"PLUNGED BACK WITH REDOUBLED FORCE": AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FICTION, NON-FICTION, AND POETRY OF THE KOREAN WAR

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To Jonas and his grand empathy
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Taking on Korean War literature as the subject of this thesis has posed several challenges. For one, the variety of perspectives on the war can be daunting. From North Korean and South Korean, to Chinese, British, Turk, and American, the points of view are diverse. This problem solved itself, however, as most of the texts that surfaced—fiction and non-fiction—were written by Americans and South Koreans. As a result, the other perspectives are given marginal attention, if any at all.

The second challenge was language-based. While much literature on the war has been written in English, it would seem inappropriate to exclude in any way Korean language texts on the war. Fortunately, a good deal of pertinent Korean literature has been translated into English. Yet there lingers the troubling fact that a much wider array of texts are available in Korean, if only this scholar claimed literacy in Korean language. Nonetheless, there is sufficient text in English translation and those that were selected represent fine examples of poetry and prose.

The other pressing challenge is rooted in the obscurity of the subject. As it turns out, there is more than enough literature on the Korean War to write volumes
of criticism. The problem was not quantity. Considering that much of the literature on the war attains a moderate-to-high level of literary value, the problem was not quality either. The sense of obscurity when approaching Korean War literature comes from cultural attitudes towards the war. Typically referred to as the “forgotten war,” for decades the Korean War has been largely ignored, or—as W.D. Ehrhart puts it—“denied...life-pulse of narrative representation.” The past fifteen years has seen a surge of interest in the Korean War however, the amount of scholarship on the literature remains rather scarce. This lack of critical writing poses not only an academic problem, but also a cultural and political pitfall. As Ehrhart writes in his introduction to Retrieved Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War, “the neglect of a literary heritage possessing power, beauty, and humanity [is equated with] the kind of amnesia that leads to ignorance, misunderstanding and repeated mistakes...[i]f we continue to neglect this literature we do so at our own peril” (xli).

As recently as twenty years ago, Korean War literature was anthologized by Carolyn Forche without including a single poem by a veteran of Korean War (“Dead” 149). Moreover, the section of Against Forgetting devoted to “War in Korea and Vietnam” focuses almost exclusively on poems about the latter war.

The reasons why Korean War literature tends to be overlooked from the American perspective are clear and understandable. The war lacked the heroism and urgency of World War II and the controversy and cultural climate of Vietnam, and therefore the literature about Korea is not as inviting. Nevertheless, the
significance of the Korean War is also clear, and not least of all because while World War II ended with the surrender of Japan, and the Vietnam War concluded with the fall of Saigon, the Korean War continues at the time of this writing.\textsuperscript{1} As a war that lingers in the memory of those directly affected by the initial thirty-seven months of bloodshed, the war remains a traumatic experience, and the literature about this event all the more relevant. As a war that poses a constant threat of renewed violence for succeeding generations, and not just to the Korean people but for tens of thousands of American GIs and other ex-patriots who call the Korean peninsula and the Far East region home, the war literature demands careful attention, if only to understand the assumptions and policies that went into creating the war that they might help in bringing it to a conclusion.

To the South Korean people, the war is commonly referred to as “Yuk-ee-oh”, meaning 6/25, the date that North Korea invaded in 1950. The initial division of the country along the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel which occurred five years earlier is a point of almost unspeakable pain and grief for Koreans, as families and friends and lovers were split up by the division, and more so by the ensuing war. Given the sensitivity of the subject—politically and culturally—much Korean War literature has either been rendered to oblivion, or simply fallen out of favor with the critics over the years (Suh 15). Incidentally, certain intellectuals, politicians, and writers harbor resentment towards the U.S. for its policy on South Korea dating from the U.S. military government (1945-1948) and lasting up to the present, resulting in a great

\textsuperscript{1} Though an armistice was signed in 1953, a formal peace treaty has not been signed. Occasionally skirmishes are reported along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) where North Korea and South Korea are divided. Naval fire is also exchanged periodically in the West Sea.
deal of polemical literature about the war (Song 197). Nonetheless, a good deal of the Korean writing on the war is unbiased and of high quality, as will be shown in the following.

In general, Korean literary history of the war falls into three stages, according to David R. McCann: the first stage makes reference to the massive wave of upheaval and social change resulting from the Japanese colonial occupation (75). A current of resistance to the foreign power comes in conflict throughout with the fact that Koreans were themselves implicated in the attendant oppression as collaborators. While this phase will not be primary to this thesis, there are undercurrents and residual effects in stories such as “A Betrayal”, and in the poems like “Resistance” and “Kansas Line.”

The second stage deals with the repressive climate of the Japanese colony which continued after its departure with the establishment of the U.S. military government. According to McCann, “mirror-like, hegemonic misreadings” of the binary Korean perspectives plagued the culture, and opposition of any kind was dealt with harshly:

“In the South the story [of resistance to government] represented an empathetic reading of the leftist position, and in the North, a retrograde, rightist sympathy for the ruling class landowners and industrialists” (75-6).

Clearly these currents of opposition—no matter how real or fabricated—had to be quashed; the repressive regimes that controlled both Koreas through the 50’s, 60’s, and beyond succeeded in doing so, meanwhile demonizing the other ideology across
the border. The story “A Betrayal,” while depicting the climate of resistance to the occupying government, can be read as tacit submission to the repressive hegemony. On the other hand, poems like “To Comrades” suggest an entrenched resistance to the repressive powers of government.

The third stage is one of reconciliation, including works that urge a clear and honest look at all sides of the war (76). Poems such as “I Can Love a North Korean,” “Brothers,” as well as some of Suji Kwock Kim’s work move towards addressing the ideological and political issues that have been erased or made taboo by the oppressive regimes in the North and South for decades. Other works, such as The Bridge at No Gun Ri and Cumings’ The Korean War represent examples of non-fiction texts that pioneer reconciliation of social issues that remain from the war, and addressing psychic wounds that have not healed.

The critical methods used to analyze the literature vary from historicist to new historicist, deconstructionist to post-colonialist, and even ecocritical, depending on the subject matter of the work under analysis. Chapter II delves into the policies of the U.S. National Security Council’s NSC 68 in order to show the “Top Secret” and official story which lays out the ideal of U.S. preparedness for such developments as the Korean War as well as the United States’ overall geo-political self-image in 1950. The NSC 68 also represents the document that triggered a massive military build-up, the consequences of which were devastating for the Korean peninsula and which are still noticeable in the U.S. military today. Hinojosa’s novel The Useless Servants and Thompson’s narrative Cry Korea expose the actual

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2 NSC 68 was declassified in February 1975 (1).
consequences of U.S. policy as it played out on the ground in the Korean War. When the official text that represents the ideal of American security and foreign policy is juxtaposed with fiction and memoir on the war, cracks appear in the master narrative that has commonly been accepted regarding the Korean War, that the U.S. functions as the world police and therefore requires a massive military to be used whenever it deems necessary.

Chapter III explores the politics in South Korea during the run-up to the Korean War, employing new historicist methodology. Using Gregory Henderson’s Korea: the Politics of the Vortex as the co-text, two fictional texts—Steiner’s “Rice” and Oh’s “A Betrayal”—are interpreted to show how the non-fiction co-text informs the fictional accounts and vice versa. Treating the fictional stories as anecdote, a sense of “the real” is gained by their reading, particularly when read alongside the non-fiction. The run-up to the Korea War is vital to understanding both the U.S. role in pre-war South Korea and the dire situation in that young nation which made civil war virtually inevitable.

Chapter IV is the most ambitious chapter which is the cause of its being broken into four sections. The soldiers’ perspective, though broad and various, is arguably the most important aspect of the Korean War considering that soldiers did the dirty work of fighting and dying for their respective causes. Each section is headed by one of the factors that most influenced the soldiers’ view of the war. In the first section, “Politics and Propaganda,” the home front and the media are shown to have a heavy influence on the soldier. The second section, “Bigotry and Racism,”
points to the social ills that are rampant in the military culture as well as society at large. The third section, “Towards a Counter-culture” explores the soldiers’ aversion to the status quo, exposing his capacity for empathy and love amidst enmity and brutality. The fourth section takes on the theme of “Excessive Violence” in the Korean War. Soldiers are often expected to commit unsavory and immoral acts aside from their basic duties. Such deeds, especially those done to non-combatants, produce long-term consequences for the soldier. In this section, the civilian plight is given some attention as well since much of the violence of the war was inflicted upon civilians, women in particular.

Chapter V picks up where Chapter IV leaves off, taking as its literary subject “Echoes,” the story of a civilian couple who withdraw from war-torn society and retreat into the hills to live a simple life. The natural environment provides nurturing support, both physically and spiritually. Approached with ecocritical and deconstructionist methods, this chapter gives two parallel readings to O Yong-Su’s culturally rich tale that celebrates the Korean characteristics of resourcefulness and reverence for nature. Derrida’s “Hauntology” and Westling’s ecocritical ideas work well together to show the complex relationship between the spiritual and the natural realms in “Echoes.”

Since the problem addressed by this thesis is the relative deficiency of criticism regarding Korean War literature, this thesis in no way attempts to solve the problem once and for all. Instead, the following pages should be viewed as a small contribution to the on-going narrative of Korean War literature.
CHAPTER II

IMPERIAL AMERICA AND THE PREDOMINANCE IN MILITARY POWER IN THE KOREAN WAR

The road might have been the Appian Way except for the starved children lining it.

-William Childress “The Long March”

It is all the more important, as has been recognized in Washington, that this predominance in military power should not be used by the United States as an excuse for seeking predominance in the political and economic sphere, thereby lending credence to accusations of imperialism (2).

The above quotations reflect the conflicted circumstances in which the United States was embroiled at the dawn of its era as superpower. While the Childress poem hinges on the tension between military greatness and its abhorrent side effects, the Foreign Policy Bulletin warns the nation about using force unwisely. When the latter text is read in light of the “Report to the National Security Council—NSC 68”—written just three months earlier—it is clear that there were fears at the outset of the Korean War that Kim Il-Sung’s invasion of South Korea was nothing

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short of a godsend for the Truman Administration’s colossal National Security agenda, and that U.S. abuse of military power was increasingly likely. Historian Bruce Cumings asserts that intervention in Korea helped the U.S. rationalize a vast increase in military budget, and bolstered the economies of “free world” countries, especially Japan’s (216-217). In fact, the military, political, and economic dynamic of U.S. Foreign Policy represents a free-flowing continuum, as the U.S. would not only use predominant military power as an excuse to exert its will politically and economically in the Far East, the U.S. would also exploit economic policy less overtly to put its military might on display.

While government documents reveal the source of American intervention in Korea, it is crucial to look to other texts about the Korean War to understand the consequences of the Truman Administration’s decisions. Several voices heard together create a fuller picture of the political and military motives, exigencies, and realities of U.S. involvement in the Korean War. Read alongside of the “NSC 68,” and informed by The Korean War by Bruce Cumings, Rolando Hinojosa’s novel The Useless Servants, and Reginald Thompson’s memoir entitled Cry Korea effectively address such issues as U.S military readiness (or lack thereof), its demeanor and performance, and the inane and brutal methods that the U.S. military used on the

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4Secretary of State Dean Acheson would claim that the Korean War “came along and saved us”, meaning it enabled the final approval of NSC 68 and passage through Congress of a massive increase in the military budget (Cumings 210).

5The political economy that [the U.S.] imagined for East Asia” is plotted in the government document “NSC-48”. Since 1900 Washington longed for “unimpeded access to the East Asian region; it wanted native governments strong enough to maintain independence but not strong enough to throw off Western influence” (Cumings 215).
Korean peninsula throughout the war. Ultimately the non-fiction and fictional texts work to portray an emerging superpower in its fledgling stages as it attempts to police the world, and the early phase of the hegemony that is the United States’ conspicuous military presence and expenditure.

Background

The commonly accepted reason for the U.S. intervention in South Korea was to contain communism, that is, a Soviet-backed North Korea. The more subtle reasons, which operated as part of the hegemony of U.S. superpower identity, were less about ideology and more about economic and military power. The NSC 68 proclaims that the U.S. is “principle center of power in the non-Soviet world and the bulwark of opposition to Soviet expansion” (6). Without a sufficient military, how was the United States to protect the world from communism?

The NSC 68 lays out Truman’s (and Secretary of State Acheson’s) military options in the face of the Soviet threat against the free peoples of the world, in line with the “Truman Doctrine”: (a) keep the status quo, which NSC 68 flatly states is not enough (Truman actually shrank the military after WWII); (b) isolation, which would amount to surrender, leaving U.S. allies feeling betrayed, and possibly leading to their being subsumed by the U.S.S.R. (NSC 68 evokes feelings of “failure” and

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6 Though the Soviets pulled troops out of North Korea in 1948 and provided marginal support during the war (Cumings 213-14).
7 Because totalitarian regimes coerced the “free peoples” they represented a threat to international peace and the national security of the U.S. (Cumings 112).
8 Demobilization was standard procedure for U.S. after it previous wars. When the Korean War ended, the U.S. refrained for demobilization for the first time, instead increasing the size of its military, making it a garrison state (Goldensohn 261).
“guilt” that Americans would suffer as a result; (c) war, which would not be popular with the American people as it would likely be preemptive, and besides, the U.S. had not the conventional weapons available to wage war—only atomic weapons, the use of which was deemed unacceptable, morally and politically; (d) build-up rapidly, which was the most rational—Truman could only agree (48-54).

The National Security Council recommended that the U.S. military budget quadruple by 1951, which would make it “greater than the combined defense budget of the next eighteen ranking military powers” (Cumings 217). Such a spike in military spending might seem extravagant, but NSC 68 reveals the situation was such that a real fear existed, that “[t]he Soviet Union actually possesse[d] armed forces far in excess of those necessary to defend its national territory” (17). Under these circumstances, the U.S. would understandably feel pressure to establish a military that could defend other parts of the world, in order to engage the Soviets elsewhere in the event of war. Even if the U.S.S.R. were not prepared to wage a foreign war, the idea that it could be preparing to do so provides a rationale for U.S. military build-up. To defray expenses and perhaps to divert attention from the United States’ central position, NSC 68 states that the U.S. will not be able to protect the world from Soviet expansion and aggression alone. Yet in spite of this the report goes on to mention how the National Security Council plan hinges on American economic and political actions:

The United States cannot alone provide the resources for such a buildup of strength. The other free countries must carry their part of the burden, but their ability and determination to do it will depend on the action the United States takes to develop its own strength and on the adequacy of its foreign political and economic policies it requires (48).
In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba makes a distinction between traditional imperialism wherein the imperialist controls the colony in all manners, including political, and the new form of imperialism which almost exclusively uses economic policy to control other nations (6). As might be inferred from the NSC 68, the U.S. upholds the former type of imperialism in the mid-1940’s insofar as its “foreign political and economic policies” exert control over the peoples and governments of allied nations, South Korea and its military occupation being a case in point.

Although decades have passed, the rhetoric has not changed. In the 21st century, the likes of Paul Johnson still argue that “Divine Providence, has placed America...in the position of...superpower, with the consequent duty to uphold global order and to punish, or prevent, the great crimes of the world” (224). Although such proclamations may be motivated by good will, they are also inextricably linked to notions of empire. Similarly, NSC 68 treads a fine line between U.S. as world leader and global emperor:

> The immediate goal of our efforts to build a success-fully functioning political and economic system in the free world backed by adequate military strength is to postpone and avert the disastrous situation that might arise in 1954 on a continuation of our present programs (59).  

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9 In the second half of the twentieth century, American set a new precedent in modern history, setting up a network of military bases inside the borders of all industrial powers except France and Russia. The typical experience of this hegemony...was mundane, benign...[though] the United States kept allied states on defense, resource, and...financial dependencies” (Cummings 219).

10 According to the NSC 68, it was assumed that by 1954, the U.S.S.R. would have developed a significant nuclear (thermonuclear) threat (39).
Once the Korean War broke out, and the money started to flow, the Truman Administration faced a serious political problem: how to justify a gargantuan military that is not just an “excuse [italics supplied] for seeking predominance in the political and economic sphere,” but a thoroughly efficient tool for dominating the Far East in all of the desired areas, political, economic, and military? The wheel was already set in motion,\(^\text{11}\) and questions that perhaps should have been asked first were put off until later. Once deployed, the U.S. and 16 U.N. allies were committed to a heinous reality of death and destruction that they would have to own up to (or ignore) over the next three years and beyond.

The assumption behind the NSC 68 and U.S. action in Korea is quite clear: military force is the remedy for all problems, territorial, political, ideological, etc. The connection between North Korea and the Soviets represented the ideological (anti-communist) implications and the cause of U.S. concern, while the geopolitical significance (communist aggression) of Kim Il-Sung’s invasion of South Korea was just cause for military action.

As a document, the NSC 68 plainly foretells what is to come: if America’s “strategic interests” are threatened by the Soviets, the U.S. will respond and it will respond with a military that is heavily funded. No one in the U.S. government knew that the response would be warranted not four years down the road, but in just over two months.

\(^{11}\) “NSC 48”, written on December 30, 1949, is the critical report that dictated future action of the U.S. in East Asia. According to Bruce Cumings, “NSC-48...cast a die in the Pacific: the United States would now do something utterly unimaginable at the end of WWII: it would prepare to intervene militarily against anti-colonial movements in East Asia” (214). North Korea’s invasion of the South is considered “anti-colonial” when viewed as an extension of the guerilla war that was waged by Koreans against the Japanese in the Manchuria in the ‘30’s.
Rolando Hinojosa’s *The Useless Servants*, provides vivid commentary via Rafe’s diary confirming the severe shortages of supplies and the military unpreparedness that represents the motivation behind the NSC 68. This “Top Secret” report juxtaposed with the Hinojosa’s fictional journal weaves a pattern that blends the rhetoric of a statesman with painfully sincere questions posed by a soldier suffering the miseries of war. Meanwhile, Reginald Thompson’s *Cry Korea* gives a sobering account of the state of the U.S. military. Thompson, who also reported WWI and WWII, gives a close-up account of the battlefield in Korea and lends poignant commentary on the manner of U.S. GI and the brutal methods being used by the U.S. military as a whole.

Between these texts, cracks begin to appear in the façade of U.S. foreign policy and the hegemony of U.S. military power. The assumption behind the NSC 68, that military build-up and deployment of armed forces is the right course of action in the Far East shows itself for what it is—a “master fiction”, by which “all politics are ordered and governed...” Moreover, “certain fictions,” according to H. Aram Veeser, “partake of a mixture of fact, myth, and wishful thinking.” (8-9). The NSC’s Top Secret report written April 12, 1950, states the geo-political facts, clings to the myth that exalts military force, while earnestly wishing that the “rapid build-up” of its military would succeed. Thompson’s text written a year later veritably indicts the U.S. for its fantasy in Korea; meanwhile, Hinojosa—having himself fought in the Korean War—exposes the harsh conditions and suffering at the front lines in all of their insanity, horror, and emptiness.
Military Readiness

In the first two chapters of *The Useless Servants*, Rafe often complains about the lack of arms, men, supplies and overall preparedness of the U.S. Eighth Army. The men who were first called to fight in Korea he calls, “a makeshift outfit”; the infantry assigned to take out the tanks of the advancing enemy “brought no mines (was not issued any?)” (18). Rafe, as part of the artillery, “sat it out: no radios and no targets” (19). Desertion was all too common as “much of our Infantry down there took off. Left their positions flat out. To the wooded area, to the rice paddies, crazy running...just snapped off, took off” (20). Because the army was short of men, instead of issuing court martials to the deserters, nothing was done; “the Old guys...said ...[t]hey may turn out to be okay later on” (21). Such an unnerving lack of preparedness was a direct reflection of the urgent pleas in the NSC 68 to begin a rapid build-up of the U.S. military.

As history goes, the United States had just mustered millions of men in order to defeat fascism in Europe and in the Pacific. The sudden outbreak of fighting in Korea was a reality for which the army was not prepared. The green troops who were rushed in had been enjoying the girls, booze, dancing—all that the Ginza District officers’ clubs in Tokyo offered. They were leading comparatively safe and easy lives as M.P.’s; suddenly thrown ill-equipped into a desperate war zone,
ordered to conduct “a delaying action: stay, fight, advance, retreat, stay, fight, etc.”
could not have been more stark in contrast (23).

Revealed in his journal is the fact that Rafe has not been rotated out for
“R&amp;R” for the entire first ten months, June 1950 until April 1951, when he is finally
removed to Honshu Island, Japan, by way of Pusan. Nearly a year of constant combat
and the incidental suffering has taken its toll: concussions caused by enemy shells,
ilness (including “rot” which presumably refers to leprosy and which is treatable
with penicillin), malnutrition, exposure to extreme weather, constant killing, and the
everyday viewing of maimed and dead bodies of friend and enemy. Incidentally,
when Rafe is on R&amp;R in Japan, he cannot help but notice the changes that have
occurred since he lived there before the Korean War: “Factories have opened up, the
Japanese are building ships for the US Army over by the Inland Sea, and we’re told
that other parts of Japan are serving as warehouses and as manufacturers for the
Army” (159). The markings of U.S. imperialism are beginning to show. Ten months
into the Korean War, Japan’s economy is experiencing a veritable boom as a result of
American economic policy in the Far East. Meanwhile, political and military
objectives are being carried out successfully across the Strait as a result of U.S.-
backed industries in Japan.

Eventually the U.S. manufactured and shipped in sufficient manpower and
materiel, and circumstances changed considerably. In his “Sept 2-15 (Sept 5)” entry,
Rafe writes, “The NK [North Koreans] broke through in the bulge but did not exploit
the advantage...Our triple A helped: Air, Armor, Artillery” (66). Then, in his “Sept 5-
9” entry, Rafe writes, “our fire was deadly accurate, from all reports by S Korean
agents. They and our runners said the sight of NK dead along the Naktong [River] was horrible” (67). Although the battle results were beginning to turn in favor of the American, ROK\textsuperscript{12} and U.N. forces, the fallout of war was beginning to bother Rafe: “Lot of bad shit out there... shit water on rice paddies. . .flies on corpses... medic will probably show up to give us shots; Lt Waller says diseases and infections usually rank higher than combat casualties” (67). In spite of disease and injuries that he himself experiences, it is the numbers of dead enemies that astonish Rafe more than anything else. He waxes shrewdly political in regards to the rift between the ideal of representative government and the ignorance of the people who are electing their leaders when he writes,

Well, “the folks back home” should see what 20 dead bodies look like. Then, they could work up to 50...After this, we could take the taxpayers by the hand and walk them through the 420 NK killed and wounded on hill 268. Make them see how their tax dollars are being spent (73).

Rafe’s comrade, a runner from Donora, PA, “[s]aid he’d seen hundreds of photographs of the Gettysburg battle and no diff from the bodies here” (136).\textsuperscript{13} America’s unassuming “police action”, backed by the myth of excessive military force as a cure-all, combined with the wish for success in the Far East, is proving to have destructive consequences akin to those of the bloodiest battle ever fought on U.S. soil.

\textsuperscript{12} Unlike the abbreviations, U.S., U.N., and U.S.S.R, the acronyms ROK (Republic of Korea), CCF (Chinese Communist Forces), and NKPA (North Korea Peoples’ Army) do not have periods between letters, and these invariably refer to the corresponding militaries.

\textsuperscript{13} In fact, the Battle of Wonju (and Hoengsong) in late winter 1951 has been called “the Gettysburg of the Korean War” in large part as a reference to the astounding number of casualties (Coleman).
Demeanor and Performance

While the intimate portrait of the lifestyle and experience of a combatant in the Korean War are shown through Rafe in *The Useless Servants*, Reginald Thompson focuses to a considerable extent on the U.S. military from an objective point of view.

Thompson was a correspondent during World War I and World War II, but what he sees in the attitude of the U.S. military in Korea is unprecedented. The American soldier defies his wildest imaginings of laziness, immorality, and imbecility. He devotes a considerable portion of his book to lambasting the GI whom he depicts as a free-wheeling, gun-slinging, ignorant brute. Thompson writes, “[t]hey impressed me as play-acting; their crew-cuts, their swagger...the glamour with which the whole thing had to be surrounded, was a refusal to face the grim and terrible reality of war and death” (102). The U.S. soldier typically shows little empathy for the people he has come to assist. In fact, Thompson continues, “...every man’s dearest wish was to kill a Korean [enemy combatant or not]. ‘Today...I’ll get me a gook.’ GIs called Koreans ‘gooks’ to other them, make it possible to commit heinous crimes [against them]” (39). Without knowledge of the people or understanding of the conflict in which he is enmeshed, such a detached and brutal attitude might be expected of the GI, though not excused.

Rafe and his fellow artilleryman Joey, in *The Useless Servants*, mention Thucydides on more than one occasion, muttering the phrase, “‘Possession for all time’” (137). Rafe and Joey have each had a Catholic school education which has given them a privileged perspective of the struggle in which they are engaged,
historically and politically. Hinojosa’s classical reference implies that the characters are aware that the world is undergoing a shift in the balance of power, and that they are pitted against their communist rivals as pawns in a geopolitical power play, manifest in the massive display of force. Moreover, reference to Thucydides implies that Rafe and Joey are aware that in the process reason is giving way to courage, and that ‘fanatical enthusiasm [is] the mark of a real man’” (Cumings 66).14

By and large, however, ignorance is the norm for the average soldier who is often unable to uphold the most basic obligation of soldiering. According to the Supreme Commander of the U.N. forces in the Far East, General Douglas MacArthur, “The soldier...is charged with the protection of the weak and unarmed...when he violates this sacred trust [he] threatens...international security” (170-171).

Incidentally, MacArthur, the man in charge of the whole production, was relieved of his duties in April 1951. Thompson alleges that he had become an “old man, isolated and surrounded by fawning sycophants in his ivory tower...a blind, ridiculous, but immensely powerful Samson capable of pulling down the world...the very world” (Thompson 147). 15

The demeanor of the U.S. soldier, from the top all the way down the chain of command, was becoming increasingly callous as a result of the frustration and failure to end the Korean War quickly and successfully.

14 Cumings quotes p. 147 of Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War, trans. Rex Warner.
15 Cumings exposes that on April 6, 1951, “the president signed an order to use [nuclear weapons] against Chinese and North Korean targets... ‘In the confusion attendant upon General MacArthur’s removal,’ however, the order was never sent” (157).

Brutal Methods

Somewhere lost in the rush to amass as much military materiel as possible, and to stimulate the weapons industry (busy in Japan), was the fact that sound tactics are more important to winning wars than superior fire power. Thompson raises this point more than once. He reasons that "better results could have been attained using one tenth of the ammunition. The advance would have been quicker. The soldiers would have gained experience. Thousands of civilian lives would have been spared" (204). Meanwhile the tactics of the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA), and later the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) were to withdraw into the hills and to eventually encircle and ambush the slow-moving U.S. advance. Thompson calculates that the communist forces “needed one man back to support one man forward [and] a bag of millet,” while the U.S. forces required “nine men back for one forward...candy, Coca-cola, and toilet supplies” (147).

Within the first year of the war, it became more and more apparent to observers and soldiers alike that two entirely different methods of war were being employed: guerrilla tactics by the outnumbering communists who would “disappear like wraiths into the hills” (79), and the massive amount of ordnance used by the U.S. and its allies, and their slow, thorough path of destruction. The armistice was ultimately agreed upon for a number of reasons, among them the disturbing reality that superior numbers of human life were fighting toe-to-toe with superior numbers of devastating machines and weaponry.
In September 1950, American forces were preparing to retake Seoul for the first time. The circumstances had now become desperate for the NKPA who offered little resistance to the American and allied advance. Thompson expresses outrage over the U.S. tactics—a slow, methodical, excessively violent, march toward the capital. Thompson’s descriptions of the U.S. military’s tactics suggest an insentient, mechanistic, juggernaut.

...this is a new kind of warfare more terrible in its implications than anything that has gone before...the preliminary softening...by bombardment, the cautious advance...the close-support air strike, artillery, the cautious advance...It is far from certain whether these methods save the lives of soldiers...It is certain that it kills civilian men, women and children, indiscriminately in great numbers, and destroys all that they have (74).

The level of casualties and the amount of destruction was by all accounts difficult to witness, particularly in regards to the air campaign. The amount of bombs dropped on the Korean peninsula (focused mostly on the North, and not counting 32,557 tons of napalm) numbers 635,000 tons. Fewer tons were dropped on the entire Pacific theater of WWII—503,000 (Cumings 159). From a legal perspective, the Red Cross Convention on the Protection of Civilians in Wartime was signed in Stockholm in 1948—ostensibly in response to the annihilation of civilians in places like Dresden and Tokyo—just in time for the Korean War (161). Unfortunately, the status quo was upheld in spite of the new Convention and hundreds of thousands of Koreans were killed in air raids.

The initial reason behind the heavy bombardment was the fact that MacArthur was bent on all-out victory. Meanwhile, Truman was content with small
gains, clinging to the hope that a quick and equitable end was in sight, which is also what the majority of the public wanted. General MacArthur was convinced that the best tactic to win the war quickly and decisively was to use nuclear weapons on China which, by late 1950 had entered the war on the communist side, and had inflicted unprecedented casualties on the U.S. Marines in December at the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. Truman replaced MacArthur with General Matthew Ridgway (who was instrumental in repelling the Chinese from South Korea in spring of 1951, and who is generally considered the genius behind the American, ROK, and allied forces’ success in the final two years of hostilities). Worth noting here is Ridgway’s military methodology and the amount of damage it did to Korea (153).

Early in 1951, Supreme Commander Ridgway stated his strategy, which would ultimately secure South Korea’s existence, but at a great cost: “...to wipe out all life in tactical locality and save the lives of our soldiers”. What Ridgway’s tactics resulted in were bombed out cities called “annihilation zones”, and in fact their “creation...destroyed masses of civilian lives...an outcome accepted by all sides in the war—and 'by the people, parliaments, and armed forces,’” explains Cumings, quoting Jorg Friedrich (153). After World War II, studies by the U.S Strategic Bombing Survey showed that enemy morale was largely unaffected by the bombing. Nevertheless, the same methods that were used Germany and Japan were used again in Korea. In regard to “the creation of urban ‘annihilation zones’, Jorg Friedrich explains that “‘modernity gave itself up to a new incalculable and uncontrollable fate’” (150). While military strategy would be partially responsible for these unfortunate consequences, the impetus behind such a fate is rooted in the
gargantuan military budget and corresponding weapons industry that was funding and building the bombs, which in turn was based on the myth that military force invariably solves all differences, political, ideological.

In *Cry Korea*, in one of the more haunting images which illustrates how uninhabitable Korea had become as a result of the excessive bombardment by the U.S. air force, Thompson recounts

...watching the boats pushing off from the beaches to seek the shelter of the barren desolate rocks without means of supporting a single human soul. On such rocks as these in scores and hundreds and thousands the refugees sought sanctuary and tried to ferry supplies of rice from the mainland. Their plight was pitiful in the extreme. To light fires at night to escape death by cold was to invite death from the ever vigilant bombers (289).

In essence, the massive build-up of military power by the U.S. and subsequent use of excessive force was exterminating the civilian population from its homeland.

In North Korea, “at least 50 percent of eighteen out of the North’s twenty-two major cities were obliterated” (Cumings 160), not because these percentages of said cities contained war industries, but for the simple reason that bombing offensives became ends in themselves. In fact, within months of the three-year war “few big targets remained in Korea” (154). Nonetheless, missions had to be carried out; ordnance that was supplied had to be used. Furthermore, air force general Otto Weyland asserted that “round the clock bombing [in the North] was ‘the most compelling factor’ in reaching the armistice.” In fact, it is widely accepted that “[s]aturation bombing was not conclusive—just unimaginably destructive” (161).

In order to lend an image to the reality of North Korea one year into the war, Cumings quotes Hungarian writer Tibor Meray:
Everything which moved in North Korea was a military target, peasants in the fields were machine gunned by pilots who...amused themselves to shoot targets which moved...We traveled by moonlight, so my impression was that I am traveling on the moon, because there was only devastation...every city was a collection of chimneys...I went through a city of 200,000 inhabitants and I saw a thousand chimneys—that was all (158-159).

Where had all the people gone? Chances are at least half of them had abandoned their homes and become refugees, a quarter of them had been sent off to war, and if the other quarter had been killed in air raids, then the city which Meray is writing about has indeed become a ghost town.

In *Cry Korea*, Thompson expresses disdain and disbelief about hearing the U.S. Air Force pilots talk of their missions over Korea: "At Itazuke I had listened in silence to the tales of young airmen proud in their missions of death and the fires they lit by night and day, unopposed in the clear skies" (42). Other accounts tell of the vomit on pilots' suits, suggesting the disgust that they were feeling during their bombing missions. While Thompson expresses disdain for the methods of war that he witnessed, ranking members of the U.S. military perceived that the war was for many reasons a colossal mistake.

General Omar Bradley later observed that the conflict in Korea was “the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong enemy” (Cumings 156-157). His statement casts doubt on the principles behind the NSC 68, such as lumping all communist nations together as a common enemy, and to earnestly defend all “free peoples.” Moreover, such a confession from a man as high up the ranks as general pays credence to the notion that American military action in Korea
was a product of unbridled hegemony. As further evidence that the U.S. military had lost control of its power, and any capacity for restraint, were the senseless bombing that continued into the closing days of the war, when the armistice was all but accomplished. Despite the fact that the “Old Guys” teach Rafe in January, 1951, “‘Killing is the name of the game...Forget the real estate...We’re after bodies and blood and our arty [artillery] is the agent,’” and regardless of Rafe’s acknowledging the “[n]o nonsense or grandstanding [policy of] Ridgway: kill the CCF, and the real estate will take care of itself” (Hinojosa 118), senseless destruction was carried out in North Korean territory.

The Toksan Dam was breached in May, 1953, “destroying six miles of railway, five bridges, two miles of highway, and five square miles of rice paddies” (Cumings 155). Then, with merely 24 minutes left before the armistice was to take effect, “a B-26 dropped its radar-guided bomb load” (159). Thompson sums up American fire power in Korea and its heavy use right up to the end of hostilities with the metaphor of one pummeling a prostrate body (68).

Reading the NSC 68 report and Cumings’ history alongside Thompson’s and Hinojosa’s accounts of the Korean War reveals cracks in the façade of U.S. foreign policy and the hegemony of U.S. military power. For the U.S. to grant its military a budget the size of the eighteen next most powerful militaries, while protecting the “free world” from the threat of communist expansion, set itself up for an obscene display of force when called upon to act in Korea. Whether military might was an

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16 The armistice was signed on July 27, 1953 (Cumings 211).
excuse for political and economic influence or vice versa, the suffering that the U.S.
military inflicted in reaction to communist aggression in Korea “violated ‘a fair
balance between the means employed and the purpose achieved’ (Cumings 150).

Rafe’s account of the second recapture of Seoul describes the artillery tactics as

. . . big league fire...the first fifteen minutes came to seven thousand rounds...To be on the receiving end of ten arty battalions is, as Lt Fleming put it, “...to stand at the gates of Hell for an eternity”...Refugees ...waiting by the river to reenter Seoul. The Lord only knows what they’ll find once inside the city...how many CCF, NK and civilians died as a result of our fire and air strikes (144-45).

Hinojosa's poem entitled “The January-May 1951 Slaughter” sums up how an artilleryman might have felt after the siege of Seoul: “I'm sick. They didn't stop coming,/ And we wouldn't stop firing” (“January” 169). The men who are assigned the task of utilizing a vast and prodigious military show signs of breaking down, not as a result of any threat by the enemy, nor as a consequence of cowardice or fear; instead, they are disturbed by the excess of violence, the brutal inhuman amount of force that they are asked to unleash on enemy and civilian alike.

While most of the annihilation would appear to have gone unchecked, rare moments of humanity are shown down the chain of command as well as in individual soldiers. In The Useless Servants, Rafe complains about conflicting orders regarding the practice of “leveling villages (this avoids house-to-house fighting)…Lt Macias ordered arty on village/settlement”, but officers were “feeling pressure from European observers,” and Battalion “turned down request to level village, and this was strange, since we'd done it many times before” (63). Apparently the presence of
outside observers caused battalion commanders to exercise restraint lest civilians be harmed. The reason for refraining from the more expedient practice becomes clear in the following account by Reginald Thompson in *Cry Korea*: once, in the rural hamlet of Hungso-ri, he came across

a peasant woman crumpled into the ditch by the roadside with her two babes crawling upon her...she lay there, peacefully, seeming only to be asleep. But dead. One babe sat on her belly, small hands reaching up to her face, stroking, pulling at her lips...The other child sat in a kind of torpor of dejection at his mother’s feet (159-160).

And in Howard Fast’s, “Korean Lullaby”, a series of poems written from the point of view of GIs killed in action, “Arthur Dembrowski, Chemical Warfare” says, “I was a flame thrower, and out of one burning house/ crawled a Korean child, blistered and singed/ all over his skin. I picked him up and cradled him in my arms” (58).

Countless other moments of merciful deeds were done by soldiers in the Korean War, but the fact that they shine so brightly and movingly is a testament to the fact that there were far more incidents of brutal treatment of civilians.

In the end, the Korean War has been largely viewed as a U.S. military failure. The line dividing autocratic communist North and the democratic capitalist South was roughly the same at the armistice as it was before war broke out, at the cost of tens of thousands of American lives. Moreover, the NSC 68 move to globalism, requiring a huge defense budget and standing army failed to win in Korea, just as it would later fail in Vietnam (Cumings 220). Using a methodical, mechanized, heavily armed force does not defeat flexible, evasive guerrilla tactics as is shown in the more harrowing sections of *Cry Korea* and *The Useless Servants*. 
From an economic standpoint, the Korean War can be seen as a contributing factor to “the repositioning of Japan as a major industrial producer” and consequently a major cause of South Korean’s economic “miracle” later on; “…once Japanese economic influence flowed back into South Korea...in the early 1960’s, along with a generous showing of American aid, these two economies were the most rapidly growing...in the world for the next twenty-five years” (220). The tragic irony lies in the fact that economics in the Far East today look much like the U.S. policymakers had envisioned for the region just prior to the Chinese Revolution\(^\text{17}\) and the Korean War.

From a political standpoint, Cumings asserts that its wars in Asia turned the U.S. “into a country entirely remote from what the founding fathers had in mind, where every foreign threat...became magnified and the fundamental relationship of [the U.S.] to the world was changed forever” (220). Thompson portrays a microcosm of this change in the imbecile bravado of the U.S. troops, killing civilians for sport, as he bears witness to the implementation of the mechanized beast of which Rafe and millions of other young Americans played their small part.

As a whole, Korean War literature succeeds in conveying the complexity of the issue that led to the massive amounts of weaponry used in Korea and the Truman Administration’s rationale for a rapid military build-up. In the interest of understanding the consequences of these high-level decisions, the fiction and reportage of the war are invaluable for their representing the cost to soldier and

\(^{17}\)Chinese Revolution of 1949 saw the U.S. side with the nationalist Kumintang forces who were eventually overrun by Mao’s liberation army. The U.S. troops did not engage in combat with the Communist Chinese, but fighting between U.S. and CCF forces in the Korean peninsula could be seen as a dislocated battleground (Morton 189).
civilian alike. Analyzing an array of texts—fiction and non-fiction—concerning the geo-political stance of the U.S. and the over-zealous push for military action provides an effective way of grasping the political, economic, and military aspects of the Korean War and how these factors work in maintaining the state power structure that continues to dictate U.S. foreign policy today.
CHAPTER III
CHAOS IN THE FATHERLAND

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity
—W.B. Yeats “The Second Coming”

At the conclusion of World War II in August 1945, Korea was liberated from Japan after 35 years of colonization. A demarcation line was hastily drawn by a pair of U.S. Army planning officers in Washington on August 11th to curtail the Soviet advance down the peninsula (Hanley ix). Soon after, the U.S. established a military government in Seoul (USMGIK), ostensibly to assist Korea in transition from colonized to autonomous nation; the results were heavily flawed.

Two noteworthy fictional texts visit these tumultuous years between liberation and the war—“Rice” by Henry Steiner, and “A Betrayal” by Oh Sang-won. Steiner’s story takes place in the fall of 1947. Korean English teacher, Mr. Song, has taken a job with the USMGIK as “his last defense against gradual starvation” (4). His primary duty is to interpret for Captain Frazer whose job is to go around and purchase recently harvested rice from rural landowners. Mr. Song’s first day on the

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18 The U.S.S.R declared war on Japan in the closing days of the war, sending ground troops across its border and into Korea. The demarcation line is also known as the 38th parallel (Hanley).
19 Settling for a job with the U.S. military is a common course of action for young Korean men at this time, most often taken out of hunger and desperation.
job proves to be his last. He unexpectedly comes face-to-face with the darker side of
the imperialist machine of the U.S. in Korea that is tearing the fabric of his culture
and cheating his people out of their promised autonomy. 20 “A Betrayal” is the story
of a young man named Min who joins one of the “hastily banded political parties”
(304) that proliferated during the post-liberation years. Min is trained to be an
assassin by an anti-imperialist opposition group. 21 Through Min, Oh explores the
complexities of politics at a time of social and political upheaval, when trust and
loyalty become paper-thin, and men put elusive ideals above mutual respect and
brotherhood.

Background
While the USMGIK attempted to set up a capitalist, democratic republic in the South,
it had to confront two forms of communism in the process: “the oppositional
communism of colonial Chosen [colonial Korea], which grew, mostly in South Korea,
to be the indigenous communism of the immediate post-liberation Korea”; the other
form of communism that was “imported into North Korea by the Soviet Union with
its occupation forces” (Henderson 312). Koreans were among the first peoples of
Asia to be exposed to communism. 22 Communism’s revolutionary and anti-colonial
ideals appealed to many Koreans eager to resist Japanese oppression, and as a
result, communism spread quickly down the peninsula throughout the first half of

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20 “The Korean Provisional Government in Chunking [China] had translated the Cairo Declaration into
Korean as soon as it had been issued in December 1943, giving the phrase ‘in due course, free and
independent’ the force of ‘immediately’ or ‘in a few days’ (Henderson 125).
21 This subject would have been risqué for Oh to write about for its potential violation of the
Anticommmunist laws (Song 181).
22 Korea borders the Far East of Russia; “a Korean Socialist party was founded in Khabarovsk in June
1918” (Henderson 313).
the 20th century. Moreover, heavy industrialization and military recruitment of Japan's war effort “intensified classlessness” among the Korean population, creating a social atmosphere conducive to forming communist groups: “students, soldiers, youth groups, factory workers, miners—made constantly growing targets for the Communist organizers” (316).

In September 1945 General Hodge arrived as governor of USMGIK. Members of the newly formed Korean People’s Republic—a group of moderates, led by Lyuh Woon-hyung, and sanctioned by the out-going Japanese—were waiting to greet him. The general refused to meet with them, and would continue to do so as “[r]umors of Communist influence and motivation in Lyuh’s ranks reached Hodge, Tokyo, and Washington”; until finally, “Hodge outlawed the Republic on December 12” (126). “People’s committees” that cropped up by the hundreds in the ensuing months were also deemed communist threats to central power and systematically eradicated by the USMGIK.

The Korean police quickly became the USMGIK's number one resource in maintaining control and political cohesion. The police were given “[b]lanket instructions to arrest all leftist leaders and agitators” (143). Thugs from right-wing youth groups regularly hunted down and murdered alleged political dissidents. A full-fledged campaign to root out communism in South Korea was carried out, and the South became as virulently opposed to communism as the north to “democratic” imperialism. The campaign worked, with the most deadly massacres of alleged

23*General Hodge was very possibly the first man in history selected to wield executive powers over a nation of nearly twenty million on the basis of shipping time [he was already in Japan]” (Henderson 123).
communists occurring on Jeju Island and in Yeosu in southern reaches of the South. According to Bruce Cumings, U.S. Army General James Hausman oversaw the operations in which tens of thousands of Koreans were killed. Moreover, in 1947 South Korean youths were being rounded up for political indoctrination led by “General” Yi Pom-Sok and his spiritual leader, Dr. An Ho-Sang, “a graduate of Jena during the Nazi era...and an open admirer of Hitler’s Jugend” (133-134). Anti-communism became almost a fetish for the USMGIK which backed anti-communist youth organizations with five million dollars in official funds. By July 70,000 had received anti-communist indoctrination; by year’s end—100,000 (Henderson 141).

Henderson calls South Korea in the years leading up the war, “The Gates of Chaos”: “Leaderless indecision” reigned; the population grew 20%; inflation skyrocketed, with the price of goods increasing five to ten times over a two year span; industrial unemployment reached as high as 40%; production at the end of 1948 was roughly 15% lower than it had been at independence in 1945; Japan had all but monopolized entrepreneurship, so only those who had collaborated had any private means intact; all other assets were in the government’s hands, but the government was incompetent and directionless; the black market emerged and soon overpowered legitimate commerce (139). By all accounts, the USMGIK administration, “failed to fill the vacuum” (316). Amid the chaos, it was clear that the USMGIK had successfully stifled Korea’s first attempt at autonomy in the South, and along with it, whatever order the Korean Republic—communist or not—might have been able to bring about.
Political turmoil continued, and failed attempts by the USMGIK to work out a trusteeship with the Soviets resulted in the South declaring its own republic (ROK) on August 15, 1948\textsuperscript{24}; North Korea founded its own Democratic People’s Republic (DPRK), led by Kim Il-Sung\textsuperscript{25}, three weeks later on September 6. From then on, two opposing ideologies worked to forge two different identities. It was only a matter of time before one side invaded the other.\textsuperscript{26} The situation was not so black and white, however, and the South alone faced the arduous task of forging political cohesion among its own opposing forces within.

While “Rice” takes a close look at the consequences of economic mismanagement during the USMGIK administration, and “A Betrayal” delves into the underbelly of South Korean politics during the latter-half of the 1940’s, both stories share a common thread, namely a disdain for the USMGIK, and attempts to resist its mandate. By reading these fictional texts in light of the non-fictional text discussed above, the goal of this chapter “is not to represent the past as it really was, but to represent a new reality by re-situating it” (Barry 169). In other words, the juxtaposing of these non-fiction and fiction texts and the correspondence between them will result in a fresh look at both. According to Gallagher and Greenblatt, the anecdote is crucial in this process. Much of the foregoing “background” relies on conventional “teleological narrative”; however, the “teleological narrative... though larger than...anecdote itself, is still...inspired by the seductive opening of anecdotal

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The USMGIK handpicked Syngman Rhee to be the puppet leader of the South (Henderson).
\item Kim was “a well-known and formidable leader of guerillas” in the war against the Japanese in Manchuria which was waged in the 1930’s (Cumings 44).
\item Incidentally, Korea had maintained the same boundaries, under one centralized government since the Yi Dynasty began in late 14\textsuperscript{th} century.
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form” (50). The two short stories under analysis, I argue, work as useful anecdotes representing the benefit of opening history up to “being anecdotalized”.

Questions abound as to the extent of USMG IK culpability for the dire circumstances in South Korea in the years before the war. Meanwhile historical narrative often leaves unanswered questions regarding how the Korean people might have exacerbated or ameliorated their socio-political problems. Steiner’s and Oh’s stories (regardless of whether they are based on true stories or not) work as exceptional anecdotes that “expose history” or “re-situate it” at the run-up to the Korean War.

Henderson writes in Korea: The Politics of the Vortex that “[t]he average monthly cost of food per person rose from 8 yen before the war [WWII] to 800 yen by 1946. The rise had early been aggravated by USMG IK’s release of controls over grain prices in October 1945” (138). Steiner’s story shows what the consequences of such massive inflation and sketchy economic policy might have been like for the landowner in Korea. The old aristocrat, Mr. Han, understands that his rice will bring in a large profit on the black market, and he is not willing to sell it to Captain Frazer and the military government at their “legal” price. As he begins to lose his temper he screams,

“The government of thieves!...For years I have worked the land for the Japanese and saw them take my rice away. Now I have the land and the rice. The government wants to take it away again. It is the same as the Japanese” (7).
Henderson’s account of South Korea in 1945 is not so generous towards the USMGIK; in fact, he references a letter that was written by conservative newspaper, *Chosun Ilbo*, to Commanding General Hodge complaining that Korea was now worse off than it had been under the Japanese rule (139).

As the U.S. military Jeep departs at the end of the story, Mr. Song shouts back to the dead patriarch’s son, “‘[d]o not ever tell them where the rice is! Never!’” (11). Steiner’s story has political overtones concerning economic protectionism and cultural identity. The message is clear, that Koreans must protect their identity and their industry against imperial powers that attempt to take advantage of them. At the same time, however, a painful lesson is learned: resisting the imperial authorities equals death.

After Sergeant Biancoli shoots Mr. Han out of self-defense—the old man attacked him with a scythe—Captain Frazer complains, “‘[d]id you have to shoot him in the chest?’” (10). While the captain and sergeant show a trace of regret, they know that their visit has been a noteworthy success due the fact that the old man is now dead. Captain Frazer notifies the mournful and shell-shocked Mr. Song on the road back to Seoul that “[t]he police’ll surely find the rice now. They’ll question the wife or the son without fear, now that the old man…” (11). Mr. Song does not let him finish; he repeats the words, “‘[t]hey will find the rice?’” in dejection and disbelief. The old man will have died in vain, a revelation that causes the young teacher to stop the Jeep and jump down to find his own way home. The story ends there,
implying that Mr. Song would sooner starve to death than collaborate with a
government that values a few bags of grain over a human life.

Mr. Song knows that the truth is not that simple, however. In his internal
monologue he asks, “Who is right? They argue the same way, with the same face, and
yet both would have killed” (12). The stubborn pride and possessiveness of Mr. Han
could be as immoral as, or worse than, the ethical position of the USMGIIK. However,
while Captain Frazer claims that the rice is going to feed the hungry in Seoul, and
that even though one man was killed, ten would live as a result, Mr. Song is not
convinced. He remains skeptical of Captain Frazer’s sincerity, vaguely aware that
other, more connected individuals, are going to profit from the sale of Mr. Han’s rice.
In the end he mutters to himself, “I know nothing” (13), perplexed by the dilemma
that he is suddenly confronted with. As wrong as it may be to blackmail—or even
kill—a subject who refuses to cooperate with the authorities, Mr. Song cannot help
but wonder whether the indignation felt as a result of being blackmailed, or
otherwise taken advantage of, justifies killing, as Mr. Han himself had attempted to
do.

Interestingly “Rice” confronts cultural and political issues related to the post-
liberation years rather than simply morality and economics. Mr. Han is ostensibly a
wealthy landowner who likely had an easier time than most Koreans during the
Japanese colony, taxes notwithstanding. After liberation, he probably envisions a
better future without interference from imperial forces. Thus the mere presence of
the foreign officer coming to his home to appropriate his crop vexes Mr. Han. To
complicate the situation, adding a new dimension to the relationship between imperialist and subject, cultural differences heavily influence the situation. The USMGIK might not understand the customs and taboos of Korean culture, for instance, the respect that one must categorically show the old. In addition to Mr. Han’s social status as landowner, his status as elder—“I think [the Korean police] must be afraid to touch him. He’s the head of a clan” (5)—is critical to understanding the complexity of the encounter between the U.S. authorities and Mr. Han. Because the USMGIK officer, Captain Frazer, does not acknowledge the old man’s position and act accordingly, Mr. Han has lost face. Add to this the fact that the young interpreter, Mr. Song, dares walk up to his porch to relay the blasphemous demand to sell his rice at a ridiculously low price, and the old man’s violent reaction becomes understandable. Mr. Han has been slighted by the foreign officer, and also offended by the young man of his culture whom he likely considers a pawn of the imperialists.

“A Betrayal” exposes the opposite side of the imperialist/subject divide in a young Korean man who decides to avenge the likes of Mr. Han and take up arms against the oppressive authorities. Set a year earlier, in the fall of 1946, Oh’s story represents the first historical stage of Korean war literature in which resistance to the Japanese colony works as the background; the USMGIK has replaced the Japanese as the target of resistance.

“The joy of liberation, now torn asunder in chaotic conflicts, was already a year old.” A lively and tense atmosphere in the streets with shouts—“News Extra!
News Extra!”—heard all around, and “[s]mall handbills carrying the news...at an incredible speed.” At “a small drinking place in one of the back alleys of Seoul...two, over-thirtyish men sat at a table, tipping their glasses and talking quietly” (298). They are discussing politics, and one man says the “leftwingers” want “to maintain the status quo of the 38th parallel”; the other replies that “[t]hey can be removed one by one as the occasion arises” (299). Meanwhile, “the only other customer in the place was a young man of twenty-five or six who sat drinking alone at a corner table” (298). The young man is distracted, on edge, paying close attention to the other men’s conversation. Suddenly “an errand boy...rushed in breathlessly with a small square piece of paper in his hand” (299) carrying news of an assassination: “‘Another great man fallen!’” exclaims one of the companions; “‘[w]ho could have shot him’” asks the other. Later, it is revealed that the distracted young man sitting alone in the corner carried out the assassination.

Oh’s story deals deftly with the bitter irony and precarious consequences of taking sides in post-liberation South Korea. One of the middle-aged men in the drinking hole functions as the chorus, stating the theme at the outset:

“All assassinations are not always carried out by political enemies alone. It could well be the doing of the closest ally. They have the advantage—I mean they could kill a person and still look most grieved over the death. It’s only the public that gets deceived. That’s how politics works” (299-300).

At liberation, Min, like so many young men of his generation, was swept away by the attending wave of enthusiasm; an “aroused political consciousness drove the youth of the country into the ranks of clashing political forces. Everyone professed to be on the side of the fatherland”. Being with the fatherland meant viewing the
USMGIK as the surrogate for the ousted Japanese, and Koreans who were seen to be assisting the foreign occupation were labeled “unpatriotic traitors”. Echoing the drinking companions’ discussion of what to do with the leftists, the opposition’s duty is also to “remove [the collaborators] before they could do serious harm” (304).

Oh brings into the story the fact that “[t]he commander of the American Occupation Forces knew little of the situation in Korea” (304). While the absurdity of General Hodge’s selection as governor reverberates throughout history, his incompetence as a leader is cause in “A Betrayal” for hunting down and assassinating “the man manipulating things...supplying distorted information to this commander” (305). Consequently, the deduction can be made that the USMGIK instigated (albeit inadvertently) much of the civil strife in the post-liberation years, i.e. violence visited on Korean by Korean.

Min is chosen to assassinate the unnamed Korean who allegedly works closely with General Hodge. He manages to execute the task perfectly and the “traitor” is removed. Min’s success, however, is overshadowed by his own guilt, which is not rooted in friendly feelings for the enemy nor any semblance of conscience that prohibits killing. Instead, Min feels horrible that another man has been framed in order to protect him and the men in whose employ he works. When Min learns of the circumstances in the life of the man who is charged with his crime, thus begins the transformation which he undergoes throughout the rest of the story,
a change that signifies the potential for empathy and individual agency to endure the social upheaval and political chaos.

While the non-fiction texts tell of wayward youths being indoctrinated by right-wing or communist organizations, each one an automaton, brainwashed into following the commands of power-crazed leaders to torture and to kill the enemy, “A Betrayal” delineates just this phenomenon; yet at the same time Oh intimates that empathy and individuality might survive in spite of the demagogues and the political machines.

The young assassin had been too busy with the organization to be at his mother’s side when she passed away, so when he hears that the fall guy has an ailing mother for whom he “had gone into town to borrow money” (301), Min identifies with the other man and begins to feel sympathy for him. He realizes that he has been taken hostage by a society torn apart by the chaotic political situation, replete with “jealousy among the political leaders, open denunciations, proliferating conspiracies,” and that the part he was playing was more detrimental to society than helpful. “[S]ince his mother’s death [Min] had begun to see that his actions, while serving one cause, were defeating another at the same time” (307). The cause that he was undermining was the preservation of the Korean people amidst fast and certain self-destruction.

When Min finds in the cellar an alleged traitor “lying prostrate on the floor…strand of hair…matted in blood” (308), his conversation with the recently
beaten man works to crystallize for Min the truth concerning the politics that he has heretofore been consumed by.

“We these politicians...fought against the Japanese colonialism, but...each one is doing his best to grab the power by enlisting as many members as possible into his own party...we young people did not enter politics for the same reason...we were pure in our passion to rebuild the fatherland...But the greed of the political leaders knows no end” (309).

The prisoner stresses to Min that even those pure in motive are “soiled by [the politicians’] greed. Take a look,” he insists, “at the bloody clashes among youth organizations.” In other words, the youth of South Korea are the hapless victims of a cruel political game that feeds on their passion and good will to produce a reign of terror.

The young assassin’s conversion culminates with a taxi ride to the home of the scapegoat’s family. He gives a large sum of money to the sister and assures her that her jailed brother will return home soon. Min goes to the office of his organization and tells his boss that he is resigning. He proclaims, “...now I want to love as many simple, ordinary people as possible...I now prefer the kind of life in which there is no need to talk about causes” (312-313).

Min’s awakening and subsequent vow to lead a simple life are the backlash of joining a group in which men put elusive ideals above mutual respect and brotherhood. His transformation provides an opportunity to put his life on a path of reconciliation. The bloodied prisoner on the cellar floor sums up how political fanaticism, and radical politics often end up robbing the individual of their autonomy and free-will. “True, I often met and conversed with men of the opposing
parties’” he explains, “but the only purpose of that was to know “myself” more clearly. It was a way of redefining myself” (309). Min makes the same bold choice: he would rather be killed for who he is than spared as the hit-man whose crimes are answered for by innocent compatriots.

The turmoil that gripped South Korea at liberation was inevitable considering the political void and social disarray resulting from the departure of the Japanese. Though no one will ever know what would have happened had the Korean Republic of Mr. Lyuh and company been sanctioned by the USMGIK at the dawn of Korean independence, it is certain that the intrusion of a new foreign power made the situation worse, as Steiner’s story “Rice” attests. Misguided policy driven primarily by anti-communism contributed negatively to a volatile environment that may have exploded regardless of the leaderships’ identity or affiliations. Knowing that the USMGIK manipulated the rice market at the expense of landowners is valuable in order to understand South Korean culture in the late 1940’s. Mr. Han’s violent reaction to the government blackmail puts the consequences of U.S. policy in perspective.27 Somewhere in the annals of recorded history there may be evidence that a man like Mr. Han was killed by the U.S. authorities for refusing to cooperate—maybe not. If such a story were found, it would take nothing away from Steiner’s own anecdote of what life under the USMGIK might have been like for landowners. In combination with the factual information that the USMGIK had deregulated the

27 “Rice” is invaluable, among other reasons, for showing the origins of the struggle between free-trade and economic protectionism that plays itself out later on in South Korea and all the way up to the present day.
rice market in 1945, “Rice” succeeds in providing a “real” glimpse of the social and political climate of the time.

Oh’s “A Betrayal” is likewise crucial to developing an understanding of post-liberation South Korea, relating particularly to the underbelly of politics. The power-grabbing, the denunciations, and the in-fighting all hinge on unthinkable reality that one’s closest ally may be the most likely to orchestrate one’s assassination. In such an environment, it is no surprise that Min chooses to withdraw from politics and devote himself to a simple life in community with his fellow men and women. Oh’s story promotes the idea that politics and political fanaticism are largely responsible for the upheaval of the times, in equal measure to—if not more than—mismanagement of the USMGIF. While Oh’s story appears to belong to the first stage of Korean war literature in its depiction of the resistance to the imperial government, the tame conclusion of the story embodied in Min’s withdrawal from politics could be read as a submission to the repressive hegemony that would eventually stifle and erase the ideological and political conflicts that are causing unrest in “A Betrayal” while simultaneously eliminating political freedoms.

In closing, Gallagher and Greenblatt stress that “we do not experience works of art...as confirmation of what we already know...a meaningful encounter with a text that reaches us powerfully, [makes us] feel at once pulled out of our own world and plunged back with redoubled force into it” (17). Steiner and Oh’s accounts of what life was like in South Korea between liberation and the war help “re-situate” the way that one views the events in Korea at a crucial time in its history. With some
knowledge of the social and political circumstances of the texts, one might be
plunged back into the world with a new awareness through reading these works of
art that bring to life the run-up to the war that changed Korea forever.
CHAPTER IV

THE SOLDIERS' PERSPECTIVE

They said, “Democracy is at the crossroads everyone
will be given a gun and a map in cases like this
there is no need to vote.” —Reg Saner “They Said”

Determining the perspective of soldiers who fought in the Korean War may
be as difficult as determining the war’s exact cause. Each attempt produces manifold
questions and explanations. There are those for whom the war was a chance to be a
hero and to make a sacrifice for their homeland, or for freedom. For others, the war
was simply their duty—they followed orders and fought. Yet another attitude
toward the war was that of acute disdain and bitterness. While the desire for
heroism is unambiguous, and obeying one’s superiors may be lacking in creativity
and purpose, the last perspective has a decidedly intriguing quality. Where does this
disdain originate? Can the military instill bitterness in soldiers? If so, can the
commanders always be sure as to where the soldier will direct his ill-will and rage?
Whatever the soldiers’ perspective, each combatant is expected to harness a feeling
of scorn for the enemy, to cultivate a disposition that permits them to kill.
Mindful of the broadness of the topic, this chapter endeavors to supply a general overview of various texts that contribute to an understanding of the soldiers’ perspective in the Korean War. The themes that work best towards this end include: politics and propaganda, racism and bigotry, counter-cultural sentiments, and egregious violence. Each of these threads will be addressed in sections with occasional connections between them. Ultimately what this chapter aims to reveal is that regardless of what side he was on, the soldier shared with the enemy similar desires, fears, concerns, and compulsions.

The first considerations to be discussed below are politics and propaganda. How much did politics effect the soldiers and what forms of propaganda influenced their attitudes regarding the war? The second factor which relates closely to the first is racism and bigotry, and how they contributed to the soldiers’ view of the enemy. The following pages will also attempt to discuss instances of resistance to the status quo. Did soldiers express disgust, not for the enemy, but rather for the systems and organizations that placed them in the precarious and deadly theater of war? Finally, this section will address the issue of violence. Constant exposure to killing and destruction effects the soldier, altering him psychologically and often physically. Similarly, civilians suffer as much if not more than the soldier, and often their perspective of combat registers more lucidly than the soldier who may become desensitized to violence due to his direct involvement.

Various non-fiction texts help to delineate the politics and attendant propaganda that riddles Korean War literature, such as Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s correspondence with corporal John Moutlette, which was released to the
press in January 1951. This publication reveals that the media and public opinion strongly influenced the morale of troops on the ground. More blatant propaganda, such as lectures with titles like “Why We Fight”, appear in Hinojosa’s novel *The Useless Servants*. In addition to the tactics employed by the U.S., examples of propaganda used by the Koreans—found particularly in the poems published in Suh Ji-Moon’s *Brother Enemy* are significant as well. Ha Jin’s *War Trash* helps expose the Chinese political perspective during the war. Through exploring these texts and others, a broad view of the political perspectives of the soldiers in the Korean War is exposed, ultimately contributing to an understanding of the political and cultural nuances of the war.

Bigotry and racism often prove to inform the soldiers’ attitudes concerning the war and the enemy. Ku Sang’s poem “On Burnt Ground 2” shows how the Korean soldier might have perceived the foreign presence in his homeland. Reginald Thompson and Rolando Hinojosa provide vivid examples of racism in the GI as do Hanley, Choe, and Mendoza in *The Bridge at No Gun Ri*. Ha Jin shows that the Chinese also circulated a narrow view of Americans in order to shape their perspective of the enemy. On the American home front, a human interest article entitled “The Koreans” published in *The New Yorker* in July 1950—when the war was just weeks old—signifies that people in the States possessed a limited, biased view of the people with (and against) whom their military was fighting.

Instrumental in depicting resistance to the status quo, and a counter-cultural point of view of the war are works by the poets William Wantling and James Magner, Jr. who write about identifying with the enemy. In these poets’ work the
idea is proposed that soldiers should not be fighting each other, but instead ought to be uniting to take down the governments which pit young men against one another in a bloodbath. Fictions such as James Drought’s novel *The Secret*, and Robert O. Bowen’s short story “A Matter of Price” take disdain for military and cultural hegemony to its extremity, reminding the reader that in addition to military personnel, non-combatant compatriots—both in the government and without—are implicated in the suffering that soldiers on the ground undergo.

The issue of violence is a given in war, especially in the Korean War, where the goal became to inflict as many casualties as possible on the enemy. However, violence extends beyond the physical, as mental damage that war violence wreaks on the soldier is comparatively devastating. Lorrie Goldensohn asserts that “[s]oldiers of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War alike begin to emphasize that casualties are not just physical injuries, but a mutilation of both flesh and spirit” (261). Chang-Rae Lee’s *The Surrendered* explores the lasting effects that war has on Hector Brennan. Similarly *The Bridge at No Gun Ri* uncovers the suffering that Korean War veterans of the U.S. Eighth Army endured and continue to endure as a result of the violent acts that they committed during the war. The same book exposes the massacre of some 400 civilians by the U.S. Army 7th Cavalry Regiment in the early weeks of hostilities.

In referring to the tragedy at No Gun Ri, a line must be drawn distinguishing violence against civilians from that inflicted on the military. The fact that civilian deaths were far from unusual demands the attention of any scholar of the Korean War. While texts such as *The Taebaek Mountains* by Cho Jung-Rae’s impart a view of
the G.I as brutal and ignorant, the U.S. was not alone in committing atrocities against civilians. *Trees on the Cliff* by Whang [sic] Sun-won also deals with violence against non-combatants, in this case that which ROK soldiers committed. While physical harm caused by war results in great hardship, the psychic damage that Korean War violence did to its people could be considered more insidious. Suji Kwock Kim’s war poetry stresses the trauma that is passed from one generation to the next as a result of families being torn apart by the war.

**Politics and Propaganda**

President Truman preferred to keep a low-key approach at the outset of the Korean War, avoiding speeches and opting not to organize a propaganda agency to manipulate public opinion. According to Steven Casey, “a propaganda agency was a creature of a total war” and Truman wanted to keep Korea a limited “police action”. Nevertheless, the lack of a public relations agenda was itself a form of propaganda—one that was aimed at keeping the American people ignorant. The backlash, however, came from an uninformed and confused public that demanded answers as to why the U.S. was fighting in Korea (217).

On January 19, 1951, young Marine corporal John Moullette’s letter to Dean Acheson was received by the embattled Secretary of State. In it he read a litany of complaints such as the “waning morale among the troops ‘because the American people are not behind them’” and “‘...men aren’t afraid to fight...it’s just that they have no cause to fight’” (219). Indeed polls showed that 66 percent of Americans wanted to pull out of Korea. Already enmeshed in a PR debacle concerning the war,
Acheson decided to give the young corporal an explanation for the U.S. action in Korea.

In response to the letter, the Secretary replied with politically-charged rhetorical expressions like “stand up to aggression” and “help create a better world.” The answer won over Moullette who appreciated most the analogy to the 1930s in which Acheson asserted that World War II could have been averted had America responded to the aggression earlier; “Korea served the same purpose now” (219). The dominant ideal behind these remarks point to the U.S. mission to police the world, in this case the Far East. But could not American global power, marked by tens of thousands of soldiers occupying Korea (and Japan), cause disdain for America and the American people? If so, can anything but low morale be expected of the GI? If his actions go unappreciated by the folks back home while being held in contempt by the people whom he is trying to help, how can the soldier be expected to carry out his duty with pride and good will?

The soldier’s question is not adequately answered. Acheson can only speak in abstract terms. He is prevented from addressing the realities on the ground for political reasons, lest he reveal how badly the U.S. is being beaten by the Chinese and North Koreans. Likewise, the young corporal likely had to restrain himself or else his letter would have been ignored for lack of decorum. The subtle balm that Moullette felt from reading Acheson’s letter likely wore off not long after receiving the response; nothing had changed for the GI. He still had to endure a compromised position of fighting a politically unpopular war, and to continue committing morally reprehensible acts mandated by the grand narrative of U.S. foreign policy. The
Secretary of State did not get off easily however; the public replied with scathing letters, complaining that Acheson “failed to state ‘what we are going to do in Korea, how long we are going to fight...and to furnish 90 percent of the troops...’” (224). As the Truman Administration continued to botch the PR side of the Korean War, increasing its unpopularity on the home front, the military was doing a marginally better job of boosting the morale of the average GI on the ground.

In The Useless Servants when Rafe gets R&R in Japan, he and his comrades experience, “the softest duty yet...to escort newcomers and take them around southwestern Honshu” (158). While in Japan, Rafe and his fellow soldiers are given unit citation certificates. Rafe sees the award ceremony as “the Army's way of indoctrinating these [new] guys” who were “pretty impressed”. The newcomers also sat through a lecture by “[s]ome Major...on Japan, Korea on ‘Why We Fight’” (162).

Similarly, public support for the war effort was being rallied back home in the States through media such as the pro-war film Why Korea? Unfortunately for the Truman Administration, the film “faced a hostile barrier...P.J Wood, the secretary of the Independent Theater Owners, publicly refused to circulate it unless the administration expressed its intention to make another film—’Why We Should Get out of Korea’” (Casey 225).

The U.S. was not alone in attempting to boost morale. The South Korean Defense Ministry organized writers and poets into an “auxiliary unit” at the outset of the war. The government believed that “morale-raising propaganda” was essential to the ROK’s success. Due to the chaotic retreat south during the opening months of the fighting, these writers suffered hardship, and their lives were often endangered.
Even worse, posterity has generally viewed these writers as “Oyong”, meaning ‘writer’s in the government’s pay’. Nonetheless their work cannot be slighted as it offers an intimate look at the war from the ROK soldier’s perspective (Suh 15).

Much of the ROK “propaganda” poetry rings overtly patriotic. For instance, Cho Chi-hun’s “Return Victorious” pities the soldiers who “push on and on/ With hungry stomachs and exhausted bodies”, while at the same time he praises their valor, exclaiming “My beloved younger brothers!/ ...Know that yours and yours alone will be the power and the glory/ Of saving the country and guarding freedom” (47). Other poems, however, present a less nationalistic view of the war, proffering a more personal look at the ROK soldier.

In “Kansas Line” by Chang Ho-gang, the soldier expresses existential angst in describing the physical and spiritual trap that is the war. The speaker asks, “Ah, who drew the Kansas Line/ That keeps the strong spirits of soldiers from ranging freely?” (145). Unlike the military demarcations lines and the bloodbaths that occur across them, the original geographical markers of Korea—“Hyangro Peak, Ungbong Peak, Magpie Peak” evoke non-belligerent connotations which are contrasted starkly with “[f]iring trenches, shelter trenches, wire fences, and mines” (144). The landscape is now dominated by military devices by which troops navigate their movements. The war has rendered the land a dangerous maze in which the soldier is lost. A general sense of longing for peace and return to normal life looms in Chang’s poem. Additionally, Chang’s speaker is making a subtle indictment of the U.S. command that is actually responsible for drawing the Kansas Line that arbitrarily cuts off the Korean people from one another. While verse by Koreans
about the war often expresses an affection for the land, the foreign point of view portrays Korea as a rugged and miserable land of rocky hills.

The logistical challenge of hill-fighting common to the Korean War represents a singular difficulty for the U.S. soldier. Acute tension and bitter irony emerge when comparing the narrative of Staff Sergeant Charles M. Bielecki with the fictional account in James Drought's *The Secret*. Each text portrays what it must have been like to try taking a hill from the North Koreans and the Chinese. Bielecki raves about the heroism that was shown by his company—mentioning only in passing the fact that he was the only member of his squad to survive. He fondly recalls how Sergeant Ben Wilson who “took on the entire Chinese army’, killing thirty-four on the first day and forty-two on the second. Bielecki points out that “[s]ince no one can receive the Medal of Honor twice, [Wilson] received the Distinguished Service Cross”. On day four of the hill-fight, Bielecki concludes without the least trace of irony that “it rained pretty hard, and the Chinese just took off”. He harbors one regret regarding what has become a moot point considering that more than enough destruction had been done: “we could have used more artillery support...and perhaps an air strike would have been helpful” (Peters 130).

In *The Secret*, James Drought's takes a similar story and adds a heavy-handed political component which infuses it with absurdity and irony. A group of four Congressmen are planning to visit the front, and in order to fill them in as to logistics, a program was circulated detailing all aspects of the upcoming attack. The plan backfires however when the “...Gooks up on the hill got hold of copies of these programs, too, and everybody knew it, but if the attack plans were changed then the
programs would be useless, not only for the Reds, but for the politicians, too, so it was decided to go ahead” (156).

Does Drought err in saying "useless [italics supplied]...for the Reds”? Or does he mean to imply that the Reds were meant to be tipped off? And if so, why? Were the honorary guests interested in seeing their own young men slaughtered? Did they think it was a theater production where everyone gets up and walks off the stage afterwards?

Somehow Frank makes it back alive despite the fact that “[he] lost his whole squad”. Due to the abject failure of the attack, the men are commanded to try again at sunrise, and when they finally take the hill, “Frank wasn’t one of the inspired handful who made the rock’s pinnacle. He lay instead in a ravine with his hand covering the bloody right mess where his leg had been” (157). Later, the general comes and puts a pair of medals on Frank while he recovers in the hospital. In stark contrast to the denotation of medals in Bielecki’s anecdote, Frank scoffs at the awards given to him in The Secret: “‘I told the cocksuckers they could cram all the goddamn medals up their ass...You know what they did? They smiled at me. They said they understood’” (158). The response of the generals could be taken two ways: either the smile and the understanding are empty and meaningless, or they suggest that the general is well aware—almost willing to admit—that the soldier has every right to resent the government and the military command, being duped, exploited, and maimed as he is by a system that would knowingly order its soldiers into a death trap.
Frank and countless other fictional and non-fictional characters of Korean War texts feel implicated in a cruel, stage-play farce, as though reason and morality have abandoned mankind. Frank has the courage to stand up—albeit in vain—to the hegemony that has conspired to ruin him physically and spiritually by refusing to be decorated for his “bravery”. The action that he was commanded to take did not involve courage; on the contrary, it required stupidity. Any medals awarded should be perceived accordingly as dubious honors at best.

Perhaps the oddest method used to boost U.S. morale was to fly in turkey dinners to troops at the front, which by Thanksgiving 1950 was hundreds of miles deep into North Korea. Gilbert Depner of the 7th Marines recounts that “[t]he only trouble was...you didn't have a place to eat it—except out in the cold...they'd dish it up...[b]ut by the time you got out there it was frozen solid” (Robertson 264). Along with the festive dinner, General MacArthur made the empty promise that they’d make a “Big push...and be home for Christmas”. Hinojosa’s Rafe is told by his comrade that such talk is “Politics...It’s his way of saving his ass” (98). Meanwhile, the U.S. and its allies were about to be annihilated by the vicious ambushes of the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) who had weeks earlier entered North Korea across the Yalu River in response to the U.S. breach of the 38th parallel dividing North and South.

What was far more significant from a propaganda perspective than any turkey dinner or Christmas promise was the denial by MacArthur that the Chinese were in North Korea at all. Keith Jernigan of the 1st Marine Combat Service Group recalls: “There was some dissension as to why MacArthur didn’t agree or want to
acknowledge the fact of their [Chinese] existence” (Robertson 266). Waging war with China was plainly not in the best interest of the U.S. (and vice versa) for political reasons. Rafe also mentions the conflicting messages from command regarding the Chinese in *The Useless Servants*. At one point the word was “We are not at war with the Chinese”; later, “Eighth Army insists Chinese not here in force”, to which Rafe replies, “well, ‘in force’ or not, these guys are here, and I believe what my eyes see” (Hinojosa 82). In addition to the dishonesty (or failed intelligence) of the U.S. command as to the make-up of the enemy, the count of North Koreans was also suspiciously inconsistent. Reginald Thompson adds in *Cry Korea* that “On October 24th, the remaining enemy [was] estimated at 57,000...On the 25th [it was] revised to 25,000” (189). In fact, 300,000 “Chinese People’s Volunteers” had by then begun moving into North Korea preparing to ambush U.S. and allied forces (Ryan 127).

While the U.S. government and military manipulated the way that its people and soldiers respectively viewed the communist enemy, this was not unique. In *War Trash*, a novel about the Korean War from the Chinese perspective, Ha Jin writes of the “regular meetings at which both civilians and soldiers would condemn American Imperialism”. In a humorous anecdote, Jin explains how the Chinese “often identified the United States as the source of their personal troubles. A college graduate...claimed to an audience of eight hundred that his health had been ruined

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28 The Truman Administration’s resilient (and successful) drive for U.N. condemnation of China as the aggressor indicates how worried the U.S. was about political repercussions of engaging the Chinese in battle. Likewise, China called its troops in Korea “volunteers” so that “nominally [China had] not sent its regular troops to Korea [and therefore] might avoid a full-blown war with the United States” (Jin 12).

29 While Chinese combatants are often referred to by Americans as CCF (Chinese Communist Forces), they referred to themselves as Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV).
by the American film industry [and its] pornographic movies from which he had learned how to masturbate” (11).

Instances of prejudice and bigotry appear throughout Korean War literature, varying from banal political slurs, to viciously racist epithets. The cause of the bigotry manifests itself either in prejudice against the enemy’s ideology or as hatred of the other race. Either way, an uninformed and ignorant outlook is being disseminated which does not take into account the predispositions of the peoples of the Far East. For instance, America’s anti-communist regime, in lumping Koreans and Chinese together with the U.S.S.R, failed to acknowledge the organic and amenable aspects of communism in East Asia.30 As a result, blind opposition to communism was firmly established in American consciousness.31 Sentiments expressed by award-winning reporter Margaret Higgins indicate the othering and the demonizing of communists: “…communism...an ugly threatening thing...best to beat it as far from our shores as possible” (86), and the “Third World War...better...in Korea...than...our own shores” (16-17).32 In short, communism is depicted as monstrous, and those who uphold communist ideals are correspondingly brutal, demonic, and inferior; the Asian enemy is assigned these qualities in part by default, while a racism against Asians also lurks in the mentality of the foreign forces.

30 John K. Fairbank writes extensively about that communism from Marx to Lenin to Stalin inspired peoples of East Asia to fight their way out of the shackles of feudalism reinforced by imperialism from the West. Absentee landlords represented feudalism and fighter planes strafing villages stood for imperialism (Foreign Policy Reports March 15, 1949).
31 It is widely accepted that the Red Scare while distracting the public from Korea contributed greatly to the anti-communist sentiment in the U.S.
32 Containing communism in other parts of the world, as was conceived in the NSC 68 report, was already being put into effect.
Bigotry and Racism

Nobody knows for sure where the earliest inhabitants of Korea came from...the present inhabitants are of predominantly Mongoloid stock, with some admixture of southern blood, probably Malay...The first European visitors to Korea noted that the natives looked more like white men than other Asiatics did. There’s no record that the Koreans were especially pleased to hear it (16).

The July 8, 1950 issue of The New Yorker printed this cheeky editorial thirteen days into the Korean War. The author condescends a people that has just entered into a civil war to forge its modern identity—a struggle in which young American GIs are being killed at an alarming rate—and assumes a playful and arrogant tone, including the use of a term that is overtly racist and off-color. In this context “Mongoloid” signifies someone born of the race originating in East Asia, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, yet the term also denotes someone with Down’s syndrome. In 1949, a year before the Korean War, the phrase “mongoloid child” was recorded in a text by S.S. Saracon as connoting a child born with Down’s syndrome (“Down,” OED). The homonym allows for one to imply the other which is the reason why the term has fallen out of use: who would want to risk confusing a reference to an Asian with a person born with a genetic defect or vice versa?

The New Yorker story concludes on a ridiculous note, suggesting that Koreans’ response to the racial estimations of Europeans might be accessible to others; even more puzzling is the vague assumption that Koreans might (or might not) take the racial comment as a compliment: if they did, they would be petting the ego of white people; if they did not, they would be refusing to submit to the racial hierarchy that is implicit in the comment.
The author goes on to describe Korea as a “doormat for other countries”, a place where “highways read, ‘If you meet a foreigner, kill him,’” and the Koreans as a people with “any number of local and household gods, the great majority of whom are evil demons” (17). In all of these descriptions, the text depends on derogatory expressions that are either cliché, hearsay, or stereotype. Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that the author is deriding Koreans, painting an unflattering image of the people whom the U.S. military is currently assisting. The purpose of demeaning the Koreans as the U.S. embarks on what will turn out to be a long grueling journey with the Republic of Korea (ROK) puzzles and vexes. Yet the attitude expressed in The New Yorker is far from anomalous; other contemporary texts used the same tone of condescension: “...the distant, strange little republic of Korea”33; “‘Operation Rathole’ [as the] G.O.P. expressed itself on the subject of Korea.”34

According to Hanley et al, “Anti-Asian racism...underlay many American attitudes on the far side of the Pacific. General Willoughby believed firmly in “the ‘military supremacy of the white race.’” Other ranking army officers were recorded saying, “‘Dumbness has almost been bred into these people” and “They are sneaky right down to their pagan souls. They are like animals” (29).

Whether on the home front or the battle front, Koreans and Chinese alike were readily othered and demonized. Sometimes the racially-motivated language appears to come from a repertory of bad adolescent jokes, like when General Walker allegedly said, “‘We should not assume that (the)/ Chinese Communists are

33 (“War in Asia.” Time. July 3, 1950)
committed in force. After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas” or when Maj. Gen. Almond says, “Don’t let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you” (Robertson 269).

Suey Lee Wong, a Chinese-American who fought against the communists in Korea claims he was fighting three wars at the same time—first, the communist enemy, second, the American bigots, and third, himself for killing his fellow Chinese (Hanley 178). Rafe, in The Useless Servants, also feels victimized by the bigotry rampant in the military; being himself Mexican-American, he rankled at comments such as General Almond’s quoted above.

Such myopia on the part of the U.S. military, particularly from high command is inexcusable if not outright condemnable, since as Reginald Thompson states eloquently in the passages below, the attitude of racial superiority makes othering possible, and othering permits violent crime:

But they never spoke of the enemy as though they were people…it was simply ‘dead Gook’ or ‘good Gook’ (44)...I realized that they had to be ‘Gooks’, for otherwise these essentially kind and generous Americans would not have been able to kill them indiscriminately or smash up their homes and poor belongings. By calling them ‘Gooks’ they were robbed of their humanity (114).

Of course the U.S. military is not alone in harboring racist views that de-humanize the other. In Ku Sang’s poem “Poetry on Burnt Ground 2,” an odd mix of racism and tolerance surfaces. The speaker notices a “black boy” sitting with his mother on the train. The child is described as having a “dark head...eyes darker than obsidian...teeth whiter than quartz”; taking the boy on his lap, the speaker resolves to “entertain him like [he] once did a monkey in a zoo” (105). Racism gives way to misogyny when he “think[s] of the few dollar bills that must have brought him into being”. Despite the discomfort caused by the child who is apparently the mixed
progeny of a Korean woman and a black man, the speaker hits on the unfathomable divide between possible fates that could have become of the father of the child: “Could his father have died in battle and been buried on a hill of this land? Or could he have returned to his country with proud decorations?” (106). In these questions lies the odd blend of respect and disdain that Koreans ostensibly feel for American soldiers, black soldiers in particular: the amazement that foreign men died for this country, yet left their imprint, sullying the Korean women, returning home without accountability for their offspring. An ambiguity resonates as to whether the speaker should feel awe or disgust at the man being buried “on a hill of this land”. If he died, should he not be pitied for being buried far from home without family or friends to visit his grave? On the other hand, if he returned a hero while his illegitimate child lives neglected on the other side of the world, then should not he be condemned?

The poem concludes on an ambiguous note. While the speaker softens to the idea that racial difference might be overcome by empathy and respect—“On the tired and abandoned face of the woman I see all of us now”—there remains a disturbing sense of all-consuming bigotry in the final line: “Only I, thrust into the part of a black child’s daddy, sweat” (105-06). The “us” that he sees in the woman’s face could simply refer to the Korean people, not humanity, thereby dismissing the child’s father and disregarding the sacrifice that he has apparently made for the Korean people.
Ha Jin in *War Trash* exposes the way that the CPV\(^{35}\) troops were taught to view Americans. For one, Americans were to be seen as immoral imperialists, “better equipped and highly mechanized with air support”. On a personal level, however,

American troops...had been spoiled and softened by comforts. GIs couldn’t walk and were road-bound, depending completely on automobiles; if no vehicles were available, they’d hire Korean porters to carry their bedrolls and food...Worst of all, having no moral justification for the war, they lacked the determination to fight. They were all anxious to have a vacation...At the mere sight of us, the Americans would go to their knees and surrender—they were just pussycats (10).

Much of the description rings true, such as the “road-bound” aspect of the U.S. Army, which incidentally was a critical reason why it was not more successful in combat against the Chinese who did not require roads and waged war from Korea’s ubiquitous hills\(^{36}\). Other aspects of Jin’s example of Chinese propaganda reveals lies. The U.S. soldier generally did not surrender; there are, on the contrary, far more instances of Chinese soldiers walking towards enemy lines with their hands above their heads.

Despite the assertion of Americans’ weaknesses, Jin’s narrator mentions feeling “unnerved,” for he had “rubbed shoulders with the Americans when [he] was in the Nationalist army\(^{37}\)...[and he] knew the enemy was not only superior in equipment but also better trained” (11). In another humorous passage, Jin writes

\(^{35}\) CPV is the acronym meaning “Chinese People’s Volunteer Army”.
\(^{36}\) Reginald Thompson makes this point abundantly clear in *Cry Korea*.
\(^{37}\) Apparently he had fought against the communists in the Chinese Civil War only to be conscripted by them after Mao’s victory when the Nationalist leadership fled to Taiwan. The U.S. supported the Nationalists.
about the “germ bomb, which was said to have landed near the train station”. This was meant to show that the U.S. was evil enough to use bacteriological weapons on the communists. “They [the Chinese command] displayed the thing at every battalion, together with photographs of infected creatures, such as giant flies, rats, mosquitoes, clams, cockroaches, earthworms” (10). Jin’s fictional account of the propaganda that the Chinese command might have used contains significant value, showing that the Chinese attempted to shape the way that its soldiers perceived the enemy.

In essence the military command was indoctrinating its own soldiers by referring to the enemy in racially-charged terms. In order to train “kind and generous Americans” to be cruel, brainwashing is necessary: “It must teach him to kill, while unteaching him ‘thou shalt not kill’” (“Secret” 148). In response to the ignorance and bigotry that was rampant in the Korean War, the question arises, was there any opposition within the military cultures or the national cultures at large to combat the trend?

Towards a Counter Culture

“Korean veterans did not come home and start throwing tantrums like many Viet vets did. We simply faded back into civilian life—no monuments, and not even a doughnut wagon to meet the [troop ship] I came home on.”

-William Childress

The Korean War did not warrant the same public response as the Vietnam War. There were no demonstrations or draft-dodgers, no hippies or peace movements. The Korean War did not define a generation. Whereas WWII inspired great works of

38 Quoted from Retrieving Bones (Ehrhart xxxvi).
literature by the likes of Heller, Vonnegut, and Mailer, and the Vietnam War
literature features highly acclaimed novels by Phillip Caputo, Frances Fitzgerald,
and Tim O’Brien, among others, the Korean War literature—with a few exceptions—
ever found its rightful place in popular culture or the canon of American literature.
Perhaps this is due to the fact that the Korean War was largely forgotten amid the
“Red Scare” back home, and the distractions of boogie-woogie and a booming
American economy. Ehrhart and Jason poignantly ask,

Who wanted to read about a backwater war that possessed neither
grand scale nor apparent nobility...Who wanted to be reminded that
the most powerful nation on earth [was being] frustrated (and nearly
defeated) by a bunch of unsophisticated Asian peasants in sneakers?
(xix).

Neglect and lack of interest back home notwithstanding, Korean War
literature features works that express counter-cultural notions and renegade ideas
that could have been the seeds of revolution. For instance, in William Wantling’s
poem “Pusan Liberty”, the speaker cops heroin from a “SEAL” who “sits on his
roller-skate cart/ minus arms & legs but beneath/ his ass a million $’s worth of
heroin”. Later the speaker finds a place to “fix, sitting in the/ sun on the adobe
veranda” when “2 Chinese agents come around/ to make their buy”. The three
young men

    sit
there and fix, I fix again, the
so-called Enemy & I, but just
three angry boys lost in the immense
absurdity of War & State sudden
friends who have decided that
our hatred of Government exceeds
the furthest imaginable limits
of human calculation.

Wantling’s poem stands diametrically opposed to the status quo concerning both how a soldier ought to view the enemy and the rhetoric of the politicians in Washington. Instead, his soldiers abhor the hegemony responsible for sending young men from America to kill the young men over in Asia. The central irony of “Pusan Liberty” lies in the fact that a separate and euphoric peace has been reached by happenstance between men who may have been shooting at one another days or weeks ago under a complex system of orders. Their narcotic fix dismisses both the validity of any enmity that Americans and Chinese might feel for each other, as well as any notion that young men are impervious to the trauma and hardship of fighting in war\(^{39}\).

Yi Yong-sang writes “I Can Love a North Korean” after witnessing the burial of a NKPA soldier by “Sergeant Richard” to whom he devotes the poem. Richard believes in the humanity of the enemy and understands that the enemy is likely coerced into fighting on the side of People’s Army. To the speaker of the poem comes the revelation that communists are human too, and he repeats the words of the Sergeant, “I love North Koreans./ I only hate Communism” (204). Yi admires how Sergeant Richard is able to circumvent the convention of demonizing the individuals against whom he is fighting, and to separate ideology from humanity.

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\(^{39}\) Wantling was in fact introduced to morphine after sustaining a combat wound in Korea which began a lifelong addiction to opiates that he never was able to overcome before he died aged 41 (Ehrhart xxxviii).
While this radical idea strikes Yi’s speaker as novel, the same attitude is shown towards the enemy in other poems by Korean poets. Such a perspective can be read as a move towards the third stage of Korean war literature, that of reconciliation.

Yu Chong’s riveting poem “Brothers” deals with the horrible fact that amid the shifting lines and the forced conscription of Republicans by Communists and vice versa, Korean men would often engage their siblings, cousins, uncles, and nephews in combat, usually unwittingly, and regardless of whether they happened to possess the same ideological beliefs, or any ideology at all.

Brother! My brother!
...Those emaciated shoulders heaving in pitch darkness
I glimpsed while peering across the frozen 38th parallel
...They are my brother’s, without a doubt.

The powerlessness to alter fate, to arrest the tragic course of the war, or to stop the tearing apart of families finds its cold comfort in the thought that brother enemies might connect by looking up at the night sky together:

Are you lying in a mountain cave tonight,
While I’m lying in a trench in a minefield?
In the sky we both look up at from our separate holes
The stars are so clear and bright
Their icy light freezes the earth” (220).

Like Wantling, James E. Magner, Jr. also takes the hostilities between Americans and Chinese and formulates an unorthodox turn of thought in “To a Chinaman, In a Hole, Long Ago.” Like Wantling, he attacks the powers that be, calling the situation in which all combatants find themselves “our demagogue damnation.”
The speaker of the poem imagines the longing and grief felt by the loved ones of the dead man beside whom he finds himself lying, barely conscious. He incants a splendid oath of empathy:

I...do bequeath my life to you
that you might fly the Yellow Sea
to your startled matron’s arms
and curl beholden
amid the pygmies of your loins.

Though the poem waxes sentimental compared with the political power of the Wantling poem, Magner expresses a profound sympathy for the enemy that is glaringly absent from other texts that treat the Korean and Chinese enemy as the plague or as mere target practice.

Wilfred Owen famously condemned the patriotic ideal that would influence a man to die for his country in his poem, “Dulce et Decorum Est” as World War I raged on. “The war to end all wars” is known as a watershed in modern warfare for the fact that weapons technology had advanced far enough to destroy human life at an unprecedented rate and in heretofore unimaginable ways.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;
...My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori

The fact that WWI did not end all wars is a tribute to the hegemony that rolls on with or without chemical weapons, and in spite of resistance from poets and peace
initiatives. Thirty years later and once again young men were deceived—this time in Korea—by the inscrutable forces of state power.

In Yu Ch’i-hwan’s poem “To Comrades”, a similar sorrow is expressed over human life wasted in the name of a fading ideal. The virtue in patriotic-sacrifice, however, is irrationally upheld. The cynicism of Owen’s poem is replaced by an “appreciation [for] the soldiers’ sacrifices [which ironically] formed the core of antiwar sentiment” (“Whether” 23). Yu issues a warning to the valiant soldier unrelated to the issue of dying a gruesome death in vain; instead, Yu anticipates a time when the soldier’s “noble” sacrifice will become useful to posterity for its own political agendas: “those may come.../Who exploit your sacrifice in the name of our country,/ And you will come to regret/ The suffering and death you offered so nobly”. In Yu’s poem, the hegemony behind the second phase of Korean war literature is attacked: soldiers North and South died so that the country might be reunited, yet the ensuing years have seen the politicians fortify the division; the sacrifices that the dead made are strengthening the ideological and political divide, rather than uniting the fractured people. If soldiers are made to feel that their sacrifice is meaningless, or worse, that their sacrifice has the potential to be exploited, does not the institution of soldiering, and the military itself begin to break down?

In the short story, “Matter of Price” by Robert O. Bowen, Carson vehemently resents the culture that sent him off to fight a war of dubious importance. His attitude epitomizes the bitter soldiers’ perspective, and the disgust that they feel toward the folks back home who feed off of others’ suffering. Through Carson one
gets the sense that soldiers feel used, not only for political purposes, but also by a culture that finds death and violence alluring, if only in a removed sense. As Carson observes the self-important surgeons on their rounds with their clipboards the reader learns that he

...despised in them [doctors] the same curiosity that fetched clerks and housewives to theaters where they cheaply thrilled at other deaths and agonies in photoed news and called their thrill and interest in the world (134).

While fighting in Korea, Carson had begun to relish the act of killing other men, not because he enjoyed killing or because he hated communists or Asians: his “real hate was turned...back toward the white Christmas-card churches and the thoughtless home-people that leched and marketed and bitched at taxes and offered neither ammo nor ideal to an unrelieved and weary mob on the Korean peninsula” (144). Like many Americans, Carson firmly believes that U.S. intervention in the Korean War serves no purpose. When he fought in WWII, Carson felt that “it had been needful to wipe out the Nazis...he had not soured on his belief in an ideal in that war”. The choice of the U.S. government to send its young men to fight in the hills of Korea had “no real object [and]...the field was never clearly sided”. Carson recalls how he and his fellow soldiers just “as often killed South Koreans as North Koreans” and that it was difficult to get behind the ROK cause since “he located nothing that he could stretch into decency in [president] Rhee’s mob” (143).

Lying in traction with a major brain injury Carson decides that the most valuable symbol to take away from the Korean War is a souvenir that a “slender
Turk corporal had shown him with mimetic explanation as a trophy. A tobacco pouch crudely worked from the flayed hide of a North Korean. At the time, Carson “had been too long at war to be repelled physically”, but the pouch disturbed him mentally and remained in his memory. The chaos and madness that had consumed everyone throughout the first winter of fighting portended for him “the end of ordered future” (143). Carson had understood war to be full of purpose, and that as a result of war, order is restored. The Korean War, on the other hand, did not function this way. Starting with the Korean War, he foresees a future of meaningless conflicts, entered hastily without sufficient thought or deliberation. As disturbing as souvenirs made of human remains may be, Carson earnestly wonders whether war...like the Turk’s tobacco pouch...would one time come to be a curio to men, harmless of reprisal, abstracted from the past and dried of living warmth and pain, resting, almost forget, in an enduring calm. A time when men might cease to kill, when men might think and war be a matter for scholars only. A dream which a wise and tired man could mediate without the need of hoping (144).

With this dream, Carson gazes out the hospital window. “He measured the hills slowly” (144) and breath[ed] his last breathe.

Few war stories succeed so well in exposing the complexity of sentiment felt by the Korean War soldier. The bitterness towards American culture and the relishing of violence correspond uncannily with a sense of humanity and a sincere wish for peace. As often appears in Korean War literature, a tense and moving sense of love for mankind pours out of those people who have been called to handle the duty of killing.
Excessive Violence

...in the spring of 1951...At the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Cincinnati, a research team reporting new findings said the wartime killing of defenseless civilians, in particular, triggers “traumatic war neurosis.” It engenders guilt, they reported, great and long-lasting.40

–The Bridge at No Gun Ri

This reference to what is now widely known as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder would have been the diagnosis of countless soldiers who experienced combat in the Korean War. Art Hunter, for instance, was haunted by the killing he had done with the 1st Cavalry Division in Korea. On his first night of fighting he recalls, “‘crawling with [his] machine gun...You could hear all these babies and all crying over in this field’...a field of dead civilians, [he] decided” (Hanley 88). Exactly how many deaths he was personally responsible for he would never know. What is documented is that the 1st Cavalry Division was ordered to fire at a massive group of refugees taking cover in a tunnel on July 26, 1950 in the small hamlet of No Gun Ri. One rumor blamed the massacre on “a ‘refugee woman with a radio’ hidden under a baby” (89). Another claimed “that refugees tossed a grenade at men in the next company or in the next battalion—somewhere” (89). “The regimental war diary...blamed ‘enemy infiltration with refugees’ (88). Whatever the cause, hundreds of civilians were killed under the train trestle at No Gun Ri, and this was not the only atrocity committed against civilians41.

40 (Hanley 181).
41 Two noteworthy atrocities occurred in the first two months of the war: The Han River Bridge in Seoul was blown up by ROK command with hundreds of civilians on it; a bridge over the Naktong River near the Pusan Perimeter was blown up by U.S. command. Killing hundreds of refugees (Thompson).
Years, even decades later, Art Hunter experiences “intrusive memories”. One particular flashback recalls an incident in which he “spotted an elderly couple in the valley bustling around their mud hut. He thought somehow they might be helping the enemy.” After getting approval from his company officer, he “took aim and opened fire. The man fell. The woman dashed here and there. Hunter fired again”. In retrospect, he says that he never even saw their faces, “…never found out if they were just innocent people...[t]hey were just left lying there, an old man and an old woman” (170). For the next fifty years, he was visited by these people countless times as “faces hovering over his bed”. He says he would have preferred losing an arm or a leg to the psychological damage that he has had to live with (236).

In Chang-Rae Lee’s novel The Surrendered, Hector Brennan experiences so much killing in the Korean War that he ironically requests being transferred to “the Graves Registration Unit, for he didn’t wish to commit or witness any more killing, figuring, too, that the dead were dead, and would always stay that way” (75). He was mistaken. Like Art Hunter in the non-fiction book about the No Gun Ri massacre, Hector remains haunted throughout Lee’s novel by the violence in which he took part in Korea.

One disturbing experience in particular occurs when Hector is expected to take a boy prisoner and “walk him back to the forward line and, at some point, shoot him” (71). Hector had killed men before in firefights, but “he had never had to think the killing through mechanically. Where to stop to do it; whether to have him kneel or stand; shoot him in the body or the head”” (72). Hector is not able to kill the
enemy soldier directly, and this complicates the deed in a horrible manner. Racist officers, Zelenko and Morra, catch up with them. Earlier they had tortured the prisoner by blowing his bugle directly into his ear until he had gone deaf; Zelenko was beating him across the face with his pistol when Hector intervened on the boy’s behalf. Hector is called “stupid mick, a dirty queer, a chink lover, but [he] ignored them” (70). As he sees the brutal officers approaching, the boy leaps from a precipice and lands in a well, badly breaking a leg. As Hector descends to aid the prisoner, Zelenko knocks him over the head with his rifle. While Hector is half-conscious Zelenko and Morra walk down to the tormented prisoner and begin “taking turns prodding his broken leg” (74). When the boy passes out from the pain, they wake him with smelling salts and torture him more.

When Hector and the boy are alone again, the latter starts muttering in broken English “No live...No live”. Hector still cannot bring himself to kill the boy. Finally he snatches Hector’s grenade. As he “held the pin...he waited for Hector to get his footing, waited for him to hike up to the path”:

At the top he peered down and the boy was gazing skyward, perhaps waiting for him to gain distance, perhaps already blind with the nearing oblivion. Hector sprinted away, getting nearly all the way back to the rear line before he heard the distant, blunted blast (76).

Hector Brennan in *The Surrendered* and Art Hunter in *The Bridge at No Gun Ri* each develop severe alcoholism after returning from the war. An anecdote about Hunter tells of him drinking four beers, “punching his wife, then his mother-in-law, throwing furniture out a bedroom window, finally grabbing the older woman’s baby
and running screaming into the street” (216). Likewise, Hector is edgy and unpredictable, and with his massive frame, is liable to pummel his adversaries without much provocation, particularly when drinking alcohol. Not long after the incident with the young Korean-Chinese prisoner, there is “an informal contest of bare-fisted boxing”. Hector gets a chance at Zelenko and succeeds in “reshaping his features to near unrecognizable, only stopping when several others jumped him” (75).

In addition to the sanctioned violence carried out by men against men both in battle and on the side, Korean War literature often portrays women as the unfortunate victims of war violence.

*The Bridge at No Gun Ri* includes an anecdote illustrating how the GIs’ carnal desire—so easily satisfied recently in “their Tokyo haunts”—becomes frustrated when “dropped into a traditional Confucian village in the Korean mountains”. When their attempts to exchange cigarettes for sex prove unsuccessful they resort to rape. Whenever GIs came wandering around rural villages, “[p]eople secured their gates and doors. Grandmothers made girls wear dirty clothes and smear their faces with charcoal to make them repulsive. They hid them behind trees and shrubs” (103).

In *The Taebaek Mountains*, a novel by Cho Jeong-Rae, the lasciviousness of American GIs is also depicted. “[They] have uncontrollable libidinal desire, and inhumane arrogance” (Song 197). While the American soldier has traditionally been represented by Korean authors as a stock character, never fully fleshed-out, the soldiers in Cho’s novel possess some level of depth; GIs are notorious for their racist
and misogynist posturing: “‘There is only one thing good in Korea. Everything except women’s vaginas is disgustingly barbaric and primitive,’ Simpson said, grimacing and twisting his mouth in laughter…” (197)

One need not try hard to imagine what sort of consequences such an attitude in the GIs would have for Korean women. Yet the U.S. soldiers are not alone in their indulgence of misogyny and rape. In Whang [sic] Sun-won’s Trees on a Cliff, Hyontae reports back to command that the village he and his squad were inspecting was devoid of people. In truth, there was one young woman there who had told them that the North Koreans had been through a few hours ago. Since she was liable to serve the same purpose for the enemy, informing against the ROK movements, Hyontae realizes that he either has to take her back to the command post or kill her. The latter is the easier option. It becomes apparent that Hyontae does more than just kill her when his squad mates “heard no shots. After a long while they saw Hyontae coming up rubbing his hand with something”. The next day he reports to his comrades that [s]he didn’t even resist very much”. In what was apparently a common practice, Hyontae first used the woman for pleasure before finishing the job by shooting her dead (34-35).

In the opening chapter of The Surrendered, Lee lays out a horrific scene in which June’s elder sister is accosted by a pair of North Korean soldiers as her family flees south to escape the war zone. They ask her, “What are you, some kind of whore for the foreigners” when they find the dried beef that she has hidden beneath a wrap around her chest. One soldier proceeds to fling the teen-aged girl over his soldier and throw her into the back of a weapons carrier. The girls’ mother races toward to
truck in attempt to save her eldest daughter. What follows represents one of the more vivid and tragic depictions of Korean War violence:

The truck had sped up for a distance but now stopped and June’s mother climbed aboard while two soldiers and a couple of others leaped out. But Hee-Sung and her mother did not. They were embracing, kissing, clothing each other in their arms, before the terrible onrush of sound and light.

When June opened her eyes the truck was gone. There had been a thunderous explosion... There was an intense pressure in her ears and for several minutes she could not hear her own breathing. The planes had made only one pass, firing a few rockets, and then flown away.

...as long as she looked... she could not find a single sign of her mother or sister. There was not a scrap of clothing, not a lock of hair. It was as if they had kited up into the sky, become the last wisps of the jet trails now diffusing with a southerly breeze, disappearing fast above her (23-24).

Though the string of events that leads to the obliteration of mother and daughter is ineffably haunting, the killing of civilians is not at all unusual. Certain books like The Bridge at No Gun Ri, and The Surrendered, as well as Bruce Cuming’s The Korean War, lucidly convey the truth of the civilian plight, which is summed up best by Gil Huff, who fought alongside Art Hunter with the 7th Cavalry Regiment. Huff’s daughter recalls that “[her father] always said soldiers as well as civilians were the pawns of war” (131). Hanley et al assert that “[s]even weeks into the Korean War, South Korean civilians were finding that the killing of noncombatants had become a routine tactic of the U.S. Army... and the U.S. Air Force to eliminate any possibility that disguised enemy soldiers or southern guerillas would penetrate U.S. lines.

The strafing by U.S. fighter planes accounts for an unsettling number of civilian deaths, but as Lee suggests in the kidnapping of the young girl by the North Koreans, both sides are equally culpable for the atrocities committed against
civilians in the Korean War. “A North Korean Officer’s Story” told by Colonel Lee Jong Kan brings to light the fact that as the U.S. and its allies were preparing to retake Seoul for the first time, “[t]he NKPA mobilized the entire population in the city, even arming and training women and children. NKPA-occupied Seoul was ready for its final battle” (Peters 80). When such tactics are employed and everyone becomes a combatant, the soldiers’ target expands to include virtually every human being in the war zone. John Osbourne’s verdict early on in the war makes a simple and compelling argument for peace: “It’s gone too far when we are shooting children” (Cumings 168). Whether children are having guns put in their hands, or they are spying for the enemy, there is no excuse for killing the innocent, and the children’s plight shows the abject depravity of war. Along with the ineffable brutality that affects the people of Korean physically and mentally, the psychic damage that afflicts the survivors of war violence may be the worst and most insidious form of suffering.

Suji Kwock Kim’s poem “Resistance” recounts the violence inflicted upon the Koreans by the Japanese as the colonized struggled for independence. As the speaker’s husband is being beaten by a soldier with their children looking on, she asks “What was worse, his beating you/ or your seeing them see you beaten.../ashamed this might be how they’d remember you” (22). With such an image of their father, what child would not grow into a hateful adult? Such scars lead directly to the violence that followed liberation, and in turn to the bloody civil war that raged on with U.S., Chinese, and U.N. intervention. Yet while resistance is the title and the theme of the poem, Kim’s speaker asks, “What won’t we do to each
other?” (23)—a rhetorical question suggesting a push towards reconciliation. How much is too much? When will the intransigence end?

What might have been a time for the Korean people to celebrate their culture turned into a nightmare rife with revenge and bitter hatred against one another: “After liberation I saw a frenzy of reprisals against former collaborators.” In a time of chaos and lawlessness, Kim aptly portrays two dominant images of Korea as the country plunged into civil war.

An old man—guilty or innocent?—lashed to a grille of barbed wire;

Bodies hung from trees in the sides of the road, swaying” (24).

Kim’s question, “guilty or innocent” implies that the concept of collaborator is arbitrary and subjective. Everyone could be charged as a collaborator if one looked hard enough for evidence. What Kim seems to be suggesting is that after a certain point, reprisal killing has to stop. If not, the Korean people as a whole will cease to exist—in fact, the war that followed closely on the heels of liberation went far in doing just this.

Kim’s “Fragments of the Forgotten War” explores the guilt felt by a son whose father is abducted by the North Korean Army never to return: “You whom I could not protect, whose suffering I will never know, when will I forget you...?” (30). The poems combines guilt with the horrors of refugee life, as the speaker flees the invading North Korean army as U.S. bombs rain down:
...we knelt like beggars before the blasts,

using the dead as shields

corpse-greaved,

covering our faces from the blizzard of shrapnel...

Yet in spite of the “smell of burning flesh” and the “stench of open sores”, the “carcass foaming with maggots” and the “wild dogs gnawing at [a boy’s] skull”, the speaker is disturbed most by the memory of his father being taken away. Later, “in...dreams” he hears his father’s voice asking, “What have you done with your life...?” Yet the horrors of war and the abandonment that he has endured render the speaker paralyzed by trauma: “I can only speak to you in broken things...I’m orphaned” (31). One question lingers at the end of the poem: which is harder to bear, the loss of a father to help guide one through life, or enduring an existence that would have disappointed the father were he alive to see it? For the speaker, to survive the war while everyone else died is the cruelest of fates. “Fragments” inspires awe at the fact that war survivors carry on and make a new life without some or all of their loved ones. In her war poems Kim asserts that no one in Korea is exempt from these psychic wounds; everyone who survived is burdened by the guilt and grief which beckon, “What have you done with your life?” The third stage of Korean war literature tells the Korean people just what to do with their lives: to reconcile the differences that caused the division, to heal the old wounds, and to tell the entire story, the whole unpleasant truth.
CHAPTER V
ECOCRITICISM AND HAUNTOLOGY IN CHIRI MOUNTAIN

Mrs. Choe was determined not to endure...risks to her sons when war came in 1950. She packed up again and walked all day to a small, isolated village in the Chiri-san Mountains (Millet 21).

“Echoes” by O Yong-Su is the story of two people who set out to inhabit an abandoned valley in war-torn Republic of Korea, preferring to preserve their dignity by resorting to the natural resources at their disposal rather than living in a society that would render them destitute vagrants.

Set in a remote valley of South Korea’s fabled Chiri Mountain (San), the setting of “Echoes” is highly significant. Chiri is famous for its splendor and beauty, and also for being a hotbed of partisan guerrillas during the war and beyond; it is where the “Rhee government crushed [the communist opposition]...with scorched-earth campaigns, burning mountain villages suspected of supporting leftists” (Hanley 208). As such the notorious place sets a grim and haunting tone akin to that which reigned in 1950’s Korea. “Echoes” is ultimately both an account of how

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42 Syngman Rhee, the first president of South Korea, was known for his hardline anti-communist stance and autocratic governance (Henderson).
survivors of the war might have struggled day-to-day at a subsistence level, and also an intimate encounter with a land that endured sudden and drastic depopulation and devastation. But more importantly, the story convincingly portrays through Yang Tong-uk and his wife that a simple life in harmony with nature is not only possible but might also be satisfying and enriching. This second interpretation invites an ecocritical reading, as Tong-uk and his wife (later joined by Mr. Pak and Mr. Yun) lead a life of “symbiosis and mutuality” with the natural world (Barry 254).

Focusing carefully on the representation of nature, the foothills of Chiri Mountain can be read as a significant character that watches over the people and sustains them. In response to the hills providing the resources necessary for survival, the human characters’ make supplication to the spirit of the hills, showing acknowledgement of their divinity.

Louise Westling quotes Merleau-Ponty and his concept of the “‘ecological sublime’, that man accepts ‘confirmation of [the world’s] astonishment’ rather than seeking or presuming control” [over it]. Westling envisions “a sacramental awareness of the world”, proposing a “participatory relationship” as the ideal manner in which humans ought to meet the natural environment since “we are embedded” in the world (4).

Although ecocriticism normally refrains from ‘social constructivism’ (Barry 255), this chapter will combine eco-criticism and post-structuralism in its analysis since the references in “Echoes” to the emptiness of the valley, the ghostly aspect of the departed, and the anticipation of their returning, bring to mind Derrida’s theory of Hauntology. A dichotomy between presence and absence is obvious throughout
the story, and to destabilize the two concepts makes for a compelling reading of “Echoes”. Lastly, the conclusion of the story links it thematically to the ending of “Retreat,” a Korean War story by seminal writer Hwang Sun-Won: both stories end with the telltale barking of a dog, suggesting that mankind’s relationship with nature and other species provides a real saving power.

The background of Tong-uk and his wife is sparse, revealing only a few basic yet poignant facts: that “they only needed medicine to keep their child alive, but they had none to give it, and had had to let it die” (O 263); that they “used to crawl under the wire every night to get a few tins thrown out of that damn back door” (287); that “Tong-uk tried working as a carpenter’s or plasterer’s mate [but] did not get even his share of work, never mind any wages”, and that “[h]is wife set out as a pedlar...but since she could not reduce her prices below cost, she made no sales”. The facts above explain their tragic plight and the reason they choose to “give it up and go right into the hills to work a bit of land” (264).

More or less removed from society, the couple goes on to make a satisfactory life for themselves in the hills. Still, Tong-uk and his wife’s modest success is overshadowed by a sense of trauma, emptiness, and the specter of violence due to the legacy of the setting. Poet Kim Chi-ha’s poem “Mount Chiri” helps elucidate the general sentiment about the location:

When I see
the snow-covered mountain my blood seethes.
...below that mountain
even now the crimson blood flowing (51).
From the start, it is revealed that Tong-uk and his wife “found this place the spring after the mopping up of communist guerillas on Mount Chiri had been completed” (O 263). Their shanty was bulldozed in the process, whereupon they were forced to look for work in the town of Chinju. Now, settled in the hills, they are told that “[b]efore, just round here alone, there used to be several hundred families living, squeezed into every odd corner; but in that damn war, many of them died” (280). Again, Kim Chi-ha’s poem helps explain the sentiment felt by Tong-uk, while giving a sense of grief felt in the Chiri Mountain region that would be felt keenly by those who witnessed the goodbyes between loved ones, or the abrupt devastation caused by U.S. bombs and guerilla wars in the hills.

...the weeping embrace and the fleeting promise to return:
all are gone,
yet still cry out in my heart.

Like the currents flowing away under the frozen surface of the stream they have gone, but like the water’s force even now they return, pounding voices that will not let me be... (51).

The account of this period in the Chiri Mountain region given by Bryan Choi who survived part of the war by taking cover there, tells that “most of the killing was civilians of civilians” (Millet 21), common people settling family feuds or civil disputes by execution-style murders. Lawlessness reigned, and the chilling simile of “currents flowing away under the frozen surface” as people disappearing emphasizes how perilous and terrifying life would have been for these people.
Moreover, the disappeared return as voices, which in keeping with title of O’s story, echo throughout the hills.

Whenever a human form approaches Tong-uk’s abode (and there are only three individuals who come), suspense fills the air. For one, “they were fearful of people” in general, and particularly anxious about “partisans ...still being picked out like lice” (288). It is not outside the realm of possibility that Tong-uk and his wife could be detained or killed by the authorities as communist sympathizers. There is also the potential that the former inhabitants of the valley could return. Tong-uk and his wife are told that four families had lived on the land where they established their home. The priest also informs the couple that “[i]n the war, all of their houses were burnt and the people scattered all over the place. Whether they’re alive or dead...Praise to the Goddess of Mercy”. In reply, Tong-uk says, “[t]hey’ll come back gradually” (274). The uncertainty as to whether the former denizens of the valley are alive or dead, combined with Tong-uk’s certainty that they will be back, lends them a ghostly aspect much like Derrida’s “specter”, “a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate” (Davis 1). Ordinarily life and death are conditions one can feel assured of identifying while the return of missing people is far from certain. In “Echoes” this dynamic is reversed: the return is expected regardless of whether existence is confirmed or not.

Helping to explain the process of how the living might be sure of such a returning and subsequent contact with a specter, another concept found in Derrida’s Hauntology, “revenant”, becomes useful. Revenant connotes
...an inadvertent, undetectable passage between loci and time frame, to another time dimension, although within the historical process, unfixed [which] produces...angst, imbalance, apprehension of untimeliness and a ‘disadjustment of the contemporary’ (Derrida 11).

The idea of a revenant is suggested in the ceremony that the men hold at “Baby Ginseng Rock.” There, through supplication to the mountain spirit—in lieu of ancestors—the men work under the assumption that worship transcends time and that therefore they might meet a specter through its revenant. In other words, the men’s act of prayer acknowledges the unfixed nature of time, and mindfulness that the “beings” whom they beseech for help and blessings are not subject to the same constraints as the living. In essence, their prayer ceremony resembles an activity that is stressed in Hauntology:

Derrida calls on us to endeavor to speak and listen to the specter...conversing with specters...may open us up to...experience...the unknowing which underlies and may undermine what we think we know (Davis 1).

In addition to the summoning of specters, the ceremony held by Tong-uk and his two male guests at the foot of Baby Ginseng Rock reveals a deep respect felt for nature and the divinity residing therein. The old carpenter Mr. Pak says, “[a]lthough we can’t [worship] at our ancestors’ graves, we depend for our lives on the hills, don’t we?” (O 293). Thus they proceed to where in the old days a ginseng root grew in the shape of a baby and “had turned into an immortal spirit and descended to Sanchong market” (294). The old carpenter refers to the fact that he, Tong-uk, and Mr. Yun are all displaced people and he suggests that they pray for the return of countless others who have also been displaced. The carpenter prays to the “‘Spirit of the Mountain...bring back to live here those who used to live in this valley’”.

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Considering their uprooted circumstances, praying for the return of the absent residents allows the three men to live vicariously through these ghosts, and to anticipate a returning of their own.

Besides the post-structuralist reading and the unsettled aspect of the presence/absence dichotomy, “Echoes” also promotes the virtues of community and communal living, while offering a convincing lesson in how to live in harmony and mutuality with the natural world.

Step one: Tong-uk and his wife start by selling “everything they could raise money on” (264); next, they buy enough provisions to keep them alive through the end of winter and the first few weeks of spring, at which point they anticipate being able to forage and sell or barter whatever they find at the market in the nearest town of Sanchong, located five miles away.

As soon as they reach the valley that they would decide to settle in, Tong-uk feels “as if he had returned to his childhood home; he “felt awed at what seemed to be the livingness of the hills. He heard the echo of the cry of a buck deer from another valley somewhere” (266). Indeed the hills are personified; unlike the society of mankind, the hills are “tolerant and do not find fault” (277). In short, step three is to move away from conventional society and, upon arrival, surrender to man’s embeddedness with nature.

Step four: shelter. The first few nights, the couple “passed...sitting back to back, with blankets around them, and a good fire to frighten off any wild animals” (264); at their nearest convenience, Tong-uk has constructed a hut to serve as shelter until they are able to build a house.
Step five: Tong-uk's wife spends the days of early spring picking wild vegetables that sprout everywhere, fern shoots (*gosari*), and wild roots (*toraji*). Tong-uk is busy with the hoe from sun-up to sun-down, getting the land ready for sewing (the couple has clearly brought with them to the hills an adequate level of knowledge as to agriculture and foraging. With hard work and perseverance, they are on track to forge a life in harmony with nature and to dwell in a sort of bliss together).

The only items they lack are manure to fertilize their plot, the tools to build a house, and a dog, since "in the hills there are times when a dog's more necessary than several people" (278). Eventually all three of these obstacles are overcome. They discover through an itinerant priest that "an old man who makes things of wood" (274) lives on a nearby hill; they also make a cesspit which is presumably a means of producing fertilizer; Tong-uk's wife is given a puppy by a woman at the market which they name *Puksuri*.

Once the house is built, and their crops are doing well, they invite Mr. Pak and his friend Mr. Yun to reside with them. Another room is built. Mr. Pak makes tools with the materials at his disposal to sell at the market, and Mr. Yun helps Tong-uk with the farming. Tong-uk's wife does the cooking and continues her foraging. Soon she and her husband decide to invite "Myong-suk's mum here" to marry Mr. Yun. By story's end, they have met with enough success that they are able to buy a sow. A veritable commune is established which, starting from nothing, has grown organically from the meager supplies and natural resources at Tong-uk and his wife's disposal.
“Echoes” represents wartime Korea with remarkable accuracy, combining the haunted sense of place and the desperation, loneliness and resourcefulness of the people in the 1950’s and to some degree beyond. The story ends with *Puksuri’s* bark echoing throughout the valley: “The echoes faded away from valley to valley, like ripples from a stone thrown into water” (297). The ending vividly recalls “Retreat”, a Korean War story by the great Hwang Sun-won. In this story, Captain Chu is close to death after being wounded in action. Private Kim carries the captain on his back, bent and exhausted after days of retreating in this manner: “The more his back bent, the less hope for life the captain felt” (327). Captain Chu, despite the fact that he is doomed, feels he ought to repay the young private for his effort, and through his vigilant attention to his surroundings, he is able to save the young private.

Captain Kim makes out the distant sound of a dog barking. “If it was a dog barking, there must be a family living somewhere in the valley”. Private Kim does not hear the sound; he is consumed by the fear of becoming food for the scavenger-species: “more crows tomorrow. This is the last night I’ll have my eyes” (329).

As the two men lie exhausted and delirious on the ground, suddenly a gun discharges. Instead of the suicidal blast that he has been hoping for from the captain, Private Kim looks up to see a gun pointed at him. The captain orders Kim to put him on his back once more. Then, with the pistol muzzle jammed into the back of his head threateningly, Private Kim follows the final orders of the expiring captain, orders that lead him to the source of the dog’s barking.
Much like "Echoes", the closing of "Retreat" insinuates humankind's love and responsibility to one's fellow man, as well as the marvelous bond that man has and must maintain with animals. Since "we are embedded" in the world, mankind's' relationship with nature and other species has the power to save if and only if we cultivate the “participatory relationship” that Louise Westling urges.

Hwang Sun-Won's "Retreat" concludes in the following manner:

Finally the private too heard the sound, and the barking of a dog became clearer and clearer as he moved on. But he still couldn't tell how far it was. He felt something burning in his throat, and each staggering step seemed to fall into a bottomless pit. He wanted to sit down every moment, and yet he couldn't stop while the pistol compelled him.

He saw nothing in the dark. He wasn't sure whether he was on his feet or not. He walked on and on. Then suddenly the barrel of the pistol was withdrawn and the dead weight of the captain fell from his back to the ground, just as he thought he saw, though dimly, the dark shadows of a thatched house, a man in front of it and a dog barking (330).

If O's story and Hwang's draw a parallel, their lines converge at their conclusions. The man with the dog would be Yang Tong-uk with Puknsuri, and Private Kim, from "Retreat", would walk straight into "Echoes", one of the expected, gradually returning, displaced.

The resourcefulness and survival of Tong-uk and his wife reveal that “we are embedded” in the world and should act in accord with it rather than against it. Through their “sacramental awareness of the world”, the characters of “Echoes” understand the significance of the hills and how they sustain and embrace mankind. Tong-uk and his wife manifest the “participatory relationship” theorized by Westling, making clear the real possibility of living in harmony with the natural world.
The background of war operates in “Echoes” to show a world torn asunder. Mr. Pak expresses vividly how “[b]efore the war, there used to be people living in every valley. There used to be villages in every valley...You never felt lonely...[a]t the very worst you could get by if you saw a fire burning a long way off, or heard a dog barking” (290). As the human presence in the hills has been altered drastically, new meaning is given to the assertion that “there are times when a dog’s more necessary than several people” (278). For Tong-uk then, the absence of the beacon-bark and the lost echo of human voices heard throughout the story is a constant reminder that something has gone terribly wrong in the peaceful valley. Yet at the same time those echoes that remain serve as a resounding message of hope that people will return, and the ghostly atmosphere will be replaced by one that is less haunted by returning spirits and more vital and populated with the living. O Yong-su suggests in “Echoes” that returning to nature and maintaining a reverence for the natural world is the first step in this process.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

While the foregoing explores a small sample of a vast body of literature, there are bound to be regrettable omissions as far as selection is concerned. Moreover, considering the complexities of the subject under analysis, there are many simplifications of political, cultural, diplomatic, and military circumstances, actions and policies. At times a broad view is favored at the cost of specifics. From the perspective of literary theory, an eclectic group of critical methods has been used, each one employed as necessary.

A historicist/new historicist approach was a proper angle for this thesis, corresponding effectively with the issues of U.S. imperialism and the predominance in military power insofar as the works of Hinojosa and Thompson are embedded in the U.S. geo-politics of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Read alongside NSC 68 and Bruce Cumings’ *The Korean War, The Useless Servants* and *Cry Korea* are far more compelling than they would be otherwise. The NSC 68 represents an immensely important and fascinating text explaining the political theory behind what has become the accepted norm of U.S. military presence throughout the world. The fiction and memoir of Hinojosa and Thompson respectively work to show U.S. foreign policy in practice on the ground in Korea in all of its imbecile brutality and atrociousness.
The manufacturing of ships and weapons in Japan as shown in *The Useless Servants* clearly illustrates the imperialist aspects that accompany U.S. support of South Korea, the stimulating of the political economy in the Asia while uprooting communism from the Far East. Through military actions, the political economy envisioned by the United States in the Far East takes root and eventually prospers. Thompson’s memoir exposes keenly the difference between U.S./Japan imperialist-identity versus the Korean political circumstances which could hardly have been starker: a vast country with endless resources and burgeoning global power unloading tens of thousands of soldiers, tanks, fighter planes and bombers over a diminutive and rugged peninsula, home to an agrarian people emerging from centuries of feudalism and nearly four decades of colonization.

Though the U.S. occupation of South Korea may have been good-willed, it undoubtedly bore marks of imperialism as is articulated in Chapter II. Moreover, the short stories analyzed in the proceeding chapter, “Chaos in the Fatherland,” reveal the politics in South Korea just prior to the war. USMGIK made perilous mistakes in South Korea which is exemplified in microcosm by the murder of a revered Korean civilian at the hands of the military government and its blackmail tactics in “Rice.” Likewise, killing those who collaborate with the opposition, or who simply will not cooperate, is shown to be the norm in “A Betrayal.” Just as the collaborators during the Japanese colony were targeted by Korean nationalists, those seen as assisting the USMGIK were also snuffed out in the aftermath of liberation. The U.S. assumed the role of imperialist, if not by design, then at least by default, infuriating not only
the Koreans in the South but the North Korean regime, increasing its resolve to eliminate imperialists from the Korean peninsula—and hence war.

The soldiers’ perspective is formed by many factors. Chapter IV mentions four of the most prominent, two of which—bigotry and violence—would seem to originate at the core of mankind and are ineradicably part of cultures the world over: war is unavoidable and the Korean War was especially so. Politics and counter-cultural aspects represent the whimsical side of the war and suggest that things could have been otherwise. If other governments had been installed in the Koreas; if the Soviets and the U.S. had managed to work out a trusteeship; if young American men had refused to fight; or the folks back home had staged protests: all of these variables could have altered the course of the war, however greatly or marginally. The texts by Magner, Drought, Wantling and Bowen that represent undercurrents of disdain and rejection of the war represent fascinating works of Korean War literature, inviting speculation as to what might have been while giving radical perspective of how some soldiers viewed the politics related to the war.

Chapter IV also emphasizes the unfortunate plight of the civilians, revealing in a broad manner the abuse of women, children and non-combatants in general. Both the soldiers and the civilians suffered horribly, yet the soldiers on both sides failed time and again in their duty to uphold honor and good will toward the unarmed and the innocent, increasing their suffering tenfold.

The resourcefulness of a people brutally displaced by war, hunted by their own brothers, neglected by society, and suddenly cast on the world stage in a drama
of ruin—such is the situation of the Korean civilian during the war which O Yong-Su exposes brilliantly in “Echoes.” Reflecting on the civilian plight, Reginald Thompson makes a savvy reference to Thoreau in Cry Korea in which he attempts to sum up the modest character and the unpretentious heritage of the Korean people circa 1950:

Had not all life been like this for them? All their history best forgot...they tried to forget [the past] regarding it with shame while aiming at a philosophy of sublime simplicity, seeking to exist on a bare minimum and embrace the doctrine of Thoreau, the wealth of no wealth (147-148).

Despite the heartache and the tears that have been shed over the Korean peninsula and the devastation that Korea suffered for three years without respite, “Echoes” provides hope that the land and its people will endure and flourish as one. Try as it may to annihilate the world with napalm showers and indiscriminate bombardment, militaries will fall short—mankind’s “sacramental awareness of the world” will win out in the end.

In closing, a line from Cho Chi-hun’s “Journal of Despair (June 26, 1950)” is appropriate, as a way of summing up Korean War literature: “But it is moments of crisis that poetry can be our support” (40). One can only imagine Cho jotting down these lines in his notebook moments after his classroom in Seoul was evacuated; with the rumble of tanks from the North and the explosion of shells growing nearer portending disaster of unspeakable proportions for his homeland and his people, somehow the professor is able to linger a moment, clinging to the tenuous ideal that literature might serve a purpose, even then, as he stood at the gates of hell. Bereft of students with whom to share his wisdom, his faith, he takes up his pen.
Though the foregoing has not stressed the comfort and consolation that literature offers in trying times, the research for this thesis encountered the same ideal throughout Korean War literature—poets, reporters, soldiers, civilians, authors, historians alike searching for comfort in meaning and understanding—that sense might be made of the war through writing about it. This particular writing endeavor itself has proven that the act of writing brings a measure of consolation. Despite the difficulties inherent to any research project, and the singular agonies and heartache that scream from the pages of Korean War literature, writing about the texts related to this grim and tragic passage of history has in it a sort of balm. Perhaps this comes from the knowledge that amid even the most destructive events causing unfathomable loss of life there are survivors to share what happened and scholars to record their impressions in verse and in prose. An increase in awareness and an appreciation for the sacrifice of the writers who commemorate the war—and the greater sacrifice of those who gave their lives that succeeding generations might live—makes for an enriching and somehow soothing tonic.

Steven I. Levine maintains in *Remembering the “Forgotten War”* that “consciously or not, we bear upon us and within us the scars of each one of the far too many wars our nation has fought...If we do not, we have failed the memories of everyone on all sides of each conflict” (3). This thesis then could be distilled as an attempt to show the scars that are left from the Korean War, an attempt which requires the writer to confront the manifold aspects of the war from the Korean side and the American, from political posturing and ideological warring, to economical enterprising and brutalizing of humanity—thus the process of this thesis was not
quite so simple. The ultimate goal, however, is less perplexing: to contribute to the analysis and criticism of Korean War literature so that the field might expand in some small measure, and gradually become more worthwhile for academies to take on. Searching the Korean Studies departments of major universities such as UC Berkeley, Ohio State University, and the University of Hawaii reveals no indication that the war literature is a prominent subject of study. At Portland State University, instructor Hanscom mentions “the Korean War and national division” in his course description. Still, there is hope. Modern language departments across the country do an admirable job of representing literatures outside the canon so that the marginalized can be heard. Korean War literature deserves the attention of modern language departments and scholars everywhere, and this thesis urges that this invigorating body of letters receive its due.
WORKS CITED


