

VIETNAM AS 'FRONTIER': SOME LITERARY RESPONSES

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Abstract

This article points out the literary response aroused by the military experience of the United States in Vietnam in terms of a recalling of the frontier myth. A limited number of works are taken in order to probe the Cooperesque reminiscences the writers hold when describing Vietnam as a space devoid of civilization and its inhabitants as «Indians».

Undoubtedly, to talk about Vietnam as the last —and failed— American frontier, can stir up a controversy I particularly want to avoid. This is a massive subject, too complex to be comprehended, attained and finally stated in these few pages; American social historians can talk about it much better than I could ever do. Nevertheless, my position as an observer of American literary history allows me to realize that the frontier, both as a myth (an abstraction of American expectations) and as physical hinterland (that would actualize those illusions) has existed throughout the literary history of the United States —therefore, no one should be surprised at seeing it alive in the American narratives dealing with the Vietnam War.

It might also seem risky to generalize about these works, as their number increases year after year. I have in fact chosen five works, only: Charles Durden's *No Bugles, No Drums*, Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, James Webb's *Fiefs of Fire*, Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* and Stephen Wright's *Meditations in Green*¹. Of course, five narratives are very few in comparison with the whole of imaginative works on Vietnam. But I think they may be

representative of at least a great part of these works written by Americans on the war, and the conclusions we might draw could be extended to many a novel or narrative.

In one sense, the idea of the frontier as literary ingredient is old enough to create a centennial tradition: let's not lose sight of Crèvecoeur's or Franklin's, or less far-off in time, Cooper's writings. But curiously, it was a social historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, who would give in his essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* the clues to probe the persistence of that myth as co-protagonist in the works that take Vietnam as stage and/or reference. Social historians agree in summarizing Turner's thesis as an argument running that there was for a long period a settled East and an unsettled West, a civilized region and a frontier region, that the people were moving from the settled region into the unsettled one, that the process of moving and occupying raw land had its effects on those who moved, and that the whole long process had a reflex effect on the older region whence the people came. So, we could say that the frontier Turner regarded was a four-sided entity that portrayed different traits. Sometimes it was an area; at other times it was synonymous with the Western part of the United States. At still other times, the frontier was the creator of a national way of life. Then, at others, Turner wrote of it as an abundance of natural resources.

Indeed, to some extent our approach to the Vietnam adventure can fit into Turner's idea of the frontier as one of the constituents of the American culture. But we have to bear in mind that Turner's frontier was a four-sided, closed concept. Yet I think that the frontier experience in Vietnam, as it seems to appear in its literary response, was much wider, and I suggest that the one evoked in these five works be shaped after an amoeba, rather. I do so because, despite seeing some of Turner's principles fulfilled, we can also appreciate a gradual contradiction, which finally leads us to assume a reversion of his thesis.

Thus, let me begin by commenting in the first place the side of Turner's square I think is most obviously reversed in the literature of the Vietnam War. Turner described the frontier as a chant to a land rife with natural resources. In our case, to the contrary, what is *Meditations in Green* but an elegy to all that green Vietnam scorched by the orange technology imported from the United States? But not only Wright meditates upon the wastage occasioned by the American army in Vietnam. An irate as well as impotent Caputo and a perplexed Webb record the effects of gasoline rain and smoke grenades of the rice paddies of the Highland peasants; and the hilarious circular letter or a non-existent Vietnam Fertilization Program private Hawkins shows to Lieutenant Whipple is nothing but a sour

reflection of Durden on the spoiling wake the American military would leave during their intervention in Southeast Asia.

Secondly, Turner saw the frontier as the Western part of the United States. In our narratives California is the last spot of civilized territory. By plane or by boat, engine-powered carts, these pioneers light out for the West, until they arrive at their scheduled but stressful destinations, absolutely different from anywhere they had ever lived in: «We were in the middle of No Man's Nam and nobody'd seen a Gino's or MacDonald's since we left West Coast civilization», says private Hawkins in *No Bugles, No Drums* (p. 27).

The same way Easterners would run to the Middle West and the Western territories, Vietnam frontiersmen start a journey that ends at either Saigon airport or Danang harbour. But once they have arrived there, the steady East-West move finishes for good, and is replaced with a multi-directional motion. It could be South-North, regarding Saigon as the civilized spot and starting point: «the contryside was either blasted cold and dead or already back in Charles' hands. Saigon remained, the repository and the arena, it breathed history, expelled it like toxin», as says Herr in *Dispatches* (p. 41). But also, the move could be North-South, beginning from Hue; or paradoxically West-East, as they would start from Pleiku or some other area founded or updated by the marines. Still more difficult to predict was the frontier these characters encounter as they are dropped off a helicopter in some wood clearing that serves as landing zone. There they face, front and rear, a ubiquitous jungle and the perils it contains, as we will soon see. And in this last case, there is no trail to go back, no direction to retrace.

In the third place, Turner apparently thought of the frontier also as a social process that starts the making of the American way of life for those actual participants in the settling and exploiting of vacant lands. Those people would help increase the amount of «civilized» land. Herr, Caputo, Webb, Wright, and Durden clearly show the phenomenon reversed. Not only are their characters unable to bring the Vietnamese frontier under control, but they start to undergo a recessive process that usually ends up in either the post traumatic stress syndrome or going over to the enemy, if they are not killed first².

Now and then, the pioneers-as-characters face raw nature. But unlike Cooper's, Vietnam's Leatherstockings do not come from a nation in the making. These arrive from the urban America of the second half of the Twentieth Century. And despite their relinquishment of attaining a state of real freedom and dignity for themselves as individuals —as well as their collective renunciation of working out their own destinies since they become members of the military institution— they want to dodge their

share of the responsibility for the ongoing barriers of social and racial caste and the inequality of opportunities persistent within the community they come from.

As can be seen in these five works, most of the characters arrive in Vietnam to be what they had been banned from in their native lands. Even Goodrich, the Harvard dropout in *Fields of Fire* (mind the Dickensian surname), puts on his platoon with a spurious personality he would never have had in the States, overprotected as he had been by his archetypal middle-class family. And self-fulfilment they all attempt with the aid of Power-conducted violence. In this context, the function Vietnam serves is not unrelated to Turner's explanation of the frontier as a «safety valve», as an economical and social escape for the needy when bad times came.

Vietnam as recipient to void one's dissatisfaction is a simile present in all these writings. Thus, Vietnam is a vortex that digests all America has rejected as unwanted. For their part, Durden and Caputo come to terms with the social conditions that coerced their marines into accepting Vietnam as a solution. As Caputo puts it, «a man who wore that uniform was somebody. He had passed a test others could not. He was not some down-on-his-luck loser pumping gas or washing cars for a dollar-fifty an hour, but somebody, a Marine» (*Rumor...* p. 28). Duden, a fatalist, depicts a similar case, although tainted with hipster-like existentialism, emphasizing the falsehood of social mobility, another American myth: «lower-middle-class poor, with just enough light to let you know where's a tunnel —but never enough to let you see the end» (*No Bugles...* p. 36).

But perhaps the emphasis on showing the United States as a wasteland that pushes its young male citizens to become both pioneers and cannon fodder is nowhere so explicit as in the first chapters of *Fields of Fire*. For being the mildest narrative at sentencing the American role in Vietnam in comparison with the other four works, *Fields of Fire* is, in my opinion, the one that condemns most energetically the socio-cultural and economical conditions that drove the men into the war. The following is a description of the district where one of Webb's candidates to Marine lived:

Concrete wasteland, beaten by the years and by neglect into cumbering uselessness. Unpainted fences and gates and little brown squares of yard, cold reminders of more vibrant days. Grass choked out by trash and bottles. Piles of garbage and broken appliances on the sidewalks.

(*Fields...*, p. 24)

Reading sentences like these prepares us to guess at and accept the recruiting station as salvage. And what Webb affirms of Snake's

environment can be applied to those of his other characters, with hardly one or two exceptions. Thus, all their characters fight a war ready-made for the poor and the alienated; and the codes of honour and human nobility and even respect to Nature, with which American writers used to supply their characters in many novels of World Wars I and II and the Spanish Civil War are definitively lost.

Lastly, the frontier in Turner's writings is a physical area —that is to say, the zone where civilization meets the wild; indeed, it is an obvious factor in all the five works I have chosen. Remember, for example, Herr's recollection of Saigon cemetery in *Dispatches*, located in an area of free fire between the Vietcong and the Allied American and South Vietnamese armies. It is remarkable how all these authors write down the ambushes the American fall in and how they repel them in terms of a clash of civilization and barbarism— which is not the same as a contest of good versus evil.

These writers divest the wild of the least hint of innocence. Murder does not exist despite the beauty of the forest, as in other wars written about by other authors; now the forest is a metonymy or murder. The land itself becomes the enemy, as Pilar Marin points out³. The picturesque idea of the frontier crammed with Indians persists in the beginning of all the works on Vietnam, when the platoons have not yet had time to get decimated. At this stage the concept of Vietcong —as *Charlie, Victor Charlie, gooks, slopes*, and so many other derisive addresses— is still soaked in the glorious memoirs of World War II. But none of these thoughts remains in their minds when they understand the actual meaning of Vietnam. Repeating Ron Kovic words, «We really became intelligent when we realized that we had been used»⁴.

The dichotomy frontier/civilization is not known after the traditional opposition West/East, or more plainly, Vietnam/the United States. They chose the opposition the *Bush/the World*, full of connotations and in line with their longings, delusions and frustrations. By baptizing Vietnam the Bush, these Marines initiate a *communal* examination of the heart of darkness of their native country, they enter «the dark side of the moon», as Gordon Taylor puts it⁵. They all are aware that the enmity of the forest transcends physical hostility. It lets them catch a glimpse of the storm to come.

The «1000-yard stare» is the first symptom of their being sucked up by the physical strength of that frontier they simply could not image back home. The Bush, then, becomes even an animate entity that sometimes plays the role of referee between them and the Vietcong. It is the raw material of their insanity as a pioneer community. And on a personal level, the individual touched by the Bush probes those «ifs» he had kept until he

was in Vietnam. As Wright suggests: «Moving through it, conscious of it, you were conscious of yourself. Irrevocably itself, a presence distinct and unyielding, it offered opportunities for definition» (*Meditations...*, p. 77). It is also his being in contact with the Bush that disillusion Goodrich (*Fields of Fire*) about the impossible ideal of fighting a war in which human rights may be respected. Similarly, Lieutenant Whipple (*No Bugles, No Drums*) resigns to the fact that no matter how hard he will try time and again, he will never become an example of a military man. And Hodges (*Fields of Fire*) learns from the Bush his inability to enhance honour following the codes valid until World War II.

As the Bush is such a mystifying frontier, the «Indians» it takes must be specially rehearsed to sap the contradictory consciousness of the Americans who arrived in Vietnam after an undercover exclusion from the Great Society. I think Caputo's approach to them, in this respect, is the most striking. Even when he was a child, the Indians he could imagine had nothing to do with the race of savages John Wayne used to «give some» on TV. On the contrary, they were members that belonged to a mythical past, anachronistic but spiritually honest— unlike his own time: «Once in a while I found flint arrowheads in the muddy creek bank. Looking at them, I would dream of that savage, heroic time and wished I had lived then, before America became a land of salesmen and shopping centers» (*Rumor...*, p. 5). Fighting in Vietnam leads him to hate that country and its people, sometimes to the point of alienation. However, in the end he acknowledges his feelings have matured; we can then read that «the war simply wasn't my show any longer. I had declared a truce between me and the Vietcong, signed a personal armistice, and all I asked now was a change to live for myself on my terms» (p. 332). Unwittingly, Caputo-as-narrator managed to live a time like the one he had dreamt of.

The myth of the good savage versus the bad one is present in these narratives as well; but here it is enlarged. Contrary to what we can see in an average frontier novel, the marines do not know where their enemy are. The problem is not so much to separate the good from the bad Vietnamese, who seem to be irreconcilable at first sight, following the instructions the Americans are given at the boot camp. On the one hand are the pervasive, ubiquitous, almost magic Vietcong; on the other, the more down-to-earth, existential «Kit Carson gook», the ex-Vietcong who finally made his mind up to fill his stomach with American C-rations, sooner than priding himself on his hunger. The real thing appears when they realize that between these two extremes there is a human interland that may swing to either direction and who not seldom ends up being slain by one or the other —or by both sides. This way the noble savage and the bloodthirsty villain (and here we cannot see clearly who is who, as M16s hurt no more

than AK47s) have to leave room for a silent majority whose resignation is as legendary as the war itself. *Fields of Fire* shows the best example of what I am suggesting. Webb focuses on Dan, a «Kit Carson gook» that deserts the Vietcong burdened by the need to feed a family, a need that apparently was not so crushing on the other side. Logically, his loved ones are summarily killed by the VC when the betrayal is discovered. Nonetheless, when he enters the marines' perimeter, Dan's thoughts dissolve into the amorphous mass of Vietnamese who believe that war is as natural as the rains:

He was processed quickly and took the oath of allegiance to the Government of Vietnam. He raised his hand and renounced the National liberation Front in his clear, melodious tones, making the oath a song. It is such a game, he thought, singing the oath. Governments are not real. Rice is real.

(*Fields...*, p. 208)

Once the American characters are posted against the frontier and its savages, we witness to which extent they regard killing as a moral problem. To some of them, from the outset, killing is an *ersatz* to reaching the goals they had been looking for. They realize that in spite of their belonging to the American disinherited, Vietnam is a place where they can have an opportunity to decide upon very many human lives. On their part, those who were the least deceived into this illusion, feel forced to recognize that for a number of months equations are to be established between setting hearts and minds on a cause on the one side, and killing, plus torturing, raping, defoliating, zippoing, etc., on the other. Goodrich and Hawkins share a repulsion for the massacre they witness during the first actions their respective patrols carry out. The former is shocked by the absence of «fair play» in the war; the latter sees no point in killing for the sake of the daily body count the Pentagon is so eager to publicize.

Little wonder the Cooperesque feeling of rejection of unnecessary violence is a troubled initiation to the pains of the battlefield. It is also true that this fact appears as a matter of course in those men drafted against their will; also, it can appear not surprisingly in Caputo, whose bitterness about his native country is stronger than the impressions that would have permeated him in Vietnam. However, it is remarkable to see how this problem fully affects Hawkins. He is not a sophisticated man, as Caputo or Goodrich are. A Deep South countryman, he rejects many of the dogmas his Northern fellows follow, and proudly tries to adopt his grandfather's attitude during the Civil War: that of giving up arms and

making the others back home believe that the war is over, at least for him —not out of cowardice, but because he had already had enough of it.

I completely agree with Walter Capps when he affirms that these stories are virtually uniform in their directing towards a lack of resolution. «Before we reach conclusions», he says, «they break off as if the chronicle doesn't go anywhere, as if it involves a plot that can find no resolution». But these words should not be understood in a pejorative sense, as some critics seems to do. That lack of resolution helps to reflect the fragmentary nature of the decade that spawned them. This leads to a vicious circle: irony slips into tenderness, tenderness into denunciation, denunciation into resentment, and back to irony. This way, the authors balance the insanity lived in Vietnam against that other insanity lived in the mainland.

Durden's is the most biting case. The irony we discover at first sight in the fact that a platoon of American soldiers are detailed to guard a pig farm in South Vietnam is enhanced by the author through his character-hero Hawkins, with an ambiguous remark that pulls down the whole «heart and minds» doctrine: «*Pig shit*. The fuckin' odor was incredible. Song My was just around the corner. We were home». (*No Bugles...*, p. 27).

The non-fiction narratives also play with the ambiguous reference to the war that lets us think of America as well. Somewhere in *Dispatches* Herr admonishes us in such a way that we do not know exactly which war he means, whether the one he finds there or the other the «civilized» people of the World are waging at the same time: «it was great if you could adapt, you had to try, but it wasn't the same as making a discipline (...) get swift when everything went to stop and all you could feel of your whole life was the entropy whipping through it» (p. 19).

Thus the civilizing wave these frontiersmen bring to Vietnam has to be as fragmentary as any approach to the sixties could be. To resist the splash of that wave we must count on the icons Tobey Herzog points out: «Rock music, drugs, body counts, helicopters and booby traps», as well as some of the factors that made them resemble anything but the most powerful army on Earth: «Their own lack of convictions and commitment, the absence of a well-defined enemy, non-existent short-time military objectives, loss of loyalty and pride within the military units, unfamiliar jungle terrain, extensive drug abuse, a strategy of measuring success by body counts, extensive media coverage, and the unpopularity of the war in the home front»⁷. Then, in the vortex of the bunkers, the mess halls, and the orderly rooms, the blare of a radio at full blast can muffle the din of the bombs and the shells. Jimmi Hendrix rivals Otis Redding, and as Herr records, George Wallace becomes an alternative to Robert Kennedy. Goodrich blesses all the men of his age and shelters them under the stars and stripes when he shouts at his father (an honourable relic from the

Second World War) that «civil disobedience is as American as —killing Indians!» (*Fields...*, p. 428). And again Hawkins, who perceives a reality compounded by the irreconcilable fragments he sees in a bunker: «The walls were covered in pinups, bright cloth, peace signs, posters of Ho, Mao, LBJ, Nixon» (*No Bugles...*, p. 90). As a result, this perception provokes him to utter a pontification *à la Warhol*: «America, we see your face in every snap-tap can of Schiltz» (p. 91).

Just in case this were not enough to appreciate the fragmentary nature of the American reality transported to Vietnam, the writers look for events, thought, topics, etc., that added to the main plot turn the narratives into hyperrealistic *tableaux*: Durden achieves it by means, among others, of a runaway beachboy, carrying no helmet or weapon of any sort, but a surfboard instead; or by the mock casualty report on the death of García, that should have stated «one apprentice bullfighter and one waterboo, KIA» (*No Bugles...*, p. 139).

Surrealism also touches Caputo's tale, as for example, when he notices that pigs indulge in charred corpses: «A memorable sight, pigs eating roast people» (*Rumor...*, p. 4). *Fields of Fire* shows Goodrich, deprived of a leg, and under the process of rethinking the role of his country in the war, addressing a meeting presided by a Vietcong flag. Similar absurdity is present in *Meditations in Green*, in the sergeant who is disgusted by the world news he reads in an issue of *Stars and Stripes*. He does not even seem to realize that he is in the middle of disgust. Herr, finally, talks about long-term plans in Vietnam, as opening a disco in Saigon «with a stained-steel dance floor, blowups of the best war photographs on the walls, and a rock group called 'Westy and the KIAs'» (*Dispatches*, p. 188).

The grotesque as a way of life, hence, creates the nonsensical tradition of lawlessness and the confirmation of a set of countervalues. At first sight, these appear to be alien to what the American people may have considered their cultural and political heritage. But a closer approach to them proves that they are macabre freaks of the constituents of the spiritual disolution the Union undergoes. «That may be why», puts Caputo very incisively, «Americans reacted with such horror to the disclosure of U.S. atrocities while ignoring those of the other side: the American soldier was a reflection of themselves» (*Rumor...*, p. XIX).

Contrary to what were their genuine wishes when they arrived in Vietnam, these twisted frontiersmen reproduce, alter, and distort the values they had brought with them from the United States. The merchant, the explorer, the hunter, the cattleman, turn out to be a gambler, a pusher, a headhunter, and a pimp, who bear the stigma of a Protestant, urban and industrialized society. A sense of individualism has therefore been forested in them, and it usually goes berserk even to a greater degree than it ever

had before. Individualism runs to lawlessness, and the socio-moral codes vanish as soon as the platoons dissolve once actions are over. So serious is this «brutish state» the marines fall in, that only court martials can stop them from committing the atrocities that cross their minds. Even so, some defy the legal restraints of the military, and their brutality quite surpasses the legendary cruelty of the Japanese to their fathers.

The five narratives I have chosen coincide in pointing out that this warped cruelty of their characters, although already in the making when they embarked for Vietnam, was fostered by the atmosphere that surrounded the military institution —beginning with the authority that did not want them to be soldiers of whatever cause, but to kill anybody and anything liable to become «Indian». Imagine, for example, the kind of approach to the Vietnamese reality a soldier can make if back at the boot camp he is taught geography as Wright conjures up:

Gentlemen, a map of Southeast Asia. This stub of land (Tap) hanging like a cook off the belly of China is the Indochinese peninsula. Here we have North Vietnam (Tap), South Vietnam (Tap), and Laos, Cambodia and Thailand (Tap. Tap. Tap). The Republic of Vietnam occupies the area roughly to the foreskin, from the DMZ at the Seventeenth parallel down along the coast of the South China Sea to the Mekong river in the delta. Today, this tiny nation suffers from a bad case of VD or, if you will, VC.

(Meditations in Green, p. 9)

It all had to lead to an insane complex of superiority —by the way, not alien to the axioms that led the Puritans to drive American Indians away.

Lastly, competition as an American value is also profited by the military. Caputo reports the killing of whomever seemed Vietcong for a six-pack, and Herr ponders on the meaning of the Green Berets as an addition of conducted sadism plus the social success money allows; however, Durden goes even further, when his colonel Levine opens a contest: «Competition. A silver loving cup for the company that kills the most gooks in any given month. And any company that wins three of them gets an all-expense-paid R&R» (*No Bugles...*, p. 116).

It should not be odd, then, that the men run amuck. But it all may work as a boomerang as well: the more debasingly the Army acts, the more offensive the rebel's replies are. The entire *A Rumor of War* could be taken as a violent indictment —but of what? America? Vietnam? The Establishment? The author's lament is too complex to be aimed at only those three culprits. Moreover, being tied down to the honesty of writing a personal memoir does not really give Caputo much allowance to enjoy himself with metaphors that may concentrate his resentment of the world.

Unlike Caputo, Wright's Griffin undergoes all the items numbered by Herzog in the quotation I mentioned before. As a soldier drilled in Kentucky and placed in Vietnam by the American army, Griffin is a human boomerang. Back in New York City, he carries out all possible rites that disassociate him from the rationality farce that surrounds him.

But in my opinion, no character out of these five works condemns the meaning of Vietnam as does Hawkins in *No Bugles, No Drums*. His superiors start to appreciate his manhood only when he has lost his fear of killing. But the more they respect him, the more he derides them and defiles the institution they all are supposedly obliged to. Even so, his scale of values is very much less corrupted than theirs. By the time the novel ends, Hawkins has been able to go back to Vietnam to fulfil a sense of intimate duty, friendship, and solidarity with his buddy Lieutenant Levine. Private Hawkins' feelings towards his brother-in-arms —though in this case homoeroticism might not be far off— are representative of those of most heroes in the Vietnam War novel. One's buddies seem to be the only object worth giving one's life for. In this sense, Pilar Marin's idea that no war literature ever written in the United States has given so much importance to comradeship as the Vietnam narratives is extremely accurate⁸.

Perhaps Durden strained the end of his novel a bit too much with the passage in which Hawkins successfully raids «Indian» territory and kills several Vietcongs, apart from an American turncoat. But even in the case that this last of Hawkins' actions reminds us of a shocking collage of his, Hawkins has little to do with that fabrication of the Reagan years. Hawkins values remain firm enough to be shocked or warped by the military Establishment. On the contrary, he allows himself to make a suggestion they did not happen to accept:

To them I musta looked like the end of their world, the ultimate insult - a bared-ass buck private holding a headless body without even a free arm to salute. So this is it, this is what our army has come to, from Valley Forge to Vietnam, two hundred years of tradition to produce a mad man. I don't know. Maybe they were just pissed that I hadn't had the decency to get myself killed.

(*No Bugles...*, p. 276)

Handing Levine's corpse over to this father seems almost subversive; doing it the way Hawkins does is the most violent inveigh he could afford against Authority. On his part, Durden manages to write a grotesque in line with the naturalistic tradition in American fiction. Therewith, he denounces the overpowering force of the State on the individual,

confirmed when Hawkins is lastly discharged from Duty on account of his «unshakable bad attitude».

And from my starting point of view in this commentary, he renounces (as do Wright, Caputo and Herr) the belief in any civilizing effects of the United States on the feeble Vietnamese frontier. Hawkins, along with Griffin, Caputo-as-narrator, Herr and his mates, and (with several reservations) Goodrich denounce their being abused for the sake of a frontier they finally realized would not absorb the message of their community. Who knows? Perhaps they just adopted and updated Thoreau's intimation that no frontier outside New England was worth exploring, as it would only expound their loss of transhistorically domestic myths.

I would like to conclude this paper by borrowing some words from David Noble, who believes in a centennial tradition in the American novel to «confront and often to criticize the central myth of our civilization — the transcendence of time»⁹. If the frontier was starting to reach the Pacific Ocean (ergo, was becoming a myth) by the time Cooper would write his novels, why cannot we consider the same mythical spirit in the narratives of Vietnam? In fact, Leatherstocking and the marines assume a shared responsibility for making us aware of many an aspect of the American culture, and this responsibility challenges their respective times. On their part, as far as it concerns Philip Caputo, Stephen Wright, Michael Herr, Charles Durden, and James Webb, they have come to a double conclusion that helps characterize a stream of the American thought: that evil may not reside in the other, but in oneself, and no covenant may last long if the ideals get stained in blood.

Notes

1. Quotations are taken from the following editions:
 - Caputo, Philip: *A Rumor of War*. London: Arrow, 1985.
 - Durden, Charles: *No Bugles, No Drums*. New York: Viking, 1976.
 - Herr Michael: *Dispatches*. London: Picador, 1979.
 - Webb, James: *Fields of Fire*. London: Panther, 1985.
 - Wright, Stepehn: *Meditations in Green*. London: Abacus, 1984.
2. Thus, we get in line with Edwin Fussell's doubts about the frontiersmen as bearers of American civilization to alien lands (*Frontier: American Literature and the American West*. Princeton: University Press, 1965). A Vietnam reading of Fussell's words on the frontier as an «imaginary line between American civilization and nature, or the uncertain future, and everything that came to depend upon that line was ironically reversible» (p. 17), and the West as «almost by definition indefinite, and indefinable, or at least changing, pluralistic, and ambiguous in signification» (p. 4) could successfully agree with the meaning of Durden's tag «No Man's Nam».
3. Marin, Pilar: *La Guerra del Vietnam en la narrativa norteamericana*. Barcelona: PPU, 1990.
4. Lomperis, Timothy (ed.): *Reading the Wind: The Literature of the Vietnam War*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987, p. 30.
5. Taylor, Gordon: «American Narratives of the War in Vietnam». *American Literature*, 52:2, May 1980. p. 295.
6. Capps, Walter: *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Consciousness*. Boston: Beacon, 1982. P. 78.
7. Herzos, Tobey: «Writing about Vietnam». *College English*, 41:6, February 1980. P. 682.
8. Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
9. Noble, David: *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden*. New York: George Brazillier, 1968. P. IX.