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Race, Feminine Power, and the Vietnam War in Philip Red Eagle's *Red Earth*

SCOTT ANDREWS

Anyone familiar with the literature of the Vietnam War should be aware that it depicts the racial tensions that were felt so intensely overseas and at home during that era, but that the literature also frequently goes to great lengths to depict the dissolution of racial tensions in the face of a more immediate threat: the North Vietnamese enemy. One of the methods of overcoming the racial (and other) differences that potentially divided the soldiers has dire consequences, both in reality and in literature: Male soldiers can erase their differences by identifying with each other against the difference of women. The literature creates a connection among men by excluding women but also by denigrating and often demonizing them. *Red Earth*, a novella written by a Dakota/Salish veteran of the Vietnam War, Philip Red Eagle, manages to resolve its racial and gender tensions in a different way, however. In part by relying on Sioux notions of the feminine rather than on those produced by the dominant patriarchy of the United States, Red Eagle is able to avoid such misogyny and offer constructions of masculinity more healthy than those found in much of the literature.[1]

INCLUDING MEN, EXCLUDING WOMEN

A common trait of the fiction and film arising from the various wars fought by the United States is the erasure of racial, cultural, and class differences among soldiers in the face of a common enemy. This is the "brotherhood of war" we have seen depicted so many times on the page and on the screen. Since the Vietnam War was waged by an American army more ethnically diverse than that involved in any previous American war and since the war was fought at the height of the civil rights movement, the actual racial division among Americans both at home and in Vietnam created a demand for imagined solutions to these problems in the literature. This erasure of difference is

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especially evident in the Vietnam War literature. In much of this literature, soldiers set aside differences based on race, class, religion, and similar factors to fight an enemy that is trying to kill them; the enemy's bullet does not prefer one skin color over another, one class over another. Men who might be enemies in America become brothers in Vietnam.

The trials of the battlefield reveal that differences among men are constructed by social situations off the battlefield. Since those differences are not "natural," they can be erased by the battlefield. William Broyles, in an essay on his experiences in Vietnam titled "Why Men Love War," describes the bond that develops between soldiers as:

> the only utopian experience most of us ever have. Individual possessions and advantage count for nothing; the group is everything. What you have is shared with your friends. It isn't a particularly selective process, but a love that needs no reasons, that transcends race and personality and education—all those things that would make a difference in peace. It is, simply, brotherly love.[2]

Indeed, the battlefield can erase even the differences between men of opposing armies, which is why American soldiers can return to Vietnam after the war and embrace the soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army or the Viet Cong. Broyles returned to Vietnam in 1984, and in the book recording that journey, *Brothers in Arms*, he states: "And I discovered that I had more in common with my old enemies than with anyone except the men who had fought at my side. My enemies and I shared something almost beyond words. . . . We had tried to kill each other, but we were brothers now."[3] These soldiers of different nations have survived the same hellish experience, which gives them a bond they do not share with anyone else, not even most of their own countrymen.

In her book *The Remasculinization of America*, Susan Jeffords discusses the dynamics of how differences such as race and class are erased in filmic and literary representations of the Vietnam War. She asserts that one difference is not overcome by the battlefield: gender, a barrier that is depicted in the literature as natural and unalterable. According to Jeffords, the American literature of the Vietnam War may seek to erase differences of class, race, and religion among the men depicted in it, but it reifies the difference of gender. In battle men can be alike, but they are never like women. Indeed, women are like an enemy in some ways. Against women—whether American women back home or Vietnamese women, especially Vietnamese prostitutes—men define themselves and overcome their differences. The otherness of Vietnamese women allows American men to think of themselves as the same, despite their differences. Their shared pursuit of sexual conquests joins the men together in ways similar to combat. Jeffords writes that "women's differences from men are made to appear 'natural' whereas the differences between men—class, race, and ethnicity—are made to seem circumstantial."[4]

One of Jeffords's several examples of this dynamic is found in William Turner Huggett's novel *Body Count*.[5] In that novel the men of a typical literary/cinematic infantry platoon—American soldiers of every conceivable

color, class, educational level, religion, and geographic region—are united by their combat experiences against the North Vietnamese but also by their pursuit to answer an "eternal question": Are Asian women's vaginas tilted sideways?

In a scene Jeffords discusses, a black soldier named Wilson and a Native American soldier nicknamed Chief take "R&R" in Japan and hold an Asian prostitute upside down between them, each grasping one of her legs, in an attempt to answer that question. According to Jeffords, Wilson and Chief are distracted from their racial differences by their shared difference from women: "Joined by their masculine bond, Chief and Wilson, rejoicing in their inclusion, notice only their difference from women."[6] The answer to their question suggests that women are the same around the world, even back in America; that is, they are different from men regardless of race, class, religion, and similar factors. This emphasis on gender difference also keeps the men from identifying with women in ways that would challenge their unity against the nation's opponent: "The denial of race, class or national differences between women disallows any possible grounding for the formation of bonds between men and women who might share the oppression of race or class."[7] Jeffords suggests here that if Wilson and Chief were not blinded by their masculine bond, they would see that as men of color they have something in common with the Asian woman they are abusing.

Without challenging her basic premise, I would point out that Jeffords overlooks the identification that could exist between Wilson and Chief regardless of their masculine bond. As ethnic minorities, they already share a bond. Both men and their ancestors have been the targets of repression, discipline, and exploitation by the United States. The mechanism for erasing racial difference that Jeffords points out alleviates white anxieties about racial difference, as most of the authors of the texts she examines are white men. The texts produced by African American authors, for instance, tend not to produce the same erasures. The barrier of race stays intact for them or even becomes more evident in Vietnam than it was back in the States. An example of the identification between ethnic soldiers appears in Cherokee veteran Dwight Birdwell's autobiography *A Hundred Miles of Bad Road*. He describes stumbling into a "Black Power" meeting in South Korea during the Vietnam War. At first he is afraid of the black soldiers' anger at his intrusion until one of them says, "He's a fuckin' Indian. He's one of us."[8] This reminds us that the dynamic Jeffords describes is not simply the erasure of racial difference but the erasure of the white/colored difference. This particular racial tension threatened both the war effort and peace at home, and this is the tension literature and film attempt to relieve or disguise.

In a similar vein as Jeffords, Philip K. Jason discusses the sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways in which American Vietnam War literature intertwines constructions of masculinity, warfare, and misogyny. The fiction depicts a "blood-and-guts vision of masculinity that polarized male and female attributes and disparaged the latter. . . . Killing the woman within is the preparation for killing the enemy without."[9] Destructive energy is understood in terms of sexual energy, Jason states, and so the energies are displaced onto each other until they are confused in the minds of the soldiers depicted in the

literature: "In the crude semantics of the battlefield, killing gooks is the same as fucking them—and being a man in the military environment 'means' being a killing and fucking machine. The metaphor of fucking the enemy, of course, turns the enemy into women, and vice versa."[10]

IDENTIFYING ACROSS RACE AND GENDER

Red Eagle's *Red Earth* alters these and other dynamics of race and gender construction in a number of ways, but my discussion focuses on how the novella erases racial difference in ways different from those Jeffords describes and, a point I think is very important, how it avoids the misogyny Jeffords and Jason articulate. The race of the novella's protagonist accounts for the initial and fundamental difference from Jeffords's dynamic; as a man with dark skin, he sees similarity rather than difference in the Vietnamese women. In this sense, he identifies with a particular Vietnamese woman in a way that Chief and Wilson in *Body Count* are unable to because of their masculine bond, according to Jeffords. Additionally, in a key scene the novella erases the racial differences among soldiers through their identification with the Vietnamese woman, through their identification with a fellow soldier's love for her. Finally, the misogyny that is prevalent in Vietnam War literature is absent from Red Eagle's text, at least in part, because it draws upon Sioux notions of the feminine that we can see in literature and in ritual.

Red Earth tells a complicated story in a rather brief space, concentrating on Raymond Crow Belt, a Dakota veteran of the Vietnam War who has a hard time adjusting to life in America after the war.[11] At the center of the plot is Raymond's traveling back in time to Vietnam to set right some of the traumatic events that made his later life so difficult. Among those traumatic events is the death of the woman with whom he had fallen in love, a Vietnamese prostitute named Phoung.[12]

When Raymond falls for Phoung he sees not difference—as Jeffords suggests for American soldiers encountering Vietnamese women—but similarity. Moments after he meets Phoung, the young woman notes their physical similarities, especially the color of their skin. "Same, same," she says, echoing remarks other Native American veterans say they heard in Vietnam (38). Raymond is already thinking along the same lines; he had picked her from the available women at the GI bar because she reminded him of the "Indian girls back home." As he introduces himself, she playfully denies that he is an American soldier—"American have blue eyes, blond hair" (39). That is, Americans look white, not like her. Americans and Vietnamese are different, she suggests, not similar, as she and Raymond are.

Raymond is soon visiting her exclusively, and he makes a medicine wheel for her to match the one he wears around his neck, which he made from a round grenade pin and red thread in the fashion that Raymond's grandfather had taught him. His grandfather had told him: "It [the medicine wheel] holds the truth to all things. . . . It helps you remember the things that you should keep in mind as you travel your path" (39). This message and this gift suggest that the truth the medicine wheel contains is not limited to racial or tribal

affiliation. It holds a truth that can, like the attraction between Raymond and Phoung, cross racial borders.

Raymond also sees in Phoung a shared history. He is attracted to her in part because of the "resilience" he sees in her eyes (38). That look was the result of the hardships she and her people had survived: "Her parents were killed by artillery, American artillery" (61). The resilience of the Indian girls back home had also been a result of their survival over the US military. This cross-racial, cross-national identification goes even further when Raymond learns that he and Phoung may be enemies—she may be a member of the Viet Cong (VC); at the least, she is from a village suspected of being friendly with the VC. This leads to a scene that contrasts dramatically with the scene from *Body Count,* cited earlier, wherein Chief and Wilson erase their racial differences through a masculine bond formed in opposition to the feminine.

Raymond's squad happens to be patrolling near Phoung's home village, which is not in the area of the bar/brothel where she works. From a hillside he and his men see three South Vietnamese soldiers interrogating a woman in a field, with a US officer nearby. The officer does not approve of the violent methods the South Vietnamese soldiers are using, but he does not stop them. When one of the soldiers pulls the woman's head back, Raymond, looking through binoculars, recognizes the woman as Phoung and sees that she is wearing the medicine wheel he made for her. In the next instant the South Vietnamese soldier shoots her in the head. Reacting instantly, Raymond raises his rifle and fatally shoots the three South Vietnamese soldiers, despite the 250 yards that separate them. Raymond and his men quickly run for cover when they are fired upon by the remaining South Vietnamese soldiers who think they have been attacked by North Vietnamese snipers. Raymond tells his men that the woman who had been killed was "that girl I told you about" (43). The men nod in agreement, implying approval of his actions.

The approval of Raymond's men is an important, though understated, point in the narrative's construction of cross-racial identification. The men in his group nod their silent approval of his actions once he tells them the dead woman was his lover: "Kramer's head began to bob up and down in a gesture of approval. Then Taylor, Lightfoot and Johnson joined in and their heads bobbed up and down" (43). Red Eagle has not told us the racial makeup of Raymond's group. Their names suggest racial differences, but those differences disappear behind their approval of Raymond's killing of the South Vietnamese soldiers. In an alteration of the racial and political dynamics Jeffords describes for Vietnam War narratives, this war unit's differences are erased through conflict not with the enemy but with an ally. And they overcome their potential differences through their identification with Raymond's motives: The woman he loved had been killed. Phoung's body is associated with Raymond's body, and they identify with Raymond's love for her and his anger at her murder—their brotherhood is established in part through identification with a female (through Raymond's love for her) rather than against a female. Their brotherhood is established by being united against her killers—with whom they would normally identify, since the South Vietnamese soldiers are their allies and are accompanied by an American officer.

Red Eagle's narrative manages to capture the element Jeffords says is missing from Huggett's work: the ability to identify across that gender barrier. His squad members' cooperation allows Raymond's cross-racial, cross-gender identification with Phoung to remain in place despite its potentially subversive implications, as she is possibly involved with the Viet Cong. Their cooperation permits the "formation of bonds between men and women who might share the oppression of race or class," which Huggett's depictions of race and gender relations do not.[13] Most important, I think Red Eagle's gender and race dynamics make it possible for his novella to avoid the misogyny that marks so much of the Vietnam War literature. Although that misogyny was real and should therefore be reflected in the literature, I believe it was not necessary. Red Eagle's novella helps us imagine ways out of the "blood-and-guts vision of masculinity that polarized male and female attributes and disparaged the latter" described by Jason.[14] One of the things that makes this possible for Red Eagle is his apparent reliance on some basic Sioux notions of the feminine and the proper relationship between the masculine and the feminine.

SIOUX FEMININE POWER

Red Earth is a story of healing and transformation, depicting four female characters who play essential roles in Raymond's spiritual growth and the various phases of that growth and of his recuperation from the war. These four women—two actual people he meets and two spirit figures who appear to him in visions or speak to him in a disembodied voice—are described in ways that suggest Sioux notions of the feminine, as depicted in literature and ritual.

The first of these women visits Raymond in a dream that establishes a circle as the site of transition and rebirth, as the connection between this world and a spirit world, between past and present. The circle becomes a doorway through which Raymond will step several times in the novella, and each time his transition is aided or guided by a woman. The first dream helps Raymond avoid the spiritual death that strikes so many of his comrades in Vietnam. "A man was required to die here, to stop thinking and feeling," the narrative states. "It was the only way to beat the fear, the frustration and the insanity of this crazy war" (20). Raymond, however, finds "another way": "the secret in the circle" (20). The first mention of the circle refers to the circle made for a helicopter landing zone, and even before he is visited by a feminine power he perceives this circle as a site of transition, although not a positive one. It is through the landing zone circle that men enter and exit the world of the war, the hell that seems to have little relation to the "real" world back home. Vietnam is otherworldly in this sense, a place Raymond refers to as hell at one point.

The strategy of the Vietnam War aided the perception of unreality. Soldiers did not arrive at battles through a linear process of fighting for territory and capturing each hill in a steady progress toward the enemy's capital, as was the case in so many wars fought in the past. Instead, soldiers were flown into a battle, where they stayed for a while and then were removed by helicopters. Territory captured was given back almost immediately. There was no "front line," just as frequently there was no "rear." So Raymond's perception

of the landing zone as a doorway between dimensions makes sense, especially when he considers his location to be one of death. The circle marks the point through which he entered this world of death, like a perverse birth of sorts, and the circle is the point through which he will exit it, perhaps by an actual death rather than just a spiritual one. But the woman who visits him in the dream instructs him how to transform this negative circle into a positive force.

The young Indian woman appears in a "blue, shiny, silk-looking dress with a woven rainbow belt around her waist." To Raymond she feels like "the blue sky on a Spring day on the plains," and he begins to think of her as "Blue-Sky Woman" (20). In the dream she draws a circle in the dirt with a staff made of "cottonwood or something. Maybe willow" (20). She places prayer sticks in each direction, lifts her arms up to the sky, and then disappears into "a waft of smoke" (20). When awake, Raymond recreates her circle inside the larger circle of a helicopter landing zone, pays respect to the four directions with tobacco, and begins a ritual of prayer. His first effort is rewarded when a "soft and beautiful female voice" tells him to wait, which he takes as a warning not to take his men out on patrol that night. By following her directions he saves his men from being overrun, as the Tet Offensive begins that night. He continues to pray at his circle within the circle, and soon other men are following suit, regardless of their apparent racial or religious differences: "As he rose they crossed themselves and left silently" (22). Such rituals, founded on his Dakota heritage, help Raymond avoid the spiritual death that strikes so many other soldiers, and his example helps others avoid the same living death.

Blue-Sky Woman has clear connections to two female figures in Sioux literature and culture: Wohpe and White Buffalo Calf Woman. James R. Walker mentions "the Feminine" as a spiritual and material force in Lakota culture "most often addressed as the Woman, the Beautiful One, or the Gracious One,"[15] all relevant to Raymond's impression of Blue-Sky Woman. Walker later gives her name as Wohpe, the daughter of Skan, the Sky, whose symbolic color is blue, which she wears. The rainbow belt Blue-Sky Woman wears could allude to the dress that is "red and green and white and blue, and all the colors" that Wohpe wears in one account of the story in which she meets the male figures who embody the wind; she convinces them to be her brothers and helps establish them in their four cardinal directions.[16] Dorothy Dooling gives the woman's name as Woope, and although she appears in a white dress she carries a bundle decorated with "many colors of mysterious designs."[17] Walker states that her "function is to harmonize" and act as a mediator between the spiritual beings and man and among humans.[18] Dooling describes her as "the loveliest and most pleasing of all beings" and states that she is "the Spirit of friendship and compassion, beauty, and happiness."[19]

Blue-Sky Woman's harmonizing function is clearly useful for Raymond, as the spiritual death he fears is a result of a lack of harmony, a sense of alienation—of the logical and moral gap between one's "real" life and one's war life, between a soldier's humanity and the inhumanity he encounters in battle. This harmonizing power is embodied, according to Walker, in "the smoke of the pipe and the smoke of the sweetgrass."[20] Just as the smoke of the pipe rises from the round bowl as prayers climbing to the sky to be heard,

Raymond's smoke also rises from a circle (the helicopter landing sites) as a prayer, and it is answered. Blue-Sky Woman establishes the feminine power in *Red Earth* as very different from the use of the feminine in the texts Jeffords and Jason discuss. There the function of the feminine is division, the target for aggression, the force against which the masculine will define itself. In *Red Earth,* Red Eagle uses the feminine as a force with which the masculine will define itself—in harmony rather than alienation.

The second woman appears during Raymond's first episode of time travel.[21] In that episode Raymond is snatched from danger in Vietnam and tossed into his past in South Dakota. An explosion in Vietnam that would have killed him vaults him instead into another dimension, where he is guided through "doorways" that lead him to his grandfather's house on the reservation. His grandfather gives advice on how to survive the war, physically and spiritually, and offers Raymond help for surviving the war's aftermath; he buries some items beneath the floorboards in his home and tells Raymond to retrieve them later, after the war. These items will be useful when Raymond travels back in time on his own, to prevent the murder of Phoung. All of this takes place while the adult Raymond, dressed in his army fatigues, watches a much younger Raymond play with toy soldiers in the yard. The wisdom comes from his grandfather, but Raymond is guided to his grandfather's home with the help of a female.

Flung by the explosion into a black void, Raymond travels toward an orange light through which, simulating rebirth, he emerges into a tipi, rising through a fire in the center of the lodge. Inside are two people, an old, "very powerful looking" (29) man and a woman who, like Blue-Sky Woman, is "young" and "beautiful" and also has "long sparkling black hair" (28). This woman, though, wears a white dress rather than the earlier blue dress. She leads him outside to a "wide plain" where he notes the "sky was blue, just like back home," just as he had noted earlier that Blue-Sky Woman reminded him of a clear blue sky on a spring day back home (29). A storm quickly approaches, with thunder and lightning—all signs of great potency and vision for the Sioux—and Raymond soon feels "charged up, renewed." The beautiful young woman leads him to another tipi, and when he steps inside he is transported to his grandfather's home on the reservation. This second woman (possibly the same person as the first woman) embodies further links to the daughter of Skan, the Sky, and the powerful old man in the first tipi could be an embodiment of Skan, as Raymond's observations on the "wide plain" suggest.

Dooling describes a scene in which the Sacred Beings gather in a similar lodge, and "Skan took the place of honor with his daughter Woope beside him."[22] This identification with what Walker calls the "Feminine" and her emphasis on harmony is reinforced when Raymond's grandfather gives him advice that suggests he should leave the war behind him when it is over, as his grandfather did after World War I: "I don't touch them [guns] anymore, Raymond," his grandfather says, "Not since my war" (30). His grandfather seems to be saying that Raymond should keep his life in balance; he should live life and not constantly relive the war. Each phase has its time and place, but

when Raymond returns he is unable to leave the war where it belongs. Never at peace, he drinks and fights, behaving self-destructively. The woman does not give him this advice, but she leads him to it. Each step in Raymond's healing involves the presence of both male and female powers, whether the masculine is represented by his grandfather, the powerful old man in the vision, or Raymond himself. This necessary interdependency reflects Sioux notions and is clearly different from the misogynistic dynamics Jeffords and Jason observed.

The beautiful women who visit Raymond in these visions can also be associated with White Buffalo Calf Woman. The second woman appears in a white dress rather than a blue dress; John Neihardt, citing Black Elk, states that White Buffalo Calf Woman first appeared to the Sioux wearing a "fine white buckskin dress" and also that "her hair was very long."[23] Raymond J. DeMallie's transcription of Neihardt's 1931 interview with Black Elk describes her as "very beautiful, her long hair hanging down" and wearing "a beautiful buckskin coat."[24] Yet another version, cited by Marla N. Powers, describes her with no dress at all, further emphasizing the length of her hair: "She was beautiful and wore no clothing; her long hair hung down and covered her like a robe."[25] The physical similarities, however, are not needed to make the connection, as Skan's daughter, Wohpe, and White Buffalo Calf Woman are the same; Wohpe comes to earth as White Buffalo Calf Woman. In Walker's account, Wohpe brings the four winds into their proper relationship to her (each wanted to be her lover, but she made them her brothers instead) and assigns them their places and colors; as White Buffalo Calf Woman she transforms the Sioux, establishing their proper relationship to her, to each other, and to the earth and its creatures—especially the buffalo.

This emphasis on transformation is more important than any physical resemblances used in the text to associate the four females in Raymond's life with notions of Sioux feminine power. They embody White Buffalo Calf Woman's power in Raymond's life. These powers are conveyed in two key scenes whose language conveys notions of rebirth, healing, and harmony.

Phoung's murder undoes any harmony he has managed to establish by following Blue-Sky Woman's instructions. In fact, after Phoung's death Raymond displays the conflation of sex and violence that Jason describes. Back in the United States after the war, Raymond has a brief fight in a bar, after which a friend persuades him to leave before the police arrive. The fight was so brief that Raymond is still filled with anger and hatred, but he has no opponent to battle. As he leaves the bar he redirects his unspent negative energy toward women and sex: "I wanna fuck, man" (45). His life after the war is filled with pointless wandering, fighting, and alcoholism. This unhealthy, out-of-harmony life ends, though, when Raymond hears the "beautiful voice again" telling him "stop now, Raymond" (45). He returns to his grandfather's old house and recalls the secret his grandfather told him, that powerful items are hidden under a floorboard in the kitchen. With these items he devises his plan to travel back in time and attempt to save Phoung. By setting right the worst event of his time in Vietnam, he seeks to save himself (perhaps a common wish/fantasy of veterans of any war).

His time travel requires that he take the place of a soldier who is dead while the younger Raymond is alive. After traveling back in time, he awakens in a body bag at a field hospital morgue. He emerges from the body bag, which is described as a "chrysalis," the chamber from which a caterpillar emerges as a butterfly. Lieutenant Annabelle LeBeaux, the nurse on duty who helps him, turns out also to be Dakota. Raymond has already met her, although she does not know it—she is working at the pharmacy near his home as he prepares for the time-travel ceremony. He will end the novella in that pharmacy, seemingly familiar to her and presumably starting a healthy, loving relationship with her once his journey is over and his healing has been initiated. In this sense, Annabelle helps Raymond complete a circle, the sign of transformation from Raymond's first encounter with Blue-Sky Woman.

After Raymond emerges from the body bag he locates Phoung and persuades her to believe his unbelievable story of traveling through time to warn her against returning to her home village. Having accomplished his purpose, they make love, rejuvenating Raymond's heart and body, which had grown so cold and been so abused in his battle against grief: "He kissed her with a passion he had not felt for a long, long time" (63). Raymond identifies *with*, rather than *against*, Phoung: "It was as if she were a part of him" (63). Phoung's actions are those of a nurse or healer, treating his wounds as they make love: "She touched the scars on his legs. She ran her hand up his front to his chest and touched his scars." She removes the weight of that grief and sorrow: "He couldn't feel the difference those years were supposed to have made. It was as if all that time hadn't passed. It was as if all that pain hadn't happened." Having emerged from the "chrysalis," his transformation is complete: "He felt reborn and he cried" (63).

One could argue that *Red Earth* inadvertently repeats a Madame Butterfly plot frequently found in the literature involving military adventures in Asia: The American soldier falls in love with a native girl but must leave her behind because she is too different to belong in his homeland, and by the end of the story he is often convinced of the superiority of the women at home. That plot, however, depends upon the American soldier being attracted to the Asian woman because of her exotic qualities, because of her difference. This clearly is not the case with Raymond's attraction to Phoung; he loves her in part because she reminds him of the Indian girls back home.

Differences also exist in his reasons for leaving her behind and not bringing her back to the United States. His time travel is apparently good for only one person, so he cannot bring her back to the future in the United States. Further, he cannot get her out of the country in their present time, even if she wanted to leave. Raymond identifies with Phoung because he sees in her and her culture a tribal existence similar to his in many ways—built around loyalty to place, family, and ancestors. Phoung's place is at home, just as Raymond's place is back in South Dakota. Although he wants her to survive in her place, he does not want to remake her life. This avoids the condescension of the Madame Butterfly plot because it recognizes the validity of the Vietnamese woman's culture and its equality with his own.

Clearly, we see a pattern of female presence and assistance in Raymond's various moments of rebirth and assumption of new powers or identities. A quick review of texts concerning Sioux culture illustrates a similar role for females, starting with White Buffalo Calf Woman. Like the women in Raymond's dream and in the vision tipi, she is supernatural. She came to the Sioux "floating instead of walking," and she advised them on the right way to live and of ceremonies they should practice. She instructed them about "the sacred hoop, the road of life," just as the woman who appears in Raymond's dream in Vietnam instructs him on how to pray inside a medicine wheel drawn on the ground (helicopter landing zones).[26]

Similarly, White Buffalo Calf Woman instructs the Sioux women on their role in the Sun Dance, which she gives to the people. Four women, virgins, are to be the first to strike the tree selected for the Sun Dance pole. The selected women then help transport the tree from where it grew to where it will stand at the center of the Sun Dance. In this way the women are essential in the process of transformation. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks write that the tree "has been ritually killed and transformed into something else"[27]—similar to Raymond, who is ritually killed by taking the place of a man who died in Vietnam and who, with the assistance of Phoung and Annabelle, is transformed into something useful and valuable. DeMallie and Parks say that this process of transforming "one sacred substance into something other than what we perceive it to be . . . is key to just about every aspect of Lakota ceremonial life."[28] White Buffalo Calf Woman is responsible for that moment in which the Sioux enter an essential phase of their growth and identity.

Such a notion of the necessary interdependency between male and female roles—of the female role in personal and cultural transformation—within Sioux culture is key to understanding how Red Eagle successfully avoids the misogynistic dynamics found in so much of American literature about the Vietnam War. Of course, Jeffords and Jason are critiquing the gender dynamics depicted as almost necessarily antagonistic or even adversarial in much of Vietnam War literature, and we need such criticism to begin dismantling that crippling ideology. Red Eagle, however, provides a welcome break from those antagonisms of race and gender and offers an alternative model.

NOTES

1. Since I am discussing a Dakota character created by a Dakota author but am using texts that draw primarily upon Lakota sources, I will use the umbrella term *Sioux*.

2. William Broyles Jr., "Why Men Love War," in *The Vietnam Reader*, ed. Walter Capps (New York: Routledge, 1991), 73.

3. William Broyles Jr., *Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 275.

4. Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 65.

5. William Turner Huggett, *Body Count* (New York: Dell, 1974).

6. Jeffords, *Remasculinization of America*, 65.

7. Ibid., 66.

8. Dwight Birdwell and Keith William Nolan, *A Hundred Miles of Bad Road: An Armored Cavalryman in Vietnam, 1967–68* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1997), 126.

9. Philip K. Jason, "Sexism and Racism in Vietnam War Fiction," *Mosaic* 23, 3 (September 1990): 126.

10. Ibid.

11. Philip H. Red Eagle, *Red Earth: Two Novellas* (Duluth, MN: Holy Cow! Press, 1997). Future citations will appear as page numbers in parentheses in the text.

12. A Vietnamese friend assured me that this name should be spelled "Phuong" and that its pronunciation is closer to "Fung" than to "Fong," but I will use the spelling that appears in the novella.

13. Jeffords, *Remasculinization of America,* 66.

14. Jason, "Sexism and Racism," 126.

15. James R. Walker, *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1917), 83.

16. James R. Walker, *Lakota Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 183.

17. D. M. Dooling, *Sons of the Wind: The Sacred Stories of the Lakota* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 45.

18. Walker, *The Sun Dance,* 83.

19. Dooling, *Sons of the Wind,* 8.

20. Walker, *The Sun Dance,* 83.

21. One element of Red Eagle's story that I could not find rooted in Lakota/Dakota culture was time travel. It is easy to see the appeal to a veteran, or anyone who has survived traumatic events, of the ability to travel back in time and correct grievous events or past deeds. In a conversation at the Native American Literature Symposium in 2003, however, Red Eagle said he had been told a version of the White Buffalo Calf Woman story that varies from the frequently printed version. In the version Black Elk tells Neihardt, for instance, two men see White Buffalo Calf Woman as she approaches for the first time. One of the men lusts after her and approaches her with sexual rather than reverential thoughts. He is instantly consumed by a white cloud and left as only a "skeleton covered with worms." His bones are deposited at her feet. Red Eagle relayed a version to me that countered this notion of the man being punished for lusting after White Buffalo Calf Woman. The young man who reached for her was taken up in a cloud, and his bones were deposited moments later in the place where he had stood, but White Buffalo Calf Woman reassures the other young man that his friend was not killed. He needed something from her that she could not provide in that situation, so she transported him to another dimension where they spent a long and happy life together; when his life had ended, she brought his bones back to his family. Consistent with the females in *Red Earth,* White Buffalo Calf Woman functions here as a transforming power, a power that realizes the potential within beings, a bringer of harmony. The misogynistic potential can also be seen in this version: A woman's function is to fulfill a man's wishes, whatever they may be. Such an interpretation would depend upon the teller and the audience. I feel that *Red Earth* does not convey that negative potential.

22. Dooling, *Sons of the Wind,* 10.

23. G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 3.

24. Raymond J. DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 283.

25. Marla N. Powers, *Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual, and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 43.

26. Richard Erdoes and Alfonzo Ortiz, *American Indian Myths and Legends* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 48.

27. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 82.

28. Ibid.