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## Seeing Signs and Telling War Stories: Recognizing Trauma Symptoms and the Role of Narrative in Recovery

*When I first came back, I was lucky enough to hook up with a bunch of vets...We were always together; we all lived together for about a year and half. I think it saved all of us in the beginning. We would only talk about Vietnam amongst ourselves...all anyone else wanted to hear was that I was a hero, and that just wasn't the case.... Nobody wants to hear about the bad stuff like your friend getting his hand blown off or a little girl in a village burned to a crisp. They didn't want to hear what really happened, so I stopped talking. My vet friends got me through the first part. My family kept me going for a long time after that until it got to be too much.*

*Then my wife got me to go to counseling. After a few years and lots of different psychiatrists and counselors, I finally found someone who wanted to hear what I had to say. Talking to the right person changed my life. My last therapist cared about what happened to me and wanted to help me. I could trust him; I could tell him what had happened to me. He was the first therapist, who made me feel that way. Now, I feel better about myself. I'm thinking about my future again...and I'm looking forward to tomorrow on most days, which is a huge improvement. I finally realized you can make it*

*better, but you gotta work at it. It's like a job; you have to work on it everyday.*  
—Clyde

From 1965 to 1975 thousands of young men and women left the United States to enter a war zone where many of them faced unimaginable scenes of death and chaos. When they returned, some readjusted well to the normal pace and rhythm at home—others found blending into the fabric of American life more complicated. Most of these individuals struggled with some form of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) brought on by combat trauma. Among soldiers who exhibited signs of PTSD after Vietnam, some of them overcame their difficulties while others succumbed to the mental disorder's devastating effects. While a number of prominent factors influence a veteran's ability to manage his or her trauma, such as family support and access to adequate mental health care, the ultimate key to successful management of PTSD lies in the veteran's narrating his trauma. Psychiatrists specializing in treating PTSD find expressing the trauma in a cohesive form as vital to the patient's recovery. Because "the release of related emotions, the accurate reordering of history, or the making of meaning...are essential in the recovery from PTSD,"<sup>2</sup> Edward Tick and numerous other PTSD specialists consider narrative restructuring a key therapeutic component to trauma recovery. After completing the first stage of therapy, which includes reestablishing safety and stability in veterans' lives, veteran therapists Jonathan Shay and Edward Tick list narrative construction and grieving as the second stage in the recovery process. Without first forming a narrative, a soldier cannot begin his road to recovery; his family and mental health care provider act as facilitators along this path.

Almost nowhere in the fictional world of literature does the veteran's struggle with trauma and recovery unfold more vividly than in Tim O'Brien's combat narratives. Soon after his return from Vietnam, O'Brien began writing about combat veterans and exploring the effects of trauma on soldiers. From his first attempt to construct a veteran character, O'Brien's portrayal of the psychological torment facing traumatized veterans has been perhaps the most genuine in American fiction. In his comprehensive analysis of O'Brien's writing, Mark Heberle characterizes O'Brien's writing as "writing that refabricates personal experience in order to transcend it through or re-create it as fiction, an art of trauma of which O'Brien is a supreme practitioner."<sup>3</sup> The complex characters, gritty prose, and fractured narrative structure that exist in many of his texts combine to create a captivating human story of the typical combat veteran trying to cope with

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. As a Vietnam veteran who grapples with his own personal demons, Tim O'Brien has a profound understanding of the psychological mechanisms and emotions affecting people attempting to overcome trauma and re-acclimate to daily life. O'Brien's personal experience with combat and trauma, which he writes about in his memoirs *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1973) and "The Vietnam in Me," (1994) imbue his novels with an air of sincerity and provide the reader with a rare glimpse into the mind of a veteran battling the effects of severe trauma. The ability of O'Brien's novels to make this emotional and psychological connection with the reader, along with his masterful writing style, explains the critical and popular attention his texts have received throughout O'Brien's writing career.

Because of the key role trauma plays in many of O'Brien's works, one may draw the conclusion that he has embarked on a journey to study and understand trauma and imagine several avenues of recovery from trauma. While O'Brien examines trauma in many different manifestations, he focuses primarily on the trauma associated with combat and its long-term effects on veterans. As such, his texts provide a way for readers to see both the possibility of demise and/or growth over a lifetime for combat veterans with PTSD. Although the American Psychiatric Association provides a standard definition of the symptoms and causes of PTSD, Dr. Jonathan Shay, who has worked with combat veterans for over fifteen years and published two books on the subject, defines PTSD specifically as it pertains to combat veterans and focuses on its effects and treatment rather than its symptoms. According to Shay, the two main focal points for combat veterans in therapy are the "effect of trauma on character and on the capacity for social trust,"<sup>4</sup> and one of the key components of recovery is constructing a trauma narrative. Veterans often lose their notion of what constitutes good character and their trust in society because their experiences in war are so far beyond the realm of what the average citizen views as socially acceptable and moral, so they must find a way to integrate their war experiences into their previous life narratives.

The veteran's struggle to redefine character and reestablish trust in society unfolds in a number of O'Brien's novels, making his novels excellent windows into the world of combat veterans with PTSD. Through studying the characters in O'Brien's novels, one can trace the path of trauma victims from their first feelings of anxiety prior to trauma to the coping mechanisms people develop years later to survive in daily life, and in turn come to a better understanding of the profound effects war and trauma have on individuals and those around them. As his characters' successes also hinge on their ability to express their trauma, one

can also see in O'Brien's work the importance of constructing a narrative in order to cope effectively with combat trauma. The Vietnam veterans in his novels share many common characteristics of individuals exposed to combat trauma; however, they also represent both the different stages of PTSD and the varying methods of handling this disorder. Careful examination of these characters reveals the complexity of trauma recovery and provides a glimpse of what a veteran's life might be like at various points in time after returning home from war.

Once the soldier returns home, he begins his long, arduous journey toward either failure or recovery. Veterans commonly adopt coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, avoidance, fantasy, and storytelling to help them reduce the trauma symptoms they experience, and all of these methods and more appear in O'Brien's texts. One of the most prolific methods and the only one that holds a promise of success for his characters is narration. For the characters who build and express their narratives in O'Brien's novels, there remains a sense of hope, but for those who fail the future looks dim. While few O'Brien critics wholly embrace the idea of a complete cure or absolute redemption through writing or narrating, most acknowledge the compulsion for trauma victims to express their stories and that retelling their experiences helps them survive. "So, stories can save us, but through preservation rather than through salvation,"<sup>3</sup> Maria Bonn concisely summarizes in her analysis of the narrative cure theme in O'Brien's work. While O'Brien's texts clearly illustrate that revisiting the experiences of combat and expressing them to others usually do not cure the veteran, his works do reveal the important role narration plays in helping veterans with PTSD attain stability.

The final stage in the trauma process—life after the traumatic event—involves navigating the winding path to recovery, and O'Brien takes his readers through the trials his characters face in this stage. As O'Brien scholar Mark Heberle notes, "each of his protagonists is characterized by specific traumatic symptoms,"<sup>6</sup> and his protagonists offer different portraits of how trauma manifests itself in combat veterans. Once the trauma symptoms clearly emerge, O'Brien continues the character's narrative, unfolding the convoluted path each character takes in his travel through trauma. Readers observe various symptoms and outcomes, which O'Brien describes in a manner well informed by his personal experiences. In light of O'Brien's detailed narratives concerning combat veterans, one can interpret his work in what Heberle summarizes as "products of trauma and vehicles of recovery."<sup>7</sup> Not all of O'Brien's stories represent "vehicles of recovery." While the texts may be a recovery tool for their author, as Heberle suggests, some of them also represent cautionary tales about the detrimental effects of trauma not expressed in

narrative form. O'Brien's depictions of veterans' struggles to reestablish themselves in civilian life reflect the real life scenarios in which veterans find themselves after war. The close parallel between O'Brien's fictional accounts of veterans and the real experiences of combatants positions his body of work perfectly as a fictional guide to understanding the psychological impact of combat trauma and to understanding the utmost importance of constructing a narrative to trauma recovery.

Throughout his writing career, O'Brien has created captivating characters suffering the ravages of PTSD. His descriptions run the gamut from mild exhibitions of PTSD to the most severe manifestations of the disorder and reflect the multiplicity of symptoms veterans with the disorder experience. The most recently published *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) lists sleep disturbance, outbursts of anger, hypervigilance, extreme startle response, avoidance of thoughts or situations which remind the individual of the event, emotional detachment, reliving the event, addiction, and social withdrawal; among others, as common symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.<sup>8</sup> While O'Brien touches on almost all of these symptoms at some point in his trauma narratives, he predominately focuses on a few key symptoms: avoidance, substance abuse, event re-experiencing, and heightened arousal.

### **Avoidance of Traumatic Memories**

In diagnosing PTSD, the DSM-IV lists avoidance as one of six major criteria, which also include exposure to a stressor, event re-experience, arousal, long-term reoccurrence of symptoms, and disruption of life.<sup>9</sup> Avoidance, as defined by the DSM-IV, involves "persistence avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness that was not present before the trauma," and this particular symptom often materializes in "efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations that remind one of the trauma" and "the inability to recall important aspects of the trauma."<sup>10</sup> Avoidance first appears in O'Brien's novel *Northern Lights* when Harvey returns home from Vietnam.

Soon after he steps off the bus to a lackluster reception in his small hometown, Harvey shows signs of an individual haunted by the traumatic events he endured. Immediately, he jokingly deflects comments and questions about his obvious eye injury: "So how you like my pretty souvenir? Better than a lousy limp, don't you think?"<sup>11</sup> His reluctance to speak about how he received his wound sets a pattern of denial and avoidance he continues to follow for the duration of his narrative. Harvey constantly skirts around the issue of how he lost his eye and directs conversations away from his war experiences. After Addie, Harvey's girlfriend,

presses him continually to tell them how he lost his eye, Harvey finally responds with “This is a bunch of crap...I’m going to Africa.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly, Harvey’s evasion of people’s questions about his eye and his war experience demonstrates classic traits symptomatic of PTSD. Without a doubt, losing his eye in combat represents one of the most significant traumatic events he experienced in Vietnam, yet he either cannot remember how the incident occurred or he refuses to recall the painful memory. No matter what the reason for Harvey’s reticence, his behavior indicates that he struggles with his combat trauma.

To flee reality and enter a place of happiness and safety, Harvey also employs fantasy, another means through which trauma survivors avoid remembering the event. According to Glenn Schiraldi, an expert in mental health who serves on the Board of Depression and Related Affective Disorders Association, some individuals with PTSD live in fantasy worlds they create so that they can pretend the traumatic events never occurred.<sup>13</sup> Harvey’s fantasy world involves exotic travel, and his travel fantasy dominates almost every conversation he has. At one point, Harvey speaks of moving to New Guinea with Addie where she will “make Indian carvings, reminders to our hordes of forthcoming descendants,” and he will “search the jungles for food and shelter and primitive niceties,” and they will all “start afresh.”<sup>14</sup> The appeal for Harvey to “start afresh” is irresistible since he cannot seem to do so in his hometown. Possibly in an exotic land the trauma would disappear, and he could regain his old life—an unlikely, but comforting fantasy. Whether it is “Asia, Africa, Australia, Alaska,” Harvey explains, “The big A’s. Adventure, the big A”<sup>15</sup> is what he searches for continuously. Adventure, however, is not what Harvey desires; he wants an alternative to the traumatic memories he suppresses. Any alternative to the traumatic reality he wishes to deny will suffice, but he never finds an effective substitute. Fantasy functions as the alternative to the truth, and Harvey’s fantasy world remains inadequate at best. Harvey’s fantasizing actually serves to detract from the possibility of recovery because it allows him to talk at length about what he could do but prevents him from saying what he has done and releasing the traumatic experiences he holds inside.

Avoidance appears again years later in O’Brien’s novel *In the Lake of the Woods*. The protagonist, John Wade, completely blocks out all memories related to his traumatic experience. Similar to Harvey, Wade turns to fantasy as a means of avoidance. Wade’s fantasies, unlike Harvey’s fantasies of adventurous travel, are not rooted in reality and have greater consequences than preventing him from communicating his trauma narrative to others. His retreat into a fantasy world becomes destructive to himself and those close to him. John fantasizes constantly

about his abusive, alcoholic father, who committed suicide, until he transforms him into an affectionate, attentive father figure who tells John, “Love you, cowboy.”<sup>16</sup> He accomplishes this fantasy through a series of mind tricks involving a mirror that reflects exactly what John wants to see:

The mirror made this possible, and so John would sometimes carry it to school with him, or to baseball games, or to bed at night. Which was another trick: how he secretly kept the old stand-up mirror in his head. Pretending, of course—he understood that—but he felt calm and safe with the big mirror behind his eyes, where he could slide away behind the glass, where he could turn bad things into good things and just be happy.<sup>17</sup>

In the beginning, John uses the mirror trick as a means of escaping to a safe place, and he is fully aware that he is doing this. Over time, the lines between his fantasy world and reality become blurred, and John has difficulty distinguishing between the two. As he tells Kathy his wife, “It’s hard to explain, but I don’t feel real sometimes. Like I’m not *here*.”<sup>18</sup> Normally, John is not *here*; he is in a world he has constructed. Nonetheless, at times, reality harshly intrudes. John copes with this intrusion by using the mirrors to create an illusion of what he wants reality to be. Through their fantasies, John and Harvey avoid remembering the traumatic events that triggered their PTSD. Of course, veterans use other means to cope with the intrusive trauma memories as well, and O’Brien delves into these other methods in his texts, particularly substance abuse.

### **Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Veterans struggling with PTSD often resort to drugs and alcohol to help alleviate the mental anguish they experience on a daily basis. Because the psychological pain persists for years, veterans’ who retreat to alcohol and drugs to lessen the pain associated with PTSD often become substance abusers. According to a study on addiction and PTSD by Josef Ruzek, 73% of veterans with PTSD also have problems with substance abuse.<sup>19</sup> Drowning the intrusive memories with alcohol or drugs temporarily reduces veterans’ pain, but the long-term side effects of substance abuse only hinder veterans on their road to recovery.

In his novels *Northern Lights*, *In the Lake of the Woods*, and *July, July*, O’Brien details his characters’ difficulties with alcohol and drug use. Throughout *Northern Lights* Harvey struggles with sleeplessness; the only nights he sleeps are those when

he collapses in an alcohol induced stupor. After waking up to a room “littered with bottles and glasses,” Harvey swears off alcohol “forever and ever.”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, he admits the alcohol helped him sleep, and within hours Harvey “brought out a half empty bottle of wine and drank without a glass.”<sup>21</sup> Harvey employs alcohol as a crutch to prop him up against the pain he must deal with daily. The alcohol numbs the pain, but it cannot completely obliterate his memories, and Harvey’s alcohol abuse ultimately pushes him farther away from the reach of his loved ones. No matter what the occasion—a family dinner, a party, the local parade, or just a regular evening at home—Harvey drinks to excess and behaves inappropriately, sometimes even callously towards his friends and family. Eventually Addie, leaves him, and his family tries to curtail his drinking. When his brother, Perry, sells the family farm, Harvey begs Perry to go drinking with him: “Just one? Just a lousy beer to celebrate? I promise to behave.”<sup>22</sup> At this point, even Harvey realizes his drinking has gotten out of control, but he cannot stop. Harvey still refuses to talk about Vietnam, and to cope with the stress his memories cause, he chooses to quiet his trauma narrative through alcohol.

In order to quell his persistent nightmares and memories, John Wade in *In the Lake of the Woods* also drinks excessively. When John returns from Vietnam, he embarks on an ambitious career in politics, and he enjoys great success until the press prints a story linking him to the My Lai massacre. Soon after the story breaks, John and his wife Kathy retreat to a cabin deep in the woods of Minnesota where Kathy mysteriously disappears one evening. The day after Kathy disappears, instead of calling the police or searching for her, John starts drinking vodka, and by “ten-thirty he finished off the vodka and switched to rum.”<sup>23</sup> John uses alcohol to drown out his thoughts that desperately try to resurface. Rather than face the painful truth of his wife’s disappearance, for which he might be responsible, John drinks himself into a stupor so that he cannot remember the event. Throughout his entire life, he does the same to forget the atrocities which he took part in at My Lai. However, the alcohol, just like his fantasizing, ultimately fails.

Reenacting the same pattern of substance abuse, David Todd turns to drugs and alcohol in *July, July* to quiet the delusional voice of Johnny Ever. When the enemy kills David’s entire platoon and severely wounds him in an ambush, David creates Johnny Ever as a coping mechanism. David converses with Johnny for hours, possibly days, while he awaits rescue in excruciating pain; however, Johnny’s voice does not disappear when David returns home, and David tries to shut out Johnny’s voice with drugs and alcohol. O’Brien quickly reveals David’s substance abuse in the novel’s first chapter:

After two drinks David left the gym. He made the way across campus to Flarety Hall, took the elevator up to his room, removed his trousers and prosthesis, popped a Demerol, popped a half sheet of acid, lay down on the tile floor, and allowed the narcotics to carry him away to a shallow, fast-moving river called the Song Tra Ky.<sup>24</sup>

The narrator's nonchalant delivery and the fact that David keeps a supply of Demerol and LSD on hand indicate that he regularly consumes drugs. David, John, and Harvey all resort to drug and alcohol abuse to cope with their intrusive memories of combat. While substance abuse is a key symptom of PTSD, the memories that prompt these characters to abuse drugs also represent a major symptom of PTSD—event re-experiencing.

### **Reliving the Trauma**

Event re-experiencing is another of the six criteria listed in the DSM-IV for diagnosing PTSD, which means that all trauma survivors officially diagnosed with PTSD exhibit this symptom, and it is one of the reasons so many veterans turn to substance abuse. The reliving of the event(s) must occur in one of four specific ways, but the number one manifestation of this symptom is “recurrent, intrusive recollections of the event.”<sup>25</sup> Unwelcome memories of the traumatic event(s) intrude upon the survivors' thoughts suddenly and uncontrollably, interfering with their everyday functions. Until individuals with PTSD learn to control these memories, this symptom often debilitates them. David Todd, Tim O'Brien (the narrator from *Things*), and Norman Bowker plainly demonstrate how event re-experiencing affects veterans after combat—each to a different degree.

Although David abuses drugs to cope with his combat trauma, he also consumes them to bring himself closer to the traumatic memories. As the passage in the previous section suggests, when he takes drugs, he allows himself to think about the trauma and return to the ambush scene that haunts him. Of course, taking excessive amounts of narcotics signifies a very unhealthy coping mechanism and a continuing struggle with PTSD. Nonetheless, the fact that he can permit himself to think about the event consciously illustrates that his incorporation of the event and his readjustment to life after the trauma is more complete than other characters, such as John Wade, who try to completely suppress and erase the traumatic memories. The drugs permit the traumatic memories he usually holds back to flood his thoughts, and he relives the day he lost his leg and his platoon along the Song Tra Ky river. Without a proper outlet for these intrusive memories,

they would likely paralyze David. Fortunately, David does not simply relive the trauma while in a drug-induced haze; he also expresses the trauma narrative to his therapist and his ex-wife.

Before writing *July, July*, O'Brien already had envisioned the long-term impact of trauma on the psyche and how veterans relive combat trauma in *The Things They Carried*. In the novel, O'Brien gives two examples of veterans coping with trauma and offers two very different outcomes for these characters. The narrator reveals his symptoms to the reader through not only what he tells his reader but also how he structures his tale. Like so many trauma survivors, the narrator relives his traumatic experiences repeatedly, and the reader listens to O'Brien tell the same stories but from different angles time and time again throughout *Things*. Early on in his narrative, O'Brien divulges to his reader that "The bad stuff never stops happening: it lives in its own dimension, replaying itself over and over."<sup>26</sup> Both implicitly and explicitly, the narrator connects his behavior to PTSD symptoms.

While the narrator reveals his personal demons, he also closely relates another character's difficult struggle with PTSD. Norman Bowker spends his days driving around his small hometown dreaming about how "he would have talked about the medal he did not win and why he did not win it."<sup>27</sup> In Norman Bowker's story, O'Brien once again illustrates how veterans who experience significant trauma often relive the trauma on a daily basis. As Norman Bowker drives around the lake in his hometown, he continually plays out a mental scenario in which he tells his father or his ex-girlfriend about failing to save Kiowa, a fellow soldier, from drowning in a field of mud and excrement during a firefight. He thinks of virtually nothing else as he drives aimlessly except one thought: "If things had gone right, if it hadn't been for that smell, I could've won the Silver Star."<sup>28</sup> The Silver Star represents something far more valuable than just a medal of valor for Norman Bowker. For Norman Bowker, not winning the Silver Star signifies his failure to save Kiowa's life. Norman Bowker feels such immense guilt that he almost exclusively refers to Kiowa's death as the time when he "almost won the Silver Star"<sup>29</sup> not the traumatic moment when Kiowa died in front of him. Obviously, Norman Bowker's constant return to the traumatic event points to at least one major symptom of PTSD, but his story also reveals another significant criterion for diagnosing the disorder.

Because he dwells incessantly on the traumatic event, Norman Bowker experiences what the APA categorizes as a life disturbance, or, in other words, he cannot function normally in social, work, or other environments.<sup>30</sup> Later, the narrator discloses Norman Bowker's inability to maintain a steady job or make any meaningful social connections after the war; he eventually stops working and

moves in with his parents, who support him financially, emotionally, and socially. Norman Bowker's condition quickly deteriorates and unfortunately ends in suicide. Though Norman Bowker's suicide by no means represents the average veteran's struggle with trauma and recovery, death is a real possibility for some veterans with PTSD. According to a study by the Agent Orange Registry, veterans with PTSD are almost four times as likely to die from suicide and nearly three times more likely to die from accidental poisoning than other men of their age group in the United States.<sup>31</sup> Without proper diagnosis and treatment, veterans with PTSD, such as Norman Bowker, face dismal consequences.

### **Sleep Disturbances and Violent Outbursts**

Because trauma survivors with PTSD constantly relive the event, they also experience "persistent symptoms of increased arousal," which is the penultimate criteria listed in the DSM-IV.<sup>32</sup> Obviously, all PTSD criteria are closely connected, but re-experiencing the event and increased arousal are intricately linked because one triggers the other in trauma survivors. Reliving the event elicits the heightened arousal that occurs during trauma, and the arousal manifests in several ways. "Difficulty falling or staying asleep" and "irritability or outbursts of anger" are two of the signs listed for this criterion.<sup>33</sup> O'Brien's veterans often exhibit these two symptoms. Insomnia and nightmares plague his veterans, and many of them are prone to bouts of anger.

From his first novel to his most recent, O'Brien illustrates the sleep disturbances that often afflict trauma survivors. In *Northern Lights*, Harvey cannot sleep at night, and over time his brother and sister-in-law, Perry and Grace, take note of his severe insomnia. One evening while lying in bed Grace comments on Harvey's insomnia: "Listen. Harvey's moving around upstairs. I hear it every night. Poor boy."<sup>34</sup> Harvey's family recognizes the severity of his insomnia but does not know what, if anything, they can do to help him. Instead of reaching out to his family, Harvey copes with his sleep disturbance by either pacing incessantly all night long or drinking until he passes out. Along with insomnia, Harvey shows signs of irritability throughout the novel. When Addie convinces Harvey and Perry to search for bears one night at the local dump, they find a rat instead, and Addie tells them to kill it. At first Harvey hesitates, but as he moves closer in on the rat, his temper flares, and he starts shouting feverishly, "Hit it!...Kill it for Christ sake!.. Smash it!" Perry tries to kill the rat, but misses because he closes his eyes in fear and disgust. Harvey taunts his brother maliciously: "Harvey laughed bitterly. 'Some killer. Eyes closed. A real killer, all right.' Harvey went to the car and climbed in

and slammed the door.”<sup>35</sup> While the incident with the rat is the most overtly violent outburst Harvey has, he also grows angry when he drinks. One evening while Harvey, Addie, Perry, and Grace are casually drinking, Harvey starts to threaten Addie because she won’t pass him the bottle of gin they are sharing: “Addie, give me that frigging bottle, will you?...Addie, give me that bottle or I’m going to...”<sup>36</sup> He never finishes his threat, but his flash of anger over the bottle of gin seems grossly out of place in such a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

With his novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, O’Brien returns to an exploration of heightened arousal among veterans with PTSD and imagines a much more vicious outburst of rage. Early on the narrator describes John’s sleep disturbances: “He performed the necessary trick, dreamed the necessary dreams. On occasion, though, he’d yell in his sleep—loud, desperate, obscene things—and Kathy would reach out and ask what was wrong.”<sup>37</sup> Despite John’s concerted effort to suppress his trauma narrative, the trauma emerges in other, unbidden ways. Hence, John has trouble sleeping at night, and when he does sleep, he frequently awakens from nightmares. John Wade’s struggle culminates in a violent eruption against Kathy. The narrator reveals that the night Kathy vanishes, John wakes up unable to sleep and spends most of the evening pacing the cabin killing plants by pouring boiling water onto them and chanting “Kill Jesus.”<sup>38</sup> Although the narrator never divulges exactly what happens to Kathy, he hypothesizes in one chapter that Wade murders her by pouring a kettle full of boiling water onto her face:

A dank odor filled the room, a fleshy scalding smell, and Kathy’s knuckles were doing a strange trick on the headboard—a quick rapping, then clenching up, then rapping again like a transmission in code. Bits of fat bubbled at her cheeks. He would remember thinking how impossible it was. He would remember the heat, the voltage in his arms and wrists. Why? he thought, but he didn’t know. All he knew was fury.<sup>39</sup>

His rage becomes so strong in this chapter that John allows it to take complete control of him, and he ostensibly commits a heinous act of violence. If the narrator’s hypothesis proves true, then John’s unspoken trauma eventually fractures his mind beyond repair. John Wade’s symptoms manifest in similar ways to other O’Brien characters, but generally in a more severe fashion, which reflects his more traumatic experiences of his father’s death and his participation in the My Lai massacre as well as his more deliberate attempt to erase his memories of the events.

Without question, John's symptoms manifest in the most severe form, but in *July, July* O'Brien re-envisioned the arousal symptom in a less crippling form for his veteran David Todd. Late in the novel, the narrator discloses David's sleep disturbances highlighting more trauma effects that endure years after the initial combat experience. At night David's wife Marla "used to lie in their dark bedroom terrified, curious, listening to him mumble in his sleep—obscenities sometimes, other times begging for his feet to stop hurting."<sup>40</sup> Nightmares constantly invade David's sleep, and other nights David simply cannot fall asleep. Like so many veterans, nighttime represents a difficult obstacle for David because night triggers an arousal response that prevents him from sleeping, and when he does fall asleep, nightmarish memories torment him. "The days are all right," O'Brien explains in his memoir "The Vietnam in Me," but "The nights are not all right."<sup>41</sup> O'Brien's personal struggle with trauma enables him to create a realistic trauma landscape and to infuse his texts with a palpable sense of veterans' struggle with persistent arousal. Though David never exhibits clear signs of uncontrollable anger or excessive irritability, his nightmares scare Marla enough to prompt her to record them and play them back for David:

"This scares me," she said. "That voice. It's you, but it's not you—all that swearing. Whoever it is, I feel like he's dangerous. Like he could hurt somebody."

David swung around toward her. For a few seconds his expression went thoughtful.

"Right," he said. "I suppose he could."<sup>42</sup>

Both Marla and David acknowledge David's potential for violence in this dialogue, and their conversation prompts David to seek counseling. With David Todd, O'Brien once again draws his reader into the life of a veteran navigating his way through trauma and expertly illustrates the continual struggle to function normally, which distinguishes a trauma survivor's life. Despite all of David's mental, emotional, and physical problems, he manages to occupy a valuable and successful role in society because Marla and David both recognize his symptoms and act to assuage them.

### **Silence as Tragedy and Narration as Therapy**

Regrettably, not all of O'Brien's veterans readjust as successfully as David does once home. Several of O'Brien's characters fail to identify their behavior as

symptoms of the severe trauma they experienced, or if they do realize the source of their damaging behavior, they cannot find an outlet for expressing their trauma narrative. Either way, for these characters, the outcome looks bleak. In order for trauma survivors to reach recovery, traumatic stress researchers Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Van der Hart surmise that “Traumatic memories need to become like memories of everyday experience; that is, they need to be modified and transformed by being placed in their proper context and reconstructed into a meaningful narrative.”<sup>43</sup> Harvey, Norman Bowker, and John Wade all keep their traumatic memories locked inside their minds and thus cannot make sense of them. They continue to cope with the events by either completely suppressing the memories or reliving the memories in their own minds, never narrating their thoughts in a cohesive, public account. For each character, his silence spells disaster. Because they cannot process what happened, the three veterans drown in their feelings of anger, guilt, and anxiety. O’Brien’s characters need a new means for telling their stories and processing the inhumanity they encountered in Vietnam, but they do not find the outlet soon enough.

If Harvey and Norman Bowker could have endured their mental anguish a while longer, then they might have found the means to express themselves. Immediately following Vietnam, Americans wanted nothing more than to forget the horror of the conflict. Civilians certainly did not want to hear the stories veterans brought home and desperately needed to tell because then they would have to acknowledge the atrocities and their own complicity in those brutal events. In his popular book *Dispatches*, war correspondent Michael Herr reflects on the prevailing attitude of American citizens after the war: “It seemed now that everybody knew someone who had been in Vietnam and did not want to talk about it.”<sup>44</sup> In regard to the Vietnam War, Americans suffered from what Bruce Franklin terms the “denial syndrome.” According to Franklin, “the various forms of denial of the Vietnam War and of the people, history, culture and even the very nation of Vietnam have spread widely and deeply in American politics, psychology, and culture.”<sup>45</sup> Franklin and other scholars view O’Brien’s work as a deliberate attempt to drag the American public out of its collective amnesia, especially his later novels *The Things They Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods*. “Prohibiting closure, *The Things They Carried* keeps the past from disappearing into the dead clichés of the war story replacing redemption with a critical engagement with the past,”<sup>46</sup> Robin Blyn concludes in her brief critique of the novel. If O’Brien’s work serves as a reminder of America’s ugly past, it also acts as a wake up call for those who do not realize or choose to deny the devastating aftereffects war has on veterans. For some O’Brien characters, the call

to face the truth and listen to the painful narratives coming out of Vietnam comes too late. Again, O'Brien's fiction reflects reality in that many veterans never receive the treatment they need to cope with their stress disorders.

When Harvey arrives home, he steps off the bus to a deserted main street where only his brother Paul and sister-in-law Grace await him. Unlike previous generations coming home from war, Vietnam veterans returned with little fanfare and often alone. Americans did not hold ticker tape parades for the soldiers coming home from Vietnam. The only mass greeting many would receive came in the form of angry protestors waiting to condemn soldiers for fighting in what they saw as an unjust war. "No bloody drink? No parade, no drink. Where the devil is everybody? Some awful hero worship," Harvey laments to Paul and Grace upon his arrival. No one needs to tell Harvey that his neighbors prefer to ignore his homecoming and forget the war in general. He wears civilian clothes on the bus and jokes that he would "look plain silly coming home in a uniform and no parade,"<sup>47</sup> an indication of Harvey's understanding of Americans' sentiments about Vietnam. Immediately after his traumatic experience, Harvey receives a collective message from his hometown and the nation to silence his trauma narrative because he receives no communal welcome and his fellow citizens refuse to listen to his war narrative. His hometown, like the rest of America, does not want to hear his brutal story, so Harvey keeps it hidden away in the depths of his mind.

Harvey takes a cue from his hometown and simply tries to recover his previous identity as a popular football player. Soon after his arrival, Harvey and his brother Paul, whom everyone calls Perry, return to one of their old haunts—a tavern named Franz's Glen. Before walking in, Harvey expresses some apprehension to Perry:

"What the hell do I say?"

"Tell them you're a hero."

"Perfect!" Harvey grinned and mashed the aluminum can in his hands.  
"Just like the old days."

"Sure."

"Everything's the same, right?"

"Exactly."<sup>48</sup>

Harvey's hesitation and questioning belie his air of confidence. Deep within, Harvey knows that everything is not the same and that he simply masquerades as the town hero. After experiencing so much trauma in the war, he can never return to the same carefree, trusting lifestyle he knew before. As Jonathan Shay explains,

contact with the extreme trauma inherent in war causes irrevocable change in an individual because “to encounter radical evil is to make one forever different from the trusting, ‘normal’ person who wraps the rightness of the social order around himself snugly, like a cloak of safety.”<sup>49</sup> No matter how badly Harvey wants to recover his old self he cannot because the war has fundamentally changed his personality, but he continues to disregard this reality. When his girlfriend Addie questions him about his eye, he grows reticent and complains that she “makes you feel like a crazy for not wanting to talk about it, as if...I don’t know what.”<sup>50</sup> Addie perceives the necessity for Harvey to speak about the trauma in order to recover, but Harvey rejects the need although his unfinished thought of “as if...” indicates he senses the possible regenerative effects of telling his story.

Nevertheless, Harvey continues to quell the voice inside, and when finally faced with the truth, he attempts to deny it. For Harvey, the moment of recognition comes during an ill-fated excursion into the winter landscape of Minnesota. Harvey convinces his brother to embark on a cross-country ski trip with him, but the two become utterly lost in a blizzard and almost die of exposure. Experiencing another traumatic event debilitates Harvey and turns his thoughts back to the trauma of the war. As Perry takes control forcing Harvey to move forward to prevent them from freezing to death, Harvey makes a futile attempt to talk about the war:

“I want to talk,” Harvey said.

“Then talk. Let’s go.”

“I want to talk about being brave and doing things.”

“We’ve done that before.” Perry started across the bridge.<sup>51</sup>

Again, Harvey grasps the importance of the trauma narrative, but he stops short of telling it, deciding instead to revert back to his old, illusory stories of brave deeds in war. Throughout the novel, Harvey misses perfect opportunities to tell his traumatic story and continues trying to revert to his pre-war existence. As the novel comes to a close, the mystery of how Harvey received his wound remains unsolved because Harvey cannot bring himself to tell anyone what he experienced in the war.

By the closing chapters of *Northern Lights*, Harvey’s failure to reintegrate into society becomes depressingly clear. In the year after his return from Vietnam, Harvey has not found a job, and there are no prospects in the near future of his obtaining employment. Addie grows weary of Harvey’s fantasies and emotional detachment and moves to the city leaving him behind. In a pitiful attempt to win Addie back, Harvey arrives unannounced at her apartment in Minneapolis,

but after sleeping on her floor for a few nights Harvey returns home without her. Because he keeps such an important part of his life hidden from everyone, even himself, Harvey cannot connect intimately with his partners or his family. Harvey's perpetual denial of his story leads to a miserably failed attempt at readjustment.

Despite the grim outlook for Harvey at the end of the *Northern Lights*, there remains a glimmer of hope for recovery should he ever choose to tell his story. The same cannot be said for another of O'Brien's characters, Norman Bowker, whose story appears in "Speaking of Courage" in *Things*. Upon arriving home, Norman Bowker experiences a similar disregard of his combat service by his hometown:

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, therefore no guilt. The taxes got paid and the votes got counted and the agencies of government did their work briskly and politely. It was a brisk, polite town. It did not know shit about shit, and did not care to know.<sup>52</sup>

Civilians' tendency to ignore veterans and avoid any real discussion of the war cut off the communal grieving and storytelling outlets that previous war veterans had access to and forced Vietnam veterans to turn elsewhere. Norman Bowker feels that he has nowhere else to confide his story. His father "had his own war" and "now preferred silence," and Norman Bowker believed "this was not a story for Sally Kramer"<sup>53</sup> his ex-girlfriend. No doubt his father's silence influences Norman to remain quiet, which is unfortunate since relating their stories to each other could have initiated the healing process for both men. Whether or not Sally Kramer would have listened to Norman's narrative is irrelevant, for clearly Norman feels this avenue is closed to him.

O'Brien poignantly emphasizes Norman's overwhelming urge to share his trauma narrative. While driving past construction workers, Norman Bowker whispers, "Want to hear about the Silver Star I almost won?" but none of the men notice him, and later he almost tells his story to the man who takes his order at the local burger joint but stops himself. The repeated references to how Norman Bowker "would've explained, would've spoken, would have talked, would have said, would have paused a second, would have told, and would have kept his voice cool"<sup>54</sup> point to the necessity of trauma narration. His need to release and reorder his narrative grips him so strongly that Norman Bowker imagines how he might tell his story if given the opportunity. Sadly, he never has the chance to narrate his

trauma, and Norman Bowker hangs himself in the locker room of the local YMCA. Because Norman Bowker cannot tell his story and start the recovery process, he finds coping with the traumatic events impossible. In his case, as is the case for a small percentage of actual veterans, his silence destroys him and ends in his paying the ultimate cost for his actions—his life.

Though suicide stands as one of the most severe consequences of not conveying a coherent narrative, O'Brien imagines an even more sinister end for John Wade, who also fails to create a trauma narrative. The key difference between Norman Bowker and John Wade, which explains Wade's extremely violent and sudden breakdown, lies in Wade's attempt to completely suppress his trauma narrative. Wade even tries to erase the memories from his own psyche. Before returning to the States, John falsifies all documents linking him to the events at Thuan Yen, more commonly known as My Lai: "The illusion, he realized, would not be perfect. None ever was. But still it seemed a nifty piece of work. Logical and smooth. Among the men in Charlie Company he was known only as Sorcerer. Very few had ever heard his real name; fewer still would recall it. And over time, he trusted, memory itself would be erased"<sup>55</sup> John is right; the illusion is not perfect, and that is why he never manages to fully erase the memory. It continues to force its way into his thoughts violently, repeatedly. Even though he can never remember exactly how the events unfolded because he remembers it differently every time, the memory is always present and nagging in the recesses of his mind. To cope with the trauma, John chooses to ignore it and refuses to give voice to his narrative. As an alternative, John uses illusions and tricks, methods he learned in childhood, to create a new persona of a charismatic, successful politician when he returns home. John moves up the political ladder quickly, soon becoming a senatorial candidate for Minnesota: "The trick then was to be vigilant. He would guard his advantage. 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 there were tricks."<sup>56</sup> John tries to wipe out his story; he has no thoughts of sharing the trauma with others because he cannot even face it himself.

After the press releases stories revealing his involvement in the My Lai massacre, John loses his bid for senate. Now, John can no longer deny his true identity; however, he still tries to escape it. He is not ready to face reality and relate his trauma narrative even though the press has told it for him. John runs from the truth with his wife Kathy; they retreat to a cabin in northern Minnesota near the Canadian border and far from civilization. Here, they try to cope with the recent revelation and repair a severely damaged relationship "built, as they now both know, on layers

of concealment, illusion, and lies.”<sup>57</sup> Until the story runs in the newspapers, Kathy is completely unaware that John participated in the atrocities at My Lai because after he forges the documents in Vietnam, John decides never to divulge his secret to anyone, not even his spouse—his most intimate companion. Considering that John denies the act of violence even to himself, it seems virtually impossible for him to have exposed his actions to his wife. His powerlessness to express the traumatic event to himself or anyone else causes his eventual breakdown.

When the press reveals his trauma narrative for the world to read, the intrusion shatters his illusions and fragments John’s mind. This is when his fantasizing becomes hazardous to his intimate relationships. On the seventh night on the remote lake, Kathy mysteriously disappears. The narrator of *In the Lake of the Woods* provides eight hypotheses of what happened to Kathy—one of which includes John murdering her and sinking her body to the bottom of the lake. The narrator never reveals what actually happened, so the reader must draw his or her own conclusions as to Kathy’s fate. Unfortunately, John cannot remember what happened either. He replays the night over and over again in his mind to remember the details, but his repetition of the night’s events only reveals “that one’s experience can be secret even to oneself.”<sup>58</sup> However, much of the evidence the narrator provides points to John as the culprit, and John’s memories of the night are fraught with violent images of his killing houseplants with boiling water and taking a tea kettle of boiling water into the room where Kathy sleeps. Did he murder his wife by pouring boiling water directly into her face as the narrator implies? The reader cannot be sure, but as David Piwinski notes during his reflection on Kathy’s disappearance, “The demonic buzz in Wade’s head during this night of uncontrollable rage suggests the distinct possibility that he did commit this act of evil.”<sup>59</sup> When reality shatters John’s trick mirror, he is left without a coping device, so his traumatic experience presents itself in rage and violence. In John Wade’s case, silence results in violent death.

Perhaps Perry’s wife, Grace, captures the problem of silence the best when she laments, “He [Harvey] never talks about that either. Nobody ever talks about anything really. I can never talk about anything either.”<sup>60</sup> Grace cannot even identify what it is that people never talk about; she only knows they never talk about “anything,” and she senses the detrimental effect this silence has on individuals. Clearly, Harvey, Norman, and John’s silence concerning the trauma of war adversely affects them and everyone around them; the same is true for real victims of trauma who do not receive treatment or narrate their traumatic experience. As these characters’ stories reveal, not telling one’s story can be devastating to those

dealing with post-traumatic stress. In *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien's narrator, who seems to closely resemble O'Brien himself, tells the reader, "I did not look on my work as therapy, and still don't. Yet when I received Norman Bowker's letter, it occurred to me that the act of writing had led me through a swirl of memories that might otherwise have ended in paralysis or worse."<sup>61</sup> For Harvey, the failure to tell his story ends in stagnation; he has no intimate relationships, he is unemployed, and the only future he can conceive of for himself is the fantasy of exotic travel. The end for Norman Bowker and John Wade, unfortunately, is the "or worse" to which O'Brien's narrator ominously refers. Norman Bowker commits suicide, and John Wade loses everything he holds dear and may even be guilty of murdering his own wife in a delusional fit of rage. If the three characters had spoken of their trauma earlier, their ends may not have been so disastrous. O'Brien's characters remind the reader of the dangers of suppressing trauma narratives. Although communicating their trauma narratives to others does not provide immediate recovery for trauma victims, without doing so the healing process can never begin.

In spite of the terrible ends O'Brien writes for these three characters, he can also imagine a more positive outcome for veterans who manage to seek help and narrate their trauma. Even though he had no intention of using writing as a form of therapy, the narrator in *The Things They Carried* admits that his writing probably saved him from a fate similar to Norman Bowker's. Through telling his story and his comrade's stories, the narrator safely relives and reintegrates the trauma into his personal history and honors the dead. The trauma does not paralyze or kill him because he finds a method to process the horrendous events he experienced in combat. Likewise, David Todd discovers ways to cope with his traumatic memories in O'Brien's *July, July*. Unlike some of O'Brien's other characters, David Todd has a support network and does not deny his traumatic story. Though his marriage ends in divorce, David's wife confronts him about his symptoms and asks him to seek help, which he does. After months of therapy at the Veterans' Administration, "He slept better. His dreams went foggy and bland. Only rarely did he hear Ortiz's transistor radio, or yipping sounds, or the murderous drone of the Song Tra Ky."<sup>62</sup> Reaching out to others and telling them what he experienced helps David manage his PTSD and maintain a productive life. Real veterans with PTSD, who have succeeded in reintegrating into society, have also given a voice to their trauma narratives through family, friends, fellow veterans, and/or therapists. Veterans with PTSD must express the traumatic event/s in a complete and lucid form to move forward along their recovery paths.

Explaining how storytelling helps trauma survivors in recovery represents a challenge because it involves an arduous and complicated mental process. Perhaps the narrator of *The Things They Carried* offers the best explanation: “By telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin certain truths down. You make others up. 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.”<sup>6</sup> When a veteran tells his story, he might have to remember it differently each time, adding and subtracting from the story in order to make sense of an event that is otherwise senseless. The exact means through which narrative forming aids in trauma recovery may remain a mystery forever, but clearly narration has healing properties for many trauma survivors that enables them to start their journey toward recovery.

## Notes

1. This epigram is taken from a personal interview I conducted with a veteran. The veteran served as a Marine Corps door gunner and crew chief in Vietnam from 1966-1969. Since his service, he has been diagnosed and treated for PTSD. His name has been changed to maintain anonymity. Leigh, Clyde A. Sr. Personal Interview. 29 March 2007.
2. Edward Tick, *War and the Soul Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 223.
3. Mark A. Heberle, *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2001), 33.
4. Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 144.
5. Maria S. Bonn, “Can Stories Save Us? Tim O'Brien and the Efficacy of the Text,” *Critique*, no. 36 (1994): 14.
6. Heberle, *A Trauma Artist*, 14.
7. *Ibid.*, 15.
8. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 464-466.
9. *Ibid.*, 467-8.
10. *Ibid.*, 468.
11. Tim O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, (New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1975), 24.
12. *Ibid.*, 54.

13. Glenn R. Schiraldi, *The Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Sourcebook: A Guide to Healing, Recovery, and Growth*, (Los Angeles: Lowell House, 2000). *NetLibrary*. 14 March 2006, 10.
14. O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 58.
15. *Ibid.*, 37.
16. Tim O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1994), 65.
17. *Ibid.*, 65-6.
18. *Ibid.*, 73.
19. Josef I. Ruzek, "Concurrent Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Substance Use Disorder Among Veterans: Evidence and Treatment Issues," in *Trauma and Substance Abuse: Causes, Consequences, and Treatment of Comorbid Disorders*. ed. Paige Ouimette and Pamela J. Brown. (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 191.
20. O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 145.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 355.
23. O'Brien, *Lake*, 82.
24. Tim O'Brien, *July, July*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 14.
25. DSM-IV, 468.
26. Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1990), 32.
27. *Ibid.*, 141.
28. *Ibid.*, 150.
29. *Ibid.*, 141.
30. DSM-IV, 468.
31. Bonnie L. Green and Rachel Kimerling, "Trauma, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and Health Status," in *Trauma and Health: Physical Health Consequences of Exposure to Extreme Stress*. ed. Paula P. Schnurr and Bonnie L. Green. (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2004) 32.
32. DSMV-IV, 465.
33. *Ibid.*
34. O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 129.
35. *Ibid.*, 113.
36. *Ibid.*, 321.

37. O'Brien, *Lake*, 75.
38. Ibid., 131.
39. Ibid., 273.
40. O'Brien. *July, July*, 40.
41. Tim O'Brien, "The Vietnam in Me," *New York Times Magazine*, October 2, 1994, 56.
42. Tim O'Brien, *July, July*, 276.
43. Bessel A. Van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Onno Van der Hart, "A General Approach to Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, ed. Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, (New York: The Guildford P, 1996), 429.
44. Michael Herr, *Dispatches*, (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 251.
45. Bruce H. Franklin, "Kicking the Denial Syndrome: Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*," in *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past*, ed. Mark C. Carnes, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 333.
46. Robin Blynn, "O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*." *Explicator*, no. 61 (2003): 191.
47. O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 23-24.
48. Ibid., 38-39.
49. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, (New York: Scribner, 1994), 185.
50. O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 177.
51. Ibid., 239-40.
52. O'Brien, *Things*, 143.
53. Ibid., 246, 247.
54. Ibid., 141-153.
55. O'Brien, *Lake*, 269.
56. Ibid., 46.
57. Franklin, 336.
58. Timothy Melley, "Postmodern Amnesia: Trauma and Forgetting in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*," *Contemporary Literature*, no. 44 (2001): 106.
59. David J. Piwinski, "My Lai, Flies, and Beelzebub in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*," *War, Literature and the Arts*, no. 12.2 (2000): 201.

60. O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 133.

61. O'Brien, *Things*, 158.

62. O'Brien, *July, July*, 279.

63. O'Brien, *Things*, 158.



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