

Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Trauma They Carry: Representations of PTSD Through War Literature of the 20th Century

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of written history, humanity has shown an interest in war and everything related to it. This fascination with war is reflected in literature around the world, from the first documented military book written in China around 500 B.C, *The Art of War*, passing through classics such as Homer's *Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid*, to books that deal with current wars such as the war in Ukraine. From odes to soldiers and war, and manuals on how to fight, to fiction or manifestos against it, war has been a major motif in universal literature throughout every historical period. According to William O. Shanahan in his essay "The Literature on War", "war has been such a shaping force in human history that no period has escaped its influence" (206). Due to this huge impact war has had throughout history, it can be considered one of the most important topics of literature that humanity has inherited from earlier civilizations. In fact, this doubtless impetus for this motif can be found in all types of literature from oral to written, from folklore songs to elevated essays.

Over the course of recorded history, the functions of war literature have changed from the beginning of its appearance as a recurrent theme from older texts to more recent texts. In Catharine Savage Brosman's words, "older war narratives and chants had as one of their primary purposes—along with the collective one of memorializing great military deeds as part of the history of a people—the setting of standards of military conduct and the inspiring of a warlike spirit" (86). This idealization of war and its pastorals can be found from medieval to early twentieth century literature as is the case of Lord Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" in which, in a propagandistic way, the poet celebrates war as an act of bravery and sacrifice. However, in the last century and especially from the First World War onwards, war literature has been used as a way of denouncing the horrors of the war and its physical and psychological consequences. There

is a tendency to demystify and discredit the idea of war by means of raw war narratives and the cold perception of the reality of war. According to Brosman, the gore imaginary, and the depiction of mutilation and death that surrounded war were used by writers of World War I and the Vietnam conflict and went “even farther than an objective tone to undercut the notions of heroism and legitimate national interest” (90). These texts were a cry condemning war and the rise of another kind of literature: anti-militarist literature.

One of the main themes used to depict the consequences of war was related to the discovery of the psychological after-effects that began to be studied after World War I, i.e., trauma. This trauma and its variants from shell shock to what is currently known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), function as a thread that connects wars as different as World War I and the Vietnam War creating a bond between them that transcends borders, generations, and literary genres. This dissertation aims to demonstrate how the traumatic effects of war act as a link between the different types of literature of the 20th century that represent trauma and PTSD through similar situations. To do so, this essay will focus on a selection of poems written during World War I by Wilfred Owen and a selection of stories in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things they Carried* that deal with the psychological consequences of the Vietnam War.

2. WILFRED OWEN'S AND TIM O'BRIEN'S EXPERIENCES AT WAR

World War I “destroyed”, in John Onions’ words, “the ideal of the heroic warrior, but it also established a particular role for the soldier-writer” (30), who became fundamental to transmitting a truthful depiction of war, making society disavow its idealization. One of these emerging soldier-writers was Wilfred Owen, whose interest in literature and poetry started long before he became a soldier. Owen did not enlist as soon as the war started, as he was focused on his study of the humanities and arts. This suggests, according to Andrew Motion, that “he did not immediately feel a personal or patriotic need to involve himself” (par. 11), an idea that is clearly confirmed by his critical poems about war and his depiction of it. Once he enrolled, his poetry changed to violence and gore, depicting his experiences at war. His participation in the war made him suffer from trauma. After being injured by a mine, he began presenting shellshock symptoms and was hospitalised in Craiglockhart War Hospital, Scotland, where he met Siegfried Sassoon, his mentor and lover. Owen’s experience of the traumatic events of war and his period at the psychiatric hospital gave him a more complete understanding of the psychological effects and wounds of war. During and after his stay at the hospital, Owen established the theme of war as the major motif of his poetry as he stated in a letter to Robbie Ross: “Above all I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity” (Motion, par. 17). This obsession with war and especially with the trauma of war is found in poems such as “Insensibility”, “Mental Cases” and one of his most famous and critical poems, “Dulce et Decorum Est”. Through his poems, he showed the horrors of the war, but he also gave visibility to an illness that would be further studied in the following years, which was known in that period as shellshock (currently PTSD).

Decades after the establishment of the writer-soldier as the cornerstone of anti-militarist literature and a counterattack on the mystification of war, Tim O’Brien wrote

about his experiences in the Vietnam War in a fictional manner. Although he started his writing career as a soldier-writer in 1973, his position on the Vietnam War and his interest in the representation of psychological trauma were reinforced after the publication of *The Things They Carried* (1990). Even though O'Brien has denied his works are part of psychological therapy or autobiographical, Mark A. Heberle, author of *A Trauma Artist: O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam* (2001), states that O'Brien's stories have their origins in his own trauma and his experiences in the Vietnam War. This can be clearly seen in *The Things They Carried* where the narrator of the stories is a writer who fought in the Vietnam War and is named O'Brien. For this reason, as happens with Wilfred Owen, Tim O'Brien's experiences in Vietnam are relevant to understand his writings, which, even though fictional, find their traumatic resource and inspiration in that war. So, basing his stories on his own experience as a foot soldier in Vietnam, O'Brien wanted not only to make an anti-war statement by showing the horrors of the war but also to give visibility to the trauma that soldiers had to undergo after all the violence and anxiety they faced there. In his collection of short stories, he shows the aftermath of war and its psychological effects on the soldiers. The book can be seen as a catalogue of the effects of PTSD in stories like "The Things They Carried", "Spin", "How to Tell a True War Story", "The Man I Killed", "Ambush", "Speaking of Courage" and "Notes", amongst others. This representation of soldiers' PTSD establishes a link between the first examples of trauma in literature, such as Owen's poems, and O'Brien's work. They show that the after-effects of war and soldier-writers' concerns are analogous regardless of the war, historical period, or country.

3. A HISTORY OF TRAUMA AND ITS EFFECTS

To understand literature regarding trauma and its representations in my corpus of analysis, it is important to introduce the notion of trauma and its history. The concept of traumatic neurosis appeared in the nineteenth century as it was discovered in victims of railway accidents. It was believed that this syndrome was a physical wound that affected the nervous system. It was not until World War I that trauma became a major illness, and it was studied as a serious disorder and categorised as a psychological wound. However, there were a lot of prejudices against the traumatized, who were considered effeminate and not manly enough. After World War I the interest in this psychological disorder started to fluctuate between the periods of war when it grew and the periods of peace when interest declined. It was not until the Vietnam War and its after-effects on veterans that “the traumatic syndrome was officially acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, where the term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was adopted for the first time” (Valentina Adami, 10).

In these texts, PTSD was considered the response to an especially stressful or violent event which was a very general term for such a complex psychological disorder and demonstrates, in Cathy Caruth’s words, “the necessity of [a] multifaceted approach” (ix) as the traumatic experience can be endured in different ways. Trauma can take the form of repeated dreams, thoughts, behaviours, or hallucinations, of the impossibility to narrate the traumatic event or of the soldier’s fear to feel emotions. In fact, traumatized people seem to relive the traumatic experience as if it was happening in the present because that is the only way the brain can deal with the traumatic event, which causes never-ending suffering. This idea is supported by Melley, who states that “the unfolding of traumatic memory is like the unfolding of the event itself, untainted by the ego of the

consciousness it inhabits” (108). This also explains how some patients that suffer from PTSD are unable to tell their own story as for them it has not “unfolded” yet.

Moreover, it is important to highlight the fact that these responses to trauma are not controlled by the traumatized, as they happen against their will. This was studied by Freud during World War I when he determined that “dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident” (SE 18:13). Due to the high rate of patients that suffered from this constant repetition of the events after a traumatic experience or after the war, it became the most symbolic symptom of PTSD represented by flashbacks or nightmares in literature, films, or any artistic representation of it. However, and as shall be demonstrated throughout this dissertation, there are other symptoms and representations of PTSD in war literature that have to be addressed, such as the impossibility of expressing both their experience and their pain or the soldier’s inhibition of his emotions due to the shame of being weak and his instinct to survive. These are images and depictions of trauma that appear in several works about war from different countries and periods as are the ones analysed in this dissertation. This is supported by Caruth, who states that “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history” (11) as trauma creates a bond between humans without considering their race, nationality, or culture but their common experience.

4. CONSTANT REPETITION

As previously stated, the constant repetition of an event is one of the most common representations of psychological trauma. These repetitions are usually literal as they just return the traumatised person to the traumatic event forcing him/her to relive it. However, in certain cases, the mind manipulates the memories in order to protect the individual from further suffering. So, on occasion, memories are altered or even cut, which leads to the creation of gaps and incoherence in the reminiscences of the events. These manipulations and gaps cause the person uncertainty as the individual cannot distinguish between reality and fiction, between memory and made-up story. However, it is the impossibility for the traumatised person to assimilate the event and its overwhelming immediacy that brings about uncertainty and mistrust towards the traumatised version of the event. In addition, it is important to highlight that these repetitions do not happen at the individual's will. They are an imposition from their minds in order to heal and survive, and not lose their minds. This is supported by Caruth, who states that "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" and concludes by declaring that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4). So, repetitions are necessary to understand the traumatic events and can be seen as a brain's mechanism to protect the individual from the horror experienced. In addition, people undergo different types of repetitions that are represented in war literature and the literature of trauma. According to Susan Lynn Eastman, "Repetition in the form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), nightmares, flashbacks, and a compulsion to repeat traumatic situations become ways through which survivors represent trauma" (10). It is important to keep this in mind as both authors discussed in this dissertation experienced the trauma of war and they represented it in a variety of ways throughout their writings.

One of the most common types of traumatic repetition is the one that takes place through flashbacks. According to the Longman Dictionary, a flashback is “a sudden very clear memory of something that happened to you in the past,” which is consistent with Caruth’s definition of these repetitions as a possession of the individual’s mind. These flashbacks interrupt the present for the traumatised and drive them to the past, impeding the person from continuing their life. They can be seen throughout O’Brien’s collection of stories, *The Things They Carried*, as the narrator keeps repeating how these memories have haunted him throughout the twenty previous years and continue to do so. In the story “Spin”, the narrator claims that the violence and traumatic events the soldiers lived in Vietnam “never stops happening: it lives in its own dimension, replaying itself over and over” (36), which coincides with Caruth’s theory of trauma possessing the traumatised body and it could be further developed, since the traumatic experience, as depicted in O’Brien’s book, seems to have taken control over the traumatised individual’s life—what Dominick LaCapra describes as “acting out” as opposed to “working through” the traumatic experience. These flashbacks and the ensuing impossibility of moving on are also depicted in the structure of another of his short stories, “How to Tell a True War Story”. The way in which the narrator recounts the same story, his fellow soldier Curt Lemon’s death, through different perspectives focusing on different aspects of the event, shows how none of the soldiers that fought in the war were able to forget the experience as they remember it in detail as if they relived it every day: “twenty years later, I can still see the sunlight on Lemon’s face” (80). In fact, he even admits that this event is stuck in his mind when he states, “I’ve told it before —many times, many versions” (85), indicating that it is not the first time he narrates or thinks about it, and he has been repeating this narrative through the years. Traumatic events haunting individuals are also seen in the first story of the book, “The Things They Carried”, when O’Brien describes

his futility in forgetting the events as “the memory-traffic feeds into a rotary up on your head, where it goes in circles for a while” (33). This reference to flashbacks and trauma as a circular structure can be interpreted as a way of showing the unfeasibility of escape from the trauma that the soldiers and veterans who suffer from PTSD must face.

Another representation of these repetitions is based on the traumatised veterans’ impossibility and fear of sleeping as the traumatic experiences trigger nightmares tormenting them when they sleep. These dreams transport them back to war and its horrors, terrifying them. These ordeals and analepses are found in O’Brien’s “How to Tell a True War Story”, in which the narrator exposes how his Vietnam memories and his traumatic experiences such as picking up the pieces of Curt Lemon’s body still “wakes [him] up” (79). In fact, these torments, as happens with flashbacks, make the soldier blur the boundaries between past and present to the point that the soldier must remind himself that “the war’s over” when he wakes up (79). In the story, O’Brien presents these night terrors as recurrent events in PTSD patients’ lives.

These repetitions of the event in the form of analepses can also be found in previous writings and poems such as Wilfred Owen’s “Mental Cases”, in which soldiers are represented as being overwhelmed by these repetitions. These poems were written shortly after Owen’s traumatic experience as a soldier and before the end of the conflict as Owen perished during World War I. Therefore, it is not possible to see the evolution throughout the years of the soldiers who suffered from PTSD as can be seen in O’Brien’s work. Throughout the poem, Owen describes how soldiers are constantly unwillingly haunted by their own memories and how the traumatic experiences are always in their minds: “Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented/ Back into their brains,” (lines 19-20). The poem, which is set in the hospital where Owen recovered from shellshock, does not only describe the flashbacks that veterans suffer but how they see war in everything

they look at, and how the traumatic experience has taken control over their minds, creating links between the objects and situations they see and live in the present and the ones in the past. This can be interpreted from lines 11 and 12: “Memory fingers in their hair of murders, / Multitudinous murders they once witnessed”, where the traumatic experience seems to have contaminated every part of the soldier’s body by transforming himself into a constant reminder of the traumatic experience and a trigger to the shock. Again, as happens in O’Brien’s story, this re-living of the war events forces the soldier to remember them in detail.

In Owen’s poetry, night terrors are also a fundamental motif. They can be found in Owen’s celebrated and critical poem “Dulce et Decorum Est”. This poem is, according to Marlene A. Briggs, a “disturbing representation of flashbacks” (102) as it narrates the memories of a soldier who experienced a gas attack and watched a man die. These nightmarish flashbacks can be seen in the use of parallelism in the poem when the poetic speaker repeats the structure “if you could” in several lines and in the set of synonyms in line 16 (“guttering, choking, drowning”) that the poet uses to transmit the horrors of the traumatic event. This is also expressed by the compulsive internal rhyme of the gerund in this line which transmits the “eternal now” of the soldier who is forced to re-live the trauma repeatedly.

According to Joshua Pederson, in “Dulce et Decorum Est”, “his [the soldier’s] sight is ‘helpless’ as these visions return in ‘all’ his dreams. Seemingly, he cannot forget it if he tries. Further, his memory is preternaturally detailed” (341). This can be seen in lines 15 and 16, where this idea of nightmares transporting the soldier back to the traumatic attack he suffered in the trenches is explicit: “In all my dreams before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning”. Additionally, it can also be seen in the last stanza, where the soldier narrates how these nightmares torture

him, making him feel dirty and remembering the agony and helplessness that he suffered when the other soldier was choking on the gas. It could be concluded that these repetitions, flashbacks, and nightmares establish a link between different genres, periods, and wars such as World War I and the Vietnam War.

5. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF EXPRESSING THE TRAUMA: FRAGMENTATION

Another feature of the representation of trauma that is commonly found in war literature and literature of trauma is the impossibility for the traumatised to express themselves when trying to narrate the traumatic event or thoughts. This is caused, according to Susana Onega Jaen and Jean-Michel Ganteau, by the “paradoxical nature of trauma” as “trauma is known/expressed in the very impossibility of knowing/expressing itself, history is told in the impossibility of telling itself, testimony exists in the impossibility of telling itself totally” (19). This description of trauma is based on the inability of the veterans who suffered from PTSD to recount their experiences with chronological accuracy and in a coherent and complete way as they suffered gaps of knowledge that they could not narrate. Writers such as Owen and O’Brien, who experienced and witnessed first-hand this impossibility, have portrayed it in their writings by using literary devices and strategies such as fragmentation, which adds realism and transports the reader to the traumatised mind. This literary device was first introduced during World War I, according to Karen DeMeester, as a way of reflecting “the fragmentation of consciousness and the disorder and confusion that a victim experiences in the wake of a traumatic event” (650). In fact, it continued to be used in the metafictional narratives of the second half of the twentieth century as it is seen in O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*. In addition, fragmentation can be both formal and thematic as it can be represented by broken

language, sentences, and narrative structures but also by informational gaps, incoherence in the events narrated, and anachrony.

As previously mentioned, fragmentation was first used during World War I as part of the modernist tendency and in order to show the effects of war, not only on the soldiers but also on the civilians. Fragmentation and dislocation can be seen in Owen's poetry as a way to transmit the suffering, chaos, and disorientation that the traumatised experienced after the event. In "Dulce et Decorum Est", Owen does not write in a structured and organised way. The poem transmits the conflict that, as Daniel Hipp states, "occurs particularly in the relationship between its first and second halves, between the speaker and the soldier, between past and present, and between Owen and his directly-addressed audience" (34). In other words, the poem portrays the internal fight that the traumatised experiences in his mind and turns himself against the traumatic experience itself. This can be seen in the way he has to fight the ghosts of his past experiences in his dreams as he states in lines 15 and 16 ("In all my dreams before my helpless sight / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning."). This couplet is put in the centre of the poem, creating structural fragmentation as it divides it into two parts.

Another example of fragmentation is seen in the words the poet selects to narrate his experience in the first stanza, in which a great number of compound words connected by a hyphen can be found ("Knock-kneed", "blood-shod", or "out-stripped"). This can be understood as a way of portraying the soldier's mind and his necessity of fusing the pieces of memories that he has about his war experience together in order to create a meaning for it. Moreover, Owen uses caesura breaking lines into segments, which adds dramatism, but also transmits the disorientation and pain with which the soldier remembers the trauma. By using these visual fragmentations, the poet tries to share the feelings and sufferings that soldiers endured at war, and the aftereffects they had to bear in its

aftermath. The poem also uses structural literary devices such as enjambement to embody the soldier's fragmentation not only in terms of memory but of his own identity as soldiers that suffered from PTSD felt that a part of them was killed in the war and experienced a transformation of the self that forced them to reconstruct their new split identity. In fact, this recovery of their identities was overwhelming and consuming. This is reflected in "Dulce et Decorum Est" and the use of this literary device. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, an enjambement is "in poetry, the continuing of a sentence from one line of a poem into the start of the next line". In other words, the enjambement occurs when the syntactic unit and metrical unit are not coordinated. Therefore, the syntactic unit runs over the pause overflowing the next line. So, the use of this device could be seen as a way of representing trauma as the experience and the reality of the events overwhelm the soldier's mind in the same way the syntactic unit in the poem flows over the boundaries of the line.

This overflowing of both the structure of the poem and the traumatised soldier's mind is represented throughout this text. The anachronic beginning of the story in medias res can be seen as a way to present the disorientation and fragmentation of the poetic speaker's mind as he is unable to narrate the event in a chronologically accurate order. This can be also interpreted from the way in which he uses visual snapshots of the event to narrate the traumatic event as occurs in the first stanza of the poem. In fact, this is used to represent the defence mechanisms of a traumatised brain, as it tends to keep the information received through its senses and, especially, through the sight to create a coherent narration of the events. In other words, the poem reflects how a traumatised mind brings together different images of the traumatic event to be able to understand the experience. In that way, the soldier can look back to the trauma from a logical perspective and is able to comprehend it and distance himself from it. In addition, this narration

transmits the panic and stress under which the soldiers lived in the trenches, transporting the reader to the traumatic gas attack by means of repetition and capitalization, “Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!” (Line 9).

This anachrony can be also found in the anti-war literature of the Vietnam War and, in particular, in O’Brien’s short story, “How to Tell a True War Story”. This story narrates the tragic death of Curt Lemon from different perspectives, and, as a result, all the fragments of the story have been joined in order to allow the reader, but also the traumatised soldier himself, to understand the event. So, fragmentation is used, like in Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est”, as a representation of the soldier’s traumatised mind. In fact, it can be also found in the narrator’s language, which sometimes fails to allow the subject to express himself. As Caruth states, “the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness” (89). This idea can be seen in this book where there is a reconstruction of memories based on the senses and especially on the sight of the soldier and the images that his brain kept from the event. Therefore, the reader can find a detailed and accurate description of the weather, light, and the beauty of the forest where Curt Lemon was killed. This ability to describe the environment and the atmosphere in which the event happened but not the event itself can be also seen as a way in which the soldier’s brain has fragmented the soldier’s memory in order to protect him from the traumatic experience itself. This can also be perceived in the way the narrator, a soldier, uses *mise-en-abyme* to narrate the traumatic event in a coherent manner as he recounts other events, that, at the same time, reflect the main event, disavowing his inability to narrate his trauma. This is the case of one of the most relevant and symbolic side stories within the short story in which a baby water buffalo was killed by Rat Riley in a similar way to that in which Lemon died: physically fragmented. Both Lemon and the baby buffalo’s deaths

embody this fragmentation of identity that the soldiers suffered due to the trauma of war, also represented in Owen's poetry.

In addition, it is important to highlight that the whole composition of O'Brien's collection of short stories, *The Things They Carried*, could be considered an example of fragmentation caused by trauma as it could be seen as an exposition of war memories created to show not only the horrors of the war but also its psychological impact on the soldiers that fought in it. This can be understood from the independence of each of the snapshots or stories from one another but, at the same time, from their thematic connection. The stories are interrelated by the ideas that are narrated in them as can be seen in the first story of the book, "The Things They Carried" and the second one, "Love", which are connected by the romantic relationship that Jimmy Cross has with Martha. This could be considered an attempt at reproducing how the human brain works and especially how a traumatised brain links the memories regarding the ideas and feelings that they transmit more than the events themselves.

However, this is not the only way in which thematic fragmentation is represented in O'Brien's work as some stories such as "The Man I Killed" and "Ambush" or "Speaking of Courage" and "Notes" narrate one story that is divided into two different stories in the book. The former pair connect the story of how the narrator killed a man at war and how the shame and trauma of it made him unable to tell the story to his daughter until years later, while the latter pair narrate Bowker's aftereffects of war as a patient of PTSD and depression. This fragmentation into two different stories could be seen as a way of using (again) division to embody the mind of a traumatised soldier. Furthermore, it reflects Caruth's statement on the lack of immediacy of trauma, as it could be seen as the representation of the soldier's impossibility of narrating the traumatic experience until he fully understands the complexity of the event and his trauma. Thus, fragmentation as

a representation of trauma can be seen, as happens with repetition, as a link between periods and wars.

6. INHIBITING EMOTIONS AND SURVIVAL

During the war, soldiers would do whatever it took to survive. One of the things the human mind did in order to avoid being petrified by fear and, consequently, to survive was to try not to feel anything, a psychic closing off caused by an unavoidable danger. According to Henry Krystal, this closing off “permits a certain automatonlike behaviour, which is necessary for survival” (81). In other words, the soldier’s psyche enters an automatic mode in order to keep fighting for their lives and survive the traumatic experience. This type of trauma often led to what is called “shock of laughter” which consisted in the soldier’s perception of the situation in a comical and hilarious way. This laughter serves the soldier to distance himself from the traumatic situation giving him an external perspective, as if he were a mere witness of the event but did not participate in the action. This could be seen as the soldier’s denial of not only his experience but also his emotions and fear. According to Kevin Newmark, it “also serves to shelter him from the traumatic collapse of knowledge that is the constant risk of an overt identification with laughter” (247). This laughter could also be seen as a mechanism to protect against trauma, the great amount of information received in a stressful and traumatic situation, and the fear suffered by the soldiers in war.

Furthermore, the shock of laughter, as well as the emotional constriction, could also be interpreted as a way of protecting the soldiers from the civilian opinion as, especially in World War I when PTSD was not considered a mental disorder, soldiers who were traumatised or scared were considered weak and effeminate. So, in a period in

which men had to be the guardians of the house, strong and not scared of anything, soldiers who suffered from PTSD saw their masculinity injured and their social status in danger. This is another reason why they feared emotions and they did not want to show their fear, trauma, and feelings, presenting themselves as tough guys who were not affected by the death of their colleagues or by the violent and stressful environment of war. In fact, in Krystal's words, "much of the psychic representation of the 'enemy' or 'oppressor' or even impersonal elements such as 'fate' and clearly personal attributes like one's own emotions come to be experienced as outside the self-representation" (85) and creates a connection between the enemy and the oppressor and the emotions and the feelings. This link allows the soldier to see emotions as a psychological enemy and a weapon that the physical enemy could use against the soldier. This inhibition of emotions and the shock of laughter are represented in the literature on trauma through different generations and, in particular, in Owen's poems and O'Brien's collection.

This constriction of emotion and coldness is found in poems such as Owen's "Insensibility" where the poetic speaker explains how some soldiers desensitise themselves as a mechanism to survive the horrors of war. This lack of humanity is represented from the very beginning of the poem when the speaker states, "Happy are men who yet before they are killed/ Can let their veins run cold" (line 1-2). By stating that these soldiers are happy, Owen is depicting this insensibility as a shield that protects the soldier from trauma. However, his description of these soldiers as cold suggests that, by restricting their emotions, they are as dead as the soldiers who are killed on the battlefield. In other words, Owen seems to suggest that trauma led the soldiers to block their emotions transforming them into an in-between betwixt death and life. This could be associated with Krystal's idea of the traumatised as "automats", as mere pieces of the war machinery. This dehumanisation of soldiers can also be found at the end of the first

stanza when the poetic speaker describes the fallen soldiers as “gaps to fill” and can be interpreted as a way of representing the high expectations that society had of these men who were supposed to be tough and unemotional, the epitome of masculinity.

The shock of laughter is represented in the second stanza where the poet explains how this constriction of feelings is a defence mechanism against the traumatic experience of the war. Owen describes the uncertainty of daily life at war as “The tease and doubt of shelling” (line 15). This selection of words highlights the fake idea that soldiers started to believe in war as a game so as to escape from the horror and trauma. The use of the word “tease” can also be seen as a way of representing this shock of laughter as soldiers preferred to pretend that nothing was happening and to search for the comic in the traumatic experience in order not to be overwhelmed by the situation. Returning to this perception of emotions as the “enemy” given by Krystal, Owen depicts terror as an oppressor in the third stanza of the poem when stating that “And terror’s first constriction over,/ Their hearts remain small-drawn.” (Lines 26-27). This transmits the perspective of the soldiers who preferred not to think or feel in order not to be petrified by their trauma or be presented as weak and effeminate. In this stanza, Owen argues that the trauma and the terror of war force the soldiers not to feel and to close off their emotions. The author feels pity for these men who are so traumatised that they have given up their humanity as is shown in the way he ironically describes them as “happy” throughout the poem. This irony when pretending to believe in these soldiers’ happiness is a clear description of this trauma as the soldiers pretended to be fine, not traumatised, and used comedy and humour to cover their psychological suffering. In fact, in the fifth stanza, Owen makes a complete description of these emotionless soldiers as “not vital...not mortal...Nor sad, nor proud, / Nor curious” which coincides again with the idea of these soldiers being diminished by the trauma and their experiences, being in limbo.

This fear of feeling and the perception of insensibility as the only way to survive is also found in O'Brien's story "The Things They Carried". As happens in Owen's "Insensibility" and as stated by Krystal, the story depicts in a direct and explicit way the soldiers' fear to show their emotions. This topic is clearly tackled by O'Brien on page 19 of the book when he states that "Some carried themselves with a sort of wishful resignation, others with pride or stiff soldierly discipline or good humour or macho zeal. They were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid to show it". These lines can be seen as a depiction of how soldiers endured trauma and reality by denying them. This is shown by the last sentence of the fragment as it transmits the soldiers' perspective suggesting that they were in a denial phase of the traumatic experience as they believed that if they did not express their fear, it would not come true, that if they did not manifest that they were scared of dying, they would not be at risk of dying. This perception of reality and trauma is associated with O'Brien's relativism that presented the soldier's experience and trauma as something between reality and fiction, something that is also found in Owen's poetry.

This fragment of the text also leads the reader to consider the role of masculinity in this traumatic inhibition of emotions as the narrator describes how some soldiers were so panicked from their own feelings that they adopted the role of "macho zeal". In fact, this is also linked to the pressure they felt of dishonouring their families and themselves by showing that they were traumatised and consequently that, if they had any feelings, they were not manly enough. This is seen in the way soldiers talk about the soldiers that could not cope with the pressure and experience of war, and shot themselves to be sent back home: "pussies, they'd say. Candy-asses" (21). This is presented in the book as a strategy to maintain their reputations as manly soldiers who cannot be affected by the horrors of the war. In addition, this fear to be scared and traumatised is depicted as a

burden by O'Brien, as one of the things they had to carry in order to survive the war, in order not to be driven mad by all the violence and traumatic experiences they lived.

Trauma is presented, in particular, through the character of Kiowa, who cannot stop thinking about the speed at which people die at war and keeps repeating the same sentence, "boom-down", throughout the narrative. His trauma is also presented in the way he does not feel grief or pain when one of his colleagues, Ted Lavender, dies. This inability to feel can be associated with what was previously mentioned in Owen's poem regarding this inhibition of emotions as a defence mechanism. Kiowa has lost part of his humanity as a consequence of the trauma of the war, "he wished he could find some great sadness, or even anger, but the emotion wasn't there, and he couldn't make it happen. Mostly he felt pleased to be alive" (17). So, this lack of emotion is what kept him fighting for his life. In addition, his character is also one of the main examples of the shock of laughter in the story as he is the first one that after the death of his friend jokes about it in order to survive the traumatic experience of seeing a person being killed, "a pisser, you know? Still zipping himself up. Zapped while zipping" (16). So, the story shows how the traumatised soldiers used jokes and "hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness" (19). In other words, they joked to forget about their reality, to distance themselves from the trauma and the war experience. They joked and avoided their emotions in an attempt to deny their reality, carry on and survive. So, as seen in these examples of war literature, trauma led the soldiers to fear their emotions and find comedy in its horrors to survive, as the lack of sentiments and laughter transformed them into automats whose only mission was to keep themselves alive.

7. CONCLUSION

World War I was the starting point for an increasing awareness regarding soldiers' trauma and PTSD. This awareness materialised in the literature of war and the poetry of soldier-writers such as Wilfred Owen and continued in Tim O'Brien's time and the Vietnam War. This is the reason why trauma has been considered one of the main links between this literature of war that is focused on the psychological after-effects that soldiers suffered and the horrors of the war. The evolution of the study and the understanding of trauma as a complex psychological disorder can be seen in the works analysed in this dissertation, although both writers make a clear and explicit representation of it in order to demystify war.

Trauma can be depicted in different ways as it varies depending on the person who undergoes it and the specific situation that causes it. Consequently, literature of war such as Owen's poetry and O'Brien's book represents the different types of trauma that stay immutable through time and geography. Their description of war through literature goes from the most common representation, like the constant repetition of the events or acting out, passing through the impossibility of these soldiers to communicate, to the inhibitions of the soldier's emotions and fear and the shock of laughter. The former representation is found in works such as Owen's "Mental Cases" and "Dulce et Decorum Est" and O'Brien's "Spin" and "How to Tell a True War Story", which show how trauma haunts the soldier "to the extent someone [he] is possessed by the past and acting out a repetition compulsion" (LaCapra, 716). The second depiction listed is represented by the use of fragmentation in texts such as Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" and O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story", "The Man I Killed", "Ambush", "Speaking of Courage" and "Notes". Finally, the last representation is seen in Owen's "Insensibility" and O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" and is a consequence of the social perception of manhood

and masculinity and the will of the soldiers to fulfil this gender role, but also of the human instinct for survival.

These representations of the variations of trauma and the ways it can be experienced leads to the conclusion that it takes control over the soldiers' lives trapping them in a loop of memories and anguish. This circularity is seen in the way soldiers keep going back to their traumatic experiences years after they happened because, as stated by O'Brien, for them war "never seems to end" (72). In addition, soldiers' inability to feel and express themselves caused by trauma keep them stuck in a liminal state between the past and the present, making them unable to live their lives and to fit into a society that does not understand their pain and consequently rejects them. So, the representation of trauma in literature not only links generations, times, countries, and wars but also serves as an introspective study of human nature showing that no matter the race, status, or historical period, the trauma of war destroys every human soul.

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