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RESEARCH

"But Meanwhile the Dead Poison Us and Those Who Come after Us": The Presence of Ghosts in Veterans' Writing and Art and the Implications for Medical Professionals

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This article reviews the depiction of the ghost in veterans' writing (and some art) from World War I to the present. The author demonstrates that the depiction of various forms of the ghost is a prevalent image in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. The author further contends that if the therapist/clinician treating PTSD is aware of the forms of the ghost his/her treatment protocols will be enhanced. The author believes that it is essential that psychological/psychiatric approaches to treating PTSD be complemented by reference to literature, visual art, and other creative forms.

Keywords: literature; art; PTSD

There is a multiplicity of themes, styles, and media in the writing and art of war veterans. One of the prevailing themes seen in veterans' literary and artistic expression throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, from World War I to the present, is the continuing impact of the past on the present, expressed by the presence of ghosts. The ghosts appear in many forms, and represent sights, sounds, and smells of war, the dead, and even the dissociated self.

James Webb (2014) reflects on a photograph he took when he returned to Vietnam in 2004. As he reminisces Webb sees not just the terrain but also "Marines who might be trapped …sniper nests and points of attack" (p. 279). This intimate knowledge of war, with the attendant unrelenting memories, separate the veteran from the civilian: "And here is where I and my fellow combat veterans stand on one side of a great impassable divide, with the rest of the world on the other" (Webb, 2014, p. 279).

This idea of the gulf between veteran and non-veteran is expressed by Paul Baumer, protagonist of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). Home on leave, Paul, echoing Krebs in Hemingway's "Soldiers Home," says "But a sense of strangeness will not leave me, I cannot feel at home amongst these things [mother, sister]. There is a distance, a veil between us" (p. 117).

More in our era, Thomas J. Brennan (2017) tells of his experience when he returns home after "the simplicity of a deployment" to Afghanistan, where there were "No bills. No grocery shopping" (p. 136). His alienation from his wife and daughter and from "first-world bullshit" is pronounced, leading to disorientation, a marriage on the verge of collapse, and a suicide attempt. He writes "I don't feel like I should be here. I wonder whether it's better to leave, to be anywhere but here…. Afghanistan seems more familiar than North Carolina" (p. 137). He could not handle the "first-world bullshit" and prefers the "simplicity" of war. Eric Leed's (1976) comment about World War I veterans applies equally well to Brennan: "The return to the home was often like the return to a strange land, while return to the front could be even a relief" (p. 110). This reversal of the usual structure, that the ghosts of war follow the veteran home, indicates that "home" can become the ghostly world and liminal space while "war" is the place where clarity and meaning are found.

The civilian might be able to empathize with military experience, but the emotional and psychological dimensions, the *lived* experience, is on Webb's (2014) side of the "impassable divide" (p. 279). I contend that in addition to the interpersonal divide noted by Webb and others, there is another, more significant divide, the intrapersonal. There is a lineage of this divide, recognizable in the artistic products of the writers and artists of the major twentieth-century wars, a lineage of ghosts that continues into the writing and art coming out of the current wars. The ghosts represent a disruption to psychic space, an unwanted memory or admonition from the past, or a lost community, and are portrayed in

various ways. They could be a comrade, a foe, the inability to readjust to home, the sensory experience of war, or the split self. The writer could commune with ghosts or be overtaken by them. Through the ghost the writer and artist can foretell their own death, or see in the living their future deaths, or speak to the living from death. In most cases the ghost represents the embodiment of the disturbed psyche. As the narrator of Richard Aldington's (2013) novel *Death of a Hero* writes: "But meanwhile the dead poison us and those who come after us" (p. 24).

Whatever forms the ghost takes in literary and artistic depictions, literal or symbolic, it is one manifestation of what Nancy Sherman (2015a) terms "the moral injury." She defines moral injury as "the hurt that comes from a shattering of your moral identity" (n.p.). Moral injury and unresolved combat trauma project from the psyche of the veteran as ghosts haunting their consciousness, resulting in dissociation from the self. She notes (2015b) that "Moral wounds demand moral healing… . It is something we all need to understand as part of the reentry of the largest number of service members into society since Vietnam" (p. 10). I would suggest that writing and the arts are instrumental in the healing process by offering ways to come to terms with the ghost.

Aldington's 1919 poem (1986) "Concert" evokes the theme of the living haunted by the dead. The poem concerns the inability of the poet to have a sexual response to a woman. He is not sure what has happened to him. While watching a parade of women "on a paltry stage" he imagines them naked but his eyes are "indifferent" (p. 152). He asks of himself: "Am I dead? Withered? Grown old?" (p. 152) His response to living, breathing flesh is nullified or negated by the ghosts of war. He writes that instead of seeing and responding to "women's living bodies" he sees "dead men" and asks us—virtually begs us—for understanding that the ghosts "With sullen, dark red gashes/Luminous in a foul trench …" (p. 152) have taken over his mind and emotions. Similarly, in his short poem "Reserve," also 1919, the poet is in bed with a lover, who desires him. Although he is "thrilled" by her "flesh," he pretends that he is asleep because he cannot get the image of his dead comrades out of his mind: "I think of how the dead, my dead, once lay" (p. 152). The war has destroyed his ability to feel normal human desire. The visions of the dead foreclose any intimacy or human contact. Aldington (1986) expresses in poetic form what Leed (1979) points out regarding Ferenczi and Lissman's observations, who saw the "sexual impotence or strongly retarded sexual desires of his [Frenczi'] patients… . Lissman noted the same phenomenon. The war … produced widespread impotence even in normal soldiers" (pp. 183–184).

Graves (1957) echoes this motif in his 1929 *Goodbye to All That*. He recounts a dinner he and some comrades had to celebrate their safe return from combat. He writes

> At Bethune, I saw the ghost of a man named Private Challoner, who had been at Lancaster with me, and again at 'F' Company at Wrexham. … Private Challoner looked in at the window, saluted, and passed on… . I jumped up, looked out of the window, and saw nothing except a fag-end smoking on the pavement. Challoner had been killed at Festubert in May. (p. 102)

Later in the book Graves, presaging O'Brien (1990), Marlantes (2011), and Webb (2014), writes

> Shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight, even though Nancy shared it with me; strangers in daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been killed… . I would smell the stench of the knacker's yard just outside the town. (2014, pp. 235, 239)

Graves is plagued by hallucinations, paracusia, and cacosmia that he says took him nearly a decade to purge.

In perhaps the best-known poem of World War I, "Dulce et Decorum Est," Wilfred Owen's (1986) 1917 work describes the effects of a gas attack. All but one of his comrades get their "clumsy helmets" on in time (p. 141). Through the green glass of his mask he watches as the man suffers from the gas. The poet cannot escape this ghost, which haunts him: "In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,/He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning" (p. 141). Owen cannot control his "smothering dreams," in which he relives the experience of his comrade's "white eyes writhing" and hears "the blood/Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs" (p. 141).

Like the poets of the earlier war, World War II veterans also felt the presence of death and the ghosts of the past, often appearing as sensory reactions. In "The Pit," in *The Pit and Other Poems*, Lucien Stryk (1969) writes of his war experience: "Twenty years, and I still remember/The sun-blown stench, … The smell kept leaking back …" (p. 62). He and two other soldiers, "the youngest in the crew," were given the job of burying the rotting dead whose fetor was permeating the air even from two hundred yards away (p. 63). Dodging snipers in the trees the three reach the bodies, successfully bury them in a pit with other dead, and make it back to camp. "Then for days/We had to helmet bathe downwind" (pp. 62–63). The smell has stayed in Stryk's memory.

In Thomas McGrath's 1955 "Remembering That Island" (1980) ghosts appear to him in "repeated dreams" ten years after his service ends. The dreams take on the reality of nightmares. He can feel the wind, hear the pounding surf and sounds of battle, all the sensations of combat. As his nightmare continues, he waits for "the remembered faces" of his comrades coming off a troop transport, but he doesn't see his own face, "mine not among them to make the nightmare safe" (p. 99). Is he hoping that the war never happened for him? Somehow if his face is not there he would be safe from the war and the memories. However, "in the seashore mud" he finally sees the drained and weary faces of his buddies, "and mine is among them" (p. 99). The dream "is as real as war" (p. 99). As the poem ends he sees all of the war as if a panorama, "Once more with bodies,/landings

on all beaches,/The bodies of dead and living gone back to appointed places,/A ten year old resurrection, …" (p. 100). The poem ends on a cynical note as he is trapped in the inescapable visions of death, while the "corrupt/Senators mine our lives for another war" (pp. 99–100).

The presence of the ghost continues in the writing and art of the Vietnam War. Tim O'Brien (1990) discusses an incident about killing an enemy soldier with a hand grenade; he can't stop staring at the body, which leads to a detailed description of its condition and O'Brien's speculation about the corpse's post-war life. Twenty-plus years after the war O'Brien writes "but now and then, when I'm reading a newspaper or just sitting alone in a room, I'll look up and see the young man step out of the morning fog" (p. 128). Similarly, Karl Marlantes (2011) writes about an incident in Vietnam where he shot at and *possibly* kills a young enemy soldier. However, like O'Brien, he is haunted by the ghost:

> That kid's dark eyes would stare at me in my mind's eye at the oddest times. I'd be driving at night and his face would appear on the windscreen. I'd be talking at work and that face with its angry snarl would suddenly overwhelm me and I'd fight to stay with the person I was talking with. (Marlantes, 2011, p. 25)

Marlantes refers to this, and the killing, as a psychological "split" that took him decades to understand.

The Wall is a physical monument to America's Vietnam War dead, but also is a literal reflection of the presence of ghosts and a symbol with various meanings. In "Facing It," by Yousef Komunyakaa (1988), the poet visits the Wall and as he reads the names he is caught between two worlds: "My black face fades,/hiding inside the black granite… . I'm stone. I'm flesh./… I turn/this way—the stone lets me go./I turn that way—I'm inside/the Vietnam Veterans Memorial …" (p. 63). He realizes that it is a trick of light and his angle of vision which cause the reflection but imaginatively he becomes a part of the wall, "half-expecting to find/my own [name] in letters like smoke," one of the ghosts (p. 63). He sees the name of a dead comrade and relives "the booby trap's white flash" (p. 63). The Wall is a mirror that reflects his physical body while also making him a "window." He sees another veteran whose reflection overlaps his, "his pale eyes/look through mine. I'm a window./He's lost his right arm/inside the stone" (p. 63). The poem ends with the poet seeing another reflection, which he thinks at first is a woman "trying to erase names:/No, she's brushing a boy's hair" (p. 63). The names cannot be erased. For Komunyakaa, the Wall symbolizes a world where death is permanent but for the living represents a world of confusion and anxiety and leads to such questions as: am I dead? am I alive? am I stone? am I flesh? *The self is the ghost.*

Stephen Ham, who served in Vietnam in combat intelligence and the 101st Airborne, has a number of paintings which reflect the ghosts of war. His *Body Bag* (n.d.) series includes "BBag Group (1)," "HoHo Body Bags," and "BBag Flag." In the latter work the stars in the American flag have been replaced by body bags. The presence of the dead also informs his *Dead Vet* series (n.d.), about which he writes:

> My Dead Vet cards are different from my paintings; they are greeting cards or letters from the dead: I'm a medium for the dead and I'm processing their pain. In Dante, the gate to heaven is found by plunging into the depths of hell. His kind of art puts us in touch with something deep within, something genuinely human; there the community is created, isolation is broken. (n.p.)

Although the focus is on death, his intent is to bring the dead home. The community of veterans includes not just the living.

The ghosts portrayed in the writing and artwork of veterans are not just referencing war experiences or dead comrades but also represent the internalized ghosts of anger, fear, guilt, and remorse, which often stay buried. At times these two intersect in the same work. One function of the writing and art is to bring forth the ghosts as a way of coming to terms with the deaths of others and the consequences of moral injuries. Maximilian Uriarte's (2016) *The White Donkey* uses the graphic novel form to tell the story of Abe, who while deployed to Iraq feels responsible for the death of his best friend, Garcia. After this incident Abe begins to spiral into anger and depression, rejecting God for not saving Garcia. While home on leave Abe descends further, attempting to silence the ghosts through alcohol. His identity shattered, he stares into a mirror and imagines seeing "hero," "veteran," "murderer," warrior," "killer," and "lost" written on his face (n.p). As the novel ends Abe, armed with a pistol with which to commit suicide, finds Garcia's grave. He sits down in front of it and says "… I think I finally figured out what I was looking for …/… It was you" (n.p.). Abe has to somehow come to terms with the ghost of Garcia. Will his resolution be life or death?

Matt Hefti's story "We Put a Man in a Tree" (2017) opens with the narrator stating, "We are all ghosts" and depicts a malevolent form of the ghost (p. 259). The omniscient narrator is one of three ghosts who inhabit the mind of the protagonist, JJ, a four-tour Army veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan who has not had a positive return to civilian life. He is disillusioned about his military service and becomes estranged from his family. The ghosts in his mind run parallel to reality, ask him questions, give him instructions, and urge him to action. As the story closes JJ runs into the woods and climbs a tree, pursued by the ghosts. As he is apparently about to hang himself, the narrator says "This is the moment where we live. This moment is where we follow, eat, and destroy. This is the moment where we feed ourselves, we ghosts" (p. 273).

Brian Castner's *All the Ways We Kill and Die* (2016) chronicles his search for The Engineer, a suspected IED mastermind. Castner is seeking resolution in a world where there may never be a final resolution or explanation or answers. At the conclusion of the book he is back home and has apparently made a partial and tentative "deal" with his ghosts:

> The ghosts in the wood behind my home are not of the wood, they are of me, and I am the one who takes them there… . I walk my path and show the grapevines to ghosts, because my friends are at war thousands of miles away or dead already because of it or bound in wheelchairs and propped on unsteady metal poles… . if the ghosts are in my woods, then they are no longer shut tight with us in our home … For then I heard my Jessie calling to me, calling me to come home. So I turned back and retraced my steps and some of my ghosts followed me but some carried on alone. (pp. 306–08)

The protagonist of Helen Zenna Smith's 1930 (1989) *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* is a twenty-one-year-old ambulance driver in World War I France. She witnesses first-hand the horrors of war and wonders if she will ever be able to return to a "normal" life: "Home, home … and I do not care. I do not care. I am flat. Old… .Emotion-dry. The war has drained me dry of feeling. Something has gone from me that will never return" (p. 169). She is most worried about the ghosts:

> For I fear these maimed men of my imaginings as I never fear the maimed men I drive from the hospital trains to the camps. The men in the ambulances scream, but this ghostly procession is ghostly quiet. I fear them, these silent men, for I am afraid they will stay with me all my life, shutting out beauty till the day I die. (p. 163)

It is clear that one of the dominant themes in the writing and art coming out of twentieth-century wars and into the twenty-first is that of the presence of the ghosts of the dead and the diverse meanings and embodiments of this image. The ghost can be viewed as a *doppelganger* that is the veteran's unwanted companion. The implication for the professional treating a veteran is that understanding the forms of the ghost can be a way of making a diagnosis more specific than simply (and too broadly) "PTSD." Not all responses to war and combat are similar. Are there hallucinations? Memory disturbance? Anger? Problematic relationships? Alcohol/drug abuse? Hypersensitivity to sound or smells? Guilt? If the *doppelganger*, the ghost, can be acknowledged, it can provide clues for effective treatment. Further, as an adjunct to an exploration for the nature of the ghost, the veteran may (perhaps should) participate in creating some form of art that reveals his/her ideations. For example, masks have been successfully used in the healing (and revealing) process. The masks become a manifestation of the veterans' psychic terrain and warrant inquiry, and become a way to objectify the experience, similar to T.S. Eliot's idea of the objective correlative, bringing the tormenting memory and feelings out of the mind, into "the public." In her work with veterans, art therapist Melissa Walker (2016) uses masks, "to explore parts of themselves, their experiences or their emotions about their injuries or treatment … That's when you know they have something important to say, and they're also learning about themselves through the process" (n.p.). Further, communication with the ghost may offer a treatment option, as the ghost itself can suggest the reasons for its appearance. For example, that the ghost could be a more benevolent presence is seen in Stephanie McBain's short film *Embedded* (2015). Drake, the main character, has returned from "the sand box" (presumably Iraq) but is plagued by flashbacks of his war experiences and turns to drinking excessively, which leads to erosion of the relationship with his wife. Drake's Army buddy, Thomas, appears one day on Drake's doorstep and they spend some time together. Thomas recognizes Drake's downward spiral and urges him to get help. As the film ends Drake looks out of the window of his counselor's office and watches Thomas as he disappears into a wall. It is at this point we see the bullet wounds in Thomas's back and faintly hear, in an auditory flashback, Drake pleading with Thomas not to die. About the conclusion of the film McBain (2019) told me "It was important for the figure of Thomas to part ways with Drake when he gets help because it's a moment where Thomas is almost giving Drake permission to go on with life. To move forward without living in the cage he created around the pain of Thomas's death" (McBain, personal communication, September 25, 2019). McBain offers a cinematic expression of Ochberg's (2019) contention that "Post-Traumatic Stress Injury [his preferred term] therapy … is about making the all-too-conscious memories into tolerable, manageable memory that can be accepted, carried, shared, and respected" (Ochberg, personal communication September 22, 2019). The ghost can be instrumental in establishing "tolerable, manageable" memories.

Karl Marlantes' (2019) process of developing "tolerable, manageable" memories is by transforming his ghosts into ancestors. The ancestor becomes part of one's life experience which he has to "own" (Marlantes, personal communication, November 13, 2019). He believes that in his case, writing (but also music and art) brings the ghosts outside of the self. The individual can then "step back" so that the ghosts no longer haunt the mind. For Marlantes, writing helps him understand his war experience and integrates him with a community of readers. Similarly, the musician or visual artist can also create community through their work.

On a broader, "global" level than Marlantes' process of personal integration, an extensive 2018 report, *The Integration of the Humanities and Arts with Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in Higher Education: Branches of the Same Tree* (Skorton and Bear, 2018), discusses at length the process of integrating the sciences and the humanities. For our purposes I will focus on their findings regarding the integration into medical school curricula and the practice of medicine, with special attention to how literature and the arts can be utilized in the treatment of PTSD. Overall, integrative education and practice increases empathy toward and understanding of the patient, allows for ambiguity and a non-formulaic approach to treatment, and improves communication. Citing Naghshineh and Wachtler the authors state (p. 155):

> The goals of a medical humanities curriculum are to (1) ingrain aspects of professionalism, empathy, and altruism; (2) enhance clinical communication and observation skills; (3) increase interprofessionalism and collaboration; and (4) decrease burnout and compassion fatigue. The curriculum, which can include literature, poetry, narrative, theatre, or visual arts as part of a medical education (Naghshineh et al., 2008), can be used as a way to help medical students develop their diagnostic skills or as a way to create more humanistic physicians. (Wachtler et al., 2006)

There are numerous examples in the literature of various integrative techniques that are used in medical training. In small-group sessions students analyze poems, stories, and visual arts with the intent of honing analytical skills and instilling an "artistic sensibility" to their future practices. One recent study illustrates this. Kirkland and Craig (2018) discuss a mandatory component of their first-year course for surgery interns. In twice-monthly seminars they read poems or excerpts from fiction and occasionally view photographs and paintings:

> We used open-ended questions to nurture their close readings of plot, form, language, and imagery through group conversation and writing exercises. Our goal was to take them far from their conventional training in operating rooms and hospital wards into a space where they could grow their proficiency in perspective-taking and build their tolerance for ambiguity, skills overlooked in many medical school and residency curricula. (p. 1532)

In this study Kirkland and Craig (2018) had students respond to a 1944 painting by Bernard Perlin of an amputation of a soldier's leg in World War II. The painting depicts the patient on a makeshift operating table with the surgeon cutting halfway through the thigh. The anesthetist is unseen. Three others assist in the operation. However, they are looking away from the gruesome scene, seemingly unable to bear the sight. Using the painting as a springboard Kirkland and Craig pose a question: "Write about a time you looked away" (p. 1533). The students' responses were then discussed. The painting was used with different groups—students, nurses, practicing surgeons—and the responses varied. This led to a revision of the question: "Write about a time you did not look away" (p. 1534). The results revealed the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences of the participants and allowed each participant to gain a better understanding of their colleagues, thus fostering communication. Kirkland and Craig conclude:

> The methods of narrative medicine offer unique ways not only to understand and accept ourselves and others, but also to *notice* what we notice. Recognizing the presence of different and even conflicting gazes can enlarge, rather than diminish, our capacity to provide compassionate care. (p. 1534)

Kirkland and Craig's ekphrastic method can be adapted to help recognize one's own ghosts and perhaps more importantly to understand and *notice* others' ghosts in a therapeutic setting. Rita Charon (2001) noted the positive benefits of narrative medicine nearly twenty years ago when she wrote:

> A scientifically competent medicine alone cannot help a patient grapple with the loss of health or find meaning in suffering. Along with scientific ability, physicians need the ability to listen to the narratives of the patient, grasp and honor their meanings, and be moved to act on the patient's behalf. This is narrative competence, that is, the competence that human beings use to absorb, interpret, and respond to stories. (p. 1)

In sum, Skorton and Bear (2018) state:

> Narrative medicine creates a platform where the voices of patients and health care providers can be heard and valued in a way that produces a more humane way to practice medicine. Narrative medicine views patient histories as stories and analyzes them as one might unpack a novel's themes and plot strands. (p. 156)

At a minimum, a more than passing familiarity with the literary and artistic expressions of veterans will allow the clinician to be attuned to the "themes and plot strands" that may emerge in treatment. Ochberg (2020) told me

> The historic tools involve art and poetry much more than psychiatry. The artists put into some form an experience so that others can see it and resonate with it. They do not do this in a dry, academic way. Sometimes the experience that's being transmitted from the veteran to the civilian who needs to know is shocking. And it's meant to shock. The soldier who has been so deeply aggrieved by the death of his friend in arms, that soldier needs to find a way of having somebody else appreciate and understand it. (Ochberg, personal communication, February 22, 2020)

Dr. Rafael Campo (2017), in the context of physical medicine, put it this way:

> I find that every clinical encounter I have with a patient is really like a poem, in that in order for me to understand the way my patients describe their symptoms, I have to be attentive to issues of language, such as metaphor. Listening to their hearts and breathing through my stethoscope is much like hearing the rhythms expressed in poetry. (n.p.)

His sensibility can easily be translated to the psychological realm, where the attentive clinician listens for the client's emotional rhythms. The emotional rhythms can be discerned through language or through artistic forms.

The ghost can act as a nexus between narrative medicine, various writing and art therapies, and the treatment of PTSD. Narrative medicine can be utilized to focus the clinicians' attention on the "story of the ghost." If we listen to the ghost we can be afforded a pathway into the veteran's injury and hopefully find a pathway out. Modifying Kirkland and Craig's (2018) approach with medical students, the clinician asks the veteran client (or clients in a group setting) to respond to writing and/or artwork from various wars depicting ghosts. The participants discuss what they see in the works. In discussion their own ghosts might emerge, and, if so, participants are asked to write about (or create, in an art therapy setting) them. The writing or artwork could be "factual" or "expressive," and become the starting point for further treatment of PTSD. The goal is to help the client create "tolerable, manageable" memories by coming to terms with the ghost, in the ways that Ochberg (2020), Marlantes (2019), and Castner (2016) suggest. There is no need for deep literary analysis on the level of a Harold Bloom.

Rather, the poems or stories are pivotal moments that open up dialogue and reveal emotional rhythms. The concept of "narrative medicine" includes not only written work but also films and public "telling" of stories. Each of these methods point to the same end: mitigation of PTSD symptoms. The Patton Veterans Project (https://pattonveteransproject.org/), started by Benjamin Patton in 2011, sponsors workshops for veterans to collaborate in the film-making process. In each four-day workshop veterans work with professional filmmakers and editors to bring their films from initial concept to actual filming to post-production to distribution. Some 300 films have been produced, with running times from less than two to ten minutes. The films range over a variety of themes, from veteran homelessness ("Camouflage"), to war's effect on families ("The Uncounted," "His Mood Swings"), to escaping from the clutches of drugs ("Auxilium") to the military-civilian divide ("Major General Zation") to the presence of the ghost ("Final Roll Call"). In this film the main character is trapped in an elevator and when he presses a button for a floor the doors open to reveal scenes from his military past, including his own death and his "final roll call." About the use of film in a therapeutic setting generally, and the Patton Veterans Project in particular, Tuval-Mashiach et al. (2018) state that film and video allow veterans,

> on subsequent occasions to reflect on the traumatic memory in a desensitized manner. Furthermore, the film may become a tool for fostering communication with others about difficult experiences. Given that veterans' avoidance symptoms and difficulties in communicating with significant others about their military service constitutes one of the major obstacles to seeking therapy, the incorporation of a video-based intervention might very well serve as an engagement tool and as a first step in the veterans' journey to healing. (n.p.)

Another form of narrative that brings forth stories is The Telling Project (https://thetellingproject.org/). Begun in 2008 in Eugene, Oregon, the project develops original performances by veterans and family members that are enacted on stage in civilian communities. The performances put a "human face" on veterans and allow civilians to become engaged with veterans and their stories. In a way the performances create a collaboration between the veteran and the civilian community and foreground the human element. The Telling Project reflects what Frank Ochberg told me about his therapeutic approach:

> I place the emphasis on the way I create a collaboration with the trauma survivor, traveling alongside one another, walking back to the scene together, re-experiencing it together, encouraging a sense of shared humanity during that walk. When I ask a patient who feels better why they feel better they say, 'Because you get it.' But my 'getting it' isn't enough. It is a necessary start. After I get it, they need to strengthen their sense of self so that they can carry their burden consciously. (Ocberg, personal communications, September 22, 2019 and February 22, 2020)

Acknowledging that the ghost is a representation of trauma aids in collaboration because the ghost can provide a "voice" that can be shared. Major Jeff Hall (ret.) (2020) says about his woodcarving *Memories Too Painful to Withstand the Light of Day*, "Making art without a doubt has worked better for me than any other medication, therapy, or activity in helping me find myself again. I can express nightmares in my art and no one is terrified of me. Nobody judges me for feeling weak or depressed" (n.p.). In this work a twisted, anguished face is carved within a log, which has a hinged door, connoting the inner fears lurking in the artist (the motif is similar to the hinged masks done under the auspices of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence). As King (2020) notes:

> Artistic symbolic expression offers the potential to make unexpected connections and discover new insights. This is essentially an isomorphic principle; through the process of making artwork and discussing the art in the context of the therapeutic relationship, we create a different way of seeing ourselves. What we make on the outside has similar properties as to what is happening on the inside—it just looks different. (n.p.)

Artists like Hall, and the hundreds of other veteran artists in all media, use their chosen form, or forms, to make visible

what has been invisible and therefore offer both an instantiation of their trauma and an approach to treatment. As Rafael Campo (2018) writes: "No wonder I have come to believe in the power of the imagination if not to cure, then to heal" (p. 4).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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