Criticising the Metaphor of Vietnam as a Diseased Land: Stephen Wright's *Meditations in Green*

Hiroaki NAITO

Summary

This essay firstly focuses upon the images of a "diseased land" and "vermin–like natives" that were commonly used by American military personnel to describe the land and the people of Vietnam. Referring to Francis Fitzgerald's classic study of the war, I would argue that those images reflect America's desires to place Vietnam in its mythological perspective, to downplay the complexities of the conflict, and to make it a simplistic battle between good and evil. By figuring Vietnam and its people as insanitary and disease-ridden, and, in turn, describing US military as a physician bound by a moral oath to sanitize/medicate the Vietnamese land and people, US military officials in effect endorsed their aggressive actions against Vietnam, including the use of chemical defoliants and napalm bombing.

The discussion about the pathologized images of Vietnam leads us to examine Vietnam-vet author Stephen Wright's novel *Meditations in Green* (1983), which attempts to criticize America's neocolonialism by explicating the racist/colonialist ideologies underlying those images. The protagonist of the novel is James I. Griffin, an herbicide researcher working for the army's Agent Orange operation in Vietnam. By narrating the war through the protagonist's unique perspective, Wright describes US military's erroneous efforts to control/sanitize the resilient forces of the Vietnamese natural world, which American officials regard as cumbersome, diseased, and insanitary. Informed by Susan Sontag's reflection on illness as metaphor, I will especially illuminate the ways in which Wright challenges the discourse of diseased Vietnam, by destabilizing the binary oppositional imagery of the technologically advanced American order and the

backward, unsanitary Vietnamese chaos that Americans have fabricated.

Keywords
Contemporary American Literature, the Vietnam War, Environmental Warfare, Post-Colonialism, Illness as Metaphor

Introduction: The Land and the People of Vietnam as Diseased

André Malraux's novel *La Voie Royale* (1930) is a story of two European explorers, which the author wrote based on his own experience of attempted smuggling of historical bas-reliefs from a small temple in Banteai Srei, a small village to the northeast of Angkor Wat. In this novel, written more than twenty years before France's colonial control over Vietnam was brought to an end in Dien Bien Phu, one can find an instance of what Edward Said calls colonialists' "imaginative geography," the representations of a certain place—including its people, landscapes, and elements of nature—that reflect the fantasies/desires of those who produce them.[1)] That is the imagery of Vietnam as a "diseased land," and years later Americans would inherit this colonialist legacy, frequently using it in their description of Vietnam.

When the two protagonists—Claude, a young Frenchman and Perkin, an experienced Dutch explorer—are about to land on the Cambodian shore, the first thing that occurs to Claude's mind is the misgiving about catching a tropical disease, malaria. Malraux quietly builds up a feeling of tension by creating a scene in which the young protagonist's anticipation of as well as apprehension about coming adventures are paralleled with the bobbing sensation of the jolting boat, and depicts the hovering Indochina landscape seen by the hero as follows:

> Claude gazed with fascination at this foretaste of the jungle that awaited him, overwhelmed by the smell of the silt spreading slowly in the sun, the insipid foam drying, the animals rotting, the limp appearance of amphibians clinging to the branches. Every time there was a gap in the leaves, he tried to glimpse the towers of Angkor Wat against the trees twisting in the wind from the lake, but in vain: the leaves, red with twilight, closed again over *this malarial life*.[2)]

Not only does the protagonist feel a premonition of physical deterioration in a severe natural environment, but he also identifies the disease with the foreign land. Hence, the elements of nature are blended into one malignant, alien whole: "this malarial life." The novel is in fact replete with the images of the Indochinese land as a disease-ridden jungle. The treasures of ancient Buddhist relics are deeply hidden in "the shapeless jungle" (49), and therefore the two Europeans have to "sink into this ferment" just "like a man sinking into illness" and are surrounded by "the force of darkness" (59). Further to this point, the sense of dread that the protagonist feels toward the land is also directed to the people: the native villages where the expedition bivouacs are figured as enormous vermin: "For four days, making camp near villages that grew out of the jungle, like their wooden Buddhas, like the palm thatch on their huts, emerging from the ground like monstrous insects …"(59). The sense of terror that the two explorers feel toward the foreign land may in part reflect the physical hardship that Europeans have to undergo in an unfamiliar environment. However, when we consider the depiction of animalistic or insect-like "savage tribes" that can be found elsewhere in the story, we have to assume that the description of South-

eastern jungle cited here is drawn by an artist who uncritically embraces colonialist imaginative geography, who, as Said discusses, helps to formulate the hostile visions of the indigenous people and their home land.[3] The observer's sense of hostility and dread are projected onto the land and the inhabitants and, when reproduced and consumed by the readers, strengthens the visions that his story creates.

About thirty years after Malraux's failed expedition in French colonial Indochina, when the United States had launched its military intervention in Vietnam, Americans also created similar visions of Vietnam as a diseased land, which, I would argue, is an aspect of the American imaginative geography of Vietnam—that is, the images of chaos and insanitation, uncivilized wilderness infested with dangerous pathogens and inhabited by disease-carrying natives. As journalist Francis Fitzgerald points out, American policy makers, military officers and GIs often described the Vietnamese terrains, North Vietnamese army and the NLF guerrillas in terms closely associated with diseases and disease carriers: General Westmoreland called the NLF troops "termites," and according to the then military officials' rhetoric, the Vietcong did not inhabit spaces, but instead they "infested areas."[4] American troops, therefore, have to implement "sweep and clear operations" or move refuge villagers into refugee camps in order that Americans "sanitize the area" (368). Importantly, as Fitzgerald further discusses, those derogatory representations are closely related to America's desire to place Vietnam in its mythological perspective, and to interpret the current conflict as another Indian War. Both ways of representing Vietnam reduce the complexities of the war into a simplistic, crude interpretation of battle between the civilized and the uncivilized.

Having associated the Vietnamese land and the people with abominable tropical diseases and pathogens, US policy makers and military officers wished to understand the Vietnam War as an update of their mythic past: "an achievement in the name of humanity—the triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil, and of civilization over brutish nature" (368).

The visions of Vietnam as a diseased land in Malraux's novel brings us to Stephen Wright's novel *Meditations in Green* (1983), which attempts to formulate an incisive critique of American neo-colonialism by portraying the psychology underlying Americans' desire to represent Vietnam as a chaotic, insanitary, diseased land. Placing herbicide researcher James I. Griffin's Vietnam and post-war American experience as a focal point around which several characters' episodes rotate, Wright's novel stands unique among a myriad of Vietnam War fictions, for it deals with the destruction, or "sanitisation" of the Vietnamese natural world brought about by US environmental warfare such as Agent Orange and napalm bombing, and makes it a compelling exegesis of the representation of the other. Although the control and destruction of the environment in war is neither a modern nor particularly American phenomenon, and American environmental warfare was conducted to some extent for strategic reasons, *Meditations in Green* asserts that the idea of controlling or "sanitising" the Vietnamese natural world is deeply rooted in the racist attitudes and the colonial mentalities on Americans' part. Informed by Said's criticism of colonial discourse as well as Susan Sontag's reflection on disease as metaphor, in this essay I will suggest that the Vietnam-vet writer tries to undermine the legitimacy of the discourse of Vietnam as diseased, by interrogating/destabilising the binary opposition of the technologically advanced American

order and the backward, insanitary Vietnamese chaos. Depicting the follies of officers and soldiers who are the caricatures of American mythic heroes, Wright attempts to expose the disorder that exists within the seemingly organized US military base as well as the fissures in the sleek surface of the official account of the war. Wright then represents the fallacies of U.S. military intervention, by describing the ways in which US strategies are undermined by the forces of the Vietnamese natural world such as the heat, humidity, sand, and rain, which, for all the military authorities' efforts to clear or "discipline" the land, relentlessly encroach the military base and keep tormenting the GIs. Eventually, Wright suggests that U.S. military efforts to "sanitize" or "medicate" the diseased Vietnamese land are nothing but a man-made plague that Americans themselves have brought to the land and the people of Vietnam, by figuring the military machines as monstrous insects; thereby the writer subverts the conventional images of Vietnam as diseased.

I. The Images of Vietnam as Diseased in *Meditations in Green*

Wright's criticism of the visions of Vietnam as a diseased land appears in an early part of the novel when, before being sent to Vietnam, Griffin attends a lecture on US official history of the war as a part of his military training in Kentucky. What is worth noting in this scene is the lecturer's use of pathological terms in figuring the enemy and their homeland. A seasoned captain, the lecturer, emphasizes the importance of preventing the communist force from taking over the Southeast Asian terrain by comparing the NLF troops in Vietnam to a venereal disease wrecking a male's genital:

> "Gentlemen, a map of Southeast Asia. This stab of land (Tap) hanging like a cock off the belly of China is the Indochinese peninsula. … Today, this tiny nation suffers from a bad case of VD, or if you will, VC. (Smiles wanly.) What we are witnessing, of course is a flagrant attempt to overthrow, by means of armed aggression, the democratic regime in Saigon. …. Consider the human body. What happens if an infection is allowed to go untreated? The bacteria spread, feeding on healthy tissue, until finally the individual dies. Physicians are bound by a moral oath which forbids them to ignore the presence of disease. …. A sore on the skin of even a single democracy threatens the health of all."[5)]

At one level, the medical metaphor—the necessity of preventing the disease from spreading throughout—may well reflect the tenet of containment policy: the US doctrine in the Cold War era to block the fall of "dominoes," Soviet-led communists' progress across Asia; the diplomatic scheme that failed to understand the internal dynamics of the Vietnamese struggles for independence and thus elevated "what might have remained a local conflict with primarily local implications" into "a major international conflict with enormous human costs that are still being paid."[6)] Stirring the fear of ever spreading communist influence over the "democratic" world, in which the United States maintains its supremacy, the captain asserts that the "sore on the skin of even a single democracy threatens the health of all," so he urges the GIs to intervene, to "pum[p] in the penicillin" (10).

More importantly, the captain's use of the analogy between venereal disease and the Vietnamese guerrilla forces can be understood as a caricature of the vision of diseased land that US military officials have

imposed upon Vietnam, such as Westmoreland's remark cited earlier. By projecting the lecturer as an avatar of the US military, who figures the NLF force as a disease spreading through an otherwise wholesome human body, who, in turn, represents the US military as a physician prescribing necessary medication, Wright attempts to illustrate the process in which US military actions are legalized by the false association made by the likes of Westmoreland.

Sontag's idea of a "punitive notion of disease" is useful in unpacking this scene. Sontag argues that "the subjects of the deepest dread"—"corruption, decay, pollution, anomie, weakness"—are often associated with disease, so illness has long been regarded not only as a mere physical symptom, but also as a malevolent existence loaded with the "feeling about evil." Therefore, when, in turn, something else is figured in terms of an Illness, it bears the negative connotations related to the illness. Moreover, patients of a certain disease themselves are identified with the psychological fear that the disease evokes and are unduly regarded as responsible for their own sufferings.[7] Thus, when Vietnam and its people are represented both as a patient and the pathogens, they too are identified with the feeling of abjection that the disease is associated with and are turned into culprits who deserve the punishment/treatment that the US Armed Forces prescribe.

Although those malignant visions of Vietnam are mere jargon that military authorities speak to their subordinates in a half-joking manner, Wright suggests that they, nevertheless, are imprinted in each GI's mind and constitute his own view of Vietnam. Fujii argues that Wright describes the 1069th Intelligent Group's base in Vietnam, where Griffin serves, as a "huge discursive space" in which "a number of clichés typical of military life"

circulate and also penetrate each one of GIs and their psyche, so those anonymous clichés, "marked by the logic of war and masculinity," "constitut[e] the utterers' identity as soldiers."[8] In other words, Wright depicts the process in which the visions of, or clichés about, Asia expressed by numerous preceding authors, officers, and others are handed down to the GIs fighting in Vietnam and eventually become the "reality" about Vietnam for the soldiers.

Indeed, Wright indicates that, after several months in Vietnam, the overtly sexist and racist discourse manifest in the captain's lecture has already permeated the GIs' minds as well. The captain slanders the NLF forces by figuratively associating them with the feeling of abjection that venereal disease evokes. On the other hand, he also implies the possibility of promiscuous sexual intercourse that is often associated with the infection, and prompts the fresh recruits to expect erotic adventures with oriental women that they may well encounter in Vietnam, whereby they might catch a VD as a trophy of their exploit. The recruits' reaction to the captain's coarse joke is still hesitant and filled with the anxiety for the danger they may face in the remote terrain—most probably the captain only succeeded in drawing nervous, tentative giggles from them, hence his "wan" smile. After several months of their service in Vietnam, however, the GIs speak in the same sexist/racist manner of the senior officers. The very first scene of Griffin's Vietnam experience opens when sudden, fitful flashes of electric bulbs wake him up. Mistaking them for the enemy's surprise attack, the protagonist thinks that "he d[oes]n't ever want to die in a place where in the corner two drunks argu[e] in loud whisper over the juiciest way to fuck a gook pussy" (3). In this way, the logic of the war, including the visions of the

enemy that it creates, is pervasively internalized and reproduced by the GIs.

II. Wright's Metaphorical Narrative Device

Several critics have argued, along with William Eastlake's *The Bamboo Bed* (1969), Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), and Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1978), *Meditations in Green* places itself in the forefront of non-realistic, experimental Vietnam War narratives, whose counterparts in the Second World War fictions are Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), and Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969), among others, but certainly not Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). As one of the first critics to write about Wright's narrative styles, Mathew Stewart argues that Wright's Vietnam novel "transcends the type of war narrative that adheres to a more confined style of conventional realism," and "succeeds in depicting Vietnam's wastage both in a literal, descriptive level typical of traditional realism and a non-mimetic level that links the novel to more experimental fictions."[9] By non-mimetic level, Stewart means the passages and techniques "whose significance [is] found primarily at a metaphorical and intratextual level …" (126). The following episode that appears in the middle part of the novel is an example of the author's such narrative techniques, for its central character's actions metaphorically/intratexually relate to the captain's lecture cited earlier. These two seemingly separate episodes, when combined together, make even more cogent the author's criticism of American discourse of Vietnam as diseased.

When Kraft, a member of Special Forces stationed in the 1069th Intelligence Group Compound, undertakes a mission to interrogate a small Vietnamese village suspected of hostile activities, the members of the

mission, first of all, have to find out the village hidden in the heart of the enemy's jungle territory. Besides the extremely severe climate and the fear of the skulking guerrillas, the GIs have to fight against the thick tropical vegetation that hinders their progress, and that blocks their views and deprives Americans of the sense of orientation. Kraft and his crew thus undergo the danger of losing their way in the midst of the alien landscape, and the sense of dread that they experience is described in the very first scene of this episode as follows: "The trees stood straight up thick as phalluses and cautiously they picked their way like blind explorers" (76). In this series of events, Wright, recycling the image of genitalia that the captain used in the lecture episode, delineates the way in which the soldiers' psychology is projected upon the surrounding landscape. Because their eyesight is hindered by the dense tropical foliage, the soldiers have to stumble across the land as if blinded; and because they are confronted with the terror of the enemy's ambush as well as the possibility of becoming lost in the foreign wilderness, the GIs feel as if they are enfeebled, miniaturized, and feminized, so the surrounding tropical forest looks menacing like tall "phalluses" that may at any moment assault them. In fact, Herschel, one of the GIs, is killed by the enemy's surprise fire during the march that almost seems to come out from the jungle itself. The Vietnamese rainforest, which Kraft perceives as "the green hostility," combined with the terror of the invisible guerrillas, appears to be sinisterly invincible to the GIs (76).

However, when the GIs finally find the village and begin their interrogation, the sense of dread, impotence and frustration that has exasperated them is replaced by another, aggressive emotion. Empowered by the superior weapons that they possess and also by the fact that the

villagers are only "[b]abies and moms and senile grandparents," the Americans now direct their untrammelled anger toward the villagers, as if, in so doing, they carry out the revenge for the demised comrade and retaliate for the humiliation they suffered. Kraft, an experienced assassin, observes the GIs abusing the people "in a grim fever" (79). Importantly, in this scene of the GIs' brutal violence against the Vietnamese villagers, in striking contrast to the jungle scene, where the hostile environment and the invisible enemy emasculate the American soldiers, the GIs assume the masculine aggressor role, and in turn attempt to feminize the Vietnamese villagers. The young Americans speak and behave in overtly militant, brutal manners, and demonstrate the likes of the racist/sexist attitudes that the captain implicitly inculcated into the recruits in his lecture—a few soldiers are laughing while "pissing into a rice jar," and a blond corporal says, "these bitches is too ugly to rape" (79).

The following scene, in which two old Vietnamese men are captivated by the GIs, is another telling example of Wright's unique narrative strategies in that the metaphorical images appearing therein intratexually relate to the preceding "phallic" jungle scene, and thus intensifies further Wright's dark portrayal of America's excessive violence in Vietnam. At one point, Kraft is asked by Captain Brack, the leader of the mission, to interpret the interrogation of two old Vietnamese men. The old men and the GIs that captured them are described as follows: "Captain Brack pointed out to a pair of old men squatting on splayed feet *amid a restless green forest of American legs*" (81, emphasis added). Contrary to the previous jungle scene, this time the GIs' khaki-clad legs turn into menacingly tall/phallic trees. Intimidating the villagers with their firearms, the Americans confiscate from the old

Vietnamese men the sense of masculine dignity as a patriarch, by forcing them to "sprawl" like insects that timidly creep across the land underneath the hostile American trees. The scene of the GIs' killing the old men is a disturbing finishing touch that Wright adds to the episode. The GIs murder the victims by detonating explosives attached to them. Narrating the incident from the GIs' perspectives, the narrator describes the victims as "Gookhoppers"—an indication that the American characters regard the Vietnamese people as weak, inferior, sinful, and disgusting as insect-pests that deserve extermination/punishment (84).

In this way, by employing the intricate metaphorical/intratextual images, Wright describes the psychological process in which one's feelings and emotions—in particular those related to the loss and the possession of power—affects his or her perception of environs. As examined above, the GIs' perception of the land and the people of Vietnam drastically changes as they go through the perilous journey and the interrogation of the village. Dispossessed of their stamina and sense of orientation, the GI are initially frightened by the alien aspects of the Vietnamese rainforest, feeling as if they are "blind explorers" almost as vulnerable as tiny insects creeping through the "Phallic" jungle trees. When they siege the village and ensure their safety, aided by their firearms, however, their strong sense of dread and anxiety disappear, and are instead replaced by the sense of omnipotence and uncontrollable anger directed at the unarmed villagers. This time, the GIs feel as if they themselves have become the menacing, phallic "green forest," and in turn regard the villagers as pestilential insects. With this, Wright suggests that, rather than being a valid, dialectic exegesis of the land and the people, the representations of the Vietnamese land and the people as

diseased, animalistic, and vermin-like are essentially an ex parte discourse that has been fabricated and preserved by the successive generations of colonialists who aspire to keep Vietnam under their supreme control. It should also be pointed out that in the same scene Wright indicates that the GIs carry "grim fever" when interrogating/intimidating the Vietnamese villagers—that is, contrary to American military authorities' claim that the United States aims to medicate disease-infested Vietnam, Wright implies that no other than Americans themselves are the carrier of detrimental diseases that endanger the Vietnamese people's lives and the ecology of their homeland.

The novel's metaphorical language invites a further intricate interpretation of the text. In particular, it brings us to Wright's attempts to place the Vietnam War in a larger context of American colonial history. After examining the GIs' outburst of violence in Kraft's jungle mission that inevitably evokes the calamity of My Lai Massacre, the metaphor of "blind explorers," which Wright uses to describe the feeling of uncertainty and fear that the GIs suffer in the hostile jungle, starts to assume even greater significance. Wright's use of the word "explorers" to designate the GIs in the Indochinese rainforest suggests the writer's attempt to relate American intervention in Vietnam to the early American colonial experience, in which European explorers journeyed across the alien landscape of the New World. For one thing, the "blind"ness of the explorers indicates the physical handicap that Americans have to endure in the cumbersome dense tropical vegetation and the Europeans in the wilderness of the hitherto unknown land. For another, however more importantly, it metaphorically signifies the spiritual blindness of both the European colonists in the New World and the

contemporary Americans in Vietnam that eventually led them to the mass destruction of the indigenous people and their culture.[10] Although both the early settlers and contemporary Americans claimed to have come from the enlightened country to bring order—the higher ethical standards of the "authentic" religion and the wisdom of advanced civilisation—to the dark, backward lands inhabited by the pagan savages, it turned out that both were "blind" to the local language, the culture and the history of the indigenous peoples, and, therefore, became callous to their opponents' causes for resistance. By paralleling the two catastrophic events that took place in the different times and spaces, Wright suggests that the Vietnam War is by no means a deviation from the logic of America's national history, but instead a contemporary manifestation of America's colonialist violence that has existed in US culture from its very beginning.

III. The Plant Imagery

Among all the narrative techniques that Wright uses, the plant imagery plays a central role in conveying the significance of the impact that Vietnam War has exerted upon US society.[11] As Ringnalda contends, "green," the hue of plants, is the colour that symbolizes the Vietnam War experience. It is the colour of "the cosmic Southeast Asian jungle, the unmapped life-giving and life-taking jungle"; and for many veterans, "the word 'Vietnam' is virtually synonym with the jungle and the colour green—a green Vietnam that was at once sublimely beautiful and terrifyingly menacing."[12] Just like the tropical green rainforest overflowing in the Vietnamese terrain, the plant imagery or metaphor, which Wright himself considers to be an element "bind[ing] the whole things together," indeed abounds in the novel.[13] For instance, the

fifteen short episodes or poems named "Mediation in Green" inserted in-between Griffin's Vietnam and post-war narratives are all related to plants; among them are references to cocaine—the drug derived from coca shrubs, commonly used among the GIs in Vietnam—and the environmental destruction brought about by the US military actions in Indochina.

Although they do not have any ostensible connection with the novel's main plot, the short interludes can be interpreted as the visions that Griffin creates during the series of "vegetable consciousness" sessions that he undergoes seven years after the end of his service in Vietnam to overcome the trauma of the war under the guidance of Arden, himself a Vietnam-vet, the guru of the New Age green therapy (86). Importantly, Wright uses the plant metaphor in order to subvert the vision of diseased land that Vietnam has long been identified with. A close look at Griffin's green therapy will enable us to investigate the author's attempts.

Upon visiting Arden's office, Griffin, despite himself, finds his eyes fixed on the strange patterns printed across Arden's green robe. Those small circles are "the emblem of uroboros, the serpent devouring its tail" (90). They are meant to be the "image of renewal, immortality, eternity," or "the chemical symbol of oxygen, final product of photosynthesis"—an element of nature vital for sustaining the life of almost all the living forms on earth. They, nevertheless, remind Griffin of the destruction that the US has brought upon the Vietnamese landscape: "Whenever I sat in this office, … , I couldn't help but think that all those circles scattered *like leper's sores* over all that green had the depressed look of craters, mandala of the bomb" (90, emphasis added). It should be noted that here Griffin figures the damage caused by US bombing in terms of illness, "leper's sore." That is, contrary to

the army officials' assertion that US military actions are compulsory/necessary medication for Vietnam infested with germ-like communist force, the protagonist recalls American intervention as the disease that the United States has brought to Vietnam. Wright's text implies that, in much the same way as the alien germs that European colonialists and their livestock brought to the New World devastated the lives of the indigenous people and the ecology of their homeland, the napalms, chemical defoliants and so forth—the pathogens that the US military had transported to Vietnam—severely destructed the fauna and flora of Indochina.

Utilising his green metaphor throughout the novel, Wright thus repeatedly re-enacts the scenes in which Americans find themselves turning into the germs or pathogens that afflict the bodies of Vietnamese and their own alike, thereby attempting to undermine the false association between disease and Vietnam. A GI character describes the Vietnamese landscape destroyed by US environmental warfare as a land suffering "vegetable cancer." Hearing this, the protagonist sees a macabre vision in which the Vietnamese land is dying from the fatal American disease: "He'd seen the land develop acne, now he'd watch it lose its hair. Sooner or later, … they [US commanding officers]'d have him on his hands and knees, polishing the skull, measuring the brain pan with a pair of steel callipers" (132–33). Griffin—a damage interpreter and an herbicide researcher—realizes that this illness tormenting the enemy's homeland is a plague that Americans have brought to Vietnam.

IV. American Machine and the Vietnamese Natural World: The Opposite Images in *Meditations in Green*

The author's use of plant imagery leads us to investigate Wright's larger

narrative scheme closely related to it, the binary oppositional images of the United States and Vietnam, with which the author further develops his critique of American colonial mind-set. As Matthew Stewart points out, Wright's metaphorical use of language "is marked by a number of different oppositions that sporadically contend against each other: urban versus rural, form and design versus formlessness and chaos."[14] Although Stewart only briefly relates this finding to Wright's botanical metaphor, when re-examining Stewart's discussion especially in relation to the novel's central image, one can argue that the "opposites" recurring in the novel are largely the binary distinction between the overwhelmingly fertile Vietnamese natural world and the US military base, which tries to subdue the hostile forces of the jungle and the enemy guerrillas who take cover therein. Just as the dense Cambodian tropical rainforest in *La Voie Royale* is seen by the European explorers as filthy "shapeless jungle," so the Vietnamese jungle terrain that expands beyond the perimeter of the US base in *Meditations in Green* is perceived by the GI characters as insanitary, formless world of chaos that threatens their physique and sense of identity as American males.

Firstly, the Vietnamese terrain outside the base is perceived by the GIs to be an amorphous and formless world, because of its unpredictability. This image is well exemplified in an episode wherein Claypool, a fresh recruit for the 1069th intelligence Group, accompanies a patrol to a hostile jungle territory. During the mission, the Vietnamese landscape that surrounds the GIs constantly changes its outlook. At times, it rather looks like a peacefully bucolic countryside: "A buffalo ambled through the water, …. Turquoise sky, silky clouds. A travel poster. An Oriental Romance" (153). With the sound of the enemy's gunfire, however, it can at any time transform into a

literal hell: “Flash. Boom. Wha happened? …. Claypool shut[s] his eyes and squeeze[s] his asshole as tight as he could. Here it [is]. The Big Scene. Yells. Screams.” (154). Because of this utter unpredictability of the Vietnamese terrain, Claypool always feels that “everything look[s] sinister and alive” (154). In the GI characters’ eyes, therefore, the foreign landscape appears to be a shapeless world of chaos that may all at once change its contours.

Not only does the land look sinisterly formless, but it also threatens to deprive the GIs of their distinct sense of identity, swallowing their bodies into its shapeless mess. What the GI character experiences in the tropical landscape is a sense of claustrophobia for the adverse elements of the jungle that constantly harass him. The bugs, the heat, and the humidity keep invading the perimeter of the soldier’s body and attempt to undermine his sense of self. Shortly before the patrol is attacked by the enemy’s ambush, Claypool is terrified by the idea of getting lost in the rainforest, seeing a horrible vision of the GIs “finally eaten by the plants” (158). He perceives the Vietnamese rainforest as insanitary “organic inferno,” which penetrates the contours of the soldiers’ body with its pestilential miasma, bugs, and the animal-like tentacles of the botany (157).

It should also be noted that the image of formless landscape is closely related to the feeling of abjection that Vietnam is associated with. For what causes the GIs to lose their sense of identity is the germs and insects swarming in the jungle that may penetrate into their bodies. In the same episode, Claypool is repeatedly disturbed by the jungle’s pathogenic organisms: “It [is] like being locked in a sick room with a vaporizer jammed on high. A cloud of tiny bugs swar[m] about his face, fl[y] in and out his mouth” (153). Significantly, the rainforest is seen by Claypool as an

insanitary "sickroom," a phrase that resonates with the US military's conventional representation of Vietnam as a diseased land, which in part reflects the soldiers' fear of contamination by the tropical pests.

As important as the images of the Vietnamese landscape are those of its inhabitants. In the novel, the NLF and NVA [North Vietnamese Army] forces, who hide under the cover of dense jungle vegetation, are often perceived by the GIs not as humans but as insect pests. When Griffin joins his comrade lieutenant Mueller's air raid operation, he overhears the radio communication among the pilots in the same mission. One of them speaks of the targeted village suspected of hostile activities in terms closely related to insect pests: "The province chief says that *the whole village is lousy with VC* so knock your self out" (213, emphasis added). The pilot's remark about the native village "lousy" with NLF guerrillas is strikingly analogous to the US military officials' comment about Vietcong soldiers "infesting" the land, which Fitzgerald reported. Later, as if the pilots' language has been handed down to and internalized by Griffin, the protagonist finds himself also describing the Vietnamese enemy as vermin crawling across the landscape. In his flight excursion to Saigon granted by his superior, Griffin fights the enemy troop in the field who have ground-fired his helicopter. Wright describes the NLF soldiers seen from Griffin's viewpoint as follows: "the paddies, the huts, *the bugs on the ground, the bugs everywhere*" (255, emphasis added).

In manners that oppose the images of the formless Vietnamese natural world, Wright constructs the images of US military base in Vietnam. Looking at the inside of the perimeter of the 1069th Intelligence Group compound, one immediately recognizes that the geometrically ordered design of the base

forms a striking contrast with the organic, shapeless chaos of the Vietnamese rainforest:

> From the air the compound of the 1069th Intelligence Group was a triumph of military design. Living quarters for both officers and enlisted men consisted of fifty-five identical hootches arranged in five ranks of eight hootches, then three ranks of five. … But the unit's basic geometric design possessed a pleasing sense of natural logic and finality that seemed somehow magical to the mind (40).

In fact, the images of straight lines, right angles, and the word "geometry" repeatedly appear throughout the Vietnam part of the novel, and function to emphasize the order of the technologically engineered world of control that the US military has created in the middle of the uncivilized foreign landscape, even though that control will prove to be partial and illusory as the story progresses. In an earlier part of the novel, Wright deliberately invites readers to look at the images of straight lines, angles, and the neatly designed order of the base: "Someone flipped a switch and darkness exploded into geometry. Spheres of light overhead illuminated the angles and planes of an enormous rectangular room. Two rows of bunks faced one another in mirrored perfection" (11). In contrast to the utter unpredictability of the Vietnamese terrain which may anytime turn "idyllic valley" into "howling badlands," the inside of the perimeter of 1069th Intelligence Group compound, at first glance, appears to be a world of control and order.

As examined above, Wright creates the two oppositional images that are associated with Vietnam and the United States respectively. In addition,

Wright represents the battle between the two contending camps in terms of clash between nature and machine, a classical theme of American literature. Whereas the NVA and NLF are associated with the forces of the recalcitrant Vietnamese natural world, the US army is often related to the high-tech machines—vehicles, weapon, and so forth—that the GIs use to tame the tropical jungle and its allies. Take the following scene for instance: "Outside, in the dark, metal and machinery [are] busy churning plants and animals into garbage" (21). Here in the novel's very first description of the Vietnamese landscape, by creating a contrast between the swampy, mushy texture of the land and the metallic surfaces of the machines, the author implies that he represents the war as a conflict between the Vietnamese natural world and the war machines of the United States. The American machines are destroying the fauna and flora of Vietnam and transforming them into formless waste.

Elsewhere in the novel Wright depicts scenes wherein the US Army appears to be an enormous machine with individual GIs seen as its mechanical parts. A typical example can be found in the following scene, where an officer regards one of his subordinates, Wendell Payne, as a tiny mechanical part of a gigantic machine, which is the Army itself: "To Captain DeLong, his section chief, Wendell [i]s just one of the loose wheels occasionally thrown off by *the Green Machine* as it lumber[s] through the soggy unmapped waste of this unfortunate war" (161, emphasis added). It should be noted that "Big Green Machine" was a slang widely used by GIs during the Vietnam War to refer to the US Army, since "virtually everything in the Army—uniform, vehicles, field gear, … —was a shade of green," and also because it reflected the soldiers' perception that "the Army, like most

bureaucracies, was impersonal and mechanical."[15] Wright incorporates the term into his narrative, thereby highlighting the novel's binary structure in which the control and order that the US army attempts to impose against the Vietnamese is incarnated as a gigantic military machine.

Conclusion: the Dissolution of Colonialists' Illusion

At first glance, by emphasising the contrast between the Vietnamese forces and the US Army, Wright may seem to merely reproduce the conventional images of the chaotic, insanitary, diseased land and people of Vietnam. However, the author actually recreates these images in order to challenge them by deliberately confusing the binary distinction and by describing the ways in which the American controlled world of order is dismantled by forces within and without the base. As stated above, the colour "green" in the epithet—"Green Machine"—designates the colour of the Army's equipment. More importantly, however, it actually forebodes the eventual dissolution of the boundary between American world of order and the Vietnamese natural world that happens at the end of the novel, by implying in the oxymoronic combination of "green" and "machine" the defeat of the United States, in which the American war machine is devoured/ destroyed by the resilient green of Vietnam.

In order to unlock the scenes of the crash between the Big Green Machine and the forces of Vietnamese natural world, it is worth noting that throughout *Meditations in Green*, American soldiers and the war machines that attack Vietnam are often figured as gigantic insects and animals. For instance, when Griffin is invited by Lieutenant Mueller to join an air-raid mission, he looks at the lieutenant's face wearing aviator's convex silver

lensed sunglasses and says, “You look like an insect” (211). During their mission, Griffin hears on the radio one of the pilots designate the bombshells, which they drop over the land, as “eggs” (213). At the beginning of the air-raid, Griffin feels elated by the sensation and speed of the flight and thinks that they will be fighting against the enemy in “Indian Country” (212). Thus, he tries to see the US bomber pilots as the contemporary Western rangers fighting in the alien wilderness, and believes in the legitimacy of the discourse that represents US military intervention in Vietnam as America’s evangelical missions to subdue Communists in Asia. Nevertheless, the sinister images of American soldiers and their machines as pestilential vermin subvert the protagonist’s romanticized vision and instead bring into focus the destruction that the US military brings about upon the land and the people. The motif of American aircrafts as giant pests recurs later, when Griffin looks at the US bomber fleet stationed in the hangar: “Opposite the wide floodlit doors the planes, thick and snout-nosed … resembl[e] obscene insects, pregnant dragonflies heavy with unborn larvae of some metallic monstrosity” (269). The image of the monstrous dragonflies carrying their unborn larvae corresponds to the previous air-raid scene where the pilots describe their bombshells as “eggs.” Moreover, considering the protagonist’s role as an herbicide researcher, it is possible to assume that inside the “larvae” are the herbicides/defoliants that the US military used to destroy the Vietnamese rainforest, whose two main ingredients, herbicides coded 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, caused great damage to American farmlands as well.[16] In those episodes, the metaphorical boundary between the American controlled world and the chaotic Vietnamese jungle created by Americans starts to dissolve, since American war machines—the symbol of their

technology—assume the semblance of disease carriers that they despise. Thus, by describing American machines as the gigantic pests that cause devastating disaster upon the Vietnamese and Americans alike, Wright attempts to undermine the false association with illness/insanitation as well as the entailing notion of inferiority that the United States has imposed upon Vietnam.

Wright further develops his critique of the American's idea of controlling/medicating "diseased" Vietnam, by describing the failures of US military efforts in the person of Major Holly, the commanding officer of the 1069th Intelligence Group. As if to embody the US Army's efforts to establish the world of American order and control upon the foreign Vietnamese wilderness by means of its advanced military machines, Holly's character is marked by his obsession with the ideas of imposing control and discipline upon the body and the land. For instance, Holly's appearance is meticulously tended, clean, and neat in manners that are quite contrary to the GIs who ignore military discipline, and who—with their disheveled hair and tattered uniforms—almost look like hippies. Holly's hair is not left growing like wild tropical plants but is cropped short like "putting green grass," and his "[f]irm jaw" and "[c]left chin" are well-shaven and exposed. Likewise, his office is meticulously organized and in perfect order. Wright describes it as being "clean and spare," because "[f]unctionary furniture [is] functionally arranged, [with] no decorations" (91). Moreover, "[t]he walls [are] bright with fresh paint, the waste baskets ree[k] of disinfectant" (98). When Holly arrives at the base to replace his predecessor, who was presumably assassinated by a few defiant subordinates, he is disgusted by the GI's slackened morale and the disorders taking place in the compound, and sets

about reformation of the base. In this, Wright narrates Holly's reformatory mission in parallel with the US military's destruction of the Vietnamese land, and projects him as an apotheosis of the US environmental warfare to clear the recalcitrant Vietnamese jungle, and of the evangelical theory of the US foreign policies.

When Holly inspects the GIs' barracks, he is appalled by the disarray prevailing therein, especially by the "The Big Board"—a collage of monstrous size that the GIs created upon the back wall of their barracks by pasting miscellaneous scraps of paper thereon such as "news clippings, paperback book covers, army manual pages, C-ration boxes, record albums, letters, photographs" and so forth (120). Although the earlier scraps are faded or peeled off, the GIs keep supplying it with newer contributions, so "the board continue[s] to renew itself like some exotic snake" (121). As Lucas Carpenter argues, "The Board is a quintessential egalitarian, non-hegemonic postmodern artifact."[17] Indeed, Wright clearly depicts the board as a symbol representing potentially subversive elements extant within the base. As opposed to the controlled space imposed by the military authorities wherein each GI is stripped of his individuality and is forced to serve as a replaceable part of the gigantic machines of mass destruction, the board is conceived to be a radically democratic, "anarchistic" space free from such strict control by the supreme central power: "There [i]s no one in charge of The Board, no one to arbitrate questions of form, harmony, and taste. Any member of the 1069th with an item he consider[s] suitable [i]s free to paste it up himself" (120). Thus, the fragments of the individual GIs personal history are gathered together and continue to create chaotic, subversive visions such as "the oversized head of Mickey Mouse decapitated

by the Cobra helicopter streaming rockets into the U.S. Capital dome that [i]s a beanie on the head of Ho Chi Minh" (121). The self-generating, organic visions of The Board, besides resembling the regenerative snake skin, also acquire the resilience of the Vietnamese natural world and people that continue invading the US base, undaunted by the mass destruction brought about by the US military machines. Major Holly, therefore, regards the GIs' billets and The Board as a space infected by abominable disease. One of Griffin's comrade observes that the major looked "like Queen Victoria visiting a leper colony" when he inspected the GI's quarters (120). Disgusted by the subversive chaos abounding in the base, Holly enforces his reformation plans to clean the compound, as if prescribing a necessary medication for the sinful patients. He forbids the GIs to grow their hair and beard, ordering them to wear proper outfits and to paint in white all the billets' walls, including The Big Board.

Importantly, Wright suggests that upon undertaking the reformation, Holly identifies himself with Wyatt Earp, the legendary Western gunfighter, who, like several other Western heroes, has been worshipped by Americans as a kind of mythic character, what Richard Slotkin calls the "cult of gunfighter," whose heroic images have been repeatedly reproduced in films and other forms of cultural representation, rather than remembered as an actual historical figure.[18] Immediately after his arrival at the base, Holly regards the 1069th Intelligence Group compound as "Dodge City before the Earp brothers. Holly want[s] an immediate cleanup, wash and wipe from the motor pool to the flight ramp" (96). That is, Holly attempts to assume the role of a "town-tamer," in much the same way as Henry Fonda's Wyatt Earp in John Ford's *My Daring Clementine* (1946), who strives to redress social

injustice and "empower" the "descent folks" by defeating a gang of criminals.[19] In the major's eyes the insubordinate GIs and the recalcitrant Vietnamese guerrillas appear to be, respectively, the Western outlaws and the hostile Indians who imposes social injustice upon decent, good citizens of the frontier town. On the other hand, in Holly's vision, the good town folks are associated with both "decent" Americans at home who support the US military intervention, and "good" Vietnamese people whose lives are threatened by the communists' mutiny. In this way, Holly establishes his self-image as a frontier hero who remedies the injustice, thereby figuratively legitimatizing America's military strategies in Vietnam. By describing Holly as a satire of the US military administration, the author thus attempts to indicate the connection between the medical metaphor that represents Americans as a physician medicating diseased Vietnam and the messianic self-image that the United States has cultivated through popular Western mythology.

Wright then proceeds to describe the fallacies inherent in US military intervention in Vietnam and in its imagined association with the surgeon/savior by narrating the failure of Major Holly's cleansing missions. For all his efforts, Holly fails to control the subversive elements—the demoralized GIs, their drug abuse, and so forth—in the base. Instead, his forcible ways intensifies the antagonism between the insubordinate GIs and the military authorities. Eventually, Holly becomes obsessed with the frightening idea that he might be subjected to the dissident GIs' terrorism like his immediate predecessor, and so hides himself by making Uncle Sam, the unit's Vietnamese carpenter, dig a tunnel through which he moves from "the orderly room to his hootch, his hootch to the commanding bunker" and is

never seen by the GIs thereafter (302–03). The sense of irony that Wright creates in this scene is stressed by the fact that the carpenter, who helps Holly demonstrate his cowardice, is named after the personification of the US federal government, an icon that the US military has used in their campaign to recruit volunteers. Moreover, despite his hatred and contempt against the Vietnamese guerrillas, Major Holly ends up living in a way strikingly analogous to his enemy, the NLF and NVA who lived in and moved through the tunnels and underground shelters in their battle against the US military forces.

Further still, using his metaphorical images, Wright depicts the untenablity of the idea of controlling Vietnam in the body of Holly. As stated above, Major Holly's outlook is marked by its neat, handsome, spruced-up features that he takes great pride in. However, the narrator invites us to note a single tiny defect that continually harasses Holly, and that, despite his meticulous cares, he is never be able to eliminate: "Just minor flaw, tiny, hardly noticeable. High on the left cheek rest[s] a brown velvety mole his straying hand f[inds] unable to resist touching, rubbing, squeezing. Hairs proliferate[s] there despite frequent plucking and the surreptitious application of various depilatories" (93). Holly is concerned that this tiny flaw might one day ruin his career, since he presumes that the maintenance of good looks—again he demonstrates his obsession with the idea of controlling one's body—is compulsory for his successful military career trajectory: "In an age when everyone's file [i]s arranged to read as identically as possible, careers c[an] be bent by such trifles as the pitch of a voice, the break in a smile. Appearance. In the military you c[an]'t ever forget. Burnished surfaces [a]re mandatory" (93). As such, the recalcitrant,

stubborn hairs that threaten Holly's promotion remind one of the confusion and disorders that takes place in the compound, that may equally spoil Holly's career, and that he and other authorities cannot take full control of nevertheless.

It is also worth noting that Wright describes Holly's mole and the hair growing thereon in manners that resemble the fertile Vietnamese land and the resilient green that hampers the US military operations: "It [i]s as if one miniscule but prominent spot ha[s] deliberately seceded from the austere well-tended country of his face, ha[s] gone *soft, mushy, fertile*" (93, emphasis added). Recalling the early part of the novel in which the visual contrast between the metallic American machines and the soft and mushy Vietnamese ground is emphasized—"Outside, in the dark, metal and machinery [are] busy churning plants and animals into garbage"—one can argue that Wright describes Holly's mole in terms closely related to the Vietnamese natural world (21). Therefore, Holly's obsession with his recalcitrant facial hair—"frequent plucking and the surreptitious application of various depilatories"—inevitably evokes the US military's environmental warfare and its failure. The use of depilatories especially reminds one of the spraying of chemical defoliants such as Agent Orange to eliminate the dense tropical forest that serves to shelter the enemy forces, the effects of which Griffin observes as an herbicide researcher.

Actually, Holly's obsession with his facial hair is again Wright's reworking of the classic American literary theme of the clash between machine and nature. Reminding one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's allegory about the mankind's hubris to achieve the "ultimate control over Nature," Wright suggests that Holly's mole and the elements of Vietnamese natural world are

parallel to Georgiana's birthmark, which her scientist husband tries to eliminate. For, if forcibly removed, they would fatally damage those who attempt it.[20)]

Although the US environmental warfare wreaks tremendous damages upon both the Vietnamese land and people, the American characters in *Meditations in Green* are often exasperated by the sense of futility about their own efforts in the face of the over-fertile Vietnamese natural world and the extremely resilient enemy forces. Holly is never able to obliterate his facial hair. Likewise, suggests Wright, the US Army cannot overcome the forces of the Vietnamese green. Throughout the novel, the elements of the Vietnamese natural world keep invading the base and ruin its design. Indeed, looking at the inside of the compound closely, one can find the erosion of the geometrical design everywhere. Latrines are "filthy from use and lack of water" (187); the thermometer hanging on the wall outside Griffin's hut is out of use because its "once glossy and distinct" scales have become "pale and freckled with rust, the enamel blistered and peeling" (268). In spite of Americans' efforts to establish a technologically controlled world of order—"the triumph of military design"—in the Vietnamese terrain by using their machines, everything in the base in fact keeps losing its distinct contours, eroded by the forces of the Vietnamese natural world.

In this way, Wright subverts the conventional binary images ascribed to the US and Vietnam respectively—the geometrical order created by machines and the chaotic jungle outside—by describing the process through which the symbolically geometrical design of the 1069th Intelligence Group Compound is gradually dismantled by and subsumed into the elements of the Vietnamese natural world. The ostensible distinction drawn between the

ordered base and the chaotic Vietnamese land dissolves toward the end of the novel.

Wright's subversive vision culminates near the end of the novel, when Griffin joins a team of GIs to search a missing US helicopter in the remote mountains. Serving exclusively within the perimeter of the base, the protagonist has never marched across the Vietnamese rainforest. This time, however, he goes beyond the boundary, and by experiences the forces of the Vietnamese natural world at first hand, Griffin recognizes the futility of the US attempts to control the resilient Vietnamese rainforest. Upon entering the remote jungle terrain, Griffin is overwhelmed by the immensity and lushness of the Vietnamese rainforest and observes that America's attempts to subdue the tropical botany will never succeed: "[t]he effort to bring down this house, of which Griffin [i]s a part, seem[s] at this close distance to be both frightening and ludicrous" (277). Significantly, in this episode Wright describes the tropical forest in a way that again subverts the binary scheme—the geometrical, controlled space of the US base and the chaotic, insanitary Vietnamese wilderness—that the US military authorities such as Major Holly have attempted to inculcate into the GIs' mind. As the dense forest consists of the extremely intricate web of diverse plants, it appears in Griffin's eyes to be a gigantic gothic architecture constructed and decorated in ways too complex and enormous for any human being to comprehend its entire structure:

> The hall way opened into other halls, the tall ornate stairs led to identical stairs even higher—jungle as architecture—pillar after pillar, arches framing arches, rope and tiered balconies, Gothic ornamental

> expanding *geometrically* in every direction, and below, who could be certain what was bubbling and fizzing down that crypt. (277, emphasis added)

The narrator uses here the image of geometry, which the American characters have theretofore solely ascribed to the characteristic of their own technologically engineered American space, to designate the complex design of the Vietnamese jungle. In so doing, Wright undermines the false, simplistic association created between Vietnam and insanitary, formless chaos. Whereupon the author asserts that besides the chaos of the "bubbling and fizzing" pathogens, the law of geometry is also a part of the larger designs of Nature, whose great forces of regeneration any human technology cannot control fully. Furthermore, here in this jungle scene, the image of enormous machinery, the symbol of America's superior technology, is inverted and assumes a different metaphorical meaning:

> Following the others up the mountain … he [Griffin] realize[s] that were he to die in here among those botanical springs and gears, *a Green Machine larger and more efficient than any human bureaucracy or mechanical invention* would promptly initiate the indifferent process of converting flesh and dreams into plant food. He f[eels] weak, out of shape (277, emphasis added).

In Griffin's revelatory vision, Nature itself appears as a colossal machine by far more efficient and more intricately engineered than any American high-technological war machines. Any human contrivance to control its great

forces, therefore, is ultimately to fail. As such, Wright contends that the US military strategies to control the Vietnamese land by their machines eventually turn out to be partial and futile, and that the binary scheme of American imaginative geography is by no means tenable.

Wright's vision of the Vietnamese rainforest as "Green Machine"—a gothic architecture by far more complex, gigantic, and powerful than America's military machines figuratively signifies the defeat of America's technology in its battle against Nature. Wright describes the US military's attempts to control the diversity and the resilience of the Vietnamese natural world with its machines as America's hubristic acts destined to fail. In so doing, the author also criticizes the ways in which US military officials and politicians have tried to impose upon the complex realities of Vietnam their own vindicative theory of the war that regards US military interventionism as America's contemporary evangelical mission to civilize/sanitize Vietnam.

Notes

1) Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, London and New York: Penguin, 2003, pp. 49–73.
2) Malraux, André, *The Way of the Kings*, trans. Howard Curtis, London: Hesperus Press, 2005, p. 41, emphasis added.
3) *Ibid*., p. 67, p. 83, p. 104, p. 121, and passim.
4) Fitzgerald, Francis, *Fire in the Lake*, New York: Back Bay Books, 2002, p. 368.
5) Wright, Stephen, *Meditations in Green*, New York: Vintage, 2003, pp. 9–10.
6) Herring, George C., *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* , New York: McGraw Hill, 2002, pp. 357–58.
7) Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor*, London: Penguin, 2002, pp. 59–60, and passim.
8) Fujii, Hikaru, "A Man With a Green Memory: War, Cinema, and Freedom in Stephen Wright's *Meditations in Green*", *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2, Summer 2009, p. 119.

9) Stewart, Mathew, "Stephen Wright's Style in *Meditations in Green*", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Winter 1993, p. 126.

10) Researchers have demonstrated that the encounters between the European explorers/immigrants and the Native Americans were more complex than merely fitting to the conventional tales of the conquest and the exploitations of the natives, and the relationship between the two camps was multifaceted. However, that does not set off the undeniable historical facts of the great loss that the indigenes were forced to suffer. See James Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Karen Ordahl Kupperman illustrates the Anglo-Indian interaction in the early colonial period. See her *Settling With the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580–1640* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980).

11) Ringnalda, Donald, *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994, p. 51, and passim.
Stewart, Mathew, *op.cit*., p. 127.
Marín, Pilar, "Entropy in Meditations in Green", *Atlantis*, Vol. 11. No. 1/2, 1989, p. 138.

12) Ringnalda, Donald, *op.cit*., pp. 50–51.

13) Ambrose, Patrick, "Stephen Wright's Literary Landscape", *The Morning News*, 7 June 2006. Web. 20 March 2018.

14) Stewart, Mathew, *op.cit*., p. 132.

15) Brown, Jerold E. ed., *Historical Dictionary of the US Army*, West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 59–60.

16) Carson, Rachel, *The Silent Spring*, New York: Penguin, 2000. pp. 80–81, and passim.

17) Carpenter, Lucas, "'It Don't Mean Nothing': Vietnam War Fiction and Postmodernism", *College Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Spring, 2003, p. 41.

18) Slotkin, Richard, *Gunfighter Nation; The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, p. 379, and passim.

19) *Ibid*., p. 379.

20) Hawthorne, Nathaniel, "The Birthmark", *Hawthorne's Short Stories*, ed. Newton Arvin, New York: Vintage, 2011, p. 177.