

How We Witness and Share War's Horror

Gary Mills

On the Cover

Interviewer: "Which of your projects are you the most proud of? And why?"

Artist: "An illustration I did a while ago called 'What A Waste' which was intended to be the cover for *American Prospect* magazine but got pulled at the last minute due to it being too controversial. It makes a strong statement on an important issue, which I believe strongly in."

Design-Inspiration interview with illustrator Robert Carter

Robert Carter's powerful art ("What A Waste") ignites WLA's cover. Originally commissioned for a progressive public policy magazine, it was pulled just prior to publication because it was considered "too controversial."¹ I would argue the hybrid (visual/textual) narrative's uncompromising fusion of fragmented imagery reveals far more than most care to know about war. It speaks to the disorientation, isolation, and dismemberment of veterans. By extension, it forces viewers to consider the same horrors inflicted on civilians caught in the fighting. It communicates the classic and more nuanced accounting of war's cost in blood (amputated arm, downturned head [PTSD/thoughts of suicide]) and treasure (\$1.27 trillion). Importantly, it also speaks to our culture's collective retreat from communal narrative traditions and honest reflections on war's fragmentation and consequences. War is revealed in Carter's work as an expression of our collective response to most complex, conscience-testing issues—a reductive quip on a t-shirt worn by those ordered to inflict and absorb the horror. With our military pull-out of Afghanistan in August 2021, I can't

¹ "Robert Carter," *Design-Inspiration*. <http://designinspiration.blogspot.com/2007/06/robert-carter.html>

help but see how Carter's illustration can be refreshed by lining through "\$1.27 trillion" and "Iraq" and writing in "\$2 trillion" and "Afghanistan." Where to next? Carter's focal point remains anchored, while the variables of cost and geography rotate like the odometer on a taxi diligently working an old route. This repetition is a horror of its own. This metaphor—war's souvenir—is a reflection of a painful pattern set into motion that pivots on treasure and terrain, with little thought on how to change, control, or comprehend the overriding narrative.

"What A Waste" serves as a launching point for a deeper examination of horror as a way to better understand war narratives. Carter's illustration is one example of the many hybrid and primary genres exposing the "horrors of war" to the American public. I had asked Carter for permission to use his work for WLA's cover due to its beautifully layered representation of a horrific truth. More to point, Carter's art stoked a long-standing desire I had to share glimpses into other works that also framed war's horror. Sampling from Civil War stereographs and pre-WWII bubblegum cards to traditional literary works, I survey different depictions of the "horrors of war" to outline underlying patterns still in play. The resulting framework can support studies of art through horror's application of 1] disorientation—fractured time, geography (navigation), language, meaning; 2] separation—individual from self/society, individual from unit, unit from main force; and 3] physical dismemberment and deformation—of self, others, animals, objects, ideals, faith. We see these elements come alive in Carter's "What A Waste," which helps to explain why his work resonates in a way that is too controversial for most, yet serves as one of WLA's exemplars.

Narratives Instruct and Heal

"Many veterans experienced that disorienting bewilderment [like Odysseus being put on the shore of his home, Ithaca, while he slept]. This wasn't the place they left. The rapid pace of social and cultural change in America, starting in the 1960s, has been often remarked and often blamed by Vietnam veterans themselves for their sense of estrangement. But for a returning combat veteran to 'fail to know the land' is typical for the return to civilian society. [...] Homer saw this first, and what he saw wasn't pretty."²

Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*

Before surveying horror's role in war story architecture, it's essential to understand the role narratives play in society, especially for combat veterans. Stories, even narrative fragments, build meaning and shape communal understanding of war. Starting with acclaimed psychologist Jerome Bruner, we get a clearer sense of the pivotal role narratives play in all aspects of life, especially our survival of, and recovery from, war.

Bruner explores the role culture plays in giving meaning to our actions through the "interpretive system" of language and symbols.³ "It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture's symbolic systems—its language and discourse modes, the forms of logic and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent communal life."⁴ These communal, collectively defined patterns are shaped by daily communication. "Indeed, the meaning placed on most acts by the participants in any everyday encounter depends upon what they say to one another in advance, concurrently, or after they have acted."⁵ Bruner asserts we have a "readiness or predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form, into plot structures, and the

² Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America* (Scribner, 2002), 120-121.

³ Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Harvard UP, 1990), 34.

⁴ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 34.

⁵ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 18.

rest.”⁶ Narratives create powerful “links between the exceptional and the ordinary.”⁷ With these culturally defined supports in place, “the function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern.”⁸ Narratives teach, warn, and restrain—and we’re predisposed to use and even personalize these templates.

Stories provide an important bridge connecting motive, ideology, and impulse to each shifting context. This bridge in turn allows us to “resolve divergent narratives.”⁹ More than just a type of cultural scaffolding, narratives provide us with tools to continue to live in light of, and in the face of, “conflicts and contradictions that social life generates.”¹⁰ Narratives give us “reflexivity” that allows us to change the present in light of lessons from the past, and they generate a “capacity to envision alternatives.”¹¹ This also opens the ability to see war through the eyes of the *other*, the enemy. Importantly, the war narrative opens a flexible way to represent social and moral contradictions seen not only on the battlefield, but also on the home front.

Representing this struggle for meaning in real terms, Kevin Sites’ *The Things They Cannot Say* examines the conflicted issues of alienation and healing war witnesses must negotiate upon their return home.¹² “Storytelling also knits a community together. It records or recreates the collective history and transforms actors and listeners alike into community

⁶ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 45.

⁷ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 47.

⁸ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 49-50.

⁹ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 68.

¹⁰ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 97.

¹¹ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 109-110.

¹² Kevin Sites, *The Things They Cannot Say* (Harper, 2013), xxv.

witnesses [underline added].¹³ War narratives allow communities to share in aspects of the combat experience. "Stories are a way for societies to share in the burden of war. They provide knowledge necessary to better understand the warrior's experience and help them find meaning and sometimes forgiveness for their actions."¹⁴ Importantly, these stories encourage an interplay of formal and informal language that may well help generate "a way to release warriors from the bonds of their own silence and help them say the things they felt they could not say."¹⁵

Expanding our understanding of the trauma associated with homecoming, Sebastian Junger explores our national-level connectedness, shared meaning, and understanding of war in his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*.¹⁶ Using medical research and cultural studies, he examines the impact modern societies have on the collective *resilience* of its people.¹⁷ Technologies and infrastructure propagate "individualized lifestyles" that are "brutalizing to the human spirit."¹⁸ Soldiers, in contrast, depend on and sacrifice for each other. This tight-knit "tribe" in turn promotes the best in humanity, even during the worst disasters and horrors.

Our national "lack of connectedness"¹⁹ rarely provides opportunities for its members to "act selflessly"²⁰ and place the good of the nation ahead of individual desires. Warriors are immersed in a "tribal way of thinking at war, [sharing, cooperating, providing for, and defending each other] but when they come home they realize that the tribe they were actually fighting for wasn't their country, it was their unit."²¹ Warriors return to a country that "isn't willing to make

¹³ Sites, *The Things They Cannot Say*, xxvi.

¹⁴ Sites, *The Things They Cannot Say*, xxxii.

¹⁵ Sites, *The Things They Cannot Say*, xxv-xxvi.

¹⁶ Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (Kindle Edition, Twelve Press, 2016), 96-97.

¹⁷ Junger, *Tribe* 52.

¹⁸ Junger, *Tribe*, 93.

¹⁹ Junger, *Tribe*, 111.

²⁰ Junger, *Tribe*, 109.

²¹ Junger, *Tribe*, 109.

[the same] sacrifices."²² This fragmentation resonates in our stories, but often intensifies when placed in contact with popular, public, and official narratives often summarized in the uninformed platitude—"Thank you for your service."²³

These narratives serve a critical role across society, especially in terms of gaining some understanding of the divergent and destructive behavior inflicted on and by humanity during war. Horror in war stories is nothing new; however, it is more than graphic detail or images of carnage. Horror's dynamic role is in the form of the lens we can craft from it to construct and analyze war narratives. We see horror revealed across the spatial, communal, and physical fragmentation in the narrative. This type of story fragment collection, cohesion, and alignment towards horror allows authors and readers to collaborate in the joint construction of new, evolving war narratives. Before we apply horror as an orienting lens, we need to examine how horror itself is understood and communicated.

²² Junger, *Tribe*, 109-110.

²³ Junger, *Tribe*, 97.

Horror Defined and Designed

"The work of horror does not concern imminent death from which one flees, trembling, but rather the effects of a violence that labors at slicing, at the undoing of the wounded body and then the corpse, at opening it up and dismembering it. [...] Albeit linked to terror by the violence that they share, horror is distinguished precisely in this effect of disfiguration."²⁴

Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*

As one of the first narratives on war, *The Iliad* is a common starting point for a look at foundational structures and scaffolding that arc across many war stories. We see the trace of this pattern in Charles Segal's examination of this classic in his book *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*. His work serves as a central source on our understanding of horror's origins. Through his exploration of destruction in *The Iliad* (stripping of armor, decapitations, and the killing of noncombatants), he reveals how Homer's war narrative serves as a "barometer of the rising violence stirred by Achilles' Wrath [against Hector for killing of Patroclus]."²⁵ Segal traces Homer's lyric tempo and rising tension²⁶ as key agents (some earnest and valorous, others evil and duplicitous) are reshaped by the war. As a result, both agents and victims are degraded by combat.²⁷ "Pity" and "gentleness" shine in parallel with their unrestrained opposites.²⁸ Achilles' wrath illustrates a "yielding to the intoxicating savagery of the war" and the "total loss of civilized restraints as the fury of the battlefield runs its course."²⁹ Horror rests in this abandonment of humanity, either through design, or in Achilles' case, uncontrolled rage.

²⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (Columbia UP, 2008), 12.

²⁵ Charles Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, NL, 1971), 18.

²⁶ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 14.

²⁷ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 11-12.

²⁸ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 12-13.

²⁹ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 20.

Segal reveals the layered patterns of mutilation through thematic and structural repetitions.³⁰ We see in warriors' internal and public discourses threats to leave victims to the horror of having their remains consumed by dogs and ravens.³¹ Animals, and warriors behaving like them, are the baseline agents of disfigurement and mutilation. We see the worst of deeds and actions overlaid on several warriors, but preeminently upon Achilles. He weeps lovingly over Patroclus' remains; however, this same loss rapidly fuels destruction and horror through the systematic and amplified fragmentation and erasure of Hector's physical appearance and, ultimately, his identity.³² Segal asserts Homer's "mutilation theme" exposes the pathos released by war, which ultimately destroys "civilized values" and "civilization itself."³³

Extending Segal's look at mutilation, Adriana Cavarero, author of *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, defines and names the outcome of humanity's deranged pathos and rejection of established values during war as "horror." It's a corrosive, malignant outgrowth that even exceeds terror. Terror, fear of "imminent death," is twisted and mutilated into "[...] the undoing of the wounded body and then the corpse, at opening it up and dismembering it."³⁴ Horror resides as the "nucleus of an even more profound [...] excessive violence [...] that spreads over the scene of war's massacre."³⁵ Cavarero addresses horror's ability to distort and marginalize. "Horror is distinguished precisely in this effect of disfiguration."³⁶ Cavarero's most valuable contribution is her exploration of horror's erasure of "uniqueness" and violation of

³⁰ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 15.

³¹ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 9.

³² Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 12.

³³ Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad*, 33.

³⁴ Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 12.

³⁵ Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 12.

³⁶ Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 12.

“corporeal unity” of the victim.³⁷ Drawing from Hannah Arendt, Primo Levi, and Michel Foucault, Cavarero includes the devastation of identity and agency as part of this annihilation...not only when inflicted on armed combatants, but even more so when turned upon helpless victims.³⁸

Segal and Cavarero expose horror’s far-reaching fragmentation of the physical body, humanity, identity, and agency. Beyond academic explications of horror, we benefit from a quick survey of works, principally American and British, starting in the 1800s that have purported to define, expose, or archive horror’s vivisection of humanity. Note these works’ use of text, then text with sketches, followed by photography with *anchoring text*,³⁹ and, ultimately, film and immersive games. Clearly the depiction of horror morphs with each technological innovation—as well as society’s response to it.

³⁷ Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 12.

³⁸ Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 12.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image [1977],” *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World* (Bedford, 2004), 156.

Horror Distilled to Genre

"To know the HORRORS OF WAR is to want PEACE."

GUM, INC., Phila., Pa., 1938⁴⁰

This is in no way a full accounting of all works depicting horror—they exist in genres and mediums beyond reckoning. However, the following collection of works assert, as expressed in their titles, to capture some attribute or depiction of war's horror. Some are witness observations and journalistic accounts, while others are technology-mediated replications of horror's aftermath. Surfacing following Europe's Napoleonic Wars and America's Civil War, the following survey tours authors' and artists' attempt to distill the unthinkable into a genre in order to share a warning with humanity.

Evan Rees' *Sketches of the Horrors of War* is published in London, 1818. It is a textual narrative based on Eugène Labaume's observations of Napoleon's brutal and costly campaign into Russia in 1812. Released for viewing in 1863, Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* initially included 80 prints of a total 82 (etchings and engraved plates) created between 1810-1820 of French atrocities in Spain during the Napoleonic Wars.⁴¹ These etchings, as Susan Sontag notes, "[...] move the viewer close to the horror. All the trappings of the spectacular have been eliminated: the landscape is an atmosphere, a darkness, barely sketched in. War is not a spectacle."⁴²

⁴⁰ Horrors of War Card Collection, 1938 Gum, Inc., BMW Sportscards, Madison, WI, bmwcards.com/sets/1938-gum-inc-horrors-of-war-nonsport/32/1. Mr. Wertz generously gave Dr. Gary Mills permission to use images of his "Horrors of War" Bubblegum Card Collection on 6 April 2015. The quoted text is on the back of each Horrors of War card.

⁴¹ Jesusa Vega, "The Dating and Interpretation of Goya's *Disasters of War*," *Print Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1994, p. 3, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41824811.

⁴² Susan Sontag, "Looking at War," *The New Yorker*, 2002, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/09/looking-at-war.

A technological leap remediating horror occurred during the American Civil War when a series of photographs were turned into stereograph cards ("3D" technology of the day) designed to capture war's horror. Entitled *The Horrors of War: 1861-1865, The War For the Union*, the stereograph [Images 1 and 2] shows a dead soldier on his back with the majority of



Image 1: *The Horrors of War: 1861-1865, The War For the Union*. [Front]⁴³

his abdomen ripped away by the path of a cannonball. Not only is the soldier's body disfigured, but it has also been fragmented. His left hand severed below the wrist. Of note, during research I've seen the same image with different descriptions in the national archives. In one set the soldier is "Federal" while in another the same casualty is labeled "Confederate."⁴⁴ It's either an honest error or the intentional accommodation to a specific (paying) audience.

⁴³ Alexander Gardner, *The Horrors of War, 1861-1865, The War For the Union* [Front], c. 1863, Photograph. Library of Congress, Washington D. C., *Library of Congress*, 22 Sept. 2016, www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/stereo.1s02695/.

⁴⁴ Alexander Gardner, *War effect of a shell on a Confederate soldier at the battle of Gettysburg* [Front], c. 1863, Photograph. Library of Congress, Washington D. C., *Library of Congress*, 22 Sept. 2016, www.loc.gov/item/2011646175.

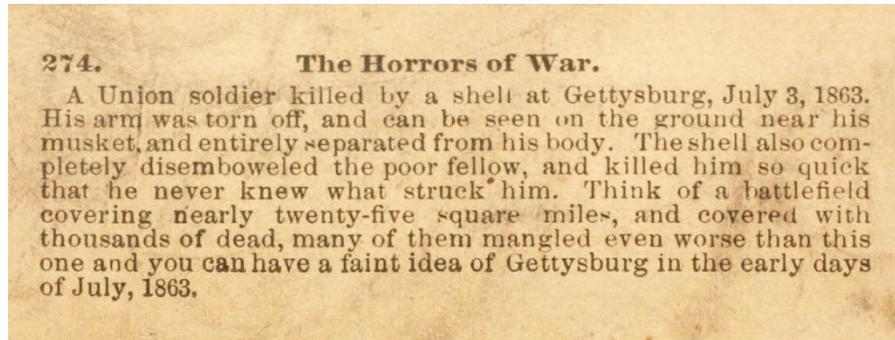


Image 2: *The Horrors of War: 1861-1865, The War For the Union.* [Back]⁴⁵

In 1876, Henry Hernbaker Jr. and John Lynch printed a historical narrative of their imprisonment under the Confederacy in *The Horrors of the Andersonville Prison Pen*. Stephen Crane's famous Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* is published in 1895. Following the novel's release, critic Harold Frederic in 1896 says the book has the "effect of a photographic revelation which startles and fascinates [...] The product is breathlessly interesting."⁴⁶ Also in 1896, Bishop William C. Doane publishes the "Follies and Horrors of War" in *The North American Review*. He lambasts tensions between America and Britain over territorial claims in South America; Turkish atrocities against Armenians; and America's ongoing expansion via the Monroe Doctrine.

In 1910 Jacob Funk publishes *War Versus Peace: A Short Treatise on War: Its Causes, Horrors, and Cost; and Peace: Its History and Means of Advancement*. It includes charts of the lives and lucre expended by participating nations ranging from the Napoleonic Wars to the Spanish-American War; a photograph of dead Japanese soldiers near Port Arthur; and, among

⁴⁵ Alexander Gardner, *The Horrors of War, 1861-1865, The War For the Union* [Back], c. 1863, Photograph. Library of Congress, Washington D. C., *Library of Congress*, 22 Sept. 2016, www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/stereo.2s02695/.

⁴⁶ Harold Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph," *The New York Times*, 26 Jan 1896, *Proquest*, search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/1016054076/AFD5482FF30046BDPQ/14?accountid=11496.

other elements, lyrics to peace songs. Walter Finks' *The Ludlow Massacre* is released in 1914. His work details the deadly clash between striking coal miners, including their families, and US troops in Colorado. He incorporates pictures of the miners' camp, militia and equipment, and political cartoons.

The film *Battle of the Somme* brought the front lines to theaters across Great Britain in 1916. Although some have questioned the authenticity of the scenes, the impact on the general public was "a kind of stunned but approving empathy."⁴⁷ Interestingly, the film was preceded by the reading of a letter written by British Secretary of State for War, David Lloyd George: "I am convinced that when you have seen this wonderful picture, every heart will beat in sympathy with its purpose [...]."⁴⁸ Published in 1924, Ernst Friedrich's *War against War!*, according to Sontag, cuts at "militarist ideology" through the "shock therapy" of 180 graphic images, including horrific close-ups of war's work to disfigure soldiers' faces.⁴⁹ Erich Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929 and the film version in 1930 "have come, like the young protagonist, schoolboy-soldier Paul Bäumer, to symbolize the transformative horror of the Western Front, a horror that remains embedded in Western consciousness."⁵⁰

In 1932 Frederic Barber's *The Horror of It: Camera Records of War's Gruesome Glories* reveals a collection of 78 graphic photographs depicting military and civilian casualties from WWI. Interlaced are 11 war poems, including Robert Service's "On The Wire" and Harold Peat's

⁴⁷ Roger Smither, "A Wonderful Idea of the Fighting': The Question of Fakes in 'The Battle of the Somme,'" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, pp. 149-168, www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01439689300260181?needAccess=true.

⁴⁸ S.D. Badsey, "Battle of the Somme: British War-Propaganda," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1983, pp. 99-115, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01439688300260081.

⁴⁹ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁵⁰ John Chambers II, "'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1930): The Antiwar Film and the Image of the First World War," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2006, pp. 377-411, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01439689400260291.

"The Inexcusable Lie." Marine Brigadier General Smedley Butler, two-time Medal of Honor recipient, publishes *War is a Racket* in 1935, a scathing text calling for the removal of profit from war through conscription of industry, implementation of a vote on going to war by those selected to fight it, and the reduction of the military to meet strictly defensive needs. He reveals horror's most vicious catalyst—greed.

In 1938 children could buy a stick of "Gum Inc." chewing gum for a penny. The package included a 2 ½ by 3 ¼ inch "Horrors of War" card—similar in layout to baseball cards of the day. One side [Images 3 and 5] shared a depiction of the horror, created by lead artist Charles Steinbacher, and on the back [Images 4 and 6] was a journalistic description of the atrocity.⁵¹ The card proclaimed in bold text that "To know the HORRORS OF WAR is to want PEACE"—it also shared that the card the child held was just one of 240 horrors to collect. The set was so popular it was later expanded to 288 cards. In June of the same year, *Superman* would premiere for 10 cents in *ACTION COMICS #1* to battle criminals, Nazis, and Imperial Japanese saboteurs—he was soon joined by *Captain America* and *Wonder Woman*.

⁵¹ Roger Hurlburt, "Blood for A Penny," *SunSentinel*, 16 Oct. 1994, articles.sun-sentinel.com/1994-10-16/entertainment/9410130554_1_gum-cards-war-cards-card-designs.



Image 3: "#11 Japanese Flagship Assailed in Whangpoo" [Front]⁵²

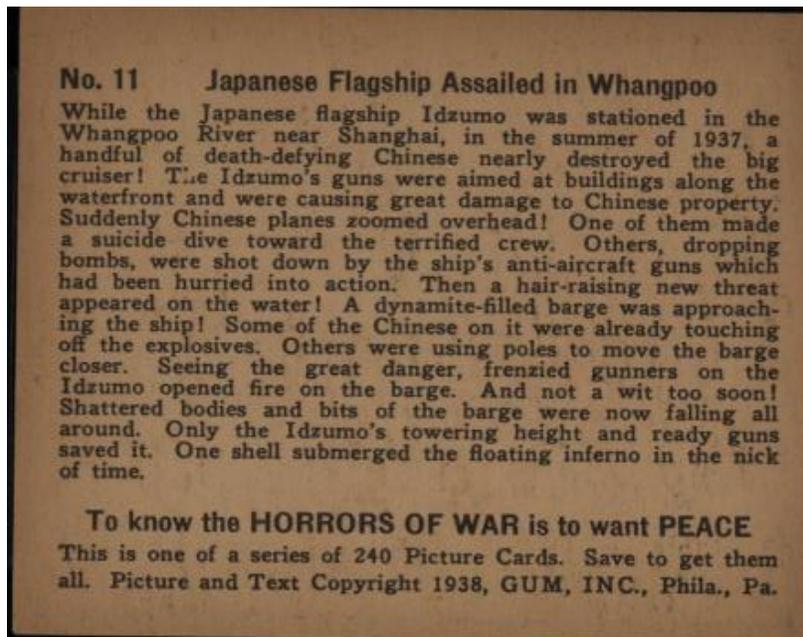


Image 4: "#11 Japanese Flagship Assailed in Whangpoo" [Back]⁵³

⁵² Wertz, "No. 11: Japanese Flagship Assailed in Whangpoo [Front]." *Horrors of War Card Collection, 1938 Gum, Inc.*, BMW Sportscards, Madison, WI, bmwcards.com/sets/1938-gum-inc-horrors-of-war-nonsport/32/1. Mr. Wertz generously gave Dr. Gary Mills permission to use images of his "Horrors of War" Bubblegum Card Collection on 6 April 2015.

⁵³ Wertz, "No. 11: Japanese Flagship Assailed in Whangpoo [Back]."



Image 5: "#99 Ghoulish Dogs Haunt the Ruins of China [Front]"⁵⁴

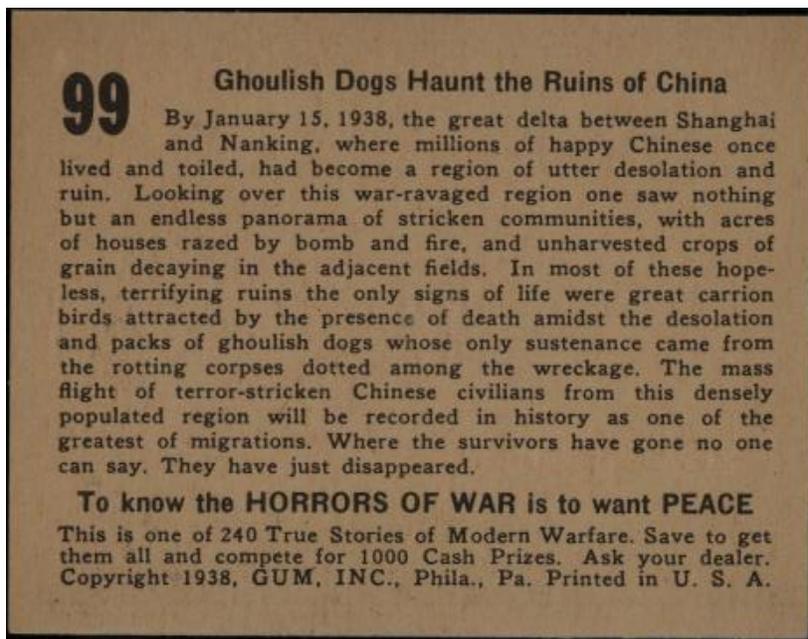


Image 6: "#99 Ghoulish Dogs Haunt the Ruins of China [Back]"⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Wertz, "No. 99: Ghoulish Dogs Haunt the Ruins of China [Front]."

⁵⁵ Wertz, "No. 99: Ghoulish Dogs Haunt the Ruins of China [Back]."

Sontag asserts these types of visuals, real or staged, tend to dominate the narrative: "The problem is not that people remember through photographs but that they remember only the photographs."⁵⁶ This has a potentially corrosive effect on war stories: "To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture [...] Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they don't help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else; they haunt us."⁵⁷ Consider for a second an audience of non-witnesses in the aftermath of the Civil War. Would they have gained a greater understanding of the horrors of war through viewing a complete set of "1861-1865, The War For the Union, The Horrors of War" stereographs or through reading *Red Badge of Courage*? The narrative, not just the shock, is critical.

Narrative fragments vie for voice, and photographs and films have taken center stage as a controlling element in key stories since 1839.⁵⁸ Susan Sontag exposes the power photographs and films have to make something "more real," although this authority fades after relentless coverage and use.⁵⁹ Over time, this visual media bombardment has not only made us immune to the horror, but it also changes our association with it. "Image-glut," as Sontag calls it, not only degrades our attention and sensitivity but may also "neutralizes the moral force" of these depictions of the horrors of war.⁶⁰

Works of all types have the potential to influence war stories. However, images may in fact distract audiences from a narrative that can build meaning and understanding of what it

⁵⁶ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁵⁷ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁵⁸ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁵⁹ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁶⁰ Sontag, "Looking at War."

means to go to war.⁶¹ "Photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric."⁶² "They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus."⁶³ Images, especially when working in isolation, lack the ability to create pause for deep reflection and, can't "unfold," in the same way as a complex narrative.⁶⁴ Where will our fascination with horror's shock value lead us? One potential way to better understand the shock and narrative of war is to see it through the lens of horror. We can use horror as a way to frame and analyze war narratives, which may help to build depth and story to humanity's capacity for horror. America's visual-centric consumption of violence makes this a serious challenge.

Returning to Carter's cover art, we can see the layered complexity. The work excels because it amplifies a specific war context. Also the critical elements of horror are muted so the waste of war can unfold. The viewer is drawn first to the crimson text. It is removed from its role as a t-shirt gift meme linked to someone's elaborate vacation. Pulled from one familiar context to be repurposed as satire, the text starts to unfold war's horror. This disorientation activates pathos (suffering wearer, suffering of the Iraqi people) and logos (cost/benefit) to open viewers' notice of the missing arm. In contrast, visuals like the earlier Civil War stereograph draw us directly to the fragmentation, the evisceration. Carter's work, however, gives us an oblique look through a hint of earlier (since healed) fragmentation. The message of horror grows instead of contracting or simplifying as viewers slowly grasp each narrative element to ultimately see their own complicity and direct contribution (taxes, lack of or targeted political involvement, etc.) in the enormous waste.

⁶¹ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁶² Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁶³ Sontag, "Looking at War."

⁶⁴ Sontag, "Looking at War."

Often, the more subtle depictions of horror stay with viewers longer. Richard Price famously said the horrors of war could be shared by forcing the audience to fill in the blanks. He provides the following advice to his students: "The bigger the issue, the smaller you write. Remember that. You don't write about the horrors of war. No. You write about a kid's burnt socks lying in the road. [...] That's what you do. You pick the smallest manageable part of the big thing, and you work off the resonance."⁶⁵ Price employs (arguably Carter applies a variant of it too) a technique Tzvetan Todorov lauds in Edger Allen Poe's works: "Poe describes fragments of a whole; and, within these fragments, he chooses the detail; thus in rhetorical terms he practices a double synecdoche."⁶⁶ In this application, "The human body in particular is reduced to one of its components [...]."⁶⁷ Price through the burnt socks allows the readers' culturally-shaped pathos for children to run wild. Readers seek answers and meaning in relation to the welfare and status of this culturally-set image of youth, innocence, and vulnerability. This culturally-constructed reverence for the safety of children is fragmented, and the reader is forced to bridge the narrative gap. The same response is activated as we look at Carter's work—staring at the limp, empty shirt sleeve—wondering what weapon or brutal melee tore the arm from his body.

Through horror's lens, we're able to construct a map to see how narrative fragments are aligned. It can help writers and researchers better understand each level of magnification. At the heart of horror's application is a hierarchy of separation—moving from the subtle disorientation to the graphic dismemberment of the body:

- Disorientation—fractured time, geography (navigation), language, meaning

⁶⁵ Richard Price quoted in Ralph Fletcher, *What a Writer Needs*, 2nd ed. (Heinemann, 2013), 49.

⁶⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge UP, 1990), 101.

⁶⁷ Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, 101.

- Separation—individual from self/society individual from unit, unit from army
- Physical dismemberment/deformation—self, others, animals, objects

Disorientation forces reader's imaginations to engage at higher levels. Physical fragmentation allows for an intense application of pathos and detail, as we momentarily see ourselves in the victim's context.

Proxies and Witnesses

"It looks like they had it pretty good to me."⁶⁸ My Uncle Roy shared this after being asked what he thought of the movie *The Great Escape* by a reporter from *The Daily Independent*. It was Sunday, 15 September 1963, and the Gem Theatre in Kannapolis, N.C. had held a special advance viewing of the film for ten local ex-POWs and their families. Roy's comment didn't make the print—likely because Mr. Grady's (captured by Japanese on Bataan) remark did: "I would call a camp like that just like being entertained at a hotel."⁶⁹

We're typically viewing narratives from one of two unique, but potentially intersecting, vantage points. Proxies construct a researcher's scaffolding supported by interviews, archives, and engagement with artifacts (letters, pictures, official correspondence, news clips, etc.) telling and reshaping the war narrative as a generative fusion of each contribution. Proxies craft a kinesthetic effect through borrowed ethos, researched perspectives, and varied voices.

Works by proxies can become the voice for those unable to share their experiences. For example, proxy and 2015 Nobel Laureate in Literature Svetlana Alexievich gives voice to Soviet women who fought during WWII in her book *War's Unwomanly Face*. She gives voice to veterans, and their families, of the doomed Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 in her book *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War*. During her medal presentation, the Chairman of the Nobel Committee for Literature describes Alexievich as "a stenographer in a high court, she enumerates the injustices visited on the unprepared and defenceless. Here are the words of thousands of witnesses for the first and only time. Without her, they would never

⁶⁸ Personal Interview with Roy Mills, July 2000.

⁶⁹ Jim McAllister, "The Kriegies Meet," *The Daily Independent*, 22 Sept 1963.

have seen the light."⁷⁰ Proxies echo and evoke new voices for fragment owners, which allows an otherwise isolated personal narrative to find an audience.

Witnesses craft deeply personal, transformative scaffolding welded by experience, with research and archives employed to refresh, replace, or reimagine faded memories. Knowing the author has kinesthetic authority with all senses immersed, accurately or not, in the experience adds alluring ethos. This authority emits power. I sense it when cracking the spine of works by Benjamin Busch, Dexter Filkins, Sebastian Junger, Brian Turner, and many others. Some witnesses have put pen to paper while in situ, adding immediacy and intimacy to their works. For example, Colby Buzzell's blogs from Iraq, later becoming *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*, and Brian Turner's powerful poem "Here, Bullet," written in Iraq and secured in his shirt pocket for the rest of his combat tour.

A bias in favor of witness narratives is understandable, but the "been there" ethos of witnesses can't carry the entire weight of the negotiation of meaning between the work and its audience. It can be a powerful aid, but in and of itself, it's not enough. We're dealing with a transfer of raw, chaotic actions, emotions, and energy into the orderly technology of writing, which can change aspects of the experience. Author and war literature authority Donald Anderson expresses this transfer issue best in terms of language's alteration of experience: "The trouble with so-called nonfiction or memoir is that language alters experience...and then supersedes experience."⁷¹

⁷⁰ "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2015 - Presentation Speech," *Nobelprize.org*, Nobel Media AB 2015, Web, 23 Sep. 2016, www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2015/presentation-speech.html.

⁷¹ Donald Anderson, "A Thought," Received by Dr. Gary Mills, 20 May 2016.

Anderson touches on the pivotal transfer our embodied actions take once they become a permanent fixture of language. He aptly compresses the constraints all writers face as they turn emotion and powerful imagery into text constrained by grammar, genre, form, and cultural or historic knowledge an audience must bring to the reading engagement. Technology creates a “culturally controlled domesticated space,”⁷² which adds abstraction and reflective distance.⁷³ Through writing, we organize, filter, and designate. Yet, the joy of writing is its ability to move beyond these barriers through a combination of perspectives, scenes, and emotions.

As readers of both types of authors, we are drawn in, but certainly with an expectation. Rhetorician Wayne Booth explains this high-stakes exchange as a type of detente. Ultimately, the author “negotiates” meaning; carefully “accommodates” to meet the needs and expectations of the audience without compromising their convictions, which ultimately generates a shared reality.⁷⁴ More directly—author and audience “[...] are pursuing not just victory [fulfillment of expectations or championing an argued position] but a new reality, a new agreement about what is real.”⁷⁵ This creation of reality is essential to the narrative. “No rhetorical effort can succeed if it fails to join in the beliefs and passions of the audience addressed.”⁷⁶ Mastery of this *techne* (craft) is open to all skilled writers, and once coupled with authority over the subject, proxies or witnesses can engage their audiences with equal intensity.

Combat veteran and author Matt Gallagher places *authority* at the foundation of good war literature: “War as a writing subject is not a mystical crucible for a chosen few who’ve stared

⁷² Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (MIT Press, 1995), 127.

⁷³ Walter Ong, “Writing is a Technology that Reconstructs Thought,” Edited by Ellen Cushman, Eugene Kintgen, Barry Kroll, Mike Rose. *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*, pp. 19-31 (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 28.

⁷⁴ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 46-54.

⁷⁵ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, 47.

⁷⁶ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, 51.

into the Eye of the Beast to render understanding for the masses."⁷⁷ It is a subject that requires research, reflection, and understanding of the many facets of the subject as possible.⁷⁸ He rapidly plows down hold-over lines of defense giving primacy to witness writers, especially in the wake of more proxies focusing on the subject of war. Importantly, he underscores that war authors of all stripes "shouldn't feel bad or ashamed that the subject we write about is important and relevant."⁷⁹ Drawing directly from author Matthew Thomas, Gallagher emphasizes the need to bring the horror and waste of war to each successive generation in a new and thought-provoking way.⁸⁰ Carter's work is a brilliant example of just such a way to challenge and engage audiences.

Authority and *techne* become the prerequisites of effective war narratives. Before leaving the issue of authority, it is vital to note that a similar flag was planted by a book reviewer not long after the release of American's touchstone of proxy-written war fiction, Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. In his 26 January 1896 review in *The New York Times*, Harold Frederic, correspondent and respected novelist, addresses the issue of war story writing by proxies and witnesses back when American war literature was, arguably, just being born. He illustrates how many reviewers of the day made it a foregone conclusion that Crane was indeed a witness of combat. Frederic quotes one ill-informed source, *The Saturday Review*, that asserts that Crane "must have seen real warfare" because of "The extremely vivid touches of detail convince us."⁸¹

⁷⁷ Gallagher, "You Don't Have to Be a Veteran to Write about War."

⁷⁸ Gallagher, "You Don't Have to Be a Veteran to Write about War."

⁷⁹ Gallagher, "You Don't Have to Be a Veteran to Write about War."

⁸⁰ Matthew Thomas quoted by Gallagher, "You Don't Have to Be a Veteran," paraphrased above.

⁸¹ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

Frederic uses this confusion on the part of his contemporaries as an opportunity to introduce his research of Revolutionary War combat narratives written by proxies and witnesses. Looking at writing from the perspective of enlisted soldiers and officers with “high education and considerable literary talent,” narratives by these witness writers were often unable to engage and immerse the audience.⁸² “I found to my surprise that the people who were really in the fight gave one much less of an idea of the desperate forest combat [Battle of Oriskany] than did those who pictured it in fancy [...].”⁸³ This comparison is then extended to accomplished witness and proxy writers:

[...] I compared the best accounts of Franco-German battles, written for the London newspapers by trained correspondents of distinction who were on the spot, with the choicest imaginative work of novelists, some of them mentioned above, who had never seen a gun fired in anger. There was literally no comparison between the two.⁸⁴

Frederic places the ability to negotiate meaning in the hands of both types of war authors. He also argues that Crane’s work is a new, hybrid genre, which establishes the dynamic American War novel, and its potential to evolve.

⁸² Frederic, “Stephen Crane’s Triumph.”

⁸³ Frederic, “Stephen Crane’s Triumph.”

⁸⁴ Frederic, “Stephen Crane’s Triumph.”

American War Stories, Fragment Fusion, and Hybrid Form

"Dad wrote me in an email: There were no sandy beaches for Papa. Just the cliffs. When they finally got to the top, his unit took cover in a cemetery. It was dark; they were exhausted and hungry and scared and they were attacked and the damn Japanese just wouldn't drop when they were shot. And shot again and again. At dawn it was evident that the Marines had definitely 'killed' every tombstone in the cemetery—along with 400 plus actual Japanese soldiers. Papa only laughed about the headstones."⁸⁵

Brian Turner sharing a narrative fragment from his memoir, *My Life as a Foreign Country*

Harold Frederic's review is seminal not only from the standpoint of balancing the issue of proxy vs. witness, but also in its exposure of war literature (*Red Badge*) as a new genre of writing—a fusion of fragments, which still negotiates a coherent story with the audience:

But it has no fellows. It is a book outside of all classification. So unlike anything else is it, that the temptation rises to deny that it is a book at all. When one searches for comparisons, they can only be found by culling out selected portions from the trunks of masterpieces, and considering these detached fragments, one by one, with reference to the "Red Badge," which is itself a fragment, and yet is complete.⁸⁶

Here Frederic describes Crane's strength, and the strength of war authors since, the ability to balance, highlight, and fuse fragments of war's horror into something new while retaining an intertextual pulse that connects and sustains fragments from conflicts and artists across time.

⁸⁵ Turner, *My Life as a Foreign Country: A Memoir* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 99-100.

⁸⁶ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

The arc, though intentionally fragmented, is clear, and you can see it in *The Iliad*, *Antigone*, and *Macbeth*, and it remains just as powerful in *Red Badge*, *The Things They Carried*, and *Girl at War*.

Refocusing on Crane, his work adds a new facet to conflict through a reflection and new extension of, as Frederic claims, "the best battle pictures from" Tolstoy, Balzac, Hugo, and Zola.⁸⁷ "In construction the book is as original as in its unique grasp of a new grouping of old materials."⁸⁸ As a result of this powerful fusion, *Red Badge* is still "more vehemently alive and heaving with dramatic human action than any other book of our time."⁸⁹

Frederic highlights Crane's scaffolding and construction as the controlling element of the work. "The central idea of the book is of less importance than the magnificent graft of externals upon it," which fulfills an expectation with the reader.⁹⁰ The reader shares Henry's "brooding over the problem of his own behavior under fire."⁹¹ We're there as "he runs ingloriously away; he excuses, defends, and abhors himself in turn; he tremblingly yields to the sinister fascination of creeping near the battle [...]."⁹² Together, as Frederic asserts, this structure and method of fragment collection negotiates meaning with the reader in a dynamic way. "These sequent processes, observed with relentless minutiae, are so powerfully and speakingly portrayed that they seem the veritable actions of our own minds."⁹³ War story architecture takes a dramatic turn, which we're still exploring and experimenting with today.

⁸⁷ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph." Crane refers to specific works for each author: Tolstoy (*War and Peace*), Balzac, (*Chouans*), Hugo (*Les Misérables*), and Zola (*La Débâcle*).

⁸⁸ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

⁸⁹ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

⁹⁰ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

⁹¹ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

⁹² Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

⁹³ Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph."

Through his look at Crane, Frederic taps into our drive to collect narratives, create meaning, and ignite expectations from the fragments around us. However, this process calls for a new form or genre that's able to interconnect shards of the old into a new, coherent form that makes the reader an active participant in the construction of meaning. In this respect, war authors of all types are representing and creating new vantages, voices, and opportunities. This complex structure demands an appropriate arena and perspective for fragments to fuse, align, and, in some cases, fight with intensity and detail that shocks and intrigues.

In terms of how we fuse war fragments, Yuriko Saito, a philosophy, culture, and design scholar, opens us to the history and role behind making the repair of fragmented items visible through the Japanese practice of *Kintsugi*.⁹⁴ It means "golden joinery"⁹⁵ and it operates across practical, aesthetic, and cultural lines.⁹⁶ This word embraces an artisan's craft (physical repair of broken porcelain with lacquer and powdered gold), an aesthetic (beauty of the deformed), and a philosophy (value of hard-lived, flawed, or damaged lives) to underscore the powerful role of the broken and fragmented. It acknowledges and esteems the story behind the scars.⁹⁷ Highlighting and reconfiguring key pieces or detail in order to give them a functional narrative form.

It works well as metaphor for the rhetorical process of applying "lacquer [form and structure] and gold [authority and detail]" to hold war narratives together. We're familiar with

⁹⁴ Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1997, pp. 377-385, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/430925.

⁹⁵ Pui Ying Kwan, "Exploring Japanese Art and Aesthetic as Inspiration for Emotionally Durable Design," *DesignEd Asia Conference 2015*, Dec. 2015, Hong Kong, Unpublished conference paper, 2015, 7, designedasia.com/2012/Full_Papers/Exploring%20Japanese%20Art%20and%20Aesthetic.pdf.

⁹⁶ Kwan, "Exploring Japanese Art," 7.

⁹⁷ Kwan, "Exploring Japanese Art," 7.

many types of fragments (pictures, letters, interviews, etc.), but the rhetorical mechanisms at play within the process of collecting and binding fragments into a persuasive whole are often overlooked, especially in terms of how proxies and witnesses craft war literature. How do these authors forge and wield their *Kintsugi-techné* to move an audience toward a negotiated meaning of war?

At this point, it is worth listening to war authors describe their construction processes. Specifically looking at how they bind story fragments. Proxy Svetlana Alexievich, Belarussian author and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, shares in an official Swedish Academy interview how she layers others' narratives into a "novel of voices":

Academy: [...] coming to your writing style, may I ask you what influenced you when you chose this kind of journalistic approach in your works?

Alexievich: [...] There is no time to sit and think it over, as did Tolstoy, whose ideas matured over decades. Every person, me too, can only try to grasp a small piece of reality, conjecture only. Sometimes I leave only 10 lines out of 100 pages of my text, sometimes one page. And all together these pieces are united in a novel of voices creating the image of our time and telling what is happening to us.⁹⁸

In a separate interview with *Dalkey Archive Press (DAP)*, Alexievich shares the depth and breadth of the fragments she collects for her stories. Here she talks about her book on Chernobyl—a real-world war waged against our own technological creations:

⁹⁸ "Svetlana Alexievich-Interview," *Nobelprize.org*, Nobel Media AB 2015, 24 Sept. 2016, www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2015/alexievich-interview.html.

Alexievich: [...] I started interviewing witnesses, more than 500 of them, which took me more than ten years. Since we were suddenly confronted with a new reality, I was on the lookout for people who had been shattered by that experience, setting them thinking about what had really happened, what was going on in a new world that they were trying to confront with old methods. [...] I was collecting material to the very last. Out of 500 or more interviews 107 were included in the final version; that is, approximately one in five. That is basically what happens with my other books as well—I select one out of five interviews, and that one makes it into the published book. For each person I record four tapes or more, making 100-150 printed pages, depending on the voice timbre and the pace of the oral story, and then only about ten pages remain.⁹⁹

The *DAP* interviewer asks about the new genre Alexievich creates through her fusion of “interviews with fictional techniques”:

Alexievich: The tradition of telling a story in this way, recording oral stories, living voices, has been laid down in Russian literature before me. I mean the books by Daniil Granin and Ales Adamovich about the Leningrad Siege. For instance, *I Came from the Fiery Village*. Those books inspired me to write my own books. It occurred to me that life offers so many versions and interpretations of the same events that neither fiction nor document alone can keep up with its variety; I felt compelled to find a different narrative strategy. I decided to collect the voices from the street, the material lying about around

⁹⁹ “A Conversation with Svetlana Alexievich By Ana Lucic,” *Dalkey Archive Press*, 16 Sept. 2016, www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-svetlana-alexievich-by-ana-lucic/.

me. Each person offers a text of his or her own. And realized I could make a book out of them. [...] My role is not just that of an ear eavesdropping in the street, but also that of an observer and thinker. To an outsider it may seem a simple process: people just told me their stories. But it's not really so simple. It's important what you ask and how you ask it and what you hear and what you select from the interview. I think you can't really reflect life's broad scope without the documentation, without the human evidence. The picture will not be complete.¹⁰⁰

She has mastered the fusion of a wide and diverse range of voices into a coherent expression of each event and sacrifice, providing a clear and encompassing meaning of war.

Witness, combat veteran, and poet Brian Turner is the author of a recently published memoir, *My Life as a Foreign Country*. In an interview with *War, Literature & the Arts* (WLA), he shares aspects of his writing process and desired impact:

WLA: Is it fair to think of your memoir, which after all had its origins in the [*The Virginia Quarterly Review*] VQR haibuns, as a kind of travelogue—traveling across different wartime geographies as well as across vast expanses of historical time?

Turner: Exactly. It's part of what I was after in the structure and construction of this memoir. If I could somehow have many of the disparate elements or fragments exist simultaneously, then I'd be one step closer to what I was after than what I was able to achieve here. Still, I think the reader holds an

¹⁰⁰ "A Conversation with Svetlana Alexievich By Ana Lucic."

idea and then another echoes to create a kind of simultaneity. In that sense, it approximates what I was going for overall.¹⁰¹

Here Turner describes the mixing of styles and genres as part of his writing process. He addresses the role of the controlling structure of Haibuns. This type of writing is a fusion of two genres, prose and verse, combining a short paragraph of prose matched with either a complimentary or contrasting haiku.¹⁰² Variations exist with the haiku either proceeding or following the prose paragraph. One variation, "Prose Envelop," allows the prose to encapsulate the haiku.¹⁰³ Importantly, this hybrid of style and meaning was a key building block for Turner's war memoir.

As part of the interview, Turner is asked about our retelling of war stories, which can help to fill "gaps" to the reconstruction and sustainment of memory:

Turner: [...] I think it's partly because I need to make sense of a disparate series of experiences, a year of my life, that doesn't really make all that much sense (while, at the same time, it all somehow makes more sense, or feels more alive to me, than much of the rest of my life). The writing of the book has helped me to gain more perspective. The intervening years have done their share, as well. I also wonder if part of the assembly, and the telling of war stories, is to recognize the gaps as well. I don't have an answer for

¹⁰¹ "Among the Lightning Trees: A Conversation with Brian Turner," *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 27, 2015, wlajournal.com/wlaarchive/27/McGuire.pdf. 26.

¹⁰² Jeffrey Woodward, "Form in Haibun: An Outline," *Haibun Today: A Quarterly Journal*, vol. 4, no. 4, Dec. 2010, haibuntoday.haikuhut.com/ht44/Article_Woodward_Form.html.

¹⁰³ Woodward, "Form in Haibun: An Outline."

that, but it seems like this memoir grapples with that question. As an interlocked series of fragments that depend upon the reader to complete the connections between things, it seems to me that this memoir both struggles and depends upon silence, upon the unknown, upon the lost bridges somewhere in the vault of memory.¹⁰⁴

Turner uses hybrid, non-traditional genres as testing grounds for compression and reflection. Narrative fragments interlock, yet they depend on readers to negotiate gaps through a struggle that brings meaning to disparate elements.

Some narrative fragments are born and defined within a specific work while others are generated by the target audience's *cultural context* and *norms*.¹⁰⁵ This interaction is complex, and authors generate new genres and representations to deal with the confusion. At this point it's helpful to see how established rhetorical frameworks such as Bakhtin's concept of *Carnival*, Burke's exploration of *Form*, Hutchin's method of coordination through tools, and Arnheim's use of shifting contexts provide dynamic construction zones.

In terms of fusing different narrative forms, through Bakhtin we potentially see the novel (war fiction and the role of the proxy) in a new light. Specifically, through the "hybrid construction" of language:¹⁰⁶ "[...] It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction—and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents [...]."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ "Among the Lightning Trees: A Conversation with Brian Turner."

¹⁰⁵ Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Edited by Michael Holquist, Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (U of Texas P, 1981), 304.

¹⁰⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 305.

This hybrid structure is likely the only one able to adapt to and absorb the contradictions and discontinuity narrative artifacts and discourses carry into and away from war. We see hybrid construction in both Alexievich and Turner's techniques. Within this shifting structure, Bakhtin's concept of carnival can flourish, allowing formal and informal narratives to intertwine and rational and absurd ideas to share the same stage. Importantly, the fluid structure of war literature demands an arena for conflicting ideas, emotions, and ideologies to clash in order to gain some balance for the characters, readers, and, often, the author.

In terms of arcing and energizing these clashes, Bakhtin's open zone of expression provides a place for the tension between the formal, culturally accepted ("centripetal forces") to stand in parallel with the ill-disciplined, pathos-fueled voices ("centrifugal forces") combat veterans carry.¹⁰⁸ Language itself is at war. Psychiatrist and author Jonathan Shay shares the struggle with language many Vietnam-era veterans face: "Lies and euphemisms by the soldier's own military superiors and civilian leaders of course undermine social trust by destroying confidence in language."¹⁰⁹ He underscores how "official lies" are one part of a "perversion of language" that erodes trust and hampers veterans' recovery.¹¹⁰

Ben Fountain, proxy author of *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, in an address at the United States Air Force Academy refers to this type of targeted, distorted, and commercialized marketing of influence as the "Fantasy Industrial Complex."¹¹¹ America's unique and pervasive perversion of language: "Words that had nothing to do with reality, words whose purpose was

¹⁰⁸ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 271-272.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (Touchstone, 1994), 34.

¹¹⁰ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 34.

¹¹¹ Benjamin Fountain, "Soldiers on the Fault Line: War, Rhetoric, and Reality," *The Seventh Annual David L. Jannetta Distinguished Lecture in War, Literature & the Arts* [transcript], 10 Sept. 2013, United States Air Force Academy, 3, wlajournal.com/wlaarchive/25_1/fountain.pdf. Fountain.

to distort, to sell an agenda, to numb the audience—or to put it another way, the language of advertising [...] The sum effect of all this was to take us farther and farther from the reality of war.”¹¹² This distance intentionally and forcefully hampers the negotiation of meaning.

Considered in this light, Bakhtin’s *carnival* is *the venue* for “internal tension and psychological stress to play out.”¹¹³ Extending this into soldier’s use of hybrid language, Fountain goes on to propose that this pressure feeds “the American soldier’s genius for profanity.”¹¹⁴ “It’s a way of venting, giving expression to the sheer weirdness of having to balance two ways of being, the democratic and the authoritarian [...] Americans have made it into an art form.”¹¹⁵ As a contingent language, profanity allows soldiers to express meaning with each other even when the context, real or staged, no longer allows negotiation of meaning with anyone else.

These negotiations are guided by audience expectations. Kenneth Burke asserts that structural patterns and form can set up expectations that readers need to have fulfilled.¹¹⁶ “Form in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence.”¹¹⁷ Burke contends that forms or patterns can “overlap” and “conflict.”¹¹⁸ Extending Frederic, Bruner, Bakhtin, and Burke, war literature is an inventive combination of existing narrative fragments, intertextual artifacts, and literary forms that allow conflicting ideas and language to interact. This mingling of form and fragments, as Frederic found in *Red Badge*, overrides the polarity of the “Central

¹¹² Fountain, “Soldiers on the Fault Line,” 6.

¹¹³ Fountain, “Soldiers on the Fault Line,” 9.

¹¹⁴ Fountain, “Soldiers on the Fault Line,” 9.

¹¹⁵ Fountain, “Soldiers on the Fault Line,” 9.

¹¹⁶ Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (U of California P, 1931), 146-147.

¹¹⁷ Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 124.

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 128-129.

Theme,¹¹⁹ allowing the intertwined forms to become a new “way of experiencing.”¹²⁰

Consequently, as Frederic projects, this interaction sustains a narrative that seems born of “veritable actions of our own minds.”¹²¹

Anthropologist Edwin Hutchins and visual media theorist/psychologist Rudolf Arnheim share how we can overlay and compare competing media and narratives. As we examine the unique collage of the old and new in the creation of war literature, it’s vital to consider how varied and complex narrative fragments can be. They include photographs, newsreels, movies, letters, news articles, trench art, sketches, paintings, stereographs, published orders, unit histories, poetry, music, and more. Different mediums and genres influence the author...and each one strives to be heard.

How do we bring these different representational genres into coordination? Hutchins in *Cognition in the Wild* provides insight into how competing fragments can be aligned. He uses the practical, real-world task of navigation as representations of ocean-going vessels’ spatial relationships to external landmarks are “transformed” and “combined” to plot the location or navigation fix onto charts.¹²² Importantly, these spatial relationships and external representations are “propagated from one medium to another bringing the states of media into coordination with one another.”¹²³

The *macrospace* of the vessel and landmark, the real world, is brought into coordination with *microspaces* of the navigational tools (compass and alidade for naval vessels, but we can

¹¹⁹ Frederic, “Stephen Crane’s Triumph.”

¹²⁰ Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 143.

¹²¹ Frederic, “Stephen Crane’s Triumph.”

¹²² Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (MIT Press, 1995), 117.

¹²³ Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*, 117.

apply it to narrative tools such as the camera, paint brush, pen, blog, Word document, etc.),¹²⁴ and “the chart [war story] is a medium in which the multiple simultaneous one-dimensional constraints can be combined to form the solution.”¹²⁵ In essence, the real world, and its reference points, is re-represented through structured tools and processes with built-in constraints until the position can be represented on a chart [in the narrative].¹²⁶

Arnheim in *Visual Thinking* provides another framework for alignment; he uses shifting contexts as a modulating force.¹²⁷ He reveals how we can strip away context from an object, or compare the same object across two different contexts, in order to gain either a degree of abstraction or variance about the object.¹²⁸ In isolation from the context, the object’s own local characteristics, such as size, shape, brightness, and color, can be better compared and understood.¹²⁹ In opposition, but with equally powerful results, by keeping the context the object is seen not only as an isolated item with local properties, but also as an integrated part of the global visual world, larger context, in which it has been placed.¹³⁰

Hutchins and Arnheim expose unique views of how narrative-shaping strategies can help to collect, observe, and arrange fragments. Proxies and witnesses engage versions of these processes in order to explore and chart potential conflicts and connections. Here war fragments are collected and initial associations and alignments are considered through notes, sketches, images, and other representations. Author Peter Turchi asserts this type of interaction allows

¹²⁴ Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*, 121.

¹²⁵ Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*, 119.

¹²⁶ Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*, 126.

¹²⁷ Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (U of California P, 1969), 37.

¹²⁸ Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 38.

¹²⁹ Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 38.

¹³⁰ Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 46-47.

writers to build and test assumptions.¹³¹ The theorists and practitioners above can help writers to design their own test chambers. These structures and constraints allow, as Arnheim asserts, entropy, disorder and tension reduction, between disparate elements to interact in new ways to reveal creative connections, associations and contrasts.¹³² Once a potential pattern is identified, then additional constraints can be applied to gain an overall sense of the pattern.¹³³ Turchi compresses it this way: "The conflict is, ultimately, between unruly nature and civilization's desire for order, utility, and meaning-making."¹³⁴

After allowing artifacts to interact, patterns appear. Let's quickly look at the how authors Roxana Robinson (proxy) and Benjamin Busch (witness) skillfully apply different, but equally effective, context-shifting strategies to not only advance their works on a common genre of protagonist, a Marine officer, but also showcase the underlying horror in their works.

In *Sparta*, Roxana Robinson is able to detail the change conflict has on the protagonist's (Conrad) life as he returns from war, back from the "alternate universe,"¹³⁵ through rapidly shifting contexts. Conrad's parents invoke an emotional trip back to Iraq through an invitation for Conrad to talk about the IED attack when he was "hit."¹³⁶ This and other "existential" events keep him emotionally tethered to the war.¹³⁷ Walking on the crowded sidewalks in NYC takes him back to "Route Michigan, the American name for the big east-west road across Ramadi"¹³⁸

¹³¹ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (Trinity UP, 2004), 12.

¹³² Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order* (U of California P, 1971), 1-56.

¹³³ Arnheim, *Entropy and Art*, 1-56.

¹³⁴ Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 21.

¹³⁵ Roxana Robinson, *Sparta* (Sarah Crichton Books, 2013), 36.

¹³⁶ Robinson, *Sparta*, 66.

¹³⁷ Robinson, *Sparta*, 88.

¹³⁸ Robinson, *Sparta*, 232-233.

We join him on this ride by the minarets of Al Haq Mosque with “vituperative diatribes [blaring] over the loudspeakers.”¹³⁹

He shares his convoy’s fated race into an IED ambush: “That was when the sound came up, huge and dark and breathtaking, crowding out everything. Something entered into him, closing him down.”¹⁴⁰ We view the attack and hear Conrad rage: “*Hold on, Olivera. I’m right here. I’ve got you. Motherfuckers!*” But Olivera, his chest caved in, died before the medics could arrive. You believed in the mission and you believed in your men.”¹⁴¹

We’re then instantly brought back to the crowded sidewalk: “And what were these people in New York doing, here on the sidewalk, walking all over the place, not paying attention, and stopping like this right in front of him? [...] *Motherfuckers!*”¹⁴² Robinson skillfully aligns the confusion of New York’s sidewalks with the chaos of Ramadi. She even anchors Conrad’s contextual teleportation through a soldier’s intimate language, profanity, which allows the same expletive to represent two types of threats to Conrad, the enemy in Iraq and uninformed civilians back home.

Other portals are used by Robinson to move Conrad across contexts throughout the work including emails, news headlines, and a call from his former commanding officer. The call takes him back to Iraq after receiving news of Anderson’s suicide: “Conrad was shouting and grabbing for Anderson, who was in the thick of the flames. Anderson was trying to wrench open the door with his bare hands, and Carleton was inside, screaming.”¹⁴³ We are shifting contexts

¹³⁹ Robinson, *Sparta*, 235.

¹⁴⁰ Robinson, *Sparta*, 235-236.

¹⁴¹ Robinson, *Sparta*, 237.

¹⁴² Robinson, *Sparta*, 238.

¹⁴³ Robinson, *Sparta*, 333.

with Conrad throughout the work, which culminates in his thoughts to end the contextual rifts and “[...] be through with it all. He wanted to be rid of the things that kept recurring in his mind. He never wanted to see these things again. The splatters on the wall. The children. Carleton, Kuchnick, Olivera. Fucking Anderson. How could he stop this endless avalanche within his mind?”¹⁴⁴ In her closing remarks during an interview with WLA, Robinson shares the role her context manipulation has on her audience: “What I think is that the book has made a bridge for some people, from the place they live to a place they have never been. I’m glad I could make that bridge.”¹⁴⁵

Robinson’s rapid alignment of competing contexts allows readers to experience Conrad’s struggle through the horror of disorientation. This horror applies not only to places but also to people, with innocent noncombatants carrying the same emotional threat as life-taking enemies overseas. The pervasive innocence, willful ignorance, exemplifies the horror of fragmentation between soldiers and the rest of the nation.

In *Dust-to-Dust*, Benjamin Busch uses natural landmarks like nautical fixes to orient his work and audience. “I gained comprehension of my environment by throwing myself against it. Digging, cutting, climbing, stacking.”¹⁴⁶ His nine chapters, “Arms,” “Water,” “Metal,” “Soil,” “Bone,” “Wood,” “Stone,” “Blood,” and “Ash,” intertextualize and expand from one another. He brilliantly uses these natural elements as a constraining, yet creative, tool for exploration. These points of navigation allow contexts to overlap. With each natural element shift, we gain a greater sense of what it means to be a son, husband, and warrior.

¹⁴⁴ Robinson, *Sparta*, 354-355.

¹⁴⁵ “Sparta: A Conversation with Roxana Robinson,” *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 26, 2014, 12, wlajournal.com/wlaarchive/26/Harrington.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ Benjamin Busch, *Dust to Dust: A Memoir* (Ecco, HarperCollins, 2012), 2.

Soil, stone, and bone share contexts not only with each other, but also with the author's travels and discoveries. "Northern Africa had the highest fecal content blowing in its winds, Kuwait had grit, Los Angeles had petroleum soot, central New York had my dander, and Iraq would have death in its dust."¹⁴⁷ He repurposes matter, metal, wood, and stones, to set not only a pattern of expectation, but also an opportunity to shift contexts. "MY ATTRACTION TO METAL continued through high school, where I kept active collections, and college, where I used it in sculpture. I drew on found objects and changed their context, rethinking metal and its use."¹⁴⁸ Brass car keys from junk yards are remembered to then open a different world of metal with vastly different consequences: "And I remembered them [brass ignition keys] again when I dropped handfuls of brass from expended ammunition into metal boxes in the Marines."¹⁴⁹

Busch not only brings these disparate worlds into coordination with one another, but he also reveals the horror embedded within the disorientation and fragmentation of mankind's understanding of nature and our desperate search for meaning in war. He does this throughout his work, but his use of interconnected fragments and context shifts gives his work a new resonance and amplified echo:

My interpreter explained that he [Iraqi father] claimed she [his young daughter] had gone crazy from the sound of bombs and had to be tied up because she would wander off. [...] I researched options for her care, but Iraq was deranged and not yet prepared for the insane. I turned my back and focused on the injuries that could be repaired. She

¹⁴⁷ Busch, *Dust to Dust*, 140.

¹⁴⁸ Busch, *Dust to Dust*, 95.

¹⁴⁹ Busch, *Dust to Dust*, 91.

seemed self-existent, but I wondered if her laughing was a crying or if it was a blissful detachment that protected her from the rest of us, kept her safe in her wild despair above ground. She scratched at the hardened dirt, hoping, maybe, the earth would open beneath her enough to let her into a quiet cavern.

War has fragmented the girl's sanity and isolated her from the rest of the war-torn world. Her one reprieve might be found in nature itself—soil, dirt, and earth. This not only advances the fragmentation Busch experiences with the people of Iraq, via broken language, translations, and combat, but also his inability to help the Iraqi people.

Busch continues the fragmentation of context through his connection of the Iraqi girl with the remains of another isolated girl found in a cavern he visited in Luray, Virginia.¹⁵⁰ "There was only one discovery that truly intrigued me. A [700 year old] skeleton had been found in the cavern. It was incomplete, and it was a girl."¹⁵¹ Through the use of this cavern portal, we are rapidly drawn back to the fragmented bones of another girl far from the war, separated in time and place, but connected to Iraq through dirt, earth, and isolation.

Robinson and Busch use orienting techniques to bring disparate fragments into coordination and alignment. Teleportation points and geographic anchors allow different characteristics and struggles of the protagonists, and their interaction with war, to enter the spotlight. Crossing contexts reveal the extreme fragmentation of events, yet bind them as part of a unified, though conflicted, whole.

¹⁵⁰ Busch, *Dust to Dust*, 122.

¹⁵¹ Busch, *Dust to Dust*, 123.

Horror's Extended Horizon

"We can imagine countless frames; what we have is not a path from here to there, not a beginning, middle, and ending, but a single point from someplace along the route. So we imagine each fragment as a beginning, and then as an ending, and as some part of the middle; we look for hints of emotion, we consider voice, we create narratives. While a poetic fragment may not carry its complete genetic code, these bits [...] engage us on their own and at the time inspire us to consider, if not fill in, the blanks around them."¹⁵²

Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*

In *The Writer as Cartographer*, Peter Turchi aligns the exploration, failures, and discoveries of writers searching for their story next to those of cartographers striving to represent the surrounding world. Writers and map makers use fragments and gaps to "provoke the imagination."¹⁵³ Both types of artists create in much the same manner as Henry Beck did with his "Way Finder" maps of the London subway system in 1933; they design by harnessing a careful balance of detail, abstraction, and blanks.¹⁵⁴ War authors work through the same process of balancing fragments. Turchi sees it as a necessary, but enriching, process: "As in a magic trick, the reader's attention must be deftly steered, the reader persuaded the world of the story is full, or complete, despite all that's missing."¹⁵⁵ If oriented properly, with horror's template as a guide, war narrative fragments can create this same magic.

¹⁵² Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 46.

¹⁵³ Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 43-44.

¹⁵⁵ Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 43.

Through horror's adjustable sight, and its associated frameworks, we can explore and calibrate the rhetorical mechanisms at work within war literature. Of critical importance, it is not an issue of declaring one type of author better than another; it is all about studying the nuanced play of form, meaning, and fragment arrangement in all war literature, regardless of the author's stance as either proxy or witness. Additionally, we're able to see how different story fragment types, mediums, and representations are brought into coordination by the tools, constraints, or contexts an author chooses.

The study of war literature, as demonstrated by Frederic's look at Crane, provides insight into an evolving genre. We need to continue to press forward our research not only into the cultural and literary realms, but also into rhetorical spaces to better understand the structure and meaning generation of war fragments and war stories. In parallel with this effort, we must realize horror is far more than graphic details of war's work; it is an expression and examination of warriors' and victims' disorientation, separation, and fragmentation. It is a guiding component for narrative fragments. As a blueprint, horror also doubles as measurement of our character, compassion, and cultural norms. Unfortunately, warfare is unlikely to end anytime soon, and the human capacity for destruction and atrocity will struggle with and run alongside our capacity for understanding and empathy. Even so, war narratives can advance understanding, healing, and respect. The more we know about this evolving and evocative hybrid genre, the more likely we are to create a war story that actually creates a lasting pause for us to truly consider peace.

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