

Russell Darnley Review

"This is a healing work.

The American War was profoundly disruptive. It took me years to forgive the Australian soldiers that went.

This in itself was a measure of the disruption that this war caused to us all. A generation should never be driven apart like this, yet the history of Australia is one in which a proportion of our society has always been vulnerable to the seduction of imperial wars and struggles.

I found your narrative absorbing and compelling, I couldn't put the book down. Everything that you said about the importance of telling the story of the 60s you've demonstrated in this work.

Hopefully Hey Joe may prove one of the useful antidotes to this warring and triumphalist era.

Unfortunately there is no easy retreat for the Vietnamese and I think you handle this very sensitively. For me, as someone with a background in ecology and environmental processes, your treatment of the environmental damage is almost subliminal. You seem to achieve it more by contrast with the intrinsic beauty of Vietnam and the power of its nature than with a clinical description of the environmental and ecological damage wrought by war.

I think using the struggle for healing in a father son relationship is very powerful. It's an important way of commenting on the need for reconciliation and healing in the world at large. Sometimes people forget just how total the destructive impact of war and large scale organised violence can be. All our relationships sustained damage as a consequence of that war. In a sense it refracted and compounded the damage that our parents' generation was carrying from WWII and the damage that our grandparents' generation was carrying from WWI and so on back through the generations. One important circuit breaker lies in the power of the young. Through Jimi you expose, celebrate and re-affirm the tenacity and idealism of youth and draw us again to this simple truth.

I can identify with Joe very profoundly and in many ways.

I appreciate your constant references to water you seem to have tapped its relentless, cleansing, renewing, transforming power. I don't know whether this is reading too much into your work, but it struck me this way. In my own spiritual life water has proved very important.

I also appreciate your clear recognition of life's brevity and transience, of the sense that we are where we are and must work from here as we face the way ahead.

Just as a footnote, I hadn't understood just how violent some of the demonstrations in Melbourne became, even though I attended at least one. I thought that the police culture here at that time was bad, remember this was when our Premier, Robin Askin made his famous statement, "Run over the bastards", but it seems to have been 'benign' by comparison with Melbourne."