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

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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.

Introduction: Trauma, Shame, and the Iraq War

For the past several decades, much of the scholarly attention toward American war narratives has revolved around the representation of the harsh realities of warfare and the traumas that afflict combatants both during and after the fighting. Paul Fussell's landmark book *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) set a defining example for this approach.[1] The emphasis on the trauma

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[1] In World War I, the technology of warfare outstripped military strategy, resulting in unprecedented casualties. Poison gas, tanks, long-range artillery, machine guns, and barbed wire were all used on the battlefield for the first time in WWI. It was not uncommon for

of warfare emerged in the wake of the Vietnam War (1964-'73), which triggered a tectonic shift in the public perception of American politico-historical purpose. The novels and films produced on the Vietnam War highlighted the nihilistic quality of violent conflict, which in turn underscored the tragic absurdity of the suffering.[2] It is no coincidence that, after the Vietnam War, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was first recognized clinically and subsequently entered the vernacular. The evolution of our understanding of trauma has been vital to our comprehension of war and our aesthetic responses to it.

Shame frequently results from and accompanies combat trauma, and it is a powerful emotion that can shape the course of veterans' lives and the stories they tell about those lives. Yet, shame has gone under-recognized in scholarship on American war literature, and psychological studies of either shame or trauma tend to overlook the relationship between the two.[3] This essay examines shame in relation to combat trauma in two memoirs composed 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, how shame works and what it entails psychologically and morally. For the purpose of this essay, I focus on shame as the feeling a person experiences internally, not shaming in the sense of one person publically ridiculing someone else. A pattern emerges in these memoirs: the protagonist forms an identity that is grounded in a strong sense of masculinity, traumas shock the protagonist and undercut his sense of self, the protagonist suffers powerful feelings of shame that stem from his wartime experience but also last long after the fighting is over, and finally the protagonist finds some measure of healing in the sanctuary of his imagination.

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thousands of men to be killed in a single day's fighting due to the mass-lethality of these weapons. Poison gas produced especially horrific deaths. Wilfred Owen, a British veteran of WWI turned poet, gives a poignant, first-hand account of a poison-gas attack in his famous poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" (1921). The speaker is haunted by the vision of a comrade dying after inhaling the gas; disillusioned by the horrors of trench warfare, the speaker concludes by rejecting the tradition of romantic heroism.

[2] See works such as Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990), as well as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), the latter two being set in World War II but commenting on the Vietnam War. In cinema, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) are fitting examples.

[3] Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994) and Dave Grossman's *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (1995) are milestones in the clinical assessment of combat trauma. For analyses of the psychology of combat trauma, in addition to Shay and Grossman, see Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (1985); Richard Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (1987); Ben Shalit, *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat* (1988); and Lawrence LeShan, *The Psychology of War* (1992). For clinical and philosophical studies on shame, see Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (1985); Francis Broucek, *Shame and the Self* (1991); Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (1992); Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (1993); and David Parker, et al, *Shame and the Modern Self* (1996).

In view of this pattern, shame constitutes not merely emotional suffering but the undoing of the self, the negative transformation of the veterans' sense of who they are as soldiers and as people. In the case of Turner and Crawford—and many veterans-turned-writers before them—their recourse is narrative: storytelling provides the means to purge and reconstruct the wounded self.

In the following section of the essay, I explain what shame is from a clinical standpoint. It is vital to establish an appropriately clinical notion of shame before examining the role it plays in the texts. I begin my analysis of the texts with a section on the traumas they relate. Combat trauma triggers, directly or indirectly, the shame these veterans suffer, and so it is important to recognize what these traumas entail. From there, I explore the representations of shame in the texts, analyzing the distinct ways it manifests for each veteran and the power it possesses to alter his sense of self. With all of this in place, I reflect on the way these veterans-turned-writers look to storytelling for healing.

What is Shame?

Shame is a self-directed emotion, a powerfully negative feeling aimed at oneself. Bernice Andrews (2009) defines shame as "a particularly intense and often incapacitating negative emotion . . . involving feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and self-consciousness" (par. 1). To feel shame is to feel degraded, and this makes shame especially toxic to one's psychic identity. While this much seems obvious, the mechanisms by which shame operates are commonly misunderstood. Shame is a member of a constellation of emotions the force of which is directed inward at the person feeling them. Gabriele Taylor (1985) lists "pride, humiliation, shame, and guilt" under the banner of "the emotions of self-assessment" (1). She explains that the "self is the 'object' of these emotions, and what is believed [about the self] amounts to an assessment of that self" (1). Similarly, psychologists regard "[s]hame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride" as "members of a family of 'self-conscious' emotions that are evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation" (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007, 347). Here again the self is "the object of these self-conscious emotions" (347). The function of shame is to evaluate one's character or condition or status. This self-orientation is essential to the nature of shame, but that alone does not distinguish it from its neighboring feelings—embarrassment, humiliation, and especially guilt—all of which are inwardly directed in some way.

The words *shame* and *guilt* are often treated as synonyms in casual conversation, but this is misleading. As Tangney (2009) observes, "People often use the terms *guilt* and *shame* interchangeably, as moral emotions that inhibit socially undesirable behavior or as problematic emotions that play a key role in a range of psychological symptoms. But much recent research indicates that guilt and shame are distinct emotions" (par. 2, author's emphasis). While shame and guilt, as well as embarrassment and humiliation,

are directed inward at the person feeling them, these emotions have different targets. Tangney explains that the fundamental distinction between shame and guilt "centers on the focus of one's negative evaluation. When people feel guilt, they feel badly about a specific behavior—about something they have *done*. When people feel shame, they feel badly about *themselves*" (par. 2, author's emphasis).[4] For example, if someone steals a pen and then later thinks, "That was a bad thing I did. I should not have done that," this feeling is guilt. But if this person steals the pen and then thinks, "I am a bad person. I am worthless, and everyone will hate me," this feeling is shame. This scenario demonstrates that "shame involves a negative evaluation of the global self; guilt involves a negative evaluation of a specific behavior" (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007, 349).[5] The distinction between shame and guilt lies in the object of the emotion: for guilt, that object is one's actions or choices; for shame, that object is the self who committed that action or made that choice.

While shame and guilt are different emotions, it is possible for a person to experience these two feelings together or to transition from one to the other. This fits with the clinical understanding that the feeling of guilt can be "magnified and generalized to the self," at which point guilt triggers shame (Tangney, Suewig, and Mashek 2007, 352-3). The transition from guilt to shame occurs when the person generalizes from the specific action to his or her whole character or identity. Bernard Williams (1993) explains, "We can feel both guilt and shame towards the same action. In a moment of cowardice, we let someone down; we feel guilty because we have let them down, ashamed because we have contemptibly fallen short of what we might have hoped of

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[4] Andrews (2009) notes this way of thinking about shame and guilt: "Helen Lewis, one of the first theorists to discuss shame specifically in relation to depression, described it as a negative feeling involving the whole self. She distinguished it from guilt, which does not normally generalize beyond the specific behavior" (par. 2). Michael Lewis (1992) agrees that shame "is about the self, not about action" (35); he describes shame as "a global attack on the self" (75).

[5] Following in the wake of Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), the longstanding consensus among scholars was that the difference between shame and guilt was a matter of the public/private binary. Guilt had to do with how a person felt bad about him- or herself privately, while shame had to do with how a person felt bad about him- or herself in relation to others: "Shame often has to do with matters of exposure when one is not prepared for such exposure" (Broucek 1991, 6); "The avoidance of shame . . . serves as a motive: you anticipate how you will feel if someone sees you" (Williams 1993, 79); "Shame is a powerful human mechanism, a normal and necessary part of any society. . . . shame and embarrassment are used to monitor the self in the social context" (Retzinger 1996, 7). Gabriele Taylor (1985) uses Sartre's thought experiment about a craftsman to complicate this public/private binary, suggesting that the person feeling shame need not "imagine an actual observer" (58); rather, "All that seems necessary is that he shift his viewpoint from that of the creator of the work to that of the critical assessor, and he himself can fulfill both these functions" (58). Michael Lewis (1992) makes the correction more plainly: "shame is not necessarily related to the public or private nature of the situation. While many hold that shame is a public failure, this need not be so. Failure, attributed to the whole self, can be either public or private" (75). Finally, psychologists abandoned the public/private binary entirely: "As it turns out, empirical research has failed to support this public/private distinction. . . . Solitary shame experiences were about as common as solitary guilt experiences" (Tangney, Suewig, and Mashek 2007, 348).

ourselves. . . . *What I have done* points in one direction towards what has happened to others, in another direction to what I am" (92, author's italics). To compare Williams' example to mine above, the person who stole the pen might initially think, "That was a bad thing I did" and then from there extrapolate to think, "Therefore, I am a terrible person." When guilt triggers shame in this way, "it's the shame component of this sequence—not the guilt component— that poses the problem, as the person becomes saddled with feelings of contempt and disgust for a bad, defective self" (Tangney, Suewig, and Mashek 2007, 353). This shame-guilt complex is present within Crawford's and Turner's memoirs. Their stories indicate that shame and guilt are, at times, bound together as the veteran is haunted by his actions but also generalizes about himself because of those actions. These memoirs also demonstrate that when shame operates in tandem with guilt, shame does the greater psychological damage.

The Psychology of Combat Trauma

Crawford and Turner construct narratives of themselves as traditionally masculine individuals. In doing so, they model their identities on a narrow and inflexible standard that turns out to be, upon going to and returning from war, at best inadequate and at worst self-destructive. Turner (2014), in particular, is dramatically influenced by his father; his identity formation takes shape through a series of childhood and adolescent phases in which he deliberately imitates his father's physical training and military service in Vietnam (38, 41-3, 47-52).[6] Crawford's (2005) masculine self-identification is similar to Turner's, though more fraught: "People pick the army—they become mechanics, water-supply specialists, cooks, clerks—but the infantry is

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[6] Turner's behavior bears a striking resemblance to that of predecessors such as Tim O'Brien and Anthony Swofford. In *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, O'Brien (1975) describes the romantic view he had of his father and his father's World War II-era generation. In a chapter suggestively titled "Pro Patria" (translated "for the fatherland"), he writes, "We bought dented relics of our fathers' history, rusted canteens and olive-scented, scarred helmet liners. Then we were our fathers, taking on the Japs and Krauts along the shores of Lake Okabena, on the flat fairways of the golf course. I rubbed my fingers across my father's war decorations, . . . and carried it in my pocket" (12). The devotion that O'Brien feels in his boyhood towards his father is almost religious, and his father's medal that he carries in his pocket takes on the aura of a totem. Similarly, Anthony Swofford measures himself according to the standards of a traditional, stoic masculinity modeled on his father. In his memoir *Jarhead*, Swofford (2003) explains, "I'd been raised by a highly disciplinarian father. I understood unattainable expectations and failure and subsequent punishment" (59). As with Turner, the prioritizing of traditionally masculine traits and the worship of the father are linchpins in Swofford's sense of self. He relates, "Before me my father had gone to war and also my grandfather, and because of my unalterable genetic stain I was linked to the warrior line. . . . I understood that manhood had to do with war, and war with manhood, and to no longer be just a son, I needed someday to fight" (128). Swofford admits his dual obsession with masculinity and war and suggests, in his use of the word "stain," that his familial patriarchy has had a morally dubious impact on him.

different. The infantry picks the man: men who do poorly in math, excel at athletics, drink a lot, love their mothers, fear their fathers; men who have something to prove or feel they have already proven it all" (65). Crawford describes the infantry as not merely a vocation but an exclusively male calling, yet his pride is tinged with feelings of inferiority about the kind of man he is.

In the context of combat, trauma breaks down a veteran's psychological defenses, such as notions of masculine invulnerability, allowing shame to rush in like water through a ruptured dam. Trauma is comprised of two aspects: an event and a person's responses to that event (Gordon and Alpert 2012, par. 2). A traumatic event "generally involves threats to life, bodily integrity, or psychological integrity; close personal encounters with violence and death; or sudden unexpected disruptions of affiliative bonds and individual frames of reference" (par. 2). Responses to traumatic events include "feelings of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, . . . which result in emotional, cognitive, and biological changes" (par. 2), which are manifested as disruptions in thought processes and capacity, as well as adverse shifts in behavioral patterns and physiological conditions (par. 10).[7] These definitions fit the experiences Crawford and Turner describe in their memoirs: as infantry, they have "close personal encounters with violence and death" on a frequent basis. The emotional damage these traumas inflict constitutes "sudden unexpected disruptions" to their "individual frames of reference," namely, their self-identification as masculine individuals. The pain and confusion they articulate in their memoirs mark the points at which their narratives of masculine self-construction rupture, necessitating some form of narrative recuperation of their negated identities.

Typically, civilians expect that violence done against one's own person or a close companion would be the most traumatic aspect of combat. However, this is not the case. According to Faris Kirkland (2002), "Killing another human being is the most traumatic experience a soldier encounters. It is more stressful than fear of death or injury, and it is the experience most likely to entail postcombat psychiatric disorders" (176).[8] Dave Grossman's

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[7] Reuven Gal and Franklin Jones (1995) developed a comprehensive model for combat-stress reactions (see "A Psychological Model of Combat Stress") in which they charted the variables that feed into an appraisal process that each soldier automatically enacts during combat. They categorize these variables as follows: individual variables, such as personality types and family dynamics (136-7); unit variables, such as unit cohesion and leadership performance (139); and battlefield variables, such as the environment and the duration and intensity of the fighting (141).

[8] By virtue of their position at the forefront of the invasion of Iraq, the Recon marines in Generation Kill "will kill a lot of people" (Wright 2004, 8). Wright (2004) laments, "A few of those deaths the men will no doubt think about and perhaps regret for the rest of their lives" (8). One aspect of the Recon Marine culture is that the men deliberately strive to overcome the natural aversion to killing: "Their highest aspiration is self-sacrifice over self-preservation. There is idealism about their endeavor, but at the same time the whole point of their training is to commit the ultimate taboo: to kill. Their culture revels in this. At the end of team briefings, Marines put their hands together and shout, 'Kill!'" (24).

(1995/2009) groundbreaking study on the psychology of killing in combat establishes the longstanding, widespread aversion to the act: "the history of warfare can be seen as a history of increasingly more effective mechanisms for enabling and conditioning men to overcome their innate resistance to killing their fellow human beings" (13). Grossman considers the "resistance to killing" to be "a powerful psychological force on the battlefield" (29), capable of determining the outcomes of conflicts: "Looking another human being in the eye, . . . and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form one of the most basic, important, primal, and potentially traumatic occurrences of war" (31). In killing, even though the enemy is a rightful combatant, the soldier takes on the responsibility for having ended that person's life, for having irrevocably severed that human being's connections to children, spouse, parents, siblings, and friends.

Questions about the morality of killing another human being, even in the context of warfare, point to the ethical dimension of combat trauma. Kirkland (2002) asserts, "While a superficial analysis might suggest that ethical considerations are meaningless for organizations dedicated to missions of destruction, the opposite is true. A system of credible ethics in the culture of an armed force is an essential foundation for its fighting power" (159). Having a clear sense of the ethical boundaries placed around the violence is vital not only to the effectiveness of a fighting unit as a whole but also to the well being of individual soldiers within that unit: "Military personnel, who function in the midst of moral and material chaos, are dependent on an ethically coherent context to enable them to persevere in their missions and to protect their sanity and character" (159). Jonathan Shay (1994) concurs: "The need for an intact moral world increases with every added coil of a soldier's mortal dependency on others" (15). The nature of soldiers' work, to put themselves in mortal danger, necessitates a moral order to keep them psychologically secure. Shay observes, "Any army . . . is a social construction defined by shared expectations and values. . . . All together, these form a moral world that most of the participants . . . regard as . . . personally binding" (6). Those shared values constitute an epistemological framework within which the violence that soldiers suffer and that they inflict on their enemies is morally sensible.

Crawford and Turner write of the traumas they suffer in terms of their exposure to violence and death, as well as the necessity of taking someone else's life. Two moments in particular in Crawford's memoir convey the shock of the violence. The first occurs when Crawford's unit is called out to give after-action support to a fellow unit; he arrives at a horrific scene where two Iraqi men and their car were destroyed. Crawford (2005) sees that the driver's "hip was blown inside out, and it was impossible to tell where his torso ended and his legs began" because "jagged edges of bone emerged in odd places" (139) and because "his spine [was] hanging out of the wound" (140). As poignant as this imagery is, the most disturbing moment occurs when Crawford realizes the driver "was looking at us, . . . despite the fact that half his brain

was all over the car" (140). He tries to explain this away, "But then [the driver's] eyes shifted, first from me, then . . . back to me. They settled on me and he began to mumble in Arabic, . . . staring at me from the abyss. I could see halfway through this man's head and he was looking at me, talking to me in an incomprehensible language" (140). The sight of this man stuns Crawford, and the enormity of the damage done to his body both humanizes him by evoking pity and further estranges him by widening the cultural gap between the two men.

Later in his tour of duty, Crawford loses a close friend in the platoon, named Robert Wise. Crawford spent months with Wise prior to their deployment, playing video games, watching movies, and "talk[ing] about girls and the army" (152-3). However, Crawford admits, "Whenever anyone asks, all I can remember about him is what he looked like, eyes closed, blood on his face, as we waited for the medevac" (153). The shock of seeing his friend badly wounded plasters over Crawford's memories of Wise, covering those memories in images of the bodily trauma Wise suffered. Crawford recalls, "I leaned over, covering Wise's head, and I could smell the sweat and blood and feel the heat of his body. I wanted him to open his eyes . . . but he wouldn't do it" (153). The close proximity Crawford shares with his dying friend—close enough to smell the man's sweat and blood—augments the terror and grief he feels.

Combat trauma of this magnitude does more than cause emotional pain; it undercuts the veteran's sense of self. In a revealing statement, Crawford observes, "People say you leave home, go to war, and become a man. *I want to be a little boy again*. I want to trust people and not look behind my back" (153, my italics). Clearly, these traumatic events have a lasting impact on Crawford, shattering his understanding of himself as a tough, capable infantry*man*. He reaches the point where he considers suicide, thinking to himself, "How easy to put a muzzle in your mouth and just fire" (153-4). The trauma also alienates him from the people he needs most back home: "I wanted to believe that when I got to America things would be all right. I was wrong; you can never go back home" (154). When he tells his wife about the earlier incident with the Iraqi driver, he is forced to lie to her and tell her, "'I'll be fine, I'm just tired'" (143). Yet he admits, "I just wanted her to understand, to tell me it was okay. I needed reassurance. It didn't come" (143). His wife, busy with mundane chores such as house-breaking their dog (137), cannot fathom what he has experienced, and he is left estranged and alone in his torment.

Like Crawford, Turner sees a great deal of destruction and faces continual threats to his own bodily safety. Early in his tour of duty, his unit is "shelled on close to a daily basis" (Turner 2014, 14). Nonetheless, the moment that haunts Turner the most involves the accidental death of an Iraqi civilian. The killing of noncombatants can be especially traumatic for soldiers because it ruptures the ethical-epistemological framework for the violence soldiers

commit.[9] While collateral damage is, to a degree, inevitable in war, there is no justification for the tragedy of killing an innocent civilian. Turner finds himself caught in a twist of irony when he is responsible for killing a man precisely because he failed to shoot him. Turner was guarding a checkpoint when the man, with his wife and baby in the car, ran the checkpoint. Whether due to the suddenness of the event or the emotional shock, Turner's memories of it are blurry: "The Iraqi driver is experiencing pain beyond any I've ever known. He has an injury shaped like a horseshoe crushed into his forehead and his infant child cries in his wife's arms. . . . I'm trying to figure out what just happened. The headlights in the roadway. The car that managed to get past me; the car I was supposed to stop. The step to my left that saved me" (140). Turner's memories are disconnected fragments stuck in his mind like the scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle he cannot put back together. Even as the medic attempts to treat the man, Turner remains stunned, unable to act: "I don't remember him saying much after this, though the baby kept crying in its mother's arms somewhere in the darkness. . . . I never forgive myself for *not* having shot this man" (141, author's italics). Turner's shock, guilt, and grief are complex: he is responsible for this man's death because he failed to stop the car from crashing through the checkpoint, but stopping the car would have meant shooting the driver and killing him anyway. His guilt and torment stem from the way he caused the man to die: slowly and painfully from massive head trauma instead of instantly and painlessly with a well-placed bullet. This moment will linger with Turner beyond any other, and it will be the source of his haunting shame.

War, Shame, and the Self

Having examined the significance of the traumas that Turner and Crawford suffer during their tours of duty in Iraq, it is now possible to explore the way shame stems from their combat trauma and poisons their sense of self. Crawford spirals from shame to alienation and despair; Turner, too, is haunted by shame, though his negative feelings are moderated by his search for redemption and by his marital bonds. In both cases, the veterans' memoirs are war stories, yes, but they are also testimonies about the transformative effect shame has on their psychic identities and what it means to seek healing through storytelling.

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[9] Two exemplary instances of this trauma occur in *Generation Kill*. Both instances involve the Recon marines' accidental shooting of Iraqi children. In the first instance, a shepherd boy is badly wounded when he is mistaken for an enemy combatant (Wright 2004, 172-3). And in the second, a young girl is shot through the head in the back seat of her father's car (218). In both cases, the marines express shame for committing such grievous mistakes: mistakes that harm or kill innocent children and that are unworthy of the elite warriors they are supposed to be.

If trauma and shame are like circuits, then the self is the central node to which they both lead. Jonathan Shay (1994) notes that the "most ancient traditions of Western culture instruct us to base our self-respect on firmness of character" (31).[10] Beliefs in individual autonomy and self-determination are common to Western, and especially American, cultural and literary traditions. However, the trouble with these fundamental assumptions is that when people, in this case veterans, are affected by traumatic events beyond their control, these individuals often perceive their experience as a failure to uphold the values of personal integrity and self-reliance. Shay encounters this perception in his patients, who are Vietnam War veterans, and the feeling appears contagious: "A permanent challenge of working with those injured by combat trauma is facing the painful awareness that in all likelihood one's own character would not have stood firm. Merely allowing ourselves to hear the combat veteran's story threatens our culturally defined sense of self-respect" (31-2). Shame is evident here in what Shay diagnoses as the veterans' loss of a "culturally defined sense of self-respect," and shame flows out of trauma insofar as trauma overloads the veterans' capacity to maintain their belief in who they are as people. According to Shay, "When a survivor of prolonged trauma loses all sense of meaningful personal narrative, this may result in a contaminated identity" (180). Veterans often experience combat trauma as a violation of their personal integrity, their sense of wholeness as a person. The resulting corruption of the veterans' sense of self, of the stories they once told themselves about who they are, gets expressed as shame.

For Crawford and Turner, having their narrative self-constructions shattered results in potent and long-lasting feelings of shame. The crux of their shame is the notion that they have failed to uphold a particular standard on which their identity is based. This is not exclusive to Crawford and Turner, or even to veterans as a group; rather, it has to do with the nature of shame. Francis Broucek (1991) explains, "One may be ashamed at times of anything with which one feels in any way identified—one's ethnic origins, country, religion, family, etc." (6). In regards to Crawford and Turner, "etcetera" entails their gender identification, as well as their self-identification as soldiers. The key is that when shame is at work, one's identity is at stake. According to Broucek, "One may feel shame over a lack of competence or over the loss of previously acquired competence. . . . Failure to measure up to what others expect or what one expects of oneself may elicit shame" (6). John Deigh (2001)

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[10] Shay bases his thinking on Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), a study of the relationship between the Greek notions of luck and morality. Nussbaum (1986) suggests that the Platonic emphasis on abstraction indicates "an aspiration to rational self-sufficiency through the 'trapping' and 'binding' of unreliable features of the world" (19). Yet, she argues, Greek poetry and plays are more accepting of the idea that "part of the peculiar beauty of human excellence just is its vulnerability" (2, author's italics). Greek literature balances "this pursuit of self-sufficiency" with "a vivid sense of the special beauty of the contingent and mutable" (3).

concurs, observing that shame "is an emotion one feels over falling short of a standard of worth or excellence with which one identifies" (par. 6). When trauma undercuts these veterans' stories of themselves as soldiers and as men, they feel shame over having failed to "measure up" to that twofold standard, a standard that previously was an essential component of their identity. The problem with failing to "measure up" is that "one displays a defect or blemish that makes one unworthy of membership in the relevant group, and shame is the shock to one's sense of worth that comes from recognizing this shortcoming" (par. 6). Gabriele Taylor (1985) remarks that when a person suffers this kind of "self-directed adverse judgement" that is characteristic of shame, such judgment entails feeling "degraded, not the sort of person she believed, assumed, or hoped she was" (64). Crawford and Turner exhibit such negative self-judgment: they articulate a sense of having failed to fulfill their expectations for themselves and of being diminished.

Shameful feelings of failure and degradation commonly result in the social alienation of the veteran. Shay (2002) asserts, "Acts of war generate a profound gulf between the combatant and the community he left behind. The veteran carries the taint of a killer, of blood pollution. . . . He may fear that if people knew what he has done, they would reject him or lock him up in a prison or mental hospital" (152).[11] It is all but impossible for civilians to comprehend what combat is like and what veterans suffer for having experienced it. This inability to translate, so to speak, between veterans and civilians leaves many veterans feeling stranded, emotionally cut off from friends and loved ones. Shay indicates that veterans feel isolated because they perceive themselves as bearing "the taint of a killer." This feeling of being tainted is consonant with shame insofar as shame is a negative assessment of one's whole self rather than one's actions, even if that negative self-assessment is triggered by a particular action or event. The shameful nature of this feeling of moral contamination is underscored by the fact that it results not only in "[s]ocial withdrawal" but also in "[s]elf-loathing" and "a sense of unworthiness" (160).

Crawford and Turner each articulate their feelings of shame in distinct ways, though they both experience shame as the undoing of the masculine identities they had constructed for themselves, and they become estranged from loved ones and from themselves as a result. The problems Crawford (2005) faces after returning home from the war are not the typical manifestations of post-traumatic stress: "I don't have nightmares, or see faces. When there is a flash outside my window at night I know it's just lightning and

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[11] In Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* (2012), Bart feels exactly this type of self-imposed rejection. After returning home, he is unable to relate to his mother and to neighborhood acquaintances due to choices he made while serving in Iraq: "I remember myself, sitting in the dirt under neglected and overgrown brush, afraid of nothing in the world more than having to show myself for what I had become. . . . I had the feeling that if I encountered anyone they would intuit my disgrace and would judge me instantly. Nothing is more isolating than having a particular history" (Powers 2012, 132).

not a flare or explosion. I can even drive without cringing at the slightest pile of rubble along the roadside" (219). He brushes aside concerns about the anxieties, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts that characterize PTSD. Instead, the pain Crawford feels is shame over the degradation that the war inflicted on him. He discovers that the war has negatively transformed him, and it is pointedly a transformation he did not choose or control. In moments scattered throughout his deployment, he intuits this change but can do nothing to prevent it: "We knew the screams of the wounded and dying, and had seen the tears of men, of soldiers. I watched as we de-evolved into animals, and all this time there was a sinking feeling that we were changing from hunter to hunted" (117). Shame operates on multiple levels here: Crawford is ashamed that American forces, which should be superior to the Iraqi insurgents, have turned into the "hunted"; he is ashamed to have witnessed the embarrassment of his fellow soldiers as they scream and weep in pain; lastly, he is ashamed of the moral change that is taking place as he and his platoon mates devolve "into animals."

Crawford's wartime metamorphosis most drastically affects his marriage, the dissolution of which becomes further cause of shame. Going to war and losing his wife go hand in hand for Crawford. While on their honeymoon, he receives a message alerting his National Guard unit for service in Iraq (8). He initially elects to hide this fact from his wife, and when she prompts him, he promises, "'I'll always be here with you'" (10). Consequently, he equates going to war with betraying her: "Three weeks later, I became a liar" (10). Yet, Crawford's situation is not merely the result of poor communication between newlyweds. Combat changes him: "Outside, all hell was breaking loose. I pulled the letter from my breast pocket and *with filthy soldier hands* I gingerly opened it, taking care to keep every crease perfect as I smelled the perfume on it" (14, italics added). The mention of his dirty hands is surely, on one level, literal: fighting in a war zone is literally messy. Yet, on a figurative level, it suggests that being a soldier is itself shameful insofar as it necessitates becoming tainted by moral contagions. Crawford's contamination is underscored by his alienation: even as he derives comfort from opening his wife's letter and smelling her perfume, he realizes how far removed he is from the innocent, domestic world she inhabits.

Crawford's estrangement from his wife is merely part of the total alienation he experiences. He articulates a diminished sense of self as he explains that the first story he wrote (which would later become a chapter in the memoir) "was all about returning home and finding myself in a world where no one understood my experience" (210). The epiphany he gains in writing this story is that his own personal transformation is so complete that it severs his relationship with his wife and strains his friendships. Because of this, Crawford spirals into substance abuse and homelessness: "I spent a few months drifting around friends' houses, from one couch to the next. . . . I was evicted from one place I was renting because I have a dog. . . . He sleeps with me at night when

I'm drunk and can't understand why I'm alone" (210). He describes the state he is in as "a lingering, wasting sickness that comes only when you have nothing left" (210). It is evident that Crawford suffers from depression, an illness that is frequently linked to shame: "proneness to shame is related to a wide variety of psychological symptoms. These run the gamut from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety to . . . posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation" (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007, 352). That "lingering, wasting sickness" is an apt description of shame, insofar as this powerful emotion acts like a cancer, consuming the tissue that comprises his sense of self.

Like Crawford, Turner suffers from a feeling of shame that lingers long after the war and alienates him from himself. Also like Crawford, Turner's self-alienation is a sign of the negative transformation he has undergone. On his way back to Iraq after being on leave, he thinks, "Soon enough, I'll find myself in a shower stall on a base in a war zone. Water streaming down, water articulating the curves of my body. . . . the armature of my body in conversation with the imagined body of a lover" (Turner 2014, 126). Turner anticipates being alone again in the war zone, having to imagine the touch of a lover instead of having that person physically present. Even as he anticipates this fantasy, he describes his own body in militarized terms: his skin and muscle become armor for use in the war. He goes on, thinking, "The mirrors will be fogged up. I will wipe the ridge of my palm across the cool surface of the mirror, and, for a brief moment before the fog returns, I'll recognize the man staring back at me" (126). Turner's description of the mirror invokes the idiom, "the fog of war," which refers to the chaos of combat and the confusion that ground-level soldiers typically experience on the battlefield. Anxiety creeps into Turner's fantasy, and he fears that, because of the moral fog into which war has cast him, he is losing himself, that is, losing the understanding he once had of himself.

After Turner is back in the war zone, his self-alienation only deepens. He admits, "The first few days after I rejoin my unit, I feel like a different version of myself, a stranger, a cherry" (128). Turner discovers he has lost the battlefield competence he worked so hard to earn, the intimate knowledge of how to survive in a war zone: "I duck down inside the hatch at the first roadside bomb after my return, and I hesitate in the hull, failing to rise and fire. . . . I freeze" (128). He realizes the identity he constructed for himself as a man and a soldier has begun to fracture, and he is ashamed of his failure to perform according to the standard on which he has founded that identity. Later, he admits, "something inside me began to unravel and snap" (143), and he behaves unprofessionally, cursing at Iraqi civilians he encounters while on patrol. The trauma that Turner experiences when he accidentally allows the Iraqi man to die at a checkpoint (140-1) occurs during this phase of his deployment, as his soldier persona is unraveling.

That particular event is the epicenter of Turner's shame, and upon returning home from the war, he cannot process it effectively. He reflects, "Maybe it isn't that it's so difficult coming home, but that home isn't a big enough space for all that I must bring to it" (173). Turner explains that arriving home is not the challenge veterans must face; rather, the challenge lies in getting all that he has become—all that war has added to or changed in him—to fit within the contours of the place where he once belonged. Unable to escape his wartime past, even several years later, Turner seeks out a sweat lodge, where he participates in a ritual cleansing ceremony (178-97). In the ceremony, sweating takes on a spiritual significance insofar as it is intended to expunge whatever is harmful within the participant. Turner hears "the crash of water on stone" and feels "[a]nother wave of heat rolling over" him (181). To him, it is the "sound of medicine" (181). But, according to the dictates of the ceremony, before these medicines can begin to heal him, the poison that is inside him must be drawn out. He thinks, "Heat demands that the desert reveal itself" (182). The desert stands broadly for Iraq, that is, for the Iraq War, and specifically for what happened to and because of Turner at the checkpoint. After this realization, he has a vision. In it a young Iraqi boy leads him to a scene: "The ruined car is to my left. Ruckled metal. . . . Doc High speaks in Latin to a dying man lying prostrate on the road. . . . I see the dying man raise his head through obvious pain, his forehead punctured deep with the mark of a horseshoe; . . . the signature of the wound I gave him so many years ago" (183). Turner obviously is haunted by guilt for having caused this man to be killed in an unnecessarily cruel way.

The crucial point here is that Turner generalizes from his guilt to incur shame, and this shame is twofold: first, he has failed—tragically—to be an effective soldier, and second, he has become an accidental killer. That Turner thinks of the man's wound as his "signature," which he writes on the man's body, is revealing: it suggests that Turner self-identifies as the man's killer, that he bears the memory of this man's suffering and death as a stigma upon his whole self. Turner's shameful self-identification is evident in that, in the vision, the medic tells the victim, "'*The man who killed you is coming now*'" (183, author's italics). Just as that wound is Turner's metaphorical inscription on the man's body, so Turner's memoir enacts the writing out of what it means for him to bear the shame associated with this accidental killing. Though he labels himself in such a damning way, he also tasks himself with the responsibility of leading the victim into the afterlife (183). Turner receives this mission as a restorative act, allowing him to atone for his mistake. Afterward, he exits the lodge triumphantly: "The wind announces itself over the entire surface of my body . . . while I raise my arms toward the low clouds rolling overhead, stormy and wild" (184). In the ceremony, Turner enacts a series of symbolic rebirths that ultimately enable him to reclaim his life. In this way, his vision at the sweat lodge acts as the narrative of his atonement, his first step towards healing.

Storytelling as Therapy

If Crawford's (2005) metaphor of the "lingering, wasting sickness" (210) befits shame, then there are medicines that can be prescribed. One, of course, is counseling. Another is storytelling. I wish to draw a link between the two, that is, to extrapolate from the counseling that occurs between patients and psychiatrists to the storytelling that veterans-turned-writers conduct when writing about their wartime experiences. In both counseling and autobiography, the veterans sharing their wartime experiences entrust a portion of themselves to a sympathetic audience—whether real or imagined—and thereby establish some therapeutic distance from the shame and trauma that generate their pain.

Shay suggests that a form of storytelling occurs within counseling. Based on decades of experience as a counselor to veterans, Shay (1994) asserts, "healing from trauma depends upon communalization of the trauma—being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community" (4). When sharing their pain with others in the context of counseling, veterans can find relief, even if that relief is not total or final. Michael Lewis (1992) suggests that confession (not necessarily religious in connotation) provides similar results: "In confession . . . we go to others and tell them about an event that has shamed us. This public acknowledgement of the transgression and the shame that accompanies it appears to be a successful way of dealing with shame" (131). The reason, according to Lewis, is that in sharing an account of one's shame with others, one is able to detach oneself from the shame (132). This detachment is critical because of the nature of shame as a negative emotion that afflicts the whole self. Sharing that shame with others enables the person to deflect the blade of that emotion. Autobiography, in this case the war memoir, can be read as an analog to confession. In writing about their wars, veterans can acknowledge their pain, share it with others in the form of readers, and find some measure of healing. In this light, writing acts as a form of self-induced therapy.

Tim O'Brien understood the cathartic power of storytelling when he began writing about his experience in the Vietnam War. In his memoir *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1975), he asks, "Can the foot soldier teach anything important about war, merely for having been there?" (O'Brien 1975, 23). His answer, surprisingly, is, "I think not" (23). However, O'Brien does not dismiss the value of what veterans have to say; rather, he argues for a particular way of saying it. He explains that the veteran "can tell war stories" (23). The reason O'Brien chooses narrative over pedagogy is that stories have the capacity for interpretation. Obviously, in reading a story we make choices about what it means to us. Yet, the writing of the story also is an act of interpretation, of

choosing to represent an experience in a certain manner.[12] In *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien (1990) claims, "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (203). While historical fact merely conveys what happened in a war, narrative has the power to convey what that experience meant to the soldier living it. This property of storytelling is vital, and O'Brien sees it as a lifeline for the veteran. He ends *The Things They Carried* with the realization that "when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later . . . it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story" (273). For O'Brien, writing about the Vietnam War is the act of the veteran Tim reclaiming the innocence and wholeness of the child Timmy.

Crawford and Turner follow in O'Brien's footsteps, not merely by writing about their experiences in the Iraq War, but by approaching autobiography as a therapeutic instrument. In the epilogue to his memoir, Crawford (2005) reflects on why he wrote the book: "Sometimes you start to feel like someone is just in your head screaming at the top of his lungs so that you can't think. Whatever stops, or at least muffles it, is worth a try. This book is a direct result of my attempts to stop the screaming" (212). He also adds that he wrote from "a need to make something, to look at it and feel as if my mind had purged itself of its demons" (214). Crawford is adamant about the cathartic quality of autobiographical writing, its ability to allow the veteran to erase the guilt and shame that have undone his sense of self. Nonetheless, Crawford also indicates that his attempt has been only partially successful.

Turner is not explicit about treating oneself through writing, but he effects a similar therapeutic result in his memoir. He does so by imagining his own death: "Sgt. Turner is dead. I was there when it happened. I climbed back up from inside the troop hold to stand in the hatch as our driver juiced it and we sped away from the explosion. . . . He recedes and diminishes in my field of vision as we drive further and further away" (Turner 2014, 149). He goes on to describe the dead Sgt. Turner rising and walking down to a riverbank; removing his boots, helmet, and body armor; and then wading into the river (150). Turner invokes the baptismal symbolism of death and resurrection through submersion in water.[13] Removing his military gear clearly symbolizes Turner's shedding the past of his combat experience. Continuing on that symbolic trajectory, "Sgt. Turner closes his eyes and sinks under the water's surface" (150). He imagines burying his dead self, this alter ego who is the embodiment of his warrior identity, thereby allowing his postwar civilian

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[12] In *Jarhead*, Swofford (2003) takes up writing in the hope of assuaging his emotional pain. He reflects, "I remade my war one word at a time, a foolish, desperate act" (254). Swofford's diction suggests that he thinks of himself as not merely describing what happened to him in the war. Instead, he sees his writing as the *remaking* of his experience, and this indicates that he is not only retelling it but also reimagining its meaning.

[13] Water imagery is key to Turner's representation of healing: later, while in the sweat lodge, he has a vision of his wife walking into the war zone in Iraq, stripping him of his body armor, and then washing him in the shower (Turner 2014, 193-6). This image of cleansing in water echoes the baptismal symbolism of purging oneself of a moral taint.

identity to arise.[14] Indeed, "Sgt. Turner" is the grown-up version of the childhood "Sgt. T," the character that Turner performed in front of his friend's camera when he was a boy. Underscoring all of this—and echoing O'Brien's image of the childhood self—is the image of a boy, the child Turner, watching as the dead Sgt. Turner sinks out of sight (150). Years after his service, in this feat of imagination, Turner rewrites his wartime experience and finally jettisons the dead weight which is the corpse of his past self, the self marred by trauma and degraded by shame.

Conclusion: War Literature, Affect, and Ethics

American war literature boasts a rich tradition, with classics such as Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), and Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977)—books that have transcended the war genre and impacted the American canon. The literary work of combat veterans offers us instructive opportunities to consider the power and pervasiveness of emotions such as shame in human thought and experience.[15] These narratives manifest the devastating negativity of shame, its power to negate a person's psychic identity. Yet, as these memoirs indicate, healing is possible—through the communal acts of counseling and storytelling, though such healing is a complex, vulnerable, and long-term process.[16]

By engaging matters of profound emotional significance, war literature invites us to investigate the ethical and political legacies of the wars the United

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[14] A parallel moment occurs in *The Yellow Birds* (2012), in which the protagonist, John "Bart" Bartle, wrestles with guilt and shame over his role in the death of his platoon mate, Daniel "Murph" Murphy. Like the real-life Turner, the fictional Bart finds emotional solace in the act of storytelling. He reimagines the fate of his comrade's corpse, which he helped to dump in a river and which was never recovered. Instead of being left with the gnawing absence of Murph's dead body, Bart creates a new, fictionalized body: "And then I saw Murph as I'd seen him last, but beautiful. Somehow his wounds were softened, his disfigurement transformed. . . . his body livid, then made clean by the wide-eyed creatures that swam indifferently below the river's placid surface" (Powers 2012, 226). Through narrative, Bart transforms the gory referent of his guilt and shame into the rapturous image of Murph's transcendence.

[15] In *Hiding from Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum (2006) seeks "to measure the large role that emotions such as fear, grief, and anger play in mapping the trajectory of human lives" (7). She affirms the power of emotions in shaping a broad spectrum of human experience ranging from an individual's worldview to the laws proscribing behavior throughout society: "If we leave out all the emotional responses that connect us to this world . . . we leave out a great part of our humanity, and a part that lies at the heart of explaining why we have civil and criminal laws" (7).

[16] A timely example of this is the work of Bryan Doerries (2017), whose Theater of War Productions stages dramatic readings of classical Greek tragedies and then uses those as platforms for public conversations about "topics such as combat-related psychological injury" (Doerries 2017, n. pag.). See Bruce Headlam's op-ed article, "U.S. Veterans Use Greek Tragedy to Tell Us About War" in *The New York Times*.

States wages.[17] In addition to compromising the United States' geopolitical position, the Iraq War devastated the lives of tens of thousands of Americans. War literature draws the public's attention to the price soldiers pay in fighting our wars. Shay (1994) argues, "we should *care* about how soldiers are trained, equipped, led, and welcomed home. . . . This is our moral duty toward those we ask to serve on our behalf. . . . Unhealed combat trauma blights not only the life of the veteran but the life of the family and community" (195, author's italics). Grossman (1995/2009) concurs, "we have a moral responsibility to consider the long-term effects of our commands. Moral direction and philosophical guidance . . . must come with the combat training and deployment of our soldiers" (295). In acknowledging the damage that combat trauma and the resulting shame do to the self, the memoirs of John Crawford and Brian Turner point to the ethical responsibility we civilians have to read what our veterans write when they return home from war.

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[17] See John Limon's essay, "The Shame of Abu Ghraib" (2007), for a study of the links among the ethical, psychological, and political dimensions of the Iraq War. Limon diagnoses the politics of shame and shaming in the public rhetoric surrounding the Abu Ghraib scandal.

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