



The Anatomy of Shame: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of the Self in Iraq War Memoirs

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Abstract

My essay examines shame and its relation to combat trauma in two memoirs by Iraq War veterans: John Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* (2005) and Brian Turner's *My Life as a Foreign Country* (2014). I analyze the nature of shame in these texts, that is, what it entails psychologically. The work of Jonathan Shay and Dave Grossman, among others, forms the framework for my thinking about the psychology of combat trauma and shame. I argue that, in these memoirs, shame constitutes not merely emotional suffering but the undoing of the self, the negation of these veterans' narratives of masculine self-identification. Crawford and Turner seek healing in narrative: autobiographical storytelling mimics counseling insofar as it acts as a mechanism for sharing their pain and rehabilitating their wounded selves. Lastly, I reflect on the link between the affective and ethical properties of war literature.

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