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The present of the past:

representation of war, testimony and ideology in 20th and 21st century war orphan narratives

Belo Horizonte

Faculdade de Letras – FALE

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For all the war orphans in the world. Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan. Mozambique, Algeria, Rwanda. Vietnam, Iran, Korea. Germany, Egypt, France, Poland. USA, Canada, Australia. Planet Earth. May your voices be heard, may your pain never be forgotten.

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Mom, for everything.

Abstract:

The studies of war literature have a fairly recent development, with most of the contributions in the field being published after the 1990s. Partly due to this recent development, these studies have so far focused centrally on the narratives written by and about war veterans and their experiences. This thesis seeks to investigate another kind of war literature, which has been so far overlooked by scholars: the war orphan narratives. It is the goal of this research to demonstrate that the narratives created by and about war orphans consist of a specific category or sub-category within war narratives in general, and that they display distinct characteristics. In order to provide evidence for this claim, this thesis analyzes the corpus considering three "horizons of reading": the aesthetic, the psychological, and the ideological. For this investigation, the research relies on current studies of war literature, the investigations of testimonial literatures, and the Marxist theory of ideology to offer a broad exposition of the distinctive elements of war orphan literature. The primary corpus of the thesis contemplates three major 20th and 21st century conflicts (the Second World War, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War) and two different "kinds" of war orphans: those who lived in war zones (battlefront orphans), and those whose fathers were killed in combat abroad (homefront orphans). With these criteria in mind, the works included in the primary corpus were Evelyne Tannehill's auto-biography *Abandoned and Forgotten: An Orphan Girl's Tale of Survival During World War II*; Susan Hadler's and Ann Mix's collection of memoirs *Lost in the Victory: Reflections of American War Orphans of World War II*; Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country*; Andrea Warren's account *Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy;* Benjamin Percy's short story "Refresh, Refresh"; and Deborah Ellis's collection of interviews *Children of War.*

Resumo:

Os estudos de literatura de guerra tiveram um desenvolvimento razoavelmente recente, com a maior parte das contribuições ao campo sendo publicadas depois dos anos 1990. Em parte devido a esse desenvolvimento recente, esses estudos se concentraram centralmente, até hoje, nas narrativas escritas por e sobre veteranos de guerra e suas experiências. Esta dissertação busca investigar outro tipo de literatura de guerra, que foi até agora posto de lado por estudiosos: as narrativas de órfãos de guerra. O objetivo dessa pesquisa é evidenciar que as narrativas criadas por e sobre órfãos de guerra consistem em uma categoria ou subcategoria específica dentro do campo mais amplo das narrativas de guerra, e apresentam características distintas. Para apresentar evidências para essa afirmação, essa dissertação analisa o corpus levando em consideração três "horizontes de leitura": o estético, o psicológico e o ideológico. Para essa investigação, a pesquisa parte dos atuais estudos sobre literatura de guerra, as investigações sobre as literaturas de testemunho e a teoria marxista de ideologia para oferecer uma exposição ampla dos elementos distintivos das literaturas de órfãos de guerra. O corpus primário da dissertação contempla três grandes conflitos dos séculos XX e XXI (Segunda Guerra Mundial, Guerra do Vietnã e Guerra do Iraque) e dois "tipos" diferentes de órfãos de guerra: órfãos que viveram em zonas de conflito (órfãos do front de batalha) e órfãos cujos pais foram mortos em combate em solo estrangeiro (órfãos do front doméstico). A partir desses critérios, as obras selecionadas para o corpus primário foram a autobiografia de Evelyne Tannehill, *Abandoned and Forgotten: An Orphan Girl's Tale of Survival During World War II*; a coletânea de memórias de Susan Hadler e Ann Mix, *Lost in the Victory: Reflections of American War Orphans of World War II*; o romance de Bobbie Ann Mason, *In Country*; o relato de Andrea Warren, *Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy*; o conto de Benjamin Percy, "Refresh, Refresh"; e a coletânea de entrevistas de Deborah Ellis, *Children of War.*

Summary

Introduction

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF WAR ORPHANS

What is the glorious fruit of our land?

Its fruit is deformed children

What is the glorious fruit of our land?

Its fruit is orphaned children

(PJ Harvey, in "Our Glorious Land")

"War is hell". This motto has seen such widespread use in popular culture that its origins are now completely lost. It has been attributed to the American Civil War general William Sherman, but no proof has ever been found of him ever saying so (Keyes 240). Even though the maxim is so old that its origin cannot even be tracked, it has only reached full significance in the 20th century wars, when the technology of warfare made a quantum leap with the introduction of mass killing apparatus and strategies, such as bombing from the air, machine guns, mustard and nerve gas, napalm, computer guided missiles, drones, etc. The adoption of such technologies attributed a new sense to the concept of "total war", for it spawned a new era of armed conflict, in which previously well-established binary terms and categories such as "combatant/civilian", "wounded/whole", "enemy/friend" or "prewar/postwar" lost their force (Cole 25).

The "hell" of modern warfare, therefore, is no longer contained in space or time: it is not limited spatially to the battlefield or to the armies, for it is waged even amidst the streets of the great cities and it amasses among its casualties more civilians than combatants – such

is the case of the two world wars when civilian deaths reached an estimated toll of sixty million (Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale* xii), in battles that paid no respect to borders which divided battlefields from civilian areas, such as Stalingrad or with the Blitz in England. Nor are modern wars limited by time for the costs of these wars (both structural and human) often persist for decades and generations. As a consequence, contemporary warfare is greater not only in its horror, but also in its complexity. Its agents are multiple, no longer reduced to its military or political protagonists, such as soldiers, generals, kings or leaders. In the 20th century, civilians, wives, nurses and elders also play a vital (and terrible) role in the conflicts – even if unwillingly. The narratives constructed out of these modern conflicts – that is, the modern war stories – also reflect this multiple agency.

The "body count" of modern warfare is a futile term with which to think about these conflicts, for the numbers are so irrationally high, that they are, as Margot Norris puts it, "conceptually irrecoverable or unimaginable in their materiality" (3). To describe this widespread character of modern war, Norris refers back to the philosopher Edith Wyschogrod and to what she describes as the "death event": a "warfare phenomenon in which compressed time plays a new and powerful role in the 'systematic rational calculation' for maximizing human destruction" (3). In Wyschogrod's words: "scale is reckoned in terms of the compression of time in which destruction is delivered" (qtd. in Norris 3). This "death event" which renders useless any quantification of death based on the number of casualties is the defining (and tragic) character of modern warfare.

"*War* developed earlier than peace", wrote Karl Marx in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, "the way in which certain economic relations such as wage labour, machinery etc. develop earlier, owing to war and in the armies etc., than in the interior of bourgeois

society" (109). A rather bold statement, to which some might argue differently – but still, its central argument is valuable here: situations of war have developed more advanced economic relations and technological achievements. One might cite several recent examples of technological leaps enabled by wars, such as the invention of radar technology or cell phone communication in the Second World War. As for the economic relations Marx himself, in his essay "Bastiat and Carey" (also included in the *Grundrisse*), gives the example of wage:

> The first form in which wages make their general appearance – military pay [Sold], which arises with the decline and fall of the national armies and of citizen's militias. First, the citizens themselves are paid as soldiers. Soon after that, their place is taken by mercenaries who have ceased to be citizens. (893)

A few among several other examples of significant economic impacts of war can be cited, if we are to contemplate modern warfare: the reintroduction of women into American heavy industry or the exploitation of rubber in the Amazon forest, in the state of Acre, by the Brazilian government, in World War II, are two examples.

As well as their importance for technology and economy, armed conflicts have been responsible for creating some of the most important artistic works in human history, from Shakespeare's *Henry V* to Picasso's *Guernica*, from Tchaikovski's *Overture 1812* to the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf.* In fact, one of the founding texts of Western civilization is a war narrative: Homer's *Illiad*. But although war narratives – and war literature – can be said to be as old as literature itself, these narratives also witnessed a great shift in the 20th century: along with a new era of armed conflict, new ways of representing war had to be conveyed. Several studies have been developed analyzing 20th Century War narratives as a distinct category, such as Margot Norris *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (2000), Paul Fussel's *The Great*

War and Modern Memory and Samuel Hynes' *The Soldiers' Tale* (1997) and at least one has investigated this diachronic shift in western literature: Luiz Gustavo Vieira's *A Escrita da Guerra:* areté*,* nóstos *e* kléos *na análise de narrativas de guerra* (2013). Much has already been discussed by these authors regarding the change in the nature of conflicts, the role of technology, the introduction of mass killings, the status of the modern soldier as opposed to ancient ones, etc. The aspect to which this dissertation calls attention is the one aforementioned: the new agents of war.

In 20th and 21st century war narratives, wives, nurses, refugees, children, journalists and other non-military individuals have been given more voice than ever before, and experiences that escape those of combat, politics or diplomacy have found their place in literature. However, the studies of war literature have so far neglected – or at least overlooked – one of these voices: that of the war orphans, who have lost one or more of their parents in military conflicts and often spend the rest of their lives attempting to cope with this trauma. Usually portrayed as victims, many of these orphans went on to have their stories – and their parents' stories – told in the twentieth century through books, films, songs and other media. But even so, their narratives have not yet been investigated from a theoretical standpoint and they remain largely excluded from the canon of war literature.

This dissertation aims at showing that while war narratives written by war orphans share several common traits with other war narratives, they have some distinctive features, which might qualify them as a specific sub-category within the larger category of the literature of war. Through the analysis of a selected corpus of literary works which deal with the subject of war and orphanhood, this research attempts to develop a theoretical basis capable of describing war orphan narratives. The development of this study also has a social-

political goal: to shed light on these voices that have been so far overlooked, in order to not only bring these narratives into the developing field of war literature studies, but also to provide evidence of how the horrors of war affect these orphans.

Before beginning the argument that sustains the hypothesis of this dissertation, some important initial considerations must be introduced, concerning key categories, the corpus of the research, and its method of exposition.

Preliminary considerations: Key Categories

This dissertation relies on a few key categories that will be depended on throughout the text. In order to avoid misinterpretations and more accurately delimit the object of research, these categories must be conceptualized in advance. These key recurring categories are: *war*, *war orphans* (*battlefront* and *homefront orphans*) and *war narratives*.

The concept of *war* can be easily misconceived – and there are, in fact, controversies around its precise focus. Expressions like "the war on drugs", "war on crime", or "war against the poor" sometimes create the illusion that any kind of violent conflict can be considered a *war*. Such expressions must be understood as metaphors, which draw from the commonsensical ideas of the horrors of war reproduced by culture and media in order to call the attention to other forms of brutal and violent acts. In fact, the aforementioned widespread character of war sometimes reinforce this misguided notion. The precise concept of "war" is, naturally, subject to debate. In fact, different civilizations have defined and waged war in very different manners – as evidenced in the term "western way of war", coined by Victor Hanson to describe the essentially western view of war as having the "battle" at its center, a tradition he traces back to ancient Greece.

With that in mind, I decided to work in this thesis with Robert O'Connell's concept of war, developed in his book *Ride of the Second Horseman: The Birth and Death of War*. His framework is, naturally, limited – as any conceptualization is bound to be; it self-acknowledges its lack of concern for the "subconscious factors" of war, and its limitation in differentiating distinct categories of war – wars of conquest, maritime war, civil war, etc. (O'Connell 5). Nevertheless, his conceptualization is, at the same time, broad and precise enough to, at least, provide a basic framework of what will and will not be considered "war" in the present text. O'Connell describes war as having the following characteristics:

> There must be an element of premeditation and planning; it is not simply a random emotion-driven act. Nor is it concerned primarily with the individual or those closely related but instead focuses on societal issues, with the intent of resolving them by force, using the resources of the group. Similarly, war implies direction by some form of governmental structure, and a military organization determined at least in part by that structure. It is assumed that combatants are willing (though perhaps not enthusiastic) and able to conduct a somewhat protracted campaign aimed at a palpable economic and/or political goals, though these may be as simple as defense and survival. Participants also are presumed ready to apply lethal violence and risk injury and death in pursuit of these objectives and in accordance with the dictates of the command authority. Finally, some understanding can be attributed to the parties involved that the results of war, for good or ill, will be more lasting than momentary. (5)

Putting it simply, Vieira summarizes this paragraph as presenting five characteristics that define war: a) premeditation and planning; b) a collective origin; c) direction; d)

willingness; and e) result (26). This is is the concept of “war” that will be considered and applied during the development of this thesis.

The concept of “war orphan” employed here, contrary to the concept of war presented above, is somewhat broader than commonsense would perhaps put it. The “collective image” of a “war orphan”, as perceived by contemporary western societies, is probably a very young child, in a ravaged war zone, possibly in Africa or in the Middle-East, impoverished, wearing ragged clothes and starving. However, this is not always the case. This commonsensical notion and its imprecision is contested in the introduction to *Lost in the Victory: Reflections of American War Orphans of World War II*, one of the works that constitute the corpus of this research:

> We are American orphans of World War II. Most of us did not think of ourselves as orphans, even though we were fatherless. Like most people, we thought of war orphans as children in Europe or Asia who had lost both parents. We pictured a child in ragged clothes seated in the burnt-out rubble of a bombed building, a forlorn child wandering hungry and parentless through war-torn streets. ... Since ancient times, fatherless children have been referred to as “orphans”. In the United States, benefits paid to the fatherless children of war were given to widows and “orphans”. Yet cultural ignorance of the existence of “war orphans” in this country goes so deeply that even those of us who are orphans are surprised by this description. (Hadler xvii)

For the purposes of the present research, therefore, orphans are considered to be both children who lost both parents and those who are only “fatherless”. These “fatherless” children often are examples of the same case revealed in the excerpt above: children whose

fathers traveled overseas to fight a war on foreign territory and were killed in combat. Of course, their perspective and the way they represent war is not the same as those children who witnessed wars being waged in their own countries. This realization has demanded the addition of two sub-categories to the concept of *war orphan*: *battlefront orphans* and *homefront orphans*.

By “homefront orphans” I mean those children who did not actually experience the war first hand, for the wars their fathers were involved in were waged in foreign lands. Stories of American children whose fathers were killed in the Second World War or the Vietnam War are typical examples. I have chosen this name as an adaptation of William Tuttle's category of “homefront children”, which he uses to designate the American children whose fathers fought in the Second World War in his book *Daddy's Gone to War.*

The “battlefront orphans”, on the other hand, are those children that have witnessed war in their home countries, have seen their towns raided, their schools bombed, their relatives taken as prisoners and, of course, their parents killed – often in front of them. Orphans of occupied countries (from France to Lebanon, from Poland to Vietnam, all around the world) fall into this category.

A more precise and in-depth distinction between the two categories will be made clear during the development of the work.

The final category is perhaps the most important in defining and delimiting the field of this dissertation: “war narrative”. This is not a study of military history, social psychology or anthropology. It is not the scope of the present work to actually interview war orphans, investigate their lives or dive into the statistical data of war orphanhood in contemporary society. The object of this dissertation are the “narratives” of war orphans, the stories they tell

(or others do) about themselves, about the war and about their parents. The category of "war narratives" is important, for there are substantial differences between the personal, individual accounts expressed in memoirs, journals, novels and short stories and the official, political and historical accounts found in books of military history, political strategy and other "official" accounts. As Brosman puts it:

> War has been treated in many different modes and kinds of texts, of course, including many that would now be considered not literary at all or only marginally literary – chronicles, histories, military and other archival records, philosophical treatises. What distinguishes literary expressions of war from these, at least in the modern period, is first of all the emphasis upon the experiential dimension. Fiction, drama, and poetry concerning war tend toward recording not simply the causes and conduct of armed conflict or individual battles but the manner in which they are lived, felt, used, and transformed by participants. (85 – 86)

Following the same line of thought, Norris expands this proposition, focusing not merely on "literature" but on "art" in general. She defends that when confronted with the "official" or "scientific" descriptions of war

> … art can be seen to seize *what is left over* for its own terrain, a leftover in the form of the *human remainder*, the affective residue, the suffering that military histories imply but don't voice, the inner experience that can't be mapped, charted, counted or otherwise quantified. (21)

This *leftover*, this *human remainder* is the subject of war narratives. But why use the term "narrative", and not "literature", or "stories" - as other authors have proposed?[1] This has

to do with the scope and corpus of this research – which will be discussed in the next section. Although my primary corpus is entirely made up of narratives which can be understood as literature – fictional and non-fictional – some secondary sources avoid this category. Such is the example of the inter-media product *The Wall*, an album, a movie and a concert by British rock band Pink Floyd. It is, definitely, a "narrative", for it presents characters, settings, and a clearly defined plot. But it escapes the term "literature" because its narrative is developed through song lyrics, music and film.[2] The category of "war stories", which has been used by other scholars, is also somewhat problematic for the scope of this thesis: the term has been more generally associated with narratives which feature the "war itself", the "experience of war" in some way – be it a combat novel, or a civilian narrative of war time, or a post-war narrative regarding the trauma of combat, etc. The *homefront orphans*' narratives which will be discussed in this thesis feature no experience of war (an aspect which will be widely discussed in the following chapters); therefore, I have refrained from adopting the category "war stories" so as not to create confusion on the matter.

These key categories help delimit the scope of this research: this is an investigation of *narratives* – understood as representations of an event consisting of characters, setting and plot – written by and about *orphans* – understood as people who have lost one or both parents at an early age – of *war* – understood as a premeditated and collective conflict, with a direction, willingness and results.

Preliminary considerations: Corpus

The goals of this research are not modest. The thesis poses the challenge of developing a theoretical framework capable of describing a vast amount of artistic works that

can be contemplated in the category “war orphan narratives”. This endeavor demands a work of generalization – a process often seen with suspicious eyes in contemporary literary studies. There are two main risks of taking this path: omission and circumlocution. The first, the result of shallow readings and quick assumptions; the latter, the consequence of excessive exposition and over-analysis. The choice of corpus for this dissertation has aimed at avoiding both issues. Therefore, the corpus chosen had to be broad and plural enough in order to allow accurate generalizations, but at the same time not so large as to make the development of the research in the time allowed impossible.

In an initial assessment, the tentative primary corpus of this dissertation consisted of more than twenty books – a number which, of course, had to be narrowed down. The first criterion used for this narrowing down of the corpus was chronological. Due to the lack of works prior to the First World War, the general scope of the research was narrowed from “war orphan narratives” to “20th and 21st Century war orphan narratives”, which excluded, for example, Homer's *Odyssey* (more specifically, the *Telemachia*) from the primary corpus (more on this in the first chapter). Second, a linguistic criterion was adopted: since this dissertation is the conclusion of the Literatures in English MA program, all works not originally written in English were excluded. Finally, the works were at last selected by applying a structural method which was thought to allow a broader perspective on the matter: in the time frame researched (20th and 21st century) and among the works available, three major conflicts were selected, which represent different periods of modern warfare, and would allow both diachronic contrasts and synchronous generalizations: the Second World War, the Vietnam War and the so-called War on Terror – an umbrella term used to encompass the American military offensive in the Middle-East after 2001, which includes the Iraq War

and the occupation of Afghanistan. For each of these three conflicts, two works were chosen, one on homefront orphans and the other on battlefront orphans. This has left the primary research corpus with six works. The selection also took into consideration generic diversity: there are both fictional and non-fictional works, including a novel, a short story, a book of interviews, a collection of memoirs, a biography and an autobiography.

The final primary corpus consists of Evelyne Tannehill's auto-biography *Abandoned and Forgotten: An Orphan Girl's Tale of Survival During World War II*; Susan Hadler's and Ann Mix's collection of memoirs *Lost in the Victory: Reflections of American War Orphans of World War II*; Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country*; Andrea Warren's account *Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy;* Benjamin Percy's short story “Refresh, Refresh”; and Deborah Ellis's collection of interviews *Children of War.* The presence of both fictional and non-fictional texts, written by orphans and non-orphans does not, I believe, hinder the research: in fact, as I hope the dissertation will show, there are several elements which pervade all the texts, whether they are written by actual orphans or not, whether they present themselves as non-fiction or not.

Abandoned and Forgotten is the autobiography of Evelyne Tannehill, a German woman from countryside East Prussia, whose father, a German-American, spoke out against Hitler's regime. Orphaned at the age of nine at the end of the Second World War, she writes about her childhood during the war and the horrors she suffered at the hands of the Nazis, the Russians and the Poles. Tannehill now lives in Reno, Nevada, and wrote her book originally in English.

Tannehill's autobiography is the longest work in the primary corpus, closing in on 430 pages that read a lot like a *Bildungsroman*. The narrative is divided into four sections: “The

Germans", "The Russians", "The Poles", and "The New Germans". The book then ends with an "Epilogue". The first section of the autobiography describes Tannehill's (called "Eva", her childhood's nickname, in the book) early life in a farm in East Prussia. These first chapters are dedicated to describing her childhood plays and friends, the pastoral life her family led, and the slowly approaching tides of war. Some characters that are introduced in this section are central to the plot: Eva's grandmother, who populated the girl's dreams with fairy tales and ghost stories, her hard-working father, a man who openly opposed Hitler's regime (and is imprisoned in the first section due to that position), her loving mother, who tended for her and her four siblings, the Polish people who helped around the house and the farm (in conditions that, later it becomes clear, were close to slavery) and her cat Schurribart. Throughout the eleven chapters that constitute "The Germans", the war goes from just a rumor, to a menacing presence which takes away the young men in the village – such as Eva's brother – until it finally becomes a routine of rationing, privation and State repression, as the Soviet Red Army approaches East Prussia and the Nazi regime tightens its grip on the German population.

"The Russians", the second section of the autobiography, describes the barbaric actions taken by the Russian Army when they reached East Prussia in 1945. Eva's family has to leave their farm and live as refugees in a countryside completely torn apart by the Russian offensive. With the men of the family either exiled or imprisoned, Eva, her mother and her sisters wander around with two other families, trying to survive. The section is filled with violent scenes of rape, execution, airstrikes and looting. Eva's father is taken as prisoner and is never again seen by the girl (she later finds out he died in a prison camp). The section ends with an epidemic of typhoid fever, which takes Eva's mother's life and makes the girl an

orphan.

The following section, “The Poles”, describes Eva's situation as an orphan in an East Prussia that has been annexed by Poland. The Poles, filled with rancor and resentment of the German people, put Eva in slavery-like conditions. Through the section, she lives in a number of houses, usually working as a maid or a nanny. Most of the time she worked for the Ilowski family, who treated her worse than any other family she lived with in the whole narrative. As she enters puberty, she too becomes a victim of the sexual violence she had only witnessed before. After her long plight, the girl – with the help of some Poles – manages to return to Germany with her brother. The last section, “The New Germans”, reports her post-war adaptation and the slow reconstruction of Germany. She first lives at an orphanage, and then is reunited with her aunts, until finally arrangements are made for her and her siblings to get American passports and emigrate to the United States. The book ends with an epilogue, reporting Tannehill's trip back to Europe as an adult, in the 1990s, where she revisits the scenes from her childhood.

Lost in the Victory is a collection of memoirs, interviews and testimonials of American war orphans of the Second World War, organized by the psychotherapist Susan Johson Hadler and the founder of the American World War II Orphans Association (AWON), Ann Bennet Mix, and edited by Calvin L. Christman. The book has rather interesting accounts and a unique perspective, since the interviews were conducted in the early 1990s, when the orphans were already adults – which allowed for a glimpse at several points in their lives. The book has an ideological goal of showing how a vast number of American war orphans have remained unheard throughout the twentieth century. The collection is the result of a long process of gathering American orphans of the Second World War, helping them to

learn more about their fathers, holding memorial ceremonies and discussion groups, and other related activities. This was all made possible by the AWON, and the book not only testifies the memories of the orphans, but also the constitution of the organization itself.

In Country is a novel by the American writer Bobbie Ann Mason, which tells the story of Samantha Hughes – Sam –, a seventeen-year-old girl from the small southern town of Hopewell, who loses her father in the Vietnam War, and lives with her uncle, Emmet (a Vietnam veteran himself), due to having finished high school and not wanting to leave the town to live with her mother, Irene. Sam is in a constant struggle to understand the Vietnam War in order to connect to the memory of her father, Dwayne, who died in combat even before the girl was born. Sam spends a lot of her time with Emmet, especially watching TV. Her conversations with her uncle frequently revolve around Vietnam – what was it like, what he remembered, what he knew of her father, etc. Throughout the novel, Emmet starts showing symptoms of Agent Orange – a chemical used in Vietnam that left lasting effects in several veterans –, and Sam spends a great part of the plot trying to convince him to diagnose and treat it. When Sam's boyfriend, Lonnie, goes away for his brother's bachelor party, the girl decides to go to the Veterans' dance, where she gets more involved with Emmet's buddies and winds up developing an attraction for one of the veterans, Tom Hudson. Sam eventually has a short-lived relationship with Tom and subsequently breaks up with Lonnie. In her brief affair with the veteran, she learns that he is sexually impotent, possibly due to injury sustained in the war. After breaking up with Lonnie, Sam decides to visit her paternal grandparents, in order to learn more about her father. There, Sam is given her father's war diary, and learns a lot about his experience “in country” – Vietnam military slang for being deployed, as opposed to being “in the real world”, at home. With mixed feelings about the diary, Sam

decides to run away to a swamp near Hopewell, in order to feel how a soldier must have felt like in Vietnam. Emmet finds her, and they have a severe quarrel, in which the veteran tells her that she will never know what it felt like to be in Vietnam. After the experience, Sam decides that she wants to visit the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall in Washington. The epilogue of the novel consists of the road trip taken by the girl, her uncle, and her grandmother to visit the Memorial. The novel was eventually turned into a feature film with Bruce Willis in the role of Emmet and Emily Lloyd as Sam.

Escape from Saigon is an investigative account by journalist Andrea Warren, in which she follows the story of a Vietnamese war orphan who was raised in the United States after being airlifted from Saigon as part of “Operation Babylift”, an undertaking of the US Army that aimed at taking orphan children from South Vietnam to be adopted by families in the US. The book relies on documents and oral accounts of people in the US and in Vietnam to try to retrace the story of Matt Steiner (born “Long”), from his early childhood in a Vietnamese village with his mother, his days living with his grandmother in Saigon, his life in an orphanage and finally his adoption and upbringing by an American family. Long is the illegitimate son of a Vietnamese woman and an American man – possibly a soldier, though the boy to this day is not sure about it. With practically no memory of his father, he spends the early years of his life living with his mother and his abusive stepfather. At the age of five, the boy and his mother move to a remote village in order to escape from her husband, and there they live with Long's grandmother (whom he calls “Ba”). There, the woman tried to give Long for adoption by a rich family, but he refused to. A few months later, the mother died – possibly a suicide –, leaving Long an orphan, to be raised by his grandmother, with whom he moves back to Saigon. As the war came closer to Saigon, and the situation turns

harsher, Ba leaves Long in an orphanage, the Holt Center, in Saigon. There, he lives somewhat safely through the course of his last years in Vietnam. When the war finally hits Saigon, Long is rescued – along with other children – as a part of “Operation Babylift”, and taken to the USA, where he is adopted by the Steiners, who give him his new name: Matt. He grows up in the new country and even forgets many details of his childhood – including the language. Already as an adult, after graduating in Med School, Long travels back to Vietnam in order to recall the events of his childhood and reconnect with his long forgotten past.

“Refresh, Refresh” is a short story by American writer Benjamin Percy, present in the homonym collection, which brings the story of Josh, a teenage boy living in the small town of Tumalo, Oregon – home to a battalion of US Marines. In the outbreak of the Iraq War, most adult men in the city are sent to the conflict, leaving the whole town somewhat “orphaned”. The short story follows Josh's perception of the conflict and the role of the military in the everyday life of the town, and how their father's absence provokes different reactions in the young people of rural America. The story follows centrally Josh and his best friend, Gordon, whose fathers are in Iraq. The boys, in their late-teens, pass their time by boxing each other in order to make themselves tougher, so they can stand up to the bullies in their school, especially the jock Seth Johnson. One of their hobbies is to visit Hole in the Ground – a meteor crater in the outskirts of the town, measuring five thousand feet wide and three hundred feet deep. The cast of important characters in the short story is complete with Dave Lightener – the town's recruitment officer, an army man who, unlike most adult men in town, did not go to war, and instead stays at home and is responsible for convincing young man to enlist and for giving wives and mothers the news of their husbands' and sons' deaths. The climax of the short story is reached in the scene when Josh finds out his father has been

killed: he comes home with Gordon and finds Dave Lightener at his doorstep, about to give the boy's mother the news. Infuriated by the man's presence, Josh and Gordon beat up the officer, kidnap him and threaten to throw him into the Hole in the Ground, tied to a sled. After the violent scene, both boys head back into the town, straight into the recruiting office, where they enlist to go serve in Iraq, like their fathers. The short story has recently been adapted into a graphic novel by Danica Novgorodoff.

Children of War is the result of interviews conducted by journalist Deborah Ellis with Iraqi children refugees living in Jordan in 2007 after they were exiled during the American occupation of Iraq. In the interviews, the children tell their stories: what their life was like before the war, to what kind of terrors they have been subject to, how they escaped to Jordan, etc. They also tell what they think American children are like, and what they would say to Americans, if they could. Though not all accounts present in the book are by orphans, several of them are – and they all offer unique insights into the horrors of the Iraq War as seen from the native civilian victims of the country.

These works comprise the primary corpus of the research; i.e., the works which will be more thoroughly analyzed and confronted in order to draw a theoretical framework of war orphan narratives. The secondary corpus will consist of a few other war orphan narratives, which were excluded from the primary corpus, as well as the main theoretical works which the analysis will rely upon. Finally, the tertiary corpus will consist of theoretical and literary works that offer specific or marginal contributions to the general development of the text.

Preliminary considerations: Methodology of exposition

It is not a custom in the field of literary studies to dwell too long on discussions of

method (except for, maybe, some more theory-oriented studies). While in other fields the section on methodology is an obligatory feature of any research project, there is usually no such devotion when it comes to literary criticism. There is a very reasonable explanation for that: differently from other areas, there is not a vast array of possible methodologies in literary criticism. A critic cannot pursue field work, statistical research, group analysis, or other such methods. Our methodology, naturally, always consists on *bibliographical research*, which has to do with the methodology of *research*. I want to call attention here to another possibility: *methodology of exposition*, i.e., how information and conclusions are organized and presented throughout the text, and why. Here, I will present a short overview of the situation within which the field of war literature studies finds itself, and discuss the methodology of exposition of this dissertation, for I believe the method I have chosen might help to overcome some obstacles which our area has been facing.

A quick overview of two *Cambridge Companions* that deal with war literature (*The Cambridge Companion to War Literature* and *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*) reveals a certain rift in theoretical tendencies. Most of the articles – since they are all rather introductory, due to the nature of the compilations – do not rely heavily on theory, and focus rather on critical and comparative analyses of war narratives. But both *Companions* feature a section which attempts to provide some elements of theory: "Themes", in *War Writing* and "Approaches and Revisions", in *Literature of World War II.* In these sections, we find, for instance, texts that are more concerned with the psychological aspects of war narratives – and in doing so, wind up referring back to psychoanalysis and trauma theory. That is the case, for example, of "Life Writing and the Holocaust", by Phyllis Lassner and "Theories of Trauma", by Lyndsey Stonebridge. Some other articles, on the other hand,

seem to draw from cultural studies, new historicism, and minority studies, for they are more concerned with the social environment of production and reception of war narratives, and their political and ideological role, such as Kate McLoughlin's “War in Print Journalism” and Gill Plains' “Women Writers and the War”.

Of course there are exceptions to this “dichotomy”, and some authors indeed find common ground between a more psychoanalytic and subject-oriented analysis and a socially and historically conscious one. Kate McLoughlin herself, in another article, “War and Words”, in which she discusses the difficulties and attempts of representing war, manages to contemplate both approaches.

I believe that such a rift between a subjective or psychologically-oriented reading and a more socially or politically-oriented reading is actually a loss to war literature studies, and a gap that has to be addressed and overcome. The central goal of this work is essentially a theoretical one – as opposed to a solely critical study –, which means this dissertation intends to develop a new theoretical approach to an already existing field – the study of war literature – and not just a critical analysis of certain literary works. In order to satisfactorily offer a comprehensive analysis of the subject and to attempt to bridge the existing rift between different critical readings of war literature, the discussion of the corpus will consider three “horizons of reading”: the aesthetic, the psychological and the political or, by using the categories presented in the thesis's title, the horizon of “representation”, of “testimony” and of “ideology”.

This layered structure is inspired by a similar proposition made by Frederic Jameson in his *The Political Unconscious.* In this text, Jameson presents the idea of different “horizons of reading”, which consist of “distinct moments of the process of interpretation” which, in

turn, “governs a distinct reconstruction of its object” (1941). The exact proposition by Jameson[3] is not precisely the point here, since the horizons of reading proposed in this project are different from his, but his text serves as a starting point in inspiring the structure of my analysis of war orphan narratives in a way that manages to achieve comprehensiveness and not fall into the pit of either purely “subject-oriented” or “society-oriented” analyses.

Jameson's proposition resonates with a similar elaboration by Marx. In the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, the German philosopher presents what he calls “the method of political economy”. (100) In this long section, he discusses how tempting a “historical presentation of development” (106) is in the study of political economy, but that in fact the analysis should not follow such a chronological and historical order of categories, for it would be “unfeasible”. He suggests, rather, an approach based on the present moment of development: “Their [the economic categories'] sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development.” (107) In other words: the researcher cannot have a direct access to the past in order to unveil its relations out of thin air – the analysis must start from the *given*, the *concrete* (in the case of Marx, bourgeois society), in order to, then, deduce the more abstract and historically surpassed categories.

This line of reasoning which departs from a more concrete *given*, and out of its manifestations attempts to draw an image of more abstract categories is, in fact, the very essence of the Marxist method, more famously known as the historical dialectic materialism. The present dissertation, which I consider a work of Marxist criticism and literary theory, follows this method. By establishing three “horizons of reading”, the work departs from a

more concrete “given” – that is, the text itself and its relations to similar texts in what concerns the representation of war – expands into a more abstract analysis focused on psychological aspects of the narratives, taking a step away from the text itself by approaching the authors and subjects of the texts, and finally reaches a third horizon, focused on the ideological aspects which surround the narratives – linking them to history and the society in which they are produced and received.

The first horizon of reading, which I have called the horizon of “war representation”, corresponds to the first chapter of the dissertation. It is the one closest to the “text itself” (as far as we can use such an expression), since it focuses mostly on the narrative and aesthetic strategies used in the source texts to represent war. Since my aim is to prove that war orphan narratives constitute a category not entirely contained in the theoretical frameworks of “war literature”, the analysis of these elements of the representation of war will be necessarily comparative. I will therefore compare studies of canonical war writings and my own observations on war orphan literatures.

Having discussed the issues of war representation – the ones which are closer to the text, one might say, since they are still somewhat on the "aesthetic" level –, the thesis will proceed to its second part, in which the analysis will take a step back from the "text itself" in order to envision a broader horizon: the psychological elements in the narratives. The investigation of these elements will depart from the central psychoanalytical category of “trauma” – an essential category to war literature – and reach the issue of “testimony”. The discussion on the testimonial aspect of the corpus will be conducted based on Seligmann-Silva's distinction between the Anglo-German theoretical category of "*Zeugnis*" and the Spanish and Latin-American concept of “*testimonio*”. The author considers the two

categories to be profoundly distinct, and, in his opinion, hold a relationship of "unstranslatability of concepts" between them. This research attempts to provide evidence that they might be, in fact, fluid categories when considered under different lights, which will be discussed in order to investigate the psychological dimension of war orphan narratives. The second chapter will show how both categories have their role in these narratives, while presenting the psychological level of the narratives in the corpus.

The third and last chapter corresponds to the final horizon of reading: ideology. It consists in understanding where the narratives stand regarding the war: do they reproduce the hegemonic discourse of the conflict or do they dissent and offer an alternative version? How does the canon of war representation and its ideological stereotypes impact on the orphan's view of war? What is or might be the overall ideological significance and impact of the war orphan's narratives in contesting hegemonic and commonsensical conceptions of war and its role in the contemporary world? These questions are approached by relying on the Marxist notion of *ideology*, departing centrally from Terry Eagleton's investigation of the subject, in interaction with Hynes's concept of "myth of war".

By following this spiral path which starts with the texts themselves and progressively broadens its approach until it investigates the historical context out of which it was created, and by presenting a large primary corpus, supported by an even larger secondary corpus, this dissertation will attempt to provide a theoretical framework capable of describing at least a few general tendencies of war orphan narratives.

Chapter 1

THE REPRESENTATION OF WAR IN WAR ORPHANS' NARRATIVES

War is a massive event. It is multiply determined by a multitude of complex aspects, each of them featuring their own enormity: the number of people involved, the proliferation of death, the tactics and strategies, the diplomacy, the individual fears and motivations of the soldiers, etc. Its magnitude can very well be said to be indescribable in its totality. Seventy years after the end of the Second World War, for example, the conflict still drives a powerful market of films, books, songs, almanacs, magazines and researches that keep shedding new light on the event, in what seems to be a never-ending process of apprehending war.

The indescribable character of war is not lost in war literature. In fact, it is one of its key features. As McLoughlin (15) points out, the rhetoric of the incompatibility between "war" and "words" dates back as far as Homer's *Illiad*, the founding text of western war literature: "… it were no easy thing/(Had I the bosom of a god) to tune to life, and sing" (12.179-180). From then until now, war literature has time and time again brought up the inadequacy between language and the experience of war – with the most famous examples being, perhaps, the experimentalism of the modernist writings in the wake of the First World War. As McLoughlin mentions, this is a "classical rhetorical trope" called "adynation": "the impossibility of addressing oneself adequately to the topic" (15).

But even though writers constantly claim that war is "irrepresentable", the fact is that it is represented. The vast corpus of war literature in the western canon speaks for itself: regardless of a supposed "impossibility of representation", the war is represented in literature, film, visual arts, music, etc. The question that remains is: how is it represented?

There is not, naturally, a univocal and generalized answer to that question. The strategies used to bypass the language-defying nature of war are vastly diverse – but it is possible to address some of the more canonical ones, especially when it comes to literature. In this chapter, I will try to discuss what strategies war orphans employ in order to represent war, and how they relate – in affirmation or negation – to more canonical strategies in war literature.

1.1 – Intertextuality and role-playing in homefront orphan narratives

An aspect of the representation of war that must be addressed in order to start the discussion on war orphan narratives is its undeniable intertextual nature. Norris describes and exemplifies this tendency:

> At the same time, war writing is an inevitably intertexted process, obliged to contend with its own tradition of genres and conventions in the spirit of debt, opposition, or subversion even as it is haunted by the betrayals and inadequacies of its predecessors. The soldiers of Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* mentally carry Homer's *Illiad* into the Civil War with them … . (24)

Examples such as this abound in war literature. British soldier-writers of the First World War, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, often had the classical authors in mind when writing about their combat experience. In turn, Vietnam writer Phillip Caputo uses these First World War authors as epigraphs to the chapters of his autobiography *Rumour of War*. But the intertexted aspect of war writing is not limited to its connections to literature, but also to several other media products, such as movies, television shows, music, video

games, etc. Norris does not fail to acknowledge this fact:

> But not only in fiction do war's participants bring genre cognitively to bear on experience, testing their perception against the expectations of film or writing, expressing their sense and feeling through the referent of media. "Mythopathic moment," Michael Herr calls Vietnam flashbacks to, say, John Wayne and Henry Fonda in *Fort Apache*. Combatants and survivors of war must themselves contend not only with genre but with their internalization of genre. (24)

There is, of course, a constitutive tension of war literature in its intertextual nature: although it is produced in close proximity to its canon, there is a radical contradiction between experience and representation; in other words, the actual living experience of war is radically different from its aesthetic portrayals – largely due to the aforementioned issue of irrepresentability. Out of the synthesis of this dialectic tension between the lived and the read (in a broad sense) some of the richest elements in war literature are born.

Intertextuality is an element also present in war orphan narratives, though it serves a somewhat different purpose – particularly in the narratives of homefront orphans. The classic war texts, television shows and war movies are often cited and referred to in these narratives, but they are used not as a reference of how to write war literature, as a canon to mirror, but rather as a connection to the lost parents – especially the father –, a way to try to understand what was the experience of war. This is especially true for homefront orphan narratives because these children had never actually experienced war, and therefore can only hope to grasp what their fathers went through by absorbing such cultural products. The case of battlefront orphans is different when it comes to this aspect; therefore, they will be addressed

separately.

Among the texts which constitute this dissertation's primary corpus, Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* is perhaps the best example of the constant intrusion of former representations of war in the narrative about the orphan – especially pop culture.

Sam Hughes, the novel's protagonist, is obsessed with mass media and pop culture – as were most American teenage girls of the 1980's, the period when the novel takes place. Bruce Springsteen, The Beatles, HBO, Donkey Kong, Pac-Man: references to pop culture are widespread throughout the narrative, running through the lives of Sam and Emmet – her uncle who lives with her, himself a Vietnam veteran like her father would be, were he alive. But perhaps the most significant element of mass media in the novel is Sam and Emmet's habit of systematically watching the TV show *M*A*S*H* together. The series was an adaptation of the 1970 feature film *MASH*, which was itself based on the 1968 novel *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors*, and followed the campaign of a team of doctors and support staff in the Korean War. The show aired from 1972 until 1983, and it was as much about the Korean War as it was an allegory to the Vietnam War. In *In Country*, the series work as a key for Sam to try to understand the experience of war her father went through, and try to relate to him in some way.

Sam has some of her central reflexions on war during her *M*A*S*H* sessions with Emmet. In the following excerpt, Mason's narrative mingles the protagonist's impression on the series with her own investigations about Vietnam, which sends off an impression that both activities consist of the same effort of trying to connect with her lost father somehow:

> Usually, whenever any of the *M*A*S*H* regulars got a chance to go home, they thought of excuses to stay in Korea. … Of course, the series would have

> collapsed if the regulars had gone home, but Sam wondered if there wasn't some truth to the idea that war was attractive. Emmet had even said that Pete preferred the war. She had been reading about how the United States got involved. All the names ran together. Ngo Dinh Diem. Bao Dai. Dien Bien Phu. Ho Chi Minh. She got bogged down in manifestos and State Department documents. (Mason 55)

It is remarkable, in this excerpt, not only how *M*A*S*H* offers her an insight on the war experience, but how there is a process of amalgamation of everything that somehow relates to war in her mind: the TV show, manifestos, State Department documents. “All the names ran together” in Sam's mind, but not only: Mason's writing also overlaps all these references, in such a way that such amalgamation ends up inscribed in the very weaving of the novel.

Even when confronted with actual accounts of Vietnam veterans, Sam associates them to *M*A*S*H* in order to, it seems, more easily process the information:

> A friend of Emmet's knew a lot of dead-baby jokes, but Sam couldn't remember any she had heard. In Vietnam, mothers had carried their dead babies around with them until they began to rot. … She could picture it vividly, although it seemed like something she had made up. In the final episode of *M*A*S*H*, Hawkeye had cracked up after seeing a woman smother her own baby to keep it from crying. He had seen so many soldiers die, but he fell apart when he saw a baby die. It seemed appropriate that Hawkeye should crack up at the end of the series. That way, you knew everything didn't turn out happily. That was too easy. (164)

*M*A*S*H* does not only offer Sam a glimpse into what a war experience might have been, but it also offers her a way to try to translate her own grief into some form of manageable expression: in the very first time the series are mentioned in the novel, the narrator describes how the death of a character – Colonel Blake – left Sam unsettled, and how that event let her finally understand the fact that her father had died in a war before she could even meet him:

> Years ago, when Colonel Blake was killed, Sam was so shocked she went around stunned for days. She was only a child then, and his death on the program was more real to her than the death of her own father. Even on the repeats, it was unsettling. Each time she saw that episode, it grew clearer that her father had been killed in a war. She had always taken his death for granted, but the reality of it took hold gradually. (25)

This tendency to refer to other texts (in the broad sense) about war in order to connect, relate and empathize with the lost father is not restricted to *In Country*. In *Lost in the Victory*, a collection of short memoirs and interviews by American war orphans of the Second World War, a few accounts display similar tendencies. Each chapter of the book is the result of an interview conducted by the organizers. The speech of the orphans is interspersed with comments and considerations by these organizers, often offering contextual information regarding the father of the orphan: where and when he served, how he died, etc.

The first memoir presented in the collection offers a good example of the intertextual nature of war writing. Vincent Papke Jr., an orphan whose father served in France as an infantry man and was killed in 1945, describes in his memoir his reaction to war movies:

> There has not been a day that has gone by that I have not thought of my father

> and missed him. As a little boy, I watched all the war movies, again and again, crying like a baby. I watched them again, as a young man, with the same emotion, the same pain and the same longing. I thought for a long time that he had amnesia and would return home to be with me. I watched all of the WWII film clips, especially "Victory at Sea," hoping that I would spot him [on a troopship]; that he was still alive; that it was a terrible mistake. (Hadler 4)

This excerpt also asks for a quick thematic detour, because it does not only illustrates the tendency of war writings to intertextualize, but it is also an example of a recurring theme in orphan narratives, especially those whose parents went missing: the fantasy that, one day, their parents will return. This theme is present in several orphan narratives, such as Evelyne Tannehill's *Abandoned and Forgotten*, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* and even the already discussed novel *In Country.*

Other accounts in *Lost in the Victory* show how war orphans often rely on other aesthetic representations of war in order to draw their own image of the conflict. John, the son of an American soldier killed in the South Pacific, reports how he used music to relate to his deceased father:

> For some reason, the situation hit me with a vengeance when I was in high school. I went out and bought a bunch of WWII-era records, such as "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition", "Goodbye, Mama, I'm Off to Yokohama" and my own personal favorite, "Lili Marlene." I'd lock myself in my room with a couple of bottles of RC Cola, and listen to these records over and over and over again, *knowing* that my dad had known them. (125)

Ellen, another war orphan whose account is included in *Lost in the Victory*,

emphasizes how her interest on war movies and books defied even gender stereotypes:

> I grew up thinking my father was a hero and that it was a good war and that he died for a cause and that it wasn't without reason. I did dwell on the war a lot. I read a lot about it. I had books about it. I liked to go to movies about World War II. I liked all that stuff, which is unusual for girls. I wanted to know all about it. (79)

In fact, in the narratives, the orphans do not rely only on strictly aesthetic representations of war to grasp the experience of their fathers: media in general, serves as a tool for such process. In another work, the short story “Refresh, Refresh”, by Benjamin Percy, CNN is one of the inspirations for Josh – the story's speaker and protagonist – to try to envision his father's experience in the Iraq War:

> We [the families of the soldiers fighting in Iraq] imagined them [the soldiers] doing heroic things. Rescuing Iraqi babies from burning huts. Sniping suicide bombers before they could detonate on a crowded city street. We drew on Hollywood and CNN to develop elaborate scenarios …. (loc. 116)[4]

Homefront orphans, deprived from an actual war experience, cannot understand the nature of the event that led to their fathers' deaths. Unable to relate to such experience, and anguished by the fact that such inconceivable event haunts them for a great part of their lives, these orphans turn to media representations of war, in order to try to gain at least knowledge – since experience seems not to be possible – about the conflict.

But, as discussed previously in this thesis, war representations are always inaccurate. War is an indescribable, incomprehensible, surreal, fragmented event. Words cannot conceive its horrors – or at least so say war writers, often. If there is such inaccuracy and inadequacy in

representing war, then how can homefront orphans attempt to understand their fathers' experiences through movies, novels, songs or TV shows? The fact is: they cannot. Pete, a Vietnam veteran in *In Country* puts it simply to Sam: “Stop thinking about Vietnam, Sambo. You don't know how it was, and you never will. There is no way you can ever understand” (Mason 136). What he adds to this remark, however, is even more significant, for it foreshadows the climax of the novel: “Unless you've been humping the boonies, you don't know” (136). To “hump the boonies” is a Vietnam military slang for long missions in the wilderness, especially in Vietnam. As described by Pete: “That means going out in some godforsaken wilderness and doing what you have to do to survive” (136). This provocation leads Sam, throughout the novel, to decide to “hump the boonies” herself: in the most climactic moment of the novel, the young protagonist decides to leave her uncle Emmet's home with no more than a backpack and some provisions and head out into the swamp, all by herself, in order to feel what it was like to be in a Vietnamese jungle during a mission. “Here I am”, thinks Sam when she gets there. “In country” (210).

In this decisive scene of the novel, Sam spends a night in a “nature preserve in a protected corner of Kentucky” (214) in order to feel how the soldiers must have felt in Vietnam. She tries to act accordingly: she takes a turn on watch and pays close attention to approaching enemies. But the differences of her experience to actual warfare are evident, and she does not fail to miss them: Sam uses a boardwalk to cross the swamp, but acknowledges that “[i]n Vietnam, the soldiers wouldn't have had a safe boardwalk” (213). She also notices that the quiet sky of Kentucky did not have anything to do with the Vietnam sky: “The night sky in Vietnam was a light show, Emmet had said once. Rockets, parachute flares, tracer bullets, illumination rounds, signal flares, search-lights, pencil flares.” Even the sounds, Sam

admits, were different: “And the soundtrack was different from bugs and frogs: the *whoosh-beat* of choppers, the scream of jets, the thunder-boom of artillery rounds, the mortar rounds, random bullets and bombs and explosions.” She concludes: “The rock-and-roll sounds of war” (214).

On the morning after, Emmet finds Sam, and gives her a scolding for her escape. During their conversation, he reinforces what Sam already suspected: that she could never understand what was like to actually “hump the boonies” just by spending a night camping in the swamp. Emmet tells her:

> I know why you were out here. You think you can go through what we went through out in the jungle, but you can't. This place is scary, and things happen to you, but it's not the same as having snipers and mortar fire and shells and people shooting at you from behind bushes. What have you got to be afraid of? You're afraid somebody'll look at you the wrong way. You're afraid your mama's going to make you go to school in Lexington. Big deal. (220)

Sam's frustration is inevitable. Since the experience of war is unparalleled, it cannot be mimicked. In the end, Sam is still attempting to understand war through a narrative. The difference is that she is not reading the experience of others in order to apprehend what they lived; she is creating her own narrative. She is writing her own intertextuality through role-play. A narrative, however, is still a narrative: it still cannot hope to transmit experience. “You think you can go through what we went through out in the jungle, but you can't”, says Emmet.

Sam's endeavor in the swamp is a key scene not only in *In Country*, but it also presents a distinctive tendency that reappears in several homefront orphan narratives: role-

play as a strategy of attempting to apprehend the father's experience. When merely reading war narratives proves to be unfruitful, orphans seem to try to take their effort in understanding war one step further, and this becomes a key aspect in how they deal with their loss – and therefore, a key aspect in how they represent war in their narratives.

In “Refresh, Refresh”, role playing the father's experience is a key narrative strategy in the short story's plot. Josh's father is not dead, initially. His death is only revealed to the protagonist towards the end of the narrative. However, even though not strictly an orphan throughout the entire development of the plot, Josh's experience is remarkably defined by the absence of the father and the attempt to mimic the war experience – often in teenage misadventures with his best friend Gordon, whose father is also in Iraq (as is the case of most teenagers in the town). Their past-times often revolve around displays of manhood and virility, such as brawling each other “to make each other tougher” (Percy loc. 74). In such activities, they cannot help but mimic their fathers, as a way of both coping and trying to apprehend their absence, and also hoping to make them proud. As Josh describes in the beginning of the short story: “He [Gordon] wanted to hurt back those who hurt him. And if he went down, he would go down swinging, as his father would have wanted. This was what we all wanted, to please our fathers, to make them proud, even though they had left us” (loc. 84).

During their brawling sessions, Josh and Gordon paint their faces “black and green and brown – with the camo-grease” their “fathers left behind” (loc. 151), for example. In one of the decisive scenes of the short story, Gordon and Josh decide to drive deep into the woods to hunt; in the scene, they once again see themselves as their fathers:

> We dumped our tent and sleeping bags near a basalt grotto with a spring bubbling from it, and Gordon said, “Let's go, troops,” holding his rifle before

> his chest diagonally, as a soldier would. He dressed as a soldier would, too, wearing his father's over large cammies rather than the mandatory blaze orange gear. (loc. 196)

Venturing further into the woods, the boys find Seth Jones – the bully who harasses them at school – and his friends from the varsity football squad. Josh and Gordon decide to give them a scare, by pulling a prank. When they decide to act, they once again picture themselves as soldiers, as they try to creep into the jocks' camp:

> Night had come on and the moon hung over the Cascades, grayly lighting our way as we crept through the forest, imagining ourselves in enemy territory, with trip wires and guard towers and snarling dogs around every corner. From behind the boulder that overlooked their campsite, we observed our enemies as they swapped hunting stories and joked about Jessica Robertson's big-ass titties …. (loc. 228)

"Refresh, Refresh" displays a significant difference to *In Country*: a male protagonist. Being a man, Josh is able to mimic his father even more than Sam; as the protagonist himself acknowledges:

> Our fathers haunted us. … And now, as our bodies thickened with muscle, as we stopped shaving and grew patchy beards, we saw our fathers even in the mirror. We began to look like them. Our fathers, who had been taken from us, were everywhere, at every turn, imprisoning us. (loc. 267)

The gender difference, finally, allows Josh to take a decisive step in role playing the father that Sam could never take: joining the army and actually going to war. In the final climactic moment of the short story, Josh is visited by Dave Lightener – the town's recruiting

officer, a man in charge of enlisting young men into the army and of delivering the news of fallen combatants to their families. Described by Josh as a “vulturous man” who “scavenged whatever our fathers had left behind” (loc. 160), his visit meant that the boy's father was killed. Before the officer is able to say a word, Josh and Gordon beat him up, tie him to a sled and take him to the edge of a meteor crater, where they threaten to push him – but eventually simply leave him there, bleeding and sobbing. The short story's final paragraph reports what Josh and Gordon do after they beat Dave:

> We got on our bikes and we drove to Bend and we drove so fast I imagined catching fire, like a meteor, burning up in a flash, howling as my heat consumed me, as we made our way to the Armed Forces Recruiting Station where we would at last answer the fierce alarm of war and put our pens to paper and make our fathers proud. (loc. 317)

An alarming ascertainment is that the act of enlisting in the army as a way of “making the father proud” and, in fact, trying to relate to the paternal figure by role playing his experience is not limited to fiction: a number of accounts in *Lost in the Victory* feature men who chose to enlist, particularly to serve in Vietnam – even though they did not have to, since sons of fallen soldiers are exempted from the draft. The first example is in the very first memoir of the book, by Vince Papke Jr – already cited above. Vince, in adult age, joins the Marine Corps, for he felt that “to die in a war was the only way” to be like his father (Hadler 3). John Nichols, another World War II orphan whose account is present in *Lost in the Victory*, served two tours in Vietnam, and retired from the Marines as a major. But the greatest irony, as the editor remarks, is that “his stateside assignment during the Vietnam War was as a casualty officer who notified the next of kin of a son or husband's death. Life had

now placed him on the other side of the door" (137). Tony Harris, a man adopted by an Australian family after his father had been killed in 1944, served in Vietnam in a "small unit of full-time professionals" which was "made part of the elite USA 173rd Airborne Brigade" (191 – 192).

What these accounts reveal is that the death of the father, contrary to what one might think, often does not serve as a "cautionary tale", as a reason *not* to serve in the military: it rather perpetuates a culture of warfare, loss and death. Unable to cope with their fathers' deaths, men go to war in order to, somehow, try to relate to the lost paternal figure. In a vicious circle of death, war perpetuates war.

1.1.1. – *The "Wall of Silence"*

The experience of losing one's father in a war that does not seem to ever be comprehended is indeed harrowing – but is it by itself so strong that it can actually drive men to go to war? Why cannot these homefront orphans talk their way out of this trauma? One of the key answers to this question is somewhat proposed by Bruce Brodowski, a World War II American orphan, in his book *The Dad I Never Knew* – which although is not a part of my primary corpus, can offer a great insight into this matter. Brodowski mentions, in his book, a "Wall of Silence under which most of" war orphans grew up (296). This refers to the fact that, in the household of homefront orphans, war is frequently – and maybe always – a taboo. Not only is it impossible for orphans to actually grasp war through its aesthetic representations, they often do not even have someone to whom they can talk to about it. This "taboo", this "wall of silence" isolates the orphans, often leading them into introspection, melancholia and sadness. This becomes another central aspect of homefront orphan

narratives. The introduction to *Lost in the Victory* does not fail to acknowledge this central aspect. In the text, Ann Bennet Mix describes the phenomenon as such:

> American families who lost a loved one generally hid their suffering. With the arrival of a death announcing telegram, silence descended like fog. As children, we absorbed the silence that enveloped our families, silence that usually obscured knowledge of our fathers and often negated awareness that we, as children, were affected by our father's deaths. Silence characterizes the war orphans' experience and intensifies their loss. The silence has continued for us into our adult lives. (Hadler xviii)

The memoirs in the book reinforce this feeling of isolation. Nearly every single account collected in *Lost in the Victory* at least mentions how silence was a defining element in the orphans' experiences. “We were left and nobody knows how many orphans were left”, says Clatie Cunningham, daughter of a flight engineer who was reported missing in 1945. “This is what goes on in the United States. Well, somebody got killed; forget about it. In the United States we don't accept responsibility any more. It just blows my mind” (Hadler 103). Her words are haunting: “somebody got killed; forget about it”. This seems to be the case for several orphans.

Connie Caldwell, daughter of a Cuban-born soldier killed in 1945 in Germany, complains that she could never learn about her father from her mother: “I was very proud of my father, and I didn't know anything about [him].(...) My mother didn't even talk about it”. Raised under the belief that “children don't ask questions”, she limited herself to try to “get a little snippet from any relative” about her father, in order to try to learn at least a little about him. “There was some written law or unwritten rule that you didn't question”, she says (53).

But the silence is not restricted to the household: the taboo regarding war seemed to be widespread, for not even Connie's education at a Catholic high school could help her grasp what the war was:

> The war was never talked about there. I remember when we studied World War II, it was just glazed over. My God – and I was a good student – what did we miss? … I cannot remember World War II. It was all about the Jewish people and the Holocaust, but not even that. … [d]id we just sleep through those years? … Where was the war? (53)

A particularly harrowing example of such silence can be seen in the memoir written by Ann Bennet Mix, one of the members of the American World War II Orphans Association (AWON) in charge of organizing the texts in *Lost in the Victory*. The daughter of an alcoholic mother, she lived her childhood and adolescence taking turns between suffering from an absolute silence about war in the household and outbursts of alcohol-induced conversations about her father:

> For years my mother would come into my room in the middle of the night and wake me. She was drunk and wanted to talk about my father. … She would cry, and I would listen. … [s]he told stories over and over and fabricated a story about my father and her which, in time, she came to believe herself. … When Mother was sober, we never talked about my father. If I brought up the subject, she got angry. In fact, somewhere along the way she burned every photo of my father and all the letters he had written when he went in the Army. … My mother made me the keeper of my father's memory when she was drunk. … On the other hand, she made it impossible for me to keep his

> memory alive by refusing to discuss him when she was sober …. She also made it impossible for me to learn anything about him from his family. (Hadler 93- 94)

Silence is also a defining element in Sam's experience of orphanhood in *In Country*. Though surrounded by Emmet and his veteran friends from the VA, they often prefer not to discuss her father or the troublesome aspects of war. Her mother avoids the subject altogether. “You never told me anything – about him, or about Vietnam”, complains Sam to her mother, discussing her father. “You always wanted to forget it, like it never happened. I think that's why you gave up on Emmet” (Mason 56). Sam claims that her mother “gave up on Emmet” due to her change of attitude towards the veteran: when he first comes back from Vietnam, she helps and understands him, offers him her own house, and even tries not to pressure him into finding a job. However, eventually she grows tired of his general lack of motivation and action, and gives up trying to help him – which eventually makes him move out of her house. In another moment, the girl is even harsher on her approach to her mother: “You just want me to get out of Hopewell and forget about Emmet, the same way you want me to forget about my daddy …. You want to pretend the whole Vietnam War never existed, like you want to protect me from something!” (167).

Tom, another Vietnam veteran and a friend of Emmet's, with whom Sam has a short love affair, also acknowledges the silence surrounding the war: “Sam, you might as well just stop asking questions about the war”, he tells her. “Nobody gives a shit. They've got it twisted around in their heads what it was about, so they can live with it and not have to think about it” (Mason 79). Further on in the novel, in another conversation with Tom, Sam complains to him about the difficulty in learning about the war: “It's so hard to find out anything” (94), she

says. After telling Sam some trivia regarding Vietnam, Tom finally concludes: “Look, Sam. It's hard to talk about, and some people want to protect you, you know. They don't want to dump all this stuff on you. … You shouldn't think about this stuff too much”, to which Sam retorts: “I can't really see it … All I can see in my mind is picture postcards. It doesn't seem real. I can't believe it was really real”. Tom drops the final words: “It was real, all right. You don't want to know how real it was” (95).

In “Refresh, Refresh”, however, this “silent” aspect of war – its taboo character – is absent. I believe that this relates to a qualitative difference between the short story and the other two homefront orphan narratives in the primary corpus: Benjamin Percy published the collection in which the short story is present in 2008, right in the middle of the Iraq war. It is not, like *Lost in the Victory* or *In Country,* a post-war narrative; it is set and was written in a period in which the war was still being waged. In the small town of Tumalo, Oregon, where “Refresh, Refresh” is set, most adult men are still in Iraq – such an absence can hardly be ignored. Furthermore, while the war is waged, the news about the conflict are constantly featured in newspapers, TV and radio. It can be inferred that it is only after the soldiers come back home that the attempt to sweep the memory of war under the rug is made – an erasure felt strongly by orphans and surviving veterans alike.

The “Wall of Silence” is a phenomenon which is not restricted to war narratives about orphans: in fact, it is present in canonical works of war literature. One of the best examples is, perhaps, Ernest Hemingway's seminal short story “Soldier's Home”. In it, the protagonist Krebs returns from the First World War to his small town in Kansas. However, he arrives

> [m]uch too late. The men from the town who had been drafted had all been welcomed elaborately on their return. There had been a great deal of hysteria.

> Now the reaction had set in. People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late, years after the war was over. (Hemingway 303)

The consequence, for Krebs, is that he "felt the need to talk [about the war] but no one wanted to hear about it" (303). The "Wall of Silence" takes its toll on veterans, and is in fact a trope of war literature by now. However, if for veterans it usually means having to suppress their experiences, for they cannot be talked about, for the homefront orphans it means the opposite: it creates, it might be said, an "absence of experience", a "non-experience", for they feel they must learn about the war and understand it, but that deed cannot be done, for the subject is a taboo.

Unable to understand the war through its representations – for they are inaccurate –, or to experience it through role-play, and surrounded by a "Wall of Silence" which keeps them from even getting simple answers about the war, the representation of war by homefront orphans is marked by a "lack of experience", by an empty space. The consequences, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the second chapter, are brutal: depression, alcoholism, anguish and helplessness.

1.2 – Representations of violence in battlefront orphans' narratives

The element which binds the homefront orphans' narratives together is a perspective of war marked by an empty space, by the "lack of experience". The reason for not having discussed battlefront orphan narratives thus far is the fact that these victims, contrary to their homefront counterparts, have experienced war intensely. Their discourse is marked by such experience, and the empty space of non-experience is actually filled with the horrors of

witnessing a war.

In this aspect, battlefront orphan narratives are very similar to more canonical war narratives. A recurring element in war narratives is the depiction of violence, gore and the helplessness of combat, as a way of attempting to convey how it feels like to actually be in the battlefield. Catherine Brosman relates this technique to what she calls the "social function" of war literature (89), a function which she believes is present in works of war literature that attempt to "demystify war and the military, with its linguistic, behavioral, and other codes, and to support pacifism" (89).[5] One of the ways in which war authors have achieved such goal is through "[i]nsisting lengthily upon the gore, the fear, the terrible conditions of existence, the wanton destruction … at the expense of the supposed rationale for war and its possibilities of value or redeeming features" (90).

In Deborah Ellis's *Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees*, the images of violence abound in the children's interviews. Living in a country torn apart by the American imperialist intervention from one side and sectarian violence between the various ethnic and religious groups in the country – Shia, Sunni, Jews, Christians, Kurds – from the other, most of these children have grown up seeing much more brutality in their early years than most Americans would see in their entire life.

The accounts are terrifying. Widian, a girl who was 14 years old at the time of her interviews, has lost both parents in shocking ways. "My father was the first one to die", she tells. "He was captured and murdered. He was tortured to death by electricity" (Ellis 58). After her father's death, her mother wanted to investigate the case, in order to prove he was tortured. She had doctors examine her husband's body and provide documents attesting the torture. "She had all these documents with her when she was kidnapped", Widian continues.

“We heard nothing about her for three months. Then my grandparents got a phone call telling them where to find my mother's body” (59).

The crudeness of Widian's interview is haunting. Her short sentences, delivered in what seems to be a matter-of-fact tone, may be a result from the translation process – the interviews in the book were conducted through two interpreters (15) –, but they can also be read as the discourse of a child who learned at a young age that violence is ordinary. The horrors in her account do not stop at her parent's death – in fact, that is where they begin.

> The thing that finally made us leave was when the uncle we were living with got beaten. Gunmen wearing masks over their heads and faces came right into my uncle's house and beat him right there, in his own home. They ordered him to pay them ten thousand dollars or they would come back and kill him and also destroy the house and his shop so that the rest of the family would not be able to eat. (60)

Eva, who was 17 years old when interviewed by Deborah Ellis, is a girl from the Mandaean Sabian religious sect, a group that has been persecuted for political reasons since Saddam Hussein's overthrow in 2003 (43). Her experience is one of the most extreme in the book, and is summed up in her interview's opening lines:

> My whole life has been war. Really, from the moment I was born. My mother was giving birth to me when a missile hit the hospital. This was during the war with Iran. It was her first time to give birth, so you can imagine how scared she was anyway, and then the missile hitting.
>
> So I came here in war, and there is still war. (43)

An interesting element that is noticeable in *Children of War* is how the death of the

parents does not seem to be a defining moment, like it is in the homefront orphan narratives discussed earlier. In fact, it seems that in the midst of the widespread violence that was the Iraq War, losing a father or a mother is only another event, reported with the same almost-catatonic voice. Eva's interview is an example:

> Our father was killed on a trip to Baghdad to buy and sell gold. That was his job. My youngest brother was with him in the car.
>
> We think the killers were watching him in Basra, followed him to Baghdad, then followed him back home. He was killed on the road back to Basra. (45)

Though later in the interview Eva discusses the impact of not having her father at home (“We have a proverb that goes, 'The walls of the house fall when the husband dies'”, she says [46]), the description of his death is almost journalistic. Again, this might be a result of the translation, but it still can be considered an evidence of how widespread the violence is among these “children of war”.

The interviews in *Children of War* are not exclusively with war orphans; in fact, most of the refugee children interviewed in the book are not orphans. What is astonishing is how the accounts of these children, whether they are orphans or not, are similar to each other. In other words: the general shock of war is so brutal to everyone that being an orphan or not seems to be almost a footnote in the narratives of these children. In this situation of generalized violence, the death of a father or a mother seems to be almost an eventuality. But of course, the temporality of these interviews must be taken into account: *Children of War*, similarly to the example of “Refresh, Refresh”, discussed previously, is a rather recent book, and deals with a conflict that is still being waged. These refugee children are giving their

accounts with a very short time-span between the war and its representation – perhaps in the future we will be able to see more distinctly the difference between orphans and non-orphans among the Iraq War children survivors.

The vivid descriptions of violence are also a constant in Evelyne Tannehill's *Abandoned and Forgotten: An Orphan Girl's Tale of Survival During World War II*. The 430 page long memoir kicks off at a slow pace, portraying the picturesque childhood of its author, affectionately nicknamed "Eva" by her family. Growing up in a rich farmer family in East Prussia, war approached her life slowly, but unmercifully. Around halfway through the book, Eva describes the occupation of East Prussia by the Russian Red Army, and her family's subsequent exile from their home. From this moment on, rampant violence is a key feature in the narrative.

The examples are innumerable, but for the sake of brevity, I will only quote a few. One of the recurring elements of shock in the memoir are the descriptions of the infamous mass rapes conducted by the Red Army during the occupation of East Prussia. The Russian's first appearance in the book is brutal, and at the same time marked by the naive eyes of the child-narrator:

> The Russians appeared, like the first, from out of nowhere, kicked the door open with brute force, and charged into the room. … There were nine of them, itching for action. "*Frauen, Frauen,* women, women," they shouted and grabbed Fraulein Gretchen, the three sisters, and Frau Kehr and dragged them to the back of the house. … One of the soldiers pushed the rest of us into a corner and held us at gunpoint, while the others ransacked the house, looking for valuables. … All the while, the women's screams from the back room

> echoed through the house. … Not understanding rape, I thought the Russians were torturing the women before killing them, like Schnurribart [Eva's cat] often did with the mice he brought home. … This nightmare seemed to last forever. The crazed soldiers alternated between pillaging and continuous raping; everyone got his turn at everything. (Tannehill 114-115)

A notable aspect of this passage is how the traumatizing scene is processed through the eyes of the child. Eva does not understand rape, and the women are not raped in front of her; therefore, she winds up relying on her imagination and previous experiences, which leads her to relate the scene she was listening to her cat's behavior. These childish strategies of interpreting the horror are recurring in Tannehill's memoir.

The brutality of war exposes Eva to a terrible reality, and forces her to acknowledge her own mortality at a very young age. At nine years old, she goes through experiences that lead her to conclusions that most people will not reach until their teenage years – and some times will never reach in their lifetimes. In the following scene, the girl faces a near-death experience, and is marked by it:

> When I came out, two young, sullen-faced soldiers jumped in front of me. I wanted to run, but my feet froze to the ground and a powerful bolt of fear left me paralyzed. One of the men pointed a long rifle at me, with a shiny bayonet attached to its muzzle. He pressed it against my trembling chest and twisted it back and forth. I felt the hardness of the steel blade getting ever closer to my skin as it bored a hole through my woolen dress. I backed against the brick wall, expecting him to thrust the sharp blade straight through my almost-stopped heart. … I realized that for one eternity-long minute I had faced death,

and now I feared it more than ever. (Tannehill 146-147)

A curious element of the representation of violence in *Abandoned and Forgotten* is that Eva is often spared of the most gruesome scenes; sometimes because she is a child, other times out of sheer luck, she is frequently left to her own imagination or the reports of other characters who witnessed certain scenes. In the following excerpt, one of the most violent passages in the book, the reader relies solely on another character's (Aunt Liesel) description:

> Aunt Liesel painted a most gruesome picture of those first days in Steglitz with the Russians. The Lithuanian pastor had shot himself before the Red Army ever got there. Then the Russians rounded up all remaining males and took them away for that "official registration" [a euphemism used by the Russians at the time for prisoners taken to forced labor camps]. But first they went after the mayor and tortured him to death. Whole families committed suicide rather than to submit to the revenge-seeking brutes. The blacksmith gassed his wife and their two little girls and then killed himself. The meat inspector drowned his three small children in the village pond, then shot his wife and himself. Their oldest son ran away. (161)

The case of Long, the Vietnamese boy whose childhood is chronicled in Andrea Warren's *Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy* is a very particular one: being born in a remote village, then having moved first to Saigon (the US base of operations in the Vietnam War) and then to an orphanage, he was kept somewhat "safe" from the most terrible aspects of war. That, associated with the fact that the book was written not by him, but by a journalist (an element with further consequences which will be investigated in chapters 2 and 3) result in a book that has little representation of gruesome

violence, at least compared to *Abandoned and Forgotten* or *Children of War*. But even so, the instances of violence in the book are remarkable: Long's memory is fragile, and by the time he is interviewed (2004), he can no longer remember even his biological mother's name; still, he is able to retell moments of violence that he has witnessed. In a sorrowful moment, Long witnesses a group of mothers trying to hand their children to the orphanage (which was already operating over capacity) in order for them to be adopted by American families:

> The next day, Long and some of the other children witnessed a chilling sight. While they were playing outside, several mothers holding small children came to the gate of the wall that surrounded the playground and the Holt Center [the orphanage]. They pleaded with staff to take their children and keep them safe. "You must get my baby to America!" cried one. "My family lived under the Communists in the North. He must not grow up that way." Another tried to reach through the gate to grab a staff member's arm. "When the Communists come, I will kill myself," she sobbed, "but please save my child!" (Warren loc. 525)

But even though scenes of direct violence do not abound in Warren's writing, the entire narrative is populated by a constant fear of impending disaster. Long was kept somewhat safe from the most terrible aspects of war, but that was never taken for granted, it seems. A general feeling of unease underlines several passages:

> Each night on the roof of the Holt Center, staff members saw more flares and heard more gunfire. In the streets, new blockades and checkpoints sprang up overnight. In spite of the South Vietnamese government's attempts to keep refugees from overwhelming the city, they still crowded in, hungry and afraid.

> The population had not yet panicked, but everyone was on edge, waiting for the worst. (loc. 525)

Long, describing his own plight, claims to remember even how he perceived his grandmother's apprehension towards the impeding disaster in Saigon:

> “I could see the worry in my grandmother's eyes”, Long says. “With the American soldiers gone, many in South Vietnam feared a takeover by North Vietnam. No one knew just what that would mean for us. The city seemed safe, but who really knew? We saw jeeps and military trucks and soldiers all the time. We had to be off the streets by eleven at night because we had an enforced curfew. Most nights, we heard shelling outside the city. (loc. 264)

There is a massive difference in the strategies used to represent war between homefront and battlefront orphans. While homefront orphans, lacking any sort of bodily experience of war, represent it as a harrowing empty space, which they try to fill in different ways, battlefront orphans perceive and portray war as a very concrete and material pain and despair, often filled with gore, violence and apprehension.

The question that remains, then, is: is there an aesthetic element, a narrative *topos* which binds these seemingly opposing categories together? In other words, is it possible to perceive at least one element which might be a defining feature of a broad category which could be called “war orphan narratives”? I believe so, and I suggest that this element might be what I call “the redeeming journey”.

1.3 – The Redeeming Journey as a defining element of war orphan narratives

The first four books of Homer's *Odyssey* are known as the “Telemachia”, for they are

centered on the character of Telemachus, Odysseus's son. In this first part of the epic, Telemachus tries to gain knowledge of his father, who has been absent from their homeland Ithaca for twenty years since he left for the Trojan War. He does so by taking a journey and retracing some of his father's steps: he first visits Nestor, the King of Pylos, who tells the young man glorious tales of Odysseus's deeds in the Trojan War. He then visits Menelaus and Helen, who proceed to do the same as Nestor.

Of course, if we take a very strict point-of-view, Telemachus cannot be considered a war orphan, for his father Odysseus is alive, and eventually returns to Ithaca. But it must also be considered that, during the course of the Trojan War and his journey back, Odysseus takes a total of twenty years to return home. This means that Telemachus was raised well into his adult years without the presence of his father, and little news about him – and in fact, not even sure whether his father was alive or not. Regardless of whether the young man hoped his father would come back or not, he was, for all effects, raised as a war orphan. One could say that the *Telemachia* is, indeed, the first western war orphan narrative; and maybe, as the *Illiad* is the prototypical war narrative, the first four books of the *Odyssey* can be the prototypical and canonical example of war orphan narratives.

The journey that Telemachus takes, in order to retrace his father's steps and learn of his deeds, resonates throughout homefront orphans' and battlefront orphans' narratives alike. With some variations, the theme of a journey – a road trip, a pilgrimage, a travel abroad – which is taken in search of some sense of closure – a “Redeeming Journey” – reappears in these narratives, usually in their *denouement*, sometimes presented as a final chapter, an epilogue, or just the closing lines of an interview or a memoir. Structurally, they often serve as a dramatic resolution to the conflict presented in these narratives, as this section will show.

The last chapter in *Escape from Saigon*, suitably called “Return to Vietnam”, reports Long's (now named “Matthew Steiner”, or Matt) trip to Vietnam, in 1995, at the age of 29. After taking a college course on the Vietnam War, Matt decides to learn of his origins and remember his roots, for while staring at the pictures of Amerasian children in Saigon he felt “a sense of recognition” (Warren loc. 992). He travels alongside the director of Holt, the institution which fostered him when he was a refugee. Upon visiting the orphanage where he grew up and seeing the new Vietnamese orphans, Matt could not help but empathize: “I saw myself in all of them”, he says. “Like these children, I had once counted on the kindness and charity of others” (loc. 1085).

During this trip, Matt/Long makes peace with one of the most troubling elements of his past: his abandonment, first by his mother and later by his grandmother, who unable to provide for the young boy, left him at the mercy of others. At one of the Holt institutions, the man meets a teacher with whom he has a revealing conversation, which finally allows him to understand and bring closure to the narrative of his orphanhood:

> “I told her about my mother and about Ba [his grandmother]. … Then I shared how my mother had once tried to give me away to a wealthy couple who lived on a plantation. … [s]he just nodded and said, 'Your mother was seeking a better life for you'”. … The teacher was quiet for a moment. “Your grandmother must have loved you very, very much to give you up…. She could have kept you for her own, and what would have happened to you?” … “Your Ba's heart told her it would work out this way for you.” (Warren loc. 1099)

And in this Redeeming Journey to his homeland, Vietnam, Matt finally finds closure:

> Matt felt something inside him shift. There had been a hole in his heart ever since his mother's death. When Ba left him at Holt, it grew larger. He had tried for twenty years to ignore it …. But the ache was still there.
>
> Sitting with the teacher … Matt finally understood why Ba and his mother made the choices they did. He felt at peace with his past. (loc. 1108)

Like Matt, other homefront war orphans go back to their homelands in order to remember their own history, understand their past and try to overcome the great trauma in their lives. Evelyne Tannehill, the little Eva of *Abandoned and Forgotten*, visits Germany in the 1990's, in a journey that teaches her a lot about her own personal history.

In the summer of 1995, after the fall of the Berlin Wall – a political and physical barrier that kept the woman from visiting her homeland –, Tannehill returns to East Prussia, now a Polish territory. It was, in her words, a "pilgrimage – a holy experience" (Tannehill 407), taken by a tour group comprised mostly of East Prussian expatriates like herself, who not only hoped to return to "the land that had nurtured them and then cast them out" but also to "break down the Poles' lingering hostility against the 'evil' Germans they remembered" (407). In her journey, she revisits the places of her childhood and relives her memories – both sweet and sour. In the last pages of the book, Tannehill meets a woman whom she met in Kahlberg, when she was an orphan child and had just escaped from East Prussia. There, she finally finds the purpose of her journey and makes peace with her past:

> I had come full circle and delved in the past enough. Life had gone on for these people as it had for me. The constant aching drive to return to the setting of all those stored memories was finally satisfied. I realized that acceptance, not time, is the healer of all emotional wounds. I always knew that; I just

didn't know I knew it. (430)

Battlefront orphans must find closure to their narratives by returning to their country of birth. Eva and Matt go back to where they lived the hardest days of their lives, and try to retell their own stories in that redeeming journey. Homefront orphans, in their narratives, describe analogous journeys; but they don't visit their homelands (for they usually never left them), but rather try to retrace their fathers' steps, or at least try to pay homage to their memories in some way. In this way, the homefront orphans' narratives resonate more with the *Telemachia* – which should come as no surprise since, if we are to consider Telemachus an orphan, he is certainly a homefront orphan.

In *Lost in the Victory* there are a few examples of such journeys. Gloria Zucarella, for example, travels to the Netherlands along with her mother and stepfather in order to visit the American graveyard where her father, Rocco, was buried since he died in 1945, after seeing action in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany (Hadler 198). Upon reaching the graveyard, among 8000 graves, Gloria claims she was "pulled" to the right one:

> It was truly a feeling that he was waiting for me. I really do believe it. It's not as if he's on the end grave or the first row. It's K53, like in the middle of everything. It's like how in God's name would you find that? But I did. I really believe it's God's miracle. But I do believe that for all these years now he was waiting for me. There had to be some closure and peace for him. I had to get there. … And now I really feel like he's at rest. I think he's more at peace. (203)

But the memoir which best captures this *topos* is the last one in the book, by Susan Hadler – one of the book editors and the founder of the American World War II Orphans Network (AWON). In line with the tendency to present the redeeming journey as a closing

scene, her text is the last one to be presented among the memoirs. Susan's father, David S. Johnson, was killed in a mine explosion, and his body was completely disintegrated – thus, leaving nothing to be buried (220). After she learns more about his death, already as an adult, she starts searching for members of her father's unit, “devouring and savoring every piece of knowledge they could share” (221) – once again a behavior that evokes Telemachus journey, and his dialogues with Nestor and Menelaus. In 1994, she decides to go to Europe with her husband, in order to retrace his steps, “from his arrival at Le Havre, to his first encampment at St. Valery en Caux in France, to his death just inside the German border”, stopping by the American Cemetery in Luxembourg, where “her father's name is carved on the wall of the missing” (221). After briefly presenting her impressions of the journey, Susan Hadler ends her memoir – the last one in the collection – with a poem dedicated to the memory of her father: a true lyrical embodiment of the *topos* of the “Redeeming Journey”.

I came to life as you went to death,
my eager reckless Papa.

It has taken me fifty years to find you
after you were blown to bits in the war.

I found you in a tiny French village
in a room at the top of the stairs.

I found you in your camp on the coast of France
sharing your whiskey with your men.

I found you in Aachen

as I entered the valley of the shadow of your death.

I found the “wooded section.”

I found the crater made by the bomb that ripped open the earth and you

The earth is still carved out,

but it's covered now with ferns that ripple in the wind.

Barbed wire that marked the spot fifty year ago

enters at the centers of the trees.

I sat down on that holy ground

and I talked with you there.

You would be seventy-five years old today.

I raise my glass to you, dear Papa, fire and spirit! (Hadler 222 – 223)

Hadler's touching poetry synthesizes much of the homefront orphan's experience. She “came to life” as he “went to death”: her very existence seems to be defined by her orphanhood, her father's death being as much of a central aspect of her life as her own birth. Her journey is retold step by step, stanza by stanza, as she retraces her fathers last moments in European soil: the “tiny French village” where he first stayed, his camp “on the coast of

France", and finally Aachen, where he met his destiny. There, she finds "the crater made by the bomb that ripped open the earth" and him. But time – not the healer of all wounds, as Evelyne Tannehill mentions in the closing lines of *Abandoned and Forgotten* – has left its marks: the crater is "covered in ferns"; the barbed wire "enters at the centers of the trees": nature has taken over what war has left behind. Her father, as much a part of that place as the trees or the ferns. In this "holy ground", where her father is, indeed, everywhere, mingled in the soil, the earth and the vegetation, she talks to him, and finally raises her glass: "fire and spirit". Only in this decisive "redeeming journey" is Hadler capable of making peace with her own past, and with her and her father's personal history: "I have begun to speak of my father", she writes in her memoir, "his life and his death as part of my history, as part of myself" (222). Just like her father's remains have been "absorbed" and integrated by the nature of the "holy ground" where he died, his life's history has been integrated to Hadler's own.

Sam, in *In Country*, makes a different journey – but still a journey, nevertheless. Being from a lower-middle class southern-American family, the girl is not able to visit Vietnam in order to connect with the memory of her dead father. But the novel opens and closes (in a prologue dubbed "Part I" and an epilogue dubbed "Part III") with a road trip: Sam, Emmet and the girl's paternal grandmother travel by car, from their small town of Hopewell all the way to Washington, D.C., in order to visit the famous Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. There, she finds her father's name, and the seemingly casual conversation between her and her grandmother, as her picture is taken, is very significant:

> Sam climbs the ladder until she is eye level with her father's name. She feels funny, touching it. A scratching on a rock. Writing. Something for future

> archaeologists to puzzle over, clues to a language. …
>
> "Smile."
>
> "How can I smile?" She [Sam] is crying.
>
> Mamaw [Sam's grandmother] backs up and snaps two pictures. …
>
> "All I can see here is my reflection," Mamaw says when Sam comes down the ladder. "I hope his name shows up. And your face was all shadow" (Mason 244)

A feeling of estrangement is noticeable: Sam sees the wall as "something for the future". Mamaw can only see her own reflection – which could indicate a metaphor for identification, but at the same time she thinks her son's name might not show up in the picture: she looks at the wall, but does not see her son, only herself. Sam's face is "all shadow" – obscured, hidden, unidentifiable. However, a twist appears on the following paragraph: Sam decides to look for her father's name in the directory where the locations of the veterans' names in the wall are indicated. She finds his name, but among many other "Hughes", one catches her attention: "SAM ALAN HUGHES PFC" (244). She rushes back to the wall to see that name:

> SAM A HUGHES. It is the first on a line. It is down low enough to touch. She touches her own name. How odd it feels, as though all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall. (Mason 244)

It is "as though all the names in America" are in the wall. The wall reveals itself as not a monument to honor the dead, but rather a monolithic reminder of the terrible consequences of a nation at war. It is as though the entire country died in the war: "Sam Hughes" included. In this final moment, Sam finds herself in her father's history, and in her country's history.

Personal, family and national history are mingled in her impressions of a monument. The novel's title reaches full significance: *In Country.* Which country? Is the novel about Vietnam our about the United States? Is it about the orphan, or the veteran? What Sam's redeeming journey seems to indicate is that these elements cannot be easily separated, and that by trying to understand her father's personal history, she builds hers.

The two remaining works of the primary corpus offer an interesting twist on this trope. In the very last paragraph of “Refresh, Refresh”, a journey is glimpsed by the young Josh. Like the other examples, it is a journey towards the battlefield and, in line with the tendency displayed by the other homefront orphans, an attempt to retrace his father's steps. However, it cannot be said to be a “redeeming” journey: Josh and Gordon head to the Armed Forces Recruiting Station, where they “would at last answer the fierce alarm of war” and put their “pens to paper” and make their fathers “proud” (Percy loc. 317), as previously cited. Josh does not go to the battlefield to search peace: in his journey, the boy seeks war – but in a way, he does so as an attempt to connect with his father.

In *Children of War*, even the glimpse of a redeeming journey is feeble. The children interviewed by Ellis – orphans or not – are refugees, exiled in Jordan, away from Iraq, their homeland. When the possibility of returning home is mentioned, it is seen merely as a distant possibility, a dream: “I try to keep in touch with my friends in Iraq”, says Laith, one of the orphans interviewed by Ellis. “I think they've forgotten me. I miss them, though. I miss my home, too, and my things”. She concludes her interview with a poignant message: “If I could talk to American children, I'd say, 'Take your soldiers out of my country. I want to go home'” (65).

These significant differences in “Refresh, Refresh” and *Children of War* must be

comprehended through the historical moment of production of these works. They are set in the context of the Iraq War, a conflict which was still being waged by the time the short story and the book were written. The other orphan narratives in the corpus all feature a difference of twenty, thirty or even forty years between the end of the war and the "redeeming journey". In the midst of the horrors of the Iraq War, right in the "eye of the tornado", it is impossible for these orphans to glimpse any possibility of redemption.

1.3.1 – The "inverted nóstos*" of war orphan narratives*

In his doctoral dissertation, Luiz Gustavo Vieira puts forward the proposition that the canon of western war literature can be understood as revolving around three key concepts, which he draws centrally from the *Illiad*: *árete*, *kléos*, and *nóstos* – which can be poorly translated to "skill", "glory" and "return". The last of these categories is useful to understand the "redeeming journey" in war orphan narratives.

The Greek word *nóstos* (νόστος) is traditionally translated as "return" or "homecoming", especially from a long journey. Perhaps the most famous narrative of *nóstos* narrative is the *Odyssey*, and its account of Odysseus's long journey home. Another classic example is Virgil's *Aeneid* and its narrative of Aeneas's escape from Troy and his subsequent journey to the Italic Peninsula. But, as Vieira points out, *nóstos* should not be understood only in this strict sense, but as a trajectory: "a movement which originates in the combat zone and in theory ends with the homecoming" (147). But not only this, Vieira also claims that "*nóstos* is the essential part and goal in the arc comprised by the period before the beginning of the war until its end". *Nóstos* can be understood, then, as both the moment of return from war – an essential part of war narratives – and as the entire trajectory, which extends from the

moments before the combatant goes to war, until his return, dead or alive.

But while the more canonical war narratives, especially those focused on combatants, feature a *nóstos* that aims at returning *home*, away from war, the war orphan narratives, in their "redeeming journeys" offer a twist in this essential aspect of war literature: instead of going back home, these orphans find their redemption, their closure, and their own *nóstos* by going back to the war zones. Literally going "back" in the case of battlefront orphans, and metaphorically in the case of homefront orphans, for they often see their own lives' histories as continuations of their fathers', as previously shown. In this way, the war orphan narratives invert the *nóstos* trajectory, by putting the journey from civilian life towards the war zone (even if already pacified) not in its beginning, but in its end.

Thus, the "Redeeming Journey", or the "inverted *nóstos*" becomes a central aspect in war orphan narratives, a literary *topos* which somehow binds them together as part of the same canon, that can be traced back to the dawn of western literature, in the *Odyssey.*

Chapter 2

TESTIFYING WAR – THE WAR ORPHANS' NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA

"I know I was loved and my children know I loved them, but there is a part of me down deep which never heals" (Hadler 4). This is the closing line of the first memoir in *Lost in the Victory*. In it, the homefront orphan Vincent Papke Jr. makes a very clear point: growing up without a father who was killed in a war is not an eventuality – it leaves an everlasting mark. "Scars that can never heal" (4), in his own words.

This line of thought resonates in other memoirs in the book. "And let me tell you one thing: the feeling of – what? loss? grief? being gypped – *never* goes away", says John Dell, in another memoir (123). "I can't say, 'Okay, I finished denial. Now I go to the next stage.' And it never happened" is a quote from Jeff Ward, yet another orphan in the book (183).

The examples above are homefront orphans. This means that they have never actually witnessed the terror of war, its sheer despair. And still, it seems that the impact of war in their lives – in their very psyche – is enormous. Throughout homefront orphan narratives, there are examples of adults diagnosed with depression, alcoholism, difficulties in maintaining relationships. Fathers who cannot deal with their children, because they feel too much grief for the loss of their own fathers.

If we consider battlefront orphans, mentioning their own lasting grief is redundant. Having witnessed torture, massacre, starvation, rape and mass killings before they were even old enough to clean their own bedrooms, the very identity of these children was formed and shaped by these experiences. The state of orphanhood in which these children were plunged into by a catastrophic event cannot be described as something else but "traumatic".

Therefore, in order to discuss the psychological impact of war in the lives of orphans, and how this impact is evidenced in their narratives, one must consider centrally the category of *trauma*.

It is classic to consider the category *trauma* as essential and central to the early development of psychoanalysis (Laplanche 679-680). Trauma is understood by Freud as "an experience that, in a short space of time, brings such a heightening excitation to the psychic life that its liquidation or its elaboration by the normal and habitual means fails, which cannot help but cause lasting disturbances in the energetic functioning" (qtd. in Laplanche 679-680).[6] In other words, it is an accumulation of excitations that surpasses the psychic apparatus's capacity to elaborate. It can be caused by a single incredibly violent moment or by an accumulation of excitations which could be tolerated if isolated from each other, but become unbearable when combined (679).

But to investigate how trauma is thematized, represented and elaborated in war orphans' narratives, their experiences must be understood as non-typical. Their trauma must be understood as of a different nature than an average person's childhood traumas. The war has to be considered a moment of exception in human history, an overflowing event. War must be addressed as a *catastrophe*. As such, we must turn to an essential matter in literary studies: the memories of catastrophes, given shape by testimonial literature. The testimonial literature of historical catastrophes has a dialectical aspect, balanced in the tension between the individual memory and the collective. As Márcio Seligmann-Silva puts it,

> In these situations, like genocides or violent en masse persecutions of certain sectors of society, the memory of trauma is always the search for *a balance* between the individual labor of memory and the other labor of memory built

by society. (“Narrar o Trauma” 67)[7]

This chapter seeks to understand war orphan narratives as being a part of such tradition. Not only that, I also seek to posit this discussion as part of an ongoing debate on the nature of testimonial literature, relying especially on Brazilian scholar Seligmann-Silva.

2.1 – *Testimonio* and *Zeugnis*: Untranslatable concepts?

In order to think about the concept of “testimony”, I would like to, as mentioned, refer to Márcio Seligmann-Silva. In his article “*Zeugnis* and *Testimonio*: A case of unstranslatability between concepts”[8] the researcher departs from the Portuguese word *testemunho* and its ambivalent meaning: it can be used both in the sense of “witnessing/to witness” and in the sense of “testimony/to testify”. This interesting polysemy makes Seligmann-Silva discuss two different traditions of testimonial literature and criticism: an Anglo-German one, associated with the German word *Zeugnis*, and a Hispanic one, associated with the Spanish word *testimonio,* both of which could be translated by the Portuguese *testemunho*, but – and this is the main argument in his article – they are not completely or perfectly interchangeable with each other, when taken as categories of literary theory. In other words, the author tries to prove that the “literature of *testimonio*” and the “literature of *Zeugnis*”, even though both could be translated to “testimonial literature” (or *literatura de testemunho*, in Portuguese), do not, in fact, refer to the same thing. In order to differentiate the concepts and discuss the literary and theoretical tradition behind each one, Seligmann-Silva analyzes the concepts based on five aspects: a) the event; b) the person who witnesses/testifies; c) the testimony; d) the scene of the testified/witnessed; and e) the testimonial literature.

Seligmann-Silva first discusses the *event*. The Anglo-German tradition of testimonial literature – *Zeugnis* – is associated with a central "overflowing event" [*evento transbordante*]. A historical, singular event, a catastrophic moment that resides beyond explanation, irreducible to speech. The paradigmatic event of the *Zeugnis* is, essentially, the Holocaust, or, as it is called in more contemporary discussions, the Shoah. This "overflowing event" is a historical exception, a singularity: a catastrophe. This includes not only the Shoah, but also moments like the two World Wars, for instance (Seligmann-Silva, "'Zeugnis' e 'Testimonio'" 122-123). The tradition of *testimonio*, on the other hand, shaped especially in Latin-American literature, is not marked by a singularity: it "emphasizes the continuity of oppression and its omnipresence in the 'Latin-American continent'" ("'Zeugnis' e 'Testimonio'" 126).[9] The memories belonging to the Latin-American tradition, then, are often associated with a continuous chain of oppression – from the genocide of the native population, to the chains of colonialism, to the military dictatorships and the institutionalized violence of the great cities torn apart by both crime and the state's repressive apparatus. Violence, in Latin America – and therefore in the tradition of *testimonio* – is not an exception, a singularity like the Shoah or the World Wars: it is permanent, almost ontological.

The second aspect raised by Seligmann-Silva is *the person who witnesses/testifies*. The subject in the tradition of the literature of *Zeugnis* is associated, centrally, with the Latin notion of *superstes* – survivor:

> [t]he witness/testifier [*testemunha*] as someone who survived a catastrophe and cannot handle the experience – because of the trauma (subjective element) and because of the "dimension" of the catastrophe (objective element) – takes us to another possible etymology of the witness/testifier as *superstes* or, in

Greek, *martir* (survivor). (“'Zeugnis' e 'Testimonio'” 123)[10]

The paradigmatic subject of the literature of *Zeugnis* is, then, the survivor (*superstes*) of the Shoah. In order to describe the subject of the literature of *testimonio*, on the other hand, Seligmann-Silva refers to a different Latin notion: *testis*.[11] The word refers to the “third element of the court scene, capable of *proving*, *certifying*, the veracity of the facts” (126); that is, it is focused not exactly on the subjectivity of the victim's experience, but rather on the “third element”, the observer who could *witness* and now can *testify* the truth in court. *Testimonio* is, therefore, essentially part of both memory and history – symbiotically united. Not focused on the category of “trauma”, *testimonio* for Seligmann-Silva must be, almost exclusively, understood in the sense of historical justice, of “attributing voice for the subaltern”[12] (126).

Thirdly, the researcher investigates the “testimony” itself: that is, how the text (in the broad sense) is produced, and what elements define it. In the literature of *Zeugnis* “literalization [*literalização*] and fragmentation are the central characteristics (and only at first glance incompatible) of the testimonial discourse”[13] (123). Since the traumatic experience is impossible to translate into images or metaphors, given its intensity, the need for literalization and fragmentation arises. In the tradition of *testimonio*, on the other hand, the emphasis lies on “realism”, in the “fidelity of the testimony/*testimonio*” (126). Since one of the central concerns of the literature of *testimonio* is the production of historical justice, it is committed to a “historical truth” and to historical documents. For Seligmann-Silva, the literature of *testimonio* – as opposed to the literature of *Zeugnis* – is not articulated in the psychoanalytical key “trauma”.

One could argue that, between the two traditions, there is an opposition between a

"realism" (*strictu senso*, associated with the Latin-American literary tradition of "realism") and a "*real*-ism" – where the *real* must be understood as the Lacanian, psychoanalitical notion of *real* – a realism that Karl Erik Schøllhammer calls "traumatic realism" (167). Schøllhammer defines this category as "an image marked by the limit of what can be represented and at the same time the index and archive of the same impossibility"[14], where "referentiality is identified (…) in the effects of an impossible real, due to the defeat of the possibilities of representation."[15] In this traumatic realism "art seeks to become the very path to an approximation of trauma, a process of rupture of the alliance between the symbolic and the imaginary that distances the subject from the real, but also protects it"[16] (Schøllhammer 167).

Furthermore, Seligmann-Silva also argues that the discourse of *testimonio* is marked by the oral speech, as opposed to the tendency of the testimonies of the Shoah, which often focus on the written text[17]: "The *testimonio* is born not from writing, but from the speech of a population that is, most of the times, illiterate".[18] (Seligmann-Silva, "'Zeugnis' e 'Testimonio'" 126-127) In the literature of *testimonio*, these voices also often demand a mediator – a translator, interpreter, journalist, anthropologist – which will attempt to "give voice" to groups that were historically silenced, excluded and marginalized.

The fourth element compared by Seligmann-Silva is the scene of the testimony. Both traditions are similar in the fact that they use the space of the *court of law* as the scene of enunciation, where the testimony fulfills a role of historical justice. However, the testimony of the Shoah (and, therefore, the tradition of the literature of *Zeugnis*) has yet another characteristic scene: the psychoanalytic scene, the scene of therapy – the testimony as the individual reflection of elaboration of the traumatic past – an element, for Seligmann-Silva,

absent from the literature of *testimonio* (124).

The last category concerns the testimonial literature itself – in other words, the canon of each tradition. The literature of *Zeugnis*, as aforementioned, considers centrally the literature of the Shoah. Here, authors like Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Maurice Blanchot, Art Spiegelman and others are canonical names. The literature of *testimonio*, on the other hand, is associated since the 1960's to the genres of "chronicle [*crônica*], hagiography, autobiography, report, diary and essay"[19] (127). Its canon contains works such as *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, Maria Esther Gilio's *La Guerrilla Tupamara*, the work of José Maria Arguedas, etc.

Seligmann-Silva, in his article, attempts to demonstrate how the category of "testimonial literature" is not limited and well-defined; by contrasting the literatures of *Zeugnis* and *testimonio*, the author shows that, in fact, when discussing "testimonial literature", two different people might be referring to different ideas. His contribution in this aspect is valuable, especially for those who research the two events centrally discussed by the author: the Shoah and the Latin-American dictatorships. In this thesis, I will try to show what aspects of each category – *Zeugnis* and *testimonio* – can be perceived in the narratives of my primary corpus. By doing this, I intend not only to evidence how the testimonial aspect is present in war orphan narratives, but also to broaden Seligmann-Silva's proposition, by showing how the categories of *testimonio* and *Zeugnis* might be understood, outside of their respective literary canons, as *moments in the testimonial act*.

2.2 – *Testimonio* and *Zeugnis* in war orphan narratives

In the early developmental stage of this research, I first thought of a formal, direct relation between the categories analyzed by Seligmann-Silva, *Zeugnis* and *testimonio,* and

my own categories of battlefront orphans and homefront orphans – which means, I first proposed that each of his categories would correspond to each of mine in what concerns the testimonial character of war orphan narratives. In that first development, I initially considered as the central element of distinction the *subject* of the testimonial discourse.

With that in mind, it can be said that battlefront orphan narratives are centrally narrated from the perspective of experience: those who in fact suffered – and *witnessed* – war are the ones who try to *testify* to it. Referring back to Seligmann-Silva's proposition, the subject of the testimony in battlefront orphans is the *superstes* – the survivor. Considering this, one could argue that battlefront orphans tend to be a part of the tradition of *Zeugnis* – or at least to display strong similarities with it.

Homefront orphan narratives, on the other hand, are not centered on the perspective of experience, but rather on the lack of it – as previously discussed. These narratives, in fact, are often not centered on the orphans themselves, but rather on their fathers – and on how the orphans can grasp their stories. The orphans, here, might be seen as mediators of the soldiers' voices, the subjects who will try to recover the stories of those who were silenced. They would not be survivors, or witnesses – their testimonies would be *testis*, not *superstes* – they have seen the war (in films, literature, diaries, etc.) but not actually *lived* it. In this case, these narratives could be grouped under the category of literature of *testimonio*. It must be acknowledged, however, that in this reasoning, the homefront orphans would qualify as a *sui generis* example of *testis*: the "mediator" in the *testimonio* literature usually directly mediates the discourse of a victim – usually through interview. But the homefront orphan attempts to testify the father's voice without having direct access to it; the orphan mediates a lack of voice, so to speak.

One example of battlefront orphan narrative that seems to be admirably similar to the tradition of the literature of *Zeugnis* is Evelyne Tannehill's *Abandoned and Forgotten*. Several aspects that Seligmann-Silva associates with this tradition are noticeable in Tannehill's autobiography. One of them is related to the *event* – if we consider Seligmann-Silva's categories. The impact that the Second World War has in the life of young Eva is completely unmatched; she and her family go from a comfortable pastoral life on a well-off farm to the absolute desperation of refugee life. In the first section of the book, war is but a distant rumor, which approaches very slowly – while Germany had the upper hand in the conflict, its population was spared much of the horrors faced by the rest of Europe. However, as soon as war hits East Prussia, things change radically and very fast:

> Barely a month had passed – A terrifying month – since we had fled from home. We knew only one thing for certain: we could expect no mercy from the Russians, who considered us their prey and fair game for any savage act. If they killed us, there would be no witnesses, no one to report our fate, and no one to bury our bodies. Our kin, if they survived, would never know what had happened to us. Law and order no longer existed. (Tannehill 125)

In merely a month, any trace of law, order or civilization is violently swept away by the magnitude of the event of war. This enormous overflowing event is very similar to what the Shoah represents in the tradition of *Zeugnis* – and of course, the Second World War and the Shoah are two intimately related events.

Another aspect that approximates *Abandoned and Forgotten* to the literatures of *Zeugnis* has to do with what Seligmann-Silva calls “the testimony itself”. Tannehill's writing reads a lot like a novel: its action is divided into chapters, each of them featuring its own

climactic moment, and grouped into five different sections throughout the book. It has no traces of oral narrative or of journalistic discourse – key aspects of the literature of *testimonio*. Furthermore, the way Eva perceives war, as a child, can easily be associated with the aforementioned Lacanian *real*-ism: several times, when witnessing something too terrible, or when trying to elaborate her experiences, Eva must rely on elements of the fantastic – based on the ghost stories and fairy tales her grandmother told her – in order to cope with the intense experience. This happens, for example, when Walek – the son of the Polish family for whom she works in slave-like conditions after the war is over – plays a prank on her by leaving a human skull on her pillow:

> That evening, I saw the living manifestation of the invisible world of ghosts, and phantoms staring at me from the shadows of my cot. Walek's hollow-eyed, gray skull rested comfortably on my pillow. My blood turned to ice, and my legs stayed solidly anchored to the floor. … I probably was getting ever closer to that fine line between sanity and insanity. (Tannehill 260)

The further Eva gets into her own misfortune, the thinner the thread that separates reality and illusion seems to her; the fragmentation of the discourse, an element of the literature of *Zeugnis*, can be seen in Tannehill's text in the anguishing fluidity between sanity and insanity:

> My life seemed to hang by a fragile thread. I escaped more and more into a world of fantasy and make-believe. I imagined Father and Erwin returning from Siberia and rescuing me, or Douglas appearing and beating up Walek. … Life became a blur of reality and nightmare, and I had trouble distinguishing between the two. … Had there ever been a better life, a happier existence, I

> wondered. Or was I locked into one long fairy tale as the unfortunate, downtrodden character, never to escape? (240)

Abandoned and Forgotten seems to be close to the tradition of the literature of *Zeugnis,* which is aided by the fact that their context of production is very similar, historically and geographically.

But although this first example confirmed my initial hypothesis – that battlefront orphan narratives could be associated with *Zeugnis*, while homefront orphans would approach *testimonio* –, as soon as I turned my attention to other narratives, the argument could no longer hold water. Andrea Warren's *Escape from Saigon*, for instance, although a battlefront orphan narrative, shares several elements of the literatures of *testimonio*.

Warren's work is almost entirely written in an authorial voice that is not the orphan's. Carrying out a work of historical and journalistic research, the author tries to give voice to those who were silenced, but through her own voice. The book begins with a "Note to Readers" which clarifies this a little:

> The events I recount in this book are based on documented historical fact and the recollections of those whose stories appear, and as memories are necessarily subjective, they may differ from those of others. I have reconstructed conversations from the memories of these individuals …. (Warren loc. 29)

This excerpt shows how *Escape from Saigon* also displays the element of the oral discourse, prominent in the literature of *testimonio*. As previously mentioned, for Seligmann-Silva the *testimonio* emerges from the speech of a population that is mostly illiterate – and therefore demand the presence of the mediator. Warren's work features both aspects: the oral

speech (implied in her writing) and the mediator (Warren herself).

Warren's motivation for writing is also typical of *testimonio* narratives: she does not seek to elaborate a trauma, but rather tell a story that has been silenced by official accounts. As she writes in her introduction: “I have long felt that the story of the plight of the war orphans, and of the [Operation] Babylift itself, needed to be told” (loc. 56). Her goal is to convince her readers to empathize with the struggles and hardships faced by war orphans:

> As you read this story of the other side of war – not of soldiers and battles, but of orphans and people trying to help them – my hope is that you will think of all the other children in this world whose lives are scarred by war. And when you have the opportunity, I hope that you will do whatever you can to help children, wherever they live, who are in harm's way and cannot help themselves. (Warren loc. 72)

Yet another common trait between *Escape from Saigon* and the narratives of *testimonio* is what Seligmann-Silva calls the *event*. In the narratives of *testimonio*, the “continuity of oppression in the Latin-American continent” (Seligmann-Silva, “'Zeugnis' e 'Testimonio'” 126) is the central stage – and not, as in the narratives of *Zeugnis*, an overflowing event (e.g. the Shoah). This notion of *continuity* of oppression and misery is central in Warren's work. The prologue of the narrative already establishes Vietnam as a country historically immersed in oppression and violence:

> Though Vietnam has been conquered many times, its people have always fought valiantly to expel invaders, including the Chinese, who ruled Vietnam for a thousand years, ending in the early part of the tenth century. The French arrived in Vietnam in 1859 and left in defeat in 1954.

> That same year, because of conflict over who would control the country, Vietnam split in two. … Thus began the long war between the two Vietnams …. (loc. 77)

Vietnam, then, like Latin-America in the literatures of *testimonio*, is pictured as a country defined by a continuous chain of oppression and domination. Thus, *Escape from Saigon*, contrary to my initial hypothesis, proves to be considerably similar to the narratives belonging to the tradition of *testimonio* literature.

But as the research ventures deeper into the investigation of war orphan narratives, even a strict separation between *testimonio* and *Zeugnis* starts to look inadequate. When investigating other works of the primary corpus, I perceived that aspects of the literature of *Zeugnis* flooded into the homefront orphan narratives, and the same with *testimonio* and battlefront orphan narratives. These categories, when taken out of their original context – the literature of the Shoah and the literature of the Latin-American dictatorships –, proved that they could be much more fluid.

Lost in the Victory offers an interesting example of the fluidity between the two categories, when taken out of their original context. If I was to take into consideration my first hypothesis, it could be argued that the collection was close to the tradition of *testimonio*: being a homefront orphan narrative, it would not feature an "overflowing event" at its core, because the war was not experienced by the orphans (and this "non-experience" is precisely a key element of these narratives, as previously discussed). It would also feature a level of mediation – for its narratives are (at least at first sight) not focused on the orphans themselves, but rather on their fathers. The element of "giving voice" to those who have not been able to express it, which is constitutive of the *testimonio* literature, is present in *Lost in*

the Victory, as expressed in the book's introduction, by Ann Mix:

> We want to know who they [our fathers] were. Perhaps our awakening is occurring as we begin to face our own mortality and think about the linkage of our lives, the past and the future. We are beginning to ask the unanswered questions: How and where did our fathers die? Is there anyone who was with them when they died? Are there those who remember them? Are there pictures or letters to provide clues that can help us know our fathers? … We want our children to know their grandfathers. We want to learn all we can before it is too late. (Hadler xxiv)

In fact, *Lost in the Victory* displays a double level of mediation of the discourse: not only do the orphans tell their fathers' stories, but they do so while being interviewed by the book's editors – which would constitute a second mediation. It must be said, however, that the process of mediation here is slightly different from the tradition of the literatures of *testimonio*: while in that canon the victims could not testify for their experience because they were often illiterate, here the soldier cannot testify because he is dead, and therefore the orphan will attempt to mediate his discourse.

A more careful analysis, however, shows some fissures in this reading, and proves it too superficial. First of all, to declare that the memoirs lack an “overflowing event” seems a rushed conclusion. Although these orphans have not experienced the front, the war is a defining element in their lives, which haunts them forever.

In fact, the very unrepresentability of war and the anguish the orphans feel for not being able to grasp it, put the war in a position of the Lacanian “real” – which, as previously discussed, is an element of literatures of *Zeugnis*. In fact, the narratives in *Lost in Victory*

seem to sit on the edge between *realism* and *real*-ism: the orphans feel a responsibility towards the memories of their fathers, and a need to "tell their stories" accordingly, close to the "fact"; thus, the book relies heavily on documents. Every memoir closes with pictures of the fathers, drawings they made, pictures of their graves, etc. Often, the orphans reproduce the letters their fathers sent from the front in their memoirs. But at the same time that these narratives feature a strong commitment to a "factual truth", most of them mention the anguish of not understanding war – the emptiness of the lacanian "real".

Another element of complexity in defining the testimonial character of *Lost in the Victory* has to do with the *subject* and the *object* of the testimony; in other words, *who* testifies and *what* they testify. It is not possible to pinpoint exactly what is the focus of the memoirs in the book: they seem to be as much about the fathers as they are about the orphans themselves. Even though they serve as a medium to convey the fathers' lost voices, the publishing of the book (and in fact all the effort conducted by AWON, of which *Lost in the Victory* is just one work) also offers the orphans themselves some comfort, and help them tell their own stories as well. As Ann Mix puts it in the book's introduction:

> As we learn more about our fathers, remember them, and mourn them, we are beginning to free ourselves. Now we are able to reflect on our fathers and our lives as their orphans. Telling our stories is part of the restoration of our individual lost heritage. Beyond that, it is part of the unfinished work of the nation. (Hadler xxvi)

This excerpt, furthermore, shows another element of fluidity between the elements that are typical of the literature of *Zeugnis* and of *testimonio*: the commitment to both the individual elaboration of trauma and the creation of a collective memory, able to bring justice

to silenced voices. These orphans are concerned with reflecting on their lives as orphans, but also with finishing the "work of the nation" by telling the untold stories of the Second World War.

Yet another factor worth discussing, which is still related to the subject of the testimony, has to do with the status of the mediators of *Lost in the Victory*. Ann Bennet Mix and Susan Hadler make their presence very much noted in the book: their voices are not elided, for most of the memoirs are intertwined with their editorial comments, identified in the text by using a different typography. This prominent figure of the mediator is typical of *testimonio* narratives. However, the mediators in *Lost in the Victory* are orphans themselves, and their own memoirs are also included in the book (Hadler's being the last one); in this sense, they are both mediators and "survivors". I put the word here between quotation marks because, naturally, they are not a typical example of *superstes*, for they have not lived through the war. They are, however, scarred by its impact – the loss of the father. They carry this trauma throughout their lives, and it is this traumatic absence that they testify in their narratives – while at the same time, as editors, working as vehicles for the voices of other homefront orphans. The editors are both *testis* and *superstes*, which once again shows how their collection of memoirs sits in a fluid in-between space in relation to the traditions of *Zeugnis* and *testimonio*.

Deborah Ellis's *Children of War* is another example of a war orphan narrative – in this case, a battlefront orphan narrative – that sits somewhere between the two traditions investigated by Seligmann-Silva. The interviews in the book feature strong similarities to the narratives of *Zeugnis*. They present a central disruptive moment, an overflowing event which radically throws all the lives involved out of balance: the occupation of Iraq by the joint effort

of the United States and its allies. Many of the children interviewed by Ellis had normal middle-class lives before the war struck. There are girls who studied in private boarding schools (Ellis 73), a boy whose mother was an agricultural engineer (62), a daughter of a State bureaucrat (20), and several other similar stories: all of them were refugees in Jordan by the time Ellis interviewed them.

The magnitude of this over-flowing event defies elaboration – and some of the consequences of this are present in the first chapter. But one particular interview in the book is notable, for it brutally reveals the most terrible physical and psychological consequences of the war: Eman, an 18-year-old mentally disabled girl who cannot speak, is fatherless, and whose mother's mental health is unstable as well:

> Eman doesn't talk.
>
> Her father died two weeks ago, from a long illness. She lives with her mother in a small, dark room. Her mother suffers from severe depression, and possibly other mental illnesses ….
>
> Eman doesn't go outside. There was no treatment for her in Iraq or in Jordan. Her mother thinks Eman's difficulties are from all the chemicals in the bombs that have been used in the wars. She has no one to help her with Eman's care. …
>
> It is hard to get a coherent story from Eman's mother. Too many years of too much difficulty have stopped her mind from thinking clearly.
>
> There is a bad smell in the house, and a heavy feeling of damp and dirt. (Ellis 71- 72)

The image that Ellis draws of Eman and her mother strongly resonates with a kind of

prisoner of the Shoah described by Primo Levi as the *Müselmänner*, certain individuals who could not handle the experience of the concentration camp to an extent that they almost ceased to be humans. Levi describes them as "the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection" (loc. 6032), the "drowned", the "men in decay" who were "not even worth speaking" and who "followed the slope down to the bottom, like streams that run down to the sea" (loc. 1392). "One hesitates to call them living", Levi goes on: "one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand". The author finally describes physically these *Muselmänner*: "an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of a thought is to be seen" (loc. 1392). The similarity between this description and the picture of Eman and her mother in *Children of War* (fig. 1) is striking; the girl and her mother can be seen as *Müselmänner* of the Iraq War.

If considering, then, the event which is testified – its overflowing, disruptive nature – and some of the subjects who testify – in this case Eman –, one might relate *Children of War* to the tradition of *Zeugnis* literature.

It is impossible, however, to overlook some aspects of Deborah Ellis' work that resist such categorization, and associate it with the tradition of the literatures of *testimonio*. The most significant factor has to do with the *subject* of the testimony: similarly to *Lost in the Victory*, *Children of War* displays prominently the figure of the mediator – in this case, Ellis herself. In fact, the mediation process is extensive: the children's discourse is originally produced in their native languages – which are completely foreign to Ellis:

> Because English is my only language, most of the interviews were conducted through two interpreters – one associated with the Mandaean community (an

> ancient religious sect) and one with a group called the Collateral Repair Project, a grassroots organization that provides relief, training, medical care and education to Iraqi refugees. (Ellis 15)

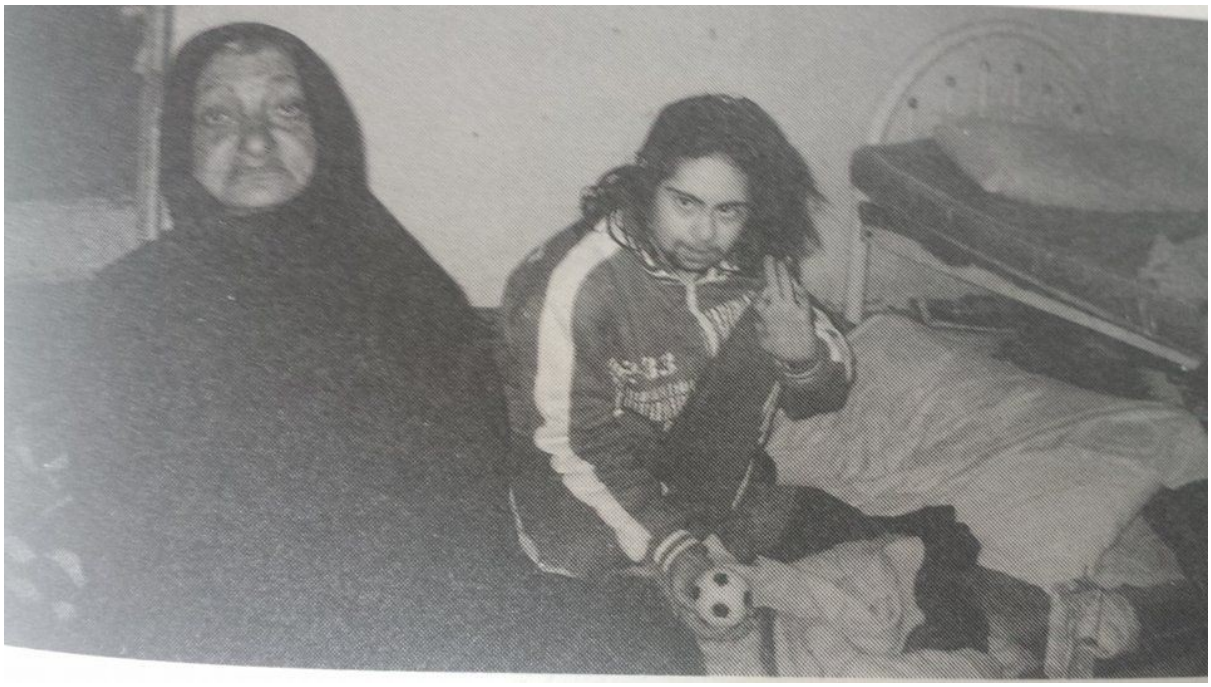

Figure 1: Eman and her mother. (Ellis 71)

The prominent figure of the mediator is an important aspect of the literatures of *testimonio*. Furthermore, the American journalist interviews the children, in an attempt to "fully understand the impact of our decisions on the world's most vulnerable – our children", so that "we can create a world without war" (15). Her goal is clearly one of social, political and historical justice – a key characteristic of *testimonio* narratives for Seligmann-Silva. *Children of War* is yet another example of how war orphan narratives incorporate elements of both traditions of testimonial literature.

2.2.1 – Witnessing and Testifying: two moments of the testimonial discourse

The investigation of the testimonial discourse in these war orphan narratives seems to point to a heterogeneous landscape; characteristics that are associated with both the tradition of *Zeugnis* and of *testimonio* might be identified in different works, and yet one cannot argue that they share enough elements in order to consist in a "testimonial canon" of its own – like the literature of the Shoah or of the Latin-American dictatorships do, for example. In other words, even though the war orphan narratives seem to constitute a distinctive category (or sub-category) of war literature – as discussed in the first chapter – they do not seem to carry enough distinct recurring characteristics in their testimonial discourse in order to be considered part of a specific genre or category within the more general tradition of testimonial literature.

But even so, the investigation of the testimonial aspects in war orphan narratives has not been unfruitful. First of all, the five aspects of the testimonial discourse raised by Seligmann-Silva were proved to be a rather efficient methodology: by reading the texts in the light of these aspects, it was possible to draw a landscape of the testimonial discourse in each of the narratives. But not only that, the realization that each of these five aspects demonstrate more fluid characteristics when considered outside of the canons analyzed by the author creates the possibility to reach conclusions on the nature of testimonial literature itself.

I would like to return to the category described by Seligmann-Silva as the *subject* of the testimonial literature. In this discussion, as aforementioned, the author makes the opposition between two Latin origins of the subject of the testimony [*testemunho*]: the *testis* and the *superstes*. In another article, "The Testimony: between the fiction and the 'real'"[20], Seligmann-Silva makes this distinction clearer:

> In Latin one can denominate testimony using two words: *testis* and *superstes*.

> The first one refers to the testimony [*depoimento*] given by a third in a trial. … The meaning of *superstes* is also important in our context: it indicates the person that went through an ordeal, the *survivor*. The concept of *martyr* is close to this notion of the survivor. *Martyros* in Greek means precisely witness [*testemunha*]. ("O Testemunho" 375-390)[21]

With this in mind, one might refer to the translation offered by the Langenscheidt German to Portuguese dictionary to the word *Zeuge* (the root of *Zeugnis*): "witness … to watch, to witness … 1. to testify (in favor of) …".[22] The word *testimonio* in the Oxford online Spanish-English dictionary gives the translation "testimony, statement, proof". But when searching for the word *testigo* (which shares the same root), the translation given is "witness". Likewise, the Portuguese verb *testemunhar* means both "to witness" and "to testify".

Seligmann-Silva refers back to the Latin language in order to differentiate between the *testis* and the *superstes* because in Spanish, German and Portuguese (the languages he discusses in his article) such differentiation is not explicitly present in the language. However, the English language offers us two verbs that can bridge this gap: "to witness" and "to testify".

Of course these two notions are strictly connected, but their difference is essential: not every witness testifies. The witness who "witnesses" is more associated with the concept of *superstes*: someone who survived an experience. The one who testifies is the one who *tells the story*. Though different, I believe that both the *superstes* and the *testis* necessarily are present in every testimonial discourse. If a person witnesses a crime and never tells anyone about it, there is no testimony; likewise, it is impossible to produce a testimony without a

witness. “To witness” and “to testify” (or *superstes* and *testis*), then, constitute two *different moments of the testimonial discourse.*

In the literatures of testimony, this difference is not always clear; in the tradition of *Zeugnis*, for instance, the *superstes* and the *testis* coincide: the person who survives is the person who tells the story. In the literature of *testimonio*, however, this is different: the figure of the mediator works as the *testis*, who tries to validate a voice that has been silenced. The journalist, anthropologist, writer or historian who is telling (or translating, or retelling) the stories of those oppressed people *testifies*, but does not *witness*. But – and this is perhaps the central argument here – the discourse of the *superstes* is still there – even if retold, translated, transcribed or paraphrased. In the end, both the literatures of *Zeugnis* and of *testimonio* need the *superstes* and the *testis*: someone has to witness so that someone can testify. This is, perhaps, the central aspect of testimonial literature, constituted in these two moments of the testimonial discourse: witnessing and testifying. The confrontation of Seligmann-Silva's propositions with the narratives of war orphans enabled this conclusion, and also evidenced the fluidity of the concepts of *Zeugnis* and *testimonio*.

2.3 – Prosthetic Memories: the testimonial nature of fictions about war orphans

The reader may have noticed the absence of two of the six works of the primary corpus from this chapter so far: the novel *In Country* and the short story “Refresh, Refresh”. This has to do with the generic nature of these works: they are both works of fiction, as opposed to the other texts, which all belong to the biographical genres (memoirs, biographies, autobiographies). More importantly than that, the authors of both texts are not orphans, and there is no explicit orphan voice conveyed in the texts (as is the case with the interviews in

Escape from Saigon or *Children of War*, for instance). Therefore, the testimonial nature of Bobbie Ann Mason's novel and Benjamin Percy's short story cannot be dealt with in the same light as the other texts. This section, then, will essentially attempt to answer the question: is there a testimonial nature to fictional texts which were not written by witnesses of catastrophes?

I would like to make my case by first discussing here the famous (or perhaps infamous) "Wilkomirski case". Binjiamin Wilkomirski released, in 1995, his childhood memoir of the Shoah *Fragments – Memories of a Wartime Childhood.* The book was enormously praised, being awarded with nominations by the *Jewish Quarterly* and the Washington Holocaust Museum, the New York *National Jewish Book Award*, among others. It was even compared to Homer, Cervantes and Shakespeare by the time it came out (Nestrovski 202). *Fragments* very quickly was accepted into the canon of the Shoah literature, and praised by public, critics and the Jewish community alike.

Four years after the release of the memoir, however, the story of "Wilkomirski" took a completely unexpected turn. In 1999, the writer and journalist Daniel Ganzfried published, in the journal *Weltwoche*, a long article providing hard evidence that "Binjamin Wilkomirski" was, in fact, Bruno Dösseker, a Swiss musician who had never seen the inside of a concentration camp during the war, and had no Jewish heritage or ties to the Jewish community whatsoever. What was quickly becoming a seminal work of the testimonial literature of the Shoah, was suddenly proclaimed a hoax, a falsification of history, a fraud.

The case has been extensively discussed over the course of the last fifteen years. Dösseker's intentions, morality and even mental health have been discussed by critics, politicians, philosophers and the public. However, there is one aspect that must be

acknowledged: even though a fiction (or a fraud, depending on whose position on the subject we consider), *Fragments* was received when first published as an astounding memoir. It resonated with victims, families and a good part of the Jewish community as a "legitimate" testimony of the Shoah. The question that must be raised is: when the truth comes out, does that take away the power of the narrative? How can it be explained that a non-victim managed to capture so deeply the experiences of those who survived the concentration camps? These are the considerations on which I will draw my argument.

Bearing in mind the Wilkomirski case, it is possible to argue that, under the light of catastrophic events, sometimes the victims cannot describe (or, if one is to think psychoanalytically, metaphorize or elaborate) the horrors they have faced – and in this situation, maybe, a fictionist might be able to produce a text that will empathize with such feeling and provide a possibility of narrativization that cannot be achieved by the victims.

A recent edition of *In Country*, printed in 2005, features a *post scriptum* section with a personal note by Bobbie Ann Mason regarding the writing of the novel, and an interview with the author. From her account, one can see how she thinks about the delicate problematic involving fiction and the literature of catastrophe and trauma. "I have to confess", writes the author, "that when I began writing the novel I was afraid of the subject. I didn't know how to confront the huge subject of the Vietnam War and its aftermath." Her main concern was that she "had not personally known any guys who fought in the war." She even went as far as claiming: "I even wondered if I – as a woman – had the right to tell his [Emmett's] story" (Mason 250).

Mason first addressed this challenge by reading a number of oral histories and first-person accounts by veterans. Among the texts she dealt with were some great works of

Vietnam war writers: Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, Mark Baker's *Nam*, and several others (256). “As I read, I could hear their voices”, the author explains. “I grew accustomed to them. I began to hear Emmett and his buddies talking, their attitudes, their sorrows, and their joys” (251).

But the defining moment for Mason, when she finally felt she indeed could write about Vietnam, came – much like her character – with her visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial:

> As I walked down the Mall toward the memorial, in my mind I could hear the voices of my characters – Sam, her uncle Emmet, her grandmother. … I hadn't known until that moment that they would go to the Wall. And when I saw the Wall, I saw it through *their eyes*, and I felt *their* hearts pounding. And then an incredible thing happened. In the pouring rain, quite by accident, my eyes fell upon my own name on the Wall, a version of my name – Bobby G. Mason. … I knew then that Vietnam was my story too, and it was every American's story. Finally, I felt I had a right to tell a small part of that story. Seeing the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, wives, and children – the families – there that rainy day, I knew we were all in it together. (251 – 252)

There are some interesting considerations about this excerpt of Mason's *post scriptum*. First of all, how her own experience is mirrored in her characters – in other words, how Sam's confrontation with the Wall seems to be a *testimony* of Mason's own encounter. Even in fiction, some biographical aspects seem to avoid being lost. But more than that, Mason here realizes that the story of the Vietnam War is the story of an entire country; as an American, the author realizes that somewhere in the constitution of her national identity, the military

fiasco of the US Army's endeavor in Vietnam is a defining element.

Alison Landsberg proposes the category “prosthetic memories” to describe the feeling of empathy towards the collective traumatic experience of others (eg. the general empathy held by westerners towards the victims of the Shoah). As he describes:

> As I have begun to describe, prosthetic memories are those not strictly derived from a person's lived experience. Prosthetic memories circulate publicly, and although they are not organically based, they are nevertheless experienced with a person's body as a result of an engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies. Prosthetic memories thus become part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the present and future tenses. Made possible by advanced capitalism and an emergent commodified mass culture capable of widely disseminating images and narratives about the past, these memories are not “natural” or “authentic” and yet they organize and energize the bodies and subjectivities that take them on. (Landsberg 25-26)

Petra Rau adopts Landsberg's category in order to discuss the contemporary writers of the Second World War, who were often born long after the war ended, and had no direct, “natural” experience of the conflict:

> With very few exceptions, contemporary fiction dealing with World War II is produced by writers with no direct experience of the war. They do not remember it in any straightforward way but only know it as second or third hand through the memories, stories, and artifacts of earlier generations, and through popular war films, museum visits, pulp fiction, memoirs, TV

> documentaries, or history books. These sources may come to produce "prosthetic memories" for what is essentially a post-memorial generation. (Rau 207)

When Bobbie Ann Mason reads the oral accounts and memoirs of Vietnam Veterans, visits the Memorial Wall and finally realizes that she "had a right to tell a small part of that story", she is indeed accessing and expressing her own prosthetic memories of the Vietnam War, which seem to be available to all Americans. The conflict was a great collective trauma, and was extensively covered by art and journalism alike (it was the first conflict with daily updated television coverage). Mason, then, writes *In Country* not based on her own personal memory and experiences, but on a collective dimension of the conflict, centered around her "prosthetic memories". Bearing this in mind, it is very significant that she decides to write her novel centered on an orphan, and not a veteran: with the high death toll of the war, every American felt somewhat orphaned. In fact, Mason indeed acknowledges how every American was somewhat involved in the war, when justifying the choice of her title: "If war includes the impact on people at home, then we are all in country" (Mason 255). Proceeding with empathy in her writing, Mason tries to reproduce the orphan's anguish as a way to capture her own (and her country's) feelings towards the war.

There is, then, a certain testimonial aspect to the fictional world of *In Country*: Mason testifies her prosthetic memories, and by doing so she is able to help elaborate the trauma of an entire nation, and address political questions that were still, at the time, in the process of being elaborated by government and public alike (the impacts of Agent Orange, the fatherless children of the war, the insertion of veterans back in civil society, etc.). In her fiction, she executes procedures that are typical both to *Zeugnis* and *testimonio*, by treating the war both

as a trauma and as a moment that has to be politically addressed.

The category of “prosthetic memories”, associated with the implications of the Wilkomirski case is the key to discuss the testimonial aspect of *In Country*. The conclusions drawn from this analysis might help understand the testimonial aspect of Benjamin Percy's “Refresh, Refresh”, the other fictional work in the primary corpus. An interview given by Percy shows a similar concern to Mason's:

> At the time I didn’t feel I could write—with any credibility—about what was happening in Iraq, among the sand dunes and desert flats, the bullet-riddled streets of Baghdad. I have friends and family who have served, but I have no military experience. …[w]hen it comes to the military, readers want to know you’ve worn cammies. So I decided instead to write about what was happening in the states [*sic*], the battleground at home. (Lorah)

Similarly to Mason, Percy chooses the theme of the homefront in order to address war without falling into the complicate issue of first-hand experience that surrounds war narratives. Percy relies, then, also on his own prosthetic memories of the Iraq War in order to build his narrative – based centrally on having “encountered so many news articles and programs about Iraq” (Lorah), in his words. “In particular”, the author continues,

> I was inspired by a National Guard unit whose soldiers came from a small town in Ohio; overnight, more than a dozen fathers, uncles, brothers and sons were killed in an ambush. I grew up in rural Oregon. I imagined the same thing happening there and could hardly imagine the cavity left behind. (Lorah)

The story of the soldiers from the small town in Ohio, when crossed with his own personal history and memories of Oregon, creates a narrative that works as powerfully as a

memoir or a biography. By taking his own “natural” memory and “implanting” a prosthetic memory – to use once more Landsberg's metaphor – Percy is able to empathize with the families of these dead soldiers, and incorporate their voices in his writing. In the end, his short story testifies for the hundreds of children of soldiers sent to the Middle-East.

In Country and “Refresh, Refresh” certainly cannot be read as featuring the same testimonial aspects shown in the other works in the corpus. Their fictional character and the self-acknowledged lack of concrete experience by its authors place these narratives aside from the other ones. But even so, they feature a level of testimonial discourse – a *testimonial content*, one might say – engendered in their prosthetic memories of two major conflicts that impacted greatly the lives of all citizens in their country: the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. At the top of these prosthetic memories, they manage to write stories that feature surprising similarities to non-fictional war orphan narratives (as evidenced throughout the first chapter of this thesis), even though they possess no “natural” memory of these catastrophic events. The fact that these fictions manage to, somehow, testify to the experience of war orphans in the United States attests for the power of fictional literature in dealing with the memory of catastrophes.

Chapter 3

THE “MYTH OF THE WAR” AND IDEOLOGY IN WAR ORPHAN NARRATIVES

Wars evoke powerful images. Not only due to their gargantuan dimensions, but also due to their historical significance, wars often leave a mark on a culture, sometimes for millennia. Like a flashing bulb, they leave an afterimage that endures long after they're over. But also like the afterimage of a flashing bulb, the marks left by wars on culture are often twisted, limited, vague or simplified.

When discussing the Trojan War, the image of the wooden horse is quickly conjured up by the mind. Joan of Arc burning at the pyre is often evoked when the Hundred Years War is the topic. The Battle of the Thermopylae, and the Spartans' brave resistance against Xerxes troops is, to this day, the greatest symbol of the Greco-Persian Wars.

Modern warfare, with its new scale of terror and destruction, brought a flood of images into the collective imagination. The American flag being raised in Iwo Jima. The nuclear detonation of Hiroshima. The Soviet flag in the Reichstag. The naked Vietnamese girl escaping from a napalm wave. A suspected Viet Cong being shot in the head during the Tet Offensive. Saddam Hussein with a rope around his neck. The list goes on.

These images condense the experience of war. They simplify it. Each of them offers a framed still photograph in which a conflict is tentatively contained. But it is not only in images that war is simplified in order to be somehow contained and described: we also bear a collective, simplified narrative of war in our minds. To this narrative – a synthesis of images, texts and memories –, Samuel Hynes gives the name “Myth of the War”.

This last chapter will investigate this category, and relate it to a broader concept:

ideology. With these categories in mind, I will attempt to evidence how the narratives in the corpus interact politically and ideologically with the hegemonic discourses on war.

3.1 – The myth of the war

Samuel Hynes was a US Marine pilot from 1943 to 1946 and from 1952 to 1953. After his military career, the author turned to literary studies, and taught at Swarthmore College, Northwestern University and Princeton University. He is, today, one of the most important and referenced researchers in war literature in the English language.

Hynes, during the course of his career, developed a very useful concept: “the myth of the war”. In *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, the author puts the category as such:

> By “myth” I don't mean a fabrication or fiction; I mean rather the simplified narrative that evolves from a war, through which it is given meaning: a Good War, a Bad War, a Necessary War. Myths seem to be socially necessary, as judgments or justifications of the terrible costs of war, but they take their shape at the expense of the particularity and ordinariness of experience, and the inconsistencies and contradictions of human behavior. The myth of a war tells what is imaginable and manageable. (*The Soldiers' Tale* xiii)

In his book on the Great War, *A War Imagined*, Hynes gives a complementary definition of the category:

> I use that phrase [Myth of the War] in this book to mean not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it, the story of the war that has evolved and has come to be accepted as true. The construction of that story

> began during the war, and grew in the years that followed, assimilating along the way what was compatible with its judgments, and rejecting what was not. The Myth is not the War entire: it is a tale that confirms a set of attitudes, an idea of what the war was and what it meant. …
>
> This story [the Myth of the First World War] has been told in many ways: in histories of the war, in fictions and memoirs, in poems, in plays, in paintings, in films; but its essential elements remain much the same. (*A War Imagined* loc. 72-83)

The myth of the war is, we might say, the "commonsensical" narrative of a certain war. The myth is not to be confused with the "official discourse" of a war. The Great War (or the First World War) is an example of how there is sometimes a disjunction between the official story of war and its "mythical" version (and the reason for such disjunction will be discussed later in the text). For decades, the official discourse of the Allied countries sustained that, however terrible were the costs, the First World War was a necessary confrontation to defend the ideals of their nations, and that the soldiers who went to combat were valiant heroes of their countries. The "myth" of the First World War, however, tells a different narrative, summarized by Hynes as such:

> [a] generation of innocent young men, their heads full of abstractions like Honour, Glory and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the

> society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance. (*A War Imagined* loc. 72 – 82)

Hynes, in his books, departs from the "myths of war" in order to discuss a kind of "counter-narrative", which he calls "the soldiers' tale": "the notional tale(...): what happened in war, one man at a time; who the men were who told war's separate stories and what their stories tell us (and don't tell us) about war" (*The Soldiers' Tale* xiii). He sums up the opposition as such: "The myth of the war tells what is imaginable and manageable; the soldiers' tale, in its infinite variety, tells the whole story" (*The Soldiers' Tale* xiii).

What Hynes fails (or does not attempt) to do is to dwell on the *reasons* why the myth of war is developed in a certain way and not in other. It "confirms a set of attitudes", the author argues; but the question is: what attitudes? Why must the myth of war exist? How does the way it is constructed relate to the general context surrounding the war and its narratives? I believe that the answer to these questions lie in a methodological leap that Samuel Hynes does not take: adopting the concept of *ideology*.

3.2 – Defining Ideology

Philosophy, theory and the humanities in general have attempted to provide a reliable concept of *ideology* for centuries, and the question is no less complex today than it was during the Enlightenment, when the category was first conceived (Eagleton 63). Naturally, I do not intend to give a definitive answer to this question in this thesis, nor will I propose a new definition of ideology. In the course of this section, I will briefly consider some conceptualizations of ideology, try to make some comments on the historical development of

the category and relate them to Hynes's concept of “myth of war”. The research for this chapter was centrally based upon Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction*, in which the author extensively discusses the concepts and the historical development of the notion of ideology, as well as contesting the late-20th century notions of “end of ideology”.

It is useful to begin with a broad, somewhat vague definition of ideology, before defining the concept in its more restricted conceptualizations. Eagleton defines ideology in a very broad manner as “the general material process of production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life” (28), a definition somewhat close to the idea of “culture”. But although this definition is useful in order to begin the discussion, it is much too broad, and has in fact little or no political implication. In this chapter, I intend to work with a more well-defined and restricted concept of ideology.

The concept of ideology was first developed during the Enlightenment, and referred to a field of knowledge which would investigate the “ideas” and its processes in the human mind (Eagleton 63). However, the term “ideology” as we today understand it had its origins with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and since then its precise concept has been a central element in the development of Marxist tradition, widely employed and investigated by great Marxists, such as Theodor Adorno, Gÿorgy Lucácks, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser. Perhaps Marx and Engels' most influential work on a theory of ideology is *The German Ideology*. An attempt to deconstruct the Hegelian idealism which was hegemonic in the German thought at the time, *The German Ideology* is one of the most important texts in Marxist tradition.

Eagleton identifies two different elaborations of the concept of ideology in *The German Ideology*. The first notion is that of ideology as the “illusory or socially disconnected

beliefs which see themselves as the ground of history, and which by distracting men and women from their actual social conditions …, serve to sustain an oppressive political power" (Eagleton 83-84). Here, then, ideology is understood as a *false consciousness*, an artificial and fallacious set of beliefs that work towards the naturalization of oppression and exploitation. The other notion describes ideology as "those ideas which directly express the material interests of the dominant social class, and which are useful in promoting its rule" (84). In other words, this notion of ideology can be summarized in the maxim "the ruling ideas of the ruling class".

These elaborations are landmarks in the development of the concept of ideology, and inaugurate some notions that are cause for debate to this day, especially the idea of a "false consciousness". However, as Eagleton reinforces in his work, these notions feature limitations and contradictions which must be acknowledged.

First, the very notion of a "false consciousness" is problematic. This notion presupposes, in a sense, the "belief that a minority of theorists monopolize a scientifically grounded knowledge of how society is, while the rest of us blunder around in some fog of false consciousness" (Eagleton 11), which is simply terrible for someone who thinks of himself as a democratic thinker. This notion is, in a sense, deeply elitist, for it completely underestimates the intellectual capacity of the working class and of the exploited and excluded sectors of society.

Furthermore, the idea of a false consciousness seems to presuppose the stupidity of most members of the human race. If we do not consider humans as a flock of obedient sheep, incapable of understanding any bit of reality around them, we must acknowledge that ideologies, in order to work, must at least make sense to the experience of humans. As

Eagleton puts it: “ruling ideologies can actively shape the wants and desires of those subjected to them; but they must also engage significantly with the wants and desires that people already have ….” (14-15)

The other concept of ideology (the “ruling ideas of the ruling class”) developed in *The German Ideology* also features inconsistencies. The most blatant one is perhaps the fact that it implies that non-dominant classes have no ideology of their own; in Eagleton's words: “Ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has” (2). By implying that the bourgeoisie has its ideology and the other classes have none, this concept falls short: even if we consider “socialism” not as an ideology, but rather as an anti-ideology, a scientific view of the world (as Marx understood it), what would characterize the body of beliefs and political agenda of the feminists? They surely cannot be said to be completely aligned to the interests of the ruling classes – otherwise, the feminist movement would not be one of the most contested in the twentieth century. Are they not “ideological”, then?

The concept of “ideology”, therefore, though introduced by Marx and Engels, is only initially discussed in their body of work. It is only in the 20th century that the concept would be more thoroughly investigated by several authors. With this historical preamble, I will attempt to present a concept of ideology which relates better to Hynes's category of “myth of war”.

The proposition of a false consciousness should not be wholly discarded, initially. Hynes defines the myth of the war not as exactly “false” or “fictional”, but as an “imaginative version” of reality. But how can it be “imaginative” and not be “fictional”? What does it mean to be an “imaginative” version, here? What Hynes probably means is that the myth of the war is constructed through a process of selection and omission, and through how

discourse shapes the reading of the same event. We can cite, for instance, how the battle of Dunkirk, in the Second World War, is celebrated as a monument to the endurance of the British – while it was militarily a defeat. But it offers a narrative that makes sense: it draws on a fact (the battle) and offers a narrative which is manageable.

According to Eagleton, ideology also works in a similar way: "successful ideologies must be more than imposed illusions, and for all their inconsistencies must communicate to their subjects a version of social reality which is real and recognizable enough not to be simply rejected …" (15). Eagleton then identifies a few strategies through which ideology filters and molds perception in order to offer a narrative which is at the same time acceptable and coherent to the goals of the class which is producing the narrative. One of these strategies is using statements which are not exactly false at face-value, but mask underlying intentions which are evidently ideological.

> One reason why ideology would not seem to be a matter of false consciousness is that many statements which people might agree to be ideological are obviously true. "Prince Charles is a thoughtful, conscientious fellow, not hideously ugly" is true, but most people who thought it worth saying would no doubt be using the statement in some way to buttress the power of royalty. (Eagleton 15)

Eagleton proceeds to offer another example of this strategy:

> Imagine a management spokesperson announcing that "If this strike continues, people will be dying in the streets for lack of ambulances". This might well be true…; but a striking worker might nevertheless see the spokesperson as a twister, since the *force* of the observation is probably "Get back to work" ….

(16)

The author, then, finally concludes by offering a synthesis of his argument:

> To say that the statement is ideological is then to claim that it is powered by an ulterior motive bound up with the legitimation of certain interests in a power struggle. We might say that the spokesperson's comment is true as a piece of language, but not as a piece of discourse. It describes a possible situation accurate enough; but as a rhetorical act aimed at producing certain effects it is false …. (16)

If Dunkirk can be cited once more, these ideological strategies can be identified in the myth of that battle. It is not untrue to claim that the British Army resisted for as long as it could; but still, if one rephrases the affirmation by saying that the British Army was brutally defeated – which is also not untrue –, the underlying motive is completely different. Through selection, omission and fabrication, the myth of the war constructs a narrative which is not only "manageable", as Hynes proposes, but also caters to political interests.

One of the "bridges" that Hynes does not cross is precisely the relationship between the myth of the war and the interests involved in class struggle. This connection is more easily identifiable if we take the myth of the Second World War (which will be discussed more thoroughly shortly): the conflict was mythologized as somewhat of a "good war", or a "necessary war" against the "evil" Nazis. This myth conveniently hides, for instance, the imperialist interests of the British Empire during the war, especially in Africa and India, the forced relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans in the USA, or the brutal campaign led by the USSR's Red Army in Eastern Europe. The myth of the Second World War is considerably close to what the leading powers of the post-war period needed as a

hegemonic idea.

However, the myths of some other wars feature a more complex relationship between the narrative that is mythologized and the interests of the ruling classes. The First World War, for example, features a myth that testifies considerably against the war effort (as seen in Hynes's description above). The ruling classes of the Allied countries would probably prefer the war to be remembered as a heroic crusade against the enemies of their countries, and not as a widespread manslaughter. How is it possible, then, that a myth of a war can be so different from the official discourse?

In order to answer this question – and to further prove that the myth of the war is an ideology –, another aspect of ideology has to be considered. If one is to understand ideology as a solid, uncontested structure, it is impossible to account for all the fissures that ideology displays. The first reason for that has already been mentioned: ideology must offer a version of reality which is credible. After the Tet Offensive and the My Lai massacre, the claims that the Vietnam War was justifiable seemed to lack verisimilitude in the minds of the average American. Ideology is always subjected to the material reality, and sometimes a version of the narrative it offers simply cannot stand.

But how, then, does ideology manage to shift its discourse in situations such as these? Sometimes, the concrete reality and experience impose themselves upon the ideological discourse, and this contradiction, sometimes, enables the emergence of other ideological frameworks. In order to discuss this process, Eagleton refers to Valentin Voloshinov's distinction between “behavioral ideology” and “established systems of ideas”, and to Raymond Williams's notion of “structure of feeling”:

> Behavioural ideology concerns “the whole aggregate of life experiences and

> the outward expressions directly connected with it"; it signifies "that atmosphere of unsystematised and unfixed inner and outer speech which endows our every instance of behaviour and action and our every "conscious" state with meaning." There is some relation between this conception and Raymond Williams's celebrated notion of a "structure of feeling" – those elusive, impalpable forms of social consciousness which are at once as evanescent as "feeling" suggests, but nevertheless display a significant configuration captured in the term "structure". (48)

"What such a notion seeks to deconstruct", Eagleton goes on to argue, "is the familiar opposition between ideology as rigid, explicit doctrine on the one hand, and the supposedly inchoate nature of lived experience on the other" (48). This perspective reminds us that the very way we perceive the world is, to a great extent, determined by the social relations which we face: therefore, even our "material experience" features ideological elements. The distinction between "behavioral ideology" and "established systems" is precisely this: the behavioral ideology has to do with these more intimate, psychological elements of ideological thought, that shape our everyday apprehension of reality; the established, formal, ideological systems (such as art, science, ethics, etc) constitute another level of ideology, which act dialectically towards behavioral ideology: "Formal ideological systems must draw vital sustenance from behavioral ideology, or risk withering away; but they also react back powerfully upon it, setting, as Voloshinov remarks, its 'tone'" (Eagleton 49).

But the aspect of Voloshinov's (and Williams's) theory which is most valuable in the discussion of the myth of the war is how the author conceives different "strata" within behavioral ideology. Voloshinov argues that there is a "lowest, most fluid stratum" of

consciousness, which is “made up of vague experience, idle thoughts and random words which flash across the mind” (49). But there is another, upper level of behavioral ideology, more vital and substantial:

> …[i]t is in this subliminal region that those creative energies through which a social order may be restructured first germinate. Newly emerging social forces find ideological expression and take shape first in these upper strata of behavioural ideology before they can succeed in dominating the arena of some organised, official ideology. … Once again, Voloshinov's thought runs parallel here to Williams's “structure of feeling”; for what Williams is seeking to define … is very often the stirring of “emergent” forms of consciousness, ones which are struggling to break through but which have not yet attained the formalized nature of the belief systems they confront. (Eagleton 49)

And finally, Eagleton points out how these “emergent forms of consciousness” relate to the more formalized forms of ideological discourse, in Voloshinov's and Williams's thoughts:

> These social experiences still 'in solution', active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, may of course always suffer incorporation at the hands of the dominant culture, as Voloshinov acknowledges too; but both thinkers recognize a potential conflict between “practical” and “official” forms of consciousness, and the possibility of variable relations between them: compromise, adjustment, incorporation, outright opposition. They reject, in other words, those more monolithic, pessimistic conceptions of ideology which would see “practical consciousness” as no more than an obedient

> instantiation of ruling ideas. (49-50)

The great contribution provided by these theories to my argument is the notion that ideology is not "monolithic"; it is a dialectical and dynamic structure, marked by conflicts between opposing world views. A dominant ideology cannot sustain itself if it does not acknowledge the "emergent forms of consciousness" which oppose it; for that end, it attempts to incorporate, adjust or, if needed, silence these emergent voices – what it cannot do is to ignore them.

This notion of ideology, as Eagleton himself points out (50), displays a clear affinity to the discussions on ideology conducted by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. The key category proposed by Gramsci is not exactly *ideology*, but *hegemony*. "Gramsci normally uses the word hegemony", Eagleton explains, "to mean the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates" (112). The difference between this category and *ideology* is somewhat complex, but the notion of "consent" is one of the key elements: hegemony attempts to seek consent, while ideology does not always do so (it is often imposed). "Hegemony", Eagleton argues, "is also a broader category than ideology: it *includes* ideology, but is not reducible to it" (112). Hegemony, for Gramsci, may take political, economic and discursive forms, while ideology – for most authors – is somewhat contained within the realm of discourse or language. Eagleton goes on:

> Hegemony, then, is not just some successful kind of ideology, but may be discriminated into its various ideological, cultural, political and economic aspects. Ideology refers specifically to the way power-struggles are fought out at the level of signification … But hegemony is also carried in cultural, political and economic forms – in non-discursive practices as well as in

> rhetorical utterances. (113)

But maybe the most important aspect of Gramsci's notion of hegemony – associated with what has already been discussed about Williams's and Voloshinov's concepts of ideology – is the fact that it is a dynamic notion, which is conceived as a subject of struggle:

> If the concept of hegemony extends and enriches the notion of ideology, it also lends this otherwise somewhat abstract term a material body and political cutting edge. It is with Gramsci that the crucial transition is effected from ideology as "systems of ideas" to ideology as lived, habitual social practice … [h]egemony as a "lived" process of political domination comes close in some of its aspects to what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feeling". In his own discussion of Gramsci, Williams acknowledges the *dynamic* character of hegemony, as against the potentially static connotations of "ideology": hegemony is never a once-and-for-all achievement, but has "continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified". As a concept, then, hegemony is inseparable from overtones of struggle, as ideology perhaps is not. No single mode of hegemony, so Williams argues, can exhaust the meanings and values of any society; and any governing power is thus forced to engage with counter-hegemonic forces in ways which prove partly constitutive of its own rule. Hegemony is thus an inherently relational, as well as practical and dynamic, notion; and it offers in this sense a signal advance on some of the more ossified, scholastic definitions of ideology to be found in certain "vulgar" currents of Marxism. (Eagleton 115)

It is precisely this "relational" aspect of the concept of hegemony that makes it so

important: ideology can then be understood as a struggle, and not as a monolithic structure. Departing from Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Voloshinov's concept of “behavioral ideology” and Williams's “structure of feeling”, it is possible to understand, then, how the myth of the First World War – as described by Hynes above – can be so different from what official discourse would have it. The construction of the myth of the war is a struggle for hegemony: conflicting views fight for their versions to be accepted. The ruling ideology attempts to justify the war by using its rhetoric of “country, honor and glory”. However, concrete experience (“behavioral ideology”) is simply incompatible with this version: the countless dead in the trenches, the use of mustard gas, the veterans with PTSD (then called shellshock or war neurosis) and the absolute wasteland that stretched across Europe after the war made it impossible for official discourse to eternalize its version of the conflict. As the myth of the war grew – through novels, poems, films, etc. –, an emergent consciousness – the anti-war ideology – gained ground, and so the myth of the First World War was gradually forged in this struggle.

The wide theoretical trajectory taken in this chapter has intended to establish the following argument: the “myths of the wars” – that is, the story of the war that came to be accepted as truth – are ideological discourses. By this I mean: they work through processes such as selection, omission and fictionalization in order to establish a version of the story which is not exactly a lie, but it is not exactly truth either. This construction is not disinterested: it is the result of a political and discursive struggle for hegemony, in which dominant ideology is confronted by counter-hegemonic voices – veterans, survivors, historians, artists, etc. – in order to establish the version of the story which will be considered history.

In the remainder of this chapter, the works of the main corpus will be investigated in the light of these considerations. First, the "myth" of each war will be established, and the political and ideological interests and struggles behind each of them will be briefly discussed. Then, I will analyze how each work is related to the myth of the war, in order to comprehend in what instances the war orphan narratives reproduce the hegemonic discourse or contest it, offering a counter-hegemonic alternative.

3.3 – Lost and Forgotten in the "Good War"

The First World War left a lasting scar on Europe's history. The collective trauma of the conflict, with its new level of destruction, and the seemingly senselessness of it created a vast anti-belligerent consciousness in the aftermath of the war – a consciousness that greatly helped shape the myth of the Great War as a senseless, irresponsible, unnecessary and terrible war, as previously discussed.

The Second World War, on the other hand, has been mythologized as the "Good War" or, at the very least, the "necessary war". As I have argued elsewhere,

> The scale of the horrors perpetrated by the Third Reich – especially the Holocaust – has made the conflict be historically acknowledged as a "Good war", an "everybody's war" or, at the very least, a "necessary war." Unlike the loose ideas of "country" and "democracy" that attempted to win over the public's and soldier's minds in the First World War, the conflict of 1939-1945 managed to present a more palpable and drastic enemy to be fought: fascism. (Mata Machado Silva, "Live to Fly, Fly to Live")

Samuel Hynes offers a synthesis of the myth of the Second World War, in *The*

Soldiers' Tale, from which the description above becomes clearer:

> There was also a difference in moral authority. The First War began in idealism, but lost its moral certainty as the fighting ground on. The Second War began with a clearer sense of moral necessity, and never lost it. Most people accepted that Nazism was evil and, to a lesser degree and later, that the men who ran Japan were evil too. A war against those enemies was a "Good War" - a phrase that never became an oxymoron, not even at the end, though by then sixty million human beings had died. (*The Soldiers' Tale* 111)

The myth of the Second World War places the conflict, then, as the "good war". Even indefensible military actions such as the bombing of Dresden or the deployment of nuclear weapons over Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been, throughout the years, swept under the rug of "necessary actions", with the rhetoric of "desperate times call for desperate measures".

"Sweeping under the rug", in fact, seems to be an adequate metaphor for how American war orphans of the Second World War felt towards the myth of the conflict. The title of *Lost in the Victory* already hints at this: the oxymoron implies that something was lost – both in the sense of defeat and of disappearance – even though the war was won. These narratives contest the glorious victory of the Allies: the orphans lost their fathers, killed overseas. They were themselves lost in a patriarchal world without a father figure, often stigmatized throughout their lives. They are lost in history: their stories were never told, their existence has been turned to a blur in national memory. They lost the war, or at least their fathers did: if in modern warfare the best a soldier can do is to survive, these orphans are the children of the defeated. *Lost in the Victory* is, then, from the start, a work that contests and exposes the fissures in the American hegemonic discourse on World War II. This becomes

more apparent in the orphans' accounts.

The frustration towards the “wall of silence” (discussed in the first chapter) that surrounds the narratives of American homefront orphans of the Second World War is one example of how their narratives help highlight the contradictions present in the hegemonic discourse of the myth of that conflict. Although most accounts do not contradict the myth of the “good” or “necessary” war, they often mention this historical erasure of the homefront victims – orphans especially – as cause for anguish. “[C]ultural ignorance of the existence of 'war orphans' in this country goes so deeply”, argues Mix in the book's introduction, “that even those of us who are orphans are surprised by this description” (Hadler xvii). Even the State bureaucratic apparatus seems to ignore the issue, as she points out:

> No government agency has a list of the American children whose fathers died in World War II. Nor do they have statistics on how many there were. Although benefits have been paid to individual dependents, no records were kept on the orphans themselves. After the children reached eighteen or finished schooling on the GI Bill, they disappeared from government records. There were no statistics on the number of war orphans. (Hadler xix)

Lost in the Victory, then, shows how the monolithic narrative of the “glorious” Allied victory in the Second World War is actually fissured: that victory came with an expensive human cost. The experience of war orphanhood, as the following memoir by the orphan and West Point officer Bill Maury shows, makes it impossible for the orphan to ignore such a cost:

> We [officers at West Point] were talking about the development of tactical nuclear weapons, and there was a discussion going on. It was a large group of

> people sitting in one of those amphitheaters. A colonel was talking, and he was saying, sort of offhandedly, like it didn't have that much effect, if you push a button, you can obliterate a division (15,000 men). Jesus Christ, man, we're talking about thousands of people. You're not talking about a division. You're talking about people. And I increasingly thought, “This is not my cup of tea”. (Hadler 27)

Although the majority of orphans in *Lost in the Victory* do not vocally oppose the general myth of the conflict, there are exceptions. Clatie Cunningham, whose father Ray Cunningham was reported missing in action in 1945, displays a vehement and angry discourse, questioning the reasons for his father's death:

> At fifty I am confused. Sometimes I ask why did my father die for this country. … What did we get? Forty-seven dollars a month! It's a contradiction, … he died for his country, but we don't want to be reminded that this happened. We were left and nobody knows how many orphans were left. This is what goes on in the United States. Well, somebody got killed; forget about it. In the United States we don't accept responsibility any more. It just blows my mind. (Hadler 103)

The rhetoric of the “good war” conceals the fact that the expression is not an oxymoron, but a paradox. The consequences of war – especially modern warfare – cannot be considered “good” by any non-sociopathic standard. Vieira finds it of utmost important to emphasize the eminently negative character of war in any study of war literature: “[w]hether we consider some wars to be justifiable or not, necessary or not”, he argues, “we cannot omit the eminently negative character of wars. War is never a positive event”[23] (10). And even

though the myth of the Second World War attempts to efface this aspect, the narratives of these war orphans refuse to give in to this discourse. The first memoir in *Lost in the Victory*, by Vincent Papke Jr., offers a summary of the effects of war which resists any attempt to put it in a positive light:

> War destroys lives: it destroys families and changes the lives of those involved forever. It creates pain, pain which transcends and affects generations. It creates scars that can never heal. It will leave widows and orphans and bereaved parents who are never quite the same. It leaves fatherless children to grow up without the love, support and comfort of a father. It leaves wounds in the soul, wounds which can never be closed because the pain is too deep. (Hadler 4)

Although *Lost in the Victory* displays several instances of a counter-hegemonic discourse, which challenges the ideologically constructed myth of the Second World War, this cannot be said to be a characteristic shared by all war orphan narratives. *Abandoned and Forgotten* offers a counter-example, by displaying a narrative that, although pictures an aspect of the war not much explored by the English-speaking canon (the civilian experience of the Eastern front), is almost perfectly aligned with the Allied's hegemonic discourse about the conflict. In the book's prologue, Tannehill presents a summarized narrative of Hitler's rise to power in Germany that is very coherent with the myth of the war:

> After Germany's defeat in 1918, the Allies were determined that Germany should remain so weak it would never be a threat to any nation again. … The result was high unemployment, unfathomable inflation, extreme poverty, and a serious breakdown of law and order. It was easy for a man like Adolph Hitler

> to rise to power in that environment. He promised something to everyone and, in the end, delivered nothing. He betrayed all those who had put him into power. He took over the German government by trickery, lies, and sheer force of his will. … He was the hero of the time, the savior. He put food on the table, created jobs, and gave the people hope. The populace drank it in and became intoxicated with visions of a glorious future. No one asked or anticipated the price or sacrifices that would be necessary to achieve this glorious future. … Men joined the military willingly and enthusiastically to free the *Vaterland* of its shackles and regain *Lebensraum*, living space. Germany embarked on a war on several fronts, a war it could not and did not win. (Tannehill vii – viii)

Tannehill's text puts the Second World War as a conflict shaped by the lies and trickery of an evil man, Adolph Hitler. She mentions the geopolitical context in which the war broke out (the humiliating conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany's economic bankruptcy, etc.), but ultimately, for Tannehill, Hitler could advance his program through "sheer force of his will". The author sees the war under a Manichean dualistic light, describing it as an event where "good and evil fight it out behind the scenes" (Tannehill viii).

The depiction of the Red Army – and of Russians in general – is also extremely ideological. Even though the horrors perpetrated by Russian soldiers during their advance across Eastern Europe cannot be ignored, Tannehill's description is dangerously close to Cold War anti-communist propaganda – which should not come as much of a surprise, since the author emigrated as a refugee to the United States during the worst years of McCarthyism and the Red Scare. Tannehill first describes the Russian soldiers offensive as such:

> The Russians occupied and held a strip of land hundred and fifty kilometers long and forty kilometers deep. Drunk with victory and a desire for revenge, they committed the most unimaginable atrocities. Stalin himself had ordered the Russian soldiers to kill every German they encountered. He told his army they would not be held accountable for any crime against the German people. "Do to them as they did to us," he commanded. (91)

Now, this topic must be carefully addressed, so that there are no misunderstandings: going back to Hynes's "myth of the war" and Eagleton's notions of ideology, it must be considered that an "ideological" discourse is not always completely untrue, nor is it necessarily a product of falsehood. The myth of the war is shaped, among other things, by a process of selection. To affirm that Tannehill's depiction of the Red Army's campaign is ideological – and, in fact, hegemonic, for it adheres to both the myth of the war and the American anti-communist propaganda – does not imply that the reports are untrue, or that the brutal war crimes committed by Soviet soldiers were justifiable. It implies that by choosing to focus so largely on the horrors perpetrated by these soldiers, while also associating them with the Kremlin's policy (as evidenced in the excerpt above) and depicting the Russians as stereotypical drunken degenerates, Tannehill adheres to one version of the war narrative which is hegemonic in the western post-war scenario: the American version. By doing this, Tannehill conveniently omits the role played by the Red Army in Berlin's takeover, and the definitive defeat of Hitler's troop on the Eastern front as one of the main reasons for the Allied victory in the war. Tannehill's depiction of the Russians – of which the excerpt above is only one example among many – can be contrasted with her depiction of the United States and the Americans. Her father's American citizenship is associated with his public opposition

to Hitler's regime, for example:

> Father's unorthodox behavior and eccentric appearance, mainly for the benefit of his children, did leave a comical and lasting impression on the inhabitants of Niederhof who had witnessed this strange family reunion. It set him and our family apart from the locals. In the early years of Hitler's rise to power, Father was merely an aberration among German citizenry. However, as Hitler tightened his grip on the populace, Father's foreignness and his refusal to march with the masses turned into a detriment for the family. He became a man to be watched and to stay clear of, a sentiment that intensified as the war progressed. (8)

The family's American citizenship, in fact, is even presented as a possibility for the family to be spared by the Russians: “My father … relied on our American citizenship papers for immunity, certain those precious documents would be our passports to safety. How naive he was!” (112). The first Russian that Eva's family meets actually tells him to “put *Americanski* flag on door. Make you safe” (111). The United States, throughout the biography, is constantly pictured as this dreamlike land, away from war and from the “evil” Russians. “America, the destination of all my hopes and dreams” (404), as the author puts it.

What I want to call attention to here is how radically different is the representation of Russia and of the United States in Tannehill's writing. What is being discussed here is not Tannehill's possible “intention” of endorsing Cold War propaganda (“author's intentionality”, in fact, is not the point at all here). It is rather the fact that the way the narrative is woven in *Abandoned and Forgotten* helps it reinforce a version of the war narrative, which has become the war myth – a war of good against evil, where the Allies are the good guys, but even

among them, the Americans are the better guys, while the Russians are a necessary evil. While *Lost in the Victory* challenges this narrative, by unveiling the hypocritical treatment dispensed by the American government and society towards its orphans, *Abandoned and Forgotten* poses no threat to this hegemonic perspective.

3.4 – "A nation's moral failure" – Hegemony in Vietnam orphans' narratives.

If the Second World War was mythologized as the "good war", the Vietnam War had, in the United States, the opposite effect. Much like the First World War in Europe, the occupation of Vietnam led the United States to a crisis in public opinion, a generalized questioning of the country's imperialist agenda and a collective trauma (addressed in the second chapter) that completely changed the way the American people dealt with its government, its veterans and war in general. Vieira offers a synthesis of the Vietnam myth as such:

> The myth of the Vietnam War, for example, tells the story of young, innocent and naive Americans, who travel to a distant unknown country to fight communism. There, amidst the jungle and the ambushes, they do drugs, get disappointed and are maimed and killed by an unseen enemy. These young men go back to the United States embittered and displaced in a society which rejects them for their defeat. (14)[24]

Samuel Hynes's discussion of the conflict – and especially of the consequences it left on the American people – is also very significant to this debate:

> But for the people of the United States, the Vietnam War is more than a lesson in political unwisdom. It lingers in American minds like the memory of an

> illness, a kind of fever that weakened the country until its people were divided and its cause lost. That fever is in the narratives Americans have written about the war, and it makes their soldiers' tale different from the tales of other modern wars – not simply because the United States lost, though that had not happened before, but because in the loss there was humiliation and bitterness and the burden of complicity in a nation's moral failure. (Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale* 177)

The Vietnam War is an interesting example of how the myth of the conflict can differ greatly from the official discourse about it. While the war propaganda fueled by the American government insisted on the need to "fight communism" and "restore democracy" in Vietnam, the popularity of the war went downhill at home, especially after the My Lai massacre, when about 500 hundred unarmed civilians in South Vietnam were killed by a company of soldiers of the U.S. Army. It can be said that the military fiasco of the campaign in Vietnam – along with its human cost – was so blatant that even hegemonic thought had to give in: thus, the emergent ideological discourse – the anti-war discourse – was somehow incorporated into the myth.

The myth of the Vietnam War also features another distinct element: the figure of the soldier as a victim, summarized by Samuel Hynes in the image of Ron Kovic, writer of the autobiography *Born on the Fourth of July*: "a paraplegic, one of the war's permanently damaged men, raging from his wheelchair against the war, a man whose anger is in his injury – which They [the government, the establishment, the media] did to him" (*The Soldiers' Tale* 179). The hero of World War II is, then, turned in the Vietnam War first into a villain – the "baby killers" of massacres such as My Lai – and later as victims of the war propaganda

machine.

This mythologized version of the Vietnam War is very close to the depiction of the conflict – especially the homefront – presented in *In Country*. In the first chapter after the prologue, Mason offers a description of Emmet that is very similar to the myth of "returned soldiers" of the Vietnam War:

> Emmet came back from Vietnam, but Sam's father did not. After his discharge, Emmet stayed with his parents two weeks, then left. He couldn't adjust. Several months later, he returned, and Sam's mother let him live with them …. She treated him like someone disabled, and she never expected him to get a job. She always said the war "messed him up." (Mason 23)

In a scene where Sam is talking to Tom (a veteran who is friends with Emmet), the man comments on the way veterans were treated across the USA upon returning from Vietnam – though he does claim that in their small town of Hopewell their reception was a little better:

> The thing is, they never spit on us [the veterans] here. They treated the vets O.K., because the anti-war feeling never got stirred up good around here. But that means they've got a notion in their heads of who we are, and that image just don't fit all of us. Around here, nobody wants to rock the boat. (Mason 79)

An interesting aspect raised by Tom in this paragraph is the silencing aspect of the myth of war: "they've got a notion in their heads of who we are", claims the veteran. But that image "just don't fit all of us" – that is, if we take Hynes's categories, the myth of the war cannot contain the Soldiers' tale. In this point, interestingly, Mason's narrative seems to offer a counter-argument not exactly to the myth of the war, but to the *notion* of a myth of war: in

other words, although here the novel does not contest directly the myth of the Vietnam War, it questions the notion of a hegemonic narrative which attempts to generalize and simplify the multiple experiences of veterans.

Curiously, there is not much of a direct critique of the myth of the Vietnam War in Mason's narrative. On the other hand, the novel offers a sharp criticism of the entire notion of war as a rite of passage for the youth, and in fact questions the stereotypes of masculinity, reaching all the way back to the Second World War – a war which offers a strong myth, which practically shields it from opposing views, as we've seen above. In the following excerpt, Sam is having a conversation with Lonnie, her boyfriend, and his father, Bud:

> "If there was a war, would you sign up?" Sam asked Lonnie.
>
> "It depends. But if America needs defending, then I couldn't stand back, could I?"
>
> "That was what Emmet thought."
>
> Bud said, "I was lucky, I guess, to be between wars. But I never felt right about it. My daddy and his daddy both fought, and I felt like I missed out on something important." He licked the edge of his jello dish.
>
> "I don't get it," Sam said. "If there wasn't a war for fifty years and two whole generations didn't have to fight, do you mean there should have been a war for them? Is that why we have wars – so guys won't miss out?" (Mason 87)

This line of thought follows Sam throughout the novel, right until the climax – the scene in the swamp. After finding her, Emmet scolds Sam, claiming that it is "childish" to "go run off to the wilderness to get revenge." It is, he says, "the most typical thing in the

world" (221), to which the girl retorts:

> "That explains it, then," Sam said disgustedly. "That's what you were doing in Vietnam. That explains what the whole country was doing over there. The least little threat and America's got to put on its cowboy boots and stomp around and show somebody a thing or two." (221)

From the two excerpts above, it might be seen how gender plays a pivotal role in the ideological alignment of the narrative discourse in *In Country*. A feminine narrative – both author and character-wise –, *In Country* manages to contest the hegemonic masculine discourse about war, questioning the world of constructed masculinity that surrounds the more canonical war narratives.

In Country, then, does not offer a specific counter-narrative to the myth of the Vietnam War – here understood as the narrative of disillusioned young men who went to other side of the globe to fight a vague threat called "communism" and, upon their return, are received as villains and "baby-killers" by the people they thought they were protecting. However, the novel manages to offer a more general critique of the masculine world of warfare, with its notions of honor, glory, duty, etc.

As previously mentioned, the myth of the Vietnam War differs from the official discourse about the conflict – in particular the discourse sustained by the government and the media during the early period of the war. In this sense, it might even be argued that the myth of the conflict is more progressive than the official discourse – given that the myth maintains the war as a mistake, a disillusion. Hegemony had to adjust its discourse in order for its ideology to be accepted. Considering this, we can see in *Escape from Saigon* how a counter-hegemonic discourse is not a synonym of a progressive discourse.

Right from the prologue of her work, Andrea Warren clearly shows which version of the narrative of the war she supports: when summarizing the conflict, she completely adheres to the notion of the Vietnam War as a conflict between the “independent republic” of South Vietnam against the “communist rule” of North Vietnam:

> That same year [1954], because of the conflict over who would control the country, Vietnam split in two. North Vietnam was under Communist rule, and South Vietnam struggled to establish an independent republic. Both North and South wanted a unified nation, but each wanted its own form of government. (Warren loc. 77)

The choice of words here is revealing: only South Vietnam “struggled” for “independence” – North Vietnam, on the other hand, did not “struggle”, but rather was under “Communist rule” (and not “Communist government”, for instance). The opposition between “Communist rule” and “independent republic” is not void of judgment value, and inevitably sounds like Cold War propaganda. The representation of the American participation in the conflict (which is greatly diminished in the text) follows the same narrative, still relying on Cold War jargon:

> Many Americans were in Saigon. The United States supported South Vietnam's struggle against the Communists of North Vietnam. With the assistance of other democratic nations, in 1961 the U.S. began to send advisers and then troops to help in the conflict. By 1965, nearly two hundred thousand American soldiers were serving in the Vietnam War, fighting alongside the South Vietnamese. (loc. 96)

Here, again, language assists the reader in identifying the narrative's ideological

alignment: the “South Vietnam's struggle against the Communists”, supported by the US with the “assistance of other democratic nations”, which sent “advisers and then troops to help in the conflict” – the American intervention in the country is somewhat sanitized, its impact diminished, its dire consequences omitted. Warren goes so far as condemning the American retreat from the conflict, blaming the economic instability of the country on the US Army's withdrawal (and not on its occupation of the Asian country):

> But the United States had not been able to win the Vietnam War. After nearly a decade of trying, the government had yielded to pressure from the American people to bring their soldiers home. They were leaving the South Vietnamese to try to win the war without American troop support. When Ba and Long arrived in 1972, the withdrawal was under way. Many businesses in Saigon had catered to the Americans. As the soldiers gradually left, unemployment increased and inflation slowly drove up prices. (loc. 187)

Warren also condemns the public opposition to the American intervention in Vietnam, which greatly increased after the My Lai Massacre. She suggests that the US government “abandoned” the people of South Vietnam in their “greatest hour of need”, because it gave in to popular pressure:

> But surely the American people would not let down the people of South Vietnam in their greatest hour of need.
>
> What Long did not know was that in America, many people were pressuring the government to resist offering additional support to South Vietnam. For ten years, the United States had tried to help South Vietnam win the war. More than 58,000 American soldiers had already died in what the

> Vietnamese often referred to as the American War, and the Americans had finally withdrawn. … This time, South Vietnam was on its own. (loc. 532)

The author even suggests that the North Vietnamese Army attacked children and babies, when, for example, she mentions a Vietnamese woman who pleaded to a Holt Center staff member to save her child, for she would kill herself "when the Communists come" (loc. 525).

One thing that is surprising, to say the least, is how Warren draws a terrifying, villainous image of the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietnamese guerrilla fighters, but completely omits the war crimes perpetrated by the US Army on Vietnam soil. The My Lai massacre, for instance, is completely ignored in the book: not even once is it mentioned. The American soldiers are described as "friendly" men who "often carried candy and gum" for the children in the villages (loc. 110) – a sharply different description than the one found in the canon of Vietnam War literature. Upon discussing the issue of Amerasian children, Warren claims that "[a] significant number of the children adopted from South Vietnam were Amerasian, fathered by U.S. servicemen", and that "[n]o one knows exactly how many Amerasian children were born during the war" (loc. 1178), but not even once does the author pose the question of where these children came from or why their fathers never claimed them. The subject of war crimes – especially rape – by the US Army is not even considered, in a discourse that sounds almost cynical.

It must be noted, however, that these excerpts are all a part of the author's (or, one could argue, the narrator's) discourse – that is, they seem to represent more of Warren's opinion than Long/Matt's. The orphan boy's voice is, in fact, seldom directly quoted in the book – and when he is, usually the subject is his mother or grandmother. The boy's

ideological alignment is almost completely effaced in the book. There is one excerpt, though, where a slight – but significant – difference between the boy's and the author's discourse can be noticed: “With the American soldiers gone, many in South Vietnam feared a takeover by North Vietnam. No one knew just what that would mean for us”, Long says in a moment (loc. 267). He does not use the word “communists” to describe the North Vietnamese, and although he expresses concern for the annexation, it seems much more a fear about the uncertainty and about the war itself, rather than the anti-communist agenda that Warren seems to endorse.

The diametrically opposing ideological standpoints from where *In Country* and *Escape from Saigon* are written help illustrate the complexity of understanding hegemony – and the role played by the myth of war in its discourse. *Escape from Saigon* features a somewhat “counter-hegemonic” discourse, but only insofar as one might consider contemporary American Neo-Nazi movements as being opposed to the hegemonic liberal ideology in American culture. *In Country* approaches the myth of the Vietnam War by seeing it as a scar on US history, a collective trauma and a shameful defeat; *Escape from Saigon* distances itself from the same myth by considering it a legitimate occupation, and bemoaning the US Army's withdrawal from the war.

3.5 – War orphans and the shaping of the myth of the War on Terror[25]

Throughout the development of this thesis, the works in the corpus which discuss the Iraq War – Deborah Ellis's *Children of War* and Benjamin Percy's “Refresh, Refresh” – have been dealt with carefully, and with a certain distinction from the other works, due to the historical proximity of the event portrayed. As previously mentioned, the Iraq War is part of a

still ongoing occupation (sometimes called the War on Terror) by the United States in the Middle-East – especially Iraq and Afghanistan. For that reason, the generalizations attempted here are risky, since it is a historical process which has not yet been concluded. These limiting conditions are especially present in this last chapter, for the “Myth of the Iraq War” – or perhaps the “Myth of the War on Terror” – is still very much in-the-making, and the ideological dispute over hegemony on the matter is still raging.

Still, I believe that the general outlines of the myth of the War on Terror can already be identified – even though this myth might still change considerably in the future, as more narratives are produced, especially veterans'. The “myth-in-the-making” of the War on Terror seems to go something like this: similarly to the Vietnam War, young and deluded lower and middle-class men are sent to a faraway country in order to fight an evil presence in the world – communism in Vietnam, terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Once there, they meet an unpredictable and unorthodox enemy, which uses children as suicide bombers, women as assassins, etc. The local population, then, is a mystery: do they love the soldiers? Do they hate them? It becomes practically impossible to tell friend from foe. Behind this curtain, the same old interests: corporations and corrupt governments greedily fighting for power.

But the myth of the War on Terror seems to feature a significant difference from that of the Vietnam War: in Vietnam, the narrative is essentially one of disillusion. In the narratives of Iraq and Afghanistan, on the other hand, even with all the corporate games, the government's lies and the injustices, there seems to always be the image of a “bad terrorist leader”, linked to Bin Laden or to the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, whose capture or death makes everything worth it – or at least justifiable. The general tone seems to be: “war is a dirty business – but someone has to do it”. This difference between the myth of the Vietnam

War and of the War on Terror may, perhaps, be associated with the impact that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 had on the American collective consciousness: while in Vietnam there was no clear "justification" for war, in Iraq and Afghanistan the attack on the World Trade Center played a similar role to what the attack on Pearl Harbor did on the Second World War. Of course, Iraq had nothing to do with the Al-Qaeda attacks, but this did not stop dominant ideology from making this connection and convincing a great part of the public opinion of it.

This seems to be the myth which is drawn out of narratives like Kevin Powers's novel *The Yellow Birds*, Kathryn Bigelow's movie *Zero Dark Thirty*, Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies*, and Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper*, among others.

Deborah Ellis's *Children of War*, however, tells a vastly different story. Unlike *Escape from Saigon*, which is mostly centered on the author's voice, Ellis's collection of interviews gives voice to the Iraqi refugee children in Jordan, by offering the entirety of their testimonies, and not only selected excerpts of the interviews. The victims of a pointless occupation by the US Army, these children present an opinion about the war which goes directly against the official discourse, and against a great part of the narratives produced by American authors about the war. Laith, one of the children interviewed by Ellis offers a chilling account of the way the US Army acted:

> The soldiers being nice didn't last too long. They started being afraid of us. I'd go to or from school, and I'd see the soldiers beating kids, yelling at them and shoving them. Someone told me that they thought that the children might be helping the terrorists. Once there was a big explosion near a tank, and soldiers said children had distracted them so they couldn't pay attention to the dangerous people around them. (Ellis 64)

The final phrase in Laith's testimony is poignant: “If I could talk to American children, I'd say, 'Take your soldiers out of my country. I want to go home'” (65). Though the questions asked by Ellis are not transcribed in the text, it can be inferred that this question – “what would you say to American children?” – is made to several children. One of them, Abdullah, offers a similar, bitter answer: “I don't know what I would say to American children, but I do know what I would say to George Bush. I'd look him in the face and say, 'I hate you'” (98). George W. Bush, in fact, seems to be a recurring “villain” in the accounts of these Iraqi children. Shahid, a 10 year old girl whose family applied to be moved to the United States, expresses a certain resistance to the country, and especially to its then-president:

> Also, the Americans scare me. They bombed my country, and they made things go very bad. George Bush is scary because he doesn't know about how wonderful the Iraqi people are. I always get scared when I see him on TV, because I am afraid that what he will say will mean more bad news for my country. American children should make their parents elect a kinder president. (104)

The feelings displayed by these children towards Americans range from mistrust and fear to open hostility. Michael, a 12-year-old orphan, says the following about American children:

> I have nothing in common with American children, except if there is maybe an American child whose father has died, whose house is destroyed, and who is forced to live in a foreign country that doesn't want them. Then he and I would have something to talk about. (37)

In the narratives which are starting to shape the canon of the Iraq war literature, the attacks on civilian neighborhoods, though portrayed as terrible, are usually justified (with the image of the "bad terrorist leader"). In the testimonies of the refugee children, the opposite happens: the occupation seems to be arbitrary, violent and intrusive. Masim, a 15 year-old fatherless girl, describes the relationship between her neighbors and the American troops:

> They always had guns pointed at people, at people who had no guns to point back at them. The soldiers broke down people's doors and yelled at people and bothered them.
>
> There was a lot of resistance in our area to the American troops. This wasn't because our area was full of terrorists. This was because people didn't like to see foreign troops trying to control their country. How would Americans or Canadians feel if there were Iraqi troops on your streets, and these Iraqi troops broke down doors and tried to tell you what to do?
>
> But because there was resistance, the American soldiers felt they had to fight back, and their fighting made more resistance. It was a very bad time. There was a lot of killing. My little sister still has nervous fits because of all the dead bodies she saw. (91)

If the children's narratives are not enough to establish the version of the narrative of the Iraq War which is present in *Children of War*, Ellis herself, in the book's introduction, offers her personal and political view on the nature of the conflict:

> Then came the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Although none of the organizers or attackers were from Iraq, the government of George W. Bush was convinced that Iraq was still

> harboring weapons of mass destruction. They also made the claim, for which no proof has ever been provided, that Saddam Hussein had links to the September 11 attacks. In addition, the Bush government claimed that a war to eliminate Saddam would bring democracy to the Middle East. …
>
> They did this [invade Iraq] against the principles embodied in the United Nations Charter. It was, in effect, an illegal war. … No weapons of mass destruction were ever found. (13 – 14)

Children of War is, definitely, a work of anti-war literature. It attempts to offer a counter-narrative to the official discourse and to emerging myth of the War on Terror. In the interviews, no justification of the war is offered, the soldiers are menacing figures, the children are helpless victims (and certainly not potential soldiers, as in some other narratives) and George W. Bush is the "villain". In a sense, one might consider Ellis's ideological perspective to be considerably straightforward: against the war. This is not the case with "Refresh, Refresh".

Though literary criticism should never take an author's word about his own work as a definite proof of any claim, Benjamin Percy's opinion about the way his short story represents the war is a good starting point for the analysis of the relationship between the myth of the Iraq War and "Refresh, Refresh". Upon discussing the ideological stance of the short story, Percy claimed that he tended to "be wary of partisan storytelling", and that, while writing the story, he "wanted to make sure" he "was being political without being polemical." He "didn't want to say war is good or war is bad, but instead this is war" (Lorah). About this attempt, Percy says:

> I suppose I've been successful. … Vietnam and Persian Gulf vets; the wives

> and mothers of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan; ROTC cadets; college professors and high school students; inmates; and so many others, they praise —or smear – the story for entirely different reasons. Among the critics, some say I'm a liberal pantywaist; others say I'm a conservative nutjob. One guy went so far as to say he hoped to see me hang alongside Bush and he would laugh as our faces turned blue. At first, I was pissed, thinking: buddy, did you read the same story I wrote? But then I felt strangely pleased, because, based on so many different responses, his included, I had apparently succeeded in occupying a kind of moral gray area that invited the reader into their own unique, visceral experience. (Lorah)

Percy's declared intention upon writing "Refresh, Refresh", then, is to invite the reader into reaching his own conclusions about the nature of the conflict, while offering a "neutral" standpoint from where the narrative develops. This, of course, must be put into question: is it possible for a literary text to be void of ideology? Is it possible for the author to completely exempt himself from letting his own political agenda overflow into the text? It is the role of criticism to doubt this proposition. The easy path, perhaps, would be to doubt the very idea of a "neutral" discourse, and adhering to the thesis that, by not taking a stance, one would be aligning oneself with the "strongest" side – in the case of the Iraq War, the USA. However, this is a simplistic argument, which leaves out the most important element in literary studies: literature. In order to deconstruct Percy's argument, then, one must refer back to the source text in order to find, in the short story, what is the version of the narrative of the Iraq War that can be extracted.

The opinions expressed by the narrator-protagonist, Josh, are a good starting point.

The reason behind the war is elusive to Josh and his friend Gordon, some part of a mysterious rite that they don't quite grasp:

> We didn't fully understand the reason our fathers were fighting. We only understood they *had* to fight. The necessity of it made the reason irrelevant. "It's all part of the game," my grandfather said. "It's just the way it is." We could only cross our fingers and wish on stars and hit refresh, *refresh*, hoping they would return to us, praying we would never find Dave Lightener [the town's recruiting officer, responsible for delivering the news of dead soldiers to their families] on our porch uttering the words, "I regret to inform you..." (Percy loc. 169)

Masculinity, manhood and the transition from "boy" to "man" are central themes in "Refresh, Refresh". The fictional town of Tumalo, Oregon, has been emptied of most of its adult men – all sent to fight in the Middle-East. The town's teenage boys – like Josh and Gordon – are left with the role of "men of the house", having to, more and more, play the role of their fathers: "And now, as our bodies thickened with muscle, as we stopped shaving and grew patchy beards, we saw our fathers even in the mirror", Josh comments at a point. Considering that this construction of manhood is a central aspect of the short story, Josh's grandfather's comment on the nature of war – "It's all part of the game" –, and Josh's own comprehension – "we only understood they *had* to fight" – approach the kind of view on war criticized by Sam in *In Country*: "Is that why we have wars – so guys won't miss out?" (Mason 87). Indeed, by the end of Percy's short story, that is precisely what happens: Josh and Gordon "put their pens to paper and make their fathers proud", by volunteering for Iraq (Percy loc. 317).

The boys' volunteering consists of a movement of full circle in the narrative. Throughout the short story, the boys' masculinity is constructed and shaped after the image of their absent fathers. Going to war, then, becomes the final step in reaching manhood: they finally become their fathers. It seems that, ultimately, Percy's short story seems to endorse the notion of war as a "rite of passage", which turns "boys into men". Though the short story does not clearly state that this is a "good", a "fair" or an "ethical" rite of passage, the fact that it sees in war a vehicle for attaining maturity reveals an ideologically conservative perspective.

Tim O'Brien, an American novelist and veteran of the Vietnam War, discusses in his fictional essay "How to Tell a True War Story" the "morality" of a war story. In the text, O'Brien puts forward the proposition that no kind of morality is ever to be extracted from a war story:

> A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been the victim of a very old and terrible lie. … As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil. (O'Brien 65-66)

O'Brien's proposition resonates with Vieira, who – as previously mentioned – emphasizes that "war never is a positive event" (10). By attributing to war the status of a "rite of passage", "Refresh, Refresh" fails to acknowledge the eminently evil aspect of war – even

if only a little, it makes its readers the victims of “a very old and terrible lie”, as O'Brien puts it. Although Josh claims not to know why the war must be waged, he finds a reason to enlist: manhood. By conforming to this ideology, “Refresh, Refresh” flirts with the hegemonic discourse, and in doing so, dangerously romanticizes the reality of war.

Of course one cannot equate “Refresh, Refresh” to a jingoistic bellicose narrative such as, for example, the movie *American Sniper*. Percy's narrative manages to reside in the “gray area” intended by the author, not clearly offering an anti-war discourse nor war propaganda material. But even so, Percy's nod at a certain moralizing aspect of war, which somewhat approximates his short story to a *Bildungsroman*, is something which cannot be ignored: by not acknowledging the eminently evil character of war, Percy's narrative risks reinforcing a hegemonic discourse which puts war as a “necessary evil”.

3.6 – Experience, authorship and hegemony in war orphan narratives

It is difficult – not to say impossible – to provide a broad generalization as to the ideological tendency of war orphan narratives. Affirmations such as “war orphan narratives tend to be anti-war” or “homefront orphans narratives often question the myth of war” cannot be uttered as conclusions to the analysis of the works in this corpus – if one was to broaden the corpus, the task would be even more absurdly impossible, I believe.

However, the role of literary criticism is not always that of generalization: on the contrary, the possibility of acknowledging the contradictions and idiosyncrasies of different texts grouped within a common category is one of the most valuable assets of the literary studies. But even so, I believe that a few specific conclusions can be drawn from this discussion.

These conclusions – which are related to the subject of the second chapter – have to do with the relationship between authorship and the myth of the war: specifically, a tendency that seems to be displayed by authors who are not orphans to offer narratives somewhat closer to the myth. One such example is that of *In Country*: though Mason offers a critique of the general "culture of war", her novel does not offer a *narrative* of the Vietnam War which questions the general narrative of the myth of that conflict. "Refresh, Refresh" seems to present a similar, yet mirrored example: its narrative of the Iraq War does not feature the recurring elements which seem to be shaping the myth of the Iraq War – the "evil bad terrorist", the general mistrust towards Iraqi people, the disillusion over the conduction of the war, etc. But it does endorse a hegemonic comprehension of war as a "necessity", and even as moralizing – an enduring ideology in American society. Both works are written by fiction writers who are not orphans.

Lost in the Victory, on the other hand, is organized by orphans, and its text is completely constituted by the words of the orphans themselves. Perhaps partly due to this fact, the collection offers narratives which greatly question the myth of the "good war" perpetuated by the stories of the Second World War. *Children of War*, likewise, although organized by a non-orphan, is almost entirely made out of the direct speech of the Iraqi refugees interviewed by Ellis. Through their voice – and their experience of war –, they question any trace of "morality" or "necessity" that the dominant ideology might try to stick to the Iraq War.

The two counter-examples to the tendency discussed above are worth mentioning: in *Escape from Saigon*, a narrative written by a non-orphan, where the orphan's voice seldom appears, offers an alternative narrative to the myth of the Vietnam War. But the nature of the

"questioning" of the myth in Warren's text must be considered: *Escape from Saigon* rejects the overall opposition to the Vietnam War, and offers a conservative discourse that endorses the war. I believe that it would be unlikely for a Vietnam orphan to endorse so emphatically the US Army's intervention in the Asian country; therefore, although her discourse distances itself from the myth of the Vietnam War, it offers the "very old and terrible lie" of pro-war narratives to which O'Brien calls attention to.

Tannehill's *Abandoned and Forgotten*, the work of an orphan, offers a narrative which can almost entirely be contained in the myth of the "Good War" perpetuated by the narratives of the Second World War. However, I believe that the nature of her experience must be taken into account: the daughter of an Anglo-German father who was a vocal opponent of Hitler's regime, and a woman who later suffered terribly at the hands of the Red Army, Tannehill seems to find in the American hegemonic narrative of the conflict a story which fits her own experience quite well: both the Germans and the Russians are seen as villains, and the Americans who offered her shelter and a home after the war are very easily identified as heroes. Perhaps, considering the intensity of the violence she has endured, it would be almost impossible for her *not* to endorse the American version of the myth of the Second World War.

All this considered, it seems that sometimes concrete experience surpasses the ideological grasp of hegemonic discourse: sometimes, the discourse of a "good" or a "necessary" war simply cannot contain in its narrative the terrible loss suffered by a war orphan. This way, it might be somewhat "easier" for orphans who tell their own narrative to question bellicose ideologies. Non-orphan writers who attempt to write narratives about orphans, on the other hand, seem to rely almost exclusively on the myths of war in order to construct their own texts – which is only natural, considering that they have no experience of

war whatsoever. It is, it seems, more difficult for them to escape the grasp of hegemony, for their own experience does not exceed the narrative offered by the myth of the war.

Final Considerations

"TO BE THE PRESENT OF THE PAST"

The eyes are wide. They cannot address
the helplessness which has lingered in
the airless peace of each glass case:
to have survived. To have been stronger than
a moment. To be the hostages ignorance
takes from time and ornament from destiny. Both.
To be the present of the past. To infer the difference
with a terrible stare. But not feel it. And not know it.

(Eavan Boland, in "The Doll's Museum in Dublin" [excerpt])

Eavan Boland's poem "The Doll's Museum in Dublin", first published in 1994 deals with one of the central moments in Irish history: the Easter Rising of 1916, where around 1,000 republican rebels seized key locations in Dublin and proclaimed the independence of the Irish Republic from the United Kingdom. The rising was quickly suppressed by the far superior military power of the British Army, leading to an unconditional surrender by the Irish republicans after only six days, followed by a number of executions. However, the Easter Rising served as the spark that would ignite the fire of the Irish independence in 1919.

Due to its status as one of the most important historical events in Ireland, a lot has been written, in prose and verse, about the rebellion – with Yeats's "Easter 1916" being, possibly, the most famous example. But Boland's poem excels in providing a new perspective

on the event, by shedding light on the aftermath of the brutal repression.

In the poem, Boland portrays a Doll's Museum in Dublin. She starts by describing the dolls which are featured in the museum: their paint is old, their lips are cracked, and their arms are dissolved to wax. The poet then invites the reader to envision these dolls decades ago, parading around the streets of Dublin during Easter, in the arms of the children who owned them. As the reader soon learns, the speaker is not presenting a casual Easter, but rather a very specific one: the Easter of 1916. The dolls in the museum are the witnesses of the massive horrors which occurred in the streets of Dublin that day. But in the poem, Boland brilliantly mingles the image of the dolls with that of the children, which leads the reader to the two last stanzas, presented above as the epigraph of this last section.

These dolls – and children – were "stronger than a moment", as the poem puts it. In 1994, when the poem was published, the children who owned these dolls were all adults – most of them elderly, in fact. They survived, as the poem says, even if the cost was the "wide eyes" – forever filled with the shock of trauma – and the incapacity to address their own helplessness. These survivors are, as Boland puts them, the "present of the past". The living testimony of atrocities committed decades before. But why does Boland chooses the dolls – and the children –, and not the surviving combatants, to be the subjects of this testimony? The answer is still in the poem: these children were the "hostages ignorance takes from time and ornament from destiny"; they were the most innocent victims of violence. Differently from combatants, there was no level of willingness – a key aspect to define a war, if we are to return to O'Connell's definition presented in the introduction – in their participation whatsoever. They could never fight back. They could not even run away without help. In fact, they could not even understand. These children grew with the gruesome memories of

violence as being constitutive of their own selves, unable to separate in their psyche what had happened in the past to what happens to them now: the “present of the past”. They can, of course, “infer the difference with a terrible stare”. But “not feel it. And not know it.” The shock and trauma at such a young age shatters, in the formative years of the child, their own perception of self.

One of the most recurring tropes of war literature is the idea that a soldier “never returns” from war; the experience bears such an impact in his life that it is forever relived, and after the war, no other experience makes sense. In this sense, it might be said that the soldier is forever living in the past. The children in Boland's poem, on the contrary, are living in the present – but their own notion of “life” and of “self” was shaped by the experience of violence, for they encountered war much too soon in their lives. It might be said that the soldier's life is disrupted by violence, while the child's life is shaped by it.

This might be, perhaps, the essential element of war orphanhood. The orphans of war are, like the dolls in Boland's poem, the “present of the past”. They are not the agents of war – like the soldiers –, but rather its consequence.

Throughout the development of this dissertation I have tried to make the case of “war orphan narratives” constituting a sub-category within the canon of war literature, with some characteristics in common, but also featuring a series of distinctive features.

The way war is represented is the first of these features. Homefront orphans, in particular, display fairly distinct aesthetic strategies in representing war. Since their narrative is not shaped by an experience of war, but rather by a non-experience – the empty space of losing a father in a conflict they never witnessed –, their stories are defined by the elements of absence: emptiness, lack of knowledge, silence. Their greatest struggle is not simply to

"get over" the war, but rather to understand it, to feel it, to live it: an endeavor which might be either impossible – especially for women – or tragic – as is the case of men who enlist in the army in order to somehow feel closer to their deceased fathers.

Battlefront orphans, on the other hand, offer narratives which are somewhat closer to the canon of war literature, especially to those works that might be grouped under the category of the "social function of war literature" proposed by Brosman (89). Since their image of war is marked by their harrowing experience, their narratives are often filled with violence and gore. However, the fact that these texts are often offered from the point of view of a child, some differences can still be noticed, if one is to compare them to the canonical veterans' war narratives: the naivety, the helplessness, the difficulty in understanding precisely what is happening around them. This way, these children often have to resort to narrative strategies that rely on the imaginative – such is the case of Evelyne Tannehill, which often refers to ghost stories and fables in order to construct her own memoir.

But what can perhaps be identified as a general narrative tendency in homefront and battlefront orphans alike is what I have identified as the "inverted *nóstos* of the redeeming journey": most of these narratives feature, usually in their *denouement*, a journey – be it a road trip or a long pilgrimage to the other side of the world – towards the battle zone. Homefront orphans take this journey in order to know where their fathers died, and battlefront orphans do it in order to reconnect with their own youth. Either way, this journey offers them some sense of closure to the narrative of their lives.

The memory of the war orphan is, naturally, marked by a trauma. However, it is not a simple trauma, but rather the memory of a *catastrophe*: the war. Literary studies have investigated the matter of the memories of catastrophes by adopting the category of

testimonial literature. The narratives of war orphans – particularly those which identify themselves as biographical texts –, then, were discussed in this thesis under the theory of testimonial literature. By analyzing the testimonial character of these narratives, in a dialogue with Brazilian scholar Márcio Seligmann-Silva, it was possible to reach a formulation regarding the structure of the testimonial discourse, which could be divided into two *moments of the testimonial act*: *testis* and *superstes*, or, as a tentative translation from the Latin categories proposed by Seligmann-Silva, *testifying* and *witnessing*. The first moment – *superstes* – consists on the witnessing of the event: the survival of the trauma – the war itself, for battlefront orphans, the lack of the father, for the homefront orphans. This first moment seems to be the one which is more emphatically approached in the narratives of the tradition of *Zeugnis* – the German tradition of testimonial literature. The second moment – *testis* – has to do with the production of the testimony itself: the act of testifying, or, the act of writing the testimony. This moment seems to be the emphasis on the tradition of *testimonio* in the Hispanic canon.

An interesting realization is the fact that even the works in the corpus which identify themselves as fictions – *In Country* and "Refresh, Refresh" – have a certain level of "testimonial content", which can be identified by relying on Allison Landsberg's notion of *prosthetic memories*: by incorporating the proliferation of images of war as being their own memories – and in fact, the memories of an entire nation –, Bobbie Ann Mason and Benjamin Percy manage to create fictional narratives which are as powerful in conveying the catastrophe of war as the narratives where the orphans present their own bodily experience.

Another aspect which was discussed was the relationship between the war orphan narratives and the hegemonic discourse about war – an investigation on the ideological

aspects which surround the production and reception of such narratives. In order to achieve that, the thesis relied on the "myths of the wars" – as proposed by Hynes –, which can be considered the hegemonic, commonsensical narratives of each war.

From the confrontation between the narratives and the myths of each war, a vast range of ideological alignments could be perceived. Though no broad generalized conclusion can be offered on this matter, a slight tendency can be observed: it seems that in the narratives which are written by the orphans themselves, or where their voices are prominently displayed, there is a predisposition to provide an anti-bellicose discourse – even for a conflict like the Second World War, where the myth situates the conflict as a "good war", or at least a "necessary" one. This is a tendency, but by any means a rule: further investigation, perhaps with a larger corpus, should be able to provide a more conclusive assessment of this matter.

Aside from the specific conclusions which were drawn out of each chapter in the thesis, I believe there are a few more general observations which can be mentioned. One of them has to do with the temporality of the narratives: the narratives of war orphans tend to be post-war stories. Even narratives that feature war scenes – such as Tannehill's *Abandoned and Forgotten* – still rely heavily on the orphans' post-war experiences. In Tannehill's biography, the book is practically divided in half: during and after the war. This is also the case with Warren's *Escape from Saigon*, where Long's emigration to the US and his adaptation to his new life as Matt Steiner is as important for the narrative as his plight in Vietnam. The only exception among the works in the corpus is "Refresh, Refresh", where the plot actually ends with the protagonist going to war; however, once again it should be noted that Percy's short story deals with a conflict which was not yet over during the time it was written, so it is bound to display some distinct characteristics.

This post-war temporality of war orphans' narratives, once again, takes us back to Boland's “present of the past”. The orphans' narratives are as much about the horrors of war as they are about their consequences: as much about how much was lost as they are about how much still cannot be recovered. These narratives reveal the open wounds of wars, the subjects who were “abandoned and forgotten”, who were “lost in the victory”, the “children of war”.

2015 was a year marked by the mass emigrations of Syrian refugees, escaping from the combination between civil war and foreign intervention which devastated the country. Among the thousands of images – photos, paintings, cartoons, etc – produced in the wake of the event, two photographs caught the world's eye: the picture of a little 4-year-old girl, Adi Hudea, “surrendering” to a photographer after mistaking his camera for a weapon (Hall) (*fig. 2*); and the photograph of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi's little dead body, found washed up on a Turkish beach (Walsh) (*fig. 3).*

Fig. 2: 4-year-old Adi Hudea "surrendering" to a photographer (© Osman Sagirli)

There is something about images of children in wars – a naked girl running away from a napalm raid in Vietnam, for instance – which captivates people's hearts like few other images can. These photographs, perhaps, attest for the failure of a project of “humanity”: when the most vulnerable, innocent, naive and fragile members of our species are witnessed in these conditions, it is almost humanly impossible not to be shocked. The look in Adi Hudea's eyes as she surrenders to a photographer seems to say everything: she does not cry. She does not scream, or run to her mother's arms. She seals her lips and raises her arms. War seems to have stripped from her even the most basic child's instincts: crying, screaming, running to her mother. At the age of 4, she is already conditioned to a reality that most people in the world can only hope never to face.

Fig. 3 - The body of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach (© Nilüfer Demir)

There is a commonsensical notion that “children are the future of the world”. This

idea is only logical: the children of today will eventually grow up to rule the world in the future. This is, perhaps, the most tragic aspect of the young victims of war: they are living – or dead – proof of the systematic extermination of the future.

Often, when veterans return from war, they are considered incapable and invalid. Several of them retire, and many of them are not even expected to rebuild their lives – to their own misfortune, naturally. But the same is not true of war orphans: no matter what horrors they have witnessed, no matter the pain and suffering they endured, they are expected to reach adulthood and effectively "be a part of society" and build their own lives.

This is, I believe, the power of war orphan narratives: they tell about present consequences of past catastrophes. These narratives show us what happens when countless "Adi Hudeas" and "Aylan Kurdis" manage to survive, grow up, build a life, without ever being able to even tell their stories. Upon reading their narratives, we are forced to understand that no war is over when armistice is declared. We are made to confront the end of temporal boundaries in modern warfare: wars do not begin with the first aggression, and nor do they end with the last peace treaty.

When telling their stories, war orphans look deep into civilization's eyes and tell us: "this is what you did. This happened to us, and it cannot be swept under the rug." "This is what goes on in the United States", says an orphan in *Lost in the Victory*: "Well, somebody got killed; forget about it"(Hadler 103). "We won't be forgotten", the orphans seem to say.

To read these narratives is to look into a mirror: reflected there is the result of a century driven by armed conflicts, ethnic cleansing, authoritarian governments and state brutality. Refusing to let their plight be vulgarized, war orphans look deep into the eyes of contemporary society and tell us "war is hell, indeed. And may our stories never let you

forget about it."

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1 On the use of the term “war stories”, cf. Vieira (2013)

2 For more on *The Wall*, cf. MATA MACHADO SILVA (2013) and (2014).

3 (...) in particular we will suggest that such semantic enrichment and enlargement of the inert givens and materials of a particular text must take place within three concentric frameworks, which mark a widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chroniclelike sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tensions and struggle between social classes; and ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production(...) (JAMESON, 2001, p. 1941)

4 The edition of *Refresh, Refresh* referenced in this thesis is the Kindle e-book version. Since there is no standard as of today for in-text citations for Kindle files, whenever citing an excerpt of a work from Kindle I chose to use the contraction “loc.” for location, followed by the digital location in which the excerpt is indexed in the file.

5 There is, today, an extensive discussion on the (aesth)ethics of the representation of violence. This dissertation will not dwell on this matter, for it is beside the point for now. More on this discussion can be read in Sontag (2003) and Rancière (2003).

6 “(...) uma vivência que, no espaço de pouco tempo, traz um tal aumento de excitação à vida psíquica, que a sua liquidação ou a sua elaboração pelos meios normais e habituais fracassa, o que não pode deixar de acarretar perturbações duradouras no funcionamento energético”.

7 “Nestas situações, como nos genocídios ou nas perseguições violentas em massa de determinadas parcelas da população, a memória do trauma é sempre uma busca de *compromisso* entre o trabalho de memória individual e outro construído pela sociedade.”

8 “Zeugnis e Testimonio: Um caso de intraduzibilidade entre conceitos”

9 “enfatiza-se a continuidade da opressão e a sua onipresença no 'continente latino-americano'”

10 “(...)a testemunha enquanto alguém que sobreviveu a uma catástrofe e que não consegue dar conta do vivido – porque ficou traumatizado (elemento subjetivo) e devido à 'dimensão' da catástrofe (elemento objetivo) – leva-nos a uma outra etimologia possível da testemunha como *superstes* ou, em grego, *mártir* (sobrevivente).”

11 Seligman-Silva draws the distinction between *testis* and *superstes* from other authors. For a more thorough, genetic discussion of the terms, cf. Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer.*

12 “conquistar uma voz para o subalterno.”

13 “literalização e fragmentação são as características centrais (e apenas a primeira vista incompatíveis) do discurso testemunhal”

14 “uma imagem marcada pelo limite do que pode ser representado e ao mesmo tempo índice e arquivo dessa mesma impossibilidade”

15 “a referencialidade é identificada (…) nos efeitos de um real impossível, em decorrência da derrota das possibilidades representativas”

16 “a arte procura tornar-se o próprio caminho para uma aproximação do trauma, um processo de ruptura com a aliança entre o simbólico e o imaginário que distancia o sujeito do real, mas também o protege”.

17 It must be acknowledged that there are exceptions: the most important one is, possibly, Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*, which is entirely built around oral testimonies.

18 “O *testimonio* nasce da boca e não da escritura de uma população explorada e na maioria das vezes analfabeta”

19 “crônica, confissão, hagiografia, autobiografia, reportagem, diário e ensaio”

20 “O Testemunho: entre a ficção e o real”

21 “Em latim pode-se denominar o testemunho com duas palavras: *testis* e *superstes*. A primeira indica o depoimento de um terceiro em um processo. Também o sentido de *superstes* é importante no nosso contexto: ele indica a pessoa que atravessou uma provação, o *sobrevivente*. O conceito de *mártir* está próxima a essa acepção do sobrevivente. *Martyros* em grego significa justamente testemunha.”

22 “testemunha (…) assistir a, presenciar (...) 1. testemunhar, depor

23 “(...) quer consideremos algumas guerras justificadas ou não, necessárias ou não, não podemos deixar de reiterar o caráter eminentemente negativo das guerras. A guerra jamais é um evento positivo.”

24 “O mito da Guerra do Vietnã, por exemplo, narra a estória de jovens americanos, ingênuos e inocentes, que viajam até um país desconhecido e longínquo para lutar contra o comunismo. Lá, em meio à selva e a emboscadas, usam drogas, se decepcionam e são feridos e mortos por um inimigo que não veem. Esses jovens voltam aos Estados Unidos amargurados e sem lugar na sociedade que os rejeita pela derrota”

25 The considerations on the myth of the Iraq War made in this section have been greatly aided by the help of my colleague Luiz Gustavo Leitão Viera, to whom I thank for the debates on this subject, which enabled the production of this excerpt.