

This is a post-print version of the article, uploaded for non-commercial research and education use. It incorporates referee's comments but changes resulting from the publishing process, such as copyediting, structural formatting, may not be reflected in this document. It is not the version of record and therefore has different page numbers.

A definitive version was subsequently published in Liste-Noya, J. y E. Barros-Grela. eds. *American Secrets: The Politics and Poetics of Secrecy in American Culture*. Lanham, Maryland: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011, pp. 37-48.

Reproduced by permission of Rowman & Littlefield. All rights reserved. Please contact the publisher for permission to copy, distribute or reprint.

The Ultimate Secrecy: Feminist Readings of Masculine Trauma

in Vietnam War Literature

Carmen Méndez García

It is a widely acknowledged and often unquestioned fact that patriarchy and its modes of behaviour and social organization favour the appearance of trauma in some of the weakest (and defenceless) members of society: women. In the last decades, trauma seems to have taken the baton of typically female maladies such as hysteria in the 19th century or schizophrenia in the 20th century. Critics and historians in the last decades have worked to prove the connection between the latter affections (and their reflection in literary texts) and patriarchal oppression or expectations of feminine behaviour in accordance to roles and rules¹.

With Trauma Studies² on the rise, the approach to the idea of the untold as related to femininity is manifold. Why not consider trauma, which precludes telling about one's own experience and keeps it locked not only from the others, but *also* from ourselves, the ultimate secrecy? Secrecy has been defined as deliberately hiding something from others, or as

¹ For the cultural and literary analysis of 19th century hysteria, see Micale (1995); Saas (1992) develops schizophrenia as a 20th century affliction. Showalter (1985) regards the diagnoses of both conditions as based on the application of medical labels to those women who fell short (or tried to go beyond) societal expectations.

² As evidenced by the seminal work by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, 1992) and the explorations on the topic by Cathy Caruth (*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Theory and History*, 1996, among others).

“[keeping] from public knowledge, or from the knowledge of persons specified; not allowed to be known, or only by selected persons” (OED). The clinical assessment of persons suffering trauma always emphasizes secrecy and silence as symptoms, and, as Ragland points out, “until such time as the truth of the unbearable can be spoken by the person traumatized and, subsequently, heard by others, the trauma can only enunciate itself as an enigma. It can only spawn the kind of symptoms that speak of what is not there, not sayable” (77). What Van der Kolk and Van der Hart have defined as “speechless terror” (442) in the experience of trauma makes reference, as we will see, to the repression, in psychoanalytic terms, of knowledge. In trauma, the event or events are kept secret, and as opposed to deliberate, ‘normal’ secrecy; traumatic veiling is further complicated since it is a part of the traumatized person’s psyche which will not tell, which is hiding information from other parts of the self (from the “conscious” in Freudian terms).

The characteristics suggested by Vickroy when dealing with trauma: silence, denial, dissociation, resistance and repression (3-4) have been analyzed by Lawn as a “pathology of secrecy” (11), which stems not from a meaningful relationship with what is lived, but rather as a dissociation constructed through concealment. Lawn considers the need to analyze the link between these pathological secrets, i.e. traumas, and mental disturbances such as neuroses or psychoses: furthermore, rather than necessarily circumscribed to one individual, to Lawn “an entire society can keep a traumatic experience secret from itself, even as an open secret” (10-11). Traumatic secrets analyzed in these terms not only affect other people knowing (or even whole societies, if we are to follow lead of Lawn’s ideas), but also prevent the subject herself from accessing knowledge, traumatic memory being defined as “wordless and static” (Herman 175): it is in this sense that we consider trauma to be the ‘ultimate secrecy’.

When analyzing literary works that reflect trauma, one is astounded by the high number which have a female protagonist and an almost all-female cast; in this sense, a ‘feminist’ reading is almost compulsory, since it is usually the author’s assumption that patriarchal systems of exploitation and expectations favour traumatic events and their outcome (silence and secrets) in the powerless, usually women. Vickroy’s assertion that women are the “most frequently vulnerable to situations of oppression, deprivation, and exploitation” (222) also places women as the most assailable to extreme experiences that have, traditionally and of late, been considered as traumatic (see note 7 on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). This is the rationale behind the combination of feminism with other analytical discourses in traumatic texts: Toni Morrison’s study of traumatic responses in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* cannot be untangled from her critique of slavery, just as much of Chicana feminism and its representations of rape and abuse (two main agents of trauma) analyze the nexus of patriarchy, new forms of post-colonialism, and the dynamics of power and powerlessness in ethnic contexts. According to Herman, traumatic realities require “a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance . . . created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered” (9).

Within this tradition that establishes the secrecies of trauma as an almost exclusively feminine characteristic, one is however faced with texts which have traumatized males as protagonists; curiously enough, most of these characters have suffered trauma through a typically ‘male’ experience: that of war and its aftermath. By analyzing novels dealing with war veterans from Vietnam or the Second World War, the frequent mixture of male or even ‘macho’ values and the denial of any kind of ‘feminine’ characteristics is often found, combined with a very stern set of rules of power and a strict hierarchy that clearly establish who is empowered and who is powerless. It is our argument that this replication of patriarchal modes of domination, which place the lowest ranks of the army in a ‘feminine’ situation,

blended with the compulsory ‘macho’ stance soldiers are forced to adopt as army men (as seen, for example, in Philip Caputo’s *Indian Country*, Larry Heinemann’s *Paco’s Story* or Ed Dodge’s *DAU: A Novel of Vietnam*) furthers the onset and seriousness of ulterior trauma.

In this sense, we can also analyze this kind of writing from a ‘feminist’ point of view, since the dynamics of über-patriarchal power established at the front in war-time veto any display of elements traditionally viewed as ‘feminine’ (such as grief, guilt or emotions) in soldiers. If trauma is the result of a game of patriarchal empowerment, how can feminist works, not only those theoretical, but also fictional ones, overthrow it? Are ‘feminine’ characteristics necessary to escape trauma, even in male victims? How can feminist readings of trauma enhance our understanding of its dynamics and help produce new modes of interaction that transcend power and gender division as the basis for the organization of society?

The traditional understanding of war as masculine, from the Classics - Heraclitus’ “War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as men” (Kirk, Raven and Schofield 193) - to the almost contemporary “war is a man’s affair”³, emphasizes the war experience as a typically male one. As Cooke and Wallacott state, “[a]fter biological reproduction . . . war is perhaps the arena where division of labour along gender lines has been the most obvious, and thus where sexual difference has seemed the most absolute and natural”⁴ (ix). Also, in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, Higonet describes war as “[a] gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of a society, whether or not they are combatants” (4).

This rhetoric of war and its environment as masculine is hard to combine with the fact that war does, in fact, produce a series of *traumas* or psychic wounds that are regarded, indeed,

³ For an in-depth analysis of the traditional perception of warfare as masculine, see Kimble (2004) and Conover and Sapiro (1993).

⁴ Within the context we will be analyzing, namely war up to Vietnam War, there is a clear divide between combatant men and non-combatant, nursing women: this distribution of roles that Cooke and Woollacott propose used to be the standard up to a couple of decades ago.

as a kind of ‘un-masculine’ or ‘emasculating’ stigma. The vocabulary used for the early study of those men affected by war provides us with clues about how being distressed by what has been endured at the battlefield was considered to be a shortcoming, a sign of a weak or ‘feminine’ personality. As stated by Allison Berg, “war inevitably inscribes gender, [but] it often does so in unexpected and contradictory ways” (441). Labels traditionally applied only to women were re-elaborated, such as in *hysteria virilis* or *male hysteria*, and we also find other labels that make reference to the specific origin of the trauma (shell shock or combat fatigue)⁵. The latter terms make it clear that, if we are to admit that there can be psychological consequences associated to men in this context, these are derived from *direct* partaking in battle, not in their being abstractly *involved* in a kind of generic war experience⁶. However, those directly involved in war were often not reinforced in their masculinity, but rather found themselves in a context where “life and death seemed the result of dumb luck rather than bravery, skill, or cunning.” (Joseph 65)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)⁷ was seen at the beginning of the 20th c. as a failure of masculinity, as effeminacy or immaturity: within the context of the German Army in WWII, “war neuroses . . . [were considered to be] hysterical reactions caused not by the trauma of war but by a pathological predisposition of certain feeble-minded soldiers who ultimately lacked the patriotism to serve [their country] . . . and were seduced by the possibility of a pension” (Presner 831). Elaine Showalter talks about a “crisis of masculinity” when it comes to

⁵ See Shepard (2000) for examination of the development of terminology used for trauma related to war. Also, Joseph describes shell shock as “a disease of the trenches” (70), as “a gendered trauma that is closely linked to ideas of masculinity and femininity” (70)

⁶ Davoine and Gaudillière suggest that the use of the term ‘shell shock’ “was retained essentially because it was felt necessary to ascribe men’s psychic breakdown to a physiological fact, as it were by the presence of a foreign body . . . if the brain was materially disturbed, honor was saved; cowardice was not an issue.” (107)

⁷ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder associated with serious traumatic events and characterized by such symptoms as survivor guilt, reliving the trauma in dreams, numbness and lack of involvement with reality, or recurrent thoughts and images. It can be caused by exposure to traumatic events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults such as rape. Symptoms also include recurring intrusive memories of the traumatic experience; feelings of detachment and estrangement, or “psychological numbing”; and a heightened sense of anxiety or a lowering of the “fear threshold.”

men experiencing trauma produced by war (171); if it is ‘masculine’ and ‘manly’ not to complain, either of the physical traces or of the mental imprints caused by the war, then shell shock can be considered as the ‘body language’ of masculine complaint: a trauma that is not explained verbally but stoically endured, concealed, either physically or mentally. Silenced experience, trauma precluding the telling of experience, would in a way be encouraged as part of a ‘manly’ way of taking things in: PTSD could, then, be analyzed as a ‘male’ way of mourning (Showalter 172).

As opposed to the masculine *war trauma*, we would like to also propose the existence of a *nursing trauma*, a useful divide that also makes reference to the two geographical polarities or places of masculinity and femininity in wartime (the battlefield and the campaign hospital), and to the difference between combatants (men) and non-combatant corps (women). Narratives of war up to the Vietnam War emphasize the active role of men in the battleground, with women as mere supporters far from the frontline, and taking only an active stand in their roles as nurses in the wings of battle. As we will see later, the supporting role of women near the battlefield (but never *near* enough to be considered *legitimate* witnesses) is often accompanied by their being a *locus* of romantic or sexual interest for soldiers.

French memoirist Léonie Godfroy distinguishes two aspects of war: the sublime and the sombre. The first is reserved to combatants, i.e. men, while women have to confront only the latter:

[w]ar appears to be something abominable or something sublime, depending upon the side one encounters. I must declare that I have seen only the sombre side. This is women’s share . . . To men in the first rank of danger go the superb élan, the epic spectacles of the battlefield. To us, the other side of the décor . . . They come

to us afterwards, bloody, weary, mute. It is not surprising that our recollections often have an element of nightmare. (5)

The passive or secondary role of women in the Vietnam War is also reflected in the small number of literary works produced by female writers and the critical attention devoted to them: apart from some memoirs, such as Lynda Van Devanter's (*Home Before Morning*, 1984) or Winnie Smith (*Vietnam: On the Front Lines with an Army Nurse in Vietnam*, 1992) and short story collections or poetry, most of Vietnam War literature is written by men⁸. As Van Devanter reflects in her memoir, "[w]hat could a woman possibly have to say about war, especially the Vietnam War" (xxi). Van Devanter seems to align herself with Hemingway in his belief that women's lack of 'war experience' (i.e. direct combat experience) forced them to borrow their evidence, their understanding, from men who had had the experience themselves (O'Brien 186)⁹. But we may wonder: since these men were often keeping the experience secret, how were women to 'learn' from the experience of combat?

The authenticity of war experience is, then, directly defined by the gaze, by "seeing" combat (Acton 2). After seeing, the telling of the experience would seem to follow as an ethical dictum, and it is precisely here that the masculine status of the war experience fails: far from its being a maturing experience, war does not seem to make men more articulate – but more silent (Higonnet 91-92). Compulsion to bear witness, to carry knowledge to a civilian population removed from any understanding of war experience, was complicated by the fact

⁸ For a complete review of Vietnam War works by women, see the excellent compilation by Edwin Moïse: <http://www.clemson.edu/caah/history/facultypages/EdMoïse/fem.html>. For an exhaustive bibliography of Vietnam War literature see Newman, John. *Vietnam War Literature: an Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works about Americans Fighting in Vietnam*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1988, who in his 1995 edition lists over 650 novels. Also, for in-depth studies of Vietnam War and literature, see Beidler, Philip. *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*. Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1982; and Myers, Thomas. *Walking Point: American Narratives of Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

⁹ Hemingway seems to identify, very simplistically, the horrors of war with those lived directly at the battlefield, while ignoring the effects on the civilian population (mostly women and children) or in places related to the front, such as nursing homes or campaign hospitals. While the front experience is a typically masculine one, the two latter scenarios, where horror can take a different but equally menacing and terrifying face, would be populated by women who would, one has to think, feel qualified to tell something about their own 'war experience'.

that many soldiers could not, or would not, *tell* what they had seen or lived.¹⁰ McCurdy observes that psychic numbing, “a generalized flattening of affective response to a wide range of emotional aspects of life” (122) is another common response to trauma. The failure at conveying the experience would then be caused not only by shock and contriteness, but also because traumatic memory is often “wordless, visual, and reenactive rather than cognitive / verbal when facing the unspeakable” (Vickroy 187), and what is more important, because affective responses are seen as incompatible with the masculine experience of war, men being precisely the ones who have experienced it through seing combat.

It is in this context where Acton sees the long-term responsibility of women to tell the truth of the war to future generations. This statement seems to us to be forgetful of the main canon of Vietnam War literature, which is, undoubtedly, male. However, we can use this assertion as a starting point to talk about the ability of women to *decipher* secret, or codified, war trauma, as their role as supporters (or non-combatants) is not necessarily dominated by the ‘male’ code of honour that emphasizes stoical silence as one of the major virtues of the soldier. War nursing can be, and indeed was, traumatic in its own way, since it involved witnessing and analyzing events where they could not be seen, less understood, or fully conceptualized by either the observer or the participant (one of the classical defining characteristics of trauma): only the effects - physical, bodily and mental - of the events can be seen, and the medical staff, including nurses, had to *read* the event in its effects. Also, hospitals could be analyzed as the place of “shared but unspoken trauma where men and women are brought together because of war” (Acton 57), where *direct* experience which cannot be told (by men at the battlefield) is *translated* or *analyzed* by their caretakers. Can this ease trauma, or does it make it more deeply ingrained? Apparently it did not ease *nursing* trauma, since the psychological survival of those tending the soldiers made them divert their gaze from the emotional to the practical: nursing

¹⁰ Especially in Vietnam, rather than in WWI or II, or those fought on ‘native’ land. The Vietnam War was fought overseas, with most of the population at home not suffering directly the effects of war and the attacks.

and curing. Furthermore, nurses would often have difficulty in expressing their own trauma, and often recur in their telling, in their memoirs, to conventional, heterosexual romance as an answer to disintegration and collapse (this is the case in the memoir by Smith): making use of the generic cliché of love in the times of war could be explained as a *traumatic* way to write, one which does not address direct concerns of hurting and war. These clichéd narratives seem also to contest the fact that most men nursed in campaign hospitals were no longer ‘men’, but emasculated (often also in a physical sense) by their wounds. Bodies tell the story, and the male body becomes the place where women (non-combatants) can ‘gaze’ at the horrors of war, making the nurses’ role to read and to repair such bodies (such as the controversial scene where an anonymous nurse provides sexual gratification to Paco, the protagonist in Heinemann’s *Paco’s Story*, as an altruistic way to ‘bring back’ his masculinity).

However, as much as nurses and doctors may be successful in integrating bodies and making them *tell* the experiences of war, the mind of the ex-combatant returned to civilian life tells, or hides, a different story. The failure to tell, the *secrecy* of the war experience (a secret to others, but also to oneself; events which are only partially glimpsed at by others looking at the body of the combatant, and also hidden from the combatant himself by a series of defense strategies) could also be rooted in the male *ethos* of the war *esprit de corps*. Apart from the already hinted-at relationship between PTSD or shell shock and effeminacy, Heinemann finds that some of the men most likely to need help were barred from getting it by spiteful officials, being ensnared, as Laub and Auerhahn judge, “between the compulsion to complete the process of knowing and the inability *or fear* of doing so” (288, my emphasis).

Furthermore, the über-masculine code of the military encourages aggressiveness in war times, even in circumstances that may effectively foster trauma (such as the cold-blooded killing of a ‘Charlie’ or the gang-rape, endorsed by an official, of a Vietnamese girl in *Paco’s Story*):

aggressiveness was often “not only sanctioned but provoked by the military and training soldiers” (Vickroy 211). Combatants (i.e. male combatants) were given “a new, warrior identity that makes them unfit to live as a civilian again and for some men prevents them from developing a fully developed adult personality” (Vickroy 211). This warrior identity emphasized characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, such as violence, aggressiveness, the ability to instil fear in others, and domination through violent coercion.

Paco's Story recounts the dismissal of a Vietnam veteran whose company was decimated and who was, effectively, considered to be DOA (Dead On Arrival) while taken to a campaign hospital. The narrator chosen by Heinemann to tell the story gives the reader a clue as to the lack of ability in Paco to *tell* and integrate the war experience: not a living human being, not Paco, but a ghost, the voice of one of the fellow soldiers of the protagonist (who was killed, just like the rest of the company except for Paco, at Fire Base Harriette), talks to a stranger, a male listener, a ‘James’, a generic somebody but yet nobody, as Heinemann states in the prologue. Interestingly, the ghost-narrator seems more able to integrate, to narrate, the events at Fire Base Harriette than Paco, who goes through the novel with “little consciousness or sense of an inner life” (Vickroy 183), “groggy from the several additional doses of medication – muscle relaxers and anti-depressants – to the point of a near-helpless stupor” (Heinemann 35) and unable to make sense of or to access his traumatic war experience. In contrast to the ghost narrative, Paco only remembers war events through nightmares where he is visited by his dead fellows or where he has to undergo a series of painful, dramatic deaths that reflect the sudden attack he and his comrades suffered in the real world.

Failure at understanding, elaborating and telling, either to oneself or to others, and their desirable outcome, mourning, are denied to Paco and other combatants, since mourning itself is seen as feminine. Also, since Paco's Alpha Company was slaughtered, he has no community to

share his experience with: the novel portrays a series of attempts by strangers to share Paco's experience of war, but there is never the feeling of a communal bonding, since these strangers' stories, no matter how similar in essence to Paco's (e.g. the experience recalled by a WWII veteran) are never met by a similar elaboration of his hidden, traumatised experience. He does not have the feeling that a reliable, safe community will be available again once his company, the ones he shared all the traumatic war experiences with, has been obliterated.

When approached with sympathy by a character who asks about the massacre, Paco prefers to keep it secret, answering: "They had me so zonked out on morphine I don't much remember" (Heinemann, 45). The ghost narrator, however, comments on his true memories: "But Paco remembers all right, and vividly". The main character is subject to what McCurdy considers to be "one of the unfortunate and most damaging results of trauma: secrecy, silence, and the resulting isolation" (123). To Paco, the truth of what he lived through during the war is a secret that never leaves him, "a glowing, suffocating uncomfortability that is more or less the permanent condition of his waking life" (Heinemann, 36).

Furthermore, the 'male bonding' which is part of the war male ethos insists that whenever 'brothers in arms'(i.e. fellow soldiers) are killed, aggressive, physical retaliation is both allowed and encouraged, as a way to 'mourn', to compensate, to honour the dead.¹¹ In Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, the worst thing that Vietnam can produce on the soldiers is to make them "sentimental" (234): a warring response is always preferred and encouraged. Paco can never use this aggressive response, as he is left almost dead after the attack, and discharged soon afterwards. There is no compensation available through violence and aggressiveness, but no acquired ability for mourning either.

¹¹ Here, being 'family' gets its significance from shared events, often traumatic, that entire companies and troops have to go through.

Some other circumstances in the soldiers' situation are conducive to trauma, understood as the inability to tell, what Felman defines as "crisis of truth" (5). A most salient feature is survivor guilt: as the one soldier in his company who was left alive, the idea of not being worthy of being 'chosen' and thus spared haunts Paco in the forms of dreams and hallucinations:

No, James, Paco has never asked, *Why me?* It is we – the ghost, the dead – who ask, Why him? So Paco is made to dream and remember . . . particularly on those nights when his work . . . goes particularly well . . . It is at those moments that he is least wary, most receptive and dreamy. So we bestir and descend. We hover around him like an aura . . . *that* is the moment we whisper in his ear, and give him something to think about. (Heinemann 137-138)

Paco has most vivid dreams, "of men come to stand beneath him, switching those axe handles against their thighs, muttering and bitching" (Heinemann 140), of executions "as punishment for some crime never mentioned. Cowardice? Mutiny?" (141). And, we are told, one of his most recurring dreams is "of what it would have been like to leave Vietnam on his own two feet" (142), waving at the rest of his company as they return, unharmed, to their homes.

Besides this survivor guilt, which haunts Paco in his dreams, there is the difficulty to *tell* or *narrate* war experience to non-combatants, especially since the general population seems not to be concerned by it, or not willing to expose themselves to accounts beyond the sanitized versions of the period. As the ghost narrator observes right before he (or it) starts telling the story, "[p]eople . . . denounce war stories . . . as a geek-monster species of evil-ugly rumor . . . folks do not want to hear about Alpha Company" (Heinemann 3-5 *passim*). MacCurdy

describes how very often “family members and others who feel a kinship with the victim can be so horrified by the trauma that they dissociate themselves from the victim” (117), what Symonds call a “second injury” (36) and Danieli refers to as a “conspiracy of silence” (4).

On the other hand, there is the constant fear in trauma survivors that in civilian life they may have to face encounters with what Langer terms “tainted” or unheroic memories (Heinemann 125), exemplified in *Paco’s Story* through events such as the brutal gang-rape of a Vietnamese girl: “We looked at her and at ourselves, drawing breath again and again, and knew that this was a moment of evil, that we would never live the same” (Heinemann 184). Philip Caputo called Vietnam an “ethical wilderness” (3), and to sustain the difficulty of integrating violent and questionable behaviour, the soldiers realize that the approach in wartime to issues of legitimacy, authority and sacrifice is not always compatible with their moral assessment in periods of peace.

This moral double bind is ravelled by the constant feeling of shame associated with Vietnam for its combatants, as a conflict not fully supported by all the population, as other wars were, and worsened by how long it took for veterans – who felt exploited both by the government and the military – to be recognized as such and worthy of pensions and other economical compensations that were almost immediate in the case of veterans from other wars. As Heinemann has the narrator in the novel,

And how many times is it, James, that people have looked over at Paco, looked down, and asked, ‘What war was that?’ as if not word of the fucking thing had ever made the papers. And Paco answers . . . the same as he nearly always

answers, 'Why, the Vietnam War, sir.' The old man squirms around on his stool and shakes his head – he has never heard of the place. (Heinemann 75)

The lack of knowledge or permanent denial of the implications or mere existence of Vietnam, and the shame associated to this specific war complicate trauma and resolution: as a result, survivors find themselves no longer functioning in civilian social contexts, placed in the unattainable situation of being asked to be brutal killers in battle and yet civilized at the same time. As we mentioned before, for society at large receiving veterans from a war there is often what Vickroy calls a “cultural taming of traumatic material” (7), which often takes the form of an idealistic view of war entrenched in the heroic tradition¹². This interpretation of war as a place where only heroic acts belong also complies in the shameful secrecy kept by veterans, who, at large in Vietnam War literature, find it impossible to communicate the events, not only because they are trying to repress them, but also because their report would not correspond with what civilians are expecting to hear. To Vickroy, “the meaning that a society ascribes to a particular traumatic event is significant in how it will be defined and resolved for the individual and the group” (15): if the meaning associated to war denies is reality, what expectation of resolution can be available to the traumatized individual?

War “denies men the expression of their compassionate and nurturing sides, further dehumanizing them” (Carson 46), and, as Felman suggests, “gender myths [and expectations] create internal conflicts that exacerbate trauma” (195). It is not our intention to perpetuate sexist ideas about what is masculine and what is feminine, but if feminism is, ultimately, about breaking down the barriers and stereotypes applied to the different genders, it is only fair that

¹² Cole suggests that “unknown warrior” memorials proliferating in the 20th c. could be analyzed as a locus of collective mourning. (478)

we analyze the possibility of trauma in men through such ‘masculine’ activities as wars and try to find possible cures in tactics and attitudes usually associated with the feminine.

The über-male notion of the soldier as a silent, enduring, unbreakable self makes it unfeasible to integrate, to overcome possible trauma. The deployment of gender-integrated troops in the late 80s¹³ was accompanied by a rise in feminist scholarship in the analysis of women’s writing about the experience war (Sherry 85). While in the last decades it has been acknowledged that direct encounter with the horrors of war and combat produces a series of problems of integration of the experience that might manifest themselves (or rather, *not* manifest) or be only glimpsed at in traumatic ways, and that simplistic views of masculine stoicism and feminine nurturing and sentimentalism (reflected in our analysis of the opposing categories of ‘war trauma’ and ‘nursing trauma’) do not longer function, we are also surprised by images of women soldiers who adopt masculinising attitudes which seek to humiliate the others through the sheer sadistic display of violence, force and domination (the pictures of private Lynndie England in Abu Ghraib during the occupation of Iraq immediately come to mind).

As Gottlieb asserts, feminism may be equal to

[a]n ethic of care, compassion, and emotional inter-identification [which] is . . . a desperate cry *for* the recognition of women; and *against* a masculine world which wields impersonal categories in one hand while it ravages women with the other. Feminist ethics celebrates what masculinity has consigned to women and (therefore) devalued. It posits as a strength what men have tried to kill in themselves while they exploit it in women: a sense of emotional

¹³ According to Richard Rainer, while women made up only 2 percent of the armed services in 1972, by 1997 they made up 14 percent of the army (“The Warrior Besieged.” *New York Times Magazine* 22 Jun. 1997: 27.

connectedness. Feminist ethics is thus a post-traumatic ethics, an imperative exclamation against the hypocrisy and violence of masculinity (240).

This post-traumatic ethics related to feminism provides a safe environment for victims to reveal their stories and to socially come to terms with the experience, by unveiling their secret injuries and upheavals. Social acceptance comes through the sense of emotional connectedness that Gottlieb proposes, for, as Vickroy concludes in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Literature*, "survival and healing depend on whether a society provides supports, meaningful modes of action, and rituals to provide structures for behaviors and emotions" (Vickroy 223). For Barker, feminism is not only concerned with women, but rather it is "about the way in which gender stereotypes distort the personal development of both sexes and make people less creative and happy than they otherwise might be" (245). Feminist ethics, as the provider of that emotional connectedness, holds the power to be an imperative exclamation against trauma and its secrecy and for the development, beyond stale notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', of attitudes and mind-sets that may preclude it.

Works cited

- Acton, Carol. "Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women's War Writing." *College Literature* 31.2 (2004): 53-79.
- Barker, Pat. "Going Home Again: An Interview with Pat Barker." *Literary Review* 34.2 (1991): 235-45.
- Berg, Allison. "The Great War and the War at Home: Gender Battles in *Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished*." *Women's Studies* 22.4 (1993): 441-52.
- Caputo, Philip. *A Rumor of War*. Arrow Books: London, 1978.
- Carson, Sharon. "Pat Barker." *British Writers Supplement IV*. Ed. George Stade and Carol Howard. New York: Scribner's, 1997. 45-63.
- Cole, Sarah. "Modernism, Male Intimacy and the Great War." *ELH* 68 (2001): 469-500.
- Conover, Pamela Johnston and Virginia Sapiro. "Gender, Feminist Consciousness, and War." *American Journal of Political Science* 37.4 (1993): 1079-1099.
- Cooke, Miriam and Angela Woollacott, eds. *Gendering Talk*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Danieli, Yael, ed. *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*. New York: Plenum Press, 1996.
- Davoine, Françoise and Jean-Maz Gaudillière. *History beyond Trauma*. Pittsfield, NH: Other Press, 2004.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Godfroy, Léonie. *Souvenirs d'ambulance et de captivité*. Paris: L'éclair, 1917.
- Gottlieb, Roger S. "Ethics and Trauma: Levinas, Feminism, and Deep Ecology." *Cross Currents* 44.2 (1994): 222-240.
- Heinemann, Larry. *Paco's Story: A Novel*. New York: Vintage, 1986.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic, 1992.

- Higonnet, Margaret R. "Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I." *Modernism/modernity* 9.1 (2002): 91-107.
- Higonnet, Margaret R., Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds. *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Joseph, Tiffany. "Non-Combatant's Shell Shock": Trauma and Gender in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*." *Nwsa Journal* 15.3 (2003): 64-81.
- Kirk, Geoffrey S., John Earle Raven and M. Schofield. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Langer, Lawrence. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Lawn, Jennifer. "Trauma and Recovery in Janet Frame's Fiction." Diss. U. of British Columbia, 1997.
- Laub, Dori and Nanette C. Auerhahn. "Knowing and Not Knowing Massive Psychic Trauma: Forms of Traumatic Memory." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 74:2 (1993): 287-203.
- Kimble, James J. "Feminine Style and the Rehumanization of the Enemy: Peacemaking Discourse in Ladies Home Journalism 1945-1946." *Women and Language* 27.2 (2004): 65-70.
- MacCurdy, Marian Mesrobian. "Truth, Trauma, and Justice in Gillian Slovo's *Every Secret Thing*." *Literature and Medicine* 19.1 (2000): 115-132.
- Micale, Mark S. *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- O'Brien, Sharon. "Combat Envy and Survivor Guilt: Willa Cather's 'Manly Battle Yarn'." *Arms and the Woman: Gender and Literary Representation*. Eds. H. M. Cooper, A. A. Munich and S. Merrill Squier. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 186-190.
- O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. Boston: Houghton, 1990.

- Presner, Todd Samuel. Rev. of *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930*, by Paul Lerner. *Modernism/modernity* 11.4 (2004): 830-832.
- Ragland, Ellie. "The Physical Nature of Trauma: Freud's Dora, the Young Homosexual Woman, and the *Fort! Da!* Paradigm." *Topologies of Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Memory*. Ed. Linda Belau and Petar Ramadanovich. New York: Other Press, 2002.
- Ramazani, Vaheed K. "The Mother of All Things: War, Reason, and the Gendering of Pain." *Cultural Critique* 54 (2003): 26-66.
- Saas, Louis A. *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.
- "secrecy, n." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford UP. 10 Sep. 2007 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/>>.
- Sherry, Vincent. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Cambridge: CUP, 2005.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady*. New York: Random House, 1985.
- Smith, Winnie. *American Daughter Gone to War: On the Front Lines with an Army Nurse in Vietnam*. New York: Morrow, 1992.
- Symonds, Mark. "The 'Second Injury' to Victims." *Evaluation and Change* 4 (1980): 36-38.
- Van Devanter, Lynda. *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam*. New York: Warner, 1984.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel and Onno Van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past: the Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." *American Imago* 48.4 (1991): 425-54.
- Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002.