooption by the industry of intercountry adoption and Franklin Hata. Further, the point I make above about how these gestures distance Sunny from the figure K also physically loosen Sunny from Hata's narrative logic that positions K as the "uncanny stranger" whose story stands in for Sunny's.

The exuberant freedom Sunny displays in this scene of dancing is fleeting, as Hata's dominance of her body reinstates a troubling racial and gendered logic; following this night, we learn that Sunny was nearly raped by Gizzi, causing her to run away to New York City with Lincoln where she remains away from home for a year (150). Through a conversation that Sunny has with Hata as an adult, we learn that a year later Sunny returned home pregnant, and Hata convinced her to have a risky late term abortion. Hata goes as far to admit,

I forced her to do it. Had she decided not to, I don't know what I would have done. In a way, it was a kind of ignoring that I did, an avoidance of her as Sunny—difficult, rash, angry Sunny—which I masked with a typical performance of consensus building and subtle pressure, which always is the difficult work for attempting to harmonize one's life and the lives of those whom one cherishes. (284)

Significant here is how Hata admits that, in his view, loving Sunny (or rather "cherishing," which has a more objectifying tone) entails "ignoring" her, "an avoidance of her as Sunny," an admission that consolidates the pattern of his treatment of her throughout the novel. Hata deceives Sunny into visiting a doctor for what he claims will only be an examination, but whom he has bribed to perform an abortion. As Hata describes to the resistant doctor just before the procedure (at which Hata himself assists), "You will be preventing further trauma" (342-3). Here Hata refers to his own further trauma, worried about "the imminent disgrace and embarrassment that would hang about the house like banners of our mutual failure" (340). Again the symbolic significance of the house, in both its American and Japanese contexts, becomes paramount in an understanding of mutually affirming paternalistic dominance, and the appearance of Sunny's body becomes that which would have caused him shame.

Therefore, the apex of freedom that Sunny displays during the scene of her dancing quickly erodes under intersecting pressures from male characters: Gizzi's assault, Lincoln's abandonment, the doctor's profit motivation, and Hata's cooption of her body. When we encounter Sunny as an adult,<sup>45</sup> she has become the manager of a store in an economically failing mall, selling women's clothes that are "eminently respectable, of conservative styling ..." (205). Hata first sees her as she is taking her son to daycare in the mall, and Hata's reaction to the sight of her son Thomas suggests that which he has also ignored in Sunny: "I think the boy must be hers, bestowed as he is with her high, narrowing eyes and her black hair, though it's tightly curled, near-Afro, and her warm, nut-colored skin (though I wonder why he isn't darker)" (209). The phrasing here about Thomas affirms Hata's recognition of her Asian American identity, yet his description of Thomas's hair, "though it's tightly curled, near-Afro," suggests that this is a physical trait he doesn't recognize as connecting Thomas to Sunny. Also, in attributing Thomas's hair to an African American father—rather than to Sunny—Hata wonders why the child has Sunny's "nut-colored skin" and "why he isn't darker." These racial expectations that hinge on Hata's vision of Sunny as being of a "like-enough race" (73) further reinforce Hata's disavowal of Sunny's multiracial identity.

Sunny functions again at the end of the novel as a conduit for Hata's reconciliation with another character (as Sunny's childhood presence served in reference to K). This time Sunny's function is as the mother of Hata's male heir Thomas, and Hata expresses his feelings for the boy through bodily connection: "It seems curious, all these

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<sup>45</sup> From the information in this scene about it being thirteen years since he last saw Sunny in the period right after the Vietnam War (approx 1976) and that she must be thirty-two, we can surmise that Sunny was born in Korea about 1957, coming to the U.S. in about 1964. This places the scene of her dancing in Gizzi's house in approximately 1974.

years alone and my rarely thinking twice of the larger questions, perhaps save certain reconsiderations in the last few weeks, but now the simple padding touch of his boy's fingers seemed to have the force of a thousand pulling hands" (219). Eschewing the significance of reconciling with Sunny, Hata prefers to draw meaning from the bodily contact with Thomas's "boy fingers." Tellingly, Thomas is the only character who directly refers to Hata by the name "Franklin" in the novel (Carroll 598), a signal that through his American male heir, Hata's conversion to an American identity becomes complete. Hata's ultimately redeems his past misdeeds by saving both Thomas and his friend Renny Bannerjee (323) from drowning, reprising—as mentioned above—Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*, except for the replacement of Rabbit's granddaughter with Hata's grandson. The literary allusion to the androcentric Updike series parallels the novel's revival of Hata's masculinist tendencies, as he finally feels a sense of patrilineal family affiliation to his grandson rather than through his daughter Sunny. With this lifelong crisis quelled through the figure of Thomas, Hata resolves to move on. Yet troublingly, Hata's decision to sell his house and move away—as he puts it "simply bear my flesh, and blood, and bones ... in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away"—enacts yet another, final abandonment of Sunny.

Ultimately, repositioning Sunny as a central character in *A Gesture Life* reveals the extent to which a "gesture life" is precisely that with which the novel's dominant narrative logic endows her. In a full consideration of Sunny's role in the novel, I argue that Chang-rae Lee departs from fully inhabiting of Sunny's subject position in a similar ethical move as his decision to not inhabit K's subject position. Recognizing his positionality as a male author and inserting an ethical distance, Chang-rae Lee lays bare

the mechanics of Hata's gaze while at the same time allowing Sunny's body to dance across the page and thereby unsettle the text. Yet, Lee's decision to turn away from fully representing either of the central female characters does not instate their mirroring of one another, as many critics who glancingly consider Sunny's role in the text suggest. Sunny becomes overlooked in the novel precisely because we are reading for the dominant form of the war trauma narrative: fixated on locating the genesis of war trauma in a particular historical moment, we read for Hata's interaction with the comfort woman K during World War II as the traumatic past of the novel. Missing a nuanced, transpacific matrix of intergenerational trauma also misses a vital strand of the violent past that Lee inscribes in his novel through Sunny's bodily gestures.

It is by pausing over the text's presentation of Sunny's body, those "blundering" moments when Hata cannot read her bodily gestures, that a new strand of the novel's testimony emerges, one that, as Nguyen posits of the generativity of Asian American literature more generally, doesn't affirm a neat oscillation between the dominant interpretive poles of Asian American accommodation or resistance. What Sunny's physical presence in the novel recovers is a view of transpacific postmemory: an articulation of intergenerational trauma that situates a child's subjective formation within an interplay of present and absent memories stemming from the cultural traumas of past and ongoing inter-imperial clashes in the Pacific. These present and absent memories are both Sunny's own and those of her adopted and biological parents. This transforms a dominant understanding of postmemory that, while accounting for the interplay of parental and child memories, proceeds from a discrete historical event in the past. Yet, in the case of wars in the Pacific, the multiple, interlocking, ongoing, and largely



unacknowledged histories of U.S. inter-imperial interaction in the Pacific constitute forms of intergenerational trauma with both diachronic and synchronic dimensions. Franklin Hata's war trauma most certainly conditions the contours of Sunny's life and the contours of her bodily appearance in the novel. However, Sunny's traumatic experience in the U.S. is also intimately tied to the history of multiracial children in Korea during the 1950s and 1960s and the commodification of these children's bodies by the industry of intercountry adoption. Moreover, the novel directly addresses the ways in which Sunny negotiates the converging pressures of growing up in Hata's purportedly Japanese American household, one constituted by the structural violence of "twinned imperialisms" (Carroll 595) of these societies that correspondingly represses both Sunny's Korean and African American identities.

My ultimate argument in regard to *A Gesture Life* is that Chang-rae Lee develops a style and form of writing that registers these complicated vectors of transpacific trauma. Lee's weaving together of intertexts drawn from a masculinist canon of American literature effectively parodies the discursive limits of the canon, drawing our attention to the problematic intersection of narrative and national power—and all that this intersection squeezes out of sight. This alignment between narrative, power, and national identification emerges at a basic textual level in the permutations of Franklin Hata's name. As mentioned before, Franklin's American name "Hata," is an abbreviation of his Japanese name "Kurohata," which the novel expressly translates as "black flag." Yet, in a point not raised about the novel, this clipping of Franklin's American name to "Hata," has specific implications for his daughter Sunny Hata. In textually removing the "black" from Sunny's name, Chang-rae Lee alerts us to Hata's suppression of the African American

dimension of Sunny's identity; instead, Hata aims to read her as a "sunny flag," an image revealing Hata's ambition to cast Sunny as a Japanese immigrant.

However, in Chang-rae Lee's mode of writing, he waves black flags everywhere in the novel to textually remind us exactly what Hata is repressing, yet our critical perception of these signals requires careful attention. As a final example, in a turn back to where my exploration of gestures within the novel began, we see how Lee preserves Hata's effacement of Sunny's multiracial identity in one of the most "peculiar" moments of the text: "finally the girl took the cloth and shook it open and placed it over her own head. The boy was confused. She sat there with her face covered in black, and he yelled at her once and then rose abruptly and left her ... The girl remained there, under the veil, unmoving for some time " (220). The extent to which this mysterious scene transfixes Hata alerts us to something more going on in the text, and it is significant that it immediately reminds him of Sunny, an immediate thought he represses by turning back to his history with K. The centrality of this scene and of this "veil" generates a literary resonance of its own, calling up both the veil as a symbol in many cultures as that which cloaks women's sexuality and the veil as Du Bois's powerful marker of black identity and double consciousness (*Souls*). It is little wonder, then, that the girl sitting under cloth, "her face covered in black" immediately reminds Hata of Sunny. This scene also invites us to consider how the narrative logic of the text operates as a veil, an account of Hata's life that has both repressed Sunny's presence and her multiracial identity.

Yet this black flag also provides Sunny "the means of her own detachment," which stands out when we consider the symbolism of the black flag as anarchy, a refusal of nationalist and imperialist ideology. After all, within a novel which on the diegetic

level consistently elides Sunny's blackness because of Hata's Japanese and American racial ideologies, it's vital to remember that it is Sunny who unearths the black flag from Hata's closet (147). Sunny's gestures become palimpsests in the novel, filling in the black holes of history that Hata instates within his obsessions about his own past, and this narrative form enacts a counterpoetics that Yunte Huang calls for in a transpacific imagination: "the enactment of poetic imagination as a means to alter memory and invoke minority survival in the deadly space between competing national, imperial interests and between authoritative regimes of epistemology serving those interests" (Huang 5).

Within *A Gesture Life's* transpacific imagination, the narratively disruptive character of Sunny points us toward the lingering unintelligibility of certain multiracial American and Asian American experiences. Further, her narrative effacement evinces the extent to which the U.S. has not acknowledged the violence that Americans have committed against Koreans during the Korean War and occupation, a point to which I will return in the next chapter on Jayne Anne Phillips's *Lark and Termite*. The continued effacement of non-Americans' war trauma also links back to the figure of the young Korean girl in Morrison's novel *Home*. Morrison's novel, as I argue in Chapter 4, pivots around the moment during the Korean War when Frank Money kills a young Korean girl scavenging desperately for food. Morrison links the bodily destruction and narrative erasure of the girl to the precarity that African American women face in the United States, a link that highlights a transnational experience of vulnerability. While in *A Gesture Life*, Chang-rae Lee doesn't fully depict Sunny's harrowing experiences in the orphanage in South Korea, in his 2010 novel, *The Surrendered*, Chang-rae Lee fully

resuscitates the figure of the orphaned Korean girl through the expansive detail of June Han's wartime struggles and subsequent life in the U.S..

However, in *A Gesture Life*, Sunny Hata's story remains a gestural sketch at best, one that we initially apprehend through the persistent presence of her body and bodily gestures, whose appearance force Hata's reluctant and oblique explanations about Sunny's life. In essence, Sunny's presence in the novel and Hata's treatment of her narratively perform how perilous the issue of postmemory can be for a generation such as Sunny's that shares the transpacific experience. In a way, we see that within Chang-rae Lee's *oeuvre*, Sunny's near invisibility in *A Gesture Life* needed to precede June Han's fuller articulation in *The Surrendered*, if only to preserve the narrative gaps that accompany certain experiences of war that are "systematically disavowed by a matrix of silence, the major components of which include the institutions of U.S. global hegemony and social scientific knowledge production, along with the more intimate forces of familial desire and shame. The result for the Korean diaspora in the United States is that one is often an unwitting participant in one's own erasure" (Cho 12). The Pacific flows of history that Chang-rae Lee preserves within *A Gesture Life* bring to the surface this "matrix of silence." Writing in a form that enacts and critiques the limitation of universal conceptions of trauma and "postmemory," Chang-rae Lee moves us away from a binary views of war, instead recognizing the ways in which "war" in the Pacific continues to shape globalization in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 6

### JAYNE ANNE PHILLIPS'S *LARK AND TERMITE* AND THE BODIES OF MAGICAL REALISM

*Yet literature insists on history--the story of a life, intimately known--and writers gamble with redemption. Surely our hope in holding a world still between the covers of a book is to make that world known, to save it from vanishing.*  
--Jayne Anne Phillips, "The Writer as Outlaw"

Traumatic experiences of parents that reach out to and structure the next generation's lives often figure as "hauntings": the traumatic event left unspoken inside a family circle traces its ghostly presence on a child's life. Jayne Anne Phillips, in her novel *Lark and Termite*, elevates the effects of postmemory to a further level of removal, illustrating how a massacre of Korean refugees during the early days of the Korean War comes to inhabit two American children's lives a decade later. In researching the little-known history of civilian massacres during the Korean War, scholar Grace Cho describes how the surviving residents of these areas make sense of the atrocity through a belief in a kind of cathartic haunting:

As I began reading reports about the massacres of Korean civilians by the U.S. military during the Korean War, I came across a finding that the highest incidence of massacres in what is now called South Korea took place in Gyeongsang province. In this part of the country in particular, there is a reported phenomenon called *honbul*, or 'ghost flames,' in which flickering lights rise up from the ground, usually at the site of a massacre. The folkloric explanation, generated since the Korean War, lies somewhere between science and the supernatural. In places where buried bodies are heavily concentrated, the remains have changed the chemical makeup of the earth, causing the soil to ignite. Through ghost flames, the spirits of the dead release their grief and rage, their *han*, into the world.  
(16)

This phenomenon of "ghost flames" as a residue trace of a violent past that comes to haunt the living, bears testimony to the power of "folkloric explanations," in narrative, to

help the surviving cope with an atrocity. Jayne Anne Phillip's novel *Lark and Termite* locates the No Gun Ri massacre during the Korean War in such a kind of folkloric space, "somewhere between science and the supernatural," employing a magical realist style to hold in space the ghostly traces of war trauma on the next generation; she gives body to this grief and rage in her characters and in so doing, traces a transnational link between the spaces of West Virginia and No Gun Ri, South Korea.

As Phillips describes in the passage that opens this chapter, the formal choices she makes in *Lark and Termite* preserve the effects of war atrocities within American bodies in order to bring home a history of Korean suffering that is largely unacknowledged in the U.S., "to make that world known, to save it from vanishing." The text secures this connection through the particular symbolic and historical significance of railroad systems in each setting, which establishes the exploited position that West Virginians and Koreans occupied in relation to capitalist ventures in the U.S. and Japan, respectively. This exploitation also heightens these characters' vulnerabilities to the violence of war, and Phillips employs the device of gesture to uncannily link the bodies of individuals in West Virginia and Korea who share outsider positions in reference to the (neo)colonial metropolises. Drawing on a point from the last chapter, the correspondence of bodily gestures that Phillips builds between siblings Lark and Termite and a Korean brother and sister specifically highlights the physical precarity that children face during and as a result of war. Significantly, this magical bodily continuum between the children—in its insistence on giving the non-American children material form—resists the trend within war fiction to represent non-Americans (or "the enemy") as ghosts.

Jayne Anne Phillips has not garnered a significant amount of attention within American literary scholarship in the United States, even though her short fiction and novels have earned critical acclaim and commercial success.<sup>46</sup> Despite the dearth of scholarship on Phillips's fiction, her short stories and novels have won numerous prizes,<sup>47</sup> and she has earned the praise of fellow authors and scholars,<sup>48</sup> for example, scholar Elaine Showalter named Phillips as one of the eight best women novelists writing in America today (Creasman 62). Phillips emerged onto the literary scene during the 1970s within a circle of writers known as the "dirty realists" or "new realists" who studied under Raymond Carver.<sup>49</sup> This group, which included Bobbie Ann Mason, Richard Ford, and Tobias Wolff, responded to the contemporary turn toward conservatism in American culture by focusing on blue collar characters, consumerism in American culture, and psychological depth in their characters (Jarvis 192), all of which troubled the happy picture of Reagan's America. Phillips's important short story collections include *Black Tickets* (1979) and *Fast Lanes* (1988), and her novels include *Machine Dreams* (1984), *Shelter* (1994), *MotherKind* (2000), *Lark and Termite* (2009), and, most recently, *Quiet Dell* (2013).

In the body of her fiction as a whole, Phillips has consistently sought to register the socio-economic plight of marginalized Americans, and *Lark and Termite* marks a

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<sup>46</sup> A search for her name on the *MLA International Database* reveals that the most recent research on her work has been primarily conducted by American literature scholars in Europe or by American literary scholars whose work focuses on Southern or Appalachian American literature. *MLA International Database* search on "Jayne Anne Phillips" brought 49 results; search conducted on February 8, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Phillips has received the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction and the Massachusetts Book Award, as well as been shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award, Orange Prize, and the National Book Award.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Nadine Gordimer praised her as "the best short story writer since Eudora Welty." (www.jayneannephillips.com)

<sup>49</sup> Phillips's publication of her first novel *Machine Dreams* in 1984 ushered her "entry into a group known in the mid-'80s as 'the girls of Knopf'—a literary brat pack of women in their 20s and 30s (among them Tama Janowitz, Amy Hempel, Lorrie Moore, Mona Simpson, and Louise Erdrich) destined for quick fame" (Phillips "Outlaw" 91).

continuation of her interest in representing Americans in the poor recesses of the nation.

Brian Jarvis contextualizes Phillips's fiction in reference to the conservative turn in

American politics of the 1980s:

The working class, the underclass, and various racial and ethnic groups constituted what could be termed a socioeconomic abject in Reagan's America. Large numbers of undesirables were symbolically expelled from the national corpus, disavowed to ensure the health of the collective body. Phillips is typically drawn to those defined in social terms by the dominant culture as 'dirty' or 'trash,' to the lives of the rural and urban poor, hookers and drunks, poor whites and mine workers living in 'perpetual thirties' towns. (Jarvis 195-6)

Phillips's characteristic draw to characters living in the shadows of American prosperity extends in *Lark and Termite* to individuals who are most vulnerable to the violent repercussions of the global struggles that accompany the Cold War and rising system of global capitalism. Another feature of Phillips's fiction is that she traces the effects of socio-economic disparities as they structure family life; in particular, the relationships between parents and children have been a paramount concern for Phillips. Of the formative influence of parents on their children, Phillips states in an interview: "There is an expansion that happens in all families. Children take on their parents' unresolved issues and emotional dilemmas, and this comes out in all kinds of subtle ways...Not to resolve them, but to help carry the burden—to keep their parents alive, in a sense" (Homes 46). Children taking on their parents' unresolved issues includes traumatic experience, including war trauma; for example, in her earlier novel *Machine Dreams*, Phillips represents the impact that a father's Pacific theater World War II service has on a West Virginia family, an impact that conditions the son's later decision to enlist in Vietnam.



This strong pull of influence between parents and children in Jayne Anne Phillips's fiction often manifests itself in her characters' bodily gestures. As if enunciating a secret grammar specific to a family circle, the physical styling of Phillips's characters "often emerges in a kind of shared consciousness which includes gestures" (Jarvis 199). Yet this familial grammar of bodily gestures should not be read as cordoned off in the private sphere; rather, Phillips very consciously aims to capture social forces and politics within her representations of characters. Especially in light of her interest in characters who live on the margins of society, Phillips states that she "see[s] politics as very subversive in most people's lives, like ripples in a body of water. I'm often talking about people who don't pay much attention to politics, people who are so involved in their daily lives, in raising their kids, in going to their jobs, in spending their paychecks, in the dramas of their own lives, that they are basically acted upon by political realities" (Homes 50). In much of Phillips's fiction, characters do not directly acknowledge, confront, or challenge their access or lack of access to power; rather, as Phillips describes above, political conditions inscribe themselves on characters' bodies and condition the ways in which they interact in family circles and beyond. As Sarah Robertson writes of Phillips's fiction,

the historicity of her work may be overlooked by those who do not attend to the semantic density both in and across her texts. Phillips' reader can only understand the socio-economic elements that propel her writing by examining the minute details of her texts, by exploring the coded interactions between characters or by considering the material objects that resonate with family and regional specificity. (*Secret* 263)

Literary critics like Robertson and Jarvis locate the "historicity" of Phillips's fiction within the conditions of Appalachia or the South more generally (though the region of Appalachia is not technically considered in the South). In order to detect the "coded

interactions" between characters within *Lark and Termite*, however, I argue that one must attend to the specificity of both the West Virginian and Korean settings.

The narrative of *Lark and Termite* details the lives of an American family and, with less detail, a Korean family during and after the Korean War, and it oscillates between five narrators and two principal temporal nodes: one narrative thread set in July 26 to 31st in 1950 and the other in July 26 to 31st in 1959. A final short chapter takes place on July 31, 1951. The primary action of the 1950 setting follows Corporal Robert Leavitt during the first days of the Korean War, as his group of American soldiers from the 27th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army leads a band of South Korean refugees further south after North Korean forces invade. The soldiers and refugees come under fire by a U.S. airstrike, and the wounded and survivors run for cover in the tunnel of a railroad bridge. Leavitt flees into the tunnel with a Korean girl who is carrying her disabled brother, along with their elderly great aunt. Over the course of the novel, Leavitt's narration veers between his interactions with the Korean family in the tunnel, memories of his upbringing in the U.S., and his wife Lola whom he envisions giving birth to their baby as he slowly dies in the tunnel.

The more dynamic parallel plot of the 1959 setting takes place in Winfield, West Virginia and springs from the focal point of Lola's two children, Lark and Termite, and Lola's sister Noreen ("Nonie"), who takes care of the children after Lola's death. Lark's narrative recalls her growing up with Nonie, the care that she takes of her younger brother Termite, and the dawning of her sexuality and intensifying feelings for her neighbor Saul ("Solly"). Nonie's narrative excavates her and Lola's upbringing in an abusive family, details her first marriages in Atlanta and Louisville and current

relationship with local diner owner Charlie, back in Winfield. Nine years old during the 1959 setting of the story, Termite delivers a perspective of the family from his viewpoint inflected by his condition as "minimally hydrocephalic...and visually impaired" (50). From the vantage of his wheelchair or wagon, he relays sights, unedited dialogue of characters around him, and mysterious memories that recall his dying father's experience in the tunnel in South Korea nine years earlier. The action in the 1959 narrative thread culminates in a devastating flood in Winfield, and in the days leading up to the flood, pressures build surrounding Lark's intensity of feelings for Solly, Noreen's conflicted relationship with Charlie's mother, and a Social Services worker intruding on the family to intervene in Termite's care. The final short section of *Lark and Termite* that takes place in 1951 is the sole narrative in which Lola serves as the focalizing character, detailing her delivery of Termite and her receipt of a telegram notifying her of Robert Leavitt's death; the section ends in the moments leading up to her suicide. Phillips writes the entire novel in the present-tense, with Leavitt, Termite, and Lola's sections narrated in a meditatively-toned, third-person perspective and Lark and Nonie's sections in a conversationally-toned, first-person, present tense.

The form and structure of *Lark and Termite* consist of a series of thematic and textual correspondences that Phillips builds between the temporal settings, correspondences that link colors, objects, sounds, behaviors, and locations. For example, the railroad bridge and tunnel in South Korea in which Leavitt dies corresponds to a railroad bridge and tunnel in Winfield under which Lark, Termite, and Solly often go to swim; the arch separating Lark and Termite's bedrooms; and the tunnel shape that Termite repeatedly draws when given crayons and paper. These connections create a

narrative logic that insistently ties the children Lark and Termite to the events in the tunnel in South Korea, even though neither of them ever met Leavitt and barely recall their mother. In this way, we can detect how postmemory of war comes to structure Lark and Termite's lives through the absences of their mother and of Termite's father Leavitt (we come to find out later that Lark's father turns out to be Charlie). Of the centrality of trauma as a structuring concept of the novel, literary critic Marc Amfreville writes that *Lark and Termite* "is not an analysis of the traumatized mind of a given character in the novel, but rather that of the text itself as following the pattern of trauma. At the deepest level, Leavitt's death is the central shock whose effects ripple throughout the novel. It is the black hole towards which two opposite forces converge [the past and future]" (167). In this way, Jayne Anne Phillips avoids locating the experience of war trauma within the single psyche of an American soldier; rather, she highlights trauma as a force that deeply shapes connected characters' perceptual capacities.

Yet Phillips does not establish the powerful pull of this postmemory on the 1959 setting through an explicit description of the children's connection to their parents, but through the mysterious, textual correspondences that bridge the gaps in time, the absence of Lola and Leavitt, and the secrets withheld from the children. Amfreville goes on to stress that *Lark and Termite* need be read "less in terms of successive narrations than as a gigantic poem that creates its inner rhymes. What lies at the origin, what happened before what, matters less than the coeval presence of the signs that constitute the letter of the final text" (171). In this way, Phillips conveys trauma's disruptions of time in a way that also resists an undercurrent of progressivist history, unsettling a stable concept of "post"memory. In other words, *Lark and Termite* does not install an easy causality or

chain of events in which Leavitt's war trauma leads to Lark and Termite's experiences of that trauma; rather, the narrative logic also reverses the flow of influence. In the unfolding of the novel, Lark and Termite's experiences likewise shape and inform Leavitt's sections in a mysterious, reciprocal flow of narrative correspondences.

The "inner rhythms" of Phillips's writing applies not only to *Lark and Termite*, but also resonate within the entire body of her fiction. Of her *oeuvre*, Phillips states, "I see my work, all of it, as a continuum. All the books I have or will write open out into one another. I don't see one revelation as necessarily 'truer' than another" (Robertson "Interview" 72). Against the tendency to characterize Phillips as a regional writer (and compare her to Faulkner<sup>50</sup>), Phillips finds the designations "West Virginia writer" or regional writer as "too restrictive" (Creasman 62). *Lark and Termite* represents a move by Phillips to push back against these regional restrictions, as her settings of West Virginia and South Korea establish her more worldly vision.

In this move toward the global, Phillips eschews a vision of traumatic postmemory as limited to the branches of a family tree and instead uses narrative correspondences and bodily gestures to bring into view the devastating effects of interrelated systems of colonial exploitation—the U.S. exploitation of West Virginia, the Japanese exploitation of Korea, and the U.S. neocolonial occupation of Korea. Here, I will briefly trace the historical and economic contexts that *Lark and Termite* evokes before moving to a detailed examination of how the characters' bodies uniquely shape an

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<sup>50</sup> The interconnectedness of her fiction and *Lark and Termite's* inclusion of a mentally disabled character has widely invited comparisons to William Faulkner's fiction; for example, Boyd Creasman writes, "The connection between Phillips and Faulkner comes to mind for three main reasons: the use of multiple points of view, the sense that the past is a continual part of the present, and in *Lark and Termite*, a clear similarity between Termite and Benjy of *The Sound and the Fury*" (74). Another point of comparison between Faulkner and Phillips stems from their rootedness in geographical locations. Like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, West Virginia is a space of continual exploration for Phillips.

ethical understanding of the effects of these contexts. In interviews and essays, Phillips discusses the political, economic, and social histories of West Virginia that form her fictional world. In these histories, Phillips foregrounds colonization, war, exploitation, and environmental destruction as the primary forces shaping the state's past. In an essay "West Virginia" she describes the space as a natural wilderness that served as a hunting ground for American Indian tribes that was fought over and carved up by European settlers" (488). The designation of "West" Virginia was painfully wrought by the divisions of the American Civil War, and Phillips characterizes this split from Virginia as cutting to the very core of individuals' lives: "Families were divided. One of my own ancestors spied for the Confederacy while her sons fought for the Union. Some towns changed hands fifty times" (490). The rupture produced between the two states and between families through the imposition of a state line during a process of war aligns West Virginia with Korea, whose calamitous fracture following World War II at the 38th parallel by decision of the Russians and Americans precipitates the very war depicted in *Lark and Termite*.

Overall, Phillips's West Virginia is an exploited and precarious space within the larger U.S. capitalist system. Matching the destructiveness of war for West Virginia and its inhabitants, in Phillips's view, has been the impact of capitalist exploitation of the state's natural resources and the environmental devastation that the extraction of these resources brings. Following the Civil War, northern companies purchased "timber and mineral rights to the land for almost nothing, and shipped the wealth of paradise to northern cities" (491). Following these initial northern incursions, further economic and environmental damage came with the dangerous practices of coal mining, strip mining,

and, by the 1980s, the industry of mountaintop removal. Especially railing against the effects of this last practice, Phillips writes,

Coal companies simply blast off the tops of the mountains and dump tons of soil and rock into the hollows and streams below, destroying watersheds and the checks and balances of weather itself in the Appalachians...Coal slurry impoundments, towering waste full of toxins and heavy metals, hang over the towns and settlements, waiting to weaken in hundred-year floods that happen more frequently, much more frequently, every other year it seems: no clear running streams to absorb the storms, the snow melt. The dumped ground that buried the interlacing waters of the mined land (1.4 million acres projected destroyed by 2012) is loose, unstable. The drenched earth turns to rivers of poison mud. (491)

These types of mining practices bring not only economic and environmental ruin to West Virginia, but as suggested by the description above, a range of health and safety problems for the people of West Virginia.

Though this mountaintop removal comes later than *Lark and Termite's* West Virginia setting in 1959, the novel already bears traces of the effects of mining and the dwindling economy. Winfield has already been squeezed dry by outside companies and left to economically wither as companies move south looking for additional resources. As Termite reports the conversations he hears around him: "[Nonie] says the rail yard is near deserted now and no place for them to be. But there are no boys anymore at the rail yard, no sounds in the ditch, only empty trains passing south and sometimes a man in a boxcar throwing bottles out ... Lark says there were coal cars, long flatbed cars filled at the tipples no one uses anymore, now the mines have closed" (68). This section narrates the grim reality of West Virginia's economy during the 1950s; while the state's coal mining industry peaked in 1948, the subsequent years' sharp decline in mining had a disastrous economic impact that led to a mass exodus of workers and families from the state (Estall 8). In stark contrast to the rest of the nation's postwar prosperity, Appalachian towns like

Winfield were descending into grinding poverty: "while total employment in non-agricultural occupations in the U.S.A. rose by 38 per cent between 1947 and 1965, that in West Virginia actually fell by 9 per cent" (Estall 4). Playing in the tunnel under these trains speeding south, Lark and Termite grow up in this shadow of the economic, environmental, and health impacts of exploitative industries. Indeed, the exploitation of the state by outside interests is so pronounced that dominant models of West Virginia history conceive the state's development in relation to the U.S. in terms of a model of "colonialism" (Simon 165), affirming Jayne Anne Phillips's vision of West Virginia as on the margins of U.S.: "It is geographically isolated and relentlessly exploited by outsiders and some insiders, all looking to sell paradise and make a buck ... In our co-opted world, West Virginia remains mysterious, downtrodden, sold short—another country within a celebrity-obsessed American culture that takes no notice" ("West Virginia 500).

Prompted by the destruction brought by the flood at the end of the novel, floods which Phillips mentions above as happening more and more frequently over the course of the twentieth century, Lark, Termite, and Solly's escape from Winfield at the end of the novel to the more prosperous sun-belt state of Florida, and this escape mirrors the exodus of many from the ruins of West Virginia.

While the empty trains passing through Winfield signal the downturn of the coal mining industry in West Virginia, another particularly pernicious industry that was in ascendency during the Cold War 1950s was the U.S. military industrial complex. The term "military industrial complex" was first used by Winfield W. Riefler in 1947 and C. Wright Mills in 1956, yet it gained prominence when Eisenhower cautioned Americans about it in his farewell address in 1961; Clark and Jorgenson explain this turning point in



the U.S. military: "Prior to this period, domestic industrial operations were redirected to support the war effort during times of conflict. The ascent of the military and geopolitical concerns helped create 'a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions' and an expansive military structure that included millions of enlisted soldiers" (560). This booming Cold War web of industries and armies touches both settings of *Lark and Termite* during the 1950s, as military service provided poverty-stricken West Virginians a source of basic necessities and U.S. military bases sprang up all over the globe. The prominence of the military during this period also links the populations within the two settings of the novel: as longtime senator from West Virginia Jay Rockefeller noted in a 2003 Memorial Day speech in Winfield, "West Virginia had the highest service rate during the Korean War" (Rockefeller). Studies of data from the Department of Defense indicate a link between poverty and enlistment rates in the U.S. military (MacLean 251); the downturned economy likely spurred young West Virginia men to flock in large numbers to recruitment centers. The convergence of American industry with the U.S. military during this period represents a point at which spaces like West Virginia whose terrain was effaced by decades of industrial exploitation begin to resemble spaces in the Global South in which the U.S. military brings destruction and establishes bases: "Given the global shifts in military strategy and operations, the systemic transfer of ecological impacts to developing nations deepens global and social inequalities" (Clark 563). In the period of *Lark and Termite*, therefore, it becomes increasingly urgent to see the interconnectivity of war and industry and how they link far-flung spaces such as West Virginia and South Korea.

The axis of the railroad as a point of linkage between the two settings of *Lark and Termite* points in the direction of a shared—though certainly not commensurate—position that West Virginia and Korea shared in reference to legacies of colonial or neocolonial forms of exploitation. Not only does the specter of the empty railroad car loom over Lark and Termite and, more generally, the town of Winfield, but the correspondence it has to the railroad bridge and tunnel in Korea calls up Korea's history of economic development under the Japanese empire. Paralleling exploitative practices by outside groups in West Virginia, the modern railroad system in Korea was built by the Japanese during their colonial rule in Korea; the railroads facilitated the extraction of valuable exports to the imperial center of Japan, and in another interesting convergence between the novel's two settings, in the 1930s the emphasis of this extraction was focused on the mining industry:

The mining of minerals and ores (mainly iron) for shipment to Japan, was among the activities where primary emphasis was placed, due to immediate war needs. ... Japanese held governmental, business, and banking structures in their own hands, compelled many Korean firms to accept Japanese partners, induced many Koreans to go to Japan as laborers, extended the export trade almost exclusively through Japanese companies, built railroads mainly for the purpose of transporting men and war goods, and developed roads principally in the provinces adjacent to Manchuria. ... After 1937, Japanese control was more or less complete, and all phases of the economy were merged into the government's war plans. (Brudnoy 183-4)

This system of colonial extraction in Korea depended to a large extent on the infrastructure of the railroad system, and, as demonstrated in the description of the multidimensional system of Japanese control above, the tentacles of Japanese empire reached into the social and economic fabric of Korean life, creating internal instability while simultaneously creating the conditions needed for Japanese imperial expansion

leading up to World War II. In a point not yet recognized about *Lark and Termite*, then, Jayne Anne Phillips's narrative correspondence between the two railroad bridges in the novel's settings signals a very particular shared precarity of West Virginia and Korea in relation to more powerful outside capitalist forces.

Though the historical contexts of the railroad systems serve as an important link between West Virginia and Korea, the context most important in relation to the Korean railroad bridge represented in *Lark and Termite* is the mass killing of Korean civilians by U.S. troops that took place during the last week of July in 1950 at the railroad tracks and tunnel near No Gun Ri. Though this massacre occurred during the first weeks of the Korean War, the American public did not learn about the event until an Associated Press news story broke on September 29, 1999. The article, based on the testimony of U.S. veterans and Korean witnesses, prompted the U.S. Army to form a review team to investigate all the evidence surrounding the incident at No Gun Ri. According to the *New York Times* article published on September 30, 1999, twenty-four Korean survivors and twelve U.S. veterans reported "that in the first desperate weeks of the Korean War, American soldiers killed 100, 200 or simply hundreds of refugees, many of them women and children, who were trapped beneath the bridge" (Choe). Though accounts of the event vary, the outlines of the massacre show that Korean civilians who were fleeing from the villages of Im Gae Ri and Joo Gok Ri ahead of the advancing North Korean forces (NKPA) met soldiers from the U.S. Army's First Cavalry Division at an area near No Gun Ri on July 26 (No Gun Ri Review Team i and Choe). These U.S. soldiers were woefully unprepared for combat or interacting with refugees, having been hastily sent to Korea from their comparatively comfortable station in postwar Japan (C. Hanley 22), and

they had been repeatedly warned by their commanders that North Korean soldiers would infiltrate refugee groups in order to attack U.S. forces behind their lines. According to Korean accounts, the soldiers stopped to search the civilians on the railroad tracks, after which some reports indicate that American planes flew overhead and strafed the group of civilians. The civilians ran for cover in the tunnel or in the ditches by the tracks. Following the strafing, "The Americans directed refugees into the bridge underpasses—each 80 feet long, 23 feet wide, 30 feet high—and after dark opened fire on them from nearby machine-gun positions, the Korean claimants said" (Choe). From July 26 to July 29, the U.S. soldiers fired into the tunnel and, while numbers vary, killed hundreds of Koreans, including children, women, and the elderly.

The history of this horrific event, little-known in the U.S. until 1999, continues to be side-stepped by the U.S. military. The 2001 official report of the No Gun Ri Review Team acknowledges that Korean civilians were killed by U.S. soldiers but concludes that there were no orders to fire upon the civilians, that no airplanes were in the area, and that in the tunnel "[t]he firing was a result of hostile fire seen or received from civilian positions or fire directed over their heads or near them to control their movement. The deaths and injuries of civilians, wherever they occurred, were an unfortunate tragedy inherent to war and not a deliberate killing" (x). Further, the review team identified the problems of memory associated with their task: "Unfortunately, the passage of 50 years greatly reduces the possibility that we will ever know all the facts surrounding this particular event. A large number of factors, including but not limited to trauma, age, and the media, influenced the recollection of Korean and U.S. witnesses" (ii). Evacuating the Army of responsibility for the deaths, the report concludes, "Neither documentary

evidence nor the U.S. veterans' statements reviewed by the U.S. Review Team support a hypothesis of deliberate killing of Korean civilians. What befell civilians in the vicinity of No Gun Ri in late July 1950 was a tragic and deeply regrettable accompaniment to a war forced upon unprepared U.S. and ROK forces" (xv). With this, the report effectively excuses the Army for the civilians' brutal deaths, laying the blame on the North Koreans who initiated the "war forced upon" the United States.

Jayne Anne Phillips read the news story about the massacre in *The New York Times* when it broke, and was stunned by the picture of the railroad tunnel at No Gun Ri that accompanied the story with its strong resemblance to the railroad bridge she had already included in an early draft of *Lark and Termite* (Amfreville 172). The news article that Phillips read also reports that the advancing North Korean troops came upon about 400 bodies of dead civilians, many of whom they buried in an unknown location. A chilling line from the *New York Times* article with particular resonance to the forms of transgenerational haunting in *Lark and Termite* comes from one of the U.S. soldiers at No Gun Ri: "Edward L. Daily of Clarksville, Tenn., who went on to earn a battlefield commission in Korea, said: 'On summer nights when the breeze is blowing, I can still hear their cries, the little kids screaming.'" This horrifying haunting of the civilian dead calling out for recognition and redress again raises the specter that opened this chapter: the "ghost flames" emitted from the Korean grounds of civilian massacre. Against the suppression of these Korean civilians' deaths, their anonymous mass burial, and the subsequent burial of the history surrounding their deaths, Jayne Anne Phillips disinters and reanimates the dead of No Gun Ri, and as I will argue, through the use of gesturing,

magical realist bodies, stages a radical intervention of the forgetting associated with "The Forgotten War."

The intricate network of narrative correspondences that Jayne Anne Phillips establishes between the settings of wartime Korea and postwar West Virginia in *Lark and Termite* certainly expresses the impact of war upon the following generation. Rather than resorting to the conventions of portraying this traumatic trace through a haunting, as do many authors of trauma fiction, Phillips chooses to draw upon the traditions of magical realism to bring the dead back to life in material, flesh and bone characters. In this way, we see characters within *Lark and Termite* living in the wake of their parents' war trauma through their physical interaction with other characters or physically reincarnating the dead. By tracing the linked bodily gestures of the novel, we detect not only the lingering trauma of war but also the force of the ethical critique that Phillips levels against war and regional exploitation.

The issues of time and space that separate the characters within familial networks of *Lark and Termite* complicate the text's articulations of postmemory. One primary complication arises from the fact that Lark and Termite's mother Lola and Termite's father Robert Leavitt are physically absent from the 1959 setting and the children have little, if any, memory of these figures. Another central point in the traumatic traces of the 1959 setting is that Lark and Termite do not only feel war trauma's aftereffects stemming from their parents' experiences, but their postmemory also takes shape from the experiences of the Korean girl and boy in the tunnel with Leavitt at No Gun Ri. While Lark may unknowingly reproduce the gestures of these children, Termite's sense of

connection to the Korean children he has never met is much clearer. As he repeats throughout the novel, Termite identifies Lark's blindness to the children in the tunnel, saying, "Lark doesn't know, she doesn't see" (169). In contrast, Termite can see the tunnel, describing that "... the picture inside him opens wide. He sees inside the roar to where the bodies are sleeping and waiting to move. So many bodies, tangled in one another, barely stirred. They want to move, lifted, turning, but they can't speak or see" (180). As though the massacre is preserved in time within Termite's mind, the past remains present for Termite and the figures in the tunnel, including the Korean boy and girl, live on with him.

Phillips textually preserves these complications of postmemory through her use of magical realism, drawing on a literary tradition that not only allows her to posit a mysterious, direct influence of the absent parents and Korean children in Lark and Termite's gestures, but also whose literary history has a distinct connection to the ruptures associated with global wars and colonization. In an interview from 1994, well before the 2009 publication of *Lark and Termite*, Phillips describes her affinity with authors who employ a magical realist style:

I've felt very connected to Faulkner's work, but I also feel very connected to what might be called Magical Realism, the term coined for South American writers—which also applies to Kafka, Bruno Schultz, and William Burroughs. There are any number of people who are working at the edge of how reality is apprehended. It's almost that perception itself is a kind of religion, meditation, a journey or a travail. Writers dealing with this material are my sources, or allies. (Homes 49)

Phillips identifies the term "magical realism" with South American writers, and though the term was coined by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925, its modern, literary usage is most associated with Latin American writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel

Garcia Marquez. Citing Kafka, Schultz, and Burroughs, though, it's clear that Phillips identifies the tradition as global and not solely anchored in Latin America.

Simply defined, magical realist fiction employs a design in which "[t]he frame or surface of the work may be conventionally realistic, but contrasting elements—such as the supernatural, myth, dream, fantasy—invade the realism and change the whole basis of the art" (Harmon 304). Typically, the author never attempts to explain the appearance of the fantastic, but, rather, the magical quality weaves itself into the fabric of the real on the diegetic level of the text; for example, nowhere in *Lark and Termite* do we find an explanation for Termite's mysterious ability to see the massacre in the tunnel in Korea. Magical realism's inclusion of these seemingly impossible elements casts an aura of unreality around a fictional world, and thereby interrupts the suspension of disbelief that typically accompanies a reader's response to realist fiction.

This aura of unreality that saturates a magical realist novel intersects the challenges of representing traumatic experience in literature. In his 2011 book *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction*, Eugene Arva makes the case that a magical realist style is particularly fitting for the fictional expression of traumatic experience. Recognizing narrative's role in helping individuals or collectives make sense of a traumatic event, Arva states:

Illusion is what ultimately helps us integrate even events from seemingly impossible experiences into a more or less rationally coherent system—and therein exactly lies the core paradox of magical realist fiction. Magic is the indispensable element by which the traumatic imagination re-arranges, reconstructs, and re-presents reality when mimetic reality-testing hits the wall of an unassimilated—and inassimilable event. (70)

Arva ultimately argues that magical realism is an ethical approach to narrativizing trauma, as the impossibility of its magical elements never allows a traumatic event to



enter into a narrative characterized by logic and causality, which would thereby allow the traumatic event to appear rational. Magical realism's resistance to the application of rationality to a traumatic event forms the basis of its critique against systems that produce trauma in the "real" world, and it also recognizes narrative's inability to fully capture or represent traumatic experience:

Consequently, magical realist authors differ, in fact, from their realist predecessors only in their honesty to admit—and in their courage to foreground—the failure of their own narratives to achieve total credibility. ... The magical realist text (as offshoot of the fantastic genre) deliberately disorients readers exactly in order to make them more aware of their world and to strengthen their sense of belonging in it. One must understand the magical realist universe not as a flight from reality but as a flight simulator, an artificial world within the real world, meant to prepare us for a better grasp of it. (Arva 108-9)

In magical realism's ability to defamiliarize a reader, the text creates the distance necessary for ethically witnessing a traumatic event in literature, a distance that produces what LaCapra calls "empathic unsettlement." This distance, or as Arva puts it, disorientation prevents a reader from responding to a text through an ethically suspect reaction of vicarious traumatization, one that doesn't acknowledge the second-hand witnessing of the traumatic event.

Thus, magical realism does not employ fantastic elements in order to facilitate an escape from the reader's "real" world but attempts to prompt engagement through its dissonant, defamiliarizing version of diegetic reality. The literary history of magical realism reflects the style's engagement with social and political life, and Arva positions the emergence of the term in 1925 as an artistic response to the horrific realities produced by World War I (97-8). In a similar vein, Eva Aldea, following Frederic Jameson, argues that magical realism's deep engagement with social and political realities has been a

particularly vital tool for postcolonial literature (Aldea 9). In the radical difference between the magic and the real within the magical realist text,

[t]he order of realism is the expression of the territorial field of history and politics, and reveals this realm's inherent structural rigidity as its limit. It defines the magic as that which escapes this limit, and becomes a supplement to realism ... as an element which allows for the imagining of a new people unfettered by the constraints of existing politics, society, and culture. (149)

Because the nation-state serves as a dominant "constraint" through which individuals imagine existing political, social, and cultural affinity, magical realism's ability to simultaneously unsettle and surpass this type of limitation on affiliation positions it as an ideal style within which to detect the transnational.

Magical realism's history of engagement with war and colonization make it a particularly fitting fictional mode through which to explore the contexts of West Virginia and Korea during the 1950s. Along with the representation of political, economic, environmental, and social upheaval in *Lark and Termite's* settings, Phillips employs magical realism to reveal how national power structures individuals' lives in these contexts and to transgress the boundaries of the nation by linking the bodies of her characters. The magical realist dimension in *Lark and Termite* draws upon both the supernatural and the uncanny in its breach of temporal and spatial boundaries. In terms of the supernatural, the text brings Leavitt and Lola back to life by reanimating them in different bodily forms. Leavitt reappears in the 1959 setting of the novel through the mysterious figure of Robert Stamble, the social worker with whom only Lark and Termite interact, and whose reality becomes unsettled by the end of the novel with Solly's inability to see him. Lola reappears in the 1959 as the figure of an orange cat, a stray animal whose presence and location Termite can mysteriously detect even when not in

visual range of the cat; the end of the novel clearly expresses this reincarnation by stating, "Lola's the cat" (282). In terms of this final section's examination of war trauma as postmemory, however, I will focus primarily on the *Lark and Termite's* employment of the uncanny, as this feature of magical realism shapes the bodily gestures of the children and effects the tie between the West Virginia and Korean settings.

As the different temporal narratives weave together within *Lark and Termite*, a gestural symmetry emerges between a Korean brother and sister who are with Leavitt in the tunnel at No Gun Ri in 1950 and Lark and Termite in West Virginia in 1959. In Korea, Leavitt leads a group of Korean refugees along the railroad tracks near No Gun Ri. Along the retreat, a girl emerges from the crowd: "A girl stands full in front of Leavitt, blocking his path, burdened by the nearly grown child on her back. She fills his vision, shocking and sudden" (29). The girl's elderly great-aunt has fallen down on the tracks, and she cannot help the elderly woman while she holds her brother. Recognizing that she needs help from the U.S. soldiers, "She glares at Leavitt, enraged that she needs help, angry at herself. She can't carry the boy on her back and pick up the old woman, yet she won't put the boy down, not here, even for a moment" (30). The fierce devotion that the girl shows for her brother mirrors Lark's devotion to Termite, and the gesture of carrying the boy on her back anticipates a scene from the 1959 setting. Lark describes how Termite has grown to an extent that requires her to hold him differently: "He gets longer, too long to be carried in my arms, up against my shoulder anymore, like a baby. This year I carry him on my back, with his arms crossed around my neck" (102). This image of the older sister carrying her frail brother on her back immediately recalls the statement from Phillips above that "[c]hildren take on their parents' unresolved issues and

emotional dilemmas, and this comes out in all kinds of subtle ways...Not to resolve them, but to help carry the burden—to keep their parents alive, in a sense" (Homes 46). Here, the girls physically assume the role of the parent in their caretaking of their brothers, enacting through a bodily gesture the effect of parental absence on their lives.

This similarity in physical styling between the Korean girl and Lark echoes with the uncanny, a doubling that disorients the reader in geographical space and time. The idea of the uncanny is particularly useful in looking at *Lark and Termite* because it brings together physical, social, and psychic forms of displacement that can accompany war trauma into the next generation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "uncanny" has several meanings, from dangerous or unreliable, to supernatural or uncomfortably familiar. In his 1919 essay on the uncanny, Freud delves into what makes an experience or figure uncanny, and writes that the uncanny "is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (20). Freud literally translates the root word *heimlich* of the German word *unheimlich* meaning uncanny, as "familiar, native, or belonging to the home." At once we see the way that the uncanny pairs affective dislocation with a sense of physical displacement from the home, which strikes a prominent note in a novel in which all the focalizing characters are exiles of some sort. Leavitt and Lola both run away from their homes, and Lark and Termite have been sent away by their now dead mother to live with Nonie, a home which the flood ruins by the end of the novel. And, of course, the uncanny in this sense of troubling the concept of home has a deep resonance for the Korean refugees who are forced by the war to leave their home villages.

An even more uncanny doubling takes shape in the Korean boy and Termite, whose bodies bear magical similarities to one another. Leavitt immediately recognizes that the boy on the Korean girl's back is somehow disabled: "The boy tilts his head oddly. Too old to be carried, he's crippled, slow-witted, something. ... He must be eight, nine. He moves his head, listening, the curved shell of his ear turned up. ... He's blind. That's why the girl won't put him down" (30-1). Significantly, Termite is also nine years old, and the Korean boy's physical disabilities mirror, in many ways, Termite's condition as "minimally hydrocephalic...and visually impaired" (50). The boys are both physically unable to walk, and the description of their legs becomes an even more explicit connection between them; once his sister has put him down, Leavitt describes the Korean boy in the tunnel: "He sits, insectlike, his thin legs drawn up" (184). By describing the boy's posture as "insectlike," we are immediately reminded of Termite. Further, this description of his sitting position matches Termite's: "His legs were always curved, but we used to keep them out in front of him. It was later that he whined and made noises until we tucked them under him, like he didn't want to see them anymore after he knew what they were" (86).

The physical immobility of the boys' legs contrasts the shared gesture of their hands. Early in the novel, Lark describes one of Termite's characteristic gestures: "He moves his fingers the way he does, with his hands up and all his fingers pointing, then curving, each in a separate motion, fast or careful. He never looks at his fingers but I always think he hears or knows something through them, like he does it for some reason" (34). With his visual impairment and inability to walk, Termite's fingers become sensors or, as appropriate for his name, feelers that perceive the world around him. By this point

in the book, we have learned that Leavitt was trumpet player in a jazz club in Louisville, Kentucky, which aligns Termite's curving fingers with his father's hand gestures of playing the trumpet. Additionally, though, the Korean boy also displays this hand gesture in the tunnel:

He sees the boy's hands hovering over him, his fingers open and parted, faintly moving. Leavitt tries to speak to him, but he only makes a sound, an exhalation. The boy turns his head as though to hear more intently, moves to touch his wrist to Leavitt's face. It's as though he reads sound with touch, as though his fingers are too sensitive to bear contact and he discerns sensation with the underside of his wrist. (184)

Leavitt interprets the boy's gesture much in the same way as Lark had interpreted Termite's finger movement, as a means to perceive the world in compensation for his other weaker senses. Thus, this movement of fingers encircles Termite, the Korean boy, and Leavitt in a shared gesture. Lark's assertion that Termite moves his fingers "like he does it for some reason" proves valid when we understand the movement as magically inherited from Leavitt and the Korean boy.

The description of the Korean boy's gestures above in relation to Leavitt in the tunnel also ties in another of Termite's mysterious, repeated gestures in the 1959 setting. As the boy "moves to touch his wrist to Leavitt's face," he reprises Termite's gesture earlier in the novel of holding one of his prized possessions, a tiny moon-shaped pitcher with a face on it—and rubbing his fingers across the surface of the face: "He holds it in his lap, rubs the flat of his wrist across its grimace of a face that's all wrinkles and bulging cheeks, like no face, even a porcelain face is too small to wink or sigh. Termite moves his wrist across and across the bumpy surface like he didn't have hold of it just this morning" (92). The Korean boy's gesture of moving his wrist across Leavitt's face recontextualizes Termite's attachment to the moon pitcher. The blind boy's touching

could likely be an attempt to feel the structure of Leavitt's face in order to establish a picture of him in his mind. Also, because Leavitt has been shot and presumably dies in the tunnel, the boy could be moving his wrist across Leavitt's nose and mouth to determine if he is still breathing. In this light, Termite's gesture of running his wrist across the face on the moon pitcher stages a physical lament for his father's absence, an attempt to put together a picture of his face. Unable to express his feelings in other ways, Termite's postwar trauma expresses itself in a repetitive style of those earlier gestures between Leavitt and the Korean boy in 1950.

The physical disability of the two nine-year olds belies their seemingly magical ability to foresee future events. As though the Korean boy and Termite's mind meet midway in the tunnel of time separating them, the boy can sense the disastrous massacre about to take place in the same way that Termite senses the impending flood in 1959. They register this awareness of looming danger through an alertness of their bodies. For example, before the planes strafe the Korean civilians on the railroad tracks near the bridge, Leavitt "feels the boy's small body go rigid, his apprehension heighten to a nearly audible pitch ... Suddenly he understands, and he hears what the boy hears. Planes" (32). Similarly, when Lark and Termite are under the railroad tunnel in West Virginia, Termite senses the coming rising of the river: "The river and the tunnel darken around him and he feels the river roll, deep and thick, folding like drenched fabric" (180); from Lark's perspective of the same moment under the bridge, she sees that suddenly "Termite has clenched his fingers" (154). Both the Korean boy and Termite, though visually impaired, become seer figures through their bodies, and Termite uncannily reenacts the physical alertness the Korean boy had displayed in the tunnel.

The magical, uncanny linkage between the Korean boy and Termite forms an alternate chain of influence for postwar trauma's transmissions within the unit of the family. Suggested by Termite's name, a compelling model for this type of new association emerges in nature between social insects, who form "complex spatio-temporal patterns" in their building of nests: "Without centralized control, workers are able to work together and collectively tackle tasks far beyond the abilities of any one individual. The resulting patterns produced by a colony are not explicitly coded at the individual level, but rather they emerge from myriads of simple nonlinear interactions between individuals or between individuals and their environment" (Theraulaz 1265). Phillips's description of both boys as "insectlike" in some way suggests this kind of decentralized social attunement, an alternative form of affiliation against the reductive nation-bound affiliations whose friction amongst one another spark war during the twentieth century. Also, this vision of interconnectivity across space and time rejects a U.S. view of war that positions its harmful effects as always elsewhere in the world.

This interconnectivity emerges most clearly in the sections that Termite narrates in the third-person, which express his inability or reluctance to differentiate between himself and objects and people around him and suggest his perception of his own body as porous to his surroundings. In reference to her other fiction, Phillips has described her use of third-person narration as a strategy of establishing connection between characters: "I didn't want to break the 'God's eye' aspect of the narrative voice by working in the first person; there had to be a sense of magical inevitability to the connections between the characters, and to what happened once they reached one another" (Robertson "Interview")



74). Importantly, Termite is the only surviving character who narrates in the third-person, which indicates a privileging of his "God's-eye" viewpoint.

Drawing on the scientific language of social insects above, the uncanny bodily relation of the children in *Lark and Termite* across space and time produce "resulting patterns" of textual correspondence in Phillips's narrative that resist seeing postwar trauma as transmitted only within spheres of Western families. The "complex spatio-temporal patterns" of the novel produce an uncanniness within *Lark and Termite* that reorients our view of war trauma's postmemory by positing multiple sources of inheritance of in a way that restores a relational view of war. While we see the magically inherited traits of Lola and Leavitt in *Lark and Termite*, we also see how two of the children killed in the massacre at No Gun Ri pass on their gestures to Lark and Termite. This expanded network of affiliation wrought from the painful experiences of the Korean War trace a minor transnational viewpoint between the poor, vulnerable, and outcast within both Korean and U.S. societies.

Phillips's use of the uncanny bodies of magical realism importantly unearths that "which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light" (Freud 47). The uncanny, in this way, works against the urge to repress a story, a vital point for the story of a massacre whose obscurity has been produced by the repressive forces of nationalist and racist versions of history. Termite's telling gesture that directly addresses this repression of the massacre at No Gun Ri is his consistent urge to draw:

He starts moving the colors as soon as I give him the crayons, edging a perfect curve on the newsprint. Over and over, fast, then slow, like there's one arc he can trace. He leans forward, starts and doesn't stop, both hands. He presses darker and darker, like he's been waiting to cover the words and the white, like he knows all his drawings are one picture I keep interrupting. (140)

The picture that Termite presses hard into the newspaper is his vision of the tunnel, and Termite's consistent desire "to cover the words and the white" with the shape of the tunnel signify his counternarrative, his attempt to fill the gap in U.S. public knowledge and public forgetting about the Korean War. The incident of No Gun Ri is glaringly absent from the U.S. newspapers of the 1950s, and Termite seeks to counteract this omission by putting the tunnel on the page, testifying to the deaths of the Koreans.

As this drawing of the tunnel textually plays out and in Phillips's network of magically linked bodies, *Lark and Termite* extends postmemory's expanding, rippling effect to encircle the Korean civilians killed in No Gun Ri, attempting to counteract a U.S. forgetting by locating the very impact of these deaths in American characters. Linking Phillips's magical realist style to Yunte Huang's counterpoetics, we see how the pattern of correspondences in *Lark and Termite* constitutes a "poetics [that] hovers between the literal and the metaphoric, the historical and the mimetic. ... they move instead toward the enactment of poetic imagination as a means to alter memory and invoke minority survival in the deadly space between competing national, imperial interests and between authoritative regimes of epistemology serving those interests" (Huang 5). The uncanniness produced through the bodily gestures of Lark and Termite overturn a dominant concern for the mechanics by which trauma passes from generation to generation as so often considered in cognitive approaches to trauma theory. Instead, in a more ethically expansive move, Phillips's magical realist articulation of postmemory concentrates on worlding the network of influence within postmemory, especially highlighting the precarity and sensitivity of children's bodies within exploited territories.

While the novel includes the supernatural effects of Leavitt and Lola returning to the 1959 plot through Stamble and the cat, it traces a direct bodily continuum between the children affected by war. In this, Phillips allocates the ghostly, supernatural elements of the text to the American soldier character and suffering wife on the homefront, rather than cast the non-American characters as ghosts. This reverses a trend within war fiction, discussed in Chapter 1 of this study, to represent "the enemy" as less than human through spectralization, and it marks the U.S. soldier as those who haunt the living. Leavitt recognizes this reversal as he lies in the tunnel in Korea:

Rural people believe that violent death or death afar requires the soul to journey home, and so the most modest, isolated villages are rebuilt again and again, even if the walls are straw and mud. The living leave hints for the dead. Ghosts are not feared. There are no ghosts. The most common form of Korean greeting is a question: *Are you at peace?* The soldiers, Leavitt thinks, the invaders and foreign protectors, become the ghosts, flying through time, across oceans, nothing to guide them but intent and need. (82)

Leavitt's use of the term "rural people" further links the village people of South Korea and the poverty-stricken people of Appalachia. Yet, here we see that there is an acknowledgment of the dead within rural Korean society, as the living establish communion with the dead through "hints for the dead" about how to return home. Further a concern for peace structures the very terms of their interactions with one another, never letting the issue of peace be taken for granted.

These practices of remembrance of the dead sharply contrast the forgetting of the Korean War in a U.S. context, the transpacific flight of these American ghosts having "nothing to guide them." The "ghosting" of these American soldiers becomes a material vanishing in the fact that many soldiers bodies, like Leavitt's, were never repatriated after

the war.<sup>51</sup> In the novel's end, the magical realist bodies of *Lark and Termite* establish a chain of gestures that allows the children to live, the symmetry of bodies suggesting that through Lark and Termite's escape from Winfield, we may also imagine the Korean brother and sister slipping out of the tunnel unharmed by the Americans. Yet, this imagined escape of the Korean children constitutes part of the novel's dissonant, ethical magic; for as Phillips insists on making clear at the outset in the novel's dedication, children did die at No Gun Ri. Dedicated to three children, the final lists, "for Cho, infant boy born and died in the tunnel at No Gun Ri, July 1950." In a later interview, Phillips confirms the historicity of this dedication, saying that the baby Cho was "a name I read on a list of victims as I was researching No Gun Ri, a baby who was born and died in the tunnel. Long after writing the novel, I learned that his mother, trying to protect those still alive, suffocated him so that his crying wouldn't draw fire" (Johnston). This heartbreaking historical fact included in the novel before the onset of the fiction commemorates the victims of No Gun Ri, yet its positioning in the dedication also preserves an important ethical distance from the history of the massacre at No Gun Ri. For the ultimate magical realist move in *Lark and Termite's* treatment of the Korean War is that we never see any of the characters actually die, and the pages play out their presence: "We could say there is no death in literature, no nothingness, because language bears witness continually, burning its shape into the mind of the reader. In literature, we don't die; we merely think about dying, and darkness is the stark relief against which the light of words fall" (Phillips "Guided" 34). In an important point not yet raised about the

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<sup>51</sup> The politics surrounding the repatriation of soldiers' remains during and after the Korean War was highly influenced by class and socio-economic considerations, and rather than challenge a KIA or MIA status, families largely accepted the government's pronouncement. This highly contrasted the fierce public debates about bringing bodies and POWs home from Vietnam (Keene 71).

novel, while Phillips names the baby Cho and the location of No Gun Ri in the dedication, she never names the Korean boy and girl or the location of the railroad bridge in the fictional portion of the novel itself, ethically preserving an important gap where the silence engendered by massacre suspends the magic of fiction.

The tunneling or transpacific flight of traumatic memories as they weave their way through families leave their mark on children who grow up in the wake of their parents' war memories. In the case of *A Gesture Life* and *Lark and Termite*, postmemory takes shape through a complex interplay of the previous generation and one's own memories. What both of these novels accentuate about the concepts of postmemory and the transpacific in reference to trauma, is that the histories of World War II and the Korean War are far from finished, and continue to play out in the geopolitical spaces of the Pacific and the U.S. because of longer systems of capitalism, empire, and the military industrial complex. The effects, these novels reminds us, are not merely economic or historical narratives that can be neatly segmented in the chapters of history textbooks; rather, the effect upon the "postgeneration" in both novels is one that persists in their bodily relation to the world, testifying to the long-lasting impact of war.

My move in this final chapter toward the transpacific repercussions of war as an alternative way to think about the legacy of American wars also gestures toward the rising tide of oceanic studies and the promise it holds for American literary studies. Scholars such as Rob Wilson argue that the ocean is generative space through which to think about the destruction that the nation turns away from in its past, yet whose consequences continue to wash up on its shores and disrupt its hegemony. Particularly in

the instance of the transpacific, oceanic studies remind us that the discourses of dominance that emerge from U.S. involvement in the Pacific region reorient our understanding of the American past; Wilson describes this transpacific imagination as a vital project of transnational American studies: "a transnationalized cultural studies must come to more fluid (and *critical*) terms with these dismantled territories of place, identity, and community. 'America' needs to be found, as well, offshore and over the ocean, where identity flows and deforms and creativity takes place along a line of flight across the older world-system geographies of New England and Canton province" (8). In light of the Pacific flows of history and the continued rippling out of traumatic experience from the impact of U.S. wars, the fiction of war's postmemory calls us to attend to the potential repercussions of staking a national claim in "America's Pacific Century."

## CONCLUSION

*Writers are among the most sensitive, the most intellectually anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists. The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power. The languages they use and the social and historical context in which these languages signify are indirect and direct revelations of that power and its limitations.*

--Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

*...when you make a bomb you are also constructing a statement, employing a more complicated grammar than is required. It's the way civilized man now encumbers his territory, not with great walls or stretches of wire but with a single well-placed device, a neat bundling with the workings of a mind. It reads time, speaks volumes. Long after the flash, the concussive burn, it will speak to you again, at your fine desk, in your fine bed. Saying these are your certain ruins.*

--Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*

Chang-rae Lee's provocative description above of "civilized man" establishing the boundaries of his territory with a "single well-placed device" purposefully intermingles the bellicose and the verbose, bringing to a flashpoint the afterimage of the written word. The bomb as a statement alerts us to the powerful ways that language's framing of the world has the ability to extinguish—the shared ability that technologies of both destruction and representation have to select or decimate the lives of others. In my readings of literature here, I have attempted to lay bare the assumptions and textual mechanisms—"the neat bundling with the workings of a mind"—by which U.S. war fiction and the scholarship on this genre have participated in the construction of nationalist visions of war.

While my examination of gesture always seeks to situate characters' bodies within particular historical and geopolitical spaces, the fictional presentation of these gestures does more than simply mirror a "real" past. These authors' representations of the bodily encounters involved in war and its aftermath reconfigure our understanding of war and its legacy. Balancing a gesture to the world on one side and a gesture to particular human suffering on the other, the body of U.S. war fiction that holds these views together does

more than mimic its historical source material. This fiction insistently points to the fact that "war trauma" for many affected by U.S. wars is not only a matter of the traumatization from the event of war, but that the pain, memory, and forgetting so associated with this war trauma is also sparked and sustained by particular intersections of race, class, gender, and nationality. The bodies of fictional characters hold these intersections in view, and while they testify to the uneven precarity that individuals face in the crosshairs of war, their gestures break the frames of historiography and simultaneously spark new possibilities for resistance, collaboration, and rebellion. As Anna Tsing expresses about the materiality of the particular encounters, "friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" (5). Ultimately, through the unscripted unpredictability of gestures in fiction, literary texts preserve a view to a particular experience of war trauma while also bodily rewriting the memory and the future implications of these wars.

This performative dimension of gestures constitutes what Morrison describes as "the ability of writers to imagine what is not the self," to imagine radically different worlds. The gestures that have most intrigued me in this study are those in which characters' bodies enact meaning that comes into friction with the diegetic world of the text, where the dissonance created by characters' gestures carries a different message about war experience. These chapters each demonstrate the ways in which O'Brien, O'Neill, Hemingway, Morrison, Lee, and Phillips employ representations of the human body to push the representational capacity of language past its current limits. These authors draw upon the conventions of war literature while at the same time embedding within these conventions those "single-well placed device[s]" of gesture whose



performativity sparks a reinvention of language. In these authors' ability to harness the generativity of language, they resist the temptation so common in American culture to regard violence as somehow unspeakable, attributing to violence itself a dematerialized, sublime status (Bachner 13). Insistently grounding violence in the material relations between interacting characters, these authors move beyond the quintessential postmodern "failure" of literary language and instead reveal how this failure participates in nationalistic logic.

In this textual experimentation and fictional language's reach beyond reference, gesture invites our ethical appraisals of war. The relational aspect of war and traumatic experience points to the ways in which fiction can resituate the individual subject as radically connected to other individuals in a wider social totality approaching a world scale. The enlarged scale of social being in these war texts can spark an ethical reappraisal of how U.S. power intersects representational forms along the lines that J. Hillis Miller describes in *The Ethics of Reading*:

If there is to be such a thing as an ethical moment in the act of reading...[t]here must be an influx of performative power from the linguistic transactions involved in the act of reading into the realms of knowledge, politics, and history. Literature must be in some way a cause and not merely an effect, if the study of literature is to be other than the relatively trivial study of one of the epiphenomena of society, part of the technological assimilation or assertion of mastery over all features of human life which is called the "human sciences." (5)

In the mixture of mimetic and prophetic, the performativity of traumatic experience's textual representation reaches out to us from the page, engaging us as readers in the critical negotiation of the sites of war. In the American context, when this reach of language becomes aware of its own national and referential limitations but lays itself

down on the page to block the path of progressivist history, a transnational view of trauma preserves its place in literature.

War fiction not only reveals the gaps, repetition, and pain associated with traumatic experience, but characters in literary texts perform self-making on a textual level. In the Butlerian sense of this performativity, "the possibilities of...transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" ("Performative" 520). War and traumatic experience produce a bodily precarity among interacting subjects that troubles the very sense of inside and out, and thereby reveals the porous nature of subjectivity itself. This likewise troubles a static view of national affiliation, economics, culture, or other material realities. Part of the message of war trauma is that it remakes these worlds, and the gestures of war participants reveal the very openness and malleability of global relations. Rather than relegate ourselves to repetitions of traumatic experience hopelessly bound to a cyclical vision of history, the transnational trauma within U.S. war fiction reveals the contingency of historical events and re-opens the possibility of "a different sort of repeating" for the future.

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