

IMAGINATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION

A collection of material entitled Imaginative Representations of the Vietnam War is preserved in the Department of Special Collections at La Salle University's Connelly Library.

The fundamental aspiration of the Collection operates under a dual intention:

- To discover how a discrete body of creative literature becomes mythopoeic. That is, how a complex event may be interpreted through creative means;
- To discover how creative treatments of an event use aesthetic values to reveal both the fact and emotional essence of traumatic cultural phenomena.

The primary resources for studying the above two processes are gathered in a collection presently consisting of about 18,000 books of fiction and poetry together with 1000 non-print items. Additionally, more than 1700 films and videos are available. These films include narrative, commercial (Hollywood), pornographic, and art films, as well as documentary films, curricular production, taped seminars, and extensive TV-generated material. The collection is limited intentionally to imaginative literature and the visual arts. The Collection is focused on fictive writing in the form of novels, short stories, poetry, drama, film scripts, and extensive examples of graphic art, painting, video, TV productions, and sound recordings.



Contained in this Collection, and additional to the published written material itself, are unpublished manuscripts, corrected manuscripts, shooting scripts, galley proofs, page proofs (corrected and uncorrected), holograph copies, limited editions, variant editions, runs of comic books, and cartoon art.

The remainder of the Collection consists of carefully catalogued items of ephemera such as poetry broadsides, dealer's catalogs of Vietnam War fiction, published strategy games, published software, vanity publications, and curriculum guides for teaching the war through its literature across many educational levels and curricula.

The Collection is intentionally strong in material produced after 1980, though virtually every earlier title that appears in the 3rd edition of John Newman's Vietnam War Literature also exists in the La Salle Collection. In view of that comparison, it is a fundamental goal of the Collection to make available literature that demonstrates the evolution of the perceptions of the war experienced after the event had actually ended.

The Collection is particularly committed to illuminating the process by which fictional narrative becomes mythopoeic. In using this Collection, it is possible to both question and document the sources of developing myths about the war experience. For example, one may examine and measure the impact of the original event by seeing how the experience is presented to the public through imaginative renderings.

Using hundreds of examples, one can compare systematically how the post-1975 presentations and perceptions of war differ qualitatively from pre- 1975 material. The more than 600 films and videos are of seminal utility in this connection. A growing sector of the Collection is composed of imaginative representations of Vietnamese refugees during and after the American conflict. As well, there is material representing the growing influence of the Vietnamese émigré community as it establishes itself in American culture. This would include typical hybrid mythic constructions such as the "the Vietnamese Mafia," rags-to-riches narratives similar in spirit and naïveté to the Horatio Algeresque tales of early 20th-century America, young adult fiction, and thinly veiled (mostly) right-wing political diatribes posing as fiction.

More globally, serious scholarly inquiry can be conducted concerning the elusive distinction between fictional narrative and autobiographical perception. The interrogation of this Coleridge-like chimera that mocks and distorts the reflexive distinctions between narrative memory and interpretive imagination fuels the enduring intellectual vigor of this Collection.

In direct support of the written and cinematic dimensions of the Collection are actively developed collections of graphic arts (posters, prints, collage, ephemera, etc.) featuring such material as ten original silk screen propaganda posters presented to Denise Levertov during the during the poet's trip to Hanoi in 1972. Additionally, artifacts of a musical/sound recording nature include tapes of Hanoi Hannah, recordings of Armed Forces Radio broadcasts from Saigon and Danang, tapes of attacks in progress recorded during the onslaught of Tet, underground tapes of GI music broadcasts in-country, and sound tracks of most films released about the war.

The Collection is directly supportive of, but by no means limited to research in the following areas of Vietnam War studies:

- American culture reflected in the war experience
- Autobiography as mythopoeic source
- Central America becoming a new Vietnam
- Changing images of gender and race
- Commercialization of the war experience
- The "enemy's" point of view
- Film versions of the war
- Gay perspectives in the war
- Graphic art and the Vietnam War
- Hollywood and Vietnam
- How the war is appropriated to political agendas
- Interrelationship of war, literature, and the arts
- Memory and the war
- Missionary work carried on during the war
- Narrative strategies in war writing
- Non-fiction films about the Vietnam War
- Pedagogy and the war
- Platoon: the game (interactive software)
- Racial tensions among American troops
- Students' projects for courses on the war
- Vietnam and Graham Greene
- Vietnam pornography
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial as myth and metaphor
- Vietnam War translated into commercial gaming as software and board games
- The war as bildungsroman or roman a clef