Staging Trauma:

Trauma and Masculinity in the War Fiction of Ernest Hemingway and Tim O'Brien

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All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.

– Karen Blixen

Norwegian Abstract

Ved å analysere Ernest Hemingway sin *In Our Time* (1924) og *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), og Tim O'Brien sin *The Things They Carried* (1990) og *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994) ut frå det psykoanalytiske opphavet til traumestudiar, viser det seg tydelege teikn på traume, både i karakterane og i narrativa rundt dei. Kjønnsforventningane som kjem fram i skjønnlitteraturen til forfattarane viser vidare at maskulinitet som han vart presentert til soldatane i den første verdskrigen og Vietnamkrigen forsterkar desse trauma og hindrar læking. Hemingway og O'Brien sin litteratur kan difor lesast som både uttrykk for traume og som ein kritikk av samtida sine kjønnsrollemønster og deira rolle i å forsterke trauma. Oppgåva anerkjenner at beskrivingane av kjønn og kjønnsforventningar kan lesast på ein måte som forsterkar stigmaet rundt mental helse og kjønn, men legg vekt på at dei i hovudsak er uttrykk for traume.

Gjennom å anvende litterære karakterar for å uttrykkje traume, viser veteranforfattarane at narrativ og skjønnlitteratur speler ei viktig rolle i å arbeide seg gjennom krigserfaringar som ikkje har vorte ordentleg handsama. Vegen er likevel ikkje lang frå samanhengande narrativ til fornekting eller frå konfrontasjon til gjentakingstrong. Her speler det sympatiske vitnet ei avgjerande rolle. Å konstruere eit narrativ i samband med ein lyttar/lesar kan bety skilnaden på å verte kontrollert av trauma sine eller å meistre dei. Den viktigaste verdien i traumestudiar er ikkje evna til å konkludere når det kjem til i kva grad traumenarrativ er lækjande, men heller dei gjentekne forsøka på å forstå traume, prosessane bak læking og korleis dette bidreg til å utvikle meir sympatiske lyttarar og medmenneske.

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Chapter One: Introduction to Trauma

As the climate crisis is more threatening than ever and we are once again experiencing war on European soil, our understanding of trauma is poignantly relevant. War trauma in particular has been a cause for concern for geopolitical, economic, military, and humane reasons for generations. In the United States alone, the costs of veteran rehabilitation from the post 9/11 wars are estimated to reach between 2.2 and 2.5 trillion USD by 2050 (2021, pp. 1, 3). In addition to visible, physical disabilities, many of the veterans in the rehabilitation system struggle with additional—or solely—mental problems due to their combat trauma. The individual and societal consequences of war are therefore something that should continue to concern all of us for many reasons.

In this context, literature possesses a value that cannot be equated. This thesis is based on an understanding of literature as something with a specific value when it comes to representing and providing understanding of the human experience. In the same way that Anne Franks' *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947) can provide unique understanding as to the individual costs of the Holocaust, Ernest Hemingway's and Tim O'Brien's fiction may contribute to a greater understanding of the consequences of unprocessed trauma.

This thesis investigates the representation of trauma in war fiction by perhaps the most legendary veteran writer of the 20th century, Ernest Hemingway, and the praised Vietnam veteran, Tim O'Brien. Signs of trauma are evident throughout Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1924) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) and *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994). The authors show that fictional narratives can play an important role in dealing with unprocessed experiences of trauma. I argue that the expressions of trauma found in Hemingway's and O'Brien's fiction can be considered a way of acknowledging, working through, and dealing with their own traumatic experiences,

regardless of their historical accuracy. I further argue that the ideas of gender evident in their works show how masculinity, as it was presented to the soldiers during World War One and the Vietnam War, reinforces trauma, prevents recovery, and sustains unhealthy gender expectations. Combined, Hemingway's and O'Brien's representations of trauma contribute to a greater understanding of trauma and its consequences, particularly seeing as their works deal with different wars and belong to different literary periods.

When investigating the primary texts in the light of psychoanalytic origins of trauma and contemporary literary trauma studies, there is evident a connection between wounds and words, trauma, and literature. I pay particular attention to trauma studies' emphasis on narrative as a method of confession, and the eventual prospect of recovery/coping it provides. Trauma studies' psychoanalytic origin is relevant when investigating the disruptive memories and flashbacks haunting the characters, unprocessed trauma, and the portrayal of the raptured self as explored by Othman Abualadas, Andrew Barnaby, Cathy Caruth, Andrew Farah, Sigmund Freud, Mark A. Heberle, Dori Laub, Wael Salam, Alex Vernon, and Sarah Anderson Wood. The deconstructive strand of trauma studies, as described by Geoffrey H. Hartman, is useful when looking at how Hemingway and O'Brien express trauma through the limitations of language.

In this context, contemporary attitudes toward masculinity and gender are contextualized and historicized in relation to trauma, particularly when it comes to the military during the First World War and the Vietnam War. Here, soldiers' expected inclination to stoicism and silence is relevant to how they were able to cope with and narrate their experiences, both in the case of the literary characters and the veteran authors who created them. In this context I consider the scholars Judith Fetterley, Judith Herman, bell hooks, Donald L. Mosher, Lorrie Smith, Silvan S. Tomkins, Vernon, and Wood. Finally, scholars' interpretations as to what constitutes an authentic war story are relevant when

assessing Hemingway's characters Frederic Henry, Catherine Barkley, Nick Adams, and Harold Krebs, and Tim O'Brien's John Wade, Azar, and 'Tim O'Brien' (the author's metafictional persona), as well as their respective creators. I argue that the trauma narratives found in Hemingway's and O'Brien's texts do not have to portray actual events in the authors' or characters' lives in order to provide healing, as the most paramount factor seems to be the process of narration itself, preferably combined with a sympathetic witness.

The introductory chapter introduces trauma studies and explains how it is applied to the primary texts. I also contextualize the periods in which Hemingway and O'Brien wrote in relation to structural trauma and their literary periods. I further introduce 'masculinity' as a key concept where I define how the term is applied to my thesis and investigate its role in relation to trauma. Further, I introduce trauma studies' position regarding prospects of healing through narrative, as well as fiction's value in conveying traumatic experiences. In this context, criticism by Susan Farrell, Jo Gill, Heberle, Herman, Margot Norris, Laub, and Wood is relevant.

Chapter two investigates Hemingway's texts through the lens of trauma studies and connects them to his own First World War- and traumatic- experiences. His use of aesthetics and style, as well as the expressions of gender found in his works are explored as evidence of trauma. Finally, I discuss how fiction and narrative introduce prospects for recovery from trauma, and to which extent this recovery process is an available alternative for the literary characters and the trauma author.

The third and final chapter is structured according to the same template as chapter two. Here, O'Brien's fiction is investigated in addition to its relation to the author's experiences before and during the Vietnam War. In this chapter, the importance of the sympathetic witness is established as an important factor in the healing potential of confession and narrative.

Trauma

Historically, 'trauma' has referred to a physical wound or damage to the human body. Its Greek origin also suggests a physical injury caused by an external factor. Today, however, trauma is more frequently associated with emotional or psychological damage. A traumatic experience is generally assumed to involve a terrifying event with heavy emotional impact which overwhelms the individual's normal response mechanisms, causing a traumatic reaction (Kurtz, 2018, pp. 1, 2).

The model of trauma theory which I apply to my discussion, has roots all the way back to the nineteenth-century neurologist Sigmund Freud and his psychological approach to trauma. The concepts which Freud described in his research are still influential as to how we understand trauma today (Kurtz, 2018, p. 3). Although his theories are to some extent considered outdated in clinical practice, their impact is highly relevant when attempting to understand how trauma has been portrayed and represented in literature throughout the 20th century. Looking at the literary trauma in Hemingway's and O'Brien's fiction through a Freudian-inflected philosophical perspective can increase our understanding as to how trauma has been/is understood, and how this influences the potential for recovery.

To Freud, trauma, or 'traumatic neurosis' is caused by an event which cannot be processed like a normal event. Instead, the inadequately processed memory returns to haunt the victim until it has been appropriately confronted. This haunting reproduces the fright-response of the event and can manifest itself in the shape of intrusive memories, visions, nightmares, and flashbacks (Freud, 2003b, pp. 146, 147).

Freud considered the human consciousness as something that can be wounded to the same extent as the body (2003b, pp. 149, 150). Literary trauma then, might be understood as a way of coping with a crisis of subjectivity, where the individual experiences a wounded consciousness that exposes them as inadequate to the demands of reality. In his book

Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety (1926), Freud argues that trauma manifests in relation to a situation of danger, where the subject's perception of their own strength compared to the danger at place, leads to a sense of helplessness (Freud, 2003d, p. 483). In other words, trauma is the realization that one is not enough compared to the reality one faces. As will be discussed, this condition is recognizable in the fictional characters Nick Adams, Frederic Henry, Tim O'Brien, Norman Bowker, and John Wade, who all, albeit in different ways, experience feelings of inadequacy when confronted with war and violence.

Regardless of the extent to which the danger situation described reflects reality, trauma is not necessarily grounded in the real world. Freud's uncanny stories, used to explain a diversity of different psychologically syndromes, call attention to this. Theories like the Oedipus Syndrome and the Castration Complex are all explained by and grounded in myths and stories, like that of the Sandman. The fears and fantasies present in these stories, prompt traumatic reactions (Barnaby, 2018, p. 28). Literature then, plays an important role in understanding the mechanisms at play when it comes to trauma: so important in fact, that Freud resorts to fiction when attempting to describe something which factual language seems unable to do.

An important milestone in trauma theory relevant to my thesis, is the introduction of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a diagnostic category in 1980. This further spurred the development in trauma studies from around 1990. Inspired by Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992), and Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), the field of trauma studies concerns itself with healing processes and the connection between trauma, narrative, and interpretation. It is a complex field engaging many disciplines, among them psychology, medicine, art, theology, and politics. Its aim is to understand wounds' imprints on the brain, how they manifest psychologically and physiologically and how they are understood by the

victim. In other words: how wounds and words are connected (Wood, 2020, p. 131). Around year 2000, literary studies started to appear with psychological approaches to *trauma narratives*, a term used to cover narratives of pain, fear, and stress (Wood, 2020, p. 132). Such approaches can be applied to access traumatic experience from fiction.

One important question in literary trauma theory is the extent to which trauma is representable at all. However, it is generally agreed that literary language is able to express and represent trauma in ways ordinary language cannot. According to Kurtz (2018, p. 8), literary trauma theory claims that narrative processes share important traits with traumatic processes, as confronting and acknowledging the trauma is central to both cases. Here, the connection between words and wounds is crucial. Thus, fiction can offer insight into the relationship between trauma and representations of trauma. Trauma studies have accordingly attempted to understand and translate mental wounds into words and analyze the impact trauma leaves upon its victims. This becomes especially relevant in Hemingway's and O'Brien's use of aesthetics, style, authenticity, concealment, and myth building when conveying traumatic experience.

The language used in literature and the language of trauma have many similarities. Homer's *Odyssey* (8th century BC) and the war poetry of Wilfred Owen (1917-1918) are examples of how representations of wounds have been present in narratives depicting the human experience for centuries (Kurtz, 2018, p. 8). Literature plays a great role in portraying the human response to life's hardships. Often therefore, a person's understanding of what trauma is stems from literature.

For the reader, it might be easier to relate to a literary character than to a stranger in the real world. When the character Tim O'Brien in the short story "On the Rainy River", dreads his inevitable departure to Vietnam, it awakens sympathy, and to the reader he might even appear more real than faceless soldiers in the news broadcast. Fiction is thus able to alter

our perception of reality, broaden our horizons, as well as our ability to understand and sympathize with victims of trauma. For the victims of trauma, like the authors and characters chosen for this thesis, increased understanding can enable them to understand and sympathize with themselves, laying the foundation for recovery.

Structural and Historical Trauma

As Hemingway and O'Brien wrote in different eras and about different wars, it is important to take the distinction between historical trauma and structural trauma into account. Historical trauma points to particular events, while structural trauma refers to a general situation, which Kurtz refers to as "an anxiety- producing condition of possibility" (Kurtz, 2018, p. 8). Modernity, which shaped the time in which Hemingway grew up and wrote, is an example of the latter. This applies especially to the First World War, which represents the ultimate traumatic consequence of modern industry and technology. However, it was initially the development of the railway, in addition to the 19th century obsession with the nervous system and the language of degeneration (Freud) that directed attention towards the connection between trauma, language and modernity (Steffens, 2018, pp. 36, 37).

Many aspects of industrial modernity were evident by the mid 1800s: coal, iron, and steel, the remapping of the world and the adaptation of standard time, are embodied in the railway (Steffens, 2018, p. 38). Additionally, new kinds of accidents with much larger force-impacts on their victims, appeared. These markers of modernity, which were generally viewed as benign, also shocked human sensibilities and perceptions of individual identity. Charles Dickens connected the railway with trauma in his writing, following the railway accident which nearly killed him, described by Jill L Matus in "Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection" (2001). The railway is linked to the development of a traumatic language, as doctors needed a diagnosis for patients suffering

from ‘railroad shock’ or ‘railroad spine’. In turn, the victims needed a traumatic language when seeking compensation for nervous symptoms caused by railway accidents (Kurtz, 2018, pp. 4, 5).

It was not, however, only accidents that caused nervous symptoms in patients. According to the American physician George Beard, ‘neurasthenia’, a nervous exhaustion stemming from overstimulation, became a symptom of everyday life in the modern world (Steffens, 2018, p. 40). In similar terms, social critic Max Nordau considers everyday activities and new inventions, such as reading new literature or the newspaper, as requiring an effort upon the nervous system. Those unable to adapt sufficiently to the new world, became “hysterical and neurasthenical” (Nordau, 1895, p. 541). Even if trauma is not a modern concept per se, the social changes brought by the industrial revolution were unprecedented and are relevant to the vocabulary and concepts by which trauma is understood today (Kurtz, 2018, p. 4). Karolyn Steffens argues accordingly that the dramatic social changes of late-Victorian modernity laid the foundation for the modernist style, as well as the medical discourse surrounding the rise of psychoanalysis (Steffens, 2018, p. 39).

When analyzing literary trauma in Hemingway’s and O’Brien’s fiction it is important to consider both the events and the time in which they occurred. The respective backdrops of modernity and the First World War, the nuclear age, and the Vietnam War, are thus important when investigating their works from a trauma studies perspective. With modernity, urbanization increased, and the development of new capitalistic economic relations and technological innovations skyrocketed. For example, the telegraph and the cinema changed the ways in which people communicated and brought the outside world closer to home. Modernity changed the way people saw the world, how they communicated, and even their understanding of themselves (Kurtz, 2018, p. 4). Especially in relation to the First World War the traumatic vocabulary developed quickly. And, by the time of the Vietnam War, one could

receive graphic news reports and harrowing imagery straight into the peace of one's living room, yet again changing how one related to war.

In turn, the Vietnam War has been referred to as the "first terrible postmodern war", by Frederic Jameson cited in Mariani (2015, p. 171). Accordingly, there is a connection between Vietnam and postmodernism, in the same way that modernism relates to the First World War. The reality of war in O'Brien's fiction is its ambiguity. This ambiguity is conveyed through narrative style emphasizing uncertainty and skepticism, concepts clearly recognizable in O'Brien's description of the Vietnam experience. At the core of these narratives, is trauma.

As in Hemingway's works, the trauma research available at the time influences the pages of O'Brien's fiction. Judith Herman, in the first chapter of her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror,* traces three major issues that have influenced treatment and research on trauma. They are 'hysteria' at the end of 19th century that spurred the development of Freudian psychoanalysis, 'shell shock' during and after the First World War, and domestic abuse within the past two decades (Herman, 2015). PTSD, the diagnostic category most influential when O'Brien wrote, includes all different kinds of trauma victims, ranging from victims of rape, abuse, natural disaster, torture, and war. Arguably, PTSD can be said to be a characteristic product of life in the 20th century, a century that started with the First World War, continued with the Holocaust, the Gulags, the nuclear horror, the genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing in Europe, and ended with the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 (Heberle, 2001b, p. 10). The trauma of the century is thus attempted covered by *one* diagnosis that ranges beyond the individual trauma to include the entire society. O'Brien's fiction similarly reflects the traumatic circumstances of, not only the Vietnam veterans, but the American post-Vietnam society.

This collective trauma includes the My Lai massacre, a stain on an already dark piece of American history which the military tried its best to cover up for some time. Contrary to Army regulation, Charlie Company, which were responsible for the massacre, were allowed to investigate itself, and allegations of deliberate mass killings were dismissed as propaganda. This remained the official story until Seymour Hersh unraveled the story of the massacre to the news, leading to the court martialing of Lt. William Calley who was convicted for the murder of twenty-two innocent villagers at My Lai and sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor. Calley only served from 1971 until 1974, at which point he was released from military custody (Miraldi, 2013; Oliver, 2003, pp. 247, 248) According to David J. Piwinski, O'Brien's inclusion of the My Lai massacre in his novel *In the Lake of the Woods* is an effort to remind America about the atrocious incident (2000, p. 197). Even if the protagonist John Wade attempts to live a normal life, betting everything on his political career, his traumatic past catches up with him. It ruins the relationship with his wife as well as his political career, reflecting the collective cultural amnesia of American society.

Another important consequence of the PTSD-diagnosis was its shift away from psychoanalysis into the physical sphere. Instead of being considered a weakness in the mind or soul, it was now considered a biological condition of the brain, further removing some of the stigma surrounding trauma. The symptoms, however, are very similar to those described by Freud, among which are involuntary re-experiencing of the traumatic event, reduced ability to relate with the external world, insomnia, hyper-alertness, nightmares, survivor's guilt, and memory impairment. In addition, these symptoms intensify when exposed to situations similar to the traumatic event (Diedrich, 2018, p. 84). Recognizable in Hemingway's and O'Brien's characters is the intrusion of past experiences into the present. Sometimes these intrusions are so powerful that the trauma victim disconnects from reality

and behaves as if reliving the traumatic event itself. For example, John Wade is clearly disconnected from reality in his perception of what has happened to his wife.

The categories described by the American Psychological Association's criteria for PTSD includes many of the symptoms recognizable in Hemingway's and O'Brien's characters. Criterion B emphasizes intrusive symptoms, such as flashbacks and unwanted memories, Criterion C lists symptoms of avoidance (feelings and external reminders), while Criterion D lists feelings of isolation, guilt, and inability to recall features of the trauma. The symptoms of emotional and psychological shutting down often resemble a hypnotic trance where time and self-consciousness seem to dissolve. Criterion E includes symptoms of irritation, nervousness, insomnia, and self-protective vigilance associated with maladaptation (PTSD, 2018). At their most destructive, these symptoms can trigger homicidal and suicidal episodes, which pose a plausible explanation for what happens between John and Katherine Wade in *In the Lake of the Woods*. Even if avoiding the past trauma may block painful and unbearable trauma responses and memories from the mind for a while, intrusive memories will continue to haunt the victim (Heberle, 2001b, p. 12; Herman, 2015). As we will see, John provides a textbook example of PTSD, ticking off all the criteria above, indicating that his trauma has not been properly dealt with.

Ruth Leys emphasizes the importance of reviving the memory and emotions of the trauma victim, in order to facilitate recovery and hinder suppression of trauma (Leys, 2000, p. 86). To write about trauma can be considered a way of remembering, and since both trauma and memory involve past events, or rather interpretations and representations of those events, the two are closely entangled. According to Lisa Diedrich (2018, p. 86), trauma might even be considered a disorder of time, or at least changing the victim's experience of temporality. Critical theorists Ian Hacking and Leys similarly argue that PTSD affects both time and memory and disrupts a person's experience of temporality. The past is not experienced as past

anymore as it keeps disrupting and overshadowing into the present (Hacking, 1995; Leys, 2000). In that sense, trauma share a lot of common traits with post-modernism's nihilist observations regarding truth and perception (Malpas, 1992) that are reflected in O'Brien's fiction, further emphasizing the close connection between trauma and literature.

Another literary concept which has been closely related to trauma theory is deconstruction. The key insight from connecting these two is that traumatic symptoms do not only appear in the mind and in the body, but also in language (Kurtz, 2018, p. 5). Hartman's essay "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies" characterizes trauma theory as a field that can contribute to new ethical awareness, as it facilitates emphasis on listening and a greater openness to testimony (Hartman, 1995, p. 537; Toremans, 2018, p. 52). Reading can be an ethical act, as art and literature can be seen as testimonies and representations of trauma that acknowledges the human condition. The deconstructive strand does not claim to understand what trauma is, but rather acknowledges it as something that cannot be made fully accessible or conveyable (Toremans, 2018, pp. 52, 53). Even if language is considered unable to reflect reality and subjectivity, Herman argues that recovery from trauma is possible (1995, p. 540). The role of fiction when it comes to understanding and acknowledging the impact of trauma is crucial here. Looking at literary trauma with deconstruction in mind is therefore relevant when applied to fiction by Hemingway and O'Brien. As one cannot rely on literal or abstract knowledge to make trauma understandable, abstract language can address and describe traumatic events. In turn, trauma theory can explore the representation of the inaccessible experience by the way it is described in Hemingway's and O'Brien's fiction.

The deconstructionists have often been accused of ahistorical tendencies (Kurtz, 2018, p. 5). O'Brien shows similar ahistorical (postmodernist) traits when emphasizing textuality and aesthetics at the expense of historical accuracy. The same applies to Hemingway. To some, this might be considered unethical. Hartman's contribution to the field, however,

supports the argument that Hemingway's and O'Brien's narratives contribute to increased understanding and acknowledgement of the realities of trauma, as their works emphasize the challenge of representing it.

As war is the primary source of trauma in the works I investigate below, the war-triggered concepts of trauma which in turn have been described as shell shock, combat fatigue, soldier's heart, survivor's syndrome, and most recently PTSD, provide examples of how, not only the primary victims, but the world at large attempts to come to terms with war related trauma in the twentieth-century. The primary insight the military and the general population have had to come to terms with is that mental wounds are as serious as physical, and that trauma is a severe consequence of war. While the ways of warfare, as well as the literary responses to it have changed over the years, trauma remains an unshakable trope in veteran literature (Kurtz, 2018, p. 13).

Hemingway's and O'Brien's trauma does not only appear in their fiction concerning war, but also in literature about their childhoods in the Midwest (Vernon, 2004a, p. 178). According to Jeff Loeb's study of autobiographies about the Vietnam War, "Childhood's End", such childhood narratives can be said to be an attempt to reintegrate and find meaning in the midst of tragedy. They can thus be characterized as "survival literature" (Loeb, 1996, pp. 96-100). In that way, even Hemingway's and O'Brien's childhood narratives can be said to be about war. Often, veterans express this desire to regain an innocent prewar self (Loeb, 1996, p. 97). Much of Hemingway's fiction, for example, can be said to be about characters attempting to erase the wounding from the war by returning to their prewar "Edenic innocence" (Vernon, 2004a, p. 179). It is hardly a coincidence that Nick Adams is named after another man who was thrown out of the "Garden of Eden". Hemingway's and O'Brien's fiction seem to chase the same prize: finding some kind of peace. Even if their ways of achieving this differ, returning to childhood is a common denominator. I do not argue that

narrating their trauma gave the authors peace of mind, rather that their fiction can be considered a method of attempting to understand and coming to terms with what war does to the people involved, thus providing a way back to the familiar world.

One cannot take for granted that either Hemingway or O'Brien had delved into the contemporary trauma theory before writing their war fiction. One can, however, assume that the newly coined PTSD-diagnosis must have made it easier for O'Brien than for Hemingway to openly write about trauma. The authors' fiction was written respectively at the beginning and end of the 20th century. Yet, the expressions of trauma available in their works carry traits of the 19th century trauma theory as well as the more recent theories. Trauma theory - the paradigm, lens, and language it offers - provides useful tools when it comes to analyzing literature that represents traumatic experiences. As trauma may be understood as an inevitable part of the human experience, literature is valuable in acknowledging human reaction to it, as well as contextualizing it in regard to social and political issues such as gender roles, war, and mental health. The emphasis both writers put on storytelling and narrative, points to fiction as a natural place to turn after having experienced trauma.

Gender and Masculinity

Expectations to masculinity are closely tied to the military experience, and interpretations of masculinity as a concept have left its mark on how trauma has been dealt with and interpreted by its victims and society at large. As the term may have other connotations today than previously, in addition to meaning different things to different people, the use of the term in this thesis is delimited to refer to a set of expectations that distinguishes 1. The man from the boy and 2. The man from the woman and the feminine sphere. Traditionally, male gender expectations have been closely connected with soldierly ideals such as strength, heroism, and bravery as well as the ability to provide for and protect a family. A man may distinguish

himself as “manly” by his rationality opposed to emotionality, and his ability to “take it” without complaint. Masculinity may thus provide a sense of purpose and usefulness on one hand, as well as a tendency for violence and control, on the other.

Silvan Solomon Tomkins’ script theory, which offers a coherent account of the macho personality, forms a basis for how traditional masculinity in understood in this thesis. Many of the criteria listed in the theory would be fulfilled in a war situation, as the macho personality includes a tendency for callous sexual attitudes, violence, and the inclination for viewing danger as something exiting. The theory provides a set of rules for interpreting, directing, defending, and creating the life of the macho man (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). According to Donald L. Mosher and Tomkins, boys are socialized to learn from an early age that superior, masculine traits like courage, excitement and anger are favored over “inferior” feminine traits, such as distress and fear. Youth rituals in adolescent social networks and processes of enculturation in the American culture and the mass media, promotes this hypermasculine socialization (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988, p. 60). The script of machismo descends from the ideology of the warrior and the stratifications follow the patterns associated with “war victor and vanquished”, “master and slave”, “the head of the house and woman as his complement”, “the patriarch and his children” (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988, p. 60). Accordingly, machismo has deep, painful rooting in American history and consciousness.

A hypermasculine man will try to assert his manhood and masculinity by participating in dangerous and violent situations or exploitive sex, as such situations allow him to express his manliness (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988, p. 60). Combined with social Darwinism, these ideas about sex and gender led to aggressiveness and competition being viewed as virtues and survival skills. Freudian psychology which links the masculine sexual instinct to aggression (Freud, 2003c, p. 314) explains why interpretations of masculinity have persuaded men to fight for centuries. bell hooks’ “A Will to Change”, similarly suggests that men have been

taught to embrace a mold that ties them to assert violence in their relationship with women and each other. She proposes that a new model for masculinity is needed which abandons the patriarchical view that men have no meaning in their life if they do not possess power to dominate others (hooks, 2004).

To a significant extent, the war machine depended on macho gender expectations to fuel the soldiers' motivations. Both Hemingway's and O'Brien's fiction express a view that if people at home knew what happened during the First World War or the Vietnam War, they would not have let it. As Catherine Barkley asserts in *Farewell:* "People can't realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn't all go on" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 20). Their fiction can thus be read as implying that society depends upon false notions of purpose and masculinity in order to maintain the initiative of war, which is especially relevant in the American context, as she did not experience war on her own soil during this period.

American war stories distinguish to a great extent between the front and home (Farrell, 2017a, pp. 4, 5). Thus, there is made a clear division between those fighting abroad and those at home unable to understand. This home/front distinction can be directly applied to a gendered experience which separates the masculine from the feminine. Like children, women would not be able to understand war. The all-male experience at the front combined with male eagerness to go to war were heightened by an imperialistic mindset accompanying the renewed militarism of the 19th century (Wood, 2020, p. 139). Masculinity, which had previously been contrasted to boyhood and childhood, now became the opposite of femininity, and this distinction was maintained by the front/home binary.

Furthermore, industrialization and the increase of women into the labor force, spurred a "crisis of manhood". To avoid emasculation and keep a sense of purpose, warring and violence, still masculine pursuits, became a way to prove oneself, cheered on by influential figures such as President Theodore Roosevelt. Many chose this option, arguably because they

felt obliged to protect, not only their nation and family, but their own sense of manhood. Due to military restrictions laid upon soldiers after the First World War, many found it difficult to retell their war stories. As they had been encouraged to show bravery, valor, and patriotism, while suppressing "unmasculine" feelings such as fear and doubt, it was better to remain silent—especially seeing as they risked being court-martialed if they did talk (Vernon, 2004b, p. 69). For this reason, Hemingway's and O'Brien's portrayals of what constitutes a man are highly relevant in relation to how veterans have been taught to deal with trauma.

The same trauma is further connected to anxieties regarding military status. In *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and the Fiction of Mobilization*, Keith Gandal argues that Hemingway (in alignment with Faulkner and Fitzgerald) embodies the insecurity of modern manhood tied to his Red Cross stationing, arguing that Hemingway was resentful for only serving as a Red Cross volunteer instead of a 'real' soldier during the First World War (Gandal, 2008, pp. 34, 35). This position was by many regarded less "manly" than the role of combatant. In similar terms, Alex Vernon argues that the character Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* is "unmanned" by the war, partly based on his position as an ambulance driver. This breaks with the original idea that war actually confirmed one's manliness. Instead, Vernon reads Frederic's story as a story of cowardice.

Sarah Anderson Wood takes a similar view, claiming that soldiers' actions and thoughts were governed to a great extent by their gender, which prevented them from expressing their fears during and after the war. This is mirrored in Frederic's stoicism (2020, p. 139). Salam and Abualadas (2017, p. 98) however, argue that Hemingway's war heroes reluctance to 'talk about it' stems from an inability to remember or narrate what has happened, not because they are afraid to be labeled unmasculine, but because they carry an inexpressible 'impossible history' (Salam & Abualadas, 2017, p. 98).

There are several connections between institutions and conditions which shaped narratives of illness between the early- and mid-1900's. Frederic's silent nature has, by women- and gender-studies professor Diane Price Herndl, been attributed to his background as a soldier (Herndl, 2001, p. 45). The military denied many World War I victims the right to express the terror and suffering to which they had been exposed. Additionally, the stigma around mental illness was so severe at this point, that Hemingway had to submit himself to a psychiatric ward under his doctor's name in fear of it being leaked to the press (Wood, 2020, p. 140).

Mental health stigma affected women differently, as evident in the character Catherine Barkley. Her trauma is mentioned only briefly in *Farewell,* although the consequences of it follow her throughout the entire novel. She lost her fiancé at the Somme and struggles with guilt that she did not marry him, or at least "give him anything he wanted" before he died (Hemingway, 2016, p. 19). Critical feminism has influenced trauma studies, demonstrating how our understanding of trauma has always been influenced by gender, and many of Freud's clinical observations are grounded in patriarchal ideas about 'hysteria'. Even if these ideas are criticized today, Herman (2015, pp. 16, 17) suggests that the age of 'hysteria' was the only age in which women's mental health was taken seriously by men of science. According to her, focus on war related trauma in the 20th century, especially after the First World War, including the more recent PTSD-diagnosis, favored the male experience without exception. However, while Catherine has been diagnosed, like countless women before her, as merely imbalanced and crazy, Frederic's injuries have been overlooked as purely physical. Both their traumas are neglected, albeit in different ways. In Frederic's case, Diane Price Herndl's suggestion that he suffers, not only from shell shock, but from *masculinity* as it had been presented to the First World War-soldier poses an important contribution to my argument

(Herndl, 2001, p. 46). It is Frederic's ideal of masculinity that keeps him from finding a voice to express his trauma.

The feminist approach to literary studies that emphasizes agency, voice, narrative and literary form and their interaction with gender when attempting to understand trauma, is relevant to the male experience as well. Jennifer Griffiths highlights the importance of the feminist scholars' initiative of understanding trauma as immersed in a larger structural system (Griffiths, 2018, pp. 184, 185). This also applies to the male experience, as it is important to acknowledge the role of the patriarchy in shaping the way in which masculinity is understood, and that the patriarchal model, which governed the superstructure during the majority of the 20th century, was extremely influential as to what would be considered a 'real man' and a 'real soldier'. Masculinity then, as it was presented to the First World War- (and Vietnam-) soldier, may have served as a double-edged sword. It urged men to go to war to prove their worth, in addition to denying them the help and support they needed upon their return. Writing war stories, and reading them, might have provided a solution to this vicious circle, as a means of making sense of and expressing trauma without letting it affect one's sense of masculinity. Through fictional characters and narratives, the veteran author is able to face the fear and trauma induced by war from a safe distance.

Trauma Narratives

The veteran literature chosen in this thesis contains entanglements of trauma, gender expectations, and narrative. Both Hemingway's and O'Brien's works are characterized by verisimilitude, but there are many pitfalls for the reader if one expects them to represent reality. However, the lack of historical authenticity in the events portrayed does not mean that the texts do not speak truly about the authors' trauma, nor that they cannot contribute to healing.

The fiction's *appearance* of portraying real events and real people is strengthened by the protagonists' similarities to their creators. O'Brien has even given one of his characters his own name and status as the fictional author behind *The Things They Carried*. Nick Adams is in the same way revealed to be the fictional author behind *In Our Time*. By providing their characters with similar traits to themselves, O'Brien and Hemingway give the reader an illusion that they act, feel, and think what their characters do. Arguably, through their fictional, yet seemingly real characters, O'Brien and Hemingway are able to express their personal trauma. They are also able to return to the war, over and over, and change the events and people involved as they please. Additionally, their texts are able to deceive the reader by giving the impression that they are representative of the authors' attitudes. As will be discussed in relation to *Farewell,* a narrator's impersonal and detached approach can give the impression that he is indifferent to ethics and moral, as well as to the fate of his characters.

Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* provides a highly relevant concept of trauma studies when it comes to literary representation. He describes the trauma victim's inclination to a "repetition compulsion", which refers to how the traumatized may experience an obsessive need to return to the site of trauma to reenact the event which they cannot truly internalize or leave behind (Freud, 2003a, pp. 162-164). This return does not have to be in a physical sense. In relation to literary trauma, the repetition compulsion represents a paradox: on the one hand, compulsive repetition is a symptom and indication of severe trauma. On the other hand, repetition could be a way for the subject to move beyond trauma and mastering it by returning to its site in a prepared state. The mind could then be able to process and integrate the past experience completely in the present (Barnaby, 2018, p. 23). Repetition and return to the site of trauma, which is an important part of Hemingway's and O'Brien's literature, can be understood as either part of the solution for trauma victims, or an involuntary reenactment of the consciousness. Contemporary trauma theory views the

symptoms of Freud's repetition compulsion, commonly associated with features of the modernist style, as contradicting catharsis (Steffens, 2018, p. 39). According to Freud, memory must win over obsessive repetition if a trauma victim is ever to recover (Freud, 2003a, p. 162). This provides a problem to my argument, as veterans' obsessive writing about their wars might be understood as merely a symptom of their inherent trauma.

Accordingly, it might be difficult to view fiction like *Farewell,* with its tragic ending, as a healing narrative. Trevor Dodman has explored how the novel challenges the tendency to assume that all narratives are healing (Dodman, 2006). After all, *Farewell* is a story about how traumatic experiences that injure the body also injure the mind. The shattering of Frederic's self cannot be fixed by narrating it, as his wounds, physical and mental, leave him unable to express his experiences (Dodman, 2006, p. 250). Considering the historicity of treatment, ranging from Freudian psychoanalysis to PTSD, the ability to express and process the traumatic experience is crucial to recovery. If one is not able to do so, the outlook for healing is bleak. As we will see, Hemingway's own inability to write and express himself became an additional factor to his inherent trauma. Still, the outlook for recovery within trauma studies is generally optimistic, depending on adequate processing of the event.

The paradox, which I introduce myself, is that the contents of the trauma narratives do not necessarily have to be historically accurate in order to express something true about the nature of the trauma experienced. By their way of creating coherency and meaning, trauma narratives may confirm that life is itself a creative, meaningful process. This meaning is also accessible for the reader. That is what Harold Krebs in Hemingway's short story "Soldier's Home" hopes for when he reads history books in an attempt to make sure that his contribution to the war mattered. In similar terms, philosopher Richard Kearny (quoted in Barnaby, 2018, pp. 34, 35) argues that narrative might be a way for trauma victims to reconstruct a moral identity by clarifying temporal experience. By facing painful truths, those able to create a

narrative self are those especially capable of responding in an ethically responsible fashion, because a narrative understanding of the self, the other, and the world, enables them to see life as a continuous moral act. Fiction contributes to this understanding and even if the narrative does not portray actual events, it contributes to how we construct and understand our lives. Frederic's trauma narrative in *Farewell* might therefor be healing after all, even if he is not able to articulate or access what has *really* happened.

Like the literary characters in Hemingway's and O'Brien's texts, trauma victims may struggle to find meaning in what they have seen and done, sometimes resorting to "alternative truths" to do so. As will be elaborated on below, this process is referred to as *responsive myth building,* and might make one's reality more bearable (Wood, 2020, p. 137). As this process borders on suppression, it must be treated with caution. This balancing act is especially considered in relation to O'Brien's character John Wade who takes his myth building too far.

In addition to functioning as a vessel for expressions of trauma, the structure of fiction has important similarities with the nature of trauma. Storyteller Katherine Ann Porter cited in Barnaby (2018, p. 33), emphasizes the way fiction treats consequences and aftermath. As trauma can be considered a temporal process in which the present struggles to come to terms with a past unassimilated into memory and understanding, the goal of trauma therapy is to make sense of this unassimilated past in the present. Porter points out that although it is possible to give an accurate account of something that has happened before one knows the consequences, it would be pointless writing that story. The end of a story, however, with tangible consequences, is to her the best starting point for a narrative. Thus, a writer functions almost like a patient or an analyst, as they know what every action means and where it leads (Barnaby, 2018, p. 33). This points to the therapeutic function of writing about traumatic experiences, as it might clarify the connection between action, consequence, and coincidence.

Arguably, the understanding of consequences that therapeutic writing provides may just as easily be found in constructed narrative and fiction as historical writing.

The representation of wartime trauma has been a concern for American war writers for the past hundred years (Farrell, 2017a, p. 3). According to Susan Farrell's *Imagining Home, American War Fiction from Hemingway to 9/11,* an especially big concern has been whether language is adequate when representing inexpressible happenings. In that case, therapeutic writing would prove a great challenge for the author, and even more so for the reader, as trauma would not be adequately conveyed or understood by either party. However, listing historical facts may not be the best way to represent trauma and war, as emotions, although unstable and untrustworthy, may paint a truer picture in terms of subjective experience. As O'Brien puts it: "It comes down to gut instinct. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 49). Deconstruction's view on language's incapacity to represent the real world is relevant here. Although facts may provide chronology and structure to the events of the story, they are not able to reveal the hidden truths of trauma. Facts can also be disagreed upon. Hemingway claims in the introduction to *Men at War,* for instance, that facts can be observed badly, but when a writer is creating something, he has "time and scope to make it of an absolute truth" (Hemingway, 1955, p. xiv). Similarly, O'Brien writes stories that contradict themselves, and place more emphasis on ambiguity than chronology of events (Robinson, 1999, p. 258). This ambiguity is perhaps the most urgent truth about his war experiences.

One of the ways in which O'Brien's ambiguity emerges is through his characters' perception. Whereas Hemingway's characters never question their own perception, or the factuality of their memories, O'Brien's characters sometimes seem unable to distinguish between truth and imagination. In addition to being an important marker of trauma, this distinction explains differences between the modernist and the postmodernist view on truth.

Frederic's story is, for the most part coherent, while in *The Things They Carried* fragmentation is brought to the fore of the story. Where modernism was dedicated to building coherent theories about all the new information available in science, philosophy and psychology, postmodernism rejected the authority of these ideas. In addition, postmodernists rejected the notion of authority itself, and maybe most characteristically questioned all objective perceptions of truth (Malpas, 1992, p. 288).

In an attempt to come to terms with the trauma and horrors of the First and Second World War, postmodernism lost complete faith in progress and truth itself. Accordingly, postmodernism has been criticized for promoting arbitrary, apolitical, amoral and nihilist worldviews. These are traits we can recognize in O'Brien's texts. Conversely, I argue that the arbitrariness, amorality, and nihilism available in the text emphasize the characters' trauma and are crucial to conveying traumatic experience. History in the modern and postmodern age, although concerning itself with objective truths, can be seen as a game of interpretation. This is one of the reasons why trauma-narratives play an important role in our responses to trauma in the real world.

Too great a concern with the authenticity of literature may contribute to other pitfalls in addition to the risk of boredom and unsuccessful communication with the reader. One example is Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), where he attempts to write a "true" book to see whether it can compete with fiction. Edmund Wilson judges this attempt quite harshly, claiming it to be an attempt to "exhibit himself while writing fiction" (Wilson, 2005, p. 232). Accordingly, this attempt makes Hemingway look artificial. By sticking to what really happened, the typical characters and incidents that give meaning to a work of fiction are lost. As will be discussed in relation to O'Brien's meta-fictional "How to Tell a True War Story", there are evident similarities, pointing to the fact that when attempting to stay completely honest, some of the truth is in fact lost. Truth, to Hemingway and O'Brien, seems

to lie to a greater extent in the subjective reactions and emotions of the fictional characters, which are reproduced in the reader, than in clear-cut truisms and facts. Hemingway's works appear skeptical to the role these emotions play in healing from trauma. As will be discussed in relation to *Farewell,* emotions as well as human relations appear inauthentic in Hemingway's fiction.

Although there is no consensus on the best way to treat trauma, there is a general perception that healing from it follows a quite predictable pattern. Providing safety is key, as is allowing the victim to "work through" their experiences (LaLonde, 2018, p. 197). To acknowledge the past and remember it are also important steps which can be facilitated by literary resources of testimony and literary criticism's capacity to "read the wound". Grief is also important, and literature's capacity for melancholy and sadness suggests ways of dealing with trauma which from a Freudian perspective would be considered "healthy mourning", as opposed to pathological melancholy (LaLonde, 2018, p. 204). Literary trauma narratives do not have to reflect real events in order to provide healing and reintegration as long as they can speak truly about certain emotions and experiences. Additionally, trauma narratives may provide relief for the reader, as long as it enables them to have healthy, emotional reactions to profound events.

It is evident that the field of trauma studies enables us to discern the relationship between the authors' trauma and their texts. Arguably, as I draw on the work of biographers who see a relationship between war experiences and the authors' trauma, this relationship can be discussed without resorting to mere speculation concerning whether writing did help Hemingway and O'Brien in processing the trauma present in their own lives. As one of them committed suicide in the end, one would expect a rather bleak outcome from this approach. I argue, however, that veteran fiction can be read as an attempt to reestablish a sense of agency, control, and comprehension, which can further help others in taking control of their own

narratives. At worst, the veteran fiction I discuss is merely an expression of repetition compulsion and authors never able to leave their wars. At best, it is the first step on the way to recovery from personal and/or collective trauma.

Chapter Two: Ernest Hemingway – Staging Trauma

"You are so brave and quiet I forget you are suffering" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 68)– Lt. Rinaldi.

Ernest Hemingway's war literature provides evidence of how literary expressions of trauma may function as a way of coping with the aftermaths of war. In this chapter I investigate Hemingway's personal trauma and how it relates to his trauma narratives. I pay attention to how trauma is expressed through his fiction and how his characters attempt to cope with their traumatic pasts. In addition, I look at how masculinity and gender expectations have influenced men's motivations for going to war, prevented trauma victims from expressing themselves as well as how trauma has reproduced and been reproduced by unhealthy gender expectations. Finally, I look at how the field of trauma studies provides insight into narrative's role in the process for coping.

Arguably the most famous writer of the 20th century, Hemingway and his works have since his debut in the literary scene been a topic of both praise and controversy. As one of several early 20th century American writers who achieved worldwide fame in his own lifetime, Hemingway's life has become somewhat of a myth, often indistinguishable from his literary works. He is remembered as "Papa", the hunter, the fisherman, the bullfighter, the womanizer, the sportsman, the big drinker, and of course: the warrior. His far from uneventful life has resulted in him being equated to an original macho man (Ferry, 2020).

Due to Hemingway's representations of a 'man's world', he has been accused of chauvinism and misogyny, while also being criticized for glorifying violence. Surviving two world wars (in addition to the Greco-Turkish war (1922), The Spanish Civil War (1937) and the Sino-Japanese War (1941)(Fenton, 1995, pp. xxxii-xxxvi)), several marriages, two plane crashes and a lifetime filled with drink, adventure, and trauma, it is no wonder that the name

Hemingway has come to equal, not only a sparse writing style and literary success, but also rigid codes of masculinity and heroism building on now outdated gender ideals. Certain scholars (like Judith Fetterley) have branded him as obsolete, arguing that his writing feeds outdated gender binaries and reinforces unhealthy notions of masculinity (Mazzeno, 2015, p. 104). These notions are closely connected to "The Hemingway Code", referring to a code of masculinity building on traditional gender expectations, often equated with Hemingway's own macho image (Ferry, 2020, p. 73). Regardless of the countless approaches available when interpreting literature, I argue that rereading Hemingway through the lens of trauma studies enables us to see that some of the meaning in his works is in fact lost if one neglects the importance of the trauma it portrays.

Hemingway's Trauma

In order to approach the trauma available in Hemingway's fiction, it is helpful to take a look at the events and injuries that triggered the trauma in his own life. As we will see, the ways in which trauma manifested in Hemingway's own life accord well with the Freudian-inflected trauma theory introduced initially. Even if Hemingway's genetic disposition has been interpreted as a possible prerequisite for his severe combat trauma, the war remains at the core of the expressions of trauma available in his literature.

In 1918, when the First World War began to draw to a close, Hemingway joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver and was sent to Italy. Due to bad eyesight, his approaches to join the US Army, Navy, and Marine Corps had all been rejected. At the Piave, he was caught in an Austrian mortar attack during an alleged rescue mission, where two Italian soldiers were killed next to him. Hemingway escaped with a severe concussion and shrapnel damage to his legs and was later decorated by both the Italian and the US governments for

bravery. Hemingway was only nineteen years old (Fenton, 1995, p. xxx). As accounted for by Wood (2020, p. 130), Hemingway wrote to his sister from the hospital in Milan where he recovered from being peppered by 227 pieces of shrapnel: “I can’t work. I’m too shot up and my nerves are all jagged”. Apparently, his inability to write can be considered a severe part of his trauma.

It was at the hospital in Milan that he first met Agnes Von Kurowsky whom inspired the character Catherine Barkley in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway, who was rejected by Von Kurowsky, had to return to Oak Park, Illinois, alone, heartbroken and suffering from nightmares and insomnia. After spending some time there, drinking and writing, he travelled around Europe with Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. During the postwar period he also worked as a correspondent who covered the Greek-Turkish war and interviewed Benito Mussolini. His fascination for the violent and bloody sport of bullfighting was also awakened around this time (Fenton, 1995, p. xxx).

In 1924 the short story collection *In Our Time* was published, achieving critical acclaim in the United States. *A Farewell to Arms* was published five years later, in 1929, a year after Hemingway’s mentally ill father committed suicide (Fenton, 1995, pp. xxx-xxxii). Both *Farewell* and many of the short stories and vignettes in *In Our Time* concern the First World War.

Despite still struggling with nightmares and insomnia, Hemingway was not finished with adventure, and volunteered to cover the Spanish Civil War. When the Second World War broke out, he officially served as a civilian war correspondent but actively participated in warfare, breaking with the Geneva agreement. His involvement included chasing Nazi submarines off the coast of Cuba, as well as participating in the D-Day landings at Omaha beach in Normandy in June 1944 (Greenspan, 2019, p. 63).

As we will see, Hemingway's personal trauma manifested in ways that accord well with the trauma theory introduced in chapter one. On July 2nd, 1961, he committed suicide. Before this, Hemingway had been reluctant to discuss his mental and physical struggles, amongst which were nine concussions, shrapnel damage, many broken bones and organ damage stemming from his heavy drinking. Additionally, Hemingway and his fourth wife Mary Hemingway were badly injured in two plane crashes—on two consecutive days — whilst on safari in Africa. Hemingway suffered a raptured kidney, spleen and liver, a collapsed lower intestine, a full concussion including double vision and loss of vision in his left eye as well as loss of hearing in his left ear. He also experienced first degree burns on his face, arms, and head, and two crushed vertebrae. The brain damage would later manifest in violence, paranoia, and threats of suicide (Wood, 2020, pp. 130, 131). Similar to his earlier hospitalization in Milan, and arguably worst of all, he lost his ability to write well. Even if trauma has already been established as a psychological injury, it is clear that it triggers concrete physical symptoms.

Hemingway's personal mental and physical decay have been connected to his family's history of depression, as well as his own alcoholism and physical injuries. Although Hemingway's medical file was never released to the public, it is widely known that he was treated for depression with electroconvulsive therapy (ETC) between 1960-61. His symptoms of depression, however, worsened after the treatment, at a time where it was estimated to improve conditions in 90 percent of the patients (Wood, 2020, p. 134). Despite ETC's rather controversial reputation due to its early use without anesthesia, it proved effective at tackling depression during the period before antidepressants became the standard method of treatment ("Electroconvulsive therapy (ETC),").

Andrew Farah, author of the 2017 book *Hemingway's Brain,* diagnoses Hemingway with brain trauma, alcoholic dementia, depression, and chronic traumatic encephalopathy

(CTE), due to the lack of improvement from ETC (Farah, 2017b). The latter is a neurodegenerative disease affecting individuals who have suffered repeated head-impact injuries (Wood, 2020, p. 134). CTE is often observed in boxers, and much like in the boxer Ad Francis in Hemingway's short story "The Battler", it manifests as mood swings, violence, dementia, and suicidality (Hemingway, 2015a).

In "Ernest Hemingway: A Psychological Autopsy of Suicide", Christopher D. Martin (2006, p. 351) suggests similar conditions, such as alcoholism, hypertension, hemochromatosis, depression, bipolar mood-disorder, chronic alcoholism, use of prescription drugs that increased said depression, in addition to traumatic brain injuries. Together, these symptoms lead to what Martin reads as chronic suicidality, and his article has become a standard medical interpretation of Hemingway's symptoms. Andrew Farah (2017a, pp. 46, 47) further suggests that Hemingway's bipolar disease was passed on from his father (and possibly mother), and further on to Hemingway's youngest son.

It is, however, important to emphasize that Hemingway's ills were not merely genetic, but rather that his combat trauma combined with genetic loads resulted in his poor mental health. Scholars also note that his childhood was characterized by corporal punishment and argue that this physical abuse contributed to Hemingway's poor mental health. His documented childhood paternal murder fantasy is also discussed as providing a feeling of guilt after his father's suicide. Additionally, Hemingway's famous hypermasculinity has been explained as a compensation for identity struggles and difficulties with interpersonal relationships (Wood, 2020, p. 133).

Other traumatic events in Hemingway's life have also been explored from the approach of trauma studies. In addition to the troubled relationship with his parents and physical injuries, this includes the theft of his manuscripts at Gare de Lyon in 1922, his hypermasculinity and his fascination for violence. The impacts of this unfortunate cocktail of

ills may have produced symptoms of dementia over time, which again may have made it difficult for Hemingway to write. The abovementioned diagnoses accord with the literary critics who have investigated the impact of trauma on Hemingway's life and work (Wood, 2020, p. 135).

From the perspective of trauma studies, trauma may initiate a creative process of "coping", which is an important aspect of my thesis moving forward. This coping mechanism involves necessary dissociations for minimizing or controlling trauma in one's life and is closely tied to narrative. In Hemingway's case, the disparaging depictions of his mother Grace Hemingway can be interpreted as an example of how the idea of a mother as simply evil is easier to handle than mere rejection (Wood, 2020, pp. 137, 138). As mentioned earlier, the field of trauma studies defines this type of coping mechanism as *responsive myth building* (Wood, 2020, p. 137). Below, I argue that the process of responsive myth building is an important asset in both Hemingway and O'Brien's (coping) narratives. Although the myths built may have little to do with facts, they speak loudly and honestly about trauma and how trauma victims resort to dealing with it. As so much of Hemingway's fiction can be said to concern trauma, I argue that this aspect needs to be considered in order to fully grasp the meaning of his works.

This brief review of Hemingway's trauma may increase understanding as to why the wounded body and mind remain at the core of his literature. His injuries gave him something to write about and a cause to write about it. The knowledge and mature understanding of trauma which Hemingway exhibits so convincingly in his literature is beyond the age of a teenage boy. Yet, his first-hand acquaintance with death as well as rejection, gave him a unique insight into the darker aspects of life. Many of these aspects are evident in *A Farewell to Arms* and *In Our Time*, which I explore below.

Manifestations of Trauma *in A Farewell to Arms* and *In Our Time*

In the following subchapter I investigate how trauma is expressed in *A Farewell to Arms* and *In Our Time.* In *Farwell* I pay particular attention to how it manifests in Frederic Henry and his girlfriend/wife Catherine Barkley. Although often described as a love story, *Farewell* is arguably first and foremost a tragedy with trauma at its core. From the point of view of the narrator and protagonist Frederic Henry, the novel portrays what it was like to experience the First World War in Italy, as well as what living in constant uncertainty does to the characters involved. They adapt to the ever-looming horror and the constant sensation of having barely "cheated death". Despite their dire circumstances the characters must continue to live. Thus, they indulge in the pleasures still available in Europe: alcohol, sardonic humor, flirting with nurses, and intense, yet brief flashes of normality, love, and friendship.

Frederic in particular is provided with some of the loads we know Hemingway struggled with. He suffers from flashbacks, nightmares, and insomnia, in addition to having trouble adjusting socially, as evident in his shallow relationship with Catherine. He even incurs jaundice due to what his nurse calls his "alcoholism", after she finds a stack of empty brandy bottles hidden in his bedroom (Hemingway, 2016, p. 150). From the approach of trauma studies and Freudian theory, these are all textbook examples of traumatic symptoms, stemming from unprocessed traumatic experiences. Taking scholars Wael Salam and Othman Abualadas' paper "Trauma Theory: No "Separate Peace" for Ernest Hemingway's "Hard-Boiled" Characters", into account, they may also pose as examples of 'impossible history' (2017).

The 'impossible history' theory suggests, in similarity with Freudian theory, that a trauma victim has experienced something beyond the normal realm of human experience which they are not able to process like a normal event. Instead, the victim has access to said experience only involuntarily through intrusive nightmares and flashbacks (Salam &

Abualadas, 2017, p. 97). By tracing such manifestations of 'impossible history' it is possible to see how the traumatized literary characters in Hemingway's texts struggle with a history that haunts them both when awake and asleep. Frederic's narrative for example, shows signs of shell shock from the very start. His heavy drinking combined with nightmares and flashbacks contribute to this theory.

The most obvious example of a traumatic event is when Frederic, like Hemingway, is wounded in Italy. The nightmares and insomnia Frederic struggles with after being wounded may not be a consequence of the traumatic event per se if one is to accept Salam & Abualadas' trauma theory (2017, p. 97). Instead, the traumatic symptoms he experiences may stem from him not being able to access and witness the event afterwards. This explains why he is forced to relive his combat trauma through involuntary recollections and nightmares.

A striking feature about the paragraph where Frederic is wounded is the way in which the he narrates the event retrospectively: "Through the other noise I heard a cough, then came the chuh-chuh-chuh-chuh-then there was a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 57). Where Hemingway is usually straightforward and to the point, this section merely describes fragmented impressions of light, sound, and sensation. Instead of registering what is happening, Frederic experiences a sensation of his soul leaving his body: "I tried to breathe, but my breath would not come, and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 57). A register of what has actually happened is not available in the text, pointing to Frederic not being able to fully register it. Correspondingly, the narrator Frederic struggles with conveying the experience when writing about it retrospectively.

Hemingway further provides certain distractions from the story of Frederic's wounding. As illustrated initially in the chapter, trauma studies enable us to see how

Frederic's trauma destabilizes him. As evident in *Farewell*, he is aware of what trauma does to a person: "the world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry" (Hemingway, 2016, pp. 262, 263). The shattering of Frederic's body and self is, however, not the most prominent tragedy available in the narrative when compared to Catherine's and the baby's deaths. According to Wood (2020, p. 139), the loss of Catherine and the baby is merely designed to disguise Frederic's trauma, which is the *real* tragedy in the novel.

To the same extent as *Farewell,* the short story collection *In Our Time* (1924) carries many portrayals of traumatic events. Although I investigate how the short story "Soldier's Home" portrays the war experiences of its protagonist Harold Krebs, my focus lies mainly on the Nick Adams-stories concerning the trauma stemming from his childhood and his First World War-experiences. In the same way that I have investigated Frederic's trauma, the following sections look at how Nick Adams and Harold Krebs are exposed to trauma.

Like Hemingway, Nick Adams is initiated in trauma at an early age. This trauma haunts him through all the Nick Adams-stories available in *In Our Time* (and in the two additional Nick Adams-stories "Now I Lay Me" in *Men without Women* (1927) and "A Way You'll Never Be" from *Winner Take Nothing* (1933)). The short story "Indian Camp", which will be thoroughly discussed later, can be said to describe one of these initiation sessions in detail, where the boy Nick is introduced to the brutalities of the world. The horrors and fears he faces during the war, including being shot and watching his friends die, can be said to be a continuation of his childhood trauma.

For Nick, the trauma of the First World War is reflected in the ways in which his life back in Michigan is portrayed. The Michigan woods, as described in "Big Two-Hearted

River", contain traits of violence and unease that echo the war. Arguably, the more explicitly violent short story "Indian Camp", where Nick's father performs a caesarian with a jack-knife and no anesthetics on a Native American mother, as well as the suicide of the woman's husband in the upper bunk, is not necessarily a crueler story than the apparently idyllic fishing trip in "Big Two-Hearted River". The detached, yet detailed description of the brutal way Nick treats his live bait and the fish, reminds us of the way his father uses a jack-knife on the Native American mother and sews her up with "tapered gut leaders" in "Indian Camp"(Hemingway, 2015e, p. 43): "Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the slim hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last segments of his abdomen" (Hemingway, 2015c, p. 155). The way in which Nick refers to the grasshopper as a "him" and not an "it", awakens sympathy for the insect within the reader. So does his use of the words "thorax" and "abdomen", which are usually associated with human body parts. Maybe Nick learned these words from his father the doctor, or maybe he did during the war. Either way, the uncanniness brought by the scientific descriptions mirrors the unease found in the woods, which again reflects how Nick brings the war and his wartime trauma with him on a seemingly peaceful fishing trip.

The consequences of Nick's trauma can be found in the way he seems unable to enjoy the peace and harmony of nature. The brutality of life is always beneath the surface and entangles with his favorite hobbies: fishing and drinking. As Edmund Wilson puts it: "the condition of life is pain; and the joys of the most innocent surface are somehow tied to its stifled pangs" (2005, p. 228). The past, and the pains Nick has endured, permeate the present, no matter how peaceful it may seem. However far from the war and its horrors, Nick is aware that the brutality of the world is everywhere. In comparison to this brutality, he feels inadequate. As discussed in chapter one, this feeling of inadequacy is an essential factor in

Freud's interpretation of trauma, and influences Nick's perception of the woods and the world around him.

The language and aesthetics Hemingway applies to the story are important in his staging of trauma, as it shows how the aesthetics of fiction may imitate the structure of trauma. Seeing as Nick has been seriously wounded, his traumatic memories are not unexpected. Dr. Charles Coleman diagnoses Nick with a traumatic brain injury, which in many cases lead victims to create different types of cerebral timelines. Sometimes such timelines are expressed as short vignettes of fragmented images, speech, action, soundtracks, words, and associated odors (Salam & Abualadas, 2017, p. 98). Hemingway formatted *In Our Time* so as to separate each short story from the next by incorporating vignettes. One of these vignettes contain the event where Nick is shot (Hemingway, 2015d). Other vignettes are about bullfighting, something that can be closely associated with wartime violence. By structuring his short story collection this way, Hemingway creates a timeline more similar to the structure of traumatic memories. The vignettes and short stories jump back and forth between Nick's childhood and adolescence, his wartime experiences, skiing- and fishing-trips, bullfighting, and Nick's life after the war. Sometimes the stories are not even about Nick, even if he occupies the position of the work's narrator. In that way Hemingway's choice of literary form imitates Nick's trauma in a way that might contribute to a greater understanding of his struggles with navigating between memories, associations, past, and present.

The trauma of Hemingway's characters' stems from, not only in the traumatic event itself, but also its belated return as flashbacks, nightmares, and visions (Crocq & Crocq, 2000). Sometimes the memory of a traumatic event is even more frightening than the event itself due to its belatedness, as illustrated by Nick in "A Way You'll Never Be". Here, he

describes, in a stream of consciousness technique, how a flashback or a nightmare is even more disturbing than a traumatic event:

> Now he was back here at the river, he had gone through that same town, and there was no house. Nor was the river that way. Then where did he go each night and what was the peril, and why would he wake, soaking wet, more frightened than he had ever been in a bombardment, because of a house and a long stable and a canal? (Hemingway, 2015h, p. 316)

Nick does not know why this memory frightens him so, or why he is more afraid of the house than he is of the front. Arguably, the memory triggers something he is unable to access, and it is the incomprehensibility that frightens him, explaining how unprocessed and unnarratable experiences lead to trauma. The description of this flashback additionally reflects how symptoms of PTSD often do not manifest until years after the traumatic event. Although Hemingway's stories were written more than fifty years before the official PTSD-diagnosis was introduced in the United States, it is evident that the symptoms his characters struggle with accord well with both Freudian inflected trauma theory and PTSD. The ways in which trauma symptoms are made available through Hemingway's fiction, contribute to the reader becoming more emotionally amenable when it comes to understanding trauma than they would have been just by reading the list of symptoms.

Coping with Trauma and the Inadequacy of Language

After being exposed to trauma, Hemingway's characters try to cope with it in different ways. They all attempt to escape their trauma through mental or physical distractions and pretense. They also resort to mental or written narratives as a way of making sense of their past and present. As we will see in the following subchapter, the effectiveness of their coping

mechanisms varies and is closely tied to an understanding of language as inadequate when it comes to articulating traumatic experiences.

Although it seems like Frederic has the commitment to access and articulate his traumatic memories to some extent (he did after all attempt to write about them), it does not seem like time has made it easier for him to communicate his experiences. This is an important insight regarding trauma, as most experiences in life can be articulated to some degree. Dori Laub argues in "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Learing" that trauma victims fear knowledge of their traumatic history. One of the reasons they might not be able or willing to put their memories into words is because they fear that "fate will strike again" (Laub, 1992, p. 67). In that case, Frederic's subconscious might prevent him from remembering, as a way of protecting his self from the traumatic truth and ensuing re-traumatization. And yet, in spite of the realization that he cannot convey his trauma or put the story coherently together for himself, let alone for others, Frederic attempts to find a language that makes it possible.

Simultaneously, a part of Frederic seems to consciously want to suppress the entire experience or disguise it behind humoristic language. When he is recovering at the hospital in Milan and is asked by his friend Lt. Rinaldi to account for the "heroic act" causing his injury, he answers: "I was blown up while we were eating cheese" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 67). The immediate impression is that he is hiding the seriousness of the situation behind banter, quite like people suffering from dementia try to hide their failing memory behind jokes. Or he might be acting tough. As the novel proceeds, he becomes reluctant to read the newspaper, because he wants to "forget the war". According to Frederic, he has already made his "separate peace" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 256), regardless of what might be happening at the front.

To Caruth (1995, pp. 5, 6) ‘impossible history’ breaks with the linearity of history. Accordingly, Laub (1992, p. 57) claims that traumatized individuals often have no comprehension, knowledge, or memory of what has happened. When it comes to Frederic’s wounding accounted for above, this theory explains why the way it is described challenges traditional modes of narration. Frederic tries to explain what has happened in the best way he can: through portrayal of sounds, images, and sensory impressions. Later, Catherine asks Frederic to tell her about him being wounded. He replies that he will, “if I get it straight in my head” (Hemingway, 2016, p. 263). He has not, in other words, been able to process the event and struggles with conveying it properly. Already at the beginning of the novel, before we know about Frederic’s injuries, the narrator reveals that something keeps defying his efforts to narrate the war experience properly: “I tried to tell about the night and the difference between the night and the day and how the night was better unless the day was very clean and cold and I could not tell it; as I cannot tell it now” (Hemingway, 2016, p. 14). This way of narrating the story disrupts the chronology of events, and Frederic’s trauma is available beneath the surface from the very start of the novel.

These examples all point to a character unable to process and narrate his trauma sufficiently, even if he attempts to communicate it through narrative. In addition to expressing his mind’s inadequate capacity to remember what has happened, the description of his wounding may be read as commenting upon language’s shortcomings when it comes to expressing traumatic memories. Here, the deconstruction strand of trauma studies is equally fitting for explaining the gaps and holes in the narrative as the ‘impossible history’-theory is. The lack of faith in language is evident in the way Frederic refuses to talk about his traumatic experiences, as well as in the way the doctor acknowledges that “there’s nothing to say” after Catherine’s death (Hemingway, 2016, p. 348). When Frederic says goodbye to her later, he

admits that “it was like saying goodbye to a statue” (Hemingway, 2016, p. 348). Words are, in other words, insufficient.

For the reader, the insight derived from Frederic’s struggles with narrating his experiences is key when reading the text from a trauma perspective. In line with Hartman’s deconstructive approach to trauma theory, such a reading can contribute to readers becoming more equipped to acknowledge the impact of trauma, although language in itself is insufficient in making them fully understand it (1995). It is precisely the characters’ *problems* with communicating trauma that strengthen the reader’s understanding of trauma, which in its nature is difficult, if not impossible, to fully articulate. A solution to this challenge is provided if the reader is able to emotionally connect with the text.

In *Farewell,* the alienation and inauthenticity that many trauma-survivors experience are visible in the relationships between the characters, making the consequences and their ways of coping with trauma more tangible for the reader. From a trauma studies’ perspective, it becomes obvious that Catherine and Frederic feel powerless in the face of the war that surrounds them. The adaption to a traumatic reality takes its toll on them and their trauma is the reason they are not convincing as human personalities. In that way *Farewell* portrays individuals who are in fact actors in their own narratives. In order to maintain some normality, and some interpersonal relationships in the middle of a traumatic reality, they must pretend. Their world, accordingly, appears inauthentic. It seems like the trauma Frederic and Catherine have experienced has taken away their personalities and replaced them with scripts telling them how they are *expected* to act as lovers. Their relationship is thus merely an idealized abstraction in a larger narrative portraying the personal cost of war. If the trauma in these scenes is neglected, I argue that it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the full meaning of the novel. As an example, Catherine speaks to Frederic in a superficial and “light” way even when she is in labor, struggling with severe birth complications: “I am not going to

die now, darling. I'm past where I was going to die. Aren't you glad?". "Oh no. I won't die. I wouldn't die. It's silly to die" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 334). This scene only emphasizes the artificiality of their relationship.

In "Big Two-Hearted River" Nick attempts to suppress everything that is not the present in order to cope with his trauma. He distracts himself from his shortcomings, his memories, and his imagination, by resorting to physical labor and carries out tasks as if he were back in France and his life depended on it. By focusing on his primary needs, such as providing food, fire, and shelter, he manages to keep his thoughts and memories at bay. He convinces himself that he is happy but subtly admits that this changes once he runs out of things to do. This is illustrated below in Hemingway's typically sparse writing style:

> He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. It had been a hard trip. He was very tired. That was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry. (Hemingway, 2015b, p. 148)

Because "things were done" and Nick seems to be running out of distractions, an unease sneaks up on him. As a way of responding, Nick finds a new distraction: he is hungry and must prepare food.

Many survivors of trauma find it difficult to think or talk about their experiences (Vernon, 2004b, p. 63). It is no wonder then, that the war is never mentioned in "Big Two-Hearted River". Yet, the violence of the world is ever-present in the descriptions and portrayals of Nick's rigid determination *not* to think about it. To some extent, he is doing exactly what Hemingway called "the greatest gift a soldier can acquire" in his novel *Men at War* (1942), namely the ability to suppress the imagination and live completely in the present without thought of past or future (Hemingway, 1955, p. xxiv): "Worrying does no good." "A

good soldier does not worry. He knows that nothing happens until it actually happens, and you live your life up until then. Danger only exists in the moment of danger" (Hemingway, 1955, p. xxiv). Despite this statement however, Hemingway's narratives do the exact opposite. Since the war is still discernible in a short story where it is never mentioned, it becomes obvious that the war and the past continue to permeate, color, and reshape Nick's reality in the same way that it shaped Hemingway's artistic representation.

As revealed in "Now I Lay Me", Nick, like Frederic, fears the night ever since he got "blown up"(Hemingway, 2015b). As Nick and his fellow soldier John try to catch some sleep in a room somewhere in France during the war, Nick's struggle with sleep is pulled to the front of the story. As he lies there, Nick reflects upon his fear of the dark and believes that his soul will leave his body if he falls asleep: "I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body" (Hemingway, 2015f; 2016, p. 274).

Like in "Big Two-Hearted River", Nick escapes into nature as a way of distracting himself from his intrusive memories, although in "Now I Lay Me" this escape happens only inside his head:

> I had different ways of occupying myself while I lay awake. I would think of a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy and fish its whole length very carefully in my mind; fishing carefully under all the logs, all the turns of the bank, the deep holes and the clear shallow stretches, sometimes catching trout and sometimes losing them. (Hemingway, 2015f; 2016, p. 274)

Escaping the aftermath of trauma does not have to be a physical thing. On the contrary, imagination is presented as a way out of trauma—if only temporarily.

In "Soldiers Home", Harold Krebs, like Frederic and Nick, experiences belated trauma, closely tied to the PTSD-diagnosis introduced earlier. Krebs does not return from his

marine enlistment until 1919. By then, the greetings of heroes are over, and people seem to think it is rather ridiculous to return so late (Hemingway, 2015g, p. 87). By the time he is ready to talk about his experiences, nobody wants to listen. The town has already heard so many atrocious stories that they are no longer "thrilled by actualities" (Hemingway, 2015g, p. 87). Krebs resorts to lying and attributing things to himself that others have done, but as not even these stories are sensational enough, he develops a distaste for the war and the things he has done. The memories which had previously given him a sense of pride, lose their value and he becomes nauseated as a result of his "lies and exaggeration" (Hemingway, 2015g, p. 88). Talking about his memories, in Krebs' experience, makes them lose their value.

An important insight gained from "Soldier's Home" is how it comments upon many things at the same time: all related to trauma. Krebs attempts to rediscover the purpose in his life by telling himself stories that give meaning to his reality and make it easier to cope with. According to these narratives, he has been a good soldier and he is doing fine on his own. In addition, his story comments upon the lack of understanding from those who had been safely at home, especially women, which results in a feeling of indifference or even resentment towards them. Additionally, the short story shows lack of faith in the concept of confiding in somebody or articulating one's story in the first place.

Finally, Krebs' trauma renders him unable to connect with people in general. This is an important factor in his belated trauma. To be heard and understood is crucial in order to connect with other people. For Krebs it is too complicated to find a girl, as he feels isolated from the outside world. He is also afraid that he will have to talk about what has happened if he gets close to somebody (Hemingway, 2015g, p. 90). In addition, Krebs keeps telling himself that he does not really need a girl, making his feelings of isolation and loneliness easier to live with. The inability to connect with other people further manifests in the relationship between Krebs and his mother. When she asks him if he loves her, he answers

"no", adding "I don't love anybody" (Hemingway, 2015g, p. 92). Just like Hemingway attempted to hide his mental illness, Krebs finds it easier to shut people out than to try to explain himself to them.

By commenting on how the people of Oklahoma were reluctant to listen to Krebs' experiences, Hemingway puts part of the blame on the "ignorant" home front that did not want to know the truth about war. The war stories had to be grander and more atrocious than previously heard, and even then, the people at home would not listen. The simple truth would not suffice in conveying the horrors of war to an unwilling audience, and Krebs never gets the chance to express himself or reintegrate properly. The story thus shows little faith in the healing powers of language. Arguably, Hemingway's characters' reluctance and inability to talk also the author's expounding of the restrictions put on soldiers, many shaped by contemporary notions of masculinity, as explored in the following subchapter.

Language, both in conversation and in literature cannot make the reader experience trauma in its literal form. I argue, however, that Hemingway's literature is able to provide a broader understanding and acknowledgment of trauma as it enables the reader to connect emotionally with the text and its characters. Fiction possesses a unique position here, as it provides a possibility for the reader to relate to trauma victims in a way that the media, sociology, psychology, medicine, or other empirical fields are unable to. In this context, *Farewell* and *In Our Time,* as well as the other Nick Adams-stories explored above, provide important insights into the consequences and aftermaths of trauma.

Complicated Masculinity

As mentioned initially, Hemingway's portrayal of women (or lack thereof) has been observed by some feminist scholars as misogynist. For example, Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader* (1978) paints an unforgiving picture of Hemingway's representation of gender,

claiming that in the world of *Farewell* "the only good woman is a dead one" (Fetterley, 1978, p. 71). In a similar way, "Big Two-Hearted River" is all about the male experience and feminine elements and women are avoided like the swamp Nick dreads fishing in. In "Soldier's Home" too, Krebs has not the capacity or psyche to approach any women.

As we will see, the way women are avoided or negatively portrayed in Hemingway's works can be compared to how the war is never mentioned in "Big Two-Hearted River" and be seen as equally representative expressions of underlying trauma. As I have established, perceptions of and expectations to masculinity play a crucial role in men's willingness to participate in warfare. War experiences and trauma may further affect a soldier's sense of gender identity. For the male veteran this particularly applies to his masculinity, his perception of himself as a man, and by extension his general concept and experience of gender relations. This explains why Hemingway's portrayal of gender can still speak about war and trauma, even if the text does not explicitly mention these topics, or only handles them in a derogatory manner.

The following subchapter investigates how notions of masculinity urged men to war and prevented them from expressing their trauma upon their return. While discussing how trauma maintains and is maintained by unhealthy gender expectations, I also show that portrayals of rigid masculinity might be read as expressions of trauma. Finally, I argue that unsympathetic portrayals of women and female trauma may increase the reader's understanding of the role toxic masculinity has played in traumatic experience.

Considering the time Hemingway was born and raised, he would have been subjected to what we today would consider unhealthy gender expectations. This is as, we will see, visible in his literature, but also biographically as in the letter from his mother written for his nineteenth birthday as he lay recovering in Milan. Here, Grace Hemingway wrote that she rejoices to know that in the eyes of humanity her son is "every inch a man" (Vernon, 2004b,

p. 75). The relationship between trauma and perceptions of gender available in Hemingway's fiction reveals a larger set of cultural codes (Vernon, 2004b, p. 68). Hemingway's portrayal of gender may accordingly function as a witness to his cultural contemporaries and the prejudice and expectations that governed during the First World War.

As the new technology and innovations of the First World War rendered the soldiers more passive in battle than ever before, they also appeared less masculine. Mustard gas and machine guns left the soldiers incapable of fighting the enemy with mere agency and skill. Much of the time spent in the trenches consisted of waiting and enduring the shelling. This led to a psychic emasculation, as passivity first and foremost was associated with femininity or homosexuality (Vernon, 2004b, p. 74). Additionally, 'hysteria', which had been considered a female diagnosis, became a common symptom of shell shock. Although this "emasculation process" had been going on for some time before the war, Sandra M. Gilbert's essay "Soldier's Heart" portrays the emasculating horrors of war as leading to sexual anxieties and resentment directed against women (Gilbert, 1983).

A paradox arises when it comes to the close relationship between being a "man" and being a "soldier", as the war allegedly made "men" out of its soldiers but simultaneously emasculated them. This emasculation process also affected Hemingway. His own status as a soldier had been subjected to much debate, as his six weeks in Italy in 1918 hardly compared to the experiences of the soldiers in the trenches (Vernon, 2004b, p. 68). In the US during this period, the general perception was that 'real men' did not join the Red Cross. Roosevelt's proclamation in 1917, cited in Vernon (2004b, p. 69), states that "Red Cross work, […] driving ambulances and the like […] should be left to men not of military age or unfit for military service, and to women; young men of vigorous bodies and sound hearts should be left free to do their proper work in the fighting line". Frederic internalizes these values when he tells Catherine: "It's not really in the army. It's only the ambulance" (Hemingway, 2016, p.

18). A decade after the war, Magnus Hirschfeld's *The Sexual History of the World War* (1913) reported how homosexuals, transvestites and those with "feminine inclinations" were reluctant to join combat service. Instead they desired to dress up as nurses and care for the sick, responding to their female urgings (Hirschfeld, 1937, p. 139) . It is perhaps no wonder then, that Hemingway, like Krebs in "Soldier's Home" began to exaggerate his war record, preserving a more manly and heroic image of himself.

James Nagel cited in Norris (1994, p. 696) corrects the impression that Hemingway was injured while serving as an ambulance driver, when he in fact was delivering refreshments and chocolate to soldiers at the front. Hemingway's own claim that he carried a wounded Italian on his back with his own legs full of shrapnel, which he wrote home to his parents about in August 1918, cannot be confirmed with certainty. Maybe it is Hemingway's own anxieties regarding his military status the author plays upon when Rinaldi visits Frederic in the hospital, and jokingly accuses him of having sexual relations with the priest (Hemingway, 2016, p. 69). It is nevertheless clear that expectations to masculinity influenced the way men viewed themselves, the world, the war, and its women during the early 20th century, and that Hemingway proved no exception in this regard.

Considering that war and trauma contribute to one's sense of identity, and thus one's sense of gender dynamics, it would be reasonable to assume that Hemingway's portrayals of gender are directly linked to the trauma experienced by the characters. Vernon points out that while pregnancy and childbirth both embody the social expectations of the woman, military service signifies the social expectations of the man (2004b, pp. 78, 79). Whereas women can give life through childbearing, the only control men possess over life and death is through taking life. Military service, especially for the American man, symbolizes liberation from the domestic sphere and reassertion of male autonomy, while at the same time representing the ultimate obligation to, and sacrifice for, society. This sacrifice was often portrayed as cheered

on and supported wholeheartedly by the female population, and war posters and propaganda from the First World War depicted women and children calling men to war. The White Feather for cowardice was also distributed by women.

The woman can thus be understood as both a push and a pull factor in driving men to war. Just as Hemingway narrated his mother as evil instead of admitting her rejection, it must have been easier for trauma victims to build a myth where women were to blame for their traumatic experiences and compromised masculinity. It is perhaps not so strange, however misunderstood, that some resentment of the war became directed towards women. The pair had become inseparably entangled, perhaps especially in the minds of trauma victims. This further explains why Fredric in *Farewell*, like Nick in "Big Two-Hearted River", must escape domestication and all social ties in order to escape the war. And like Harold Krebs in "Soldier's Home", Frederic must renounce love (Vernon, 2004b, p. 80). Catherine dies in *Farewell*: not because the "only good woman is a dead one", but because Frederic must relinquish all social ties embodied in his wife and their child in order to escape the war. The portrayal of women in Hemingway's fiction can be said to reveal more about the male characters' cowardice and trauma than about the "traditional masculine heroism" and misogyny that Fetterley asserts.

The field of trauma studies offers further insights into the construction of gender and masculinity in Hemingway's texts. When investigating the role perceptions of gender have played in preventing soldiers from dealing with the consequences of war, this becomes closely tied to trauma. In this context, women are not only blamed for urging men to war, but also for tying their tongues when they return. In *Farewell,* this is visible in the way Catherine plays a critical role in establishing the notion that stoicism and silent suffering are manly virtues. It may not matter that Frederic has no particular heroic event to write home about, as long as he was there, did his duty and is able to subsequently hide behind a wall of "brave

silence". Catherine underlines this after meeting the boastful Ettore Moretti: "We have heroes too," she said. "But usually, darling, they're much quieter" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 130). Later, Frederic quotes Shakespeare: "The coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave but one." To this, Catherine replies that the poet was probably a coward then, because "[t]he brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he's intelligent. He simply doesn't mention them" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 147). This emphasizes the idea that women, in the soldier's mind, carried expectations to their masculinity that urged them to war and coerced them into silence about their trauma.

Hemingway's personal trauma and tragedy point back to feelings of shame tied to his mental condition. This shame can be explained by how mental illness was stigmatized during the early 20th century, when diagnoses such as depression and 'hysteria' were branded as exclusively feminine concepts. The stigma surrounding mental health during and after the First World War reinforced gender expectations, particularly in relation to masculinity. Soldiers were supposed to be brave, not hysteric. The injuries Hemingway suffered and the treatment his doctors subjected him to are representative, not only for the veteran experience, but for the difficulties in healing from severe trauma in the population in general. This is commented upon in Wood's study of trauma in modernist literature, where she explores the question of narration as a tool in the process of healing from trauma (Wood, 2020, p. 139). My argument agrees well with Wood's point that critics have yet to contextualize the stigma of mental health in the 1950's as an account for Hemingway's self-medication throughout the period of his deteriorating health (Wood, 2020, p. 140). I further argue that these stigmas were particularly connected to masculinity and lingering prejudice stemming from the branding of 'hysteria' as a female diagnosis. As an example, Hemingway had to enter the Mayo Clinic under his doctor's name in the 60's, due to fear of negative publicity. The hospitalization was eventually discovered, but few knew how serious his condition was, as

Hemingway convinced his doctors and his wife that he was well enough to be discharged without revealing his suicidal plans (Wood, 2020, p. 140). Hemingway did not get the help he needed, and the rest is history. Neither did Nick Adams, Frederic Henry, or Harold Krebs. Instead, they all sought to literature, reading or writing, as a way of helping themselves.

The field of trauma studies—whether grounded in advances in medicine and psychiatry, in politics, or the artistic representation of pain—enables us to understand Hemingway's trauma and suffering, and how this relates to both gender and narrative. This may contribute to a greater understanding of the role gender stigmas played in why many veterans never received the help they needed, and how this is commented upon in veteran literature. In turn, the trauma narratives available in Hemingway's fiction can be seen as a way of avoiding some of the gender stigmas that put a lid on sufficient processing of traumatic experiences.

Some of the trauma expressed through Hemingway's literature has, like we have seen, been interpreted as misogyny. Although the accusations of misogyny Fetterley and other feminist critics directed at Hemingway have been toned down in the works of succeeding critics, the images of childbirth, pregnancy, and marriage continue to receive much critical attention. In *Farewell* and *In Our Time* for instance, there is not a single example of an uncomplicated, undramatic childbirth. Catherine dies in labor in *Farewell* while Nick's father must perform an emergency Caesarian section on the Native American woman in "Indian Camp". Critics, like Fetterley, have interpreted this as a manifestation of the male characters' "Peter Pan-syndrome" and their fears of losing their independence and male camaraderie which a child would represent. Such readings reflect the "Hemingway Code", limiting Hemingway's fiction to topics that emphasize the author's personal machismo. Instead of being read as misogyny, I argue that the unsympathetic portrayals of women found in

Hemingway can be read as expressions of trauma, and that these expressions contribute to increased understanding as to how trauma is influenced by and influences notions of gender.

Despite my previous account of Herman interpreting female trauma as being neglected after the age of 'hysteria'(2015, pp. 16, 17), I argue that Catherine's trauma is not overlooked in *Farewell.* It is visible in the way she fits herself into the discourses about gender available in her time. Even if she does not believe in romantic love anymore, she adapts to a character that allows her to find meaning and move on with her life after the traumatic loss of her fiancé at the Somme. This includes playing house with Frederic and explicitly worrying about being thin or good-looking enough for him (Hemingway, 2016, p. 308). Her character *appears* submissive and shallow, but the way in which she minimizes herself and her own importance is not necessarily an expression of female submission or her defining herself in "the terms of men", as it has been interpreted by Fetterley (1978, p. 67). Arguably, it is rather a technique to cope with her trauma. The visions she has of herself dying in the rain foreshadows the tragic outcome, proving that she is aware of her own pretense and that it is not durable. Catherine has a will of her own and a traumatic past to balance in her relationship with Frederic.

In "Indian Camp", the reader's sensibilities are challenged by the injustice and trauma portrayed, albeit dispassionately, by the narrator Nick. In addition to portraying the boy Nick's initiation to trauma, the short story symbolizes his first (as far as the reader is informed) confrontation with childbirth, and more importantly, his grown male fellow characters' attitudes towards it. The lesson taught to Nick during the violent Caesarian section is that a woman's pain does not matter. As Nick's father says: '"No, I haven't any anesthetic" […] "But her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important"'(Hemingway, 2015e, p. 42). What is important to Nick's father is the "sensationality" of it all, and his own role as a hero. The way he describes the operation to Nick's uncle George reminds the reader of something a hunter or a veterinary might do to an

animal: "'That's one for the medical journal, George,' […] 'Doing a Caesarian with a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders"'(Hemingway, 2015e, p. 43).

If one were to read "Indian Camp" colored by the "Hemingway Code", one might agree with the feminist scholars who believe it promotes an outdated view on gender. One might also ask oneself whether the narrator Nick cares about the victims in the story at all, based on his detached and impersonal voice when describing the event. The dispassionate, modernist aesthetics (as described by Walter (2014), Hemingway applies to his fiction here, invite the reader to participate in the creation of the text, by having a reaction to it without subjective guidelines from the narrator. The narrator Nick's impersonality triggers sympathy for the Native American woman and her husband, whilst putting the doctor in an unsympathetic light. Depending on the sensibilities of the reader, the short story can thus be read as a critique of the contemporary treatment of women and racial others, as well as the expectations to machismo and assertion of power and violence which Nick's father now passes on to his son.

In this case, the assertion of power is applied to a woman as well as to racial others, reflecting the collective trauma of American history of violence, as described among others by bell hooks (2004). The insensitivity shown toward the Native American mother awakens additional resistance within the reader, especially since her pain and obvious trauma is never commented upon again. This resistance, spurred by the impersonal and dispassionate narrator, is something that scholars, except perhaps Margot Norris (as shown below), have yet to consider. Hemingway leaves it to the reader to resist. By doing so, trauma can be recognized in the author's treatment of both gender and race on many levels. The collective trauma of American history of violence as well as the individual childhood trauma of the boy Nick can all be connected to machoistic gender expectations as described by Mosher and Tomkins (1988) and hooks (2004).

As can be expected, the boy Nick struggles to understand what has happened to the Native American woman's husband:

> "Why did he kill himself, Daddy?"
> "I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess."
> "Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?"
> "Not very many, Nick."
> "Do many women?"
> "Hardly ever". (Hemingway, 2015e, p. 44)

Although this dialogue contributes to male monopolization of trauma and suicide, it is disturbingly accurate considering the suicide rates in the 21st century (Elflein, 2021). "Indian Camp" can thus be said to comment upon topics ahead of its time: toxic masculinity and male mental health, as well as how patriarchic gender norms contribute to both male, female, and racial trauma.

As we have seen, there are many essential factors involved in how Hemingway became "Papa". The crisis of manhood, the "woman problem", his childhood among sisters, a mentally troubled father, and the morality of gender ideas from his Midwestern, middle-class background, all played a part. In addition, the self-reliant frontier manliness that Theodore Roosevelt championed, the heritage of 19th century literary gender constructions in Victorian novels, and new sexual psychology influenced his formative years. And then there was the war. Branding Hemingway's writing as merely outdated, is misguided, blind to the role of fiction in portraying historical and social mechanisms at play which we must still learn from. Peter Ferry for example, argues that any reader of Hemingway must not make the mistake of being distracted by the "Hemingway Code" when reading his works. Ferry argues that reading Hemingway as some kind of embodiment of a code of masculinity can make it difficult to discern the most important ideas of men and masculinities present in his works. The texts

must be approached as texts, and arguments claiming his fiction to be autobiographical and speaking the truth about the author and his views on men and masculinity must be disregarded (Ferry, 2020, p. 73). According to David Wyatt, Hemingway is not merely a champion for the code of emotional reticence, understatement and 'not talking about it', but he has rather taken it upon himself to portray the cost of the "performance of being male" (cited in Ferry, 2020, p. 74). This is a precise image of what I argue is a great value in Hemingway's texts: the portrayal of the cost of being male in a society characterized by war and masculinity in crisis. One of these costs is trauma.

Accordingly, Hemingway's portrayal of ideas of masculinity and trauma is highly relevant today. The idea that vulnerable men are not "real" men, points to the fact that cultural expectations of manhood are/have been innately traumatizing and therefore contributing to the trauma experienced by war veterans. Ideas of masculinity may drive men to war and coerce them into remaining silent about their mental and physical health. This can result in incomplete processing of events, and an ensuing inability to express oneself.

Hemingway attempted to escape the emasculating 20th century into the wars in Europa and "Tarzan's Africa". Ironically, the military deprived him of any possibility for autonomy as he became subjected to the military (Vernon, 2004b, p. 81). Combined with his ambiguous military status and his severe wounding, the war turned out not to be an arena to assert his masculinity after all. By portraying the wounding of Nick and Frederic, and the latter's tale of desertion, Hemingway confronts the notion that "war makes the man". Frederic and Nick also attempt to escape their wars and the modern world. Nick escapes into the solitude of the Michigan woods, as Hemingway escaped to Africa. Frederic escapes, first to an Alpine landscape in Switzerland, then through severing all social obligations when Catherine and their baby die. As we have seen, the face of war can be downright emasculating, and sometimes women take the blame, partly because incomplete traumatic experiences lead its

victims to build myths about them. Hemingway's fiction sheds light on these myths. In line with trauma studies, the modern world must take its share of the blame for the trauma it introduced. Through his fictional characters, Hemingway created mouthpieces through whom he could express and investigate his own and his characters' trauma from a safe distance. Thus, the expressions of rigid codes of masculinity found in Hemingway's narratives may have more to do with trauma and less to do with misogyny, more to do with healing and less to do with violence.

Healing Narratives

By using fiction to work through unprocessed experiences of war, narrative can promote healing. As we will see, this healing process is available for the trauma-author and the fictional characters in addition to contributing to increased understanding of trauma. As established in the section accounting for Hemingway's trauma, he was reluctant to elaborate on his personal life and trauma, especially the psychiatric aspects of it. Hemingway's fiction reveals, however unintentionally, connections between the characters and his own injuries. Critics often argue that the characters' suffering reflect general emotional patterns and processes of suffering that can be traced to biographical events in the author's life. Both Lawrence Broer, Peter L. Hays, and A. E. Hotchner argue that Hemingway uses fiction to deal with unprocessed experiences of war. Hays observes that behind the war experiences that cause characters' trauma there is an autobiographical element, and Hotchner, cited in Wood, accounts for Hemingway equating his typewriter to a therapist (2013, p. 234; 2013, pp. 59, 60; 2020, pp. 137, 138). This implies that writing fiction might provide some relief on a personal level.

Even though the importance of distinguishing Hemingway from the masculine code associated with him has already been established, it is important to consider the possibility

that it was Hemingway's personal experiences that made him able to write so convincingly about trauma. So does Hemingway's personal emphasis on only writing about what one knows. In a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, he wrote that "you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously" (Hemingway, 2004, p. 19). It seems like pain and suffering function as sources of inspiration.

As we have seen, Dodman emphasizes that trauma narratives are not always healing, and points to how Frederic's narrative turns out to be a tragedy. I argue that a tragic outcome does not necessarily mean that the narrative cannot prove helpful in a reintegration process. Storytelling offers Frederic and Nick (and Hemingway) a device for pursuing peace, even if this peace is continually interrupted by traumatic flashbacks and memories. They each have trouble with narrating their stories, yet they *attempt* to do it all the same. Even if the duality between mind and body has taken a blow, the human consciousness can heal, just like the wounded body, and the dissemination of trauma becomes the most important factor in healing from it. It might be that revisiting the sites of their past trauma from a safe distance, like they do when they try to narrate their traumatic experiences in writing in the present (as Freud proposes in his trauma theory), is exactly what the characters and the author need in order to achieve reintegration. Although the experienced trauma is never properly articulated and the process of trying to do so might never end, it might inspire self-sympathy and a greater understanding of oneself.

Just like Frederic thinks to himself that he looks like a masquerader in his civilian clothes (Hemingway, 2016, p. 256), veterans may struggle, not only with external relationships, but with recognizing themselves outside of their soldierly selves after the war is over. Constructing narratives can be a step on the way to helping trauma victims rediscover their "humanity" and seeing themselves in civilian clothing once again. *Farewell* can be read as Hemingway's expression of the broken self's struggle to remain human, during and after

traumatic experiences (Wood, 2020, p. 139). The struggle to remain human is particularly visible, as illustrated initially in the chapter, in the artificial relationships between the characters or the lack of human connection and authenticity. Frederic and Catherine pretend to be "whole" and cope by playing house in the middle of the war. Krebs attempts to find his place through history books but is not able to connect with anybody. Nick resorts to nature, where physical labor enables him to pretend that he is perfectly happy even if he is not able to think about his past. Just like Hemingway, Frederic and Nick are revealed to write fiction.

As established above, trauma threatens the integrity of the self, while narrative provides a means to reconstruct a sense of self (Vernon, 2004a, p. 199). This applies to all ways in which one can achieve a narrative understanding of one's life, either through text or conversation. As previously established, Frederic and Nick share obvious parallel traits with their creator. Nick is perhaps the character most often interpreted as autobiographical to some degree. Giving his characters certain of his own traits might be read as Hemingway's attempt to reassemble his own identity and reinvent his prewar-self. The fictional characters can thus help his come to terms with his wartime failures, traumas, and his own mortality. Although the process of narrating one's trauma might never end, the idea that it can facilitate healing is an optimistic one.

It is not only the author and his characters who are able to rediscover themselves through narrative. By reading fiction, the reader might discover certain biases in their own interpretations of it (Norris, 1994, p. 690). As an example, one might be more inclined to believe that Frederic is a hero and that war is honorable, than that he is a killer and that the war serves no purpose. Hemingway's fiction makes us aware of these biases by challenging us to take seriously the realities of war. In line with the deconstruction strand of trauma studies, however, language may not be sufficient in conveying the truth. By drawing attention to the artificiality of his fiction through self-reflexive aesthetics, Hemingway conveys to his

readers that the novel does not reflect the reality of war. As we have seen, Frederic admits that he has been unable to tell his story "as he cannot tell it now" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 14). The way in which the narrator Frederic comments upon his problems with articulating his trauma at the very start of the novel is one way in which Hemingway alerts the reader to be on the watch for deceit and lies.

Furthermore, Margot Norris emphasizes how the novel misdirects the reader by foregrounding the mutually seductive relationship between love stories and war stories, in her essay "The Novel as War: Lies and Truth in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms"* (Norris, 1994, p. 691). The reader is tricked into the novel by misinterpreting it for a love story. Like Krebs in "Soldier's Home", who lies in order to make people listen, Hemingway's war story is disguised as a love story as a means for receiving the attention of the reader.

This disguise becomes evident when comparing *Farewell* to "A Natural History of the Dead", a chapter in the novel *Death in the Afternoon* (1932). This short story exhibits a detached, scientific language when describing dead bodies in a battlefield. The mock author attempts to shock the Old Lady with graphic depictions and describes dead bodies, sadistic doctors, and euthanasia under a detached guise of empirical objectivity. Norris (1994, p. 692) argues that this dialogue is designed to assault the reader's sensibilities with brutal truths about war. The "reader", imitated in the Old Lady, is not affected however, and simply states: "I like it when you write about love" (Hemingway, 1960, p. 69). She only wants to hear the love story. Such an interpretation enables the reader to see how Hemingway *could* have told the war story: explicitly and brutally, while at the same time demonstrating why this kind of story awakens reader responses that makes it difficult to convey the actual message. The result is that the reader is deemed incapable of understanding the brutality of war with its violence, cruelty, and trauma, if not wrapped in a more delicate wrapping. In other words,

Farewell only pretends to give the reader what they want, which is a love story, or at least something less harrowing than a war story.

In *Farewell,* the reader's bias is perhaps most challenged when Frederic kills the Italian sergeant in cold blood, simply because he refuses to help move their truck. The scene consists of mere description and dialogue, and there is not a trace of emotion available. Since the reader wants to believe that Frederic is a hero and that his actions are honorable, this sudden portrayal of him as an unprovoked murderer reveals the lies inherent to the perception of war as something glorious, and the reader is torn between ignorance and discomfort. The sergeant is not armed, he is not threatening, and he is not even an enemy, yet the narrator Frederic tells the story without sentiment or regret: "I opened up my holster, took the pistol, aimed at the one who had talked the most, and fired. […] I shot three times and dropped one" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 214). When the sergeant does not die, Frederic calmly shows Bonello how to finish him off. The narrator does not linger on the event or try to defend what has happened. Instead, he appears detached and unaffected by it all. Here, Hemingway's writing style is crucial in conveying the overall sobriety of the scene.

Some readers, the critic Charles Nolan amongst them, refuse to see Frederic as dishonorable (Nolan, 1984, p. 273). According to him, Frederic Henry shoots the sergeant because this is what is required of him in a war situation. The description of the sergeant's cruel murder however, imitates the cruelty of war (Norris, 1994, p. 693). Like the sergeant, the people killed are not always villains, and like Frederic, the people who kill do not always do so out of duty. The scene can thus be said to test and provoke the reader's ethics by showing them something they do not want to admit about war and humanity. At the same time, it immerses the cruel truth in the ideology that American soldiers must, at all costs, be portrayed as honorable. Thus, Nolan's argument only reinforces the logic of war that the

novel portrays: namely that plain murder can be disguised as duty and honor in a war situation.

This underlines my point that truthfulness does not necessarily lie in facts or historical accuracy, but rather in how the story is presented to the reader. If the reader pays close attention, this is where the trauma and evil of war is most tangible. There are so many contradictions between the language used to describe war, and its unornamented, violent "reality", and these contradictions continue to shape our understanding of the term "war" in literature. According to Norris (1994, p. 693) it belongs to the rhetorical structure of war to mask its atrocities and horrors with sentiment and idealism. It is up to scholars and readers to expose this deceit.

Hemingway can thus be said to utilize naturalist observations to bridge the divide between the objective and the subjective through Frederic's detached narration of the shooting of the sergeant: "The pistol clicked empty and I put in another clip" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 214). In modernist fashion, excess emotion and ornamentation are removed from the scene. Naturalist authors, such as Emile Zola believed that the experimental, naturalist novel should use the same principles for objective observations as science when discussing culture and the human experience (cited in Steffens, 2018, p. 44). Although the nineteenth-century physiologists and neurologists who had influenced the world in which Hemingway grew up had established that emotion, passion, and the workings of the brain could not be objectively observed, an author like Hemingway is able to imagine what happens in his characters' minds. The same applies to the reader, who must imagine the inner workings of Frederic in order to make sense of the scene. This transition from a naturalist observation of psychological phenomena to an entirely subjective modernist aesthetic, parallels the rise of psychoanalysis in the wake of the war (Steffens, 2018, p. 50). The reader must accordingly decide which emotions to attribute to the characters and the narrator. Only considering the

objective and the observable are the same biases that lead to accusations of malingering when railroad accident victims sought compensation, or victims of shell shock sought to get away from the front. What Norris and other scholars have yet to explore is how a detached narrator enables the reader to become aware of such biases and thus increase their understanding of trauma's invisible and subjective nature. This accords with my previous analysis of "Indian Camp", arguing that it is more efficient for a writer to trigger the reader by objectively describing ethically ambiguous events, than to subjectively take sides.

Another way in which the reader's resistance to hypocrisy is tested, is through the inconsistencies that occur between the words of Frederic and the words of Frederic the narrator. Frederic does not know that he is going to survive the war. The narrator Frederic on the other hand, writes from a point of view where he knows that he is safe. What he is writing in the present does not necessarily reflect what Frederic was feeling in the moment it happened. By drawing attention to this discrepancy, the reader is made aware that the novel is not able to convey the absolute horror and trauma of war and that the narrator Frederic's version of events might be the only version he knows how to articulate in his traumatized condition.

By portraying Frederic as a loving husband, while at the same time harshly describing his killing of the Italian sergeant, Hemingway combines the unambiguous description of action with an impersonal, objective voice and emotionless voice. The reader will probably feel sympathy for Frederic and Catherine and might be cheering for their happy ending. It is perhaps extra difficult then to choose whether to judge Frederic's killing, the way it is narrated, or both. Since Frederic's behavior breaks with the norms of dignity and morality, it takes an effort to justify his actions. Unless the reader is able to do navigate this ambivalence, the story turns out to be a story where there are no heroic soldiers, and where both friend and

enemy commit atrocities. To Hemingway, this ambiguity might have spoken more truly about war than a narrative that caused no discomfort in its audience.

In order to convey the brutalities of war and trauma, the reader is encouraged to looking beyond the seductive surface of the story. By doing so, they are able to be witnesses of war, while at the same time understanding why lies sometimes expose the truth, and how narratives sometimes make trauma bearable. In each case, the reader, the writer, and the trauma survivor must choose which narrative fits better with their sensibilities.

In the end, Hemingway's writing can be said to be about catharsis after all, despite the tragic fates of many of his characters. According to Hemingway, "truer than things can be true" can be invented through writing. As Hemingway wrote in a letter to Bernard Berenson in 1954:

> You know that fiction, prose rather, is possibly the roughest of all in writing. You do not have the reference, the old important reference. You have the sheet of blank paper, the pencil, and the obligation to invent truer than things can be true. You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable and also have it seem normal so that it can become a part of the experience of the person who reads it. (Hemingway, 2004, p. 16)

In *Farewell* we cannot trust what Frederic is saying, and we certainly cannot trust that it reflects Hemingway's opinion. It is evident, however, that writing enabled him to exhibit expressions of trauma that become "part of the reader's experience". The moral and ethical ambiguities of war that can be recognized in the novel present to the reader a dilemma where they must choose between accepting the ambiguities of war or rejecting them on behalf of the more comfortable love story. By putting the reader into this dilemma, Hemingway articulates the incomprehensibilities of war, and the necessity of finding a narrative by which to make it "completely palpable". If successful, one might be able to understand one's experiences and

choices, essential in healing from war related trauma. This makes the complexity and incomprehensibility of trauma more tangible, and in line with Hartman's deconstructive strand of trauma theory, reading becomes in itself an ethical act, however unethical the narrative. Although the reader is not able to fully comprehend the trauma portrayed, they become more equipped to acknowledge the impact of it, which I argue is the paramount element.

Chapter Conclusion

A benefit of trauma studies is that representations of pain and coping work as a bridge between biography and fiction, enabling the reader to see the connection between Hemingway's self-propelled fiction and his personal trauma (Wood, 2020, p. 139).
From a trauma studies perspective, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and *In Our Time* illustrate how the author's own trauma serves as inspiration and motivation behind his works. He uses the characters' relationships with each other, their perceptions of gender and masculinity as well as language and untraditional narrative methods when portraying disruptive memories, traumatic history, and self-deceit. Due to his own involvement in war, Hemingway conveys trauma convincingly in ways far beyond mere description.

Narrative proves an important tool in dealing with unprocessed experiences of war, as it facilitates the author to fill gaps and incoherencies in his own memories through alternative narrative methods and responsive myth building. These narratives can help him come to terms with both his childhood trauma and his combat trauma. In addition, they help the reader understand and acknowledge the impact of trauma by contributing to an emotional connection with the works.

As trauma has been established as stemming from an event incompletely processed, Hemingway's narratives served a chance for him to work through his past in a safe, distanced,

and prepared state without it affecting his sense of masculinity. His portrayals of gender can equally be read as expressions of his trauma, as they point to innately traumatizing gender expectations that motivated warfare, tongue-tied trauma victims and lead to feelings of emasculation and resentment directed toward women. As trauma awareness and mental health awareness were minimal at this point, Hemingway, like countless veterans, did not get sufficient help with his trauma and had to find a way to cope with it on his own. This can explain why he so often returns to war in his writing, and why it was so unbearable for him to lose the ability to write well.

Chapter Three: Tim O'Brien – Witnessing Trauma

"Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 14; 2009k).

Although the name Tim O'Brien does not give off the same air of mystique and myth as Hemingway, there are many similarities between the pair. O'Brien himself admits to being inspired by Hemingway (Bevilacqua, 2016), perhaps sensibly so, as any writer, especially any veteran writer, must come to terms with the shadow of Hemingway in which they write. The most important similarity, investigated in the following chapter is that O'Brien's trauma is visible in his fiction, and that narrations of this trauma can be seen a way of coping and reintegrating for both the author, the reader, and his fictional characters. In O'Brien's fiction, there is an evident connection between trauma narratives, having a witness or sympathetic listener/reader, and recovery.

Even if O'Brien grew up during the nuclear age, his childhood in Minnesota appears less traumatic than Hemingway's. He describes it as a Norman Rockwell small town, pastoral kind of upbringing, and his hometown, Worthington, as "the turkey capital of the world" (Vernon, 2004a, p. 183). For the boys who had led pastoral, small town lives in the Midwest, the Vietnam War must have posed a dramatic change. Like so many others, O'Brien was drafted into the US Army, just after finishing his BA in political sciences as Macalester College. As he did not even support the war, his experiences differ quite a lot from Hemingway's volunteer trips. O'Brien had even participated in a couple of peace vigils and campus debates opposing the war during his time in college (Vernon, 2004a, p. 183), and it is perhaps no wonder that his fiction about Vietnam is characterized by a certain bitterness.

Speaking about his experiences in retrospect, O'Brien accuses his hometown of "congratulating itself of the ignorance of the world", and that the likes of his hometown were

to blame for getting America into Vietnam in the first place: “The people of that town sent me to that war, you know, couldn’t spell the word ‘Hanoi’ if you spotted them three vowels” (O’Brien, 1999). O’Brien’s bitterness reflects ambiguities concerning ethics and morality shared by other American soldiers serving in Vietnam, whose trauma does not only stem from combat experience but also the dramatic moral choice they had to make in advance: to desert and disappoint or to participate in a war they found immoral. Like many others in their generation, O’Brien’s parents had served during the Second World War, making the choice even more charged.

Before he fictionalized his Vietnam experience, O’Brien wrote the memoirs *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973). In his own words this was an attempt to “get the war out of his system”, so that his following fiction would not be spoiled by a desire to “tell the truth” (cited in Vernon, 2004a, p. 177). The relationship between “historical truth” and “emotional truth” is further explored in his literature and proves an important tool in his portrayal of trauma and war. The narrator distinguishes between “story truth” and “happening truth”. As I am applying this distinction further in my thesis, I translate “story truth” to mean “emotional truth”, whereas “happening truth” means “historical truth”. Literature may accordingly be *emotionally* true, by replicating the emotions of the characters within its readers yet be completely fictional otherwise. Even if O’Brien left writing historical memoirs in favor of fiction, he never seemed to be able to “get the war out of his system”, let alone leave Vietnam.

This chapter focuses on O’Brien’s “middle period”, which includes the short story/fiction collection *The Things They Carried* (1990) and the novel *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994). Together with the novel *Going After Cacciato* (1978), which I do not discuss due to limitations of space, these works are generally considered his most “artistically successful” (Vernon, 2004a, p. 180). In contrast to Hemingway’s *Farewell,* where the war is

disguised behind Frederic and Catherine's love story, O'Brien's graphic war depictions superimpose stories about love and universal tropes of human experience. Where the reader must look closely to discover the brutal truth of trauma and war beneath the deceptive love stories and descriptions of nature in Hemingway's fiction, O'Brien invites the reader to discover that his war stories are not really about war—they concern the human experience.

The trauma in O'Brien's life is clearly reflected in the boys of Alpha Company in *The Things They Carried*, ranging from naïve, morally complicated boys to damaged and even dangerous soldiers. In the novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, too, the veteran protagonist John Wade, and the veteran reporter who narrates the story, are both revealed to have traumatic pasts. As in Hemingway's fiction, O'Brien's characters' trauma starts before the war and continues to haunt them as they attempt to piece their lives and their identities together in its aftermath. As I will elaborate on, what they all long for in order to succeed in their recovery is to find somebody to whom they can narrate their trauma. O'Brien's entire literary project can be said to attempt one thing: making the reader, not necessarily understand, but *experience* the emotional impact of war and trauma.

Manifestations of Trauma in *The Things They Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods*

The next subchapter explores how trauma manifests in O'Brien's characters and narratives, before investigating how it is dealt with. As reflected in the fictional Tim O'Brien in "On the Rainy River", O'Brien's own trauma began already before the war. It consists of an ethical crisis, where he must make the choice whether to participate in a war which he finds immoral or comply with the expectations of his family and his hometown. O'Brien has described the

period before his introduction into the army as a confused and traumatic period, as he had to decide whether or not to flee to Canada (quoted in Heberle, 2001c, p. xix).

The character Tim O'Brien who will be referred to as 'Tim' or 'narrator Tim' hereafter, is the protagonist of *The Things They Carried* also revealed to be the fictional author of the collection. Like O'Brien, Tim spent the summer leading up to his departure to Vietnam working in a meatpacking plant (Vernon, 2004a, p. 185). The imagery is obvious: while washing blood clots from dead carcasses, Tim is being prepared to slaughter on behalf of the US government. This is emphasized in Tim's assertion that "you don't make war without knowing why" (O'Brien, 2009h, p. 25), pointing to his belief that American involvement in Vietnam was unjustifiable and ignorant.

In "On the Rainy River", Tim's ethical crisis is manifested in the vision of people appearing on the shore, urging him onwards to Canada and freedom, or back, to the other shore and eventually Vietnam:

> I saw my parents calling to me from the far shoreline. I saw my brother and sister, all the townsfolk, the mayor and the entire Chamber of Commerce and all my old teachers and girlfriends and high school buddies […]. I saw faces from my distant future. My wife was there. There was a slim young man I would one day kill with a hand grenade along a red clay trail outside the village of My Khe. (O'Brien, 2009h, pp. 37, 38)

The external expectations from his family and culture appear pressing. So is the imagery of the man he would "one day kill", as if Tim, in that moment, has to decide if he is to disappoint his family or kill in order not to.

The soldiers of Alpha Company, the infantry regiment in Vietnam which Tim is a part of, do not appear to be against war per se. As Tim explains in "On the Rainy River": "there were occasions […] when a nation was justified in using military force to achieve its ends, to

stop a Hitler or some comparable evil, and I told myself that in such circumstances I would've willingly marched off to the battle" (O'Brien, 2009h, p. 27). The problem in this case however, is that "a draft board did not let you choose your war" (O'Brien, 2009h, p. 27). The "pre-war trauma" evident in "On the Rainy River" is perhaps why so many of the characters appear traumatized from the beginning. In order to cope, they need to justify their actions in Vietnam, in addition to their being there in the first place.

This ethical dilemma distinguishes O'Brien's characters from Hemingway's, who do not seem to have any trouble justifying their fighting in the First World War. If O'Brien's characters are not able to justify their actions, some turn to denial. John Wade in the novel *In the Lake of the Woods* is an example of this. He loses touch with reality, imagines his father back to life, denies the fact that he participated in the My Lai massacre, and does not know whether he has killed his own wife or not. Traces of the same confusion or denial is detected when O'Brien states in a phone interview with Mark A. Heberle in 1998 that "I'm not even sure that my own life even happened anymore" (Heberle, 2001c, p. xxiii).

Similar to Hemingway's literature, trauma is reflected in the structure of O'Brien's fiction. Here, the lines between past and present, fact and fiction, are blurred, as evident in the structure of *In the Lake of the Woods.* Some chapters deal with the story of John's wife, Kathy (Katherine Wade), whose mysterious disappearance lies at the heart of the novel. Other chapters contain "evidence", ranging from historical documents, including testimonies from the My Lai massacre and the wars on Native Americans, excerpts from trauma theory, quotes and testimonies from literary characters, famous historical figures as well as excerpts from classical literature. Additionally, there are chapters dealing with John's childhood and the traumatic suicide of his alcoholic father, his growing fascination for "magic tricks" as well as stories from his college years and his obsessive relationship with Kathy. Finally, there are flashbacks from his time in Vietnam, where he was simply known as "sorcerer". In other

words: the narrative is structured like a puzzle which the reader must put together in order to understand John, as well as what happened to Kathy. The structure of the novel complicates the narrative, mimicking the confusing environment in which it is set: the Michigan lakes and the landscape of Vietnam.

The narrator describes the war as follows:

> Who was VC and who was friendly and who among them didn't care? These were all secrets. History was a secret. The land was a secret. There were secret caches, secret trails, secret codes, secret missions, secret terrors and appetites and longings and regrets. Secrecy was paramount. Secrecy was the war. (O'Brien, 2006, p. 111)

It is evident that the narrator finds the war intangible. As we have seen, the same applies to unresolved trauma which manifests as interruptive symptoms even if its source is "secret" to the victim. The labyrinthine structure of both the war and the unresolved trauma is also present in the hearts and minds of the characters and the narrator of the novel, pointing to the unpredictability and unfathomability of the human mind and soul, as well as the dangers of getting lost in oneself without means of navigating reality (Farrell, 2017c, p. 112). In one way, this is what happens to John. His trauma, harking back to the suicide of his father and his subsequent fear of rejection is further reinforced by his participation in the war and the My Lai massacre.

As previously established by Diedrich (2018, p. 85), trauma is a temporal disease in addition to being a disease of the memory. After the traumatic night when Kathy disappears, John cannot, or will not, remember what has happened. His most distinct memory is the smell of plants having had boiling water poured over them. This memory is disrupted by images of him approaching a sleeping Kathy with the same kettle. John's memories from Vietnam are equally unreliable, showing how his self has been destabilized and how his inability to access the past hinders him from coping with his past trauma in the present.

In *The Things They Carried,* there are equally unreliable depictions of trauma. In order to make trauma more tangible, the narrator Tim provides a beautiful reflection in the middle of a description of him being wounded in "Spin":

> You're pinned down in some filthy hellhole of a paddy, getting your ass delivered to kingdom come, but then for a few seconds everything goes quiet and you look up and see the sun and a few puffy white clouds, and the immense serenity flashes against your eyeballs—the whole world gets rearranged—and even though you're pinned down by a war you never felt more at peace. (O'Brien, 2009j, p. 23)

We can all relate to the beauty of nature, and Tim makes himself more human in his trauma by commenting upon this. By the use of second person, he takes for granted that this is also something the reader is able to recognize. In contrast to Hemingway's characters, Tim is describing his trauma with emotion. As will be elaborated on later, however, it is not the war that is being described here. Rather, O'Brien is creating literature out of his perceptions of it. Arguably, he is even describing hope.

In "The Ghost Soldiers", there is a more graphic description of trauma, reminding us of Frederic Henry's shrapnel wounding in *Farwell*. The narrator Tim uses second person here as well, as if inviting the reader into the experience. He has been shot and the medic at the scene is inexperienced, not recognizing that Tim is going into shock:

> [A]ll I mean is that you should be able to *talk* about it [getting shot]: the stiff thump of the bullet, like a fist, the way it knocks the air out of you and makes you cough, how the sound of the gunshot arrives about ten years later, and the dizzy feeling, the smell of yourself, the things you think about and say and do right afterwards, the way your eyes focus on a tiny white pebble or a blade of grass and how you start thinking, Oh man, that's the last thing I'll ever see, *that* pebble, *that* blade of grass, which makes you want to cry. (O'Brien, 2009a, p. 121)

Contrasting Frederic, narrator Tim is able to describe the experience retrospectively. After all, he is narrating the episode from a safe point of view, and the reader should not assume that he is less traumatized for this reason. By using the second person he is distancing himself from the event, thus making it easier to fictionalize the experience. What actually happens does not seem to matter as much as the literary description of it which can leave an emotional impact upon the reader. Tim is therefore able to describe and fictionalize the event as he sees fit, without regard to accuracy or memory.

When Tim switches back to first person, the experience is more similar to that of Frederic:

> [L]eaking to death, I thought. […] Like a genie swirling out of a bottle—like a cloud of gas—I was drifting upward out of my own body. I was half in and half out. Part of me still lay there, the corps part, but I was also that genie looking on and saying "There, there", which made me start to scream. (O'Brien, 2009a, p. 137)

This is a much more familiar description to Hemingway's account of trauma: a traumatic memory, fragmented and disoriented, focused on the sensation of the soul leaving the body.

The descriptions of Tim's trauma, varying as they are, can be seen as different interpretations of the same event, each equally valuable in conveying traumatic emotion: fear, sadness, or utter confusion. In "How to Tell a True War Story", the reader is warned not to trust anything a war story says, as it is not able to teach anything about the war. As reflected in the labyrinthine structure of *In the Lake of the Woods*, a war story cannot, and is not supposed to make sense on its own. However, the war veteran may create a narrative through which the war makes sense to them, even if this is not an historically correct account. Through storytelling the characters and authors of war fiction are able to turn the wastage, the horror, and immorality of war into something worthwhile: art and literature, which further

awaken emotions. In O'Brien's literature, this transformation is crucial in understanding how narrative may be cathartic. The war does not have to make sense because literature is in itself meaningful enough.

Coping with Trauma

As in Hemingway's fiction, O'Brien's characters choose different ways of coping with their traumatic experiences. Whereas Tim escapes to the Tip Top Lodge near the Canadian border for a while, O'Brien turned to his writing as a means of coping with his own draft notice (Vernon, 2004a, p. 185). Through writing O'Brien would have been able to make up and experiment with alternative outcomes to his moral dilemma. Instead of providing Tim with a different fate and letting the sympathetic owner of the lodge, Elroy Berdahl, escort him to Canada, he too ends up being what O'Brien refers to as a 'coward': "I was a coward. I went to the war" (2009h, p. 39). Like his creator, he ends up serving as a grunt in Alpha Company in Vietnam.

Denial oversteps Freud's parameter for healthy mourning, even though it is a tempting alternative for trauma victims seeking a way to cope with their trauma, as exemplified in the character John Wade. According to Heberle, the word trauma phonologically imitates the German word "traum", meaning "dream". In his opinion, O'Brien's stories can be seen as "traumwerk" (dreamwork), spinning dreams out of traumatic experiences (2001c, p. xxi). These "dreams" include waking people from the dead, as narrator Tim does with Linda in "The Lives of the Dead" or altering one's reality as John attempts to do in *In the Lake of the Woods*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the creation of alternative cerebral timelines is considered a symptom of traumatic brain injury. In *In the Lake of the Woods*, John's timeline is continually interrupted by his "magic tricks". The mirrors for instance, are repeated images

in the novel, enabling John to continue to suppress his trauma. They are present in a physical and literal sense, like the mirrors he practiced magic in as a child and the mirror of the lake where Kathy allegedly disappears (Farrell, 2017c, p. 136). In addition, they are imaginative, like the mirrors in his head where he is performing the illusion that his father is not dead after all, that he did not participate in the My Lai massacre, and arguably: that he did not kill his wife with a kettle of boiling water. As the narrator explains:

> [H]e tricked himself into believing it hadn't happened the way it happened. He pretended he wasn't responsible; he pretended he couldn't have done it and therefore hadn't; he pretended it didn't matter much; he pretended that if the secret stayed inside him, with all the other secrets, he could fool the world and himself too. (O'Brien, 2006, pp. 104, 105)

In that sense, mirrors symbolize "responsive myth building". Since John cannot cope with the historical truth, he creates illusions in his head – magic tricks – that make his present bearable. He takes it too far however, as his narratives are not able to provide peace of mind. Instead, they hinder him from accessing and coping with his past: "The secrets would remain secret—the things he'd seen, the things he'd done. He would repair what he could, he would endure, he would go from year to year without letting on that they were tricks" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 75). Instead of narrating his story in a healthy way, enabling him to make sense of his past, John denies the entirety of it all. It must be a lonely and isolating endeavor, cutting the trauma victim off from reality and other people as a consequence.

John's war trauma is simply a continuation of his past. He is afraid of being rejected by his wife because he already feels abandoned by his father. In response to war, he feels equally inadequate and responds by taking on the identity of "sorcerer", an invincible persona who can "fix" reality with the help of his "magic tricks". One of the magic tricks he applies in order to make his reality more bearable is his attempt to erase all historical records of his role

in Charlie Company's involvement in the My Lai massacre. When he is stationed as a clerk before the end of his second tour, he rewrites the war record, making it as if he were never there. "Sorcerer's" idea is probably that his memories and guilt will disappear along with the historical record. Yet, it is not in the nature of trauma simply to be suppressed or forgotten. John's mother, Eleanor K. Wade, describes her son like this: "He couldn't stay asleep. It was as if he were on guard against something, tensed up, waiting for ... well, I don't know what" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 19). Years after the event, John is still not able to stop his traumatic past from completely wrecking his present.

Just like the reader of *In the Lake of the Woods* must piece together the pieces of evidence in order to "solve" the mystery of Kathy's disappearance, the trauma victim must come to terms with their uncomfortable past. In one way, the narrator of *In the Lake of the Woods*, also traumatized, does exactly what O'Brien does: explores John's motivations through the writing of a novel. The narrator is in fact attempting to understand himself, his war, and the lack of memory regarding it: "After a quarter century, nothing much remains of that ugly war. A handful of splotchy images… I cannot remember much, I cannot feel much" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 470). The lack of memories points to some kind of suppression. But where John chooses to continue to live in denial, O'Brien and the narrator choose to narrate instead, digging deeper into a veteran's mind (and arguably their own), memories, and sense of self. They never arrive at a final truth, but the multiple narratives provided leave this up to the reader. Truth is after all, in postmodernist fashion, a game of interpretation.

Tim too, copes with his trauma in a better way than John. Due to Tim's inability to register the traumatic events of his life, he is left, twenty years after the war (from the perspective of which he writes the story) with what he calls "faceless responsibility and faceless grief" because he was "afraid to look" (O'Brien, 2009b, p. 115). His guilt and trauma have no concrete source because he was not able to process it at the time. By telling stories

about it in retrospect, however, he is able to "make things present" (O'Brien, 2009b, p. 116). He is able to face the things he never dared face, and, like he writes: "attach faces to grief and love and pity and God" (O'Brien, 2009b, p. 116). By attaching his detached feelings to specific events, and his guilt to specific people, he makes his trauma less chaotic and more tangible, even if the stories are made up.

Guilt is closely tied to responsive myth building, evident in the characters Norman Bowker and Lt. Jimmy Cross in *The Things They Carried,* who are unable to bring definition and closure to their pasts. In the case of the Vietnam War, it is not controversial to say that the blame lies beyond the individual soldier. Yet, guilt keeps haunting the boys in Alpha Company. Norman Bowker ends up committing suicide, feeling that he is responsible for his comrade Kiowa's gruesome drowning in a "shit field". Although he states that Kiowa's death is "nobody's fault", and "everybody's", his guilt grows over the years and in the end he is unable to cope with it on his own (O'Brien, 2009d, p. 113). Suicide is thus presented as the ultimate consequence of unprocessed trauma.

Lt. Jimmy Cross shares in Norman Bowker's view that the blame does not exclusively lie on the individual soldier unable to save Kiowa. The narrator reports Cross' thoughts in "In the Field": "You could blame the war. You could blame the idiots who made the war. You could blame Kiowa for going to it. You could blame the rain". He goes even further:

> You could blame the people who were too lazy to read a newspaper, who were bored by the daily body counts, […] you could blame the munitions makers or Karl Marx or a trick of fate or an old man in Omaha who forgot to vote. (O'Brien, 2009d, pp. 113, 114)

The soldiers seem desperate to distribute blame for their suffering, particularly among people considered too ignorant to see the war for what it was, the people too lazy to read the

newspaper or people who did not vote "correctly". This reflects a view that the ignorant small towns of America were to blame for their meddling in Vietnam in the first place. It seems however, that such blame narratives do not help the soldiers deal with their own guilt. As will be discussed, there is a difference between distributing blame, and people willingly sharing in it.

Masculinity and Motivation

As already discussed in relation with Hemingway's fiction, our understanding of trauma can be increased if we see it in context of masculinity. Through portrayals of gender expectations and their conflict with the characters' personal desires, O'Brien's literature can be read as an example of how gender expectations reinforce trauma and how expectations to masculinity motivate warfare.

Many war narratives portray war as something rational that provides purpose to the sacrifices made. In *Farewell* Frederic states his opposition to such narratives when he utters his embarrassment for abstract words such as "glory", "honor", and "courage" (Hemingway, 2016, p. 194). *The Things They Carried* too, avoids implications of purpose and rationality when describing the war in Vietnam. Unlike the patriot John Wayne's movie *The Green Berets* (1968), O'Brien portrays the war as irrational, intangible and unmanageable (Tunzelmann, 2014). The true motivations behind the character's sacrifices are never John Wayne-like notions of heroism, patriotism, or bravery.

The motivations, I argue, can be connected to the trauma experienced by the characters, before, during and after their combat experiences in addition to their notions of masculinity. By the time O'Brien wrote *The Things they Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods,* PTSD had already been an official diagnosis for several years. As this diagnosis could be applied to both male and female sufferers of trauma, it offered a solution to the problem of

sexual difference lingering from earlier trauma genealogies, thus relieving the stigma surrounding mental health and 'hysteria' (Diedrich, 2018, p. 88). Compared with the psychological and political environment in which Hemingway wrote, this must have made it easier for O'Brien to confront his trauma in his works. Although never mentioned by its name, the newfound diagnosis is recognizable in most all of his characters and O'Brien is able to reflect more freely upon gender expectations and restrictions in his fiction. He is also less secretive as to the soldiers' lack of traditional masculinity and the pressure it put on them: "It was very sad, he thought. The things men carried inside. The things men did or felt that they had to do" (O'Brien, 2009k, p. 17). Arguably, the burden of masculine expectations is one of the heaviest things the soldiers carry in *Things.*

The motivations of many soldiers who were sent to Vietnam are recognizable in Tim's dilemma when he is struggling to decide whether to escape to Canada or not. They did not go to war for America, not to assert their masculinity, nor for pride. It is the fear of embarrassing those he loves that eventually leads Tim to stay in the boat (Heberle, 2001c, p. xx). These are quite different motivations than those usually associated with American literary heroes and frontiersmen (like Theodore Roosevelt, John Wayne, or David Crockett) and points to the experience of purposelessness surrounding the war.

The boys making up Alpha Company average between the age of nineteen and twenty years old. Most of them are drafted, and few have experience with military service. They are boys, with no idea what it means to be a 'man', let alone a soldier. In addition to the heavy load of gear they are carrying, they carry expectations to their masculinity and the soldier's greatest fear: "the fear of blushing" (O'Brien, 2009k, p. 14). The reflections upon the gender expectations that led men to war in the first place are even more potent in *Things* than in Hemingway's fiction. "On the Rainy River" is perhaps the most obvious example, as the narrator claims men's motivation for killing and dying to be that they were "embarrassed not

to. It was what had brought them to war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor" (O'Brien, 2009k, p. 15). The connection between explicit gender expectations, the "ideal soldier", and the subsequent guilt for giving in to such expectations is evident. This applies to John Wade as well, whom the narrator describes as "not much of a soldier, barely competent, but he managed to hang on without embarrassing himself" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 61). Fathers and other men, in particular, seem to represent these expectations. This is heartbreakingly clear when Norman Bowker in "Spin" wishes that his father would write him a letter saying "it's ok if [you] don't win any medals" (O'Brien, 2009f, p. 23).

In "The man I Killed", the expectations are revealed to be universal and apply to the Viet Cong as well as the American soldiers. Tim reflects upon the Vietnamese soldier he has allegedly killed, imagining his emotional struggles: "In the presence of his father and uncles, he pretended to look forward to doing his patriotic duty, which was also a privilege, but at night he prayed with his mother that the war might end soon" (O'Brien, 2009f, p. 81). One could assume that the expectations to courage exhibited in O'Brien's texts would simply strengthen similar gender expectations in society at large. Conversely, I posit that they draw attention to masculinity as a performance that contributes to and reinforces trauma.

At the root of masculinity as a source of trauma lies the fear of rejection, as evident in Tim's hallucination of all the people he loves on the shore, whom he is not willing to let down. John's motivations are in similar terms described by the narrator as "love": "It was in the nature of love that John Wade went to war. Not to hurt or be hurt, not to be a good citizen or a hero or a moral man. Only for love. Only to be loved" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 92). This speaks to soldierly ideals being so closely tied to gender expectations that John is not able to distinguish one from the other. He goes to war to earn the love of Kathy and gain the acceptance of his community.

As discussed, the portrayal of gender expectations is not exclusive to the American soldiers. The Viet Cong too, evident in the Vietnamese soldier portrayed in "Man", struggle with moral disjunctions. The Vietnamese soldier is, like Tim, afraid of bringing shame to his family. Nationalism has little to do with his going to war, he is simply afraid of being a coward. Admittedly, this is a portrayal of Vietnamese motivations, written by an American veteran who can speak minimally of the cultural or nationalist motivations behind the Viet Cong. At first glance one might understand the accusations of ethnocentricity to which O'Brien has been subjected to by Renny Theresa Christopher (1992, p. 13). I argue that O'Brien does not attempt the impossible task of speaking the final truth about Vietnam, nor *for* the Vietnamese, as he does not pretend to know the Vietnamese motivations. His portrayal of the soldier is explicitly fictional and narrated by the character Tim. It is thus presented as a fragment of a fictional character's imagination, reflecting his emotions and subjective belief in the universality of gender expectations and trauma. This unites him with the Viet Cong soldier in their humanity and common struggle with masculine ideals.

Portraying the emotional cost of war and gender is more accurate than attempting to speak for somebody else in historically correct terms. The short story "Man" provides additional insights into American perceptions of masculinity at the time, especially within the military. This perception colors O'Brien's portrayal of a Vietnamese soldier's motivations for fighting, as well as the American soldiers'. As an American veteran, he would never be able to portray Vietnam less ethnocentric or personal (Heberle, 2001a, p. 303). Instead, O'Brien may speak of American perceptions of Vietnamese beliefs and motivations without making the mistake of claiming to speak *for* somebody else's trauma in a disempowering way, like Kurtz warns about (2018, pp. 8, 9). As Heberle argues, awareness of one's ignorance is honest and less presumptuous than pretending to be able to identify with another people or culture (Heberle, 2001c, p. xxv).

As discussed, the soldiers' motivations for going to war in O'Brien's fiction are connected to the society's perceptions of masculine honor, duty, and courage. Doris Lessing argues in *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, however, that it is "sentimental to discuss the subject of war, or peace, without acknowledging that a great many people enjoy war, not only the idea of it, but the fighting itself" (2013, p. 17). The fact that there are large numbers of people who find war exciting, maybe even the best part of their lives, is to her under-communicated. Lessing notes that war can be elating, almost a possessive experience of "awful, illicit and violent excitement" (2013, p. 18). On the other hand, Lynne Hanley argues that war literature of the 20th century is full of ideas about the profound and unique emotions and relationships soldiers experience in combat (1991, p. 4). Both Hemingway and O'Brien's literature seems to oppose Hanley's claim. It does, however, acknowledge the fact that some people enjoy war, which is communicated without glorifying war as a general concept.

Azar of Alpha Company is one example of a soldier who embodies dubious motivations. To him, Vietnam is a playground where he is exempted from restrictions and consequences, and he is able to act like a child again. The impulses brought out of him in Vietnam must normally be contained. In "Spin" it is revealed that Azar blew up Ted Lavender's puppy just for fun. When confronted about this, he answers: "What's everybody so upset about? […] I mean, Christ, I'm just a boy" (O'Brien, 2009j, p. 23). In Azar's perception, being a "boy" exempts him from normal expectations of morality and empathy. These views are reflected in many of the Vietnam Veterans interviewed in the documentary *First Kill* who are very honest about the "thrill" of killing human beings (Schrijber, 2001). The same attitudes are found in the soldiers interviewed about their involvement in war crimes in the documentary *Winter Soldier* (Aranow, 1972). These soldiers were trained to kill, and then expected to rejoin society as functioning citizens upon their return. Some of the interviewees are honest about their longing to go back to Vietnam to kill again. This points to

how trauma has dismantled their prewar identity and rendered their moral compass imbalanced. Many of the people interviewed were never able to reintegrate into society and turned to drugs or suicide (Aranow, 1972; Schrijber, 2001). Traits from Mosher and Tompkins script theory, as well as bell hooks, are recognizable in the veterans' emphasis on violence and assertion of power as something valuable and exciting.

Evidently, the characters in *Things* go to war for all the wrong reasons. Masculinity, as it was presented to the soldier, can be recognized in O'Brien's characters as their motivation for going to war, not only in those wanting to live out their inner "animal" but also in those merely afraid to make a fool out of themselves. It is not patriotism, nor unselfish love for their country or their liberty. It is not because they feel that the war provides purpose and meaning to their lives, and it is not because they are politically convinced. Rather, they comply to the expectations laid upon them. Some are afraid of embarrassment, rejection, and cowardice; some seek out the reckless freedom it provides as if it were a children's game. The decision to go to war is based on negative reasons, and this lack of positive purpose mirrors the ambiguities surrounding American involvement in Vietnam in the first place, as the characters struggle to find their purpose in a chaotic and morally ambiguous war (Robinson, 1999, p. 258).

Breaking Binaries

Like in Hemingway's fiction, women are included in O'Brien's narratives. In the wake of Susan Jefford's *The Remasculinization of America* (1989), O'Brien's representations of female characters have like Hemingway's, been subjected to feminist criticism, although not to the same extent (Heberle, 2001c, p. xvii). Lorrie Smith for one, reads *Things* as a discourse of war where women are "objectified, excluded and silenced" (1994, p. 583). In her opinion, it only portrays the Vietnam war from a masculine perspective. Conversely, I find, in line

with Farrell's reading, that *Things* challenges the established view that only men are able to understand war. O'Brien's women, like Hemingway's, know what trauma is. Many of them are traumatized, and some, like Mary Anne in "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" even participate in battle. By showing that trauma also applies to women, O'Brien breaks the distinction between the masculine front and the feminine domestic sphere.

One can argue that it is not revolutionary to include women in a trauma narrative, as trauma is a part of the life experience for many women and children in the US, especially within the families of veterans (Heberle, 2001b, p. 11). A crucial point, however, is that the trauma found in O'Brien's fiction reaches behind the war story, uniting the audience in a common experience that reaches beyond gender, race, and politics. That the protagonist of *In the Lake of the Woods,* John Wade, has a name clearly playing off of "John Wayne", is hardly a coincidence. Contrasting John Wayne, John Wade is not portrayed as a traditional, masculine hero, but rather a traumatized, paranoid individual, afraid of rejection. This portrayal breaks with traditional expectations to masculinity and shows how trauma accordingly complicates the usual paradigms of power and purposeful violence inherited from the American frontier mythology (Heberle, 2001b, p. 11).

Although attempting to unite men and women through a common experience of trauma, O'Brien's portrayal of women is not uncomplicated. As discussed in relation to Hemingway's works, war changes the people involved in addition to the narratives by which they identify themselves. This also applies to gender constructs. Both authors' characters share feelings of being betrayed by women in their lives, and there are recognizable parts of the same resentment in the way O'Brien's female characters either disappear or are violently killed. Many of them, like Kathy Wade and Lt. Jimmy Cross' "girlfriend" Martha, have been unfaithful while their men were off "saving the world". Just like Harold Krebs, O'Brien's characters point to a struggle of coming to terms with the society that sent them to war. To

both authors, this society is closely connected to women and their refusal to listen to war confessions. This leads me to the importance of having a witness or sympathetic listener when attempting to narrate one's trauma.

The Role of the Witness

Inviting the reader into the narrative appears crucial in O'Brien's works. Enabling readers to feel and think what the characters do is connected to their role as witnesses and their ability to sympathize, understand, and share in the responsibility for war and its subsequent trauma. Having a sympathetic listener is, as I see it, important in trauma recovery for three reasons. First, a listener, or a witness, makes the story real in the sense that the victim, in contrast to John Wade, can no longer suppress or pretend that the traumatic event has not taken place, thus laying the basis for proper processing. Second, telling the story to a willing audience invites the listener to take part in the narrative, no longer able to turn a blind eye or pretend that they "did not know". The blame for war and atrocities is thus distributed, relieving the trauma victim of feelings of guilt (as experienced by Norman Bowker, Tim, and Lt. Jimmy Cross). Finally, having a witness contributes to greater understanding of the universality of trauma, especially if they are able to find the "emotional truth" in the confession. If successful, this leads to decreased isolation and alienation for the trauma victim, and a greater chance to reintegrate.

Many of the stories in *Things* can be read as attempts to confess trauma, some of which may cause the reader discomfort. An example is the description of Rat Kiley violently killing a baby water buffalo while the other boys of Alpha Company let it happen (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 49). Confessing is, as made clear by theorist Dori Laub, closely connected to witnessing. According to her, a confession of trauma needs to be listened to in order to make the traumatic event come into existence and consciousness. Despite historical evidence to the

event, the shock of the trauma itself has not been truly witnessed until thoroughly confessed to a listener, and cannot be properly dealt with until then (Laub, 1992, p. 57).

When Tim confesses, through his narrative, that he went to war simply because he was afraid not to, he questions existential ideas about humanity, bravery, and the purpose of war. The fact that the reader/listener additionally starts to question existing ideas about war and humanity is an important factor in the search for truth in fiction. Laub accordingly asserts that when a victim of trauma works together with a listener, they can discover new *knowledge*. Factual knowledge is not necessarily reproduced or replicated by the trauma victim, but the event is *made* real when confessed to a listener (1992, p. 62).

Jo Gill similarly emphasizes that a confession is not only a way of conveying historic truth, but rather it is a way of "producing truth" (2006, p. 4). The way in which O'Brien invites the reader into the text to feel the emotions, the unease, and the fear of the characters, is a way of making the reader responsible for the narrative process in which they participate. Trauma becomes part of the reader's experience, joining civilian listeners/readers together with traumatized veterans and sharing the responsibility between them. By bringing shame and negative emotions into the light, the trauma victim may better grasp their traumatic past and find common ground with the world around them.

By imitating the structure of trauma therapy, *In the Lake of the Woods* invites readers to further understand the nature of trauma. They become witnesses who have to piece together fragments of an incoherent narrative, evidence sections, statements, citations, and contradicting solutions in order to create something coherent themselves, just like the trauma victim has to. This mirrors the postmodernist idea that truth is mediated through interpretations of literature, even historic literature (Farrell, 2017c, p. 137). The narrator of the novel underlines this in a footnote that reads:

> Even much of what might appear to be fact in this narrative […] must ultimately be viewed as a diligent but still imaginative reconstruction of events. I have tried of course, to be faithful to the evidence. Yet, evidence is not truth. It is only evident. (O'Brien, 2006, p. 448)

The reader's ability to acknowledge the impact of trauma does not depend on the factuality of the evidence presented, but on their ability to interpret the text.

History, even if it pretends to be a medium through which reality can be observed, does not constitute truth in the novel. The reader must search for the solution to the mystery through fragments of information but there is not a final, objective answer to be found, no conclusion, no catharsis. As the narrator writes: "Kathy Wade is forever missing, and if you require solutions, you will have to look beyond these pages. Or read a different book" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 448). The frustration produced by not getting a final answer to what has happened to Kathy, leaves the reader more equipped to understand the similar difficulties in not being able to interpret one's traumatic past.

Even if O'Brien's fiction reflects an optimistic view of language's ability to convey trauma as well as contribute to the recovery process, some of the ways in which his characters express themselves appear unsympathetic to the reader. In an attempt to make their traumatic encounters easier to express, their language becomes morbid. In "The Lives of the Dead", narrator Tim elaborates on how the soldiers develop methods for coping with reality, through euphemisms and pretense: "We had ways of making the dead seem not quite so dead. Shaking hands, that was one way. By slighting death, by acting, we pretended it was not the terrible thing it was" (O'Brien, 2009e, p. 153). He goes on:

> Words make a difference. It's easier to cope with a kicked bucket than a corpse; if it isn't human, it doesn't matter much if it's dead. And so a VC nurse, fried by napalm,

> was a crispy critter. A Vietnamese baby, which lay nearby, was a roasted peanut. (O'Brien, 2009e, p. 153)

Even if the words and pretenses might appear unhealthy, they might have rendered the soldiers more capable of expressing themselves, thus laying the foundation for narrating their experiences to a witness. In a metafictional fashion Tim reflects upon the importance of being able to narrate his experiences:

> By telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin down certain truths. You make up others. You start sometimes with an incident that truly happened […] and you carry it forward by inventing incidents that did not in fact occur but that nonetheless help to clarify and explain. (O'Brien, 2009g, p. 100)

Contrasting Frederic in *Farewell*, Tim does not accept that some experiences cannot be told. He thus reflects the postmodernist view that fiction has equally as much authority as the writing of history. It does not matter whether the war story reflects the historical truth as long as it makes the reader feel if but a fragment of what the characters do in the moment.

Tim warns us however, in the metafictional "How to Tell a True War Story", of all the pitfalls the reader must keep in mind when reading a war story. If we believe the view posited by Tim, we cannot trust one single of the stories in *Things* to convey the truth. According to the narrator, "a true war story is never moral" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 43). "As a first rule of thumb you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 43). Communication with the reader in order to create an emotional connection between them and the text seems crucial. "It comes down to gut instinct. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 49).

Fiction is thus an important tool in creating sympathetic listeners, important in trauma recovery.

Failing to Witness

Sharing one's war narrative can go wrong, especially if the listener is not able or willing to listen. As discussed in relation to "Soldier's Home", Krebs' trauma only increases when he attempts to talk about it without anybody listening. In the end, he stops trying. In *Things* several characters attempt to tell stories from Vietnam through letters to the people back home. When Tim attempts to flee to Canada, he writes a letter to his parents, explaining why he cannot go to Vietnam. As "there aren't enough words" to do this, he ends up going anyway (O'Brien, 2009h, p. 35). When Kiowa dies in the "shit field", Lt. Jimmy Cross composes letters to Kiowa's parents in his head, imagining what to say to them. He is never able to send the letters. When Ted Lavender dies, Rat Kiley writes to Lavender's sister, but never receives an answer. Even if Rat Kiley "pours his heart out", "the dumb cooze never writes back" (O'Brien, 2009c, pp. 42, 43). Bowker too, writes a letter to Tim, trying to explain how he is feeling. These examples point to the lack of real communication the soldiers' letter writing provides. The receiver is often distant, maybe unable or unwilling to relate, thus making a poor witness. Laub emphasizes that such witnesses often do more harm than no witnesses at all, as the victims risk re-traumatization and further alienation (1992, p. 71). Bowker and Krebs, who are both led to the conclusion that nobody understands them, are examples of victims of re-traumatization. The same applies to John in *In the Lake of the Woods*, who attempts to confess to his unwilling wife:

> "Kath, listen, I need to tell you this. Something's wrong, I've done things."
> "It doesn't matter."
> "It does."

> She smiled brightly at a spot over his shoulder. “We could catch a movie.”
> “Ugly things.”
> “A good movie wouldn’t hurt.” (O’Brien, 2006, p. 113)

The lack of willingness to listen takes an almost comical form, as the chasm between war and an everyday activity like watching a movie is so great. These poles are nevertheless brought into the same conversation, pointing to how the war has created a distance between John and Kathy which can only be bridged by proper communication. Instead, Kathy is doing what many recipients of traumatic confessions do: she refuses to accept the emotional impact of the truth, instead choosing a narrative easier for her to live with. A confession from John does not fit into her narrative, as it will alter her entire life.

Being able to communicate is key in maintaining a sense of self, as seen in Frederic’s shattering of self, which stems, not only from his war trauma, but also his troubles with communicating it. Communication is deemed equally important in “How to Tell a True War Story”, when Mitchell Sanders and five fellow soldiers have been placed on a listening post operation. They are supposed to keep quiet and cannot relieve their tension through “horsing around” or storytelling. As a result they start to hear strange noises, cocktail parties, and music in the middle of the jungle (O’Brien, 2009c, p. 47). The sounds scare them, and they think that they are going mad. Eventually, the experience leaves them feeling disembodied and shut off from their physical self, showing how lack of communication leads to trauma in itself, not only preventing the recovery process.

The consequences of unsuccessful communication of trauma are, as we have seen, paramount in the cases of Harold Krebs, Nick Adams, and Frederic Henry. Their isolation leads them to question the relationships in their lives and cuts them off from a reality that appears to them “inauthentic”. Farrell emphasizes that a similar form of isolation is illustrated by the tunnels in *Things,* through which the soldiers have to crawl (Farrell, 2017c, p. 123).

Tunnels shut people in, rendering them unable to communicate, and their comrades equally unable to hear them. The same applies to the mud in which Kiowa is swallowed. As is evident in many of O'Brien's short fictions, "Speaking of Courage" among them, characters' inability to communicate is closely related to their trauma. It swallows the soldiers up, leaving them unheard by the world around them.

Sanders, who narrates the story of the soldiers on listening duty, admits that he exaggerated certain elements of his story: "Last night, man, I had to make up a few things". He goes on: "But listen, it's still true" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 48). This truth is not necessarily historically accurate, but what O'Brien calls "story truth" or emotional truth. The emotional truth is the isolating feeling of not being able to communicate and the lack of understanding one can meet when one attempts to convey one's experiences. In Sanders' case, the "fat bird colonel" with "wax" in his ears (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 47), and the girls back home who do not even write back are examples of "failed witnesses". More than anything, Sanders' story speaks about the importance of a voluntary listener, as forcing somebody to listen is meaningless.

It is not however, given that the recipient of a confession is willing to or capable of dealing with it. In "Speaking of Courage", Norman Bowker, former grunt of Alpha Company, drives around his hometown, imagining what it would be like if he were able to tell somebody of his experiences. He feels that nobody is willing to be the witness he longs for:

> The town could not talk, and would not listen. 'How'd you like to hear about the war' he might have asked, but the place could only blink and shrug. It had no memory, therefor no guilt. […] It was a brisk, polite town. It did not know shit about shit, and did not care to know. (O'Brien, 2009i, p. 91).

In addition to showing frustrations that the town did not care about his trauma, Bowker expresses the need to relieve some of the guilt with which he struggles. But like Frederic, Bowker is unable to communicate his trauma: “There was nothing to say. He could not talk about it and he never would” (O’Brien, 2009i, p. 98).

Bowker ends up killing himself in the locker room of the YMCA in Iowa, as revealed in “Notes”. In a letter to Tim (the narrator of “Notes”), he describes his trouble with narrating what happened to their fellow soldier Kiowa who drowned in the “shit-field” in Vietnam. In addition to expressing how much he desires the story to be told, he admits that he is deeply traumatized, unable to get out of a mental quagmire himself: “My life, I mean. It’s almost like I got killed over in Nam… Hard to describe. That night when Kiowa got wasted, I sort of sank down into the sewage with him… Feels like I’m still in deep shit” (O’Brien, 2009g, p. 99). It seems like Bowker feels that if he were only able to tell Kiowa’s story, something would be corrected, and he asks Tim if he can write it down for him: “I’d write myself except I can’t ever find any words, if you know what I mean, and I can’t figure out what exactly to say” (O’Brien, 2009g, p. 100). When Tim fails to write a story that Bowker can recognize, things deteriorate for him. It is not *Bowker’s truth* Tim has narrated, alienating him even further.

Narrator Tim is aware of what it is like to tell a story to an unwilling audience. In “How to Tell a True War Story” he tells Sanders that he understands why Sanders exaggerated his account of the “cocktail party” in the jungle. At the end of the short story, which accounts for an older woman misinterpreting the story of Rat Kiley shooting the baby water buffalo for a war story, Rat emphasizes: “She wasn’t listening [..] It wasn’t a war story. It was a love story” (O’Brien, 2009c, p. 54). She is unable to understand that the violence portrayed is a direct consequence of the grief and disillusionment Rat Kiley feels following Ted Lavender’s death. In contrast to Hemingway, who disguises his war story as a love story in order to make people listen, O’Brien narrates the story again and again, making up a few

things, in order to make his audience better equipped to recognize the emotional truth of the story—which apparently is love.

The lack of sympathetic witnesses seems to be an important aspect of the veterans' trauma as it leaves them alone with their guilt. This is further evident in "Good Form", where we are introduced to Tim's view on responsibility for the war in Vietnam. He has already admitted to having killed a man in "The Man I Killed", but later goes back on this in "Field Trip". According to Tim, he did not kill him in the factual, historical sense—only in the emotional sense, he just might have. In "Good Form" we get to know why:

> I did not kill him. But I was present, you see, and my presence was guilt enough. I remember his face, because his jaw was in his throat, and I remember feeling the burden of responsibility and grief. I blamed myself. And rightly so, because I was present. (O'Brien, 2009b, p. 114)

When Tim's daughter asks him if he has ever killed anybody, he is able to honestly say "of course not", by only considering the factual history of the situation. Additionally, taking the emotional aspect into account he can answer honestly, "yes.", too (O'Brien, 2009b, p. 115). Following this logic, the sympathetic reader, who is able to relate and emotionally connect with the narrative, is equally guilty as Tim and has also been to Vietnam. This is a paramount aspect in O'Brien's project, emphasized in Tim's assertion that "I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (O'Brien, 2009b, p. 115)

The role of being a witness is not a comfortable job and requires an effort. Additionally, it links the witness to the traumatic event, making them a co-owner and a participant in it (Laub, 1992, p. 57). They are no longer outsiders and possess *sinful knowledge* of the trauma. In Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, this is visible in his way of

describing responsibility: “it took the war to teach it, that you were responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did” (1999, pp. 42, 43). While those at home did not answer the soldiers’ letters and were unwilling to hear their stories upon their return, they could plead ignorant to the brutalities of the war. Lt. Jimmy Cross was sent to Vietnam for his country and must take responsibility for the death of his friends Ted Lavender, Curt Lemon, and Kiowa. O’Brien makes it clear, however, through Cross’ statement cited above, that the deaths in Vietnam can be blamed on everybody, even the old man in Omaha who forgot to vote.

By bringing My Lai into the narrative of *In the Lake of the Woods*, O’Brien leaves the reader with a choice regarding which scenario to believe in. Whether John participated in the massacre or merely observed, remains uncertain. If the reader is uncomfortable with this, they might just as easily choose to believe that Kathy simply escaped or left to wait for John in Canada after his political scandal. Like Hemingway, O’Brien replicates the reader’s tendency to build comfortable narratives and myths in response to traumatic situations. Hemingway does this by portraying Frederic as a morally ambiguous character when he shoots the sergeant. In the same way, O’Brien comments upon what Farrell (2017c, p. 141) refers to as the “collective amnesia” of the American population. Denial is without a doubt a survival mechanism. Instead of believing that Frederic and John are killers, it is easier to pick the comfortable narrative. Suppression, or amnesia, is not only described, but demonstrated within the reader’s sensibilities. In line with trauma studies, however, suppression is not a good way to deal with trauma, something John proves an example of, as it neglects one crucial factor: proper processing of the traumatic event. The reader must, in the same way as the characters, accept the uncomfortable alternative or risk failing to witness like Kathy or the people who never answered the soldiers’ letters.

The Uniting Ability of Trauma

By sharing responsibility, literary trauma is uniting. In both *Things* and *In the Lake of the Woods,* trauma is not only ascribed to those having survived war. Trauma can equally be found in heartbreak, infidelity, rejection, parental suicide, and alcoholism. In Hemingway, it has also been found in relation to gender expectations, childbirth, death, and nature. As O'Brien argues in "The Vietnam in Me", everybody is able to experience trauma "when fathers die, when husbands ask for divorce, when women you love are fast asleep beside men you wish were you… You don't have to be in Nam to be in Nam" (O'Brien, 1994). In "The Lives of the Dead" for example, O'Brien shows that trauma is a part of ordinary life, and that this life also includes traumatic deaths. This kills the "soldier-author" cliché that has so often left civilians as outsiders to the traumatic experience of war.

The Vietnam War continues to shape American self-perception, not only for the Americans who served in Vietnam, but all Americans of the 1960's and 1970's who were exposed to the media coverage of the war. O'Brien can thus assume that parts of his audience participate in this trauma, if only by being alive during the Vietnam era. The war is by most people considered a cultural and historical tragedy, and O'Brien's literature accordingly invites the reader to recognize a collective responsibility for it (Heberle, 2001c, p. xvii). This is further emphasized when O'Brien places the Vietnam war as an extension of the wars against Native Americans, illustrated by the excerpts in the evidence-chapters of *In the Lake of the Woods.* O'Brien's literature can be read as an attempt to unite its readers in an understanding of the collective responsibility for, and national trauma surrounding, the Vietnam War.

Whether American literature can credibly represent the war is, however, a topic for discussion. O'Brien has, like we have seen been criticized for ethnocentrism and Western understanding of the conflict by Christopher (1992, p. 13). Rather than providing an

ethnocentric view upon the conflict, I argue that O'Brien's fiction unites people, across nations, in the common experience inherent to the human condition that is trauma. Violence or the threat of violence is a reality for large parts of the population. This includes abuse, rape, catastrophe, and war. Additionally, the mass media is permeated by violence, and we are constantly reminded of our own mortality. Although O'Brien's works express what Heberle (2001c, p. xix) refers to as the "American posttraumatic culture" trauma reaches beyond the perimeter of nations.

By creating sympathetic listeners, or readers in this case, O'Brien urges us to recognize and acknowledge what happens in war. Thus, we are no longer able to turn a blind eye to suffering and atrocities, and no longer able to "choose" the more comfortable narrative. By confessing to his weaknesses and his motivations for going to war, Tim is no longer only "a coward", but a product of the contemporary climate and expectations in society, which are also to blame. He admits the truth to himself, making it impossible for him to regress into a condition of denial. Sharing responsibility and acknowledging his part helps him coming to terms with his trauma to a greater extent and leaves him with concrete happenings whereas to place his otherwise detached emotions.

Whereas Hemingway's characters dread the inauthentic, O'Brien's characters seem to pursue it as it is able to provide relief from their trauma. According to narrator Tim, stories are able to fight death and bring the dead back to life: "In a story, which is a kind of dreaming, the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world" (O'Brien, 2009e, p. 144). This is of course an illusion, but the illusion of aliveness found in O'Brien's fiction seems helpful for his characters (Farrell, 2017c, p. 133). The last story of the collection concludes it beautifully, as young Timmy (the boy Tim) experiences the traumatic death of his childhood sweetheart Linda. This connects the different sorrows everybody experiences during life to the Vietnam experience, showing how war is not a separate world that renders

the veterans isolated and impossible to relate to. By reading fiction, one is able to partake in the veterans' trauma and connect it to one's own experiences, realizing that neither the reader, the characters or the author is alone in their feelings. Where Harold Krebs, Nick Adams and Frederic Henry seek solitude as they lack somebody with whom to share their trauma, O'Brien attempts to *unite* everybody through their common experience of being human. As the narrator of "How to Tell a True War Story" concludes: "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" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 54). Universal things, in other words, are at the core of O'Brien's fiction.

Tim argues that in some cases "you can't even tell a true war story. Sometimes it's just beyond telling" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 45). The extent to which the narrator has faith in the power of narrative to convey trauma seems not to be unlimited. In the last fiction in *Things,* "The Lives of the Dead"*,* this is made even more ambiguous. The story starts with the optimistic claim that "this too is true: stories can save us" (O'Brien, 2009e, p. 144). They can save us in the sense that they can bring people back, they let us alter our past, and create better outcomes than those provided by providence. Through narrative, Tim and O'Brien are able to dream Linda, Ted Lavender, Kiowa, and Curt Lemon back to life. The same goes for the man Tim allegedly killed. This all points to imagination and fiction as a possible route out of trauma. Yet, O'Brien has already warned us never to believe any uplifting war story with a happy ending. As is revealed already in "On the Rainy River", there is no closure for Tim. "I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war" (O'Brien, 2009h, p. 39).

Even if O'Brien's characters never achieve catharsis, it does not mean that the trauma author will not be resolved. According to Heberle, stories can save lives because human identity is a construct. The world starts, is lived, and ends entirely inside our minds. Through

narratives, trauma victims may recognize and reintegrate their identities (Heberle, 2001c, p. xxii). After all, O'Brien is the one telling the stories and the one able to close the book on his characters as well as his own past, should he desire. The goal is perhaps not to recover fully, or leave Vietnam, but to *master* one's trauma—not letting it master you, as is the case for many of his characters.

Conclusion

Whereas Hemingway's texts contain a certain skepticism as to words' ability to save people from their symptoms of trauma, O'Brien's works are more optimistic. His works reflect the view that language can construct an artificial form of reality as seen in the way he describes the same events from contradictory points of view. Even if he is aware of the artificiality of narrative, and the impossibility of bringing dead people back to life, his fiction seems to embrace the artificial reality it portrays. Fiction provides a place for trauma victims to make sense of their confusing and incoherent emotions, whether these are guilt, anger, regret, or a longing to return to the war.

In Hemingway's fiction language seems to be yet another form of dishonesty in an artificial world. His fiction reveals lack of faith in confession and illustrates how "talking about it" removes some kind of value from the event. The contrast between the dark topics encountered in the texts and the simple language by which they are portrayed, indicates unnarratable pain. Hemingway's words appear to disguise the traumatic reality they represent. Whereas his fiction seems to accept that the world cannot provide authentic peace, O'Brien's literature, for the most part, does not accept that trauma has to define the lives of his characters. Stories can save them, and trauma can motivate alternative narratives which make the reality easier for them to "carry". Even if these narratives sometimes border on denial and suppression, they prove that language and fiction constitute our *personal* reality. Our interpretations of said narratives are the only sources of truth we are able to find in O'Brien's fiction. In the same way, trauma victims can attempt to interpret their traumatic past through construction of narrative.

Contrasting the skepticism in Hemingway's fiction of whether a narrative is able to free victims of trauma, O'Brien's works posit a more optimistic view on the prospect of healing. The result is, however, equally ambiguous. Where Hemingway's characters

completely lack somebody to whom they can express their traumatic history, O'Brien's characters emphasize the importance of articulating themselves to a sympathetic listener, either through speech or writing. O'Brien's literary project can thus be seen as an attempt to make sympathetic listeners out of his readers. By retelling stories of trauma from different perspectives and with different outcomes, the reader might come to understand the "emotional truth" and acknowledge the intangible impact of trauma.

Literature is important in O'Brien's works, as the only way war can make sense and be meaningful is through portrayals of it. To a greater extent than Hemingway, O'Brien's works emphasize how fiction and art surpass the writing of history when it comes to conveying the brutalities of war. This is not because war is beautiful, but because art and narrative are the only valuable and moral things that may ever come out of it. Modernists preceding O'Brien shared the view that art would be able to fill the vacuum left by senseless war and changing gender roles. Hemingway's literature does, however, not reflect the view that art would be able to provide points of reference in a changing world, even if he, himself, and his characters turn to narrative as a way of coping with their trauma. Art seems only able to imitate life: never replace it. Frederic, who claims that he is searching for his separate peace, is in fact searching for something real: the truth behind his trauma and the truth of who he has become. O'Brien's characters, on the other hand, do not look for authenticity but peace in the truer sense. It does not matter that this peace is linguistically constructed, as long as it is beautiful.

Hemingway's characters are traumatized, not only by the war, but by modernity's way of questioning their role in it. The ideas of gender that are evident in his fiction show how masculinity, as it was presented to the WWI-soldier reinforces trauma and prevents its recovery, and that in turn unresolved trauma maintains unhealthy gender expectations. Even if the notions of gender found in both Hemingway's and O'Brien's texts may express trauma, my thesis does not deny that they can be read in a way that continue to reinforce stigma

surrounding mental health and gender. This is, however, entirely dependent on the sensibilities of the reader and what they choose to pay attention to in the texts. Instead of reflecting a code of masculinity, part of the trauma found in Hemingway's and O'Brien's works can be blamed on the masculine ideals at play within the military and the period whence they wrote. Like Laub argues, war causes its victims to question the very nature of what it means to be human. What are men if not men in the traditional sense? What is war if not honorable? In order to process the severity of such trauma, there needs to be a witness who can be a "participant and co-owner of the traumatic event", thus contributing to the creation of new knowledge (1992, p. 57).

By its focus on witnesses, O'Brien's fiction reflects a more positive outlook for literature's and narrative's role in trauma recovery. In his literature, the witness makes all the difference. In Hemingway's defense, the stigma surrounding trauma and gender in the time in which he wrote rendered it difficult to seek out sympathetic witnesses. This struggle is reflected in his characters' isolation and retreat into solitude. As Farrell (2017b, p. 17) claims, in Hemingway's works "language can even be dangerous". It leaves one vulnerable and easily re-traumatized. When talked about, the traumatic past becomes real, something many trauma victims will avoid at all costs. His characters have no choice but to suffer in silence as they feel trapped in an artificial world that does not allow them to cope with their trauma in the open. The best way Hemingway's characters know how to face their isolation is by bravely and silently accepting it.

Accordingly, signs of trauma are clearly evident in the characters and the narratives found in Hemingway's and O'Brien's war fiction. These expressions of trauma can play an important role in dealing with unprocessed experiences of war and can be considered a way of working through the authors' own traumatic experiences, regardless of their historical accuracy. However, it would be arrogant to claim that Hemingway's and O'Brien's literature

proves that creatively narrating one's trauma equals recovery. Even if fiction lets the author pursue alternative destinies without it simply being expressions of denial or obsessive repetition compulsion, the problem is to know where to draw the line. As we have seen, recovering from trauma is a complex process which involves countless factors, ranging from perceptions of gender roles and the availability of sympathetic witnesses to one's faith in language as a sufficient means for communicating trauma. Further, recovery seems to be a balancing act between coherent narrative and suppression, confrontation and compulsive repetition, acknowledgement and understanding, acceptance and moving on. We may not even be talking about *recovery* per se but rather about learning to *master* once trauma before it masters one. Here, the importance of having a sympathetic witness is crucial. Constructing a narrative with the help of a listener can mean the difference between controlling one's trauma and being controlled by it. Thus, the construction of trauma narratives is not necessarily a matter of *healing*, but rather a means in learning to live with the damage done.

The most important value in trauma studies then, is perhaps not its ability to be conclusive when it comes to the connection between narrative and recovery, but rather its continued attempts to *understand* trauma and its recovery processes. In the spirit of O'Brien: "If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of an old and terrible lie" (O'Brien, 2009c, p. 43). Inconclusiveness is perhaps not the worst outcome, as we have been taught never to trust a war story if we feel elated by the end of it.

Further Possibilities

As a teacher training student, I am invested in how literature, especially canonical and classical literature, can be made accessible for my students by emphasizing its relevance to the students' own lives. By putting this thesis into the sphere of didactics and pedagogy one can further explore how trauma narratives, like the ones provided by Hemingway and O'Brien, can be utilized in order to educate sympathetic witnesses. This would be relevant for students' development within interdisciplinary topics such as health and life skills and democracy and citizenship (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019b). As we have seen, being a witness presupposes the ability to relate to, share in on, and take ownership of a confession, thus requiring an effort. If successfully done, this can contribute to a greater understanding for controversial topics reaching well beyond trauma.

To further look into racial trauma as an extension of this thesis can additionally provide entrees into discussions and topics regarding structural racism and trauma and how these topics are conveyed in veteran literature. Hemingway and O'Brien would be a fitting choice of authors. The authors seem to find a certain continuity between the wars on Native Americans, the Civil War, The First World War, and the Vietnam War. For educational purposes, this could prove a relevant topic of investigation that could contribute to development of core values such as human dignity, democracy and participation and ethical awareness (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019a).

Afterword

In 1943 my grandfather, Alfred Sortland was arrested by the Gestapo in the house where he lived with his sisters. They came in the morning of May 8th, raided the house where he lived with his sisters and brought him by boat to Bergen County jail. Alfred had been a part of a resistance group based on Bømlo, a small unsheltered island on the west coast of Norway. He belonged to a group of local partisans who provided what they had of smacks and fishing boats to transport refugees, British allies, and the families of arrested partisans from Bømlo to Shetland and safety.

The Germans had for some time grown tired of the continued resistance from local partisans and saboteurs, and the "Nacht und Nebel Erlass" (NN-establishment) had been invented to make rebels disappear in "night and mist" ("nacht und nebel" in German). Instead of being executed, which would cause disgust in the public opinion, the NN-establishment aimed at shipping the prisoners to secret concentration camps abroad where they would initially contribute to the war industry as free labor and eventually die anyway. Nobody in Norway knew where these people were taken. Not even the Red Cross could locate the NN-camps.

Alfred's journey as an NN-prisoner went with the infamous slave ship *Donau* to Stettin (today: Szczecin in Poland), from where he was brought by cattle carriages to the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp in Alsace-Lorraine in today's France. After some time, he was transferred to Mauthausen, a notorious camp outside Linz in Austria. Today, Mauthausen is famous for its quarry, where the prisoners had to carry heavy rocks up the "stairs of death" in order to build roads and expand the camp itself. On top of these stairs was a precipice, referred to by the SS guards as the "parachute plunge". Many prisoners were chased off this cliff or jumped voluntarily as if to "parachute".

By the end of the war, there was a great effort in Germany to save the war industry from the allies' bombing raids. In Melk, a sub-camp of Mauthausen, prisoners were put to digging tunnels and caves into the mountains to where some of the industry could be moved. In these tunnels, Alfred saw his friend from the same partisan group as himself being beaten to death simply because he sat down to have a breather. This is only one story of many that describes the cruelty and violence he witnessed, which he could just as easily led to his own death.

By the time white Red Cross' buses came to liberate the camps in March 1945, Alfred was a man of 189 cm weighing 45 kilos. He had seen countless people and comrades die and was barely alive himself. Some of them had died of exhaustion, some from illness and malnutrition. Many had been killed. Alfred counted himself lucky. After the war, he married a girl from Southern Norway, had five children and built an idyllic home in Bømlo. His sense of humor was great, and he laughed a lot. When he had the chance, he took out a small smack he had built out to fish the rough seas surrounding Bømlo.

It was not until I had grown up myself that I became aware that my grandfather struggled with PTSD for the remainder of his life. I grew up with stories about the war, but those were generally told by my grandmother. She, Kristine Sortland wrote a book containing Alfred's memoirs, *Til deg skal det ikke nå* (Sortland, 1998). From this book I know that it took Alfred many years before he was even able to talk about his experiences in the camps. I also know that he was never able to stand the German language again, whether on television or from German motorhome tourists. The language triggered flashbacks and painful memories. However, his trauma manifested itself mostly in his struggle with sleeping. Ironically, sleeping, which had been such a welcome escape from reality when he was imprisoned, now brought him back to the camps, forcing him to relive his past.

Alfred never received any help with his PTSD. As a result, he had to cut back on his working days at Wichmann motor factory due to lack of sleep. With five children to provide for, this was not an ideal situation. Trauma in concentration camp survivors is quite a different field from what this thesis has dealt with and would probably be more relevant in relation to authors such as Primo Levi or Kurt Vonnegut. I wanted to include my grandfather none the less, as the idea of him as a victim of trauma was at some point very surprising to me. It made me realize the many unlikely and different ways in which trauma can be expressed–or simply not expressed at all. This made me curious as to how perceptions and notions of trauma have changed from the early 1900's until this day, and how literature has helped these changes come about. Hopefully, we are more equipped to understand, relate to and help victims of trauma today than we respectively were in 1918, 1945 and 1975.

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