

CASEY CLABOUGH

“Which Ones are the Enemy?” The Military Writings of George Garrett

*‘Which ones are the enemy?’ he yelled. ‘Jesus Christ, Riche!
Which ones are the freaking enemy?’*

George Garrett, *Which Ones are the Enemy?*¹

This question, frantically shouted by United States Army Lieutenant Huff in George Garrett’s second novel, *Which Ones are the Enemy?* (1961), as indistinguishable contingents of North and South Korean soldiers converge on his position, is one that military personnel and their beleaguered fictional projections find themselves asking again and again, across time, in numerous scenarios—even with regard to their commanding officers. Referencing such archetypal themes, the best writers of military fiction and war accounts often seek to abstract their narratives beyond immediate historical events and into an arena where their usually ambivalent underpinnings are laid bare as timeless variables of martial existence and armed conflict, as relevant to the night-vision goggled American infantryman in Iraq as to the confused,

terrified helot fleeing before a Spartan advance. Garrett has said of war writing, “Clearly a crippling of some kind has taken place if it is necessary for each generation to begin at the beginning of human experience and, in spite of all previous knowledge and experience, to suffer the same series of shocks and disillusionments.”² Attempting to capture the relevant universal qualities of military life, Garrett’s martial writing uniquely works toward an understanding of recurring philosophical motifs rather than tunnel-visioned explanations of isolated martial experiences. And within the genre of American military fiction it is especially notable—albeit previously unrecognised—for its early Cold War portrayals of the period following the Second World War and preceding the 1960s: an era which, according to Walter Shear, had the task of “creat[ing] an identity out of a stance toward society using whatever spiritual resources the individual could summon from a personal history.”³

A veteran of the United States Army himself, Garrett relates humanity’s timeless archetypal interest in war to our most base inner urges: “It is enormously appealing.... People love the excitement of being at risk and the pleasure of killing other people... it comes with the animal, I think.”⁴ The unfortunate and sometimes perverse immediacy of war to the human experience results in its constantly having a profound influence on culture, artistic and otherwise. In *James Jones*, his biography of the popular American Second World War writer, Garrett observes, “The story and direction of our literature has changed, even as our national life, our *way of life*, has changed—sharply, perhaps radically—since World War II.”⁵ Though it specifically points to the powerful culture-shaping influence of the Second World War, Garrett’s assertion is applicable to almost any historical conflict on some level, the repercussions of which often have formidable effects beyond the generation of those who actively experience the

altercation. Meditating on the haunting quality of World War I, Paul Fussell memorably observed the “obsession with the images and myths of the Great War among novelists and poets too young to have experienced it directly. They have worked it up by purely literary means, means which necessarily transform the war into a ‘subject’ and simplify its motifs into myths and figures expressive of the modern existential predicament.”⁶ Whether wanting for their lack of genuine experience or valuable for their more distant perspectives (or perhaps a little of both), military accounts related by authors removed from the event by a generation or more nonetheless underscore the far-reaching and evolving repercussions (as much imaginary as real) of conflicts across time.

Speaking to the interrelatedness of different wars and their various representations, Garrett once described in a lecture at the University of Virginia the general tension between artist participants in separate conflicts, and how that adversity often gives rise to and is accompanied by changes in aesthetic form.⁷ Having been on active duty during the Korean War, Garrett comments on this relationship with some authority and seems to have experienced it himself in terms of his artistic American relationship both to the Second World War and the Vietnam War. Writing in the 1990s about accounts of the Vietnam conflict, Garrett remarked, “[I] had logged too many hours of hearing and swapping tedious stories (‘war stories,’ we always ironically called them) with other G.I.s not to be profoundly skeptical of a whole lot of what I heard from the next generation of soldier boys.”⁸ Though its specific historical variables differed from Korea, Vietnam held little fundamental difference for Garrett as an overall military phenomenon. In fact, in a 1965 notebook Garrett toyed with the idea of writing a “G.I. story” set in the context of the Vietnam war, in which the protagonist would “sense [the] decay and degeneration of

culture and [the] American Dream,” a theme he had earlier identified with post-Second World War American culture.⁹ In abstracting universal cultural and military motifs to the milieu of different historical conflicts, Garrett’s approach resembles the technique of American military writers like William Hoffman, who in narratives such as the short story “Night Sport” and the novel *Tidewater Blood* removes his own military experiences from 1940s Europe to Vietnam settings, for the sake of cultural relevance. As Hoffman has explained,

I really feel that war is a timeless universal. The only thing that changes are the cultural conditions and outer accoutrements: tactics, technology, uniforms, and so on. But the central truth of it is the same in all wars. The reason I use Vietnam now is the immediacy it has for readers, but the essence of war doesn’t change.¹⁰

Seeking to articulate the eternal aspects of war and the military, writers such as Garrett and Hoffman have no problem with transfusing their own genuine experiences and ideas into the given conflict of the day, hoping that its contemporary pertinence will help compel readers to delve toward the deeper truths that lie beneath it.

Even when an author sets his story in the context of the most recent newsworthy war, he still faces the formidable challenge of convincingly expressing perhaps the most horrifying phenomenon a human being can encounter. As Garrett explained in an interview, “You can’t duplicate the combat experience of war. The movies can’t do it. They can be noisy and scary, but that’s about it.”¹¹ Part of the problem with portraying war and even peacetime military life is the fact that normal human and societal criteria rarely function. With this dynamic in mind, writer Robert Bausch has characterised Garrett’s military fiction as a “world of lunatic order.”¹² Though a regimented authoritarian structure exists, it is one that often appears, especially to the civilian

reader, devoid of logic and meaning—a kind of method of madness: the now-proverbial “catch-22.” Whereas the soldier may have his doubts about the structure as well, it is an unavoidable edifice that almost inevitably takes over his own habits and thought processes. Writing about his military service in his notebooks, Garrett explains that it was due to “a combination of G.I. haircuts, the rubbing tightness of a steel helmet, nerves and fear, bad food, dirt and so forth.... I lost my strength... and with it my interest in the church. Any church.”¹³ Influenced by the persistently numbing and banal lifestyle of army existence, Garrett abdicated any concern for conventional structures of religion, their organisation and customs seemingly irreconcilable with the system and rituals of army life.

The breaking down of civilian edifices of order and belief, while sometimes leaving the soldier in an interpretive limbo, occasionally affords him a new freedom of realistic association, sharpened by the nearness of danger and death, that enables him to imagine in great detail the lives of other military participants—comrade and enemy, enlisted man and officer, victimised civilian, and so on. Referencing this idea of fluid identity in Garrett’s work, writer David Madden has remarked, “[T]he army stories are so memorable for me because the author could be, in the army, one of at least two; when he could not, he empathized himself into being a participant in the crowd.”¹⁴ Whereas many of the most celebrated novels of the American military—*From Here to Eternity* and *Catch-22*, to name but two—interpret experience predominantly from the perspective of the enlisted man, often at the expense of demonising officers, Garrett’s narratives generally are more ambivalent, presenting various tiers of the military equation with objective understanding. As Fred Chappell has noted, Garrett “is one of the few writers of military fiction who sympathizes with the officer as well as the enlisted man,”

a quality he shares with James Gould Cozzens, who in the Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel *Guard of Honor* produced arguably the most convincing fictional depiction of officer interaction and military bureaucracy in the history of American literature.¹⁵ Referencing *Guard of Honor* himself, Garrett has suggested his preference for what he calls “indirect” military narratives, those that attempt to get at the essence of military life through nuanced considerations of some of its more overlooked, unpopular, and trivialised aspects. He maintains:

I don't know what constitutes good military fiction. I do believe that some of the finest pieces have been very indirect. One of the great novels of World War II is *Guard of Honor* and there's no combat in it. It's all about the military hierarchy. One of the best World War II films which covers the immediate post-war period is *Tunes of Glory* with Alec Guinness. It's about a regiment in Scotland and the transition from war to peace. The men are being sent home and the regiment is falling apart. At one time I wanted to do a little piece on two stories, J.D. Salinger's "For Esmé—With Love and Squalor" and one by Peter Taylor ["Rain in the Heart"].¹⁶

Salinger's memorable story follows a veteran in post-Second World War New York City and Taylor's a group of pre-Second World War trainees in the American South. Although Salinger and Taylor both saw substantial combat during their military stints, they eschew battlefield narratives in their work for the more subtle shades of pre- and post-war dynamics of identity. Combat surrenders the stage to the complexities of people living their lives shortly before and after it, with favourable and valuable results.

Much of Garrett's military fiction, like the stories of Salinger and Taylor, focuses on the dynamics of non-combat or peacetime military existence, suggesting some of the more universal aspects of soldiering in a very indirect manner. In one of his earliest published stories, "In Other Countries" (1956), Garrett portrays the relationship of two enlisted men from opposite ends of

the civilian social ladder: a college-educated man from New York and a barely literate Tennessean. Their relationship is best characterised by a remark Garrett makes in his notebooks: “They are the kind of curious friends the system of the Army creates, men who might never have met otherwise, men whose lives and backgrounds are utterly different.”¹⁷ At the centre of the story is a meditation on the ways in which civilian structures break down in the face of shared military rank and a jointly traumatic field experience. After the two men are nearly run over in the night by a wayward tank, the narrator recounts:

This was the accident, the sudden equalizing force of fear and the feeling that death had been near to both of us, that made Harry and me buddies. It just happened. We didn’t have to think about it or even be self-conscious about it; we were just friends from that instant. There was nothing to talk about anyway. Both of us had participated equally in an awful, incommunicable experience. Both of us, in a sense, felt that we owed our lives to the other.”¹⁸

Having mutually experienced a traumatic life-threatening event, the two men suddenly are transformed into brothers—beyond all considerations of civilian background, class, and education—in a way that is both powerful and “incommunicable.”

Reflecting the influential though often overlooked dynamic of military bureaucracy, the protagonists of “In Other Countries” are thrown together simply because the first letters of their last names are the same. Correspondingly, in an untitled, unpublished, story Garrett employs a character named David Barnstone who experiences a number of unusual experiences in the army simply because his last name places him at or near the head of most lines. In “The Other Side of the Coin” (1957) Garrett abstracts this concept of regulation-based chance to a more tragic arena, highlighting the ridiculousness of military procedure in the midst of death through the doomed

figure of Lieutenant Austin, a young flier whose self-destructive irrationality reflects the general chaos of the Second World War. A formidable pilot whose on-the-ground antics exasperate his superiors, Austin eventually earns the grudging respect of the narrator, Captain Pierce:

In a way I began to like him, to sympathize with him because it seemed to me that we were all living strangely in what was not much more than a series of disconnected adventures. On the other hand, to be truthful, I envied him too, because I thought he had possession of something which the rest of us had lost somewhere. I'm not sure what it was, unless (to make a guess) it was a kind of innate ability to see himself and the wide world without taking either very seriously.¹⁹

Possessing a youthful, boyish appearance, Austin functions as a kind of cherubic trickster figure, underscoring the absurd meaningfulness of off-duty military regulations to individuals who regularly risk death. His propensity for getting drunk, wrecking trucks, and punching out officers appears minor when he eventually meets his end in the air, and much of his erratic earthbound behaviour seems to manifest itself as a kind of coping mechanism for the constant danger he faces while flying. As Pierce informs the teetotal colonel, "Maybe the boy's crazy. I don't know. I'm almost forty now, and I've forgotten what the world looked like at twenty. I do know it would have seemed like a damned crazy world if I had to do the things these kids are doing."²⁰ Thrown into a milieu in which people ceaselessly are trying to kill him, young Austin often has trouble abstracting his stressful and unpredictable duty in the clouds from the mundane, rule-laden life on the ground, which appears both silly and absurd in the context of the dangers he constantly faces while flying.

One of Garrett's favourite war novels, Stephen Becker's *When the War is Over*, is a largely factual narrative of the American Civil War based on the execution of a twelve-year-old

boy arrested for being a Confederate guerrilla. Not considered a threat by any of his captors, the boy is nonetheless executed out of malice in the wake of Lincoln's assassination, well after the war has concluded. The seemingly heartless and even meaningless role of military bureaucracy and unequivocal regulations in the midst of human courage and loss that appear in narratives like "The Other Side of the Coin" and *When the War is Over* support Jeffrey Walsh's observation, that "[s]ince war is demonstrably the most pointless and destructive of all human activities it frequently inculcates in the front-line writer a feeling of existential loss and disorientation, a dawning awareness that the exemplary sacrifice of troops is meaningless and utterly futile."²¹ Overwhelmed by the terrible relationship between strategic decisions and real human expenditure, military writers who are also veterans approach and represent concepts like courage with attitudes that range from reserved caution to outright cynicism.

Not one to ignore the horrors and ambiguities of military service, Garrett investigates a number of problematic scenarios in his fiction. In "The Blood of Strangers" (1957), for instance, an American veteran of the Second World War, named Peter, returns to post-war Austria on vacation with his shallow wife, Louise, whom the narrator describes as "pretty, petulant."²² Forsaking their established tourist itinerary, Peter insists that they drive out into the Austrian countryside. Although he does not inform Louise of his intentions, Peter is searching for the spot where he had raped a local girl during the war. In contrast to this buried horrific act, Louise remarks that in his army photograph Peter had looked "so young and sweet and funny," producing a confused ambience of chronology and ambiguity in the story.²³ Louise's naïve and spoiled American demeanour balances that of the victimised, war-suffering Austrian girl just as the lucrative post-war American boom that allows Peter and Louise to take grand international

vacations counters the surreal hardness and brutality of the country at war. From his prosperous rational perch looking back, Peter recalls, “place and time were vague, distorted... nothing made much sense.”²⁴ Unable to reconstruct his wartime identity or even the time and place of his crime, Peter remains frustrated at his inability to reconcile his private horrific past with his identity in the present.

Similar incidents that focus on the implications of overseas military men abusing women appear in a number of Garrett’s other stories. In “Don’t Take No For An Answer” (1956) a surly G.I. named Stitch relates his elaborate hustle of a plain-looking, vacationing American woman while on leave in Paris. Although Stitch conveys his seduction in heartless, misogynistic terms, he remains curiously attractive as an adept breed of story-telling anti-hero. In his notes for the dramatic version of the story, Garrett remarked that Stitch is “complex. He is a loner and the others don’t *like* him really, but he has a kind of hold over them and people. Partly it is his ability to act and tell a story. Partly, it is his ambiguity.”²⁵ Despite the fact that he seems to have performed a questionable act, misleading and then dumping the naïve American woman, Stitch remains compelling to his male military audience, mostly because he “could always tell a good story.”²⁶ Any moral considerations are ignored in the face of the men’s desire to hear an interesting tale related in fine detail, which breaks the overpowering monotony of their lives in the barracks. As Stitch maintains, “I felt kind of bad, not real bad,” his feelings about the event being subordinated both to the apparent success of his literal actions and his skilful recounting of them.²⁷

Writing about the post-Second World War American military in the 1990s, Garrett noted the fundamental shift in the role of the American soldier:

The new thing (already old now in my lifetime) was the sending forth of American citizen soldiers all over the world where, quite aside from their duties, just by being there they came to know foreign people and languages and cultures, in bits and pieces, true, but more closely than even they could have imagined. We had been strictly local and were now bound to be global.²⁸

Thrown into other cultures where their presence was met with a whole range of positive and negative reactions, post-Second World War American soldiers frequently found themselves participating in intimate cultural narratives well beyond the scopes of their jobs and country. For example, in the vignette “The Art of Courtly Love”—from the short story “What’s the Purpose of the Bayonet?” (1957)—the narrator, an American soldier, takes up with a Czechoslovakian war refugee named Inge. Although he knows she does not love or even like him very much, the narrator regularly bombards her with material goods she cannot afford herself, to the point that she comes to rely on his support and allows him to live with her. Stubbornly refusing to recognise his own complicity, the narrator becomes enraged when he discovers that she is in love with a local German man, destroying everything in her apartment and threatening to report her to the police as a prostitute. Exploiting his colonising presence in a foreign culture, the narrator preys on the poverty of Inge’s local community while selfishly refusing to acknowledge her natural preference for a member of her own culture.

Not all of Garrett’s culture-bearing stories centre around the invasive role of the American military in a foreign country, many of them choosing instead simply to reflect the strange inner workings of a foreign local community or life on an overseas military base. For example, the vignette “Torment,” the final military anecdote from “What’s the Purpose of the Bayonet?” recounts the severe beating of local prostitutes by Austrian police. Unable to stop

prostitution, especially with the nearby presence of the American military inevitably fuelling the business, the police periodically gather together as many hookers as possible and flog them severely, brutally mauling them without any real hope that the punishment will make them change their profession. Witnessing this hellish, chaotic spectacle, the story's narrator, an American serviceman, remarks,

In back rooms, in hidden corners, behind blank smiles, all over the world people are suffering and making other people suffer. The things God has to see because He cannot shut his eyes! It's almost too much to think about. It's enough to turn your stomach against the whole inhuman race.²⁹

Unable to interpret what he sees in terms of Austrian society or his military background, the narrator abstracts the event to the meaningless cruelty of all humanity, a dynamic that freely and consistently crosses all cultural barriers.

The prevalence with which military culture ushers in, either directly or indirectly, casual, absurd brutality reveals itself through a number of unlikely avenues and figures. For example, in "Crowfoot," an anecdote collected in *The Old Army Game* (1994) but written much earlier, a group of enlisted men shoot up a portion of their base after having their passes pulled at the last minute. Long after the rest of the men have given themselves up to base authorities, a Native American named Crowfoot continues to hold out by himself, periodically spraying the ground with his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) when anyone attempts to advance on his position. After his sergeant, who is also the story's narrator, succeeds in persuading him to surrender, Crowfoot stands up and, despite all promises to the contrary, is promptly shot. The narrative action of Crowfoot's purposeless death, coming on the tail of an equally irrational action by his peers, is mirrored amid a Korean War setting in "Heroes." More ridiculous than Crowfoot both

in his appearance and actions, the story's protagonist, Floogie, is described as "goofy looking. Clumsy as a bear cub. Couldn't do much of anything right."³⁰ The scourge and brunt of his outfit, Floogie constantly separates himself from his brother soldiers in an effort to avoid the constant hassles of ridicule and bad camp assignments. Sleeping apart from the other men in his outfit, Floogie is accidentally left behind when his unit withdraws from a position during the night, and awakes to find a strong contingent of Chinese advancing on him. Thinking his comrades are still around him, Floogie puts up a valiant fatal fight which the rest of his unit can hear more than a mile away. Listening to Floogie's firing, the narrator imagines Floogie "crawling around the position in the dark. Feeling for his buddies and not finding anybody."³¹ Killed while single-handedly defending his position, Floogie becomes an unlikely hero. A modern knight in fool's clothing, he proves his mettle when death is imminent.

In the vignette "How the Last War Ended," a section from the story "Comic Strip" (1957), two opposing captains discuss "the utter absurdity of defeat" and "the marvelous shrug of the surviving."³² Against the accidental and incidental losses of people like Crowfoot and Floogie, military personnel who have endured such expenditures repeatedly find themselves meditating on these largely archetypal topics. Winning and losing, death and survival, are met with ambivalence and a weary "shrug," the process of achieving whatever end fate has dealt them having worn the participants to a perspective of uneasy doubt or, worse, apathy. Revealing the significance of the title "Comic Strip," writer Madison Smartt Bell explains, "Garrett evolved what he calls the 'comic strip' principle of narrative design as a way of arranging material that lacks conventional linear continuity... the relationships between panels can just as well be imagistic or thematic."³³ With their temporal and thematic ambiguity, war and military narratives

are ideal and frequent candidates for the comic strip technique, forsaking thematic closure and narrative resolution for brief and sometimes fragmented snapshots of archetypal military dynamics—an approach that seeks to capture the chaotic displacement and personal fragmentation often associated with war and the martial life.³⁴

Whereas Garrett locates his military fiction in different times and contexts, many of his comic strips and more traditional military narratives take place against a specific backdrop: the camp of the Nth Field Artillery. A fictionalised projection of his own American artillery regiment in post-Second World War Eastern Europe, the Nth appears among Garrett’s earliest military writings—unpublished stories such as “One More Tattoo”—in which he experimented with and practised a number of different styles and voices as a means of successfully relating the military experience. In “Hooray for the Old Nth Field,” a comic strip section from “What’s the Purpose of the Bayonet” (1957), the narrator says of the outfit, “It’s amazing how all the misfits, deadbeats, eightballs, VD cases, alcoholics, and walleyed, knockkneed, stockade-bait suddenly turned out to be trained artillerymen.”³⁵ Whereas figures like Crowfoot and Floogie constitute memorable individual anti-heroes, the Nth seems to comprise a kind of collective anti-hero army, the acknowledged garbage-dispenser/hotbed for all the American military’s problems. However, with that identity comes a singular resignation and toughness that results in a peculiar *esprit de corps*. While offering up a kind of lengthy mock-prayer, the narrator gets close to the essence of his unit:

Save me, Lord, from companies and battalions of well-adjusted,
 dead-serious, clean-cut, boy-scout, post-office-recruiting poster
 soldiers. Deliver me from mine enemies, West Point officers
 with spitshined boots and a tentpole jammed up their rectums....
 Save me from good people, on a piece of graph paper,
 percentage-wise. Give me the bottom of the barrel, men who

still have themselves to laugh at and something real to cry about, who, having nothing to lose and being victims of the absurd dignity of the human condition, can live with bravado at least, and, if they have to die, can die with grace like a wounded animal.³⁶

Ridiculing the pomp of military class and appearance—neatness, West Point rigidity, paper-laden statistical efficiency—the narrator celebrates his preference for real soldiers with genuine human problems and gifts. Often down-and-out and wanting in both discipline and demeanour, the Nth nevertheless takes pride in its visceral authenticity, stubbornly celebrating its flawed, hard-scrabble humanity against the attempted sterile regimentation of military culture.

Appearing under various names and guises in several narratives, the Nth receives its most thorough treatment in Garrett's second novel, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?* (1961), which is narrated by a hard-luck enlisted man named John Riche, a Korea veteran and self-nominated prospect for "the Congressional Medal for Losers" who finds himself stationed in Trieste.³⁷ A kind of Nth everyman, Riche, according to Garrett, "conceals his virtue behind a screen of vices."³⁸ Like the Nth itself, Riche buries his legitimate attributes behind his half-assed practices of gambling, whoring, drug-dealing, and generally working the army system, which has led Garrett to characterise him as "a variation of the unreliable narrator. You can't take his opinion as being wholly accurate."³⁹ Yet, this is an inevitable dilemma all narrators demonstrate to greater or lesser degrees on some level. As Garrett says of James Gould Cozzens' *Guard of Honor*, "The form of narration, with all events filtered through a single center of consciousness, creates its own pattern and its own difficulties."⁴⁰ However, whereas *Guard of Honor* constitutes a high-minded, intricate meditation on the concept of ethical duty, channelled through the impressions of an intelligent army officer who is also a civilian lawyer, *Which Ones Are the*

Enemy? is related through the largely uneducated, enlisted sensibility of Riche. Riche's rough, conversational dialogue also possesses a peculiar air of spontaneity, possibly stemming from the fact that Garrett composed the novel in "about two weeks or so."⁴¹ In fact, when Garrett submitted the manuscript, one editor accused him of having pilfered someone else's work, its tone and appearance appearing so radically different from his previous stories or his highly descriptive, meditative first novel, *The Finished Man*.

The ambling, colloquial narrative style of a delinquent narrator that Garrett chose for the book was not without precedent, suggesting a variation on Mac Hyman's technique in his wonderful picaresque Second World War novel *No Time for Sergeants*, which anticipated such memorable American Second World War satires as William Hoffman's *Yancey's War* and Heller's *Catch-22* in its hilarious indictment of military culture. Yet, the action of *Which Ones Are the Enemy?* is more traditionally dramatic than it is satirical, and Riche's rough comparisons often convey his own situation, and that of the proverbial military outcast, with a clarity that outshines highly refined, descriptive narratives. For example, when Riche explains his fondness for the cuckoo, he remarks,

They say it's a dirty bird and a thief and all. I couldn't have cared less. What he does with himself is his business. It was his cry or his song or whatever it was that seemed like it was my language. And you never saw one. At least I never did. You could only hear him, here, there, and then gone again like a ghost.⁴²

Simplistically rolling up his own difference, independence, and remoteness into the personality of the bird, Riche reveals much about himself, especially in relation to "they," the military and the world at large which view beings like the bird and himself as "a dirty bird and a thief and

all.” Although Riche has plenty to worry about and consistently makes his situation even more precarious, he views the adversity of life with a resigned, happy-go-lucky attitude, maintaining, “Whenever I feel like putting the blame on something I can always blame my good luck.”⁴³ In a preface to an early unpublished version of the book Garrett remarked that “soldiers tend to make ‘mistakes’ that a more rational man in a more casual society would not.”⁴⁴ Deprived of freedom and many of the other pleasures of civilian life, military personnel often find themselves pressing the boundaries of regulations and good sense in an effort to make their lives more bearable and humane.

Although Riche’s personal dilemmas remain front and centre throughout the book, they often serve as springboards for deeper observations concerning military history. When Riche has a conversation with Fishbein about Second World War novels, he not only reveals a deeply concealed penchant for self-education but an engagement with military experience beyond the scope of his own enlistment. Fishbein maintains that between their contemporary comrades and the soldiers in Second World War novels

there’s one big difference. All those characters in the old prewar, peacetime Army were different in one way. None of them had been in a war. Almost all of you guys have been shot at. Some of you, like Ryder and Mooney and Loller, say, have been in *two* wars. That makes a hell of a difference.⁴⁵

Referencing the large-scale deployment of Second World War and Korea veterans in the post-war era, Fishbein contrasts their own more jaded and realistic perspective on combat and service versus the naïve outlook of personnel just before the Second World War. In fact, the novel’s title serves as a kind of reference to this shift in the American military. On the verge of an engagement during the Korean War a green officer character named Lieutenant Huff is unable to

tell the difference between northern and southern Korean soldiers, frantically imploring Riche, “which ones are the enemy?”⁴⁶ Of, course the implications of his question go well beyond Huff’s imminent engagement and the Koreans. As editor and critic George Core has pointed out, “The enemy is everywhere,” pervading the opposing combatants, fellow soldiers, chain of command, and even oneself—a metaphor for the ambiguity and senselessness of war.⁴⁷ For Garrett’s part, he conceptualises the “enemy” as the abstract historical phenomenon of peacetime military:

“There is no real enemy. There is only the Cold War. There are the inescapable facts of routine, training, spit and polish and boredom, the hurry up and wait of peacetime army duty.”⁴⁸

Perceived as being devoid of any legitimate meaning or identity, the general military becomes the enemy. In fact, Riche experiences an unusual cross-rank affinity with his captain since he thinks of him, like himself, as “another loser in the old army game.”⁴⁹ Garrett elaborates on “the old army game” in a story of the same name which appeared the same year as *Which Ones Are the Enemy?* Following two recruits who come to outrank their cruel, hard-army drill instructor, the tale mocks military rank and identity while also portraying the powerful hold it establishes on certain individuals. As Sachs tells Sergeant Quince, the army is “just a game, a stupid, brutal, pointless simple-minded game.”⁵⁰ Sachs gloats since he believes he has won the game, but Quince, for whom the army provides his only sense of identity, begins to weep since Sachs has taken “everything away” from him through his belittlement of the system of being to which Quince has dedicated his life.

As Sachs’s behaviour demonstrates, the occasional cynicism and humour that inform the old army game are often of a perverse variety, and Garrett pursues this theme further in a number of stories that interrogate domestic military cultural issues and the tension between civilian and

military mores. In “The Wounded Soldier” (1964), for instance, a veteran with a horribly disfigured face attempts to readjust his identity in the context of civilian American society. Seeing his disfigured face for the first time in a mirror, he feels as if he has just been “born again.”⁵¹ Mindful of the soldier’s impact on civilian perceptions about the military, a high-ranking officer attempts to bribe him to stay in the hospital, fearing that his appearance in society might cause, in the soldier’s words, “a considerable cooling of patriotic ardor.”⁵² From the point of view of military culture, the soldier constitutes a serious problem of representation. The wounded man rhetorically tells the visiting officer, “It would have been so much more convenient if I had simply died.”⁵³ Yet, the soldier is curious about life beyond the military hospital and eventually reenters the civilian world, albeit with a mask to cover his face. As the soldier discovers for himself, there is no place in society for a person with his variety of wounds and background, and he resigns himself to one of the few professions that celebrate grotesque difference: the circus. Only in that arena is his appearance acceptable and the people are free to laugh at him since it is what they are expected to do. Yet the audience’s laughter is not that of warm, genuine humour, but rather a nervous reflexive mechanism against something they cannot fully confront or absorb. As the narrator points out, “[A] man is just as likely to giggle when he meets his executioner as he is to melt.”⁵⁴ Unable to account for the soldier’s wound, the civilian audience dismisses it with laughter, even as the emotion that triggers their thin merriment points to something darker and more disturbing within themselves.

In “Unmapped Country” (1964) a more subtle conflict between military and civilian methods of interpretation emerges when an officer drives out to the eastern Tennessee back-country to present a father with the details of his son’s death. Standing as a road-block to this

task is the difference between the officer's acute military language and the father's uneducated, agrarian culture. An even more marked cultural conflict informs "Texarkana Was a Crazy Town" (1964) which focuses on the friendship between Mooney, an African American soldier/character who also appears in *Which Ones Are the Enemy?* and the unnamed narrator. In *Which Ones Are the Enemy?* Riche describes Mooney as "naturally pissed off about being born black," which on the surface appears racist but actually turns out to be a form of gentle teasing since Mooney is one of the few people in the book Riche genuinely admires as a soldier and a man.⁵⁵ The narrator of "Texarkana Was a Crazy Town" also has a high opinion of Mooney, who seems to know the narrator's mind better than the narrator. When the speaker resolves to leave the army, Mooney prophetically tells him, "You don't know anything else but the army."⁵⁶ Mooney also has affected the narrator in more subtle ways. When he discovers that his new civilian employer and co-workers have assaulted a mildly retarded African American man named Peanuts, the narrator beats up his boss and returns to the army—actions that have larger cultural connotations. As Garrett explains,

Service was already the destiny of the poor even before, again out of pure political fear, the American Army was returned to its earlier status as Regular. But before all that, from the days of World War II through much of the time of the Cold War, the service, the Army, even with all its elaborate hierarchy and rank and privileges, was the great democratic equalizer.⁵⁷

Conceptualising Mooney and Peanuts as human beings without reference to their race, the narrator of "Texarkana Was a Crazy Town" embodies the post-Second World War army's practice of "democratic equalizing," lashing out against the racially-motivated beating. At the end of the story, when he returns to the room he and Mooney share, he asks his friend, "[H]ow

come you're so black?" to which Mooney responds with laughter, their friendship being devoid of many of the tensions that would inform a similar relationship in civilian life.⁵⁸

Following his flurry of military fiction published between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, Garrett would move away from definitively martial narratives, his references to soldiering appearing in small anecdotes such as Moses's service flashback in *Do, Lord, Remember Me* (1965), Jojo Royle's war stories in *The King of Babylon Shall Not Come Against You* (1996), and various sections from Garrett's celebrated historical novels of Elizabethan England. However, although the references to military life generally are spare, they often are character-shaping and carry with them repercussions for the larger work. As Moses relates in *Do, Lord, Remember Me*:

Lucky or not, I am alive and am still breathing. I learned then, knew and know still a few things worth knowing. I know that pain is bad and life is precious. I grieve not for the fallen any more than I ask them to grieve for me.... over those wide fields, through trees and deadly streets of villages, towns and cities I ran and I run still, bent low, forward, not backward, holding my weapon, until my time comes.⁵⁹

For Moses his past life and the value of his existence in the present are irrevocably wedded by his experiences in the army and the memory of his dead comrades. Just as the spectre of his life-changing past continues to haunt Moses, so Garrett eventually began moving away from fictional military narratives toward autobiographical accounts of his own time in the service. In "The Tanks," a piece from *Whistling in the Dark* (1992), this transition becomes altogether palpable as Garrett describes a story he would have written about a forced march by reservists. Relating the details of the piece, Garrett's memory and his planned fictional elements blur as he articulates an autobiographical march he endured while serving as a reservist.

In the title narrative of *Whistling in the Dark*, perhaps Garrett's most powerfully intimate

piece of military writing, fiction is forsaken altogether for the autobiographical recounting of Austrians who fought for Germany during the Second World War being returned from Siberia in the 1950s. A young enlisted man in Austria, Garrett listens to a *gausthaus* owner's own internment account beforehand but remains unimpressed—"young and strong and (as yet) undefeated," he cannot "seriously imagine surrendering to anybody."⁶⁰ However, the ironies and hard lessons of history are closer about him than he initially imagines. As it turns out, it is to the very same *gausthaus* where he is drinking that a young Adolf Hitler, only a boy, would come to fetch beer for his father. In the poem "Some Enormous Surprises," the young Garrett/soldier figure reflects on Hitler as

this little pale-faced boy,
for whom [God] has arranged some enormous surprises,
beyond any kind of imagining, even myself,
drunk in this place, years from home, imagining it.⁶¹

Initiated into the place-bound complexities of history beyond his own time and country, the narrator can only wonder at its strange relation to himself. Later, the immediacy of the connection becomes unavoidable and overpowering when he witnesses the Austrian prisoners-of-war returning from Siberia:

I stand there knowing one thing for certain—that I am seeing
our century, our time, close and truly. Here it is and, even
among strangers, I am among them, sharing the moment of
truth whether I want to or not.

An American sergeant stands in the swirling crowd with
tears rolling down his cheeks. He will be gone from here soon,
first miles, then years and years away. But he will not, because
he cannot, forget this moment or himself in it, his share of this
world's woe and joy, the lament and celebration of all living
things.⁶²

Moving from a position of youthful, present-bound indifference to one that recognises the

individual's irrevocable connection to human history everywhere, the young Garrett/narrator powerfully discovers his own tenuous relationship to time and human events, the crushing epiphany of which will stay with him forever.

The recognition of one's relationship to universal and timeless historical forces segues, almost inevitably, into an interest in one's family history. In "Uncles and Others" (1992), another autobiographical section from *Whistling in the Dark*, Garrett recounts his family's military involvement over the centuries as

usually paradoxical. Which is to say, even the most innocent and inexperienced of us, thanks to Tribal history, arrived wherever we were sent, that is wherever we had to go, almost without expectations or illusions. Which, in turn, means that we were usually spared the common experience of disillusionment.⁶³

Citing the scepticism and resignation of other Garretts who have served, Garrett matches it to his own—a kind of cross-generational sensibility that recognises history's ironies and contradictions, but does not inhibit Garretts from continuing to dutifully take part in them. Abstracted to another level, the Garrett family's historical relationship to military service is not unlike George Garrett's own identification with history. In "A Story Goes with It" (2002) he recounts several contrary historical perspectives on a group of Second World War German saboteurs before concluding, "Based on official United States government documents and data, the actions taken (or not taken) by the FBI, the Coast Guard, the Justice Department, et al. are shown in the most favorable possible light."⁶⁴ However, Garrett ultimately gives greater credence to the largely undocumented version of scholar Eddie Weems, who recounts blunder after blunder on behalf of the Germans and the American government, culminating in a shootout in which contingents of

FBI agents fight it out, each believing that the other group is made up of Nazi spies. Which ones are the enemy? For Garrett, Weems's interpretation of history is closer to the reality he has experienced and knows. Moreover, it is this very paradox of history and people's wide-ranging interpretations of it that continues to make Garrett's military fiction relevant. As Garrett once elaborated in an interview, military writing is:

[S]till applicable because of these last couple wars. Before they came along a lot of editors had a distinct dislike for military fiction. They might think you're endorsing military life or something. Plus, I've had younger editors tell me that they're not into doing historical fiction since my military stories take place before 1960, which is before they were born. I guess they are historical although I've never thought of them that way.⁶⁵

Recognising the unintentional historical legacy of his own fiction in a genre that unfortunately regenerates its popularity and publishability with the ongoing arrival of new military conflicts, Garrett confirms his archetypal perspective on both the military and the writing that portrays it. Though the face of the enemy may change (and occasionally even resemble our own), we can be sure there always will be one, and for writers like Garrett the complexity and value of that lamentable eternal narrative is greater than the finite dynamics of a single conflict or campaign.

Notes

¹ George Garrett, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961) 124.

² George Garrett, "The Literature of the Great War" (*Sewanee Review* 84.3, 1976), 509.

³ Walter Shear, *The Feeling of Being: Sensibility in Postwar American Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 244.

⁴ George Garrett, *Going to See the Elephant: Pieces of a Writing Life* (Huntsville: Texas Review Press, 2002), 141.

⁵ George Garrett, *James Jones* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984), 14.

⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 321.

⁷ George Garrett, *American Literature of World War II*, Videocassette (Eminent Scholar/Teacher Series, Omnigraphics, 1988).

⁸ George Garrett, *My Silk Purse and Yours: The Publishing Scene and American Literary Art* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 251.

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- of Missouri Press, 1992), 101.
- ⁹ George Garrett Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.
- ¹⁰ Casey Clabough, "William Hoffman's Fictional Journey: An Interview" (*The Southern Quarterly* 41.1, 2002), 85-86.
- ¹¹ Casey Clabough, unpublished interview with George Garrett, 9 July 2003 (hereafter Clabough interview).
- ¹² Robert Bausch, "George Garrett's Military/Army Fiction" in Paul Ruffin and Stuart Wright, eds., *To Come Up Grinning: A Tribute to George Garrett* (Huntsville, TX: Texas Review Press, 1989), 9.
- ¹³ Garrett Papers.
- ¹⁴ David Madden, "Continually Astonished by Everything: the Army Stories of George Garrett" in Ruffin and Wright, *To Come Up Grinning*, 48-49.
- ¹⁵ Fred Chappell, "Fictional Characterization as Infinite Regressive Series: George Garrett's Strangers in the Mirror" in Jefferson Humphries, ed., *Southern Literature and Literary Theory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 71.
- ¹⁶ Clabough interview.
- ¹⁷ Garrett Papers.
- ¹⁸ George Garrett, "In Other Countries" (*Prairie Schooner* 30.3, 1956), 293.
- ¹⁹ George Garrett, "The Other Side of the Coin" (*Four Quarters* 6.2, 1957), 25.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ²¹ Jeffrey Walsh, *American War Literature: 1914 to Vietnam* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), 3.
- ²² George Garrett, *King of the Mountain* (New York: Scribner's, 1957), 109.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 112.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ²⁵ Garrett Papers.
- ²⁶ Garrett, *King of the Mountain*, 77.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ²⁸ Garrett, *The Old Army Game* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), xviii.
- ²⁹ Garrett, *King of the Mountain*, 143.
- ³⁰ Garrett, *The Old Army Game*, 314.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Garrett, *King of the Mountain*, 101.
- ³³ Madison Smartt Bell, *Narrative Design: Working with Imagination, Craft, and Form* (New York: Norton, 1997), 325.
- ³⁴ In addition to some of the American military novels mentioned in this essay, military/war films such as *Full Metal Jacket* frequently make use of the comic strip technique.
- ³⁵ Garrett, *King of the Mountain*, 127-128.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.
- ³⁷ Garrett, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?*, 3.
- ³⁸ Garrett, *Going to See the Elephant*, 139.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ George Garrett, "By Love Possessed: The Pattern and the Hero" (*Critique* 1.3, 1958), 43.
- ⁴¹ Garrett, *Going to See the Elephant*, 139.
- ⁴² Garrett, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?*, 29.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.
- ⁴⁴ Garrett Papers.
- ⁴⁵ Garrett, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?*, 189.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.
- ⁴⁷ George Core, Introduction to Garrett, *The Old Army Game*, 12.
- ⁴⁸ Garrett Papers.
- ⁴⁹ Garrett, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?*, 14.
- ⁵⁰ George Garrett, *Cold Ground Was My Bed Last Night* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1964), 16.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 39.

- ⁵³ Ibid., 40.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 41-42
- ⁵⁵ Garrett, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?*, 45.
- ⁵⁶ Garrett, *Cold Ground Was My Bed Last Night* , 127.
- ⁵⁷ Garrett, *The Old Army Game*, xviii.
- ⁵⁸ Garrett, *Cold Ground Was My Bed Last Night* , 144
- ⁵⁹ George Garrett, *Do, Lord, Remember Me* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1965), 174.
- ⁶⁰ George Garrett, *Whistling in the Dark: True Stories and Other Fables* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992), 13.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 15.
- ⁶² Ibid., 17.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 34.
- ⁶⁴ Garrett, "A Story Goes with It" (*Sewanee Review* 110.4, 2002), 677.
- ⁶⁵ Clabough interview.

Casey Clabough (pronounced "Clay-bo"), is an American writer, farmer, and professor in the Etowah Valley Writers MFA at Reinhardt University. Casey Clabough. Clabough was born in Richmond, Virginia , and raised primarily on a farm in Appomattox County , Virginia. "Casey Clabough," The Writers Directory (Gale, 2011) (biographical entry with list of publications). "Casey Clabough" Contemporary Authors (Thomson/Gale, 2007) (biographical entry and interview). External links. Clabough's author website. "Casey Clabough's unique vision, his curious and important quest, his personable and earnest manner of expression draw us into his world just that engagingly. His world is our world, too, the trace our ancestors followed into the wilderness to transform a landscape into a nation. History, memoir, travel journal, meditation" "The Warrior's Path" is all these things at once, its firm understanding of the past made lyric with lively language. Casey Clabough Norrod is on Facebook. Join Facebook to connect with Casey Clabough Norrod and others you may know. Facebook gives people the power to... Casey Clabough Norrod is on Facebook. To connect with Casey, sign up for Facebook today.