

BARBARA KOWALCZUK

My Lai's "Fucking flies!":
The Stigmata of Trauma in Tim
O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*

I know the boil that precedes butchery.
—Tim O'Brien, "The Vietnam in Me"

Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is
nothing to remember except the story.
—The Things They Carried

16 March 1968, 7:22 a.m.: John "Sorcerer" Wade, boards a helicopter with Charlie Company. Around 7:30, the chopper lands in the subhamlet of Thuan Yen, identified by US army maps as My Lai 4, and what will later be historically (dis)remembered as the four-hour-long My Lai massacre begins for the main protagonist of Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* in "the wind and heat, the wicked sunlight" (O'Brien 1994a: 105). Following the infamous mass killing, Wade, prostrated in a desperate mental haze, realizes in a visionary epiphany that he has witnessed "pure wrongness" and "things unnatural" (105). His numbness paradoxically concurs with a devastating awakening confronting him with an incomprehensible yet utterly tangible reality: "At one point it occurred to him that the weight of this day would ultimately prove too much, that sooner or later he would have to lighten the load" (108). Evidently, the traumatic event is marked by the absence of referentiality and it is the very nonexistence of

any point of spatial, temporal and perceptive references which will over the years conspicuously haunt Wade in the form of ghostlike and graphic flashbacks. Cathy Caruth evokes the “unassimilated nature” of trauma (1996: 4), insisting on the non-integration of what has been “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” (4) but the term *misprocessed* seems more suitable for the purpose of the present discussion, which aims at delineating the stigmata of trauma within the narrative to eventually explore the synergy of the artistic and aesthetic dynamics occurring in the liminality of discourse. Indeed, not only does the aftershock continuously affect the subject of the story, but it also has an impact on its agent(s), generating an ambiguous narrative equally prone to camouflage and trapdoors yet “faithful to the evidence” (O’Brien 1994a: 30). Accordingly, this leaves us with a problematic and intangible hermeneutics in the end, hence the proposal to consider further in the discussion the “realization accomplished by the reader” (Iser 1972: 274) to excavate and possibly to re-construct the narrative’s ‘story-truth’, a notion O’Brien unquestionably distinguishes from ‘happening-truth’² which, to him, seems inadequate to render the essence and the outcome of traumatic episodes. Evidently, the stigmata of trauma, somehow metabolized by the acts of narrating and (re)reading, stand as emblematic marks for the reader, who is encouraged to unveil the unsaid.

Starting *in medias res*, in September 1986, the story introduces amateur magician and obsessive deserter John Wade, now a defeated politician, as he arrives at Lake of the Woods with his wife Kathy, after his downfall in the primary for the US Senate. The subsequent flashbacks indicate that the defeat is the direct consequence of the media’s disclosure, during the campaign, of his partaking in the My Lai massacre. Soon after taking refuge in the vicinity of Angle Inlet, Kathy mysteriously disappears, leaving Wade a primary suspect in the ensuing investigation. Before long, Wade, too, will eventually achieve a final, absolute and never resolved mystifying vanishing act. The narrative, which gradually reconstructs his traumatic experience at My Lai as well as his last days before fading away, reads like a detective story that remains a puzzle to the end. It is composed of kaleidoscopic flashbacks, collages of factual information taken from history and psychology books, as well as from the official court-martial records of the Peers Commission, which was established in November 1969 to investigate the My Lai massacre. In addition, it presents a patchwork of hypotheses, along with reported interviews and contradictory testimonies of real and fictional people. The peritext gradually turns into a textual growth that phagocytizes the body of the text through the increasingly intrusive footnotes of the Evidence chapters. The anonymous narrator of these chapters, a self-proclaimed “[b]iographer, historian,

medium” (O’Brien 1994a: 30) who writes after a four-year-long investigation on the two unsolved missing persons cases, urges those expecting a crystal-clear account to “look beyond these pages. Or read a different book” (30). The ensemble is marked by what Judith Herman delineates as a “kind of fragmentation, whereby trauma tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion” (1992: 34). The disintegration which generally affects victims of psychological trauma is markedly best exemplified within the narrative by the uncertain biography of Wade which the reader builds with the conflicting facts reported in the Evidence chapters: “John wouldn’t hurt a fly” (O’Brien 1994a: 13); “The fucker did something ugly” (30); “Yet evidence is not truth” (30). Central to Tim O’Brien’s novel is the erratic portrait of a traumatized subject who is constantly trying to cope with dissociation, “slipping day by day into the graying shadows” (301) as he is confronted to “the void of things missing, the inconclusiveness of conclusion” (301) flashing on the mirrors in his head. The repeated mirror imagery, often connected to the passages recalling Wade as a child practicing magic tricks in front of a stand-up mirror, functions as a reminder that a comprehensive reading of *In the Lake of the Woods* calls for the fundamental recognition of war as a “mythic arena” which accordingly “reshapes the imagination as an agent of negation” (Tick 2005: 21), displacing the traumatized subject and his eerie singularities to a liminal locus, a midpoint that should normally represent only a transition until the uncanny horror is correctly processed. The indeterminacy and uncertainty marking the narrator’s investigation indicate that the shocking slaughter at My Lai cannot be fully comprehended and treated by Wade. The latter undeniably remains traumatized by overflowing knowledge all the more so as his motivational drive makes him the very agent of successive attempts to rearrange or repress the facts. The chaotic representation of his war trauma leads to a series of spatial (there and here), temporal (then and now) and emotional ruptures. The symptomatic outcome of acute cognitive dissonance³ propels Wade to make a pact with himself: by lending the events a convenient signification, he temporarily displaces the unprecedented knowledge in the background of his consciousness. The abortive, yet reiterated, act aims at banishing the sudden, devastating otherness that sets him apart and engenders a division of his self. However, over the years, the repression of the terrible knowledge maintains Wade in a state of liminality, without him being able to transcend the assaults of his traumatic memory and to achieve “the positive work of ‘memorization’, which brings in ‘an operation of language’, from which the subject will be able to ‘assimilate’ the event”.⁴ The never-ending katabasis to the limbo of dreadfulness metaphorically transpires in the neurotic recurring image

of the flies invading the site of My Lai: “Millions of them. Big mean fuckers. These were some very pissed-off flies” (O’Brien 1994a: 98). The fixation on the cloud of ‘fucking’ flies is repeatedly evoked by the veterans, Wade included; they remember the insects buzzing and radiating in the darkness of the site as if they were wildly animated by an inner self of their own.⁵

The atrocities seen and carried out at My Lai have thrown Wade into a liminal zone of subterfuge filled with “[t]oo much walled-up history” (O’Brien 1994a: 54), a place of secrets deprived of the “membrane” (Shatan 1985: 172) which normally “separates sense from nonsense, narrative from chaos” (Tal 1996: 15). The resulting mental oxymoronic protruding hole, a monstrous fissure, prevents healing because of the reiterated intrusion of flashbacks and distressing nightmares. The unrelentingly sustained, unachievable, erasure of the past, along with the chronic traumatic hallucinations, booby-traps Wade in a psychological matrix oversaturated with incoherent blanks and flashes. The narrative singularly uncovers the cracks aggravated by the “internal foreign body”⁶ and the illusory void generated by constriction. The intrusive traumatic memory is experienced as if it were an invasion. Just as the flies plagued the site of My Lai once the massacre was over, it is at the origin of the “repeated *possession*” of the traumatized subject (Caruth 1995: 4). The overloaded (w)hole traps Wade. He is surrounded by “crystal-images” which reflect ad infinitum in a mirror maze, engendering a confusing amalgamation of past and present that triggers cyclic short-circuits. Defining the characteristics of the “crystal-image,” Deleuze writes that “[t]he virtual image becomes all the more actual as it absorbs and captures the character. The actual image becomes all the more virtual as the character is cast off out of the picture [...] He will recover his actuality only by breaking the mirror.”⁷ Wade is often caught in an uncanny act of disidentification, observing himself as if he were standing in an imaginary hall of mirrors, rationalizing his past acts and experiences while perceiving from a distance a duplicated reflection of his own fallacious self. The *mise en abyme* is without doubt the most evident stigma ensuing from post-traumatic cognitive dissonance. For psychiatrist Louis Crocq, the traumatized subject is stigmatized⁸ by his radical initiation to a form of uncontrollable, appalling knowledge which may activate guilt-ridden thoughts:

For, more than death, suffering, ruins and desolation, it is nothingness that they have glimpsed and they drag with them its horrifying remanence. Somehow, beyond the still organized and meaningful world of hell and its pantheon, they have caught a brief glimpse of original chaos, from

before creation, where there is no life yet: nothingness, nonsense, non-being.⁹ (Crocq 1999: 358)

The stigmata of trauma and the craving to obliterate them are metaphorically embodied by the obsessive reminiscence of a pair of snakes on a path near Pinkville. Wade remembers contemplating them as they were swallowing each other, forming a circle of death drive and annihilation until “one plus one equals zero” (O’Brien 1994a: 61). Although a soldier’s machete eventually cut off the strange loop, the image remains permanently fixed and is obsessively reported, just like the memory of the flies’ “deep droning buzz” (206). Therefore, Sorcerer’s crucial evil act of magic at the end of his second tour in the fall of 1969, the obliteration of his name from Charlie Company’s files, not only attempts to erase his presence at My Lai but it also negates a radical form of *knowing* caused by a sudden forced clash with reality.¹⁰ This distinctive and unparalleled knowledge leaves Wade a marked man, a PTSD endemic zone made flesh, haunted by secrecy and betrayal. He has turned into a living dead dazed by encoded visions of shadows and squealing pigs, “[d]ead human beings in awkward poses” (48), a body hanging from a tree, “float[ing] under a lovely red moon” (41) and incarnating “the special burden of villainy, the ghosts at Thuan Yen, the strain on his dreams” (50). Wade’s name removal denotes the fundamental and foundational constrictive act of avoidance prompted by the mental conflict that will stimulate other self-deceptions: “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” (269). Nevertheless, the dreadful negatives are endlessly mentally reprinted and associated with another trauma, which occurred during Wade’s childhood when his father committed suicide. The link between the two traumatic events is expressed in his final hallucinatory reminiscence before swinging north into Lake of the Woods, never to come back:

Yet he could not stop returning. All night long he revisited the village of Thuan Yen, always with a fresh eye, witness to the tumblings and spinnings of those who had reached their fictitious point of no return. Relatively speaking, he decided, these frazzle-eyed citizens were never quite dead, otherwise they would surely stop dying. Same-same for his father. Proof of the loop. The fucker kept hanging himself. (283)

The desperate “Don’t be dead” cry, “begging [Wade’s father] to please stop dying” (14-15) recalls the intense, re-traumatizing My Lai’s mass murder mental snapshots which trespass on Wade’s psychic thresholds, eventually overcoming the constriction schemes meant to keep at bay the lingering non-sense. The psychological entropy is at some point of the novel spectacularly represented in the confused nightmarish dream-reels in which Wade has appalling phantasmagoric visions of My Lai’s dead villagers meeting the mourners at his father’s funeral, “conducted in bright sunlight along an irrigation ditch at Thuan Yen” (42). In spite of his “forgetting trick” (109), Wade seems to be frozen in the temporally and spatially frame of the traumatic event. Forever stuck in the slime of My Lai’s ditch, he is scarred by apartness, which metabolizes in “that blank dead-man look of his” (293), a stigma confining him to a post-traumatic alienating state where concealment remains the ultimate battle: “History was a secret. The land was a secret. There were secret caches, secret trails, secret codes, secret missions, secret terrors and appetites and longings and regrets. Secrecy was paramount. Secrecy *was* the war” (73). His own idiosyncratic liminality, placing him in an uncanny state of suspension,¹¹ conjures up trauma’s distinctiveness, its “quality of ‘otherness’, a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery” (Felman and Laub 69). Wade surrenders to a decisive but destructive performance of denial, meant to cancel out evil:

In the months and years to come, John Wade would remember Thuan Yen the way chemical nightmares are remembered, impossible combinations, impossible events, and over time the impossibility itself would become the richest and deepest and most profound memory. This could not have happened. Therefore it did not. (109)

The determination to proceed to forgetfulness maintains Wade in a never-ending rite of passage, which prevents him from fixing the spatial, temporal and psychological cracks caused by his war trauma. The fixation on the flies and the couple of snakes stands as a metaphorical substitution for violent and shocking occurrences. When the latter surge forward, the threads of linearity are slashed by the unrelenting, pathological struggle to forget. Wade faces the excruciating dilemma experienced by most traumatized subjects *for he must remember to disremember*. Through PFC Thinbill’s metafictional testimony— “[H]e tried to do

something about it. Erase it, you know? Literally” (258)—the reader is also invited to follow the signals spread in the Evidence chapters’ footnotes and to maneuver towards the narrator’s subjectivity. To Lacan, “impossible knowledge is censored, forbidden, but it isn’t if you properly write the *inter-dit*, it is said between the words, between the lines”¹² (1975b: 108). As revelation lies in the *dit-mension*—“the mention of the said (*dit*)” (Lacan 1975b: 97)—the reader must seize the forbidden address by investigating and searching the *mention/mansion of the said*, where knowledge, hitherto encoded and unattainable, is no longer barred. The success of this displacement equals the fulfillment of an act of magic and demonstrates that “in every trick there are two carefully thought out lines—the way it looks and the way it is”.¹³ If one accepts with Lacan the fact that “[a]ll speech always possesses a beyond” (1975a: 369), then the narrator’s intrusions on the narrative’s threshold deliberately guide the reader between the lines, through the situs of a sub-text that finally comes to “*ex-sist*” and apprehend yet another’s transpiring “wanting-to-say”¹⁴:

Thuan Yen is still a quiet little farming village, very poor, very remote, with dirt paths and cow dung and high bamboo hedgerows. Very friendly, all things considered: the old folks nod and smile; the children giggle at our white foreign faces. The ditch is still there. I found it easily. Just five or six feet deep, shallow and unimposing, yet it was as if I had been there before, in my dreams, or in some other life. (O’Brien 1994a: 146)

The *déjà-vu* motif participates in the novel’s specularity, but more fascinatingly, it sends the reader into another *dit-mension*, which lies in the boundless transtextuality that connects O’Brien’s works together. This thwarts the possibility of absolute hermeneutic consistency, while opening up new paths for interpretation. Accordingly, what is at stake is the creation of the complementary stories that will emerge out of the indeterminacies and the similarities. After Wade’s disappearance, while Thinbill bets that he is certainly “out there swatting flies” (298), Footnote 127, the final and longest interference, literally engulfs the textual body, contaminating the last Evidence chapter’s final page and making the parallel between Wade’s and the anonymous narrator’s predicament rather unambiguous:

Swatting flies—yes. Maybe. But still, it’s odd how the mind erases horror [...] and from my own experience I understand how he kept things buried,

how he could never face or even recall the butchery at Thuan Yen. For me, after a quarter century, nothing much remains of that ugly war. A handful of splotchy images. [...] And yet a quality of abstraction makes reality unreal. All these years later, like John Wade, I cannot remember much, I cannot feel much. (298).

In October 1994, concomitantly with the publication of *In the Lake of the Woods*, O'Brien's "The Vietnam in Me" was issued in the *New York Times Magazine*. The literary montage of the piece cuts back and forth between two significant moments in the writer's life, his return in February 1994 to Vietnam¹⁵—more specifically to the Landing Zone Gator and My Lai in the Quang Ngai Province—and the following months of June and July in Cambridge, Mass., during which he was assailed by suicidal thoughts. For the first time, and after many years of denial, the author publicly acknowledged his own ambush by war trauma, "the guilt chills" (O'Brien 1994b) and hopelessness: "On Gator, we used to say, the winds doesn't blow, it sucks. Maybe that's what happened—the wind sucked it all away. My life. My virtue. [...] Talk about bad dreams. One year gave me more than enough to fill the nights" (O'Brien 1994b). The uncanny *déjà-vu* feeling once again impregnates the text, leaving the reader with mental photomontages which connect the article with the stigmata of trauma, the horrid thoughts and the nightmares depicted in *In the Lake of the Woods*. O'Brien's clear-cut statement—"You don't have to be in Nam to be in Nam" (O'Brien 1994b)—operates like a developer that reveals retroactively the transtextual links not only between the two works, but also between the rest of the opuses. These links are mostly interwoven with guilt-ridden considerations which are echoed here and there—"I have written some of this before, but I must write it again; I was a coward. I went to Vietnam"¹⁶ (O'Brien 1994b)—and too much knowing combined with a deep feeling of betrayal "by a nation that shrugs off barbarity" (O'Brien 1994b). Accordingly, reading and re-reading O'Brien's oeuvre instigates a quest for the wanting-to-say which could be akin to what Laplanche defines as "a hermeneutics of the message of the other [...] the translating of an *address*" (Caruth 2001: para. 111 and 119, emphasis added). It is undoubtedly the translation of this address that retrospectively gives sense to the *inter-dit* of the novel. Footnote 127, peculiarly reverberating the deeply downhearted tone of "The Vietnam in Me", reads like an overdue post-traumatic torn confession avowing the double bind of the traumatized subject. Judith Herman sees this impasse as "the central dialectic of psychological trauma" which generates "the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy" and breeds "the conflict between the will to deny

horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud” (1992: 1). Yet, as the novel’s author figure and the narrator’s seem to merge elliptically in the final footnote, the “convenience of a faulty memory” (O’Brien 1994a: 189) loses its *raison d’être* and the only certainty that emerges from post-traumatic discourse is that neither history nor trauma can be apprehended by the closure of the mind. The multifaceted angles of storytelling metamorphose the use of imagination into an “inherently life affirming” act (Tick 2005: 21) which symbolizes the unfathomable:

My own war does not belong to me. In a peculiar way, even at this very instant, the ordeal of John Wade—the long decades of silence and lies and secrecy—all this has a vivid, living clarity that seems far more authentic than my own faraway experience. Maybe that’s what this book is for. To remind me. To give me back my vanished life. (O’Brien 1994a: 298)

By baring the stigmata of war trauma through a mastered metastatic syndrome of repetition, storytelling and its enigmatic interstices do not heal but “bring comfort before death” (Ricœur 1983: 138). Wade’s liminality, then the narrator’s, transpire betwixt the gaps of the story, until the author’s metalepses generate repeated crossings of the *embedding* threshold ([*seuil d’enchâssement*], Genette 2004: 14). Thus, it leads to the formation of connections and cross-examinations which uncover what the narrator means when he evokes “[t]he unknown, the unknowable. The blank faces. The overwhelming otherness” (O’Brien 1994a: 199). The impulse to inscribe (for the addresser) and decipher (for the addressee) the *inter-dit* eventually mutates into the virtual artistic and aesthetic re-membering of a so far intangible textual body which will “bear witness to the mystery of evil” (O’Brien 1994a: 199), thus giving way to a concrete, objectified “journey home” (Tick 2005: 199). Therefore, it is possible to consider the relation between the narrator and the reader as a *pas de deux* which mitigates the enigma of trauma. If “memory is an elusive thing, subject to loss as well as revision, and even metamorphosing into something greater, myth” (Trittle 2000: 158), then, going through the liminality of post-traumatic storytelling also signifies an endeavor to interweave expectations and faith.¹⁷ Thus, in the end, the reader has to find his place as a subject in-between the different levels of the narrative, to process the unutterable and the incomprehensible. In “the blending twilight of in between” (O’Brien 1994a: 288), the communalization of trauma takes place in a post-traumatic account, which, just like the Uroborus, eats up its own tail, blocks any closure but also allows regeneration via the subtexts emerging

from the reintegration of the narrative's "shadowy penumbra of possibilities, of might-have-beens" (Harvey 1965: 147).

Finally, with the exposure of the stigmata of trauma, it becomes clear that 'happening-truth' is not what specifically matters for O'Brien in the act of storytelling. Rather, what prevails in the end is the uplifting impression that, as Deena Metzger puts it, "[s]tory gathers and integrates the elements of event and imagination [...] When it opens, meaning emerges in a flow or explosion of light and understanding [...] Perhaps, ultimately, we are each a story [...] resonant with larger stories" (2002: 9). The post-traumatic textual frame stands as an anti-archive room—where 'happening-truth' is not fixed and cannot be put in safekeeping. Rather, it is a tempting place to be trespassed, one which ultimately reflects "the fascination of magic." Likewise, "[i]t is a paradox, a riddle, a half-fulfillment of an ancient desire, a puzzle, a torment, a cheat and a truth."¹⁸ By tempting the reader to reach beyond the lines, "set the work in motion"¹⁹ (Iser 1972: 275) and connect with transtextuality, O'Brien opts for liminality as a creative space. There, the synergetic reunion of fiction, imagination and reality give way to imaginisation: the significant act of symbolic reintegration is not triggered by memories as such, whether they are Wade's, the narrator's, the reader's and— who knows?—the author's, but rather by their indeterminacy and the hermeneutic aspiration they provoke. The performance also gives the author the possibility to let go clues that are relayed by the reader. It is up to the latter to decide what to do of the fissures and the strange echoes in the story, and how to establish for himself renewed possibilities of meaning.²⁰ While war's "symbolic status is that of the ultimate anti-pastoral" (Fussell 1975: 231), the possible metabolization of trauma within the narrative's *dit-mension* turns the latter into a post-traumatic site of self-poiesis, a world of contingency and resilience, in which "whereabouts are uncertain" (O'Brien 1994a: 301) but surely filled with salutary and liberating *maybes*.

Notes

1. Freud defines this repercussion as the "posthumous effect of trauma" (1973: 57).
2. "I want you to know what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (O'Brien 1990: 179). In his discussion about psychoanalytical narratives, Spence (1982) distinguishes the event—"historical truth"—from the story of the event—"narrative truth". The construction is seen as an artistic endeavor. Eagle (2000) criticizes such post-modern theory which blurs the lines between truth and falsehood, facts and fiction.

3. Cognitive dissonance, a negative drive state, is generated by inconsistent cognitions. The subject is motivated to reduce mental conflict by adapting his beliefs and attitudes. For more on cognitive dissonance theory, see Festinger 1956.

4. Crocq (1999: 327), citing Janet, for whom the “memory of hallucination” causes the repetitive occurrences of “the fixed traumatic idea.”

5. “We were breathing flies when it was over. They crawled up into our noses” (O’Brien 1994a: 257).

6. Freud coined the expression to evoke pathogenic memory in *Studies in Hysteria* (see Barrois 1998: 5). The symptom is experienced as a “foreign body that constantly generates stimuli and reactions in the tissue in which it has become embedded” (Freud 2003: 165).

7. “*L’image virtuelle devient d’autant plus actuelle, qu’elle absorbe et capture le personnage, l’image actuelle devient d’autant plus virtuelle, que le personnage est repoussé hors champ [...] Il ne reconquerra son actualité qu’en brisant le miroir*” (Deleuze 1984).

8. Robert Jay Lifton interestingly evokes a ‘death imprint’ which is “likely to be associated not only with pain but also with value—with a special form of knowledge and potential inner growth associated with the sense of having ‘been there and returned’” (1988: 19).

9. “*Car, plus que la mort, la souffrance, les ruines, la désolation, c’est le néant qu’ils ont entrevu, et dont ils traînent la rémanence horrifiante. En quelque sorte [...] ils auraient entr’aperçu le chaos original, d’avant la création, là où il n’y a pas encore de vie : le néant, le non-sens, le non-être.*”

10. On the subject of trauma and reality, Crocq (1999: 263) evokes a 1994 report by French psychiatrists who see trauma as “an ‘un-missed’ meeting with the real” (“*une rencontre «non manquée» avec le réel*”).

11. To Felman and Laub,

[t]he traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of “normal” reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time [...] Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both. (1992: 69)

12. The translation does not render Lacan’s pun explicit (“*ce savoir impossible est censuré, défendu, mais il ne l’est pas si vous écrivez convenablement l’inter-dit, il est dit entre les mots, entre les lignes*”). His connection between the forbidden (*l’interdit*) and the said-between (*l’inter-dit*) clearly envisions the act of reading as the realization of a transgression, putting the reader in the paradoxical position of a summoned trespasser.

13. O’Brien (1994a: 97), citing Robert Parrish’s *The Magician’s Handbook* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1944: 122).

14. On “wanting-to-say” (“*vouloir-dire*”) and the creative function of speech, see Lacan 1975a: 369. To Lacan (1975b: 108), “no formalization of language is transmissible without the use of language itself. It is in the very act of speaking that I make this formalization, this ideal metalanguage, *ex-sist*” (“*nulle formalisation de la langue n’est transmissible sans l’usage de la langue elle-même. C’est par mon dire que cette formalisation, idéal métalangage, je la fais ex-sister*”).
15. “I’m *home*, but the house is gone” (O’Brien 1994b, emphasis added).
16. This echoes the last words in “On the Rainy River”: “I survived, but it’s not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war” (O’Brien 1990: 61).
17. Rorty evokes “a coherent web of belief and desire” (1989: 178).
18. Parrish (1944:16). In O’Brien 1994a: 96.
19. Iser sees the literary work as a “gestalt” whose “unwritten part [...] stimulates the reader’s creative participation” and puts forward “outlines” that the reader will “animate” (1972: 276).
20. “The process of reading thus entails a progressive growth of *insight*: of the reader into the text as something *other* than himself, and into himself as one who is transformed by his encounter with the texts” (Weber 1986: 185).

Works Cited

- Barrois, Claude. 1998. *Les névroses traumatiques*. Paris: Dunod.
- Caruth, Cathy. (ed.). 1995. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth, Cathy. 2001. “An Interview with Jean Laplanche”. *Postmodern Culture*. Volume 11, Number 2 (January 2001).
- Crocq, Louis. 1999. *Les traumatismes psychiques de guerre*. Paris : Odile Jacob.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1984. “Vérité et temps”. *La voix de Gilles Deleuze*. 29 May 1984. Université Paris 8. 20 September 2010.
- Eagle, Morris N. 2000. “A Critique of the Postmodern Turn in Psychoanalysis: Recent Work of Mitchell & Renik”. *Rapaport-Klein Study Group*. Psychomedia. 23 June 2011.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. 1992. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge.
- Festinger, Leon, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter. 1956. *When Prophecy Fails*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1973. *Névrose, psychose et perversion*. Paris : PUF.

- Freud, Sigmund. 2003. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*. Trans. John Reddick. New York: Penguin.
- Fussell, Paul. 1975. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Genette, Gérard. 2004. *Métalepse*. Paris : Seuil.
- Harvey, William J. 1965. *Character and the Novel*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Herman, Judith. 1992. *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence-from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: Basic Books.
- Iser, Wolfgang. (1972) 1974. *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Iser, Wolfgang (1976) 1978. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1975a. *Le Séminaire, Livre I, Les écrits techniques de Freud, 1953-1954*. Paris: Seuil.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1975b. *Le Séminaire, Livre XX, Encore, 1972-73*. Paris: Seuil.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. 1988. "Understanding the Traumatized Self: Imagery, Symbolization, and Transformation". In Wilson John P., Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana. (eds). *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress: From the Holocaust to Vietnam*. New York: Plenum Press: 7-32.
- Metzger, Deena. 2002. *Entering the Ghost River*. Topenga, CA: Hand to Hand.
- O'Brien, Tim. (1990) 1998. *The Things They Carried*. New York: Broadway Books.
- O'Brien, Tim. (1994a) 1995. *In the Lake of the Woods*. New York: Penguin.
- O'Brien, Tim. 1994b. "The Vietnam in Me". *New York Times Magazine* (2 October 1994): 48-57.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1983. *Temps et récit*. Tome I. Paris : Seuil.
- Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Shatan, Chaim. 1985. "Afterword—Who Can Take Away the Grief of a Wound?" In Boulanger Ghislaine and Charles Kadushin. (eds.). *The Vietnam Veteran Redefined: Fact and Fiction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum: 172.
- Spence, Donald P. 1982. *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Tal, Kalí. 1996. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Tick, Edward. 2005. *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Wheaton: Quest Books.
- Tritle, Lawrence A. 2000. *From Melos to My Lai: War and Survival*. London: Routledge.

Weber, Samuel. 1986. "Caught in the Act of Reading." In Samuel Weber. (ed.) *Demarcating the Disciplines: Philosophy, Literature, Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 181-214.

BARBARA KOWALCZUK is a PhD student at the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne. She is affiliated with the University of Bordeaux. She has published articles on Tim O'Brien and photographer Philip Jones Griffiths. Her research interests lie in literary and photographic representations of war and trauma.