“STORIES CAN SAVE US”: WRITING AS THERAPY IN WAR LITERATURE, POETRY, AND MEMOIR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the contemporary studies of “moral injury” through the modes of war fiction, poetry, and memoir. Using the works of poet Carolyn Forché regarding the concept of poetry as witness, moral philosopher Nancy Sherman and psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Shay’s work on moral injury, as well as the research of psychiatrist Dr. Judith Herman and her studies on trauma and the process of recovery, I argue that writing is a means of creating witness. Additionally, using author Leslie Jamison’s work on empathy, I argue that the acts of writing and reading allow for the potential for those who have undergone trauma to heal, and those who have not to understand.

My first chapter focuses on Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried and the telling of fictional stories as a method of assuaging his trauma. O’Brien, a Vietnam War Veteran, recounts his time as a soldier in the war and creates fictionalized versions of his experiences. My second chapter centers on Pat Barker’s Regeneration and the function of poetry as witness for those affected by moral injury. In Barker’s dramatized account of World War I, British soldiers Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen create poetry to make sense of their trauma. In my third chapter, I focus on William Manchester’s memoir Goodbye, Darkness and address the function of recounting traumatic experience through memoir as a method of recovery for war trauma and moral injury. Manchester, a veteran of World War II, details his time as a U.S. Marine, and thirty years after the war’s end, returns to the sites of battle in the Pacific. Through their stories, these authors assert that the acts of writing and storytelling heal moral injury.
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Introduction: The Development of Moral Injury

“But this too is true: stories can save us.”
Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried

Following the end of battle, the trauma of war remains for some veterans. Forced by higher-level commanders to make decisions in precarious situations, service members are often left with traumatic wounds not physically visible. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs describes moral injury as “a construct that describes extreme and unprecedented life experience including the harmful aftermath of exposure to such events. Events are considered morally injurious if they ‘transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations’” (Maguen and Litz). Writers assert that recovery from moral injury can be found through the process of reading and writing. Writing permits veterans to re-examine and cope with their trauma. For readers of war literature, reading yields empathy, permitting those who have not undergone trauma to understand those who have, and subsequently, creating the possibility for those with trauma to heal. Writers assert that through communities created by the sharing of traumatic experience, veterans can make peace with their trauma. In The Things They Carried, author Tim O’Brien writes short stories and through these short stories, implies that healing can be accomplished through the acts of telling and writing. In Regeneration, Pat Barker creates a fictionalized discourse community in which patients of Craiglockheart War Hospital express their experiences through poetry and talk therapy. In Goodbye, Darkness, World War II Veteran and author William Manchester re-engages with his war trauma by both visiting the sites of battle thirty years after the war’s end, and by writing his own experience in war. Through the combination of revisiting the sites of his trauma and writing about his war trauma, Manchester claims to find healing from moral injury. The process of creating and sharing traumatic experiences through war literature, poetry, and memoir encourages the communalization of trauma and, in these
respective stories, ultimately offers the opportunity for healing for veterans suffering from moral injury.

The study of moral injury in war is relatively new and follows in the wake of the study of “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD). The concept of mentally suffering after undergoing a traumatic experience has been recorded since as early as 490 BC (Babington 7). World War II Veteran and writer Anthony Babington recounts the tale of the Athenian, Epizelus, who, during the Battle of Marathon, was suddenly blinded, though he did not appear physically wounded. Epizelus reportedly remained blind for the rest of his life (7). In the seventeenth century, physicians noticed an illness that caused soldiers to “sink into a state of deep despair”; this illness was chiefly present during the Thirty Years War among conscripted Spanish soldiers (7). In 1678, Swiss physician Johannes Hofer documented the illness, naming it “nostalgia” because it was like “the pain which the sick person feels because he is not in his native land, or fears he is never to see it again” (7-8). The term “nostalgia” once more appeared during the American Civil War. In addition, Dr. Matthew Friedman, Executive Director of the VA National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder states that “soldier’s heart” or “soldier’s irritable heart” became common terms used during the Civil War, as physicians observed that soldiers’ “cardiovascular system[s] in terms of their heart dynamics, their blood pressure, and pulse rate, seemed to be altered” (“‘Soldier’s Heart’ and ‘Shell Shock’”).

The term “shell shock” emerged during World War I in response to symptoms of “fatigue, tremor, confusion, nightmares, and impaired sight and hearing” (Jones 18). Psychiatrists Dr. Marc-Antoine Crocq and Dr. Louis Crocq of the Institute for Research in Neuroscience and Neuropsychiatry in Rouffach, France state that the origin of the name came from being near explosions and seeing comrades who were killed or maimed in battle (Crocq and
During World War II, the terms “traumatic war neurosis,” “combat exhaustion,” and “operational fatigue” were used to describe the psychiatric responses to war trauma (Schnurr 1). It was not until 1980, when the American Psychiatric Association published the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III), that the term “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” appeared. The introduction of the term brought controversy, but was significant in that it introduced the “stipulation that the etiological agent was outside the individual (i.e., a traumatic event) rather than an inherent individual weakness (i.e., traumatic neurosis)” (Friedman).

In addition to the change in name, the study, understanding, and subsequent treatment of war trauma have changed considerably from the early years of “nostalgia” and “soldier’s heart.” In the nineteenth century, British physicians began studying treatments for those suffering trauma-induced impairments. As shell shock became an obvious problem for the British Army in the winter of 1914, psychologist Charles S. Myers was hired to study and offer solutions to the growing problem of psychiatric trauma (Jones 18). Those who studied the soldiers believed that men who suffered from trauma following war needed to be kept near the front lines, as they believed “evacuation only led to chronic disability” (Crocq and Crocq 50). Additionally, soldiers in the British Army were frequently court-martialed for “cowardice” and desertion (Babington 3). During World War II, although the concept of “combat exhaustion” was becoming better known, it was not necessarily well-received by those in leadership positions. General George Patton reportedly slapped two enlisted soldiers suffering from the effects of war trauma after visiting them in a hospital during the Allied invasion of Sicily. He later sent a memo to his high-level commanders:
It has come to my attention that a very small number of soldiers are going to the hospital on the pretext that they are nervously incapable of combat. Such men are cowards, and bring discredit on the Army and disgrace to their comrades who they heartlessly leave to endure the danger of a battle which they themselves use the hospital as a means of escaping […] Those who are not willing to fight will be tried by Court-Martial for cowardice in the face of the enemy. (Axelrod 117)

Unsurprisingly, those who experienced war trauma during World War II often “went silent, doing their best to lock away their trauma, as society had little capacity to acknowledge it, let alone treat it” (Levinson). Author Tim Madigan states that this silencing had profound effects on the generation that returned from the war— inability to sleep, alcoholism, and suicidal thoughts plagued some of these veterans for their entire lives (Madigan).

The Vietnam War introduced new methods of fighting unlike methods used in previous wars. It specifically introduced guerilla warfare which brought additional moral dilemmas for American soldiers who could not distinguish the “enemy” between Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. War was no longer fought in large battles, periods allotted explicitly for fighting; rather, American soldiers knew they could be attacked at any time. To survive the constant exposure to violence and death, soldiers needed to mentally remove themselves or “be somewhere else” to survive the war. In his book War Trauma: Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam to Iraq, Professor Raymond Scurfield emphasizes that the Viet Cong often used women and children to carry out attacks against the American soldiers which required them to “dehumanize the enemy” and mentally villainize entire populations of Vietnamese civilians (Scurfield 11). This dehumanization of the Vietnamese people was apparent through racially-charged nicknames applied by the American soldiers. One Vietnam Veteran recounted his experience during the
war: “You are immediately and incessantly told not to call Vietnamese ‘Vietnamese.’ Rather, everyone is called gooks, dinks, slant-eyes and not talked about as people and not to be treated with mercy or apprehension” (10-1). However, the combination of disconnection from constant violence and dehumanization of the enemy was not without its repercussions. Veterans returning from the war had problems adjusting to civilian life; many were haunted by memories of the atrocities committed and violence witnessed during the war (14). Additionally, many veterans felt a sense of betrayal, that they “had been used up and thrown away by their country and government, being made to feel unwelcome or simply ignored when they returned home” (14).

During and following the Vietnam War, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials and some politicians pushed the narrative that PTSD was an “anti-war concept,” worrying that too much attention placed on veterans’ psychiatric issues would bring negative publicity to the war effort (15). Additionally, those who returned from Vietnam with symptoms of PTSD were believed to have schizophrenia and their conditions were subsequently stigmatized (Boyle).

In the wake of the Vietnam War and the introduction of the term PTSD, physicians and psychiatrists have introduced the concept of the “moral injury” resulting from a traumatic experience in or outside of war. This distinction between PTSD and moral injury introduces an additional complication to the psychiatric analysis of traumatic experience, emphasizing the moral dilemma that service members face during war. In his book *Achilles in Vietnam*, psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Shay describes the origin of moral injury. An individual who suffers from moral injury has experienced the undoing of character and has been betrayed in some manner. Shay employs the Greek word *themis* to describe “what’s right” and compares the story of Achilles in *The Iliad* to soldiers in the Vietnam War (Shay 5). Just as Agamemnon betrayed Achilles, he writes, soldiers, too, have been betrayed by their leadership, government, and
country: there has been a betrayal of “what’s right.” Shay uses equipment failure in the war as an example of betrayal committed by leadership. Initially, soldiers in the Vietnam War used the M-14 rifle which soldiers described as heavy but dependable. The military then outfitted its soldiers with the M-1 Garand rifle. One soldier described it as “a piece of shit that never should have gone over there with all the malfunctions”; the unreliability of the rifle often placed soldiers in serious peril, and others were killed due to the rifle’s poor performance (17). Additionally, leadership negligence, Shay writes, plays a crucial role in moral injury, which sets the stage for a lifetime of expectations of betrayal. He describes the influence and role of REMFs (“rear-echelon motherfuckers”) during the war, the high-ranking officers who stayed safely behind the front lines of combat and made decisions which affected the fates of the infantry soldiers (150). These officers often rarely saw combat and never understood the full impact of their potentially lethal decisions, further heightening the sense of betrayal felt by soldiers fighting on the front lines. Poet Carolyn Forché adds an additional dimension to moral injury and writes that a fundamental change occurs following trauma. In the 70’s, Forché traveled to El Salvador with Amnesty International and witnessed numerous human rights abuses during its civil war (“Carolyn Forché”). In the introduction to her book Poetry of Witness, she writes about her time in El Salvador and the lasting impact of her experiences:

If asked when I returned from El Salvador for the last time in those years, I have said March 16, 1980, a week before the assassination of monsignor Romero. After thirty years, I now understand that I did not return on that date, that the woman who traveled to El Salvador—the young poet I had been—did not come back. (Forché and Wu 21)

The notion that one is fundamentally different when suffering from moral injury is common throughout medical studies and literature.
As one would expect, recovery from moral injury is no simple task. Shay distinguishes the difference between PTSD and moral injury: “Veterans can usually recover from horror, fear, and grief once they return to civilian life, so long as ‘what’s right’ has not also been violated” (20). This distinct difference between the two types of injury produce issues for those seeking to recover from moral injury. However, recovery from moral injury, he states, can be achieved through “communalization of the trauma,” which is conducted through the telling of the traumatic narrative to a “trustworthy community of listeners” (189, 188). He and moral philosopher Dr. Nancy Sherman agree that trust is achieved through respecting the storyteller and listening without judgment. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, psychiatrist Dr. Judith Herman emphasizes the theory of recovery in stages. First, she writes, the victim of the trauma must feel safe. The second stage of recovery involves “remembrance and mourning,” which includes the retelling of the traumatic experience. Lastly, because victims have disconnected themselves from the traumatic experience, they must “[reconnect] with ordinary life” to heal (Herman 154).

The effects of moral injury are felt more deeply due to the United States’ departure from a mandatory draft and mandatory military service. This departure has created a divide in understanding between civilians and military personnel. In his 2014 *New York Times* editorial “After War, a Failure of Imagination,” Iraq War Veteran and author Phil Klay addresses the divide between the civilian population and the post-draft, all-volunteer military. Following the harsh and unfair treatment of the returning veterans of the Vietnam War, Americans have been conditioned to hate war and the often dubious motivations for entering war, but appreciate the service member sent to fight. However, while this approach to welcoming home veterans is an appreciated change from the angry protests of the past, it also creates a disconnect between
military and civilian. While the conversation-ending phrase for veterans is “You wouldn’t know, you weren’t there,” the civilian equivalent is “I could never imagine what you’ve been through” (Klay). Klay writes: “It’s a difficult spot to be in, for both. The civilian wants to respect what the veteran has gone through. The veteran wants to protect memories that are painful and sacred to him from outside judgment.” However, he concludes, the result of this arrangement is “the veteran in a corner by himself, able to proclaim about war but not discuss it, and the civilian shut out from a conversation about one of the most morally fraught activities our nation engages in—war.” Further, he writes that little good comes from those refusing to engage in conversation, and less good comes from those unwilling to share: “Believing war is beyond war is beyond words is an abrogation of responsibility—it lets civilians off the hook from trying to understand, and veterans off the hook from needing to explain.” Klay writes as an attempt to close the gap between civilian and military understanding and to open conversation between civilian and military personnel.

Likewise, in their writing, O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester generate both conversation and empathy from their readers through their stories of war. By reading their stories, the reader participates in the communalization of trauma. In her book The Empathy Exams, author Leslie Jamison expresses a similar sentiment regarding understanding and the importance of empathy in the process of recovery for patients suffering from illness. Writing from personal experience, she states that to find recovery, the patient requires empathy from a listener. However, Jamison also writes that empathy requires more than just listening, and more than simply saying “that must really be hard.” Empathy is “asking the questions whose answers need to be listened to. Empathy requires inquiry as much as imagination. Empathy requires knowing you know nothing. Empathy
means acknowledging a horizon of context that extends perpetually beyond what you can see” (Jamison 5).

Witness, too, is required for healing. Within her study of poetry of witness, Forché emphasizes the importance of reading in the process of reconciling with one’s trauma, defining the term of “witness” as “a mode of reading rather than of writing, of readerly encounter with the literature of that-which-happened, and its mode of evidentiary rather than representational.” Forché describes this mode of witness “as evidentiary, in fact, as spilled blood” (Forché and Wu 21). Additionally, psychoanalyst Dr. Dori Laub asserts the importance of bearing witness to trauma and the benefits of listening to said trauma. Recovery requires witnessing one’s traumatic testimony. He writes “[t]he testimony to the trauma thus includes its [sic] hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time” (57). The individual witnessing the trauma becomes a part of the victim’s traumatic experience:

By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that it’s henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place. (57-8)

This concept of having a witness to trauma is key to the trauma victim’s ultimate recovery.

Through their writing, O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester attempt to create communities of individuals brought together through the experience of reading their war stories. In critiquing the broad application of the word “community,” in social thought, Professor Joseph Harris writes
that the concept of “community” is a “vague remove of actual experience” (A Teaching Subject 136). In defining community, he writes that readers are brought together through common purposes:

Abstracted as they are from almost all other kinds of social and material relations, only an affinity of beliefs and purposes, consensus, is left to hold such communities together. The sort of group invoked is a free and voluntary gathering of individuals with shared goals and interests-of persons who have not so much been forced together as have chosen to associate with one another. (“The Idea of Community” 15)

Harris’s concept of the formation of community through common purpose, too, extends to writing, and specifically, the writing of trauma. O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester create communities which are brought together by the shared experiences of trauma and moral injury, in addition to the reading of these experiences. Professor Harris states: “We write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions are thus not merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong” (“The Idea of Community” 12). Anne Ruggles Gere addresses the concept of discourse communities, following groups of writers from the Tenderloin Women’s Writing Workshop and the Lansing, Iowa Writers Workshop who are “[h]obbled by poverty, histories of alcoholism and drug addiction, along with the indignities of aging” (Gere 76). These groups meet in “living rooms, nursing homes, community centers, churches, shelters for the homeless, around kitchen tables, and in rented rooms to write down their own worlds” (76). She writes, “These writers bear testimony to the fact that writing development occurs outside formal education” (76). This writing community “take[s] strength from finding that their experience is worth expressing” (76).
Within the realm of this thesis, discourse communities are created by the authors through the writing of war stories. In their writing, the authors display a desire to connect and communalize through these stories. In this paper, I define the term “community” as a group of individuals who read a story and empathize with the characters or the writer of the story. Through this understanding of what the author or character has experienced, the reader communalizes the trauma that has been experienced, bringing both character and reader onto the same figurative page of understanding. As the reader empathizes and understands the individual who has undergone the trauma, he or she has become part of the community of trauma.

O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester and their characters attempt to find affirmation through sharing their stories and their writing. O’Brien addresses the notion of communities of listeners in his short stories. His characters attempt to tell stories of their trauma, but ultimately fail to find willing and trustworthy listeners, complicating the notion of a discourse community within his writing. Barker writes about shell-shocked soldiers who work together to create their own discourse community, discussing poetry and its relation to the war. Manchester attempts to engage with his audience, retelling his war stories and warning those who follow him about the realities of war, death, and military incompetence.

In their respective works, all three authors dramatize the “communalization of trauma.” In The Things They Carried, O’Brien uses storytelling to recreate his war trauma and attempts to connect with his audience through his storytelling. In Regeneration, Pat Barker uses poetry as a means of expressing the witness of traumatic experiences. Additionally, her novel introduces a discourse community created by veterans of the Great War who produce poetry to deal with and share their trauma. In Goodbye, Darkness, William Manchester voices his trauma through memoir and the telling of his own true war experiences. Although those who have undergone
such traumatic experiences in war are permanently altered, writing allows for the expression and, ultimately, the potential for the communalization of trauma with both those who have and have not undergone such trauma.
Chapter 1: *The Things They Carried* and Storytelling as Healing

“This book is lovingly dedicated to the men of Alpha Company, and in particular to Jimmy Cross, Norman Bowker, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Henry Dobbins, and Kiowa.”

Dedication, *The Things They Carried*

As a Vietnam War Veteran, author Tim O’Brien skirts the boundaries of fiction and truth in his storytelling. Much of his writing mirrors his own war experiences. As such, it is often difficult for audiences to separate his identities as author and narrator/storyteller. Throughout *The Things They Carried*, narrator O’Brien and author O’Brien remain two separate entities. However, this fact is often confused in *The Things They Carried*. Despite the book’s title declaring that it is “a work of fiction by Tim O’Brien,” the book is also “lovingly dedicated to the men of Alpha Company,” which is coincidentally the same company author O’Brien served in during the war (Heberle 42). Additionally, he dedicates *The Things They Carried* “in particular to Jimmy Cross, Norman Bowker, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Henry Dobbins, and Kiowa,” the supposedly fictional characters whose presence fill the book. The characters in the book address and interact with narrator O’Brien, and as readers, we often experience events through his eyes; yet, while this character speaks and acts based on seemingly real Vietnam War experiences, narrator and author are not the same. However, by creating stories that challenge conventional expectations of fiction and truth, author O’Brien emphasizes the importance of sharing stories of trauma by creating stories in which his characters fail to find adequate audiences for their own traumatic stories. By writing stories of the failure of the “communalization of trauma” he shares others’ stories of trauma, those whose voices are often unheard.
In “How to Tell a True War Story,” O’Brien blurs the lines between truth and fiction. Narrator O’Brien begins the story by assuring the reader of the story’s truthfulness: “This is true. I had a buddy in Vietnam” he states (O’Brien 65). He introduces the character Bob “Rat” Kiley. Rat’s friend, Curt Lemon, has been killed, and one day, Rat decides to write a letter to Lemon’s sister. In this letter, he commends her brother’s heroism, selflessness, and bravery. “A real soldier’s soldier,” he writes. “Stainless steel balls,” he continues (65). Within this letter, he also writes of the nature of her brother’s character, stretching the truth slightly; he talks about “how her brother would always volunteer for stuff nobody else would volunteer for in a million years, dangerous stuff, like doing recon or going out on these really badass night patrols” (65). The letter is “personal and touching,” and “Rat almost bawls writing it” (65). He writes and writes, and then “the letter gets very sad and serious. Rat pours his heart out. He says he loved the guy. He says the guy was his best friend in the world. They were like soul mates, he says, like twins or something, they had a whole lot in common” (65). By writing this way about his friend, Rat hopes to experience catharsis and desperately hopes to connect with Lemon’s sister. When Rat mails the letter, he expects a response in return, but she never writes back.

Psychiatrists often maintain that veterans are only able to share their stories when they feel that their listener is trustworthy. Psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Shay writes that trust is earned by the listener’s ability to show respect, specifically, showing that he or she can listen attentively to the storyteller. He emphasizes that veterans tell trauma therapists to “Listen! Just listen” (Shay 189). Additionally, moral philosopher Dr. Nancy Sherman claims that trust itself “can be reparative,” and that “reparative trust can be built on empathy” (Sherman 113-4). However, throughout “How to Tell a True War Story,” narrator O’Brien blatantly distinguishes the storyteller from the audience and questions the association between the two. Storyteller Rat,
heartbroken and grieving, attempts to connect with Curt Lemon’s sister. Although he “pours his heart out” to his reader, she cannot comprehend his war story. There are too many military moments to which she cannot relate: when Lemon goes fishing with “a whole damn crate of hand grenades” and they end up with “all that gore, about twenty zillion dead gook fish” (65). Or when Lemon, one Halloween, “paints up his body all different colors and puts on this weird mask and hikes over to a ville and goes trick-or-treating almost stark naked, just boots and balls and an M-16” (65). These moments are too much for Curt Lemon’s sister; this story of war is too alien. Narrator O’Brien implies that she can neither connect nor relate, and so, she does not respond.

Despite being only nineteen years old, Rat is forced to deal with the atrocities of the Vietnam War. O’Brien describes him as having “big sad gentle killer eyes”—an accurate description of the juxtaposition between the age of the soldiers and the adulthood of the situations into which they are thrust. The individuals sent to fight for the United States are young, essentially still children. When Curt Lemon dies, he and Rat Kiley are playing catch with smoke grenades. The pair was “giggling and calling each other yellow mother and playing a silly game they’d invented” (66). They were pulling out the pins of the grenades and seeing who would “[chicken] out first” (66). The scene harkens of children on a playground playing a game of “Hot Potato.” Instead, these children are in a foreign country, asked to kill and do harm to other human beings. Additionally, they are forced to cope with the unknowable and untimely deaths of their closest friends, their brothers. Thus, Ray Kiley’s immature, vulgar response to the betrayal of not hearing back from Curt’s sister is not surprising: “Cooze, he says. He does not say bitch.
He certainly does not say woman, or girl. He says cooze” (66). Rat’s use of the word “cooze” dehumanizes and dissociates himself from Curt’s sister; she becomes a cruel slang term and nothing more. Because Rat receives no acknowledgment from Curt’s sister, O’Brien then prompts the reader to “[l]isten to Rat: ‘Jesus Christ, man, I write this beautiful fuckin’ letter, I slave over it, and what happens? The dumb cooze never writes back’” (66).

Sherman writes of resentment felt by the betrayed veterans of the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. She highlights the gap between civilians and veterans, noting that the sheer differences in the military and civilian lifestyles contribute to a “sense of us vs. them moral tribalism” (Sherman 29). Veterans she writes about often respond negatively to the phrase “Thank you for your service” (29). Some of these veterans believe this simple expression of gratitude allows the civilian who has not gone to war to quickly absolve any guilt he or she has for not going. Additionally, Sherman writes, veterans’ resentment stems from the separation a civilian place between him or herself and the veteran: “A civilian may say ‘Thank you’ sincerely, yet with an unspoken sense of relief—I am glad it’s not my child returning from war” (33).

Narrator O’Brien chastises his audience, sharing guilt with those who are presumably without blame: “If you don’t care for obscenity, you don’t care for the truth; if you don’t care for the truth, watch how you vote. Send guys to war, they come home talking dirty” (66). His words seep of the kind of resentment Sherman cites as symptomatic of moral injury.

Author O’Brien emphasizes the notion that an audience is absolutely necessary for those who have undergone traumatic experience. As O’Brien’s fellow platoon mate Mitchell Sanders tells him the story of the music and voices in the mountain, he, like Rat Kiley, demands an

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¹ North American vulgar slang for “[a] woman, especially one regarded as sexually attractive or available”; a derogatory term (“Cooze”).
audience. As he begins his story, he stops and says, “‘Understand me?’” O’Brien responds in the affirmative twice before Sanders continues (69). He resumes the story of the non-human voices, then stops and says, “‘Follow me?’” (71). Not waiting for a response, he continues to tell the story, and asks again, “‘Understand?’” (71). To ensure that O’Brien is truly grasping his story, he repeats details frequently, as if he is uncertain as to whether O’Brien is listening and believing.

“Everything talks. The trees talk politics, the monkeys talk religion. The whole country. Vietnam. The places talks. It talks[…] Nam—it truly *talks*” (71). This repeating of these details within story echoes the desperation in his voice, the desire to be heard and, more importantly, the desire to be believed by another.

As he tells the story, Sanders reassures O’Brien of the truthfulness of the story: “‘This next part […] you won’t believe’” he tells O’Brien (70). “‘And you know why? […] Because it happened. Because every word is absolutely dead-on true’” (70). Sanders assures O’Brien that the story is true to assume credibility and acquire a listening audience. However, the story’s absurdity is almost too much to bear. Sanders later recants some parts of his story, implying that he tailored his story to ensure himself a listening audience. The morning after, he approaches O’Brien, confessing that he made up a few aspects of the story. O’Brien reassures him that he is already aware. There was no glee club, no opera. Despite this, Sanders is still adamant that the overall story is true. Incredulously, O’Brien anticipates Sanders’ next line. “‘All right,’ [O’Brien] said, ‘what’s the moral?’” (74). Previously, O’Brien assured the reader that “[a] true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done” (65). Additionally, he writes, “[i]f a story seems moral, do not believe it” (65). O’Brien, like Sanders, repeats and reaffirms the details of the story throughout, assuring the reader that everything happened. He
begins the story with same assertion O’Brien begins his tale with: “This is true” (64). As he tells about the moments leading up to Curt Lemon’s death, he stops in the middle of the story to reaffirm: “It’s all exactly true” (67). Furthermore, he mentions Curt Lemon’s death numerous times, both a passing fact and a continual affirmation like Sanders’ assertion that Vietnam truly talks. O’Brien insists to his readers that “[y]ou can tell a true war story if you just keep on telling it” (81). Repetition plays a key role in the telling of a true war story as the more one tells the story, the more real it becomes for both the teller and the listener.

Throughout the story, truth is used as an attention-grabber; the storytellers insist on the truth of their stories to maintain the attention of their audience. However, truth plays a small role in the telling of O’Brien’s stories. Stretching and fabricating the truth allow for greater expressions of trauma. Heberle writes that interchanging fiction with experience allows O’Brien to “[refigure] himself as his own subject, not simply to effect self-expression but to translate or even empty out his identity into other possibilities” (33). Even if his stories are untrue, the telling of stories expresses not only his imagined trauma, but also allows him to vocalize the trauma of others. Furthermore, Dr. Judith Herman writes that trauma survivors are often unable to face the truth: “Because the truth is so difficult to face, survivors often vacillate in reconstructing their stories. Denial of reality seems beyond what any human being can bear” (Herman 181). O’Brien, too, assures the reader that “[a]bsolute occurrence is irrelevant” (79-80). Thus, just as Sanders fabricates portions of his own story to O’Brien, those who have undergone traumatic experiences create their own versions of the “truth” as a protective coping mechanism.

Within this story of Rat Kiley’s trauma, narrator O’Brien, too, experiences trauma of his own. “This one wakes me up” he begins (79). At last, after telling segments of the story of Curt
Lemon’s death, he discusses the event in its entirety, as well as his own traumatic experience—the story that stays with him and wakes him up. Once more, he recounts the day that Lemon dies:

In the mountains that day, I watched Lemon turn sideways. He laughed and said something to Rat Kiley. Then he took a peculiar half step, moving from shade into bright sunlight, and the booby-trapped 105 round blew him into a tree. The parts were just hanging there, so Dave Jensen and I were ordered to shinny up and peel him off. I remember the white bone of an arm. I remember pieces of skin and something wet and yellow that must’ve been the intestines. The gore was horrible, and stays with me. But what wakes me up twenty years later is Dave Jensen singing ‘Lemon Tree’ as we threw down the parts. (79)

The story of Lemon’s death is told and retold so many times throughout the story, and his final expression of trauma is the account that narrator O’Brien seems to remember with the most detail. The game Rat and Lemon play moments before the explosion, Lemon’s body movements, the pieces of Lemon’s body on the tree and the song Jensen sings as they literally peel Lemon off the tree. This visceral description of the incident heightens its “realness”—even if, perhaps, O’Brien is fabricating this traumatic episode, the visual image of Lemon’s body being peeled off the tree remains with the reader.

Regarding the way in which veterans suffering from injury can recover, Sanders achieves a conclusion much like Shay’s:

“All right,” [O’Brien] said, “what’s the moral?”

“Forget it.”

“No, go ahead.”
For a long time he was quiet, looking away, and the silence kept stretching out until it was almost embarrassing. Then he shrugged and gave me a stare that lasted all day.

“Hear that quiet, man?” he said. “That quiet—just listen. There’s your moral.” (74)

Those who have undergone traumatic experiences require attentive and trusting listeners. Despite whether a story is true or not, Dr. Herman asserts that the listener must “remember that [he or she] is not a fact-finder and that the reconstruction of the trauma story is not a criminal investigation. [His or her] role is to be an open-minded, compassionate witness, not a detective” (180). That a victim of trauma can speak at all is sign of recovery as well, Shay writes (xxii). Our job as the audience is to listen to what the victim says. Absolute truth within the story is unimportant; the act of telling the story is progress towards reconnection and recovery.

At the end of the story, the narrator describes the genre of the story in a moment of clarifying honesty, emphasizing the multiple morals that emerge from storytelling. “It wasn’t a war story. It was a love story” (81). Ultimately, Professor Stephen Kaplan argues, the entire book is a love story that allows for the expression of traumatic events and horrible truths (Kaplan 186-7). It is a love story about the love of storytelling, and it is a story about the love between brothers, a camaraderie only broken through death. It is the story of love between Rat Kiley and Curt Lemon. Narrator O’Brien concludes, explaining the purpose of telling a true war story: “And in the end, of course, a true war story is never about war. It’s about sunlight […] It’s about love and memory. It’s about sorrow. It’s about sisters who never write back and people who never listen” (81). The telling of a true war story is about the expression of life, love, loss, remembrance, connection, and reconnection; it is not about truth. Both narrator O’Brien and
author O’Brien consolidate and express these emotions and the trauma they have undergone, as well as the trauma others have undergone. This expression of trauma—storytelling—ultimately keeps them alive and assists in their recovery.

The notion that the expression of trauma through storytelling heals, along with the emphasis on having willing listeners is discussed beyond O’Brien’s stories. In the introduction to his book *Achilles in Vietnam*, Shay relays the account of a Vietnam War Veteran who has returned home and finds that no one except for his wife is willing to listen to his war stories. The man discloses to Shay:

I had just come back [from Vietnam], and my first wife’s parents gave a dinner party for me and my parents and her brothers and their wives. And after dinner we were all sitting in the living room and her father said, “So, tell us what it was like.” And I started to tell them, and I told them. And do you know within five minutes the room was empty. They was all gone, except my wife. After that I didn’t tell anybody I had been in Vietnam.

(xxii)

Because no one from the veteran’s family wants to listen to him, he is silenced. While this veteran later speaks about his experience in war, not all veterans find their voice after being silenced by an audience reluctant to listen. The notion that storytelling saves is explicitly stated in O’Brien’s story “Speaking of Courage.” The main character of the story, Norman Bowker, is a former Vietnam War soldier and returns home after having lived through the trauma of witnessing the death of one of the soldiers in his unit. Norman feels that he is responsible for the soldier’s death. In his mind, he imagines himself talking to others about his experiences in the war and the trauma that he has undergone. However, because no one initiates conversation with him nor shows that they are willing to listen to him, he goes about his small-town life, and
eventually, commits suicide. In one of his few post-war short stories, O’Brien makes a startling statement about the necessity of audiences willing to listen to those who have undergone trauma.

Upon returning to the war, Norman Bowker finds that the people in his hometown are inaccessible. His childhood friend Max Arnold drowned following high school, long before he departed for the war. Following the war, most of his other friends left his hometown to work and go to school elsewhere. Sally Kramer, the girl “whose pictures he had once carried in his wallet,” has since married (133). His father is more interested in watching baseball than interacting with his son. There is no one for Norman Bowker to talk to, and “[t]he town seemed remote somehow. Sally was married and Max was drowned and his father was at home watching baseball on national TV” (133). Despite not having anyone to talk to, he soberly shrugs and utters to himself: “‘No problem’” (133). He takes his Chevy on a drive around the lake in his hometown. As he drives, he notices two boys hiking, and honks as he drives by, but neither boy looks at him. After driving around the lake for almost three hours, he passes the boys six times, but each time is unacknowledged, further highlighting Norman’s isolation (133).

As he drives through the town, Norman thinks about the conversations about the war he would have if anyone were willing to listen. He imagines stopping by Sally’s home and talking about his experiences and the Song Tra Bong River. However, even in his own imagination, Norman Bowker is unable to describe the story to Sally Kramer. He says to her, hypothetically: “Partly it was the river—a dead-fish smell—but it was something else, too. Finally somebody figured it out. What this was, it was a shit field. The village toilet. No indoor plumbing, right? So they used the field. I mean, we were camped in a goddam shit field’’” (139). Norman imagines Sally closing her eyes, and in his imaginary exchange with her in his car, she tells him to not use the word “shit.” “Stop it. I don’t like that word’’” she tells him repeatedly, effectively shutting
down the conversation (139). Norman thinks to himself after this imaginary exchange:

“Clearly[…] this was not a story for Sally Kramer” (139). He dismisses even the notion of sharing the story with her. Although, in his mind, Sally does not want to hear the conversation, he is sure that his friend Max would have enjoyed the story. Unfortunately, he, like Sally, is also unavailable because he was dead. Max, he notes, “would’ve liked it, the irony in particular, but Max had become a pure idea, which was its own irony. It was just too bad” (139). Throughout the story, Norman continually returns his thoughts to Max and what he would say if had still been around. “A pity that Max was gone,” Norman later thinks as he watches a sunset (141). Norman constantly seeks out audiences that are unavailable; he is unable to share his war stories and accounts of trauma with living and willing listeners.

As Norman begins to hypothetically tell his father the story of Kiowa’s death, he unveils both the true nature of his injury and his subsequent inability to tell anyone about his story. Norman imagines the conversation between his father and himself using the words “might” and “would have”; these words emphasize the potential understanding between father and son: “‘The Silver Star?’ his father might have said […] And his father would have nodded, knowing full well that many brave men do not win medals for their bravery and that others win medals for doing nothing” (135). In Norman’s mind, his father understands the circumstances of war with little to no explanation. Later, Norman thinks about the way in which his father would embrace his story:

And then he would have talked about the medal he did not win and why he did not win it.

“I almost won the Silver Star,” he would have said.

“How’s that?”
“Just a story.”

“So tell me,” his father would have said. (135)

This imaginary conversation between father and son highlights the engagement and interest Norman so desperately desires, complete with his father prompting Norman for further detail and explanation. Just as he tries with Sally, he imagines telling the story to his father, describing the Song Tra Bong River, telling about its seemingly ordinary characteristics and how the river changed during the rainy season: “For a solid week the rains never stopped, not once, and so after a few days the Song Tra Bong overflowed its banks and the land turned into a deep, thick muck for a quarter mile on either side. Just muck—no other word for it. Like quicksand, almost, except the stink was incredible” (136). In his mind, he describes the stink of the river to his father, the details of the intense experience stick with him: “‘You couldn’t even sleep,’ he’d tell his father. ‘At night you’d find a high spot, and you’d doze off, but then later you’d wake up because you’d be buried in all that slime. You’d just sink in. You’d feel it ooze up over your body and sort of suck you down’” (136). Norman imagines his father actively engaging in conversation with him, responding to his son’s description with: “‘Sounds pretty wet’”; then, urging him on, Norman imagines that his father asks: “‘So what happened?’” (136). As Norman asks his father if he is sure he wants to hear his story with all its potentially horrifying details, his father reassures him: “‘Hey, I’m your father’” (136). In this made-up conversation between father and son, Norman pictures his world as one in which his father is the obvious audience for his traumatic war stories; his father is a willing listener who prompts additional detail from his son and assures him of the importance of his story. Encouraged, Norman smiles as he tells his story, claiming that he was not very brave; his statement is refuted by his father, who insists that he most certainly was not a coward. In Norman’s mind, his father is suddenly understanding and
kind, ensuring that Norman knows that if he does not want to talk, he does not need to, then reminding him to take his time if he does (136).

With its pauses, stops, and starts, Norman’s story of trauma takes the entire duration of the short story to tell. He thinks about the field, how it explodes with “[r]ain and slop and shrapnel” before he at last sees Kiowa’s “wide-open eyes settling down into the scum” (142). He delays moving forward, and when he at last gets to Kiowa, his teammate is almost completely submerged under the murky slop (143). At this, O’Brien pauses the story to note that “[Norman] could not describe what happened next, not ever, but he would’ve tried anyway. He would’ve spoken carefully so as to make it real for anyone who would listen” (143). He then describes the moment when Norman attempts to save Kiowa; as he pulls on Kiowa’s boot, he finds himself sinking into the sludge. Soon, “[t]he shit was in his nose and eyes […] and the stink was everywhere—it was inside him, in his lungs—and he could no longer tolerate it. Not here, he thought. Not like this” (143). In his story, Norman pulls himself out of the mud, pushing himself away from Kiowa who is sinking deeper into it. He can remember the taste of “shit in his mouth” as he watches his friend disappear into the waste. Although it is apparent that Norman feels immense guilt for failing to save Kiowa from death, he reframes the scenario in terms of winning decorations: “‘If things had gone right, if it hadn’t been for that smell, I could’ve won the Silver Star’” (143). Even as he imagines telling the story to his father, he prefaced the story by saying that he “‘almost won the Silver Star’” (135). His father’s imaginary assurance that he is not a coward is a conceived vindication for the trauma of watching Kiowa die and not being able to save him.

As in “How to Tell a True War Story,” O’Brien brings awareness to the notion that those of the electorate are responsible for the veterans they sent to war. These individuals, he implies,
are responsible for the moral injury veterans acquire when they return from war. As Norman drives around his town, he does so with little hurry as he has no agenda or place to go. He notices that the “town could not talk, and would not listen”; as he imagines asking his town, “‘How’d you like to hear about the war?’” he also imagines that the “place could only blink and shrug” (137). His town “had no memory, therefore no guilt. The taxes got paid and the votes got counted and the agencies of government did their work briskly and politely. It was a brisk, polite town. It did not know shit about shit, and did not care to know” (137). O’Brien criticizes those who vote for war, then leave the veterans without aid nor assistance. Once more, he refers to Norman’s story using the word “shit.” The people of the town both did not know “shit,” nor did they know Norman’s traumatic story revolving around “shit”; thus, they were without both memory or guilt. To remain absolved of guilt, they wish to remain ignorant, to not hear Norman’s story about “shit.” However, the repercussions of not listening to Norman’s story are made clear in “Notes” where O’Brien ostensibly breaks from his storytelling, narrator form to address the reader regarding the fate of Norman Bowker and his true story.

In “Notes,” the story immediately following “Speaking of Courage,” O’Brien once more intentionally blurrs the boundaries between fiction and illusive reality. O’Brien appears to break from his fictional narrator form, writing in a way that makes the reader assume that everything from the previous story was true and was written at Norman’s suggestion. Three years after the story’s end, O’Brien narrates, Norman hanged himself in a YMCA in his hometown (149). Before he does so, he sends O’Brien a handwritten seventeen-page letter, writing in tones varying from “self-pity to anger to irony to guilt to a kind of feigned indifference,” and in the end, does not “know what to feel” (150). However, he suggests that O’Brien write about a guy “who can’t get his act together and just drives around town all day and can’t think of any damn
place to go and doesn’t know how to get there anyway” (151). Norman admits that he would write it himself but can’t find the words to say (151). The truth of Norman Bowker’s tale is uncertain; however, author O’Brien’s message is clear: the expression of stories saves lives. Those who cannot express their own stories are left in a dangerous position. Furthermore, O’Brien has both the ability and obligation to voice the stories of others, whether told in their true, factual form or not. Likewise, these stories are necessary for his recovery. Just as he recreates himself through the expression of storytelling, he recreates others; whether “Speaking of Courage” tells the true story of Norman Bowker’s trauma is irrelevant. What matters is that the traumatic story is told.
Chapter 2: Poetry as Witness in *Regeneration*

*My friend you would not tell with such high zest*  
*To children ardent for some desperate glory,*  
*The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*  

Wilfred Owen, “Dulce et Decorum Est”

In *Regeneration*, author Pat Barker reimagines the war trauma of several real-life World War I British Army Officers, focusing specifically on Second Lieutenant Siegfried Sassoon. Sassoon is the victim of war trauma and moral injury. His experiences at the front lines of war and belief that the war is being unnecessarily elongated for political gain cause him to denounce the war altogether in a letter to his superiors. When he refuses to return to the war, his superiors deem him “shell-shocked” and send him to Craiglockhart War Hospital. At the psychiatric hospital, the patients’ treatment includes a combination of talk therapy with neurologist and anthropologist Captain W. H. R. Rivers and the formation of a discourse community focused on the creation of poetry. The combination of camaraderie from the creation of a military discourse community, along with the truth that is uncovered through poetry aid in the healing of trauma for Sassoon. Barker uses actual accounts of soldiers and physicians during the First World War to create a fictionalized account of a true story regarding traumatic stress and moral injury. Through this portrayal of a discourse community, the concept of creating and sharing poetry, and the stories of Siegfried Sassoon and W.H.R. Rivers, Barker implies that discourse communities assist in the healing of moral injury and, further, that poetry offers a successful means of creating testimony.

Barker makes Siegfried Sassoon’s moral injury apparent in her novel’s first lines. *Regeneration* begins with the actual text from Second Lieutenant Siegfried Sassoon’s “Soldier’s Declaration.” Written in 1917, the declaration states: “I am making this statement as an act of
willful defiance of military authority, because I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it” (Barker 3). Through Sassoon’s initial proclamation, it is apparent that moral injury has occurred. Sassoon believes he and the men fighting the war have been wronged by those in the higher echelons of the government. However, Sassoon’s letter is interpreted as a blatantly anti-war statement; such a statement could result in court-martial and imprisonment. Robert Graves, a British Army officer and Sassoon’s friend (both in real life and in the novel), is concerned that his friend would be jailed or possibly killed for having made such a controversial statement, and persuades his superiors to instead send Sassoon to a psychiatric hospital under the pretense that he is suffering from “shell-shock” or neurasthenia, the term used at the time to describe such trauma. Although Sassoon is convinced that there is no way his military superiors would not court-martial him and place him in a hospital, Graves counters with the notion that, perhaps, Sassoon is suffering from such an ailment:

‘You can’t put people in lunatic asylums just like that. You have to have reasons.’

‘They’ve got reasons.’

‘Yes, the Declaration. Well, that doesn’t prove me insane.’

‘And the hallucinations? The corpses in Piccadilly?’

A long silence. ‘I had rather hoped my letters to you were private.’ (7)

Sassoon, with this response, expresses both admission of his trauma and extends the possibility that he may be a victim of moral injury.

Dr. W.H.R. Rivers, a captain in the British Army and famous neurologist and anthropologist during the First World War, plays a prominent role throughout Regeneration. Rivers receives Sassoon’s file prior to his arrival and compares his situation to that of another patient: “He’d only ever encountered one similar case, a man who’d refused to go on fighting on
religious grounds. Atrocities took place on both sides, he’d said. There was nothing to choose between the British and the Germans” (8). Barker highlights Rivers’ observation of Sassoon’s Military Cross medal, awarded to him for saving lives under heavy fire. “Reading the citation, it seemed to Rivers more extraordinary than ever that Sassoon should have thrown the medal away. Even the most extreme pacifist could hardly be ashamed of a medal awarded for saving life” (8). Rivers’ analysis of Sassoon’s counterintuitive response reveals his understanding of war trauma far beyond the misguided diagnosis of “cowardice” popularly given to military personnel who abstained from war.

Moreover, Barker implies that the act of writing is therapeutic through Rivers’ astute observations of his patients. As Rivers conducts his initial assessment of Sassoon, he notes that the act of writing itself is healing: “Writing the poems had obviously been therapeutic, but then Rivers suspected that writing the Declaration might have been therapeutic too” (26). This introduction of writing as therapy extends to the poetry which Sassoon would later write, a form of writing that would eventually bring him healing at Craiglockhart War Hospital. While O’Brien, in his storytelling, reveals the consequences of not being able to tell one’s story, Barker shows how writing heals those with moral injury.

The relationship between poetry and witness is articulated by poet Dr. Carolyn Forché, who worked as a human rights activist in El Salvador, and traveled through parts of the West Bank, Lebanon, and South Africa (Forché 30). During her travels, she documented her experience as a witness to traumatic testimony, creating her own poetry in response to her witness of traumatic events and the aftermath of traumatic events. In the introduction to her collection of poems, Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness, she writes that poems are “not only a record of experience but an exhortation and a plea against despair. It is not
a cry for sympathy but a call for strength” (32). Writer Anne Gere finds a similar sentiment among the women of the Tenderloin Women’s Writing Workshop. One of the women of the group states: “‘I had never before written. They’ve encouraged me incredibly… You are given the freedom to try. You feel brave here. You feel brave at the women writers group’” (Gere 76).

In addition, Forché argues that community comes from the act of writing poetry: “One could argue that it uses the promise of personal happiness against a politically induced misery, but it does so in the name of the poet’s fellows, in a spirit of communality” (32). In addition to the sense of community that arises from writing and sharing writing, Forché claims that the act of creating poetry is its own traumatic event:

If [...] a poem is *itself* an event, a trauma that changes both a common language and an individual psyche, it is a specific kind of event, a specific kind of trauma. It is an experience entered into voluntarily. Unlike an aerial attack, a poem does not come at one unexpectedly. One has to read or listen, one has to be willing to accept the trauma. So, if a poem is an event and the trace of an event, it has, by definition, to belong to a different order of being from the trauma that marked its language in the first place. (33)

The notion that the writing of the poetry re-opens the trauma that the victim has experienced is articulated within Barker’s novel. Sassoon creates his own poetry to write his own experience of his moral injury and shares this poetry with Dr. Rivers. Although the experience of writing is different from the original experience the re-experiencing assists in the healing process. Sassoon’s poem “The General” explicitly addresses the incompetence within the war and how this incompetence leads to the death of his soldiers:

‘Good morning, good morning!’ the General said

When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldier he smiled at are most of ‘em dead,
And we’re cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
‘He’s a cheery old card,’ muttered Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack. (24-5)

Sassoon’s cynical war poem also addresses Shay’s notion of moral injury in that incompetence above the ranks resulted in the deaths of many innocent soldiers. Shay asserts the notion of a “fiduciary assumption” in which “orders, arms, ammunition, food, water, information, training, and fire support is ultimately a moral structure, a fiduciary, a trustee holding the life and safety of that soldier” (15). Shay writes that as soldiers become mortally dependent on others during battle, “[t]he need for an intact moral world increases” (15). Because of the soldier’s reliance on a fiduciary, the betrayal made by fiduciary was felt in a greater manner, leading to moral injury. Likewise, a betrayal such as the General’s betrayal documented in Sassoon’s poetry adds to his moral injury.

Captain Rivers conducts a diagnostic evaluation on Sassoon upon the Second Lieutenant’s entrance into the hospital, and Rivers quickly identifies signs of what he believes is war neurosis in Sassoon: taking unnecessary risks, nightmares, and hallucinations (Barker 12). In addition, as Rivers and Sassoon begin to talk about the nature of Sassoon’s opposition to the war, Rivers asks him if he would describe himself as a pacifist, to which he answers:

‘I don’t think so. I can’t possibly say “No war is ever justified”, because I haven’t thought about it enough. Perhaps some wars are. Perhaps this one was when it started. I just don’t think our war aims – whatever they may be – and we don’t know – justify this level of slaughter.’ (13)
This sense of not understanding the justification for the number of deaths caused by the war is echoed throughout Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Fussell writes that the First World War changed the way in which society and the victims of the war viewed war. Fussell notes that famous postwar poet Philip Larkin, too, accounted for this sense of betrayal and longing for the incorruptibility of the past. In his poem “MCMXIV,” Larkin writes:

Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word—the men
Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again. (Fussell 20)

Sassoon’s admission to Rivers reveals a similar feeling to that of Larkin’s speaker—the recognition of a loss of innocence due to an uncertain motivation and decisive goal for the war. This, Fussell writes, resulted in a general sense of “irony” towards the war. He states: “Casualties had been shocking, positions had settled into self-destructive stalemate, and sensitive people now perceived that the war, far from promising to be ‘over by Christmas,’ was going to extend itself to hitherto unimagined reaches of suffering and irony” (3). The erroneous belief that the war would not take long and the subsequent assumption that only few lives would be lost promulgated Fussell’s notion that war is an ironic action. He posits: “Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends” (8). The feelings of cynicism caused by war and felt by both soldier and citizen would last long after the end of World War I.
In contrast to the feelings of disillusionment triggered by the Great War and millions of deaths, Barker implies that there is a truth within trauma that is only accessible through writing. Barker introduces another real character from World War I, Second Lieutenant Wilfred Owen, who was hospitalized after suffering from a concussion in the trenches (“Wilfred Owen”). Soon after Sassoon’s admittance to Craiglockhart, he meets Owen, a nervous young man with a habit of stuttering. In an exchange between the two men, Barker dramatizes the way that Sassoon identifies with trauma through his inability to speak without stuttering. However, he becomes more comfortable around him knowing that his physical self and the self portrayed through his poetry were two different entities: “And suddenly [Owen] relaxed. It didn’t matter what this Sassoon thought about him, since the real Sassoon was in the poems” (82). In an analysis of Owen’s poetry, critic Arthur Lane writes:

> The content burdening Owen’s poetry, and that of several other war poets, was the most important of all possible contents: the untold truth. The need to speak out about the war had its basis in a strong moral conviction—in Owen’s case especially, a conviction so strong as to define his calling: “All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.” (Lane 13)

This truth is key to uncovering and facing the trauma that he has experienced, and this truth can be found within writing; for Sassoon and Owen, this truth is discovered through poetry. Owen was also attributed with stating that he was “not concerned with Poetry”; this claim is explained by Lane, who observes: “Only the facts themselves—those that the poets could personally vouch for—would suffice; and perhaps the very enormity of their subject removed the temptation to reduce it to metaphor, to dilute its dramatic and experiential actuality” (21). Furthermore,
uncovering the truth has the potential for aiding in the healing for these soldiers marred by moral injury.

In an apparent attempt to further convey the healing potential of writing, Barker introduces Second Lieutenant Billy Prior, who, because of his war trauma, has lost the ability to speak. A fictional character created by Barker, Prior suffers from nightmares and muteness because of his experience at the front lines as “target practice” for the Germans (Barker 52). The trauma he experiences is beyond words, and the only way he can communicate is through writing (41). Furthermore, he has lost most of his memory of the war, keeping him from being able to voice his trauma even if he had a voice with which to speak. As Rivers begins to assess Prior, he asks to see the back of Prior’s throat. Prior responds in writing: “‘THERE’S NOTHING PHYSICALLY WRONG’” (42). Much like the shell-shocked victims documented by World War II Veteran Anthony Babington, there is nothing wrong the individual physically; the victims have not sustained any physical injuries. However, as Prior becomes more comfortable at Craiglockhart Hospital and around Dr. Rivers, he once more finds his voice. Rivers attempts to diagnose Prior’s issue with speaking:

‘It comes and goes?’

‘Yes.’

‘What makes it go?’

Another shrug from the repertoire. ‘When I get upset.’ (49) Rivers believes that articulating the trauma that has been experienced is an effective means of treating said trauma and encourages Prior to speak. Additionally, Barker endorses Rivers’ belief that speaking is key to recovery which is apparent when he asks Prior if he wants to discuss his nightmares about the war:
‘If you feel you can’t talk about France, would it help to talk about the nightmares?’

‘No. I don’t think talking helps. It just churns things up and makes them seem more real.’

‘But they are real.’ (51)

Rivers asserts that the problems that have been repressed need to be addressed in full; the result is an endorsement of the effectiveness of “talk therapy” in treating war trauma and moral injury.

Barker dramatizes the relationship between trauma survivors and those within their social circle. In *Trauma and Recovery*, psychiatrist Dr. Judith Herman states: “Because traumatic life events invariably cause damage to relationships, people in the survivor’s social world have the power to influence the eventual outcome of the trauma […] A supportive response from other people may mitigate the impact of the event” (61). Because the lives of those who have experienced trauma are fragile, she writes, and their lives and sense of self, too, are “shattered,” their “sense [of self] can be rebuilt […] in connection with others” (61). Barker highlights the importance of connection through her portrayal of the discourse communities within Craiglockhart Hospital. The patients create *Hydra*, the hospital newspaper that publishes poetry and other works of fiction. Owen, the editor of the magazine, invites Sassoon to contribute to the magazine, to which Sassoon agrees. Upon discovering that Owen is a poet, Sassoon asks him about his view towards poetry. Owen reflects and responds: “I s-suppose I’ve always thought of p-poetry as the opposite of all that. The ugliness.’ Owen was struggling to articulate a point of view he was abandoning even as he spoke. ‘S-Something to to t-take refuge in’” (84). However, despite Owen’s articulated beliefs on poetry and war, the two poets find community in their ability to speak and understand one another’s language. Like the women in writing groups that
Gere studied, Owen and Sassoon create their own discourse community as they produce their poetry, employing suggestions regarding how long one should take when writing poems. Sassoon asks Owen: “‘How long do you spend on it? Not that one, I mean generally?’” Owen responds that he works on his poems for fifteen minutes everyday. Sassoon criticizes Owen’s work ethic: “‘Good God, man, that’s no use. You’ve got to sweat your guts out. Look, it’s like drill. You don’t wait till you feel like doing it’” (125). This comparison between military drill and poetry places Sassoon and Owen into their own specific discourse community. They are able to better understand the topics in the poetry because they have both been through military boot camp and experienced drill. Prior to Rivers’ departure on leave, Sassoon and Owen have their own poetry workshopping session. Sassoon stops at two lines:

What minute-bells for these who die so fast?
– Only the monstrous/solemn anger of our guns. (141)

Owen and Sassoon exchange ideas regarding the strength and weaknesses of specific words; their military connection and expertise in poetry are apparent in their discussions of poems. As Sassoon dissects the second of the two lines, he comments on the jingoistic nature of the poetry: “‘Owen, for God’s sake, this is War Office propaganda’” (141). Only individuals with similar backgrounds would be able to comment on Owen’s war poetry in such a manner. As the two change and mold the poetry, their mutual respect is likewise apparent. Sassoon and Owen receive their validations as poets through this process of reading and revising, and their empathy and understanding of one another assists in the process of healing. In their final exchange of poetry, Sassoon reads through Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth”:

Sassoon read through the poem. When he’d finished, he didn’t immediately comment.

‘It’s better, isn’t it?’
‘Better? It’s transformed.’ (157)

Barker’s scene between the two Great War poets ultimately reimagines a space within Craiglockhart Hospital in which discourse communities exist and assist in the healing of Sassoon and Owen.

Within *Regeneration*, the psychoanalytic concept of “testimony” is regularly applied. Additionally, within Barker’s novel, discourse communities are a space in which traumatic testimony can be expressed. However, Captain W.H.R. Rivers, too, represents a hearer of traumatic testimony for the patients of Craiglockhart Hospital and provides empathy for the patients of the hospital. Dr. Laub writes, “The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time” (Felman and Laub 57). Laub writes that the “listener to trauma” becomes a “participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event” (57). Furthermore, he writes, “The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past. The listener has to feel the victim’s victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony” (58). Rivers is witness to the traumatic testimony his patients undergo and struggles alongside his patients. Laub also warns about the effects and dangers of being a witness to traumatic testimony. Rivers’ experience as witness to the testimonies of his patients is so traumatic that Rivers must go on leave to rest and recharge. After months of treating patients, one night, Rivers experiences chest pain, along with “all the familiar symptoms. Sweating, a constant need to urinate, breathlessness, the sense of blood not flowing but squeezing through veins. The slightest movement caused his heart to pound” (139). Rivers’ fellow psychiatrist Bryce checks out Rivers in the morning, asking him, “‘What do you think is wrong?’” (140). Rivers responds, “‘War neurosis […] I already stammer and I’m starting to
twitch’” (140). Rivers identifies his symptoms as psychosomatic, to which Bryce responds, “‘And, as we keep telling the patients, psychosomatic symptoms are REAL. I think you should take some leave’” (140). The troubled doctor attempts to dismiss the need for leave. Bryce insists, telling him simply: “‘That wasn’t a suggestion’” (140). Rivers’ involvement with his patients ultimately causes him to experience symptoms similar in nature to those of his patients.

However, because of his genuine involvement in the lives and betterment of his patients, Rivers becomes the trusting figure that as Herman and Shay state, trauma victims need in order to open up and ultimately heal. Unlike the physicians of the time, Dr. Rivers presents a starkly different view towards “war neurosis.” He thinks to himself:

[A]s soon as you accepted that the man’s breakdown was a consequence of his war experience rather than of his own innate weakness, then inevitably the war became the issue. And the therapy was a test, not only of the genuineness of the individual’s symptoms, but also of the validity of the demands the war was making on him. (115)

Rivers reflects on the system in which manliness is privileged above all; however, he recognizes that this “emotional repression” does more harm than good. He considers the patients within the hospital: “It was Rivers’ conviction that those who had learned to know themselves, and to accept their emotions, were less likely to break down again” (48). Rivers’ thoughts of open understanding within Barker’s novel echo his actions in real life. Additionally, Herman notes an actual account in which Sassoon stated that “[Rivers] made me feel safe at once, and seemed to know all about me […] All that matters is my remembrance of the great and good man who gave me his friendship and guidance” (22). Making patients feel both safe and cared for contrasted greatly with the popular treatment techniques at the time. Additionally, caring for patients with genuine concern also assisted in the healing of patients. Laub states the dangers of a traumatized
individual re-experiencing trauma when there is no audience to witness the trauma: “The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is re-living; not relief, but further retraumatization […] Moreover: if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as the return of the trauma—a re-experiencing of the event itself” (67).

Barker establishes the notion that Rivers is an open-minded doctor, one who empathizes with his patients and applies progressive philosophies to his treatments. In addition to the notion of writing poetry as therapy, Barker also validates the then-progressive treatment of psychoanalysis and the ideas of Sigmund Freud. However, while Rivers frequently refers to the psychoanalytic concepts, his practice also diverges from the traditional thinking of Freud. Professor Karolyn Steffens comments, “Barker […] effectively shows the reader that Rivers is not a typical ‘Freudian Johnny’ who sees sexual significance in everything” (Steffens 41). In the novel, Rivers treats a patient named Anderson, a doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), who experiences moments of uncontrollable vomiting after serving in France. Additionally, he is burdened with nightmares involving heavy symbolism: Anderson dreams of himself naked in front of his wife and friends, being chased by his father-in-law waving a big stick with a snake wrapped around it, and getting tied by his father-in-law with corsets (Barker 28). As Rivers asks Anderson about the dream, the latter physician snaps, impatiently assuming that Rivers will make a sexual connection to his dream: “‘Well, go on then,’ Anderson exploded at last. ‘That’s what you Freudian Johnnies are on about all the time, isn’t it? Nudity, snakes, corsets. You might at least try to look grateful, Rivers. It’s a gift’” (29). However, Rivers responds: “‘What the er snake might suggest is that medicine is an issue between yourself and your father-in-law?’” (29). The two continue to unravel Anderson’s troubling thoughts, and
Rivers’ unwillingness to completely abide by Freud’s psychoanalytic theory causes Anderson to disclose more information to Rivers. Through the implementation of psychoanalysis in her novel, Barker implies that while repression of traumatic memory occurs throughout the novel, through both writing and talking to an actual listener, the soldiers are able to convey their experiences in a productive manner. Additionally, Rivers’ departure from the norms of Freudian psychoanalytic theory makes him a more well-rounded and progressive psychiatrist for the patients of Craiglockhart War Hospital.

Barker favors the notion that compassion is necessary when treating trauma and endorses Rivers’s take on treatment for war trauma over some of the popular techniques of the early twentieth century. This endorsement is apparent through her portrayal of other doctors in the story as a cold and uncaring. In 1917, when the events of *Regeneration* take place, several medical treatments concerning war trauma were still experimental. So, too, was the treatment of “shell-shock” and “war neurosis.” While doctors such as Captain Rivers practiced medicine with compassion, still others were skeptical that war could affect soldiers in such a debilitating manner, believing instead that these soldiers were cowards who did not want to fight in the war. Barker contrasts Captain Rivers’ understanding nature with that of the unsympathetic psychiatrist Dr. Lewis Yealland, Rivers’ colleague at his new posting at the National Hospital. Yealland takes Rivers around the ward, and as he does so, Rivers notes the disconnection between patient and physician:

Contact with patients was restricted to a brisk, cheerful, authoritative greeting. No questions were asked about their psychological state. Many of the patients, Rivers thought, showed signs of depression, but in every case the removal of the physical symptom was described as a cure. Most of these patients would be out within a week,
Yealland said. Rivers asked questions about the relapse rate, the suicide rate, and received the expected reply. Nobody knew. (224)

This lack of caring about the ultimate status of their patients at the National Hospital is juxtaposed with Rivers’ own practice of becoming deeply ingrained in the lives of his patients. None of the doctors seem to show concern for the mental well-being of their patients, only that the patients appear physically fine. During the First World War, the societal belief was that “shell-shock” or neurasthenia was, in fact, “cowardice or malingering” (Jones 18). Barker ultimately asserts her belief in Rivers’ empathetic and sympathetic treatment of his patients by comparing his nature with that of the unlikeable and chilling Dr. Yealland. As Rivers asks him about his treatment techniques, Yealland responds: “The last thing these patients need is a sympathetic audience” (228). The seeming success Rivers later has with his own patients through his treatment endorses the use of empathy while Yealland’s own seemingly callous characteristics implies that the latter physician’s take on treatment for war trauma is outdated and, ultimately, wrong.

Although Rivers is successful in treating some of his patients, he is not successful in the goal of physicians during the First World War, which was to return victims of “war neurosis” back to war (Herman 22). Ingrained in the mind of Second Lieutenant Prior is the notion that to be a “man,” he must be at the front lines, fighting in the war. Although he desperately wants to return to the war, as he “wanted nothing more than to get back to France as soon as possible, to get away from what he called ‘the shame’ of home service,” he is ultimately given home service, far from the war front (206). However, although Prior is unable to return to the war, Barker endorses Rivers’ methods of treatment for trauma, which is evidenced by the fact that Prior makes impressive strides in recovery during his time at Craiglockhart Hospital. While Prior
initially is mute and he is unable to articulate his war trauma, he eventually regains his voice permanently. Additionally, he is later able to articulate his feelings of “survivor guilt” with Rivers, and eventually comes to terms with the notion that he still has much of his life ahead of him.

Ultimately, Sassoon uses writing as a way to help deal with his anxieties and trauma. As Sassoon waits for his final medical board which will determine whether or not he is allowed to return to the front lines, he seems to become re-traumatized by the experience of having to wait for the board. However, he finds solace in his writing:

He seemed at times to be almost unaware of his surroundings, as if he could get through this interim period between on Board and the next only by shutting down all awareness of where he was or what was happening. And yet he was writing, and he seemed to think he was writing well. All the anger and grief now went into the poetry. (Barker 221)

The “shutting down” of his awareness harkens to the sense of disconnection that veterans feel during the war. However, he is able to channel his feelings into a positive diversion—a sign of progress in terms of his trauma.

Barker subtly suggests that writing and talking through traumatic experience can significantly assist in the healing of moral injury. At his medical evaluation board, Sassoon is asked about his nightmares. He states that he has not had them for a while, to which Rivers and the board “sensed he was lying” (246). When asked if his views have changed since his “Soldier’s Declaration,” Sassoon responds in the negative, but claims that it is his “duty to go back” to the war (246). Following Sassoon’s questioning, one of the board members asks Rivers if he believes the officer will “go back and foment rebellion in the ranks,” to which Rivers responds: “No, he won’t do that. He won’t do anything to lower the morale of his men”’’ (245-
6). Although Sassoon has undergone significant trauma, Rivers recognizes that Sassoon’s previous self-destructive tendencies have subsided; this is a clear sign of healing.

Barker’s implication that discourse communities, witnesses to trauma, and writing are therapeutic solutions to moral injury is affirmed through the healing that occurs among Rivers’ patients. However, while Barkers endorses the employment of writing as therapy, she also finds a conclusion akin to Shay’s. At the question, “Is recovery possible?” Shay responds with three answers: “(1) Return to ‘normal’ is not possible. (2) We don’t know. (3) Yes” (184). While Regeneration’s fictionalized version of Craiglockhart War Hospital conceives of a setting accommodating of healing for the war-traumatized patients, and progress towards healing certainly occurs for Rivers’ patients, recovery is not always entirely accomplished. However, Barker implies, some healing may be possible. In the final scene of Regeneration, she reveals hope and cautious optimism at the story’s seeming denouement. In the story’s final lines, Dr. Rivers reflects on his time with Siegfried Sassoon and writes in Sassoon’s file: “Nov. 26, 1917. Discharged to duty” (250). These final lines reveal that the doctor himself seems to question the completeness of Sassoon’s healing, while acknowledging that some progress has been made.
Chapter 3: *Goodbye, Darkness and Memoir as Therapy*

“The Marine Corps taught me how to kill but it didn’t teach me how to deal with killing.”

Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like To Go To War*

In the preamble for *Goodbye, Darkness*, William Manchester reflects on his wartime experiences in the seat of a Boeing 747, traveling across the Pacific more than thirty years following the end of the Second World War. As the sun goes down, he feels the weight of “[o]ld memories, phantoms repressed for more than a third of a century” (Manchester 3). In his opening paragraphs, he unveils a stunning revelation: “One of my worst recollections, one I had buried in my deepest memory bank long ago, comes back with a clarity so blinding that I surge forward against the seat belt, appalled by it, filled with remorse and shame […] I am remembering the first man I slew” (3). This begins his memoir of traumatic confession. His trauma emerges from both the battlefields of the Pacific, as well as the familial trauma of his past. While writing seemingly helps him to cope with his guilt, Manchester, through writing, also assists in allowing those with whom he served to cope with their guilt and trauma. Upon reflection of his own experiences as well as his father’s experiences in the military, he reveals the betrayal of leadership and expectation within the military. This betrayal leads to the conception of moral injury within Manchester’s story. In addition to allowing him to express this moral injury, through writing and memoir, Manchester mourns the lives lost during the war, both from the American forces and the Japanese forces as well. Ultimately, the act of expressing his trauma through writing allows the veteran to absolve a portion of the guilt he bears, including survivor’s guilt. Furthermore, by returning to sites of previous trauma, he connects with other veterans and creates a World War II-specific community of individuals who have shared experiences and are able to connect and converse with one another because of these experiences. In *Goodbye,*
Darkness, Manchester’s expression of traumatic experience and engagement of audience by sharing his experience as a U.S. Marine fighting in the Pacific Theatre during the Second World War assists in his quest for healing from moral injury. He admits: “Writing [my experiences] was extremely difficult. My feelings about the Marine Corps are still highly ambivalent, tinged with sadness and bitterness, yet with the first enchantment lingering” (398). Manchester claims that writing initiates his understanding of the events of the war, suggesting the beginning of healing.

Through the writing of his memoir, Manchester effectively engages in the steps required for healing. Psychiatrist Dr. Judith Herman writes of the recovery of trauma: “Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (Herman 155). Manchester establishes his sense of safety by being taken out of the dangers of war and returning to the United States following the war. Additionally, he conducts remembrance and mourning through the act of writing of this memoir. In writing the trauma of his own experiences, he reflects on his own involvement in the war. However, in writing about the previously untold stories of his fellow Marines, the Japanese soldiers he fights, and the civilians caught in the fight, he conducts both remembrance and mourning for these individuals. Lastly, Manchester establishes his own sense of reconnection. His writing of the memoir allows him to both connect with his audience and ultimately, leave his past ghosts behind him. His reintegration is apparent throughout the memoir; he has had time to reflect on his experiences in war, and concludes that to better reconcile his trauma, he must return to the sites of trauma: “I have repressed what war memories I do have for so long that I have no way of knowing how distorted they are now. That, of course, is why I have come back to the islands” (194).
Author William Manchester’s trauma begins at a young age, and his memoir is a means of exploring the various trauma he undergoes as a young boy eclipsed by the shadow of his war hero father. The notion that Manchester’s father holds great expectations for his son are clear, causing author Manchester great trauma and insecurities throughout his life. Long before his son enters the service, William Manchester, Sr. encounters gross incompetence during his time in the military, and thus suffers from moral injury. Author Manchester’s first chapter is devoted entirely to William Manchester, Sr., the hero from the First World War and William Manchester, Jr.’s relationship with him. While Goodbye, Darkness is “A Memoir of the Pacific War,” the chapter begins in France on All Saints’ Day—Friday, November 1, 1918. On this day, the American forces began their final assault of the war. Author Manchester writes that his father had fared well until this moment; however, on this day, Manchester, Sr. is not so lucky. He and his company crawl out of the trenches, slowly advancing up the mud amid flares bursting over them; Manchester feels a pain in his shoulder. He realizes that he has been hit by pieces of shrapnel, “[o]ne piece went through the shoulder, just missing the shoulder blade” (16). Manchester, Sr. writes a relatively upbeat letter to his parents, detailing his injury, which Manchester, Jr. writes, “Like many another casualty trying to spare his parents, he was putting a bright face on what was in reality a desperate business” (16). Author Manchester writes that his father’s career is essentially a “compendium of American military incompetence,” starting from his initial enlistment to his training at Parris Island boot camp when his time was, instead of focused on training, “occupied building a road” (16). The author notes that his father was ultimately “untrained and unprepared for the fighting in France” (16). However, the American military’s dealing with his father’s injury is the compendium of its ineptitude. Author Manchester writes:
[Manchester, Sr.’s wound] was grave but not mortal; nevertheless, the surgeon at a casualty clearing station, following the French triage principle—concentrating on casualties who could be saved and abandoning those who couldn’t—judged his case to be hopeless. Appropriately, on November 2, All Souls’ Day, the Day of the Dead, his litter was carried into a tent known as the ‘moribund ward’; that is, reserved for the doomed. Gangrene had set in. He was left to die. (18)

Yet, Lance Corporal Manchester remained alive for the next five days, his “death certificate already signed” (18). It is not until Manchester’s sixth day in the moribund ward that he is discovered by navy medical corpsmen. By then, his arm is unsalvageable and subsequently amputated. Following this, Manchester, Sr. experiences the military’s final act of betrayal: “[o]n May 30 the Marine Corps reduced him to his precombat rank of private and discharged him as No. 145404, ‘unfit for service’” (19). The remainder of the chapter notes the complicated relationship between Manchester, Sr. and the Corps: “My father’s attitude toward the Marine Corps was highly ambivalent […] he saw through the Corps scam. He didn’t want me to join up if another war broke out. At the same time, he was proud to have been a leatherneck himself” (21).

Author Manchester’s familial trauma is apparent as he notes the complicated relationship he harbors with his father and the sense of insecurity he felt growing up. He writes “Until my father’s death I was ‘Billa,’ or, more formally, ‘William Manchester, Jr.’ I hated that—I have always regarded ‘Jr.’ as a sly boast of legitimacy—and throughout my early life I was mortified by people telephoning our house who had to be asked whether they wanted ‘Big Bill’ or ‘Little Bill’” (23). Childhood sickness, too, consumed William Manchester, Jr.’s early life, leaving him fragile and subject to bullying at school. He writes, “I was the son of a Marine; it was
inconceivable that I should be a sissy. Yet I was” (25). When Manchester is beaten up, his father instructs him to hit back, and to “‘Never forget that [he is] a Manchester’” (25). His mother, however, gives him seemingly opposing advice, to “‘Always remember that [he is] a gentleman’” (25). And so, Manchester notes, “Civility triumphed. Swapping punches made no sense to me. I simply couldn’t see the point of inflicting pain on another boy” (25). Word spreads of Manchester’s inability to strike back, and he is heavily bullied. His unresponsiveness to their bullying enrages them further, until a gang of bullies eventually decides to enlist the help of a girl: “Her name was Betty Zimmerman. At eleven she already had the build of a bull dike” (26). She quickly gives him two black eyes. Manchester’s insecurities towards his relationship with his father is further complicated through this moment, and his lifelong trauma of feeling inadequate next to his father.

By writing about his childhood trauma, he relives his experience, ultimately allowing himself to organize his childhood trauma. Additionally, the act of reflecting on each of his experiences in preparation for the memoir forces him to re-live the experience. Manchester’s perplexing relationship and traumatic experiences with his father follow him throughout his time fighting the war in the Pacific as well. At each turn of his Marine Corps career, he compares himself to his father. The beginning of Manchester’s career as a Marine begins in Parris Island, South Carolina, where he enlists in the Marine Corps and undergoes basic recruit training. Because he already has a college degree, and because he shows exceeding potential throughout training, he is sent to the Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Quantico, Virginia. However, he quickly realizes that “I wasn’t meant to be an officer, at least not by Quantico standards, and […] the attempt to make one of me was a grave error” (128). This sending of Manchester to OCS appears to be the first mistake the military makes with regards to his Marine Corps career. The
officer candidates are, in Manchester’s view, a particular sort that he does not associate himself with: “I recognized their type. I had known many of them, if distantly, in college. They were upper-middle class snobs, nakedly ambitious conservative conformists, eager to claw their way to the top” (129). Manchester cements his belief that the military mistakenly sent him to become an officer in a particularly telling anecdote. Prior to a weekend of liberty, the officer candidates’ lieutenant-instructor inspects their rifles and deems them satisfactory. However, soon after, their corporal-instructor inspects the rifles, deeming them unfit and canceling liberty for their owners. Instead of going out, meeting with girlfriends and parents, they are instructed to clean their rifles until they are considered satisfactory. Manchester is understandably frustrated, stating: “Something snapped within me […] I considered the corporal’s order an atrocity” (131). He argues with the corporal until he finds himself at a court martial on Monday morning. He explains himself with little remorse: “I told the kindly, troubled lieutenant colonel who presided over the court that I had joined the Marines to fight, not to kiss asses and wade through the very sort of chickenshit we were supposed to be warring against” (132). Before he leaves Quantico, he requests to be sent to his father’s regiment, the Fifth Marines. Lastly, he states: “I still had my petty pride, not to mention the fact that I now outranked my father” (132). Manchester’s desire to compare himself to his father and consequent desire to exceed his father’s accomplishments recur. Later, while fighting in Okinawa, Manchester is injured and receives what he calls a “superficial gunshot wound.” He recalls the events proceeding the event: “I remember asking a corpsman, ‘Will I get a Purple Heart?’ He nodded, and I thought of my father: We’re even” (383). These words serve as both a confession and a validation.

For Manchester, memoir allows him to express the trauma he has undergone, and it also serves as a warning to his audience regarding the harsh realities of war. Additionally, memoir
helps Manchester uncover truth, while also allowing him to share this truth with his audience. In the prologue of his memoir *What It Is Like To Go To War*, Vietnam War Veteran Karl Marlantes writes:

I could have kept my thoughts in a personal journal, but I took on trying to get these reflections published so that I could share them with other combat veterans. Perhaps, in some way, I can help them with their own quest for meaning and their efforts to integrate their combat experiences into their current lives. (Marlantes xi)

Memoir serves a similar purpose in Manchester’s own writing, and he expresses a deep desire to tell how the war truly was by separating truth and fabrication in war. One example in which Manchester separates the notion of honor and glory from war was a time in which he writes about the deaths of Marines who die because trees fall on them. He describes his thoughts about how such deaths are reported: “In Cape Gloucester we lost a hundred Marines to huge falling kanaris. I wondered then, and still wonder, how this was phrased in Marine Corps records. ‘Killed in action’ was an honorable end, meaning that a Marine had died for something, but how do you officially describe the end of a man who died because a tree fell on him?” (97).

Manchester refutes the notion that every death that occurs at war is honorable; language plays a vital role in representing the honor and deaths of these Marines. Furthermore, he brings up a notion of betrayal that Americans died without purpose and, furthermore, without honor.

Manchester continues the notion that “Those of us who fought in the Pacific believed we would be remembered, that schoolchildren would be told of our sacrifices and taught the names of our greatest battles” (116). He considers later: “one wondered whether there would be anyone left to tell it” (175).
This is the not the only time in which Manchester confesses to the lack of glory in war. He also returns the audience to the scene of the first enemy soldier he had ever shot at (6). He describes the Japanese soldier in detail, as if the man were right in front of him: “He was a robin-fat, moon-faced, roly-poly little man with his thick, stubby, trunklike legs sheathed in faded khaki puttees and the rest of his squeezed into a uniform that was much too tight” (6). The Japanese soldier finds himself tangled in his sniper’s harness, unable to fire at Manchester. The young Marine responds by firing at the Japanese soldier, going into a berserk state; even after he recognizes that the soldier is dead, he “kept firing, wasting government property” (6). As the young Manchester assesses the situation, he recognizes the familiarity of death: “Yet seeing death at that range, like smelling it, requires no previous experience. You instantly recognize the spastic convulsion and the rattle” (6). As flies land on the dead Japanese soldier, Manchester comments, “I don’t know how long I stood there staring” (7). Following this experience, Manchester breaks down: “I began to tremble, and next to shake, all over. I sobbed, in a voice still grainy with fear: ‘I’m sorry.’ Then I threw up all over myself” (7). He realizes that, in the heat of the moment, he has urinated on himself; he is the picture of helplessness. As his Marine teammate runs over to ensure that the Japanese soldier is, in fact, dead, he looks over at Manchester, telling him bluntly, “Slim, you stink” (7). Manchester, with no response but full understanding of the pathetic sight he has now become, wonders, “Is this what they mean by ‘conspicuous gallantry’?” (7). War isn’t, Manchester asserts, heroic encounters worthy of cloth ribbons and medals. Instead, he states, war is vomited C-ration beans down the front of fatigues, “tears and twitchings and dirtied pants”; war is not glorious (7). Manchester further addresses the notion that the illusion of the grandeur of war lies behind the fabric worn by soldiers and Marines. He states, “[A] man wouldn’t sell his life to you, but he will give it to you for a piece of
colored ribbon. The whole panoply of military glory, I argued (and still argue), is a monstrous deception. I felt (and still feel) that one of the effective ways to end war would be to strip the military of its anachronistic ribbons, uniforms, and titles” (200). This admission of the realities of war and why men fight serve as warnings to those who have never experienced war themselves.

In addition, Manchester writes of a betrayal felt by the ground troops during the war, and the notion that moral injury assumed a key role throughout the war in the Pacific. He writes about the logistical disasters that define American operations in the Pacific:

One reason the struggles in the Pacific constantly teetered on the brink of disaster is that they were shoestring operations. At one point the United States was spending more money feeding and housing uprooted Italian civilians than on the Americans fighting the Japanese. The navy let the Marines on the Canal down because washing was letting the navy down, devoting nearly all its resources to Eisenhower’s coming invasion of North Africa. (175)

This lack of support for the American forces in the Pacific echoes the notion of betrayal Shay mentions with the mandatory shift to using M-1 Garand rifle and its subsequent unreliability. Although the men have no choice but fight, sending men to the Pacific underfunded is a severe betrayal of “what’s right.” Additionally, Manchester’s experience mirrors his father’s experience as he is shipped off to France to fight in a war he is ill-prepared to fight.

Throughout his memoir, Manchester refutes the legitimacy of the romantic notions of inspirational leadership and sacrifice during war. He writes of a professional baseball player-turned Marine corporal who, during the Battle of Tarawa, helped throw incoming Japanese grenades back “as fastballs.” However, one bounces before he can grab it, exploding
immediately. The corporal’s hand was later amputated as a result of his injuries. Manchester writes that while the corporal’s sacrifice “awed his men,” it “did not inspire them.” He concludes this anecdote negatively: “Real leadership was impossible” (229). The notion that true leadership is non-existent in war is further examined through Manchester’s short-lived platoon commander Tubby. In his chapter “Les Braves Gens,” he writes that Tubby has freshly arrived from officer candidate school, a “replacement officer making his debut as a leader, or presumed leader, of seasoned troops” (233). Manchester continues, implying that Tubby didn’t have a chance to adequately lead his platoon: “If there is a more pitiful role in war, I don’t know it. Troops are wary of untested officers” (233). Regardless, fresh from OCS, he announces his plans to charge the hill in the middle of battle, hoping to motivate the rest of his platoon to follow his lead. Unfortunately, his naiveté shows. Tubby tells Sergeant Manchester: “‘I’m going to lead these people over the top, and I want you with me’” (234). Manchester reveals the reality to his audience:

He actually said “over the top.” We didn’t talk like that. He must have heard it from his father. World War I soldiers left their trenches to go over the top, over the parapet, into no-man’s land. Then the implication of what he had said hit me. I whispered, “You mean over this wall?” He nodded once, a quick little jerk of his head. He said, “That’s where the Japs are. You can’t kill them if you can’t see them.” I felt numb. I said, “Look, Tubby—Lieutenant—I think—” He snapped, “You’re not paid to think. You’re paid to take orders.” I considered saying the hell with it. But this was literally a matter of life or imminent death. (234)

Sergeant Manchester attempts to convince his platoon commander that his plan is a poor one. His platoon commander asks Manchester: “‘You’re scared shitless, aren’t you?’” (235). Manchester
nods that he is, then: “[Tubby’s] voice rose higher. All the guys could hear him now. He said, ‘That’s why I put up bars and you’re just an NCO. They could tell the difference between us in O.C. I’ve got balls and you haven’t’” (235). Manchester explains: “What Tubby had done, and it was unforgiveable, was make me look ridiculous in the eyes of all my men. He knew that was wrong. They had taught that at Quantico. By mocking me he had contaminated both of us” (235). As Tubby attempts to leap over the wall, he is hit by several slugs which “stitched him vertically, from forehead to crotch” (235). He dies within seconds. By telling this story, Manchester becomes both a witness to trauma, able to retell the story of his short-lived platoon commander and the subsequent betrayal he feels: “I raged as I had raged over the death of Zepp. It was the sheer futility of it which was unbearable” (237). While Manchester’s initial encounter with the new platoon commander was not positive, Manchester retains guilt from the experience: “No one could lengthen [his life] for him. I’ve kept telling myself that all these years, but there will always be a tug of guilt” (235). However, his writing about the experience is his attempt to absolve himself of some of the guilt he experiences. Additionally, his writing about the experience is a representation of the complicated relationship between the military’s enlisted and officer ranks. Ultimately, the experience Manchester gains is impossible to relay to his prideful platoon commander; though he tries, he cannot save him.

Memoir allows Manchester to empathize with the Japanese soldiers with whom he fights and the innocent Japanese civilians caught in the middle of battle. In addition to the seemingly meaningless deaths and casualties on the side of the U.S., Manchester frequently refers to and sympathizes with the Japanese individuals who are killed. While he is in Okinawa, Manchester sees the dead corpse of a Japanese girl on the beach. He states: “I had never seen anything like that. The thought that an American man could commit such a crime in fighting a just war rage
against everything I believed in, everything my country represented. I was deeply troubled” (356). This moral injury expressed is a betrayal of everything he believes the United States embodies—a belief in just war and justifiable killing. However, while collateral damage is assumed during war, its existence de-legitimizes the sense of purpose in war. Manchester finds similarities between the killing of innocent civilians and the hiding behind the fabric of the uniform; it is a betrayal of the truth that causes cynicism and disillusionment in war and the armed forces.

During his time as a sergeant in the Marine Corps, he faces explicit moral trauma when he forced to directly disobey a direct order of a superior with combat fatigue. Manchester writes that trauma affects all ranks and leadership positions, placing those lower-ranked in precarious positions. Mike Powers, a sergeant major\(^2\) begins showing signs of mental instability; he sings out questions in different high-pitched voices, much to the unease of Manchester and his men. Manchester soon recognizes Powers’s voice when he says, “‘Knock off beating the bishop, guys; get ready to charge’” (105). Powers’ order is “followed by a giggle which turned into a gale of laughter” (105). Manchester quickly analyzes the situation, stating: “This was trouble. I had seen combat fatigue, and recognized the signs, but couldn’t believe they were coming from and Old Corps sergeant major” (105). The Marine witnesses also realize how problematic the situation is: “Rip said, ‘Powers is snapping in for a survey’ – ‘survey,’ in this context, being the Marine Corps equivalent of an army ‘Section Eight,’: a discharge on grounds of insanity” (105). Manchester, only a sergeant, must decide how to act: “I was in a fix. In this sector I was next senior to Powers, but the gap between a buck sergeant and a sergeant major is roughly comparable to that between a platoon leader and a lieutenant colonel, and I was notoriously

\(^2\) An E-9, or highest enlisted rank attainable in the Marine Corps.
insubordinate. Yet this was an illegal order if there was ever one” (105). Manchester laments that only an officer could override the sergeant major’s ill-intentioned order and expresses his anxiety regarding what he can and should do. The military’s attempt to fool-proof the system fails;

Powers is supposed to maintain order and discipline within the troops. Manchester describes Powers as “the seasoned NCO capable of dealing with any replacements who panicked. No one had foreseen that Powers himself might panic” (105). In a moment of moral introspection, Manchester overrides the senior Marine’s order and tells his fellow Marines that they will not conduct the ill-planned attack. Sergeant Major Powers responds by calling Manchester “yellow,” and orders him to “put [himself] under arrest” (105). However, Manchester’s action is acknowledged; an officer down the ranks concurs with his assessment and tells the troubled sergeant major to report back to base. Powers begins sobbing, “spread-eagled on the ground outside his foxhole, shaking uncontrollably, first shrieking as I once heard a horse shriek, then blubbering and uttering incomprehensible elementary animal sounds” (106).

When the battalion surgeon asks Manchester if the man reduced to tears is Mike Powers, he responds: “‘It was’” (107). Even a sergeant major can be reduced to nothing because of the traumas of war. In the end, Manchester seems to eulogize Powers:

I never saw Powers again, but I know what happened to him […] I heard the officer of the day [at San Diego’s Balboa Park Naval Hospital] declare that one Michael J. Powers, a sergeant major in the Marine corps, had been sentenced to eighty-five years in Portsmouth Naval prison for indecently, lewdly and lasciviously taking into his mouth the penis of one Robert F. Winkler, medical corpsman second class. (107-8)

By sharing this story with the reader, Manchester ensures the reader is witness to Sergeant Major Powers’ trauma.
In addition to using memoir to re-explore his trauma, Manchester uses his memoir to voice the traumatic experience of those who cannot. During his tour of the Pacific three decades after the war’s end, he visits Peleliu, the site of one of the battles he fought. There, he seeks out an American monument erected in honor of the battle. The stone monument is in horrid condition: while it, at one point, was an impressive stone statue with memorialized words strewn across its front, when Manchester visits, letters are visibly missing. What was once the phrase “LEST WE FORGET THOSE WHO DIED” now reads “LEST WE FO GET THOSE WH DIED” (322). Manchester’s response is both justified and also speaks for those who have undergone trauma:

Exhausted as I am, I feel a surge of fury. To commit brave men to a needless struggle was criminal; to consign them to oblivion is profane. Is this the apotheosis of our mourning? Can we FO GET them so completely? […] Can’t the Pentagon spare a few token dollars out of its billions for a decent memorial? Can’t the American Legion and the VFW, so adept at lobbying for live Veterans, pause to propose a suitable tribute to those who, thought they cannot vote, safeguarded our right to do so? (322)

Manchester’s outrage at this moment, along with his justification in being outraged, allows him to point out this betrayal. Although these men have paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country, some not even old enough to vote, their country cannot or will not put together the funds necessary to mourn them. So, Manchester uses his platform and audience to conduct his own memorial. In pointing out this, he brings his audience in as witness to the trauma that those whom the statue had attempted to mourn.

Manchester is generally successful in creating witness for his trauma by returning to the sites of battle, by connecting with those around him, and by re-connecting with those who also
experienced the traumas of battle. However, he experiences a feeling of failed witness when he travels to Leyte Gulf, Philippines. He steps on the sands of the legendary Red Beach, where General MacArthur was photographed wading onto its shores. On the shores of the beach, statues of the reenactment are erected, each statue twice the size of a normal human being. Manchester notes that “[t]here is one peculiar error. MacArthur’s collar bears five-star ornaments, but he didn’t achieve five-star rank until December 16, 1944, nearly two months after he waded in” (329). Manchester’s pointing out of this factual error ends the romantic notion of war once more, pointing out the fallacy in the heroic story painted by MacArthur and promulgated by history. Escorted by Philippine President Marcos, Manchester wades into the water, noting that “the spectators, including several small children from the huts, watch solemnly, almost standing at attention. This ground is sacred to them […] they celebrate Liberation Day every October 20 by reenacting MacArthur’s return with landing craft and fireworks simulating shellfire” (329). While the land is sacred to the Filipino people, for Manchester, “the experience is flat” (329). Although he participated in the battles at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, he did not fight in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, and so, he states, “I cannot identify with what happened here—cannot re-create it because I neither served here nor knew anyone who did […] You cannot evoke the past in a crowd. I need solitude” (329-31). While he does often connect with his audience, connection is not always possible, Manchester asserts.

Through memoir, Manchester addresses the relationship between the “us vs. them” mentality that betrayal creates. Psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Shay writes of the “shrinkage” of both the social and moral horizon” for soldiers in battle, stating that “[m]en fight mainly for their comrades,” and that “[p]rolonged exposure to danger and the profound strain of battle compel this contraction of loyalty to some degree in every war” (Shay 23). This notion is furthered by
the lack of supplies given to the Marines. The feeling that not only were the men fighting the Imperial Japanese Army but also their own logistics team is a feeling of betrayal. Additionally, Manchester lovingly tells the tale of the “Raggedy Ass Marines”—a group that willingly chips in so that a young corporal can go on a date when Manchester is a broke recruit in San Diego, that find 23 bottles of sake on Irammiya Island in Okinawa and proceed to drink all of it (288-89). They are, as Manchester describes, the “least subordinate of fighters” (233). While Manchester often experiences a series of confusion and existential crises regarding his participation in the war, when he is with the Raggedy Ass Marines, he is certain of himself: “Subsequent generations have lost that blazing patriotism and speak of it, if at all, patronizingly. They cannot grasp how proud we were to be Americans” (127). He later asserts the notion that they fought for each other as opposed to any other reason or conviction. Furthermore, he writes that his war story is, in fact, a love story:

   It was an act of love. Those men on the line were my family, my home. They were closer to me than I can say, closer than any friends had been or ever would be. They had never let me down, and I couldn’t do it to them. I had to be with them, rather than let them die and me live with the knowledge that I might have saved them. Men, I now knew, do not fight for flag or country, for the Marine Corps or glory or any other abstraction. They fight for one another. (391)

This notion of war being a love story is echoed throughout Tim O’Brien’s novel. In his story “How to Tell a True War Story,” O’Brien claims of the story about his fellow platoonmate Rat Kiley: “It wasn’t a war story. It was a love story” (81). He refutes the notion that the story was one of solely violence or war.
Through the writing of *Goodbye, Darkness*, Manchester explores the notion of traumatic latency. Psychoanalyst Cathy Caruth writes of a “latency” of trauma in which trauma that is unresolved at the occurrence later reappears. “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 11-2). Manchester revisits Sugar Loaf Hill in Okinawa, reopening the wound he has suffered and attempting to resolve his trauma. As he reflects on the deadliest battle of his time as a Marine, he claims that “[r]eturning to Okinawa today is like watching a naked priest celebrate mass. It is so incongruous, so preposterous that indignation is impossible. Solemn memories suppress the urge to laugh, so you simply stand stunned and helpless, unable to respond or even move” (385). Although Manchester’s response to returning to Okinawa is one of stunned immobility, he finds strength in returning with those within his community; these individuals with his shared experience of war bring solace to his anxiety. He states: “two Marine friends of friends, Lieutenant Colonel Jon Abel and his Top Sergeant, Arnold Milton, are there to assure me that I haven’t lost my sanity, that there’s no need for that stiff drink I’ve begun to crave” (385). Through the communalization of his trauma, Manchester finds peace and understanding regarding his time at Sugar Loaf Hill.

The final pages of Manchester’s memoir read as both remembrance and mourning—an “in memoriam” section for his fellow Marines. Manchester struggles with the notion of survivor’s guilt. “I wondered, as I had wondered before, what had become of our dead, where they were now. And in a way which I cannot explain I felt responsible for the lost Raggedy Asses, guilty because I was here and they weren’t frustrated because I was unable to purge my shock by loathing the enemy” (374). He mourns what could have been, had these men escaped
the grips of war and returned home: “Lefty had been Harvard ’45 and premed; Swifty had been Ohio State ’44 and an engineering major; Chet, Colgate ’45, hadn’t picked a major; Wally, MIT ’43, would have become a physicist” (375). He continues, telling a story of unexpected courage and an untimely end:

Knocko Craddock had quivered all over as we approached the line. But on Horseshoe Ridge he found a Japanese knee mortar and carried it to his foxhole. When the Nips rushed him, he fired eight rounds at them with their own ammunition and then stood erect in his hole, blazing away with a tommy gun until they cut him down. Knocko was Holy Cross ’45. He would have become a lawyer. (375)

In these pages, Manchester speaks to the potential that is ripped out from underneath them because of war. Shay asserts that remembrance assists in healing trauma and moral injury:

“Forgetting combat trauma is not a legitimate goal of treatment […] The task is to remember—rather than relieve and reenact—and to grieve” (Shay 192). Furthermore, his mourning of loss extends to the death of the relationship between himself and the U.S. Marine Corps: “As I look back, it was somewhere on the slopes of [Sugar Loaf], where I confronted the dark underside of battle, that passion died between me and the Marine Corps […] Half the evil in the world, I thought, is done in the name of honor” (381-2). Shay also asserts that grieving includes not only the dead, but also “their own lost innocence in both its meanings, as blamelessness and as unawareness of evil” (192).

Manchester admits to his disillusionment and the death of his own innocence: “I, to my shame, had been among the enchanted fighters. My dream of war had been colorful but puerile. It had been so evanescent, so ethereal, so wholly unrealistic that it deserved to be demolished. Later, after time had washed away the bitterness, I came to understand that” (382). By
remembering his fellow Marines, he conducts mourning for their lost lives and suffering. By revisiting the sites of battle and trauma, Manchester reconnects with others whom have undergone trauma as well. Through the writing of his memoir, Manchester participates in the communalization of trauma by creating a way for audiences who have not undergone such trauma to empathize and understand what he has undergone. Ultimately, his memoir reveals understanding, acceptance, and peace with his past. Manchester writes: “The child within us never vanishes. And neither does man’s atavistic fear of the dark […] In battle, darkness can strip men of their sanity” (99). Remembrance, mourning, and writing of the darkness eventually allow him to bid it farewell.
Conclusion: “Good Form”

“War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead.”

Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried

In a manner unlike most of his previous stories, in “Good Form,” the 18th story in his book of 22 short stories, O’Brien steps back from storytelling and directly addresses his reader, breaking the “fourth wall.” He admits: “It’s time to be blunt. I’m forty-three years old, true, and I’m a writer now, and a long time ago I walked through Quang Ngai Province as a foot soldier” (O’Brien 171). After O’Brien has told seventeen stories about the Vietnam War, he admits: “Almost everything else is invented” (171). O’Brien emphasizes the form in which he can relay his war trauma. “But it’s not a game. It’s a form” (171).

O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester use their use their own genres and styles of writing to recreate the trauma of moral injury. Using his experience in the Vietnam War, O’Brien creates stories to tell stories of moral injury and trauma. Author Pat Barker uses historical figures from the past to create her own fictionalized accounts of their trauma. World War II Veteran William Manchester uses his time as a Marine in the Pacific as a framework to tell the story of his own moral injury and to tell the stories of the Marines with whom he fought alongside. Ultimately, the forms of storytelling gives voice to the authors and offer ways to connect with their audience.

O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester use their individual forms of storytelling to highlight the emotional impact of war. While the reader could discover facts about war from history textbooks, storytelling amplifies the feelings and emotions felt by the reader. O’Brien admits: “I want you to feel what I felt” (171). Additionally, he makes the distinction between what he refers to as the “story-truth” and the “happening-truth,” stating that the “story-truth is truer sometimes
than happening-truth” (171). The “happening-truth,” he writes, is plain: “I was once a soldier. There were many bodies, real bodies with real faces, but I was young then and I was afraid to look. And now, twenty years later, I’m left with faceless responsibility and faceless grief” (172). The “story-truth,” on the other hand, is much more devastating: “Here is the story-truth. He was a slim, dead, almost dainty young man of about twenty. He lay in the center of a red clay trail near the village of My Khe. His jaw was in his throat. His one eye was shut, the other eye was a star-shaped hole. I killed him” (172). While O’Brien openly admits to fabricating some of his experiences in the war, Barker’s stories of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, W.H.R. Rivers and the rest of the patients from Craiglockhart War Hospital are fictionalized, though based on real events. Manchester’s own accounts of the Second World War are admittedly dramatized. In his author’s note at the end of his memoir, he writes: “After thirty-five years, any man who suffered a head wound […] can never be absolutely sure of his memory” (397). However, the purpose of their writing and their fabricated storytelling is to “make things present,” allowing readers to ultimately participate in the “communalization of trauma” (172).

Additionally, through their storytelling, O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester give voices to those who are unable to speak about their own trauma, ensuring that their stories are told. In his book The Theater of War, writer and director Bryan Doerries writes about his experience conducting readings of ancient Greek plays to veterans, active duty service members, and their families. He and his drama company travel throughout the world, performing at military bases overseas. Following one of his readings, he asks his military audience what Sophocles was trying to do with his plays. A soldier responds with certainty, and Doerries is taken aback at the soldier’s observation. He states:
The soldier had highlighted something hidden within *Ajax*: a message for our time. Sophocles didn’t whitewash the horrors of war. This wasn’t government-sponsored propaganda. Nor was his play an act of protest. It was the unvarnished truth. And by presenting the truth of war to combat veterans, he ought to give voice to their secret struggles and to convey to them that they were not alone. (Doerries 4)

In addition to the story of Ajax, Doerries translates and presents the story of Philoctetes, a soldier who is left for dead when he becomes sick and worthless to his command, to modern times; he makes comparisons between the betrayed Philoctetes and warfighters in the United States’ modern military: “Philoctetes, after all, wasn’t just a chronically ill patient. He was a veteran who had been abandoned by the nation that sent him to war” (66).

However, the Greek tragedies do not only resonate with veterans but also with civilian audiences, and the lasting impact left by these stories is similar to the stories O’Brien, Barker, and Manchester tell. Their stories open the potential for conversation. Doerries writes: “The performances, which were always raw and powerful, seemed to leave people buzzing in their seats, unsure how to respond to the graphic, unbridled depiction of human suffering at the center of the play, but wishing to talk about it” (65). Additionally, Doerries argues that plays were not staged merely to entertain. He writes: “Appallingly violent scenes like the suicide of Ajax or the massacre in Euripides’s *Madness of Heracles*, I would argue, were not staged for their entertainment value. They were staged in order to elicit a specific response from a specific audience” (95). This specific response is directed to both those who have fought and suffered from moral injury, as well as those who have not. As Doerries begins the arduous process of selling his Greek play idea to the military, he finds support where he had least anticipated it.
Army General Loree Sutton supports Doerries’s idea and speaks at one of the readings. Doerries documents the moment:

General Sutton stood up, her hands visibly trembling, and addressed her peers. “Perhaps Sophocles wrote these plays,” she said, “because he was in the minority as a leader with regard to the compassion he felt for the warriors in his community who were struggling with the issues he portrayed in his plays. Perhaps,” she concluded, “Sophocles wrote these plays to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” (108)

Likewise, in their own forms, Tim O’Brien, Pat Barker, and William Manchester extend their words to their audiences, ultimately writing to “make things present” (172).


